

**SCTR 100R**  
**Biblical Poetry and Ancient Myth**  
**Religion Seminar**

**Course Outline**

**Winter 2016**

**Instructor: Prof. J. David Pleins**

**CORE:**

**Religion, Theology, and Culture 3**

**Class Meeting Time:**

32246 (5.0 Units): MW 3:30-5:15 pm, Kenna 104

**General Information:**

Office: Kenna 300D, phone (408) 554-4763

Office Hours: MW 2:15-3:15 or by appointment

Email: [jpleins@scu.edu](mailto:jpleins@scu.edu)

**Prerequisites:**

This course is a Religious Studies Seminar and is *only* open to Religion Majors, Religion Minors, and Honors Students.

The prerequisite for this Third Course in Religion is any course from among the Second Courses in Religious Studies numbered 020-099.

**Required Texts:**

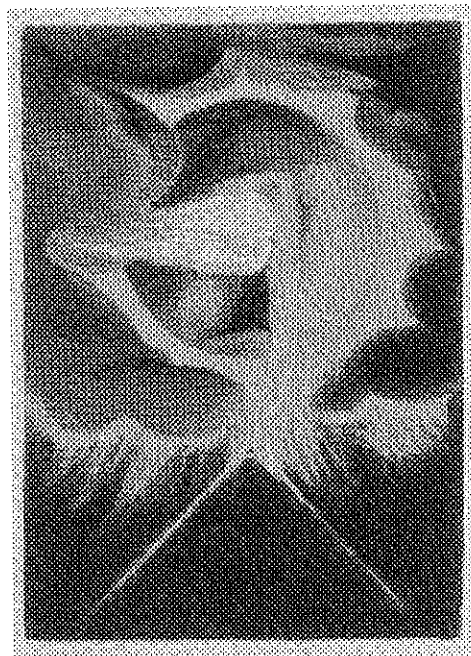
Campbell, J. *Pathways to Bliss* (New World Library, 1577314719).

Dundes, Alan. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (University of California, 0520051920).

Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses* (Shocken, 0805211195).

Mitchell, S. *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Free Press, 0743261690).

Mitchell, S. *The Book of Job* (San Francisco: Harper, 0060969598).



### **Focus of this RTC Course:**

This RTC 3 course focuses on contemporary debates over the role of Bible and mythology in society. Using diverse methodologies, we will engage the religious aspects of questions faced by our world today.

In this course we debate such questions as: Why are myths so violent? What do hero myths do for their societies? Is there wisdom about suffering in myth? Do myths reinforce false stereotypes about gender? Has science destroyed the Bible and belief in myth? Do we need myth today? These are some of the questions we explore in this course by means of a discussion of theories of myth and a selection of texts from the Bible and the ancient Middle East.

### **RTC Core Learning Objectives:**

As an RTC 3 Core Course, this class has two major learning objectives:

- A. Students will be able to identify diverse perspectives and evaluate ethical positions on contemporary questions.
- B. Students will be able to evaluate and apply insights from the study of religion to open-ended questions facing contemporary society.

In terms of objective A, students will read (pairing ancient texts with modern theorists), discuss (through specific class session debate questions), and write research papers that take into account diverse schools of thought and methodological viewpoints regarding mythology that have arisen in the modern world.

In terms of objective A, students will also use the knowledge and skills they acquire regarding these methodologies to evaluate (both in class and in writing) the values that are enshrined by the Bible and related myths, particularly as these bear on pressing contemporary concerns, such as violence in society, gender issues, and the contemporary resurgence of fundamentalism.

In terms of objective B, students will write two research papers that will engage the methodological and textual insights gained from the class, applying these insights to a study of contemporary social challenges raised by the Bible and myth. In these research papers, students will use the lens of diverging theories about myth and the Bible to evaluate contemporary challenges, such as political conflict, gender issues, theological debates about the Bible, or the relation of religion to modern science.

### **Pedagogy:**

**Collective Inquiry:** In a course that employs a collective inquiry format, students engage in a group-oriented investigation into the topic. Prime importance is placed on students raising their own questions of the material, discussing and debating the issues at hand, and formulating tentative hypotheses in dialogue both with the course readings and with the other members of the class.

**Question-Oriented Learning:** Rather than being a teacher focused class or even a student focused class, the class seeks to put the key questions about the subject at the center of each session, treating each of us as "knowers" who are willing to wrestle with and explore the issues as they emerge.

