

***SRS 6907 Miracles, Healings, and Apparitions:
Exploring Extraordinary Religious Phenomena***

**Winter Term, 2006
Prof. Emma Anderson**

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:00-11:00 am
Fridays, 1:00-2:00 pm
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Course Description:

- * In France, in 1846, two young children report seeing a mysterious white shape which weeps and warns them of horrible chastisements to come.
- * In England, in 1982, a devout Roman Catholic awakens to find mysterious holes gaping in his wrists and feet.
- * In the United States, in 1997, a female victim of child sexual abuse bravely utilizes the symbol system of Charismatic Christianity to effect her own healing from a debilitating skin condition caused by psychological trauma.

The above vignettes represent just some of the diverse narratives, images, and situations which we will encounter during our term together. This course explores apparitions, healings, and other extraordinary religious experiences, such as stigmata and inedia, within the Christian tradition. Charting the development of such phenomena in the medieval, modern, and contemporary context, the course will explore the theoretical and methodological difficulties inherent in studying such occurrences, and delineate the multiple ways in which they have been interpreted both by those who have experienced them, and the religious studies scholars, psychologists, doctors, anthropologists, historians, and sociologists who study them.

Of particular importance in discussing these religious experiences will be the concepts of narrative and embodiment, as many of the course's preoccupations revolve around how devotees encode meaning through the construction of narratives or through the encoding or introjection of symbol systems into their body. Critical questions we will ask in this course are: "How do human communities negotiate mutually meaningful narratives out of sometimes cryptic individual experiences?" "How does the human body transact personally and communally significant meaning through experiences of illness, suffering, and healing?"

Required Texts:

1) Robert Orsi. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religions Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005 (please order this text yourself through Chapters or Amazon.com).

2) Course Pack. The packet of course readings is available for purchase at Laurier Office Mart, 226 Laurier Ave. (east of King Edward, 233-0635).

Evaluation:

As this is a graduate level course, the primary focus of the evaluation will be upon the student's analytical, research, writing, and presentation skills. It is expected that each student will come to class sessions fully prepared to engage in informed discussion with their fellow students and the instructor, and they will be willing to clearly express their informed views on course materials and themes.

Presentation Assignments:

“Forum” Facilitation and Participation (25%): Each week, following the lecture, students will engage in a Forum, in which they will discuss the readings for the week. The Forum will be facilitated each week by a different student, who is charged with formally presenting their own views and devising interesting ways to engage those of the class. Each student will lead Forum once during the semester.

Research/Case Study Presentation (25%): Students will make one formal 20 minute presentation of their research (normally their research for their final paper, but potentially on another topic of their choosing) to the class. Students are encouraged to quickly develop ideas for their research presentation/paper and discuss them with the instructor at their earliest convenience. To that end, sign up sheets for both Forum Leadership and Research Presentations will be circulated during the first two classes, and posted on the instructor's door.

Writing Assignments:

Weekly Reflection Papers (25%): Each week, students will prepare a two page response to the assigned readings to facilitate their thinking about the issues concerned in preparation for the lecture and Forum. The brief essay will present the student's considered views on the material by briefly summarizing the week's readings, analytically responding to its argument, and providing both a pertinent quote and a question which they would like to discuss during Forum. Students should pass in (or email) a copy of their reflection paper to the instructor no later than 10 am on the day of class (earlier submissions preferred), but retain a copy for their use in class.

Research Paper (25%): Throughout the term, students will be researching their own projects on miracles, healings, or apparitions for their twenty page final research paper. Students must present the instructor with verbal indication of their intended project ASAP (to allow for scheduling of the research presentations), followed by a more formal research proposal with a provisional bibliography later in the term.

Course Map:

January 10:

Introduction to Theory and Method in the Study of Extraordinary Experiences

As we begin our study of extraordinary religious experiences, it is helpful to pause and briefly consider the question of theoretical and methodological approach. This class, as well as over viewing the themes of narrative and embodiment, which run throughout the different sections of the course, and addressing student questions and concerns, will consider the questions: “How should we theoretically approach the subject of extraordinary religious experiences?” “What should our relationship be to our subjects and informants?” “How does our study relate to larger debates in the wider context of religious studies?”

