

Film-Faith Dialogue: Using Popular Films for Religious Education in the Age of Hollywood

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Abstract

This is the Age of Hollywood, and so utilising popular films in the religious education quest is only a natural strategy to employ, whether in the classroom, home or pulpit. In addition to providing entertainment and education, feature films can also create a *locus theologicus*, that is, a place to explore religion and theology. Thus, movies are a convenient, contemporary form of visual piety that has tangible benefits hitherto under-appreciated. A brief scan of the field revealed a veritable smorgasbord of filmic delights ranging from pious religious epics to Christ-figure films, from subtextual biblical characterisations to religious biopics, from new age cinema to mainstream films with significant theological resonances. A selection of these films were identified and categorised herein. It was argued that this abundant resource should not go to pedagogic waste. It was also argued that engaging in video exegesis is an exciting film-faith dialogue means of recentring religious pedagogy that is also firmly rooted within the Nazarene's own teaching praxis, and where even "bad" films are good value when adopting the *via negativa* stratagem. It was concluded that the time is now ripe for the profession to seriously embrace film-faith dialogue as a 21st century approach to religious education. Further research into the religion-and-film field is warranted, warmly recommended and certainly long overdue.¹

Introduction

According to Camille Paglia (1994, p. 12), this is the "Age of Hollywood." Photography got it started, film got it moving, television got it into the lounge room, and now the Internet is bringing it directly into our offices.² Therefore, this is the perfect time to take popular feature films out of the theatres, homes and offices and put them to work in the classroom and pulpit. Not as a trendy audio-visual aid, or as a student pacifier, but as a legitimate scholarly-cum-pastoral tool, and thus as a proactive act of applied religious education (R.E.). Contrary to many pious hopes, wishes and desires, reaching for a Bible, hymnbook or liturgical notes to peruse while idling the time away is not the usual response of bored youth in this multimedia age. Yet, most students will reach almost instinctively for a video as part of their normal leisure time activities. As Fr. Michael Scully (1997, p. 7) pointed out: "Young people almost always "get into" films. They will fix themselves on the images of a movie screen much more easily than they will on an instructor, no matter how good the course is."

Indeed, popular feature "films exist as natural texts for our students interested in religion in contemporary society" (Ostwalt, 1998, p. 4), while cinema-going itself has many quasi-religious elements. For example:

It is this not only in its use of religious symbols and themes, but in and through its social practice, which congregates people in the dark for visions of desire. Like church, cinema creates social bonds through the projection of other forms of life that exceed the mundane, through the production of visions or dreams that can be sustained only through their repeated attendance (Loughlin, 2000, p. 46).

Not surprisingly, David Graham (1997, p. 314) claimed that: "perhaps the cinema for many people is the focus of their religious experience, and the film directors their priests." After all, "movies can be seen as part of a long tradition in which images have been used to produce

emotion, to strengthen attachment, and to encourage imitation” (Miles, 2001, p. 70), and hopefully foster positive religious behaviours, or at least highlight the ones to be avoided.

The Call for Film-Faith Dialogue as Applied Religious Education

It seems a tragic waste to ignore this easily accessible pedagogic resource given films’ ubiquitousness and undoubted worldwide influence. One argues that popular films should be employed in the both the classroom and the pulpit for religious education, faith development and general education purposes precisely because they are entertaining. Fun is not a sin! Indeed, Leonard Sweet (1999) argued that film’s entertainment function is now a postmodern necessity for preachers. As he put it:

Moderns have serious problems with that word *entertain*. No modern leader likes to be seen as an entertainer, or doing entertainment. *Entertainment* literally means “holding the attention of.” You don’t want to be an “entertainer”? You don’t want to “hold the attention of” your people? You don’t want to be a “crowd pleaser”? You want to antagonize, alienate, displease your congregation? We “entertain” people in our homes all the time. We judge hosts on how well they have “entertained” or hosted us. We are the hosts of God’s house; we had better know how to “entertain” postmoderns in God’s house (p. 213).

