

HIST 803 – Spring 2021 – Revised Jan. 2021

Historical Theology Through the Lens of Contemporary Film

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary HIST 803

Course Syllabus: Spring 2021

PREREQUISITE: HIST 501 (*History 1*)

*(Note: Students who have taken
HIST 803 "Christology and Trinity in the Early Church"
may not also take this course for credit)*

The Doctor:

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office hours by appointment

Synchronous Discussion Group Meeting Dates:

*This course is an online hybrid course with some required synchronous meetings.
All meetings are scheduled to be on Zoom, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm, US CENTRAL
TIME
*on the following dates:**

February 8, February 22, March 8, March 22, April 12, April 26, May 10

Course Description

This course is a history elective that begins with the foundation laid in the introductory course, *The History of Christian Thought and Practice I*, especially with regard to the development of doctrine. Here we will take a deeper dive into the doctrine of the Trinity and christology, not only reading farther into the primary sources, but also taking the opportunity to read the extant writings of some of the heretical positions from the early Church.

A major emphasis of this course will be to explore expressions of Christology in contemporary popular culture/media, especially science fiction and superhero stories, as a way into the teaching of christology. For the purposes of this class, "contemporary" media is defined as anything from the second half of the twentieth century to the present. In many cases, we will be analyzing classic movies and TV shows, the goal being to develop a methodology for analyzing the worldview, anthropology, and christological/soteriological implications of any media expression of popular culture.

Course Requirements:

The course will consist of watching films/shows, readings in primary and secondary sources, and online synchronous discussion. It is expected that all students will watch all of the required films, even if they have seen the film before. Participation in the online discussion sessions is mandatory. Note that the first

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discussion meeting is in the second week of the semester, so there will be reading assignments required to prepare for that first discussion meeting. PhD students will have additional reading assignments.

It is assumed that students will normally access the films/shows on some streaming service such as Amazon Prime (at this time the only thing on Netflix is Star Trek: TNG, but all the Marvel and Star Wars stuff is on Disney+, if you have access to that), and that many of them will have to be rented for a fee. This fee is considered part of the student's "book" costs for the course. If you find that, due to circumstances beyond your control, you simply cannot get access to a film or show, then just skip it and move on, but still read the relevant chapter(s) in the book that go with the movie or show in question. However, the fact that a film or show is only available for a rental fee is not a reason to skip it. Fair warning: whenever you have not seen a film or show that we discuss, there will be spoilers.

Finally, a note about adult themes and language. Some of the films we will watch and discuss are rated for adult audiences. There may be scenes that make you uncomfortable for one reason or another. Such is the reality with art, however: 1) Since you are watching these films/shows on your own, you should always feel free to fast-forward over anything that you do not want to see; and 2) In our online discussions, you are always free to sit back quietly and not enter into the discussion if we get talking about anything that makes you uncomfortable. You also always have the right to mute your camera for a while for any reason if you want/need to, though it is preferred that you keep your camera on most of the time. In addition, the actors in these films may use "earthy" language, including words that would be considered offensive by some people. If it is absolutely necessary to quote a line with offensive words in it, you may, but do so sparingly. Apart from that, let's keep our language such that no one could be offended. Let's not let the free-flowing nature of the dialogue in the films we watch make us think that we have to emulate that in our discussion. I know we're all adults and we will be talking about a topic that may be fun and exciting to discuss, but let's always keep in mind our responsibility to the emotional safety of our colleagues. With great intellectual power comes great verbal responsibility.

Except for the times we are actually online together, all communication for this course will be via email. It is a requirement of the course that students are able to use e-mail, receive e-mails (with attachments) from the professor, and possibly turn in assignments via e-mail (as attachments). If you need to send a document to the professor, DO NOT send a link to some cloud-based thing. Attach the actual Word document to the email. You must plan to check your GARRETT email account daily. Do not attempt to contact the professor directly through the "chat" functions in Moodle, MyGETS, Outlook, or any of that. Just use email.

Students will write two papers for this course:

Analysis Paper – Using the methodology from the book *From Star Wars to Superman*, analyze a film or show episode of your choice. But make sure there is a clear hero/Christ figure. I found I could not include Firefly or Blade Runner in my book because they feature something more like an anti-hero. So when you choose your film/show, be prepared to demonstrate how you see the hero character as a Christ-figure, though it does not have to be particularly orthodox – you can teach orthodoxy by comparison with a heresy. The point of the paper is to show how the film or show you chose can be used to teach christology. You may imagine a target audience of youth, young adults,

adult learners, or some combination of those (but not children under age 13). As part of your conclusion, think about where your hero falls on the continuum expressed by the chart on p. 129 of *The Earliest Christologies* and make sure to include an orthodoxy score for your hero!

