

Jesus, the Gospels, and Cinematic Imagination: A Handbook to Jesus on DVD

Study Questions

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Chapter Two: *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ, 1905*

1. Summarize what you know of the story of Jesus. In light of what you have written, what surprises you about this film?
2. What important incidents from the life of Jesus or the gospels are missing from this film? Why would the directors not include those incidents?
3. What does this Jesus teach?
4. Why are the miracles so important?
5. Is this Jesus human or divine?
6. Who are Jesus' followers?
7. Why did this Jesus die?
8. Compare the resurrection to the other miracles in the film, especially the first "walking on water" scene.
9. Compare this film to the other silent films (Olcott, *From the Manger to the Cross*; Griffith, *Intolerance*; DeMille, *The King of Kings*). What is its major similarity to them? Its major difference?
10. Compare Gibson's "Via Dolorosa*" in *The Passion of the Christ* with Zecca's "Via Dolorosa*" and the gospel accounts of Jesus' journey to Calvary.
11. What is the role of the angels in Zecca's film? Why do they tend to disappear from film as Jesus films develop? Compare, for example, with Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* and Sykes and Krisch's *The Jesus Film*.
12. What is the role of the soldiers in Zecca's film? Compare with the soldiers in Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*.

13. How does this film combine the birth stories of Matthew and Luke to make them one seamless event?
14. Compare the annunciation and birth of Jesus in Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* to Zecca's annunciation and birth scene.

Chapter Three: *From the Manger to the Cross, 1912*

1. What kind of film script does a gospel (or the canonical gospels) make?
2. What view of human nature does this film have? In order to answer this question, consider these questions: Why was Jesus crucified? Why did Judas betray Jesus?
3. What is the role of women in the gospel story of Jesus? What is the role of this film's Jesus in the home? Outside the home?
4. What does Jesus teach?
5. Why end the film with the death of Jesus and no resurrection narrative?
6. Compare the endings of Greene's *Godspell*, Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* and Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar* with Olcott's *From the Manger*. Why do you think Olcott's film was considered an authentic portrayal of Jesus by churches—despite its ending—while these other films were viewed as suspect?
7. Compare Olcott's use of “on location” sites for filming his Jesus story with Jewison's use of “on location” sites for *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and Sykes and Krisch's *The Jesus Film*. What effect, if any, does the setting of the Jesus story have on audiences?
8. Compare Olcott's use of “on location” sites for filming his Jesus story with Gibson's choice of “original languages” in his *The Passion of the Christ*. Do you think the two directors' intents were the same? Do you think the actual effect upon audiences would be the same?
9. Which film has more of a cohesive, integrated plot: Zecca's *Life and Passion* or Olcott's *From the Manger*? Why?

10. Compare the portrayal of Simon of Cyrene in Olcott's *From the Manger*, DeMille's *The King of Kings*, Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, and Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Which is closest to the gospels' portrayal of Simon? Explore the role of Simon of Cyrene as a cultural or religious icon*.
11. Explore the cultural significance of exotic travel and its connection to imperialism in the early twentieth century, and how that might be related to Olcott's *From the Manger*.
12. Compare the portrayal of Jesus' childhood in Olcott's *From the Manger*, Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* (flashback), Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, and Young's *Jesus*. How do these directors use the childhood of Jesus to foreshadow events in Jesus' later life?

Chapter Four: *Intolerance*, 1916

1. Compare Griffith's four versions of one story with the canonical "*the* Gospel according to ..." pattern. What is "imperial" about the nature of these patterns? Critically evaluate.
2. Griffith crosscuts* stories in order to provide an implicit commentary, which either compares or contrasts the connected stories. How does the Gospel of Mark use "crosscutting*" (intercalation*)?
3. Is Griffith's Jesus divine? Messianic? Prophetic? An ethicist? Where does his view of Jesus come from? From Scripture? Tradition? Historical Jesus* scholarship?
4. Does Griffith rightly portray Jesus' relationship to American culture? Was Jesus tolerantly non-activist? Was he a philanthropist? A prophet? On what basis do you build your portrayal of Jesus?
5. What did Jesus teach?
6. Why did Jesus die?
7. What ideology should Jesus serve?
8. How "white" is the Jesus of film? How "white" is the Jesus of America? Of the liberal arts academy?
9. Was the historical Jesus* a pacifist? Is he in this film? How can militant empires of Griffith's day or our own day be comfortable with a pacifist icon*?
10. Compare the way Griffith and DeMille (*The King of Kings*) utilize the motif of white doves.

