

Coming to Faith through Popular Theology

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From Angels to Aliens (2003)

- Clark on how teens explore spiritual and religious identities
- Use of television / popular culture
- Finding religious “narratives”

Cautions

- Sources of narratives both legitimize and delegitimize
 - Religious groups
 - Public narratives
- Individual sees self as authority over narratives

“Cultural tool kit” model

- Frees individual from default social “positioning”
- Individual’s actions must occur in relation to shared practices and habits
- But, can lead to view that culture is a separate thing

From Angels...

- Teens (and everyone) seek meaning in lives
- All draw inspiration from images / narratives / ideas at hand
- A model of a kind of faith formation

Some theory--Gordon Lynch (2005)

- Lynch: four areas of overlap of religion and pop culture
 - How religion relates to everyday life
 - How popular culture serves religious functions
 - How religious groups respond with missiology
 - How people use popular culture “texts” for theological reflection

Religious functions of popular culture

1. Social function: community formation
2. Existential / hermeneutic function: make sense
3. Transcendent function: places to experience God, the numinous, the transcendent

Faith formation in this context

- Theology as “faith seeking understanding” (Anselm)
 - Task for all believers (often unthematized)
 - Use tools at hand
 - Theology here as a process, not a set of texts or beliefs

Popular theology limits

- Not as coherent as formal theology, catechetics, etc.
 - Form (of any popular culture) less likely valued
- Questions of orthodoxy
 - Who interprets?
 - Who judges adequacy?

Traditional faith formation

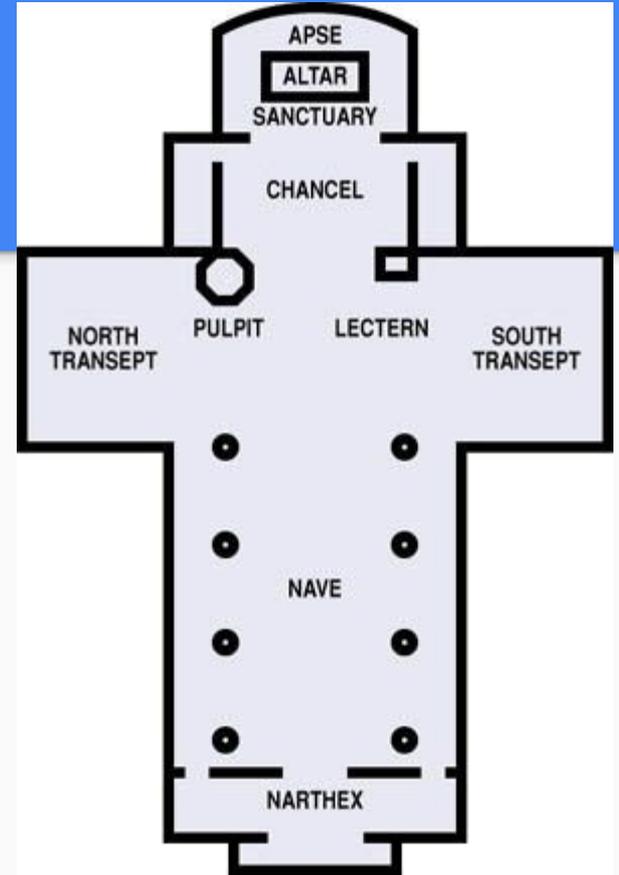
- Formal teaching
- Spiritual practices
- Spiritual reading
- Catechisms
- Religious activities / culture

Popular culture faith formation

- Influence
 - Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al.)
- Reflections on belief in many forms
 - Or, what in popular culture forms faith...