In addition to entertainment, popular films can supplement the Scriptures and theology in a way that can excite people out of physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual indolence. As one student reported after watching Cecil B. DeMille’s biblical epics: “Something that had seemed so old fashioned and dead came alive to me” (Finney, 1992, p. 66), and as the anonymous Teen Movie Critic (1997) reported regarding *The Ten Commandments*:

I’m not one who is particularly interested in biblical stories, or at least not much of a believer in them. I see such stories mostly as just another form of fairy tale, with religious mysticism and mumbo-jumbo thrown into the mix. So indeed, it is a strange feat how this particular tale manages to suck me in (p. 2).

Such a positive outcome is always to be coveted by teachers and preachers alike. In fact, many films possess this engagement capacity. Why? Because it is the intrinsic nature of dramaturgy and the very foundation upon which popular film rests. Nor is such enthusiasm limited to students or the uneducated laity, for academic scholars themselves are rediscovering the delights of religious epics. For example, biblicist J. Cheryl Exum (1996, p. 13) claimed that: “For all its hokeyness *Samson and Delilah* is a brilliant film” whilst her peer David Jasper (1999) claimed that:

In the Hollywood tradition of Old Testament epics..the cinema has occasionally contributed in a significant way to the history of biblical interpretations, perhaps unwittingly and most notably in the figure of Cecil B. De Mille in films like *Samson and Delilah* (1949) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956)...[DeMille] deconstructs the trope of Delilah as the *femme fatale par excellence*, and re-reads the text of the Book of Judges midraschically as a love story which shifts the coherent and dehumanizing biblical perspective of Israel’s salvation history and replaces it with a *countercoherence* of a Delilah following her heart and remaining true to Samson... (p. 51).

Thereby, creatively fusing the Bible with the imaginative, and academia with the poetic. Rather than being just a piece of Hollywood hokum, as Jeffery A. Smith (2001, pp. 206-207) pointed out, DeMille’s: “understanding of Providence becomes less the punishment of evil and more the possibility of personal transformation. Instead of a morality play or magic show, an inner drama occurs as people make their choices and perhaps reach for their better

natures.” And what R.E. teacher does *not* want such behaviour emulated by their students?

Religious Rations: A Smorgasbord of Filmic Delights

A brief scan of the literature revealed a veritable feast of religion-and-film books that can be used for instructional purposes (e.g., Baugh, 1997; Campbell & Pitts, 1981; Forshey, 1992; Stern, Jefford & DeBona, 1999; Tatum, 1997), and an even more bewildering array of feature films on offer. Not only should R.E. teachers prevent this valuable pedagogic resource from going to waste, but they should also proactively engage the popular culture by bringing it into the classroom for video exegesis possibilities. That is, to deconstruct these cinematic texts for their scriptural, religious and theological import. The following is an introductory taxonomy of five feature film areas that are readily amenable to this sort of pedagogic application.

1.0 Biblical Epics, Jesus Stories and the Darker Realms

One can start with the tried and true biblical epics like *Samson and Delilah*, *The Story of Ruth* and *The Ten Commandments*, or Jesus films like *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and *King of Kings*. This can be followed with challenging scandal films such as *Hail Mary*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Monty Python’s Life of Brian*, and then to lighten the murky air, a quick dose of films designed to delight, amuse and enthrall, such as *Godspell*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Jesus of Montreal*. For the younger at heart, *The Miracle Maker* and *The Prince of Egypt* can weave their respective claymation and animation magic. On the other hand, for a safer peek into the darker side of light, cinematic meditations upon *The Book of Life*, *Demon* (aka *God Told Me To*) and *The Exorcist* can be experimented within the comfort and security of a supportive environment.

