

# RLST 255: Religion in the Media (§1 and §2)

Jason G. Cather

Fall 2018

E-mail: [cather@sxu.edu](mailto:cather@sxu.edu)

Web: [jasoncather.com/students](http://jasoncather.com/students)

Office Hours: MWF 12 - 1, or by appointment

Class Hours: MWF §1 9 - 9:50, §2 11 - 11:50

Office: Warde N413

Class Room: §1 Warde L321, §2 Warde S110

---

## Course Description

This course examines the religious, theological and ethical issues and perspectives examined in all media formats, but particularly those that have had a significant impact on cultural attitudes towards religion (e.g., the portrayal of religion and faith in fiction and film)

## Learning Outcomes

Students will use the concepts, theories, and methods of analysis used in Religious Studies to evaluate religious phenomena and to analyze the ethical implications of religious claims for self, others, and the world.

In addition to demonstrating general knowledge of the source materials, students will be able to:

1. Employ interpretive methods to arrive at a defensible reading of materials.
2. Identify and analyze the ethical and/or social justice implications of source materials.
3. Recognize and analyze the way source materials make theological claims or make the sacred present.
4. Read philosophical texts closely, identifying the argument of the text and restating it clearly and fairly in their own words.
5. Critically assess arguments in terms of the assumptions made and the structure of reasoning to a conclusion.
6. Formulate and defend a philosophical thesis with evidence and careful reasoning both in speech and writing.

## Required Texts

- McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore: *The Medium is the Massage*
- Dante: *Inferno* (Anthony Esolin translation)
- Greene, Graham: *The End of the Affair*
- Other readings will be posted to Canvas in advance of class meetings

## Course Policies

Please read and understand the policies listed below. You are responsible for abiding by and understanding all of these policies. If you e-mail a question for which The Answer Is On The Syllabus, I will respond "TAIOTS."

### General

#### Classroom Decorum and Content Notice

This course includes images and other content about religious themes. These topics are very important to many people, which may include you, and will certainly include some people in this class. It is the nature of art that it can shock, provoke, and even offend. This makes it *very* likely that at least some of the course content may be offensive to the religious beliefs or practices of people in this course. This does not give anyone in this class the right to be rude or disrespectful to you (and it most certainly does not give you permission to treat others in this way). You should expect to be shocked by some of the course content. If you are not prepared to see your deepest religious commitments provoked in this way, you should strongly reconsider whether you want to take this class.

By virtue of attending an institution of higher learning, you are part of an academic community governed by the norms of free inquiry, hermeneutic charity, reasoned argument and a demand for evidence. Our classroom is a unit of this community, and you are expected to be mature adults and model citizens. Accordingly, everyone in the class will engage with one another respectfully, while hewing to the demanding norms of academic discourse. It is of the nature of the subject matter of this course (and therefore also the kinds of discussion that will take place) that they will be controversial. It is also of the nature of our discussions that it may not be obvious ahead of time *when* a difficult subject matter will arise as either a topic or an example, or what specific topics will cause concern. Because examples are necessary, and the topic of any course in our subject will involve material some will find disturbing, I cannot make accommodations to avoid the topics or to provide advance warning of each difficult or uncomfortable topic for a particular class. Please be advised and plan accordingly.

Your views may turn out to challenge the views of others, who in turn may challenge your views. Our classroom is *not* a place where your ideas will be safe from scrutiny. *However*, this will always proceed in a civil manner, according to our shared intellectual norms. If you feel that you were not treated in a civil manner, please arrange to see me in office hours.

Please note that the requirement of civility in no way exempts anyone from our rigid standards of evidence and argument. Nor does it grant *any* of your views immunity from criticism.

I am liable to challenge any claims you may make, regardless of my own position on the matter. Learning and exercising critical thought requires these challenges of all of us.

All of this being said, I am very sympathetic students in distress regarding topics we discuss in class, and if in any way you feel the need to approach me with a concern about this, please do not hesitate to do so.

### **Consent to Recording and Intellectual Property**

I reserve the right to record class lectures in audio and/or video formats, to keep them on file, and to upload them at a later date, with your identities kept anonymous. If you would like to record the lectures, you will need to notify me in advance (I will almost certainly say ‘yes’ – but it is good etiquette). You may not reproduce, distribute, or retain such recordings beyond the end of the academic term without my express permission.

