

TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION: RELIGION 30823:055 JESUS IN FICTION AND
FILM

Spring 2001, 2:00 p. m. -- 3:20 p. m., Tuesday and Thursday, TBH 205.

Dr. Darren J. N. Middleton, 228 Beasley Hall. 257-6445 (Office); 922-0248 (Home).

d.middleton2@tcu.edu. Office Hours: Tu-W-TR 11:00 a. m. -- 12:00 p. m.

Course Description

For someone supposedly out of fashion, Jesus of Nazareth makes more than a few passing cameo appearances in the movies, novels, poems, and short stories of the last fifty years. Recognizing this recent trend, Religion 30823:055 examines how the figure of Jesus and the symbol of Christ has been appropriated by recent creative writers and filmmakers. Throughout the course, we will focus on the doctrine of the person (christology) and work (soteriology) of Jesus through such fictional works and films, as well as background theological readings. We will achieve this through four units.

The first unit deals with biographies of Jesus. Here we will investigate how fiction and film retells the Gospel story, as set in first-century Palestine, in contemporary terms. The second unit explores how fiction and film uses the device of a minor New Testament character as narrator. Units one and two constitute the first half of the course.

The third unit investigates a relatively recent and controversial phenomenon within the genre of Jesus fictions and films, namely, the trend towards the so-called "scandalizing" of the Gospels. Here we will focus on one allegedly "blasphemous" novella and one allegedly "heretical" film, exploring questions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in light of modern theological attempts to focus on Jesus as the "scandal of particularity" (Karl Barth).

The fourth and final unit analyzes how fiction and film presents and responds to cross-cultural images of Jesus (e.g., Canada, Denmark, Ghana, Japan, and El Salvador). We will pay particular and considerable attention to the question of what the doctrines of christology and soteriology look like from a global perspective.

Course Objectives

Through examination, writing assignments, reviews, and class discussions, you will be assessed on your ability to accomplish the following:

A: To understand how traditional and modern Christians view the doctrine of the person (christology) and work (soteriology) of Jesus.

B: To understand how the teachings, deeds, and personality of Jesus have exerted a hold on the imagination of recent creative writers and filmmakers.

C: To understand and be able to critically evaluate the different responses (theological and literary) to the place of Christ in a pluralistic world.

D: To develop and be able to critically express your personal voice in considering the theological impact of Jesus in fiction and film.

Assigned Texts

Non-Fiction

A: Baugh, Lloyd. *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film*. Baugh provides a survey, by means of

representative examples, of the reception of Jesus and Christ-like characters in contemporary cinema.

Fiction

A:Endo, Shusaku. *Silence*. A Japanese Roman Catholic portrays a seventeenth century Jesuit priest in Japan at the height of the dreadful oppression of the small Christian community and, in so doing, Endo illustrates the theological and moral quandaries caused by a "Christ-like presence" in a non-Christian context.

B:Fredrikson, Marianne. *According to Mary Magdalene*. Winner of the Stora Journalist-priset, Sweden's equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize, Fredrikson uses the character of Mary Magdalene to present a new form of Christianity that embraces the female equally with the male and celebrates women's spirituality.

C:Kuma, Afua. *Jesus of the Deep Forest*. A farmer in the forests of Kwahu, Ghana, crafts an extended "prayer-poem," seeing and experiencing God incarnate in the customs and structures of West African traditional life and thought-forms.

D:Lawrence, D. H. *The Man Who Died*. The son of a Nottinghamshire coal-miner, Lawrence uses his commitment to Bergsonian philosophy to recreate the resurrection of Jesus, "scandalizing" the canonical Gospels by having his Jesus awake from death and experience a redemptive sexual encounter with a priestess of the pagan goddess Isis.

E:Theissen, Gerd. *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form*. A German Professor of New Testament writes a dramatic narrative in which he sets the first-century stage and fills it with characters who help to explain the life and meaning of Jesus of Nazareth.

Course Requirements

A: Attendance, Preparation, Participation. Attendance is expected in order to do well. After three unexcused absences, a half letter grade will be deducted from your course grade for each additional unexcused absence. By definition, the only excused absence is one that is documented, due to illness, emergency or official university business. Have the day's assignment read before class and be ready to participate actively in class discussion. Periodically, you may be asked to complete in class writing assignments or to lead the discussion. While these assignments will not be individually graded, they will help serve as a tool for determining the level of class preparation. Overall, preparation and participation counts towards 10% of the final grade.

B: Two Writing Assignments (papers). Specific details will appear later. Basically, each writing assignment is a minimum five-page essay response to an assigned question or topic. The first essay is due on Tuesday, March 6, and the second essay is due Tuesday, April 24. Each writing assignment counts towards 25% of the final grade.

C: A Final Exam. Testing will be based on the reading and viewing assignments. The exam will have short answer and essay sections. A study guide will be distributed during the last week of class. In addition, you can expect an "out of-class" study review session prior to the final. Scheduled for Thursday, May 10, the final exam counts towards 25% of the final grade.

