

King, Rebekka (Candler School of Theology, Emory University) - What is a Christian?

Candler School of Theology

Emory University

Spring 2013

Wednesdays 1-4pm

CST 411

Course Instructor

Rebekka King (rebekka.king@emory.edu)

Office Hours: TBA Office

Location: CST 266

Course Description

This course examines global Christianities from the perspective of the anthropology of Christianity, which is an emerging field of study that differentiates itself from anthropology of religion and studies of Christianity through a number of historical and methodological criteria. In this course we will consider how narratives of the global correspond to and feed into localized religious practices. Readings for this course will focus on the study of global Christianities as a discipline and will explore the socio-religious power-dynamics of Christianity as both hegemonic and marginal traditions. Our examination will focus on themes of mediation, culture and conversion, multiple modernities, neoliberalism and post-secularism.

A Note about Sensitivity: Many people have strong and personal views when it comes to the topic of Christian faith in a global context. In this class, you are encouraged to hold strong opinions and to share these opinions with your classmates in a respectful manner. You are expected to listen politely to, and offer your own analysis of and perspective about, doctrines/traditions/practices/beliefs you may not share. In many cases we will be looking for the cultural logic within a viewpoint that may seem utterly foreign or appalling. Students who disrupt this process by being intolerant, dismissive or unfair in their criticism will be asked to

leave. If you are offended by something that is discussed in class, please come and speak to the instructor about it. When dealing with “hot” topics it is best to keep communication lines open rather than to allow hurt feelings to stew.

Required Texts

Fenella Cannell, (ed.) *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) [AOC Reader].

Matt Tomlinson and Matthew Engelke (eds). *Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity* (Berghahn, 2006) [LOM Collection]

Omri Elisha, *Moral Ambition: Mobilization and Social Outreach in Evangelical Megachurches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011)

Additional articles will be made available to the students through course reserves.

Expectations, Policies, and Common Courtesy Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all classes. Should you miss a class you are responsible to find out what you missed from one of your colleagues in the class; Dr. King will not provide notes or an overview. Absence from more than one class can adversely affect a student’s grade.

Punctuality:

Please arrive on time and plan to remain for the entire class. Unless you become ill, do not begin packing up your books because this is distracting to everyone. If you know in advance that you cannot stay for the entire class, please sit next to the door and exit quietly.

Courtesy in Class:

Other than to respond to or ask a question, please do not converse during lectures (even quiet whispering is distracting and disrespectful of your fellow students and your professor). Please turn off (or silence) all cell phones before the class begins. Students who plan to spend the lecture time checking email, facebook or texting are invited to sit at the back of the classroom or leave. Should laptop use become a distraction we will, as a class, consider setting up laptop-free zones. Students are encouraged to limit their use of technology in the classroom and to take notes ‘the old fashioned way’ with a pen and paper. Studies have shown that overall the use of computers and other fancy technological gadgets distracts students and alienates them from their learning environment.

Email, Blackboard and Other Online Communication:

Students are expected to write courteously and clearly (no text-messaging abbreviations or slang). Always use your emory.edu email address (the server often rejects hotmail accounts as spam) and always include an appropriate summary of the email topic along with the course code in the subject line. Once I have received an email from a student I will gauge the urgency of the email and reply appropriately. In general, I keep regular business hours and you can expect a reply within 2 business days.

Discussing Grades:

You are welcome to discuss your grades with Dr. King a minimum of 24 hours after you have received work back. Please note that I put a great deal of effort into grading fairly and consistently. Mistakes in calculation do happen, but generally speaking, I take pride in grading well. This means that you must consider very carefully any urge you have to seek to change a grade. Do not think that "it never hurts to ask," as in this case, your request is, in fact, an affront to our academic integrity. If, however, you feel that a genuine mistake has been made or you wish an explanation for the grade you have received, you are always welcome to make an appointment or drop in to office hours.

Policy on Late Work:

All assignments are due at the beginning of class. Any assignment handed in after the class has commenced will have 5 points (1/2 of a letter grade) deducted from their mark and may continue to lose points for each additional day that they are late. If you have a problem with the due date, please see Dr. King in advance (2 weeks). If there is an emergency, I will be understanding. Students who miss an assignment due to illness or other acute adversity beyond their control must submit a formal letter of petition to the course instructors in advance of assignments or within one week for missed tests.

We live in a technological age and, unless a student was born yesterday, he or she is aware that technology has the potential to fail and that the likelihood of such an event doubles the night before a paper is due. With this in mind, students are encouraged to backup assignments regularly; computer failure and other technological mishaps do not qualify for an extension.

