Syllabus for

Myth, Ritual and Sacrament
Fall 2013
Prof. John Hilary Martin, O.P.
HRST 4220  Fall 2013

Course Description

God is beyond ordinary human experience but can be known in part through religious symbolism. Historical revelation also makes use of myth and ritual to explain the reality and activity of God. This course will examine the place of myth and ritual in shaping religious symbolism and how symbolism points to a transcendent, divine order. The transmission of religious symbolism from one generation and one culture to another will be studied. Attention will be paid to the symbolism of indigenous religions, and of Judaism and Christianity. The latter part of the course will concentrate on the sacrament of Initiation in Christianity both as that ritual incorporates new members into the community and forms the spirituality of individual members and as it develops a community’s ongoing life with God.

Expectations

The lecture/ seminar method will be used. Assigned readings are to be completed before the day of the class meeting to facilitate discussion. Classes will begin with a brief discussion of a reading assignment posed for the week and/or a book review.

Assessment:

Four reflection papers (6-8 pp.) plus a brief review (9-10 pgs) of a book or significant article dealing with the nature of myth and/ or ritual (30%) Presentation in class of a proposal for the final paper. A final paper on an approved topic (70%).
Bibliography

Books are listed generally in the order they will be taken up to be taken up in class.


*Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell et al., Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010


__________, *Dramas, Fields, Metaphors and Symbolic Actions in Human Society*, Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974


Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part III, q. 60, a. 1-4; q. 62, aa 1-5; q. 64, aa 1-5; 9 & 10. (any edition either Latin or English translation)


*A Form of Traditional Aboriginal Baptism*, ed. Wadeye community, Daly River, N.T.: Daly River Centre, 1990


“Time and Creativity in 20th Century Classical Music: A Retrospective View from Philosophy” [“Temporalidad y creatividad en la musica contemporanea una vision retrospectiva desde la Filosofia”] in El Tiempo en las musicas del signo XX, Valladolid: Glares-Sitem, 2001, 33-46


Reading

1. Each week there will be a reading assigned to be read before class meets to facilitate discussion

2. Read and review a book or substantial article on myth, ritual or a sacrament, (e.g., on Christian Initiation) and/or attend and review a religious ritual during the term, (15%)

3. Active informed discussion in class of the readings (15%)

4. A final paper on an approved topic, topic to be discussed in class (70%)

Written work

1. 4 Short reflection papers (4-6 pgs.) dealing with the readings.

2. A review of a book or a substantial article about myth or ritual, OR write a review of a religious ritual attended during the term (10-12 pgs.)

3. A final paper of 20 pages. A short written proposal for the final paper will be presented in class 4-6 weeks before the end of the term for discussion, criticism and peer support.

Course goals

This course will show what contribution myths make to an understanding of the invisible God and what role ritual has in making the unseen God present to people of faith and in forming community. The course will show how sacramental actions can
enlighten and empower the faithful. The Christian sacrament of baptism will be analyzed as a case study of sacramental grace and action.

1. The weekly papers will serve as evidence of an **intellectual integration** of how sacraments make use of natural signs and symbols.

2. Promote a realization among students that a proper understanding of myth and ritual requires a philosophic and a theological background will help students acquire **intellectual humility**

3. The weekly papers and the final paper will require students of the sacraments to look beyond liturgical fads and ever changing programs to develop a sense of **self-direction** in their sacramental spirituality.

4. Sacramental celebrations are communal events the discussion of weekly papers in class and the discussion of the proposal for a final paper are designed to generate a sense of **intellectual collaboration**.

5. The truly **prophetic character** of the religious meaning of sacred myths and sacramental rituals appears when a society changes and when contrary values are introduced. By studying the deeper religious meaning behind the myth and ritual of the sacraments students will be enabled to meet the **prophetic challenges** of our own day.

**Grading Rubrics**

“**A**” The ability to appreciate the myth and rituals of Christian and non Christian religions. To have an understanding of symbolism and theories about symbolism. To be aware of the difference between an “old time story,” simple metaphor and forms of analogy. To know how ritual forms a) a secular community, b) a religious community and c) an historical religious community. As a case study to know the symbolic and theological structure of the Christian sacraments of initiation.  To be aware and use the secondary literature on these topics

Faithfulness to class discussion and the weekly papers. The ability to write a clear and concise final paper on an approved topic with suitable bibliography.

“**A-**” An awareness the myth and rituals of Christian and non Christian religions. To be able to give a definition of symbol and to be aware of differences between, “an old time story,” a metaphor and an analogy. To know how ritual forms community in general terms and a religious community in particular. As a case study to know about the symbolic and theological structure of the Christian sacrament of initiation.  To be aware of secondary
literature. To fail to recognize or have little knowledge of contemporary problems of ritual and sacraments.

Faithfulness to class discussion and weekly papers. The ability to write a clear and concise final paper on an approved topic with suitable bibliography

“B+” Unclarity about importance of myth and ritual in general and what is meant by sign and/or sacrament. Lack of awareness between the differences between an, “old time story”, a metaphor and an analogy. To over-look secondary literature and not to be aware of contemporary problems about sacrament and ritual.

Lack of faithfulness to class discussion and weekly papers. The final paper lacking a clear statement of the problem chosen for discussion. Giving few clear conclusions

“B” Unclarity about importance of myth and ritual in general. Lack of awareness of differences between an “old time story”, a metaphor and an analogy. To over-look the secondary literature and not be aware of contemporary problems about sacrament and ritual.

Lack of faithfulness to class discussion and weekly papers. The final paper not on the topic we had agreed on. The final paper was largely journalism, or an exchange of others opinions without sourcing them and without any final conclusion.

(A “B” in the first semester indicates the student shows promise, but needs to see the advisor for basic instructions about what is expected.)

“C” You will get three credits for this course on your transcript, but your work is below graduate level. Mistakes about the form, purpose and affect of myth and ritual. Failure to turn in written work. Final paper either incomplete or not on the topic that was approved.

Plagiarism

This is taking credit for the work of another without giving credit to your source. Sometimes this is unintentional, but you will have to prove that. You will be assumed to be guilty if you use someone else’s material without attribution. Plagiarism includes, paraphrasing texts, lifting ideas from another without citing your source. The academic penalties for plagiarism are severe. An F, a O for a grade is common.

Remember if you quote the full name of the author and the title of the work you are not committing plagiary. Your paper may have a long string of quotes and little more, but all you can be accused of is not being very original.