

**Lived Religion in America:  
Institutions, Innovations, and Individuals  
REL 124  
Duke University  
Fall 2004**

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### **Course Justification**

I'm taking the opportunity to develop an American religion syllabus at the advanced undergraduate level, because it's the one with which I've struggled the most. The first and only time I taught such a course, it was at Texas Christian University, a Fort Worth, Texas, school affiliated with the liberal Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); the school is populated with reasonably good and very diligent students who are largely white, traditional-age, well-off, and evangelical Midwesterners. Most students take six classes per semester, so faculty members adjust the workload expectations accordingly. For this first class, I worried and wondered and finally designed an almost entirely thematic syllabus with light if steady assignments. It was, in hindsight, really bad. Student evaluations were fine, but I am convinced it was largely because the course was too easy. Very few students had much knowledge of U.S. religion before the class, but they were capable thinkers and writers. I simply didn't provide enough background information or intellectual challenge for them. Nor was there an overall aim of the course. So while class discussions were lively, they often rehearsed students' previously held assumptions, rather than debating new insights. I often found myself wondering what I was trying to convey to them, what was my point. It was frustrating and boring.

In this syllabus, then, I set about to correct past inadequacies, and ideas raised by participants in the YSAR seminar helped me do it. I am also adjusting for a different student population, this one at Duke University. Duke, located in Durham, N.C., draws excellent traditional-age students who are more diverse in terms of region, class, religion, and race and ethnicity. Moreover, Duke students typically take just four classes per semester. This course should enroll 15-20 students and is not required for the general populace or for majors. For these reasons, I ratcheted up the expectations even more.

Most of the things I wanted to change, however, remained the same. If Duke students have had better preparation in general, they do not necessarily have any more background in U.S. religion, and might even—not being so churchy—have less. So, in this next go-round, I decided to

- 1) use the overall intellectual "hook" of "lived religion," which I hope will be big enough to pose big questions but small enough to delimit the

- topic;
- 2) offer depth by looking at just five traditions; and
- 3) keep us all interested with challenging assignments, i.e., have fun.

Then there are a few things that are part of most courses I teach, because they reflect my general teaching philosophy, strengths, and tastes:

- 4) emphasis on close reading of primary texts;
- 5) lots of writing; and
- 6) no exams.

I decided on the “hook” of lived religion after much thought. It is the way of framing the study of religion that I like best and with which I am most familiar. I’m not out to convince students to see things my way, however. The lived religion concept just helps to do practical things I want. It offers that single chewy question to introduce and frame the course: What do we see when we look at religion as lived religion?—and what do we miss? A lived religion theme also organizes the course schedule: I couldn’t very well have a lived religion course that attempted coverage, because coverage by nature slights the details. The theme also helps select readings, which should show lived practice, not official doctrine (unless we’re talking about the practice of formulating official doctrines). It also inspires interesting assignments—assignments that put students in the presence of religion, not just in the library.

In the **Introduction**, we’ll start with readings and discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of the lived religion approach. First, Catherine Albanese’s opening pages in *America: Religion and Religions* should open up our definition of religion to include many versions beyond the institutional ones students usually recognize. Then we’ll read Stephen Prothero’s *American Jesus*. This is not really a lived religion book, but it serves several purposes. First, using evolving conceptions of Jesus as the prism, it tells the Protestantism-to-pluralism narrative of U.S. religious history in a fun way and in the process, introduces major ideas and helps students get their bearings. Second, the book shows that in U.S. religion, cross-tradition mixing is inevitable and pervasive. If we’re doing traditions, I need to establish right away that traditions are not hermetically sealed. Third, *American Jesus* concentrates on leaders’ ideas rather than people’s practices, offering an example of what you see (and miss) when you don’t do lived religion. Reading this text alongside articles by Robert Orsi and primary documents, I hope to launch the semester-long discussion of religion as lived religion.

