

# CINEMA AND RELIGION

Religion 240  
Spring Semester, 2004  
7:00-10:00, Tu; 11:00-12:20 Th  
Hoover #100

Joseph L. Price  
Platner #112  
Tu: 10:00-12:00  
W: 9:00-12:00

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of the course is to provide an introductory study of contemporary cinema as an art form that often presents religious issues and concerns in non-ecclesiastically oriented ways. Since artistic presentations do not conform neatly to the rubrics of a religious analysis, the order of the films (although grouped with some desire for design) is not intended to restrict the understanding of the films to the themes or categories under which they appear.

**RESOURCES:** Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 9th. ed. (G)  
Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality* (RJ)  
Musser and Price, *New & Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology* (MP)  
*Journal of Religion and Film*, [www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/index.html](http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/index.html)  
<http://movies.go.com/index.html>  
<http://www.imdb.com>

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation: Attendance at all regularly scheduled class meetings is required. More than three absences will result in failure of the course. Class participation includes the quality of contributions that students make to class meetings, and it incorporates classroom manners, such as showing respect for each other, and being alert and attentive. Personal viewing of the films on a VCR will not be counted as an adequate substitute for seeing the films with the class.

Readings: Completion of assigned reading is required for adequate participation in class and for discussion of the films.

Exams and Quizzes: Three scheduled exams will cover the information in assigned readings. In addition, there will be unannounced, in-class quizzes for which no "make-up" quizzes will be given. A final exam over the readings and films will be given on Thursday, May 13, 10:30 a.m.

Film Reports: Eight film reports, each 1-2 typewritten pages, will be due on Thursdays at the beginning of class. Guidelines for the film reports follow on the next page.

Film Reviews: Three film reviews, each approximately 5 typewritten pages, will be submitted on films seen in class or during possible film trips. The reviews will address the aesthetic character and religious significance of the films. Prompts for film reviews will be distributed the week before their due date.

<b>GRADING:</b>	Class Participation & Pop Quizzes	10% of the final course grade
	Film Reports	10% of the final course grade
	Film Reviews	30% of the final course grade
	Exams	30% of the final course grade
	Final Exam	20% of the final course grade

## **FILM REPORT GUIDELINES**

Using the prompts provided below, write a brief report about the film, striving for a condensed, coherent summary and analysis. The length of your reports should be approximately 2 pages, typewritten.

### Title of Film:

Provide the English title (and, where appropriate, the original language title) and the date of the film.

### Director:

Identify the director and indicate whether or not there are other significant films by this director. Where in the sequence of film making does this particular film fit in the oeuvre of the director?

### Characters:

Identify the characters and the actors portraying them. What motivates the characters? How effective is the actor in living that motivation? What matters most to the characters? What kinds of difficulties do they encounter? How is resolution to their difficulty worked out?

### Plot:

Summarize the plot. What is the central conflict or issue? How is it started? How is it resolved? Are there significant sub-plots? If so, how are they related to the dominant plot?

### Cinematic Techniques:

Identify distinct cinematic techniques that enhance or detract from the film. What kinds of perceptions or responses do the techniques elicit? Do the techniques draw attention to themselves or are they interwoven in supportive ways into the development of character or the execution of the plot?

### Religious Issues:

Identify religious themes articulated by characters or implied by action and techniques in the film. Does the director employ traditional religious images and symbols to provide a context for or contrast to characters' motivations and actions? How is the perception of religious themes, issues, and images affected by cinematic elements (e.g., cinematography, editing, mechanical movement, etc.)?

## SCHEDULE:

### TRANSCENDENT VARIATIONS

- Feb. 5 Introductions, Definitions, and Expectations
- Feb. 10 ***Close Encounters of the Third Kind***  
<http://wyoming.pacificnorthwestmovies.com/CloseEncountersOfTheThirdKind/>  
[www.dvdtalk.com/dvdsavant/s260ce3k.html](http://www.dvdtalk.com/dvdsavant/s260ce3k.html)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 1—“Photography.”  
*Handbook*, “Aesthetics,” “Experience-Religious,” “Revelation,” “Transcendence.”
- Feb. 12 Film Report #1 Due  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 1 (review)  
*Reel Spirituality*, Chapters 1-2
- Feb. 17 ***Contact***  
[www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/stonear2.htm](http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/stonear2.htm)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 3—“Movement.”  
*Handbook*, “Ambiguity,” “Faith,” “Science and Christianity,” “Technology.”
- Feb. 19 Film Report #2 Due  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 3 (review)  
*Reel Spirituality*, Chapters 3-4.

### RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

- Feb. 24 ***Whale Rider***  
[www.filmjournal.com/Article.cfm/PageID/77720435](http://www.filmjournal.com/Article.cfm/PageID/77720435)  
[www.maori.org.nz/](http://www.maori.org.nz/)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 2—“*Mise en Scene*”  
*Handbook*, “Myth,” “Symbol,” “Spirituality,” “Tradition.”
- Feb. 26 **EXAM #1**  
Film Report #3 Due
- Mar. 2 ***The Mission***  
[www.rottentomatoes.com/click/movie-1014027/reviews.php?critic=columns&sortby=default&page=1&rid=761897](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/click/movie-1014027/reviews.php?critic=columns&sortby=default&page=1&rid=761897)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 4—“Editing.”  
*Handbook*, “Culture,” “Liberation Theology,” “Missiology,” “Tragedy.”
- Mar. 4 FILM REVIEW #1 Due  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 4 (review)  
*Reel Spirituality*, Chapters 5-6

## **THE HUMAN CONDITION**

- Mar. 9      *Hannah and Her Sisters*  
[www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showarticle?item\\_id=1171](http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showarticle?item_id=1171)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 7—"Drama"  
*Handbook*, "Anthropology," "Existential Theology," "Sin," "Society."

## **QUEST FOR MEANING**

- Mar. 11      *Modern Times*  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 5—"Sound"  
*Handbook*, "Alienation," "Institutionalized Violence,"  
                  "Silence."  
                  Film Report #4 Due

## **SENSUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY**

- Mar. 16      *Like Water for Chocolate*  
[www.sparknotes.com/lit/likewater/context.html](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/likewater/context.html)  
[www.snopes.com/religion/sheet.htm](http://www.snopes.com/religion/sheet.htm)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 8—"Story"  
*Handbook*, "Embodiment," "Hope," "Imagination," "Love," "Paradox,"  
                  "Sexuality," "Spirituality."
- Mar. 18      **EXAM #2**  
                  Film Report #5 Due

## **GRACE**

- Mar. 30      *Babette's Feast*  
[www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/BabetteWW.htm](http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/BabetteWW.htm)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 1—"Photography"  
*Handbook*, "Ecclesiology," "Providence," "Ritual," "Sacrament."
- Apr. 1      Film Report #6 Due  
                  *Reel Spirituality*, Chapter 7

## **EVIL AND THE DEMONIC**

- Apr. 6      ***Silence of the Lambs***  
[www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert\\_reviews/1991/02/635014.html](http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/1991/02/635014.html)  
[www.filmsite.org/sile.html](http://www.filmsite.org/sile.html)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 6—“Acting”  
*Handbook*, “Ethics-Christian,” “Evil,” “Suffering,” “Terror.”
- Apr. 8                                  FILM REVIEW #2 Due

## **JUSTICE AND TRUTH**

- Apr. 13      ***Lone Star***  
[www.bostonreview.net/BR21.5/stone.html](http://www.bostonreview.net/BR21.5/stone.html)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 3—“Movement”  
*Handbook*, “Justice,” “Religion,” “Truth,” “Secularity.”
- Apr. 15                                  Film Report #7 Due  
*Reel Spirituality*, Chapter 8

## **SALVATION AND REDEMPTION**

- Apr. 20      ***Jesus of Montreal***  
[www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showarticle?item\\_id=172](http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showarticle?item_id=172)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 2—“Mise en Scene” (review)  
*Handbook*, “Atonement,” “Incarnation,” “Justification,” “Resurrection.”
- Apr. 22                                  Film Report #8 Due  
*Reel Spirituality*, Chapter 3
- Apr. 27      ***The Green Mile***  
[www.hollywoodjesus.com/green\\_mile.htm](http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/green_mile.htm)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 3—“Movement” (review)  
*Handbook*, “Authority,” “Freedom,” “Health,” “Miracles,” “Soteriology.”
- Apr. 29                                  EXAM #3
- May 4      ***Being There***  
[www.newciv.org/nl/newslog.php/\\_show\\_article/\\_a000097-000100/](http://www.newciv.org/nl/newslog.php/_show_article/_a000097-000100/)  
*Understanding Movies*, Chapter 6—“Acting”  
*Handbook*, “Epistemology,” “Hermeneutics,” “Christology.”
- May 6                                  FILM REVIEW #3 Due  
*Reel Spirituality*, Chapter 4

## **LAST AND FUTURE THINGS**

May 11

***Testament***

[www.csie.ntu.edu.tw/~ntucs82/PEOPLE/b2506017/sf/6k.html](http://www.csie.ntu.edu.tw/~ntucs82/PEOPLE/b2506017/sf/6k.html)

[www.tc.umn.edu/~yahnk001/filmteach/test-v.htm](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~yahnk001/filmteach/test-v.htm)

*Handbook*, "Eschatology," "Eternal Life," "Suffering," "Time."

May 13

Final Judgment: 10:30a.m.-12:30 p.m.