

**The University of Findlay  
College of Liberal Arts  
Fall WEC 2005  
Reli 340.41 Special Topics in Religion:  
Religious Themes in Film**

*The Mission of the University is to equip our students  
for meaningful lives and productive careers.*

**Course Number/Title:** Reli 340.41

**Credit Hours:** 3

**Class Time/Place:** Saturdays 8:00-11:50 a.m. TBA

**Prerequisites:** Engl 106

**Instructor:** Louis Stulman, 313 Old Main, extension 6988

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 8:00-11:00 a.m. 2:00-4:00 p.m.

**Course Description** Special Topics in Religion: Religious Themes in Film GE/LAD

Each time this course is offered, it will focus on a specific topic in religious studies. May be taken more than once, provided the topics are different.

**Relationship to the  
Conceptual  
Framework**

Reli 340 is a humanities course in the tradition of liberal arts education. Students will thus demonstrate competency in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking carefully, clearly, and effectively about issues which matter deeply to all peoples and cultures: life and death, rites of passage, ethical reflection and action, relationships between self and society, faith and transcendence, and human destinies.

**Course Objectives**

Reli 340 Religious Themes in Film is designed to explore themes and concerns in selected films, modern literature, and the Bible. The course will examine a broad range of topics including innocent suffering, responses to pain, good and evil, modernity versus tradition, meaning and absurdity, non-violence as social protest, exile and homecoming, and the power of imagination and memory. Students will demonstrate a critical understanding of the ways in which the assigned films and religious writings function as a source of insight into human experience and social action.

**General Education Learning Outcomes Addressed**

Goal 1. Students will take courses which expose them to a range of basic religious beliefs and diverse ethical perspectives and which encourage them to develop their own perspectives on global issues.	XX
Goal 2. Students will become familiar with the historical, scientific, literary, and/or philosophical content of a range of disciplines.	
Goal 3. Students will acquire and practice skills for reading, writing, speaking, listening, abstract inquiry, critical thinking, logical reasoning, and using computers and related technology.	XX
Goal 4. Students will develop an appreciation for and means of analyzing art, literature, music, communication, science, and/or theatre.	XX
Goal 5. Throughout their general education experience, students will analyze and reflect upon the challenges facing our global society as well as the importance of being a life-long learner and responsible citizen.	XX

**Required Textbooks and other materials**

The New Oxford Annotated Bible (Oxford, 2001)

Reel Spirituality, Robert K. Johnson

The Violence of Love, Oscar Romero

Useless Beauty, Robert K. Johnson

## Knowledge Base

<http://www.imdb.com/>  
<http://www.mith2.umd.edu/WomensStudies/FilmReviews/>  
<http://www.rottentomatoes.com/>  
<http://www.mrqe.com/>  
<http://www.jewfaq.org/index.htm>  
<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~jtreat/rs/resources.html>  
<http://www.christiancentury.org/>  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/>  
<http://www.sbl-site.org/>  
<http://www.sojo.net/>  
<http://www.bible.gen.nz/>  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/>  
<http://www.filmreview.co.uk/>

Distributed material includes M. L. King, O. Romero, Brueggemann, Davies, Stulman, et al.

See also Alter, R. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Hopeful Imagination*.

Crenshaw, J. L. ed., *Theodicy in the Old Testament*.

Frei, H. W. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*.

Gottcent, J. H. *The Bible: A Literary Guide*.

Sapp, S. *Full of Years: Aging and the Elderly in the Bible and Today*.

Thompson, L. *Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country*.

## Instructional Strategies

Case Analysis		Library and Internet Research	X
Debate		Practice/drill	
Discovery/Independent Research	X	Problem solving	
Discussion/Questioning/ Interviewing		Reading assignments	X
Experiential Learning		Role playing/simulation games	
Field Experience	X	Service Learning	
Group Discussion	X	Video/Audio Review and Critique	X
Laboratory Experiences		Individual Presentation	X
Lecture	X		

**Methods of Assessment**

Abstracts		Participation	X
Attendance	X	Peer Evaluation	
Capstone Project		Portfolio	
Case Study		Portfolio Lab Performance	
Exam	X	Presentations	X
Group Projects		Professional Evaluation	
Homework Assignments	X	Quizzes	
Internet Research		Research Essays	X
Journaling		Other	
Lab Performance			
Oral/written review of literature	X		

**Course Requirements**

**Course Requirements-- Evaluation**

1. Assigned reading in the primary and secondary material.
2. Regular attendance and participation in the class discussion, and preparation of preceptorial assignments. Attendance is required. Absences will result in the lowering of a student's final grade.
3. Five critical essays (4-5 pages typed) on the assigned films and readings. The style and format for these essays will be discussed in class.
4. Ten minute presentations of film critiques at the start of each class.
5. A final examination covering the class discussions, lectures, films, and required reading.

