

Movies, Music and Spirituality

CE 459/CFM 694 Spring, 2009 Thursday 7:00-9:30 PM



Professor: Dr. Donald Ratcliff
Office Hours: Mon 12:00-4:00, Tues 2-4,
Other days by appointment
Email for appointment

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Textbooks and Readings

Cluck, Darrell W., Catherine S. George, & J. Clinton McCann. *Facing the Music: Faith and Meaning in Popular Songs*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999.

Johnston, Robert K. *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.

Lang, J. Stephen. *The Bible on the Big Screen: A Guide from Silent Films to Today's Movies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007.

Two chapters will be handed out in class. Parts of the above books are to be scanned rather than read, and an additional book of the student's choice will also be scanned.

Course Description

Popular movies and music have included spiritual and religious themes throughout their histories. Yet careful analysis of this content is often lacking among Christian consumers and participants in popular culture. This class gives careful attention to this aspect of popular music and cinema, comparing and contrasting such themes with Christian perspectives. Religious music and Christian cinema--primarily intended for religious audiences--are not included in this course. Rather, the attempt is to seriously engage the broader culture to produce better understanding, and offer a distinctively Christian critique of these aspects of popular culture.

Objectives

The competencies described below are reflected in student activities and products, as assessed by the instructor. Students can expect assignments that foster:

1. reading, journaling, and conducting ongoing analysis of selected music and cinema
2. analysis of music and cinema from a Christian perspective
3. interactive discussion of themes and perspectives of selected media

Course Requirements

1. Reading and Media Journal. Throughout the semester, keep a journal of ongoing analysis of music, movies, and readings. Journaling involves writing down key ideas you encounter in movies or music that are related to spirituality and religion. Compare and contrast those ideas

with your own personal beliefs and understandings. You may also describe your emotive responses to a movie or song, and suggest possible reasons from your personal background for your reactions. Two to five handwritten pages on standard notebook paper is the recommended weekly journal entry, either in several shorter segments or one entry. The instructor will briefly examine the journal each week, and twice during the semester the journal will be turned in for formal grading.

During the first three weeks of class, the journaling focuses on listening to and analyzing at least three popular songs (classic or current). After those three weeks, the journaling assignment involves watching at least two movies each week (part of one of those movies will be viewed in class each week). The listening and watching is to take place when you are reasonably alert and not distracted by other activities or persons. Watching and listening may take place in group settings provided that those involved are not being distracted by one another. It is highly recommended that journaling take place during the music or movie, or immediately thereafter.

Throughout the semester, you should also write in your journal about the readings required in textbooks and two handouts (see “readings” above). Comment on selected issues raised by textbooks, rather than summarizing textbook materials. Some textbook content will be read carefully, other sections will be scanned for ideas, movies and music that are of personal interest. Thus scanning leads to reading about media or topics that are interesting to you.

2. Analysis Papers. Four analysis papers will be written, each involving an in-depth consideration of spiritual themes in media, comparing and contrasting those themes with Christian perspectives. You are encouraged to draw upon previous journal reflections for these papers. Articulate themes, critique themes, and argue persuasively for your perspectives of those themes. Logical and biblical analysis is to be used, reflecting careful consideration of the media involved. Each paper will be two pages in length, written in Turabian, 7th edition format, and be free of typographical, grammatical, and spelling errors. You may consult with other students and college-related personnel regarding the latter aspects of your writing, but may not plagiarize ideas or have others do your reading, writing, or analysis.

3. In-Class Discussion. During class it is expected that every student will participate in discussions regularly, making comments that reflect careful reflection, and with consideration to other participants in the discussion.

Assignment 2 is the designated assignment that can be part of your degree portfolio. This portfolio—a representation of work from all CE core classes—will be collected in its entirety during Senior Seminar (CE 494). As a way to keep from losing these assignments, you may email a copy as an attachment to the following address: cfm.portfolio@gmail.com . Place your name and the name of the assignment in the subject heading of the email.
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Grades

The final grade will be calculated in the following manner:

Assignment one: journaling readings and media experiences = 40% of the final grade

Assignment two: four short papers @ 10% each = 40% of the final grade

Assignment three: class participation = 20% of the final grade

Assignments turned in late without an adequate excuse can be penalized 10% each day and are not accepted after ten days, unless special permission is granted. Late work due to excused absences should be turned in the class period following the day the student returns to class.

