**Professor:** Anna I. Corwin Ph.D.

**Office:** Garaventa 317

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays 11:35am -12:35pm, Thursdays 3-4pm & by appointment

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Please email only questions that can be answered briefly. If you have a complex question or situation, please visit me during office hours. Please write **ANT 117 and a topic** in the subject line.

**Course Description**

Through the study of ethnographic texts, social science theory, and first-person accounts of religious experiences from religious practitioners around the world, students in this class will examine a range of religious rituals, traditions, and experiences. In the course, we will encounter a number of religious traditions including Hinduism, Shamanism, Stoicism, Jainism among others. Through the close examination of ethnographic texts, we will gain an appreciation for a diversity of social, cultural, ethical, and theological religious traditions. Students will engage with the texts from an *emic* or insiders’ perspective, demonstrating an understanding of how individuals within the theological tradition experience and understand their religious practices and experiences. In addition to exploring ethnographic accounts of religious experiences, students will examine the texts using disciplinary methods developed in the social sciences, specifically anthropology, to interpret the texts. This process of interpretation and analysis will engage an *etic*, or outsider’s perspective. To do this, we will read a number of social scientists, including E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, D. W. Winnicott, Justin Barrett and Mary Douglas. We will apply the social scientists’ theories of religion to analyze religion in the ethnographic texts we read. Through this process, students will gain the skills to analyze various world religious traditions from the practitioner’s experiential perspective and students will gain experience applying social science theory to religious practice. In addition to the readings and papers, students will also be asked to conduct an ethnography in which they attend a religious event and analyze it from both a believer’s perspective and drawing on the methods and perspectives of social science theory. Students are strongly encouraged to research a religious practice with which they have little or no familiarity.

**Course Aims and Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

* Demonstrate an understanding of a number of diverse religious traditions and experiences
* Appreciate the great diversity in religious traditions, rituals, and cosmologies
* Demonstrate an ability to explore religious questions from a believer’s point of view (an emic perspective) and from the critical or social science perspective (an etic perspective).
* Demonstrate mastery of the anthropological vocabulary and the analytical ideas that underlie their usage
* Apply anthropological methods of inquiry to ethnographic data while engaging respectfully and using cultural relativism
* Display familiarity with a variety of social science approaches to religion and their contributions to the discipline

**Required Texts Include:**

* Freud, Sigmund (2012) Future of an Illusion. Broadview Editions
* Barrett, Justin (2004) Why Would Anyone Believe in God, AltaMira Press.
* Douglas, Mary (2002) Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo, Routledge Classics.
* Pederson, Morton Axel (2011) Not Quite Shamans: Spirit Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia

Students are expected to complete all reading assignments **before** the lecture for which the readings are assigned. The required texts are available for purchase in the SMC bookstore. They have also been placed on reserve in the library. Please note that we may not be reading each text in its entirety. Chapter selections will be assigned in class.

*Course Requirements:*

1) Attendance and Participation– 30%

A primary mode of learning in this class is through in class participation. Students will be evaluated for the quality of their efforts to learn through class participation as well as to contribute to classmates’ learning by helping others understand ideas and participate in discussion. Class participation will follow the Saint Mary’s College Seminar model. This model emphasizes collaborative learning in which participants should aim to deepen the focus and depth of the class discussion. Students will be graded not only for the quantity but of participation, but rather for how deeply their participation engages the text, collaborates with others, and deepens our collective learning.

2) Article Synthesis Assignments – 20%

Before most classes, students will be responsible for bringing a short, one to two paragraph article summary and two discussion questions for each of the assigned articles or chapters. The **article synthesis** should summarize the **argument and key points** the author makes in the paper. The synthesis should demonstrate and understanding of the author’s main arguments. In addition, students should bring questions designed to deepen our discussion**.** Unlike what you’ve encountered in seminar, in this class, the **questions** may focus how the article relates to other readings we’ve done in class.

3) Social Science Analysis Paper – 25%

Students will be asked to write a paper analyzing the ethnographic experiences we read about in one of our ethnographic texts (such as Sri Ramakrishna’s account) from two perspectives. First, explain how the individuals in the ethnography understand their religious experiences. What did these experiences mean to them? How did they interpret them? Next, students are asked to analyze the experiences according to each of the social science theorists we’ve read in the class. How would William James, Émile Durkheim, Justin Barrett, and D.W. Winnicott explain the account of these experiences? The paper encourages students to examine the religious experience from both an *emic*, or insiders perspective, taking seriously the individuals’ own interpretation of their experiences, as well as an *etic*, or outsiders perspective, bringing theoretical social science analyses to the account. Details and rubric will be handed out in class.

