

(CINEMATIC) VISIONS OF CHRIST

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Course Description

Although the very first depictions of Jesus were textual, pictorial representations of him were not far behind. At the turn of the 20th century, Jesus rose on the silver screen, first as simple recordings of theatrical “passion plays” and then as full-blown features depicting a wide variety of “Jesuses”. This course introduces students to the range of textual and cinematic depictions of Jesus by a close examination of a number of canonical and non-canonical gospels as well as of a number of major “Jesus movies”.

Books

1. Tatum, W. Barnes, *Jesus at the Movies: A Guide to the First Hundred Years*. Rev. ed. Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2004. (ISBN: 978-0944344675)
2. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. 3rd rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. (ISBN 978-0195289602)
3. Ehrman, Bart. *Lost Christianities : The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* . Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. (ISBN 978-0195182491)
4. Ehrman, Bart. *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. (ISBN 978-0195182507)
5. Akenson, *Surpassing Wonder*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2001. (ISBN 978-0226010731)

Handouts

1. Wills, “The Words That Remade America: Lincoln at Gettysburg”
2. Fischer, “Myths After the Midnight Ride [of Paul Revere]”
3. Longfellow, “Paul Revere’s Ride”
4. Last, “Captain America, RIP”
5. Economist, “The Rewriting of History”
6. Peters, “Epilogue: Sacred History” / “End Thoughts” / “End Thoughts”
7. Kaltner, “Abraham’s Sons: How the Bible and Qur’an See the Same Story Differently”
8. Barcio, “The New Saints”

Films

1. **From the Manger to the Cross** (Olcott, 1912, 71 min, Silent)
2. **The King of Kings** (De Mille, 1927, 115 min, Silent)
3. **The Greatest Story Ever Told** (Stevens, 1965, 197 min, English)
4. **The Visual Bible: Matthew** (van den Bergh, 1993, 265 min, English)
5. **The Gospel According to St. Matthew** (Pasolini, 1964, 136 min, Italian)
6. **Godspell: A Musical Based on the Gospel According to St. Matthew** (Greene, 1973, 101 min, English)
7. **The Last Temptation of Christ** (Scorsese, 1988, 164 min, English)
8. **The Passion of the Christ** (Gibson, 2004, 127 min, Aramaic & Latin)

Requirements

Reading/viewing, discussing and writing about a text/film are interdependent. Working at each task helps one do the others better. For this reason, students will be required to do all three. However, since this is a discussion course operated according to what is sometimes called the “Socratic Method” (see below) rather than a lecture course, **it is particularly important that all students prepare for, attend and actively participate in class discussions.**

Reading/Viewing: Students are required to do all the assigned reading for each class in a thoughtful and open-minded manner that prepares them to participate in classroom discussion. This will require time and concentration. Questions raised by the reading are especially encouraged. Similarly, students are required to thoughtfully view all of the films and film excerpts screened in class.

Discussing: Students are required to actively participate in each class discussion, sharing their own viewpoints and listening to those of others. Through this collaboration the class will try to get a better understanding of each work and its implications. Since we will be referring to the reading during class, **students must bring the current text to each class.**

Writing: Students will be required to write a 2-3-page review of each film screened in class as well as two short papers on assigned topics and make a final presentation based either a third paper or on a project. Each paper will be roughly 4-6 pages long (typed in a standard 12-point font, double-spaced, 1” margins). See schedule for due dates. *(Note: Plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable. All quotations and paraphrases of others’ work must be cited using an appropriate format. However, since no outside research will be required or expected, this issue should only arise when referring to portions of the texts read and discussed in class. See Plagiarism Appendix for more information.)*

Grading

For those who want grades, final grades will be based on an assessment of a student’s:

- 1) Ability
- 2) Effort
- 3) Writing

as determined in approximately the following manner:

Class Participation & Homeworks	70%
Papers & Presentation (3)	10% each

Class participation grades are based on attendance, active participation and submission of completed homework assignments; unexcused absences, late arrivals, early departures, missing or incomplete homework assignments, and/or silent non-participation will lower this part of the grade. Papers are due at the beginning of the class on the day due. Late papers will be penalized one grade “step” for each day (or portion thereof) late (e.g. an “A” becomes an “A-” if it’s up to one day late). Occasional homework in addition to the assigned reading and unannounced “pop” quizzes may be given at any time and will also influence the grade.

