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MW 725 Primal and Folk Religions

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Primal and Folk Religions

Fall 2003

Dr. Eunice L. Irwin

Course Description:

A study of the interaction of Christianity with primal and folk religions' institutions and worldviews. Emphasis is given to how people from these types of religious traditions receive the witness of the gospel and come to understand and practice the Christian faith.

Course Objectives:

This course introduces the student to the world of primal and folk religions as it relates to Christian mission. Its specific objectives are:

1. To become aware of several disciplines used in the study of primal and folk religions.
2. To outline distinctive features of the worldviews of primal and folk religions.
3. To introduce the student to the methods of library and field research used when investigating a group that practices a primal or folk religion.
4. To put the student in touch with firsthand experiences (via guests or students accounts) when possible.
5. To prepare the student to engage in incarnational Christian witness and evangelism to people who practice primal or folk religion, and to respond to their needs in discipling.
6. To encourage the student to do constructive critique of mission efforts done in the past or the present among people with primal or folk religion backgrounds in order to better inform mission practice, church development, and theological reflection.
7. To provide biblical and theological reflection and response to the issues of primal and folk groups.

Methodology of Course: Lecture and activities, with opportunity for students to contribute during the semester through discussion and class presentations. All students will select a particular people group or Christian community in order to investigate an aspect of primal or folk religion. Information from the case may be shared in class or used to illustrate points in the response papers. The objective of studying the people group or issue will be to produce a research paper for the course. A take-home (open-book) mid-term assignment over the book Understanding Spiritual Powers will be given in place of an exam.

Requirements:

1. Submit Response Papers (1-2 pages each) for eight chapters or articles assigned for class discussion. RPs are due by class time on the dates the readings are listed. [See schedule for readings given in bold type having notation "RP" in the margin. Answer the RP question given for that reading.] (25%)

2. Mid-Term Assignment (open-book, take-home) over the book by Marguerite Kraft, understanding Spiritual Powers [Distributed: October 30, and Due: November II.] (20%)
3. Class Participation through: timely completion of assigned readings, joining in class discussion of topics and in group activities. (15%)

4. Research Paper done during the semester on any aspect of primal or folk religion affecting a people group or Christian community. In stages, with two parts:
   a. Submit . (with minimum of 5 sources/75 pages of material from journal articles, scholarly works, or other data, of which the 4th book read for the course may be counted as a source).
   [Due: October 16] (10%)

   b. Submit a Research Paper of 20+ pages, interpreting the issue of primal or folk religion studied, integrating information from research with theories given in the course (such as Critical Contextualization, for example) with practical recommendations for Christian witness and discipleship most needed at this time. [Due on December 4] (30%)

Contacting the Instructor:
Students may contact me at my office, McPheeters Room 311, or phone me there: 858-2148. If you need to reach me at my home, the number is: 858-0705.

Required Reading
Burnett, David

Hiebert, Paul a., Daniel Shaw & Tite Tienou

Kraft, Marguerite G.

4d1 ReQuired Reading (Select ONE below or propose one to instructor)

Bediako, Kwame

Ching, Julia
1993

Hultkrantz, Ake

Kirwin, Michael

Magesa, Laurenti

Recommended Readini
Achebe, Chinua

Other Resources

Arnold, Clinton
1996 The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk

1999

Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians.

Aulen, Gustaf
1969 Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea

Eliade, Mircea
1959 The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion. Translated by Willard

Hiebert, Paul G. and Eloise Hiebert Meneses
1995 Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization
1980ff Lausanne Occasional Papers. [Known as LOP’s, these represent the
documents that have been created from global consultations involving
widely recognized evangelical leaders. Relevant reports are: 6, 16, 17, 18,22.
See: http://wwwgospel.com.net/lcwe/LOP/index.htm ].

Loewen, Jacob A.

McIlwain, Trevor with Nancy Everson
[This is a study guide with workbook on biblical texts relevant to animists.]

Niehardt, John G.

