



*Jerusalem, “the City of Peace,” center of the three largest monotheistic religions of the world: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.*

**COURSE:** REL 204 010 INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION

**TERM AND YEAR:** FALL SEMESTER, SESSION I, 2023

**SCHEDULE AND LOCATION:** Tuesdays and Thursdays  
6:00 PM – 8:50 PM  
LAWSON # 104

**INSTRUCTOR:** Dr. Aquiles Ernesto Martínez  
Professor of Religion  
Religion Program Coordinator

**OFFICE HOURS:** You may call or email me to make an appointment via  
TEAMS  
Office: Tarpley # 103  
Phone: (770) 720-5973  
E-mail: [aem@reinhardt.edu](mailto:aem@reinhardt.edu)

**CATALOG DESCRIPTION.** This course introduces the critical study of religion. Students examine the cognitive, performative, and social characteristics of religion. This course includes cross-cultural studies of religious beliefs and practices.

**RELIGION PROGRAM OBJECTIVES (RPO).**

1. To enable students to understand the various major religions of the world **(RPO 1)**.
2. To enable students to clarify their vocation **(RPO 2)**.
3. To assist students to understand the Christian tradition **(RPO 3)**.
4. To enable students to think critically and be able to express those ideas in writing, speech, and visual media **(RPO 4)**.
5. To help students become familiar with a variety of research methods appropriate to the field of religion, particularly those relevant to the study of primary sources **(RPO 5)**.
6. To help students develop their own understanding of moral and spiritual issues **(RPO 6)**.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COURSE OBJECTIVES.** Considering the general objectives of the Religion Program, the main purpose of this course is to help you think through basic questions and/or issues that arise in the study of the beliefs and practices of religion in several cultures. Thus, after completing this course, you will be able

1. To define what the field of religion is and does in society **(RPO 1, 3, and 5)**
2. To explain the meanings, roles, expressions, and functions of religion **(RPO 1, 3, and 4)**
3. To detect the different ways in which religion has shaped our lives **(RPO 2, and 6)**
4. To summarize the main contributions that religion has made to our cultures **(RPO 1, 3, 4, and 6)**
5. To use a framework of interpretation that will enable us to understand present, past, and future religious groups **(RPO 4 and 5)**
6. To identify and describe the main characteristics present in some of the major religions of the world **(RPO 1, 3, 4, and 6)**
6. To provide a healthy critique of religion and religious groups **(RPO 1, 4 and 6)**.
7. To embrace some of the teachings of the major religions of the world in practical ways so we can help improve the life conditions of others **(RPO 2 and 6)**.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING SYSTEM.** Your academic performance will be evaluated based on a **100 point-scale**. All the points you earn for every assignment need to be added to your accumulated total, not averaged out. At the end of the course, the points you accumulate will give you the corresponding letter-grade according to the following scale: **F (0 -59 points); D (60-69 points); C (70-79 points); B (80-89 points); A (90-100 points).** **GRADES WILL NOT BE ROUNDED** (for example, 79.5 accumulated points is not a B- but a C+). The assignments with their corresponding assigned points will be distributed as follows:

**1. TESTS (RPO 1, 3, 4, and 6) (50 points).** To help you understand and remember some of the basic characteristics that define religion and its different cultural appropriations and manifestations, there will be **3 TESTS** during the semester (15 points the first 2 tests, and 20 points the final test). Considering the pedagogical objectives for this course, these tests will be OPEN-BOOK/NOTES and cover the content of my textbook (*“Encounters with the Mystery”*), as well as his Power-Point lectures in class, selected articles, videos, and/or handouts. Students must take good notes in class as well. I will provide some preparation guidelines for each test in advance. Some short-answer questions might be given for students to work on and turn in the day of the test.

In addition to having a section dealing with some crucial issues pertaining to religion for which you will have to write some brief critical-thinking reflections, these tests will also have section such as True and False, Filling the Blanks, Short Definitions, and Multiple Choice. You must take these tests on the designated dates. No exceptions! In cases of emergencies, I must be notified immediately.

Regarding the days for these tests, please check **the Calendar of Topics and Assignments below**.

