These texts offer a meditation to express the goals of this course.

“In human history, everything and anything can serve, and has served, to connect human spirits and communities with The Sacred, that is, the greater reality which grounds, surrounds, and transcends it.”

-- Paraphrase of Professor Mircea Eliade

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shaken foil. It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil Crushed. . . . “

-- Gerard Hopkins, S.J. Jesuit Poet, d. 1889

“Human life is filled with superstition, idolatry, and vicious prejudice. That is why human religion is full of these things. Religion does not necessarily inspire these things. It does not necessarily reflect a Higher Reality filled with these things. These evils would be part of human culture with or without religion. When religion inspires ignorance or hatred, it falls below its own high calling.

The purpose of true religion is to root out these things, to call the human community beyond superstition, idolatry, and vicious prejudice. The great religions know how to do this, whether Native American nature religions or globe-girdling religions whose names we all know, like Christianity and Buddhism and the others.”

-- From my undergraduate class notes

“O God ... open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world around us.”

- Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, p. 372
TH16201 The Religious Quest 3 Credits, Summer Session, 2013

Instructor: Prof. James M. Weiss  email: james.weiss@bc.edu
Office: Stokes N-435  Office Hours: By arrangement as needed
Telephone: Use e-mail.  Room: Fulton 425
Schedule (class times and day(s)): Tuesday and Thursday, 6:15-9:15

Boston College Mission Statement

Strengthened by 150 years of dedication to academic excellence, Boston College commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation's finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition. As a Catholic and Jesuit university, it is rooted in a world view that encounters God in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together. In this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious traditions and value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.

Course Description

In the first part of the course, we learn one of the principal theories of religion. In the second part, we use that theory to reflect on the Christian life: its ideals and its realities in the lives of its founder, of a saint, and of some simple seekers.

Course Objectives

This course aims to provide skills and categories of thought essential to an educated awareness of religion. It does not propose to make the student religious any more than a course in musical theory imparts specific musical tastes. It does require that a student gain intelligent understanding of religious life and of one major religious tradition. Hence, it focuses on the following information and skills.

1) Regular involvement in shared classroom community & etiquette
2) Understanding major categories of religion as used in academic theory
3) Ability to interpret religious experiences by using those terms
4) Readiness to discuss these matters with classmates
5) Ability to write coherent brief essays on religious matters
6) Knowledge of basic facts and distinctions of Christianity
7) Ease in describing Christian spirituality
8) The student will demonstrate appropriate knowledge of cultural settings and will learn the impact of culture, gender, and age in religion as demonstrated by ritual examples.
9) The student will understand the difference between ethical and religious.
**Grading**

*WCAS Grading System*  The undergraduate grading system consists of twelve categories:  A (4.00), A- (3.67), excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), B- (2.67), good; C+ (2.33), C (2.00), C- (1.67), satisfactory; D+ (1.33), D (1.00), D- (.67), passing but unsatisfactory; F (.00), failure; I (.00), incomplete; F (.00), course dropped without notifying office; W (.00), official withdrawal from course.  The graduate grading system is A (4.00), A- (3.67), Excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), good; B- (2.67), C (2.00), passing but not for degree credit; F (.00), failure.

Grade Reports.  All students are required to log into the web through Agora to access their semester grades.  Students must utilize their BC username and password to log on.  If your username or password is not known the HELP Desk located in the Campus Technology Resource Center (CTRC) in O’Neill Library will issue a new one.  The CTRC requires a valid picture ID (a BC ID, driver’s license or passport) to obtain your password.

**Required Texts and Readings**

All required readings will be found in online Course Reserves for O’Neill Library.  The one book required for purchase is

Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God*

**Recommended Texts and Readings**

Highly recommended are

James Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred*

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*

**Important Policies**

**Scholarship and Academic Integrity**

Students are required to know the University policy on academic integrity:

http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/advstudies/guide/academicinteg.html

It is expected that students will produce original work and cite references appropriately.  Failure to reference properly is plagiarism.  Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, cheating on examinations or assignments, and submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without seeking permission of all instructors concerned.  Scholastic misconduct may also involve, but is not necessarily limited to, acts that violate the rights of other students, such as depriving another student of course materials or interfering with another student’s work.
Important Policies, continued

**Written Work**

Students are expected to prepare professional, polished written work. Written materials must be typed in the format required by your instructor. Strive for a thorough, yet concise style. Cite literature appropriately, using APA, MLA, CLA format per instructors decision. Develop your thoughts fully, clearly, logically and specifically. Proofread all materials to ensure the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You are encouraged to make use of campus resources for refining writing skills as needed [http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring.html].

