

CORE 1000-38: Ignite Seminar  
Fall 2024

# RELIGION AND SCIENCE FICTION

**“Religion is but the most ancient and honorable way in which men have striven to make sense out of God’s universe. Scientists seek the lawfulness of events. It is the task of Religion to fit man into this lawfulness.”**

**–Frank Herbert, *Dune* (1965)**

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Tuesday – Thursday  
9:30 – 10:45 AM  
Spring Hall 136

*Office hours by appointment*

## **COURSE IN BRIEF**

There is a misguided popular perception that religion and science are incompatible, and that science fiction writers imagine a future without God and religion. Reading popular science fiction refutes this misperception since religion has provided some of science fiction’s very best novels and short stories.

## **DETAILED COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This Ignite Seminar (“Religion and Science Fiction”) explores major theological themes through a critical reading of popular works of science fiction. By exploring how fiction writers explore religious themes in speculative fiction this course examines the relationship between religion and science, giving special attention to the rise of secularism in the United States while also acknowledging the continuing vitality and growth of religion around the world.

Speculative fiction, popularly labeled science fiction, is an exercise in imagining possible worlds either to postulate a better future (Utopian fiction) or as “cautionary tales” (Octavia Butler) about where current choices might lead us (Dystopian fiction). Writers often use imagined future settings to address contemporary problems like racism and sexism, to explore the consequences of scientific, social, and technological advances, or to offer veiled critiques of existing social structures, which is why science fiction is often called the “literature of ideas.”

This course uses science fiction to reflect on the role of religion in our society today and in the future.

## **SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENT**

The Mission of Saint Louis University is the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity.

The University seeks excellence in the fulfillment of its corporate purposes of teaching, research, health care and service to the community. It is dedicated to leadership in the continuing quest for understanding of God's creation and for the discovery, dissemination and integration of the values, knowledge and skills required to transform society in the spirit of the Gospels.

As a Catholic, Jesuit university, this pursuit is motivated by the inspiration and values of the Judeo-Christian tradition and is guided by the spiritual and intellectual ideals of the Society of Jesus.

## **IGNITE FIRST YEAR SEMINAR**

This course is part of the Saint Louis University Core, an integrated intellectual experience completed by all baccalaureate students, regardless of major, program, college, school or campus. The Core offers all SLU students the same unified approach to Jesuit education guided by SLU's institutional mission and identity and our nine undergraduate *Core Student Learning Outcomes* (SLOs).

## **A CONFLUENCE PROGRAM COURSE**

This Ignite seminar is part of the Confluence Program. Confluence courses place special emphasis on *transformative texts*—primary sources with the capacity to inform and inspire us. To that end, we will read great texts that ask fundamental questions about humanity and the world. Students will engage with differing perspectives and practice key liberal arts methods including close reading, critical thinking, and communication. This skillset will serve you well in your future academic career, and it also provides unique opportunities for both individual introspection and shared participation in the learning process. Similarly, it will help students become informed global citizens, fulfilling SLU's mission to serve the greater good.

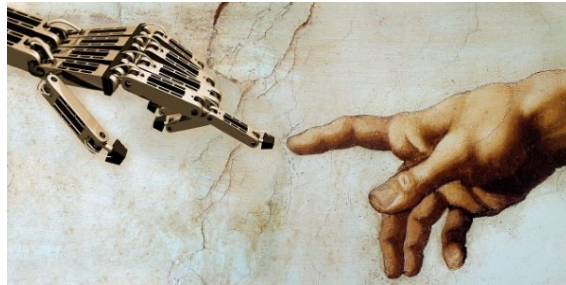
## **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Core SLO(s) that this component is intentionally designed to advance are:

- Examine their actions and vocations in dialogue with the Catholic, Jesuit tradition (SLO 1)
- Integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to address complex questions (SLO 2)
- Assess evidence and draw reasoned conclusions (SLO 3)
- Analyze how diverse identities influence their lives and the lives of others (SLO 5)

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Recognize that both personal and social context shapes all learning
- Characterize how the experience of learning through a distinct disciplinary or interdisciplinary mode of inquiry shapes knowledge of ourselves, or communities, and our world
- Reflect on learning experiences to arrive at a deeper understanding of who they are as scholars and citizens
- Evaluate the ways in which new knowledge illumines routes towards future action, and identify possible actions one might take in the service of humanity
- Identify, evaluate, and utilize a variety of SLU library source materials to complete a course assignment



**“One man’s theology is another man’s belly laugh.”**

**–Robert A. Heinlein, *Time Enough for Love* (1973)**

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Over the course of the semester, students must complete *any* three (3) of the following seven (7) creative writing assignments **(60% of final grade)**. Assignments are due on set dates throughout the semester (SEPT 19, NOV 7, DEC 9), but the student decides which project to submit at each of these three dates. See **Appendix C** for detailed instructions and guidelines.

