

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 102  
THE BIBLE: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS



Rhodes College  
Spring 2017

Section 2: 9:00 AM, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays  
Section 5: 11:00 AM, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays  
Professor Mark W. Muesse

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES 102

### THE BIBLE: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

Spring 2017

[Professor Mark W. Muesse](mailto:Mark.W.Muesse@rhodes.edu)

Section 2 ([27692@rhodes.edu](mailto:27692@rhodes.edu)), 9:00 AM, MWF

Section 5 ([27695@rhodes.edu](mailto:27695@rhodes.edu)), 11:00 PM, MWF

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 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 primary texts, we shall develop an understanding of significant concepts, events, 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 graduated series of written assignments designed to stimulate critical thinking and verbal expression.

The first section of the course examines the early Christian world and the central issues faced by the first Christians. We will observe the great diversity among early Christians and study how the processes of institutionalization gradually shaped religious multiplicity into orthodoxy with special attention to Augustine, one of the most influential Christian thinkers. We also will study the characteristic religious practices of this era, including sacramental rites and pilgrimage.

In the second section, we will see how these early theologies and practices shaped the religious outlook and activities of the medieval world. Our examination of this era focuses on asceticism, monasticism, iconography, mysticism, and architecture. The second section also investigates the development of Islam and the Jewish mysticism. This unit concludes with a study of the reformations of the late Middle Ages through the works of the protestant theologians Martin Luther and John Calvin.

When we turn to the modern world in the final unit of the course, we will meet decidedly new problems and new efforts to maintain religious intelligibility and relevance. As we shall see, modernity brings a scientific worldview and causes a fragmentation in western culture that has profound effects on religious and theological communities. We will study the theological responses to the intellectual and moral dilemmas of our times.

## Resources

### Required Texts

Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions*. Trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. New York: Penguin Books, 1961.

Benedict of Nursia. *The Rule of St. Benedict*. Trans. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

*The Qur'an and Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad: Selections Annotated and Explained*. Trans. Yusuf Ali and ed. Sohaib N. Sultan. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Path, 2007.

Rami M. Shapiro. *Hasidic Tales: Annotated & Explained*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2003.

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of God and the Distinction of the Soul from the Body Are Demonstrated*, 3rd ed. Trans. Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993.

Andre Comte-Sponville, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*. Trans. Nancy Huston. New York: Penguin, 2008.

Other course readings are available online.

### Required Films

*Life of Brian* (94 minutes)

*From Jesus to Christ, Part 4* (50 minutes)

*The Message* (220 minutes)

*Building the Great Cathedrals* (60 minutes)

*Holy Russia* (58 minutes)

*Luther* (124 minutes)

*Galileo's Battle for the Heavens* (120 minutes)

*God on Trial* (86 minutes)

*A Serious Man* (106 minutes)

The films are available on Moodle or online.

## Course Requirements

The requirements for this course are as follows:

### 10%--Participation

Your participation grade comprises your contributions to the colloquia and your involvement in out-of-class events related to the course. The elements of the participation grade are explained below.

**Preparation:** It is important to come to class adequately prepared, having read the assignments and thoughtfully considered them. **Please bring the day's reading with you to class.** To prepare for some discussions, you will also need to view a film prior to class.

**Contributions to Discussions:** Since the course is discussion-based, is essential that you contribute to the colloquia. If you have difficulty speaking up in class, please see me. I can offer you several strategies for contributing to class discussions. Appended to the syllabus is a statement explaining how contributions to class discussion will be assessed.

**Life Lecture:** You are also required to attend an evening lecture on 26 January at 7:00 PM in the BCLC Ballroom.

**Monastic Community Supper:** You are required to participate in a Community Supper on Wednesday, 8 February at 5:30-6:30 PM, in East Village Lodge. The Community Supper is an evening event that complements our study of medieval monasticism by sharing a common meal in the manner of the ancient monks.

### 20%--Quizzes

There will be 12 unannounced short quizzes during the course of the semester. These quizzes will test your comprehension of the day's reading and viewing material. The quizzes give you an opportunity for writing practice and provide the basis for the day's discussion. There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes, but I will drop the two lowest quiz scores.