11. Compare the “Wedding at Cana” in Griffith’s *Intolerance*, Olcott’s *From the Manger*, Scorsese’s *Last Temptation of Christ*, and Young’s *Jesus*. Think particularly of the role of women in the stories, and compare with John 2:1-11.
12. What might a feminist critique of *Intolerance* look like?
13. What might a feminist critique of Griffith’s Jesus in *Intolerance* look like?
14. Compare the lack of resurrection scenes in Olcott’s *From the Manger*, with Griffith’s *Intolerance*, Greene’s *Godspell*, and Scorsese’s *Last Temptation of Christ*.
15. Compare Arcand’s crosscutting* of two stories in *Jesus of Montreal* with Griffith’s crosscutting* of the story of The Boy and The Dear One and the story of Jesus. What is the connect/disconnect between their two juxtaposed stories?
16. Compare the “woman caught in adultery” in DeMille’s *The King of Kings*, Steven’s *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Zeffirelli’s *Jesus of Nazareth*, Scorsese’s *Last Temptation of Christ*, and Young’s *Jesus*. At what point in Christian history does this woman become “Mary Magdalene?” Why is it important for her to be “Mary Magdalene?”

Chapter Five: *The King of Kings*, 1927

1. Compare the narrative order of DeMille's film to that of the Synoptics. Then to the Gospel of John. What are the major similarities? Differences? What do these differences tell you about DeMille's film?
2. Is the gospel story spectacular? Does it involve casts of thousands, huge sets, epic conflicts, and special effects? Is the gospel an expensive production?
3. Do the gospels present Jesus as savior? A savior in terms that modern American evangelicals* would understand? Is the gospel a sin-to-salvation story?
4. How puritanical/Victorian do we imagine Jesus' ethic to have been? How American?
5. How do historians reconstruct Jesus' relationship to women? To family? How does DeMille's Jesus deal with these?
6. What was Jesus' teaching on wealth? Why is it important for the most capitalist of nations to have a Jesus who rejects "riches?" How does DeMille handle the tension between the gospels' impoverished Jesus and DeMille's capitalist audience?
7. What do historians say killed Jesus? Who do they say killed Jesus? Compare the gospels and DeMille's film on this point.
8. What is historically accurate in DeMille's portrayal of Jewish Temple politics? What is unhistorical in this portrayal?
9. DeMille's film is remarkable in that it lacks many of the central stories from the gospels—despite being two and a half hours long. What are the film's major

- omissions? What replaces these omissions—if anything? What is the effect of those omissions?
10. Is DeMille's Jesus divine? If so, how, and at what point in the film does the viewer know this? If not, why not?
 11. Compare DeMille's film with Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ*.
 12. DeMille erases nearly all the gospels' specific references to geographical regions and towns. What is the effect of these erasures?
 13. Compare the Jewish crowds in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* with the crowds in DeMille's *The King of Kings*.
 14. Compare Mary the mother of Jesus as "co-redeemer*" in DeMille's *The King of Kings* and in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.
 15. Based upon your viewing of DeMille's *The King of Kings* and Ray's *King of Kings*, what affect did the Hays Code* have on Hollywood's Jesus films?
 16. Discuss the iconography/symbolism of animals in DeMille's *The King of Kings*. Think in terms both of the live animals and the artistic renderings of animals (e.g., doves, lambs, dogs; the Roman eagle with Pilate; the spider with Caiaphas). You might want to also look at doves in earlier films (e.g., the gospel scenes in *Intolerance*).
 17. Compare the 1928 version of DeMille's film with the 1927 version. What are the major changes? What are the effects of those changes on the film's plot, characterization, and theology/ideology?
 18. Compare the role of children in DeMille's *The King of King* with the children in Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*.

19. Compare the portrayal of the impoverished masses in DeMille's *The King of Kings* and in Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, and Jesus' reaction to their situation in each film.

Chapter Six: *King of Kings*, 1961

1. Contrast the visual motifs and their effects in DeMille's *The King of Kings* (light, doves) and Ray's *King of Kings* (eyes, shadows).
2. What is the content of Jesus' teaching?
3. Compare Ray's Jesus' teaching with that of liberal Christianity.
4. Ray sets Jesus in his historical context. Do the gospels? If so, how do they do that?
5. Historical critics* labor to describe the historical Jesus*. Describe this Jesus. Is Ray's Jesus like the Jesus of the historical critics*? Are the gospels' Jesuses like those of historical critics*?
6. If Jesus is a person from ancient history, how can he be relevant to a modern audience?
7. What is the role of the voiceover* narration? Compare that narration to the use of scripture titles by earlier films' like Zecca's *The Life and the Passion*, Olcott's *From the Manger*, Griffith's *Intolerance*, and DeMille's *The King of Kings*.
8. How do reported miracles differ from visualized miracles?
9. Describe the role of Lucius in the film.
10. Can Jesus films portray unbelief seriously and sensitively?
11. Why is it easier for audiences to accept violence than sex in a Jesus film?
12. How does Ray's Mary Magdalene compare to DeMille's in *The King of Kings*? In Hayes' *The Miracle Maker*?
13. Compare Ray's crucifixion scene with Gibson's in *The Passion of the Christ*. Which is closer to the gospels?

