

# **THEOREL 101/101G**

## **The Bible in Popular Culture**

### **Semester 2, 2018**



**Lecturer: Caroline Blyth**  
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### **Office Hours**

Thursday 10-11am, Science Building foyer; 2-3pm, HSB Art Student Centre study space (I'll be sitting around – just come find me)

### **Brief Description of Course**

An exploration of biblical themes, images, and metaphors within contemporary popular culture. You will learn how to use some of the tools and methods for analyzing religion within various modes of popular culture, including music, film, TV, art, advertising, and the media.

### **Learning outcomes of course**

Upon completion of this course, students should:

- a. Have learned basic theories of analyzing popular culture and be able to apply these to cultural texts, including those discussed in class;
- b. Be able to explain how the Bible influences popular culture and how popular culture influences interpretations of the biblical texts;
- c. Be familiar with the ways in which the Bible functions as a cultural resource in a wide variety of contemporary contexts and cultures;
- d. Be able to identify some significant Biblical themes and characters as they appear in popular culture texts, including film, music, art, advertising, television and the media;
- e. Have learned the skills of creating a well-written and engaging essay that people will want to read.

## Assignments

- a. Online quiz [On Canvas] 15% total grade
- b. Essay proposal 10% total grade
- c. 1500-word essay 25% total grade
- d. 2-hour examination 50% total grade

Available: 20-27 August  
 Due: 11.59pm, 21 September  
 Due: 11.59pm, 8 October  
 Date: TBA

## Lecture Schedule

Week	Lecture Topic	Weekly biblical texts
Week 1	<b>Introduction to the Course</b> What is popular culture?	
Week 2	<b>The Bible Industry</b> Introduction to the Bible as a cultural text.	
Week 3	<b>Biblical characters and their cultural afterlives</b> Delilah as a case study.	<b>Judges 16</b>
Week 4	<b>The Jesus industry</b> Jesus's afterlives in pop culture	<b>Mark 14-16</b>
Week 5	<b>Prophecy in the Bible and popular culture</b> The secular prophet in contemporary pop culture.	<b>See handout on Canvas module for week 5</b>
Week 6	<b>It's the end of the world (or at least the first half of semester)</b> Themes of the apocalypse in the Bible and popular culture. <b>Mid semester quiz goes live this week (20-27 August)</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>
	<i>Mid-Semester break</i>	
Week 7	<b>Biblical messiahs, popular messiahs and the American monomyth</b> Political messiahs, sporting messiahs, celebrity messiahs	<b>Psalms 2; and see various biblical texts on the week 7 slides</b>
Week 8	<b>The political Bible</b> Radical Bibles, Liberal Bibles, Cultural Bibles <b>Essay proposal due</b>	<b>Matthew 6: 9-13; Mark 12; Exodus 20.1-17.</b>
Week 9	<b>The Bible and Violence</b> Does the Bible justify violence and intolerance?	<b>Genesis 4</b>
Week 10	<b>The Devil made me do it</b> Representations of Satan in the Bible and pop culture	<b>Job 1-2; Matthew 4:1-11</b>
Week 11	<b>The Capitalist Bible</b> Biblical themes in advertising	<b>Genesis 2-3</b>
Week 12	Exam revision	No readings this week.
	<i>Study Break and Examination Period</i>	

## Course Assignments

### 1. Online Quiz [available on Canvas] 15% total grade. To be taken between 20-27 August.

This will be a 20-question multiple-choice quiz and will check your knowledge and understanding of the material presented *in lectures, lecture slides* and *required readings* for Weeks 1-5.

The test will be available on Canvas from **9am 20 August** until **11pm 27 August**.

You can complete it any time within these dates. You will have 30 minutes to complete the test and you must complete it at one sitting. Once you exit, you cannot return to the test, so make sure you have that length of time when you begin the test. If you are accessing the test from off- campus, please also make sure you have reliable Internet access to Canvas.

To access the test you will need to go to the Canvas site for THEOREL 101/G and Click on Quizzes for your instructions.

