Chapter 16 – New Religious Movements Teaching Tips

Strategies

This is a good class to do a general review of the course. The teacher might now want to cluster the various religions in groups. For example group them according to religions that developed in the Sub Continent of India- Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism; religions that developed in Asia- Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto; religions that developed in the Middle East, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam; finally religions that were influenced by the Yoruba Tradition.

A fruitful path of inquiry might be to develop a grid of similarities between the religions that developed in the various regions. For instance from the Subcontinent, much emphasis is placed on forms of meditation, the concept of re-incarnation etc. From Asia, these religions are far more holistic, from the Yoruba tradition these religions tend to be much more emotional and connect into the pathos of suffering and pain because of the issue of slavery.

This overview should raise some obvious questions for inquiry: 1) to what extent are religions merely a product of the social milieu from which they arise? This might challenge the notion of religion being supernatural phenomena 2) How much of one’s religious affiliation is just a mere accident of social location or geography? 2) With the spread of dominant cultures, does it mean that some religions will be rising while religions that now are popular might be on the decline? For example China is the most populous country in the world and it is stretching its economic reach throughout the world. Does it mean that Daoism, Confucianism, Falun Gong and other Asian religions might rise with the prominence of China, to become some of the largest religions of the world?

Videos

http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/index.html

God is Green is a documentary that was directed by mark Dowd and Bruno Sorrentino. It profiles the rise of the evangelical environmental movement. This documentary taps into a sentiment about responsible stewardship of the environment that was long shared by the more liberal side of the evangelical divide. The documentary however makes the case that conservatives are also getting on board.

http://www.climatecrisis.net/

An Inconvenient Truth is a documentary that was produced by Al Gore. In this film he attempts to communicate the dangers of a placid society in the face of a global eco-crisis. The film was directed by Davis Gruggenheim and produced by Paramount Pictures.
L. Ron Hubbard is the founder of Scientology. This video gives a selection of recordings of some of his lectures with contemporary questions. From this recording the student will gain insights into the religion of Scientology and, more so, the thinking that gave rise to scientology.

This video gives an in-depth look at Scientology as a religion and the man L. Ron Hubbard. In assessing any religion a good place to start is usually with its founder. Religions generally do not develop in a vacuum. They are important parts of the social fabric that give rise to them. The student will appreciate the link between the life of Hubbard and the religion he championed.

The Believers

This is a film directed by Patrick Crowley. It features the religion of Santeria. Santeria is a religion that has roots in the Yoruba tradition of West Africa. It was brought to the West Indies when African slaves were plucked out of African in the 17th and 18th centuries. Such traditions combined with Spanish Catholicism in Cuba and Santeria was the result. This video is set against the backdrop of Santeria as practiced in New York City.

Beyond the Red Wall: The Persecution of Falun Gong.

This is a documentary about Kuanlun Zhang, an artist and professor at McGill University. He was imprisoned in China for almost three years because of his connection with Falun Gong. Falun Gong is one of the new religions that developed in China, but China has been hostile to any form of organized religion.

Rebel Music: The Bob Marley Story

Rastafarianism was developed in Jamaica, West Indies, in the 1930’s. Its roots however go back to the days of the tragic African Diaspora of the 17th and 18th centuries when Africans were ripped out of their homeland to serve on sugar plantations in the West and Caribbean. A group of Ashanti and Ebo slaves, call Maroons, came to inhabit the mountains of Jamaica. They were a terse resistant group who inspired an anti-colonial movement called the Rastafarians. This group has been classified as one of the new religions of the 20th century. The late Bob Marley was an ambassador for the movement through his inimitable voice in reggae music. This documentary is a profile of Bob Marley, and his influence on the movement.
Voodoo and the Church in Haiti

This is a documentary that was directed by Bob Richards and produced by CustomFlix. It features the confluence of Christianity and Voodoun in Haiti. Voodoun is a religion that has roots in the Yoruba tradition of West Africa. It came to the West Indies with the African Salves of the 17th and 18th centuries. The slave’s folk ways and religious practices combined with French Catholicism in Haiti and Voodoun was the result. This film highlights this intermixing.

Articles

http://www.aarweb.org/

Aarweb is a site dedicated to providing academic reflections on religion, especially the development of new religions. It seeks to engage readers and listeners in a conversation about the role religion plays in social, political, and economic events, as well as in the lives of communities and individuals. The student will gain helpful insights on various religious traditions and examine the contours of the development of new religions.

http://hirr.hartsem.edu/denom/new_religious_movements.html

The Hartford Institute for Religion Research is an excellent resource with academic articles on a variety of new religions. Additionally, it gives links to other resources that deepen the student’s knowledge on religions. The student will find information on subjects such as cults versus sect, the psychology of new religious movement, as well as various expose on specific new religious movements.

http://www.skepsis.nl/nrm.html

This site provides a wealth of information on traditional and new religions. It features over one hundred scholarly resources on new religious movement. The student will find enriching articles on the scientific study of religion, religion and society, conversion and brainwashing, religious violence, the phenomenon of charisma among others.

http://www.religiousworlds.com/journals.html

Religious World provides links to academic research and articles on various religious movements. It is a link to many standard academic journals on religions. Some of the featured journals are Asian Women Studies, The Journal of Southern Studies, The Journal of Religion and Society, The Journal of Religion and Ethics, among many others.