14. Compare the Via Dolorosa* in Ray's *King Kings*, DeMille's *The King of Kings*, Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, and Young's *Jesus*.
15. Compare the role of Mary, mother of Jesus, in Ray's *King of Kings*, DeMille's *The King of Kings*, Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, and Young's *Jesus*.
16. Compare the dance of Salome in Ray's *King of Kings*, Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, and Young's *Jesus* to the gospel accounts. What is the plot function, if any, of the story in the gospels? In the films? How does Salome's character relate to "family values" ancient or modern?
17. Compare the function of the shadow cross in Olcott's *From the Manger*, Griffith's *Intolerance*, and Ray's *King of Kings*.
18. Discuss how, in many ways, Jones's *Life of Brian* seems mostly a parody of Ray's *King of Kings*.
19. Compare the function of Jesus' teaching in Greene's *Godspell* and Ray's *King of Kings*. What is the function of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" in the Gospel of Matthew?

Chapter Seven: *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, 1965*

1. Is Pasolini's Matthew film faithful to the gospel? Why or why not?
2. What happens to a gospel if one removes it from the canon?
3. Why is it that a confessed atheist like Pasolini can film the miracles more directly than someone like Ray (*King of Kings*)? How can the church affirm the work of an atheist?
4. What is the message of Pasolini's Jesus? How does this message compare to Jesus in Ray's *King of Kings*? To the Jesus of the historical critics*? To that of the canonical Gospel of Matthew?
5. Who are this Jesus' followers? Are they on screen? In the audience?
6. Who are Jesus' opponents?
7. Why does Jesus die? Historical critics* have often had difficulty explaining the reason for Jesus' death. How does Pasolini deal with this issue?
8. Is Pasolini's Jesus more violent than the Jesus of Matthew's gospel? Why or why not? Was the historical Jesus violent?
9. Compare Pasolini's Jesus on the issue of violence to Ray's Jesus in *King of Kings*.
10. Why is Pasolini's Jesus angry? When and why is he happy?
11. Pasolini intends his Jesus to be a proto-Marxist. Where does Pasolini's Jesus stand vis-à-vis capitalism and Marxism?
12. Compare Jesus' sufferings at Pasolini's cross to those in the films of Ray (*King of Kings*) and Gibson (*The Passion of the Christ*). Compare the sufferings of Pasolini's Jesus to those of his character Stracci in *La Ricotta*. Compare Pasolini's

- point with the suffering of Stracci to Ray's point with his forest of crosses in *King of Kings*.
13. Compare Pasolini's depiction of Jesus' opponents with Gibson's portrayal of Jesus' opponents in *The Passion of the Christ*.
 14. Compare Pasolini's use of children with DeMille's use of children in *The King of Kings*.
 15. Compare how Pasolini clothes the opponents of Jesus and how Jewison (*Jesus Christ Superstar*) clothes Jesus' opponents. What is the significance?
 16. In contemporary American culture, the color of a person's skin, quality of teeth, and body shape (thinness) are the three most important markers of social class. Compare these visual markers within Pasolini's film (e.g., Jesus compared with others) and compare with at least one other Jesus film (e.g., Young's *Jesus*, Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*).
 17. Compare the sensuousness of John running with the fishing nets to the running of the woman caught in adultery in Ray (*King of Kings*), Stevens (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*), and Zeffirelli (*Jesus of Nazareth*).

Chapter Eight: *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, 1965

1. Compare Ray's historical location of the Jesus story in *King of Kings* with Stevens's ecclesiastical location.
2. Compare Stevens's relegation of Jesus' story to the church with Pasolini's treatment of the Jesus story in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*.
3. Compare the end of Stevens's film with the way Griffith (*Intolerance*), DeMille (*The King of Kings*), and Ray (*King of Kings*) end their films.
4. What does Jesus teach?
5. Why does Jesus die?
6. Compare the attitude toward wealth of Stevens's Jesus, with that of DeMille's Jesus in *The King of Kings*.
7. Compare the teaching of Stevens's Jesus to the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of John.
8. Compare Stevens's crucifixion scene with those of Ray (*King of Kings*), Pasolini (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*), and Gibson (*The Passion of the Christ*).
9. In what ways is *The Greatest Story Ever Told* like a Western?
10. In what ways is *The Greatest Story Ever Told* an American gospel?
11. Compare Steven's "Dark Hermit" with Gibson's Satan figure in *The Passion of the Christ*. In what sense are these characters mythical? What narrative roles do they play?
12. Stevens's film emphasizes communities of faith (Jewish and Christian) in a variety of ways, and more so than any other Jesus film. Discuss.
13. Discuss the role of prayer in Stevens's film.

