

Spiritual Autobiographies: Encounters with Holiness

REL 38 spring 2014

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Thornton 208b Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-10:00

Catalogue description: Course begins with the first spiritual autobiography in the West, Augustine's *Confessions*, as a standpoint from which to compare and contrast other spiritual journeys. Primary emphasis is on the professor's area of expertise: Christianity.

We read samples of very personal, grace-filled narratives spanning the colonial era to the present-day and witnessing to a variety of encounters with the holy: Puritan, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Native American.

Excerpts of personal accounts about experiential faith from FINDING GOD ; overview of *multi*-faith conversion narratives, among them African-American, Native American and Muslim through IN SEARCH OF GRACE; contextual information about the historical development of these various religious perspectives.

RULES OF THE CLASS: We are all different and yet same. Therefore, we form a community. As members of this community, we listen; we respect each other; we all learn with and from each other; no raising of hands and no exclusion. We may analyze but we do not judge. Sharing of personal faith experiences is welcomed as is inquiry into non-faith experiences (e.g. humanism, atheism) that are liminal, elevating, therapeutic, otherwise of interest to the class.

STUDENT WORK

1. FINAL PROJECTS paper and ten minute oral summation

Project: OPTION #1 Students are encouraged to investigate a faith tradition with which they are unfamiliar and to expand on the relevant essay in IN SEARCH OF FAITH (e.g. Scientology; the Amish; Christian Science ...) in either a religious historical or cultural perspective (10 -12 pp. essay)

OPTION #2 OR read in full one of the works in the anthology OR OPTION #2a bibliography and summarize and analyze its spiritual perspective for their final project (10-12 pp book report)

OPTION #3 Students write their own spiritual autobiography which MUST be modeled in some demonstrable way on Augustine's *Confessions* (10-12 pp. autobiographical narrative

2. Oral Contextual presentations: students sign up to do TWO of the texts in the anthology throughout the term for which they will construct a pictorial, contextual Powerpoint support. This is IMAGES and CAPTIONS ONLY—no need to supply any narration(5mn. Max.)

One field trip Rauner Rarn Book Library for spiritual diaries and journals—including Eleazar Wheelock's!; three films.

Class structure: 10:00-11:00 context, *lectio divina* (read aloud, reflect on spiritual themes and language, style and rhetoric)

*Speaker Series: "Sharing My Story, My Spiritual Journey" 45 hr presentation and Q & A

the Reverend Dr. Randall Balmer, Chair of Dartmouth Dept. of Religion

Ms. Kalindi Trietley, DHMC, on living in an ashram

Mr. Andrew Nalani, Dartmouth student and former Pentecostal Christian

Required texts:

Ed. J. Mulder. *Finding God: A Treasury of Conversion Stories*. Eerdmans, 2012. ISBN 9780802865755

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*. Ed. Henry Chadwick, Penguin, most recent

Kristin Hahn, *In Search of Grace: A Religious Outsider's Journey across America's Landscape of Faith*. Harper, 2002.

Supplemental bibliography:

Randall Balmer, *Growing Pains: Learning to Love My Father's Faith*

Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark*

John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners; Pilgrim's Progress*

Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*

Trevor Herriot, *River in a Dry Land; Jacob's Wound*

Anne LaMott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*

Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace; Dakota; Cloister Walk; Acedie and Me: A Marriage, Monks and a Writer's Life*

Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*

Jana Reiss

Thomas Urquhart, *For the Beauty of the Earth*

Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. Vintage, 1991.

Lauren Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*

---, *God's Perfect Child*

Recommended Reference: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. Harvard University Press, 1989.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Tuesday, March 25 Introduction to spiritual autobiography. Overview of syllabus and Introduction of text, FINDING GOD. The great progenitor: St. Augustine

Assignment: Augustine's *Confessions*, Books 1-7; also pp. 14-18 in FINDING GOD

Thursday, March 27 Preliminary Discussion of the *Confessions* and elaboration on the genre of spiritual autobiography. Model for so many others.

