

SYLLABUS – REL 1030: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION

Catawba College, Fall 2011

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Course Description

REL 1030 is a study of the characteristics and universal features of religion, as expressed in the institutions, rituals, beliefs, and other phenomena of religions of the past and present.

Overview: As human beings, each of us has distinct needs, yet one of the needs we share with each other is the need for meaning in life. Each of us pursues different courses of action and we seek experiences which will bring to our lives a sense of purpose, a sense of having a "ground" or a "center." As humans we also share with one another the common quest for answers to questions and problems which we face each day. The answers for and sources of those questions are many and varied. But, among all human cultures there is one unique means of dealing with those features in life which we do not understand and which we cannot control. That element is what we refer to as "religion." In the practice of religion people seek to relate to a world of mystery, to a reality which may be part of our experience or which may extend beyond it. Religion involves a search for hope, for belonging, for security, for a better way of life. The varieties of religious belief are a fascinating testimony to the differences of world view which individuals and cultures alike embrace. It is this variety which we will consider; it is also the unity of humanity's constant search for understanding and the expressions of that understanding which will comprise our study of religion.

REL 1030 will introduce you to religion as a dynamic element of the human experience. You will be invited to explore the meanings of the term "religion," and to be open to new possibilities in belief and practice. You will be led to an examination of your own views on human life issues and to compare and contrast these to beliefs and views that might be quite opposite from your own perspective.

This is not a course in comparative religions, although we will consider examples from a variety of religions to illustrate many of the concepts and issues we will study.

Expected Learning Outcomes <i>Each Student Should Be Able to:</i>	Means of Assessing Those Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate an understanding of the elements associated with the religious dimensions of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two "application papers"• Two examinations (may include both "objective" and essay questions)• Occasional pop quizzes• Final Examination
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate an awareness of the issues inherent within the study of religious experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two examinations (may include both "objective" and essay questions)• Occasional pop quizzes• Final Examination
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate an appreciation for the role of religion in human life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two examinations (may include both "objective" and essay questions)• Final Examination

Textbooks

Livingston, James C. *Anatomy of the Sacred*. 6th ed. New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2009. ISBN: 0-13-600380-X. The approximate cost of this book is \$77.00.

Please Note: *At the end of each of Livingston's chapters is a section called "Review Questions." It would help your learning were you to use these questions as part of your preparation.*

Attendance Policy

Your regular attendance in class is especially important in a course of this nature; i.e., this is not a lecture course in which the professor simply imparts to you a given body of knowledge which you then regurgitate in examination. On the contrary, our class sessions will consist of both lecture and discussion where we will teach one another under the professor's guidance and leadership.

Attendance will be checked promptly each day at the beginning of class. If you are late you must speak with me at the end of class or you will be counted absent. **Three absences are allowed during the semester, whether "justified" or not. Each absence beyond the three permitted will result in a two-point reduction in the final grade for the course.** Any student missing more than one quarter of the sessions during the semester will automatically be given an F or an I for the course, depending on the circumstances. Tardiness should be a rare exception. Should late arrivals persist, they will be counted as absences. Finally, please use the bathroom before class.

Late Papers are penalized one grade per week day unless a justifiable excuse is accepted. Missed quizzes cannot be made up, although the lowest quiz score will be dropped from your final quiz tally. If you miss an examination then you must contact me immediately (or, even better, before you miss it) and we will have a serious talk. I do not guarantee that you will be able to make up the exam, and my make-up examinations are much harder than the originals.

Cell Phones: As a courtesy to all, please turn your cell phone notification system off when you enter the classroom. You are not permitted to send or receive messages of any kind (including texting) during class time. If you use your cell phone during an in-class examination, you will automatically flunk the examination.

Summary of Grade Distribution

Examinations (2):	30%
Papers (2):	30%
Quizzes:	20%
Final Examination:	20%

Grading Scale:

100-92:	A	Clearly superior college level achievement
91-90:	A-	
89-87:	B+	
86-83:	B	Good college-level performance
82-80:	B-	
79-77:	C+	
76-73:	C	Acceptable college-level performance
72-70:	C-	
69-67:	D+	

66-63:	D	Minimally-acceptable college-level performance
62-60:	D-	
≤ 59:	F	Failure to achieve college-level performance

OUTLINE AND PREPARATIONS

- ⇒ Given the nature of this course, it is difficult to determine specific dates for assignments far in advance. It will be **YOUR** responsibility to anticipate and keep abreast of assignments.
- ⇒ It will be in your best interest if, from the very first day of class, you begin keeping a **vocabulary list** for this course. The words that are the building blocks for the study of religion will be presented often and you will be held directly accountable for their meanings, both through quizzes and tests.

I. What IS Religion After All?

A. Different definitions of Religion

Preparation: [NOTE: Before reading the secondary sources, first jot down your own definition of religion, and later, revise your definition if you wish.] Then, read Livingston, Ch. 1. What are the characteristics of a good definition, and what do they mean? What do you mean by 'religion' or 'religious'? What is the difference between spirituality and religion? How useful is the word "superstition"? **Film Excerpts : Baraka.**

B. Why study religion?

C. Different approaches to the study of religion

Preparation: Livingston, Ch. 2.

