

Religion, Ritual, and the Sacred
(Anthropology 395: Anthropology of Religion)

Tuesday/Thursday 9:30 – 10:45 Candelaria 0045 Section 001 Spring 2011

Instructor: Dr. Sally McBeth Candelaria 2056 (970) 351-1746 sally.mcbeth@unco.edu	Office Hours: Mon 2:00 – 4:00 Tues 11:00 – 3:15 Thurs 1:00 – 3:15 <u>or by appointment</u>
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Texts (Required): God Is Not One (2010) by Stephen Prothero
(both on reserve at Michener) Salvation on Sand Mountain (1995) by Dennis Covington

E-Reserve Readings (Required): listed in order of due date (see syllabus)
Available on-line at Michener Library

- “On the Origin of Religion” (Elizabeth Culotta)
- “Living the Compassionate Life” (His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama)
- “Christian Violence in America” (Mark Juergensmeyer)
- “Just Say Om” (Joel Stein)
- “Resisting Marriage and Renouncing Womanhood” (Hillary Crane)
- “Hallucinogenic Plants and Their Use in Traditional Societies” (Wade Davis)
- “The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events” (E.E. Evans-Pritchard)

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1. Begin at the **UNC Homepage** (www.unco.edu) and click on **Libraries**
2. Click on **The Source Library Catalog**
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4. Enter my name: **McBeth, Sally**
 - a. This page displays all items on Paper and Electronic Reserve. Items that are listed as “**View or Print [Title]**” are electronic Reserves. Click on the item you’re looking for.
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DSS Statement:

Students with disabilities: Any student requesting disability accommodation for this class must inform the instructor by giving appropriate notice. Students are encouraged to contact Disability Support Services at UNC: 970-351-2289 to certify documentation of disability and to ensure that appropriate accommodations are implemented in a timely manner.

Catalogue Description:

Topics in Cultural Anthropology: Study of a global theme (art, religion, etc.) as represented in a variety of subsistence technologies and/or world cultures. Repeatable under different sub-titles.

Course Description:

Religion, Ritual, and the Sacred (Anthropology of Religion). This class is designed to challenge your assumptions about what religion is. I hope that you will encounter the 'Other' and interrogate the familiar. According to some, religions are huge meaning-making "machines" –how can we understand this statement? Religion has perpetuated some of the worst atrocities as well as some of the most humanitarian works of social justice—how can we make sense of this? The study of religion has an illustrious history in anthropology. Since its earliest period, many eminent anthropologists have explored the topic. The breadth of the subject is immense, and all areas cannot be covered with the same degree of depth.

Questions to Investigate:

- WHY RELIGION? (as opposed to no religion)
- WHY IS RELIGION A UNIVERSAL?
- WHAT PURPOSE DOES RELIGION SERVE?
- WHY DO ELABORATE SYMBOL SYSTEMS AND RITUAL PROCESSES EXIST?
- IS THERE AN ULTIMATE REALITY?
- HOW CAN WE DEVELOP OUR FULL POTENTIAL AS HUMAN BEINGS?

Course Objectives:

1. gain a general familiarity with anthropological approaches to the study of belief systems
2. understand the role of belief systems in society
3. gain an introductory and comparative appreciation of the belief systems of some of the world's religions
4. be aware of and tolerant to the variety of religious traditions that exist worldwide
5. provide students with skills of critical inquiry and fair-minded critical thinking and independent thought

Learning Outcomes (Anthropology)

1. Knowledge of the concept of culture and how cultural processes work in cultural adaptation.
2. Methods commonly used by cultural anthropologists, including participant observation, interviewing, listening, and ethnographic descriptions, interpretation and comparison, cultural awareness, critical thinking, empathy for others, and the ability to conceive and apply alternative interpretations to the contemporary problems of culturally diverse societies.
3. Ability to critically analyze and synthesize well structured arguments, to solve problems effectively and creatively through research and scholarship in the various subfields of anthropology.

