

## TEXT, TALK, AND GOD

ANT 320L (31650)

TU/TH 2:00-3:30PM, SAC 4.118

Prof. Courtney Handman

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SAC 4.124, x10059

Office hours: Wed 1:30-2:30p and

Thurs 9-10a or by appointment



### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce students to the anthropological study of Christianity where we will focus in particular on the linguistic and semiotic forms of Christian practice: the ways in which Christian missionaries and Christian communities participate in traditions of textual circulation in which people are reading, translating, studying, arguing with, resisting, or praying from the Bible and other sacred Christian textual forms. More broadly, we will examine the varied ways in which many seemingly secular modes of reading, talking, or thinking about signs and meaning have strong roots in Christian and especially Protestant histories. We will look at the complex modes of global circulation of Christianity, from colonial missionization to contemporary televangelism. We will read ethnographic monographs and articles about communities in North America, Melanesia, West Africa, Southern Africa, and Europe. As an Independent Inquiry course, students will conduct an ethnographic research project over the course of the semester examining Christian modes of communication at a particular local site.

Students will learn about linguistic anthropological theories of communication and semiotics (the way signs have meaning and are used), about the spread of Christianity under European colonialism, and about the influence of Christian models of communication in contemporary secular U.S. contexts. Students will gain experience with anthropological methods of research and analysis. Class participation is largely through discussion of assigned reading materials. Student research will include an ethnographic assignment that will develop student skills of participant observation of social groups, interviews, and ethnographic writing.

### ASSIGNMENTS

**READING:** Prior to most class sessions you will need to read the articles or books that I have listed on the syllabus.

For each reading assignment I will give you guiding questions to help prepare you for a productive in-class discussion. You do not need to turn in answers to these questions, but you do need to think through them as you do the reading.

**QUIZZES:** At eight points during the semester there will be a 10-minute in-class quiz for which you have to answer one of the reading questions from the previous session's readings. You will always have a choice between two different questions. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped. [30]

**PARTICIPATION AND ABSENCES:** Come to class prepared to discuss the readings for the day and take notes on the discussion. In order to get full participation points, students need to participate – talk – regularly during class discussions. Going over the reading questions I provide will prepare you for discussion and for the quizzes. You

can miss one class without penalty. Each absence beyond 1 results in a point taken off your participation grade. You lose the entire 10 points for participation if you miss five classes total. [10]

**POST-FILM REFLECTIONS:** We will watch 2 documentaries during the semester. A 1-page reflection on each film guided by a topic/question I provide is due 3 days after the screening (Oct 21, Nov 18, 5pm, Canvas). [10]

**ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH PROJECT:** At some point during the semester you need to attend 2-3 (related) events relevant in some way to the course and develop an ethnographic analysis of them. These could be church services, worship music concerts, Hell Houses, Quaker meetings, or meetings of atheist associations, among other possibilities. You will use the course readings to develop a research question about this site/these events. You will also need to interview 1-2 people who are connected to this event/site. All of the elements below are mandatory parts of the project.

- Sep 13 and Oct 16: In-class writing exercises to help you begin to write and think ethnographically. You will turn in the writing that you do in class. [10]
- Between Oct 9 and Oct 25: Meet with me in office hours to discuss which events to attend, which aspects of the event you will focus on, what questions you will bring to your analysis, and what makes the site/event interesting to you. Bring a one paragraph description of your proposed event, the questions you will ask about it, and potential connections to class readings. [5]
- Nov 27, Nov 29, Dec 4: End-of-semester class presentations. During the final sessions of the class we will have a chance to present to the class on their projects in a multi-media context. [15]
- Dec 13: Turn in final ethnographic papers. Roughly 12-15 pages. Papers will use written sources from class readings to help frame the research question/problem and provide a theoretical framework. Students will find their own background materials on the site/events to give basic social/historical context. The main portion of the paper will be an analysis of the events and interviews that you will have attended or conducted during the semester. You will come to a conclusion that responds to your research question with a generalization of some sort. You will also note what further research would be needed for a more in-depth analysis of this issue and provide a critical evaluation of the evidence that you gathered. More information on the final paper will be distributed later in the semester. [20]

#### INDEPENDENT INQUIRY FLAG

This course carries an Independent Inquiry flag. All courses are designed to help students develop their critical thinking and research skills using different disciplinary research methods. Anthropology uses qualitative research methods to try to understand the cultural knowledge and experiences people bring to everyday interactions. Anthropological research methods include participant observation, interviewing, textual analysis, and spatial analysis, among others. These methods – generally bundled together as ‘the ethnographic method’ – can be used in a number of different professional contexts outside of anthropology where close examination of how groups of people are responding to an event, problem, or object is a central issue (international development, market research, consulting, etc.). The objectives for this course and your research project include:

