

**Contents**[General Purpose of the Course](#)[Course Outline](#)[Course Objectives](#)[Texts](#)[Exams](#)[Common Readings Reports](#)[Special Group Reports](#)[Grade Standards](#)[Specific Policies](#)[Calendar](#)[Common Readings Reports](#)[Special In-Class Report
Assignments](#)

Introduction to Religion

Instructor

Michael H. Barnes
barnes@udayton.edu

Institution

Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Dayton

General Purpose of the Course

This is a Humanities Base course, part of a basic study of the human condition. It is a course that pursues an understanding of our own humanness, its nature, needs, and capabilities, by analyzing and evaluating one of the most pervasive and influential aspects of human life--religion. Religion has been the strongest influence in human history for defining the person (e.g., as free and responsible) in relation to the world, to others, and to the Ultimate.

Course Outline

Four parts (see the calendar on the backside of this sheet for precise dates).

1. An introduction to the range of beliefs about the religious dimension of life, and to theories about the origin and functions of those beliefs. [Text Intro + Chs.1-3 + readings]
2. An analysis of what these beliefs indicate about our common human condition, consciousness, capacities, and needs. [Chs. 4-7 + readings]
3. Descriptions of various ways in which religious traditions guide and influence human behavior and consciousness. [Chs. 8-11 + Mark's Gospel + readings]
4. An analysis of the modern situation of religion in the context of science, skepticism, and secularity. [Chs. 12-14 + Tribble + readings]

Course Objectives

At the end of the course you should have achieved the following:

1. to know relevant information about the history of forms of religion.
2. to be familiar with major analyses and criticisms of religion today.
3. to have experience in comparing and contrasting major aspects of religion.
4. to be able to recognize & evaluate human interests, needs, & contributions in religion.
5. to practice using information and skills gained from #1-#4 in order to make informed choices about religion in your own life and understand it better in the lives of others.

Texts

Michael Barnes, In the Presence of Mystery, 1991. Humanities Base Readings (in the History and Religious Studies Common Readings book) and selections from various primary sources (in the Rel. 103 Reader for Barnes). All three of these are for sale in the bookstore.

Exams

One at the end of each of the four parts of the course (see the calendar)

These will be multiple choice. Each exam is worth a total of 75 points. [Total of 300 points for the semester] About 1,000 multiple choice questions are on reserve in the library. This is the pool of questions from which the actual exam questions will be taken.

Common Readings Reports

Four reports (see syllabus) worth up to 20 points each. [80 points for the semester.]

Special Group Reports

Each person will participate in one 3-person report team, on a selection from the 103 Reader, worth up to 20 points.

Grade Standards

90%=A, 80%=B, 70%=C, 60%=D, below 59%=F. [360, 320, 280, 240 pts for the course.]

Specific Policies

Late exams: except in unusual circumstances all exams should be taken at the assigned time. If you miss one call me at once or leave word and your phone number at 229-2034 to make arrangements for a make-up exam. [Give your name and number *slowly and clearly*, please.]

Missed classes: you are responsible for everything that takes place in class, including any announced change in exam or other dates. (Class attendance is required, with a maximum of four absences allowed for TTh classes. Hoard your allowed absences; you may need them.)

Plagiarism: check the section in the Student Handbook on this; make sure you understand what counts as plagiarism and what the penalties may be.

(Class participation is not required, but relevant helpful contributions will have an influence on borderline grades.)

Calendar

Th.Aug29 Intro to In the Presence of Mystery; and begin ch. 1. For next class read Amazon Journey, pp. 3-7 in BOOK OF READINGS AND TABLES FOR RELIGION 103.

T. Sep 3 Finish ch.1; begin ch. 2. For next class read **Genesis 1-3** and do COMMON READING REPORT #1: reading guide ["RG"] #1 + one page response (see instruction sheet).

Th.Sep 5 Hand in Report #1. Finish ch. 2. Discuss Genesis 1-3

T. Sep 10 Begin ch. 3 Special Report ["SR"] on Freud:

Th.Sep 12 continue ch. 3. SR: Rig Veda + Katha Up.

For next class read "**Sermon at Benares**;" COMMON READING REPORT #2.

T. Sep 17 Hand in Report #2. Finish ch. 3. [Tomorrow = last day to withdraw w/o record]

Th.Sep 19 Exam 1. 75 multiple choice questions; 75 pts. Question pool on reserve in the library.

T. Sep 24 Chapter 4. SR on Augustine

Th.Sep 26 Part II. Intro; and begin ch. 5. SR on Dan and Rev.

T. Oct 1 Finish ch. 5. SR on Phaedo

Th.Sep 3 Begin ch. 6

T. Oct.8 Finish ch. 6; begin ch. 7. [Optional Spec Rprt]

Th.Oct.10 Finish ch. 7. SR on Pascal (2 people?)