14. Is Steven's Jesus a Jew or the first Christian? Compare with Zeffirelli's Jesus in *Jesus of Nazareth*.
15. In many ways, Stevens's film is a battle of high places. Discuss the motif in terms of who is on high places, and when; and who talks of high places. How might this motif relate to the Bible? To the social/political context of American life when the film was released?
16. Compare Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and John the Baptist's prophecy about Jesus with John F. Kennedy's nomination speech (July 15, 1960) and his subsequent inaugural address (January 20, 1961).
17. Many scholars think that the settings of Matthew's "Sermon on the *Mount*" and Luke's corresponding "Sermon on the *Plain*" have metaphorical significance. If scholars are correct in this assessment, what might be the significance of Stevens setting part of Jesus "Sermon on the Mount" *under* a bridge?

Chapter Nine: *Jesus Christ Superstar*, 1973

1. What happens to the passion when you put it to music? How does Jewison's music interpret the passion differently than Bach, Handel, or church hymns do?
2. Who has the stronger singing voice, Jesus or Judas? What is the effect of that choice? Why would you cast the voices in this way?
3. Who denies the typical theology or myth associated with Jesus? Who speaks for that tradition?
4. Does Jewison deal effectively with modern doubts about the Jesus story? Compare his treatment of the distance between modernity and the tradition with those in the films of Ray and Stevens.
5. Is the movie blasphemous or orthodox?
6. Compare Jewison's Judas to those of DeMille (*The King of Kings*), Ray (*King of Kings*), and Stevens (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*).
7. Is it significant or problematic that Judas is African American and Jesus is Caucasian; that Mary Magdalene is Japanese American?
8. Compare Jewison's Magdalene to that of DeMille (*The King of Kings*).
9. What does this Jesus teach? What does he stand for?
10. Why does Jesus die? What role does "fate" play? What is that "fate"?
11. What happens to Jesus when he is imagined as a superstar or celebrity?
12. Compare the "Cleansing of the Temple" scene in *Superstar* with that in Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal*.
13. Compare Judas's role and death in *Superstar* and Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*.
14. Compare Pilate's role in *Superstar* and Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*.

15. Compare the 2000 *PBS* television remake of *Jesus Christ Superstar* with Jewison's *Superstar*.

Chapter Ten: *Godspell*, 1973

1. What does *Godspell*'s Jesus teach? What does the Matthean Jesus teach? Who would be happier with *Godspell*'s Jesus' teaching, liberals or evangelicals?*
Why?
2. Does Jesus teach his gospel as a singular individual or do his followers participate in his teaching? What happens to the teaching of Jesus when it is considered as a "performance"?
3. How faithful is Greene's movie to Matthew? Compare Greene's use of Matthew to Pasolini's use of Matthew in *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*.
4. Why does *Godspell*'s Jesus die?
5. How does *Godspell*'s Jesus live on among his disciples? Which of its film precursors is *Godspell* most like at this point? Ray (*King of Kings*), Pasolini (*The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*), or Stevens (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*)?
6. Does Greene/*Godspell* see any problem with the connection between modernity and the ancient gospel tradition?
7. What does the gospel (or a fragment of it) mean outside the canon? What does the gospel mean in a capitalist consumer society?
8. Would *Parable* be a Jesus film without the opening voiceover?
9. Compare the Jesus of Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar* with the Jesus of *Godspell*.
10. Both *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* contemporize the Jesus story. How do the different settings of the musicals affect the meaning and or significance of that story?

11. Compare the plots of *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. How do these plots relate the social-political context of the late 1960s and early 1970s?
12. *Godspell* is basically a “Q” gospel, but *Jesus Christ Superstar* is not. Explain.
13. In the opening scene of *Godspell*, John the Baptist enters New York City with the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers in the background. John the Baptist later baptizes Jesus in Bethesda Fountain in Central Park—the same fountain that is very important in the closing scene of Tony Kushner’s play *Angels in America*. Discuss how September 11, 2001 and Kushner’s use of the fountain expand the interpretive possibilities of *Godspell*.
14. Compare the ending of *Godspell* and Olcott’s *From the Manger to the Cross*.
15. Compare the plot of *Godspell* to Zecca and Nonguet’s *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ* and Olcott’s *From the Manger to the Cross*.
16. Compare Greene’s happy Jesus in *Godspell* with Young’s happy Jesus in his 1999 film, *Jesus*. When are their respective Jesus characters happiest? When are they saddest?
17. In Matt. 10:38 Jesus says, “Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (cf. 16:24). In *Godspell*, Jesus’ disciples sing about a “pebble in my shoe” when they talk about following. Discuss.
18. Compare the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 with the same story in *Godspell*, Zeffirelli’s *Jesus of Nazareth* and Scorsese’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*. How does the ending of the parable in *Godspell* fit the tone and theme of the film? Is the story a true parable in *Godspell*? In *Jesus of Nazareth*? In *The Last Temptation of Christ*?

