



A SUBSTITUTE FOR GOD
RELIGION & FILM

M a r k R y a n

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Introduction

*"Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy and blessed are those who hear it."*¹

Revelations 1:3

Religion and Film are two popular areas in society guaranteed to divide people regarding opinion, thoughts and tastes. Both are tools in which to educate, inform, manipulate and to distract the general populace. Film is very much like a religion; it gathers a following, creates its own dogmatic codes and conventions, and encourages many to embrace or defer from its main position. From time to time some may come along who disrupt the equilibrium with radical notions and ideas. Cults spring up. But through its battles and changes, it still holds a core that keeps the devout devoted, and many exiled and on the fringe. Many are left waiting to get 'the call' to enter the holy church of cinema.

So, what role does religion play in today's Hollywood landscape, and how does this affect the making and consumption of such movies? If indeed it does at all. From the Bible belt of America, through to the holy city of Jerusalem, back to the Catholic dominant state of Italy; western religion has gripped modern society for thousands of years. Art, which includes song, dance and literature, has been used to inform and condition generations of people in areas of religion and the church for centuries. Film is a particularly modern popular art form and is, suffice to say, a powerful means in which to educate, brainwash and enlighten people (for which it has been widely been used in this regard). In 2004 Mel Gibson directed *'The Passion of the Christ'*, which tells the story of Jesus Christ's final days and crucifixion.

To date, that movie has earned \$612m in worldwide box office receipts, a good indication that religion is still a strong subject to reach the people. More importantly, it still seems to be a profitable one. Bible yarns are nothing new, biblical narratives were a staple in Hollywood for years, but as tastes and themes have shifted Religion in today's climate it still seems to play an important role.

Despite social standing, gender, age or race, everyone will have an opinion regarding religion. Even if you're not religious or your position is that of apathy, your reason for not being so is still important. It is significant to view whether religion is important and relevant in modern film making for this very reason. It is worth asking this question for two incentives. 1) As stated above, everyone will have an opinion on the subject of any religious representation in film, and 2) this opinion shapes the way in which movies are made and indeed targeted. There is perhaps a more silent third reason, and that is it is still interesting to see how and why people react and engage in movies, and what motivates them to do so. The 1973 movie *'The Exorcist'* has long been argued to be one of the scariest movies ever

¹ King James Bible – Revelations 1:3

made. Upon its initial release, people were reported to have fainted in cinemas while viewing it while others denounced it as the work of Satan himself. What prompts people to react to films in this fashion, are they not just moving pictures on a screen? Let us find out why religion can wield such a strong control over us by just going to see a *simple movie*.

Looking at the huge success of ***'The Passion of the Christ'***, I will hope to explain what made it such a cultural phenomenon and why, in today's current climate, religion still has a huge sway and influence over people. I have selected four other movies over the past thirty years that contain and display images/themes/notions of religion in which to highlight different areas that it can touch upon. This is in context of the baggage that comes with such devotion: race, censorship, and sex for example. By looking at these issues, and in light of ***'The Passion'*** and its cultural response, I hope to offer answers as to why religion can still be used as a tool in which to generate interest and strong box office from modern audiences. For this, I will focus on western and Abrahamic religions, specifically that of Catholicism/Christianity; and those that see Jesus Christ as an authorised central figure. Also, the focus will be on the United States and Europe, specifically the UK. This is for a practical perspective, in view of the constraints of this paper.

Areas such of 'Bollywood' for example, heavily use religious themes, iconography and practices; and those that move away from Christianity and the occidental view of faith. This, in itself, would be an interesting area to research, but again, due to the limitations of the paper it will only be mentioned in passing and for referencing. Hopefully by looking at specific examples of religion in film, and the topics brought up by it, a reason for its cultural importance and success can be established.

I have also opted to do some audience research, if on a somewhat small scale, in which the selected movies will be offered to a particular group of people to ascertain feedback on current ideas involving the view of religion and its cinematic attributes. I am aware of the constraints and restrictions of research of this kind, the sheer number of films alone that tackle religion as key themes are astounding. However, with regards to the films selected for study, these each hold key significant cultural points in which to establish a relationship between faith and audiences, especially in a contemporary perspective. The selected movies are as follows: ***'Jesus Christ superstar'*** (1973) [dir-Norman Jewson], ***'The Exorcist'*** (1973) [dir-William Friedkin], ***'Agnes of God'*** (1985) [dir-Norman Jewson], and the ***'The Last temptation of Christ'*** (1988) [dir-Martin Scorsese].

