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## Religion and Film Part I: History and Criticism

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# Religion and Film

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## I. Introduction

Perhaps the place to start a study of religion and film is with the Second Commandment of the Decalogue, mandating that one should not make any graven image. Receiving the Law from God, Moses descended from Mount Moriah to find the Israelites worshiping a golden calf they had made out of material possessions. The juxtaposition of the Commandment and the devotion toward the graven image was ironic, and a source of adversarial suspicion developed between Hebrew culture and visual art.

However, within chapters of the book of *Exodus*, religious aesthetics were established. The first person that God breathes His Spirit into is Bezalel, a craftsman of material arts, who is equipped to construct the Ark of the Covenant. Not much later in Israel's journey across the wilderness, God instructs Moses to make a brazen symbol, a bronze serpent that will bring healing to a sickly and grumbling people. Those who look up and gaze upon the elevated and projected image regain their health. The typological symbol suggests the possibility of a visual mode of religious communication, one that invites the habit of the gaze. The history of the Hebrews, however, is replete with the rejection of and temptation to the worship of neighboring cults of idols, the Canaanite Baal, the Phoenician Asherim, or the Moloch of the Ammonites. Associated with rites of violence and sex, these cultic images seduced many willing and wayward Hebrews, including the sagacious king Solomon himself through the influence of his numerous foreign wives, into the twin taboos of spiritual adultery and idolatry.

Rooted in this aniconic Hebrew culture, but tempered by Hellenic visual arts, the early Church wrestled with the place of imagery in its worship and instruction. By the eighth century, Leo III denounced all use of graven imagery in the church, calling forth a movement of Iconoclasm. He was roundly trounced by the very articulate apologist of images, St. John of Damascus, and by Pope Gregory the Great. Grounding their defense of the use of imagery in the Incarnation, wherein Christ

became the image/icon of the invisible God, these religious leaders envisioned the religious possibilities of the visual art (John of Damascus, 1997). Thus, while concocted in a cauldron of religious controversy, the visual arts found themselves baptized into the creativity of the Church, and eventually, after being alloyed with theatre, literature, music, and other lively arts, evolved into the communication medium of moving pictures or film.

Previous overviews of *Communication Research Trends* have inserted sections on films under their general rubrics of media and religion or entertainment and religion (De Vries, 1995; Soukup, 2002). Soukup (1989) compiled an encyclopedic annotated bibliography that inspected an international list of key books and articles (e.g., Ayfre, 1953; Smith, 1921) on these subjects. Others, particularly Johnston (2000c), May (1997a), Hulsether (1999), and Nolan (1998) have capably sorted notable texts on film and religion and categorized them according to clear and cogent typologies. Johnston follows Niebuhr's classic framework of Christian positions vis-à-vis culture while May practices a similar theoretical set of categories (based on an acknowledged schema rooted in the academic inter-discipline of religion and literature) that delineates authorial approaches to the relationship of religion to film studies (i.e., a fuller system of classification centered on hermeneutical modes of heteronomy, theonomy, and autonomy). Hulsether sorts out the relationships among Christian values, American popular religion, and Hollywood films, offering four different approaches for studying these relationships: a mythical, a theological, a sociological, and an historical "apparatus-centered criticism" of religious film censorship. Finally, Nolan pinpoints a very helpful threefold system of methodological trends in religious film analysis in a cinematic theology (preoccupied with directorial vision and cinematic analogues of biblical concerns), biblical-hermeneutical interests (viewing biblical themes being interpreted by or developed in films), and a general religious studies cultural approach. While theoretically the most fruitful and fresh, Nolan limits his

overview to in-depth studies of about half a dozen influential authors. What is most remarkable and laudatory is Nolan's detailed understanding of how these texts on film and religion evolved out of religious historical contexts that called them forth. For example, he contextualizes the serious early works of Wall (1971) and Hurley (1970/1975) in the challenges of a secular theology and the creeping hegemony of film as cultural barometer *and* cultural stimulus.

This review, however, is intended to survey the English literature on film and religion and to corral various research trends into suitable academic categories. (For a remarkable review of relevant literature in other languages, see May, 1997a, and Hasenberg, 1992.) Rather than looking at the critical posture or interpretative mode of the writings, I will be examining the works according to a set of scholarly and pedagogical research motives. In the larger framework, I am less concerned with theological positions or critical attitudes toward film, than I am with what methods of research or postures of intent have been appropriated and practiced by various scholars engaged in the mingled disciplines of religion and film studies, and which ones are emerging as the most heuristic (or merely fashionable) at this time. However, my debt is great as I borrow heavily from the aforementioned authors in organizing appropriate categories.

Like the sorting hat of Hogwarts, my own taxonomy places works in what I deem suitable categories of scholarly approaches. One of the earliest established publications, Reverend Herbert Jump's 1911 pamphlet,

*The Religious Possibilities of the Motion Picture*, provides a sort of prologue for historical based studies of religion and film, under the research heading of Film History and Religion—such studies accommodate the dominant issue of film censorship.

A second, larger and broader, category of Film Criticism encompasses various religious approaches to understanding (and then rejecting, engaging, or appropriating) film as significant modes of human communication. Subsumed under this rubric are representational studies (from Jesus films and Christ figures to various portrayals of religious character and rituals) and more recent trends in inter-textual, cultural studies approaches to religion and film and to audience analysis, ethnographic, and reception studies.

A third section examines the more conceptual strand of Theology and Film Theory. Finally, I have added a review of presentations of Pedagogical and Pragmatic Applications of film and religion. [The third and fourth sections will appear in *Communication Research Trends*, Volume 24, #1, March 2005—Editor.] As a caveat, or more aptly a confession, I admit that these categories are quite elastic, slippery, and overlapping. Arguments, and good ones at that, could be made for situating a text in alternative groupings. Some of my favorite texts received less than deserved coverage, but the avalanche of materials was simply too overwhelming to give fair and full treatment to all these deserving and notable works. And to those whose works I have overlooked and completely missed, I offer a word of apology, “oops.”

## 2. Film History and Religion

### A. Pre-cinematic Studies

Studies of images underlay many of the texts in this study, particularly in relationship to the religious imagination. Both Kochan (1997) and Bevan's Gifford Lectures (1940) raise important issues on the connections between pagan graven images and religious communication and on how graven images enable humanity to recreate God and itself in its own images. The controversy of the image for religious discourse extends, of course, into the stimulating arguments of Ellul (1985), Postman (1985), Babin (1970, 1991), Lynch (1959), and Stephens (1998), among many others.

From the classical studies of great works to the New Film Histories of the 1970s, where specific and

systematic research into delimited areas recovered primary sources and archival materials, film historians have opened up the canon to look at films other than the biblical epics and bathrobe films. They have tried to understand the texts and discourse surrounding a film, mostly by contextualizing the film, placing it in both cultural and religious situations, and interrogating it as a formal system of communication and as a rhetorical mode of religious discourse. As histories, these studies range from broad overviews to specific close textual readings, but all with the emphasis on products shaped by particular social, political, and religious conditions of production and reception.

## B. *Religious Film Histories*

Part of the International Film Guide series, Butler (1969) surveys the treatment and representations of religion in film, from the earliest silent film Bible stories through satiric portrayals as in Luis Buñuel's films. The work is, unapologetically, a convenient and inclusive handbook with brief synopses on topics like nuns, priests, ministers, evangelists, missionaries, churches, saints, allegories, parables, and witchcraft. While more of a representational study, it does set forth a chronology of various portrayals of religious figures and themes.

May (1980) incorporates more discussion of religious influences than all previous film histories. As Gomery and Allen (1985) argue, alternative approaches to the study of film history (i.e., economic, technological, and social/cultural) must balance the aesthetic approach, and May demonstrates such awareness of the significance of religion to the study of film. A genuine cultural history must include the religious dimension, from the Victorian, progressive, and optimistic Protestant beginnings of the art before the era of moral censorship through the current renaissance in Christian filmmaking. (It was May's inclusive history that sparked my own studies in the church's relations to moving pictures during the silent era, excavating numerous surprises on how the two realms intersected in dynamic and positive ways during the silent film era.)

Holloway (1977), the earliest intentional religious history of film with its international scope, contains in embryonic form many of the heuristic approaches to analyzing and understanding the relations of film and religion that appear in subsequent books and articles. While claiming to offer only a modest survey of a broad field, this work provides one the most thoroughly theological studies of the field. The 10 sections begin, appropriately enough, with a theology of the cinema, one rooted in a theology of technology that violently separates the human from nature and from himself/herself. In its own modernity, secularity, and kinetic processes, cinema offers motion and illusion as aesthetic principles for bringing an awareness of something/Someone beyond the image. Holloway sets forth 10 specific guidelines for understanding a religious cinema, such as its concern for all aspects of life and culture, its necessary depictions of all characters and situations of the drama of life, and the essential, even indispensable need for dialogue among filmmakers and church people.

Holloway places film both in an historical chronology of film itself and in a stream of intellectual history. Ideas of transcendentalism and existentialism

impose themselves into a fuller context of film studies. His expansive command of details of films, filmmakers, and theological trends is astounding. I continue to marvel at his inclusion of the vast array of films, including the overlooked parabolic form of international animation, that he sets forth to show how cinema is a reflection of the human predicament, how it has been used politically, how it invites religious dialogue, and how filmmakers like Carl Dreyer, Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson, and Charlie Chaplin are the theologians of a visual 20th century.

One of the themes addressed by Holloway, namely that of regulatory censorship, unfortunately became one of the primary markers of film historians in dealing with the place of religion in film studies. That theme, however, did attract more substantial historical investigation in the 1990s with a series of works on the involvement of Roman Catholic leaders in the development of the Production Code.

Romanowski (1988) follows Holloway's variegated and provocative approach, examining the confluence of religious and cultural tensions within a history of American entertainment. Guided by a sense of Gramsci's cultural hegemony, Romanowski carefully negotiates between the Scylla of legalistic religion and the Charybdis of worldly amusement in charting a course through film history, up to the present trends of youth marketing.

Tibbetts and Weise (1977), in a mischievous but substantial study of silent film star Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., compare the gymnastic evangelist of Hollywood to his dynamic counterpart, the evangelist Billy Sunday.

While research has delved into various archives to scrutinize materials on religion and film, one realizes the immense untapped sources that still wait to be opened and revealed.

## C. *Roman Catholics and the Legion of Decency*

Generally, most historical analyses of religion and film have focused upon the Roman Catholic Church and its successful negotiation and resistance during the early 1930s to the perceived corruption of Hollywood via the Legion of Decency and the Breen Production Code. During a period of discontent with the Presbyterian elder and Hollywood czar, Will B. Hays, film content became increasingly more promiscuous and violent at the beginning of the sound era, and concerned Catholics mounted a vigorous campaign to arrest the moral decline by confronting Hollywood leaders with an amazing concerted effort of protest and economic boycotts.

Skinner (1993), in a thorough and meticulous study of two key Roman Catholic organizations that shaped what America saw on its movie screens, shows how the Legion and the National Catholic Office of Motion Pictures (NCOMP) worked in tandem to promote their moral agenda and transfer ephemeral hegemony of social mores from Protestants to Roman Catholics. Dealing with what he sees as a conspiracy of prudish silence on sensitive moral issues, such as abortion, STDs, birth control, sexual abuse, and euthanasia, Skinner argues that a magisterial condemnation of films proceeded via the *Index Prohibitorum*, eventuating in Father Sullivan and the publication of the papal encyclical, *Miranda Prorsus*, heralding a new era of Roman Catholic relations to the cinema as the church acclimatized itself to new relativity and sophistication in morality.

Skinner's work points to the commercial power of a religious minority (due in part to the complicity in the pusillanimity and appeasement of the industry itself and the acquiescence of the general public) and to the emergent liberal naiveté of NCOMP regarding a voluntary classification system.

The Legion's ethical position was unequivocal. It was based on the contention that morality is timeless and unchangeable. Like the Production Code, its standards were rooted in the Ten Commandments. To have called for their dilution, it insisted, would be tantamount to demanding a revision of the Decalogue. (p. 181)

Skinner helpfully provides primary archival appendices on the League of Decency and illuminating annual reports of controversial films examined.

In the first of two volumes on censorship, Black (1994) excavates the original documents of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the private papers of Martin Quigley and Daniel Lord, and papers from the United States Catholic Conference (of Bishops) archives in Washington, DC. Black connects censorship and editing of films to conservative political agendas. Mostly his work examines those films that dared to treat sex, crime, and fascism, as Father Daniel Lord sought to demonstrate that they were not, as moguls argued, mere harmless entertainment, but visual sermons that should be reinforcing virtue, American citizenship, and "Christian values." Black's concern is to show the collision of free artistic expression and the design of the Roman Catholic Church, with the ever vigilant lay Catholic, Joseph I. Breen ("I am the Code!"), heading the PCA. Under the banner of "self-regulation," the film industry was confined by the MPPDA's pre-production censorship against

immoral amusements. The PCA and Legion of Decency became, *de facto*, a national board of censorship. Black opens various canisters of key films and projects the issues and controversies of each (e.g., *The Merry Widow* and Mae West films), as well as showing the pervasive "deodorizing" work of the Legion around the country, particularly in its fight against angora sweaters.

Black's second volume (1998) goes into more detail with later controversies and with the complex processes of making films during delicate political eras. While chronicling the rancorous debates, the work lacks an overarching framework for the reasons the Church engaged in such intense cultural activity. Catholic hegemony was undermined during the radical changes in post-war American society and culture, an era marked by Supreme Court decision on the *Miracle* case extending free speech protection to the movies (overturning the 1915 *Mutual vs. Ohio* case). Rave reviews given daring films (*Darling* in 1965) by a more liberal Catholic press and NCOMP opened up audiences, ultimately ushering in the abolishment of the Code, with its being replaced by Jack Valenti's current MPPAA rating system. Black cogently attributes the drastic change to a moral emphasis on the individual's responsibility of conscience. His book, essentially about how the Church got power, used it, and ultimately lost it—a historical document relishing the inner workings of religious leaders—neglects to probe the theological principles and Catholic worldview that shaped this era. As Romanowski (1988) explains, what is suggested is that

the crux of the issue is perhaps best understood in terms of the function of motion pictures as a means of cultural transmission and criticism. It is a struggle not simply for control of the content of motion pictures, but for the possession of cultural powers. (p. 365)

Texts that view religion through the lens of censorship invariably focus upon the Roman Catholic Church. The premiere study remains Walsh (1996), a detailed and fascinating study that traces the trajectory of critical involvement of the clergy from World War I sex hygiene films through the apex of influence in the 1930s to an institutional transfer of censorship from Catholics to Protestant fundamentalists. He charts the religious influence upon the film industry as it reached its zenith in establishing the Legion of Decency (1934) and dictating the substance of the Production Code. Believing that the industry appointed czar of the movies, Will Hays, had sold his soul for pottage, Walsh's in depth investigation into the various archives of the archdioceses of Boston and Los Angeles, the

National Legion of Decency, and the Production Code Administration, and the papers of Will H. Hays establishes a laudable model for historical research into otherwise overlooked sources of primary data.

Dealing with problems of Paramount's purchase of Theodore Dreiser's novel, *An American Tragedy*, with its seduction, contemplated abortions, and murder, and addressing the troublesome images of ethnic gangster films (e.g., *Public Enemy* and *Scarface*), Walsh examines economic constraints, internal politics (with the Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures, for example), and other contextual matters in situating the Church's holy crusade and economic boycotts, revealing a fascinating set of differences of approaches within the Church. Culling primary historical documents, Walsh scripts the unfolding drama with flair and verve, drawing out seminal moments of controversy (*The Outlaw*) in a lucid and compelling narrative.

Numerous other works address the legal/moral approach of the Roman Catholic Church to the struggle for cultural authority, including Jacobs (1997), Vieira (1999), Doherty (1999), La Salle (2000), and Leff and Simmons (1990). What these historical works have in common is a perspective on religion as a political source of control and cultural power to maintain a status quo, often tying historical moral struggles to contemporary Roman Catholic and fundamentalist protests.

#### *D. Secular Film Histories and Religion*

Film scholars have noted the importance of religion in shaping the cultural landscape in which cinema emerged. Musser and Nelson (1991) point us back to the traveling exhibitions of the early 20th century, in which pre-cinema entrepreneurs of uplift, education, and novel amusements, like Lyman Howe, built cultural alliances with conservative churchgoers and genteel elites through peripatetic high-class entertainments, which set a welcome stage for film use in churches. (See also the Scribner History of the American Cinema series, especially the early volumes by Musser, 1990, Koszarski, 1990, and Bowser, 1990, for additional, original historical material on film and religion.) Musser (1993) also looks at the remarkable popularity of biblical stories during this period.

Couvares (1992, 1996) locates a complex *kulturkampf* on church/industry relations before the development of the Production Code. Rosenbloom (1987) examines the struggle over early American film censorship in the Progressive Era while Uricchio and Pearson (1994) seek to reconstruct competing discourses of morality and identify audiences during the

nickelodeon era. Lindvall (2005) mines primary material on local film history of Norfolk, Virginia, to demonstrate the reciprocal exchanges between churches and theatres during the 1910s and the impact of Sunday closing laws, a two-month revival series by Billy Sunday, and race relations on the film business in the Mid-Atlantic city.

