

THE MOVIES AND GOD:
RELIGION THROUGH THE EYES OF FILMMAKERS

Theology

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday; 6:30 - 10:00 pm

Instructor

Jim L. Papandrea, Ph. D.
office hours by appointment

Course Description

The third century theologian Tertullian had asked the question, "What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?" A contemporary version of the same question might be, "What does Jerusalem have to do with Hollywood?" In our society, opinions and popular philosophies are often shaped and swayed by secular art forms and entertainment media. This course will examine films which present religion or religious people to the viewer, using class discussion and short written assignments to assess a film's impact on its audience.

It is hoped that the student will begin to see beyond the all-too familiar medium of "the movies," and understand that films are bearers of messages. Throughout this course the student should begin to learn to evaluate films beyond their surface entertainment value, as interpretations of sacred texts, and as commentaries on the values of society.

Note: Sorry, but this class does not fulfill a General Education requirement

Course Requirements

Each class meeting will consist of viewing one film, along with a short introduction, and a discussion on the religious elements of the film. It is expected that all positions and opinions will be respected in our discussions, and no sincere question will be excluded from our exploration. Reading assignments are to be done before each class meeting. Late assignments will be reduced in grade by one third of one letter for each class meeting that the assignment is late (one week late equals one whole letter grade), unless previous arrangements are made with the instructor, or in the case of emergencies, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the instructor. Assignments turned in after the end of the course will not be accepted, except in extreme cases, and then only at the instructor's discretion. All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course.

Required Reading

The Oxford Annotated Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version

Class participation: Attendance, reading preparation, and class discussion will effect the course grade, especially in the case of a borderline final grade. Students must bring their Bibles to each class (New Revised Standard Version only), and be prepared to read aloud when called upon. Students may be expected to participate in small group discussions, and share the observations and conclusions of those discussions with the class.

Essays: Each student will write four essays, of 4 or 5 pages each. There will be one essay for each week, to be written about one of the films viewed and discussed that week. The papers should answer these questions: **What religious elements or symbols are used in the film? How are religious people portrayed in the film? How well does the film interpret and/or transmit sacred texts or religious concepts? What religious themes, beliefs, or values emerge through the film? Does the filmmaker seem to have a particular religious or political agenda? Is there a lesson to be learned from the past, or a warning about the future?**

Final Exam: The final exam is the 4th essay. The final exam is due Thursday, January 30th (the last class meeting) at the beginning of class. Therefore, you will not be able to write on the last film we see. Turn in the exam in a large envelope, and include your own campus box number for return. If you would like to receive your exam by US mail, include your mailing address and correct postage.

Please Note:

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this course, please contact the Director of Advising at 103 Goebel Hall (617-3450).

Tentative Film Schedule

Week 1: Will the real Jesus Christ please stand up... please stand up...

January 7: Jesus of Montreal

January 8: The Fifth Element - Read Bible: Gospel of John, chapters 1-4, 14-21
Read Handout: The Nicene Creed

January 9: The Matrix - Read Handout: Matrix websites

Week 2: Good vs. Evil

January 14: Pleasantville - Read Bible: Genesis, chapters 1-3

January 15: The Exorcist - Read Bible: Matthew, chap. 8 & 17; Acts, chap. 19

January 16: Star Wars - Read Handout

Week 3: Comedy & Blasphemy

January 21: Monty Python's Life of Brian - Read Bible: Matthew, chap. 1 - 7

January 22: Jesus Christ Superstar - Read Bible: Gospel of John, chap. 13

January 23: Dogma - Read Handouts

Week 4: The Question of Providence and Free Will

January 28: The Time Machine (Original) Read Bible: Romans, chap. 8-10

January 29: Signs - Reading assignment TBA

January 30: The Devil's Advocate