



DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS
Indiana University
Indianapolis

Introduction to Christianity

REL-R180 (24018 & 32252) | Spring 2022 | Online Course

Professor Peter Thuesen

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St. Fidelis Cemetery in Victoria, Kansas, a town settled by Catholics of Volga German heritage (ethnic Germans who immigrated from the Volga River region of Russia). Photo by Peter Thuesen.



Mombasa Pentecostal Church in Mombasa, Kenya. By the middle of the current century, Africa is expected to have a larger Christian population than any other continent.

Course Description

Christianity is world's largest religion, with some 2.4 billion adherents, or roughly a third of the human race. Christianity's influence on world cultures has been incalculable. Yet it all began in the most unlikely of circumstances—with a Jewish peasant in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire.

REL-R180 will introduce you to the history, beliefs, and practices of Christians around the world. The course is designed for students with no prior knowledge of Christianity as well as for those who grew up in Christian contexts but never studied the subject academically.

The course is divided into two parts. In Part 1 (Christian Foundations), we will explore the historical question of how the religion *of* Jesus of Nazareth (a Jewish apocalyptic prophet) became a religion *about* Jesus. We will also examine some of the big questions that Christians have debated since ancient times, including: Which books belong in the Bible? Are humans by nature evil? Is it acceptable to address prayers to the saints? Does Christ's death on the cross save humans by substitution or by example? What are the proper roles for women and men in the churches? In Part 2 (Christian Diversity), we will survey the major subgroups of Christianity, focusing on their similarities and differences. We will pay attention not only to textual evidence but also to visual art, music, architecture, and other products of Christian cultures.

Learning Outcomes

REL-R180 counts toward the Arts & Humanities requirement of the IUPUI General Education Core and is designed to cultivate the skills described in IUPUI's Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success (IUPUI+). By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Analyze Christianity in terms of the seven dimensions of religion (experiential, mythical, doctrinal, ethical, ritual, social, material).
- Read primary and secondary texts using the critical, reflective tools of religious studies and apply these skills in real-life settings.
- Explain the basic development of the Christian tradition, including how it was transformed from an obscure Jewish sect to the world's largest religion.
- Describe the major differences and similarities among Christians under each of the seven dimensions of religion and apply this cultural literacy in the workplace or other contexts.

Intangible Learning Outcomes

Religion is arguably the most primal phenomenon in human cultures, engaging what people for millennia have regarded as life's most important questions. The study of these questions has intangible benefits beyond what can be articulated, quantified, or evaluated through any assessment mechanism. This course—and every course in religious studies—is an invitation to lifelong appreciation of the religious factor in our common humanity.

Faith Perspectives and Religious Studies

The academic field of Religious Studies neither requires nor excludes any faith commitment on your part. Our goal is to understand religious traditions as historical phenomena in all their fascinating complexity. *We will not—indeed, cannot—settle questions of ultimate religious truth.* The only thing required of you is open-mindedness—that is, a willingness to consider perspectives other than your own.

Required Course Texts

- Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell, 2015). Available at the IUPUI Barnes & Noble, via Amazon, and also as an e-book through the publisher.
- Additional primary and secondary readings (all available as PDFs within the modules in Canvas).

The Structure of the Course

Everything that you need for the class (other than the books listed above) will be available in Canvas or elsewhere on the web. To succeed, you must be a self-starter and adhere strictly—even religiously!—to the course schedule. To help you stay on track, the course is organized into weekly modules, which will be **due by 5:00 p.m. on Thursdays.** (*The one exception is Module 16—the Final Exam—due on Tuesday, May 3.*) The quizzes, assignments, or other activities for each module will be posted in Canvas one week in advance (by 5:00 p.m. the previous Thursday). Submitting all of each module's work by 5:00 p.m. Thursday should become your weekly ritual. Don't fall into the trap of leaving all of the work until the last minute: 5:00 p.m. Thursday is a hard deadline! *Late submissions will not be accepted.*

Grades

Your final grade will be based on a total of 1,000 points. Each module is worth 50 points, except for Module 8 (which includes the Midterm Exam) and Module 16 (the Final Exam); these two modules are worth 150 points each. All tests and other graded assignments (quizzes, short writing assignments, etc.) will be contained and explained within each module in Canvas. Final grades will be awarded according to the following system: 930-1,000 = A | 900-920 = A- | 870-890 = B+ | 830-860 = B | 800-820 = B- | 770-790 = C+ | 730-760 = C | 700-720 = C- | 670-690 = D+ | 630-660 = D | 600-620 = D- | Below 600 = F

Administrative Withdrawal

A basic requirement of this course is that you keep up with all modules and conscientiously complete all required assignments. If you miss more than half of the required assignments within the first 25% of the semester without contacting me, **I reserve the right to administratively withdraw you up until February 28.** Administrative withdrawal may have academic, financial, and financial aid implications. Administrative withdrawal will take place after the full refund period, and if you are withdrawn from the course you will not be eligible for a tuition refund. If you have questions about the administrative withdrawal policy at any point during the semester, please contact me.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of another person's words or ideas without attribution. All sources used (whether web-based or printed) must be properly cited. Plagiarism is a serious offense and may result in a failing grade and other penalties, as determined by school and campus authorities. For campus policies on plagiarism and other issues of academic conduct and student rights and responsibilities, see: <https://studentcode.iu.edu>.

