

Introduction to Theology & Religious Studies (TRS101.52)

Summer 2, 2014 (June 16–July 17)

Online and Asynchronous

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to the religious beliefs, behaviors, and communities of human beings across the centuries and in diverse parts of the world. (Please note that this is not a “world religions” class, but rather an introduction to the academic study of religion.) The central foci of the course will be threefold:

1. The complexes of symbol, myth, and ritual which comprise various religious systems
2. Specific beliefs which undergird these symbolic words and actions of various religious communities
3. Social and behavioral implications of these ritual celebrations and belief systems (*i.e.*, ethics and morality)

Indigenous, imagined, and real religions (especially Christianity) are used to provide examples of how religion functions. Methods and approaches are emphasized over the content of any specific religion(s).

Reflections on Jesuit Education & Ignatian Pedagogy²

Since the founding of their first school in 1548, the Society of Jesus has been committed to educating the whole person, head and heart, intellect, emotions, and will. Disciplined studies engaging critical thinking are constitutive of the call to human excellence. The “product” of a Jesuit education is not a parrot repeating rote knowledge, but a person who exhibits precision of thought, eloquence of speech, moral excellence, and social responsibility. Ignatian pedagogy entails an apprenticeship where teachers “accompany learners in the lifelong pursuit of competence, conscience, and compassionate commitment”—a radically different process than the “banking” model ubiquitous in other educational settings. This course is designed to mesh with this active-learning stance toward education.

Student Learning Objectives

By successfully completing this course, a student will develop the following competencies:

1. Cognitive:
 - a. Recognize, define, and correctly use the key terms relating to the academic study of religion.
 - b. Understand how to interpret religious texts and visual media in accordance with their literary genres, cultural settings, and other salient features.
 - c. Present the views of religions other than her/his own in an accurate, coherent, and respectful way.
 - d. Recognize the inter-disciplinary nature of the academic study of religion.
 - e. Identify the web of connections between religion and “the real world” of culture, politics, and economics.
 - f. Gain a better understanding of her/his own religion and how it compares and contrasts with those of others.
2. Affective
 - a. Respectfully present views of those with whom you disagree, while giving reasons for your disagreement.
 - b. Recognize the value of an historical, analytical understanding of religions.
 - c. Respect the value of other religions in their own right, not simply as a supplement to your own.
 - d. Engage the challenge of the Jesuit, Catholic emphasis on being “a person for others,” and recognize the impact of such a lifestyle on oneself and society.
3. Skills
 - a. Hone critical thinking and reading skills.
 - b. Develop precision in speaking and writing.
 - c. Demonstrate command of the phenomenological method for study of religions.
 - d. Make fruitful use of the standard research tools for the academic study of religion.

¹ Use the “contacts” tool on the Blackboard site to find contact information for the technical support team.

² These reflections are based in part on a talk given in September 2005 by the Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus. These reflections developed as a response to a talk given in September 2005 by the Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus. A more developed exposition is provided on the course Blackboard site under the “Syllabus & Policies” Learning link.

Assessment

Students will demonstrate achievement of these learning outcomes by:

1. Successfully completing discussions, quizzes, examinations, and other assessments (SLOs #1–3)
2. Doing excellent work on the following writing assignments:
 - a. "What Is Real?" Essay (#1a–c, f; 2a–b; 3)
 - b. Verbatim Report (#1a & c; 2a & c; 3)
 - c. Credo Essay (#1a–b, e, f; 2b; 3)
 - d. Vocation Essay (#1a–b, e; 2a, d; 3)
 - e. Religious Worldview Podcast Script (#1–3)
3. Creating an interesting and informative podcast on the topic of assignment #2e (SLOs #1–3)

Class Format

The course is presented asynchronously online through the Blackboard site, which has been designed to include a variety of media to engage participants in the contents. Course components include assigned readings; PowerPoint presentations; reflective & research essays; films, videos, & music; a podcast; online discussions; quizzes; self-assessments; and a final examination. Students are expected and encouraged to be active participants in the learning process. To that end, each student will develop a customized learning contract that will include key personal goals for the course and strategies for reaching those student goals.

