

## **December 2017 Theories and Methods Examination**

### **Question #1: History and formation of the field**

Describe the emergence of the concept of religion in relation to European overseas imperial and colonial projects. Attend to how those projects and the concept have changed over time.

What are the top five books that every graduate student in religious studies ought to read and why? At least four must be from the list. You have the option to include the theorist from Question #2 as an *addition* (i.e., a sixth book).

### **Question #2: Theorist of religion**

Situate and explain the nature of the intervention your theorist made in his historical and scholarly context.

What kinds of interventions can your theorist make to the study of religion today? Are they consistent with or different than the interventions your theorist made in his own context?

### **Question #3: Key Concepts**

Power/Authority

Piety/Devotion

Working Example: If you had been asked to discuss the concept of mysticism, you might address which books on the reading list address that concept explicitly (e.g., James) or implicitly (e.g., Otto) or in an extended sense (e.g., Orsi). You would want to distinguish between theorists whose main interest is in personal experience, mystical or otherwise, and theorists who focus more on communities or societies. You would certainly want to examine how “mysticism” has been defined, how the definition has been contested or problematized, and how it might be reconceived in the light of critiques. You could also attend to distinct forms or elements of mysticism as it appears in different religious traditions and in various scholarly analyses.

*Email sent re exam prep*

The exam committee has narrowed down the “concepts” for question #3. They are as follows:

Textuality  
Power/authority  
Embodiment  
Practice/belief  
Magic  
Ritual  
Piety/devotion  
Experience

At the time of the exam, the committee will select two concepts from this list; you will choose to write on one of them for essay #3.

Example: If you were asked to discuss the concept of mysticism, you might wish to begin by asking which books on the reading list address that concept explicitly (e.g., James) or implicitly (e.g., Otto) or in an extended sense (e.g., Orsi). You might want to distinguish between theorists whose main interest is in personal experience, mystical or otherwise, and theorists who focus more on communities or societies. You would certainly want to examine how “mysticism” has been defined, how the definition has been contested or problematized, and how it might be reconceived in the light of critiques. You could also attend to distinct forms or elements of mysticism as it appears in different religious traditions and in various scholarly analyses.

Please feel free to discuss these with any one of us as you prepare for the exam.