In the **Traditions** section—the big middle chunk of the course schedule—we’ll do in-depth study of American expressions of Catholicism, evangelicalism, civil religion, the Latter-Day Saints, and Islam. Each section will include an introductory lecture, a film, a bit of secondary reading, and significant primary source reading. In addition, each section is designed to test the limits of the idea of lived religion by looking at **Institutions, Innovations, and Individuals**. Lived religion studies are generally good at describing religious innovation and individual variation. They have generally not focused on institutional religion.

But if Robert Orsi is right that lived religion is the only kind there is, then we can look at institutions as well as individuals with lived religion questions. In this course, that’s

one of the things I'd like to try—largely to find out for myself whether it's possible and useful.

I'll draw readings from several books of primary and secondary sources. Except for the McDannell volumes, all selections will be posted on Duke's online class resource site, called Blackboard, where students can download individual copies. These books include:

Albanese, Catherine. *America: Religion and Religions*. Third Edition. Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1999. (ARR)

Butler, Jon and Harry S. Stout, eds. *Religion in American History: A Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. (RAH)

Hackett, David, ed. *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2003. (RAC)

Hall, David, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. (LRA)

Mazur, Eric Michael and Kate McCarthy, eds. *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2001. (GID)

McDannell, Colleen, ed. *Religions of the United States in Practice, Volume I*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. (RUSP I)

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Religions of the United States in Practice, Volume II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. (RUSP II)

Orsi, Robert A., ed. *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. (GOC)

Sernett, Milton C., ed. *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*. Second Edition. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. (AARH)

Of all of them, I've previously taught only from the Albanese and the Sernett, so I'll just have to see how the rest work.

Students will write a weekly essay on one of the primary documents to encourage them to keep up with readings, and we'll spend about two-thirds of class time discussing them.

I'll spend the other third of class time on "religion in practice" sessions (which could include music, material culture, or activities) and preparation for assignments. If I'm doing a lived religion course, then the requirements must involve living some religion. For that reason, there are five small fieldwork assignments peppered throughout the course, all of which will be incorporated into the final presentation and paper. Students will research their religious family trees, visit the same house of worship twice, interview two people, do archival research, and investigate an item of material culture.

Except for the religious family tree, all these assignments will relate to one religious group of the student's choosing. Each is free to choose his or her own tradition or another one that's interesting.

The assignments will take some prep time, as they are designed to teach new skills. Each of the **Traditions** sections includes a due date for one assignment and a "how to" session for the next.

The assignments each add another piece to the final presentation and final paper, both due at the end of the semester. Each student will give a presentation that showcases her or his family religious tree, interviews, site visits, archival research, and material culture analysis. Each will also write a final paper entitled "Lived Religion in My Family in My City and State, U.S.A.: Institutions, Innovations, Individuals." If someone has chosen a religious tradition not his or her own, part of the paper will account for how the family tree and social context created an individual interested in another faith.

Since this is a cumulative project that will take up numerous out-of-class hours, it's only right that the last part of the course is given over to students' original work.

I'm much happier with the overall feel of the course and look forward to giving it a try. Concerns remain: Will the occasional lectures be enough to convey information? Does the lived religion approach work to understand institutional religion? Is the course now too demanding, Duke students or no?

Well, I guess these questions will be answered in the process of lived teaching.

### **Course Description**

When most people in the United States think of religion, they think of beliefs. But beliefs are only a small part of religion in a country full of people of faith who also practice, mix, play, dispute, reform, consume, market, support, change, and leave their religions. In short, people don't just believe religion; they *live* it. In this class, we will explore "lived religion" in America—religion as people live it, not just how they talk about it. Along the way, we will continuously raise a few key questions: Who lives lived religion? What are the advantages and disadvantages to thinking of religion this way? What are particularly American features of lived religion? What do we see about particular traditions through the lens of lived religion? Through class discussions, readings, films, and fieldwork, we will follow the hints of historical and contemporary religious Americans toward understanding.