In his vivid study of the synergistic interface between the British theatre of the late Victorian and Edwardian era and the emerging British silent film industry, Burrows (2003) foregrounds a cultural phenomenon he aptly calls "illegitimate cinema." Gaudreault and Jost's (1990) heuristic concept of *intermediality*, of the multiple interactions of cinema with theatre and other cultural spheres, offers a fresh method for studying the cross-fertilization of the film industry and religious spheres.

A number of film scholars extend in some senses beyond May (1980) the pioneering Middletown studies of the Lynds (1929). The Lynd study of Muncie, Indiana, applied social anthropology to assess leisure activities (especially movie-going), religious practices, and daily life of a typical small town. Linking silent film history to the progressive movements and economic and cultural problems of the era, both Sloan (1988) and Ross (1998) acknowledge the cultural roles played by the church and religious leaders. Fuller (1996) looks at the church and morality and their relation to movie-going practices during the silent film era, and the resulting homogenization of diverse movie audiences. Waller (1995) delves deeply into the intersecting sites of religion, race, and movie going in a southern metropolis in a landmark study.

Other curiosities exist, like Oberdeck's (1999) chronicle of evangelism at the turn of the 20th century, showing a contestation of religion, entertainment, and cultural politics in America, an amusement precursor of the alloy of religion and film. Oberdeck examines the negotiation of piety and pleasure in Pastor Alexander Irvine's evangelism, a working class missionary using entertainment techniques, and Sylvester Poli's vaudeville world, particularly in the context of the working class and social hierarchy, and thus contextualizes the cultural debate occurring in late 19th-century America about churches adapting theatrical techniques or variety shows adapting to demands for sanitized entertainment. Her work reveals how "religion and entertainment comprised an arena of vibrant conflict over the meaning of class distinction" (p. 2). Within the hierarchy of Protestant evangelical uplift, one meets the transforming intersection of popular

entertainment, which opened up a juncture of religion and popular culture producing cultural transformations in the public sphere social gospel.

Cosandey, Gaudreault, and Gunning (1992) examine religion from the side of the film historians in the proceedings from the 1990 Domitor Conference, an International Association to Promote the Study of Early Cinema. Investigating the relation between early film and organized religion, the participants, film scholars rather than theologians, raised issues that were stylistic and formal as well as historiographic. Recognizing the pervasive influence of religious material on story telling and imagery in silent film, the papers cover filmic discourse in early films themselves and surrounding the films. While censorship was frequently an integral issue, Tsivian (1992) offers a new angle by examining its operation in Russian films. Other essays probe how organized religion in Belgium, Spain, and Italy interacted with the emerging entertainment and educational technology of film. A second series of essays examines the aesthetic roots and narrative issues of the filmed Passion Plays. Gunning (1992) uncovers new layers of writing on top of older texts, showing essentially how silent biblical films built upon a pre-knowledge of the story, elaborated upon familiar art and narratives, and engulfed (and superceded) the previous texts. Similarly, he examines how films were exhibited and used by the people who saw them.

Part 3 looks at the cinematic representation of religion. Kramer (1992) discusses “screen sermons” as the film industry’s attempt (marketing strategies) to gain respectability among middle class (Protestant) audiences, with certain leaders finding the power to “frighten the wicked and to spiritually renew the wayward” through film. Uricchio and Pearson (1992) explore the use of biblical blockbusters to instruct children and, simultaneously, to make money. Nelson (1992) demonstrates Charles Taze Russell’s creative combination of magic lantern artistry, movies, and music to proselytize for Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Part 4 addresses forms of spirituality. Reynolds (1992) charts the use of the Tissot Bible as a visual source for films, and Knee (1992) tests what he sees as spirituality in D.W. Griffith’s editing, a technique of spiritual cross-cutting to show justice/injustice and the role of Providence in life. Staiger (1992) summarizes the material with a call for further research, particularly in Protestant/Roman Catholic differences (in the former, the reformation and conversion; in the latter, beliefs in prohibitions, Purgatory, and hell) that seem to figure prominently in both production practices and exhibition habits, inquiring whether the embryonic

United States film industry was emphasizing the Protestant place of the individual in receiving salvation rather than the communal. She also calls for an investigation of reception practices, examining heterogenous discourses and identifying who were the spectators and how films signified for religious audiences.

Lindvall (2001b) follows up with an anthology of early film documents and issues from both film and religious periodicals, dealing with the years from 1908-1925. Dividing his study into four eras, he looks at a “Prophetic Vision” occurring among church leaders like the Reverend Herbert Jump; “Great Debates” in which pros and cons were exchanged in hopes of finding “What Would Jesus Do with the Drama?,” as Charles Sheldon put it. Then he examines the golden era of the Methodist Centenary and the influx of Kodak projectors into churches and religious education, with the motion picture as the “Handmaid of Religion.” Finally, he sets forth the “Great Divorce” in which Hollywood became Babylon (and the Devil’s Incubator) through its scandals, and the church opted for the radio as its mass medium of choice.

(For an annotated bibliography of original articles on moral and religious aspects of film in moving picture and religious periodicals, see Workers, 1985. See also the key historical documents: Jump, 1911; McConoughy, 1916; Wimberly, 1917; Lathrop, 1922; Oberholtzer, 1922; and Harmon, 1926.)

*Film History* has devoted two issues to the subject of early and classic film history and religion. Jowett (2001) introduces Phelan’s (1918) book that offered insights from a progressive religious mind dealing with creating an ideal church, social amusements, and problems in caricatures of the Protestant ministry in public motion pictures. Leab (2002) follows with an official “Film and Religion Issue,” defining key uses of film as a tool for proselytizing and of film as a means for exploiting religions. D.R. Williams (2002) demonstrates the commercial pressures regarding the Sunday closing of picture shows as a result of the Cinematograph Act of 1909. From a series of articles in *Crisis*, de las Carreras Kunt (2002) formulates a “Catholic vision in Hollywood” from among four directors raised in the Roman tradition, namely John Ford, Frank Capra, Frank Borzage, and Alfred Hitchcock. Her emphasis, as has become standard among studies of the Catholic imagination, turns on communion, mediation, and sacramentality, as well as Catholic narratives, tales of original sinner, moral epiphanies, and gospel parables.

Two other essays focus upon influential individuals who contributed to the idea, opportunities, and



practice of religious film production and exhibition. Bottomore (2002) looks at Salvation Army pioneer, Reverend Wilson Carlile, whose innovations in cinematic methods of evangelism established him as the enterprising inspirational force behind novel use of audio-visual techniques, a media-savvy precursor to many contemporary religious communicators. Lewis (2002) highlights Reverend Herbert Jump, whose clarion call for churches to appropriate the holy invention of film for church use was considered visionary by the film industry itself.

Rapp (1996, 2002, 2003, 2004; Rapp & Weber, 1989) opens up the history of British cinema and church, especially between nonconformists and Anglicans. In his studies he provides fascinating material on the British Salvation Army, the early film industry, and urban working-class adolescents during the first decades of film exhibition, as well as looks at various religious pioneers in film use and their reception in the British Isles.

Few studies have examined the interaction of religious groups and themes. Dooley (1981) devotes an entire chapter of his book on American cinema of the 1930s to looking at portrayals of both religious charlatans (e.g., Barbara Stanwyck) and exemplary priests (e.g., Spenser Tracy and Pat O'Brien). Pauly (1980) plots the way to salvation through the Hollywood blockbusters of the 1950s. Shaw (2002) interprets the religion in *Quo Vadis* and *The Ten Commandments* as obvious political references to Cold War propaganda, with Rome and Egypt representing Communist countries. He also imaginatively connects Martians in *Red Planet Mars* as Christians spawning a religious revival among Tolstoy-type peasants in a fight against Soviet atheists. Finally, the informative brochure published by the Library of Congress in conjunction with its "Religion and the Founding of the American Republic Film Series" (Hutson, 1998) captures the centrality of religious practice to American history, represented in popular culture, from various Pilgrim documentaries and fictional films to the documentary expose of *Marjoe* and the allegorical *The Night of the Hunter*. The booklet offers a fascinating overview of the role of faith in contemporary life, offering glimpses of evangelists in films like *The Miracle Woman* and *Elmer Gantry*.

### *E. History of Christian Filmmaking*

The historical study of classic Hollywood films is being supplanted by critical attention to marginal and alternative modes of narrative. The place of Christians in the communication media has drawn commentary from

scholars like Baum (1993). Much has come to light regarding primary historical religious documents and their place in the discourse of film and religion. Denominational studies include those of Romanowski (1995) on the Christian Reformed Church and Lindvall (1995) on Congregationalists. Romanowski examines theological issues behind the Christian Reformed Church's stand on movies from their 1928 declaration against movies. Grappling with the seminal ideas of "common grace" (finding pleasure in all of God's creation) and its antithesis (teaching how to discern and diagnose those pleasures), Romanowski connects ecclesiastical responses to the debate regarding highbrow and lowbrow art. The CRC's newsletter accused film of being associated with lower classes of humanity, appealing to corrupt tastes, and giving a "false view of life." By 1918, films were deemed culpable for ruining family life, as women neglected duties to children and husbands when they ran off to see movies. Statistics, however, show that church members frequently voiced adverse opinions and did attend movies. In 1951, a more iconophilic decision changed church perspectives, encouraging choices based on individual consciences, with a debate calling the church to have a more transformative role in culture. Alongside the Protestant involvement, Molhant (2000) places Catholicism, laying out a short early history of the role of the OCIC, the international Catholic Church organization for cinema.

Religious filmmaking often crept into bizarre areas as well. Writing in *Film Comment* magazine, McDonough (1987) studies marginal religious filmmaking in undertaking the strange case of June, Ron, and Jim Ormond, who produced cheap, drive-in films, such as *The Girl from Tobacco Row* and religious exploitation films for Jesus, such as *The Grim Reaper Hell*, *The Land Where Jesus Walked*, *The Second Coming*, and *The Burning Hell*, renowned as the "most potent soul-winning picture that has ever played a church."

In an eclectic survey of culturally redeeming movements, Gilbert (1997) examines how Dr. Irwin Moon's Moody Science Films extolled the glories and wonders of God's creation and persuasively propagated science as a vehicle to communicate biblical truths, particularly to a generation of military personnel. In "churching American soldiers" through MIS films, Moon presented the "first-century gospel with 20th century illustrations," and brought a rapprochement between religion and science.

Looking at the broader evangelical culture, Hendershott (2004) assesses how the Moody Science films gave pleasure to their audiences and reaffirmed a

biblical worldview. Placing the vertical integration of Christian film production in general, and the Moody Institute of Science films apologetic promoting a Creationist intelligent design in particular, under the microscope, Hendershott discovers that Christian media is not so much overt propaganda, as a set of

undervalued media artifacts that resist hegemonic mass culture and confound secularization theories of the religious faith. Her textual and industrial analyses also focus upon the personal and political apocalyptic films such as *Thief in the Night* and *Left Behind*.

### 3. Film Criticism and Religion

Undeniably, the predominant perception of the Christian church's stance toward film has been as a negative and often hostile critic. While historical research is opening up other more positive examples of engaging relationships, the scholar must contend with the fact that the church, like other institutions, looks at movies and evaluates them. As fashions change, so do the sundry postures of religious organizations alter from condemnation to dialogue.

Traditionally, three dominant critical streams have shaped most approaches to film criticism. The first and most pervasive approach stems from Niebuhr's (1951) classic discussion of the relationships between Christ and culture. The key works that utilize Niebuhr mostly marshal other texts along a continuum of religion's hostility toward or assimilation of film culture, exploring postures of nuance and complex relations. Second is a critical approach that analyzes films according to standards categorized as heteronomous, theonomous, and autonomous, namely those works that evaluate films according to criteria developed from other external sources, those developed from theological (God's) sources, or criteria suggested by the aesthetic forms themselves (May, 1997a). Third, one finds a critical distinction among works that articulate a Catholic or Protestant imagination, an approach closely aligned to Niebuhr's categories. This final delineation, articulated by various theologians and film scholars, envisions a dialectic continuum between two imaginative ways of seeing and responding. The argument consists of the notion that Catholic and Protestant imaginations see reality differently, anchored as it were, in particular doctrines of the church, and construct responses based on those foundations.

Foremost among those works offering a Niebuhrian perspective is Johnston (2000b). Key to understanding Johnston's approach is to see theology as conversations about God, the interest being in knowing about God and talking about Him. Johnston, a professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary,

adheres to art critic John Ruskin's theological vocation of *seeing*, namely in affirming that the "greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way" (p. 15). Johnston outlines five approaches to film criticism: avoidance, caution, dialogue, appropriation, and Divine encounter. He assigns various critical works within each of these categories. His own emphasis, informed by the classic conception of Egyptian gold as developed by St. Augustine and Origen, is on the salient practice of common grace within human culture. He affirms that the imagination, like other human faculties, can be baptized, even as evidenced in the writings of such diverse Christians as C.S. Lewis, Paul Tillich, and Peter Berger. He calls for theology to respond to movies positively, namely *dialogically*, and to ride the narratives that inhere the "hidden heart of Pauline theology" or to chase the sacred in films like *The Apostle*.

Marsh and Ortiz (1997b) also negotiate Niebuhr's conceptual models for understanding the relationships of theology and film culture. They call for informed discussions that originate in Christian theology (God talk) that could potentially bear fruitful dialogue of the three perspectives of theology against culture, theology immersed in culture, and theology in critical dialogue with culture. Marsh and Ortiz modify Paul Tillich's theology of culture in order to elicit many "diverse conversations within a pluriform culture" (1997b, p. 32).

One godfather of theological reflection on cinema, John R. May, surveys pertinent works and categorizes them according to theoretical approaches. The dominant concern since the 1960s was to define the relationships between film and religion, and May excavates five overlapping approaches from the literature: religious discrimination, visibility, dialogue, humanism, and aesthetics. This pentad of classification places the films in a diachronic emergence, suggesting an historical progress, and marked by a transition from heteronomic and theonomic to autonomous.

With Michael Bird, he recognizes a growing tendency in the late 1970s to hunt out religious allusions, themes, and symbols in film (May & Bird, 1982). Trying to find a balanced approach between the pseudo-intellectual God talk of certain European films and the superficial readings of Hollywood films, they attend to the primacy of film language and technique as the fundamentals of an art form. What is needed, they suggest, is a true autonomous exegesis of film, letting film suggest its own rules for interpretation. Although they rarely involve the biblical texts themselves, they seek a dialogue between the two fields. Their tripartite book first offers theoretical reflections on the religious interpretation of film wherein Bird sees films' "celebration of reality" as a "potent seedbed for the sacred event itself" (1982b, p. ix).

Bird borrows Mircea Eliade's concept of *hierophany*, to show how film can transcend the everyday with the everyday, direct viewers to discern the holy within the real, and evoke a sense of ineffable mystery of life. As such, film functions as the locus of mythic encounters (Bird, 1982a). Dufrenne's phenomenological notion of a "sensuous realism" offers the spectator a romantic experience of the "depth" of the world through art. Reviewing the aesthetic realism of three Roman Catholic film theorists (Andre Bazin, Henri Agel, and Amedee Ayfre), Bird indicates how one might find spiritual realism within film realism, namely that nature is the "mother of images" ready to unveil or point to the transcendent (see Andrews, 1976). Signs of the celestial are always terrestrial traces. The centrifugal force of screen fare like Robert Bresson's *The Diary of a Country Priest* casts the viewer outwards, beyond the self. "Cinema, because of its ontogenetic relationship to reality, enables the possibility of listening" to the depths of meaning, where one encounters the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, something beyond our world, a hierophany (Bird, 1982a, p. 21).

Ferlita (1982) and May (1982b) look at the analogy of dramatic action for meanings and interpret the structures of visual story, respectively. May borrows three theoretical approaches from the literary tradition: Heteronomy, the law is outside (T.S. Eliot's famous essay on "Literature and Religion") in which the standards for the greatness of literature can be found outside literature, as in theology; Theonomy, the law is God (Paul Tillich's "Religion and Secular Culture"), which offers a synthesis of religion and literature, neither judging the other, each being expressions of man's ultimate concern; and Autonomy, the law is within (R.W.B.

Lewis's "Hold on Hard to the Huckleberry Bushes"), in which norms for evaluation are inherent in the discipline itself. For the authors, a theology of story grounded in the thought of John Dominic Crossan allows a narrative contrast of myth and parable, with the former establishing a world and the latter subverting it.

In the introduction to his edited collection of papers on how films are used in church, society, and education, May (1997a) reminds his readers that religious film extends to more than the old biblical epics, explicit religious subjects, and films dealing with morality. Assessing pertinent English-language works on the relations of film and religion, and basing his analyses on the aforementioned categories of autonomy, heteronomy, and theonomy, May offers the five stages of developing dialogue already mentioned: religious discrimination, visibility, dialogue, humanism, and aesthetics. The religious as a category must be viewed as more than mere morality, but not other or less than. As Kierkegaard invented his stages on life's way, so aesthetics and ethics (morality) will always be intertwined with the religious, even if in descending hierarchical ways. Where Marsh's "new" paradigm involves a discernment of the theological implications of secular films and a search for inventive cinematic analogues addressing topics such as redemption and damnation in films, May identifies various distinctive trends that continue today, such as a new spirituality in cinema; the presentation of themes of alienation, isolation, or fragmentation as reflections of human experience; and mostly the spectator/readerly responses to film, in how viewers appropriate and use such images. May's book is divided into six sections that survey developments in film criticism and interpretation and assembles various approaches to the religious interpretation of film.

