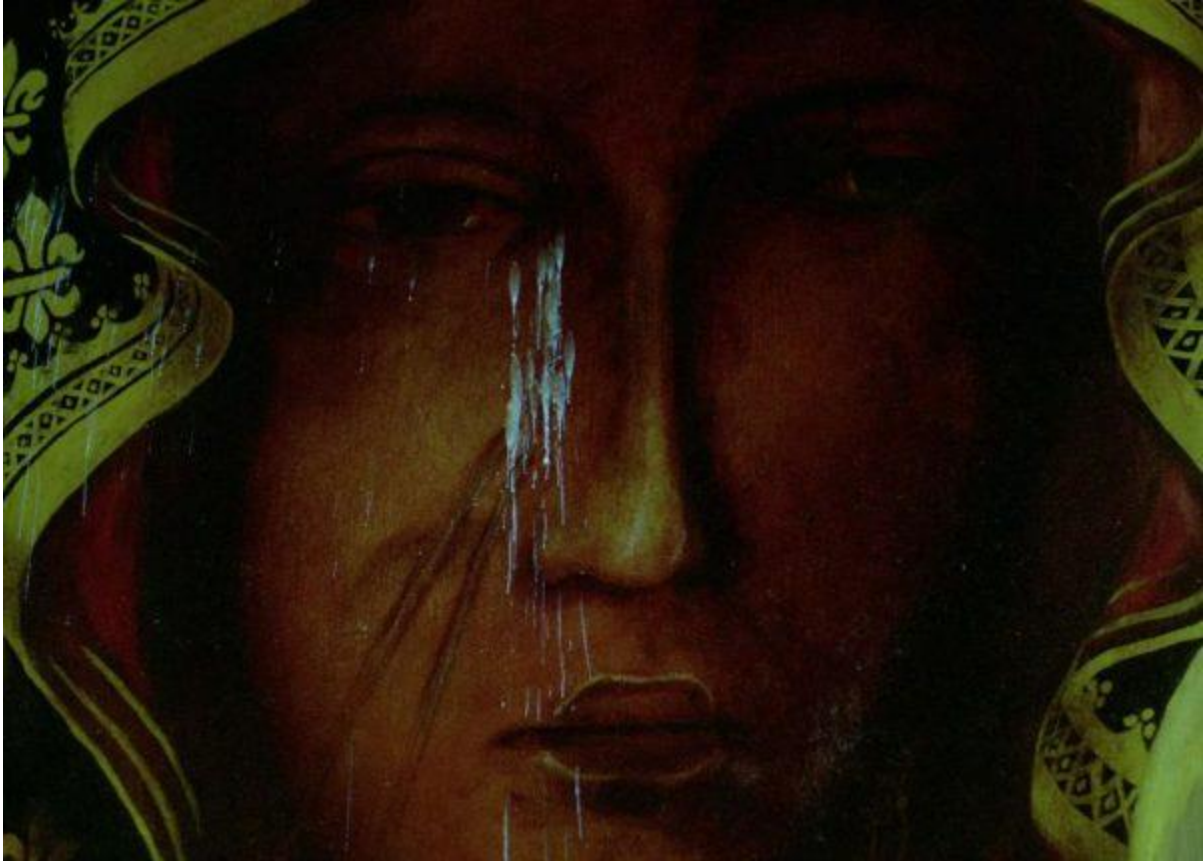


ENG4936 Honors Seminar

CINEMA AND RELIGION

Section 1PB1 Class #11526



Since its emergence at the end of the nineteenth century, cinema has been profoundly marked by religious themes, often narrating stories of mysticism, transcendence, and spiritual experience. This is hardly accidental: religions have always wrestled with the problem of the image – how, or whether, to represent God. But can God truly be represented in visual form? Is there such a thing as an “image of God”? Or, as some traditions insist, is every attempt at representation already a form of idolatry? What would it mean to fashion a sensible image of what is, by definition, otherworldly?

This course explores how cinema, across its history, has engaged with these questions by depicting religious and mystical experiences. At the same time, it asks how the problem of representing God and transcendence confronts cinema with what is perhaps its most fundamental and philosophical question: can the invisible be seen?

