

**RELG 203 Fall 2017**  
**Bible and Western Culture**

STBIO N2/2, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:05-5:25

Instructor: Aaron Ricker

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**Course Description**

Bart D. Ehrman recently called the Bible “the most frequently purchased, commonly read, passionately believed, and widely misunderstood book in the history of Western civilization.” REL 203 is designed to address the situation of most students knowing more about the Bible than they might think, but also being more confused about that inherited cultural knowledge than they might think. To this end, “Western culture” will be defined and outlined historically for the purposes of the class, as a family of cultures shaped by ideas of the sacred and the secular that were developed in conversation with Greco-Roman and biblical traditions. The class will then will review key examples of biblical tradition, and critical discussions of their place in Western culture. ***Students will show they can notice biblical traditions at work in Western culture, and think about them critically – both on the spot in real time*** (in the class discussions and the Midterm exam) ***and in depth on their own time*** (in the Responses, Reflections, and Final Paper). Section 1 (January 5 – Feb 16) introduces the materials and problems involved in a Religious Studies approach to “the West” and to biblical traditions. Reflective engagement with the readings and ideas is expected. Section 2 (Feb 21 – April 11) is more “hands-on” and thematic. Students are expected to come prepared for active discussions of key texts and interpretations.

**Required Texts**

Students will need access to a Bible, preferably an NRSV with both “Old” and “New” Testaments, as well as the “Apocrypha.” Other versions may work just as well, but please ask. The following text is also required:

*The Bible. A Very Short Introduction*, by John Riches (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Available at The Word bookstore at 469 Milton (514-845-5640).

Students are expected to complete all required readings indicated in the syllabus before coming to class. Lectures and discussions will assume that students have done this prep work. Informed, thoughtful engagement with the required assigned readings must also be demonstrated in the one-page Reading Reflections/Questions.

## **Evaluation**

Daily Reading Reflections 20% (1 page, due before beginning of each class)

In-class Orientation Test 5% (Multiple Choice, in-class, Sep. 21)

Midterm Exam 20% (Multiple Choice, in-class, Oct. 17)

Essay 25% (Approx. 10 pages, due last day of class)

Final Reflections on Class 5% (2 pages, due last day of class)

Final Exam 25% (Short IDs, short and long answers, scheduled by McGill)

**Students are responsible for understanding and following McGill's policy on academic honesty. *Ignorance is not an excuse.* All the relevant information is easily available online and/or in the *Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities*. McGill's rules on plagiarism and other kinds of cheating are laid out for example at [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)**

**Written work may be submitted in either English or French. Grammar and style will affect grades. Late work is worth less each day: A to A-, A- to B+, etc.**

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## **Section 1: Getting our Bearings. Sep. 5 – Oct. 17.**

### **Day 1 – Sep. 5**

Class Intro, Syllabus Review, Class Survey “Quiz”

### **Day 2 – Sep. 7**

“How the Bible was Written” (Required Reading: Riches 9-30)

*Note: First Reading Reflections/Questions due at beginning of class*

### **Day 3 – Sep. 12**

“The Making of the Bible” (Required Reading: Riches 31-53)

Genesis 19:1-38

Judges 19:16-20:11

### **Day 4 – Sep. 14**

“The Bible in the World of the Believers” (Riches 54-69)

2 Chronicles 36:15-23

Malachi 4:1-5

Revelation 22:10-21

**Day 5 – Sep. 19**

“The Bible and its Critics” (Riches 70-83)

Ephesians (whole letter)

Colossians (whole letter)

***Add/Drop Deadline***

**Day 6 – Sep. 21**

***Multiple-choice In-class Orientation Test***

**Day 7 – Sep. 26**

“The Bible in the Modern World: Classic or Sacred Text?” (Riches 1-8)

Genesis 19:1-38

Judges 19:11-20:10

**Day 8 – Sep. 28**

Intimate International Biblical Studies Conference, with Invited Guests

*Theme: “The Bible in the Modern World: Classic or Sacred Text?”*

**Day 9 – Oct. 3**

“The Bible in the Post-Colonial World” (Riches 84-99)

Exodus 2:1-4:31

Mark 12:13-17; 15:1-39

**Day 10 – Oct. 5**

“The Bible in High and Popular Culture” (Riches 100-118)

Genesis 22:1-18

Judges 16:4-31

1 Samuel 17:4-54

Matthew 5:1-20

**Day 11 – Oct. 10**

“The Bible in Politics” (Riches 119-133)

Exodus 20:1-21

Romans 12:1-13:14

**Day 12 – Oct. 12**

“Conclusion” (Riches 134-142)

**Day 13 – Oct. 17**

***In-class Midterm Exam***

***All assignments outstanding from Add/Drop late joiners due before midnight***

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## **Section 2: Getting Our Hands Dirty. Oct. 19 – Dec. 5.**

### ***Beginnings – Oct. 19 & 24***

Required Readings:

Genesis 1:1-2:24

Matthew 1:1-25

Mark 1:1-14

Luke 1:1-80

John 1:1-28

### ***Ancestors – Oct. 26 & 31***

Genesis 4:1-5:32; 9:1-10:32; 12:1-20

Matthew 1:1-25; 3:1-17

Luke 3:23-38

Hebrews 11:1-40

Galatians 4:22-31

### ***Leaders – Nov. 2 & 7***

Genesis 14:11-24

1 Samuel 11:1-27

Psalms 2:1-9; 110:1-6

Matthew 22:15-22

Hebrews 7:1-22

Revelation 11:11-14

### ***Deliverance – Nov. 9 & 14***

Exodus 3:1-6:26

Isaiah 40:1-5; 43:14-19; 51:4-16

Philemon 1-21

Galatians 5:1-13

Hebrews 3:1-4:11

Revelation 18:1-24

### ***Songs and Writings – Nov. 16 & 21***

Job 1:1-2:10

Psalms 22:1-18, 23:1-6

Proverbs 1:1-33; 8:1-36

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18; 3:1-8

Song of Solomon 4:1-5:6

Wisdom of Solomon 7:21-8:2

Sirach 1:14-20

***Apocalypses – Nov. 23 & 28***

Daniel 12:1-13

Ezekiel 1:1-3:15

Mark 13:1-37

Luke 24:13-34

1 Corinthians 15:3-10

2 Peter 2:4-3:7

Jude verses 9-16

Revelation 1:1-20; 10:1-11

**Class Outro – Nov. 30**

**Flex Day – Dec. 5**

***Essays and Final Reflections due before midnight***