From a theoretical approach, Stuart Hall's work on *'Encoding and decoding'* in the media, along with *'Reception theory'*, will be taken into account when gathering the audience research; as this will provide insight and understanding to the reactions towards the movies and the readership of them

(from their perspective). I hope to be consistent with the historical evidence (reviews etc....) that I hope to find, making it easier to establish some understanding to the main questions of my research. The key focus of this paper is 'why and how is religion important in film?' a large question in itself. Many factors will be focused upon such as controversy, importance of pressure groups, ethnicity and censorship. How audiences respond to religious movies is a good indication to cultural themes and social issues relevant at the time, allowing historical contexts to be made around the release of certain movies.

On a personal level, in the case of religion and film; I find organised religion creates separation and divides instead of uniting. Hopefully with this paper, I can show whether this is true in cinema also, or if people can come together on topical issues from an objective standpoint. Linking these themes back to '***The Passion***' will hopefully place this question in a current context and hopefully be more relevant.

But what would Jesus do.....?



God...

'And blessed are those who hear'

I

...probably go to the movies. According to national statistics² and unsurprisingly, more people go to the cinema than to church. In the United Kingdom, for example, in 2007 there were 163 million admissions to cinemas throughout the year³. That is out of a total population of around 60 million. 870,000 regularly go to church (Christian) on Sundays in the UK⁴; overall (on a yearly basis) there are around 41 million admissions to church services.

That's only 1.5% of the country going to church every Sunday. Statistics for religions and religious beliefs can be a complicated area. For one thing, many people class themselves as belonging to a religious group (83% of the population in the UK class themselves as Christian = 50million), but not all are practising.

This can raise the question on the validity of church going in relation to religious beliefs. As previously mentioned, the focus here will be on the Abrahamic religions (predominantly Christian/Catholic) and church attendance is deemed important to these doctrines.

'The Passion of the Christ' depicts the last hours of Jesus Christ as presented (though arguable) as it appears in the Bible. The death of Jesus gave rise to Christianity, which in 2,000 years has become the most popular religion in the westernised world, and indeed the whole world with 2.1 billion followers. This compares to Islam, which accounts for around 1.5 billion.⁵ Christianity is an umbrella term though, encompassing many branches and denominations.

That is nearly 33% of the entire world's population attached to one organised belief system. With its widespread reaches, Christianity has found centres of attention predominantly in certain countries. Both the UK and the US boast around 280 million Christian followers (50m, 230m roughly, 82% and 84% of total populations), a huge number of target-able cinema goers and highly important in terms of national identity and cultural conditioning.

These key figures have been useful statistics in regards to demo-graphs and consumerism research, most notably in political campaigns for example. In America, areas of the mid-west have been termed the 'Bible belt' for its predominant Christian focus and emphasis. With US cinema admissions reaching 1,400m in 2008, those with distinguishable religious faith are sizable chunks of the audience. Although

² http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html + <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/religion/> + http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/rel_chu_att-religion-church-attendance + - figures specifically for 2005 to present.

³ <http://business.pearlanddean.com/marketdata/admissions.html>

⁴ http://www.churchsociety.org/issues_new/church/stats/iss_church_stats_attendance.asp - 2006 figure

church attendance is on the decline in both of these countries, and has been since the Second World War, the religious governing bodies still command attention; especially when there is a call to arms.

II

Since the birth of moving pictures in the latter part of the 19th Century, religious themes have taken their place within this body of entertainment. This is not surprising due to its saturation of other art forms for centuries including literature, paintings and theatre. With the development of cinema around the beginning of the 20th century, one of the first 'feature' films was an adaptation of 'The Passion' play. Running at a length of 40 minutes, *'The Life and Passion of Christ/ La vie et la passion de Jésus Christ'* (1903) [dir Nonguet, L and Zecca, F] is classed as one of the first 'Jesus biopic' pictures. Each decade since has seen around 2-3 similarly themed features.

The Jesus biopic is the prominent genre of religiously inspired/themed movies. Other notable practices include attention on a Gospel or many of these from the Bible, or a particular event in which to dramatize; say the 'great flood' for example. Jesus is seen as the 'hero', understandably, in all of these films. This is something that is quite unique to the Christian faith in regard to film. Islam, for example, forbids any representation of the prophet Mohammed, which makes creating a feature film about him something of a challenge.

