

Religion, Ritual, and the Sacred
(Anthropology 398: Anthropology of Religion)

Tuesday/Thursday 11:00-12:15 Candelaria 1085 Section 005 Spring 2009

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Office Hours: Mon 1:00 - 3:00
 Tues 12:30 - 4:00
 Thurs 12:30 - 4:00
 or by appointment

Texts (Required): Salvation on Sand Mountain (1995) by Dennis Covington

 Poisonwood Bible (1998) by Barbara Kingsolver

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

- “Living the Compassionate Life” (His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama)
- “How Religion Began: Human Evolution and the Origin of Religion” (James McClenon)
- “Ritual, Consciousness, Belief: A Speculation on the Origin of Religion” (Robert Graber)
- “Theology Since Darwin” (John Haught)
- “Creation Myths” (Scott Leonard and Michael McClure; pp. 32—45)
- “An Eskimo Shaman Purifies a Sick Person” (Knud Rasmussen)
- “The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events” (E.E. Evans-Pritchard)
- “Resisting Marriage and Renouncing Womanhood” (Hillary Crane)
- “Hallucinogenic Plants and Their Use in Traditional Societies” (Wade Davis)
- “Just Say Om” (Joel Stein)
- “Nonviolence as Taught by Jesus Christ” (New Testament)
- “Non-Violent Resistance” (M.K. Gandhi)
- “A Buddhist Perspective on Nonviolence” (Sulak Sivaraksa)
- “Aztec Sacrifice” (Bernardino de Sahagun)
- “Christian Violence in America” (Mark Juergensmeyer)
- “The Letter” (Shadi Eskandani) & “Collateral Damage” (Sarah Husain)
- ”Mother Cow” (Marvin Harris)

Instructions for Accessing Electronic Reserves

1. Begin at the **UNC Homepage** (www.unco.edu) and click on **Libraries**
2. Click on **The Source Library Catalog**
3. Click on **Course Reserves by Instructor**
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.
 - b. You will see the first page of the Reserve item. Enter your name and ID number and click on **Submit**.
5. You can now view or print the Reserve item.

Reserve materials are stored as PDF files. For a free download of the Adobe Acrobat Reader software, go to <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html> For further help accessing electronic Reserves, please call (970) 351-2671.

DSS Statement:

Students who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Disability Support Services at UNC: 970-351-2289 as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

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?

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

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

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. This is not a comparative religions class.

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

100 points	Short Written Assignments
25 points	Group Project on Creation Narratives
50 points	In-class Assignments, Group Projects, etc.
50 points	<u>Paper Assignment #1</u> : Why is There Religion? A Personal Expression of belief or non-belief due January 27 th
50 points	<u>Paper Assignment #2</u> : <i>Salvation on Sand Mountain</i> due March 5 th
100 points	<u>Paper Assignment #3</u> : Religious Service Project due April 7 th
100 points	4 Quizzes on <u>Poisonwood Bible</u> (@ 25 x 4 = 100)
475 points	TOTAL

A	450-405	(100-90%)	C	359-315	(79-70%)
B	404-360	(89-80%)	D	314-270	(69-60%)

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

Due: January 27th

Pages: 4-5

Points: 50

This 4-5 page (double-spaced, 12 font) assignment will be divided into four parts.

Part I (approximately two pages) requires you to examine McClenon's "How Religion Began" and Graber's "Ritual, Consciousness, Belief: A Speculation on the Origin of Religion" as well as McBeth's 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 (you should not try to cover every area). Be sure to cite page numbers and use some materials from each of the required sources.

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; relate to Haught's theoretical perspectives on evolution.

Part III (brief: ½ page) consider whether you think that anthropologists should examine the truth or falsity of religious beliefs.

Part IV (brief: ½ page): what do you hope to get out of this class?

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

Due: March 5th

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.

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 (+ oral presentation)

Due: April 7th

Pages: 7-10

Points: 100

This 7-10 page paper (+class presentation) 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.

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 community (or not)
7. Parallels with other experiences (or not)
8. Emotions (yours *and* members of congregation; as well as your candid reactions)
9. Other: parking lot etiquette, bumper stickers, what have I forgotten?
10. **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.
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), interview, or from some combination thereof...

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.

Class Presentation: you will also be making a presentation to your class-mates about your experiences. This presentation (of under 8 minutes) should be lively and will impress your classmates with your brilliant insights into the religious service of your choice. However you decide to do this is up to; think about impressing me with your perspicacity

Tentative Course Outline & Assignments

- please look ahead; assignments are due on day listed
- please do not turn in any assignments on sheets torn from a spiral notebook
- turn off and put away all cell phones (except for emergency situations)

Week #1

January 13

Introduction

Introduction to Course and Course Requirements

January 15

What is Religion?

Assignment: “Living the Compassionate Life” (Dalai Lama) + one-page, single-spaced typed notes: about 1/3 summary and 2/3 reaction to his message (5 pts).

Week #2

January 20

Origins and Evolution of Religion: Theories and Controversies

Assignment: “How Religion Began: Human Evolution and the Origin of Religion (McClenon) and “Ritual, Consciousness, Belief: A Speculation on the Origin of Religion” (Graber). Answer the 3 questions for each article (on page one of each article): one-page, single-spaced, typed notes for each article (2 page total). (10 pts; 5@).

