



FALL, 2009

FAITH AND FILM

TC-847

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course uses the medium of film as an avenue for reflection upon the meaning and truth of the Christian gospel as well as its communication and embodiment in contemporary culture. The course will use a broad cross-section of film to open up creative windows for understanding and communicating the Christian faith, and it will also assist the student in thinking critically about film from a variety of theoretical and theological perspectives.

METHOD:

The course will combine film screenings and discussion with accompanying readings and lectures.

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READING QUIZZES

The following are required reading for this course:

- Deacy, Christopher and Gaye Williams Ortiz, *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/Secular Divide* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).
- Johnston, Robert K, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue, Revised and Expanded* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). **BE SURE TO GET THE NEW 2006 EDITION**
- Miles, Margaret R., *Seeing and Believing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).
- Stone, Bryan P., *Faith and Film* (St. Louis: Chalice Press 2000).

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class attendance is required at all sessions listed in the course schedule. If, in the professor's opinion, the student is missing too many class sessions or is not actively participating, this can affect the student's final grade —sometimes seriously. Punctual attendance is especially crucial in a class of this nature, since a basic platform of the course is that film should be watched together and reflected on together to have optimal theological benefit. Please be on time! No one likes it when people come in late to watch a film!! Please consult with the professor ahead of time if you believe you will have difficulties in this area. Note: talking, texting, and working on a laptop are forbidden during all film screenings.

READING RESPONSE PAPERS

On March 17, all students should bring to class **two copies** of a short, **two-page** response to *Seeing and Believing*, by Margaret Miles. This counts as two quizzes. The paper should be typed, **single-spaced**, using a standard 12-pt. font with 1" margins. Some of these will be read in class. This response paper should be divided into two equal parts:

On the first page, provide a *brief summary* of the reading and of the author's overall thesis and argument. What do you understand the author to be saying? How does the author develop this thesis in the reading? Do not give a chapter by chapter summary of the book. Instead, provide a comprehensive summary, referring to individual chapters only to show how her argument is substantiated.

On the second page, interact critically with and evaluate the reading. What did you find helpful, provocative, useful, disturbing, difficult, or faulty? Why? A scholarly evaluation is not merely a statement such as "I liked this..." or "I didn't like that..." (in fact, avoid the first person altogether if possible), but rather a thoughtful, reasoned reflection on what you understand the author to be saying.

Failure to maintain an adequate balance between these two sections will result in a serious grade reduction on the paper, possibly even a failing grade.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The instructor will conscientiously attempt and all students are urged to use inclusive language, images, and metaphors in both their speaking and writing.

LATE POLICY

No papers will be accepted late, and quizzes may only be taken at the times when they are scheduled

MOVIE PRÉCIS¹

Each student will be asked to write a “Movie Précis” on two movies of his or her choice during the semester. The films should be selected on the basis of their importance or potential in illuminating the contemporary human predicament, shaping values, or critically evaluating and communicating the symbols, practices, and beliefs of the Christian faith. See course schedule for due dates. Each movie précis should be 8-10 pages, double-spaced, and should include the following. Please indicate each of the four headings in your paper so that it is clear both to you and the reader when you are doing each of the four parts:

Part 1: Introduction: In one paragraph (or brief bullets in no more than 1/4 of a page), provide all pertinent data such as title, date, language/country, genre, color or B/W, production company, director, producer, primary actors, and rating.

Part 2: Context: (1-2 pages) What is the (a) cinematic context (other movies by same director or producer, remakes, parallel movies and (b) historical, social, and cultural context (what was going on in the culture of the time?)

Part 3: Film Analysis (2-3 pages)

(a) Plot & Character Development: (no more than 1 page) What is the main theme or central premise of the film in brief? For example, is there a protagonist who wants something? What are the obstacles causing conflict and what is the outcome or resolution? Is there an underlying subtext (a hidden agenda or message repeated subtly)? Trace the film’s development of the central character(s) throughout the course of the film (e.g., paralysis, growth, decline, fragmentation, redemption).

(b) Cinematic analysis: How does the world of the film projected on screen contribute to the story-telling and to the viewer’s experience? Here you may want to discuss such items as lighting, camera angles, sound, sound editing, composition, spacing, depth of field, distance of shots, set, props, costumes, art direction, etc. You might also want to consider how the editing of the film contributes to the story-telling and to the viewer’s experience. The important thing here is to interpret the key religious or existential issue(s), question(s), or claim(s) you have identified with reference to how it (they) surface in the film “as a piece of film” (i.e. through imagery, editing, symbols, mise-en-scène, music, lighting, camera work, etc.). Also, be sure to provide evidence through appropriate citations and bibliography of your research.

Part 4: Theological Analysis (2-3 pages)

(a) Identify the issue to be considered. What faith claim(s) or existential/religious issue(s) does the film communicate, challenge, or engage either implicitly or explicitly and how does the film do this? Some of these faith claims might have to do with *worldview* (nature of ultimate reality, God, universe, human nature, knowledge, nature of evil, history, etc.), *ethics* (values of life, death, wealth, sex, gender, race, justice, relations with neighbor, environment, etc.), or perhaps meaning and beauty.

(b) Engage the issue theologically. Having identified the issue, construct a dialogue between the film’s implicit or explicit faith claims and those of the Christian faith for the purposes of mutual critique and

¹ My appreciation to Prof. John Castelein, Lincoln Christian Seminary, from whom I have adapted this assignment.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any students in this course who have a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with the instructor as soon as possible to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure your full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.

