The 2024 International Conference on Religion & Film

RELIGION & FILM: PAST & PRESENT

Sponsored by
Bill and Monica Blizek
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Brehm Film at Fuller Theological Seminary
The International Journal of Religion & Film
WiFi Access

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Meals

Scan the QR code for information regarding local eateries and happy hour options in the area:
Welcome to Sunny Southern California!

We are delighted not only to be hosting the 2024 International Conference on Religion & Film, but also to be welcoming our colleagues and friends to the City of Angels, some for the first time! Given the unique location of this year’s conference, we are eager to explore the rich history of Hollywood with you as well as the ways emerging technologies will influence the future of filmmaking in Hollywood and around the world.

The International Conference on Religion & Film has established itself as an event that fosters intellectual stimulation, builds networks, and advances scholarship related to Religion and Film Studies. Beyond the opportunities afforded by the conference itself (including our day-long Hollywood tour), our hope is that you are able to explore the beautiful city of Pasadena, with its own rich history of filmmaking.

On behalf of The Journal of Religion & Film and Brehm Film, we wish you a successful and inspiring conference!

Co-Chairs:

Jeanette Reedy Solano, Ph.D.
Professor of Religious Studies
California State University, Fullerton

Kutter Callaway, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology & Culture, Fuller Theological Seminary
# Schedule: Day 1

**Thursday, June 27**

8 AM Registration  
*Coffee and Pastries*

8:30 AM Opening Remarks

9 – 10:30 AM  
**FIRST PRESENTATION BLOCK**

**Religion and Film in Early Hollywood, Moderated by Craig Detweiler, PSY 130**
- The Shroud of Cinema: Remembering and Reframing Sacred Space in Silent American Film - Terry Lindvall, Virginia Wesleyan University
- Consumed by the American West: Embracing Humanity Through Reconciliation - Josh Neuberger, Boston University School of Theology
- Antiquity and Authority in Intolerance and The Ten Commandments - Emily Pothast, Graduate Theological Union

**Celluloid Opportunities (cont.)**
- Religion, Gender, Horror, Comedy: Barbie’s Plastic Boundaries - Ken Derry, University of Toronto Mississauga

10:30 AM Break  
*Coffee and Pastries*

11 AM – 1 PM  
**SECOND PRESENTATION BLOCK**

**The Cinematic Now, Moderated by Adam Soenstrom, PSY 13**
- Acceleration and Contemporary Filmmaking: Camera-based research in the Study of Lived Religion - Srdjan Sremac, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
- Reel Bad Religions? Investigating trends of how religion is depicted in contemporary cinema - Annette Gjerde Hansen, University of Oslo
- The Transcendence of Space and Time in Science Fiction - Jochen Mündlein, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich
- More Screen Time: Between Access and Representation in Film and Religion - Candace Mixon, Reed College

**Celluloid Opportunities**  
**Moderated by Mugdha Yeolekar, PSY 126**
- Beyond the Beard: Women Rabbis in Feature Films - Laurie Baron, San Diego State University
- Black Muslim Women in North American Film - Kristian Petersen, Old Dominion University
Franchising Fear, Moderated by Kutter Callaway, PSY 126
- From The Conjuring Universe to Capital Insurrection: The Evolving Awareness of Spiritual Warfare in the American Imaginary - Dayna Kalleres, University of California, San Diego
- The Past and Future of The Exorcist Franchise: The Anti-Spiritualist Paradigm behind Exorcism Films - Michael Heyes, Lycoming College
- Ghostbusters and the Apocalypse - Jack Roempke Andersson, University of Gothenburg

1-2:15 PM Lunch Break On Your Own

2:15 – 3:45 PM
THIRD PRESENTATION BLOCK
The Politics of Reception, Moderated by Melissa Croteau PSY 130
- The Barbenheimer Effect: A Postsecular Pilgrimage to the Movies - Joel Mayward, George Fox University
- A Cultural History of Red-Pilling - Rachel Wagner, Ithaca College

Lex Visio, Lex Credendi, Moderated by Lindsey Macumber, PSY 126
- The Cross as Symbol, Prop, and Paradigm in Horror Cinema - Bryan Stone, Boston University School of Theology

Lex Visio, Lex Credendi (continued)
- “It had to be supple and consistent”: Divinity, Matter and Bresson’s Eucharistic Vision in A Man Escaped - Gilbert Yeoh, National University of Singapore

3:45-4 PM Break

4 – 5:30 PM
A CONVERSATION WITH NICK VALLEONGA & RALPH WINTER
Moderated by Jeanette Solano Travis Auditorium

Nick Vallelonga is a multi-award-winning actor, director, writer and producer, best known for garnering two Academy Awards® and two Golden Globes® for Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay for Green Book.

Ralph Winter is a renowned Hollywood producer best known for the Star Trek and X-Men movies as well as many other blockbuster films. His most recent project was producing Darren Aronofsky’s Postcard from Earth, the premiere film in Las Vegas’ state-of-the-art Sphere.

