

Approaches to the Study of Religion

RS 200

Spring 2005

Monday night 7-9:50 in Tehama 134

Instructor:

Sarah Pike

Trinity 231

x-6341

e-mail: spike@csuchico.edu

Office hours: **W 1-3, TH 2-4** and by appointment

• Course Description •

This course will explore 1) the origins, development, and institutionalization of religious studies as a scholarly and academic discipline; 2) the diverse theories and methodologies employed within the field of religious studies; and 3) the significant contributors to the discipline and their classic works.

This course is designed primarily for religious studies majors and minors as well as for others who have a serious interest in the nature and methods of the cross-cultural and historical study of religion.

Prerequisites: RS 5 or RS 6 or permission of the instructor.

• Course Texts •

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*

Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*

Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality*

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

(Other readings are on electronic reserve)

• Course Requirements and Grading •

PARTICIPATION and ATTENDANCE

Your participation and attendance are essential to the success of this course. Absences will only be excused in the case of medical or other emergencies. If you miss class for reasons other than emergencies, YOU are responsible for finding out from other students, not from me, what we did that day. If you missed class because of an emergency or illness I will be happy to help you catch up. Tests will only be made up in the case of emergency or illness. Homework assignments will be included in your participation grade (20%).

READING RESPONSES:

One-page responses to the readings are due every week at the beginning of class. These should be typed double-spaced in 10-12 pt. font. Reading responses will be graded using the following scale (20%):

- 1) A=your summary of the material and the points you found interesting indicate a careful and thoughtful reading of the text; you demonstrate that you've put some ideas together on your own; quotations from the text are short but well-chosen and appropriate page numbers are supplied.
- 2) B=Your paper indicates a basic understanding of the material read, with quotations and page numbers adequately in place, but lacks the depth and complexity for an "A."
- 3) C=Your paper indicates a basic understanding of the material read, but misses important points or contains mistakes.
- 4) D=Your paper does not indicate an adequate reading of the material.

RITUAL OBSERVATION PAPER:

See handout (10%)

TESTS: Two tests will cover readings, films, class lectures and discussions, and extra readings. On test days (2/21, 3/28), please bring blue books (20%)

CLASS FACILITATION:

Every week two students will facilitate discussion of the readings. Each presenter must read at least two outside articles about the topic or readings for the week and bring in an annotated bibliography of works consulted (10%).

FINAL PAPER:

See handout (20%)

Course Calendar: Topics, Readings and Films

January 24, Introduction

January 31, Interpreting religion

Readings: Paden, "Interpretive Frames" and Preus, "Religion Within the Limits of 'The Science of Man'"

February 7, Psychological understandings of religion

Readings: Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*
FILM: "Freud"

February 14, The social-scientific study of religion

Readings: Marx, excerpt from "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844" and Weber, Chs. 1-3
Film: "Voodoo and the Church in Haiti"

February 21, Religion and social power

Readings: Weber, Ch. 4

TEST

February 28, Religion as a social construct

Readings: Berger, Chs. 1-2, McGuire, "The Provision of Meaning and Belonging"

March 7, Gender bias in the study of religion

Readings: Berger, Chs. 3-4, King, "Gender and the Study of Religion"

SPRING BREAK

March 21, The history of anthropology and the study of religion

Readings: Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* and Ortner, "Anthropology Since the 1960s"

March 28, Mid-term test

FILM: "The Apostle"

April 4, Ritual studies and field work

Readings: van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* and Grimes, excerpt from *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*

April 11, Magic and religion: introduction

Readings: Tambiah, Chs. 1-3

FILM: "The Last Wave"

Ritual observation paper due

April 18, Magic and religion: rationality and experience

Readings: Tambiah, Chs. 6-7

April 25, Comparative and phenomenological studies of religion

Readings: Eliade, "The Moon and Its Mystique"

FILM: Campbell, "The Message of the Myth"

May 2, The cross-cultural study of religion and cultural relativism

Readings: Achebe, Chs. 1-11

FILM: "The Gods Must Be Crazy"

May 9, Conclusions

Readings: Achebe, Chs. 12-25

Final paper due by the end of finals week

• Other Information •

- Students with certified disabilities: please notify me of any special needs within the first two weeks of the semester. I will make every effort possible to facilitate your success in this course.
- Lateness: In fairness to all, I will penalize late papers 1/3 letter grade per business day.
- It is recommended that students make and keep a copy of all assignments and papers submitted to the instructor, especially anything submitted over e-mail.
- Students are expected to turn off all pagers, cell phones and other electronic devices during class time.
- Students are expected to pay attention and participate in class meetings.
- Students may not read other materials (newspapers, magazines) or work on assignments from other classes during this class.
- All class participants are expected to exhibit respectful behavior to other students and the instructor.
- Plagiarism and cheating are grave violations of the academic integrity policy of the California State University, Chico. This policy (EM 04-36) is posted at http://www.csuchico.edu/prs/EMs/EM04/em04_36.htm. Every student enrolled in a Religious Studies course is required to read through the policy and complete the RS tutorial and self test on plagiarism and cheating either as an in-class assignment, homework exercise, or WebCT activity. We view plagiarism and cheating as serious offenses. The policy of the Department of Religious Studies is that anyone found to have blatantly cheated or plagiarized on an assignment will automatically fail the course and be referred to student judicial affairs for further disciplinary action.