



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

TRTR5003
TRTR6002

Religion in Film

Semester 2, 2010-2011

MODULE HANDBOOK

Lampeter Campus

Religion and Film				
TRTR5003				
TRTR6002				
Dr Greg Barker				
Dr Robert Pope				
Date		1 st hour	2 nd hour	3 rd hour
Week 1 1 February	RP	Introduction to course	Lecture: Historical Overview	Group work
Week 2 8 February	RP	Lecture: Reading a Film	Film: My Son the Fanatic	
Week 3 15 February	RP	Lecture: Approaches to Interpreting Film	Seminar level 5	Seminar level 6
Week 4 22 February	RP	Lecture: Apocalyptic Films	Film: Babette’s Feast	
Week 5 1 March	RP	Lecture: Myth and Fantasy	Seminar level 5	Seminar level 6
Week 6 8 March	GB	Lecture: Cinema-Going as a Religious Practice	Film: Groundhog Day	
Week 7 15 March	GB	Lecture: Spirituality in Film	Seminar level 5	Seminar level 6
Week 8 22 March	GB	Lecture: Jesus in Hollywood	Film: Life of Brian	
Week 9 29 March	GB	Lecture: Christology at the Movies	Seminar level 5	Seminar level 6
Week 10 5 April	RP	Film: End of Days		Group work
EASTER BREAK				
Week 11 3 May	GB	Lecture: Mythology and Film	Film: Network	
Week 12 10 May	GB	No Lecture	Seminar level 5	Seminar level 6
Week 13		Exam period begins		

Book list

- Alice Bach, *Biblical Glamour and Hollywood Glitz*, Semeia 74 (Atlanta Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996)
- Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1997)
- William L. Blizek (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (London: Continuum, 2009)
- Eric S. Christianson, Peter Francis and William R. Telford (eds), *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film* (London: SCM, 2005)
- Christopher Deacy, *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001) (**2 copies**)
- Christopher Deacy, *Faith in Film* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)
- Rachel Dwyer, *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006)
- Robert Jewett, *Saint Paul at the Movies: The Apostle's Dialogue with American Culture* (Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993)
- Robert Jewett, *Saint Paul Returns to the Movies: Triumph over Shame* (Grand Rapids Mn.: Eerdmans, 1999) (**2 copies**)
- Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality* (Grand Rapids Mn.: Baker Academic, 2000)
- Larry J. Kreitzer, *The Old Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994)
- Larry J. Kreitzer, *The New Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993)
- Larry J. Kreitzer, *Pauline Images in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999)
- Larry J. Kreitzer, *Gospel Images in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002)
- John C. Lyden *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003)
- Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz (eds), *Explorations in Theology and Film: Movies and Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) (**4 copies**)
- Joel Martin and Conrad Ostwalt Jr (ed.), *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1995)
- John R. May (ed.), *Image & Likeness: Religious Visions in American Film Classics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992)

John R. May (ed.), *New Image of Religious Film* (Franklin Wis.: Sheed and Ward, 1997) (**2 copies**)

John R. May and Michael Bird, *Religion in Film* (Knoxville Tn.: Universeity of Tennessee Press, 1982)

Jolyon Mitchell and S. Brent Plate (eds), *The Religion and Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2007) (**2 copies**)

S. Brent Plate (ed.), *Representing Religion in World Cinema: Filmmaking, Mythmaking, Culture Marking* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

Bernard B. Scott, *Hollywood Dreams & Biblical Stories* (Minneapolis, 1994)

Richard C. Stern, *Savior on the Silver Screen* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999)

W. Barnes Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies: A Guide to the First Hundred Years* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1994)

Melanie J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 2007)

On order for the library:

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

John C. Lyden (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (London: Routledge, 2010)

Robert Pope, *Salvation in Celluloid: Theology, Film and the Imagination* (London: T & T Clark, 2007) (**2 copies**)

The following websites might be of use:

Journal of Religion and Film, <http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf>

Movies and Ministry, <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~dpc>

Culture at Home, <http://anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/cul/main.html>

Christianweek – Culture Watch, <http://www.christianweek.org/editor/culture.htm>

Shoot the Messenger, <http://www.shootthemessenger.com.au>

Hollywood Jesus, <http://www.hollywoodjesus.com>

<http://www.textweek.com>

Please note: care should be taken when referring to web sites. Often they are uncritical and one-sided. If used, then (1) be especially critical in evaluation and (2) make sure that you reference them clearly. You should not depend on web sites alone in preparing your written work.

