

REL 2502: INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce students to the Christian religion, providing an overview of the religion's origins, and to some of the artistic, intellectual, and political traditions which it has inspired. We will begin by looking back, to the sources which gave birth to the Christian tradition, and also to the way the tradition was shaped and developed through the centuries, by its adherents and also by its contract with other worldviews. We will then focus on core beliefs and rituals shared by Christians across centuries and cultures, before considering the Christian religion in its diverse global settings today. We will then examine some of the literature which this religion inspired, before concluding with a look at the way in which the Christian religion has engaged with cultural issues such as science, race, and the environmental crisis.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives for students of REL 2930 include the following:

- * gain a basic knowledge of the origins of Christianity and of its central beliefs and practices
- * achieve a functional literacy in the New Testament and the gnostic gospels
- * critically engage both the biblical text and its critics
- * gain an elementary knowledge of major developments in the history of Christianity
- * recognize the significance of the modern context for Christianity
- * address a sampling of contemporary issues facing Christianity today
- * gain an appreciation for Christianity as an intellectual and artistic tradition

TEXTBOOKS (OTHER READINGS WILL BE PROVIDED ONLINE)

1. The Bible (NSRV translation please - save some \$\$\$ - take advantage of biblegateway.com or any of the other free Bible sites out there)
2. McGrath, Alister E. *Christianity: An Introduction*. 3rd edition. Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.
3. Borg, Marcus and Wright, N.T. *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*. 2nd edition. HarperOne, 2007. (Get this one first)
4. Endo, Shusaku. *Silence*. Teplinger, 1980.
5. Dreher, Rod. *How Dante Can Save Your Life: The Life-Changing Wisdom of History's Greatest Poem*. Regan Arts, 2015.

WHAT THIS COURSE IS BASED UPON

This is a course based and built upon reading and writing. You will be exposed to a range of diverse material dealing with Christianity, and I am expecting you to read it for understanding, and also to read pieces in conjunction with each other, so you can connect the dots, when necessary, and so you can spot and understand differences, when necessary. You will be asked to write in order to facilitate that process. Much of your writing will be in response to the readings. You will be prompted to write in such a way as to show your understanding, but also to help you in thinking through the various viewpoints you will encounter.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS (TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE: 1000)

Unit Quizzes (200 pts total)- At the conclusion of each unit, there will be a quiz designed to test your grasp of the material presented, both in the readings and in the course lectures. A variety of question types will be used: matching, true/false, multiple choice, and short answer are all fair game. See the course schedule for dates and details concerning each exam.

Quiz Questions (130 pts total) - After we work through each week of the course, I will ask you to submit potential quiz questions based on the material of that particular module (reading, lecture, etc). Specifically, I will ask you to submit three: A True/False, a multiple choice, and a short answer (answerable in couple of sentences.) You don't need to provide the answers (although you probably should know them! - focus on crafting good questions. I will collect the best ones, modify them if necessary, and release them back to you, in effect making a study guide for the quizzes as we go along. The way I see it, this is a way to measure your grasp of the reading and the lectures which goes beyond busy work, giving you a tangible purpose for the weekly work I am asking you to do.

Final Exam (150 pts total) - The final exam will be an open-source (books & notes) essay test. You will receive more details as we get closer. See the course schedule for dates.

Reflections/Responses (120 pts total) - While the quiz questions (see above) will be a test of your ability to grasp the content of each module (including notable people, ideas, themes, etc), the online reflections will be designed to draw out your response to it. In other words, what you think and how you react emotionally to the material, rather than just your cognitive grasp of it. To that end, there will be reflection questions posted for each module. You will be required to post two responses: one in response to the question itself, and a second in response to one of your classmates reflections. All responses need to be at least 100 words, thought through, and RESPECTFUL to one another. If your response fails to meet any of these requirements, it will lose points.

Church Visit Paper (200 pts) In this assignment, you will be asked to attend two Christian worship services and write an 6-8 page paper (double spaced, 12 pt font, no monkeying with the margins) comparing and contrasting the two worship experiences. In order for this to work, you must attend services from two very different traditions. If you pick a conservative evangelical church for your first, go find a progressive mainline church for your second. If you choose a Catholic mass for your first, go choose a Lutheran or Orthodox for your second, etc. The services you choose will go a long way towards determining the quality of your paper. Think them through. Also, I will be looking for you to provide background information on the traditions you choose. Place what you observe in context. **YOUR CHURCH SELECTIONS MUST BE APPROVED AHEAD OF TIME.** Please see Appendix A to see an outline of what I expect in this paper.

Christian Interview Paper (200 pts) In this paper, you will be asked to sit down with a Christian, conduct an interview which explores their faith, and write a 6-8 paper (double spaced, 12 pt font, no monkeying the margins) on what you learned. Topics of conversation ought to include their faith background, family influences, and how their faith affects their thoughts and decisions in their daily life. Again, think through who you choose to interview. Obviously, someone who is serious about their religious commitments would probably make for a better source of material than someone who has been a Christian for a couple of months, although this may not be true in all cases. **YOUR INTERVIEWEE MUST BE APPROVED AHEAD OF TIME.** Please see Appendix B for an outline of what I expect in this paper.

Grading Scale

A	4.0	93-100	930-1000	C	2.0	73-76	730-769
A-	3.67	90-92	900-929	C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899	D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
B	3.0	83-86	830-869	D	1.0	63-66	630-669
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829	D-	0.67	60-62	600-629
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799	E	0.00	0-59	0-599

Schedule of Classes and Assignments (Subject to modification at my discretion)

Unit 1: Jesus & the Sources for Ancient Christianity

Week 1- August 22-26

- Course Intro, the academic study of religion
- Texts: Russell McCutcheon, "What is the Academic Study of Religion," <http://rel.as.ua.edu/pdf/Aboutreligion.pdf>, Borg & Wright, part 1
- DUE: Reflection #1

Week 2 - August 27-Sept 2

- Jesus' Life and Teachings
- Texts: McGrath, pp 1-27, Borg & Wright, part 2, Matthew 5-7
- RECOMMENDED TEXTS: The Gospel of Mark. (If you've never a Gospel before and don't know the story, you really ought to read the Gospel of Mark to get caught up.)
- DUE: Reflection #2, Quiz Questions (QQ) #1

Week 3 - Sept 3-9

- Death and Resurrection
- Texts: Luke 22-24, 1 Corinthians 15, Borg & Wright, parts 3 & 4
- DUE: Reflection #3, QQ #2, CHURCH VISIT LOCATIONS MUST BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL

Week 4 - Sept 10-16

- Who is this guy?
- Texts: 2 Corinthians 5, Rev 21-22, Borg & Wright, parts 5 & 7
- DUE: Reflection #4, QQ #3

Unit 2: The Evolution of Christian Doctrine

Week 5 - Sept 17-23

- The Outgrowth of theology
- Texts: McGrath, p 28-120
- DUE: QQ #4, Quiz 1

Week 6 - Sept 24-30

- Theology: Everything is broken, part 1
- Texts: Dreher, pp 1-51
- Due: Reflection #5, QQ #5

Week 7 - Oct 1-7

- Theology: Everything is broken, part 2
- Texts: Dreher, pp 52-179
- Due: Reflection #6, QQ #6

Week 8 - Oct 8-14

- Theology: How it Gets Fixed, part 1
- Text: Dreher, pp 180-295
- Due: QQ #7, Reflection #7, CHURCH VISITATION PAPER

Unit 3: Church History - Culture Clash, Missionaries, and the Movement of Christianity

Week 9 - Oct 15-21

- Christian History #1: Early Church to the Middle Ages
- Texts: McGrath, pp 121-148, Justin Martyr, The Apology, ch 3-8 (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>.)
- The Martyrdom of Polycarp, chapters 9-16 (see <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/polycarp-smyrnaeans.html>)
- The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity, chapters 2 (sections 1 and 2 only) and 6 (the whole chapter- see <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian24.html>)
- St. Augustine's Confessions, - Book 1, chapter 1 (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>) and Book 8, chapters 11-12 (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110108.htm>)
- St. Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of Brother Sun," (http://www.prayerfoundation.org/canticle_of_brother_sun.htm)
- and finally, skim this webpage which contains selections from The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (<http://www29.homepage.villanova.edu/christopher.haas/saying%20of%20the%20desert%20fathers.html>)
- DUE: Quiz #2, QQ #8

Week 10 - Oct 22-28

- Christian History #2: Reformation to the Modern Age
- Texts: McGrath, pp 148-163, 199-218, Martin Luther, "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants," http://zimmer.csufresno.edu/~maritere/against_the_robbing_and_murderin.htm
- the Schleitheim Confession, <http://www.anabaptists.org/history/the-schleitheim-confession.html>
- , "Dirk Willems," https://www.goshen.edu/mqr/Dirk_Willems.html
- , John Wesley's conversion, <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/john-wesleys-heart-strangely-warmed-11630227.html>
- Due: Reflection #8, QQ #9, INTERVIEW SUBJECT CONFIRMED

Week 11 - Oct 29- Nov 4

- Text: Endo, part 1
- Due: Reflection #9, QQ #10

Week 12 - Nov 5-11

- Text: Endo, part 2
- Due: Reflection #10, QQ #11

Unit 4: Christianity and Modern Issues

Week 13 - Nov 12-18

- Modernity
- Texts: McGrath, pp 163-198, Collins & Hayhoe lectures
- Due: Quiz #3, QQ #12

Week 14 - Nov 28- Dec 2

- Equality
- Texts: Tim Keller, "The Bible and Same-Sex Relationships: A Review Article." http://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/the_bible_and_same_sex_relationships_a_review_article, (NOTE: I was having trouble

getting straight to the article. If that happens to you, simply click "Redeemer Report Archive", go to June 2015, and you will find the article there.)

- Matthew Vines, "A Response to Tim Keller's Review," <http://www.matthewvines.com/a-response-to-tim-kellers-review/>, (Having a similar issue with this one. I am trying to fix the link, but if it remains broken, simply google the author and title of the post, and you should be fine.)
- Wesley Hill, "Hoping for Love," <http://spiritualfriendship.org/2015/06/28/hoping-for-love/>
- Martin Luther King, Jr, "Letter From Birmingham Jail" (you can easily find this online, <http://www.uscrossier.org/pullias/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/king.pdf>)
- Ekemini Uwan, "Why Presidential Candidates Can't Ignore Black Lives Matter." <http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2015/october/why-presidential-candidates-cant-ignore-black-lives-matter.html?paging=off>
- Due: Reflection #11, QQ #13

Week 15 - Dec 3-Dec 9

- Community
- Texts: Miroslav Volf, Q Ideas Video, <http://qideas.org/videos/public-faith-in-a-pluralistic-society/>
- tbd from Wendell Berry
- Due: Reflection #12, CHRISTIAN INTERVIEW PAPER

Final Exam Week - Quiz #4, Final Exam

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Attendance

This course is entirely online. All course activities will be conducted via Canvas (<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>). So what does attendance mean? Be "present" on the course webpage and do the work!

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Student Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits and defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism. A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

a.) Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.

b.) Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.

(University of Florida, Student Honor Code, 15 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>>)

University of Florida students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the entire Student Honor Code.

Important Tip: You should never copy and paste something from the internet without providing the exact location from which it came.

Classroom Behavior

Even though our “classroom” is virtual, the rules of civility and courtesy still apply. Online boorishness will result in reprimand, and could negatively affect your grade. If the infraction is serious enough, or repeated enough, it will be passed on to University discipline. Although the course is online, the University’s honor and conduct codes still apply:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/> Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, ethnic, and yes, religious backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. (I know that comes as a shock in a religion class.) Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own.

Turning in Work

Papers and posts are due and exams are to be taken by the assigned deadline. Late papers and exams will not be accepted. Failure of technology is not an excuse. The best way to handle your business? Don’t wait until the last minute, and if you’re not sure that something went through, follow up to be sure!

Paper Maintenance Responsibilities

Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers, it is the student’s responsibility to have and to make available this material. This is good practice for all classes - cover yourself!

Students with Disabilities

The University of Florida complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students requesting accommodation should contact the Students with Disabilities Office, Peabody 202. That office will provide documentation to the student whom must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Course Evaluations

“Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <http://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.”

Appendix A: What Does a Successful Church Visitation Paper Look Like?

Remember, the idea is for you to visit two separate Christian worship services, from two different traditions, and to compare and contrast what you experience. Here are some things to keep in mind...

Choosing the Services

- Think contrast. Choosing an evangelical Southern Baptist service, and then an evangelical nondenominational service, won't set you up for success.
- Get beyond the collegiate services (this is obviously for Gainesville residents). I know it's easier to go to St. Augustines, or Gator Wesley, but trust me - if you want to stand out, you will choose different church experiences.
- Do your research - how do you know you have an interesting contrast on your hands? Do research beforehand! Visit church websites. Look up denominational histories. This will also help you know what to look for when you actually go the service.

While You're There

- Be observant. I'm looking for little details about what you experience.
- Be relevant. But at the same time, the little details have to be relevant to your larger project. I don't care what color the carpet is, unless it matters! You'll have to use your discernment to figure out details to leave in and to cut out.
- Take literature. Church bulletins. Pamphlets. These will be enormously helpful.
- Talk to people. I know it can be intimidating, but the best way to get a sense of a church is to talk to its people.

Writing the Paper

- Tell a story. A good way to start the paper is with a paragraph explaining why you chose the churches you did, and what you know about these traditions. ("My boyfriend's parents are Catholic, wanted to learn more," etc.) Then you can move into the details of your visit, before getting into the analysis (see below) and telling me what you learned.
- Give me analysis. Don't just give me details. Actively compare and contrast the services you go to, and then dig a little deeper - what would explain the differences? Why would one church have a 45 minute sermon, while another has a 10 minute homily? Why would one use a pipe organ while another uses guitars? Take what you know about the traditions of the churches, and use it to think through why church services are structured the way they are. Remember - the structure of the service will tell you what matters to that particular church. Try to figure out why.

Appendix B - What Does a Successful Christian Interview Paper Look Like?

Remember, the idea here is to interview a Christian and get an in-depth picture of their faith. What I am particularly interested in is how their faith shows up in their daily life - in their job, parenting, relationships, etc.

Choosing a Subject

- A serious Christian is probably the best way to go. If you choose someone who is Christian in name, but it doesn't result in distinctive behaviors or worldview, it won't make for an interesting paper.
- You can interview someone you know, but be careful - you might be tempted to cut corners in telling your story because you already know the details. I don't. Make sure to tell the story.
- Give them plenty of notice - "My paper is due tomorrow, can you meet this afternoon?!" Yeah, don't be that person. It's annoying and disrespectful. Get out ahead of this.

Conducting the Interview

- Show respect. They are doing you a favor. Act accordingly.
- Have questions laid out ahead of time. Don't just stare blankly. That's a waste of everyone's time.
- Don't necessarily stick rigidly to your questions though. If it turns into a flowing conversation, that's cool.
- Do not use any audio recording equipment without asking. And honestly, I wouldn't use it at all. I would write notes in a notebook, and then, immediately after the interview, rewrite them in your computer. This will help your brain organize and classify what you've learned.
- Good things to ask about:
 - How did they come to Christian faith?
 - Did they grow up in a Christian house?
 - What are some ways their faith has an effect on their daily life? How does it affect the way they work/parent/are a student/etc?
 - Have they ever had any crises of faith? How'd they get through it?
 - There are so many things you can ask about. Again, what I want most of all is evidence as to how their Christian commitments affect their lives.

Writing the Paper

- Tell a story. Don't just reprint your interview notes. A good flow would be: Why I chose this person, an intro of the person, the 3 most significant themes of the interview, and conclusion.
- Obviously, if you quote the person directly (a good idea) let me know that is what you're doing.