



Saint Mary's College
Fall Semester, 2002
Religious Studies 101

Introducing Religious Studies

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Course Description

Does life have a meaning that survives death? Does humanity need to be saved? Saved from what? And saved *by* what? What would it mean for a religion promising salvation to be *true*? And why do any of these things matter for how you live your life or think about your world? These questions are by no means easy to address. Some people spend their whole lifetime searching for the answers. You will meet some of them.

Why should you (or any college student) care about the subject of religion? In a society which measures us largely by our abilities and accomplishments, religion and religious questions frequently get pushed to the margins and dismissed as impractical or boring (at the least) or as positively dangerous or delusional (at the most). A world after September 11th well knows the ambiguity of religious commitments: While some people, in the name of their beliefs, were meticulously planning and carrying out the murder of those who did them no wrong and whose names they knew not, others (in the name of *their* beliefs) were running into collapsing buildings trying to save them. Wherever we look these days, religious fanatics crowd the headlines and the electronic media, while elsewhere many sincere searchers ask very anguishing questions about where God is and what God is in a world which all too often tramples on the good and rewards the wicked. Why should you bother studying religion and why study it now? In reality, there are few occasions in your life when so much changes at one time as when you begin college. You get a new address, new friends, new ideas, and oftentimes new goals and perspectives—all while being on your own in ways you probably have never been before. And whether you think of it in these terms or not, it is the case that the questions you will inevitably be asking about your own life and world are the same questions that virtually every religion also addresses to the individual: who am I? where am I going? and how do I get there? Studying religious texts and positions in college, then, allows you to listen and learn at the very time of your life when these questions become especially compelling by becoming your own. In this class, therefore, we'll be talking about what religion is, what questions religion prompts and how it functions in peoples' lives to affect how those lives are lived, how hopes unfold, and how others are encountered.

So, we shall study religion by asking these questions and examining various religious themes which exhibit answers to them (faith, human nature, goodness, evil, revelation, and salvation). We'll be orienting our focus around the writings of Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century French mathematician and father of the modern computer, *and* C.S. Lewis, the twentieth-century English writer, professor, and creator of the land of Narnia. Along the way, you'll acquire skills in reading and interpreting texts, and in speaking and writing about what you have read. "Theology" literally means discourse about God. To do theology well, then, means being able to communicate your thoughts well. And that's why this course is designed to develop and polish those basic skills of oral and written communication essential both to a successful collegiate career and to an informed and literate lifestyle. "Introducing Religious Studies" takes its place as part of the General Education Requirement at Saint Mary's by sharing its goals of fostering the ability to think clearly about complex problems, promoting the capacity to communicate with precision and style, and studying freely the rich heritage of the Christian tradition.

Goals and Outcomes of the Course

The student who successfully completes this course will be able to appreciate the role religion occupies as a source of meaning in people's lives, make the connections between religious belief and practice (both moral and ritual), understand the nature of and challenges to religious faith alongside other forms of knowing, gain a basic knowledge of different world religions and a more detailed knowledge of how different facets of Christian belief fit together, view religion against broader horizons (both personal and cultural) that will give a wider context to the multiple ways it functions in the life of an individual and a society, give a coherent answer when someone asks why you believe what you do, and demonstrate through written and spoken words habits of critical thinking and problem solving.

Requirements and Grading

To complete this course successfully, you must ① participate actively in class, ② turn in regular 1-page preparatory writings on the assigned readings, ③ contribute postings or written responses to the online discussion forum held through the course website, and ④ pass three tests. The grade you receive at the end of the course is broken down in this way:

1.	Preparation and class participation	15%
2.	Short preparatory writings on assigned readings	15%
3.	Online contributions & written responses to the internet discussion forum	10%
4	Three tests: each worth 20% (Sept. 27, Oct. 30, and Dec. 18)	60%

1 **PREPARATION AND CLASS PARTICIPATION** This course will depend heavily upon student input. You should come to class having read the assigned material and with something to say about it. On the syllabus, I give you some study questions to help focus each reading assignment and occasionally provide some comments or background on the assigned readings. Both questions and comments are listed under "Reading Guide" on your syllabus. Look at the Reading Guide *before* you read, and think about it *as* you read. You will read better and retain more when you have some specific information or questions to read *for*. The issues on the Reading Guide will form the basis for class discussion. You'll be done preparing when you're able to answer *all* the questions I ask you about the upcoming readings. If there are any points you can't figure out on your own, you should either contact me before class or ask questions about at the start of the following class.

At first, you may find some of these readings rather difficult because you won't be used to the terminology or the concepts. But they should get easier with practice, and I do provide links on the course website (under "Handouts" in the left frame) to online dictionaries and glossaries of religious terms and concepts. As you read, try to set the main issues and subjects clearly in your mind. Don't just passively highlight a page and expect it to end up in your head.

I may also occasionally begin class by asking you to write for a few minutes on some question or issue from that day's assigned reading. (Be sure always to have some loose-leaf paper with you.) These writings will constitute extra-credit for your preparation grade. Of course, not doing well on them will incur some penalty to that grade since it will demonstrate to me that you haven't adequately prepared for that day's discussion. These papers will be unannounced, but you can always prepare for them by very carefully going over the Reading Guide on the assigned reading. Your grade will reflect how closely you've read the assigned material, how thoroughly you've prepared for class, and how accurately you're able to put into your own words the ideas found in the readings for that day. *I would strongly encourage you to take notes on these readings, because doing so should give you a significant advantage when there's an in-class writing since you'll be able to use your notes (but not your texts) as you write.* These writings cannot be made up if you're absent.

Any in-class writings will be evaluated as follows:

- √+ You demonstrate an excellent grasp of the material and an especially careful and thorough reading of the assignment. Your response is complete and well written. A " + " is equal to an "A."
- √ You show a satisfactory reading of the material. Your response is generally good, but has some gaps or flaws in content or writing. A " " lacks the level of depth and complexity that a + contains and corresponds to slightly below a B.
- √- You do not demonstrate an adequate or complete reading of the material. Your response has significant gaps or flaws in content or writing. A " - " corresponds to a very low C/high D.
- 0 This means that *either* you do not turn a paper in for that day *or* you just completely miss what the reading was saying.


You are expected to attend class regularly. Attendance will be taken daily. Your presence in class is a kind of participation. Therefore, more than 3 unexcused absences will lower your grade. All absences for which I do not receive a written excuse from Susan Vanek (First Year office: 121 Le Mans) or Teresa Marcy (Assistant to the Vice President: 111 Le Mans) will be considered unexcused. More than 6 may result in failure of the course. *It is the student's responsibility to inform the professor of any extenuating circumstances affecting attendance or class performance.* In rare circumstances, even an excessive number of *excused* absences (more than one-fourth of

class meetings) may not allow you to pass this course. Coming in more than 5 minutes after the start of the period counts as one-half absence. Consistent tardiness less than 5 minutes late will also count against you. And if I ever see you with your eyes shut in class or otherwise zoning out or nodding off, that will count as an absence for that day. Mere physical presence in the classroom class participation. If you're drowsy or otherwise out of it, do not come to class. I try to run the class as informally as possible. Do not, however, abuse this informality: behavior not conducive to learning (e.g., extraneous side conversations or comments) will not be tolerated. In general, I expect the kind of behavior from you that you would appreciate were you in the front of the room. This means making eye contact, sitting up straight, and looking attentive and interested.

Note: There will also be three evening meetings of the class during the semester at which movies will be shown in Carroll Auditorium. Plan your schedule accordingly. These occur on Tuesday, September 17 (6:00-7:40PM); Thursday, October 17 (5:30-8:00PM); and Monday, November 25 (6:00-8:15PM). For each video, I'll give a Viewing Guide containing some questions to think about as you watch the movie (these are also available through the course website). You will have the Viewing Guide in front of you as the movie is shown so that you can fill in your responses to the brief questions it asks. We'll then use your responses as a basis for discussion at the next class. If you turn in your Viewing Guide *after* we've discussed the movie, you'll receive no credit for having seen it. If you're unable to make the evening showings, the movies will be placed on reserve with Mrs. Harrington in Madeleva 148 about a week prior to their showing in class. You can check them out and watch them on your own.

Class participation will be assessed according to these criteria:

- ☆ **Frequency:** demonstrated consistency in contributing to the class (= getting an "A" for class participation requires [but is not solely determined by] frequent—that is, *daily*—contributions to class discussion and consistent readiness to speak up in class to voice your insights or answer questions on the class readings.)
- ☆ **Understanding:** demonstrated familiarity with course content (= your comments show your comprehension of ideas, concepts, and theories presented in the readings and in class.)
- ☆ **Presentation:** demonstrated ability to express yourself with clarity, fluency, and conciseness (= you avoid rambling speeches and raw opinions that we could just as easily get from the average patron at the nearest bar who has never heard of this course and its assigned reading.)
- ☆ **Interaction:** demonstrated skill in asking questions, answering questions or in otherwise contributing to the process of learning (= Your contributions fit into the flow of the discussion, and your comments build on those of others to lead to a new insight, question, or conclusion. You take the lead in asking questions and raising topics for discussion. What you say draws others into the conversation. The class participation I value most enhances the interest and enthusiasm of others for the material, thereby leading them to participate as well.)
- ☆ **Respect:** cooperation in creating a supportive learning atmosphere (= you listen to and respect the views of others. You are critical of ideas, not people. If you disagree with others, you do so *constructively* in ways that make the issues clearer for everyone. In general, your conduct in class is conducive to the learning of others in the room. That means being attentive to whoever is speaking and not interrupting others or taking the discussion off on a tangent.. You adhere to the standards of behavior set out in the handout 'A Modest Proposal to Students.')
- ☆ **Engagement:** demonstrated preparation for class, demonstrated reflection and *enthusiasm* about the course content either in class or outside of class by showing up during office hours or scheduled appointments with questions or comments to discuss (= your conduct in class gives every impression that you're well prepared, and interested in what's going on. You take responsibility for your own learning such that you ask questions and do what you need to do to learn the material and clarify any misunderstandings about it.)

② **PREPARATORY WRITINGS ON ASSIGNED READINGS** To help you prepare for discussion, I ask that you complete some writing prior to each class of the syllabus marked with a  next to the date. The purpose of these shorter papers is to clarify to both you and me where you have arrived on your own with the day's readings. These will then provide the basis for classroom interaction so that, together as a class, we can build on that starting point.

