



RS 356
*** Contemporary Religious Thought ***
Fall semester, 2017
Mondays and Wednesdays
12:30 – 1:45 p.m. * Sierra Hall 314
Professor Jody Myers

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Office hours: Wednesday 2-3:00 and by appointment

Course Description

RS 356 is a study of selected major writings in religious thought, with the aim of analyzing representative modern approaches to questions such as God and the world, faith and self-understanding, and belief and social consciousness.

In this specific section, we examine recent personal memoirs by Christian, Muslim, and Jewish individuals who reflect upon how they became religious or spiritual, adopted religious practices, and meet contemporary American cultural and social challenges.

Purchase books in paper, not Kindle or other eBook form, any publication year.

1. Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint*
2. Sabeeha Rehman, *Threading My Prayer Rug*
3. Dani Shapiro, *Devotion*
4. PowerPoint files and readings posted on the RS 356 Canvas

Written and Oral Work, and Evaluation of Work 1000 points total

Grading scale

A+	98-100	B-	80-82	D	63-67
A	93-97	C+	78-79	D-	60-62
A-	90-92	C	73-77	F	59 and
B+	88-89	C-	70-72	below	
B	83-87	D+	68-69		

There are 1000 points in the course. Your course grade is based on the following:

1. six quizzes = 140 points total (14%)
2. class participation = 40 points (4%). This includes an individual meeting with instructor.
3. two religious site visits and reports = 160 points (16%)
4. three 5-6 page papers = 660 points (66%)

Six 12-Minute In-class Quizzes, notes permitted

Reading questions will be posted on Canvas to help you read effectively and to serve as a basis for in-class discussions. A week before the scheduled quiz, I post five of these questions and during the in-class quiz, I will ask two of these questions. You may (and should) answer them by using your *printed* notes or copying directly from your notes. No books or digital technology is permitted during quizzes. Answers must be in full sentences, not fragments, you must credit your sources, and you are not given credit for quotations. Make-up quizzes will be arranged only in accordance with the attendance policy below.

Two Religious Site Visits

I am arranging three class opportunities, and you need to attend two and write a 2-page report on each. If you cannot attend with the class, you may attend at a different time *with advance approval of the instructor*. Guidelines for the reports will be posted on the Canvas.

Three Papers, 4-6 pages each, plus Works Cited page

1. Paper #1 is on contemporary approaches to Christianity appearing in *Pastrix*, the supplemental reading, lectures, field trip, and class discussions.
2. Paper #2 is on the contemporary approaches to Islam appearing in *Threading My Prayer Rug*, the supplemental reading, lectures, film, field trip, and class discussions.
3. Paper #3 is on contemporary approaches to Judaism appearing in *Devotion*, the supplemental reading, lectures, field trip, and class discussions.

I post a description of the topic prompt, paper description, and a grading rubric at least 1 week before your draft is due. Class time is dedicated to an in-class review of your draft. Your draft and your final version must be submitted on Canvas *and* in hard copy in class.

Attendance, Class Participation, Communications, and Academic Honesty

Your attention in class and your active engagement in class discussions are essential to this course. *You must bring assigned reading to class*. More than one unexcused absence will lower your course grade 2%. If, however, you are sick or have had some form of personal crisis and must miss, your absence may be excused if you contact me prior to class.

No late work will be permitted unless arrangements are made with me prior to the due date of any assignment.

Respectful behavior towards all other participants during class discussions and activities is required. This includes placing all cell phones in the OFF position, and removal of earpieces or headphones, *before entry into the classroom space*; students who bring their laptops or iPads to class may only use them to take notes and at the times I permit. Failure to abide by these rules will lower your grade.

Write all correspondence in a professional manner. Emails must include a salutation (i.e., "Dear Dr. Myers,"), a brief (2-3 sentence) message that begins with your primary reason for contacting the instructor, and be signed with your first and last name (e.g., "Signed, Marco

Polo"). Use your CSUN email account. Do not include shorthand, slang, or unnecessary abbreviations.

Students with disability and need accommodations are welcome in this classroom. You must first register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (NCOD). The DRES office is in Bayramian Hall, room 110 and can be reached at (818) 677-2684. NCOD is located on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at (818) 677-2054. I am happy to speak to you confidentially about your approved accommodations.

