

Welcome Letter: Introduction to Religion

I am Ross Enochs and I will be the instructor for the online course Introduction to Religion. I thought it might be helpful if I included a brief biography to let you know about my experience in religion. I graduated from Colgate University in New York with a B.A. in Religious Studies in 1985. I then went on to graduate work at the University of Virginia where I received my M.A. and Ph. D. in Religious Studies with a concentration in American Religious History. I taught part-time at Boston College, Merrimack College, and Marian College of Fond du Lac. From 1999 until 2022, I was an assistant professor at Marist College in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. I am now semi-retired and am teaching as a part-time instructor. At Marist I have taught a variety of courses including Marriage and the Family from Religious Perspectives, Religion in America, Catholic Thought and Spirituality, Judeo-Christian Scripture and others.

This is not an easy class. In this class we will be learning to analyze religious phenomena. One of the great problems with regard to religion today is that most people think that they understand religion. Most people have the comfortable confidence that they have figured out everything about religion. The problem with this assertion is that very few people study religion, and unless you spend some time studying religion, you really do not understand it. Today people spend far more time on the internet or cell phone than they would ever commit to the study or practice of religion. When you graduate from college, most of you will have very little free time to study religion; new jobs, new friends, dating, marriage, new houses will most likely push religion out of your immediate interest. We have eight weeks, so you might as well commit some time to it now. I promise you, there will be some surprises for all of you.

The first thing you need to do is to buy **hard copies** of the books that are listed on the syllabus. You will also need access to a Bible for this class but you do not need a hard copy. There are several different versions of the Bible and you can use any version. If you have a Hebrew Bible, you will need a New Testament as well. There are copies of the Bible available on the internet so if you do not have a hard copy, you can go online. *The New American Bible* (a Catholic Bible) and the NRSV Newly Revised Standard Version (a Protestant Bible) are both available online and I have links on the syllabus to these books.

Each week your post for the discussions is due Sunday night by 8:00 PM. You only have to post once each week. Some weeks, there will be several topics for discussion. Even though there are several different topics, you do not have to post in all the topics. Each week, you only have to post in one topic - any topic that you like.

About thirty years ago when I started college, I began looking at religious stories and rituals. I remember that they did not make much sense when I first started to read them. There are, however, patterns in these stories, and when you read enough religious stories, the patterns

start to become clearer. Then you may start to ask why the pattern is there. This is one way to start trying to understand religion. To understand religious phenomena, you have to ask continually when you are reading scripture or reading about rituals, "Why did they do it that way?" "Why do they use that symbol?" There is always a reason that religious practitioners do something in a certain way; religion is not random. As we read through the religious stories and rituals, I will be asking a number of questions to help you focus on the significant messages in the texts. To understand a religious story or myth, sometimes you have to read it a few times before it starts to make sense. Sometimes you have to study related rituals or other aspects of culture before the story starts to make sense. Sometimes the story will not make sense until a few years have passed and you have an experience that is reflected in the story. The stories that we are looking at have survived through the ages, and have shaped cultures. Looking at these stories and rituals tells us something about the nature of human beings, and we will find again and again that the symbols and patterns in one religion are similar to those in other religions. I am not, however, one of those people who think religions are basically all the same; they are not.

The purpose of this class is to study religions, not advocate a particular religion, and the class is not here to challenge any particular religion or denomination. We will start with the study of ancient religion and we will use Native American, Norse and Ancient Greek religion as examples. In the ancient world there were three basic types of religions that were inextricably linked to the different types of economies in the ancient world: farming, hunting and raiding. This class will use Native American religions as examples of religions related to farming and hunting, and will use the Viking or Norse religion as an example of a raiding type religion. Since the theme of this course is concerned with comparing ancient and modern religions, the class will then examine Judaism, which was the first modern religion and also a religion that has changed a great deal through time. Since Jesus was raised as a Jewish person and since the New Testament is replete with references to controversies about Jewish law, the class will then consider Christianity's origin in Jewish culture and its dispersion as a universal religion.

I hope you enjoy the course and I hope you find it challenging,

Best wishes,

Ross Enochs

Contact Information:

The best way to get in touch with me during the class is through email, ross.enochs@marist.edu. I will check the site each day so I should be able to get back to you within 24 hours. There are no Zoom meetings for this class, and I do not meet with students individually through Zoom. If you send me a message, I will answer any questions that you have.

Required Texts: You will need hard copies of all the following books

The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux edited by Joseph Epes Brown. ISBN0806121246 Link to Amazon http://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Pipe-Account-Civilization-American/dp/0806121246/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1275685787&sr=8-1-catcorr

The Norse Myths by Kevin Crossley-Holland. ISBN 0394748468
Link to Amazon, http://www.amazon.com/Norse-Myths-Pantheon-Folklore-Library/dp/0394748468/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1275685868&sr=8-1-catcorr

The Voyage of the Argo by Apollonius of Rhodes ISBN 0140440852
http://www.amazon.com/Voyage-Argo-Argonautica-Penguin-Classics/dp/0140440852/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1388414514&sr=1-1&keywords=voyage+of+the+argo

Man's Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl ISBN 9780807014295
https://www.amazon.com/Mans-Search-Meaning-Viktor-Frankl/dp/080701429X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1534811793&sr=8-1&keywords=mans+search+for+meaning

The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis ISBN 1557483159
https://www.amazon.com/Screwtape-Letters-C-S-Lewis/dp/1557483159/ref=tmm_mmp_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

The Bible - Any version of the Bible with the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament is fine; you can also find the Bible online if you do not want to buy a hard copy. *The New American Bible* <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.shtml>, a Catholic Bible, and the *NRSV New Revised Standard Version*, <http://www.godweb.org/nrs/index2.htm>, a Protestant Bible, are both available online.

If you would like to save money, you can buy all these books used on Amazon for very reasonable prices. You can, of course, buy these books anywhere you like.