Format for Preparatory Writings on the Readings: Prep writings to be done outside of class should be no more than 1 page long and typed. Space as you need to fit everything on one page. Put your name at the top. Bring two copies of these papers to class with you. These writings will be due at the start of class, and so hand in one copy as you walk in the door. Keep the other copy with you to refer to *and mark up* during class. ***Be ready each day to share with the class what you have written.*** Late papers may be turned in only following an officially excused absence. Organize these papers as follows and number the two main parts:

1. Summarize the main points made in the reading or readings as concisely, *but as completely*, as you can. What went on in these texts (whether in print or online)? Feel free to provide brief illustrative quotations from the texts (with page numbers in parentheses after the quotations) to help you get the points out. Where there are many readings assigned, their main points generally overlap, and so just do the best you can in succinctly presenting what's most crucial.
2. On (about) the second half of the page, say what you thought was most interesting about what you read. Your aim *here* should be to *personalize* (that is, say what these readings taught you, what you found interesting or of value in them), rather than to *summarize* (as you did in the first part). So use phrases like the following: "From these readings, I learned ..." or "I didn't use to understand ..., but now I do because ...," or "What I found interesting was ...," and so on.

At the end of class, I want you to turn in the other copy of your paper *marked up* with any corrections to Part #1 that you discovered during class and/or a circle around a point you made in discussion that you originally wrote in Parts 1 or 2. Doing the latter will usually be an automatic +, because then the prep writing will have done what it was supposed to do: prepare you to contribute to class discussion. When you make a comment from your prep writing, just circle what you wrote/said and put a ★ next to it in the margin and give yourself a √+ at the top of your paper. Otherwise, I will grade your paper and may not remember particular comments you made. (The same deal will hold for papers written in response to online postings—see below, *and* to the Viewing Guides on the videos.) I won't be commenting in great depth about what you turn in, because by the time class is over each day, your understanding of the material should have progressed beyond the point found in your preparatory writing. For this reason, I may not grade every paper you turn in. The ones that do get graded, however, will receive a +, , - or 0 according to the scale found below. Papers will usually be returned the following class. For every other one you turn in which doesn't get graded, you will receive at least 1 point (2 points if you circled something you said in class). For the ones you turn in that *are* graded, you will receive 1 point for a -, 2 points for a , and 3 points for a +. At the end of the semester, these points will be tallied and a letter grade assigned.

- √+ Your summary of the material and the point you found interesting indicate a careful and thoughtful reading of the text; you demonstrate that you've put some ideas together on your own; quotations from the text are especially well chosen, and appropriate page references are supplied. You explain in some depth what you learned. A " + " is equal to an "A" and receives 3 points.
- √ Your paper indicates a basic understanding of the material read, with quotations and page references adequately in place. A " " lacks the level of depth and complexity that a + contains and receives 2 points.

- √- Your paper does not indicate an adequate reading of the material. A " -" receives 1 point.
- 0 You don't turn a paper in (0 points).

3 **ONLINE CONTRIBUTIONS** This class will conduct online discussions over the internet. A few times during the semester when you see the icon to the right, you will be asked to make a contribution to an online class forum. You are certainly encouraged to contribute more than just the times that a posting is required. Additional online contributions at other times or on other related topics will be considered extra credit for this portion of your grade. Feel free, therefore, to start a new topic for discussion, ask your classmates for their views on something related to the course, or continue a conversation we began in class. Or, offer some personal reflections on the readings and explain how the ideas we discuss in class touch down in your life and observations of the lives of others. This is an especially good opportunity for quieter students to add their voices to our common discourse.



You will be expected to enter your contribution on the campus computer network, and everyone else in class will be able to read what you've written. We'll make use of software called "Internet Classroom Assistant" or ICA (also known as "Nicenet"). I will provide instructions on how to use this program. It's not hard and is easily learned, but it will take a bit of getting used to. And of course I'll be available for help early on to get everyone up to speed.

Format for Web Postings: Before the posting is due, I'll put the question online to which I want you to respond. I'm not looking for long, involved responses that go on for several screens. Be concise. Around a paragraph is generally fine. To receive full credit, you must respond by 6:30 PM of the evening on which the posting is due (no exceptions). The grade will be lowered on anything posted late; and if your submission is more than 1 hour late, you will receive no credit at all. You will also need to read the messages left by other students, because one of the most crucial parts of this exercise is that you dialogue with others in the class. To receive credit, your posting MUST refer to something written by another student (unless you're the very first one to write in on a given topic). The goal of this exercise is to have you all connecting outside of class and writing for and helping out everyone else. The idea is to create a virtual learning community. And so the more you mention other classmates by name and refer back to—or build onto—their points, issues, or questions to agree or disagree with them, the better all of this will work, and the better those of us reading the messages will be able to follow the discussion. The BEST THING TO DO would be to put something in the "Subject" line of your posting that summarizes your contribution by referring to a classmate and giving a hint of the way you're bridging off that person's comment, as in "Disagreeing with Jane Doe." Always bring to class a hard copy of what you wrote on the forum so you have something to which to refer. You can access the online forum through the "Introducing Religious Studies" site at the following address:

<http://www.saintmarys.edu/~incandel/IRS.html>

You need to type this address *exactly* as shown—note that "IRS" is in all capitals. Once you get to the above site for the first time, follow the onscreen instructions to get to the discussion forum where you will be dialoguing with your classmates online. Working online insures universal participation, guarantees that everyone in the class has a voice, and requires that all views be heard. Online postings give everyone an equal voice. Moreover, this exercise should make you a more critical, thoughtful writer. Writing out your ideas encourages you to think through your positions very carefully. Doing this over a computer network gives you a wider audience than just me and makes your writing public. Online discussions create a community of learning. Not only will this exercise give

you a wider audience than just me, *it will give you more teachers than just me*. The goal, then, is to increase peer communication and learning. I will ask only $\frac{1}{2}$ the class to post on a given question. The other $\frac{1}{2}$ will do a prep writing on those postings (not on the readings per se). *Use essentially the same format as in the prep writings discussed under #2 above:* Namely, in the first half of the paper, briefly summarize the postings. In the second half, respond to (at least) one of the postings in some depth. Your response could indicate your agreement, disagreement, or raise a question that you'd like to address to the author of the posting. Or you can say what's still a question for you after reading all the postings. What major conclusion did you draw from them? What was interesting to you in these postings? Identify the people you're responding to (or discussing) by name.

The average of all your online contributions will count 10% of the course grade. I'll be monitoring the online discussions and will report on your progress at midsemester. The grade you earn is based on the following criteria:

- ☆ **Reflection:** obvious thoughtfulness behind your comments and questions (= your online posting must demonstrate that you've carefully done the reading and are bridging off it with the comment you make or the question you pose.)
- ☆ **Initiative:** demonstrated active search for information and insight (= you take the lead and move the issue along creatively and coherently. This may come with asking a good question. Or it might come in directing your classmates' attention to something that hasn't been mentioned yet—something from the text or something else from the web or from your own experiences or insights.)
- ☆ **Interaction:** demonstrated ability to respond to and dialogue with others' contributions; demonstrated ability to synthesize previous postings by bringing together what has been said to form a new insight, question, or conclusion (= your comments build on others' comments and your questions elicit your classmates' response. In general, building these kinds of bridges which lets us see how one particular topic is related to other significant issues is a very helpful thing to do.)
- ☆ **Respect:** cooperation in creating an effective, supportive learning atmosphere, demonstrated ability in constructive disagreement (= your comments advance the discussion while always treating others with dignity and respect.)

These criteria correspond to the following grades, which have the same values as those listed on the bottom of p. 5/top of p. 6 of the syllabus. All postings are worth 3 points. You'll receive 1 point for your response being in on time, 1 point for making use of the readings in a substantive way, and 1 point for responding to your classmate(s) in a substantive way (unless you're the first one to respond to a particular question). Now, what do I mean by a "substantive way"?

- √+ "Substantive" in this context means that it becomes clear that you've put some things together with your own **reflections** on the material. For example, you demonstrate **initiative** by referring to specific ideas or concepts in the assigned reading and reflecting on them articulately and with evident understanding. Or, you make interesting connections (between different parts of the class, or between what's in the class and what's outside the class in terms of relating personal experience or focusing on related subjects to those we're discussing) that **interact** effectively with the contributions of others and provide helpful, **respectful** feedback on what they had to say. Doing these things in a posting that comes in on time is 3 points and a +.
- √ Your comment or response is adequate but doesn't go into the depth or level of originality that a + requires, *especially* in your reference to other postings (2 points).
- √- You do a posting on time, but don't do much with the readings or with what others have said. Your posting does not indicate an adequate reading of the material or others' postings; or what you say does not rise to a satisfactory level of critical thinking and review of concepts (1 point).

0 Your posting is more than 1 hour late.

You may consult with me as the semester progresses for how you're doing, as I'll be monitoring the postings and bringing into class points that people have made online. I will also give you an evaluation of your progress at mid-semester.

④ **TESTS** There will be a test at the end of each of the three main sections of the course. These tests will not be cumulative, but will cover only the material from the preceding section. That means that the test during Finals Week on Wednesday, December 18 at 1:45-3:45 (the date and time set by the Registrar), is just over the third section of the course and isn't really a "final" exam for the course. I'll tell you in more detail prior to each test how to prepare. The best way, in general, to prepare for these exams is to keep up with the readings and be able to address the issues and questions I present in the Reading Guides for each day's class. You should also feel free to see me in my office beforehand for help with any other questions you have.

Please realize that tests in a college religion class are not tests of your own religious beliefs or personal convictions. Rather, these tests examine your understanding of the ideas found in the readings and discussed in class and your ability to interact with them intelligently. Expect both objective and essay questions. Objective questions like identifications and short answers evaluate your grasp and analysis of concepts from class and the assigned texts. I'll evaluate the objective part by the following criterion:

☆ **Comprehension:** accurate grasp of ideas, concepts, and theories presented in the readings and in class (= you correctly describe a particular term or concept and do not attribute views to an author that she or he does not hold.)

Essay questions allow you to synthesize what you have learned and present it coherently. I will give you the essay question for each test ahead of time so that you can prepare a response (though you won't be allowed to use any notes or texts during the exam). Prepare your answer carefully, as things thrown together at the last minute usually look like it. I'll evaluate your essays according to the criterion of Comprehension (above) and the other criteria appearing below:

☆ **Organization:** structure of thoughts, coherent development and orderly presentation of ideas (= one point builds on another, and you are clear in what you say so that the reader does not have to read between the lines to figure out what you're trying to communicate. Your answer's structure should be easy to follow.)

☆ **Preparation:** reflective development of ideas (= The ideas and organization in your essay don't make it look like it was slapped together the night before. You demonstrate by what and how you write that you've been keeping up with the readings.)

☆ **Reasoning:** critical and interpretative skills, consistency in what you say (= you satisfactorily and thoroughly defend your views and cogently explain your thinking without contradicting yourself. Remember that an opinion is only as good as the evidence, theory, or reasoning on which it is based. You *must* back up your points with reasons that attempt to demonstrate to your reader the validity of what you're saying. I'll be looking for evidence of analytical thinking in which you demonstrate an ability to see complexities, pursue clarity, and confront inadequate explanations.)

