CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND THE POPULAR CINEMA: THE
CREATIVE FUSION OF FILM, FAITH AND FUN

Anton Karl Kozlovic
School of Humanities
Flinders University (Adelaide, Australia)

Abstract

During this second century of the age of Hollywood, popular
movies have become the *lingua franca* of Western culture, and
contain innumerable religious references that are informative and
highly entertaining to the proverbial children-of-the-media.
Regrettably, this fun-filled, extra-ecclesiastical resource is fre-
quently dismissed, devalued or under-utilized in Christian edu-
cation despite being a legitimate teaching tool for today. A vital
first step in its pedagogic restoration is to raise the consciousness
of Christian educators by mapping out movies' multiple mani-
festations and teaching applications. Consequently, utilizing tex-
tually-based, humanist film criticism as the guiding analytical
lens, the critical film and religion literature is selectively re-
viewed and the Hollywood cinema scanned to explore the phe-
nomena of: (i) sacred subtexts, (ii) Scripture quoting, and (iii)
five teaching approaches using popular cinema. It is concluded
that the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film has
a promising pedagogic future that warrants further investigation
and other teaching deployment strategies.

Introduction: A Cinema Society and Cinema Faith

Peta Goldburg (2004, 178) argues for a creative arts approach to
Australian and British religious education in schools using

movies,[1] "the most pervasive and powerful of all the arts." She considers film study to be a credible mode of academic reflection that enhances visual and religious literacy, provides unique insights into the nature and function of religion, challenges assumptions about the static character of evidence, reveals organic patterns of ideational growth and challenges the received wisdom of religious traditions. One can only agree with her and extend her arguments to Christian teaching situations internationally, particularly in North America. Indeed, since the genesis of the cinema as a scientific toy in 1885, it has evolved into a world-wide entertainment phenomenon via nickelodeons, theatres, TVs, videos, DVDs, computers, the Internet, cell-phones and who-knows-what-next tomorrow. The popular cinema has now become the primary paradigm of contemporary screen culture, the *lingua franca* of Western society, and the "Tenth Muse . . . [that] has driven the other nine right off Olympus—or off the peak, anyway" (Vidal 1993, 2–3).

Since feature films are significant cultural bearers of social, moral and political values, watching them can be a valid form of religious practice. As Christine Hoff Kraemer (2004, 243) argues: "In some cases, the communal viewing of a film in a darkened theatre and the lively discussion it inspires have become a more vital site of spiritual exploration and reflection than the mainstream church service." This pragmatic reality has been intimately experienced by Kieran Scott (2007, 15) who argues: "That is why on Sunday mornings my wife and I sometimes choose to hear, see and experience the telling of the sacred tale in the cinema. For us, it has become a spiritual practice—a form of contemplation. No longer is it simply a time of leisure or escapism. Rather it has become a time of rest, centering, Sabbath and sacrament." "It has become a spiritual practice of hearing, seeing and experiencing the sacred tale of

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1.   Real ontological differences exist between "film," "cinema," "motion picture," "movie," "video," "TV movie," "CD," "DVD" "Internet movie" etc., but since they are all audiovisual images, they will be treated herein as essentially interchangeable.

our redemption and salvation. It has become for us real communion in the dark" (20). In view of such experiences, these flickering shadows should be discussed in the light of day more than ever before.

Despite the numerous sacred dimensions of the cinema, let alone its physical pervasiveness, ideological persuasiveness and inherent audiovisual virtues, Peta Goldburg (2004, 179) notes that: "Few religious educators contribute to religious dialogue in the marketplace of the cinema." This is a lamentable state of affairs and in need of urgent correction, particularly in view of the traditional knee-jerk response of dismissing, devaluing or under-utilizing feature films for pedagogic purposes simply because of their popular (but not high art) nature. This corrective goal is not only valid but important for the various religious studies professions and Christian education practitioners, whether concerned with faith development or dogmatic enculturation, ecumenical theology or inter-religious dialogue, cultural studies or scriptural exegesis, religious education or studies in religion, especially if they wish to thrive and remain relevant to the proverbial children-of-the-media in the twenty-first century.

