

Religion & Filmmaking – RS129

Westmont College

Spring, 2022

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This rigorous course considers film medium as a cultural phenomena that warrants investigation and engagement for its impact on religion, identity, society, and culture. Our course itself is considered a film studio, where we will learn technical skills, reflect theologically, and produce films. The course will focus on both the creative and interpretive processes involved in understanding and analyzing films as well as the production of film for a wide audience. As such, the course relates the interpretation and production of film as an integrative process of learning throughout the course. Topics covered are the theoretical, theological, and religious components of film, the materials and methods of media production, the major styles and genres of moving image media, and the relationship between film to world culture. The course includes lectures, readings, and discussion of theory and criticism and teaches basic filmmaking (i.e., preproduction planning, filming, lighting, audio, and postproduction) with a view of students completing film assignments throughout the semester and presenting a short film at the end of the semester.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Godawa, Brian. *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom & Discernment* (IVP, 2009).
- Johnston, Robert. *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue* (Baker Academic, 2006).
- Lumet, Sydney. *Making Movies* (Vintage, 1996).
- Plate, S. Brent. *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture: A Cross-Cultural Reader* (Palgrave, 2002).
- Articles posted on Canvas
- Five months rental of Adobe Creative Cloud (CC)
- One month rental of Lynda.com

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

- Goldman, William. *Adventures in the Screen Trade*
- Kael, Pauline. *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*
- Mamet, David. *On Directing Film*
- Pincus, Edward and Steven Ascher, *The Filmmakers Handbook*
- Schultz, Quentin. *Christianity and the Mass Media*

WEB RESOURCES

- Every Frame A Painting: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjFqcJQXGZ6T6sxyFB-5i6A>
- Rocketjump Film School: <https://school.rocketjump.com/learn>

Lessons From The Screenplay:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCErSSa3CaP_GJxmFpdjG9Jw

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. *Hermeneutical competence*: Students will apply close reading skills, scholarly resources, and critical methodologies in the interpretation of film and film production, with a view of engaging in thoughtful Christian reflection on their work.
2. *Theological judgment*: Students will think theologically about specific films and the genre of narrative film, identify theological claims and suggestions made in films, and evaluate them from orthodox Christian perspectives.
3. Students will demonstrate artistic processes and interpretive understanding in an artistic production. Evaluation will be based on paper assignments, discussion, and in a final production of a film.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and Participation (10%). Attendance is mandatory and subject to the policies of Westmont College. Failure to appear for any examination will result in an “F” for that examination. Beyond your attendance in class, the *Attendance and Participation* grade includes the following requirements:
 - A. Being an active member in class discussions: each student will lead a discussion of a class reading.
 - B. Technical aspects of filmmaking will be discussed each week.
2. Film reviews (10%). On most weeks, students will watch a film out of class and write a film review that *incorporates the material from class and readings*. Papers will be graded on the basis of content, grammar, style, and presentation (see *Grading Information and Instructions for Paper Formatting* sections below). Rules regarding plagiarism will be strictly enforced. Papers should be 300 to 400 words in length. Please italicize all book titles and foreign words. As a reminder, backup all your work, as extensions will not be given due to computer problems. Late papers will receive a 10% deduction in grade for each late day and will not receive written comments on the paper.
4. Filmmaking Assignments (except for Final Production) (30%). Each film counts for 10%.
5. Midterm Examination (20%). This Midterm paper assignment will cover course readings, class discussions, and outside assignments.
6. Final project (30%), short film, including script, treatment, and pitch. Each student group will submit and show a completed short film at the end of the semester. The film will demonstrate sophisticated treatment of a topic and incorporate all pertinent technical components of preproduction, production, and postproduction learned in class. More details will be given in the course. Since this assignment serves as the final project of the course, students need to provide their best work and attention in creating the short film.

GRADING INFORMATION

Grading criteria include correctness, completeness, precision, depth, grammar, presentation, and coherence of your answer. The importance of the argument is also important in evaluating papers. The following is a brief explanation of how I distinguish among grades.

100-90%: Superior work that involves something more than mere competence. This work entails depth of analysis, imaginative insight, careful synthesis of the material, and an attention to detail that hints at a nuanced and subtle analysis. This level work requires superb grammar, presentation, and content. This level of work is distinguished from lower levels by its qualitative difference.

89-80%: Good work that is solid, on target, and competent. It does not mislead. This level work states the important points and explains them adequately and competently. Work at this level attends carefully to the assignment, fulfilling each component of it. In examinations this requires answering the question in full. In papers it means exploring a carefully delineated topic or text as carefully and as fully as space allows.

