

# DRAFT ONLY

Myths, Gospels, and Human Lives  
Pacific School of Religion  
Summer 2010  
July 6-16, 2010  
1:30-6 p.m.

Instructor: Tat-siong Benny Liew  
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## Purpose:

This intermediate-level course will attempt to evaluate the category of “myth” as a lens to read and think about the stories related to the gospel or “good news” about Jesus, and how those stories relate to human lives. The majority of the course will seek to acquaint students with both the theories and specifics of myths. We will look at the work of myth critics (Frazer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss, Burke, Ricoeur), several ancient Near Eastern myths and a couple from other cultures and geographical areas, Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologizing project, as well as Paul Tillich’s understanding of “broken myths.” Then we will turn to look at the effects—both socio-political and individual—of myths. Issues concerning the relationship of myth to ritual, of myth to history, and of myth to faith and life will also be raised.

## Textbooks:

1. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (translated by Annette Lavers; New York: Hill and Wang, 1972);
2. Carol Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and
3. Herbert Mason, *Gilgamesh: A Verse Narrative* (New York: Mentor, 1990).

Extra required readings will be available at course site via Moodle.

## Learning Outcomes:

Through their reading, discussion, and reflection of lectures and assigned readings, students—after successfully completing this course with a final course grade of B or above—will be able to:

1. Know and understand something about what critics have been saying about the functions of myths in both ancient and contemporary lives and societies;

2. Become acquainted with some selected myths that they might not be familiar with before, and hence understand and appreciate the pervasiveness of myth across time and culture;
3. Reflect on and evaluate critically the relationships between myth and stories associated with the Gospels and/or the Christian faith traditions;
4. Become more self-reflexive on the powerful legacies (both positive and negative) of stories related to the Christian traditions on contemporary life, both individual and social.

Requirements:

1. Regular and active class attendance is expected of all students. Students who missed more than two (2) class session will automatically fail the course (5% of course grade);
2. Read all assigned readings carefully and critically (5% of course grade);
3. Students will take an in-class examination on July 12. This examination will cover materials of the first half of the course (40% of course grade);
4. Students will write a reflection on and response to the book by Delaney. This paper should be five (5) to six (6) pages long, typed (double-spaced, with a font size of twelve [12]). The paper should contain first a summary of the book, and then a critical reflection of the book's strengths, weaknesses, and significance. This paper is due at the beginning of class on July 16 (50% of course grade).

Schedule:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| July 6  | What Does Plato Say about Myths?  |
| July 7  | What Are "They" Saying about Myths?   |
| July 8  | Enuma Elish   |
|         | * Finish reading Enuma Elish (available at course site via Moodle)  |
| July 9  | Hesiod's <i>Theogony</i>  |
|         | * Finish reading Hesiod (available at course site via Moodle)   |
| July 12 | The Myth of <i>Gilgamesh</i>  |
|         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finish reading Mason, 11-92</li> <li>• In-class examination</li> </ul> |

- July 13          Demythologize the Gospels?
- July 14          Broken Myths? Current Myths?
- Finish reading Barthes, 15-105
- July 15          Faith and/or Politics?
- \*          Finish reading Barthes, 109-59
- July 16          Myth, Gospel, and Life Legacy
- Finish reading Delaney
  - Paper on Delaney due at the start of class session

PSR Academic Policies:

We will hold students and ourselves to the official policies set out by PSR. Please consult the Plagiarism Policy at: [http://www.psr.edu/docs/PSR\\_PlagiarismPolicy.pdf](http://www.psr.edu/docs/PSR_PlagiarismPolicy.pdf).

Please see also PSR's Grading Policy below:

Grades are pedagogical tools to help students understand two things: (1) where they stand on any one assignment in relation to others in the class (since grading is mainly a comparative matter); and (2) whether they have fully mastered a particular assignment or need to do further work on it before moving on to the other issues. Thus, assigned grades should communicate the following:

A+      Publishable work; superb work, far beyond the level of excellence generally found in student work.

A        Excellent work; work that shows a level of mastery *consistently* beyond the expected scope of the assignment.

A-      Excellent work: work that shows a level of mastery *usually* beyond the expected scope of the assignment, but also indicates a few instances of *only* adequate levels of mastery.

B+      Very good work; work that indicates a *consistently* adequate mastery of the assignment at the expected level.

B        Good work; work that indicates a basically adequate level of understanding but where improvements are clearly possible.

B- Work that shows a beginning grasp of the assignment but that needs improvement and additional study to reach a level of adequate mastery.

C+ Work that indicates significant lacunae in understanding, execution, or critical engagement; much additional study is needed.

C Poor work: work that shows a lack of overall understanding.

C- through D-

*Levels of* extremely poor work; work that indicates varying degrees of severe weakness in understanding, execution, and critical engagement.

F Failure - Consistent inability to understand, execute and critically engage the material; student receives no credit for assignment or class.

### **INCOMPLETE POLICY**

The PSR Incomplete Policy is the rule for this class:

If you need an extension, you must submit a “Petition to Take an Incomplete” to the PSR registrar that is signed by your instructor (instructor approval by email and forwarded to registrar is fine) by the final day of the semester. Make sure on this petition (or in the email) that the date on which you are to submit your late work is clearly stated and agreed to with your instructor. In general with the approved petition, the date your late work is due to your instructor is usually **three weeks after the end of the semester**. If your work is submitted then, your instructor will then submit a replacement grade for you. Please be aware that if you do not meet the new deadline date, your “I” grade will automatically change to an “F.” You may pick up a “Petition to Take an Incomplete” form outside Holbrook 135, or download it at: <http://www.gtu.edu/docs/incomplete.pdf>. However, also be aware that:

1. Extensions are NOT an automatic privilege. Each one must be approved and signed off in consultation with the instructor of the class. Once you submit them, they will also need to be individually approved by the PSR Associate Dean or Dean.
2. There may be PENALTIES to taking extensions: A record of your incompletes may remain on your transcript, and if you exceed the maximum number of extensions you can take, you may either be placed on academic probation or any other extended work you do for any future classes will result in an “F” grade automatically. Please consult your program manual for more details.