

**SRS 6907**  
***Aboriginal Encounters with Christianity***  
***1600-Present***

**Professor Emma Anderson**  
Wednesdays 4:00 – 7:00 pm  
Arts 114

Office Phone: 562-5800, x 1176

Email: Emma.Anderson@uottawa.ca

Office hours: Mondays, 1:15- 2:15 pm, Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30 am.

**Course Description:**

The first encounter of Canadian First Nations with French Catholic missionaries bent upon their conversion to what they viewed as the one true faith triggered the beginning of a lengthy conversation – one fraught with tension, passion, and many mutual misunderstandings. This course will delineate the contours of that four hundred year long conversation – which continues today – exploring how aboriginal peoples have resisted, appropriated, and embraced Christianity, often simultaneously, at both the individual and community level.

Through the intimate study of individual aboriginal lives, and broader consideration of both their historical context and their social impact, this course will illuminate both the intellectual rigor of this religious dialogue and its personal costs. This course will explore the experiences of a seventeenth-century Innu child taken to France by Catholic missionaries and the mysticism and self-mutilation of Catherine Tekakwitha, a young Mohawk woman regarded by her Jesuit mentors as a saint. It will examine the possible connection between de-conversion and religiously motivated violence through consideration of the torture and death of Jesuit missionary Jean de Brebeuf from the perspective of his aboriginal antagonists. It will illuminate native religious revival, prophesy, and protest movements, led by revolutionary figures such as Handsome Lake and Tecumseh, which, though protesting the influence of Christianity and European culture, themselves incorporated Christian themes and influences. Through the lens of individual experiences, the course will explore the painful, multi-generational impact of residential schools in Canada from their genesis in the early seventeenth century to their demise in the late 1980s.

Finally, it will consider contemporary aboriginal perspectives upon Christianity at both the individual and community level, focusing in particular upon the tensions between an allegiance to Christian beliefs and the growing movement toward traditional aboriginal spirituality. At the same time that it delineates the historical patterns and social effects of religious dialogue and coercion, the course will foreground pressing historiographic and methodological issues in the field. Though it will focus primarily on the Canadian encounter, we will take sidelong glances, as appropriate, with colonial and contemporary aboriginal experiences in the United States and Mexico.

**Required Texts:**

\* Anderson, Emma. *The Betrayal of Faith: The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

\* *SRS 6907 Course Packet*.

Both the book and the course pack are available for purchase at Agora Bookstore (145 Besserer, www.agorabookstore.ca, (613) 562-4672).

## **Evaluation:**

### **Weekly Reflection Papers (25%):**

Each week, students will prepare a two page (typed, double spaced) response to the assigned readings to facilitate their thinking about the issues concerned in preparation for the class lecture and Forum. The brief essay will present the student's considered views on the material by briefly summarizing the week's readings, analytically responding to its argument, and providing thought provoking questions for discussion during Forum. Students must email a copy of their reflection paper to the student leading the Forum that week and to the professor no later than 8 pm each Tuesday, the day before the class (this is an **absolute deadline** - earlier submissions are, of course, preferred).

### **Research Paper (30%):**

Throughout the term, students will research their own projects concerning the aboriginal dialogue with Christianity for their fifteen page formal research paper, due in class **Wednesday, November 21st**. Students are encouraged to approach the professor with proposed topics for their papers at their earliest opportunity, in preparation for their formal 1-2 page research proposal (with a provisional bibliography), which is due on **Wednesday, October 10th**.

### **Forum Facilitation and Class Participation (20%):**

Each week, following the lecture, students will engage in a Forum, in which they will discuss the readings for the week. Forum will be facilitated each week by a different student, who will present their own analysis of the topic under consideration and utilize their review of student reflection papers to lead debate and discussion of the pertinent questions raised by the readings. Each student will lead Forum once during the semester. It is expected that each student will come to class sessions fully prepared to engage in informed discussion with their fellow students and the instructor, and they will be willing to clearly express their informed views on course materials.