79-70%: Acceptable but flawed work. This work may be flawed in different respects: missing the target, not quite seeing the point, misunderstanding what the question asks for, struggling for clarity. The work still demonstrates a grappling with the material and ideas in a plausible manner. In examinations, such work may make ambiguous points or use imprecise terms and concepts. Such work typically does not construct arguments well or misses some crucial points implied in the question. This level of work still evidences a general sense of the issues and a capacity to think about them. This level essay frequently is quite short in length.

69-60%: Unacceptable but passing work. This work usually demonstrates only a rudimentary awareness of the issues or problems, but even this is often confused by acute writing difficulties or an inattentiveness to the question. This level essay is typically quite short.

59-50%: Unacceptable and unpassable work.

INSTRUCTION FOR PAPER FORMATTING

1. In the upper right-hand corner type your name, the date, the course number, and the number of words in the paper. Never use a cover sheet.
2. Two lines down, centered, type the title of your paper.
3. Use the Times New Roman 12-point font.
4. Set your line spacing to double.
5. Use one-inch margins on all sides.
6. Place page numbers in the lower center of all pages except the first.
7. Staple the assignment (if more than one page) in the upper left-hand corner.

CLASS ETIQUETTE

1. Do your best to have your computers and monitors turned on and ready to go by the start of class (3:15 p.m.).
2. Be sure to clean up any garbage around your workstation.

3. Turn off the monitor prior to leaving class.
4. Log off your computer station.
5. Consider ourselves guests in this classroom.

OTHER

1. Westmont College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should notify the office of Disability Services, and notify me within the first two weeks of class.
2. *Written documentation* from a medical doctor or the campus health clinic must be obtained and promptly forwarded to the professor if poor health prohibits you from appearing for an examination. Role will be taken at the beginning of each class period. Failure to appear for an examination will result in an “F” for that examination.
3. Lectures may not be recorded, unless with the permission of the professor.
4. Please check Canvas for handouts. Print them out.
5. Please contact the professor if you have any questions or concerns:
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesdays, 8:30-10:30 a.m. or by appointment
Email, Charles Farhadian, farhadian@westmont.edu; Phone, x7094
Email, Tim Eaton, timothy@veritestudios.com
6. Finally, the professors reserve the right to revise the syllabus at any time

BRIEF FILMOGRAPHY

Note: This is by no means an exhaustive list, just a smattering. These are primarily American films. Students will not be required to watch the complete list, but portions of these may be shown in class for reference.

Edwin S. Porter *The Great Train Robbery*
Charlie Chaplin *City Lights*
Michael Curtiz *Casablanca*
Orson Welles *Citizen Kane*
Elia Kazan *On The Waterfront*
Billy Wilder *Sunset Boulevard*
Frank Capra *It's a Wonderful Life*
George Cukor *The Philadelphia Story*
Alfred Hitchcock *Rear Window / North by Northwest*
John Ford *The Searchers*
David Lean *Lawrence of Arabia*
Francois Truffaut *Day For Night / Jules et Jim*
Francis Coppola *The Godfather / The Conversation*
Carroll Ballard *The Black Stallion*
Terrence Malick *Days of Heaven*
Werner Herzog *Aguirre, The Wrath of God*
Wim Wenders *Wings of Desire*
Hugh Hudson *Chariots of Fire*
Bruce Berenson *Tender Mercies*
Milos Forman *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*
Martin Scorsese *Raging Bull*
Roman Polanski *Chinatown*
Bob Fosse *Cabaret / All That Jazz*
Oliver Stone *Platoon*
Barry Levinson *Rain Man*
Steven Spielberg *Schindler's List / Saving Private Ryan*
Christopher Nolan *Memento*
Woody Allen *Annie Hall / Manhattan*
Sidney Pollack *Tootsie*
Ridley Scott *Blade Runner*
Tony Scott *Man on Fire*
Christopher Nolan *Memento / Dunkirk*

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

SCENE I: GETTING STARTED

- 1 Jan. 9 (T) Westmont closed
- Jan. 11 (Th) Westmont closed
- 2 Jan 16 (T) Martin Luther King Holiday – no class
- Jan 18 (Th) Introduction to course / Why Cinema?
- Rent Adobe Premiere (CC) (5 months)
 - Rent Lynda.com Premiere Pro CC 2017 Essential Training (1 month)

