

Religious Studies 102
Section 09
The Bible: Texts and Contexts
Spring 2008

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Office Hours: Mondays 10:00-11:30, Wednesdays 1:00-2:00

Day & Time: TR 9:30-10:45
Location: Clough 302

Course Overview

Religious Studies 102 continues the Life sequence begun in Religious Studies 101 by examining the development and central themes of the traditions based on the Bible. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to some of the important facets of post-biblical theology and religious practice as well as the contexts in which they occur. Beginning with the close of the Bible and proceeding to the present, we will consider in chronological fashion some of the representative figures and issues of these traditions. Through careful reading and discussion of important writers, we shall develop an understanding of significant concepts, terms, and points of view in western religion. As a writing intensive course, Religious Studies 102 will also provide opportunities for the engagement of theological ideas and practices through a series of written assignments that are designed to stimulate critical thinking and improve students' skills to express themselves verbally.

Required Texts

- Augustine, *The Confessions*
- *The Rule of St. Benedict*
- John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*
- Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant*
- Any assigned reading not contained in these books is available on the course Moodle site

Course Requirements and Grading Proportions

Regular Attendance and Meaningful Participation (15%)

In order to benefit from this course, you will need to be present and prepared to participate in our discussions. Bring your assigned texts to class every day and be prepared to discuss them. Simply attending class is insufficient to earn highest marks for participation. You must also participate actively in our discussions and show respect for your fellow students. **Absences and tardiness will negatively affect your course grade. More than five absences will result in a failing grade for the course.**

Working Groups (15%)

You will be assigned to a group responsible for organizing class discussions. Each group will lead several class discussions. The group has four responsibilities:

- Gather questions from classmates at the beginning of the class session
- Provide a précis of one assigned text
- Make a presentation/organize our conversation
- Submit a summary of the discussion and a revised précis before the next class meeting

Divide your work so that each group member takes responsibility for each task at least once. All materials must be submitted to me electronically before class meets. I will post them to the course Moodle site after class.

Weekly Descriptive Essays (20%)

Weekly writing assignments provide an opportunity for you to practice both formal, analytical writing and personal, reflective writing. Assigned topics are indicated on the Moodle site and on the course schedule on the due date. Assignments must be submitted before class via the Moodle site.

Late papers will not be accepted.

The first part of each weekly essay is a descriptive account of the assigned text. A descriptive essay provides an account of the meaning and function of a text by answering two questions: “what does it say?” and “what does it do?” The second portion of your essay should include a one-paragraph reflection on how the issue raised in the text informs your own thought and practice. These essays should be 300-400 words.

Analytic Essay, Due March 27 (15%)

The purpose of the analytic essay is not only to describe the assigned text, but to evaluate it. A good analysis will attend to the central claim of the text (its thesis), the evidence adduced in support of that claim, and the structure of the argument. Your analysis should note both the merits and flaws of the argument. The assigned text for this essay is Jonathan Edwards’s *The Nature of True Virtue*. This essay should be 1200-1400 words. Your essay must be submitted before class via the Moodle site.

Spiritual/Intellectual Autobiography, Due April 10 (10%)

After reviewing Augustine’s *Confessions*, and the introductions to Sallie McFague’s *Life Abundant* and James Gustafson’s *A Sense of the Divine*, write your own spiritual/intellectual autobiography. Notice that Augustine, McFague, and Gustafson provide both broad, sweeping descriptions of their lives and occasional, detailed accounts of particular events. Try to do the same: zero in from time to time on particular episodes that have been moments of clarification for you. Your autobiography should be 900-1100 words. Your paper must be submitted before class via the Moodle site.

Final Comparative and Reflective Essay, Due 11:00 AM, Saturday, May 3 (25%)

The comparative essay brings three texts into conversation. You should offer an analysis of each text, but this analysis is in service of your comparative work. What values and commitments do the authors share? Where do they differ? How might they respond to each other on their points of

difference? How do these perspectives compare with your own? The comparative essay should be 1200-1400 words. Your final exam/essay must be submitted via the Moodle site by 11:00 AM on the date of the final exam.

All writing assignments must conform to the following formatting requirements:

1. In the upper left-hand corner type your name, the date, and the word count
2. Never use a cover sheet
3. Pledge the paper
4. Two lines down, centered and in bold, type the title of your project
5. Use the Times New Roman 12 point font
6. Set your line spacing to double
7. Use page numbers in the upper right-hand corner of all pages except the first

Academic Honesty

All work must be pledged. All submitted assignments should be exclusively your own work. **All students are expected to abide by the Honor Code. I will be diligent about reporting all violations to the Honor Council.** If you have any questions or concerns as to what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, please consult me **before** submitting the work. Together we shall likely be able to avoid any such incidents. I will indicate in class when collaboration is appropriate.

Moodle

A copy of this syllabus, reading guides, and many of the assigned readings are found on the Moodle site for this course. To use Moodle, click on the “login” menu at the upper right corner of the Rhodes home page. Click on “Moodle” link and follow the instructions. You will use your normal Rhodes user ID and password. If you have trouble logging in, call the Rhodes Help Desk, extension HELP (4357).

Incompletes

An incomplete grade may be given to a student who is unable to complete the required coursework because of illness or other extenuating circumstances. Students wishing to receive an incomplete must consult with the professor prior to the final examination. Upon the professor’s approval, the student must submit the appropriate application to the Registrar before final grades are due. All unfinished work must then be completed and submitted to the professor by the end of the second week of the following semester.

Students with Disabilities

Students with a documented disability in need of special accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services and also discuss the situation with their professors. Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented psychological and physical disabilities.

