

AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
Department of Global Studies and Sociology
Los Angeles Term

GLBL345: *Urban Religious Movements* (3 units)

Professor: Richard Christopherson

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CATALOG DESCRIPTION

A survey of religious life in Los Angeles, including various forms of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and new religious movements. Emphasis is placed on the vernacular character of faith, embodied and expressed in the beliefs, attitudes, practices and rituals of their specific social and cultural situations. Learning activities include participant-observation at religious events (services), informant interviewing, directed reading, and group discussion.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students completing this course should be able to:

- Recognize the role that religions play in providing the shared meanings and sense of belonging that make collective life possible;
- Compare and contrast two general approaches to the study of religion, the *detached* approach typical of social science and a *committed* approach typical of Christian theology;
- Discuss the particularist, inclusivist, and pluralist models for understanding the relationship between different religious traditions;
- Conduct a field research project focusing on a religious community in Los Angeles and write a descriptive report based on systematic observations and interviews;
- Demonstrate the ability to empathetically learn *about* and *from* faith traditions different from their own.

TEXTS

- Coles, Robert. *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990.
- Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991 (optional)
- John Hinnells (ed.). *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.
- Winfried Corduan. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 1998.

Additional Sources:

- Sir Norman Anderson. *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984.
- H. Paul Chalfant, R. Beckley, E. Palmer. *Religion in Contemporary Society* (3rd ed.). Itasca, IL: Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- Andrew Clark & Bruce Winter, eds. *One God One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism*. Cambridge, U.K.: Tyndale House, 1991.
- John B. Cobb, Jr. *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way beyond Absolutism and Relativism*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Winfried Corduan. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998.
- Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991.
- Diana L. Eck. *A New Religious America: How A "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. N.Y., N.Y.: Harper Collins, 2001
- Richard W. Flory, and D. Miller. *GenX Religion*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2000.
- Rita Gross, T. Muck, Eds. *Buddhists Talk about Jesus, Christians Talk about Buddha*. New York, NY: Continuum International Pub., 2000.
- Hassan Hathout. *Reading the Muslim Mind*. Plainfield, IN: American Trust Publications, 1997
- Ronald Johnstone. *Religion and Society: A Sociology of Religion* (5th ed.). Prentice Hall, 1997.
- Terry Muck. *The Mysterious Beyond: A Basic Guide to Studying Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993.
- Jacob Neusner. *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus: An Intermillennial, Interfaith Exchange*, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1994.
- Lesslie Newbigin. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989.
- S. A. Nigosian. *World Faiths*. N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Don Pittman, Ruben L.F. Habito, Terry C. Muck. *Ministry & Theology in Global Perspective: Contemporary Challenges for the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Novak, Philip. Ed. *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*. San Francisco: Harper, 1995.
- Robert Orsi (ed.). *Gods of the City*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Center for Religion and Civic Culture. 1998. *Los Angeles Religion: A Civic Profile*. University of Southern California.
- Thomas P. Rausch, ed. *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000.
- Vernon Reynolds and R. Tanner. *The Social Ecology of Religion*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Ninian Smart. *Religions of Asia*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1993.
- Ware, Timothy. *The Orthodox Church*. London: Penguin. 1993.
- William Zellner & M. Petrowsky. *Sects, Cults, and Spiritual Communities: A Sociological Analysis*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS: We will be a seminar style class. Each student's participation is vital to the success of this course. Arrive on time with your days work completed, ready to fully engage with the class. If speaking comes easy to you, please remember to encourage other students to speak and to be an active listener as well as an active speaker. If speaking doesn't come easy to you, "plan ahead"--*prepare to make a contribution every day*. Everyone listens, everyone speaks, we learn together!

1. **Attendance** at each class session is required. The class agenda includes:
 - Formal and informal discussions of the reading assignments, common questions, puzzlements, academic and personal challenges;
 - Planning aspects of our fieldwork including the questions you want to ask during our site visits;
 - Interpreting field information in terms of the models described in the readings;
 - Presentations of topics by instructor and students.

2. **Participation** grades will be based on a point system:
 - 1 present, but did not verbally participate
 - 2 verbally participated one time
 - 3 verbally participated more than once
 - 4 made equitable contribution to discussion in terms of both quality and quantity

3. **Reading.** Assigned articles and book chapters that provide the historical, theological, and sociological framework for organizing and interpreting insights gained from your community experiences.