1. **Short Story (5 pages max)**. Compose an original piece of prose fiction in the science fiction genre that explores religious themes.
2. **Movie Treatment (5-10 pages)**. A treatment is a multi-page, detailed synopsis of your film written in prose, not as a script. It contains all the key elements of your story, like important scenes, main characters, and crucial plot points. Write a film treatment for a science fiction movie that explores religious themes.
3. **Book Review (2 pages)**. Read then write a book review of a science fiction novel NOT assigned for this course that explores religious themes.

4. **Reading Log (10 pages max).** Maintain a reading log in which you provide a concise summary of the text and a personal reflection (250 words) for each assigned reading in the syllabus. *This assignment can only be submitted for the third (final) assignment.*
5. **Class Presentation.** Ten-minute oral or multi-media presentation on a science fiction novel, TV show, or film NOT assigned for this course that explores religious themes. The presentation must provide a summary of the story and an analysis of how religion is used in the story. Please coordinate the date of your presentation with the instructor.
6. **Infographic (poster size).** Infographics are visual representations of information, data, or knowledge intended to present information quickly and clearly. Create an infographic that presents the religious themes explored in a work of science fiction (can be drawn from assigned readings).
7. **Graphic Novel (5 pages max).** Compose an original work of science fiction in comic book format that explores religious themes.

Furthermore, all Ignite Seminar’s require students to “identify, evaluate, and utilize a variety of SLU library source materials to complete a course assignment.” To that end,

8. **Library Research Project (20% of final grade).** Students will avail themselves of the many resources available in Pius Library to conduct research on a historical or contemporary work of speculative fiction NOT read or discussed in class, providing a summary and analysis of the work, with special attention given to the religious or theological themes explored in the work. The project will entail a 1000-word (approximately 4 double-spaced pages) essay, plus an annotated bibliography of at least 5 different sources. See **Appendix B** for more detailed instructions. *The library project is due at midterm, submitted in class on Thursday, October 17, 2024.* See **Appendix C** for instructions on completing the required **Library Research Tutorial**.
9. **Class Participation (20% of final grade).** Attendance, active participation, and positive contribution to class discussions are a *required* part of your grade. *Excessive unexcused absences and/or excessive tardiness will result in the lowering of a student’s grade. Students are allowed one (1) unexcused absence per semester. Further unexcused absences will result in a grade of zero (0) for their class participation grade on the day(s) missed. Excused absences require documentation of legitimate absence (medical reasons, family emergency, etc.).* See **Appendix A** for guidelines on how to participate in classroom discussion.

## GRADING SCALE

Class Attendance and Participation	200 points
Library Project	200 points
Creative Writing Assignment #1	200 points
Creative Writing Assignment #2	200 points
Creative Writing Assignment #3	<u>200 points</u>
<b>Total Possible Points</b>	<b>1000 points</b>

A = 1000 to 930 points  
A- = 929 to 900 points  
B+ = 899 to 870 points

B = 869 to 830 points  
B- = 829 to 800 points  
C+ = 799 to 770 points

C = 769 to 730 points  
C- = 729 to 700 points  
D = 699 to 600 points

F = 599 to 0 points



**“Paradise is for those who make Paradise.”**

**–Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974)**

## **REQUIRED READINGS**

### **SHORT STORIES** (posted on Canvas)

Isaac Asimov, “Reason,” in *I, Robot* (Signet, 1957).

Isaac Asimov, “The Last Question,” in *Robot Dreams* (Berkley, 1986).

Alfred Bester, “The Men Who Murdered Mohammed,” in *The Dark Side of the Earth* (Signet, 1964).

Martin Buber, “The Careless Rabbi,” in *The Book of Fantasy*, ed. by Jorge Luis Borges (Viking, 1988).

Octavia Butler, “The Book of Martha” in *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (Seven Stories Press, 2005).

Orson Scott Card, “Mortal Gods,” “Saving Grace,” and “Holy,” in *Maps in a Mirror: The Short Fiction of Orson Scott Card* (Tor Books, 1990).

Arthur C. Clarke, “The Nine Billion Names of God,” and “The Star,” in *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (Tom Dougherty Associates, 2000).

Samuel R. Delaney, “Aye, and Gomorrah,” in *Dangerous Visions* (Doubleday, 1967).