If anyone encounters technical difficulties when attempting to take the test, or is unable to sit it during this period for another reason, please contact Caroline Blyth, the course co-ordinator, as soon as possible ([c.blyth@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:c.blyth@auckland.ac.nz)).

A sample quiz is available on Canvas.

### 2. Essay proposal 10% total grade c.500 words Due: 21 September

The aim of this assignment is to get you thinking about and planning your essay. It is also a good opportunity to get valuable feedback on your planned essay and some additional help with resources etc.

The proposal worksheet asks you to tell me your essay topic, create a title for the essay, outline your essay plan, and list some of the resources you may use. A model worksheet answer can be found on the assignment page. You are welcome to use ideas from this worksheet, but please do not simply cut and paste bits from it, or from any of the Canvas resources for this course (because they will be flagged on Turnitin).

Complete the essay proposal worksheet on Canvas and submit it to Turnitin via the Canvas assignment page (**no hard copy is required**). Proposals will be graded online and returned, with feedback, by 1 October.

### 3. Essay 1500 words 25% total grade Due: 11.59pm, 8 October

**The essay is a compulsory part of the coursework for THEOREL 101/G. Failure to submit an essay will result in you receiving a DNC (Did Not Complete) grade for this course.**

Create an interesting and well-written essay answering **one of the questions given below**. I am looking for something creative, thoughtful, and engaging – something that people will enjoy reading, take seriously, and recommend to their friends. The **content** of the essay should be academic (with a clear focus, well-argued analysis, and coherent structure) and the **style** should be engaging and readable – think in terms of a well-written blog post or magazine article, rather than a convoluted, wordy academic text.

More details about the essay, including the essay questions, an essay writing guide, essay topic

suggestions, and FAQs can be found on Canvas – check the Module dedicated to the essay. There are also **a lot of model essays for you to look at**, written by students from previous years.

The grading criteria for the essay are found in the grid below – these will be a helpful guide to what we are looking for in your essay.

Submit a copy of your essay **to Turnitin** via the Canvas assignment page before it is marked. Your Turnitin originality report will be available to you once you submit. No paper copy is required. You'll be able to view your essay feedback and grade via Canvas.

**The essay questions are:**

1. Choose a character from the Bible and compare their biblical portrayal with one or more of their afterlives in popular culture.
2. With reference to the American Monomyth and/or biblical understandings of the messiah, choose a contemporary figure (real or fictional) and discuss why you think they can be described as a popular messiah.
3. Using Borg's definitions of the 'biblical prophet', identify and discuss a contemporary individual or group (real or fictional) who you think has a similarly prophetic role within their own culture or context.
4. With reference to the Cultural Bible, the Liberal Bible, and the Radical Bible, discuss how the Bible is used in contemporary politics.
5. Using one or more examples from popular culture, discuss the ways that Jesus may be transcribed from the Bible into visual form (in movies, TV, art, etc.).
6. Discuss the ways that apocalyptic themes found in the Bible are used to similar effect in popular culture. You can focus on one particular cultural text (i.e. film, novel, comic book, video game, TV series, etc.), or compare more than one.
7. Write an essay on any aspect of the Bible and popular culture that you are interested in (speak to either Caroline or your tutor first if you wish to do this 'freeform' essay option, and they can let you know how viable it is, plus give you some advice!).

**Criteria for assessment:** these criteria are what we look for in student essays for this course. Before submitting your essay, check the grid below – which boxes does it tick?