### 50%--Writing Assignments

This course is writing-intensive and fulfills the F2 (as well as the F1) requirement. You will submit five essays at various times during the semester. The essays give you an

opportunity to respond critically and creatively to the reading material, discussions, and activities. Because the essay assignments are progressively more demanding, they are weighted differently. This chart indicates the relative worth of each paper towards the Writing Assignment grade:

First paper:	10%
Second paper	15%
Third paper	20%
Fourth paper	25%
Fifth paper	30%

### 20%--Final Writing Assignment

The final writing assignment will be a substantial paper incorporating material from the entire semester and reflecting an engagement with the central themes of the course. The assignment will be given during the last week of classes and due during the final examination period.

## Course Policies

### Attendance Policy

It is essential to attend class. What you learn from participating in the course goes beyond what can be measured on papers and other forms of evaluation. I do not reckon absences as excused or unexcused. If you choose to miss class to participate in an extracurricular or other activity, your choice indicates the priority you give to this course and the grade you receive will reflect that decision. Each student is permitted three absences during the semester without an adverse effect on the grade. After the third absence, however, each subsequent absence will lower the final numeric average by one point. Missing one-third of the class sessions will result in an automatic failure in the course.

### Electronic Devices

Our classroom is a **WI-FI GOLD SPOT**. The use of laptop computers, cell phones, media players, or other electronic devices is *verboten*. All electronic devices must be turned off and kept off table tops, laps, and desks. Want to know why? [Click here](#).

## Written Assignments

All work submitted for this course should be the product of your own efforts. Students are expected to abide by the Honor Code. Late papers will not be accepted unless you have made prior arrangements with me. See **How I Grade Essays** below for more information and helpful hints to improve writing.

## 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 me prior to the due date of the final paper. Upon my 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 by the end of the second week of the following semester.

## Communication

I encourage you to check your e-mail frequently for announcements and other matters concerning this course. I will use the e-mail to communicate with you collectively and individually. My e-mail address is [muesse@rhodes.edu](mailto:muesse@rhodes.edu).

## Grace

You may have observed that it is not a perfect world, and from time-to-time, we all need a little slack. I recognize this. There may come a time when you need to turn in a late paper or want some other *slight* bend of the rules. You can count on *one* act of grace during the semester to help get you back on track. But since I'm not god, my supply of grace is limited. Don't count on getting *too much* slack. (Grace is not forgiveness; you must ask for it *in advance* of your transgression!) Grace cannot be used to erase absences or postpone tests.

## Office Information

My office is located in 411 Clough. You may drop in during office hours: Tuesdays, 9:00-9:45 AM; 11:00 AM-12:00 N and Thursdays, 9:00 AM-12:00 N. If these times are not convenient for you, please call or e-mail me to make an appointment for another time. My campus number is 901 843 3909, and my cell number is 901 494 2902.

## Classroom Etiquette

### Beginning

We will begin each class with a bow and a moment of mindfulness.

### Middle

Pay attention—or at least feign it! Please don't work on other courses (or anything else!) during class time. If you work on anything other than our course during the class period, you will receive an absence for that day.

### End

It ain't over till it's over. Please do not begin to pack your things until the class is concluded.

## Course Outline

11 January      **Welcome to the Course**  
View:  
*Life of Brian* (94 minutes)

## THE ANCIENT WORLD

13 January      **The Invention of Christianity**  
View:  
*From Jesus to Christ, Part 4*  
Read:  
[Timeline of Early Christianity](#)  
[Correspondence from Pliny to Trajan](#)

16 January      **MLK Holiday**

- 18 January      **The Diversity of Early Christianity**  
 Read:  
                   [The Gospel of Judas](#)  
                   [The Infancy Gospel of Thomas](#)
- 20 January      **The Development of Christian Doctrine**  
 Read:  
                   [Ten Bizarre Early Christian Sects](#)  
                   Athanasius, “On the Incarnation of the Word” and “The  
                   Nicene Creed” (Moodle).
- 23 January      **Sacramental Practice**  
 Read:  
                   Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, pp.  
                   ix-xxiv; 40-80 (Moodle).
- 25 January      **Pilgrimage**  
 Read:  
                   Egeria, selections from *Travels*, pp. 333-347 (Moodle).
- 26 January      *First paper due.*  
 3:00 PM          411 Clough
- 26 January      **“The Origins of God”**  
 7:00 PM          Thomas Römer  
 Ballroom, BCLC
- 27 January      **The Life and Teachings of Augustine**  
 Read:  
                   Augustine, *Confessions*, Introduction; Books, I-III, pp. 11-70.  
                   [Manichaeism](#)  
 View:  
                   [Animated Philosophers: Augustine](#)
- 30 January      **The Life and Teachings of Augustine**  
 Read:  
                   Augustine, *Confessions*, Books IV-VI, pp. 71-132.