Course Premises:

1. all belief systems can be studied cross-culturally
2. all belief systems are potential candidates for study

3. the validity of non-empirical philosophical foundations cannot be ascertained
4. the importance of beliefs to the believers and its role in society can be studied

We will combine a seminar discussion format with group work and lecture; your opinions and insights are valued, and I want you to feel free to share and express them. As a student in this class, you will be expected to

- Keep up with all reading
- Come to class prepared to discuss, question, think
- Keep up with weekly assignments
- Show respect for all opinions and views
- Keep an open mind; become fair minded critical thinkers
- Question everything! And in so doing, learn a lot

Course Requirements

80 points	Short Written Assignments; 6 @ 10 pts; 1 @ 20 pts.
20 points	Creation Narratives Project
25 points	Student-led discussion
75 points	Participation and discussion; in-class assignments, etc.
50 points	<u>Paper Assignment #1</u> : Why is There Religion? A Personal Expression of belief or non-belief due February 1 st
50 points	<u>Paper Assignment #2</u> : <i>Salvation on Sand Mountain</i> due February 22 nd
100 points	<u>Paper Assignment #3</u> : Religious Service Project due April 7 th
100 points	Comprehensive Take-home final Exam due May 2 nd
500 points	TOTAL

A	500-450	(100-90%)	C	399-350	(79-70%)
B	449-400	(89-80%)	D	349-300	(69-60%)

Student-Led Discussion

Due: as assigned

Points: 25

Discussion should include: 1) terms students should be familiar with; 2) basic tenets (beliefs); 3) 21st century understandings; 4) interesting stuff/what piqued your interest? 5) “don’t lecture; 6) call on students or otherwise get them involved; 7) use the board.

Paper #1: Why is There Religion? A Personal Expression of Belief or non-Belief

Due: February 1st

Pages: 4

Points: 50

This 4 page (double-spaced, 12 font) assignment will be divided into two parts.

Part I (approximately two pages) requires you to examine “On the Origin of Religion” (Elizabeth Culotta) and the lecture “what is religion” to speculate on the sources/origins of religion as well as to examine a variety of definitions of religion. Choose a few theories or ideas that pique your interest; I also want to know why you think religion exists.

Part II (approximately two pages) requires you to share perspectives on your own religion (or lack of). Get personal here; share as much of your religious upbringing and views of religion as you are comfortable with.

Paper #2: Salvation on Sand Mountain (If God was a rattlesnake, would you pick it up?)

Due: February 22nd

Pages: 4-5

Points: 50

This remarkable book, recounting Covington’s spiritual journal, has many internet sites providing the reader with summaries and even book reports on the topic. **I have read every one.** Do not even think about plagiarizing, because you will fail this course if you even consider this option.

That said, your assignment on this book is to examine snake handling, faith healing, speaking in tongues, forging friendships, and establishing rapport through an anthropological lens as Covington comes to investigate snake handlers in the American south. I expect your paper to cover the obvious: how does Covington come to investigate the snake handling culture, as well as the mysterious/ritualistic aspects of drinking strychnine, the handling of poisonous snakes, and other avenues of understanding the ‘sacred’ that you found interesting. Have fun with this assignment, but be sure to consider how Covington does (or perhaps does not?) utilize an anthropological approach, realizing that many anthropologists “go native” as they investigate culture. NEED CITATION STATEMENT

The end result will be evaluated according to the following criteria

- originality and creativity of work
- thoroughness and accuracy of description; evidence of reading of text
- thoughtful and well-argued analysis/interpretation
- clearly written and well organized
- covers important anthropological aspects of text

Written Paper #3: Religious Service or Religious Rite of Passage

Due: April 7th

Pages: 8-10

Points: 100

This 8-10 page paper requires you to attend a religious service or rite of passage from a religion that you are unfamiliar with. You will need to attend a service more than once (or related fellowship/prayer/Bible study meetings), or, if you are observing a rite of passage, then you will want to attend a related service. You will then write a thorough and accurate description of this service or rite of passage. Your description will need to be clear enough and with as much detail that your reader (me!) feels like I've been at the service with you. A photo (or photos) at least of the exterior of where the service is held should be included. NEVER take photos of people or the interior of a sacred space without permission.

Thoughts on what to look for:

1. Setting (color, lighting, symbols)
2. Sounds
3. People (ethnic, age, and gender mix)
4. Behaviors (gestures, other)
5. Religious specialists (describe)
6. Evidence of hierarchy
7. Evidence of community (or not)
8. Parallels with other experiences (or not)
9. Emotions (yours *and* members of congregation; as well as your candid reactions)
10. Other: parking lot etiquette, bumper stickers, other?