Philip K. Dick, “Faith of Our Fathers,” in *Dangerous Visions* (Doubleday, 1967).

W.E.B. DuBois, "The Comet," in *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (Dover Thrift Editions, 1920).

Robert A. Heinlein, "'—All You Zombies—'" in *Masterpieces: The Best Science Fiction of the Century* (Ace Books, 2001)

N. K. Jamesin, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight," in *How Long 'Til Black Future Month?* (Orbit Books, 2018).

N.K. Jamesin, "Non-Zero Probabilities," in *Clarksworld Magazine* (September 2009).

Damon Knight, "Shall the Dust Praise Thee?" in *Dangerous Visions* (Doubleday, 1967).

Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" in *Brave New Worlds (Dystopian Stories)*, ed. John Joseph Adams (Night Shade Books, 2012).

Jack McDevitt, "Gus," in *Cryptic: The Best Short Fiction of Jack McDevitt* (Subterranean Press: 2009).

Michael Moorcock, "Behold the Man," in *The Best of Michael Moorcock* (Tachyon Publications, 2009).

Lester del Rey, "Evensong," in *Dangerous Visions* (Doubleday, 1967).

Robert Silverberg, "Good News From the Vatican," in *Robots Through the Ages: An Anthology* (Blackstone Publishing, 2023).

Robert Silverberg, "The Pope of the Chimps," in *The Best of Robert Silverberg: Stories of Six Decades* (Subterranean Press, 2012).

Theodore Sturgeon, "If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?" in *Dangerous Visions* (Doubleday, 1967).

Kurt Vonnegut, "2BR02B," and "Harry Bergeron," in *Complete Stories* (Seven Stories Press, 2017).

Roger Zelazny, "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," in *The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth, and Other Stories* (Doubleday, 1971).

**NOVELS** (available on Amazon or SLU bookstore)

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) ISBN: 9780385490818

Carl Sagan, *Contact: A Novel* (1985) ISBN: 9781501197987

Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) ISBN: 9781668017401

**CRITICAL STUDIES** (available on Amazon or SLU bookstore)

James F. McGrath, *Theology and Science Fiction* (2016) ISBN: 9781498204514

Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel according to Science Fiction: From the Twilight Zone to the Final Frontier* (2007) ISBN: 9780664229016

**“Man does not create gods, in spite of appearances. The times, the age, impose them on him.”**

**–Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris* (1961)**



## **COURSE CALENDAR**

### WEEK ONE: DEFINING RELIGION AND SCIENCE FICTION

- AUG 22**      **First Day of Classes**  
Welcome & Introduction  
Course syllabus overview  
Group Discussion: *What is science fiction? What is religion? Why study them together?*
- Required Reading(s)**  
Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” in *Brave New Worlds (Dystopian Stories)* (posted on Canvas)  
James F. McGrath, *Theology and Science Fiction*, “Introduction,” 1-10  
Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, “Gods of the Future,” 1-20

### WEEK TWO: CANONS, RELIGIOUS AND FICTIONAL

- AUG 27**      **Naming God**

Group Discussion: *What are the sources of theological knowledge? How does this differ from the natural sciences and the scientific method.*

Introducing Flash Fiction

Six-Word Short Story

**Required Reading(s)**

Arthur C. Clarke, "The Nine Billion Names of God," in *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (posted on Canvas)

James McGrath, *Theology and Science Fiction*, "Space Can(n)ons and Scriptural Canons," 11-24

**AUG 29**

**Questioning God**

Group Discussion: *Moorcock's short story is clearly written from the perspective of a skeptic and an unbeliever. But what does his criticism of Christianity teach us about the nature of religion and its place in human existence?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Michael Moorcock, "Behold the Man," in *The Best of Michael Moorcock* (posted on Canvas)

Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, "Christ, Prometheus, and Klaatu: Alien Messiahs," 128-150

**SEPT 2**

**University Holiday: Labor Day (No classes)**

WEEK THREE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

**SEPT 3**

**Artificial Intelligence and Personhood**

Group Discussion: *If a machine can become sentient (self-conscious, intelligent, and autonomous) is it a person? And if a person, how does it change how we use and interact with them?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Isaac Asimov, "Reason," in *I, Robot* (posted on Canvas)

Robert Silverberg, "Good News From the Vatican," in *Robots Through the Ages: An Anthology* (posted on Canvas)

Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, "Inside Data's Brain: Mind, Self, and Soul," 40-62