T. Oct 15 Review for exam (begin ch.8)

Th.Oct.17 Exam 2. 75 multiple choice [Midterm grades due Monday, Oct. 16]

T. Oct 22 Begin ch. 8. SR Sartre

Th.Oct.24 Finish ch.8. Begin ch.9 Read all **Mark's gospel**; do COMMON READING REPORT #3

T. Oct.29 Hand in Report #3. Finish ch. 9.

Th.Oct.31 Chapter 10.

T. Nov 5 Begin ch. 11 SR on Paley

Th.Nov 7 Continue ch. 11. SR on Aquinas

T. Nov.12 Finish Ch. 11.

Th.Nov.14 Exam 3 (Multiple choice, 75 pts.)

T. Nov 19 Begin ch. 12 SR on Galileo

Th. Nov 21 Continue ch. 12 SR on Boyle

T. Nov 26 Finish ch. 12 Begin ch. 13. SR on Darwin

Th. Nov 28 THANKSGIVING

T. Dec 3 Finish ch. 13; begin ch.14. For next class read **Phylis Tribble**, do REPORT #4. SR on James

Th. Dec 5 Hand in Report #4. Chapter 14, continued.

T. Dec 10 Finish ch. 14. LAST CLASS

Th. Dec 12 Study Day; no classes. Final Exams (Exam 4): 2:00 WED, Dec 13.

Common Readings Reports

There are four religious studies readings required of all first year students at U.D. They are in the booklet with HISTORY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES COMMON READINGS, available in the U.D. bookstore.

Each of the reports has two parts, to be handed in on two *separate* sheets with your name and title at the top of each sheet.

The first part of the report is a one-page set of answers to the reading guide questions. These questions are meant to call your attention to significant aspects of the reading and perhaps to give some background to help understand the reading better. This page is worth up to ten points. A normal "satisfactory" grade for this will be eight points ("B-"). Nine points ("A-") is for doing above average work. Ten points ("A+") is reserved for truly excellent work.

On this reading guide you are not expected to get all the answers exactly right. Different people read different texts in different ways. But you are expected to give responses that are clearly based on a good attempt to deal directly with the text, to analyze the words of the text itself.

Please type your answers on a single sheet of paper, numbering the answers. To repeat: put your name at the top as well as the name of what you are reporting on (Genesis 1-3, Sermon at Benares, Mark's Gospel, or Tribble are four identifying titles to use.) Don't forget your name at the top.

On a separate sheet of paper, also with your name and the title of the material at the top, provide a one-page analysis and response to the single question identified as the "analysis and commentary" question. Answer this in no more than one page (double spaced, one inch margins all around, 11 point type or larger (12 cpi or larger). Any page with more than three typographical and/or spelling errors will be returned to you to do over, with the next class as deadline for this. Please take special note of this. Always proofread what you hand in, for this or for any class.

This part of the report is also worth up to ten points, with the same grading standards as the reading guide page. Note that each of the questions for this part of the reports ask you to pay attention to the text when you respond. Write to me as though I had never seen the texts. Refer back to what the text says. Do not be afraid to bore me. This is a skill I want you to practice. (Even the experts in a field, writing to other experts, remind them or state clearly the ideas of a text they are commenting on. This may seem redundant, but it makes sure that all parties know just how the writer/expert *understands* the text.) The grade for this page is based on two

aspects: 1) how carefully you make use of the original text, and 2) how thorough or reflective you are within the space limitation. Your own reflections are always "correct," but some are more thorough than others.

Special In-Class Report Assignments

These are reports to be given verbally in class by teams of three people. Each team will report on one of the readings in the Religion 103 Book of Readings and Tables.

The three people must work together to plan what they will do in class.

The three people must consult with Barnes a week in advance on possible approaches to their material.

They must also meet with Barnes at least two full days before the report is scheduled, to review the reports in advance. At this meeting the team members should present exactly what they intend to do in class, in written form if needed.

Sign-up time for these readings will be the second day of class; so look over the readings in the Barnes 103 Reader (not the *History* and Religious Studies Reader) before that class.

There will be two major aspects to each report:

1. The first aspect is the summary

a. Summarize the content of the reading selection.

b. Do this by first identifying the major theme or general content;

c. then describe the specifics that explain the theme or that cumulatively add up to the general content. Be sure to state the obvious. Do not presume that because everyone has had a chance to read the material that they already know the basics. Restate the basics, clearly and cogently. The purpose of this is to allow everyone to check to see whether they interpreted the selection in the same way, and to provide a common starting point for further comments and discussion.