### **Final Examination (25%):**

The final examination will be a cumulative review of all of the topics addressed in the course. It will take place (on a date to be announced) during the final examination period, between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, 2007. Please note that the instructor is unable to accommodate requests to write the final exam at any other date and time than that assigned by the University. **Students are therefore urged not to make any travel or work plans before the exam schedule is announced by the University.**

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

\* All assignments are due on the dates indicated. Late papers (without certified evidence of ill health, family emergency or other compassionate consideration) will be penalized for each day they are late. Plagiarism, of course, is absolutely unacceptable and, if engaged in, will result in failure of the assignment, if not the course.

\* Students are **strongly urged** to keep a back-up digital and printed copy of their work, including reflection papers, as the instructor and/or Forum leader cannot take sole responsibility for safeguarding originals.

## Course Overview:

September 12:

### **Theoretical and Methodological Introduction to the Course and its Themes**

This week, in addition to introducing the themes and goals of the course, we will situate our studies theoretically and methodologically, exploring the conceptual and historiographic issues which have long plagued the exploration of aboriginal appropriations of Christianity. We will focus in particular upon the problematic model of “conversion” – generally presented as a permanent, irrevocable, and exclusive decision to abandon the subject’s previous form of religiosity for another – and explore alternative conceptual models.

#### **Readings:**

- 1) James Axtell. “Were Indian Conversions Bona Fide?” in *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 101-121.
- 2) Allen Greer. “Conversion and Identity: Iroquois Christianity in Seventeenth-century New France,” in *Conversion: Old Worlds and New*. Mills, Kenneth and Grafton, Anthony, eds. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003. **Please note:** For this class, please read the introductory section exploring the historiographic debate concerning conversion, p. 175-178.
- 3) Cornelius Jaenen. “Amerindian Responses to French Missionary Intrusion, 1611-1760: A Categorization” in McGowan, Mark G. and Marshall, David B., eds. *Prophets, Priests, and Prodigals: Readings in Canadian Religious History, 1608 to Present*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992, p. 3-15.
- 4) Michael Dorris. “Indians on the Shelf” in Calvin Martin, *The American Indian and the Problem of History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 98-105.

September 19:

### **Precontact Aboriginal Cultures**

Aboriginal pre-contact religious life was incredibly complex and diverse. This week, using as case studies the seventeenth-century Innu, a migratory hunting and gathering people, and the Cherokee, a more southerly, agrarian group, we will explore baseline aboriginal assumptions regarding the nature of reality and of the optimal relations between human beings and the rest of the natural world. As well, we will study the impact of the physical environment and conceptions of gender and age differences upon religious beliefs and practices and upon cultural organization.

#### **Readings:**

- 1) Emma Anderson. *The Betrayal of Faith: The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. Please read Chapter One, “Thy God has Not Come to Our Country.” Innu Childhood,” up until section heading, “The European “Them.” Innu-French Relations.”
- 2) Theda Perdue. *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998, Chapter One, “Constructing Gender,” p. 17-40.

September 26:

### **First Contact and the Creation of the “Middle Ground”**

Initially, contact between Canada’s aboriginal people and European newcomers was not primarily religious in nature, but was based on shared economic interests and military alliances. As neither

aboriginal people nor French traders were able to impose their social vision forcibly on the other, they created a hybrid culture – dubbed by Richard White “the middle ground” - characterized by its mutual accommodation. This week we will explore this middle ground phase of Canadian religious history, contrasting it with developments during the same period in the colonial United States and Mexico.

**This week we are delighted to be joined by Cornelius Jaenen, Professor Emeritus of the University of Ottawa’s History Department (and author of several pivotal pieces in our course packet).**

**Readings:**

1) Emma Anderson. *The Betrayal of Faith: The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert*. Please read the Chapter One section entitled: “The European “Them:” Innu-French Relations.”

2) Richard White. *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Introduction, p. ix-xv.

3) Cornelius Jaenen. “Amerindian Views of French Culture in the Seventeenth Century.” *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 55, 1974, p. 261-91.