These three critical approaches enable us to place various scholarly texts and articles into heuristic categories that help to make sense of principal approaches of religious and theological attitudes toward film.

#### A. *Critical Texts of Avoidance and Discrimination*

Until the last few decades, the primary perception of the church's relation to film has been one of censorship. The epistolary command of St. John to avoid the flesh, the world, and the devil was conveniently attached to the suspect phenomenon of film entertainment, thus demanding that spectators either avoid movies altogether or discern the spiritual dangers inherent in the medium. Problems with film are well documented in historical Protestant sources as well as more contemporary

books and pamphlets. Examples include Linn (1923), Burnett and Martell (1932), Miles (1947), Paine (1957), Lindsay (1964), Tozer (n.d.), and Wilson (1999). By the late 1960s, works like Summers (1969) and McClain (1970) represent the varying critical approaches of the church to the Hollywood industry. Coppenger (1981) develops a kinder, more open approach to understanding film from a Christian perspective in regards to the Christian imagination. The wary but engaging posture was to extend up to the more trenchant and witty Muggeridge (1977) and to Baehr's quantitative moral assessments in his watchdog publications (1998, 2003). More Calvinistic than most, Saunders (1982-1983) recommends reform in the media arts from a relativist humanist use to theological reconstruction.

Roman Catholics have generally offered more positive, although qualified, recommendations, beginning with Pope Pius XI (1936), Pope Pius XII (1957), various speeches by the popes on cinema (Eilers, 1993), and official Vatican documents from 1936 to 1992 (John Paul II, 2000). Yet they too diligently warn the faithful against the ills and dangers of corrupt films. Butler (1984) cautiously approaches the viewing of films in his guide for Roman Catholics when venturing out into the celluloid world.

Under the heading of "Religious Discrimination," May treats such Catholic works as Getlein and Gardiner (1961), Schillaci (1968), and Arnold (1972), and Jewish works as Medved (1992) as exemplars of, obviously enough from their respective titles, moral concerns regarding the cinema. Harold Gardiner, former literary editor of *America* magazine, borrows Rene Ludmann's provocative description of the baleful effects of cinematic visual arts upon an audience with the apt phrase, the *phenomene de sedimentation*. "Little by little the moral sense silts over" clogging the soul of the viewer, reminding one of actor Kirk Douglas's line in *Detective Story* that he would give his soul to take out his mind, put it under a faucet, and wash away all the dirty pictures he had seen. Gardiner and film critic Frank Getlein design their publication to meet "repeated papal injunctions that the motion pictures be made the object of serious positive study by Catholics." As such, it accompanies Lynch's (1959) theoretical framework in *The Image Industries* as cautiously showing the relevance of theology to the artistic imagination.

Grounding film in the renaissance of a 1960s moral theology, after years in servitude to a Production Code designed and regulated by Roman Catholics, Schillaci (1968) also approaches film as an art form and as a potential source of emotional maturity and

moral sensitivity. Unearthing fascinating possibilities for improving the human condition, he argues that films are modern man's morality plays. As such, he points viewers away from what he sees as the sentimental and spiritually degrading entertainment of *Going My Way* or *The Cardinal* and toward a "new mode of film appraisal" from the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures. He sees a prophetic role for film to exorcise the illusions and falsehoods of ordinary life and optimistically (even quixotically) believes that film can open up fields of moral formation and catechism; film is the bridge twixt church and world. While wary in some of his analyses, Schillaci was daring in his introduction of Bergman's and Fellini's works into the communion of the faithful.

Another Catholic critic, Arnold (1972) looks to all the experiences of wonder, joy, tragedy, terror, and despair captured by film as openings for shedding light on the "religious" topics of life, on explanations of evil, suffering, and the purpose of death, on the nature of goodness and reality, and finally on how one ought to live in such a variegated universe. He emphasizes the moral dimensions of religious humanism, teasing out the significance of the wild images of Fellini and others. Arnold argues that all films, including "junky ones," ask us to believe something, and then reviews films ranging from the A-1 rated *Goldfinger* and *The Graduate* to condemned (C-rated) ones like *Rosemary's Baby*.

Medved (1992) assesses what he sees as the toxic nature of Hollywood films that subvert religion. According to Medved, a conservative Jewish critic, Hollywood intentionally promotes a "comic book clergy," a culture of violence and ugliness, and an assault on traditional family values. Like Gardiner, Medved prophetically warns of the sedimentary impact of the movies in abetting immorality, through the "subtle, incremental, cumulative changes in the way we view the world." An accompanying video to his book illustrates his arguments with vivid clips from the films themselves, although showing them out of narrative context. Medved (1993) also addresses the ludicrous hypocrisy of Hollywood executives who argue that movies only reflect society and don't influence anyone, even as they spend millions on advertising.

Billingsley (1989) challenges the "liberal elites'" manipulation of film propaganda. His conservative polemical critique of the film world is full of brief anecdotes and humorous quotations from Jay Leno (more than from Bergman, Truffaut, and C.S. Lewis combined) and bold assertions; yet he provides provocative

chapters on such topics as religion and the Hollywood Blacklist, marshalling evidence from neglected sources. The wisdom of discrimination is exemplified in Drew (1974), which offers a remarkably literate and informed evangelical critique of the movies, analogizing film as a weathervane or barometer of culture. In a pithy, lucid work, Drew explores images and themes within film that answer “man’s search for meaning” via dimensions of sex, violence, work, play, and religion. In its quest to articulate a Christian perspective, the book thoughtfully and provocatively wrestles with scriptural texts and issues of ontology and epistemology, and worldviews (e.g., romantic, existential, nihilist, etc.) implicitly present in film. Likewise, Romanowski (2001a) travels widely and delves deeply into the cultural landscape of Hollywood movies, astutely locating key sites and monuments of meaning along the road. In such a vein of inquiry and investigation, *Christianity Today* devoted an entire issue to “Can Anything Good Come Out of Hollywood?” with an interview with Producer Ken Wales (White, 1984; see also White, 1983).

For Johnston (2000c), critics of the left are as culpable as those on the right in judging Hollywood. To force films onto a Procrustean bed of ideology or theology is to use them rather than receive them as works of art (on this, see Lewis, 1961, pp. 14-26). Two fairly recent intelligent works do seemingly use films as political clubs. Miles (1996) offers a penetrating liberal look at movies, mirror antitheses of Baehr, as Miles champions a commitment to culturally liberal values, pressing her own public agenda for those who are impoverished, marginalized, and oppressed. Yet along with her sermonistic passions and biases, Miles deftly poses axiological issues of film, from the representation of Islam and Judaism, or how race is represented, misrepresented, and self-represented in films like *The Long Walk Home* and *Daughters of the Dust*. She also examines the social construction of spectators, how religion and other demographic values (race, gender, and class) have been imaged in film, and how films recommend how humans should live. Using a template of social justice, she seeks films with which to treat pressing social anxieties and examine possible resolutions, with concepts such as the objectifying male gaze as conspiratorial support for status quo. She looks at the impact of box-office films to interrogate and resist resident values. Finally, while she accuses films of being lazy icons, of not demanding much of their viewers, as little concentrated attention is needed as with religious paintings, she recognizes that they do perform their inherent potential of raising questions and issues.

With the critical grounding in all the usual leftist suspects (Althusser, Freud, Baudrillard, etc.), Runions (2003) sets forth on a quixotic quest to provoke resistance to capitalist patriarchy, oppressive genderizing, colonialism, and a legion of other dehumanizing demonic structures. She draws some blood in her fascinating deconstruction of sacred and mediated texts, all in the name of propaganda. To her credit, she does not disguise her agenda, but invades, twists, triangulates, and interrogates via gendered criticism films like *Paris is Burning* with passages from biblical sources like *Micah*. She is nothing if not game and adventurous, but her radical fundamentalism (creatively coercing her own ideological interpellation on these texts) parallels the religious fundamentalist’s attacks on spiritual principalities and powers. Yet Runions is remarkably lucid in applying cultural theory (e.g., Slavoj Zizek) to these texts, even as she laments, like an old prophet, that the opportunities for subversive action against the phallic windmills are generally missed. One will not misrecognize her voice crying in this political wilderness.

Mostly reading against the grain of biblical scholarship and traditional interpretations, she adheres to that contrary coterie whose aim is designed to disrupt identification with systems of dominance that the Bible and Hollywood have maintained. Imagining that alternate points of identification can open a politics of resistance, she practices a lively hermeneutics of suspicion. For Runions, both sacred canonical texts and popular films create, reinforce, and normalize identification and allow resistance to oppressive societal norms and ideals, such as colonization, patriarchy, the heterosexual gender binary, wealth, and whiteness. In a shining paradigmatic example of political correctness, employing practices that used to be called proof-texting, she compares disparate and seemingly unrelated texts to extract her ideological opinions of how racial and gender identities are constructed. Most compelling is her treatment of Hollywood media patriarchy as signaled through *Magnolia*, a contemporary story of oppression, struggle, and resistance that is often strangely similar to biblical stories and themes from Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, and Revelation. Believing that the Bible has been used unintentionally as a cinematic club to persuade people to submit to hegemony of oppressive systems, she challenges the naïve enframing of audiences and their consuming of a conspired conservatism, indicating a political concern with readerly identification as privileged lens. She concludes that hysteria—namely a failure to identify with dominant, patriarchal, symbolic, capitalist order—can be a

strategy for political and religious resistance. Films and scriptures are mere tools in the higher call of resistance.

In an earlier classic exploration, Ludmann (1958) attacks all unfavorable elements in narrative film that predominated through history, such as superficiality, opaqueness of the image, rootlessness and sentimentality, and the absence of God. In his remedies for this moral destructiveness in films, he suggests that films should propose rather than impose, opening up the subconscious to the dimensions of the marvelous. Ludman's argument was, ironically, an imposed proposal.

### *B. Assimilation and Syncretism of Religion and Film*

An alleged hegemonic conspiracy between a conservative status quo and Hollywood patriarchy misses one crucial fact, namely the antagonistic status of evangelical religion vis-à-vis film culture. However, more liberal religious views tend to embrace films as meaningful cultural texts, even sacred ones that provide psychological coherence and spiritual significance to fragmented audiences. In an emerging postmodern milieu of Pauline Kael and Marshall McLuhan and Herbert Marcuse and the secular city, Hurley (1975) penned one of the classic lines of the field: "movies are for the masses what theology is for an elite" (p. ix). Hurley's early *Theology Through Film* (1970) explores nonsectarian universal dilemmas that plague the human heart, probing deeply held human concerns: freedom, self-loathing, conscience, and shadow of death. In seeking to cultivate a theological imagination, Hurley connects theological concepts around several suggested movies as "imaging" references (p. 177) and then rates them with a theological valence, as to how they communicate to the mass public on such concerns as illustrating the human capacity (or incapacity) to cope and overcome troubles. Imaging a new worldwide religious ethos, Hurley essays to bring about a wedding of faith, prophecy, and reverence with insight, criticism and wonder. Yet his work, inspired by the pioneering work of Lynch (1959; see also Lynch, 1960), which warned against the "centralized management of the imagination" by a giant entertainment industry, produces more of a sociology and psychology of religion than a theological treatise.

In his optimism of finding religious transcendence in film that would enable a knowledge of the truth, Hurley envisions how motion pictures as secular prophecies could "create intercultural and interfaith bonds among peoples of the world," especially in subverting negative identification with villainy and forms of evil

and in reaffirming Christian virtues of sacrifice, suffering, and selfless forms of love. Such a strategy in wedding cinema and theology would, according to Hurley, provide the necessary compass for steering a precarious course between technology and truth. Films are modern mystery plays with theological clues. His primer does not intend to promote a religious Esperanto, but seeks to discover cinematic theologies of freedom (e.g., John Frankenheimer's *Bird Man of Alcatraz*), of sex (e.g., the works of Ingmar Bergman), of evil (e.g., Joseph Losey's *The Servant*), of grace and sacrificial love (e.g., Rod Steiger in Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* of a man trying to stay human and survive despite the horrors of his life and memories), and of the future (where artistic prophecy assumes the apocalyptic ring of religion). Hurley's work merges theology with film by blending the human spirit in its striving for transcendence and a universal search for transcultural values, such as the conciliatory acts of healing in Martin Buber's I-Thou relationships, most clearly represented for Hurley in films like *La Strada* and *Nazarin*.

As in McAnany and Williams (1965) Hurley attaches positive valence to those films that encompass an ecumenical theology (e.g., Ray's Apu trilogy). Hurley's assimilation of the two realms is expressed in his conclusion that "All images have some necessary relation to this Proto-Image, the matrix of the Eternal Plan of Providence" (1975, p. 192). His search is for the universal spark of the divine among all people, a religious transcendence enabling all to identify negatively with evil and positively with goodness and sacrifice. Originally titled *Theology Through Film*, Hurley's book was subsequently re-released and re-titled as *Toward a Film Humanism*. In a more secular follow-up (1978), film for Hurley exists as potentially religious, as it provides statements on the human condition, its frustrations, conformities, rebellions, and appetites for justice. Film can supply a fashionable theological model of liberation from various modes of bondage.

Finding themselves stranded between contemporary faith and American secularity, Cooper and Skrade (1970) summon a collection of essays more interested in raising questions than providing answers. The authors look for both the prevailing image of humanity in films and the seeds of new symbols that could speak to existence, finding in Roman Polanski's films, for example, intriguing issues on the death of God. For example, the *Christian Century's* James Wall (1970) issues an indictment of pseudo-Biblical spectacles and calls for the visions that would focus on the agony of humanity as in *The Pawnbroker*. Generally, the tendency to draw con-

clusions more from filmmakers, Zen Buddhism, Susan Sontag, and secular theology, led to a theological climate in which Wall (1973), among others, found the reality of God in secular structures as much as or even more than in conventional religious structures. Many, including Nelson (1976) were able to uncover American values in popular culture. Nelson even identifies worship ceremonies within the American cultural religion of film genres such as the Western.

Ferlita and May (1976, 1977) continue such a cosmic quest in two books of film comment. They outline three dimensions in which films open up significance for their spectators: the personal dimension (reconciling a divided self looking for love as in *La Strada* and *Wild Strawberries*); the social dimension (finding centrifugal communion and battling technology as in *Alice's Restaurant* and *Easy Rider*); and the religious dimension (testing one's relationship to God as Father, Word, and Spirit, in a journey to find meaning and hope as in *The Seventh Seal* and *la Dolce Vita*). Likewise, Wall (1971, 1997) deals with life-values rather than biblical materials. The work evolves from a study of religion in film to a preoccupation with film as film, finally suggesting a sociological critical methodology (a "do-it-yourself film criticism") to help address concerns with racism in film, place films in social contexts, and provide practical alternatives to repression and censorship. Wall argues that the church needs to be enriched by visions of filmmakers, as films make the church a sensitive agent of change and enable it to become a sustaining community. These approaches effect a sliding assimilation of film and religion, a sort of indistinguishable blending of two realms in which major themes are reduced to universal human concerns rather than theological ones.

### *C. Engagement and Dialogue of Religion and Film*

The preferred critical approach by contemporary scholars is tidily labeled the dialogic. The task of engaging film texts as invitations to discourse, rooted in sources as diverse as Martin Buber and Mikhail Bahktin, defines a dialogic encounter in which the spectator allows the images to suggest their own meaning. One attends to the text, even submitting to its forms, to receive it rather than to use it for one's own purposes. Thus one approaches the other with humility and with a desire to understand, without sacrificing one's own religious faith and convictions.

Avoiding the tendency to baptize filmmakers to fit one's theology requires for some theologians a will-

ingness to honestly listen to the candid questions raised by films. In the Lutheran tradition, Kahle and Lee (1971) and Konzelman (1972) take this approach. In the former, film is seen as a resource for faith and a means of communicating religious truth to others, sifting parables from the popcorn, discovering what is good and worthwhile in the movies. Lee, who produced the provocative religious films *Question 7* and *A Time for Burning*, writes out of a context that views film as a threatening weapon, and he and Kahle remind their readers of Marshall McLuhan's observation that every new art rises like the phoenix from the ashes of its predecessors. For them, films function as Christ's parables. Konzelman focuses upon providing a place for dialogue, seeing the ministry of the church to the community as the need to develop ways and means to use secular films in religious education. Essentially writing a "how-to" book, he suggests not only how the local theater could serve as a community forum, but also particular criteria for selecting films for discussion, both historical (e.g. *Cromwell*) and relational ones (e.g., *I Never Sang for my Father*), and ends with lists of challenging questions.

