COURSE DESCRIPTION AND APPROACH

Movies and religion are extremely powerful forms of social and personal expression. In this course we will explore various understandings and functions of religion as we discuss films and articles in light of our experiences. You should know that, for this course, religion is less an ‘object’ of analysis than an ‘occasion’ for analysis. That is, I am invested in getting us to explore plural meanings and ambiguous images of religion in film. I am not interested in using film to teach about specific religions or faith traditions in any substantial or consistent manner. The twelve films we will screen do refer to Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity and indigenous religions, but I do not approach these films as sufficient or authoritative representations of these religions so much as texts that allow us to analyze and debate how and why the films are making religious references. (If you want a course to teach you about the traditions, texts, and practices of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity, I encourage you to take one of our Department’s traditions courses. This semester we are offering “Religions of the World”, “Judaism”, “Islam”, “Christianity”, and “Native American Religions”, among others.) I want to ask you questions such as the following: “When does a film signal the religious? Is it by a certain use of light? Is it in the music? Is it through a character’s gaze? How are specific indices of religion (e.g., mosques, menorahs, crucifixes) filmed?”

By not giving religion one set definition, this class can use film as the occasion for interpreting, analyzing, and debating the meanings, cultural functions, and powerful affects responses generated by images of religion in film. Finally, this course will give you skills for interpreting film, and for analyzing how religion can be used to crystallize and reflect certain political, economic, social, and sexual parameters of human cultures.

I have arranged this semester’s films in loose conjunction with the Humanities Center’s 2010-2011 theme of “Conflict: Peace and War.” The Units cover, 1) debates between religion and science; 2) personal conflict around religion and death; 3) documentaries that engage religion and social controversy; and 4) religious impulses in a violent—perhaps even a-religious—world.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS:

1. Louis Giannetti, Understanding Movies, 12th edition. This book is available in the Student Bookstore and online. Please use this most recent edition. If you use the 11th edition, just be aware that I will hold you responsible for the new material on animation and technology.
2. Articles and other class worksheets and handouts will be posted on Blackboard. Please print these out for class.

REQUIREMENTS

1. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION 16%: It may be difficult for you to make the shift from watching movies as sheer entertainment to watching movies as a text to be examined, studied and discussed (albeit still entertaining!). You really will benefit from attending class regularly and from attending to class, both by not accessing cell phones, email, internet (etc.) during class, and by taking notes on the scenes, terms, and concepts we discuss. The readings we do will sometimes be dense and difficult. For some of you, even the Giannetti will be a dense thicket of new vocabulary and novel ways of looking at film. I strongly encourage you to create either a vocabulary journal or flashcards for yourselves. I also strongly encourage you to star passages or concepts that you don’t understand and either raise them in class, or email (or come see) me about them. The grading criteria for Attendance and Participation is the following:
   A: 0-2 absences, focused attention in class, consistent and committed participation
   B: 3-4 absences, intermittently focused attention, and usually committed participation
   C: 5 absences, occasionally focused attention, and occasional committed participation
   D: more than 5 absences and clear difficulty attending to or participating in the class
   F: overt disrespect for the pedagogical process, including absences and frequent disruptions.
II. WEEKLY RESPONSES 24%: I will divide the class into three groups. Each week, one group will write responses that discusses the film in conjunction with Giannetti; a second group will write responses that discusses the religious themes and images in the film; and students in a third group will be responsible for each selecting the one scene or short sequence that s/he considers crucial for grasping the argument of the film and how religion plays a central role in that argument. These responses need to be emailed to Becky and me before class on Monday. Alternately, the class may also opt to post responses on Blackboard and discuss them with each other. In this case, if you experience any difficulty in posting, you are responsible for emailing your response to Becky and me so that your response counts as ‘on time.’ The grading criteria for the weekly responses is as follows:

A: Paragraphs are packed with detail, cite Giannetti and articles correctly, and demonstrate intelligent and creative insights. These responses indicate extraordinary effort.
B: Paragraphs have sufficient detail, usually correct citations, and intelligent and/or creative insights. These paragraphs indicate strong effort.
C: Paragraphs have slim detail, frequent incorrect or missing citations, occasionally poor grammar or spelling, and insights that are relatively more obvious. These paragraphs indicate less effort.
D: Paragraphs have slim detail, poor grammar or spelling, and few insights at all. These paragraphs indicate rather little effort. I also give D’s to students who turn in responses late (regardless of the reason).
F: I give F’s only to students who fail to turn in a response before class. You may convert the “F” to a “D” by turning in a late response.