II. Some Useful Background in Religious Traditions

A. A Crash Course in the World's Major Religions

Preparation: Monk, *Exploring Religious Meaning*, Ch. 2 (on reserve)

B. Do You See What I See? World Views and Religion

Preparation: Monk, *Exploring Religious Meaning* (on reserve): if you read the book version, then read Ch. 18; if you read one of the copies in the folders, read Ch. 20. In either case, the chapter title is "Human Response to the Natural Process."

WRITE: PAPER #1 (due date will be announced in class).

III. The Divine/Holy/Sacred

A. Ways of Conceiving of the Holy (including Theistic & Non-Theistic Views)

Preparation: Livingston, pp. 35-42; Ch. 8.

EXAM #1: PARTS I-III A

B. The Appearance of the Holy

Preparation: Livingston, pp. 43-52.

C. The Language of the Holy

Preparation: Livingston, Ch. 4; Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, pp. 41-54 ("Symbols of Faith")[on reserve]-- What does Tillich say are the differences between symbols and signs? Is religious language "symbolic language" or "signifying language?" **Read also** the Handout, "A Scripture Sampler"—what makes these readings scripture? What do they have in common? (This document will also be placed on our Blackboard site.)

IV. Elements of Religious Experience

A. Ritual

Preparation: Livingston, Ch. 5.

B. The Mystical Experience of the Holy

Preparation: Monk, pp. 81-84; "Mystical Fragments" (handout, and on Blackboard). *What characteristics do these short stories/sayings have in common?*

WRITE: PAPER #2 (due date will be announced in class).

EXAM #2: PARTS IIIB -IVB

V. Theodicy

Preparation: Livingston, Ch. 11; Handout: "Regarding Theodicy." Things to think about: What is evil? What are the two types of evil? What is a theodicy? What are some the classic "responses to evil" (Christian and non-Christian)? What questions might WE ask of a theodicy to evaluate its adequacy?

VI. Ways and Goals of Salvation

Preparation: Livingston, Ch. 13. From what are people "saved" in each of the major religious traditions? How are they "saved?"

VII. Religion in the Modern World

A. Secularization—New Religious Revitalization Movements

Preparation: Livingston, Ch. 14.

B. Contemporary Challenges to Traditional Religion

Preparation: Livingston, Ch. 15.

VIII. Conclusions, Second Viewing of *Baraka*, Evaluation, and Loose Ends

FINAL EXAMINATION: TUESDAY, December 6, 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Your Application Papers

The two papers you will write for this course require you to directly apply knowledge acquired to analyze religious experience. Each paper should be **3-6 pages long**, typed, double-spaced, standard fonts, and should reflect those qualities epitomized by a liberal arts education. **Please Note: Your grade will be affected by grammar, syntax and spelling. After determining your paper's grade, I will deduct 2 points for each grammatical error, and 1 point for each spelling and punctuation error, not to exceed 10 points (i.e., one letter grade).** The simplest way to avoid such penalties is to have a reliable friend proof-read your paper before submitting it for a grade. For further information on plagiarism and the Honor Code consult the appropriate pages in the Catawba College Honor Code.

The general purpose of these papers is to require you to demonstrate your understanding of the assigned topics by analyzing readings on those topics. Be sure to follow the specific instructions for each paper, but remember overall that the care which you take in presenting your analysis is critical.

Paper Grading Criteria:

- Extent to which you fulfill the specific instructions
- Coherency of your response
- Grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax

Special Instructions for Submitting Papers

It is a requirement of this course that you submit your papers to me via *Blackboard*. You must follow the following instructions carefully:

1. Compose your paper in **WORD (not in WORKS)**.
2. The paper must be titled and must conform to all of the paper requirements stated above.
3. **Write the following at the top of the first page: Your name; and, also at the top of your paper, type your email address. If it is not there, I will deduct five points from your paper's grade.**
4. Save the paper in WORD ('97-2003), noting where you saved it. (Of course, always back up your paper to a thumb drive or some similar, secure storage device.)
5. Log in to Blackboard.
6. Go to this course and click on the *Assignments* link.
7. Find the assignment for which your paper has been written, and click on the hyper-link for that assignment.
8. To attach your file, use this sequence of commands:
 - a. Browse; Choose File, Open, Submit (don't forget this one); **CLICK SUBMIT ONLY ONCE.**

You will receive a day and time receipt window for your submission. You **MUST** copy and print that window and save it. If there is some question about your paper being submitted on time, this is the only proof you will have that you did so.

PAPER #1:

1. Carefully read the John Fire Lame Deer handout.
2. Carefully analyze the worldview represented in John Fire Lame Deer's account of his ritual experiences.
3. In your paper determine which worldview is represented by Lame Deer and provide thorough

evidence *from throughout the text* justifying your claim, i.e., carefully connect the evidence with characteristics of the worldview you think it represents. It is also best to indicate why the evidence indicates that his worldview does **not** match the other worldviews you eliminated.

PAPER #2:

1. Carefully read the text which will be placed on Blackboard.
2. Analyze the experience in terms of William James's Four Characteristics of the Mystical Experience. In your paper explain how the experience conforms to James's typology. You must define James's characteristics and demonstrate how they are found in the experience. For example, if you see the characteristic of ineffability present in the experience, **describe** the text where you see it **and explain** why you think it represents ineffability. You will find several examples of each of James's characteristics.