**2. PAPERS (20 POINTS).** In addition to taking 3 tests, you will have a chance to write a couple of short papers focusing on the following themes:

- a. RELIGION, THE CANAANITES, AND COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS (10 points) (2 full pages).** In this course we have been arguing that all religions are, in essence, the same and that they still have some distinctive features that define them contextually. As a result, all religions may be compared and contrasted. However, there are some religions that have disappeared or that have not been studied at all through the lens of the field of comparative religions. With this background in mind, please study the article *“The religion of some inhabitants of Canaan: an approach from some scraps from the material culture”* (to be provided via Canvas later) and, in your own words, identify the five most important contribution of Canaanite religions to the study of comparative religions, and provide a brief evaluation. In other words, what is it about Canaanite religions (based on the profile that the article provides) that helps us to better understand other religions? And what is your take on it?

Regarding the content and format for this paper, see **The Required Format for All Papers section below**. Regarding the due date of this assignment, please check **the Calendar of Topics and Assignments below**.

- b. RELIGION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (10 points) (2 full pages).** A few centuries ago, it was predicted that religion would eventually disappear and give way to the advancements of science and technology and the worldview and values associated with these phenomena. Contrary to this prediction, however, religious experiences (formally and informally) continue to grow stronger in many parts of the world to the surprise of many. And now, this issue has become even more challenging with the arrival of the so-called “Artificial Intelligence” and the overwhelming role it has played in our lives.

Taking this situation into account, take some time to reflect critically, briefly, and in your own words, on theme of Artificial Intelligence. What is it and what are some practical implications for world religions and their belief systems?

Regarding the content and format for this paper, see The **Required Format for All Papers** section below. Regarding the due date of this assignment, please check the **Calendar of Topics and Assignments** below.

**3. RELIGIOUS SITE VISIT AND ANALYSIS (RPO 1, 3, 4, 5 AND 6) (20 points) (2 full pages).** You are required to attend a religious service at a *sacred place* of any of the religions we are studying this semester; namely, a *synagogue*, *mosque*, or *temple*. To help us move beyond a comfort zone, visiting a Christian-related place is not accepted for this assignment.

During your visit you must reflect on the whole experience from the standpoint of what we have been learning in class and write a report that includes the following elements: (1) a creative title, a brief introduction, and a conclusion; (2) an identification of the religious place you visited and a brief explanation of what you heard and saw during the service; and (3) a critique of your experiences through the lens of what we have been learning in this course (this is the most important part of your paper). Please remember that this assignment is NOT a simple report. It is an opportunity to analyze and reflect deeply on this religious experience.

Regarding the due date of this assignment, please check the *Calendar of Topics and Assignments* below.

**REQUIRED FORMAT FOR ALL PAPERS.** Since all students have the capabilities and potential to contribute to a scholarly culture of teaching and learning, it is expected that all the papers will be your own work. In addition to having a creative title, a brief introduction and a conclusion, these papers must be double-spaced, typed, and written using an 11 character-font (Arial). They must also indicate what section you belong to (either SECTION 1 or 2. See above). If by any chance you use of secondary sources, you must make a clear distinction between your own words and the words of the sources you used. Credit must be given to the materials used and/or consulted (only author, name of the source, and page number).

All your papers will be evaluated based on the following additional criteria: (a) style and grammar; (b) faithfulness to the subject matter; and (c) engagement, creativity, and relevance. Please do not write your papers the way you talk! Although your papers must reflect a formal dialogue with your intended readers, it is okay to use first person pronouns.

Points will be taken off if all or any of the above guidelines are not followed literally. Outstanding papers will be considered for extra credit. Papers must be turned in on the designated dates by the time the class meets or before. Late papers will not be accepted unless there was real emergency or powerful justification.

**3. PARTICIPATION IN CLASS (RPO 4, AND 6) (10 POINTS).** Since all of us are part of a course that seeks to create a culture of teaching and learning, you are expected to intentionally participate in class with your insights, good observations, arguments from

other perspectives, words of clarification, and meaningful questions, to contribute to an environment that is conducive to the personal understanding and the growth of all your classmates. We are partners in this undertaking! Thus, you must be willing and open to engage in conversations with the professor and your classmates to be successful and get credit for it.