### **Your Use of Technology in the Classroom**

You will take notes on paper (cf. “materials” below). Laptops, tablets, phones, etc. have proven to be a distraction to everyone in the classroom – including the students using them, other students nearby, and to me. For this reason, I do not allow electronic technology in the classroom.<sup>1</sup> Take care of all socializing (e.g. facebook, texting, emails) outside of our classroom. If you need to use your phone for whatever reason, you may quietly leave the classroom and return when you are finished.

### **E-mail**

Please read the syllabus and the *Frequently Asked Questions* section of the course website before e-mailing. If the answer to your question is on the website or the syllabus, I may not respond. I encourage you to email me if you have substantive questions concerning the material we are discussing in class. If you send me an e-mail, please show up to the next class. If several students have similar questions, I may answer your question in class. I may deem that it is better to speak with you in person to answer your question immediately before or after our class. Please do not e-mail me to ask what you missed if you were absent. There will be regular quizzes designed to test you on the material covered up to that point in the term. There will be no make-up quizzes offered – the same holds true for the essay assignments and conferences.

### **Course Website**

Major assignments, revisions to the syllabus, and grades will occasionally be posted to Canvas. You will receive a notification when a change has been made. The print copy of the syllabus is for your convenience; the authoritative version is online. If you miss class or forget to write the assignment down, check Canvas first and then ask another student in the class. Do not email me to ask what the assignment is.

---

<sup>1</sup>The sole exception for this rule is for students with official letters of accommodation specifying the use of technological devices as one of their accommodations (see the “Students With Disabilities” section below). A letter of accommodation is not permission to surf the Internet. If you are caught using the computer for anything other than note-taking during class, you will be dismissed and given an unexcused absence for the day.

## Materials

1. **COURSE PACKET:** You will receive a course reading packet at the beginning of the term. You are expected to keep up with the packet throughout the entire semester. Any additional materials will be distributed in class in advance of their due date. You are responsible for getting copies of materials from classes you missed. Bring every text – including the syllabus and course documents – to every class meeting. This serves two purposes. First, part of the work of philosophy is the comparison of texts, which means we will often be referring to multiple texts, regardless of the day's assigned reading. Second, Your studies are intended to prepare you for future employment. Being responsible for documents over the entire term is an excellent way to practice important organizational skills, and develop a sense of responsibility.
2. **NAME PLATE:** In order to learn your names and so that your colleagues can address you respectfully, I provide materials for a name plate for your desk. You are responsible for this throughout the term. If you lose your name plate, please create another one before the start of class. I will use this to check attendance, which means if you do not have this, you may be marked absent. As this results from your not arriving at class prepared, this will be an unexcused absence.
3. **PEN & PAPER:** You are required to bring paper and a pencil or pen to each class. There may be quizzes or short writing assignments to be completed and turned in during the class. Loose leaf or detachable paper is suggested for this purpose. I strongly recommend that notes be taken on paper. I strongly discourage taking notes on your computer. This will actually be to your advantage, because we will be using symbols, diagrams, and tables, all of which are difficult to format on a computer at the pace we will be proceeding.
4. **STUDY GUIDES AND OTHER SOURCES:** The works we will be reading have a long and rich tradition of scholarship. Many, many people have read these texts, and there are no doubt countless study guides and interpretive essays that may be easy to find online. Rather than spending time reading these guides about our texts (scholars call these secondary sources), you should spend that time re-reading the texts themselves (the primary sources). Do not be tempted to plagiarize from these guides – if you can find it, it is likely that I can find it as well, and this will result in a failing grade (see academic integrity). All of my students have the integrity to do their own work. Cheating will not help you to understand the material, but will actually prevent you from learning it. More importantly, whatever points you think you might earn from cheating are not worth compromising your integrity. At the end of your life, you probably will not remember or care about the grade you made in this class. You will reflect on whether you lived with honesty and integrity.

## Grading Policies

For complete grading policies, including rubrics for papers and frequently asked questions, please refer to the supplements at the end of this syllabus.

