

COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology

# ANTH 262: Anthropology of Religion

## Spring 2022

**INSTRUCTOR:** Doug Bafford

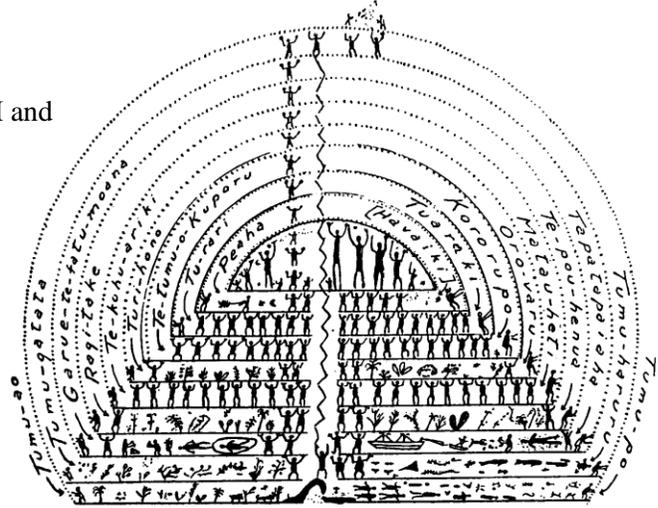
**EMAIL:** [dbafford@holycross.edu](mailto:dbafford@holycross.edu)

**OFFICE HOURS:** Wednesdays 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM and  
Fridays 2:00 – 3:00 PM and by appointment

**OFFICE LOCATION:** Beaven Hall 216

**CLASS MEETING TIMES AND LOCATION:**

Wednesdays and Fridays, 8:30 – 9:45 AM,  
Haberlin Hall 219



### Course Description:

From an ethnographic and qualitative perspective, we will explore religious expression around the globe, including the major Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam but also Buddhism, Hinduism, African religions, and lesser-known faiths from small-scale, non-industrialized societies. Emphasis is placed on the analytic categories for understanding religious experiences and the prospects and challenges of cross-cultural comparison. We will adopt the techniques of anthropological inquiry to consider the social forces at work within religious life, including the political, colonial, gendered, and transnational dimensions of worship. Topics of ritual, mythology, ecology, witchcraft, trance, magic, and science will guide our exploration of belief and spirituality beyond the formal boundaries of institutional religions. Experiential assignments, including participant observation and interviews with practitioners of unfamiliar spiritual traditions, are combined with in-depth written exercises to strengthen intercultural and communication skills.

### Prerequisites:

You are strongly encouraged to have taken ANTH 101 (The Anthropological Perspective) prior to or concurrent with this course. Those with little familiarity with anthropology should be prepared to read extra materials in the first couple weeks of the semester to help orient themselves.

### Common Requirements:

This course fulfills either the Cross-Cultural Studies or Social Science common area of the undergraduate curriculum. Students interested in potentially declaring a major or minor in anthropology can learn more from the Department of Sociology & Anthropology, located on the second floor of Beaven Hall.

## Required Readings:

The following required books can be purchased through most major online retailers in either physical or electronic format. The Lambek reader *must* be the second edition, as this version has a different set of chapters than the first edition. The Butticci text has only been published in one edition, so any version you find will suffice. All other required and supplementary readings will be available online via the course Canvas site, which can be accessed at <https://hc.instructure.com>.

Butticci, Annalisa. 2016. *African Pentecostals in Catholic Europe: The Politics of Presence in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (indicated on the schedule as APCE)

Lambek, Michael, editor. 2008. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. **Second edition**. Blackwell Anthologies in Social & Cultural Anthropology, 2. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. (indicated on the schedule as RAR)



## Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, you should be able to

- Explain the advantages and limitations to adopting an anthropological perspective toward religion
- Articulate the values and ethical systems that motivate diverse religious traditions, especially those unfamiliar to you
- Summarize theoretical arguments about the development and internal dynamics of religious systems and provide critical commentary on different theories' underlying assumptions
- Provide historical and contemporary illustrations of the complex relationships between governments, national identity, colonialism, and the spread of Christianity and Islam
- Compare the appearances of religious influences in supposedly secular domains, such as medicine, science, and politics
- Examine problems involving intercultural and interfaith relations using ethnographic evidence as a foundation for establishing mutual empathy