Assessment

There are four parts to the assessment:

Level 5:

- A seminar presentation on one of the five films to be screened during the module (10% of the final mark). More information can be found about this below. You will be assessed on the presentation itself but you are required to submit a written version as part of the folio of work.
- A 1000 word diary (20% of the final mark) offering brief evaluative comments on the four films that were not subject to your seminar presentation (250 words each).
- A 1000 word book review. More information can be found about this below.
- A 2000 word essay.

Book review to be submitted on or before: **Friday, 11 March 2011**

Diary and essay to be submitted on or before: **date to be confirmed**

Level 6:

- A seminar presentation on one of the five films to be screened during the module (10% of the final mark). More information can be found about this below. You will be assessed on the presentation itself but you are required to submit a written version as part of the folio of work.
- A 1200 word diary (20% of the final mark) offering brief evaluative comments on the four films that were not subject to your seminar presentation (300 words each).
- A 1000 word book review. More information can be found about this below.
- A 3000 word essay.

Book review to be submitted on or before: **Friday, 11 March 2011**

Diary and essay to be submitted on or before: **date to be confirmed**

Preparing for the Seminar

General information

The seminar presentation is designed to help you to develop your skills in presenting and communicating information orally. You will therefore be assessed on those skills as well as the subject-specific information you will be conveying. Bear in mind, then:

1. You need to think about *how* you will present material as well as *what* you will present.
2. You will need to prepare the material and, if you think it will be helpful, you can also prepare a PowerPoint presentation and/or a handout. If you do so, then think carefully about what you will include on the slides or in the handout as well as what you will leave out. These are ‘visual aids’ to assist the presentation far more than summaries or verbatim records of the information conveyed.
3. You will be assessed on the way in which you actively seek to engage the rest of the class in discussion. **It is the seminar presenter’s responsibility to facilitate discussion.** How you do this is up to you, but this part of the assessment will deal with the mechanism you employ in order to try to provoke discussion in the class. You will not be assessed on (i) whether or not there is a discussion or (ii) the level of discussion (i.e. you are not responsible for the outcome, but you will be assessed on the means and methods you have chosen to employ).
4. You only have 10 minutes each to make your presentation and 5 further minutes in which to engage in discussion and to invite questions. It is therefore very important to try to keep to time. This is partly because there are other people who have to present but it emphasises too that time-keeping is an essential skill in the world of work. This, too, will be assessed.

Specific information

Do not attempt to prepare for the seminar until you have seen the film!

The film will be screened during class in weeks 2, 4, 6, 8 and 11. You need to attend this class. **If you do not attend, it is your responsibility to find a copy of the film and to watch it in preparation for the seminar and in writing that particular entry in the diary.** The seminar relevant to the film will be held in the following week (weeks 3, 5, 7, 9 and 12), level 5 and level 6 will have separate seminars.

You will be provided with one piece of reading that is directly relevant to the film:

My Son the Fanatic

‘My Son the Fanatic’, in Melanie J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 2007), pp.107-28.

Babette’s Feast

Clive Marsh, ‘Did you say “grace”?’, in Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz (eds), *Explorations in Theology and Film: Movies and Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp.207-18.

Groundhog Day

'The Deadly Deception of the Flesh in *Groundhog Day*', in Robert Jewett, *St Paul Returns to the Movies: Triumph over Shame* (Grand Rapids Mn.: Eerdmans, 1999), pp.88-103.

The Life of Brian

Carl Dyke, 'Learning from *The Life of Brian*: Savors for Seminars', in George Aichele and Richard Walsh (eds), *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections Between Scripture and Film* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002), pp.229-50.

Network

Kathleen Fitzpatrick, '*Network*: The Other Cold War', in *Film and History* 31.2 (2001), pp.3-9.