October 3:

**“Second Contact” and Aboriginal Children’s Experiences of European Christianity**

Following their somewhat tardy arrival on the Canadian scene, arriving Christian missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic, quickly focused their evangelical attention on aboriginal children and youth, whom they adjudged to be less “steeped in sin” than their adult kin. This week, we will overview both Catholic and Puritan strategies for converting native children in seventeenth-century North America, and the often deleterious effects of Christian education upon the youths it targeted.

**Readings:**

1) Emma Anderson. *The Betrayal of Faith: The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert*. Please read “Prologue: Pierre-Anthoine Pastedechouan: Voyager between Worlds,” and Chapter 2, “Do Not Take Me Back to Those Beasts Who Do Not Know God:” Transformation in France.”

2) James Axtell. “Dr. Wheelock’s Little Red School” (selection), in *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 91-106.

October 10:

**Aboriginal Negotiations with Christianity**

Aboriginal adults, unlike their younger and more vulnerable kin, often evaded educational institutions which sought systemically to control their interpretation of Christianity. Rather, the aboriginal people of early modern North America encountered Christianity from squarely within their own cultural and religious frame of reference. Shamans, in particular, disputed with missionaries regarding the nature of dreams, the afterlife, and the soul, and expressed their dissatisfaction with Christian exclusivism and preoccupation with hellfire. This active aboriginal engagement with and appropriation of the faith of the missionaries, as well creating misunderstandings on both sides, often led to relativistic incorporation of Christianity into native beliefs systems, an appropriation, ironically, which was often opposed by missionaries.

**\* PLEASE NOTE: your formal 1-2 page research proposal with a provisional bibliography is due in class today \***

**Readings:**

- 1) Calloway, Colin G., "A World of Dreams and Bibles," in *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 68-91.
- 2) Emma Anderson. *The Betrayal of Faith: The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert*. Please read Chapter 3, "I Have Not a Mind Strong Enough to Remain Firm: Religious Ambivalence," and Chapter 4, "God Has Let His Thunderbolts Fall: Apostasy and Death in the Canadian Woods."
- 3) Rebecca Kugel, "Of Missionaries and their Cattle: Ojibwa Perceptions of a Missionary as an Evil Shaman," *Ethnohistory*, 41:2, p. 227-244.

October 17:

**Illness and Conversion, Apostasy and Violence**

As Christianity penetrated native cultures increasingly disorganized by epidemic and warfare, aboriginal societies factionalized into pro- and anti-Christian factions. The experience of illness proved pivotal in this process of factionalization. Those aboriginal people who converted to Christianity often did so because they saw in its rituals a healing power. While some converts shared their opinion of their traditionalist kin that missionaries had deliberately caused their illness, they also believed the European "shaman" had the power to heal the damage they had inflicted. Those who retained their Christianity, like Catherine Tekakwitha, often utilized forms of ritual self-mortification which combined Christian disdain for the needs of the flesh with traditional native practices designed to demonstrate physical stoicism. Others, who became disillusioned with Christianity when epidemic continued to plague their communities, became "apostates," returning to their traditional spiritual roots. Those who de-converted often harboured strong feelings of resentment and anger towards missionaries, which could manifest itself in physical violence.

**Readings:**

- 1) Greer, Allen. "Conversion and Identity: Iroquois Christianity in Seventeenth-century New France" in *Conversion: Old Worlds and New*. Mills, Kenneth and Grafton, Anthony, eds. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003 (#2 in course packet, for today please read p. 178-192).
- 2) Daniel Richter. "Iroquois vs. Iroquois: Jesuit Missions and Christianity in Village Politics, 1642-1686," *Ethnohistory*, 32(1) 1-12.
- 3) Emma Anderson "Blood, Fire, and "Baptism:" Three Perspectives on the Death of Jean de Brebeuf, Seventeenth-Century Jesuit "Martyr" " in Martin, Joel and Nicholas, Mark, eds. *Crossings: Exploring European-Aboriginal Religious Interaction in Colonial North America*, University of North Carolina Press (forthcoming).

