

THEOLOGY AND FILM (TIC7304 -20 CREDITS)

SARUM COLLEGE, MA IN THEOLOGY, IMAGINATION AND CULTURE - 9TH - 12TH JANUARY
2012

SUMMARY

This course will explore the growing field of theology and film. Students will become conversant in the language and history of cinema, and specific focus will be on the range of models by which film and religion may be employed as possible dialogue partners. Students will be provided with the tools necessary for exploring critical links between theology and the medium of film. The course will begin with an examination of the methodological, conceptual and disciplinary issues that arise before any such dialogue can begin before exploring in critical depth the historical relationship between theology and film, with specific reference to the reception (ranging from prohibition to utilisation) of film by the Christian Churches. There will be a focus on particular categories of film and categories and models of theological understanding, allowing the student to develop the critical skills helpful for film interpretation and for exploring possible theological approaches to film criticism.

TUTORIAL TEAM

Dr Chris Deacy

c.deacy@kent.ac.uk - 01227 827242

Dr. Chris Deacy is Senior Lecturer in Applied Theology and Director of Learning and Teaching for the School of European Culture and Languages at the University of Kent, where he has been based since 2004. He has published widely in the field of theology and film. His PhD was in the area of redemption and film, published in 2001 by the University of Wales Press as *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film*. Other publications include *Faith in Film* (Ashgate, 2005), *Theology and Film*, co-authored with Gaye Ortiz (Blackwell, 2007), and, most recently, *Screening the Afterlife: Theology, Eschatology and Film* (Routledge, 2011) which critically explores whether, and how successfully, filmmakers have been able to encroach upon theological territory regarding questions of the survival of personhood after death (www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415572590). Chris is currently working on a proposal for a book that will develop critical links between Christmas films and theology.

Dr Colin J.D Greene

cgreene@sarum.ac.uk - 01722 424818

As well as being Program Leader for Theology, Imagination and Culture, Dr Greene is currently: Research Professor of Contextual and Biblical Theology, New York Theological Seminary; Senior Consultant to the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship (American Bible Society); Priest in Charge for St Gregory's Parish Church, Marnhull, Dorset and Director of Metavista Associates. His background, teaching experience and research interests cover the areas of modern systematic theology, the history of doctrine, biblical and philosophical hermeneutics, biblical and cultural engagement, theology and ethics and his consultancy work has expanded his

interests and expertise into the related fields of practical theology, the theology of mission, globalization and the theology and practice of public life.

MODULE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Having completed this module successfully learners should:

- Have developed and refined their intellectual skills by exploring critical links between theology/religious studies and the medium of film, including the evaluation and appropriation of film criticism;
- Have recognized to a sophisticated degree the extent to which theological and religious models and criticism may be applied to the medium of film;
- Have investigated particular aspects of religion and film in critical depth;
- Have enhanced their oral skills through class presentations and seminars;
- Have learned critical skills from applying a theological perspective to popular culture.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

PREPARING FOR RESIDENTIAL INTENSIVES

Before students convene at Sarum College for their residential intensive, they will be asked to begin reading the core course materials which are listed in the module handbook. Though students are encouraged to read and digest as much of the course material beforehand as possible, particular attention should be paid to the readings that will contribute to the student-led Seminar Discussion assignment. Students will be assigned a seminar chapter (at random) at the time of booking in for the module. The chapter will be from either:

Clive Marsh's *Cinema and Sentiment: Film's Challenge to Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004) or Christopher Deacy & Gaye Ortiz's *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/Secular Divide* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) and prepare to lead a 15 minute discussion of their readings for the Seminar Discussion indicated below. More information about this assignment is also available below.

DURING RESIDENTIAL INTENSIVES

At Sarum College, MA students learn collaboratively in small cohorts which meet for four-day residential intensives throughout the year. This distributed and flexible mode of delivery combines class-based and home-based study and allows working students and students at a distance to benefit from contact with tutors and lecturers, with minimal disruption to their domestic, ministerial, or professional lives. Moreover, by consolidating our class-based teaching into four-day intensive breaks, we are able to recruit world-leading scholars and seasoned practitioners to guest-lecture on many of our courses.

Each full day of the module will consist of four classroom sessions of approximately 1.5 hours each. There will also be time allocated for meeting your personal tutor and using the library. This intensive residential study week will include the following modes of delivery:

- **Lectures:** individual members of the teaching team will deliver material on the core themes of the module in light of their own teaching and research perspectives
- **Student-led seminars:** students will present assessed work on topics relevant to the module which they have researched and prepared either individually or in a group. These seminars promote peer learning and provide a safe environment to develop communication and collaboration skills
- **Discussion-based seminars:** students, tutors and / or lecturers will discuss a common text or cultural form and exercise a variety of methodological approaches to evaluate that form (e.g. poetry readings, film viewings and discussions, performances, etc.)
- **Common Room Discussions:** students are encouraged to engage in interdisciplinary and informal discussions with their fellow students throughout the intensive and so learn from one another's experiences and the different theological perspectives represented by those participating in the course