## Course Policies:

In order to create the most effective learning environment possible and for the consideration of your fellow students, I ask that we all follow these simple guidelines while in class:

1. Arrive on-time having read the assigned materials and completed any relevant assignments or preparation for that day. Our sessions are short enough that even seemingly nominal tardiness can cause you to miss critically important points. It can also be interpreted in our culture as a disruption to others around you.
2. Turn all cell phones and other electronic communication devices off or to silent. This simple step is a common courtesy to fellow classmates and mitigates the temptation to check in continuously

with electronics. If you must have use of your cell phone (e.g., you are waiting for an important call or otherwise need use of your device), please let me know at the start of class. This course demands your full presence, undistracted by concerns outside the room.

3. Always have something on which to write notes in front of you. You are free to use whatever medium you prefer, but try to jot down not just what I have to say in class but what your classmates share in discussion, all of which may be used on the exams or assignments (and the notes about which will be invaluable in your studying).
4. Allow for an atmosphere of respectful academic discourse. This course covers potentially controversial social topics on which many people (including me) have strong opinions. Try your best to debate respectfully and sympathetically, even when you disagree with your classmates or with me. We want to allow everyone to express his or her perspective in a supportive yet academically critical setting. You may find it helpful to think of our job as to debate *ideas*, not other people.
5. Ask questions about anything (terms, concepts, history, etc.) you do not know or are unsure of. Even if it seems like a silly question, chances are that other people have the same uncertainty, and you will help others by asking it.
6. If you have concerns with anything in the course, please see me as soon as possible. Troubles that build over the course of the semester become more difficult to address; it will be much easier to deal with them as early on as possible. I am always available to find a solution that works best for you, regardless of what issues come up.
7. Regularly scheduled office hours are available on a first-come, first-served basis. I will meet with everyone who shows up during my office hours (listed at the top of the syllabus, unless modified by prior email announcement) in order of arrival. If your time is limited and you can only meet during a specific time, email me in advance to reserve a spot. You can also send an email to arrange a time outside of my regularly scheduled hours if they don't work for you, as I am usually on campus most days of the week.



### **Assignments:**

In addition to smaller weekly activities and in-class exercises (discussed below), you will complete five major assignments over the course of the semester: interfaith fieldwork, the theory of religion essay, the ethnography of religion project, a midterm exam, and a final exam. More details and submission guidelines for each of these written assignments will be posted to Canvas and discussed in class well in advance of their due dates.

#### ***Interfaith Fieldwork***

This first task will require you to adopt the techniques of participant observation and qualitative interviewing to construct a miniature project in anthropological fieldwork. Your initial step is to locate a local religious leader from a tradition in which you have not been a participant. You must identify this person two weeks before the assignment is due so as to allow enough time to find a mutual time to meet, whether virtually or in person. Next, you will interview him or her about the tradition's practices, core beliefs, and community of worship, and if appropriate, you will attend and observe a public service. After

your observations, you will use your field notes and interview data to write a short social scientific analysis (no more than five double-spaced pages) of the communal dimensions of this faith tradition.

### ***Theory of Religion Essay***

For the second assignment, the theory of religion essay, you will synthesize information found in two of the assigned readings covered during the first part of the course into an original argument. You will need to summarize the core argument and perspective of each author, but more importantly, the goal of this exercise is to consider how each text can shed light on the other and how, together, they constitute a synthetic whole with insights not apparent in each text individually. The essay you submit should be no longer than six double-spaced pages, so conciseness will be key.

### ***Ethnography of Religion Project***

The final extended essay, an ethnography of religion, requires you to compose an essay of no more than seven double-spaced pages in which you will offer ethnographic data about a religious practice of your choice. You will conduct secondary research using library resources (and possibly supplemented with first-hand, primary observation) to give a detailed account of one aspect of how religious ideas and traditions play out in people's everyday lives. In addition to describing in rich, detailed language religious practices and beliefs, a critical component of this essay is that you incorporate your findings with the anthropological questions, concepts, and frameworks presented in the course. As your thesis, you will suggest how information about this religious group intervenes into any of the scholarly debates we have explored throughout the course (i.e., how it supports an answer or partial answer to a central question in the anthropology of religion).

