

# The Anthropology of Christianity

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Office Hours: W 2pm-3:30pm, Th 10:30am-12pm, or by Appt.



*Course Description.* With 2.2 billion estimated adherents, Christianity is the largest religious movement in the world. Despite this large size, Christianity has, until relatively recently, been under-studied by anthropologists. However, the past two decades have seen an explosion of anthropological studies of the social, cultural, and discursive dimensions of Christianity.

In the first part of this course (Units 1 and 2,) we explore the underlying elements of Christianity, outlining common beliefs and various divisions; we also consider the difficulties in defining the term “Christianity.” As well, we will unpack the importance of ritual to Christianity, while also focusing on how Christianity teaches people to understand themselves and their emotions.

In the second half of this course (Units 3 and 4) we will explore how conversion to Christianity transforms cultures across the world and how these cultures, in turn, transform Christianity. From syncretic Mayan/Catholicism to Filipino crucifixion commemoration rites (seen above), we highlight the “ethnographic paradox” of Christianity: that it sees itself as a universal transcendent truth but has been radically re-envisioned by the diverse peoples who practice it. Finally we consider the impact of Christianity on other social phenomena, such as conceptualizations of gender, U.S. politics, medieval European monarchies, and anthropology itself. In this regard, we question our understanding of Christianity as simply a religion, and highlight it as a culture of its own.

## Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to perform ethnographic analyses of Christian groups.
- Students will be able to explain central concepts from the anthropology of religion, such as ritual and subjectivity, and apply them to Christianity.
- Students will comprehend the ways in which Christianity produces cultural change by identifying specific examples of this phenomena.
- Students will be able to apply an anthropological perspective to identify Christianity's intersections with other social forces such as economy, politics, and kinship.

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## Required Texts

1. Luhrmann, Tanya M. *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (Vintage Books, 2012).
2. Robbins, Joel. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in Papua New Guinea Society* (University of California Press, 2004).

## Assignments

### Online Discussion Board

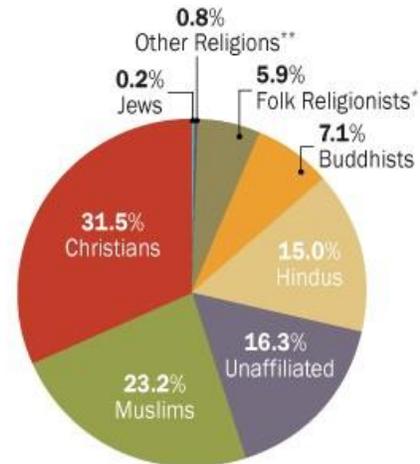
Once a week students are required to briefly respond to the weekly thought question in a discussion board on Blackboard (100-200 words). These questions are designed to provoke students to go beyond fact-recall and synthesize what they have learned. Responses will be graded on a ten-point scale based on evidence of completion of readings up to that point and engagement with the question. These are due every week by **Tuesday at 11:00 AM via Blackboard**.

### “The Sacred Social” Term Paper and Seminar

An important purpose of this course is for students not only to learn *about* the anthropology of Christianity, but to gain the tools to *do* ethnography with Christian communities. Along these lines, students will produce a paper, due **08/12/15** at the start of class, in which you choose a Christian group and document 2-3 interesting cultural or social dimensions of that group. The paper will be 5-6 pages, doublespaced, Times New Roman 12 point font. Additional instructions and a grading rubric will be provided. On 08/12/15 you will briefly present about your paper to the class.

### Size of Major Religious Groups, 2010

Percentage of the global population



\*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.

\*\*Includes Bahá'ís, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and many other faiths. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

## Exams

To assess student comprehension, an in-class mid-term (**07/29/15**) and take-home final (distributed 08/10/15, due 08/13/15) will be given. The mid-term will be multiple choice, true/false, and short answer. The final will be essay-based and students will submit it via email by **08/13/15 by 5:00 PM**.

## In-class Discussion

It is expected that students will come to class having read the assigned readings and prepared to take part in discussion. I will keep a record of students' participation in class discussion. This discussion will play a critical role in helping students to apply concepts from the readings, synthesize broader points, and critically evaluate the authors' arguments. Frequent lack of attendance will affect this portion of your grade.

## Grading Makeup

Online Discussion.....	15%
Term Paper.....	20%
Mid-term Exam.....	25%
Final Exam.....	25%
In-class Discussion.....	15%

## Grading Scale

A.....	90-100
B.....	80-89
C.....	70-79
D.....	60-69
F.....	59 and lower

## Course Policies

**Withdrawal:** If you are unable to complete this course, you must officially withdraw by the University-designated date (for a "W" with instructor approval). Withdrawing from a course is a formal procedure that YOU must initiate. I cannot do it for you. If you simply stop attending and do not withdraw, you will receive a performance grade, usually an "F".

**Extra Credit:** There is no extra credit planned at this time.

**Acceptable Student Behavior:** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be

tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at [www.deanofstudents.unt.edu](http://www.deanofstudents.unt.edu).

In this classroom, “**acceptable student behavior**” includes:

Always be respectful of others' thoughts, opinions, and perspectives.

Do not come late to class.

No cell phone usage, internet browsing, or social media use unless directed by the instructor.

Engage in class discussions, having read assigned readings.

Attend class regularly.