Final grades, as well as individual assignments, also must meet the following quality criteria, as stated in the college catalog:

A [distinctive]	B- [acceptable]	D+ [inadequate]
A- [superior]	C+ [acceptable]	D [inadequate]
B+ [superior]	C [acceptable]	D-
B [superior]	C- [inadequate]	F

Topics and Related Readings

C=Cluck, D=Detweiler, J=Johnston, L=Lang, V=Vanhooser, (S)=Scan, (R)=Read Carefully

Date	Topic	Reading Due
Jan 15	Introduction to the Class, Spirituality, and Reading Culture	
22	Music & Spirituality: Crossover Classics	C 1-10 (R), C 12-40 (S), V 15-60 (R)
29	Music & Spirituality: Recent Crossovers	C 41-73 (S), D 125-153 (R)
Feb 5	Christian Formation Symposium (required attendance)	
12	Analysis 1 Due: Written and Presented in Class	C 75-111 (S), C 113-117 (R)
19	Old Testament Movies	L 7-43 (R), 44-88 (S)
26	New Testament Movies	L 89-193 (S)
Mar 5	Bible and Movies / Movie Preferences / Journal Due	L 194-254 (S), 255-293 (R)
12	Spring Break	
19	Classic Movies & Analysis / Analysis 2 Due	J 21-53 (R), Another 50 pages (S)
26	Classic Movies & Analysis	J 55-85 (R), Another 50 pages (S)
Apr 2	1980s and 1990s Movies & Analysis	J 87-115 (R), Another 50 pages (S)
9	1980s and 1990s Movies & Analysis / Analysis 3 Due	J 117-149 (R), Another 50 pages (S)
16	Recent Movies & Analysis	J 149-183 (R), Another 50 pages (S)
23	Recent Movies & Analysis	J 185-216 (R), Another 50 pages (S)
30	Current Movies & Analysis / Analysis 4 Due	J 217-266 (R)
May 7	Current Movies & Analysis / Journal Due	

Plagiarism, Cheating, and Dishonesty

Plagiarism is the act of representing the work of others as one's own. This and other forms of academic dishonesty are subject to strict disciplinary action, according to the following policy and procedure.

1. Students must avoid unauthorized collaboration, fabrication of data, unauthorized use of computer data, and excessive revision by someone other than the student.
2. Students are responsible to report to their instructor any dishonest behavior of which they are aware, or any circumstances that tend to encourage dishonesty.
3. If there are mitigating circumstances, lesser sanctions than those listed below may be applied with the concurrence of the instructor's superior (i.e. chair or dean).

Suspicion of Dishonesty

1. Students suspected of dishonesty will be confronted discretely and a response solicited.
2. If the student admits to dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action (as described below) will be applied and a report made to the Student Development Office. The student will also be informed of his or her right of appeal.
3. If the student denies dishonesty, but not to the satisfaction of the instructor, the matter will be referred to the petitions subcommittee of the Educational Policies and Curriculum Committee, who with the Dean of Students will hear both parties and submit their recommendations to the Vice President for Student Development, who shall make a determination.
4. Any further appeals will follow the College process of appeals.

Conformation of Dishonesty

1. A grade of zero will be assigned to any individual assignment or test on which a student has been dishonest.
2. In the case of inadvertent plagiarism, the instructor may at his discretion require that the assignment or examination be rewritten, and may assign a grade one letter grade lower than it otherwise would have been.
3. In the case of a second instance of dishonesty in a course, a student will be dropped from that course with a grade of F and placed on disciplinary probation.
4. Successive acts of dishonesty may result in expulsion from the College, subject to standard procedures of the Student Development Office.
5. A Student who knowingly assists another student in dishonest behavior is equally guilty and subject to the same degrees of sanctions.

--Adapted from the Wheaton College faculty handbook (section 3.1.16)

The information in this syllabus is subject to revision, as announced in regular class periods. Students are responsible for course content and any announcements made when absent, regardless of the reason for missing the class.