### ***Midterm and Final Exam***

Finally, there will be an in-class midterm exam given approximately halfway through the semester and a final exam given during Holy Cross's designated exam period. For the midterm you will have a full class period to answer a series of short-answer and essay questions based on the readings and class discussions completed thus far. For the final, you will have the full allotted period to answer a similarly structured exam; although it draws on core concepts introduced throughout the course, its emphasis will be on the ethnographic cases covered since the midterm. A study guide for both will be distributed beforehand to help guide your preparation.

## **Submitting Written Assignments:**

All written assignments prepared outside of class should be fully documented with consistent use of a citation style. American anthropologists typically follow the Chicago Manual of Style (author-date version) as a disciplinary convention, and you are welcome to use the same in this course. However, if you are more familiar with another style (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.) and would prefer to use it, you are welcome, as long as you do so consistently. The most important point is that you give clear references to outside texts and ideas you have borrowed, even if the texts have been assigned in class. Resources to help you learn good citation practices are available in Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*, online at the [library's citation guide](#), and in person at the Writer's Workshop on the second floor of Dinand Library.

For all formal papers (i.e., the interfaith fieldwork write-up, theory of religion essay, and ethnography of religion project), please try to think of a creative title (not the name of the assignment, like "Theory of Religion") and place it at the top of the page. Of particular importance, make sure you set the font to Times New Roman size 12, the line spacing to double, eliminate extra space between paragraphs,

place the *current* date in your standard heading (not the date on which you began the assignment), and include a reference list if you are relying on other people's ideas and data. You are strongly recommended to visit the Writer's Workshop to improve the quality of your academic writing, especially given the writing-intensive nature of anthropological work. You can [visit their website](#) to schedule a free forty-five-minute appointment, to which you should bring a copy of the assignment and your current draft.

You should strive to submit all assignments by the due dates listed in their prompts and on Canvas. Keeping abreast of submissions will make it easier for you to manage the workload over the course of the semester rather than postponing it for later, when you're likely to be even busier. For each day (or portion thereof) that your paper is late, your grade will be reduced by one-third of a letter (e.g., from B+ to a B). Please remember to read through your entire draft at least once before submitting it. Extensions are granted *automatically* for circumstances outside your control equal to the number of study days lost, **provided you let me know ahead of the due date**. Do not hesitate to reach out by email if you are having trouble meeting deadlines or other targets. If you would like to rewrite an assignment to try for a higher grade, please see me during office hours to make individual arrangements and to discuss your plans for revision. In most cases, you may request a grade that is the average of the old and new scores. There are no other opportunities to earn extra credit.

### **Engagement and Collegiality:**

A critically important component of your success in this course can be framed as "engagement and collegiality," a unique metric for this course that includes elements that sometimes go under the heading of attendance and/or participation. Here it encapsulates how seriously you have engaged with the course material and with your classmates during class sessions, not only in formal written submissions. It is much broader than what can be measured in a single assignment with a specific due date. Still, to help you track throughout the semester how well you are engaging with the class, its calculation is made up of four specific items. First, attendance at all classes is expected as a basic requirement of the course. You cannot learn this material if you are not present in class, since much of what we will be covering will be brought out through discussion and many important points are not covered in the readings. Each student will begin with an A in attendance. After the second missed class, each subsequent absence will result in lowering your attendance grade by one-third of a letter (e.g., to an A-, then to a B+, etc.). However, I realize that unexpected things may come up during the semester (e.g., illness, family concerns, etc.) that may prevent you from being physically in class. Therefore, if you come to see me during office hours (or another time by appointment or virtually) to talk about the course content that you missed, this reduction in your grade will be waived.

Second, as an incentive to ensure everyone has invested an equal amount of preparation, some meetings will begin with a short quiz based on the assigned readings for the day. These quizzes do not require significant reflection or memorization, nor are you expected to understand everything you have read ahead of time; if you have read and taken notes on the main arguments in each text, you will likely earn 100% on each. They are merely a tool to ensure you are familiar enough with the material to jump into the discussion. Quizzes will be held immediately at the start of class (another incentive to arrive on-time) and will take between five and ten minutes.

