

Fall, 1999

## Religion 256: CHRISTIANITY

T,Th 10:00-11:20 a.m. in 111 Hall of Languages

Professor James B. Wiggins Phone: 443-2241  
Office: 501 HL e-mail: [jbwiggin@syr.edu](mailto:jbwiggin@syr.edu)  
Office Hours: T: 1:30-2:30-1 W:2-3 Fax: 443-3958  
Teaching Assistant: Steve Benko Phone: 443-3861  
Office: 514 HL e-mail: [sabenko@msn.com](mailto:sabenko@msn.com)  
Office Hours:

### Course Purpose:

Students will be encouraged to think about religion through the resources of Christianity that arose as a reform movement within Judaism and over the course of centuries became an independent religious tradition spread among cultures and across geographies encircling the planet. Never from its beginning was Christianity a single religion: it has always incorporated significantly differing interpretations under its singular name. There have always been "christianities" within CHRISTIANITY. Gaining familiarity with some of the stories of some significant persons who helped shape some of the differing interpretations of Christianity; getting some acquaintance with some of the widely practiced rituals and their interpretations; learning the place of the Bible and other texts in interpreting and asserting meanings of Christianity; and learning some dimensions of the thinking that has constituted theology and ethics within the christianities -- these will provide the content of the course.

In the process of thinking with, through and about some of these materials of and from Christianity, students will also be learning some perspectives and approaches that are applicable in studying other religions, as well.

Given this stated purpose for this course, what do you want to learn and know from taking this course? Here are some of the things that are to be presented and some others that are not in the course:

- It will not presuppose that you are familiar with "Christianity" nor committed to being a Christian;
- it will not confirm any particular form or expression of Christianity as the only correct or true version; thus, it will privilege no particular form of Christianity;
- It will satisfy a humanities distribution requirement for the Liberal Arts Core;
- It will attempt to offer you the opportunity to explore whatever human experiential base underlies the selected expressions of Christianity that we examine in this course. In so doing it will enable you to encounter yourself, your values, your prejudices and your presuppositions, whatever those may be. In doing these things students will be stimulated to engage in comparative religion thinking.

### Required Texts:

- *The Holy Bible*
- H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*

- Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*
- Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith*
- Alan Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity*

## Course Requirements:

In-class presentations and discussions will supplement and compliment the assigned readings. Tests and examinations will include in-class materials as well as reading assignments. Participation in class discussions will be factored into the final evaluations for the course.

The classroom is the laboratory of humanities course. Exchanging ideas, arguing, expressing differences-these are some of the marks of thinking clearly and engaging people who think differently. Therefore, class attendance and participation will be taken for granted in this course. Absences will have a negative effect upon our evaluation of your performance for the simple reason that learning is enhanced by the stimulation provided by participation in discussions and by learning the views of others on the subjects we will consider in the course.

There will be two examinations required of everyone and a choice between a third examination and a paper. The third (of four) component of the final grade will come from your opting either to do a research project and write a brief paper or to take the third examination. The three grades will be averaged and estimates of your class participation will be factored in to reach the grade to be assigned to you for the course. If you choose to write a research report, you must submit a topic proposal not later than September 28. Each test and examination will include some short answer questions and some essay responses.

Since thinking is enhanced by both reading intelligently, sensitively and critically and writing/speaking with the same qualities, writing is as important to success in this course as is reading. Speaking will occur when you complete the final assignment. You will work in teams of four to do a visit to a church after collaborating on research to help you prepare for the visit. The report you generate will be presented to the class within the times indicated below in the schedule and a written version of the report will be submitted. Each person on the team will receive the same grade for the project, so it is prudent for all of you to make the commitment of time and participation to enable your group to perform at an optimum level. A more detailed assignment sheet will be provided in the second week of class.

## Course Schedule:

### Unit 1: PRELIMINARIES AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

**August 31:** Introduction

**September 2:** Smart, pp. 1-36 "Introduction" & "Exploring Religion & Analyzing Worldviews"  
Tillich, pp. 41-54 "Religious Symbols"

**7:** Smart, pp. 37-61 "Worldviews: An Inventory"

**9:** The Idea of Scripture and Textual Diversity

The Bible: Genesis, Chapters 1-11;

The Gospel According to John, Chapter 1, "Beginnings"

Gospels of Matthew & Mark, Chapters 1 and Luke, Chapters 1 & 2.

### Unit II: CHRIST AND CULTURE, MYTH AND HISTORY

For the Unit, read Niebuhr, "The Enduring Problem", pp. 1-44; Smart, pp. 62-78; Watts, "Prologue", pp. 5-26

**September 14:** Looking at Approaches to Religion

**16:** Looking at Approaches to Religion (2)

**21:** The Five Types, 1

**23:** The Five Types, 2

**28: EXAMINATION #1 (Paper Proposals Due)**

### **Unit III- MYTH AND RITUAL**

Read Watts, pp. 27-236, and Smart, pp. 79-95; pp. 130-143

**September 30:** Worship, Creation, Birth, Baptism: The Beginnings (A God Story)

**October 5:** The Christian Year: Advent to Kingdomtide (A Christ Story)

**7:** The Cycle of Sacraments (A Christian's Story)

**12:** Story and Religion

### **Unit IV. CHRISTIANITY IN HISTORY**

Read New Testament: Gospels of Mark, Luke, John and the Acts of the Apostles

**October 14:** Citizenship: Martyrs and Monks

Re-read Smart, pp. 144-158

**19:** Chaos: Theodicy and Prelacy

**21:** Unity: Mystics and Theologians

**26:** Allegiance: Moralists and Pietists

**28: EXAMINATION #2**

### **Unit V. BELIEF: THEOLOGY AND ETHICS**

Read Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (entirety)

Smart, "The Doctrinal Dimension", pp. 96-113; "The Ethical Dimension," pp. 114-129.

**November 2:** The Role of Thinking in Religion

**4:** Theology--What is It?

**9:** Ethics--What & Why?

**11:** Metaphors, Symbols, Images, Narratives and Concepts, Beliefs, Creeds

### **Unit VI. A FUTURE FOR CHRISTIANITY**

Read Smart, pp 159-176.

**November 16:** Christianity Among the Religions (Papers Due)

**18:** Diversity of Religions and Fundamentalisms

**23: NO CLASS**

**25: Thanksgiving**

### **Unit VII. Deepening Understanding Through Research, Observation and Conversation**

**November 30:** Visitation Team Reports

**December 2:** Visitation Team Reports

**7:** Visitation Team Reports

**9: Examination #3**

The class will meet on Friday, December 17 at 10:15 during the finals period. Papers and other work will be returned at that time and final grade information will be available.