INTENSIVE TIMETABLE

	Time	Activity	Tutor	Location
Monday	2.30	Registration		Reception Desk
	3.00	Lecture: Methodological questions: Definitional and interdisciplinary perspectives in theology and film	CD	Tindall
	5.00	TEA		Tindall
	6.30	SUPPER		Refectory
	7.15	Film: (to be announced)	CG/CD	Tindall
				Common Room
<i>Library staffed from 9am – 1pm and 2pm – 5pm</i>				
<i>Finding our footing</i>				
Tuesday	8.15	BREAKFAST (for residential students)		Refectory
	9.15	Lecture: Secularization Revisited: Cinema as [quasi-] religious practice?	CD	Tindall
	10.45	BREAK (Coffee/Tea)		Common Room
	11.15	Lecture: Applying Niebuhr's Christ against Culture model	CD	Tindall
	12.45	College Prayers (optional)		Chapel
	1.00	LUNCH		Refectory
	2.00	Lecture: Film and religion as discrete?: A case study of escapism	CD	Tindall
	3.30	BREAK (Coffee/Tea)		Common Room
	4.00	Student Led Seminar I	CG	Tindall
	5.15	BREAK		
	5.45	Meeting with Tutors	CD/CG	Tindall
6.30	SUPPER (for residential participants)		Refectory	
<i>Library staffed from 9am – 1pm and 2pm – 7pm</i>				
<i>Challenges for biblical interpretation</i>				
Wednesday	8.15	BREAKFAST (for residential participants)		Refectory
	9.15	Lecture: Biblical Epics and Jesus films – From <i>King of Kings</i> to <i>The Greatest Story Ever Told</i>	CD	Tindall
	10.45	BREAK (Coffee/Tea)		Common Room
	11.15	Lecture: Biblical Epics and Jesus Films: From <i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> to <i>The Passion of the Christ</i>	CD	Tindall
12.45	College Prayers (optional)		Chapel	

	2.00	Lecture: The efficacy of drawing cinematic Christ-figure correlations	CD	Tindall
	3.30	TEA		Common Room
	4.00	Student-Led Seminar II	CG	Tindall
	6.30	SUPPER (for residential participants)		Refectory
<i>Library staffed from 9am – 1pm and 2pm – 6.30 Pm</i>				

<i>The church, the bible and biblical interpretation</i>				
Thursday	8.15	BREAKFAST (for residential participants)		Refectory
	9.15	Lecture: Robert Jewett and the dualist approach to religion and film exchanges	CD	Tindall
	10.45	BREAK (Coffee/Tea)		Common Room
	11.15	Lecture: Themes in Theology and Film (1): The paradox of cinematic violence and theology	CD	
	12.45	College Prayers (optional)		Chapel
	1.00	LUNCH		Refectory
	2.00	Lecture: Themes in Theology and Film (2): Conceptualizing the afterlife in theology and film	CD	Tindall
	3.30	BREAK (Coffee/Tea)		Common Room
	4.00	Group Seminar: Can theology and film be brought together?	CD/CG	Tindall
	<i>Library staffed from 9am – 1pm and 2pm – 5pm</i>			
	5.15	FINISH		

ASSESSMENT

SCHEDULE OF WORK

Assignment	Due Date	Word Length	Credit Weighting	Mode of assessment
Seminar Discussion		15 minute (max)	0%	Formative (Verbal feedback from peers and tutor).
Seminar Paper		500-800 words	20%	Summative (Written feedback from tutor).
Essay		3,500-4,000 words	80%	Summative (Written feedback from tutor).
Learning Journal		1-entry per week	0%	Formative (self-assessed).
'wiki' entry		1-entry	0%	Formative (student-steered).

The assessment strategy for the MA in Theology, Imagination and Culture is based upon the assumption that evidence of deep learning can only be determined through creative and innovative forms of assessment. During this module, we will use both **formative** and **summative** forms of assessment, in order to develop in students the skills and competencies which will be measured against the module's learning outcomes. Students are required to complete all assigned work, though only summative assignments will count towards the student's final mark.

For this module the primary modes of **formative** assessment will be learning journals and seminar presentations.

- **Seminar Discussion:** Each student will be given the opportunity to lead a brief seminar discussion (no more than 15-mins) during the residential intensive. This discussion will centre on the assigned chapters from Clive Marsh's *Cinema and Sentiment: Film's Challenge to Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004) or Christopher Deacy & Gaye Ortiz's *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/Secular Divide* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) (depending on the number of students who register for this module). Though students are free to lead the discussion however they would wish, normally the discussion will take the following form: 1) **Summary** of chapter; 2) **Critique** of methodology described (What's good about the theological method discussed in the chapter? What's lacking from the methodology?); 3) **Application** of the methodology (how would you use this methodology in your own work?). Students are reminded that they are leading a discussion, so their presentation of the material should be given in a way which encourages the involvement of their classmates. Seminar discussion will receive verbal feedback from tutor and peers.
- **Learning journal:** students can maintain a learning journal, in which they keep track of their reflections about the module which are based upon their ongoing self-study. Learning journals can either be maintained online or in a student's notebook.
- **Wiki:** All students will make at least one contribution to the module Wiki in the form of an encyclopaedia type entry (short book review, biographical entry, definition of a particular term / concept), etc.). All contributions will be viewable and can be commented on by fellow students. This particular exercise is designed to encourage group work, collaboration, and research skills. It will also contribute to the creation of a consistently updating research index which will be made available to future students.