**Request for Academic Help and Accommodations**

If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for this course, please register with either Dr. Kathy Duggan (dugganka@bc.edu), Associate Director, Connors Family Learning Center (learning disabilities or AHD) or Dean Paulette Durrett, (paulette.durrett@bc.edu), Assistant Dean for students with disabilities, (all other disabilities). Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations. http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html.

**Policy on Attendance and Absence**

Why is the policy on absence firm? It is so (a) to avoid learning problems that always arise in a rapid summer course and (b) to promote the goal of creating a community of shared learning. For a shared learning experience, we depend on each other. Therefore, attendance is required and roll is called in every class. Cutting class without permission before or after break, for whatever reason, constitutes a full absence.

- “Excused” absences must be approved for a good reason in person or by e-mail before class or by 10 the next morning. Not all reasons for absence will be honored.

- “Unexcused” absences are allowed in this course. Plan your travel responsibly. Absence due to travel is NOT AUTOMATICALLY excused. Discuss this with the professor.
  - The first unexcused absence drops the final grade by .2, the third by .3, etc.

**PROHIBITED USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CLASS**

To get the right rhythm and feel for shared learning, we have to be focused on here and now. We cannot do that if we are using cellphones, iPhones, blackberry, twitter, instant messaging, texting, e-mail, or Internet. Class is a group effort at all times, even when the professor is lecturing. Being bored or having multiple commitments does not excuse us. **Therefore, use of any of the above technology is expressly prohibited. If you are found to be using one of those means, you will be marked absent for the evening and asked to leave the classroom.**

**Use of laptops to take notes is not allowed,** unless you have individual permission. Even with permission, if you are found using Internet or e-mail, your permission will cease.
CLASS COMMUNITY & ETIQUETTE

To assure the growth of a community in the classroom, the following etiquette is assumed for all. Failure to observe this will affect the participation grade. Wide variation in current practice makes it necessary to clarify these basic forms of respect, presence, and attention. All these rules amount to the same point: be here, focus on each other and the professor, show that you are connected to the class.

• Caps and head coverings are not worn in class, except for religious reasons (Jewish men, Islamic women, etc.). This rule applies in all business and professional settings.
• Turn off cell phones. The first time your cell phone rings during our course, it can be excused. The next time it rings during our course, it will be considered a negligent nuisance and may affect your participation grade.
• Learn your classmates’ names and acknowledge them during open discussions.
• If you miss the first two class meetings for any reason, you cannot take the course. Late arrival affects your participation grade. If you arrive late during a quiz, it is up to the professor whether there is time to take it. If not, you will submit a summary of the readings for that class in written form by the next morning at 10 AM.

BE ACCESSIBLE VIA BOSTON COLLEGE E-MAIL SYSTEM

To reach the entire class, use your BC e-mail to: TH16201U@bc.edu You need to be able to receive messages from me and classmates on your BC e-mail account. If you use a different account, you are responsible to set your BC account to forward to your regular account.

MISSED CLASS MATERIAL

Following standard professional traditions, if you miss class, you should contact a classmate, not the professor. Please get names and phone numbers of two classmates NOW. The professor cannot answer voice- or e-mails on practical matters (like “What did you cover in class?”, “What will be on the Quiz?”, “What do we have to read?”, “When is the assignment due?”) Contact me if you need to understand academic content or preparation of a paper.

LATE OR MISSED ASSIGNMENTS & MAKE-UP WORK

Make-up Quizzes are not offered. If you miss a Quiz, you must bring to the next class a written summary of the readings that were due on the evening of the quiz that you missed. Each summary should be a paragraph or two.

The mid-term paper and final exam must be completed in order to receive a grade. Thus, you are not free to skip a paper and take a lower grade. If you do not submit an assignment, your final grade will be Incomplete, which converts to an F after two weeks.
PARTICIPATION

“Talk in front of class? Oh, no! I’m not that kind of person!” I know! I know! Some people were born to talk in public. Some people would rather not be born if they have to. Some people feel the same about writing. Some people feel that way about reading.