October 24:

**Christian Components of "Nativist" Movements**

One of the most common (and misleading) historiographic bifurcations of aboriginal experience is into the categories of "traditional(ist)" and "Christian." During this week and the next, we will complicate this assumption – this week by exploring the Christian theological and ritual contributions (particularly prophesy and messianism) to aboriginal movements often labelled "nativist" or "traditionalist" – such as those of Pontiac, Tecumseh, Handsome Lake, Wovoka (Jack Wilson), and Louis Riel. What aspects of Christianity were aboriginal leaders able to tap into to forge a powerful critique of the European presence? How did they perceive the relationship between Christianity and traditional religion? Between Europeans and aboriginal peoples?

**Readings:**

- 1) John Sugden. *Tecumseh: A Life*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999, p. 116-120.
- 2) Gregory Evans Dowd. "Thinking and Believing: Nativism and Unity in the Ages of Pontiac and Tecumseh," in Peter Mancall and James Merrell, eds. *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850*. New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 380-384.
- 3) Alice Beck Kehoe. *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization*. Second Ed. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2006. Chapter One, "The Ghost Dance Religion," p. 3-12 and Chapter 10, "Revitalization," p. 133-147.

October 31:

**Articulating a Native Christianity (or Would the "Real" Black Elk please stand up?) Native Converts, Catechists, and Preachers**

This week we will continue our complication of the dualism of "traditionalist" and "Christian" with our exploration of aboriginal converts, catechists and preachers. How did Askenootow and Black Elk understand their religious identities? How have they been interpreted by their families, communities, and descendents, as well as historians and religionists? What is at stake in the characterization of such figures' religious identities? How do their experience challenge the either/or dichotomy of "traditionalist"/"Christian"? How do they uphold this distinction? How do their experiences speak to the similar dilemmas faced by contemporary aboriginal Christians?

**Readings:**

- 1) Wheeler, Winona. "The Journals and Voices of a Church of England Native Catechist: Askenootow (Charles Pratt), 1851-1884," in Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert. *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History, second edition*. Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2003, p. 237-257.
- 2) Costello, Damian. *Black Elk: Colonialism and Lakota Catholicism*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005. "The Essentialist Black Elk or the Catholic Black Elk?" p. 13-21, 72-77.
- 3) Treat, James. "Native Christian Narrative Discourse," in *Native and Christian: Indigeneous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*. Treat, James, ed. New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 1-18.

November 7:

**Gender-specific effects of Christianization: The Debate**

An interesting and contentious debate rages concerning the impact of Christianity's patriarchal family models upon aboriginal gender roles and relations. For some historians, such as Karen Anderson, the advent of Christianity was tantamount to an assault upon aboriginal women's relatively high status. Others, like Natalie Zemon Davis, suggest that Christianity brought new opportunities as well as new challenges for native women. Whatever their position on the relationship between Christianization and women's social status, historians agree that the paucity and biases of our historical sources further occlude the issue.

**Readings:**

- 1) Theda Perdue. *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998, "Introduction," p. 3-11.

2) Karen Anderson. *Chain Her by One Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century France*. London: Routledge, 1991, Chapter One, "Proud, Disobedient and Ill-Tempered," p. 1-12.

3) Natalie Zemon-Davis. "Iroquois Women, European Women," in *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers From European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850*. Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell. New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 97-110.

November 14:

### **Children's Experiences of European Christianity II: Residential Schools**

In the nineteenth-century, aboriginal children across North America were once again targeted by Christian missionaries eager to convert entire native cultures through the systemic religious education of their youth. Though their experiences were in many ways similar to those of their seventeenth century predecessors (such as Pierre-Anthoine Pastedechouan and Samuel Occum), native youth educated in these residential schools from the 1830s to our own times faced a more trenchant assault on their individual and collective identity. Aboriginal peoples, now a minority in their own countries, were legally required to attend institutions which had as their basic mandate the annihilation of native cultures, languages, and religions.

#### **Readings:**

1) Emma Anderson. *The Betrayal of Faith: The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert*. Please read Chapter 5, "Pastedechouan's Legacy."

