

**PSCI 11**  
**The Gospel According to U2**  
**Winter Study 2008**

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PSCI 11  
Griffin 6  
TWR 10am-noon

Office Hrs.: Mondays 2:00pm - 4:00pm and by appointment

### **Course Description**

It has been said that U2 is the "world's greatest rock band" – but is it also (unknown to most) the world's greatest – and most unusual – Christian rock band? This course explores the theology, spirituality and politics of U2 expressed through the group's songs, stage performances and human right campaigns. We will travel from the band's origins in the Shalom Christian Fellowship in Dublin to their overtly Christian second album *October* (1981); the culmination of their superstardom in *Joshua Tree* (1987); through their techno and ultra-ironic 1990s marked by Zoo-TV, PopMart and Bono's "mock the devil" phase as Mr. MacPhisto; and a return to their roots in *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000) and *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* (2004). Along the way, we will listen to a lot of U2, watch some videos and tour footage – but it's not all fun and games. We will also read serious theological and philosophical tracts on U2 lyrics and explore the band's complicated interweaving of faith, sexuality, grace, fame, doubt, justice, and the meaning of America in a way which makes them a surprisingly popular and poignant spiritual voice in our superficial and materialistic age. We will also delve into the group's human rights and social justice work, from Band Aid in the '80s to (Product)<sup>RED</sup> today, and in particular explore Bono's Christian social justice moorings.

How does a band which quotes psalms at the Super Bowl and routinely stirs millions at its concerts to chant an Old Testament lament ("how long? how long?") get into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame? How does Bono simultaneously play the role of rock idol and prophet, prompting professions of love from both star-struck teenage girls and conservative U.S. Senators? How far can you go with a red guitar, three chords and the truth?

### **Readings**

This course has four readings sources for the term:

1. Steve Stockman, *Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2*, revised edition, 2005.
2. Robert G. Vagacs, *Religious Nuts, Political Fanatics: U2 in Theological Perspective*, 2005.
3. Stephen Catanzarite, *U2's Achtung Baby: Meditations on Love in the Shadow of the Fall*, 2007.
4. Course reader.

The three books should all be purchased through your favorite on-line retailer – *they are NOT available at Water Street Books*. The course reader can be picked up outside the Political Science Department secretary's office (Stetson g18). It will also be very helpful to have a Bible on hand, both in class and while doing the readings. Any translation is fine.

## Music & Video

Any course about U2 would be sorely lacking without a vigorous engagement with the band's music, videos and stage performances. I will playing all three types of media in class, and we will also have access to them outside of class during the term. Sawyer Library owns all U2's albums – from *Boy* to *Atomic Bomb* – as well as a couple of video recordings which I have placed on reserve for your use. The entire U2 song collection – all 446 of them! – is available from iTunes ([www.apple.com/itunes/](http://www.apple.com/itunes/)), but is neither free nor subsidized by the college for this course. Songs via iTunes are 99¢ each. Being college students, you probably have ingenious ways to get them for less.

## On-line

There are many good U2 resources on the internet. The most useful for our purposes are:

- Lyrics@U2 <http://atu2.com/lyrics/>
- U2 Sermons <http://u2sermons.blogspot.com/>

## Course requirements

Showing up: The number one requirement of this course is to come to class. We have a limited number of sessions together, so if you don't come, you not only hurt yourself but you hurt the class. We all depend on one another to make this course interesting and enjoyable.

Reading: Not just being a warm body, but a warm brain, is the next step. Come to class every morning prepared to discuss and learn. Readings assigned for a particular class session will be the topic for that day's discussion, and therefore should be completed prior to class.

Speaking: This class will be conducted as a seminar. That means lots of discussion on your part. Our class is far from small, but we're talking about not only about U2's music and message, but also our views on the band and their rendition of the gospel. That means *your* opinions and *your* interpretations. If you don't talk, we all sit around and stare at each other.

Discussing: Each weekend I will get a discussion rolling on our course Blackboard site on topics relevant to the previous week's topics. Each student is expected to make a minimum of five significant postings (i.e. a paragraph or more) on Blackboard during the course of Winter Study. If you get into the swing of things, make more than five. The best thing is that, unlike WSO discussions, these postings are not for public consumption.

Writing: You are also responsible for one final project which can be either: **[1]** a 7-8pp 'spiritual songs' paper, an interpretation of three or more relevant U2 songs/videos on a common theme of your choice; or **[2]** a creative multimedia interpretation of one of five U2 concerts which will be shown throughout the term. The final project is due Friday, January 25.

## Grades

Your grade in this course will be based on the following formula:

Final project	60%
Blackboard discussions	20%
Class participation	20%

## Course Calendar

### Jan. 3 IS U2 A CHRISTIAN BAND – AND DOES IT MATTER?

#### Readings

- [Walk On](#), chs. 1-3
- [Religious Nuts](#), pp. 1-8
- Steve Stockman, “Do U2 make any difference?,” [Rhythms of Redemption](#)
- Charles Honey, “Calvin College on U2,” [Christianity Today](#), 23 February 2005
- U2 with Neil McCormick, [U2 by U2](#), pp. 117-9

#### Songs

- “I Will Follow” (*Under a Blood Red Sky* version)
- “Gloria”
- “Tomorrow”
- “All Because of You”