1 February            **The Life and Teachings of Augustine**  
 Read:  
                           Augustine, *Confessions*, Books VII-VIII, pp. 133-179.

3 February            **The Life and Teachings of Augustine**  
 Read:  
                           Augustine, *Confessions*, Books IX-X.9, pp. 181-217.

## THE MIDDLE AGES

6 February            **Monasticism**  
 Read:  
                           *The Rule of St. Benedict*, xxvii-70.

8 February            **Monastic Supper** , East Village Lodge  
 5:30-6:30 PM        *Second paper due.*

10 February          **Asceticism**  
 Read:  
                           “Domnina: A Female Disciple Of Saint Maron”; “Abraham:  
 The Apostle of Lebanon”; and “Life of Antony” (Moodle).

13 February          **Islam**  
 View:  
                           *The Message*, 220 minutes.

15 February          **Islam**  
 Read:  
                           *The Qur’an and Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*, xv-37.

17 February          **Islam**  
 Read:  
                           *The Qur’an and Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*, 38-105.

20 February          **Islam**  
 Read:  
                           *The Qur’an and Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*, 106-201.

- 22 February      **Sacred Space**  
 Voorhies Chapel    View:  
                          *Building the Great Cathedrals*  
 Read:  
                          Suger, Abbot of St. Denis, *On What Was Done in His Administration* (Moodle).
- 24 February      **Iconography**  
 View:  
                          *Holy Russia*  
                          A Selections of Icons (Moodle)
- 27 February      **Iconography**  
 Read:  
                          John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 7-33 (Moodle).
- 1 March            **Mystical Theology**  
 Read *Twice*:  
                          Denys, "The Mystical Theology" (Moodle).
- 3 March            **Mystical Experience**  
 View:  
                          [The History of Love](#)  
 Read:  
                          Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, Introduction, pp. 1-11; Book I.1-20, pp. 39-48; and Book I.44, pp. 58-62; Book II.4, pp.72-75; Book II.26, pp. 96-98 (Moodle).
- 6 March            **Spring Break**
- 8 March            **Spring Break**
- 10 March          **Spring Break**
- 13 March          **Mystical Experience**  
 Read:  
                          Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, Book IV.2, pp. 139-144; Book III.1, pp. 101-107; Book III.9-10, pp. 114-119; Book III.21, pp. 127-132; Book V.4-6, pp. 182-186; Book VI.1-3, pp. 223-230 (Moodle).

- 15 March            **Hasidic Judaism**  
Read:  
*Hasidic Tales*, xxvii-xxxii; 2-93.
- 17 March            **Hasidic Judaism**  
Read:  
*Hasidic Tales*, 94-191.
- 20 March            **Martin Luther**  
View:  
*Luther*, 113 minutes.  
Read:  
[Insults from Luther](#)
- 21 March  
3:00 PM            *Third paper due.*
- 22 March            **Martin Luther**  
Read:  
Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings," Dillenberger, 3-12; "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," Dillenberger, 19-34 (Moodle).
- 24 March            **John Calvin**  
Read:  
*The Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book One, Part IV, Chapters 16-17; Book Two, Chapters 1-3; Book Three, Part XII, Chapters 21-22; 24-25 (Moodle).

## MODERNITY

- 27 March            **What It Means to Be Modern**  
View:  
*Galileo's Battle for the Heavens*

- 29 March            **Religion and the Modern World**  
View:  
                         [How Do You Know You're Real?](#)  
Read:  
                         Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, vii-ix; 1-4; 8-24.
- 31 March            **Religion and the Modern World**  
Read:  
                         Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 24-42.
- 3 April              **The Critique of Theism**  
Read:  
                         Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 1-32. (Moodle).
- 4 April  
3:00 PM            *Fourth paper due.*
- 5 April              **Faith and Doubt**  
Read:  
                         Unamuno, "San Manuel Bueno, Martyr" (Moodle).  
                         ["There's No Such Thing as Free Will"](#)
- 7 April              **God on Trial**  
View:  
                         *God on Trial*
- 10 April            **When Bad Things Happen to Good People**  
View:  
                         *A Serious Man*
- 12 April  
3:00 PM            **No Class**  
                         *Fifth paper due.*
- 14 April            **Easter Break**
- 17 April            **Ultimate Concern**  
Read:  
                         Tillich, "Ultimate Concern" (Moodle).  
View:  
                         [Ultimate Concern, the Music Video](#)

