

**Fresno Pacific University**  
**Division of Biblical and Religious Studies**  
**MIN 486 Topics: Theology, Culture and U2 (2 units)**  
**Fall 2008**

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Tuesday, 3:25-5:05, Room: AIH 114

Tim Neufeld, Instructor

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Office hours: Wed, 11:00-12:00, 1:00-4:00; Thu, 10:00-12:00

### **Course Description**

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The rock band U2 has delivered a consistent message of Christian faith and social justice since its 1980 debut album. The band members, heavily influenced in their early years by living in war-torn Ireland and belonging to a Christian community called Shalom, fill their music with rich biblical imagery. Lead singer Bono has become a political activist addressing global issues of poverty, inequity, fair trade, AIDS, and debt relief. In this course students will explore how U2's message and theology interact with culture to create a unique expression of Christian faith. The course will critically examine the works of U2 and will challenge students to think theologically about current cultural issues.

### **Student Outcomes**

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You will...

- 1.** Gain skills for critically and theologically assessing culture using U2 as a case study.
- 2.** Learn theological themes that permeate the U2 catalog and the contextual influences behind those themes.
- 3.** Become globally aware by exploring the historical context of Ireland, Africa and the middle east, and by learning about pressing issues like AIDS, debt relief and fair trade.

### **Course Requirements**

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**1. Reading.**

Class participants will be responsible for reading the following texts according to the reading schedule, and should be prepared to discuss these texts in class:

Assayas, Michka. *Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas*. Riverhead Hardcover. 2005.

Whitely, Raewynne and Maynard, Beth. *Get Up Off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalog*. Cowley Publications. 2003.

Other selected articles will be distributed through the course of the semester.

## **2. Listening.**

Students will be given a copy of Jann S. Wenner's in depth interviews with Bono. These interviews were the basis for an extensive article on Bono in the October 2005 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine. Students will listen to the interviews in conjunction with class topics. These mp3 files were originally taken from podcasts at <http://www.rollingstone.com/bonovox>.

## **3. Internet Research.**

Spend at least one hour per week for fifteen weeks investigating the works of U2 on the web. Students should read the following two websites. Beth Maynard's <http://u2sermons.blogspot.com/>, a site created for the discussion of the book *Get Up Off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalog*, explores a myriad of topics relating to the theology of U2. You may also follow links from the U2Sermons blog and investigate topics of interest (note: "fan sites" are not suitable for our purposes). Also read the Tim's blog, [www.timneufeld.blogspot.com](http://www.timneufeld.blogspot.com); click on the "U2 & Theology" category on the right-hand side of the page for a series of posts. Be prepared to discuss your research in class. Keep a log of your time and submit it at the final exam.

Due date: December 9

## **4. Spiritually Significant Songs Paper.**

Choose one of the following and write an essay.

- 1) Discuss five to ten U2 songs and why they are spiritually significant to you personally. Describe how each song has affected you on a theological, spiritual and personal level.
- 2) Do a narrative interview of two or three individuals who have been following the work of U2 for at least twenty years each. Let them tell stories of how U2 has impacted them spiritually. Discuss their favorite songs and how the songs have been spiritually significant. (These narrative interviews could also be produced in video form. See Tim for approval.)

To stimulate the creative juices on this project please see Tyler Williams' post at <http://biblical-studies.ca/blog/wp/2006/08/14/my-top-10-12-spiritually-significant-u2-songs/>

Length: 4-5 pages

Due date: October 14

## **5. Comparative Paper.**

Write a paper in good essay form comparing the films *Rattle and Hum* and *Vertigo 2005 Live from Chicago*. Use the following questions to guide the writing but feel free to include others.

What are similar themes that emerge in each film?

What are the themes that are unique to each film?

What can you deduce about the bands understanding of theology and culture from each film?

How has the band changed in nearly twenty years between the two projects?