As Peta Goldburg (2004, 180) also notes, popular films are useful as Scripture study aids because: "Visual images can be an important entry point into biblical texts for students . . . In fact, many of the students in religious education classrooms [and, one might add, even some in church youth programs] only know of biblical characters through films or other images rather than through reading the biblical text" (180). Therefore, it is even more regrettable to find theological and educational hierarchies and those who disciple youth only slowly acknowledging the fun-filled dimensions of religion-and-film studies (also referred to as sacred cinema, spiritual cinema, holy film, theo-film, cinematic theology, cinematheology, celluloid religion, film-and-faith and film-faith dialogue). Films can be used particularly as a means of enhancing religious literacy that is aimed squarely at media-saturated young people who already consider the cinema a natural part of their cultural turf and social heritage, and the audiovisual means of exploring their concerns, values and dreams.

During this second century of the "Age of Hollywood" (Paglia 1994, 12) within an increasingly post-print culture, it is even more prudent for teachers to adopt a film studies approach to religious studies. After all, as Frost and Hirsch (2003, 151) bluntly put it: "Let's face it! The entertainment industry—in particular, film—has changed traditional education and communication in profound ways, and the church had better take notice." Although encouraging signs of this newly emerging enterprise exist (e.g. Deacy and Ortiz 2007; Kozlovic 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Mahan and Herman 1993; Marsh 2007; Mitchell Legg 1996, 1997; Rowe 2004; Wright 2006), more work is needed before the Hollywood hermeneutic becomes automatically accepted alongside the Bible, concordances, historical-archaeology textbooks, drama and sacred storytelling sessions in class.

Popular Films as Religious Pedagogy

It is argued that commercial feature films and the art of video exegesis (i.e. religious exegesis, Hollywood style) should be treated as a valid resource and methodology for religious studies in the *vox populi* mode. Movies are a shared social asset that should be utilized in the classroom and other Christian education environments as freely as they are deployed within the public domain because of their cultural currency, accessibility, cost-effectiveness and world-wide popularity (which would be churlish and professionally irresponsible to deny). Indeed, for "many people today, especially the young, popular culture *is* culture, and theology, to remain true to its calling, must take such cultural expressions seriously" (Simmons 2003, 254). This means teachers must proactively embrace the cinema as a legitimate religious studies tool beyond its traditional utilization as diversionary entertainment (i.e. a way to keep students quiet) or visual aid. Educators need to do this even if sometimes it causes them anxiety if they have not yet developed audiovisual skills to complement their book skills. As the Reverend Brian Douglas (2003) counsels regarding his use of films with high-schoolers:

> "Oh yes", I hear you saying, "just put on another video and fill up the religious education time slot in the timetable. It keeps the kids happy and it makes it very easy for the teacher". True I suppose, it does fill up the space but if this is all we do then we are failing to meet the spiritual need and we are failing in our duty as teachers and spiritual guides. (3)

The institutional reluctance to employ the popular cinema for religion studies is of course understandable for historical reasons simply because the enterprise has been mired in numerous film fears since its birth. Generations of people had been biased against film culture for allegedly being the modern manifestation of the biblical prohibition against graven images (Exod 20:4),[2] for supposedly dumbing down educational standards, and for promoting ungodly values, especially regarding the use of profanity, loose sexual morals and the love of violence. As *Commonweal* movie critic, Richard Alleva (1999) laments:

> All my life I had been told by teachers that reading was greater than movie-going because you had to work at reading, had to decipher the words, turn them into images in your mind, had to work at understanding what the author had to say, and it was the work of reading that consecrated that activity and made literature a greater form than film, which was scarcely art at all, since movies just flowed in front of your eyes and did all your imagining for you. [Not so!] . . . To truly watch a movie was to read it, i.e. to see all that was put before you and to question yourself about what was shown. (468)

Fortunately, there is more to using films in teaching situations than just watching flickering images with no follow-up; notably, students must learn the art of discerning the desirable amidst the media morass while progressing from passive consumption to thoughtful reflection to critical evaluation.

