

Andover Newton Theological School
THEO 712: Screening Theology: Theological Reflection In and Through Film
Fall 2008: Tuesdays 2:00-4:50 pm

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Description of Course:

Highlighting the possibility and potential of a relevant theology of culture, this course explores the ways in which recent Hollywood movies can be used as resources to think about and even to think over the meanings of key theological concepts such as ideas of God, human nature, sin, Christ, redemption, and eschatology. Through lectures, reading materials, the viewing of movies, and class discussion, students will be encouraged to consider how an appreciative and critical engagement with popular culture can allow for a relevant and contemporary practical theology.

Working Methodology:

This course will combine a lecture and seminar/dialogical format. It will also include extensive in-class film screening. Usually, during the first half of most class sessions, the course instructor will begin by reflecting on the film viewed in class the previous week. Following a fifteen minute recess, the remainder of each meeting will be devoted to an open discussion focusing on the film and the theme connected to it.

Main Texts to be Used:

1. Robert Johnston, Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue (Baker Academic, 2000).
2. Margaret Miles, Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies (Beacon, 1996).
3. Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz, editors, Explorations in Theology and Film, (Blackwell, 1997).
4. Chris Seay and Greg Garrett, The Gospel Reloaded: Exploring Spirituality and Faith in the Matrix (Pinon Press, 2003).
5. Peter Hodgson and Robert King, editors, Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks (Fortress Press, 1994).
6. Other readings will be assigned and made available (*).

Course Requirements:

1. Faithful attendance to class sessions. More than two absences will affect your overall grade for the course. More than three absences, not occasioned by serious medical reasons or some other life-altering circumstance, eliminates possibility of credit for the course.
2. Students will put together a journal throughout the semester, containing brief two-page reflections on the films viewed in class. It is recommended that these reflections be written on the week that proceeds the viewing of a film. These brief reflections will be gathered and turned in at the end of the semester.

3. Students will prepare a final paper of approximately 12 double-spaced pages, offering an analysis of a chosen film. This assignment should aim to provide an exegetical summary of the film and a theological exploration of some theme portrayed in the movie. Students should make use of scholarly sources when writing this final paper (e.g. academic theological texts; cultural theory/studies texts, film theory/studies texts, etc., etc.). Other popular sources such as newspaper articles, newspaper reviews, Church magazine articles, among other things, can also be used to complement the more scholarly sources employed. These papers will be evaluated for scholarly adeptness, critical insight, creativeness, and overall writing efficiency. This final assignment is due on the final day of class (December 9, 2008). To improve on your writing skills and form, I recommend the following writing resource book: Your Indispensable Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology by Nancy Jean Vyhmeister (Zondervan Publishing, 2002).

Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

I. (September 9)- Introduction to the course; its topic; and each other.

II. (September 16)- “Reel Theology: Reflections on the Confluence of Theological Thought, Culture, and Film.”

Readings: Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz, Explorations in Theology and Film, (Chapters 1-3).
Robert Johnston, Reel Spirituality, (Chapters 2-4).
Margaret Miles, Seeing and Believing, (Preface, and Chapter 1).

*****No Class on Tuesday, September 23 (Community Day)*****

III. (September 30)- “Lights, Camera, God-Talk: Thinking About God In and Through Film.”

***** In-Class Screening of *Bruce Almighty* *****

IV. (October 7)- “Lights, Camera, God-Talk: Thinking About God In and Through Film.”

Readings: Peter Hodgson & Robert King, eds. Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks (Chapter 3).*
Gordon Kaufman, In the beginning...Creativity (Prologue).*
Gordon Kaufman, God The Problem (Chapter 3).*

V. (October 14)- “Escape From Paradise: Theological Anthropology In and Through Film .”

***** In-Class Screening of *The Truman Show* *****

VI. (October 21)- “Escape From Paradise: Theological Anthropology In and Through Film .”
Readings: Adele Reinhartz, Scripture On The Silver Screen (Intro., and Chapter 1).*
Hodgson and King, Christian Theology, (Chapters 6 and 7)

VII. (October 28)-“Is This Real or Just a Dream?: Human Estrangement and Faith.”

***** In-Class Screening of *The Matrix (Part I)******

VIII.(November 4)-“Is This Real or Just a Dream?: Human Estrangement and Faith.”
Readings: Chris Seay and Greg Garret, The Gospel Reloaded, (Entire Book).

IX. (November 11)- “From The Manger to The Cross, and to The Screen: Jesus Christ in Film.”

***** In-Class Screening of *The Last Temptation of Christ******

X. (November 18)- “From The Manger to The Cross, and to The Screen: Jesus Christ in Film.”
Readings: Margaret Miles, Seeing and Believing, (Chapter 2).
Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz, Explorations in Theology and Film, (Chapter 9).

*****No Class on Tuesday, November 25th (Thanksgiving Recess)*****

XI. (December 2)- “Imagining The End: Cinematic Visions of Apocalypse.”

***** In-Class Screening of *Children of Men******

XII. (December 9)- “Imagining The End: Cinematic Visions of Apocalypse.”

Readings: Paul Hanson, The Dawn of Apocalyptic, (Chapter 2).*
Stephen Cook, The Apocalyptic Literature, (Chapter 1 and 3).*
Gerhard Sauter, What Dare We Hope? (Chapter 1).*
Hodgson and King, Christian Theology, (Chapter 12).

***Final Papers are Due!**