OK, different courses develop different skills. This course proceeds on the view that a key ability for educated people is to be able to talk, read, and write intelligently about religion. Hence, just as there is a writing requirement, there is a discussion requirement! For some, that comes easily. For others, it means a growth step and a challenge.

The participation grade is based on the quality and regularity of your oral work in class. Every class gives you a chance to participate in discussion. Sometimes lectures proceed by direct questions to students and give-and-take between instructor and students.

Oral participation is simple. It does not demand that you be right. It only demands that you want to be part of the group and be serious about what you say. Often, the best thing you can do is to say you do not understand the point of the discussion, because there will be five others afraid to say so. You can participate in many other ways:

- ask a question of the instructor or a classmate;
- offer your own ideas;
- refer to a READING relevant to the discussion;
- correct the errors of instructor or classmate;
- bring the discussion back to the point;
- ask what the point is anyway!!!

Deadlines

Assignments are due as noted in the syllabus. Late assignments will be graded accordingly.

According to normal University policy everywhere, a minimum of 2 hours should be spent studying for every hour of time in class.

Course Assignments

| All classes | Participation | 20% |
| Various dates | Quizzes on May 16, 21, 23; June 6, 11, 13, 18, 20 | 20% |
| May 29 | Quiz on H. Smith chapter on Christianity, May 28 | 10% |
| May 28/June 4 | Mid-term paper assigned/due in hard copy | 25% |
| June 26 | Final deadline for final essay, hard copy by 7 PM | 25% |
SYLLABUS - PART I

RELIGION: SYMBOLIC PARTICIPATION IN HOLY MYSTERY

1. **Tuesday May 14** What kinds of religion are there? What is religion? What does religious experience feel like? How do you put it together? Four simple parts!

Lecture
A. Explanation of Course & Getting Acquainted with Each Other
B. Categories of Religions
   1. Primal
   2. Axial
C. Operating Definition for This Course:

   Religion means **symbolic participation in SACRED mystery.**

2. **Thursday, May 16** What does a religious experience feel like? How do you put it together? Four simple parts!

Readings due for today
- Stephen Prothero, “Separate Truths” (PDF sent by e-mail to class)
- Louis Roy, “Transcendental Experiences” (Handout)
- Matthew Fox, “Life and Its Mysteries” (BC Online Course Reserve)

Quiz on contents of May 14 lecture and readings by Roy, Prothero, Fox

Discussion of Louis Roy’s four models of “sacred” or “religious” experience
What does a religious (or “transcendent”) experience feel like? (Mystery)
What is it an experience of? (Mystery & Sacred)
What shifts during the experience? (Participation & Sacred)
What elements or objects enable the experience to happen? (Symbol)

Lecture
C. Operating Definition for This Course, continued

1. Mystery: reality beyond language that encompasses the person
2. Symbol: something that really is/embodies something else
3. Participation: perception and action on the basis of mystery
4. The Sacred: the source of value, the pattern of reality, the dominant power, the self-constituting reality or power.
3. **Tuesday, May 21** The Holy: All over the world and outta this world!
*Ritual:* Are they just going through the motions?

*Readings due for today are all on BC Library Online Course Reserves*
- John Shea, "Exceeding Darkness and Undeserved Light"
- James Livingston, segments on "Religion as Ultimate Concern", "The Holy", "Symbol" "Space", "Ritual Action" and all other sections on ritual
- Daniel Pals, Read the segments of the article on "Eliade’s concept of religion"

*Quiz on content of May 16 lecture and readings due for today*

*Lecture will conclude material from previous class and cover as much as possible of:*

**D. Symbols:** How we live with them, how they live through us
   a. (1) Rituals and (2) Rituals of Passage
   b. Symbolic objects
      (1) Space as a symbol
      (2) Nature: water, sky, objects in sky, earth, etc.

*Video and Discussion* "The Jewish Rituals of Sukkoth"
Video can also be viewed in O’Neill Media Center: “Ritual: Three Parts of Jewish Life” Videotape, Call Number BV 180. R57 1990 (Middle segment, 20 minutes)

What are the different levels of meaning in this ritual?
What kind of ritual is it, based on Livingston’s classifications?
What would happen if these people skipped the ritual?
Are there any symbols used?
What kind of symbols, based on Prof. Weiss’s classifications?

