TEACHING THE BIBLE
THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE AND THE ARTS

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Edited by

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Contents

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Introduction

Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray

Relatively few resources offer specific, innovative ideas for teaching particular texts and topics in courses devoted to the Bible. In our own effort to provide such a resource (*Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction* [SBLRBS 49; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005]), we drew on the expertise and experience of nearly one hundred college, university, and seminary professors. One trend that came to our attention in the process of editing that collection is the increasing use of various nonbiblical media—music, film, art, and literature—in biblical studies classrooms. The present volume, which focuses on the incorporation of popular culture and the arts, is thus a supplement to our first volume. Both works assume an academic approach to the Bible but represent a wide range of methodological, theological, and ideological perspectives. The primary objective of each is to present an eclectic compendium of engaging classroom strategies for teaching the Bible in undergraduate, seminary, church, and synagogue settings. Whereas the first volume is organized according to the standard divisions of the Jewish and Christian canons, this volume features chapters devoted to the various media that serve as intertexts for study alongside the biblical writings.

Each section includes an introduction surveying the ways in which the Bible intersects with works in a given medium and highlighting common pedagogical objectives well-suited to that medium. Concluding the introductory essays are bibliographies listing general studies, anthologies, and secondary literature cited in the discussions of particular works in the subsequent chapters.

> **Part 1** ("Music"): one chapter discusses classroom strategies for use with several dozen examples of popular music; a second chapter considers a selection of classical compositions.
> **Part 2** ("Film"): one chapter examines renderings of biblical narrative into film (so-called "sword and sandal" movies); a second chapter considers Hollywood releases bearing less explicit connections to the Bible

and the ways in which particular scenes may be employed in the class-
room.

Part 3 ("Art"): one chapter discusses works of art that depict scenes and
characters from the Bible; a second chapter examines works that gener-
ate conversation about a variety of concepts arising in biblical studies
courses, despite the fact that the artists make no attempt at representing
subjects typically considered "biblical."

Part 4 ("Literature"): one chapter explores the heuristic uses of poetry
with direct or indirect links to biblical themes; a second chapter discusses
the pedagogical potential of a smaller sampling of prose excerpts (fiction
and nonfiction).

Part 5 ("Other Media"): a final chapter briefly introduces material such as
comic strips, the Internet, and television programs, resources for biblical
studies courses that have until recently remained largely untapped.

Each chapter consists of a catalogue of entries focusing on one or more
literary, cinematic, artistic, or musical works. Entries concisely lay out specific
strategies for deploying these works in classroom settings or related assign-
ments. While the introductions outline generic sets of questions that could be
applied, say, to any artistic image or musical composition, individual entries
briefly describe and include discussion questions or exercises tailored to the
particular works under consideration. Although the chapters do not function
as primers in the technical skills of literary or film criticism, there is sufficient
background for enhancing one's teaching repertoire through the integration
of the diverse materials surveyed in the following pages.

The contributors to this volume have not attempted to catalogue all cre-
ative works that allude to, interpret, depict, or spur reflection on some aspect
of the Bible; nor do all biblical texts receive equal attention. To accomplish
either task would have entailed a project of encyclopedic proportions. The
items discussed here represent a relatively small selection of the possibilities.
(Since the volume is organized according to genre, the Scripture index is the
most efficient way to find the broadest range of entries dealing with specific
biblical texts.) In addition to the entries devoted to individual works, some
chapters also include lists that help instructors locate other works inspired by
the Bible that might be used in the classroom. Along with ease of integration
into biblical studies courses, one of the main criteria for selecting items to be
included is accessibility. The vast majority of the works discussed are readily
available in any library, movie rental store, or on the Internet—normally for
free or at a minimal cost.

In addition to providing analogies for various approaches to the study of
the Bible, using comparative texts from popular culture and the arts, broadly

defined, helps students to become critical and creative readers and thinkers. Drawing on such material does not represent a "dumbing down" of education. Rather, by failing to incorporate it, many instructors miss valuable opportunities to capitalize on their students' natural interests and to nurture their capacity to engage and analyze classic texts like the Bible and the traditions informed by it. By challenging students to compare the Bible and the worldviews it embraces with those expressed in more familiar cultural forms, these intersections encourage them to attend to the gaps—both real and apparent. How broad, exactly, is Lessing's "ugly, broad ditch" (*der garstige breite Graben*)? What is required to bring about Gadamer's "fusion of horizons"? Our hope is that this collection provides instructors with a resource for grappling with these and other, less theoretical questions that regularly arise in a biblical studies curriculum.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to series editors Susan Ackerman of Dartmouth College and J. Ross Wagner of Princeton Theological Seminary for their helpful suggestions in the early stages of this project; to Bob Buller and Leigh Andersen of the Society of Biblical Literature for their guidance in preparing the manuscript; to student assistants Rebekah Kuhn and Eric Hagemeyer of Rhodes College, whose work in compiling the index and bibliographies has been indispensable; and to Jessica Haynes of Wingate University, who offered much help with the popular music chapter.

All abbreviations conform to the guidelines found in *The SBL Handbook of Style* (ed. Patrick H. Alexander et al.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999).

PART 1:
MUSIC

Introduction: Teaching the Bible with Music

Mark Roncace and Dan W. Clanton Jr.

Although the study of the intersection between the Bible and music has until recently received relatively little attention from scholars, popular and classical music both offer a wealth of pedagogical possibilities.[1] Both categories require some definition. Popular music, as we are treating it here, includes a variety of genres—rock, country, folk, hip-hop, heavy metal, and others. The designation "classical music" is similarly expansive. Even though "classical music," strictly speaking, denotes only a certain period within the Western tradition of music (ca. 1750–1825), it is now commonly used to designate a much broader range of music (rather than simply to distinguish "classical" from Baroque or Romantic). Deciding what belongs to this larger family of musical genres does not fall within the purview of this introduction, where "classical music" will refer to the types of music most nonspecialists have in mind when they use the term. Rather, the goal here is to focus on effective use of music in the classroom. "At its most profound and best," writes Jan Swafford, "music is the ideal stimulus for humanity's eternal meditation on the

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1. Studies of the Bible and popular music include, among others, Michael J. Gilmour, *Tangled Up in the Bible: Bob Dylan and Scripture* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Darrell W. Cluck, Catherine S. George, and J. Clinton McCann Jr., *Facing the Music: Faith and Meaning in Popular Songs* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1999); David Fillingim, *Redneck Liberation: Country Music as Theology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003); Michael Gilmour, ed., *Call Me the Seeker: Listening to Religion in Popular Music* (New York: Continuum, 2005); and Raewynne J. Whiteley and Beth Maynard, eds., *Get Up Off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalogue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 2003). For classical music, see Helen Leneman "Portrayals of Power in the Stories of Delilah and Bathsheba: Seduction in Song," in *Sacred Text, Secular Times: The Hebrew Bible in the Modern World* (ed. L. Greenspoon and B. F. LeBeau; Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2000), 227–43; Bluma Goldstein, "Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*: A Vanishing Biblical Nation," in *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg* (ed. C. M. Cross and R. A. Berman; New York: Garland, 2000), 159–92; Dan W. Clanton Jr., "*Samson et Dalila*: What French Opera Reveals about the Biblical Duo," *BRev* 20/3 (June 2004): 12–19, 44–46.

mystery of its own being."[2] Indeed, because it appeals to such a wide range of students, music can provide a catalyst for engaging the multitude of questions raised in the academic study of the Bible.

Music has several practical advantages over other forms of media when it comes to teaching. No "smart classroom" or special technology is required. It is also time efficient, as it typically takes fewer than ten minutes to introduce and play a given piece. Classical music pieces sometimes run longer, but most recordings now are helpfully divided by CD track, so one can easily skip to the most illuminative portion of a particular piece. Furthermore, musical selections—especially popular songs—are remarkably accessible. For 99 cents apiece, one can purchase millions of individual songs at websites such as iTunes.com or Limewire.com.[3] The sheer amount of available music makes it possible to locate items that relate to a variety of biblical texts and themes. Song lyrics, too, are easily accessible on the Internet with a simple search for the title of the song, followed by the word "lyrics." Websites such as song-lyrics.com or getlyrics.com catalogue millions of lyrics from artists in every genre. One can also use a search engine to locate background material on particular artists and songs. Especially for classical music, it is often helpful for the teacher to provide historical information about the piece as well as some biographical background on the composer in order to contextualize the work.[4]

Music offers theoretical as well as practical benefits in the classroom. Studies show that music activates different sensory receptors that prime students for learning by stimulating emotional involvement and physical movement. While songs may not generate emotional and kinesthetic responses in ways directly related to the material to be studied, music's ability to activate different senses nevertheless facilitates retention of material.[5]

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2. Jan Swafford, *The Vintage Guide to Classical Music* (New York: Random House, 1992), 520.

3. Some of the songs discussed here have been recorded by multiple artists. If one version is difficult to locate online, finding the same title by another artist is relatively simple with any search engine.

4. Resources for gathering such information are plentiful. For example, Swafford (*The Vintage Guide to Classical Music*) presents a chronological biography of many key composers, as well as a glossary and suggestions for building a classical library. Similarly, both the *Penguin Guide to Compact Discs* and the *Gramophone Good CD Guide*, updated yearly, offer reviews of thousands of classical CDs. Finally, there are many excellent websites providing access to reviews, discographies, and information (e.g., www.classicstoday.com; www.arkivmusic.com; www.classical.net; and www.gramophone.co.uk).

5. On the physiological aspects of music and learning, see Eric Jensen, *Brain-Based Learning: The New Science of Teaching and Training* (rev. ed.; San Diego: The Brain Store,

Whatever its impact on individual learners, music also has a positive effect on learning communities. One strategy that highlights the communal benefits is to play background music as students arrive for class. For example, on days when Luke is the target text, Krzysztof Penderecki's *Passio et mors domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Lucam* (*St. Luke's Passion*) provides a calming introduction to the session's topic. Or more upbeat popular music can be played in order to stimulate chatter among the students as they prepare for class. Lively background music cultivates an environment for active, engaged learning, in part by creating a sense of community.[6] Another approach is to play background music during small group work. This helps to encourage conversation, as students are more willing to talk when there is already some "noise" in the classroom. The music in this case functions, according to educational theorists, as a "pad" to ease students into dialogue.

The most obvious manner in which biblical studies instructors might use music, of course, is as a vehicle for discussing specific course content. The possibilities are limited only by the imagination of the instructor.[7] For example, the technique of "sampling," where one artist uses part (a sample) of an earlier song in the composition of a new song, can offer helpful ways to discuss hermeneutical issues.[8] Similarly, instances in which one artist sings an entire piece that was originally performed by someone else (called "covering") can lead to productive discussions about characteristics of biblical literature

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2000); and idem, *Music with the Brain in Mind* (San Diego: The Brain Store, 2000).

6. Richard Howell Allen, *Impact Teaching* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), presents empirical and anecdotal evidence for this effect; see also "Songs for Teaching," n.p. [cited 3 May 2007]. Online: www.songsforteaching.com/richallen/strategies.htm.

7. In addition to items catalogued in the following chapters, Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, contains entries for a number of others using popular music: Donald C. Polaski, "Tom Lehrer and Historical Criticism," 26–27; idem, "Holiness as an Unknown Culture," 129; and "Hosea Meets Hank Williams," 181–82; Mark McEntire, "Isaiah and Bob Dylan on the Watchtower," 173–74; Brent A. Strawn, "Lament and Praise, Top Forty and Psychology," 201–203; idem, "Imprecatory Psalms: Ancient and Modern," 203–204; Mark Roncace, "Psalm 23 and Modern Worldviews," 205–206; idem, "The Structure of Ecclesiastes and the Views of the Teacher," 232–33; Frank M. Yamada, "The Characterization of Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes," 230–31; Emily R. Cheney, "The Gospels as Aural and Socio-Political Documents," 271–72; and Gregory Stevenson, "The Letters and Historical Context," 341–43. Entries outlining strategies using classical music include Sara Koenig, "Canonicity, Musical Polyphony, and the Book of Psalms," 206–207; Amy C. Cottrill, "Lamentations through Musical Interpretation," 224–26; and Patrick Gray, "Gospel Music," 266–67.

8. See, in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, Guy D. Nave Jr., "The Documentary Hypothesis and Sampling," 134–35; and Brent A. Strawn, "Ancient Near Eastern Parallels and Hip Hop Sampling," 246–47.

such as intertextuality and allusiveness.[9] Playing a song with social, political, or historical referents which students will not understand can underscore the importance of social, cultural, and historical criticism. But the most common way that music can be used in class is as a comparative "text" to be "read" alongside the Bible in order to explore a particular biblical theme or text or to open up fresh avenues of inquiry. Songwriters who quote or paraphrase biblical texts are, in effect, interpreters of the Bible, and as such they provide interesting material for studying the history of its reception. When Bob Dylan, for example, alludes to the Akedah in "Highway 61 Revisited" or Bruce Springsteen sings that "Jesus Was an Only Son," instructors have ample opportunity to place such musical instances of biblical interpretation within the broader contexts of popular and scholarly discourse.

Two caveats, one for popular music and one for classical. First, some teachers who do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable about poplar music might be hesitant to use it in their classrooms. A middle-aged white woman presenting a song by 50 Cent (a contemporary rap artist), for example, might think, "I could not play that song. Students would see right through me and laugh." This is an understandable sentiment, and not all instructors will be able to escape it. There is nothing wrong, however, with students knowing that the instructor's knowledge of popular music is the result of academic study rather than a long-standing personal subscription to *Rolling Stone*. Most students will appreciate the teacher's attempt to keep up with pop culture. (And keeping up is not terribly difficult. One hour a month with the library's copy of *Rolling Stone* goes a long way.)

Second, in many cases involving classical music, students will need access to the lyrics or the libretto of a given piece, if it contains a vocal part. This text will allow the students to not only *see* the words the composer is setting to music, but, when coupled with the music, should allow them to *hear* the text as well. Because students respond to music so differently than they do to a traditional lecture or class discussion, it is very important that teachers do not separate the words from the music. Classical music, especially opera, ideally makes a holistic demand on the listener, and to dissect it by focusing solely on the text would be a disservice not only to the composer, but it also lessens the pedagogic impact. Reading the lyrics to Handel's oratorio *Messiah*, for example, is a radically different experience without the music; it reduces the piece to nothing more than a string of loosely connected Bible verses. Many operas based on biblical texts (e.g., Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*; Verdi's *Nabucco*)

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9. See Brent A. Strawn, "On Covering (the Song of) Songs and the Importance of (Canonical) Context," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 216–18.

are available on DVD with closed-captioning. This makes it possible for students to be more thoroughly engaged by adding the visual component to the aural.

A single song or composition could be employed in a variety of ways, so teachers are encouraged to explore how each piece might best fit into their classrooms. The aim of the chapters on popular and classical music is to make instructors aware of the variety of possibilities and then offer a few suggestions for classroom use. Teachers and students, too, will likely think of additional avenues of inquiry in connection with any given piece. A simple but effective technique is simply to say to students: "How does this song connect to today's text?" or "Compare these lyrics to the biblical text." It is not unusual for students to make their own insightful observations. The category "popular music" covers a vast terrain, and so it can be instructive for the teacher—as well as fun for students—to assign them the task of locating and commenting on material that relates to some element of the course. Allowing students to present their findings gives them a sense of ownership of the course.

The songs discussed in the chapter devoted to popular music are drawn from a variety of genres, artists, and time periods. Some deal exclusively with a biblical text or image, others have a passing biblical reference, and still others have nothing explicitly to do with the Bible. Most of the pieces discussed in the chapter devoted to classical music are explicitly inspired by or based on biblical texts.[10] This diversity is designed to prompt consideration of additional songs that could be used successfully. The examples discussed here represent only a fraction of the possibilities open to a thoughtful pedagogue.

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10. Classical music not explicitly inspired by the Bible can also be an effective teaching device; for example, the opening of Mahler's *Symphony No. 1* or Richard Strauss's "Fanfare" sequence from *Also Sprach Zarathustra* can accompany a reading of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1–18).

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MUSIC

Popular Music

Mark Roncace and Dan W. Clanton Jr.

The songs discussed in this chapter are arranged according to the order in which their subject matter appears in the canon. The indices may be consulted to find entries with classroom strategies related to particular texts. All secondary literature cited here is included in the preceding bibliography (pp. 11–13).

Hebrew Bible

Torah

Bob Marley, "We and Dem" (Reggae, 1980)

Marley cites the biblical text which says that God gave humans "dominion" over the earth (Gen 1:26). He then decries the fact that humans are destroying the earth and will one day pay for their irresponsible actions. The song invites one to consider the meaning of the word "dominion," the fact that God gives humans (not just "man") dominion only over the animals (not "all things" as Marley sings), and that God gives plants to humans and animals for their food (Gen 1:29–30), which suggests that "dominion" over the animals does not include killing them. In general, Marley's song sets the context for a discussion of how, if at all, one appropriates the biblical text in light of a variety of contemporary environmental and ethical issues.

Esther, "Eve's Lament" (Folk, 2001)

The song expresses Eve's perspective, which invites students to consider the story from multiple points of view. Eve wonders how she was supposed to know the consequences for eating the fruit; this is an understandable question since in the biblical narrative the Lord's instructions about the Tree are given only to the man (Gen 2:16–17). Further, the deity vows death "on the day" that the fruit is eaten, which of course is not the literal, immediate consequence for the man and woman. Eve's observation that they would not have

been banished if they had not eaten the fruit can lead to consideration of the main reason for banishment in the biblical version: to prevent access to the Tree of Life (which significantly complicates the logic of the story). Eve's assertion "I thought I would try something new" can open up discussion about the desire for knowledge, the reasons the deity would try to withhold it from humans, and what it means to be human. Similarly, Eve wonders why, if God had wanted her to remain innocent, would there be a serpent and the Tree in the Garden. Is the deity somehow at least partially responsible for the situation? The song also invites one to consider whether the biblical story ends on a note of "lament," per the song title, or if it offers a more hopeful conclusion.

Bob Marley, "Adam and Eve" (Reggae, 1975)

This song makes a number of extrabiblical observations, which can lead to a discussion of the importance of not following Marley's exegetical lead, even if he is in some cases supported by subsequent Christian tradition. The song refers to the devil, original sin, and asserts that "woman is the root of all evil." On a less egregious note, the first verse of the song claims that God named Adam and Eve and gave them a happy life in the Garden. The former idea is incorrect, since the man names Eve in the biblical story (Gen 3:20); and students might consider the ways in which the Garden could (or could not) be a truly happy place prior to eating the fruit. Interestingly, however, the song does hold both the man and woman responsible, saying "they" disobeyed—a notion supported by the text. A simple question such as, "Where does Marley follow the biblical story and where does he deviate?" can get the discussion moving.

Bob Dylan, "Man Gave Names to All the Animals" (Folk, 1979)

This light-hearted song details how the man named the animals. It helps one to pause over the fact that God's goal in creating the animals and bringing them to the man was to identify a suitable companion. Dylan does not mention the naming of the woman, a note which can prompt discussion about the significance of naming (does it indicate power over someone or something?) and the fact that the man names the woman with a poetic utterance (Gen 2:23). Instead, the song concludes by mentioning the man's encounter with the serpent. This raises questions: Had the man encountered the serpent prior to the incident at the Tree? Why would the deity create the serpent? If the serpent was not "good," how does that affect our understanding of the Garden? Obviously there are not clear answers to these questions, which helps students appreciate not only the gaps in the story, but how filling them can significantly alter one's understanding of the story.

Garth Brooks, "Against the Grain" (Country, 1991)

The song points to Noah as an example of a man who "bucked the system" and went "out on a limb." The song includes the popular and extrabiblical idea that Noah was ridiculed for building the ark, but continued anyway. Like the biblical text—but unlike other ancient flood stories—Brooks's version has a moral or pedagogical point. The points, however, are different and reflect the values from which they emanate. The biblical Noah escapes the flood because he is righteous; in the song, it is because he is brave enough to be different. Brooks presents a maverick (comparing him to Columbus and John Wayne); he is an American Noah who is praised for recognizing that "nothin' ventured, nothin' gained." Brooks transforms the biblical story of a man who follows God's instructions to build the ark into a figure who prides himself in the American ideals of individualism and independence.

Ice Cube, "When I Get to Heaven" (Rap, 1993)

This song, which rails against the hypocrisy of the church, features a couple of interesting lines regarding the flood story which can help students reflect on the image of the deity. Ice Cube notes that if he himself must use violence, "God won't mind" because God too "is a killer from the start. Why you think Noah had to build his ark?" These lyrics shift the focus away from the ark as a vehicle of salvation to what the salvation is from: massive death and destruction (cf. Doré's painting, *The Deluge*). Students are not accustomed to thinking about the implications of God's actions: God regrets making people and so simply wipes them all out, save eight. Ice Cube's assertion that God will approve of his use of violence raises questions about how one appropriates the biblical text. Clearly, we are uncomfortable with his reasoning, but why? Is the deity not a moral exemplar? How does one responsibly draw moral meaning from the text?

Boogie Down Productions, "Why Is That?" (Rap, 1989)

The song is a diatribe against the manner in which black youth are educated. In the process, the song cites Gen 11:10 as evidence that Shem was black and since Abraham was a decedent of Shem, he too must have been black (citing Gen 14:13). Teachers could invite closer study of these two verses and other genealogical material in a discussion about the identity/ethnicity of the patriarchs. The song then observes that since Moses passed as Pharaoh's grandson, he must have been black—which means black Egyptians were enslaving black Israelites. This observation would fit nicely with a discussion of Moses' identity, for example, how Moses seems to have difficulty identifying with the Israelites (Exod 3–4), or how liberators of oppressed people often come from positions of power or have access to it. In general, the song

can be employed to facilitate discussion of the origin of Israel as it relates to surrounding people groups. In a different vein, the song challenges what people are taught and why ("why is that"), which can be used to underscore the importance of considering the ideological agenda behind "facts" and who benefits from a given presentation of them. What is at stake by depicting the Israelites as light or dark skinned?

Momus, "The Lesson of Sodom (According to Lot)" (Alternative, 1986)

This is an odd and intriguing song about Lot and his daughters after the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19:30–38). Lot's wife is appropriately named "Salt," but the daughters, as in the Bible, are not named, which could lead to conversation about the anonymity of biblical women. In the song, Lot struggles to identify the lesson of Sodom—what was the point? After considering several clichéd options (spare the rod spoil the child, you can lead a horse to water…), Lot concludes that he has forgotten the lesson. The song prompts one to ask what exactly did provoke the deity's wrath: Homosexuality? Inhospitality? Or something else? If students are asked to identify the sin of Sodom, according to the text, very few will suggest homosexuality, which can lead to a discussion of how texts are (mis)appropriated in contemporary debates. Further, the song underscores the irony of Lot being saved from Sodom since he is not righteous—as the song observes, he is "exempt" from the destruction (cf. Abraham's debate with God in Gen 18:22–33). Not only did Lot offer his daughters to the angry mob (Gen 19:7–8), but in the song, he actively participates in and enjoys the incest with his daughters. Indeed, what is the lesson of Sodom? (For an exercise related to Lot's wife's perspective, see F. V. Greifenhagen, "Lot's Wife: Bringing Minor Biblical Characters Out of the Shadows," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 91–92.)

Bob Dylan, "Highway 61 Revisited" (Folk, 1965)

As with many Dylan songs, the overall meaning or purpose of these lyrics is not entirely clear. The first stanza presents an alternate version of the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22). Here Abraham thinks that God's instructions to kill his son must be a joke. Abraham resists God's commands, which stands in striking contrast to the reticent biblical Abraham (but compare the Abraham of Gen 18:22–33). In response, God observes that Abraham can do what he wants, but "the next time you see me coming, you better run." As with the biblical text, the song raises questions about the nature of the deity and human freedom. Highway 61 is where God commands the sacrifice to occur; elsewhere in the song, Highway 61 is representative of human trials and tragedies. The carnival beat to the song stands in odd juxtaposition to its disturbing lyrics; in some ways this parallels the biblical text. On the one hand, it

is a deeply troubling story; but on the other hand, the reader knows it is a test (22:1) and so does not expect that God will permit Abraham to kill Isaac.

Leonard Cohen, "Story of Isaac" (Folk, 1969)

The first part of this song is a detailed retelling of Gen 22 from the perspective of Isaac. The song fills in many elements not present in the text—the color of Abraham's eyes, the tone of his voice, what occurred on the trip up the mountain. Students can be invited to fill the gaps in their own ways and consider the different understandings of the story that emerge. Similarly, students can expand the development of Isaac's perspective begun by the biblical text (Gen 22:7) and Cohen or write a similar song or poem from the perspective of another character (e.g., Sarah). Students can compare their image of Isaac to the one presented by Cohen (a small nine-year-old boy who would submit to his father) and consider the implications of the different depictions. What would have been Isaac's relationship with Abraham (or Sarah) after this event? The final two stanzas of the song are social commentary against sacrificing sons by sending them to war. Students might be asked what they think of using Gen 22 in this way or if there are any responsible ways in which the biblical story might have meaning for a contemporary audience.

Joan Baez, "Isaac and Abraham" (Folk, 1992)

In this retelling of Gen 22 it is not clear that God commands the sacrifice—it is a voice in the troubled mind of Abraham. While this is different from the biblical narrative, it still raises the question about people who do strange and violent things, claiming that God enjoined them. The song also says that the angels did not comprehend why the righteous Isaac must die; and at the end, Abraham "most mysteriously" stops before killing Isaac and declares that he wishes he were the one to have spared the boy's life. This connects with the fact that in the biblical text it is an angel of the Lord who stops Abraham. Is this angelic figure acting independently from the deity, or is it simply the agent of the Lord? The conclusion to the song celebrates Isaac, which stands in stark contrast to the taciturn denouement of the biblical account where there is no verbal or emotional reaction from the characters. The song thus invites students to speculate about the nature of the relationship between Abraham and Isaac after this incident, as well as that of Abraham and God, who never speak again in the biblical narrative.

Grateful Dead, "My Brother Esau" (Rock, 1987)

This song employs the Jacob and Esau narrative as a commentary, seemingly, on the Vietnam War. It mentions an inheritance, birthright, paternal favoritism, Jacob's dreams, Esau's hairiness, a blessing, and fraternal com-

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petition in which Esau is a warrior and Jacob, the voice singing, is a quiet man. Toward the end of the song, Jacob takes responsibility for "Esau's curse," seems to sympathize with his suffering, and sees himself in his brother when he says: "The more my brother looks like me, the less I understand." This can lead to a discussion about the reconciliation, or lack thereof, between Jacob and Esau in the biblical story. Has Jacob matured after his stint with Laban? Or does he remain a conniving trickster who continues to deceive his brother (Gen 33:12–17)?

Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder, "Jacob's Vision" (Bluegrass Gospel, 1999).

Skaggs's album *Soldier of the Cross* is filled with biblically based songs, complete with scriptural citations of verses referenced or alluded to in any given song. Because the album is unabashedly Christian, the Hebrew Bible texts used are all viewed as proof texts for Jesus' divinity and actions on behalf of humanity. In the case of this song, Skaggs retells the story of Jacob's vision in Gen 28, but musically connects it with Jesus' execution in the chorus: "Hallelujah to Jesus who died on the tree, to raise up this ladder of mercy for me." Skaggs even writes in the liner notes, "I believe the ladder represents the cross and the stone represents Jesus, the stone the builders rejected." Because of the Christological interpretation present here, this song can be useful not only for its retelling of Gen 28, but also for a discussion of the ways in which New Testament writers reinterpret Hebrew Bible narratives, shifting the focus to Jesus. Like Skaggs, the Gospel writers and Paul used the Torah to understand their own experiences.

Dolly Parton, "Coat of Many Colors" (Country, 1971)

This song sets up discussion of how Joseph's coat, which is referenced in the song, functions in the narrative. In both the song and the biblical story, the coat is a special gift from parent to child, a symbol of parental love. In the song, however, it is a present from a poor mother to her daughter; in the biblical text, of course, it is from a father to a son and is a symbol not only of love but also of favoritism over other children. In both stories, people resent or make fun of the coat—Joseph's brothers and the girl's schoolmates. For Joseph, however, the coat does not bring "good luck and happiness," as the parent in the song hopes; rather his brothers bring the blood-stained garment to Jacob as evidence of their brother's death. The song interweaves the story of Joseph with Parton's own humble upbringing. Students might be asked to link the biblical tale with their personal experiences, for example in terms of their relationship with siblings or parents. How would they use the text as inspiration for a song about their life?

MUSIC

Joan Baez, "Little Moses" (Folk, 1979)

This song gives a broad overview of Moses' life, including his rescue by Pharaoh's daughter, his subsequent return to his mother, the crossing of the Red Sea, and his standing on a mountain looking into the Promised Land. One might note the unsurprising omission of Moses as a law-giver, his most significant role both in the text and in Jewish tradition. The song's juxtaposition of the rescue by Pharaoh's daughter with the drowning of "Pharaoh's host" calls attention to the story's ambiguous attitude toward Egyptians: They save Moses and adopt him as their son, yet they are the enemy killed by the powers of God. The final stanza also fails to mention that God prohibits Moses from entering the land because of one mistake (cf. Deut 32:48–52). It says as well that Moses went to heaven upon death, which provides an occasion to explain the Hebrew concept of the afterlife. Students might be asked to fill in other crucial elements of Moses' life not mentioned by the song—for example, his reluctance to return to Egypt and free the Israelites, his near death at the hands of God (Exod 4:24–26), or his struggle to lead the recalcitrant people in the wilderness. The biblical Moses indeed is a complex character, an element which popular portrayals, such as this song, fail to capture.

Steven Curtis Chapman, "Dive" (Contemporary Christian, 2000)

Although this song has nothing explicitly to do with Moses' experience at the burning bush (Exod 3:1–6), it can serve as a comparative text illustrating the typical human response to a theophany according to Rudolph Otto's idea of *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*. Both Moses and Chapman encounter a theophany—the "river" in the song—and both express fascination (Exod 3:3) and fear (Exod 3:6). Both are simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by their respective theophanies. Chapman is drawn to the river and wants to jump in, but he also describes the river as "wild and rushing," "deep," "wide," and "alive." He feels compelled to jump into the river, even though he is aware that he might get swept away and die. Fire and water are appropriate mediums for each theophany, as both can give life (thus the attraction to them), but yet both can be lethal (thus the fear). Later God attempts to kill Moses (Exod 4:24–26); indeed, the appearance of the deity can lead to death, just as Chapman knows he might die in the river—paradoxically in the river of "life."

Metallica, "Creeping Death" (Heavy Metal, 1984)

This song depicts the utter horror of the final plague, the killing of all first born of Egypt. The song makes reference to other elements of the Exodus story, but the repeated phrase "I am creeping death" gives the listener an image of the death angel that wreaks havoc on the Egyptians. The heavy metal genre is fitting. The song can serve to help students wrestle with the complex-

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ity of the biblical narrative. Must the Egyptians die in order for Israel to be saved? Can salvation be wrought without violence? Is there any irony or significance to blood on the doorpost being the sign for the death angel to pass?

Cradle of Filth, "Doberman Pharaoh" (Heavy Metal, 2003)

The song presents Pharaoh's perspective on his struggles with Moses and Yahweh. The Pharaoh is stubborn in part because of his reliance on his own deities, which can provide an opportunity to point out that the specific nature of some of the plagues (e.g., of the Nile and the sun) may have been to demonstrate the power of Yahweh over Egyptian gods. The lyrics are obscure in places, but one can follow the description of the various plagues imposed by Moses. As in Metallica's "Creeping Death," the final plague receives the most attention and the listener is forced to focus on its horror—the "carrion" and the "bleeding in the dark." Students might reflect on why it is that heavy metal bands have gravitated toward the plague narratives.

Snoop Dog, "Mac Bible Chapter 211 Verse 20–21" (Rap, 2001)

Teachers might utilize this song to illustrate that one learns a great deal about an author or community by studying their laws. Snoop Dog's list of "the gangsta's ten commandments" reflects his (gangsta) culture and values, namely, loyalty, misogyny, and respect for guns and cash, among others. The same is true of the biblical Ten Commandments. For example, one sees the obvious focus on religious matters in the first four commands and its male perspective in the final one. If one studies the laws in other Hebrew Bible texts, such as Exod 21–23, one learns about the Israelite view of slaves, women, children, violence, property, and individual rights. The song also illustrates the difficulty of understanding certain laws if one stands outside the culture. What does Snoop mean by "Thou shall flex his G's" or, in the Bible, what is the significance of the festival of unleavened bread (or what is unleavened bread) or what is the rationale for the command not to boil a goat in its mothers milk? The song can also set up a discussion in which students are asked to produce their own list of Ten Commandments for contemporary society. These too will reflect current cultural problems and values.

Prophets

Michael W. Smith, "Be Strong and Courageous" (Contemporary Christian, 1987)

God promises to bless and protect Joshua as he leads the people into the land that God has given them (cf. the song title and Deut 31:23). The song is a typically uncritical reading of the Joshua narrative. Smith reinscribes the

Holy War ethic of the book of Joshua. He focuses on the advice to "be strong and courageous," but does not consider the implications of what God has instructed Joshua to do: wipe out the inhabitants of the land in order to possess it. The final two lines of the song recapitulate Deuteronomistic theology: If Joshua keeps God's law in his heart, he will be invincible.

Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder, "The Joshua Generation" (Bluegrass Gospel, 1999)

This song, also found on Skaggs's album *Soldier of the Cross*, represents an anthemic interpretation of the conquest narratives found in Joshua for modern evangelical Christians. Skaggs notes here that these Christians in America have achieved societal and political prominence, and as such their behavior should parallel the holy forces of Joshua. The chorus reinforces the paradigmatic example of Joshua for modern Christians: "Let's rise up and take a stand, claiming the keys to every kingdom. We can go in and take the land.…The power of God is in our hands." Because of the near militancy of Skaggs's lyrics, this song can be used to illustrate the ideological danger of the conquest narratives, both in the text itself and in later interpretations.

Bob Dylan, "With God on Our Side" (Folk, 1964)

Dylan rehearses a long list of wars in U.S. and world history, including the killing of the Native Americans, the Spanish American War, the Civil War, and both World Wars. In each case, he notes, people killed in the name of God, believing that the deity sided with them and opposed their enemies. According to the lyrics, people fight bravely, ask no questions, and do not bother to count the dead when God is on their side. The song, of course, stands in opposition to the Holy War ideology of Joshua, thus helping students to contemplate the rhetoric of the biblical book. Dylan's song also makes the important connection between the Bible and contemporary violence in the name of religion. The song ends by expressing hope that God will stop the next war, which may lead to discussion about what would, in fact, eliminate, or at least curb, religious violence; and what, if any, is the deity's role is these affairs.

Grateful Dead, "Samson and Delilah" (Rock, 1977)

The song begins with the Samson and Delilah scene (Judg 16:4–22) and then backtracks through the biblical text to discuss other events in Samson's life. The song describes Delilah's physical beauty—unlike the characteristically laconic biblical text—but it omits Samson's repeated lies to Delilah about the secret source of his strength. It also omits the biblical element that Delilah was under pressure from the Philistine lords. One can reflect on how

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the song's simplified version alters the biblical one. The song then includes the incident in which Samson kills a thousand men—ten thousand in the song—with a jawbone of a donkey (Judg 15:14–17) and Samson's killing a lion (Judg 14: 5–9). The chorus to the song references Samson pushing down the Philistine building. One could ask which significant elements of the biblical text are omitted by the song, namely, the debacle with Samson's Timnite bride (14:10–20) and his consorting with a prostitute (16:1–4). What are the effects of such omissions?

Neil Sedaka, "Run Samson Run" (Pop, 1970)

This version of Samson and Delilah articulates the traditional misogynist reading of Delilah. She is a "cheatin' gal," a "demon," and "a devil in disguise" who brings about the strong man's demise. The dangers of female sexuality are seen as Samson is seduced by Delilah's wily ways, which leads to him "getting clipped," a perfect Freudian double entendre. The song goes one step further by outlining a moral: Every girl is a little bit like Delilah. Students can consider how the song rewrites the biblical account, noting mainly its omissions and simplifications. It also invites discussion about what motivates such retellings, and what is the moral "lesson" of the biblical tale—if there is one.

Pixies, "Dead" (Alternative, 1989)

This short song about David and Bathsheba is sung from David's perspective. Its lyrics are arcane and so asking students to connect them to the biblical tale can lead to creative insights. One could ask in what sense Bathsheba is "suffocating"? How does the word "dead" function in the song? Who is "torn down" and how?

Leonard Cohen, "Hallelujah" (Folk, 1984)

This song can prompt thought about the image of David in the biblical text. It begins with an allusion to David playing music to soothe Saul and then rehearses the episode with Bathsheba. Students might be asked about the significance of the line which says that Bathsheba "broke your throne and cut your hair." In what sense, if any, did Bathsheba "break" David's throne? Or did she help to continue it by birthing Solomon and then seeing to it that he was appointed king (1 Kgs 1–2)? The reference to "cutting hair" is presumably an allusion to the Samson and Delilah story, which invites a comparison between those two male-female relationships: Who has the power? Who acts as an autonomous agent? Is love involved? What is the outcome for each character? At the end of the song, David says that he did his best and although "it all went wrong," he will stand before the Lord and sing Hallelujah. Questions

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for further discussion include: What is the relationship between God and David in the stories in 1–2 Samuel? In Chronicles? What are the implications of the all-too-human David being associated with the book of Psalms? Does the word "hallelujah" on David's lips ring true?

Momus, "King Solomon's Song and Mine" (Alternative, 1986)

Momus describes a man who is conscripted to work for King Solomon in the construction of the temple and palace (1 Kgs 3–9). Solomon prospers mightily at the expense of his laborers, though the singer, at least, finds the work tolerable. The song highlights the disparity between the wealthy king and his servants—compare Samuel's warning about the nature of a monarch (1 Sam 8)—witnessed, for example, when the Queen of Sheba visits Solomon. The song could open a discussion about daily life for the average Israelite during the monarchy, which, in turn, can prompt conversation about disparities between the perspective of the biblical narrator and "actual" historical conditions. On an ideological level, the song illustrates how people in power manipulate their human resources to maintain and increase power.

Sade, "Jezebel" (R&B, 1985)

As is well known, Jezebel's image has not fared well in cultural representations. This song offers a Jezebel who is confident, determined, hard working, and ambitious. Although the biblical narrator does not approve of Jezebel, in a number of ways she possesses characteristics that a contemporary audience would admire: She is tolerant of the beliefs of others (Elijah is the religious fanatic), loyal to her husband, willing to do what was necessary to acquire what she wanted, and successful in her career. The Jezebel of the song, reminiscent of the biblical figure, is a woman who "won't deny where she came from" (i.e., maintains her own religious traditions) and who declares: "I want to get what's mine" (e.g., Naboth's vineyard). The song sets the context for a discussion of the one-sided depiction of Jezebel or any number of other biblical characters.

Bob Marley, "Exodus" (Reggae, 1976)

Marley's song proclaims that it is time to leave Babylon and return to the "fatherland." Like Second Isaiah (Isa 43:16–21), Marley employs images of the Egyptian Exodus (referring to Moses and the Red Sea) to encourage a new, second Exodus. Similarly, both Marley and Second Isaiah employ the language of creation to bring about hope. Marley sings about walking on the "road of creation," which is reminiscent of texts such as Isa 40:28; 44:24; 45:7, 18. The biblical text, naturally, focuses on God's power in bringing about a new Exodus, whereas Marley's focus is on "looking within."

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Derek Webb, "Wedding Dress" (Contemporary Christian, 2003)

Employing language and imagery reminiscent of Ezek 16 and Hos 2, Webb accuses the contemporary church of prostituting itself to cultural values in exchange for material wealth. The white wedding dress hides the filth underneath. The song is different from the biblical texts in one crucial way. It is sung from the perspective of the unfaithful woman, rather than the husband. Accordingly, it does not include any of the rhetoric found in the biblical text in which God violently punishes and humiliates his estranged wife. The song's metaphor thus functions differently. Students can be asked to compare their reaction to the biblical text with their response to the song. How and why does the metaphor "work" for the biblical prophets? Does it "work" today? It may also be interesting to consider the implications of a male singer taking the perspective of a "whoring" female. This can open up discussion on the gendered nature of the biblical text and how male Israelites may have heard the metaphor and identified (or not) with the woman. Are similar issues in play for men today who see themselves, as the song suggests, as the bride of Christ? Further, Webb has explained that he wrote the song in response to Bruce Wilkinson's wildly popular *Prayer of Jabez*, which he sees as an example of the church prostituting itself. Webb is the prophetic voice indicting the establishment, but if students know the book and approve of it, they will identify with the establishment and resist the song's rhetoric. Other students will agree with Webb's indictment. This can lead to a discussion of how difficult it can be to distinguish "true" prophetic voices; it can also help students understand why the message of biblical prophets was not always welcomed in ancient Israel. Does prophetic rhetoric need to shock in order to be effective? Could one identify with the content of the message (be faithful to God alone), but not endorse its form (adulterous wife metaphor)?

Mark Chesnutt, "Broken Promise Land" (Country, 1992)

Chesnutt sings about a cheating husband whose wife grows tired of waiting for him to return home and so she too is unfaithful. In the biblical metaphor (Hos 2; Ezek 16; Jer 3) the wife, Israel, is unfaithful to the husband, God. The song helps to underscore the fact that students, based on common cultural expectations, are more likely to anticipate a husband cheating (per the song and contra the biblical metaphor), which can open up discussions about the social functions of marriage in ancient Israel—that is, the ramifications of female versus male infidelity. Unlike the biblical texts, the husband in the song acknowledges his own failures and says that he will hate himself for giving her the opportunity and excuse to cheat. The song, then, can be used to raise questions about the reasons for Israel's infidelity to God. Is the male

partly responsible for the female's infidelity? The biblical metaphor does not allow room for this possibility; asking why it does not can lead to consideration of the text's rhetorical function. The biblical allusion in the song's title works nicely: the covenant between Israel and God has been broken and now Israel will be exiled from the land. In short, Chesnutt invites discussion about the theological and psychological complexity of the embattled Yahweh-Israel relationship.

The Byrds, "She Has a Way" (Folk Rock, 1965)

The song describes a woman who "has a way" of running around. It works well in comparison with Ezek 16 and 23, where Israel is said to have been unfaithful from its youth (e.g., Ezek 23:3), in contrast to Jer 2, where the nation was loyal initially, in the wilderness (Jer 2:2). Students can review the wilderness narratives (Exod 16:1–4; 17:1–4; 32:1–14, 30–35; Num 11:1–6; 14:1–35; 16:41–50; 21:4–6; 25:1–9) to see how those traditions depict the early relationship. Students might consider the implications of the male/God entering into a relationship with a partner who was unfaithful "from the start," as the song says. The singer and the deity lament that they have treated the women well, only to be scorned. The singer, however, is patiently waiting, hoping for her return, while God is much more assertive and forceful. Which depiction of the male presents authentic love? Or are there problems with both?

Dom Crincoli, "Jonah" (Contemporary Christian, 2005)

The opening stanza helpfully explains that Jonah ran away because he was reluctant to help the hated Assyrians—a fact that the original audience would certainly have understood, though modern readers may miss. The song also rightly explains that the big fish is a vehicle of salvation, not of punishment, as many novice readers wrongly assume. Most of the song, however, is quite different from the biblical version, thus highlighting for students some of the key features of the canonical account. In the song, God personally calls Jonah to get his attention ("and he called me Jonah"), whereas in the Bible, "the Lord hurled a great wind" and "mighty storm" on the sea, nearly killing everyone on the boat. In the song, Jonah regrets deeply his actions and prays fervently for God "to change my course" and for release from the fish. Jonah's prayer is much more ambiguous in the biblical text (Jonah 2). The song omits any element of Jonah's continued defiance (cf. Jonah 4); instead, the prophet concludes that "the sea was a serendipitous highway leading me back to you."

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Boney M, "Rivers of Babylon" (Pop, 1978)

The song presents an alternate version of Ps 137. It follows verses 1–4 fairly closely, but instead of concluding with expressions of bitter anger and resentment toward the conquering enemy (137:7–9), the song substitutes another biblical phrase, "let the words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable in thy sight." This censored version illustrates the reluctance in modern religious contexts to voice feelings of rage and hate. The biblical psalm represents raw, candid, human sentiments which, though harsh, are seemingly a normal and healthy part of the grieving process.

Linkin Park, "Hit the Floor" (Rock, 2002)

This song can be compared to imprecatory psalms, such as Ps 59. The singer, like the biblical writer, is angry at the injustices that surround him. Both psalmist and singer also claim that they did nothing to warrant the persecution they are experiencing at the hands of their enemies. Both also describe their adversaries with similar language—underscoring their pride, their eagerness to torment, and their persistence. The song and psalm also call for revenge to be taken against their foes, and both use explicit language in describing the desired destruction. The singer, however, intends to exact retribution himself. He will wait until the time is right and will then strike with vengeance. The psalmist, by contrast, relies on the power of God to destroy the enemies. The song, then, provides an opportunity to reflect on human expressions of anger and violence and how they might function for individuals or a community.

Evanescence, "Tourniquet" (Alternative Rock, 2003)

This song closely parallels a lament psalm in form and content. It contains an invocation (a call for God to remember), a complaint (a description of the suffering—a sense of betrayal, the bleeding, and screaming), and a petition (a plea for God to be the singer's tourniquet). It does not, however, conclude on a note of assurance or hope as most biblical laments do. In fact, the last word of the song is "suicide." Thus, the song works well as a comparison specifically to Ps 39 or 88.

U2, "40" (Rock, 1983)

This version of Ps 40 combines elements of thanksgiving—the Lord has saved me from the pit (cf. 40:1)—with the cry of lament, "How long?" The song could be used to consider the nature of Israelite faith as expressed in the psalms generally or to illustrate specifically how one individual psalm, such

as Ps 40, can express paradoxical sentiments. One might extend this discussion to connect with the vicissitudes of Israelite history or to consider the psychology of the psalms.

Hank Williams, "Funeral" (Country, 1952)

In recounting the funeral of a child, the song claims that God has the right to take away the child because it was only a loan from God in the first place. It counsels the child's parents not to criticize God because the deity knows best—and besides, the child is in a much better, happier place. The song thus represents a poor model for dealing with human suffering and anguish. It acknowledges none of the natural sentiments of anger, grief, bitterness, frustration, and doubt that are found in the lament psalms. The song tries to circumvent the pain, rather than confronting it and working through it; it offers the antithesis of a "biblically based" model for counseling.

Hank Williams, "Thank God" (Country, 1948)

This song's structure and content can be compared to psalms of praise. It features a call to praise ("Get on your knees and pray"), a reason for praise, specifically, as with many biblical songs, for the deity's creative power (for every flower, tree, mountain, and sea, etc.), and closes with a repeated call to worship ("Wherever you may be, thank God"). As with a number of psalms, the structure is not paradigmatic and may include other genres within it, in this case, elements of wisdom.

Johnny Cash, "Spiritual" (Country, 1996)

On Cash's last few albums (*American Recordings*), this master storyteller recorded a number of gospel and spiritual songs, including a solo gospel album titled *My Mother's Hymn Book* (2004). This song, from *Unchained*, is a five-minute, wrenching plea from a penitent to Jesus not to forget him on his deathbed. The lyrics are plain ("I don't wanna die alone," "Don't leave me here," "I know I have sinned but Lord I'm suffering"), but therein lies the usefulness of the song in the classroom. Cash's delivery is both strong and pleading, and the weariness and age in his voice reveals more about the emotional content of psalms than any academic treatise can. In conjunction with this song, students may be asked to compose their own psalm, based on either their understanding of what a psalm is, or their own religious and personal backgrounds. One could even assign them a specific psalm to work from (e.g., Ps 6). Following this, the Cash song could be played as an example of one person's religious plea for mercy from God, and as such illuminate the emotional depths of these works, so that students might feel better about sharing their psalms with the class or anonymously online. (A good resource

for information about Cash is Dave Urbanski, *The Man Comes Around: The Spiritual Journey of Johnny Cash*, which includes a chapter on this album.)

John Coltrane, "Psalm" (Jazz, 1964)

The fourth movement of Coltrane's signature album *A Love Supreme* (beginning at 10:45 into the third track) is a musical recitation of Coltrane's poem "A Love Supreme." Not until recently was it widely known that Coltrane composed this movement as a wordless narration, but it is a logical way to end an album that charts a pilgrim's progress toward God, with titles such as "Acknowledgment," "Resolution," and "Pursuance." The psalm, reprinted in the liner notes, is a very personal praise of God, with a special emphasis on music: "One thought can produce millions of vibrations and they all go back to God.… everything does." Admittedly, Coltrane is no poet. However, the personal imagery in the poem, as well as the deeply felt emotion of the music, can serve as an example for students who might feel the psalms are dated, or who might like to write their own psalm. In this regard, one could ask students to pick a certain psalm and compose a simple tune for it (again, Ps 6 works well for this exercise). If students are uncomfortable composing, one could ask them to consider the ways in which music can express religious sentiment apart from the spoken word. Along this line, one could play this portion of the album and provide the text for students, asking afterward their impressions of how Coltrane's psalm compares to the canonical psalms and noting any specific similarities. One could also use this piece in conjunction with Johnny Cash's song, "Spiritual," to illustrate different genres of psalms, as Coltrane's poem is a psalm of praise, whereas Cash's is one of petition.

Tori Amos, "God" (Alternative Rock, 1994)

Amos has made it clear that this song is a direct response to patriarchy and the repression of women in religious traditions. In the song she accuses God of being unreliable and needing the help of a woman, which may lend itself to a discussion of the possibility that in ancient Israelite religion Yahweh had a female consort. The song also asks God if he will tell the woman about his creative powers regarding the "sky," which could be linked to Prov 8:22–31 which places Woman Wisdom with God at creation. Specifically she claims: "I was there . . . when he made firm the skies above" (8:27–28). The song makes an explicit link to the book of Proverbs when it quotes, in a speaking voice, Prov 31:3: "Give not thy strength unto women; nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings." The Hebrew word rendered "strength" is the same word translated as "capable" and "excellently" in Prov 31:10, 29; thus a number of commentators note the tension between the universally negative portrayal of women in 31:3 and the poem that follows in verses 10–31. Amos's song,

as does the biblical text, presents different views on women. Students might consider how the citation of Prov 31:3 functions rhetorically in the song.

Hank Williams, "Lost Highway" (Country, 1949)

Williams relates that when he was a young man he was led astray by gambling, alcohol, and a woman's lies. The woman's deception was the primary culprit for his current condition, which he describes as "alone and lost." The singer's perspective is reminiscent of the father/teacher in Proverbs who warns his son to avoid the loose woman whose paths lead to death ("boys, don't start your ramblin' around")—that is, to the "lost highway." However, unlike the biblical father, Williams admits to having "paid the cost" for his sins; he speaks not from a position of power and authority, but as a male who has succumbed to the loose woman and other worldly pleasures. He hopes his listeners will not repeat his mistakes. This notion can lead to a discussion of the nature of wisdom literature and who is in the best position to dispense counsel.

DC Talk, "That Kinda Girl" (Christian Rock, 1992)

This song is about avoiding a sexually promiscuous girl and pursuing a virtuous one. This, of course, parallels Proverbs' "loose woman" and Woman Wisdom and the "capable" woman of Prov 31. The promiscuous woman, as in Proverbs, is portrayed as the temptress who seduces the male with her appearance and her speech. As in the biblical text, her words are spoken by the male voice—that is, she is a male construct. Interestingly, the encounter with her occurs in a "garden" and she says, "I'm an apple. Would you care to take a bite?" Associating the loose girl with Eve could open up discussion about Eve's portrayal in Genesis, particularly how she plays a role more akin to Woman Wisdom in her desire for knowledge. Obviously, however, the song participates in a long tradition of denigrating Eve. The song is both like and unlike Prov 31, which it directly references. In the biblical text the "capable woman's" religiousness is mentioned only once at the end (31:30), but in the song it is her main attribute (she "loves the Lord"). Although the singer promises to treat the girl properly, ultimately, perhaps like Prov 31, the virtuous girl is "for me," the male singer, who asks that divine intervention bring her "to me."

Lost in Rotation, "Proverbs" (Alternative Rock, 2004)

The song simply sings the words of Prov 2:2, 4, and 3:3, 7. It illustrates the imperative form of a proverb, which can be contrasted with other forms found in the biblical book. It also combines elements from four different verses, that is, it is a mini-collection of sayings; this can lead to discussion of how sayings

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are collected in Proverbs as well as in cultural traditions more broadly. The song can also be used to consider how various parts of the body function in wisdom discourse—ear, heart, neck, and eyes appear in the song.

Elvis Presley, "Sound Advice" (Rock, 1962)

Presley warns that one should not always heed the "sound advice" that one is given, even if those giving it assure the listener that it is, in fact, sage guidance. It presents a countervoice to the wisdom-dispensing father of Prov 1–9. The song urges one to think twice about following advice from those who think they are smart and enjoy being in positions of power. This connects to the power and social dynamics at work in Proverbs: The patriarchal societal structure depends on the implied reader (the son) heeding his father's advice. Those in power do not wish for the status quo to be challenged. How is the son to identify "sound advice" and what is at stake in the decision?

Smashing Pumpkins, "Bullet with Butterfly Wings" (Hard Rock, 1995)

This Grammy-winning song mentions explicitly and draws on themes in Job. The meaning of the lyrics is abstruse (and a variety of interpretations have been proposed), but connecting them to the story of Job is not difficult. Students might be asked how the first stanza connects to the prologue (Job 1–2). It mentions "secret destroyers" (Job is unaware of the causes of his suffering), "betrayed desires" (does God "betray" Job by handing him over to the *satan*), and "the game" (the divine wager between God and the *satan*). The singer asserts that he will demonstrate his "cool" and "cold" like Job. Job indeed appears to be cool in his response to the disasters and personal suffering in chapters 1–2, but then turns "cold" in his dialogues with his friends. In the song's repeated refrain (and most audibly clear line) the singer expresses his "rage," but still feels as though he is nothing more than a confined rat. Does the rhetoric of the divine reply in Job 38–41 ("Gird up your loins and answer me"; "Surely you know…") invite Job to feel like a meaningless rodent? Or is the speech more conciliatory and consoling than that? In the end, the singer declares that he cannot be saved. The conclusion to the book of Job, of course, is more optimistic, but is there a sense in which Job too, or perhaps the reader, cannot be saved from the trauma?

Seatrain, "Song of Job" (Rock, 1970)

This song retells the biblical story of Job, but with some key omissions. It focuses exclusively on Job's remaining faithful and does not include Job's venomous accusations against the deity (e.g., Job 16) or the fact that Job holds God accountable for his sufferings and demands a response to his plight (Job 31). The song also significantly revises the theologically complex divine

speech in Job 38–41 by summarizing the speech thus: "Job has proved his faith and shall live joyous days." The song helps to highlight the challenging aspects of the biblical book precisely because it glosses over them. The song also presents a one-sided, negative portrayal of the friends, which can lead to discussion of their role in the biblical tale.

Joni Mitchell, "The Sire of Sorrow (Job's Sad Song)" (Folk, 1994)

Drawing on specific language and imagery in Job's speeches to his friends, the first verse of this song focuses on Job's pain and anguish, as well as his protests directed toward the deity. The second verse parallels Job 29, in which he remembers his prosperous former days. The song continues with Job expressing his despair and frustration. The friends appear in the song, much as in the Bible, as characters who assume that Job must be guilty. The song is particularly striking in that it features no divine speech from the whirlwind or any restoration of Job. Instead, after Job describes his "festering flesh," his "terrifying visions," and his desire to die (cf. Job 3), the song ends on a note of sorrowful questioning. The song provides an excellent contrast to Seatrain's version of the story (see above).

"He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" (Traditional)

This is a children's song that can be employed as a comparative text for the divine speeches in Job. Like God's answer to Job, the song declares that God has the wind and rain, land and sea, sun and moon, night and day, and fall and spring in his hands (in the fullest version of the song). But, in contrast to the biblical text, the song claims that "he's got the little tiny baby" and "everybody here" in his hands. The children's song highlights the striking absence of any mention of humanity in God's speech to Job, much less any mention of Job's specific suffering. The song prompts reflection on the purpose and point of the deity's "answer" to Job.

Hank Williams, "Everything's Okay" (Country, 1951)

This is a story about Uncle Bill who loses everything but continues to assert that it is going to be all right. Uncle Bill's experiences have obvious connections with story of Job; however, Bill's sufferings do not arise as the result of a debate between God and the *satan*. This is a crucial difference which underscores a fact that students sometimes forget: Job is not simply suffering a string of bad luck, as Uncle Bill is. Rather, Job's misfortune comes directly from the deity's hand, as God admits (Job 2:3) and Job himself recognizes (1:21; 2:10). The song can also prompt discussion about whose response to their sufferings is more appropriate, both theologically and psychologically: Job's rancorous outbursts or Bill's passive optimism?

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50 Cent, "Candy Shop" (Rap, 2005)

The song can serve as a comparison to the nature of the poetic language in Song of Songs. Both songs have a male and female voice; both have indirect descriptions of sexual acts ("I'll let you lick the lollipop"; cf. 2:3; 5:4–5; 7:8–9); both appeal to multiple senses (taste, touch, sight), including the use of "wine" imagery ("champagne campaign"; cf. 1:2; 7:9); both refer to sexual activity in multiple locations, especially outdoor "garden" areas ("on the beach or in the park"; cf. 7:11–12; 8:1, 5); both describe various aspects of the female body; and both feature reference to the girl's female friends. The two songs are also different. For instance, the biblical song features prominently the female voice—or, at least, there is balanced representation with the male perspective—while in the contemporary song the male voice dominates and the female voice is relegated to only a few lines. "Candy Shop" focuses only on the male "stick," while the biblical text offers extended gazes at the whole male body (5:11–16). Further, the biblical text seemingly presents a more meaningful, intimate encounter than the song's focus on sexual exploits. Juxtaposing the two songs can lead to discussion of similarities and differences between how human sexuality is understood in modern songs and the biblical one. In short, playing a sexually explicit song—and there are many from which to choose, including ones that are much more (porno)graphic—and comparing it to the biblical song in terms of tone and content can be a productive exercise.

Kate Bush, "The Song of Solomon" (Alternative Rock, 1993)

This song quotes lines from the biblical book by the same title in order to express the singer's (female) desire for sexual intimacy. Bush declares that she "just wants your sexuality" and "I'll come in a hurricane for you," sentiments in many ways is akin to the (sexually) aggressive woman in the biblical text (cf. 3:1–5). The song can be juxtaposed with many others that express male sexual desire, such as 50 Cent's "Candy Shop" (above), in order to weigh the perceptions of male versus female expressions of sexual desire. Male expressions traditionally receive a more sympathetic read than female ones, thus highlighting the biblical book's positive portrayal of the woman's desires.

Dave Matthews Band, "Tripping Billies" (Rock, 1996)

The song's chorus, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die," echoes Ecclesiastes both in its advice to enjoy the pleasures of life and in the rationale for doing so, namely, that death is the end (cf. 3:19–22). The Teacher, however, asserts that his advice to eat and drink is sanctioned by God (cf. 3:13), whereas Matthews makes no mention of the divine. This can invite discussion about the "religious" nature of Ecclesiastes, whether or

not the Teacher is correct in associating pleasure with the deity, or whether there is any substantive difference between the views of Matthews and the Teacher.

Sixpence None the Richer, "Meaningless" (Pop, 1994)

Drawing on language and images from Ecclesiastes, this song expresses a sense of the futility of life. In light of this sentiment, the singer, much like the Teacher, concludes that the best course of action is to enjoy the pleasures of this life before death comes. The song, however, contains the line, "Fear your God, this is all I know." Thus, like the book of Ecclesiastes, the song contains conservative exhortations (cf. 3:17; 5:1–6; 7:18; 11:9) alongside more pessimistic observations. The biblical book, of course, concludes with the command to fear God (12:13–14) while the song ends on a note of hopelessness. The song, then, can help students consider the contradictory nature of the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole, as well as the paradoxical words of the Teacher. What are the singer and the Teacher attempting to do by juxtaposing conflicting observations? What is the editor of the biblical book trying to accomplish with the epilogue?

Kansas, "Dust in the Wind" (Rock, 1977)

Both "dust" and "wind" are important theme words in Ecclesiastes, showing the ephemeral nature of life and its absurdity (1:6, 12; 2:11, 26; 3:20, etc.). The song observes: "Same old song, just a drop of water in an endless sea," and "Nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky"; this is reminiscent of the Teacher: "A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever" (1:4; cf. 1:2–11). Similarly, both the song and biblical text lament the fact that human accomplishments are ultimately worthless ("all we do crumbles to the ground," cf. 2:1–11). Both also note the futility of dreams (cf. 5:3, 7). Although the song and biblical text are ideologically similar in many ways, the Teacher seems to find more hope and optimism than the song, namely, with the notion that one should enjoy life precisely because "all we are is dust in the wind" (cf. 5:18; 9:9).

The Stanley Brothers, "Old Daniel Prayed" (Gospel Bluegrass, 1959)

This bluegrass gospel standard by one of the most important groups in traditional American music retells the story of Daniel in the lion's den (Dan 6). Much like the hero lists one finds in Acts 7, Heb 11, Sir 44–50, and other apocryphal texts such as 1 Macc 2, Wis 10, and 4 Macc 16 and 18, this song exhorts the listener to emulate Daniel's example of piety in the face of religious persecution. As such, the song can be used to illustrate not only Dan 6, but also the phenomenon of hero lists and typological interpretation. One

might ask students to reflect on what makes Daniel a heroic figure during the Second Temple period. Or, one could have students look at the hero lists mentioned above and ruminate on the commonalities found among those included. Another exercise is for students to draw on other chronologically appropriate writings to construct their own hero list.

<div align="center">New Testament</div>

Gospels

Bruce Cockburn, "Cry of a Tiny Babe" (Folk, 1990)

Cockburn's song retells Matthew's birth story, with little deviation from the basic biblical outline, although Mary becomes more of a character when she asks Joseph, "What if I were with another man?" and says that she felt the baby kick. The song's refrain interprets the significance of the birth ("redemption"), as does the final verse ("forgiveness"). One could ask students where, if at all, these theological elements may be detected or foreshadowed in Matthew's birth narrative. Or, what kind of "theology" is Matthew interested in developing with his birth story (e.g., with the fulfillment quotations)? The third verse fits better with Luke's story, as it asserts that the baby came not to kings, but to "shepherds and street people, hookers and bums." Interestingly, the song never mentions Jesus by name. Can that fact at all be linked to the nature of the biblical accounts?

Dave Matthews Band, "Christmas Song" (Rock, 1993)

The song focuses on Jesus' birth and death, so students might be invited to discuss themes that appear in both the Christmas and crucifixion story. The lyrics mix the birth narratives from Matthew and Luke, as the wise men visit Jesus in the manger; there is no mention of the virgin birth, only that a "surprise" is on the way for Mary and Joseph. When Jesus is on the cross, he calls out to "Daddy" and expresses fear that his mission has failed, which naturally can be compared to the anguish that Jesus voices on the cross in Matthew and Mark. Students can be asked about the significance of the repeating refrains "Love is all around" and "The blood of our children is all around" and how they may connect to the Gospel narratives. How are love and violence linked in the Gospels and in Christian tradition?

Pearl Jam, "Meaningless" (Rock, 1992)

In the first verse this song declares that "We're all meaningless," but then ultimately resists this conclusion, saying "We're not meaningless." The song reflects the human struggle to find meaning in life, much like the book of

Ecclesiastes. Notably, however, and quite unlike the Teacher, the song concludes that meaning can be found in love: "If you love someone, tell them," and "Show them how you feel." This is reminiscent of Matt 5:43–45. Here Jesus exhorts his followers to "love your enemies," and he then provides a reason: "for [God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Jesus, like the Teacher in Ecclesiastes, recognizes the inequities of life, but rather than concluding that all is meaningless and recommending the pursuit of pleasure, he teaches that the absurdity of it all is actually part of the divine plan and thus we, like God, should pursue love of everyone. If nothing else, Pearl Jam serves to underscore the different ethical principles that might emerge from the notion that life is meaningless; the song and Jesus advocate a different, presumably higher, ethic than the Teacher. If life is meaningless, if it has no point or purpose, how then should one live?

Hank Williams, "A House of Gold" (Country, 1950)

This tune can be compared to the antiwealth theme in Luke. Williams proclaims that people steal, cheat, and lie to obtain wealth, even though it will be of no value on judgment day. Similarly, he asserts that he would rather be saved than live in a house of gold. There is one crucial difference, however, between Williams's song and Jesus' teaching in texts such as Luke 12:13–21; 14:15–24; 16:19–31; and especially 18:18–30. In these passages, the wealthy people are not moral or religious failures; rather, they are condemned simply because they are wealthy. The rich man is building bigger barns to store his wealth; the people who do not accept the dinner invitation are tending to the duties of life; the rich man, as he is tormented in Hades, is told simply that he was wealthy and Lazarus was not and so now the tables are turned (cf. esp. 16:25); and the rich ruler has kept all the commands (i.e., he is morally and religiously upright) but is not willing to sell all that he owns. Williams's song, by contrast, offers typical religious rhetoric: Wealth is not bad in and of itself; rather it is bad because it will likely cause you to do bad things, such as lie, cheat, and deny God. While students are more inclined to identify with Williams's ideas, the song helps them appreciate Jesus' much harsher teachings about wealth.

Crash Test Dummies, "God Shuffled His Feet" (Alternative Rock, 1993)

The song tells a story about God preparing a picnic of "wine and bread" (an obvious reference to the Eucharist) for people to eat. As the people enjoy the food, they ask God questions about the nature of life in heaven, such as if one needs to eat, or get a haircut, and what happens if one's body were maimed in this life. These queries could lead to discussion of texts that deal

with bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15) and associated issues, such as body-soul dualism. In response to their queries, God tells the people a story about a boy who woke up with blue hair. The people do not understand the meaning of the story and ask if it was a parable or a subtle joke. God does not respond. The enigmatic story about the blue-haired boy can serve as basis for discussion of parabolic discourse. Jesus, too, tells stories that his listeners may have had difficulty comprehending or, at the very least, were stories that they were not expecting. The song fits nicely with Mark 4:10–12, in which Jesus explains that he speaks in parables precisely so that people will not understand.

U2, "The First Time" (Rock, 1993)

This song, according to lead singer Bono, is a version of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). Unlike the parable, however, in the song when the wayward son returns home, he throws away the key. He rejects his father's welcome. But the song then ends by saying that for the first time, he felt love. The song not only helps one to think about the nature of the biblical parable, but also is itself a parable. It twists the expected ending both with the son's rejection and with the final line expressing love. Given the antimaterialist themes in a number of U2's songs, one wonders if the son refuses the keys because the father is a rich man who dresses the part and is eager to bestow his wealth on his son. One might employ this song in conjunction with an exercise in which students are asked to play the different roles of the characters in the biblical parable. How would they respond if they were the wayward son, the father, or the faithful son?

Johnny Cash, "Matthew 24 (Is Knocking at the Door)" (Country, 1982)

In this brief song, Cash claims that the end times are near, based on the predictions of Jesus as recorded in Matt 24 (cf. Mark 13). In cryptic and easily applicable language, Cash notes that "the rumors of war," "people getting ready for battle," and "an earthquake" are "signs of the times we're in today." Cash joins a long tradition of applying apocalyptic images to modern events, and as such this song can be used to illustrate this tradition, as well as to initiate discussions on the malleable nature of apocalyptic literature and symbols in general.

Collin Raye, "What If Jesus Comes Back Like That" (Country, 1995)

Raye's song explores the implications of Jesus returning as a hobo or a homeless person. It asks the listeners if they would embrace these people or turn their back on them. The song concludes by suggesting that Jesus will accept or reject people based on their treatment of others (i.e., the hobo and homeless). In this sense it closely parallels the parable of the Sheep and Goats,

where Jesus says, "As you have done to the least of these, you have done unto me" (Matt 25:31–46), and where admittance into the kingdom is granted only to those who cared for the disenfranchised. In addition to connecting with social ethics, the song lends itself to reflection on the significance of the incarnation more generally. One might also note that if the song is taken more eschatologically, the image of the returning Jesus in Revelation is hardly that of a hobo.

Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers, "Jesus Gave Me Water" (Gospel, 1951)

Before Sam Cooke, arguably the most important soul singer in music history, scored pop success with hits like "Cupid," and "Wonderful World," he recorded exclusively gospel music with a group called The Soul Stirrers. This song retells the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4. In it, Jesus gave the woman "livin', lovin', lastin' water." In the Johannine account, the woman's experience seems to be downplayed in 4:39–42, but in this version, the woman's perspective retains its power, as we are told in the last verse that she "left him shoutin'" and there was "no room for doubtin'" that she would "of his wonders tell." As such, this song can be used to illustrate a feminist reading of John 4, as well as Jesus' attitude toward women during his ministry.

Sam Cooke, "Touch the Hem of His Garment" (Gospel, 1956)

This recording conflates the Gospel stories of the woman suffering from hemorrhages in Mark 5:25–34, Matt 9:20–22, and Luke 8:42b–48. The song focuses on the distress of the woman, even supplementing the Gospel accounts with new details of her unsuccessful treatment by doctors. Also, the song increases the healing of the woman, so that she is not simply healed, she is made whole. Because of the emphasis on the woman's situation and Jesus' role in her restoration, this song can be used to discuss Jesus' attitudes toward cultural and social "others," especially women, during his ministry, as well as the importance of faith in the Gospels.

Iris DeMent, "He Reached Down" (Folk Gospel, 2004)

A highly regarded singer-songwriter of Americana and traditional music, DeMent's 2004 album *Lifeline* contains twelve classic Christian hymns, almost all from the nineteenth century. This song is her own contribution, and it retells two well-known Gospel narratives: the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37) and the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 7:53–8:11). DeMent highlights the compassionate aspects of these stories through the refrain, "He reached down and touched the pain." In the final verse, the perspective shifts to encourage hearers to emulate this altruism and emphasizes the eternal rewards for doing so. As such, the song can be used to supplement discussion

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of the portrayal of Jesus, his view towards the "other" during the first century
c.e., and the practice of conflation in interpretation.

Eric Taylor, "Bread and Wine" (Folk, 2001)

This slow and intense song from Taylor's album *Scuffletown* retells Jesus'
speech to his disciples at the Last Supper in a distinctly modern parlance, for
example, "You people find yourselves a chair. We're going to go through this
just one more time. And then I've got to be somewhere." Taylor's Jesus seems
tired and disturbed by his fate, and as such can be used to cast a new light
on the Gospel accounts of this event. One way to accomplish this is to dis-
play several different Jesuses who demonstrate different attitudes toward their
respective missions, for instance, John's Jesus and the Jesus from *Jesus Christ
Superstar* as compared with Martin Scorcese's *Last Temptation of Christ*,
Mark's Jesus, and Eric Taylor's Jesus. This exercise should hammer home the
point that over time there have been a number of different Jesuses, each of
whom show varying levels of enthusiasm for their missions.

Bob Dylan, "In the Garden" (Folk, 1980)

Dylan sings primarily about Jesus' reception by the people. The song fea-
tures a series of rhetorical questions asking if they saw the miracles, heard his
teaching, believed the resurrection, and so forth. The basic gist is this: How
could people have misunderstood or rejected Jesus. This is in fact an interest-
ing question, and teachers could explore it from a historical or social angle;
for example, it could lead to a discussion of first-century Judaism as a way
to explain Jesus' mixed reception, or it could help students understand how
Jesus was only subsequently proclaimed "Lord" as Dylan seems not to recog-
nize. From a literary perspective, one could point out to Dylan that in Mark,
Jesus goes to great lengths to keep his identity and his teaching a mystery—
that is, the Messianic Secret is a way to explain why there was not universal
understanding and belief. Indeed, the song relies on a much higher Christol-
ogy than the one found in Mark.

Bruce Springsteen, "Jesus Was an Only Son" (Rock, 2005)

Springsteen imagines Jesus' last moments before his execution and
emphasizes his mother Mary's presence: "His mother Mary walking beside
him, in the path where his blood spilled." Because of the popularity of the
artist, this song can serve as a useful way to encourage students to imagine
the Passion narratives from different perspectives, as well as to initiate dis-
cussions about the role of Mary in the Gospels. The title, of course, can be
brought to bear on discussions of Jesus' brothers in various biblical texts (e.g.,
Mark 6:1–6) and later Christian tradition.

Brand New, "Jesus Christ" (Alternative Rock, 2006)

The overall meaning of the song is ambiguous, but it makes several clear biblical references. It asks what Jesus did during his three days in the tomb, which could relate to a discussion of noncanonical texts that wrestle with this question. The singer is afraid to die because of the uncertainty of what comes next; students might consider where, if at all, this issue appears in the canonical Gospel tradition. He says that Jesus will come like a thief in the night, which, of course, echoes only one of several New Testament traditions. Here the song stands in some tension with Jesus' own speech in Mark 13, which says that the coming of the Son of Man will be preceded by numerous signs, although verses 32–33 also says that no one will know the time. In addition to being lonely and worried about the afterlife, the singer also asserts that "we all got wood and nails," reminiscent of Jesus' command to "take up your cross and follow me."

Tupac and Outlawz, "Black Jesuz" (Rap, 1999)

This posthumously released song works nicely in a discussion of different images of Jesus. It illustrates how portraits of Jesus often reflect the identity of those constructing the image—whether it be an artist or an historical Jesus scholar. Tupac is searching for a "black Jesus" who will understand his pain of life in the ghetto, a Jesus who is not "too perfect," a Jesus, even, who will smoke and drink like he does—in short, a Jesus who will "understand where we comin' from." Tupac appears to be aware that his image of Jesus is a reflection of himself. The song could lead to discussion of the way various understandings of Jesus function for individuals and communities.

Johnny Cash, "If Jesus Ever Loved a Woman" (Country, 1973)

Cash takes up a current topic in this song, namely, Jesus' relationship with Mary Magdalene, as well as a perennial question, namely, how human was Jesus? The former is answered specifically: "If Jesus ever loved a woman, I think Mary Magdalene was the woman that he loved." The latter issue is addressed more obliquely, that is, Cash feels Jesus' life was perfect, sinless, without temptation, but he adds, "only did his Father know about his human needs." Cash also addresses Jesus' attitudes towards the sexes, noting, "He never did condemn a man or woman, just for being man or woman." As such, there is ample material here to further discussion of Jesus' relationships with women, biblical views on Jesus' humanity, and the role of Mary Magdalene in the early Jesus movements.

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Johnny Cash, "The Man in Black"/"The Man in White" (Country, 1971/2000)

Cash here condenses his only novel, also titled *The Man in White*, into a five-and-a-half minute summary of Paul's life from the death of Jesus to his blinding on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Several things are interesting about Cash's treatment of Paul. First, he highlights Paul's Jewish background in the first verse so that he is able to emphasize the "conversion" of Paul in similar terms to those used in Acts. Second, Cash is more interested in Paul's mission than his death, as evidenced by the last verse, in which Cash recounts (as Paul): "I go to all the world, and I let the whole world know that the Man in White appeared to me." Finally, anyone who knows anything about Cash knows that he considered himself "The Man in Black." He even recorded a song by that title in which he described himself as a symbol for the disenfranchised and downtrodden, which explains why he always wore black. The last verse of the song establishes the near-scapegoat effect Cash's choice has on his world, in which Cash states he would love to be happier than he is, "But I'll try to carry off a little darkness on my back." The dichotomy between Cash's self-understanding here and his portrayal of Jesus as The Man in White is curious, to say the least. However, "The Man in White" is perhaps more useful in the classroom, not only to orient students to Paul, but also to illustrate how helpful narrative rewriting of biblical stories can be for content-recognition purposes.

Momus, "Lucky Like St. Sebastian" (Alternative, 1986)

The first half of this song discusses the life of Paul and could serve as a comparative text for some of the narratives in Acts or Gal 1–2. The song notes Paul's persecution of Christians but, against the biblical text, asserts that Paul converted, and changed his name, because he concluded that his acts of violence were actually facilitating the growth of Christianity. The blood on Paul's hands, however, stains his letters, and Paul, unable to overcome his past, decides it is best if he dies. So he asks the authorities in Rome if they can arrange his death as a martyr. The song may give students a chance to pause and reflect on the dramatic nature of Paul's conversion—the man who is responsible for writing much of the New Testament was once one of Christianity's most adamant foes, according to the biblical image of Paul. Of course, the song does not present the biblical Paul, which is what makes it thought-provoking in the same way that alternate versions of the life of Jesus prompt debate.

Red Hot Chili Peppers, "Shallow Be Thy Game" (Alternative Rock, 1995)

The meaning of the lyrics is somewhat obscure, although they are clearly objecting to certain tenets of Christianity. One of those is original sin, which is seen as a way to make people guilty and thus more easily controlled. Rather than being born into sin, the singer asserts that that he was "not created in the likeness of a fraud." For both Paul and the song, the Genesis creation stories have something to say about human nature. Paul, however, draws from the Garden of Eden story ("By one man sin entered into the world," Rom 5), whereas the song alludes to the creation of humans in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). Students may reflect on these different interpretive moves, the issues that are at stake, and how "original sin" functions in Paul's theology (or at least in Augustine's understanding of Pauline theology). Are the Red Hot Chili Peppers right in their rejection of original sin?

Believer, "Dust to Dust" (Christian Heavy Metal, 1990)

Using language reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, the song expresses the futility of life and the inevitability of death. But then there is a shift to Pauline concepts, asserting that Christ died to absolve human guilt, was raised, and through belief in Christ one can gain life. Students might reflect on how belief in Christ's death and resurrection may, or may not, help a person confront the meaningless struggles of this life that the song so aptly describes at the outset. Like Paul, the song focuses exclusively on the significance of the resurrection of Jesus rather than, say, Jesus' teachings. If God "molded man's flesh and soul," then one might ask of both Paul and the song why humans are guilty and in need of the redemptive violence of the cross. How or why, in other words, does one move from the fairly obvious "you are dust and will one day return to dust" to "you are guilty and need to believe in Jesus to overcome death"? Students might compare the thoughts of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes regarding death and the (lack of) afterlife.

Horace Andy, "Love Is the Light" (Reggae, 1977)

The song begins by quoting Rom 6:23—the wages of sin is death but the gift of God (Jah) is eternal life. This, of course, represents basic Pauline soteriology. But the song then shifts focus as it exhorts people to "do right" and "be good" and ends by saying only the "fittest of the fittest" will stand. It also points out that the wise man built his house on the rock (cf. Matt 7:24–27), which, again, is more reminiscent of traditional wisdom thought (cf. Proverbs) and the book of James. Perhaps in this sense the song mirrors the shape of the New Testament itself as it contains different ideas regarding salvation—is it a gift or must it be merited?

Revelation

Lowell Blanchard with the Valley Trio, "Jesus Hits Like the Atom Bomb" (Bluegrass Gospel, ca. 1950)

Long considered to be a novelty song, this upbeat, catchy tune connects the anxiety over nuclear weapons in the 1950s and the imminent return of Jesus. While this premise may sound kitschy, Blanchard, a popular DJ of the period, takes this opportunity to warn his listeners in the song's refrain to be less concerned about atom bombs than about the Parousia, which will be akin to an atom bomb. The second verse goes even further, noting a similarity between the bomb, the fire of Elijah, and the rainbow following the Flood. Because of these interesting connections, Blanchard's song can illustrate the continuing impact and evolution of apocalyptic thought. More specifically, it can also be used in conjunction with secondary texts such as Eugen Weber's *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages*, as well as various documentaries such as A&E's "Mysteries of the Bible" episode on Revelation, to exemplify how persons in a specific time period interpret Revelation's dark imagery.

Manowar, "Death Angel (Revelation)" (Heavy Metal, 1983)

The song is replete with language from Revelation as it describes the apocalyptic defeat of Satan. One could ask students to locate all the passages in Revelation to which the song refers (e.g., keys of death, hair white as wool, the four horsemen, seven plagues) and perhaps identify the very few nonbiblical elements in the lyrics. The heavy metal genre captures the violent nature of the biblical book. The song helps students understand that Revelation is less about predicting future events and more about crushing the forces of evil—ideal fodder for a band that thrives on images of carnage.

Hank Williams, "The Angel of Death" (Country, 1948)

Williams claims that the book of Revelation warns its readers that when they die, they will meet the Angel of Death (cf. Rev 14:14–20). Williams asks his listeners if they are ready for this encounter. The rhetoric here is similar to Dylan's "Are You Ready?" (see below) and in the same way, it can prompt discussion of how the song employs or reconfigures biblical imagery and rhetoric (i.e., it shifts the focus to the individual's fate). The song's Death Angel is an apocalyptic judge who decides the fate of individuals upon their death. Manowar's Death Angel (see above) destroys the powers of evil. Students might consider which depiction is more akin to the biblical image. How do the strikingly different musical genres (country versus heavy metal) relate to the images of the Angel?

Bob Dylan, "Are You Ready" (Folk Rock, 1980)

Dylan asks if one is prepared for "judgment," "the terrible swift sword," "Armageddon," and the "day of the Lord." The song could be used in a discussion of these terms and how they are employed and connected in biblical apocalyptic literature. One might ask students to locate New Testament passages that pose the question "Are you ready?" or "Are you prepared to meet Jesus?" or texts that clearly associate "judgment day" and whether "you want to be in heaven or in hell." Students might be surprised to have trouble identifying such passages, which can illustrate the difficulty of outlining biblical eschatology.

REM, "It's the End of the World as We Know It" (Rock, 1987)

While the title of the song indicates its connection to Revelation, its lyrics are cryptic. Teachers might employ the song as an illustration of the mysterious nature of apocalyptic discourse. Both song and book have something to do with the "the end," but after that, it is difficult to say much with any certainty. If students cannot interpret contemporary apocalyptic texts (the song), how much more difficult will it be to understand ancient ones? The singer claims that even though it is the end of the world, he feels fine. This may lead to a discussion of the social location of apocalyptic literature. Was the author or audience of Revelation "feeling fine" or a persecuted minority? Is it possible that the audience was "feeling fine" but that the author wanted to alert them to reasons to be more concerned? Why would people who are doing well in the world as we know it—those with some material wealth or power, for example—wish for the end?

Jimmy Buffett, "Apocalypso" (Country, 1994)

This song from the album *Fruitcakes* takes a uniquely light-hearted view of the Apocalypse, as one might expect from Jimmy Buffett. Unlike many other songs dealing with this topic that encourage either repentance or the more somber aspects of the end of the world, Buffett notes wryly, "When this earthly light is burning low, this dance will take you to the next plateau … We'll be dancing when we go." Because of the almost celebratory tone, this song can illustrate the joy with which many throughout time have viewed the Apocalypse.

Merle Haggard, "Rainbow Stew" (Country, 1981)

There are many songs whose reliance on Revelation is thematic rather than literary. That is, they portray an ideal, utopian future that will take place only after certain conditions have been met. This general idea is matched by apocalyptic literature in general, but found more specifically in texts such as

1–2 Thessalonians and especially Revelation. In the first two verses of "Rainbow Stew," Haggard notes a litany of ecological and financial woes and then postulates that when these woes are addressed, "We'll all be drinkin' that free bubble-ubb and eatin' that Rainbow Stew." This ecological awareness is all too rare in country music, but it parallels the transformation of the heaven and earth in Rev 21–22, as well as many postmillennial eschatological movements. As such, Haggard's song can demonstrate not only the imagery of a new creation, but also the interpretations of Revelation.

Various

B. B. King, "Ain't That Just Like a Woman" (Blues, 1976)

King blames Eve, Lot's wife, and Delilah for the "problems" they cause the men in their lives. The song is a misogynistic reading of these three female characters, but it nicely invites students to compare and contrast them. For example, Eve and Delilah are depicted as much more cerebral than their male partners. Lot's wife is the only anonymous figure and the only one who ends up dead. All three, in one way or another, defy the passive role assigned to them. The final verse of the song claims that no matter how much a man takes care of a woman, "they ain't never satisfied." Of course, Adam, Lot, and Samson are not models of male concern and compassion, but, more importantly, King's notion can help underscore the male perspective in texts such as Hos 2 and Ezek 16, where God as the husband expresses anger at Israel his wife because she does not appropriately acknowledge the care that he has provided for her—she is "never satisfied." Perhaps God and B. B. King have not figured out "what women want," and both lash out in vitriolic frustration.

Elvis Presley, "Hard Headed Woman" (Rock, 1958)

The song references the stories of Adam and Eve, Samson and Delilah, and Ahab and Jezebel in order to illustrate how a "hard headed woman (has) been a thorn in the side of man." In each instance, Presley reads the text poorly. He claims that Adam told Eve to stay away from the (apple) tree, that Samson enjoined Delilah to keep her fingers out of his hair, and that Ahab was "doin' swell" until he met Jezebel. Connecting these three women can open up discussion about their portrayal in the biblical text, in contrast to Presley's (traditional) male reading. All three women, for instance, appear more intellectually engaged and diligent than their male counterparts (cf. 1 Kgs 21 for Jezebel). Interestingly, Presley concludes by observing that he has a hard-headed woman, but he nonetheless hopes desperately that she will not leave him. One might argue, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that Pres-

ley, like the biblical text, is fascinated with and drawn to "dangerous" women, even as he wants to blame them for all his failures.

Sting, "It Ain't Necessarily So" (Rock, 1997)

This 1935 George Gershwin song covered by Sting summarizes the stories of David and Goliath, Jonah, and the birth of Moses, but expresses incredulity regarding their historical veracity (per the song title). The song also claims that "it ain't necessarily" the case that the devil is a villain and that it takes clean living to get into heaven, and it expresses doubt about Methuselah living 900 years. By drawing on stories from the primeval history (Methuselah), a fictional short story (Jonah), legendary tales from the history of Israel (Moses' miraculous birth, and David and Goliath), and disparate material from the New Testament, the song helps students to consider the different genres of biblical material, the function of those genres, and the different kinds of truth that biblical stories might present, or claim to present.

KRS-One, "The Truth" (Rap, 1995)

The song has two distinct parts. The first stanza challenges traditional understandings of the crucifixion. It explains that a cross was simply the Roman form of capital punishment. If Jesus were shot with a gun, people would wear little gold guns around their neck, or if he were electrocuted, people would kneel in front of electric chairs. The song is thus calling its listeners to contemplate the nature of the cross as a religious symbol. It is also objecting to the violence that is associated with crucifixion, as the last line of the stanza notes the paradox of calling for an end to violence while continuing to venerate a remarkably violent symbol. The song could be connected to several of Paul's discussions of the cross (e.g., 1 Cor 1; Phil 2). The second stanza addresses the issue of how the world could be populated if there were only four human beings originally—Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. Reading the text literally, of course, causes certain logical problems, as it would for any number of other Hebrew Bible texts. The song can lead to a discussion of other ways of reading the story, including how the Israelites themselves may have understood it.

Don McLean, "American Pie" (Rock/Folk, 1971)

While this sing-along favorite makes little or no reference to the Bible, it serves as a familiar example to use when discussing the issues raised when interpretation must take place without the benefit of the author's own commentary. Buddy Holly's death in a 1959 plane crash is the explicit inspiration of the song. Many of the allusions contained in the lyrics are obvious, but many others are not and McLean has stubbornly refused to explain the mean-

M U S I C

ing of his work. (One is reminded of T. S. Eliot's response when asked what he meant in the first lines of "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock," when he described the evening as being "like a patient etherized upon a table": "It means, 'like a patient etherized upon a table.'") Into this vacuum, countless interpreters—whose efforts are easy to find on the Internet—have entered to explicate the letter and spirit of the song (www.faqs.org/faqs/music/american-pie). Many of the interpretations differ significantly, and since they cannot all be correct, one suspects that perhaps none of them are. In this respect the song is similar to biblical writings such as Daniel or Revelation. Why does McLean not step in and clear up all the confusion? Should he? (When an interviewer asked Bob Dylan about his "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," which is usually interpreted as a warning about the dangers of nuclear war, Dylan protested that it was not fallout rain but that "it's just a hard rain.") Are we obliged to pay attention to an author's intended meaning? How would our understanding of, say, Isaiah or Ezekiel change if the prophets were to preface their works with introductions like the ones found in most study Bibles? To what extent would such preface be a part of the work itself? What are we to do in the absence of an "authoritative" interpretation coming directly from the author?

Flame, "Context" (Rap, 2005)

Not many hip hop/rap songs mention hermeneutics, exegesis, eisegesis, and other standard terms and tools in biblical interpretation (like "concordance," "Bible dictionary," "commentary"), but this one does and is able to make them rhyme! Although the terms are used in the song, they are often under-introduced, so that the teacher can explain their meaning and significance. The song is also useful insofar as it illustrates a number of hermeneutical principles with which teachers or their students may not agree. For instance, the song argues the point that exegesis is (primarily) about authors and their original intended meaning; this would serve as a good entry into recent debates on the locus of textual meaning. The song also advocates using Scripture to interpret Scripture, a classic exegetical strategy of the Reformation period. This, too, would serve as an excellent entry into larger interpretive matters such as the history of interpretation or exegetical strategies in different time periods and from different theological perspectives. Finally, one should note that in addition to points where teachers or students might disagree with the song, there are also a few points of factual error ("exegesis" and "eisegesis," for example, are not, as Flame would have it, Latin words). But perhaps even this is instructive: How foolproof can interpretation be? How foolproof can instruction in interpretation be?