Final Essay – Imagine you are writing a blog or bulletin article in response to the question: Why do we consider Coptics to be legitimate Christians (not heretics) but the Jehovah's Witnesses are not treated as a Christian denomination? Behind this question is the question of why the boundaries set at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 are no longer considered the boundaries of orthodoxy, and yet the boundaries set at the Councils of Nicaea & Constantinople are still considered to be the defining boundaries of orthodox Christianity? Why is it NOT possible to be considered Christian and non-Nicene, but today one *can* be considered Christian and non-Chalcedonian? Review the relevant section of *Reading the Early Church Fathers* from your History 1 class for some of the details, and make good use of the Frances Young book.

PRIMARY SOURCES *will be distributed as PDFs or links to be read online.*
They are included in the schedule below, and are subject to change.

Required BOOKS (Secondary Sources)

Nicaea and its Legacy, Lewis Ayres
(Oxford, ISBN: 978-0198755050) - \$32.81 on Amazon

Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy, by John McGuckin
(St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, ISBN: 978-0881418637) - \$45.00 on Amazon

The Earliest Christologies: Five Images of Christ in the Post-Apostolic Age, by James L. Papandrea
(IVP Academic, ISBN: 978-0830851270) - \$18.00 on Amazon

From Star Wars to Superman: Christ Figures in Science Fiction and Superhero Films, by James L. Papandrea
(Sophia Institute Press, ISBN: 978-1622823888) - \$19.95 on Amazon

Novatian of Rome and the Culmination of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy, by James L. Papandrea
(Pickwick, ISBN: 978-1606087800) - \$25.00 on Amazon

From Nicaea to Chalcedon, by Frances Young
(Baker Academic, ISBN: 978-0801039157) – \$27.49 on Amazon

And for REVIEW:

Reading the Early Church Fathers: From the Didache to Nicaea by James L. Papandrea
(Mawah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012) – You already have this from History 1

Trinity 101: Father, Son, Holy Spirit by James L. Papandrea
(Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2012) – You already have this from History 1

Additional Required Reading for PhD Students

Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God, ed. C. Stephen Evans
(Regent, ISBN: 978-1573834445) - \$22.69 on Amazon

Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol. 1: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451), by Aloys Grillmeier
(Westminster John Knox, ISBN: 978-0664223014) - \$37.78 on Amazon

The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea, by Stephen Hildebrand (OPTIONAL)
(CUA, ISBN: 978-0813217178) - \$28.95 on Amazon

One book by Larry Hurtado:

EITHER: Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity, by Larry Hurtado

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(Eerdmans, ISBN: 978-0802831675) - \$40.40 on Amazon

OR: One God, One Lord, Larry Hurtado
(T&T Clark, ISBN: 978-0567657718) - \$30.95 on Amazon

Athanasius: A Theological Introduction, by Thomas Weinandy
(CUA, ISBN: 978-0813231143) - \$34.95 on Amazon

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: You may wonder whether it's better to watch a film/show first with no particular agenda, and then read my analysis of it in *From Star Wars to Superman*, or read the analysis of it first and then watch the film/show with that in mind, so you know what to look for. I wish I had a simple answer for that, but I think it depends a lot on your personal preference and how long ago (if at all) you saw the film or show in question. If you have already seen the film/show, I would like you to watch it again, though in that case you *may* want to read my analysis of it first, and then watch it, keeping an eye out for the things I talk about in the book. If you have never seen the film/show in question, then feel free to watch it first and just enjoy it, and then read the analysis. You can always go back to it, and usually even if you rent it you should have 24 to 48 hours to watch it again if you want to. Where I give you a choice between two or more films/shows, you should watch any that you've never seen. But at the end of the day, it's completely up to you. I want this experience to be fun, and I do not want the analysis of these films/shows to detract from your enjoyment of them. It is my hope that watching films/shows like these with eyes more wide open to issues of worldview, anthropology, christology, & theology will actually enhance your enjoyment, not to mention your enjoyment of discussing them with friends and colleagues.