**Contacting the Professor:** Please feel free to come by office hours for assistance. Email is the other best way to get in touch with me outside of class. In the email, indicate your full name to facilitate my response. Please give me 24 hours to respond. \*\*Be aware that I usually do not answer emails on Sundays or after 8:00 PM at night.

**Do Not Miss Exams or the Seminar:** If you have a conflict with one of the course exams or with the end of term seminar, it is your responsibility to make alternative arrangements the first week of class – NOT the week of the exam or seminar. Allowing make-up is up to the discretion of the instructor. The date for the mid-term exam is 07/30/15, for the seminar 08/12/15, and to turn the final in by email, 08/13/15 by 5:00 PM.

**Late Work:** Discussion board comments are due, through the Blackboard system, once a week (Tuesday at 11:00 AM CST). After this point, comments receive a 20% deduction in points by day (with Tuesday after 11:00 AM being Day 1), unless there are previous arrangements with the instructor. Students may NOT turn in the seminar paper or final exam late, unless there are previous arrangements with the instructor.

**Academic Misconduct:** The Department of Anthropology does not tolerate plagiarism, cheating, or helping others to cheat. Students suspected of any of these will be provided the opportunity for a hearing; a guilty finding will merit an automatic “F” in the course. For information on the University's policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty, see the UNT Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities, <http://www.unt.edu/csrr/>.

**ADA:** The Anthropology Department does not discriminate based on an individual's disability, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Our program provides academic adjustments or help to individuals with disabilities, and attempts will be made to meet all certified requirements. Please see me if you have a documented disability so that appropriate arrangements can be made to help you get the most out of this class.

## *Course Schedule*

### **Unit I: Introduction to the Anthropology of Christianity**

- 07/13 Course Introduction: Anthropology & Christianity  
07/14 A Brief History of Christianity  
07/15 Ritual, Sin, and Redemption: An Anthropological Perspective  
Text: Robbins, *Becoming Sinners*, Chapter 7 (pp. 253-268, pp. 281-288)  
07/16 Ethnography with Christian Communities  
Text: Lurhmann, *When God Talks Back*, Preface, Chapter 1 (pp. 12-39)

### **Unit II: The Making of Christian Selves**

- 07/20 The Problem of Presence  
07/21 Learning to Hear God: Christian Subjectivities  
Text: Lurhmann, *When God Talks Back*, Chapter 2  
07/22 Crafting the Christian Self: Affect and Cosmology  
Text: Lurhmann, *When God Talks Back*, Chapter 4

### **Unit III: Conversion and Culture Change**

- 07/23 Syncretism and Catholicism in Guatemala  
Text: Mackenzie, "Judas Off the Noose: *Sacerdotes Mayas, Costumbristas*, and the Politics of Purity in the Tradition of San Simón in Guatemala" (pp. 356-361) (Blackboard)  
07/27 Strategic Participation by Protestants in Papua New Guinea  
Text: Robbins, *Becoming Sinners*, Chapter 2  
07/28 Conversion by Pentecostals in Papua New Guinea  
Text: Robbins, *Becoming Sinners*, Chapter 3  
07/29 Localization and Hybridity: Presbyterians in Ghana  
Text: Meyer, "If You Are a Devil, You Are a Witch and, If You Are a Witch, You Are a Devil,': The Integration of 'Pagan' Ideas into the Conceptual Universe of Ewe Christians in Southeastern Ghana" (pp. 100-119) (Blackboard)  
07/30 **Mid-term Exam**

### **Unit IV: Christianity and...**

- 08/03 Christianity and Communication  
Text: Klaitz, *Death in a Church of Life*, Excerpt (Blackboard)  
08/04 Christianity and Gender  
Text: Smilde, "The Fundamental Unity of the Conservative and Revolutionary Tendencies in Venezuelan Evangelicalism" (pp. 343-359) (Blackboard)

- 08/05 Christianity, Individualism, and Social Relations  
Text: Robbins, *Becoming Sinners*, Chapter 8 (pp. 293-303)
- 08/06 Christianity and Politics  
Text: Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" (Blackboard)
- 08/10 Christianity and Capitalism  
Text: Weber, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" Excerpt (Blackboard)
- Final Exam Distributed**
- 08/11 Christianity and Anthropology; Conclusion  
Text: Asad, "Religion as a Cultural Category" (Blackboard)
- 08/12 **"Sacred Social" Seminar**  
**Term Paper Due in Class**
- 08/13 **Final Exam Due by 5:00 PM**

### Some Notes on the Schedule

- 1) \*\*\*The course schedule is subject to change at the instructor's discretion; you are expected to attend class, check Blackboard, and check your university email to ensure you are apprised of any updates.
- 2) Just because a group is not mentioned specifically in the schedule or readings does not mean we will not cover it: for example, we will talk about Greek Orthodox, Southern Baptists, and Jehovah's Witnesses, despite none of them appearing on the schedule.
- 3) Just because a *topic* is not mentioned in the reading list does not mean we will not be covering it. For example: Christianity and evolution.
- 4) Please try to get the books by the first week, but I will have the first day of readings up on Blackboard.
- 5) If the readings seem too heavy, DO.NOT.WORRY. This is an accelerated summer course, but we will talk in class about some strategies to make the readings quicker and easier to understand.