

# THEO 216-01: RELIGION, MEDIA, AND POP-CULTURE

(In-Person) Fisher Hall 709, Tues. and Thurs. 12:15-1:30pm, Spring 2024

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## 1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

***Is life enhanced or entranced by media and popular culture?*** In today's world, faith experiences are increasingly sought after and discovered outside of institutions, and in surprising media contexts. This puzzling development is balanced against another surprise of modern life – one can no longer remain focused on one's own beliefs! We must acknowledge the existence and validity of differing traditions! This sense of balance involves popular culture, which influences belief systems through the technology we use, the visuals we watch, the music we listen to, the comic books we read, the social media we create, and even the video games that we play. This course examines the interplay of media, pop culture, and religion, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of this interplay in society.

## 2. COURSE PROCESS

***Should we study the influence of technology to resist and reject it, or embrace and adapt it for ethical and spiritual purposes?*** This is the question that we will think, read, watch, and talk through! Each class session involves a brief lecture and group discussions of the daily topic. There are three Units: Religion Through Media and Pop-Culture, Religion vs. Media and Pop-Culture, and Presenting Faith Through Media and Pop-Culture.

## 3. COURSE GOALS

This course does not presume a religious background. Those with and without personal religious faith will become informed, equipped, inspired, and engaged regarding the interplay of media, pop culture, and religion in society!

📖 **Informed:** Learn how one's own view of God, humanity, and the universe is shaped by pop-culture and media.

📖 **Equipped:** Adapt theological insights for recognizing the roles that popular culture and religion play in modern media.

📖 **Inspired:** Discern how media and pop culture convey powerful faith narratives, rituals, and symbols.

📖 **Engaged:** Examine racism, religious bigotry, violence, materialism, idolatry, etc. in popular culture and religion.

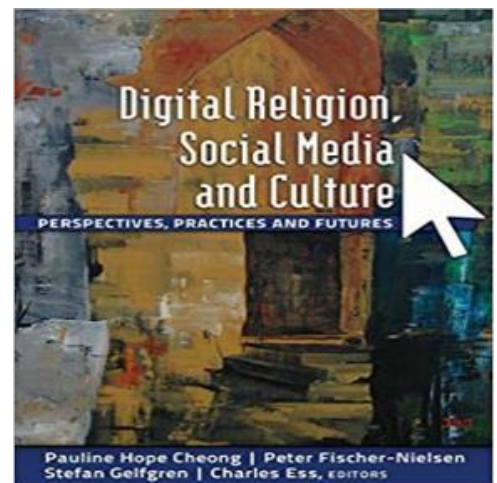
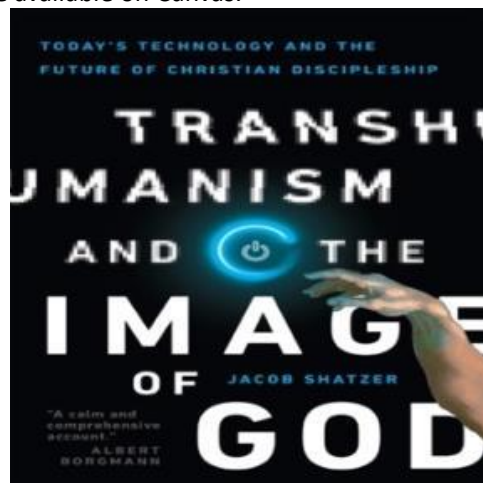
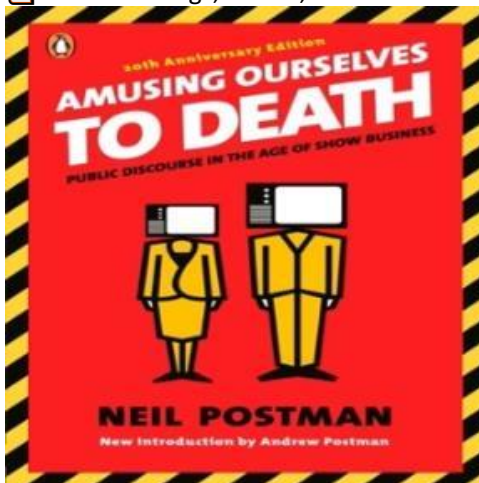
## 4. COURSE TEXTS / MEDIA (access to these and other readings are all found on Canvas, in the "Books and Readings" Module)

📖 Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. England: Penguin Books, 2005.

📖 Pauline Hope Cheong, Peter Fischer-Nielsen, Stefan Gelfgren, & Charles Ess (eds). *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2012.

📖 Jacob Shatzer. *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2019.

📖 Other readings, videos, and materials are available on Canvas.



## 5. COURSE ACTIVITIES / GRADING

Consider this a "Build-Your-Score" Course. All students start at zero and build points toward their grade, rather than start with a perfect score and lose points on course activities. This is an approach that is more about emphasizing the paths to successful learning, and less about emphasizing the mistakes. *Crucial point: points are earned, not taken away. The more you do to meet and exceed expectations, the more points you will earn for your contributions. Deficiencies do not result in point deductions; they simply do not earn points.*