

RELIGION 156 — CHRISTIANITY

Fall 2009

Wednesdays and Fridays
12:45 P.M. to 2:05 P.M.
010 Eggers

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Course Description and Methods

This course is an introduction to the academic study of Christianity. Students can expect to learn about the ideas and beliefs, the sacred writings and practices of the people who call themselves Christians or who belong to Christendom or Christian culture, particularly in the Western world. Our approach to Christianity will not privilege any of its many groups, movements, practices, or expressions. Rather, we will take a humanistic approach to this complex set of faith traditions. That is, we will ask what Christianity has to do with being human; how it addresses human needs and concerns, particularly for those people who are committed to it. This means that we will ask who Christianity's people are, especially some of its leading thinkers and noteworthy figures; why this religion is compelling to them; how it addresses their concerns and issues; how it relates to their world; what problems it has caused and continues to cause for its own people as well as others; and why in spite of its problems, Christianity remains appealing and viable to a broad array of people over centuries and across cultures.

This humanistic approach to Christianity will primarily involve intellectual, social, and cultural history. That is, we will look at ideas, beliefs, sacred writings, creative expressions, cultural ideals, social values and conventions, personal experiences, and religious, moral, and institutional practices in their historical and cultural context in order to see how particular people at particular times with particular issues and concerns embraced or attended to this faith. In doing so, we will assume that as a religion, Christianity is something distinctive, something with its own integrity, even as it interacts with and is embedded in the world. Thus, we will not treat it as though it were simply reducible to an understanding of human behavior in sociological, psychological, or even philosophical terms, even though we will not neglect to attend to these insights, especially when we examine Christianity in the modern world.

Course Goals

There are two broad goals of this course. First, this course aims to give students a general understanding of Christianity, through its historical, intellectual, and cultural expressions, so that they might comprehend something of its significance – and pervasiveness – in human affairs

today. Second, this course aims to help students to think critically, particularly existentially, about a religion that itself claims to be fundamentally about the meaning of human life.

Required Course Texts

Catherine A. Cory and Michael J. Hollerich, eds., *The Christian Theological Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2009).

Readings in Christian Humanism, ed. Joseph M. Shaw et al (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2009, 1982)

Both of these texts are available in the Syracuse University Bookstore.

Highly Recommended Text

The HarperCollins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version (New York: Society of Biblical Literature/HarperCollins Publishers, 1993). All biblical references will come from this version of the Christian Bible, and students are expected to use it when they make references to the Bible. The most recent version of the study bible is available for purchase in the Syracuse University Bookstore. If you do not purchase your own copy, which you are strongly advised to do, then you will need to make photocopies of required readings from Bird Library's copy, which is currently on 2-hour reserve.

If you have taken REL 114 – The Bible, you may use *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, New Revised Standard Version. You, however, will need to figure out how to coordinate your use of this version with the work that we do in class.

Other Required Readings on Reserve

Other required readings listed on the schedule below will be available on Blackboard. Students should make their own copies, and bring them to class, when they are discussed.

Course Requirements and Grading

In addition to the **weekly reading assignments**, students will be required to: 1) take **three exams**, and 2) **participate in class through informal discussion**, occasional **short writing assignments**, and occasional **pop quizzes**.

Exams will account for three quarters of a student's grade. Thus, each of the three exams will account for one quarter of a student's grade. *The first exam* will be a combination of objective and short-answer questions worth up to 100 points. *The second exam*, also worth 100 points, will be a take-home, short-answer exam. Students will have the opportunity to write short responses to (that is, two to three paragraphs on) a select number of questions. (For example,

students might be asked to respond to five out of ten questions.) *The third exam* will be a take-home essay of no more than three pages, based on material in the *Christian Humanism* reader or on reserve, but not covered in class. This can include an analysis of any of the films related to these materials. We will discuss topics you might cover in more detail later in the class. This exam is designed to give students the opportunity to use what they have learned in the course to assess the meaning of Christianity for a particular figure or group of figures in the pre-modern or modern period. Like the first two exams, this exam will be worth 100 points.