### **Additional Methodological Aims and Learning Outcomes:**

**Hermeneutics/Interpretation:** Students will regularly engage and analyze the broader hermeneutical questions regarding the interpretation of poetry and of the nature of myth. Students will critically assess and compare numerous theories of myth.

**Reflective/Existential:** Students in this course will discuss and write (both analytically and creatively) on the contemporary religious and philosophic dimensions of human suffering, hope, social justice, political power, gender, and war as these issues are raised by these texts and additional select modern poetry and analytic readings.

**Biblical/Textual:** By exploring the narratives and poetry of ancient Israel, students will engage in reflection, discussion, and written analysis regarding the enduring theological questions of biblical belief and worship.

**Ancient/Comparative:** Through the reading of various mythic and biblical texts, students will develop perspectives on how to place the biblical materials into broader historical and literary contexts.

## PARTICIPATION AND ASSIGNMENTS

### 1. Class Participation and Daily Written Assignments:

- (1) **Daily Written Assignment:** Primarily your class participation grade is a function of your daily written assignment. Prepare a written response to the day's assigned question in light of the reading for that session. These assignments are to be single-spaced and generally run about 500 words with quotations from the reading.
- (2) **Class Sessions:** Active preparation and consistent involvement in the lecture/discussion sessions of the course: ask good questions; make relevant comments; raise key issues; explore hypotheses. Be active in addressing questions posed in class, whether you are asked them in a general way or if the instructor calls on you for comment.
- (3) **Leadership of Group Discussions.** Students will rotate leading discussions by providing reports on the assigned reading and posing questions for discussion.
- (4) **Preparation:** Evidence of knowledge of course readings as preparation for the class session.
- (5) **Readings:** *Bring the relevant course books, articles, and assessments to each class session.*
- (6) **Appointments:** Set up additional appointment times to discuss course content and final paper topics with the instructor.
- (7) **Outside of Class:** Participate in outside of class group discussions and other activities such as related performances, films, and lectures that may be noted for extra credit.
- (8) **Communication:** E-mail the instructor your ideas about the course subject matter, questions discussed in class, and thoughts about the readings.

75% of grade

### 2. Final Thematic Research Paper

**Overall Writing Requirement:** Students will develop a final major research essay on the topic related to the subjects discussed in the class. This essay is to be crafted with divergent methodological perspectives in mind and should reflect the varied literary conventions of the field of religious studies. For English majors with a creative writing emphasis, students may propose a fictional presentation for the major research essays, provided genuine research still factors into the fictional mode of the work.

**Scope:** The final papers is to be a *research-oriented analytic essay of eight to ten pages in length, typed double space with an attached bibliography.* For this paper, you are asked to examine a debatable contemporary question

appropriate to the myths, biblical texts, and theories of myth relevant to the course.

**Paper Topic Consultation:** The specific paper topics will be of the student's own choosing, in consultation with the instructor. Students must make an appointment with the instructor well in advance of the paper's due date to secure a paper topic.

**Thesis:** The essay must pose a central debatable question, offering a succinctly stated initial answer that constitutes the overall view defended in the essay. In other words, tackle a contentious question and take sides in the debate, arguing for a specific position regarding the material at hand. Papers that simply summarize the views of others are deficient in this respect. You must seek to defend a point of view through your efforts, taking into account opposing viewpoints throughout.

**Class Readings and Research:** Papers must reference (by quotation) the course readings but go beyond that reading into a specific question. These essays are to be based proportionately on quotations from the assigned reading and library research. Research should include books and scholarly articles, not simply Websites. At the very least, use JSTOR to isolate appropriate scholarly essays. Only the course texts are acceptable as your primary sources for translations of the assigned readings. Do not rely solely on how others might translate the texts in question or other translations you may have read in the past.

**Synthetic Analysis:** Papers are to be organized according to 3-4 sub-topics that carry forward the thesis, not around persons or stories. So, for example, do not organize your paper as (1) Jung, (2) Campbell, (3) Doty, (4) Sontag. Set it up around 3-4 ideas that cut across the persons and stories under consideration. In other words, use each section to unpack a specific aspect of your total thesis.