III. TWO IN-CLASS TESTS 2 x 10% = 20%: These tests are 55 minute tests that cover vocabulary from Giannetti, concepts from lectures and articles, and scene analysis from the films. I will go over the test format in class and give you sample questions. The best way to prepare for these tests is to keep a vocabulary journal or flashcards for Giannetti, and to take notes on what we go over in class.

IV. TWO TAKE-HOME EXAMS, 2 x 15% = 30%: For Units two and four, I will give you questions for a take-home exam by the end of the first week of the unit. The exam for Unit two is due the Monday we start Unit three; the exam for Unit four is due on the date scheduled for our final exam. I will give you more questions than I will require you to answer (e.g., I’ll ask you to answer 3 of the 5, or 4 of the 7 questions). I want you to answer each question in no more than 2 paragraphs (250 words total per question). I expect these answers to be polished, carefully crafted paragraphs with detailed support drawn from Giannetti, the articles, lectures, and specific scenes in the films. Grading criteria here matches the criteria for weekly responses.

GROUND RULES:
- Speak with respect and care for those who might disagree with you.
- Respect the class process and your peers: come to class on time. If you must be late, enter quietly.
- Once in class please don’t leave until class is over unless you have a medical emergency.
- If you must leave during class, I expect you not to return. Bring Kleenex and water to class, if you need it.
- Turn off your cell phones, blackberries, iphones and other identity extensions.
- The Professor reserves the right to change or substitute readings in light of in-class conversation and developments (but the Giannetti textbook readings will remain the same).

Note on DVDs: Bird Library’s media center (on the 4th floor) can be unintentionally difficult. Each film will be on “reserve” up through the due date for the paper in which the film will be discussed. This means the DVDs will be in the “reserve drawer”. I’ve included Bird’s DVD number when available. The sign ^ in the syllabus means I’ve put one of my personal copies on reserve.
OFFICIAL POLICIES:

Academic Integrity: The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The Policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/.

Disability Statement: Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. In order to obtain authorized accommodations, students should be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309 (315) 443-4498 and have an updated accommodation letter for the instructor. Accommodation and related support services such as exam administration are not provided retroactively and must be requested in advance. For more information about services and policy, visit the Office of Disability Services website at http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/ or contact the office at the addresses below:

Syracuse University
Office of Disability Services
804 University Avenue Room 309
Syracuse, NY 13244-2330

Phone: (315) 443-4498
TDD: (315) 443-1371
Email: odssched@syr.edu

Emergencies and Religious Holidays: Please inform me in writing (email) if you must miss class, a film screening, or a paper due date. In fairness to the other students, if you do not notify me before the class, screening or due date, I cannot allow you to make up the work. This policy includes emergencies, deaths in the family, and medical conditions. By university policy, if you will miss class or assignments because of a religious holiday, I need to be informed in writing one week before the holiday. Travel days around the holiday are not excused.
Syllabus

UNIT 1: RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Week 1: How do we See Religion?
Mon Aug 30  Introductions
Wed Sep 1  Read: selections from Blackboard: John Berger’s Ways of Seeing, Chapter 1; Andre Bazin, “Evolution of the Language of Cinema”
Fri Sep 3  Read: Giannetti, Chapter 1, “Photography”
Intro. to Stanley Kramer’s Inherit the Wind (1960, 128 min.)

Week 2: Inherit the Wind
Mon Sep 6  Labor Day: No Class
Tue Sep 7  Screen Inherit the Wind (VHS available in the Law Library)
Wed Sep 8  Read: Randy Moore, “Creationism in the U.S.”
In-class Discussion of Inherit the Wind
Introduction to K. Kieslowski’s Decalogue I (1989, 55 min.)
Fri Sep 10  Eid ul-Fitr: No Class

Week 3: Decalogue 1
Sun Sep 12  Screen Decalogue I, Bird DVD #9253
Mon Sep 13  Discussion of Decalogue I
Fri Sep 17  Read: Giannetti, Chapter 2, “Mise-en-scène”
Introduction to Robert Zemeckis’ Contact (1997, 150 min.)