2.0 Sacred Servants, Hagiographies and Religious Biopics

The next tier of offerings would inevitably involve a cinematic serve of sacred servants, that is, the mundane holy, the brides of Christ, and other religious workers of God who toil in the fields of the Lord. For example, starting with the traditional biopics and hagiographies such as *Brother Sun Sister Moon*, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and *Romero*. Then followed by the innumerable films about the religious life in its various historical guises, but usually displaying their earthly weaknesses, triumphs and tragedies, as depicted in *Agnes of God*, *The Apostle*, *The Bells of St. Mary’s*, *Chariots of Fire*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Diary of a Country Priest*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Going My Way*, *The Lilies of the Field* etc. (see Kozlovic, 2002).

3.0 Sacred Subtexts and Other Hidden Religious Figurations

The next tier of video exegesis possibilities requires greater viewer sophistication to fully enjoy as one examines the fascinating world of hidden religious figurations (aka sacred subtexts; holy subtexts; divine infranarrations). For example, who would have thought of the alien Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie) in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* or little E.T. (voice of Pat Welsh) in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* or Superman/Clark Kent/Kal-El (Christopher Reeve) in *Superman: The Movie* (aka *Superman*) were alien Messiahs. Or that key Gospel events were cinematically re-enacted by Christ-figures as unbelievable as the T-800 Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the wandering cowboy Shane (Alan Ladd) in *Shane*, or the cyber hacker hero-cum-chosen one, Neo (Keanu Reeves) in *The Matrix* (see Kozlovic, 2000).

Yet, they all contain powerful religious resonances and some were deliberately planted there. For example, Edmund H. North, the screenwriter for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* confessed: “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 & Stock, 1982, p. 44). "I didn't honestly expect audiences to pick up the allusion...I never wanted it to be a conscious thing, but I thought it had value being there" (Warren & Thomas, 1982, p. 26).

4.0 The Secular is the Sacred

If the above-documented cinematic fare is not exciting enough, then there are all the biblical lessons one can learn in the countless non-religious films dealing with humanity-in-the-raw. Our screens are filled with innumerable tales of love and hate, rage and ruin, hope, despair and redemption. In fact, the "world of cinema is packed with hidden jewels, films of compassion and shrewd observation. These works of art entertain, delight and enrich our humanity" (Coffey, 2000, p. 332). They can also recharge ones' flagging spirituality, whether packaged as *The Blues Brothers* or *The Spitfire Grill*. Such feature films can be characterised as encapsulating "creative imagination; with 'truth carried alive into the heart by passion'" (Mitchell, 1986, p. 415).

5.0 The New Age and Non-Christian Films

Although ours may be a secular age, even a post-Christian age, contemporary films are repeatedly riddled with the theological, as evidenced by the rash of New Age films such as *Ghost*, *Michael*, *Phenomenon*, *What Dreams May Come* and *The Sixth Sense*. Included in this pop culture onslaught is the scholarly reappraisal of classic films for their newly discovered religious import, such as *Star Wars* as evidenced by David Wilkinson's book *The Power of the Force: The Spirituality of the Star Wars Films*. Then of course, there are all the popular films dealing with non-Christian sacred stories, such as Buddhism within *Little Buddha*, American Black Muslims within *Malcom X* and mainstream Islam within *Mohammad: Messenger of God*. Every year the religion-and-film field is continually expanding in range, depth and complexity that would be churlish to deny. Nor can it continue to be ignored by either educational or ecclesiastical authorities without running the risk of being behind the times or pedagogically irresponsible. The time has definitely arrived to put popular films to work.

Video Exegesis and Theological Debate as Applied Cinema

Video exegesis in Scripture study classes concerning Jesus Christ can certainly be a fun, poignant and nostalgic way of stimulating theological debate. Even the Hollywood biblical potboilers that are usually accused of getting things so horribly wrong are still useful tools in the caring classroom context. These so-called "bad" films are not necessarily poor readings of biblical stories, rather, they can be viewed as contemporary attempts to come to terms with Jesus' paradigmatic question: "But whom say ye that I am?" (Luke 9:20).³ Each film being a different answer to that basic challenge, albeit in multiple disguises and with varying quality of expression. How? Because every cinematic retelling of the Bible is interpretation and thus an artistic means of testing the depth and veracity of one's own faith and understanding. Herein lay films true pedagogic and spiritual value.

