The Anthropology of Religion

The anthropology of religion is not fashionable at present in American anthropology. In light of the fact that huge portions of the world’s population, including a great many of the people whom anthropologists purport to be interested in, are deeply invested in religious ideas and practices, this scholarly neglect is regrettable. (It also deserves analysis.) After an introductory set of important general articles in the field, in the course of this semester we will consider approaches anthropologists have taken recently to three religious traditions: Protestant Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. A guiding question will be whether Hinduism and/or Islam show tendencies toward the kinds of innovations Protestantism introduced into Christianity. We will finish off with some consideration of secularism (considered by some to be the logical, if unintended, outcome of the Protestant Reformation).

Requirements:
Each student is required to complete the assigned reading every week and to write a brief, one-paragraph or half-page comment or question on the reading. Those comments are to be submitted on Canvas before class. Each class will begin by going over these topics for discussion, which will then structure the seminar discussion for the class.

Students must submit two additional written assignments. The first, due mid-way through the semester, is a consideration of at least four of the readings we have discussed, with reference to each other. How do they support or suggest emendation of each other? The second is either of the following: 1) a paper of ten to twenty pages on a topic of your choosing, but with evidence in the paper that the readings and discussion for this course have had some impact on your thinking; or 2) an annotated syllabus for an upper-division undergraduate course in your field that draws on ideas we have discussed. Were you to teach a course on religion, what topics would you address and what readings would you assign? The syllabus must be extensively annotated. For every reading assigned, you need to provide a brief synopsis of its contents and then an explanation of what purpose it serves in the course and why it comes at that point. You are expected to develop a syllabus that goes beyond the readings in this course, emphasizing whatever perspectives and areas most directly concern your own interests or work.

During the last sessions of the seminar, students will present their term projects as works in progress, to solicit reactions and suggestions from other members of the seminar.

Regular attendance is required. All absences must be explained, and following any absence, a two-page discussion of the reading must be submitted before the next meeting of the seminar.

I have placed book orders at the Co-op Bookstore. The readings will also be available at PCL Reserves.

Reading schedule

Week 2 January 24


GN 315 G36


Week 3 January 31


Week 4 February 7


Week 5 February 14


Week 6 February 21


Week 7 February 28

Week 9        March 21


*Q 1785 M34 2005  
Electronic Resource*

Week 10       March 28


*BP 170.85 H57 2006  
Electronic Resource*

**Midterm essay is due, to be submitted on Canvas, by March 30.**

Week 11       April 4


*Electronic Resource*


*BL 1205 E25 1998*

Week 12       April 11


*BL 1284.532 B46 S37 2015  
Electronic Resource*

Week 13       April 18


*BL 1237.58 D48 R3635 2014*

Week 14       April 25


*Electronic Resource*

Week 15       May 2


*JC 591 A83 2013*
Final projects are due on Monday, May 14, at noon. They are to be submitted on Canvas.