Class participation, comprised of informal class discussion, short writing assignments, and perhaps pop quizzes, **will account for the last quarter of a student's grade.** A student's **regular participation in class discussion** will be noted by me and my assistant over the course of the semester. A letter grade will be assessed for it based upon the quality of a student's verbal participation—insightfulness, preparedness, and clarity. **Two short, occasional writing assignments**, which will be graded and returned as quickly as possible, will be worth up to 100 points. These short papers will typically be assigned as a way to respond to a film, a certain reading, or a presentation. **Pop quizzes** may be given occasionally throughout the course. They will usually cover some aspect of the reading, and be worth up to 100 points each. **The final class participation grade** will be an average of the pop quizzes and writing assignments—increased, balanced, or lowered by my and my assistant's assessment of a student's participation in class discussion. (In other words, the average of pop quizzes and writing assignments will be reduced by the assessment of a student's verbal contributions to class discussion only if s/he **never** contributes anything to class discussion). **Failure to attend the course regularly and timely can also hurt this grade. Therefore, MAKE SURE THAT YOU ATTEND REGULARLY AND TIMELY AND THAT YOU SIGN IN EVERY DAY.** Irregular attendance, including regular tardiness, will diminish your overall class participation grade in the following manner:

- One absence = No deductions.
- Each absence thereafter = 10 points per instance.
- Regular tardiness = 10 points per instance.

These penalties will be enforced. However, if you are having problems or have special issues, do not hesitate to inform me or my assistant immediately.

Grade Scale

A	=	95-100
A-	=	90-94
B+	=	87-89
B	=	84-86
B-	=	80-83
C+	=	77-79
C	=	74-76
C-	=	70-73
D	=	60-69
F	=	0-59

Fractions of points will be rounded to the nearest whole point *only at my discretion, and only in regard to the final grade*. No rounding off will apply to individual exams, pop quizzes, or written assignments.

Expectations

Attendance : Students are expected to attend each class session regularly and timely. **You are not fully present, if you do not have your books or readings for the day.**

Preparation : Students are expected to be prepared for each class and to submit all assignments when due. **Tardy work will not be accepted.**

Respect: Students are expected to be attentive and courteous to me, my assistant, and each other. This means **no talking while others are talking; no entering and exiting while class is in session** (unless there is an emergency or this is part of the structure of a presentation); **no cell-phone calls; no text messaging or writing and sending e-mails; no reading newspapers during class**; no chewing gum or eating; no putting on makeup or combing one's hair; and so forth.

Problems : If you have problems with the assignments or anything else that might affect your performance, please contact me or my teaching assistant immediately. If you cannot reach us during office hours, please e-mail us.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF LECTURES, ASSIGNMENTS, FILMS, & PRESENTATIONS

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1.	Wed., 9/2	Introduction: Methods in Studying Religion; Methods in Studying Christianity. A Humanistic Approach (Belief, Meaning, and Life).
	Fri., 9/4	The Bible, Inspiration, and Identity: Introduction to the Bible and Canon Formation. Assignment: Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 1, Introduction; Pt. I, opening pages, pp. 19-27; Pt. II, opening pages, pp. 91-96. We will focus on the material discussed in the introductions to Parts I and II. But you may find Ch. 1, Introduction, a helpful way to review the material covered in the first class session, along with the text slides available on Blackboard.

2. Wed., 9/9 **Reading the Bible:** Christians on Justice, Freedom, and Liberation in the Old Testament.

Assignment: Read Cory and Hollerich, Chs. 2-3. Also read Exodus 1-20 (that is, the Book of Exodus, chapters 1-20), on Moses, the Israelites, and the Ten Commandments in *HarperCollins Study Bible*. Please bring the Bible (or your copies of the reading from it) to class.

- Fri., 9/11 **Love, Salvation, and the Suffering (embodied) God:** Portraits of Jesus in the Christian Gospels.

Assignment: Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 6. Before doing so, though, browse Chs. 4-5. They set the stage for Ch. 6. Then, read the Gospel of Matthew in *HarperCollins Study Bible*. Consider what it might mean to say that God is a human being who suffers. Please bring the Bible (or your copies of the reading from it) to class.

3. Wed., 9/16, and
Fri., 9/18

Jesus the Jew and Jesus the Rebel: Portraits of Jesus (continued). Who is Jesus? And why have people been so taken with him? We will screen two films in the BBC series, “*The Lives of Jesus*.” **On Wednesday**, we will watch and discuss “*Jesus the Jew*,” Part I of the series. **On Friday**, we will watch and discuss Part 2 of the series, “*Jesus the Rebel*.”

[**Note:** During our discussion on Friday, I may refer to the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, a feminist New Testament scholar at Harvard who allows us to ask if Jesus, the god-man, were a woman. A selection of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work is on Blackboard.]

