

# Sainthood

## *in Four Traditions*

Spring Term 2008, Washington and Lee University  
Prof. Timothy Lubin, 23 Newcomb Hall

### Course Description

A survey of sainthood in a variety of religious contexts: Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist. The course will ask: What makes someone holy? How do saints behave and what do they do? What does tradition say about them? How and why are they worshiped? Readings will include sacred biographies (hagiographies), studies of particular traditions of saint worship, and interpretations of sainthood in both theological and cross-cultural perspectives. The latter four weeks will include short modern fictional works depicting saints and their relation to the secular realm. Discussion will approach the question of saints' ambiguous position between the human and the divine—what this perceived holiness entails for the saint, the devotee, and the religious community, and what it implies about a religion's conception of human spiritual potential.

### Aims of the Course

To understand the idea of sainthood in terms that make sense cross-culturally, by identifying many of the basic characteristics, activities, and religious roles attributed by various traditions to individuals of an extraordinary or exemplary status; and to assess the social and historical significance of saints by noting the ways in which people remember and worship such individuals. The class will work to develop a comparative typology of the phenomenon that takes account of differences between religions.

A Sufi Darwish >



## Requirements

The final grade will be based on:

1. **preparation for and participation in class discussion**, including written analytical or interpretive observations or topics for discussion (25%); more than one unexcused absence will lower the grade.
2. **written analytical or interpretive observations or topics for discussion** (one page each maximum), to be turned in at the beginning of each class except the last (25%)
3. a **final 3500-word paper** on a particular saint or cultic tradition of the student's choice; the analysis should seek to apply or the typology developed in class (50%); the instructor will help students select topics during Week II; students will present their research orally to the class in Week V; the paper itself is due in the last class of term.

## Books Available for Purchase

Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. R. Gregg

Richard Kieckhefer and George Bond, eds., *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions* (K&B)

Tayeh Salib, *The Wedding of Zein and Other Stories*

Kiran Desai, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*

## Schedule of Topics and Readings (subject to revision)

### WEEK I BASIC CATEGORIES; PRECURSORS (HEBREW & GREEK SAGES AND HEROES)

#### Tuesday Models of Virtue and Wisdom

From the Hebrew Bible: 1 Kings 17–22, 2 Kings 1:1–2:25, 4:1–8:6, and 13:14–20 (The Miracles of Elijah and Elisha); Daniel 1–6; Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14).

#### Thursday The Philosopher as Spiritual Guide and Moral Hero / Gods and Heroes

Plato, “Phædo.”

“Ecstasy and Divination,” section II.8 in Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*.

“Heroes,” ch. 2 in *Sources for the Study of Greek Religion*.

### WEEK II GREEK HEROES & CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

#### Tuesday The Greek Cult of Heroes

Casey Dué and Gregory Nagy, “Preliminaries of Philostratus’s On Heroes.”

Philostratus, *Heroikos* (‘On Heroes’), pp. 1–29 and 67–89.

Hans Dieter Betz, “Hero Worship and Christian Belief.”

#### Thursday Jesus as Model / The Cult of Martyrs

Kieckhefer, Ch.1 in K&B, “Imitators of Christ: Sainthood in the Christian Tradition.”

Acts 6:8–8:3 (the stoning of Stephen).

From *The Golden Legend*: St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Lucy, St. Sebastian, St. Agnes, St. Catherine, St. James the Mutilated.

**WEEK III      CHRISTIAN SAINTLY PARADIGMS: ASCETIC, SCHOLAR, SERVANT**

\* Film: "Miracle in Rome" ("Milagro en Roma")

Tuesday      **The Man-God and His Imitators**  
Athanasius, *The Life of Antony* pp. 1–19, 29–99.  
From *The Golden Legend*: St. Anthony.

Thursday      **Varieties of Saintliness: Martyrs, Monks, and Housewives**  
Selections from *Holy Women of Byzantium*.  
From *The Golden Legend*: Sts. Nicholas and Francis.  
A Saint's Legend from *The Travels of Marco Polo*.

**WEEK IV      ISLAM**

\* Tayeh Salib, "The Wedding of Zein."

\* Film: "A Door to the Sky" ("Bab al-Sama Maftouh") (1989).

Tuesday      **The Prophetic Model / Imam and Martyr in Shi'i Islam**  
H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, pp. 23–87, 120–126.  
Selections from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*.  
Annemarie Schimmel. "Nūr Muhammad."  
Scene XXIII from *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husain*.  
David Pinault, "Shia Lamentation Rituals."

Thursday      **The Sufi Master, the Tomb, and the Lineage**  
Gibb, pp. 127–157.  
Carl Ernst, "Lives of the Sufi Saints" and "Conversations of Sufi Saints."  
Smith and Haddad, "The Cult of Saints."  
Richard Eaton, "Court of Man, Court of God."

**WEEK V      HINDU TRADITIONS**

\* Kiran Desai, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*.

Tuesday      **The Ascetical or Contemplative Exemplar (Sage, Yogi, Sant)**  
Lubin, "Models of Sainthood in India."  
Patrick Olivelle, "The Renouncer Tradition."  
Patrick Olivelle, "Upanisads," pp. 34–71 and 148–156.

Thursday      **The Devotional Exemplar (Bhakta, Sant)**  
Nancy M. Martin, "North Indian Hindi Devotional Literature."  
Ed Dimock, "On Impersonality and Bengali Religious Biography."  
Selections from Mahipati's *Bhaktavijaya* ("Victory of the Saints") of.  
David Lorenzen, "The Lives of the *Nirgunī* Saints."  
A. K. Ramanujan, "On Women Saints."  
McLeod, "The [Sikh] Gurus."

**WEEK VI      BUDDHISM**

\* Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*.

Tuesday

**Models of Buddhist Saintliness**

“The Legend of the Buddha Shakyamuni.”

From *The Golden Legend: Sts Barlaam and Josaphat*.

Bond, Ch. 5 in K&B, “The Arahant.”

Tambiah, “The Buddhist Arahant: Classical Paradigm and Modern Thai Manifestations.”

Thursday

**The Bodhisattva: The Ideal Way of Being**

Lopez, Ch. 6 in K&B, “Sanctification on the Bodhisattva Path.”

“Nichiren, the Buddhist Prophet.”

FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS