

REL 2502 (25749-6001) Introduction to Christianity Fall 2021

Tuesday Period 7 (1:45-2:55) and Thursday Periods 7-8 (1:45-3:50)

Anderson Hall Room 113

Instructor: Professor David Hackett

Phone: 352-273-2929

Email: dhackett@ufl.edu

Office: 122 Anderson Hall

Office Hours: Tuesday 12:00-1:30; Thursday 12:00-1:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class introduces students to the Christian religion. We first examine the New Testament, the core scripture for Christians throughout the world. Then we ask: Who was Jesus and what did he teach? Historically, we highlight critical moments in the development of the Christian community in the West. Finally we ask several contemporary questions: What is the significance of the emergence of World Christianities? What is the status of Evangelicalism after Trump? and What are the possibilities and pitfalls of being “spiritual but not religious”?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- *gain a basic knowledge of the origins of Christianity, its central beliefs and practices
- *gain an elementary knowledge of major developments in the history of Christianity
- * consider a sampling of issues facing Christianity today

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This course is built upon reading, discussion, and writing. Together we will be taking a journey to try to understand Christianity. *I am expecting you to do at least two hours of course reading and preparation for every hour of class time.*

Among other requirements, you will be required to keep a journal of your responses to the readings and to class discussions. You are 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. I will discuss these journals individually with you at three intervals during the course.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING (300 points)

- 1) **Journal (30% of Grade – 90 points)** You must make at least one paragraph entry in response to each class’s required reading(s) and each classroom discussion. Three times during the semester (September 23rd, November 9th, and December 8th) you will hand these in to me before we meet individually to discuss them.
- 2) **Church Visit Paper (15% - 45 points).** 5 pages. Due December 7th. See instructions at the end of this syllabus.
- 3) **Three Take-Home Tests (45% of Grade – 135 points; 15% each – 45 points).** The purpose of these tests (Due October 14th, November 9th, and December 13th) is for me to assess your grasp of the materials under discussion at about one-third, two-thirds and at the end of the course.
- 4) **Attendance and Participation (10% - 30 points).** You will miss journal points if you are not present to participate and write notes about each classroom conversation. Missing class, for whatever reason, diminishes the community of conversation among us.

I want you to succeed.

BOOKS TO PURCHASE (other readings will be provided online and in the course web site's files)

Johnson, Luke Timothy The New Testament: A Very Short Introduction Oxford, 2010.
(Get this one first - 1st readings come out of this book)

Borg, Marcus and Wright, N.T. The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions 2nd edition. HarperOne, 2007.

The Bible (Any good translation will do - NASB, NRSV, NIV, ESV are all fine - no paraphrases.
Recommended: The Harper Collins Study Bible (New Revised Standard Version)

ONLINE* AND COURSE WEBSITE** READINGS

*"The Gospel of Thomas," at <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html>

**Elaine Pagels, "Gospels in Conflict: John and Thomas" in Beyond Belief, pp. 30-75

**Alister McGrath, Christianity: An Introduction, pp. 122-198

*The Apostles Creed, at <http://sacred-texts.com/chr/apocreed.htm>

*The Nicene Creed at <http://sacred-texts.com/chr/nicene.htm>

*Martin Luther, "Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation"
<https://web.stanford.edu/~jsabol/certainty/readings/Luther-ChristianNobility.pdf>

*John Wesley's conversion, <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/john-wesleys-heart-strangely-warmed-11630227.html>

**Philip Jenkins, "The Christian Revolution" and "The Rise of the New Christianity" in The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity, pp. 1-14, 101-133.

**Gerardo Marti, "The Unexpected President: The 2016 Trump Election and White Evangelical Support" Chapter One pp. 1-23 in American Blindspot: Race, Class, Religion and the Trump Presidency (2020)

**R. Marie Griffith, "Introduction" pp. vii-xx to Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics (2017)

*New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/us/examining-the-growth-of-the-spiritual-but-not-religious.html>

Class Schedule

Introduction to the Class

August 24

August 26

I The New Testament

August 31st

Approaching the New Testament

Read: Johnson, New Testament 1-35

September 2nd

The Gospel of Mark

Read: -Johnson, 36-42

-The Gospel of Mark

September 7th

The Gospel of Matthew

Read: -Johnson, 42-48

-The Gospel of Matthew

September 9th

The Gospel According to Luke

Read: -Johnson, 48-50

-The Gospel of Luke

Differences and Distinctiveness in the Synoptic Gospels
(review Mark 1-8; Matthew 5-10; and Luke 5-9)

September 14th

Paul and his Letters

Read: -Johnson, 60-83

-Corinthians

-Romans

-Galatians 1-6

September 16th

The Gospel According to John

Read: -Johnson, 95-113

-The Gospel of John

September 21st

The Gospel According to the Gnostics

Read: *"The Gospel of Thomas," at <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html>

**Elaine Pagels, "Gospels in Conflict: John and Thomas" in *Beyond Belief*, pp.
30-75

September 23rd

Journals due September 23rd. Individual 20 minute conversations with me during class and office hours.

II The Historical Jesus

September 28th

Borg/Wright "How do we know about Jesus?"

Read:

- Either Borg, "Seeing Jesus: Sources, Lenses, and Method" or Wright, "Knowing Jesus: Faith and History"
- And Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2

September 30th

Borg/Wright "What Did Jesus Do and Teach?"

Read:

- Either Borg, "Jesus Before and After Easter: Jewish Mystic and Christian Messiah" or Wright, "The Mission and Message of Jesus"
- And: Mark 1-10; Matthew 5-7, 13; Luke 6, 10.25 - 16; John 6, 10, 15

October 5th

Borg/Wright, "The Death of Jesus"

Read:

- Either Borg, "Why was Jesus Killed?" or Wright, "The Crux of Faith"
- And: Mark 11-16; Matthew 21-28; Luke 22-24; John 13, 18-21; 1 Corinth. 15

October 7th

Borg/Wright, "Was Jesus God?"

Read:

- Either Borg, "Jesus and God" or Wright, "The Divinity of Jesus"
- And: 2 Corinthians 5, Rev 21-22

First Take-Home Test Assigned

October 12th:

Work on First Take-Home Test

October 14th:

First Take-Home Test Due

III The History of Christianity

October 19th

The Early Church, 100-500

Read: **McGrath, Christianity, pp. 122-134

*The Apostles Creed, at <http://sacred-texts.com/chr/apocreed.htm>

*The Nicene Creed at <http://sacred-texts.com/chr/nicene.htm>

October 21st

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance,, 500-1500

Read: **McGrath, Christianity, pp. 135-148

October 26th

The Reformation, 1500-1650

Read: **McGrath, Christianity, 148-163

Recommended:

*Martin Luther, "Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation"
<https://web.stanford.edu/~jsabol/certainty/readings/Luther-ChristianNobility.pdf>

*John Wesley's conversion, <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/john-wesleys-heart-strangely-warmed-11630227.html>

October 28th

The Modern Period, 1650-1914

Read: **McGrath, Christianity, pp. 163-180

November 2nd

The Twentieth Century to the Present

Read: **McGrath, Christianity, pp. 181-198

November 4th

Journals Due – individual conversations in class and during office hours
Second Take-Home Test Assigned

November 9th

Church Visit Paper Assigned

Second Take-Home Test Due

[November 11th – No Class Veteran's Day]

IV Contemporary Issues

November 16th

1. World Christianities

Read: **Philip Jenkins, "The Christian Revolution" in The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity, pp. 1-14.

November 18th

The Rise of the New Christianity

Read: **Philip Jenkins, "The Rise of the New Christianity" in The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity, pp. 101-133.