That is not to say that all religious movies need to center on Jesus Christ. From a secular position, it is possible to read texts through a Christian lens quite easily, if you're in a position of being entirely objective. It is possible to take religious themes and elements from nearly any motion picture; be its portrayal of good and evil, or its sacrificing protagonist/'Christ figure'. Some movies may have this religious ideology pre-subscribed as a subtext of the narrative, even in ones that are not specifically about religious subjects at all. This does come down to audience interpretations of texts that may or may not be associated with the film maker's intentions, as with all texts; they are subjective to the reader.

The tendency does seem to be though, that there is more emphasis on the Jesus biopic, in view of the more successful films over the years. This is not surprising due to Jesus's importance within the Christian faith. Successful example of earlier pictures include: *'The Last supper'* (1914), *'The King of kings'* (1927), *'Jesus of Nazareth'* (1928). This led to the religious epic during the more lucrative period of the golden age of Hollywood with successful pictures such as *'The Robe'* (1953), *'The Ten commandments'* (1956), and *'Ben Hur'* (1959). Some of these earlier productions; notably DeMillie's 'King of Kings', would come across the sensitivity of portraying a religious figure on film and the censorship it can generate.

Along with the traditional religious movie, there have been deviations in the form of horror, comedy and documentary approaches to the religious text in film. The Moses driven animated tale *'The Prince*

of Egypt' (1998) told the story of the exodus, which was heavily marketed and released at Passover (Pesach), it offered a Jewish themed feature film and was hugely successful, appealing to a wide audience. Either used in a sensational way to generate shock or controversy, or as mere narrative framework, religious themes have been prominent in Hollywood movies over the years. The consistency of the religious movie, and the consumption of it by audiences in the US and UK reached its pinnacle in 2004 when *'The Passion of the Christ'* broke many box office records upon its initial release on the religious holiday of Easter.



Passion

'He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him.'

Directed by Mel Gibson, ***'The Passion of the Christ'*** (2004) depicts the last twelve hours of Jesus's life as it appears in the Bible, in the gospel of Mark. It tells the story of how Jesus is betrayed by Judas Iscariot and brought before the Jewish high priests, and subsequently Pontius Pilate (Roman overseer in the region). This leads to his sacrifice and ultimate crucifixion upon the cross. Within the Christian faith it is the cornerstone of the religion, in that Christ's sacrifice is for 'Us' as it embodies the 'sins of the world' with his death and succeeding resurrection. Jesus Christ is seen as the son of God, and with him, the representation of God on earth, or God as man. The description of the crucifixion in the gospel texts is somewhat brief however, and it does not linger on graphic elements to heighten the emotional response, unlike the film.

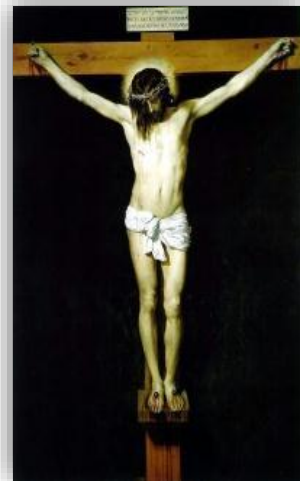
This has led to the embellishments of the image throughout history (see figs i, ii , iii) and how open, despite the church's monopoly on it, the interpretation of the image is. When it was released in the United States on Ash Wednesday 2004, its opening weekend box office was in the region of \$84m; and after just five days had amassed \$125m.⁶ It finally ended with \$370m in the United States alone and \$612m worldwide becoming the most successful 'Religious' ever made. 'Passion's' success was a result of many factors, notably the controversy it generated within the public and religious sphere.



fig i



fig ii



fig

iii

⁶ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=weekend&id=passionofthechrist.htm> – Box office results

'The Passion of the Christ' embodies all the elements which have led to the success and infamously of previous religiously themed movies, soon to be discussed here. It used certain avenues to become an 'Event Film', where it reached far within the public consciousness and media. A curiosity factor also played a huge role with many wanting to see what the controversy was actually about. As a result, it was able to become of cultural importance despite individual particular religious inclination, in that it became a statement as to whether you had or had not seen the movie. It was also able to cross over to mainstream, and not single out those who were perhaps self-defined as 'non religious'.

Even before the film was released, it was seeking condemnation from groups who saw it as anti-Semitic, and paradoxically, praise from the right-wing Churches due to its attention to the gospels. Mel Gibson's official statement on the planned project was that he intended to "Inspire not offend"⁷, and that he was up-front about his agenda as using this picture as somewhat of a propaganda piece for his faith.

