

THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

THEOREL 206/306 Religion in Film and Television



Lecture Location & Time: Check Student Services Online

Lecturer: Caroline Blyth

Email: c.blyth@auckland.ac.nz

Office Hours: 3-5pm, Tuesday (or by appointment) – Arts 1, level 4, rm 402

Brief Description of Course

This course will explore the ways that religious themes (eg, salvation, sin, faith, theodicy, prophecy), stories, characters, and imagery are given expression within the narratives of a number of classic and contemporary films and television dramas. Students will learn skills to identify the articulation of religious beliefs, narratives and the sacred or transcendent within the medium of film and television, and to comment critically and informatively on this cultural engagement with religion.

The films and TV programmes that we will study in 2017 will include *Last Days in the Desert*, *A Serious Man*, 'A Certain Samaritan' (*Vera*, season 2), *Gattaca*, *Wadjda*, and *Angels in America*. These will be screened during class time, with discussions taking place in weekly tutorials.

1. Learning outcomes of course

Upon completion of this course, students should:

- Have developed the skills necessary to identify and discuss in an informed way religious themes, myths and images within a number of classic and contemporary films and television dramas.
- Have developed an understanding of the ways that religious beliefs, myths and images are utilised in film and television drama narratives to engage with, critique, or affirm religious understandings of a number of themes, beliefs and issues.
- Show a knowledge of and ability to engage critically with different methodological approaches to researching film and television as a cultural medium within religious studies.
- Become familiar with some of the scholarly literature concerning religion and film/television that has been written by local, national and international scholars.
- Have been shown some of the skills required in academic writing and guided through the process of composing an engaging, well-written and well-argued essay.

2. Assignments

THEOREL 206

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|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|--------------------------|
| a. Weekly discussions | 20% total grade | 1500 words | Due: weeks 2-12 |
| b. Worksheet | 30% total grade | 1500 words | Due: 18 September at 4pm |
| c. Final essay | 50% total grade | 2000 words | Due 27 October at 4pm |

THEOREL 306

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|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|--------------------------|
| a. Weekly discussions | 20% total grade | 1500 words | Due: weeks 2-12 |
| b. Film review | 30% total grade | 1500 words | Due: 18 September at 4pm |
| c. Final essay | 50% total grade | 3000 words | Due 27 October at 4pm |

3. Lecture Schedule

Week	Lecture Topic	Film
Week 1 24-28 July	Introduction to the Course Studying religion in film and television Retelling sacred stories 1: explicit retellings	
Week 2 31 July-4 Aug	Retelling sacred stories – background texts and contexts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus' temptation in the desert - Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 (week 3) The Good Samaritan - Luke 10:25-37 (week 4) The Book of Job - Job 1-3, 38-42 (week 5) The biblical messiah and the American Monomyth - Psalm 2 Matt. 16:13-20; John 11) (week 6) 	
Week 3 7-11 Aug	Jesus at the Movies <i>Last Days in the Desert</i>	<i>Last Days in the Desert</i>
Week 4 14-18 Aug	The Good Samaritan retold Screening Tuesday, Tutorial discussion Wednesday	'A Certain Samaritan' (<i>Vera</i> , series 2)
Week 5 21-25 Aug	Religion, faith, God, and the Book of Job Screening Tuesday, Tutorial discussion Wednesday	<i>A Serious Man</i>
Week 6 28 Aug-1 Sept	From Norse gods to biblical messiahs Screening Tuesday, Tutorial discussion Wednesday	<i>Thor</i>
<i>Mid-Semester break</i>		
Week 7 18-22 Sept	A slice of (religious) life Gender, culture, religion in film Assignment 2 due Screening Tuesday, Tutorial discussion Wednesday	<i>Wadjda</i>
Week 8 25-29 Sept	The search for life's meaning Humanity and transcendence Screening Tuesday, Tutorial discussion Wednesday	<i>Gattaca</i>
Week 9 2-6 Oct	The great work begins Introducing <i>Angels in America</i> – prophecy, religion, angels, salvation, reconciliation, hope, forgiveness, ritual and God!	
Week 10 9-13 Oct	Angels in America 1 Screening Tuesday, Tutorial discussion on Wednesday	<i>Angels in America pt. 1</i>
Week 11 16-20 Oct	Angels in America 2 Screening Tuesday, Tutorial discussion on Wednesday	<i>Angels in America pt. 2</i>
Week 12 23-27 Oct	Angels in America 3 Screening Tuesday, Tutorial discussion on Wednesday	<i>Angels in America pt. 3</i>