### Jan. 8 BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

#### Readings

- [Walk On](#), chs. 4
- [Religious Nuts](#), pp. 34-37
- James Henke, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” [Rolling Stone](#), 9 June 1983
- David Breskin, “Bono: U2's passionate voice,” [Rolling Stone](#), 8 October 1987 (excerpt)
- Michka Assayas, [Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas](#), pp. 160-165, 168-173, 176-187
- “Bloody Sunday (1972),” [Wikipedia](#)

#### Songs

- “Sunday Bloody Sunday”
- “Pride (In the Name of Love)”
- “In God’s Country”
- “Bullet the Blue Sky” (*Rattle and Hum* version)

**Jan. 9 JOSHUA AND THE WILDERNESS**

*Readings*

- Walk On, chs. 7-8
- Religious Nuts, pp. 29-34, 37-45
- John Lennon, "Imagine"
- John Lennon, "God"
- Beth Maynard, "Lent part one," Get Up Off Your Knees

*Songs*

- "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For"
- "Where the Streets Have No Name"
- "With or Without You"
- "God Part II"

**Jan. 10 THE FALL**

*Readings*

- Achtung Baby, chs. 1-4
- Genesis, chs. 1-3
- Dante, The Inferno, Canto XXXIV

*Songs*

- "One"
- "Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses"
- "Love is Blindness"
- "Until the End of the World"

**Jan. 11 Optional U2 concert viewing: RATTLE AND HUM (1987)**

**Jan. 14 Optional U2 concert viewing: ZOO-TV: LIVE FROM SYDNEY (1993)**

**Jan. 15 AMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH**

*Readings*

- Walk On, chs. 9-10
- Religious Nuts, pp. 23-28
- Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business, Forward and ch. 5
- Joe Jackson, "Bono vs. the Beast," Musician, August 1993
- C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, chs. 7, 14 & 22

*Songs*

- "Desire"
- "The Fly"
- "Zooropa"
- "Daddy's Gonna Pay For Your Crashed Car"

**Jan. 16 ALL IS VANITY AND GRASPING FOR THE WIND**

*Readings*

- Walk On, chs. 11-12
- Religious Nuts, ch. 4
- Derek Walmsley, "Finding the way to the Playboy Mansion," Get Up Off Your Knees
- Book of Ecclesiastes

*Songs*

- "Discotheque"
- "The Playboy Mansion"
- "The Wanderer"
- "Numb"

**Jan. 17 LOVE. WITH LOVE.**

*Readings*

- Walk On, chs. 15-16 & 20
- Religious Nuts, chs. 5-6
- Achtung Baby, ch. 7
  
- Wade Hodges, "Grace the beauty-maker," Get Up Off Your Knees
- Kenneth Tanner, "Courageous crooners," National Review, 23 November 2004

*Songs*

- "Beautiful Day"
- "Grace"
- "When Love Comes to Town"
- "Vertigo"
- "All Because of You"

**Jan. 18 Optional U2 concert viewing: POPMART: LIVE FROM MEXICO CITY (1997)**

**Jan. 21 Optional U2 concert viewing: U2 GO HOME: LIVE FROM SLANE CASTLE (2001)**

**Jan. 21 Optional U2 concert viewing: VERTIGO 2005: LIVE FROM CHICAGO (2005)**  
*Griffin 4, 2pm*

**Jan. 22 CAN BONO SAVE THE WORLD?**

*Readings*

- Walk On, chs. 5 & 17-18
  
- Bono, "Forward" in Jeffrey Sachs, The End of Poverty
- Bono, "Message 2U," Vanity Fair, July 2007
- "Bono's beneficent universe," New York Times, 13 November 2006
- Michka Assayas, Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas, pp. 80-103
- James Traub, "The statesman," New York Times Magazine, 18 September 2005

*Songs*

- "Love and Peace or Else"
- "Miracle Drug"
- "Walk On" (*America: A Tribute to Heroes* version)

**Jan. 23 AM I BUGGING YOU?**

*Readings*

- Juan Rodriguez, "Bono's biggest sellout," Montreal Gazette, 9 February 2002
- Jim DeRogatis, "The Rev. Bono," Chicago Sun-Times, 9 May 2005
- Greg Kot, "Bono: 'We need to talk'," Chicago Tribune, 22 May 2005
- Matt Cooper, "It's about time someone told Bono just to shut up and sing," Sunday Times (London), 12 August 2006
- Mya Frazier, "Costly Red campaign reaps meager \$18 million," Advertising Age, 5 March 2007
- Mark Roseman, "The patina of philanthropy," Stanford Social Innovation Review Opinion blog, 11 April 2007
- Paul Valley, "The big question: Does the RED campaign help big Western brands more than Africa?" The Independent (London), 9 March 2007
- William Easterly, "What Bono doesn't say about Africa," Los Angeles Times, 6 July 2007
- Michka Assayas, Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas, pp. 258-271

*Songs*

- "Silver and Gold"

**Jan. 24 SALT AND LIGHT**

*Readings*

- Walk On, chs. 13 & 21
- Religious Nuts, pp. 8-13
- Bono, "Introduction," Selections from the Book of Psalms
- Bono, "Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast," 2 February 2006
- David Di Sabatino, "Why I would follow Bono into hell," PRISM, July/August 2002
- Bruce Springsteen, "Speech at the induction of U2 into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame," 17 March 2005
- Tony Campolo, "Bono kneels humbly in the spotlight," Religion News Service, 8 October 2005
- Cathleen Falsani, "Bono's American prayer," Christianity Today, March 2003
- Bono, "Bono," in U2 by U2

*Songs*

- "Please"
- "Crumbs From Your Table"
- "Out of Control" (*Slane Castle* version)
- "40"