



Department of Religious Studies

**VERSION 2 – May 1, 2024**

## **RS 2180 (650) Spiritual Quests & Popular Culture**

Spring 2024 (6 weeks = May 6~June 14)

Class Time & Location: *This will be conducted as a fully online course*

Instructor: Dr. Julius-Kei Kato, S.S.L., Ph.D.  
Instructor Profile/Info: <https://jkato.kingsfaculty.ca/about-jk-kato/>  
E-mail: [jkato@uwo.ca](mailto:jkato@uwo.ca) (for normal communication with the professor)  
Physical Office: King's / FB (Faculty Building) 205  
Office Hours: By appointment. Email me at [jkato@uwo.ca](mailto:jkato@uwo.ca) or **BETTER!** send me a DM on Microsoft Teams

**NOTE WELL:** The best way to communicate with me is by sending me a direct message (DM) at the Microsoft Teams chat function. **I prefer a DM** to email because I can respond more quickly to chat messages. Emails might get lost or be dealt with more slowly.

Webpage for RS2180 (under construction) <https://jkato.kingsfaculty.ca/spirituality-culture/spiritual-quests-and-popular-culture/>

**BRIGHTSPACE Page:** <https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/home/12574> (Everyone is new to Brightspace at Western. So, please be patient about possible “hiccups” along the way).

### **Microsoft Teams Page:**

*It is very important that you join and become familiar with our Microsoft Teams page because we will be doing a lot of course work here.*

Link to this team: [RS2180 \[2024\] Spiritual Quests & Popular Culture | General | Microsoft Teams](#)

CODE to join this team: **2z3zgr** (If you join with this code, you don't have to ask permission from me to join the team!)

**Blog** where I post relevant essays, some of them relevant to this course – **JKK's Pensieve: Spiritual but not-and yet Religious.** Link: <http://spiritual-notandyet-religious-jkk.blogspot.com/>

### **Course Description**

Popular culture is usually consumed for its entertainment value but rarely explored for spirituality. This course studies the human spiritual quest and how that is expressed in popular culture through films, novels, music, and other forms. We will study the nature of spiritual or sacred quests and how those are an integral part of being human. We will also see how this spiritual quest has been expressed in the dominant Western religious tradition (Christianity). A special focus of this course is how the spiritual quest has been expressed in the Harry Potter saga. I will assume that the students are (more or less familiar) with the Harry Potter books and films.

### **Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will:

1. Be familiar with and be able to describe the archetypal spiritual quest (aka as “The Hero’s Journey”) and how that is expressed in many pieces of popular culture.
2. Know the ways in which some expressions of popular culture are actually based on the predominant Western religious tradition and its founding figure (Christianity-Jesus)
3. Demonstrate basic proficiency in the main religious/spiritual notions that will be presented in the course and their relationship with popular culture.
4. Demonstrate critical reading/viewing skills, as well as clear written and oral expression and argumentation.

## Texts

- Required readings will be put in the “Resources” folder in this course’s BRIGHTSPACE page (or MS Teams Page).
- (if needed we will use the following version of the Bible) The **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with Apocrypha** (or the Catholic edition) is the preferred translation for this course. If you wish to use a different translation, please consult the instructor. Available online (<http://bible.oremus.org/>)
- Consult also my website: <http://jkato.kingsfaculty.ca/spirituality-culture/spiritual-quests-and-popular-culture/>

*Please view the following films. They are available through the library or you can rent them through a streaming platform that you use:*

- [1] Narnia: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; <https://streaming-acf-film-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/audiocine/play/0382fe13a389569d?referrer=marc>
- [2] *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*: <https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/display/006?t=W200120>
- [3] *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*: <https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/display/006?t=W200407>
- [4] *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* : <https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/display/006?t=W200605>
- [5] *Regarding Henry* (1991 movie starring Harrison Ford and Annette Benning): <https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/display/006?t=P32403>

## Required Viewing/Reading at various points during the course

*Finding Joe* by Patrick Solomon. Available in the public domain:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8nFACrLxr0>

Follow the video with the transcript to be made available on OWL-Resources

Julius-Kei Kato: *Why Religion and Spirituality Matter as Part of One’s Education*. Link: <http://spiritual-notandyet-religious-jkk.blogspot.com/2021/01/why-religion-and-spirituality-matter-as.html>

Julius-Kei Kato: *Jesus as Source of a Spirituality that Transforms the World*. Link: <http://spiritual-notandyet-religious-jkk.blogspot.com/2021/05/jesus-as-source-of-spirituality-that.html>

## Reference Texts (to be made available at the King’s library for a two-hour loan)

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 1968.

Carol S. Pearson, *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By*. 1989.

Carol. S. Pearson, *Awakening the Hero Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help Us Find Ourselves and Transform the World We Live in*. 1991.

Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. 1995. AVAILABLE AS AN EBOOK: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=6932252>

Luke Bell, *Baptizing Harry Potter: A Christian Reading of J.K. Rowling*. 2010.