Readings: 1) William E. Paden. *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992. Chapter 1, “Interpretive Frames,” p. 1-13, “Reading the World: Levels of Religious Meaning,” p. 97- 109.

2) Robert Orsi. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religions Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Chapter 5: “Have You Ever Prayed to Saint Jude?:” Reflections on Fieldwork in Catholic Chicago,” p. 146-176.

Section One (January 17-February 7)

Marian Apparitions: From Individual Experience to Collectively Negotiated Narrative

Marian apparitions encapsulate many layers of meaning and narrative. Intensely individual and private, they nevertheless often become the venue for the community creation of meaning. Together, the seer, their family and community, the clerical hierarchy, the media, as well as those who claim to have derived spiritual or physical benefits from proximity to the apparition site craft powerful collective narratives which shape public understanding of these events, and define the nature of future interactions between the multiple players. Our readings, lectures, and discussion for during this section will thus explore the different vectors of the apparition experience, telescoping from individual experience to community, clerical, and national reactions.

January 17:

Ground Zero: The Experience of the Seers

Readings: 1) Sandra Zimdars-Swartz. *Encountering Mary: Visions of Mary from La Salette to Medjugorje*. New York: Avon Books, 1991. Introduction, “Modern Marian Apparitions, Their Background, and Their Religious Mileau,” p. 3-20.

2) Michael Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. Chapter Six, “Marian Apparitions,” p. 115-140, 165-172.

3) Michael Carroll, “The Virgin Mary at La Salette and Lourdes: Whom Did the Children See?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1985, Vol. 24, #1, 56-73.

4) Emma Anderson. “Changing Devotional Paradigms and their Impact upon Nineteenth-Century Marian Apparitions: The Case of La Salette,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Volume 52, #3-4, p. 85-122.

January 24:

The Developing Narrative: Community Contributions

Readings: 1) Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age*. London: Penguin Press, 1999. Chapter 2, “The Apparitions and their Interpretation,” p. 55-82.

2) David Kinsley, *The Goddesses’ Mirror: Visions of the Divine from East and West*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. Chapter 10, “Mary: Virgin, Mother, and Queen,” p. 215-264.

3) Barbara Corrado Pope, “Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century,” p. 175-200, in Clarissa Atkinson, Constance Buchanan, and Margaret Miles, *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

4) Robert Orsi. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religions Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*, Chapter 10, “The Many Names of the Mother of God,” p. 48-72.

January 31:

“The Cold Eye of the Church:” Evaluation by the Clerical Hierarchy

Readings: 1) Thomas Kselman. *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth Century France*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983. Chapter 6, “The Institutionalization of the Miraculous,” selections, p. 141-160.

2) Mark Garvey. *Searching for Mary: An Exploration of Marian Apparitions Across the United States*. New York: Plume, 1998, Chapter 63, “Discernment: Private Revelation and the Catholic Church,” p. 63-75.

3) Sandra Zimdars-Swartz. *Encountering Mary: Visions of Mary from La Salette to Medjugorje*, Chapter 7, “the Fundamentals of Modern Apparition Worldviews,” selections, p. 245-259, 263-270.

February 7:

Marian Healings: Miracles at Apparition Sites

Readings: 1) Thomas Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth Century France*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983. Chapter 2, “The Social Drama of a Miraculous Cure,” p. 37-59 (see course packet).

2) Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age*. London: Penguin Press, 1999. Chapter Nine, “The Cures,” p. 288-319.

February 14-March 7:

Section Two: Miraculous Healing

In this section, we will explore contemporary theories regarding how human beings somatically introject symbol systems, attempting to discern how religiously-based healing is reliant upon the perception of shared religious referents and systems of meaning.