Taking notes, being silent in class, trying to participate, and coming to class DO NOT literally count as participation. Depending on the quantity and quality of your pro-active participation, and at my discretion, I will assign you a 0, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10 points for this part of the course. Any violations of the code of ethics as explained in "Course Policies and Expectations" below (please read above again) will result in an automatic 0/10 for the present evaluation category.

**DUE DATES AND TIMES FOR ALL ASSIGNMENTS.** Papers and tests must be turned in **VIA CANVAS** on the designated dates and times. **Only the papers may be turned in by 12 AT NIGHT AT THE LATEST.** Please check the "Calendar of Topics and Assignments" below. **LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED** unless there was a real emergency or powerful justification shared with the professor before the due date and time. Regarding due dates, please check **the Calendar of Topics and Assignments below.**

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE REGARDING ALL ASSIGNMENTS.** Students who participate more than what is required or walk the extra mile on the tests will be considered for **EXTRA CREDIT** and/or for **GRADES TO BE ROUNDED** at the end of the semester.

**NO** academic work can be **RESUBMITTED**. However, **DRAFTS OF ANSWERS TO the SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS OF THE TESTS** can be sent ahead of time for review so you can do well on the tests.

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE FOR ATHLETES.** Those of who play sports for Reinhardt must contact me and let me know ahead on time when you will be missing class because of games, injuries and/or emergencies so I could make the corresponding adjustments. You must **NOT** rely on your coaches' notifications sent to me. You must contact me individually about these issues.

**CREDIT HOUR STATEMENT.** Over 15 weeks, students will spend 150 minutes per week in lectures, class discussions, and examinations (37.5 hours for the semester). Instructional time includes a 3-hour final exam. Out-of-class work includes papers, reports, service as volunteers, visits to religious places, and preparation for exams, and is estimated at around 300 minutes per week (75 hours for the semester).

**CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS.** For those students needing help with their papers, study habits, note-taking, and preparation for test-taking, please make an appointment at "the Center for Student Success" (Lawson, bottom floor). They will more than happy to help you out. I am willing to give you a hand outside of the classroom as well.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.** Students with learning disabilities must read and comply with the following statements: *“The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a documented disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Academic Support Office (ASO). Reinhardt University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. Therefore, if you are seeking classroom accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you are required to register with the Academic Support Office (ASO). ASO is in the basement of Lawson Building. Phone is 770-720-5567. To receive academic accommodations for this class, please obtain the proper ASO letters/forms.”*

**COURSE FORMAL POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS.** Having in mind that education is about equipping students with the values, skills, knowledge, and experiences to interact with the world in relevant and transformative ways, it is expected that student will honor a set of ethical, professional, and civil principles that will guide their actions in this course. We hereby outline some of the most important ones:

1. **ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES.** To create a culture of learning, professionalism, and civility, all students are expected **to attend class faithfully and on time**. Although the Reinhardt Catalog states that attendance is an “obligation,” please remember that attending class is also a privilege. Formal education is a blessing not too many people enjoy. **Missing too many classes (without any legitimate justifications) will have negative implications on your final grade.** In the case of an emergency or justified absences, please contact me via email ahead of time to indicate the reasons why you were not or will not be in class.
2. **INTEGRITY AND PROFESSIONALISM.** Throughout this course the following ethical principles are assumed as norms of conduct:
  - a. **ANY FORM OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY WILL NOT BE ACCEPTABLE AND WILL BE SERIOUSLY PENALIZED. PLAGIARISM or CHEATING will make you fail this course!!!!**
  - b. Good-in-class behavior is assumed as a norm. Any form of disrupting behavior is not acceptable. It is assumed that each student will follow the Reinhardt’s code of conduct as explained in the student handbook.
  - c. This class is a **FREE-CELL-PHONE ZONE**. Cell phones must be turned off and put in your pockets or back packs. Failure to comply with this requirement will have negative implications on you grade.
  - d. **LAPTOP COMPUTERS/TABLETS may only be used for TAKING NOTES and you must formally ask for permission to do so.** During class time, you are **NOT ALLOWED TO DO HOMEWORK FOR OTHER COURSES or USE SOCIAL MEDIA**. You must be fully present! Failure to comply with this requirement will have negative implications on you grade.
  - e. The conditions of this syllabus are binding and must be followed faithfully. I assume you all know its content. By deciding to take this course, you **ALL AGREE** to follow the norms ruling this course.

