

**Religious Studies 316:
“The Politics of Apocalypse”
Agnes Scott College Fall Semester 2009
Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 am-12:15 pm, Buttrick
Instructor: Dr. Tina Pippin; x6227-o; 404-371-9475-h
SASS Representative: Chelsea Guenther; cguenther@agnesscott.edu**

Course Description:

“The Politics of Apocalypse” course is an upper-level course in Religious Studies. This course is interdisciplinary and includes biblical studies, politics, ethics, literary criticism, philosophical and critical theory, social movements, history, art, music, dance, theatre and film studies. We will be considering the apocalyptic imagination and representations in religion, politics, and culture. The ideology of apocalyptic, millenarian, and utopian thought is part of the envisioning of the end of the world and a future utopia (or dystopia). Apocalyptic imagery and discussions are especially vivid at the turn of a century, and this course is designed to give you some interpretive tools as you “face apocalypse” in the world. Also, this course is designed as a space for you to imagine, create, tell stories, dream, mourn, remember, birth, find voice, stand silently on the edge, and be empowered.

Course Objectives:

1. to explore the context and interpretive options of biblical and extra-biblical (Jewish and Christian) apocalypses—from historical biblical research to the bible as a cultural artifact.
2. to become competent readers and interpreters of apocalyptic culture in current politics, social movements, literature, film, music and the arts.
3. to examine and gain deeper knowledge of various millenarian and apocalyptic social movements in history.
4. to develop your own skills and interests as students of religious studies, philosophy, politics, and culture as you learn different strategies for reading apocalyptic in the world.

Required Texts:

1. Course Reader for Religion 316 (available from the professor).
2. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, Vintage, 2006.
3. David A. Sanchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths*, Fortress, 2008.
4. Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven’s Gate*, Chatham House, 2000.
3. Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes: Part One: Millennium Approaches; Part Two: Perestroika* (Theatre Communications Group, 2003)
4. For the readings of Daniel and the Apocalypse of John and other biblical texts, you are to use the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. There will also be additional

readings given as handouts in the class, especially around contemporary events. Be prepared for several field trip opportunities and class “dinner and movie” gatherings.

Requirements and Grading:

Class Participation (20%): This class is a participatory course. Your presence is valued and necessary, so if you miss more than 3 class periods, it will begin to affect your class participation grade (1/3 letter grade off for each additional class missed—does not apply to flu cases!). Class participation includes your involvement in making the learning process work—for you and others. We are all teachers and learners here and will only fully benefit if all find voice. The best way to participate fully is to have read the assignment before each class period and to find ways throughout the semester to share in small groups and/or to the larger class. Another way we will share ideas is through an “Apocalypse Watch” of contemporary religion, politics, and culture; you will sign up for “interest groups” to bring cultural news, objects, etc. to share with the class.

Written Assignments:

Critical Reflection on Biblical Apocalyptic: (20%): You are to choose a (short) text (verse or passage) in biblical apocalyptic literature and (1) briefly outline the major exegetical debate on the passage and (2) add your own voice and opinion to the scholarly discussion and (3) determine the major questions about interpreting this text. The main point of this paper is to give you practice in biblical studies research. This **4-6 page** paper is due on *Friday, 18 September* by 5 pm.

Introduction of a millennial movement (20%): This research project and class presentation will be made in teams of 2-3 students. You are to write a **5-6 page** paper (individually, or a 10-12 page collaborative paper) introducing an apocalyptic movement (Branch Davidians, Heaven’s Gate, Jonestown, etc.) to the class. *Presentations will be on 29 September or 1 October.* Your group proposal (one page plus a working bibliography) is due on or before **22 September** by 5 pm. In your group proposal you will state your plan for the papers (individual or collaborative) and the class presentation.

