

## **Final Writing Assignment: Theory Application**

Due: December 2, 11:59pm

28% of the Final Grade

This assignment requires you visit a service at a Buddhist monastery, Hindu temple, Jewish synagogue, Christian church, Muslim mosque, or other religious place of worship. You may choose which you will visit and when you will visit, but it is up to you to find out how this community expects visitors to behave, when visitors are welcome, etc. PLAN AHEAD. You cannot do this the day the paper is due. You should choose to visit the service of a tradition with which you not are already familiar (e.g. if you grew up Jewish or currently consider yourself Jewish, you should attend a Muslim, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist service).

After your visit, you will write an essay of **750 words**. Your paper should answer the following questions in a single, coherent, well-structured argument (do not reproduce the questions in your paper and don't answer with bullet points). These are not a checklist you have to complete, but are meant to guide to your thinking: *What are the most important things that happened at this religious service? If my theorist had been to the service I attended, what would he or she say about it? How would the theorist characterize the religion of this community? To what extent does this theorist's explanation accord with what the community says about themselves and what I actually experienced?*

Your paper must have a THESIS and present a clear ARGUMENT. You are trying to explain why things occurred the way they did at this service. You are using a theorist from this course to help you do that. Be as specific as possible in your description of what happened at the service. The most effective papers will provide a sense of texture, of the fine grains of what actually happened at the particular service you visited.

In your paper you must apply ONE of the theoretical texts we have read in this course to help you analyze the religious service you visited (note: you must not generalize about the religious tradition, but must stick to what you actually observed at this particular religious service). Below, you will find a list of theorists whose work we have read in this course. You must choose ONE theorist from the list to form the framework of your paper. Use the theorist's work to make sense of the things you experienced at the service.

DO NOT CONSULT WIKIPEDIA, ONLINE ARTICLES, OR ANY OTHER OUTSIDE SOURCES. This paper is only asking you to apply the things you have read in this class to the study of a living religious community.

This assignment is asking for a very *specific* application of theory *from this class* to your observations of a *specific* religious service. Generalizing along the lines of "all Christians/Muslims/Jews/Hindus/Buddhists believe X" is not sufficient and will be penalized. Instead, use phrases like, "at the Christian service I attended, people did X" or "according to the

person I spoke to, this is what she thinks her religion is.” Be as specific as possible about what you actually experienced at the service you actually visited.

Papers that are too long or too short by more than 75 words will be penalized. Spelling and grammar count towards your grade. You should use citations to demonstrate that you have understood the theorist. Provide the author’s last name and a page number in parentheses when you cite a theorist. You do not need a works cited page.

## How to Write the Paper

You should follow a two-step process when writing this paper.

First, attend a service and **observe**. Carefully note what people are doing, saying, wearing, discussing, etc. Are there ordained leaders or other specially trained people who conduct the service? How does their authority operate? Does this tradition have a sacred book? What are people actually doing with it? Are people arranging their bodies in particular ways? How? When? In what capacity? What role does gender play in this tradition? Do men and women sit together or separately? Do you notice any special/sacred objects used in this service? What do people do with them? What do people say about them? How are people dressed? Are they wearing any distinctive articles of clothing? Who is wearing this clothing? Make sure to talk to someone at the service you attend. Ask them questions about what is important to their personal religious practice or identity.

Second, **apply** one theorist’s major ideas to what you have observed. In your paper, try to use the theorist’s work to answer questions like these (not a checklist, just a guide for your thinking): *How would this theorist characterize what happened at this service? What would this theorist say is the most important thing I observed? How does this particular theorist give insight into what I observed? In what ways, if any, do the theorist’s ideas about religion conflict with what people told me about their tradition?* Use appropriate citations to prove that you have understood the theorists’ major ideas.

Choose ONE theorist from the list and apply their work to an analysis of the service you visited:

David Morgan  
Emile Durkheim  
William James  
J.Z. Smith  
Clifford Geertz  
Talal Asad  
David Chidester  
Robert Orsi

## **Example Paper Titles and Theses**

NOTE: these examples use theorists who are NOT on the approved list. Copying these theses word-for-word will not guarantee you a good grade. In fact, it will guarantee a bad grade because these theorists are not on the list. These are simply meant to show you the *kinds* of analyses you should conduct for this assignment.

