

Fall 2015  
Professor Wasserman  
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Hybrid, T/F 12:35-1:55, RAB 104  
Tues meetings Face to Face  
Fri meetings Online

Office hours:  
Tues 11-12 (Loree 110, Douglas)  
Tues 2:30-3:30 (B & N, College Ave)  
Skype/Adobe Connect, by appt.

### **RELIGION 120: JESUS AT THE MOVIES**

This course focuses on representations of Jesus of Nazareth in 20<sup>th</sup>-century film, paying particular attention to the ways that writers, directors, and production-teams creatively retell Jesus stories to meet changing interests and pre-occupations. We will begin by investigating films as forms of entertainment, technological products, and object of artistic, social, and historical analysis. We will then treat early textual representations of Jesus's life drawn from the canonical and non-canonical gospels before returning to the media of film. We will explore the early silent films such as the King of Kings (DeMille, 1927), later big budget epics such as The Greatest Story Ever Told (Stevens, 1965), The Last Temptation of Christ (Scorsese, 1988), and the Passion of Christ (Gibson, 2004). We will also consider musicals such as Jesus Christ Superstar and the less mainstream, art-house films by Pier Pasolini and Denys Arcand.

1. One in-class midterm scheduled for Oct. 20, to be geared towards paper-writing. Students will prepare responses to essay questions circulated in advance and then write them during the 80 minute class period. 20%
2. Two short papers (1500-2000 words), to be revised in response to comments from the instructor and from peer reviewers. 30% total.
  - a. The first short paper will be a rewrite of one of the essay questions from the midterm. 15%
  - b. The second short paper will consider the adaptation of biblical texts in film, focusing in on one or two particularly rich scenes (topics to be distributed in advance). 15%
3. One take-home final paper, approx. 2000-2500 words, to be turned in by Dec. 22. 25%
4. Participation in face-to-face and online discussion. 25%
  - a. In addition to the regular meetings each Tuesday, there are two types of online discussion projects to be completed weekly:
    - i. Pre-discussion forum posts: in smaller forum groups (TBA), students will post reading reflections at least once per week and later respond to at least one of their peers. Forum posts (min. 100 words) must be uploaded by 11:55 pm on Thursday. Responses to at least one of their peers (min. 50 words) must be completed by the next class-period (typically Tues. at 12:35).
    - ii. Online chat via Adobe Connect (to be used in Chrome or Firefox); typically scheduled for Fridays during the normal meeting time and lasting about 40 minutes; the first will begin at 12:35 and the second at

- 1:15. If you have a major, unavoidable conflict with either of these time-slots, please notify the professor ASAP.
- b. The standards by which I grade participation are attached to the bottom of this syllabus. Please familiarize yourself with these standards. Participation is an active and rewarding process which requires more than mere attendance.

Books required for purchase:

1. There are two major study Bibles that are appropriate for the study-of-religion perspective we will adopt in this course: *The Harper-Collins Study Bible* (e.g. <http://www.amazon.com/HarperCollins-Study-Bible-Student-Edition/dp/0060786841>) and *The Oxford Annotated Bible* (e.g. <http://www.amazon.com/The-Oxford-Annotated-Bible-Apocrypha/dp/0195289609>). You must purchase one of them and bring it with you beginning with the third week of class.
2. Throckmorton, *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels, NRSV Version* (1992). You will need to have a copy in hand by the fourth week of class.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE; PLEASE CHECK THE SYLLABUS ON SAKAI (AND THE SAKAI PAGES) TO STAY UP-TO-DATE**

### **WEEK 1: FILM AND REPRESENTATION**

Tuesday 9/1: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. During the first class we will go over the syllabus and then screen and discuss some film clips.

Friday 9/4: Online Meeting

Prepare the following before Friday's discussion:

1. *Shane* (George Stevens, 1952, 117 minutes); *take notes as you watch the film to remind yourself of particularly interesting and important scenes or images.*
2. Steven J. Ross, "Introduction: Why Films Matter," in *Movies and American Society*, 1–11; John Storey, "Film," in *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods*, 54–74 (skim p. 61–67, starting with the first full paragraph on p. 61).
3. View the online lectures on the readings (Approx. 30 mins. total) and take the comprehension quiz or quizzes
4. Forum reflection posts (min. 100 words), to be posted by 11:55 pm on Thurs. See the Sakai page "Week 1: Online" for the forum links and to find out which Forum-group you should post to.

Online live chat session using Adobe Connect: Friday 12:35 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15 (Chat-room 2). We will have a shorter chat session this week (about 20 mins.); please use the extra time to begin watching the film for next week: *Ben-Hur* (W. Wyler, 1957), which runs for 212 minutes.