Finally, your mental presence at and participation in each session is a crucial component of this course and your engagement grade. I will assess how thoroughly you have taken advantage of opportunities to speak up, come to office hours, ask thoughtful questions, and respond to your colleagues with meaningful contributions. This expected level of engagement starts with solid preparation before each meeting. You cannot earn an A for this component simply by showing up; you must earn it through

consistent, careful, thoughtful, and eager engagement in class discussions. I understand that outgoing conversation or debate is not a style suited to all learners. Therefore, if you feel you are not able to participate rigorously during class, please let me know so that we can figure out an alternative mode of participation, whether through office hour visits or other activities.

At the same time, careful preparation does not exclude taking risks; feel free to try new ideas without fear of being wrong. One of the most important skills we will cultivate this semester is making a habit of bold moves in your thinking. Practically speaking, boldness entails suggesting alternative ideas that you may not be entirely sure about, exposing them to scrutiny along with your own cherished positions and assumptions. In all assignments, you are encouraged to think imaginatively and not always worry about having the “correct” position or interpretation. While you should always strive to support your arguments with good evidence, there is value in testing out explanations that may at first seem counterintuitive or speculative. To offer a sense of how I evaluate this important component of your engagement and to offer an opportunity for improvement, you will receive my assessment for how well you have met these criteria approximately halfway through the semester, as well as at the end of the course. Together, these four items—attendance grade, quiz average, participation in the first half of the course, and participation in the second half of the course—will be weighted together to calculate your engagement and collegiality grade according to the guidelines listed above.

### **Readings:**

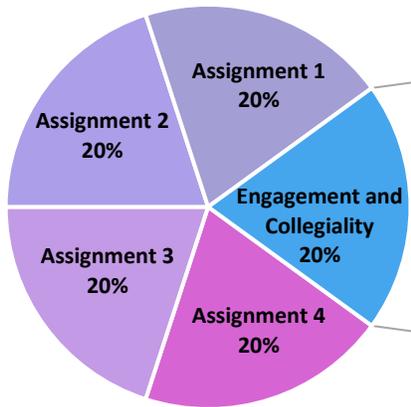
As in other reading-intensive courses in the humanities and social sciences, you are expected to come to class having carefully read *all* the assigned materials. Due to our relatively small class size, I expect everyone to contribute something (even if it is small) to discussion at each meeting. If you have not closely read the materials for the day, it will be noticeable, and your engagement grade will be affected. Since many of our readings will be available electronically on Canvas, some students find it helpful to print them out to annotate while they read and to refer to during class. While you are not *required* to print out all the readings, if you do not have them in front of you during class, I expect you to have taken notes on some of the important passages, and I may call on you to answer questions about them. Nevertheless, I want you to see the readings for this course not as a burden but as a chance to connect with ideas and ways of knowing that may be unfamiliar to you, even if approaching these themes may be difficult at first.

### **Grading:**

You will be evaluated based on the quality of your assignments, the degree of improvement throughout the semester, and the value of your participation to our community of inquiry. Aside from “engagement and collegiality” (which is worth 20% of the grade), there are five major assignments (three written assignments and two in-class exams). The four highest scores will be weighted at 20% each, while the lowest score will be dropped. As a result, you may elect not to submit one of the essays or take an exam and still pass the course; however, you are urged to use this provision with caution, as a skipped assignment early on commits you to the grades received on all the other assignments. To visualize the calculation of your final course grade, the various components will be weighted as follows:

Four highest-scoring assignments (lowest is dropped) from the following list, each worth 20%

- i. Interfaith Fieldwork
- ii. Theory of Religion Essay
- iii. Ethnography of Religion Project
- iv. Midterm Exam
- v. Final Exam



Breakdown of engagement and collegiality components, 20% total

Your work will be evaluated according to the following scale, as set by the College:

- A.....High Distinction (for exceptional work)
- A-
- B+
- B.....Distinction (for very good work)
- B-
- C+
- C.....Satisfactory (for acceptable work)
- C-
- D+
- D.....Passing, but Unsatisfactory (for poor work)
- F.....Failing Grade



**Students with Disabilities:**

Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should reach out as early in the semester as possible to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Office of Accessibility Services in Hogan Campus Center Room 505 or by phone at 508-793-3693 to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

**Academic Integrity:**

All education is a cooperative enterprise between faculty and students. This cooperation requires trust and mutual respect, which are only possible in an environment governed by the principles of academic integrity. As an institution devoted to teaching, learning, and intellectual inquiry, Holy Cross expects all members of the College community to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any violation of academic integrity undermines the student-faculty relationship, thereby wounding the whole

community. The principal violations of academic integrity are plagiarism, cheating, and collusion. See the [full academic integrity policy](#) for more details.