D: Movie Reviews. You are required to write and submit three "movie reviews" during the semester. Imagine that you are a cultural critic for Faith and Film, a monthly magazine devoted to the theological critique of recent movies (domestic and foreign), and then write a scholarly account of any three films mentioned in the course. Do not be afraid to "personalize" your review; having said this, please think and write carefully. See each assignment as a chance to sharpen your skills of critical interpretation. Do not exceed 500 words per review (please place a word count at the end of your review). While you are free to select and evaluate the three films which interest you the most, I suggest you identify and analyze films of varied intent and content. Broaden your cultural, theological and cinematic horizons! While reviews may be submitted at any point during the semester, and I will do my best to grade and return them within one week, the third and final review must be submitted no later than the last day of class: Tuesday, May 1. This assignment counts towards 15% of the final grade.

Viewing the Films.

With luck, viewing our movies will prove to be instructive and fun. Our biggest challenge, however, is to find a time that suits all our busy schedules. Arranging this "common viewing time" will not be easy, I am sure, and yet I would like to try. Thus, if you check the course outline below, a "common viewing time" has been arranged, though I want you to know that you do have more than one opportunity to view our selected movies. If you are able and inclined, please join us for the "common viewing time." If your schedule does not allow, please know that local videostores possess copies of most films included in our syllabus. In addition, I have my own copy of all titles; if all else fails, you are free to use my video library. Just sign my "check out" book and return the video as soon as you have finished viewing it; in this way, of course, you will help others unable to locate a copy and who wish to view it.

From my perspective, you have the liberty to view our movies at a time that works for you, although I think it would help if, whatever you elect to do, you view each film prior to the class session that follows the "common viewing time." Any questions? Please feel free to come and see me; always know that I am more than willing to help you in this area of our course.

Films

1: *Babette's Feast*. Continuing their late father's mission work in a dying religious community in a remote part of Denmark, two sisters befriend and give shelter to a woman refugee from Paris. When the refugee wins the French lottery, she rewards the sisters' charity by preparing a special dinner, a Great Banquet honoring the late pastor's 100th birthday.

2: *Barabbas*. An all-star American cast in a film about Barabbas, the murderer who was freed in place of Jesus, who finds his life changed as a result of witnessing the the Passion Week.

3: *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Jesus's life is told in newsreel style, from choosing his disciples to his betrayal by Judas. Directed by an Italian Marxist.

4: *Jesus of Montreal*. A group of unemployed Canadian actors work to update a version of the Passion Play. Well received by the Montreal community, the production distresses some of the local clergy.

5: *King of Kings*. An epic answer to the "Who Does Hollywood Say That I Am?" question; considered one of the classic screen biographies of Jesus of Nazareth.

6: *Last Temptation of Christ*. A controversial life of Jesus, written by a maverick Greek novelist and directed by an Italian-American former seminarian, featuring the Messiah's imaginative "dream sequence" on the cross, the so called Satanic "temptation to happiness."

7: *Romero*. The life and death of archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who, after facing murder, torture and oppression, made a Christ-like stand against social injustices in his country.

Grading

The final grade will be determined based on the following ratio and scale:

Attend./prep./participation Assignment	10%	Movie Reviews	15%	Writing Assignment	25%	Writing
	25%	Final Exam	25%			

90 - 100 = A = excellent

80 - 89 = B = superior

70 - 79 = C = satisfactory

60 - 69 = D = inferior

0 - 59 = F = failing

Course Outline UNIT ONE: FICTIONAL AND CINEMATIC BIOGRAPHIES OF JESUS

16 January Jesus and the Journalist Introduction, short notices. Peter Jennings, "The Search for Jesus" (Video). <http://www.abcnews.go.com/onair/jesus/>

18 January Christology and Soteriology: Definitions and Issues

"The Nicene Creed: Homousios with the Father,"; "Athanasius Truly Human, Truly God"; "The Chalcedonian Definition: One Person, Two Natures" (Readings).

23 January Literary Lord, Screen Savior Lloyd Baugh, vii-17. Georg Langenhorst, "The Rediscovery of Jesus as a Literary Figure" (Readings). Michael Morris, "The Reel Jesus" (Readings).

EVENING FILM: "GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW."

25 January Matthew's Jesus Refracted Through a Marxist Prism Lloyd Baugh, 94-106. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Jesus and the Political World" (Readings). William Hamilton, "The Camera Produces a Political Jesus." (Readings).

30 January Who Does Gerd Theissen Say That I Am? Gerd Theissen, 1-74; 189-195. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/>

1 February Narrative Exegesis: What Is It? Gerd Theissen, 75-108.

6 February Bringing the Ancient World to Life Gerd Theissen, 109-153.

8 February Jesus Counts Among the Great Theologians Gerd Theissen, 155-187. William Hamilton, "Jesus Fictions when Jesus is off-stage" (Readings).

13 February Technicolor Christ: Jesus as Hot Box Office Property Lloyd Baugh, 18-47.

EVENING FILM: "KING OF KINGS."