Because of the intrinsic nature of the medium, a feature film has to make audio-visually *explicit* what is frequently only *implicit* within the sacred text. It has to fill in the usually taken-for-granted textual gaps, and thus make concrete what may only be abstract, implied or hinted at within the Bible. Tracking the various assumptions and where these theological watersheds occur can be very informative and insightful. Indeed, even deeper insights into the

sacred text can be gained through feature films than through traditional historical and archaeological exegesis channels simply because the Bible is silent on so many facts that a film *must* recreate on-screen.

Filmmakers are required to guess frequently, and with as much authenticity as possible (whether textual, historical, theological, spiritual, poetic) to bring the potentially dry stories to life, even if they momentarily balk at all the biblical minutia to contend with (e.g., shoe types, headgear, jewellery styles). Major biblical characters can also cause serious headaches for filmmakers. For example, there is no biblical description of what Jesus actually looked like, and yet a film must make Him a certain height, weight and build, and give Him a hairstyle, a fashion sense, and a demeanour when He walks, talks and acts. This is awkward when the Bible omitted these essential details, and especially when contemporary history or archaeology is not very helpful.

This pragmatic fact-of-life raises some intriguing issues. For example, when the cinematic Saviour is depicted as a white-robed, blue-eyed American, such as Jeffrey Hunter in *King of Kings*, or a black-robed, olive-skinned Spaniard, such as Enrique Irazoqui in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, or a monumental-looking Swede such as Max von Sydow in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, or a gaunt Britainer such as Robert Powell in *Jesus of Nazareth*, are these representations authentic? Why? Why not? What of the sun-tanned Jew Jesus of Jewish parents, background and faith who came to Earth to fulfil the Jewish law and prophets (Matt 5:17), and then go beyond it? Are these filmic variations fraudulent, bad faith, oversights, religious political correctness, or just poetic license? Many insights and arguments can be gained from examining Jesus films to verify how they presented the essential quantum we factually know about Christ, and His supposed qualities beyond the sacred text. This process is not unlike examining the evolution and socio-cultural development of Jesus imagery in fine art portraiture, and it is just as fascinating.

Film as a Hermeneutical Tool for Recentering Religious Pedagogy

Since this is also the age of the moving image, popular films can no longer be considered as just escapist diversionary fun, and automatically dismissed with disdain and dismay because of it. Rather, movies can now be considered an important scholarly resource in tune with 21st century sensibilities that needs to be seriously utilised rather than emotionally reacted against. Feature films can be an innovative hermeneutical method for recentering religious pedagogy. Both teachers and preachers have at their disposal a postmodern means of coming to grips with contemporary religiosity that can strongly inform, delight and engage their audiences. The new range of cinematic intentions, viewpoints and presuppositions richly supplements the textual, archaeological and historical data traditionally relied upon in academic settings. Popular films are thus a form of intrareligious communication that engages ones' emotions, mind and soul by evoking spiritual empathy in the very act of identifying with the on-screen characters.

Indeed, popular religious filmmakers can serve a quasi-sacred function in society. They have the privilege of fleshing out the sacred text and the scholars' bare bones, plus sensitise viewers to the human dimensions of the Bible by revealing facts which might otherwise get missed, ignored or devalued using traditional exegesis. And especially considering that traditional rational discourse deals with concepts, principles, myths and symbols with admirable precision and clarity, but it can miss other vital issues because of its intense focus upon scientific abstraction.