4. Course Assignments

a. For THEOREL 206 and 306: Assignment 1 – discussions – 20% total grade. Weeks 2-12

Ten short class discussions (to be posted on Canvas) – 150 words each – weeks 2-12 – 2% each

Objectives: this assignment gives you the opportunity to share with classmates what you've taken away from each week's lectures, films, and tutorial discussions.

Instructions: each week, you will write a short (c.150 word) response to the week's class content using the Canvas discussion forum. You can write about the film we've watched, or lecture/tutorial discussions.

Your discussion should demonstrate your **understanding** of and engagement with the film and the religious issues that it raises. Discussions that are at least 150 words, well written, and demonstrate your engagement with the class material will get full marks. Marks will be deducted if the discussion post is too short, badly written, or fails to show you have given careful thought to the week's topic. There are a total of 11 discussion threads – you only need participate in 10 of these (so if you want to skip one week, you won't lose any marks).

These discussions do not need to be submitted to Turnitin. Please ensure that your discussion is your own work.

These discussions are compulsory – you must submit at least 6 discussion posts to complete this assignment (but you will lose marks if you do not do at least ten posts). Failure to complete at least six weekly discussion will mean you receive a DNC grade for the course. You must complete your discussion by 11.59pm on the Friday of that week.

For THEOREL 206

b. Assignment – worksheet 30% total grade 1500 words Due: 18 September

Worksheet – guided study of a film/TV programme – due 29 September – 30%

Objective: This assignment will guide you through the process of analyzing a film/TV programme that we have looked at in class during weeks 2-6. This will allow you to develop skills that you will go on to utilize in your final essay.

Instructions: Complete one of the worksheets that are listed on Canvas under this assignment. Each worksheet is based on a film/TV programme we have watched and discussed in weeks 2-6. The worksheet guides you through the analysis of the film/TV programme. Your task is to demonstrate your ability to reflect critically on what you have seen, drawing on lecture and tutorial discussions and relevant readings.

All worksheets should be submitted to Turnitin via Canvas.

Scholarly works should be cited accurately according to your preferred referencing style. For help with referencing, see the [QuickCite](#) referencing guide on the Library website. Our subject librarian Mark Hangartner will also be happy to help (m.hangartner@auckland.ac.nz).

Worksheets should be submitted to Turnitin on Canvas and a hard copy submitted by 4pm on the due date to the Arts Assignment Centre. Please attach a cover sheet to this assignment. The usual policy for late submissions will apply (see below).

Grading criteria for worksheet

Criteria for assessment	A 80-100%	B 65-79%	C 50-64%	D 0-49%
Analytical skills – how well did you understand the film's religious themes and	Excellent – in-depth analysis of film. Imaginative and engaging answers, demonstrating	Good – some nice analysis of film. Some evidence of independent thought.	Limited analysis of film. Less evidence of independent thought.	None demonstrated – limited or no analysis of film. No evidence of independent thought.

content?	independent thought.			
Quality of written expression	Very high standard. A pleasure to read.	High standard but further care needed with proofreading, structure, grammar.	Generally good writing style but many errors throughout review – writing unclear in places due to poor grammar.	Poor – not up to University standard. Writing is frequently hard to understand.
Accuracy in referencing and bibliography	Excellent (or N/A)	A few errors, but mainly good.	Many inaccuracies.	Inadequate referencing and/or no bibliography
Submitted to Turnitin, on time, and within word limit.	All 3 requirements met.	2 out of 3 requirements met.	One out of three requirements met.	No requirements met. Plagiarism

c. Assignment – final essay 50% total grade 2000 words Due 27 October at 4pm

Essay objective: Your final essay will allow you to consolidate the skills you have learned from your previous assignment, your readings, viewings, and participation in class discussions. It will demonstrate the skills you have gained throughout the course and show me that you are able to discuss religious themes/stories/characters presented on screen in an informed and critical way. I will also look for your ability to construct a good essay question and essay structure, draw on scholarly sources to enhance your discussion, and write clearly and stylishly. **NB your essay topic should not focus on the same film/TV programme that you did for your worksheet.**

