

# Faith, Film, and Culture / Spring 2018

Monday-Friday, 1:30-4:20 pm  
Gardencourt 206  
Film viewings: Tuesdays, 4:00 pm

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## Course description

This is a course designed to introduce the student to ways of thinking theologically about contemporary popular film, the messages about religion and values films convey, and the cultural context of film production and viewing. Students will examine a variety of theoretical approaches to film interpretation and use these interpretive methods to explore the ways popular films depict such themes as the human condition, evil and suffering, transcendence, moral and religious redemption, and religious and cultural difference. The course will give special attention to the contributions of this visual and narrative medium to public debate on moral and religious issues in church and society.

## Goals and objectives

Students will

- Develop their capacity for attending closely to visual texts,
- Examine latent theological and religious meanings in cultural productions,
- Learn and apply a variety of critical methods of film interpretation and explore the relations between critical method and theological interpretation, and
- Improve in their ability to articulate a theological interpretation of film and culture.

## Books available for purchase

- Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz, ed., *Explorations in Theology and Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
- Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, *Film Criticism: Major Critical Approaches to Narrative Film* (New York: Longman, 1989).

These and other books from which assignments are made are on reserve at the Ernest Miller White Library. Some readings may be posted on the CAMS course site.

## Requirements

1. *Course engagement*: Thorough preparation for class and active, thoughtful participation in discussion is a basic requirement of the course. Attendance is mandatory. Students will submit a one-paragraph self-assessment of their course engagement, including a grade, in the conclusion of their Theology and film journal (see 2, below). The following is a rough guide to letter grade assignment: A = completed 95-100% of the reading prior to class discussion, with critical reflection, and engaged thoughtfully and with respect for others in class exchanges; B = completed 85% ...; C = completed 75% ... Grades should be lowered appropriately for unexcused absences, tardiness, leaving class early, in-class texting or other forms of non-participation. The instructor reserves the right to adjust the reported grade when necessary. (about 15%)

2. *Theology and film journal*: Students are to keep a journal as a record of their thinking as it develops in response to their viewing of films, their reading, and the class discussion. This journal may summarize significant themes arising in films and writing on films and should include your attempts at theological-practical interpretation, using one or another of the critical methods discussed in the class. Be as creative as you like in the form, style, and content. Make sure that this is a process that gives you space to reflect and engage theologically on film and culture and your own learning and growth. The completed project will be the subject of a presentation on the last class meeting, along with a presentation on requirement 5, below. Due **April 30**. (about 25%)

3. *Film review*: A short (600-900 word) review of the film *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* is **due Sunday, Feb. 11**. Write for an audience interested in the intersection of faith, film, and culture. For models, see reviews in *The Journal of Religion and Film* (esp. Frederick J. Ruf's review of *The Motorcycle Diaries*,

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1666&context=jrf> or in *The Christian Century*. (about 5%)

4. *Approaches to film interpretation paper*: Students will write a short (2-4 page, double spaced) paper outlining one of the methods of film interpretation outlined by Bywater and Sobchack in *Introduction to Film Criticism* (humanist, auteurist, genre, social science, historical, ideological/theoretical). The paper will serve as the basis for an in-class presentation and discussion of methodological options in interpreting film. **Due March 19.** (about 25%)

5. *Theological analysis of a film*: Students are to write a 6-8 page paper utilizing a combination of textual and contextual methods of interpretation discussed in class and in the assigned reading to arrive at a theological reading of a film of their own choosing (not one of the films assigned in this course). They should also prepare a short presentation of this analysis (no more than five minutes) for class discussion on the final class meeting day. **Essay due Friday, April 27; presentation on April 30.** (about 30%)

All papers must be submitted electronically to the instructor's email inbox on or before the due date.

### Film List

*The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005; 121 min.)

Supplement: *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles, 2004; 128 min.)

*Jesus of Montreal* (Denys Arcand, 1989; 120 min.)

*Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993; 101 min.)

*Silence* (Martin Scorsese, 2016; 161 min.)

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004; 108 min.)

*Wonder Woman* (Patty Jenkins, 2017; 161 min.)

Supplement: *Spider-Man 2* (Sam Raimi, 2004; 127 min.)

*The Pursuit of Happyness* (Gabriele Muccino, 2006; 117 min.)

*Do The Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989; 120 min.)

**Note on screenings:** Films will be shown in GC 206 on Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. on the weekday prior to the class session on which they will be discussed. Attendance is not mandatory (but you must see the film).

### Citation Policy:

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center. For help with citation, voice, development of argument, or other aspects of writing, students are encouraged to consult with the ASC early in the semester.

### Academic Honesty:

All work turned in to the instructor is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

**Accessibility and Accommodation:**

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center ([bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu](mailto:bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu)) during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

**Inclusive Language:**

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. For more information, see <http://www.lpts.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-support-center/online-writing-lab/avoiding-gender-bias>.

