

ENG 4133 Cinema and Religion
Section 1PB1 Class #26723



Since its birth at the end of the 19th century, the history of cinema has always been traversed by religious themes, and films have always narrated stories of mysticism and religious experiences. The reason is simple: religions always had to confront the problem of the image of God. Religions always had the problem of how (or if) to represent God. But is it really possible to represent God in a visual form? Is there an image of God after all? Or is the image of God – as some religions believe – a form of idolatry? Is it possible to create a sensible image of an otherworldly entity?

In this course we will examine the different ways in which film, throughout its history, has represented religious, mystical, and transcendent experiences. We will especially reflect on how the cinema – in dealing with the problem of the representation of God and of transcendence – ended up dealing with what is probably its most philosophical and fundamental question: is it possible to see the invisible?

Instructor Name: Pietro Bianchi

Course meeting times: T Period 5 - 6 (11.45am–1.40pm) / R Period 6 (12.50pm-1.40pm)
Turlington 2334

Screenings: M Period E1 - E3 (7:20 PM - 10:10 PM) Rolfs Hall 0115

Office Hours: Tuesday (2:30 – 4:00) at Turlington 4342 or on Zoom (personal ID: 561 851 9876). (NB: Zoom appointments have to be scheduled in advance by email, even during office hours).

Course website: elearning.ufl.edu

Instructor Email: pietrobianchi@ufl.edu

Course Objectives

Through active and persistent engagement with course materials, activities and discussion in class students will:

- Become familiar with the basics of the philosophical debate regarding the visual representation of divinity and transcendence
- Be able to discuss the themes and styles of “religious cinema”
- Be familiar with the “Transcendental Style” as it has been defined by Paul Schrader
- Be able to contextualize the different forms of representation of the religious experience in modern and contemporary films
- Develop advanced skills in reading and interpreting theoretical works of film theory, film history, critical theory and film studies
- Learn how to view films from a variety of critical perspectives
- Improve critical analysis capabilities in the process of analyzing and writing on films
- Learn to recognize the philosophical dimensions and implications of film, including the ethics of filmmaking, the ontology of the cinema, and how the creation of a film reflects the pursuit of knowledge
- Find and use scholarly research on film theory, critical theory and film studies in an academic essay

Required Books

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (any edition)

Required Readings and Films

All readings – with the exception of Paul Schrader’s *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* – will be available on Canvas in the Files section of the website. While normally not being substantial in terms of number of pages they will have to be read and studied thoroughly and with extreme care. Since the readings will be informing much of our work, it is crucial that you keep up with them, devoting the necessary time and energy to their understanding. Reading will consist of film reviews and scholarly articles that will give an interpretation or an analysis of the films, but also of book chapters and essays that will offer a philosophical perspective on religious cinema. Some of them will be more theoretical and challenging, others will be more accessible. You are expected to come to class prepared and be able not only to faithfully summarize the content of every assigned article or book chapter, but also to critically reflect on them. If you will encounter particular difficulties with the reading, schedule an appointment with me or come to office hours and I will be happy to help or indicate extra clarificatory sources.

The films required for this class will be screened every Monday evening at 7:20 PM in Rolfs Hall 0115 (the projections will be taken care of by Kayla Conde) or during classes. The screenings should be considered an essential part of this class and attendance is mandatory. Films need to be watched with care and attention (avoiding checking the cell phone while watching them and always keeping a notebook to write down your impressions during the viewing). **Some films required for this course might include scenes of menace, violence, sexual violence and the deaths of humans and other living beings. Some of them might include nudity and scenes of sexual activity.**

All the assigned material (readings, films and lectures) will be the subject of class assignments, in-class discussions, presentations and two in-class quizzes.

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.

Calendar of the screenings

M Period E1 - E3 (7:20 PM - 10:10 PM) Rolfs Hall 0115

22 January *Andrey Rublev* (1966, Andrei Tarkovsky) (first part)

29 January *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962, Yasujiro Ozu)

5 February *Tokyo Story* (1953, Yasujiro Ozu)

12 February *Ordet* (1955, Carl Theodor Dreyer)

19 February *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951, Robert Bresson)

26 February *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964, Pier Paolo Pasolini)

4 March *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988, Martin Scorsese) (first part)

18 March *Silence* (2016, Martin Scorsese)

25 March *Dekalog: One* (1988, Krzysztof Kieslowski) and *Dekalog: Five* (1988, Krzysztof Kieslowski)

1 April *Dekalog: Six* (1988, Krzysztof Kieslowski) and *Dekalog: Ten* (1988, Krzysztof Kieslowski)

8 April *First Reformed* (2017, Paul Schrader)

15 April *Jeannette: The Childhood of Joan of Arc* (2017, Bruno Dumont)

Organization of the Class

This is a discussion-based course, where participation is vital and it will be significantly considered for the final grade. Students are strongly encouraged to participate actively in class discussions by asking questions, drawing class attention to passages of the reading or particular sequences of the films, or offering a possible interpretation. In general (but there will be exceptions, so always check the schedule of classes!) the course will be organized as follows: on Monday night there will be the screening at Rolfs Hall 0115 of the film that will be under discussion that particular week; on Tuesday, the class will be briefly introduced by two or three

of you where you will share – with a 5-7 minutes presentation – your reflections on the assigned film and readings, and open up the discussion with the class; on Thursday we will continue the discussion collectively and I will eventually present extra sources or excerpts from other films (NB: some of the films for this class will be significantly long. In these cases, you will see only part of the film during the Monday screening, and we will finish the film during the Tuesday class. At the end of the semester there will also be screenings during class time, **so always check the schedule of classes on the syllabus on Canvas!**)