11. **Ritual:**

One definition of ritual is, "a traditional form of behavior through which persons can relate to the sacred." But ritual is also defined as a highly structured social event which promotes a sense of community. Ritual is the means by which the social bonds of a group are reinforced and tensions relieved, as well as a way that important events are celebrated and times of crises made less socially disruptive and less difficult for the individual to bear. Some of the below may occur in your setting; consider those that are apparent:

A. Repetition: either of occasion, content, or form, or any combination of these.

B. Acting: a basic quality of ritual is that it is not an essentially spontaneous activity, but rather most (if not all) of it is consciously acted like a part in a play. Further, this usually involves doing something, not only saying or thinking something.

C. "Special" Behavior or Stylization: actions or symbols used are extra-ordinary themselves, or ordinary ones used in an unusual way, a way that calls attention to them and sets them apart from other mundane uses.

D. Order: collective rituals are by definition an organized event, both of persons and cultural elements. They have a beginning and an end, and therefore have order as well. Order is the dominant mode and is often quite exaggeratedly precise. The very "order" may be what sets the act apart as ritual.

E. Evocative Presentational Style / Staging: collective rituals are intended to produce an attentive state of mind; ceremony commonly does so through manipulations of symbols and sensory stimuli.

F. The “Collective” Dimension: collective ritual has social meaning which may only have a meaning known to the culture.

G. Key Symbols: among a culture's many symbols in language, social action, and artifacts are its KEY SYMBOLS, those that express its important truths. If you ask the participants, they can probably identify some of their key symbols. Others can be recognized by the anthropologist in myth and ritual. Questions to ask yourself and members of the culture: Is the symbol culturally important to the members of the culture? Are people emotionally aroused by the symbol? Does the symbol appear in many different contexts? Are the ideas and language used to talk about the symbol extensive? Are there more and stricter cultural rules and sanctions surrounding the symbol than surround most other cultural elements?

Record your observations using the above features as guidelines—but DO NOT use these as the outline for the paper. Ask yourself questions based on What, Where, When, Why, and How. Be sure to consider what cultural meanings are present.

I also want you to include a brief (less than one page) background section describing a little about the origins of the religion which you chose. This can be internet research (especially consider sites *from* your religion), class readings, interviews, or from some combination thereof... CITE YOUR SOURCES including information from interviews.

After you've written your description, you will need to interpret/analyze this religious experience. Interpretation here means getting to the underlying meanings of setting, ritual, colors, and anything else of importance. Consider your readings and various theoretical perspectives in writing this section.

I would also like you to talk to a few people after the service (this does not need to be a formal interview). Who are they? How long have they been part of the religion? Why did they join? Ask them their views on what happened during the service (e.g. how do they understand communion? have they ever spoken in tongues or taken part in the laying on of hands? what makes their religion unique?). This information should be incorporated into your interpretive section.

The end result will be evaluated according to the following criteria

- originality and creativity of work
- thoroughness and accuracy of description
- evidence of adequate fieldwork
- thoughtful and well-argued analysis/interpretation
- clearly written and well organized
- well researched
- covers important issues
- adequately acknowledged sources: be sure to include a references cited page including readings, internet searches, interviews, etc.

There are literally hundreds of religious services to choose from. Check the telephone directory under Churches or the Faith section of the Saturday Greeley Tribune. While most are Christian, there are non-Christian services listed as well. Take this opportunity to explore a religion that you know little about.

Tentative Course Outline & Assignments

- please look ahead; assignments are due on day listed
- turn off and put away all cell phones (except for emergency situations)