The dialogic challenge of theological criticism for bridging movie themes and Christian categories, connecting the human quest for contact with the sacred through cultural forms like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, is tackled by Martin and Ostwalt (1995; see also Peck, 1993). Like others involved in dialogic studies, they first lament how film and religion exist in academic isolation. Historically, the desire to link the two, however, has issued from religious corridors of the Academy more than from film studies. The vocabulary of film criticism (alienation, patriarchy, ideology, hysteria, the theoretical lexicon of Freud, Lacan, Althusser, Derrida, Kristeva, etc.) is not that of typical theological language. One does not find much criticism addressing eschatology, soteriology, or theology itself. The Martin/Ostwalt text is enriched by a diversity of interdisciplinary backgrounds, recommending three critical approaches, theological, mythological and ideological.

Ostwalt (1995) looks at apocalyptic themes in cinema (e.g., *Armageddon*) and how secularity and modernity have co-opted end-time myths. (On this theme, see also Torry, 1991a, 1991b). Mythological study, namely communicating universal vs. particularistic truths, appeals to the imagination, as in *Star Wars* functioning as a Campbell journey monomyth for our time (Ellis, 1995). Rushing (1995) offers an ideological study of aliens in which she argues that science fiction may be especially suited to communicate religion to

secular audiences. Martin (1995b) grapples with race and scapegoating (race baiting) religion and McLemore (1995) digs deeply into the underground postmodern mind of director David Lynch. While dealing directly with cultural studies problems of circumscribing race, encoding class, and constructing gender, the cross-pollination of these studies reveals how popular films have influenced and shaped American religion and opens a dialogue among different vocabularies. Underlying this collaborative effort is Williams (1980; see also Williams, 2002), in which he argues that popular cultural forms perform some of the religious roles usually associated with ecclesiastical institutions. Ostwalt (1995) goes on to show how religion has been “popularized, scattered, and secularized through extra-ecclesiastical institutions” like the media. Film challenges and often even supersedes religious authorities in the race for adherence. Ostwalt (1998) proposes using films like *The Seventh Sign* to address and provoke discussion on the apocalypse, attempting a systematic pedagogy on the subject.

Fraser (1998) takes on both religious classics and overlooked curiosities: From *Diary of a Country Priest*, *Ordet (The Word)* and *Andrej Rublev*, to *Hardcore* and *You Only Live Once*, Fraser examines the idea of an audience experiencing a “purgative identification in a sacrificial ritual.” For Fraser, the appeal of these films emerges out of a yearning for personal relationship with God in the physical realm, and thus uniquely synthesizing “the diverse practices of the Christian devotional and liturgical traditions” captured a sense of incarnational holiness.

In both of his volumes of visiting the movies with the apostle Paul’s epistles at his elbow, Jewett (1993, 1999) finds miraculous moments in films like *Star Wars* and *Pale Rider*. As Paul took on different and alien ideas on Mars Hill, so Wesleyan Jewett takes Paul to the movies as the primary locus for debating and exploring central human issues in the public marketplace of ideas. He strives to avoid reading religious meanings *into* film, extending the encounter beyond mere conversation to treating film and sacred text in tandem, a “dialogue in a prophetic mode.” While recognizing the autonomy of films, he grants precedence to biblical text *primus inter pares*, first among equals. This, as Jewett notes, is not film criticism, but “culturally contextual interpretation,” connecting an arch between ancient moments and contemporary situations that enable the stories to interact and the viewer to see through glass darkly.

In his second volume, Jewett (1999) deals with the theological significance of themes of honor, shame,

grace, and righteousness that surface in surprising ways. The interface shakes up traditional viewpoints, but not truly biblical ones. Jewett goes back to the movies, taking along a historical-critical methodology of salient Pauline themes as a set of hermeneutic lenses, so that Pauline texts may be interwoven into modern stories. By dealing with individual sins, temptation, guilt, judgment, forgiveness, and reconciliation, Jewett aims for a “fusion of horizons” that provides a ritual of uncovering hidden or unveiled faces. One can gaze, unashamedly even, at class prejudice or a lack of intelligence, and see the special social texture of shame and honor in films like *Sling Blade* and *Forrest Gump*. Jewett looks to such themes as honoring the lowly in *Babe* or grappling with the problematic symbol of the Bible in *Shawshank Redemption*, and asks, “Could it be that certain movies afford a deeper access to the hidden heart of Paul’s theology than mainstream theologians?” (p. 20). According to at least one critic, Jewett’s attempt at dialogic encounter results in a remarkably fruitful exchange between Paul’s epistles and modern film themes, in which the two unravel and illuminate each other (Deacy, 2000).

Kreitzer, a cross-disciplinary New Testament scholar, offers three immensely readable and accessible experimental studies in the biblical seminar series that aim at illuminating biblical texts, classic works of literature, and their cinematic adaptations. Kreitzer tinkers with various facets of contemporary culture through a synergy of approaches to “reverse the hermeneutical flow” in understanding theology. In contrast to other dialogic models, Kreitzer works from the cultural works back to the New Testament, looking at the representation of biblical stories as transferred to literature and screen. His three-way hermeneutical flow compares and contrasts theological themes of shipwreck and salvation, eschatology, eucharistic imagery, slavery, and liberation, in classic film and fiction. The foray into the imagination enables one, as C.S. Lewis observed, to send oneself back to the original with fresh eyes. Once you have been in a fairy world, the real woods become more enchanted.

In his first volume, Kreitzer (1993) sets a dialogue between ancient texts and contemporary understanding by placing their voices into conversation, freshly engaged in the hermeneutical circle, to secure a fresh understanding of New Testament writings. Light of the sun reflected in the many moons of culture, each age sees from its own horizon of interpretation, literature seen in its cinematic adaptations/versions. He interjects film images and themes back onto their liter-



ary sources, such as studying the cup of water motif in Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur* and its cinematic versions, or juxtaposing *Romans 7* and Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll/Hyde spiritual dilemma.

In subsequent books, Kreitzer (1994, 1999) continues to attend to the novel conversations of the texts. For example, he looks (almost mischievously) at Daniel Defoe's famous story of *Robinson Crusoe* in light of *Gilligan's Island* and Paul's shipwreck experiences as noted in *Acts* and *2 Corinthians*, and at the blood of life, communion imagery, and crucifixion imagery in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and in Francis Ford Coppola's sanguine interpretation. Although meticulously analytical, Kreitzer stirs thinking about biblical interpretation in light of contemporary media culture. When critic Steve Nolan charged him with a "redaction-critical preoccupation with authorial intent of NT scholarship," Kreitzer pleaded guilty, but pointed out the death of the author to be a futile eulogy (p. 28). For a true dialogue, the intent of the author is needed to fully hear the text. As will become evident in the following pages, many other works considered throughout this essay espouse this preferred method of dialogic communication between theology and film (e.g. Johnston, 2000b).

One trendy extension of the dialogic has been the category of intertextual criticism with its innovative hermeneutics. Scott (1994) envisions the intertextual marriage of Hollywood and Bible in a somewhat forced coupling that did, however, issue forth in curious offspring. Scott dips into the mythic wells of American film, finding perennial dreams and tensions in themes of alienation, race relations, violence, wealth and poverty, and apocalyptic fears. Under a larger category of *The Duke*, Scott offers a fascinating comparison between Paul's Philippians' hymn and John Wayne's *The Shootist*, as paradigm shifts of redeemer figures. Trafficking with the likes of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Rudolph Bultmann, and the Horatio Alger hero, Scott is significantly interested in analyzing the effects of Walter Ong's secondary orality in the pervasive medium of film, culminating in studies of self-reflexive, media oriented films such as *Broadcast News*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Being There*. Scott ably uses the teachings of the New Testament to evaluate the messages of film.

Aichele and Walsh (2002) also squeeze out critical intertextual connections between scripture and film in their influential collection, which demonstrates both the value and the vices of postmodern ideological criticism; rather than discovering meanings, the authors in this volume often construct and invent fresh insights for tradi-

tional texts and for a variety of non-Western scriptures. They do find illuminating relationships through serendipitous methods as in stretching the story of Ruth to fit *Midnight Cowboy*. The essays see magic indwellings in the films. Where it used to be that theologians only talked to themselves, here they talk mostly about themselves as well, identifying their own "precursors" and applying a Procrustean bed of hermeneutics that privileges cultural criticism and theory (e.g., Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Lacan, etc.).

Subjectivity is both the book's virtue and fault. It has honesty to it, not feigning objectivity or neutrality, but it also forgets to encounter the texts *qua* texts. Called the "next stage of sophisticated studies," the pluralistic collection foregrounds the interpretative lenses of the authors, the musings of the Jesus Seminar, and critical methodologies (e.g., psychoanalytic) more than the texts themselves. Confessedly, the essays are eisegetical. The editors acknowledge the authors "screen" recent popular movies as "rewriting the Scriptures" and "project" biblical texts on to the silver screen; they also screen or filter the biblical texts to fit their arguments. What is lost in translation is reinvented in creativity. The voice of the author is now dominant, (Barthes' dead authors have been revived and reified.) The scholars as well as film and biblical texts are intertextual constructs. Yet all offer undeniably heuristic interpretations.

Both McCrillis (2002) on the "nuclear monster" film and Walsh (2002) on the end times challenge simplistic ways of viewing the science fiction genre and cast their films on a larger cultural canvas. *Behemoth the Sea Monster* of Hebrew biblical passages and of radiation monster films of the fifties shows forth the grave threat of modernity and technological nuclear weaponry. Walsh interprets the apocalyptic of film and scripture in sectarian versus imperialist ways, finding traces of a mythic struggle against violence. Rohrer-Walsh (2002) shows off the best of this process (with Plato and Charles Dickens thrown in) in her cultural comparison of coming of age stories in Israel's history out of Egypt and Moses' growing up in the DreamWorks' (though not, as the editors mistakenly allege, Spielberg's film—a problem of not attending to the texts themselves) production of *The Prince of Egypt*. Gender and sexuality, technology and psychoses, and Lacanian gazes provide the glasses to look at narrative uses of Jesus from *Patch Adams* and *The Life of Brian* to *Lethal Weapon* and *Sling Blade*. If nothing else, the authors invite the playful esemplastic pleasures of seeing recognizable shapes in the clouds and wild religious meanings in films.

Coates (2002) unleashes some of the freshest and most provocative material on our topic through his eclectic, interdisciplinary methodologies. His primary distinction among religion (institutionalized ritual) and spirituality (living and dynamic) enables him to articulate theoretical arguments on how films purvey beauty and sublimity (and horror!), and the necessity of a unity between the two realms. As he surveys the cinematic conceptualizations of Jesus, Satan, and the Madonna, Coates calls into question the very nature of the Christ figure. Looking at issues of representation in the European films of directors like Tarkovsky, Kieslowski, Dreyer, and Godard, he cross-examines the redemptive function ascribed to the indexical realism of film art and deals with the more disturbing and problematic material that Hollywood wouldn't dare show. In a section on aspects of popular images of the priesthood, he contrasts the romantic notions of a religious calling against the emotional/libidinal drives valued by Romanticism. Through films like *Ponette* and *Spirit of the Beehive*, Coates carefully teases out patterns of a personal and childlike quest to know God. He identifies films like *The Truman Show*, *Grand Canyon*, and *American Beauty* as unchurched discourses on his themes of spirituality and beauty. In one of his pithy but profound appendices, he traces the image of suffering through St. Veronica into the realm of photography. His Adornian approach grants primacy to the object as he looks at the Gospel kerygma and multiple textuality. Coates's contributions herein offer one of the most fertile (and even febrile) hatching of ideas in our field, evoking mystery and invoking dialogue.

#### D. Catholic and Protestant Imaginations

Grounded upon the watershed literary works of Lynch (1960, 1973; with an excellent summation in Bednar, 1996; see also Tracy, 1989), Greeley (1998) plows the essential differences between Catholic and Protestant perceptions and stories. Shafer (1991) transplants these ideas for a special edition of *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* that bore tremendous fruit. She called for a series of scholarly essays that each reveals a peculiar Roman Catholic slant. Planted in the ideas of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, and David Tracy, these articles form a paradigm called the "Catholic imagination." According to Greeley and Shafer, while Protestants and Catholics tend to see reality differently, most individuals contain a mix of the two tendencies, with both forms serving valid and necessary purposes. Wolterstorff (1988), writing as a Reformed Church theologian, echoes that

two main streams or traditions could be seen in dealing with the arts: the sacramental stream, which sees the artist as the creator, and the reformed stream, which sees the artist as worker or steward. The former is often associated with the orthodox doctrine of Creation while the latter is viewed as working from the doctrine of the Fall. Both join in recognition of the centrality of the Incarnation and Redemption, but one branching off of the doctrine of primary goodness and the other from an ensuing evil. What would be helpful, according to these critics, is to establish a dialogue or dialectic between these two poles on a continuum.

Morgan (1989), drawing on his studies of visual history, traces problems that many Protestants have had with images by contrasting Luther with Calvin whose more vigorous iconoclasm incited many to strip churches bare of their images. However, in his larger study (1999), he convincingly documents the thriving presence of a visual culture among Protestants during the 19th century, a phenomenon that surely prefigured the church's use of moving pictures during the early 20th century.

For Greeley (1988), all films are religious in some sense, because all stories implicitly try to assign meaning even when they assert that there is no meaning or that meaning is a deception. Mast (1979) says as much from his perspective as a film historian, identifying three types of communication in film: those that are intentional in their meaning and explicit and direct in presentation; those that are intentional in their meaning and covert or indirect in presentation; and those that are unintentional, but implicit. For Greeley, film is a *locus theologicus*, a locale where one may encounter God. On such an assumption, Greeley lays out a theory of the religious imagination and theological implications of popular culture. Film can, in his opinion, be sacramental in both triggering faith and pointing to images of hope and cosmic love. Stories resonate as one experiences a communal linking of one's grace experience with an "overarching experience of his religious tradition" (p. 67). The Catholic imagination emphasizes the deprived nature of human beings rather than depraved aspects and looks for an incarnational theology. One finds the focus upon a combined religion of body and religion of spirit in Christian theology. What filmmakers can do is not to merely communicate catechisms, doctrines, or dogma (which they however do as noted above), but to stir up resonating religious experiences with others and make "epiphanies" happen (p. 246). In particular, the sacramental appears in comedies, apocalyptic, and detective stories. Robert Benton's *Places in*

*the Heart*, for example, privileged symbols of grace for the human imagination. Homiletic material is scattered broadcast, from the morality of Woody Allen to the soteriology of Clint Eastwood.

### *E. Biblical Spectaculars and the Jesus Films*

Cataloguing the enormous output of films dealing with biblical subjects, Campbell and Pitts (1981) provide an indispensable and remarkably comprehensive checklist from 1893 through 1980 of international titles and synopses dealing with the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as well as selected television programming. Yet the plethora of titles is but a fraction of the interpretative schemes of scholars and critics in trying to comprehend the films. Approaching the Hebrew Bible as an open, linguistically, socially, and historically determined world that invites contemporary interpretation, Nash (1996) ponders how one recreates and stages biblical films. Yet as Nash understands, the task is more than engaging the text as only an afterthought, but translating films as agendas of their makers or revealing more about contemporary cultural mind than biblical world.

In the 1950s, *Variety* reported that six of the top 10 grossing films of the decade were religious spectaculars, culminating in William Wyler's Academy Award winning *Ben Hur* (1959). Banal and superficial attacks on biblical epics as mere bathrobe and sandals theology have been replaced by Forshey (1992) who addresses the latent content of ostensibly religious American films. Forshey suggests that such films reflect deep-seated American problems regarding issues like nationalism and evil. His historical/critical approach adopts a mode of "reciprocity" between popular film and religion to provide social/political critiques of American foreign policies inherent in films like *The Ten Commandments* or *Hawaii*. Probing the cultural and political context of biblical spectaculars, Forshey demonstrates how the prevailing climates of the Depression, the cold war, racism, imperialism, sexual violence, and success coincide with the presentation of these filmed religious narratives. This most popular genre on the screens translates the persistent tensions of American life and fashions them into popular pious art. Arguing that "Every generation finds in Jesus a savior compatible for its times," Forshey expertly makes manifest the latent ideological conflicts and cultural contradictions in the grand style of religious spectaculars.

A veritable cornucopia of books and articles representing numerous critical approaches on the sub-genre of the biblical film—the Jesus film—has appeared in the last decade, many of which reaffirmed Forshey's obser-

vation of the cultural construction of contemporary Jesus figures. The issue was discussed as far back as Simons (1928), which argues that Protestant churches were accepting modern methods of film to attract people.

The more recent wave of attention begins with Malone (1990), which offers a lively and snappy pop catalogue of religious films, loosely arranged into variegated groups. Sketchy references and mini-sermons dot the cinematic landscape under such categories as "Clown Figures" and "Mad Saviours," following Ziolkowski (1972). Kinnard and Davis (1992) paint a pictorial version of the Jesus film, an illustrated survey addressing a modified version of Jesus' question from Mark 8:27: "who do filmmakers say that I am?" While more of a coffee table book, it includes discussions of less well known, but significant, films on the margins of Jesus films. For example, the authors deal with *Day of Triumph*, a 1954 feature from Episcopal filmmaker, James K. Friedrich, founder of Cathedral Films. On more distant edges, the authors introduce Carl Dreyer's sublime film *Ordet (The Word)* (1955), as well as the wonderfully entertaining allegory, Frank Borzage's *Strange Cargo*, about a mysterious man who joins a ragtag group of Devil's Island escapees and brings grace to all who would receive it.