5:30 - 7 PM Dinner
On Your Own

7:00 PM
Film Screening: Wildcat Travis Auditorium
Schedule: Day 2

Friday, June 28

8 AM  Coffee and Pastries

9 – 10:30 AM  FIRST PRESENTATION BLOCK

The Future (of Teaching) Is Already Here, Moderated by John Lyden
PSY 130
• Teaching the Replicants: Religion, Film, and Pedagogy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence - Regan Hardeman, Boston University School of Theology
• Teaching the Film Pi (π): Interventions of Horror and Mysticism in a STEM-Dominated Academy - Matthew B. Lynch, Oregon State University
• Screening the Divine: How Pluralistic Storytelling Builds Religious Literacy - Kianna Mahony, Harvard Divinity School

10:30 AM Break
Coffee and Pastries

11 AM – 1 PM  SECOND PRESENTATION BLOCK

Acoustical Power: Political Critique through Music, Moderated by Kutter Callaway, PSY 130
• MIPSTERZ - Abbas Ratani, MIPSTERZ; Reyhab Patel, Carleton University
• From The Jazz Singer to “Ma” Rainey’s Black Bottom: Or, Why Movies About Jazz will be Banned in Florida - Jon Pahl, United Lutheran Seminary
• Filming the Spirit: Amazing Grace and the Challenge of the Music Documentary - Joseph G. Kickasola, Baylor University

A Quiet Strength: Past and Present Depictions of Pacifism, Moderated by Robert Johnston, PSY 126
• Terrence Malick’s A Hidden Life: Franz Jägerstätter and the Way of the Cross - William Skiles, Regent University
• Gary Cooper’s Pacifist Trilogy vs. Hacksaw Ridge: Changing American Attitudes Toward Christian Pacifism from World War I to Today - Zachary Ingle, Hardin-Simmons University

They Come at Night, Moderated by Amir Hussain, PSY 126
• The Jesus Movement and The Thief in the Night - Karl Martin, Point Loma Nazarene University
• The Djinn: The Evolution of the Monstrous and Islam in Hollywood Horror Films - Rubina Ramji, Cape Breton University
• Nope and Nahum as Survival Literature - Diana Abernethy, Huntingdon College
A Quiet Strength: Past and Present
Depictions of Pacifism (continued)
• “I felt His voice take the sword out of my hand”: Nonviolence and the Many Versions of Ben Hur - John Lyden, University of Nebraska Omaha

1 – 2:15 PM Lunch Break
On Your Own

2:15 – 3:45 PM
THIRD PRESENTATION BLOCK

Streaming Evil, Moderated by Jeanette Reedy Solano PSY 130
• Panel on Yellowjackets
• From the Garden to the Wilderness: Inverting the Myth of the Goddess in Yellowjackets - Lindsay Macumber, Saint Mary’s University
• Yellowjackets meet the Windigo: A Settler Cautionary Tale -Syed Adnan Hussain, Saint Mary’s University
• Hellbound and Mediated Religion in Korean Netflix Originals - Seung Min Hong, International Christian University

Dealing with Death and Reconciling Your Life, Moderated by Rebecca VerStratan-McSparran, PSY 126
• Burying Ashes and Making Dust: Redemption, Religion, and Memorialization in Recent Road Movies - Laura Senio Blair, Southwestern University
• Death, Loss and Continuity: Exploring continuing bonds in contemporary Swedish films - Sofia Sjö, The Donner Institute

3:45PM - 6 PM Happy Hour
On Your Own

6 – 8 PM FOUNDER’S BANQUET
HONORING WILLIAM BLIZEK AND ROBERT JOHNSTON at The Garth, Fuller Seminary’s Outdoor Event Space

Consider wearing a jacket or sweater. California evenings can be chilly even in the summer season.

8 PM Wine Reception at The Blue House, 255 S Marengo Ave, Pasadena, CA 91101
As sociologist Andrew Greely noted in his work, Catholic Imagination, Catholics are storytellers who live in a world that is haunted by a sense that the objects, events, and people of daily life are sources of grace. The statutes, holy cards, statutes, and medals help form Catholic material culture. But, as Dominican priest and art historian Michael Morris noted, the collecting of such objects is not necessarily reserved to believers. Hollywood, with its stars who dwell in Olympian heights beside their earlier Egyptian, Greek, and Roman predecessors, is its own cult with its own material culture. In the earliest days of this empire, movie posters were its icons. Like their Catholic and Orthodox counterparts, these icons of Hollywood opened a portal into a heavenly realm filled with epic drama.

With many of the items being artistic masterpieces, Morris gathered more than eighty first-edition posters and related ephemera from Bible-themed movies. The resulting collection follows the transition in Hollywood culture from the written to the celluloid Bible, from real religion to reel spectacle as it was created and sustained by the dynastic priests of the Hollywood studio industry.

On display at the 2024 International Conference on Religion & Film is a small sampling from this epic collection owned by Blackfriars Gallery in Berkeley, CA. Following five themes that characterize Biblically inspired films – violence, sexuality, art, mysticism, and magnificence – the collection illustrates, both literally and metaphorically, the diverse ways in which this art genre and movies in general exert a fascinating power on the contemporary imagination.