SCENE II: STORYTELLING, WORLDVIEWS, & SPIRITUALITY IN THE MOVIES

- 3 Jan. 23 (T) Storytelling in the Movies
- Lynda.com Lessons 6, 8, 9
 - Godawa, Introduction, Act 1 (ch. 1-3)
 - See film #1 *Casablanca*
- Jan. 25 (Th) Worldview at the Movies
- Lumet, ch. 2 - The Script, ch. 3 - Style
 - Godawa, Act 2 (ch. 4-6)
 - Film Review due and class discussion
- 4 Jan. 30 (T) The Filmmaking Enterprise
- Lynda.com PP Ess. Training (2015) Lessons 1 & 2
 - See film, #2
- Feb. 1 (Th) Filmmaking: Story, Story, Story / Right Brain or Left Brain?
- Lumet, Preface & ch. 1 - The Director
 - Lynda.com Lessons 3 - 5
 - Film Review due and class discussion
 - Film Treatment for Film One
- 5 Feb. 6 (T) Filmmaking: What's The Process, A to Z?
- Lumet, ch. 4 - Actors
 - Lynda.com Lessons 10,11
 - FILM ONE DUE: Character Study: Silent / 2 minutes or less
- Feb. 8 (Th) Theoretical & Theological Challenges of Creation
- Lynda.com Lessons 12 - 15, Conclusion

- Handout: Latour, chapter 1
 - See film #3

- 6 Feb. 13 (T) Filmmaking: Pulling the Trigger / Framing
 - Lumet, ch. 5 - The Camera: Your Best Friend, ch. 6 - Art Direction & Clothes
 - Film Treatment for Film Two
 - Film Review due and class discussion
 Feb. 15 (Th) Filmmaking: What Comes Next?
 - Lumet, ch. 7 - Shooting The Movie
 - Handout: Pincus, ch. 2 - Before You Begin Production (Excerpts)
 - Film Two Treatment Due

- 7 Feb. 20 (T) Spirituality in the Movies
 - Godawa, Act 3 (ch. 7-10)
 - Review #3 due, *Departures*
 Feb. 22 (Th) Film as Theological Insight
 - Lumet, ch. 8 - Rushes: The Agony & The Ecstasy
 - Handout: Marsh and Ortiz, pp. 9-43 from *Explorations in Theology and Film: An Introduction*
 - Sound Track
 - See film #4

- 8 Feb. 27 (T) MIDTERM

SCENE III: SPIRITUALITY, THEOLOGY, AND FILM

- Mar. 1 (Th) Power, History, and Theological Approaches
 - Johnston, ch. 1-3
 - FILM TWO DUE: Music Video or Documentary: With Music /
 - Film Review #4 due and class discussion

- 9 Mar. 6 (T) Filmmaking: Camera, Lights, Action
 - Lumet, ch. 9 - The Cutting Room: Alone at Last
 - Handout: Pincus, ch. 9 - Shooting the Movie (Excerpts)
 - See film #5
 Mar. 8 (Th) Art and Story: Why Watch?
 - Johnston, ch. 4-6
 - Film #5 Review due and class discussion

- 10 Mar. 13 (T) Spring Recess

 Mar. 15 (Th) Spring Recess

- 11 Mar. 20 (T) Filmmaking: Decisions Decisions / Production 102
- Lumet, ch. 10 - The Sound of Music: The Sound of Sound
- Mar. 22 (Th) Image & Response
- Johnston, ch. 7-10
 - See film #6
- 12 Mar. 27 (T) Filmmaking: A to Z Part 2
- Lumet, ch. 11 - The Mix
 - Handout: Pincus, ch. 13 - Picture & Dialog Editing
 - Final Film Treatment
 - Film #6 Review due and class discussion
 - Film Three Due: Class Film Project
- Mar. 29 (Th) Filmmaking: / Sound 101
- Lumet, ch. 12 - The Answer Print
 - Handout: Pincus, ch. 17 - Producing & Distributing the Movie
 - See film #7
- 13 Apr. 3 (T) Project Day – Class Film
- Film #7 Review due and class discussion

SCENE IV: SEEING AND BELIEVING: RELIGION AND MOVIES

- Apr. 5 (Th) Seeing and Believing
- Handout: Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing*, ch. 1-3
- 14 Apr. 10 (T) Seeing and Touching
- Lumet, ch. 13 - The Studio: Was It All For This?
 - Handout: Diana Eck, *Darśan*, ch. 1-2
 - See film #8

SCENE V: PERCEPTION AND IMAGES IN RELIGIONS

- Apr. 12 (Th) Aisthesis: Perceiving Between the Eye and the Mind
- Plate, Sections Introduction & 1
 - Film #8 Review due and class discussion
- 15 Apr. 17 (T) Icon and Qalam: Image of Jesus Christ and Islamic Calligraphy
- Plate, Sections 2 & 3
- Apr. 19 (Th) Shinjin and Darshan: Seeing in Japanese and Hindu Traditions
- Plate, Sections 4 & 5

16 Apr. 24 (T) Zakhor: Modern Jewish Memory
• Plate, Section 6

Apr. 26 (Th) Final Film Workshop / Director's Choice

PUBLIC SHOWING! (DATE TO BE DETERMINED)