☆ **Originality:** creativity, personal appropriation of the issues and questions surrounding the topic (= you go beyond what the readings and class say to formulate some creative ideas of your own. You take some chances with the material.)

☆ **Mechanics:** grammar, spelling, writing style, sentence structure (excessive instances of poor grammar or poor spelling will definitely lower your grade. Good writing is precise writing, and mistakes in grammar and spelling, do not contribute to precision.)

Readings Available for Purchase (in order of assignment)

- Fr. William J. O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*
- *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Nancy Sandars, ed.)*
- Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion**
- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity**
- C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**



Most other readings on the syllabus will be distributed as xeroxes. *I would strongly encourage you to get a binder or folder to keep these xeroxes in order.* Because of the amount of xeroxing, I'll ask each of you to contribute \$5 towards defraying the costs of copying. *If you ever want to read ahead or miss getting a particular handout in class, all of the xeroxes I'll distribute are on reserve in the Library.* *In addition, you will need a Bible to consult and to bring to class occasionally.* You can also find one online at the course's website. A Bible is on 2-hour reserve at the Circulation Desk in the Library, as are all of the above books with an *. A copy of the syllabus is available through the course website, but you must use Adobe Acrobat to read it (this should automatically launch if you're on a networked lab machine, but might need to be downloaded if you're not). Acrobat can be downloaded through the website. You will also regularly be given assigned readings from the internet. These are designated on your syllabus by **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT**. Recommended (viz., not required) readings from the web which offer background or further considerations about a given topic are designated by **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES**. You may access both of these by going to the course website, looking in the left frame and selecting the date on which the online assignment is due. Click "View Class" and the online assignment(s) for that day will come up in the right frame. Then just click on the assignment in the right frame and that will take you directly to where you need to be.

PowerPoint: The slides that will be projected up in front during class will be available on the web for your preview and review. Go to the website and find the particular class in the frame on the left. When it comes up in the frame at the right, select "Class Outline" right after the date. When that comes up, you'll again see two frames. In the top of the frame at the left, there will be two arrows, one ↑ and the other ↓. Select the down arrow to expand all the outlines on the frames for that class. You can then select "Print Frame" from the "File" menu in Netscape to print out an outline. *I would strongly suggest that you do that before class, as this will save you lots of time taking notes.* There will, of course, still be material you'll need to fill in, but you won't have to copy off lots of things from the screen.

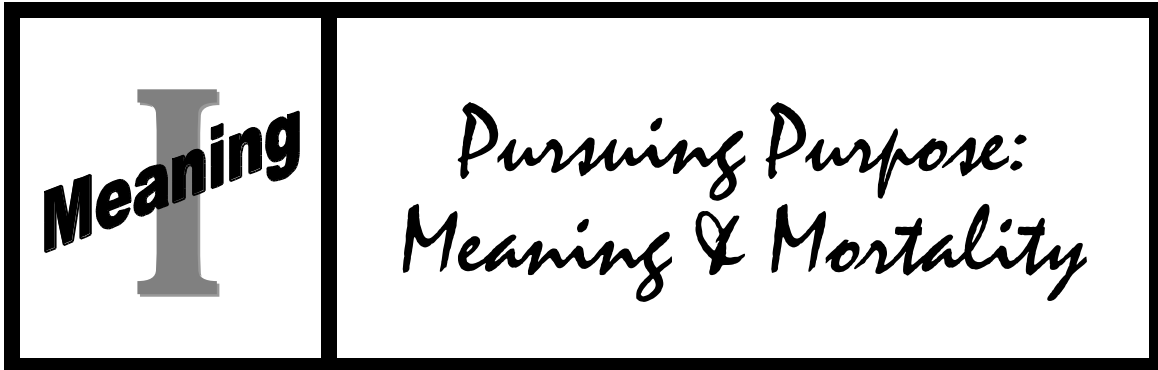


Course Outline and Reading Assignments

AUG 28 (W)

Introduction to the course: Syllabus, class format and requirements

- In addition to the assigned readings for Friday, also read pp. 1-9 on the syllabus to be clear on course policies, due dates, etc; and introduce yourself on the class's online forum (see below for more on this online assignment).



In this section of the course, we'll begin by asking what religion is and how the quest for meaning in life relates to the quest for the transcendent (which some call "God"). We'll also examine ways in which many people remain indifferent to these quests and how *they* live their lives without them. Along these lines, we'll examine the role that death (mortality) has in our thought about religion and purpose in life. Finally, we'll look at a very different take on religion which stands many of the above questions and answers on their head: Sigmund Freud will argue that, far from leading to an encounter with the 'really real,' religion is an illusion which diverts us from living our lives authentically.

AUG 30 (F)



(Web Posting due
for everyone
by 6:30 PM,
Thursday, Aug. 29.)

The Meaning of 'Religion' and the Meaning of Life

- Alister McGrath, "Intimations of a Beyond" (xerox)
- "The Meaning of Life in Five Great Religions" (xerox)
- Ed Cohen, "What is the Meaning of Life?" (xerox)
- Gary Comstock, "What is Religion?" (xerox)
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Introduce yourself online to the rest of the class (name, hometown, dorm you're in, and so on) and give your own definition of religion.

Reading Guide: The goal of this class and these readings is to come up with a preliminary definition of religion that we could use to begin our explorations this semester. How does McGrath think that contemplating the starlit heavens opens up questions of meaning and destiny? How did Socrates link an understanding of the universe as rationally constructed with an understanding of the best way for people to live? What does Freud mean by wish-fulfillment? How do the five great world religions differ on the meaning of life? In the third reading, what does Cohen think we are really asking when we ask what the meaning of life? What are the three schools of thought about the meaning of life that he identifies? What does the "transcendent" mean, and is it a necessary part of a definition of religion? Why or why not?

SEPT 2 (M) **Avoiding Religion: Pascal on Indifference**

- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ##160, 164, 176, 427, 428 on indifference (pp. 1-4 in the handout)
- Pascal, "The Memorial" (xerox)
- Brief biography of Pascal (xerox)
- James Kunen, "It Ain't Us, Babe" (xerox)
- Peter Gomes, "Death and the Believer: The End Is Where We Start From" (xerox)

Reading Guide: Who was Pascal? What happened to him on the night of November 23, 1654? What are the *Pensées*? In these *Pensées* passages, Pascal writes of the indifference of those people who don't think about or don't care about life's *big questions*. Summarize what Pascal is saying about the folly of indifference. That is, what points is he making in these *pensées* about those who neither care nor think about life's big questions and human destiny? In #427, Pascal writes, "All our actions and thoughts must follow such different paths, according to whether there is hope of eternal blessings or not..." What does he mean here and is he right about this observation? (Note that whenever you read something in Pascal that is in single quotation marks [e.g., on the right side of p. 2 in the handout], those are words he's putting into the mouth of a conversation partner. Pascal himself then responds to them in the passages without quotes.) How are Pascal's points about indifference exhibited in "It Ain't Us, Babe," especially in the statements of techno-Goth Alexandra Lynn? How, especially in his discussion of the funeral of Princess Diana, does Peter Gomes show that the modern age tends to sanitize death? In what "business" should religion be, according to Gomes (p. 48)? What two understandings of "the good life" does Goes present (p. 50)? and why is death perfectly compatible with the first one, but completely contradictory to the second? How can a good death give meaning to a good life? This is *exactly* why Pascal is so concerned about death here, and Gomes's point that "The End Is Where We Start From" is an insight on which we will build a lot of this course.

SEPT 4 (W)**Diversion: How the Indifferent Occupy Their Time**

- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ##47, 70, 132, 133, 134, 136, 139, 148, 165, 166, 407, 414, 415, 434, 641 (pp. 5-8 in the handout)
- James St. James, "A Little Splash to a Party" (xerox)
- Alexander Curry, "One Day Soon" (xerox)
- Debbie Richards (on last page of the Curry xerox)
- Dr. Roger Walsh (xerox)
- Fr. William O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*, pp. 1-6

Reading Guide: In these *Pensées* passages, Pascal describes ways people avoid life's big questions and certainties by diverting their attention to other pursuits. How do the readings by St. James, Curry, and Richards provide examples of what Pascal is saying about diversion? Why does Pascal think we pursue diversions? And why is this diversion ultimately unsatisfying, according to him? That is, why can't diversions ever make us truly happy? (He gives three main reasons.) What explanation does Walsh give for why we so readily engage in diversions and avoid life's big questions? What does Walsh mean by "tranquilization of the trivial"? What does Fr. O'Malley identify as "the chief obstacle in the search for God"? How are human beings unique according to O'Malley? What does human restlessness indicate about being human? And for class today, I'd like you to do the following religion 'lab': Sit by yourself in your room in silence (no music, TV on) for 10 minutes.

SEPT 6 (F)**Your Examples of Diversions & Indifference**

- Thomas Naylor, "The Living Dead" (xerox)
- John Monczunski, "The Meaning of Things" (xerox)

Reading Guide: Come to class today with a contemporary example of the use of diversions to avoid the reality of death and the confrontation with life's biggest questions. This example could be something from pop culture like song lyrics, television, movies, or advertisements. It could be something from literature, like a poem or story. It could be something from college life that you've observed (along the lines of Naylor's essay). Be ready to share what you've come up with during class today. (If it would help to have us see or hear what your example is, feel free to load the graphic into your home directory or bring along a CD to play—though obviously, we won't be able to listen to a great many songs due to time constraints.) Why does Naylor think we are in the midst of "a spiritual crisis of unprecedented proportions"? Why does he think college campuses show the prevalence of the loss of meaning in our lives? What does he say the true search for meaning involves? Why do 'students have no incentive to delay gratification'? Who are 'the living dead'? Do you see any signs of the living dead in contemporary culture? Or, more locally, at Saint Mary's?! **[Note: I'll collect \$5 for xeroxing today.]**

SEPT 9 (M)**Gilgamesh: An Ancient Case Study of Indifference and Diversion**

- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Prologue & Chapters 1-4 (pp. 61-107)
- The Old Testament (or Jewish Scriptures): Isaiah 14:9-11; Job 10:20-22; Psalms 30:9 and Psalms 88:3-12
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Look up Sheol, an ancient Jewish notion of the abode of the dead.

Note: If you're new to reading or looking things up in the Bible, the first number in a citation refers to the chapter of the book. The second number or numbers (after the ":") refer to the verses in that chapter. So, Isaiah 14:9-11 refers to the passage in the 14th chapter of the Book of Isaiah, verses 9 to 11. You're also free to look these passages up on the course's website, where all Bible readings for the semester are located. Just select the date of the class in the left frame of the course website and then select the Bible reading that comes up in the right frame. This will take you directly to where you need to be.

