

Religious Studies

TESP 4

The Christian Tradition

Dr. Sally Vance-Trembath

svancetrembath@scu.edu and <vancetrs@mac.com>

Course Description: Some of the sloppiest discourse of our time is about religion in general and the Christian tradition in particular. This course inspects the truth claims of the Christian tradition in dialogue with several intellectual partners. Our dialogue partners come from the "inside" that is, the theological tradition of critical reflection upon the experience of God, as well as from the "outside". By outside I mean the intellectual traditions of literature and history, both scientific and socio-political. The framework for the course is the Catholic intellectual tradition with particular attention to Ignatius and fellow Jesuits, Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner.

Texts:

Violence Unveiled: Christianity at the Crossroads Gil Bailie (New York: Crossroads, 2001).

Prodigal Summer Barbara Kingsolver (New York: Harper-Collins, 2000).

Holy the Firm Annie Dillard (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

Structures of Scientific Revolutions Thomas S. Kuhn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius John F. Thornton, Ed., (New York: Random House, 2000).

The Silence of the Lambs Thomas Harris (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

Class Notes: Each lecture introduces material that is not in the texts; in this way each class functions as a text. The daily reading outside class will act as the frame for the material presented in class each day. The readings provide you material that we shall be placing in conversation with the material presented in class. In this way, each class day models the form of analysis that I will be asking you to use when you write your Critical Book Reports. Attendance in class is very important. The class is incomplete without the material presented each day.

Assignments:

50% of the grade you earn will be based upon two Critical Book Reports. These texts are 7-9 page analyses of either *Prodigal Summer*, *Silence of the Lambs* or *Structures of Scientific Revolutions*. The analysis of the book reports shall engage three voices: your own, the text's central argument and another voice (argument or insight) from one an idea from Bailie, St. Ignatius or from class lectures.

25% of the grade you earn is based upon quizzes, shorter assignments and the final exam. These assignments and the exam are designed so that you may display your careful reading and note taking.

25% of the grade you earn is based upon class participation. This includes, but is not exclusively, discussion in class. Participation has many features that emerge as our learning community is formed.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments:

Week One July 30, August 1 and 2

Begin reading *Violence Unveiled*. Read Chapters 1 and 2 Aug. 2
Read *The Silence of the Lambs* pp. 1-256. There will be a reading quiz on this text on August 2.

Week Two August 6, 8 and 9

Finish reading *The Silence of the Lambs* for August 8.
Read *Violence Unveiled* Chapters 3- 5 pp. 42- 110 for August 9.

Week Three August 13, 15 and 16

Read *Violence Unveiled* Chapters 6- 8 pp. 111- 12 pp. 167- 233 for August 15.
Prodigal Summer is due August 20. There will be a reading quiz August 20

Week Four August 20, 22 and 23

Read *Violence Unveiled* Chapters 13- Epilogue pp. 234- 276. Read selected sections from *Structures of Scientific Revolutions*. (This text will be broken up and assigned in clusters.)

Week Five August 27, 29 and 30

Read *Holy the Firm* and *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. (The pages for the Exercises are yet to be determined.)

Course Objective: This course meets the first level requirement for the Core Curriculum in the *Religious Studies Department* by inspecting the Christian tradition in its historical, ethical and theological roots. We will strive for university level discourse about the human experience of the presence of God using theological analysis, literature, intellectual history and the spiritual reflections of Ignatius Loyola.

This is a foundations course in Christianity. It is also a course in the discipline of Theology. Theology is critical reflection upon the human experience of God. This course will make use of the same intellectual tools as do all other courses at SCU. The course is animated by the vision of St. Ignatius Loyola who was convinced that when the human mind and imagination are at work, God is present. Because this class is a university class, the critical reflection will be even farther away from catechesis than any

adult education or more advanced high school classes you may have attended. One of the hallmarks of Catholicism is how it has embraced and encouraged the intellectual life. At the same time, the subjects of this critical reflection are the most personal and meaningful aspects of human life. The course involves reflection upon our experience of the Living God and that God's personal presence in each person's inner life and in the corporate life of the community. Therefore, a constitutive part of the critical reflection is the respect for and attention to the various experiences of God that all of us will bring to this study. I shall work to achieve this standard and ask that you do so as well. While this course may indeed enhance and develop your own faith life, it is not materially about your faith life; it is materially concerned with critical reflection upon the meaning of human existence and God's existence. Wherever you as an individual person find yourself with regard to these questions of meaning, will in no way effect the grade you earn in this course. Your grade will be based upon how well you engage these questions at the university level.