

RE330:

The Bible in Contemporary American Film

Syllabus



Resources



Film List



Course Contract

Skidmore College
Summer Session I
May 29th-June 29th, 2001
Class Times: M-Th., 3:45-6:15 p.m.
Class Location: TLC 201
Instructor: Prof. Nicola Denzey

Course Description:

Within the past three years, Hollywood has released an unprecedented streak of films which explore directly or indirectly Biblical religious themes and symbols: miracles (The Third Miracle; Touch); apocalyptic (End of Days; The Devil's Advocate); demonology (Fallen; The Ninth Gate); dogmatism (Dogma), and the spiritual journey (The Matrix; Stigmata). These films have been offered in wide cinematic release; they all feature huge budgets and today's most marketable stars. If Hollywood's obsession with Christianity tells us anything, it's that religious symbols have not lost their potency, even for self-proclaimed atheist slackers of Generation X. Although many of us lack a deep enough understanding of these themes to fully appreciate them, we remain profoundly fascinated by religious symbolism, in however inchoate and garbled a form. This course investigates the inflections of Christianity in modern Hollywood film. Along with regular film viewings, we will be reading sections of the Old and New Testaments as well as other ancient extra-biblical writings, and drawing on contemporary methodologies from cinema studies.

Readings and Films:

We will focus on this class on primary source readings from the Bible, and secondary readings from selected academic journal articles. I have ordered some copies of the HarperCollins Study Bible in case you do not have your own academic Bible; it's a fine investment.

Many of the secondary readings are available here on the course web site. I strongly recommend that you download these texts, print them for your own use, read and comment on the hard-copies, then bring these to class. The films we are watching should be readily available for rental, if you need to re-view them after we have seen them in class.

Some of the films viewed in this course contain scenes of explicit sex and violence, brutality, and offensive language. It is not my intention to de-sensitize students, but rather to enable them to discuss the relevant issues that these films introduce.

Important: make sure you bring your Bible to each class.

Course Format:

This will be predominantly a seminar course, though certain classes will

be conducted as seminars. I will lead off each week with an overview of the week's theme. This is a long class, since it's been reconfigured from 3 to 4 credits, like all Religion courses in the Dept. of Philosophy and Religion., so we will be meeting 4 days a week, for 2 1/2 hours each day. We will take breaks! We will be watching sixteen films together over the course of four weeks just about one every class. Many of these films you have seen before; some you likely have not. It's important that we see these together, together. I will also be using a controversial "technique" for viewing these films as a class; we will be stopping them frequently, in the middle of the action, to comment on things or to read passages of primary or secondary source material. You may find this frustrating, but the point of this class is not for you to put up your feet, munch your popcorn, and be babysat or entertained for a few hours; the point of this class is to make you more thoughtful, educated consumers of popular culture and critical thinkers.