Instructor Name: Pietro Bianchi

Course meeting times: Tuesday – Period 7 (1:55PM – 2:45PM); Thursday – Period 7/8 (1:55PM – 3:50PM) Turlington 2334

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

Office Hours: Tuesday (10:00 – 12:00) or by appointment 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 sustained engagement with course materials, activities, and in-class discussions, students will:

- Become familiar with the main philosophical debates concerning the visual representation of divinity and transcendence
- Develop the ability to analyze and discuss the themes and stylistic strategies of “religious cinema”
- Gain a solid understanding of the concept of the *Transcendental Style* as defined by Paul Schrader
- Learn to contextualize different modes of representing religious experience in modern and contemporary cinema
- Develop advanced skills in reading and interpreting theoretical works in film theory, film history, critical theory, and film studies
- Learn to approach films from a variety of critical and theoretical perspectives
- Strengthen their capacity for critical analysis through the close analysis of films and through analytical writing
- Learn to identify the philosophical dimensions of cinema, including questions of ethics, ontology, and the ways in which filmmaking can be understood as a form of knowledge production
- Acquire the ability to locate, evaluate, and use scholarly research in film theory, critical theory, and film studies in academic essays

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 course site. Although the readings are generally not extensive in terms of page count, they must be read carefully and studied in depth. Because they will inform much of our work throughout the semester, it is essential that you keep up with the readings and devote the necessary time and attention to understanding them.

The assigned materials will include film reviews and scholarly articles offering interpretations and analyses of the films, as well as book chapters and essays that approach religious cinema from a philosophical perspective. Some readings will be more theoretical and challenging, while others will be more accessible. You are expected to come to class prepared – able not only to summarize the content of each reading but also to reflect on it critically. If you encounter difficulties, you are encouraged to schedule an appointment with me or attend office hours. Screenings of required films will take place every **Monday at 7:20PM in Rolfs Hall 0115**, organized by Isabella Motta-Zack. Attendance is mandatory, as these screenings are an essential component of the course. Films must be watched attentively and respectfully. The use of laptops, cell phones, or other devices during screenings is strictly prohibited. Please bring a notebook to record impressions and notes during viewing.

Be aware that many of the films required for this course include scenes of menace, violence, sexual violence, and the deaths of humans and other living beings. Some may also include nudity and scenes of sexual activity.

All assigned materials (readings, films, and lectures) will form the basis for in-class discussions, presentations, two quizzes, and the final exam. 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 9 – 11 (4:05 PM – 7:05 PM) Rolfs Hall 0115

1/26 *Andrey Rublev* (1966, Andrei Tarkovsky) (first part)
2/2 *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962, Yasujirō Ozu)
2/9 *Tokyo Story* (1953, Yasujirō Ozu)
2/16 *Ordet* (1955, Carl Theodor Dreyer)
2/23 *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951, Robert Bresson)
3/2 *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964, Pier Paolo Pasolini)
3/9 *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988, Martin Scorsese) (first part)
3/23 *Silence* (2016, Martin Scorsese)
3/30 *Dekalog 1* and *5* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)
4/6 *Dekalog 6* and *7* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

Organization of the Class

This is an Honors seminar, and as such it is designed to be significantly more intensive and more interactive than standard upper-division courses. Enrollment is limited to a small group of students who meet the Department's honors requirements, and the seminar is structured in ways that explicitly anticipate graduate-level work. For this reason, active, consistent, and thoughtful participation is not only expected but essential, and it will weigh heavily in the final grade.

Students are expected to take responsibility for the collective intellectual life of the seminar. Participation means more than speaking occasionally: it involves coming to class fully prepared, engaging closely with the readings and films, asking substantive questions, drawing the class's attention to specific passages or sequences, and offering well-developed interpretations and critical reflections. The seminar depends on sustained engagement from everyone, and each participant is expected to contribute regularly and meaningfully.

In general (though there will be exceptions, so please always consult the course schedule!), the course will be organized as follows. On **Monday** evening, the film for that week will be screened at 7:20 PM in Rolfs Hall 0115. On **Tuesday**, I will introduce the film and the assigned readings, highlighting key scenes, sequences, and passages that will orient our analytical work for the week. On **Thursday**, class will begin with short introductory interventions by two or three students, who will offer 5–7 minute reflections on the assigned film and readings and help open the discussion. The remainder of the class will be devoted to collective discussion, during which all students are expected to participate actively and substantively.

Please note that some films included in the course are significantly long. In such cases, only part of the film will be screened on Monday evening, and we will complete the viewing during Tuesday's class. Sometimes some screenings may also take place during class time. For this reason, it is essential that you regularly consult the course schedule on Canvas.