4. **Reading Reflections:** "WRITING about READING" assignments are due as listed in the "Schedule of Topics and Assignments". Due at the beginning of class.

5. **Videos:** A few selected videos intended to expand your understanding of religious movements beyond the texts and lectures.

6. **Site visits:** As a class will visit the religious sites listed in the class schedule. Participation in all site visits is required.

7. **Religion Fieldwork Project.** Pairs of students will plan and complete a course project involving an extended encounter with the people and practices of another faith community. Student pairs will (a) select a particular religious community to study, (b) plan/schedule a series of visits to their services, (c) complete corollary reading, (d) gather information using the instructor-provided *guides for observation and interviewing*, and (e) individually write up your field notes, reading notes, and interview transcripts into a final report. *See the attached description: "Religion Fieldwork Project."*

GRADING:

Writing about the Reading	20%
Reading Discussion Facilitator	5%
Participation in class and on site visits	20%
Field Research Project	50%
Oral report of Field Research Project	5%

*The grade of “incomplete” can only be given in the case of verified personal/family emergency and with the approval of the department chair and the college dean.)

Students are expected to conduct themselves responsibly and honorably in all of their activities as members of this class. Lying, cheating, or stealing in any form will not be tolerated. Failure to adhere to the high standards of integrity required in academic work will result in an “F” grade for the course.

Here is the official statement of APU’s academic integrity policy:

The mission of Azusa Pacific University includes cultivating in each student not only the academic skills that are required for a university degree, but also the characteristics of academic integrity that are integral to a sound Christian education. It is therefore part of the mission of the university to nurture in each student a sense of moral responsibility consistent with the biblical teachings of honesty and accountability. Furthermore, a breach of academic integrity is viewed as an act which is fundamentally inconsistent with the purpose and mission of the entire university. A complete copy of the Academic Integrity Policy is available in the Office of Student Life, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs, and online.

Here is the official APU disability procedure:

Students in this course who have a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with an advisor in the Learning Enrichment Center (ext. 3849) as soon as possible to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, ASSIGNMENTS, & SITE VISITS

1. 10/19: GETTING ACQUAINTED, GETTING STARTED –

Readings: Chap. I, "Point of Departure" in *The World's Religions*, Huston Smith
Chap.2, "Method" in *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Robert Coles

Topics: "Detachment" and the "commitment" in the study of religion
Religion is ritual, experience, community, and belief

Site Visits: Immanuel Presbyterian 12:30
Rev. Frank Alton
3300 Wilshire Blvd.
St. Nicolas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral 2:30
Deacon Nicholas Hanna
2300 3rd Ave.

2. 10/21: HINDUISM

Reading: Chap. 2 "Hinduism" in Huston Smith
Topic: Religious worldviews--naturalism, theism, and pantheism

Site Visit: Vedanta Society
Swami Atmavidyananda
Hollywood

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Bring to class your written responses to the "WRITING about READING" questions.2. With your fieldwork partner, bring to class your one page "Fieldwork Proposal". |
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3. 10/26: BUDDHISM

Reading: Chap. III, "Buddhism" in Huston Smith
Topic: The culture of American Buddhism—emerging values, norms, and practice

Site Visit: International Buddhist Meditation Center 1:00
928 S. New Hampshire Ave.
Rev. Kusala

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Bring to class your written responses to the "WRITING about READING" questions. |
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4. 10/30: ISLAM (*note:* We will be meeting on Friday--instead of Weds.--so that we can attend the Friday prayer service at the Islamic Center.)

Reading: Chap. VI, "Islam" in Huston Smith
Chap. 10, "Islamic Surrender" in Robert Coles
Topic: Cultural diversity and Muslim identity in Los Angeles

1. Bring to class your written responses to the "WRITING about READING" questions.

Site visit: Islamic Center of Southern California 11:30am
434 So. Vermont Ave.
Jihad Turk, Religious and Social Services Coordinator

6. 11/2: JUDAISM

Reading: Chap. VII, "Judaism" in Huston Smith
Chap. 11, "Jewish Righteousness" in Robert Coles
Topic: Three ways to be Jewish: Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox
Judaism

1. Bring to class your written responses to the "WRITING about READING" questions.

Site Visit: Rabbi Chaim Kolodny 1:00
APU Wilshire Center

5. 11/4: CHRISTIANITY (*note:* We'll meet at St. Thomas the Apostle for morning Mass at 8am.)

