

Directions: Read the article by Mahan on Camino first. Then, as you watch the film clips on class prep, fill out this worksheet.

Reading: Jeffrey H. Mahan, “Celluloid Savior: Jesus in the Movies”

1. Discuss five of the problems Mahan identifies with rendering the gospel stories of Jesus into film, in terms of the issues with our gospel sources, sensibilities about Jesus, and differences between what the gospels care about and what our culture expects to know.

Beginning the Story

2. Begin with the first 25 minutes of one of the first great Jesus films, *The King of Kings* (dir. Cecil B. DeMille, 1927). How does this silent film use the affordances of film and of image to depict the divinity of Jesus Christ? In what NON-biblical ways is Mary Magdalene presented, and how are the scribes and Pharisees portrayed?

Infancy Narrative

3. Pier Paolo Pasolini was an Italian film director who was also gay, an atheist, and a communist. He said, "It is against my nature to desacralize things and people," and in fact his film is widely regarded as the most artistic and theologically sophisticated of all the Jesus films. How does he make common people sacred in the infancy portion of his 1964 film, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*? Consider setting, casting, the use of sound and camera angle.

Baptism of Jesus

4. Contrast the treatment of John the Baptist in the film *Jesus* (dir. John Krish and Peter Sykes, 1979), with the portrayal in Martin Scorsese's adaptation of novelist Nikos Kazantzákis' book *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). While the former has been widely distributed by Christian evangelicals, the latter quickly caused controversy, but both directors were exploring questions of faith in their work.

Sermon on the Mount

5. Franco Zeffirelli's epic film, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), made for TV so running at almost 6 ½ hours in length, is one of the most well-known Jesus films, as it is often replayed at Easter every year. Zeffirelli portrays Jesus in a reverential way, whereas Pasolini explicitly rejects a reverential style, considering it “ridiculous” when applied to the sacred text. Offer three contrasts between the techniques each director uses to render the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., field or angle of view, motion of characters and camera, use of zoom, lighting, and the deployment of other cast members). Does one strike you as more or less reverential?

Agony in the Garden

6. Our last clip is from the 1973 film version of Andrew Lloyd Weber's Broadway rock musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. As our only example of a musical, analyze how camera movement, angle and the song “Gethsemane” itself work as a kind of visual and aural rhetoric. How do they move you, or persuade you, and of what?