

D. Keith Naylor Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

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The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Katherine Albanese of the University of California, Santa Barbara. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

I. Syllabus Justification

Occidental College is a small liberal arts school with a renewed commitment to excellence and equity. Drawing from the diversity of peoples in Los Angeles and from the U.S. and other countries, the College seeks to be a leader in multicultural education. Our students are generally bright and highly motivated, but they have a wide range of preparation for college. The religious studies department is small (4 full-time faculty), but draws consistently some of the highest class enrollments in the College. Religious studies faculty are heavily involved in the College's Core Curriculum.

My syllabus is predicated on a class of 25 students, mostly sophomores, with a few frosh, juniors and seniors. This course fulfills part of the College's American Culture requirement, and is expected to meet four days a week for one hour. I will not teach this course until fall 1993, thus, some details remain to be worked out.

ORIENTATION: The course aims to counter three strong notions which I have found to be prevalent among our students: 1) that religion and belief are synonymous, 2) that religion is static, and 3) that the Puritans and the televangelists are the sole identifiable religious groups in American history. Beyond countering such notions, I seek to engender appreciation for history and historical development (see graphic below), and for the dynamism and creative energy which may be found in religious traditions. The expansion and refinement of students' critical thinking abilities is, of course, a major goal of the course. I expect this intro course to interest students in the broader study of religion (and of culture) and therefore, to lead them to take other religious studies courses. This usually happens. I begin with the assumption that students know something about religion in America and their knowledge is variously partial, partisan, false, and/or dated. Thus, questions which surface their own knowledge and which put it under scrutiny, while suggesting vast other areas of knowledge, are strategic. I see my role as much like that of a jazz musician - I generate precise notes (data), repeat and explore themes, and improvise with questions from outside the field of religion.

REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION: No student can hide in my relatively small classes. By "alertness" I mean readiness to engage the material, even if one has not completed the assignments. I sometimes begin class with "automatic writing" on an assigned topic which helps to generate discussion. I

am moving towards more writing (in-class essays, shorter, more frequent papers) in all my classes. Writing and its evaluation seem to be the best way to help students develop their critical thinking abilities. Short in-class writing assignments are evaluated as part of class participation.

I originally conceived of the student panels as a way of encouraging students to work in groups on a topic of their liking. It yielded mostly religion as exotica. This time I will provide more structure, giving them topics (probably on culture) to choose from. Albanese's suggested readings at the ends of chapters are invaluable for this assignment.

The paper assignment evolved from one Bob Michaelsen used at UCSB years ago. If done well, if done as exploration rather than testimony, and if linked to dynamics of American history, this can be one of the most meaningful assignments in students' careers. These papers have also been interesting to read, providing insight into American religion "on the ground."

TEXTS: I chose the Albanese text because it presents American religious history in imaginative terms. The ordinary/extraordinary distinction throughout the book seems puzzling, then intriguing, then informing to students, based on my classroom experience. The second part of the book on public, civil, and cultural religion has launched several senior theses in our department. The pluralism of American religion becomes clear to students quickly, but the interplay of these traditions with each other and with American culture is not so readily visible. I use the text to transmit information about traditions and their American histories, and to raise questions about the changing contours of religion in the world's first modern secular state (Gastad). We cover traditions with unequal attention, depending on the appeal of the issues their presence in America raises, in a kind of modified "survey." So, I use the Albanese text as a guiding text and a reference text.

The out-of-print McNamara text is excerpted in the Reader to bring important socio-cultural perspectives to the class, especially on issues of race, class, gender, coercion, etc. The Reader will also include first-person accounts from various traditions to help students understand religious experience for some twentieth-century people. I am still searching of and brooding over these selections, but the ones listed will definitely be part of the reading assignments.

SCHEDULE: I am experimenting with packing in comparative data by "handling" two traditions a week. This will be a challenge for me and the students. I am betting that superficial juxtaposition can actually lead to deeper questioning and more critical analysis. Is this an article of faith?

II. Course Syllabus

Religious Studies 4
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INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION IN AMERICA - FALL 1993

Participants in this survey course will examine religion in the USA from historical and socio-cultural perspectives. Our most persistent questions will be, "What is religion?" and "What is America?" We shall explore the contours of American culture and society as a setting in which various religions are imagined, established, nurtured, hindered, altered, valued, ignored, and/or abandoned. This course will include lectures, assigned readings, class discussions, student panels, and films/videos.

EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to attend all classes regularly and to be alert. Students are expected to complete assigned readings, to reflect on them, and to bring questions to class. Readings provide critical background for class sessions and should not be delayed. All students are encouraged to bring issues, problems, and questions concerning the course for discussion during the instructor's office hours. Additional requirements with their evaluative weights are listed below:

- Two in-class essays (10% each)
- Midterm exam consisting of short answers and identifications (10%)
- Panel presentation and one-page outline (10%)
- 10 page paper on religious development of family or influential person (30%)-see detailed separate sheet
- Final essay exam (20%)
- Class participation (10%)

REQUIRED TEXTS

- America - Religions and Religion (Second Edition), Catherine L. Albanese
- Reader, compiled by instructor, including selected articles from Religion: North American Style (Second Edition) by Patrick H. McNamara (out-of-print). The Reader also includes:

"The Spiritual, Political Journey of a Feminist Freethinker", Emily Erwin Culpepper (to be published); "Jesus-An Interpretation" from Jesus and the Disinherited, Howard Thurman, Abingdon Press, 1949; "Introduction", The Secret Kingdom, Pat Robertson, Bantam Books, 1984; "Credo", Hunger of Memory, Richard Rodriguez, 1981.

READINGS - WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Please keep up with assigned readings. First person articles from the Reader will be assigned as the class proceeds.

Week #1: Approaching Religion

Albanese: Preface and Introduction: The Elephant in the Dark

Reader: "Conclusion from The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life" (Durkheim), "Religion as a Cultural System" (Geertz), "The Problem of Definition in Religion" (Spiro)

Week #2: Native American Religions -Judaism

Albanese: "Original Manyness: Native American Traditions", "Israel in a Promised Land: Jewish Religion and Peoplehood"

Reader: "Sun Dance: Sacrifice-Renewal-Identity" (Brown) "Chapter 6, American Judaism"

Week #3: Roman Catholicism - Liberal Protestantism

Albanese: "Bread and Mortar: The Presence of Roman Catholicism"

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Reader: "Chapter 5, American Catholicism: A Church in Crisis" "Chapter 3, Mainstream Protestantism"
Albanese: "Word From the Beginning: American Protestant origins and the Liberal Tradition"

WEEK #4: Protestant Missions - African American Religion

Albanese: "Restoring the Ancient Future: THE Protestant Churches and the Mission Mind", "Black Center: African American Religion and Nationhood"

Reader: "Chapter 8: Religion According to Class, Race, and Sex"

WEEK #5: Eastern Religions - The Occult

Albanese: "East is West: Eastern Peoples and Eastern Religions", "Homesteads of the Mind: Occult and Metaphysical Movements"

WEEK #6: New Religions - Regional Religion

Albanese: "Visions of Paradise Planted: Nineteenth Century New Religions", "Regional Religion: A Case Study of Regional Religion in Southern Appalachia"

Reader: "Chapter 9, The New Religions"

WEEK #7: Pluralism - Religion in Los Angeles

Albanese: "Fundamentals of the New Age: An Epilogue on Present-Day Pluralism"

Assorted handouts on religion in Los Angeles

WEEK #8: Public and Civil Religion

Albanese: "Public Protestantism: Historical Dominance and the One Religion of the United States", "Civil Religion: Millennial Politics and History"

WEEK #9: Cultural Religion

Albanese: "Cultural Religion: Explorations in Millennial Dominance and Innocence", "Many Centers Meeting"

WEEK #10: American Religion: Toward the Turn of the Century AIDS? Economic Justice? The Environment? Assorted Handouts

n.b. From time to time handouts (charts, graphs, maps, statistics, brief narratives, etc. may be assigned for review. Also, films and/or videos relevant to the topic may be shown in segments. Students are encouraged to bring relevant articles from current newspapers and periodicals to class for (brief) discussion.

ABOUT THE PAPER - DUE DURING THE EIGHTH WEEK

The paper is really a project, a project to explore and uncover the religious development of your family, a family member, or someone else who has influenced you in important ways. Religious change, growth,

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decline, crisis, and intensity are just some of the themes which may help shape your paper. The paper/project involves gathering information via interviews and discussions, analyzing the information and organizing it into a written document. While the subject is religious development, purely subjective religious statements or detailed personal confessions of faith are inappropriate. The idea is to place the religious development of your subject(s) into a larger context, namely, to link it with developments in American culture and society. You will need to reflect carefully on the themes emerging in the course. Albanese's suggested readings at the end of each chapter are very useful as is the Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience to help you "locate" your subject(s).

The paper should be 10 pages, double spaced, standard print and margins. Sources should be properly documented. Your topic should be discussed with the instructor during the early part of the term.