Attendance and Participation (10%)

The core of this class will be the discussions in class, where your active participation will not only be graded but will be a fundamental component for the success of the class. *I firmly believe that more than an individual performance, a university class is a collective effort to increase the knowledge of everyone and regarding which we should all be considered responsible.* Please be an active participant of this class! Also, be aware that, **especially in this class**, discussions will often include review of materials not among the assigned texts or films. For these reasons, your presence in class is essential and attendance is mandatory.

No more than three unexcused absences for personal reasons will be tolerated (screenings are included). Each additional unexcused absence will reduce your total final grade by 3 percentage points (for instance, if your final grade is 91% and you have 5 unexcused absences, your final grade will be 85%). **More than 6 unexcused absences will result in the automatic failure of the class. (NB: keep in mind that being absent during a double-period class will be counted as two absences)**

For every other absence (for medical reason or family emergencies) you should provide documentation as soon as possible, and make up the material covered in class, which includes viewing films and getting notes from class discussion. Absences for religious reasons do not require written documentation, but students should inform me timely so that they reflect credit for attendance. I will take attendance at the beginning of class. If a student arrives after attendance is taken **within the first five minutes**, they are considered tardy. Three counts of tardiness are the equivalent of one unexcused absence. Latecomers can receive partial absences and must see me after class so I know you attended. Students who arrive after five minutes after the beginning of the class will be considered absent.

Requirement for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies>.

Post on Canvas and short introduction to the class discussion (20% + 5%)

1. Every Tuesday (but in some instances it will be on Thursday, so always check the class schedule on the syllabus), you will be asked to post a short paragraph (around 150 words) on the Discussion section of Canvas with a short reflection and/or a few questions regarding the material assigned for the day. The purpose of this assignment is not to test your knowledge about the reading or the film (you do not have to summarize them!) but

ask you to share with the class what you believe are the most interesting problematics and questions that emerge from them. This can also have the form of a question or a series of questions. An original post or a response to someone else's post will equally be counted (discussions are encouraged!). The deadline of the posts on Canvas is usually **Tuesday at 10:00 am** (or Thursday, when that will be the day of the assignment). You have the possibility to skip this assignment once in the semester without penalty. After that, every post uploaded after 10:00am of the due date will not be considered and receive a 0% grade.

2. Once in the semester you will be asked to give a **5–7-minute presentation** where you will share your reflections on the assigned reading and open up the discussion with the class. On most Tuesdays, the class will be opened by two or three of you who will introduce and present the assigned material (a calendar will be given in the second week).

Short Quizzes (20% + 20%)

Twice during the semester there will be a short quiz based on few open-ended questions on the readings and films analyzed in that section of the semester. They can cover general or specific topics related to the readings, films and discussions held in class.

Final research essay (25%)

A final 1,500-2,500 words research paper on a research topic related to the material covered in class. The paper is a research project, wherein you will have the opportunity to further expand upon, analyze in more detail, or take in new directions the material covered in the course. You may want to explore in more depth one of the topics that we analyzed; make connections between several of them; examine a specific theme or issue that emerges in a number of different works; compare and contrast the arguments of different scholars; or try something else altogether. **All paper topics must be approved in advance by the instructor (either coming to office hours – which is strongly encouraged – or by email) and submitted before April 4.** The essay is due the last day of class.

Evaluation

Evaluation method in this course is consistent with UF's policies on grading <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Grades are calculated on a numeric scale, as below:

A 93–100	A- 90–92	
B+ 88–89	B 83–87	B- 80–82
C+ 78–79	C 73–77	C- 70–72
D+ 68–69	D 63–67	D- 60–62

A grade of 59 or below is a failing grade (E). A minimum final grade of C is required for General Education Credit.

Cell phones and Computers

The use of personal computers and other electronic devices in class is acceptable only for purposes related to class discussion and collaboration. Casual web browsing, emailing, chatting, texting, etc. unrelated to class activities will not be tolerated.

Plagiarism and Cheating

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code”. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [HereLinks to an external site.](#) you can read the Conduct Code. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource CenterLinks to an external site.](#) It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Statement on Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sexual, racial, ethnic, gender, and religious discrimination and sexual harassment.

