

**COURSE SYLLABUS--Psychology of Religious Experience
CC 300 DX/PSY 390X—Spring 2009
TR 2:50—4:05, MUH 114**

**Professor: Jim Nelson Office: Dickmeyer 209
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Office Hours: MW 2:00--4:00, or by appointment**

Required Texts:

Jim Nelson (2009), *Psychology, Religion and Spirituality*. Springer.
William James (2004), *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Touchstone.
William James (1995), *Pragmatism*. Dover.
Rudolf Otto (1958), *The Idea of the Holy*. Oxford University.
Teresa of Avila (1979), *The Interior Castle*. Paulist.
Thomas Merton (2004), *The Inner Experience*. HarperOne.

Please note that the Nelson text will not be available until later in the semester, but we will need to read from it early in the class. Accordingly, I am posting an electronic copy of the uncorrected proofs for your use. These should not be distributed to others outside the class. You are not required to purchase the book when it is available, although it will probably be of interest to you.

Recommended Text:

Fraser Watts & Mark Williams (2007), *The Psychology of Religious Knowing*. Cambridge University.

This book addresses many of the issues we will discuss in the class, and may be useful to you in the completion of your oral report and term project.

Overview of Course:

At the heart of every great religious tradition stands the personal experience of members and founders who have sought to build relationships with God. This seminar will explore how the resources offered by psychology may help us understand this experience and the meaning it has for us.

Course Outline: The course will be divided into three segments. During Part I we will examine various psychological approaches to religious experience, such as the pragmatic view of William James and the phenomenological tradition of scholars like Rudolf Otto. Empirical research on religious experience by scholars such as Ralph Hood will be considered in the context of these theories. Part II will involve examining the religious experience of some great Christian writers and thinkers including Martin Luther, Teresa of Avila and Thomas Merton. In Part III, each participant in the seminar will select a favorite religious figure and lead part of a class session analyzing their religious experience.

Requirements: Attention to reading assignments and active participation in discussion is expected. Along with short written responses to texts and in-class presentations, two major projects will be required.

First, each participant will be asked to construct their own theory of religious experience and articulate this in a paper. A rough draft of this will be submitted to the instructor and a small group of peers for comments. A final refined version of this will be handed in at the end of the semester, and will constitute your final exam.

Second, an oral presentation will follow later in the semester that involves discussion of a selected figure. This presentation may be done individuals or as part of a group (the latter is encouraged). Handouts will be distributed that describe both of the major assignments in more detail.

Grading: Final grades for the course will be based on a modified curve. Grades for individual assignments will be weighted according to the following scheme:

- Discussion Participation: 15%
- Reading Response Papers: 25% (5 papers, 5% each)
- Case Study Response Papers: 15% (6 papers, 2.5% each)
- Oral Presentation of Case Study: 20%
- Final Conceptual Paper: 25%

In general, I use the following standards for grading assignments:

- A: Superior work that is without significant defects and is particularly insightful and creative in its content and presentation
- B: Good work with no significant defects, or work that is superior at times but also has significant problems in content or presentation
- C. Work that fulfills the assignment, but has some deficiencies in style and content
- D: Incomplete assignment
- F. No assignment submitted

Please note that I reserve the right to reduce the final grade of any student who is chronically absent or has large amounts of incomplete work. Except in extraordinary circumstances, I define chronically absent as missing more than 2 course sessions without prior approval. Of course, I will also raise the grade of a student who I feel has put forth exceptional effort over the course of the term. Questions about grading policy or scores on individual assignments are welcome, feel free to speak with the instructor outside of class.

Class Ground Rules:

While there will be some lecturing, the focus of the class will be our discussions. Texting and other cellphone or electronic device use under these circumstances interferes with the class. Please switch off and put away phones, ipods etc.

Religion and spirituality are extraordinarily sensitive topics. All of you will have strong personal feelings about some or all of the issues that we discuss in class. Sometimes you choose to share personal experiences during discussions. Accordingly, we need to make explicit several ground rules.

1. No student is expected to share personal information about themselves in class or in work submitted to the instructor.
2. When personal information is shared, it is expected that all students will keep this information confidential. Please note that unauthorized sharing of personal information about another student is considered a violation of the Honor Code. If you have some concerns about this issue, discuss the matter with your instructor.
3. In class discussions, it is expected that all individuals will remain respectful of the opinions (and differences) of others.

