**Gods, Myths, Religions In a Secular Age**

**Fieldwork Paper Assignment**

**Papers are due on Monday, 5/6 at the beginning of class in hard-copy and via Turnitin on SAKAI**

The purpose of this assignment is for you to encounter and describe the religious service of a selected community as an occasion of religious ritual, and to think about its meaning and place within the broader narratives and trends of religion, and the intersection of religion, culture, and society. In general, we will want to find out:

-What events, symbols, and beliefs form this rite?

-What distinctive meaning and feeling does this rite have for those who participate in it?

-What role does it play in their lives as individuals, as a group and as members of society?

To discover some answers to these questions, you will act as an ethnographer, a *participant-observer*, visiting a religious community, either by yourself or with another student in the class; this community should be different from your own in some \*\*important\*\* respect. These differences might include religion, race, age, ideology, or social class of most of the people who belong to it. **You must see me to discuss your choice and paper, as this will assure that there are no misunderstandings in this regard.**

As a participant-observer, you will **directly observe** the community events of gatherings in detail. In addition to an event, you will **interview** several of the community members about their experience in this community, and what it means to them. **Try to talk with one person who is part of the leadership (if the community has leaders), but also with a few members not in positions of leadership**. Introduce yourself, tell them what you are seeking to learn, and keep the conversation as short as they wish to make it. Hold several basic questions in mind (see below) to guide yourself. But use your observations to focus these questions. Relax, and let people speak freely. Don't press them, argue with them, or put words into their mouths.

In your fieldwork and writing, you will want to explore several sorts of questions; we might call it exploring the *5 C's*:

1. **Cultus**: What is happening during the event? When does it happen? How does it happen? Who is passively and actively involved, and who is facilitating the experience? Who says what to whom, using what texts? Also try to say what you can about the building. What sorts of objects are used and how?

2. **Creed and Code**: How does the event relate to the ideology, religious, and/or moral beliefs of the group? Consider that beliefs can be both formal and informal: determine how the event relates to their formal beliefs (look for a pamphlet or something that states these beliefs, do a little research on-line, and/or ask one of their leaders) and how it relates to their informal beliefs revealed in the group members' conversation. How does the event communicate these beliefs symbolically as well as literally? How does it enact them dramatically and give them emotional power?

3. **Community**:How is the group organized, and how does the event express or manifestitsorganization, e.g. the role and authority of its leadership?

4. **Composition**: What is the social composition of this community? Who are these people, as a group, in social terms? What can you say about their predominant age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, and family background? What types of jobs might these people have? Can you broadly categorize their education level, social position, and political outlook, or are they too diverse?

5. **Context and Connection**: What does this community mean to its members? How does this community connect with the life-situation of the people? How does it *fit* with their social circumstances and context? How does it function in their lives?

In tackling these questions, the paper's first task should be **DESCRIPTIVE**, especially regarding questions 1-4 above. You should rely mainly on the methods of direct observation and interviewing. \*\*\* At the end, you can sharpen this with any comparisons you see with your own religious experience and those of others you have observed.

The paper's second task is **INTERPRETIVE**, especially regarding question 5 above. Drawing on the readings, lectures, and your own insights, what can you say about the relationship of this community to the larger society? What are their points of tension and/or accommodation? What is important for others to know about this group and their relationship to society? Do any of our readings illuminate the beliefs or nature of the community? Explain.

There is no need to do much external research. However, I will be happy to provide you with a basic article, which may serve as an introduction to the community that you will visit.

Also, in identifying your interviewees you need only mention something about them (as in “older man”, “young woman”) etc., you do not need to provide names. Should you wish to provide a name, be sure to provide a pseudonym.

Your written report should be 5-7 double-spaced pages, in Times New Roman, 12-point font, with 1” margins. To cover all of these questions, you will need to be clear and concise, selective, and organized as a whole. Keep the primary thrust of the report descriptive, **bringing in ideas from the reading and lectures where they may shed light on the description.** You should not have a title page, but **you must have a title.**

Reports will be graded for (1) clarity and vividness of description; (2) your own insight into event in a social context; (3) your interpretation of the group’s relationship to the larger society; (4) contextualizing the community within the greater narrative of course readings/discussion; and (5) organization, conciseness, and style of writing. You should use whatever style of citation you are most comfortable with. Meaning, choose a style of citation and use it properly and consistently.

**Reminder: Your paper must have a thesis. And, you must see me to have your paper topic approved.**