<b>Criteria for Assessment</b>	<b>A 80-</b>	<b>B 65-</b>	<b>C 50-</b>	<b>D 0-</b>
Answer to essay question	Offers an excellent and creative answer to essay question, which stretches beyond the predictable to something innovative	Good solid answer to essay question – less impressive than A.	Answer is poorly structured and/or argued, and does not adequately address the essay question.	Answer makes little attempt to engage in essay question in an appropriate way. Serious flaws in essay structure and
Use of class lectures, readings and discussion to engage with study of the Bible and Pop Culture	Demonstrates excellent engagement with class material, using it resourcefully and creatively. Shows clear ability to write academically about the Bible and pop culture.	Some good engagement with class material, using it appropriately to construct essay. Has ability to write academically about the Bible and pop culture, although some minor flaws or gaps in method may be apparent.	Partial engagement with class material within essay. Some ability to write academically about the Bible and pop culture, although more major flaws or gaps in method may be apparent.	Little or no engagement with class material. NO evidence of ability to write academically about the Bible and popular culture.
Writing is clear, stylish, and has been carefully proofread	Writing is clear, stylish, and engaging, keeping the reader interested. It has also been carefully proof-read. A real pleasure to read.	Writing is generally good, but a number of typos and grammatical errors present. Less of a joy to read.	Essay is not carefully proof- read, significant number of typos and grammatical errors that make some parts of essay difficult to follow. A chore to read.	Essay does not measure up to academic expectations. It is poorly written, not proofread, and subsequently difficult to understand. Not at all pleasant to read.
Citations and bibliography	Citations and bibliography conform to a referencing style  OR N/A	Most citations and bibliography conform to a referencing style but a few errors noted.	More significant errors in citation and bibliography – referencing style not followed with adequate attention to detail.	No referencing style used; lack of citations and/or bibliography.
Have you submitted to Turnitin?	Submitted to Turnitin – Turnitin report acceptable.			Not submitted to Turnitin. Turnitin report unacceptable. Plagiarism detected.

**c. Exam Two hours duration Date TBA**

**The exam is a compulsory part of the coursework for THEO 101/G. Failure to sit the exam will result in you receiving a Did Not Sit grade for this course.**

More details about the exam will be given later in the semester. To get an idea of what it might look like, see last year's exam paper (available on the library website – search for THEOREL 101 under the 'Exams' tab. I've changed round some of the topics this year, so don't worry if there are some questions you don't understand!

## References and resources

You will need to have access to a copy of a Bible in your preferred language. [Bible Gateway](#) is great, as it offers lots of different translations of the Bible in a range of languages. For English Bible translations, I recommend the New Revised Standard Version (it's a fairly literal translation, so gives a good sense of the original Hebrew and Greek texts).

## Weekly Modules (your main resource for this course)

I've created a **module for each week on Canvas** – in each module, I've created a **Page**, which tells you what the weekly topic is about, some **questions** to think about, and a reminder of the **weekly required readings**. I'll also post the week's **slides** on the module (which I'll put up before the lectures), links to the lecture recordings, links to the weekly Bible readings, and any other **resources** (handouts, links to video clips, websites, etc). There is also a **special module dedicated to the course essay** – there is loads of help available, including model essays from previous years, guides to answering each essay question, formatting and referencing guidance, FAQs, and recommended readings.

## Weekly Readings

Reading material for each week is listed under the "Readings" section available online in Canvas. **Essential** readings will be the focus of the week's lectures – I've reminded you what these are on each week's page. **Further** readings are to help with your essay and exam revision. There is a biblical text allocated for each week (which is also essential reading).

## Extensions and lateness policy

Extensions for assignments will be given 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 three weeks late, it needs to be submitted **prior to the final exam** if you want to avoid a DNC grade.

As a rule, I'm fairly sympathetic with extension requests. The main thing is that you contact me and that you're honest with me about the reason you need the extension. My generosity does have limits though, and very long or repeated extension requests will need to be accompanied by a medical certificate or other supporting documentation.

## Important reminders

- **Failure to complete the essay will result in a DNC grade, while failure to sit the exam will lead to a DNS grade.**
- **Assignments must comply with the University of Auckland's *Academic Conduct* guidelines (accessible [here](#)).**
- **Extension requests should be made to [c.blyth@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:c.blyth@auckland.ac.nz) before the essay due date.**
- **All assessment grades are provisional until final grades are released.**
- **Enjoy the course!**