Reading Guide: Who was Gilgamesh? What does he want? Why does he want it? What does the beginning of chapter 2 say about Gilgamesh's destiny? How does the view of the afterlife in the Bible passages listed above compare to the one described by Enkidu? What reason does *The Epic of Gilgamesh* give for why people die? Namely, why did the gods keep eternal life just for themselves? (See Siduri's words to Gilgamesh in chapter 4.) What links do you see between the story of Gilgamesh, thus far, and the issues we've discussed in this course thus far?

SEPT 11 (W)**Gilgamesh: The "Secret of the gods" Revealed!**

- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Chapters 5-7 (pp. 108-119)
- The Book of Genesis (first book of the Bible), 6:5 - 9:17 (= read from chapter 6, verse 5 to chapter 9, verse 17)
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Look up what the Catholic Church teaches in its *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, paragraphs 11-13, about the "literary forms" and "the intention of the sacred writers."
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Visit the "Infinite Humanity" website, where you can find what Gilgamesh was looking for ... sort of.

Reading Guide: What were Gilgamesh's 3 setbacks at the end of the story? What, in your view, is *The Epic of Gilgamesh* trying to say about the human condition in the episode with the snake? More broadly, what message do you take away from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* about life and death? Finally, find some similarities between the story of the flood in Gilgamesh and the story of Noah in the Bible. What might explain these similarities? (Note that the Gilgamesh story was written down about 1200 years before the Noah story was.) How would the Church explain them, based upon what it says in its *Constitution on Divine Revelation*?

SEPT 13 (F)

Religion & Afterlife: Are God and Immortality Necessary to Give Meaning to Life?

- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Bishop John Shelby Spong, "Life After Death: A Fatal Delusion?"
- Fr. William O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*, "A World Without God, Guilt, or Grace" (pp. 27-34)
- William Lane Craig, "The Absurdity of Life Without God" (xerox)

Reading Guide: What this class is trying to get at is the role of death (mortality in general) as a motivating force for religious belief and perhaps a central ingredient in the nature of religion itself. If there's *nothing* after death, can life still be meaningful? I'd like everyone to read all of the above articles, but I'd like the first ½ of the alphabet to concentrate on the first two articles and the second ½ to concentrate on the third. In class, we'll have a friendly debate. The first ½ will represent Bishop Spong's views. The second ½ will represent Craig's views. John Shelby Spong is an Episcopalian bishop known for his somewhat controversial views on a number of long-standing Christian doctrines. What is he saying about belief in an afterlife? What is the "middle path" he identifies? What is his conclusion "if the motivation for our goodness is to escape punishment or to win a reward"? Could there be any religion without belief in an afterlife? Conversely, if there were no death, do you think religion would have ever arisen? Craig is trying to construct arguments that there can be no Ultimate Meaning to human life unless there's a God and there's an afterlife. Try to follow his points to these conclusions and see if you agree. You'll see lots of references to Pascal in Craig and so he'll be building on a familiar foundation. What does Craig think is wrong with people conferring *their own meaning* on life? Why is *God* necessary? And what would be the consequences for meaning and purpose if life ended at the grave? Figure all this out and you'll see how the problem of the meaning of life naturally and inevitably leads to questions about the existence of God. This is the *key point*.

SEPT 16 (M) 


The Book of Ecclesiastes: A Biblical Look at Meaning and Mortality

- The Book of Ecclesiastes (all)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Listen to "Turn, Turn, Turn" by the Byrds and compare the lyrics in the song to Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Reading Guide: In what kinds of things did the author try to find meaning in life? What does the Preacher (or Qoheleth) mean when he repeatedly says "all is vanity" (e.g., 1:2; 1:14; 2:17; 3:19; etc.)? (Note that your Bible may have a different translation for "vanity.") There are a great many contradictions in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Try to identify a few places where the author says one thing and then later appears to say the opposite. Be sure to bring your Bible to class today and Wednesday. If you don't have a Bible, you can just print out the Book of Ecclesiastes from the website (it's not long).

SEPT 17 (Tu)

Groundhog Day: A Modern Take on Ecclesiastes

 **Movie:** *Groundhog Day* (This movie will be shown at 6:00-7:40 in Carroll Auditorium. If you're unable to make it then, the movie will be available in Room 148 Madeleva with Mrs. Harrington from Tuesday, September 10, to Monday, September 16. You can sign it out and return it the next day. Be sure you have a Viewing Guide before you watch it so that you can fill it in and return it by tomorrow no later than 9:00 AM under my office door (you can obtain a Viewing Guide from me or print one off online under "Handouts" on the course web page). If you watch it with the rest of the class on Tuesday, Viewing Guides will be collected after the movie.)

▣ **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** You can find a review of this movie (and all of the other movies for this class) through the course website.

SEPT 18 (W)

Ecclesiastes and Modern Meaninglessness

- The Book of Ecclesiastes (continued)
- W.T. Stace, "Man Against Darkness" (xerox)
- Richard Robinson, "Life Has No Purpose" (xerox)

Reading Guide: Three issues for today: First, why do you think that Ecclesiastes is in the Bible? And second, what is the major historical development, "the great revolution" in W.T. Stace's words, that he argues changed the way religion is thought of in the West? And what does he say is the "essence of the religious vision"? Third, how does the author of "Life Has No Purpose" exhibit the things that Stace talked about (in terms of purpose in the universe, the role of cause & effect in our lives, the origin of our values—or "goods" as Robinson calls them)? Also, why does Robinson say that "The atheist's conception of man is, however, still sterner and nobler than that of the theist"? In this regard, be sure to study the blurb from the great philosopher Bertrand Russell found on the last page of the Robinson reading. Be able to give reasons to back up your answers to these questions. In class, we'll talk about why these readings are grouped together and how the answers to these questions all relate to each other.

▣ **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** There are lots of online resources to atheistic views.

SEPT 20 (F) 

And on the other hand... Freud as anti-Pascal

- Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Chapters 3-6 (pp. 18-42)

Reading Guide: What does Freud mean when he calls religion "an illusion"? Where does he think culture comes from? Where does he think religion comes from (that is, what social and psychological factors lead to its development?) and how does he think religion functions in people's lives? How do these views contrast with Pascal's? What, according to Freud, are the 3 functions of the gods (p. 22)? And what are the 3 reasons offered for why religious people believe what they believe (p. 33)? Note: just as Pascal did, Freud also puts objections in the mouth of an imaginary dialogue partner. He employs this technique extensively in chapter 4, where everything in single quotation marks is what this imaginary dialogue partner is saying either in response to Freud or as an objection to Freud's views.

▣ **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** Background on Freud and the major concepts in his writing is available through the course's website.

SEPT 23 (M)

(Web Posting due by **6:30 PM**, Sunday, Sept. 22. First ½ of alphabet posts online; second ½ prepares a prep writing on their postings. Everyone: remember to bring a copy of the postings!


Freud's Religion of Science

- Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Chapters 7-10 (pp. 43-71)
- Dr. John Swartz (xerox)
- Fr. William O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*, "Negative Consequences of Belief" & "Science's Acts of Faith" (pp. 26-27 & 60-61)

Reading Guide: Why does Freud think that the world would be better off without religion? How would it be better? (You might need to review ch. 5 of *The Future of an Illusion*.) What are some examples that might illustrate Freud's thesis about the negative effects religion has had upon civilization? You'll find plenty of vivid illustrations in O'Malley and at the "Atrocities Committed in the Name of Religion" website (see below). [And to help you out as you read Freud: The Oedipus complex is Freud's name for childhood hostility toward the parent of the same sex and attraction toward the parent of the opposite sex. As the child naturally identifies with the parent of the same sex, she or he comes to consider that parent a rival to the affection of the parent of the opposite sex. The Oedipus complex arises as part of the psychosocial development of the personality around ages three to five. Growing up and through this stage is part of normal development. Neuroses develop when this conflict remains unresolved. Also, the word "Weltanschauung" (pp. 43, 46) means "worldview."] How do Freud and Swartz compare science to religion? On what basis would they say we should ground anything that we believe? That is, try to complete this sentence as they would: 'You should only believe' At the same time, how is Freud making a kind of religious commitment to science itself? How does he refer to science on p. 69? What are 'science's acts of faith' according to O'Malley?

►►► **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** For more on Freud's theory of the unconscious and theory of infantile sexuality, see the website. For more on violence with a 'religious' motivation, see "Atrocities Committed in the Name of Religion."

SEPT 25 (W)**Putting the Scientific Pedal to the Religious Metal: the line between faith & gullibility, between Religion & Science**

- Fr. John Polkinghorne, "Christian Belief in a Scientific Age" (xerox)
- Bishop John Shelby Spong, "Yes, Virginia, There is a God!" (xerox)
-  in-class video: *60 Minutes* episode: "... Thy Will be Done?"


Reading Guide: The first reading for today is by someone who is both a scientist and a believer (in fact, a priest). John Polkinghorne is a former professor of mathematical physics at Cambridge University who left his academic career to become an Anglican priest at the age of 49. I'm using his reading because it will help us sum up this first section of the course and lead us nicely into the second section. What does Polkinghorne mean by "the unity of knowledge"? What does he mean by "faith"? How would his view of faith differ from Freud's? Where is the line between faith and gullibility? What does Polkinghorne say a "Grand Unified Theory" ("a GUT as we say in physics") is? What are the only two starting points for such a GUT? Why is the choice between these two explanations "a choice not between a scientific explanation and a religious explanation, but two alternative metaphysical explanations" (p. 6)? [Note: By a "metaphysical explanation," he means something that goes beyond just what's observable, something *beyond* the physical.] What, in the end, does religious belief help Polkinghorne do (p. 9)? For his part, Bishop Spong gives three possibilities for how believers today can encounter the scientific age. Make sure you're familiar with these possibilities, as well as their analogies to different cases about belief in Santa Claus. How in particular does Spong think fundamentalism originates? You'll see a video in class today which very poignantly raises this issue as it examines a case in which parents refused

medical treatment for their ill child, thinking that the only cure could come through a miracle from God. What do you think Freud would say to these parents? We'll have an in-class debate on this and review for the first test.

▶▶▶ ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES: There are some additional resources, both pro and con, on the web about belief in miracles. You might also look up the rationale that Jehovah's witnesses give for refusing transfusions.