Joan Osborne, "One of Us" (Folk/Rock, 1995)

By far Osborne's best-known song, this tune deals with various aspects of God and how one might relate to the deity. It could be used pedagogically in a variety of ways. It asks about God's name, which could prompt discussion of Yahweh and Elohim as well as the various names for the deity in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. It addresses the nature of God (a "slob," lonely in heaven) and the physical appearance of God, which may lead to a discussion of the anthropomorphic deity in the Hebrew Bible or of the incarnation in the New Testament. The song queries, "What if God was one of us?" which may set up a conversation about the *imago Dei* or the incarnation. It also asks if one would want to see God if seeing entailed that one had to believe in heaven, Jesus, the saints, and the prophets. Further, the refrain of the song asserts that "God is great, God is good," though it is not entirely clear how that line functions in the song (As ironic? As a counterbalance to God being a slob?). The song, like the Bible, appears to contain a variety of theologies, or better yet, hold a variety of them in tension.

Dishwalla, "Counting Blue Cars" (Alternative Rock, 1996)

The song depicts God as feminine with the oft-repeated line: "Tell me all your thoughts on God. Cause I'd really like to meet her." Holding the pronoun "her" until the end of the sentence surprises the listener. The song thus can illustrate the significant shifts that occur when thinking of the deity as female. It can set the context for discussion about the power of metaphor—particularly the metaphorical nature of language about God—or about feminine imagery of the deity in Hebrew Bible texts (e.g., Isa 49:15).

Randy Newman, "God's Song (That's Why I Love Mankind)" (Pop, 1972)

Newman takes on the voice of God and declares that humans are worthless to God, and even though God destroys them all, humans continue to look to God for hope and salvation. In a sense, the song poses the theodicy question and may thus be connected to texts such as 2 Kgs 17 or a variety of lament psalms. God declares that humans are less significant than flowers and trees, and that human squalor and filth causes God to recoil. Such notions can be contrasted with a number of biblical texts that place a much higher value on humankind, such as Psalm 8:4 ("What are humans that you are mindful of them?") or the idea that humans are created in God's image (Gen 1:26–27). The song is reminiscent of Job's sentiments, as the people implore God, "If you won't take care of us … please let us be." God then responds that even though he has burned down cities and taken children, people still foolishly have faith in God and even consider themselves blessed, which again, connects to issues raised by the book of Job (cf. Job 1:21). In fact, the rhetoric of

MUSIC

the song as a whole stands in opposition to Job: Newman mocks belief in God in the face of human suffering, whereas Job, ultimately, persists in his faith.

Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On* (R&B/Soul, 1971)

This entire album represents a prophetic critique of war, ecological abuse, economic injustice, and a lack of religious motivation. Specific songs like "God Is Love" and "Wholy Holy" draw on religious language (e.g., in the latter, Gaye speaks of believing in Jesus as well as makes the claim that Jesus "left us a book to believe in"). However, other, more recognizable songs, such as the title track, "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)," and "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)," mount a more broadly based condemnation of specific practices. Because of the album's popularity and the bases for its censure, it can be used profitably to illustrate the social and religious bases of prophetic literature. Prophetic texts such as Isa 1:17 and 2:4, both of which advocate social justice and a hope for an end to military solutions to problems, might be read in tandem with the title track as students reflect on their intersection with contemporary debates about militarism. Similarly, after a discussion of Amos's cry against the privileged "Cows of Bashan" (Amos 4:1–13), an instructor could shift the focus to how the underprivileged in modern society express themselves by listening to "What's Happening Brother" or "Inner City Blues." (A good resource for this album is Michael Eric Dyson, *Mercy Mercy Me: The Art, Loves, and Demons of Marvin Gaye.*)

Judy Newton and Diane Stanton-Rich, *Songs of Bible Women: Old Testament* (Christian/Inspirational, 2004)

This album contains seventeen short songs that retell specific Hebrew Bible narratives featuring women. As such, each song offers an interesting comparative text. Students might consider questions such as: How does the song's portrayal of the woman compare to that in the biblical text? Which parts of the story are omitted or highlighted? What effect do the omissions or additions have on the depiction of the woman? How are the actions and speech of the characters rendered by the song? What function or role does the woman play in the Bible and the song? What motivates the retelling? The songs feature the stories of Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Tamar, Miriam, the daughters of Zelophehad, Rahab, Ruth, Abigail, Bathsheba, the widow of Zarephath, the woman of Shunem, Esther, and Gomer.

To give just one example from the album: In the retelling of the David and Abigail story in 1 Sam 25, the title of the song voices the perspective of David, "Abigail, I Praise the Lord for Sending You." In the biblical text, Abigail makes a long speech to David (25:24–31) to which David offers a relatively brief response (25:32–35). The speech roles are reversed in the song: Abigail

speaks one line and David six lines. Similarly, in the song Abigail loses some of her autonomy and agency, as there is no mention of her acting independently of her husband (25:19). One could ask if the song's interpretation of Abigail as "joyfully" becoming David's wife is a good reading of verses 41–42. One might also consider how the song's omission of God killing Nabal (25:38) influences interpretation of the characters.

Judy Newton and Diane Stanton-Rich, *Songs of Bible Women: New Testament* (Christian/Inspirational, 2004)

This album features seventeen short songs about New Testament women, including Elizabeth, Mary Magdalene, Salome, Mary and Martha, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the persistent widow, Pilate's wife, Tabitha/Dorcas, and Rhoda. (See the previous entry for suggested general discussion questions.) To give just one example from the album: "Too Near the Cross" imagines the thoughts and feelings of the women at the crucifixion (cf. Matt 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49; and John 19:25–27). They are sad and confused and wonder why Jesus is dying and whether he will come back. Nonetheless, they make the theological observation that Jesus forgives them all and that Jesus must surely be God (cf. the centurion in Matt 27:54). They also point out that Jesus' male disciples are too ashamed to approach the cross. Following the song's lead, students might be asked to develop creatively the perspective of the women at the cross. Is the song's depiction of women in keeping with their portrayal elsewhere in the Gospels? How does their portrayal here compare to their depiction after the resurrection (Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–18)?

MUSIC

Classical Music

Dan W. Clanton Jr. and Bryan Bibb

Works by classical composers inspired by the Bible—concertos, cantatas, oratorios, symphonies, motets, tone poems, operas, even ballets—number well into the hundreds. In the space available here, it will be possible to discuss only a small, selective sample of this gargantuan body of work. (Discussion of pedagogical strategies in connection with specific works begins on p. 56.) The list of works below is provided as a resource for instructors desiring to broach specific biblical texts through the medium of classical music.

Torah

C. Saint-Saëns, *The Deluge* [Gen 6–9]
A. Rubinstein, *Tower of Babel* [Gen 11]
I. Stravinsky, *Babel* [Gen 11]
A. Schoenberg, *Jacob's Ladder* [Gen 28]
G. F. Handel, *Joseph and His Brethren* [Gen 37–50]
G. F. Handel, *Israel in Egypt* [Exod 1–15]
A. Rubinstein, *Moses*
G. Rossini, *Moses in Egypt*
C. P. E. Bach, *Israelites in the Wilderness*
E. Bairstow, "Sing Ye to the Lord" [Exod 15]
J. Rutter, "The Lord Bless You and Keep You" [Num 6]
J. Brahms, "Wo ist ein so herrlich Volk" ("Where is such a nation?") [Deut 4]

Prophets

G. F. Handel, *Joshua*
I. Pizzetti, *Debora e Jaele* [Judg 5]
G. F. Handel, *Jephtha* [Judg 10–11]
M. Seter, *The Daughter of Jephthah* [Judg 10–11]
G. F. Handel, *Saul* [1 Sam 9–31]
C. Nielsen, *Saul and David* [1 Sam 16–2 Sam 1]

T. Tomkins, "When David Heard" [2 Sam 18]

A. Honegger, *King David*

F. Bartoni, *David Poenitans* [2 Sam 24; 1 Chr 21]

G. F. Handel, "Zadok the Priest" [1 Kgs 1]

G. F. Handel, *Solomon*

E. Bloch, *Schelomo*

R. Starer, *Ariel, Visions of Isaiah*

L. Bernstein, *Jeremiah*

H. Purcell, *Let Mine Eyes Run Down with Tears* [Jer 14]

Verdi, *Nabucco* [Jer 21; 30; 50; the exile]

S. Peter, "Ich will euch wie en Thau seyn" ("I will be unto you as a dew")
     [Hos 14]

H. Purcell, "Blow Up the Trumpet in Sion" [Joel 2]

J. Tavener, *The Whale* [Jonah]

G. F. Handel, "Thus Saith the Lord" (from *Messiah*) [Hag 2; Mal 3]

G. F. Handel, "Rejoice Greatly, O Daughter of Zion" (from *Messiah*) [Zech 9]

G. F. Handel, "But Who May Abide the Day of His Coming?" and "And He
     Shall Purify" (from *Messiah*) [Mal 3]

WRITINGS

A. Pärt, *Psalms of David*

G. F. Handel, *Messiah* [Pss 2; 16; 22; 24; 68; 69]

L. Bernstein, *Chichester Psalms* [Pss 2; 23; 102; 108; 122; 131]

J. Brahms, "Herr, Lehre Doch Mich" (from *A German Requiem*, movt. 3) [Ps
     39]

I. Stravinsky, *Symphony of Psalms* [Pss 39; 40; 150]

A. Pärt, *Psalm 51*

T. Avni, *De Profundis* [Ps 130]

G. Verdi, "Va Pensiero" (from *Nabucco*) [Ps 137]

C. Parry, *Job*

L. Dallapiccola, *Job*

H. Purcell, *My Beloved Spake* [Song of Solomon 2]

A. N. Boskovich, *Ruth and Boaz*

G. F. Handel, "Behold, and See If There be Any Sorrow" (from *Messiah*)
     [Lam 1]

I. Stravinsky, *Threni* [Lam 1; 3; 5]

G. F. Handel, *Esther*

G. F. Handel, *Belshazzar* [Dan 5]

W. Walton, *Belshazzar's Feast* [Dan 5]

F. McBeth, *Daniel in the Lion's Den* [Dan 6]

Apocrypha

J. Haydn, *Return of Tobit*
T. Arne, *Judith*
C. Parry, *Judith*
E. Reznicek, *Holofernes* [Judith]
G. F. Handel, *Susanna*
C. Floyd, *Susanna*
G. F. Handel, *Judas Maccabeus*

Gospels and Acts

J. S. Bach, *Christmas Oratorio* [Matt 1–2; Luke 1–2]
O. Messiaen, *La Nativité du Seigneur* [Matt 1–2; Luke 1–2]
H. Berlioz, *The Childhood of Christ* [Matt 1–2; Luke 1–2]
J. Rheinberger, *The Star of Bethlehem* [Matt 1–2]
G. F. Handel, "And Lo, the Angel of the Lord Came Upon Them" (from *Messiah*) [Luke 2]
A. Stradella, *San Giovanni Battista* [Luke 1–3]
C. Franck, *Beatitudes* [Matt 5]
R. Strauss, *Salome* [Matt 14]
B. Britten, *Church Parables* [Luke 15]
H. Alfven, *The Prodigal Son* [Luke 15]
C. Debussy, *L'Enfant Prodigue* [Luke 15]
J. S. Bach, *St. Matthew Passion*
C. Wood, *St. Mark Passion*
A. Pärt, *St. Luke Passion*
A. Pärt, *St. John Passion*
J. S. Bach, *St. John Passion*
F. Martin, *Pilate*
J. Haydn, *The Seven Last Words of Christ*
L. v. Beethoven, *Christ on the Mount of Olives*
J. Taverner, "Dum Transisset Sabbatum" [Mark 16]
J. S. Bach, *Easter Oratorio*
J. S. Bach, *Ascension Oratorio* [Luke 24; Acts 1]
E. Elgar, *The Apostles*

Letters

F. Mendelssohn, *St. Paul*
G. F. Handel, "If God Be for Us" (from *Messiah*) [Rom 8]

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C

G. F. Handel, "O Death, Where Is Thy Sting? But Thanks Be to God" (from *Messiah*) [1 Cor 15]

H. Schutz, *Es ist erschienen die heilsame Gnade Gottes* [Tit 2]

G. F. Handel, "Unto Which of the Angels Said He at Any Time" (from *Messiah*) [Heb 1]

J. Brahms, "Denn Wir Haben Hie Keine Bleibende Statt" (from *A German Requiem*, movt. 6) [Heb 11; 13]

J. Brahms, "Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras" (from *A German Requiem*, movt. 2) [1 Pet 1]

Revelation

J. Tavener, *The Apocalypse*

J. Langlais, *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* [Rev 1; 2; 9; 22]

G. F. Handel, "Hallelujah" (from *Messiah*) [Rev 11; 19]

The works discussed in this chapter are organized according to the order in which their primary subject matter appears in the canon. (A number of works deal with multiple texts; discussion of these pieces appear toward the end of the chapter.) The indices may be consulted to find entries with classroom strategies related to particular texts. All secondary literature cited here is included in the preceding bibliography (pp. 11–13).

Hebrew Bible

Joseph Haydn, *The Creation* (*Die Schöpfung*), Hob.XXI:2 (1798)

This oratorio, one of only two Haydn composed, is generally regarded as one of his greatest accomplishments. In three parts, it retells the first story of creation, narrated in Gen 1:1–2:4a. Haydn's piece begins with the wonderfully expressive instrumental "Representation of Chaos," and then proceeds to narrate the Genesis material through the voices of Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. Each biblical section is complemented by an elaborative aria or recitative that expounds on the mostly familiar biblical passages. For example, after Gabriel recites Gen 1:20, he sings, "On mighty pinions rising, / the proud eagle / cleaves the air / and soars in swiftest flight / towards the sun." In much this same way, Haydn narrates the creation of humans in part 2; yet he conflates the creation of humans in Gen 1:26–27 with the account of Adam and Eve in Gen 2–3. However, perhaps owing to the laudatory tone of his subject, Haydn stops short of scoring the disobedient act in the Garden. Instead, the listener is presented with an exultant Adam and Eve, reveling in the sensual delights of their new existence, urging all of creation to worship God. Unlike the Eve of

Genesis, however, this is a fully submissive Eve who is quite comfortable being at the beck and call of Adam: "O thou, for whom I was created! / My shelter, my shield, my all! / Thy will is my law, / for so hath God disposed, / and in obedience to thee I find joy, / good fortune and honour." The story of these first humans concludes on a foreboding note, uttered by Uriel, when he sings, "O happy pair, happy for evermore if vain delusion lead you not astray to want more than you have and know more than you should!" Here students might ponder whether or not "vain delusion" is the best way to render Eve's actions in the biblical narrative. This foreshadowing does not sour the jubilance of the piece, as it finishes with a gorgeous praising of God by the chorus.

Due to its length, it is unlikely that teachers will have time to play the entire piece for a class, but the individual Parts are broken down into discrete units, so that one could focus on a specific biblical text and its elaborative companion. One could also use this piece to discuss the theological category of creation itself, since Genesis is not exactly filled with praises for creation, as is the book of Psalms. One could easily match a section in Haydn's piece with a specific psalm in order to examine an aspect of creation. Finally, and most obviously, one could utilize this piece to discuss the relationship(s) between Adam and Eve. Given that Haydn's interpretation of their relationship is vastly different from modern, feminist readings, there is ample material here to illustrate musically an alternative viewpoint, as well as a conflated reading of Gen 1–3.

Aaron Copland, "In the Beginning" (1947)

Aaron Copland was born in Brooklyn, of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry and received musical training in Paris. His compositional voice is distinctly American, as he drew upon jazz and country-western musical themes as well as American history and folklore. His public reputation survived accusations that he was a member of the Communist Party, and his masterpieces, *Fanfare for the Common Man* and *Rodeo*, can be heard throughout American popular culture. Copland wrote the short choral work, "In the Beginning," at the request of the Harvard Symposium on Music Criticism held in 1947. The original request had been for a musical setting of a Hebrew text, but Copland chose instead to create an extended *a cappella* choral rendering of the first chapter of Genesis (with a few verses from Gen 2). It alternates between a mezzo-soprano who voices God's speech and a chorus who fills in the narrative text. This structure leads to a complex interaction between a single pure voice and a larger plurality that is sometimes harmonious and sometimes filled with dramatic tension. As the days of creation progress, there are changes in the tempo and mood, reaching a vibrant climax in the creation of humanity: "And man became a living soul" (beginning around the

ten-minute mark). Aside from being beautifully evocative of the mood of the creation story, this work is effective as part of a classroom discussion of the genre of Gen 1. By paying attention to the repetition, cadence, and rhetorical structure of the passage, readers may recognize in the chapter an element of orality, perhaps taking the form of a sermon or other liturgical recitation. This performative quality of Gen 1 leads naturally into the kind of dramatic presentation in Copland's "In the Beginning."

Copland's piece reinforces the ordering of creation and the dramatic, sweeping nature of Gen 1. Students can ponder how Copland has divided the material and emphasized particular phrases or ideas. They may also consider how Copland, as well as Gen 1 itself, places humanity at the pinnacle of creation. Then students can answer the same questions regarding the Yahwist creation story that begins in Genesis 2:4b: How is creation ordered and structured? What is the place of humanity in the creation? What is the style and tone of the story as compared with Gen 1? In short, Copland's majestic rendering of Gen 1 helps bring the differences between the Priestly and Yahwistic creation stories into sharper relief. Finally, the nature of Copland's piece also invites students to contemplate the power of divine speech in biblical narrative, from Genesis to John.

Gabriel Fauré, *La Chanson d'Eve*, Op. 95 (1907–10)

This cycle of ten songs based on the poems by Charles van Lerberghe is scored for piano and voice and stems from the final period of Fauré's compositional output. Like Beethoven, Fauré was plagued by hearing loss late in life, but his own hearing loss was accompanied by terrific distortion of tones, so that what little he could hear was not accurate. Given this, it is all the more remarkable to listen to these delicately impressionistic songs that, according to one of Fauré's biographers named Émile Vuillermoz, "should be among the highest products of universal thought." The songs certainly depict a very different Eve from the one we find in Genesis. Here, the listener sees the new creation through the eyes of Eve, who has been commissioned by God to "bestow a word from your lips / on all things that I have created, / a sound for them to be known by" (from the first song, "Paradise"). In other words, Eve's discovery of and marvel at the newly created earth are at the service of providing it an identity through sound. This service to God is in contrast to the naming of the animals performed by the man in 2:19–20, and it allows teachers to offer a different perspective on these primeval events by highlighting Eve's God-given duty. One might consider the deity's lack of direct interaction with Eve in the biblical text, the significance or power associated with naming, and whether or not the woman is more "qualified" to carry out this function given her curiosity about knowledge and the man's lack of it.

The remainder of the song-cycle is a first-person recounting by Eve of the marvels of God's creation, as she witnesses them for the first time. As Eve encounters roses, sunlight, twilight, and even death (all subjects of individual songs), the hearer can ponder how this earliest creation may have appeared, in contrast to the rather sparse description in the biblical text. This literary effervescence can also allow students to consider the newly created earth from Eve's perspective and to ask questions about Eve's innate knowledge and how this knowledge is enlarged by natural phenomena, especially the idea of death. This emphasis on death is particularly important, given the prescription of God in 2:16–17, as well as the importance of this theme in other renderings of the Garden, most notably George Bernard Shaw's play *Back to Methuselah*. More generally, this piece could instigate discussion of the traditionally negative views of Eve found in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions.

Stephen Hartke, *Sons of Noah* (1996)

Hartke's piece has been described as a miniature opera, similar in style to other twentieth-century composers like Igor Stravinsky and Judith Weir. The music is transparent in tone—scored as it is for quartets of guitars, bassoons, and flutes—and at first listen sounds a little odd; after all, one soprano is singing multiple parts in English. Upon adjusting to the style of the piece, however, one discovers the intent behind the words. Hartke found a nineteenth-century short story by the Brazilian author Machado de Assis and gave it to the poet Philip Littell, whose resulting libretto is the basis for this piece. The story reputes to be three lost chapters that tell the story of what happens on the Ark after Noah and his family set sail. The majority of the piece is concerned with the arguments and brutal fighting that erupts once the brothers begin discussing who will get what land, and how much will be allotted to whom after the flood. At one point, Japhet and Shem argue over ten measly acres, and one says to the other, "I would rather shed your blood / than even cheat myself like that!" Even the animals, who heretofore had been living peacefully on the ark, now recall that they are supposed to mistrust each other. Tellingly, the piece ends with a prayer from Noah after he breaks up a bloody fight between the sons and their wives. Noah says, "My God they're fighting over land they haven't got yet, / land they don't even own!" In order to connect this primordial contest over land in the name of religion with similar modern conflicts, Noah then says, "Oh Lord / can you imagine what will happen in / _____ and _____ and _____ and _____ and…?" Hartke inserts a note in the libretto here that reads "fill in the blanks with whatever current territorial aggressions come to mind." In this way, this piece can be used profitably not only to illustrate the narrative ellipses in

the flood story in Gen 6–9 but would also be a wonderful resource when discussing the impact of biblical narratives on modern geopolitical and ideological issues. For example, this piece could supplement discussions of texts such as Stephen R. Haynes's *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* or Regina Schwartz's *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, both of which discuss how the Bible's stories about the flood and land have been used to justify violence and hatred.

Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem* (1962)

Benjamin Britten was commissioned to write the *War Requiem* to celebrate the rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral, which had been destroyed in World War II. It was performed inside the new cathedral on May 30, 1962, and featured solos by a British tenor, a German baritone, and a Russian soprano. Britten's purpose was to express his antiwar convictions, and using nationals from the three major European participants in World War II indicated that his concern was for the world generally, not just peace for Britain. He also expressed this pacifist ideology through a creative editing of the traditional text of the Latin mass, into which he inserted nine poems written by an infantry soldier killed during the last week of World War I, Wilfred Owen. Musically, Britten calls for an orchestra and chorus to sing the parts of the mass, soloists to sing the Owen poetry, and a boys choir to float at a distance above the chaos. The music alternates between slow, brooding sections and loud, chaotic representations of warfare and violence. Emotions range among fear, anger, bitterness, and panic, with moments of serenity and acceptance. It is musically challenging and yet quite affecting. It creates a stark and instructive contrast with some of the other famous Requiems.

The text of the *War Requiem*, however, provides the most interesting possibilities for conversation, especially the topic of why Britten includes particular poems where he does within the liturgy. After the initial *Requiem aeternam*, we hear Owen's poem, "Anthem for Doomed Youth." In this selection, Owen laments the young soldiers who "die as cattle" with only rifle shots and whistling shells as musical accompaniment. The *requiem* asks for "perpetual light" to shine upon the dead, but these war casualties experience only the "drawing-down of blinds" into darkness. The *Dies irae* contains four different poems, "Voices," "The Next War," "Sonnet On Seeing a Piece of Our Artillery Brought Into Action," and "Futility." In this long sequence, the poems bring the various parts of the liturgy together into an overall theme: what we hope for in heaven is very far from what we experience in the messy violence of this world. On the Day of Judgment, God will come with trumpets blaring, but in the war the bugles are "saddening" and "sorrowful." In this final scene of judgment, God brings the world to completion as "every-

thing hidden becomes apparent," and "nothing remains unavenged." In war, however, death is an animating force that spurs the men onward toward more killing and dying. The *recordare* section presents the image of gentle Jesus "sinking down" to die on the cross to save the faithful supplicant. Owen's poem, however, describes the powerful gun "towering toward heaven" and "lifted up" to crush "arrogance." The poem ends by calling on God to curse the gun and remove it from the soul of humanity. Finally, the *Lacrimosa* describes the "day full of tears" when the guilty man arises from the ashes to be judged by God. Owen's poem "Futility," however, expresses the despair of moving the body of a dead comrade into the sun, with the bitter thought that he might awake from the sun's touch like a seed. The reality of the dead body causes the poet to wonder why the sun brings things to life to begin with, if they must end with such futility. There is no hope of resurrection. This basic pattern of alternation continues throughout, with clear keyword and theme associations connecting the sections.

The most interesting section to discuss might be the poem that is paired with the *Offertorium*, in which the boys announce their sacrifices and prayers to God for those who have died, asking God to "pass them from death to life" as he had promised Abraham and his seed. In the middle of this section, however, Britten includes the poem, "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young," which is a bitter retelling of the story in Gen 22, the binding of Isaac. At the end of the poem when the angel calls for Abraham to spare the boy and sacrifice the ram instead, "the old man would not do so, but slew his son, And half the seed of Europe, one by one." This is a kind of "reversal" that is seen commonly in prophetic literature, in which the prophet draws the audience in with a familiar theme and then turns the tables at the last moment. In a section that specifically connects the sparing of Isaac and the sacrifice of Jesus, it is quite unsettling to hear a version in which Abraham kills Isaac, thus extinguishing the promise and derailing God's whole plan for humanity. In this juxtaposition, Britten's antiwar sentiment could not be more apparent.

One way to begin class is to print a version of Gen 22 that subtly changes the ending so that Abraham ends by killing Isaac and have a student read the text aloud. Gauge the group's reaction when the ending is suddenly different, and ask them how the new ending changes their view of Abraham. Then, after playing the Britten *Offertorium* including Owen's poem, students can reflect on how the surprising narrative change affects the way we hear the theme of sacrifice in the *Offertorium*. Is Britten's description of the modern world accurate when he suggests that there is no compassion among humanity and no hope for divine reconciliation or salvation? This would work as a way to begin a discussion of biblical views of war and peace. Like Abraham-gone-wrong,

to what extent are modern people willing to sacrifice what is most precious to achieve their political, military, or religious goals?

Arnold Schoenberg, *Moses und Aron* (ca. 1932)

This piece is the sole opera by one of the most influential composers of the twentieth century. Schoenberg tells the story of the relationship between Moses and Aaron and their bitter feud over (1) who should lead the people, and (2) whose conception of God is the most appropriate for the people. Moses insists on a very philosophical, abstract notion of God, as he says in act 1: an "infinite, omnipresent, unperceived, and inconceivable God." Aaron, on the other hand, is motivated more by his love for the people rather than devotion to the idea of God, and as such, he longs to show them a comforting God that can be grasped and beheld through God's actions. Their conflict comes to a head at the wildly frantic Golden Calf scene, where Aaron argues: "You also would have loved this people, had you only seen how they lived when they dared to see and feel and hope. No folk is faithful, unless it feels." Moses remains unmoved by Aaron's plea for the people and insists that "they must comprehend the idea! They live for that end!" Aaron retorts that "no folk can grasp more than just a partial image, the perceivable part of the whole idea." Moses then asks the central question behind the whole exchange: "Am I to debase the idea?" Aaron offers to present the idea in a way that the people will understand, but Moses will not listen. Moses even smashes the tablets of law when Aaron comments that "they're images also, just part of the whole idea." In fact, act 2 ends with a reversal of the biblical narrative: Aaron leading the people away from Moses, to the Promised Land. However, in the unscored act 3, we see Moses addressing a chained Aaron, saying to him, "You have betrayed God to the gods, the idea to images, this chosen folk to others, the extraordinary to the commonplace." Aaron then dies, and the people return to the wasteland to commune with their revitalized idea of God.

Even though this piece is both innovative and powerful, it is very difficult to listen to. The chords are dissonant, and all of Moses' dialogue is given in *sprechgesang,* or speech-song. Given these limitations, one can still make marvelous use of this piece in several ways. First, given that the opera is basically a philosophical musing on the nature of God, teachers can use Moses' and Aaron's speeches in act 2 to compare and contrast various ideas of God in the Exodus narrative. Second, this opera can be employed to evaluate the relationship between Moses and Aaron in Exodus. Since most source-critical scholarship finds evidence of this relationship in at least two different sources, the relationship is unstable and uncertain. By allowing students to hear a very different rendering of both Moses and Aaron, teachers can generate reflection

on these key characters and how they both work to better their people. Finally, by exposing students to such a philosophical exegesis of Exodus, teachers can (one hopes) stimulate more advanced reflection on the new conception of God set forth in the narrative, as well as the new relationship between God and the people.

Camille Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Dalila* (1867–76)

This opera by one of France's most important musical figures focuses exclusively on the story of Samson and Delilah. Saint-Saëns takes tremendous liberties with the biblical text in his attempt to shift the story from its focus on the downfall of Samson due to his failings with women to a broader story of conflicting religious loyalties and doomed love. For example, in the Samson stories in Judges, Samson usually comes off as an oaf who is more interested in women and fighting than any religious identity. In the opera, however, Samson is portrayed as not only a prophetic figure, but also a highly religious one (act 1, scenes 1–2). Similarly, Delilah is shown in Judg 16 to be rather calculating in her dealings with Samson. She is in it for the money; she never expresses love for Samson and could simply be acting out of patriotic pride. Saint-Saëns alters the nature of their relationship so that Samson and Delilah had once been lovers—for example, in act 1, scene 6, Delilah takes pains to flirt with and seduce Samson—but now their respective religious beliefs have come between them. Delilah in the opera is emotionally unstable and vindictive, and she is looking for a way to harm Samson (act 2, scene 1). In fact, after being offered money to secure the secret of Samson's strength, Delilah laughs and says, "What matters your gold to Delilah? And what could a whole treasure if I was not dreaming of vengeance. . . for, as much as you, I loathe him!" Samson even admits that he still loves Delilah, and in a moment of weakness, succumbs to her charms. Of course, she betrays him, and when we see him at the beginning of act 3, his hair is shorn, and his eyes have been put out. The opera ends with Samson praying to God to forgive him as he pushes down the pillars of the temple, killing everyone inside, including himself.

Teachers could ask students to note the differences between the Bible and Saint-Saëns's version and to consider the rhetorical emphasis of each account. Since the opera is relatively long at close to two hours, one would need to focus on certain scenes. More generally, the opera could also be employed to illustrate larger trends in biblical interpretation, namely, the afterlives of either Samson or Delilah, so that students can learn an important lesson: One's knowledge of biblical stories and characters is often heavily influenced by cultural retellings.

Felix Mendelssohn, *Elijah*, Op. 70 (1846–47)

One of the great examples of musical conservatism during a period of growing romantic excesses, Mendelssohn not only did much to renew the classical tradition of Bach and Handel, but he also promoted their works in performance and, more indirectly, through his own compositions. Born in 1809 to a family with an illustrious Jewish background—his grandfather was the great thinker and activist Moses Mendelssohn, founder of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) movement—his parents nevertheless chose to have him and his sister baptized as Christians. As such, it might be surprising that of his two major religious works, *Elijah* was not only more successful, but has also survived better historically than his other oratorio, *Paulus* (see below).

Mendelssohn saw much to admire in this rather bizarre prophet whose story is told in 1 Kgs 18–21. We know Mendelssohn was basically a conservative humanist, terribly concerned about not only the state of music in the nineteenth century but also the morality of his times. In his notes to the recent Decca recording of this piece, Nicholas Temperley offers a plausible explanation for Mendelssohn's preoccupation with Elijah: He not only thought that his culture could use someone like Elijah to address the decline in morality, but he may also have viewed himself as an Elijah-like figure when it came to guarding against musical excesses and preserving the time-honored traditions of composers like Bach and Handel. Mendelssohn had a more specifically religious emphasis, as he ends the oratorio not with Elijah, but rather with several beautifully christocentric choruses that shift the focus of the piece from a celebratory ode to Elijah to a devotional experience directed at Christ. As such, one could use these last pieces to discuss not only the ways in which the Gospels present Jesus as a new Elijah, but also the phenomenon of messianic exegesis more generally, or triumphalist readings of the Hebrew Bible. One may also use the oratorio to supplement the biblical text by playing an excerpt, say, the healing of the widow's son, as a way of offering an audio illustration of the text. More fruitful, perhaps, would be to focus on various attempts to render 1 Kgs 19:12, which the nrsv translates as "a sound of sheer silence." Mendelssohn's libretto uses the kjv's "still small voice," but the real usefulness of the piece is in the way it represents Elijah's theophanic experience on Mount Horeb. The music exhibits a wide range of emotions, as the chorus is both violent and tender. This allows students to engage and experience the text in a new way, in a sense beyond translations, so that they can develop a deeper understanding not just of Elijah, but perhaps of theophanies in general.

Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Job: A Masque for Dancing* (1927–30)

Vaughan Williams was one of England's most important composers in the early to mid-twentieth century. Early on in his compositional career, he

rejected the fashionable trend of writing in the Germanic style and decided instead to focus his efforts on (re)discovering an indigenous English music. After the turn of the century, he began an intensive field study of English folk music which would eventually lead him to reshape his own music into a more emphatically nationalistic mold. He enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps in World War I and after the war composed one of his most beautiful and characteristic pieces, the Symphony No. 3, dubbed "A Pastoral Symphony." This elegiac and serene piece paved the way for his next large-scale work, *Job: A Masque for Dancing*. In this roughly forty-five-minute work, divided into nine scenes, Vaughan Williams musically translates the 1820–26 watercolor series on Job created by William Blake into staged dances, incorporating folk-song elements as well as the tonal tension that was to highlight his next major work, the rather apocalyptic-sounding Symphony No. 4 (1935). The nine scenes of *Job* relate the biblical account in sequence, beginning with "Scene I: Introduction—Pastoral Dance—Satan's Appeal to God—Saraband of the Sons of God," and ending with an Epilogue in Scene IX in which Job is reunited with his family and blesses them.

Because Vaughan Williams composed no libretto for this piece, the textual references are, admittedly, abstract. However, given the emphasis in the present volume on appealing to students who are visual and auditory learners, innovative teachers can still use this piece profitably. One way to do so would be to discuss a portion of Job that Vaughan Williams scores. Then, play the corresponding Scene from *Job* and exhibit the Blake watercolor. This way students can experience the text as word, sound, and image. Teachers can also experiment with more kinesthetic learning as well, given the suggestive instructions included in the score of *Job*. Namely, one could ask the students to act out Vaughan Williams's dance instructions, so that the text of Job could be experienced bodily as well. A wonderful resource in all this would be the score of *Job* published in 1934 by Oxford University Press in London, which contains not only a synopsis of each movement, but also the Blake illustrations that correspond to each movement.

Felix Mendelssohn, *Three Psalms*, Op. 78 (1843–44)

This work comprises three psalms in German: "Warum toben die Heiden," (Ps 2, "Why do the heathen rage"), "Mein Gott, warum hast du?" (Ps 22, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"), and "Richte mich, Gott" (Ps 43, "Judge me, O God"). They were very popular pieces during the composer's lifetime and showcase a lively interaction between a solo voice and a full choir, totally *a cappella*. The tone of these compositions is generally pastoral and soothing, with the choir gently responding to the heartfelt request of the supplicant. Psalm 22 would be especially useful in a classroom setting

because the Romantic style of composition does not express the sharpness or anguish that we often associate with the lament psalm in general or with Jesus' cry on the cross in particular. In fact, this contrast raises the question of how interpreters have reconstructed Jesus' emotional state on the cross from the words that he speaks. The various "last words" of Jesus in the Gospels may express confusion and doubt ("My God, why have you forsaken me?"), resignation ("It is finished"), or compassion ("Father, forgive them"). When Jesus quotes Ps 22, does he do so for theological reasons—simply because there is something in Ps 22 that he wants to bring into the mind of readers? Or, is he actually experiencing a moment of doubt and confusion? In the Gospels, how much does Jesus really know about his identity, his future, and what will happen when he dies? The answer to this may depend on the particular Gospel one reads, and on the interpreter's relative emphasis on Jesus' humanity versus his divinity.

Gregorio Allegri, *Miserere mei Deus* (1638)

Gregorio Allegri was born in Rome and spent his life from age nine singing in chapel choirs, beginning and ending his career at the Papal Chapel in the Vatican. In addition to his vocal performance, Allegri composed a large number of choral pieces, the most famous of which is his rendering of Ps 51, the *Miserere mei Deus*. It is a haunting work that became famous in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as European pilgrims visited Rome on their Grand Tour. The history of *Miserere mei Deus* is analogous, generally speaking, to that of many biblical writings

Many legends grew around the piece, including the story that the Papal Choir performed secret embellishments to the official score that were only known to the performers and passed down confidentially through generations of singers. King Leopold I of Portugal wrote in 1770 that Mozart had secretly copied down the score after listening to the piece and given it to him, but that he would not share with anyone else "one of the secrets of Rome." Other traditions indicate that Mozart passed the score to a British historian, Charles Burney, who in fact published the composition in 1771. Burney's edition did not reflect the embellishments used by the Papal Choir, although those were eventually published as well in the mid-nineteenth century. Even so, certain musical elements in the piece are still of disputed authenticity. One question is about the so-called "top C," a transposition of part of the verse up a fourth, which evidently is the result of a transcription error in a late-nineteenth-century dictionary of music.

The complex textual history of this piece might be a good way to discuss the question of what one ought to consider the "real" *Miserere mei*: the one Allegri composed, the one sung with embellishments by the Papal Choir, the

plain original publication, or the one commonly performed now with more modern changes. The final version of a complex textual or artistic creation always bears the imprint of editing, revision, copying, and transmission from one context to another. These changes, far from being interlopers that must be rooted out of the "original" text, often bring new richness or interest to the work.

The text of Allegri's *Miserere mei Deus* is taken from Ps 51, which begins, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great mercy." This prayer for forgiveness is identified in the psalm's apocryphal title as the one offered by David after his affair with Bathsheba. As with many classical pieces, the first question students might consider is whether the musical interpretation of biblical themes "matches" the tone or spirit of the original text. In one sense, the music is serene and otherworldly, befitting a performance in the Papal Chapel and matching the beauty and majesty of that liturgical setting. In the solo voice, however, one can hear an overtone of melancholy and resignation that may correspond to David's attitude in 2 Sam 12. David seems rather callous when he abruptly concludes his fasting and prayer after the death of his son. However, one might read his reaction as rooted in a strong sense of God's righteousness and sovereignty. In any case, the serenity and quiet of this prayer for forgiveness raises the issue of whether the supplicant's emotional state might affect the outcome of a penitential psalm.

One way to address the issue of David's "tone" in class is to begin with a dramatization of the story. One might allow a particular group of students to stage the scene of David's penitence and comments after the baby's death in 2 Sam 12 as well as a portion of Ps 51. A quicker option would be to have a dramatic reading of the passages by two different students who are instructed to perform the dialogue "with feeling." After the dramatization, students can express what tone they heard in David's voice and what that tone implies about the state of his emotions during the episode. Then, they may consider the question: How did Allegri interpret the words of contrition in Ps 51, and is his interpretation on target?

Arnold Schoenberg, "De Profundis" (1954)

Like much modern classical music, this is a complex and difficult piece, but its spare strangeness and haunting choral parts create a very effective musical setting for Ps 130, "Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord." An adaptation of the Hebrew text of the psalm, the soaring, overlapping choral parts create the effect of echo and reverberation that describes a cavernous sonic space, the tangible "depths" from which the music emanates. Schoenberg alternates between lilting soprano voices and ponderous choral exclamations that sound almost like accusations or incantations. It is a short piece,

MUSIC

and one that is usually followed in class by silence as students ponder what they just heard. After playing the piece, but before telling students where it is from, they can guess which kind of psalm is being sung. Some will accurately perceive the music as a lament psalm; more specifically, Ps 130 is a "penitential psalm," which is a type of lament that begins with the confession of sin. The "depths" is a metaphor for the chaos into which sin has flung the psalmist, and only God can bring the supplicant back from such a dreadful location. Schoenberg's setting of the psalm certainly captures the sense of chaos and despair, and as such is a nice way to illustrate the emotional content of the psalm.

William Walton, *Belshazzar's Feast* (1931)

Unlike his countryman and fellow composer Edward Elgar, Walton had little use for religion or religious music. It is a little surprising, then, that his first large-scale choral work focuses on a rather obscure portion of Daniel. However, if one parses the libretto (compiled from the KJV by Sir Osbert Sitwell), one quickly realizes that Dan 5 is merely the catalyst for a more specific focus on the great symbol of civilized decadence and idolatry in the Bible: Babylon. In both the text and the bombastic orchestral writing, Walton emphasizes the fall of Babylon through an array of biblical citations and rousing music. For example, he begins with two citations from Isaiah (39:7 and 13:6), both of which speak to the suffering and trials of the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C.E. Next, he includes an extended selection from Ps 137 before jumping ahead to Rev 18:12–13. Only after these selections from two of the most anti-Babylon sections in the Bible do we finally come to the retelling of Dan 5 from which the piece takes its name. After recounting the story of Belshazzar and the bizarre handwriting at his banquet, but curiously omitting any mention of Daniel, Walton returns again to more generic Babylon-bashing, with texts from Ps 81:1–3 and Rev 18. Due to the prominence of Babylon in many biblical texts as a symbol of evil, rampant sexuality, and everything impure, Walton's piece can be used in the classroom as an illustration of this theme. Furthermore, *Belshazzar's Feast* is an excellent example of homiletic writing, in that he and Sitwell have constructed an amalgamation of biblical texts around a basic theme. It may thus be used as an example of that type of biblical interpretation.

New Testament

Johann Sebastian Bach, *The Magnificat* (1723)

Bach wrote this piece to be performed on Christmas Day in 1723 in Leipzig. It follows the Latin text of the *Magnificat*, the hymn that Mary sings

in Luke 1:46–55 after Elizabeth, perceiving through the Holy Spirit that Mary is carrying the Messiah, proclaims her to be "blessed among women." The title is taken from the first word of Mary's response ("My soul magnifies the Lord"). Bach's setting of the *Magnificat* is truly monumental and embodies the grandiose sentiment of the Baroque period. He alternates arias and choruses in a way that is familiar to audiences from Handel's *Messiah*, revolving around the central affirmation, "Fecit potentiam" (he has showed strength). Throughout, the music embodies the spirit of Mary's hymn in emphasizing the majesty, grandeur, and power of God. There is nothing personal or intimate about the musical setting to Mary's speech, and students might be led to consider how Bach interprets the tone and emotion in Luke and whether it matches their own reading.

In this context, one possible way of promoting discussion of Mary's emotional and intellectual state is by comparing Bach's *Magnificat* with contemporary Christian songs about Mary, most notably Amy Grant's "Breath of Heaven (Mary's Song)" and Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene's oft-covered "Mary, Did You Know?" Grant's song is told from Mary's point of view and emphasizes her fear and weariness, while Lowry and Greene juxtapose the image of Mary tenderly gazing on her infant son with the image of Jesus performing great works of power later in life. A good way to begin a class on the birth narratives, or about the literary portrayal of Mary in particular, would be to contrast these with Bach's *Magnificat* and have students write their own short hymn, prayer, or "diary entry" from Mary's point of view.

G. F. Handel, *The Messiah* (1741)

George Handel was born in Germany but lived most of his life in England after he followed his patron, George, the Elector of Hanover, to London when the latter became George I, King of England. *The Messiah* is Handel's most famous work, and is perhaps one of the most performed sacred pieces in all of classical music. Although it was written originally for performance during the Easter liturgical season, it is now performed almost exclusively during Advent. Handel follows a libretto by Charles Jennens that brings together thematically related texts from the KJV. A large percentage of the passages come from the book of Isaiah, but there are also excerpts from the Gospels, Job, and Revelation.

There are two ways that Handel's *Messiah* might be used in a classroom setting. First, it makes excellent "entrance music" for classes in which the topic is either Isaiah or the Gospels, or in any case during the Advent season. While the music plays, students who enter the room will already begin the process of thinking and focusing so that they will be primed to consider the instructor's first question or comment, especially if it is rooted in the musical

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selection that has been playing. *The Messiah* is especially good for this because it is recognizable and the English text is easily understood by listeners without the libretto in front of them. Second, almost any passage could be adapted for a classroom discussion of Christian interpretation of prophecy. Three particular sections merit attention here, "Behold, A Virgin Shall Conceive," "And with His Stripes We Are Healed," and "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth," although the same kind of analysis would apply to any section of the work.

(1) Section No. 8 in the first part of *The Messiah* follows the text, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us," quoting Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:23. The Isaiah prophecy about Immanuel/Emmanuel was one of the most controversial translation issues in twentieth-century scholarship, and the instructor could begin this discussion by looking at various modern translations to see how they handle the text. In brief, as is well known, the Hebrew word used in Isa 7:14 means "young woman," but the Septuagint translators used a Greek word that also carries the connotation of "virgin." Matthew uses the Septuagint translation to support his claim that Jesus was born of a virgin in fulfillment of the prophecy originally given to Isaiah. After reading from various modern translations that use "virgin," "young woman," or "maiden" in Isa 7:14, one can play this passage from the Messiah and ask students to imagine that the young woman described in Isaiah is not a virgin when she gives birth (i.e., that she conceived in the natural way). Would such an interpretation of Isa 7:14 undermine Matthew's claim about Jesus, echoed by Handel? After this, the conversation can be expanded to include the whole prophecy of Immanuel in Isa 7:10–17. Students should note that this child is the second of three children mentioned in Isa 7–8. Both Immanuel and the third child, Maher-Shalal-hash-baz, serve as "time stamps" in the prophecy, indicating that Isaiah's prediction of the end of the Syro-Ephraimite threat would come to pass within a couple of years.

A historically oriented reading of Isa 7, therefore, does not support the conclusion that Isaiah was predicting a child to come hundreds of years in the future. Given the broader meaning of the Hebrew term used for the woman, it is not at all required for her to conceive miraculously and give birth as a virgin for the "time stamp" function of Immanuel to be fulfilled. Therefore, this text reveals a fundamental rift between a "reading forward," in which Isaiah is read in its historical context without reference to Jesus, and a "reading backward," in which Matthew (and Handel) read Christian beliefs about Jesus back into earlier texts. There is also a contrast between the "proof-texting" approach used by Matthew and a more contextual, literal reading of Isa 7–8. By lifting this particular verse and using it in an unexpected way, Matthew has in essence created a whole new text, and it is this text that is used in Handel's *Messiah* and is familiar to modern Christians. This classroom exer-

cise brings together discussion of Matthew's use of the Hebrew Bible and the historical context of Isaiah with the powerful musical tradition of Handel. In this way, the instructor will be able to make the point that a christological reading of Isaiah follows interpretive rules that are different from other reading strategies. However, such a reading cannot simply be dismissed because it is centrally important to Christian theology and liturgy.

(2) Sections 23–26 in part 2 follow the text of Isa 53:4–6, including the phrases "He was wounded for our transgressions" and "With his stripes we are healed." Like Isa 7, the history of interpretation of the Suffering Servant songs in Second Isaiah shows that Christians read this passage in startling new ways in light of their experience with and developing beliefs about Jesus. Commonly, Christian readers have difficulty seeing the reference in Isa 53 to be anything but Jesus, so one must spend time looking at the small details in each of the Servant songs to show that other interpretations are possible, including the common Jewish reading of interpreting the Servant as Israel itself.

One can use the beginning of the second part of Handel's *Messiah* to make the point that Christians interpreted Hebrew Bible texts very differently in light of Jesus, often by reading clearly nonmessianic texts in a messianic light. The unit begins with John 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world," and then launches directly into Isa 53 as an illustration of Jesus' redemptive suffering. The libretto continues with quotations from Pss 16, 22, 24, 69, and others, none of which were originally intended as prophecy. After playing a selection of these prophetic passages about Jesus' sacrificial death, ask the group to discuss why, if the prophecy was so clear, did Paul suggest that "Christ crucified" was hard for Jews to comprehend (1 Cor 1:23)? The answer is ultimately that Christians were reading these passages in dramatically new ways, linking the royal messianic passages with the Suffering Servant image and the lament psalms to suggest a new way of defining "the Messiah." The contribution of Handel's *Messiah* in this discussion is its powerful expression, of course, but it also provides a direct example of Christian exegesis of the Hebrew Bible.

(3) The third part of *The Messiah* begins with Job 19:25–26 ("I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth") and moves immediately to descriptions of Jesus' resurrection in 1 Cor 15. The Hebrew in Job 19:25–26 is difficult to translate and it is even more difficult to interpret Job's meaning. Even the NRSV capitalizes "Redeemer" in verse 25, which may subtly promote a christological reading of the verse, as that term is one of the most important titles for Jesus in Christian proclamation. Thus, it is easy to see how a christological reading of this passage works, but it does so at the expense of the larger conceptual worldview in the book of Job, and in the Hebrew Bible in general.

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Handel draws a direct line from Job 19 to 1 Cor 15 on the subject of Jesus' resurrection, the model and guarantee of the resurrection of all believers at the second coming. Other than this passage, there is nothing on the subject of resurrection or most any other aspect of the afterlife in Job. In the context of Job's legal complaint against God, the "redeemer" in Job 19:25 could be the same (nonexistent?) mediator as the "umpire" in Job 9:33 and the "witness" in Job 16:19. In other words, Job desperately wants there to be a third party that can judge between him and God, but no objective observer exists, so Job is left only to appeal to God in his wretchedness. One can certainly understand why Christians would identify Jesus as just the one to judge between a powerful God and helpless humanity, but that is a later reading that imports Christian doctrine back into Job. Further, the idea of resurrection itself is found in the Hebrew Bible clearly only in Dan 12, and the Christian view of resurrection depends heavily on developments within Judaism during the intertestamental period.

Therefore, the link that Handel's *Messiah* draws between Job and 1 Corinthians depends on a long history of christological interpretation that lies underneath the surface. After playing the relevant sections in *The Messiah* and reading the passages from Job and 1 Corinthians, students may be asked whether they see the strong link themselves. How might modern interpreters respect the importance and power of the interpretive tradition embodied in *The Messiah* without losing touch with the historical reality of the Hebrew Bible itself?

Robert Kyr, *The Passion according to Four Evangelists* (1998)

Robert Kyr is an American-trained composer, currently teaching at the University of Oregon's School of Music and Dance. In the mid-1990s, he accepted a commission from the Boston-based Back Bay Chorale for a large-scale choral work and decided to compose a very different type of Passion. In the Western classical music tradition, there are many works that retell the story of Jesus' passion and crucifixion, and the vast majority of them are told from the viewpoint of one of the Gospel writers, for example, Bach's *St. John Passion*. The form is usually simple; a recitative (i.e., a recited section of biblical text) is followed by a more inventive vocal piece, sung by one of the characters in order to invite the audience to delve more fully into the emotions of the narrative. The overall intent is celebratory in that even though Jesus' torment and suffering is emphasized, the listener is well aware that the piece is but a prelude to Jesus' resurrection. Kyr revises these long-standing practices, and instead of telling the story from only one viewpoint, he weaves all four Gospel stories together in what looks like a musical version of the Gospel Parallels of which all New Testament teachers are so fond. And if it

looks different on paper, it sounds different as well, for Kyr wants to emphasize the role of women in this story. To do so, he has scored the voices of Matthew and Mark for soprano and alto respectively (Luke is a tenor and John is a baritone), but he has also included several sections in which women's voices and characters are highlighted.

Kyr has arranged the Passion into three sections (The Judgment, The Way of the Cross, and The Crucifixion). Not only are the two main Evangelists women, but in parts two and three, women are featured prominently. In the former, Kyr accentuates female characters by way of a scene titled "Daughters of Jerusalem." It is in part 3, though, that women really come to the fore. The final scene in part 3 is an eleven-minute piece titled "Witness," in which the female voices of Matthew and Mark join together to sing Ps 88, while a women's chorus sings an intertwining lyric from the traditional *Stabat Mater*. As Kyr has written, "this scene focuses on the women at the cross who mourn the death of Jesus; these final moments of the work are a musical pieta expressing the lamentation of Jesus' mother and friends." After Ps 88 is sung, the entire chorus joins in to close the piece with Ps 130 and an epilogue. Kyr labels the former a "Psalm of Desolation," and in it the psalmist begs God for help but is left with no answer, only waiting. Similarly, Ps 130 petitions God to "hear my voice," and notes, "My soul longs for you / More than those who watch for daybreak." Following these texts, the piece concludes with the full chorus, scored elegantly but not bombastically, singing a few sparse words describing God: "O one! O eternal! O One eternal living God ever and always within! Alleluia."

Given the unique textual arrangement and the emphasis on women found in the piece, Kyr has provided teachers of the Bible a wonderful tool for classroom use that is musically accessible. Obviously, this piece can be used to address the roles and functions of women in the story of Jesus, but perhaps the most useful aspect of this piece is its innovative textual arrangement. One of the axioms of modern New Testament scholarship is that there exists a mimetic relationship among the Gospels. Teachers routinely assign students papers and worksheets on this relationship, and usually students use one or more Gospel Parallels to accomplish these tasks. Like the writers of the canonical Gospels, Kyr has taken elements of preexisting (Gospel) stories to fashion his own narrative. Teachers may thus use Kyr's piece to illustrate the process of Gospel formation as well as provide more auditory learners with an example of a Gospel parallel that might be more engaging than an ordinary worksheet.

Finally, since Kyr ends his Passion not with a resurrection, but rather with two maudlin psalms and a titular epilogue, teachers can ask students to ponder how these choices might affect hearers who are expecting more

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"traditional" endings, namely, with the resurrection of Jesus and perhaps even subsequent appearances. This consideration, in turn, could help students understand the varying responses within early Christian writings to Jesus' death and resurrection, for example, Mark's empty tomb as opposed to Luke's bodily resurrection and ascension.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, *Stabat Mater* (1590)

Giovanni Pierluigi was born in Palestrina, near Rome, and became known as the greatest Italian composer of his century. He composed the *Stabat Mater* for Pope Gregory XIV near the end of his life, and for centuries it has been performed during Holy Week and on September 15, the feast day of Our Lady of Sorrows. The hymn "Stabat Mater Dolorosa" ("The Grieving Mother Stood") originated in the thirteenth century and contains twenty couplets that describe the mother of Jesus standing before the cross in mourning. The stanzas focus on her grief and anguish as Christ hangs in pain on the cross. The characteristics attributed to Mary throughout the prayer include noble resignation, enduring patience, sorrowful meditation, and loving devotion. Mary's grief emerges from her love of her son, and this love in turn fills her with a spirit of patience and hope.

The purpose of the hymn can be seen in the latter half, in which the supplicant asks Mary to create in one's heart a mirror of Mary's own devotion and love for Christ, and thus the emotional identification with Christ's suffering: "Grant that I may sincerely weep with you, mourn the crucified as long as I live." Identification with Mary leads the faithful person to have more love for Christ, and thus more sorrow at his death, and finally a greater share of Mary's own compassion on the Day of Judgment. The supplicant asks for Mary to be near upon the person's death and to intercede with her son so that one may be received "with the fruits of victory" into "glorious paradise." By recognizing the true compassion that Mary exhibits toward Christ, and participating spiritually with it, the believer unites with Mary and Christ in their familial bond. Literal and dynamic translations of the Latin text are available in liturgical books and on the Internet.

Together the music and text provide a way for students to describe how they imagine the crucifixion scene, perhaps in comparison with popular cinematic depictions. Due to his balanced and beautiful Renaissance style, Palestrina's *Stabat Mater* does not induce the intense grief and shock of the scene found in some music and movies. How does this serene and lilting musical score connect emotionally or theologically with its subject matter? Also, the hymn raises the question of what Jesus' death means in the Gospels, both for him and for believers. What is the nature of Christ's "sacrificial" suffering and death, and how are disciples called to participate in it?

One might begin a class on the subject of the crucifixion with the question of whether the students find purpose or meaning in human suffering. As they answer the question, certain particulars can be pressed: What meaning is there in the death of an innocent child, in the carnage of a natural disaster, or in the deaths of those people who die fighting in a war? One could assemble various quotations from Christian and perhaps Muslim martyr texts that encourage believers to be ready to suffer for the true faith. As the *Stabat Mater* plays, students may reflect on what suffering they would be willing to live through to support their faith, political beliefs, or family. Why would a Christian want to identify so closely with the suffering of Jesus and of his mother? Are such believers motivated mostly by the desire to make it to their "glorious paradise"? Would they feel the same urgency if they knew it would have no direct "payoff"?

Felix Mendelssohn, *Paulus*, Op. 36 (1836)

Perhaps Mendelssohn's familial background, not to mention growing anti-Semitism in German society, led Mendelssohn to compose the earlier of his two great oratorios on the subject of Paul (see above for discussion of *Elijah*). Since Mendelssohn focuses almost exclusively on the account of Paul in Acts, the theme of conversion and newfound moral and religious knowledge must have appealed to him. *Paulus* was extremely well-received when it premiered in 1836 and was performed frequently in the following year.

In part 1, the oratorio focuses on the story of Stephen from Acts 6, including a moving Recitative and Chorus detailing his death. Saul is then introduced, as in Acts 7:58, and his experience on the road to Damascus is scored with great emotion, as the Chorus and a Bass vocalize the exchange between Jesus and Paul in Acts 9. As part 1 ends, Saul has been healed by Ananias and is preaching in the Damascus synagogues (Acts 9:19–20). In part 2, we meet Paul as he embarks on his missionary activities. In keeping with the laudatory tone of part 2, Mendelssohn ends the piece prior to Paul's arrest and subsequent trial(s) in Acts 21:27ff. Instead, we see Paul leaving for Jerusalem willingly, even though he acknowledges he is heading toward affliction and death.

There are several scenes one may use effectively in the classroom, such as Stephen's *apologia* in part 1 and his subsequent stoning. One can play Mendelssohn's version of Paul's conversion as a way of illustrating the differences between the account(s) in Acts and Paul's own account in Gal 2. Also, one could use this piece to initiate a discussion on how biblical interpretation is conditioned by the background(s) of the interpreter. For example, as Ralf Wehner has noted, Mendelssohn uses different compositional styles when scoring Jews and Gentiles, especially when he is retelling stories like

Acts 14. Wehner claims the Gentile voices are scored quite simply, with minimal ornamentation, but "in the choruses of the Jews Mendelssohn unfurls an astonishing range of compositional details." If one adds this musicological observation to what we know of Mendelssohn's background, one can easily initiate a discussion on the nature of biblical interpretation. Bold instructors could introduce students to Richard Wagner's infamous tract *Judaism in Music*, published pseudonymously in 1850, in which he attacks Mendelssohn's religious music. Finally, Mendelssohn's biography can be compared to Paul's, or at least the Paul that is presented in Acts. There has been, for some time now, a difference of opinion about Paul's identity, namely, did Paul remain Jewish while preaching Christ or did he "convert" to a new religious identity, leaving his Judaism behind? By introducing students to a brief biographical sketch of Mendelssohn, and then his music about Paul, one can invite students to consider the nature of Paul's religious identity, even as they are absorbing some of the greatest choral and vocal writing of the nineteenth century.

Olivier Messiaen, *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps* (*Quartet for the End of Time*) (1940)

It is difficult to place Messiaen, a French Catholic composer, into any of the modern trends in music. Equally fascinated by Catholic mysticism and the songs of birds, his music can sometimes be difficult to listen to, but at the same time, there are moments of profound depth and beauty as well. This piece has an especially interesting history. As a captured member of the French forces during World War II, Messiaen found himself imprisoned in a German POW camp in Görlitz. A pianist, Messiaen began to compose works for the instruments which other inmates knew how to play. This compositional limitation accounts for the somewhat odd scoring of this piece for violin, cello, clarinet, and piano.

Messiaen reports that his inspiration for the piece came from Rev 10:1–7, an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Here, the seer describes an angel descending from heaven, who announces that "in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled" (10:7). Given Messiaen's situation as a POW, as well as his interest in Catholic mysticism, we can well imagine that he thought the end of time could be coming soon. However, the *Quartet* is not filled with doom and gloom. The piece is divided into eight movements, each with an evocative title; for example, the second movement is a "Vocalise for the Angel Who Announces the End of Time." Messiaen also takes this opportunity not to dwell on the coming end, but to ponder the divinity of Jesus through music. In movements 5 and 8 he provides a "Praise to the Eternity of Jesus," and a "Praise to the Immortality of Jesus." Per the former, Messiaen noted in the score,

"Jesus is considered here as the Word. A broad phrase, infinitely slow, on the violoncello, magnifies with love and reverence the eternity of the Word, powerful and gentle." The eighth movement is described as follows: "Expansive solo violin, counterpart to the violoncello solo of the fifth movement. Why this second encomium? It addresses more specifically the second aspect of Jesus, Jesus the Man, the Word made flesh.… Its slow ascent toward the most extreme point of tension is the ascension of man toward his God, of the child of God toward his Father, of the being made divine toward Paradise." In the third movement, Messiaen includes music to praise his beloved birds, and the sixth movement portrays the sounds of the Apocalypse itself. Messiaen described it as follows: "The four instruments in unison take on the aspect of gongs and trumpets (the first six trumpets of the Apocalypse were followed by various catastrophes, the trumpet of the seventh angel announced the consummation of the mystery of God). Use of added [rhythmic] values, rhythms augmented or diminished … Music of stone, of formidable, sonorous granite…" Aside from the title and textual inspiration of the piece, it is this sixth movement that ties most directly into Revelation.

Teachers can use this piece in several different ways to teach not only Revelation, but also other New Testament texts. Given that most scholars think the earliest New Testament texts are pre-Pauline hymns quoted in places such as Phil 2:6–11, one could accompany a discussion of these hymnic fragments (which could have been vocalized via music) with a hearing of either the fifth or eighth movements, both of which contemplate the character of Jesus through music. Also, a teacher could use the sixth movement to accompany a discussion of Revelation. Because the piece is by nature abstract, one could ask students a number of "listening questions," such as what they imagine they are hearing, how they feel the piece relates to the text(s) at hand, or how they "hear" the Apocalypse, that is, what sorts of sounds or music come to mind when reading Revelation? Such questions not only draw students into the text in a different way, but they also ask them to reconstruct creatively the text for themselves, using their own musical identities to do so. Such engagement might allow them to connect with the text in a more personal and immediate fashion.

Franz Schmidt, *Book of the Seven Seals* (1937)

Schmidt is not (yet) a well-known composer, but his pedigree certainly speaks for itself. A student of Bruckner and one of Mahler's favorite cellists, his compositions represent some of the last vestiges of the great European tradition of Romanticism. In this piece, his last great work, he attempts what no other composer in history had ever accomplished: to create what he called a "comprehensive setting" of the book of Revelation. And in fact, this lengthy

piece (over one hundred minutes) surely does so, albeit with a few cuts; for example, the seven letters in Rev 2–3 are edited into an initial address by John. Schmidt was adamant that these cuts did not reflect any disrespect for Revelation. In conjunction with the premiere of the piece in 1938, he prepared some explanatory comments, among which one finds the following claims: "My approach to the work had always been that of a deeply religious man and of an artist.… If my musical setting of this unparalleled work, which is as relevant today as it was at its creation eighteen and a half centuries ago, should succeed in bringing the hearer spiritually closer to it, then that will be my greatest reward." Unfortunately, Schmidt did not live long enough to see the success of his work; he died in 1939.

Because of the length and complexity of the piece, a summary here would be unwieldy. However, there are several ways in which Schmidt's work can prove useful in the classroom. The opening of the first Four Seals, with their accompanying riders on horseback, include various observations and conversations by individuals (along with wonderfully expressive music) so that students can experience the terror and emotions of these events in a more significant way than simply reading them. One of the more dramatic sections in Revelation is the seven angels blowing seven trumpets (8:6–9:21; 11:14–19); Schmidt scores these sections into a lush, nine-minute portion of part 2 which features solos, quartets, and a chorus, all expressing the simultaneous dread and hope of God's Day of Wrath. This section is a prime example of the more general tone of apocalyptic literature, with its mix of emotions and wonderfully strange imagery, and can be appreciated by students who do not normally like classical music due to its almost simplistic vocal writing and its luxuriant orchestral scoring.

Various

Johannes Brahms, *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Op. 45 (1865–68)

The great German composer wrote only one Requiem, and it differs significantly from the official text of the Catholic Requiem Mass that had been established in the mid- to late-1400s. In that official text (which can be heard in many versions, such as Mozart's magnificent K. 626 or even Fauré's sublime Op. 48) the emphasis is on the dead who pray and supplicate Jesus to be pardoned "in die illa tremenda" ("on that awful day"). As such, the traditional setting borrows from biblical images and texts, specifically those dealing with Jesus' divinity and the coming Judgment. However, in the mid- to late-1860s, Brahms finalized his very personal, idiosyncratic Requiem and discarded the traditional Latin text in favor of an amalgam of texts from Luther's Bible and the Apocrypha.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the Requiem took shape in the aftermath of the deaths of two extremely important people in Brahms's life: his mentor Robert Schumann and his mother Christine Brahms. Owing to their deaths, and especially to his humanistic agnosticism, his Requiem reflects not only a pride in the German language to express ultimate grief, but it also focuses almost exclusively on "they that have sorrow" (from movement 1). Brahms thus excludes any overt emphasis on the dead in favor of offering comfort to those who mourn for them. In doing so, he musters an impressive array of biblical texts, and it is this interplay that can prove useful for Bible teachers. For example, in part 2 of the Requiem, Brahms weaves together three different New Testament texts (1 Pet 1:24; Jas 5:7; and 1 Pet 1:25). Together they offer the one who grieves an image of hope in the "Coming of the Lord," but the texts are intertextually linked by the agricultural image of the farmer and the harvest. Additionally, in part 5 Brahms links disparate texts (e.g., John 16:22; Sir 51:27; Isa 66:13) in order to offer comfort to the mourner, but the texts are connected through images of suffering, labor, and motherhood. In this way, teachers can employ the Requiem to illustrate not only the influence of the Luther translation on even an agnostic, nationalistic composer, but also the way in which texts can be intertextually interpreted. Much in the same way that early Jewish followers of Jesus read and adapted the Torah in order to address a perceived existential crisis in their community, Brahms turns to the Luther Bible to offer a message of comfort to those who, like him, are grieving for lost friends and relations.

Dave Brubeck, *The Gates of Justice* (1969)

Dave Brubeck's 1959 album *Time Out*, with its instantly recognizable title track, cemented his place as one of the great American jazz composer-musicians of the twentieth century. In the late 1960s, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati jointly commissioned Brubeck to write an extended cantata. Brubeck was troubled by the unrest brought about by the Civil Rights struggle as well as the deteriorating relationship between American Jews and African Americans. As such, he set about composing a generically hybrid piece containing texts from the Bible, the *Union Prayer Book*, the great Jewish sage Hillel, his wife Iola, and speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. As Brubeck wrote in his original program notes, "The essential message of *The Gates of Justice* is the brotherhood of man. Concentrating on the historic and spiritual parallels of Jews and American blacks, I hoped through the juxtaposition and amalgamation of a variety of musical styles to construct a bridge upon which the universal theme of brotherhood could be communicated." This bridge is constructed by focusing on the ethical issues that concerned Bru-

beck during the 1960s, but which also find expression in the Hebrew Bible. To connect the two, Brubeck has scored vocal parts for a Hebrew cantor—whose melodies stem from the Jewish liturgical tradition and who symbolizes the ethical-prophetic tradition—and a black baritone—whose melodies stem from the musical tradition of the spirituals and blues and who symbolizes the ethical concerns of modern humans. The interplay of these musical styles and emphases serves to present the listener with a fusion of music that is both intriguing and accessible.

For the Bible teacher, Brubeck's piece offers a variety of options. For instance, one could focus specifically on the texts Brubeck uses and ask students to reflect on the relationship and themes found within certain movements; for instance in "Open the Gates," Brubeck utilizes Ps 118:19–23 and Isa 62:10; 57:14. It would be fairly easy to play this four and a half minute piece and pose questions about shared themes or images. Teachers may also employ this piece to discuss the relationship between Jewish and African American interpretation of the Bible. A prime movement for that emphasis would be the longest piece in *The Gates of Justice*, specifically, "Shout unto the Lord." This movement combines biblical texts (Pss 95–98; Isa 2:4; 50:8; 57:19) with the words of Hillel and Martin Luther King Jr. By examining not only the texts used, but also the musical styles, a fruitful discussion could be initiated on how different communities have interpreted and responded to key passages in biblical literature in an attempt to illustrate the continuing influence of the Bible on communal identities. For instance, Brubeck's work could set the stage for conversation about how the Bible has been used in the Jewish communities of which Brubeck is a part in comparison to the ways in which biblical images and literature have been central to the formation of certain African American identities. One could develop that discussion with a corresponding emphasis on the role of music in those identities, focusing specifically on liturgical Jewish music and "secular" black music, such as jazz and blues. (Useful resources for these discussions include Marsha Bryan Edelman's *Discovering Jewish Music*; James Cone's classic *The Spiritual and the Blues*; and Allen Dwight Callahan's *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*.)

John Rutter, *Requiem Aeternam* (1985)

John Rutter is a master of short choral pieces and carols, but his full length *Requiem* is also highly regarded among contemporary performers and audiences. Like Brahms and others before him, Rutter departs from the traditional liturgy of the "mass for the dead," by integrating other texts into the *Requiem*, in this case the Book of Common Prayer and certain biblical passages. Rutter opens the *Requiem Aeternam* with a dramatic and somewhat

dark passage, with a steady drum beat underneath the voices. This quickly resolves in an angelic chorus which brightly continues the phrase: *requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine*, "Grant them eternal rest, Lord." This continues into the *Kyrie eleison* in which the chorus proclaims confidently, "Lord, have mercy." This opening indicates well the mood and theme of the whole work, which is hopeful and compassionate. In contrast to the dark and bleak mood of Mozart's *Requiem* or the sadness of Britten's *War Requiem*, Rutter expresses the hope that those who have died are peaceful and safe in God's protection. Rather than an ominous or threatening call for God's mercy, this *requiem* states the faith of believers plainly and with reverence. The second movement is a setting of Ps 130 in English: "Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord." The textual and musical climactic moment is the phrase, "I look for the Lord.… In his word is my trust." After the *Pie Jesu*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, Rutter moves to a thoughtfully sad rendition of the *Agnus Dei*, a reflection on Jesus' sacrificial death. He intersperses the traditional Latin text (translated, "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world") with quotations from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer that begin, "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery," and "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord" (cf. Job 14:1; John 11:25). As in the Anglican liturgy for burial, death is considered a release from the limited and painful nature of human life when seen in the light of eternal life in the presence of Christ. After a soothing setting of Ps 23, Rutter emphasizes again the blessing that the dead receive through Christ in the closing section, the *Lux aeterna*, "Let eternal light shine on them." He incorporates into the Latin liturgy the English text from the Book of Common Prayer that begins, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (after Rev 14:13).

Like other Masses that depart from the traditional Latin text, Rutter's *Requiem* provides an opportunity to talk about the importance of redaction and editing to the "final form" of a composite text. How does Rutter change our interpretation of the original Latin prayers by including these particular biblical passages? Also, what is the effect (to an English speaking audience in particular) of a concert that alternates between Latin and English? How does the listening experience differ when one does or does not know the meaning of the text being sung?

One promising way to use this *Requiem*, as well as any other Mass text, is to play the same textual unit in two very different musical settings. The *Kyrie eleison* in this piece, for example, presents a stark contrast with the same passage in *requiem* settings of Mozart, Verdi, and Britten. Since the text is in Latin, and not understandable to many students, one might begin by asking students to listen to two different sounding pieces and to write down what they think the piece is trying to communicate to listeners. After this, students

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can share their interpretations of the piece and group similar thoughts in a mind map on the board. How many students recognized the text as being the same? Did they mention key ideas in the *requiem* mass such as death, hope, forgiveness, or judgment? One may use this exercise as a way to introduce the range of biblical ideas about death and dying, such as the sanguine view of Qoheleth in Eccl 3:19–21, the graphic descriptions of death as judgment in Nahum, and the hopeful resurrection of the persecuted dead in Rev 20:4–6.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Requiem* (1791)

This piece may be familiar to American audiences because of the 1984 movie *Amadeus*, a fictionalized account inspired by the circumstances surrounding the composition of the *Requiem*. A wealthy Count Walsegg commissioned the work anonymously through a servant, hoping to pass the work off as his own at a memorial service for his deceased wife. Mozart only fully completed the initial *Requiem* and *Kyrie* sections before his death, but his wife Constanze wanted to profit from the work and so she enlisted the help of other composers to finish the work without acknowledging their role in the final product. Constanze maintained that Mozart had left explicit instructions for the work's completion, but the truth of this is unclear, and some sections were certainly written largely by Franz Xaver Süssmayr. Whatever the circumstances of its composition, Mozart's *Requiem* is one of the most recognizable choral pieces within sacred music. The opening two movements are the most famous and have made their way into many films and television shows. Many students will be familiar with the music even though they might not know what it is.

There are at least two possibilities for using this piece in discussing the Bible. First, it raises questions about death, the relationship between God and humanity, and possibilities for the afterlife. Unlike Rutter's *Requiem*, which focuses almost exclusively on pastoral expressions of hope and comfort, Mozart's *Requiem* follows the liturgical text more fully and includes the scenes of final judgment in the sequence of the *Dies irae, Tuba mirum, Rex tremendae, Recordare, Confutatis, and Lacrimosa*. These sections clearly outline the fateful decision that God will make on the day of final judgment, a "day of wrath." Drawing on prophetic language about the Day of the Lord, the liturgy describes the arrival of God as righteous judge who examines all people in light of the information written in the secret book. The middle parts of this sequence contain the faithful person's prayer for mercy and salvation, appealing first to God, the "tremendously majestic king" who has the power to save, and Jesus, who is bidden to "remember" (*recordare*) that his death on the cross has already secured redemption for the penitent sinner. The supplicant prays to be among the blessed when the guilty are tossed into the flames

of punishment. It might help to make the Latin text and English translation available as students listen to sections of Mozart's *Requiem* so that they can discuss how the music emphasizes aspects of the theology of the prayer. Especially when compared directly with other requiems by Rutter and Brahms, one can discern the relative emphasis on God's merciful nature versus God's righteous judgment.

Second, Mozart's work is especially suited for conversation about the nature of revelation. Listening to a good recording of the *Requiem* is an awe-inspiring event. Some of the beauty of this composition comes from the liturgical text that he is setting to music, but the *Requiem* would be just as powerful without any words at all. Where does such genius originate? Like the best artists and writers, Mozart began with what had been done before and moved it to a new level that no one had envisioned before him. Such arguments have been made about so-called "religious geniuses" like Moses, Isaiah, Jesus, Augustine, and Martin Luther. After Mozart's death, the *Requiem* was finished by other composers, and in recent decades musicologists have attempted to uncover and remove "inferior" accretions. How does this compare with the modern impulse to find the original layer of authentic tradition in the Gospels, the "historical Jesus," or the "authentic" oracles of Isaiah of Jerusalem? Similarly, what should be identified as the "real" *Requiem*?

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PART 2:
FILM

Introduction: Teaching the Bible with Film

Patrick Gray

College and seminary courses on "The Bible and Film" have become quite popular in recent years, and while curricular limitations often preclude entire courses devoted to the subject, an increasing number of instructors are incorporating movies into existing biblical studies courses on an ad hoc basis. The catalogues that comprise the following chapters are intended to serve as resources for use in these settings. One chapter suggests teaching strategies for use with more or less conventional "Bible epics." A second chapter offers pedagogical suggestions for use with films bearing relatively little, if any, explicit connection to the Bible. These catalogues are by no means exhaustive. Many other movies lend themselves to use in a biblical studies course.[1] The films discussed here are intended to stimulate further reflection on the intersection of the Bible and film in the classroom.[2]

A few basic questions arise when considering this intersection: (1) What objectives are best suited to the use of film in teaching the Bible? (2) What are some common pitfalls? (3) What are the underlying assumptions in various pedagogical approaches to the Bible via the medium of film?

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1. In addition to those catalogued here, Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, contains entries for a number of other films: *Blade Runner* (Tod Linafelt, "The Human Condition in Genesis 2–3 and in *Blade Runner*," 73–75); *Breaking the Waves* (Carleen Mandolfo, "Film as a Resource for Theological Reflection on Biblical Texts," 321–24); *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Philip A. Quanbeck II, "The Letter to the Romans and Pauline Theological Concepts," 360–62); *The Godfather* (Ronald A. Simkins, "Patronage in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 8," 158–60); *It's A Wonderful Life* (William Sanger Campbell, "Mark and the Movies," 324–26); *The Lord of the Rings* (Brad E. Kelle, "Remembering Deuteronomy," 130–31); *Pale Rider* (Rolf Jacobson, "Imagery and the Psalms," 197–98); *Wall Street* (Michael Barram, "Jesus, Wealth, and Wall Street," 293–95); *The Shawshank Redemption* (Brent A. Strawn, "Second Isaiah and the Exilic Imagination," 175–76); and *Star Wars* (John B. Weaver, "Teaching the Unity of 'Luke-Acts,'" 330–31).

2. In most cases, the discussions will include not only a general overview but also attention to specific scenes that are suitable for use in classroom contexts.

As one surveys the range of strategies commonly employed in the class-room, a handful of broad objectives seem particularly well served by the incorporation of film:

Using movies helps to cultivate close reading skills. The simplest way to pursue this objective involves one or more of the dozens of "sword and sandal epics" that have been produced over the past century. It is very easy to show a clip from, say, *The Ten Commandments* or *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and have students write or comment on its fidelity (or lack thereof) to the bibli-cal text. Biblical narrative tends to be quite sparse—as Eric Auerbach puts it, "fraught with background"[3]—and discussing various attempts at translating it into another medium helps students to appreciate this quality. In the case of the Gospels, of course, it quickly becomes clear that in most films the director is presenting a composite version. It is one thing to tell students that there are four different versions of the gospel in the New Testament and to alert them to a few of the problems with the harmonizing impulse, but it is quite another thing for them to discover it on their own and to witness what difference it can make for the tone, plot, and overall message. Even the most conscien-tious efforts to present "the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text" (for example, Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* or Saville's *The Gospel of John*) inevitably entail interpretive decisions. Movies make this palpably clear.

With appropriate adjustments, the following questions might be used with almost any film belonging to this "biblical narrative" genre: Is there any-thing from the biblical text that this film omits? Is there anything it adds? Is there anything about the text—particular scenes, characters, or speeches—that this film helps you see that you did not see previously? What is it about the text that obscures this aspect? What is your reaction to the film's portrayal of _____ (Jesus, Moses, Abraham, Peter, Judas, etc.)? Is there something about the gospel that the medium of film will always miss, no matter how conscien-tious the director tries to be in representing the text? Is there something about a story as a written text that imposes certain limitations when trying to stage it on the screen? Are there motifs that are repeated that you had not noticed when reading the text over an extended period? Is there anything implicit in the text that the film makes explicit? What about the language? Does the translation used by the screenwriters lend a more "realistic" feel to the action and dialogue? Does it feel stilted? Are there particular lines that seem to work very well or very poorly? How do you assess the artistic license exercised in the invention of minor characters? How does the director handle large blocks

3. E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. W. R. Trask; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 12.

of material that is lacking in dramatic action? In what way, if any, does the film anachronistically inject later Christian or Jewish theological notions into the story? How does this film reflect the context in which it was made? Could you have guessed correctly had you not known its release date in advance? How do you assess the use of background music in the film?

The cultivation of close reading skills is not the only objective served by film. Watching movies also helps to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. A hurdle to be cleared by most teachers is the students' familiarity (both real and imagined) with the biblical text. It can be difficult even to get students to read texts that, in their minds, they already know. Movies can help in this regard. The notion that Jesus' suffering provides some vicarious benefit for others does not seem as shocking as it perhaps should until one sees, in Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*, a depiction of unimaginable sacrifice as a means of salvation (in the form of a woman's willing sexual degradation at the request of her paralyzed husband). Those consumed by the question of the historicity of the Eden narrative in Gen 1–3 might overlook the profound existential questions it raises about the nature of human knowledge and mortality found also in a number of science-fiction movies such as *I, Robot*.

At the same time, much of the Bible and the world that produced it seems so utterly alien to most students that they write it off as being irrelevant or unintelligible. To counter this sentiment, some teachers have found that showing the opening scene of *The Godfather* helps to explain the ancient patron-client system or that *Twelve Monkeys* can help to acquaint students with the standard elements of the apocalyptic genre.

In addition, movies often provide excellent analogies for specific concepts, methods, or patterns one encounters in the field of biblical studies. When we interpret the Bible, for example, should we concern ourselves with the final product or should we delve into the compositional history of the text?[4] Do the biblical authors retain some kind of veto power over what the text means? May other factors such as the tradition in which the text has been canonized or the social location of the individual reader come into play when determining the meaning? Or, translated into cinematic terms, is the movie shown at theaters the real thing, or should we wait until the director's cut is released on DVD, complete with commentary and deleted scenes? Should we take into account prerelease screenings that aim at gauging initial audience reaction before the final version is produced? While some students may be

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4. See, for example, Brad Kelle's use of the *Star Wars* episodes to illuminate how Isaiah should be read as three separate works as well as to emphasize the ways in which the entire book functions together as a whole ("Introducing the Book of Isaiah," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 172–73).

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suspicious of theories about Priestly redactors or Matthew's use of Mark, it is easy to illustrate the process and the goals of redaction criticism by viewing movies based on biblical narrative.[5] How has the director edited the narrative and what overall effect do the changes have? Does it change the tenor of, say, the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11) when, in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Martin Scorsese leaves out the final line ("Go forth and sin no more")? Is the shift in emphasis intended or accidental? Does it fit into a pattern of other tendencies?

The incorporation of movies can also provide a painless way for teachers to include group work in their courses. Group work is anathema to many professors and also to many students. Requiring students to watch movies is one way to make a pedagogical virtue out of a logistical necessity: In most cases, only one or two copies of a movie will be available, and so the formation of viewing groups is essential if the students are to be prepared for subsequent in-class discussion. Small groups are moreover conducive for generating and articulating detailed insights about the film in response to any questions posed by the instructor. For whatever reason, students are frequently more ready, willing, and able to participate substantively in discussions about movies. An additional advantage is that integrating movies—which, for practical reasons, must be viewed outside of class—allows a teacher to make greater demands on the time of students without causing undue resentment. Recent surveys reveal the woefully small amount of time most college students spend on coursework. Together with philosophical commitments to a learner-centered model of teaching, this has caused many instructors to seek out ways to shift more responsibility for learning to the student outside the classroom. Time spent viewing movies is perhaps not "quality time," but then again, it may be that the five total hours spent by the average college student on all courses combined is not all "quality time," either.[6]

Notwithstanding the objectives for which movies have proven conducive, there are at least two practical pitfalls. First, many teachers have found that follow-up discussion can flounder if they have not primed the pump by

5. For the use of Jesus movies to introduce students to redaction criticism, see these entries in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*: Marianne Meye Thompson, "Comparing Synoptic Texts Using 'Jesus Film' Clips," 261–62; and Jeffrey L. Staley, "How to Read a Gospel by Viewing a Miracle Story in Film: An Exercise in Redaction/Narrative/Feminist Criticism," 273–74.

6. According to a recent survey, sixty-five percent of students reported spending fewer than six hours per week on homework and studying. See "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2001," n.p. [cited 3 April 2007]. Online: www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/norms_pr_01.html.

distributing a list of specific questions and viewing suggestions before the students go off to watch the movie. Second, while movies may provide a way to create distance, to make the familiar text of the Bible appear in all its foreignness, and to help students overcome preconceived ideas about what the Bible is and how one interprets it in a critical manner, it is sometimes possible to invoke analogies or parallels of such utter strangeness that the average student throws up a wall of resistance and is unable to consider matters in a dispassionate manner.[7]

Finally, it may be helpful to articulate a few of the underlying (and perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions that appear to be at work in various strategies for using film in the biblical studies classroom:

First, it is assumed that incorporating movies has pedagogical value in that it humanizes the professor. We are not only teaching a subject; we are at the same time teaching students. Students like watching movies. Therefore, if we show movies, students will enjoy the course. Since most students perform better when they enjoy the task or are favorably disposed toward the taskmaster, movies can help to accomplish course objectives.

Second, there is a widely held assumption that students are more eager to broach weighty theological questions when they appear in the guise of a movie. What is the proper relation of creature to creator? Play *Blade Runner*. What would it look like to serve mammon rather than God? Watch Michael Douglas's performance in *Wall Street*. Do we interpret the text or does the biblical text stand over and interpret us? Consider Samuel Jackson's recitation of Ezek 25:17 at the close of *Pulp Fiction*.

Third, it is generally assumed that the process of "reading" a film is a good analogy for reading a text. On this score, it would seem that many professors are simply putting into practice one of the foundational principles of critical exegesis (famously articulated in 1860 by Benjamin Jowett in *Essays and Reviews*) to read the Bible "like any other text." Or, conversely, it may be the case that the impressive level of pedagogical energy and innovation seen in cinematic approaches to the study of the Bible actually demonstrates the implicit assumption that the Bible is not, in fact, just like any other book. After all, how often does one see movies in classes devoted to Aristotle or Dostoevsky?

It may be too early to tell whether we are seeing a kind of paradigm shift in the increased popularity of movies in biblical studies courses. It is the

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7. For example, more than one colleague has reported mixed results (at best) from attempts to explore certain discursive practices in biblical literature with reference to the proclivity of Canadian directors for stories involving pedophilia, incest, and necrophilia.

nature of things that paradigm shifts become fully visible only in hindsight. Our hope is that the discussions in the following pages not only aid other teacher-scholars in planning their classes, but also provide some empirical basis for deliberations about what is (or ought to be) happening on the ground when we teach the Bible.

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The Bible in Film

Nicola Denzey and Patrick Gray

The films discussed in this chapter are organized according to the order in which their subject matter appears in the canon. One of the main criteria guiding our selection of films in this chapter is availability; generally, if a film is not readily available through one of the major rental companies such as Blockbuster or Netflix, it has not been included (since logistical constraints mean that most instructors will not be able to show it). An unintended and unfortunate result is that the compilation in this chapter is very light on films covering Hebrew Bible narratives. Prior to 1960, Hollywood produced a number of movies inspired by stories from the Hebrew Bible, but very few of these can now be obtained through the usual channels. Most films in recent decades have been "Jesus films" of one sort or another.

The indices may be consulted to find film entries with classroom strategies related to particular biblical texts. All secondary literature cited here is included in the preceding bibliography (pp. 92–96).

The Bible: In the Beginning (1966)

John Huston directs, narrates, and stars in (as Noah) this adaptation of Gen 1–22. Students will be familiar with most of the stories included, discussion of which may pursue the following questions:

(1) If only for practical purposes, the movie has to end *somewhere*. How appropriate is Gen 22 as a stopping point? The meaning of a text is conditioned in part by what comes before and after it. How does the story as a whole (or the last episode) change by virtue of its placement at the end?

(2) Adding details not present in the written text is, of course, unavoidable, but Huston is relatively reserved when it comes to "filling in the gaps." Assess the film's depiction of the miraculous. How might he have handled this material differently? By not trying to explain or make these elements more plausible in naturalistic terms, the film in some ways preserves what Bultmann and others would describe as the text's mythic character. Too quickly "translating" the text's specific images and categories overlooks the fact that its message comes through those very images and categories.

(3) The voice of the serpent who tempts Eve (DVD ch. 3) belongs to the same actor (Huston) who speaks God's lines. While it is unlikely that the director intends to do so, this provides an opening for discussing the theological question of responsibility. Is God to blame for "the fall" by placing the tree in the Garden? Does God intend for the couple to eat of the tree from the beginning? Is this biblical narrator a reliable narrator?

(4) Gen 1–11 is usually referred to as the Primeval History. This section has a timeless quality and addresses questions of origins of relevance to all of humanity before turning to the specific dealings of God with Israel. Does the presentation of this section have a primeval "feel"? Is there a noticeable change when the Abraham cycle begins?

(5) Gen 14 is significant in later biblical traditions because it features the figure of Melchizedek. In the film, however, he does not appear. Instead, the battle and Abraham's rescue of Lot is greatly expanded (DVD ch. 14). Considerations of genre likely influence this decision. Is it more difficult to imagine a director doing the opposite, that is, omitting a detailed battle scene and expanding the role of a shadowy character with no other apparent impact on the narrative?

(6) The binding of Isaac is one of the most gripping sections of the movie (DVD chs. 19–20). This narrative from Gen 22 is notoriously sparse in detail. How does this depiction compare with others (e.g., Kierkegaard's)? A few of the interpretive decisions made here include: Isaac is a young adolescent. Abraham questions the voice that tells him to sacrifice his son. He is distraught, even angry through most of the episode. Abraham mentions the custom of child sacrifice practiced by neighboring tribes. Sarah does not know what is about to happen.

For further discussion, see Forshey, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars*, 145–61.

The Ten Commandments (1956)

If there is a single film that qualifies as the quintessential "biblical epic," this Cecil B. DeMille production is the one. At nearly four hours in length, there is ample material for comparison with the text of Exodus (as well as parallel accounts given in Philo and Josephus). Fodder for discussion may include the following:

(1) DeMille appears on screen to introduce the film, which he says is "the story of the birth of freedom." To what extent is this an apt summary of Exodus? He also states that his intent is not to create a new story by filling in the missing periods in the life of Moses but rather "to be worthy of the divinely inspired story." What assumptions about the nature of inspiration does this statement suggest?

(2) Only a few of the plagues are shown on screen. Most are simply reported in very brief terms (DVD ch. 34). Inasmuch as the text itself cannot literally depict the plagues in visual terms, is this device in any way preferable to trying to re-create them via special effects? (Cf. Pardes, "Moses Goes Down to Hollywood: Miracles and Special Effects," 15–31.)

(3) The physical and spiritual change in Moses after the burning bush theophany (DVD ch. 29) is stark. To what degree does this transformation match the testimony of Exodus?

