

RGP3281HS Religious Experience in the World's Religions
(cross-listed to the Theology Department)

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or by appointment

Tuesday 2-4pm
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Course Description

This course explores the nature of religious experience in some of the major religions of the world, with special attention to Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. It includes some comparative analysis between traditions, and creative reflection on the theological and pastoral significance of such comparative study. Lecture, discussion, three short reflection papers, one major essay.

Course Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- describe key scriptures, historical events, beliefs, and practices relevant to the religious experiences (depth, visionary, mystical, numinous, prophetic) associated with some of the major religious traditions;
- compare major differences and similarities of beliefs and practice, as these pertain especially to religious experiences between traditions;
- reflect creatively and self-critically on essential features of their own religious or secular spiritual experiences, in response to the religious experiences associated with other major religions;
- write clearly and structure coherently pastoral/theological reflection papers and a major essay;
- appreciate the significance of religious experiences associated with religious traditions of some of the major religious traditions.

Required Books (available at Crux Books, Wycliffe College)

Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (N.Y.: Harper SanFrancisco, 1991).

Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Text's of the World's Religions* (N.Y.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

Other Readings

There are various survey texts of the world religions on Reserve Reading at the Regis College Library, listed below on p. 6, as well as a few other sources. All of those books have more historical and factual detail than Huston Smith's survey text. These books will be particularly helpful for the essay assignment.

Grading

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. Following the final examination, a letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

A+	= 100-90	B	= 76-73
A	= 89-85	B-	= 72-70
A-	= 84-80	FZ	= 69-0
B+	= 79-77		

Course Requirements

5% Participation. Attendance; evidence that you are keeping up with the readings; class discussion, etc.

45% Three (of four choices) Pastoral/Theological Reflection Papers, on the nature of religious experience in a religious tradition (15% each).

- Reflect personally, intelligently, and creatively on the following points:
 1. Summarize briefly key elements of a specific **scripture, belief** and/or **practice** relevant to religious experience in the tradition in question. Various possibilities will be suggested as we study each tradition, and relevant information can be drawn from books listed on Reserve Reading, p. 6 below.
 2. Reflect on your attractions/resistances/aversions to aspects of the scripture, belief or practice, and what might cause these.
 3. Relate this scripture, belief or practice to a similar or contrasting Christian scripture, belief or practice, or from that of another tradition.
 4. In what ways (or not) might this facet of the tradition speak to a contemporary reader's sense of spiritual well-being and development?

5. What are the questions or issues that it raises for you?
 6. What is the possible pastoral/theological significance (or limitations) of the readings?
- Reflection papers are to be no longer than three double spaced pages – 800 words or so.
 - Pastoral/Theological Reflections will be due (choose three of four):
 Week #5; February 2—Hinduism,
 Week #7; February 23—Buddhism
 Week #9; March 9—Confucianism or Taoism
 Week #11; March 23—Judaism
- Note the date deadlines.** A 10% reduction of the grade will be applied to late papers each week or part week it is late

50% Major Essay.

- 1) Choose a theme or topic related to religious experience in one to the traditions (for example, ideas of liberation, nature of ultimate Reality, view of God or the Goddess, rituals, specific Scripture, afterlife beliefs, prayer or meditation, *avatar*, myths, *bodhisattva*, moral teachings, purity practices, etc). This topic needs to be approved by me and it must be a different (though it could be a related) topic from your Pastoral/Theological reflections.
- 2) Creatively and critically develop the topic with special focus on its relevance to religious experience in the tradition. See possible reference books listed in Reserve Reading on p. 6 below.
- 3) Briefly and creatively compare this theme or topic with a comparable one in another tradition.
- 4) Comment on what you take to be the pastoral/theological significance of the topic.
- 5) You might begin the research of your theme or topic by looking at some of the books I have listed below on reserve reading. All of the books listed below have more historical and factual detail than Huston Smith's survey, and you should also focus on the bibliographies contained in these books, which will direct you to other books that focus on the specific tradition you have chosen for your essay.
- 6) This major essay should be about 8 pages (about 2200 words or so) and is due one

week following the last class, on April 6.

Format and Marking Criteria

- 1) The Critical Reflection Papers should show significant thought and effort. They should be well-developed and polished.
- 2) **Format:** papers must be **double spaced**, have a **title page**, **page numbers**, and appropriate **margin spacing**. **Footnotes** are necessary if you quote passages or are dependent for your ideas on another writer. Neglect of appropriate notation will result in a significant reduction of your grade, possibly even an “F”.
- 3) **Academic Honesty:** Documentation for footnotes is necessary, when quoting writers or referring to secondary sources. All material which you quote directly should be noted, as well as any judgments, arguments, and data that you draw from other sources:
 - i. Plagiarism will result in a grade of “F” for the assignment and possibly for the course, and the notification of the Dean of your College.
 - ii. In order to deter plagiarism, I might require an oral defence of papers. Failure to attend the defence will result in an “F” on the paper.
 - iii. Failure to document properly the sources of your research will involve a significant reduction in your grade, possibly even an “F”. This includes the failure to cite the appropriate books or page numbers of books from which you have quoted.
 - iv. If the paper makes any major use of work done in another course, submit the work along with the paper. If there is not a significant amount of new work, the grade may be reduced. See me if you have any questions on this.