Length: 4-5 pages

Due date: November 11

## **6. Research Paper.**

The major research paper in this course should explore themes of U2's music in a significant manner, connecting U2's material to theology and culture. Use good research skills to craft a paper in one of the following ways:

- 1) Pick a theological or cultural theme and trace it across the catalog of U2. Do an in depth examination of all albums that present the theme you have selected. Draw some conclusions about U2's understanding of theology and culture.
- 2) Select one specific album and discuss it's primary and auxiliary themes. Highlight how the songs relate to theology and culture.
- 3) Choose one biblical genre of scripture such as psalms, wisdom, prophecy, parable or apocalypse. Discuss how the genre you have selected functions biblically, how it is evidenced in the songs of U2 and its significance theologically and culturally.
- 4) Select one song and write a sermon. The sermon must include good exegetical work in a biblical passage, good exegesis of the selected song, and application of the sermon's thesis to contemporary culture. Students may not use songs discussed in the Whitley and Maynard text, but should use the text as a reference point for style and structure.

Students may also explore the creative arts as an addendum to their work (i.e. creating visuals, producing a multimedia piece, writing a song/poem, etc.) Check with Tim for approval as partial fulfillment of the assignment.

Each student will give highlights from his/her research in class in an oral presentation on the last day of class.

Length: 8-10 pages

Due date: December 2

## **7. Quizzes and Exams.**

There will be a brief quiz related to reading every class session.

Two-page reflection on CNN/People special and *Noreena's Agenda*, due September 30.

Final exam: December 10, 3:00-5:00 PM

## **8. Extra Credit.**

You may earn 10 points of extra credit for the following:

Attend the workshop that Tim will lead in conjunction with Building a Culture of Peace Week on September 30, 12:40-1:50. Students must be present for the entire presentation and submit a one page reflection within a week of the event.

## Course Policies

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- 1.** Class Participation: Due to the discussion format of this course, class participation will be important. Students are expected to have read the required work by the assigned day, and should be prepared for discussion in every class session. It will be to your advantage to notify the instructor in advance if you will be absent. Laptops may be used in class only for note taking purposes. Students using laptops or cell phones to write email, text messages, etc., will be asked to leave the classroom. All assignments are due in class on the assigned date and will be considered tardy after that.
- 2.** Attendance: Prompt and consistent attendance is expected. This upper division course will include a high level of student participation and discussion in the classroom, therefore, attendance will be factored into the student's final grade. Tardiness is disruptive to the nature of class discussion, student presentations, and occasional devotional exercises, and will also be considered in determining the student's final grade.
- 3.** Written Assignments: Unless indicated otherwise in the course syllabus, all papers should be written in keeping with the standards of university level work. All written assignments should be double spaced, sources should be cited when necessary, and conform to the MLA format. If the MLA format is unclear, please see Slade, Campbell and Ballou, *Form and Style*, ninth edition; view the Video #1200 in the Hiebert Library "Crediting Your Sources;" use the Writing Center located at the center of Marpeck (453-5585, [fptutor@fresno.edu](mailto:fptutor@fresno.edu)).

For examples of the MLA format see the following websites:

<http://webster.comnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>

<http://ollie.dcccd.edu/library/Module4/M4-V/examples.htm>

<http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/mlastyle.htm>

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r\\_mla.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r_mla.html)

If papers contain a significant number of spelling/grammatical errors or do not demonstrate a level of quality appropriate for upper division courses, assignments will be penalized with a lower grade or handed back for resubmission.

According to the grading policy of the Division of Biblical and Religious Studies, late papers are accepted, but grades will reflect a penalty commensurate with the degree of lateness. Also, no "fine grading" will appear on the paper - critical comments, marginal glosses, personal remarks, and so forth. However, the paper will be read carefully and evaluated appropriately.

As a Christian university, we acknowledge our responsibility to affirm and promote equality of all people. We commit ourselves to be inclusive, therefore, in language and imagery we will eliminate prejudice, whether sexual, racial, ethnic, national, religious, denominational, cultural, or physical. This way of proceeding in no manner seeks to deny personal identity, rather it guards against any use or phrase that tends to exclude people. In keeping with BRS Division policy, gender inclusive language should be included in all written assignments.

- 4.** Academic Honesty/Integrity  
Everyone who participates in the educational process at FPU is expected to pursue honesty and integrity in all aspects of their academic work. This means avoiding plagiarism and cheating. Plagiarism is defined by the catalog (p. 8) as "representing the writings, works or images of another as one's own, or copying materials from a resource, or including such information as public domain information without proper acknowledgment in an academic exercise." When using sources, please

cite them using your departmental style. This avoids plagiarism. Cheating is defined as "using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise." Academic dishonesty also includes "aiding and abetting," which is helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Cases of academic dishonesty are first handled between the instructor and student. Depending upon the severity of the case, consequences may range from partial credit after work is redone to expulsion from the University. See the University catalog for further details.