Expectations

- *Student responsibility* includes careful reading of assigned texts; civil and active participation in discussions; elegance in written work; and successful and punctual completion of all assignments, assessments, and test measurements. Students also are expected to take ownership of their learning by working directly with JCU ITS and Blackboard technical support to resolve any course delivery issues or other technical difficulties that may arise.
- *Academic integrity* expectations are the same in an online class as with one on campus: Submit only your own independent and original work; properly document any sources you use; except a Bible, use NO resources while taking the quizzes/exam *unless the directions clearly specify that you may do otherwise*. ESL students are permitted to use an English-X (insert the pertinent foreign language) conversion dictionary for all assignments, including quizzes and exams. Teamwork may be permitted on specific assignments; if so, this will be noted in the assignment description. Violations of academic honesty incur a failing grade for the course.
- *Timeliness*. Because of the compressed summer schedule, the pace of this course will be much faster than during the regular academic year. This means timeliness is essential to success in the course (and even to survival). Late writing assignments will incur a minimum grade penalty of 10%/day; late discussion contributions and assessments will not be accepted.
- *Comprehension*. Reading assignments require analysis and synthesis for real understanding. Test questions, including objective questions, will require you not merely to have memorized course content but also to demonstrate that you understand its significance and, in the case of methodology, how and why to use it.

Quizzes & Exams

Each unit of study involves several quizzes to test your reading comprehension and recollection of key terms and facts. Occasionally, a quiz will require short essay answers, but typically the questions take objective formats such as true/false, multiple-choice, or matching. Essay quizzes may be taken only once, but the objective quizzes may be retaken an unlimited number of times. If a quiz is retaken, the last score (which presumably will be the highest) is the one that enters into the actual course grade calculations.

During the summer session, there is only one examination, the cumulative final, which is administered during the last week of class.

Required Written Assignments

Required class work will include a few learning assessments (which earn a completion grade), three short essays and an observation report, at least thrice weekly online discussion posts (which are graded), and a final podcast (the script of which is to be submitted with the video).

Student Self-Assessments:

1. Pretest, Learning Goals Worksheet, & Learning Contract - DUE Wednesday of Week 1 @ NOON
2. Posttest, Summative Assessment of Learning Contract, & Final Course Evaluation - DUE Wednesday of Week 5 @ NOON

Major Assignments:

1. What Is Real? - DUE Friday Night of Week 1 @ Midnight
2. Verbatim Observation - DUE Friday Night of Week 1 @ Midnight
3. *Credo* - DUE Friday Night of Week 3 @ Midnight
4. Vocation - DUE Friday Night of Week 4 @ Midnight
5. Podcast Script & Podcast - DUE Thursday of Week 5 @ NOON

Detailed expectations and grading criteria for specific writing assignments can be found at the Bible web's writing page (www.jcu.edu/bible/academicexcellence/writing) or through the "Writer's Toolbox" link of the Blackboard site. Online discussion posts are treated as formal writing, so you will do well to proofread your posts before submitting them. All assignments are graded based on timeliness, accuracy, insightfulness, and elegance of expression.

For any written work, keep in mind the following:

1. Written assignments are statements of *your point of view* with an aim to *persuading the reader*. Simply making an assertion falls flat; to be persuasive, you need to present evidence and a rationale for why that assertion makes sense (e.g., cite sources you have read, argue from practical experience, and/or give sociological or historical data.) Answer the questions of the critical reader: Why should I agree with this? Why is this a convincing interpretation of the question or situation?
2. Know the meanings of the terms you use, include clear definitions of your key terms, and be consistent in using the terms in accord with your definition. As with your other data, draw your definitions from university-level academic sources (e.g., the Oxford English *Dictionary* for general terms, the *Concise Sacramentum Mundi* for theological ones).
3. Watch grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax, *etc.*—all the rudiments of writing—and be sure to use inclusive language. If you are unsure of your writing skills, ask a friend or family member who writes well to help you proofread, or consult a writing tutor.
4. Avoid contractions and colloquialisms in formal prose.
5. Follow the humanities-style citation format from *the Chicago Manual of Style* to credit your sources. An essay typically ought to make use of at least six university-level, academic sources.
6. Unless specifically indicated in the assignment, e-texts available through EBSCO and other such academic resources are welcome, but NO websites are permitted as resources for class assignments. See the more detailed policy on the Bible web's writing page noted above.
7. For further information and suggestions, see "What Professors Expect from Your Papers" and other resources available through the Blackboard site "Writer's Toolbox."