(4) While the institution of the Passover ritual receives less space than it should relative to the attention it receives in Exod 12–14, it takes place as the screams of Egyptians, whose firstborn have just died, can be heard in the background (DVD ch. 37). This depiction nicely captures the awfulness of God in Exodus (in the older sense connoting awesomeness as well as dread).

(5) Pharaoh returns after the debacle at the Red Sea and dramatically declares, in reference to the victory of the God of Moses, "His God *is God*" (end of DVD ch. 42). The scene provides an opportunity to distinguish between henotheism and strict monotheism and to examine biblical texts portraying the Israelites at various points along a trajectory toward the latter (e.g., Exod 20:2–6; Deut 6:4–9; 2 Kgs 17:7–18; 21:1–16; Isa 45:14–25; Mic 4:5).

(6) Some of the Israelites are unimpressed when Moses descends from Sinai with the tablets of the law (DVD ch. 46). They want freedom, one says, not the law. Moses replies, "There is no freedom without the Law." In what sense(s) can this sentiment be squared with the perspective of Exodus? In light of his reflections in Romans and Galatians, what might Paul say if he were to view this scene?

(7) Given the title of the film, the Decalogue occupies very little narrative space. Is the film misnamed? Similarly, to what degree may it be said that the Torah (as a synonym for the Pentateuch) is centrally concerned with Torah (in the broader sense of "the law")?

For further discussion, see Forshey, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars*, 123–44.

The Prince of Egypt (1998)

This animated film contains a three-minute scene (DVD ch. 7) that helps facilitate consideration of identity in the Exodus story. Students naturally think of Moses as an Israelite, and for good reason. The text identifies Moses' parents as Levites (Exod 2:1), he leads the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, and receives the laws from God. It is also clear from the text, however, that Moses is raised in the house of Pharaoh, given an Egyptian name (2:10),

and is reluctant to help emancipate the Israelites (Exod 3–4). Indeed, Moses does not even know the name of the Israelite deity (3:13), and that deity subsequently tries to kill him (4:24). In this clip, Moses encounters Miriam and Aaron. Miriam is thrilled to see her brother, who she thinks has returned to help them. Moses, however, does not recognize his sister and becomes angry when she informs him, for the first time, that he is an Israelite. As Moses is departing, Miriam begins to sing a lullaby that Moses recognizes; this is the beginning of his (ethnic) identity crisis. In the next scene (DVD ch. 8) Moses returns to the palace and—through a voice-over song—expresses his affinity for his Egyptian home and family. This clip effectively depicts what is written between the lines of the biblical narrative: Moses is part Israelite and part Egyptian, and that presents a struggle.

On an "academic" level this scene launches a discussion about the Exodus and the many ways in which it is a story of Israel's forging their own identity, apart from Egypt. The narrative, for example, recounts how God distinguished between the Israelites and the Egyptians (8:22–23; 9:4; 11:7). The Israelites, however, clearly struggled with this distinction, as they were remarkably eager to return to Egypt (16:3; 17:3). On a "personal" level, students might write about their own conflicting identities—cultural, ethnic, or otherwise. This is a particularly instructive exercise for many bi- or multicultural students—not only as they engage in self-reflection, but as they share with others their experiences as well. For students not in this category in any obvious or conventional sense, one might ask them to reflect on the tensions requisite in being, for example, a student-athlete or a nontraditional student; or what struggles were inherent in having one parent Catholic, the other Protestant or Jewish or Muslim; or one religious and one not. Whenever possible, they should draw comparisons or contrasts to Moses' situation.

For a related exercise, see F. V. Greifenhagen, "Israelite And/Or Egyptian? Ethnic Identity in Exodus," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 111–12.

King David (1985)

This retelling of 1–2 Samuel starring Richard Gere is the most readily available screen portrayal of "the man after God's own heart." Items for discussion may include:

(1) The opening scene, in which Saul "negotiates" with the captured King Agag (cf. 1 Sam 15:1–31), concisely captures a number of the key themes of 1 Samuel and of the larger Deuteronomistic History. Samuel confronts Saul over his failure to carry out the gruesome command to utterly destroy the Amalekites, refers to his initial doubts about the Israelite call for a king "like other nations," and then informs Saul that God has rejected him. Saul looks like the lame duck that he is almost from his first appearance in the text.

(2) Have students comment on the characterization of Bathsheba (DVD chs. 13–14). She is frequently portrayed as a temptress. Is this reputation justified on the basis of the text (cf. 2 Sam 11:2–5)? Does the film perpetuate this image or undercut it? The director seems confused as to the function of this story line. For example, it mitigates David's guilt considerably to have Bathsheba describe Uriah as an abusive husband.

(3) The final scene, which shows David on his deathbed giving advice to his heir Solomon, is bizarre. "Be guided by the instincts of your own heart" and not by the prophets, he says, for "it is through the heart that God speaks to man." Have students comment on the fidelity of this conclusion to 1 Kgs 2:1–9 and to the rest of the David story.

The Gospel Road (1973)

Johnny Cash personally financed the production of this musical retelling of the Jesus story. It is not of the highest quality, but its distinctive character opens several avenues of discussion:

(1) This film is markedly different from other Jesus films. Is it in any apparent way reacting against or responding to others? (Perhaps compare Luke's reference to "other accounts" in the prologue to his Gospel—likely a reference to Mark.) Despite the differences, does it in any way show the influence of other films in the genre?

(2) None of the filming took place after dark, despite the fact that the Gospels clearly locate certain scenes at night (e.g., the meeting with Nicodemus, the Last Supper, Gethsemane). Does this departure have a substantial effect on the meaning or impact of these scenes?

(3) Prior to the sequence in the passion narrative, Cash shuffles the order of Jesus' sayings from the Gospels pretty freely. In what way, if any, is this analogous to the ways in which Luke and Matthew appropriate Q material for their narratives?

(4) The film's low budget made it impossible to employ large numbers of extras for the crowd scenes. In a number of scenes requiring crowds, the director goes in the other direction, frequently depicting Jesus alone with only the sound of crowds in the background. How does the lack of a visible crowd affect the audience's reaction? When one reads the Gospel accounts, in what ways do the narrators make the crowds' presence felt?

(5) Whereas the narrators of the canonical Gospels remain anonymous, viewers of the film are acquainted with Johnny Cash. Does the identity of the narrator affect either the substance of the message or the audience's reception of it? Would it make a difference to the reader to know for certain that Matthew or Mark, for example, were or were not the authors of their Gospels?

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(6) With only two or three brief exceptions, there is no spoken dialogue in the film. The story is told entirely through songs and through Cash's narration. Comment on the overall effect of this presentation.

(7) In terms of narrative style and substance, which Gospel does the film most closely resemble? Mark, on account of its quick, paratactic tempo? Matthew or John, on account of the more active role of the narrator in shaping the story? Luke, on account of the use of songs by characters? One of the extracanonoical Gospels?

Jesus Christ Superstar (1973)

This rock opera focuses on the last week of Jesus' life, with special attention to his relationship with Judas and Mary Magdalene. As the music plays, a number of issues for discussion emerge:

(1) Few other films engage in the same degree of reflection on Jesus' self-consciousness. Note the famous refrain: "Jesus Christ, Superstar, do you think you're what they say you are?" The Gethsemane scene (DVD ch. 13) contains much material for comparison with the canonical Gospels as well as with the description of Jesus in Heb 5:7–9. In this text, is Jesus afraid? Would there be something culpable about fear in this situation? Does he willingly go to his death (cf. Heb 10:5–10)? Is his acquiescence to the divine will seen as a prerequisite for its efficacy as a sacrifice?

(2) The opening number sung by Judas (DVD ch. 1) concisely broaches several topics typically covered in a course on the Gospels: Did Jesus think of himself as divine or simply a man? Did his followers, both during and after his lifetime, accurately understand his teachings? Did the later church intentionally distort his teachings? Did Jesus intend to provoke the Jewish and Roman authorities in such a way that his death would result, or did he let things "get out of hand"? What was the essence of Jesus' teaching? Was it a message about God or about himself? Or both? To borrow Bultmann's terms, when did the proclaimer become the proclaimed?

(3) Mary Magdalene's signature number (DVD chs. 10, 19: "I don't know how to love him") makes for an easy transition to a discussion of the role of women in Jesus' ministry or the many imaginative theories about her relationship with Jesus. Such theories have received great attention with the popularity of Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*. Students may benefit from examining the two chief texts upon which this speculation rests, the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Mary*.

(4) What did Jesus teach about care for the poor? Readers frequently overlook Jesus' somewhat unexpected words on the topic (Matt 26:6–13). The film includes a scene (DVD ch. 4) in which Jesus and Judas debate the matter.

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(5) Jewish characters—both the leaders and the people—are almost relentlessly opposed to Jesus. Is it fair to level the charge of anti-Semitism?

(6) The prominent role of Judas may prompt discussion of the recently published *Gospel of Judas*.

For further discussion, see Forshey, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars*, 104–18; Stern, Jefford, and DeBona, *Savior on the Silver Screen*, 161–93; Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 35–41; and Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 117–30.

Jesus of Nazareth (1977)

After repeated broadcasts on television, Franco Zeffirelli's six-hour miniseries ranks as one of the most widely viewed Jesus films of all time. Because of its length, it contains more material for textual comparison than most other films.

(1) Anthony Burgess wrote a novel based on his early draft of the screenplay for the movie but containing much additional material (*Man of Nazareth*). Somewhat oddly, William Barclay also produced a novelization (*Jesus of Nazareth*) of the movie, which was in turn based on a screenplay, which was based on the Gospels! An extended student project might involve a source-critical or redaction analysis of these interdependent versions. Shorter assignments could be given for specific scenes.

(2) Peter is portrayed as something of a hothead (e.g., DVD chs. 35–38 of disc 1). What is the textual basis for this common depiction?

(3) Zeffirelli has said that one of his main reasons for making the film was to clear the Jews of the charge that they were responsible for killing Jesus (cf. Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 73). How has he attempted to do this, and how successful has he been? (Scenes to discuss on this score are plentiful, including DVD chs. 9–12, 16–20, and 26–31 of disc 2.)

(4) This film was made for television, which features frequent commercial breaks. Is the manner of storytelling and scene construction noticeably affected by this medium? Is this an apt analogy for the way scholars connect *Sitz im Leben* with the particular forms in which Gospel pericopes are transmitted?

(5) The Annunciation affords the opportunity to consider the phenomenology of religious experience (DVD ch. 5 of disc 1). No angel is seen or heard by the viewer or by Mary's mother, who "witnesses" it in process. How does Luke present this encounter?

(6) Does the child Jesus evince a strong messianic self-consciousness (cf. DVD chs. 23–26 of disc 1)? Is it possible to imagine this Jesus performing the deeds seen in, for example, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*?

(7) Much to the chagrin of Peter and others, Jesus dines with the sinners and tax collectors at Matthew's house (DVD chs. 38–39 of disc 1). The

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setting becomes the occasion for a moving recitation of the parable of the
Prodigal, where two very different groups listen simultaneously to his teach-
ing on divine mercy. This visual rendition raises important questions about
the audiences for Jesus' parables. Who were the original intended audiences?
Were they all aimed at a generic audience? How might different hearers draw
different lessons from them?

For discussion of *Jesus of Nazareth*, see Stern, Jefford, and DeBona, *Savior
on the Silver Screen*, 197–229; Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 135–45; and For-
shey, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars*, 164–71.

Intolerance (1916)

Widely hailed as one of the masterpieces of the silent era, this D. W.
Griffith epic mostly confounded audiences as it shifted back and forth
between four parallel story lines—one set in the modern age, focusing on
social reformers; one in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus; one in ancient Baby-
lon; and one in 1572 Paris, during the persecution of the Huguenots. Each
story, according to the opening credits, "shows how hatred and intolerance
… have battled against love and charity." Its length may make it difficult to
incorporate into some courses, but the biblical story is by far the shortest of
the four and may foster discussion along the following lines:

(1) Viewers here experience the story of Jesus juxtaposed alongside
three other narratives. Many modern and ancient readers of, for example,
Mark's Gospel likewise experience the story of Jesus alongside three other
narratives, as well as the rest of the Bible's table of contents. In what ways
does this juxtaposition resemble the canonical context for much reading of
the Bible?

(2) Jesus is introduced as "the greatest enemy of intolerance" before the
wedding at Cana (DVD ch. 11; the scene also features the Pharisees as "med-
dlers" who fault Jesus for eating with sinners). Ask students to write on this
topic: Would "The central idea of _____'s Gospel is Jesus' role as an enemy of
intolerance" make a good thesis statement for a short essay? If so, how would
you go about supporting it? If not, how would you undermine it?

(3) The Bible consists of words and no actual images. A silent film con-
sists almost entirely of images, with very few words. To provoke creative
reflection about the nature of canon, ask students to speculate about the dif-
ferences that one would see if Christianity and Judaism had adopted visual
(as opposed to written) canons.

(4) Film was a new genre when *Intolerance* appeared. Similarities to other
genres notwithstanding, the Gospels likewise constituted a new genre. The
movie seems largely unremarkable to viewers now, but this is in part because
it was so successful in introducing new techniques and devices that we now

take them for granted. Which elements of the Gospels have become type-scenes that influence subsequent literature in a similar manner?

For background and discussion of the film, see Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 33–43.

Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo (*The Gospel according to St. Matthew*) (1966)

A Marxist and atheist, director Pier Paolo Pasolini was murdered in 1975 but not before leaving behind this masterpiece. His intent was to remythologize the Gospel, to bring to it a new beauty: "I, a nonbeliever, was telling the story through the eyes of a believer." Still, it is dated and quite slow-moving for modern audiences used to color and fast edits, who may have little patience for the film's black and white and English-language dubbing.

Since this movie is a cinematic rendition of a single Gospel, it makes a nice foil for movies such as *The Greatest Story Ever Told* that rely on harmonizing techniques to tell a story. No dialogue is added. No scene is invented. One way to present this to students is to emphasize that by focusing on a single Gospel, Pasolini is doing something similar to what contemporary biblical scholars are doing when they practice redaction criticism. But one can also practice redaction criticism on the movie's "text." Pasolini does omit some scenes, and he does reorder the sequence of events in the Gospel. Thus it is useful to ask students to analyze as systematically and thoughtfully as possible how Pasolini "redacts" the Gospel. Since this requires time, attention, and multiple viewings, this sort of work is best done as a written assignment, with the movie made available on reserve. To reduce the scope of the task, one might take only one portion of this film—the infancy narrative or the Sermon on the Mount—and look at how Pasolini has worked with the biblical text to reinterpret it. A few sets of questions might sharpen classroom discussion:

(1) Why the de-emphasis on the crucifixion, compared to what we see in other films? Why do you think Pasolini chose anachronistic elements to retell the Gospel, such as medieval hats, ancient ruins, and a soundtrack that features African drumming or African American spirituals? Why does he exclude so much sayings material? Apart from questions of intent, what is the resultant effect of these decisions?

(2) A study of Pasolini's Christology would also be interesting here since it focuses only on one Gospel. Matthew itself presents, many have argued, a thoroughly Jewish Jesus, who comes as a fulfillment, not a replacement, of the law. Do students see evidence for Jesus' Jewishness here? And what sort of Jesus is this, in terms of his personality or nature?

(3) Pasolini deliberately refrained from consulting religious experts or scholars when making his film, partly because he wished to "remytholo-

gize" the story rather than to historicize it. He also meant to draw parallels between Jesus and the Jewish authorities and the political and religious conflicts in twentieth-century Italy. And yet one consequence of this is that the film includes anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish material from the Gospel often left aside in contemporary passion plays. For instance, the woes against the Pharisees in Matt 23 are here presented in their entirety. Do students find the inclusion of these elements anti-Semitic?

(4) Pasolini was a Marxist who stated explicitly in interviews that his version of the Jesus story was a Marxist film. Where, if at all, is this apparent? Does he draw this out of the biblical material? Does he inject it where it is not present? Is it hard to tell because of the text's silences or ambiguities?

For further discussion, see Fraser, *Images of the Passion*, 67–78; Stern, Jefford, and DeBona, *Savior on the Silver Screen*, 95–125; Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 94–106; Walsh, *Reading the Gospels in the Dark*, 95–120; and Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 103–15.

Godspell (1973)

This screen version of the successful off-Broadway production bills itself as "a musical based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew." Here Jesus comes to life as a hippie clown who wanders New York City with a merry band of disciples reenacting parables from the Gospels. Points for discussion include the following:

(1) Evaluate the film as a retelling of Matthew's Gospel. Does it really "get" Matthew, despite leaving out a number of major Matthean texts (e.g., birth and infancy narratives, the giving of the "keys of the kingdom" to Peter, the Great Commission)? What of significance does it miss? Answers to this question help to clarify what is central to Matthew's version of the story and what is peripheral.

(2) Comment on the characterization of John the Baptist. (He is decidedly more jovial than the biblical Baptist.) Without any signal of a change of character, the same actor performs the deeds of Judas. What is the effect of this merging of the two roles? Is there a point in the film where the transition from John to Judas can be detected? When Jesus tells Judas, "Do what you must do" (DVD ch. 14), he appears to do so approvingly—a striking interpretive move in light of the recently published *Gospel of Judas*.

(3) The company's reenactments of various parables take up much of the script: the hard master (Matt 25:14–30) at DVD ch. 4; the sheep and the goats (25:31–46) at DVD ch. 5; and the sower (13:3–9) at DVD ch. 8. Parables from Luke's Gospel also appear: the Good Samaritan (10:30–37) and Lazarus and the rich man (16:19–31) at DVD ch. 6; and the Prodigal (15:11–32) at DVD ch. 9. Why are Lukan parables included in a musical based on Mat-

thew? What is the effect of seeing the parables acted out instead of hearing or reading them? Does it alter their meaning when someone other than Jesus is narrating them?

(4) One critic has observed that *Jesus Christ Superstar* stresses the humanity of Jesus while *Godspell* stresses his divinity. Is this an accurate assessment?

(5) To what extent, if any, does the film's presentation of Jesus as a clown communicate Paul's message about the "foolishness" of the gospel in 1 Cor 1:18–25?

(6) Several camera shots focus on the World Trade Center. For many viewing the film after September 11, 2001, these shots evoke strong memories. Is this in any way an apt parallel to the experience of those reading the Gospels after the Roman destruction of the temple in Jerusalem? Many references to the temple in the Gospels are incidental, while other episodes more explicitly remind the reader of its demise.

(7) Ask students to summarize the plot. When they are limited to summarizing purely on the basis of what is said or shown in the film, they realize that it essentially has no plot of which to speak. Jesus comes; Jesus teaches; Jesus dies—that, in a nutshell, is the whole story. Viewers must import the necessary background and transitions to produce a coherent narrative. To some degree, the viewer is like the audiences of the Gospels who already know the story before they hear it. There are no miracles and no resurrection. Instead of a retelling of Matthew, then, perhaps the film is better compared to Q or the *Gospel of Thomas*. Jesus is a teacher and little else. What might a community look like if *Godspell* were its only "Gospel"? (Note the partial parallel to Q and *Thomas*: Is it conceivable that any real community would have read one of these documents and nothing else? Would these documents or the film represent the sum total—no more, no less—of any group's theological convictions?)

For discussion of *Godspell*, see Walsh, *Reading the Gospels in the Dark*, 69–93; Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 42–47; and Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 117–30.

The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965)

Max von Sydow stars as Jesus in this star-studded film shot in the American southwest. As the story proceeds at a snail's pace, a number of issues for discussion emerge:

(1) The film begins with a shot of the interior of a church that fades into a shot of the countryside, and it ends inside a church as well. Ask students to comment on this as a way of framing the story. While no part of the story takes place within a church, there is something fitting about it in light of the church's role in remembering, transmitting, and shaping the Gospel accounts

as we now have them. Were it not for the church, how likely is it that we would know of Jesus today? (One clue: A few sentences in Josephus are the only other clear references to Jesus to survive from the first century.) In connection with this ecclesiastical setting, compare also the Last Supper (DVD ch. 25), which has almost the feel of a mass, and the chanting of Ps 23 (DVD ch. 23).

(2) The Sermon on the Mount is divided and dispersed to various parts of the story (the largest portions are in DVD chs. 8 and 17). How does it condition the audience's reception when it does not take place on a mountain? Similarly, when the rejection at Nazareth of Luke 4 does not occur in a synagogue, does it significantly affect the function of the scene (DVD ch. 18)?

(3) Very few miracles are depicted here. The best-known miracles are reported by a minor character in one fell swoop (DVD ch. 17). Perhaps this is due to the director's worries about the difficulties of presenting them in a plausible manner. What difference would it have made if the Evangelists had simply had a character report the miracles (cf. John 20:30–31)? Are they ever described in minute detail?

(4) The raising of Lazarus (DVD ch. 21) occurs to great fanfare. (An arrangement of Handel's Hallelujah chorus plays in the background.) Although the scene is more than a little melodramatic, this staging is not entirely inappropriate as a way of capturing the climactic tone of John 11, at the end of the Johannine "Book of Signs."

(5) In stark contrast to many other Jesus movies, the scenes dealing with the trial and crucifixion (DVD chs. 28–30) are almost entirely devoid of blood and violence. And after three hours of screen narrative, furthermore, the actual crucifixion is brief—less than four minutes elapse from the raising of Jesus on the cross to the point at which he gives up the spirit. Compared to other films, are these aspects more or less faithful to the way the passion is depicted in the Gospels? What is the effect of a less protracted, less violent death?

(6) On the third day, Mary Magdalene literally wakes up and remembers Jesus' prediction of his resurrection—before she finds the tomb empty (DVD ch. 32)! The scene works well as an example of how the texts do *not* describe the first Easter as well as how the earliest christological reflection did *not* take place.

For further background and analysis, see Babington and Evans, *Biblical Epics*, 139–48; Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 24–32; Stern, Jefford, and DeBona, *Savior on the Silver Screen*, 129–60; Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 87–100; Walsh, *Reading the Gospels in the Dark*, 147–71; and Forshey, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars,* 94–104.

Jesus (1979)

This film is widely believed to be the most-watched movie of all time. Quite apart from any artistic quality, for this reason alone it is of special cultural significance. Now used as part of Campus Crusade for Christ's "Jesus Film Project," this movie has been translated into nearly one thousand languages, and a conservative estimate is that it has been viewed over four billion times. One advantage for use with students is that it can be viewed for free online (www.jesusfilm.org). Almost every word in the script is taken from Luke's Gospel, which affords pedagogical opportunities not available with other movies.

(1) The official website states that the non-Lukan material added to the film amounts to three verses—John 3:16; Rev 3:20; Matt 28:19. Although evangelism is a primary aim of the film rather than fidelity to Luke per se, is there anything about these additions that is particularly consonant with or contrary to the spirit of Luke's Gospel? Likewise, does the short shrift received by the birth and infancy narratives of Luke 1–2 detract from the story in a significant way? (The film acknowledges up front that it deals with "the public life of Jesus.")

(2) This film includes a number of scenes normally absent from other Jesus films (e.g., the stilling of the storm, the transfiguration, the Gadarene swine, the meeting with Zacchaeus, Jesus constantly at prayer). Do such scenes have common traits that make them ill suited to the film genre? Do these scenes display peculiarly Lukan concerns?

(3) Due to its use as an evangelistic tool in remote, non-Western areas, a large portion of the audiences for this film consist of those who are barely, if at all, familiar with the basic story. How might this affect their response to the film? Is this similar to or different from the audiences for the written Gospels in antiquity? (Close reading of Luke 1:1–4 might accompany discussion of these questions.)

(4) Because the crucifixion scene is considered too graphic for younger viewers, a children's version has been produced, which may also be viewed online. It is half the length of the original. An exercise in redaction criticism might have students assess the overall effect of the changes made in this shorter version.

For further discussion, see Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 147–57.

The Gospel of John (2003)

Every word in the script for this film is taken verbatim from the Good News translation of the Fourth Gospel, which affords pedagogical opportunities not available with other movies:

(1) If students do not notice that John's Jesus is markedly more talkative than in the other Gospels, a showing of the quite lengthy Farewell Discourse of John 14–17 (DVD chs. 23–27) should help them see the difference. The director's commentary recounts the efforts to exploit even the tiniest opening in the text to shift the physical setting as Jesus talks without interruption. The flashbacks during this discourse effectively highlight the themes that recur in the narrative.

(2) After showing the scene with the woman caught in adultery (7:53–8:11; DVD ch. 11), have students write a memo to the director. Should it be included? This exercise allows for discussion of the text-critical, literary, and theological questions that arise in connection with this disputed pericope.

(3) A number of female students have commented that Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman has a flirtatious feel (DVD ch. 5). Does this mirror the way in which this text may have been read by the intended audience? This scene provides a starting point for discussing female characters in the Gospels, Jesus' views on women, social customs in first-century Palestine, or the theological assumptions behind various responses to a "sexual" Jesus in this text and elsewhere.

(4) Is the purpose of the Fourth Gospel the same as the purpose of this film? In John 20:30–31, the author states that he is writing "so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah" (NRSV). Some textual variants give a slightly different meaning on the basis of the verb tense: "These are written so that you may continue to believe." So which is it? Does the author intend to persuade the unbeliever? Or is the purpose to strengthen the faith of those already in the fold? Does the Gospel give any indication of which construal is the more likely? How would the responses of believing and unbelieving viewers of the film differ?

The Last Temptation of Christ (1988)

Martin Scorsese's controversial movie begins with scrolling text from Nikos Kazantzakis's novel of the same name on the "incessant, merciless battle between spirit and flesh." And then follows a disclaimer: "This film is not based upon the Gospels but upon this fictional exploration of this eternal spiritual conflict." *The Last Temptation of Christ* (*LTC*) is in some ways the most thoughtful, moving, troubling, and annoying movie about Christ ever made. At its release, *LTC* was boycotted by several Christian groups. If only to provide the current generation of university students with a comparison to the controversy engendered by Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* or the recently published *Gospel of Judas*, a showing of this film can be useful. *LTC*'s depiction of a sympathetic Judas (Harvey Keitel) who has "the hardest job" (i.e., betraying his friend) and a protracted and gory crucifixion are likely to go

over somewhat differently than they might have twenty years ago when the film first came out.

There is no doubt that the film was meant, in part, to shock. We see Jesus (Willem Dafoe), weak, whiny, and tormented by inner voices, in love with Magdalene the prostitute. He is shiftless and neurotic, angry at God, and comes to understand his destiny only at the film's final moment. It might be interesting to discuss with students what precisely Jesus' "last temptation" was, according to this film. Its post-Nicene theology of Christ as fully human and fully divine is not something that always comes across in the New Testament Gospels, and thus students who are more biblically oriented may have more trouble cultivating sympathy with the theological meditation here. At the same time, Jesus being fully human means that he experienced the full range of what it means to be human (cf. Heb 2:14; 4:15), and *LTC* is virtually the only film to take this low Christology seriously in a way that never stoops to satire.

Despite not being based on the Gospels, the film does in fact take a variety of scenes from the Gospels:

(1) Jesus rescues a woman taken in adultery (here, identified as Mary Magdalene) (DVD ch. 8)
(2) The Sermon on the Mount (DVD ch. 8)
(3) Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (DVD ch. 10)
(4) Jesus is tested in the wilderness (note that the serpent has a woman's voice—in fact, it is the Magdalene) (DVD ch. 11–12)
(5) Jesus conducts various exorcisms and miracles (DVD ch. 13)
(6) The wedding at Cana (DVD ch. 13)
(7) Jesus is rejected by his hometown (DVD ch. 14)
(8) The raising of Lazarus (DVD ch. 15)
(9) The cleansing of the temple (DVD ch. 16)

Much of what we see here is a sort of Gospel harmony (e.g., all of Jesus' last words from all four canonical Gospels are used at the end), with additional creative interpretation (such as Paul killing Lazarus postresurrection). But it would be worthwhile to have students compare any or all of these scenes with what they read in the New Testament.

The scene of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus discovers something of his true calling might be good to compare with Matthew's text—not in terms of accuracy, but how successfully it casts Jesus as a sort of antirhetor. The scene of Jesus and Paul meeting—wholly fictional, of course—is also a fine way to broach a persistent issue: Who is the true founder of Christianity? Paul (Harry Dean Stanton), amusingly, gets the last word (DVD ch. 27).

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For further discussion, see Stern, Jefford, and DeBona, *Savior on the Silver Screen*, 265–95; Babington and Evans, *Biblical Epics*, 149–68; Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 51–71; and Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 161–74.

The King of Kings (1927)

In 1927, it was a relatively new discovery that motion pictures could be pressed into the service of Christ. Cecil B. DeMille took this on as his personal mission, choosing to open the film with a clear message to the audience: "This is the story of Jesus of Nazareth. He Himself commanded that His message be carried to the ends of the earth. May this portrayal play a reverent part of that great command." As a missionary tool, *King of Kings* had remarkable success. DeMille bragged that his movie had brought more people to Christ than had any other effort apart from the Bible itself. Indeed, the visual image of a long-haired, bearded, blue-eyed Jesus so deeply entrenched in the minds of so many people owes much to *The King of Kings*.

DeMille worked with one of the biggest budgets in history at the time and with the fanciest technology of the day. The movie is in black and white, but the final scenes of the resurrection are in Technicolor. Although the narrative does not closely follow the Gospels or the life of Christ, most "dialogue" is really quotations of chapter and verse. The cinematographer researched, and supposedly replicated, over three hundred paintings of Jesus as tableaux. The original musical score draws on a number of well-known hymns, some of which fit with the narrative context in not-so-obvious ways.

For those who enjoy working in class with Gospel harmonies, showing the crucifixion scenes alongside the canonical passion narratives makes for fruitful work. This one is shot from afar, without tight close-ups. Students might exegete the scenes, and pick out which scenes correspond to which Gospels. They might speculate why, for instance, DeMille's Jesus does not say "My God, why have you forsaken me?" They might note that certain scenes are titled with chapter and verse, other scenes are untitled and yet correspond to one or the other of the Gospels, and sometimes an event takes place in all four Gospels and yet its title corresponds to only one of the Gospels. And they are sure to be amused by the apocalyptic atmosphere of the crucifixion.

The Passion of the Christ (2004)

Is it historical? Is it faithful to the Gospels? Is it anti-Semitic? These three questions dominated public and private discussions of Mel Gibson's film at its release. Although many students might be inclined to disagree with the assessment, it is clear that the film is historically inaccurate and lacks fidelity to the Gospel accounts in several areas. One simple exercise in the classroom

is to air the film, but to stop it at various points and ask for comments or for students to "match" it with biblical text. This exercise has, however, limited pedagogical value after a while. That Gibson had taken artistic liberties with Gospel materials is not a point that needs to be hammered home eight or ten or twelve times. But *where* Gibson got his wild riffs on Gospel narrative is a more interesting question. In classes with substantial time to devote to study of the Gospels, it would be good to assign Anne Catherine Emmerich's *The Dolorous Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* alongside their Gospel reading and their viewing of this movie. The Emmerich work answers many questions about some of the more striking elements of the film—particularly its violent imagery and its emphasis on corporeal suffering and torture.

Students are frequently most fascinated by Gibson himself—what sort of a Christian he is, what sort of Roman Catholicism he espouses. Understanding Gibson's particular brand of Catholicism helps them to understand—and to be open to—the film's distinctive emphases. It is not just the influence of Emmerich on this film. It is the role Gibson assigns to the Jews in Jesus' death, the redemptive value of suffering, and the prominent visibility of women, particularly Jesus' mother Mary.

To exclude any mention of this film's impact on contemporary Christians in favor of a strict exercise comparing biblical text to movie keeps the reader from working through one of the most interesting issues surrounding the movie: its reception, particularly in the United States. It did not really provoke a *Kulturkampf* between Catholics and Protestants, although much of the media coverage skewed it that way. Divisions and differences of opinion existed within each denomination. Catholics debated the film's historical accuracy (especially the Pope's alleged endorsement of it, quickly retracted or denied by the Vatican), but also the ethics of constructing contemporary passion plays given their potential for incendiary anti-Semitism. Protestants had their own set of disputes. Some fundamentalist denominations decried the film's "idolatry" by permitting a human actor to play Jesus, or opposed its Mariolatry as offensive.

Instructors wanting to devote a portion of a syllabus to this film are blessed with several excellent resources (e.g., the online essays from the February 2004 issue of the *Journal of Religion and Film* [www.unomaha. edu/jrf/2004Symposium/Symposium.htm] and Kathleen Corley and Robert Webb's collection of essays by prominent scholars, *Jesus and Mel Gibson's* The Passion of the Christ: *The Film, the Gospels and the Claims of History*).

Jesus of Montreal (1989)

Depressed by the flagging popularity of a passion play that his diocese has enacted each year, a priest in Montreal sets out to update it for a modern

audience. He brings in a cast of out-of-work actors headed by one Daniel Coulombe, who slowly begin to inhabit—and be profoundly changed by—the roles that they play. Their audiences, too, are transformed by their experience of viewing the narrative—to the extent that the Catholic diocese begins to find their priests inadvertently playing modern-day Pharisees and Sadducees to the actors' Jesus/Coulombe and his disciples.

Jesus of Montreal was, at its release, a controversial film. Denys Arcand's vision of Jesus (Lothaire Bluteau) as a revolutionary, a countercultural hero of the people, and a challenger of the hypocrisy he sees around him is, one could argue, biblically defensible. This construction of Jesus the revolutionary would be well supported in the classroom by secondary studies (e.g., Crossan, Freyne, Horsley) and passages from the canonical Gospels that appear to have Jesus challenging authorities. The "temple tantrum" pericopes have a nice parallel in the film as Coulombe accompanies a female friend who is auditioning for a beer commercial but is treated objectionably by the producers. Disgusted, Coulombe overturns the set and chases the businessmen from the studio (DVD chs. 18). As Daniel comes to inhabit his role more and more deeply, so too are his actor-friends caught up, transformed, and brought together into a tightly knit group of disciples who see signs of hypocrisy (particularly religious hypocrisy) everywhere.

An interesting element of *Jesus of Montreal* is that it effectively combines stagings of the passion play (the "play within a play" conceit), modern transformations of the actors in contemporary Montreal, and a running commentary during the passion play by the characters that reflects academic perspectives on Jesus' life. Coulombe does his research, even meeting up in a parking garage with members of a theology faculty who secretly pass him subversive academic articles. His new script that results from this research reads more like an academic work than a passion play (DVD ch. 10). The narrator begins "the story of the Jewish prophet Yeshu Ben Panthera" with an explanation that ancient historians like Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, and Josephus mention him only in passing and that "what we know was pieced together by his disciples a century later. Disciples lie; they embellish." While some of the details may be off, even here one may find fodder for discussion: Which disciples lied? How do we know? In what sense do they lie? Is there a difference between lying and embellishing?

And yet, for all this, *Jesus of Montreal* comes across as deeply religious in a way. It is a moving film to watch, and would work well in New Testament classes, viewed in its entirety. Particularly intriguing scenes are the parallels to the temptations of Jesus and the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13 (DVD chs. 23, 27).

For further discussion, see Fraser, *Images of the Passion*, 98–106; Stern, Jefford, and DeBona, *Savior on the Silver Screen*, 299–333; Baugh, *Imaging the Divine*, 113–29; and Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies*, 177–88.

Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979)

A send-up of biblical "Life of Jesus" epics, this film was released in 1979 amidst a furor in the U.S. and the U.K. It is difficult to imagine that contemporary American students who had somehow never seen it would be too terribly offended by it, although they might find a number of scenes—particularly the chorus line "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" at the movie's conclusion—in poor taste.

Students love *Life of Brian* and would benefit from a screening of the entire film. However, a variety of scenes work well shown in class in isolation. The brief but hilarious nativity (DVD ch. 1) can be shown along with other filmic examples of harmonized scenes. Another scene that works well in class is a brief one in which members of the People's Front of Judea gather clandestinely to discuss their grievances against Rome (DVD ch. 10: "What have the Romans ever done for us?"). This scene works nicely when laying out the political situation of first-century Judea and the effect of the Pax Romana on the Jewish population of Jerusalem. Students see how it is that the Romans can bring a civilizing force for the "good" which nevertheless breeds substantial disaffection among the indigenous population. *Life of Brian* has a number of other minor details in background scenes that get things Roman just right, from its spoof of gladiatorial games, Roman food, a background scene of the desecration of the temple with the Emperor's statue being carried in, one shot of Jerusalem's main street where various prophets on soapboxes spin out various addled but surprisingly accurate prophecies, and other arcane references to delight the *cognoscenti*. The Monty Python crew know their Roman history, which is what makes the satire so brilliant.

Another scene that works well in the classroom is a brief one in which Jesus does appear, preaching the Sermon on the Mount (DVD ch. 3). Since he is relatively far away, the gathered crowd cannot fully hear him, and the ensuing dialogue is full of absurd misunderstandings and misinterpretations ("Blessed are the *cheese*makers?" "Aha, what's so special about the cheesemakers?" "Well, obviously it's not meant to be taken literally; it refers to any manufacturers of dairy products")—a nice example of how oral traditions might have shifted Jesus' original sayings over time (and even *at* the time, as different disciples might have heard differently). Finally, the phenomenon of people blindly following a religious authority, as people seek to follow Brian and beg for signs, can resonate with many students as an example of the inherent danger in many religions.

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Above all, *Life of Brian* is clever and learned—deceptively so. One example of such learned humor is a scene in which Brian asserts his Jewishness to his mother (DVD ch. 6). His mother then reveals that his father was actually a Roman soldier. "Did he rape you?" asks Brian, horrified. "At first, yes…" replies his mother. Everyone laughs at this, because the answer is so transgressive. Rape is not at all funny, of course, but here we can laugh at it anyway, because the answer is so unexpected. And since Brian is clearly meant to "be" Jesus, the laughter reflects, in part, some people's discomfort at the story of Jesus' birth from a virgin. But what is funnier, from an academic perspective, is Brian's mother's confession that echoes ancient Jewish slanders of Jesus as the illegitimate son of one Pandera or Panthera (see, e.g., the *Toledoth Yeshu*). Some controversies have been around for a long time.

For further discussion, see Stern, Jefford, and DeBona, *Savior on the Silver Screen*, 233–63.

The Robe (1953)

Like the other parabiblical epics from the 1950s (*Barabbas*, *Ben-Hur*), *The Robe* attempts to capture the decadent glory that was Rome during the time of Tiberius and Caligula. When the tribune Marcellus Gallio (Richard Burton) is dispatched to Jerusalem, he participates with other Roman soldiers in casting lots for Jesus' robe at the crucifixion. After Marcellus wins the robe, his guilt over his complicity in killing the Son of God drives him insane. Marcellus's slave Demetrius (Victor Mature), by contrast, is deeply inspired by his brief encounters with Jesus. Thus *The Robe* is a classic conversion narrative: really, a double conversion narrative—Marcellus's and Demetrius's. Although some students may still enjoy *The Robe*, at just over two hours it is perhaps too long and slow for the current generation. *The Robe* is based on the 1942 historical novel of the same name by the Lutheran minister Lloyd C. Douglas, who specialized in Christian inspirational literature. It was so popular upon its release that it threatened to unseat *Gone With the Wind* as box-office favorite. And yet, predictably, the movie comes across as a cultural relic of a bygone era that makes it difficult to use in the contemporary classroom.

Jesus appears only peripherally in *The Robe*, and yet his influence is undisputed and his status as the Messiah taken for granted—not only by the vast crowds around him, but quite obviously by the assumed audience of the movie. There is no sense that Jesus and those around him were Jewish—despite all the talk of him being the Messiah, it is taken for granted that an audience understands this through an exclusively Christian hermeneutic. One scene to show in the classroom is Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem; it looks like a late nineteenth-century American Romantic landscape painting—lots of palms and people at a distance—but with a soundtrack of

soaring choirs. One might read along with this Zech 9:9–10 and accounts of Jesus' entry into the city (Mark 11:1–11; Matt 21:1–11; Luke 19:28–44; John 12:12–19). Why does this director choose to include the elements he does? And what sort of a sense of Rome, of Judaism, and of the relations between the two of them do we get from this movie?

The Robe's crucifixion scene is a good one to play in conjunction with other more gruesome cinematic depictions (e.g., *The Passion of the Christ*). Students might be asked how this scene relates to the Gospel depictions. More interesting, however, is to note the lack of gore and what the director refuses to show us; it is a crucifixion scene that lacks a Jesus, although while the camera is behind and below him he does speak from the cross. Fifty years makes a huge difference in how filmmakers choose to depict this scene. Why the renewed emphasis on Jesus' suffering in twenty-first-century American Christianity? Put differently, why are modern cinematic accounts of the passion so much gorier? And why are the "follow up" scenes so much less dramatic than in the 1950s?

Ben-Hur (1959)

In the 1950s, a number of movies developed parabiblical stories set in the Roman Empire (e.g., *Quo Vadis*). *Ben-Hur* is one such film that takes the term "epic" seriously—which means it is *very* long. It is also dated enough that students may find it more of a relic of the past than something honestly gripping. If you inflict all 214 minutes on them, they will hate you. Nevertheless, *Ben-Hur* has its uses in the classroom.

Despite its subtitle ("A Tale of the Christ"), *Ben-Hur* is really more about Jewish resistance to Rome than about the story of Christianity and may thus help to introduce the turbulent political context of the first century. When Messala arrives in Jerusalem as the new Roman tribune, he and his childhood friend Prince Judah Ben-Hur (Charlton Heston) begin a bitter enmity over political allegiances. Ben-Hur must lead his people; Messala demands their submission to Rome. *Ben-Hur*'s plot, therefore, is not unlike Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*: A hero highly placed in Rome breaks with his friends on matters of principle, suffers by being transformed into a slave and fighter, and ends up in a position of greater power against his powerful opponent.

Students might be invited to think about the Jewishness of Judah Ben-Hur. What does it accomplish for the plot? Apart from pawing at a mezuzah on the door of his old palace when he returns after many years, it is difficult to see any markers of the hero's Jewishness at all. He never mentions the temple or Torah, and apparently never keeps the Sabbath nor keeps kosher as he fraternizes with his Roman friends. The only time that he does pray, imploring God to help him, Jesus himself steps in to save him (DVD ch.

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18 of disc 1). On the other hand, there is no question that we have in *Ben-Hur* a more positive vision of first-century Judaism than that which we find in many Christian movies about Jesus. How much this had to do with Hollywood ethics at the time and how much was an attempt at historical verisimilitude (*Ben-Hur* gets Judaism as a *political* entity more or less correct) is a question that merits consideration. Finally, Judah is very much of a Joseph figure, like Maximus of *Gladiator*, and so raising those parallels in class can make for a fruitful discussion. (On this and other gladiator movies, see Babington and Evans, *Biblical Epics*, 177–205.)

Barabbas (1962)

Based on a novel by Nobel laureate Pär Lagerkvist, *Barabbas* tells the story of the criminal set free while Jesus was crucified. It is a classic conversion narrative—Barabbas (Anthony Quinn) suffers a crisis of conscience when he discerns the significance of Jesus having, quite literally, died in his stead. Relentlessly downbeat, *Barabbas*'s view of Rome is cynical enough that it occasionally resembles a not-very-scary biblical horror film.

Barabbas's conversion comes as one dramatic moment framed by a series of vignettes in the post-Jesus aftermath of Jerusalem. Obsessed with whether Jesus will really rise from the dead, Barabbas accuses the disciples of having stolen the body (cf. Matt 28:11–15). To find out more about what happened to Jesus, he meets with a very creepy Lazarus. (These scenes may function as entry points for discussion of the ways in which the claims of the early Christians would have been understood by outsiders.) The woman whom Barabbas loves is a Christian who is stoned to death for her faith. Barabbas is next sentenced to hard labor in the sulphur mines, where he endures a hellish existence until he meets another Christian who leads him to convert. The movie ends on an ironic note: Barabbas, freed by Nero after his successes as a gladiator, is one of the Christians later crucified under Nero in ostensible punishment for the Great Fire of 64 c.e.

Barabbas yields a 1960s-style collection of moral tales of human ignorance and error, not likely to be appreciated by contemporary students. In terms of utility for the classroom, the gladiatorial scenes can nonetheless supplement a lecture on martyrdom and the social context of early Christian Rome. More remarkable is the adaptation of the passion narratives. Cinematographer Dino Di Laurentiis filmed the crucifixion scenes during a solar eclipse, yielding a remarkable film sequence that captures an unparalleled sense of eerie foreboding. This is mandatory viewing for a "Celluloid Jesus" course or for anyone who might ask New Testament students to exegete a filmic crucifixion.

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Nonbiblical Narrative in Film

Nicola Denzey and Patrick Gray

The films discussed in this chapter, most of which deal with multiple texts and topics, are organized alphabetically rather than canonically. The indices may be consulted to find film entries with classroom strategies related to particular texts. All secondary literature cited here is included in the preceding bibliography (pp. 92–96).

Alexander (2004)

Proving that even bad art can have pedagogical value, a scene from this Oliver Stone film about Alexander the Great facilitates discussion of critical sociocultural developments that profoundly affected Judaism and Christianity in antiquity. The two-minute scene (DVD ch. 19) depicts the party after Alexander's wedding to the Bactrian princess Roxanne. Alexander (Colin Farrell) delivers a speech in which he mentions the main elements of the Hellenistic ideal whereby all in his empire would be "citizens of the world." Among these are (1) his promotion of intermarriage between his Macedonian soldiers and the women of the local peoples they have met along the way, and (2) the propagation of Greek education (*paideia*) for the offspring of such unions. Why would these practices prove to be significant? Who will they benefit? What will be some of the tangible results? Whether or not the details of the costuming are accurate, the scene visually displays the cultural mixing that is a hallmark of the age. Alexander's distinctive appearance, moreover, is a reminder that the process of Hellenization was not simply a matter of a Greco-Macedonian steamroller imposing its will on every culture it encountered between the Mediterranean and the Indian subcontinent. Greece, too, was influenced by these sustained encounters.

Discussion or in-class writing may focus on the various responses to Hellenization. How might the Greeks and Macedonians view this rapprochement with the "barbarians"? (The scene shows palpable resentment among the Macedonians.) How might the Persians see matters? In conjunction with a general survey of Second Temple Judaism or 1 Maccabees in particular, the

question may be posed in this way: Imagine that you are a Jew present for Alexander's speech. Describe your reaction. Would it resemble that of the jubilant Persians in the movie? Why or why not? How would Ezra, the Deuteronomistic Historian, or the author of Ruth respond? Student responses will likely include the range of options seen in 1 Macc 1–4—enthusiastic embrace, staunch resistance, refusal to engage—thus the exercise helps students to appreciate the fact of Jewish ideological diversity in this formative period.

Apocalypse Now (1979)

Hollywood at the end of the twentieth century produced a spate of cinematic variations on apocalyptic themes, but only this film actually shares part of its title with the book of Revelation. Francis Ford Coppola's critically acclaimed film, based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, follows Army Intelligence agent Benjamin Willard (Martin Sheen) upriver through Vietnam to the jungles of Cambodia, where he is to "terminate" Walter Kurtz (Marlin Brando), a renegade officer with a private army who worship him as a god. Because the film is still familiar to students, it can be used to generate discussion of apocalyptic literature as well as manifestations of apocalyptic sensibilities in contemporary culture.

Why was this title chosen for the film? While some have suggested that it is a turn on the Vietnam-era slogan "Peace Now," explanations from the film's producers are hard to find. Did Coppola expect his audience to connect the events of the film to its biblical namesake? Here it may be helpful to provide students with the well-known "*Semeia* 14" definition of apocalypse as "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world" (Collins, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, 9). Is anything particularly "apocalyptic" about the story or its screen presentation? Did the Vietnam War witness a cosmic conflict between good and evil? Is the bombing of Kurtz's camp at the end of the film (DVD ch. 19) analogous to the final battle in Rev 16? Is there a sense of violent judgment such as one finds in Rev 14, where the avenging Christ is seen "trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored"? Does the film reveal anything to the viewer about the past (i.e., the period during the war, prior to the film's release)? about the "present" (i.e., the period just after the war's end in which the film was produced)? about the "future"? (Note how these three periods are easy to confuse.) Does the film equate apocalyptic with eschatology (cf. the Jim Morrison lyric, "This is the end," on the soundtrack as Willard kills Kurtz)? What is the apparent purpose of the film?

On the prevalence of apocalypticism in recent cinema, see the April 2000 edition of the *Journal of Religion and Film* (Online: www.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol4n1.htm).

The Apostle (1997)

Robert Duvall wrote and stars in this film that follows Sonny Dewey, a Pentecostal preacher with a magnetic, if flawed, personality. After he loses his Texas church, in a fit of rage he assaults the youth minister with whom his wife is having an affair and then leaves town to avoid arrest. He arrives in a small Louisiana town, rapidly revives an old church, and enjoys a devoted following as "the Apostle E. F." before the police catch up with him. In addition to providing an authentic sense of the atmosphere in which millions of believers encounter the biblical text, this film affords a number of points on which to engage students:

(1) The Apostle E. F.'s zeal, volatility, and indefatigable sense of mission have drawn comparisons to the Apostle Paul. What qualities and experiences do these two figures share? (Both have sometimes rocky relationships with their followers and colleagues; both have had trouble with the law; both identify themselves as apostles; et al.) This task facilitates a close reading of the letters and Acts, a text with clear sympathies for the protagonist that, like the movie, nonetheless displays some of his less-than-admirable traits.

(2) What is an apostle? On the basis of lexical and textual evidence, is it possible to construct a basic job description? Does the Apostle E. F. qualify? This can function as an exercise in using a concordance and other reference tools.

(3) What is baptism? How was it practiced in the first century and what was its purpose? Again, this can function as an exercise in using reference tools. The memorable scene in which Sonny baptizes himself in the river after faking his death (DVD ch. 14) serves as a compelling introduction to the question.

(4) Why does Sonny change his name? Is his name change similar to or different from other name changes in the Bible or in more recent times? Frequently (e.g., Abraham, Israel, Muhammed Ali) the new name is fraught with religious significance. In some cases (e.g., Paul) the reasons are obscure.

(5) As his world begins to fall apart, Sonny "yells at the Lord" in an all-night prayer session (DVD ch. 8). Why is this happening, he asks. In tone or substance, is this conversation similar to Job's debates with his friends or with God? Is it similar to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane?

(6) Have students view the film in conjunction with a study of 2 Sam 11–12, the story of David and Bathsheba. According to tradition, Ps 51 was composed by David after Nathan confronts him with his guilt in the affair.

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Like Sonny, David is a fornicator and murderer. What psycho-spiritual qualities do Sonny and David share? Would the penitential psalm seem out of place on Sonny's lips?

As Good as It Gets (1997)

What is a parable? All-encompassing definitions that capture all of the characteristics of parabolic discourse are hard to formulate. Insofar as parables represent Jesus' preferred mode of teaching, it is important to understand how the genre functions. An analytic paper treating a well-known parable alongside a kind of cinematic retelling of that parable serves as a helpful heuristic device for addressing the hermeneutical questions pertaining to genre, purpose, and meaning.

This film translates the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) into a different idiom. Melvin (Jack Nicholson) is, as one character puts it, "an absolute horror of a human being"—a misanthropic, bigoted, obsessive-compulsive writer who despises his gay neighbor Simon (Greg Kinnear) and is cruel to animals. When Simon is hospitalized after being brutally beaten (DVD ch. 4), Melvin reluctantly agrees to take care of his dog. Later, he also helps the destitute Simon by letting him move into his apartment (DVD ch. 11). Simon in turn helps Melvin in his romantic pursuit of Carol (Helen Hunt), the only waitress at Melvin's favorite restaurant who will put up with him. Carol has to leave her job to care for her chronically sick son and eventually accepts Melvin's offer to pay for the mounting medical bills. As the movie ends, Melvin, through the influence of Carol, is making great progress in conquering the various neuroses that make him such a difficult person to be around (DVD chs. 27–28).

Students should view the film outside of class and then write an essay in which they argue that the film should, or should not, be regarded as the cinematic equivalent of the parable. Each character gives as well as receives help from a person with whom he or she is loath to have any dealings. Is this the point of the film? Is it the point of the parable? Does such a summary leave out anything essential? Do particular characters in the film stand for characters in Luke 10? Is the traditional title of the parable an apt one, that is, should the Samaritan be seen as the main character? Does the hearer have to agree with certain religious tenets—not at all present in the film—to appreciate its message? Is the point, rather, to highlight the absurdity of certain prejudices? To urge universal, unconditional compassion? To make the point that our "neighbors" are not of our own choosing? The exercise forces students to articulate their assumptions about the formal characteristics of the genre (narrative in form? univocal or multivalent? allegorical? any superfluous details permitted?), the intended purpose or effect (to clarify or

to confound?), the audience (insiders or outsiders?), and so forth—that is, assumptions regarding what a parable is and is not.

According to available time and instructor inclination, the ensuing discussion may be integrated with a broader study of the history of the interpretation of parables, touching on the different approaches of, for example, Jülicher, Jeremias, Dodd, and Crossan. For other exercises on the parables, see Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 297–304, 326–28.

Blade Runner (1982)

Ridley Scott's masterpiece, *Blade Runner*, delves into the relationship between memory and the self. A "blade runner," or assassin, trained to track down bioengineered beings called replicants, Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) pursues, and comes to know, his enemy—to the extent that he begins to question what it means to be human (and to be humane). The film's original release has been largely replaced by a later Director's Cut (1994) that removes Deckard's voiceover narration and the "happy ending" demanded by the studio in its first release.

Blade Runner would work well in courses that examine Genesis in depth. Direct allusions to the Bible are brief and relatively straightforward; for instance, the dancer and sex-worker replicant Zhora works with a serpent in her burlesque show, announced by an off-stage voice as the same serpent "who had once corrupted man." Some more penetrative themes germane to Genesis include a creator's responsibility to his creations, the relationship between creator and created, and the nature of good and evil.

As in Genesis, the film's protagonists contend with the limits of mortality. The replicants, dangerous because of their superior knowledge and power, are hobbled by an abbreviated lifespan. What they want, as the chief replicant Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) makes clear, is a longer life. Here, there are perhaps echoes of God's promise to Adam and Eve in Gen 2:17. Mortality, therefore, is a consequence of the "fallen" state of the replicants—proud, intellectually superior beings who have rebelled against their own creator. Yet Batty's struggle against mortality ends with his acceptance of his own humanity, reflected in his last words: "Time to die."

Several of *Blade Runner*'s characters bear similarities with Genesis's characters. Rachel (Sean Young), like Eve, is in fact a new creation, the first of her kind; the end of the film hints that she and Deckard (as Adam) will continue together as a new "race" who possess self-knowledge, free will, and self-awareness. Tyrell is a sort of Yahweh, although in a way more reminiscent of "gnostic" interpretations of Genesis than Genesis itself. Some of the characters are polyvalent and polysemic. Batty is at once Tyrell's "prodigal son" (cf. DVD ch. 26), Lucifer, and the Christ-figure who drives a nail into his

hand, saves Deckard's life, and whose soul, at death, ascends to heaven in the form of a dove.

Blade Runner also evinces a series of themes that recall the story of the fall of the angels—a well-known motif never clearly articulated in the Bible (see Jude 6 and Gen 6:1 on the Nephilim; Rev 12 on "Lucifer"; and Ezek 28). The replicants that are created "off-world" (i.e., in the "heavens") are, themselves, fallen angels; since they are neither fully human nor fully gods, humans interpret the replicants' superior knowledge and strength as malevolent. Batty even intentionally misquotes William Blake ("fiery the angels fell" rather than "fiery the angels rose," from Blake's *America, A Prophecy*). His dying speech mirrors that of a defiant yet wistful angel describing the mysteries of the cosmos: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain" (DVD ch. 34). The speech underscores what Batty has seen as a sort of timeless, cosmic being, to the point that we forget he is merely four years old.

Blade Runner is now much older than most university students, and many will never have seen it. For it to "work" in the classroom, therefore, students may need more guidance and background, and perhaps a bit of prompting as to how to draw biblical themes from the movie once they have viewed it in its entirety. For further analysis, see Gravett, "The Sacred and the Profane: Examining the Religious Subtext of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*," 38–43; Desser, "The New Eve: The Influence of *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein* on *Blade Runner*," 53–65; and Keefer, "Knowledge and Mortality in *Blade Runner* and Genesis 2–3."

Bless the Child (2000)

Just after Christmas, with a portentous star shining above New York City, a young nurse named Maggie (Kim Basinger) gets a visit from her younger sister Jenna, a drug addict and new mother. Jenna runs out, abandoning her infant—a baby girl named Cody—to be raised by Maggie. Cut to a few years later. Cody exhibits symptoms of autism, and is referred to a Catholic school for special needs students. There, she begins exhibiting other remarkable talents, starting with bringing a dead dove back to life (DVD ch. 3).

The trope of the miracle-working divine child is not often expressed in secular film, particularly when it is done as positively as here—that is, very differently from *The Omen* series of the satanic child. Since Cody is so clearly a Christ-figure, it might be interesting to have students read, along with viewing this scene, selections from the noncanonical infancy Gospels (e.g., *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*) or even passages about Jesus as a child from the Qur'an (in Sura Âl 'Imran 3:46–49, Isa [Jesus] models a dove out of clay and animates

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it; see also Sura Al-Ma'idah 5:110; Sura Maryam 19:30; and Sura Al-Ma'idah 5:111 for other accounts of Isa's childhood).

Viewed alongside the canonical infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke, students should have fun catching and listing all the biblical parallels: the star, the "virgin birth," the slaughter of the innocents, and so on. They also might list the nonbiblical elements (for instance, the tattoos that all the antichrist's followers wear, the swarm of rats that besiege Cody's room) and discuss in class why these might have been added. This is perhaps the only movie that blends themes from the infancy narratives with popular biblical apocalyptic drawn ever so loosely from the Revelation, although the apocalyptic contribution appears to be confined to the notion of the antichrist.

Maggie's dormant but amiable Catholicism allows for much explanatory dialogue. When she asks at one point what the "slaughter of the innocents" is all about (DVD ch. 6), the detective John Travis (Jimmy Smits) responds by loosely paraphrasing Luke 2:16 (students may liken Travis to Michael the Archangel or the warrior angel of Rev 12). Maggie is the perfect foil to the evil Eric, who calmly plays Satan to Cody's Christ, including a variation on the synoptic passages (Matt 4; Luke 4) where Satan tempts Jesus from the top of the temple (actually, Cody's retort is more clever). All in all, this film makes a nice addition to any instructor's repertory of movies based directly on contemporary Christ-figures or the struggle between good and evil.

The Blues Brothers (1980)

"We're on a mission from God," the protagonists declare as they evade the police, their creditors, and sundry other characters on their way to save a Chicago orphanage. This musical comedy is not a religious movie in any conventional sense. The five-minute scene (DVD chs. 3–4) in which Jake and Elwood "see the light" during a charismatic church service (presided over by James Brown) nevertheless supplies a point of entry for considering various call narratives in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as well as the phenomenology of religious experience. Although the brothers are skeptical when they have been advised to "get wise" by going to the church, a bright light appears as the choir sings and Jake (John Belushi) begins to tremble involuntarily. Elwood (Dan Ackroyd) is at first oblivious; he replies, "What light?" when the preacher calls out, "Have you seen the light?" Soon, however, the spirit fills him and he is dancing in the aisles alongside his brother. The audience is not privy to any message communicated in the experience, but the significance for Jake and Elwood is clear: They can save the orphanage by reuniting their old band for a charity concert.

The scene may be used to introduce the concept of theophany when studying Exodus, for example, by suggesting ways in which to construe the

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descriptions of the divine presence at Horeb in the burning bush (Exod 3–4) and at Sinai (Exod 19). Is the articulation of the divine will in Exodus similar to that seen in the movie? Or does it more closely resemble the "still, small voice" heard by Elijah after the wind, earthquake, and fire (1 Kgs 19:11–18)? If a camera had recorded their encounters, what could it have captured? Would it detract from the truth of the narrative if, say, a tape recorder had not registered any audible message? Do the biblical writers present these experiences, or that of Isaiah in the temple (Isa 6), as ones which could be shared by others? And to what degree does the recipient of revelation acquiesce to or cooperate in mediating the experience? Jeremiah (20:7–9) reports that he has tried to resist the call to prophesy but is struck with burning pain when he does so.

Luke's reports of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus exhibit some of the same qualities as that of Jake and Elwood. In Acts 9, the men with Paul hear the voice but do not see anyone. When Paul retells the story in Acts 22:9, however, they see the light but hear no voice. Is this a slip on the part of the narrator, or a reflection of the fugitive character of such numinous encounters? What is the reader to make of Paul's expansion of the content of the message he received from Christ in his vision? Does Luke mean to suggest that the processing of divine revelation is something that necessarily takes time and reflection? Finally, fruitful discussion may emerge from consideration of the proper term to apply to these scenes. Is it accurate to think of Moses, Isaiah, Paul, and the Blues Brothers as having undergone conversion experiences? Or are these, rather, instances where an individual has received a specific task to fulfill within a preexisting religious framework that has not changed appreciably as a result of the encounter? Is the distinction an important one to make when reading these texts?

The Body (2001)

The Vatican dispatches a Jesuit from El Salvador named Guttierez (Antonio Banderas) to investigate (read: disprove) the claim that a recently discovered body of a first-century crucified man in Jerusalem is that of Jesus of Nazareth. The grave (and body) was discovered by an Israeli archaeologist who plans to make a career out of her remarkable find. The Vatican has other plans, as do the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Everyone, it seems, wants a piece of the action—or, conversely, to silence the story.

The movie is concerned with the central question: What might the discovery of Jesus' body do to Christian faith (here, specifically the Vatican— once again presented as an outdated body of hypocritical and power-hungry evil men)? The recent "discovery" of the Talpiot tomb and the ossuaries pur-

ported to be those of Jesus and his immediate family members offers a very nice counterpoint to *The Body*. Students have been very curious about whether or not the ossuary might have belonged to Jesus, or whether the tomb held his body. A discussion of the find and how it was marketed to the public—contrasted with how professional biblical archaeologists responded to it—would make for a fun biblical archaeology "case study" in class. What is really amazing is, in fact, with a real-life scenario unfolding in 2007 that was quite like the discovery of Jesus' body in this movie, how *little* of an impact it made on the broader political and religious issues in Israel or in the world. But that was already recognized in the movie itself. As one character, the Israeli attaché Moshe Cohen wearily notes (in a scene just after the middle of the movie), Christianity will survive just fine in the event that Jesus' body is discovered. Those with faith will not believe that it is really Jesus' body despite whatever "proof" is offered; those who don't believe won't care, and in the end, perhaps nothing will change. (On the related theological issues raised by Bultmann, see the discussion of *Schindler's List*, pp. 161–63.)

Braveheart (1995)

Loosely based on historical events involving Scottish national hero William Wallace, this film contains one of the most memorable and most quoted speeches in recent cinema. Just before a pivotal battle against the English, Wallace (Mel Gibson) concludes the speech with a rousing call to arms (DVD ch. 10): "Fight and you may die. Run and you'll live. At least awhile. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willing to trade all of the days from this day to that, for … just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom!" The speech lends itself to two exercises:

(1) To introduce students to textual criticism and the peculiar problems its practitioners have to solve, the speech may be used to "dramatize" the process of transmission, in combination with the child's game of "telephone" in which one person whispers a message to the person in the next seat, who whispers it to the next person, and so on until the message has been whispered to the last person in the queue. The original message changes, sometimes significantly, by the time it reaches the end of the line. When it reaches the end, each student writes down what they think was the original message. Discussion may then draw comparisons between "telephone" and the scribal process of copying manuscripts. What are the reasons for any distortions of the message or, depending on how much it has been altered, the reasons it did not change more than it did? (For a fuller description of a similar exercise, see Patrick Gray, "Introducing Textual Criticism," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 31–33.) The last line of the speech works well as the

"message" in this illustration. It is long, but not unreasonably so. It is also familiar, but not so familiar that every link in the human chain will be able to reproduce it verbatim whether or not they hear it clearly. Its familiarity more-over helps to simulate the influence of oral tradition on the process of textual transmission.

For use in this exercise, there is no shortage of famous movie lines that are frequently quoted or—perhaps even more pertinent—misquoted. Examples include: Marlin Brando in *On the Waterfront* ("I coulda been a contender"); Butterfly McQueen in *Gone With the Wind* ("I don't know nothin' 'bout birthin' babies"); Dustin Hoffman's neighbor in *The Graduate* ("I just want to say one word to you, just one word—'plastics' "); Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca* ("Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine"); Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life* ("I suppose it'd been better if I'd never been born at all"); Gary Cooper in *The Pride of the Yankees* ("Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the Earth"). For discussion of common misquotations, see Tim Dirks, "Greatest Film Misquotes."

(2) The scene also provides an analogy of sorts to the scenario encoun-tered in 1 Maccabees. Discussion after viewing the clip can bring out the similarities and differences between the two contexts. Wallace's speech is usually remembered as a *tour de force*, but the editing reminds the viewer that not all Scots shared the same nationalist vision. One character interrupts to endorse the "run and live" option, and the nobles, whose interests were likely to be adversely affected by any upheaval, are noticeably unenthused as Wallace whips the makeshift army into a frenzy. Jewish tradition likewise celebrates the Maccabean revolt as a nationalist triumph, notwithstanding the marked lack of solidarity among Jews in 1 Macc 1–3. Many Jews, who stand to gain by their relationship with members of the ruling class, want to join with the Hellenists and abandon the distinctive signs of Jewish iden-tity. Many Hasideans oppose the hellenizers out of religious scruples rather than for political reasons and are massacred when they refuse to fight on the Sabbath. Mattathias and his sons also oppose these "lawless men" but are willing to do so by taking up arms against Antiochus. In each case, one sees competing notions of freedom and the good life at play among the vari-ous parties on the same side of the battle. Finally, one also sees a similar use of set speeches in both works (cf. 1 Macc 2:27–28; 3:16–22). The speeches, while inspirational and dramatic, are perhaps best seen as epitomes or ide-alized recitations rather than transcripts of speeches as actually delivered. (It seems unlikely that a thirty-second address would have won over all the doubters so decisively in either scenario.) What rhetorical resemblances does one see in the speeches in the two works?

A Clockwork Orange (1971)

Anthony Burgess, whose dystopian novel provides the basis for Stanley Kubrick's screen adaptation, has said that humans have the gift of free will and that it is within their power to choose evil rather than to choose good. In an interview, he has stated that one message of the novel is that "it is better for a man to do evil of his own free will than for the state to turn him into a machine which can only do good" (bu.univ-angers.fr/EXTRANET/Anthony-BURGESS/liana/ABClockwork.html). Selected scenes from the film prompt reflection on moral responsibility, freedom, and the nature of good and evil as they appear in the Bible.

Alex (Malcolm McDowell) is a vicious gang leader who lands in prison after he is arrested for murder. To shorten his sentence, he volunteers to undergo an experimental treatment. This treatment is a form of aversion therapy in which the patient is conditioned to experience extreme nausea at the thought of committing violent deeds. As part of the treatment, the patient is forced to view footage of horrible acts of the type he once committed with impunity (DVD chs. 20–22; warning: this clip contains quite graphic images). The treatment is successful in Alex's case, as is demonstrated by his inability to respond when provoked (DVD ch. 23). When an official presents the experiment as a success—Alex is now a "true Christian" who is able to "turn the other cheek"—the prison chaplain objects that the treatment is a travesty because "he ceases to be a creature capable of moral choice" (DVD chs. 24–25).

Is Alex now a good person? He wants to perform evil deeds but is physically unable to do so. This scenario relates to the theological issues at stake in four biblical texts:

(1) Were Adam and Eve truly free before they ate of the Tree in Gen 3:1–7? Were they truly free after eating of the Tree? Does the author of Genesis regard their sin as a "fortunate fall" (*felix culpa*) whereby the way is opened for God's plans for history to be realized? Is it necessary to be able to "sin" by making choices not in harmony with the divine will? Were they "good" before the fall if they were not capable of making free moral choices? Does the text provide any help with the difficult task of imagining the nature of prelapsarian human life? Is Alex better off when his rehabilitation is complete?

(2) Is it fair for God to punish Pharaoh for his behavior in Exodus if God has constricted his freedom to choose to act differently? What, exactly, does it mean for one's heart to be "hardened"? (The text does not spell this out, but one's evaluation would surely depend on the details.) In Exod 7–11, sometimes God hardens Pharaoh's heart, sometimes Pharaoh hardens his own heart, and sometimes the passive verb is used (7:13–14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34–35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). The same issue arises in connection with

the reference to Pharaoh in Rom 9:16–18, though Paul's larger argument has less to do with moral culpability.

(3) After Job's wife urges him to "curse God and die," the narrator states that Job "did not sin with his lips" (Job 2:10). It has been suggested that the wording of this verse, after the simpler "Job did not sin" in 1:22, implies that Job did in fact sin in his thoughts, if not in his words. Does the text support this view? Would it qualify as a sin if Job were to resent God's dealings inwardly but refrain from voicing these thoughts? Alex still desires to respond to violence with violence but is physically unable to do so. Is he "cured" or is he still evil at heart?

(4) Paul's argument in Rom 7:7–26 has bedeviled scholars for centuries. What does Paul mean when he says, "I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do the deeds I want to do, but I do the very thing I hate" (v. 15)? After describing the "war" that is going on within himself, he ends the chapter by saying that he is a "slave to the law of God" with his mind but "a slave to the law of sin" in his flesh. In what sense is Alex a slave? Is it accurate to describe him as not being able to do the evil he desires but, rather, the good that he does not desire? Does his experience suggest any possibilities for understanding Paul?

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)

Because they are enshrined in the canon, it may be difficult for students to appreciate the impression made by many of the prophets on their original audiences. Few prophets were as bizarre as Ezekiel. The main character of this Steven Spielberg classic manifests in a contemporary context many of the same qualities and evokes similar reactions from his friends and family. Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) develops an obsession with UFOs after a "close encounter" one night in rural Indiana. His obsession takes the form of building models—out of clay, garbage, shaving cream, even mashed potatoes—of a particular mountain. (The image is that of Devil's Tower, Wyoming, but Roy only discovers this later in the story.)

A ten-minute clip at the halfway point of the film contains several elements seen also in the case of Ezekiel (DVD chs. 12–13; the clip has much the same impact if shortened to five minutes). Roy cannot understand the forces compelling him to engage in the odd behavior that causes his family to abandon him, and he finally cries out at the night sky, "I don't know what's happening to me!" Ezekiel, too, encounters skeptics and undergoes great distress (3:8–9, 12–15) when he shares his message about a great light he has seen (1:1–28). He speaks of family problems related to the strange events (16:15–34; 24:15–18). He has trouble making himself understood (3:22–27). And he shuts himself in a house and builds a model of a structure he has not actually witnessed

(3:24–4:3). (For a related approach to Ezekiel's behavior, see Johanna Stiebert, "Diagnosing Ezekiel," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 178–79).

It may surprise students that there are hundreds of books and Internet websites propounding the theory that the "vision" of Ezek 1 is in fact the record of an encounter with an alien spaceship. This bizarre subculture constitutes a ready-made body of material for a study of apocalypticism and its contemporary expressions.

Crimes and Misdemeanors (1989)

This film contains a three-minute scene that illustrates the differences between the perspectives of Proverbs and the Teacher in Ecclesiastes (DVD ch. 11). In the scene, Judah (Martin Landau) visits his childhood house, stirring memories of a family discussion that takes place at a Passover meal. (The scene is a flashback.) In the conversation, Sol, Judah's father, articulates the perspective of Proverbs: The world is orderly, meaningful, and fair; good deeds will be rewarded and bad deeds punished. His sister, May, represents the views of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes: the world is chaotic, lacks a "moral structure" (or at least one discernible by humans), and is unjust; righteous people suffer and wicked prosper (cf. Eccl 7:15). Other characters chime in, agreeing with one view or the other. Both May and the Teacher refuse to close their eyes to "reality." Sol, by contrast, claims that he will "always prefer God over the truth" (i.e., "reality").

The clip works effectively after a study of Proverbs as a means to introduce the contrasting perspectives found in Ecclesiastes. Students are asked to add their own voices to the conversation, as if they were at the dinner table. What would they say to each of the characters? With whom would they agree? Is the book of Proverbs naïve and unsophisticated (as May suggests about Sol's ideas)? Or is the Teacher cynical and nihilistic? Who would be a better parent—Sol or May? Can both be correct? Here one can point to the "traditional" wisdom that is scattered throughout the words of the Teacher (cf. Eccl 7:1–14; 10:1–11:6). One might also ask how Job, Job's friends, and the God of the whirlwind speeches would contribute to this dinner-table debate.

Finally, it may be helpful to close the conversation by noting that one of the characters argues that Sol is "relying too heavily on the Bible." This provides an opportunity to underscore the diversity within the canon: Ecclesiastes, too, is a part of Scripture. For further analysis, see Roche, "Justice and the Withdrawal of God in Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*," 547–63.

Dark City (1998)

John Murdoch (Rufus Sewell) awakens in a panic to find himself naked in a bathtub, unable to remember who he is or what chain of events led him

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there. Horrified to find a dead, mutilated prostitute in his apartment, the phone rings. A voice warns him that he is in great danger and must immediately leave. Murdoch rushes out, just before the evil "Strangers" arrive. Murdoch soon finds himself the chief subject of a serial murder investigation led by the ineffectual but generally sympathetic Inspector Bumstead (William Hurt). But he retains little memory of who he is. Murdoch soon encounters Dr. Daniel Schreber (Kiefer Sutherland), who proves to be a key to understanding Murdoch's true identity.

That the character John Murdoch presents many christological motifs and resonances has been well documented. Apart from these parallels, a few items are worthy of note:

(1) Watch for the fish symbolism. In the opening scene Murdoch stops to rescue a goldfish before fleeing from the police and the Strangers. Fish are prominent on postcards from Murdoch's childhood. To gain clues about his identity, he visits his uncle who was a champion sport fisherman. His apartment is decorated with fish fossils. Is there a connection between Murdoch and the Christ symbol of the *ichthys*? Perhaps it is also significant that the Strangers have an aversion to water. Murdoch is obsessed with the ocean and Shell Beach; his first act of creation after his awakening at the end of the film parallels God's in Genesis (he "separates the firmament" and creates an ocean apart from the land, creates the first day, and causes the sun to shine over the waters for the first time).

(2) Like Morpheus in *The Matrix*, Daniel Schreber is a John the Baptist figure. He calls the hero to awaken. He moves easily between the constructed world of illusion and the real world He is convinced that he has found "the One" to save the world. And Schreber, like John the Baptist, is not destined to awaken humankind to its enslavement, although they alone initially recognize that enslavement. They themselves need to be rescued, just as they recognize a coming Armageddon or showdown between the forces of Good and Evil.

(3) *Dark City* shares a dystopian vision of the world with films such as *Blade Runner*, *Metropolis*, and the *Matrix*. In a rowboat on Dark City's muddy canals, Schreber reveals the truth: that they are all trapped in that place by the Strangers, an alien race that uses human dead as their vessels. Humans are caught in their hapless enslavement, convinced that the lives they live and relive in different combinations are realities, never awakening to the horror of their condition. Schreber, terrified that the Strangers will kill them, shrieks helplessly as Murdoch and Bumstead break through the walls of the city, only to discover that nothing lies behind the walls but an open, swirling cosmos. As in the Gospel of Mark, only those specially possessed or specially gifted recognize the true situation of the world and of Murdoch's status as savior. But the cosmic dimensions of the human story of salvation are noteworthy

and might be compared to New Testament texts such as the Johannine Pro-
logue and Eph 6:12: "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against
… spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places."

(4) The film's "demonology" is quite interesting because the Strangers
resemble the fallen Watcher angels of apocryphal texts such as *1 Enoch* and
the archons from Nag Hammadi documents such as the *Hypostasis of the
Archons*. The Strangers, like the archons, desire to be human, and they fear
Murdoch's divinity: "This man Murdoch is much more powerful than we can
imagine.… he is becoming like us … so we must become like him." In this
way, Murdoch is not only a Christ-figure, he is also like Adam in the classic
"gnostic" myth. In the second-century *Apocryphon of John*, the evil Archons
are celestial beings who possess malformed, demonic bodies but no souls.
In *Dark City*, too, the Strangers are obsessed with acquiring human souls.
They become jealous of humans, recognizing in them the spiritual possibili-
ties for wholeness that they themselves lack. Yet the Strangers can only seek
that salvation through manipulation and experimentation, not through their
own paths to knowledge.

At the end of the encounter, Murdoch, affixed crucifix-like to the time
clock, steps away from his bonds newly empowered and engages in a final,
apocalyptic, telekinetic showdown with the chief Stranger. Their kingdom
shattered, Murdoch works to create a new reality for the remaining humans,
one filled with oceans and light and "true" new memories. Comparison with
the scenarios described in Revelation would make for a nice end-of-term
project in a New Testament course.

The Da Vinci Code (2006)

In Paris to give a lecture, Harvard professor Robert Langdon (Tom
Hanks) is called to an unusual crime scene: a prominent curator at the Louvre
has been murdered. As he lay dying, he left a secret message for his adoptive
daughter, cryptologist Sophie Neveu (Audrey Tatou), to seek out Langdon.
The two begin a modern-day quest for the Holy Grail, which here turns out to
be not a chalice but a woman: Jesus' last living descendant.

As a novel, Dan Brown's bestseller raised eyebrows for its alternative ver-
sion of Christian history. That Jesus is presented here as having married Mary
Magdalene angered those who maintained that Jesus was celibate. That he
might have survived the crucifixion obliterates the theology of the cross and
the significance of the resurrection. Finally vexing is the movie's depiction
of Constantine and the Council of Nicaea as the turning point in which the
human Jesus came to be considered, overnight, the divine Christ—depicted
as a self-serving and deceitful position that served the nefarious aims of the
first Christian emperor.

The Da Vinci Code's producers hired academic advisors, with the result that in the film's most explicitly theological scene (in which Nicaea's Christology is "explained"), the dialogue is recast differently from the novel. By providing students with the text of the novel (for this scene, pp. 230–36) and then discussing its differences from the movie (DVD chs. 11–12), one may prepare for a discussion of the precise claims that are made and the evidence on which they are based. In the movie, Langdon plays the academic skeptic against Teabing's conspiracy theories. Teabing quotes no canonical writings but, rather, two second-century texts, the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Mary*. Thanks to the film's advisors, he cites both accurately. Students might be asked to consider which biblical texts these second-century authors may have amplified to arrive at the portrait of Jesus and of his followers they present.

Director Ron Howard confronts the theological controversy engendered by this film head on in the closing scenes, where Langdon muses in a voiceover such thoughts as "Why couldn't Jesus have been a father and still have been capable of all those miracles?" and "Why does it have to be human or divine? Maybe human is divine." The scene is a good a conversation starter or a good entry into discussions of high versus low Christology in the Gospels and in the Epistles (e.g., John 1:1–5; Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:1–14; 5:5–10).

For background, it may be helpful to consult one of the many books published in the wake of the novel's success (e.g., Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code*).

Dead Man Walking (1995)

This film contains a one-minute scene that helps students think about hermeneutical questions, specifically, the complexity of citing the Bible in contemporary debates on moral and ethical issues. The clip (DVD ch. 3) could be employed in discussions of Hebrew Bible laws, New Testament ethics, or more general discussions of hermeneutics and the relevance of the Bible for modern faith communities. The scene depicts a conversation between Sister Helen Prejean (Susan Sarandon) and one of the prison officials where convicted rapist and murderer Matthew Poncelet (Sean Penn) awaits execution. The official is in favor of the death penalty and points out that the Bible says "an eye for an eye," to which Sister Helen responds with a list of other offences for which the Hebrew Bible law calls for the death penalty, such as adultery, profaning the Sabbath, and dishonoring parents. The nun decisively makes her point: it is problematic to cite one biblical text and ignore many others. The same issue is applicable to the New Testament, which contains a variety of injunctions which many Christians make no attempt to follow today—such as Jesus' teachings on divorce and remarriage (Mark 10:11), the command for

women to be silent in church (1 Cor 14:34), or the recommendation not to marry (1 Cor 7:25–27, 37–38).

Since the film clip deals specifically with Hebrew Bible law, one could extend the conversation regarding the tension between the Bible's utter foreignness and its potential relevance by distributing photocopies of Exod 21–23 to small groups and giving the following instructions:

> Imagine that your group has been called in as legal consultants for the Israelites. They ask you to review the law code found in Exod 21:1–23:9 and to suggest which laws should be eliminated, revised, or retained as they are currently written. You are asked to respect their cultural, religious, and social systems as much as possible, but do not set aside your modern sensibilities. Perhaps think of it this way: a small group of people in the jungles of South America today adheres to the law codes in Exod 21:1–23:9 and they ask you to say what you think about their laws. On the attached photocopy, put a line through the laws that the Israelites should completely eliminate; circle the laws that need some revision (you do not need to make the revision, but circle only the part of the law that needs to be revised); and leave unmarked the laws that you deem acceptable.

Alternatively, one could make a list of biblical injunctions and ask which ones are permanent (valid across all times and cultures) and which ones are cultural (applicable only in a certain time and place). For a list of New Testament texts for consideration, see Cukrowski, "What Does New Haven Have to Do with Lubbock? Texts, Techniques, and Sociology," 96–102.

Questions to pose concerning the film clip include: Is Sister Helen suggesting we ignore the Bible all together? Presumably not, since she belongs to the Catholic Church and talks about the love of Jesus in other parts of the film. What underlying assumptions appear to influence her way of reading and applying the Bible? How would she determine what to follow and what to reject as irrelevant? Is she essentially making the same hermeneutical move as the prison official? That is, she opposes the death penalty and so makes one point about the biblical text to bolster her view; he is for the death penalty and thus handles the Bible in a way that supports his position.

Dogma (1999)

From their place of exile in Wisconsin, two fallen angels (Matt Damon and Ben Affleck), discover a (fictive) loophole in Catholic dogma: if they cross the threshold of a church in New Jersey, all their sins will be forgiven and they will be able to return to heaven. The catch, however, is that this loophole also proves the fallibility of God, and so (according to Dogma) the world would come to an end.

Dogma sports a wide range of familiar and not-so-familiar characters. The casting is an exercise in postmodernist transgression: Linda Fiorentino as the messiah-figure, Alanis Morrisette as God, Chris Rock as the thirteenth apostle Rufus, and George Carlin as Cardinal Glick, who wants to replace Jesus with an upbeat "Buddy Christ" who flashes a thumbs-up sign instead hanging on a crucifix. (Carlin's character might be used to discuss the ways in which many people refashion Jesus in their own image or the different responses to Paul's characterization of the cross as foolish and weak in, e.g., 1 Cor 1:18–25.)

Part of *Dogma*'s "shock value" lies in director Kevin Smith's choice of the most hilariously inappropriate pop culture heroes to fill traditional biblical roles. But can Christianity be funny, without being made fun of? Smith insists it can. In answer to his critics, Smith insisted that he was, at the time of the film's release, a regular church-goer, "so pro-faith I feel like I'm doing the Catholic League's job." While Robert Horton describes it as "an unabashedly pro-God movie" ("Snoochie Boochies: The Gospel according to Kevin Smith," 60), others argue that the replacement dogma that the film suggests is fundamentally misleading. As Douglas Leblanc comments, "God does not shrug and settle for people believing whatever they like, so long as they are sincere about it" ("Dogmatically Anti-Dogma," 80). Many students will sympathize with one or the other of these views or will fall somewhere in between, and thus the film offers a chance to introduce reader-response theory and certain critiques of author-centered approaches. How can two viewers have such radically different reactions to the same movie (cf. the responses to *The Passion of the Christ*)? Is Smith's characterization of his intentions sincere? If so, is it possible for the author to fail in accomplishing his stated objectives? Perhaps by writing essays in which they try to articulate the reasons a viewer might or might not find the film offensive, students can come to appreciate the importance of "the world in front of the text" as well as its relationship to the worlds "behind" and "of" the text, to use Paul Ricoeur's terms.

Donnie Darko (2001)

Even though this film flopped commercially, probably because the movie's advertising campaign made this neat little film about time travel, a teenage hero, and the angst of growing up in the suburbs look like a strange slasher flick, *Donnie Darko* has achieved virtually cult status among American college-aged students. (References here are to the widely available Theatrical Cut.) The story begins with the eponymous protagonist (played by Jake Gyllenhaal) waking up early in the morning on an open stretch of road near his house. We learn that he has had a number of such blackouts that have led to his diagnosis (and medication) as schizophrenic. Not so much angry and

psychotic as confused and sickened by the hypocrisy and mediocrity that he sees around him at his parochial school in an affluent Virginia suburb, Donnie suffers from terrifying visions in which a giant blue grotesque rabbit named Frank speaks to him and compels him, so it seems, to commit acts of vandalism. Frank also gives him a chillingly delivered countdown as to how many days are left until the end of the world (28 days, 6 hours, 42 minutes, and 12 seconds).

In keeping with the ambivalent status of any visionary within an ignorant and insensitive society, we do not know if Donnie is truly privy to secret knowledge or whether he is simply insane (the Director's Cut clarifies that Donnie has been prescribed placebos—thus suggesting that his visions were no mere hallucinations—but the Theatrical Cut lets the ambiguity remain). Donnie offers up ill-appreciated cultural jeremiads as any prophet of doom might do, and it might be an interesting exercise to show *Donnie Darko* for any component of a course that deals with the prophetic writings and social critique (e.g., Amos) or to show an excerpt simply to draw an analogy illustrating how strange most of the biblical prophets must have appeared to their contemporaries.

The jeremiads of *Donnie Darko* extend into full-blown apocalyptic, although the explicitly Christian elements of this apocalyptic are muted in the theatrical release and come out more clearly in the film's deleted scenes and additional features (included in the DVD). In the audio commentary, the director claims that Frank's warnings signal a divine intervention; Frank is the "messenger." In one deleted scene, Donnie reads from an apocalyptic poem he has written: "A storm is coming … and I'll deliver them from the Kingdom of Pain." In another, we witness a dialogue between Frank and Donnie in which Frank calls Donnie to follow him "because the world is coming to an end" very soon.

Donnie also comes to realize that he is a savior-figure whose sole purpose in the tangential universe that had erroneously formed is to set the world back on its intended course. (When, one might ask students, does Jesus become aware that he is also a savior or messiah? When do the Evangelists present this realization taking place? The question seems to underlie texts such as the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* that feature Jesus' messianic self-consciousness as a subtext.) In a moving montage near the conclusion of the film, Donnie's inversion of the realized (or avoided) eschaton is displayed in terms of its human consequences: The persecuted are comforted, and the evil and mediocre are brought before their own frailties.

Christians are fascinated with *Donnie Darko* because it can be read as a triumphant discourse on the nature of God's omniscience and control over fate and the future. When, at the end, Donnie meets his end laughing, many

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Christians interpret his laughter as a sort of vindication: he sees that God really does create and control all things. (How does this compare with the laughing savior in the gnostic *Apocalypse of Peter*?) Non-Christians, however, may see the film's ending—and Donnie's sacrificial role—in a rather different light.

The Exorcist (1973)

This film is an almanac of what frightens us—even what makes us feel guilty. Within days of the onset of her daughter Regan's (Linda Blair) strange behavior, Chris MacNeil (Ellen Burstyn) takes her to the hospital for a thorough battery of testing; the doctor prescribes Ritalin, but Regan's bizarre bouts of acting out only intensify. The new cinematic release ratchets up the tension as we see the slow onset of Regan's possession and wait for Satan's inevitable manifestation.

There is no question that *The Exorcist* is a creepy film and that its chief aim is to shock. Satan says some pretty rude things, especially through the mouth of an adolescent girl. The scenes of exorcism are clearly movie exorcisms; they teach us little about contemporary Roman Catholicism. The young priest even rejects the very notion of an exorcism as outdated. When Regan's mother asks when the Church ceased doing exorcisms, he replies, "Well, since we learned about paranoid schizophrenia … all that stuff I learned at Harvard" (cf. DVD ch. 14). The exorcisms themselves are also remarkably Bible-free; that is to say, the demonology or Satan's manifestations are never really articulated through the framing lens of the New Testament (as one sees in *The Omen*, where they clearly are).

Since this film may be too intense for many viewers, the best way to use it in a course may be to list it as one choice among many and then to have students write on one or more questions: (1) What does this film say or assume about Satan? How does it compare with what one finds in the Bible? This question provides an opportunity to teach about using a concordance or Bible dictionary. In this case, the result is to highlight the ultimate separation of some conceptions of Satan from anything one actually finds in the Bible. (2) What does this film say or assume about demonic possession and exorcism? How does it compare with what one finds in the Bible? (3) How might one of the authors of the Gospels respond if confronted with the medical "explanation" of demon possession?

Fallen (1998)

This curious thriller pits a detective, John Hobbes (Denzel Washington), against a demon, Azazel. Though its harsh language may make some students uncomfortable, it has utility in the classroom for its demonology and its rela-

tively unusual theodicy in which people are evil because they are possessed, not because they are inherently sinful. We first meet Azazel as he possesses various lowlife criminals, including one on death row. At the moment of his execution, Azazel jumps bodies; the implication, of course, is that evil can never be extirpated and, by extension, the death penalty is misguided since it kills an effectively innocent man while evil merely transfers to another host. This concept neatly subverts the *lex talionis* of Exod 21:23–27. The idea that demons may jump from one body to the next is also reflected in the parables of the Gerasene demoniac of Mark 5:1–20 and parallels.