A necessary part of that process of enhancing one's media and religious literacy, coupled with the development of a questioning scholarly attitude, is the identification and taxonom-

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2. The Authorized King James Version of the Bible will be used throughout, because most of the biblical phrases that are embedded in Western culture are from it.

ic categorization of the numerous religious phenomena already embedded in the popular cinema. Being sensitized to their existence, forms and functions can add layers of insight and meaning about film and faith previously unappreciated, and hopefully prompt the search for even greater religious revelations hidden in mundane media and their scriptural correlates.

In many students' minds, watching films and learning to understand and evaluate them is a fun-filled activity that can quickly catapult the potentially drab, dull and boring reputation of Christian education and religious studies into the realms of the desirous, culturally relevant and pragmatically useful (see Nash 1996, 183). Naturally, the precise learning point of each filmic example is a function of the study topic, lesson plan and knowledge goal, but just pointing out the frequently-ignored existence of faith applications is itself valuable and thought-provoking. This can be true even for adult learners who have fond memories of their past experiences at the movies. Points made in relation to details of memorable films from their past are easily remembered, reinforced by the great personal pleasure of viewing these films again.

For the purposes of this article, the critical film and religion literature has been selectively reviewed and integrated into the text to enhance narrative coherence (albeit, with a strong reportage flavor). Using textually-based, humanist film criticism as the guiding analytical lens (i.e. examining the world *inside* the frame, but not the world *outside* the frame—Bywater and Sobchack 1989), a brief scan of the Hollywood cinema reveals two categories worthy of video exegesis, namely: (i) sacred subtexts and (ii) Scripture quoting, both of which will be explicated below utilizing copious inter-genre exemplars to demonstrate their richness and diversity. This examination will be followed by the identification of (iii) five teaching applications using popular cinema that will highlight its value as a tool of both pedagogy and piety.

Sacred Subtexts: Hidden Religion Out in the Open

A sacred subtext (also called a holy subtext or divine infra-narrative) is basically "anonymous religiousness" (Gallagher 1997, 151) or the pursuit of "overtly religious themes in a secular 'wrapper'" (Ellis 2001, 304), which at first glance hides its true ontological status. Popular films do this easily because they have two independent natures working simultaneously, namely, an *overt* plot and a *covert* storyline of varying complexity that is comparable to the metaphorical or symbolic within literature. As Bernard Dick (1998, 129) describes this relationship: "the narrative and infranarrative (or text and subtext) are not two separate entities (there is, after all, only one film); think of them, rather, as two concentric circles, the infranarrative being *within* the narrative." Because of this dual arrangement, secular films can engage in religious storytelling *without* necessarily appearing "religious." Moreover, a "character needn't be consciously aware of his shadings of the truth or the hidden meanings in his words or actions for there to be subtext or for us to become aware of it" (Howard 2004, 189).

A very popular sacred subtext in Western cinema is the Christ-figure, that is, a deliberately engineered transfiguration of Jesus Christ that replays selected aspects of his earthly life, character and mission; however, this is *not* to be confused with a Jesus-figure. As Peter Malone (1997) explains concerning their essential differences:

> "Jesus-figure" refers to any representation of Jesus himself. "Christ-figure" describes any figure in the arts who resembles Jesus. The personal name of Jesus (in line with contemporary spirituality, thought and practice) is used for the Jesus-figure. The title "Christ"—the "Messiah," or the "Anointed One"—is used for those who are seen to reflect his mission. In cinema, writers and directors present both Jesus-figures and Christ-figures. (59–60)

Jesus-figures are thus limited to a specific external form and related socio-cultural, political, religious, physical, geographical or temporal context (i.e. the ancient world of the Bible). The filmmaker's aim is to approximate the historical Jesus as closely as possible, albeit, with differing focuses depending upon the theological goals and aesthetic styles of the filmmaker

(Humphries-Brooks 2006), such as the countercultural, I-was-a-teenage-Jesus played by Jeffrey Hunter in *King of Kings* (1961, dir. Nicholas Ray) versus the suffering and violently bloodied Jesus played by Jim Caviezel in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004, dir. Mel Gibson).