Babington and Evans (1993) trace the sacred narratives of three subtypes of Hollywood epic films: Hebrew Bible films, Christ films, and the Roman/Christian epic films. With literate, witty analytic writing, they reconstruct the vast ancient worlds, especially of three of the top films of the 1950s: *Ben Hur* (first), *The Ten Commandments* (second) and *The Robe* (fourth), expertly demonstrating how the films can be read as political subtexts, and as secularized dramas of American religious life during the cold war. The authors create a useful framework of a theory of and for the biblical epic genre, identifying the social and intellectual roles of religion without the reductionistic, deconstructive tendencies of cultural studies along Marxist, Freudian, Althusserian-Lacanian lines. Like the more dispassionate and fair analyses of Max Weber's *The Sociology of Religion* or Mircea Eliade's *A History of Religious Ideas*, Babington and Evans seek to understand both texts and contexts of the films, looking at the audiences who attended or did not attend. Instead of mucking in the political sub-texts of Michael Wood's "unconscious allegory of meanings central to American [and Hollywood] mythology" where the use of British actors represented the oppressing ruling class and Americans the oppressed Jews, or Neale's psychological dabbings with sado-masochistic

drives amid the spectacle and games, or Deleuze's gnostic discourse about the treatment and distortions of history, authenticity, triviality, and crepuscular perceptions, the authors trace the analogical parallels of history. For Babington and Evans, the monumental moments of history are viewed as duels between individuals through antiquated symbols and images for an ethical demonstration of Judgment. Citing Gilles Deleuze, they argue that:

The ancient or recent past must submit to trial, go to court, in order to disclose what it is that produces decadence, and what it is that produces new life, what the ferments of decadence and the germs of new life are, the orgy and the sign of the cross, the omnipotence of the rich and the misery of the poor. A strong ethical judgment must condemn the injustice of "things," bring compassion, herald the new civilization on the march, in short, constantly rediscover America. (p. 12)

Significantly the authors choose not to treat the religious content as merely a screen for other meanings, but recognize its revelatory value as both religious and cultural discourse.

Offering a Jewish perspective on Jesus films, Singer (1988) judges the religious films according to their screen entertainment value rather than for any theological significance. As he notes, once Scriptures are transferred to the screen, they are no longer Holy Writ as evidenced from first audible words of Christ in the 1935 French production of *Golgotha* to what must be the loopyest moment in film history with John Wayne as the Roman centurion growling: "Surely, this musta been the sona Gawd" in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Extending the comic commentary on religious films in the pages of *Film Comment*, Baptist critic Joe Bob Briggs (1987) offers the hilarious "The Gospel According to Joe Bob," smiling at the effete representation of rebellion and Sunday school lust in *The Cross and the Switchblade*. From another purely personal perspective, Yancey (1995) engages many of the popular Jesus films, adding a remarkably entertaining and informative video designed for church use, with rare clips from the unorthodox BBC production of *The Son of Man*.

Baugh (1997) divides these films into two categories: a direct historical presentation of the Jesus story and a study of the creative, symbolic representation of the Christ figure or myth. Among other treatments, Baugh contrasts Pasolini's masterpiece with Scorsese's naïve and superficial and neurotic treatment of the Gospel story. Building upon the scholarship of

Babington and Evans, Stern, Jefford, and Debona (1999) is geared for an adult education class's exploration of the Jesus films, posing questions and suggesting topics of discussion. While choosing to look at the films through various lenses, such as social, political, and cultural contexts, it is a general survey of the films' eras, drawing forth an informed and very accessible synoptic study of previous works. It is simply, and humbly, an introduction, as is Mahan (2001). A special issue of *Movieguide* on "Jesus Christ in the Movies" also provides clear snapshot introductions to various films dealing with the historical Jesus (Baehr, 2000).

Tatum (1997) looks at harmonizing attempts to tell the story of Jesus and other alternative, innovative approaches. In a critique of Pelikan (1985), Tatum points out that this detailed study of the various transmutations of Jesus (from the Rabbi to the Prince of Peace) in paintings, mosaics, sculptures, manuscript illuminations, literature, hymns, etc., completely neglects cinema. Tatum, as New Testament scholar, follows his own Quest for Jesus study, gathering those films by commercial studios with the exception of John Heyman's 1979 *Jesus*. Tatum deals skillfully with production background, presentation of the gospel story with particular attention to the use of New Testament materials, how each film portrays Jesus in light of other artistic representations, reflections of cultural history, and how the film was received, and revealing each film's legacy of controversies.

An illuminating study on the portrayals of Jesus in film, Walsh (2003) offers substantial and provocative lights on the ideological motives underlying various films. Building upon the critical tradition of Tatum and others, Walsh works from a self-confessed pluralistic and postmodern framework, opening up windows on alternative interpretations. Walsh establishes a unique approach in following a narrative tradition, focusing upon the modes of storytelling and mythmaking. Jesus is the central signifier of the sacred, but only one among many that also includes cinematic versions of Judas. Addressing complex issues of textuality, history, and hermeneutics, Walsh examines how the Gospel is portrayed among "Sacred Stories in Cathedral Cinemas." He finds that certain film techniques can enable or enrich this communication. Such techniques for Walsh include the realistic photography of talismans, special effects (which approximate stories of miracles or Eliade's hierophany), spectacle, and even theatrical faces (which he finds in Otto's *mysterium tremendum* an analogous religious technique). Walsh supplies a compelling method in attaching a par-

ticular Jesus film with a particular portion of Scripture. Incorporating some very heuristic comparative tables and figures, he focuses on five key representative films and corresponding sacred texts, as in his fascinating treatment of Denys Arcand's existential *Jesus of Montreal* and its apocalyptic parallels to the Gospel of Mark, and Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* being aptly coupled with Matthew's Gospel, and *Godspell* with the parables of Luke (see also Sklar, 1990).

Mikkelson and Gregg (2001) argue that one can view certain movies as visual gospels. They set forth criteria for defining a film about Jesus as a silver screen gospel, namely its main focus is to present a dramatized historical biography of Jesus; it is derived from the New Testament gospels; and it is released as a major motion picture or television movie. Applying a synoptic method of analysis, the authors compare and contrast the content of the film as they would one of the original gospels, summarizing the pericopae under study and then commenting upon it. The silver screen gospel under scrutiny is Nicholas Ray's 1961 *King of Kings*. Mikkelson and Gregg interpret the representations of the film against parallel biblical texts and the relevant historical works of Josephus, Tacitus, and others, compiling a commentary on one cinematic gospel, with little theological inquiry. Mikkelson (2004) follows this work with a synoptic treatment of *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. (Hall, 2002, explains why George Stevens' *The Greatest Story Ever Told* was a financial failure. Examining historical documents in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, he discovers production cost overruns, bad mass marketing, and the bloated cost for spectacle. See also Neale, 2004, and Darby, 1992.)

One surmises that the literature on director Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* will add new, vivid, and controversial chapters on the sub-genre of the Jesus film (Corley & Webb, 2004). In the first significant study, O'Brien (2004) looks at the fierce religious absolutes of the filmmaker that brought a radical reversal to Jesus movies. Rather than fitting a film to contemporary tastes, Gibson turned multiplex audiences into the contemporaries of Jesus. In other significant scholarly and pedagogical attention, Plate (2004), Landres and Berenbaum (2004), James (2004), and Brown (2004) each examine the film as film, while Cooper (2004) approaches its aesthetics from the perspective of art criticism.

Herman (2000) assesses Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* as a dangerous anti-Semitic film. Even before the over-hyped outcry on Gibson's film, she sur-

veys how Jewish leaders attempted to deal with films that they viewed as dangerous, being an equivalent religious pressure group to the Legion of Decency. Working from primary sources, she shows the competing strategies of two Jewish audiences, of how B'nai B'rith covertly worked behind the scenes and how the American Jewish Congress protested with public denunciations.

Two other relevant publications deserve notice: first the original, unexpurgated, and unrealized screenplay of the life of Jesus Christ by Carl Dreyer was published and accompanied by tributes from other grand European directors (Renoir, Truffaut, Fellini) as well as essays from the director on his "Passion" (Monty, 1971). Dreyer sought to emphasize the death of the man, whose "spirit lived." Second, Zeffirelli (1984) offers a "spiritual diary" of his film in which he offers his motives and describes the "conspiracy" of events leading to the production as well as the interface of the story with his personal odyssey in which he made a "rediscovery of the Gospel" after seeking to capture the "true image of the social and human dimension of the story of Jesus' work of art and faith.

Chattaway (2000) discusses books on biblical epics shedding light on the Scriptures, identifying specific concerns of each director and each providing its own peculiar challenges to the church. "Guardians of high culture were deeply concerned that Jesus had been turned into a commodity, into a gimmick for lowbrow consumption" (p. 10). However, filmmakers found that biblical pictures brought in middle class audiences, who would otherwise be quite wary of movies, and audiences relished them as they made it possible to "embark on virtual pilgrimages to the Holy Land," bringing the Bible to life, such as in seeing Mary and Joseph resting near the Sphinx in *From the Manger to the Cross*. For Chattaway, the various Jesus films fuse together in an amalgam of images.

As a brief diversion, Paffenroth (2001) picks up the character of Judas to examine the diverse and unorthodox depictions of Judas in the Jesus films. The betrayer is often portrayed as a traditional villain and pawn of Providence, with shifting loyalties and ambitions. From the messy intimation of a lover of Mary Magdalene in DeMille's *King of Kings* to a misguided patriot in Ray's version, Judas is cast as an archetypal traitor. Paffenroth shows that his heterodox roles as naïve and gullible or ultimately responsible for Jesus accepting the cross indicates more about the skewed motives of the filmmakers than about biblical interpretation.

## F. The Christ Figure

In contrast to the direct, quasi-historical approach of the Jesus film, there exists a plethora of literature scanning metaphorical representations of the Christ figure in film. In the second half of his presentation, Baugh (1997) offers a genealogy of types in Dali's cosmic, surreal Christ; Chagall's Hebrew messianic figure; and Roualt's holy clown as precursors to the metaphoric Christ figures of film to be found in the cinema of Bresson, Kieslowski, Tarkovsky, and others.

Hurley (1982) lines up various faith-inspired and humanistic projections of the Christ persona. When liberal biblical scholarship began seeking other Christs, particularly incarnated as rebellious heroes with a mystical aura of martyrdom, they found them in a cinema that bore the uncanny imprint of Christ's countenance like an esemplastic Shroud of Turin. Christ was a popular cultural figure like Paul Newman in *Cool Hand Luke*, Gene Hackman as Reverend Scott in *The Poseidon Adventure*, Peter Sellers as the Anglican rector in *Heavens Above*, and even Alec Guinness as Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*.

Peavy (1974) examines films from the late 1950s that he found colored by the God is Dead controversy. He notes a shift from the doctrine of God becoming human in Jesus Christ, to humans becoming God. Visual characterizations of Christ move from the Victorian ethereal figure, meek and mild, to a man of action, and then to anti-heroic characters mired in indecision, as in Stuart Rosenberg's archetypal Christ film, *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), with Luke martyred for the men of the chain gang, becoming their sacrifice and hero. Peavy also looks at works like Dedak's *The Ruling Class* (1972) with Peter O'Toole as a paranoid-schizophrenic nutcase, cured into being a god of wrath and vengeance, and Zurlini's *Black Jesus* (1968) that attempts to transfigure Jesus into a contemporary black leader of an African resistance movement who is executed, with graphic allusions to the Passion with excessive torture and blood. Peavy shows that Christomaniac deviations from conventional portrayals show that men who shadow the Christ story may not be saintly, but mentally unbalanced. These are secularized anti-heroes seeking personal revelation that is mostly self-serving and self-destructive, none of whom experience a resurrection or bring about any redemption.

McEver (1998) finds a messianic figure in many of the same films, from *Cool Hand Luke* to *Sling Blade*, fitting holy garments on various film characters, and identifying the unlikely redeemer in a prison, mental hospital, classroom, or inside the home of an abused

child. Malone (1997) also provides creative analogies of the resident Christ figure in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*. (In the same volume of essays, Telford, 1997, surveys depictions of Jesus in the cinema as "Jesus Christ Movie Star.")

What these authors do is identify the main thread of the Christ story, unveiling its disguises within the surface narrative and relying on viewers to connect the incarnational and storytelling dimensions of faith. Deacy (2001) goes further in viewing films as the articulation of religious rituals and cultural values. In particular he probes how the theological doctrine of redemption is represented in film, especially in his privileged genre of *film noir*, finding it a fertile site for exploring themes of alienation and violence. Deacy demonstrates how secular film has displaced and transposed religion, supplanting some of the roles traditionally associated with the church. He sets forth traditional theological themes in the genre of *film noir* and in the work of director Martin Scorsese. For Deacy, secular agencies like film carry and convey religious ideas and values, especially tapping into secular apocalyptic imagination. *Film noir* has the capacity to resonate with the experiences of suffering and alienation of audience members, not as mere utopian escapism, but as a mode of redemption.

Moore (1994) visits Jean Luc Godard's reincarnation of the Annunciation, *Je vous salue Marie*, exploring which ways film corresponds to body or flesh and whether spirit can be represented on that body of film. As such, Moore shows how the French New Wave director renders the familiar alien and fresh. Recalling Andre Bazin's concerns for religious filmmaking, Godard's seeks to redeem a fallen world in his version of *Hail Mary*, also hinting of a myth of a pregnant virgin of art that would renew cinema itself. Bowman (2001) finds faith in *Central Station*, a moving spiritual journey film, in which separated brothers (all the sons of the father "Jesus") are Josue, Moises, and Isaias, pointers to a Christ of Moses and Isaiah. Jesus as father is revealed only through his "word" at the end of the film. By faith Dora chooses to believe the letter. In *Platoon* Beck (1995) finds a biblical story extending from creation to resurrection. Character names offer overt references to biblical symbolism: Chris, the film's narrator becomes Christ figure. Elias embodies actions of Elijah the prophet, and Barnes symbolically represents the worldly King Ahab as well as the beast or anti-Christ [sic]. A moral struggle between good and evil plays out between Elias and Barnes, with Chris ultimately following Elias, taking up his mantle.

## G. Representational Studies

God also receives attention on His cinematic image. Greeley (1997) catalogues a set of nine distinct images of God. Arguing that all God talk is metaphorical (isn't all language metaphorical?), he outlines Hollywood's graven constructions of the Divine, ranging from an old, gentle, funny patriarch in *O, God*, who simply wants people to behave better, improve the world, and trust him, to a vision of the divine as a beautiful woman in Fosse's *All That Jazz*, who becomes more attractive and desirable as the protagonist Joe gets nearer to death. The host of images includes an exiled French chef, a bartender, ghosts, and a chiropractor helping a tormented Vietnam vet struggling with death of his son and a government experience. Greeley indicates that the movies sustain American optimism, with belief that God's mercy is stronger than his justice. In his discovery of the analogic God, Greeley finds Him to be represented as attractive, sympathetic, dialogue oriented, and flexible. Essentially, God fits the category of a process theologian, made in the image of man, not violating free will, but caring deeply. Bergesen and Greeley (2000) continue this investigation of the question in relation to the religious imagination. His exercise in cultural sociology and urban anthropology culls similar examples as a beautiful and frisky woman as God in *Dogma* and anime-like *Ghost in the Shell*.

Smith (2001) offers an abridged inquiry into historical development of theology as represented in films. From classical theistic idea of God's divine intervention in human affairs, mingled with concepts of divine inspiration, one finds God directly involved in human affairs in early films. The film industry's portrayal of religion and image of God shift as tragedies of world impose a different public perception of God's Providence, or seeming lack of it. In the second half of the 20th century, one finds such existential portrayals of humanity, with or without God that supported notions of individualism in opposition to mass society or community. Smith argues that cinematic representations have been constructed and maintained by and through audiences' evolving views of religiosity, and identifies four movements: Classic Theism (anchored in Scripture, promoting an Almighty God reigning over earthly events); Divine Inspiration (brought about by experiences with war, disease, and economic depression, resulting in a more amiable but limited God who shifted responsibility to humans as in the god of *Green Pastures* to *Lilies in the Field*); Existentialism (emphasized individualism against mass society, with alienation and anxiety displayed against background of

Cold War and Vietnam as in *M\*A\*S\*H\**); and, finally, Consumer Confections (marked by postmodern erasure of clear definitions of good and evil that allowed self-indulgence not as a sin, but almost as a sacramental acceptance of divine gifts, exemplified by films like *Michael* and *Field of Dreams*). For Smith, Hollywood represents God as sometimes dominating, sometimes disinterested, sometimes delightful, but always in direct response to changing cultural factors. "The God of the cinema, in other words, is commercialized and commodified as a product that aims to satisfy audiences' changing interests and concerns about the spiritual as history happens" (p. 230).