Architectural patterns

- Design
- Elevations
- Orientation
- Changing locations
- Decoration



Oral communication

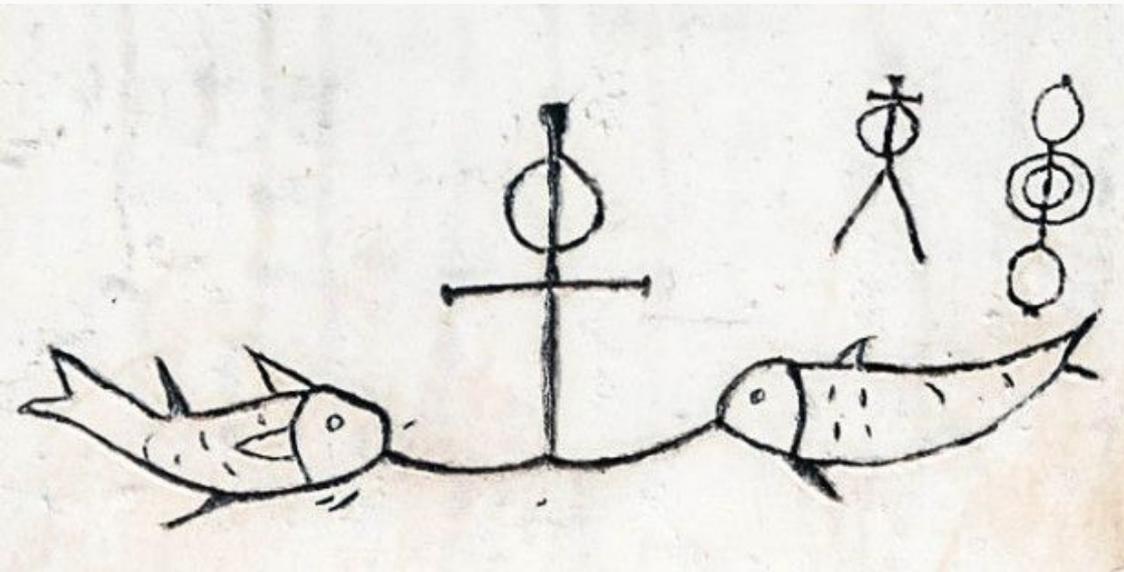
- Gospel as performance text
- Narrative theology -- structure of storytelling
 - Gospel of Matthew vs. Gospel of John
- Stories of faith
 - Collecting and telling

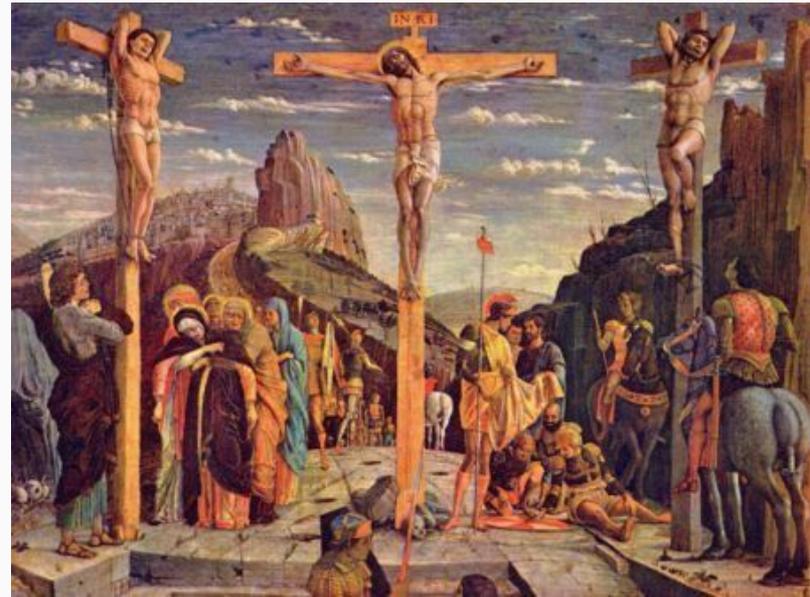
Oral communication

- Christian poetry
 - Varies by culture, time period
 - E.g. John Donne, Batter my heart
 - E.g., Gerard Manley Hopkins, Wreck of the Deutschland
- Poetry of popular music

