2014

333-01 The Bible and Film

John Johnson

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The Bible and Film
Theo 333 – 01

Fall 2014
Tues. 4:30–7:15pm
Lindner Hall 101
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Overview
In this course we will explore the ways in which the Bible (and related literature for at least one film) is interpreted in modern culture through the medium of film. After viewing films in class, coupled with outside readings of both biblical and secondary sources, we will engage in assessment of the use and interpretation of the Bible in these films. We will sample from a variety of genres: e.g., the biblical epic, comedy, science fiction, and drama. We will seek to understand each film as a product of its environment (the cultural, social, theological, and historical background of the film and its creators). The course will bring together ideas from biblical studies/theology and concepts from film studies in order to understand various aspects of the use of the Bible in film.

Course Goals
Through this course you will learn:
1. Based on certain methods and criteria, how to critique films both theologically, ethically, and artistically.
2. Aspects, or components of, biblical studies and film studies.
3. To recognize and appreciate the setting in which films are made (their social, historical, theological background), and how this impacts the film and its reception.
4. About major biblical events and themes portrayed in film.
5. To develop your critical thinking skills through the use of logic in civil dialogue.
6. To enhance your reading comprehension and writing skills.

Texts
Required:


Also, one of the Following:
Class Structure
This course relies heavily upon classroom discussion as opposed to lecture. Thus, you must come to class prepared to dialogue and/or ask questions regarding the discussion topics assigned for that day. The required readings, combined with the films, will lead us into the discussions for each class session. In the event that class discussion does not move apace, I will implement reading quizzes and/or written reading reviews. I expect students to be passionate about their beliefs, but always remain courteous and sympathetic to others’ as well.

Course Requirements
1. 20% - Class Participation (discussion in class is required)
2. 20% - First Exam
3. 20% - Final Exam
4. 20% - Book Review
5. 20% - Film Review

Grading Scale
A  100%-94%  C  81%-78%
A-  93%-92%  C-  77%-76%
B+  91%-90%  D+  75%-74%
B   89%-86%  D   73%-70%
B-  85%-84%  D-  69%-68%
C+  83%-82%  F   below 68%

Late Policy
For each day an assignment is late, the grade will be lowered one full letter grade from the grade given to the work. If it is “A” caliber work, it will be recorded as a “B.” If it is “B” level work, it will be recorded as a “C,” etc. If an exam is missed, it must be for a documented emergency. Otherwise, you will receive a zero.

Attendance
While I will not formally take attendance in each class, if you do not show up you may miss something important. It is your job to find out what you missed from one of your fellow students. If you know you are going to be absent in advance, you need to email me before the class starts to inquire about any possible missed assignments. Otherwise, you will not be able to make up these points, unless there was a verifiable emergency, proof of illness, or some other cause (left to the discretion of the instructor). Further, since class relies on each student’s participation in the discussions, your absence will be recognized and noted. Since this is 20% of your grade, don’t lose easy points here!
**Electronic Devices**
Refrain from using any electronic devices during class. If you must take an emergency phone call, please leave the room quietly. Laptops or tablets are only to be used for taking notes and absolutely nothing else as this poses a serious hindrance to the learning of those around you.

*Laptops are to be closed during all film viewings.*

**Academic Integrity**
You are responsible for knowing Xavier University’s policy regarding academic integrity and upholding it.

**Learning Assistance Center**
Students with special needs will be accommodated in conjunction with the LAC. Please notify the instructor early in the semester in order to make the necessary accommodations.

**
I reserve the right to alter the syllabus, in any way, as the course progresses. It is not a binding contract.

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**Resources**
—Particularly helpful is the online *Journal of Religion and Film (JRF).*

*JRF* includes essay articles, book reviews, and film reviews.

http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/

—http://biblefilms.blogspot.com/ (by Matt Page, an all-around hub of information on Bible and Film)

—http://www.cmu.ca/library/faithfilm.html (reviews and much more)

—Bibliographic Essays:


—A number of handbooks, dictionaries, and other reference materials will be useful:

*The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, William Blizek, ed. 2009


*The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, Livingston and Platinga, eds. 2009
Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films, Reinhartz, ed. 2012

And on Film Studies specifically:
The Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory, Branigan and Buckland, eds. 2013
A Dictionary of Film Studies, Kuhn and Westwell, eds. 2012
Film Theory and Criticism, Braudy and Cohen, eds. 7th edition 2009
The Oxford Guide to Film Studies, Hill and Gibson, eds. 1998

In Biblical Studies and Religion (too many to count):
Anchor Bible Dictionary, Freedman, ed. 1992 (6 vols.)

Dozens of Oxford Handbooks, Cambridge Companions, and Blackwell Companions

—Routledge Studies in Religion and Film, edited by Robert Johnston and Jolyon Mitchell

Class Outline

* Tues., Aug. 26th *
Discussion: Introduction; Syllabus

Reading: MP, 1–42
CFT, 1–43

* Sept. 2nd *
Discussion: 1st MP and CFT readings

Reading: Genesis 5:25–9:28;
1 Enoch, Book of Watchers

Film: *Noah* (dir. Darren Aronofsky, 2014)

* Sept. 9th *
Discussion: *Noah* and related readings

Reading: CFT, 44–60; MP, 43–65

Film: *Babette’s Feast* (dir. Gabriel Axel, 1987)

* Sept. 16th *
Discussion: *Babette* and Readings

Reading: Exodus 1–20
Film: *The 10 Commandments* (Cecil B DeMille, 1956)

**Sept. 23**
Discussion: the era of the epics

Reading: MP 295–326

Film: *The Book of Eli* (Albert and Allen Hughes (the Hughes brothers), 2010)

**Sept. 30**
Discussion: *Eli* and MP reading

Reading: MP, 280–84, 327–50
CFT, 167–81

Film: *The Prince of Egypt* (Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner, and Simon Wells, 1998)

**Oct. 7**
Discussion: *Prince*, animation, and the Bible and ethics

Reading: CFT, 78-93
Genesis 1–2
MP, 351–83
Recommended: any of the essays edited by Kolker (2006) (see bibliography)

Film: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968)

**Oct. 14**
EXAM

Film: *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978)

**Oct. 21**
Discussion: *Superman* and searching for the Christ-figure

Reading: Gospel of Matthew;
MP, 203–07

Film: *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964)

**Oct. 28**
Discussion: Pasolini and the Jesus film genre

Reading: MP, 385–420
Film: *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* (Terry Jones, 1979)

**Nov. 4**
Discussion: *Brian* and MP reading

Reading: MP, 421–44

Film: *The Green Mile* (Frank Darabont, 1999)

**Nov. 11**
BOOK REVIEW DUE

Discussion: Reinhartz and Walsh on Jesus on screen;

Reading: CFT, 266–88, and 214–35

Film: *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Norman Jewison, 1973) and *Godspell* (David Greene, 1973)

**Nov. 18**
Discussion: Jesus and the musical

Reading: CFT, 137–48;


**Nov. 25** –No Class

**Dec. 2**
Discussion: *Blade Runner* and Black reading

Reading: Gospel of Mark;
rec: Jeffrey Staley, “Meeting Patch Again for the First Time,” in *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections between Scripture and Film*. Aichele and Walsh, eds.

Film: *Patch Adams* (Tom Shadyac, 1998)

**Dec. 9**
FILM REVIEW DUE
Discussion: *Patch* and the ethics of compassion

Film: *Jesus of Montreal* (Denys Arcand, 1989)

**Bibliography**