SEPT 27 (F)

TEST 1



Finding the 'Good' Life & Staying on Course: Right, Wrong, & Redemption



The previous section of the course showed us how the quest for happiness (a quest which Pascal said *all* people share—#148) may also be the engine behind our diversions. We all seem to be looking for *something* that will complete us and give us rest. But what is that 'something'? What is happiness, after all? What kind of life does one have to live to be happy? Is the 'Good' Life one devoted to pleasure? or one devoted to maintaining values which may even bring pain? Can bad people be happy, or are virtue and happiness somehow joined? Are good & bad, right & wrong just 'good & bad for me,' 'right & wrong for me? Or, are there real, *objective* standards of behavior that go beyond just what a person thinks is right or wrong for her? How does God and religion figure in to such standards? How does seeking goodness relate to the quest for happiness and meaning we examined in the previous section? And how does the human quest for happiness relate to the human quest for God? Are people even capable of attaining their own spiritual or moral well-being? Or does someone (God?) need to help us? Does *Jesus* save? How?

SEPT 30 (M)

Happiness on Skis: Party Vikings and Pleasure

- Scott Salinski, "Party Viking" (xerox)
- Tad A. Devlin (xerox)
- The Dalai Lama, "The Need for Peace and Kindness" (xerox)
- Armand Nicholi, "Happiness: What Is The Source of Our Greatest Enjoyment in Life?" (xerox)

Reading Guide: For class today, I'd like you to ask three people (preferably of different ages and backgrounds) whether they are happy. If yes, then in what does their happiness consist? If no, then what would they need to *be* happy? Assure them that their names won't be used! But come to class ready with their responses. Are Salinski and Devlin happy? How do you respond to Devlin's views and the quest for happiness implied by "The man with the most toys wins"? The Nicholi piece compares Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis on happiness. So that will allow us both to pick up on themes from the previous part of the course and preview some issues from this part of the course, where we'll concentrate on Lewis. How does Freud's understanding of happiness compare to the Party Viking's? Why does Freud think we're not very happy? How does C.S. Lewis link being happy with having a relationship with God? In the final reading, what are the Dalai Lama's two ways to happiness? What is the relation of inner peace to happiness? Can angry people be happy? What does the Dalai Lama say about most of our experiences of pleasure? (Hint: you'll find some similarities to Pascal here.)

OCT 2 (W) **Body & Soul Sisters**

- Thelma Black and Joanne Baker, "The Soul Sisters" (xerox)
- Marlo Meadows, "God Loves the Sinner" (xerox)
- J.R. Reineke, "Introduction" (from *Bad Verses From the Heartland*) (xerox)

Reading Guide: Compare and contrast the Soul Sisters with Marlo Meadows. Are you more impressed with their similarities or differences? Which would you assign to Reineke's Point One and which to Point Two? In light of your response to the initial comparison and contrast, are you satisfied that Reineke is right that there really are, at bottom, only two ways to live life?

OCT 4 (F)**Morality as Objective Reality vs. Subjective Taste**

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Preface & Book I, chapters 1-2 (pp. vii-xvi, 3-15)
- Alison Hornstein, "The Question That We Should Be Asking" (xerox)
- Gail Mandell, excerpt from *Madeleva: A Biography* (xerox)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: On the course website, read Lewis's biographical information. The other sites after this one are there just for your interest.

Reading Guide: Read from Prof. Mandell's biography of Sister Madeleva to find the Saint Mary's connection to C.S. Lewis. According to Lewis, are "right" and "wrong" ("good" and "bad") purely personal (individual) preferences? or are they somehow absolute and universal realities? That is, are moral rules more like the law of gravity (which holds always and everywhere), or are they more like a particular society's rules about which side of the road to drive on (which are, of course, culturally conditioned and therefore variable across times and peoples)? Define what Lewis means by the "Law of Human Nature" (p. 4, *Mere Christianity*) and state why he thinks there is one. What does he mean on p. 13 when he states, "The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other"? What point is Alison Hornstein trying to make about how we understand the events of September 11th? What "deficiency" does she think has arisen by "being taught to think within a framework of moral and cultural relativity without learning its boundaries"? How does this relate to what Lewis is trying to say in these chapters from *Mere Christianity*? **Note:** There's a very good videotaped lecture by Prof. Louis Markos (30 minutes long) on *Mere Christianity* in the Saint Mary's Library Media Center [call number is PR 6023 .E95 Z77 tape 1], and the title of the lecture is "Ethics and the Tao: *Mere Christianity* and *The Abolition of Man*". It's the third lecture on Tape 1.

► **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** There is also a helpful set of study questions on *Mere Christianity* at the website.

OCT 7 (M) **'Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe': From Morality to God**

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book I, chapters 3-5 (pp. 16-32)

Reading Guide: What's the difference between what laws of nature say and what the Law of Human Nature says? What are the shortcomings Lewis uncovers when he tries to explain the origin of moral obligation—the origin of *ought*—through what's convenient and what benefits society? What conclusion does Lewis come to at the end of chapter 3 of Book I? What two views does Lewis consider in chapter 4 to try to explain 'what lies behind the law'? What's wrong with the first one? What conclusion does he come to at the end of chapter 4? At the beginning of chapter 5, why does he think we should agree that "God is 'good'"? In

what way is this good news? and in what way is it bad news? Why do we have 'cause to be uneasy'? What's the "terrible fix" that Lewis thinks we're in? And why, ultimately, does "Christianity not make sense until you have faced the sorts of facts [Lewis has] been describing"? Paraphrase what Lewis is saying in these chapters to make a case for the existence of God. That is, how does Lewis get from the Law of Human Nature to God? Namely, if you start by affirming the existence of the moral law as Lewis describes it, do you end up with something like God? Now, step back a bit and say what you think about whether this argument is successful.

OCT 9 (W)



(Web Posting due by 6:30 PM Tuesday, Oct. 8. Second ½ of alphabet posts online; first ½ prepares a prep writing on their postings. Everyone: remember to bring a copy of the postings!)

Ship-shape Living: The 3 Parts of Morality

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, chapters 1, 2; Book IV, chapters 1, 4 (pp. 69-81, 172-177, and only pp. 153-156 of Book IV, ch. 1)
- Elizabeth Austin, "In Search of Virtue" (xerox)
- Fr. J.A. DiNoia, "Doctrines about Other Religions" (xerox)

Reading Guide: What are the three parts of morality that Lewis mentions? What's a virtue, and what are the *cardinal* virtues? In the Elizabeth Austin essay, what does Fr. Keenan say about the cardinal virtues? According to Austin, what is virtue 'essentially about' (second page, middle of right column)? And what is morality about (third page, top left)? In light of Lewis's analogy of the fleet of ships, what does he mean when he says that "different beliefs about the universe lead to different behaviour"? Try to relate this to Stace's explanation of the origin of the "widespread belief in 'ethical relativity.'" According to Book IV, ch. 1 of *Mere Christianity*, how is theology both like a map, but also much more than a map? How, in short, is theology "practical" (Book IV, ch. 1)? The DiNoia essay and its example of the musician will nicely complement Lewis's analogy of the ships. In addition, Fr. DiNoia makes some nice connections between moral practice and the aim or purpose of life (for our purposes, between Part I and Part II of the course). And so, how do Fr. DiNoia's points parallel those of Lewis? In particular, how is his analogy of the cellist like Lewis's analogy of the three ships? And what does DiNoia mean when he says (of Buddhists), "By undertaking to seek Nirvana and to have one's capacities and dispositions shaped by the pattern of life commended by the community, one becomes the sort of person who can attain and, more importantly, *enjoy* that which Nirvana entails" (italics mine)? In a Christian context, DiNoia speaks about "the true aim of life" as "fellowship with the Blessed Trinity" (p. 7). Take this point back to what Lewis says in Book IV, chapter 4 in *Mere Christianity* about the trinity (or three-personal life of God). First, how does he 'explain' the trinity? Second, what does Lewis mean when he says "There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made" (p. 176)? And all of these points tie completely back to what Lewis was saying about Heaven in the very last paragraph of Book III, chapter 2 (pp. 80-81).

OCT 11 (F)

Going Wrong: A View from the Beginning

- Fr. William O'Malley, "Scripture and Myth" (xerox)
- William Placher, "Is the Bible True?" (xerox)
- The Book of Genesis 1:1-3:24
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on symbolism and different literary forms (genres) in the Book of Genesis. See paragraphs ## 110 & 362. Also re-read paragraphs ## 11 - 13 from the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* from the Second Vatican Council. The latter were first assigned when we read *Gilgamesh*.

Reading Guide: What does Fr. O'Malley mean by the "positive sense" of myth vs. the "negative sense"? What does he think those who *always* interpret the Bible *only* literally miss out on? What does Placher think it means to say that the Bible is true? and how is an understanding of different *genres* important to perceiving biblical truth? How are his points

related to what the Catholic Church is saying about symbolism and different “literary genres”? We’ll apply these points to the biblical accounts of the creation of the world. A careful reading will show that God seems to create the world twice in these pages. The first account of creation runs from Genesis 1:1-2:4. The second runs from 2:4-3:24. Many biblical scholars think there are actually two separate, though related versions of creation in the first three chapters of Genesis. Let’s take that as a starting hypothesis. Then the questions become (1) what are the differences? and (2) why would there be two accounts of creation? Perhaps the two versions make distinct points. What does the first account say and what does the second say about our world and about our lives in the world? Where is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Please bring your Bible to class today (or a printout of these chapters from Genesis).

OCT 14 (M)

Pride: The Road Away from God & The Obstacle to Happiness

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, chapters 4, 8, 11, 12 (pp. 84-93, 121-128, 138-150)
- Elie Wiesel, “How Can We Understand Their Hatred?” (xerox)
- Jim Farrands, “The Grand Wizard” (xerox)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: On the website, see the representation of Satan in this painting from a 16th century Dutch artist, Michael Coxie.
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT [SELF-ASSESSMENT]: By the end of this week, respond via e-mail on the form provided about how you’re doing in this class so far.

Reading Guide: Why does Lewis think that pride is such a vice? Using the categories found previously in his 3 points of morality, what are the dangers of pride? Why does Lewis think that pride is “the complete anti-God state of mind” (p. 110)? What does he mean when he says, “When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less. A moderately bad man knows he is not very good: a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right” (chapter 4)? How does this understanding of pride relate to the representation of Satan on the web? How are Elie Wiesel’s points about religious fanaticism and September 11th related to Lewis’s sense of pride? Why does he think fanaticism is seductive? Why does the fanatic ‘feel proud and superior’? And how are the dangers of pride (in light of what both Lewis and Wiesel are saying) exhibited in the Farrands piece?

► ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES: There’s a very interesting website sponsored by www.tolerance.org that tracks hate groups across the country and gives some background about their beliefs. You can click a state on the map and get a list of hate groups in your home state.