- Students will identify a creative, focused, and manageable research question or topic for inquiry.
- Students will identify and synthesize existing knowledge and research relevant to their inquiry topic.
- Students will draw from one or more disciplinary perspectives to design a methodology for answering their research question or pursuing their inquiry.
- Students will gather, evaluate, synthesize, or create relevant evidence, knowledge, or other elements to reveal insights about their topic.
- Students will present a conclusion or creative work that logically follows from the inquiry findings.
- Students will critique their own inquiry process and the processes of others when possible, demonstrate that they understand the limitations of their conclusions or results, and identify directions for future inquiry.

#### COURSE MATERIALS

**READINGS:** Articles are available through Canvas, either as PDFs or links to journal websites. There is one book for the course. It is available as an ebook through the library (link on Canvas) and is on reserve at PCL. The book is available for purchase at many online stores for \$15 or less.

- Luhrmann, Tanya. 2012. *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York: Vintage Books.

### COMPUTERS/PHONES/TABLETS

Devices are permitted in class with the assumption that you need these to access the readings or to take notes. Please do not use your devices for other purposes during class.

### CONTACTING ME

The best way to contact me is through email (chandman@austin.utexas.edu). I will reply within 24 hours. As soon as you see that there is an issue you want to discuss with me, let me know. Please note that last minute emails about missed deadlines or due dates will be replied to within 24 hours just like any other email.

My office hours are Wednesday 1:30-2:30pm and Thursday 9-10am. If these times do not work with your schedule, please email me for an appointment. I am happy to find another time to meet. If meeting in person is not possible, then a less optimal but still acceptable way to talk is over the phone. My office number is 512-471-0059. Please email me so that we can set up an appointment to talk over the phone.

### SCHEDULE

Aug 30	Introductions	
Sep 4	Studying Christianity <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Jenkins, Phillip. 2002. "The Next Christianity" <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i>, 290(3): 53-68.</li></ul>	
Sep 6	Rituals <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Turner, Victor. 1967. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage." IN <i>The Forest of Symbols</i>. Cornell: Cornell Univ. Press. Pp. 93-111.</li></ul>	
Sep 11	Religious language <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Keane, Webb. "Religious language." <i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i> (1997): 47-71.</li><li>Silverstein, Michael. 2004. "'Cultural' Concepts and the Language-Culture Nexus." <i>Current Anthropology</i> 45(5):621-652. <b>**ONLY READ PP. 626-627**</b></li></ul>	Think of a ritual you have recently witnessed. Be prepared to talk about how Turner and Keane readings help you analyze that ritual.
Sep 13	Rituals observed <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No reading – in class exercise on observing rituals and writing fieldnotes</li></ul>	
Sep 18	Catholic relics and Catholic language <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Brooke, Rosalind and Christopher Brooke. 1984. "The Bible." IN <i>Popular Religion in the Middle Ages, Western Europe 1000-1300</i>. Pp. 130-145.</li><li>Errington, Joseph. 2008. "Early Conversions, or, How Spanish Friars Made the Little Jump." IN <i>Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power</i>. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Pp. 22-47.</li></ul>	
Sep 20	The individual and Protestant semiotics <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Weber, Max. 2003. <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>. T. Parsons, trans. Dover. [pp. 47-78; 98-128; 180-183.]</li></ul>	QUIZ on Brooke, Errington, Weber
Sep 25	Plain language, pure language, Quaker language <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bauman, Richard. 1983. <i>Let Your Words Be Few: The Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers</i>. Ch. 1, 4, 8</li></ul>	