Week #1	Introduction
January 11	Introduction to Course and Course Requirements
January 13	Religious Literacy Quiz (and discussion)
Week #2	Origins and Evolution of Religion: Theories and Controversies
January 18	What is Religion?
January 20	<u>Assignment:</u> "On the Origin of Religion" (e-reserve). Answer the following in one page/12 font/single space/10 points: Anthropologists (among other scientists) are interested in the origins of religion; 1) one of the arguments in this article is that humans attribute "agency" to inanimate things. In your own words, what does this mean? Provide an example from your own life or from an "informant;" 2) what are the evolutionary advantages of religion? Do you agree? Provide an example.
Week #3	Narrative: Creation Myths
January 25	<u>Assignment:</u> "Genesis [Judeo-Christian]," "P'An Ku" [China], and "Bumba" [Africa] and one other narrative (all hand-outs). Group Presentations (and discussion). Hand-out and assignment tba.
January 27	Creation Myths (continued) + what is our nature as humans? <u>Assignment:</u> "Living the Compassionate Life" (e-reserve). Answer the following: Recently scholars argue that we may be as likely to be altruistic as we are to be violent (by nature). What does the Dalai Lama say about this? Summarize article in about ½ page and respond, reflect, react in about ½ page; one page/12 font/single space/10 points
Week #4	Why Religion?
February 1	<u>Assignment:</u> Paper #1: Why is there Religion? A Personal Expression of Belief or non-Belief (see p. 4 of syllabus)
February 3	<u>Assignment:</u> <i>God Is Not One</i> ; Introduction pp. 1-24 (+ discussion)
Week #5	Islam
February 8	<u>Assignment:</u> <i>God Is Not One</i> ; Chapter 1 (Group #1)
February 10	more on Islam: veiling, Rumi, whirling dervishes...

Week #6	Christianity I
February 15	<u>Assignment:</u> <i>God Is Not One</i> ; Chapter 2 (Group #2)
February 17	more on Christianity: Mother Teresa, blood sacrifice, sacred pain...
Week #7	Christianity II
February 22	film: "Holy Ghost People" <u>Assignment:</u> Paper #2: <u>Salvation on Snake Mountain</u> (see p.4 of syllabus)
February 24	<u>Assignment:</u> "Christian Violence in America" (e-reserve). Answer the 3 questions (on page 2) for the article; then respond, react to content; one page/12 font/single space/10 points.
Week #8	Hinduism
March 1	<u>Assignment:</u> <i>God Is Not One</i> ; Chapter 4 (Group #3)
March 3	Death: a cross-cultural perspective (guest lecture: Angela Gale)
Week #9	Buddhism I
March 8	<u>Assignment:</u> <i>God Is Not One</i> ; Chapter 5 (Group #4)
March 10	more on Buddhism: politics, meditation, Zen... <u>Assignment:</u> "Just Say Om" (e-reserve). List some of the benefits of meditation; try it, or if you meditate, what are your thoughts on the "how to" box. Conclude with responses, reactions, thoughts, doubts on article and practice of meditation; one page/12 font/single space/10 points.
Spring Break	
Week #10	Buddhism II (and Celibacy)
March 22	<u>Assignment:</u> "Resisting Marriage and Renouncing Womanhood: The Choice of Taiwanese Buddhist Nuns" (e-reserve). This scholarly anthropological article examines Chinese (Taiwan) women's choices in becoming nuns. What is the premise of the article? Do examples in this article resonate with any of your experiences or those of friends and family? Reflect; explain. 1 ½ pages/12 font/single space/20 points.
March 24	Sound and Silence: cross-cultural examples
Week #11	Yoruba Religion (and Animism)
March 29	<u>Assignment:</u> <i>God Is Not One</i> ; Chapter 6 (Group #5)
March 31	focus on the <i>Native American Church</i> (group project) <u>Assignment:</u> next page

Assignment: "Hallucinogenic Plants and Their Use in Traditional Societies" (e-reserve). Answer the 3 questions for the article (on page one); one page/12 font/single space/10 points.

Week #12

April 5

Judaism

Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapter 7 (Group #6)

April 7

Out of Town for Conference

Assignment: **Paper # 3: Religious Service Paper** (see page 5-6 of syllabus)

Week #13

April 12

Daoism (and Confucianism)

Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapter 8 (Group #7); skim Chapter 3

April 14

Jero Tapakan Project (or tba)

Week #14

April 19

Shamans and Sorcerers

Becoming a Shaman

April 21

Assignment: "The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events" (e-reserve). Answer the questions on page 110. Then, consider the following quote from E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "The Zande notion of witchcraft is incompatible with our ways of thought" (p. 109). Do you agree? Why or why not? Provide an example if possible; one page/12 font/single space/10 points.

Week #15

April 26

Other Topics

Atheism; Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapters 9 & 10
Mao and China

April 28

Cao Dai in Vietnam (slides, lecture, and group project)

Week #16

May 2 (Monday)

Finals Week

Take Home Exam Due; De-briefing brunch at my house 8:30 – 10:00
1315 Cranford Place.