OCT 16 (W)


Salvation: The Way Home

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book II, chapters 1-4 (pp. 35-59)

Reading Guide: Why does Lewis think Christians “must believe that God is separate from the world” (p. 45)? What is pantheism and what is dualism? What critique does Lewis offer for the one and then the other? Why is badness ‘parasitic’ (p. 51) on goodness? What is the “shocking alternative” about Jesus? What is the ‘hole’ Lewis said we have gotten ourselves into? Why can’t we get out on our own? How does Jesus help us out of the hole, according to Lewis? More specifically, why does Lewis say that God needed to become human and why does Jesus need to be God to rescue us (end of chapter 4, pp. 60-61)? These points get at what Lewis means by salvation and why and from what he thinks humanity needs to be saved.

OCT 17 (Th)

'Get Busy Living or Get Busy Dying'

 **Movie:** *The Shawshank Redemption*

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, chapter 10 (pp. 134-137)
- The Book of Hebrews 6:19 & 11:1
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** On the website, read the explanation of "Redemption" and keep it in mind as you watch this movie.

[Note: This film will be shown tonight from 5:30-8:00 in Carroll Auditorium. As before, it will be available in Madeleva 148 from last Thursday through today for those who can't make it tonight. Be sure that if you see it early, you have a Viewing Guide at hand to fill out and hand in under my door no later than 9:00 tomorrow morning.]

OCT 18 (F)

Hope & The Desire for One's True Home

Discussion of *The Shawshank Redemption*



OCT 28 (M)

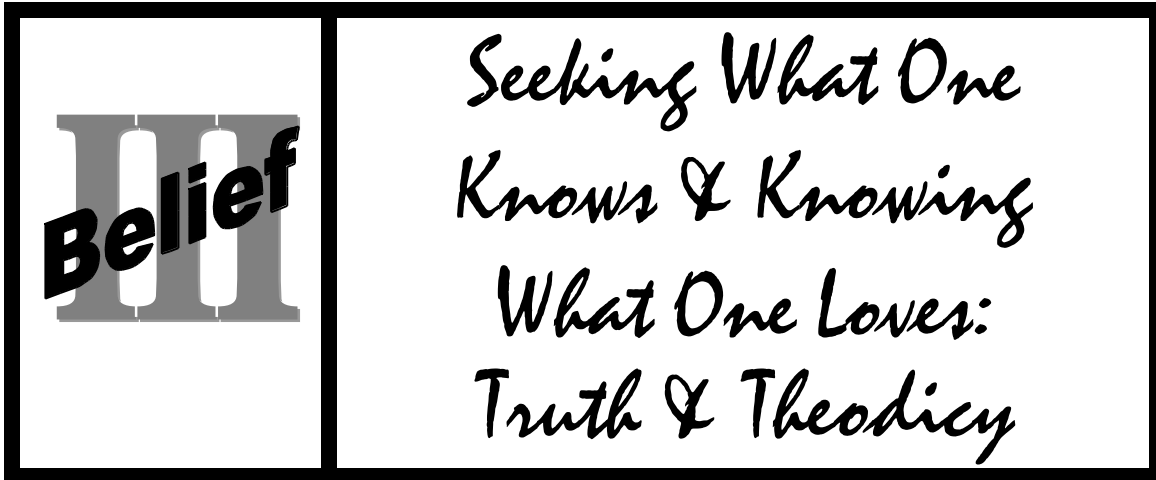
Lewis in Narnia & Salvation with a Mane

- C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (all)
- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, chapter 1 (finish off this chapter from the previous assignment a few classes ago, and so read from the bottom of p. 156 to p. 159)
- Catherine Lynskey Crisham, "The Adventures of Aslan" (xerox)

Reading Guide: Why would the same person who wrote *Mere Christianity* write this children's story? What does the Crisham essay say Lewis's intent was in writing fairy tales (see especially the passages she quotes from Lewis's own essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said")? What themes and ideas are common to both *Mere Christianity* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*? We'll also review for the second test today. **Note:** In the Media Center of Saint Mary's Library, there is a videotaped lecture by Prof. Louis Markos on *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It's lecture 9 of Tape 3 of *The Life and Writings of C.S. Lewis* [call number is PR 6023 .E95 Z77 tape 3].

OCT 30 (W)

TEST 2



Is faith really blind? Do believers leave their minds behind when they take the 'leap of faith'? How does the quest for truth relate to the quest for God? We'll look at two major subjects under these headings (and ultimately relate them). **First**, we have to this point in the course been looking at belief vs. unbelief, religion vs. atheism. There is, however, an equally important series of choices under the "belief" option relating to *which* belief to hold. That is, is any religious path as good as, as right as, as true as, any other, and how should we understand other religions and belief systems? **Second**, how do encounters with evil and the suffering of the innocent affect religious belief (theodicy)? Why do bad things happen to good people? How do we (or *can* we) understand deadly diseases and events like September 11th?

NOV 1 (F)

11:00 section
meets in 324
Moreau today;
1:00 & 2:00
sections meet
in Library
Media Center.

Heaven's Gate: A Journey to the Next Level

- Newsweek, "The Next Level" (xerox)
- Kenneth Woodward, "Christ and Comets" (xerox)
- Rosemary Ruether, "Heaven's Gate: A Mingling of Traditions" (xerox)
- Fr. Richard McBrien, "The Lessons of Heaven's Gate" (xerox)
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** St. Paul, The First Letter to the Thessalonians, 4:13-18
- Larry Cunningham, "How do we rise from the dead?" (xerox)
- C.S., *Mere Christianity*, Book II, chapter 5 (pp. 60-65)
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** On the course website, browse through both the Heaven's Gate home page. At the Heaven's Gate site, read "Do's Intro: Our Purpose—The Simple Bottom Line." Also, examine how Heaven's Gate believers used the Bible to support their own beliefs. You might also wish to read "Statement by an E.T. Presently Incarnate."
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Consult the "Rapture index," which is billed as a kind of Dow-Jones industrial average for the end of the world. The higher the number, the closer the world is to the Second Coming of Christ.

Reading Guide: The issue that we begin today is why do people believe what they believe? What—if anything—grounds or provides some rational foundation for religious belief? We'll first look at this question in light of the beliefs of the Heaven's Gate community. What's the basic outline of Heaven's Gate belief? Who are the Luciferians? (The first two articles assigned for today will help you with these questions.) As you look at the Heaven's Gate website, note down two interesting things that Do says about the purpose of his community. Where does his group find

meaning? According to the readings from Rosemary Ruether and Fr. McBrien, what similarities exist between the beliefs and practices of the Heaven's Gate movement and the beliefs and practices found in the Christian tradition? What similarities exist between what St. Paul says in the letter to the Thessalonians about Christian resurrection and what Do says about the Heaven's Gate group joining Ti in the mothership? (The brief Cunningham piece is just for background on the Christian notion of resurrection.) What similarities exist between how Lewis describes salvation as "not merely the spreading of an idea; it is more like evolution—a biological or super-biological fact" (p. 64) and what Do says about becoming "a new creature"? Back at the Heaven's Gate site, examine how the group uses the Bible to back up its beliefs and practices (see, especially, Matthew 19:29). As you read these things, think whether Christian belief is any better grounded—any more or less rational, any more or less credible—than Heaven's Gate belief, or any other kind of belief.

Note the room change for class today according to the section you're in.

For those in the 1:00 & 2:00 sections, the Media Center is in the basement of the library. At the bottom of the stairs, turn right when you get to the Trumper Center, walk back through the periodicals and take your first right.

NOV 4 (M)



(Web Posting due by 6:30 PM Sunday, Nov. 3.
First ½ of alphabet posts online; second ½ prepares a prep writing on their postings.
Everyone: remember to bring a copy of the postings!

Religion vs. Cult, and Dying for what one Believes

- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas
- St. Ignatius of Antioch, "Epistle to the Romans" (xerox)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Background on St. Ignatius of Antioch
- Bishop Spong, "Heaven's Gate and the Death of Christianity" (xerox)
- Gary Macy, "A Dangerous Cult" (xerox)
- Newsweek, "Far from Home" (xerox)
- Erica Goode, "The Eternal Quest for a New Age" (xerox)

 in-class video: *60 Minutes* episode: "Heaven's Gate"

Reading Guide: Why would people join Heaven's Gate (the *60 Minutes* episode will help us with this one)? In fact, why would *anyone* willingly go to their deaths for a *belief*? You'll read about the martyrdom of the Christian Saints Perpetua and Felicitas from the early 3rd century and Saint Ignatius from the 2nd. Both make fascinating tales told largely in the first person. As you read these stories of martyrdom, think about how their commitment to their Christian belief compares with commitment to Heaven's Gate belief by *its* followers. In particular, can we compare the longing for death by Saint Perpetua and Saint Ignatius with the longing to escape this world found among Heaven's Gate adherents? From the background short piece by Gary Macy, how were early Christians viewed by their surrounding society? Where does Bishop Spong agree with Freud, and do you agree with Spong when he says that "religion is always in the mind control business"? How does he think that Heaven's Gate shows that Christianity needs "to separate itself from religion"? Do you agree with Spong that "organized religion is cultic at its very core"? Finally, is Heaven's Gate a religion (according to our definition or religion)? Or is it a cult? If the latter, what do we mean by a cult? And—if you want to say that Christianity is a religion and Heaven's Gate is a cult—how can this be in light of the apparent similarities between Christian belief & practice and Heaven's Gate belief & practice?

NOV 6 (W)

The Eastern Face of the Transcendent: Hinduism

- Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Dissolution into the One Lies Beyond Death" (xerox)
- Swami Nikhilananda, "The Sacred Is the One True Reality of Brahman" (xerox)

- Fr. William O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*, chapter 6 on Hinduism (pp. 85-92) and chapter 7, pp. 144-147 on Eastern vs. Western views of transcendence
 - ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Namaskar (learn about ritual Hindu greeting)
 - ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Explanation of all major Hindu deities (just browse through this list and click on some of the names you encounter in these readings)
 - ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: The Chandogya Upanishad (read about the Hindu notion of oneness ("You are that!"))
 - ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Listen to "My Sweet Lord" by George Harrison
- Reading Guide:** The Radhakrishnan and Nikhilananda essays are from representatives of the Hindu tradition, which the reading from O'Malley introduces. What is Brahman? What is Atman? And what does it mean to say that Atman is Brahman? As we'll see, Hinduism is a very diverse tradition, but what does O'Malley say is its "essence"? What does the Radhakrishnan essay mean by freedom and how can it be attained? What are *karma* and *samsara*? From the online assignment, what is Namaskar, and what does it mean? The Chandogya Upanishad will give you a classic Hindu scripture that illustrates the notion "That art thou" from p. 124 of the Nikhilananda essay. What does this mean? What differences do you see between this liberation by Hindus and the salvation through Christ we discussed earlier (see pp. 144-147 of O'Malley)? What elements in Hinduism remind you of beliefs held by the Heaven's Gate group? That is, what ideas do you think were borrowed? Try to get a sense of how religions influence each other. Finally, what's the relevance to a class on Hinduism of listening to George Harrison's "My Sweet Lord"?
- ▶▶▶ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES: As you might imagine, there are lots of helpful websites out there devoted to Hinduism and Buddhism. You might especially benefit from the glossaries as you're reading the assignment for today and for next time.