19. Compare Jesus' bloodless death in *Godspell* with Jesus' bloody death in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. How much blood does it take to save the world in 1973? In 2004?

Chapter Eleven: *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1977

1. What is Zeffirelli's attitude toward Judaism? Is it anti-Semitic? Is his Jesus Jewish or simply a precursor of apostolic Christianity? Can you imagine a more Jewish Jesus?
2. How does Zeffirelli's "canonical" approach differ from those who film one specific gospel? Does Zeffirelli have clear standards by which he chooses material from the gospels? Which gospel does Zeffirelli favor most often?
3. What does Zeffirelli's Jesus teach? Is this an ancient, modern, or universal message?
4. Was "religion" or "spirituality" a meaningful construct in the first century? If so, do the terms mean the same thing now?
5. Is Zeffirelli pandering to a popular audience? Is his vision of Jesus deliberately anti-intellectual? Why are Zerah and Judas characterized as they are? Is Zeffirelli deliberately anti-political?
6. Why does Zeffirelli's Jesus die?
7. How does a TV "movie" presentation of Jesus differ from a theatrical version?
8. How does Zeffirelli's "Italian Catholic" Jesus differ from Pasolini's?
9. Compare Zeffirelli's "traditional church" story of Jesus with that of Stevens. To whom does the story of Jesus belong, and why?
10. One could argue that when the Jesus story is produced as a television miniseries, each new television broadcast of the film becomes a new version of the story. Explain.

11. Directors who tell the stories of Jesus' birth and early life like to use foreshadowing. In many ways Matt. 2 and Luke 2:41-52 also foreshadow the life of Jesus. Compare what Matthew and Luke do with what Zeffirelli does.
12. Compare the raising of Jairus' daughter in Hayes's *The Miracle Maker*, Sykes and Krisch's *The Jesus Film*, and Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*.
13. Compare the role of Joseph in Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* and in Young's *Jesus*.
14. Compare the raising of Lazarus in Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Young's *Jesus*, and DeMille's *The King of Kings*. Think particularly about the roles of women, Christology*, and plot function.
15. Compare the role of the Jewish synagogue in Sykes and Krisch's *The Jesus Film* and Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*.
16. Compare the birth of Jesus in Zecca's *The Life and the Passion of Jesus Christ*, Ray's *King of Kings*, Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, and Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*. How does the Hays Code* affect the showing of Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' birth? How does theology affect the showing of Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' birth? Is there a theology behind Daniel's reconstruction of Jesus' birth in Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal*?

Chapter Twelve: *The Jesus Film, 1979*

1. How faithful is the film to Luke? What does it omit? What does it add?
2. What elements in the film come from the Jesus film tradition?
3. What is the function and role of the film's narrator? Compare the use of the narrator in this film with that in Ray's *King of Kings*.
4. Compare how the film deals with anti-Semitism and the issue of anti-Semitism in the gospel of Luke. Compare how this film deals with anti-Semitism and how Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* deals with anti-Semitism.
5. What does this Jesus teach? What does the Lukan Jesus teach?
6. Why does Sykes and Krisch's Jesus die? What does the film's depiction of Satan have to do with Jesus' death? Why does the Lukan Jesus die?
7. Compare this film's presentation of Jesus' death with the presentation of Jesus' death in Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* and Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.
8. What makes a story true, and why does this film claim to be entirely from the gospel of Luke when it is not?
9. Sykes and Krisch's film has fewer exorcisms than the gospel of Luke, which has fewer than the gospel of Mark, and no one in the film ever accuses Jesus of being demon-possessed. Discuss in the context of American evangelicalism* and its uneasy relationship to Pentecostalism.*
10. How is the shepherds' message (Luke 2:17-18, 20) different from the narrator's description of the shepherds' message as one of "the virgin mother and the savior's birth?" Why are the film's changes important for American fundamentalism* and evangelicalism*?

11. What is the role of the synagogue in the film? In Luke-Acts? How might it relate to American evangelicalism*? How does this compare with the role of the synagogue in Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*?
12. Discuss the theme of riches and money in the film and in Luke-Acts. How might the theme be important to American evangelicalism*?
13. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in this film? In Luke-Acts?
14. Compare Peter in this film with Mary Magdalene in Saville's *The Gospel of John*.
15. What is the effect of the producer's decision not to list the title of the film or its directors in the DVD version of the film? How might this relate to the anonymity of the earliest gospels?
16. Why does the film claim to be a documentary*?