- f. Any comment or suggestion that contributes to your growth as students, the improvement of this class, and a learning environment is welcome. I am here to help you learn, succeed and be a better human being. Please do not wait until the end of the semester to ask for help. Feel free to contact him at any time.
- 3. COMMUNICATION MODE.** All of you are responsible for **constantly checking CANVAS (Files, Announcements, etc.)** and your **Reinhardt email accounts** regarding issues pertaining to this course (materials, lectures, announcements, class schedule changes, grades, etc.). When you communicate with me, you must follow a **formal, respectful protocol**. You must be **polite and/or use manners**. **Do NOT use your personal emails!**
- 4. IMPORTANT REINHARDT ACADEMIC DATES**
- August 15**, Tuesday Final day to add P-designated online courses.  
**August 21**, Monday Final day to change schedule, end of drop/add  
**August 28**, Monday Last day to submit a graduation application for May 2024 degree completion without a late fee.  
**October 10**, Tuesday Final date to withdraw with grade of W, full semester classes.  
**October 16-27** Advising/Registration for Winter Term 2023, and spring and summer 2024.

**THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF STUDENT SUCCESS.** Your job is to do well in this class, be responsible, take initiative, follow my instructions carefully, listen, and be open to new understandings, skills, knowledge, and methodologies. My job is to make sure that these goals are achieved and to give you my best. It is a relational undertaking. To this end, the following principles may help us get there:

- I. HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND CHALLENGES
- II. YOU CAN AND WILL RISE TO THE OCCASION
- III. THE QUALITY OF YOUR EFFORT IS THE KEY
- IV. YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE WITH YOUR IDEAS, QUESTISM KNOWLEDGE, AND EXPERIENCES
- V. LISTEN TO OTHER VOICES AND CONSIDER OTHER PERSPECTIVES
- VI. MAKE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES RELEVANT
- VII. BE ATTENTIVE, RESPONSIBLE, TAKE NOTES, AND PARTICIPATE
- VIII. REVIEW THE MATERIAL DAILY
- IX. DEVELOP FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIPS
- X. PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOK AND ADDITIONAL MATERIALS.**

Martínez, Aquiles Ernesto. Encounters with the Mystery: An Understanding of Religion. Published and printed by Kdp.Amazon.com, 2019. **THIS BOOK CAN ONLY BE ORDERED from the following site:**

[https://www.amazon.com/Encounters-Mystery-Aquiles-Ernesto-Mart%C3%ADnez/dp/1729526675/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=aquiles+ernesto+martinez&qid=1595345873&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Encounters-Mystery-Aquiles-Ernesto-Mart%C3%ADnez/dp/1729526675/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=aquiles+ernesto+martinez&qid=1595345873&sr=8-1)

-----, “O Círio de Nossa Senhora de Nazaré: A Faith Assessment and Beyond.” <https://blogs.reinhardt.edu/ich/2019/11/01/o-cirio-de-nossa-senhora-de-nazare-a-faith-assessment-and-beyond/?fbclid=IwAR2vefkQE5NH5XxCBsHjo7IJBByKoU9t-Z0UE1G6nvoLdkkpoAXCYvhxvEu9k>

Lectures, handouts, world trip pictures, web videos, articles provided by me as needed,

**RECOMMENDED READINGS** (for students interested in deepening their understanding of religion).

Appleby, R. Scott. The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.

Bach, Markus. Major Religions of the World. Nashville: The Graded Press, 1959.

Bloom, Irene and Wayne L. Proudfoot, eds. Religious Diversity and Human Rights. NY: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Berger, Peter. The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion. NY: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1967.

Cunningham, Lawrence S. The Sacred Quest: An Invitation to the Study of Religion. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002.

Durkheim, Emile. Durkheim on Religion. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994.

Eliade, Mircea. Patterns in Comparative Religions. New York: The World Publishing Company, 1967.

Hopfe, Lewis M. Religions of the World. Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1976.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence. Berkley: University of California Press, 2000.

Noss, John B. Man's Religions. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. NY: The Macmillan Company, 1971.

Otto, Rudolf. The Idea of the Holy. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Ring, Nancy C., Kathleen S. Nash, Mary N. MacDonald, Fred Glennon, and Jennifer A. Glancy. Introduction to the Study of Religion. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001.