The primary modes of **summative** assessment will be essays and seminar papers.

- **The Seminar Paper (20% overall mark):** The seminar paper is a written assignment which evolves from the seminar presentation (formative assessment, above). Following the three-part structure set by the seminar discussion (Summary, Critique, and Application), in the Seminar paper, students are required to write a tightly focussed piece of research which identifies and assesses the key critical issues, and presents a balance and comprehensive account of their topic in a restricted word limit of **500 – 800 words**. It is hoped that the Seminar Paper will integrate peer and tutor feedback received from the seminar discussion.
- **The Essay (80% overall mark):** The essay builds upon the ongoing research undertaken by students in their learning journals, their seminar presentation and their seminar paper. The essay allows students to display a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of a specific topic, the ability to identify and critique scholarly methods and opinions in an objective manner, and demonstrate the ability to develop an independent perspective on the topic. Topics are provided for each module, though students can select to research a topic of their choosing, in consultation with the module tutor. Essays will be between **3,500 and 4,000 words**. Guidelines for essay writing are proved in the Programme Handbook. Students are expected to adhere to the College's style guidelines.

CRITERIA OF ASSESSMENT

The criteria for assessment are provided in MA Programme Handbook. Students should be reminded that in addition to these metrics, as a part of a programme which is delivered at Level

7 (Masters Level), students work must also comply with the standards for postgraduate taught programmes in the UK, which are set out by “The Quality Assurance Agency’s Framework for Higher Education Qualifications”. This document states that at Level 7, postgraduate students must exhibit:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice;
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
 - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

CORE TEXTS

Christopher Deacy & Gaye Ortiz’s, *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/Secular Divide* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007)

Clive Marsh, *Cinema and Sentiment: Film’s Challenge to Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004)

ESSAY TITLES

1. Essay questions

- 1) “Religion and film work, with few notable exceptions, has some way to travel before it can be securely established as a viable field of scholarly investigation.” Critically assess this claim.
- 2) “In light of work taking place at the interface between religion and film, the conventional distinction between the sacred and the secular realms needs to be re-examined.” Critically examine this assertion.
- 3) With specific reference to the medium of film, critically assess Stewart Hoover’s claim that religion and media “occupy the same spaces, serve many of the same purposes, and invigorate the same practices in late modernity.”
- 4) “It is increasingly the case that people gather around cinema and television screens rather than in churches to ponder the quandaries of life.” Critically evaluate the claim that film is a new and alternative site of religious significance for many people in society today.
- 5) Critically assess Clive Marsh’s suggestion in *Cinema and Sentiment* that the multiplex may be the modern cathedral and that those who work in film may be functioning more authoritatively or at least more influentially than bishops.
- 6) Critically assess David Jasper’s argument that theological reflection is “two-edged, ironic, difficult and ambiguous” whereas the cinema comprises merely “a house of illusions”. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Jasper?

- 7) Critically assess Adele Reinhartz's claim that the variety of representations of Jesus on the silver screen testifies to the conviction that Jesus remains relevant to our society today.
- 8) "Jesus films and biblical epics comprise an unproductive topic for academic discussion." Critically evaluate this claim. Give examples to support your answer.
- 9) Critically evaluate Robert Pope's claim that the category of Christ-figure films "has become so ubiquitous that it seems to have lost any real meaning and certainly any real theological resonance."
- 10) Critically assess the contribution of any **one** filmmaker **or** scholar to the field of religion and film.
- 11) In the light of Jolyon Mitchell's claim that "it is more common for filmmakers to portray scenes of violence or revenge than scenes of peacemaking or forgiveness", to what extent would you say that the relationship between 'violence' and 'religion' needs to be re-assessed?
- 12) Critically assess whether filmmakers and theologians are involved in two discrete enterprises when they endeavour to represent the topic of the afterlife.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Highly Recommended

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- Deacy, Christopher, *Screening the Afterlife: Theology, Eschatology and Film*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.
- Lyden, John (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, London & New York: Routledge, 2009.
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- Mitchell, Jolyon & Plate, S. Brent, *The Film and Religion Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Wright, Melanie J., *Religion and Film: An Introduction*, London: I.B. Taurus, 2007, esp. pp. 11-31.

Recommended

- Aichele, George & Walsh, Richard (eds.), *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections Between Scripture and Film*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2002.
- Babington, Bruce & Evans, Peter, *Biblical Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.
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