*Quiz for next Tuesday, May 28:* Tonight, you will receive 17 questions based on Huston Smith’s chapter on Christianity. It is found on BC Library Online Course Reserves. On Tuesday, May 28, class opens with a quiz on 10 of them

4. **Thursday, May 23** “Once upon a time” and The Moral of the Story
So ... was that “over and over” or “forever and ever”?

*Quiz on previous lecture, previous class, and readings due for today, all found on BC Library Online Course Reserves*
- Livingston on “Metaphor & Myth”
- Daniel Pals on “Archaic Religion, Symbol & Myth” “History and Sacred Time”, “Revolt against Archaic Religion: Judaism & Christianity”

*Lecture*
E. Further Symbolic Dimensions
   (a) Sacred stories (Sacred stories are technically called “myths”)
   (b) Sacred time
5. **Tuesday, May 28 Catching Up**

*Quiz on Huston Smith chapter on Christianity.*

10 of the 17 questions from the study sheet will be on quiz.

*Lecture will catch up with course material.*

*Video, “Footsteps of the Buddha”, segment on initiation of a boy as a Buddhist monk*  
To prepare for quiz, video may be viewed in O’Neill Media Center,  
The DVD is in the 6-DVD series “The Long Search”, on the disk entitled “Footprints of the Buddha”. From the menu, find the 15-minute segment on the initiation of a young boy as a Buddhist monk. Call #: BL80.2.L64 2001

*Discussion of video*

   Again, what kind of ritual is it, based on Livingston’s categories?  
   As a ritual of passage, where do Livingston ‘s three phases happen?  
   How many symbols can you count?  
   What do they symbolize, or seem to symbolize?  
   **Why and how** are they able to symbolize what they symbolize?  
   For example, if you decide that shaving the head is a symbol,  
   what is it about shaving the head that makes it a good symbol of whatever it symbolizes? Why isn’t something else done to symbolize that? What is the link between “shaving head” and “the larger meaning”?  
   Are there some that seem essential to the ritual, and why?  
   Are there some that seem non-essential, and why?

**IMPORTANT NOTE**  
Assignment for Mid-term Paper is given tonight, due in class on June 4.
6. Thursday, May 30 Introduction to Christianity

The opening part of the evening might be used to finish up material from Part I and to discuss the preparation of your mid-term papers. We will then begin Part II.

PART II

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Reading for class The lecture on this evening and at the next class is based on these readings (Handouts) but you will probably not be able to read them beforehand. The lecture will serve as a preparation for them. These readings should be read for the quiz in class on Tuesday, June.

The following texts should be accessed at this website (or just google: nrsv):
http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm
or just enter “Oremus Bible Browser”

in your browser. Then follow these directions:
1) At “Use this version”, select “New Revised Standard Version” (Continued..)
2) Uncheck the three options that are already checked (hence, uncheck:
   Omit verse numbers; Omit footnotes; Show section headings)
   You may have to uncheck these again for each passage
3) Now enter the Bible passage exactly as found below***; note that you can only enter
   1 passage at a time, so enter Matthew 18: 15-22 separately from Matthew 5-7.

***
- John 14-17 (Jesus’s Farewell Discourse)
- Matthew 5, Matthew 6, Matthew 7 (Sermon on the Mount)
- Matthew 25: 31-46
- Luke 15: 11-32
- Colossians 1, Colossians 2, Colossians 3

Lecture

F. Foundations of Christian Spirituality
   1. Comments on the Bible, its origin and contents
   2. Comments on the origins of Christianity
   3. Christianity and the individual: conversion "of the heart"
   Christianity and the community: membership, ritual & symbol
7. **Tuesday, June 4**  Christianity for Saints and for Sinners, Part I

Mid-term essay due in class
Lecture continued from last class.

8. **Thursday, June 6**

Quiz on lectures from May 30 and June 4
and on readings from May 30, June 4, and the two brief readings here.

**Reading for class tonight**
- John Garvey, “Loving God for Nothing” (Handout)
- Jane Redmont, “Chapter 2: Begin Where You Are” (Handout)

**Discussion**
What is at the core of Christian spirituality?
Discussion of Jesus’s speeches, Bible texts, Garvey, and Redmont

9. **Tuesday, June 11**  Saints and Sinners -- Not an either/or

Quiz on contents of Muggeridge’s book and readings about and by Weil
The questions will be ONLY about Muggeridge and Weil.