Some guidance

- The whole class should read the set work in preparation for the seminar. Each person will be expected to make a presentation to the group. In fairness to your peers, you should come to each seminar having prepared for it, ready to engage in discussion and to ask questions.
- Those leading the seminar will be assessed on (1) their understanding of the film (2) their knowledge of the reading (3) their ability to evaluate and critique this information (4) their presentation skills (5) the extent to which they enable the group's participation.
- Level 5 students will need to show that they can present the main religious or theological themes coherently, that they have understood the reading utilised and that they can draw on this information in producing a definite argument.
- Level 6 students will need to show that they can evaluate the effectiveness of the film's portrayal of theological or religious themes, that they can approach the reading material independently and that this can be presented clearly and succinctly in the seminar.
- Alongside the set reading, see if you can find other articles or chapters analysing the film and incorporate those analyses into the presentation. If you do so, please ensure that you make it obvious that you have used other sources. You will be assessed on how you handle information. Try, if possible, to integrate your reading with information from the lectures, for example.
- The module is about *religion in film*. These are the sort of questions you need to ask: (1) how, if at all, is religion portrayed in the film? (2) are there any specifically religious motifs which belong to the plot/narrative, the characterisation, the imagery? (3) what kind of experience might the viewer have when watching the film? (4) do the techniques of film making add anything to this religious interpretation? (This involves camera angle, lighting, shot selection, use of props, music and so on, and will be covered in the second lecture). Remember: it is not so much *description* as *analysis* and evaluation that the examiners will be looking for, and this will be most highly rewarded.

Finally, do not worry too much about the seminar presentation as it represents only 10% of the final mark. However, that should not be an excuse for not preparing for the seminar. As with all assessment, high marks can be achieved, but only when time and effort has been given to the task.

Presentations Assessment Sheet

Student name:

Date:

Planned learning outcomes	Level of attainment <i>High average low</i>	Tutor's comments
Content		
- Knowledge and understanding of key issues - Critical skills - Application of theory (including sources)	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Structure		
Development of argument (e.g. intro; main body; conclusion; avoidance of repetition; logical flow of argument)	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Sources		
Extent of research and how it is used to support the argument	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Delivery and communication		
- Timing and Pace - Use of visual aids - whiteboard, handouts, illustrations, PowerPoint, clarity of layout etc.	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
- Clarity and coherency - Engagement with audience (e.g. audible; appropriate body language: eye contact; avoiding reading from text) - Leading discussion and responding to questions and comments raised	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Further comments if applicable		

Marker

Signature

Date

Preparing the Diary

This part of the assessment is intended to do two things. First, it promotes the ability to record information succinctly. Second, it helps you to develop skills of reflecting on what you have experienced or learnt. Remember the following:

1. You should set the work out properly, including a date for and title to each entry (this is not to be counted in the word-count). The diary should be formatted in the same way as the example.
2. You must restrict yourself (level 5 students) to 230-250 words per entry or (level 6 students) to 250-300 words per entry. **You must not exceed this.**
3. We are not particularly interested in the film's narrative or plot or characterization. It is on the presence or otherwise of religion or theology that you should concentrate.
4. Try to think of an imaginative angle in approaching each subject. Reflect on what you thought as you watched the film. Did any link become apparent with any reading you have done, with any of the lectures, with something from another module?
5. Do not try to include everything. You will have to choose one thing on which you wish to write. Part of the exercise will require that you offer a coherent reason for choosing that particular aspect. You could, for example, concentrate on one of the following questions: (1) how, if at all, is religion portrayed in the film? (2) are there any specifically religious motifs which belong to the plot/narrative, the characterisation, the imagery? (3) what kind of experience might the viewer have when watching the film? (4) do the techniques of film making add anything to this religious interpretation? (This involves camera angle, lighting, shot selection, use of props, music and so on, and will be covered in the second lecture). This is a guideline. The examiners will be more impressed if you demonstrate some independent thinking and imagination when preparing your diary.
6. The seminars are in part designed to help you to prepare the diary. Watching the film, reading the set text and attending the seminars where the film will be discussed should all assist you in writing the diary entries.
7. It would be advisable to draft your diary entries after each film-showing and to revise them after each seminar. You will have time to make final amendments and revisions before submission.
8. Although the diary entries are short, they should be fully referenced like any other piece of academic writing. Footnotes should only be used for references, not for adding additional material. Footnotes should not be included in the word count.
9. At level 5: you need to show that you are aware of the possible arguments, you can justify the selection of a particular angle, you are aware of its strengths and weaknesses, and that you can express yourself correctly and clearly.
10. At level 6: you need to show that you can analyse and evaluate, that you can apply relevant information to your argument, and that you can express yourself accurately and succinctly.