**SEPT 5**

**Believing Machines**

Group Discussion: *Imagine an advanced alien species came to Earth and conquered us because they did not consider us sentient beings deserving of dignity and respect. How would you try to convince them of our intelligence, self-consciousness, and personal autonomy?*



### Required Reading(s)

Jack McDevitt, "Gus," in *Cryptic: The Best Short Fiction of Jack McDevitt* (posted on Canvas)

Robert Silverberg, "The Pope of the Chimps," in *The Best of Robert Silverberg: Stories of Six Decades* (posted on Canvas)

James McGrath, *Theology and Science Fiction*, "Theology and Science Fiction at the Intersection with Philosophy and Ethics," 67-79



**"The human race had long ago overcome its childhood terror of the merely alien in appearance. That was a fear which could no longer survive after the first contact with friendly extraterrestrial races."**

**—Arthur C. Clarke, *The City and the Stars* (1956)**

## WEEK FOUR: FIRST CONTACT

### SEPT 10      **The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence**

Group Discussion: *The astrophysicist Adam Frank states that religion and science begin from the same sense of awe and wonder about the universe: "the human aspiration to find what is true, what is real, and to then build lives in accord with that understanding" (The Constant Fire, 5). As intelligent beings, why do we seek to find signs of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe?*

### Required Reading(s)

Carl Sagan, *Contact: A Novel*, 1-132

### SEPT 12      **If there are others, why won't they contact us?**

Group Discussion: *The Fermi Paradox says that given a potentially infinite number of stars and planets in the universe, intelligent civilizations capable of developing radio astronomy and interstellar travel should speckle the distant stars, yet we have been unable to contact them. Why? The Drake equation attempts to solve this paradox by delineating the vast and complex number of factors necessary for life, let alone intelligent life in the universe.*

### Required Reading(s)

Carl Sagan, *Contact: A Novel*, 135-278

**SEPT 17**      **What if WE are the primitive species?**

Group Discussion: *If Earth were visited by an alien species so advanced and so powerful, what characteristics would it need to have before we begin to consider it a “god”?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Carl Sagan, *Contact: A Novel*, 279-372

James McGrath, *Theology and Science Fiction*, “Science Fiction Against Theology and as Theology,” 25-50

**SLU Pius Library Research Resources**

Presentation by Research & Instruction Librarian

WEEK FIVE: APOCALYPTIC FUTURES

**SEPT 19**      **How does it end?**

Group Discussion: *Reflecting on the fact that humanity now has the technology to destroy all life on earth, the poet T.S. Elliot wrote, “This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but with a whimper.” Albert Einstein, after we dropped the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, said, “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.” Is our self-destruction an inevitable part of the future?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Isaac Asimov, “The Last Question,” in *Robot Dreams* (posted on Canvas)

Damon Knight, “Shall the Dust Praise Thee?” in *Dangerous Visions* (posted on Canvas)

Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, “The Last Days (and After),” 235-249

**FIRST CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY**

WEEK SIX: ALIEN GODS

**SEPT 24**      **What is worship?**

Group Discussion: *Science fiction, like science and religion, is interested in the deepest secrets of the universe and is motivated by awe and wonder to speculate about those mysteries. Is the Bible, the primary source of knowledge of God for Christians, open to the unknown and to mystery? Accordingly, ought Christians be open to new things, like the possibility of artificial intelligence or alien life forms?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Orson Scott Card, "Mortal Gods," in *Maps in a Mirror: The Short Fiction of Orson Scott Card* (posted on Canvas)

Roger Zelazny, "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," in *The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth, and Other Stories* (posted on Canvas)

James McGrath, *Theology and Science Fiction*, "Science Fiction and Theology in Dialogue and Synthesis," 80-92

**SEPT 25**      **Wellness Day (No classes)**

**SEPT 26**      **The sacred and the profane**

Group Discussion: *The idea of the holy is the belief that there are things beyond human experience that are perfect and set aside from our everyday existence. These things might become objects of worship, but more importantly they are points of contact with the transcendent divine. Are there things you consider holy? What does it mean to profane something holy?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Lester del Rey, "Evensong," in *Dangerous Visions* (posted on Canvas)

Orson Scott Card, "Holy," in *Maps in a Mirror: The Short Fiction of Orson Scott Card* (posted on Canvas)

Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, "Believing and Knowing: Faith and Religious Experience," 151-181

WEEK SEVEN: MORALITY AND SCIENCE FICTION

**OCT 1**      **Alien invasion!**

Group Discussion: *During the Cold War, sci-fi movies and books became one way of coping with the "Red Scare," with alien invasion serving as an analogy for the Soviet threat. The biggest fear was the threat of nuclear annihilation. What elements of Cold War thinking do you find in Le Guin's novel?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Lathe of Heaven*, 1-72

Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, "Imagining the Afterlife," 214-234

**OCT 3**      **Apocalypse or Afterlife?**

Group Discussion: *Why do you think so many Utopian stories and novels are written as science fiction? Do you think that dealing with possible futures, good or bad, is a safe way of addressing controversial issues of today?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Lathe of Heaven*, 73-125

WEEK EIGHT: UTOPIAN DREAMS & DYSTOPIAN NIGHTMARES

**OCT 8 Building better futures?**

Group Discussion: *Every Utopia is distinguished by its efforts to create a perfect society. But despite the best of intentions, sometimes Utopian plans become dystopian and oppressive. Give examples of this from the novel **Lathe of Heaven**.*

**Required Reading(s)**

Ursula K. Le Guin, *Lathe of Heaven*, 126-184

**OCT 10 Life under occupation**

Group Discussion: *Dystopian fiction differs from Utopian fiction in that rarely does a dystopian writer offer hope for a better future. Is hope a motivating factor in either one of these stories? Is hope important for human well-being?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Philip K. Dick, "Faith of Our Fathers," in *Dangerous Visions* (posted on Canvas)  
Martin Buber, "The Careless Rabbi," in *The Book of Fantasy* (posted on Canvas)  
Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, "Dark Stars: Sin and Evil," 97-127

WEEK NINE: WHAT ABOUT MIRACLES?

**OCT 14-18 Midterm Exam Week**

**OCT 15 "A doer of wonderful deeds"**

Group Discussion: *The age of science looks at the idea of miracles with great suspicion, yet to a person of the 16<sup>th</sup> century contact lenses and antibiotics would appear miraculous. Why are modern believers skeptical of miracle stories? Do people of our day and age experience miracles?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Orson Scott Card, "Saving Grace," in *Maps in a Mirror: The Short Fiction of Orson Scott Card* (posted on Canvas)  
Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, "In the Fullness of Time: Free Will and Divine Providence," 63-96

**OCT 17 *Deus absconditus***

Group Discussion: *There is a mystical tradition within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that teaches God is never known directly but always remains hidden. Therefore, we must endeavor to seek and find traces of God in the world. How does this belief in divine hiddenness harmonize with belief in miracles?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Arthur C. Clarke, "The Star," in *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (posted on Canvas)

James McGrath, *Theology and Science Fiction*, "Theology Against Science Fiction and as Science Fiction," 51-66

**LIBRARY ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY**

WEEK TEN: SCI-FI ON FILM

**OCT 22 From book to screen**

View Video: "The Lathe of Heaven" (1980) directed by David Loxton and Fred Barzyk, produced by Public Broadcasting Service (WNET)

**OCT 24-27 Fall Break (No classes)**

WEEK ELEVEN: AFROFUTURISM

**OCT 29 Is Dystopian fiction pessimist?**

Group Discussion: *Dystopian fiction differs from Utopian fiction in that rarely does a dystopian writer offer hope for a better future. Is hope a motivating factor in either one of these stories? Is hope important for human well-being?"*

**Required Reading(s)**

W.E.B. DuBois, "The Comet," in *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (posted on Canvas)

Octavia Butler, "The Book of Martha" in *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (posted on Canvas)

**OCT 31 Afrofuturist Revival**

Group Discussion: *N. K. Jamesin finds fault in Le Guin's story and opts for a third option: stay and make a difference in that child's life. Even if it entails violence. The citizens of Um-Helat are shielded from evil by 'social workers' empowered to act as judge, jury, and executioner. Is Um-Helat a better place to live than Omelas? Where would you rather live?"*

**Required Reading(s)**

N.K. Jamesin, "Non-Zero Probabilities," in *Clarksworld Magazine* (posted on Canvas)

N. K. Jamesin, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight," in *How Long 'Til Black Future Month?* (posted on Canvas)

Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" in *Brave New Worlds (Dystopian Stories)* (posted on Canvas)

WEEK TWELVE: TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES

NOV 5

**Heterosexist Dystopias**

Group Discussion: *What makes a story science fiction (as opposed to historical fiction, mystery fiction, fantasy, etc.)? Do you think that dealing with possible futures, good or bad, is a safe way of addressing controversial issues of today? Does Delany do this when writing about human sexuality?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Samuel R. Delaney, "Aye, and Gomorrah," in *Dangerous Visions* (posted on Canvas)

Theodore Sturgeon, "If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?" in *Dangerous Visions* (posted on Canvas)

