



# Call for Papers

## Faith, Film and Philosophy

### “The Tree of Life: The Way of Nature and the Way of Grace”

October 5<sup>th</sup> & October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Gonzaga University’s *Faith and Reason Institute* and Whitworth University’s *Weyerhaeuser Center for Faith and Learning* are pleased to announce their Sixth Annual Seminar on Faith, Film and Philosophy, entitled “**The Tree of Life: The Way of Nature and the Way of Grace.**” This year’s seminar theme takes its inspiration from Terrence Malick’s 2011 film, *The Tree of Life*. The film provoked widely divergent responses from critics and audiences. Interpretations of the film were no less diverse and ranged from those who saw it as Heideggerian to those who saw it as a very Christian meditation on life. No matter the response or interpretation, those who viewed the film seemed clearly to think that Malick was attempting to say something important about the place of humans in creation and the meaning (or lack thereof) of human life. And central to what Malick was saying in the film were the two themes he introduced explicitly in voiceover narration—the way of nature and the way of grace.

We invite proposals for papers that deal with Malick’s work in general, this film in particular, the themes of the way of nature and the way of grace, or any of the issues on which the film touches. These themes and issues need not be approached simply through Malick’s work or this particular film. Other directors, screenwriters and films have dealt with these matters as well and are thus part of the conversation we wish to encourage in the seminar. We are particularly interested in popular films from the last 20 years, although the program committee will certainly consider exceptions to the 20-year rule.

**Seminar sessions** will take place on Friday (October 5<sup>th</sup>) and Saturday (October 6<sup>th</sup>). **Public lectures and other events** associated with the seminar will take place in the days leading up to the seminar. On the evening of October 5<sup>th</sup>, there will also be an invited keynote address open to the public.

Possible topics for seminar papers focused especially on the film include the following, although **proposals on other topics, questions, or films of relevance are certainly welcome and encouraged.**

- What are the ways of nature and of grace?

- Does *The Tree of Life* extend the view of the world that Malick has presented in his previous films or does it represent a significant departure from that work?
- Does the film have anything significant to say about the problems of evil and/or suffering?
- What does the film's portrayal of adolescent development show us about the way of nature and/or the way of grace?
- Of what relevance to his purposes is Malick's depiction of the history of universe?
- How have other directors/screenwriters/films approached the themes and issues that concern Malick?
- Is the manner in which the main character's sexual awakening is portrayed developmentally plausible?
- What do films say to us about the relationship between fathers and sons? What does this film in particular say?
- How does one do philosophy in a narrative setting?
- Are we meant to take at face value the film's opening statement about the ways of nature and grace?
- Does this film help us to understand why people fall away from religious belief?
- What does the film mean by suggesting that the main character's mother and brother were responsible for bringing him (back) to religious belief?

Proposals not longer than one page (double-spaced), and in Word format, should be submitted electronically to the attention of Margaret Rankin at [faithandreason@gonzaga.edu](mailto:faithandreason@gonzaga.edu) no later than **30 June 2012**, and should include title, author(s), institutional affiliation (if any), mailing address, email address, and the text of proposal. The seminar organizers will send **acceptances** by **6 July 2012**.

The seminar and its associated public events are part of a series of jointly-sponsored programs focused on "Faith, Reason and Popular Culture." The conviction behind these programs is that if Christian institutions of higher learning are to respond properly to their charge to be places where faith seeks understanding, then they must engage contemporary popular culture. Film is among the most powerful and important forms of popular culture. Thus, the seminar organizers seek scholars who will engage in two days of discussion investigating issues of faith and philosophical import raised by contemporary popular film. Presenters need not have any formal academic appointment.

For further information please contact Margaret Rankin, Program Coordinator, Gonzaga University Faith and Reason Institute at [faithandreason@gonzaga.edu](mailto:faithandreason@gonzaga.edu) or Dr. Brian Clayton, Director, Gonzaga University Faith and Reason Institute at [clayton@gem.gonzaga.edu](mailto:clayton@gem.gonzaga.edu).