

**Contents**[Purpose](#)[Required Reading](#)[Assignments](#)[Grading](#)[Plagiarism Policy](#)[Course Outline](#)

The American Religious Experience

Instructor

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PURPOSE

This course examines a variety of ways of being religious in the North American context. Rather than attempt to cover all religious groups, we will focus on diverse and creative forms of religious expression and transformation. We are particularly concerned with the interaction of religion and culture and will attempt to answer such questions as: What role has religion played in the shaping of our diverse American culture? How were the religious beliefs of the American people transformed by the experience of life in this land, the political structure of the nation, and by the salient and diverse characteristics of America's culture? What forces, secular and religious, led to the development of a religiously pluralistic society? What contributions have the American people made to the variety of humanity's experience of the sacred and to the expression of that experience in systems, beliefs, communal structures, and patterns of action? Finally, what does it mean to be religious, and how is faith related to core components of personal and communal existence?

REQUIRED READING

- Catherine Albanese, *America Religions and Religion* 2nd edition
- Course Reader, available from bookstore

ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance at all class sessions, responsible leadership and participation in small group discussions. Assigned readings are to be completed prior to class.

1. Family Religious History project with three parts. (1) Develop a "Family Religious History" chart for three generations of your family, beginning with yourself. List the religious affiliations (or lack thereof) of each family member as fully as possible and briefly note other important religious/social data (e.g. the person formed part of an ethnic immigrant community; she/he was converted in a revival context; she/he became alienated from Christianity due to an acrimonious church split.) (2) Write a 6-8-page research paper, placing some aspect of your religious family history in the context of broader themes of the American Religious Experience. For example, your thesis might be that the "conversions" of your family from Christianity to Islam reflect the perceived need for a faith that is more inclusive and more closely aligned with their cultural heritage. Or, your family might illustrate the rise of the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement, the conflicting views of what it means to be Evangelical in America, the role of women, etc. (3) Based on your charts and first drafts of these papers you will work in small groups to develop twenty-minute presentations on the character of Christianity in America as reflected in your communal family religious histories. These presentations may be in the form of reports, role-plays, panel

- discussions, interview, etc. Methods must be approved in advance by instructor.
2. Class participation
 3. Mid-term Exam (short answer and essay)

GRADING

- Class participation 20%
- Family Religious History project 50%
- Exam 30%

Format for Research Paper:

1. The paper should be typed and double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Block quotations should be single-spaced. No folders or binders for the papers – staple your pages together. If you are uncertain about any of the mechanics of paper writing, see Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*. End/footnotes should follow the second form in Turabian (full citation, not parenthetical).
2. Use inclusive language. *Man* is not generic when referring to all human beings. When speaking about people, use terms like humanity, humankind, people, persons, individuals; use him or her, he or she for singular. When talking about God, since God is neither male nor female, but has attributes of both, you are invited to use terms like Yahweh, God, Creator, Godself, the divine, or other metaphors in lieu of *Him*. Since Jesus was a human male, masculine pronouns are appropriate when referring to the Christ. For assistance with inclusive language, see Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing for Writers, Editors, and Speakers*.

Grading Criteria for Research Paper:

Is your writing *coherent*? Does it reveal an ability to write carefully, intelligibly, and intelligently?

Is your writing *informed*? Does it reveal an ability to appropriate the issues and resources necessary to develop the thesis? Does it demonstrate familiarity with the content material of the course, as well as reflect on and respond to that material?

Is your writing *thoughtful*? Does it reveal an ability to think conceptually and critically? Is the position taken supported by cogent and valid arguments?

Is your writing *constructive*? Does it reveal an ability to think creatively and imaginatively? Does it analyze rather than describe?

Is your writing *contextual*? Does it reveal an ability to offer substantive implications for your way of living and participating in the church and society? Does it explain how your attitudes, information base, and ethical/theological framework have been impacted?

PLAGIARISM POLICY

Plagiarism, borrowing someone else's words and ideas and claiming them as your own without proper credit, is a serious academic issue. Persons found guilty of plagiarism may fail the course. If you do not understand how to properly credit quotations and thoughts, consult Professor.

COURSE OUTLINE

Thursday, September 10: Introduction and syllabus

Video: NIGHTLINE: "Jerusalem Stories"

Defining and Finding Religion in North America

Tuesday, September 14: Albanese, 1-21

Thursday, September 16: **Video: 20th Century With Mike Wallace: "Cults"**

Native American Traditions in North American

Tuesday, September 22: Albanese, 24-48

Thursday, September 24: "The Lakota Ghost Dance," Raymond J. DeMallie

Being Jewish in North America

Tuesday, September 29: Albanese, 50-72

Thursday, October 1: "Seeking Jewish Spiritual Roots in Miami and Los Angeles," Deborah Dash Moore

Being a Muslim in North America

Tuesday, October 6: **Video: NIGHTLINE's "The Hajj"**; Albanese, 292-299; "The Basic Beliefs and Worship Practices of Islam," Frederick Mathewson Denny

Thursday, October 8: "This Is a Muslim House," Aminah Beverly McCloud
Family Religious Charts Due; Take Home Midterm Exam Distributed

The Protestant House in North America

Tuesday, October 13: Albanese, 102-148

Thursday, October 15: "Protestant Christianity in the World and in America," Martin E. Marty
Take Home Midterm Exam Due

The Religious World of African Americans

Tuesday, October 20: Albanese, 193-217

Thursday, October 22: "African Americans, Exodus and the American Israel," Albert J. Raboteau

The Religious World of Hispanic Americans

Tuesday, October 27: "The Religious World of Hispanic Americans," Justo L. Gonzalez

Thursday, October 29: **Video: 60 MINUTES' "Selection of Next Pope"**; "The Challenge of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity to Hispanic Catholicism." Allen Figueroa Deck

Asian Religions in North America

Tuesday, November 3: Albanese, 300-322

Thursday, November 5: "Frontiers of Encounter," Diana L. Eck

Different Faces of Religion in North America

Tuesday, November 10: Mysticism and the New Age Movement, Albanese, 250-278; 350-389

Thursday, November 12: "Religion and Women in America," Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

Finals Week: Student Presentations

Tuesday, November 17: Groups 1-3; **Student Projects Due**

Thursday, November 19: Groups 4-5

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