This in itself created controversy, with Gibson being of a branch of Catholicism that is known to refuse to acknowledge the 'Second Vatican council'⁸, which among other things, lessened the church's prejudice on the role that the Jewish people played in the death of Jesus Christ. The ADL (Anti-Defamation League) were the first to point out the danger of the film being anti-Semitic and cautioned the makers about the responsibility not to incite violence towards those of the Jewish faith.

As the controversy over the movie escalated, studios were urged not to distribute the picture. Gibson had already self-financed the movie himself at the cost of around \$25-30m. American democrat Dov Hikind, a prominent Jewish politician, openly asked 20th Century Fox not to release the picture, claiming it associated the collective guilt of the murder of Jesus Christ to the Jews. They partially succeeded, with Gibson choosing the independent route for distribution when in 2003 Fox declined to distribute.

At this point the movie had moved away from merely being a motion picture, and instead had become a Trojan horse adorned by many arguments, beliefs and issues, positioning itself into the American mainstream. To defuse some of the negativity, Gibson set up a selective screening which was predominantly for Church leaders and those who had much deeper religious leanings. Their comments were very endorsing of the movie, praising its realism and accuracy of the depiction of Christ's suffering. However, members of the ADL had managed to sneak into one of the screenings; they later attacked the movie saying it confirmed all of their suspicions:

⁷ <http://www.villagevoice.com/2003-11-04/news/mel-gibson-s-jesus-christ-pose/>

⁸ http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/

*"We are deeply concerned that the film, if released in its present form, could fuel the hatred, bigotry and anti-Semitism that many responsible churches have worked hard to repudiate."*⁹

- ADL press release, 11 Aug 2003

Along with the anti-Semitism, the movie was also attacked for its graphic depiction of violence and gore. Within the movie there is at least twenty sole minutes where Jim Caviezel's character of Christ is tortured and crucified. "The movie is grotesque, savage and often fetishized in slow-mo."¹⁰ reported movie critic Jami Bernard for the 'Daily news', later going on to write "No child should see this movie". She was not alone with her disgust for the graphicness of the film, with many criticisms coming for the unnecessary depiction of flagellation within the film.

When passed as an R rated movie, it was clear that the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America), who famously take issue with representation of sex on screen, would never give an NC-17 certification for violence alone. Perhaps it is interesting to note this was a religious movie and it may have influenced their decision more than they would care to admit.

The church's standpoint was support for the violence; suggesting many people needed to see what Christ suffered, and to be shocked by his suffering. Indeed, the Pope himself (then Pope John Paul II) claimed "It is as it was"¹¹, later to be retracted when it appeared to come across as an endorsement of the movie.

Despite these instances, many churches in America rallied behind the movie. In its opening weekend, many cancelled services; encouraging their congregations to see the film instead, booking out entire theatres. Leader of the American Bible Society Gene Habecker gave away 8,000 tickets to followers. These actions were seen as slightly hypocritical due to the intense nature of the violence depicted in the movie, many of the organizations are/were quick to denounce violence in other media products and forms, yet when it seemed to help their agenda they were happy to turn a blind eye. This was noted in the news media and commented heavily at the time.

When the movie went on to smash box office records, and earn huge amounts of money, it was not as a result of a flawless, piece of movie making. That is not to take credit away from those who produced the movie, and some may argue that it is flawless, but that it was helped by its marketing and controversy which was just as important as its content. Something else seemed to take hold,

⁹ The Religion and film reader – pg343

¹⁰ http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/2004/02/24/2004-02-24_gore_s_the_crime_of__passion.html

¹¹ <http://www.tldm.org/News6/PassionOfChrist.htm>

**This is not drastically unusual with many American movies succeeding more so domestically than abroad. However, 'The Da Vinci code' (2006) [dir.Ron Howard], a more mainstream blockbuster but still religiously inspired, reversed this notion taking 70% of its revenues from the international market.*

shifting the emphasis away from the film itself. The huge success of 'The Passion' was replicated around the world, but in different forms. Naturally, many predominantly catholic countries reacted favorably to the film, but the majority of returns came from the American audience (60% accounted for the worldwide total*).

'The Passion of the Christ' followed the path similar themed films had trodden before, but it manipulated the controversies surrounding it and used it for its publicity and advantage. It was able to engage with audiences that were not necessarily religious, having moved into the 'event movie' arena.

Obviously, the religion was important on some level, but it spoke more about social and cultural issues of the time more than anything particular about the historical accuracy of the death of Jesus Christ. Aside from making a huge amount of money, it enabled discussion on the gospels to be opened up and indicated that religion still held as much importance in today's society as it had done before, for better or worse. This is what is important in regard to the relationship of cinema and religion, it is the engagement of audiences and the repercussion certain films can have. Like religion, it can divide or unite people and ideas.