Ruland, Vernon. Imagining the Sacred: Soundings in World Religions. Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1998.

Smart, Ninian. The Religious Experience of Mankind. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984.

Smith, Jonathan Z. Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. The Meaning and End of Religion. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Streng, Frederick J. Understanding Religious Life. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1985.

Weber, Max. The Sociology of Religion. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

**CALENDAR OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS.** Before class, all of you must have read the topics of the days and come prepared to ask questions or make comments about the chapters of the textbook. You must also take notes of the Power-Point presentations and participate in class.

Week # 1		
Date	Topic	Assignment
August 15	<p><b><i>Introduction to the Course</i></b></p> <p><b><i>ENCOUNTERS WITH THE MYSTERY: AN UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION</i></b></p> <p><i>(The topics below follow the textbook's outline)</i></p> <p><b>PART 1 INTRODUCTION</b></p> <p><i>As Old and New as Human Existence</i></p> <p><i>Justifying What Needs no Justification: Why the Study of Religion is Important</i></p> <p><i>Knowing More to Live Better: The Purpose of Studying Religion</i></p>	<p>Read syllabus before coming to class</p> <p>Participation in class</p>
August 17	<p><b>PART 2 FUNDAMENTALS</b></p>	<p>Study the textbook and presentation</p>

	<i>The Heart of the Matter: What Religion Seems to be</i>  <i>The Abstract Becomes Concrete: How Religion Is Made Viable</i>	Participation in class
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Week # 2		
Date	Topic	Assignment
August 22	<i>In the Beginning: The Origins of Religion</i>  <i>How It Works: The Functions of Religion</i>	Study the textbook and presentations  Participation in class
August 24	<b>STUDY TIME – NO CLASS</b>	Study handout on Islam and presentations  <b>PAPER # 1: CANAANITE RELIGIONS (due by midnight)</b>

Week # 3		
Date	Topic	Assignment
August 29	<i>In all Shapes and Sizes: Types of Religion</i>  <i>The Eyes of the Beholders: How We Must Interpret Religion</i>	Study the textbook and presentations  Participation in class
August 31	_____	<b>TEST # 1 ON CANVAS</b>

Week # 4		
Date	Topic	Assignment
September 5	<b>PART 3 THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN: WHAT RELIGIONS HAVE IN COMMON</b>  <i>Faith: The Decisive Force</i>	Study the textbook and presentations  Participation in class

	<i>Views of the Universe</i> <i>Social Contexts and Histories</i> <i>Beliefs and Norms</i>	
September 7	<b>STUDY TIME – NO CLASS</b>	Study the textbook and presentations

<b>Week # 5</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
September 12	<i>It's All About Love</i> <i>Languages of their Own</i> <i>Foundational Stories: Myths</i>	Study the textbook and presentations Participation in class <b>PAPER 2: RELIGION IN A DIGITAL AND SCIENTIFIC WORLD (due by midnight)</b>
September 14	<b>STUDY TIME – NO CLASS</b>	Study the textbook and presentations

<b>Week # 6</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
September 19	<i>Holy Texts and Oral Traditions</i> <i>Meaningful and Performative Acts: Rituals</i> <i>Social Organization</i> <i>Maintenance and Growth Mechanisms</i>	Study the textbook and presentations Participation in class
September 21	_____	<b>TEST # 2 ON CANVAS</b>

Week # 7		
Date	Topic	Assignment
September 26	<b>PART 4</b> <b>A QUEST FOR “THE TRUTH:”</b> <b>RELIGION RE-EXAMINED</b>  <b>A SAMPLE OF A WORLD</b> <b>RELIGION</b>  <i>ISLAM: Total Submission to Allah</i>	Study the textbook and presentations  Participation in class  Study handout on Islam
September 28	<b>STUDY TIME – NO CLASS</b>	Study handout on Islam and Presentations  Participation in class  <b>RELIGIOUS SITE VISIT</b> <b>REPORT (due by midnight)</b>

Week # 8		
Date	Topic	Assignment
October 3		Study handout on Islam and presentations  Participation in class
October 5	_____	<b>TEST # 3 (FINAL) ON CANVAS</b>