California State University adheres to the philosophy that all community members should enjoy an environment free of any form of harassment, sexual misconduct, discrimination, or intimate partner violence. If you have been the victim of sexual misconduct, I encourage you to report this. If you report this to me or any other faculty/staff member, we must notify our university's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose to request confidentiality from Title IX coordinator). If you encounter sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability please contact Susan Hua, Campus Title IX Coordinator, (818) 677-2077, University Hall 285, E-Mail: equityanddiversity@csun.edu.

Course Writing and Grading

All work prepared outside of class must credit sources and to be free of capitalization errors, spelling errors, and incomplete sentences. Grades will reflect this expectation.

All students are subject to the University policy on Academic Honesty. Plagiarism and/or cheating will have serious grade consequences and will be reported to the Office of Student Affairs. A second instance of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of F for the course.

RS 356 Student Learning Objectives – at the end of this course,

1. Students will be able to analyze, interpret and reflect on the cultural forces and factors that shape religious expression in the contemporary era (approximately the previous 20 years).
2. Students will be able to explain and give examples of a diversity of contemporary religious outlooks using critical reasoning as well as empathy.
3. Students will recognize and reflect upon religious or spiritual values found in contemporary literature, music, art, and popular culture.
4. Students will demonstrate (orally and in writing) a recognition of the difference between an academic approach to religion and a personal, devotional approach; and will be able to demonstrate a basic level of proficiency in locating academic resources and primary material for the study of contemporary religion.

GE Arts & Humanities Student Learning Objectives – students will learn to

1. Explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and expression in one or more eras/stylistic periods or cultures;
2. Analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and/or humanities;
3. Produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms;
4. Demonstrate ability to engage and reflect upon their intellectual and creative development within the arts and humanities;
5. Use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression, literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged;
6. Describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged.

GE Writing Intensive Student Learning Objectives – students will learn to

1. Develop and clearly define their ideas through writing;
2. Ethically integrate sources of various kinds into their writing;
3. Compose texts through drafting, revising, and completing a finished product;
4. Express themselves through their writing by posing questions, making original claims, and coherently structuring complex ideas;
5. Revise their writing for greater cogency and clarity;
6. Utilize adopted communication modes and documentation styles of specific disciplines (MLA) where appropriate. *In each WI course, students will be required to complete writing assignments totaling a minimum of 2500 words.*

Topics and Reading The reading is due before the class meeting

The Canvas site for this class, with posted assignments, due dates, and grade system, is the official course syllabus and overrides what is in this document.

1) Monday, August 28 & Wednesday, August 30

Learn how to approach the course reading and writing. Start the unit on contemporary Christianity.

READING: Pastrix, xv-xviii, 3-18. PowerPoint Definition of Religion (on Canvas). "What are the reading quizzes and how do I do well on them? (on Canvas). "How to cite your Sources" (on Canvas).

2) Wednesday, September 6

Christianity/Christianities (because there are multiple versions): What do they have in common? How do Nadia's perspectives compare to those in Stephen Prothero's chapter on Christianity? *In-class quiz at the start of class on September 6.*

READING: Pastrix, 19-58. "Christianity," 65-82 (on Canvas).

3) Monday, September 11 & Wednesday, September 13

Forms of Christianity that originated in America. Discussion of *Pastrix*.

VISIT CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF NORTHRIDGE this week or next. Site visit report due 1 week later.

READING: Pastrix, 59-107. "Christianity," 82-99 (on Canvas).

4) Monday, September 18 & Wednesday, September 20

Discussion of *Pastrix*. Themes to develop in your first paper. *In-class quiz at the start of class on September 18.*

READING: Pastrix, 108-166

5) Monday, September 25 & Wednesday, September 27

Discussion of *Pastrix*. *First paper draft due on Canvas and in class. In-class editing of your draft.*

READING: Pastrix, 167-204. "Apostrophes" website (on Canvas). "How to cite your sources (on Canvas.)

Paper #1 due on Sunday night in Canvas.

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6) Monday, October 2 & Wednesday, October 4

Start the unit on contemporary Islam. Islam from an academic, historical perspective. *Bring hard copy of paper #1 to class.*

READING: "Islam," 349-364 (Canvas).

7) Monday, October 9 & Wednesday, October 11

Discussion of *Threading My Prayer Rug* and "Islam" article. *In-class quiz at the start of class on Wednesday, October 11.*

VISIT ISLAMIC CENTER OF GRANADA HILLS this week or next. Site visit report due 1 week later.