## WEEK 2 (SHORT WEEK): SCREENING THE ANCIENT PAST: BEN-HUR

Tuesday 9/8: No Class (change of class-day schedule)

Fri 9/11: Online Meeting

Prepare the following before Friday's discussion:

1. Post peer responses to the forums from last week (min. 50 words).
2. Ben-Hur (William Wyler, 1959; 212 min); *take notes!*
3. Jeffrey Richards, *Hollywood's Ancient Worlds*, 53–83; focus on 54–58 (a general introduction) and 78–83 (on Ben-Hur); you may skim the overview of other films in the middle.
4. Post a new forum reflection (min. 100 words) by 11:55 pm on Thurs.
5. Watch the online lecture (20 mins.) and complete the comprehension quiz by 12:35 on Fri.

Online live chat session using Adobe Connect: Friday 12:35 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15 (Chat-room 2).

## WEEK 3: OTHER KINDS OF REPRESENTATION: JESUS IN THE GOSPELS

Tuesday 9/15: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Peer forum responses for last week (50 words min.)
2. Watch the short video: "What is the bible?"  
<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/tools/video-gallery/w/what-is-the-bible-beal.aspx>
3. Bart Ehrman, "Text Criticism," *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 487–500
4. Mark 1–5 (i.e. Mark 1:1–5:43)
5. Prepare for an in-class quiz on the readings

Friday 9/18: Online Meeting

1. Ehrman "Chap. 1: What is the New Testament?" (1–16)
2. Mark 6–16
3. Online Lecture (20–25 minutes) and comprehension quiz
4. Forum posts

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

## WEEK 4: MATTHEW, LUKE, AND THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

Tuesday 9/22: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Peer forum responses (50 words min.)
2. Matthew 1–17
3. Ehrman, "Chap. 4: The Jewish Context of Jesus and His Followers," (49–68)

Friday 9/25: Online Meeting

1. Matthew 18–28
2. Luke 1–8
3. Online lecture on Matthew, Luke, and the Synoptic Problem (20–25 min) and comprehension quiz or quizzes
4. Forum posts

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

## **WEEK 5: THE CURIOUS CASES OF LUKE-ACTS AND JOHN**

Tuesday 9/29: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Peer forum response
2. Luke 9–24
3. Acts 1
4. John 1–2

Friday 10/2: Online Meeting

1. John (the whole thing!)
2. Online lecture on Luke and on John; comprehension quiz
3. Forum posts

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

## **WEEK 6: THE BIRTH OF CINEMA AND EARLY JESUS FILMS**

Tuesday 10/6: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Peer forum responses
2. From the Manger to the Cross (1912; clips only)
3. Screen King of Kings (Cecil B. DeMille, 1927; 155 mins.)
4. Adele Reinhartz, “Jesus on the Silver Screen,” in *Jesus of Hollywood*, 3–15

Friday: 10/9: Online Meeting

1. Cecil B. DeMille, “The Screen as a Religious Teacher,” *Theatre* (June 1927)
2. Stern et. al. *Cinematic Savior*, p. 47–57
3. Online lecture and quiz
4. Forum posts

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2)

## **WEEK 7: EPICS AND EPIC DECISIONS**

Tuesday 10/13: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Peer forum responses
2. Sonja Spear, “Claiming the Passion: American Fantasies of the Oberammergau Passion Play, 1923–1947,” 832–862; *this is a scholarly article; be sure to read carefully and take notes!*

Friday 10/16: Online Meeting

1. The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965, George Stevens; 199 mins)
2. Stern et al., pp. 149–160
3. Humphries-Brooks, 39–54
4. Online lecture and quiz
5. Forum posts

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

## **WEEK 8: OF MIDTERMS AND MUSICALS**

Monday 10/19 (Time TBD): online chat review session using Adobe Connect

Tuesday 10/20: In-class midterm; the exam will consist of essays to be prepared in advance but written during the regular 80 minute class period.

Friday: 10/23: Online Meeting

1. Jesus Christ-Super Star (N. Jewison, 1973; 108 mins.)
2. Mark Goodacre, “Do You Think You're What They Say You Are? Reflections on Jesus Christ Superstar,” *Journal of Religion and Film* 3:2 (Oct 1999).
3. Forum posts
4. (No lecture)

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

## **WEEK 9: OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM: PASOLINI'S JESUS FILM**

Tuesday 10/27: Face-to Face Meeting

1. Peer forum responses
2. *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (Pier Pasolini, 1964; 137 mins)
3. Stern et al., *Cinematic Savior*, 114–124

Thursday 10/30: Online Meeting

1. Bart Testa, “To Film a Gospel . . . and Advent of the Theoretical Stranger,” in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa, 180–189. *This is an important but sometimes technical scholarly essay, so please read carefully.*
2. “Sopraluoghi in Palestina, and the Gospel According to St. Matthew,” from *Pasolini on Pasolini: Interviews with Oswald Stack*, 73–98.
3. Online lecture and quiz
4. Forum posts

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

## **WEEK 10: CREATIVITY AND CONTROVERSY: THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST**

**Monday, 11/2: First paper due by 12:00 noon; no late submissions will be accepted without a written excuse from an MD or Dean.**

Tues 11/3: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Peer responses to forum discussion
2. *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese, 1988; 164 mins.)
3. Stern et al., *Cinematic Savior*, 285–95