For teachers, congregations and lay group leaders, this means critically viewing and re-viewing selected films. Then one goes back to the religious source documents with new

thoughts and fresh eyes as one appreciates the truths of Scripture more fully in the light of their cinematic reworking (see Goodacre, 2000). Of course, during this process, many will suffer disappointment, disapproval and disillusionment. But this is to be expected because it is rooted in the filmmakers' interpretative guesses that are markedly different from our own understandings, imaginings and interpretative guesses.

However, this in itself can then generate good pedagogical outcomes. How? Because it allows one to test the accuracy of what one really believes by illuminating the compositional and redactional processes at work in the Bible, ourselves and society-in-general. David Jasper (1999) considered this process to be of real service to biblical scholarship. For example, he argued that:

...De Mille's film [*Samson and Delilah*] does what art and literature has always in fact done, read the Bible and unpicked its historical and theological consistencies which have defined how religious orthodoxy has read it, and offered a countercoherence in terms of other priorities (in this case filmic melodrama) which may expose the dangerous assumptions that often underlie our reading of Scripture and the Bible... (pp. 51-52).

And once those dangerous assumptions are exposed and explored, then real growth, insight and understanding can be profitably mined.

The Positives of *Via Negativa*

This pop culture, visual piety approach to Scripture study may horrify believers who are primarily rooted within the world of words (i.e., textual-centrism), and who have not yet co-developed complementary audio-visual skills. Yet, religion, education and scholarship can only profit from utilising popular films as a teaching aid in the very act of being an instrument of the apostolate, or a pastoralia of the media responsibility. For example, the more horrible biblical films are, the more positive a teaching asset they can potentially become. How? Precisely *because* of their deficiencies, popular films can energise a culture of complaint that can be profitably mined by guiding hands.

Film badness allows one to employ the time-honoured strategy of *via negativa* (negative witnessing) of the "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor 13:12) variety. If one is outraged, then this can be the impetus for viewers to reach out and research the Bible to see if the filmic renditions were truly faithful or not, and why? After all, every film-watcher is automatically a film critic. If the Bible is textually silent on a specific point, then how did one's beliefs and attitudes about it seep into one's consciousness? Who is propagating the idea, who is being privileged in the process, and why bother at all?

For example, the biblical Delilah is popularly conceived as a beautiful seductive liar who brought down a godly man through manipulative sex. Yet, there is no scriptural description of what she actually looked like, so who said she was beautiful? Delilah was forthright in asking Samson for the secret of his strength and how he could be bound and afflicted (Judg 16:6). Far from lying to him (as opposed to withholding important information), it is actually Samson who lied to Delilah three times in a row (Judg 16:7,11,13), and yet it is Delilah with the reputation for deceptiveness!

Who said Delilah sexually seduced Samson for his hair secret when the Bible clearly stated that she got the answer by nagging him until "his soul was vexed unto death" (Judg 16:16)? Indeed, the Bible documents that it is Samson who willingly slept with prostitutes (Judg 16:1), it does not specifically mention this unwholesome profession regarding Delilah, and yet she has the reputation for sexual immorality while the philanderer Samson does not! Many

other fact-belief disparities can be similarly explored. In this way, faith is nourished through film while fostering a mystery-driven desire to seek the truth behind the truth. In fact, for believers, it is ones' Christian duty to scrutinise "the signs of the times" (Matt 16:3), and there can be no more entertaining sign of the times that popular films!

Prejudices against Film, Fun and Visual Culture

The field of film-faith dialogue (aka cinematic theology, religion-and-film, celluloid religion, theo-film) has yet to reach its apex because the movies are barely one hundred years old, and it has had to fight many anti-film battles along the way. These disputes have been rooted in the religious loathing of graven images, snobbish disparagement of film because it was "popular" (i.e., not "art," let alone "high art") and the associated fear of sinfulness, triviality and contamination (Grenz, 2000; Turnau III, 2002). There was also a generalised bias against the visual *per se*. As *Commweal* film critic Richard Alleva (1999) complained:

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 (p. 468).