NOV 8 (F)

The Eastern Face of the Transcendent: Buddhism

 in-class video: *Mandala: The Sacred Circle of Vajrabhairava*

- Fr. William O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*, chapter 6 on Buddhism (pp. 92-101)
- Dhiravamsa, "Meaning is Found Through Overcoming Attachment to Reality" (xerox)
- "A Conversation with His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet" (xerox)
- The Dalai Lama, "Examining How Beings and Things Exist" (xerox)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: "The Discovery of the Dalai Lama"

Reading Guide: In what sense is Buddhism "a Hindu Protestantism"? That is, in what areas does Buddhism differ from Hinduism? What is the Buddhist view of the self? What are the Four Noble Truths? And what is the path to the relief of suffering? What does Tenzin Gyatso (the Dalai Lama) teach about the means to inner peace? And how does he interpret suffering? In "Examining How Beings and Things Exist," the Dalai Lama says that "the fundamental cause of suffering is ignorance" (p. 137)—most particularly, the ignorance that living beings and objects have a kind of independent existence. What does he mean by "the wisdom of emptiness"? What happens when the "ignorance that misconceives phenomena to inherently exist" is removed? Why is compassion needed to become enlightened? In class today, we'll look at a mandala ritual, which will help us understand in a very artistic way some main themes of Buddhism as they come out in the above articles.

NOV 11 (M)

The Western Face of the Transcendent: Judaism

- Abraham Heschel, "The Spirit of Judaism" (xerox)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Rabbi David Wolpe, "The Meaning of Being Chosen"
- Jacob Milgrom, "You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk" (xerox)
- Fr. William O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*, chapter 7 on Judaism (pp. 111-121)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: "Time-line for the History of Judaism"
- Kenneth Woodward, "In the Beginning, There Were the Holy Books" (xerox)

Reading Guide: According to the first two articles above, what does it mean for the Jews to be "the chosen people"? Along these same lines, why does Heschel say "There is a unique association between the people and the land of Israel"? And—also along these same lines—how does Jacob Milgrom explain the biblical prohibition against boiling a kid (that is, a baby goat) in its mother's milk? The O'Malley piece will give you further background on Judaism, and I'd like you to look through the online timeline (up to "The Early Christian Period of Development") to get a sense of the major figures and periods in Jewish history. Pay special attention to the idea of a *covenant*, as this directly relates back to the Jews as chosen people. Finally, in the Woodward piece, discover the similarities and differences between the Bible and the Qur'an. Most especially, if Jews and Christians "regard the Biblical text as the words of divinely inspired human authors," what do Muslims regard the Qur'an?

► ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES: There are some online glossaries that will help you with terms and concepts from Judaism, including Jewish dietary laws. You can also send a (virtual) prayer to the Western (Wailing) Wall of the Temple.

NOV 13 (W)

The Western Face of the Transcendent: Islam

 in-class video: *Nightline* episode: "Temple Mount"

- Mohammad Zia Ullah, "The Sacred Is Allah, the One True God" (xerox)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: "The Dome of the Rock" by Roger Garaudy
- *Newsweek*, "Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus" (xerox)
- Fr. William O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*, chapter 7 on Islam (pp. 139-144)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Osama bin Laden et al., "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders"
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: "Q & A on Islamic Fundamentalism"
- Karen Armstrong, "The True, Peaceful Face of Islam" (xerox)

Reading Guide: We want to use the city of Jerusalem as a lens through which to examine both Jewish and Islamic theology. Why is this city important to each? Did the Prophet Muhammad think that he was founding a new religion (see the online piece by Roger Garaudy)? This online assignment will also fill you in on the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine which now sits on the former site of the first and second Jewish temples, known as the Temple Mount. (We'll get some more background on this through the *Nightline* episode we'll view in class today.) Why does Garaudy call the Dome of the Rock "the first example, and a very striking one, of the Islamic world-view"? That is, how does that building encapsulate what Islam is all about? Observe from the online site how the inside of the dome is decorated. What, in particular, *don't* you see in the decorations on the walls that are usually found in most Christian churches? How does this relate to the concept of "shirk" which Mohammad Zia Ulla describes in his essay on Allah? Why would both Jews and Moslems come to blows in the wake of a September 2000 visit to the Temple Mount by one of Israel's leading conservative politicians (and now Prime Minister), Ariel Sharon? More broadly, what causes religious

persecution, especially among groups worshipping the same God? To help you get through these readings, here is some vocabulary. An **Arab** is anyone who speaks Arabic as a native language. A **Palestinian** is usually taken to be an Arab who lives in Palestine (now a part of the country of Israel) and advocates the establishment of a separate homeland for the Palestinian people. This homeland would be carved out of the present nation of Israel. Most Palestinians are Moslem. **Israel** is the Jewish nation founded in May, 1948, and located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Jews claim the state of Israel as *their* homeland.

► **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** As before, there are some online glossaries that will help you with terms and concepts from Islam. You can also find background on Ariel Sharon's September 2000 visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem which contributed to the latest wave of Mid-east violence.

NOV 15 (F) 📖

The Universal Face of the Transcendent?

- Forrester Church, "The Cathedral of the World" (xerox)
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** look up the Unitarian website and read the statement of Unitarian belief
- Stacy Cara Cohen, "An Interview with a Pagan Priestess" (xerox)
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Religion and faith basics of Wicca

Reading Guide: What we've seen so far in this section of the course is how questions about other belief systems lead us to ask what concepts like truth and rationality mean where religion is concerned. We now take these questions to Forrester Church's essay. Explain Church's analogy of the windows in the cathedral. What does he take that to show? How does this relate to Unitarian belief? What is the one thing about which Church says he's "dogmatic"? What do *you* think about Church's analogy as a way to explain other beliefs? As a case study, we'll examine the article about Teresa Lynch, a pagan priestess and former valedictorian of her Saint Mary's class ('91).

► **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** You can find abundant information about other religions and belief systems through the "Sources of General Information" at the course's website. You can also look at Forrester Church's homepage (and even e-mail him through it), and you can get additional information about wicca and earth-based religions (including the website for EarthSong, the group that Teresa Lynch leads).

NOV 18 (M)

Encountering an Elephant and Responding to Church

- Peter Kreeft, "How to Be Comparatively Religious," *Socrates Meets Jesus*, Chapter 6, pp. 77-101 (xerox)
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** *Dominus Jesus*, by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Read sections 1-2 and 20-23.
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Belief System Selector: An Exploration of the World's Religions

Reading Guide: According to the first two readings, can all religions be *equally* true? How do Kreeft's analogies with the elephant and the mountain contribute to addressing this question in these pages? What did Bertha use these analogies to prove? And how does Socrates respond about what these analogies *really* show? In particular, does Socrates think that Christianity is our search for God? or is it God's search for us? How would Socrates respond to Forrester Church? What does the Catholic Church teach about the truthfulness of other religions? The Belief System Selector is billed as "a fun and informative activity to explore world religions and belief systems." Fill in your responses to about 20 questions, submit them, and instantly find out which religion most closely matches what you believe. There are also links for more information on each belief system when you get your results. Try it!

NOV 20 (W)

11:00 section
meets in 324
Moreau today;
1:00 & 2:00
sections meet
in Library
Media Center.

God's Initiative Down the Mountain: Revelation and Gospels

- The Gospel of Mark (all)
- reread Fr. William O'Malley, "Scripture and Myth"
- Paul Beeching, "Gospels in the Classroom" (xerox)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: I've put several pictures of Jesus on the website. Take a look at them (this will take only a few minutes) and try to figure out why they differ and what these differences mean. Recall that Fr. William O'Malley in his essay "Scripture and Myth" had compared the gospels to *paintings* of Jesus, rather than photographs.
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: Take a tour of the synoptic Gospels. When you go to the website and click on the synoptic gospels, you'll see four columns come up: one for Matthew's Gospel, one for Mark's, one for Luke's, and one for John's. The reason for grouping them in this way is to see parallels (and differences) between their accounts of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. So you'll note that Matthew's Gospel is represented by a little purple book, Mark's by a blue one, Luke's by a green one, and John's by a red one. If you scroll down any of these columns, you'll see different color books next to the text. If you click on, say, a purple book as you're going through Mark's Gospel, you'll see the parallel in Matthew's Gospel come up. Now, here's what I want you to do: Scroll down through Mark's Gospel, and what do you notice? That is, which Gospels seem to have the most parallels to Mark's Gospel? Next, scroll down through John's Gospel. What do you notice as you do this? We'll play around with the Synoptics a bit more during class today in the Media Center.

Reading Guide: The issue of other religions and what to make of them led us to Socrates's question of whether religions come from the top down or whether they are all just human attempts to reach God from the bottom up. This issue now leads us to the Gospels and the issue of divine revelation, since the person and mission of Jesus just are what Christians claim to be God's initiative down the mountain to the bottom of the pit to save a fallen humanity. What does Fr. O'Malley mean when he likens the gospels to paintings? Many times in his Gospel, Mark "frames" a particular section of his Gospel by putting one kind of miracle before it and the same kind after it. For example, Jesus cures a blind man in 8:22-26 and 10:46-52. Between these two cures is what many regard as the central section of Mark's Gospel where Jesus is trying to get his disciples to see why he must suffer and what the true nature of Christian discipleship is. Find and try to explain another example of this framing technique in Mark 2:1-3:6. What techniques do the Synoptic Gospels employ and what does this mean for what Beeching calls "the narrative's overall design"? What does it mean to read Mark as a "pastoral document"? What conclusions do you draw from the online assignment about overlap between the different gospels? Who was King Herod? Who was Pontius Pilate? (If you don't know, consult the additional online resources for today's class.) *While we'll be looking at the gospels online today, it might help to have a Bible ahead of you as well.*

- ▣ ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES: There is good general background to what kinds of writing gospels are, why there are 4 canonical gospels, and so on.

NOV 22 (F)

CLASS CANCELLED

NOV 25 (M)

Love & Suffering: The Unpleasant Reality

- The Gospel of Mark (continued)
- John Garvey, "A God Who Hurts" (xerox)
- ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: the crucifixion of Jesus

- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Listen to “I Am a Rock” by Simon & Garfunkel and “The Rose” by Bette Midler
- **ONLINE ASSIGNMENT:** Background to the Gospel of Mark. Look especially at the historical context of this gospel’s composition and what was going on in Jerusalem in the late 60’s, early 70’s AD.

