

Faculty:
Shannon Craigo-Snell
scraigo-snell@lpts.edu; ext. 438
Office: Schlegel 200

Theology and Popular Culture

TH 3883
SUMMER 2022
June 20-24 9:30-4:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course analyzes how doctrines are assumed, explored, and recapitulated within US popular culture, including novels, music, television, and movies. The course is organized around systematic doctrines. It requires work before and after the week of June 20-24, as well as full presence and participation during that week.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

The work of the course has been designed to contribute to the following program-specific Student Learning Outcomes:

MDIV

SLO 3: Students will be able to think theologically and ethically in relation to particular traditions and contemporary needs.

SLO 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to reflect critically and self-critically on relationships between Christian faith and various forms of systemic injustice.

MAR

SLO3: demonstrate an understanding of multiple theological perspectives, historical and contemporary

SLO4: demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues

MAMFT

SLO 3: Graduating students will be able to think ethically and make appropriate clinical ethical decisions.

REQUIREMENTS and GRADING:

1. Read texts by Jen, Butler, and Lofton before June 20.
2. Write **two** 2-3 page reflection papers on the work of Octavia Butler and Gish Jen, to be turned in on June 19 (assignment at end of syllabus). [10%, 10%]
3. Come to class on June 20 prepared to collaboratively present one chapter of Kathryn Lofton's work (specifics will be assigned to enrolled students in advance). [10%]
4. Attendance and informed participation during class.[35%]
5. A final paper or project to be turned in by July 24. [35%]

Prompts for reflection papers and final paper/project are at the back of the syllabus. All assignments are to be submitted through Canvas by midnight of the day they are due.

Papers will be written following the conventions of academic writing. I highly recommend that you take advantage of the services of the Academic Support Center, located on the first floor of Schlegel Hall, in preparing your written assignments for this course.

In unusual circumstances, requests for extensions may be made in advance. Late papers submitted without an extension will be penalized by loss of up to a grade (e.g. from B+ to B) for each day they are late.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

1. Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. ISBN 9780226482095
2. Gish Jen, *The Resisters*, Vintage, 2021. \$21. ISBN 0525657223
3. Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, Grand Central Publishing, 2019. Kindle free for Prime members. \$12 ISBN 1538732181

SUGGESTED BOOK (for fun)

4. Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Talents*, Grand Central Publishing, 2019. Kindle free for Prime members. \$13 ISBN 153873219X

ADDITIONAL TEXTS:

1. Kathryn Lofton, "Practicing Purchase: The Prosperity Gospel of a Spiritual Capitalism," In *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*. University of California Press, 2011. Pp. 20-50.

2. Kristen Leigh Mitchell, "What Did It Cost? Sacrifice and Kenosis in The Infinity Saga." In *Theology and the Marvel Universe*. Ed. Gregory Stevenson. Pp. 7-24.
3. Tim Posada, "The Gospel According to Thanos: Violence, Utopia, and the Case for Material Theology." In *Theology and the Marvel Universe*. Ed. Gregory Stevenson. Pp. 71-84.
4. Rachel Harris, "'Could Have Sworn It Was Judgment Day': Prince, Eschatology, and Afterlife." In *Theology and Prince*. Ed. Jonathan H. Harwell and Katrina E. Jenkins. Pp. 1-18.
5. Joseph Trullinger, "'I Am Something That You'll Never Comprehend': A Queer Reading of Purple Rain." In *Theology and Prince*. Ed. Jonathan H. Harwell and Katrina E. Jenkins. Pp.
6. Gregory J. Sakal, "No Big Win: Themes of Sacrifice, Salvation, and Redemption." In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*. Ed. James B. Scott. Pp. 239-254.
7. ---, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Ed. Jefferey Jerome Cohen.
8. Kathryn Reklis, "Prime Time Torture: Jack Bauer as a Hero of Our Time," *Christian Century*, 3 June 2008.
9. Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993. Pp. 127-157. [Ch. 6. Womanist God Talk and Black Liberation Theology]

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASS:

Students are expected to set aside class time for the sole purpose of focusing on the class. Please do not email, text, use social media, read or watch things online, or any other electronically mediated activities during class. Cell phones should be silenced and/or turned off and put away. In the event that you have a legitimate need to be accessible during class, you may ask us for an exception to this rule.

