

**Conversion to Christianity in Modernity:
Historical and Theological Perspectives**
Theology 436/536A, History 436A, AfAm Studies 438, IIPS 436
Spring 2003
9:30-10:45am, DeBartolo 246

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Conversion to Christianity names both an individual spiritual journey as well as a collective experience undergone by many peoples. This course will examine conversion both as a personal experience as well as the expansion of Christianity in the modern period. It will attend both to conversion narratives as well as various historical encounters of Christianity with cultures and peoples in the past 5 centuries, along with the theological innovations that accompanied such experiences and encounters. Building on a study of several well-documented cases from various places and times, an analysis will be made of the dynamics of conversion from theological as well as other perspectives. The larger historical and social consequences of conversion to Christianity will also be examined.

Course expectations

1. Participation

As much as possible the course will take the form of a seminar, and seminars at the university level, especially with advanced students, demand preparation and participation from those present. Such preparation includes both thoughtful reading and reflection before the class period, and participation means willing and critical engagement in conversation during the class meeting itself. Seminars are collective learning experiences, so that regular attendance is a strong expectation. More than two unexcused absences in the semester will lower your grade. *If you are absent, please inform me afterwards explaining the reason, and if you know you will be absent, please inform me beforehand.*

2. Assignments

For *nearly every class* there will be required reading and often a written assignment, usually between one sentence and one page. There will also be a cumulative final exam. In addition, you will give a personal oral presentation on an article or book excerpt, take part in a group presentation, and write two 5-page papers. Roughly speaking, participation will constitute 20% of your grade, the final 20%, each 5-page paper 20%, and the two oral presentations 20%.

3. The moral responsibility of a student and the university honor code.

As you know, the university has had an honor code in place for a number of years. Recently this code underwent review and some revisions were made. You will be expected to abide by the new honor code. In particular, this means that you will not turn in someone else's work as your own, whether this "someone else" be a fellow student or some other source—either in a printed text, from the Internet, or elsewhere—not cited by you. If you have written something and not attributed it to another via footnote or endnote, then it should be your work or idea,

unless it is entirely part of common wisdom. Even in such cases, however, your wording must be your own. The university has subscribed to a service designed to determine whether plagiarism has occurred. I don't want to use it, so please do not tempt me!

Texts I have ordered the following required texts through the Notre Dame bookstore:

1. Cosmopolis by Stephen Toulmin
2. Contracting Colonialism by Vicente Rafael
3. Hell Without Fire by Love Henry Whelchel
3. Border of Death, Valley of Life by Daniel Groody
4. Deep River by Shusaku Endo

There is also a course packet, available at the Copy Center in LaFortune, #42.

Part one: What is conversion?

1. Tuesday, January 14: Introduction. The many perspectives on conversion to Christianity

For next time: Read Rambo (**CP 1-15**) and conversion narratives of St. Ignatius of Loyola and John Bunyan (**CP 16-21**).

2. Thursday, January 16: Conversing about conversion

For next time: Read William James (**CP 22-48**)

3. Tuesday, January 21: The legacy of William James' Varieties of Religious Experience

Oral report 1: Catholic conversion narratives: Newman, Day, and Merton

Oral report 2: Protestant conversion narratives: Wesley, Truth, Colson

For next time: Read Toulmin, to 62.

Part two: What is modernity?

4. Thursday, January 23: Perspectives on modernity: the standard account and Toulmin's thesis

Oral report 3: Louis Dupre, "The Fateful Separation"

Oral report 4: Ariel Glucklich, Sacred Pain, "The tortures of the Inquisition and the invention of modern guilt"

For next time: Read Toulmin, 63-137

5. Tuesday, January 28: Evaluating Toulmin and other perspectives on modernity

Oral report 5: Habermas, "Modernity's Consciousness of Time..."

Oral report 6: Kolakowski, Leszek, "Modernity on endless trial"

For next time: Read Luria (**CP 49-61**)

6. Thursday, January 30: Modernity and the politics of conversion

Oral report 7: Anthony Giddens, "The premodern and the modern"

Oral report 8: David Harvey, "Time-space compression..."

