Of particular importance in this course, and a feature I accented in this iteration, is the experience of another culture. This shows in the first objective and is related to the first of the three central features of the course discussed at the end of the syllabus. Uganda is an agrarian culture, especially in the rural areas in the southwest. People have very little by our standards; especially they do not consume as we do. Everything is used and used again, people relate to land and place, raise all their own local food, and they are knowledgeable of and proud about the naturally beautiful settings they love in. Their lives have a simplicity of form, communities are strong, and there is much joy. Encountering this culture challenges students to ask questions about their own lives which are based largely around consuming things. The course targets this indirectly; it can become a challenge for students about how they can live more simply.

Theology 295: Christianity in Africa (P) (D)
Intersession, 2014 - Dr. Charles Pinches

Description: This is a travel course, which determines its form. It will focus on a 2 week trip to Uganda in East Africa. Students will meet on campus in January immediately before departing to prepare for the trip, discuss preliminary readings, and learn basics about African Christianity and Ugandan culture.

We will begin our travel in the south central region of Uganda, in the Kampala area, where we will become acquainted with the Baganda people, their succession of kings (or kabakas), and their political history including the colonial period, independence (in 1962), and the present day. We will principally cover religious history, especially the central story of the Uganda martyrs. Besides visiting sites in Entebbe and Kampala related to this history, we will spend time in more remote areas in the region learning some elements of traditional religions, considering how Christian missionaries respond to this other features of Ugandan culture in their work. Since the international airport is located in this region, we will return to it briefly before we depart.

Masaka, a Catholic stronghold from the late 1800s forward, will function as a course midpoint as we travel southwest. Using the Masaka diocese as a window, we will briefly investigate the close connection between the church and social services, and the struggles of the Ugandan people against poverty, sickness and war. We will tour Catholic sites in the region, and visit schools and health care facilities.

We will continue southwest to the rim of the Albertine Rift Valley touring two of Uganda’s national parks. There we will witness the life of the dominant people of the region, the Bakiga, and also engage with the Batwa Pygmies who were evicted from Bwindi Impenetrable Rainforest in 1992. The plight of the Batwa will be a focus as we visit American Christian missionaries who care for their health needs, and local leaders in the Church of Uganda who have befriended them.

Student Learning Objectives:
- To experience and learn from a culture and people much different from our own
- To see and understand the struggles of the poor in other countries
- To consider how Christianity varies between cultures, and how it remains constant
- To learn and experience Africa and African Christianity, particularly in Uganda

Texts:
- Bible (small).
- Emmanuel Katongole. The Sacrifice of Africa.
- James Martin, S.J. This Our Exile (2nd edition).
- Packet of Supplemental Readings (supplied).
- US Catholic Bishops. “A Call to Solidarity with Africa.”
Reading Assignments and Expectations:

Students are expected to prepare enthusiastically for our trip, being present at all orientation sessions. The texts by the US Bishops should be read in advance. Portions of Fr. Donovan’s and Fr. Katongole’s book will be assigned over Christmas break. We will discuss both in the two days we will spend on campus directly before departure to Uganda. Fr. James Martin’s text collects vignettes that arise as an American (Martin) comes to know and appreciate East African culture. It can be read along the way, with appointed excerpts from the Bible and the Supplemental Readings Packet.

Perhaps the most essential assignment of the course is to watch and listen attentively to what we encounter in Uganda. This is an extraordinary experience, filled with surprises and new things. DRINK IT IN. Ask questions, share your thoughts with the group and with the Africans we will meet, and think deeply about their lives and yours. We will plan to share with each other both an intellectual and spiritual level; your ready participation in discussion will enhance the course. Readings from the texts will often be used as a starting point in these discussions. (See “Day-by-Day in Uganda” in the Reading Packet.) Please acquaint yourself with these readings before discussion.

Finally, as you engage in this rich experience, please remain culturally sensitive to the people we encounter. Enjoy their company (this will be very easy), but remain aware that sometimes your ways are different from theirs. Be respectful, polite, thoughtful, grateful, and open. Furthermore, be patient, helpful and kind to your fellow travelers—including the faculty!

Graded Work:

Required written work will be kept to a minimum while we are on our journey. The main writing assignment during the trip will be to keep a journal, writing in it every day. I will review this journal for thoroughness and thoughtfulness at the end of the journey. A brief test will be given, likely during the Masaka phase of the trip. Finally, a final paper will be due after we return.

I will give you further directions about the final paper after we return; however, it is worth thinking about as we travel. The paper, 10-12 pages in length, should spring from and engage your experience while on the trip while also pursuing a specific theme. Sample topics include: “Anglican and Catholicism in Ugandan Christian history” or “Music and Dance in the Ugandan Christian Experience” or “The Influence of the Uganda Martyrs” or “Religion and Politics in Uganda” or “missionary Christianity” or (even more theologically) “the meaning of faith” or “Christ and the poor.” Finally, student projects that utilize media other than that of the traditional term paper are possible, even encouraged. Substitutions will be worked out on a case by cases basis.

Grades will be determined based 40% on participation in the class journey through Uganda and 60% on the additional written work: journal [15%], test [10%] and final paper [35%].

Course Themes:

Our course is more than a trip; it is a “pilgrimage”—which means that it is likely to change how you look upon and live in the world. You will encounter many new and sometimes unsettling truths. Perhaps the most difficult thing will be to keep your thinking focused as you are engaged and challenged. Here are three key themes, each with a set of questions that you might find helpful to mull over as we travel.

1. CULTURE – what is it? And how thoroughly does it shape who we are?

   We are often oblivious to culture when we have always lived in only one. Cultures give us habits of living and thinking; these become so familiar and we rely on them so much that we can’t imagine another way. But as we travel we see that Ugandans don’t live like Americans. This makes us realize that Americans live in certain ways—and that these ways are not absolutely necessary. Seeing this makes us question the differences. Can we evaluate the different cultural ways? Can we learn across cultures? How?

2. The GOSPEL – what is it, and what does it mean for it to be brought across cultures?

   In Luke’s Gospel story, at Jesus’ birth an angel announces: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people . . . a savior has been born to you who is Christ the Lord.” This gospel was brought as “mission” to Ugandans not so long ago, in the 1880s. Many are still aware of it as “new news.” What kind of news is it? Was it good news for Ugandans?
How and why is it received especially by the poor? Furthermore, how is the news received in a culture, which (as noted in #1) so shapes human patterns of life? How do the Christian gospel and culture mix and mingle? And, where do they clash, as in the defiance of the young martyrs before their Kabaka?

3. **Our SHARED HUMANITY – what is its core, and how do we connect through it, across cultures?**

   Despite the cultural differences of #1, you will likely feel that you share something deep with the people you meet. Can you identify what are these deep human connections? For instance, you may be aware of our shared life in the body, or our dependence in life on others or on certain shared virtues such as faith, hope and love. What do these shared elements have to do with the gospel (#2)? Or, how do they relate to culture (#1); indeed, how might culture sometimes even obscure them?