#### *Objectives*

- 1) Learn general narrative of U.S. religious history
- 2) Define and compare "religion" and "lived religion"
- 3) Identify particularities of U.S. religion
- 4) Perform close reading and analysis of texts, objects, and experiences
- 5) Improve writing and thinking skills
- 6) Learn fieldwork skills
- 7) Integrate course materials and original research in final presentation and paper

## Requirements

All requirements are graded 1-10.

### *Class Preparation and Discussion*

Though I will give a few lectures for context and background, this class will operate as a seminar. And my role in a seminar is primarily to moderate discussion. We will analyze, debate, and reflect upon assigned materials in each class session, and I expect you to be current with all reading at all times. I strive for diversity in discussion and will happily call on you if volunteers are not forthcoming. While grading class participation is necessarily subjective, I take into account the thoughtfulness as well as the frequency of contributions, with discernment as to how much they reflect having prepared in advance. I also think willingness to be both generous and opinionated in class discussion is important. You will receive the following grades for preparation and discussion.

10=always prepared; contributed often, generously, thoughtfully, and intelligently

9=always prepared; contributed often **or** always generously, thoughtfully, and intelligently

8=usually prepared; contributed often

7=usually prepared; contributed

5=often unprepared; contributed occasionally

3=often unprepared; contributed rarely

1=just showed up, if that

### *Attendance*

Attendance is crucial to the work and experience of a class, and it is part of the class participation grade. I will take attendance every day. Two unexcused absences in the course of the semester will not adversely affect your grade. For every unexcused absence after two, you will lose a point of your class participation grade. (If you have a 10, 3 absences=9, 4 absences=8, etc.) In certain cases I will excuse absences, *only if* I hear the reason by email or phone message *before* the class hour. I reserve the right not to excuse absences even if I do hear about them beforehand.

Timeliness is the same as attendance. Folks walking in at different points in the hour compromises the work of the class. A few instances of minor lateness will not adversely affect your grade. Numerous or egregious instances of lateness will adversely affect your grade. In certain cases I will excuse lateness, *only if* I hear the reason by email or phone message *before* the class hour, same as above.

### *Office Visit*

An office visit with me sometime during the semester is required. This is an informal, get-to-know-you visit. If you don't do it, however, you'll lose a point in your class participation grade.

### *Films*

All films will be screened in my campus apartment on evenings scheduled for everyone's convenience. You must attend three of five of these screenings, or you'll

lose a point in your class participation grade. Of course if you do not make a screening, you are still responsible for viewing the film before the class hour.

### *Papers*

In a seminar class, while I do dispense information, I aim primarily to develop skills, including thinking and writing. For that reason, there are eleven one-page essays, five short papers, a final paper, and no exams. I will grade all papers 1-10 on four bases:

- 1) following the Rules of Writing (see handout)
- 2) close reading and analysis
- 3) clarity and organization
- 4) creativity, originality, or acuity

Missing papers are zeros; late papers will be accepted at any time but are automatically downgraded by two number points (a 10 becomes an 8). Late means anything after the end of class period on the due date.

All papers returned with Rules of Writing mistakes must be revised and resubmitted by the next class period before the grades will be recorded. Late revisions will be counted as late papers.

If you are absent and unexcused on a due date, your paper is still due on time. If you are absent and excused, your paper is due by the end of the next class session.

As we get to the papers and projects, I'll be giving you all much more information. The following is a preview.

### *One-page Essays*

The eleven one-page essays, due most Tuesdays in class, are short exercises in critical thinking and writing.

### *Religious Family Tree Project*

You'll complete a family tree detailing the religious affiliations and/or activities of four generations of your family and write a 3-4-page paper.

### *House of Worship Visits Project*

You will choose a house of worship related to the group about which you want to write your final paper, visit there twice, and write a 3-4-page paper.