Readings: Chap. VIII, "Christianity" in Huston Smith
Chap. 9, "Christian Salvation" in Coles
Reserve: Leslie Newbiggin, "The Gospel and the Religions", in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*
Topic: Liturgical worship, incarnational faith, & kingdom theology in Catholic L.A.

Site Visit: 8:00am, Morning Mass
St. Thomas the Apostle
1321 S. Mariposa Ave. (corner of Mariposa and Pico Blvd.)
Father Jay Cunnane

1. Bring to class your written responses to the "WRITING about READING" questions.

7. 11/9: NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

Readings: Reserve: "The Church of Scientology: Lightning Rod for Cultural Boundary Conflicts," Mary Farrell Bednarowski, in *America's Alternative Religions*, Tim Miller (ed.), 1995.

Topic: The pursuit of pure spirit—secret knowledge, "classic tech" & escape from the physical world

Site Visit: Church of Scientology of LA 1pm
4810 W. Sunset Blvd.
Hollywood

8. 11/11: STUDENT PROJECTS

Readings: Chap. X, "A Final Examination" in Huston Smith
Seminar presentations of field research projects

Field Research Projects Due

I. General Procedures for the Field Research Project:

A. With a partner from the class, select a religious community that interests you but with which you are relatively unfamiliar. Contact a representative of the congregation or religious group, explaining that you are doing a project for a university course, and ask permission to visit their services and to talk with some of their members and leaders.

B. Partners hand in a typed 1 pg. proposal statement on Wednesday 10/21. Include:

1. The name and location of the congregation and/or religious community;
2. A brief account of your contact/visit with this group;
3. A brief description of how you plan to do the field study. Provide the dates you plan to visit, and kinds of events/rituals you expect to observe (e.g. services, social gatherings, religious instruction classes, other special events).
4. Why you are interested in this group and what you hope to learn from them.

C. Use the proposal to guide your research. With your partner, visit the religious group at least three times, observing the worship services, making personal contacts, attending classes, social events, etc. Write up individual field notes for each visit. (See “*The Protocol: Some Things to look for at Religious Events*”)

D. Each partner interviews 3 members of the group. If possible, tape record the interviews and transcribe the portions that you plan to include in your report. If you don’t tape record, take notes during the interview including as many direct, word-for-word quotations as possible. Expand those notes as soon as you’ve concluded the interview session. Tape recording is the most efficient way to collect data. (See “*The Interview: How to Ask Questions about Religious Practices, Beliefs, and Experience*”)

E. Locate and read materials about the religion. Use libraries, bookstores, websites, material provided by the religious group, our textbooks, sources referred to in our class materials, etc. Ask for assistance from librarians, your professor, and the people that you meet at your research site. Read a balanced selection of sources. For example: 1.) material published by the religious group itself, 2.) material written by academics such as sociologists, anthropologists, religion scholars, and (perhaps) 3.) material written by individuals who oppose this particular religion.

F. Keep the professor and our class informed of your progress. I will act as a consultant on your project and help in development of a thematic framework for the final report.

G. Partners work together and share their field notes and interview data; however, each student selects their own thematic focus and writes their own report. Reports are 3500 to 5000 words (10+ pages double spaced.). A substantial portion of the report will be quotations/data that you have collected in the form of field notes and interview transcriptions. You will provide a classroom presentation of your project during our final class session (Wednesday 11/11).

II. A Suggested Format for the Report:

A. Introduction: Subject and Method

1. Name and location of group or congregation that you studied; religion, denomination or tradition of which it is a part.
2. How you conducted the research:
 - a) Dates you visited the place of worship;
 - b) Number and kind(s) of events you observed;
 - c) With whom you talked and how often (interviews, informal conversations, visits to people's homes).
3. Why were you interested in this particular religion? What expectations did you have when you began the project.

B. The Religious System:

1. Using your field data and bibliographic sources, describe the religion from the viewpoint of an insider. As best you can--try to achieve a sympathetic grasp of the practices and beliefs as these are lived out by the people you studied.
2. Using your field data and bibliographic sources, write about topics such as:
 - (a) Sacred rituals and services. What do people do when they get together?
 - (b) Basic beliefs (including the social ethics of members);
 - (c) The experiences of members and participants;
 - (d) The structure of the religious community (includes the relationship between clergy and laity, men and women, adults and children, etc.).
3. Try to show how various elements are related.

