

CALL FOR PROPOSALS:

# Reconsidering the Cinematic Hero

Faith, Film and Philosophy Seminar

October 15-17, 2026 | Gonzaga Faith and Reason Institute



<https://www.gonzaga.edu/ffp2026seminar>

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

**John C. Lyden** (Religious Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha; author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals* [2nd ed 2019]; editor of *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* [2009]; editor of *Journal of Religion & Film*)

**Micah Watson** (Politics and Economics, Calvin University; coeditor of *Film and Faith: Modern Cinema and the Struggle to Believe* [2024])

**Richard McClelland** (Philosophy, Gonzaga University [retired]; coeditor of *The Philosophy of Clint Eastwood* [2014])

Film treatment of the traditional hero is at a crossroads. The harsh naturalism of recent decades has punctured idealizing portrayals of the heroic. Revisionist treatments of the hero have emphasized human limitations, mixed motivations, fallenness, and vicious degradation. At the same time, a relentless postmodern drive to find hints of the heroic at the margins has functioned as an implicit critique of traditional ideas of heroism especially in its masculine form, in effect offering a deconstructive genealogy of the “heroic” that exposes its deep flaws and uneven record in promoting human flourishing. These forces have contributed to what has been called “superhero exhaustion,” a phenomenon recognized by critics and film industry leaders alike, though the fatigue is much wider than the superhero genre.

In recent years, however, hints have appeared of a rethinking of the idea of the heroic, such as the quiet and sacrificial family leader of *A Quiet Place* (Krasinski 2018), the stolid anti-Nazi conscientious objector of *A Hidden Life* (Malick 2019), a vulnerable and unironic Superman (Gunn 2025), the physically imposing but humble-hearted Knight of the Seven Kingdoms (Harris & Smith 2026), and the reluctant and self-effacing astronaut

of this year's *Project Hail Mary* (Lord & Miller 2026). Fans of Christopher Nolan are eager to see what he does with the classical hero in his *Odyssey* slated for Summer 2026.

What are the continuing prospects for cinematic depictions of the hero and the heroic? Is the traditional hero dead? Can revisions and reboots of the heroic continue to refresh it in new and meaningful ways? In what ways can cinematic heroes challenge and inspire people today?

This set of questions is the focus of the **Faith, Film, and Philosophy 2026 seminar**, set for October 15-17, 2026, on the Gonzaga University campus in Spokane WA. The Seminar employs a unique approach in which 12-15 scholars read one another's papers prior to the seminar and then discuss them in a collegial setting over a weekend. Each participant will have ten minutes for a summary presentation and thirty-five minutes for questions, discussion, and feedback specifically focused on his or her paper.

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 Faith & Reason Institute at [faithandreason@gonzaga.edu](mailto:faithandreason@gonzaga.edu) no later than midnight on **Monday, August 17, 2026**. For further information please contact David H Calhoun, Gonzaga Faith & Reason Institute, at [faithandreason@gonzaga.edu](mailto: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
- **Submission schedule:** Proposals are due Monday, August 17, 2026, at 12 midnight. Acceptances will be communicated by Friday, August 21. Final papers (target length 3000-3500 words) are due Wednesday, September 23, and will be distributed to seminar participants prior to the seminar