Two (separate) Thesis Papers (20% each): Two **5-6 page** papers (double-spaced, 10-12 point type) will reflect your deeper engagement with specific topics in the course. One paper (final draft) is due by **Friday, 23 October** by 5 pm; the second paper (final draft) is due at the end of the semester on the day you present. You will present one of your topics (your choice, in consultation with the professor) to the class on either *19 November or 1 or 3 December.*

Note: Papers are due on the day of presentation. In order to obtain a two-day extension, a written note from a Writing Center tutor on your visit for assistance on your paper (before the due date!) is required. Late papers will be deducted a letter grade for every day late. Papers will be returned in 1 week. One revision will be allowed on each paper; revisions are due 1 week from receiving your draft grade; team papers are due in 2 weeks.

Grading Scale:

A (90-100); B (80-89); C (70-79); D (60-69)

Course Schedule:

[Note: the films are suggested background material for sections of the course; we'll be viewing short clips in class of most of these films; you may use these films as material for your topics papers, but with adequate film research. Since we're a small seminar, I am not putting the films on reserve (too hard to check out) but rather counting on all of us to use and share responsibly.]

Also note: Two Hollywood apocalyptic films will be coming out this fall:

The Road on 16 October and 2012 on 13 November. I suggest we organize field trips to see these films. Also we will plan a trip to Tribulation Trail just before Halloween.

Thursday, 27 August: Introductions; ground rules; determining interest groups; setting our course together.

[Films for this period: *Last Night; The Book of Life*]

Tuesday, 1 September: Defining apocalypse in our time by reading the biblical times. READ for today: Daniel 7-12; Mark 13 and parallels; The Apocalypse of John (NRSV);

Thursday, 3 September: Apocalypse in the ancient and modern worlds.

READ: The Apocalypse of John (again); ancient apocalypses (4 Ezra/2 Esdras; The Apocalypse of Peter; The Apocalypse of Paul; The Shepherd of Hermas—in the Course Reader); Frank Kermode, “The End” (in the Course Reader).

Tuesday, 8 September: Feminist Reinterpretations of the Apocalypse of John.

Read for today: Tina Pippin, “The Heroine and the Whore: The Apocalypse of John in Feminist Perspective” and Tina Pippin and J. Michael Clark, “Apocalypse/Revelation” (in the Course Reader).

[Film for this period: *The Jesus Factor; The Bible Code; Waco: The Rules of Engagement*]

Thursday, 10 September: Are You Ready for the Rapture? An Introduction to Prophecy Belief

Paper on biblical apocalypse due Friday, 18 September by 5 pm!

Tuesday, 15 September: Millennial Dreams. Read for today: Daniel Wojcik, “The Transformation of Apocalyptic traditions in the Post-Cold War Era” in the Course Reader.

Thursday, 17 September: Good vs. Evil in Religious Fundamentalisms.

Read for today: Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence: “The Rapturous Rebirth of Millennial Zealotry” in the Course Reader.

18 September by 5 pm: one page proposals and working bibliographies due!

Tuesday, 22 September: Apocalyptic Spaces: Jerusalem as the Center of the Universe. Read for today: Gershom Gorenberg, “The Gate of Heaven” in the Course Reader.

Thursday, 24 September: How the Millennium Comes Violently
Read for today: Wessinger, chapters 1 and 2.

Note: Use the Wessinger book as background and resource for your research into your millennial group. Also, you are to read the chapters in Wessinger on the other groups that are presented by your peers.

Tuesday, 29 September: Presentation Day: Millennial Movements: Heaven’s Gate; Aum Shiri Kyo

Thursday, 1 October: Presentation Day: Millennial Movements: Jim Jones and Jonestown; Branch Davidians

Note: Team papers on apocalyptic movements are due on Tuesday, 6 October in class.

[Films for this period: Democracy Now’s video of Arundhati Roy’s speech to the American Sociological Association in August 2004; Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove; Metal of Dishonor: Depleted Uranium*]

Tuesday, 6 October: Wars and Rumors of Wars: A Look at Contemporary Apocalyptic Events.