Conversely, Christ-figures can assume *any* external form, whether male or female, human or alien, animal or inanimate, and they remain legitimate subtextual figurations of Jesus regardless of the historical milieu, socio-cultural context, physical location etc. In essence, "'the Christ-figure' seeks to counter the straitjacketing of Jesus in physical correspondence to a stereotype" (Coates 2003, 80), and so:

> Jesus is not portrayed directly but is represented symbolically or at times allegorically. Christ figures can be identified either by particular actions that link them with Jesus, such as being crucified symbolically (*Pleasantville*, 1998 [dir. Gary Ross]), walking on water (*The Truman Show*, 1998 [dir. Peter Weir]) or wearing a cross (*Nell*, 1994 [dir. Michael Apted]; *Babette's Feast*, 1987 [dir. Gabriel Axel]). Indeed, any film that has redemption as a major theme (and this includes many, if not most, recent Hollywood movies) is liable to use some Jesus symbolism in connection with the redemptive hero figure (Reinhartz 2003, 189).

Because Christ-figures are so popular and powerful in contemporary films, their engineering and discovery, and scholarly discussion of their use, grows yearly (Baugh 1997; Deacy 2001; Kreitzer 2002; Scully 1997), while hunting for them becomes the adult equivalent of a Where's Waldo adventure. At times, their explication can be sheer joy, in addition to giving theological insight, intellectual illumination and dramatic engagement.

Furthermore, their subsequent identification can radically change the entire meaning of a film. For example, many commentators saw the science fiction (SF) cult classic, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, dir. Robert Wise) as a UFO or robot-monster film (Telotte 1995), while more astute viewers saw it as a political allegory about American nuclear politics during the dawning of the atomic age (Hendershot 1999). True and valid as

these claims are, even fewer viewers realized that this ostensibly secular film was fundamentally a religious film, a Christ-figure narrative with Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie), its intergalactic spaceman, deliberately crafted as an alien Messiah.

> Edmund H. North [the film's screenwriter], himself admitted that the parallels between the story of Christ and *Day* were intentional, from Klaatu's earthly name of Carpenter [Jesus' occupation], to the betrayal by Tom Stevens [the Judas-figure], and finally to his resurrection and ascent into the heavens at *Day*'s end [Jesus' ascension]. "It was my private little joke. I never discussed this angle with [producer Julian] Blaustein or [director Robert] Wise because I didn't want it expressed. I had originally hoped that the Christ comparison would be subliminal. (von Gunden and Stock 1982, 44).

Indeed, when Jesus is not starring in Cecil B. DeMille-style biblical epics, Christ-figures frequently inhabit the SF genre because Jesus' holy life resonates strongly with the iconic space opera story about a human-alien hybrid who visits Earth, is ill-treated, leaves the planet, and subsequently resides in an off-world home with a return expected, but uncertain. Learning the lessons of Jesus' character, life and mission through subtextual storytelling provides religious and Christian education with a new critical methodology that is a proverbial breath of fresh air, while simultaneously stimulating students' imaginations about the theologically possible.

Scripture Quoting: Linguistic-Literary Props

This category of the religion-and-film field is the linguistic-literary equivalent of finding Bible props on-screen and requires one to scan the popular cinema for examples of Holy Scripture (or pseudo-scripture) being quoted, used or abused. Characters verbally quoting Scripture, or the displaying of divine verses on-screen for audience contemplation, or disembodied voices reading aloud sacred passages have been standard Hollywood conventions for setting the tone of many films within numerous genres. Why bother doing it? Because as Flesher and Torry (2004, 5) note regarding Bible films, "Scripture itself often supplies

authoritative material for additions to a story. The start of *The Ten Commandments* [1956, dir. Cecil B. DeMille], for example, refers to the opening lines of Genesis in order to bring God's power at the creation to the story of Moses and the Exodus."

The Scripture-quoting phenomenon also occurs frequently in putatively secular films to add holy auras, spiritual-cum-moral poignancy or emotional punch to their storylines. For example, holy verse is used as a *de facto* sparing weapon in the American prison drama, *Dead Man Walking* (1995, dir. Tim Robbins). A prison guard wonders why Sister Helen Prejean (Susan Sarandon) is so dedicated to the cause of Matthew "Matt" Poncelet (Sean Penn), a detestable racist, misogynist and rapist-murderer. The guard is very unsympathetic to the holy Sister's compassionate approach to him and uses the eye-for-an-eye quote from Exod 21:24. However, Sister Helen just as quickly retorts that the Bible also calls for "death as a punishment for adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, trespass upon sacred ground, profaning the Sabbath and contempt of parents." The stunned guard quickly concedes, saying, "I ain't gonna get in no Bible quotin' with no nun, 'cuz I'm gonna lose."