Keyser and Keyser (1984) catalogue various images of Roman Catholics in Hollywood. Building on Hurley's suggestion that American movies are for the masses "what theology is for an elite," and looking through the glass lens darkly at the Hollywood religious cult, the Keyseres identify salient cinematic markers of the Catholic life, clues about economic, social, psychological, and theological problems and issues all dimly reflected in film's distorted mirroring of the Church. Based on Friedman's examination of the Hollywood image of Jews (1982, 1987), the Keyseres bring critical attention to screen representations of Catholics, that even "constitute a catechism" by drawing out surface answers to perennial questions about faith and morality and life. They persuasively argue that no fixed canon of identity exists in Hollywood, but one sees a range of indelible images impressed upon the imagination and consciousness of spectators. From nuns in the convent to immigrant Irish cops or Italian gangsters in the crime movies, the Keyseres deal with the undercutting of orthodox theology in such films, replacing it with a sort of creative evolution according to Teilhard de Chardin. The new Hollywood catechism suggests, for example, that, "Catholic girls, especially lapsed, demure, shy ones with alluring bodies, make exceptional mates for demons" (p. 226).

Lacy (1982) scrutinizes the two clerics who appear in Miguel de Unamuno's *Saint Emmanuel the Good, Martyr* and Bergman's *Winter Light*, finding not mere hypocrisy, but an inability to believe. Without spiritual subjectivity, such representations strive for substitute intersubjectivity or capitulate to spiritual suicide. On sheer craziness, Gordon (1994) provides a reader of *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's* to describe the caricatures of priests.

Boswell and Loukides (1999) organize sets of rituals in film, noticing how essentially sacred rituals like baptisms, weddings, or funerals are generally secular-

ized. Initiations into the sacred world of faith are frequently made secular as in *The Godfather* or *Leap of Faith*. Where the authors expect to find transcendence, transformation and spirituality in sacramental occasions, they find mostly the profane. Within the same Bowling Green University Popular Culture series, Lindvall (1993) catalogues nine cinematic representations of the church, from social structure, political institution, center of hypocrisy, museum, supernatural fortress, sanctuary, locus of romance, source of healing and transcendence, and the house of God and the people of God. In another work, Lindvall (1987) explores the different representations of military chaplains throughout historical periods of film as well. Hopkins (1990) playfully analyzes “religion in extremis” in her tongue-in-cheek commentary on the representation of miracles, religious fakers, and antichrists in movies (e.g., *Wise Blood*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Carrie*), to find, beyond the anthropological fictions of Margaret Mead, distinct religious rituals in movies. Kozlovic (2002) extends his studies on divine figures in popular cinema to examine what he calls the sacred servant categories (from Samson to Saint Francis), seeking a “taxonomic survey of the mundane holy” as well as tracing the typecasting of actor Joseph Schildkraut as a Judas figure in four DeMille films. His work also applies a cinematic theology and visual piety to religious education, looking at sacred subtexts (including unholy ones) and hidden religious figurations within various films like *Superman: The Movie* (1978) and *Superman II* (1981). As such, he covers all manner of holy aliens and cyborg saviors within the science fiction genre, as well as finding a transmogrified Bible within popular Western genre films. Pedagogically, he tests how to nourish faith through film, seeking “What good can come from Nazareth?” against common prejudices and visionary prospects. Within religious education he also explores how popular films can serve as cinematic epiphanies, as sites for reel devotion and psycho-spiritual encounters.

Discussions of cinematic hagiography include Neely (1996) on missionaries in the cinema and several works on Robert Duvall’s *The Apostle*. Ostwalt (1999) provides a useful ethnographic study of southern Pentecostal/Holiness tradition and sees in the film a portrayal of the small rural church as idyllic and not an expose of charlatan evangelist, but an honest examination of a flawed minister who “doesn’t lose his humanity either to sainthood or to evil” (p. 672). In contrast, Steiner (2001) interprets the film as a humiliation of the faith. His Burkean analysis points to how the film misrepresents Word-centered evangelicals and Pentecostals, provoking him to ask whether the evan-

gelical faith could be represented in any film. Finally, Hagen (1998) lauds the inspiring portrayal of British Christian author and Oxford don, C.S. Lewis, in *Shadowlands*.

Reinhartz (1999) deftly catalogues how Bibles and biblical texts function as symbolic props and signs in Hollywood films. For her, *Sling Blade*, *The Apostle*, and *Shawshank Redemption* appropriate the Word to emphasize themes of freedom while in *Nell* and *Amistad*, the Bible helps to define the narrative structure, wherein the main characters find their own stories in the sacred Gospel. In *Coneheads* and *Pulp Fiction*, the Bible is shown to be an alien artifact in contemporary culture.

However, one of the best examples of representational studies is Sanders (2002). Beginning with the question of the meaning of sainthood, Sanders delves into such theologically significant issues as holiness, a passion for God, martyrdom, asceticism, evangelism, the miraculous, and poverty. Chapters on the Holocaust and the Virgin Mary complete the book, as well as a curious exploration of the fine line between saint and psychotic. These themes are amply connected to relevant cinematic representations of hagiography (from *Black Robe* to *Entertaining Angels*) in which the issues themselves are defined and delineated in clear and unforgettable fashion.

#### H. Feminist and cultural criticism

Sullivan (2000) examines how religious topics and figures, especially nuns, function to negotiate larger social conflicts. In the postwar era, film portrayals of the nun character mediated anxieties over religion and women, with the sisters straddling two extremes, being independent, heroic, and yet conservative in a patriarchal institution. As such, the nun functioned both to feminize the Roman Church and to domesticate feminism.

Guomundsdottir (2002) offers a feminist critical analysis of two powerful films, *Breaking the Waves* and *Dead Man Walking*. By looking through a feminist “Christological lens” Guomundsdottir raises intriguing issues about the theological significance of Jesus’ historical maleness and how Christ may be viewed as incarnate today. As an extension of the Christ figure studies, the two films suggest how the Lord could be seen in various guises and genres. The masochistic portrayal in *Breaking the Waves*, in which a wife reluctantly prostitutes her body, spirit, and sanity for her husband’s crippled desires offers a much less persuasive model than Sister Helen, who in *Dead Man Walking* reflects God’s enduring, forgiving love, clear-



ly demonstrating a female side of Christ figures. On the other hand, Heath (1998) argues that *Breaking the Waves* does provide an incarnation of divine love as a sacred sexual sacrifice. The wife's odd actions proved that a radical saint could devote herself to *amor omnie* (love, at least eros, is all). Challenging Heath and others, Faber (2003) takes issue with rapturous fans of *Breaking the Waves* by offering a feminist critique. Where others see Bess's sexuality as a transgressive force for good, and an extreme form of feminine martyrdom, Faber cites Julia Kristeva's rejection of the idea of transgressive sexuality having emancipatory power; rather, she argues, Bess's behavior is a debilitating masochism which valorises male domination and invests sexual violence with redemptive meaning. Such self-sacrifice is a bit excessive and delusional.

An entire issue of *Semeia* gathers a coterie of biblical and cultural scholars to address film theory and sacred texts, particularly those biblical films of the last 50 years that situated women as fundamental texts. The authors show how biblical figures have been ideologically coded and tainted by media—seeing embedded social norms interwoven into the sacred narratives, with impressionist interpretations of biblical narrative based on collection of images gleaned from paintings and the media. Bach (1996a) examines Salome as a demonized castrating virago. She contrasts Demille's attempts at verisimilitude and Scorsese's obsessions with the psychologically complex, or King Vidor's 1959 Caucasian version of Solomon and Sheba with the 1994 Showtime remake casting African Americans. The various sword and sandal features of biblical stories assumed contemporary preoccupations and anxieties, which then re-framed the biblical texts themselves.

Pardes (1996) deconstructs DeMille's *Ten Commandments* in the context of 1950s Hollywood to show how Hollywood shapes an understanding of the Bible. For Pardes, Biblical mythic narrative is anchored/frozen into this specific historical physical setting and image, with reel event becoming the real event. Biblical literacy of the exodus was now to be *cinemaliteracy*. The film conjured up uncritical images of deity as magician God, and Pardes argues that scholars need to portray these films as cultural myths and explicate their ideologies. She quotes DeMille on *The Ten Commandments*: "God needs this film [*The Ten Commandments*] as a tool to employ for the salvation of the world" (to which James Thurber quipped, "It makes you realize what God could have done if he had the money") (p. 32).

Gunn (1996) peeks at Bathsheba and proposes that Susan Hayward's character was not a 1950s stereo-

typical seductress, but provided multiple dimensions for the Woman's film, mirroring tensions within the emerging desires of women as subjects. Koosed and Linafelt (1996) weigh the Clint Eastwood film, *Unforgiven*, against the Book of Judges and discern a futile attempt by men to create a masculine world that excluded women, and needing flawed men *and* women to restore order. Several articles, however, seemed more invested in contemporary theoretical issues, pushing an extended engagement with feminist modes of address than theological critiques.

Schleich (2003) blends two seemingly disjointed questions into a thoughtfully reasoned whole: "Why do Hollywood roles for women tend to typecast them as virgins or vamps, with little depth or complexity?" and "Why are Catholic women to this day restricted from full participation in many meaningful practices of the Church?" Deftly exploring the history of how women have been perceived in Catholicism, and meticulously deconstructing female roles in movies such as *The Song of Bernadette*, *Sister Act*, *Dogma*, and others, Schleich offers a unique, thoughtful, and thought-provoking survey and commentary of institutionalized Catholic and Hollywood studio perspectives with respect to and its lasting impact upon gender studies.

Other studies blend typical psychoanalytic themes with theology. Loughlin (2004) stretches the interface between religion and contemporary cinema by testing metaphors of the body and its desires as contested sites of the gaze, mystery, dread, and fascination. Rather than being an alien force within the body, sexual desire for Loughlin is a marker of deep religious yearnings. Loughlin finds in Divine *eros* a wondrously alien and truly intimate desire that is masked (and even denied) by secular representations. In particular, he explores the Christian notion of *sacred eroticism* though films such as *The Devils* and *Breaking the Waves*. His primary concern is to show sexuality from a Christian rather than Gnostic perspective, in enjoying the body rather than escaping it. Sex and religion in the media also take center stage in Claussen's edited collection (2002). Several of the contributions specifically address film, namely Kozlovic's (2002) "The Whore of Babylon, Suggestibility, and the Art of Sexless Sex in Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949)" and Lindvall's (2002) naughtily titled "The Organ in the Sanctuary: Silent Film and Paradigmatic Images of the Suspect Clergy."

The complex signifying of woman as "other," encoded as "good" or "evil" through certain signs as objects of worship and desire, is explored by

Makarushka (1998). In a full series of essays looking at community and difference, Plate and Jasper (1999) address otherness as part of the Cultural Criticism Series project from the American Academy of Religion. In particular, the book highlights the aforementioned *Breaking the Waves*. Keefer and Linafelt (1999) tangle with a theology of eros (i.e., George Bataille's theories of eros) and desire, by reading Lars von Trier's uneven (melodrama, tragedy, or religious parody?) film through the fertile lens of the *Song of Songs*. Plate and Caruso (1999) sing the praises of, and prefers art house films to, popular films as vehicles for analyzing culture, seeking to interrogate the deep structures of culture in more esoteric sites. This slight elitism and sophistication is cleverly undermined, however, by Beal (1999) who identifies the monster (a warning, a seeing) as the cultural representation of the Other, an envoy of sacred terror (strange, exiled, forgotten, destitute, marginal, outcast) outside the dominant Caucasian, heterosexual, male social symbolic order.

The volume's use of feminist criticism, world religions, and postmodern tendencies of irony, pastiche, and self-reflection gives it a lively subjective tone, but it remains a self-centered exercise of reflection. In its primary concern of the relationships between aesthetics and ethics, it inquires about how others' differences have been constructed via cinema and then to imagine how to overcome those constraints and find life together with others. Film is viewed functionally as medium for using one's critical imagination to address important religious issues, looking for non-hierarchical difference, and respecting an indefinable Otherness, beyond the established categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The authors ask what a cinema of otherness would look like. What has been repressed and forgotten? How can others communicate with each other? Commercial cinema only advertises and props up such stereotypic representations; thus what is needed is the promotion of an alternate or other independent and international cinema. With such a goal, the essays experiment with a variety of religious perspectives (e.g., Hinduism, Native American religion, Judaism—in Eli Cohen's *The Quarrel*—and Chan Buddhism) in learning how to live with otherness in community. Maisto's (1999) self-reflexive treatment (showing how interpretation of the cinematic event depends upon one's approach, from film studies or theological studies) of *Babette's Feast* sets household tables as sites of transformation in communities that break bread together. In Frank Capra's *You Can't Take it With You*, for example, otherness haunts and unites the wildly diverse community. Chapter titles of Surviving,

Desiring, Eating, Colonizing, and Ending Community use postcolonial perspectives in their longing to locate an ethics of vision, not just to tolerate Otherness but also to love Others. With intentional irony, the final essays challenge the western dualistic notion of otherness and community.

May (1997b) addresses various developments and changes in methods, languages, contexts, and consciousness of religious film studies. He identifies four specific aesthetic approaches to religious interpretations of film, each grounded in interrelationships with other fields such as sociology, anthropology, philosophy, art history, literature, and communication studies. An introductory essay, May (1997a), sketches a broad history of film theory and classifies the principle English-language works on film/religion. Eichenberger (1997) handles approaches to criticism by directing readers to fruitful (which for the author means anthropological—theology from below) engagement between the two realms—debating whether one ought to speak of the “religious interpretation of film” rather than religious film. The primary tasks are to find traces of a *telos* and to ascertain recognizable identities (personal, national, ethnic, etc.) in film. The author does raise the riveting question of film content topics, such as suffering as in *Katastrophenfilme*, where one stumbles upon the holy through *via negativa*.

In the second section, contributors investigate how changing cultural demands and new audiences invite new representations and languages of the religious, showing how aesthetically innovative directors devise new ways of dealing with religious themes. Hasenberg (1997) tries to describe tendencies in the broad treatment of the religious (texts, institutions, practices, experiences, and attitudes) as a Catholic film critic, examining the “agnostic” investigations of international filmmakers, the nagging questions of political cinema (the failure of communism, rise of neocolonialism, etc.), religious motifs of sci-fi and underground thrillers like Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant*, and the new religious cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski, Wim Wenders, and Andrei Tarkovsky. Zwick (1997) analyzes the problem of evil, the *malum morale*, holds up terrifying mirrors to humanity, and contrasts the Manicheanism of mainstream cinema to evil in the abyss of the human soul as in David Lynch's works.

In Part 3, the writers chronicle the “changes in religious consciousness” signaled by the postmodern rupture with modernity and materialism. Apostolos-Cappadona (1997) deals with gender identification and the sacred, examining the contemporary pluralistic theo-

logical situation disconnected from any single identifiable or unifying ecclesiastical tradition. She borrows from Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) to situate the locus of the female, historically and ideologically, by unwrapping the Victorian era films *The Piano* and *The Age of Innocence*.

The fourth part, addressing theological reflection, dissects film as a mode of wonder making, of exploring the mystery of the seen and unseen. According to Marty (1997), films that open up mystery (even dimly) liberate like the word (Word) of God, providing a mode of revelation in the incarnation of film. In moving toward a theological reading of film, Marty connects the relation of the image to reality back to the Second Council of Nicea's documents. Gallagher (1997) finds practical uses for St. Ignatius Loyola's rules for spiritual discernment for assessing long-term impact of "anonymous religiousness" or latent theology through and from secular film. For more accurate discernment, Gallagher directs the reader back to the historical practice of *dokimazein*, the biblical testing of the spirits. Closing out the section, Verbeek (1997) maps out a quest for aesthetic harmony among the classic triad of *verum*, *bonum*, and *pulchrum* [the true, the good, the beautiful], to join the beauty of creation with an ethic of living. In "Developments in Mass Media Studies," the conversation focuses upon the place of film in religious education, personal spiritual growth, and the promotion of a discerning worldview (the old *Weltanschauung*) of films. Hoekstra (1997) comments on systematic, dialogic, goal-oriented film education and looks at variations of media as supermarket, public forum, and Areopagus; while White (1997) negotiates a model for constructing personal meaning through media for one's spiritual development. The final part of the volume's complex set of essays filters religious communication through third-world cinemas, particularly that of India, Latin America, and Africa, discussing entertainment/education regarding the representation of the family for family viewing. Tavares de Barros (1997), for example, examines universal human values in Latin American cinema. In a similar vein, Brown and Cody (1991) test the effects of prosocial soap operas in promoting women's status and in inculcating audiences of ethical foundations. Others, such as Nolan (1998) and Williams (2000) review religion at the movies in light of American culture.

### *I. Auteur Criticism*

Ever since the *Cahiers du cinema* extolled the virtues of *auteur* theory, of studying directors as authors of their films with their own *camera stylo*, critics sought

personal signatures of artists in their work. Ideology and theology leak into their *mise-en-scene* and through their *montage*. Even with the danger of the Personal Heresy—of seeing a film as a slice of autobiography—critics find fascinating correlation between the director (or screenwriter) and his or her productions. Early in the 1950s, Doniol-Valcroze (1951, reprinted 1989) explores director Cecil B. DeMille's personal stylistic stamp in *Samson and Delilah*, conflating one of the pillars of the temple of film, his American capitalism and patriotism (with the Screen Directors Guild's requirement of loyalty oaths) with his moral, religious, and aesthetic convictions to demonstrate a model of the *auteur* policy. Miller (1953) distinguishes between DeMille's biblical films and those films with more authentic religious content like *The Next Voice You Hear*, in which God speaks through radio, showing life as it is.

