

# **Bible and Religion in Popular Culture**

**LINC 101.O**

**Classroom:** 213 Comenius Hall

**Class times:** Tues/Thur/Fri 10:20-11:30

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**Office:** 108 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314

**Office Hours:** Fridays 1-3pm

and by appointment.

## **Course Content**

This course will explore how ancient, classic religious ideas continue to experience new life and transformed meanings in popular culture, particularly in science fiction. We will study how major religious themes such as the existence and nature of God, God's relationship with human beings, life after death, and religious diversity are explored in science fiction films, television, and written fiction. The first half of the course will examine these themes and others in film and television, while the second half of the course will explore religious themes in a Christian novel and in Jewish short stories within the genres of fantasy and science fiction, and the course will conclude with a look at "fantasy studies" in relation to the Bible.

## **Course Description and Objectives**

First-Year Seminar introduces writing as a process that is central to college learning and to life. First-Year Seminar focuses on college-level reading and writing, so students will begin to sharpen the critical reasoning skills needed for success in any academic discipline at Moravian College. The subject area focus of each section of First-Year Seminar entails reading and discussing ideas and styles from various academic disciplines, but all sections are the same in their general approach: students will practice both speaking and writing and will work collaboratively in workshop settings.

**With regard to broad academic and writing skills, by the end of this course, students will:**

- Demonstrate a process approach to writing.
- Use writing as a way to discover new information and insights—in short, to learn.
- Demonstrate competency in writing including framing questions, posing problems, and synthesizing information to write an academic paper.
- Write effectively for a variety of audiences.
- Gather information for assignments through the use of appropriate technology and evaluate the credibility of sources needed to write an academic paper.
- Read critically and comprehensively to integrate others' ideas with their own.

**With regard to transition to college expectations, by the end of this course students will:**

- Articulate an understanding of liberal education as it affects one's life now and prepares the individual for the future.

- Practice behaviors for successful learning including effective study habits, time management, goal setting and coping skills.
- Collaborate with faculty and student advisors and engage with the College community—students, faculty and staff—to promote the students’ success at Moravian College.

### Course Requirements

Grading will consist of the following:

- Four exams (40% overall)
- Three research papers (45% overall)
- Participation (5%)
- Attendance at academic extracurricular events (5%)

Attendance Policy: After two unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will reduce your overall course grade by one third of a letter. Two times late unexcused counts as one unexcused absence. Cell phones must be silent in class.

Each student enrolled in First-Year Seminar will complete several pieces of writing. You should expect to receive suggestions from their instructor or classmates as they develop writing assignments through multiple drafts. Individual conferences, written comments, small group workshops, the College Writing Center—all may be used to help you as you plan, draft, revise, and edit a piece of writing.

Most of the writing assignments should involve substantial use of Reeves Library. You will develop information literacy as you learn to identify and investigate a research topic. By the time you complete First-Year Seminar, therefore, you should be proficient in the following “**basic competencies**” of information literacy:

- Define a research need
  - Formulate a research topic
  - Determine an information need
- Plan and execute a search for information
  - Identify key terms and concepts
  - Identify the most appropriate sources of information
  - Use Boolean operators and truncation where appropriate
  - Impose limiters (e.g., scholarly vs. popular, date, language)
  - Modify the search based on search results
- Know how and where to find the sources discovered in the search process
  - Determine which sources the library owns or provides access to and retrieve them
  - Request material not owned by the library on Interlibrary Loan
  - Locate material faculty may have put on reserve in the library
- Understand the obligation to credit sources and be able to do so in an appropriate citation style

## Required Texts

*Sacred Space: The Quest for Transcendence in Science Fiction Film and Television* by Douglas E. Cowan (Baylor University Press, 2010)  
*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis (any edition)  
*Wandering Stars: An Anthology of Jewish Fantasy & Science Fiction* edited by Jack Dann (Jewish Lights, 1974)  
*Fantasy and the Bible*, Semeia journal number 60 (Society of Biblical Literature, 1992)  
*Holy Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford University Press)

## Course and Assignment Schedule (subject to change)

### General Introduction

Course Introduction, advice on college life September 1<sup>st</sup>

Introduction to the study of religion: rationality and faith September 3<sup>rd</sup>