Special consideration is given for students who are non-native English speakers or who have documented learning disabilities. If you belong to either or both of

these groups, please speak with me.

Academic Honesty:

All students are expected to abide by the Student Conduct and Academic Honor Codes as outlined in the Candler catalog. Plagiarism, in particular, will be treated as of utmost significance and is ground for immediate failure of that particular assignment and will have broader repercussions on the course grade. If you have ANY questions about this, please speak with Dr. King.

Note the following writing assistance resources here at Candler/Emory.

a. Emory Writing Center: www.writingcenter.emory.edu (primarily for undergraduate use, but graduate students can sometimes be accommodated)

b. Candler Writing Program:
www.candler.emory.edu/STUDENTLIFE/writing_center.cfm

c. Candler's Office of Student Programming also coordinates Candler's ESL program for international students and Candler's Luce Korean Initiative offers additional support for students of Korean ancestry.

Course Requirements and Assessment

This course is designed to foster participation and dialogue. It is my hope that in this course you will learn a much about the learning process as you do about the subject matter. With this in mind, the course adopts what is known as a "learner centered" pedagogy. You will be expected to be an active participant in your own learning experience, as well as that of the other students in the class. You will also be given a fair amount of choice when it comes to assignments. For example, you will be able to choose what type of final assignment you would like to undertake.

1 - Participation (10%)

This includes class attendance, participation and general engagement. Online discussion board will be set up for students to augment their participation and involvement in class.

2 - Presentation to "the innocent" (15%)

Each week, one or two students will be assigned to introduce the readings to the rest of the class. Students should present for no more than 7 minutes each and

are expected to hand in a 2-3 page document based on their presentation (due in class). In this introduction students should summarize the main arguments and points in the article(s) assigned for that week as well as raising some introductory questions to help us focus our discussion. This presentation is for the benefit of the entire class but students should pay particular attention to “the innocent.”

“The innocent” constitutes one or two students who have been instructed NOT to complete the readings for that particular week. Upon the completion of the presentations, “the innocent” will then explain to the rest of the class what the readings are about, based on their own understanding of the presentations.

A schedule for presentations and “the innocent” will be circulated during the first class.

3 - Critical Reflection Assignments (45%)

Students must write THREE critical reflection assignments (although they may hand in a total of four and use their best three out of four towards their final mark). Each CRA is worth 15 percent for a total of 45 percent. CRAs should be between 4-6 pages in length (double spaced, 12 point font) and should consist of an engagement with the core themes and topics present within the specific unit as well as those which emerge from within the course in general. The CRA should not be a summary of the articles/arguments, although some summary may be required in order to make your point. The intention is that students will begin the process of dialogue between theology and anthropology on a given subject. You are not required to use any secondary sources for this assignment although you may if you desire. All sources should be cited appropriately. All CRAs are due the week following the week which we wrap up discussion of a particular unit.

4 - Final Paper/Project (30%)

Write an 8-10 page paper that treats a particular anthropological or analytical problem concerning Christianity. There are a number of viable options for this assignment and you are encouraged to choose an assignment that aligns with your own particular learning needs. This assignment is due Friday, May 3rd, 2013. It is worth 30 percent of your final grade.

Option One: Research Paper

The first is to consider the works of one of the scholars on the syllabus in more depth, or in comparison with another scholar also on the syllabus. This paper

would resemble a standard research paper and should include a well-developed argument and in-depth research into the thinking of one (or more) of the theorists/anthropologists whose work we have discussed. You should conclude your discussion by offering some insights or suggestions as to how this theorist's work might contribute to theological studies and/or faith communities.

Option Two: Ethnographic Analysis

The second is to take a particular context that is important to you and to apply the insights from our class to it. You might choose to draw upon material and experiences from faith communities with which you are familiar or to follow the model that we used in class to think critically about the Candler School of Theology as a site of data. In this instance you can follow the models of the anthropologists we have studied and apply some of the core themes from our class to a particular site (in doing so, you would be expected to draw upon and bring your data into conversation with the scholars and sources we have read throughout the term). You should conclude this paper by offering a hypothesis as to how you think this analysis might be received by the community you are discussing. What use do you think your work might be to that community? What objections might they raise? How might an anthropologist respond to these objections?