Communications:

Outside of class and individual meetings, email is the primary means of communication for the course. It is expected that all of you will check your VU email accounts on a regular (preferably daily) basis. A class website will be maintained on the CourseVU system that will have syllabus information, class gradebook, and links to readings, some lecture notes and other materials. Go to <https://coursevu.valpo.edu> to access the site. While my scheduled office hours are limited to Monday and Wednesday afternoons, I am available at many other times during the week for appointments.

Honor Code Policy:

Since 1943, all academic work at Valparaiso University has been done within the context of an honor system. This honor system is part of the way the University attempts to assist both students and faculty to do work and live lives characterized by integrity. According to this policy, examinations and quizzes are not proctored by faculty. Instead, each student must write out and sign on every piece of written work submitted the Honor Code, which reads as follows: **“I have neither given or received nor have I tolerated others’ use of unauthorized aid.”** In this course, the following will be considered violations of the Honor Code:

1. Unauthorized giving, receiving, or use of material or information while writing examinations or quizzes (questions directed to the instructor are encouraged).
2. Fraudulent or deceptive generation of data or the knowing use of data gathered in such a manner, e.g. quoting sources that do not exist.
3. One person taking a quiz or examination, or producing a paper, for another.
4. The use of ideas, data or specific written passages of others that are unacknowledged or falsely acknowledged (plagiarism).
5. Theft or destruction of library materials or other materials that are meant to be accessible to all other students and faculty.
6. Knowingly presenting false accusation or testimony before the Honor Council.
7. Presenting a draft and/or paper that is someone else’s work.
8. Submitting work that has previously been submitted to meet the requirement of another course without permission of the instructor.
9. The sharing of person information about a fellow student outside of class without their approval.
10. Tolerance of any of the above.

Please ask the instructor questions about what is considered authorized aid, as some kinds of aid and collaboration are strongly encouraged and are NOT violations of the Honor Code in this course. These include:

1. Discussion or brainstorming about assignments and readings.
2. Getting student/faculty reactions to work prior to submitting or presenting it.
3. Working with classmates to revise drafts of assigned papers or presentations.
4. Working together on group projects.

If you believe that the Honor Code has been violated, you should contact the instructor or the Valparaiso University Honor Council, which administers the Honor Code and assigns penalties for violations. Penalties can include failure of the course or expulsion from the University. If you become aware that someone has made plans to use unauthorized aid on an examination, you may request that the examination be proctored.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

Part I—Psychological Conceptual Structures

Date	Topic	Text
Jan 08	Introduction	Nelson C1
13	Phenomenology of experience	Nelson C4
15	Experience and construction	Nelson, C6.3
20	Experience and practices <i>Response to Nelson Due</i>	Nelson C12-13
22	Intro to James and Pragmatism	
27-29	Pragmatism and veridicality	James, <i>Pragmatism</i>
Feb 3	The Reality of the Unseen <i>Response to Pragmatism Due</i>	James, <i>Varieties</i> , Lectures 1-3
5	The Soul and the Self	James, <i>Varieties</i> , Lectures 4-8
10	Conversion and Saintliness	James, <i>Varieties</i> , Lectures 9-13
12	Mysticism <i>Response to Varieties Due</i>	James, <i>Varieties</i> , Lectures 16-20
17-19	Otto and the Holy	Otto, <i>Idea of the Holy</i>

Part II—Religious Conceptual Structures

Date	Topic	Text
Feb 24-26	Martin Luther	Posted excerpts
SPRING BREAK Feb 28—March 15		
Mar 17-19	Teresa of Avila: Concepts <i>Initial Conceptual Paper Due</i>	Teresa, <i>Interior Castle</i>
24-26	Teresa of Avila: Experience	Posted excerpts
31	Thomas Merton: Intro <i>Response to Teresa Due</i>	Merton, <i>Inner Experience</i>
Apr 02	Thomas Merton: Concepts	Merton, <i>Inner Experience</i>
07	Thomas Merton: Experience	Posted excerpts
09	Wrapup <i>Response to Merton Due</i>	

Part III—Case Studies

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Text</u>
Apr 14-16	Class presentations	
21-23	Class presentations	
28-30	Class presentations	
May 05	Wrapup	

Final Papers Due on Friday, May 8, 5 pm