*Student Affairs session: Sex Signals* September 4<sup>th</sup>

### Religion and Science Fiction Film

World Religions: Major types September 8<sup>th</sup>  
Assignment: Watch *Contact*

Discussion of Cowan on *Contact* September 10<sup>th</sup>  
Assignment: Read Cowan chapter 1

*Student Affairs session: Counseling, Health, Religious Life* September 11<sup>th</sup>

Transcendent Robots September 15<sup>th</sup>  
Assignment: Watch Star Trek: *Contact*, read Cowan chapter 2

Androids and Human-ness September 17<sup>th</sup>  
Assignment: Same as previous day

*Student Affairs session: Academic Support Center* September 18<sup>th</sup>

Aliens and the Centrality of Human Life September 22<sup>nd</sup>  
Assignment: Read Cowan chapter 3

Alien Contact and Religion September 24<sup>th</sup>  
Assignment: Same as previous day

<i>Student Affairs session: Career Development Center</i>	September 25 <sup>th</sup>
Pro or anti-Christian in <i>War of the Worlds</i> Assignment: Read <i>War of the Worlds</i> (free online), see 1953 film version of it, and read Cowan chapter 4.	September 29 <sup>th</sup>
War of the Worlds continued Assignment: Same as previous day.	October 1 <sup>st</sup>
<i>Student Affairs session: Student Involvement and Leadership</i>	October 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Religion and film exam	
<b>Religion and Science Fiction Television</b>	
Religion on a Star Trek space station Assignment: Watch select episodes of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, and read Cowan chapter 5.	October 6 <sup>th</sup>
Star Trek: Deep Space 9 continued Assignment: Same as previous day.	October 8 <sup>th</sup>
<i>Student Affairs session: Intercultural Advancement and Global Inclusion</i>	October 9 <sup>th</sup>
Fall Break,	October 13 <sup>th</sup>
Stargate: the Von Däniken Proposal Assignment: Watch select Stargate SG-1 episodes, read Cowan ch. 6.	October 15 <sup>th</sup>
Stargate continued Assignment: Same as previous day, first paper due.	October 16 <sup>th</sup>
Babylon 5: Religion on a different sort of space station Assignment: Watch select Babylon 5 episodes, read Cowan ch. 7.	October 20 <sup>th</sup>
Babylon 5 continued Assignment: Same as previous day	October 22 <sup>nd</sup>
Battlestar Galactica: Religion in a War with Robots Assignment: Watch selection BSG episodes, read Cowan ch. 8.	October 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Battlestar Galactica continued Assignment: Same as previous day	October 27 <sup>th</sup>

Further Theological Issues in Sci-Fi Film and TV  
Assignment: Read Cowan chapter 9  
October 29<sup>th</sup>

Further Theological Issues continued  
Assignment: Same as previous day  
October 30<sup>th</sup>

*Religion in Science Fiction Television Exam*

### **Christian Fantasy Literature: Narnia**

Chronicles of Narnia  
Assignment: Read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*  
November 3<sup>rd</sup>

Themes of Christian Fantasy  
Assignment: Same as previous day  
November 5<sup>th</sup>

Themes of Christian Fantasy continued  
Assignment: Select biblical readings, second paper due  
November 6<sup>th</sup>

### **Jewish Science Fiction Literature**

Introduction to Judaism and Major Jewish Themes  
Assignment: Handout  
November 10<sup>th</sup>

Theme: Membership and Identity  
Assignment: Dann: Stories by Carol Carr and Robert Silverberg  
November 12<sup>th</sup>

Theme: Exile  
Assignment: Dann: Story by William Tenn  
November 13<sup>th</sup>

Theme: Monsters  
Assignment: Dann: Stories by Avram Davidson  
November 17<sup>th</sup>

Further Jewish themes  
Assignment: Dann: Stories TBA  
November 19<sup>th</sup>

Further Jewish themes  
Assignment: Dann: Stories TBA  
November 20<sup>th</sup>

*Christian and Jewish Fantasy/Science Fiction Exam*

## **Fantasy Studies and the Bible**

Introduction to the Bible Assignment: Semeia: Introduction, chapter 1	December 1 <sup>st</sup>
Job and the Fantastic Assignment: Semeia chapters 2 and 3	December 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Jesus and the Fantastic Assignment: Semeiah chapters 3 and 4	December 4 <sup>th</sup>
The Book of Revelation Assignment: Semeia chapter 5	December 8 <sup>th</sup>
The New Testament and Fantasy Assignment: Semeia chapter 6	December 10 <sup>th</sup>
The Bible in Fantasy Literature Assignment: Semeia chapters 7 and 8, last paper due	December 11 <sup>th</sup>
<i>Final Exam</i>	1:30pm December 17 <sup>th</sup>

### **Writing as a Process**

Writing is more than simply a report of what you know and see; it's also an important way of exploring a subject. Developing a finished piece of writing through time and involving the recursive process discussed below can deepen your understanding of the world and yourself in a way that reading and thinking by themselves cannot. By practicing writing in this way, we hope that you can eventually become your own teacher/editor and be able to use writing as a way of learning. Here is a brief overview of the usual process, based on what we know about how successful writers actually work.

**Prewriting** (or planning) is the work you do before composing and includes those important early decisions about purpose, audience, and style. Prewriting also means reading, taking notes, talking to others, outlining, or freewriting—in other words, gathering together your information and thoughts.

**Writing** (or drafting or composing) those first words on a blank page is sometimes the most difficult step, often preceded by procrastination and anxiety that the writing will not work and that you might fail. Beginning writers should remember that it is neither natural nor possible for the words to come out just right the first time. Trying to make each sentence perfect before going to the next is one of the worst things to do. Writing takes time and often trial and error to become exact. The process we follow at Moravian allows time for your unique mind and your store of language to work together.

Therefore, writing the first draft should be the fastest part of the process. You should write freely and without concern for style or mechanics in order to probe your ideas and

let the act of writing help you discover what needs to be said. This first draft should be an open conversation between you and the writing. But for this conversation to move forward, you the writer must continue to put words on paper and respond to those words by writing more. Most any words will do to start the ball rolling, to set up this dialogue between you and the page. You are simply using writing to make yourself think in a sustained way about your topic. You aren't even sure yet what you wish to say. What comes out may surprise you. But at least give yourself a chance to let your thoughts flow in writing without trying to make each sentence correct before going to the next.

**Revising** is the crucial stage. Indeed, it has often been said that good writing is rewriting. It is through multiple drafts that a piece of writing is developed to fulfill the writer's purpose for a reader. You may add paragraphs and sentences while deleting old ones, or restyle flabby sentences and sharpen word choice now that the ideas are clearer. You may even trash much of what you've written in a first draft as your purpose and your sense of yourself in relation to your audience becomes sharper. Always ahead in revision are several opportunities to improve what you are working on.

**Final editing and proofreading** occur as you approach completion of a writing project. For the first time the writer becomes a police officer, inspecting and verifying the grammar and spelling and punctuation. Good writing is much more than good grammar, but for most academic essays, the two go together. So writers at this point become concerned that no spelling or grammatical blunder will interfere with a reader's ability to understand and enjoy what was written.

You won't always have as much time as you would like for every essay. All of us, students and teachers alike, must learn to live within the limitations of this special version of life called college. But you can still practice this process of writing, learning to anticipate each stage and the writing problems that are a part of it. Someday your success will almost certainly depend, at least in part, on your ability to write meaningfully and to write with style. This semester is the time to start preparing for that moment.

### **The Writing Center**

The Writing Center, on the second floor of Zinzendorf Hall, is there to support the efforts of all writers at Moravian College. The tutors there are students who are good, experienced writers and who are professionally trained to help you improve your writing. They will go over an essay draft with you and guide your understanding of how you might improve that draft. You could also drop to seek advice on virtually every part of writing: getting started, writing a thesis, developing paragraphs, eliminating wordiness, using commas, and the like. The Writing Center is generally open Monday-Thursday afternoons and Sunday evenings during the semester. The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392.