**Fictional Paper Option:** Depending on the student's training and major field of study, it is possible to submit a fictional piece, epic-style poem, play-script, or film-script (with filmed scenes) as either a midterm or final paper. These creative works still need to take into account the issues raised in the relevant section of the course and engage in research but will express that research in a creative literary mode. *Such works must be approved by the instructor and must be taken through at least one draft that is reviewed by the instructor.* Proposals obviously must be made well in advance of the due date for a fictional work. A digest of the student's research as well as a discussion of the piece should accompany the fictional work as an appendix. Please, only suggest *serious* efforts here and nothing at the last minute. The creative

projects must give evidence of on-going development during the relevant segment of the quarter.

**Due date:** The final paper will be discussed during the time slot assigned for the final exam. Note that late papers are not accepted without significant reduction in grade. Note also that you must complete all assignments to receive a grade for the course.

**Length:** 8-10 pages each with separate bibliography page.

25% of the course grade

## GRADING

Paper grades run from A to F. But what are the qualities that distinguish high grades from low? There are three areas that are considered as papers are evaluated for *quality*.

1. **Comprehension and Knowledge:** Excellent papers will show a high degree of comprehending the course content, avoiding superficial comparisons. Such papers will offer strong critical reflections on the readings through specific quotations, observing carefully the two goals for an RTC 3 course.
2. **Critical Reasoning:** Excellent papers will ask thought-provoking contemporary questions that can be debated, as indicated by the RTC 3 goals listed earlier. Such papers will quote (and evaluate and analyze) relevant sources and offer rigorous use of evidence to make the case. These papers will tap different analytic approaches from different disciplines (such as history, theology, science, and law) to examine the same data. These papers will unfold in a logical fashion a tightly considered argument. They will also show a healthy ability to spar with opponents' views.
3. **Synthesis, Connections, Application:** Excellent papers will make strong comparisons between different readings, time periods, and analytic methods, as indicated in the RTC 3 goals listed previously. Such papers will also "make connections" between thinkers, sources, time periods and regions, applying the insights gained to new situations or problems.

Good papers (B) are less strong, usually in at least one area, or are less strong in terms of consistent use of cited evidence but still demonstrate a genuine engagement of the sources and a diverse use of critical methodologies.

Fair papers (C) show some command of these three categories but are more superficial in character in terms of argument and use of sources, often substituting personal opinion for researched facts. These papers show less command of the RTC 3 goals.

Deficient papers (D) make a weak effort at all categories, substituting personal opinion in virtually all cases for evidence of research.

Failing papers (F) have not made engaged the analytic dimensions in most if not all aspects.

#### **ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

All students are expected to attend all classes and to *arrive promptly*. Chronic lateness or failure to attend class may result, at the instructor's discretion, in immediate dismissal and/or failure of the course, *regardless* of completion of assigned work.

Exceptions require written proof of illness from the health service or from the student's personal physician. If you are unable to attend, leave word at 554-4763.

The basic rule of thumb is: 2 unexcused absences and the highest grade you may receive in the course is a C (you have missed 10% of the course at this point); with 4 unexcused absences (20% of the course), you are encouraged to withdraw from the class because if you do not, you will fail the course.

Note that your presence in class is *mandatory* for the discussion of research papers and that your papers may not be handed in by another student.

#### **PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY POLICY:**

**One's Own Work:** All written work must be uniquely and individually one's own work. While in-class discussion and outside of class discussion is certainly desirable and encouraged, the material that a student hands in must reflect one's own labor and ought to be clearly and decisively distinguishable from the work of all other students in the class.

**Quoting Sources:** In assignments and papers, you are to make clear when you are quoting sources others have written or when you are substantially paraphrasing the work of others. You are not to claim as your own the work that others have done. Such dishonest conduct harms the class, fellow students, the university degree, and oneself.

Failure and Dismissal: Failure to abide by the spirit and the letter of this policy will result in immediate dismissal from the course and will merit a failing grade for the course. Note also that such academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office for Student Life and Leadership for action under the University Code of Conduct.

Students in the School of Engineering are reminded that their work is also governed by the Engineering Honor Code.

**DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION POLICY:**

See separate sheet.



## COURSE OUTLINE AND READING SCHEDULE

### I. MYTHS FOR MODERNS (AND POSTMODERNS)

#### **Jan 4: The Need for Myth**

Q: What is myth? Has science ended the need for myth?

Film: Campbell, *Hero's Journey*, tape 4355, part 1

#### **Jan 6: Compulsions Behind Myth**

Q: Are we biomythic creatures? What compulsions lie behind our mythmaking?

