

**Relg 417: Seeing and Believing:  
Images and the Senses in Christian Spirituality**

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MW 2:30 - 3:50  
Fall 2000  
Women's Studies Seminar Room

Office Hours: My office is located at Hascall Hall, Room 105. MW 11:30 – noon, F 1:30-2:30. Other times available by appointment.

**Course Description:**

This seminar explores how Christians have struggled with the problem of knowing God through sense experience, words, and images. We shall focus on the works of theologians and mystics who have proposed solutions to this problem through action, meditation, and reflection. Topics include the nature of religious language, sense perception and religious experience, verbal and visual imagery for the divine, and the use of mental images in meditation techniques. The course is writing intensive and discussion-based.

**Books Required** (available at Colgate Bookstore)

Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* (Brock trans.)  
Ps-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* (Luibheid, trans.)  
John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*  
*The Cloud of Unknowing* (Wm. Johnston, ed)  
Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (**Spearing** trans.)  
Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises* (Mottola, trans.)  
*Way of the Pilgrim* (Bacovin trans.)

Other Resources: You will need to be familiar with the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL): <http://www.ccel.org>, a site with links to primary sources (in translation). Follow the "Early Church Fathers" link for on-line versions of Ante-Nicene Fathers (i.e., pre-325, hereafter, **ANF**) and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series 1 & 2 (hereafter, **NPNF**). Case Library also owns ANF and NPNF volumes in print (both in Case BR 60 and Dewey stacks).

**Format:** The seminar will proceed on a Wednesday - Monday sequence. On Wednesdays, the instructor will introduce the text/topic in a presentation combined with discussion. Read the entire assignment before this meeting. On Mondays, two students will open discussion by framing key concerns and preparing questions for discussion. All members of the seminar should reread the assignment for the purpose of clarifying, nuancing, rethinking, and deepening your initial reactions and questions. Response papers (described below) are due on Mondays.

**Requirements and Evaluation**

- This seminar depends on the sustained commitment and contributions of all its members. Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory. Students are expected to have read the entire assignment carefully and to come to class prepared to discuss their informed reactions. Each student will also serve as discussion facilitator on two Mondays. Sign up for one week, when you will serve as discussion facilitator. On that Monday, you will make a brief presentation on the assigned reading (5 minutes each), then distribute a list of thought-provoking questions (max. one page, typed.)

- Weekly response papers (max. 500 words, 2 pp., typed), except on the day when one opens discussion. Papers will be graded on a scale of 1 (“let’s talk”) to 5 (“excellent”). The papers will be turned in at the end of each class to be read, commented on, and returned the following week. In these papers, you have a chance to collect, focus, and deepen your thoughts on a particular text or a theme in two or more texts. These papers are best when they focus on an issue or theme raised in the reading and form a judgment about it. Cite specific passages from the text to support your points (citations will also provide quick reference to key passages for discussion); avoid long quotations and pointless summaries. As the semester proceeds, you will be encouraged to draw connections to other readings, images, and contemplative settings. *Out of consideration for other members of the seminar, it is my policy not to accept late papers, without written permission from your administrative dean.*

- **Research Paper** (16 - 20 pp.) (40 % of grade). By mid-semester, you will receive more detailed instructions about the research process we shall follow. It is in your interest, however, to come speak to me at your earliest convenience about your interests and ideas for research. In large part, the evaluation of the research paper will take into account the care with which you developed the proposal (5%), the quality of your contributions (both written and oral) to the Writing Workshops (5%), and the quality of the final paper (30%). Late papers will be penalized one grade step per 24-hour period past the deadline. So, a paper that earns an A, but is turned in within 24 hours of the deadline, will enter the record as an A-, within 48 hours of the deadline, a B+, and so on.

The final grade for the course will be computed as follows:

Attendance and class participation including facilitation	30%
10 Response papers	40%
Research Paper:	40%

Please be aware that all assignments (including response papers) must be completed in order to receive a passing grade for the course. Students who miss more than four meetings may be dropped from the course. If you experience a family or medical emergency, please notify me and/or your administrative dean as soon as possible.

**Questions for Consideration:**

Can the human body know God?

Is God's body a help or a hindrance to knowing God?

What are the goals of the various devotional practices?

Does changing places bring one nearer to God? If so, "nearer" in what sense of the word?

What role, if any, do the senses play in bringing the contemplative to her/his goal?

Is the use of the physical senses necessary or even desirable in contemplation?

Can the physical senses perceive God?

What are the "eyes of faith"? What do they see? How does this sense operate?

Is there a distinction between corporeal and spiritual senses? If so, how exactly does this writer understand the relation between both sensory orders (e.g., opposition, exclusive, analogous, compatible, sequential)

Which sense(s) can best know God? Why?

What are the limits/pitfalls/benefits of the sensory knowledge?

