

AN 48080

**Anthropology of Religion
Chaminade University**

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Course Description

This course introduces students to the basic concepts used in the anthropological study of religions. We first recognize religion as a universal feature of human cultures. From this are distilled themes that have guided the anthropology of religion throughout the last century. In this class, these themes will include cosmologies & mythologies, ritual, spirit possession, shamanism, syncretism, and the role of religions in sociopolitical control and changes. Case studies are presented which illustrate the diversity of their expression among Native Americans, indigenes of Amazonian, Asian cultures, Brazilians, and faiths found in modern Westernized countries. Throughout, instruction emphasizes the primary relationships between religion, culture, and the environment. This focus is turned towards specific examples and issues of spiritual ecology in the latter part of the course. The instructor will discuss his related fieldwork among Amazonian shamans and with "neo-indigenous" adherents of nature religions in the U.S..

Goals

1. To gain familiarity with the anthropological approach to the study of religions, including familiarity with the basic concepts and vocabulary of the anthropology of religions, its literature and resources.
2. To compare and contrast religions in different cultural and geographic settings.
3. To become critically aware of everyday assumptions about religion.
4. To apply the insights gained through a critical analysis of spiritual ecology to the social/cultural and environmental problems facing our global society.

Format

The course will be devoted mostly to discussion, though lectures will be given every class meeting by the instructor. Class will begin with a discussion of the previous assignment, followed by a lecture on new material, a video, more discussion, and a final lecture. Each student will also be responsible for:

1. 2 chapters or articles in the readings to summarize and present to the class. This presentation should contain a summary of main points, and include questions for discussion.
2. a research report on any topic relevant to this course. The purpose of the project is for students to creatively exchange knowledge between the

- classroom and real life experience. This will be given as a 15 minute presentation to the class, accompanied by a one page handout summary.
3. The completion of a final exam.

Grading

The following evaluation criteria is suggested: final examination (35%), research report (25%), chapter or article summaries (25%), class attendance and participation (15%).

90-100 @ A; 80-90 @ B; 70-79 @ C; 60-69 @ D; 59-0 @ F

The following requirements will be considered in the grading:

- come to class on time and stay for the whole period.
- be courteous and professional in class discussions; i.e. take turns in speaking, allowing others to express their ideas without interruption, communicate with positive, constructive verbal and nonverbal language.
- show respect and an open mind to different ideas and opinions of class members.
- complete assignments on time.

Learning Outcome Assessment

All the student's work will be evaluated for:

- knowledge of the subject matter from the textbook, handed-out articles, class lectures, discussion, videos, and resources from research.
- ability to provide relevant examples to support viewpoints.
- ability to apply the knowledge to understand current issues in society.
- clarity and logical presentation.
- demonstration of having an understanding of the subject matter objectively and from opposing viewpoints.
- demonstration of achieving the objectives of this class.
- ability to analyze, critically review, and compare the issues cross-culturally.

Readings

One textbook is required:

Kinsley, D.

1995 Ecology and Religion: ecological spirituality in cross-cultural perspective. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Schedule

Sept. 15 (F)

LECTURE:

- An overview of anthropology and anthropological approaches to culture and religions, including a survey of classic studies and theories of religion in anthropology.
- On the origins of religion

FILM: Baraka: A documentary of spiritual images and sounds from all over the world.

Sept. 16 (SA)

LECTURE:

- A survey of ways of knowing the world, leading to the dialectics between rationality and religion, science and magic, exoteric (civic/doctrinal) religion and esoteric (mystical/ecstatic) spirituality; and how these effect the enchantment or disenchantment of nature.
- Introduction to Spiritual Ecology

FILM: The Rebirth of Nature: Discussions on the greening of science and God (neoAnimism) by Biologist Rupert Sheldrake, and Eco-psychologist Ralph Metzner.

READING: Kinsley, Chapter 10.

Sept. 15 (M)

LECTURE:

- History of psychoactive or "teacher plants". (slide show on *ayahuasca* in the Amazon)
- Cosmologies and Mythologies

FILM: Popul Vuh: Canticles of the Cosmos:

READING : Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo

1976 Cosmology as Ecological Analysis: A View from the Rain Forest (Huxley Memorial Lecture 1975). *Man* 11:307-318.

Sept. 20 (W)

LECTURE:

- Shamanism
- Religion, illness, and health, with an emphasis on spiritual healing.

FILM: The Holy Ghost People: Concerning Christian snake handling services in rural Kentucky. _

READINGS: Greenfield, Sidney

1999 Hypnosis and Trance Induction in the Surgeries of Brazilian Spiritist Healer-Mediums. (In) *Across the Boundaries of Belief*.

Halifax, Joan

1990 The shaman's initiation. *Revision*.

Turner, Edith

1993 The reality of spirits. *Revision*.

Sept. 22 (F)

LECTURE:

- Religion in traditional cultures
- Rituals and ritual specialists, including rites of passage.

FILM: Balinese Nights: Spirit possessions in Bali taking place in various villages and with various entities.

READING: Kinsley, part 1

Sept. 23 (SA)

LECTURE:

- Asian religions
- Resonance cosmologies

FILM: Shinto: Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan: Just as the title describes, a film that integrates the three elements (Nature, God, Man) emphasized in this course.

READINGS: Kinsley, part II

Sept. 25 (M)

LECTURE:

- Christianity and Ecology
- Ecotheology

FILM: The Shrine about Chimayo: Concerning modern pilgrimages in New Mexico; Short film of Matthew Fox

READINGS: Kinsley, chapters 8, 9, 12

Sept. 26 (TU)

LECTURE:

- Nature religions in the U.S.
- The spiritual ecology of the U.S. herbal renaissance

FILM: Juliette of the Herbs: Pioneering herbalist Juliette De Levey is interviewed near the end of her life. She has the status of a saint among many herbalists, and conveys a message of salvation through positive relations with nature and great concern for the ecological problems that have attended modernity.

READINGS: Kinsley, chapter 11, 13-17.

Sept. 27 (W)

LECTURE:

- **Revitalization movements: syncretism, fundamentalism, millenarianism, and the New Age. Contemporary and Future trends in religion.**
- **Student research reports**

FILM: From the Heart of the World: the Elder Brother's Warning: The Kogi Indigenes of Columbia relay a message to the "Younger Brother" (global industrial society) concerning the devastating environmental effects of our current lifestyle.

Sept. 29 (F)

LECTURE:

- **Student research reports**
- **Exam**

FILM: The Shark Callers of Kontu: Concerning New Guinea coastal tribes people whose mystical relationships with the ocean, specifically sharks, are undergoing changes typical of colonization._