

MWF 12:00, 2:00  
Clough 313

Office Hours: Clough 400A  
TTh 1:30-3:30  
or by appointment: 843-3740  
robertsm@rhodes.edu

## RELS 102: The Bible: Texts and Contexts

Dr. Michelle Voss Roberts  
\*syllabus subject to change

### Course Objectives

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 and a site visit that are designed to stimulate critical thinking and improve students' skills to express themselves verbally.

In the first unit of the course, we will examine the early Christian world and the central issues faced by the first Christians. We will observe the great diversity among early Christians and how processes of institutionalization gradually shaped this diversity into orthodoxy, with special attention to Augustine's autobiography. We especially observe the *embodiment* of Christianity in the characteristic religious practices that developed during this era, including textual practices, sacraments, pilgrimage, and asceticism.

In the second unit, we will see how these early theologies and practices shaped the religious outlook and activities of the medieval world. Our examination of this era will focus on monasticism, the phenomenon of mysticism, the gendered nature of authority, religious icons and architecture, and the rise of Islam. Unit three investigates the religious reformations of the late Middle Ages; in this section of the course we will encounter the ideas of Lutheran, Anabaptist, and Catholic reformers that feed into the modern period.

In the final unit of the course, we will meet decidedly new problems, moral dilemmas, and efforts to maintain Christianity's intelligibility in the modern world. We will review the importance of religious experience for western Christians as well as observe the worship of specific Christian communities in Memphis.

## Required Texts

- Cyril of Jerusalem, *On Christian Sacraments*
- Augustine, *Confessions*
- Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*
- Daniel Matt, *Zohar*
- Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*
- Mark Salzman, *Lying Awake*
- *Rhodes College: A Guide to Effective Paper Writing*
- Other readings and films on Moodle

Attendance is expected. You have three absences in case of emergency: use them wisely. For every four unexcused absences, your grade will be reduced by one third a letter grade (A to A-, A- to B+, and so on).

In addition to class attendance, students will attend three of the “Engagement Opportunities” listed in the syllabus (you may suggest other opportunities as alternatives). A one-page response to each Engagement Opportunity is due on Moodle by the following class day.

Quizzes: I will administer unannounced quizzes at the beginning of class. Quiz questions will test completion of the assigned reading and films and encourage punctuality. I will drop the lowest quiz grade. Absences: you may notify me *before* your absence and request to take a quiz by e-mail (due before the next class).

Contribution: Contribution to class discussions and online activities accounts for **20% of your grade**. Thoughtful, active participation by all members of the class community is essential for the success of our investigations. Appropriate participation consists of contributing questions or observations based upon assigned texts or upon personal knowledge and experience that pertain to the topic(s) at hand. It requires the generosity of listening as well as speaking. A good rule of thumb is that you should actively contribute to class discussion at least once per class period—either **in class** or by posting questions, comments, or responses to questions **on the RS 102 blog** (Moodle).

Writing: RELS 102 is a writing-intensive course. I will frequently assign **daily writing** on a question assigned at the end of each class. These are **due in class**. When I collect them, they will be graded on a scale of 1-10 as follows:

1-3: Unsatisfactory. You display evidence that you have read the materials but have failed to: a) demonstrate basic understanding of the material; b) address the assigned question; c) critically engage or analyze the material.

4-7: Satisfactory. You address the question and display understanding of the material but have not engaged the ideas beyond basic comprehension.

8-10: Very good - Excellent. You display solid comprehension of, and engagement with, the material.

There are no exams—you will receive your exam questions one at a time in the form of a series of papers. Students will write **four formal papers**. The objective of these assignments is to develop skills of careful reading, textual analysis, critical thinking, thesis development, application, and revision. Papers are due to my office (hard copy) **by 5 pm** on the due date.

**I do not accept late submissions.**

How I Assign Letter Grades (borrowed from John Bean, *Engaging Ideas*, 264):

In grading “thesis papers” ... I ask myself the following set of questions:

1. Does the paper have a thesis?
2. Does the thesis address itself to an appropriate question or topic?
3. Is the paper free from long stretches of quotation and summaries that exist only for their own sakes and remain unanalyzed?
4. Can the writer produce complete sentences?
5. Is the paper free from basic grammatical errors?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” I give the paper some kind of C. If the answer to most of the questions is “no,” its grade will be even lower.

For papers which have emerged unscathed thus far, I add the following questions:

6. How thoughtful is the paper? Does it show real originality?
7. How adequate is the thesis? Does it respond to its question or topic in a full and interesting way? Does it have an appropriate degree of complexity?
8. How well organized is the paper? Does it stick to the point? Does every paragraph contain a clear topic sentence? If not, is another kind of organizing principle at work? Are the transitions well made? Does it have a real conclusion, not simply a stopping place?
9. How well-supported is the paper?
10. Is the style efficient, not wordy or unclear?
11. Does the writing betray any special elegance?
12. Above all, can I hear a lively, intelligent, interesting human voice speaking to me (or to another audience, if that’s what the writer intends) as I read the paper?