Assignment: *Confessions*, Books 8-13; also Paul and Constantine, pp. 3-13 in FINDING GOD; pp. 51-66 in IN SEARCH OF GRACE ("Congregating with Monks and Nuns")

Tuesday, April 1 discussion of the *Confessions* and Paul and Constantine.

Assignment: choose your on-line journal format, or purchase a journal. Make your first entry. *
Continue journaling regularly from this time. FINDING GOD, pp. 22-45

Thursday, April 3 Discussion of Las Casas, Loyola, Calvin and Teresa of Avila. BORN AGAIN
typology LECTIO DIVINA. what is LECTIO DIVINA?

Assignment: Read pp. 46-81 FINDING GOD

Tuesday, April 8 **Dr. Randall Balmer, “the Born Again Experience”**

Discussion of Baxter, Pascal, Fox, Bunyan, Wesley.

Assignment. Pp. 82-117 FINDING GOD

**Thursday, April 10 JOURNALING WORKSHOP with spiritual autobiography journalist expert. Bring
colored pencils, art supplies you like and a journal or blank notebook to class**

Tuesday, April 15 FILM: “The Apostle”

Assignment: write a 1-2 pp. response to the film, using the born again typology. This response is for in-
class discussion; Read pp. 118-137 FINDING GOD.

Thursday, April 17 Share film response papers. Discussion of Edwards, Seton, Finney, Sojourner
Truth, Fanny Crosby, Leo Tolstoy.

Assignment: Read pp. 138-188 FINDING GOD; pp. 5-27 IN SEARCH OF GRACE (“Communing with the
Medicine Man; Appropriating with non-Indians”)

Tuesday, April 22 Discuss Therese of Lisieux, Black Elk, Billy Sunday, Evelyn Underhill. Clips from film
“Therese of Lisieux.”

Assignment: Read pp. 189-221 FINDING GOD

Thursday, April 24 Rare Book Spiritual Diaries exhibit

Assignment: pp. 222-258 FINDING GOD; pp. 200-231 IN SEARCH OF GRACE ("Worshipping with Devotees " Stretching with Yogis")

Tuesday, April 29 Discuss Singh, Dorothy Day, C.S.Lewis, Waters and Muggeridge

Assignment: Read pp. 258-306 FINDING GOD

Thursday, May 1 FILM: "The Way" with spiritual autobiographical component)

Assignment: response paper 2pp. (counts as class participation) on the spiritual autobiographical statements in the film. Read pp. 307-338 FINDING GOD; pp. 97-110 IN SEARCH OF GRACE ("Spreading the Word with Preachers")

Tuesday, May 6 Share response papers to film and discuss. Discuss Weil, Mother Teresa, Merton, Graham, Colson, King

Assignment: 339-393 FINDING GOD

Thursday, May 8 Discussion of Fuller, Day, Pentecostals, Bono

Tuesday, May 13 Donuts and full free-form discussion of all aspects of Hahn's Book, IN SEARCH OF GRACE

Thursday, May 15 FILM "One Track Heart"

Assignment: write a 1-2 pp. assessment of Ram Das's spiritual journey for class discussion

Tuesday, May 20 Visit with former ashram member, Ms. Kalindi Trietley of DHMC and film discussion

Assignment: Fine-tune your oral summation of your final paper. These are TEN MINUTES MAX and provide either an overview of your paper or a focus on one section—your choice! Powerpoint is NOT required.

Thursday, May 22 Student Presentations

Tuesday, May 27 Presentations and “Soul Food

Grading:

20% student oral report

30% class participation

15% --7% each: images for FINDING GOD, two selections

35% final paper

Disabilities: please provide me with a students disabilities service letter and we will work together on your plan.

Honors principle: please do your own work and do not collaborate unless so instructed. Please consult the college on-line honor code and adhere.

Religious observance: we will honor your religious obligations. Please let me know a week ahead of time.

Grading is always inevitably subjective. If you are present in class AND an active, informed, prepared, presence, that always helps. Grading is also comparative-you will be assessed in terms of your own performance BUT ALSO as compared to others’ class input and enthusiasm.

Syllabus and grading policy may change without notice.