Sep 27	<p>Witnessing as Christian speech act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harding, Susan. 2000. <i>The Book of Jerry Falwell</i>. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Ch. 1.</li> </ul>	QUIZ on Bauman and Harding
Oct 2	<p>Colonialism and Christianity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Errington, Joseph. 2008. "Between Pentecost and Pidgins." IN <i>Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power</i>. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Pp. 93-122.</li> <li>Meyer, Birgit. 1998. "'Make a complete break with the past.' Memory and Post-colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse." <i>Journal of religion in Africa</i> 28: 316-349.</li> </ul>	
Oct 4	<p>Being Christian without the Bible?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engelke, Matthew. 2004. "Text and performance in an African church: The Book, 'live and direct'." <i>American Ethnologist</i> 31(1): 76-91.</li> </ul>	QUIZ on Errington, Meyer, and Engelke
Oct 9	<p>Talking like a Christian/Talking like an individual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robbins, Joel. 2001. "God Is Nothing But Talk: Modernity, Language, and Prayer in a Papua New Guinea Society." <i>American Anthropologist</i> 103(4):901-912.</li> <li>Robbins, Joel. 2002. "My Wife Can't Break off Part of Her Belief and Give It to Me: Apocalyptic Interrogations of Christian Individualism among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea." <i>Paideuma</i> 48:189-206.</li> </ul>	Start to MEET DURING OFFICE HOURS to discuss possible ethnographic projects.
Oct 11	<p>Mind-reading like a Christian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Klassen, Pamela. 2007. "Radio Mind; Protestant Experimentalists on the Frontiers of Healing." <i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i> 75(3):651-683.</li> <li>Peters, John D. 1999. "History of an Error: The Spiritualist Tradition." IN <i>Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication</i>. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press. <b><u>**ONLY READ PP. 74-77; 89-108**</u></b></li> </ul>	QUIZ on Robbins, Klassen, and Peters
Oct 16	<p>Doing ethnography</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion of interviews and sites</li> <li>In-class exercise on interviewing</li> </ul>	
Oct 18	<p>Post-colonial missionaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FILM: <i>The Tailenders</i>.</li> <li>Take notes during the film of a particular scene or sequence in which the missionaries discuss the problems and possibilities of communication. How would you write about that in an ethnographic way?</li> </ul>	POST-FILM: 1-page ethnographic comment on the scene you took notes on. What about the event helps prove your point? Due Oct 21.
Oct 23	<p>Christian language as material stuff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coleman, Simon. 1996. Words as Things: Language, Aesthetics, and the Objectification of Protestant Evangelicalism. <i>Journal of Material Culture</i> 1(1): 107-128.</li> <li>Tomlinson, Matt. 2014. The Holy Ghost Is about to Fall. IN <i>Ritual Textuality</i>. Pp. 22-47.</li> </ul>	ATTEND ONE EVENT for your project by this date.

Oct 25	Christian language and other material stuff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bielo, James. 2017. "Replication as Religious Practice, Temporality as Religious Problem." <i>History and Anthropology</i> 28(1):31-148.</li> <li>• Bandak, Andreas. 2017. "Repeated prayers: saying the rosary in contemporary Syria." <i>Religion</i> 47(1):92-110.</li> </ul>	QUIZ on Coleman, Tomlinson, Bielo, and Bandak  Last chance to MEET DURING OFFICE HOURS to discuss ethnographic projects.
Oct 30	Listening like a Christian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schmidt, Leigh Eric. 2000. "Sound Christians." IN <i>Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment</i>. Cambridge: Harvard UP. Pp. 38-77.</li> </ul>	CONDUCT an interview for your project by this date.
Nov 1	Listening like a Christian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schmidt, Leigh Eric. 2000. "Oracles of Reason." IN <i>Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment</i>. Cambridge: Harvard UP. Pp. 78-134.</li> </ul>	QUIZ on Schmidt
Nov 6	Learning to Be inspired <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luhrmann, Tanya. 2012. <i>When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God</i>. New York: Vintage Books. Ch 1-3.</li> </ul>	ATTEND A SECOND EVENT for your project by this date
Nov 8	Learning to Be inspired <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luhrmann, Tanya. 2012. <i>When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God</i>. New York: Vintage Books. Ch 6-8.</li> </ul>	QUIZ on Luhrmann
Nov 13	Mass-Mediated Christianity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frederick, Marla. 2016. <i>Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global</i>. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Introduction, Ch. 2, 4.</li> </ul>	ATTEND A THIRD EVENT for your project by this date
Nov 15	Happy Belated Halloween <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FILM: <i>Hell House</i></li> <li>• Take notes during the film of the structure of the Hell House. What are the key ritual moments?</li> </ul>	POST-FILM: 1-page reflection on the ritual structure of Hell Houses. Due Nov 18 (Canvas).
Nov 20	Atheist rituals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engelke, Matthew. 2015. The Coffin Question: Death and Materiality in Humanist Funerals. <i>Material Religion</i> 11(1):26-49.</li> </ul>	QUIZ on Frederick and Engelke  CONDUCT a second interview for your project by this date.
Nov 22	Happy Thanksgiving – NO CLASS	
Nov 27	PRESENTATIONS	
Nov 29	PRESENTATIONS	
Dec 4	PRESENTATIONS	
Dec 6	Work on final projects	
Dec 13	Turn in final projects (Canvas)	

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## Class Policies

### Grading Policies

The following grading scale will be used:

Grade	Cutoff
A	94%
A-	90%
B+	87%
B	84%
B-	80%
C+	77%
C	74%
C-	70%
D	65%
F	<65%

For the quizzes, the film responses, the final project presentations, and the final papers, your writing (or your presentation script) should demonstrate familiarity with the reading and course themes. Responses that not only answer a quiz question or film prompt but provide further links to other readings, or to other questions, themes, or issues in the course will receive the highest point values. Final project elements (presentation and paper) should connect your own ethnographic material to thematic and theoretical issues discussed in class and in the readings, demonstrating your understanding of key concepts and ability to use them in the analysis of novel ethnographic material.