Art

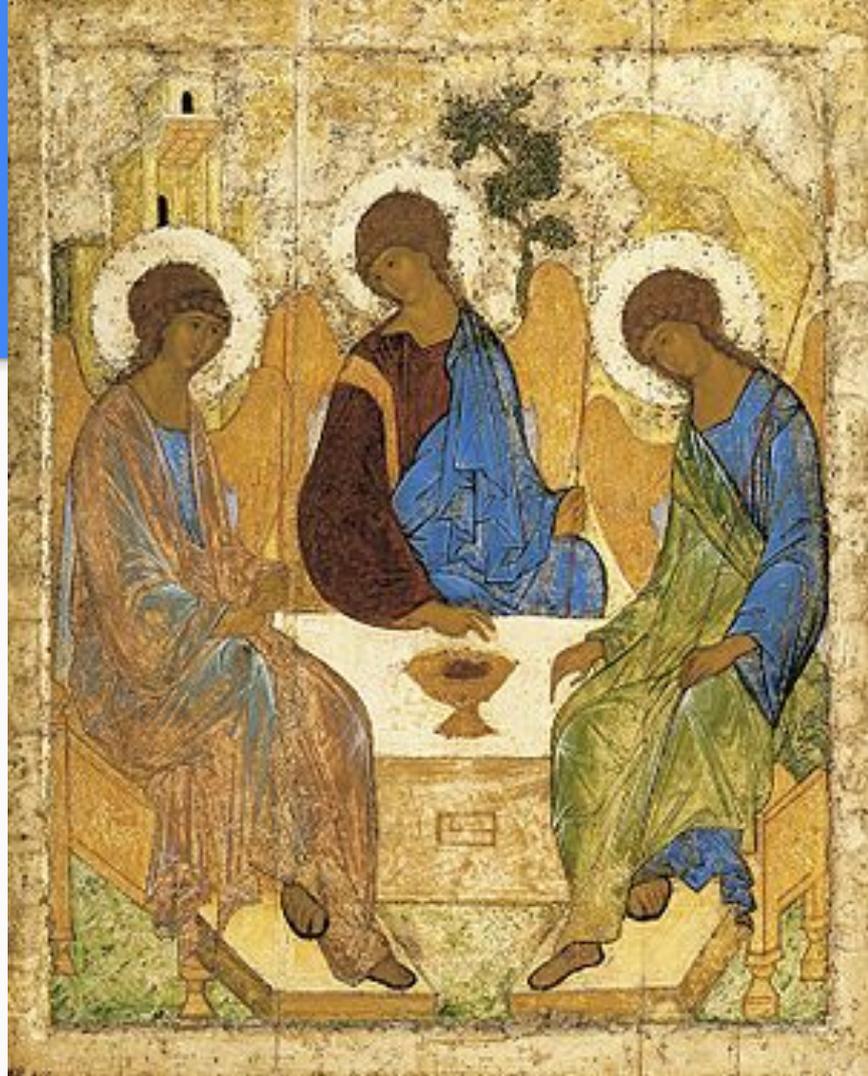
- Symbols





Themes in the Orthodox tradition

Andrei Rublev: The Trinity (The
Hospitality of Abraham) 15th c.



More art

- From church locations to book illustrations
- From sacred spaces to home places
- Connecting to popular culture
 - Revivals, entertainments



THE GOOD SAMARITAN.
Luke x. v. 33, 34.



CHRIST AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.
John iv. v. 25, 26.



JESUS DRIVES OUT THE MONEY-CHANGERS.
John ii. v. 14, 15.



THE ADULTERESS TAKEN BEFORE CHRIST.
John viii. v. 47.

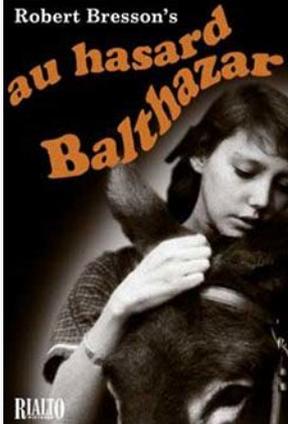
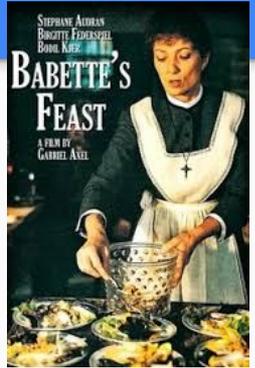
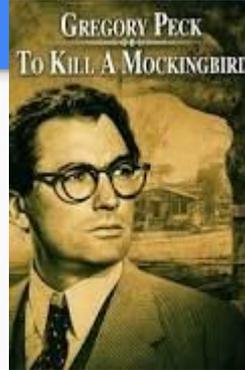


CHRIST RAISES THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS.
Mark v. v. 41, 42.



CHRIST RAISES THE WIDOW'S SON.
Luke vii. v. 14, 15.

Film



- (Theological) worlds
- Choice of themes
- What if . . . thinking

Television

- Places to wrestle with / understand belief as ongoing patterns



Social media

- Online hermeneutics
- Many voices
- Unstructured

Who judges adequacy / orthodoxy?

- Open to interpretation?
- Proposes different model of faith formation

Popular faith formation

- Take components seriously
- Discussion
- Recovery of dialectic / dialogue
- More from unconscious to conscious appropriation
 - Attempts to thematize

Popular faith formation

- Actively do theology--seek to understand what we believe
 - Discuss
 - Move from consumption to creation
 - Use different, popular, forms to express belief

Popular faith formation

- Reinforce key functions
 - Establish a community
 - Existential / hermeneutic
 - Transcendent
- Connect formal and informal faith formation