Chapter Thirteen: *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, 1979

1. Is this a Jesus film? Why or why not?
2. What is parody? What is the worldview (message) of comedy?
3. What parts of the film parody earlier Jesus films or biblical epics?
4. What parts of the film parody the gospels or church tradition and theology?
5. Compare the gospels and comedy. Compare Jesus epics* and comedy.
6. Why does the connection of Jesus and comedy (humor) make many people uncomfortable?
7. What does Brian teach? Compare this to Jesus' teaching.
8. Why does Brian die? Compare this to Jesus' death.
9. How does this film profane the cross? What are the effects of this approach?
10. What makes a messiah? What do the gospels say? What does this film say?
11. How does this film explain the origin of the miracle traditions? Of sects? Of heresy?
12. Describe modern mythology. How do films typically support this myth? How does this film critique it? What is a parable? Is this film a parable?
13. Compare John Dominic Crossan's historical Jesus to the Monty Python troupe's Brian.
14. The lives of Daniel Columbe (*Jesus of Montreal*) and Brian both parallel the life of Jesus in certain ways. Compare and contrast.
15. From the film, reconstruct the story of Brian's nativity. The Monty Python troupe seems to be drawing upon an ancient, noncanonical tradition for that. What is that

tradition and its probable origin? How do scholars assess the historical value of that tradition today?

Chapter Fourteen: *The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1988

1. How does this film differ from a Jesus epic*?
2. How does Scorsese bring the audience to share Jesus' visionary world?
3. Describe the development of Jesus' message in this film. Does Jesus' message develop in the gospels? In other Jesus films? Does the Jesus of the gospel or film tradition struggle to understand God's plan?
4. How do the people in the film receive Jesus' teaching?
5. Why does this Jesus die? How does this film's treatment of Jesus' death compare to that of other films?
6. What tempts Jesus? Compare this to the temptation narratives in the gospels.
7. Compare Scorsese's Judas to those of DeMille (*The King of Kings*), Ray (*King of Kings*), and Jewison (*Jesus Christ Superstar*).
8. Compare Scorsese's Mary Magdalene to those of DeMille (*The King of Kings*) and Jewison (*Jesus Christ Superstar*).
9. Is film more comfortable with sex or violence in a Jesus story? Why?
10. Compare Gnosticism*, Neoplatonism*, and orthodoxy on the flesh and the spirit. Are flesh and spirit key terms on the gospel narratives?
11. How is Scorsese's Jesus a modern hero? An American hero?
12. Compare the use of blood/lamb motifs in Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.
13. Who is the "Beloved Disciple" (John 13:21-28) in the film? Why?

14. Despite Jesus' "last temptation," many would argue that the film has a very high Christology, much like the Gospel of John. How and why might one argue this case?
15. Compare the connection between Judas and the cross in DeMille's *The King of Kings* and Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*.
16. Compare the use of Isaiah 53 in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, and Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.
17. Compare Gibson's portrayal of Jesus' temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane (*The Passion of the Christ*) with Jesus' first and second temptations in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. How might these reflect issues of American foreign policy at the time when the films were released?

Chapter Fifteen: *Jesus of Montreal*, 1989

1. How many Jesuses appear in this film?
2. Compare the historical Jesus* of Daniel's play with the church's traditional Jesus. Do historical critics* reconstruct Jesus as Daniel does? Does Arcand capture the method of historical criticism* accurately? How "wrong" can you get the story of Jesus and still be "converted" to the truth of what Jesus was saying and doing?"
3. What does this Jesus teach? What do his followers say he teaches?
4. Which cinematic Jesuses are most critical of wealth? Capitalism?
5. Why does this Jesus die? Why does Daniel die? Compare this "reason" with the gospels' reasons for Jesus' death.
6. Is Daniel a modern Jesus figure? If so, why/how does he become one?
7. Compare this film's use of a modern story and a passion play* with that of Griffith's film, *Intolerance*.
8. Does this film say that Jesus belongs to antiquity or to modernity? What connects Daniel and Jesus?
9. What is "demythologizing*" and how does it relate to the film?
10. What is the significance of setting the story in Montreal instead of Toronto? Why use French instead of English? How might this relate to postcolonial issues of "empire" in the ancient Roman and modern world or the use of Aramaic and Latin in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*?
11. What is the significance of the character René for Arcand's view of the world and the Jesus story?

