

ASSIGNMENTS FOR CORE 259: SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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ABOUT THESE ASSIGNMENTS

The following assignments were developed by Dr. Janice Thompson for her [“Spiritual Autobiographies”](#) course at Kings College (Wilkes-Barre, PA), which explores interfaith topics through the medium of storytelling.

In 2015, Dr. Janice Thompson participated in a *Teaching Interfaith Understanding* faculty development seminar, run in partnership between the Council of Independent Colleges and Interfaith Youth Core, and generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. For information on future seminars, and to access more resources created by seminar alumni, visit www.ifyc.org/content/ifyc-cic-resources.

Small Assignments

1. Write part of your own spiritual autobiography.
2. Compare two spiritual autobiographies discussed in class, around a common connection, analyzing especially the influence of different contexts.
3. Compare yourself to a class text. Analyze how one of your central experiences compares to the author’s, especially addressing differences of context, and offering your own questions and challenges and praise to the author. This assignment could be completed as a letter to the author of the class text.
4. Research a central theological idea in connection to a class text (note: to do research successfully, there must be good scholarly theological articles about it - e.g. Augustine, Malcolm X, though I can help you find materials). This assignment does not require you to write a paper, but only to prepare to write a paper by using 3 of research essays to develop a list of 10 important ideas (quotes and your own brief comment on its potential relevance) with page references from the articles that you might use if you were writing a final paper comparing 2 of our class texts for your final project. The assignment should conclude by suggesting the thesis you would try to argue.

Small In-Class Assignments

1. Explore a central theological idea: Rahner/Patel - We explored Rahner's understanding of "Theological anthropology," especially the notion of transcendence, and then explored how well it could be applied to Patel's book (addressing the importance of both transcendence--well stressed by Rahner-- and historical context - something later theologians argue is more important than Rahner acknowledges).
2. Using the packet of texts that reflect on "worship," make an argument about what worship is (consider whether it is focused on the individual or the community or both, and whether it addresses specific beliefs, or deep feelings, and the issue of having the freedom to worship).
3. Using our study of *The Confessions*, by Augustine (considered to be the first "spiritual autobiography") answer the provided questions to analyze how Augustine uses his life story to teach a particular theological concept (God, the human person, created things, the good, or sin/evil).
4. Mosque Visit or Suffering Assignment: Students have the choice for this assignment either to attend our mosque visit and debriefing discussion, or to use the final packet of texts to analyze and compare how two different authors in terms of how they experience faith in times of suffering.

Final Project

General Description

The final project is designed to use and developed some of the elements practiced in the small assignments.

- ▶ Reflecting on a part of your spiritual experience
- ▶ Analyzing the shaping power of context
- ▶ Applying a comparative element.
- ▶ Exploring and developing a central theological idea
- ▶ Constructing your own teaching about a spiritual/theological aspect of life (addressing the idea of God, the human person and the human community, sin, salvation/rescue, conversion)

Specific Requirements

Complete Final Project A or B. Project is worth 25% of your grade.

- A. Compare, using research, a theological idea present in two theological anthropologies we studied. For example, compare "sin" or "conversion" in *The Confessions* by St. Augustine and sin in Malcolm X. Because we will study most of these concepts by reading Augustine, the easiest comparisons to make will be between Augustine and another text (6 pages long, 3-5 sources). (5-8 pages)

OR

- B. Write a polished section of your own spiritual autobiography, as if for a "Spiritual Humans of King's" Collection (5-6 pages long, plus a 1-2 page explanation of what you were trying to communicate through your story, 6-8 pages total).

Both should be written to be sharable with future classes, or as “case-studies.” For this reason, I recommend leaving your name off of your paper (Moodle will store your paper safely under your name). I will send you a link to specific what kind of future uses you would permit for your paper.

Rubrics

Research Paper

1. Thesis, specific and arguable, thoughtfully bringing together 2 texts in a way that will address theological ideas. Thesis must be in the introduction, developed in body of paper, and addressed in conclusion (10 points).
2. Richness of reflection on class themes. We have read many different spiritual journeys and have addressed theological topics (God, the human person, creation, the good, sin/evil, transcendence) in light of the particular ways humans encounter them (growing up, belonging or not belonging to groups, seeking love, seeking truth, facing suffering or death, etc.) Your paper should showcase that you are a more sensitive and experienced thinker about these topics (10 points).
3. Use of Class Texts: 2 Class texts are used well, focusing on a specific theme or section of each text. Evidence from the text (direct quotes or paraphrases with page numbers) are used (10 points).
4. Use of Research: 3-5 Scholarly sources from ATLA are used as sources of evidence to build the argument (these are posted for you on Moodle). Proper research format (MLA or Chicago style, every paraphrase or direct quote is properly referenced, including the page number), the first time a source is used it is introduced (10 points).
5. Well-written: Author stays in command of the paper (not a mishmash of quotes), topics are organized by paragraphs, sentences are clear and varied, transitions between paragraphs, basically free of spelling and grammar errors (10 points).

Spiritual Autobiography Essay (5-6 pages)

1. Well-focused on a well-chosen experience within your spiritual journey. Your focus should be your experience and your reflection on it (it should not seem like you needed to fill space so you threw in another incident) (10 points).
2. Thoughtful and reflective: Your reflection should demonstrate your openness to listen to and learn from your experience. Experiences that challenged, changed or deepened your thinking tend to show this better than incidents that just confirmed something you already thought. I'd be more impressed to see you struggle to discuss a challenging experience than easily describe an easy one (10 points).
3. Descriptive and Original: Claim your own voice and your own experience: As you tell your story, make sure your reader gains a sense feel for who you are, how you think and what you care about, help draw the reader to listen to you as you (10 points).

4. Well-written: The author has polished the writing to communicate the author's experience to the reader. Excellent writing uses some writing strategies, such as using concrete details, or sensory details, key units of dialogue, comparisons, a sense of setting, thoughtful word choice, avoids boring formulations ("There was," "This is," "It was.." "I felt..."), correct grammar and spelling (10 points).
5. Explanatory Essay (1-2 pages): Clearly explain what you intended to communicate or teach through your spiritual autobiography essay. This explanatory piece should showcase richness of your reflection on class themes and class texts. We have read many different spiritual journeys and have addressed theological topics (God, the human person, creation, the good, sin/evil, transcendence) in light of the particular ways humans encounter them (growing up, belonging or not belonging to groups, seeking love, seeking truth, facing suffering or death, etc.) Your discussion of your own spiritual autobiography should showcase that you are a knowledgeable, sensitive, and experienced thinker about these topics (10 points).