One of the first critical studies to deal overtly with the religious worldview of a director was Gibson (1969), which offers close readings of seven Bergman films dealing with God's absence. A decade later, Pomeroy (1977) examines the necessity of human communication for Bergman as a penultimate spiritual experience in the face of God's perceived silence, and Blake (1978), like Drew (1975), probes the subtle influences of Bergman's strict religious upbringing. Another 10 years later, Lauder (1989) extends Gibson's metaphysical inquiry into Bergman, making Bergman, along with French director Robert Bresson, the *cause celebre* for "religious" *auteurist* readings. McLean (1983, 1997) finds Bergman, after wrestling with his demons for 40 years, knocking on Heaven's door in his last film, *Fanny and Alexander*, glowing with angelic presence, and burning with just desserts for anyone associated with his Lutheran upbringing. His insights are based in part in Jones's (1983) provocative interview with Bergman at Southern Methodist University. The Scandinavian legacy would not be complete without acknowledgment of the works on Danish director Carl Dreyer (*Passion of Joan of Arc*, *Ordet*). Skoller (1973) translates Dreyer's own writings about film, juxtaposing the art of the Danish director with his profound reflections on art, theatre, imagination, mysticism, style, and criticism.

Where studies of the agnostic Protestant Bergman mostly chronicle his representation of loss of faith, studies of French Catholic Robert Bresson zero in on a core of grace in his films. Ayfre (1964) examines signs of divine presence and absence in films, limning four basic responses to God within the cinema. For Ayfre, two fundamental and paradigmatic models are Bresson, who

masked divine presence in filmic absence, and Bunuel, who rejected the divine presence by filmic absence. Two full issues of *Film Comment* (1999a, 1999b) are likewise devoted to Bresson and his oeuvre, identifying the emotional immediacy of a film like *Au hasard, Balhasar*, which Haskell (1999) avers is guaranteed to “awaken the dormant Christian in anyone who’s ever passed over the baptismal font on the way to secular perdition in loss of faith” (p. 58; see also Keegan, 1981 and Dempsey, 1999). Film critic for the National Catholic Reporter, Joseph Cunneen (2003) illuminates the “spiritual style” of the famed French director, as both a dismissal of the artificial cinema of photographed theater and a celebration of a supernatural cinema that adheres to a ruthless and unflinching close-up of reality. Finally, in Cameron (1969), a diverse group of critics analyze the French director of such religious masterpieces as *Diary of a Country Priest* and *Mouchette*, drawing out his art of suggestion and grace.

May (1992) exhumes the religious aspects of auteurism in looking at how Catholic theology informs the work of filmmakers like Ford, Hitchcock, or Scorsese. He suggests that spiritual biography can serve as an artistic force in shaping film content. In the book, he collects a wild and provocative set of critical essays, each assuming that the American films discussed originated out of the religious sensibility of its American director. Studying not morality but religion, the author looks for clues, hints, and traces of transcendence by examining principal cinematic elements such as *mise-en-scene* or frame composition (e.g., the close-up of Chaplin’s tramp’s smile). For Rule (1992), for example, the proximity of characters in John Ford’s frames points to the recognition of human solidarity through intimate cinematic spacing. The dynamic movement of film, kinesis itself, is viewed as spiritual quest or rite of passage of suffering and redemption by Hurley (1992) in his analysis of *On the Waterfront*.

Part 3 of the aforementioned May and Bird anthology (1982) opens a gallery of directors exhibiting their varieties of religious sensibility. Cameos of numerous directors are portrayed, from Francois Truffaut and Luis Bunuel (who slaps the face of theology to wake it up—his works crack open the false nut that film is mere entertainment; it is confrontation) to Alfred Hitchcock and Sam Peckinpah. (On this, see also Valle, 1993.) Malcolm (1969-1970) takes on the outrageously satiric Luis “Thank God, I am an atheist” Bunuel in an article on his film, *The Milky Way*. The movie mapped a pilgrimage that dramatizes six major heresy-inducing challenges to dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church:

Incarnation, Trinity, Transubstantiation, Immaculate Conception, Free Will, and origins of Evil. The film serves as unprecedented primer for Catholic catechism and necessary exorcism of the director, who seems to be saying that: “If God exists, how I hate him,” but “My hatred of science and technology will perhaps bring me to the absurdity of a belief in God.” A more recent scrutiny on the Vatican itself comes from *Cineaste* editor Dan Georgakas (2003) regarding Costa-Gavras’s film *Amen*, indicting certain religious leaders with criminal negligence during the Holocaust.

Bedouell (1979) champions “cinema’s spiritual destiny” as envisioned by French New Wave director of moral tales, Eric Rohmer (who includes the Latin liturgy of Good Friday in his film *Perceval le Gallois*). Bedouell recounts how Rohmer heralds Malraux’s declaration that the 21st century would be “religious or nothing” and argues that one should see Christianity as consubstantial with the cinema. Rohmer’s “liturgical” film work is that of a truly *theo-logia*, speaking a word about God and his grace. As a critic, Rohmer himself sees the Christian symbolism in Alfred Hitchcock, and proposed cinema as the “cathedral of the 20th century,” even as he was designated as one of the best evangelists of church and film (Rohmer & Chabrol, 1957).

French directors, in spite of a regnant national anti-clericalism, remain fascinated by religion. Shafto (2002) examines the themes of artist as Christ and as Father in the work of Philippe Garrel and Jean-Luc Godard. She looks at the Catholic imagination of lapsed French Protestant New Wave filmmaker Godard and at Garrel’s identification with Christ through aesthetics of poverty. Garrel believed in a social mission of cinema, acting as savior through incarnate art. Influencing both of these artists was the curator and historian Henri Langlois, a godfather of French cinema. For Shafto, these two en flesh an ethos of filmmaking impregnated by Christianity.

Where the French may dabble in religion, Italians are consumed by it. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1986-1987), atheist director whose *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* is a remarkably authentic biblical adaptation, reflects on fellow filmmaker Federico Fellini and his film, *La Dolce Vita*, as symptomatic of both European neo-decadence and yet with a Catholic magical-lyrical style. Ferlita (1977) looks at the ironic religious narratives of the foremost female Italian auteur, Lina Wertmuller. Two significant works on director Ermanno Olmi (*Tree of the Wooden Clogs*) honor the Italian director’s quiet spirituality of ordinary people. Kennedy (2001) looks at his film on the Magi, *Camminacammina*

(*Keep on Walking*). Concepts dealing with the pilgrim's journey and the miracles of life underlie Young's (2001) treatment of the director as well.

Terry (1995) investigates how African-American film director Spencer Williams Jr. deviates from the classical Hollywood paradigm of individual self-determination to show how Divine causality shapes the narrative structure of his race films. Weisenfeld (1996) tests how race and religion present representational quagmires in films like *Cabin in the Sky*, comparing its fictional construction of African Americans with those in films like Spencer Williams' *The Blood of Jesus*. Weisenfeld aptly applies religious categories of Otherness, finding in the role of hymns and spirituals in slave religion an expansion of time from promises of the biblical past to a future hope of justice. Her work supplies a useful paradigm where biblical studies, film theory, and cultural studies intersect, seeking to connect the two scholarly worlds that incorporate two separate lexicons, two languages that need translation. The films of Williams and Oscar Micheaux position African Americans with respect to inclusion or exclusion from national identity.

Pavelin (1990) garners a list of classics and their contemporary successors that were marked by a concern for fundamental questions of the human condition, a category of religious humanism, in which one would find "the ordinary unsaintly individual going through some kind of spiritual struggle or crisis." Pavelin identifies 100 art house classics, mostly Bergman, Bresson, and Rossellini (with France and the United States claiming 10% each) that evoke a sense of religion, including the finest of all films about saints, Andrei Tarkovsky's 1996 *Andrei Rublev* (Pavelin, 1993). Holloway (1993) distinguishes between spiritual (depth of meaning) and religious (subject matter). Assessing the 1980s as one of the richest periods of theological cinema in film history, Holloway showcases the works of spiritual film authors like Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Decalogue*, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Sacrifice*, and Alain Cavalier's *Theresa*. Christman (2003) deals with the contrasting Tarkovsky and American versions of *Solaris*, while Tennant (2003) looks closely on Kieslowski's works.

Tarkovsky (1986) provides a perceptive examination of his own works in modern Russian cinema; many of which from *Andrei Rublev* to *The Sacrifice*, were often banned. The collected volume assembles his notes, jotted and remembered from his productions, as well as poetic and philosophic reflections on the art of filmmaking, capturing his yearning for the ideal; his quest for artistic creation in the film image, rhythms of editing,

use of actors, music, noise; and the artist's spiritual responsibility in his craft.

Perlmutter (1997) reads Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Decalogue* and sees a fusion of the Father-God and the Father Land. The loss of morality and personal freedom in Poland is marked by absent lawgivers, images of a recurring angel, and a need for more than the impersonal god of the commandments. Looking at the cinematic art of Kieslowski, Kickasola (2004) brilliantly charts the liminal spaces of his films (*Red*), "demarcating the apparent thresholds of metaphysical and physical, transcendent and immanent, eternal and temporal" (p. 4). For Kickasola, this is the "same liminal ground that philosopher and critic George Steiner describes when he states that the arts are 'rooted in substance . . . immanence,' but 'do not stop there'" (p. 5). We may begin with the human, but the presence of the "Other" demands we investigate. Kickasola finds that for this Polish director, metaphysics *matters*.

In spite of Greeley's aside comment that only Europeans make religious films, American directors have also scratched their religious markings upon the screen. Regarding the religious significance of classic film directors, only three, Cecil B. DeMille, Frank Borzage, and Frank Capra, have been examined in detail. Perlmutter (1976) exposes DeMille's wizard-like manipulation of public's desires, lulling audiences with his religious homilies. DeMille, viewed as an impresario of seductions to a 19th century paternalistic capitalism and Victorian values through his almost salacious melodramas (in which attractive packages of sin led only to paying the piper), was characterized as a purveyor of romantic bourgeois evangelism. Maltby (1990) views DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927) with an exacting scholarly scrutiny that lights up various historical and cultural aspects of the mammoth religious production. Birchard (2004) deals directly with the religious and cultural elements in the great showman's films. Lamster (1981) explores the spiritual sermons of director Frank Borzage while Tibbetts (1979) looks at Capra's character of Florence Fallon, loosely based on evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, in *The Miracle Woman*.

In contrast to Poland's (1988) polemic of the "untold story" behind Scorsese's film (including the infamous Valenti's mother issue), Riley's (2003) case study of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* provides an extensive analysis of the various groups castigating, scapegoating, and defending the film, opening up multiple levels of meanings about the sacred and the rhetorical rituals of blame and victimizing. Based on the motif of scapegoating articulated by

Rene Girard, in which various opposing social hierarchies in American society motivate views, Riley follows the life-cycle of the controversy for patterns of relationships for religious conservatives and liberal progressives. Riley analyzes the historical data of the competing parties, looking at the role of religious language and images, examining the rituals of blame perpetrated through commercialized television (like the Oprah Winfrey show), which reflect deep levels of cultural difference and animosity, and pointing out the film's significance as an indicator of prevailing cultural values and attitudes.

Collet (1987) treats Girard's themes of sacrificial crisis and mimetic violence, occurring in cinema (as one of the last "sacred places" that exist in our profane universe as it is a place set apart, in sharp contrast to its mundane surroundings), identifying a "cinema of sacrifice transcended" in such rare films as *Sunrise* and *Ordet*, the latter wherein one discovers the pleasure of authentic human sacrifice between two separate sectarian communities, being converted from violence to love.

Lindlof (1996) studies sundry community inscriptions from among the "passionate audience" that viewed the Scorsese film. Morris (1988) deals with the theological issues raised by the film and shows how Scorsese accentuated Christ's humanity while simultaneously underscoring the weakness of what it means to be human. Bliss (1995) paints a larger canvas, testing Scorsese's choreographed conflicts between conventional morality (from the Roman Catholic Church) and individual desires. For Bliss, the most notable characteristic of Scorsese's films is "the director's Catholic sensibility" where all his characters are moralist and/or religious fanatics, believers who think God has spoken to them and must wrestle with how can one act morally in a morally skewed universe. Bliss deftly illustrates this oppositional tension of the director, torn between the rigorous demands of living in the mean streets of the world and the authority of biblical teachings in the Church.

For Blake (1991b), blood in Scorsese's universe is redemptive and sacramental. Blake accepts the film of the wandering Catholic who wanted to be a priest, *The Last Temptation*, as a prayer and act of worship. True to the sacramental optimism of the Catholic imagination, Blake finds Catholic thinking permeating the director's style, with blood signifying and associated with redemption, and an ecclesiastical concept of belonging. In sanguine (and quite compelling) contrast, Metaxas (2003) recognizes what he calls "a bloody shame" in the "apotheosis of Martin Scorsese," his

*Gangs of New York*, where blood is offered in religious devotion, but to devil gods like Moloch.

To Scorsese, Braudy (1986) would add Coppola and DePalma as dispensers of sacraments in film. Dealing with ethnic movies undergirded by Catholic mores and instincts, Braudy finds that, unlike the Protestant and often Jewish "denigration of visual materiality in favor of verbal mystery, [Catholics] mine the transcendental potential within the visual world" (p. 17). Objects, people, places, and stories are irradiated by the meaning from within. Thompson and Christie (1989) present an edited volume with personal interviews enhancing critical articles on the Roman Catholic director and punctuating his religious proclivities.

On the same canvas as Lourdeaux's (1990) study of Italian and Irish filmmakers, Blake (2000) paints broad Roman frescoes of the Catholic imagination (on this, see Lynch, 1973). For Blake, an *afterimage* (an image or sensation that remains or returns after the external stimulation has been withdrawn) of a residual Roman Catholic sensibility lingers, even in the face of a loss of institutional or personal faith. Looking at the filmic texts, and not biography or allegorical interpretations, the critic can detect where the presentation of certain materials may have stemmed from perception of world along Roman Catholic footprints. Signs of a religious imagination in a love for saints, for the physical, for the sacramental, for devotional piety, along with notions of conscience, mentoring, community, and narratives of moral growth (also marked by hierarchy and a male universe) point to such a tradition. Blake sorts through many guises of American Catholicism: the sacramental universe of Martin Scorsese, the communion of sinners in Alfred Hitchcock, the religion of worldly faith within Frank Capra, the journey to an everlasting kingdom in John Ford, Francis Ford Coppola's American solitude, and Brian De Palma's homilies from the Dark Side (both Hitch and de Palma zero in on sense of depravity in human nature). Core influences on both Blake and Lourdeaux's works are Greeley's thoughts on the Catholic imagination, with the triune theological foci of communion, mediation, and sacramentality shaping the art of these directors.

Incorporating interviews and various commentaries, Jackson (1990) studies Paul Schrader and traces the filmmaker's path from his conservative Reformed beginnings through his critical/theoretical phase to that of screenwriter and director. Jackson keys in on Schrader's passionate concern with redemptive sufferings, probing even the personal death scene of his mother in *Light of Day*. As a former film critic and the-

orist, Schrader has thought carefully about religious issues (and about separating the act of criticism from creative work) and offered numerous interviews. In a fairly focused interview, Smith (1992) explores Schrader's intense *Light Sleeper* as Biskind (1992) cajoles a wider and wilder range of reflections from the Calvin College alumnus (such as Schrader on meeting God and not having to apologize "for making a bunch of shitty pictures"). Personal interviews frequently open up issues of spiritual intentionality in the works of various directors. Bliss has been quite instrumental in cracking open the topic of religion in usually reticent artists. He conducts a discussion with Schrader on *Affliction* and forgiveness (2000) and hosts a fresh conversation on a sense of wonder with director Peter Weir (1999; see also Johnston, 2000a).

Leggett, the author of numerous articles in *Christianity Today* on Hammer Studio's director of horror and fantasy, Terence Fisher, produces a full-length study of the Christian, religious, and mythological themes in films like *Dracula* (a.k.a. *Horror of Dracula*) and the titillating *The Brides of Dracula* (2002). Leggett masterfully shows how the director employed the studio's resources to spin narratives on the supernatural triumph of good over evil, with fascinating redeemer figures. Leggett's final chapter incorporates Walter Fisher's paradigm of narrative to demonstrate how Terence Fisher is essentially a biblical storyteller, in the literary tradition of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, concocting allegory within a realistic framework. (See also Leggett, 1977, 1981.) Smith (1996) celebrates another British filmmaker, J. Arthur Rank as the Methodist visionary who became the patron saint of British cinema. MacNab (1993) provides an excellent context for Smith's work.

Blake contrasts the irrepressible Woody Allen (Blake, 1995) with the sobering Ingmar Bergman (Blake, 1978), showing the parallel religious questions that each addresses from their respective Jewish and Lutheran frames of reference, calling for fresh exegetical methods of reading their films, and ascertaining spiritual merits without imposing a subjective set of beliefs or "Christian imperialism." Blake bases his critical methodology upon Catholic approaches to dialogue with non-Christian traditions, a sort of unpresumptuous cross cultural communication, in which one engages another world without forcing either conversion or relativism (Blake, 1991a; see also Downing, 1997; Berkey-Gerard, 1997; Yacowar, 1988). Commins (1987) also looks into Woody Allen and his theology, finding ultimate concerns paired with silly ones in the

comic's quest to grapple with absurdity. For Commins, Allen pursues the idea of god more than God.