Students of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish pseudepigrapha may recognize Azazel from Lev 16:8, where the high priest Aaron mentions two goats, one consecrated to the Lord and the other to Azazel. Azazel's goat, given the sins of humankind, is sent into the wilderness (cf. Talmud *Yoma* 67B, where Azazel is the name of the cliff from where the goat is cast in a Yom Kippur ritual). Azazel (possibly meaning "arrogant against God") also appears in *1 Enoch*'s "Book of the Watchers" where he is one of the chief Watchers, a class of fallen angels who take human women as their wives (cf. Gen 6:1). He teaches women to make cosmetics, and men how to make weapons and wage war (*1 Enoch* 2:8). Humankind is corrupted by such knowledge. Eventually, Azazel is punished for his iniquity by being cast down. An essay assignment might require students to argue for or against the thesis that the screenwriter is consciously working with these sources and themes in specific ways rather than simply borrowing a demon's name from an ancient text.

In *Fallen*, Azazel is a formless demon, able to hop from body to body. Hobbes, then, faces the impossible task of trying to defeat a supernatural enemy who takes manifold forms. Hobbes is aided by a seminary professor Gretta Milano (Embeth Davidtz), an expert in demonology and, as it turns out, a member of an ancient secret society formed to keep watch on Azazel's activity. Much of Milano's explanatory demonology bears little resemblance to academic views on such matters, and student might enjoy a discussion of what they ostensibly learn about Azazel from this film compared to the primary sources in which he is mentioned.

Fiddler on the Roof (1971)

The screen version of the musical depicts a "slice of life" among peasant Jews in prerevolutionary Russia. Two scenes prompt reflection on issues arising in biblical studies courses:

(1) The opening number, "Tradition" (DVD chs. 1–2), helps to contextualize the New Testament "household codes" (Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:21–33; 1 Tim 2:8–15; 1 Pet 2:18–3:8). These texts represent attempts to delineate the expected roles, behaviors, and goals for members of a household, namely, for

spouses, children, and slaves. Because they promote values that at some points diverge in marked ways from widely held values in contemporary Western society, such texts are greeted with suspicion by many readers. The song in the film is essentially a household code set to music, describing in succession the duties of fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. Introducing the clip in this way helps students to see that the assumptions built into these texts are not entirely unique to early Christianity. Surviving documents from ancient Greece and Rome likewise mirror the codes in broad terms. Placing the various texts side by side enables students to notice the common assumptions as well as ways in which first-century Christians distinguished themselves from their neighbors. What have these authors added to the general template? What have they deleted or subtly transformed?

This opening scene also helps students appreciate the challenge faced by Christian writers such as Paul (especially in Galatians) and the author of Hebrews as their respective audiences felt a newfound sense of community or the nostalgic tug of Jewish symbols and customs. "Because of our traditions," Tevye says, "every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do."

(2) Near the end of the movie, Tevye's third daughter, Chava, announces her intention to marry a Gentile. Tevye sorts out his emotions at this looming break from tradition and plans his response in an interior monologue (DVD ch. 30): "Can I deny everything I believe in? On the other hand can I deny my own child? On the other hand, how can I turn my back on my faith, my people? If I try to bend that far, I will break!" This moving scene hints at the tensions associated with intermarriage and assimilation in the Jewish tradition. To what extent are Tevye's concerns those of Deut 7:1–5 or Ezra 9–10? What would the author of Ruth or Jonah say if asked for advice? How do different social-historical settings affect the stance one sees on the matter of intermarriage?

Fight Club (1999)

What compelled the earliest Christians to refer to Jesus as the Christ? Some students are unaware that "Christ" is a transliteration of the Greek word for "messiah" instead of Jesus' family name. The factors that led the early church to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah are varied and complex, and most of their contemporaries appear not to have agreed with the identification. Among believers, too, not all of the qualities displayed by Jesus were considered necessary or sufficient for achieving messianic status. Modern observers sometimes regard as essential certain traits that ancient observers saw as incidental to Jesus' identity as the Messiah, and the New Testament writers themselves frequently focus on different aspects of his person and work as more or less central.

Reflection on one of the many cinematic Christ-figures brings this question to the fore. Many students mistakenly assume that there was a single, standardized job description for the Messiah (found in the Hebrew Scriptures) and that the birth of Christianity was simply a matter of consulting this checklist when candidates for the position presented their credentials. In discussing characters who have been hailed as Christ-figures, students come to realize that even today there is no unanimity when it comes to defining the central and peripheral traits of Jesus, among neither Christian theologians nor secular audiences. (For a list of twenty-five common traits of the Christ-figure identified and explicated, see Kozlovic, "The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-Figure.")

This film is one of many on which students may write in preparation for class discussion. The question may be put this way: In what sense, if any, is it appropriate to consider the protagonist a Christ-figure? What specific traits, deeds, quotations, or plot devices support such a label? The whole class could view the same film, or the instructor may give a limited number of choices. Options familiar to most of the class will enable even those students who have not written on a particular film to argue for or against the positions taken in the discussion. Material for discussion is rarely lacking, but the instructor should be prepared with evidence. Here, Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) is a violent, foul-mouthed anarchist—not exactly what comes to mind when one thinks of the Prince of Peace. But he also exhibits many qualities that parallel those of Jesus: He attracts scores of disciples. He speaks in aphorisms that are in turn quoted by his followers. He sends out his disciples on various missions. His movement spreads to other cities. His radical antimaterialistic message discourages his followers from "storing up treasures on earth." He is willing to become a eunuch (though not for the kingdom of heaven; cf. Matt 19:12). He instructs members of the club to keep it a secret (DVD ch. 15). He preaches a kind of salvation (from emasculating, consumerist culture). He is decidedly against the spiritual status quo. He speaks of bringing down—quite literally—key cultural institutions (cf. "Project Mayhem" in DVD ch. 23, 35). Legends about his exploits arise during his lifetime or shortly thereafter. Rumors about the bizarre activities of his followers abound. He is willing to endure great physical abuse on behalf of others.

How should we evaluate this character? Are the similarities significant? Are they sufficiently detailed to warrant comparison with Jesus? What differences militate against a serious comparison, despite any similarities?

A similar exercise could be performed with the following films, among others: *The Matrix*; *Sling Blade*; *The Green Mile*; *E.T.*; *Superman: The Movie*; *Superman Returns*; *The Shawshank Redemption*; *Cool Hand Luke*; *Shane*; *The Seventh Sign*; *Twelve Monkeys*; *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; *Edward*

Scissorhands; *The Terminator*; *The Lord of the Rings*; *Touch*; and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Frailty (2002)

In this modern film noir told in flashbacks, a tortured man, Fenton Meiks (Matt McConaughey), confesses to a skeptical FBI agent (Powers Boothe) that he knows the identity of a serial killer known as the God's Hand Killer: his own father (Bill Paxton) and, later, his younger brother (Jeremy Sumpter).

Paxton plays a widowed father of two sons who believes that an angel has commissioned him to murder sinners because they have been possessed by demons. When the father touches a sinner, he claims to be able to feel the power of the demon; he becomes "God's Hand." The problem is that only the father can see and experience this sinfulness. One son trusts that Dad is right, while the other son is wracked by doubts. The children are trapped in a nightmarish world of blood, gore, and the deliverance of "God's wrath" from which they cannot escape (no adult believes them over their father). Gradually, the father forces them to follow in his own ways.

Frailty plays throughout with the most sinister implication of Christian fundamentalism—when an individual feels deeply right about what God is telling him to do, regardless of the moral nature of those commands. There is no way out of Dad Meiks's righteousness; he even tells his son that if he tells anyone what is going on, according to the angel, someone else will die. The father is unwavering in his insistence that he is doing God's work—a viewpoint with which he consistently indoctrinates his boys. And, frighteningly, his faith can never be proven incorrect. Students are sure to have much to say about the nature of authority here. Does the fact that the angel of God wants Dad Meiks to murder "prove" that Meiks is merely insane? Or can God ask anything of his servants, even if it defies human morality? Is there such a thing as a righteous killing? What if Meiks is right—that the supposed innocents whom he murders are actually very bad demons? Who has the right to administer justice, according to the New Testament (cf. Rom 13:1–7)?

Frailty is worthy of screening in its entirety, but be forewarned that the movie is quite bleak and will probably disturb more sensitive viewers. Virtually all the dialogue centers around the tension between the sons and the father on the nature of God's instructions. But the film contains many ambiguities and raises moral and theological questions to be explored in class discussion or in a paper: (1) How were various biblical figures who have spoken for God been received (e.g., Noah, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul), whether in terms of the narratives in which they appear or in "real life"? It is not as simple as saying that everyone in the ancient world believed

everything they were told about God and everyone learned to be suspicious after the Enlightenment. (2) How have ancient and modern readers dealt with God's test of Abraham requiring him to sacrifice his son? (3) Is the father really similar to other divine messengers or prophets? Notice the paradox inherent in attempts to verify "true" prophecy involving predictions in the Bible on account of its form and function (usually laying out some dire consequence if the people do not follow a certain course of action). God, through the prophets, desires for the people to turn from sin, but if the people respond to the prophet's call for repentance, then the prophecy of doom is not fulfilled, which makes the prophet look like a false prophet.

Gladiator (2000)

Biblical studies mavens recognize the Joseph story from Genesis in this account of a general who is the Roman emperor's favored son. Maximus (Russell Crowe) promises the dying emperor Marcus Aurelius (Richard Harris) that he will help usher back the Roman Republic; that is to say (very implausibly) that he plans to put an end to the "slavery" and restore freedom for all its people. But his "brother" Commodus, Marcus Aurelius's son and successor, is no fan of such democratic free-thinking, and is, in the understated words of the movie, "not a moral man." But Maximus's vengeance requires a long process of overcoming considerable adversity. It is the "journey motif" again, the same motif as in the biblical story of Joseph.

The Joseph parallels are well established early on: the theme of the favored son granted a boon by his father, that is, leadership of the people against the normal "rules" of succession. Like Joseph at the hands of his brothers, Maximus suffers a crushing loss of status at Commodus's hands when the young emperor orders his murder. Maximus escapes, only to return home to find his family murdered and his home razed to the ground. He ends up enslaved and forced into gladiatorial combat.

Plunged into the merciless "kill or be killed" environment that is the Roman amphitheater, Maximus remains, steadfastly, a good man. A foil to Commodus's bloodlust, Maximus refuses to kill his rivals in the amphitheater. Pitched against Rome's most notorious *secutor*, Maximus triumphs and, at the last minute, defies Commodus's "thumbs-down" signal that he must slice the gladiator's throat. For this, he becomes to the crowds "Maximus the Merciful," and his display of mercy underscores his nature as, like Joseph, the moral hero of the piece. Indeed, the character's decency can serve as a salutary reminder that a distinctive moral sensitivity was not the primary aspect of Judaism and Christianity that set them apart from the other religions and philosophies of antiquity. And insofar as it was a key period in the emergence and evolution of Judaism and Christianity, this film (despite any historical

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inaccuracies) can help students gain some sense of the political and cultural milieu of second-century Rome.

Jacob's Ladder (1990)

Jacob Singer (Tim Robbins) is a Vietnam veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome who finds himself plagued by terrifying visions of demons. In dreams that manifest with startling clarity, he suffers flashbacks to his pre-Vietnam existence as a philosophy professor, husband, and father living in the suburbs. The realism of his dream life throws him severely off kilter, and Jacob fears he is going insane until a fellow veteran reveals to him that Jacob was a victim of Army experiments in which soldiers were given drugs to enhance their aggression. Singer realizes his dreams and visions are the consequence of those experiments—but not in the way that he, and the audience, at first believes.

On a simple level, many students may notice that most of the characters in the film have biblical names. In terms of imagery, the film's demonology breaks free from typical movie genre restraints. At the same time, neither is it informed by the Bible. Points of contact with Jacob's ladder in Gen 28 do exist, but only if stretched substantially; here, the title is both literal (the codename of Jacob's experimental drug therapy is "the Ladder") and a metaphor for the development of an individual's consciousness. Only when Jacob reaches the top of the metaphorical ladder of the soul's ascent can he perceive the entire picture and the drama of his salvation. There, he realizes the need to give up fear, hatred, aggression, attachment, and the passions of the flesh. As a vision of Purgatory in which demons are really angels fighting for Jacob's release into heaven in order to reunite him with his son, *Jacob's Ladder* is powerful. Paired with noncanonical documents, including the *Apocalypse of Peter* in which the eponymous hero travels through hell and witnesses the torments of the wicked, students have a fine opportunity to ponder individual eschatology, soteriology, visions of the afterlife, and the nature of redemption.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (2005)

Before this movie's release, a biblical studies instructor could assign C. S. Lewis's extraordinary children's book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and only then reveal that the novel was intended as Lewis's symbolic presentation of the Christian story told in the Gospels. But now the secret is out.

Students might be interested to learn more of Lewis's career as a Christian apologist and Oxford literature professor who finally realized that the finest way to preach the resurrected Christ was to cloak the Truth in a world of magical wardrobes, talking animals, and children who become kings and queens. Still, Lewis argued that *Narnia* was not meant to be a Christian alle-

gory; it was meant to be "suppositional," a sort of alternate fantasy world that still resonates with God's gift of his Son. The chief deity of this world is a magnificent talking lion named Aslan, who epitomizes the majesty of God; he is at once loving and fierce, immanent and transcendent, incarnated and abstract. He is also a prophet, who declared long ago that two "sons of Adam" and two "daughters of Eve" would someday come to end the one-hundred-year period of darkness and winter imposed by the evil White Witch.

But it is only the appearance of the children in Narnia that initiates the chain of events that wrest the land from the White Witch's grasp. What is really needed is a protracted ritual of "Deep Magic" in which Aslan allows the witch and her minions to shame, torture, and slaughter Aslan one night. Aslan's torture and death is perhaps less wrenchingly rendered in the movie than in the children's book, but the point of the parallel with Christ is made. Sacrificed on the Stone Table, Aslan breaks the old covenant with his resurrection. If any scene might be shown in class, this would be it (DVD ch. 16–17). Students might discuss the theme of Jesus' death as a replacement of the Old Mosaic law and its demands of blood sacrifice with a new law of resurrection and atonement, as well as related issues raised by this theology (e.g., would the author of Leviticus or the Epistle to the Hebrews, especially chapters 8–10, agree with this Narnian "logic"? Would Paul? What does it imply about Judaism?) And is Lewis successful in weaving together "pagan" elements such as mythological beasts and magic with Christian narrative? A comparison with the reception of the Harry Potter books and movies in certain Christian communities might make for fine discussion.

Magnolia (1999)

This film offers an interesting case of scriptural use at once transgressive and profound, meaningful and meaningless. Two passages from the Hebrew Bible play a part. In one wrenching scene, a depressive, repressed homosexual (played by William H. Macy) vomits into a public toilet while quoting Ezek 18:20: "The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." Seemingly gratuitous, the use of Scripture here actually serves to highlight the film's central *leitmotif*: family dysfunction passed from parent to child through incest and abuse. The second passage, Exod 8:2, forms part of the conceptual background for the film's conclusion. It reveals Yahweh's words to Pharaoh: "And if thou refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs." *Magnolia* ends quite remarkably, with an actual rain of frogs that serves as a redemptive event, altering the path of its characters all caught in a downward spiral of self-destruction because of the sins of their fathers.

P. T. Anderson reports that the rain of frogs in *Magnolia* was not initially taken from the Bible at all, but from Charles Fort, an early nineteenth-century writer on strange natural phenomena, including documented "rains" of frogs. Anderson says that he did not even know there was a plague of frogs in the Bible until he had completed the film's script. When he found it there, it served as a sort of synchronistic confirmation that his story was on the right track.

Since another theme in the film is that events and people are interconnected, Anderson weaves Exod 8:2 into the fabric of the film. He drops the biblical citation, chapter and verse, into tiny details—for example, waving on a placard in the studio audience of a quiz show scene. Like the John 3:16 poster held up at athletic events, Anderson's use of the citation here is less an invitation to viewers to look it up than it is a type of visual icon. It is the director's "deep play." Asked in an interview about the deeper significance of the film's many references to Exod 8:2, Anderson laughs: "I just thought it was a fun directorial, bored-on-the-set thing to do" (ptanderson.com/articlesand-interviews/austin.htm). As a means of illustrating the ease with which readers produce eisegetical readings of Scripture, one might ask students to discuss the significance of these references—before sharing Anderson's comments, of course. Some students will likely try to find answers on the Internet, however, and will come across the Anderson interview. When they share their information, one might respond by suggesting the Anderson is being insincere ("Is it really plausible that an educated American reader would be familiar with arcane literature dealing with raining frogs and *not* with the Exodus story?!"). Whether or not Anderson is sincere in confessing his ignorance of the text, discussion of the use of Scripture in the film alerts students to the difficulty that frequently attends our efforts at discerning authorial intent and also highlights the fact that authors—including biblical authors—sometimes quote other texts out of context or find significance that was not intended by the original author.

Overall, *Magnolia* is about ordinary and tiny moments of grace, points at which people at their most brittle and broken moments of debasement can be profoundly changed. And children can be angels and prophets, speaking out the truth in surprising ways. One theological interpretation of the movie is that the same God of Exodus who brings the Israelites out of slavery (Exod 2:23–25), brings such moments to save people through giving them hope.

For further discussion, see Reinhartz, *Scripture on the Silver Screen*, 24–38.

The Matrix (1999)

The hero of *The Matrix* has two identities. On the "profane" level, he is a mid-level computer programmer named Thomas Anderson. But he is also

known to some as Neo, a computer hacker and illegal software dealer. Neo receives his Monomyth-style "Call to Action" from Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), who gradually reveals to Neo the truth: reality as we know it is actually an elaborate cyber-illusion in which humans are unwittingly caught, believing it to be reality. What appears to be America in the year 1999 is actually, he says, "the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the Truth." The truth of the situation is much more horrible: Artificial intelligences have taken control of humankind; needing a reliable source of energy, these computers have learned to grow humans to serve as living batteries. While they are drained of their life energies, all humans are kept pacified or "asleep" by being literally plugged into the cyber-world of the Matrix.

Morpheus heads a small group of rebels who have learned to subvert the Matrix to some extent. But as much as they can do, they await The One who can lead them all to salvation. Morpheus—a type of John the Baptist—is convinced that Neo is this person. Neo must come to that recognition on his own before he is able to manipulate the Matrix to serve his own ends—to liberate the world from sleep, ignorance, and bondage. This narrative and its philosophical underpinnings—that humankind is spiritually and conceptually enslaved by malevolent beings and awaiting the awakening of a savior—is classically "gnostic," a point hardly lost on contemporary gnostic groups who have been known to use *The Matrix* as a sort of missionary tool. The film certainly fits the characteristics of Gnosticism (as presented in, e.g., Hans Jonas's seminal study, *The Gnostic Religion*).

One see shades of the film's stark dualism reflected in a few passages of the New Testament such as 1 Thess 5:4–5 ("We are not of night, nor of darkness, so let us not sleep as others do"), Eph 5:14 ("Wake up! O sleeper, rise from the dead"), and 1 Peter 2:1 (where Christians are "now 'aliens' to this fallen world"). And much has been made over the prominent messiah motifs. Christians, in particular, have reveled in the opportunity to read into the film a dizzying array of Christ-parallels, often with little critical reflection—almost certainly with a specificity that the Wachowskis had never intended. (Fanciful readings of the film's purported symbolism can be found online and provide cautionary tales about the pitfalls of reading and interpretation without basic controls in place.) The directors were not setting out to create a parable for Christianity (cf. the interview with Larry Wachowski in *Time Magazine*, April 19, 1999). So while many tout *The Matrix* as a sort of pop-culture scripture ideal for turning a jaded, hyper-stimulated Generation Exile to Christ, *The Matrix* is hardly a Christian movie. There is also little truly "biblical" about it. The Bible is never quoted, beyond the appearances of biblical names (the "promised land" for the rebels is called Zion; the name of Morpheus's ship is the Nebuchadnezzar). The ship's plaque reads Mark III, 11 ("Whenever the

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evils spirits saw Him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God!' "), the significance of which is not entirely clear.

The final scenes in which Neo battles Agent Smith, dies, and is resurrected by Trinity's kiss are fun to show in class; students can point out parallels to and diversions from the New Testament resurrection accounts. How is Neo a Christ-type? What sort of powers (or body) does he have after resurrection? What is Trinity a type of in this setting? And what theological function might the ending have, in which Neo flies off to the heavens without immediately redeeming the world? The two subsequent *Matrix* movies answer some of these questions as well as make for a good illustration of different New Testament Christologies. One might show the scenes from *Matrix: Reloaded* in which Neo arrives on Zion and has to do the prosaic, hands-on work of a Jesus-figure rather than that of a majestic redeemer, or the final battle between Neo and Smith in *Matrix: Revolutions* to illustrate *Christus Victor* atonement theories that imagine Christ on the cross as a sort of "bait" which Satan swallows and thereby destroys himself.

Memento (2000)

Memory is a pervasive theological motif in the Passover narrative in Exod 12–14. The Israelites are instructed again and again to recall the mighty acts of God that have resulted in their deliverance (e.g., 12:14; 13:3, 9). This collective act of remembrance in part constitutes Israel as a people. Israel would in some fundamental sense cease to exist without these shared memories, just as the maintenance of any individual's identity becomes problematic without the capacity to recollect the past.

Life would be chaos without memory, and few films make this point more vividly than *Memento*. When Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) and his wife are viciously attacked, the woman dies and Leonard is left with Korsakoff's Syndrome, a rare type of retrograde amnesia that prevents him from forming new long-term memories. He remembers the attack and knows that he wants revenge (the *lex talionis* of Lev 24:17–20 in the Gideon's Bible appears fleetingly on the screen: DVD ch. 2). But as he sets out to find the killer, his condition requires him to tattoo key facts onto his skin and write notes on Polaroid pictures to remind himself of what has taken place and how it fits into his overarching objective. To complicate matters further, the movie scenes unfold in reverse chronological order. This device helps the audience to experience something of the disorientation that plagues Leonard. It also shows the ways in which memory is neither a purely linear nor a passive faculty. Leonard's comments on the nature of memory (DVD ch. 6) may spur provocative discussion of biblical genres and authorial intent: "Memory's not perfect. It's not even that good. Ask the police; eyewitness testimony is unre-

liable.… Memory can change the shape of a room or the color of a car. It's an interpretation, not a record. Memories can be changed or distorted and they're irrelevant if you have the facts." To what extent, if any, is this an accurate way to understand the operating assumptions of the biblical authors or the legacy of their writings?

Certain events are more charged with meaning than others. For Leonard to retain any shred of identity, select memories are absolutely critical. His case illustrates the link between memory and identity in a striking fashion. Less bizarre but equally helpful examples highlighting this link can be drawn from the experience of the students by posing the following question: If you were asked to choose three or four events for which everyone in the room can clearly recall where he or she was when they took place, what would they be? For earlier generations, choices would include Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy assassination, and perhaps the first moon landing. More recent examples might include the 1986 explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, the 1994 police chase involving O. J. Simpson, and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Subgroups within a larger culture distinguish themselves in part on the basis of the memories that have attained similarly iconic status. For example, Boston Red Sox fans—and relatively few others—will be able to remember where they were for the heart-breaking loss to the New York Yankees in the 2003 playoffs as well as for their miraculous comeback the following year. Memphians are more likely than most Americans to remember where they were when Elvis Presley died. The memories that make such indelible imprints on the collective consciousness of a group make a kind of statement about the peculiar character of that group. (It is probably significant, for instance, that far more Americans remember hearing the news of Princess Diana's death than Mother Teresa's death, even though both occurred on the same day.) The movie and the follow-up exercise reinforce this dynamic one sees in Exodus as well as in such texts as the Last Supper narratives in the Gospels ("do this in remembrance of me").

Monster (2003)

This film is based on the story of Aileen Wuornos, a Florida prostitute who was sentenced to death for murdering seven men. The opening scene helps students understand the male perspective of Prov 1–9, particularly regarding the dangers of the "loose woman" (e.g., 2:16; 5:3, 20; 6:24; 7:5, 10). The biblical text presents advice from a father to a son. The loose woman does not speak; when she does, it is only as quoted by the father. One does not hear her side of the story. More disturbingly, there is no room for her rehabilitation or redemption. Rather, the discourse encourages the reader to flee from the whore whose paths lead to death. Before showing the film clip, students

can be asked to provide a voice for the loose woman by writing a paragraph describing what she would say if interviewed. Responses vary widely, but relatively few give her a sympathetic read.

In the two-minute clip, Wuornos (Charlize Theron) tells us in a voice-over about her childhood as we see scenes from her youth. She explains how she was hopeful about the future, but unloved and subjected to horrific abuse, the details of which are easily available in documentaries and on the Internet. She turns to prostitution at a young age, which leads to more abuse. After the flashback to her childhood, we see Wuornos sitting in the rain holding a gun considering suicide. It is a sad story, to say the least, of one particular "loose woman." The biblical text, however, tends to ignore such stories, a fact which the clip sharply underscores. Taking into account these divergent perspectives aids in developing a thicker description of the moral, cultural, psychological, emotional, and even legal circumstances lying behind a text like Proverbs.

Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975)

This quirky British comedy, which remains quite popular among undergraduates despite its age, can be used to introduce two topics.

(1) The "Holy Hand Grenade" scene (DVD ch. 22) helps to introduce genre criticism, which studies the form, function, and content of smaller literary units. If specific qualities are found with sufficient regularity across texts, then scholars are justified in identifying a discrete genre, which in turn clarifies which questions may be properly posed to the material. The "Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch" is used near the end of the film to destroy a killer rabbit that blocks the path of the knights. Before deploying it, a friar reads a blessing from the (fictional) Book of Armaments 2:9–21: "O Lord, bless this, Thy hand grenade, that with it, Thou mayest blow Thine enemies to tiny bits in Thy mercy." After a prelate asks him to "skip ahead a bit," the friar continues with the instructions:

> "And the Lord spake, saying, 'First shalt thou take out the Holy Pin. Then, shalt thou count to three. No more, no less. Three shall be the number thou shalt count, and the number of the counting shall be three. Four shalt thou not count, neither count thou two, excepting that thou then proceed to three. Five is right out. Once the number three, being the third number, be reached, then lobbest thou thy Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch towards thy foe, who, being naughty in My sight, shall snuff it.' Amen."

A simple way to begin the discussion is to ask why it is a funny scene. As students articulate the reasons (e.g., it "sounds" biblical but really is not; it contains vocabulary that is anachronistic; it deftly apes King James English), they begin to see that they already have a good ear for biblical forms, for how

they can be adapted, for what gets repeated, for the probable *Sitz im Leben* of particular locutions, and the like.

(2) The two-minute scene in which the knights receive their quest for the grail (DVD ch. 8) nicely illustrates the typical elements found in Old Testament call narratives. In groups, students can quickly compare the scene with one or more biblical call narratives (Exod 3:1–22; Judg 6:11–24; 1 Kgs 22:19–23; Isa 6:1–8; Jer 1:4–10). Standard components to note include (a) the encounter with God, (b) the call proper, (c) an objection from the one called, and (d) reassurance or sign (See Brad E. Kelle, "Prophetic Call Narratives," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 167).

The Omen (1976/2006)

On June 6, at 6 p.m., a son is born to Robert Thorn, American ambassador to Italy. But he is told at the Catholic hospital that his son is stillborn, and—to spare his beloved wife aching grief—is encouraged to take in another orphaned infant born at the same moment as his son. His wife need not know of the switch. And so the Thorns take home a changeling and, after Thorn is appointed as ambassador to Great Britain, they move to the English countryside, where things slowly begin to go terribly wrong.

Comparing the way that the Bible appears in both the original 1976 *Omen* and its 2006 remake makes for fascinating work in the classroom. Both movies are extraordinary cultural artifacts because the movies capture so well some of the latent neuroses of the past thirty years (e.g., the guilt of the professional parent and the nagging suspicion that perhaps we are not as "religious" as we ought to be). The Christianity behind *The Omen* movies is similarly charged. Catholicism comes across as deeply superstitious but nevertheless informed as to the way that the world will come to an end.

The 2006 remake adds to the beginning a scene at the Vatican in which a professional "apocalypse watcher" interprets modern disasters (the 9/11 attacks, Hurricane Katrina, and the tsunami of southeast Asia all flash across the screen). He keys these modern events in to the book of Revelation's "prophecies" of the disasters that will accompany the opening of the seven seals. Although this mode of interpreting Revelation owes far more to American evangelicalism than to Vatican exegesis, the point is made more trenchantly than in the original *Omen* that we are living at the end of times.

Thorn is "enlightened" because he does not know his Bible nor pay much heed to the insane priest who insists that his son Damian is the son of the devil. But at the same time, he is badly mistaken. As in the Gospel of Mark's "Messianic Secret," the only people who recognize Damien for who he really is are women, lunatics, animals, and the audience. Thorn's ignorance of Christian demonology and apocalypticism extends to the Bible. In a key scene in

the 1976 *Omen* (DVD ch. 9) the priest who helped arrange Damien's adoption reads to Thorn from the "Book of Revelations" (sic). The verses are completely fictitious, which suggests that the movie's audience also shares Thorn's biblical ignorance. One interesting exercise is to see whether or not students recognize the verses as spurious, and then to ask in what way the verses sound, or do not sound, authentic. A discussion about the melodramatic language of "apocalyptic rhetoric" would be interesting, especially if this scene were paired with other pseudo-scripture readings in movies (e.g., *Pulp Fiction*'s pseudo-Ezekiel or *Lost Souls*'s scrolling text of a fictitious Deut 17). At this point, it would be good to play the same scene from the *Omen* remake (DVD ch. 13). The quoted verses are identical, but the Bible is absent, and the verses are no longer attributed to Revelation. Students might be pressed to discuss: What does this sudden absence of the Bible mean? Could it be that the 2006 movie presumes a more biblically literate audience?

The only actual biblical quotation in the 1976 *Omen* appears as script on a black screen at the movie's closing: "This calls for wisdom, If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number, His number is 666" (Rev 13:18 NIV). In the remake, one added scene shows Thorn and the photographer Keith Jennings (David Thewlis) at a refreshment stand near Cerveteri, where they are headed to find more information about Damien's real mother (a jackal!). The photographer flips through a Bible and notes that the verses quoted by the priest are not found there, but appear to be various images and scriptural fragments drawn from various writings in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament—just as, he says, the antichrist narrative is never really articulated in Revelation. The unexpected appearance of this more sophisticated hermeneutic would make an excellent scene to use in class (DVD ch. 17).

On the Waterfront (1954)

What can we learn when one author alludes to or quotes the words of another? Writers, both consciously and unconsciously, have appropriated the words of the Bible for centuries. This also happens within and throughout the Bible, though with greater frequency in the New Testament. But the biblical writers rarely spell out in detail their purposes in quoting other Scripture, nor do they specify how much of the original context they intend to conjure up for their audiences.

This classic film, which has in turn been quoted quite often in other works, contains a scene that may be used to introduce intertextuality. At the halfway point in the film (DVD chs. 15–16), the scene depicts the "accidental" death of a longshoreman who has cooperated with a police investigation into union corruption. When a priest, Fr. Barry (Karl Malden), is called in to

administer the last rites, he delivers a powerful speech indicting the bosses and challenging the dockworkers to do the right thing. "Some people think the Crucifixion only took place on Calvary," he says, but this is a mistake. Every time the mob tries to intimidate a man and keep him from doing his duty as a citizen—that, says Fr. Barry, is a crucifixion. Moreover, whoever stands by idly as this happens is as guilty "as the Roman soldier who pierced the flesh of Our Lord to see if He was dead." The speech ends with a close paraphrase of Matt 25:40: "If you do it to the least of mine, you do it to me!"

After viewing the clip or reading the excerpted transcript, students should analyze the speech in terms of its use of the biblical text. This exercise serves as a warm-up for studying the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament. The following questions, formulated for similar exercises dealing with biblical intertextuality, may be adapted for use with the speech from the film: (1) What texts are cited or alluded to in this passage? (2) Does the text of the New Testament citation exactly match the Hebrew Bible passage? Does it appear that the New Testament author has modified the passage in any way? Are there any evident reasons for the changes? (3) What is the context of the passage in its original setting? Does the New Testament author's use of this passage reflect an awareness of the original setting? (4) How does the quoted passage function in the argument or narrative of the New Testament author? For what apparent purpose is the New Testament author using this particular Hebrew Bible text? What can we learn about the audience on the basis of the author's aims and assumptions?

Biblical texts for use with this exercise are legion. Examples include: Mark 1:1–7; John 19:23–30; Acts 2; 28:23–28; Rom 9:13–15; 15:7–13; 1 Cor 10:1–13; Heb 10:26–39; Jas 2:14–26; 1 Pet 2:4–10; Jude 14–16.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975)

This film is one of many for use in discussions of cinematic Christ-figures. (The background for this exercise is found in the entry for *Fight Club* on pp. 140–42.) In considering various characters who have been hailed as Christ-figures, students come to realize that the factors leading the early church to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah were varied and complex and that even today there is no unanimity when it comes to defining the essential and the merely incidental traits of Jesus.

In what sense, if any, is it appropriate to consider Randall McMurphy (Jack Nicholson) a Christ-figure? What specific traits, deeds, quotations, or plot devices lead the viewer to apply this label? Here, the protagonist is a violent, foul-mouthed, hyper-sexed convict in an asylum. But he also exhibits many qualities that parallel those of Jesus: He attracts disciples, who frequently frustrate him. He takes them fishing. He tries to open their eyes to a reality they

could not previously see (the baseball "telecast"). He "cures" the Chief, who had been thought deaf and dumb. He is variously considered a criminal and a lunatic. The powers that be (the nurse, the doctors) shuttle him back and forth and debate who should take responsibility for rehabilitating him. In the end, he is betrayed by a close confidant, who then commits suicide. He endures great physical abuse and is martyred on behalf of others. Legends about his exploits arise when he disappears. His example helps to "liberate" others from the demons that have plagued them. How should we evaluate this character? Are the similarities sufficiently detailed to warrant comparison with Jesus? What differences militate against a serious comparison?

Pi (1998)

Driven by his work on chaos theory, the genius mathematician Max Cohen (Sean Gullette) programs his supercomputer, Euclid, to calculate Pi so as to unlock the mathematical patterns that rule the stock market. Uploading a disk containing the Hebrew alphabet, Euclid seems to malfunction—and spits out a 216-digit number that is, it turns out, the unknowable, unspeakable Name of God. As a human, Max is too limited a being to contain God's fullness, and the knowledge drives the hero—already plagued by crippling migraines—insane.

Pi is not a movie that is easy to watch. It is filmed in grainy black and white, and has relentlessly vivid and gory scenes of Max's migraines. Indeed, the question here (as in *Jacob's Ladder* and *Last Temptation of Christ*) is whether or not Max is crazy or touched by God. He is not a likeable character, and yet he manages to see the world knitted together by some kind of divine order—he just calls it math, not God. It takes a fundamentalist Hasid (Ben Shenkman) to help Max to see that the two are identical: God reveals himself in numbers, in letters, in nature, and all things are interrelated.

The idea of the all-powerful Name of God as a sacred and hidden number (known as the *Schemhamphoras*) derives from kabbalistic Jewish gematria traditions. It is encoded into the Hebrew text of Exod 14:19, 20, and 21, each verse of which has seventy-two letters. Kabbalistic sages noted that if one were to write these three verses one above the other, the first from right to left, the second in reverse order, and the third from right to left again and so on, the result is seventy-two columns of three-letter names for God. These are further subdivided into four columns of eighteen names each, the four columns corresponding to the four letters of the Tetragrammaton.

Pi is useful in the classroom because it is a deeply Jewish movie and offers one type of authentic approach to the Torah never really depicted in film. What emerges from *Pi* is not a sense of the Hebrew Scriptures as literature, but of the Torah as Bible Code, an encapsulation of the entire cosmos. The

world is a manifestation of God, governed by immutable mathematical laws. In this way, the film provides an opening to introduce various "modern" and "premodern" methods of interpretation, including rabbinic exegetical principles such as *gezerah shawa*, *binyan ab*, and *qal wa-homer* (cf. the seven Rules of Hillel and the thirteen Rules of R. Ishmael).

Planet of the Apes (2001)

The *Planet of the Apes* movies were a 1960s phenomenon. At their best, they presented American audiences with a parable about racism and intolerance. Director Tim Burton's "remake" adds religion to the mix of elements that can either socialize or destabilize us. Maverick scientist Leo Davidson (Mark Wahlberg) leaves his research vessel to bring back a wayward, genetically altered supermonkey who has escaped in a shuttle. Davidson's shuttle crashes on the Planet of the Apes, where he is imprisoned with other humans by evil apes until set free by Ari, a scientist who finds herself fascinated by Davidson's keen intelligence and ability to speak. Together, the two liberate humankind from the oppression and cruelty of apes. It is a deliverance story, with Leo as a reluctant Moses and the Kingdom of the Apes as Pharaonic Egypt.

The conceit of the film is that humans and apes are separate species, with humans lower down the developmental scale than apes. The evolutionary debate is posed as an ignorant question: Do lower species have souls? The discourse here mirrors nineteenth-century American parlor conversations on whether or not African American slaves had souls. Perhaps one of the most interesting nuances of the latent evolutionary debate is the movie's assertion that apes, like humans, are fundamentally myth-makers, with an innate need to create cosmogonies or creation myths. In this Eliadean world, apes have religion; they worship a Christ-like figure called Semos, who was present at creation and who, they believe, will also return one day. They also have sacred space, even holy writings. One character, Attar, worships at a candle-lit shrine containing the likeness of an ape, which suggests that we, too, worship a god in our own image. Indeed, the language of creation in the Father's image is made explicit in Attar's prayer: "Bless us holy father, who created all apes in his image. Hasten the day of your return when you bring peace to all apes." Less-evolved gorillas enthusiastically embrace Semos as a deity, but by the end of the movie, it becomes clear that their faith is mere folly. More intellectual apes (including the heroine Ari) scorn such beliefs and devotion as silly. As she leads Leo away from the city, Ari explains that their path takes them through the sacred ruins of Calima. According to the holy writings, she tells him, "that is where creation began; where Semos breathed life into us." She quickly undercuts this "religious" view saying, "But most intelligent apes dismiss it as a fairy tale." In fact, the movie's ending in which Semos returns

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literally as a *deus ex machina* vindicates Ari's position. Religion is seen not so much as deliberately constructed but the result of a garbled understanding of the way things really were—like nineteenth-century theories of religion as a "corruption of language." At the same time, Burton leaves room for faith to re-enchant the logical world of science. Ari's final words are telling, as she ultimately loses her academic distance and waxes poetic: "One day they'll tell a story about a human who came from the stars and changed our world. Some will say it was just a fairy tale; it was never real. But I'll know."

Although biblical studies and introduction to religious studies courses are typically taught separately, there is considerable overlap, and the perspectives one finds in the film will be, variously, embraced or rejected by many students in courses on the Bible. For instructors who want to confront these larger issues, this film serves as a fine touchstone for discussion.

Pleasantville (1998)

Two bored siblings, David and Jennifer (Toby MacGuire and Reese Witherspoon) find themselves mysteriously transported back into the fictitious, black-and-white sitcom *Pleasantville*, circa 1958, where they find themselves playing out the roles of siblings Bud and Mary Sue Parker. Bud, an avid fan of the old television show, at first revels in his chance to live out the episodes he has so eagerly memorized. Mary Sue, however, takes no interest in embodying the limiting role of a late 1950s teenage girl and quickly relishes the opportunity to bring mayhem into this staid universe. She seduces a young basketball player and thereby introduces sexuality into an aseptic, asexual, unreal world. The gradual sexual awakening of Pleasantville's citizens is graphically and strikingly illustrated by the literal (and gradual) colorization of Pleasantville's black-and-white world into brilliant Technicolor. Sexual awakening is portrayed graphically and colorfully; in one scene (likely to embarrass some students) Bud's mother (Joan Allen) masturbates in the bathtub for the first time, at the climax of which a tree outside her window bursts brilliantly and suddenly into flame (DVD ch. 18). It does not take a scholar to recognize this as the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Bud's mother now knows something about herself, about human potential, that powerfully transforms her and her world.

Overall, *Pleasantville* can be read as a thoughtful and creative meditation on Genesis. It addresses questions of what it means to be human, to possess free will, and what is the true nature of sin. Similar to other ancient exegeses of Genesis including texts such as the *Hypostasis of the Archons* from the Nag Hammadi Library in which Eve (and other female characters) bring redemptive knowledge to Adam and other men, it offers a subversive reading of the Christian idea of the "fall" and "original sin." Pleasantville's Lover's Lane is

a gorgeously colorized Eden with no ironic danger present, and when Bud's love-interest Margaret plucks a scarlet apple from a black-and-white world and offers it to him, we see clear allusions to Bud's sexual awakening. Margaret becomes an Eve (the film has several Eve figures). But here the act is outrageous only in the eyes of a demiurgical Don Knotts—a minor "god" who controls the Pleasantville cosmos. This can and will upset some conservative students (many Christians were disgusted by the film) while others are likely to be inspired by a liberating reading of the biblical text.

Pleasantville incorporates and subverts traditional Christian interpretations of Eve as the temptress who provokes the fall. It sees women as sexual creatures who nevertheless employ sexuality for positive, even salvific ends. Still, the knowledge that Bud and Mary Sue bring to Pleasantville is not merely sexual knowledge, but something more diffuse—the knowledge of human creative potential. Mary Sue herself cannot be transformed ("colored") until she immerses herself in literature—no amount of raw sexuality will redeem or transform her. Thus *Pleasantville* makes the point that sexuality is not the only thing that can save humanity; rather, the true key to a transformed life is to live in accordance with one's true inner nature, which each person must discover for herself or himself. To what extent, one may ask students, does this point capture the spirit of the Genesis narrative?

For further discussion, see Reinhartz, *Scripture on the Silver Screen*, 144–65.

Pulp Fiction (1994)

This Quentin Tarantino film follows the tangled paths of two hit men, the wife of their boss, a washed-up boxer, and a pair of small-time thieves. Many students will be familiar with the final scene of the movie (DVD ch. 26), a speech delivered by Jules, one of the hit men (played by Samuel L. Jackson). Jules has just decided to leave his life of crime after surviving—in his mind, miraculously—an ambush earlier in the day. In this three-minute scene he points a gun at one of the thieves while he recites, and then analyzes, the speech he had been accustomed to delivering just before dispatching his victims. The text, he says, is taken from Ezek 25:17.

Jules's speech, which is readily available on the Internet, provides an opportunity to reflect on the task of interpreting the Bible, critically and otherwise. One might pose a discussion question along these lines: "To what extent is it appropriate to think of this speech as an example of biblical interpretation?" Astute readers will take the trouble of consulting Ezek 25 and will find that it does not say what Jules says it says. (His version is a pastiche of fiery phrases that "feel" like Ezekiel, as well as bits from Gen 4 and Ps 23.) What is the difference between paraphrasing and interpreting? Must we read biblical texts in context? Must we view the rest of the movie in order to under-

stand Jules? Is Jules's application of the text's significance to his own situation a legitimate way of reading? Or is it a form of eisegesis? Is it always incumbent on the interpreter to give the author's intent a privileged place when determining the meaning? Is it ever possible to have a "wrong" interpretation of a text? (Jules's assessment of his own former way of construing the text suggests that the answer is yes.) Students may raise other hermeneutical questions: Is a murderer truly capable of understanding the Bible? What, precisely, is the proper object of the interpreter—the mind of the author, along with the appropriate historical-cultural setting? the text by itself? the "world in front of the text"? For example, should we ask whether it is Jules or Tarantino who is responsible for the misquotation?

For further discussion, see Reinhartz, *Scripture on the Silver Screen*, 97–113.

Raging Bull (1980)

Martin Scorsese's film is based on the life of Jake LaMotta—his rise and fall as a middleweight boxer, his stormy relationships with brother Joey and wife Vicki, his brief imprisonment, and his sad post-ring career as a stand-up comedian and night-club owner. After the closing scene, which shows Jake practicing his stage routine in front of a mirror, the text of John 9:24–26 (NEB) appears on the screen: "So, for the second time, [the Pharisees] summoned the man who had been blind and said: 'Speak the truth before God. We know this fellow is a sinner.' 'Whether or not he is a sinner, I do not know,' the man replied. 'All I know is this: once I was blind and now I can see.'"

Rather than viewing the short clip in class, the scene works best in connection with an out-of-class writing assignment dealing with intertextuality and hermeneutics. Once they have viewed the film, students should respond to the following questions: Why does Scorsese add the postscript from John's Gospel? Since an author has only one chance to leave a final impression, is there some significance in this choice? Does the postscript help the audience to understand the film better? Does the film, conversely, help the audience to understand John (or the passage about the man born blind) better? Do the characters in the biblical text (the man born blind, the Pharisees, Jesus) stand for characters in the film in some allegorical fashion?

It matters little whether students consult secondary sources—commentary on the ending is surprisingly scarce. It is sometimes interpreted as a summing up of Jake's "rebirth" after a tortuous journey through personal and professional failures. Or, it may point at Scorsese himself, who had been struggling with drug addiction just prior to making the film. (His cinematic "recovery" resulted in a film judged by critics to be one of the century's best.) This instance of appropriation of the biblical text is one in which the cliché "there are no wrong answers" seems to apply. The follow-up discussion after

students have written on the topic functions as a forum for clarifying what we mean, exactly, when we talk about "biblical interpretation." Most students will notice connections or similarities or parallels between the movie and John. Is this the same thing as observing Scorsese in the act of interpreting the Bible? Could we clarify matters by asking him what he had in mind when he ended the film on this note? Time permitting, the discussion may be broadened by including opposing views regarding authorial intent (e.g., Wimsatt and Beardsley on "the intentional fallacy" and E. D. Hirsch Jr.).

Raging Bull presents an explicit and undeniable case of appropriation. A more devious way to broach the same set of question is to assign a short paper on a film without any such explicit biblical references. For example: "Write a two-page paper on (1) the way in which *Eyes Wide Shut* alludes to the Letter to the Romans; (2) the way in which *The March of the Penguins* reflects on Prov 31; or (3) the way in which *Napoleon Dynamite* (re)interprets Acts 10–11." After they have done the assignment, the instructor can inform students that there are in fact no connections between these randomly chosen movies and the corresponding texts. Students trust—up to this point, at any rate—that their professor would not play a trick on them, and as a result many come up with quite ingenious comparisons. But is it necessarily the case that all the papers must be exercises in eisegesis? Along with many of the basic metacritical questions raised by scholars, a range of differing (and entertaining) viewpoints will emerge in the ensuing debate as students defend or attack the examples of biblical interpretation their classmates have produced.

The Rapture (1991)

This is a controversial, troubling film that is sure to provoke strong reactions from viewers. Sharon (Mimi Rogers) is a young, bored woman who fills the emotional and spiritual holes in her life as a switchboard operator by cruising swingers bars with her boyfriend. An unsettling sexual encounter and an even more unsettling dream provokes Sharon's sudden "born again" conversion to Christianity. The experience transforms Sharon's understanding of the world and its purpose, and she completely renounces her previous life of sin. Few films portray the psychology of conversion as effectively as *The Rapture*, but Sharon's life before conversion is conveyed graphically enough to make this film potentially embarrassing for many viewers.

An enthusiastic new convert, Sharon finds herself drawn to other fundamentalist Christians, particularly those who cluster around a preternaturally wise child prophet. The child warns his community that they must prepare for the Rapture, the final apocalyptic event in which true believers are suddenly caught up into the heavens while unbelievers are left behind on earth.

(The primary text expressing the notion of a "rapture" is 1 Thess 4:16–17 and not, as is commonly thought, the book of Revelation.) He reads portions of the Gospel of Mark's "Little Apocalypse" (Mark 13: "there will be wars and rumor of wars"), a brief scene that might work well shown in the classroom, particularly in discussions of these texts in modern discourse (DVD ch. 9). Some students may be surprised at the bewildering variety of millenialist interpretation, examples of which are plentiful on the Internet.

David Duchovny plays Sharon's lover Randy. Inspired by Sharon, Randy converts and the two marry, have a child, and begin their lives as committed Christians. Randy's tragic death provokes another crisis for Sharon. She sells or gives away all her possessions, packs up her car, and moves with her young daughter out to the desert to await further instructions from God. The movie becomes progressively more difficult to watch as she and her child, starving and freezing, wait fruitlessly for further signs.

It is difficult to know what to make of *The Rapture*'s shocking ending, and perspectives vary on whether or not the film is authentically Christian or anti-Christian. What it means to convert—from the first days of glowing self-assurance, bursting pride, and missionary zeal to the thoroughgoing conviction that one is right and outsiders are wrong, to the intensely personal struggles of faith—are well captured. Certainly, its view of certain strands of fundamentalist Christianity is not essentially incorrect, nor does it get its theology or hermeneutics wrong, at least from a biblical point of view. Still, it presents a disturbing theodicy: What kind of God demands such sacrifices from his children? What kind of God kills his children who fail to believe in him, and rewards only those who believe in him at all costs? It is difficult for many viewers not to sympathize with the strong-willed Sharon, who makes a decision she must deal with for eternity. At the same time, the consequence of this sympathy is that the audience finds itself on the opposite side of a vast divide from God—thus leaving many viewers distressed, bewildered, and even outraged. *The Rapture* works well in the classroom, but should be previewed by the instructor beforehand and used with discretion.

Rosemary's Baby (1968)

Roman Polanski's movie about a woman who unwittingly gives birth to the antichrist stands as a classic of the thriller genre. Unbeknownst to his wife Rosemary (Mia Farrow), Guy Woodhouse (John Cassavetes) has literally made a deal with the devil to aid his struggling career as an actor. Rosemary's growing suspicions that their neighbors make up a coven of witches with whom Guy is conspiring climax with the revelation that the child she has just borne is not her husband's, but Satan's.

The closing scene (DVD ch. 31) is in many ways a fiendish parody of the infancy accounts of Matthew and, especially, Luke. At four minutes, it is short enough to be shown in class to prompt a discussion of the central themes and plot elements of these narratives. Ask students to identify the elements from the Gospels that they detect in some form in the movie's final scene and then to decide whether it is more similar to Luke or Matthew. The point of the exercise is not to praise or to blame Polanski for his fidelity to the Gospels. Rather, it forces students to (1) read the Gospels closely and in context so as to determine which themes are central for the biblical writers and which are incidental, (2) avoid the harmonizing impulse that accompanies much reading of the Gospels, and (3) hone their skills in recognizing the various reconfigurations undergone by biblical motifs in the later tradition.

Among the echoes of the New Testament infancy accounts, the following may be noted: (1) the mother's name is a variant of Mary; (2) those who have come from far and wide to pay their respects to the newborn babe represent a variety of nationalities, similar to the magi in Matt 2; (3) the mother's husband is not the true father of the child; (4) Rosemary's child "shall overthrow the mighty and lay waste their temples" and "shall redeem the despised" (cf. Luke 1:48, 51–52, 71; 2:34); (5) Rosemary is chosen "out of all the women in the whole world" to bear Satan's child (cf. Luke 1:30–33, 42–45, 49); (6) the cries of "Hail!" echo the "Hail, favored one!" of Luke 1:28; (7) the gathered company declares that the birth of the child marks "Year One"; for them, 1966 *Anno Domini* is the true inaugural "year of the Lord"; (8) just before the credits roll, Rosemary appears to accept her role as mother and gently rocks the child to sleep, even as her facial expression suggests that she is full of wonder at what this turn of events will mean; compare this with Mary's reactions in Luke 1:38; 2:19, 51.

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Schindler's List (1993)

Is the Bible historically accurate? Films based explicitly on historical events constitute helpful analogies for use in discussions of this important question, which inevitably arises in biblical studies courses. Any number of works lend themselves to this exercise (e.g., *Amistad*, *The Killing Fields*, *Malcolm X*, *Glory*, *Munich*), but this moving Steven Spielberg film about an opportunistic German industrialist who saves more than a thousand Polish Jews from extermination in the Holocaust is perhaps the most familiar.

To set up the discussion, the instructor should present a few historical inaccuracies found in the film. These are easy to locate on the Internet. A few examples: (1) The film downplays Schindler's drinking and womanizing. (2) The "list" was not compiled by Schindler (Liam Neeson) or Itzhak Stern (Ben Kingsley) but by another Jewish subordinate, Marcel Goldberg, who exacted

bribes from Jews who realized that the alternative to work in Schindler's factory was almost certain death. (3) Schindler's transformation from cold-hearted businessman to "righteous Gentile" motivated by charity was not the result of seeing an anonymous girl in a red coat during the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto (the only splash of color in the black and white body of the film: DVD ch. 14). (4) Because Schindler was never awarded the Golden Nazi Party Badge, he could not have tearfully regretted not selling it and using the money to save more Jews (DVD ch. 37).

Do such errors matter? On what factors does one's answer depend? Does it still qualify as a "true story" if this is the extent of the artistic license taken by Spielberg or by Thomas Keneally, on whose novel the screenplay is based? Is there a line that, when crossed, marks the boundary between the realms of fiction and nonfiction? For example, would it be true if (1) the film portrays Schindler saving eleven thousand Jews instead of eleven hundred? (2) if "Schindler" were simply a composite of several different Germans who had taken risks in saving Jews? (3) if the film puts into Schindler's mouth words he may have thought but never actually spoke? Can the story qualify as "true" if it is fictional in the ordinary sense? If yes, is it possible to form a precise definition of "truth"? Should tolerance for "white lies" correspond to one's sympathy for a cause—in this instance, reminding the audience of the horrors of Hitler and lauding heroic resistance? Should the film have a disclaimer informing viewers that some liberties have been taken with the historical record? Is the author safe in assuming that the audience is competent at recognizing the genre and understanding its implicit rules? Or is the genre classification not perfectly clear?

This line of questioning can be pursued with several different texts (e.g., the primordial history in Genesis, the Exodus, or the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2) regardless of the stance the instructor or the students take on the particular historical questions involved. The books of Esther and Judith raise these issues and also share the film's thematic focus on the survival of the Jewish people. For many students, however, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection constitute the most obvious parallel. Rudolf Bultmann framed the issue in terms of the related German concepts of *historie* (what actually happened) and *geschichte* (the historic event that becomes significant for human existence). His approach met resistance at several points, most notably in his inclusion of the resurrection among the "mythical" elements of early Christian teaching. Bultmann denies that the resurrection took place as described in the Gospels but that the legitimacy of the kerygma is not thereby undermined. What truly matters, he says, is not the actual events transpiring on Easter but, rather, their ultimate significance, namely, the way in which Jesus has opened up a new self-understanding for human beings. But can an event

really become historic (*geschichtlich*) that was not at some point historical (*historisch*)? Is it more important to settle this question for some events than for others? Is it possible to understand the biblical texts without understanding how their authors would have answered this question?

Seven (1995)

Sin is without a doubt among the most ubiquitous concepts students will encounter in their study of the Bible, yet many survey courses dedicate little class time to it. The conceit of this film is helpful for immersing students in the biblical thoughtworld and encouraging reflection on later theological developments of the doctrine of sin. Two detectives are chasing a serial killer who chooses seven victims, egregious examples of each of the seven deadly sins—gluttony, wrath, greed, envy, sloth, pride, and lust. The New Testament alludes to a category of "mortals sins" (1 Jn 5:16–17) but the enumeration belongs to the late patristic and medieval periods.

Instead of a lecture on sin, a variety of writing or research assignments can engage the attention and energy of students: (1) Which of the seven sins appear most often in the Hebrew Bible? in the New Testament? Good answers to the question require facility with concordances, sensitivity to differences between translations, and also alertness to considerations of genre, audience, and purpose. (E.g., is Jesus' silence on a particular sin due to his approval of the deed in question? Or is it explained by his tacit assumption that his audience would automatically understand his views on the matter?) (2) If the class were to compile a list of biblical characters to represent each of the sins, who should be paired with which sin? Popular images of particular characters are occasionally at odds with what the texts actually recount, and so answering this question forces students to attend to what narrators include, what they emphasize, and what they implicitly or explicitly condemn as sinful. (3) Has subsequent tradition successfully identified those offenses deemed the most heinous in the Bible? Are there serious sins which the traditional list of seven omits?

The Seventh Sign (1988)

The *Seventh Sign*—nicknamed "Rosemary's Omen"—is not a great movie, but there is good material to work with in the classroom:

(1) Note the female "savior" in pregnant heroine Abby (Demi Moore). She is a sympathetic character, and a great deal of the narrative tension comes from her need to understand what she and her unborn child have to do with the apocalyptic events unfolding around her.

(2) The role of Judaism here is more fully delineated than in other similar movies. There is a teenage boy, Avi, who knows his Talmud and acts as Abby's

able guide in the world of Judaism. He takes on the role of junior detective and Bible scholar with enthusiasm, and gets a lot of stuff right that many other movies tend to get wrong. There is a lot about something called the Guf, a hall of souls in Jewish kabbalistic teachings, which needs to be empty before the Messiah can return. The idea of the Guf being emptied works well with the idea of the Messiah's return at the end of Revelation; it is therefore one "Jewish" interpretation of Revelation, which some scholars, of course, have argued is a thoroughly Jewish first-century apocalyptic text.

(3) The apocalypticism of this movie, like other movies that interpret current events as the plagues of the book of Revelation (*The Rapture*, *The Omen* [2006], *Omega Code*) works nicely alongside a study of the biblical book. How does the director "read" Revelation? Note that the movie opens with someone wading into the water with a scroll, breaking a seal, and dropping it into the sea which then boils around it. Is this as students imagine the opening of the seven seals?

(4) Jurgen Prochnow plays a fabulously menacing Christ who goes by the name of "David." The neat twist here is that he is not the antichrist come at the end of days, the way we might expect for such a storyline. Instead, as he himself makes clear, he comes not as the Lamb but as the Lion, to pour out his wrath on humankind. A good question for students involves whether or not this Christ is the one they find in Revelation; it might help them to reevaluate their preconceptions of Jesus as being as nice and irenic as they often imagine him to be.

The Shawshank Redemption (1994)

Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) is an innocent man, unjustly accused of murdering his wife and her lover. Based on a short story by Stephen King, *The Shawshank Redemption* remains a hugely popular film. Many see in Andy Dufresne a Christ-figure and in the film an inspiring tale of hope and redemption. Dufresne endures his time in prison with dignity, moral fortitude, a willingness selflessly to help others, and a pervasive sense of faith that he will find his deliverance.

And he does find that deliverance: a small rock hammer that he has used, over many years, to chip his way out of his prison cell. Not one to sit around and wait to be saved, Andy cannot help but offer a parting jibe to the evil, hypocritically Christian prison warden who serves as the movie's chief antagonist: he leaves the rock hammer for the warden after his escape tucked into a carved-out Bible—appropriately opened at the book of Exodus. Andy's last note to the warden we see written at the front of the Bible: "You were right: salvation lay within."

Andy Dufresne is undeniably a Jesus-figure, but one with a low Christol-

ogy. He is Dufresne the Teacher, Dufresne the suffering servant, Dufresne the fisher of men. Only after his symbolic rebirth and resurrection—crawling half a mile through a narrow tunnel, spat out into the rain—does he stand with head upraised, arms extended to the side, in triumphant praise as Dufresne the Christ-figure. Students can easily engage in an analysis of this character-ization: Are the similarities sufficiently detailed to warrant comparison with Jesus? What differences militate against a serious comparison, despite any similarities?

Many Christians bristle at the film's supercilious and self-righteous warden as representatively Christian, but others have read the character differently: if Andy is the Christ of the film, the warden is the Sadducee or Pharisee—nit picking in his interpretation of the law, committed to his Bible, cruel and rigid. His misuse of the Bible is evident from the needlepoint slogan posted on his office wall: "His judgement Cometh and that Right Soon."

Most of all, *The Shawshank Redemption* is about, well, redemption. But it is not Dufresne's escape from Shawshank prison that constitutes redemp-tion; it is his quiet hope and his role as a leader that effects redemption in those around him. In this way, the film's narrative takes its secondary focus in a man Dufresne befriends and mentors in prison, Red (Morgan Freeman), who narrates the film. His experience with Andy transforms him and, at the culmination of the film, leads to his "salvation" in an Eden-like setting where his reunion with Andy mirrors the return of the faithful disciple to heaven. Meanwhile, Andy's presence as an example of hope and steadfast resistance in the face of arbitrarily cruel human authorities lives on in the stories that Shawshank's residents tell about him, long after his departure—not unlike the stories of Jesus that circulated among his first disciples.

For further discussion, see Reinhartz, *Scripture on the Silver Screen*, 129–43.

Signs (2002)

Although the main action involves an invasion by extraterrestrial beings, this film is as much a psychological drama as it is a sci-fi thriller. The story focuses on the family of Graham Hess (Mel Gibson), a former pastor, and like all of M. Night Shyamalan's films, it features an unexpected twist at the end. Scenes from the film may be used in connection with a variety of subjects:

(1) The audience learns that Graham's vocational crisis was a result of his wife's tragic death in an auto accident. As she lay dying, she tells him that it was "meant to be" (DVD ch. 19). This scene concisely introduces the clas-sic problem of theodicy: Why do bad things happen to good people? How can apparently senseless suffering occur if the universe is under the watch of an all-loving, omnipotent deity? How would various biblical writers (e.g., Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, the Deuteronomistic Historian) evaluate Graham's

response (when his son is in grave danger of dying, he cries out, "Don't do this to me again. Not again. I hate you!")?

(2) The death of Graham's wife is told in a flashback, which introduces the final seven-minute scene of the film (DVD ch. 19). The surprise ending, tying together as it does a number of seemingly unrelated plot elements, raises the question of divine providence. When Paul writes in Rom 8:28 that "all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose," what exactly does he think this might entail? Would he say that the film's denouement is an example of this theological principle at work? Since Graham is shown returning to the ministry in the closing frame, is it at all appropriate to regard it as a "biblical" or "Christian" film?

(3) Giant crop circles are the "signs" to which the movie's title refers, but their simultaneous appearance around the globe leads to a conversation between Graham and his brother about signs in the Johannine sense, that is, miracles (DVD ch. 10). "People break down into two groups when they experience something lucky," Graham states. "Group number one sees it as … a sign, evidence, that there is someone up there, watching out for them. Group number two sees it as just pure luck.… What you have to ask yourself is what kind of person are you? Are you the kind that sees signs, sees miracles? Or do you believe that people just get lucky?" This dialogue could be connected to the biblical concept of providence, but it also opens a point of entry for other discussions:

(a) What is the nature of faith? Do the New Testament authors present it as something that one either has or does not have? Do they conceive of humanity as being divided into two such groups? Can a person desire or decide to have faith who does not already have it (cf. the cry of the father in Mark 9:24: "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!")? Is faith "belief that" certain propositions are true? Is it a matter of trust or "belief in" God or Jesus? Or is the difference between these two conceptions not so great? When Paul commends the faith of Abraham in Rom 4, on what aspect does he focus? When James asserts the need for works in addition to faith, what understanding of faith is he addressing?

(b) What is a miracle? Is it accurate to characterize a miracle as a violation of the ordinary laws of nature? According to biblical writers, why do they occur? What do they mean? What do they prove in the mind of the authors who record them? Frequently one encounters the tendency to assume that ancient readers were utterly credulous when confronted with reports of the miraculous. The conclusion of Matthew's Gospel contains a detail that problematizes such an assumption. As the disciples are gathered to receive the Great Commission from the resurrected Jesus, Matthew writes that "some doubted" (28:17). Who were "they" and what did they doubt? Did they doubt that this

was indeed Jesus, risen from the dead? Did they doubt that the resurrection possessed the significance claimed by the early Christians? It is odd that the author would present some of Jesus' closest followers as doubting even when given such a seemingly clear sign, but that is precisely what Matthew does. If the resurrection had probative value, what did it prove, and to whom?

(c) What is the purpose of the Fourth Gospel? John always uses "signs" (*semeia*) for Jesus' marvelous deeds rather than other available synonyms for "miracle." In John 20:30–31, the author states his purpose for writing, saying that Jesus had done many other signs that have not been recounted, but "these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah" (NRSV). Some textual variants give a slightly different meaning on the basis of the verb tense: "these are written so that you may continue to believe." So which is it? Does the author anticipate that the recorded miracles will persuade the unbeliever to come into the fold of the faithful? Or is the purpose to strengthen the faith of those already in the fold?

Sling Blade (1996)

This film is one of many for use in discussions of cinematic Christ-figures. (The background for this exercise is found in the entry for *Fight Club* on pp. 140–42.) The question may be put to students this way: In what sense, if any, is it appropriate to consider the protagonist a Christ-figure? What specific traits, deeds, quotations, or plot devices lead the viewer to apply this label? Here, Karl (Billy Bob Thornton) is a mentally retarded man who has spent most of his adult life in a psychiatric hospital after murdering his mother and her lover. But he also exhibits many qualities that parallel those of Jesus: He was born in a shed. He is humble and powerless. He participates in table fellowship with those who have been ostracized by the larger community. He carries with him a Bible and a book on carpentry. He spends a lot of time in quiet contemplation. In the film's climax, he willingly accepts punishment for an act of violent revenge (like the Christ in Rev 14:14–20—thus, Karl is a reminder that, if one takes into account the entire New Testament canon, Jesus is an ambiguous figure). How should we evaluate this character? Are the similarities significant? Are they sufficiently detailed to warrant comparison with Jesus? What differences militate against a serious comparison?

For further discussion, see Mark Roncace, "Paradoxical Protagonists: *Sling Blade*'s Karl and Jesus Christ," in Aichele and Walsh, *Screening Scripture*, 279–300.

Spartacus (1960)

The Roman slave revolt that began in 73 B.C.E. inspired Howard Fast's 1952 novel *Spartacus*, which became the basis for this blockbuster directed

by Stanley Kubrick and starring Kirk Douglas. The closing scenes (DVD chs. 38–39, 45) provide an opportunity to highlight two points of intersection between the New Testament and its Roman sociopolitical context: (1) When the revolt is quashed, Spartacus dies by crucifixion, which alerts students to the fact that Jesus' manner of death was not unique to him. It was typically reserved for slaves and for those found guilty of crimes against the state, such as treason. What, if anything, might this suggest about the reasons behind Jesus' death under Pontius Pilate? It was also the most despicable way to die, which makes Paul's summary of his gospel message as "Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:18–25; cf. Gal 3:13) all the more remarkable. (2) Spartacus is crucified together with six thousand slaves along a 130–mile stretch of the Appian Way between Rome and Capua. (Try to imagine taking a two-hour trip by car, with every second or so bringing a new crucifixion into view.) It is easy to guess that the idea of deterrence lay behind such a spectacle, and, although the inclusion of Spartacus among those executed is likely unhistorical, the harsh punishment accurately suggests the degree to which Roman society could not function without the institution of slavery. These considerations are especially pertinent to Paul's Letter to Philemon concerning a runaway slave. Many readers wonder why Paul refrains from condemning slavery when, apparently, he has an occasion to do so (cf. 1 Cor 7:20–24; and the household codes at Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22–4:1; 1 Tim 6:1–2; Tit 2:9–10; 1 Pet 2:18–19). It comes as a surprise to hear that opposition to slavery on general moral principle is exceedingly rare in the ancient world—a fact obscured by the anachronistic abolitionist motives the screenwriter puts in Spartacus's mouth. These factors remind students to attend to genre; much of the New Testament consists of occasional writings, and the process of deriving moral or theological norms from its contents is sometimes not as simple as it may appear.

Stigmata (1999)

Stigmata tells the story of a young woman named Frankie (Patricia Arquette) who, though an atheist, becomes possessed by the spirit of a dead priest who wants the existence of a new Gospel—containing the authentic words of Jesus—to be revealed to humankind. Because of the powerful secret she harbors, Frankie is under attack by a demon who oppresses only the holiest and most devout of saints with the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ. With the help of a sympathetic priest sent from Rome to investigate her case (Gabriel Byrne), Frankie learns that there are dozens of ancient Gospels in addition to the four canonical ones, but that the Roman Catholic Church has systematically suppressed them because of their revolutionary implications.

This film is one of several recent Hollywood movies that explore the idea that traditional Christian accounts of God, humanity, and salvation might

simply be wrong. According to *Stigmata*, the truth about Jesus is contained not in the church-sanctioned Bible but in a document that has been maligned and censored by cynical religious authorities. Of course, in real life there is a *Gospel of Thomas* that may even contain some authentic sayings of Jesus, but it is hardly considered by most scholars to be the closest of the Gospels to the historical Jesus; nor has it been covered up by the Vatican. Students are quite amused to know, given how dangerous a document is the *Gospel of Thomas* according to the film, that it is readily available online and in stores.

Stigmata can work quite well in the biblical studies classroom because it still cites the text more or less accurately and it presents an authentic struggle in ancient Christianity recast as a modern dilemma. Where does one find the Kingdom of God? The line in the film, repeated at various points, is "The Kingdom of God is inside/within you (and all about you), not in buildings/mansions of wood and stone. (When I am gone) Split a piece of wood and I am there, lift the/a stone and you will find me." The line is a combination of *Gos. Thom.* 3a and 77b. (There are also echoes of Stephen's words in Acts 7:48: "the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands.")

A fruitful line of discussion in the classroom would be to ask for responses to its female, atheist Christ-figure. It is perhaps the only Hollywood movie to have such a figure, and what is still remarkable is that *Stigmata* generated virtually no controversy at its release. A second line of discussion might be the nature of spirituality asserted by the movie as, well, more "spiritual" than "religious." *Stigmata* hinges upon a paranoid and caricatured interpretation of the Vatican (as does *The Da Vinci Code*). But it also puts forward a version of Christianity fairly well suited to American young people disillusioned by institutionalized religion and seeking an alternative.

Two scenes work particularly well in class: one inside the Vatican where the *Gospel of Thomas* is introduced as a supposedly subversive document (DVD ch. 18), as well as the final scenes where exorcists attempt to free Frankie from her possession, but the words from *Thomas* are repeated again and again. Just showing these scenes in isolation, however, requires some setup for students who have not seen the film, so it is best to assign the movie outside class time and then to follow up with the final scenes. The film ends with the ominous notice:

> In 1945 a scroll was discovered in Nag Hamadi, which is described as "The Secret Sayings of the Living Jesus." This scroll, the *Gospel of St. Thomas*, has been claimed by scholars around the world to be the closest record we have of the words of the historical Jesus. The Vatican refuses to recognize this Gospel and has described it as heresy.

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It is baffling how a film could use the *Gospel of Thomas* as its central theme but then get the details of the text so wrong: it was found at Nag Hammadi, not Nag Hamadi, which is in Egypt, not in Israel (where the film places the cave where it was discovered); it formed part of a codex, not a scroll; and it was written in Coptic, not in Aramaic. What is the point of including the Gospel at all if one is going to be careless with the little details? Are the mistakes the result of mere carelessness? Or are the discrepancies intentional? If intentional, what is the desired effect of the changes?

Touch (1997)

Touch's screenplay is by Paul Schrader, a self-confessed Calvinist who also wrote the screenplay for Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ*. Juvenal (Skeet Ulrich) is a strange fellow. He is young, cute, disarming—and a miracle worker. He quickly catches the eye of a Christian promoter and impresario, Bill Hill (Christopher Walken). When Hill dispatches his friend Lynn (Bridget Fonda) to capitalize on Juvenal's healing talents, the two fall in love.

Juvenal is a bit like Francis of Assisi—he has that gentle air, and he, too, suffers the stigmata. As a Jesus-figure, Juvenal breaks the mold, if only because he is not celibate. Students have been moderately shocked by this young Jesus who swears and who sleeps with a woman. The scene is not that graphic; it is just that Jesus-figures never get romantically involved because if they do, they lose their superpowers—look at Superman, after all. The same thing happens here: Juvenal loses his ability to work miracles. (For general background to discussions of cinematic Christ-figures, see the entry for *Fight Club* on pp. 140–42.)

Touch is really about the hypocrisy of organized religion versus the more freewheeling, charismatic impulse we see in Juvenal. Like Jesus in the Gospels, Juvenal is surrounded by people who are out to get from him what they can. Hill is a charlatan. Tom Arnold (over)plays August, a goofily militant Catholic fundamentalist who heads up an organization called OUTRAGE, the Organization Unifying Traditional Rites As God Expects. These are caricatures, but nevertheless their shallowness is often grating and the pokes at fundamentalism come off as a series of cheap shots that go on too long. But August and Hill are foils for the sweetness and sincerity of Juvenal, to whom many contemporary college students might relate and to whom the movie points as the ideal of a humane, engaged, and faithful servant of God.

Students are often asked their impressions of Jesus and Christianity in general at the outset of a New Testament course. Many of their impressions of how Jesus "was" tend to be normative (i.e., he was gentle, he worked miracles, he healed, and so on) just as, often, students evince a wariness of "institutionalized" religion or the way in which people, historically, have twisted Jesus'

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"original" words and actions in a way that is self-serving or removed from Jesus' original intent. Both themes come through loud and clear in *Touch*. Students might then be asked, after viewing the movie, to write a brief reflection piece on the Christology of *Touch*. Do they like this Jesus? Does he resonate with them? Is Juvenal true to the Gospel depiction of Jesus? If so, which one? If not, from where did this image of Jesus come?

Unforgiven (1992)

This dark western contains characters and scenes well suited to the discussion of signature Pauline themes in Romans, albeit with key variations. When a cowboy who has horribly slashed the face of a town prostitute gets off with a slap on the wrist, the victim's friends offer a bounty to anyone who will kill him. Enter William Munny (Clint Eastwood), once an outlaw but now a law-abiding widower and struggling farmer. To pay the bills, he reluctantly agrees to do the job along with his old partner Ned Logan and the Schofield Kid. In a conversation after the job is done, the Kid, visibly shaken, reveals that this killing was his first (DVD ch. 27). "Hell of a thing, killin' a man," says Munny. "Take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have." "I guess he had it comin'," the Kid replies, echoing a line heard at several points in the film. Munny's response brings to the surface the story's dominant theological undercurrent: "We all got it comin', kid."

Do we, in fact, "all got it comin'"? If so, why, or in what sense? Would the line work as a dynamic equivalent of Rom 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"? Some see Munny's line as a summary of the doctrine of original sin, more closely associated with Rom 5:12. Is Munny saying that all humans are guilty of some sin? (The sadistic sheriff Little Bill Daggett would concur. When a witness accuses him of beating an innocent man, he responds, "Innocent? Innocent of what?") "It" is punishment for our crimes—but when will "it" come? There appears to be no prospect of postmortem retribution if, as Munny says, death takes it all away now and forever. Is Munny's point, rather, that as sinners we all deserve "it," even if we are never caught for the crimes we have committed? (The film's ending suggests that he is finally able to escape his violent past, while Logan ends up being tortured and killed by Daggett for a crime he did not commit. Daggett later tells Munny that he does not deserve to die, to which Munny replies, "Deserve's got nothin' to do with it.") In some sense, while the protagonist acts like a Stoic, the film's perspective provides a counterpoint to that found in works like Seneca's *De providentia*: Why do bad things happen to good people? They do not, says Seneca, because what we consider bad is not actually bad. Munny likewise suggests that they do not, but for the reason that there are no "good people" to whom bad things happen.

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Whereas the film makes no such effort, one of Paul's aims in Romans is to explain how humans have gotten themselves into this existential predicament and how they may escape it. Follow-up discussion or a writing assignment may ask students to examine texts from Paul's Jewish milieu that identify various sources for the human tendency toward sin (e.g., Eve, Satan, or an "evil heart": Sir 25:24; Wis 2:23–24; *4 Ezra* 3:20–27; 4:30; 7:116–118).

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PART 3:
ART

Introduction: Teaching the Bible with Art

Lynn R. Huber and Dan W. Clanton Jr.

The opening line of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word," seemingly sets the tone for teaching and learning within the field of biblical studies. Those who reside and teach in this field of study not only begin with "the Word," but also typically remain focused, perhaps obsessively, upon words. However, John's Gospel pushes us to shift our glance away from the page, as it is arguably as much about the visual as it is about the verbal. On more than one occasion, John depicts Jesus asserting that whoever has *seen* him has *seen* God (12:44–45; 14:9; cf. 1:14–18). Throughout the Johannine text, the verbal or textual and the visual are intricately related—reinforcing, interpreting, and expanding upon one another. Taking a cue from the Johannine tradition, we contend that visual art, including but not limited to works of art that specifically reference the Bible, can be an integral part of the biblical studies classroom: reinforcing, interpreting, and expanding upon the texts we explore.

In this introduction we will highlight some of the reasons for employing art in this traditionally textual environment, outline some of the ways that visual art can be incorporated into teaching, and discuss how one might guide students in the interpretation of images.

Beyond the Johannine call that we attend to the visual, there are obvious pedagogical reasons for making the visual a presence in the classroom. First, while most of us who specialize in biblical studies are close readers of the texts in their original languages, our students often have to be taught how to "see" even the most obvious textures in these ancient writings. This is particularly true given that Western culture has been saturated with biblical imagery, themes, language, and thinking patterns. This saturation effectively blinds many students to the complexity of the biblical writings. Exploring visual art with students trains their eyes to see detail in an image, which helps them see detail in other things, such as writings. Using two different types of material, textual and visual/artistic, to develop students' seeing and reading skills acknowledges the widely accepted notion, articulated famously by Howard

Gardner, that attending to multiple intelligences enhances student learning and the retention of ideas and skills.[1]

Second, in an age of biblical fundamentalism (an interpretive perspective adopted by both "conservatives" and "liberals"), students have to be prodded to see the possibility of multiple interpretations in texts, especially texts that many hold as sacred. Most students have been better trained to think that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," which assumes that an interpreter's perspective shapes her interaction with a piece of art, than to recognize the same phenomenon exists when approaching a written text. One hopes that their recognition that a Picasso or Matisse yields many interpretive possibilities dependent upon the "eye of the beholder" will be translated to the prophets and the Gospels when we address the visual and the textual side by side.

Third, even when we as teachers do not incorporate the visual into our classrooms, it is present in our students' minds. Regardless of their religious upbringings, as products of Western culture, our students carry with them images related to the writings we explore, including mental pictures of Jesus shaped by the memory of Jim Caviezel playing Jesus in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and visions of God colored by Michelangelo's depiction on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Many students come to class "knowing" exactly what these figures look like and how they act in certain situations. Such "knowledge" often negates genuine, open interaction with the text. Intentionally incorporating the visual into our classrooms sheds light on these culturally given images, allowing both students and instructors to be more critical of how we use mental images to fill in textual gaps. The use of images, therefore, can disrupt students' mental images, encourage them to develop more complex mental pictures, and prepare them for the multivocality of the text.

In addition, attention to the visual requires students to think metaphorically, abstractly, and in other nonliteral ways. These ways of "seeing" are similar to the forms of perception employed in religion and religious texts.[2] Religious discourse, including biblical writings, swells with metaphor and imagery. Students, often pressed into a literal reading of textbooks, are sometimes hesitant to engage fully the metaphors and images presented in the Bible. Examining visual art, including abstract art, can help students think in abstract and metaphorical terms.

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1. For a brief discussion of artistic intelligence in relation to the theory of multiple intelligences, see Howard Gardner, "Artistic Intelligence," *Art Education* 36 (1983): 47–49.

2. Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 4.

Categories for Employing Art in the Classroom

There are a variety of ways that art can be used in a biblical studies class; here we will outline three general approaches: (1) art as illustration; (2) art as narrative interpretation; (3) art as illumination. These three fluid categories are borrowed from the work of Katharine Martinez on the use of images in the field of American history.[3] This is a subject that, like ours, has been historically beholden to the textual, and so Martinez's categories are easily adaptable to our work.

Art as Illustration

Using visual art as an illustration of a particular point or idea about a text or tradition is the most basic approach to employing the visual in the classroom. An image can be employed to underscore a specific interpretation or to help students recognize something about the text that they might otherwise overlook. For example, if we wanted to have students remember the observation made at the beginning of this chapter—that John's Gospel is as much about the visual as it is about the verbal—we might show students an image of a twelfth-century manuscript in which the words of the first chapter of John are printed in the form of a cross.[4] Similarly, a teacher may want to emphasize that in the nativity stories, especially Luke's annunciation scene, the designation "virgin" implies a young girl. However, students sometimes have difficulty grasping that within Luke's social context an unmarried girl was truly a girl and not a young woman. To help them appreciate this, one might show an image that highlights Mary's youth, such as *The Annunciation*, by Jennifer Linton, which depicts Mary as a pubescent girl lying on the ground with her head propped on her arm.[5] Even though Linton's image places the story of the annunciation in a contemporary context, it allows students to analyze the text in relation to its historical context and invites students to see something about the text that they might have overlooked or misunderstood.

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3. Katharine Martinez, "Imaging the Past: Historians, Visual Images and the Contested Definition of History," *Visual Resources* 11 (1995): 21–45.

4. "Gospel of St. John," *Gospel Lectionary*, twelfth century. British Library, London. Cited 13 March 2007. Online: www.imagesonline.bl.uk/britishlibrary/controller/textsearch? text=john%20cross&&idx=1&startid=13401.

5. Jennifer Linton, *The Annunciation*, 2002. Collection of the Artist, Toronto. Cited 13 March 2007. Online: www.jenniferlinton.ca.

Art as Narrative Interpretation

While images can be utilized to illustrate texts, works of visual art often involve more complex relationships between text and image than the illustrative model allows. In fact, simply treating visual art in terms of textual illustration runs the risk of replicating a problematic assumption that has historically plagued textually focused fields of study—that images are somehow easier to comprehend or less complex than written texts. We might describe this as the legacy of Gregory the Great and his infamous claim (in *Ep.* 105 of book 9) that church art was primarily to teach the unlearned masses what they were unable to read in the text.[6] Implied in this assertion is an assumption that images are readily understandable even when an audience has little or no resources for interpreting images. Despite Gregory's claim, images are not necessarily easier to understand than texts and they require their own sort of "reading."[7] In a way similar to how we make sense of a psalm or a Pauline letter, we make sense of images by interpreting the signs within the image in relation to certain concepts and ideas, within a certain contextual frame. This approach can involve having students read images explicitly framed as narrative interpretations of biblical texts or reframing nonbiblical images in relationship to a specific document or pericope.

For example, Marc Chagall's *Creation of Man* is an interpretation of Gen 1:26–27 ("Let us make humankind in our image…"). [8] Chagall renders this verse by depicting a winged, human-like creature holding the limp body of a man in its arms. This winged creature occupies the center of the canvas, which is painted primarily in shades of blue, while in the upper right-hand corner rainbow colors spiral out of a red orb. Intermingled with the spiraling colors are various images, including a ram-headed person carrying a scroll, a crucifix, a praying figure, another angelic being, and hands holding tablets.

When presented with an image such as this, students should first describe what they see. What are the elements of art in the image? Lines, colors, composition? Then students may ponder how what they see reads the text: What does it capture from the text? What does it highlight? What does it downplay? Specifically, one might ask students what the red globe might represent. Something from the text? Why does it have these attendant

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6. While Gregory's claim may appear to be disparaging toward art, it was part of his defense against the destruction of icons or images.

7. Mieke Bal, "Reading Art?" in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (ed. G. Pollock; London: Routledge, 1996), 25–41, esp. 32.

8. Marc Chagall, *The Creation of Man*, 1956–58. Musée National Message Biblique Marc Chagall, Nice. Cited 27 March 2007. Online: www.musee-chagall.fr.

images—a crucifix, angels, animals? This method of reading the image parallels the method of reading texts in which we look first at its component parts—the words, grammar, syntax, structure, imagery—before addressing its meaning(s).[9]

Chagall's painting shows us, moreover, the complex ways in which an image reads a text. With its allusions to the giving of the Mosaic Law suggested by the tablets, to the crucifixion, and to cultural gender roles (through an image of a bride and groom), Chagall's painting rings with many of the same intertextual allusions and echoes that are often brought by interpreters to the text of Genesis. In this way, the painting does not "solve," but rather highlights, the interpretive challenges. The depiction of an angel holding the body of the man, for example, does little to explain Genesis' use of the plural, "Let us make humankind/Adam in our image." Is this Chagall's depiction of God? Or, could this winged figure be a co-creator implied in the plural pronouns? Chagall's painting, indeed, is as multilayered and complex as Gen 1.

One issue to be aware of is that the language of images, just as the language of biblical texts, is not universal.[10] The meanings of the various elements that comprise a particular piece of visual art may need to be translated into a language understandable by students. For example, in Chagall's painting, students may not recognize the stone tablets as a visual sign of the Decalogue, unless, of course they have seen Charleston Heston in *The Ten Commandments* (to use one image as a cipher for translating another)! Leading students through a piece of art often requires helping them translate the unfamiliar and ambiguous.

With images that are explicitly framed as biblical interpretations, it can be illuminating to show more than one image interpreting the same text as a way of highlighting how texts yield multiple meanings. For instance, alongside Chagall's twentieth-century version of the sixth day of creation, one might have students view a medieval manuscript that illustrates the same text. Juxtaposing different images, especially ones from different time periods, allows students to see the various ways a single text can be imagined and understood. This can also be used to help students see the diachronic development of interpretations in the Western tradition in general.[11] More-

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9. For a useful guide in thinking about what to look for in a piece of art, see Steven Engler and Irene Naested, "Reading Images in the Religious Studies Classroom," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5 (2002): 161–68.

10. Miles, *Image as Insight*, 29–34.

11. For a discussion of how art can be used to discuss the history of a biblical text's interpretation, see Robin M. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 34–45.

over, the use of images from different historical, social, and cultural settings demonstrates how textual interpretations are shaped by contextual concerns, issues, and questions. This, in turn, can allow us to talk with students about how their own locations similarly shape the interpretive grids that they bring to the biblical texts.

Besides paintings that explicitly frame themselves as biblical interpretations, we find it particularly enriching to reframe images depicting subjects other than biblical ones, encouraging students to read these images in relation to particular biblical texts.[12] Often images that are explicitly biblical replicate the ideological assumptions communicated through the texts, while images of other subjects, reframed in relation to the Bible, challenge those ideological presuppositions.

For example, read in relationship to 1 Corinthians, Robert Mapplethorpe's 1982 black-and-white photograph of body builder Lisa Lyon, simply entitled *Lisa Lyon*, provides a provocative starting point for a critical discussion of Paul's comments regarding women's roles in worship, specifically his suggestion that women who pray and prophesy in the religious assembly be veiled.[13] The portrait displays the female body builder from the waist up. Her right arm is flexed and her left hand pushes her right wrist for resistance. Lyon wears a black leather bustier and a black hat with a sheer black veil. Through the veil, the audience can see a stoic Lyon. Admittedly, the veil that Lyon wears is different from veils worn in the ancient world; however, the image allows students to think about some of the implications involved with veiling. In particular, Lyon's posture of power, as suggested in her flexed arm, prompts students to read 1 Cor 11:2–16 (concerning the veiling of women who prophesy) as a text about power and limiting power. One might ask them to imagine that this portrait of Lyon represents women in Paul's congregation: Does she represent the women Paul hopes to address in his letter or does Lyon embody the women in the congregation after they have received the letter? If students suggest the former, we might encourage them to use elements from the image to explain why they think Paul felt the need to address these women. If students suggest the latter, then have them imagine how Lyon's image functions as a response to Paul. In particular, what does this portrait suggest about how Paul's audience might have responded to his assertion that women ought to be veiled? Among other things, this image allows students to imagine that Paul's view may have met with various responses among the women in the

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12. See Bal, "Reading Art?" 27–28, for a discussion of framing and reframing.

13. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Lisa Lyon*, 1982. Reproduced in *Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition* (ed. G. Celant et al.; New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2004), pl. 75.

Corinthian community. It suggests the possibility, for instance, that women remained powerful even under the veil.

Art as Illumination

Martinez identifies as a final pedagogical approach using art as illumination, which entails making connections between different subjects with and through visual art, employing artistic pieces to make one's way through complex ideas. Abstract art can be a helpful avenue into many of the topics that arise in the examination of biblical texts, including issues of hermeneutics and the creation and function of texts. While abstract art is sometimes understood as nondenotative or nonrepresentational, works of art typically recognized as abstract still show patterns, feelings, and ideas.

Using pieces of abstract art in the biblical studies context involves metaphorical thinking, using the visual experience to consider an idea or feeling. Because these pieces are typically open-ended, they can serve as conversation partners for understanding a variety of difficult concepts.[14] For instance, it can be challenging for students to grasp that their view of a particular writing is filtered through layers of interpretive tradition. It can be even more difficult for them to understand that many of the biblical writings began as oral traditions that have been shaped to fit into written narratives, adding to the interpretive layers surrounding a particular story. An image such as Paul Klee's *Around the Core*, a painting that consists of a spiraling line and layers of color around a small drop-like center, provides a path into these issues with students. Students can be asked to imagine the line as a textual tradition which develops around the "kernel" of an oral tradition or they might be prompted to think about the colors of the painting as overlapping traditions.[15]

In addition, as teachers of biblical subjects, we often find ourselves addressing topics of ethical, political, and social importance. Our subject matter necessarily raises discussions of class, ethnic identity, peace and war, sexuality, and family relationships. Given the cultural importance of the biblical texts in these discussions and students' differing relationships to these texts, at times it is helpful to offer a "neutral" text or image to begin these often polarizing conversations. As Robin Jensen points out, visual art potentially serves a prophetic function, illuminating "individual and communal

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14. Douglas Adams and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "Art as Religious Studies: Insights into the Judeo-Christian Traditions," in *Art as Religious Studies* (ed. D. Adams and D. Apostolos-Cappadona; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1987), 3–11, esp. 8.