EXAMPLE DIARY ENTRY

Tuesday, 1 February 2011

Amadeus directed by Milos Forman, (1984)

Milos Forman's adaptation of the Peter Schaffer play presents the court composer, Antonio Salieri (F. Murray Abraham) as the one who plotted the downfall, if not also the murder, of the precociously talented and, according to the film, lecherous, infantile and ill-mannered Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Tom Hulce). Although the plot is fictitious, Gregory Allen Robbins contends that the film 'reveals deep truths about the human condition' revolving around human inequality and the way this drives pride to become envy and ultimately the desire to destroy.¹ For Robbins, the film is an allegory of the story of Cain and Abel, that 'the Lord had regard for Abel [Mozart] and his offering, but for Cain [Salieri] and his offering he had no regard' (Gen. 4:4-5, NRSV). The film certainly offers a meditation on pride, jealousy, anger and disappointment all of which can lead to the most extreme of actions. God is the absent figure, prayed to, but distant and apparently fulfilling the opposite of Salieri's request, leading to the composer's apostasy. Nevertheless, religion's presence is more implicit than explicit, more moral than doctrinal, as befits a story which unfolds as the lead character makes his confession to a priest. The story is expertly told, interspersed with stunning imagery and beautiful sound, all of which succeeds in beguiling the audience into extremes of emotion, especially as the haunting strains of the '*Lacrimosa Dies Irae*' (On this day full of tears) from the *Requiem* accompany the perfunctory disposal of Mozart's corpse in an unmarked grave beyond the Viennese city walls, while the rain pours down almost as a sign of divine pathos in the absence of any corresponding human mourning.

299 words

¹ Gregory Allen Robbins, 'Mozart and Salieri, Cain and Abel: A Cinematic Transformation of Genesis 4', *The Journal of Religion and Film*, 1.1 <http://cid.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/robbins.htm>.

Preparing the Book Review

Level 5

Write a 1000 word, critical book review on ONE of the following:

- Larry J. Kreitzer, *The Old Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).
- Larry J. Kreitzer, *The New Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).
- Larry J. Kreitzer, *Pauline Images in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).
- Larry J. Kreitzer, *Gospel Images in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).
- Robert Jewett, *Saint Paul at the Movies: The Apostle's Dialogue with American Culture* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).
- Robert Jewett, *St Paul Returns to the Movies: Triumph Over Shame* (Grand Rapids, n.: Eerdmans, 1999).
- Melanie J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London, New York: I. B. Taurus, 2007).

Level 6

Write a 1000 word, critical book review on ONE of the following:

- E. Christianson, P. Francis and W. R. Telford (eds.), *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film* (London: SCM, 2005).
- Christopher Deacy, *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001)
- Christopher Deacy, *Faith in Film* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)
- Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz (eds.), *Explorations in Theology and Film: Movies and Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997)
- John R. May (ed.), *New Image of Religious Film* (Franklin Wis.: Sheed and Ward, 1997)
- Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, Mn.: Baker Academic, 2000)

These books have been selected because they are comparable (in length and content) and that, in giving sufficient choice, you should be able to borrow the book unhindered from the library. It *might* be possible for you to select a different book for review. If you intend doing this, you must first ask the module tutor's permission so that the book you have selected can be confirmed as comparable with the books on these lists. Level 5 students **will not** be permitted to review a book included on the level 6 list, and *vice versa*.

