

# RLR700R

## INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

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*Spring 2011*

*Fridays 9-12*

*Callaway S221*

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**Instructor:** Thomas G. Long

**This course** explores the conversation between two sometimes independent, sometimes overlapping projects: the academic study of religious practices and the activity of doing practical theology. This exploration involves examining such questions as,

*-- What is a practice? How do religious practices relate to the texts, artifacts, and other materials of religious life and thought?*

*-- How are practices lived? How do communities of faith sustain, extend, and teach the practices of their traditions?*

*-- By what means and methods do communities of faith think about, assess, and seek renewal or transformation of their practices? How do practices relate to the lived theology of communities of faith?*

*-- How are practices most usefully studied? What methods (e.g., sociology, ethnography, performance studies, ritual analysis) best illuminate the content and role of religious practices?*

*-- What is practical theology? How does practical theology, particularly in Christian traditions, proceed in critical reflection on practices in conversation with the heritage of practices and contemporary cultural contexts?*

*-- What are the implications of the study and interpretation of religious practices for the formation of leadership in religious traditions?*

### REQUIREMENTS

- Weekly readings and discussions plus lively seminar participation
- Discussion facilitator for three seminar readings – in which you....

- prepare to guide learning and discussion of an essay for approximately 30 minutes
- place the author of the reading into larger context. Who is this author? How does this piece fit into his or her larger work?
- show how this reading connects to the overall purposes of this seminar, namely the analysis, understanding, and/or teaching of religious practices and practical theology?
- Research project, including preliminary reports

## **RESEARCH PROJECT**

1. Pick a religious practice on which you can do a non-invasive study ( I don't want you or us in trouble with the IRB). This could be....

- ... daily prayer in a mosque or church
- ... "homecoming" in a congregation or "Wednesday Night Family Suppers"
- ... choir practice and performance
- ... religious dance
- ... the Mikvah in a synagogue
- ... the Bat/Bar Mitzvah in a synagogue or confirmation in a church
- ... the Chevre Kadisha practices in a synagogue
- ... pilgrimage
- ... wearing religious jewelry
- ... scripture study
- ... special services of worship, e.g. "revivals," "Pascal Vigils," "High Holy Days"

2. On February 4, make a 15-20 minute report to the seminar in which you...

- ... describe the practice you are studying
- ... say why this practice attracted your attention
- ...provide some history and background for this practice
- ... describe your current plan for studying this practice and any "hunches" about what you may discover

3. Utilizing the methods of this course (as applicable) prepare a 20-page paper on this practice in which you address such questions as how this practice....

- ... is connected to basic human need and yearning
- ... is (or is not) social in character
- ... has developed over time
- ... is currently performed (at least one concrete instance)
- ... shapes the participants
- ... is transmitted and taught to others

... has “standards of excellence,” that is, can be said to be done poorly or well  
... connects to a larger “way of life”

4. Make a 30-minute presentation to the seminar on either **April 15 or 22** about your practice. The final paper is due **May 1**.

## **SCHEDULE**

### **January 21**                    ***What is a Religious Practice?***

Readings:

Anthony, Francis-Vincent; Chris A.M. Hermans; and Carl Sterkens, “Religious Practice and Religious Socialization: Comparative Research among Christian, Muslim and Hindu Students in Tamilnadu, India. *Journal of Empirical Theology* 20 (2007), 100-128.

Jones, Andrea Sun-Mee, “What the Doing Does: Religious Practice and the Problem of Meaning,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 6.1 (December 2004), 96-107.

Mikoski, Gordon S. “Editorial: Speaking of Religious Practices,” *Theology Today*, 66 (2009), 271-278

Ortner, Sherry B. “Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26/ 1 (Jan. 1984), 126-166

### **January 28**                    ***What is a Religious Practice? (cont.)***

Courtney, Bender, *Heaven’s Kitchen: Lived Religion at God’s Love We Deliver*, Chapters 4 and 5 (Rebecca)

Durkheim, “Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (Tom)

Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” (Matthew)

MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chapter 14. (Molly)

Orsi, Robert, “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion” from *Lived Religion in America* (Tom)

Ricoeur, Paul, “The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text”  
(Josie)