Online Course Evaluation Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS

Introduction

- Week 1

T 9 Jan

Explanation of the syllabus/class policies

R 11 Jan

Introduction to the course

PART I: The Image of God

- Week 2

T 16 Jan

Wikipedia page of Byzantine Iconoclasm https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Iconoclasm
Moshe Barasch, *Icon. Studies in the History of an Idea* (ch: The Biblical Prohibition of Images)

R 18 Jan

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 1-13)

- Week 3

M 22 Jan

Screening – *Andrey Rublev* (1966, Andrei Tarkovsky, first part)

T 23 Jan

Screening – *Andrey Rublev* (1966, Andrei Tarkovsky, second part in class)

Introduction to *Andrey Rublev*

R 25 Jan

Discussion on *Andrey Rublev* (1966, Andrei Tarkovsky)

Robert Bird, *Andrei Rublev* (Ch: The Shape of the Story; The Elevating Gaze)

Discussion Post #1

Presentations #1

PART II: The Transcendental Style in Film

- Week 4

M 29 Jan

Screening – *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962, Yasujirō Ozu)

T 30 Jan

Discussion on *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962, Yasujirō Ozu)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 15-38)

Discussion Post #2

Presentations #2

R 1 Feb

Discussion on *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962, Yasujirō Ozu)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 15-38)

- Week 5

M 5 Feb

Screening – *Tokyo Story* (1953, Yasujirō Ozu)

T 6 Feb

Discussion on *Tokyo Story* (1953, Yasujirō Ozu)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 38-55)

Discussion Post #3

Presentations #3

R 8 Feb

Discussion on *Tokyo Story* (1953, Yasujirō Ozu)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 38-55)

- Week 6

M 12 Feb

Screening – *Ordet* (1955, Carl Theodor Dreyer)

T 13 Feb

Discussion on *Ordet* (1955, Carl Theodor Dreyer)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 109-147)

Discussion Post #4

Presentations #4

R 15 Feb

QUIZ #1

- Week 7

M 19 Feb

Screening – *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951, Robert Bresson)

T 20 Feb

Discussion on *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951, Robert Bresson)
Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 57-108)
Discussion Post #5
Presentations #5

R 22 Feb
Discussion on *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951, Robert Bresson)
Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 57-108)

- Week 8

M 26 Feb
Screening – *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964, Pier Paolo Pasolini)

T 27 Feb
Discussion on *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964, Pier Paolo Pasolini)
Maurizio Viano, *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice* (ch. II Vangelo secondo Matteo)
Discussion Post #6
Presentations #6

R 29 Feb
Final discussion on the conclusions of Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (pp. 149-169)

PART III: Martin Scorsese

- Week 9

M 4 Mar
Screening – *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988, Martin Scorsese, first part)

T 5 Mar
Screening – *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988, Martin Scorsese, second part in class during the first hour)
Introduction to *The Last Temptation of Christ*
Mary Pat Kelly, *Martin Scorsese: A Journey* (Ch. Almost the Last Temptation)

R 7 Mar
Discussion on *The Last Temptation of Christ*
Mary Pat Kelly, *Martin Scorsese: A Journey* (Ch. Passion)
Discussion Post #7
Presentations #7

— **SPRING BREAK** —

- Week 10

M 18 Mar

Screening – *Silence* (2016, Martin Scorsese)

T 19 Mar

Discussion on *Silence* (2016, Martin Scorsese)

Antonio Spadaro S.I., “*Silence*”. *Interview with Martin Scorsese*

Discussion Post #8

Presentations #8

R 21 Mar

QUIZ #2

PART IV: The Ten Commandments as Secularized Ethics. The Decalogue by Krzysztof Kieślowski

- Week 11

M 25 Mar

Screening – *Dekalog: One* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski) and *Dekalog: Five* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

T 26 Mar

Discussion on *Dekalog: One* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski) and *Dekalog: Five* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

Joseph G. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski. The Liminal Image* (Ch. *The Decalogue*)

Discussion Post #9

Presentations #9

R 28 Mar

Discussion on *Dekalog: One* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski) and *Dekalog: Five* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears* (Ch. Displaced Commandments)

- Week 12

M 1 Apr

Screening - *Dekalog: Six* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski) and *Dekalog: Ten* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

T 2 Apr

Discussion on *Dekalog: Six* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski) and *Dekalog: Ten* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

Joseph G. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski. The Liminal Image* (Ch. *The Decalogue*)

Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears* (Ch. Displaced Commandments)

Discussion Post #10

Presentations #10

R 4 Apr

Explanation of the final papers

PART V: Contemporary Filmic Images of God

- Week 13

M 8 Apr

Screening – *First Reformed* (2017, Paul Schrader)

T 9 Apr

Screening – *Lourdes* (2009, Jessica Hausner) + discussion (in class)

R 11 Apr

Discussion on *First Reformed* (2017, Paul Schrader) and *Lourdes* (2009, Jessica Hausner)

Discussion Post #11

Presentations #11

- Week 14

M 15 Apr

Screening – *Jeannette: The Childhood of Joan of Arc* (2017, Bruno Dumont)

T 16 Apr

Screening – *Young Ahmed* (2019, Luc Dardenne and Jean-Pierre Dardenne) + discussion (in class)

R 18 Apr

Discussion on *Jeannette: The Childhood of Joan of Arc* (2017, Bruno Dumont) and *Young Ahmed* (2019, Luc Dardenne and Jean-Pierre Dardenne)

Discussion Post #12

Presentations #12

- Week 15

T 23 Apr – **Submission of the Final Papers** (11.59pm)