15. See the discussion of Klee's work in this volume on pp. 230–31.

evil."[16] Art, such as Mary Lovelace O'Neal's abstract lithograph *Racism Is Like Rain, Either It's Raining or It's Gathering*, challenges the viewer to imagine how racism functions and how it might be challenged.[17] Using a piece of art to discuss topics such as racism or poverty, before turning to the biblical texts, helps students see the historical and contemporary reality of such problems and allows them to reflect on their understanding of the issues before considering the way in which they are addressed in biblical texts. Ideally, this has the effect of making some students less defensive when studying the Bible critically and other students more aware of how these ancient texts might have contemporary relevance.

Teaching Students to Read and Think through Images

Successfully employing visual art in the classroom requires teaching students how to read and think through images in a careful and critical fashion. Sometimes we assume that they will be better equipped to interpret images or visual art than texts, since students have been raised in a world in which they are bombarded with images. However, it is problematic to equate exposure to the visual with an ability to navigate critically the complexities inherent in a piece of visual art. In fact, the need to teach students how to read biblical texts is paralleled by the need to teach students how to read visual texts. Furthermore, students must be taught to take time with art, not to just look at a piece, but to really *see* a piece. As Douglas Adams and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona have observed, the learned discipline of seeing means that viewers allows a piece of art to engage, challenge, and even transform them.[18]

There are a variety of ways to encourage students to become more careful readers of images. For example, students can study images outside of class in conjunction with the texts they read for class. Course websites and blogs make this relatively easy, since an instructor can gather images electronically for students to view. It is also interesting to have students find and share relevant images. In our own classrooms, students have submitted images ranging from Adam and Eve for an Altoids advertisement to a *Rolling Stone* photograph of Madonna, taken by David LaChapelle, which can be read as an allusion to Revelation's Great Prostitute. This approach allows students to gather images and analyze them on their own. In addition, it can help instructors build their own image collections.

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16. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 97.

17. See the discussion of this piece in this volume on pp. 233–34.

18. Adams and Apostolos-Cappadona, "Art as Religious Studies," 4–5.

To help students read images, especially ones that involve the inter-
pretation of biblical texts, it can be advantageous to provide a guideline for
them to follow. First, encourage students to take time to look carefully at an
image. This may seem obvious; however, students tend to turn quickly to the
question of what an image means. Second, have students describe the artis-
tic elements within the image. It may be necessary to provide them with the
requisite vocabulary (color, line, texture, balance, etc.) and a set of explicit
questions to consider: What media are used to create the image? What lines,
shapes, textures, colors, and patterns do you see? Do the lines and shapes of
the image suggest movement? How does the image use space? Is there nega-
tive space? Or, is the piece completely "full"? Is the piece monochromatic?

Third, prompt students to read the image either alone or in relation to a
particular text. For instance, ask them to talk about what the text "says" and
how it "says" it. If they are reading an image in relation to a text, ask them to
describe what parts of the text the image captures and what parts it seems
to ignore. Finally, students should be given the opportunity to communicate
their own opinions about the piece. Given the deliberate nature of the process,
the opinions they articulate are, one hopes, grounded in their observations of
the image rather than their initial impressions.

Making art an integral part of the classroom requires a number of com-
mitments on behalf of the teacher. First, it takes time to find pieces that
provoke us and speak to us. While images are becoming easier to access
through electronic resources, developing a collection of high-quality images
still is labor intensive. Image databases, such as ARTstor (a nonprofit digi-
tal library sponsored by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation) and CAMIO
(a nonprofit database sustained by OCLC—the Online Computer Library
Center), allow instructors and students at subscribing institutions access to
thousands of images for instructional purposes.[19] Thankfully, these electronic
resources make it possible for instructors to use copyrighted images legally,
which is a growing concern in the digital age. Also, we recommend using
images that captivate or challenge you as a teacher; this makes it much easier
to help students engage with the piece. Second, it takes a certain willingness
to consider different types of art. If all of our images are medieval manuscripts
or renaissance paintings, they lose their power to provoke students to look for
the different ways texts and images function and communicate. We need to
look in unexpected places, among the self-taught artists, conceptual artists,

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19. ARTstor (www.artstor.org) provides access to over 500,000 digital images,
including artistic works and images of material culture, and CAMIO (www.oclc.org/
camio/default.htm) provides access to over 90,000 images. Most museum websites have
online collections that are searchable by artist's last name or by title.

and photographers. Artists, especially modern and contemporary ones, often challenge commonly held ideologies and theological assumptions. Before we bring these types of images into the classroom, we have to consider whether we are ready for those challenges.[20]

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20. In addition to items catalogued in this chapter, Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, contains other strategies using art: see Daniel E. Goodman, "*Guernica* and the Art of Biblical Hermeneutics," 5–6; Sandie Gravett, "Genesis 22: Artists' Renderings," 97–98; Lynn R. Huber, "Introducing Revelation through the Visual Arts," 398–400; and Jaime Clark-Soles, "Christology Slideshow," 282–84.

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Biblical Subjects in Art

Lynn R. Huber, Dan W. Clanton Jr., and Jane S. Webster

The works discussed in this chapter are organized roughly according to the order in which their subject matter appears in the canon. Due to the impermanent nature of many website addresses, it will frequently be necessary to perform a simple artist or title search at the sites listed with many of these works. The indices may be consulted to find entries with classroom strategies related to particular texts and topics. All secondary literature cited here is included in the preceding bibliography (pp. 184–86).

Domenichino, *Adam and Eve* (1623–25) [Musée des Beaux-Arts, Grenoble; www.artrenewal.org]

This early seventeenth-century oil portrays the encounter between Yahweh and the first humans in Gen 3:8–13. Both humans have eaten of the Tree, and now Yahweh is confronting them about their disobedience. Domenichino renders this scene with a wonderful flourish, as God hovers above the lush landscape with his divine council. On the ground below, we see not only a lion and lamb lying together (perhaps a nod to the idyllic nature of the Garden that is about to be shattered), but also the serpent as it slithers away. The two humans are about to embark on the "blame game" found in 3:11–13. There is obviously a humorous inference here, as Domenichino renders Adam with shrugged shoulders, holding his hands in a gesture of resignation as he motions to Eve as the source of the disobedience. One can almost hear Adam saying, "What am I gonna do with her, eh? Fugedaboutit!" As such, this piece can be used to indicate not only Adam's attempt to blame Eve (which is problematic in light of the Hebrew word *immah* in 3:6), but also to demonstrate the continued attempt to read Gen 2–3 as somehow Eve's fault.

Gustave Doré, *The Deluge* (1865) [www.biblical-art.com]

This image invites students to see the flood story from a different perspective. Many artistic renderings follow the biblical text, which focuses on

the character of Noah and the ark as a vehicle of salvation. Instead of looking at the ark, Doré depicts what one might see looking from the ark out into the rising flood waters. He shows people scrambling up a rock, parents pushing their children to the highest point possible to escape the deluge. A tiger, with a cub in its mouth and others at its feet, is perched atop the rock. The sky is dark, and the crashing waves take the shape of a hand about to swallow the victims. When students are asked what issues this image raises, they typically note that it calls into question God's indiscriminate destruction of the earth. How can the young children, pathetically huddled on the rock before their demise, deserve to die? And what about the animals? Are they also wicked? Indeed, the biblical deity is clear that the flood is intended to destroy animals as well as humans (Gen 6:7). But why? The juxtaposed images of the cubs and the children underscore the death of two groups who seemingly cannot be morally culpable. Moreover, the adults in the image are endeavoring to save the children—that is, they are acting righteously, which, again, raises the question of wholesale annihilation. Can "all flesh" warrant death (6:13)? The image also compels one to imagine the scene awaiting Noah and his family when they exit the ark. There is the rainbow, of course, and a chance at new life, but there would also be the aftermath of the flood—the countless dead bodies of the animals and humans who did not survive. In short, Doré's provision of an alternate point of view invites thought about the image of the deity and the complexity of the flood story.

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Guercino, *The Angel Appears to Hagar and Ishmael* (ca. 1652–53) [National Gallery, London; www.nationalgallery.org.uk]

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Hagar in the Wilderness* (1835) [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; www.metmuseum.org]

Pietro Berrettini da Cortona, *The Return of Hagar* (ca. 1637) [Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; www.khm.at/homeE3.html]

Avi Katz, *The Angel Comforteth Hagar* (late twentieth century) [www.avikatz.net/sf/aliencorn/alienframe.htm]

Guercino, *Abraham Casting Out Hagar and Ishmael* (1657) [Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan; www.wga.hu]

Barent Fabritius, *Hagar and Ishmael* (1658) [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; www.metmuseum.org]

Willem Bartsius, *Abraham Pleading with Sarah on Behalf of Hagar* (1631) [J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; www.biblical-art.com]

The story of Hagar in Gen 16 and 21 is confusing for several reasons. First, readers are not entirely sure how the two chapters relate to one another; that is, should we read them in narrative succession so that chapter 21 follows chapter 16 in the plot, or should we regard chapter 21 as a doublet from a different literary source? Second, the reader is unsure about the identity of Hagar. Is she a slave or a maidservant? Is she Abraham's wife, or merely a surrogate womb for Sarah? Third, it is uncertain how the parties in this triangular relationship and their offspring relate to one another. Is Abraham in love with Hagar? Does he love his son Ishmael? How does Sarah regard Ishmael? Does she treat Hagar brutally or in accordance with the social mores of the time? Alongside these key questions, we can discern the singular importance of Hagar in this narrative: She is the first woman to have a theophanic experience as well as a promise of progeny. She even becomes the only character in the Bible to name God in 16:13 and is the only mother who finds a wife for her son. Even so, ambiguity and perplexity surround Hagar.

Comparatively speaking, there has not been much art with Hagar as its subject. The pieces we do have, though, can serve not only to address the uncertainties of this significant character, but also to help students with them as they see how other biblical interpreters have addressed them in the past.

Regarding the first difficulty, that of the relationship of chapters 16 and 21, artistic renderings of Hagar are admittedly not much help. This is because, as Zefira Gitay has noted, artists have always favored chapter 21 because of the added drama of the danger young Ishmael faces. They can portray the distress of Hagar, the impending death, and timely appearance of the angel. Many of the most famous pieces of Hagar do indeed focus on this peril in the wilderness, such as those by Guercino and Corot. Others, however, focus on chapter 16. In Cortona's work, for example, we see Abraham welcoming Hagar back from the wilderness with open arms while Sarah lurks in the background, looking none too pleased (see the piece by Katz). By juxtaposing these images and asking students to identify the chapter on which the image is based, one can easily begin a conversation addressing narrative and source-critical issues.

Art is far more useful, however, in dealing with the second and third ambiguities. That is, a thoughtful panoply of images can initiate and stimulate fruitful discussions on these matters. A good place to begin is Guercino's 1657 oil. Here we see Abraham facing Hagar and a weeping Ishmael, pointing with his right hand, but holding his left palm up either in a gesture of blessing or one indicating a command of silence. Sarah is shown in the left of the frame, glancing over her right shoulder in what appears to be a dismissive look. The emotion here on Ishmael's part is palpable, but Abraham appears steady as a rock. One can then compare this piece with the one by

Willem Bartsius in which Abraham is tugging at Sarah's robe in an attempt to persuade her to change her mind about banishing Hagar and Ishmael, while Isaac looks off of the frame, probably at his brother leaving. Here we see a much more emotional Abraham who appears to be devastated by the forced exile of his wife and son. It is crucial for students to understand and identify with the emotions present in these chapters, because once they become emotionally invested in a narrative, their excitement and advocacy are piqued. In contrast to the pieces that focus primarily on Abraham, the work of Fabritius centers on Hagar's reaction to Abraham's decision. She is weeping in his arms, while a wide-eyed Ishmael looks on. Comparing these images (and others in this vein) will allow teachers to present variant readings of these characters, evidence for which can be found in the text. One could then ask students to identify the passage(s) that could support such a rendering over another, and once students become involved in working out the mechanics of representation and interpretation, they will be able to formulate their own reading(s) of the text.

Albrecht Dürer, *Lot and His Daughters* (1496–99) [National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; www.nga.gov]

Lucas van Leyden, *Lot and His Daughters* (ca. 1520) [The Louvre, Paris; www.wga.hu]

Albrecht Altdorfer, *Lot and His Daughters* (1537) [Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; www.artchive.com]

Joachim Wtewael, *Lot and His Daughters* (ca. 1600) [State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; www.hermitagemuseum.org]

Hendrik Goltzius, *Lot and His Daughters* (1616) [Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; www.rijksmuseum.nl]

Orazio Gentileschi, *Lot and His Daughters* (ca. 1621–24) [National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; cybermuse.gallery.ca]

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 18–19, along with the story of Lot and his family, has long fascinated interpreters and artists. A study of various images can help students consider the traits and motivations of the different characters; it can also help them glimpse how artists pick up on and perpetuate biblical views on key moral issues, such as sex, alcohol, and revenge. One can begin with the rather docile treatment of the story by Albrecht Dürer, which depicts a scene after the destruction of the cities and the transformation of Lot's wife but prior to the sexual encounter in 19:30–38. Lot is portrayed as a well-dressed patriarch, and his girls are dutifully fol-

lowing him in their trek. Dürer's work is more interested in the spectacular rendering of the destruction of the cities in the top of the frame than it is in the sexual aspects of the story. In almost all of the pieces that are more focused on the fantastic rain of fire from heaven, one can ask students to play a variant of "Where's Waldo," because Lot's wife is usually present but nearly camouflaged in her new existence as a pillar of salt.

Beginning with Dürer allows instructors to illustrate the near-chronological move away from an interest in the destruction of the cities to a more eroticizing focus on the sexual encounter in later works. A medial position between these two trends is found in the piece by van Leyden, which portrays several events in the story. At the top of the work, we see a colorful burst of devastation, but we also see Lot and his daughters leaving the city with their mother left behind at the right center. Dominating the lower central region is a scene of Lot and his daughters after their journey. One daughter is pouring wine for their father, while the other sits, visibly uncomfortable, with her hands in her lap as Lot begins to embrace her. All the figures are fully clothed, and the viewer may recognize that this is but a preamble to the sexual act not depicted.

After examining the works of Dürer and van Leyden, students can view several pieces that focus almost exclusively on the sexual, alcoholic aspects of the story, beginning with Albrecht Altdorfer's depiction. The frame here is dominated by a horizontal pairing of Lot and one of his daughters, both fully nude, with a quite lecherous smile on Lot's face. We also see the prominence of wine, as well as Lot's other nude daughter either resting up or waiting in the wings, as Sodom and Gomorrah burn in the top right of the frame. In this same vein of images that focus on sex and liquor are the works of Joachim Wtewael and Hendrik Goltzius. Both of these show two naked daughters lounging with Lot as they all drink. Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves, and there is no indication that either daughter has any compunction.

Since students should consider carefully the interests and motivations of the daughters, it is helpful to conclude with Orazio Gentileschi's piece. Here, we see no lecherous sex, no glorification of liquor, and no destruction. Instead, it depicts two women, crouching over the form of their father, incapacitated from liquor, looking and pointing off the frame to, we assume, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The starkness of the painting allows students to focus on the daughters and what they might be thinking. Obviously they have already made the decision to ply Lot with alcohol, but they have not yet engaged in any sexual activity with him. The off-frame destruction they are witnessing might lead them to believe that they must act. As Sharon Pace Jeansonne (*Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*) notes, the motivation for the actions of the daughters is complicated not only by their belief

that their father is the only man left in a world that will need repopulating, but they may also be continuing the cycle of sexual abuse he nearly initiated when he offered them up to the men of Sodom. In other words, there could be a motive of revenge in their drunken exploits with Lot. Gentileschi's work, in short, allows teachers to focus closely on the plight of the daughters and as such is able to elicit more concentrated cogitations from students.

George Segal, *Sacrifice of Isaac* (1979) [Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.; speccoll.library.kent.edu/4may70/exhibit/memorials/segal.html]

Albert J. Winn, *Akedah* (1995) [Jewish Museum, New York; www.jewish museum.org]

When George Segal was commissioned to memorialize the campus riots against the War in Vietnam and the subsequent death of four young people at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, he created a statue that depicted a modernized version of Abraham (see Gen 22), with knife in hand, standing over a kneeling supplicant Isaac, bound at the wrists and wearing only athletic shorts. Kent State declined the statue—it was deemed inappropriate—but Princeton purchased the bronze cast and erected it near its chapel. This statue may facilitate discussion of the sacrifice of children, whether by Abraham, Jephthah, God, or the fathers of soldiers ever since. How does the story of the Akedah justify or challenge the sacrifice made by parents during times of war? Or, more generally, how does this provocative artwork understand the original text? What aspect does it emphasize? What does it miss?

Albert J. Winn's black-and-white photograph *Akedah* encourages students to think about some of the implications of the story of Isaac's binding. In particular, it can be used to highlight the issue of theodicy, which is central in this story, in a contemporary way. Winn captures the image of a male torso, including the left arm, which bears tefillin and which has a bandage, suggesting a blood test recently has been taken. In his explanation of the piece, Winn, who is Jewish and HIV positive, compares the tourniquet used in taking a monthly blood test to the ritual of wearing tefillin. Among other things, Winn's image seems to push the audience to consider the story from the perspective of Isaac, since the only figure in the image is the one who is "bound." Isaac, one might argue, is being metaphorically represented by a modern HIV-positive man. After telling students about Winn's explanation of the piece, one might ask them to discuss why Winn names his piece *Akedah*. What part of the story does Winn seem to capture? What does he leave out? In particular, an instructor might encourage students to explore what Winn's image communicates about the story's notion of sacrifice. How could God ask for the sacrifice of Abraham's precious son? Similarly, how could God

allow for the deaths of so many from HIV/AIDS? (For related exercises, see Gravett, "Genesis 22: Artists' Renderings," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 97–98.)

Gustave Doré, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1855) [Granger Collection, New York; www.ibiblio.org]

Doré depicts a winged angel, dressed in white, struggling with Jacob (Gen 32:22–32). The angel is prevailing, as he calmly clasps both of Jacob's wrists and pushes him down off of the rock where they are perched, despite Jacob's strained resistance. This portrayal is what one would expect: the divine being easily forcing the human into submission. But this, of course, is different from the biblical scene, where it is reported that the "man" did not prevail against Jacob (32:25) and the confrontation culminates with Jacob releasing his unidentified opponent (32:26). Students may consider why Doré does not follow the biblical script more closely. Are we to imagine that it is a scene earlier in the contest—before Jacob ultimately triumphs? Or is the artist uncomfortable with the notion that Jacob "wrestled with God … and prevailed" (32:28)? What are the theological implications of Jacob's victory? Further, the biblical text does not refer to Jacob's adversary as an "angel" (cf. the title). Rather, it says that Jacob wrestled with "a man," but Jacob later interprets the experience as having struggled with the deity (32:30). In light of this ambiguity, how are viewers to interpret Doré's figure? Is it God? If not, then why not simply render the figure as a man (i.e., without wings)? Finally, Jacob's garb is reddish in color. Does this recall his brother Esau/Edom, whose name means "red" (Gen 25:30)? Indeed, the biblical text implies that Jacob, as he is about to meet his brother for the first time in years, is struggling with past issues—hence the themes of blessing (32:26) and the mixing of pronouns in the Hebrew text, suggesting the "likeness" (i.e., twins) of the two combatants.

Avi Katz, *The Alien Corn* Series (late twentieth century): *Judah Meeteth Tamar by the Roadside*; *Samson and Delilah*; *The Angel Comforteth Hagar* [www.avikatz.net/sf/aliencorn/alienframe.htm]

If students tire of Baroque and Renaissance paintings, a series of works on biblical characters created by Avi Katz called *The Alien Corn* series can offer fresh perspectives. Since 1990 he has been the staff artist for the *Jerusalem Report*, illustrated over one hundred books, and helped found the Israel Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy. This eclecticism, and especially the interest in science fiction, is obvious in his work for *The Alien Corn* series, which renders all of its subjects in bright, almost neon, colors and in futuristic settings. In so doing, Katz defamiliarizes these figures and allows students to approach them in a very different environment.

For example, in Katz's piece titled, *Judah Meeteth Tamar by the Roadside*, we see a bleak terrain with only two figures in the fore. One is wearing what appears to be armor from Old Spain, driving a vehicle that resembles a Land Speeder from *Star Wars*. This figure, who we know from the title is Judah, is leaning out of the right side of his craft, beckoning the other figure, Tamar, to enter. She is dressed in an outfit reminiscent of the 1980s TV show *Miami Vice*, with her bikini top, large sunglasses, and "pageant hair." Her right hand is lifted, and she seems to be gesturing for Judah to come to her as well. In the top right corner of the piece we see a short snippet—in both Hebrew and English—from Gen 38, so that we can identify easily the scriptural context of the image, even without the accompanying title. Genesis 38 is notoriously difficult to understand, in terms of its place in the surrounding Joseph novella as well as the intentions and possibly scandalous behavior of Tamar. By placing this scene in such a novel context, Katz allows students to come to the story with fresh eyes. Students can ask questions about Tamar's behavior and dress, as well as Judah's role in the incident, so that new stock can be taken of this narrative.

An even more provocative rendering is Katz's *Samson and Delilah*, in which we see the brief narrative of Judg 16 transplanted into a seedy-looking motel. Samson is completely naked on the bed, with a very satisfied look on his face. Delilah is wearing nothing but a negligée, and her position in the frame makes it obvious that she has just finished sexually gratifying Samson. As Samson rests, Delilah signals to a robot standing in the doorway to come in. The robot's torso is shaped and colored like an old barbershop pole, with red and white swirls, so the viewer knows that Samson is about to be sheared. In depicting the scene in this fashion, Katz allows us to ask various questions: What is Delilah's role? Does she cut Samson's hair, or does someone else? In the Masoretic Text, it is clear that even though Delilah "calls to a man," she is the one who does the cutting. However, in the Septuagint and Vulgate, this man is called a barber, and it is he who does the shaving, so the textual evidence is sketchy. Does Delilah seduce Samson? The Masoretic Text (Hebrew Bible) tells us, "She made (or let) him sleep on (or between) her knees," but does not tell us anything about intercourse. In sum, by portraying Delilah in this way, Katz counters the biblical text, and students can be asked to compare and contrast the text and image, as well as be queried as to the history of interpretation of Delilah that may have influenced this depiction.

A final example will suffice. In his work *The Angel Comforteth Hagar*, Katz bucks the dominant depiction of Hagar in Western art by focusing not on Gen 21, but rather on Gen 16 in which a pregnant Hagar runs away from Sarah's rather brutal treatment (16:6). His work depicts Hagar as a runaway,

pregnant teen waiting at what appears to be a bus stop. Hagar has removed her roller skates but looks extremely depressed as she sits on the bus bench, fountain drink in hand. Next to her sits what we presume to be the angel, but this angel looks more like a robot, or even a bit player from *Tron*, than the typical angel in Western art. Nevertheless, the angel puts its arm around Hagar in a show of comfort that contrasts with the command in 16:9 to return to Sarah so that she can abuse Hagar more. As such, Katz has provided ample material here for students to return to Gen 16 and 21 and ask newly formed questions about (1) Hagar's status as an unwed, pregnant woman in the ancient world; (2) Sarah's treatment of Hagar; and (3) the fate of this notable, yet often overlooked character in the Torah.

In short, Katz's series—which also depicts Esau as a red Wookie and Ruth as a sexually charged Vulcan—takes familiar biblical characters and resituates them in the far reaches of the galaxy. In so doing, students' imaginations can be fired to (re)approach these figures from alternative vantages with innovative interrogations.

Michelangelo, *Moses* (ca. 1515) [San Pietro Church in Vincoli, Rome; www. wga.hu]

This monumental marble statue, 235 cm in height, was commissioned for the tomb of Julius II, which was never completed. Moses is presented as a towering, powerfully built figure, with unkempt hair and a long beard, certainly not the hesitant, stuttering figure we encounter early on in texts like Exod 4:10. The most noticeable attribute of this figure, though, are the two short, stubby horns Michelangelo has placed on the crown of his head. This iconic feature of Moses is based in a physiognomic description of the great leader in Torah. In Exod 34:29, as Moses descends from Mount Sinai, he is described as "not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him [God]" (JPS). The verb "was radiant" is translated from the Hebrew verb *qāran*, which is a near homonym for *qeren*, the Hebrew word for "horn," as in an animal horn. The conflation of the two words is somewhat understandable; even in Ps 69:32 the verbal form is used as a participle to indicate an animal "being with horns." Jerome, in the Vulgate, renders Exod 34:29 in part, "his face was horned as a result of his speaking with God." All of this may seem but an interesting footnote, but when we add this textual tradition to other literature like John 8:44, in which Jesus tells a group of Jews, "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires" (NRSV), then we see the beginnings of one of the most prevalent anti-Jewish myths in history: that Jews have horns because in some way, they are connected to the devil. As such, Michelangelo's work can be used not only to contrast images of Moses in the Torah, but also to

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highlight the seemingly trivial origin of an anti-Semitic myth, with the hope of countering it.

Gustave Doré, *Jephthah's Daughter Coming to Meet her Father* (1865) [www.biblical-art.com]

Arnulf Rainer, *Jephthah's Daughter Goes to Greet Her Father* (1995–98) [Museum Freider Burda, Baden-Baden; www.samm lung-frieder-burda. de]

Barry Moser, *The Daughter on the Pyre* (2003) [Illustration in Moser, *The Holy Bible: King James Version: The Pennyroyal Caxton Bible* (New York: Viking Studio, 1999); www.womeninthebible.net/BIBLE-1.9C.htm]

These three paintings relate the story of Judg 11 in dramatic and telling ways. Without disclosing the title, one can show students the woodcut by Gustave Doré. Central to the composition, the daughter leads a crowd of young women in exuberant but modest dance, stepping lightly, almost suspended over the earthen mountain path. The grain of the woodcut rises and falls with the energy of her dance. Does the illustration capture the moment when she celebrates her father's victory or bewails her virginity? Students can make a decision based on evidence they identify, both from the content and the artistry of the work. If they argue, for example, that the moment captured must be before the daughter learns of her fate, they might point to the presence of her timbrels and the fact that she is dancing (cf. Judg 11:34). Alternatively, they may reason that the black and white of the illustration suggests that the daughter knows she has only two choices: to die or to live.

Next, one can consider the revision of Doré's woodcut by Arnulf Rainer. Rainer takes Doré's woodcut and colors it with streams of bright red, blue, yellow, and pink rays emanating from the dancing daughter, as though she were the center of radiant flames of fire. The whole scene is haloed with entwining lines. Students can speculate on the meaning of these lines. Are they brambles of wood, foreshadowing the fuel of her sacrifice and, perhaps evoking the Akedah? Or do they suggest barbed wire, emphasizing her loss of freedom (to live or to choose her own destiny)? Or is Rainer evoking a motif of the Jewish Holocaust, offering a social critique of those who went to their death without resistance? Here, too, students could make arguments one way or another using evidence from Rainer's illustration.

Finally, Barry Moser's engraving captures an anorexic adolescent already half-consumed by the pyre in which she lies. Her resolute face reaches upward, yet her eyes are closed. She goes to her death with intention, to honor her father.

These depictions of Jephthah's daughter may be used to pose a number of questions: (1) Which image best conveys the sense of moral and political chaos that pervades the second half of Judges? (2) Which is the best illustration of the story in Judg 11? (3) What do these images suggest about the value and purpose of women and their sacrifices in the Bible, and how are these sacrifices often expected today in the shaping of young girls?

Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Bathsheba* (1889) [Private collection; www.biblical-art.com]

Most people assume that the story of David and Bathsheba is one of adultery (2 Sam 11:1–12:14). In order to provoke a careful reading of the text and to set the stage for a consideration of the image, students can perform an exercise in which they "put the characters on trial." If this were a modern story, what charges could be laid and what might stick? Is it a seduction, voyeurism, sexual harassment, adultery, or a rape? Teachers can also take the opportunity to define these terms and discuss the possible consequences of the charges. It is sometimes enlightening to ask the men first and then the women what they conclude, which provides a chance to discuss gender perspective and feminist biblical hermeneutics.

Then, when students are presented with this painting, they can describe how Gérôme has interpreted this narrative, and how it is communicated in his painting. Students might say, for example, that Gérôme depicts a seduction. Bathsheba entices David: She is bathing naked on an open rooftop; she is turned to the sun—and to David—and her chest is illumined; her hip is hitched up in a traditionally provocative pose; she stands in the center of the symbol of a fertile woman, a "v" created by the black shadowy woman on the left and the white garment on the right. The black and white come together at her feet and suggest that she has power. Furthermore, the angle of the kneeling woman and the pointed tower direct both Bathsheba's and the observer's gaze to David. She is "inviting his attention." Alternatively, students might suggest that, according to Gérôme, David is a voyeur: David is partially concealed by the balustrade and the altitude of his balcony; he is in the shadowy background; he is alongside a phallic pointed tower. Bathsheba has not noticed him (yet) or she would cover up. Or they might argue that Gérôme is depicting sexual harassment; that is, in David's exalted state (at the top of the painting and in the building) and unreachable position (distant perspective), he can do whatever he likes without consequences. The evening assignation and the outstretched arms of both Bathsheba and David creating mutual union might suggest adultery. Bathsheba has cast her veil of purity (the white garment) to the side. Then again, rape might be implied by the dark and crooked visual line of the wall reaching to David set against the con-

trast of Bathsheba's white skin and garment. In short, placing this open-ended painting of Bathsheba beside 2 Sam 11 demonstrates how biblical interpretation is truly "in the eye of the beholder."

Dieric Bouts the Elder, *Prophet Elijah in the Desert* (1464–68) [Sint-Pieterskerk, Leuven; www.biblical-art.com]

Peter Paul Rubens, *The Prophet Elijah Receiving Bread and Water from an Angel* (1625–28) [Musée Bonnat, Bayonne, France; www.ibiblio.org]

Abraham Bloemaert, *Landscape with the Prophet Elijah in the Desert* (1610) [The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; www.hermitage museum.org]

Washington Allston, *Elijah in the Desert* (1818) [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; www.mfa.org]

Among the themes upon which to focus when reading the stories of Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1–19:25; 2 Kgs 1:1–2:12) is that of eating in the wilderness. In the first, Elijah curses Israel with a drought and goes to the Wadi Cherith east of the Jordan where he is fed bread and meat by ravens (1 Kgs 17:6). In the second, fearing Jezebel, Elijah flees to Judah, leaves his servant, and then goes another day's journey into the wilderness. There he sits down under a tree and hopes to die (1 Kgs 19:4). An angel awakens him from sleep with "a cake baked on hot stones" and a jar of water. Again, he falls asleep and is fed by the angel, who says, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." Elijah went "in the strength of that food" for forty days (1 Kgs 19:8). With students, brainstorm a list of possibly related themes, such as the exodus, Babylonian exile, Jesus' temptation, or his multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Remind them that the Deuteronomistic Historian was likely writing from the exile and thus experiencing some form of wilderness at that time. How might these feeding miracles of Elijah be received by the Babylonian exiles?

One might continue the discussion by breaking students into groups and giving each group a color copy of one of the paintings listed above. Ask them to work together to identify what the artist emphasizes with composition, color, background, foreground, structures, characters, props, garments, gestures, space, light and dark, and flow lines. By emphasizing these features, what emotions does the artist try to evoke in his contemporary audience? For example, does the painting suggest hope at a time of war, shame for overindulgence during times of peace, or confidence in God's providence during times of famine? Ask them to form guesses based on their observations of the paintings. Each group can then collaborate with each of the other

groups, sharing what they have learned and discussed. As they rotate around the room, each group is able to incorporate new insights. In the plenary session that follows, each group can explain what they learned about (1) Elijah, (2) the use of traditional motifs in later biblical texts, and (3) how artists use these motifs rhetorically for their own audiences.

John Singer Sargent, *Frieze of the Prophets* (1895) [Boston Public Library, Boston; sargentmurals.bpl.org]

This frieze, part of Sargent's giant mural *Triumph of Religion*, which he executed (but never completed) for the Boston Public Library between the years 1890 and 1919, is well-known and easily the most famous piece of the larger mural. It depicts an imposing golden and winged Moses holding the Ten Commandments. At his right is Elijah; at his left, Joshua. Spread out on either side of this central triad are sixteen other prophetic figures: the three major prophets, the twelve minor prophets, and Daniel.

The painting has had a rather lively and interesting history of reception in both Jewish and Christian circles and has a number of potential uses in classroom contexts. With a total of nineteen figures represented, the range of possibilities for discussion can at best be only hinted at here.

(1) One may note the individualism at work in Sargent's presentation of the prophets in contrast to the more schematic images represented immediately above (which have to do with the Egyptian oppression). This artistic observation is certainly significant for the mural as a whole: Egypt, despite its power, is ultimately depersonalized, whereas these few lone figures, and the religion they represent, in no small way "triumph" over the glory that was Egypt. But it is also somewhat indicative of earlier approaches to the prophets (e.g., Wellhausen) which saw them as the high point of and *telos* in the development of Israelite religion.

(2) The centrality of Moses to the entire tableau and especially the centerpiece where he appears with Joshua and Elijah might be analyzed. Why these three? Why does Sargent portray Moses with the prophets anyway? Is it a construal of Exod 3 as a prophetic call narrative? And why Joshua and Elijah as opposed to, say, Samuel or Nathan, who are arguably as important?

(3) In addition to the winged (!) Moses with two tablets, there are other distinctive elements of representation: Joshua is appropriately drawing a sword; Amos has a shepherd's crook; Daniel carries a scroll; and Jonah is mostly concealed behind Jeremiah and Isaiah—a reluctant prophet to the end! Equally as intriguing and more interpretively daring is the pathos Sargent captures with a number of the figures, especially Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Joel, and Obadiah. Students could be asked about how and where Sargent's

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depictions reflect the biblical text. How are they *interpretations*? Finally, do they cast any light on the text and in what way? Obadiah, for instance, is probably the most poignantly depicted. A comparison with the grief and cry for justice, even vengeance, that pervades this briefest of prophetic books supports Sargent's depiction. But Sargent's depiction, in turn, may cast further light on Obadiah. Perhaps the grief that is captured so poignantly and visually in the painting is two-part: (a) the grief the prophet feels after the destruction of Jerusalem, and (b) the grief the prophet feels for having personally to carry a rather vicious message of retribution. This latter point, if correct, is at least implicitly present in the text but is brought to the fore in a powerful and visual way by Sargent's painting of Obadiah.

Raphael, *The Vision of Ezekiel* (1518) [Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence; www.wga.hu]

William Blake, *The Whirlwind: Ezekiel's Vision of the Cherubim and Eyed Wheels* (1803–5) [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; www.mfa.org/collections]

William H. Johnson, *Ezekiel Saw the Wheel* (1944–45) [Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; americanart.si.edu]

Norbert H. Kox, *Ezekiel's Vision* (contemporary) [Collection of the Artist; www.apocalypsehouse.homestead.com/EZEKIEL.html]

Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *The Glory of God* (1851–60) [Illustration in von Carolsfeld, *Die Bibel in Bildern* (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1906); www.pitts.emory.edu/woodcuts/1853BiblD/00011489.jpg]

The vision of the divine in the first chapter of Ezekiel is a particularly powerful text; however, as is the case with other visionary texts, such as the book of Revelation, a literal reading of the vision yields an almost absurd portrait of divine being and power. Reading this text in conjunction with select images can encourage students to think beyond the constraints of literal language and to understand the details of the text as evoking moods and abstract qualities of the divine.

One way of beginning this conversation is to have students sketch the vision as the instructor, or a student, reads aloud the text of Ezekiel. Students should be provided with blank paper and encouraged to capture the details of the text. Of course, this requires that the reader read slowly and deliberately. After they have tried their own sketches, students can discuss what they think Ezekiel's vision is about. Is it about the winged creatures with multiple faces? The wheels that move and spin? Or, is it about communicating characteristics associated with God? If it is about more abstract characteristics, why does the

author include such vivid detail? The conversation can encourage students to think about the vision as a rhetorical construction, which aims to persuade its audience to accept a particular view of God and of Ezekiel.

Students may then consider what the various artists capture in the text and how they interpret the purpose of Ezekiel's vision in their illustrations. The images by Raphael and William Blake are the most detailed. In Raphael's painting one is able to see the winged creatures, but one of its most striking aspects is the proximity between God and earth. Even though Raphael does not depict the "wheels" described in the vision, he seemingly captures the text's suggestion that the divine vision is close to the earth (Ezek 1:15). Blake's watercolor rendition utilizes the male body to represent the human form of the living creatures described by Ezekiel (1:5). This muscular body conveys a sense of strength and power. Like Raphael, Blake avoids depicting literal wheels; however, he does allude to a circular form and motion around the body of the living creature. In both images, we see the artists communicating particular themes in the text, by highlighting certain details and disregarding others.

The paintings by Johnson and Kox, both self-taught artists, are simpler than the others. These paintings lend themselves to discussions of the text's function. Johnson's work uses a primitive style to depict Ezekiel experiencing the vision of the wheels. The audience sees a partially clothed prophet, looking up into the sky, with two wheels floating above his head. The prophet's arms and hands are in the air, and he looks as though he has fallen to the ground. Johnson reminds the viewer and the reader that the vision of Ezekiel communicates something about Ezekiel, as a prophet, and is part of a larger story in which the prophet plays a key role. In contrast to Johnson's focus on Ezekiel, Kox uses oranges, reds, and yellows to depict an abstract vision of rotating "wheels" that blaze above a body of water. Above the wheels, which look strikingly similar to depictions of UFOs, is a spot of light, which might be the divine. In some sense, Kox places the viewer in the role of Ezekiel experiencing the fiery vision. What does Kox imply by placing the viewer in this position? Does it suggest, for example, that Ezekiel's vision is meant to reveal the divine nature to the audience?

After showing Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld's work and inviting students to make sound effects and to move "in any of the four directions without veering," students may contemplate why Ezekiel's vision of God has wheels. Is it meant to imply that God is able to move, in this case, to Babylon? This leads easily to questions of why God might leave Jerusalem (it was defiled) and go with the exiles (the privileged). Kinesthetic learners appreciate acting this out: God sits in Jerusalem, stands up, the temple (chair) is forcefully knocked over, and then God crosses the room, sits down in exile, and chats with Eze-

kiel. (Perhaps other players can be included: the people left behind who do not have access to God and the exiles in Babylon who do have access to God. The tension of the Reconstruction between the Jews and the people of the land comes into clearer focus.)

For a related exercise, see Johanna Stiebert, "Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 179–80.

Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Jonah* (ca. 1885–95) [Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; americanart.si.edu]

Most images of Jonah focus on either the "great fish" swallowing the recalcitrant prophet or the typological relationship between Jonah and the risen Christ. In fact, Jonah (along with Susanna) is depicted frequently in early Christian art and sarcophagi. In Ryder's oil, we see a chaotic, dark scene in which Jonah has just been tossed overboard by the "pagan" sailors after discovering he is the cause of the storm that plagues them. God is seen hovering above the action, flanked by wing-like spans of gold light, while Jonah is in the choppy waves, holding his arms aloft, helpless and seemingly ready for oblivion. This piece challenges both of the standard *topoi* of Jonah mentioned above; it also raises questions for students about the character of God and Jonah and the nature of the narrative itself. For example, is God controlling all this action? If so, why? If Jonah is a prophet, why is he so ready to accept death? What kind of a prophet would act like this, or, why is Jonah so negative about carrying out God's commission? If he is ready for death, why does God commission the "great fish" to swallow him? Energetic teachers can also ask students to reflect on the technical aspects of Ryder's work, adumbrated nicely on the Smithsonian's webpage, complete with QuickTime movie commentary (see americanart.si.edu/collections/tours/ryder/). Ryder fiddled constantly with his works, and his *Jonah* is no exception. He even reused an older canvas, as a faint image of a female character is visible via an autoradiograph. The technical aspects of Ryder's paintings could also be incorporated into a discussion of Jonah, insofar as God seems to be constantly fiddling with Jonah, attempting to perfect his understanding of treating Gentiles with justice, while Jonah is trying to reuse the traditional understanding of "insider-outsider" categories prevalent in Israelite ideology for so long.

Jean Fouquet, *Job sur le fumier* (1452–60) [Musée Condé, Chantilly; expositions.bnf.fr/fouquet/grand/f093.htm]

In a miniature illustration from the Book of Hours of Étienne Chevalier, Jean Fouquet depicts Job on the ash heap being instructed by his three friends. Job has come to the end of his strength; his ribs and sinews show through his darkened boil-stricken skin, his beard and hair hang unkempt and grey. The

ashes cradle his broken body. In contrast, his three pious friends, dressed in rich hues of red, gold, blue, and white and with crowns on their heads, keep their distance from Job, stand over him and "look down their noses" at him. One friend extends his delicate foot in Job's direction, perhaps to check for life or perhaps in disdain that his foot is soiled. A castle stands in the background, and travelers (perhaps Elihu?) approach along the way. All things seem to point heavenward—the trees, the castle, the visual lines of the friends' figures, the clear blue sky—except for Job who has succumbed to despair. Will he curse God now? The Latin subscript ironically appears to cite Ps 95:1, "O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us rejoice in our salvation!"

One can ask students if they can identify one friend from the other by their gestures and stance. Teachers might assign one of the speeches of the various friends to each of several small groups and ask them to match the speech with one of the characters in the painting. Which is the agitated Zophar (20:1–29), Eliphaz the accuser (22:1–30), and Bildad the cynic (8:1–22; 18:1–21)? Can they identify the intent of the friends' accusations: What would be an equivalent contemporary friend's comment? How might they themselves respond to this friendly piece of advice? How does Job respond? Finally, students may reflect on the way the order and the clarity in this small painting challenge the disorder and chaos of Job's reality (cf. Job 2:12). The artistry of the painting suggests that order is more divine.

Marc Chagall, *Ahasuerus Sends Vashti Away* (1960) [Svetlana & Lubos Jelinek, Chrudim, Czech Republic; www.spaightwoodgalleries.com/Pages/Chagall_60Bible_lithos3.html]

Gustave Doré, *The Queen Vashti Refusing to Obey the Command of Ahasuerus* (1865) [www.biblical-art.com]

Edwin Long, *Vashti Refuses the King's Summons* (1879) [Bob Jones University Museum and Gallery, Greenville, S.C.; www.bjumg.org/collections/old_masters/centuries_18_19/long.htm]

When Vashti refuses King Ahasuerus's request to be exhibited, the king and his sages send out an edict to all the provinces so that people know that "every man should be master in his own house." This story obviously supports male domination in the household, but this introductory tale, as well as the greater narrative of Esther, demonstrates that female subversion works. Vashti gets what she wants by refusing to use her sexuality; Esther gets what she wants by using her sexuality. The king never seems to get what he wants, except perhaps Esther.

Art captures both sides of this story as well. In Chagall's color lithograph, Ahasuerus dominates. The royal red of rage in his ornate robe bleeds into the

innumerable people close to him, and extends down the stairs. His height and weight—supported by the dark diagonal lines dividing the pair—overshadow Vashti, who hides crouching under the stairway, face downcast and fading pink and green, seeing darkness. Compare this to Gustave Doré's engraving. Here, Vashti stands straight and proud at the top of stairs, with her arm outstretched in restraint, bathed in light and in layers of white clothes (as innocent), but no crown. She is surrounded by angry men looking and leaning into her; they are in shadow. Finally, in Edwin Long's painting, Vashti looks weak, uncertain, and sad; she clutches her garments in a gesture of modesty. Her servants are pleading for her to go to the king.

This series of paintings can serve to demonstrate how an artist's (and author's) perspectives and commitments may be communicated in the construction of a story or an artistic rendering, in this case, the (in)appropriate response of Vashti.

Botticelli, *The Return of Judith* (1470) [Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; www.arca.net/uffizi1/Uffizi_Pictures.asp?Contatore=112]

Giorgione, *Judith* (1504) [The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; www.hermitagemuseum.org]

Jan Sanders van Hemessen, *Judith* (ca. 1540) [Art Institute of Chicago; www.artic.edu/aic/collections]

Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598–99) [Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome; www.wga.hu]

Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (ca. 1620) [Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; www.wga.hu]

Valentin de Boulogne, *Judith and Holofernes* (ca. 1626) [National Museum of Fine Arts in La Valletta, Malta; www.wga.hu]

Johann Liss, *Judith and Holophernes* (1628) [Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; www.wga.hu]

While the apocryphal narrative of Judith has long fascinated interpreters due to its rather gruesome, yet religious heroine, many students are unfamiliar with this story. Once they engage it, however, they find themselves caught up in the many issues raised by the text, such as divine justice; what makes a Jew a Jew during the Second Temple period; the status of women during this period; and finally, deceit and violence in the name of God. Unfortunately, the depiction of Judith in the Western artistic tradition has focused almost exclusively on only one moment in the narrative: Judith's beheading of Holofernes in 13:8. As such, the tradition has siphoned Judith into a singular

mode of feminine violence, and usually she is doomed to be presented in one of two ways: as a brutish woman who readily embraces her role in the killing; or as a highly feminized figure who looks as if she could not possibly partake in this murderous act.

Both depictions find support in the narrative. Students can view a sampling of both trends to illustrate how different ideas of "woman" permeate both the apocryphal text and the artistic tradition. Put another way, if, as some scholars claim, Judith is a cipher for "Jews" during the Second Temple period, then how we interpret her character affects not only the way we understand women during that period, but also how we interpret Jewish identity therein. As such, these different trends of interpretation allow us to raise important questions, such as: What could be the ideological motivations for portraying "troublesome" women like Judith in certain ways? Is there a dominant trend in biblical scholarship akin to the trend(s) we see in art? Which one of these pieces resonates with your view of the story, and why? How do these images of Judith address the larger view(s) of and concerns about women within biblical literature?

Botticelli's work portrays a "feminine Judith" in which we see Judith and her maid on their way back from the enemy camp, presumably going to Bethulia. There is no hint here of any urgency, no sense that a hideous beheading has just taken place. Rather, Botticelli has painted a pastoral scene, with Judith in lovely attire, looking as if she and her servant were simply out for an afternoon stroll. Only the small sword in Judith's hand and the severed head of Holofernes in the servant's basket betray what has just happened. Similarly, the piece by Giorgione shows a serene looking Judith with a pious visage standing near a large tree, looking down upon the severed head of Holofernes, upon which she has placed her left foot. Giorgione's Judith displays no trace of the grim determination found in her apocryphal counterpart, and in fact she seems almost too "dainty" to have performed such a grisly task.

On the other hand, there are copious examples of a more macabre trend in portraying Judith. Jan Sanders van Hemessen shows us a totally nude, muscular Judith with Holofernes' sword raised in her right hand and the bag she will use for his severed head in her left. Looking at this Judith, the viewer is left with little doubt that this woman is fully capable of lopping off Holofernes' head. Along these same lines, we must mention the grand tradition of Judiths begun by Caravaggio. We are told in the apocryphal narrative that Judith has to whack Holofernes' head not once but twice in order to decapitate him. Caravaggio and those who follow him, including Artemisia Gentileschi and Valentin de Boulogne, focus on this precise moment in order to depict the action of the beheading itself, complete with what students familiar with the television drama *CSI* would term "arterial spatter." These

gruesome renderings allow us to pursue the issue of violence in the name of God and its justification. Finally, concluding with the work by Johann Liss allows students to enter into the psyche created by this line of representation. Liss shows the viewer the massively muscular back of Judith, as well as the freshly decapitated body of Holofernes, as she is loading his head into her basket. The real key to this work, though, is that she is gazing out at the viewer with a look that radiates determination and ruthlessness. It is truly a "Schwarzenegger" moment, and it allows teachers to broach this character in a very different light than many other renderings, focusing as they do on Judith's feminine presence.

In sum, comparing and contrasting these two trends of interpreting Judith permits instructors not only to illustrate divergent renderings of the same narrative, but it also opens up space for questions about women and violence in the Bible.

Ralf Kresin, *Susanna im Bade* (1999) [www.kresin.de/websites/oelbilder/susanna.html]

Sisto Badalocchio, *Susanna and the Elders* (ca. 1609) [Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota; www.ringling.org/collections.asp. The Ringling Museum attributes this painting to Agostino Carracci]

Rembrandt van Rijn, *Susanna and the Elders* (ca. 1636) [Mauritshuis, The Hague; www.mauritshuis.nl/index.aspx?Contentid=17521&Chapterid=2341&Filterid=988]

Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders* (1610) [Schonborn Collection, Pommerfelden; www.metmuseum.org]

Allesandro Allori, *Susanna and the Elders* (1561) [Musée Magnin, Dijon; www.musee-magnin.fr/homes/home_id24567_u1l2.htm]

George Pencz, *Susanna and the Elders* (ca. 1532) [Spaightwood Galleries, Upton, Mass.; spaightwoodgalleries.com/Pages/Bible_Susanna.html]

Agostino Carracci, *Susanna and the Elders* (from *The Lascivious Series*, mid-1590s) [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; reproduced in Diane De Grazia Bohlin, *Prints and Related Drawings by the Carracci Family* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1979), 291]

The story of Susanna represents one of the narrative gems of the apocryphal corpus and has been rendered in numerous media, including music, literature, and art. Containing as it does a plot that focuses on an attempted rape and cover-up by those in authority, as well as a pious and beautiful heroine, it is no coincidence that artistic renderings of the story have been

somewhat schizophrenic in their approach. That is, within the works that treat this theme, one can find scenes of sexual aggression and seduction alongside depictions of righteous refusal and pictorial piety. For this reason, paintings of Susanna can serve to demonstrate several important concepts in the biblical studies classroom, for example, (1) the multiple possibilities of interpretations of narratives about women; (2) the ways in which mostly male interpreters read this story of an embattled woman, which can serve as a springboard to discuss ideologies in interpretation; and (3) the process by which potentially harmful readings of female characters can de dissected to reveal the tentative foundations on which they stand.

Students should pay attention specifically to the two main thematic levels of the story: the sexual level in which we find the attempted rape and the discussion of the elders' lust; and the level of piety, which includes Susanna's refusal and prayer, as well as all of Daniel's presence and dialogue. Even though the latter level appears to dominate within the story, it is the former we find most often in the artistic tradition. Nonetheless, it is helpful for students to view artistic renderings that treat both themes in an attempt to highlight the three concepts mentioned above. In addition to the variety of material from the Renaissance, earlier and later examples exist. The earliest, from the mid-fourth century c.e., is a painting from the Praetextatus Catacomb in Rome, depicting Susanna as a lamb between two wolves (cf. du Bourguet, *Early Christian Painting*, pl. 55). In 1999, Ralf Kresin painted Susanna drying off in a shower, with the elders peering at her through a turned corner in the tiles.

Badalocchio's oil is one of the "Pious Susanna" pieces. She is depicted as both shocked and terrified, grasping her cloak in an attempt to cover herself. Her hand is raised to defend or shield herself from the advances of the elders, and her eyes are fixed skyward to symbolize her reliance on God to save her from this predicament, lyrically stated in her prayer in verses 42–43. Rembrandt's and Gentileschi's famous pieces are similar. In the former, the figure of Susanna dominates the frame as she struggles and contorts her body in order to hide her nakedness from the elders, all the while gazing directly at the viewer, out of the frame. This image is quite discomforting, as this Susanna seems to be imploring the viewer for help in an immediate fashion. No less gripping is Gentileschi's work, which depicts a Susanna in clear emotional turmoil, arms raised to resist the elders, all placed in a cold stone setting. Using these images allows students to empathize with Susanna in her plight to remain true to God, as she is presented in the story. Teachers can also utilize these images to note the ways in which both male and female interpreters focus on the more ethical, less erotic themes in the story and thereby stimulate discussion on the role of background in interpretation.

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At the same time pious readings of Susanna are present in Western art, a more sexually aggressive interpretation tends to dominate the tradition. One can turn directly from Gentileschi's stark and painful expression of Susanna's confusion and despair to Allessandro Allori's mid-sixteenth-century oil. Here we see a scene of enjoyed seduction, in which Susanna seems to be caressing the heads of both elders, as one edges his hand up her inner thigh. We get no sense from this work that Susanna is conflicted, scared, or in despair, as the narrative describes her. Instead we see a woman who might be willing to acquiesce to the elders' advances. Other works in this vein heighten the theme of sexual aggression, some depicting an attempted rape. For example, Georg Pencz's engraving depicts Susanna with a leg draped over the knee of one of the elders, while both of them are holding her wrists tightly, and one of them is fondling her left breast. Similarly, Carracci's piece shows a terrified, fully naked Susanna trying to get away from the elders, one of whom is grabbing her *derriere*, and one of whom has pulled his robe up to allow himself to masturbate behind a column on the right side of the piece. Given the level of violence and sexuality exhibited here, it is safe to say that Carracci was interested in Susanna for the opportunity to portray a scene of erotic aggression, not a picture of piety.

These sexually charged, and often lewd, images allow students to interrogate the story as to the sexual elements within it, as well as to discuss larger issues raised by such renderings. For example, was Susanna "asking for it" by bathing nude? How does this portrayal of sexual violence connect with other examples in biblical literature? What effect does viewing scenes of sexual violence have on us and the way we return to the story time and time again? The artistic renderings of this text, both pious and pornographic, are fertile ground for feminist and ideological queries.

Fra Angelico, *The Annunciaton* (ca. 1440–45) [Museo di San Marco, Florence, Italy; www.artstor.org; a number of annunciation paintings are attributed to Fra Angelico and his workshop; one similar to this fresco resides in the Prado in Madrid and is viewable online at museoprado. mcu.es]

Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Annunciation* (1898) [Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; www.philamuseum.org]

Raphael Soyer, *Annunciation* (1980) [Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.; americanart.si.edu]

Viewing these three markedly different annunciation paintings together provides an opportunity to explore themes introduced in Luke's narrative and to push students to think critically about "truth" and what is represented as

real. After reading Luke 1:26–56, students view these images and are asked to describe how each image captures the text.

Fra Angelico's work serves as a beautiful example of a Renaissance annunciation scene: Mary sits indoors on a columned portico as an angel with rainbow-hued wings kneels before her. Mary is haloed and wears a blue robe. In the background and to the left, we see a fence that suggests the garden off of the portico is closed off. Students viewing this image might be encouraged to think about how this depiction of Mary indoors and separated from the world by a fence highlights her virginal or "untouched" nature. For many students, Mary's gesture indicates her faithful acceptance of Gabriel's news.

Painted at the end of the nineteenth century, Henry O. Tanner's oil painting uses realism to render Luke's story of Mary. Tanner's painting captures the moment when Gabriel, represented as a glowing pillar of light, approaches the young, Jewish girl. Mary, clothed in simple robes, sits on a bed and hesitantly looks up at the luminous figure. Her expression is marked neither by fear nor eagerness. Mary's surroundings appear to be earthen or stucco-like, a woven rug is on the floor and a simple blanket hangs behind Mary. As students experience this painting, they can compare its portrayal of Mary's social context to Fra Angelico's portrayal. It might be illuminating to remind students of Luke 1:46–56, since Tanner's painting can be read as highlighting the "lowliness" of Mary.

After viewing Tanner's rendition, Raphael Soyer's 1980 painting might prove quite thought provoking, since it depicts a modern scene of two women in a bath or dressing room. The painting's title frames it as an annunciation scene. A woman, dressed in a pink skirt and black top, leans against a cool blue wall and gazes at a second woman. This second woman is dressed in a slip of pale blue, the traditional blue identifying her with Mary. Mary's hair is tied back, and she carries a towel that indicates she has just washed in the sink basin. Prompting students to read this painting in relation to the annunciation story might involve asking them what washing and water suggests about Mary's character in Luke. One might encourage students to read her tied-back hair as an indication of controlled sexuality, a common trope in visual depictions of women. In addition, students can consider what Soyer communicates by translating this story into a modern context. Is this a way of capturing Mary's claim that "from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48)?

Furthermore, these paintings can serve as entry into a conversation about truth and realism. When viewing these images, students often comment on how Tanner's depiction seems so real. This sense of reality is communicated primarily through the setting, which fits how many modern Westerners imagine the first-century Palestinian setting. The knowledge that Tanner was

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the son of an African Methodist Episcopal bishop who often painted religious and biblical scenes and that he even traveled to Palestine to capture better the settings might initially reassure students that Tanner's painting captures "how it must have happened." However, this type of assumption can be troubled by adding that Tanner explicitly sought to "humanize" the characters in his biblical paintings, showing that they were "kin" to everyone. As an African American painter living at the turn of the twentieth century, this had social and political implications. For Tanner, this painting of Mary is not simply about capturing a realistic picture, but it is also about depicting Mary's connectedness to all people, regardless of race. In other words, while Tanner sought to capture some of the reality of ancient Palestine, his painting was shaped by complex social, historical, and political issues (Boime, "Henry Ossawa Tanner's Subversion of Genre," 415–42). What appears real, students learn, is shaped by the artist's political and theological commitments. One might ask students: Does this make Tanner's painting any less true to the text? Once students have thought about how realism functions in Tanner's painting, they can think about how Fra Angelico and Soyer's paintings may be just as true to the text, even though they do not strive for historical realism. This question opens up a conversation about distinctions between realism and truth.

Luc Olivier Merson, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1879) [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; www.mfa.org]

Matthew's depiction of the holy family's flight into and out of Egypt (Matt 2:13–23) is one of the ways that the author constructs his understanding of Jesus' identity, especially as he portrays Jesus as a new Moses. French artist Luc Olivier Merson provides a way of illustrating this interpretation, as well as providing a way of highlighting the differences between the Matthean and the Lukan birth narratives.

Merson's painting, dominated by the dark colors of a night sky, positions the view at a distance from this desert scene. To the left we see a statute of the sphinx, partially buried in sand. Resting between the front feet of the sphinx is a female figure, presumably Mary, with an infant in her arms. The infant glows, the light reflecting onto Mary's face. To the right of the statue we see a figure laying face down on the ground by a campfire and a lone donkey next to a saddle. The night sky, the sphinx, and the glowing child create a scene of mystery and dramatic importance.

This painting provides an effective way into a conversation about the unique elements of Matthew's birth narrative. Students should make a connection between the sphinx, a symbolic image of Egypt, and the depiction of Jesus as a new Moses. Further, students can discuss whether Merson's

focus on Mary and his depiction of Joseph face down faithfully portrays Matthew's narrative or whether this depiction of Mary seems more in line with Luke's Gospel.

Otto Dix, *The Temptation of Jesus* (1960) [Marian Library, Dayton; campus.udayton.edu/mary//gallery/works/temptationofjesus.htm]

Buoninsegna di Duccio, *The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain* (ca. 1308–11) [The Frick Collection, New York; collections.frick.org]

The story of the temptation of Christ links Jesus and humans most profoundly. As Matt 4:1–11 tells it, the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. For forty days and nights, Jesus eats and drinks nothing. Then the devil comes to him and tempts him three times: first with bread, second with protection, and third, "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor" if Jesus falls down and worships him.

In Otto Dix's lithograph, the kingdoms of the world are represented by the façade of a skyscraper and the hash marks of other undistinguished buildings; they are well lit but too far off to impress. In the foreground, a rather weary looking Jesus is overshadowed by a menacing devil whose four horns and pointed chin form strong visual lines piercing the head of Jesus, extending down his face and back. The seated Jesus raises a weak hand in response, but the slump of his body and hollowed eyes suggest that he is defeated.

The painting raises a variety of questions. Is Jesus calmly responding to a pesky annoyance, or is he overcome? Is Jesus connected to the divine or abandoned? Is this a positive or a negative view of Christ? If Jesus meets humanity most closely in this narrative, what is Dix saying about humanity and the pursuit of power and the wealth of the nations (e.g., the devil controls the cities; humans disappear in the city)? What does Dix imagine for the future? (A continual decline of cities through evil; the good are helpless to stop it?) How does this painting alter the meaning of Matt 4? (Jesus can no longer resist temptation; the cities are too nebulous, the devil too powerful?)

Compare Dix's lithograph with Buoninsegna di Duccio's tempera painting on wood. Here, Jesus is robed in royal red and navy robes, flanked by two angels, with his hand extended in command to the devil to leave. His feet are planted solidly on a rock, and the lines and textures of the painting support him. The devil, in contrast, is old, naked, winged, and possibly only one-armed; he is so dark that his features are obscured. He perches precariously on a precipice ready for a fall or flight. Three superb cities stand in subordination to these four figures; complete with the details of loggias, battlements, towers, Gothic windows, and red-tiled roofs, the bright pink and yellow cities are protected by stout walls and fed with lively running streams

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of water. Compared to Dix, how does Duccio represent Jesus? Is Jesus more human or divine? What is the relationship between Jesus and the development of cities? It would seem that Jesus is casting the devil out of the cities in order to preserve them for habitation, to "bless them." Does this corrupt the meaning of Matt 4?

Henry Wolf, *Christ Walking on the Sea* (1899) [Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.; americanart.si.edu]

Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Christ Walking on the Water* (no date) [Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.; americanart.si.edu]

B. J. O. Nordfeldt, *Christ Walking on Water* (1951) [Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.; americanart.si.edu]

Each of these pieces literally provides a different angle on the story of Jesus walking on water (Mark 6:45–52; Matt 14:22–33; John 6:16–59). Comparing these different paintings alongside the Gospel accounts opens up conversation about how writers, like artists, shape the elements of a story to communicate a particular idea or to fulfill a specific function.

Henry Wolf highlights the storm at sea, as sea swells dominate the foreground of the picture. The boat filled with the disciples is about to be overcome by the waves. To the upper right, however, we see a haloed Jesus walking on water that is still. Jesus, arms outstretched in a cruciform pose, emerges out of the darkness toward the boat. In this way, Wolf's artwork seemingly suggests peace and salvation in relation to Christ and his crucifixion. Like Wolf, Henry O. Tanner places Jesus toward the upper right hand corner of his illustration, although he is represented through the faintest of sketching. Tanner captures Matthew's and Mark's references to the ghost-like figure of Jesus. In the foreground of this artwork, Tanner depicts a view into the hull of the boat. We see the ribs of the boat's hull as it seems about to tip over. Most of the disciples are huddled at the far end, but one disciple, probably Peter, hangs on to the edge of the vessel. Perhaps, Peter is ready to jump out of the boat toward the apparition, making this artwork a story about Peter's sudden burst of eager faith.

B. J. O. Nordfeldt's modern oil painting is the most distinctive of the three. Nordfeldt does not include a boat, focusing on Jesus instead. The absence of the boat has the effect of placing the viewer in the boat, viewing Jesus as he approaches. The figure of Jesus, which is in the center of the painting, is abstract and surrounded by an abstract outline alluding to the disciples' mistaking Jesus for a ghost. Underneath Jesus' feet are fish, linking this story to the feeding miracle which precedes it in Matthew and Mark and which surrounds the story in John. In the latter account, the story of Jesus walking

on the water ties together the feeding of the five thousand with Jesus' teaching about the bread of life, claiming, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Read in relation to John's Gospel, Nordfeldt's painting might be understood as a visual blending of the story of the fish and bread, if we read Jesus as the bread, and the story of Jesus walking on the water.

These three visual depictions of the "same" story, which has three textual versions, allow students to see how artists and authors shape the meaning of an image or a story by selecting and arranging its parts. To make this point, students can identify the focus or significance of each piece (e.g., faith, Jesus, disciples) in relation to the angles from which the viewer approaches various aspects of the images. What, for example, does the view into the boat suggest about the meaning of Tanner's painting? Is this an attempt at having the viewer empathize with the experience of the disciples in the boat? This line of inquiry can be expanded to compare the angles and arrangements of the paintings in relation to the texts. What does Nordfeldt communicate about this story by having the viewer see Jesus in relation to the fish? Does this perspective capture the perspective taken in the Johannine account?

Ian Pollock, *Talents* (2000) [Private collection, Macclesfield, United Kingdom; www.eichgallery.abelgratis.com/p10.html]

Jesus' parable of the talents evokes multiple interpretations (Matt 25:14–30). To illustrate this, students can study Pollock's work which features a large Caucasian male in a black suit juggling three smaller males with different racial features (possibly African American and East Asian). Students may consider some of these questions: What is a talent, according to Pollock: the ability to juggle balls, finances, or slaves? Is the master good? What do the colors and positions of the players suggest? Is a picture worth a thousand words—that is, is the picture as effective as the parable? Gauging effectiveness depends in part on the intended effect. Is it simply to reproduce Jesus' lesson in a different medium? To apply the parable to a different historical setting? Does Pollock depend on a prior familiarity with the Matthean text? How might a viewer without this familiarity respond to this work? The painting may also be used to discuss the role of slavery in America and how the parable has been used to rationalize injustice in the pursuit of multiplying talents, or to discuss problems of translation, as in the word "talent." Students' mixed responses will demonstrate to them the "riddle of parables," the need for interpretation, and the impact of bias on their interpretation.

Pollock has produced forty paintings based on Jesus' parables which may be used in a similar way. For a related exercise dealing with divergent responses to the parables, see Guy D. Nave Jr., "The Social Functions of Parables," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 297–98.

Henri Lindegaard, *On the Earth and in Heaven* (2003) [Reproduced in *La Bible des contrastes: Méditations par la plume et le trait* (Lyons: Réveil, 2003); www.biblical-art.com]

Henri Lindegaard, *The Gift for Today* (2003) [Reproduced in *La Bible des contrastes: Méditations par la plume et le trait* (Lyons: Réveil, 2003); www.biblical-art.com]

In John 3, Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night seeking the one who comes from God. Jesus answers, "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again/from above." (The Greek here can mean either "from above" or "anew.") Nicodemus is confused and asks Jesus how he can be born again; Jesus says that he must be born of "water and of Spirit."

Lindegaard's *On the Earth and in Heaven* can illustrate the complex distinction between the world of Jesus and that of Nicodemus. The "earthly" horizontal blinds on the left reveal Nicodemus's reverse-question-mark shape edged in black, suspended halfway between sitting and seated. One hand holds his chest; the left hand droops pointing to a womb-shaped void. To the right, the vertical "transcendent" lines capture Jesus' figure with predominantly white overlaid on black. He points upwards with his left hand and extends his right to Nicodemus, the line of his hand forming the top of the womb-shape but now suggesting a baptismal font. The vertical and horizontal lines meet in the center in the form a cross, indicating that Jesus brings the spiritual and the earthly together.

Compare the illustration and story of Nicodemus in John 3 to Lindegaard's *The Gift for Today* and the story of the Samaritan Woman in John 4. Whereas Jesus meets Nicodemus at night, he meets the woman at noon. Nicodemus is a male Jewish authority-figure who does not understand Jesus; she is a female Samaritan outcast (possibly) who recognizes Jesus as the Messiah. Lindegaard captures these differences well in his illustrations. The white and black contrast is still sharp, but rather than vertical and horizontal lines separating the two characters, the two characters in *The Gift for Today* are embraced by five bright beams emanating from the sun in the top center of the illustration. Jesus' hand is outstretched to the woman; she cradles her water jug tipped toward him at hip level (perhaps that she is offering herself to him sexually, as the allusions to "living water" might suggest). He leans toward her; she leans away from him. He beseeches her with upturned white face; she is turned to him, her face in the dark. The innocent and modest buttons on her dress challenge our presuppositions of this woman as one who is seductive and "of a certain age."

These two illustrations can be employed to highlight contrasts in these two particular stories in the Gospel of John and as prime examples of other

contrasts in this gospel, such as light/dark, earthly/heavenly, us/them, day/night, and male/female.

Lucas Cranach II, *Christ and the Fallen Woman* (1532) [The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; hermitagemuseum.org]

Valentin de Boulogne, *Christ and the Adulteress* (1620s) [J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; www.getty.edu]

Rembrandt, *The Woman Taken in Adultery* (1644) [National Gallery, London; www.nationalgallery.org.uk]

William Blake, *The Woman Taken in Adultery* (1805) [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; www.mfa.org]

Even though most scholars regard the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery in John 8 as a later addition, it has captured the imaginations of visual artists throughout history. Representations of this text are especially interesting because of the diverse ways in which they depict the relation between the woman and her accusers, the scribes and Pharisees, and the relation between these characters and Jesus. These images provide an entry point into conversations about John's characterizations of women and "the Jews" and the ways in which subsequent interpreters have approached these gender and ethnic categories.

Students can analyze how each artist depicts the characters or set of characters from the text, including the accusers, the woman, and Jesus. What types of costumes do the artists use? Are certain characters depicted in particular colors? How are the different characters positioned in the paintings? Encourage them to write down notes as they view each of the paintings.

Lucas Cranach's painting offers the most explicitly negative depiction of the scribes and Pharisees, employing stereotypes, such as crooked noses and scowling faces. In fact, one of the accusers, immediately to the left of Jesus, bears a striking resemblance to a pig. Although Jesus is depicted with neatly tended side curls, these seemingly convey a sense that he is the ideal Jewish rabbi in contrast to those around him. Cranach suggests the judgmental nature of the scribes and Pharisees in contrast to the compassion of Jesus, as the accused woman stands demurely, her head bowed, indicating her probable innocence. In contrast, Valentin de Boulogne's painting depicts a woman whose head hangs apparently in shame, as she is brought before Christ with her blouse falling off. The accusers stand in the darkness behind Jesus, carefully watching him (perhaps judging him) as he bends down to write on the ground. Jesus looks up at the woman, and the light that shines on both of

these characters suggests a connection. The woman may be guilty, but she is drawn to and considered by a gentle-looking Jesus.

Rembrandt's painting of this scene offers a unique depiction, as we see the action from afar. The action takes place within or just outside of a large and seemingly opulent structure, although it is depicted in dark and somber tones. The only light in the painting seems to fall upon Jesus and the woman, who kneels before him in a white dress. Even though the scribes and Pharisees are adorned luxuriously, Jesus is clearly the central focus as he stands head and shoulders above those around him. Jesus' simple dress, moreover, sets him apart from the surroundings and the scribes and Pharisees. Again, the scene depicts the woman in positive terms; she kneels before Jesus and her white robe could be mistaken for a baptismal garment.

In contrast to the other paintings, William Blake's watercolor eschews stereotypical depictions of Jewish leaders; we simply see the backs of the accusers as they turn away. Blake focuses instead on the interaction between Jesus and the woman, which is highlighted by their matching pale robes and light hair. The woman watches intently as Jesus is still bent over and writing on the ground.

Additional questions for students: Do they see any patterns in how the characters are portrayed? If they do, what do these patterns say about how people have read and interpreted this text? In particular, what might these patterns say about how people have tended to interpret John's negative depictions of "the Jews" throughout the Gospel?

As students talk about the artists' depiction of the woman, they should note her somewhat sympathetic portrayal. Arguably, in each of the paintings the audience is given the sense that she actually takes Jesus up on his command to "Go and sin no more" (8:11). In other words, through the close connections the artists draw between Jesus and the woman we are given the sense that she repents or converts. However, students can discuss how this repentant woman is characterized: Is she depicted as strong and active or weak and passive? What does this say about the understandings of gender that each artist brings to the text? Does this understanding of gender cohere with this particular text or even John's Gospel as a whole?

Margo Humphrey, *The Last Bar-B-Que* (1989) [David C. Driskell Collection, University of Maryland Art Gallery, College Park; www.artgallery. umd.edu/exhibit/02–03/driskell2003/humphrey_bbq.html. The print reproduction does a better job of capturing the color and detail of this art work; see Juanita Marie Holland, ed., *Narratives of African American Art and Identity: The David C. Driskell Collection* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), pl. 76]

Albrecht Dürer, *The Last Supper* (1523) [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; www.mfa.org]

While there are countless depictions of the Last Supper, this lithograph by Margo Humphrey is unique because of the artist's explicit attempt at reinterpreting traditional portrayals of the scene. Specifically, Humphrey draws upon African and African American imagery and culture. Most notably, she depicts Jesus and the disciples as African or African American, using brown and blue pigments for their skin. She also clothes the traditional characters in patterns that echo traditional African prints. The context of a bar-b-que itself, which includes chicken along with wine and bread, places the story of the Last Supper in the context of southern African American traditions. It is important that students realize that this recontextualization of the Gospel story is not a parody or a piece of humor. Humphrey explains, "*The Last Bar-B-Que* is a serious piece: a rewriting of history through the eyes of my ancestry, a portrayal of a savior who looks like my people" (Strychasz, "Margo Humphrey, *The Last Bar-B-Que*, 1989").

This image can be used to highlight both the Last Supper as a Passover meal, at least in the Synoptic Gospels, and African American hermeneutical traditions. Specifically, the allusion to the Exodus narrative in the story of the Last Supper allows us to think about the Gospels' appropriations of the narrative in relation to traditional African American appropriations of the narrative. We might encourage students to think about how these more recent interpretive strategies resemble ancient strategies. In order to accomplish this, students can read one or more of the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper, as well as a reading which discusses African American interpretations of the Exodus narratives (such as Kirk-Duggan, "Let My People Go! Threads of Exodus in African American Narratives," 123–43). One might ask students to consider whether or how the Exodus narrative and African American appropriations of this narrative relate to other themes within the Synoptic Gospels. It is also possible to compare Humphrey's lithograph with another more famous depiction of the Last Supper, such as one of Albrecht Dürer's woodcut versions, asking students to compare the images in relation to the text or texts.

El Greco, *The Disrobing of Christ* (*El Espolio*) (1579) [Toledo Cathedral, Toledo, Spain; www.wga.hu]

One of El Greco's most famous works, *The Disrobing of Christ*, hangs in the sacristy (priests' change room) in the Cathedral in Toledo. Students can compare the accuracy of the content in this painting to the account in Mark 15:16–24 and its parallels. What does El Greco change or add (e.g.,

the number of people present, the unlikely scarlet robe, the Spanish gentle-man)?

What does El Greco emphasize? Consider the elongated figures, the off-balance focus on Jesus, his red robe and his eyes pointing upward rein-forced by the ascending clouds in the background, the press of people, and the unnatural lighting. With these types of emphases, what Christology is El Greco communicating? (Jesus is central but oppressed by evil; he transcends the physical; he wears royal signs of wealth in spite of the description of his undignified death in the Gospels, etc.) Students should be alerted to the fact that the details in a painting help us to identify what is central to the artist's interpretation of the narrative.

Finally, what response was El Greco trying to evoke from his primary audience, that is, the religious authorities who change their clothes to prepare for or to conclude worship? (The scarlet robe might suggest cardinals.) On the one hand, the religious authorities will discard their regal clothes of status and power to enter worship; on the other hand, they also put on these clothes of status and power! How does this image align with Jesus' status and power during his crucifixion? Might this suggest anything about El Greco's attitude toward the religious authorities of his day? This painting demonstrates how artists use biblical art to both affirm and to challenge the religious authorities and social conventions of their contemporaries.

Macha Chmakoff, *J'ai soi* (*I Am Thirsty*) (twentieth century) [From *Les 7 dernières paroles du Christ*; arts-cultures.cef.fr/artists/chmakoff/ mchma34.htm]

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus states that he is thirsty while he hangs on the cross. After a drink of wine, he says, "It is finished," and "gives up his spirit" (John 19:28–30). Given the abundance of water themes in the Gospel of John (see 2:6; 3:23; 4:7–15; 5:7; 7:38; 13:5; 19:34), and especially the claim that Jesus is the source for living water (4:10; 7:38), his words on the cross come as a surprise. Macha Chmakoff's image can help one to con-sider the irony of this phrase in John. The painting is awash in aqua, blue, greens, and yellows swirling out from Jesus in a fluid cross; he seems about to drown in the color, but he reaches—with his arm attached to the beam of the cross—upward into the light. He is both the source and the victim of water.

Matthias Grünewald, *The Small Crucifixion* (ca. 1511–20) [National Gal-lery of Art, Washington, D.C.; www.nga.gov. This is a less famous but more easily accessible version of the Isenheim Altarpiece (Musée d' Unterlinden, Colmar; www.wga.hu)]

El Greco, *Christ on the Cross Adored by Donors* (ca. 1590) [The Louvre, Paris; www.louvre.fr]

Thomas Eakins, *The Crucifixion* (1880) [Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; www.philamuseum.org]

Marc Chagall, *The Crucifixion* (1940) [Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; www.philamuseum.org]

Arnulf Rainer, *Wine Crucifix* (1957/1978) [Tate Britain, London; www.tate.org.uk]

These paintings represent a variety of ways of understanding the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion and of Jesus' crucified body. An effective method of incorporating these into the New Testament classroom is to show these images after students have explored in some detail the Gospel accounts of Jesus on the cross. The images bring into relief different emphases in the Gospel stories. Students can note—perhaps on a handout containing the titles and artists—which images capture which aspects of the Gospel accounts.

El Greco's panting depicts the body of Jesus as a beautiful thing; the elongated and pale body hanging on the cross suggests a fine line between the erotic and the violent. Jesus turns his head upwards, which can be read as a questioning, pleading, or even longing. The troubled sky in the background alludes to the Gospel accounts of a darkened sky, as well as to the turmoil preceding and following the crucifixion event in the Gospels. Matthias Grünewald's painting, in stark contrast, famously depicts the tortured and seemingly decaying body of Jesus on the cross. Another version of the crucifixion by Grünewald, the Isenheim altarpiece, hung in a hospital offering perhaps solace or meaning to those whose bodies were also decaying (Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 139–42). Among other things, Grünewald's piece raises the question of the purpose of depictions of the crucifixion, an issue to be examined with students in relation to the Gospels as well. For instance, are depictions of the crucifixion intended to comfort or to challenge, to engender devotion or to prompt action?

Thomas Eakins's painting, which originally was received with much criticism for its realism, suggests the humanity of Jesus (cf. Milroy, "'Consummatum est…': A Reassessment of Thomas Eakins' Crucifixion of 1880," 269–84). The expression of Jesus, his head hanging in darkness, evokes the abandonment of Jesus' expression in Mark 15:34, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Arnulf Rainer's painting offers only the sense of a body on the cross, alluding to a body in the contours of his abstract cross. Rainer's use of dark red splattering and staining, however, clearly connotes blood and, thus, the violence of the crucifixion. (It may be possible to con-

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nect discussion of this aspect of the piece to the various reactions to the violence Mel Gibson incorporates in his interpretation of the cross in *The Passion of the Christ*.) The title of this piece, *Wine Crucifix*, points to Christian tradition's association of the Eucharist with the crucifixion. In this way, the piece can be utilized to discuss theological and christological interpretations of the crucified body. Rainer originally produced it as an altarpiece for the Student Chapel of the Catholic University in Graz, Austria. After the work was removed from this setting, he bought it back and decided to rework it, explaining that he "realised that the quality and truth of the picture only grew as it became darker and darker." The history of the piece thus provides an analogy for the way in which the meaning of a work can sometimes change over time, even for the author.

On first glance, one might think that Marc Chagall's painting is the least focused upon the body of Jesus. To be sure, it lacks the bloodiness of Rainer's painting and the realistic depiction of the body seen in Eakins's version of the event. Chagall's painting, however, highlights the ethnic and religious orientation of this body by suggesting Jesus' Jewish identity by clothing him with a Tallit or Jewish prayer shawl. Instead of the plain white loincloth employed by other artists seemingly to preserve Jesus' modesty, Chagall covers Jesus' genitals with an emblem of Jewish identity. Chagall's painting provides an important reminder for many students who might read the Passion narratives as "the Jews" crucifying Jesus, as though Jesus were not himself Jewish (let alone the fact that his crucifixion is carried out by the Romans!).

Matthias Grünewald, *Crucifixion* (1501–2) [Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsrhe; www.wga.hu]

O. A. Stemler and Bess Bruce Cleaveland, *Consider the Lilies* (1928) [Illustration from Lillie A. Faris, *Standard Bible Story Readers, Book One* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1928); www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/Picture.htm]

Anonymous, *Worship the Lamb* (1702) [Illustration from Martin Luther, *Biblia: Das ist die gantze Heilige Schrift, Alten und Neuen Testaments*; www.pitts.emory.edu/woodcuts/1702BiblD/00012955.pdf]

To emphasize the unique perspective of Jesus presented in each New Testament text, to reinforce these differences, and to encourage students to bridge the gap between verbal and visual learning, one might cut and paste three portraits of Jesus and give the following instructions: "Describe how three New Testament texts emphasize the role and significance of Jesus in different ways, linking each text to one of the paintings below. Support your answer with details from both the paintings and the text." The portraits of

Jesus should highlight various aspects of his character or function (e.g., as teacher, crucified one, exalted one, wonder worker, or prophet). There are myriad examples from which to choose in addition to these three (see www.biblical-art.com). Thus, for example, Grünewald's black chalk drawing on grey paper emphasizes Jesus' suffering and death; alone, Jesus' face is downcast and hollow, his head wrapped in heavy thorns, and his crooked body strains against the pull of gravity. This drawing might be used to illustrate the central characteristics of the Gospel of Mark with its extended passion narrative. In contrast, Lillie Faris's children's book illustration depicts Jesus in a garden of lilies surrounded by several women, one child, and a solitary man, all listening in rapt attention. Jesus is sitting on a rock in a white robe with his arms out in explanatory gesture. Birds feed at his feet. The mountain in the background suggests that this is a scene from the Sermon on the Mount, or more explicitly, Matt 6:28–29. Students might conclude that this painting represents the teaching Jesus of the Gospel of Matthew with its five major blocks of sayings. Alternatively, *Worship the Lamb*, by the unknown illustrator of Martin Luther's *Biblia*, presents Jesus as a lamb before God on the heavenly throne surrounded by angels and witnesses. Students would likely identify this representation of Jesus as coming from Revelation (5:8) or the Gospel of John (1:29). This summative evaluation can help students see the "larger picture" of the Gospels, their diversity, and their emphases.

For other images, see Jaime Clark-Soles, "Christology Slideshow," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 282–84.

The Arch of Titus [Many websites contain images of this Roman landmark; www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/titus/titus.html]

After the Maccabean revolt, the Jews governed themselves for about a century until Pompey established Roman supervision of Judea. Many Jews actively resisted this occupation. According to Josephus, this "Fourth Philosophy" persisted in challenging Rome, leading to a devastating war from 66 to 70 C.E. During the Roman siege led by Titus, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and many Jews were killed; some were taken to Rome as slaves. (Book 6 of Josephus's *Jewish War* provides the best account of the revolt and its aftermath.) When Titus died in 81 C.E., the city of Rome commemorated the conquest of Judea by erecting the Arch of Titus. On the inside of this arch is a carved relief depicting the Romans taking some of the treasures out of the temple, specifically a very large seven-branched candelabra (menorah) and several silver trumpets.

The triumph depicted in this arch has an accompanying sorrow. For the Jews, the destruction of the temple as the center of their sacrificial worship required a reformation of their sense of the sacred. Students can imagine them-

selves as one of the slaves being marched into Rome on that day and can make a list of questions they might have had about God and their own identity.

The class can then read Acts 6:8–15 (cf. Luke 19:41–44) and check their list with the complaints made against Stephen and the followers of Jesus. Then one can examine Acts 7 to identify ways that the book of Acts—and the early Christians—responded to these allegations. In brief, the Jews blamed the Christians for the destruction of the temple because they believed that Jesus was God; the Christians blamed the Jews for the destruction of the temple because they did not believe that Jesus was God. This provides background for some of the Jewish-Christian polemic found in the New Testament.

At the conclusion of the discussion, students may be apprised of the fact that Jews have refused to walk under the Arch of Titus, with one notable exception: On the day when Israel was given independence in 1948, a contingent of Roman Jews marched under the arch in the opposite direction from the original triumphal entry. As their own sign of triumph, Israel used the image of the menorah from the Arch of Titus in their coat of arms, an image seen on all Israeli passports.

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Michelangelo, *The Conversion of St. Paul* (1542–45) [Capella Paolina, Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican City; www.wga.hu]

After students have read and carefully compared the third-person accounts of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1–19; 22:6–21; 26:12–18) with Paul's own accounts (Gal 1:11–24; 1 Cor 15:1–11), they can consider Michelangelo's Vatican fresco *The Conversion of St. Paul*. This painting facilitates discussion of composition in terms of both the content (what part of the narrative is captured, the characters, the gestures, etc.) and the form of the painting (background, foreground, focal lines, use of color, shadow, light, etc.). Students may be asked to make a list of what they see in the painting. In the ensuing discussion, one should outline the focal line from the top left corner, through the figure of Christ and his outstretched arm, through the uplifted arms of the soldiers, the bright face and arm of the man bent over Paul, into the upturned white face of Paul. The line continues through Paul's right leg, through the valley of people, to the city in the distance (Damascus? Jerusalem? Rome?). The message is clear: Paul is inspired to carry the light to all people and, as some would have it because the sight line is in the shape of a shepherd/bishop's hook, oversee the church. This fresco can open conversation about the nuances of storytelling and art. Other queries to pose: Which of the specific conversion accounts does Michelangelo represent, or does he harmonize them? What does he add to the basic biblical account?

Caravaggio, *The Conversion of St. Paul* (1600–1601) [Cerasi Chapel, S. Maria del Popolo, Rome; www.artstor.org]

Raphael, *St. Paul Preaching in Athens* (1515–16) [Victoria and Albert Museum, London; www.vam.ac.uk]

Valentin de Boulogne (?), *Saint Paul Writing His Epistles* (ca. 1618–20) [Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; www.mfah.org]

Rembrandt, *The Apostle Paul* (ca. 1657) [National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; www.nga.gov]

Rembrandt, *St. Paul in Prison* (1627) [Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart; www.staats galerie.de/gemaeldeundskulpturen/nl_matrix.php]

Having students interact with a variety of portraits of Paul provides a creative way of discussing the life of Paul as it is seen in Acts and the Pauline letters (e.g., Acts 9:1–31; 1 Cor 15:3–10; Gal 1:11–24; Phil 3:4–6). Each of the above paintings depicts a different aspect of Paul's life. For example, Caravaggio shows the conversion of Paul in a dramatic fashion. Dressed in Roman garb, Paul lies flat on the ground after having fallen off his horse. Pointing out Paul's clothing in this image provides an opportunity to remind students of Paul's Roman citizenship. While Caravaggio captures the beginning of Paul's Christian life, as depicted in Acts, Rembrandt paints an elderly Paul. He sits in prison with a sword (a traditional indication of his death), a number of leather-bound books perhaps alluding to his familiarity with the Scriptures, and a stylus suggesting he has written or is about to write.

It is possible to have students interact with these images in a number of ways. One approach is to show students the images before they have read the texts that describe Paul's life. Students can think about what the images "say" about Paul, his life, and his significance; they can also record their impressions of Paul in the portraits. Is the Paul they see the same as or different from the Paul described in the texts? Since certain images directly relate to Acts, namely, the paintings by Caravaggio and Raphael, and others seem to capture Paul's letter writing activity, this can lead into a discussion of how Paul's life is portrayed in Acts (which never mentions his letters) in contrast to how Paul describes his own life.

Teachers can print out color copies of the images for small group use in class. Each group describes how its image relates to the assigned readings (from both Acts and the Letters) about Paul. Which text or texts does the image best capture? What parts of Paul's story does the image neglect? This might lead to a conversation about the different portraits of Paul in the New Testament.

Wisnu Sasongko, *The Ceremony of Resurrection* (2003) [Asian Christian Art Association, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; www.asianchristianart.org]

This abstract acrylic painting depicts resurrection in relation to the crucifixion, thereby linking the general resurrection of the faithful to Christ's resurrection. As such Sasongko's painting provides a visual context for discussing 1 Cor 15.

Sasongko's painting consists of dark background with abstract patches of color, which provides a contrast to the light, off-center cross shape in the foreground. The cross shape is made up of tiny human figures wearing white. The human figures are abstract and featureless, although they appear linked together by thin arms. The amorphous nature of the figures prompts one to ask if they are bodies or souls and how this relates to 1 Cor 15. The off-centered position of the cross, specifically the horizontal beam close to the top edge of the painting, creates the effect of it being raised or moving upwards. In this way, Sasongko suggests that the cross, composed of human bodies or souls, is being resurrected. To the right side of the cross on a patch of yellow, it is possible to see faint hash marks, presumably marking off those who are being raised or resurrected. Interestingly, the piece offers no indication as to where these figures have come from or where they are headed. This would be something an instructor might want to ask students about, encouraging them to use the Pauline text to help "fill in the gaps."

Students can consider how the image captures or fails to capture Paul's understanding of the resurrection. For example, if Paul understands the church as "the body of Christ"—a body that has been crucified as well as raised—is this an image that Paul would endorse? Or, if Paul had been an eyewitness to the moment of resurrection, what would he have expected to see (e.g., something like the giant talking cross of the *Gospel of Peter*?)? Or would he say that resurrection is not something that can be depicted? Students should use details from the text and from the image to support their interpretation. In particular, they can study Sasongko's use of color, light and dark contrasts, and abstraction (in reference to the small bodies or souls) in relation to Paul's text.

Rembrandt van Rijn, *St. Paul in Prison* (1627) [Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart; www.staatsgalerie-stuttgart.de/gemaeldeundskulpturen/nl_rundg.php?id=7]

Paul Klee, *The Captive* (1940) [Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Zimmerman, New York; www.sai.msu.su/wm/paint/auth/klee/klee.captive.jpg]

Students soon learn that when they are reading Paul's letters, they are

reading over his audience's shoulder, just as one overhears one side of a phone conversation. They have to figure out what is happening in the background to understand the letter. Several of the Pauline letters are written from prison (e.g., Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Philemon), and this setting frequently influences the tone and content of the correspondence. After reading 2 Timothy or other letters from prison, students are assigned to write a detailed description of a painting that would capture the essence of Paul in prison. In class, they share their responses. Then, one after the other, these two paintings are displayed without identifying the title of the works.