NOV 7

**Criminal or nonconformist?**

Group Discussion: *Many futuristic stories equate the elimination of crime with Utopian perfection. Often, nonconformity and rebellion against authority is seen as precipitating criminal activity. How do each of these stories eliminate crime to build a better future? Do you see yourself living in either society?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Kurt Vonnegut, "2BR02B," and "Harry Bergeron" in *Complete Stories* (posted on Canvas)

**SECOND CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY**

WEEK THIRTEEN: FEMINIST FUTURES

NOV 12

**Post-Feminist Backlash**

Group Discussion: *The 1980s saw the rise of Christian Fundamentalism in U.S. politics. Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 and 1984 because of the support from white Evangelical Christians. In what ways is Atwood's novel a reaction to this political shift?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 1-100

NOV 14

**American Theocracy?**

Group Discussion: *In 2022, a conservative 6-3 majority on the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade (1973) and opened the door for states to outlaw abortion. Atwood does not think of her writing as prophetic, yet many believe we are closer to the world described in **The Handmaid's Tale**. What do you think?"*

**Required Reading(s)**

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp. 101-196

WEEK FOURTEEN: FEMINIST FUTURES CONTINUED

**NOV 19 Utopian Movement or Religious Cult?**

Group Discussion: *Is Atwood's **The Handmaid's Tale** anti-religion? Or is it anti-authoritarianism? Many Cold War era dystopian novels imagined a totalitarian communist state. Why do you think Atwood decided to make her dystopian future religious?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 197-295

**NOV 21 Book or Film: Which is better?**

View Video: "The Handmaid's Tale" (2017), television series adapted by Bruce Miller; Season 1, Episode 1 ("Offred")

**NOV 27-DEC 1 Thanksgiving Holiday (No classes)**

WEEK FIFTEEN: TIME TRAVEL

**DEC 3 Tinkering with Time**

Group Discussion: *If you had a time machine, where might you go, if you could go any place or time of your choice? Is there anything you could encounter in the past or the future that could change your core beliefs?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Robert A. Heinlein, "'—All You Zombies—'" in *Masterpieces: The Best Science Fiction of the Century* (posted on Canvas)

Gabriel McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, "Good News from the Vatican: The Future of the Church," 182-213

**DEC 5 Can we change the past? The future?**

Group Discussion: *In Bester's short story a man tries to change his future by altering the past only to find nothing has changed. If we cannot change the past, does science fiction teach us that we can still work to change the future? Hopefully for the better?*

**Required Reading(s)**

Alfred Bester, "The Men Who Murdered Mohammed," in *The Dark Side of the Earth* (posted on Canvas)

**THIRD (AND FINAL) CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE DEC 9!**

**DEC 6 Last day of classes!**

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

*Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity.” Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service through which SLU fulfills its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern. The full University-level Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the Provost's Office website at:*

<https://www.slu.edu/provost/policies/academic-and-course/academic-integrity-policy.pdf>.

## **TITLE IX STATEMENT**

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual harassment, including sexual assault, stalking, domestic or dating violence, we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident that involves a Title IX matter, **that faculty member must notify SLU’s Title IX Coordinator that you shared an experience relating to Title IX.** This is true even if you ask the faculty member not to disclose the incident. The Title IX Coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

Anna Kratky is the Title IX Coordinator at Saint Louis University (DuBourg Hall, room 36; [anna.kratky@slu.edu](mailto:anna.kratky@slu.edu); 314-977-3886). If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK or make an anonymous report through SLU’s Integrity Hotline by calling 1-877-525-5669 or online at <http://www.lighthouse-services.com/slu>. To view SLU’s policies, and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: <https://www.slu.edu/about/safety/sexual-assault-resources/index.php>.

## **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations must formally register their disability with the University. Once successfully registered, students also must notify their course instructor that they wish to use their approved accommodations in the course.



Please contact the Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources (CADR) to schedule an appointment to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Most students on the St. Louis campus will contact CADR, located in the Student Success Center and available by email at [accessibility\\_disability@slu.edu](mailto:accessibility_disability@slu.edu) or by phone at 314.977.3484. Once approved, information about a student's eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors by email from CADR and within the instructor's official course roster. Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one also are encouraged to contact to CADR. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

## **APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS**

Students are expected to always conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner.

Classroom discussions will from time to time involve disagreements and differences of opinion. This is perfectly legitimate and part of the learning process. Such discussions must respect the dignity of all participants, regardless of our different perspectives. The classroom should be an environment in which students have the liberty to test out ideas, even if they are not yet fully formulated, without fear of ridicule or reproach. It is important to enter conversation with an open mind, seeking to learn more than to persuade.