For next time: Read Toulmin, 139-209

7. Tuesday, February 4: In the wake of modernity: Where are we now?

Oral report 9: David Tracy, "On naming the present"

Oral report 10: Mary Louise Pratt, "Modernity and periphery"

For next time: Read Horton, (CP 62-74)

Part three: Conversions collective, conversions individual

8. Thursday, February 6: Why do people convert to Christianity? Horton's thesis

First paper assigned, due February 13.

For next time: Read Horton, (CP 75-97)

9. Tuesday, February 11: Horton and his critics. Is conversion to Christianity intellectual?

Oral report 11: Michelle Gilbert, Conversion in contemporary Ghana

Oral report 12: Carl Sundberg, Conversion in contemporary Congo-Brazzaville

For next time: Read Hefner (CP 98-119)

10. Thursday, February 13: Horton expanded; the rationality of conversion and the expansion of Christianity and other world religions. The history of Christianity in the Philippines.

Oral report 13: Kwame Bediako, Conversion in Africa and traditional belief

Paper #1 due.

For next time: Read Rafael, up to 83

11. Tuesday, February 18: Conversion and translation in the Philippines

For next time: Read Rafael, 84-136

12. Thursday, February 20: Conversion and confession in the Philippines

For next time: Read Rafael, 137-end

13. Tuesday, February 25: Conversion, submission, and the redefinition of death in the Philippines

For next time: Read Lamin Sanneh (CP 120-143)

Wednesday evening, February 26: Movie: *Shadowlands*

14. Thursday, February 27: Conversion and translation in western Africa: Sanneh's thesis

Oral report 14, John Casson, "Missionaries and Mau Mau..."

Oral report 15, Paul Landau, "'Religion' and Christian Conversion in African History..."

Assign paper 2, due March 6

For next time: Read Welchel, to 62

15. Tuesday, March 4: Conversion in slave religion: literacy
Oral report 16: Paul Radin, ed., Slave conversion narratives
Oral report 17: Will Coleman, Analyzing slave narratives of encounters with spirit(s)
For next time: Read Whelchel, 63 to end

16. Thursday, March 6: Conversion, resistance, and African-American churches
Oral report 18: Riggins Earl, Conversion according to slave and master
Paper 2 due.
For next time: Read Groody, up to 77

Spring break

17. Tuesday, March 18: Culture and conversion

For next time: Groody, 78 to end

18. Thursday, March 20: Conversion and the Encounter retreat in Coachella

For next time: readings to be assigned

Part four: Toward a theology of conversion

19. Tuesday, March 25: Oral presentation, #1. Conversion as understood by contemporary sociologists of religion.

For next time: readings to be assigned

20. Thursday, March 27: Oral presentation, #2: Conversion, contemporary theology, and liturgical practice.

For next time: readings to be assigned

21. Tuesday, April 1: Oral presentation, #3: Conversion and contemporary spirituality.

For next time: Read Hopkins (**CP 144-152**)

22. Thursday, April 3: Constructing theology from conversions in the past: slave religion

For next time: Read articles by Beckford and Cooley (**CP 153-174**)

23. Tuesday, April 8: Conversions and prison environments

For next time: Read John Dunne (**CP 175-188**)

24. Thursday, April 10: Conversion and the journey of faith in contemporary spirituality

For next time: Read Kurtz and AA's 12 steps (**CP 189-207**)

25. Tuesday, April 15: Conversion and recovery from addiction
Oral report 19: Stanley Brandes, Staying Sober in Mexico City (selection)
For next time: Read Comaroffs, *Redemptoris Missio*, and Mantel (**CP 208-241**)

Part five: Beyond conversion? Beyond modernity?

26. Thursday, April 17: Conversion in contemporary anthropology, church teaching, and literature

For next time: Read Endo to 103

27. Tuesday, April 22: Conversion, possibly postmodern?
Oral report 20: Colleen Carroll, Conversion and the contemporary return to orthodox Christianity among young Americans
For next time: Read Endo, 104 to end

28. Thursday, April 24: Conversion and contemporary fulfillment
Oral report 21: Jane Bennett, The Enchantment of Modern Life
For next time: Read Walls (**CP 242-252**)

29. Tuesday, April 29: Conversion and conceiving Christian history

Exam: Friday, May 9, 2003: 10:30am-12:30pm