Rommen, Edward, ed.
1995 Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues. (Evangelical Missionary Society, Series, No.3). Pasadena: Wm Carey Library. This entire volume is given to the topic of spiritual warfare and views of evangelical missiologists, and include:
Kraft, Charles, "Christian Animism' or God-Given Authority?", 88-136.

Shorter, Aylward
1982 "Folk Christianity and Functional Christology," AFER 24(3) (June), 133-137.

Course Schedule

Readings reQuired (due as scheduled below) are from
B = David Burnett, World of the Spirits
H = Paul Hiebert, et al., Understanding Folk Religion
MK = Marguerite Kraft, Understanding Spiritual Powers
RP = articles/ chapters from which response papers are due on dates noted
Locate these on reserve shelf in library, e-reserve or on the ESJ icon.

Date

Topic and Reading Assignment

9/2 Topic: PRIMAL WORLDVIEWS (Folk1 and Folk2)
B 7-28 (Read text after class today. Hereafter, readings will be due before class time on dates assigned as indicated below. )
Recommended: David Burnett, "Principalities and Powers" in Clash of Worlds, 57-69

9/4 Topic: CRITICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION THEORY
RP#1 H 9-29 (Chapter 1)
RP Question: "What is 'split-level Christianity' and what theological assumptions as well as other assumptions are represented by this concept?"
Recommended, the article from which the term 'split-level Christianity' originated: Jaime C. Bulatao, "Split-Level Christianity" in, Phenomena and their Interpretation, (Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1992), 22-31

9/9

Topic: PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION
H 31-44 (Chapter 2)
Discussion: "How do we understand and interpret what we see going on?"
(Theological/ Cultural/ and Religious systems)

Topic: GODS AND POWERS (Magic1 & Sacral World Manipulation)
B 29-45
RP#2 H 45-72 (Chapter 3)
RP Questions: "What are distinctive characteristics of 'folk' belief systems?"
"Why might Christians believe in ouija boards, horoscopes and fortune tellers?"
Recommended: Edward G. Newing's "Religions of Pre-literary Societies" IN Sir Norman Anderson, editor, The World's Religions, 11-48

9/11

9/16

Topic: CONTROLLING THE COSMIC FORCES
Video: "Legacy of the Spirits"
(A similar video is available in the Media Center: '/The Emerald Forest")
Discussion: "How and why does the magical 'folk' belief system work in NYC?"

9/18

Topic: "FOLK AND FORMAL RELIGION"
H 73-92 (Chapter 4)
RP#3 Bill A. Musk, "Popular Islam: The Hunger of the Heart"
Question: "Do you believe manipulation of the Qu'ran can be an act of 'faith'?"
9/25

9/30

Topic: MEANING OF LIFE AND DEATH: HUMAN SOUL(S), GHOSTS, ANCESTORS, TOTEMS
B 46-74
H 93-132 (Chapter 5)
Discussion: "What basic worldview Issues/ concerns underlie ancestor practices?"
Recommended: David Burnett, "Ancestors and Almanacs" IN Clash of Worlds, 89-104

Topic: ANCESTOR PRACTICES IN TAIWAN
Video: "Taoism"
Discussion: "Should Christians participate in ancestor practices? If so, how?"

Topic: POLLUTION, POWER OF RITUAL, AND DIVINING
B 75-121
H 133-174 (Chapter 6)
Discussion: "How do people explain and respond to lack of 'the good life'?"
"Should Christians be open to 'the health and wealth gospel'?"
Recommended: Michael C. Kirwen, The Missionary and the Diviner

Topic: DANGEROUS SPIRITUAL POWERS: WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY (Magic & Selfish Manipulation)
B 122-156
Video: "Witchcraft Among the Azande" OR alternative video
(Supplemental Video on Haitian Voodoo can be watched in the Media Center: "The Serpent and the Rainbow")
RP#4 Harriet Hill, "Witchcraft and the Gospel: Insights from Africa",
Missiology 24 (1996), 323-344
RP Question: "How do Christians respond to accusations of witchcraft?"