Some guidance:

1. Read the book! While you should give some space to outlining the content, make sure that you *evaluate* the book's content. Ask the question – What is (or are) the author(s) trying to say? Then ask how clearly (or otherwise) they make the case and then evaluate whether or not the argument(s) is (are) convincing. The examiners will be looking for clear evidence that you have read the book.
2. If you can find other reviews of the book in academic journals (such as *Theology* or on the Web) then incorporate some of the analyses you find there into your answer. Work that demonstrates some level of research alongside reading the book will impress the examiners.
3. Book reviews sometimes refer to the scholarly field in general. This might be difficult for you, but you might like to try comparing the book with the content of other books you have read for the module.
4. Try to see what, if any, contribution the book makes to our understanding of theology or religious studies and the use of film in theological reflection. The examiners will be looking for knowledge and understanding as they read the review. This includes knowledge and understanding of the field *per se* as well as the book itself. Perhaps you can make reference to something you have read in other books or to something mentioned in the seminars or to something discussed in the lectures.
5. Remember, you are most concerned with theology or religious studies and only secondarily with the films mentioned. This highlights that the book review is to be more evaluative and critical than descriptive.
6. It is probably worth you beginning work on the book review immediately, even reaching the point of having written it. You will have time to revise the book review in light of the lectures and the seminars before submission.
7. The book review should be formatted in the same way as the example.
8. Level 5 students will be tested on their understanding of the book's argument, their ability to offer a critique of the argument and the clarity of presentation.
9. Level 6 students will be tested on their understanding of the place of the book in the field study, their critical evaluation of the book's argument(s), clarity of presentation and autonomy of thought.

EXAMPLE BOOK REVIEW

***Film, Lacan and the Subject of Religion: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Religious Film Analysis.* By Steve Nolan. London and New York: Continuum, 2009. Pp. xii + 219. £65.00. ISBN 978-0-8264-2760-1.**

Academic studies of film and religion, or film and theology, have abounded in recent years, most of which seem to pursue a similar line of enquiry looking either to analogies between cinematic stories and those of the religious tradition or to the treatment of film as narrative. Steve Nolan seeks to go beyond such approaches and to the extent to which he succeeds, this book can be welcomed as a significant contribution to the study of religion and film.

Steve Nolan's work appears to be inspired by two things. First of all, he recounts (fairly briefly) his experience as a child and young man where the local cinema and Roman Catholic church both played a formative influence in his upbringing. It is from the juxtaposition of these two contrasting buildings with apparently different aims and practices that the main thesis in this book finds its origin. The thesis is that worshippers who celebrate the Eucharistic sacrament undergo a similar inclusion into the drama of the mass as that experienced by the cinematic spectator in watching (or experiencing) a film. The second thing which inspired the author was the recognition that the vast majority of commentators who link religion and film tend not to take film theory seriously and thus are not disposed to treat film as film, choosing instead to treat it as another form of narrative.

From this Dr Nolan constructs an erudite and convincing argument in which he categorises previous discussions as 'phenomenological' (or 'sacramental'), where film becomes a means of experiencing the transcendent; 'literary', where film is treated as no more than story or narrative; and 'anthropological', where film is treated as in itself as a religious practice. To counter this he utilises the work of the 1970s film-theory journal, *Screen*, which brought together Marxist ideology, semiotics and the psychoanalytical insights of Jacques Lacan in order to try to understand what an audience might experience when watching a film. In so doing, he emphasises the 'suturing' or stitching of the viewer into the narrative of a film in which the viewer is drawn into an ideological reality and where each one experiences the existence which properly belongs to another. In this he recognises a process similar to that experienced by the worshipper in attendance at the mass. Through witnessing the priest's performance of a particular liturgy, so the believer is drawn into a particular ideological reality in which the salvific event is made real in the present.

I would wish to highlight three issues which arise from the book.

First, Dr Nolan's grasp of theology or religious studies is not always quite as profound as his coherent assimilation of cinematic theory and his precise and detailed treatment of the work of Lacan. I say this because it appears, at one level at least, that the argument about 'suturing' the cinematic audience or the eucharistic congregation into the ideological reality being represented before them is no more than an *analogy*. That this goes beyond the usual appeal to analogy is beyond doubt, for rather than discern narrative similarity Dr Nolan argues that it is in participation and representation that the analogy can be made between this particular religious rite and the practice of watching a film. But, apart from the reference to the worshipper's experience during the performance of the mass, there seems to be very little specifically *theological* engagement here. What, ultimately, is the significance of being 'sutured' into the mass, and does it in any way differ from being 'sutured' into a film? Are both little more than the means of strengthening of a particular ideology? And if they are,

does it matter? Furthermore, this might be a particularly *Catholic* reading, and one wonders whether similar points could be made about Protestant practices.