- 19 April                    **The New Being**  
Read:  
                                  Tillich, "Symbols of Faith" (Moodle).
- 21 April                    **Atheist Spirituality**  
Read:  
                                  Comte-Sponville, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, ix-66.
- 24 April                    **Atheism Spirituality**  
Read:  
                                  Comte-Sponville, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, 67-133.
- 26 April                    **Atheism Spirituality**  
Read:  
                                  Comte-Sponville, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, 134-206.
- Section 2                    **Final Writing Assignment Due**  
3 May, 12:00 N            411 Clough
- Section 5                    **Final Writing Assignment Due**  
2 May, 3:00 N            411 Clough

### How I Grade Essays

Writing and critical thinking are, I believe, the most important parts of a liberal arts education. I therefore take essay writing very seriously and make it a significant part of your final grade. In grading students' essays, I take care to mark them as accurately and as painstakingly as possible. My own experience tells me that one's writing cannot improve unless mistakes are clearly pointed out. Learning to write well is hard work and takes much practice. In this sense, we are all beginners.

To help you in your writing practice for this course, I have outlined below the general principles I use in assessing grades for essays. I readily admit that grading essays--especially papers in the humanities--involves subjective judgments, particularly in the area of content. Ultimately, the grade you receive is the consequence of a judgment part objective and reasonable, part intuitive and aesthetic. In general, I try not to evaluate the particular position or point of view you express; rather, I look at how well you have argued that position, how fully and sympathetically you have

considered alternative views, how logical and coherent your point of view is. In the final analysis, I am not really interested in whether or not you believe in God, for example, but I am very interested in *why* you believe or do not believe.

**A**--The A paper is, above all, interesting and effectively written. It demonstrates knowledge of the subject and evidences much thought about it. It is clearly structured and has a carefully argued thesis. The A paper is outstanding in all respects: it is devoid of any mechanical, grammatical, or typographical mistakes. Formal errors will reduce a paper's grade, regardless of content.

**B**--The B paper is missing some element that distinguishes the A essay. Perhaps the paper demonstrates sufficient knowledge and thought, but the presentation is pedestrian. Perhaps the content is thoughtful and interesting, but the essay suffers from mechanical or typographical mistakes.

**C**--The C paper fulfills the terms of the assignment without distinction.

**D**--The D paper is uninteresting, lacking in comprehension, and flawed by mechanical errors.

**F**--The F paper is without merit. It is flagrantly lacking in insight and comprehension, and appears insufficiently acquainted with academic standards for written work.

### *Some Hints for Better Writing*

I expect proper form for papers in the humanities.

It is okay to use the first person.

Do not use the passive voice unless it is absolutely necessary.

Use inclusive language: that is, do not use "man" or "mankind" as the generic term for all of humanity (humankind, humans).

Create an interesting title.

Use "that" and "which" appropriately. ("Which" generally follows a comma.) Use "who" when you are talking about a human being.

**Do not use "relatable."**

If a quotation is more than three lines long, it should be indented and single-spaced, omitting the quotation marks.

Avoid vague abstractions like “the Church.” Specify exactly what you mean.

Do not use the word “feel” as a substitute for “think.”

Avoid inappropriate use of slang (e.g., “It really sucked to be a slave in Egypt.”)

Avoid clichés like the plague.

Quote the dictionary only if absolutely demanded by the context. Ordinarily, Webster is not an authority in this course. Never begin an essay with “According to Webster’s Dictionary....”

Please staple the paper in the upper left corner.

When you receive your graded paper, please review it carefully. I spend much time and energy grading these essays and usually provide detailed commentary. You will not profit by our efforts--yours and mine--unless you review the graded essay. Always feel free to talk to me about the paper, both before and after it is graded. If you do not understand why the paper receives the grade it does, then we should talk. The essay is only part of what I hope is a semester-long dialogue.

If you are serious about improving your writing skills, you may wish to consult:

Ronald Walters and T.H. Kern, [“How to Eschew Weasel Words”](#)

William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979.