- 5.** Disabilities: Students with disabilities are eligible for reasonable accommodations in their academic work in all classes. In order to receive assistance, the student with a disability must provide the office of Student Life with documentation which describes the specific disability. The documentation must be from a qualified professional in the area of the disability (i.e. psychologist, physician or educational diagnostician). Students with disabilities should contact Student Life to discuss academic and other needs as soon as they are diagnosed with a disability. Once documentation is on file, arrangements for reasonable accommodations can be made.
- 6.** Credit/Non-Credit: See FPU Catalog for requirements and deadlines.
- 7.** Incompletes: These are only given in extreme cases and may not be used when course work has not been completed due to lack of time.

## Course Assignment Values

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Internet Research . . . . .	30pts
Reflections on CNN special and Noreena's Agenda	10pts
Comparative Paper . . . . .	30pts
Songs Paper . . . . .	30pts
Research Paper . . . . .	60pts
Quizzes (15@2pts) . . . . .	30pts
Exam . . . . .	30pts
Class Participation Attendance . . . . .	30pts
<b>TOTAL . . . . .</b>	<b>250pts</b>

## Course Grading

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97-100% . . . . .	A+	73-76.9% . . . . .	C
93-96.9% . . . . .	A	70-72.9% . . . . .	C-
90-92.9% . . . . .	A-	67-69.9% . . . . .	D+
87-89.9% . . . . .	B+	63-66.9% . . . . .	D
83-86.9% . . . . .	B	60-62.9% . . . . .	D-
80-82.9% . . . . .	B-		
77-79.9% . . . . .	C+		

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**Class Schedule**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>READING</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>DUE</b>
<b>An Introduction to U2</b>			
Aug 26		<b>Introduction &amp; How to Exegete a Song: “City of Blinding Lights”</b>	
Sep 2	Assayas, 1-43	<b>Why Study U2? Reflections on the Good Samaritan</b>	
Sep 9	Assayas, 44-79 <i>Rolling Stone</i> Interview 01	<b>The Context of U2: Growing Up in Ireland</b>	
<b>The Albums</b>			
Sep 16	Assayas, 80-130 Interview 04 & 05	<b>Innocence and Idealism: <i>Boy, October, War</i></b>	
Sep 23	Assayas, 131-173 <i>Rolling Stone</i>	<b>Behind the Music: Class cancelled, students to view CNN/People in the News special and <i>Noreena’s Agenda: The New Activism</i></b>	
Sep 30	Assayas, 174- 225 <i>Rolling Stone</i> Interview 05	<b>Into the Arms of America: <i>Under a Blood Red Sky, Unforgettable Fire, Joshua Tree</i></b>	<b>Reflections on CNN special and <i>Noreena’s Agenda</i></b>
Oct 7	Assayas, 226-257 <i>Rolling Stone</i> Interview 06	<b>Political, Spiritual and Sensual: <i>Rattle and Hum, Achtung Baby</i></b>	
Oct 14	Assayas, 258-299 <i>Rolling Stone</i> Interview 07	<b>The Experiment: <i>Zooropa, Pop</i></b>	<b>Significant Songs Paper</b>
Oct 21	Assayas, 300-323 <i>Rolling Stone</i> Interview 07	<b>Rage Can Only Take You So Far: <i>ATYCLB, HTDAAB</i></b>	

## **The Influence of Scripture**

Oct 28 Whitley & Maynard **Psalms and Wisdom**

Nov 4 Whitley & Maynard **Prophecy and Parable**

Nov 11 Whitley & Maynard **Apocalypse** **Comparative Paper**

## **Africa**

Nov 18 *Rolling Stone* Interview 03, Speech from National Prayer Breakfast, *The Independent* (RED edition) **A Continent Consumed by Flames**

Nov 25 [www.data.org](http://www.data.org) **Debt, AIDS, Trade**

## **Conclusion**

Dec 2 Article assigned in class **U2 as Worship Leader, Worship Leader as U2 Presentation of Research Papers** **Research Paper**

Dec 9 Final Exam, 3:00-5:00 **Internet Research Log**