15 February Biblical Epics: All Played Out? Toni Cade Bambara, "Gorilla, My Love" (Readings). Countee Cullen, "The Black Christ" (Readings). Langston Hughes, "On the Road" (Readings). UNIT TWO: MARY MAGDALENE (FICTION) AND BARABBAS (FILM): VIEWING JESUS THROUGH THE EYES OF MINOR BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

20 February Marianne Fredriksson: A Harlot's Gospel? Marianne Fredriksson, vii-87. The Gospel of Mary (Readings).

22 February Satirical Revisions of the Jesus-Story Marianne Fredriksson, 88-136.

27 February A Feministic Re-Reading of the Gospel Marianne Fredriksson, 137-200.

EVENING FILM: "BARABBAS."

1 March Karen L. King: "Forbidden Scriptures" video <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/women.html>

6 March A New Form of Christianity? Marianne Fredriksson, 201-233. Karen L. King "The Gospel of Mary Magdalene" (Readings).

* First essays are due today. UNIT THREE: SCANDALIZING JESUS (Matthew 11:6, 26:31): D. H. LAWRENCE, NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS AND MARTIN SCORSESE

8 March D. H. Lawrence: Nottingham, Greece; Bergson, Jesus D. H. Lawrence, 3-30; 89-101. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Positive Christology" (Readings).

13 March To Shock Us, To Save Us (skándalon) D. H. Lawrence, 31-85. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Offence of the Incarnation" (Readings). William Hamilton, "Novel as Critique of Orthodoxy" (Readings).

EVENING FILM: "LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST"

15 March Martin Scorsese's Spiritual Jesus? Lloyd Baugh, 48-71. Kevin Fauteux, "The Final Portrait of Christ" (Readings). Darren J. N. Middleton, "Kazantzakis and Christian Doctrine" (Readings).

20 March Spring Break: No Class 22 March Spring Break: No Class UNIT FOUR: GLOBAL MESSIAH: TRACES OF CHRIST IN WORLD FICTION AND WORLD FILM

27 March Afua Kuma: A Ghanaian Poet's Jesus Afua Kuma, 5-48. Philip T. Laryea, "Mother Tongue Theology: Reflections on Images of Jesus in the poetry of Afua Kuma" (Readings).

29 March West African Christian Theology in Verse Form Kwame Bediako, "Cry Jesus: Christian Theology and Presence in Modern Africa" (Readings).

3 April Christ Figures in Fiction and Film Lloyd Baugh, 205-225. Theodore Ziolkowski "Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus: A Working Definition" (Readings).

EVENING FILM: "JESUS OF MONTREAL"

5 April Daniel Coulombe: A Secular Messiah for Our Time? Lloyd Baugh, 109-129.

10 April Shusaku Endo: Jesus, Japan and the Jesuits Shusaku Endo, vii-46. John Hick, "One God, Many Images" (Readings).

12 April Jesus Through Asian Eyes Shusaku Endo, 47-100. C. S. Song, "On the Cross and the Lotus" from "Third Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings" (Readings).

17 April Theological Quandries: What Would Jesus Do? Shusaku Endo, 101-120. Elizabeth Wills, "Christ as Eternal Companion: A Study in the Christology of Shusaku Endo" (Readings).

19 April The Crucified Samurai: Cross-Cultural Christology Shusaku Endo, 121-191. Bradley Baurain, "Shusaku Endo and the Great Temptation" (Readings).

EVENING FILM: "BABETTE'S FEAST."

24 April From Christ to Christa: An Example from Denmark Lloyd Baugh, 130-156. Edward N. McNulty, "Babette's Extravagant Love," (Readings).

* Second essays are due today.

26 April The Priest as Christ-Figure: A View from El Salvador Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Sacrament of Liberation"

(Readings).

EVENING FILM: "ROMERO."

1 May "If You Kill Me, I Shall Arise In My People" Ricardo Ramírez, "Completing Romero's Unfinished Eucharist" (Readings). Gustavo Gutiérrez, "From Galilee" in "The God of Life" (Readings).

10 May Final Examination 3:00p.m--5:30p.m. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Latest in New Testament Research

<http://www.ntgateway.com/>

<http://religion.rutgers.edu/jseminar/>

<http://www.abcnews.go.com/onair/jesus/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/>

http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/Internet/bible_new.htm

<http://reluctant-messenger.com/gospel-magdalene.htm>

Jesus in Literary, Cinematic and Visual Art

<http://susan.chin.gc.ca/Exhibitions/Annodomini/introduction-en.html>

<http://www.ntgateway.com/film/>

<http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/>

<http://www.postfun.com/pfp/features/98/mar/filmography.html>

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<http://www.ala.org/booklist/v95/adult/oc1/39jesus.html>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2000/002/2.10.html>

There are numerous websites connected with the authors and filmmakers associated with our course, so I encourage you to surf the net and find as much background information as you think will help you in making progress in our course.

Dr. Darren J. N. Middleton, Spring 2001.