Another dramatic Scripture quoting incident involving eyes occurs in the B-grade, SF classic, *X–The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* (1963, dir. Roger Corman), but this time, holy verse is used as a form of personal guidance that has dramatic consequences for one troubled listener. Due to financial cutbacks, research surgeon Dr. James Xavier (Ray Milland) is forced to experiment on his own eyes and subsequently develops x-ray vision; however, this supposed blessing quickly becomes a curse that unhinges him psychologically. While in deep despair, and on the run from authorities in the Nevada desert at the film's end, he enters the tent meeting of a dynamic evangelical preacher (John Dierkes). Upon hearing the preacher's emphatic words: "if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out" (Matt 18:9; cf. 5:29), Dr. Xavier *literally* does so, thus finding a unique, if somewhat gruesome solution to his personal torment.

Another scripturally-based solution to personal torment occurs in the WWI film, *Sergeant York* (1941, dir. Howard Hawks). American hillbilly farmer, Alvin C. York (Gary Coop-

er) is a pacifist who suffers a moral dilemma regarding going to war and killing because it is against one of the Bible's Ten Commandments. As Hollywood scriptwriter Howard Koch (1979) describes the situation:

> The pivotal scene was York's inner struggle to reconcile his newfound religion with his patriotic duty to fight for his country. The commandment "Thou shalt not kill" [Exod 20:13] was in direct conflict with his participation in an endeavor whose purpose was to kill. In an attempt to dramatize this subjective process we had York (Cooper) spend a day alone on a mountain top trying to resolve the dilemma. (75)

While York is sitting on that mountaintop with his faithful hound-dog at his side, the wind flicks the pages of his open Bible as he is searching his soul for a solution to his problem. When the pages stop turning, he looks down at his Bible and immediately focuses on a critical passage there. As Koch (1979, 75) reports, "Since his decision to go to war was a matter of history, we had York find his solution in Christ's words as written in the New Testament: "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's [Matt 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25]." This (God-inspired?) page-turning event triggers York's change of heart and mind from active pacifism to muted activism resulting in his inevitable a-man's-gotta-do-what-a-man's-gotta-do behavior. Farmer York promptly joins the army as a foot soldier, kills many of the enemy overseas, and subsequently becomes a war hero, saving his army buddies by single-handedly capturing a nest of hostile soldiers. He is duly rewarded with continuing life, respect, honor, love and land, thereby totally vindicating his earlier biblically-inspired, pro-war decision.

Conversely, the forces of evil win in the religious horror film, *The Omen* (1976, dir. Richard Donner). This film ends with the Antichrist-as-child, Damien (Harvey Stevens) surviving the murderous attack of his American ambassador father, Robert Thorn (Gregory Peck), who has come to the horrific realization that his son is literally the spawn of Satan. Thorn is killed by the police before he can ritually murder his devilish young son.

While young Damien is standing innocently next to the American President during the funeral, with a haunting film score in the background, he turns around and smiles malevolently towards the audience. This is followed by a quote from Rev 13:18, namely: "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and the number is 666." Evil is alive and well and prospering in the modern world, thus vindicating the prophetic veracity of the Bible with its gruesome end-time scenario. *The Omen* was a classic production that eventually prompted three film sequels, a recent remake and many devilish imitations thereafter.

On other occasions, Scripture quoting is more part of solemn ritual, as depicted in the sea adventure, *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003, dir. Peter Weir). Nineteenth century British Captain, "Lucky" Jack Aubrey (Russell Crowe), reads aloud a contemporary variant of the Lord's Prayer (from Matt 6:9–13, but not Luke 11:2–4), namely, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen." Lucky Jack performs this solemn service before the assembled crew to honor their fallen comrades following their victorious sea battle against the French warship, Acheron.