Depending on my answers to such questions, I give the paper some kind of A or some kind of B.

Format: Every paper you turn in for this class should follow these guidelines:

12 point, Times New Roman font

1” margins

Double spaced (DS)

Longer quotations (over three typed lines) should be typed single-spaced, indented, with no quotation marks.

Page numbers on the bottom of every page

Citations must give page numbers

See Editorial Notations handout for common problems with student writing.

### Inclusive Language

This course seeks to be inclusive of people of different genders, races, cultures, and sexual orientations. Please be mindful that, when writing papers, you should use terms like people, us, human being, humanity, etc. instead of the terms man, mankind, and men.

### Honor Code and Plagiarism

I support the Honor Code of Rhodes College and expect that you pledge any and all work that you submit for this class. You should refer to the work of others in the Chicago style as outlined in *Rhodes College: A Guide to Effective Paper Writing*.

All written work in this course *must* be original to you. These examples are copied from the University of Albany web-site and may provide a fuller understanding of what falls under the plagiarism umbrella.

([http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate\\_bulletin/regulations.html#integrity](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html#integrity))

EXAMPLES OF PLAGIARISM INCLUDE: failure to acknowledge the source(s) of even a few phrases, sentences, or paragraphs; failure to acknowledge a quotation or paraphrase of paragraph-length sections of a paper; failure to acknowledge the source(s) of a major idea or the source(s) for an ordering principle central to the paper's or project's structure; failure to acknowledge the source (quoted, paraphrased, or summarized) of major sections or passages in the paper or project; the unacknowledged use of several major ideas or extensive reliance on another person's data, evidence, or critical method; submitting as one's own work, work borrowed, stolen, or purchased from someone else.

Encyclopedias provide summations of knowledge; they are not usually considered scholarly contributions. They can, however, provide a fine *starting point* for your research. Entries typically contain a bibliography: these are the sources that should constitute your research. I do NOT want to see Wikipedia in your bibliography!

If you have questions about these policies, please feel free to consult with me.

### Academic Accommodations

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services at x 3994 as soon as possible.

### Grade Distribution

Contribution	20%
Quizzes	20%
Debate	10%
Debate analysis paper (2 pp.)	5%
Rhetorical analysis paper (3 pp.)	10%
Comparative paper (choose 1, 4-5 pp.)	15%
Field Visit presentation	5%

Application paper (4-5 pp)

15%

Grading Scale

94-100	A	90-93.9	A-	88-89.9	B+	84-87.9	B
80-83.9	B-	78-79.9	C+	74-77.9	C	70-73.9	C-
68-69.9	D+	63-67.9	D	60-62.9	D-	0-60	F

COURSE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS
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### Unit 1: The Early Christian Body

Week 1

W 1/9: Introduction. "How to Read a Primary Text"

- F 1/11:        Pilgrimage
- View Film, "From Jesus to Christ" on Moodle
  - Review the web page for the film: especially the section on "Why did Christianity Succeed?"  
(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/>).
  - Read excerpt from Egeria, *Travels*

Week 2

M 1/14:        Scripture        Origen, excerpt from *On First Principles*

W 1/16        Virginity        Jerome, *Letter to Eustochium*

F 1/18        Asceticism        *Life of Antony* (excerpts)

Week 3

M 1/21        MLK HOLIDAY

W 1/23        Baptism        Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, pp. ix-xxiv, 40-67

F 1/25        Eucharist        Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures*, pp. xxv-xxxiv, 67-80

Week 4

M 1/28        Desire        Augustine, *Confessions*, Books I-II, III.1-5, and IV

Engagement Opportunity 1	Ethicist Nel Noddings, Jan. 28, times TBA
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W 1/30        Grace        Augustine, *Confessions*, Books VI.11-16, VIII, IX.1, 5-13

F 2/1 Matter Augustine, *Confessions*, Books VII; X.6-8, 24-27; XII.1-8  
Rhetorical analysis paper due, 5 pm

## Unit 2: Biblical Traditions in the Medieval World

Week 5

M 2/4 Monasticism Benedict of Nursia, *Rule of Saint Benedict*, Introduction, Chronology, chapters 1-30;  
Listen to interview with Joan Chittister (Moodle)

W 2/6 Monasticism *Rule of Saint Benedict*, chapters 31-73;

Engagement Opportunity 2	Liberation Theologian James Cone, Feb. 6 at 7 pm, Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church
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F 2/8 Debate Does early/medieval Christianity denigrate the body?