John Granger, *How Harry Cast His Spell: The Meaning behind the Mania for Rowling's Books*. 2008. AVAILABLE AS AN E-BOOK: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=5395465>

### Course Requirements, Evaluation & Readings

Students will be evaluated based on the following categories. In all of those areas, I will be looking for evidence in the student of critical reading/listening/viewing, thinking, and interpretive skills with regard to our course topics.

Item	Percentage of final grade	Date assigned	Explanation
<b>Weekly Worksheets</b>	30%	The weekly worksheets will be available as a <i>Microsoft Form</i>  Dates TBA (to be announced)	This is a form that will contain questions (mostly “multiple choice” and “fill-in-the-blank” questions to gauge whether you have gone over the course materials for that week
<b>Active and Critical Participation</b> throughout the semester	25%	Throughout the semester	There will be several opportunities to show active participation such as <i>questions, comments, etc..</i> <u>But the major way by which I will gauge this category will be through your Course Journal entries and your participation in the discussion forum and whiteboard</u> (to be explained) See the more detailed explanation below.
<b>Course Project</b>	25%	Day of Submission TBA (to be announced)	I will give specific instructions on how to do this project
<b>Final Exam</b>	20%	TBA	This is an open notes/open book, “do it at home” exam. It will cover all materials of the course, hence, cumulative

### Course Journal Entries

Every week, students will be given an opportunity to submit a “course journal” in the form of a Microsoft Form. You are highly encouraged to submit every week because this will be an important indication of how you’re doing critical thinking and reflection on the course materials. This is a *time-sensitive exercise*. You have to complete and submit a journal entry at the latest by end-of-the-day Monday about the course materials **of the past week**. After that, you will no longer be able to submit an entry about the previous week’s content.

A journal entry will be about anything that was covered in a given week, either in the readings or the pre-recorded lectures of the instructor. It can have the following components: [1] ‘Points that stood out most to you and why’ *accompanied by your critical reflections, comments, and even questions* (remember, if a particular point “strikes you,” it is because you need to hear that at this point in your life); [2] Regardless of whether they

“stood out” to you or not, write down in your own words—what you think are—the most important objective points in the topics covered, *accompanied by some critical reflections*; [3] Questions you have about that week’s study materials; [4] Other matters that interested you.

What I am particularly trying to observe in this exercise is *the student’s critical reaction* to material encountered as they reviewed the course materials for a given week. The model for this journal entry is the opinion section (editorials) of newspapers, serious journals or blog sites.

***The course journal (and whatever participation shown through Microsoft Teams Discussion Forum and Whiteboard) will be the main ways by which I will gauge active and critical participation, a category that makes up 25% of your final grade. If you go beyond the minimum and do these activities really well (that means: more entries, more depth and elaboration in the individual entries, more forms of participation), I will give you extra credit that will go toward your final grade.***

**IMPORTANT:** You have to submit a journal entry for any given week during that week. The deadline is the next Monday, at the end-of-the-day. That is when the Microsoft Form will close. From Tuesday onward, I will no longer accept journal entries about the previous week. The rationale for this rule is that I would like you to work regularly on this reflective and introspective exercise and NOT CRAM at the end.

### **Form of Submission of Course Journal Entries**

I will provide a Microsoft Form on our Team Channel for you to submit your journal entries every week. To be explained at the beginning of the semester

### **Project**

The course project is valued at 25% of your final grade. It is a work that should contain an analysis of anything from popular culture (movie, song, book, poetry, etc.) that *has impacted you in a significant way* and its relation to spirituality and spiritual quests (the topics we are dealing with in this course). This project should be chosen by the student and approved by the instructor. A project proposal form will be made available some time during the term. Other further details will be provided in the course of the semester. Submission date is TO BE ANNOUNCED.

### **Final Examination**

The final examination, valued at 20% of your final grade, will consist of a number of open-ended questions to see how you have understood and how you engage with the course material that has been given during the whole semester. It is an open-notes/open-books summative evaluation. The dates and due time are to be announced.

### **Academic Honesty & Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a scholastic offence at the appropriate Western website.

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. I will check any suspicious sign of plagiarism and/or use of AI. The basic rule is: Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their intellectual debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and/or by proper referencing (such as footnotes or citations). Plagiarism/Use of AI is a major academic offence.

*Nevertheless, as per departmental policy, all required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to Western University for the detection of plagiarism.* All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between the University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com

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Good luck and if you have any other concerns, know that I’m always available to discuss them personally with you.

JK Kato [jkato@uwo.ca](mailto:jkato@uwo.ca)

(BETTER: send me a message on the MS Teams chat)

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### Things to do before the course (in order of importance)

- 1) Try to do a quick first viewing of the documentary *Finding Joe* (see the link above). I will assign sections of the documentary as required viewing/reading of some weeks during the term.
- 2) Be familiar with the general flow of the story of Harry Potter. Consult: [https://jkato.kingsfaculty.ca/jkato/assets/File/Synopsis\\_Harry%20Potter%20Series-BESTv3.pdf](https://jkato.kingsfaculty.ca/jkato/assets/File/Synopsis_Harry%20Potter%20Series-BESTv3.pdf) or Consult this recap at youtube: (better) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHZlsKyWRhc&t=403s> . (minimum – 6 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDnSdmznaTk> .
- 3) Try to view the movie *Regarding Henry* starring Harrison Ford and Annette Benning (1991). It will serve as an illustration of the Hero’s Journey in a non-mythological, potentially real-life situation. It also illustrates the concept of “Limit,” which is a key idea of this course.