“Socratic Method”

This class is operated according to what is sometimes called the “Socratic Method” in which students are required to learn for themselves through the various class activities. The role of

the teacher is primarily to facilitate discussion, pose questions, and offer occasional insights into the text and/or ideas under discussion—not to lecture on “what the book/film means”. The success or failure of such a class therefore depends primarily on the combined contributions of all participants.

Etiquette

A collaborative exploration of ideas requires that participants treat the material and each other with respect. Participants may argue for or against any relevant idea as long as they do so based on the readings and an acknowledgement that others may hold different points of view. In addition, students should:

- 1) arrive for class on time and **not leave the room until the end of class;**
- 2) **turn off cell phones,** pagers, and other disruptive devices;
- 3) not eat or drink to the extent that it will affect their or others’ participation;
- 4) exercise common sense and courtesy in their dealings with others.

Students who do not abide by these rules will be marked down substantially in the “class participation” portion of their grade and risk not passing the course.

Schedule

W	6:00-7:25	7:35-9:00	Required Background
1	Class Introduction	Bible Introduction	
2	<u>Bible</u> • 1-2 Chronicles • Isaiah (1-20)	<u>Bible</u> • Lamentations • Psalm 137 • Ezra-Nehemiah	<i>Surpassing Wonder</i> (1-4, B, C)
3	<u>Bible</u> • Matthew	The Visual Bible: Matthew (1993); van den Bergh, 265 min, English	Handouts <u>Movies</u> • Promise and Problem • Jesus-Story Films • Appendices A& B
4	The Gospel According to St. Matthew (1964); Pasolini, 136 min, Italian	<u>Bible</u> • Matthew	<i>Surpassing Wonder</i> (5-9) <i>Lost Christianities</i> (P-4) <u>Movies</u> 7: Gospel According to St. Matthew
5	Godspell: A Musical Based on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (1973); Greene, 101 min, English	PAPER 1 PREP	<u>Lost Scriptures</u> • General Introduction • Canonical Lists <u>Movies</u> • 8: JC Superstar/Godspell
6	PAPER 1 REVIEW	<u>Lost Scriptures</u> • Non-Canonical Gospels	Paper 1 Due
7	From the Manger to the Cross (1912); Olcott, 71 min, Silent	<u>Bible</u> • Mark	<i>Lost Christianities</i> (5-7) <u>Movies</u> • 1: From Manger to Cross
8	The King of Kings (1927) DeMille, 115 min, Silent	<u>Bible</u> • John	<u>Movies</u> 3: King of Kings
9	The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965); Stevens, 197 min, English	<u>Bible</u> • Luke	<u>Movies</u> • 6: Greatest Story Ever Told
10	<u>Bible</u> Acts of the Apostles	<u>Lost Scriptures</u> • Non-Canonical Acts	
11	The Last Temptation of Christ (1988); Scorsese, 164 min, English	<u>Bible</u> • Romans	<i>Lost Christianities</i> (8-10) <u>Movies</u> • 12: Last Temptation
12	The Passion of the Christ (2004); Gibson, 127 min, Aramaic & Latin	<u>Lost Scriptures</u> • Non-Canonical Epistles	<i>Lost Christianities</i> (11-12) <u>Movies</u> • 14: Passion of the Christ
13	PAPER 2 REVIEW	Course Review & Synthesis	Paper 2 Due <u>Movies</u> • Retrospect and Prospect
	NO CLASS		
14	Presentations	Presentations	Presentation Due

From the Manger to the Cross (Olcott, 1912, 71 min, Silent)

The Kalem Company reenacted their passion play for the camera, resulting in this, the first Biblical epic to be filmed in the Holy Land. In a straightforward fashion it shows the life of Christ, beginning with the Nativity and ending with the Crucifixion. It includes footage of the Holy Family at the Sphinx and is tinted to match the release prints. Sidney Olcott---USA---1912--71 mins. [Facets]

The King of Kings (De Mille, 1927, 115 min, Silent)