Instructions: Write an essay about one of the films we have watched in weeks 2-12, which will consider the ways that this film reflects on or reimagines a religious theme, character, or story. By the end of week 10, you should have come to see me during my office hours to discuss your essay topic, and get my feedback and help with planning it. **It is up to you to schedule this meeting.**

Your essay should have the following structure:

- Introduction: introduce your essay question and explain how you are going to answer this question in the essay (outline the main issues you will be discussing and why this question is worth asking).
- Aim to have between 2 and 4 key points that you will discuss in your essay. Each point should build up your discussion about the film you have chosen, and you will need to organize these points in a way that leads the reader logically through the important features of your discussion. So, your first point should lead logically to your second point, which will lead to the third point, etc.
- A conclusion – summarize your main findings and reiterate your answer to the essay question. You might also want to include a brief mention of other issues that are raised by the question, which you have not been able to address (e.g. ambiguities, wider issues, further questions that are raised by your answer).

As with your other assignments, all citations should be cited according to your preferred reference style. Include a bibliography at the end of your essay. For help with finding secondary sources, either see me or arrange a time to meet with Mark Hangartner (I'll confirm his drop-in hours).

Essays should be submitted to Turnitin on Canvas and a hard copy submitted by 4pm on the due date to the Arts Assignment Centre. The usual policy for late submissions will apply (see below).

Grading criteria for essay

Criteria for essay assessment	A 80-100%	B 65-79%	C 50-64%	D 0-49%
Interesting and appropriate essay topic with a focused discussion	Excellent essay topic, making creative use of course material, discussions, readings, etc., to form a clear and detailed discussion.	Similar to A but not quite so stunning.	Good essay topic, although essay fails to address it in any depth. Discussion tends towards the descriptive rather than the analytical.	Badly thought out essay topic, which the essay fails to address adequately.
Ability to analyze relevant material in film	Excellent and creative analysis of film, drawing on audio and visual elements, plot lines, characters, etc.	Similar to A but not so impressive.	Limited understanding of visual methodologies; attempts to use these to interpret the visual images are inconsistent.	Little or no understanding of visual methodologies. Unsuccessful or no attempt to use these to interpret visual images.
Essay structure and clarity of argument	Essay very well structured; argument flows logically, beginning with a clear introduction and progressing to a sound conclusion.	Essay generally has a good structure with clear introduction and conclusion. There may be minor faults in flow of argument or evidence of irrelevant material.	Structure of essay may need revision. Some parts of discussion do not flow logically and there may be evidence of irrelevant material.	Limited evidence of structure in essay; little clarity of argument and evidence of irrelevant material. Poor/absence of introduction and/or conclusion.
Quality of written expression	Very high standard in written expression, editing, spelling and style.	High standard but further work needed in: writing style, proofreading, and editing.	Generally good writing style but many errors throughout review.	Writing style and structures poor – many grammatical and spelling errors, badly edited.
Accuracy in referencing and bibliography.	All referencing and bibliography accurate and consistent according to style	Most referencing and bibliography accurate according to style.	Many inaccuracies in referencing and bibliography.	Inadequate referencing and/or no bibliography Plagiarism detected
Submitted to Turnitin, on time, and within word limit.	All 3 requirements met.	2 out of 3 requirements met.	One out of three requirements met.	No requirements met. Plagiarism

For THEOREL 306

b. Film review 30% total grade 1500 words Due: 18 September at 4pm

Objective: this review will offer you the chance to develop your skills to critically analyze a piece of visual culture, which you can then use in your final essay.