January 22

Assignment: “Theology Since Darwin” (Haught). It is a mystery to me why so may 21st century students have a problem with the elegant universe/earth “theory” as put forward by Darwin and others. For this reading, your one-and ½ page, single-spaced, typed notes should include ½ page+ summary of Haught’s position on the 3 perspectives; then choose which position best represents your personal position on the issue and discuss why you chose this position (½+ page). This will/should also help you think about your paper due next Tuesday. (10 pts)

Week #3

January 27

Creation Myths I

Assignment: “Creation Myths” (Scott & McClure; pp. 32-45); Read in preparation for group work and presentations due Thursday (this week) and next week; each group will present an assigned creation narrative and explain its cultural significance and how it fits into the schema as presented in this weeks reading

Assignment: **Paper #1: Why is There Religion? A Personal Expression of Belief or non-Belief** (see p. 4 of syllabus)

January 29

Assignment: Group Presentations I (25 points)

Week #4

February 3

Creation Myths II

Assignment: Group Presentations II

Quiz #1: Poisonwood Bible (Books 1 and 2: pp. 1-186)

Week #4 February 5	Creation Myths II (cont.) <u>Assignment:</u> Group Presentations III +Trickster Stories & Wiley Coyote in “The Scrapes of Wrath”
Week #5 February 10	Religious Specialists I Shamans (Animism) and Sorcerers <u>Assignment:</u> “An Eskimo Shaman Purifies a Sick Person” + <u>one-page, single-spaced typed notes:</u> about 1/3 summary and 2/3 reaction (5 pts).
February 12	No class: Out of town for conference
Week #6 February 17	Religious Specialists II Witches & Sorcerers, Priests & Priestesses, Prophets & Ascetics <u>Assignment:</u> “The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events” + <u>one-page, single-spaced typed notes:</u> about 1/3 summary and 2/3 reaction (10 pts) (+ clip from “Strange Beliefs”)
February 19	Celibates: Monks, Nuns, & Priests (+ the ultimate celibates: Shakers) <u>Assignment:</u> “Resisting Marriage and Renouncing Womanhood; the Choice of Taiwanese Buddhist Nuns” + <u>one-page, single-spaced typed notes:</u> about 1/3 summary and 2/3 reaction to his message (15 pts)
Week #7 February 24	Altered States I a focus on the Native American Church (Peyote Way) <u>Assignment:</u> “Hallucinogenic Plants and Their Use in Traditional Societies” Answer the 3 questions for the article (on page one) <u>one-page, single-spaced, typed notes</u> (5 pts)
February 26	Meditation <u>Assignment:</u> “Just Say Om” + <u>one-page, single-spaced typed notes:</u> about 1/3 summary and 2/3 reaction (5 pts)
Week #8 March 3	Altered States II Trance: film “Jero Tapakan Project” (+ group project)
March 5	Snake Handling; film: “Holy Ghost People” <u>Assignment:</u> Paper #2: <u>Salvation on Snake Mountain</u> due (see p. 4 of syllabus)
Week #9 March 10	Sound and Silence Sound (group project)
March 12	Silence (group project) <u>Quiz #2:</u> Poisonwood Bible (Book 3: pp. 187-311)

Spring break March 16-20

Week #10

March 24

Violence and Nonviolence I

Nonviolence: Gandhi, Buddha, Jesus

Assignment: "Nonviolence as Taught by Jesus Christ," "Non-Violent Resistance" [Gandhi], and "A Buddhist Perspective on Nonviolence"
Reads these 3 short articles and write about 1 ½-2 pages comparing/contrasting these 3 perspectives (10 pts).

March 26

Violence

Assignment: "Aztec Sacrifice" (a great read; no written assignment) and "Christian Violence in America." Answer the 3 questions for the article (on page two) one-page, single-spaced, typed notes (10 pts)
(possible film clip: "The Passion of the Christ" and/or "Apocalypta")

Week #11

March 31

Violence and Nonviolence II

Assignment: "The Letter" and "Collateral Damage." Write a one-page single-space reaction to these short articles (5 pts)
film clip "The Women of Hezbollah"

April 2

Buddhist Warriors (my PP on Burma and Thailand)
Quiz #3: Poisonwood Bible (Book 4: pp. 313-375)

Week #12

April 7

Ritual Presentations I

Presentations

Assignment: **Paper # 3: Religious Service Paper**

April 9

Presentations

Week #13

April 14

Ritual Presentations II

Presentations

April 16

tba

Week #14

April 21

Syncretism & New Religious Movements

Introduction to the Topic

film: "The Gospel According to Papua" (group project)

Quiz #4: Poisonwood Bible (Books 5-7: pp. 376-543)

April 23

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

Week #15

April 28

Architecture, the Environment, and the Sacred

Stupas, Temples, Pagodas, and Cathedrals

Assignment: "Mother Cow." Answer the 3 questions for the article (on page one) one-page, single-spaced, typed notes (10 pts)

April 30

Video: "In the Light of Reverence" RMNP, and CNM (group project)

Week #16

May 8 (Friday)

Finals Week

De-briefing brunch at my house 10:45. 1315 Cranford Place.

Written Assignment #2 (plus) short oral presentation:

Symbols and Their Meanings

Due: January 31

Points: 15

This 2-3 page paper will require you to research a religious or mythological symbol. Each student will be assigned a symbol on January 24th (or if you have a symbol in mind that you'd like to research, let me know before 1-24: you can do an internet search, there are dozens of "symbol" sites). Your challenge is to research the meaning of your symbol. Include a little about the history of the symbol and what it means. Be prepared to make a short class presentation that does not ramble and gets to the point. There is nothing worse (well, maybe surgery without anesthesia) than 25 (or so) unfocused too-long class presentations. Keep it lively; make it interesting.

Written Assignment #2 (plus) short oral presentation:

"...every faith in the world is based on fabrications. That is the definition of faith—acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove. Every religion describes God through metaphor, allegory, and exaggeration, from the early Egyptians through modern Sunday school. Metaphors are a way to help our minds process the unprocessable. The problems arise when we begin to believe literally in our own metaphors."

The Davinci Code; Dan Brown; Doubleday 2003: 341-42