Title: *The Opiate of Durham? Social Transformation at Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church.*

Thesis: Marx's idea of religion as "the opium of the people" too easily dismisses the tangible social transformations being enacted by Durham, NC's Emmanuel AME church. My experience visiting the prison ministry of this church demonstrated that religion does not just lull people into accepting their fate—it can inspire them to change unjust systems.

Title: *Darshan: Encounters with a Powerful Object at Sri Venkateswara Temple of Cary, NC*

Thesis: E.B. Tylor's understanding of religion as animism illuminates my experiences at the Hindu Temple in Cary, North Carolina, where people made offerings to a statue of the god Vishnu. According to Tylor's theory, they made offerings because they believed the living presence of Vishnu was manifest in the statue.

## **Example Citation**

*E.B. Tylor thought religion was all about belief. More specifically, he defined religion as "the belief in spiritual beings" (Tylor 424). He elaborated this definition by showing that "the belief in spiritual beings" was better understood as animism. Animism is either the belief that individual things have souls or that spiritual beings inhabit the earth (Tylor 426).*

Notice that I have cited BOTH when directly quoting the theorist and when using the theorist's idea.

## **Places to Consider for Your Visit**

You can choose to visit a place not on this list. Whatever you decide, remember: you are on your own to contact the community and learn their policies for visitors. Be respectful during your visit. You are not just representing yourself on your visit, but the entire UNCW community. Be polite and respectful. You are trying to understand their community and its traditions, so you need their help.

- **Wat Carolina - Thai Buddhist Monastery**  
Bolivia, NC (near Wilmington)  
<http://www.wat-carolina.com/>  
1610 Midway Road  
Bolivia, N.C. 28422

Phone: (910) 253-4526

- **Temple of Israel – Reformed Jewish Synagogue**  
Wilmington, NC  
<http://www.temple-of-israel.org/>  
1 South Fourth Street  
Wilmington, North Carolina 28401  
Phone: (910) 762-0000
- **Islamic Learning Center**  
Wilmington, NC  
<http://www.wilmingtonislamiclearningcenter.com/>  
2117 Wrightsville Avenue  
Wilmington, NC 28403  
Phone: (910) 910-343-1919
- **Basilica Shrine of Mary – Catholic Church**  
Wilmington, NC.  
<http://thestmaryparish.org/>  
12 Ann Street  
Wilmington, NC 28401  
Phone: (910) 762-5491
- **St. Stephen African Methodist Episcopal - Protestant Christian Church**  
Wilmington, NC  
501 Red Cross Street  
Phone: (910) 762-9829  
This is not the church's website, but this link will give you some information about the church: [http://www.aahfwilmington.org/aahmw\\_virtualexhibits\\_heart\\_13stephen.html](http://www.aahfwilmington.org/aahmw_virtualexhibits_heart_13stephen.html)
- **First Baptist Church Wilmington – Protestant Christian Church**  
Wilmington, NC.  
<http://www.fbcwilmington.org/>  
411 Market Street  
Wilmington, NC 28401  
Phone: (910) 763-2471
- **B’Nai Israel – Conservative Jewish Synagogue**  
Wilmington, NC  
<http://www.bnaiisraelnc.org/>  
2601 Chestnut Street  
Wilmington, NC 28405  
Phone: 864-404-6893
- **Port City Community Church – Protestant Christian Church**  
Wilmington, NC; Leland, NC; New Bern, NC; and Jacksonville, NC

<http://portcitychurch.org/>

See website for addresses and service times at local branches

- **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – Mormon**  
Wilmington, NC  
[www.mormon.org](http://www.mormon.org)  
514 South College Road, Wilmington, 28403  
910-754-9479
- **Sri Venkateswara Temple of North Carolina – Hindu**  
Cary, NC  
<http://www.svtemplenc.org/>  
121 Balaji Place  
Cary, NC 27513  
Phone: (919) 468-0040