## Grading Scale

- Successful, on time completion of all work at an acceptable level: **C** (70% - 79%)

- On time completion of work at a high level that indicates significant effort beyond the acceptable level: **B** (80% - 89%)
- On time completion of excellent work that indicates a very high level of effort exceeding expectations: **A** (90% and above)
- Incomplete work or work at a level lower than expected: **D** (60% - 69%)
- Little or no work completed, or otherwise unacceptable work: **F** (Below 60%)
- Plagiarism or other academically dishonest work (including “accidental plagiarism” or failure to cite your sources): 0% (*Note: This is very different from an ordinary F!*)

### Credit and Quality Points:

I am a very strict, very demanding grader. Few papers earn a B in my classes, and even fewer (if any) earn an A. despite this rigor, I want you to feel confident that you will earn a passing grade for the course, provided you complete all of the required assignments. Reflecting these facts, there are two levels of points for each assignment: **credit** and **quality**. **Credit points** will be given to assignments based on their meeting minimum standards. A completed, on-time assignment that meets standards of academic integrity and makes a good-faith effort to address any assigned prompt will earn the credit points available for that assignment. There are 65 credit points available from the assignments for this course. This will earn you a mid-level D, which is to say, you will earn a passing grade for this course.

Some students will want to earn a course grade that is above the passing mark. This is commendable, and entirely possible. In addition to the 65 credit points for assignments, there are 3 quality points available to students with high attendance (see below). Thus, You will note that by attending every class and completing each assignment on time, you will be a mere 2 points away from earning a 70% for the course. A grade of 70% is a C-minus. I encourage you to view this as an acceptable, passing grade for a course. Everyone doing college-level work has the opportunity to earn this grade, but to do this, you will need to do something more than simply earn credit: you will need to earn quality points.

You will have the opportunity to earn up to 46 **quality points** for your work throughout the term. If you have been reading closely, you will notice that 46 quality points plus 65 credit points adds up to more than 105 points! This is because I want you to have the opportunity to succeed, even though I do not expect that you will earn all of the quality points available for each assignment. Remember: I am a demanding grader. Turning in an acceptable assignment will earn full credit, but it may not earn any quality points.

### Points/Letter Conversion

I calculate grades by adding up the points you earned. If you want to know your grade, just add them up. If you have questions or concerns about your grade, please start by consulting the FAQ about grades. If you know your letter grade and want to know how many points that’s worth (or vice-versa), refer to this handy chart:

Letter	Credit	QP/5	QP/10	Final /100
A	full	5	9-10	95+
A-	full	4	6-8	90 - 94.999...
B+	full	3	5	87 - 89.999...
B	full	2	4	84 - 86
B-	full	1	2-3	80 - 83
C+	full	0	1	77 - 79.999...
C	full	0	0	74 - 76
C-	full	0	0	70 - 73
*	*	*	*	*
D+	partial	0	0	67 - 69.999...
D	partial	0	0	64 - 66
D-	partial	0	0	60 - 63
F	possible	0	0	0 - 59.999...
Missing	none	0	0	0
Plagiarism	none	0	0	0 (and my disappointment)

\* note: Late work and work below C level may not receive full credit. Any assignment that is missing or plagiarized will receive zero points and will not be eligible for quality points.

### Credit Will Be Given For The Following:

1. A term paper (maximum 5 pages), due on the last day of class. *Note: this is the deadline. I am happy to receive papers earlier than the deadline, and I will allow revisions for papers turned in adequately in advance of the deadline.* (15<sub>c</sub>/10<sub>q</sub> 25 points)
2. Reading/viewing notes for the each of the media artifacts assigned for class. Due Friday of every other week (when we aren't checking commonplace books) (25<sub>c</sub>/0<sub>q</sub> )
3. Three response papers (maximum 3 pages) to one of each kind of media artifacts (one film, one painting, one book). *Note: the general questions can be found in the supplement. Some responses will have the option of specific questions as well. If you are absent when an assignment is given, check with the other students to see if the assignment has special questions.* (5<sub>c</sub>/10<sub>q</sub> points each)
4. A commonplace book. This will be checked every other Friday, after week two. You are expected to have at least five pages of notes per week (meaning five pages at the first check, after which ten new pages since the last check). (10<sub>c</sub>/5<sub>q</sub>)

### Attendance and Participation

There are no make-up assignments or quizzes. Record the due dates now and do not miss on those days. I expect you to attend and participate every day. While your final grade will not be

directly penalized for absences, I will take attendance for my records. You will not be able to succeed if you are absent regularly and your grades will reflect this fact.

Up to three quality points can be earned by those with high, on time attendance throughout the term. Perfect, on-time attendance will earn 3 points. Students who miss one class (for whatever reason) will earn 2 points, and so on. Students who miss more than two class meetings – for any reason – will earn no quality points for high attendance. Class will begin promptly. I will close the door to take attendance, and no student is to enter until after roll is called, when I will re-open the door to admit late students. Each late arrival will be docked half a point from the high-attendance points. After twenty minutes, I will close the door for the duration of the class. If you come to class and the door is closed, check your watch. If it is more than twenty minutes after the start time, you will be counted as absent (you are still welcome step in and attend if you can do so without a disturbance, but you will not receive credit for attending that day. If you arrive late, please shut the door behind you).