**Feb. 4**            ***What is Practical Theology?***

Browning, Don S., “Introduction” and chapters 3 and 9, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Molly)

Cahalan, Kathleen and James R. Nieman, “Mapping the Field of Practical Theology,” *For Life Abundant* (pp. 62-85) (Kyle)

Dykstra, Craig, “Reconceiving Practice” (Janel)

Cahalan, Kathleen, “Three Approaches to Practical Theology” (Christina)

Osmer, Richard R., *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, “Introduction” (Sarah)

**February 11**            ***Methods 1: Ethnography***

Professor Joyce Flueckinger, guest

Lawless, Elaine, “I was afraid someone like you. ....”

Lawless, Elaine, *Handmaidens of the Lord*, excerpts

Raheja and Gold, “Perdah is as Purdah’s Kept”

**February 18**            ***First Reports on Projects***

**February 25**            ***What is Practical Theology? (cont.)***

Chopp, Rebecca, “Practical Theology and Liberation” (Josie)

Farley, “Theory and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm” (Matthew)

Burkhart, John, “Schleiermacher’s Vision for Theology” (Sarah)

Tracy, David, “The Foundations of Practical Theology” (Christina)

March 4

***Methods 1: Ethnography (cont.)***

Pierre Bourdieu, “Understanding” from *Weight of the World* (Rebecca)

Bourdieu, “Fieldwork in Philosophy” (Janel)

Swinton and Mowat, “What is Qualitative Research” (Josie)

Swinton and Mowat, “Practical Theology and Qualitative Research Methods”

March 18

***Methods 2: Performance and Ritual***

Bell, Catherine, “Performance” from *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Matthew)

Bell, Catherine, “Ritual Reification” (Sarah)

Seeman, “Ritual and It’s Discontents” (Kyle)

March 25

***Methods 3: Space and Place and Congregational Analysis***

Casey, “Remembering Place” (Rebecca)

Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time”  
(Christina)

Frank, Thomas, *The Soul of the Congregation*, 103-157 (Molly)

Hoffman, Lawrence A., “Sacred Space: The Message of Design,” *The Art of Public Prayer*

Nieman, James, “Attending Locally”

Friedman, Edwin H., *Generation to Generation*, chapters 1,2, 7, and 9

April 1

***NO CLASS***

April 8

**Two Example Practices**

***Example 1: Funeral Practices***

Long, Thomas, "Whatever Happened to the Christian Funeral" (Janel)

Smith, Ted A., "Ethnography and Pastoral Wisdom Literature"

Other readings, TBA

***Example 2: Prayer, Said and Sung***

Readings TBA

April 15

***Class presentations***

April 22

***Class presentations***

## DEFINING RESEARCH

Federal Regulations define **research** as “**a systematic investigation, including development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge**” (45CFR46.102(d)). As described in the Belmont Report “...the term 'research' designates an activity designed to test a hypothesis [and] permit conclusions to be drawn... Research is usually described in a formal protocol that sets forth an objective and a set of procedures to reach that objective.”

“Research” generally does **not** include operational activities such as defined practice activities in public health, medicine, psychology, and social work (e.g., routine outbreak investigations and disease monitoring) and studies for internal management purposes such as program evaluation, quality assurance, quality improvement, fiscal or program audits, marketing studies or contracted-for services. It generally does not include journalism or political polls. However, some of these activities may include or constitute research in circumstances where there is a clear intent to contribute to generalizable knowledge.

## DEFINING HUMAN SUBJECTS

A **human subject** is defined by Federal Regulations as “**a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information.**” (45 CFR 46.102(f)(1),(2))

**Living individual** – The specimen(s)/data/information must be collected from live subjects. Cadavers, autopsy specimens or specimens/information from subjects now deceased is not humansubjects.

**“About whom”** – a human subject research project requires the data received from the living individual to be **about** the person.

**Intervention** includes physical procedures, manipulations of the subject, or manipulations of the subject's environment for research purposes. **Interaction** includes communication between the investigator and the subject. This includes face-to face, mail, and phone interaction as well as other modes of communication.

[Adapted from a brochure of the IRB, University of Southern California]