Example rubric for quizzes:

Demonstrates excellent understanding of the reading and its relationship to the overall course themes and issues: A

Demonstrates solid familiarity with the reading, answering the question satisfactorily: B/B+

Slight familiarity with the reading, but one or more elements of the answer incorrect: C

No familiarity with the reading demonstrated (or no assignment turned in): F

### Late work & missed quizzes

Late work will be marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day late (e.g., from an A- to a B+). Sometimes things happen that are out of your control. Once during the semester you can turn in something 2 days late or make up a missed quiz.

### Absences

You can miss one class without penalty. After that, 1 point will be taken off your 10-point attendance/participation grade for each absence. If you miss 5 classes you lose all attendance/participation points. The only absences that will be considered excused are for religious holidays or extenuating circumstances due to an emergency.

### Names and Personal Pronoun Preference

I will gladly honor your request to address you by a name different than what appears on the roster, and by the gender pronouns you use.

## University Policies

### Academic Integrity

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code: "As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity."

**Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT.** Therefore, if you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT's Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code which can be found at the following web address:

[http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint\\_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php)

### **Q Drop Policy**

If you want to drop a class after the 12th class day, you'll need to execute a Q drop before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Under Texas law, you are only allowed six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. For more information, see:

<http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>

### **University Resources for Students**

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. There are also a range of resources on campus:

#### *Services for Students with Disabilities*

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students, but I can only do so if you discuss your needs with me as early as possible. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions. If appropriate, also contact Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329- 3986 (video phone).

<http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

#### *Counseling and Mental Health Center*

If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. <http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/individualcounseling.html>

#### *The Sanger Learning Center*

Did you know that more than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

*Undergraduate Writing Center:* <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

*Libraries:* <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

*ITS:* <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

*Student Emergency Services:* <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

### **Important Safety Information:**

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.

### **Title IX Reporting**

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's [relevant policies](#).

Faculty members and certain staff members are considered "Responsible Employees" or "Mandatory Reporters," which means that they are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. **I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX related incidents** that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an

official report to the university, email [advocate@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:advocate@austin.utexas.edu) For more information about reporting options and resources, visit [titleix.utexas.edu](http://titleix.utexas.edu) or contact the Title IX Office at [titleix@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:titleix@austin.utexas.edu).

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: [www.utexas.edu/emergency](http://www.utexas.edu/emergency)

### *Guns*

Pursuant to SB11 (<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/84R/billtext/pdf/SB00011F.pdf>) and UT- Austin Campus Carry Policy (<https://campuscarry.utexas.edu/>; <https://www.policies.utexas.edu/policies/campus-concealed-carry>), persons with a current legally valid Concealed Carry License may carry a concealed legal handgun on or about their person in this class. Please take note of several provisions:

1. All legal provisions associated with concealed carry on campus must be followed without fail at all times. In addition to SB11 and UT-Austin Campus Carry policy, please review at least the 84 pages of applicable law curated by TX DPS (<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/InternetForms/Forms/CHL-16.pdf>).

Please take special note of two of the many legal provisions:

a. Holstering requirements: "A license holder who carries a handgun on campus must carry it in a holster that completely covers the trigger and entire trigger guard area. The holster must have sufficient tension or grip on the handgun to retain it in the holster even when subjected to unexpected jostling" (UT-Austin HOP 8-1060, VII-A-2).

b. "On or about your person means a person licensed to carry a handgun must carry a handgun in a manner that the handgun is close enough to the license holder that he or she can reach it without materially changing position" at all times (UT-Austin HOP 8-1060, IV).

2. A license holder may not carry a partially or wholly visible handgun on campus premises or on any university driveway, street, sidewalk or walkway, parking lot, parking garage, or other parking area. (SB11, Section 4 and Texas Penal Code, Section 46.035(a-1)). Violation is a Class A misdemeanor or a third degree felony.

If any legal requirement is violated at any moment, the person who witnesses the violation should leave the classroom and call 911 immediately without waiting to ask me for permission. Police will respond. This will disrupt the class and may create a dangerous situation for all of us. Violations may result in criminal penalties and sanction by the university.