Superstar

'Those of you who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan.'

"Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Who are you? What have you sacrificed"¹² from the title track of the stage production of Jesus Christ Superstar. Released in 1973 the film version of **'Jesus Christ Superstar'** [dir. Norman Jewson] is a rock opera telling the story of Jesus' last days and crucifixion. All the dialogue is sung, not spoken, as per the rules of an opera. It is the adaption of the successful stage version created by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber. The story is told from Judas Iscariot's perspective and his struggles in working out who Jesus actually is (son of god/man etc....). The film takes the songs from the opera and places them in a context of drama students going into the desert on a bus to put on a performance of the typical Christian Passion play. The movie met with controversy and success, especially from the younger generations for the latter. Released the same year as **'The Exorcist'**, it finished as the 13th top grossing picture of the year with around \$13m. The soundtrack of which went on to sell tens of millions of copies and has since spawned numerous stage productions.

Earlier the same year **'Godspell: (A Musical based on the gospel according to St. Matthew)'** [dir. David Greene] was released. A similar premise, and also based on a stage production, the movie had Jesus appear in New York City spreading the word through, and with the help of, some of the city's inhabitants. The movie was a moderate success. *'Superstar'* however, with its controversy attached, was a much more progressive and groundbreaking movie, and its legacy has lasted much longer. Today, it is still used in high schools in America as somewhat of a learning/teaching tool, an accessible way to teach the Bible. The presentation of Jesus was very much different from what had been seen before, which is perhaps what led to much of its controversy.

The movie is presented in an outward looking way, not narcissistic like other historical Bible films. The humanist perspective allows access to the religious elements in a more fundamental manner. The use of rock music plays down any patronizing aspects normally associated with the gospels and hymns that may lack emotional involvement. The main question of the movie is 'Who was Jesus Christ?', was he man, god, revolutionary (all of the above?). The story of the trial and crucifixion follows the route of the Bible, but it is done so in a more innovative fashion. Aside from the theatrical title track number, which is supposed to be heightened and fanciful, the movie is a cruder interpretation of the Bible. The premise of the drama students/play is shown with a 'cheaper' look; there are no lavish costumes or sets for example. The desert is used as the stage and the music is very much the 'star' of the picture.

¹² <http://www.songmeanings.net/songs/view/126677/>

Jesus is presented as the world's first superstar, a man who has risen to lofty heights and whom many feel had gone mad with success/power.

The controversy surrounding the movie came predominately for this very representation of Jesus. The church, along with pressure groups, denounced the movie as blasphemous, stating the very title alone was sacrilegious. They took offense with the association of rock music towards religion, presuming that rock music connotes a deviant lifestyle. The idea of a 'false Christ' was argued to be the most offensive, suggesting the young were being tricked by this image of Jesus, one that differed to the standardized and church sanctioned view of Christ. What was being missed was that this very image, a different presentation of Jesus, was actually more accessible to the younger audience, as it placed religion in a way that could be digested by a different generation.

The message was still the same, just the packaging had changed. Churches and leaders took offence to the following: Seeing the story through Judas's eyes, viewing Jesus from a humanist perspective and also not showing the resurrection (suggesting, they argued, that perhaps Jesus had 'lost' in the end). Again, this comes back to the interpretation of Jesus that is outside the church's control, and as such, it was denounced and attacked.

The movie was also attacked for being both anti-Semitic and racist. Jewish pressure groups took offence to the depiction of the Jewish priests, claiming they were portrayed as stereotypical and that the movie furthered the notion of the Jews alone as responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. Other groups objected to Judas being played by African American actor Carl Anderson. Tim Rice, in interviews after the release of the movie, noted that he was merely the "best actor for the role"¹³, having been in the original stage production and that they were not trying to "make any statement" in regards to the casting. Indeed, little was said in regard to Yvonne Elliman, who played Mary Magdalene, being Hawaiian and part Japanese.

What the movie was able to achieve was perhaps the removal, if not temporarily, of the religious aspect and create interest on the meaning with the music. The positive reactions many had towards both the stage and film versions, were that they presented the story of the crucifixion, which had been done a thousand times, in a different and unique way. It allowed many people to access something of a religious teaching without the old, perhaps somewhat boring, prospects of a church or sermon.