10/2

Topic: "GUIDANCE AND THE UNKNOWN": SHAMANS, HEALERS, MEDIUMS, MYSTICS
Religious Specialists and Their Spiritual Roles (Part 1)
B 157-191
RP#5 H 175-195 (Chapter 7)
RP Questions: "How do people seek and secure spiritual guidance?"
"What are typical means by which revelation comes from the spirit world?"

10/7
Topic: SPIRIT POSSESSION CULTS
Video: "Umbanda"
Discussion: "How do beliefs and practices of Brazilian spirit cults challenge Christian faith?" 'Is Pentecostalism at all a type of 'spirit cult'?'

10/14 Research Paper Topic and Bibliography Due!
Topic: ENFORCING RIGHT AND WRONG
H 197-228 (Chapter 8)
Discussion: "How are systems of morality useful to declaring the gospel?"
Recommended: Lester Grabbe, Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages.

II/6 Topic: THE PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE OVER TIME
B 209-225
RP#7 Michael A. Perry, IFACTS in Progress: A Diacronic Overview of Kimbanguism", Missiology 12 (1984), 195-211
RPQuestion: "Describe the events and processes that you see at work in the religious transformation of the people in the Belgian Congo.
Recommended: Darrell Whiteman, Melanesians and Missionaries.

11/11 Take-home Mid-Term Due
Topic: RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM OF PEASANT PEOPLES
B 226-240
Discussion: "What folk elements commonly remain despite acculturation?"
"How may we know that the gospel of Christ has been received and is practiced?"
Recommended: Peter W. Williams, "Folk Religion and the 'Little Tradition'" IN Popular Religion in America

11/13 Topic: NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS & THEIR TYPES
B 241-271
H 347-365 (Chapter 13)
Discussion: "What do new religious movements teach us?"
Recommended:
Harold W. Turner" "Religious Movements in Primal (or Tribal) Societies "
David B. Barrett" Schism and Renewal in Africa
Allan H. Anderson" "Types and Butterflies: African Initiated Churches and European Typologies, [nternational Bulletin of Missionary Research 25 (3)" 2001" 107-113

11/18 Topic: PARADIGMS OF CONVERSION
H 369-392 (Chapters 14 & 15)
Discussion: "What theological ideas are essential to Christian conversion?"
"How will we recognize vibrant folk Christianity that is rooted in the gospel?"

Recommended:
Christian Keysser, A People Reborn

Discussion: "Do you think incremental stages are needed in the conversion process when primal and folk groups decide to become followers of Christ?"

11/20 Topic: FOLK CHRISTIANITY IN TRIBAL SETTING
Case Study from Eunice Irwin: "Lapuyan Subanen Christianity"
(Supplemental Video in the Media Center: Religion in [ndonesia )

Recommended:
Clinton Arnold" Ephesians: Power and Magic

Recommended with some reservations:
Gailyn Van Rheenan" Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts

11/25 & 27

SPRING READING WEEK (Noclasses will be held.)

Topic: THEOLOGICAL VIEWSOF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

RP#8 Paul G. Hiebert, tSpiritual Warfare: Biblical Perspectives",
Taiwan Mission 3 (2) October 1993, 15-23

RP Question:
"Can the worldview and biblical account (or the "myth") presented in the spiritual warfare paradigm be supported biblically?"

Recommended overview:
Bruce Bradshaw, Bridging the Gap
Thomas H. McAlpine's Facing the Powers
Edward Rommen, ed., Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the [ssues Video: "Transformations ll"

Discussion:
"What shifts in worldview and practice of ministry are needed today to address the realities of spiritual powers among primal and folk religions?

12/2

12/4 Student Research Papers Due!!
Continued discussion from 12/2
Concluding comments on the course

12/11 FINALS WEEK [Class will meet during time of final exam.]
Selected Student Research Papers will be shared in Class