

**The Spirit on the Screen**  
**Rabbi Daniel A. Weiner**  
**Seattle University STMA 592**

**"Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he entralls and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm of the ever-enduring."**

**"The images of myth are reflections of the spiritual potentialities of every one of us. Through contemplating these, we evoke their powers in our own lives."**

**Course Description**

**This course will explore the ways in which contemporary and popular film expresses the transcendent values and ideals of religion and culture. There will be a significant focus on religious themes as they tap into and reflect universal human concerns.**

**Warning**

*Some of the films we will view contain scenes of explicit violence, sexual content and offensive language. It is not my intent to offend or desensitize students, but rather to confront and discuss the issues raised by these films within the creative context and as derived from the artistic expression of the filmmakers.*

**Course Goals**

- 1. To think, dialogue and write critically about film as a vehicle for the expression and reflection of timeless religious values in modern culture.**
- 2. To embrace the way in which film is a uniquely accessible art form for the transmission and interpretation of religious values.**
- 3. To open one's mind to the diversity of thoughts and perspectives on the sacred.**

### Course Evaluation

1. **Class Participation (20% of grade):** including attendance, completion of assignments and involvement in discussions. A "Socratic" dialogue approach will be utilized in the classroom, with the instructor evoking and facilitating discussion. Readings are required for the fullest class preparation.
2. **Midterm Paper (40% of grade):** 1500 words/5-7 ppgs; due the week of midterms. A comparative analysis of 2 or more films on a specific theme to be submitted no later than February 21.
3. **Final Exam (40% of grade):** An in-class test based on films, readings and lectures; comprised of short answer and one essay question.

### Texts and Resources

1. Readings Packet
2. Journal of Religion and Film: [www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/](http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/)
3. The Internet Movie Database: [us.imdb.com](http://us.imdb.com)
4. Rabbi Daniel A. Weiner: 315-7425; [radbam@tdhs-nw.org](mailto:radbam@tdhs-nw.org); STM office.

## Course Outline

**January 10**

**Introduction: Story Power: Myth and Symbols in Religion and Art**

**Film: Assorted Clips**

**Readings: Jung, Campbell, Martin**

**January 17**

**A Hero Arises: The Epic Journey**

**Film: Star Wars**

**Readings: Campbell, Gordon, Lucas interview, Lyden**

**January 24**

**"Redeem Us!": Messianic and Savior Figures**

**Film: The Matrix**

**Readings: Cleave piece, "messiah," terms/definitions, Ford**

**January 31**

**Self, Identity and Imitateo Deo**

**Film: Blade Runner**

**Readings: Donaldson, Zakai, Pontolillo**

**February 7**

**"Let There Be....Intelligent Design!"**

**Film: Inherit the Wind**

**Readings: Scopes background, McCabe, Kevles review**

**February 14**

**"If you prick us, do we not bleed?"**

**Film: Merchant of Venice**

**Readings: Van Doren, Shapiro**

**February 21**

**"Reflections on the Guillotine"**

**Film: Dead Man Walking**

**Readings: Reinhartz**

**February 28**

**Dog is God: Humor and Satire to Diffuse Controversial Views on Religion**

**Film: Life of Brian**

**Readings: Script, Aichelle and Walsh, Baugh**

**March 7**

**"I Need Dead People": Redemption from Beyond**

**Film: The Sixth Sense**

**Readings: Burruss, Bruce, Reinhartz**

**March 14**

**Final**

**Concluding Readings: Ostwalt, Lyden**