Film: Campbell, *Hero's Journey*, tape 4355, part 2

Read: Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss*, ch. I.

### II. MYTH, SCIENCE, AND ORIGINS

#### **Jan 11: Creation Mythology in Genesis**

Q: Is Genesis myth?

Read: Genesis 1-11 (Fox translation)

Frazer, "Fall of Man" (in Dundes)

#### **Jan 13: The Eternal Return**

Q: Why do myths continually return to "origins"? Apply Eliade and Numazawa to Genesis.

Read: Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and Sacred History" (in Dundes)

Numazawa, "Separation of Earth and Sky" (in Dundes)

#### **Jan 18: Holiday**

### III. THE HERO'S JOURNEY

#### **Jan 20: Hero Quests**

Q: Why are we addicted to the hero myth's such as the Gilgamesh epic? Is this a healthy addiction?

Read: Mitchell, *Gilgamesh*, pp. 69-199

Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss*, ch. VI.

**Jan 25: Abraham as Hero**

Q: How does ancient Israel recast the hero myth? Apply Segal/Campbell to the Abraham narrative.

Read: Genesis 12-25 (Fox translation)

Segal, "Joseph Campbell's Theory of Myth" (in Dundes)

**IV. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MYTH****Jan 27: Archetypes of the Unconscious**

Q: What are the psychological functions of myth?

Read: Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss*, ch. IV.

Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype" (in Dundes)

**V. WOMEN, GENDER, AND MYTH****Feb 1: Women in Myth and the Bible**

Q: What roles do women play in the hero myth? Compare the Jacob narrative with the Gilgamesh story. Critique?

Read: Genesis 25-37 (Fox translation)

**Feb 2: Lamentations performance**

7:00 p.m. in the Mission Church (attendance mandatory)

**Feb 3: The Beauty Myth**

Q: Are women imprisoned by the beauty myth? Does the Bible escape? Apply Wolf to Ruth.

Read: Book of Ruth (handout)

Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (handout)

**Feb 8: Women as Culture Heroes**

Q: Can feminists redeem the Bible? Apply Fuchs to Esther.

Read: Book of Esther (handout)

Fuchs, "Who is Hiding the Truth?" (handout)

**Feb 10: Gender, Sex, and Desire**

Q: What is the link, if any, between human desire and Divine love? Apply Carr to your reading of the Song of Solomon.

Read: Song of Songs (handout)

Carr, "Gender and the Shaping of Identity" (handout)

**Feb 15: Holiday**

## VI. MYTH, POETRY, AND SUFFERING

### Feb 17: Suffering for a Purpose

Q: Is there a purpose to suffering? Compare the Joseph story and Gilgamesh.

Read: Genesis 37-50 (Fox translation)

### Feb 22: Suffering of the Innocent

Q: Why do the innocent suffer? How is meaning found in such suffering?

Compare Job to Gilgamesh and Joseph.

Read: Mitchell, *The Book of Job*, pp. 5-91.

## VII. MYTH, RELIGION, AND VIOLENCE

### Feb 24: National Catastrophe

Q: Can we reclaim the Bible's war poetry? What are the lasting insights in Lamentations for our world today?

Read: Pleins, "Lamentations" (handout)

### Feb 29: Cosmic War and Liberation Theology

Q: Is Exodus an imperialist or liberationist text? Apply Juergensmeyer to Exodus.

Read: Exodus 1-20 (Fox translation)

Juergensmeyer, "Cosmic War" (handout)

### Mar 2: Final Paper Consultations

Assignment: Submit a preliminary thesis description and outline for your final paper. Discuss briefly the issues you plan to tackle in your paper. Include a bibliography of sources that you will potentially use in this work (apart from class readings). This bibliography should include a mix of books, scholarly articles, and internet resources.

## VIII. MYTH AND SOCIETY

### Mar 7: Myth as Social Charter

Q: By what myth(s) does our society live? Do we need a new social myth?

Read: Malinowski, "The Role of Myth in Life" (in Dundes)

Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss*, ch. III.

### Mar 9: The End of Myth?

Q: Does myth have a future?

Read: Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss*, ch. V.

Armstrong, "Does God Have a Future?" (handout)

**FINALS WEEK:**

Meeting Time: Wednesday, March 16 at 6:30 p.m.

Due: Presentation of Final Research Paper

Attendance for presentations is mandatory. No exceptions. Make travel plans accordingly! You will be docked a full letter grade in the event of absence from this final presentation.