**Policy on late work:**

All written assignments are due, unless indicated otherwise, by 11:59 pm on the date given in the syllabus. Students who encounter unusual obstacles to getting an assignment in may ask for an extension of the due date. They should contact the instructor to request an extension before the work comes due. They may speak to the instructor directly, but they are required to communicate by email so as to provide a record of the request. Extensions are granted solely at the discretion of the instructor. Assignments submitted late, when no extension has been granted, will be penalized in the grading by one letter grade increment for every day (a B+ paper becomes a B if one day late, a B- if two days, a C+ if three days, etc.). Assignments submitted more than ten days after the due date will not be accepted.

**Use of electronic devices in class:**

Do not send or read text messages during class. Cell phones should be turned off. In the event that you have a legitimate need to be accessible during class, you may ask the instructor for an exception to this rule. Laptops should not be used if you cannot trust yourself to restrict your use to note-taking and referring to the assigned primary source readings for the day. You may not access the Internet during class time unless specifically for purposes directly relevant to the course. Any misuse of electronic devices during class time, including checking of email or social networking sites will negatively affect the course grade.

**Attendance Policy:**

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

**Contacting the instructor:**

While students are always welcome to speak to the instructor at any time about questions or issues that arise, the most reliable and efficient means of setting up an opportunity to meet and talk over important matters is through email. Students are strongly encouraged to contact the professor when they feel they need clarification on topics and questions that arise in the class, or when they are confronting significant challenges in their learning.

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## Calendar of Topics and Assignments

### I. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- Feb. 5*            **Avenues of Approach: Interpreting Film as Theological Reflection**  
Required reading:  
Marsh and Ortiz 9-34  
Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis," in D. Brown, S. Davaney, K. Tanner, ed., *Converging on Culture* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001)

### II. ATTENDING TO THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS THEMES

- Feb. 11*            **Film review due**

- Feb. 12*            **Toward the Resting Place: *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada***  
Required reading:  
Marsh and Ortiz 35-43  
Bywater and Sobchack ch. 1 and 2 (give more attention to ch. 2)  
Further reading:  
Marsh and Ortiz 59-71  
Supplemental viewing:  
*The Motorcycle Diaries (Diarios de Motocicleta)*

- Feb. 19*            **Enacting the Christ in *Jesus of Montreal***  
Required reading:  
Marsh and Ortiz 115-139  
Bywater and Sobchack ch. 3 and 4  
Further reading:  
Peter Malone "Jesus on Our Screens," in John R. May, ed., *New Image of Religious Film* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2000), 57-71  
Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997), 113-129  
Peter Malone, "Edward Scissorhands: Christology from a Suburban Fairytale," in Marsh and Ortiz 73-86

- Feb. 26*            **Redeeming Time in *Groundhog Day***  
Required reading:  
Marsh and Ortiz 155-165  
Bywater and Sobchack ch. 5 and 6

- March 5*            **Faith and Suffering in *Silence***  
Required reading:  
Bywater and Sobchack ch. 7 and Appendix (review quickly)  
Ian Deweese-Boyd, "Scorsese's *Silence*: Film as Practical Theodicy," *Journal of Religion and Film*,  
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1924&context=jrf>  
Roy Peachey, "The Troubling Legacy of Susaku Endo's *Silence*," *First Things*,  
<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/12/the-troubling-legacy-of-shsaku-ends-silence>  
Further reading:

Marsh and Ortiz 87-95

Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine* 51-71, 205-233

Caesar A. Montevecchio, "Silence" (review), *Journal of Religion and Film*,

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1908&context=jrf>

*March 12-16* **RESEARCH AND STUDY WEEK**

*March 19* Interpreting Film: Discussion of Critical Method

*Student presentations: Film interpretation paper due*

Required reading:

By now, all students should have made their way through Bywater and Sobchack

*March 26* Parables of Love, Loss, Memory: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

Required reading:

David L. Smith, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and the Question of Transcendence," *Journal of Religion and Film*,

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1668&context=jrf>.

Augustine, *Confessions* 10.24/35-28/39 (New City edition)

Further reading:

Brannon M. Hancock, "Film Review: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*," *Journal of Religion and Film*

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1664&context=jrf>.