[November 23rd No Class AAR Meetings]

[November 25th Thanksgiving – No Class]

November 30th

2. Evangelical Christianity Today

a. Evangelicalism and Trump

Read: **Gerardo Marti, "The Unexpected President: The 2016 Trump Election and White Evangelical Support" Chapter One pp. 1-23 in American Blindspot: Race, Class, Religion and the Trump Presidency (2020)

December 2nd

b. Liberal vs. Conservative Divisions over Gender

Read: **R. Marie Griffith, "Introduction" pp. vii-xx to Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics (2017)

December 7th

3. Spiritual but not Religious

Read: *New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/us/examining-the-growth-of-the-spiritual-but-not-religious.html>

Church Visit Paper Due

Third Take Home Test Assigned

Journals Due December 8th (Conversations scheduled after reading days)

December 13th

Third Take-Home Test Due

POLICIES, RULES, AND RESOURCES

1. Late or Make-Up Assignments: You may take an exam early or receive an extension on an exam or essay assignment only in extraordinary circumstances. If possible, please request prior approval from me. If that is not possible, please contact me as soon as possible to arrange for the makeup. If an extension is not granted, the assignment will be marked down 1/3 grade (e.g., from B+ to B) for each day late.
2. Completion of All Assignments: You must complete all assignments and fulfill the requirement for class participation in order to pass the course. I will not average a grade that is missing any assignment or requirement.
3. Attendance and Participation: Class attendance is required. See above n.4
4. Common Courtesy: Cell phones should be turned off during class, except in emergencies, when you may set your phone to vibrate so you can receive notifications. Please notify me at the start of class in this situation. You may take notes on a laptop computer, although I may ask you to turn off the computer if circumstances warrant.
5. I reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (e.g., whispering, reading a newspaper) to leave the class.
6. Honor Code: The honor code applies to this and all courses taken at UF:
"We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity. On all work submitted for credit by students at the university, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment"
(<https://archive.catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/1617//advising/info/student-honor-code.aspx>).

The university specifically prohibits cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, bribery, conspiracy, and fabrication. Any student(s) demonstrated to have cheated, plagiarized, or otherwise violated the Honor Code in any assignment for this course will fail the course. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines may result in judicial action and sanctions, as specified in the Student Conduct Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>).

7. Accommodation for Disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the me when requesting accommodation.
8. Counseling Resources: Resources available on-campus for students include the following: a. University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575, personal and career counseling; b. Student Mental Health, Student Health Care Center, 392-1171, personal counseling; c. Sexual Assault Recovery

Services (SARS), Student Health Care Center, 392-1161, sexual counseling; Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.

9. Software Use: All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate

CHURCH VISIT: INSTRUCTIONS (5 pages)

The purpose of this assignment is for you to describe and seek to explain how your chosen Christian Church worships and think about its meaning in a social context. As a participant-observer, you will directly observe the worship of a group of religious practitioners as it unfolds. After the service you will informally interview one or more of the members about their experience of this worship and what it means to them. Try to talk with one person leading the service, but also with ordinary members. Introduce yourself, tell them what you are seeking to learn, and keep the conversation as short as they wish to make it. Don't take notes during your talk or tape record it. Afterwards, you should draw up an overview of what you saw and heard. This will provide you with detailed notes for your report.

The report's first task should be DESCRIPTIVE, you should rely mainly on what you saw and what you were told. The report's second task is INTERPRETIVE. Drawing on class readings to date, discussions, and your own insights, what can you say about the relationship of this group to the larger American society? What are their points of tension and/or accommodation? What is important for others to know about this group and their relationship to American society? The paper **MUST** have a thesis and this should be stated in the first paragraph. There is no need to do external research. However, you will need to be clear and concise, selective and organized as a whole. Keep the primary thrust of the report descriptive, bringing in ideas from class where they throw light on the description. Conclude with some ideas about how you see the relationship between the ritual's meaning and the social setting of their lives and how the community under study relates to the larger American society.

The church you chose to visit must be approved by me ahead of time.