

Religion 10
Summer Reading Assignment
Mr. Ives' Christmas
Places in the Heart

Faith is not any conviction at all – true or false, good, bad or indifferent. It is a particular kind of conviction and it receives its power from the kind of conviction that it is. Faith is a good and a true conviction. It is the conviction that something can and will happen because it is good and because it is true that goodness can triumph over evil. In other words it is the conviction that God is good to humanity and that God can and will triumph over all evil. The power of faith is the power of goodness and truth, which is the power of God.
-- Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, p. 39

Mr. Ives' Christmas, by Oscar Hijuelos, is a rich and moving novel about one man's quest to live a life of faith through suffering, beauty, and doubt. Set in New York City from the 1950s to the 1990s, the novel also examines ethnic tensions and stereotypes that continue to color our world today.

Places in the Heart is a compelling film set in Texas during the Great Depression. When Edna Spalding is left widowed with two small children, she must save her family by learning to trust the goodness of the strangers who enter her life. The film also explores the evils of racism and poverty in the United States.

Your assignment is first and foremost to read the novel and watch the movie and to enjoy them both! But before you begin the assignment, consider the above quote from *Jesus Before Christianity*, our primary text for Religion 10. Spend ten minutes free-writing about the quote. Is this definition of faith familiar to you or would you define faith differently? Does some part of the quote surprise you? Challenge you? Can you think of an example of this sort of faith in your own life?

As you read the novel and watch the film, find examples that illustrate Nolan's definition of faith. Which characters have the kind of faith that Nolan describes? Which struggle with this idea of faith? Which events in the novel and the movie call for this type of faith?

Finally, consider the overall messages of Hijuelos' novel and *Places in the Heart*. How do they relate to the above quote? Write a reflection paper comparing and contrasting how Nolan's definition of faith is exemplified in *Mr. Ives' Christmas* and *Places in the Heart*. In comparing the two, be sure to consider the ethnic and racial tensions that both works ultimately attempt to overcome. The paper should be carefully edited and should be no longer than two typed double-spaced pages.