CO 621 Psychology of Religion

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Course Description:
This course is designed to explore topics in the psychology of religion with the goal of relating the findings to the helping professions. The course is also designed to encourage thought about the psyche as it works in religious thought, feeling, and behavior. One tool we will use to facilitate this kind of reflection is reading of some of the major approaches to the psychology of religion. Another is observation of religious practice. Another is a habit of asking questions--and following them up with questions. Questions are important because psychology, like most fields of study, is a process of inquiry. A seminar format allows for sharing results of student research on selected topics. A key goal is to consider the significance of some of the psychological research findings for counseling or for Christian helping relations ministries.

Everyone should come to class prepared to say what he or she sees as the main point of the reading.
- Everyone should attempt to understand the structure of the author's argument. Everyone should have questions about the readings. Note the pages that are the basis of your questions.

Course Objectives:
After having completed this course the student will:

1. be able to think about how the psyche works in religious thought, feeling, and behavior.
2. become familiar with the psychological methods and tools by which religion is studied.
3. be aware of the interplay of religion and culture as it affects individuals.
4. gain awareness of the relationship between religion, psychology, health and coping
5. develop awareness of approaches to evaluating the effects of religion and psychology upon individuals' lives in personal and faith development.

About the Readings:
This is a seminar/reading course (assume a total of @ 1500-1600 pp. of assigned and collateral readings). Some class time will be reserved to process/discuss textual reading
and suggested readings, but the student will be expected to pursue reading in depth along lines of personal interest and topic chosen. Most textual reading will be directly related to class process. **Individually prepare 2 questions or statements per assigned readings (6 for first day, and 4 for 2nd day of class) and hand to the professor at beginning of class. We will also divide up some of the other assigned readings first day of class.**

**Required Texts:**


**Chapters from Texts**

Geertz Clifford, *The Interpretation of Culture*, 1973, (Chapter: 4)


**Note. Our main texts are David Wulff; & Spilka & McIntosh.**

We will use parts Geertz and Mbiti, so there will be a course packet for the readings from Mbiti and Geertz. However, you can also buy these texts cheap over the net.

**Recommended Texts:**

William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience.*


3. Part of the course will be seminar sessions led by class (group) or individual members on topics selected from the following list:

1. Conversion
2. Mysticism
3. Healing and Health (body/mind/spirit)
4. Spiritfilledness and Leadership (power)
5. Tongue Speaking and Charismata (objective study)
6. Faith development
7. Dividedness and Wholeness of the Self
8. Developing of the image of God
9. Evil and the attribution theory
10. Fundamentalism and psychology
11. Religion, culture and psychology

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance.

2. Write either a thorough religious autobiography or your faith development in light of your psychological development (7-8 pages) (your own psycho-religious development). Due June 3, 2005

3. Try to complete textual and other assigned readings by specified days. Individually prepare 2 questions or statements per assigned readings (6 for first day, and 4 for 2nd day of class) and hand to the professor at beginning of class. Points will be taken off if you come unprepared without the questions or statements.

4. Working with a small group or individually (depending on the class size), prepare a 60-minute seminar presentation on a selected topic.


6. Grades will be developed from class participation, reading responses, seminar presentation, and the two papers.

Class meets May 23 – June 3, 2005; (1:00 – 5:00pm)

Seminar Assignments with Daily Readings

Day 1                         Psychology and Religion


Wulff, Psychology of Religion, 70-103.

Question: Is there a relationship between Mbiti’s descriptions of religion in light of what the psychologists have to say?

Day 2                         Psychology and Religion

The Interpretation of Cultures, Chapter 4, Geertz

Wulff: 259 – 285, Freud on Religion
**Question**: What is your response to Freud’s notion of religion as an illusion? How would Mbiti and Geertz respond to Freud’s notions of religion as an illusion?

**Day 3**  
**Typologies of Religious Orientation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic.**

2. Gorsuch, Richard L., "Toward Motivational Theories of Intrinsic Religious Commitment," in Spilka and McIntosh. (p. 11 – 26)

**Question**: How does Allport relate psychology to other ways of knowing? What do you think of the distinction Allport draws between intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations?

**Question**: Which of the studies described seems to you to give the most insight into religion? Think about what aspect of religion it allows you to understand. How satisfying is this insight? Will it help you understand other aspects of religion? of the psyche?

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**Day 4**  
**Attachment Theory and Psychology of Religion**


**Wulff**: Object-Relations Theory  

**Question**: In what ways can attachment theory and object-relations theories help us to understand how people develop religiously? What are the down sides of the theories?

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**Day 5**  
**Religion and Mature Adulthood**


**Question**: What difference do social structures make to development, according to Erikson? When is religion most important to people in their lives? In what forms is religion important to people and at what ages, as Erikson sees it? Is development a concept, which depends strictly on psychological investigation?

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**Day 6**  
**Religion as a Means of Dealing with Life:**


**Wulff, Psychology of Religion**  pp.243 –257

*Questions*  What are the main aspects of religious beliefs that help people to cope as per readings?  
What does this say about the relationship between psychology and religion?

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**Day 7  Religion and Thought Processes, Judgment Causes**


*Question:* According to Proudfoot and Shaver, does the setting of an experience have any effect on how religious it seems?

*Questions:* What reasons do the writers give for thinking that attribution theory will help the psychology of religion?

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**Day 8  Psychology on Religious Experiences**


*Question:* Why is mystical experience important to psychology of religion?

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**Day 9  Presentations**

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**Day 10  Presentations**

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**The professor reserves the right to modify the syllabus.**