Second, the author claims to be analysing the viewer's experience in watching a film. It has to be admitted that many commentators who bring together theology or religious studies and film claim this as an inherent part of their argument. Dr Nolan's thesis is rather more subtle than most, locating the experience in the subconscious which explains the dependence on psychoanalytic theory. However, like others, this remains a theoretical standpoint. That in itself does not disqualify it, but it begs the question whether or not some empirical research and evidence is required in order to support or validate his claims. Until such work is done, can we really claim that audiences (rather than particular commentators) interpret their cinematic experiences in religious or theological terms?

Third, the emphasis in the book is firmly on theory rather than application. When Dr Nolan turns to interpret specific films in light of his analysis, his treatment is exquisite. This reviewer would have welcomed further examples of application in order to see just how widely relevant and deeply insightful his approach might be.

None of this is intended to suggest major weakness in the book. There can be little doubt that this is a skilful and scholarly treatment. As befits a work which started life as a doctoral thesis, the discussion is highly technical – especially those parts which discuss the work of Lacan – but the analysis is in no way diminished as a result. The argument is well made and logically set out, and Dr Nolan certainly takes the subject to a new level of critical appreciation. The work deserves the attention of those who are interested in the dialogue between film and theology or religious studies as well as those who are interested in film theory per se. If it is widely employed, then the arguments advanced here may be developed in order to contribute further to our understanding of a most significant aspect of contemporary study of religion and popular culture.

985 words

Essay titles

Level 5

Write a 2000 word essay on one of the following:

Either:

To what extent, if at all, is there any truth in the notion that popular film is taking on the function of traditional religious agencies such as the Christian Church in contemporary society? Give reasons for your answer.

Or:

Is the 'person of Christ' revealed or obscured by the 'Christ figure'? Use examples to illustrate your answer.

Level 6

Write a 3000 word essay on one of the following:

Either:

'People are no longer relying on traditional religious institutions such as the Church to provide answers to many of the fundamental questions pertaining to human existence, and contemporary secular agencies such as film are taking this function.' Critically assess this claim.

Or:

'The cinema is the modern myth-making factory'. Critically evaluate this statement and draw particular attention to how it might impact on our understanding of religion.

Some Guidance

When writing your essay, bear in mind:

1. Answer the question! An essay that keeps firmly to the point, includes only relevant material and maintains constant focus on the question will impress examiners far more than an essay that meanders, that goes off on a tangent, that gives too much space to 'background information'. Avoid phrases such as 'Before we look at the question, we have to ...'
2. The examiners will be looking for evidence of research. It is acceptable to refer to matters that have been discussed in lectures or seminars because this shows an ability to process and to apply information. But it is essential that you show, in your essay, that you have been accessing other reading material relevant to the subject.
3. There is a relevant book list contained in this handbook. All these books can be found in the library, and some have been put on restricted loan. You need not restrict yourself to these books. Use the library catalogue in order to find other books, or use internet searches and websites. **Remember that the internet is an unregulated source. Not all websites are worth using in an academic context and it is highly unlikely that you will produce your best work by using internet sources alone.**
4. Before you begin to write, construct an essay outline or plan. Consider what it is you are going to argue and how best you can present it. Think about how you will introduce the topic, how you will develop the argument and what conclusion you will offer. Think about how you will move logically from point to point and whether or not you will need to use sub-headings.
5. As you read and do your research, make careful notes in preparation for your essay. Keep all references, and make sure you reference your work fully. You must avoid plagiarism at all costs.
6. Level 5 students will need to show that they can analyse and evaluate the portrayal of religious or theological themes in film and discuss the effectiveness of this portrayal in a coherent manner, supported by the analysis of scholarly literature. This material must be presented in a systematic and cogent way in order to construct a particular argument.
7. Level 6 students will need to show that they can apply the scholarly arguments to a thorough evaluation of the portrayal of religious or theological themes in film. A level of critical awareness of the field of study is required as is the ability to nurture independent thinking. The essay must be systematic and the use of language should be succinct and accurate.