

Religion 121: Introduction to Christianity
Carleton College
Fall 2005
Professor Lori Pearson

Independent Project: Christianity in the News

Your task in this assignment is to explore the diversity and complexity of Christianity as a global phenomenon by analyzing a select number of newspaper articles on Christianity in various settings and in relation to a range of political, cultural, social, economic, and religious issues. To prepare for this assignment you should:

- Choose 3 newspapers from 3 different continents (one should be THE NEW YORK TIMES) to read 4 times a week for the next 5 weeks of the term. Your reading of these papers should be aimed at articles that are about Christianity. As you find stories on issues related to any aspect of Christianity, save them in an electronic file or print them out.
- Organize your collected articles into broad topics, such as Christianity and culture; Christianity and politics; American evangelicalism; Christianity and sexuality; Christianity and globalization; Christianity and social issues; etc.
- Once you have gathered and organized your sample, choose 5 articles that are particularly rich and interesting. Aim to select articles that represent a range of Christian perspectives, groups, or geographic regions. You may choose articles that are on the same broad topic (such as Christianity and politics) but you should choose stories that are about communities or issues in different parts of the world. (Or, similarly, you may choose 5 articles that focus on the same geographic region, but in that case you should choose articles on a diverse range of subjects).
- Reread and analyze your 5 selected articles in conversation with 3 of the news articles placed on e-reserve for this course. (See purple binders that are full of news articles and that are on Closed Reserve at the library, under "News Articles I" and "News Articles II".)

Write a paper (5-7 pages) that links your selected articles together under one analytical theme. Use these broad, abstract questions to develop your own, narrower topic:

- What is Christianity? Based only on your sample of articles, how would you define or characterize Christianity as a tradition?
- Is there a clear boundary between Christianity and culture?
- In what ways does Christianity intersect with political issues? In what various ways do Christians engage in politics? Does Christianity stand in tension with political culture?
- What guides the actions and beliefs of Christian groups and individuals?

Be sure your paper has an argument. As you substantiate your argument in the body of the paper, be sure to draw on specific examples and details from your sample set of articles.

Titles of articles on e-reserve:

African Bishops Loosen Western Ties (BBC)

Nigeria: Launch Pad for Next Pope? (BBC)
How Linguists and Missionaries Share a Bible of 6912 Languages (NYT)
Mexico's Controversial New Saint (BBC)
Leading Cardinal Redefines Church's View on Evolution (NYT)
For Mormon Pilgrims, a New York State Mecca (NYT)
US Evangelicals Boost Green Lobby (BBC)
Analysis: Religious Voting in Lebanon (BBC)
Iraqi Christians' Long Religious History (BBC)
China's Christians Suffer for their Faith (BBC)
Here Comes the Japanese Bride, Looking Very Western (NYT)
True Believers [on Mainline Christians in China] (Time Asia)