Sometimes there was just a deep suspicion about having fun at the movies, as if "enjoyment" and "religion" were mutually exclusive categories. But even if fun *is* the root motivation for movie watching, then this is to be applauded because:

To enter into reflection on the meanings and influences of popular culture out of simple curiosity or because "its fun" is an effective starting point that requires no apology, and it easily leads to the conviction that we have stumbled upon something that holds promise for significant insight in understanding ourselves, and in understanding religion in the context of our culture (Forbes, 2000, p. 17).

As Revd. Larry Kreitzer (1993, p. 20) succinctly put it: "It seems to me that there is nothing inherently virtuous or self-authenticating in having theology be something that the reader must endure rather than enjoy." One can only agree with him.

The *Locus Theologicus* Path to Spiritual Growth

Hopefully, both students and parishioners will come to realise that God can speak to them in many different ways, including through the cinema. As Sr. Rose Pacatte (2000, p. 33) pragmatically argued: "film is so hot and the culture of movie-going so strong in North America today [and elsewhere], having a "place" to talk about film through the lens of theology can be a relevant way to bring faith and life closer together." This is what Fr. Andrew Greeley (1988, p. 9) called a "*locus theologicus*." Perhaps students' souls will be stretched as they become more receptive to God's grace in their non-fictional lives, and then pester their teachers just like the ancient Greeks who petitioned Philip: "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:21).

So, it is not surprising to find Kevin O'Donnell (2000, p. 204) advising his readers that: "It is wise to scan popular culture to seek hints of spirituality" because "People are searching,

thirsting and exploring, even if they are not yet listening. Let us listen to their heart cries and searchings in the popular media” (p. 212). Hopefully, they can later successfully claim: “I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

The fundamental premise behind this film-based religious pedagogy is not new, radical or alien. In fact, it is thousands of years old and embodies the very essence of the Nazarene’s own teaching praxis. Namely, going *to* the people, using *stories*, speaking *their* language, using *their* idioms, about *their* concerns, to teach them about *our* desires. After all, “film is just another way of preaching, with a different set of strengths and weaknesses than the spoken homily” (Perkins-Buzo, 2001, p. 42). If this pop culture strategy was good enough for the Teacher of Teachers, the founder of Christianity, and the source of infinite wisdom, it ought not be beneath the dignity of 21st century teachers, preachers and parents. Indeed:

Jesus’ parting words were to go into all the world (Matthew 28:19). That means not only India and China, but also New York and Los Angeles. God is calling “pop culture missionaries,” as well as people committed to praying for those working in arts and entertainment. The only requirement is love for Christ and a willingness to be real and honest with unchurched people (Nasfell, 2000, p. 35).

As such, like Jake (John Belushi) and Elwood (Dan Aykroyd) in *The Blues Brothers*, teachers too can be on a mission for God, and hopefully have a fun-filled trip along the way.

Conclusion

The time is ripe for the profession to warmly embrace film-faith dialogue as a spiritual aide to religious education, personal development and the cause of innovative pedagogy. Both the Churches and the secular pulpit of movie theatres can easily organise regular film viewing nights coupled with printed notes and follow-up theological discussions (see Fields & James, 1999; Scully, 1997). Religion-and-film courses can also be taught in the seminary and the university as part of a postmodern curriculum that is sensitive to the realities of contemporary religion, particularly working priest’s lives. For example, Revd. James Henderschedt (1987) showed the priest film *Mass Appeal* starring Jack Lemon playing Fr. Tim Farley because it depicted four major preaching techniques, which he subsequently explored in class. As a scholarly arena of academic inquiry, many have seriously addressed the issues of religion-and-film (e.g., Babington & Evans, 1993; Fraser, 1998; Jewett, 1993; Kreitzer, 1993; Marsh & Ortiz, 1997; Miles, 1996; Scott, 1994), but there is still much more to be done to creatively apply popular films to the religious education field ranging from pre-school to post-doctoral.