Grading

The average course grade at the university is defined as a "C." Students who do the required work at an adequate level earn a "C" grade. Students who do the required work at a superior level earn a "B." An "A" grade denotes outstanding student performance; achieving such a distinction typically involves work beyond what is required for the course. Students who seek an "A" grade in this class would do well to plan strategies for achieving this goal and discuss them with the instructor before the term begins.

The various coursework components will be weighted in the following manner when calculating the final grade:

- 10% Assessments
- 15% Discussions
- 50% Essays & Podcast (10% each)
- 10% Final Examination
- 15% Quizzes

Grading Scale

- A = 95%
- B+ = 88%
- B- = 81%
- C = 74%
- D+ = 65%
- F = 0-59%
- A- = 91%
- B = 85%
- C+ = 78%
- C- = 70%
- D = 60%

Required Texts & Resources

Required readings and most AV materials will be posted on the Blackboard. Students will need to own, borrow, or rent the following feature films:

- *A Beautiful Mind*
- *The Matrix* (the original movie) or *Inception*

Recommended Texts & Resources

Films

- *Contact*
- *Jacob the Liar*
- *Schindler's List*

Texts

- Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Tr. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Scribner's, 1970. ISBN 0-684-71725-5.
- Douglass, Mary. *Purity and Danger*.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Future of an Illusion*. Tr. and ed. James Strachey. New York/London: Norton, 1961.
- Greene, Graham. *The Power and the Glory*. New York: Penguin, 1981. ISBN 0140184996.
- Lewis, C. S. (Clive Staples) *The Great Divorce* and *Perelandra*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Nolan, Albert. *Jesus Before Christianity*.
- Otto, Rudolph. *The Idea of the Holy*.
- Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. New York: Bantam/Doubleday/Dell, 1960, 1982. ISBN 0-553-27253-5.

Class Schedule

The course will have five sequential, topical units, one for each week of the summer session. To help you pace yourself without the external structure of specific class meetings, I have posted on the Blackboard site a suggested timetable for completing the various reading and writing assignments within each unit. However, since the course is offered asynchronously, you may adapt that timetable to suit your particular schedule—as long as you finish each unit by the stated deadline. If you wish and have the time at your disposal, you are free to work ahead through the five units. Even if you work ahead on the content units, however, the final exam will be available only during the final week of the session.

- Unit 1. Beginning the Academic Study of Religion—DUE NOON Friday of Week 1
Addresses the question: What is religion and how do scholars study it?
- Unit 2. Religious Ritual, Transforming Encounter with Sacred Mystery—DUE NOON Thursday of Week 2
Explores the function of ritual in religious systems.
- Unit 3. Religious Beliefs & Sacred Scriptures—DUE NOON Thursday of Week 3
Addresses sacred scriptures, religious language, the ineffable experience of the transcendent, and the human responses of faith, belief, and doubt.
- Unit 4. Religious Ethics, the Religious Worldview in Action—DUE NOON Thursday of Week 4
Analyzes “where the rubber meets the road” in terms of religious attitudes and lifestyles.
- Unit 5. Religion in Contemporary Life—DUE NOON Thursday of Week 5
Surveys a handful of the many varieties of religious experience and expression in the contemporary world.

Services for Students with Disabilities

John Carroll University recognizes its responsibility for creating an institutional climate in which students with disabilities can succeed. In accordance with federal law, if you have a documented disability (Learning, Psychological, Sensory, Physical, or Medical) you may be eligible to request accommodations from the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Please contact the Director, Allison West at (216) 397-4967 or come to the office located in room 7A, in the Garden Level of the Administration Building. Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive so it is best to register at the beginning of each semester. Only accommodations approved by SSD will be recognized in the classroom. Please contact SSD if you have further questions.

Course Policies

See the Blackboard site for other important course policies, expectations, and procedures. Those statements constitute addenda to this Syllabus and are included in the student's contract concerning this course.