In the airplane drama, *Flight 93* (2006, dir. Peter Markle), Scripture quoting is used for both emotional and political reasons in the form of an indirect verse battle. The film is about courageous American passengers battling the hijacking of their airplane by Middle East terrorists on the fateful day of September 11, 2001. During their terrifying ordeal, the Lord's Prayer is recited in tandem by heroic white passenger, Todd Beamer (Brennan Elliott) in flight, and the airplane company's black shift supervisor, Lisa Jefferson (Monnae Michaell), stationed on the ground, as they maintain electronic contact. Their prayer functions as (overt) emotional-cum-spiritual consolation and

(covert) Christian counter-balancing of the terrorists' Islamic prayers and loud invoking of Allah throughout the rest of the film.

Scripture quoting can also be used as a powerful aid to superstition, as in *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*, when the doom-prophesying seaman, Joe (George Innes) blurts out: "And they said unto him, 'For what cause the evil?'" (Jonah 1:8). This quotation is from the Old Testament story of Jonah and Joe uses it to accuse the timid midshipman, Mr. Hollom (Lee Ingleby) of, like Jonah, being responsible for the bad luck the ship has been experiencing. The overly sensitive Mr. Hollom takes the biblical quotation to heart and subsequently commits suicide by grabbing a cannon ball, jumping over the side of the ship and rapidly sinking to the bottom of the sea. The biblical Jonah obviously fared much better because he survived his ordeal (being swallowed by a great fish, traditionally termed a whale) and went on to serve his heavenly master another day (Jonah 1:12, 15).

Overall, the exploration of on-screen Scripture quotation can lead students into fruitful discussions about the conflicting meaning, nature and versions of Holy Writ, and its many socio-cultural functions in contemporary religious and filmic discourses.

Five Teaching Applications of Popular Cinema

The emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film is also ripe for the exploration of its numerous pedagogic possibilities (Mercadante 2007; Shields 2005). Since feature films that depict or refer to biblical stories must make *explicit* what may only be *implicit* in the Bible, they provide unique opportunities for students to imaginatively explore religious topics from unfamiliar but insightful perspectives. A scan of the critical literature offers at least five useful approaches to this task as follows.

One pedagogic possibility is the mapping out of Synoptic parallels and examining the interpretative character of the Gospels from a review of Jesus film clips. This can highlight how much the reader actually supplies to make the Bible come to life

(Thompson 2005), as well as provide new answers to age-old theological disputes (Goodacre 2000) and deeply engage students in the process. According to Carleen Mandolfo (2005, 323), "students throw themselves into theological and exegetical reflection more eagerly with film than with any other medium." Jeffrey L. Staley (2005, 273) similarly observes that "Students are usually much more adept at picking up on these abstract issues in film than they are in seeing them in the New Testament itself." Since film analysis makes students keen and intellectually more able to study the Bible and religion, instructors need "to teach students about interpreting the arts and visual images with the same seriousness with which they teach them to read books" (Goldburg 1999, 24), if not more, in our visual media mediated culture.

A second pedagogic possibility is to get students to research cinematic sins of commission and omission. For example, Mary Karita Ivancic (2006, 136) reports how her students submitted projects that entailed "viewing a full-length feature film based on Scripture (e.g. *The Ten Commandments* or *The Passion* [*of the Christ*]) and comparing and contrasting the filmmaker's depiction of events with the actual biblical text." She considers this a "fine example" (136) of the creative fusion of arts and Scripture study that could also benefit "Catholic education and the field of practical theology" (136) as well as many other fields and faiths. A good exercise in this method is to examine Jesus films to see, for example, how Mary Magdalene is portrayed (e.g. as a prostitute, a passionate penitent, an apostle, the apostle to the apostles). Similar video exegesis benefits can also be conferred upon non-Christian religious traditions that likewise have interesting theological things to say within the cinematic renditions of their holy texts (see Mitchell and Plate 2007).

A third pedagogic possibility is to compare the storytelling techniques of a feature film with a biblical text to discover their narrative parallels. For example, William Sanger Campbell (2005) got his class to watch the classic angel movie, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946, dir. Frank Capra) and then compare it to Mark's Gospel, which they read as a screenplay. One could also profit from a comparison of the storytelling techniques used in

the David and Goliath story (1 Sam 17) to the confrontational showdown between sheriff Will Kane (Gary Cooper) and murderous gunslingers in the classic western, *High Noon* (1952, dir. Fred Zinnemann). Such a strategy brings the past into the present and demonstrates that modern narrative strategies may actually be pre-modern and yet still valuable for today, in addition to the many insights that a narrative theological approach can inherently provide.

