

Gods, Saints, and Sinners: The Culture of Religion in Colonial Latin America

Dr. Emily Berquist



The Virgin of the Mountain of Potosí, ca. 1720

Course Description: It is impossible to understand the colonial period in Latin America without an awareness of the centrality of religion in changing, shaping, and building colonial society. Religion in colonial Latin America is an inherently diverse subject; we will examine not only European religious traditions in Latin America (specifically Catholicism and Judaism,) we will also look at Indian and African religious beliefs, and what happened when these various traditions combined to produce a new, hybrid religion. The goal of this class is to develop our understanding of religion as a cultural, social, and political institution in Colonial Latin America. Prior knowledge of Latin America, North America, or Europe in the colonial period helpful, but not required.

The course is designed as an upper-division course with lectures on Monday and discussion on Wednesday. Each week, a student or students (depending on enrollment) will be responsible for leading class discussion. Each week, students are responsible for writing a response paper. There are fourteen opportunities to write response papers, but students only need to write ten. Each student is given four free passes to use on a week of their choosing. The final assignment for this course is a historiographical essay pertaining to religion in colonial Latin America.

COURSE MATERIALS

Books:

William A. Christian. *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain.*

Inga Clendinnen. *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatán, 1517-1570.*

Irene Silverblatt. *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World.*

Joan Cameron Bristol. *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century.*

Course packet: available at college store

Required Film: *The Mission*

DVD is on reserve at the library, available on Netflix, and possibly at your local video store. Do not wait until the last minute to watch it! You want to be sure you have access to a copy with plenty of time...

GRADING RUBRIC

Attendance:

possible negative points

Attendance in class is mandatory. Absences are not excused unless they meet university regulations (see below.) Arrival in class more than 5 minutes after class begins counts as an absence, even if you remain in class for the entire session. Leaving early also counts as an unexcused absence.

Each unexcused absence counts for one point off your total final grade in the course. This can have a seriously negative impact on your grade. If you are the type of person who misses classes or is late frequently, this is probably not the best class for you.

Participation

10% final grade

Your participation in every class meeting is essential and required. You must attend every class, and you must arrive on time. Each missed course or late arrival (the official course definition of a late arrival is arrival more than five minutes after the official class start time, as per the classroom clock) will count as one point off your total final grade for the course. This is a non-negotiable policy that has the potential to negatively impact your grade.

In addition to arriving in class each day and on time, your participation grade is also based on your contributions to class discussion. Each student must contribute to each discussion at least once. Do not worry that your ideas will be criticized or held against you; our classroom is a supportive environment where we welcome all ideas, including challenges to our pre-existing notions. *Each student will be called on at least once in every discussion section.*

Weekly Response Papers (10 papers)

each 5% final grade/altogether 50%

Throughout the semester; you are responsible for ten response papers to the week's readings. These are 2 pages, double spaced, 12-point font. They must articulate a clear thesis and support this argument with evidence. You are advised to follow 5-paragraph essay format. If your response papers go over two pages, I will not read the rest of the pages and whatever you write will not count towards your grade. *Response papers are due at the beginning of each class meeting and they must also be turned in through turnitin.com. Those response papers not submitted through turnitin.com will not be accepted.*

Late response papers will lose one entire letter grade each day they are late. This means that a paper that was due at the start of class at 12:30 on Monday but was turned in at 2 on Monday will lose one letter grade from what it would have earned originally. If turned in after 12:30 on Tuesday, it will lose two letter grades, so on and so forth. Remember it is always better to turn in a very late assignment and receive an "F" than it is to turn in nothing in at all and get zero points.

If you do not attend class the day an assignment is due, please email your work to me.

You will notice in your syllabus that we have 12 response papers listed, but you only need to complete 10. This is because you have been given two free passes that you may use at any time throughout the semester. However, please be aware that choosing to use your free pass does not mean that you are exempted from doing the readings. If it seems that students are not doing the reading on the days they choose to use their free pass, this privilege will be revoked for the entire class. Students who choose not to use one or both of their free passes will have their lowest or lowest two grades for response papers dropped.

Any paper that does not adequately convey having done the reading for the week will automatically earn a D.

Leading Discussion

10% final grade

Each week, a student or a group of students (depending on enrollment) will be responsible for leading seminar with an introductory 10-minute presentation. During this time, presenters will briefly summarize the authors' approach, argument, and evidence. They will also share their own questions about the work, so as to facilitate discussion.