Rembrandt presents Paul as an old man pausing in thought while in the midst of writing. One arm rests on a large open book, probably the Scriptures; his elbow rests on loose pages, perhaps one of his letters, and his hand is pensively raised to his chin. His eyes are unfocused and tired. His foot is on a discarded sandal; does it indicate that he has "finished the race" (2 Tim 4:7), or that he is ready to put on "whatever will make him ready to proclaim the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15), or that he is not really "bound" after all? Beside him on the cot lie other large tomes, some personal belongings, and a leather bag. Leaning against the bed is a sword with its tip buried in the floor. Its cross-shape hilt evokes both the crucifixion and the metaphor for the word of God, the "sword of the spirit" (Eph 6:17). The sword also foreshadows his impending death. On the far left, the edge of a barred window permits light to halo Paul's face and lift him upwards, transcending the dark prison and this "earthly life." In chiaroscuro fashion, the extension of light suggests the reality of a greater presence around Paul. The prison is filled with this presence. Paul is neither overcome by the darkness nor the prison walls. He suffers hardship, "even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained" (2 Tim 2:9). Rembrandt's painting suggests freedom rather than imprisonment.

In an abstract self-portrait from the end of his own life, Paul Klee captures the torment of prison. The flattening of three-dimensional features provides two facial expressions: one perhaps identified as contentment, the other as alertness. Both are the "stand up expressions" of someone in pain. But the head-shaped body gives another facial expression, that of peaceful death. The strong black crosshatches over a red background might evoke the debilitating connective tissue disease that crippled Klee; they might also represent the swastikas of Nazi Germany and the pain of Klee's exile to Switzerland. The central pale blue light connects his prison walls to his heart and mind and "holds him together," in spite of the forces that fragment him.

As students compare and contrast these two paintings, they might note that the common elements—the bars, light, death images—are used to convey two very different messages. In one, prison has no power even if it is physical;

in the other, prison is overwhelmingly powerful even if it is metaphorical. This comparison will help students to pay attention to the details of both the texts and the visual arts in order to construct meaning. It will also challenge their understanding of metaphor and reality in language.

Alternatively, these images may be used to discuss various uses of the "prison" metaphor (e.g., Pss 68:6; 79:11; 107:10–16; Eccl 7:26; Isa 42:7; 58:6; 61:1; Luke 4:18–19; Rom 7:23; Gal 3:22; Rev 1:18), texts written to or by prisoners, or narratives that take place in captivity (e.g., the stories of Joseph, Jeremiah, Daniel, and the apostles in Acts).

Bamberg Apocalypse (ca. 1000) [Staatsbibliothek, Bamberg, Germany; www.bamberger-apokalypse.de]

Albrecht Dürer, *The Apocalypse* (ca. 1496) [Wetmore Print Collection, Connecticut College, New London; camel.conncoll.edu/visual/Durer-prints/index.html]

William Blake, *The Four and Twenty Elders Casting Their Crowns before the Divine Throne* (ca. 1803–5) [Tate Britain, London; www.tate.org.uk]

Grace Cossington Smith, *'I Looked, and Behold, a Door Was Opened in Heaven'* (1953) [National Gallery of Art, Canberra; nga.gov.au]

Myrtice West, *Thou Art Worthy …* (1985) [Reproduced in Carol Crown, ed., *Wonders to Behold: The Visionary Art of Myrtice West* (Memphis: Mustang, 1999), 59]

Robert Roberg, *John Sees God* (1992) [Reproduced in Nancy Grubb, *Revelations: Art of the Apocalypse* (New York: Abbeville, 1997), 40]

Students often associate the book of Revelation with violence and destruction, even though the book includes an extended scene of heavenly worship (Rev 4–5) and seven subsequent visions of worship. These scenes of worship reflect one of Revelation's main rhetorical aims, to assert divine authority over and against earthly or political authorities. It is possible to draw upon the rich tradition of artistic renderings of Revelation as a means of highlighting this aspect of the text.

It is also possible to use these images as a way of showing students how interpreters' imaginations—the ways that interpreters visualize the text—engage in theological interpretation. Since the visual nature of Revelation's narrative itself encourages students to imagine their own vision of the text and the heavenly throne room, teachers might begin by reading chapter four aloud and having students do a quick sketch of what they imagine as they hear John's description of the heavenly throne room. The class can then

compare their own visual interpretations to various artistic renderings of the throne-room scene. Students can reflect on how the text describes the divine presence and how the visual depictions, including their own, try to make sense of the text's abstract description of God. Do they, like Blake's watercolor or Dürer's woodcut, depict God in human form? Or, do they take a more literal approach, such as Robert Roberg in his multimedia depiction of a hot pink (his rendering of carnelian) abstraction sitting upon a throne, or Myrtice West with her abstract figure? Do the depictions of the divine replicate or challenge cultural assumptions about God? Concerning the depiction of the elders that surround the throne, do they, like the illumination from the *Bamberg Apocalypse*, highlight the political nature of the elders by including crown imagery? Or do they interpret the crowns as halos, making the elders religious figures? How do these interpretive moves reveal the artist's assumptions about the nature of God's influence? In addition, what meanings are implied by the various locations of the heavenly throne room in relation to earth or in relation to John? What does Dürer suggest about heaven and God by showing the throne room just above the horizon of the earth? Does this communicate something about the relationship between heaven and earth that is found in Revelation? Or, what does Grace Cossington Smith's painting imply by John looking up through the door of heaven only to see the seats of the elders on their thrones? Does this suggest some distance between the divine and the earthly?

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Beatus of La Seu d'Urgell (tenth century) [Museu diocesà d'Urgell, Spain; casal.upc.es/~ramon25/beatus/beat_65.jpg]

Bamberg Apocalypse (ca. 1000) [Staatsbibliothek, Bamberg, Germany; www.bamberger-apokalypse.de]

Albrecht Dürer, *The Apocalypse* (ca. 1496) [Wetmore Print Collection, Connecticut College, New London; camel.conncoll.edu/visual/Durer-prints/index.html]

William Blake, *The Whore of Babylon* (ca. 1800–9) [The British Museum, London. Frances Carey, ed., *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come* (London: British Museum Press, 1999)]

Robert Roberg, *The Whore of Babylon Riding of a Beast with Seven Heads* (1991) [Collection of the artist; www.robertroberg.com/art.php]

Norbert Kox, *Mother of Harlots: The Pie-Eyed Piper* (1996) [Collection of the artist; www.nkox.homestead.com/writings_west.html; also available in Carol Crown, ed., *Wonders to Behold: The Visionary Art of Myrtice West* (Memphis: Mustang, 1999), 120]

The image of Babylon, the great prostitute, in Rev 17 has captured the imaginations of artists over the centuries. The text's depiction of Babylon combines gendered, sexual, and political references to build a critique of the Roman Empire. These pieces of art emphasize different aspects of Revelation's imagery in unique ways, reflecting six distinct interpretations of the chapter. The two manuscript illustrations, from the *Beatus of La Seu d'Urgell* and the *Bamberg Apocalypse*, downplay the sexualized aspect of Revelation's depiction in favor of the religious and political nature of the imagery. The latter depicts a somewhat regal looking prostitute, clothed in purple robes. One has the sense that this prostitute is a medieval European queen or noblewoman. The illustration from the former, however, appears to connect the prostitute to Muslim influences in medieval Spain, as she wears a crown with a crescent moon and sits in a position that echoes the depiction of princesses in medieval Islamic manuscripts. Dürer's woodcut also captures the religious and political elements of the imagery by highlighting the complicity of the "kings of the earth" in the activities of the prostitute. This detailed image shows the prostitute on a beast as a variety of figures representing different social roles come before the prostitute, including a kneeling monk!

In contrast to the medieval images, William Blake's watercolor, which depicts a bare-breasted Babylon, and Robert Roberg's mixed-media, in which a bleached blonde Babylon rides a hot pink beast, emphasize the sexuality of Revelation's imagery. This approach communicates Revelation's assertion that the prostitute, or the political power that the imagery symbolizes, is seductive. Even John is "greatly amazed" by the prostitute's appearance (Rev 17:6). In addition, Blake's painting captures the text's suggestion that the prostitute is drunk on the blood of the saints, as he portrays faint soul-like figures flowing out of (or in to) the large goblet held by the prostitute.

The painting by Norbert Kox is certainly the most provocative as it depicts the prostitute as a cross-dressing Jesus-figure riding the beast onto the island of Manhattan. The prostitute's face resembles traditional images of Jesus and her left arm is taken from the Statue of Liberty, including the torch. Kox depicts Manhattan on the verge of destruction under the feet of the beast, creating an image that evokes 1950s monster movies. Given the criticism of traditional American Christianity (the Jesus-prostitute wears a flaming sacred heart) and civic religion (the Statue of Liberty) inherent in Kox's depiction, the painting provides an entry into conversations about whether or not the U.S. might be indicted by Rev 17. While some students might find this image extremely offensive, it reflects a salient modern interpretation of Revelation's imagery.

A final idea: students can look at the images prior to reading Rev 17 and develop a portrait of Babylon based on the artwork, which can then be compared to the text itself.

Abstract and Nonbiblical Art

Lynn R. Huber

The possible ways that abstract and reframed nonbiblical art might be used to explore biblical studies themes and topics with students are limited only by the instructor's imagination. The works discussed in this chapter are organized alphabetically according to the name of the artist. Due to the impermanent nature of many website addresses, it will frequently be necessary to perform a simple artist or title search at the sites listed with many of these works. The indices may be consulted to find entries with classroom strategies related to particular texts or topics. All secondary literature cited here is included in the preceding bibliography (pp. 184–86).

Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (1917/1964) [Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; www.sfmoma.org]

Fountain (originally exhibited in 1917, although later copies were exhibited in 1964) is one example of the "ready-made" genre of art made famous by Marcel Duchamp. Similar to art made of "found objects," Duchamp's ready-mades were functional objects that the artist transformed into art works by renaming them and placing them within artistic contexts. One of the most famous examples of this genre, *Fountain* consists of a ceramic urinal, signed "R. Mutt, 1917." *Fountain* provides a way of talking about a number of topics related to biblical studies, including how context shapes perception and interpretation and how things and ideas can be redefined. For example, an image of *Fountain* can be used to facilitate student discussion about how the biblical texts are approached and understood differently in different contexts. A writing that is treated as sacred in a religious context is approached differently in an academic context. The writing, like the ready-made object, does not change; but how the piece is perceived and interpreted changes. Presenting a urinal as a fountain is sufficiently jarring to drive this point home.

In a specifically New Testament context, *Fountain* can assist discussion about how the Gospels portray Jesus' approach toward those traditionally understood as undesirable (e.g., sinners and tax collectors). In a way similar

to Duchamp's redefinition of a urinal into a piece of art, Jesus redefines or renames these cultural outsiders, naming them as followers and participants in the kingdom of God. For instance, Jesus' invitation to Levi (Matthew) effectively redefines the tax collector, traditionally unacceptable as the follower of a Jewish religious leader, as a disciple (Matt 9:9–12; Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32). In some sense, Jesus places these culturally unacceptable people into a new context—the kingdom of God.

Paul Klee, *Around the Core* (1935) [Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas; camio. oclc.org]

This work by Swiss expressionist Paul Klee provides a tool for discussing the complex ways that textual interpretations accrue and develop. The center of this mixed-media painting is a bright red teardrop shape with an open center. The image evokes a blood drop or a kernel, although it is possible to "see through" the open center in the drop. The drop is surrounded by what at first glance appears to be overlapping ovals; however, a closer inspection reveals that the ovals are formed by a single line. The overlapping layers are created by a unified "thread." Further, the largest of the ovals reaches past the edge of the canvas, effectively leaving the multiple layers open and unbounded.

It can be difficult for students to grasp that their view of a particular writing is filtered through layers of interpretive tradition. It can be even more challenging for them to understand that many of the biblical writings began as oral traditions that have been shaped to fit into written narratives, adding to the interpretive layers surrounding a particular story. *Around the Core* can be used as a visual aid for addressing these concepts. As the image is shown to the students, ask them to imagine the drop or the kernel as a story. If this small drop is the creation story, then how do we understand the rest of the image? It is helpful to have students first describe what they see and then describe what the ovals, layers, and lines might represent in this scenario, namely, the layers of meaning that develop around an oral tradition or a text. The line around the oval might be understood as suggesting that there is some unity to these layers of interpretation, although this would be something one may question. Are the layers of interpretation around a text bound together or unified in some way?

Furthermore, students may contemplate and discuss where, if the drop represents a text or a story, they as textual interpreters are located in relation to the text. Are they, like the viewer of the painting, looking at the whole picture, able to see how the layers move out from the drop? Are we able to see a narrative's interpretive layers as we read it? Or, are they standing in the ovals, their view of the drop colored by the earth-toned pigments of the ovals? One

may, moreover, press students to consider the "hole" in the drop. Why does it have a hole? If we imagine the drop as a text or a story, does this suggest that the story is, even in its original form, somehow incomplete? This can lead to discussions about how even supposedly original versions of stories involve interpretive decisions that leave out possible elements.

Barbara Kruger, *You Invest in the Divinity of the Masterpiece* (1982) [Museum of Modern Art, New York; www.moma.org]

This piece prompts the viewer to question how individuals and communities "invest" in particular visions of the divine. The composition of the piece is similar to many of Kruger's works: black-and-white photographic prints (here of the Sistine Chapel ceiling) are framed in a red border, while black bands across the work bear the text of the piece's title. In this case, the word "divinity" is the focal point, as it is on a black band in the middle of the image and its font is much larger than the rest of the title. The images that Kruger employs in this artwork are taken from Michelangelo's painting of God creating Adam on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. However, these images are only portions of the creation scene; the iconic "fingers touching" scene comprises the top portion of her work.

This artwork can be used as entryway into conversations about how cultures and individuals imagine and construct, especially through images and texts, notions of the divine. In particular, the artwork encourages a feminist analysis of the Judeo-Christian theological imagination, as Kruger, a feminist artist, specifically uses images of the creation of man by a God depicted in male terms. To engage these issues, students can consider Kruger's choice of words or images. For example, what does the word "invest" imply? Why does Kruger utilize these images and not, for instance, images of Eve in the garden?

Robert Mapplethorpe, *Ken, Lydia, and Tyler* (1985) [Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, New York; www.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/mapplethorpe; also in the catalog *Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition* (ed. Germano Celant et al.; New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2004), pl. 100]

In this black-and-white photograph, Mapplethorpe draws upon the classical artistic tradition of depicting nude bodies in highly formal poses. In this image Mapplethorpe presents his subjects, all three nude, from the shoulders down. The sculpted bodies of Ken and Tyler are turned toward the similarly sculpted body of Lydia, who stands between them and facing the camera. The arms of Ken and Tyler mirror each other: they each have one arm behind Lydia and their other arms in front of Lydia, hands clasping in front of her

pubic area. Lydia is encircled by Ken and Tyler's arms, although their bodies remain somewhat distant from hers.

This image provides a tool for reflection on biblical constructions of gender and sexuality. More specifically, it can be used to introduce elements of the gender ideology underlying the Levitical regulations about menstruation and childbirth and about acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices (Lev 12; 15:19–33; 18; 20:10–21). For instance, after reading aloud Lev 12 or 15:19–33, students may comment upon how the photography visually represents ideas in the text. Students should observe the way in which Mapplethorpe depicts the female body as circumscribed by the males' arms. This is analogous to the separation of the female from the community after giving birth and during menstruation, which similarly is being circumscribed by male boundaries. Given that the center of this image is the handclasp of Ken and Tyler over Lydia's pubic area, students likely will also note that the image suggests masculine control over feminine sexuality and reproduction. Notably, it is the priest who makes atonement to God on the woman's behalf (e.g., Lev 12:7). The handclasp also can be used as a way of explaining the Levitical use of "uncovering nakedness" to describe sexual intercourse (Lev 18).

Further, the calm mood of *Ken, Lydia, and Tyler* allows students to think about how gender ideologies function in a culture. Ideologies are not often enforced through coercion; rather, power relationships and dynamics are commonly accepted unthinkingly by those living within them, even those who benefit least. Likewise, Lydia seemingly allows her body to be hemmed in by the arms of Ken and Tyler.

Barbara Morgan, *Martha Graham-Letter to the World-(Swirl)* (1940, printed ca. 1980) [Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.; americanart.si.edu]

This photograph captures dancer and choreographer Martha Graham "mid-swirl" in one of her most famous dance compositions, *Letter to the World*, which was inspired by the writings of Emily Dickinson. In the photograph we see Graham stepping forward, in the direction of the camera, in an exaggerated fashion while her arms seem to pull backwards. This image, especially with its title, evokes the biblical instances of women communicating a message of prophetic or divine significance. It can be used, for example, as an illustration of the Samaritan woman who tells her village about the stranger at the well (John 4) or the story of the women who are entrusted with the news of the empty tomb in the Gospel accounts. The image of Graham, which conveys a simultaneous urge to move forward and a hesitation, seemingly captures the women's mood as described in Matt 28:8: "So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples" (NRSV). An

instructor might project this image in order to help students imagine the text and ponder how it fits with the narrative's mood and message.

Mary Lovelace O'Neal, *Racism Is Like Rain, Either It's Raining or It's Gathering Somewhere* (1993) [David C. Driskell Collection, University of Maryland Art Gallery, College Park; www.artgallery.umd.edu/exhibit/02-03/driskell2003/oneal_racism.html. The print reproduction captures better the detail of this artwork; see Juanita Marie Holland, ed., *Narratives of African American Art and Identity: The David C. Driskell Collection* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), pl. 87]

This lithograph by American artist Mary Lovelace O'Neal evokes a sense of imminent crisis and change, a mood that permeates the biblical canon, including Jesus' warnings of coming judgment and strife in the Gospels (e.g., Luke 12:49–59). The layout of the piece, the left half of the image a stark dark gray and the right side a mass of competing colors and abstract shapes, creates this sense of tension. The colors and shapes on the right, including bright orange-reds, pinks, purples, blues, and black, run down the painting, suggesting movement and disorder. The dripping effect contributes to the sense that the mass of color is in the foreground of the artwork and is about to move over the stark gray space. Viewed in relation to the title, the color mass appears as a storm ready to overtake the gray. A curved line of black stretches from a black mass in "the storm" across the gray to the edge of the piece.

The title of O'Neal's piece and its inclusion in an exhibit that served as response to the Rodney King verdict, the "No Justice, No Peace? Resolutions" exhibit at the California Afro-American Museum, indicates its political nature and power. The chaos of the colors, which push against and begin to overtake the gray, might be read either as racism itself or as various reactions and responses to the gray of racism and oppression. In terms of the later reading, these responses are neither neat nor unified; rather, they are jumbled and bleed into one another.

While the evocative nature of this piece would allow it to be used in a number of ways, one option is to view it in relation to Jesus' announcements of the division his presence will bring to the earth. In Luke, Jesus proclaims,

> I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you but rather division! … When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the

earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 13:49–51, 54–56 NRSV)

Students may view the image as they hear the text being read aloud. After describing the details of the image, they may consider how it could be understood in relation to the text. Could the cloud of colors be interpreted as the division that Jesus brings? If so, what kind of division is this? Is it solely those who follow Jesus in opposition to those who do not follow? Or, is it something more complex? If colors are the division brought by Jesus, what is the dark gray? Could this be the kingdom of the world in contrast to the kingdom of God?

Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* (1937) [Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Carsten-Peter Warncke, *Pablo Picasso, 1881–1973* (Cologne: Borders, 1998), 148–49]

Arguably Pablo Picasso's most famous painting, *Guernica* depicts the terrors of war in powerful fashion. The painting, as is well known, depicts the destruction of the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish civil war in 1937. The painting lends itself to discussions of destruction and war in biblical texts, especially since the painting includes a sun-like eye of God (positioned in the upper left half of the painting and somewhat near the center) or some other all-seeing entity watching the destruction unfold. The action occurring beneath the eye includes a number of images that can be related to violent biblical texts: a writhing horse, a fallen statue, humans (especially women) crying out in horror. Students should consider the eye's relation to the violence. Is there anything in the biblical text that corresponds to the eye? *Guernica* truly captures the feel of texts such as Lamentations or Ezek 7:4, in which God says to Israel, "My eye will not spare you, I will have no pity. I will punish you for your ways, while your abominations are among you" (NRSV).

Picasso's inclusion of four explicitly female figures, including a mother and child, make this image a helpful resource for engaging biblical texts from a critical feminist perspective (although Picasso himself was not known to espouse a feminist attitude). For instance, the image provides a compelling counterpart to prophetic texts, such as Isa 1, which depicts Israel's destruction using feminine imagery. In particular, viewing the image of the mother wailing over her dead child highlights the irony in the prophetic explanation of Israel's misfortune because the people "did not defend the orphan" (Isa 1:23). The inclusion of primarily female figures highlights that women are often the victims of war and violence, a fact often hidden in the biblical depictions of the destruction of an unfaithful Israel. God's willingness to let Israel, his whore-of-a-wife, be destroyed at the hands of other nations stands in con-

trast to the image of women wailing in the midst of war. Picasso poignantly reminds the viewer that it is women and children who typically suffer most during war.

At the lower edge of the painting is a fallen statue of a man. This element, along with the depictions of women fleeing from destruction, also makes *Guernica* a compelling illustration of apocalyptic texts. Students can view this image alongside Mark 13, for example, which describes the desolating sacrilege in the temple and which laments over those who are pregnant and nursing during the coming destruction.

Guernica is such an important piece of modern art that it is easily found in a variety of print sources, and photographs of the painting can be found in art databases such as ARTstor. The original painting is quite large (349.3 x 776.6 cm), which contributes to its power; thus it is ideal for students to view it in a large format.

Edward Rauscha, *The End #1* (1993) [Tate Modern, London; www.tate. org.uk]

The *End #1* is an acrylic and pencil piece done in shades of gray, black, and white. It appears as if Rauscha has captured a moment between two frames from an early black-and-white movie: the top frame cut off at the top of the painting and the bottom frame cut off at the bottom of the painting. The piece takes it name from the text that appears, cut off of course, in each of the frames. Printed at the top and the bottom of the image in gothic text is "The End." "Scratch marks" on the painting contribute to the illusion that these are movie frames.

Rauscha's work provides an illustrative tool for discussions about biblical eschatologies. Is the "end" as described by Revelation, for example, really an end or is it also a beginning? How might Rauscha's capturing of the moment between two "The End" frames be similar to the eschatological thinking in the writings of Paul? Are Paul's audiences, like Rauscha's viewer, experiencing a suspension of the end (it is here, but not quite)? One might simply ask students to assay how this image captures or does not capture the sense of "the end" described in a given text.

Robert Rauschenberg, *Yellow Body* (1968) [Guggenheim Museum, New York; www.guggenheim.org]

Yellow Body is made by a process of solvent transfer, in which images from print sources, such as newspaper and magazine pictures, are burnished onto the canvas. Bound together by the square of yellow color, these appropriated images appear as traces and blurred memories. The piece of art is complex, yet the process of solvent transfer means the images are subtle.

Students can ponder how this piece might be understood like a text such as the biblical writings. How does Rauschenberg's work relate to its historical and social context? How is its use of sources similar to or different from that of the writings of the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament? If we imagine this piece of art as a biblical text, what does the square of yellow represent? Is it a concept or story around which the author of the text anchors the pieces that are combined to make his or her own story? For instance, is it the story of the historical Jesus around which prophetic images, ideas about the Messiah, and Greco-Roman conventions about miracle workers are arranged? How we should interpret and assess the appropriation of images, whether by Rauschenberg, Paul the Apostle, or John the Seer? Do we interpret them in relation to their original contexts, in relation to their new contexts, or both? Further, students may contemplate the overall effect of appropriated images on the viewer or audience. For example, does appropriation primarily serve to make the innovative seem familiar?

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80) [*Untitled Film Still #21, 1978.* Museum of Modern Art, New York; www.moma.org; *Untitled Film Still #15,* 1978. Guggenheim Museum, New York; www.guggenheimcollection.org]

The sixty-nine black-and-white photographs that make up Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* series can be used to introduce conversations about topics such as genre and traditional feminine imagery. In these images, Sherman creates self-portraits that mimic typical film scenes of the 1950–60s. In one of the most famous ones, *Untitled Film Still # 21*, Sherman depicts a young woman in a business suit and a dress hat. The camera angle allows the viewer to see the skyscrapers towering above Sherman. She looks off camera, and her expression is one of hesitation. The scene is reminiscent of films in which a young heroine is off to her first job in the "big city." In contrast to this "innocent" young woman, the young woman in *Untitled Film Still # 15* appears provocative and sexually alluring. Her long legs, hot-pants, and high heels worn with anklet socks suggest the woman might be a dancer. Her pose, sitting in a windowsill looking down into a street, could suggest regret, sadness, or loneliness. Jennifer Blessing's commentary on the image for the Guggenheim Museum describes the image as "the tough girl with the heart of gold" (Jennifer Blessing, "Cindy Sherman").

Sherman's photographs use visual cues, such as angle, setting, and costume, to allude to generic films. These scenes, as the above two images suggest, often revolve around stereotyped female roles. "Reading" these visual cues in Sherman's images can help students appreciate how even the most subtle detail in an image or text can prompt an audience to interpret it according to

a particular set of criteria. Something as simple as Sherman's hat in *Untitled Film Still #21*, for example, instructs the viewer to read the image as a young woman's first job or her first trip to the city. Similarly, certain words and phrases (e.g., "begat," "verily," "behold!") direct a reader to interpret a biblical text according to a certain genre or a set of interpretive criteria.

Since the film stills focus on feminine imagery, they also can be used as analogies to the biblical depictions of the feminine according to certain types, such as the prostitute with a heart of gold (Rahab), or the virgin and the whore of Revelation. One might employ Sherman's photographs as a way of elucidating how biblical depictions of the feminine similarly draw upon cultural conventions, rather than depicting the lives of actual women. In addition, the film stills can facilitate conversation of how biblical texts have contributed to the construction of feminine stereotypes.

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PART 4:
LITERATURE

Introduction: Teaching the Bible with Literature

Jaime Clark-Soles

In his introduction to *The Vintage Book of American Short Stories*, Tobias Wolff writes:

> That sense of kinship is what makes stories important to us. The pleasure we take in cleverness and technical virtuosity soon exhausts itself in the absence of any recognizable human landscape. We need to feel ourselves acted upon by a story, outraged, exposed, in danger of heartbreak and change. Those are the stories that endure in our memories, to the point where they take on the nature of memory itself. In this way the experience of something read can form us no less than the experience of something lived through.[1]

If this is true, then surely fiction, poetry, and Scripture have much in common. All literature aims to act upon readers to shape them somehow, to suggest something about realities and possibilities. This introduction will suggest reasons to use fiction and poetry in teaching the Bible and address some of the practical considerations.[2]

Why Use Poetry and Fiction?

Spiritual Formation

Literature has the power to form, deform, or transform individual readers and communities of readers. Anyone who has read Wayne Booth's *The Company We Keep: The Ethics of Reading Fiction* or Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in*

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1. Tobias Wolff, ed., *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xiii.

2. Let me state from the outset that I teach in a Christian, Protestant seminary in the Bible Belt and this context profoundly influences my thinking and practices. While I share many concerns and goals with those who teach in other contexts and with other commitments, I do not presume to speak for everyone who teaches the Bible.

Tehran needs no convincing on this point. Witness the appeal of ubiquitous book clubs. Reading texts can create, destroy, and re-create. Both the Bible and other literature engage the great themes: truth, beauty, despair, sacrifice, hate, love, fear, questing, death, birth, rebirth, redemption, citizenship, good, evil, deceit, pain, joy, missed opportunities, second chances, human motivations. Even if one is reading for mere entertainment or information, all reading contributes to formation. Some reading deforms. (For instance, Booth relates an experience in which an African American colleague protested including *Huckleberry Finn* on the reading list, given its portrayal of African American people.[3]) Some reading has the power to transform us; I put the Bible in that category. Simply put, reading good fiction and poetry can help us become better, deeper people.

Community Formation

Reading literature can, and frequently does, create community. This has a number of important implications. First, in class I have the students respond to the assigned story: What was it about? What response did it evoke from you? Did you see yourself in the story? There are, of course, no right answers to these questions. Sometimes, however, students are reluctant to respond in this way to the biblical text for fear that they are showing that they do not know the "right" answer. I use literature to form community in my own classrooms, and I encourage my students to do this in their churches to get people "unfrozen" and speaking and learning about one another and what makes them tick, to investigate the human situation and how various characters address it. These practices raise questions about how texts function in groups, questions closely tied to topics such as form criticism, canon formation, and the like.

Better Readers

Reading good poetry and fiction makes students better exegetes and hermeneutes. I want students to develop certain skills and habits. They learn to attend to themes, metaphor, character development, plot, diction, patterns, structure, rhetoric, and tone. Many students have not been taught to read *anything* in a detailed, nuanced fashion. Add to this the fact that some already think that they know "the" meaning of a given biblical text, and the teaching project may be stymied from the outset. Working with poetry and fiction

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3. Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 3–8, 26–27.

provides a way through the impasse as the students, in effect, sight-read non-biblical material and may then bring those sensibilities to their engagement with the biblical texts.

A familiar job description of the Bible teacher says that the task is to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. In the first instance, there are people for whom reading fiction (and, less so, poetry) is customary but they do not read or cannot seem to find enthusiasm for the Bible, perhaps because it seems antiquated, hopelessly oblique and obscure, or requires a special code to crack it. They are at home with fiction but not with the Bible. When they begin to see that they already have skills to bring to the biblical text, the text begins to have a more familiar look to them. ("Oh, this is a story, this is a character, this is a plot, this is an ironic tone, this is symbolic," and so on.) It gives them a sense of connection with the biblical text and a confidence that they can derive something from it.

On the other hand, I have students who are very comfortable with the Bible but who do not read fiction or poetry on any regular basis. Inviting them to read other materials can provide for them new eyes and ears and, therefore, new experiences with the Bible. The familiar becomes strange again and thereby regains the power to scandalize, intrigue, encourage, infuriate, or transform them. As Nathan the prophet knew, sometimes the indirect route is just what is needed for a person to encounter truth, especially hard truths about oneself.

The ability to interact with story or metaphor opens up possibilities for reflection (With what do I identify or not identify? Why or why not?). In this process students learn how multivalent, polysemous texts can be opened up or closed down for an audience; they understand how the audience is distanced as an outsider or invited in to make the story their own in some way. It teaches them to entertain endlessly provocative possibilities and revel in that rather than insisting upon a single signification. Indeed, they feel freer to do so with the nonsacred texts because there is nothing "transgressive" about it since it is "just literature."

Better Communicators

Reading good fiction and poetry makes students better communicators. In my context, that means that they write and preach better. Like the poet and short-story writer, preachers need to have maximum effect with a minimum of words. Poetry and fiction train them in allegory and metaphor, forms of communication that are simultaneously less direct than prosaic propositions explicated pedantically and more direct in that they produce a feeling, an experience, not necessarily mediated through reasoned arguments. Students

are then ready to understand the punch of a parable or sublimity of a psalm, to listen for cadence, meter, and rhythm. They get in the habit of asking, "How does language actually *work*?"

Better Leaders

Reading good fiction and poetry can make my students better community or congregational leaders insofar as they come to know more fully (1) themselves, (2) others who are truly unlike them, and (3) others who are ostensibly unlike them. Students learn to honor the stories of others—to let people tell their stories the way they actually see them and to have the listener respect that story as it is with its plot, characters, and so on. It teaches them to be better pastors by sitting quietly and patiently while people narrate their stories in their own way, without editing. (Think of Job and his friends, who sought to explain Job's story, to correct it, or to talk him out of it.) Moreover, they will gain skills in helping individuals and groups articulate their own stories; from there, community can form around individual and shared narratives.

Truth, Belief, Reality, and History

Reading good fiction and poetry broadens our notions of truth, belief, reality, and history. For every class I teach, I assign the incisive chapters from Dostoevsky's *The Brother Karamazov* entitled "Rebellion" and "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor." Is the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor "true"? Well, what do you mean by true—that it happened at some point in history and was properly recorded and notarized? No. Is it true? Of course. Is Ivan "real"? Should we conduct a quest for the historical Ivan? Do we have to dig behind the text to discover whether Dostoevsky knew a historical man named Ivan Karamazov? Do we have to discern which part of Ivan, if any, is really a projection of Dostoevsky's own personality and then discard Dostoevsky's influence, or can we simply read Ivan as "real" just as he stands in the text— conveying shattering truths about the human situation? Is fiction "true"? Are the biblical stories "true"? Whether the subject is the Akedah, the exodus, or the life of Jesus, these kinds of questions and concerns will never be far from the surface.

Practical Considerations

Choosing the Material

How tight should the connection be between the biblical and nonbiblical material? There are three options. First, one can set them up to be in direct connection (e.g., present a poem about the Samaritan woman when studying John 4). There are a number of books that provide literature coded to specific passages this way.[4] Second, one can take a thematic approach. For instance, when we study Luke, who is rather keen on forgiveness, I have students read Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower: On the Limits and Possibilities of Forgiveness.* Third, one can simply have students read good poetry and short stories quite apart from forcing a direct connection. I like this approach because it allows for more play and creative, revelatory imagining in a way that making one-to-one correlations does not, because the latter approach tends to predetermine and overdetermine their reading rather than allowing for the mystical, explosive, subtle, and unpredictable.

Processing the Material

Deciding how and where to process the material is the next consideration. I take a varied approach on this. Options include: (1) discuss the material during class time; (2) have students post their responses to an online discussion forum (providing them with some basic guidelines), as well as responses to a certain number of classmates; (3) let it lie, like the seed that grows automatically in Mark 4, or allow students to start their own thread on the course website; (4) have them keep a journal about it; and (5) allow them to decide how to incorporate readings into other work for the course (e.g., creative project, research paper, church project).

Challenges

Two main challenges confront teachers who want to incorporate literature into biblical studies courses:

(1) Students do not necessarily know how to read fiction and poetry. How

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4. E.g., Robert Atwan and Laurance Wieder, eds., *Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); David Curzon, ed., *Modern Poems on the Bible: An Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994); and David Jasper and Stephen Prickett, eds., *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

much time should be invested in that larger project? Some students do not get the point and complain that "this is not a literature class."

(2) Given heightened concerns about race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, how does one factor this into choosing what to read? Much good literature is good precisely because it tackles rather than avoids these issues, which also loom large in biblical texts. On the other hand, I once assigned Flannery O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger," and it became problematic as people were offended by having to read the word "nigger" repeatedly. The point was lost on them that O'Connor was critiquing the social relationships between blacks and whites in the south, not condoning them. Add to that fact that I am a white, heterosexual female, and it can make choosing some of the texts a heavy task. How sanitized do I want things to be?[5]

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5. In addition to items catalogued in this chapter, Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, contains other strategies using poetry: Jaime Clark-Soles, "Poetry and Exegesis," 8–9; Brent A. Strawn, "Poetry and History," 38–39; F. V. Greifenhagen, "Lot's Wife: Bringing Minor Biblical Characters Out of the Shadows," 91–92; Roy L. Heller, "Modern Poetry and Prophetic Form Criticism," 169–70; and L. J. M. Claassens, "Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Foreign Women," 236–38.

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Poetry

Ira Brent Driggers and Brent A. Strawn

Poems in English inspired by, responding to, reinterpreting, or simply sharing thematic concerns with the Bible number into the thousands. In the space available here, it will be possible to discuss only a small, selective sample of this gargantuan body of literature. (Discussion of pedagogical strategies in connection with specific texts begins on p. 256.) The list of works below is provided as a resource for instructors desiring to broach specific biblical texts through poetry. Most of these works are readily available online or in easy-to-find anthologies:

Torah

> Joseph Addison, "The Spacious Firmament on High" [Gen 1]
> D. H. Lawrence, "Let There Be Light!" [Gen 1]
> Geoffrey Hill, "Genesis" [Gen 1]
> A. E. Housman, "When Adam Walked in Eden Young" [Gen 2]
> Thomas Traherne, "Eden" [Gen 2]
> e. e. cummings, "Sonnet IV" [Gen 2]
> Anthony Hecht, "Naming the Animals" [Gen 2]
> Karl Shapiro, "The Recognition of Eve" [Gen 2]
> Theodore Roethke, "The Follies of Adam" [Gen 2]
> Walt Whitman, "As Adam Early in the Morning" [Gen 2]
> Ralph Hodgson, "Eve" [Gen 3]
> Abraham Cowley, "The Tree of Knowledge" [Gen 3]
> John Keats, "Sharing Eve's Apple" [Gen 3]
> William Blake, "Earth's Answer" [Gen 3]
> Derek Walcott, "The Cloud" [Gen 3]
> Emily Dickinson, "Eden Is That Old-Fasioned House" [Gen 3]
> W. H. Auden, "They Wondered Why the Fruit Had Been Forbidden" [Gen 3]
> Christina Rossetti, "Eve" [Gen 3–4]

Sigfried Sassoon, "Ancient History" [Gen 4–5]
Francis Quarles, "On the Two Great Floods" [Gen 6–9; 19]
W. S. Merwin, "Noah's Raven" [Gen 8]
Robert Herrick, "The Rainbow: or Curious Covenant" [Gen 9]
Laurance Wieder, "The Tower of Babel" [Gen 11]
Delmore Schwartz, "Sarah" [Gen 17–18]
Daryl Hine, "The Destruction of Sodom" [Gen 18–19]
A. D. Hope, "Lot and His Daughters I" [Gen 19]
A. D. Hope, "Lot and His Daughters II" [Gen 19]
Emily Dickinson, "Abraham to Kill Him" [Gen 22]
Wilfred Owen, "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" [Gen 22]
Henry Vaughan, "Isaac's Marriage" [Gen 24]
John Donne, *Holy Sonnets*, No. 11 [Gen 27]
Francis Quarles, "On Jacob's Purchase" [Gen 27]
Jones Very, "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel" [Gen 32]
George Herbert, "Joseph's Coat" [Gen 37]
Diana Hume George, "Asenath" [Gen 40]
Celia Gilbert, "The Midwives" [Exod 1]
Robert Frost, "Sitting by a Bush in Broad Daylight" [Exod 3]
Weldon Kees, "The Coming of the Plague" [Exod 9]
Isaac Rosenberg, "The Jew" [Exod 26–27]
Arthur Hugh Clough, "The Latest Decalogue" [Exod 34]
Robert Herrick, "The Chewing the Cud" [Lev 11]
Charles Reznikoff, "Day of Atonement" [Lev 16]
Norman MacCaig, "Golden Calf " [Num 14]
Robert Herrick, "To His Conscience" [Deut 16]

Prophets

Alicia Ostriker, "The Story of Joshua" [Josh 3]
Phyllis McGinley, "Women of Jericho" [Josh 6]
X. J. Kennedy, "Joshua" [Josh 10]
Charles Reznikoff, "Joshua at Shechem" [Josh 24]
Henry Vaughan, "The Stone" [Josh 24]
Lord Byron, "Jephtha's Daughter" [Judg 11]
Robert Graves, "Angry Samson" [Judg 13–16]
Robert Crashaw, "Samson to His Delilah" [Judg 16]
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Warning" [Judg 16]
P. Hately Waddell, "David and Goliath" [1 Sam 17]
Charles Reznikoff, "I Do Not Believe That David Killed Goliath" [1 Sam 17–18]

LITERATURE

Lord Byron, "Song of Saul before His Last Battle" [1 Sam 31]
Philip Levine, "The Death of Saul" [1 Sam 31]
John Berryman, "King David Dances" [2 Sam 6]
Charles Lamb, "David in the Cave of Adullam" [2 Sam 23]
John Greenleaf Whittier, "King Solomon and the Ants" [1 Kgs 10]
G. K. Chesterton, "The Surrender of a Cockney" [1 Kgs 19]
Rudyard Kipling, "Naaman's Song" [2 Kgs 5–6]
Lord Byron, "The Destruction of Sennacherib" [2 Kgs 19]
George Meredith, "Lucifer in Starlight" [Isa 14]
Robert Harris, "Isaiah by Kerosene Lantern Light" [Isa 29]
William Meredith, "On Falling Asleep by Firelight" [Isa 65]
Francis Quarles, "Isaiah 66:11" [Isa 66]
Carl Rakosi, "Israel" [Jer 3]
Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Thou Art Indeed Just, Lord" [Jer 12]
John Wheelwright, "Live, Evil Veil" [Ezek 1]
Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Aholibah" [Ezek 23]
Wilfred Owen, "The End" [Ezek 37]
Jones Very, "My People Are Destroyed for Lack of Knowledge" [Hos 4]
Herman Melville, "The Ribs and Terrors…" [Jonah 1–2]
Randall Jarrell, "Jonah" [Jonah 3–4]
Thomas Hardy, "A Dream Question" [Mic 3]
Jonathan Swift, "The Day of Judgement" [Zeph 1]
William Blake, "In a Myrtle Shade" [Zech 1]
George Herbert, "Easter Wings" [Mal 4]

WRITINGS

John Hollander, "Psalms" [Ps 23]
Henry Williams Baker, "Psalm 23" [Ps 23]
Allen Ginsberg, "Psalm III" [Ps 27]
Denise Levertov, "O Taste and See" [Ps 34]
Thomas Stanley, "A Paraphrase upon Part of the CXXXIX Psalm" [Ps 139]
David Curzon, "Proverbs 6:6" [Prov 6]
Delmore Schwartz, "Do the Others Speak of Me Mockingly, Maliciously?" [Prov 27]
Hart Crane, "To Brooklyn Bridge" [Job 1]
Elizabeth Sewell, "Job" [Job 1–2]
Jones Very, "Hath the Rain a Father?" [Job 38]
Jay MacPherson, "The Beauty of Job's Daughters" [Job 42]
Robert Lowell, "The Book of Wisdom" [Song of Solomon 8]

Derek Mahon, "Ecclesiastes" [Eccl 1]
Robert Southwell, "Times Go by Turns" [Eccl 3]
J. P. White, "In Ecclesiastes I Read" [Eccl 7]
Francis Thompson, "Past Thinking of Solomon" [Eccl 12]
Christopher Smart, "The Conclusion of the Matter" [Eccl 12]
Elinor Wylie, "Nebuchadnezzar" [Dan 2]
John Keats, "Nebuchadnezzar's Dream" [Dan 2]
Emily Dickinson, "Belshazzar had a Letter" [Dan 5]
David Rowbotham, "Nebuchadnezzar's Kingdom-Come" [Dan 6]
Carl Rakosi, "Services" [Neh 8–9]

Gospels and Acts

G. K. Chesterton, "Joseph" [Matt 1]
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "A Christmas Carol" [Matt 2; Luke 2]
William Butler Yeats, "The Magi" [Matt 2]
William Everson, "The Flight in the Desert" [Matt 2]
T. S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi" [Matt 2]
Sylvia Plath, "Magi" [Matt 2]
Robert Graves, "In the Wilderness" [Matt 4; Luke 4]
Jorge Luis Borges, "From an Apocryphal Gospel" [Matt 5]
Yusef Iman, "Love Your Enemy" [Matt 5]
Countee Cullen, "For Daughters of Magdalen" [Matt 6]
Theodore Roethke, "Judge Not" [Matt 7]
Karl Kirchwey, "He Considers the Birds of the Air" [Matt 8]
Anthony Hecht, "Pig" [Matt 8]
Vachel Lindsay, "The Unpardonable Sin" [Matt 12]
Henry Vaughan, "The Daughter of Herodias" [Matt 14]
James Dickey, "Walking on Water" [Matt 14]
Vassar Miller, "Judas" [Matt 27]
Countee Cullen, "Simon the Cyrenian Speaks" [Matt 27]
James Wright, "Saint Judas" [Matt 27]
Judith Wright, "Eli, Eli" [Matt 27]
Sylvia Plath, "Mary's Song" [Matt 28]
William Cowper, "The Sower" [Mark 4]
Allen Ginsberg, "Galilee Shore" [Mark 6]
Geoffrey Hill, "Canticle for Good Friday" [Mark 15]
Edna St. Vincent Millay, "To Jesus on His Birthday" [Mark 16]
Rupert Brooke, "Mary and Gabriel" [Luke 1]
Primo Levi, "Annunciation" [Luke 1]
C. S. Lewis, "The Nativity" [Luke 2]

Henry Vaughan, "The Shepherds" [Luke 2]
William Butler Yeats, "The Mother of God" [Luke 2]
T. S. Eliot, "A Song for Simeon" [Luke 2]
Jones Very, "John" [Luke 7]
e. e. cummings, "A Man Who Had Fallen among Thieves" [Luke 10]
Christina Rossetti, "A Prodigal Son" [Luke 15]
Elizabeth Bishop, "The Prodigal" [Luke 15]
Robert Bly, "The Prodigal Son" [Luke 15]
Hilaire Belloc, "To Dives" [Luke 16]
Paul Kane, "Asleep at Gethsemane" [Luke 22]
Eric Pankey, "The Confession of Cleopas" [Luke 24]
Denis Devlin, "Ascension" [Luke 24]
Emily Dickinson, "A Word Made Flesh Is Seldom" [John 1]
D. H. Lawrence, "The Body of God" [John 1]
Dylan Thomas, "In the Beginning Was the Three-Pointed Star" [John 1]
Edgar Lee Masters, "The Wedding Feast" [John 2]
Seamus Heaney, "Cana Revisited" [John 2]
Howard Nemerov, "Nicodemus" [John 3]
Emily Dickinson, "I Know Where Wells Grow—Droughtless Wells"
     [John 4]
Henry Colman, "On Lazarus Raised from Death" [John 11]
A. R. Ammons, "The Foot-Washing" [John 13]
Nina Kossman, "Judas' Reproach" [John 13]
Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "Christ Climbed Down" [John 19]
James Joyce, "The Ballad of Joking Jesus" [Acts 1]
Dylan Thomas, "There Was a Saviour" [Acts 5]
Thomas Merton, "St. Paul" [Acts 9]
Rosemary Dobson, "Eutychus" [Acts 20]

LETTERS

Dylan Thomas, "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" [Rom 6]
Peter Kocan, "AIDS, among Other Things" [Rom 6]
Francis Quarles, "On a Feast" [1 Cor 5]
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Forbearance" [1 Cor 13]
Robert Frost, "Revelation" [1 Cor 14]
John Milton, "Sonnet XIV" [2 Cor 5]
William Cowper, "Contentment" [Phil 4]
William E. Brooks, "Pilate Remembers" [1 Tim 6]
George Herbert, "Hope" [Heb 6]

Revelation

>William Cowper, "Sardis" [Rev 3]
>Charlotte Mew, "The Trees Are Down" [Rev 7]
>John Crowe Ransom, "Armageddon" [Rev 16]
>Victor Daley, "A Vision of Sunday in Heaven" [Rev 21]
>W. H. Auden, "Victor" [Rev 21]

The works discussed in this chapter, many of which are related to multiple texts and topics, are organized alphabetically according to the author's name. The indices may be consulted to find entries with classroom strategies related to particular texts. All secondary literature cited here is included in the preceding bibliography (pp. 246–49).

Todd Alcott, "Television" (*The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop and the Poetry of a New Generation* [ed. M. Eleveld; Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, 2004])

This is a hysterical prose poem that purports to be the words of a television to any and all who watch it. As one might expect it is dominated by a series of repeated demands: "Look at me." The television knows, however, that those who watch it need to do other things, such as eat or sleep or go to the bathroom. The television is willing to let those things occur, but it repeatedly insists "I am here for you" at all times.

While students find the poem quite funny, it is also pedagogically useful on at least two fronts: (1) It is a good example of poetic personification where something that does not normally speak or have a voice is given both, along with a personality which evokes either sympathy and identification or disgust and distance. One might compare personification strategies in a number of places in Scripture; for example, in the personification of destroyed Zion in Lamentations, Wisdom in Prov 8–9, Balaam's ass in Num 22, or the trees and the bramble in Jotham's fable (Judg 9:7–15). (2) The poem is a wonderful example of how literary texts must be interpreted, especially in an oral/aural environment. The poem is funny enough when read silently, but it can be even funnier if it is read aloud—that is, if it is interpreted *orally*. The volume that contains the poem, *The Spoken Word Revolution*, contains a CD that has a track of Alcott himself reading his poem. His rendition makes this funny poem even funnier. More to the point, however, is the fact that poems (and other literary compositions) sound and mean differently when they are interpreted performatively. That can be well done or poorly done, of course, but the point is that oral (i.e., public) performance (i.e., interpretation) of literature often brings out nuances and aspects that are not apparent in a flat, eyes-only,

mouth-closed, "traditional" reading. This raises all kinds of interesting questions for students to ponder, for example, the purported oral origins of much that is found in Scripture, the public performance of the Psalms, or the oral aspects of Jesus' teachings underlying the Gospel accounts. The insights into the differences between written text and oral performance could be achieved by any number of poems where recordings of readings done by the author exist and can be played alongside the text for comparative purposes (again, some good, some bad). Many such readings are available online or in poetry anthologies (e.g., Elise Paschen and Rebekah Presson Mosby, eds., *Poetry Speaks*).

Matthew Arnold, "Progress" (*The Poems of Matthew Arnold* [ed. M. Allott; 2nd ed.; London: Longman, 1979]; www.bartleby.com/236/125. html)

In this twelve-line poem Arnold begins with a re-enactment of Matt 5:17–20 (stanzas 1–3) and then reflects upon the significance of Jesus' words for a modern world consumed with antireligious notions of progress (stanzas 4–12).

The instructor can use the poem to reinforce fundamental Matthean concerns, namely, the purpose of the Mosaic law and the relationship between the church and Judaism. To this end, students should already be somewhat familiar with the message of Matt 5:17–20: Jesus does not represent a break with the Torah but rather its fulfillment, so that Jesus' disciples must follow it more deeply, looking to Jesus as its ultimate authority and thereby surpassing the scribes and Pharisees in their obedience (thus the famous "antitheses" of 5:21–48). It would also help if students knew what was at stake in this claim: that the community of believers represents the true Israel and is not some bastard offshoot.

With these pieces in place students are better equipped to evaluate Arnold's poem vis-à-vis its biblical source. Initial questions should include: How well do the words of Arnold's Jesus follow the Matthean script? What prompts Arnold's Jesus to stress the importance of the Mosaic law? What, according to the poem, is the relevance of Jesus' message today? Careful examination should reveal that while the words of Arnold's Jesus (stanzas 1–3) follow Matt 5:17–20 rather closely, the message is put toward radically different ends. In the poem Jesus scolds his disciples for *wanting* to break from Torah, while Matthew's Jesus (according to the scholarly consensus) seeks to *assure* an audience of its *continuity* with Torah and thus its identity as the people of God.

The rest of the poem (stanzas 4–12) criticizes the modern pursuit of progress at the expense of spiritual health—as the soul "perishes of the cold"

LITERATURE

(line 32). Thus Jesus urges fidelity to the law as a way of checking this danger-
ous tendency. There is therefore also a general lesson for exegesis here: What
difference does attention to historical and narrative contexts make in the
interpretation of the text? What other interpretations of Matt 5:17–20 might
we arrive at if we did not have those contexts to set parameters?

Despite these discontinuities, students may very well sympathize with the
poem's overall message. If that is the case, instructors could bring to their
attention the warning against "earthly treasures" in Matt 6:19–34, a passage
(in the same sermon) that anticipates the poem's chief anxiety: "No one can
serve two masters" (6:24). Finally, the poem's concluding acceptance of all
religions (stanzas 10–12) raises interesting questions to which students often
gravitate naturally. Although this is another instance of the poem standing at
odds with Matthew, intrepid instructors may want to move the discussion in
this direction, particularly since the Sermon on the Mount asserts the *abso-
lute* authority of Jesus. Indeed, Matthew's Gospel contains some of the more
polemically harsh passages in the New Testament (e.g., 23:1–39; 25:31–46).

Wendell Berry, "Whatever Happens" (*Given: Poems* [Emeryville, Calif.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005])

This very short poem (only seven lines) from Berry's celebrated "Sab-
baths" collection (poems he wrote on Sabbath days over the years) could be
instructively used to discuss realized/realizing eschatology or the present
presence of eternal life as found in the Gospel of John, where one "has" eter-
nal life, even now (cf. 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 17:3). The poem describes how those
who have learned to love one another (another Johannine theme) have found
their way to "the lasting world" and will not leave it, no matter what. The
poem begins and ends with the same phrase, "whatever happens," showing
the similarity of *Urzeit* and *Endzeit*, or at least how the *Endzeit* presses in
upon the present.

William Blake, "The Lamb" (*William Blake: The Complete Poems* [ed. A. Ostriker; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977])

This famous little poem by William Blake opens with the simple ques-
tion: "Little Lamb, who made thee? / Dost thou know who made thee?" (lines
1–2). While the first stanza (lines 1–10) fosters a sense of thanksgiving with
its stress on the idyllic comforts of the lamb's life (food, stream and mead,
wooly clothing), the second stanza (lines 11–20) fosters a sense of identifica-
tion between the lamb and its creator who "calls himself a Lamb" (line 14).

Although the poem does not engage any specific biblical texts, instructors
can use it to engage thematically related passages. For instance, the opening
emphasis on the sheer gift of the lamb's life and the seemingly "natural" pro-

vision it finds in the world (stanza 1) finds an interesting parallel with Matt 6:19–34, where Jesus assuages human anxiety over possessions through the analogy of birds: "They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" The connection between provision and creation is easier to see in the poem, where the refrain "made thee" (lines 1, 2) is followed by the refrain "gave thee" (lines 3, 5, 7, 9, 10). Thus instructors may wish to introduce the poem before the biblical text, asking students to find and explain the connection ("How does the poem, and especially stanza 1, shape the lamb's view of his own life and its provisions?"). Then, with this connection in mind, the students will be better equipped to see it in the biblical text, where humans "store up treasures" (Matt 6:19) because they forget what the birds know, namely, that all of life is a gift from God. Theologically minded instructors could also segue into a discussion of the Christian life as defined by dependency on God and the connection between that dependency and thanksgiving (see Ps 23; 1 Cor 4:7;).

The poem also finds interesting parallels with the Gospel of John, which identifies Jesus not only as "the Lamb of God" (1:29, 36) through whom all of creation came into existence (1:1–5) but also as the "gate" and "shepherd" who provides for his own sheep (10:1–18). In this case attention to differences will better illuminate the biblical text: What do the sheep of John's Gospel receive that the lamb of Blake's poem does not? How is the lamb-provider depicted differently in each work (see also the Lamb of Rev 5:6–13; 7:9–17)? How does John's focus on the collective sheep differ rhetorically from Blake's focus on the individual lamb?

Robert Bly, "Warning to the Reader" (*Eating the Honey of Words: New and Selected Poems* [New York: HarperCollins, 1999])

This prose poem is a wonderful text to use with students when they find the Bible difficult to understand or too hard to take. It describes the beauty of a swept-clean granary with shafts of light against the walls coming in through slats between the wallboards: "So in a poem about imprisonment, one sees a little light." But this is a dangerous situation—birds can get trapped in these granaries and never get out because they insist on flying against the walls, thinking the bands of light are windows. Instead, "The way out is where the rats enter and leave; but the rat's hole is low to the floor." Bly ends by warning writers not to promise too much in poems by showing (only? mostly?) the sunlight on the walls, and by warning readers not to love "poems of light" too much lest they end up "as a mound of feathers and a skull on the open boardwood floor.…"

The poem is useful in discussing the necessity of sticking with difficult texts; perhaps it is only with them that a way out (low to the floor?) is found.

Similarly, the poem works well with students' inherent penchant to favor "nice" texts and "positive" messages, both in Scripture and, perhaps even more poignantly, in interpretation and proclamation.

Robert Bly, "St. George and the Dragon" (*Eating the Honey of Words: New and Selected Poems* [New York: HarperCollins, 1999])

This is an interesting poem to discuss with reference to the relationship of the testaments—or even their competition. In it, Bly describes a sculpture made by Bernt Notke in 1489 for Stockholm Cathedral (images are available on the Internet). The dragon is, as Bly notes, losing, but he goes on to say that "As children, we knew … / … our part / Lay with the dragon." As for the knight, Bly associates him with the New Testament, which he read as an immature boy. True, the "solar knight" is victorious, but the dragon remains "the great spirit / The alchemists knew of. / He is Joseph, sent down / To the well. Grendel, / What we have forgotten, / Without whom is nothing." The Joseph story is evoked here, as is the monstrous demon of Beowulf. Bly asserts there is something raw and truthful about these figures and their *sine qua non* status. They may have been forgotten, but they must, in the articulation of the poem, be remembered and resaid. They constitute what Bly calls our "muddy greatness" which stands in contrast with the victorious "solar knight" (= the New Testament). Students might discuss the different images in the poem, their association with different parts (and testaments) in the canon, and see with which they identify and why. Moreover, perhaps it is possible for one to identify with several images and both testaments simultaneously. After all, Bly states that, as children, he knew his part lay with the dragon (= the Old Testament?) but that he also read the New Testament as a boy. Perhaps the contrast in the poem, then, is finally just an apparent one, yielding to a more subtle canonical synthesis in the last analysis.

Robert Bly, "The Yellow Dot" (*Eating the Honey of Words: New and Selected Poems* [New York: HarperCollins, 1999])

This poem is dedicated to the memory of poet Jane Kenyon (see below for the discussion of her poem "Otherwise"). It is a fascinating take on theodicy. To put it bluntly, the poem offers no complex theodicy, perhaps because none is ultimately satisfying. Instead, the poem begins with a simple assertion: "God does what she wants. She has very large / Tractors." God can do whatever she wants with those tractors; nothing can stop them (or her). Bly then likens God to a seamstress whose needlework is life. God is working on a larger pattern, and those of us who live on the quilt, as it were, are of no matter. So, the husband of a sick wife (Kenyon's?) cries, " 'Don't let her die!' But God says, 'I / Need a yellow dot here, near the mailbox.' " A

yellow dot by the mailbox makes no sense, but then again, the death of the wife at forty-eight years of age does not make much sense either. One can be angry, as the husband is in the poem, but as Bly says, the turbulent ocean (a new metaphor for God) "doesn't / Mean anything" and a chicken's claws (another metaphor for God's ways) "will tear / A Rembrandt drawing if you put it down."

The poem is useful to facilitate class discussions on gendered (especially feminine) God-language, the meaning of suffering, and God and the problem of evil. Its particular theodicy has obvious resonances with certain emphases in the Reformed tradition of systematic theology, but it might also be profitably compared with the speeches at the end of Job (38:1–41:34).

Robert Bly, "A Home in Dark Grass" (*Eating the Honey of Words: New and Selected Poems* [New York: HarperCollins, 1999])

This is brief poem that, like many of Bly's poems, deals with death. In this particular case, death is both inevitable and natural: "We did not come to remain whole. / We came to lose our leaves like the trees." Moreover, death is even a good, as Bly ends the poem with the wish that we might find "A home in dark grass, / And nourishment in death." The poem might be compared, then, with some of Jesus' statements about his own death that similarly portray it as a good (e.g., John 12:24). The poem might also be used as a foil to texts that think of death as an enemy that must be defeated (e.g., Rom 7–8; 1 Cor 15) or as an inevitable evil (e.g., Ecclesiastes).

Billy Collins, "The Trouble with Poetry" (*The Trouble with Poetry and Other Poems* [New York: Random House, 2005])

This short poem identifies the problem with poetry as the fact that poetry encourages the writing of more poetry and the cycle will never end, Collins avers, until perhaps the day comes when "we have compared everything in the world / to everything else in the world." The poem is useful in addressing the issue of literary productivity leading to more literary productivity, and the sense in which subsequent interpretation of texts like Scripture is, in a way, little more than the urge to write more poetry based on the inspiration given by the primal poem. In his clever way, Collins also highlights the nature of much poetry (or at least poetic metaphor) as comparison and imitation, the latter of which he discusses in the end of the poem as the urge to "steal" from other poems. This stealing might be more acceptably presented as "influence" or "inspiration," but it, too, underscores the power of foundational literature that leaves its imprint on all subsequent interpretations, retellings, even—to some degree—antiversions. Finally, Collins ends with a reference to the book of poetry he carried inside his uniform "up and down the treacherous halls

of high school"—a wonderful image showing how important literature (just literature!) can help people survive.

Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry" (*The Apple That Astonished Paris* [Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996]; www.loc.gov/poetry/ 180/001.html)

This is a good poem to use for a class session devoted to hermeneutical theory or one that discusses the difference between author-centered approaches, such as historical criticism, and text-centered ones, such as various types of literary criticism. Collins uses a number of interesting metaphors describing how he wants his students to treat a poem, culminating in an image of having them water ski across the surface of the poem "waving at the author's name on the shore." But, instead, the students want to torture a confession out of the poem. They strap it to a chair and beat it with a hose "to find out what it really means."

At least two things are clear in the poem: Collins's own stance on how best to interpret poetry, which is one that is not overly beholden (if at all) to author-centered approaches, and his students' approach which is more firmly entrenched in the quest for a singular meaning, which Collins clearly presents as a bad approach (likened unto torture). A third item is also clear, however: namely, that interpreting different genres of texts may require different approaches, such that it may not be the nature of poetry to contain something that could be described as "what it really means"—or, at least, not in such a way that that meaning emerges from tying the composition to a chair and beating a confession out of it!

Richard Crashaw, "Two Went Up into the Temple to Pray" (*Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw* [ed. G. W. Williams; New York: Norton, 1974]); www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/crashaw/twowent.htm)

This poem by Richard Crashaw offers a concise and penetrating commentary on Luke 18:9–14, a story unique to the Third Gospel. Directed by Jesus to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt" (Luke 18:9), the story contrasts the prayers of a contemptuous Pharisee and humble tax collector, thus illustrating what might be called true and false prayer. The poem itself is short and rather straightforward, so that instructors may introduce it to students in class without sacrificing much time. In fact, given the brevity of Luke 18:9–14, students need not be familiar with this before class, either.

In courses that aim to teach exegesis, the poem can be read alongside the biblical passage as a way of practicing basic interpretive skills. Once students are familiar with both texts, instructors should ask: What in the biblical

text supports Crashaw's interpretation? What in the biblical text challenges it? What important elements of the text does the poem leave out (e.g., the narrative audience, the stigma of the tax collector, other Lukan teachings on prayer)? What difference do these omissions make to our understanding Luke 18:9–14? Here the point is simply to emphasize the nature of exegesis as an argument about the text using evidence from the text.

In courses that either introduce or focus on the narrative elements of the Gospels, instructors may use the poem as an aid for illustrating the power of irony (in this case situational irony). So Crashaw draws the implications for Jesus' claim that only the humble tax collector, in recognizing his need for divine mercy, went home "justified" (Luke 18:14): The very man who "dares not send his eye" (line 4) toward God is the one who actually treads closer to God, while the one who "stands up close" (line 3) to "brag" (line 2) draws closer only to "God's *altar*" (line 5, emphasis added). In this way the poem can spark a conversation on the function of irony as a way of accentuating the literary and artistic nature of the Gospels: What irony does the poem capture? What other ironies can be identified in the biblical passage (e.g., the differences between a Pharisee and tax collector, the audience to which Jesus directs the story)? From here the instructor can point to other instances of situational irony within the Gospel of Luke: for example, the implied contrasts between lowly Galilean Jews (from whom Jesus comes) and powerful political rulers (Luke 1:5; 2:1–4; 3:1–2), or the contrasted fates of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). Depending on the goals of the course, the instructor could set these examples of situational irony alongside cases of *dramatic* irony—for instance, Nicodemus's confusion over "rebirth" in John 3—thus accentuating the literary richness of the Gospels. (What difference does it make whether we understand the Gospels as works of art and the Evangelists as relatively skilled writers? How might the use of literary irony affect or "involve" an audience differently than, say, a simple treatise or letter?)

If the topic of discussion is restricted to the Gospel of Luke, one could tie the above examples of situational irony to the larger theme of reversal, particularly as it pertains to the social status quo (e.g., Luke 1:46–55; 4:16–30; 6:20–21, 24–25; 14:7–24; 16:19–31): What aspects of the Lukan reversal theme does the poem capture? What aspects does it fail to capture? In addition, one could place the poem and Luke 18:9–14 alongside other important references to prayer within Luke, both in the immediate narrative context and elsewhere (Luke 6:28; 11:1–4; 20:4–7; 22:40–46): What aspects of the Lukan view of prayer does the poem capture? What aspects does it fail to capture? Regardless of the trajectory, the instructor will want to emphasize how, in the case of Gospel narratives, particular themes can rarely be reduced to a single

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passage. Rather, gauging a Gospel's perspective on an issue involves attention to multiple passages, each falling within its own narrative context.

Countee Cullen, "The Litany of the Dark People" (*Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible* [ed. R. Atwan and L. Wieder; Oxford University, 2000]; http://grace-ed.org/blog/archives/101)

The speaker of this three-stanza "litany" is a collective people who have turned from "ancient deities" (line 3) to the "Christ of Bethlehem" (line 8). As a result of this conversion, they experience peace and hope in Christ's solidarity with their sufferings and a love for their persecutors. Instructors will find this piece a helpful means of elucidating (whether by comparison or contrast) New Testament passages that coalesce some or all of the same themes (e.g., Matt 5:38–48; Mark 13:9–13; Rom 7–8; Phil 3:2–21; 1 Thess 1:6–10; 2:13–16; Heb 2:1–18; 1 Pet 2:18–25; 3:8–22; 4:12–19; Rev 11:15–19; 19:1–21). Depending on course objectives, the poem may also be placed in conversation with early Christian martyrdom literature as the same themes are often at work there (e.g., *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* or *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*).

Of all of these potential parallels, perhaps the closest is Paul's letter to the Philippians. Like the community speaking in the poem, the Philippian Christians have "left behind" their pagan past (line 4; Phil 3:7–8), seek a oneness with the "mind" of Christ (line 7; Phil 2:5), find solidarity with the sufferings of Christ (lines 9–12; Phil 1:29–30; 2:5–8; 3:10), and journey unswervingly to their spiritual destination (lines 13–16; Phil 3:12–16). The similarities to Phil 3:2–21 are particularly striking (leaving the past behind, pressing on toward the goal, knowing Christ's sufferings), although the poem's loving attitude toward the community's opponents sounds more Matthean (Matt 5:38–48) than Pauline. If instructors choose to introduce the poem before turning to Philippians, they will want to direct the conversation toward those basic themes. For example, "How do the speakers describe their collective past, present, and future? What is their relationship to Christ in each?" Conversely, instructors may use the poem by way of conclusion: "What parallels (and differences) do you find between the poem and Philippians?"

Because the poem's title brings an obvious ethnic dimension to its meaning (Cullen was a nineteenth-century African American) instructors may also use it as an exercise in cultural hermeneutics. Reading the first stanza in isolation from the title and subsequent lines, for instance, students will likely assume a strictly spiritual significance to the conversion of the speaking community. Taken as a whole, however, the poem illustrates how the meaning of Christian conversion—and the way the converted community defines itself—will vary depending on the status of that community within the larger society.

Here important questions include: How does the title affect our understanding of the poem? What difference do stanzas 2–3 make in our interpretation of stanza 1? How might an American slaveholder or segregationist interpret the meaning of Christian conversion differently?

Emily Dickinson, Poem #1735 ("One Crown That No One Seeks") (*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* [ed. T. H. Johnson; 3 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown, 1960]; famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/emily_dickinson/poems/9402)

Although consisting of only eight short lines, Emily Dickinson's poem captures well the irony of both the crucified Messiah and the complicity of Pontius Pilate in the Messiah's death. Without actually naming him, the first stanza (lines 1–4) contrasts Christ's godly status with his seeking, and even "coveting," the shameful alienation of the cross. The result of this ironic scenario, according to line 4, is the equally ironic "deification" of the cross' "stigma." The second stanza (lines 5–8) proceeds to contrast the irony of Christ with the irony of the powerful Pontius Pilate who, as the agent of Christ's "coronation," must perpetually remember his complicity while living in hell. Thus the irony comes full circle, as the earthly ruler is now made low, "pierced" by his own transgression.

This poem draws most directly from the canonical accounts of Jesus' trial before Pilate and his subsequent "coronation" with a crown of thorns— the "crown that no one seeks" (Matt 27:29; Mark 15:17). Because the poem captures so much irony in so few lines, it can bring to light what is easily missed in these accounts, particularly since students are not normally trained to look for irony in the Bible ("What examples of irony do you find in the poem, and what are these ironies saying about Jesus and Pilate?"). Along these lines, Mark's Gospel will probably work better than Matthew's since it so emphasizes the kingly dimensions of the term "Christ" and thus the irony of a crucified king (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32). Students may also glean one or both accounts for evidence of what the poem calls "stigma," reinforcing the element of shame that is often new to introductory-level students.

Looking to the larger narratives, the instructor may ask whether, or to what degree, Matthew and Mark really do depict Christ seeking out or "coveting" his own shameful death (as the poem claims). Also, do they reveal an interest in Pilate's fate after the crucifixion? These questions will help students zero in on the Evangelists' main emphases by using the poem as a foil. The first question may also serve as a segue to a larger discussion on the differences between the Gospels, since it is John's Gospel that most mirrors the poem in its depiction of Christ as a deity who seeks out his own death.

LITERATURE

Looking to different New Testament texts, certain passages in Paul's letters can speak to Christ's reversal of the cross' stigma (e.g., 1 Cor 1:18–25; Phil 2:5–11), while Luke's emphasis on reversal can speak to the bringing low of the powerful (e.g., Luke 2:51–52). Particularly if the course is organized thematically, rather than book by book, the instructor can use these passages alongside the poem to accentuate other dimensions of the crucifixion's significance.

W. S. Dipiero, "Near Damascus" (*Restorers* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992])

This poem gives the perspective of Saul of Tarsus as he lies on the ground, having just fallen from his horse on the way to Damascus, "[his] mouth / plugged with road grit and surprise" (lines 6–7). From this perspective Saul sees the smallness of the world up close—red ants bulldozing, a wasp dragging a grasshopper, and heat-crusted mud slots that seem as big as lunar craters.

As the poem attempts to describe an unnarrated moment within Acts 9:1–9 (cf. Acts 22:6–11; 26:12–18), instructors may wish to use it as an entry point into Luke's characterization of Saul/Paul and his conversion in particular. To this end, students should be asked to name the ways the poem accentuates Saul's (1) denigration and (2) recalcitrance. In the former case one easily sees Saul's lowly state among the bugs, with even his horse looking upon him with contempt (line 23). In the latter case one notes Saul's resistance to the lightning flash that knocks him from his perch (line 8–9) and his willingness to eat nearby larvae "if it would have saved [his] sight" (line 15).

This approach to the poem can prime students for questions of Lukan literary design and theology: How fitting is the dynamic of being knocked off of a horse in the case of this particular character, especially given Saul's history in the narrative (Acts 7:58–8:3) and the purpose of his journey to Damascus (Acts 9:1–2)? How is this dynamic more appropriate (if not also more necessary) than, for instance, a "normal" resurrection appearance such as the apostles experienced (Luke 24:13–49; note also the theme of reversal forecast as early as Luke 1:51–53)? Why does Luke choose not to pursue the themes of denigration and recalcitrance to the degree that Dipiero does? What themes does Luke pursue instead, and what difference does this make theologically?

Another helpful discussion may stem from the question, "Where does the poem anticipate Saul's salvation?" Dipiero's single reference to Saul's future is subtle but significant given its location at the end of the poem (lines 25–27). That he subtly likens Saul's fall from the horse to Christ's crucifixion—"the light shaft … nails me down" (lines 24–25)—provides instructors with an opportunity to explore Paul-Christ parallels both in Acts and in Paul's own

letters. The poem's emphasis on Saul's recalcitrance—even after his fall—can also lead into an exploration of Paul's own view of justification as predicated upon divine grace.

John Donne, "Nativity" (*John Donne's Poetry* [ed. A. L. Clemens; 2nd ed.; New York: Norton, 1991]; www.sonnets.org/donne.htm#002)

John Donne offers in this sonnet a subtle harmonization of the Matthean and Lukan nativity stories, presenting the instructor with several avenues to explore. First, if the class is somewhat familiar with these accounts, the instructor might read the poem aloud and then ask students to list the poem's biblical references as precisely as possible. Depending on the size of the class, the instructor may also wish to break students into small groups, thereby encouraging peer interaction, the culling of knowledge, and friendly competition. Although some of the poem's more theologically abstract lines might remind students of any number of biblical verses, the two obvious Synoptic references are Luke 2:7 (the inn having no room; line 5) and Matt 2:1–23 (the magi, Herod, and the flight to Egypt; lines 6–8, 13). There are also a few more Johannine references to God entering the world as a human (lines 1–4, 9–10). In addition to being a simple test of Bible content, this exercise gives the class an opportunity to explore the birth of Jesus as systematic theologians, engaging multiple biblical texts over a single issue.

Another important issue raised by the poem is that of harmonizing disparate Gospel accounts. In fact, introductory textbooks frequently cite the harmonization of Matthean and Lukan nativities stories to illustrate this traditional approach to the Gospels. As part of the above exercise, then, instructors may wish to include a question that forces students to think in those terms; for example, what Gospel passages does the poem combine? The introduction of Tatian's *Diatessaron* or Augustine's *Harmony* may prove helpful here as ancient examples of the tendency to read the Gospels as a single account rather than as four distinct narratives with their own theological-rhetorical interests. The poem's more Johannine references to Jesus' divinity may also contribute to this discussion, particularly if the instructor wants to discourage students from reading the Synoptic Jesus as altogether divine or (in less polemical terms) to bring attention to John's distinctively "high" Christology. Here the poem serves less as an object of interpretation than as a segue to the introduction of critical approaches to the Gospels.

Finally, as an exercise in theological reflection, the instructor might use the poem to explore the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation. Donne addresses the radical claim of God being born from a woman's womb (lines 1–2) as a weak child subject to human powers (line 3–8), the divine condescending implied by this claim (line 9–12), and the role of faith in discerning

the infant Jesus' identity (line 10). With respect to this issue the poem can be placed in conversation with John's prologue (John 1:1–18, esp. vv. 1–13) or the "Christ hymn" of Philippians (Phil 2:5–12), as both passages treat God's movement toward humanity and the ironic vulnerability such movement includes.

William Drummond of Hawthornden, "For the Baptist" (*Dr. W. H. Drummond's Complete Poems* [Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger, 2005]; rpo.library. utoronto.ca/poem/726.html)

This fourteen-line work by the Scottish writer William Drummond pays homage to the character of John the Baptist in his unique role as final prophetic precursor to Christ. The spare nature of the poem brings it most closely into line with Mark 1:1–8. For reasons discussed below, however, instructors will find it helpful to incorporate Synoptic parallels (Matt 3:1–12; Luke 3:1–17), if not also the somewhat different Johannine version (John 1:6–9, 15, 19–42).

Placing the poem in conversation with Mark's account can help students better appreciate the terse Markan style and the way that style often contributes to Mark's rhetorical objectives. Although it is common to find instructors explaining Mark as a source upon which Matthew and Luke elaborate (which is most likely the case historically), Mark's rhetorical effect is often better experienced *after* students have read the more extensive Synoptic parallels. To this end, instructors may wish to assign those parallels (as well as John's account) for homework, and then begin the next class with a reading of Drummond's poem. Initial questions should include: What does the poem omit from the biblical stories about John's desert ministry? What does it choose to focus on instead? This will inevitably lead students to note Drummond's emphasis on John's ascetic, animal-like existence and habitat (lines 2–8), his very simple message of repentance (lines 9–11), and his isolation from mainstream civilization (lines 8, 12–14). From there the instructor can pose the more fundamental question: Is the poem in any way deficient for its omission of so many details we have come to associate with John? The purpose of the ensuing discussion should help students see that it is obviously *not* deficient but rather, as a work of art, it forwards its own distinctive interpretation of John. It is only deficient if we hold it to strictly (modern) historical standards, that is, if we require it merely to record data rather than shape an audience (as ancient writers intended, and as ancient audiences expected).

The point here is obviously to help students understand that, like Drummond, Mark is not to be disparaged but rather appreciated for his very brief account of John's desert ministry (he too is a kind of artist). Thus the instructor should be sure to follow the discussion of Drummond with a discussion

of Mark. Drummond's emphases are closely parallel to Mark, not only in the details mentioned above but also in his opening line, which in many respects captures the essence of Mark's simple view of John: "The last and greatest herald of heaven's king."

Instructors may also wish to require students to identify the major differences between the poem and Mark 1:1–8, if only to accentuate certain dimensions of the biblical account. Most notably, Drummond casts the human landscape in much more negative terms (lines 4, 12–14; cf. Mark 1:5), so that John no longer leads a peripheral ministry of renewal but stands in utter solitude, with his call to repentance echoing "from the marble caves" (line 14).

Stephen Dunn, "At the Smithville Methodist Church" (*New and Selected Poems 1974–1994* [New York: Norton, 1995])

This delightful poem is about a daughter of "post-Christian" parents who goes off to Vacation Bible School and gets a dose of religion at the local Methodist church. The poem helps one to consider the power of biblical texts and the competition they offer to other, rival narratives, and vice versa. At one point Dunn compares Jesus with Lincoln and Jefferson and the stories about Jesus with those about evolution. "Soon it became clear to us: you can't teach disbelief / to a child, / only wonderful stories, and we hadn't a story nearly as good," and "Evolution is magical but devoid of heroes. / You can't say to your child / 'Evolution loves you.' The story stinks / of extinction and nothing / exciting happens for centuries." The poem ends on a note of contrast: the child singing about Jesus in the back seat of the car with the adult parents driving, "rid[ing] it out, sing[ing] along / in silence." In fact, a close study of the poem's lineation suggests that the parents may be more inclined toward the child's (and church's) perspective than the content itself suggests. The poem is thus a complex illustration of the power of narratives (and poems!) and the energy that is created by their interface.

George Eliot, "The Death of Moses" (*Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible* [ed. R. Atwan and L. Wieder; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000])

This poem is profitably used in a class on Deuteronomy, especially after completing the book, or in any lecture dealing with the powerful figure of Moses in the Pentateuch. Eliot, who is best known for her novels, proves to be an insightful reader of Deuteronomy as she describes the last moments of Moses' life. The poem is about what the title purports—in the poetic case, God attempts to send an angel to take Moses' life. First, Gabriel, "the messenger / Of mildest death," who refuses since Moses is one of a kind (cf. Deut

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34:10). Next, Michael, who declines since he taught Moses wisdom and so Moses is a part of him. Finally, the angel of death, "Zamaël, the terrible," who accepts but is twice rebuffed: first by the radiance gleaming from Moses' brow, which leads the angel to state, "An angel this, deathless to angel's stroke"; and, second, by Moses' own address, which instructs him to reap "fruitless plant and common herb" but "Not him who from the womb was sanctified / To teach the law of purity and love." The last rebuff sends Zamaël fleeing, baffled.

So God himself must come to take Moses. God commands Moses to close his eyes, put his feet together, and place his hand over his heart. Moses obeys with perfect obedience, a detail echoed in much of what is said of Moses in the Torah, but which is nevertheless in contrast to the need for his death in Moab in the first place: because of his *disobedience* (see 32:48–52). But when the Lord commands Moses' spirit to leave his body, it cannot. "I love this body with a clinging love: / The courage fails me, Lord, to part from it." This detail, too, resonates with aspects of the presentation of Moses in Deuteronomy, including his repeated insistence that he wishes to see the Land (3:23–29) or even the fact that his last words to Israel are ones of blessing (33:1–29). In the face of this resistance, the Lord comes down and kisses Moses, and this carries him to heaven. Even this detail finds a curious echo in Deut 34:5, which says that Moses died "at the Lord's command," but which could be (certainly too) literally translated "at the mouth of the Lord." After Moses' death, heaven and earth mourn his loss because "No prophet like him lives or shall arise / In Israel or the world forevermore" (see 34:10). The fact that no one knows Moses' burial place (34:6) is discussed in the poem, and the last lines are spot on when it comes to Moses' death in Deuteronomy: "He has no tomb. / He dwells not with you dead, but lives as Law." Throughout the book, that is, Moses is at pains to set the words of Deuteronomy before the people precisely because he will not accompany them into the Land and because these words are especially oriented toward that Land (12:1). Moses must die, but the Law will continue on. Eliot's poem thus nicely captures a number of smaller details and larger movements in Deuteronomy and in the presentation of Moses in the Pentateuch.

J. W. von Goethe, *Faust* (*Faust I and II* [trans. S. Atkins; Goethe: The Collected Works 2; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994])

The literary unity of the book of Job is a thorny problem. There are at least four major issues that must be addressed in a discussion of the book's composition: (1) the relation of the prose prologue (which mentions "the *satan*" and the divine council) to the prose epilogue (which does not); (2) the relation of the prose framework to the internal, poetic material; (3) the structure of the third cycle (Job 22:1–27:23; Bildad's speech is unexpectedly short;

Zophar is nowhere to be found; and Job's speech seems long and unlike his previous speeches); and (4) the "fit" of the Elihu speeches (32:1–37:24) since this figure emerges out of thin air, as it were, and is not referred to again by name thereafter.

Many possible solutions, of course, have been raised to explain one of these problems or the other, or even several at a time. For instance, perhaps the structure of the third cycle is a literary device to show that the argument has completely broken down among the interlocutors and they are completely "talking past" one another. An interesting idea derived from Goethe's *Faust* by J. J. M. Roberts draws an analogy between the complicated compositional history of that work and the book of Job. *Faust* already bears some thematic connections to Job (e.g., Mephistopheles is given permission by God to test Faust, making this testing of cosmic significance like Job's), but in this particular comparison it is the history of the literary piece's composition that bears evaluation. Goethe's *Faust* had a very long and complex composition (see Goethe, *Faust I and II*, 306–307). It began with "Urfaust," composed between 1773–75 and first published (in part) in 1782. After this came *Faust: A Fragment*, written during 1778–90 and published in 1790. *Faust I*, composed in the years 1797–1801, was not published until 1808. Finally, *Faust II* was begun 1800–1801 but was not completed until 1831, when it was sealed for posthumous publication which took place finally in 1833.

This history indicates that Faust as we now have it was written over a protracted period of time—indeed over a period of sixty-one years. Goethe did not write it all at one sitting, nor even in one extended period. There were long gaps of time when he did not work on Faust actively (at least *in writing*, as far as we know), and much of it was written out of order. Note, for example, that he completed act 5 (1830–31) of *Faust II* before he completed act 4 (1831), the last to be finished. Act 4 was begun, however, in 1827–28, before the opening scenes of act 2 were written (1828). Note also that the first two scenes of act 1 and Faust's death in the middle of act 5 were the first things written in *Faust II*, already back in 1800–1801. What is perhaps equally as striking is that *Faust II* was begun before *Faust I* was completed and some eight years before *Faust I* was published.

While none of this is perfectly analogous to the book of Job, it does present a fascinating example of a masterpiece of dramatic literature (certainly Job fits that description!) with a remarkably rich and complicated compositional history. That process can be teased apart, analyzed, divided. About 1,600 verses of "Urfaust" (1773–75/82), that is, can be found to correspond to verses in *Faust: A Fragment* (1790). The latter, in turn, lends some of its material—some rewritten, some borrowed entirely—to *Faust I* (1808). Nevertheless, Goethe's *Faust I and II* can be read and appreciated as a holistic

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piece of work. So, too, Job, despite all its problems of literary unity (or lack thereof).

Janet Ruth Heller, "Devorah" (*Modern Poems on the Bible: An Anthology* [ed. David Curzon; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994])

This four-line poem simply observes that the biblical text does not report that, after the events of Judg 4, Deborah settled down with Barak, raised a family, and ceased her duties as judge over Israel. The poem, of course, underscores the taciturnity of the biblical narrative. One may use the poem to point out the ambiguity around the phrase, "wife of Lappidoth" (4:4), which could alternatively mean that Deborah was a "fiery" individual. Whether or not Deborah was married, she is not depicted as a domestic figure. Rather, she is clearly called a prophetess and is said to have "judged" Israel (4:5), not to mention being a singer and songwriter (Judg 5). Heller, thus, has good reason to suggest that Deborah continued to exercise leadership during the forty years in which the land rested (5:31). One can ask students to comment on the purpose of the poem, as well as its own reticence. Is there a reason it is so brief? How might one extend the poem? What did Deborah—and Barak and Jael, for that matter—do after delivering the Israelites?

George Herbert, "The Holy Scriptures (1)" and "The Holy Scriptures (2)" (*The Complete English Poems* [ed. J. Tobin; London: Penguin, 2004])

These two poems from the central section, "The Church," of Herbert's extensive collection *The Temple* are beautiful paeans to Scripture that might be profitably explored at the beginning or end of a semester on the Bible, or even both. Is it easier to praise the Bible, as Herbert does, prior to knowing its unsightly details? Is it possible to praise the Bible, as Herbert does, after knowing those details? How and in what way? There might be something of Ricoeur's second naïvete at work here. Herbert ends the first poem by writing of Scripture: "heav'n lies flat in thee, / Subject to ev'ry mounter's bended knee." Is a dispositional stance of "submission" or a hermeneutics of trust necessary for interpretation of Scripture? For positive interpretation of Scripture? For interpretation of the Bible *as Scripture*? The second poem plays with the interconnections of Scripture and is interesting to contemplate with reference to intertextuality or the Reformation practice of letting Scripture interpret Scripture: "This verse marks that, and both do make a motion / Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie." The conclusion admits that there are other "books" one might live life by, but these are no less (or, rather, in Herbert's opinion, are far more) problematic than Scripture: "Stars are poor books, and oftentimes do miss: / This book of stars lights to eternal

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bliss." At this point, one could introduce Wayne C. Booth's notion of coduction and the ongoing process of evaluating new literary works on the basis of works with which we are already familiar so as to determine which books are our true friends, whose company we would like to keep long term (see his *The Company We Keep*).

George Herbert, "The Pulley" (*The Complete English Poems* [ed. J. Tobin; London: Penguin, 2004])

This poem is an intriguing conversation partner with Ecclesiastes insofar as it takes up the issue of rest. In four short stanzas the poem describes how God gave humanity every blessing and all of God's treasures save one: rest. God decides not to give rest to humanity lest humans adore the gifts and not God, or rest in nature, not the God of nature. In the last stanza, God is content to let humans have all "the rest" (of the blessings) but to have them with "restlessness" so that "If goodness lead him not, yet weariness / May toss him to my breast."

In its brief compass the poem builds an entire metaphysic that is remarkably dense and extensive. God gives all good gifts (Eccl 2:24), but they are not sufficient in themselves—a point with which Qoheleth is painfully familiar (e.g., 2:1–19)—in part because they do not provide rest, another point Qoheleth laments (2:23; 8:16). But insofar as Herbert's poem argues that rest and restlessness remain as the final (perhaps even decisive) path to God, it accounts for most of Qoheleth's problems. Of course, the poem's perspective avers, the things Qoheleth recounts do not satisfy or lead to rest (or God), for those good things are not invariably designed to do so; rest is restrained by the Divine. But Herbert's poem goes even further—evoking the possibility that Qoheleth's frustrated (restless?) search may, in the end, "toss him to my breast." This language is probably far too intimate for Qoheleth, but the book does end with a rather orthodox-sounding epilogue that speaks of the "fear of God" (12:13)—a point that is also mentioned in the body of the book (5:7; 8:12–13). At the very least, Herbert's poem provides an alternative metaphysic from that recounted in Qoheleth. In a sense these two perspectives are in contrast and competition. What is perhaps most remarkable about Herbert's is how in such brief compass it accounts for Qoheleth's and ties it firmly to an explanation rooted in God's own purposes, a point that Qoheleth would certainly challenge, at least on some levels (see, e.g., 3:11). Students might want to debate whether Qoheleth's metaphysic, in turn, can account for Herbert's. (Since the poem deals with the creation of humans and the issue of rest, it could also be used with the opening chapters of Genesis.)

LITERATURE

George Herbert, "Death" (*The Complete English Poems* [ed. J. Tobin; London: Penguin, 2004])

This twenty-four-line poem might be used in any number of teaching sessions where death is the topic. It describes the transformation of a personified Death from a once "uncouth hideous thing, / Nothing but bones," to something "Much in request, much sought for, as a good." The cause of this remarkable transformation? Christ's death, of course, which "put some blood" into Death's face! Subsequently, the poem indicates, Christians view Death now as at the final judgment, at which point all Death's bones "with beauty shall be clad." The final stanza indicates, then, that believers can die as easily as they sleep; it matters little whether their pillows are down or dust.

The poem's connection of sleep and death is instructive insofar as this metaphorical connection is also found in the Bible (see Ps 13:3; Sir 30:17; Matt 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52; John 11:13). The poem could also be used to describe the difference Christ's death makes in Christian understandings of death in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 10:45; Rom 6:1–4; Heb 2:14–18; 5:7–10). Finally, the poem could be used as a foil or dialogue partner with other, less positive understandings of death found in the Bible, especially in the lament psalms which want release from the realm of death (e.g., Pss 3; 4; 5; 7; 9; 12; 44; 58; 60; 74; 141; 142) or in the book of Ecclesiastes. Are the problems with death found in the latter book "solved" by Herbert's poem, or at least its referent? Qoheleth might say "no," noting the irony that, in fact, Death's "conversion"—if it be so—comes only via the *death* of Christ.