Week 4: Contact
Sun Sep 19  Screen Contact, Bird DVD #12710
Mon Sep 20  Discussion of Contact
Wed Sep 22  Read: Gregory M. Sadlek, “Robert Zemeckis’s Contact as a late 20th Century Paradiso”; Antonio D. Sison, “Epiphany of the Throne-Chariot: Merkabah Mysticism and the Film Contact”
In-class test preparation
Fri Sep 24  55 minute TEST
Please remember to pick up a handout on Ingmar Bergman

UNIT 2: RELIGION AND DEATH

Week 5: The Seventh Seal
Sun Sep 26  Screen The Seventh Seal (Bergman, 1957: 92 min.)
Bird DVD #9471
Mon Sep 27  Discussion of The Seventh Seal
Wed Sep 29  Read: Bragg, “Art and Religion” and “The Play’s the Thing”
Fri Oct 1  Read: Bergman, “Miscreance Credence”
Giannetti, Chapter 3, “Movement”
Introduction to Yoshiro Takito’s Departures (2008, 130 min.)
Week 6: Coens or Takito
Sun  Oct 3  Screen *Departures*^^
Mon Oct 4  Discussion of *Departures*
Wed Oct 6  Read: selections from S. Aoki’s *Coffinman: Reflections of a Buddhist Mortician*
Fri Oct 8  Read: Giannetti, Chapter 4, “Editing”
           Introduction to Kim Ki-duk

Week 7: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter…and Spring
Sun  Oct 10 Screen *SSFW...and S* (Ki-duk, 2003: 103 min); Bird DVD # 12706
Mon Oct 11  **TAKE HOME #1 DUE**; Discussion of *SSFW...and S*
Wed Oct 13  Read: Leslie Felperin, “The Temple on the Lake Within”
Fri Oct 15  Read: Giannetti, Chapter 5, “Sound”
           Introduction to S. Dubowski’s *Trembling Before G-d*

UNIT III: RELIGION AND SOCIAL CONTROVERSY
Week 8: Trembling Before G-d
Sun  Oct 17  Screen *Trembling Before G-d* (Dubowski/Smolowitz, 2003)
             Bird DVD # 11032
Mon Oct 18  Discussion of *Trembling Before G-d*
Fri Oct 22  In-class Review
             Read: Giannetti, Chapter 8, “Story”
             Intro to Zarqa Narwaz’s *Me and the Mosque* (2005, 52 min.)

Week 9: Me and the Mosque
Sun  Oct 24  Screen *Me and the Mosque*, Bird DVD #12328
Mon Oct 25  Discussion of *Me and the Mosque*
Wed Oct 27  Read: article from *Islam for Today*, “Women in Mosques: No Curtains, No Walls, No Partitions!”; Joanne McEwan, “They Say this Mosque is a Jewel, but How Would I Know?”
Fri Oct 29  Read: Giannetti, Chapter 9, “Writing”
           Introduction to Ewing and Grady’s *Jesus Camp* (2006, 84 min.)

Week 10: Jesus Camp
Sun  Oct 31  Screen *Jesus Camp*, Bird DVD #12935
Mon Nov 1   Discussion of *Jesus Camp* (I recommend scanning the film’s website, http://www.jesuscamphemovie.com/)
Wed Nov 3   Read: selections from Almond, G., Appleby, R. S., & Sivan, E.,
Fri Nov 5   Read: Giannetti, Chapter 7, “Drama”

Week 11: Review and Pause
Mon Nov 8  In-class viewing and discussion of other documentaries
UNIT IV: RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

Week 12: Children of Men
Sun  Nov 14  Screen *Children of Men* (Cuarón, 2006: 109 min.)
          Bird DVD # 13115
Mon  Nov 15  Discussion of *Children of Men*
Fri  Nov 19  Read: Giannetti, Chapter 6, “Acting”
            Introduction to the Coen brothers

Week 13: Thanksgiving
Mon  Nov 22  In-class scene analysis
            Introduction to the Coen brothers
Wed  Nov 24  Thanksgiving: No Class
Fri  Nov 26  Thanksgiving: No Class

Week 14: No Country for Old Men
Sun  Nov 28  Screen *No Country for Old Men* (Coen and Coen, 2007: 122 min.)
          Bird DVD #13525
Mon  Nov 29  Discuss *No Country for Old Men*
Wed  Dec  1  Read: Nietzsche, “Parable of the Madman”; Kafka, “Before the Law”
Fri  Dec  3  Read: Giannetti, Chapter 11, “Critique”
            Introduction to James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009: 162 min.)

Week 15: Avatar
Sun  Dec  5  Screen *Avatar*, Bird DVD #15287
Mon  Dec  6  Discuss *Avatar*
Wed  Dec  8  Read: Susan Sontag, “The Imagination of Disaster”; newspaper article(s) on the “real” Na’vi in India; selections from Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*
Fri  Dec 10  In-class scene analysis and course evaluations
            TAKE HOME EXAM #2 DUE DURING EXAM WEEK