Final Historiography Paper Draft

5% final grade

Final Historiography Paper

25% final grade

More information will be given in class. Note that *you cannot pass this class if you do not turn in the final historiography paper.*

READINGS & CLASS SCHEDULE

Week One: Welcome

Wednesday, September 3:

Welcome, course introduction

Week Two: Introductions

Monday, September 8:

Lecture: Introduction to Religion in Colonial Latin America

Wednesday, September 10:

Reading: (all in course packet)

James Wiggins, "What on Earth is Religion?"

Carlo Ginzburg, "The Inquisitor as Anthropologist"

Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System"

Assignment: Response Paper #1 due

Activity: discussion

Week Three: Pre-Hispanic Religions

Monday, September 15:

Reading: excerpts from *Popol Vuh* (beachboard)

Joseph Campbell, "The Monomyth"

Activity: Lecture on Maya religion

Wednesday, September 17:

Assignment: response paper #2 due

Activity: Discussion with student leaders

Week Four: Religion in Spain

Monday, September 22:

Reading: William A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (you do NOT have to read chapters 4 & 6)

Activity: Lecture on religion in Spain

Wednesday, September 24:

Assignment: Response Paper #3 Due

Activity: Discussion with student leaders

Week Five: Spanish Versus Maya

Monday, September 29:

Reading: Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, first part

Activity: Lecture on Spanish evangelization in America

Wednesday, October 1:

Assignment: Response Paper #4 Due

Activity: discussion with student leaders

Week Six: Maya Versus Spanish

Monday, October 6:

Reading: Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, second part

Activity: Lecture on syncretism and resistance through religion

Wednesday, October 8:

Assignment: Response Paper #5 Due

Activity: discussion with student leaders

Week Seven: Secret Jews in Latin America

Monday, October 13:

Reading: Excerpts from *Luis de Carvajal, A Secret Jew in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (beachboard)

Activity: Lecture on Jews in Latin America

Wednesday, October 15:

Assignment: Response Paper #6 Due

Activity: discussion with student leaders

Week Eight: African Religious Traditions in Latin America

Monday, October 20:

Reading: (course packet)

James Sweet, "Witchcraft, Ritual, and Resistance in the African-Portuguese Diaspora"

Activity: Lecture on African Religious Traditions in Latin America

Wednesday, October 22:

Assignment: Response Paper #7 Due

Activity: Discussion with student leaders

Week Nine: Witchcraft in Colonial Latin America

Monday, October 27:

Reading: Ruth Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil in Late-Colonial Mexico" (course packet)

Activity: Lecture on women and witchcraft in Latin America

Wednesday, October 29:

Assignment: Response Paper #8 due

Activity: Discussion with student leaders

Week Ten: The Inquisition in Latin America

Monday, November 3:

Reading: Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions* (read only chapters 1-6)

Activity: Lecture on the Inquisition in Latin America

Wednesday, November 5:

Assignment: Response Paper #9 Due

Activity: Discussion with student leaders

Week Eleven: Women in the Catholic Church

Monday, November 10:

Reading: Margaret Chowning, "Convent Reform, Catholic Reform, and Bourbon Reform in Eighteenth-Century New Spain: The View from the Nunnery" (course packet)

Activity: Lecture on Women in the Catholic Church

Wednesday, November 12:

Assignment: Response Paper #10 Due

Activity: Discussion with student leaders

Week Twelve: Afro-Mexican Religion

Monday, November 17:

Reading: *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (entire)

Activity: lecture on Catholicism among people of African descent

Wednesday, November 19:

Assignment: Response Paper #11 Due

Activity: Discussion with student leaders

Week Thirteen: The Bourbons and the Catholic Church in the Eighteenth Century

Monday, November 24:

Viewing: *The Mission* (watch the DVD at home or at the library where it is on reserve)

Activity: lecture on the Bourbons and the Catholic Church/Discussion (**no student leaders this week**)

Assignment: Response Paper #12 Due

Wednesday, November 26: NO CLASS, FALL BREAK

Week Fourteen: The Bourbon Church and Religious Reform in the Eighteenth Century

Monday, December 1:

Reading: "The Splendor of Worship: Baroque Catholicism, Religious Reform, and Last Wills and Testaments in Eighteenth-Century Mexico City," by Brian Larkin (course packet)

Activity: lecture on religious reform in the eighteenth century

Wednesday, December 3:

Assignment: Response Paper #13 Due

Activity: Discussion with student leaders

Week Fifteen: The Bourbon Church and Socio-Economic Reform

Monday, December 8:

Reading: "Bishop Martínez Compañón's Practical Utopia in Enlightenment Peru," by Emily Berquist
(course packet)

Activity: lecture on church-sponsored socio-economic reform in the eighteenth century

Wednesday, December 10:

Assignment: Response Paper #14 Due

Activity: Discussion (** no student leaders**)

Final Historiography Papers Due During Final Exam Period