READING: Threading My Prayer Rug, pp. 11-34, 47-51, 62-63. "Islam," 370-379 (Canvas).

8) Monday, October 16 & Wednesday, October 18

Discussion of *Threading My Prayer Rug*.

READING: Threading My Prayer Rug, pp. 67-104.

9) Monday, October 23 & Wednesday, October 25

Discussion of *Threading My Prayer Rug*. *In-class quiz at the start of class on October 23.*
Themes to develop in Paper #2.

READING: Threading My Prayer Rug, pp. 119-163, pp. 185-195.

10) Monday, October 30 & Wednesday, November 1

Discussion of *Threading My Prayer Rug*. *In-class editing of your draft of the second paper on November 1.*

READING: *Threading My Prayer Rug*, pp. 249-294 (optional pp. 213-241)

Paper #2 due on Sunday night in Canvas.

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11) Monday, November 6 & Wednesday, November 8

Start the unit on contemporary Judaism. *Bring hard copy of Paper #2 to class.*

READING: Ritual and Beliefs handout (on Canvas), "Judaism," 423-434 (on Canvas).

12) Monday, November 13 & Wednesday, November 15

Discussion of *Devotion*. Dani's theological perspective compared to conventional Orthodox Judaism.

READING: Devotion, pp. 1-54. Judaism article, pp. 443-452 (on Canvas).

VISIT TEMPLE RAMAT ZION AND RABBI SELA 10 a.m. Sunday, November 19

13) Monday, November 20 (no class on Wednesday, November 22)

Discussion of *Devotion*. *In-class quiz at the start of class on November 20.*

READING: Devotion, pp. 55-116. Judaism 101: Kashrut website.

14) Monday, November 27 & Wednesday, November 29

Discussion of *Devotion*. Themes to develop in your third paper.

READING: Devotion, pp. 116-181.

15) Monday, December 4 & Wednesday, December 6

Discussion of *Devotion*. *In-class quiz at the start of class on December 4. In-class editing of your draft of the second paper on December 6.*

READING: Devotion, pp. 181-243.

Paper #3 due by 12:45 p.m., Monday, December 11 (on Canvas and in class).

RS 356, Fall 2017, schedule of work		Monday	Wednesday
¹ Aug 28 Aug 30	PowerPoint "Defining Religion" <i>Pastrix</i> , xv-xviii, 3-18		
² Sept 6	<i>Pastrix</i> , 19-58 "Christianity," 65-82	Labor Day, no class	QUIZ
³ Sept 11 Sept 13	<i>Pastrix</i> , 59-107 "Christianity," 82-99		
⁴ Sept 18 Sept 20	<i>Pastrix</i> , 108-166	QUIZ	
⁵ Sept 25 Sept 27	<i>Pastrix</i> , 167-204	Draft of first paper due	edit draft first paper due Sunday night
⁶ Oct 2 Oct 4	"Islam," 349-364	Bring hard copy of first paper to class.	
⁷ Oct 9 Oct 11	"Islam," 370-379 <i>Threading My Prayer Rug</i> , 11-34, 47-51, 62-63		QUIZ
⁸ Oct 16 Oct 18	<i>Threading My Prayer Rug</i> , 67-104		
⁹ Oct 23 Oct 25	<i>Threading My Prayer Rug</i> , 119-163, 185-195	QUIZ	
¹⁰ Oct 30 Nov 1	<i>Threading My Prayer Rug</i> , 249-294	Draft of second paper due	edit second paper second paper due Sunday night
¹¹ Nov 6 Nov 8	Ritual and beliefs handout "Judaism," 423-434	Bring hard copy of second paper to class.	
¹² Nov 13 Nov 15	<i>Devotion</i> , 1-54 "Judaism," 443-452 Field trip Sunday, Nov. 19		
¹³ Nov 20 Nov 22	<i>Devotion</i> , 55-116	QUIZ	
¹⁴ Nov 27 Nov 29	<i>Devotion</i> , 116-181	FIELD TRIP REPORT DUE	
¹⁵ Dec 4 Dec 6	<i>Devotion</i> , 181-243	QUIZ	edit third paper

The third paper is due on Canvas and in class at the final, 12:45 p.m. Monday, December 11, 2017.