Chapter Sixteen: *Jesus*, 1999

1. The Jesuses of film are typically somber. Is this Jesus? What about the Jesus of the gospels?
2. Compare this Jesus to Scorsese's Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ*.
3. What does this Jesus teach?
4. What is the relationship between miracles and faith in this movie? In the gospels?
5. Why does this Jesus die? Do other films treat the theology of the cross similarly?
6. Why is freedom so important in this movie?
7. Compare the opening of Young's film to the opening of Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Discuss how these scenes relate to the underlying Christologies* of the films.
8. Compare Satan and Jesus' differing views on the nature of humans.
9. Why does Satan wear modern clothing?
10. Why is there so much violence in the name of Jesus and/or religion?
11. Compare this made for television movie to Zeffirelli's made for television movie, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Think particularly of the first half-hour of each film. What issues are important for how Young and Zeffirelli set up the story to come?
12. Compare the theme of freedom in Young's *Jesus* to the same theme in DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*.
13. One could argue that when the Jesus story is produced as a television miniseries, each new television broadcast of the film becomes a new version of the story. Explain.

14. Why might it be important for Young to portray Jesus occasionally in contemporary settings?
15. Compare Young's rendering of Jesus turning water into wine with the same miracle in Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ*. Compare these with the story in John 2:1-11 and Saville's rendering of the scene (*The Gospel of John*).
16. Compare Young's rendering of the raising of Lazarus with the same miracle in Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ*. Compare these with the story in John 11:1-44 and Saville's rendering of the scene (*The Gospel of John*).
17. Compare DeMille's woman caught in adultery (*The King of Kings*) with Young's woman caught in adultery.
18. Why does Young place the "Cleansing of the Temple" scene so early in his film? Is there any evidence for such an early placement in the gospels?
19. Compare the "forest of crosses" near the beginning of Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* with the "forest of crosses" near the beginning of Young's film. What do these scenes tell you about the directors' Christologies*?
20. Compare the Jesus of Greene's *Godspell* with the Jesus of Young's film.
21. Compare the Garden of Gethsemane scene in Young's *Jesus*, Hayes's *The Miracle Maker*, and Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar*.
22. Jesus' primary opposition comes from the Zealots, for whom hatred of the Romans is contrasted with Jesus' message of love for the enemy. Discuss in light of twenty-first century US global politics.

Chapter Seventeen: *The Miracle Maker*, 1999

1. What does Jesus teach?
2. Why does Jesus die?
3. What is the effect of representing flashbacks and states of mind with animation?
For example, compare Jesus' temptations with Mary Magdalene's "demons/delusions" and with Judas's torment. Compare with the exorcism of Mary Magdalene's "Seven Deadly Sins" in DeMille's *The King of Kings*.
4. Compare Hayes's Judas with the Judas figures in DeMille's *The King of Kings* and Ray's *King of Kings*.
5. Compare the role of the boy Mark in DeMille's *The King of Kings* with that of Tamar in this film.
6. Discuss the connections between Hayes's *The Miracle Maker* and Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.
7. Compare Hayes's Herod Antipas with the Herod Antipas of Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and Young's *Jesus*.
Which one seems more historically believable, and why? Which portrait is closest to Mark's portrait? To Luke's?
8. Compare Hayes's Jesus telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan with Sykes and Krisch's Jesus telling of the parable (*The Jesus Film*) and with Greene's telling of the parable in *Godspell*.
9. Does the puppet figure Jesus affect the intended reverential tone of the film? Is the film less serious because of the puppetry, or is it somehow more reverent because of the iconographic* quality of the Jesus puppet?

Chapter Eighteen: *The Gospel of John*, 2003

1. Why does the film begin with the intertitles that it does? Compare these intertitles to those beginning and ending of Sykes and Krisch's *The Jesus Film*, especially Saville's claim "This is a faithful representation of that Gospel [of John]" (opening intertitles) with Sykes and Krisch's title, "A documentary* based on the Gospel of Luke."¹
2. What is anti-Semitism? Are the gospels guilty of such? One or some more than others? Are Jesus films guilty of such? One or some more than others?
3. Compare the "literal" approach of this film to those of Pasolini (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*), Greene (*Godspell*), and Sykes and Krisch (*The Jesus Film*). How does Saville's approach differ from those who craft a movie script from one particular gospel? What are the features of the movie script that directors normally create?
4. How else might one handle the difficulty of filming a gospel text? How did Scorsese (*The Last Temptation of Christ*) deal with this problem?
5. When are the same words not the same words? Think about the actors' deliveries, the focus of the camera and lighting, the use of flashbacks, and cultural shifts. Saville's opening intertitles call attention particularly to the cultural shifts, attempting to deflect the anti-Semitism of the gospel text. Do the intertitles suggest that one cannot simply present the literal text of John to a modern audience? If so, why?

¹ In some software media programs, the subtitles in Sykes and Krisch's *The Jesus Film* will have to be turned on in order to read the title.