2) George Fulford and Louis Bird: "Who is Breaking the First Commandment?" Oblate Teachings and Cree Responses in the Hudson Bay Lowlands in *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*. Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003, p. 293-318.

3) Randy Fred's "Forward" to Celia Haig-Brown's *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School*. Vancouver: Tillacum Library, 1988, 15-24.

November 21:

### **Beyond Christianity: AIM, the 60s, and the Reassertion of Traditional Ways**

The 1960s and the Civil Rights movement brought with it a new wave of aboriginal activism across North America and the advent of a new historiographic perspective which privileged aboriginal perspectives and experiences. Even as aboriginal people fought to gain greater control over their present and future, native scholars reassessed their past. During this period, missionary-authored documents and the views of aboriginal culture they encoded were newly challenged. Aboriginal traditional religions were compared, often favourably, with Christianity, and reasserted as invaluable sources of individual and collective identity and ethics.

#### **Readings:**

1) Vine Deloria, "Christianity and Indigenous Religion: Friends or Enemies?" in *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*. New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 145-161.

2) Georges Sioui. *Huron-Wendat: The Heritage of the Circle*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999, Chapter One, "Origins and Mythology," (portion), p. 16-22.

**\* PLEASE NOTE: 15 page Research Papers due in class today. No Reflection Papers due this week.\***

November 28:

### **Cooption and Commercialization of Native Spirituality**

The dominant, non-aboriginal culture of North America was also convulsed during the 1960s and 70s, as Christianity became increasingly criticized as patriarchal and exclusivistic. Amidst the collective rebellion of the counter-culture, anti-war movement, and the birth of feminism and environmentalism, religious experimentation was as endemic as drug use, as many sought to fill the spiritual void left by the Christianity they had rejected. Aboriginal traditional religions – widely perceived as egalitarian and environmental in its ethos – seemed to many an ideal replacement. While native traditions had long been appropriated and commercialized by non-aboriginals, this historical period witnessed an upswing in non-aboriginal people “playing Indian” which continues into our own time. But what are the ongoing effects of non-aboriginal appropriations of native culture? Does modern experimentation with “shamanism” represent the long overdue recognition by non-aboriginals of the wisdom of native spirituality, or does this movement trivialize and misunderstand aboriginal traditions?

#### **Readings:**

- 1) Dagmar Wernitznig, *Going Native or Going Naïve?: White Shamanism and the Neo-Noble Savage*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2003. “Introduction,” p. xiii-xxxiv.
- 2) Philip Deloria. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, Chapter Six, “Countercultural Indians and the New Age,” selections, p. 154-158, 168-173.
- 3) Katie N. Johnson and Tamara Underiner, “Command Performances: Staging Native Americans at Tillicum Village,” in *Selling the Indian: Commercializing and Appropriating American Indian Cultures*. Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, eds. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001, p. 44-60.

December 5:

### **The Current Conversation: Christianity and Traditional Beliefs in Contemporary Aboriginal Communities**

This course has attempted to look closely and critically at the encounter between aboriginal traditional beliefs and Christianity, which for many native peoples has become, over the past four centuries, an intimate part of their “traditional” sense of identity. In closing the course, we will examine the contemporary individual and collective experiences of aboriginal peoples who, in their everyday life, bridge the conceptual, ritual, and political gap between “traditional religions” and “Christianity” understood as two discrete traditions. Using the experiences of contemporary Ojibwa and Dene Tha peoples, and of individuals who self-identify as Christians, we will ask: must religious identity be an either/or choice?

#### **Readings:**

- 1) Michael McNally. “The Uses of Ojibwa Hymn-Singing at White Earth: Toward a History of Practice,” in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. David D. Hall, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 133-153.
- 2) Jean-Guy Goulet. *Ways of Knowing: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Dene Tha*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998, Chapter 8, “When the Drum and the Rosary Meet,” selection, p. 212-222.



3) Adrien Jacobs, "The Meeting of the Two Ways," p. 184-190 and Laverne Jacobs, "The Native Church: A Search for an Authentic Spirituality," p. 236-240 in James Treat, ed. *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*. New York: Routledge, 1996.