### Religious Observances:

Any student who faces a conflict between the requirements of a course and the observance of his or her religious faith should contact me as early in the semester as possible. In such event, I will provide reasonable and fair accommodations that do not unduly disadvantage you and allow you to keep abreast of any missed course material.



### Schedule and Important Dates:

<i>Class Unit</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Reading and Assignments Due</i>
<b>Week 1: Prologue – Why Religion?</b>	January 26	None
	January 28	Syllabus  James Bielo, “What is ‘Religion’?” (Canvas)  Michael Lambek, “General Introduction” (RAR)
<b><u>PART I: Foundational Theories of Religion</u></b>		
<b>Week 2: Evolutionary and Psychological Models</b>	February 2	Edward Burnett Tylor, “Religion in Primitive Culture” (RAR)  Paul Radin, <i>Primitive Religion</i> (Canvas)  Paul Radin, “The Winnebago Trickster Figure” (RAR) ( <i>supplementary</i> )
	February 4	Sigmund Freud, <i>Totem and Taboo</i> (Canvas)  Gananath Obeyesekere, “Medusa’s Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience” (RAR)  W.E.H. Stanner, “Religion, Totemism and Symbolism” (RAR) ( <i>supplementary</i> )
<b>Week 3: Social Scientific Approaches</b>	February 9	Emile Durkheim, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (RAR)  Max Weber, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” (RAR)  <b><u>Submit</u></b> Interfaith Fieldwork Site Selection

	February 11	James Frazer, <i>The Golden Bough</i> (Canvas)  Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s <i>Golden Bough</i> ” (RAR)  Bronislaw Malinowski, “Magic, Science, and Religion” (Canvas)  Bronislaw Malinowski, “Myth in Primitive Psychology” (RAR) ( <i>supplementary</i> )
<b>Week 4: How to Study Religion Anthropologically</b>	February 16	James Bielo, “Doing Religious Ethnography” (Canvas)  Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” (RAR)
	February 18	Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category” (RAR)  Benson Saler, <i>Conceptualizing Religion</i> (Canvas)
<b><u>PART II: Myth, Meaning, and Ritual</u></b>		
<b>Week 5: Belief and Praxis</b>	February 23	Jean Pouillon, “Remarks on the Verb ‘To Believe’” (RAR)  Malcolm Ruel, “Christians as Believers” (RAR)  Roy A. Rappaport, “Enactments of Meaning” (RAR) ( <i>supplementary</i> )  <b><u>Submit</u></b> Interfaith Fieldwork
	February 25	Susan F. Harding, “Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion” (RAR)  Charles Hirschkind, “Passional Preaching, Aural Sensibility, and the Islamic Revival in Cairo” (RAR)
<b>Week 6: Ritual and Social Transformation</b>	March 2	Annalisa Buttici, Introduction and Chapter 1: African Pentecostalism in the Storm (APCE)  Arnold van Gennep, <i>Rites of Passage</i> (Canvas)  Victor Turner, “Liminality and Communitas” (RAR)

	March 4	Annalisa Butticci, Chapter 2: Contact Zones and Religious Short Circuits (APCE)  Roy A. Rappaport, “Ritual and the Regulation of Ecological Systems” (Canvas)  AND EITHER  Alfred Gell, “Closure and Multiplication: An Essay on Polynesian Cosmology and Ritual” (RAR)  OR  Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism” (RAR)
<b>Week 7: Structure, Revisited</b>	March 16	Claude Lévi-Strauss, “A Jivaro Version of <i>Totem and Taboo</i> ” (RAR)  Mary Douglas, “Land Animals, Pure and Impure” (RAR)  Marshall Sahlins, “Folk Dialectics of Nature and Culture” (RAR) ( <i>supplementary</i> )
	March 18	MIDTERM EXAMINATION
<b>Week 8: Semiotic Approaches to Religion</b>	March 23	Sherry B. Ortner, “On Key Symbols” (RAR)  Eric R. Wolf, “The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol” (RAR)  Susanne K. Langer, “The Logic of Signs and Symbols” (RAR) ( <i>supplementary</i> )
	March 25	Jodi Mikalachki, “Fraternity, Martyrdom and Peace in Burundi: The Forty Servants of God of Buta” (Canvas)  <i>Zacharie Bukuru, We Are All Children of God: The Story of the Forty Young Martyrs of Buta–Burundi</i>  E.E. Evans-Pritchard, “The Problem of Symbols” (RAR) ( <i>supplementary</i> )