Natalie Goldberg. *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. Boston: Shambhala, 1986.

## Grades for Class Participation

### “A” Range:

- Consistently demonstrates mastery of content and context of readings through careful preparation and analysis.
- Connects daily readings to recurring themes of the course by contrasting and comparing them with past readings; makes and adequately defends judgments about texts and ideas; consistently raises questions and highlights issues of importance connected to the readings.
- Initiates discussion; listens respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others and responds in a way that benefits the discussion rather than dominates it.
- Always arrives on time for class.

### “B” Range

- Frequently demonstrates attention to content and context of readings by raising good questions about texts and ideas.
- Shows improvement over the semester in understanding texts and their significance and connecting daily assignments to past readings; makes and adequately defends judgments about texts and ideas; often raises questions and highlights issues of importance connected to the readings.
- Listens respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others and responds in a way that benefits the discussion rather than dominates it.

### “C” Range

- Does not always complete assigned readings prior to class; is unable or unwilling to engage in discussions and/or respond to questions or raise questions related to the readings.
- Makes connections between texts rarely and with difficulty; makes judgments about texts and ideas based solely on opinion or feeling; demonstrates little grasp of the overall significance of the readings and makes little effort to investigate further their significance.
- Waits for others to initiate discussion and usually speaks only when called upon.

### “D” Range

- Is minimally prepared for class, having only scanned the reading assignments if at all; consistently fails to bring assigned materials to class and shows no sign of engagement with the texts prior to class.
- Makes indefensible connections between reading and/or judgments about the readings that are free from thoughtful analysis; is uninterested in the significance of the readings apart from passing the course.



- Is passive in class; shows little respect or interest in the points raised by peers and the professor.
- Forgets to turn off cell phone before class.
- Whispers or writes notes to other students during class

### Learn and Live: Some Thoughts about Teaching

*Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself.*

Chinese Proverb

Teaching is an act of faith. I have long given up the expectation that I will see and enjoy immediate results in my teaching. The things I really want students to know—how to live well, how to be and do good, how to think about the wonders of the world and the mysteries of being alive—are not things that can be measured by tests, grades, or evaluations. I can only hope that my influence will someday have a salutary effect in their lives and that consequently I will contribute modestly to making the world a better place.

Accepting that the real value of my teaching is manifested in the future has transformed my way of thinking about what I teach and how I teach it. Five years—maybe five weeks!—after my course, most students will have little recollection of the material we studied. But they will remember me. For better or worse, the way I comport myself, treat others, and approach the business of learning is what makes an indelible impression. The Hasidic tradition of Judaism relates the story of Leib Saras who returned from a visit to his rabbi and was asked by family and friends what words of Torah he learned. Leib Saras replied, “I did not go to my teacher to hear his words of Torah; I went to see how he ties his shoelaces.” I am very much aware that many of my students are there to see my shoelaces, and those who aren’t, observe them anyway.

What I want my students to see in me is a real individual who aspires never to stop learning, a person who struggles to understand the world and to live a life of genuineness and sincerity, one who often falls short of that aspiration and gets discouraged, and yet tries again. It is more important to me that they regard me as a master of learning than as a master of a subject. As teacher, my goal is to be the best student in the classroom. I want students to learn from me how to learn, how to teach themselves, and to see the value of never giving up the spirit of inquiry and curiosity.

Foremost among my pedagogical aspirations is humility, but I confess this is more an ideal than a reality. I have come to prize humility as the greatest of virtues, but I lament how far away from me it often is. Humility is imperative to the work of learning, and

hence of teaching. The students I have found to be the hardest to teach are those who lack humility; it is difficult to inspire someone who thinks he or she already knows. Seeking to be humble as a teacher means recognizing my own limitations both as student (there are still so many things I do not know and never will) and about how best to encourage and inspire others to learn. Being humble means striving to keep learning how to teach.

I have also come to embrace the virtue of risk and its companion courage, although, again, I make no special claims to having attained either. I have learned that becoming a better teacher means risking innovation, trying out new approaches and new ideas. Taking pedagogical risks has to be done with courage, because it is quite possible to fail.

But I'm consoled by the words of one worthy philosopher: "You can ultimately succeed only at unimportant things. The loftiest things in life often end in failure." Because learning and teaching are among the most important things in life, it is inevitable that we will sometimes fail at them. The best teachers, I believe, make that moment the occasion for another lesson.