### Use of BRIGHTSPACE and Microsoft Teams

Besides Western’s official LMS (Learning Management System) OWL-BRIGHTSPACE, we will also use ‘Microsoft Teams’ for certain things. Please learn the very basic things about using Microsoft Teams if you are not yet familiar with it. I can recommend the following online resources:

[1] A quick (10 minute) student guide to the use of Microsoft Teams:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-UfAvO18Uc>

[2] A more extensive guide for students (the essential information starts at the 10:00 minute mark):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teiZvb5xJzs>

Think of **OWL-Brightspace** as our “storage space/cabinet” for PowerPoint slides, readings, gradebook, etc.

Think of **Microsoft Teams** (MT) as our place to “hang out” online.

Link: [RS2180 \[2024\] Spiritual Quests & Popular Culture | General | Microsoft Teams](#)

CODE to join this team: **2z3zgkr** (If you join with this code, you don’t have to ask permission from me to join the team!)

We will use it for the following things:

[1] Personal messages or questions using the *personal message* CHAT function. *This would be the quickest way to communicate with me.*

[2] Online discussion forum, questions, and quick announcements (using the class general conversation/chat function). We will also use the Whiteboard. Your participation here will be noted under ‘Class Participation’

[3] We will especially use Microsoft forms for the weekly worksheets, weekly course journals, quiz, surveys.

**Optional Zoom Check-in:** I might periodically schedule an optional zoom check-in to see if there are any questions or clarifications needed. I'll communicate with you about this.

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**Religious Studies 2180 (650): Spiritual Quests & Pop Culture**  
Spring 2024

**TENTATIVE PROGRESSION OF TOPICS / READINGS**

*This is a tentative plan. I will email you a more detailed "Progression of Topics/Readings" as soon as the term begins*

<b>Week#</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics to be covered in lectures and readings</b>	<b>Readings</b>
1	May 6~12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Preliminaries: Spirituality and Religion</li> <li>· <b>Spiritual Quests-Journeys, Archetypes, The Hero's Journey</b></li> <li>· Some thinkers to note: Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung, Carol Pearson. Their contributions</li> <li>· The Archetypal Hero's Journey (aka, The Spiritual Quest) I</li> <li>· Christianity as the dominant Western cultural and spiritual tradition</li> </ul>	-Pre-recorded lectures and readings: To be (made) available (TBA)
2	May 13~19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Jesus as a "Hero" on a Spiritual Quest</b></li> <li>· <b>Christianity's BIG Story</b>... Christianity's Understanding of Human Life. What Christianity tells us about—what it believes as—REALITY: God-Christ-Human Life-Eternity</li> <li>· The Archetypal Hero's Journey (aka, The Spiritual Quest) II</li> </ul>	-Pre-recorded lectures and readings: To be (made) available (TBA)
3	May 20~26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Spiritual Quests as Portrayed in Popular Culture</b></li> <li>· Focus #1: Narnia-<i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i> as an expression of the traditional Christian worldview</li> <li>· Focus #2: Either Star Wars -Luke's Journey or <i>The Hobbit/The Lord of the Rings</i></li> </ul>	-Pre-recorded lectures and readings: TBA
4	May 27~June 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Harry Potter as a Hero on a Journey-Quest</b></li> <li>· <b><i>The Philosopher's Stone (PS)</i></b>.</li> <li>· Dominant Themes: "Magic" – the "bigger" dimension of reality; Love as protection and salvation</li> <li>· <b>Harry Potter: <i>The Prisoner of Azkaban (PA)</i></b></li> <li>· Dominant Themes: "Dementors", "Escapes and Revelations" (Sirius and Harry himself), <i>Patronus</i> Charm</li> <li>· Harry, image of his father</li> <li>· Harry's compassion on Peter Pettigrew</li> <li>· The Orphan Overcoming Trauma</li> </ul>	-Pre-recorded lectures and readings: TBA

5	June 3~9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Harry Potter: <i>The Half-Blood Prince</i> (HP)</b></li> <li>· Dominant Themes: Horcruxes and Harry's purity and capacity for love</li> <li>· Dumbledore at the Lake – Christ-figure(s)</li> <li>· Other Considerations from Pop Culture</li> <li>· Harry Potter's Sacrifice in <i>The Deathly Hallows</i> vis-à-vis Jesus' Death &amp; Resurrection</li> </ul>	-Pre-recorded lectures and readings: TBA
6	June 10~14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Discerning your own Hero's Journey</b> by discovering which expressions of popular culture have influenced and impacted you: songs, literature, films, etc.</li> <li>· Analyzing these pieces of pop culture using "the Hero's Journey and Archetype" templates</li> <li>· How a Hero's Journey can happen in real life; "Limit"; <i>Regarding Henry</i>; "conversion"</li> <li>· Components of a personal spiritual quest</li> </ul>	-NO Pre-recorded lecture. Only readings and other tasks: TBA
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