A fourth pedagogic possibility involves the creation of a cinematic montage (i.e. a rapid succession of images) extracted from different films to highlight a selected theological theme. For example, one could focus on the physical image of Jesus (e.g. short hair versus long hair; beard versus no beard, strong versus weak; Jewish versus non-Jewish; short versus tall; effeminate versus masculine; sexual versus non-sexual), or explore the cinematic interpretation of his miracles (e.g. healing, resurrecttion, demon control—see Staley 2005), or the depiction of Jesus' temptations (e.g. by Satan—see Thompson 2005), or his mode of crucifixion (e.g. on a cross, pole or trestle). Furthermore, one could use this technique to explore the cinematic representations of the apostles (e.g. Judas, Peter, Paul), biblical women (e.g. the Virgin Mary, Delilah, Salome), biblical men (e.g. Samson, Moses, David), various religious workers throughout history (e.g. nuns, priests, pastors, ministers, rabbis, missionaries, evangelists, mystics, saints, Popes), including God (e.g. white bearded old man, hippy figure, disembodied head, female form) and much, much more. All of these topics could be profitably discussed for both their insights and delights.

Michael R. Cosby (2005) provides a fifth pedagogic possibility by turning the above approach on its head and focusing on a single biblical character, such as King David (1–2 Samuel) and then asking his students to write a blockbuster movie script about his life to highlight what they included, ignored, emphasized or de-emphasized. Not only did his students realize how selective one must be in choosing information to write about sacred persons, times and events, but, as he claimed, "For many of my students, realizing that biblical authors wrote with particular perspectives is a major hurdle. Using a movie

approach to David puts the issue into more familiar form and helps them deal with the matter more objectively" (153). The students of William Sanger Campbell (2005) were asked to do a similar job, including writing the synopsis of a Gospel screenplay in their own words as if pitching it to a prospective Hollywood producer. This approach enabled students to gain a deeper understanding of the Gospels because they had to condense and translate this ancient sacred story into contemporary idioms that had greater personal meaning and relevance to themselves and their peer groups. It also engaged their religious imaginations and generated or released their creativity, which may not have be accessed, released or developed in any other exegetical way previously.

Conclusion

The variety of sacred subtexts and Scripture quoting in popular films is remarkable. The many ways they can be used in Christian and religious education are mute testimony to the cinema's power to entertain, inform, disturb and speak meaningfully to contemporary audiences. As such, cinema is a valuable extra-ecclesiastical resource that cries out to be employed (i.e. putting movies *to* work as a proactive act of applied cinema and not just using them as a relief *from* work). Further research into the religion-and-film field will yield many more insights and delights unappreciated to date, especially considering that "the dialogue between 'religion' and 'film' is really just another form of inter-religious dialogue . . . [and so] traditional religions might benefit from learning to listen to the religions of popular culture just as they are learning to listen to one another" (Lyden 2003, 126). Such active listening will itself suggest even more innovative approaches to the field and their associated deployment in teaching.

Additional research is also recommended concerning the interaction between film studies and parochial doctrines (Pungente and Williams 2004), traditional religious education models (Burgess 2001) and preaching (Cargal 2007). Then there are all the pragmatic issues pertaining to the audiovisual dissemination

of sacred stories: (a) per learning context (e.g. secular classroom, home and pulpit); (b) per educational institution (i.e. government versus private schools, secular versus Christian schools, after-school organizations and outreach groups); and (c) per teaching level (i.e. primary, secondary, post-secondary, undergraduate, postgraduate, professional development, parish, congregational, confessional, Sunday schools and youth groups). All of this involves exploring even more exciting possibilities in what "is still a highly immature field" (Kraemer 2004, 243). After all, who says religious studies and Christian education have to be endured rather than enjoyed? And what better way to enjoy them than through the creative fusion of film, faith and fun?

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