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Edison’s Copyrighted Production of The Passion Play, USA, 1898

Beginning with the murder of Abel by his brother Cain in the Book of Genesis, violence is constitutive to the Biblical narrative. In the Christian Biblical texts, the primary focus is on the sufferings of Jesus Christ or his followers. After the stereoscope expanded their accessibility, the medieval passion plays became a popular means to experience the Biblical spectacle. Many European actors, including Bela Lugosi, began their careers in these plays. Created by Hennegan & Co, this piece is not a movie poster as such. Rather it advertises the Richard G. Hollaman production, *The Passion Play of Ober-Ammergau*. Hollaman failed to obtain permission to use a patented filming method created by Thomas Edison. Representing the combative, if not violent, environment of the early film industry, the poster records one of the earliest motion picture camera infringement lawsuits filed by Edison.
Jesus Christ Superstar, Japan, 1973
The suffering of Jesus Christ and the violence of his death are continuous themes across the decades, culminating in the graphic depiction in Mel Gibson's Passion of the Christ (2004). This Japanese poster for the cinematic adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice's iconic rock opera, Jesus Christ Superstar, signals the truly global appeal of the films in this genre, but particularly films about the life of Jesus, be they musicals or dramas.

Adan y Eva, Mexico, 1956
Again, the Book of Genesis provides the source material for this popular cinematic couple. Nudity was a key promotional device with early silent films containing scenes later forbidden by the 1930s Hays Code. This Mexican production, written and directed by Alberto Gout, featured 1953 Miss Universe, Christiane Martel and Carlos Baena. The poster depicts the balancing act by artists to get as close to the limits of the Code as possible.

Christus, France, 1917
Inspired by “Rest on the Flight into Egypt” (1879) by Luc-Olivier Merson (1846-1920), this stone lithograph reflects a broader interest of this early twentieth period in Egypt and the Near East cultures. The hour-long film, shot on location in Egypt, is compositionally based on famous paintings by DaVinci, Rembrandt, Mantegna, and other artists.

De Laaste Dagen Van Pompeii, Netherlands, 1939
Catholic theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) observed that magnificence is a virtue because in its practice humans are drawn closer to the divine magnitude of God. Similarly, the English philosopher, Edmund Burke, observed in his commentary on the sublime and the beautiful several characteristics of human experience that mirror qualities associated with the Divine: immensity, multitude, terror, and disaster. Many of these qualities are key to the spectacle dimension of Biblical movies. This poster created by Frans Mettes for The Last Days of Pompeii (1935), for example, captures the terror released when natural forces beyond our control are unleashed.
Evanjelium Sv. Matúša, Czechoslovakia, 1964

Pier Paolo Pasolini, a gay Marxist atheist, was inspired to make *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* by Pope John XXIII, who, in the spirit of openness of the Second Vatican Council, had encouraged the Church to dialogue with non-Catholic artists. In 2014, the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano called it the best Christ film ever made. This poster by Josef Vyletal is inspired by “Christ of St. John of the Cross,” Salvador Dalí’s interpretation of a sketch by the sixteenth century Spanish mystic, John of the Cross. More dramatic, however, was the adaptation by Mel Gibson of the visions of the nineteenth century mystic Anne Catherine Emmerich for his 2004 *The Passion of the Christ*.

Content for this summary derived from Michael Morris, OP, *Reel Religion - a century of the Bible and Film* (2009), and from text by Richard Lindsay, PhD and Ryan Parker, PhD.

To view the full collection of Biblical movie posters, scan the QR code to visit Blackfriars Gallery website.

The Biblical Movie Poster Collection of Blackfriars Gallery is available for exhibition. For more information contact C. Rena, crenz@dspt.edu.
Our Founders

William Blizek

William L. Blizek is Professor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Co-Founder of the Journal of Religion & Film, first published in 1997. The Journal of Religion & Film has covered the Sundance Film Festival for more than 20 years and has sponsored International Conferences in Omaha, Istanbul, Syracuse, Toronto, Halifax, Amsterdam, and now Hollywood. During the past 12 months, the Journal has been downloaded more than 220,000 times.

Bill is the Editor of The Bloomsbury Companion to Religion and Film and Co-Editor of Sinema ve Din (Religion and Film) with John Lyden and Bilal Yorulmaz. He is also the author of numerous articles on various topics in the field of religion and film studies and the author of hundreds of film reviews for the Journal of Religion & Film.

Robert K. Johnston

Robert K Johnston is Senior Professor of Theology and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary. Rob joined the faculty of Fuller in 1993, serving as provost until 1995, and has continued to teach, mentor students, and publish. He brought with him 20 years of teaching, ecclesial, and academic administrative experience, including 11 years as dean and provost at North Park University. Dr. Johnston is a past president of the American Theological Society.

Dr. Johnston has published in a variety of fields, including theology, selected Old Testament topics, evangelical theology, theology and film, and theology and culture. He is co-editor of Routledge’s Religion and Film series. He is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church, married to Catherine Barsotti, has two grown daughters and five grandchildren, and likes the beach.