About attendance *Extra Muros*: There is a special case with school sanctioned events (e.g. away games or model U.N. meetings). Participation in these will count as attending class extra muros (outside the walls). You are counted as attending extra muros only under specific conditions. In order to qualify as attending class, you must fulfil these requirements. :

1. You must notify me in person (not e-mail) in advance of your absence.
2. I must record your event in my grade book in advance of your absence. NOTE: It is your responsibility to make sure I have my grade book available, and mark down on the book that you will miss that day. DO NOT assume that I have recorded it unless you see me with your own eyes write it down in front of you in my grade book.
3. You must provide official, written verification that the event is school-sanctioned at the time I write it down. This means that I will need the official notice *in advance* of the day in question.

Any assignment that is due on a day you will be *extra muros* may be turned in electronically or by proxy. To turn in an assignment by proxy, simply find a dependable student in the class willing to serve as your proxy. Give your proxy a hard copy of the assignment in advance, and have him or her turn in the assignment in to me during class. It will be helpful, and I will be appreciative if you identify that you are turning in an assignment on someone's behalf. This will prevent me from thinking that there has been a violation of academic integrity. If you prefer to submit your work electronically, make sure you follow the format exactly. You will also want to verify that I received it, so please check with me in person at the next class meeting you attend.

NOTE: you may turn in assignments by proxy if you are absent for any reason, but unless I am explicitly aware in advance that you intend to submit an assignment electronically, I may not receive it, in which case it will be counted as missing or late.

### **Late Work**

As a policy, I do not accept late work without consultation about the matter. If you notify me in advance, it may be possible to work out an extension for an assignment (although I strongly caution against taking on this kind of "assignment-debt"). If we have passed the due date for an assignment, I am willing to consider taking late assignments (I have done so in the

past), but I will not accept them unless we meet in person to discuss it. If you complete the assignment, meet with me as soon as possible so we can discuss the possibility of working out an arrangement.

## Academic Integrity

The policy for academic integrity in this course is very straightforward: I expect that any work submitted for this course will be your own. Never submit another's work as your own. This goes for any unit of writing, down to a sentence, or a memorable phrase. If someone else wrote it first, you must cite it, and give credit to the original author. This includes but is not limited to readings from the assigned texts, readings from outside sources (see the section on secondary sources under policies on materials), words I use in a prompt for a writing assignment, and help given in revising your papers (I always recommend using the writing center, but you are not to allow an editor to re-write your paper). Any submission of another's work as your own constitutes plagiarism. Any instance of plagiarism, intentional or otherwise, will result in a grade of zero for the assignment, and makeup will not be allowed. I will be happy to meet with you during office hours to discuss any questions you may have about what constitutes plagiarism. If you are at all unsure, please meet with me. It is not worth making a mistake on this matter. If you are unsure about how to cite a source, please be in touch with me in advance. If this is not possible, make your best good-faith effort. There is a vast difference between a mistake in citation procedure and failing to cite at all.

A fuller treatment of SXU's policy on plagiarism – including examples – can be found at:

<https://www.sxu.edu/catalog/current/graduate/aca/integrity.asp>

### Here are the highlights:

Consistent with the mission of Saint Xavier University and the statement regarding the Catholic Identity of Saint Xavier University, the University operates within an atmosphere of high ethical standards. All academic communities must assume a high standard of integrity to govern the interactions of its members, students and faculty. When such a standard is not met, the entire community suffers. To ensure just and accurate assessment of each student's academic accomplishments, teachers must be certain that the work of the student is his/her own, and that all records of accomplishment are authentic and reliable. However, cases of academic dishonesty will inevitably arise, and the Saint Xavier University policy to handle these cases is one that emphasizes fairness and the integrity of the institution.

Academic dishonesty includes **but is not limited to**:

- Cheating on an examination, including using cheat sheets, unauthorized materials, copying from peers, or obtaining copies of tests through unauthorized means;
- Using unauthorized or falsified instruments of identification with the intent of academic fraud;
- Supplying false academic records (transcripts, grade reports, etc.) to any official of the university;
- Forging, altering, or making unauthorized use of University records or documents;
- Abusing library or other instructional materials.