READ: Arundhati Roy, “Come Sunday” in the Course Reader
SASS will do Midterm Evaluations today

Thursday, 8 October: Nuclear Apocalypse.

READ: Paul Boyer, “The Atomic Bomb and Nuclear War” (in the Reader)

Tuesday, 13 October: Nuclear Atlanta: Visit from Atlanta WAND.

READ: Helen Caldicott, *The New Nuclear Danger* (in the Reader)

15 – 18 October is Fall Break

[Films for this period: *Fahrenheit 911; Apocalypse Now; The Road*]

Tuesday, 20 October: A Discussion of *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, so have it read by today

Thursday, 22 October: Postmodern Apocalypses.

READ: Two articles by Jacques Derrida (handout)

First topic paper due Friday, 23 October by 5 pm!

[Films for this period: *Children of Men; 28 Days Later*]

Tuesday, 27 October: Imagining Apocalypse: Dystopianism. Read for today: Lee Quinby, “Coercive Purity: The Dangerous Promise of Apocalyptic Masculinity” in the Course Reader.

Thursday, 29 October: Smiling through the Apocalypse. Read for today: Catherine Keller: Ms. Calculating the Apocalypse” in the course reader.

[Film during this period: *Metropolis*]

Tuesday, 3 November: Feminist Futures: Utopianism

Thursday, 5 November: Feminist Futures: Mapping our desires for the world.

[Film for this period: *Angels in America* (HBO)]

Tuesday, 10 November: NO CLASS; time to work on your papers! AAR/SBL Annual Meeting in Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Thursday, 12 November: AIDS Apocalypse: *Angels in America: Part One: Millennium Approaches*

Field trip to see 2012 (release date 13 November)

Tuesday, 17 November: *Angels in America: Part Two: Perestroika*

Thursday, 19 November: Topic Presentations

Tuesday, 24 November: No Class: Society of Biblical Literature Meeting in New Orleans

25-29 November is Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday, 1 December: Topic Presentations

Thursday, 3 December: Last Day of Class: Last of the Topic Presentations

8-9 December: Reading Days

10-15 December: Exam Days

LEARNING COVENANT

RS 316: The Politics of Apocalypse

Fall Semester 2009, Agnes Scott College

I, _____, enter into an agreement with my instructor to perform the following learning tasks for a grade I have circled below. I realize my commitment and responsibility in the learning process and accept the consequences for late work (1/3 letter grade off for every day material is late). At midterm and near the end of the semester the contract will be reevaluated by the instructor and me. More than three absences will result in recontracting. My work is to be of exceptional quality, and for a grade of "B" or above I agree to revise/rewrite. Extensions of two additional days will be granted if I attend a session with a Writing Center tutor and have her write a note about the visit. Revision entails the use of an editing partner *and* a writing tutor. Papers may be revised once; revisions (with all previous editions attached) are due one week after the first draft is handed back to me.

- "D"
1. Read assigned materials.
 2. Completion of 60% of the requirements.
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- "C"
1. All "D" work plus:
 2. Completion of all papers.
 3. Group and class participation.

[Note: A "C" will be earned if work is mediocre and you decide not to do revisions on papers.]

- "B"
1. All "C" work plus:
 2. Good writing and research.
 3. Full presence and participation in class.
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- "A"
1. All "B" work plus:
 2. Full participation in course requirements.
 3. Exceptional quality in research and writing (including revisions).
 4. Active leadership and presence in class.

Student's signature

Date

Instructor's signature

Date

LEARNING CONTRACT: PART II

My Specific Goals: Name: _____

My goals for this course are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

I intend to work toward these goals by completing the following work:

Assignment	Date to present and/or date due
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1. Critical Reflection on Biblical Apocalyptic: Text:	
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2. Research project on a millennial movement: Topic:	
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Group members:

3. Course research project: Topic #1:	
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Topic #2:

4. Apocalypse Watch Interest Group/s:	
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My editing partner for this semester is: _____(name)

_____ (signature of partner)