Reading Guide: How are the disciples portrayed in Mark’s Gospel? Look especially at Mark 4:10-13; 6:50-52; 7:17-18; 9:2-6; 9:10; 9:31-35; 10:35-37; 16:8. What kind of picture of Jesus’s first followers emerges here? I mean, are these folks to be proud of? What do you think the author’s point was in emphasizing these qualities? Secondly, Jesus was clear in Mark’s Gospel that following him came with a price—in fact, a relatively painful price. See 8:34-35. How does the link between love and suffering come out in the online music? What is the root meaning of the word ‘compassion’? and why does Garvey think that “Love is not serious without compassion”? What was going on in Jerusalem at about the time that Mark’s Gospel was written? and how does this historical context affect themes and emphases in Mark (for example, the way Mark presents the disciples)? The theme of suffering will be with us until the end of the semester, but we’ll see it especially in *Shadowlands*. Please bring your Bible to class today.

NOV 25 (evening)

Lewis’s Pain Linked to Lewis’s Happiness: ‘That’s the Deal’

Movie: *Shadowlands*

[Note: The film will be shown tonight from 6:00-8:15 in Carroll Auditorium. It will be on reserve in Madeleva 148 from last Tuesday until this morning. If you see it over break, your Viewing Guide will be due no later than 9:00 on Monday, December 2 under my door. **IMPORTANT:** There are two versions of the movie *Shadowlands*. If you see it on your own, be sure you watch the 1994 version starring Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger.]

► **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** The “Into the Wardrobe” website features several interesting pictures from Lewis’s life, including lots of pictures relating to scenes and people from *Shadowlands*. Pictures of Lewis and Joy, as well as Douglas Gresham, are available here. You can also download an audio file to hear Lewis’s voice. And if you want to continue with C.S. Lewis after this course, a different quote from Lewis’s work appears each day at this site.



THANKSGIVING

DEC 2 (M)

The Shadowed Side of C.S. Lewis

Discussion of *Shadowlands*

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, chapter 11 (pp. 138-143: *reread*)
- “A C.S. Lewis Timeline” (xerox—This will help you to place the various events depicted in *Shadowlands*.)

DEC 4 (W)

(Web Posting due by 6:30 PM

Tuesday, Dec. 3.

Second ½ of alphabet posts online; first ½ prepares a prep writing on their postings.

Everyone: remember to bring a copy of the postings!

American Shadowlands: The Events of September 11

- Dr. John Clinton Evans, "God's Care Is Beyond Reason" (xerox)
- Rev. Pat Robertson, "God Almighty is Lifting His Protection" (xerox)
- Rev. Jerry Falwell, "I Blame No One but the Hijackers" (xerox)
- James Skillen, "Not without Criticism" (xerox)
- Bishop José Gomez, "How Do We Keep Our Faith When God Seems to be Silent?" (xerox)
- Archbishop Rowan Williams, "Last Words" (xerox)

Reading Guide: All of these are Christian theological reflections about where God was (and what God is) in light of September 11th. As you'll see, the different authors adopt a variety of perspectives, and some of them directly disagree about important matters. Try to compare and contrast these different perspectives. Which of these views do you think are most correct? Which of these are least correct? And on what basis are you making these judgments? That is, what are these readings saying (or not saying) about God that leads you to your position?

DEC 6 (F)**Theodicy Revisited: Does Everything Happen for a Reason?**

- Thomas Tracy, "Why Do the Innocent Suffer?" (xerox)
- Kevin Axe, "When Bad Weather Happens to Good People" (xerox)
- David van Biema, "When God Hides His Face" (xerox)
- Kenneth Woodward, "Overcoming Sin" (xerox)

Reading Guide: What does "theodicy" mean? What do they try to do? What 'solutions' to the evil in the world do Tracy and Axe reject? Do they think that everything happens for a reason? Do you? What does Tracy think is wrong with the theodicy he calls "a vast pedagogy of pain" (p. 49)? What would be the consequences if all pain and suffering were eliminated so that we lived in what Tracy calls "a cosmic nursery school"? What would happen to morality? Where does Christian trust in God's benevolence find its sources? Evaluate all of these ideas in light of the heart-wrenching story of the Guthrie family profiled in the van Biema essay. As background, read Woodward's "Overcoming Sin." How has evil and suffering been explained in the major world religions?

DEC 9 (M)**The Christian Response to Suffering and Evil: The Resurrection of Jesus**

- Peter Kreeft, "Look Out! It's Alive!" *Socrates Meets Jesus*, pp. 150-153, 160-179 of Chapter 9 (xerox)
- Fr. William O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question*, "The Meaning of Religious Faith" (pp. 6-8)

Reading Guide: We began this section of the course by speaking about other religions. This led us (a) to questions about faith, rationality, and truth; and (b) to the Gospels and the person of Jesus Christ, whom Christians claim as the decisive *revelation* of God (the ultimate trip *down* the mountain). Mark's Gospel led us to the topic of suffering, which we followed into C.S. Lewis's 'shadowlands' of his soul. Most recently, we've seen that the primary response by Christians to suffering—the way out of the shadowlands and out of the pit—goes through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I hope you can now see why nothing less than everything is at stake with the death and resurrection of Jesus for how we think about meaning (Part I of the course), morality and salvation (Part II)

and truth and other religions (Part III). This leads us to the home stretch. And so.... we pick up where Tracy's essay left us off with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus as absolutely central to Christian belief. How does Socrates's understanding of the resurrection compare to his Christology professor's? What significance does Socrates think the resurrection has? How does Socrates attempt to argue for the literal truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Look at Socrates's swimming analogy (to belief) and compare with what Fr. O'Malley is saying. According to O'Malley, how is faith neither a blind leap in the dark nor an assent with absolute certitude? How is marriage a parallel for belief in God?

▣ ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES: See the course website for a site called "Evidence for the Resurrection," which gives alternate statements of many of the points Socrates is making in the above reading.

DEC 11 (W)

Belief and The Gift of Doubt

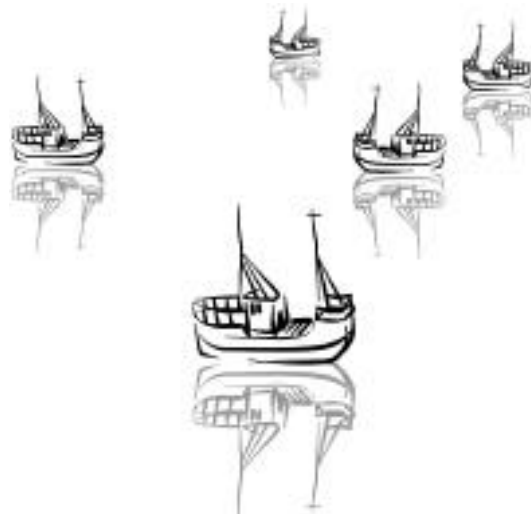
- Lee Strobel, "Objection #8: 'I Still Have Doubts, so I Can't Be a Christian'" (xerox)

- Anita Mathias, "I Was a Teen-Age Atheist: Memoirs of a naughty Catholic girlhood" (xerox)

Reading Guide: If you're taken the course seriously to this point, then I'm sure that at least some of your beliefs have been challenged. Others have probably been solidified. Perhaps some of you are emerging from here with more questions about important matters in your life and world than you had when you entered in August. For all of these reasons, I chose this reading from Strobel which affirms the importance of continual intellectual scrutiny of one's religious commitments. The stories he tells about various people's obstacles to belief show that religious commitment isn't an isolated part of one's life or one's thoughts. Instead, note how these stories show that Belief (Part III) is intrinsically connected in people's lives to Meaning (Part I) and Morality (Part II). Why does Strobel think that, in the end, doubt is a "gift"? How did Fr. O'Malley in the reading from last class agree with this point when he wrote, "The great sin is certitude; the great virtue is doubt" (p. 8)? The piece by Anita Mathias is meant to be an illustration of some of Strobel's points. Why did she become an atheist? What experiences later in her life challenged that commitment? How, for her, were belief, meaning, and morality connected? To what point can intellect bring a person? What did she mean when she called faith "the missing link"? How is faith like love?

DEC 13 (F)

Journey's End



RLST 101 Student Information Sheet

☞ Name (first name as you wish to be called in class + last name):

☞ I.D. #

☞ Hometown:

☞ High School attended:

☞ Year in school:

☞ Local address (if on campus, please list hall, room number, and P.O. box):

☞ Local phone #:

☞ Do you regularly (= at least a few times a week) check your e-mail? What is the address of the account you use most often? _____

☞ Are you acquainted with how to find things on the World Wide Web?

☞ Do you have fairly convenient access to a networked computer (namely, is there one in your room or one owned by a friend who lives close-by in your residence hall)?

☞ What is (or might be) your major?

☞ What would you like to do or be when you leave college?

☞ What other courses will you probably be taking this semester?

☞ Any extracurricular activities, sports, or hobbies?

☞ Have you ever studied religion before? If so, when and how?

☞ What do you hope to get out of this course? As a way of answering this, complete this sentence: "I'll consider this course a big success if ..."

☞ Related to this, what do you think it would take to make this class actually fun for you?

☞ Class participation will be an important part of your educational experience in this course. You learn when you formulate your own thoughts into words, and others learn from the things you say. In light of this, four questions:

- ① Do you feel comfortable participating in class discussions?
- ② If **yes** to #1, is it OK to call on you even if your hand isn't up? If **no** to #1, what can I do to help you feel comfortable in sharing your thoughts with the rest of us (in terms of setting up the class, organizing group discussions, etc.)?

- ③ Without my calling on you, how often do you think you would naturally speak up in class?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> more than once a class | <input type="checkbox"/> about once a month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> about once a class | <input type="checkbox"/> less than once a month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> about once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> hardly ever |

- ④ Answer the following carefully, as I will give you a midsemester evaluation based upon how well you are meeting your participation goal (**so note down your answer to the following question somewhere**): In light of ##1-3, my *realistic* goal is to speak up in this course ...

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> more than once a class | <input type="checkbox"/> about once a week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> about once a class | <input type="checkbox"/> about once _____ |

☞ Would you like this class to meet with the desks in a circle, or in rows?

☞ It might help me in my teaching if I had a sense of the way in which you learn best. Any ideas or help on this one? Do you have any other questions/comments/ concerns about this course or its content? I'll get back to you as soon as possible either in person or via e-mail.

☞ Is there anything else that you think I should know about you or your background that would help me teach you better in this class?