While few studies on the religious universes of lapsed and active Christians involved in filmmaking, such as Wes Craven and Tom Shadyac respectively, have appeared, Naglazas (2001) does cover the success and the turn to God of director Shadyac (*Liar, Liar* and *Bruce Almighty*), revealing a sense of divine humor coming through story. Horton (1999) also looks at the comic Gospel, this time according to Kevin Smith, in his satiric *Dogma*, finding it an "unabashedly pro-God movie." Norden (1993-1994) offers a fine and welcome study of John Sayles' *Matewan* (see also Sayles, 1987). *Christian Century* publishes an interview with horror film screenwriter director, Scott Derrickson (2002), exploring the nature of Christian vocation in the suspect industry. In a rare and innovative approach, Sawyer (1994) critiques the religious grounding of a major film critic, as an auteur. Writing about Roger Ebert, he investigates this *Sneak Previews*' critic (raised a Roman Catholic who struggled with images of women like Kim Novak who had the power to send men to hell by provoking impure thoughts) and asks about looking at religious issues with a sense of gravity, possibly even reverence, seeking to define the apparent religious sensibility underlying his criticism.

More attention has been given to the religious themes in the works of offbeat independent director, Quentin Tarantino. Davis and Womack (1998) find an ethic of redemption in his ultra-violent *Pulp Fiction*. For Irwin (1998), the films of Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez possess the capacity of American *film noir* to function as mode for religious inquiry, using pulp for a pulpit. As *noir* adherents find no ordering structure in the universe, where the ground of being doesn't exist, has been lost, or is ignored, so the protagonist must create his or her own structure. Irwin points out that as their characters believe they discover a sense of fatalism, they feel they must cope with the social structures through violence. Yet, their protagonists adhere to personal codes of professionalism, a sort of Tao for their profession in a cosmos of crime. The religious elements emerge when the character first recognizes that he can't create his own ontological foundation and must believe that it may exist outside of his own powers—even in God. In the mix of numerous genres and styles (offering "sensational and unsavory stories of a lurid nature"), both directors confront a persistence of evil and the presence of a terrifying type of salvation in their work. The fall of the powerful reminds Irwin of houses built on sand, with the acts of repentance and redemption

coming at the price of death. The quotation of obscure biblical verses, peppered with obscenities, in *Pulp Fiction*, introduces a radically different kind of religious character, who discovers in analogies of lucky escapes an opening up possible themes of grace and sovereignty of God. For more on Tarantino, see Stone (1999), Smith (2004), Peary, (1998), and Phillips (1998).

One may also find treatment of the religion of producers, particularly of Walt Disney, whose own confession of faith once appeared in *Daily Guideposts*. Several works probe faith and Disney films. Anderson (1999) describes the Christian values in Disney works. In an impressive forward, classic Disney animators Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas suggest that problems faced by Disney cartoon characters could be ably addressed by ministers, such as how Pinocchio can become a real human being (Hebrews 4:12-13) or what we can learn of the Fall from the poison apple of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Anderson finds inspiration for 20 sermons from such early Disney products. Ward's (2002) rhetorical analysis commands considerable respect from her ability to exegete the moral worldviews within recent Disney feature films, looking, for example, at moral pedagogy through myth, archetype, and ritual in *The Lion King*, and celebrity/heroic identification through narrative strategies in *Hercules*. Borrowing heavily from Ward and others is Pinsky (2004), in his discussion of the Disney Gospel, a faint shadow of his more engaging and insightful work on the Simpsons (2001; see also Dart, 2001). Finally, in Field (2004) the creative spirits behind such films as *Batman Forever* and *X-Men* provide candid interviews on the inclusion of spiritual themes contained in their scripts and films.

### J. Individual Film Criticism

Certain individual films have received considerable attention due to manifest and latent religious meanings. Dempsey (1987) deals with the special cinematic representations of Jesuit missions to the Guarani tribe of Paraguay in Roland Joffre's *The Mission*, simultaneously illuminating the influence of the international debate over liberation theology. Hale (1995, 1997) develops this theme in greater detail. A resistance model of heroic virtue among partisan/martyr saints is drawn out as well by Perry (1997), extolling films that demonstrate spiritual fortitude through the martyrdom of Christian saints in the fight against Italian Fascism. Rush (1998) lays out the ironic juxtaposition of the sacrament of baptism of Michael Corleone's nephew and the mass slaughter of enemy bosses in her discussion of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*.

When Potter (1996) turns to Richard Einhorn's voices of light, she quotes the confession of the cinematographer of Joan of Arc: "In my social milieu, people could talk about sex more easily than they could talk about their religious beliefs" (p. 29). What has become more evident is that, in the critical analysis of certain films, more people are talking about religious beliefs and themes, and some are talking about both sex and religion. Miles (1994) brilliantly shows how popular films shape "circulation values," particularly in the context of race. In her discussion of Spike Lee, Miles overviews a brief history of religion and film to demonstrate the emergence of religious entertainment, in which religion and film share similar social functions. Both select and represent particular values in society and both are committed to calling forth, shaping, and articulating desire. Herein, Miles makes evident that director Spike Lee sees religion as part of the problem of racism. Lewis (1990) plots out how Alice Walker's narrative utilizes a form of spiritual guidance in her characters, reminiscent of the "image of the odyssey," that traces the story's trajectory and frames the spatial metaphors of her life. In commenting on *The Color Purple*, Lewis charts Celie's journey from oppression, enmity, and license to arriving at her Pa's house, in search of a moral and spiritual community.

Hasian and Carlson (2000) investigate the selective choice and highlighting of particular historical narratives and the distortion of the past to create a contemporary social, political, and religious identity in Steven Spielberg's *Amistad*. The authors try to redress imbalance between "appreciation of the aesthetics of cinematic representations and the validity of truth claims within those films" (p. 60). They also compare how multiple audiences interpret the film to fit their own agendas and how films try to shape their collective memories of historical events. In *Amistad*, the authors argue, the movie reflects current social concerns about multiculturalism that distorts the veridical historic narrative.

Marsh and Ortiz (1997a) offer a series of essays on particular films, written by the following biblical scholars or practitioners of ministry. As inspiring as it is informative, Maher (1997), commenting on *Awakenings*, probes what it means to be human and how we are to act under the constraints of the loss of memory. Other worthy essays on individual films include Banks (1997) on George Stevens's *Shane*. In a study of Frank Capra films, Brown (1997; see also 1998) distinguishes between feel good movies and the Christian theme of hope, based on concepts developed by Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar regarding



the divine, the transcendent, and the revelation of God's glory. Brown characterizes Capra as an iconographer of theological optimism, evangelizing the cinematic gospel that the ultimate control of the world is good, and mediated through spiritual community, powerlessness, and glory (light in the midst of darkness). Marsh (1997) offers a sumptuous comment on *Babette's Feast*, which, like Peter Fraser's essay on the same theme, serves nourishing and delicious food for thought. Jewett (1997), in one of the best intersections of theology with film, limns *Groundhog Day*. Jewett opens the Bill Murray comedy to fresh and revelatory insights by combining the film with Paul's letter to the *Galatians*. By means of an interpretive arc, Jewett tinkers with biblical conceptions of time, of *kairos* (special moment), and of *chronos* (an action in time an event) and finds provocative analogies between ancient and modern texts and situations.

Various articles dealing with religion and documentary films provide extended analyses beyond typical reviews. Glicksman (1987) interviews Diane Keaton on her feature-length documentary *Heaven* that used assorted film clips to address popular myths and images of the afterlife. Branham (1991) examines the rhetorical impact of documentaries on pro-life and abortion rights issues, as vehicles for conversion in his analysis of *Eclipse of Reason* and *The Silent Scream*.

Gardner (1999) investigates how Jeffrey Katzenberg and DreamWorks reduced the telling of the Exodus story, *The Prince of Egypt*, to the level of Greek mythology. The author feels that fictionalizing and animating the Holy Word diminishes the significance of the biblical characters to DC comic book heroes.

The splendid BFI series of individual modern film classics analyzes films that hold enormous religious potential, but often overlooks the full significance of those films. Dyer (1999) offers a captivating critique of *Se7en* but lacks something in terms of theological insight. Fisher (1998) watches *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* and finds dialectic binaries of the Madonna/Whore and the City/Country but neglects to offer fuller theological treatment of this sublimely religious film. Jones (1999) has an easier time in locating the Catholic theology in *L'Argent*, with a director like Robert Bresson being so dedicated to understanding suffering and grace from religious perspectives. Cripps (1979) engages more religious background in *The Green Pastures*, but one wishes for more substantial treatments of the religious elements.

Yet I am most partial to Solomon (1983), a brilliant study of *Chariots of Fire*. Situating the Academy

Award winning film within the vision of producer David Puttnam, who was looking for a film story about a man who does an unexpected thing like Sir Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*, Solomon applies Walter Fisher's tension between two competing American dreams, the materialistic myth and the moralistic myth. One reinforces the work ethic and commends achievement, venture, success, and competition while the other champions the values of charity, tolerance, and equality. Solomon identifies the Jewish character, Harold Abrahams, with the former and the Christian runner, Eric Liddle, with the latter. The two runners provide the metaphors for quests of temporal and eternal goals.

Studies of individual films easily lead to genre studies, as specific observations may be applicable to related films. In looking in the genre of comedy, Lamm (1991) asks whether we can laugh at God in the context of apocalyptic comedy. Beginning with the cinematic adaptation of Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*, Lamm explores the idea that if we laugh at God, the world will relapse into chaos. He notes the power of myth to create or dispel the role of religion through comic means, even through the black, nihilistic comedy of apocalyptic films. Ellen Bishop (1990) finds a liberating Rabelasian humor in her study of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, while Ronald Bishop (2000) takes on Peter Weir's parabolic *The Truman Show* as media criticism. The religious role of mediator and peace-maker is explored by Chumo (1995) in a fine study of Forrest Gump as an agent of redemption for divisions within American society. Interestingly enough, Jaehne (1999) provides a similar review of another Tom Hanks' movie, Spielberg's sacrificial *Saving Private Ryan*.

Like apples of gold on plates of silver, the essays on individual films in Bandy and Monda (2003) shine with scintillating wisdom and, if one may be so bold, precious piety. Complementing an exhibition of religious films by Museum of Modern Art, the book tests Pascal's thought that: "If you had not found me, you would not search for me," delving into the riches and subtleties of God's presence in kinetic icons. The editors gather a talented company of 35 critics and film artists (e.g., Andrew Sarris, Molly Haskell, and visionary filmmaker Stan Brakhage) to probe the clues, signs, and hints of God scattered about and embedded in a diverse collection of international films (e.g., Bresson's *Au Hasard Balthazar*, Kieslowski's *Dekalog*, and Ramis's *Groundhog Day*). Each author actually addresses the issue, diligently seeking markings of Divine transcendence, pursuing the quest with utmost

clarity, authenticity, and grace. Bandy's brilliant and informative essays on *The Flowers of Saint Francis* and *Babette's Feast* compel the reader to return to the films with eagerness and hope for spiritual renewal.

### K. Audiences and Reception Studies

Hendershot (2000) collects a set of insightful essays that address the academic film community on how the relationship between religion and the media continues to be a marginal topic due to the "typical liberal university professor mindset" which "often does not acknowledge the worldview of the religious right as textured, 'liveable' and, for those who live within it, 'natural' and 'reasonable'" (p. 1). Media scholarship has not kept pace with global industries, texts, and audiences for whom religion is a central issue, and film scholarship must grapple with these issues. In the issue of the *Velvet Light Trap* (2000) devoted to the relationship, several fresh trends are notable. Hendershot invites further research into the media culture of the religious right, pushing for salient angles beyond both textual analysis and industrial analysis of "zealot figures" and the Family Channel. In particular, she centers her inquiries on the overlooked significance of pleasure and belief and how they play in religious audience's relationship to mediated texts. Hendershot recognizes that what is missing is not only an understanding of the diversity and heterogeneity of Christian groups, but also of the non-advocacy entertainment media of conservative Christians, which constitute the nonpolitical bulk of the Christian cultural products industry. As such, she opens up research into crossover products like the Veggie Tales children's videos and the relevance of audience spirituality, faith, and a sense of community as genuine sources of motivation and energy for media participation. In one sense, she approaches, in a more secular, sociological way, the moral and spiritual life of films as practiced by psychiatrist Robert Coles (1986) in his truly remarkable study of films on the spiritual lives of children.

Stevens (1990) studies reception by one particular religious group with a longitudinal content analysis of motion picture reviews in the evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, and identifies changes in attitudes toward motion pictures among evangelical Christians over a period of 30 years, 1956-1985. In looking at the ethnographic significance of religious identity as well as gender in spectatorship, Rendleman (1999) investigates how some evangelical Christians perceive representations of Christianity in contemporary film in a study focused upon Evangelicals and representations of sexuality in film. Through interviews, he compiles reactions to sexuality in film, and demonstrates how

they were inextricably aligned with audiences' religious beliefs. Rendleman (2002) also contributes an audience reception research project on Michael Tolkin's 1991 *The Rapture*.

While much of the material in Stout and Buddenbaum (1996) deals with print and broadcasting media, several specific studies address cinema. Bourgault (1985) finds that the patterns of media use are directly connected to ideological frameworks of personal piety among Ohio Pentecostals who generally saw movies as "sinful." Bainbridge and Stark (1981) contrast the viewing habits and religious orientations of Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants against those who define themselves as "born-again" and find that the former were much more likely to see films like the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *The Exorcist*. Iorio (1996) investigates how the Mennonites preserve their religious identity through producing film. Hills (2000) tests a larger audience in his sociological approach to audience reception, calling for identifying the religious (ritualistic) factors of fandom.

Through a series of 250 in-depth personal interviews, Clark (2003) provides an illuminating ethnographic study of the demographics, psychographics, and spirituality of a younger generation, interpreted through a larger sociological lens in their preferences for media products. Where personal experience is privileged over institutional authority, this generation opts for an eclectic and syncretistic spirituality and alternate religious experiences over adherence to traditional religious institutions, with curiosity for Eastern religions like Hinduism and Islam and for the mysticism of the occult. While tending mostly to pop culture products like the Alien films, Harry Potter, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and Angel as manifestations of teenage fascination with the paranormal and the supernatural, Clark dabbles in the resurgence of an apocalyptic imagination and "the dark side of evangelicalism," like the *Left Behind* series. Writing within the framework of social theorists like Bourdieu and Gramsci, Clark finds the roots of such pop fascination in an American religious heritage of concerns for hell, the devil, and the afterlife—essentially the four last things—showing a blurring of the boundaries between traditional religion and the entertainment media versions of these themes, from angels to aliens.

Representation in cinema (minorities, gender, etc.) is now being extended to religious characters and characterizations. The Lilly Foundation sponsored research on images of clergy in film, television, and journalism. Worden (1962) looks at the portrayal of the Protestant minister during the decade of the 1950s and seeks to

evaluate its significance for ministerial self-images. Under the Pulpit and Pew Research Reports, Smith (2003, pp. 2-44) surveys chronological trends in clergy portrayals in the media, and then tests the impact of these representations on clergy and laity. She uses movie databases to assess scope and kind of religious leaders and religious rituals (weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc.) in feature films. The study measures years of church attendance against the numerical presence of clerical figures in film, charting an increase in the 1990s from 2% to 6% since a peak in the teens. The lowest decline came, ironically enough, in the 1950s (during the decade of biblical spectaculars) through early 1980s. Smith incorporates numerous charts and statistics regarding gender, denominations, genre, (horror, action, drama, and comedy, with many religious leaders in horror films). Using both humanistic (historical-critical) and social scientific (quantitative-objectivist and qualitative-interpretivist) methodologies, Smith ambitiously aims at compiling a thorough set of mediated images of ministry. Stewart Hoover's apt critique of these "public scripts" about ministry suggest that the study might have been better served with being limited to a synthesis of quantitative content analyses, noting that the history of media research has shown, time and again, a tendency for scholarship "devoted to media to be drawn toward analyses that are over-generalized and overly deterministic" (Hoover, 2003, p. 47).

Finally, Thomas (1984) indirectly opens a method for studying psychological and spiritual components of immediacy and audience bonding in watching films. For Thomas, the important elements of "communion," of spectators sharing in common the affective impact of a film story, are the moment, experiential density, and immediacy. The bonding moment provides a sudden flash of recognition; transcends the linear expectations for the viewer; increases identification with the characters; is short-lived, convincing, and idiomatic; and provides a complex often contradictory mix of emotions, thoughts, and image that require participation for a construction of new meaning. It simultaneously stands out and reveals something new to the viewer. Experiential density involves the rate, degree, mode, and mix of change experienced by the audience while viewing the film, with velocity and unexpectedness of change being the principle facets for building communion. Finally, immediacy is the relative degree ofnowness in a scene or sequence, offering as it were, an existential moment that connects the differences among the audience. As such, the screenplay functions as the holy *script-ure* that binds the viewers into one body.

[Professor Lindvall's review essay on Religion and Film will continue with Sections 4, 5, and 6, in Volume 24, #1 of *Communication Research Trends*, due in March 2005. —Editor]

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