III. RELIGION, HISTORY, MORAL VISION, AND THE POLITICS OF VIEWING

*April 2* Power, Evil, Gender, Saving the World: *Wonder Woman*

Required reading:

John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 21-48

Jill Lepore, "The Surprising Origin Story of Wonder Woman," *Smithsonian Magazine*, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/origin-story-wonder-woman-180952710/>

Further reading:

Frank Rich, "Spidey Crushes 'Fahrenheit' in 2004," *New York Times*, July 11, 2004 (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DE1D8143CF932A25754C0A9629C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=print>)

Supplemental viewing:

*Spider-Man 2*

*April 9* Chasing the Good Life: *The Pursuit of Happyness*

Required reading:

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001), 1-10, 193-221

Manohla Dargis, "Climbing Out of the Gutter With a 5-Year-Old in Tow," *New York Times*, December 15, 2006

(<http://movies.nytimes.com/2006/12/15/movies/15happ.html?pagewanted=print>)

Read a sampling of the following reviews/discussions:

Patty Moliterno, review of *Pursuit of Happyness*

(<http://www.christiananswers.net/spotlight/movies/2006/pursuitofhappyness2006.html>)

“‘The Pursuit of Happyness’; Winner! People's Award for Best Spiritual Film of 2006” ([http://www.beliefnet.com/story/210/story\\_21078\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/210/story_21078_1.html))

Ben Witherington, “Self-Evident Truths: ‘The Pursuit of Happyness’”

(<http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2006/12/self-evident-truths-pursuit-of.html>)

Further reading:

Dilshad D. Ali, “Chris Gardner’s Real ‘Pursuit of Happyness’”

([http://www.beliefnet.com/story/206/story\\_20658.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/206/story_20658.html))

*April 16*

### More on Theological Interpretation

Required reading:

Margaret R. Miles and S. Brent Plate, “Hospitable Vision: Some Notes on the Ethics of Seeing Film,” *Cross Currents*, Spring 2004, Vol. 54, No 1.

<http://www.crosscurrents.org/MilesPlateSpring2004.htm>.

Clive Marsh, “Religion, Theology and Film in a Postmodern Age: A Response to John Lyden,” *Journal of Religion and Film*,

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1860&context=jrf>.

John Lyden, “To Commend or To Critique? The Question of Religion and Film Studies,” *Journal of Religion and Film*,

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1865&context=jrf>.

Further reading:

Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 151-172

*April 23*

### Race, Otherness, and the City in *Do The Right Thing*

Required reading:

Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), ch. 5

Further reading:

Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 157-167

Sharon Willis, *High Contrast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 158-188

*April 27*

### **Theological analysis paper due**

*April 30*

### Conclusions: Discussion of Our Work

### **Theology and film journal due**

## Select Bibliography for Theological Themes in Contemporary Film

### Books:

- Baugh, Lloyd. *Imaging the Divine*. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1997.
- Billingsley, Lloyd. *The Seductive Image: a Christian Critique of the World of Film*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989.
- Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. New York: Continuum, 1990.
- Brown, Delwin, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner. *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Bywater, Tim, and Thomas Sobchack. *Introduction to Film Criticism*. New York: Longman, 1989.
- Chernus, Ira. *Dr. Strangegod: On the Symbolic Meaning of Nuclear Weapons*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1986.
- Christianson, Eric S., Peter Francis, and William R. Telford, eds. *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film*. London: SCM Press, 2005.
- Deacy, Christopher and Gaye Williams Ortiz. *Theology and Film: Challenging the Sacred/Secular Divide*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.
- Detweiler, Craig and Barry Taylor. *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003.
- Erens, Patricia. *The Jew in American Cinema*. Indiana U. Press, 1984.
- Ferlita, Ernest and John R. May. *Film Odyssey: The Art of Film as Search for Meaning*. New York: Paulist, 1976.
- Friedman, Lester. *The Jewish Image in American Film*. Secaucus: Citadel, 1987.
- Godawa, Brian. *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films With Wisdom & Discernment*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002.
- Hill, Geoffrey. *Illuminating Shadows: The Mythic Power of Film*. Boston: Shambhala, 1992.
- Hillier, Jim. *The New Hollywood*. New York: Continuum, 1989.
- Holloway, Ronald. *Beyond the Image: Approaches to the Religious Dimension in the Cinema*. Geneva: Film Oikoumene, 1977.
- Hurley, Neil P. *The Reel Revolution: A Film Primer on Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987.
- Hurley, Neil P. *Theology through Film*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970. [Republished as *Toward a Film Humanism*. New York: Delta Paperbacks, 1975].
- Jewett, Robert. *Saint Paul at the Movies: The Apostle's Dialogue with American Culture*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.
- Johnston, Robert K. *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film In Dialogue*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000.
- Kammen, Michael. *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: Knopf, 1999.
- Keller, Catherine. *Apocalypse Now and Then*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Kellner, Douglas. *Media Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Kort, Wesley. *Narrative Elements and Religious Meaning*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.
- Johnston, Robert K., ed. *Reframing Theology and Film: New Focus for an Emerging Discipline*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Lyden, John C. *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*. New York: NYU Press, 2003.
- Marsh, Clive. *Theology Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Critical Christian Thinking*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Marsh, Clive and Gaye Ortiz. *Explorations in Theology and Film*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
- Martin, Joel W., and Conrad E. Ostwalt, Jr. *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995.
- Martin, Thomas. *Images and the Imageless: A Study in Religious Consciousness and Film*. Associated University Presses, 1991.
- May, John R., ed. *New Image of Religious Film*. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1997.
- May, John R. and Michael Bird. *Religion in Film*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982.
- May, John. *Film Odyssey: The Art of Film as Search for Meaning*. New York: Paulist Press, 1976.