C. The Analysis--Step outside the religious system and discuss aspects of this religious community that you observed. These might include phenomenon such as:

1. The system of authority and how conformity is maintained;
2. Evidence of community--friendship, mutual aid;
3. Social class backgrounds of members (this may include styles of speech and dress, typical kinds of education, jobs, neighborhoods, etc.);
4. The group's relationship with the larger society. Are they engaged with the world outside their religious community or are they isolated and set apart?
5. Etc., etc.

Key to your analysis: organize your report around a theme that emerges as you do the fieldwork and read about your religious group. Remember, you cannot report everything. Some things will be more interesting to you than others, and you'll know more about some things than others. So, focus your report on what interests you most, and what you've learned the most about. The professor can help you identify an exciting theme. **Themes developed by prior L.A. Termites** include: growing up Hindu; Islam adapts to American pluralism; the lives of Islamic women in Los Angeles; non-observant Jews convert to Orthodoxy; the relationship between pastor and laity in a Korean Presbyterian congregation; Pentecostals raising children in the barrio; Buddhist students at UCLA; social ministry in a Roman Catholic parish; multi-ethnic ministries in a mainline Protestant church; generational conflict in an Ethiopian Orthodox church, etc.

D. Personal Reflection:

Consider the impact of the religious fieldwork project on you. Relate your experiences with this new group to your own religious background. What are the common elements? What is different? What understandings, insights or qualities of community life are you inspired to integrate into your own faith experience? What unresolved issues has the experience raised for you. What words of advice would you give another student who was about to undertake a similar project?

HOW WILL YOUR PROJECT BE GRADED?

1. The quantity and quality of your fieldwork: How many visits and interviews? High quality field notes and interviews provide a rich description and a sympathetic understanding of the religious system and it's members? **40%**
2. The quality of your bibliography: Read "insider" accounts of your group as well as analysis provided by professional students of religion. **20%**
3. The quality of your report: Is there a coherent theme? Is the report well structured? (Structure includes a title, introduction, conclusion, sub-headings, and paragraphs, etc.) Proper format for citations and bibliography is required. The report will contain direct quotations from the fieldnotes, interview transcripts and bibliographic sources. Make your report interesting and informative. **40%**

HOW TO ENJOY YOUR FIELD RESEARCH PROJECT:

1. Select a religious community that is accessible to you and that interests you.

- An “accessible” group is one that you can visit without too much hassle. Groups that are especially secretive, that don’t meet regularly, that charge participants on a fee-for-service basis, that are geographically difficult to get too, etc. will create more hurdles for you as an observer.
- There are literally hundreds of churches, temples, synagogues, and religious centers within a few blocks of Wilshire and Normandie. Keep an open mind as you consider the possibilities for your project, and keep your eyes open as you move about the city. Match your interests with what is possible.

2. Work with one partner.

- Ancient field research project wisdom: *One is the loneliest number. Two is a perfect pair. Three’s a crowd.*
- A partnership doubles the amount of data you have to work with, gives you someone to attend services with, someone to talk to about your experiences, someone to help you find good reading sources, and someone to motivate you to get started and dig deeper.
- Generally speaking two people can work together more equitably and with less friction than three. Two is a less obtrusive number when you visit services and other activities.

3. Be prepared to begin your project immediately. Team up with a partner and find a religious community to visit ASAP. Getting a slow start on the project makes everything more difficult. Do not wait until the 3rd week of our course to begin this project!

4. Begin now to look for things to read about the groups that interest you. Write down the references, browse bookstores and libraries, and ask your friends and faculty what they might recommend. There are many, many interesting and informative books and articles about religion that will help you. A sensible place to begin is with the chapter(s) in our texts about the religious tradition that you have decided to study.

5. Write as you go. Don’t wait until a few days before the final paper is due. As you learn things, as you think of things, as you observe things, as you read things, as questions occur to you, write it all down. Write a little bit at a time. The final “report” will grow naturally out of the bits and pieces of data, sudden insights, jotted notes, and conversations with your partner, the professor, and our class.

Some suggestions for religious communities suitable for this project:

- Christian churches different from your own religious background including: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, liberal Protestant, ethnic churches such as Korean, Guatemalan, Ethiopian, etc., and “storefront” urban churches that are very common throughout poorer communities in LA.
- Non-Christian traditions including: Buddhist, Hindu, Baha’i, Orthodox Judaism, Reform Judaism, Islam, Unitarian Universalism, and “new-religions” such as Scientology, Eckankar, Santeria, LDS, Religious Science, etc..