A. E. Housman, "The Carpenter's Son" (*The Poems of A. E. Housman* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997])

A. E. Housman offers a quasi-parody of the crucifixion in this work, in which Jesus, the unnamed speaker, reflects on the meaninglessness of his death for the benefit of witnessing friends. His reflections begin at the moment "the hangman stops his cart" (line 1), but by the poem's midway point (line 13) it is clear he is already hanging. Generally speaking, the first half of the poem emphasizes Jesus' regret ("Oh, at home had I but stayed," line 5), while the second half emphasizes Jesus' warnings to his friends ("See my neck and save your own," line 23). Interestingly, the poem's only refrain ends with an encouragement to avoid Jesus' fate: "Live, lads, and I will die" (lines 4, 28).

The parodic nature of the poem makes it an easy foil to the New Testament's perspective on the crucifixion, regardless of whether the instructor chooses to focus on the Gospels, a particular Gospel, a Pauline letter, or the larger topic of New Testament Christology. In the case of the Gospels, for instance, instructors can use the poem to elucidate, by way of contrast, the

interpretations of the passion provided by one or more of the Evangelists: How does the poem differ from the Gospel(s) on the question of why Jesus died? On the question of how and why Jesus anticipated, accepted, or resisted his death? On the question of how we understand the meaning of Jesus' death? On the question of how Jesus' death should shape our own actions? In the case of each disagreement, what is at stake for a particular Evangelist in depicting Jesus precisely this way? Conversely, what seems to be at stake for Housman in his own depiction?

This kind of discussion will prove particularly helpful if students are encouraged to cite specific biblical passages and frame their answers in theological-rhetorical, and not simply historical, terms (avoiding answers like, "Mark depicts it this way because that's the way it really happened"). If the format of the course allows for the inclusion of all four Gospels, the discussion can also bring to light interesting differences between them; for example, the lack of a Gethsemane prayer in John's account. Indeed, Jesus' fleeting resistance to suffering and death in Gethsemane (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42) constitutes an interesting parallel to the poem.

Since the poem so forcefully asserts the meaninglessness of Jesus' death, and the futility of his life because of that death, students may benefit from an exploration of biblical passages that acknowledge the possibility (though not the validity) of that perspective (e.g., Mark 8:31–33; 1 Cor 1:18–25). In each case, why does it happen that some perceive the crucifixion as meaningless but others as meaningful? Given the insistence of Housman's Jesus that friends *avoid* his fate, instructors may also include certain questions raised by liberation theologies: How can an overemphasis on Jesus' death potentially lead to un-Christian expressions of faith? What biblical passages can contribute to this? Are such passages genuinely at fault or simply misinterpreted? Finally, there is the question of canonical versus noncanonical versions of the Jesus story: What cultural and religious factors stand behind our infatuation with alternative versions—whether contemporary (literature and movies) or ancient (apocryphal Gospels)? What role should those alternatives versions play in our study of the Bible, whether for academic or religious purposes?

Langston Hughes, "Harlem" (*Montage of a Dream Deferred* [New York: Holt, 1951])

This is a powerful and brief poem that could be profitably used in a class on the prophets. It begins with a simple, prose question: "What happens to a dream deferred?" It then explores possible answers: A deferred dream can dry up, fester, stink, crust over like a piece of candy, or sag under a heavy load. These are quite different options and are worth exploring in the classroom in

greater detail with reference to specific dreams. Then comes the final climactic line set off by itself and in italics for emphasis: "*Or does it explode?*"

The fact that the poem is entitled "Harlem," an important location in African American history in the United States and a place where racial tensions often ran hot, is noteworthy. In fact, in 1964, an explosion of sorts took place in the riot following the fatal shooting of a fifteen-year-old African American boy, James Powell, by a white police officer.

Hughes's poem does not urge rioting, but it does observe that explosive results can occur when dreams are deferred. The poem might be instructively compared to the explosive rhetoric of the prophets who often speak in violent images and metaphors, apparently in part to arrest their audience and command their attention, and perhaps because the prophetic dream—Yahweh's dream—has been deferred too long. In Hughes's case, as often in the prophets' and Yahweh's, the dream that must not be deferred is one of justice and equity (see, e.g., Isa 1:10–17; 5:1–7; Amos 2:6–8; 5:21–24; Micah 6:1–8).

Ben Jonson, "A Hymn on the Nativity of My Savior" (*Ben Jonson* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985]; www.poets.org/viewmedia. php/prmMID/19312)

In this twenty-four-line "hymn" Ben Jonson uses the nativity story as a way of reflecting upon Christ's theological significance for humankind. As a summary of numerous christological themes it is perhaps best used to help students understand the relationships between biblical interpretation, canonization, and the formulation of doctrine. This use of the poem will be most effective at the end of a New Testament survey course, after students have learned the basic contents of the canonical documents, and after they have learned to see each document as a distinctive theological voice arising from its own historical context (i.e., after they have learned to honor the rhetorical integrity of each document and to accept the tensions between them).

If these elements are in place, students can analyze the poem as a creative articulation of the doctrine of the Incarnation through the blending of biblical passages. A helpful way to begin such an analysis would be by identifying Jonson's possible biblical allusions, either through a small group exercise or a homework assignment that uses an English concordance. General references to Christ's birth (line 1), infancy (line 22), and the searching shepherds (lines 3–6) obviously draw on the Matthean and Lukan nativity accounts. Possible Johannine references include connections between life and light (line 2), the Word rejected by the very world it created (lines 10–11), that same Word taking on human nature (lines 17–18), and the identification of wills between Father and Son (13–16). However, some Johannine references could just as easily draw from passages like Phil 2:6–11 and Col 1:15–20. Finally, the

poem's references to salvation (lines 8–9) and atonement (lines 19–23) could draw on any number of passages, so that part of the fun for students will be sharing and collecting insights.

During this first phase of the exercise instructors should, when necessary, push students to articulate their reasons for seeing specific scriptural allusions. They may also wish to poll the class on how convincing those arguments are. (This could easily lead to a lesson on identifying implicit Hebrew Bible allusions in the New Testament, since the same type of argumentation is at work.) When a sufficient number of allusions have been discussed, the instructor should pose questions that force the students to ponder the role of canon and exegesis in theological reflection: How many different dimensions of Christ's significance does Jonson cover? To how many documents does he (potentially) allude, and do you see any tension between those documents when they are read on their own terms (e.g., the question of Christ's divinity or the reason for his earthly existence)? If so, does the poem's combining of various passages compromise the rhetorical integrity of those documents? How does the canonization of multiple documents benefit the task of theological reflection?

Although instructors should make the connection in a way best suited for their classes, students should arrive at a better appreciation for the sticky issue of appropriating the Bible for the formulation of doctrine (an appropriation that "critical" approaches are not entirely equipped to perform but which religious communities nonetheless must). Approaching this issue through a poem, as opposed to a traditional creed or doctrine, may prove more comfortable for some students (at least initially). It will also exemplify how the "uncritical" or "precritical" appropriation of biblical passages pervades Christian culture, leaving the class to debate the consequences (both positive and negative) of that reality.

Instructors might also use this poem in the ways suggested for John Donne, "The Nativity" (see above).

Anna Kamienska, "The Weariness of the Prophet Elijah" (*Modern Poems on the Bible: An Anthology* [ed. David Curzon; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994])

This short poem is a rendition of the scene in 1 Kgs 19:1–8 in which Elijah, fatigued and harried by Jezebel, asks to die (19:4). As students compare the two texts, they can debate whether the Elijah of the poem, while certainly depressed, goes so far as to wish for death. Or is he asking for "release" from his dismal circumstances and for a good night's rest? Either way, the poem highlights the utter despair of the biblical account, which can open up discussion about the difficult nature of the lives of prophets (cf. Moses, Samuel, Jonah). In particular, this poem and biblical text are natu-

ral conversation partners with the laments of Jeremiah (Jer 11–20). Indeed, characteristic of Jeremiah, Kamienska's Elijah expresses both anguish and hope—hope that the deity understands his weariness, because, after all, prophets only hear whispers of the divine (a reference to the "sound of silence," 1 Kgs 19:12 NRSV) and they are awakened with a "jolt of new hurt" and called to cross new deserts. Furthermore, the poem invites closer consideration of the overall portrayal of Elijah. Is one to feel sympathetic or skeptical? While the former seems an obvious response, the latter may be appropriate as well. For instance, a careful reading of the remainder of 1 Kgs 19 suggests that God and the prophet are on different pages: God asks Elijah what he is doing at Horeb (19:9); God does not address Elijah's fear of death (19:10); God disagrees with Elijah's assertion that he alone is faithful (cf. 19:10, 18); and Elijah appears unaffected by God's appearance (19:11–13), giving the same answer as the one before the theophany (cf. 19:10, 14). The poem, in short, helps students see that prophetic biographies can be quite pathetic and ambiguous.

John Keble, "Hezekiah's Display" (*Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible* [ed. R. Atwan and L. Wieder; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000]])

This poem takes its cue from 2 Kgs 20:12–19, the account of the Babylonian envoys received by Hezekiah (cf. Isa 29:1–8). The biblical text is puzzling. It is out of place chronologically; the reason for the Babylonian visit is unclear, as is the reason for Hezekiah's revealing his wealth; the motivation for Isaiah's reaction is nebulous, and so is the literary/rhetorical purpose of the passage. The poem, indirectly, addresses some of these uncertainties, thereby opening exploration of the issues. For example, the poem exhorts Hezekiah not to show his wealth because God will manifest it in due time. The king should be humble and grateful for the riches that God has given. Is this the "message" of the biblical text? Is Isaiah's judgment oracle (2 Kgs 20:18–19) a response to the king's pretentiousness? The poem here evokes a connection with postexilic texts such as Haggai and Third Isaiah in which God does display Israel's wealth—in fact, the wealth of the nations is brought to Israel. Keble is also suspicious of the Babylonian motives for the visit, and he depicts them in an unflattering light. Like Isaiah, then, the poet is leery of foreign alliances of any kind. Keble's piece is also reminiscent of a number of anti-Babylonian biblical texts (e.g., Ps 137; Jer 51). The poem makes no mention of Hezekiah's response to Isaiah's prediction of defeat (2 Kgs 20:19). One might ask students how they would incorporate this enigmatic line into the poem? Lastly, the final lines of the poem refer to (without naming) the four Judean kings who follow Hezekiah before the fifth sees the temple looted. The poem can

prompt study of basic historical content, namely, students can identify the kings: Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin. Apparently, then, Keble understands Isaiah's prophecy as foreshadowing the events of 598 B.C.E. rather than 586 B.C.E. Teachers can use this opportunity to discuss the exilic or postexilic editing of the Deuteronomistic History—that is, how one might understand Isaiah's "prophecy."

Jane Kenyon, "Otherwise" (*Otherwise: New and Selected Poems* [St. Paul: Gray Wolf, 1996])

As a way of reiterating or introducing what William P. Brown, in his commentary, has called Qoheleth's emphasis on the "glory of the ordinary," one could easily use this beautiful poem by Jane Kenyon. In twenty-six lines, Kenyon describes the beauty of a day in her life, a beauty that is poignantly underscored by the repeated refrain "It might have been otherwise." She recounts waking up in the morning, being in good health, eating a delicious breakfast, taking a walk with the dog, work she loves, lying with her mate, having dinner together, sleeping in a decorated bedroom. All of these things "might have been otherwise." As she lies in bed, she plans on another day just like the day she has just had but then, in the climactic final lines, she writes: "But one day, I know, / it will be otherwise."

The poem nicely captures the "glory of the ordinary" and also how the ordinary is made that much more glorious by the inevitability of chance, decay, death. There are, of course, any number of pieces in various media that make the same point (e.g., U2's song "Beautiful Day" or Sheryl Crow's "Soak Up the Sun"). But Kenyon's poem is especially powerful given its concision and perfect rhythm that lead inevitably to the final lines that reframe her "beautiful day" in an inimitably poignant way. Moreover, this poem was almost prophetic for Kenyon: "Otherwise" was first published in a collection (*Constance: Poems*), which appeared on July 1, 1993. In January 1994, she was diagnosed with a virulent form of leukemia and died only fifteen months later at forty-eight years of age. See the "Afterword" in *Otherwise* by her husband, the poet Donald Hall, along with her final poem, "The Sick Wife," which she dictated a month before her death. Setting "Otherwise" next to "The Sick Wife" further underscores the poignant truth of "But one day, I know, / it will be otherwise."

D. H. Lawrence, "The Hands of God" (*Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* [ed. V. de Sola Pinto and W. Roberts. London: Heinemann, 1972])

In the opening line of this short poem, Lawrence quotes Heb 10:31 (RSV) verbatim, only to follow it with a second line suggestive of the sometimes ambivalent reactions to the prospect of becoming a part of God's people: "It is

a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God / But it is a much more fearful thing to fall out of them." The poem concludes with a cry for salvation from "ungodly knowledge": "Let me never know myself apart from the living God!" A primary aim of the author of Hebrews is to assist his audience in experiencing "confidence" by showing them how Jesus has neutralized the most persistent causes of fear, namely, judgment by God and persecution by humans (e.g., 2:15–18; 3:6; 4:16; 10:35; 13:6). But in order to help them see themselves as God sees them, he draws on a register of language in some respects expressive, even evocative, of fear (5:7; 12:18–29).

This poem provides a point of departure for discussing the motif of fear as it appears in a wide range of biblical texts. Analyses of fear language present in microcosm many of the broader debates about "God-talk" and its implications for contemporary Jews and Christians. (Among the responses to this biblical imagery is the simple omission from lectionary readings of such "hard" texts as the so-called imprecatory psalms [e.g., 83, 109, 137, 139] in which the author calls down the wrath of a decidedly fearsome God on his enemies.) Especially in the Old Testament, "fear of God" is mentioned so frequently that it functions as a virtual synonym for "faith" or "true religion" or "the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1:7; 9:10). Proselytes to Judaism are often termed "God-fearers." Paul tells the Philippians to work out their salvation "with fear and trembling" (2:12–13). And Jesus himself, in Heb 5:7, is said to have his prayers heard "on account of his godly fear." Is it possible to tell when biblical authors use "fear" to denote something like "reverence" and when they mean something like "terror"? Are these different aspects mutually exclusive? (A concordance search will quickly turn up dozens of texts for consideration.) An examination of how various authors negotiate this question also highlights the ways in which early Judaism and Christianity resembled or differed from Stoics, Epicureans, and other intellectual systems that emphasized the importance of emotional tranquility for a life of virtue.

D. H. Lawrence, "The Hills" (*Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* [ed. V. de Sola Pinto and W. Roberts. London: Heinemann, 1972])

This six-line poem is a dark parody of Ps 121. When Lawrence lifts up his eyes to the hills, "there they are." But that is it. Indeed, he states that no strength comes to him from them; only from darkness and blindness does he receive strength. The poem is an alternative perspective to that offered in Ps 121, which celebrates the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, who keeps Israel and "you," who does not sleep or slumber, but is restless in protecting the psalmist (and the reader) from all evil, now and forever (121:2, 3–5, 7–8). Psalm 121 is an expansive psalm, to be sure, promising too much—more than can be reasonably expected. Is it disappointment in the face of Ps 121's

unfulfilled promises that leads Lawrence to write his poem (and others to read it now)? Or is there something *beyond* mere disappointment at work in Lawrence's poem? Does it, like so many of the biblical laments, attest to a connection between darkness and the Lord of Life (cf. César Vallejo, "I Am Going to Speak of Hope" below)? If so, then it becomes an example, like the lament psalms and other similar texts (e.g., portions of the book of Lamentations), that poetry *about* suffering and *from* suffering is profoundly humane insofar as it gives transformative voice to the sufferer, allowing the victim to speak. Moreover, in many of these types of grief-poems, the listener is compelled to feel addressed by and even to identify with those in pain. Poems like Lawrence's, that is, may prove to be salves to the injured and an impetus to compassion for the reader. All this, in six lines!

Similar exercises might be carried out with other "revisions" of the Psalter. (Dozens of examples may be found in Wieder, *The Poets' Book of Psalms: The Complete Psalter as Rendered by Twenty-Five Poets from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*.)

C. S. Lewis, "Stephen to Lazarus" (*Poems* [New York: Harvest Books, 1964])

In this short poem the martyr Stephen (Acts 7:54–8:1) expresses amazement over the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–44). Surprisingly, however, Stephen's amazement stems from his pity over the plight of his biblical counterpart who, being "already free among the dead" (line 3), surrenders such freedom to return to the "fetters" (line 4) of life. The poem will help instructors elucidate some of the main features of both episodes, both of which are crucial moments in their respective narratives.

Students need not have a thorough knowledge of the entire Stephen episode (Acts 6:1–8:1), or even his death (Acts 7:54–8:1), to understand his perspective in the poem (line 1 clarifies that he is the "first martyr"). They will, however, need to know that Lazarus (mentioned only in the title) is raised by Jesus from the dead in the Fourth Gospel. With that knowledge in place, instructors can begin with basic interpretive questions: What is Stephen's perspective on the raising of Lazarus? How does he view the relationship between death and life? What kinds of metaphors does he use to make his point? After exploring the poem, instructors may then turn to the text of Acts, whether the entire Stephen episode (which will require more preparation on the part of students) or the death scene specifically (which takes little time to read in class): What is it about the Stephen episode that justifies his perspective in the poem? What details in the biblical text reinforce Stephen's perspective in the poem, particularly the notion that death is liberation from life? What episodes in the larger narrative of Acts support this idea? What is the danger

of understanding death only in these terms? What episodes or themes in Acts counterbalance this perspective?

The poem will prove equally helpful in elucidating the Johannine views of life and death as depicted in the Lazarus episode and related passages in the Fourth Gospel. A bit more preparation is required in this case, however, insofar as the Johannine views of life and death cannot be captured in a single episode. Thus instructors may wish to begin with a discussion of John's distinctively "realized" eschatology and the implications this has for issues of life and death: Because Jesus is the very incarnation of God (John 1:1–18) through whom believers come to abide in God's love (John 14:1–15:11), death and life are necessarily cast in terms of such abiding—or not abiding. True life is thus *eternal* life (e.g., John 17:3), abiding in the Father through the Son, quite apart from one's biological "life." The raising of Lazarus, though technically less a resurrection than resuscitation, nonetheless points towards Jesus' significance in bringing such eternal life (John 11:21–26). Thus Lewis's poem here serves as a foil: How would the *Johannine* Jesus respond to Stephen? To what extent would he acknowledge Stephen's antipathy toward the struggles of life (see John 15:18–25; 17:11–19)? On what grounds would he oppose Stephen's understanding of life and death? To get more mileage out of the poem instructors may ask students to assess it both before and after discussing the Fourth Gospel, thus allowing students to experience the difference John's perspective makes to such issues.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Three Kings" (*The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* [Laurel, N.Y.: Lightyear, 1993]; www.hwlongfellow.org/poems_poem.php?pid=243)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow retells, in this fourteen-stanza work, the story of the three kings (Greek: *magi*) traveling from the east in search of the king of the Jews. Because it is a rather elaborate retelling (more elaborate than, for example, T. S. Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi"), the poem can be used to familiarize students with the biblical account, found only in Matt 2:1–12.

The instructor may begin by asking students to list points of convergence and divergence between the poem and the Matthean account: Where does the poem correspond most precisely with Matthew? Where does the poem elaborate upon Matthew? Which of these elaborations do you find to be faithful interpretations of Matthew's story? Which do you find unfaithful? Where can you find Longfellow drawing upon the Lukan nativity story? What do you think motivated Longfellow to elaborate in each (or some) of these cases?

To make this exercise more efficient instructors could ask students to read the Matthean account closely before class, in which case analyzing the

poem will reinforce for them what is contained, and not contained, there. It may prove more interesting, however, to introduce the poem and questions first, with Bibles closed, and with the instructor writing students' answers on the blackboard. This approach will likely spark more debate about, or at least more immediate interest in, what exactly Matthew says. Students may then read Matthew in order to verify, or disprove, specific claims made during the class discussion. If teachers wish to guide students more directly in documenting differences, they may pose specific questions about, for example, how the poem describes the number of kings/wise men (three, not specified in the biblical text), or how it foreshadows the death of the baby Jesus.

Because the poem includes so many nonbiblical details (e.g., conversations while traveling, the response of Mary to the gifts), instructors may also wish to engage students on the nature of "gap filling" in the reading of Gospel narrative: To what extent is it inevitable? How, and under what circumstances, is it beneficial and/or detrimental to exegesis? In what other artistic genres does one encounter it? In what other circumstances is it common?

Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Deus Iræ" (*The Miscellaneous Writings, Speeches and Poems of Lord Macaulay* [London: Longmans, Green, 1880]; rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/1357.html)

This poem is one of several modern translations of a famous medieval Latin requiem sequence, the title of which is taken from its opening line, *Deus Iræ* ("God of wrath"). With a plethora of scriptural allusions the speaker anticipates the coming day of judgment, beginning with an ominous tone of divine wrath but concluding with a plea for divine mercy, forgiveness, and salvation (lines 59–62).

Instructors may place various biblical documents in conversation with the poem: for example, prophetic promises of "the day of the Lord" (Joel 2; Amos 5; Zeph 1); psalms celebrating God's judgment (Pss 9; 82); the apocalyptic visions of Dan 7–12; the parables of judgment in Matt 25; the expectation of Christ's return in Paul (1 Thess 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess 2); or any number of similar passages in the book of Revelation. Depending on the instructor's objectives in using the poem, the following questions will prove helpful: What makes the anticipated day both "great" and "awful" (line 1)? How does the poem depict God? How does the poem describe the relationship between divine judgment and creation (lines 17–20, 60)? The relationship between divine judgment and death (lines 9–18, 55–58)? How does it depict Jesus in relation to God's coming judgment (lines 35–44)? What difference does it make that the speaker professes faith in God, as opposed to being an enemy of God (and how is that difference at work in designated biblical texts)?

As the poem is replete with references to both the Hebrew Bible and the

New Testament, it would work quite well on the final day of a Bible intro-
duction course, especially if the course ends with a lesson on the book of
Revelation. Instructors could challenge small groups to identify as many
scriptural allusions as possible, whether in class or (for better results) using
various concordances outside of class. As the theme of divine judgment can
be seen in virtually every major section of the biblical canon, this exercise
gives students the opportunity to engage the whole spectrum of canoni-
cal writings in a single exercise. Having experienced the dominance of this
theme, students may also begin to understand how it is almost inevitable for
the book of Revelation to be equally replete with scriptural references.

Edgar Lee Masters, "Business Reverses" (*Chapters into Verse: Poetry in
English Inspired by the Bible* [ed. R. Atwan and L. Wieder; New York:
Oxford University Press, 1993])

This humorous poem by Edgar Lee Masters tells the story of two busi-
nessmen who set out with bread and fish to "follow the crowds who follow /
The prophet of Galilee" (lines 7–8). They aim to profit from the hunger of the
crowds, but Jesus (who remains unnamed) squanders their economic hopes
through the miraculous feeding of five thousand people (Matt 14:13–21; Mark
6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15). The story ends, ironically, in financial
loss for the two fortune seekers: "what was there to do / But dump our stock
on the sand?" (lines 53–54).

Masters's approach to the feeding of the five thousand (the only miracle
common to all four Evangelists) offers an amusing and readable entryway into
the social world of the Gospels and the liberating dimensions of Jesus' mira-
cles. Instructors can use the poem as a conversation starter, leading students
to a better understanding of the very serious social implications of Jesus' mir-
acles. Initial questions should focus on the poem itself: What are the financial
consequences of Jesus' miracle for the fortune-seeking businessmen? What
are the financial consequences for the crowds who follow Jesus? Students who
protest that the poem fabricates the two businessmen might nonetheless learn
from the conversation. Thus the instructor might ask: Despite such fabrica-
tions, does Masters nonetheless capture the economic dimensions of Jesus'
miracle (in all four Gospels someone is spared from *buying* provisions)? In a
world of limited supply, how do the "haves" tend to benefit from the desperate
need of the "have-nots," and is the scenario of the poem nonetheless realistic
in this sense? What does the leftover surplus of food (lines 49–52, also noted
by all four Evangelists) mean for a world accustomed to limited supply? In
what ways might we overlook the economic dimensions of this or any miracle
in favor of an overly spiritualized interpretation or interest in the historicity
of the miracle itself?

This kind of conversation can easily lead into an exploration of other social dimensions of the Gospel narratives, if not an outright introduction to social-science criticism. Guiding questions might focus on the element of oppression: Where in the Gospels do we find people like Masters's two fortune seekers, that is, characters motivated by the prospect of personal gain at the expense of others; here instructors should point out how even the disciples fit this description (Mark 10:35–45)? How does the ministry of Jesus effect the "reversal" of such business (following the title of the poem)? Conversely, one might focus on the communal or material dimensions of Jesus ministry: How does a particular healing address the issue of social exclusion? How many kinds of physical needs does the ministry of Jesus address? Along these lines, it is interesting to note that the poem, although focused on the miraculous provision of food, makes a passing reference to the *loss* of swine (Matt 8:32; Mark 5:13; Luke 8:33). Regardless of the particular line of questioning, the poem can help students see Jesus' ministry as a material phenomenon just as much as a spiritual one, and a social phenomenon just as much as a personal one.

Pablo Neruda, "Ode to a Beautiful Nude" (*The Wadsworth Anthology of Poetry* [ed. J. Parini; Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006])

Feminists and others have worried about the problem of the male gaze that objectifies women and sees them as little more than sexual objects. So it is that feminist biblical scholars have worried about the male gaze in the Song of Songs, which contains a number of *wasf*s—a descriptive poem-form that celebrates the body of the beloved. The Song also contains two *wasf*s where the woman celebrates the man's body, but, regardless of the referent, Neruda's poem might be used as a kind of modern-day *wasf*. Neruda's ode is especially interesting in how it begins: "With a chaste heart, / with pure eyes, / I celebrate your beauty." He then proceeds to describe the "beautiful nude" in poetic detail, beginning with her feet and moving to the ears and then to other parts of the woman's body—breasts, eyelids, shoulders, spinal line, and other regions—each described with allusive and erotic metaphors like those found in the Song of Songs. Here too, then (cf. Sharon Olds's poem "Topography" below), one sees the art of poetic reticence. Neruda tells just enough, not too much. The beautiful nude dressed in poetic metaphor turns out to be as seductive—better: more seductive—than one shown starkly in a room with all the lights on. Moreover, by means of his poetic skill and his capacity to conceal even while revealing, Neruda shows that he does, in fact, have a chaste heart and pure eyes. His "gaze," that is, is a true celebration of the woman's beauty, not one that objectifies the woman solely for sexual gratification. Students might benefit from contrasting poetic technique like that found in the Song of Songs and Neruda (and others) with less allusive and

reticent techniques of pornographic art or writing (cf. George Steiner, "Night Words," 68–77).

Sharon Olds, "The Signs" (*The Gold Cell* [New York: Knopf, 2004])

The poet of the Song of Songs says that love is stronger than death (8:6). What does that mean? This short poem by Sharon Olds suggests a connection between death and love but does so by means of a different metaphor than that used in the Song. Instead of erotic love between a man and a woman, Olds's poem concerns parental (specifically, maternal) love for children. This shift in metaphorical referent may help students think of the love in the Song as much more (and less than) sexual activity proper, which in common idiom has been ciphered as "love" (e.g., "making love," "we are lovers").

In the poem, the children are getting ready to depart for camp, and they are loaded on the bus. The bus is described in terms of death: Its windows are tinted black so that the children are only seen "as / figures … through a dark haze, like the dead." But even with this haze and tint, Olds can pick out her son with the barest of clues: a tuft of hair, a curve of the chin. The same is true for all the other mothers. Finally, the bus departs, still in its deathly mode: "in a Stygian stink of exhaust." But now Olds can pick out this bus as easily as she could pick out her son within it. And even when it turns the corner and goes into the world, Olds would "know this world anywhere / as my son's world, I would love it any time in his name." The fierce maternal love Olds feels for her son makes his departure a death. And yet, her maternal love is stronger than death. By confronting a different but related love metaphor, students come to see with more specificity the distinctive aspects of the metaphor used in the Song of Songs.

Sharon Olds, "The Twin" (*The Gold Cell* [New York: Knopf, 2004])

The poem is written for Lazarus Colloredo, a famous seventeenth-century conjoined twin. Details of Lazarus and his conjoined twin brother named Joannes Baptista ("John the Baptist") are available on the Internet along with an etching done by a contemporary artist. The etching that is available on the Wikipedia website must have been what Olds was writing about, given the close correspondence between the poem and the image (this is an instance of *ekphrasis*: art commenting on art). There are differences of opinion and conflicting reports regarding whether or not Joannes was alive. Olds's poem, for its part, implies not. Olds consistently refers to the malformed twin that extended from Lazarus's chest as an "it." The poem states that the twins were given only one name, but that Lazarus, after he was grown, had the conjoined twin baptized and named. She notes that Lazarus looks at the observer with eyes "full of weariness … / across his brother, the one he named / John the

Baptist, who goes before him / into the wilderness." The last line is quite evocative, especially if Joannes was "dead." The poem might be used in a class on John the Baptist in the New Testament, especially the way his life and death prefigures that of Jesus. It could also be used to generate discussion and insight into Jesus' sense of things upon hearing of John's death (Matt 14:12–13). Does he too, like Lazarus, look at us, across John the Baptist, with a direct gaze, "without expectation, [with] heavy-lidded eyes / full of weariness"?

Sharon Olds, "Topography" (*The Gold Cell* [New York: Knopf, 2004])

This poem is a useful example to discuss the allusive (and elusive) nature of poetic metaphor and the poetic device of understatement. In this case, the poem's content concerns love and sexuality and thus is an appropriate text to use with the Song of Songs which contains similar themes. "Topography" describes the two lovers' bodies as if they were folded into each other like two sides of a map of the continental United States. The parts of the body are evoked but not precisely delineated ("my / New Orleans deep in your Texas, your Idaho / bright on my Great Lakes, my Kansas / burning against your Kansas your Kansas / burning against my Kansas"). There is sexuality here, of course, but of an understated or reticent sort. And there is poetic (and erotic) climax with "all our cities twin cities, / all our states united, one" but in a way that is as concealing as it is revealing. One need only contrast a recent movie with full frontal nudity or various top-40 songs that are increasingly graphic about the sex act. Once students are alert to the sexuality and eroticism at work in the Song of Songs, it is easy to find it everywhere and to miss the fact that, while it is there, it is there in an allusive way. Olds's poem illustrates this phenomenon and begins to suggest reasons for why this is so in the last line where she describes the lovers' union as one "with liberty and justice for all." One wonders, that is, if Olds's reticence is not from prudery (indeed, many of the poems on sex in *The Gold Cell* are far from allusive!) but from a concern with human decency or privacy. The reader is allowed to participate with the imagination, that is, but not with the eyes, as it were. Perhaps the Song of Songs is similarly oriented toward decency and justice.

Linda Pastan, "Why Are Your Poems So Dark?" (*Poetry Magazine* [August 2003]: 249)

This short but powerful poem answers the question posed in the title by alluding to the poet's sadness. When that question is asked directly, however, the poet refers the inquirer to "Ask the moon. / Ask what it has witnessed." Earlier the poet had pointed out that the moon is dark, too, most of the time. The poem is a powerful piece to use with regard to the importance, even necessity, of sadness and grief as part of the human predicament and condi-

tion. The darkness of the moon is just the way it is, and it is that way most of the time. That is as it should be. But in the twist that connects the darkness of the poet's poetry to her sadness, the poet suggests that this darkness is also rooted in what has been seen and witnessed.

One could easily use the poem in conjunction with particularly dark, painful, or terrifying portions of Scripture—for instance, Judges, Ecclesiastes, and Revelation—as a kind of response to or anticipation of students asking: "Why is this story so dark?" Or one might even use it with reference to larger canonical units, testaments, or the entirety of Scripture. "Why is the Scripture so dark so often?" Ask the moon, ask what it has witnessed, which is to say, the Scripture has *seen* quite a bit in its day throughout its long history of composition and reception. It is a book of sorrows, deeply acquainted with grief. It does not tell "dark" stories or poems to depress its readers but because it must do so, because it must witness, because it must tell the truth about what it has seen and what it knows to be true.

Marge Piercy, "The Book of Ruth and Naomi" (*Modern Poems on the Bible: An Anthology* [ed. David Curzon; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994])

This poem nicely illustrates the various foci of the book of Ruth. The first stanza correctly notes that in many ways it is a peculiar and arcane story dealing with land inheritance, gleaning, threshing floor décor, marriage customs, and exchanging sandals. Historical, social-scientific, and literary critics thus have plenty to study, on the one hand. But, on the other hand, as the second stanza articulates, female readers enjoy it as a delightful story of the solidarity and love between two women. The poem focuses on this aspect of the story, suggesting that all women desire the close companionship of one other woman.

Although the poem highlights the friendship of Ruth and Naomi, commentators have detected a contrasting strand in the biblical version, which students might be asked to find. For example, Naomi is not particularly enthused that Ruth has decided to return with her. In fact, after Ruth's well known "where you go, I will go" speech (1:16–17), the text reports: "When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her" (1:18). Likewise, when the two reach Bethlehem, Naomi instructs the people to call her Mara ("Bitter") saying that the Lord has dealt harshly with her and brought her back empty (1:20–21). Does Ruth's companionship mean nothing? One might ask, then, if the poem's depiction of the Ruth-Naomi relationship is faithful to the biblical story or if it is embellished. If it is a love story, which is more salient in the biblical account: the love between Ruth and Naomi or between Ruth and Boaz? In addressing this question, one should

notice, as the poem does, that Ruth, rather strikingly, brings the baby produced with Boaz as a "gift" to Naomi (4:14–17). What is the significance of the child for Naomi? For Ruth? For Israelite history (4:18–22)? Finally, one might consider the title of the poem: Is it more fitting than simply "Ruth"? Or perhaps simply "Naomi" would be more appropriate—after all, the book begins and ends with her (cf. 4:17)?

Francis Quarles, "David's Epitaph on Jonathan" (*Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible* [ed. R. Atwan and L. Wieder; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000])

Quarles's work provides an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between David and Jonathan. Students can compare the poem with the text on which it is based (2 Sam 1). The biblical version is a lament over Saul and Jonathan, though the poem does not mention the former. Based on the events in 1 Samuel, why would David mourn Saul's death? Does it spring from genuine sorrow, or is it part of David's political machinations? Why does Quarles omit any reference to Saul? The poem, in general, helps students consider the complex relationships among Saul (king; rejected and tormented by God; father), David (outlaw; king's son-in-law; king-to-be), and Jonathan (prince; son; friend). In 2 Sam 1:26, furthermore, David refers to Jonathan as a brother, but also proclaims that Jonathan's love was better than the love of women. Does this imply a homosexual relationship (cf. 1 Sam 18:1; 20:17)? Class discussions can be interesting. Typically some students simply assume that David and Jonathan are lovers—that is, they think the text makes it obvious—while others assert that the idea never occurred to them. Does the poem suggest a sexual relationship? Any double entendres or innuendos? Here students may note, among others, the flower/garden imagery and the idea that Jonathan was the joy of David's heart. Finally, the poem can lead to a comparative discussion of other fraternal affiliations (e.g., Jacob and Esau) or close friendships (e.g., Ruth and Naomi) as portrayed in the Bible.

Rainer Maria Rilke, "Abishag" (*Modern Poems on the Bible: An Anthology* [ed. David Curzon; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994])

Many poems give a voice to silent biblical characters. Such is the case with the first stanza of this piece, which provides a glimpse into the mind of Abishag: She is uncomfortable and frightened, glancing nervously about the room as she keeps David warm. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the poem focuses exclusively on this aspect of her duties, omitting any reference to her serving the king (cf. 1 Kgs 1:2). The biblical world, indeed, is foreign to contemporary audiences in this scene—a fact which the poem underscores by noting that her "childlike arms" were "bound by servants" around the aging king. Did the

biblical Abishag also undertake her duties reluctantly? Is this story reminiscent of Esther—a beautiful virgin brought to a needy king? Might Abishag, like Esther, stand to gain from this experience?

The poem also imagines the thoughts of David. What, based on previous stories, may be referenced by David's reflections on "deeds accomplished" and "unfelt pleasures." Similarly, the poem refers to David's "tangled life," which can prompt a review of the complicated nature of the king's reign (2 Sam 9–20). In the final stanza, David acknowledges, with regret, his sexual impotency. Is this symbolic of his decline (compare his earlier actions with Bathsheba)? Other questions to consider include: How would Bathsheba have felt about Abishag's presence? Based on 1 Kgs 2:19–22, how do other characters understand Abishag's status? Students might extend the poem and imagine what ultimately happened to Abishag—an issue on which the biblical text is silent.

John Savoie, "Trimmed and Burning" (*Poetry Magazine* [July 2003]: 207)

This poem is a wonderful example of the power of the final line to transform expectations and meanings. The poet begins by confessing that he has sheltered a flame and goes on to say that, while it would have been better to let it die or snuff it himself, he has nurtured it because it is holy. The poem proceeds to describe that flame with imagery drawn from pilgrims and devotees in a cathedral full of candles, which underscores the holiness of the flame and offers hints into its nature. The poem ends with the following two lines: "Yes, that is the kind of flame I have / sheltered, only that mine burns black." With the final line, the reader is disoriented. What seems to have been a "good" thing, even if it is a flame of lost or unrequited love, turns out to be something that burns black. What does that mean? Why "black"? The final line causes the reader to go back and reread the entire poem, wondering about this flame that is like the candles burning in the cathedral "only" (= "but for the fact that"?) the poet's flame burns black.

Many poems have final lines that produce this sort of rereading process. They can be put to good use in thinking about any number of biblical texts that end in unusual ways which lead to a reconsideration of prior materials. For example, Ps 137, with its violent ending about children being dashed against the rock; the rather enigmatic ending of Lamentations (esp. 5:22); the end of Solomon's reign as recounted in 1 Kgs 11, which raises serious questions about preceding chapters and his legendary "wisdom"; the shift in Commandment 10 to internal affect states ("coveting"), which leads to wondering about the role of Commandments 1–9 in similar, interior ways; the complete deterioration that occurs at the end of the book of Judges (17–21); the ending of Amos, which seems to move from complete darkness to simplistic sweetness;

the epilogue(s) to Ecclesiastes; the odd and virtually mid-sentence ending of Jonah; or the enigmatic conclusion to the Gospel of Mark.

William Stafford, "With Kit, Age 7, at the Beach" (*Allegiances* [New York: Harper & Row, 1970]; www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/william_stafford_2004_9.pdf)

This poem is useful in introducing speech-act theory, which has been applied to various aspects of biblical literature (God's creative word), ancient thought (nominal realism and divine/personal names), and biblical theology (Scripture as illocutionary address with perlocutionary response expected; see Dale Patrick's work on the rhetoric of revelation in the Hebrew Bible).

The poem's *locutionary* content is the poem itself—the words of the poem—which describe the poet and his daughter's trek up a beach dune to watch a sea-storm. The *illocutionary* force "what words do when they are said" is found in the poet's response to Kit's question: "How far could you swim, Daddy, / in such a storm?" / "As far as was needed," I said, / and as I talked, I swam." The storm apparently raises questions for the daughter, questions that pertain to her daddy's efficacy, at least that is how the father takes them (see below). So she asks about his abilities vis-à-vis a storm of such magnitude. In saying that he could swim as far as was necessary he is, in fact, swimming—the words *do* something. In this case, they promise that the father has what it takes, is sufficient to the challenge and task that might be posed by the daughter and a storm that she (or they together) might encounter in the future. The *perlocutionary* force—what readers are supposed to do on the basis of the words—is found in two places: First, in the poem itself, the daughter's question has perlocutionary content that evokes a response from her father. Second, the poem might have perlocutionary force on contemporary readers, who might think to parent, mentor, or "swim" differently in light of it.

An audio file of Stafford reading a slightly different version of the poem in 1974 is available online (www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15922). The difference in aural/oral and written/published versions of this poem could also be instructive in at least two ways: (1) discussion of change and variation in compositions over time; (2) the difference in effect when poetry is read silently or spoken aloud (see the discussion of Todd Alcott, "Television" above).

César Vallejo, "I Am Going to Speak of Hope" (*The Rage and Bone Shop of the Heart: Poems for Men* [ed. R. Bly, J. Hillman, and M. Meade; New York: HarperCollins, 1992])

This striking prose poem of four brief paragraphs is useful for two peda-

gogical purposes: probing (1) the universality of pain and suffering and (2) the tension between the title of the poem and the content itself, which might say something of the relationship of pain and hope. In contrast to the title, the poem itself never once mentions hope. Instead, it speaks exclusively about pain and ache—consistently, repeatedly, and insistently. The suffering Vallejo describes is profound in the deepest sense for three reasons. First, it is of a transcendent sort: The pain is not simply Vallejo's, nor does it inhere with his status as an artist, a man, a human being, or a member of a particular religious or even nonreligious group. Instead, "Today I am simply in pain." Moreover, the ache is without explanation. It is too deep to have a cause and is in a sense undifferentiated: It is as bad as if his bride were dead or his throat were slashed or if his life were different. "Today I am simply in pain." Lastly, the pain is completely inefficacious. This pain is not the result ("a son") of anything, nor is it a progenitor ("a parent") of anything good. And yet, the tension between the content and the title of the poem emerges at this point and is worthy of reflection. What does Vallejo mean by the title, "I am *going to* speak of hope"? Is it that he believes—hopes—he will eventually get to speak of hope but that now, today, when he is simply in pain, he cannot? Or is it that speaking of pain is the necessary prerequisite before one can speak of hope? If it is the latter, the poem bears comparison to a number of places in the Hebrew Bible where lament and articulation of pain apparently precede any expression of hope, as in the lament psalms.

The tension between the title and the content may also foster discussion of the titles of biblical works, many of which were added to the compositions by someone other than the author. Are there examples of titles which seem to fit their texts particularly well or particularly poorly? (Examples include Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1–2 Samuel, the superscriptions of many of the Psalms, Lamentations, any of the Gospels, Acts, Hebrews, Revelation.) In what way does a title predispose readers to approach a text in a certain frame of mind?

Reed Whittemore, "Psalm" (*Good Poems* [ed. G. Keillor; London: Penguin, 2002])

This brief poem is a wonderful text to use with any lament psalm or similar grief-filled passage of Scripture. The opening line is immediately arresting: "The Lord feeds some of His prisoners better than others." This is just the beginning of a series of images that Whittemore calls "the dark images of our Lord." In this way, the poem could be employed with any number of difficult texts found in the Bible. In some ways Whittemore's poem is like the canon of Scripture, however, insofar as both press through and beyond—but not around—these dark images. As Whittemore says, the dark images "make it

seem needful for us to pray not unto Him / But ourselves." But when that happens—and the poem ends with this—"we are truly lost / And we rush back into the safer fold, impressed by His care for us." One could easily have students ponder the end, which seems like a non sequitur in light of the poem's beginning. How does one (*can* one?) go from the "dark images" to the "safer fold"?

Oscar Wilde, "Ave Maria Gratias Plena" (*The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* [New York: Harper Perennial, 1989]; www.englishverse.com/poems/ave_maria_gratia_plena)

This work by the Irish poet Oscar Wilde takes its title from the traditional Roman Catholic *Ave Maria* prayer, which is an adaptation of various verses in Luke 2:26–45. Although the poem does not cite specific verses from Luke's Gospel, it does focus on the key Lukan interest in Christ's humble birth to a young Jewish peasant woman, contrasting these origins with Zeus's more "wondrous" possession of human women in Greek mythology (lines 1–8).

This poem gives two counterexamples to Mary: Danae, upon whom Zeus fell "in a rain of gold" (line 3), and Semele, whose "dread vision" (line 5) of Zeus resulted in her own death. Instructors may wish to explore these myths in more detail so that students can better appreciate their appropriation by Wilde and more clearly see the continuities and discontinuities vis-à-vis Luke's account of Mary and the birth of Jesus. This will raise important questions regarding the New Testament's cultural background: How might an ancient audience familiar with Greek mythology have experienced the story of Christ's birth, coming as it does from a divine-human encounter? How might that experience have differed between believing audiences (the likely recipients of the Gospels) and nonbelieving audiences (who would have learned of Christ's birth indirectly)? Depending on course objectives one may also wish to pose the more fundamental question of how present-day Christians should deal with such mythological precedents in articulating a notion of biblical authority, a question often raised with reference to the Gilgamesh epic in Old Testament courses. (For a list of liaisons of Zeus, see www.csun.edu/~hcfll004/zeusgirl.html.)

Along these lines the basic theme of Wilde's poem is worth noting. The rather undramatic story of Mary, "some kneeling girl with a passionless pale face" (line 12), defies the speaker's expectations for how divinity encounters humanity. The instructor may therefore pose questions about the particular ways Wilde captures this surprise: What in the poem (especially lines 9–14) speaks to the humble, unspectacular nature of Jesus' birth, and how does Wilde's treatment of the Zeus stories accentuate the differences? How does the

poem's title ("Hail Mary, full of grace") contribute to this ironic theme? What details in Luke's nativity account affirm Wilde's interpretation?

This discussion may then lead to more directly exegetical questions about Luke's first two chapters. How does even the *preparation* of Jesus' birth, most notably the stories of Elizabeth and Zechariah, speak to his humble origins? What is the effect of Luke's repeated and seemingly fleeting references to the powerful Roman Empire in this regard (1:5; 2:1–2; 3:1–2)? With all of this in mind, what kind of God does Luke's Gospel describe, and what is the implicit theological message for hearers who, like Wilde's speaker, expect to encounter more spectacular and powerful tales of the divine? In answering these questions students might also envision an early Christian community struggling to articulate a view of the suffering, human Jesus as the full revelation of God.

William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming" (*The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* [ed. R. J. Finneran; New York: Collier, 1989]; www.online-literature.com/yeats/780)

This very famous poem works well introducing students to apocalyptic eschatology and the specific theme of Christ's second coming. In typical apocalyptic sequence, the first stanza depicts a bloody "anarchy…loosed upon the world" (line 4), while the second stanza ominously anticipates the arrival of a lion/human beast (Rev 4:7; 5:5)—"its hour come round at last" (line 21)—an allusion to Christ's final judgment.

The most obvious biblical parallel here is probably the book of Revelation. However, instructors may just as easily use the poem in teaching the "little apocalypse" shared by the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 24:1–25:46; Mark 13:1–37; Luke 21:3–36), certain Pauline passages that speak of the Parousia (1 Cor 15:20–28; 1 Thess 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess 2:1–12), or even the visions of Dan 7–12. In all of these passages one sees a dramatic divine intervention into history that brings vindication for the suffering innocent through the conquering of God's reign over the powers of chaos/evil. Students should therefore read the poem with the following questions in mind: How does the first stanza depict the human situation, and where can these things be seen in the world today? Why does the speaker believe "some revelation is at hand" (line 9)? What form will this revelation take, and what seems to be its purpose? How is its true identity revealed in the final line, and what is ironic about this "birth"?

The surprise of Yeats's poem—particularly given its title—is that it does not actually depict the "second coming" but simply anticipates it in the nativity story: "what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" (lines 21–22). For courses with overtly theological objectives, this gives instructors a helpful illustration of the connection

between incarnation and Parousia (the "deeper" meaning of Advent). Instructors should know, however, that Yeats's appeal to the *Spiritus Mundi* ("spirit of the world," line 12) suggests that knowledge of the second coming is inherent in all people—a subtle but significant difference from Jewish/Christian apocalyptic eschatology, the highlighting of which will help instructors accentuate the distinctiveness of the biblical perspective.

LITERATURE

Prose: Fiction and Nonfiction

Jaime Clark-Soles, Patrick Gray, and Brent A. Strawn

The works discussed in this chapter, many of which deal with multiple texts and topics, are organized alphabetically according to the name of the author rather than canonically. The indices may be consulted to find entries with classroom strategies related to particular texts. All secondary literature cited here is included in the preceding bibliography (pp. 246–49).

Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (trans. M. Ginsburg; New York: Grove, 1967)

With the exception of John, Jesus' encounters with Pontius Pilate in the Gospels are remarkably brief and short on dialogue (Matt 27:11–14; Mark 15:2–5; Luke 23:1–5; John 18:28–19:12). What happened and what words were exchanged at this meeting, perhaps the most significant legal proceeding in recorded history? Literary retellings of the story provide a platform on which to discuss the issues that arise when scholars assess various reconstructions of the encounter.

Bulgakov's surrealistic satire on life in the Soviet Union—complete with flying witches, talking cats, and a visit from Satan—was first published nearly 30 years after his death. The plot alternates between early twentieth-century Moscow and first-century Jerusalem. The second chapter (18–43) concerns Pilate and his interaction with Jesus, here called Yeshua Ha-Nozri. (Chapters 16, 25, and 26 also focus on Pilate as well as on Matthew and Judas.) This twenty-five-page retelling corresponds with the canonical versions at several points but obviously includes much material not found elsewhere. Bulgakov makes no claim that his story is a true or historically accurate rendering of the trial. (In fact, the story is first told by Satan and later appears in the Master's novel, which he burns when the manuscript is rejected.) To provoke spirited discussion of the key issues, however, one may shift the burden of proof to the students and ask, "What in this account *cannot* be accurate?" Elements to be subjected to scrutiny include: Bulgakov's general characterizations of Pilate (Was he fond of his dog? Did he suffer from migraines?)

and of Jesus (Was he twenty-seven years old at the time? How many languages could he speak?); the authenticity of particular sayings attributed to Jesus (e.g., 27: "There are no bad people in the world"); the identity of the other criminals executed; the context and tone of Pilate's famous question ("What is truth?"); the likelihood of a secretary being present to preserve a record of the trial; the plausibility of their discussion about the nature of the power of the state (30); and the nature of Jesus' relationship with Matthew and other followers. Another way to frame the question is: Where does this narrative take elements that are only implicit in the canonical versions and make them explicit?

Sorting through the possible answers to these questions provides an opportunity to introduce the basic principles of the historical method formulated by Ernst Troeltsch (methodological doubt, analogy, correlation) and the criteria for assessing the authenticity of dominical sayings formulated by Norman Perrin and others (multiple attestation, dissimilarity, coherence).

One outcome of this exercise is that students as well as teachers come to realize how much we *do not* know about the events portrayed in the Bible. Extrabiblical sources sometimes support biblical portraits of events and characters, sometimes they undermine biblical portraits, and sometimes they do both, as is the case with Pontius Pilate. His character, it is often argued, is drawn sympathetically and is let off the hook by the Gospel writers. Josephus (e.g., *B.J.* 2.175–177) depicts a Pilate who was not weak or indecisive or concerned to mollify the Jews under his rule but was rather a fairly nasty guy. On the other hand, Josephus reports an earlier incident in which Pilate actually backs down for fear of unduly antagonizing the Jewish populace and causing an uproar (*Ant.* 18.55–59; Philo, *Legat.* 299–305, also reports that he is admonished by the emperor for offending the Jews' sensitivities). In this manner, students may see that determining "What would Pilate do?" is perhaps no less tricky than determining "What would Jesus do?"

Shusaku Endo, *Silence* (trans. W. Johnston; New York: Taplinger, 1969)

One way to plunge students into the study of the New Testament is to expose them to its perennial concerns as they arise when the Christian faith is introduced into new settings. *Silence* is a particularly vivid example. Endo's novel is based on historical figures and events during the early Christian mission in Japan, before and after the country was closed to foreigners in 1603 (all missionaries were expelled in 1614) and intense persecution by the Tokugawa shogunate had begun. The story focuses on Rodrigues, a Portuguese Jesuit, who has come to Japan to minister to the clandestine community and to learn the truth about his mentor Ferreira, who has apostatized under threat of torture. Rodrigues is betrayed by another apostate, Kichijiro,

and spends more than half of the story in hiding or in prison before a climactic encounter with Ferreira.

The wrenching story provides a touchstone for discussing several texts and topics in a New Testament survey:

(1) To what extent is Rodrigues a kind of Paul figure? A very effective method of creating apostates among the missionaries was to torture Japanese Christians until the priests agreed to deny their faith. While this method is not attested in the New Testament, Paul's evangelizing activities in Asia Minor not only resulted in his frequent incarceration but also exposed his converts to unwelcome attention from their non-Christian neighbors and the Roman authorities on occasion. Are there any signs that Paul has qualms about this? Does he address the hardships his followers will meet as a consequence of their conversion? (Perhaps have students take on the persona of one of Paul's addressees who write him a letter on this question or the persona of one of the persecutors. What sorts of rationales might they have for wanting to stamp out this new, foreign religion?)

(2) Rodrigues faces the almost certain alternatives of martyrdom or apostasy throughout the novel. Early on, he almost seems to long for the death of a martyr though he has been instructed not to seek it actively. Do any New Testament writings address this issue? A comparative text may be found in Phil 1. Some interpreters believe that the imprisoned Paul in Phil 1:20–30 is contemplating suicide. At the very least, he is contemplating the possibility that he will soon die for the faith. Is it plausible that he is considering suicide as an option? Do other texts suggest that entertaining this course of action should be off limits?

(3) Christianity grew very quickly after its introduction to Japan by Francis Xavier. Christian expansion in the first century, though modest in sheer numbers, was similarly rapid. What factors might account in part for this rapid spread (a captivating message? social benefits accompanying conversion? good roads?)? Tertullian's dictum that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church" is now something of a truism, but it is hardly self-evident that persecution might actually be reason for the success of the movement.

(4) To what extent is Kichijiro a kind of Judas figure?

(5) In his preface and in other writings, Endo is captivated by what happens when foreign ideas such as the Christian faith come into Japan. He refers to Japanese culture as a swamp which sucks up and smothers various ideologies it encounters, transforming and even denaturing them in the process. When and where does this happen in early Christianity?

(6) Endo tests the logic of martyrdom by posing a question: If sacrificing the body is good, is sacrificing one's very soul (e.g., by apostatizing) even better? Is this syllogistic reasoning attested in the Bible? Compare this atti-

tude with that of the Letter to the Hebrews toward apostasy (6:4–6; 10:26–31) or Matt 12:32 on the sin against the Holy Spirit as unforgivable.

(7) The novel's title refers to the silence of God in the face of unspeakable evil and thus evokes the classic problem of theodicy, especially as it is manifested in apocalyptic literature. Ask students to imagine a dialogue between Endo and the author of Revelation. Where might they have similar ideas about God? Where might they diverge?

If the instructor prefers a shorter work, Endo's play *The Golden Country* (trans. F. Mathy; Tokyo: Tuttle, 1970) focuses on Ferreira and touches on many of the same themes as the novel.

Harry G. Frankfort, "On Bullshit" (*The Raritan Review* [Fall 1986]: 81–100)

Despite the humorous and slightly off-color title, Frankfort, a retired moral philosopher from Princeton University, sets himself a serious (if somewhat tongue-in-cheek) task: to define "bullshit," in particular to distinguish it from lying. Building on the prior work of such figures as Max Black and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Frankfort concludes that bullshit is different from lying and that it is, ultimately, a more serious enemy to truth than is lying. Liars, he argues, at least care somewhat about the truth even if only to (and because they) willfully misrepresent it. Bullshitters, however, could not care less about the truth; what is said may or may not correspond to the truth/facts. They only care how they appear, especially before others (just like, one might argue, the Pharisees excoriated by Jesus in the Gospels).

Students greatly enjoy the essay because, although at times the discussion is somewhat theoretical, the subject matter is entertaining and the writing enjoyable. It can be used as a way to invite students to think about interpretive dispositions. It is better to try to tell the truth in interpretation—even if that is difficult—than to just look good doing it. Likewise, seeking after truth—again, even if difficult—is better than not trying at all. It also helps students to reflect on the nature of Scripture as truth-telling literature. Finally, it facilitates contemplation of the importance of truth-telling in public speech, in preaching, teaching, commentaries, and classroom discussion—platforms where bullshit is often in oversupply. Students might think of this essay as an extended analysis of the dangers of the faculty of speech so frequently mentioned in the Bible (e.g., in Proverbs and the Letter of James).

Susan Glaspell, "A Jury of Her Peers" (*The Best American Short Stories of the Century* [ed. J. Updike and K. Kenison; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999]; www.learner.org/exhibits/literature/story/fulltext.html)

In this suspenseful story set in rural Iowa, Mrs. Peters (the sheriff's wife)

and Mrs. Hale (the wife of the man who discovers the murdered John Wright) accompany their husbands to the home of Minnie Foster Wright. What could drive a wife to murder? Throughout this brilliantly crafted story, the reader watches and listens as the men conduct their investigation but come up with no hard evidence, while the women actually piece together how the murder occurred and remember Minnie as a vivacious young woman. Twenty years with John Wright destroys her as he kills everything she loves, including the canary she had to keep her company as she toiled. As the women piece together what must have happened, they draw upon their own knowledge of women's experience and assess their own lives. The author repeatedly describes the sheriff's wife in the same terms as she describes Minnie. The effect is heightened by the fact that none of the men in the story take any women seriously. When the men come into the kitchen to look for evidence, they do not stay long: "'Nothing here but kitchen things,' he said, with a little laugh for the insignificance of kitchen things."

Notice how the author chooses to designate the characters. Sometimes Mr. Hale is "Mrs. Hale's husband" or Mrs. Peters is "the sheriff's wife, married to the law." Gendered experience and knowledge, power relations between the sexes, the nature of justice, the gendering of evil, solidarity between those who suffer—all of these themes and others that regularly arise in a biblical studies course receive attention. This story allows readers to discuss such themes with a story about which they have no preconceived ideas before dealing with the biblical narratives. This story is also useful to read alongside the New Testament *Haustafeln* (Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:21–33; 1 Tim 2:8–15; 1 Pet 2:18–3:8), especially 1 Peter as it valorizes silent suffering and calls for the submission of women and slaves. Glaspell's story is also well suited for teaching exegesis because she is so careful with her diction and literary technique. When one is trying to show that language such as "hour," "abide," "see," "light," and "darkness" are terms intentionally used by the author of the Fourth Gospel, for example, a story such as this can help make the point that authors can be very deliberate in their choice of language. Finally, the use of irony is on brilliant display in this story, much as it is in a text like the Fourth Gospel, among others.

Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004)

How does one reconstruct the ancient world, ancient peoples, even ancient individuals? This is a serious problem for biblical studies in the historical mode, but the problem is not confined solely to historicism. Greenblatt's popular book on Shakespeare demonstrates that many of the same problems bedeviling biblical studies also obtain for almost any study concerned with literary texts from the past. Insofar as some students (and scholars!) are overly

dubious about reconstruction of whatever sort, while others are overly excited about it, Greenblatt's work is a fascinating, oblique approach to the problems involved, demonstrating that one must be dubious, but there is a good bit to be excited about. And, in turn, while one can get excited, it is quite reasonable to maintain a good bit of doubt. Reading the preface (12–14), the opening "Note to the Reader" (17–19), or the first chapter (23–53) will be sufficient to introduce the problem.

(1) Greenblatt's book is itself eminently reasonable and judicious but it is not without imagination. He has searched the vast sea of Shakespeare studies including the wealth of data that has been culled on the playwright's life, influences, and so forth. And there is a lot to be known on this score. In this way Greenblatt's approach resembles that of any good biblical scholar who amasses historical data of various sorts to investigate, say, the Deuteronomist or the apostle Paul.

Despite the large amount of data available for Shakespeare's life, career, and legacy, the picture is far from complete. "Even with this relative abundance of information," he writes, "there are huge gaps in knowledge that makes any biographical study of Shakespeare an exercise in speculation" (18). As an example, consider the chronology of the plays. The relative chronology which is so crucial for any biography inevitably requires speculation. Or, as another example, the exact date of Shakespeare's birth (April 23 or April 26, 1564) has been debated, though, according to a parish register, the baptism of "Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakspere" took place on the later date. While this would seem definitive, Greenblatt points out that some scholars have argued for a three-day interval between the birth and baptism. Even "hard evidence," that is, can be debated and interpreted differently. So too in biblical studies! When the evidence is even softer, it should come as no surprise that the degree of certainty is still less and the range of opinion still broader. Greenblatt discusses the difficulties surrounding identifying with certainty the Stratford grammar school teacher, Simon Hunt, who presumably would have taught Shakespeare. Is it the Simon Hunt who matriculated to the University of Douai in 1575 and became a Jesuit in 1578? But there is another Simon Hunt who died in Stratford ca. 1598, and maybe he is the one who was Shakespeare's teacher. Even more to the point, records for the school do not survive, so there is no solid proof that Shakespeare even attended the school. But where else would he have gone and where else would he have been educated? These kinds of questions and ambiguous evidence are cognate with the kinds of problems and issues that beset biblical scholars.

(2) It is at this point that the use of imagination comes in. The sources regarding Shakespeare's life are fragmentary. "What matters most are the

works" themselves (18), but how these relate to his life is an exercise in imagination. But it is not solely an exercise in *historical imagination*; instead, it is an exercise in the *interpretive imagination*, or, in a word, hermeneutics. Greenblatt "aims to discover the actual person who wrote the most important body of imaginative literature of the last thousand years. Or rather, since the actual person is a matter of well-documented public record, it aims to tread the shadowy paths that lead from the life he lived into the literature he created" (12). What clues might "unravel the great mystery of such immense creative power" (ibid.)? What links are there "between the timeless work with its universal appeal and a particular life that left its many scratches in the humdrum bureaucratic records of the age" (13)? Given the problems surrounding the interpretation of the "scratches" Shakespeare's life left, the works are given preeminence in the interpretive process. They are not, however, given sole proprietary rights because the scratches do exist and do have a role to play in the interpretive process. Relating the two is the problem and promise; and imagination helps.

Framed in these ways, the connections to certain conundrums in biblical study are rather obvious. Greenblatt's book thus casts important light on: (a) how the hermeneutical problems faced in biblical studies extend to other disciplines; (b) the importance of the artifactual and historical record; (c) the preeminence of the literary remains themselves when dealing with the past; (d) the role of imagination in relating the historical and the literary, as well as in the interpretive process as a whole. It might be used profitably in a class on hermeneutics or as a comparative exercise with regard to how biblical scholars traffic in similar discussions. One might compare, for example, the roles archaeology and epigraphy have played in understandings of Israelite religion, attempts at dating Paul's letters, debates between the minimalists of the Copenhagen school and the maximalists, or note a particularly robust reconstruction of a Christian community on the basis of writings in the New Testament (e.g., Raymond E. Brown's work on the Johannine community or various attempts to describe a "Q community").

Jack Handey, *Deep Thoughts* (New York: Berkeley, 1992)

Students often think that Jesus' parables are clear-cut stories with a lesson that is easy to discern. It is difficult for them to appreciate the radical twist that characterizes many of the Gospel parables. The absurdist "Deep Thoughts" of comedian Jack Handey, familiar to many students from their appearance on the television program *Saturday Night Live*, can be very useful in helping students to think about the nature and function of parabolic discourse. Many of these are available on the Internet. For example:

Maybe in order to understand mankind, we have to look at the word itself: "Mankind." Basically, it's made up of two separate words—"mank" and "ind." What do these words mean? It's a mystery, and that's why so is mankind.

We tend to scoff at the beliefs of the ancients. But we can't scoff at them personally, to their faces, and this is what annoys me.

If trees could scream, would we be so cavalier about cutting them down? We might, if they screamed all the time, for no good reason.

If you're in a war, instead of throwing a hand grenade at the enemy, throw one of those small pumpkins. Maybe it'll make everyone think how stupid war is, and while they are thinking, you can throw a real grenade at them.

In each of these instances, Handey's thoughts take an unexpected twist, which is what makes them amusing. One anticipates that he will say "mankind" is made up of "man" and "kind," that we should not scoff at the beliefs of the ancients, or cut down trees, or throw grenades. But Handey pulls the rug out from under us. This element of surprise can be compared to Jesus' parables, particularly many of those in Luke. The first hearers would have been shocked, for instance, when the Samaritan stops to help (10:25–37), when the poor and lame are invited to the dinner (14:15–24), when the prodigal son is given a banquet (15:11–32), when the manager is commended for being dishonest (16:1–9), or when the kingdom of God is likened to a mustard seed and yeast (13:18–20). Like Handey's one-liners, Jesus' parables take unexpected turns that jar the hearer or reader into thought. They may also have been met with laughter. Jesus and Handey provide short, entertaining, memorable sayings which "work" because of the unexpected. Thus, Handey helps students rethink what parables are and how the genre functions.

Ron Hansen, *Atticus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996)

This novel is a modern version of Luke's Prodigal Son parable (15:11–32). Atticus Cody has two sons. Frank is successful, with a good career, a great wife, and wonderful children. On the other hand, Scott and disaster are never separated for long. Scott drives the car recklessly with his mother in it. When they crash, she dies and he lives. His father continues to love him, even though Scott is shiftless and cannot (or will not) keep a job. He spends time in a mental hospital where he falls in love with another patient. He follows her when she moves to Mexico, where he lives off the trust fund set up by his father, squandering it on riotous living.

When Scott is found dead, Atticus is told that it is suicide. Atticus starts sleuthing and begins to suspect murder. It appears to be nothing more than

a murder mystery until the story takes an astonishing twist: It turns out that Scott is alive and in trouble. The story moves from third-person to first-person narration, as Scott poignantly watches (and relates to the reader) his father's search for clues to his son's murder. Scott is too ashamed for all he has done to let his father know that he is alive. Eventually, they are reunited and find redemption.

What is the point of this story? In what ways is this story similar to or different from Luke's parable? What does it bring to life or what gaps does it fill in the original parable? For example, there is an "explanation" as to why no mother is mentioned in Luke 15. (Sometimes students do not notice the absence of women.) Also, the son does not set out intending to become prodigal or profligate. His sin is not willfulness, but a complete lack of any will or intention. In this way, the novel's more "realistic" character development throws into relief certain conventions of the parable genre.

The story would nicely accompany a study of the parables of Jesus. Insofar as parables represent Jesus' preferred mode of teaching, it is important to understand how the genre functions. An analytic paper treating a well-known parable alongside a literary retelling of that parable serves as a helpful heuristic device for addressing the hermeneutical questions pertaining to genre, purpose, and meaning. Time permitting, the ensuing discussion may be integrated with a broader study of the history of the interpretation of parables, touching on the different approaches of, for example, Jülicher, Jeremias, Dodd, and Crossan. (For other exercises on the parables, see Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 297–304, 326–28.) More generally, the story would also serve the study of form criticism. The form of the story up to a certain point is simply a fictional novel that starts to look like a murder mystery. But the second part of the novel moves away from third-person to first-person narrative with the protagonist assuming the role of narrator. This authorial strategy constitutes a point of contact with the Gospels. Where, if at all, do the Evangelists shift from third-person to first-person? Is the narrator omniscient? Does a first-person perspective always signal to the reader the unfolding of an essentially historical narrative?

Robert Heinlein, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (New York: Putnam, 1991; originally published in 1961)

This Robert Heinlein novel about a human raised by Martians and later brought back to earth as an adult, arguably the most significant work of science fiction written in the twentieth century, is one of many for use in discussions of literary Christ-figures. In considering various characters who have been hailed as Christ-figures, students come to realize that the factors leading the early church to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah were varied and

LITERATURE

complex and that even today there is no unanimity when it comes to defining the essential and the merely incidental traits of Jesus, among neither Christian theologians nor secular audiences. For this exercise, which may take the form of an essay where class time is not available for plenary discussion, the whole class could read the same work or the instructor may give a limited number of choices.

The question may be put this way: In what sense, if any, is it appropriate to consider Valentine Michael Smith a Christ-figure? What specific traits, deeds, quotations, or plot devices support such a label? Smith exhibits many qualities that parallel those of Jesus: He comes into the world "from above." He says, "I am God" (though he also greets others with the phrase "Thou art God"). His name, Michael, means "who is like God." He has twelve close associates and a mentor, whom he calls "Father." He can perform miracles, such as levitation and making objects and people disappear. He makes the governmental authorities nervous. He preaches a message of love and nonviolence and acquires a following as leader of the Church of All Worlds (which later spawned a real-life group that used the name and organization described in the novel). When he dies—willingly, it seems, as if it were a sacrificial act—he cries out, "I am son of Man" and arranges himself in such a way that the light hitting him will give the appearance of an angel's halo. How should we evaluate Smith? Are the similarities significant? Are they sufficiently detailed to warrant comparison with Jesus? What differences militate against a serious comparison, despite any similarities?

A similar exercise could be performed with the following works, among others: Aslan in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*; Ransom in C. S. Lewis's Space Trilogy; Gandalf, Frodo Baggins, and Aragorn in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*; the eponymous hero of the *Harry Potter* novels of J. K. Rowling; Simon in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*; Billy Budd in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*; Jim Casey in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*; Santiago in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*; Benjy in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*; Prince Myshkin in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*.

William Hoffman, "The Question of Rain" (*God: Stories* [ed. C. M. Curtis; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998], 95–107)

One "dusty, choking summer," thirty-seven-year-old Pastor Wayland receives a visit at the parsonage from a parishioner, Alex Bradner. When Bradner's textile business is suffering from the drought, he comes to ask Wayland to pray for rain. Now Alex "had little spiritual depth. He was generous with his pocketbook, but not himself." It turns out that Alex wants a community-wide Sunday service, a "Special Prayer Day for Rain." Wayland is not inclined to devote a special service to the topic. More members of the con-

gregation join to voice the request. Again, he puts them off trying to explain that a distinction should be maintained between "asking for grateful hearts" rather than "putting in a special order." The distinction is lost on the congregants who begin to lose their jobs as plants close down due to lack of rain. As the week moves toward Sunday, Wayland is, ironically, working on a sermon about baptism. The story chronicles the struggle Wayland endures all week, the conversations he has, the counsel he seeks, his prayers, what he sees and hears around him in the community and church. In the end, he holds a prayer service and it rains.

This story might be used in conjunction with the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal (1 Kgs 18). It also correlates well with the Gospel of John and its concern over "signs faith," that is, faith that is based upon seeing a miracle. Do moderns believe in miracles? At one point Wayland interacts with an educated doctor who derides the blue-collar parishioners for believing in miracles, at which point Wayland becomes defensive on their behalf: "Miracles happen," he says, even today. "He did believe that, didn't he?" The doctor replies, "But you wouldn't want to put your chips on the line, would you? … I mean right up there in front of everybody in church, to put your chips on the line for a miracle?"

The story helps seminary students reflect upon their role as pastors of congregations. (Would they pray for rain upon a request from a congregant? Would they devote a special service to it or does the regular liturgy already cover all human problems? Would it matter which congregant or how many congregants made the request? Would the rich businessman's request be treated in the same way as the poor homeless woman's?) In nonseminary settings, the story is well-suited to a more general study of prayer as it appears in Scripture. What is the point of prayer? Is it as Wayland describes it? ("We don't pray to ask favors as if [God] is a rich uncle, but to have fellowship with Him, to achieve a feeling that we are close and in His care.") When the Letter of James says that "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jas 5:17), is it appropriate to ask, "How much?" When Paul says that we should "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17), does he mean it literally? What is in the "small print" that goes with the claim (in 1 John 5:14–15) that "if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him"?

Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* ([trans. A. Hannay; London: Penguin, 1985; originally published in 1843], 44–48)

The story of the binding of Isaac in Gen 22 (the Akedah) stands as one of the most enigmatic narratives in Scripture. Kierkegaard's philosophical

reflection on the mystery of faith as manifested by Abraham begins with a four-page exordium consisting of four different retellings of the story. Each version emphasizes a different aspect of the "gaps" in the canonical text (e.g., Abraham's state of mind, Isaac's awareness, the aftermath of the near sacrifice). In one version Abraham feigns madness as he raises the knife so that Isaac will blame his father for the horrible act instead of God. Abraham begs God to forgive him for his willingness to kill his son and Isaac loses his own faith in God in other versions. Kierkegaard concludes by affirming that "no one was as great as Abraham," and at the same time wondering, "who is able to understand him?"

Biblical narrative tends to be quite sparse, and nowhere is this truer than here. One might ask students whether Kierkegaard's attempts at retelling the story make it more understandable. In some ways they do, but in other ways they raise key interpretive questions that highlight the utter strangeness of the narrative as well as the difficulty of extracting a simple, straightforward lesson: Does Abraham know that the voice is God's? If he does, is he also aware that it is a test? If he does not know that it is a test, why does he go through with the sacrifice and what does he think about God? If he does know that it is a test, does he also know what would constitute "passing" the test? (When commanded by God to kill, it might be natural to assume that the proper response is, in fact, to kill.) How old is Isaac, and how would his age influence the dynamic between father, son, and deity? Does Isaac hear the angel's voice in verse 11? What is Sarah's role? Is it appropriate to think of this as a test of Sarah? (Note her prior treatment of Hagar and Ishmael.) What is life like for the family after this incident? (Interestingly, Abraham goes to Beersheba, and the next mention of Sarah is when she dies—at Hebron.) Is Abraham meant to be an example to the reader, or is he unique? Of all the stories one might tell about "the father of the faithful," why tell this one?

Such questions provide helpful reminders that what is not said can sometimes be as important as what is said in a story. While it is possible to inject into the narrative concerns that were not present for the author or original readers, it is difficult to deny that many of these considerations are crucial for assessing the character of Abraham and for hearing the "message" conveyed.

Similar analyses might be conducted with other retellings of this story, such as Philo (*Abr*. 168–183); Josephus (*Ant*. 1. 222–236); Qur'an 37:99–113; *The Brome Play of Abraham and Isaac* (a fifteenth-century English mystery play); and Woody Allen's retelling contained in his essay "The Scrolls." For other exercises on the Akedah, see Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 92–100.

Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (*The Wind's Twelve Quarters* [London: Orion Group, 2000; originally published in 1973], 278–83)

This stunning story is set in a town called Omelas as its residents prepare for the great Festival of Summer. "The people in Omelas are happy people. Happiness is based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary or destructive, and what is destructive." They have religion there, but no clergy. Of utmost importance is this: There is no guilt in Omelas. The town has the veneer of utopia, but it holds a dark secret. The narrator proceeds to explain that in a squalid basement of one of the gorgeous buildings, there is a locked room with no windows and a damp, dirt floor. She describes the room in depressing detail and then indicates that in the room, a child is sitting: "It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten." She goes on to describe this "it"—naked and covered with festering sores—which "lives on a half-bowl of corn meal and grease a day." The child has not always lived there; it has memories of its mother and sunlight. Sometimes it speaks: "Please let me out. I will be good."

All the people in Omelas know the child is there and some have come to see it: "They all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies, depend wholly on this child's abominable misery." Usually those who come to see the child are young people. When they see the child, they are shocked and want to bring it out into the sunlight, clean it, feed it, but at that moment, if they chose to do so, Omelas would be destroyed. "Those are the terms," says the narrator. "To exchange all the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement: to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed."

Most of the citizens of Omelas have come to accept these conditions. Some people, however, after seeing the child, walk away from Omelas, but when they do, each does so alone. "The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas."

This story can be used in conjunction with 1 Peter to discuss concepts of atonement, the suffering of the innocent, scapegoating, and evil. What is evil? Who is to blame for it? How might the problem of various kinds of evil be solved? Additional questions to pose might include: What constitutes happiness or joy? Upon what is it predicated? How do various biblical texts attempt to answer these questions? How is joy related to suffering? What is guilt—a

subjective feeling, an objective state before God, or something else? What is its purpose and how, exactly, does guilt work for individuals and societies? How may it be eradicated? What are its consequences? Fruitful texts for dialogue include Lev 4 (on unintentional guilt); Josh 7 (on collective responsibility); and Rom 7 (on internal struggle with awareness of guilt).

Finally one might ask, "How does this story intersect with our own society?" Where is the church or synagogue in this town and, if it existed, what would you expect it to do? This generates vigorous discussion that can be correlated with a variety of Bible-related topics, for example, economic systems, child abuse, liberation theology, doctrines of atonement, issues of individual conscience, mindless adoption of cultures and systems into which one is born, and the nature of hope.

Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* ([New York: Ballantine, 1965], 185)

Students in biblical studies courses encounter any number of scholarly theories formulated to answer questions about authorship, provenance, dating, and so forth. They also encounter somewhat less scholarly theories outside of class (such as those of John Allegro and Dan Brown). Almost anything is possible, but not everything is equally plausible or probable. A brief anecdote from Malcolm X gives students an intriguing but improbable example for which to articulate standards for evaluating hypothetical reconstructions of the world in, behind, and before the text.

Malcolm tells of his participation in weekly debates when he was incarcerated for robbery at the Norfolk Prison Colony. In one debate, he argues that "William Shakespeare" was the pen name of King James (of the King James Version). He reasons as follows: The KJV represents the finest literature in the English language, and its language is the same as Shakespeare's. King James, he says, recruited the best writers of the time to translate the Bible. Shakespeare should have been included, but he is nowhere reported to have been part of the translation committee. Why not? Because "Shakespeare" existed only as the alter ego of the king.

A related theory has Shakespeare as one of the translators of the Psalms in the KJV (shakespeare.about.com/b/a/027673.htm). Counting forty-six words from the beginning of Ps 46, one finds the word "shake," and counting forty-six words backwards from the end, one finds the word "spear." The Bard, moreover, was forty-six years of age when the KJV was translated. Just a coincidence? Yes, probably. (Earlier translations, such as the 1551 edition of the Matthews Bible and the Geneva Bible of 1599, feature the same coincidence.)

What kinds of assumptions are made in these theories? What kinds of

evidence would support or undermine the hypotheses put forward? Upon whom does the burden of proof rest? Where is technical expertise required to adjudicate the question and where does logic or common sense suffice?

Flannery O'Connor, *The Violent Bear It Away* (*Collected Works* [New York: Library of America, 1988; originally published in 1960], 329–479)

This Gothic novel about a dysfunctional Tennessee family can serve as an alternative approach to a unit or an entire course on Old Testament prophetic literature. Where class time is not available for plenary discussion, student work may take the form of an essay. The title is a reference to the Douay Version of Matt 11:12.

As the novel opens, Old Tarwater has just died. Through flashbacks and through the main character, his fourteen-year-old grand-nephew Francis Tarwater, the reader is presented with a vivid portrait of a backwoods prophet. Old Tarwater has unsuccessfully attempted to raise his nephew Rayber as a prophet and is subsequently placed in a psychiatric hospital for four years. Rayber refuses to baptize his mentally retarded son Bishop as a form of rebellion against his strict religious upbringing. Baptizing the child is the primary mission with which Francis is charged as Old Tarwater again tries to pass on the mantle to his grand-nephew. Spurred on in part by voices he hears, Francis, too, tries—ultimately in vain—to avoid his "calling" as a prophet. He gets drunk, burns down a farmhouse, drowns a child, and is a victim of assault while hitchhiking on the way to his awakening.

To what extent is it appropriate to think of Old Tarwater or Francis as prophets? Students react quite strongly to this grotesque narrative and its bizarre characters, and reading with this basic question in mind helps them to identify what constitutes prophecy as it appears in the Bible. Quite frequently students see the prophets as nothing more nor less than predictors of the future. And because they are enshrined in the canon, it may be difficult for students to appreciate the impression made by many of the prophets on their original audiences. The dialogue generated by O'Connor's story leads to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. References to specific prophets are scattered throughout the novel. Much of the opening chapter depicts Francis's reflections on and doubts about his own calling as a prophet. It also contains Old Tarwater's own "call narrative" (332) and Rayber's psychologizing interpretation of his uncle's experience (341–42). Are the confirming signs of one's prophetic vocation always recognized by the one called? Is it possible to escape one's destiny as a prophet when called by God? Is it necessary for the recipient of revelation to acquiesce to or cooperate in mediating the experience? These are recurring questions as Francis struggles to discern God's will (cf. 430–31).

Biblical texts with which the novel may be read in tandem include Isa 6:1–13; Jer 1:4–10; 20:7–12; Ezek 2–5; Hos 1:1–8; Joel 1:13–20; and Jonah. For related exercises on the prophets, see Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 162–69.

Peggy Payne, "The Pure in Heart" (*God: Stories* [ed. C. M. Curtis; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998], 222–35)

What would happen if you were a Yale-trained Presbyterian pastor and one ordinary night, while grilling kebabs with your wife, you actually heard the voice of God? Such is the struggle that besets Swain Hammand. Swain, the ever-rational, respectable leader must decide whether or not to tell his equally rational, respectable congregation that he has heard the unbidden but certain voice of God say, "Know that there is truth. Know this." He knows that his parishioners will ascribe this to "stress." He discusses the situation with his wife who feels that, as a minister, it is his job to testify when God speaks. Certainly his choice will affect their marriage. Either he tells the story from the pulpit, which may lead to his dismissal, or he does not, at which point he will lose his wife's respect and his own integrity. In the end, he tells the story. Phone calls are made between worried parishioners and, finally, the church operations committee votes to recommend that the pastor seek professional counseling. The congregants take sides, but not a single parishioner is curious enough to approach Swain to learn more about his experience.

Swain Hammond approximates those characters in Scripture who are set apart, looked on with suspicion, and even persecuted for having profound personal encounters with the voice of God. Moses repeatedly encounters the voice of God firsthand from a burning bush (one of Swain's experiences finds God's voice coming from shrubs), and after his close encounter on Sinai he must veil his face. Moses is called a friend of God, sees God, hears God, and is now incomprehensible to his fellow Jews. And where does it get him? Not into the Promised Land, as one might expect.

The story works well with biblical texts that deal with people hearing God. Hearing the voice of Jesus or God comprises a primary theme in the Fourth Gospel. In the Lazarus story (John 11:1–44) Jesus calls out to Lazarus who then moves from death to life. For Swain, too, "The voice is unmistakable. At the first intonation, the first rolling syllable, Swain wakes, feeling the murmuring life of each of a million cells" (223). This story also fits nicely with a study of the biblical prophets (esp. Jeremiah, Hosea, or Ezekiel) or of the Akedah. The story can also be assigned alongside a study of Paul, who was at the time of his call a success within the Jewish religious establishment (Phil 3). Then he encountered God in a profoundly immediate, revelatory, physi-

cally taxing way, and everything changed. He became persecuted, beaten, shipwrecked, arrested, despised by Jews and Gentiles alike.

For seminary students, it is well worth the time in class or in writing to ask, "What would you do in Swain's situation and why?" It helps them think about the nature of their churches and their pastoral role, as well as the role of personal experience in shaping encounters with the stories one reads in Scripture.

Iain Pears, *An Instance of the Fingerpost* (New York: Riverhead, 1998)

The length of this erudite murder mystery precludes its candidacy for a complete read by students taking a semester-long course, but one could still easily use portions of it effectively. Divided into four parts, the novel narrates the "same" story set in seventeenth-century England from the perspective of four different characters. This has obvious connections with the four Gospels. All of the delights and difficulties of hearing a story from multiple perspectives apply. Whom to believe? Upon what basis? How do their own perspectives and agenda color what they include and omit and shape that which is included?

The book elegantly displays *prosopopoeia* as each of the four narrators truly speaks within character, exhibiting a style distinct from each of the other narrators. Having students read part 1, chapter 1, and part 4, chapter 1, and then examining the claims of the narrators makes for good discussion relevant to biblical studies. What reasons do the narrators give for recounting their stories? Are they convincing? What is their relationship to the events which they narrate?

Especially useful for courses on the Gospels is the beginning of the last part told by Anthony Wood (559–62). Wood begins his version of the events by noting, "Two men, it seems, can see the same event, yet both remember it falsely." According to Wood, one narrator, Prescott, is insane and another, Cola, is a liar. Of Wallis, another narrator, Wood writes, "Wallis himself was so used to living in the dark and sinister world of his own devising that he could no longer tell truth from invention, or honesty from falsehood. But how can I tell which assertion to believe, and which to reject?" (561). He cites his own personal familiarity with the concerned parties and his own "disinterested state" as reasons to trust his own ability to tell the story correctly.

The questions one might pose about Wood's qualifications might also be posed to Luke, for example, who begins his own Gospel with a prologue commenting on the reliability of previous accounts of the Jesus story (1:1–4). All things considered, would it be better to have an outsider tell the story of the early church or an insider? What are the advantages and disadvantages in each case, assuming that accuracy is a desideratum?

J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1st American ed.; New York: A. A. Levine, 1998)

Due to their phenomenal popularity, one need not assign students to read any of the *Harry Potter* novels as a prerequisite for using them in a biblical studies course. An instructor may also rely on familiarity with one of the controversies surrounding the series, namely, its alleged celebration of sorcery. A number of Christian groups in the U.S. and elsewhere have criticized what they regard as positive messages about witchcraft. Others, referring to the distinction between "black" and "white" magic, insist that the novels are harmless on this score and that, besides, they are fantasies and not how-to manuals for the occult arts.

This debate is not entirely unlike the debate that took place at Corinth between those who thought Christian faith was incompatible with the consumption of meat that had been sacrificed to idols and those who saw no problem with the custom (1 Cor 8–10). In his response Paul initially sides with "the strong," claiming that the meat has not in fact been offered to strange gods since the idols are not gods at all. But he comes down on the side of "the weak" when he says that a sense of community solidarity should guide their actions and that they should not create stumbling blocks for those who feel pangs of conscience at the thought of eating. One way to get students to pay close attention to Paul's arguments and the social dynamics at work in Corinth is to ask them to assess the aptness of the parallel to the Harry Potter controversy. On the basis of the principles Paul lays out in 1 Cor 8–10, how would he address this contemporary question? One possible hitch to anticipate—perhaps by arbitrarily dividing the class into two teams—is that very few students will be sympathetic to the view that Harry Potter is an agent of demonic influence or to any analogous principle that would bolster the "fundamentalist" perspective. (It has been argued, in fact, that the novels function as a sort of Christian theological allegory, sometimes with the wrinkle that the main character is a Christ-figure.)

One variation of this approach is to connect the black magic–white magic distinction to Hebrew Bible texts referring to, and usually condemning, sorcery (Deut 18:10–14; Lev 19:26, 31; 20:1–6; 1 Sam 28; 2 Kgs 21:6; Mal 3:5). Is it possible to discern a logic to the system whereby certain practices are permitted and others are proscribed? Do these texts lend themselves to fine distinctions between different types of magic? Would the miraculous deeds of the prophets or of Jesus qualify as magic by the terms of modern definitions? (For a related exercise, see Kenneth L. Cukrowski, "Just Like Magic: The Acts of the Apostles," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 338–39.)

Dorothy Sayers, *He That Should Come* (*Four Sacred Plays* [London: Victor Gollancz, 1957; originally published in 1939], 215–74)

Judaism in the Roman period was anything but uniform, and few works make this clearer than this one-act drama intended originally for performance as a radio play. Sayers writes that her primary aim is to depict the birth of Jesus against its "crowded social and historical background." Indeed, the nativity occupies only a small portion of the play. The characters—including magi, shepherds, Pharisees, Jewish merchants, and Roman soldiers—come together for one night in a small town inn, and their conversations reflect different aspects of Roman administrative policy (such as taxation), social tensions between different classes of Jews, travel conditions in the empire, Jewish attitudes towards Rome, various degrees and kinds of Hellenization, and widely divergent forms of messianic expectation among Jews. Pertinent to the reception of the Christian message among Gentiles, the dialogue also explores the ways in which pagans might have made sense of the title "Messiah."

A reading of this entertaining work takes less than an hour and can be easily staged inside or outside of class. There are fifteen speaking parts, plus a handful of minor parts with only a few lines. Although British turns of phrase may throw American students off balance, little or no rehearsal is needed for a successful "performance." As preparation or as follow-up, students can be assigned short papers or presentations detailing what is known about the stock characters who appear in the play. This will help familiarize them with useful reference works on the sociocultural contexts of the biblical world and will serve as a vivid reminder that there is a vibrant "world behind the text" that is assumed and built upon by the New Testament authors.

Similar exercises might involve one installment in Sayers's twelve-play cycle focusing on specific events or periods in the life of Jesus, *The Man Born to be King*, written also for radio broadcast in England during World War II.

Amy Tan, "Fish Cheeks" (*The Bedford Reader* [6th ed.; ed. X. J. Kennedy, D. Kennedy, and J. E. Aaron. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997], 54–55)

In this story, the Chinese American adolescent protagonist falls in love with the minister's son who is "not Chinese, but as white as Mary in the manger." The girl's family invites the minister's family over for Christmas Eve dinner, one which includes not turkey, dressing, and cranberry sauce, but rather squid and tofu. While her relatives "licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into the dozen or so plates of food, Robert and his family waited patiently for platters to be passed to them." Her shame increases when the whole meal is finished off with a loud belch

by her father, who does so as a polite Chinese custom. Many years later, the girl-turned-woman realizes the full meaning of her mother's words spoken to her on that day: "You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame." Only as an adult does she see that her mother was teaching her to exult in her identity and to find an anchor in the love of her community regardless of the reactions of the dominant culture.

This 492-word story is a goldmine for anyone attempting to deal with issues of biculturalism and levels of accommodation and assimilation to one's host culture. Its use would help students better understand the experience of Paul's own life situation as a Hellenistic Jew turned Christian and the experience of Gentile pagans now turned Christian by analogously treating issues raised in a more familiar landscape than the first-century Mediterranean. It might also be used in connection with the issues raised in Ruth and Ezra concerning intermarriage in ancient Israel. The story poignantly highlights the intersections of religion, culture, ethnicity, and family ties, all matters overtly relevant to characters in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. It is particularly well-suited to Gal 2 and, in the place of the fourteen-year-old Chinese girl who is the protagonist in "Fish Cheeks," one might picture Cephas when the "ones from James" arrive.