### **Learning Services Office**

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Laurie Roth, director of academic and disability support at the Academic Support Center

on the first floor of Monacacy Hall, or by calling 610-861-1401. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

### **Policy on Academic Honesty**

Moravian College expects its students to perform their academic work honestly and fairly. A Moravian student, moreover, should neither hinder nor unfairly assist the efforts of other students to complete their work successfully. This policy of academic integrity is the foundation on which learning at Moravian is built.

The College's expectations and the consequences of failure to meet these expectations are outlined below. If at any point in your academic work at Moravian you are uncertain about your responsibility as a scholar or about the propriety of a particular action, consult your instructor.

### **Guidelines for Honesty**

All work that you submit or present as part of course assignments or requirements must be your original work unless otherwise expressly permitted by the instructor. This includes any work presented, be it in written, oral, or electronic form or in any other technical or artistic medium. When you use the specific thoughts, ideas, writings, or expressions of another person, you must accompany each instance of use with some form of attribution to the source. Direct quotes from any source (including the Internet) must be placed in quotation marks (or otherwise marked appropriately) and accompanied by proper citation, following the preferred bibliographic conventions of your department or instructor. It is the instructor's responsibility to make clear to all students in his or her class the preferred or required citation style for student work. Student ignorance of bibliographic convention and citation procedures is not a valid excuse for having committed plagiarism.

When you use the specific thoughts, ideas, writing, or expressions of another person, you must accompany each instance of use with some form of attribution to the source. You may not collaborate during an in-class examination, test, or quiz. You may not work with others on out-of-class assignments, exams, or projects unless expressly allowed or instructed to do so by the course instructor. If you have any reservations about your role in working on any out-of-class assignments, you must consult with your course instructor. In each First-Year Seminar class and in the Writing Center, we try to establish a community of writers who can review and provide helpful criticism of each other's work. Although no students in your class or in the Writing Center should ever be allowed to write your paper for you, they are encouraged to read your work and to offer suggestions for improving it. Such collaboration is a natural part of a community of writers.

You may not use writing or research that is obtained from a "paper service" or that is purchased from any person or entity, unless you fully disclose such activity to the instructor and are given express permission.



You may not use writing or research obtained from any other student previously or currently enrolled at Moravian or elsewhere or from the files of any student organization, such as fraternity or sorority files, unless you are expressly permitted to do so by the instructor.

You must keep all notes, drafts, and materials used in preparing assignments until a final course grade is given. In the case of work in electronic form, you may be asked to maintain all intermediate drafts and notes electronically or in hard copy until final grades are given. All these materials must be available for inspection by the instructor at any time.

### **Plagiarism**

A major form of academic dishonesty is plagiarism, which we define as the use, whether deliberate or not, of any outside source without proper acknowledgment; an “outside source” is defined as any work (published or unpublished), composed, written, or created by any person other than the student who submitted the work (adapted from Napolitano vs. Princeton). Instructors often encourage—and in the case of research essays, require—students to include the ideas of others in their writing. In such cases, students must take care to cite the sources of these ideas correctly (in other words, to give credit where credit is due). The Bedford Handbook Online and OWL provide guidance in using several systems for documenting sources. You can access these pages on the Writing Center website at <http://home.moravian.edu/public/eng/writingCenter/links.htm>

At Moravian, if a First-Year Seminar instructor suspects plagiarism, the student will be asked to show the notes and drafts contributing to the final version of a paper. The instructor also has the right to see any books or periodicals that were used. The grade for the paper will be suspended until these materials have been reviewed. An instructor who suspects a student of violating the policy on academic honesty with regard to an assignment, requirement, examination, test, or quiz will consult with the Chair, First-Year Seminar Committee, using a blind copy of the work in question, to verify the violation. If the charge is verified, the instructor will, in almost all cases, assign either a grade of zero to the academic work in question or a failing grade in the course in which the violation occurred. The student must be informed in writing of the alleged violation and penalty; a copy of this memo must be sent to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs.

A student may appeal either a charge of academic dishonesty or a penalty as follows:

- 1 First, to the course instructor.
- 2 Next, in the case of First-Year Seminar, to the Chair, First-Year Seminar Committee.
- 3 Next, to the Academic Standards Committee, chaired by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

The Moravian College Academic Honesty Policy can be found in full here:  
<http://www.moravian.edu/studentlife/handbook/academic/academic2.html>