Instructions: Choosing one of the films we have considered in weeks 2-6, write a short review of the film, reflecting in particular on its engagement with religious stories, characters, and themes. Your review should offer: (1) a short synopsis of the film and details including its date of release, writer/director, and genre; (2) a discussion of the religious themes, stories, and/or characters that the film explores, including its use of sacred texts, religious iconography, characterization of religious

figures, etc.; (3) a discussion of what you liked about the film – how it portrayed religious content, creative decisions made about the presentation of religious material, its style, mood, and plot, etc.; (4) your critical reflections on the film – is there anything you did not like about its use of religious material, its creative decisions, its stylistic features, plot lines, etc.?; (5) summary and conclusions.

As with your other assignments, all citations should be cited according to your preferred reference style. Include a bibliography at the end of your essay. For help with finding secondary sources, either see me or arrange a time to meet with Mark Hangartner (I'll confirm his drop-in hours).

Reviews should be submitted to Turnitin on Canvas and a hard copy submitted by 4pm on the due date to the Arts Assignment Centre. The usual policy for late submissions will apply (see below).

Grading criteria for review

Criteria for assessment	A 80-100%	B 65-79%	C 50-64%	D 0-49%
Clear and succinct identification of the film's engagement with religious themes/ stories/ characters	Meets criterion to a high standard. Identifies key religious content of film and describes it in a clear and thoughtful way.	Like A, although discussion lacks some detail or is less clearly articulated.	Some of the film's religious themes etc are not identified, or have been misunderstood.	Little or no evidence that religious themes etc raised in the film have been understood.
Critical evaluation (positives and negatives) of the film	Detailed and well-argued critical evaluation. Clearly outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the film's religious engagement.	Like A, but lacking detail in places, or less clearly articulated.	Critical evaluation lacks depth and detail; points raised are not adequately demonstrated, or main strengths and weaknesses of the film are not identified.	Little or no evidence of critical evaluation; discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the film are either absent or lacking appropriate argument.
Quality of written expression	Very high standard of writing. A joy to read.	Like A, but some minor issues (typos, clumsy grammar, editing issues, etc)	Generally good writing style but many errors throughout, including a few places where writing is difficult to understand.	Writing style and structures poor to the point that the discussion is difficult to understand. Not up to University standard.
Accuracy in referencing and bibliography according to chosen referencing style	Excellent	Very good - just the odd error	Many inaccuracies present	Inadequate referencing and/or no bibliography
Submitted to Turnitin	Yes			No. Turnitin report

				detected plagiarism
c. Essay 3000 words 50% total grade Due: 27 October at 4pm				

Essay objective: Your final essay will allow you to consolidate the skills you have learned from your previous assignments, your readings and also your participation in class discussions. It will demonstrate the skills you have gained throughout the course and show me that you have learned skills to analyze religious content and themes in film.

Instructions: Write an essay that focuses on the presentation of religious themes/characters/stories within a film or television show of your choice. You can choose a film we've looked at in class or something different. Your essay should have a clear and relevant thesis question or thesis statement, which you clarify in your introduction (does it pass the 'so what?' litmus test?). So don't just write a description of the film, but choose one particular focus for your essay, based either on a particular question you want to answer, or a claim you want to make/explore (e.g. 'What are the functions of angels in Angels in America?', 'How does 'A Certain Samaritan' subvert the message of this gospel parable?' 'Gattaca challenges biblical understandings of imago dei')

You are welcome to arrange a time to see me to discuss your essay and get guidance about it.

As with your other assignments, all citations should be cited according to your preferred reference style. Include a bibliography at the end of your essay.

Essays should be submitted to Turnitin on Canvas and also to the Arts Assignment Centre by the due date. The usual policy for late submissions will apply.