- Plagiarizing; that is:
  1. Copying phrases or sentences word for word from a source without enclosing the copied words in quotation marks and indicating the actual source; or
  2. Changing the wording of a source slightly, but still incorporating all the ideas of the source; or
  3. Altering the wording significantly but still incorporating the main ideas from other sources without indicating, through standard forms of documentation, which sources have been used, thereby implying that the ideas were original to the writer of the plagiarized paper;

These forms of academic dishonesty include those perpetrated physically, visually, or electronically. The faculty member or administrator who discovers the violation may handle the instance of academic dishonesty. The penalty for academic dishonesty may include failure for the assignment, failure for the course, a semester-long to permanent notation of academic dishonesty on the student's transcript, suspension from the University, or permanent dismissal from the University. When the proposed penalty for the offense entails suspension, dismissal, or notation on the student's transcript, the faculty member or administrator should consult with the appropriate Dean and the Provost.

### **Seriously, Don't Plagiarize!**

I recognize that most instances of plagiarism occur out of a sense of panic or desperation over one's grade. If you find yourself struggling, please e-mail me and explain your situation. I am understanding of students who are struggling. I have no leniency toward those who cheat. Remember that not all Fs are created equal. Writing a poor paper will at least result in *some* credit, whereas a plagiarized paper will earn nothing but my disappointment. If this isn't clear, go through the assignments on the syllabus for this course, and see the difference. Assume someone completes all of the homework (thus getting full points), and makes the highest F on every other assignment. Add up all of those points. Now change the second assignment to a zero and add up all of those points.

### **Students With Disabilities**

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Center for Accessibility Resources (CAR) in L-108 or call 773-298-3308 to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. CAR is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Confidential Accommodation Plan letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CAR as soon as possible.

## Schedule:

### Week 01, 01/14 - 01/18: Introduction / Media

- M Syllabus distributed,
- **Read This:**
  1. Syllabus
  2. *The Medium is the Massage*
- **Do This:**
  1. Take Syllabus Quiz (online)
  2. Reading notes to *TMItM* on Friday

### Week 02, 01/21 - 01/25: Media / Religion

- M MLK Day: NO CLASS
- W
- **Read This:**
  1. *TMItM* (continued)
  2. Religion, Religions, Religious
- **Do This:**
  1. Commonplace Books checked Friday

### Week 03, 01/28 - 02/01: Dante: Inferno I - XX

- M
- W
- F Reading notes due (J.Z. Smith and Dante)

### Week 04, 02/04 - 02/08: Dante: Inferno XXI - End

- M
- W
- F Commonplace Books checked

### Week 05, 02/11 - 02/15: Religion and Art part one

- M Slide-show distributed
- W
- F Reading notes due
- S Field Trip: National Museum of Mexican Art

**Week 06, 02/18 - 02/22:**

- M The End of the Affair
- W
- F Commonplace Books checked

**Week 07, 02/25 - 03/01:** The End of the Affair

- M
- W
- F Reading notes due

**Week 08, 03/04 - 03/08:** Religion in Art part two

- M
- W
- F Commonplace Books checked

**SPRING BREAK!!!, 03/11 - 03/15:**

- M Be Safe
- W Have Fun
- F Experience Beauty!

**Week 09, 03/18 - 03/22:** Religion in Cinema

- M
- W
- F Reading notes due

**Week 10, 03/25 - 03/29:** Cinema

- M
- W Mission Heritage Day (Possible Class Cancellation?)
- F Commonplace Books checked

**Week 11, 04/01 - 04/05: Cinema**

- M
- W
- F Reading notes due

**Week 12, 04/08 - 04/12: Cinema**

- M
- W
- F Commonplace Books checked

**Week 13, 04/15 - 04/19: Cinema**

- M
- W Reading notes due early!!!
- F Easter Holiday – NO CLASS Friday

**Week 14, 04/22 - 04/26: Cinema**

- M
- W
- F Commonplace Books checked

**Week 15, 04/29 - 05/03: Conclusion**

- M
- W
- F Term Paper due

**Final Exams Week, 05/06 - 05/10:**

- We do not have an exam, but I will be available in my office if you make an appointment.

**Other Information:**

In order to keep this syllabus reasonably manageable, I have created an additional document labeled “syllabus supplement” and made it available at [jasoncather.com/students](http://jasoncather.com/students) as well as our course website. This supplement is considered part of the syllabus, and you are responsible for understanding the policies listed there.