Also: You may wonder why in some cases I've chosen older versions of a particular story (for example, why Michael Keaton's Batman and not Christian Bale's, or why not an Avengers movie?). The answer has to do with the fact that when we look at a hero as a metaphor for Christ, the christology we find will be revealed to a large extent in the hero's origin story. So I've tried to choose versions that have clear origin stories – though of course we can discuss other versions of each story, other adaptations, remakes, and reboots. Nothing is off limits in our discussion time (within reason).

So... here is our schedule for the semester:

To Prepare for Feb. 8 discussion:

Watch: Star Trek the Next Generation: Rightful Heir (season 6: ep. 23, on Netflix)

Watch: Spider-Man (2002 Maguire) OR Iron Man (2008) OR Captain America (2011)

Read Secondary Source(s): *The Earliest Christologies*, pp. 11-43

From Star Wars to Superman, chapters 1, 2, & 14 (pp. 275-294)

CHART: *Christology Continuum*, *The Earliest Christologies*, p. 129.

Read Primary Source(s): Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolichus*

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Hermas, *The Shepherd* (excerpts)

Sibylline Oracles 8.569-641

PhD Students also read: Hurtado

ZOOM February 8 – Adoptionism (Salvation by Personal Holiness?)

To Prepare for Feb. 22 discussion:

Watch: Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope (1977) OR The Terminator (1984)

Watch: The Matrix (1999) OR Tron (1982)

Read Secondary Source(s): *The Earliest Christologies*, pp. 45-84

From Star Wars to Superman, chapters 3, 7, 9, & 10

Read Primary Source(s): *The Gospel of Philip*, *The Acts of John*

PhD Students also read: Grillmeier, (relevant chapters/first one-third of the book)

ZOOM February 22 – Docetism and Gnosticism

To Prepare for Mar. 8 discussion:

Watch: I Robot (2004)

Watch: Men in Black (1997)

Read Secondary Source(s): *The Earliest Christologies*, pp. 85-127

From Star Wars to Superman, chapter 4

Novatian of Rome – whole book

REVIEW: *Reading the Early Church Fathers*, pp. 144-147

Read Primary Source(s): Novatian, *On the Trinity* (excerpt)

Hippolytus, *Against Noetus*, Dionysius of Rome, *Against the Sabellians*

PhD Students also read: Grillmeier (relevant chapters/second one-third of the book)

ZOOM March 8 – Modalism and Apollinarianism/Monothelism

To Prepare for Mar. 22 discussion:

Watch: The Fifth Element (1997)

Watch: Wonder Woman (2017) OR Man of Steel (2013) OR Superman (1978) OR Batman (1989)

Read Secondary Source(s): Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy* – whole book (sorry)

From Star Wars to Superman, chapters 5, 14 (pp. 294-311)

REVIEW: *Trinity 101*, chapters 2 & 3, & COMPARE the elements in the Nicene Creed to the criteria in the Orthodoxy Score Chart on pp. 332-333 of *From Star Wars to Superman*

Read Primary Source(s): Athanasius, *Defense of the Nicene Council*

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Arius, *The Thalia* (fragments excerpted from Athanasius' *Against the Arians*)

PhD Students also read: Weinandy

ZOOM March 22 – Nicaea & Constantinople, Arianism

To Prepare for Apr. 12 discussion:

Watch: Pleasantville (1998)

Watch: IF you watched the show LOST, rewatch the end (optional)

Read Secondary Source(s): McGuckin – whole book

From Star Wars to Superman, chapters 6, 8

Read Primary Source(s): Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity*

PhD Students also read: Hildebrand (optional)

ZOOM April 12 – Salvation by Enlightenment?

APRIL 12 – ANALYSIS PAPER DUE

To Prepare for Apr. 26 discussion:

Watch: Doctor Who: Father's Day (2005) and The Power of Three (2012)

Watch: All of Me (1984, the one with Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin)

Read Secondary Source(s): Young (excerpts TBA)

From Star Wars to Superman, chapter 13

Read Primary Source(s): Cyril/Nestorius Correspondence

PhD Students also read: Grillmeier (the rest of the book)

ZOOM April 26 – Ephesus & Chalcedon, Nestorianism and Monophysitism

To Prepare for May 10 discussion:

Watch: The Time Machine (2002) OR The Time Machine (1960)

Watch: Planet of the Apes (1968)

Read Secondary Source(s): *From Star Wars to Superman*, chapters 11, 12, 15

REVIEW: *Reading the Early Church Fathers*, pp. 210-219

Read Primary Source(s): TBD

PhD Students also read: Evans

ZOOM May 10 – Salvation by Progress?

MAY 10 – FINAL ESSAY DUE