Fri: 11/6: Online Meeting

1. Robin Riley, *Film, Faith, and Cultural Conflict: The Case of Martin Scorsese's The Last Temptation of Christ*, 11–34.
2. Andrew Greeley, "Scorsese's Last Temptation Offers a Profound Religious Challenge," *New York Times* (August 14, 1988): 1, 22
3. Online lecture and quiz
4. Forum posts
5. Peer review responses to two other papers (to be distributed on Mon. 11/2)

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

## **WEEK 11: CREATIVITY WITHOUT CONTROVERSY: A "POST-MODERN" JESUS**

**Monday, 11/8: Final draft of the first paper due by 12:00 noon; no late papers will be accepted without a written excuse.**

Tuesday 11/9: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Peer responses to forums
2. *Jesus of Montreal* (D. Arcand, 1989; 120 mins.)
3. Stern et. al., *Cinematic Savior*, 321–333

Friday 11/13: Online Meeting

1. Mary Alemany-Galway, "Jesus of Montreal," in *A Postmodern Cinema: The Voice of the Other in Canadian Film*, 141–65
2. Adele Reinhartz, "History and Anti-History," in *Jesus of Hollywood*, 21–40
3. Online lectures and quizzes
4. Forum posts

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

## **WEEK 12: THE RETURN OF THE EPIC? MEL GIBSON'S PASSION OF CHRIST**

Tuesday 11/17: Face-to-Face Meeting

1. Peer responses to the forums
2. *The Passion of the Christ* (2004, Mel Gibson; 127 mins)
3. Paula Fredriksen, "Gospel Truths: Hollywood, History, and Christianity," in *On The Passion of the Christ*, 31–47

Friday 11/20: Forum discussions (no online chat)

1. Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, "The Medieval Passion Play Revisited," in *Re-Viewing The Passion*, ed. S. Brent Plate, 3–18

2. Mark Silk, “Almost a Culture War: The Making of The Passion Controversy,” in *After The Passion is Gone: American Religious Consequences*, ed. J. Shawn Landres and Michael Berenbaum, 23–32.
3. Stephen Prince, “Beholding Blood Sacrifice in The Passion of the Christ: How Real is Movie Violence?” *Film Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2006): 11–22. *This article offers a valuable perspective drawn from film studies; it is sometimes technical but the lecture should help to clarify some of the more difficult terms or arguments.*
4. Online lectures and quizzes
5. Forum posts: instead of the usual online chat session, please write and post forum responses to each of the three readings (min. 100 words each) by Friday at 12:35; then post 3 peer-responses by 1:55 (min. 50 words each).

No online discussion/chat sessions

### **WEEK 13: SECOND PAPER AND PEER REVIEW EXERCISE**

**Monday 11/23: Second Paper due by 12:00 noon; no late papers will be accepted without a written excuse.**

Tues 11/24: Online Peer-Review Exercise

1. Read the papers written by 2 other students (to be distributed by Monday afternoon)
2. Write responses and critical suggestions to both papers as forum posts (minimum 150 words each); post these by the end of the normal class period at 1:55.

Friday 11/27: Happy Thanksgiving!

### **WEEK 14: SYNTHESIZING INTERPRETATIONS**

Tuesday: 12/1: Face-to-Face Meeting: Jesus as a Jew

1. Reinhartz, *Jesus of Hollywood*, 43–63 (plus notes)
2. Check in with the professor about your plans for the final paper (during office hours or after class).

Friday 12/4: Online Meetings: God and Satan

1. Reinhartz, *Jesus of Hollywood*, 97–122 (plus notes)
2. Reinhartz, *Jesus of Hollywood*, 181–195 (plus notes)
3. Online lecture
4. Forum posts

Online live chat session: Friday 12:35–1:15 (Chat-room 1) and 1:15–1:55 (Chat-room 2).

### **WEEK 15: INSIDE THE CONFSSIONAL MATRIX**

**Monday 12/7: Turn in final draft of paper 2 by 12:00 noon; no late papers.**

Tuesday 12/8: Last Face to Face Meeting

1. Watch The Jesus Film (128 mins.) and study the promotional materials at <http://www.jesusfilm.org>

2. Check in with the professor about your plans for the final paper (during office hours or after class).

Tuesday 12/22: Final papers due by 7 pm. Extensions may be granted in exceptional cases but they must be requested well in advance.

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### Standards for Grading Student Participation in Class Discussions

A:

A student who receives an **A** for participation in discussion typically comes to every class with questions about the readings in mind. An **A** discussant engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others, and consistently elevates the level of discussion.

B:

A student who receives a **B** for participation in discussion typically does not always come to class with questions about the readings in mind. A **B** discussant waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some discussants in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.

C:

A student who receives a **C** for participation attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant, or an obstreperous one.

D:

A student who fails to attend regularly and prepare adequately for discussion risks the grade of **D or even F**

[These standards are adapted only slightly from those officially adopted by the Princeton University Department of History in 1998. They were authored primarily by Andrew Isenberg]