Assignment: Bring the Bible or a copy of the four Gospels to class.

4. Wed., 9/23 **Revelation, Sin, and Conversion:** How does one become part of Christianity as a religious movement? Focusing on the conversions of Paul and Augustine, we will ask: What did they need to be saved from? And what about Christianity seemed to be an answer? Today’s focus: Paul.

Assignment: Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 7. Also read Acts 7:54-8:3, 9:1-31 in *HarperCollins Study Bible*. Please bring the Bible (or your copies of the reading from it) to class.

- Fri., 9/25 **Revelation, Sin, and Conversion (continued):** Augustine.
- Assignment:** Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 10. Read the selection from Augustine’s *Confessions* on Blackboard, as well as the selection from Augustine’s *The Way of Life of the Catholic Church* in the *Christian Humanism* reader.
5. Wed., 9/30 **Power: The movement catches fire** — How does Christianity develop and spread? What role does heresy, persecution, and the Roman world play in disseminating and developing the faith?
- Assignment:** Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 8. Read the selections from Justin and Tertullian, as well as the Apostles’ Creed, in the *Christian Humanism* reader. Also read the selection from Perpetua on Blackboard.
- Fri., 10/2 **Review Session for Exam 1**
6. Wed., 10/7 **EXAM 1**
- Fri., 10/9 **Power: The Imperialization of Christianity**—Should Christianity have taken over the style of Pagan rule, with bishops, popes, armies, etc?
- Assignment:** Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 9. Read the Nicene Creed and the selection from Augustine’s *City of God* in the *Christian Humanism* reader. In the *City of God* selection, focus on chapters 4, 12-14.
7. Wed., 10/14 **Prayer as Power/Prayer Institutionalized/Prayer and Worship:** From the “ascetics” of the Egyptian and Syrian deserts to the “monastics” of Medieval Europe to the “igumens” of the Russian Orthodox Church.
- Assignment:** Read Cory and Hollerich, Chs. 11, 13. Read short selections from Athanasius’ *Life of St. Antony* and Ephrem’s *Hymns*, and Igumen Chariton of Valamo’s *The Art of Prayer*, all on Blackboard.
- Fri., 10/16 **Prayer and Worship (continued).** Our discussion today will be interspersed with images and music from the medieval monastic world. We will consider these as we discuss Benedict and Hildegard today.
- Assignment:** Read the Prologue and chapters 1-3, 5, 7, 16, 19, 33-37, 39-40, 48, 53-55 of Benedict’s *Rule* in the *Christian Humanism* reader; and the selection from Hildegard of Bingen on Blackboard. Browse all of the selections under “Hymns and Sequences from the Middle Ages” in the

Christian Humanism reader. Review and read Cory and Hollerich, Chs. 13-14, respectively. Also look at Islam Time-line at p. 211 (Ch. 12).

8. Wed., 10/21 **Faith and Knowledge (or God, Cosmos, and Human Knowing):**
Thomas Aquinas.

Assignment: Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch.15. Read the selection from Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles* in the *Christian Humanism* reader.

Supplementary reading only: If you have time, and are interested, you might browse Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics*, and Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, all of which is in the *Christian Humanism* reader.

- Fri., 10/23 **Dignity, Finitude and Grace:** Renaissance and Erasmus.

Assignment: Read Cory and Hollerich, Chs. 16-17; read pp. 262-263 under Erasmus' *Enchiridion Militis Christiani (Handbook of the Militant Christian)* in *Christian Humanism* reader, and also the short selections from Ficino's *Platonic Theology* and della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* in the *Christian Humanism* reader. For fun, you might look at Erasmus' "Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake" on Blackboard. I will refer to all of these briefly in class.

NOTE!!! SIGN UP FOR EXTRA CREDIT:

Volunteers needed for a play of Zwingli's liturgy next week.

9. Wed., 10/28 **Dignity, Finitude and Grace (continued):** Luther and Erasmus.

Assignment: Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 18. In *Christian Humanism* reader, read selections from *The Freedom of a Christian* and *The Bondage of the Will*. **Write a short paper** (1-2, double-spaced, typed pages), comparing Luther's *Bondage of the Will* to Erasmus' *Diatribes or Sermon Concerning Free Will* (also in the course reader). Explain the differences between the two men's positions on the human condition. Be prepared to discuss your paper in class today.