### *Interviews Project*

You'll interview two people, one in your family and one in your chosen religious group, and write a 3-4-page paper.

### *Archival Research Project*

You'll find two archival pieces of information about your chosen religious group and write a 3-4-page paper.

### *Material Culture Project*

You'll analyze and research an item of material culture in your chosen religious group and write a 3-4-page paper.

### *Final Paper*

You'll write a 10-12-page final paper entitled "Lived Religion in My Family in My City and State, U.S.A.: Institutions, Innovations, and Individuals." It should incorporate your original findings from the projects into a paper that makes arguments and draws conclusions about lived religion in your family and in America.

### *Final Presentation*

You'll have twenty minutes to present your original findings to the class in some engaging fashion.

### **Grading**

You will be graded according to the cumulative number (0-100) you score on your participation, presentation, and written assignments throughout the semester.

A	100-90
B	89-80
C	79-70
D	69-60
F	59-0

Your scores on each assignment will be weighted as follows:

- 10% Weekly essays
- 10% Class participation
- 10% Religious Family Tree Project
- 10% House of Worship Visits Project
- 10% Interviews Project
- 10% Archival Research Project
- 10% Material Culture Project
- 10% Student Presentation
- 20% Final Paper

### **Books**

The following book is required for the course:

Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003.

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard. Please print them out and bring scheduled readings to each class.

### **Academic Conduct**

In this class I follow all guidelines and procedures for academic conduct, including disability rights and academic honesty, as outlined in the Duke Student Handbook.

## Class Schedule

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Lived Religion in the U. S.*

- 1 Tu Class: Getting started: syllabus and introductions
- 2 Th Class: Religions as religion  
*Reading for this class: "active reading"*  
Read: Prothero, Introduction and chs. 1-2  
Albanese, "The Elephant in the Dark," ARR  
Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," AARH
- 3 Tu Class: Other things as religion  
*Writing for this class: Rules for Writing (handout)*  
Read: Prothero, chs. 3-6  
"Freedom Songs and the Civil Rights Movement,"  
RUSP II #8
- 4 Th Class: Lived Religion: What is it?  
*How to do a Religious Family Tree*  
Read: Prothero, chs. 6-8, Conclusion, and Timeline  
Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," LRA
- 5 Tu Class: Lived Religion: Is there any other kind?  
Read: Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42:2 (June 2003), 169-174  
Council of United Methodist Bishops' letter to Bush; faith of George W. Bush (TBA)  
Due: Essay 1

### TRADITIONS I

#### *Roman Catholicism*

- 6 Th Class: Introduction to U.S. Catholicism  
*Religion in practice: the sacraments*  
Read: Thomas Tweed, "Diasporic Nationalism and Urban Landscape: Cuban Immigrants at a Catholic Shrine in Miami," RAC  
"Reception of Novices," RUSP I #6  
"Advice for Irish Catholic Girls," RUSP I #15
- 7 Tu Class: Institutions  
Read: "Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament," RUSP II #4

"Folk Music in the Catholic Mass," RUSP II #9  
Due: Essay 2

8 Th Class: Innovations  
*How to visit a house of worship*  
Read: "Baptism in Haitian Vodou," RUSP II #29  
"Battling Spiritism," RUSP II # 34  
Due: Religious Family Tree Project

9 Tu Class: Individuals  
Read: "Miracles of St. Anthony of Padua," RUSP I #23  
"Mother Marie de Saint Joseph," RUSP I #24  
View! *The Blinking Madonna*, dir. Beth Harrington  
Due: Essay 3

### **TRADITIONS II** ***Evangelical Protestantism***

10 Th Class: Introduction to Evangelical Protestantism in the U.S.  
*Religion in practice: gospel music*  
Read: Griffith, "Submissive Wives," LRA  
"Sex and Submission in the Spirit," RUSP II #15  
"Temperance Songs and Hymns," RUSP I #12