If, due to the ongoing infuriating heartbreaking pandemic, classes are held online, please treat class time with the same respect and standards of good manners that would apply in person. Keep your camera on (backgrounds can be changed) and remain seated, in a position in which you can take notes and respectfully engage with your classmates. Class time is not to be used to prepare a meal, go shopping, exercise, drive, or anything else that would not normally be done during an in-person class session. It is tempting to believe that we can successfully multitask and that hearing class discussion is enough. Mounds of research show that multitasking decreases how well we do each task. Research further shows the people who believe they are skilled at multitasking do it with the least success.

The one standing exception to this rule is pets. If you are so fortunate as to cohabitate with an animal, feel free to introduce your pet to the class. The pet did not consent to the rules of the class and cannot be expected to follow them.

LPTS CLASSROOM POLICIES:

As with all LPTS classes, this course will honor these Seminary policies:

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. For more information see:

<http://lpts.libguides.com/content.php?pid=469569&sid=4083885>

Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God.

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see The Code of Student Conduct, 6.11; the Student Handbook, p. 19.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu) during the first two days of class (or, even better, before the class begins) and should speak with the instructors as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructors.

Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructors of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

6/20 Religion in Pop Culture/Religion of Pop Culture/Christianity and Pop Culture

1. Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion*
2. Kathryn Lofton, "Practicing Purchase."
3. Star Wars: A New Hope
4. Buffy the Vampire Slayer, first episode
5. Prince, The Lord's Prayer

6/21 Theological Anthropology

1. Star Trek: The Next Generation, Data
2. Buffy the Vampire Slayer, episode to be determined
3. Blade Runner
4. Prince, "Purple Rain," "Beautiful, Loved and Blessed"
5. Joseph Trullinger, "A Queer Reading of Purple Rain."
6. ----, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)"

6/22 Salvation and Sacrifice

1. Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2
2. 24, episode to be determined
3. Kathryn Reklis, "Prime Time Torture: Jack Bauer as a Hero of Our Time,"
4. Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Buffy sacrifice episode
5. Prince, "I Would Die 4 U"
6. Gregory J. Sakal, "No Big Win: Themes of Sacrifice, Salvation, and Redemption."
- 7.

6/23 Salvation and Sacrifice??

1. Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, ch. 6, 127-157.
2. Star Wars: The Last Jedi
3. Infinity Wars (section)
4. Endgame (section)
5. Kristen Leigh Mitchell, "What Did It Cost? Sacrifice and Kenosis in The Infinity Saga."
6. Tim Posada, "The Gospel According to Thanos: Violence, Utopia, and the Case for Material Theology."
7. Buffy the Vampire Slayer, final episode
8. Prince, "The Cross"

6/24 Christian Life and Eschatology

1. Ted Lasso, episode to be determined
2. Schitt's Creek, dinner with friends

3. Gilmore Girls, cat's passing/dog funeral
4. The Good Place, heaven is boring, point problem, final
5. Prince, "Let's Go Crazy," "I Wish You Heaven"
6. REM, "It's the End of the World as We Know It"
7. Mary Chapin Carpenter, "Jubilee"

Reflection Paper Format

The reflection paper both summarizes and responds to the main themes of a book. The review should be two to three pages, typed (10-12 point text) and double-spaced. Divide the review into the following sections:

1. Summarize the main set up and plot of the book. This should take about one page.
2. Describe your own response—emotional, spiritual, experiential, intellectual, or some combination of these—to this work.
3. Reflect theologically on the future depicted.

Final Paper/Project Format

After the intensive week of classes, find your own example of a work of popular culture (this is not limited to fiction, movies, television, and music) that engages in a sophisticated manner with the subject of a Christian doctrine. Analyze what this work says about this doctrine. Then find a theological artifact—a confession, creed, written work, or hymn—and bring the two into dialogue. Do they align perfectly? What could the pop culture learn from the theology? What could the theology learn from the pop culture? This paper or project needs to include specific examples and close textual analysis. Your work can be communicated in whatever genre you find best does the job. If it is a paper or a project, it should reflect the amount of work necessary to write a 15 page paper.