Grading criteria for essay

Criteria for essay assessment	A 80-100%	B 65-79%	C 50-64%	D 0-49%
Answers essay question; essay question is appropriate and meets the 'so what?' litmus test.	Excellent thesis statement/question, which the essay addresses with depth and creativity	Similar to A but not quite so stunning.	A good thesis statement/question, although essay fails to address it in any depth. Discussion tends towards the descriptive rather than the analytical.	Poor thesis statement/question, which the essay fails to address adequately. No thesis statement/question indicated in introduction
Ability to analyze relevant material in film	Excellent and creative analysis of film, drawing on audio and visual elements, plot lines, characters, etc.	Similar to A but not so impressive.	Limited understanding of visual methodologies; attempts to use these to interpret the visual images are inconsistent.	Little or no understanding of visual methodologies. Unsuccessful or no attempt to use these to interpret visual images.
Interaction with scholarly literature	Excellent exploration of and response to relevant scholarly works.	Offers some engagement with relevant scholarly works. Shows some independent thought in approach to the discussion.	Less impressive analysis of the film - discussion too descriptive, superficial, or inaccurate.	Like C but even less impressive
Essay structure and clarity of argument	Essay very well structured; argument flows	Essay generally has a good structure with clear introduction and	Structure of essay may need revision. Some parts of discussion do not flow	Limited evidence of structure in essay; little clarity of argument and

	logically, beginning with a clear introduction and progressing to a sound conclusion.	conclusion. There may be minor faults in flow of argument or evidence of irrelevant material.	logically and there may be evidence of irrelevant material.	evidence of irrelevant material. Poor/absence of introduction and/or conclusion.
Quality of written expression	Very high standard in written expression, editing, spelling and style.	High standard but further work needed in: writing style, proofreading, and editing.	Generally good writing style but many errors throughout review.	Writing style and structures poor – many grammatical and spelling errors, badly edited.
Accuracy in referencing and bibliography.	All referencing and bibliography accurate and consistent according to style	Most referencing and bibliography accurate according to style.	Many inaccuracies in referencing and bibliography.	Inadequate referencing and/or no bibliography Plagiarism detected
Submitted to Turnitin, on time, and within word limit.	All 3 requirements met.	2 out of 3 requirements met.	One out of three requirements met.	No requirements met. Plagiarism

5. References and resources

Weekly Modules (your main resource for this course)

I've created a module for each week on Canvas – here, you can look at the week's Page, which tells you what the weekly topic is about, some questions to think about, and a reminder of the weekly readings. I'll also post any slides under each Module plus additional resources (handouts, links to video clips, websites, etc).

For each film that we watch, I'll create a short 'cheat sheet' with key details about the film and some questions to guide your viewing.

Weekly Readings

Reading material for each week is listed under the "Readings" section available online in Canvas, and also listed on the weekly Pages. Essential readings will be the focus of the week's lectures – further readings are to help with your essay and exam. Some weeks, I ask you to look at a particular biblical passage or other religious source (as it's something referred to explicitly or implicitly in the film). I don't have a great deal of readings for this course, as I'd rather you spend your usual reading time viewing our films again and treating them as a 'text' that you need to study and analyze in your own time, as well as during class time.

6. Extensions and lateness policy

Extensions for assignments will be given in special circumstances, and only if requested **prior** to the due date of the assignment (i.e. extensions will not be granted retrospectively except in exceptional circumstances). Essays submitted late will lose 5% for the first day late, then an additional 1% for each subsequent day late. After 3 weeks, your essay will receive 0%. The essay is a compulsory part of the course work, so even if it is over two weeks late, it needs to be submitted if you want to avoid a DNC grade.

As a rule, I'm fairly sympathetic with student requests for extensions, and would rather grant you an extension than have you lose marks for your essay or fail to submit it at all. The main thing is that you ask me **BEFORE** the essay is due, and be honest with me about the reason you need the

extension. My generosity does have limits though, and longer extension requests (of over a week) will need to be accompanied by a medical certificate or other supporting documentation.

7. Important reminders

- All assignments for this course are compulsory; failure to complete any of them will result in a Did Not Complete grade.
- Assignments must comply with the University of Auckland's *Academic Conduct* guidelines (accessible [here](#)).
- Extensions: extension requests should be made to the course co-ordinator (c.blyth@auckland.ac.nz) before the essay due date (see below for extension policy).
- All assessment grades are provisional until after the end of semester THEOREL Examiners Meeting.
- Enjoy the course!