4) Ethnographic Analysis – 15%

Students will attend a religious service, ideally one that they are not familiar with. Students will take field notes and analyze the service using the theoretical concepts from class. The paper asks students to write an ethnography that integrates from both the *emic*, or insiders perspective, as well as an *etic*, or outsiders perspective of the religious event they attend. Students will be asked to interpret how believers might experience the event they attend and they will be asked to interpret the event using the social science theories covered in class. Details and rubric will be handed out in class.

5) Presentation of Ethnographic Findings – 10%

Students will present their ethnography and analysis in an oral presentation in class.

**Class Schedule**

*\*\* The course schedule may change to accommodate*

*scheduling changes or developing student interests\*\**

**Week 1: Introduction to the course**

*Tuesday 8/28:* Introduction to the course.

* Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, *in* Ram Das, *Be Love Now* pp 188-196

*Thursday 8/30:*

* Byron Good: *Medical Anthropology and the Problem of Belief* (On Moodle)
* Synthesis and Questions due

**Week 2: Magic, Witchcraft and Shamanism –Making Sense of the World**

*Tuesday 9/4:*

* David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* Chapter 1
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 9/6:*

* Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 4
* Synthesis and Questions due
* Identification of Ethnographic Site due for Instructor Approval

**Week 3: Freud, Atheism, Greek Stoicism, and the Uselessness of Gods**

*Tuesday 9/11:*

* Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (Book II, pp. 65-77)
* Greenblatt, Stephen, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 9/13:*

* Sigmund Freud, *Future of An Illusion* (Select Chapters)
* Synthesis and Questions due

**Week 4: Psychological Anthropology and Religious Experience**

*Tuesday 9/18:*

* D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Select Essays)
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 9/20:*

* Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Conclusion
* Synthesis and Questions due

**Week 5: William James and Religious Experience**

*Tuesday 9/25:*

* William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, Lectures 16 &17
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 9/27:*

* William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, Conclusion
* Synthesis and Questions due

**Week 6: Perspectivism and Evolutionary Psychology**

*Tuesday 10/2:*

* Vivieros De Castro, *Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism* (Moodle)
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 10/4:*

* Justin Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God*, chapters 1-3, pp. 1-44
* Synthesis and Questions due

**Week 7: Evolutionary Psychology and Religious Experience**

*Tuesday 10/9:*

* Justin Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God*, chapters 7-9, pp. 95-125
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 10/11:*

* Sarma, *The experience of Sri Ramakrishna*
* Swami Nikhilananda, *Introduction to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*
* Synthesis and Questions due

**Week 8: Making Sense of Religious Experience**

*Tuesday 10/16:*

* Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, pp. 1-30
* **Theoretical Outline for Sri Ramakrishna paper Due**

*Thursday 10/19: NO CLASS, MIDTERM HOLIDAY*

**Week 9: Mary Douglas and Symbolic Anthropology**

*Tuesday 10/23:*

* Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 10/25:*

* Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* Introduction and Chapters 4 and 7
* Synthesis and Questions due
* Ethnographic Field Notes Due

**Week 10:**

*Tuesday 10/30:*

* Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* Chapters 8, and 10
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 11/1:*

* Pederson, *Not Quite Shamans* Introduction
* Summary and Synthesis Due
* **Sri Ramakrishna paper Due**

**Week 11:**

*Tuesday 11/6:*

* Pederson, *Not Quite Shamans* Chapter 1
* Summary and Synthesis Due

*Thursday 11/8:*

* Pederson, *Not Quite Shamans* Chapter 3
* Synthesis and Questions due

**Week 12:**

*Tuesday 11/13:*

* Pederson, *Not Quite Shamans* Chapter 4 and Conclusion
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 11/15:* AAA MEETINGS – Kumaré Film

* Introduction (with Thesis) and Outline for Ethnographic Paper Due

**Week 13:**

*Tuesday 11/20:*

*Thursday 11/22: THANKSGIVING BREAK*

**Week 14:**

*Tuesday 11/27:*

* Laidlaw, *A life worth leaving: fasting to death as telos of a Jain religious life*
* Synthesis and Questions due

*Thursday 11/29:*

* Superbabies Don’t Cry
* Synthesis and Questions due

**Final Presentations**

**Tuesday Dec. 4, 1-3pm**