Other Course Policies

Students needing accommodations because of physical or learning disabilities should contact Adaptive Educational Services, Joseph Taylor Hall (UC), Room 100: <http://aes.iupui.edu>. For other problems you don't know how to solve, including difficulties affecting your participation in the class, the Student Advocate Office offers confidential assistance: <http://studentaffairs.iupui.edu/student-rights/student-advocate/>.

Don't Forget! Important Spring 2022 Deadlines

Last Day to Withdraw through One.IU (with no record on transcript)	Jan. 16
Pass/Fail Option Deadline (5:00 p.m.)	Jan. 30
Administrative Withdrawal (by the Professor) Deadline	Feb. 28
Last Day to Withdraw with Automatic Grade "W" (advisor approval required)	Mar. 13

SCHEDULE OF MODULES & READINGS

NOTE: For the required assignments and other activities under each module, see the Module Guide within each module in Canvas.

Part I

Christian Foundations: From the Religion *of* Jesus to the Religion *about* Jesus

Module 1 (50 points)

Course Introduction: What Is Christianity?

Due: **Thurs., Jan. 13, by 5:00 p.m.**

- No reading (but see other assignments within the module in Canvas)

Module 2 (50 points)

The Jewish Context

Due: **Thurs., Jan. 20, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 28-40
- McGrath, pp. 1-17
- "Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels" (PDF in Canvas)

Module 3 (50 points)

Jesus as (Preexistent and Resurrected) Christ

Due: **Thurs., Jan. 27, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 19-25
- Selections from Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God* (PDF in Canvas)
- "Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (John)" (PDF in Canvas)
- 1 Corinthians 15 (PDF in Canvas)

Module 4 (50 points)

Setting Boundaries, Defining Doctrines

Due: **Thurs., Feb. 3, by 5:00 p.m.**

- The Infancy Gospel of Thomas (PDF in Canvas)
- McGrath, pp. 54-59, 74-78, 86-92, 129-131

Module 5 (50 points)

Perennial Debates: Canon and Calendar

Due: **Thurs., Feb. 10, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 40-49
- McGrath, pp. 236-246
- John Barton, "Canon" (PDF in Canvas)

Module 6 (50 points)

Perennial Debates: Human Nature, the Church, and the Atonement

Due: **Thurs., Feb. 17, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 102-112
- McGrath, pp. 92-102

Module 7 (50 points)

Perennial Debates: Translations and Missions

Due: **Thurs., Feb. 24, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 49-51
- Peter J. Thuesen, "Bible: As Sacred Text, Translations, Cultural Role" (PDF in Canvas)
- Dana Robert, "Vernaculars and Volunteers, 1450-" (PDF in Canvas)

Module 8 (150 points)

Perennial Debates: Gender and Sexuality—& **MIDTERM EXAM**

Due: **Thurs., Mar. 3, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 25-26, 65-72, 194-196
- William C. Placher, "Is the Bible True?" (PDF in Canvas)

Part II

Christian Diversity: A Survey of the Major Traditions

Module 9 (50 points)

Orthodox Christianity

Due: **Thurs., Mar. 10, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 138-139, 203-204
- Timothy Ware, "Introduction," and "Orthodox Worship I: The Earthly Heaven" (PDF in Canvas)
- McGrath, pp. 262-263
- Nicholas Gendle, "Windows of Eternity: The Theology of Icons" (PDF in Canvas)

MARCH 14–18: NO MODULE DUE (SPRING BREAK)

Module 10 (50 points)

Catholic Christianity, Part I

Due: **Thurs., Mar. 24, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 63-65, 142-143, 175-176
- "The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church," from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (PDF in Canvas)
- McGrath, pp. 63-65, 141-142
- Selections from Anselm and Aquinas (PDF in Canvas)

Module 11 (50 points)

Catholic Christianity, Part II

Due: **Thurs., Mar. 31, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 143-145
- The Order of the Mass (PDF in Canvas)
- Eamon Duffy, "What Catholics Believe About Mary" (PDF in Canvas)

Module 12 (50 points)

The Earliest Protestant Traditions: Lutherans and Calvinists

Due: **Thurs., Apr. 7, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 151-153, 209, 211
- Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics" (PDF in Canvas)
- McGrath, pp. 153-154, 211
- John Calvin, selections from *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (PDF in Canvas)
- Westminster Confession of Faith (PDF in Canvas)

Module 13 (50 points)

The Earliest Protestant Traditions: Anglicans and Anabaptists

Due: **Thurs., Apr. 14, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 154-155, 156-157, 206-207
- Ethan H. Shagan, "The Emergence of the Church of England, c. 1520-1553" (PDF in Canvas)
- Burial of the Dead: Rite One, from the Book of Common Prayer (PDF in Canvas)
- McGrath, pp. 154-155
- Menno Simons, "The Community of the Faithful" (PDF in Canvas)

Module 14 (50 points)

Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals

Due: **Thurs., Apr. 21, by 5:00 p.m.**

- McGrath, pp. 207-208, 209-210
- John Wesley, "On Perfection" (PDF in Canvas)
- McGrath, pp. 212-213
- Alister McGrath, "Tongues of Fire," from *Christianity's Dangerous Idea* (PDF in Canvas)

Module 15 (50 points)

Latter-day Saints: Mormon Christianity

Due: **Thurs., Apr. 28, by 5:00 p.m.**

- 2 Nephi 27-29, from the Book of Mormon (PDF in Canvas)
- Claudia Bushman, "Identity, Beliefs, and Organization," from *Contemporary Mormonism* (PDF in Canvas)

Module 16 (150 points)

FINAL EXAM

Due: **Tues., May 3, by 5:00 p.m.**

Note the TUESDAY due date!