

**GRADE 12  
CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE SYLLABUS  
HONORS**

The goal of the senior religion course is to provide students a rational basis for their religious belief. It is best reflected in St. Anselm's dictum: *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). By providing a rational basis for faith, the course seeks to demonstrate the credibility and the reasonableness of faith. What can our human wits figure out about the nature and purpose of our existence. Great effort goes into an examination and evaluation of the secular models of happiness that often derail good thinking. Therefore, epistemology is a great concern. How does human knowing acquire truth, any truth. Some of the dictums of the course are:

1. One cannot be free unless you see.
2. An opinion is only as good as the evidence one has.
3. One opinion is not as good as any other opinion.
4. The tree comes to me.
5. What makes the black Labrador wag it's tail?
6. Trust is the key to all growth.
7. Cartesian thinking is stinking thinking.
8. We need the poet and the engineer in one mind.
9. The denotation and connotation of propaganda.
10. Knowing about the Living God is different from but not contradictory to meeting the Living God.
11. The language of paradox is very different from lawyer's language. The Mind Behind It All is into paradox.
12. Death raises the God question for most people.

Each one of these twelve statements and many more provide pegs in the ground so to speak as we erect our tent. Indeed the order and the disorder of all human experience point to a Mind Behind It All. Much of this epistemology is reflected in John Paul II encyclical, *The Splendor of Truth*.

Specialized vocabulary is a meaningful part of this class. Some of the favored terms and expressions are the following:

Calculated Risk	Assisted Suicide
Tyranny of Logic	Pascal's Wager
Abdication of Logic	Notional Knowledge
Causality	Real Knowledge
Hungers and Curses	Palliative Care
Convergence of Probability	Hedonism
Health Care	Anesthesia
Tension of Opposites	Inchoate
Skeptic	Paranoia
Atheism	Agnosticism

In addition to this abbreviated list of terms and expressions, the course uses many allusions to literary classics both foreign and American. Students are encouraged to become familiar with these references.

There are three further topics that are weaved into the senior syllabus. They are self-knowledge, death and end of life moral decisions, and a short section on relationship.

A very useful tool for growth and self-understanding is the enneagram. It is a complex system of nine personality characteristics. Each of those nine types has within it a rainbow of beauty and blind spots. Self-awareness, a consciousness of the emotional patterns provides a much better interior guidance system. Approximately three weeks from Thanksgiving to the first trimester exam is devoted to this topic.

Once students think they know their numbers, panels of each number are encouraged and provide opportunities for interaction.

*Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom is a wonderful complement to a chapter on Death, the crucial mystery in the major textbook. The story of Morrie awakens the serious issues humans deal with during a life time. And *The Five People You Will Meet In Heaven*, also by the same author, is very complementary to this powerful topic. Further in view of the Marianist Community proximity and involvement in the death of Brother Joseph Fox along with legal and moral decisions that surrounded his death, this example proves a teachable context for explaining Catholic moral doctrine in regard to end of life decisions. Father Philip's auditorium presentation on this topic culminates this segment of the syllabus.

1. "Stirring the Oatmeal," Robert Johnson
2. "Love Is Not A Feeling," Scott Peck  
The Art of Loving, Eric Fromm
3. Is Love an Art - pages 1 - 5
4. The Objects of Love - pages 43 - 45
5. Motherly Love - pages 45 - 49
6. Erotic Love - pages 49 - 53
7. Self-Love - pages 53 - 58

Finally, depending on the remaining teaching days, we address some important aspects in relationship. We do this by handing our articles. There are three guiding statements in this lesson:

1. Love is friendship that has caught fire. Reversing this equation generates fire but no friendship.
2. Identity before intimacy. When this equation is reversed personal growth is often stunted.
3. Love is more volitional than emotional. Confusing these two human powers creates false expectations and sometimes bitter disappointments.

#### TEXT BOOKS:

- *Meeting the Living God* by William O'Malley (Paulist Press, 1998)
- *The Enneagram in Work and Love* by Helen Palmer (Harper Collins, 1993)
- *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom (Broadway Books, 2007)
- *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom (Hyperion, 2003)