Attendance and Participation (10%)

Active participation in class discussions is central to this course. Your engagement is not only graded but also fundamental to the collective success of our learning community. *I firmly believe that, more than an individual performance, a university class is a collective effort to enhance the knowledge of everyone, and we should all share responsibility for its success.* Please come prepared and contribute actively to discussions. Note that discussions will often include materials beyond the assigned readings and films, making regular attendance essential. Attendance is therefore mandatory.

- **Unexcused Absences:** You are allowed up to **three unexcused absences** (including screenings) for personal reasons. Each additional unexcused absence will lower your final grade by **3 percentage points** (e.g., a final grade of 91% would be reduced to 85% with five unexcused absences). More than **six unexcused absences** will result in automatic failure of the course. (NB: keep in mind that being absent during a double-period class will be counted as two absences)
- **Excused Absences:** Absences due to medical reasons or family emergencies require documentation submitted as soon as possible. Students must make up the material covered, including screenings and class notes. Absences for religious observances do not require documentation, but students must notify the instructor in advance so that attendance can be recorded appropriately.
- **Tardiness:** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Students arriving within the first five minutes after roll is taken will be marked tardy. **Three tardies equal one unexcused absence.** Students arriving more than five minutes late will be marked absent, though they should check in with the instructor after class to confirm attendance.

Canvas Discussion Posts (20%)

Each week (normally on Thursday, but there will be exceptions!), you are required to post a short paragraph (approximately 150 words) in the *Discussion* section of Canvas. This post should include a brief reflection and/or a few questions regarding the material assigned for the day. The purpose of this assignment is not to test your knowledge of the reading or film (you are not required to summarize them!) but to encourage you to share what you find to be the most interesting issues and questions that arise from them. This can take the form of a question or a series of questions. An original post or a response to someone else's post will both be counted (discussions are encouraged!).

Deadline: Thursday at 9:00 AM. Posts submitted after this deadline will not be graded.

You may skip this assignment once during the semester without penalty.

In-Class Presentation (5%)

Twice during the semester, each student will give a brief (5-7 minute) presentation introducing the assigned film and readings for the day. Presentations should highlight key issues or questions and serve as a springboard for class discussion. Two or three students will present at the start of most Thursday sessions. A calendar of presentations will be distributed by the end of Week 2.

Short Quizzes (20% + 20%)

There will be two short quizzes during the semester, each consisting of open-ended questions covering the assigned films, readings, and class discussions. Questions may address general themes or specific details, and are designed to test both comprehension and critical engagement.

Final In-Class Essay (25%)

On **Thursday, April 16**, you will write a final in-class essay (100 minutes). You will be given five possible topics, all drawn from material studied during the semester. You will select one topic and develop a focused, analytical response. Detailed instructions and review guidance will be provided later in the course.

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. [See the UF Conduct Code website for more information.](#) If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Policies on the use of GenerativeAI in this class

U-M GPT, ChatGPT, and other similar technologies are advancing rapidly and there are many instances where they will be key tools in your schoolwork and career. For the purposes of this class, we are asking all students to pledge that they will *not* use these technologies. We believe this is key for this learning environment because we want you to learn how to *critically engage with* the material we'll be discussing, including learning how to search for and identify relevant sources, synthesize these materials, and make recommendations without the aid of technology. Artificial Intelligence cannot do this learning for you. Students who are found to have used GenerativeAI or the like to complete their assignments will receive a grade of zero for that assignment.

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 Center. [See the “Get Started With the DRC” webpage on the Disability Resource Center 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.

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. Students can complete evaluations in three ways:

- The email they receive from GatorEvals
- Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals
- The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Academic Resources:

- E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- [Career Connections Center](#): Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- [Library Support](#): Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. Call 866-281-6309 or email ask@ufl.libanswers.com for more information.
- [Academic Resources](#): 1317 Turlington Hall, Call 352-392-2010, or to make a private appointment: 352- 392-6420. Email contact: teaching-center@ufl.edu. General study skills and tutoring.

- **Writing Studio:** Daytime (9:30am-3:30pm): 2215 Turlington Hall, [352-846-1138](tel:352-846-1138) | Evening (5:00pm-7:00pm): 1545 W University Avenue (Library West, Rm. 339). Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- Academic Complaints: Office of the Ombuds; [Visit the Complaint Portal webpage for more information.](#)
- Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions): [View the Student Complaint Procedure webpage for more information.](#)
- UF Student Success Initiative: Visit <https://studentsuccess.ufl.edu/> for resources that support your success as a UF student.

