

**ME/DME 834: CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO POPULAR RELIGIONS**

**Paul G. Hiebert**

**Mon.-Wed. 1:00=215. Fall Semester, 2005**

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Description:

This course deals with tribal and folk religions from an anthropological point of view. Particular attention is given to the structures of religious beliefs and symbols, the nature of religious rituals, the functions of religion in society, the types of religious practitioners, and the dynamics of religions movements. Topics dealt with include totemism, ancestor veneration, magic, mana, spirit possession, divination, witchcraft, sorcery, and shamanism. The course also deals with questions of human crises and death, guidance and success, and meaning and purpose as these relate to folk religion. Attention is given to how all these affect the planting of indigenous churches that are vital and alive in faith, and to responses to real situations missionaries and church leaders face.

Format:

The class is a seminar in which the focus is class reports and participant critiques. The first weeks will be used to set the theoretical foundations for the course.

Texts and Readings:

Required Texts:

Hiebert, Paul, Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiènou. *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices..* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 1999.

Recommended Texts: (single copies on reserve in the library)

Morris, Brian. 1993. *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lehmann, A. C. and J. E. Myers. *Magic, Witchcraft and Religion.* (2nd edition). Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company. 1985

Lessa, William A. and Evon Z. Vogt. 1979. *Reader in Comparative Religion.* 4th ed. New York: Harper and Row.

Keyser, Christian. *A People Reborn.* Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1980

Stein, Philip. *God's of Power.* Dallas: Touch Outreach Ministries. 1989

Primary Sources::

I have a number of binders full of materials on folk religions in different parts of the world, and on specific topics such as shamanism, possession, and so on. Please check with me if you have trouble finding materials for your report.

Reading Reports:

One of the values of graduate seminars is to share what we find in our readings. Read widely in the literature, and be ready to share articles or chapters that you find valuable on the subject at hand.

### Course Requirements:

This is a graduate course. Unlike undergraduate courses in which all students cover the same body of materials, graduate courses assume that each student is pursuing his or her own studies based on personal interest. Consequently, while a basic body of materials is covered in class, participants in the class is encouraged to pursue research in areas of their interest. Also, in graduate courses, topics deal with specific problems in the field and the debate surrounding these problems, and do not necessarily relate directly to the textbooks. Material in print is more rapidly and thoroughly assimilated by reading rather than by lecture.

This course requires one major research paper which is to be presented in class. Please choose a particular people or region as the focus of your paper.

- 1) Trace the essential characteristics of religious beliefs and practices in the area. After a general survey, you may focus on one or two aspects of the religion, such as witchcraft, sacrifices, divination, and so on.
- 2) Note the major missiological concerns that these beliefs and practices raise, and discuss how the church and mission **are** dealing with these issues, if at all.
- 3) Conclude by making recommendations on how the church/mission might respond to the challenge of the local religion.

Please be ready to make a preliminary presentation of your research in class. Revise your paper and submit it by the end of summer. Use Turabian. Write addressing an academic audience (do not 'teach' readers the basics--assume they know this). If possible, write it as a 20 page article that can be submitted to a journal for publication. This requires rewriting the paper several times for clarity, conciseness, and logical progression. Such articles have: 1) a brief introduction to the problem at hand with citation of key authors who have dealt with it, 2) your presentation of the data on the religion of a people or area, and 3) how the church/mission has dealt with the problem [if at all], and 4) your conclusions and recommendations.

### Expectations:

Participants are expected to complete the reading of assigned text books and search out related materials before topics are discussed in class. They are expected to partipate in the discussions, and to make presentations on their research.

**Class Discussion:** In a graduate seminar it is essential to read the materials ahead of time. Chapter assignments will be made at the beginning of the course. Be sure to have read the materials and be ready to discuss and debate the issues at hand before coming to class.

**Class Reports:** Hopefully we will have time for brief research reports during the second week of class. Be ready, also, to raise questions and critique the class report

### Assessments:

Assessments: 20% reporting outside readings in class, 20% attendance and participation in discussions, 60 % major paper and class report.

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6. **Class Reports:** Hopefully we will have time for brief research reports during the second week of class. Be ready, also, to raise questions and critique the class reports.