In many ways this second option may be the more difficult one because it will ask you to think critically as an anthropologist about communities with which you are involved (which was obviously not your initial intention upon participating in that community). Recognizing the inherent difficulties with this approach, I encourage you to meet with me to discuss your assignment in advance and to consider submitting a working draft of your papers for review prior to the due date (so that I can offer some feedback, etc).

Option Three: What is a Christian?

The final option may be of interest to students who are technologically savvy. For this option, you may choose to create a short video highlighting and explaining for a lay-audience some of the key themes with which we have worked (for example, you might choose to create a video on sincerity or Protestant language ideologies). Imagine that this video could be used within the context of an adult education program on global Christianity. In this assignment I would like you to think pastorally about how you might explain our project of challenging and de-centering Christian identity in such a way that does not privilege North American

varieties of Christianity. You should draw upon the readings that we have examined in class and may also use any of your own personal experiences in missions fields or travels abroad as well as popular media sources. Along with the video, you should submit a brief written assignment (3-4 pages) outlining the approach that you have taken, why you have choose certain definitions, imagines, examples, etc. You should conclude by discussing how you think this video might be received by a lay-audience.

Further Assignment Details

In each case, I expect the papers to be written in a formal matter. Please think of this assignment as a scholarly work and assume a tone and style similar to that used by the authors whom we have read in class (videos may of course be less formal in tone). For the purposes of what I expect is merely procedural, I also need to add that plagiarism—representing someone else’s words as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offense that can result in a grade of zero or more serious consequences. Trust your own ability to think and write, and make use of the various resources available at Candler that can help you do so (e.g. professors, writing centers).

Late assignments will be penalized 1/2 of a letter grade (and may continue to lose points for each additional date that they are late).

Tentative Schedule and Readings

This course is divided into five thematic sections (units) which represent topics of interest to anthropologists that we will be investigating over the course of the semester. Our purpose is three-fold: first, we will gain an understanding of the ways that certain manifestations of Christian belief, identity and practice are interpreted by anthropologists; second, we will respond theologically to these anthropological suppositions; third, we will begin to imagine a dialogue between the two fields that begins to answer this seemly simple question, “what is a Christian?”, but as we will likely discover complicates and challenges our preconceived categories as Christians, theologians, scholars and anthropologists.

UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

January 16th: Course Introduction and Overview - Why should I care about anthropology? Why should I care about Christianity?

- There are no assigned readings for this week's class. For the discussion, I will be drawing from Talal Asad's "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category"; Jon Bialecki, Naomi Haynes and Joel Robbins', "The Anthropology of Christianity." I am happy to provide PDFs of these articles to any students interested in the arguments presented.

January 23rd: The Great Debate

- Fenella Cannell, "The Christianity of Anthropology" (AOC Reader).
- Joel Robbins, "What is a Christian? Notes Toward an Anthropology of Christianity" (Reserves).
- William Garriott and Kevin O'Neill, "Who is a Christian? Toward a Dialogical Approach in the Anthropology of Christianity" (Reserves).

January 30th: Christian Believers

- Malcolm Ruel, "Christians as Believers" (Reserves).
- Olivia Harris, "The Eternal Return of Conversion: Christianity as Contested Domain in Highland Bolivia" (AOC Reader).
- Matt Tomlinson and Matthew Engelke, "Meaning, Anthropology, Christianity" (LOM Collection).
- Peter Gow, "Forgetting Conversion: The Summer Institute of Linguistics Mission in Piro Lived World" (AOC Reader).

UNIT TWO: SINCERITY

February 6th: Interiority and Christian Subjectivities

- Webb Keane, "Sincerity, Modernity and the Protestants" (Reserves).
- James Bielo, "'How Much of this is Promise?' God as Sincere Speaker in Evangelical Bible Reading" (Reserves).
- Simon Coleman, "Materializing the Self: Words and Gifts in the Construction of Charismatic Protestant Identity" (AOC Reader).
- Joel Robbins. "On Not Knowing Other Minds: Confession, Intention, and Linguistic Exchange in a Papua New Guinea Community". *Anthropological Quarterly* 81(2008): 421-429 (Reserves).

February 13th: Textual Cosmologies, Bible Reading and Relating

- James Bielo, "On the Failure of Meaning: Bible Reading and the Anthropology of Christianity" (Reserves).