February 14:

Envisioning the Body/The Body in Pain/The Body and Meaning

Readings: 1) Anthony Synnott. *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society*. London: Routledge, 1993. Introduction and Chapter 1, "Body," p. 1-37.

2) Malcolm MacLachlan. *Embodiment: Clinical, Critical, and Cultural perspectives on Health and Illness*. New York: Open University Press, 2004. Chapter 1, "Body Plasticity," selections, p. 1-9, 17-22 and Chapter 2, "The Sensing Self," selections, p. 25-38.

3) Bryon Good. *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience: An Anthropological Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Chapter 5, "The Body, Illness Experience, and the Lifeworld: A Phenomenological Account of Chronic Pain," p. 116-134.

*******Spring Break Feb. 20-Feb. 24 – No Class on Feb. 21*******

February 28:

Christian Interpretations of Pain and Suffering

Readings: 1) Meredith McGuire. *Ritual Healing in Suburban America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988, Chapter 3, "Healing in Christian Groups," p. 38-78.

2) Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, Chapter 1, "Mildred, is it Fun to be a Cripple?" The Culture of Suffering in Mid-Twentieth Century American Catholicism," p. 19-47.

3) Nancy A. Hardesty. *Faith Cure: Divine Healing in the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003. Chapter 6, "No Doctors, No Drugs," p. 72-86 and Chapter 7, "Theology," p. 87-100.

March 7:

Christian Ritual Responses: Healing by Symbol

Readings: 1) Meredith McGuire. *Pentecostal Catholics: Power, Charisma, and Order in a Religious Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982. Chapter Six, "Wholeness, Holiness, and Healing," p. 125-162, Chapter 7, selection, p. 163-179.

2) Anderson, Emma. Lisa's Story: Paper Presented at the American Academy of Religion, 1997.

3) Thomas J. Csordas, "Elements of Charismatic Persuasion and Healing," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Vol. 2, 1988, p.121-142.

4) Thomas J. Csordas, "The Rhetoric of Transformation in Ritual Healing," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, Vol. 7, 1983, p. 333-375.

Section Three: “Sacred Wounds” and Deprivation: Stigmata and Inedia

While miraculous healing is one form of symbolic introjection, sacred wounding or stigmata is another. In this section, we will explore a range of historical and social scientific explanations of stigmata, or reception of the wounds of Christ, and the related phenomenon of inedia, or the miraculous ability to abstain from food.

March 14:

Healing in Reverse: the History of Stigmata

Readings: 1) Ted Harrison. *Stigmata: A Medieval Mystery in a Modern Age*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994, Chapters 3 and 4, “Cases from the Past,” and “Cases from the Present,” p. 23-99 (professor’s personal copy, on reserve at Morisset Library).

2) Paula Kane, “She Offered Herself Up: The Victim Soul and Victim Spirituality in Catholicism,” *Church History*, Vol. 71:1, March 2002, p. 80-119.

March 21:

Written on the Body: Stigmata and Meaning

Readings: 1) Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, Chapter 4, “Two Aspects of One Life: Saint Gemma Galgani and My Grandmother in the Wound between Devotion and History, and Natural and the Supernatural,” p. 110-145.

2) Ted Harrison. *Stigmata: A Medieval Mystery in a Modern Age*. Chapter 2, “A Medical View,” p. 11-22, Chapter 5, “Authentication,” p. 100-113, and Chapter 6, “Why Then?,” p. 114-129 (professor’s personal copy, on reserve at Morisette Library).

3) Michael Carroll, *Catholic Cults and Devotions: A Psychological Inquiry*. Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989, Chapter 5, “Heaven Sent Wounds: The Stigmata” p. 79-103.

March 28:

Holy Anorexia?: Inedia and Mystical Experience

Readings: 1) Caroline Walker Bynum. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, Chapter 5, “Food in the Writing of Women Mystics,” p. 150-186 and Chapter 6, “Food as Control of Self,” p. 189-218.

2) Rudolph M. Bell. *Holy Anorexia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, Chapter 2, “I, Catherine,” p. 22-53.

April 4:

Conclusion