PLAGIARISM


Do not plagiarize.

clarification. Here you need to show that you have done theological research in addition to cinematic research complete with appropriate citations and bibliographic references. Draw upon Christian theological, ethical, or scriptural resources in considering the claim(s), issue(s), or question(s) raised by the film. Consider also whether the film utilizes any symbols that have theological significance for reconstructing or communicating the Christian faith.

(c) Communicating the Gospel. It may be useful to consider whether there are obstacles or advantages of entering into dialogue with this film for the purposes of carrying out a ministry of evangelism, liturgy, preaching, counseling, religious education, or spiritual formation. If so, feel free to discuss these at the end of the paper.

ASSIGNMENT	POINTS
Quizzes and Reading Response Paper (8 x 5 points)	40 points
Movie Précis (Each one is 30 points)	60 points
Total	100 points

COURSE CALENDAR

<p>CONTACT (1997, PG, Science-Fiction)</p> <p><i>“I believe”</i> (What is the nature of religious faith in a secular world?)</p>	<p>WEDNESDAY, SEP 2 3:00-7:00PM</p>	
<p>2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968, PG, Science Fiction)</p> <p><i>“Creator of heaven and earth”</i> (What does it mean to speak of God as “creator” and humans as created in God’s image?)</p> <p>Quiz #1: Johnston (1-86), Stone (1-38)</p>	<p>WED, SEP 9, 3:00-7:00PM</p>	
<p>JESUS OF MONTREAL (1989, R, Drama)</p> <p><i>“Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord”</i> (What does it mean to speak of Jesus as the “Christ”?)</p> <p>Quiz #2: Deacy and Ortiz (vii-75), Stone (39-49),</p>	<p>WED, SEP 16, 3:00-7:00PM</p>	
<p>STUDENTS' CHOICE</p> <p>No reading is scheduled during this week to assist students in focusing on preparing the first film précis. Also, the Center for Practical Theology Annual Lecture begins at 6pm.</p>		

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST MATTHEW

(1966, G, Religious)

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary”

WED, SEP 30, 3:00-7:00PM

(Who was Jesus of Nazareth and what was his message?)

Film Précis #1 is due at the beginning of class by e-mail attachment to bpstone@bu.edu.



ROMERO

(1995, R, Drama)

“Suffered under Pontius Pilate”

(For the Christian, what is the proper relationship between faith and politics?)

WED, OCT 7, 3:00-7:00PM

Quiz #3: Johnston (87-162), Stone (50-80)



THE ROAD

(2009, Sci Fi Drama)

We hope to schedule an advance screening of this film and discussion with Prof. Shelly Rambo on Wed, Oct 14. The film is scheduled to be released on Friday, Oct 16. So if we can't get an advanced screening, we'll take a field trip to the movie theatre and move our class time to Friday afternoon.

WED, OCT 14, 3:00-7:00PM

Quiz #4: Johnston (163-290)



ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

(1975, R, Drama)

“He was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended to the dead.”

WED, OCT 21, 3:00-7:00PM

(How does Jesus' death relate to our salvation?)

Reading Response Paper on Miles, *Seeing and Believing*. This paper counts as two quizzes.



FLATLINERS

(1990, R, Horror)

WED, OCT 28, 3:00-7:00PM

“He Will Come Again to Judge the Living and the Dead”
(Does what we do ultimately matter? What does it mean to be “judged” by God?)

Quiz #5: Stone (81-132), Deacy and Ortiz (123-59)



THE MISSION

(1986, PG, Drama)

WED, NOV 4, 3:00-7:00PM

“The holy catholic church”
(What is the nature and purpose of the church?)

No reading is scheduled during this week to assist students in focusing on preparing the second film précis.



BABETTE'S FEAST

(1987, G, Drama)

WED, NOV 18, 3:00-7:00PM

“The Communion of Saints”
(What do Christians mean in speaking of a “communion of saints”?)

Film Precis #2 is due at the beginning of class.



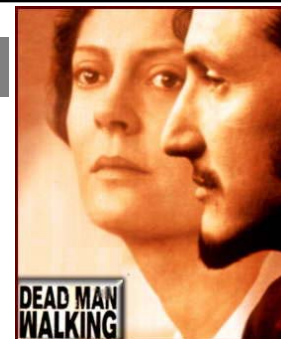
DEAD MAN WALKING

(1995, R, Drama)

WED, DEC 2, 3:00-7:00PM

“The forgiveness of sins”
(What do we mean by the forgiveness of sins? How does God forgive? How should we forgive?)

Quiz #6: Stone (122-166), Deacy and Ortiz (79-122)



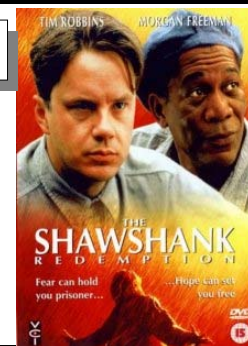
SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

(1994, R, Drama)

WED, DEC 9, 3:00-7:00PM

“The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting”
(What is the nature of Christian hope? For what do we hope?)

Quiz #7: Stone (167-189), Johnston (Deacy and Ortiz (160-211))



INDEPENDENT FILM VIEWING

Students should watch at least four of the following films on their own prior to October 21 and turning in the paper on Margaret Miles' book. Try to watch all eight if you really want to take in the full value of the book! We will try to place all of them on reserve in the library.

