

ANT 333
Anthropology of Religion

Tuesday/Thursday 12:30 – 1:45

Candelaria 0065

Section 001

Spring 2013

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Office Hours: Mon 2:00 – 5:00
Tues 11-12 – 2-3
Thurs 11-12 – 2-3
or by appointment

Texts (Required): God Is Not One (2010) by Stephen Prothero (2 copies on reserve at Michener)
Holy Ghost Girl (2011) by Donna Johnson

E-Reserve Readings

Required: listed in order of due date (see syllabus)
Scanned in Weekly BB Folders

“On the Origin of Religion” (Elizabeth Culotta)
“On the Origin of Art and Symbolism” (Michael Balter)
“Genesis” “P’An Ku” “Bumba” “Emergence” “World on Turtle’s Back” “Amma and Nummu
Prepare the World”
“The Letter” (Shadi Eskandani)
“Aztec Sacrifice” (Bernardino de Sahagún)
“Mother Cow” (Marvin Harris)
“A Buddhist Perspective on Nonviolence” (Sulak Sivaraksa)

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:

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?

Student Learning Outcomes; students will

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. demonstrate critical inquiry skills, 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, 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

- 150 points Short Written Assignments; 15 @ 10 pts.
These papers are not optional; they are due on the date listed and will not be accepted as late assignments. In cases of documented illness or family emergency, late papers will be accepted with points deducted. They include 9 responses from *God Is Not One* and 6 BB article responses (see above titles).
- 100 points Participation and discussion; in-class assignments, etc.
Your participation in this class is essential. Also included is that each student (or team) is required to engage the class in an un-graded religious or spiritual "exercise" —something community oriented. You can teach a song, a prayer, a meditation (or other exercise), explore a symbol... If you use a media clip/song, you must conduct a discussion or short "free-write" exercise—these will be assigned daily and you will have a chance to sign up. They must be respectfully presented in 5 minutes.
- 50 points Paper Assignment #1: Why is There Religion? A Personal Expression of belief or non-belief due February 7th
- 100 points Paper Assignment #2: *Holy Ghost Girl* due March 14th
- 100 points Paper Assignment #3: Religious Service Project due April 25th
- Final Exam: If you are not keeping up with the reading, attending class, and contributing to class discussion, I will add a cumulative final exam.
- 500 points TOTAL

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

Nama means "bow," as means "I," and te means "you." Literally: I bow to you. It is a Hindu/Sanskrit gesture *and* greeting. Namaste represents the belief that there is a spark within each of us that is located in the heart chakra. The gesture pays homage to the inner light in all living things—the divine spark that makes each person individual, and indeed spectacular. The hands are placed together at the heart chakra, and the head is bowed. It is a gesture of friendship, kindness, hospitality, and appreciation.

We will use this gesture and word at the beginning and end of each class, out of respect for each other. It can also be used in class discussions, when there are differences of opinion, or if students are not respecting their professor or other students in the class.

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

January 15

Introduction

Introduction to Course and Course Requirements

January 17

Religious Literacy Quiz

Written Assignment: *God is Not One*: Introduction. Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this Introduction can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.

Week #2

January 22

Origins and Evolution of Religion: Theories and Controversies

Religion, Evolution, and Prehistory

January 24

Written Assignment: "On the Origin of Religion" Write a 300-500 word response which answers the following questions: 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; 2) what are the evolutionary advantages of religion? Do you agree? Do you think we are "born believers?" Please provide # of words.

Week #3

January 29

Religion, Art, and Symbolic Thought: Chauvet Cave

film: *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (Herzog)

Written Assignment: "On the Origin of Art and Symbolism" Write a 300-500 word response which answers the following questions: 1) what was a possible evolutionary advantage for humans who had the cognitive ability to construct symbols that communicate meaning? Provide an example from your own life; 2) what else piqued your interest and why? Please provide # of words.

January 31

Cave of Forgotten Dreams (cont.)

Week #4

Feb. 5

Creation Narratives

Assignment: read: "Genesis" [Judeo-Christian], "P'An Ku" [China], "Bumba" [Bushongo/Bantu/Zaire], "Emergence" [Apache], "World on Turtle's Back" (Cayuga/Iroquois), "Amma and Nummu Prepare the World"[Dogon/Nigeria] in preparation for in-class group assignment which we will begin today. No written assignment.

February 7

What Creation Narratives tell us about our nature as cultural beings. Group Presentations/Discussion. Hand-out and assignment tba.