- May, John R., ed. *Image and Likeness: Religious Visions in American Film Classics*. New York: Paulist Press, 1992.
- Medved, Michael. *Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Miles, Margaret. *Seeing and Believing*. Beacon, 1996.
- Mitchell, Jolyon and S. Brent Plate, eds. *The Religion and Film Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Monaco, James. *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, Multimedia: Language, History, Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- O'Brien, Tom. *The Screening of America: Movies and Values from 'Rocky' to 'Rainman.'* (New York: Continuum, 1990.
- O'Leary, Stephen. *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Plate, S. Brent, and David Jasper, ed. *Imag(in)ing Otherness: Filmic Visions of Living Together*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.
- Reinhartz, Adele. *Jesus of Hollywood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Reinhartz, Adele. *Scripture on the Silver Screen*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003.
- Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.
- Ryan, Michael and Douglas Kellner. *Camera Politica: The Politics of Ideology and Contemporary American Film*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Schrader, Paul. *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.
- Scott, Bernard Brandon. *Hollywood Dreams and Biblical Stories*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.
- Seay, Chris, and Greg Garrett. *The Gospel Reloaded: Exploring Spirituality and Faith in The Matrix*. Colorado Springs: Pinon, 2003.
- Stern, Richard C., et al. *Savior on the Silver Screen*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999.
- Stone, Brian P. *Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.
- Tatum, W. Barnes. *Jesus at the Movies: A Guide to the First Hundred Years*. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1997.
- Sara Anson Vaux. *Finding Meaning at the Movies*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Wall, James M. *Church and Cinema: A Way of Viewing Film*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1971.
- Walsh, Richard. *Reading the Gospels in the Dark: Portrayals of Jesus in Film*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, Intl., 2003.
- Wills, Sharon. *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997.

**Internet sites:**

*Film Studies Resources, UC Berkeley Library:* <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/filmstudies/index.html>.

Mostly bibliographical in focus, but includes links to reviews and to several databases.

*The Internet Movie Database:* [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). A site that supplies a wealth of information, plot summaries, cast and full credits, and links to reviews.

*Jesus: real to reel:* [www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/syllabi/a/ascough/Apocalypticism/realreel.htm](http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/syllabi/a/ascough/Apocalypticism/realreel.htm).

Devoted to studies of Jesus through film, this site also features links to a variety of resources on the topic of religion and film.

*The Journal of Religion and Film:* <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/>. An online journal with articles and reviews, mostly written from a religious studies perspective.



## **Some Questions for Theological Interpretation of Films**

### **I. Religion**

Is religion treated in the film? Explicitly or implicitly?

In what form is religion depicted? As institutional, communal or individual? With attention to particularities of belief and/or practice?

How are understandings of or attitudes toward religion conveyed or elicited?

Does the film display religious dimensions (such as symbol, ritual, or myth) outside the context of any explicit reference to religion or religious practice?

### **II. Theology**

Does the film advance a particular religious or theological vision?

Does it disclose a perspective on God, the sacred, or transcendence?

On the human condition or predicament?

On the nature of community?

On redemption or liberation?

What attitudes toward nature or history are communicated in the film?

Does the film convey messages about the goal or consummation of history? About the capacity of human beings to affect historical outcomes?

### **III. Values**

Are particular values advanced in the film?

Are certain values called into question?

By what techniques does the film advocate or denigrate particular values?

Are certain values or social arrangements assumed as normative?

How are gender roles and relations, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class depicted?

### **IV. Contextual readings**

Are there continuities between themes addressed in the film and those taken up in other contemporary films?

To what experience(s) of the contemporary cultural moment might one relate the film's treatment of religion and values?

To what matters of contemporary debate, concern, or anxiety does the film speak?

Are pertinent issues ignored?

Does the film address a particular audience? marginalize particular viewers?

## **Theology and film journaling and reflecting**

Areas to explore

### 1. The film narrative

- What aspects of this film especially invite theological interpretation?

### 2. The film's context

- How does what I know about the production of this film, its reception, and other elements of its context influence my theological reading?

### 3. Filmic elements

- What (new) details of the film (and of the tactics of film making) am I noticing in this film? How do these details contribute to the film's meaning or impact?

### 4. Criticism

- What interpretive tools am I using as I interpret this film? (Aim to try a variety of tools and lenses through this course.)

### 5. The interpreter

- From what position am I viewing this film (and reflecting and writing on it)?