6. What does Saville's Jesus teach? How does his teaching compare to that of other film's Jesus characters?
7. Why does this Jesus die? Compare the reasons for the death of Saville's Jesus to the reasons for the death of Young's Jesus (*Jesus*) and Gibson's (*The Passion of the Christ*).
8. Compare Saville's visual rendering of the Johannine* prologue (esp. John 1:1-5) with that of Stevens in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.
9. Compare Saville's visual renderings of Jesus' "I am" sayings with Stevens's renderings of them in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.
10. Hardly any New Testament scholars today believe that John 7:53-8:11 was originally part of the Gospel of John (read the notes in a *NRSV* Bible). So why should Saville keep this story in his rendering of the Gospel of John? (Not insignificantly this woman also appears in a flashback during the farewell discourse at John 15:22 [2.08:22]).
11. No biblical scholars today think that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. Yet Saville clothes her in red and with ornate jewelry when she first appears onscreen, as though she is a "loose woman" (see especially Ray, *King of Kings*; Stevens, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*; Zefferilli, *Jesus of Nazareth*). Why should Saville's "literal" rendering of the gospel portray Mary Magdalene this way?
12. Who is the Beloved Disciple in Saville's film? In the Gospel of John? (The DVD blurb says John wrote the gospel, and the screenwriter, John Goldsmith, says the same in the Production Design [DVD Extras]). When does the Beloved Disciple

- first appear in the Gospel of John? In Saville's film? What effect does this difference have on the telling of the story?
13. Whose Jesus is more angry, Saville's or the Jesus of the written gospel of John? Why?
 14. What is the effect of having Jesus address people that the film's audience sees (Saville), as opposed to Jesus' long monologues with no hint of audience (the written gospel of John)?
 15. Which has a higher Christology*: Saville's *The Gospel of John* or the written gospel? Why?
 16. What sections of the Gospel of John does the two-hour version leave out? What might be the logic for leaving these parts out? How do these omissions affect the rendering of the Jesus character? Jesus' opponents? The plot of the gospel?

Chapter Nineteen: *The Passion of the Christ*, 2004

1. What is the meaning of the cross? Does Jesus Christ suffer for us? Because of us? With us? Does he suffer on our behalf to appease a wrathful God? To redeem us from Satan's clutches (sin and death)? Does he suffer because of our hatred of others and of ourselves? Does he suffer to demonstrate God's love?
2. What is the appropriate way to show the cross? Empty or filled? With a living Jesus or with a dead Jesus? With Jesus by himself or with others?
3. Is Gibson's film too violent? Should children be allowed to see it? Why or why not?
4. Is the film anti-Semitic? Misanthropic?
5. What elements suggest Gibson's Catholic faith? Why might evangelical* Protestants appreciate the film? Why might liberal Protestants and Jews object to the film?
6. What does Gibson's Jesus teach?
7. The film came out on Ash Wednesday*, 2004. What events around that period in US history might have made the redemptive violence of the film particularly convincing?
8. What is the function of Jesus' mother in the film?
9. How might Judas be seen as Jesus' opposite?
10. What is the significance of using a script in Aramaic and Latin with subtitles, instead of English? Compare with Arcand's choice of French in the Canadian film, *Jesus of Montreal*.

11. Some have suggested that this film is a miracle of cloth (the white cloths Claudia gives to the two Marys to wipe up Jesus' blood, the loincloth of Jesus that is never touched and never falls down despite the horrific beating, and Veronica's veil*). What might be the cultural, theological, and symbolic significance of these cloths?
12. Compare Mary the mother of Jesus as co-redeemer* in Gibson's film and DeMille's *The King of Kings*.
13. Compare the mother of Jesus in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and in Young's *Jesus*.
14. Compare the Jewish crowds in Gibson's film and in DeMille's *The King of Kings* with the crowds in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Which seems most anti-Semitic? Which seems least anti-Semitic? Why?
15. Compare the temptations of Jesus in Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Young's *Jesus*, and Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. In what ways are these uniquely American temptations?
16. Compare Gibson's Simon of Cyrene and Ray's Judas (*King of Kings*) on the Via Dolorosa* and at Golgotha.
17. Filmed violence is choreographed. Compare Arcand's (*Jesus of Montreal*) and Jewison's (*Jesus Christ Superstar*) ways of choreographing the violence of Jesus' passion with Gibson's way of choreographing violence.
18. Compare Jesus' bloodless death in Greene's *Godspell* with Jesus' bloody death in Gibson's film. Much of Roman Catholic art and many Protestant hymns emphasize the importance of Jesus' blood (e.g., *There is a Fountain Filled with*

Blood, There is Power in the Blood, and Nothing but the Blood of Jesus). Can Jesus' death "save humanity" without bloodshed? Why or why not? Can the US "save humanity" without bloodshed? Why or why not?