Essay #1: Why is there Religion? A Personal Expression of Belief or non-Belief (see p. 7 of syllabus)

Week #5

February 12

Seven Theories of Religion

#1: Animism & Magic: Tylor and Frazier (case study: magic/witchcraft)

#2: Religion and Personality: Freud

Assignment: Holy Ghost Girl (1-65)

February 14	<p>#3: Society as Sacred: Durkheim</p> <p>#4: Religion as Alienation: Marx (case study: Mao and China)</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Holy Ghost Girl (66-146)</p>
Week #6	<i>Theories of Religion (cont.)</i>
February 19	<p>#5: Reality of the Sacred: Eliade (case study: sacred places)</p> <p>#6: Religion as Construct of the Heart: Evans-Pritchard</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Holy Ghost Girl (147-207)</p>
February 21	<p>#7: Religion as Cultural Symbol: Geertz (case study: natural symbols)</p> <p><u>Assignment:</u> Holy Ghost Girl (208-276)</p>
Week #7	<i>Islam</i>
February 26	<p><u>Written Assignment:</u> <i>God Is Not One</i>; Chapter 1: Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this religion can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.</p>
February 28	<p>more on Islam: veiling, Rumi, Sufi & whirling dervishes...</p> <p><u>Written Assignment:</u> "The Letter" Write a 300-500 word response detailing: what is the relationship between Palestine and Israel? What is an intifada? What is Hamas? Can you relate to suicide bombers? [Note; there is a later reading about a Palestinian group committed to challenging the Israeli occupation non-violently]. Please provide # of words.</p>
Week #8	<i>Christianity</i>
March 5	<p><u>Written Assignment:</u> <i>God Is Not One</i>; Chapter 2: Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this religion can you (do you?) relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.</p>
March 7	<p>Cross-cultural Comparisons of sacrifice</p> <p><u>Written Assignment:</u> "Aztec Sacrifice" Write a 300-500 word response exploring the issue of ritual pain and violence. Religious scholar, Girard, believes that violence is implicit in and lies at the heart of ritual. He says, "sacrifice is therefore the community offering a substitute for itself—protecting itself from its own violence." Why do <u>you</u> think that death (and rebirth) are crucial aspects of so many religions? [Note that Buddhists, Hindus and many others do not agree with Girard's premise—here, though, we are trying to understand why sacrifice that requires pain and sometimes death is common in the world's religions]. Please provide # of words.</p>
Week #9	<i>Syncretistic Religions</i>
March 12	Cao Dai in Vietnam (slides, lecture)
March 14	<p>Native American Church (case study: hallucinogens and ASC/SSC)</p> <p>Paper #2: Holy Ghost Girl (see p. 7 of syllabus)</p>

Spring Break

Week #10

March 26

Hinduism

Written Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapter 4: Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this religion can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.

March 28

Written Assignment: "Mother Cow" Write a 300-500 word response answering the 3 questions on the 1st page of the reading. Please provide # of words.

Week #11

April 2-4

Rituals and Their Environments: Sacred Spaces and Third Paper Requirements: Assistance & Discussion

tba

Week #12

April 9

Buddhism

Written Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapter 5: Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this religion can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.

April 11

Written Assignment: "A Buddhist Perspective on Nonviolence" Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this short essay can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.

Week #13

April 16

Yoruba Religion

Written Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapter 6: Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this religion can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.

April 18

Spirit Possession—a primer

Week #14

April 23

Judaism

Written Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapter 7: Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this religion can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.

April 25

pig hate and cow love: a sampling of religious culinary practices
Paper # 3: Religious Service Paper (see page 7-9 of syllabus)

Week #15

April 30

Daoism and Atheism

Written Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapter 8: Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of this religion can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.

May 2

Written Assignment: *God Is Not One*; Chapters 9 & Conclusion: Write a 300-500 word response detailing: 1) what piqued your interest and why; 2) what part of these chapters can you relate to your personal life? Please provide # of words.

Week #16**Finals Week**

May 10 (Friday)

De-briefing brunch at my house 10:45 – 11:15
1315 Cranford Place

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

Due: February 7th

Pages: 4 (app. 1200 words)

Points: 50

This 1200 +/- word [4 page (double-spaced, 12 font] assignment requires that you examine why there is religion. Using concepts from reading and lecture, examine why you think religion exists. Consider also that the U.S. is the only country in the western world where as incomes and education increase, religious affiliation and belief in God remain very high. Then share your 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: Holy Ghost Girl

Due: March 14th

Pages: 5-6 (app. 1500-1800 words)

Points: 100

This 1500-1800 +/- word [5-6 page, double-spaced, 12 font] assignment requires that you examine the Pentecostal Holy Rollers (Brother Terrell, Donna, and/or congregation) using the **seven theories** of religion. That is, briefly describe each theory and then discuss how *or if* it fits your understanding of tent revivals. Use examples and quotes and cite as (Johnson 2011:X). You do not need to cite BB notes for theory section, but do not use direct quotes. Demonstrate that you understand the theories in your own words. Note also that Prothero (87-91) provides a good introduction to Pentecostals.

The end result will be evaluated according to the following criteria

- originality and creativity of work
- understanding and coverage of theories
- application of theory to Holy Rollers
- thoughtful and well-argued analysis/interpretation
- clearly written and well organized

Paper #3: Religious Service or Religious Rite of Passage

Due: April 25th

Pages: 8-10 (app. 2500-3000 words)

Points: 100

This 8-10 page paper (2500+ words) 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.

What to look for (do **not** use the below as an outline; all may not apply; incorporate into your Description/Interpretation section)

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.

- 1) Background: 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.
- 2) Description & Interpretation: You will need to describe and 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. In Anthropology, **I** is acceptable, **you** is not.
- 3) Interviews: I would also like you to talk to a few people before and/or after the services (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.