Cecil B. De Mille's opulent Hollywoodization of the New Testament, with casts of thousands, in its original silent (with music track) re-incarnation. The first in a series of grand biblical epics for De Mille, *King of Kings* showcases the director's love of visual splendor and his strong spiritual conviction. Featured are H.B. Warner, Dorothy Cumming, Ernest Torrence, Joseph Schildkraut and William Boyd. The DVD version contains DeMille's 155-minute roadshow version and his subsequent 112-minute general release. Cecil B. DeMille---USA---1927---115 mins. [Facets]

The Greatest Story Ever Told (Stevens, 1965, 197 min, English)

One of Hollywood's most humongous productions, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* offers the best and worst of the epic production and is a must-see precisely because of that. Max von Sydow's performance as Christ is superb--perhaps the best ever done for the screen--and the film's slow pace and solemn nature can really work for the patient viewer. However, throwing the film out of balance is an endless supply of celebrity cameos, some of which (like John Wayne as a Roman centurion) are downright laughable. Also starring Charlton Heston, Angela Lansbury, Sidney Poitier, Shelley Winters, Claude Rains and too many other big names to mention. Originally released in Super-Cinerama at 4 hours and 20 minutes, the film was later cut into several shorter versions. This 3-hour, 17-minute cut is the longest available on George Stevens--USA---1965---197 mins. [Facets]

The Visual Bible: Matthew (van den Bergh, 1993, 265 min, English)

Experience The Visual Bible's Matthew. This powerful and entertaining film is taken word for word from the text of the New International Version translation. This multi-million dollar production appeals to all ages, and it offers educational, spiritual and entertainment value. "The goal of The Visual Bible is to put the entire Bible on film using only Scripture to tell the story." Filmed on location in Tunisia, Morocco and South Africa, Matthew features a cast of thousands, historically accurate costuming and award-winning directing. The film stars Emmy award-winning actor Richard Kiley as Matthew, and introduces Bruce Marchiano as Jesus. [Amazon]

The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Pasolini, 1964, 136 min, Italian)

Undoubtedly one of the greatest achievements of iconoclastic Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini. *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* is a moving, quasi-documentary recreation of the life of Christ that takes "the greatest story ever told" and fuses it with neorealist aesthetics. Using non-actors, cinema verite techniques, and shooting on location in Jerusalem, Pasolini grounds this epic tale with an immediacy like no other. "Magnificent . . . Stands today as the most dynamic version of the gospel story ever filmed" (David Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*). In Italian with English. Pier Paolo Pasolini---Italy---1964---136 mins. [Facets]

Godspell: A Musical Based on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (Greene, 1973, 101 min, English)

An international hit musical in the tradition of *Hair*, *Tommy* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Godspell* was brought to the screen in a version that seems as sincere as its counter-culture fashion sense is dated. This modern interpretation of the Gospel's teachings includes the beautiful hit song, "Day by Day." Future Broadway headliner Victor Garber plays Jesus, while David Haskell, in an odd casting choice, plays both John the Baptist and Judas. David Greene---USA---1973---101 mins.

The Last Temptation of Christ (Scorsese, 1988, 164 min, English)

Martin Scorsese's powerful adaptation of the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis generated unwarranted controversy when first released. Those who protested the film (many without actually seeing it) for its depiction of Christ's human temptations failed to notice the overt and sincere spirituality Scorsese brought to his work. A visually striking, intelligent and sensitive film, with an outstanding performance by Willem Dafoe as Jesus and a distinctive musical score by Peter Gabriel. With Barbara Hershey, Harvey Keitel, Harry Dean. Martin Scorsese---USA---1988---164 mins. [Facets]

The Passion of the Christ (Gibson, 2004, 127 min, Aramaic & Latin)

Mel Gibson's chronicle of the last twelve hours in the life of Jesus Christ sparked a great controversy upon initial release, with divided audiences either heralding the film as a divine revelation or admonishing it with charges of anti-Semitism and historical inaccuracy. All arguments aside, *The Passion of the Christ* is a powerful account of physical brutality and punishment, with a surprising abundance of blood and gore. Regardless of the unflinching violence and debate, the film, self-financed by Gibson, achieved massive, worldwide box-office success. Stars James Caviezel as Christ, Maia Morgenstern as Mary and Monica Bellucci as Mary Magdalene. Mel Gibson---USA/Italy---2004---127 mins. [Facets]