**Grading**

1. 30% of the final grade will be based upon classroom preparation and discussion.
2. 50% of the final grade will be based upon critical essays, each of equal weight.
3. 20% of the final grade will be based upon the final examination.

**Grading Scale/Distribution**

A= 100-90, B=89-80, C=79-70, D=69-60, F=below 60

<b>Honor Code</b>	<i>I will not knowingly engage in any dishonorable behavior, cheat, steal, lie or commit any act of plagiarism during my academic work, course, or endeavor. If I observe an act which I believe violates the University's Honor Code, I may, in my discretion, report it to the appropriate personnel.</i>
<b>Course Policies and Practices</b>	Make-up exams will be given only in extenuating circumstances and only if the instructor is contacted PRIOR to the time of exam and with the signature of the Dean/Vice President of Academic Affairs; Attendance is required. Non-attendance of three or more classes will lead to an automatic reduction of one letter grade. See also policy in recent University catalog as well.
<b>Final Exam Date</b>	Final Exam date: November 19, 2005 @ 8:00 a.m.
<b>Special Services</b>	If you are a student with a disability, it is your responsibility to register with the Office of Disability Service and notify your instructor one week prior to any needed service so that reasonable accommodations can be made for you.
<b>Additional Information</b>	Note about religion classes: Although the religious studies classes offered at the University of Findlay are equal to other areas of study in terms of rigor and objectivity, they are nonetheless distinctive in several important aspects. A religion class is more than a course of study to be mastered—with competition, grades and rewards. The main questions of religion—Who am I, Where have I come from? Where am I going? Does life hold meaning and value? How should I live?—are questions that transcend the confines of any classroom and lead us deeper into the “unspeakable mystery of existence” (Nouwen). Therefore, the present course is not one in which you can passively absorb the instructor’s comments and then simply regurgitate them to the instructor on tests. Students are encouraged and expected to participate by intellectually struggling with the complex issues of “meaning.” Thus, although the approach of Rel 340 is historical and literary in orientation, it is nonetheless profoundly “religious” (however not in a sectarian manner).

## Tentative Class Schedule

(Course outline is subject to change throughout the semester)

In preparation for class read the first few chapters of “Reel Spirituality.”

Unit 1: -Introduction to the Course: Religious Themes in Film

Chaim Potok’s *The Chosen*. Note in your essay Potok’s use of irony, reversals, character development, and symbols such as the “eye.” See in the Bible the following passages: Luke 15; 1 Samuel 18 (David and Jonathan); Genesis 25:19-26. Please include a critique of the film’s characters, plot development, setting, and thematic coherence. Also note the interplay of modern culture and traditional expressions of faith.

Unit 2: -Vocation (Life as a “Calling”) and Solidarity with the Poor

“Dead Man Walking”

Read Helen Prejean, *Dead Man Walking*; also read the following texts in the Bible: Gen 1:26-27; Jer 1:4-10; Amos 5. I will handout a series of questions that you may use to frame your critical essay.

Unit 3: -Gratuitous Suffering and Responses to Pain

-We will watch one of the following films: “The Revolt of Job,” Romero,” Schindler’s List,” “The Mission” or “Crimes and Misdemeanors”

Read assigned sections in the book of Job and the Gospels

Unit 4: - The Ambivalence of “Homecoming” and “Memory”

Horton Foote’s “The Trip to Bountiful”

See also Deut 8; Isaiah 40, 43 and study other assigned sections in the Bible on memory and homecoming

Unit 5: -Useless Beauty/ Meaning/Meaningless in Life

Read Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament;

“Crimes and Misdemeanors,” “About Schmidt” (2002) or “American Beauty”

Unit 6: -Final Examination—November 19<sup>th</sup>