Religion 64, The Nature of Religion
Spring 2011

First Paper Assignment

As we have seen, nineteenth century theorists made use of the notion of an ‘essence’ in order to solve the problem of the identity of religion in general, and of specific religions, across the wide range of different characteristics these phenomena display. In your paper, address three questions regarding the notion of essence.

First, how does the notion of essence make it possible to speak of religion as such, or of specific religious traditions, given the variability of religion and religions within history?

Second, how do Troeltsch’s reflections on the ‘essence of Christianity’ affect the idea that the ‘study of religion’ might make use of the notion of essence?

Third, in light of Troeltsch’s work, do you think the notion of ‘essence’ is still useful for identifying religion in general or particular religious traditions? Why or why not?

Requirements and recommendations:

Your paper should be 4-5 pages in length, double-spaced. Use 1” margins and a 12-point font. Number your pages.

You will need to be as concise as possible. Do not bother with an introduction; jump right into exposition in the first paragraph of your paper. Do not pad your paper with unnecessary prose.

Do not simply summarize the contents of our texts. Speak only about such matters as are clearly relevant to the questions detailed in the assignment.

Make explicit reference to our assigned texts in your exposition. Whether you quote our authors directly or paraphrase their words, you need to provide a textual reference for each significant claim you make about their positions.

Make sure your writing is grammatically and syntactically correct. Make use of the Writing Center if you need help doing so.

Check your paper over carefully for spelling and typographical errors before turning it in.

Do not submit a first draft of your paper as a final draft.

Make sure your paper addresses the assigned questions.

Papers are to be turned in to my office, 208 Chapin Hall (under the door if I am not in).

Due date: Friday, February 18, 4:00 PM