Week 6

M 2/11 Islam *Qur'an*, Sura 4  
View the film, *The Message*

T 2/12 Debate Paper 1 due (non-debaters only), 5 pm

W 2/13 Islam John Kaltner, “Mary” or “Jesus”  
Sign up to be an expert on one or the other

F 2/15 Icons John of Damascus, “First Apology,” *On the Divine Images*

Week 7

M 2/18 Sacred Space Abbot of St. Denis, *Book of Suger*  
View the film *Cathedral* (60 min.)  
**Meet in Voorhies chapel**

T 2/19 Comparative Essay Opportunity #1 (4-5 pages), due 5 pm.  
Compare and contrast the Qur'an and John of Damascus on the use of images in worship

W 2/20 **Visit to St. John's Orthodox Church**

View their website at <http://www.stjohnmemphis.org/>, especially the link on “Orthodoxy”

F 2/22	<u>Mystical Ascent</u>	Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Mystical Theology</i> Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i> , Pt. 1, Q. 3, Art. 1, “Whether God is a Body?”
Week 8		
M 2/25	<u>Mystical Union</u>	Bernard of Clairvaux, <i>The Three Kisses</i> Mechthild of Magdeburg, <i>The Flowing Light of the Godhead</i> , I.1-5, 11-20, I.44 (=pp. 39-44, 46-48, 58-62)
W 2/27	<u>Mystical Authority</u>	Mechthild of Magdeburg, <i>Flowing Light of the Godhead</i> . Introduction: pages 1-11 and II.26, IV.2
F 2/29	<u>Mystical Visions</u>	Mechthild of Magdeburg II.4, III.1, III.9, III.21, V.4 <b>Field Research Project proposal due in class</b>

### SPRING RECESS

Week 9		
M 3/10	<u>Jewish Mysticism</u>	<i>Zohar</i> , xxi-43
W 3/12	<u>Jewish Mysticism</u>	<i>Zohar</i> , 44-125

### Unit 3: Reformed Bodies

Engagement Opportunity 3	Philosopher Linda Alcoff, March 13-14 (TBA)	
F 3/14	<u>Politics:</u>	Martin Luther, <i>To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation</i> <b>Comparative Essay Opportunity #2, due 5 pm: Compare and contrast the role of the feminine in <i>Zohar</i> and <i>The Flowing Light of the Godhead</i>.</b>
Week 10		
M 3/17	<u>Works:</u>	View the film <i>Luther</i> Martin Luther, <i>The Freedom of a Christian</i>
W 3/19	<u>Gender:</u>	Katherine Rem and Ursula of Munsterberg, <i>Letters</i>

F 3/21        **EASTER RECESS**

Week 11

M 3/24        Worship/Sacrament    The Schleithem Confession

Engagement Opportunity 4    Anthropologist Donald Johannson, Gilliland Symposium, 3/25
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W 3/26        Catholic Reformation Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*

F 3/28        New World                Jose de Acosta, “On the Salvation of the Indians”

Engagement Opportunity 5    Bach Mass in B Minor, Immaculate Conception, 3/28, 7:30
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#### **Unit 4: The Body and Christianity in the Modern World**

Week 12

M 3/31        Experiencing Religion        Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion*,  
Second Speech (focus on pp. 18-29)

W 4/2        Questioning Religion        Karl Barth, “The Revelation of God as the  
Abolition of Religion”  
\* Begin reading *Lying Awake*

F 4/4        Questioning Experience        Mark Salzman, *Lying Awake*  
Comparative Essay Opportunity #3, due 5 pm: Compare and contrast the  
notion of religion in Schleiermacher and Barth.

Week 13

M 4/7        Projecting Religion    Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, selections

W 4/9        Questioning Projection    James Cone, “The Social Context of Theology”

F 4/11        Questioning Projection    Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, chapter 1

Week 14

M 4/14        Debate                *Do Reformation and modern Christianity value the  
experiences of some bodies more than others?*

W 4/16      Earth              Rosemary Ruether, *Gaia and God*, chapter 1

F 4/18      Review/Evaluations  
Debate Paper #2 due, 5 pm (non-debaters only)

Week 15

M 4/21      Observing Religion      Group Presentations of Field Observation Project

W 4/23      Observing Religion      Group Presentations of Field Observation Project

F 4/25      URCAS

M 4/28, 12pm (12:00 section)      Application Paper due with revision checklist

Sat. 5/3, 1pm (2:00 section):      Application Paper due with revision checklist

Application Paper: Use two course readings from the sixteenth century through the modern period to analyze the Field Research Project experience (3-4 pages).

**Student Acknowledgement**

I acknowledge that I have received and read carefully a copy of the syllabus for Religious Studies 102, "The Bible: Texts and Contexts" taught by Professor Voss Roberts in the Spring semester, 2008. I understand that I am responsible for fulfilling all obligations, for completing all assignments on time, and for adhering to all policies as specified in the syllabus. I also acknowledge that failure to do so will adversely affect my grade in this class. I further understand that the professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, and that I will be notified of any such changes by e-mail at my Rhodes College e-mail address.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Local Phone Number/E-mail Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Class Year:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your anticipated major (or academic interests if you are unsure about a major)?**

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**What did you learn in RS 101 that you hope to continue thinking about in RS 102?**

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**What is your interest in taking this class, and what do you hope to learn?**

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**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_