In that spirit, the following guidelines are offered to make our time together more mutually beneficial:

1. This is not debate class! We are here to discuss theology by participating in the type of conversation that genuinely advances understanding. It is important to approach these discussions with both a high degree of introspection and a willingness to engage in dialogue.
2. Engage in academically responsible scholarship by presenting all perspectives fairly, by trying to understand an author's historical and cultural context, and by consulting primary sources directly (always citing references fully).
3. Before discussing differences of opinion, it is always helpful to begin by identifying some common convictions about the issue at hand.
4. Be open to constructive criticism since much can be learned from objections to one's own position, even if in the end one's position remains unchanged.
5. Point out mistakes or misinformation in your interlocutor's position gently and constructively.
6. At the conclusion of the conversation assess what you have learned or need to learn in order to further refine your own position.

## APPENDIX B: GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Due Thursday, October 17, 2024

### LIBRARY RESEARCH PROJECT

One of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) for an Ignite Seminar is to identify, evaluate, and utilize a variety of SLU library source materials to complete a course assignment.

For this seminar on Religion and Science Fiction, you are expected to conduct your own individual research project that requires you to use the resources available at SLU libraries to conduct research on a historical or contemporary work of speculative fiction NOT read or discussed in class, providing a summary and analysis of the work, with special attention given to the religious or theological themes explored in the work. The project will entail a 1000-word (approximately 4 double-spaced pages) essay, an annotated bibliography of at least 5 different sources.

Your 1000-word essay (plus annotated bibliography—see below) will provide a brief description of the novel, the religious ideas discussed in the novel, and evaluate whether the author had a positive or negative view of religion.

Remember, a RESEARCH paper carefully presents someone else's ideas by drawing upon multiple sources for clarification and verification in order to provide a defensible thesis or opinion about their ideas. Before you critique someone else's ideas, you must first demonstrate that you have understood them by restating their argument in your own words. Then you state whether you agree or disagree and why.

### WRITING AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

An **annotated bibliography** is a list of citations for various books, articles, and other sources on a topic. The annotated bibliography looks like a Works Cited page but includes an annotation after each source cited. An annotation is a short summary and/or critical evaluation of a source.

Annotated bibliographies can be part of a larger research project or can be a stand-alone report. You are required to submit **evaluative annotations** for at least five sources.

#### Types of Annotations

- A **summary annotation** describes the source by answering the following questions: who wrote the document, what the document discusses, when and where was the document written, why was the document produced, and how was it provided to the public. The focus is on description.
- An **evaluative annotation** includes a summary as listed above but also critically assesses the work for accuracy, relevance, and quality. Evaluative annotations can help you learn about your topic, develop a thesis statement, decide if a specific source will be useful for your assignment, and determine if there is enough valid information available to complete your project. The focus is on description and evaluation.

### Writing an Evaluative Annotation\*

- Cite the source using MLA style.
- Describe the main ideas, arguments, themes, theses, or methodology, and identify the intended audience.
- Explain the author's expertise, point of view, and any bias he/she may have.
- Compare to other sources on the same topic that you have also cited to show similarities and differences.
- Explain why each source is useful for your research topic and how it relates to your topic.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each source.
- Identify the observations or conclusions of the author.

**\*Remember:** Annotations are original descriptions that you create after reading the document. When researching, you may find journal articles that provide a short summary at the beginning of the text. This article abstract is like a summary annotation. You may consult the abstract when creating your evaluative annotation, but never simply copy it as that would be considered plagiarism.

### Basic Tips on Writing and Formatting

- Each annotation should be one paragraph (about 150 words).
- Start with the same format as a regular Works Cited list.
- All lines should be double-spaced. Do not add an extra line between the citations.
- If your list of citations is especially long, you can organize it by topic.
- Try to be objective and give explanations if you state any opinions.
- Use the third person (e.g., he, she, the author) instead of the first person (e.g., I, my, me)

### Sample Evaluative Annotation

London, Herbert. "Five Myths of the Television Age." *Television Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1, Mar. 1982, pp. 81-69.

Herbert London, the Dean of Journalism at New York University and author of several books and articles, explains how television contradicts five commonly believed ideas. He uses specific examples of events seen on television, such as the assassination of John Kennedy, to illustrate his points. His examples have been selected to contradict such truisms as: "seeing is believing"; "a picture is worth a thousand words"; and "satisfaction is its own reward." London uses logical arguments to support his ideas which are his personal opinion. He does not refer to any previous works on the topic. London's style and vocabulary would make the article of interest to any reader. The article clearly illustrates London's points but does not explore their implications leaving the reader with many unanswered questions.