In addition to fleshing out the lived experience of first-century Christians, students can also engage in conversations about modern analogues, especially since one class will often contain both students who live bicultural lives and those who do not. Students can move from there to a larger discussion of identity formation and the ways that even those who do not live biculturally also inhabit various identities, some of which inevitably conflict. (For a related exercise, see Timothy J. Sandoval, "Diaspora and Identity," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 242–44.)

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (3 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002; originally published in 1954–55)

The connections between Tolkien's life's work, *The Lord of the Rings*, and Scripture are fairly numerous and well-known (websites discussing the parallels as well as Tolkien's Christian background are plentiful). One thinks, for example, of Gandalf the Gray's role as Christ-figure in the trilogy, giving his life for his companions in the first book, only to be "resurrected," as it were, as Gandalf the White in the second. The connections between Tolkien's work and Scripture only multiply when one takes into consideration the elaborate mythology he envisioned as lying *behind* the trilogy, which he published only later in *The Silmarillion*. So, either the trilogy (or the movies based on them) or *The Silmarillion* could work well for any number of purposes; for instance, they could introduce students to a particular biblical theme from the stories

with which they are already familiar or open discussion on the influence of Scripture on other media.

Another, perhaps less obvious connection between the trilogy and portions of Scripture is the role of the tragic. (Warning: this paragraph reveals the ending of the trilogy.) Students typically have problems understanding tragedy. They are often irredeemably and existentially optimistic and this tendency is both reinforced and created by a never-ending wave of happy-ending movies and stories. Life, however, is seldom *that* happy. So it is that students might dislike the fact that Frodo, when finally at Mount Doom where the Ring of Power must be destroyed, is unable to do it, despite the fact that he alone has been able to bear its weight and resist its temptation. At the critical moment, he succumbs to the Ring's power and desires it for himself. It is only destroyed when Gollum/Smeagól takes the Ring back and, in the struggle that results, falls, with the Ring, to destruction. What happens then is something of a "happy ending" as Sam and Frodo are rescued and all recover, but thereafter the tragic reemerges. Frodo's wound from the Nazgûl never fully heals, and, in the end, the burden and grief of being the Ring-bearer means that he must leave Middle Earth. While this is something of an honor—only he and Bilbo (another Ring-bearer) of all the hobbits are allowed to accompany the elves to the West—it is also clearly the result of the pain caused by bearing the Ring.

Other tragic elements might be highlighted, especially the fact that it is the race of humans that is most frail vis-à-vis the temptations of the One Ring and the other rings of power. They are unable to resist their power, and this is repeatedly emphasized in a number of vignettes, perhaps most poignantly by Ilsidor, who failed in an earlier attempt to destroy the Ring. Whatever the case, student (dis)comfort with the tragic element in Tolkien could be discussed via the place of the tragic in a number of places in Scripture. Of note here are the ending to the garden story in Gen 2–3; the fact that one of the first two brothers ends up murdering the other (Gen 4); the devolution at the end of the book of Judges; the doomed kingship of Saul; or the ongoing struggle with sin evident in Paul.

Students might also be asked about the significance of the Ring itself: Is there some biblical analogue for the Ring? If so, what is it? Is there any way, short of asking Tolkien himself, to adjudicate between interpretations of this element? (Here, one might play a trick on students by fabricating a biblical construal of the Ring and then having them argue for or against its propriety; for example, the Ring symbolizes sin, Satan, free will, or the Holy Spirit. The process nicely illustrates the difference between exegesis and eisegesis.)

LITERATURE

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (trans. A. Briggs; New York: Penguin, 2005; originally published in 1865–69)

Who is the antichrist? Throughout history people have offered various answers to this question, such as Nero, Adolf Hitler, Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, or one of the popes. Pierre Bezukhov, a central character in Tolstoy's magnum opus, would reject all of these identifications. A friend suggests to Pierre that, if one assigns a number to each letter of the alphabet, "L'Empereur Napoleon" adds up to 666, the "number of the beast" mentioned in Rev 13:18. Napoleon has invaded Russia, and Pierre has come to believe that he is destined to be the French general's assassin. Chapter 19 of book 8 contains his brief ruminations on this insight (the passage in Anthony Briggs's translation is less than five pages). Pierre attempts to write his own name so that it also adds up to 666, and after several unsuccessful tries he "discovers" that "L'russe Besuhof" ("the Russian Bezukhov" in improper French) adds up perfectly. By what means he was connected with the events foretold in Revelation he did not know, but "he did not doubt that connection for a moment."

This short narrative nicely dramatizes much of the history of interpretation of John's Apocalypse as well as portions of the book of Daniel, with its "creative math" and inconsistently applied principles. As Tolstoy describes it, Bezukhov's method for reading the text and for forecasting history is absurd. Having students dissect his hermeneutical decisions helps to make explicit what responsible interpretation of the Bible does and does not permit. By viewing contemporary examples of reading Revelation through the prism of current events—and vice versa—students may see that some caution may be in order when approaching such a complex document.

For a related exercise, see Mark Roncace, "Symbolism in Revelation," in Roncace and Gray, *Teaching the Bible*, 391.

Mark Twain, "Letters from the Earth" (*The Bible According to Mark Twain* [ed. H. G. Baetzhold and J. B. McCullough; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995; originally published in 1909])

Silence sometimes speaks louder than words. Biblical texts are frequently so familiar that students have great difficulty imagining the narratives they contain taking any other form, yet an alertness to the specific details and questions *not* included or addressed can be the key to understanding the author's aims, the genre of the work, or its theological implications. To help students appreciate the possible significance of what is not said in a text (but might have been), one could do much worse than assigning Mark Twain's various "supplements" to the Bible at the beginning of a course. His "Letters from the Earth" is the longest—nearly fifty pages—and best known of these writings (www.sacred-texts.com/aor/twain/letearth.htm), but many others are available

online and in print. Among the titles typically anthologized with "Letters" are such shorter works as "Extracts from Adam's Diary," "Adam's Expulsion," "Eve's Diary," "Autobiography of Eve and Diaries Antedating the Flood," "Passages from Methuselah's Diary," "Passages from Shem's Diary," and "God of the Bible vs. God of the Present Day." Most of these texts are five to ten pages long and may easily be broken into smaller passages for in-class discussion.

The simplest way to use these texts is to assign students to read excerpts and then respond in writing: In what ways do these "supplements" help you to notice features of the biblical narratives that you did not notice the first time you read them? Where do they raise significant historical, literary, or philosophical questions, and where do they simply function as entertainment? Intriguing examples abound, including the following:

(1) Were Adam and Eve psychologically similar to humans today or were they "blank slates" when they were created? Adam's diary contains amusing descriptions of Eve's concern for the fish, which have to live in the cold water (19–20; she gets them out and puts them in bed with her to keep them warm). Adam recounts his confusion at the water trickling from Eve's eyes when he tells her to leave him alone (8). Together they are perplexed at a new creature that appears—is it a bear or a kangaroo (12–16; they end up naming it Cain once they realize it is of their kind)? In attempting to take the Genesis narratives at face value and bracket anything outside the text, any number of questions naturally arise: Did Adam and Eve love each other? Did they understand the concept of "love"? Did their relationship evolve over time? That the author seems totally uninterested in answering such questions suggests that to read Genesis as one would modern fiction or biography would be a category mistake.

(2) "Letters" largely consists of correspondence between the archangels Satan and Gabriel reflecting on the peculiar features and foibles of humankind. One topic of discussion is the creation of the universe—including differences between human and heavenly experiences of the passage of time—and the instituting of unchanging physical laws of nature (219–21). Were Gen 1–11 a scientific treatise on the origins of the universe, these are subjects one might expect to see addressed.

(3) The opening passage of "Letters" (218–21) takes place in the "heavenly council" that many scholars posit as the background for the plural form *elohim* in Gen 1:26 (cf. 3:22; 11:7). Twain also explains Satan's alienation from this council and his relationship with the serpent in Eden. Were Genesis a treatise of systematic theology, one might expect some sort of reflection on such weighty matters as the origin of evil and the population of the supernatural realm. The Genesis account of the fall likewise receives much less attention than a modern writer like Twain (cf. 229–32) would devote to it.

LITERATURE

(4) An abiding concern in "Letters" is the Bible's internal (in)consistency. This concern is unavoidable in an academic approach to the study of the Bible. The last sections address this topic generally by considering the different images of God in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (250–60). Some of the points will coincide with those made by most critical scholars; other points are caricatures or examples of inattentiveness to genre or context. This section provides ample material with which to begin a discussion of what, precisely, constitutes a contradiction and what strategies are available for making sense of such problematic texts.

Mark Twain, "The Story of the Good Little Boy" (*The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain* [ed. C. Neider; New York: Bantam, 1984], 66–70)

This very short story (available online) tells of Jacob Blivens, a boy who is well behaved in every way but seems to have all the bad luck. Jacob believes the stories that he reads in the Sunday school books in which the good boys are happy and prosperous and the bad boys suffer with broken legs and the like. But it never turns out like this for Jacob in his own life. The bad boys have fun being mischievous and Jacob suffers terribly before dying a meaningless (nonheroic) death. The story nicely illustrates the view of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes. Jacob's life experiences do not match up with the neat worldview expressed in the book of Proverbs: Good people are blessed and wicked ones are punished. Jacob tries valiantly to reconcile his life with the one described in the religious books, but he never can. Similarly, Job and the Teacher expect the perspective of Proverbs to "work": Job protests mightily when he suffers for "no reason" (cf. Job 2:3), and the Teacher claims that he pursued a life of wisdom (Eccl 1:16–17). Job and the Teacher, however, have different approaches to coping with the incongruity. How would Job, Job's wife, Job's friends, and the writer of the epilogue of Ecclesiastes (12:13–14) respond to Jacob's plight? Students may also be asked if they identify with Jacob and what advice they would give to Jacob based on their own experiences and wisdom.

Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992)

Wills's thesis in this Pulitzer prize winning book is that in the ultra-short Gettysburg Address—it is only 272 words and took a maximum of three minutes to deliver—Lincoln remade America by remaking the U.S. Constitution. Ten to twenty thousand people were in attendance at the cemetery in Gettysburg on November 19, 1863. But, according to Wills:

Lincoln is here not…to sweeten the air of Gettysburg, but to clear the infected atmosphere of American history itself, tainted with official sins

and inherited guilt. He would cleanse the Constitution—not, as William Lloyd Garrison had, by burning an instrument that countenanced slavery. He *altered* the document *from within*, by appeal from its letter to the spirit, *subtly changing* the recalcitrant stuff of that legal compromise, *bringing it to its own indictment*. By implicitly doing this, he performed one of the most daring acts of open-air sleight-of-hand ever witnessed by the unsuspecting. Everyone in that vast throng of thousands was having his or her intellectual pocket picked. The crowd departed with a new thing in its ideological luggage, *that new constitution Lincoln had substituted for the one they brought there with them*. They walked off, from those curving graves on the hillside, under a changed sky, into a different America. Lincoln had revolutionized the Revolution, giving people *a new past to live with* that would *change their future* indefinitely. (38, emphasis added)

Stated this way, Wills's interpretation of the Gettysburg address bears marked similarity to what Moses (better: the Deuteronomists) does in the plains of Moab in Deuteronomy. Moses/Deuteronomy, too, performs a daring sleight-of-hand, subtly altering a constitutive (in many ways *the* constitutive) document/event: Sinai. Israel walked away with a new constitution—Deuteronomy—that gave them a new past to live by and one that would guide them in the future and change that future fundamentally, forever. It is in Deuteronomy that Moses/the Deuteronomists win the ideological Civil War that was waged at many points in Israelite history, but perhaps at no time more seriously than in the seventh century B.C.E. Wills continues:

> Both North and South strove to win the battle for *interpreting* Gettysburg as soon as the physical battle had ended. Lincoln is after even larger game—he means to "win" the whole Civil War in ideological terms as well as military ones. And he will succeed: the Civil War *is*, to most Americans, what Lincoln wanted it to *mean*. Words had to complete the work of the guns. (37–38, emphasis original)

In many ways this is true for Deuteronomy as well, which has left its indelible stamp across the Hebrew Bible, most notably in the Deuteronomistic History. Moreover, people tend to think that Sinai/covenant means what Deuteronomy wanted it to mean. This is apparent even in the New Testament when Jesus says the greatest commandment in all the law is precisely Deut 6:5.

Wills's remarks also raise interesting questions regarding the genre of Deuteronomy as a polity or constitution (as suggested by S. Dean McBride) or a revision of said constitution (through amendments or through an interpretive address such as Lincoln's).

Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1998)

One subplot in this sprawling novel set in the 1990s centers on Conrad Hensley, a working-class Californian who loses his job and, through an incredibly unfortunate series of events, ends up in prison though he is guilty of no crime. While incarcerated, he receives a copy of the writings of Epictetus by mistake, which proves indirectly to be his salvation. The Stoic insights of Epictetus, who had also spent time in prison, help Conrad to conquer his fears and to withstand the horrors of prison life until a timely earthquake leads to his escape. Portions of chapters fifteen, seventeen, and nineteen chronicle Conrad's prison experience in gruesome detail and contain several excerpts from Epictetus (352–69, 395–418, 441–65; the first excerpt may be omitted if length is a concern). Instructors should be aware that the realistic descriptions of jailhouse activity and inmate dialogue are quite graphic.

Stoic philosophy was a major component of the intellectual milieu in which much of the New Testament was written. The author of the Acts of the Apostles mentions Stoics by name (17:22–31), and scholars frequently detect their influence in Paul's letters (e.g., Rom 1:19–21; 2:14–15; 1 Cor 7:29–31). It is sometimes argued that in Phil 1:19–26 the imprisoned Paul is contemplating suicide in accordance with Stoic ideas about a proper death (cf. also his reflections on contentment in Phil 4:11). In addition, the martyrs in 4 Maccabees are clearly characterized as heroes of Stoic self-control. Wolfe's narrative can serve as an engaging introduction to Stoic thought, in tandem with secondary reading or class lecture. Questions for discussion may include: Does Wolfe accurately and adequately represent Stoic teachings? Is the way in which Epictetus helps Conrad to cope with his situation plausible? (Most likely, few students will have firsthand knowledge of prison life.) Do Stoic teachings address any of the same questions and concerns addressed in New Testament texts (e.g., fear of death in Heb 2:14–15)?

PART 5:
OTHER MEDIA

Introduction

Music, film, art, and literature are by no means the only materials that can be productively employed in the biblical studies classroom. This final section orients the reader to a number of media that can enhance teaching and learning and outlines representative strategies for use with examples drawn from various categories (Cartoons and Comics; Youth Literature, Programming, and Entertainment; Animated Television; Television Dramas and Documentaries; and Internet Websites). As with each of the previous sections, this survey is certainly not exhaustive. Teachers are encouraged to use the material presented here as a stimulus for designing creative and engaging class sessions and assignments.

The indices may be consulted to find entries with classroom strategies related to particular texts. All secondary literature cited in the following chapters is included in the following bibliography.

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OTHER MEDIA

Cartoons and Comics

Dan W. Clanton Jr.

As biblical studies instructors seek ways to illustrate important points, stimulate discussion, or simply add an air of levity to the classroom, the first thought probably is not of comics or comic books. This is, in some ways, understandable. Today, television, film, and music are easy to access digitally and are probably more popular among students. However, cartoons and comics are cultural repositories of what Wiley Lee Umphlett calls "the unique personal expressions, fantasies, and fancies of thousands of our forgotten yesterdays" (*Mythmakers of the American Dream*, 74). Be it *Peanuts* or *Spider-Man*, because comic art has indeed infiltrated our cultural psyche, it can serve as a wonderful pedagogical tool.

Comics are widely available online. It is now possible to download comics and comic strips for free at sites such as cartoonbank.com, comics.com, creators.com, and ucomics.com, which publish digital versions of hundreds of comics. However, unlike music, art, or literature, comics (especially daily or weekly comics strips) are more temporary in that once they are published either in print or online, they usually vanish quickly unless collected in a book of strips. Teachers, of course, can make their own digital collection by saving the images to their computer. Because of the transitory nature of comics, the ones discussed below are not readily available. (The author, however, has digital copies of all of them and can send them upon request.) While this is less than ideal, an analysis of them can illustrate the pedagogic possibilities of the medium. Comic books, on the other hand, are more permanent in that once published they are more readily available, either in their original print form, which one can buy as a new copy, as a "back issue," or in a graphic novel form, which often collects issues of the same title.

Comic art scholarship makes a distinction between several different types, or forms, of comic art. The simplest and perhaps the easiest to understand is the cartoon. Technically speaking, the cartoon is a single-panel work that delivers to the viewer one static scene. Because of its form, it lacks substance and elaboration and instead relies on inherited and easily recognizable

images and conventions, such as stereotypes, to convey its message (e.g., Gary Larson's *The Far Side*). As such, a cartoon is different from a comic strip, which is usually characterized as "sequential art," that is, a piece containing several panels that tells a more intricate story or joke. Furthermore, the "comic book" is a term that usually refers to a serialized piece of sequential art, often with more detail and depth of plot than a newspaper comic strip. Finally, there is the graphic novel, which can be a collection of comic books or simply a novel told in the form of text and images.

Long thought by many within academia to be a childish pursuit, scholars are now taking serious stock of the contribution comics and comic art have made to the culture, as is evinced by the instructional materials and programs of study listed by the National Association of Comics Art Educators (www.teachingcomics.org). In this vein, M. Thomas Inge notes that comics "deal with the larger aesthetic and philosophical issues mainstream culture has always defined in its arts and humanities. The comics are another form of legitimate culture quite capable of confronting the major questions of mankind" (*Comics as Culture*, xxi). Others have focused on the technical acumen needed to create such art. Will Eisner notes "an average comic book story would reveal the involvement of a range of diverse disciplines that would surprise a pedagogue" (*Comics and Sequential Art*, 147). How, then, does one employ comic art profitably in the classroom? The following discussion sketches some examples using material that relates to the book of Genesis.

Comic art can assist in the teaching of biblical content because in the process of rendering a biblical text for the purposes of humor, a cartoonist will often either reinforce or subtly change the text's content. For example, in a 2005 *Natural Selection* cartoon, Russ Wallace creates a humorous play on God's command in Gen 1:28. The comic depicts Adam and Eve covered in fruit, performing multiplication problems on a blackboard. Adam remarks, "I'm not sure why He told us to do this, but I think we should do what He says." Obviously, Wallace is playing with double meanings here, but his portrayal allows us to approach important content-related questions: Who is being addressed in 1:28? What does this command mean? What is its importance, given that it is repeated three times in the first nine chapters of Genesis? And, more abstractly, did these first humans have the conceptual ability to distinguish God's intended meaning from the one shown in the cartoon? That is, were they created with fully functioning cognitive abilities? Similarly, Wiley Miller's 1998 *Non Sequitur* cartoon allows one to examine the character of the serpent. It depicts both Adam and Eve eating apples, while the serpent remarks, "My long-term goal is to become a tobacco lobbyist." By drawing the connection between the serpent and a lobbyist for tobacco companies, Miller implies that the former is morally questionable by link-

ing it to the latter. Similarly, in Tom Toles's 2001 *Randolph Itch* cartoon the serpent is held responsible for Cain's killing Abel by slyly suggesting that Abel let Cain shoot an apple off his head. Not only does Toles's work allow for the relatively simple matter of distinguishing between his depiction and the narrative in Gen 4, but it also permits students to continue the discussion of the serpent's character because it both furthers the inherited understanding of the serpent—which many students demonize, literally—as essentially evil and at the same time lends credence to the view of the serpent as trickster.

Once content has been taught, other pedagogic goals can be pursued, such as introducing method, history of interpretation, and instigating discussion of contemporary issues. As one might guess, newspaper comics are not an arena in which issues of biblical critical method come up frequently, but there are some examples one might use. A *Peanuts* strip features Charlie Brown being insulted by Violet. Linus asks Charlie Brown, "She really took you apart, didn't she?" to which Charlie Brown replies, "Uh-huh … Step by step, verse by verse, and line by line." Linus then makes the connection between her approach to the insulting and biblical studies by noting, "You sound like a victim of higher criticism." This gentle comparison can easily serve as a transition into a discussion of method. Another strip shows Linus discussing the prologue to the Gospel of Luke. Linus dispenses biblical-critical advice to Charlie Brown, such as "Note the role of Gabriel.… He also appears in Revelations [*sic*] and Daniel.… Ask yourself what 'finding favor' really meant to Mary.… Check out Hosea 11:1." After this lesson, Chuck looks depressed at his lack of knowledge and says sadly, "All I ever knew about was the star and the sheep on the hillside," to which Linus responds, "Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown!" Indeed, many students share this sentiment when it comes to critical approaches to the Bible, and this strip could be a way to open up conversation about certain hesitations or outright mistrust. Analyzing the strip on a much deeper level, one might suggests that Linus here is—perhaps unintentionally—engaging in a hermeneutical act of serious religious significance. Summarizing a point made by Daniel Boyarin, Norman Cohen writes, "Interpreting texts by means of connecting one text to another, or by revealing the link between texts and the historical context in which they are produced, the student of Torah *re-cites* … the word of God, and so recreates the original moment of revelation" (*The Way into Torah*, 20).

One of the most useful areas comic art can address is the history of biblical interpretation. For example, in Rick Detorie's 2003 strip *One Big Happy*, young Ruthie asks a simpleminded question about what Noah and his family did for food on the ark. Her grandfather replies that they probably fished, to which Ruthie replies in a childlike fashion, "No, no, no! They only had two worms!" Questions such as Ruthie's—which are not addressed by the biblical

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narrative—can stimulate the imaginations of students and send them scurrying to find out what other interpreters have conjectured in the past. Once these interests have been piqued, one can then turn students' attention to the history of interpretation on a specific issue. Another question not addressed by the biblical narrative, but one that has occupied interpreters, is why exactly Noah was chosen to build the ark. In one of Johnny Hart's *B.C.* cartoons from 2006, a young ant poses this query to his father, who replies laconically, "He was the only holy man on earth. That—plus he was the only one familiar with the cubit system." Or, finally, one can explore the comic views of what became of the ark after the flood, as Mike Peters does in a 2005 *Mother Goose and Grimm* comic that shows the ark being used as a casino, while Noah wistfully reflects, "Well, after the flood it was just sitting here." In sum, there are a variety of ways in which comic art can be used to broach the history of interpretation of a given passage.

Comic art can also be used profitably to stimulate discussion on a particular topic. Editorial comics and comic books tend to work better in this regard than one-frame cartoons or an isolated comic strip. For example, the comic on evolution and creationism by David Horsey from 2005 depicts a dinosaur eating Adam in the Garden of Eden. The 2004 cartoon on gay marriage by Larry Wright shows the ark being boarded by same-sex couples, two-by-two, while a man (presumably one of Noah's sons) asks Noah, "Are you sure God suggested stopping in Massachusetts?" Another example is the more serious 2005 hurricane Katrina-based cartoon by Mike Luckovich which pictures numerous dead animals in the midst of the flood, with Noah telling the viewer, "Cut me some slack! I'm a Bush crony who's never built a boat before!" In each of these cases, one can easily stimulate discussion through an examination of the cartoon's use of Genesis to make a statement about current events.

A more involved use of comic art to stimulate discussion about Genesis can be found in two recent comic book series. In December 2006, Viper Comics released the first issue of *The Lost Books of Eve*, written by Josh Howard, whose credits include the fan favorite *Dead @ 17*. The comic's official website (vipercomics.com/features/the_lost_books_of_eve.asp) invites the reader to:

> Journey back to a time when magic still thrived, dragons and fallen gods roamed the earth, and man was just a myth. The Garden of Eden was a place of perfect peace and tranquility. That is, until its keeper, Adam, went missing. Now, his newly created wife, Eve, must venture outside the safety of the Garden for the first time to go in search of her husband, all the while battling monsters, beast men, wizards, demons, and even the gods themselves.

Howard's work opens with a quotation from Gen 2:15–18, 21–23, and follows with a quotation from "The Lost Books of Eve 1:1," which details Eve's "insatiable curiosity" and Adam's decision to build a raft so that Eve could see the oceans. Evidently, Adam is lost at sea, and Eve is now left alone in the Garden. One of the most interesting devices Howard uses is to portray God physically, so that God and Eve can converse. God is drawn as a male figure, outlined completely in white, with three eyes on its face, eyes on its palms, and a larger eye on its chest. Eve finally decides to journey out of Eden to find Adam, and she is accompanied by Asherah, one of the guardians of the gate. In its compact narrative, Howard's comic not only introduces key Edenic concepts like free will, but also presents the reader with an enlarged palette of the Garden so that it comes alive. Finally, Eve's character is fleshed out nicely (in more ways than one, given Howard's propensity for scantily clad heroines) so that her motivations and experiences become the touchstone for the story. As such, Howard's work can be employed to explore the character of Eve, the Garden, issues raised by the situation(s) of the first humans, and the ways in which other interpreters have rendered Eve.

A much more intricate example is the ongoing comic book series *Testament*, written by Douglas Rushkoff. Published by Vertigo Books, the "mature readers" imprint of DC Comics, this series contains one of the most sophisticated uses of biblical materials within the field of comic art. Rushkoff's website (rushkoff.com) describes *Testament* this way: "What if the Bible were happening right now? In the world of *Testament*, the archetypal struggle for dominion over humanity is being fought by the revolutionaries of two eras against the would-be tyrants of their ages." That is, Rushkoff identifies various themes within biblical literature and writes complex narratives that take place simultaneously in three different time periods: one in the setting of the biblical story, one in a more totalitarian and dangerous future, and one in sacred time, which is inhabited by deities. Space restraints do not permit adequate summary of the series, but a few words can be said about the first issue.

Rushkoff's first volume, entitled *Akedah*, is a retelling of Gen 22. Juxtaposed with the biblical narrative is the story of Jake Stern and his father Alan, who has developed a tracking chip to assist in locating soldiers. The draft has been reinstated and all potential candidates are required to be implanted with these chips. After much deliberation, Alan decides to implant his son's chip into their family dog and as such does not sacrifice his son to a government he mistrusts, just as Abraham does not sacrifice Isaac, an act Rushkoff links with the deity Moloch. In the succeeding issues, Jake discovers that his father's identification chip is being used to quell dissent against the new government and that all of these evils have been orchestrated by three gods: Astarte, Atum-Ra, and Moloch. They are being opposed, then as now, by Mel-

chezidek, Elijah, and Krishna, acting on behalf of God. Rushkoff is trying to alert his readers to the power of the Bible as human story. In the introduction to the graphic novel collection of the first five issues of *Testament*, Rushkoff writes, "We could all use the kind of wake-up call that a good dose of Bible could provide. … For by 'insisting' that the Bible happened at some moment in distant history, the keepers of religion prevent us from realizing that the Bible is happening right now, in every moment" (6). In 2007, Vertigo released the second graphic novel collection, comprising issues six through ten, as *Testament: West of Eden*. Teachers can be thankful for this second volume, as it contains a section titled "Mysteries and Meanings: Notes on the Biblical History behind *Testament*." Written by Rushkoff, these annotations to the first ten issues of *Testament* are extremely helpful in connecting the comic with the biblical stories behind them. DC Comics has also posted the notes to *Akedah* online (www.dccomics.com/media/special/Testament_Vol_1_Notes.pdf).

Beyond Genesis, there are several useful graphic novels that can be mentioned. The oldest, and one of the most influential, is Will Eisner's seminal *A Contract with God* (1978), reprinted in *The Contract with God Trilogy* in 2006. Long considered the first graphic novel in America, Eisner's title story is rich in Joban allusions, yet set in modern New York. The past few years have seen a flowering of biblical graphic novels. A partial list includes Jim Krueger and Mario Ruiz, *Testament* (2003); A. David Lewis, with M. P. Mann and Jennifer Rodgers, *The Lone and Level Sands* (2005); Steve Ross, *Marked* (2005); and J. T. Waldman, *Megillat Esther* (2005).

Two final suggestions on ways to implement learning-by-comics. First, students can draw their own cartoons/comics. As David Barnhart ("The Collaborative Comic Strip") has noted, when students—alone or in groups—participate in the creative process of selecting the perspective and fashioning the focus of a particular story or event, they not only perform exegesis but also become more aware of the choices made by later painters, writers, musicians, and filmmakers in their renderings and perhaps even of how those choices have influenced what they understand about the text. Second, in the grand tradition of *The New Yorker* and, subsequently, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, the teacher can ask students to fill in the thought bubbles found in preexisting cartoons and then justify or explain their choices. Students often have as much fun creating dialogue for this assignment as they do creating their own cartoons, and the less artistically inclined students can participate in a more substantial way.

Youth Literature, Programming, and Entertainment

Mark Roncace

This chapter offers teaching strategies related to children's Bibles, the *VeggieTales* video series, and computer video games.

Children's Bibles

Children's Bibles offer an easy and enjoyable way to engage biblical texts. They have two particular advantages. First, they are readily available in a wide variety of approaches and styles. Books vary depending on the age, gender, and religious affiliation (e.g., Catholic or Jewish) of the intended reader. Used children's Bibles can be purchased very cheaply on the Internet, and the local public library should have plenty on hand. Secondly, many students are familiar with the genre; in fact, students have confessed to reading their children's Bible as a "Cliffs Notes" version. Students also appreciate the opportunity to reflect on what they read and were taught as a child in comparison to the "real" Bible. A study of the differences can prove invigorating and enlightening.

When employing children's Bibles in class, it is helpful to break students into groups and have one person in each group act as the "teacher" by reading the story aloud as the others listen; the teachers must be sure to show the accompanying sketches to their "class." It is very easy to gather a collection of children's Bibles so that different ones can be distributed to different groups. Of course, if only one children's Bible is available, it could simply be read to the class as a whole. Students are then asked to discuss the following types of questions, which could be modified, or made more specific, based on the text: How does the children's version compare to the canonical text? What elements does the children's version omit, add, or change? How do the deletions or additions influence the overall story? What motivates the changes in the children's version? Is there an explicit "lesson" for children to learn? How do the accompanying illustrations help readers interpret the story? Is the children's version a responsible and helpful way to render the story? In general,

and not surprisingly, children's versions simplify matters, which underscores and facilitates reflection on the complexities of the biblical text.

Many different biblical passages, particularly from the Hebrew Bible, could be studied via children's Bibles. The tales of Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Saul, David, and Esther come immediately to mind. Sometimes it is instructive to point out which stories are virtually absent from children's Bibles, such as many of the narratives in Judges or the story of Job. Other stories are found in most children's Bibles, such as Jonah, which can be analyzed here for the purposes of illustrating how a class discussion might unfold.

While commentators debate the meaning and purpose of the canonical book of Jonah, in many children's Bibles the meaning and purpose are clear: It is a story of disobedience, punishment, repentance, and forgiveness. This is accomplished in several ways. First, as students immediately recognize, children's Bibles generally omit the fourth and final chapter in which Jonah becomes angry that God does not destroy Nineveh. In the last verse of the book, God poses a question to Jonah, thus concluding the story in a wonderfully open-ended fashion. In contrast, numerous children's stories end with the Ninevites heeding Jonah's message and repenting to avoid God's wrath. There is no bush, no worm, and no irate prophet. This simpler ending rewrites a complex story and ambiguous protagonist into a tidy tale of forgiveness and "second chances"—for both Jonah and Nineveh. Even some of the children's accounts that do include elements of the canonical ending mold it into a lesson for Jonah and the reader. For instance, *My First Study Bible* has Jonah say in conclusion, "God reminded me that He loves everyone. I learned that I should love people like that, too." Similarly, *Bible Stories for Children* concludes with, "So Jonah came to understand God's ways and how much he loved his people, and Jonah was glad that Nineveh was saved." This "moral of the story" serves to interpret the biblical text, and whether or not one approves of the lesson, it is important to see that no such moralizing occurs in the biblical text. (It is a common feature of children's Bibles to have a moral point to the stories. Asking students if they deem this appropriate often leads to lively discussions.)

Children's versions typically contain more subtle differences that significantly alter the story. For example, in the canonical version, Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish is rather peculiar (Jonah 2). He never repents, and he is eager to return to the temple, which does not accord with God's commands to go to Nineveh. In children's versions, by contrast, Jonah clearly repents. For example, Jonah says, "I'm sorry I ran away. Next time I'll do as you tell me" (*My First Bible*). Or Jonah "had plenty of time to think about how he had behaved, and now he was sorry for disobeying God (*Children's Everyday Bible*). Or finally, "Jonah thought about how he disobeyed God. He felt

bad, 'I'm sorry, God. I should have obeyed you. If you still want me to go to Nineveh, I'll go' " (*Little Boys Bible Storybook*). Telling the story in this fashion also suggests, incorrectly, that the big fish is a vehicle of punishment (akin to being put in "time-out") rather than of salvation.

Further, Jonah's message to the Ninevites in the canonical version is a terse declaration of coming destruction: "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4). Children's Bibles expand Jonah's message considerably in order to include explicitly the call for repentance. For example, Jonah "told both the king and people about the God of earth and heaven, who would no longer let their cruelty and wickedness continue. They must admit how wrong they had been, tell God they were sorry and then change their ways, or else God would punish them and their proud city" (*Children's Bible in 365 Stories*). In short, these changes serve to simplify the story's ambiguities; thus students are able to see more clearly the interpretive challenges that confront readers of the canonical version.

Another feature of children's Bibles that lends itself to use in the classroom is the tendency toward harmonization. Two examples can be offered. First, rather than presenting separately both creation stories found in Gen 1–3, nearly all contemporary children's Bibles rewrite the two stories into one. The most common way to unite them is to move the account of the creation of the man from dust and the woman from the man's rib in the Garden of Eden to the sixth day of the first story. This rewriting omits any reference to Gen 1:26–27 where male and female are created simultaneously and in God's image. Further, some children's Bibles depict only the man created on the sixth day. For instance, the *Good News Bible Stories for Children* says: "When all this was done, God made man from the dust of the earth and called the man Adam. God looked at everything He had made and saw that it was very good. Then God took a rest!" Similarly, the *New Catholic Picture Bible* reads: "God said, 'I shall make man in My image. I shall make him to rule over all the things that I have created.' God formed man out of the dust of the earth." The text then proceeds directly to the seventh day of rest. Yet another example is *The Bible Story*, which reads, "Last of all, God said, 'I will make man. I will make him in my likeness and after my image.' So out of the dust of the earth God formed the first man." God then sets the man in the Garden. In many of these harmonized versions, the woman, remarkably, does not appear during the seven days of creation. She is not created in God's image; she is not part of the creation that is pronounced good. This observation typically evokes animated responses from students.

Secondly, rather than providing two separate accounts of Jesus' birth, children's versions typically combine the stories found in Matthew and Luke into one narrative. Students can be asked to identify the elements of the chil-

dren's story that come from each Gospel. They can also note the elements that are omitted as a result of the harmonization. Children's versions usually follow Luke's story through the shepherd's visit before switching to Matthew's account for the visit by the wise men and the subsequent flight to Egypt. As a result, the most commonly excised material is Luke's scene of Jesus' presentation in the temple where his parents offer a sacrifice of two turtledoves and two pigeons "according to what is stated in the law of the Lord" (Luke 2:24). By rewriting the story in this fashion, the fact that Jesus was Jewish, and that events surrounding his birth followed Jewish customs, is easily overlooked. The genealogies in both Matthew and Luke also establish Jesus' Jewish lineage, but, of course, these do not appear in children's Bibles. Students, in short, are able to appreciate more fully the distinctive elements of the canonical accounts by comparing them to the blended children's stories.

Finally, it can be a fun and productive exercise for students to write—and perhaps even illustrate—their own children's version.

VeggieTales

Co-created by Phil Vischer and Mike Nawrocki, *VeggieTales* is a series of children's computer-animated films. The popular series features comical anthropomorphic vegetables as characters. Most of the episodes are fairly short (thirty to forty minutes), and biblical studies instructors should have no difficulty selecting specific scenes to play in class. The films are explicitly didactic and draw on a variety of biblical stories. Series titles include:

> *Where's God When I'm S-Scared?* (Daniel and the Lion's Den)
> *Dave and the Giant Pickle* (David and Goliath)
> *Are You My Neighbor?* (Parable of the Good Samaritan)
> *Rack, Shack, and Benny* (Daniel in the Furnace)
> *Josh and the Big Wall!* (Battle at Jericho)
> *King George and the Ducky* (David and Bathsheba)
> *The Ballad of Little Joe* (Joseph and his Brothers)
> *Duke and the Great Pie War* (Ruth; Moses and Miriam)

Three additional episodes illustrate how class discussion might unfold:

Esther: The Girl Who Became Queen (2000)

It would be possible to view this entire thirty-minute video and use it as a basis to launch discussion of the biblical text. Three scenes are particularly helpfully as they highlight the sexual and violent nature of the biblical story— material that is inappropriate for children. First, the drunken king demanding

OTHER MEDIA

that the beautiful queen Vashti display herself for the viewing pleasure of the men at the feast (1:10) is certainly a scene with adult themes. Before showing the parallel film clip, students might be asked to imagine how they would rewrite that scene for a children's audience. In the *VeggieTales* version Vashti refuses to make the king a sandwich at three in the morning, resulting in her being expelled from the palace (DVD ch. 1). Similarly, the sexually suggestive nature of Esth 2 in which the girls vying for the position of the new queen spend a night with the king (2:12–14) is altered as Esther wins a singing contest (DVD ch. 2). Here students can pay special attention to the words of Esther's song since it refers to God. This mention of the deity provides a chance to mention the Greek version of Esther, which also includes the divine element. Finally, the violent and vengeful conclusion of the biblical story (Esth 9) can be contrasted with Haman's fate in the film: banished to the island of perpetual tickling (DVD ch. 8). These film clips not only introduce an element of humor into the class; more importantly, they help students consider the "mature themes" in the biblical story: Is Esther an innocent girl who does what she must to save her people, or does she use her sexuality to bring about the bloody destruction of those who oppose her? As a concluding exercise, students can attempt to identify the "lesson" of the biblical book. Very few of them indicate "courage," which is the moral of the *VeggieTales* film ("you never need to be afraid to do what's right"). This can lead to a discussion of (1) the didactic nature (or lack thereof) of biblical narrative, (2) Purim and the significance of the book in Jewish tradition, or (3) the "lesson" that Esther might have taught to its original audience—how to live successfully under foreign rule (cf. Daniel and Joseph).

Jonah: A VeggieTales Movie (2002)

This movie-length (eighty-three minutes) version of Jonah features several scenes that could be used to study the biblical book. Perhaps the best is the six-minute concluding scene (DVD ch. 21) which can be compared to Jonah 4. How is the film interpreting the canonical account? What does it change, retain, or omit? And how do the differences alter the overall significance and purpose of the story? Among a variety of possible topics one could pursue, the following may be noted: (1) In the Bible, Jonah and God have a more direct relationship than in the film where the deity (or a divine voice) is absent; this changes the literary and theological texture of the story. (2) In the biblical text, God plays a much more adversarial role as he appoints a worm to destroy the plant and sends a sultry wind to torment Jonah (4:7–8). By contrast, in the film, we are told only that God's compassion provided a plant to shade Jonah. The plant is eaten by Khalil—Jonah's traveling companion—and no wind is mentioned. (3) In the film, Khalil explains that God spared Nineveh because

the Ninevites repented, so God gave them a "second chance." This is not unlike the biblical text (3:10). However, God's final questions to Jonah (4:10–11) focus on God's sovereignty and love for all creation, not Nineveh's repentance and "second chance." That is, God cares for the people (and animals!) of Nineveh even though they "do not know their right hand from their left."

(4) Like the biblical version, the story of Jonah in the film ends without any resolution—Jonah is still on the hillside confused and frustrated. The characters in the film to whom the Jonah story is being told (it is a story within a story) object to this open ending until the storyteller observes (DVD ch. 22): "It's not what Jonah learned; it's what you learned." Just as the biblical text summons the reader to a response by concluding the book with a question, so too the film calls the reader to wrestle with the issues raised in the story. (5) The film ends with a song, in line with the biblical account, that explains, "Jonah was a prophet, but he never really got it." The point, according to the song, is that God wants people to be merciful and compassionate. To develop this idea, teachers can shows students a picture of a T-shirt which reads in large letters, "Jesus loves you!" and in smaller letters underneath, "Then again, he loves everybody" (www.cafepress.com/larknews.23099704). If "Jesus" is replaced with "God," then this shirt illustrates one of the central theological issues that the book of Jonah invites its readers to ponder: How can God show mercy and compassion to everyone? Aren't we more special? Surely God loves us more than our enemies? The students who dislike the sarcastic tone of the T-shirt can perhaps begin to understand Jonah's bitterness—his difficulty in "getting it"—in response to God's compassion for Nineveh.

Gideon: Tuba Warrior (2006)

Only about half (12–15 minutes) of this episode is a retelling of the Gideon story (Judg 6–8). If the *VeggieTales* version of Jonah includes the complex ending, it omits it altogether with Gideon (Judg 8). There is, as one might suspect, no mention of Gideon's vengeance on the people of Succoth for failing to assist him in his pursuit of the Midianite leaders (Judg 8:1–17) or of Gideon's ephod which led to false worship and problems for Gideon (8:22–28). Obviously these omissions change the overall portrayal of Gideon, thus prompting students to consider the rhetorical and theological function of Judg 8. What is the point for including those dubious elements? Is there any significance to the deity's absence during this part of the narrative? Similar omissions at the beginning of the story also change the animated version. In it the Midianites are simply presented as the enemy—no reason is supplied as to why they plan to attack the Israelites. In the Bible, of course, God designed the Midianite oppression as punishment for Israel's sins, and God seems initially reluctant to deliver them (6:6–10), which yields a different image of God from the one in

the film. In both versions Gideon is depicted as initially fearful and reluctant, but the *VeggieTales* Gideon overcomes his fear more quickly and with fewer protestations. For instance, in the canonical account, Gideon is shown as fearful right up until the eve of the battle when he journeys to the Midianite camp for one last sign of victory, the hearing of a dream presaging Israelite victory (7:7–15). In the *VeggieTales* retelling, Gideon accidentally overhears the dream and tells God: "I did not need that [sign], but thanks anyway." In general, students can discuss the differences between Gideon's image and role in the two accounts. The subtitle of the film is "a lesson in trusting God." What subtitle would students supply for the biblical story?

Video Games

Bible-related video games offer the opportunity to think about important issues, including the violent nature of biblical texts, how texts are reinterpreted for modern audiences, and the effect, intended or otherwise, such games might have on those who play them. Teachers can derive pedagogical benefit simply by showing the video game's website in class rather than actually purchasing the product and attempting to demonstrate the game.

There are relatively few Bible-based video games (excluding trivia oriented ones), though the number is growing. Not surprisingly, the books of Joshua and Revelation are the two texts featured most prominently. For example "Joshua and the Battle of Jericho" (Wisdom Tree Games) is described this way:

> You, as Joshua, must lead God's people into the land of promise. But watch out! There are falling rocks, soldiers, battering rams and elite forces that will try to block your every move. But God has given you the power. Weapons like the horn of Jericho, God Speed, power-ups, secret exits and other armor will help you in your quest. Conquer the Canaanites, Amorites and Hittites as you collect silver and gold, race through deadly mazes, and defeat the enemies of God!

Obviously the game reflects the violent rhetoric found in Joshua; the cover depicts a strong-armed man wielding a sword. Joshua, of course, can lose the game, which can open the door for discussion of the Canaanites perspective (e.g., what if Joshua had lost?). Interestingly, Wisdom Tree's slogan is "family friendly learning that excites the mind." Whether or not killing Canaanites is "family friendly" is something that students enjoy discussing.

The recently released "Left Behind: Eternal Forces" is adapted from the best-selling *Left Behind* book series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Like the novels, the game is loosely based on the book of Revelation, focused on the so-called "Rapture" of believers. The game has been criticized for encourag-

OTHER MEDIA

ing the killing or converting of non-Christians ("convert or die"), but Tyndale House, the publisher, denies the accusation. They do, however, admit, "The game is a good versus evil story, which in turn results in conflict." Players lead the Tribulation force against the antichrist in a battle of "physical and spiritual warfare." Like the book of Revelation, the game is a violent battle between good and evil. Similarly, in "Catechumen," a game by N'Lightning Software, players are told: "Your mentor and brethren have been captured by the demon-possessed Roman soldiers. It is your job to work your way through the catacombs to free them. Satan has a powerful hand in the Roman Empire and has powerful foes to block your every effort." In the process, players will "encounter Satan's minions and banish them back to their evil realm. Evil lurks everywhere you turn. With your Sword of the Spirit in hand, you must confront the demons head on and show them nothing can overcome the power of the Holy Spirit."

In general, these Bible-based video games are relatively tame when it comes to the depiction of violence. For instance, one reviewer writes of "Catechumen": "It's a joy to know my son can immerse himself in such an interactive game without the threat of any blood, guts or gore." Several observations and questions emerge here: Presumably, few people would be able to say the same thing about certain biblical texts—"I am glad my children can read them without the threat of blood, guts, or gore." How, then, does that affect their attitude toward the Bible? While the Bible-based games may be relatively innocuous, they still clearly have a violent theme. Do people fail to recognize video game violence because it is not "real," that is, only on a screen? Likewise, do people overlook the violence in the biblical text because it is "only a text"? What is the relationship between graphic violence and "real" violence? Further, do people tend to excuse violence as long as the "bad guys" are the ones being killed? Does this make Joshua's or Revelation's violence somewhat palatable? What makes someone a "bad guy"—that is, what is the heart of the conflict (moral/religious values; land possession; etc.)?

In short, students are invited to see the biblical text in a different light when they witness it translated into a video game. How does the new medium affect one's reading of the text? Showing students these video games provides an excellent visual contrast to, say, the books of Ruth or Jonah or Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, which present a much different view of outsiders/enemies. If there are, indeed, many different perspectives in the canon, students can be invited to reflect on why the particularly violent ones are adapted to video games. What would a video game based, for example, on Jonah look like? Why do the video games opt for the texts that present a black-and-white (i.e., dualistic) worldview? What are the implications of using biblical imagery, themes, and language to promote such a worldview?

ANIMATED TELEVISION

Dan W. Clanton Jr. and Mark Roncace

This chapter discusses several episodes from each of three prime time animated television shows—*The Simpsons*, *South Park*, and *Family Guy*.

THE SIMPSONS

The popular Fox television cartoon *The Simpsons* has attracted not only countless admirers, but also the attention of scholars (e.g., Keslowitz, *The Simpsons and Society*; Brown and Logan, *The Psychology of The Simpsons*; and Pinsky, *The Gospel according to the Simpsons*). The best source for information on the show is The Simpsons Archive (snpp.com), which contains synopses and transcripts of all episodes, except the most recent ones. It also has a list of the show's references to religious issues, including a list of biblical references arranged by book (www.snpp.com/guides/religion.html). Teachers might simply glance through the list to glean something to mention in class without showing the clip. For instance, when discussing the book of James and how his views of works and salvation relate to Paul's views, one can quote Homer: "Wow. God does so much for me and he doesn't ask anything in return." Or if the issue of the trinity emerges in discussions of the Spirit in Acts, one can cite, with sympathy, Ned Flanders (the conservative Christian neighbor of the Simpsons), who is clearly having trouble understanding the concept when he says: "Homer, please don't tempt the Gods." Then, looking upward and stuttering, says, "I mean, mean God. There's one God. Only one. Well, sometimes there's three." Similarly, Bart raises some of the same questions as those found in 1 Cor 15 concerning bodily resurrection when he asks his Sunday school teacher: "What if you're a really good person, but you get into a really, really bad fight and your leg gets gangrene and it has to be amputated. Will it be waiting for you in heaven?"

In addition to numerous one-liners, the show also has featured entire episodes which explore themes related to the Bible. What follows is a brief sketch of how a few episodes might be employed in the classroom. Note that

only the first nine seasons are currently available on DVD; the rest will pre-
sumably be released in the future. Each episode is about twenty-two minutes,
so it could be shown in its entirety; in many cases, however, teachers could
select a representative clip. In addition to the specific suggestions provided
below, simply asking students what questions the episode raises about the
biblical text or topic can be a helpful, if risky, strategy. Students often connect
the cartoon and text in insightful ways. Note: Some students will occasionally
find the humor offensive to their personal values and beliefs; teachers should
proceed with due sensitivity and caution.

"Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment" (Second Season, 1991)

In this episode, Lisa (the daughter) fears that the family might go to hell
because Homer steals cable TV by getting an illegal hookup. First, the title of
this episode can help students note that the Commandments are not num-
bered in either Exod 20 or Deut 5 and as a result they are counted differently
in different traditions. If students are asked to number the Commandments,
they will come up with different lists, in part because there are more than ten
imperative verbs. Those students who focus on Deut 5:6–21 typically end up
numbering according to the Catholic tradition in which the law prohibiting
theft is the seventh, not the eighth commandment (i.e., the title of the episode
reflects only one tradition of numbering the commands).

The first half of this episode can underscore certain features of the biblical
laws, for instance, their simplicity. The biblical text does not list penalties for
breaking the Commandments, which raises the question of what the penalty
might be—perhaps exclusion from the covenant community, which of course
is quite different from contemporary penalties for theft. By contrast, in *The
Simpsons* the consequence for breaking the law is clear: eternal punishment in
hell (a concept that students are surprised to learn is not in the Hebrew Bible).
This can lead to discussion of how the specific punishments were added (or
changed) as biblical laws developed. Similarly, the Decalogue does not define
stealing with any specificity or give any regulations to govern various scenar-
ios. Homer calls attention to this issue when in a conversation with Lisa he
agrees that stealing is wrong but then goes on to ask Lisa, "When you had
breakfast this morning, did you pay for it? And did you pay for those clothes
you're wearing?" As an eight-year-old, Lisa did not. Later Lisa probes the issue
much more deeply than Homer when she asks the minister, "So even if a man
takes bread to feed his starving family, that would be stealing?" The minister
says it would not be, unless the man puts anything on the bread, such as jelly.
This exchange can set up a discussion of the development of biblical laws to
deal with more complex societal situations. Further, just as getting a free cable
hookup might be seen by some (i.e., Homer) as a victimless crime, or even no

crime at all, so too the Israelites evidently had difficulty in determining cases of disputed ownership (see Exod 22:1–12, especially v. 9).

Bart and Lisa's Sunday school teacher asserts one must obey the Ten Commandments in order to avoid eternal damnation. Here one can ask students what Jesus would think about this view. After they typically say that Jesus would disagree, one can have them consult passages such as Matt 5:17–20 or the text in which Jesus answers the rich man's questions about how to inherit eternal life by enjoining him to keep the commandments (Matt 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30). This often enlivens the discussion and helps Christian students take a more active interest in the laws.

"Simpsons Bible Stories" (Tenth Season, 1999)

Bored in church, the Simpsons doze off, dreaming of themselves in the Garden of Eden, making the Exodus from Egypt, and as David fighting Goliath. Thus this episode conveniently breaks roughly into three six-minute vignettes. In the Adam and Eve sequence, one can simply ask students to point out the differences between cartoon and biblical version, such as: Who is present when the deity forbids eating the fruit (both Adam/Homer and Eve/Marge in the cartoon vs. only Adam in the Bible)? What punishment is stipulated for eating the fruit (nothing specific vs. death)? Who eats the fruit first (Adam vs. Eve)? Why does Eve eat the fruit (because she does not want to waste the fruit vs. to gain knowledge to be like God)? Who does God approach first after they have eaten (Eve vs. Adam)? There are similarities as well, such as the man names the animals and both the man and woman are present when the snake appears. One can ask about the overall portrayal of the characters. Like the biblical story, the cartoon depicts Eve as the more intelligent, cerebral creature. She, for instance, wants to call one of the animals "groundhog," but Adam has already named it "land monster." Adam eats the fruit compulsively, but Eve tries to convince him to stop (an obvious difference from the canonical account) and then reasons that "it's a sin to waste food" before she eats. She confesses her failure when confronted by the deity, but the man tries nonchalantly to push the apple cores out of sight and then fails to intercede on her behalf when God expels her from the garden. The cartoon also helps students contemplate the image of God. In the biblical version, the deity is more anthropomorphic than in the cartoon, where God is represented as a hand reaching out of heaven. The biblical God might be seen as more merciful since the humans are not punished by death for eating the fruit (Gen 2:17). But neither deity is particularly forgiving, as seen in Adam's protests in the cartoon just prior to being expelled, "God is love, right?"

Two other thoughts: Adam, surmising that God will let them back in the garden, asks "How long can God hold a grudge?" The answer is "forever and

ever" (which is the preacher reading from the Bible as Homer emerges from his dream). This gives students a chance to reflect on the Pauline concept of original sin as an interpretation of the Garden story. Secondly, when Adam is hungry for some bacon, the pig simply pulls some out of its own flesh and gives it to him. This prompts students to inquire about the nature of life as God intended it (i.e., "should we be vegetarians?"), and to reflect on how this text might be brought to bear on general environmental issues.

The second and third vignettes stray a bit farther from the biblical account than the first one, but they still offer some talking points. In the cartoon, Moses, played by Milhouse, is depicted as timid and fearful and needs the help of Lisa (Miriam?) to accomplish his mission. When Lisa first urges Moses to confront Pharaoh about the Israelites, Moses resists identification with the slaves saying, "Oh, now they're my people?" This captures nicely Moses' "identity crisis" seen in the biblical text (e.g., Exod 3:11, 13–15); it also reminds students that Moses was raised as an Egyptian. The cartoon underscores the violent nature of the biblical story by omitting the killing of the firstborn (although there is a reference to it) and the death of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Instead, after the water washes over them, the Egyptians play like children in a pool, splashing one another. After the Israelites cross the Sea, one of them asks, "What's next? Land of milk and honey?" to which Lisa, looking at a scroll says, "Actually it looks like we're in for forty years of wandering in the desert." Although this does not quite follow the biblical plot line, it does highlight the fact that the story of ancient Israel is one of constant suffering and oppression.

The third vignette, featuring Bart as David and Nelson as Goliath, may be more difficult to employ pedagogically. The most impressive aspect is that it plays off the idea that there are two different names associated with the killing of Goliath in the biblical text (David in 1 Sam 17, and Elhanan in 2 Sam 21:19). One can also take this opportunity to discuss the textual problems with 1 Sam 17. This last sketch could be shown as part of a review at the end of the semester, asking students how many Hebrew Bible allusions they can find and how they "work." There are references to Solomon's judgment regarding the baby, Jezebel, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Canaanites, Methuselah, Samson, the Tower of Babel, and Jonah (and perhaps David's womanizing and his friendship with Jonathan).

"Thank God It's Doomsday" (Sixteenth Season, 2005)

This episode, a spoof of the *Left Behind* series, introduces students to certain aspects of apocalyptic literature and its interpretation. Homer sees a movie about the rapture entitled "Left Below" and becomes worried that he will not be among the righteous on judgment day—illustrative of the dualis-

tic nature of apocalyptic thinking. Marge, however, assures him not to worry because signs will precede the end, a notion that has biblical parallels. When Homer interprets several odd events as signs, even though they have perfectly natural explanations, he decides to do some research on the rapture. He discovers a book entitled "1989: The Year of Armageddon," and later Lisa apprises him that seers have been predicting the end for centuries and have all been wrong, both of which challenge a prophetic reading of biblical books. By factoring in the number of verses in Revelation and the number of people present at the Last Supper, among other peculiar numbers, Homer calculates that the apocalypse will begin in one week. This illustrates how the symbolic nature of apocalyptic discourse lends itself to a wide range of interpretations. Numbers can be easily manipulated.

Nobody listens to Homer until he makes a prediction, citing Rev 6:13, that "the stars will fall to the earth," which is what happens when a celebrity-filled blimp crashes—again demonstrating how signs can be variously interpreted. Soon Homer has a large group of followers who believe the end is nigh. If students are asked to read Rev 6, they will immediately notice many other "signs" that should precede the end—ones not cited by Homer. This helps students to appreciate the selective nature of interpretation, as does the fact that when Homer's prediction proves incorrect, he revises it based on a new calculation. Students might also be invited to consider how Homer's statement, "God loves you. He's gonna kill you," reflects the violent nature of apocalyptic literature and the image of Jesus in Revelation as it compares to his portrayal in the Gospels (e.g., in the Sermon on the Mount).

South Park

South Park is Peabody Award-winning animated comedy series about four elementary-age boys who reside in the small town of South Park, Colorado. Created and written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, it has aired on Comedy Central since 1997. It is well known for its parody and satire, often in crude and vulgar form, as it addresses a variety of political, religious, and social issues. Many of the *South Park* episodes are available for individual purchase ($1.99) on iTunes, including the three discussed here. Note: *South Park* is much more potentially offensive than *The Simpsons*, so again, teachers should exercise due discretion.

"Cartmanland" (Fifth Season, 2001)

This episode deals with the issue of theodicy through the rising and declining fortunes of two characters: Cartman (a foul-mouthed, racist, and devious little boy) and Kyle (a basically good-natured Jewish character). As

OTHER MEDIA

the episode opens, Cartman's grandmother has died and leaves him a million dollars with which he plans to buy an amusement park in order to have all the rides to himself. This good fortune for Cartman leads to a crisis of faith for Kyle. Furthermore, Kyle is afflicted with a hemorrhoid. He tells his friend Stan, "All my life I was raised to believe in Jehovah, to believe that we should all behave a certain way and good things will come to us. I make mistakes, but every week I try to better myself.… And what does this so-called God give me in return? A hemorrhoid! It doesn't make sense!" He then looks upward and asks God, "What is your logic?" Kyle eventually decides, "There is no justice! There is no God!" and renounces his Jewish faith. In order to help him through this existential crisis, his parents tell him the story of Job, which is simultaneously animated. Curiously, they end the story prior to Job's confrontation with God and the restoration of his family and fortunes. This causes Kyle to exclaim, "That's the most horrible story I've ever heard. Why would God do such horrible things to such a good person just to prove a point to Satan?" His father replies, "Uh, I don't know," to which Kyle says, "Then I was right … there isn't a God." Meanwhile, Cartman is in the process of losing the park. Once Cartman's fortune has vanished and Kyle sees him humiliated, he instantly recovers from his hemorrhoid-related illness. The show ends with Kyle once again looking to heaven, saying "You *are* up there."

This show can be used in the classroom to illustrate not only the issue of theodicy, but also a modern adaptation of the Job story (albeit very different from, e.g., Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.*). Students may consider why the retelling of Job's story in the cartoon omits the divine speeches and Job's restoration. How would Kyle have reacted to God's response to Job? To the epilogue? Unlike Kyle, Job never doubts God's existence, only God's justice (cf. Holocaust survival literature). Did Job go too far, or not far enough? Other questions to consider: Why do Kyle's parents tell him the story of Job—is the book appropriate (cathartic or helpful) literature for someone who is suffering? How do Job's friends function in the plot of the book in comparison to the way in which Cartman functions in the cartoon? How does Deuteronomistic theology (reward for righteousness and punishment for sin) play out for the various characters?

"Are You There God? It's Me, Jesus" (Third Season, 1999)
In this show the people approach Jesus and ask that God appear to mark the millennium celebration. Jesus is excited about the renewed interest in him because of the millennium and asks that God grant the people's request. God, however, warns Jesus about his pride and refuses to appear. Like a number of Jesus films, the show depicts a Jesus who is struggling to come to terms with his own identity and mission; thus it can be employed in tandem

with conversations about various Christologies present in the Gospels. When God does not show up at the celebration, the people become upset and prepare to crucify Jesus, leading him to conclude that God hates him (cf. Jesus' cry of dereliction on the cross in Mark 15:34 and parallels). The show can also invite reflection on the theology of the cross: What is the purpose of Jesus' death according to the Gospels and to Paul (and subsequent Christian tradition)? When Jesus realizes that his own pride clouded his judgment and that sometimes God must not grant requests in order to allow people to work through problems, God appears. The theophany is neither frightening nor awe-inspiring in the classic sense, but God looks nothing like the people expect. This could be used in conjunction with discussions of *imago Dei*, the face of God in the Hebrew Bible, the incarnation, or more general theological discussions about the nature of the deity as it relates to human understanding.

"Super Best Friends" (Fifth Season, 2001)

The boys discover David Blaine, magician and cult leader, performing miracles in the streets. Stan realizes that Blaine and his cronies are interested in the power and wealth that can accrue with a large following. Stan tries to convince the other boys that they have been brainwashed, but it appears to be too late as they have forsaken their friends and families to follow Blaine. Stan calls on Jesus and other religious figures (Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, Joseph Smith, and Moses) to destroy Blaine and thwart the suicide pact he has instituted. The episode could be employed as part of a discussion of miracles and magic and how, if at all, to distinguish between the two. Students might also consider the way in which people respond to such demonstrations of special powers. In the show, people find Jesus' miracles much less impressive than Blaine's and are thus inclined to follow Blaine's teaching. To what extent does Jesus' authority in the Gospels derive from his miraculous power? How do miracles function in the Gospel narratives in comparison to the cartoon? The show could also open discussion about the social and psychological dynamics of religious movements, from the early Christian church to the contemporary. Stan observes that cults are dangerous because they promise hope, happiness, and an afterlife, but they require you to pay money and any religion that asks you to pay money is wrong. Viewers are invited to consider how the major world religions may or may not fall into the same category. How might one compare Blaine's movement to the early Jesus movement or churches founded by Paul? How did each attract converts? Did the early Christian community as described in Acts function like the cartoon's cult?

Family Guy

Created by Seth MacFarlane, *Family Guy* is an animated Fox television series about an American family in Rhode Island. The comedy has run from 1999 to the present, with a few brief interruptions. In comparison to *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, the show is not nearly as rife with religious themes, but a few episodes do offer teaching possibilities. Most of the episodes, including the two discussed here, are available on DVD.

"If I'm Dyin' I'm Lyin'" (Second Season, 2000)

In order to revive their favorite television show, Peter tells the "Grant a Dream Foundation" that his son Chris is dying and that his last wish is for the show to return to the air. Their deception is successful, but problems ensue as people find out that Chris is supposedly dying. In order to stay out of legal trouble for defrauding the Foundation, Peter claims that he has healed Chris through some sort of divine power. Now, however, people begin to flock to Peter and view him as a charismatic faith healer and, eventually, as God. Lois, Peter's wife, tells him, "These people are worshiping you. Don't you think there's someone who might resent that? A being who's all-knowing and all-powerful?" Always the dense one, Peter responds, "Someone's got a pretty high opinion of herself." Once Lois points out that God could be displeased by the idolatry of Peter's followers, Peter retorts, "When did God ever say he didn't want someone else being worshiped like him?" Lois rightly responds that it is one of the Ten Commandments, but Peter dismisses her claim, saying, "Oh, come on Lois, those were written like two hundred years ago. Times have changed." Immediately following this claim, the Griffin family begins to experience phenomena that parallel the plagues delineated in Exod 7–11. The light bulbs in the house go out (darkness); the family dog Brian gets fleas (flies); and Chris gets zit-like boils all over his face. Peter insists there must be a rational explanation for these occurrences but begins to demur when the baby's bath water turns to blood. As Peter tries to find a natural reason for these events, Brian slaps him, exclaiming, "God is pissed!" As frogs erupt out of Peter's clothing, the family runs outside, only to see Peter's followers dancing around a massive golden statue they have made of Peter (an obvious parallel to the golden calf). Peter finally admits that he is a fake, and lightning strikes the statue, toppling it over onto Chris. Brian excitedly points out that this is the final plague—the death of the firstborn—and Peter realizes the error of his ways. He apologizes to God, and the plagues stop. Peter says, "Thank God. I mean, thank me," at which point a frog jumps into his face and the episode ends.

This episode, obviously, weaves together several themes and texts from

the book of Exodus. In the biblical story the giving of the laws follows the plagues, whereas here it precedes it. This might lead students to reflect on why God is opposed to the Egyptians—what have they done to rouse divine wrath? Peter's idea that the Ten Commandments are outdated can open discussion about the meaning and significance of the laws for contemporary people of faith. Further, the show can illustrate the humanity of Pharaoh, since it is evident that Peter is a metaphorical Pharaoh. The end of the Exodus story finds a parallel in the cartoon in that both Pharaoh and Peter have not quite changed their thinking—Peter hangs on to the notion that he is God, while Pharaoh sends his army after the fleeing Israelites. Have neither Peter nor Pharaoh ultimately been that impressed with the plagues? The episode may also help students to reflect on the golden calf. In the biblical text, unlike the cartoon, those who have witnessed the plagues and been saved by God are the ones who, nonetheless, construct the false god; in the cartoon, as expected, those who worship the false deity are the ones who commit the idolatry. Finally, one can consider the portrayal of God in Exodus as opposed to the God rendered here. Is the God of Exodus a deity who, as Lois says, is "all-knowing and all-powerful"? What motivates God to send the plagues in the biblical text as compared to the cartoon? Is God "pissed" or not?

"The Father, the Son, and the Holy Fonz" (Fourth Season, 2005)

After a family crisis about whether or not to baptize their son, Peter begins to search for a religion that appeals to him in a series of scenes reminiscent of Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters*. He tries to be a Latter-Day Saint (but gives up because of the restrictions on alcohol), a Jehovah's Witness (but in witnessing, he confuses the story of Jesus with the plot of the TV series *Quantum Leap*), and a Hindu, but all to no avail. Finally, Peter's father, Francis, tells him, "You want to find religion? All you've got to do is look in your heart. Who's always been there for you, offering wisdom and truth? You've known him all along, son. Now, worship him!" Peter, of course, misunderstands his father's advice and founds the First United Church of the Fonz, based on the 1950s nostalgia TV show *Happy Days* (1974–84). In the scenes of worship from Peter's new church, the writers humorously incorporate catch-phrases and references from the show into what appears to be a rather normal Protestant liturgy. Peter even offers a reading from "the Letters of Potsie to the Tuscaderos." Ironically, Peter's growing following and the success of his new religion upset Francis, who manages to sabotage his accomplishments by recruiting Sherman Hensley (George Jefferson of *The Jeffersons*) and Gavin MacLeod (Captain Stubbing of *The Love Boat*) to start their own churches. Peter feels like a failure, but Lois tells him that the values he preached were worthwhile; even if only one person was improved through

OTHER MEDIA

his church, it was worth it. The show ends with Francis praying to the Fonz to the sounds of Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock around the Clock."

This episode, even though it includes no stories or substantial references to the Bible, can still be used rewardingly in the classroom. Given the resurgence in social-scientific approaches to the Bible and especially to nascent Christianity in the first century, Peter's founding of a new church can provide a humorous and satiric example of a similar movement in our time. Most scholars agree that early Jewish followers of Jesus were caught unprepared by his execution and had to recover from that blow to their movement if it were to survive. They searched their scriptures, the font of their worldview, for a way to understand and explain not only what had happened but also why it was important. In sections of Scripture such as Isa 52:13–53:12 they found texts that resonated with their experience and allowed them to tell their faith-story in such a way that other Jews and even Gentiles listened. In this episode, we find Peter performing a similar action. Disillusioned with his inherited tradition, he develops a new one based on the main source of his worldview: popular culture, and specifically television. He does not abandon his Christian tradition completely, however, as the worship scenes show; rather, he adapts it to his new way of viewing the world. As such, this episode can be used to illustrate the formation of new, scripturally based religions and can specifically serve as an analogue to the formation of Christianity in the first century.

OTHER MEDIA

TELEVISION DRAMAS AND DOCUMENTARIES

Dan W. Clanton Jr. and Mark Roncace

This chapter addresses episodes from two TV dramas—*NYPD Blue* and *Criminal Minds*—as well as three documentaries.

NYPD BLUE

NYPD Blue was a critically acclaimed television police drama set in New York City. It was created by Steven Bocho and David Milch and aired on ABC from 1993 to 2005. The episodes discussed here are scheduled to be released on DVD in 2007.

"Lost Israel," Parts 1 and 2 (Sixth Season, 1998)

These are generally considered among the best episodes the series has produced. In part 1, Steve and Sherrie Egan report the disappearance of their son Brian. Detectives Bobby Simone and Andy Sipowicz are assigned to the case. Mr. Egan suggests that a homeless mute named Israel, who communicates mainly by pointing to seemingly obscure biblical passages, might have something to do with Brian's disappearance. At the beginning of the second episode, Israel commits suicide, leaving his Bible open to Ps 119, which Andy interprets as a secret message. Most of Andy's time in part 2 is spent trying to decipher this hidden message. As the investigation continues, it becomes clear that Mr. Egan is involved in his son's murder.

The last few scenes in part 2 are the most intense and probably the best for showing in class. The encounter between Bobby and Mr. Egan in the observation room is reminiscent of a confessional. Mr. Egan, the penitent, is looking for forgiveness, and Bobby can offer it to him. Mr. Egan questions the existence of God and asks why God would not want someone who was suffering to be taken away. He then asks Bobby to shoot him, and when Bobby refuses, he asks for help in confessing. It is unclear whether or not Mr. Egan experiences any remorse over murdering his son, but the subsequent confession (not shown in the episode) implies that he does. Bobby, like most people,

does not think there is forgiveness for Mr. Egan's murder and implies that Mr. Egan himself does not think there is either. The most emotional moment in the entire episode comes when Andy recites Ps 119:81–88 to comfort Mrs. Egan after she learns that her husband has confessed to killing their child. The section that Andy reads represents a supplication to God for protection because of the speaker's adherence to the law. It is a moving piece of poetry, and Andy's reading of it seems to bring about catharsis after the episode has brought all the characters into a state of emotional turmoil. Andy has finally realized Israel's message, and Mrs. Egan seems to be consoled after the murder of her son.

These episodes, particularly the final scenes of part 2, illustrate the theological purposes and functions of the psalms. Perhaps Ps 119 could serve to explore the ways in which the composer(s) of the psalms viewed them; that is, unlike other texts in the Hebrew Bible, these pieces are *direct discourse* aimed at God. The immediacy of the language as well as the variety of discourses (laments; praises; psalms ruminating on creation and wisdom; and liturgical psalms for specific purposes) point to a range of experiences captured in language so direct that it is as though one is eavesdropping on some of the most intimately relational God-language ever composed. The function of these poems, then, would be to tie the reader (either visually or orally) to God through the experience of first-person narration of petitions, praises, and pleas. This scene might also prompt closer analysis of Ps 119:81–88. Do these verses function like a lament psalm? What genre of psalm would be most appropriate to recite to Mrs. Egan at this point? How might she identify with the speaker in Ps 119:81–88? Are there ways in which her situation is different or not applicable? Does that matter? How are psalms most effectively employed today in the lives of individuals and communities? More generally, the episode prompts thought about the nature of forgiveness. Bobby claims that "forgiveness doesn't depend on us" and that remorse and understanding are necessary for forgiveness. Is this true? Who can offer forgiveness and how should it be sought? One could also consider Andy's initial struggle to interpret Israel's "message." Must one be a "believer" to "get" the psalms? How might psalms speak differently to a person depending on their dispositions? Finally, showing the concluding scenes could serve as a prelude to asking students to compose their own psalm in response to a public or private traumatic event.

Criminal Minds

This television crime drama debuted on CBS in 2005. It follows a team of FBI profilers; its unique focus is, as the title indicates, on the criminal, rather

than the crime. The team builds a psychological profile of criminals so as to anticipate acts of violence in hopes of stopping them. The episodes discussed here are scheduled to be released on DVD in 2007.

"The Big Game" and "Revelations" (Second Season, 2007)

These two episodes contain a complex set of biblical allusions and references. "The Big Game" opens with a team of FBI profilers investigating a murder at which the criminal(s) have left a page from the book of Revelation, with 6:8 highlighted ("I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him"). The profilers slowly realize that the killer(s) understand their activities as both justified by and the carrying out of Scripture. A video of the murder, posted on the Internet, mentions Lev 26:18 as a warning ("And if in spite of this you will not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins"). When they capture a second victim, the killer(s) engage in a scriptural argument over the woman once they have tied her up. As the woman begs for her life and apologizes for her behavior, one quotes Rev 2:22–23, a passage dealing with the punishment of the adulterous Jezebel, and the other quotes Luke 15:10 ("Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"). The former killer wins out, and in the second videotaped message distributed over the Internet, the prophecy regarding the canine complicity in the death of Jezebel in 2 Kgs 9 is read prior to releasing a pack of dogs that maul and kill the victim. Over the course of this and the next episode, we realize that there is only one killer: a young man named Tobias. His father Charles was compulsively literal about the Bible and had branded a cross on Tobias's forehead so that he would have "the mark of the Lord" on him. The profilers hypothesize that Tobias's brutal treatment at the hands of his father resulted in a psychopathic condition in which he developed a split personality: one as Tobias and the other as Raphael, an angel of God.

In "Revelations," the profilers are searching Tobias's house and make three important discoveries: They find the phrase "Honor thy Father" scrawled all over his walls; they recover his father's frozen dead body in the basement; and they discover that his father was very ill and asked his son to euthanize him. Tobias responded with "Thou shall not kill," but his father retorted, "Honor thy father." Based on these three discoveries, the agents surmise that this gray area in Tobias's otherwise strictly religious, dualistic upbringing triggered the onset of a split personality in order to keep his father alive through adopting his personality. So, there are now three personalities within Tobias's psyche. As they begin to understand Tobias better, another murder is committed, this time with Isa 59:4 left at the scene ("No one brings suit justly; no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas; they speak lies, conceiving mischief

OTHER MEDIA

and begetting iniquity"). The remainder of the plot continues to interweave biblical references (Rev 8; Gen 23:4; Job 15:31; Exod 21:17).

Given the length and complexity of these episodes, it could be time-prohibitive to show them in their entirety in a class session. Instructors could show a clip that uses a certain image, such as the Jezebel murder by dogs in "The Big Game," as a prelude to a discussion of women in Revelation. Or, one could discuss the use of Scripture in ethical decision-making, based on the debates between Tobias and his father Charles. There are also larger issues addressed by these shows, such as the intersection of religion and violence. Students could be asked to reflect on the ways in which the Bible has been used to justify violent actions. Alternatively, students might identify the various ways in which the Bible is treated in these shows: object of religious devotion or font of violence? One might also analyze the hermeneutical approach of the show, namely, treating the Bible as a code of sorts; unlocking its mystery is the key to finding the answer. This can be compared and contrasted to the interpretive approaches taken by religious and academic communities.

Documentaries

There is no shortage of documentaries that deal with Bible-related matters. Indeed, professors' mailboxes are often stuffed with catalogues full of them. Many of these—too many to mention—are potentially useful in the classroom, but they are usually prohibitively expensive for individual teachers to purchase. Instructors should be aware that there are a number of documentaries and TV specials that are becoming available on the Internet for just a couple of dollars. Such is the case with the following three from iTunes.

"The Real Sin City: Sodom and Gomorrah" (*Digging for the Truth*, The History Channel, Season 2, 2006)

This forty-five-minute program asks whether the biblical story is "just a parable" or if there is "evidence that such a thing actually happened." Teachers could use this show to open discussion about a number of technical aspects of biblical archaeology. In fact, the very title of the show—*Digging for the Truth*—could lead to conversation about the nature of truth that digging can, and cannot, yield. In its desire to attract an audience, the show takes a misguided approach by setting the question in a dramatic black-and-white manner: either the biblical story is just a made-up tale or it actually happened (i.e., it is true). Instructors can explain that if archaeologists find evidence that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, it does not make the biblical account "true." Analogously, if several millennia from now, archaeologists discover

evidence that New Orleans suffered major water damage in the early twenty-first century, it would not "prove" a belief that God sent Katrina to destroy the city. What kind of truth is the biblical narrative interested in conveying? And how does that compare to the work of an archaeologist?

"The First Christians" (*Lost Worlds*, The History Channel, Season 1, 2007)

This program provides background on the life of Saul/Paul, sketching the history of the port city Tarsus and explaining how the Roman and Jewish culture there would have shaped him. It follows Paul's journeys to Ephesus and, through computer-enhanced imaging, reconstructs the temple of Artemis that Paul would have found there. This, of course, can connect with study of the religious and philosophical traditions of the first-century Roman world, an important context for understanding Paul and his writings. Teachers might discuss the show's claim that Paul and Christianity triggered the decline of "pagan" worship in Ephesus and the destruction of the Artemis temple. How and why was Christianity influential in cities such as Ephesus? What other factors may have contributed to the decline of certain Roman traditions? The show also examines the theatre, "brothel," and bath houses at Ephesus, all of which factor into understanding Paul, his message, and the spread of Christianity (cf. Acts 19–20). The exploration then moves to Cappadocia, where archaeological remains of some of the earliest Christian communities and churches are examined. As with many documentaries, the value of this one may lie primarily in the fact that it gives students concrete visual images—if only tentatively reconstructed ones—to connect with the content of the biblical text.

"Resurrection: A Search for Answers" (ABC News, 2006)

This *20/20* special, approximately forty minutes long, opens up opportunity for discussion about a variety of questions concerning Paul, the early Christian community, the nature of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection, as well as larger theological and philosophical issues. Elizabeth Vargas interviews a variety of scholars, theologians, and archaeologists, including, among others, John Shelby Spong, Paul Maier, Karen King, Arthur Dewey, Luke Timothy Johnson, Ben Witherington III, Daniel Schwartz, and Kathleen Corley.

The show could be connected to specific biblical texts. For instance, it begins by asking how a religion could start with a man crucified, the issue that Paul addresses in his discussion of the foolishness of the cross (1 Cor 1:18–25). The program traces the crucifixion and resurrection story from the Gospels but does not make any effort to distinguish among the four accounts, a task students could undertake. Is it possible to talk about "the" Gospel story, or are

OTHER MEDIA

there too many discrepancies among the canonical accounts? One wonders why the apocalyptic signs reported in Matthew are so infrequently mentioned in these types of conversations about the historicity of the resurrection—the tearing of the temple curtain, the earthquake, and mass resurrections in Jerusalem (Matt 27:51–53). Should these reports be taken into account when attempting to reconstruct events? Further, the program explores the question of bodily versus spiritual resurrection, with views presented on both sides. Students might be assigned to weigh in on the conversation based on various New Testament texts (e.g., 1 Cor 15).

The program can also be used to facilitate reflection on broader topics. The show raises some of the standard pieces of evidence for the historicity of the resurrection, such as that the earliest disciples must have been truly convinced of its veracity since they were willing to die for the cause. This might lead to a discussion of how to weigh and assess evidence. If a group of people whole-heartedly believe something to be true, does this make it so? What are the philosophical merits of Lee Strobel's notion that millions of Christians cannot be wrong? How does one evaluate and respond to the assertion that the "resurrection is a fact" in contrast to the idea that "it requires faith"? The program is fairly balanced, presenting a variety of views on the subject, although it may be a worthwhile exercise to ask students if it is an evenhanded report. Are there important topics or perspectives omitted? What bias does this reveal? Finally, the program features scenes from a variety of contemporary Christian celebrations of Easter—from Catholic Mass, to African American Protestant churches, to Christians in Jerusalem. This may aid students in reflecting on the diversity of the tradition; it may also help Christian students gain an "objective" perspective on their own cultic practices.

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Internet Websites

Mark Roncace

There are countless websites that teachers might successfully employ in the classroom; this chapter discusses four possibilities.

Cyberhymnal.org

In addition to the variety of popular and classical musical pieces that can be employed in the classroom, many Christian hymns can also be utilized to prompt study of biblical texts. One particularly good resource is Cyberhymnal, a website that features over 6,100 hymns and gospel songs from various Christian traditions. The site enables one to search by title, Scripture allusions, tunes by meter, tunes by name, or by topic. Hence teachers can locate potentially useful items quite easily. As with Youtube (see below), Cyberhymnal can be employed to find material related to less popular biblical texts. For example, by clicking on "scriptural allusions" and then "Habakkuk," one finds the titles of seven hymns listed according to the verse references in Habakkuk to which they allude. When one clicks on the title, the lyrics are displayed, a piano rendition of the hymn plays, and the verse from Habakkuk streams across the top of the screen. Many of the hymns make interesting hermeneutical moves which students can observe by noting which parts of a biblical text are omitted and which are highlighted or how the biblical text is recontextualized to give it a new meaning. So for instance, students might be asked to speculate why no hymns reference Hab 1, a theologically rich text in which the prophet, in typical lament language, challenges the justice of God. One hymn refers to Hab 2:14 ("The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"), and two other hymns allude to Hab 2:20 ("Let all the earth keep silent before the Lord"). In the biblical text, both of these verses appear in a series of five woe oracles, which serve as a warning for evildoers (Hab 2:5–20). The hymns, however, use them for a rather different purpose. For example, the line "to keep silent before the Lord" becomes a call to worship on "the Lord's day" (i.e., Sunday), a striking reversal of the prophetic "day of the Lord."

The number of hymns related to less-studied New Testament texts is equally impressive. For example, the link to hymns for 1 Peter features over fifty pieces, many of which could lead to fruitful discussions of the biblical text. To take but one example: A song entitled "Do Not Be Surprised," written by Susan Peterson in 1998, reinscribes the rhetoric of 1 Pet 4:12–15, namely, that one should embrace suffering by identifying with Christ. This can facilitate a discussion of the historical setting of 1 Peter, how the passage may have been understood by its first audience, its relevance or lack thereof for contemporary faith communities, and its social and political implications. Similarly, the link to 2 Thessalonians reveals a number of songs, one of which is entitled "What a Gathering," based on 2 Thess 2:1 ("Concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him…"). The tone of the song, not surprisingly, is hopeful as it anticipates the gathering of the saints when the Son of Man returns, which is "drawing nigh." By contrast, the biblical passage appears to be rejecting the notion that the return is near. Instead, it warns that the "the man of lawlessness" must come first and then be annihilated by Jesus. The biblical text, quite unlike the song, is meant to assuage the fears of those believers who thought the gathering of the saints had already taken place. Thus, the song is much more akin to 1 Thessalonians, which expects the imminent Parousia, than it is to 2 Thessalonians from which it draws its lyrics.

Hymns, in short, are compelling intertexts for those studying the Bible. And there is no shortage of hymns relating to both well-known and more obscure texts. Simply presenting the hymns and asking students how the piece interprets the biblical text can prompt thoughtful dialogue. Finally, students may be invited to write their own hymn based on a given text.

Wikipedia.com

Wikipedia.com is a free online encyclopedia that is collaboratively written by its readers. Anyone can write, edit, and add articles. The very nature of Wikipedia as a multiauthored, continuously edited document is wonderfully analogous to the development of biblical literature. Wikipedia does not, however, always provide the best information about biblical texts and topics. Thus, teachers, understandably, have expressed concern over the fact that many students use the site as a source of information. However, rather than steering students away from Wikipedia because of potential errors or bias in its articles, it can be employed as a teaching tool in a number of ways. One approach is simply to have students read and evaluate a given article. While students may be reluctant to criticize or challenge a traditional biblical commentary because it is written by an expert scholar, they understand that Wikipedia articles can be written by anyone and so they read it expecting to find errors,

misinformation, significant omissions, or evident bias. That is, Wikipedia is an excellent opportunity for students to practice being suspicious readers, a skill that can then be applied more broadly.

Another strategy, which flows naturally from the first, is to have students revise and expand articles. Students, especially those in upper-level or advanced classes, will feel, and in fact are, qualified to edit the material, which is quite easily done. So, for instance, students could be asked to supplement the section entitled "The Syro-Ephraimite War" in the article on Isaiah. (As of January 15, 2007, it was only three sentences long.) In some places Wikipedia explicitly requests a supplement; such is the case with the section labeled "Songs of the Suffering Servant," which currently features only one short paragraph. Given the nature of Wikipedia, there is very little uniformity among the articles. For example, the entries on Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel vary in length and topics addressed, so students could supplement the articles in a way that would give all three of them a more consistent format. Sometimes there are glaring omissions, such as no mention whatsoever of Jeremiah's laments/confessions. Indeed, just about any article can be supplemented in some fashion.

A third strategy is for students to generate their own new articles (ones not listed anywhere on the site). These may be short entries related to specific biblical texts or topics. Possible articles relating to the so-called Major Prophets might include "Valley of Dry Bones," "Oracles Against the Nations," or even "Third Isaiah." Students are often inspired by the thought of authoring something that will be available for the whole world (in theory), rather than writing a paper that only the instructor or a few peers will evaluate. This "real world" experience is invigorating and is perhaps the most valuable aspect of employing Wikipedia in one's pedagogical repertoire.

Wikipedia has a wealth of information for instructors, including ways to use the website as an instructional tool and a list of student projects that have been developed in conjunction with Wikipedia (Wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia: School_and_University_projects). See also Holger Szesnat, "Who Knows? Wikipedia, Teaching and Research."

Youtube.com

Youtube.com is a popular free video-sharing website which enables users to upload, view, and share video clips. It features a wide variety of content, including movie and TV clips, music videos, and amateur content such as videoblogging. The site may be helpful to biblical studies instructors because users (anyone can access the site) can simply employ the search command to find videos related to any topic. If one searches for the phrase "Adam and Eve," one will find over four hundred videos, ranging from puppet shows, stage pro-

OTHER MEDIA

ductions, sermon clips, music and home videos, cartoons, and others which relate to Gen 2–3. Indeed, some of these videos (certainly not all or even most!) could prove to be valuable teaching tools, though it would take some time to identify which ones best engage students. But rather than using You-tube to locate resources for popular texts, one can find a surprising number of videos for more obscure passages. For instance, a search for "Haggai" yields eleven videos (though that could change as more are uploaded), two of which are potentially useful. One of them is a four-minute, light-hearted video by three teenage boys who discuss how few people have even heard of Haggai, much less know its content. They then give a fairly decent overview, albeit brief, of the historical setting and theological significance of the biblical book. While it is true that the content of the video is basic, one imagines that students are more likely to remember an introduction to Haggai given by three quirky teenagers with a hand-held camera than by the course instructor. The second video relating to Haggai is a seventeen-minute sermon on the topic of stewardship in Hag 1:3–11 and Luke 2:7–11; it could be used to launch a variety of discussions relating not only to the text, but also to the use and interpretation of the text.

Similarly, a search for "Galatians" produces thirty-two hits. Among those one finds a four-minute music video based directly on Gal 5, Paul's discussion of "freedom in Christ" and its implications. Another three-minute video presents a summary, with instrumental background music, of Paul's confrontation with the so-called Judaizers. A third offers a reading of Gal 5:16–26 with corresponding images from contemporary American life. A fourth is an explicitly anti-Muslim commentary on the allegory of Sarah and Hagar in Gal 4. The best way in which each of these videos could be employed depends on the instructor and the educational context.

A search for "The Ten Commandments" produces over two hundred videos, but if the search is refined by adding, say, the word "comedy," the list is reduced to a more manageable nineteen. (Note: Simply adding the word "Bible" is often an effective way to limit searches.) Here one finds a variety of clips that raise serious and important issues, though in funny ways. A six-minute clip of comedian George Carlin's take on the Commandments is certainly vulgar (and no doubt offensive to some), but it raises fundamental questions about who makes laws, the power dynamics involved in maintaining them, the rhetorical nature of the laws, and their practical application (Should parents always be honored? What about people who kill in the name of God? And isn't coveting what drives the economy?). In addition, one can find a clip of an interview with Georgia congressman Lynn Westmoreland, who co-sponsored a bill to place the Ten Commandments in the House of Representatives and the Senate. He is unable to name the Commandments.

Another video shows people who are "caught on tape" breaking the commandments—a person who "steals" a pen by forgetting to return it, a woman raking leaves in her yard on the Sabbath, and a woman "coveting" some items in a catalogue. Again, videos such as these can prompt students to think about a variety of questions, depending on the instructor's agenda. In short, there is a remarkable breadth of material that can be found on Youtube.

One final issue: it is very easy to go directly to the website and play the videos in class—and "favorite videos" can be collected in one's Youtube account. However, Youtube does not make it easy to download and save videos for offline viewing, so if teachers wish to save videos as part of their permanent resources, they will need to employ certain browser extensions or websites that offer free software designed for that purpose.

Thebricktestament.com

The Rev. Brendan Powell Smith, who is not ordained but is rather an atheist, has built thousands of scenes from Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts with Legos and then photographed them for display on the website. They are quite compelling and adhere closely to the biblical plotlines; many illustrations are accompanied by the corresponding biblical verse. The images can be useful in the classroom in a number of ways, but they may be especially facilitative as a means for students to ponder the lurid nature of many Hebrew Bible stories. Smith's depictions of incest, gang rapes, beheadings, and genocide are tolerable only because they are done with Legos. Most other media would render them too (porno)graphic for many viewers. According to the press releases listed on the website, one Catholic publication, reviewing the coffee-table book of Lego illustrations, observed that children will "love … examining what figures from which sets [of Lego Bricks] were used to create the scenes" and that the book "is guaranteed to be passed around the living room." Either the book does not include many of the scenes available on the website or this reviewer has not looked carefully at the illustrations. They are not fit for children. To give one example: Genesis 34—the account of Dinah and Shechem—is clearly rife with adult themes, but pause and imagine what would be required to depict the details of that story visually. This is what Thebricktestament does, thereby providing students an opportunity to contemplate the specific content of the narrative. On a more theoretical level, students can reflect on the ramifications of translating the biblical text into this unique medium.

OTHER MEDIA

Index of Biblical Texts

Old Testament/Hebrew Bible

Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books

NEW TESTAMENT

Index of Noncanonical Texts

Music Index

Film Index

Art Index

Literature Index

LITERATURE INDEX