**Readings**
- Simone Weil, "Hesitations concerning Baptism"
- Wikipedia entry on Simone Weil down to and including “Last Years”; stop at “Philosophy”.

**Quiz on Muggeridge’s book and reading by Weil**

**Discussion of Muggeridge as a person of religious sensitivities**

**Discussion Part I.**

Where do you see in Muggeridge’s experiences or language indications of what religious theory calls: symbol; mystery; the sacred; participation (i.e., involvement in a process of transformation of cognitive awareness or of behavior, under the influence of “the Sacred”)
any other terms we have studied, like ritual and myth.

**Discussion Part II, next page**
**Discussion Part II**

Muggeridge finds a role model in the famous Jewish French mystic Simone Weil (pronounced see-mo an vay), 1909-1943. Please read the Wikipedia article on her.

**10. Thursday, June 13 Saints and Sinners, Part II**

**Quiz on** Something Beautiful for God but ONLY on material about Mother Teresa

**Readings**

- The reading of *Something Beautiful for God* is taken for granted.

**Opening Discussion on the book**

*Where do you see in Mother T’s experiences or language indications of symbol, mystery, the sacred, myth, ritual, and participation (i.e., involvement in a process of transformation of cognitive awareness or of behavior, under the influence of “the Sacred”)*

**Video** about Mother Teresa followed by discussion

Video can also be viewed in O’Neill Media Center, 82 minutes

“Mother Teresa”, Videotape, BX4406.5 .Z8 .M6x 1986

**Discussion**

How does the video change, refine, modify, or confirm the view you had from the book? Please pay special attention to:

- the key words used by the blond Southern college student volunteer and how he describes the change in his own perception/expectations; compare this to Muggeridge’s change;
- the incident over land use in Guatemala (political background will be explained);
- the different arguments over the rescue operation in Beirut (with particular attention to the statement by the British Red Cross director, “To be perfectly honest, a saint is not what I needed most.”)
- the nuns’ arrival and decisions about their new home in San Francisco;
- the veiling ceremony of the young nuns;
- the importance of certain small rituals and repeated words by MT
**Tuesday, June 18 Holiness at home and at work ... What, me holy?**

Quiz on the Catholic articles below

Readings (all BC Online Reserves, except a few handouts)

*Catholic Perceptions*

- Kathleen Norris, “Holy … Gossip”, “Where I Am”, “Getting to Hope” (Handout)
- Andre Dubus, “Bodily Mysteries” & “Sacraments”
- Gregory F. Augustine Pierce, “Rose Mary Hart” and “Chris Satullo”
- James Martin et al., “… On Being a Catholic Businessperson”

*Protestant Perceptions (Stay tuned: handout/e-reserve status not finalized)*

- Harvey Huntley, “How does ‘God-Talk’ Speak to the Workplace?”
- Gordon Preece, “The Threefold Call: Trinitarian Character of Everyday Vocations”
- Mary Munford, “The Television Journalist … Glorifying God in the Media”
- Sandra Herron, “Reflecting Christ in the Banking Industry”

**Discussion of readings: -- See topics below**

*Discussion Topics*

- What did you find surprising in these readings? What did you find obvious?
- Where do ordinary Christians find God?
- Think of examples in the readings where a Christian doctrine that you read about in Huston’s chapter now makes a major difference in someone’s life.
- Do you find differences between Catholics and Protestants?
- How do Christian mysteries, myths/stories, and symbols work on the everyday level of peoples’ lives?
- *** How does God manage to get past people’s ordinary egotism, petty faults, and lack of awareness? That is, how can a life mixed with virtues and vices nevertheless have an element of the sacred?
- What does prayer look like, how does it function, in ordinary Christian lives?

*Final paper topics will be assigned tonight*  
*but if you are absent for the last class, your participation grade drops by 25% and you are counted as absent twice*
12. **Thursday, June 20**  
**Completion of course**

*Quiz on the Protestant articles above*

Discussion of the Protestant articles from the previous class  
and of the lecture on Protestantism on 6/21

Discussion of final paper topics

*Absence without a permitted excuse this evening* counts double and drops your participation grade by 25%. Absence because of a “last minute” emergency must provide documented proof.

*Final assignments* are due next Wednesday, June 26, at noon by e-mail.  
E-mail must contain an attachment in .doc, .docx, or .pdf – no other formats.  
E-mail must ALSO CONTAIN the text of your essay in the text of the e-mail itself.