Other Course Policies

- Any paper not submitted at the beginning of class on the due date will be considered late. Late papers will be penalized by 5%, plus 5% per day, including weekends and holidays. ***I will not accept late weekly writing assignments.***
- Lectures and class sessions may not be recorded without prior written consent of the professor.
- You can expect papers to be graded and returned about two weeks after the due date.
- Turn off all pagers, cell phones, and watch alarms before coming to class.

Term Schedule

- 1 Jan. 10 R **Establishing Group Norms**
Reading: Course Syllabus
Due: Acknowledgement Form (fill out and submit online before class)
- 2 Jan. 15 T **Challenges to the Early Christian Movement**
Reading: Correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the Emperor Trajan
Gospel of Thomas
The Second Treatise of the Great Seth
- 3 Jan. 17 R **“From Jesus to Christ”**
- 4 Jan. 22 T **Incarnation and Trinity: Irenaeus, Arius, and the Council of Nicea**
Reading: Irenaeus, Incarnation, Recapitulation, Redemption
Arius, Letter of Arius to Eusebius
Nicene Creed
Due: Descriptive Essay #1, Identify Irenaeus’s central claim and two arguments he makes in support of it.
Leaders: Group 1
- 5 Jan. 24 R **Practices: Athanasius and Early Asceticism**
Reading: Athanasius, On the Incarnation
Athanasius, Life of St. Antony
Leaders: Group 2
- 6 Jan. 29 T **Trinity Again: Gregory of Nyssa, the Monarchians, and Macrina**
Reading: Gregory of Nyssa, On Not Three Gods
Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Macrina
Due: Descriptive Essay #2, Why does Gregory admire Macrina?
Leaders: Group 3

- 7 Jan. 31 R **Pseudo-Dionysius: Mysticism and Liturgy**
 Reading: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy
 The Mystical Theology
 Leaders: Group 4
- 8 Feb. 5 T **Intellectual/Spiritual Autobiography**
 Reading: McFague, *Life Abundant*, “A Brief Credo” (3-24)
 Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine*, “Introduction”
 Due: Descriptive Essay #3, Choose one episode from one of the assigned
 autobiographies and explain how it shaped the author’s thought.
- 9 Feb. 7 R **Spirituality and Architecture: Inside an Eastern Orthodox Church**
 Due: Descriptive Essay #4, Instructions can be found on the Moodle site
- 10 Feb. 12 T **Augustine**
 Reading: *The Confessions*, Books 1-3
 Leaders: Group 1
- 11 Feb. 14 R **Augustine**
 Reading: *The Confessions*, Books 4-6
 Due: Descriptive Essay #5, Focus on book 4, chapters 4-9
 Leaders: Group 2
- 12 Feb. 19 T **Augustine**
 Reading: *The Confessions*, Books 7-10
 Leaders: Group 3
- 13 Feb. 21 R **Benedict**
 Reading: *The Rule of St. Benedict*
 Leaders: Group 4
- 14 Feb. 26 T **Medieval Women’s Spirituality**
 Reading: Mechthild, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*
 Kraemer, *The Status of Women*
 Agrippa, *Declaration on the Nobility and Preeminence
 of the Female Sex*
 Leaders: Group 1
- 15 Feb. 28 R **Faith Seeking Understanding: Anselm and Aquinas**
 Reading: Anselm, *Proslogion*
 Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*
 Thomas Aquinas, *The Five Ways*
 Due: Descriptive Essay #6, Focus on *Cur Deus Homo*
 Leaders: Group 2
- Mar. 3-7 **Spring Break**

- 16 Mar. 11 T **Luther**
 Reading: The Freedom of a Christian
 "Luther" (film)
 Leaders: Group 3
- 17 Mar. 13 R **The Radical Reformations**
 Reading: Menno Simons, The Writings of Menno Simons
 The Schleithem Confession
 Due: Descriptive Essay #7
 Leaders: Group 4
- 18 Mar. 18 T **Calvin**
 Reading: *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (21-35, 39-41, 69-75)
 Leaders: Group 1
- Mar. 20 R **Easter Break**
- 19 Mar. 25 T **Calvin**
 Reading: *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (231-271)
 Leaders: Group 2
- 20 Mar. 27 R **Jonathan Edwards**
 Reading: *The Nature of True Virtue*
 Due: Analytic Essay
- 21 Apr. 1 T **Schleiermacher**
 Reading: Excerpts from the Speeches
 The Relation of Prayer to Outward Circumstances
 Leaders: Group 3
- 22 Apr. 3 R **Reinhold Niebuhr**
 Reading: Sin as Pride
 Due: Descriptive Essay #8
 Leaders: Group 4
- 23 Apr. 8 T **James Cone and Delores Williams**
 Reading: Cone, The Content and Method of Black Theology
 Williams, A Womanist Notion of Sin
 Leaders: Group 1
- 24 Apr. 10 R **Spiritual Autobiography**
 Due: Spiritual/Intellectual Autobiography

- 25 Apr. 15 T **McFague**
Reading: *Life Abundant*, “The Matter of Theology” (39-67)
Due: Descriptive Essay #9
Leaders: Group 2
- 26 Apr. 17 R **McFague**
Reading: *Life Abundant*, “The Contemporary Economic Model
and Worldview” (75-97)
Leaders: Group 3
- 27 Apr. 22 T **McFague**
Reading: *Life Abundant*, “Christ and Salvation” (157-180)
Leaders: Group 4
- 28 Apr. 24 R Review
- May 3 Sa **Final Exam Due by 11:00 AM**