What can be said about God? What must be left unsaid?

Are the senses obstacles to or instruments for knowing God?

Is the human body itself a barrier to knowing God?

How can God appear to humanity? How can God, who is beyond matter, be revealed in a world of material things?

Can religious truth be represented either in word or image?

### Tentative Schedule of Readings

\* *reponse paper due on the Monday of this sequence*

M 8/28            Introductions

**Week 1            God in a Body**

(8/30, 9/4\*)    Handout: Gregory of Nyssa, "Sermon on the Sixth Beatitude"  
 Bible: Gospel of John 1:1-18; 14:9; 20:10- 21:23.  
 handouts: John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 86, 87; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, chaps. II-III. (on-line at [CCEL](http://www.ancientlibrary.com/CCEL) ).

**Week 2            Paths to God: Pilgrims & Monastics**

(9/6, 11\*)        Gregory of Nyssa, "On Pilgrimages" (NPNF II.5.382-83)  
 Jerome, *Letter* 46 (entire), *Letter* 108.1-14 (in NPNF II.6)  
 John Cassian, *Conference X: On Prayer* (NPNF)

**Week 3            Eyes of the Body, Eyes of Faith**

(9/13, 18\*)      handout: Origen, *Against Celsus*, books 1.48; 7.33-34, 39; Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily on the Song of Songs*, I.  
 Pseudo-Macarius, *Spiritual Homilies*, 1, 2, 5, 7-8, 12, 14, 25, 28, 30.  
 Bible: Ezechiel 1:4-2:1; Prov. 2.5.  
 Reserve: David Chidester, *Word and Light. Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. ch. 1.

**Week 4            Ephrem the Syrian**

(9/20, 25\*)      Ephraem, *Hymns on Paradise*.  
 Reserve: Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Embodiment in Time and Eternity: A Syriac Perspective." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 43 (1999): 105-30.

**Week 5 & 6        Pseudo-Dionysius**

(9/27, 10/2\*, 4) *Mystical Theology and Celestial Hierarchy*, pp. 135-91.  
 Reserve: Rorem, "The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius," in *Christian Spirituality I*, ed. by B. McGinn (pp. 132-51).  
*Class will not meet Mon.10/9, (midsemester recess).*

**Week 7            Icon Piety**

(10/11, 16\*)     John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, pp. 3-107.

**Week 8            Project Development**

(10/18, 23)      We will meet at Case Library this "week." Please schedule an appointment with Prof. Frank to discuss the progress of your research.

**Week 9            Entering the Darkness**

(10/25, 30\*)     *Cloud of Unknowing*            Johnston, trans. pp. 43-146.

Reserve: Richard Kieckhefer, "Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion," in *Christian Spirituality II*, Raitt, ed., pp. 75-108.

\*\* Research Log due Fri, Oct. 27 before noon in Hascall 113.

**Week 10 Somatic Piety in the Middle Ages**

(11/1, 6\*) Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (long and short text)  
Reserve: Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, chap. 2 (pp. 111-48).  
Reserve: Caroline Walker Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Christian Spirituality II*, ed. by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 121-39.

**Week 11 Imagining the Senses**

(11/8, 13\*, 15) Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*

**Week 12 Library Research**

(11/20) Class will not meet today. Use this time to complete your research and draft the first four pages of your paper.

11/21 Submit 4 copies of outline and first 4 pages of your paper to 113 Hascall before 4:00 pm.

11/22 Thanksgiving Recess. Class will not meet.

**Week 13 Devoted to writing workshops and consultations.**

11/27\* Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* [selections]  
Instructor will distribute packets (including instructions, drafts, and questionnaires) for writing workshops.

11/29 Small groups will meet for Writing Workshops.

**Week 14 Concluding Thoughts: Contemplation, Action, and the Senses**

(12/4, 6) *Way of the Pilgrim* [entire]

**\*\* Final Research Paper due Monday 12/11 by noon in 113 Hascall.**

## Bibliography

Fall 2000

Key: \* = primary sources in translation

Ⓡ = 2-hour reserve at Case Library

### Primary Sources in English Translation

Individual volumes devoted to specific spiritual writers (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish) appear in the "Classics of Western Spirituality" series (Paulist Press). Works by ancient Christian writers (2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> c.) are conveniently translated in several series, including Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Newman/Paulist, 1946- ) and Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947- ).

### General Works (with individual chapters on authors and themes)

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vol 1: *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (1991)

vol. 2: *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12<sup>th</sup> Century* (1994)

vol. 3: *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism —1200-1350* (1998)

Ⓡ McGinn, Bernard and John Meyendorff, eds. *Christian Spirituality* vol. 1: *Origins to the Twelfth Century*. World Spirituality, 16. New York: Crossroad, 1989.

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Ⓡ Chidester, David. *Word and Light. Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Foster, Hal, ed. *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle: Bay, 1992.

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