Campus Health and Wellness Resources:

- UF Whole Gator Resources: Visit <https://one.uf.edu/whole-gator/discover> for resources that are designed to help you thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally at UF.

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#)

SCHEDULE OF THE COURSE

Week 1

T 1/13

Explanation of the syllabus/class policies

R 1/15

Introduction to the course

PART I: The Image of God

Week 2

T 1/20

Wikipedia page of Byzantine [Iconoclasm](#)

Moshe Barasch, *Icon. Studies in the History of an Idea* (ch: The Biblical Prohibition of Images)

Moshe Barasch, *Icon. Studies in the History of an Idea* (ch: In Defense of Images: John of Damascus)

R 1/22

Wikipedia page of Byzantine Iconoclasm

Moshe Barasch, *Icon. Studies in the History of an Idea* (ch: The Biblical Prohibition of Images)

Moshe Barasch, *Icon. Studies in the History of an Idea* (ch: In Defense of Images: John of Damascus)

Week 3

M 1/26

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

T 1/27

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

R 1/29

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

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

Robert Eford, *Andrei Rublev. Transcendental Style and the Creative Vision*

Discussion Post #1

Presentations #1

Week 4

2/2

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

2/3

An Autumn Afternoon (1962, Yasujirō Ozu)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (OLD EDITION: pp. 1-38; NEW EDITION: pp. 35-66)

2/5

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

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (OLD EDITION: pp. 1-38; NEW EDITION: pp. 35-66)

David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (Ch: Career; An Autumn Afternoon)

Discussion Post #2

Presentations #2

Week 5

2/9

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

2/10

Tokyo Story (1953, Yasujirō Ozu)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (OLD EDITION: pp. 38-55; NEW EDITION: pp. 67-83)

2/12

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

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (OLD EDITION: pp. 38-55; NEW EDITION: pp. 67-83)

David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (Ch: Tokyo Story)

Discussion Post #3

Presentations #3

Week 6

2/16

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

2/17

QUIZ #1

2/19

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

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (OLD EDITION: pp. 109-147; NEW EDITION: pp. 133-167)

(optional) David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl Theodor Dreyer* (Ch: Ordet)

Discussion Post #4

Presentations #4

Week 7

2/23

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

2/24

Diary of a Country Priest (1951, Robert Bresson)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (OLD EDITION: pp. 57-108; NEW EDITION: pp. 85-132)

2/26

Discussion on *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951, Robert Bresson)

Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (OLD EDITION: pp. 57-108; NEW EDITION: pp. 85-132)

Discussion Post #5

Presentations #5

Week 8

3/2

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

3/3

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

3/5

Final discussion on the conclusions of Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (OLD EDITION: pp. 149-169; NEW EDITION: pp. 169-185)

PART III: Martin Scorsese

Week 9

3/9

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

3/10

Screening – *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988, Martin Scorsese, second part in class)

3/12

Discussion on *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988, Martin Scorsese)

Mary Pat Kelly, *Martin Scorsese: A Journey* (Ch. Passion)

Discussion Post #7

Presentations #7

SPRING BREAK (4/14-21)

Week 10

Screening – *Silence* (2016, Martin Scorsese)

3/24

QUIZ #2

3/26

Discussion on *Silence* (2016, Martin Scorsese)
Antonio Spadaro S.I., “*Silence*”. Interview with Martin Scorsese
Discussion Post #8
Presentations #8

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

Week 11

3/30
Screening – *Dekalog 1* and *Dekalog 5* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

3/31
(to watch at home)
Dekalog 2, 3 and 4 (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

4/2
Discussion on *Dekalog 1-5* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)
Joseph G. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski. The Liminal Image* (Ch. *The Decalogue*)
Discussion Post #9
Presentations #9

Week 12

4/6
Screening – *Dekalog 6* and *Dekalog 7* (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

4/7
(to watch at home)
Dekalog 8, 9 and 10 (1988, Krzysztof Kieślowski)

4/9
Discussion on *Dekalog 6-10* (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

PART V: CONCLUSION

Week 13

4/13

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

4/14

Discussion on *First Reformed* (2017, Paul Schrader)

Discussion Post #11

Presentations #11

4/16

FINAL

Week 14

4/21

Final discussion