- Fenella Cannell, “Reading as Gift, Writing as Theft” (AOC Reader).
- Eva Keller, “Scripture Study as Normal Science: Seventh Day Adventist Practice on the East Coast of Madagascar” (AOC Reader).
- C. Mathews Samson, “The Word of God and ‘Our Words’: The Bible and Translation in a Mam Maya Context” in James Bielo (ed.) *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009. (Reserves)

UNIT THREE: ECONOMIES

February 20th: Prosperity

- Simon Coleman, “Prosperity Unbound?: Debating the ‘Sacrificial Economy’” (Reserves)
- Naomi Haynes, “Pentecostalism and the Morality of Money: Prosperity, Inequality and Religious Sociality on the Zambian Copperbelt” (Reserves)

February 27th: Ambition

- Omri Elisha, *Moral Ambition: Mobilization and Social Outreach in Evangelical Megachurches*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

March 6th: Charity

- Erica Bornstein, “Rituals without Final Acts: Prayer and Success in World Vision Zimbabwe’s Humanitarian Work” (LOM Collection).
- Ilana Gershon, “Converting Meanings and the Meaning of Conversion in Samoan Moral Economies” (LOM Collection).

March 13th: Reading Week - no class

UNIT FOUR: LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

March 20th: Voices and Speakers

- Fenella Cannell, “Spirit Mediums and Séance Forms: Changing Relations to the Spirit World”. In *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) (Reserves).
- Simon Coleman, “Voices: Presence and Prophecy in Charismatic Ritual”. In Martin Lindhardt (ed.) *Practicing the Faith: The Ritual Life of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians*. (Oxford: Berghahn, 2011) (Reserves).

- Jon Bialecki, "No Caller ID for the Soul: Demonization, Charisms, and the Unstable Subject of Protestant Language Ideology" *Anthropological Quarterly* 84 (2011): 679-703. (Reserves).

March 27th: Discourse and Discursive Praxis

- Susan Harding, "Speaking is Believing". In *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2000. [Also published as Harding, Susan. "Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamentalist Baptist Conversion." *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987):167-181 (Reserves).
- Matthew Tomlinson, "The Limits of Meaning in Fijian Methodist Sermons" (LOM Collection).
- Rebekka King, "Still, Already, Yet: A Linguistic Analysis of the Use of Eschatological Adverbs by Progressive Christians" (Reserves).

April 3rd: Prayer

- Robin Shoaps. "'Pray Earnestly': The Textual Construction of Personal Involvement in Pentecostal Prayer and Song" *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12 (2002): 34-71 (Reserves).
- Esther Goody, "Social Intelligence and Prayer as Dialogue." In Esther Goody (ed.) *Social Intelligence and Interaction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) (Reserves).
- Simon Coleman, "When Silence Isn't Golden" *Charismatic Speech and the Limits of Literalism*" (LOM Collection)
- Tanya Luhrmann, Howard Nusbaum and Ronald Thisted. "The Absorption Hypothesis" *Learning to Hear God in Evangelical Christianity,*" *American Anthropologist* 112(2010): 66-78 (Reserves).

UNIT FIVE: MEDIATION AND MISSION

April 10th: Thinking Globally

- Matthew Engelke, "Text and Performance in an African Christian Church: The Book, 'Live and Direct' in Zimbabwe" *American Ethnologist* 31 (2004): 76-91 (Reserves).
- Brian Howell, "Local Language and Global Faith: Choosing Church Language in the Philippines" in *Power and Identity in the Global Church: Six Case Studies*. Howell and Zehner, eds., pp. 89- 121, (William Carey

Library Press: Pasadena, CA, 2009) (Reserves).

- Courtney Handmann, "Israelite Genealogies and Christian Commitment: The Limits of Language Ideologies in Guhu-Samane Christianity" (Reserves).
- Joel Robbins, "Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time and the Anthropology of Christianity." *Current Anthropology* 48(1): 5-38. (Reserves)

April 17th: Confession and Conversion

- Peter Stromberg, "Language and Self Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative" (Reserves).
- David Mosse, "Possession and Confession: Affliction and Sacred Power in Colonial and Contemporary Catholic South India" (AOC Reader).
- Danilyn Rutherford, "The Bible Meets the Idol" *Writing and Conversion in Biak, Irian Jaya, Indonesia* (AOC Reader).

April 24th: Transcendence, Rupture and Imagination

- Joel Robbins, "Afterward: On Limits, Ruptures, Meaning and Meaningless" (LOM Collection)
- Webb Keane, "Epilogue: Anxious Transcendence" (AOC Reader)
- Matthew Engelke, "Number and the Imagination of Global Christianity: Or, Mediation and Immediacy in the Work of Alain Badiou," In *Global Christianity, Global Critique*. Special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109(4), 2010 (Reserves)