<b>PART III: Religion of the Concrete</b>		
<b>Week 9: Materiality and the Body</b>	March 30	<p>Annalisa Butticci, Chapter 3: Holy Bones: Desire and Disgust of Real Presence (APCE)</p> <p>Janice Boddy, “Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance” (RAR)</p> <p>Stephan Palmié, “Evidence and Presence, Spectral and Other” (RAR) (<i>supplementary</i>)</p> <p><b><u>Submit</u></b> Theory of Religion Essay</p>
	April 1	<p>Rebecca Seligman, “The Unmaking and Making of Self: Embodied Suffering and Mind-Body Healing in Brazilian Candomblé” (Canvas)</p> <p>Mattijs van de Port, “Candomblé in Pink, Green and Black: Re-scripting the Afro-Brazilian Religious Heritage in the Public Sphere of Salvador, Bahia” (RAR)</p>
<b>Week 10: Colonialism and Globalization</b>	April 6	<p>John and Jean Comaroff, “The Colonization of Consciousness” (RAR)</p> <p>Michael Taussig, “The Genesis of Capitalism amongst a South American Peasantry: Devil’s Labor and the Baptism of Money” (RAR)</p> <p>Kenelm Burridge, “New Heaven, New Earth” (RAR) (<i>supplementary</i>)</p>
	April 8	<p>Annalisa Butticci, Chapter 4: Afro-Pentecostal Renaissance: Remediation and Mimesis of Raphael’s Transfigured Christ (APCE)</p> <p>Annalisa Butticci, Conclusion (APCE)</p>
<b>Week 11: Religion and the State</b>	April 13	<p>Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” (RAR)</p> <p>Anya Bernstein, <i>Religious Bodies Politic</i> (Canvas)</p> <p>David A. French, “FIRE’s Guide to Religious Liberty on Campus” (Canvas) (<i>supplementary</i>)</p> <p><b><u>Submit</u></b> Ethnography of Religion Source Summary</p>

<b>PART IV: Danger and Healing</b>		
<b>Week 12: Witchcraft: Religion or Science?</b>	April 20	E.E. Evans-Pritchard, <i>Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande</i> (Canvas)  Meyer Fortes, "Fate in Relation to the Social Structure" (RAR)
	April 22	Raymond C. Kelly, "Witchcraft and Sexual Relations: An Exploration in the Social and Semantic Implications of the Structure of Belief" (RAR)  Filip de Boeck, "On Being Shege in Kinshasa: Children, the Occult and the Street" (RAR)
<b>Week 13: Healing: Science or Religion?</b>	April 29	Robert J. Thornton, <i>Healing the Exposed Being</i> (Canvas)  Susan Martha Kahn, <i>Reproducing Jews</i> (Canvas)  Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, "Form and Meaning of Magical Acts" (RAR) ( <i>supplementary</i> )
<b>Week 14: The Future of Religion</b>	May 4	Wes Granberg-Michaelson, "Think Christianity Is Dying? No, Christianity Is Shifting Dramatically" (Canvas)  Barbara Myerhoff, "'Jewish Comes Up in You from the Roots'" (RAR)  <b><u>Submit</u></b> Ethnography of Religion Project
	May 6	Charles Taylor, <i>A Secular Age</i> (Canvas)  OR  Saba Mahmood, <i>Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report</i> (Canvas)  OR  Robert N. McCauley, <i>Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not</i> (Canvas)
<b>Exam Week: Epilogue – Reflecting on Religion</b>	Thursday, May 12 at 11:30 AM	FINAL EXAMINATION

\*\*\* NB: This schedule and syllabus are subject to change as we move through the semester. \*\*\*.

Source for Image on First Page: Alfred Gell, "Closure and Multiplication: An Essay on Polynesian Cosmology and Ritual," in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion, Second Edition*, 268. Caption: "The Tuamotuan conception of the Cosmos," adapted from an illustration by Paiore, c. 1820