11 Tu Class: Institutions  
Read: "A Methodist Dream," RUSP I # 27  
"The Way of Holiness," RUSP I #5  
Due: Essay 4

12 Th Class: Innovations  
*How to interview informants*  
Read: "The Oneida Community," RUSP I #16  
"African-American Vision Stories," RUSP I #28  
Due: House of Worship Visits Project

13 Tu Class: Individuals  
Read: "Lucy Smith and Pentecostal Worship," RUSP II #1  
"Tongues and Healing at Azusa," RUSP II #18  
"Millions Now Living," RUSP II #30  
View! *The Apostle*, dir. Robert Duvall  
Due: Essay 5

### **TRADITIONS III** ***Civil Religion***

14 Th Class: Introduction to American civil religion

*Religion in practice: monuments and memorials*

Read: Perry Miller, "Errand to the Wilderness," RAH  
Albert Raboteau, "African Americans, Exodus, and  
the American Israel," RAC  
Bellah, "Is There a Common American Culture?"  
RAC  
Proposals for Ground Zero site (TBA)

- 15 Tu Class: Institutions  
Read: Religion in the founding documents (TBA)  
Due: Essay 6
- 16 Th Class: Innovations  
*How to do archival research*  
Read: Court cases (TBA)  
Due: Interviews Project
- 17 Tu Class: Individuals  
Read: "Reconciling Patriotism and Catholic Devotion,"  
RUSP II #14  
*"We are Still Pacifists," The Catholic Worker*  
View! *Bowling for Columbine*, dir. Michael Moore  
Due: Essay 7

**TRADITIONS IV**  
***Latter-Day Saints***

- 18 Th Class: Introduction to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-  
Day Saints  
*Religion in practice: Mormon food and health*  
Read: R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making  
of Americans*, selections  
*"Mormon Fast and Testimony Meetings,"* RUSP II #6  
*"The Latter-Day Saint Word of Wisdom,"* RUSP II #23
- 19 Tu Class: Institutions  
Read: *The Book of Mormon*, selections  
Writings of Joseph Smith, selections  
Due: Essay 8
- 20 Th Class: Innovations  
*How to read material culture*  
Read: "Supernaturalism and Healing in LDS," RUSP I #20  
Mormon online dating sites  
Due: Archival Research Project
- 21 Tu Class: Individuals  
Read: Terry Tempest Williams, *Leap*, selections

View! *God's Army*, dir. Richard Dutcher  
Due: Essay 9

**TRADITIONS V**  
***Islam***

- 22 Th Class: Introduction to Islam in the U.S.  
*Religion in practice: al-Jummah prayers*  
Read: Edward Curtis, "Islamizing the Black Body: Ritual and Power in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam," *Religion & American Culture* 12:2 (Summer 2002), 167-196  
*The Qur'an*, selections
- 23 Tu Class: Institutions  
Read: "Daily Prayer (*Du'a*) of Shi'a Ismaili Muslims," RUSP II #3  
Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, selections  
Wallace D. Muhammad, "Self-Government in the New World," AARH  
Due: Essay 10
- 24 Th Class: Innovations  
*Preparing your Student Presentation*  
Read: articles on Muhammad Ali, Hakeem Olajuwon, and Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf (TBA)  
Due: Material Culture Projects
- 25 Tu Class: Individuals  
Read: "My Body Is My Own Business," from Braude, *Women and American Religion* (New York: Oxford, 2000)  
"My Abayah," by Daniel Wideman  
View! *X*, dir. Spike Lee  
Due: Essay 11

**CONCLUSION**  
***Lived Religion in Our American Lives***

- 26 Th Class: Student Presentations  
*Writing your Final Paper*
- 27 Tu Class: Student Presentations
- 28 Th Class: Student Presentations
- 29 Tu Class: Student Presentations  
Class conclusions

**FINAL PAPER DUE**

**EXAM WEEK**