2. The second aspect is to say something interesting about what has just been summarized. Some possibilities:

a. Analyze the selection, listing possible pro and con arguments for and against it, noting any weak or strong points in the logic of the argument.

b. Relate the selection to aspects of the main course textbook, showing specifically how it illustrates, supports, or contradicts relevant ideas in the textbook, particularly the "evolution of religion" framework.

c. Show relations of the selection to ideas or materials that are probably part of the larger academic work of students, e.g., to topics in philosophy, history, literature, religion.

d. Identify something in contemporary culture that is a striking instance of what the selection is talking about, e.g., in a major movie, a well-known piece of music [feel free to present a one-minute video clip].

Each three-person report-and-commentary should add up to no more than 6 minutes (5 minutes total is fine), no more than 2 minutes per person. That is less than the time it takes to read aloud one double-spaced, large

type, full-margined single sheet of words. At the end of the report there will be some time for class discussion.

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO DO SPECIFIC SPECIAL REPORTS

The first goal is to summarize. Here you may need an "angle" so that you do not merely repeat some of the details of the reading with no particular theme. The second goal is to say something interesting. The suggestions here may guide you, but you do not have to let them restrict you.

1. The selection from Freud:

Summarize: give his main point, then describe the specific pieces of his analysis.

Pro: identify what you think is plausible about his ideas. Explain

Con: identify what you think is not plausible. Explain

2. Selections from the **Rig Veda** and the **Katha Upanishad**:

Summarize the major point(s) that these readings have in common, explaining as clearly as you can.

Identify any aspect of these that seem similar to archaic style thought.

Identify any aspect of these that seem to represent historic style thought.

3. The selection from **St. Augustine's Enchiridion**

Summarize a major point. You may select only part of this reading if you choose.

Pro: identify those aspects of his thought that seem correct; explain why you think this.

Con: identify those aspects with which you disagree; explain why.

4. Selections from **Daniel** and **Revelation**

Summarize what the selection from Daniel seems to be saying.

Summarize what the selection from Revelation says.

Identify what is clearly similar and whether there are any basic differences in approach.

5. The selection from **Plato's Phaedo**

Summarize Socrates argument about how the soul differs from the body, and the nature of the soul.

Pro: explain what you can agree with in this, and why you agree.

Con: explain what is weak about this argument.

6. The selection from **Aquinas**

Summarize the basic argument of the first three "ways."

[It may take two people: one to give the 1st way; the second to describe the 2nd and 3rd.

Criticize the basic argument: does it make sense? is it plausible?

7. The selection from **Galileo**

Summarize his basic argument, identifying the major points he has to make.

Summarize the role of reason (of the mind using sense evidence and logical "demonstration").

Give reasons why or why not this is a good way for a religious person to interpret scripture.

8. The selection from **Boyle**

Summarize his position on what God does, including "extraordinary interpositions."

Describe the nature of the universe according to Boyle

Indicate where you think there could be ways and reasons to disagree with Boyle

9. The selection from **Paley**

Summarize the main points of his argument

Pro: what is valid about this argument? Con: what is not valid?

10. **Darwin's letter**

Summarize his arguments as to why he does not find scripture believable. Criticize him, if you like.

Summarize his reason why he does not trust an experience of awe. Criticize him, if you like.

Summarize his reasons why he is precisely an agnostic. Agree or disagree.

11. The selection from **Pascal**

Summarize the reasons Pascal gives or implies why science is not enough

Summarize the position that this leaves the human person in, in relation to the universe.

Summarize and comment critically on Pascal's answer: "heart"

12. The selection from **Wm. James**

Summarize and explain the major characteristics of the religious option (live, forced, momentous).

Summarize James's reasons why it is reasonable to make this option in spite of uncertainty.

Give reasons why (or why not) James's argument is valid.

13. The selection from **Sartre**

Summarize what Sartre thinks the human situation is, in regard to God and morality.

Pro: explain what might be valid in his position.

Con: explain what might be invalid.

Notes to help you decide on whom to report:

Freud is an atheist who says that religion is an infantile neurosis.

The Rig Veda and Upanishads are part of the most ancient Hindu tradition about the Ultimate.

St. Augustine thought that God had predestined a few people to heaven; all others go to hell.

Daniel and Revelation are major sources of "end-of-the-world" prophecies today.

Plato's writings are the major source for belief in an immortal soul, not the Christian scriptures.

Aquinas's 13th century five proofs of God's existence are the most famous proofs in Western history.

Galileo represents the challenge that science still offers to aspects of religious belief.

Boyle, father of modern chemistry, did away with miracles like most other deists.

Paley's book Natural Theology, was the major reference point for Darwin's thought on God.

Darwin began as a Christian and ended as an agnostic, partly because of his theory of evolution.

Pascal said science cannot answer ultimate questions and that people have an instinct for God.

Wm. James argued that it is reasonable to believe in God even if you cannot be certain.

Sartre said that belief in God solves nothing; to be human we must still stand on our own.

Select a location 

http://www.wlu.ca/~wwaar/syllabi/introduction_to_religion-barnes.html

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