## APPENDIX C: GUIDELINES FOR CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

### CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

One aspect of the Ignite Seminars is that students are encouraged to draw on their own experiences as they study and examine a subject. This course is taught by a faculty member from the Department of Theological Studies, but it is *not* a course in Theology. Rather, students will experience religious worldviews through the prism of speculative fiction instead of by reading sermons, theological tracts, and confessional statements.

By immersing themselves in a fictional world, students are more likely to set aside their own political and ideological commitments, which allows the text to speak for itself. This, in turn, leads to a more meaningful engagement of the ideas presented in the text and deeper consideration of the societal changes demanded by such ideas. Course assignments will be designed to evaluate the student's willingness to engage the ideas encountered within the fictional worlds through a series of directed group discussion questions, by keeping a critical reading log, and writing a piece of original speculative short fiction.

Students will be encouraged to draw upon their own personal beliefs and upbringing to create a fictional world then write a short piece of prose, verse, or other creative literary form, which in some way analyzes or critiques those beliefs. Students will not be evaluated on the aesthetic merits of their writing, but on their willingness to articulate religious ideas in a form other than nonfiction prose.

1. **Short Story (5 pages max).** Compose an original piece of prose fiction in the science fiction genre that explores religious themes. While a revised, edited, and polished submission is most desirable, I will accept your submission even if unedited or unfinished, so long as you have made a sincere effort to write an original short story.
2. **Movie Treatment (5-10 pages).** A treatment is a multi-page, detailed synopsis of your film written in prose, not as a script. It contains all the key elements of your story, like important scenes, main characters, and crucial plot points. Write a film treatment for a science fiction movie that explores religious themes. Visit [this website](#) for directions on how to write a movie treatment and examples of movie treatments from actual films.
3. **Book Review (2 pages).** Read then write a book review of a science fiction novel NOT assigned for this course that explores religious themes. Visit [this website](#) for advice and guidelines on writing a fiction book review.
4. **Reading Log (10 pages max).** Maintain a reading log in which you provide a concise summary of the text and a personal reflection (250 words) for each assigned reading in the syllabus. *This assignment can only be submitted for the third (final) assignment.*
5. **Class Presentation.** Ten-minute oral or multi-media presentation on a science fiction novel, TV show, or film NOT assigned for this course that explores religious themes. The presentation must provide a summary of the story and an analysis of how religion is used in the story. Please coordinate the date of your presentation with the instructor.

6. **Infographic (poster size).** Infographics are visual representations of information, data, or knowledge intended to present information quickly and clearly. Create an infographic that presents the religious themes explored in a work of science fiction (can be drawn from assigned readings). Go [here](#) for more information on infographics, and visit [this site](#) for tips and advice on creating your own infographic.
7. **Graphic Novel (5 pages max).** Compose an original work of science fiction in comic book format that explores religious themes. Again, you will not be evaluated for your artistic talent, but for your willingness to explore religious themes in story form—in this case in graphic form. Therefore, so long as you tell your story, even stick-figure art is acceptable!

Students must complete *any* three (3) of the above seven (7) creative writing assignments (**each one is worth 20% for a total 60% of final grade**). Assignments are due on set dates throughout the semester (SEPT 19, NOV 7, DEC 9), but the student decides which project to submit at each of these three due dates.

## APPENDIX D: IGNITE SEMINAR LIBRARY RESEARCH TUTORIAL

Students must complete the **Core 1000: Ignite Seminar Library Research Tutorial** (link below) and the accompanying quiz that covers basic information about the library and research.

This is a tutorial *required* of ALL Ignite Seminar students and should be completed before a librarian visits our class on **September 17, 2024**. After students complete the quiz, they will receive a “Certificate of Completion” which will need to be submitted to the professor in order to make sure you receive credit.

The tutorial consists of five (5) modules. It is designed to introduce you to **SLU Libraries** and research at the university level, to help you develop your information-seeking and evaluation skills. *Be sure to locate your Ignite Seminar class section number before starting the tutorial.*

- Module 1: Introduction to Virtual Library
- Module 2: Explore Pius Library
- Module 3: Evaluating the Credibility of Information
- Module 4: Using Information Ethically
- Module 5: How to Get Help
- Quiz

[https://libguides.slu.edu/ignite\\_library\\_research\\_tutorial](https://libguides.slu.edu/ignite_library_research_tutorial)