One needs only the hierarchical will and the way can open up before us, although not quite as dramatic as Charlton Heston parting the Red Sea in *The Ten Commandments*. Nonetheless, the treasures to be found in this cinematic promised land is certainly worth the effort, especially if one desires a 21st century theology that acknowledges its inestimable debt to popular culture. Besides, as Theodore A. Turnau III (2002, p. 296) argued: “Whether we like it or not, popular culture forms our world. It *is* our world, the world of our children, and the world of our non-Christian friends and neighbors, and we, by God’s grace, are called to it.” Let us answer that call as both educators and children of the media ourselves. Further research into the religion-and-film field is warranted, warmly recommended and certainly long overdue.

Notes

1. A revised version of this paper has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Religious Education* (2004). Permission to trial it in this conference was graciously given by the journal's editor, Dr. Louise Welbourne, Australian Catholic University.
2. Although there are significant ontological differences between film, cinema, movies, video, TV, DVD, Internet movies etc., they provide similar audio-visual images and so they will be treated herein as essentially interchangeable.
3. The Authorized King James Version of the Bible (KJV) will be used throughout.

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Filmography

- Agnes of God* (1985, dir. Norman Jewison)
- The Apostle* (1997, dir. Robert Duvall)
- The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945, dir. Leo McCarey)
- The Blues Brothers* (1980, dir. John Landis)
- The Book of Life* (1998, dir. Hal Hartley)
- Brother Sun Sister Moon* (1973, dir. Franco Zeffirelli)
- Chariots of Fire* (1981, dir. Hugh Hudson)
- The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, dir. Robert Wise)
- Demon* (aka *God Told Me To*) (1977, dir. Larry Cohen)
- Dead Man Walking* (1995, dir. Tim Robbins)
- Diary of a Country Priest* (1950, dir. Robert Bresson)
- Elmer Gantry* (1960, dir. Richard Brooks)
- E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982, dir. Steven Spielberg)
- The Exorcist* (1973, dir. William Friedkin)
- Ghost* (1990, dir. Jerry Zucker)
- Godspell* (1973, dir. David Green)
- Going My Way* (1944, dir. Leo McCarey)
- The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1966, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini)
- The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965, dir. George Stevens)
- Hail Mary* (1985, dir. Jean-Luc Godard)
- Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973, dir. Norman Jewison)
- Jesus of Montreal* (1989, dir. Denys Arcand)
- Jesus of Nazareth* (1977, dir. Franco Zeffirelli)

King of Kings (1961, dir. Nicholas Ray)
The Last Temptation of Christ (1988, dir. Martin Scorsese)
The Lilies of the Field (1963, dir. Ralph Nelson)
Little Buddha (1994, dir. Bernardo Bertolucci)
Malcom X (1992, dir. Spike Lee)
Mass Appeal (1984, dir. Glenn Jordan)
The Matrix (1999, dir. Andy & Larry Wachowski)
Michael (1996, dir. Nora Ephron)
The Miracle Maker (2000, dir. Derek Hayes)
Mohammad: Messenger of God (1977, dir. Moustapha Akkad)
Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979, dir. Terry Jones)
The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928, dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer)
Phenomenon (1996, dir. Jon Turteltaub)
The Prince of Egypt (1998, dir. Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner & Simon Wells)
Romero (1989, dir. John Duigan)
Samson and Delilah (1949, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)
Shane (1953, dir. George Stevens)
The Sixth Sense (1999, dir. M. Night Shyamalan)
The Spitfire Grill (1996, dir. Lee David Zlotoff)
Star Wars (1977, dir. George Lucas)
The Story of Ruth (1960, dir. Henry Koster)
Superman: The Movie (aka *Superman*) (1978, dir. Richard Donner)
The Ten Commandments (1956, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)
Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1992, dir. James Cameron)
What Dreams May Come (1998, dir. Vincent Ward)