Making Criteria

- i. **Clarity** of the paper, in grammatical detail and expression, and in the overall structure. Be sure your paper is drawn together coherently; a strong introduction stating what you will do and how you will do it, and conclusion summarizing what you have done, are essential in this regard.
- ii. **Substance** of the paper, whether it is significant or superficial, rigorous or sloppy. You must take an appropriate objective and scholarly approach, and show some significant understanding of the material and relevant issues.
- iii. **Accuracy** of the paper, where it involves an exposition or explanation of information from books or lecture notes.

- iv. **Scope** of the paper: that is, be sure to develop the significant relevant issues and implications that arise from the problems, issues or themes of the material in question.
- v. **Conciseness** of the paper, in contrast with being wordy or overly elaborate or needlessly repetitive.
- vi. **Originality** of the paper: the analysis should show some critical reflection on the theme or question, whether it is your own or a synthesis of ideas connected to another course-reading or of ideas developed in class discussion. You must show some critical and creative development on your part.

Tentative Course Syllabus

Week #1—Jan. 5. **Course Introduction; Defining Religious Experience; Defining Dimensions of Religion.**

Optional Reading: Smart, *World Religions*, pp. 9-24 (R.R.); and class handouts.

Week #2—Jan. 12. **Christianity and the Nature of Inter-Religious Dialogue.**

Readings: Smith, *World's Religions*, pp. 317-339; Cardinals Francis Arinze and Josef Tomko, "Dialogue and Proclamation", *Origins*, 21:8 (July 4, 1991), pp. 122-135.

Week #3 and #4—January 19 and 26. **Religious Experience in Hinduism.**

Readings: Smith, *World's Religions*, pp. 12-81; Novak, *World's Wisdom*, pp. 2-49;
Optional Additional Readings: Robinson/Rodrigues, *World Religions*, pp. 160-183 (R.R.).

Weeks #5 and #6—Feb. 2 and 9. **Religious Experience in Buddhism.**

Readings: Smith, *World's Religions*, pp. 82-153; Novak, *World's Wisdom*, pp. 50-112.
Optional Additional Readings: Robinson/Rodrigues, *World Religions*, pp. 208-216 (R.R.).
*Pastoral/Theological Reflection due Week #5, February 2—Hinduism,

Reading Week, Feb. 16—No Class.

Weeks #7 and #8—Feb. 23 and March 2. **Religious Experience in Confucianism and Taoism.**

Smith, *World's Religions*, pp. 154-220; Novak, *World's Wisdom*, pp. 111-169.
Optional Additional Readings: Robinson/Rodrigues, *World Religions*, pp. 267-277 (R.R.).
*Pastoral/Theological Reflection due Week #7, February 23—Buddhism

Weeks #9 and #10—March 9 and 16 **Religious Experience in Judaism.**

Readings: Smith, *World's Religions*, pp. 271-316; Novak, *World's Wisdom*, pp. 176-227.
Optional Additional Readings: Robinson/Rodrigues, *World Religions*, pp. 66-78 (R.R.).

**Pastoral/Theological Reflection due Week #9, March 9—Confucianism or Taoism*

Week #11 and #12—March 23 and 30.

**Religious Experience in Islam
and Concluding Reflections**

Readings: Smith, *World's Religions*, pp. 221-270; Novak, *World's Wisdom*, pp. 282-333.
Optional Additional Readings: Robinson/Rodrigues, *World Religions*, pp. 160-183 (R.R.).

**Pastoral/Theological Reflection due Week #11, March 23—Judaism*

**Major Essay due Week #13, April 6.*

Reserve Reading

Cardinals Francis Arinze and Josef Tomko, “Dialogue and Proclamation”, *Origins*, 21:8
(July 4, 1991), pp. 122-135.

Dennis Edwards, *Human Experience of God*, New York: Paulist Press, 1983.

Mary Pat Fisher *Living Religions*, 4th ed., Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999.

John A. Hutchinson, *Paths of Faith*, 4th ed. N.Y.: McGraw Hill, 1991.

T. M. Ludwig, *The Sacred Paths*, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1989.

Neils C. Nielsen, Jr., et. al. *Religions of the World*, 3rd ed., N.Y.: St Martin's Press, 1993.

S. A. Nigosian, *World Faiths*, 2nd ed., N.Y.: St Martin's Press, 1994.

D. S. Noss and J. D. Noss, *A History of the World's Religions*, 9th ed., N.Y.: Macmillan,
1994.

Willard G. Oxtoby, ed., *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*, N.Y.: Oxford
University Press, 2007.

Hillary Rodrigues and Thomas Robinson, *World Religions: A Guide to the Essentials*,
Peabody, Massachusetts.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006.

Ninian Smart, *The World Religions*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989.

Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery*, Joseph Cunneen, tr.,
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006 (2002).