- Fri., 10/30 **Smashing Images and Altars:** Iconoclasm and Protestant Reform.

Assignment: Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 19. Read Zwingli's liturgy on Blackboard. Browse through the Catholic Low Mass. Bring your copies of both liturgies to class, and be prepared to compare these two services after the performance. That is, write a few notes to help focus your discussion. **We will perform Zwingli's liturgy at the beginning of class today.**

10. Wed., 11/4 **Sin, Human Being, and the Glory of God:** Calvin, Puritanism, and Wesley.

Assignment: Read selections from Calvin's *Institutes* in *Christian Humanism* reader and selections on reserve. Browse selection from John Bunyan, in *Christian Humanism* reader. I will also introduce Wesley today. Review Cory and Hollerich, Ch.19, pp. 336-340, 344-348; and read Cory and Landry, Ch. 23 on Blackboard, pp. 349-359.

- Fri., 11/6 **NO CLASS.** Look at the guidelines below for the take-home exam, and begin to think about how you might answer the questions under them, using the material that we have read since the last exam. Also, start thinking about what figure you may want to discuss in your final essay.

11. Wed., 11/11 **Perfecting the Human Being:** Wesleyan Pietism Responds to Calvinism.

Assignment: Read short selection from John Wesley in *Christian Humanism* reader. Read Cory and Landry, Ch. 23 on Blackboard.

- Fri., 11/13 **TAKE-HOME EXAM**

REVIEW FOR TAKE-HOME EXAM: A review session will be offered during the first part of class today. As our classes since the first exam have focused on Catholicism and Protestantism, the review and the exam will compare these two broad, often conflicting traditions. Some questions to consider: Are individuals free to "connect with God" on their own? What is the danger of this, as well as a multiplicity of churches? Or is it a good thing that Christianity is so diverse? Why should the Christian religion be one? What might be at stake in this? Consider our study of early Christianity. Finally, what is appealing about a theocracy? What is dangerous about it? Consider the Puritans as well as ancient Jews and Christians in this regard. Also consider the kind of world that Wesley and the Methodist seem to promote.

EXAM 2: TAKE-HOME EXAM. During the second half of class today, the exam will be distributed. For the exam, you will choose one of several questions on our study of Christianity from its imperialization in the 4th-century to Calvin and his followers in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, and write a two-page, double-spaced, typed essay. **THIS ESSAY EXAM IS DUE WEDNESDAY, 11/18, AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS (12:45PM).**

12. Wed., 11/18 **Perfecting the Human Being: Catholic and Quaker Mysticism.**
- Assignment:** Read brief selections from Teresa of Avila and Howard Thurman, on Blackboard. For context, read as needed Cory and Hollerich, Chs. 20, 25 (463-466). Also review Cory and Landry, Ch. 23, 360-363 on Blackboard.
- Fri., 11/20 **Perfecting the Human Being: Rationality, Critique, and Religion in Modern European World: Religion in the Enlightenment.**
- Assignment:** Read Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 22. Read the small selection from Kant on Blackboard.
13. Wed., 11/26 and
Fri., 11/28
- NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK.** Start thinking about what figure or figures you will use in your final take-home exam, and email or plan to see me or Mr. Webb about your choice before or after the break.
14. Wed., 12/2 **Religion as Faith, Feeling, and Passion: Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard.**
- Assignment:** Read Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve* dialogue in *Christian Humanism* reader. If you are interested and have time, browse the selection from Schleiermacher's *On Religion* on Blackboard.
- NOTE:** You may use the second Schleiermacher reading from *On Religion* for your Final Take-Home Essay.
- Fri., 12/4 **Religion as Faith, Feeling, and Passion: Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard.**
- Assignment:** Read Kierkegaard's *Christian Discourses* on Blackboard.
15. Wed., 12/9 **Confronting Evil, Justice, and Hope: Religion as a Discourse of Human Value and Empowerment: Christianity and Human Rights in the 19th and 20th centuries.**
- Assignment:** Read the selection from Martin Luther King, Jr. in the course reader. For context, review/read Cory and Landry, Ch. 23, pp. 360-363, on Blackboard, and Cory and Hollerich, Ch. 25, pp. 455-466.
- Fri., 12/11 **Closing Lecture and Discussion of Final Take-Home Exam.**

16. Wed., 12/16 **EXAM 3: TAKE-HOME ESSAY EXAM DUE AT 4:00 PM IN DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION OFFICE. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**