

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Spiritual Film Themes *in a* Secular Age

Faith, Film, & Philosophy Seminar
October 10-12, 2024



GONZAGA
UNIVERSITY

Faith & Reason
Institute

<https://www.gonzaga.edu/ffp2024seminar>

**Keynote speakers: Michael P. Foley (Honors College, Baylor University)
Duane Armitage (Philosophy, University of Scranton)**

Is there still space for spiritual themes—faith, transcendence, human meaning, the sacred, the holy—in popular films and series? Perhaps not. Consider the two blockbuster biopics of 2023: *Napoleon* (Scott) and *Oppenheimer* (Nolan). One told the story of the world-historical figure who lived through what might reasonably be described as the most severely secularizing period of western history—the French Revolution—and then, as a general and then an emperor, battled with and promoted the cultural restoration of the Catholic Church. And yet in Scott’s film religion and the Church provide little more than background decor. Similarly, Robert Oppenheimer’s fascination with Eastern religion and philosophy surfaces only in isolated scraps in Nolan’s film, including the repurposing of the famous quote from the *Bhagavad Gita* about “death, the destroyer of worlds” as part of a sexual encounter. The other blockbuster of the year, Greta Gerwig’s *Barbie*, succeeds in building a surprising story of existential awakening and personal growth onto a scant pink plastic foundation, and yet seems absent of transcendent spiritual themes.

Have spiritual themes been restricted to the background scenery of historical films like *Napoleon* and *Killers of the Flower Moon*? Gone underground? Been consigned to art films like Ethan Hawke’s Flannery O’Connor biopic *Wildcat*? Evolved into new forms? Dropped out completely, in keeping with the secularism of the age? Been banished to

the ghetto of the Christian market, where films like *Jesus Revolution* and series like the crowdfunded juggernaut *The Chosen* thrive? What trends are there in treatment of religious and spiritual themes over the last few decades? Is the hidden God present in ever more subtle ways in contemporary films? Are there particular filmmakers in whose work spiritual and religious themes remain significant?

This set of questions is the focus of the Faith, Film, and Philosophy 2024 seminar, set for October 10-12, 2024 on the Gonzaga University campus in Spokane WA. The Seminar employs a unique approach in which 12-15 scholars read and discuss one another's papers in a collegial setting over a weekend. Each participant will have approximately ten minutes for a summary presentation and thirty-five minutes for questions, discussion, and feedback directly focused on his or her paper (final paper target length 3000-3500 words).

Individuals interested in participating in the seminar must submit a proposal of no longer than 500 words, in .doc, .docx, or .pdf format. Proposals should be submitted via email to the Director of the Faith & Reason Institute at faithandreason@gonzaga.edu no later than midnight on Tuesday, September 3, 2024.

For further information please contact David H. Calhoun, Director, Gonzaga University Faith & Reason Institute at faithandreason@gonzaga.edu.

Things to know about the seminar:

- The seminar begins with a keynote address Thursday night at 7 pm and ends with a banquet on Saturday evening. Seminar participants are expected to attend all sessions from Thursday through Saturday
- **Cost:** There is no registration cost for the seminar. While participants are responsible for travel and lodging costs, all meals on Friday and Saturday of the seminar will be provided by the Faith & Reason Institute, including a concluding banquet
- **Travel stipend:** Each participant traveling to Spokane from a distance greater than 500 miles is eligible to apply for a travel stipend of \$300. Stipends are awarded based on the quality of the submitted proposal
- Proposals are due Tuesday, September 3, 2024, at 12 midnight. Acceptances will be communicated by Monday, September 9. Final papers (target length 3000-3500 words) are due Wednesday, October 2, and will be distributed to seminar participants prior to the seminar