The movie was not created to be either controversial or disrespectful, but to offer the gospels in a new light. What it does demonstrate is the Church's control over the image of Jesus. When Mel Gibson presented the world his take on Jesus Christ in *'The Passion of the Christ'*, he presented one that he

¹³ Interview on Jesus Christ Superstar [dvd], 2002 Universal

claimed had stuck close to the religious texts. As a result, Churches (and religious institutions) praised it for its representation.

Any image that seems to deviate from the sanctioned portrayal is condemned by these institutions, as it relinquishes the control that the governing bodies have. If people are allowed to interpret Jesus on their own, maybe they don't need the church at all. What a rebellious notion! This more progressive presentation of the Christ story, made more contemporary through music, was successful in reaching many who were not even religious. It crossed over from 'biblical film' to entertainment; and as such, the religion, it can be argued, mattered secondly.

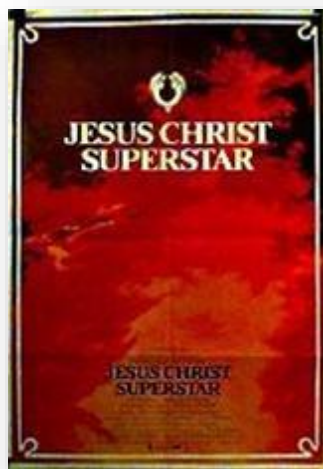


fig iv

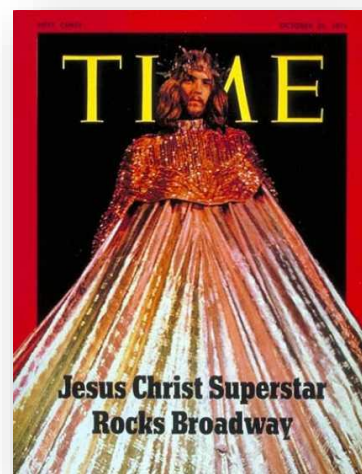


fig v



The Exorcist

'And every eye will see him'

"Something beyond comprehension is happening to a little girl on this street, in this house."¹⁴ This was the movie/poster tagline for the 1973 motion picture *'The Exorcist'*, directed by William Friedkin and based on the popular novel by William Peter Blatty (which was dramatized from actual accounts of a claimed possession). It tells of a young girl who seems to be possessed by the devil, and who brings horrors into her mother's life through the stages of possession. The film climaxes with an exorcism (the exorcising of the demon or devil out of a living person) performed by two Jesuit priests, both of whom end up dying as a result.

The movie has become famous and infamous, both for its shocking content and the controversy it caused at the time of release. To this day the movie is still banned in some countries, and many claim it to be the scariest movie of all time. However, when you go into the story presented both within the movie and the novel, there is the old tale of good vanquishing evil, sermoned in biblical stories for years.

Starring Linda Blair as Regan the young girl, and Ellen Bernstein as her mother the story chronicles the possession of the girl from her initial activities with a 'harmless' Ouija board, right up until the exorcism by the two priests at the end of the picture. Released on Boxing Day, December 26th in 1973, the movie was given an R certification in America. This allowed children to see it if accompanied by an adult, and an 18 certification in the UK. Upon release, the movie was met with protests from the Catholic Church, with many extremists claiming the movie was the work of the devil. This movie is a departure from the other films spoken about so far, in regard to both style and content and even genre. It is removed from the Jesus biopic, but the use of religion is crucial for the narrative; and some would argue for the effect the movie has on the audience.

Despite the furor it created, or because of it, *'The Exorcist'* was a huge success both financially and critically. The novel had enjoyed many weeks at the top of the best seller lists, and the movie went on to be the top grossing picture of the year in the US. With \$193m¹⁵. It has become one of the top grossing pictures of all time, accounting for inflation. It was also nominated for ten Academy awards, winning best screenplay and score respectively. Released in a time of much change within Hollywood, the early 1970's is perhaps known for being Hollywood's renaissance period. Despite the rise of exploitation pictures, due to the relaxation of censorship and a breakaway from the main studios, the

¹⁴ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070047/>

¹⁵ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=exorcist.htm>

rise of independent production companies gave birth to more controversial, engaging, gritty pictures that challenged people's perceptions.

One could be forgiven for viewing the movie as itself an example of an exploitation picture, sensationalizing the church and religion as a whole. However, I think to do this would remove the themes, messages and questions the film is raising, and also the fact it runs much deeper than those superficial exploitation levels.

"I wanna see if it'll make me faint"¹⁶

- Audience patron of 'The Exorcist'

It is safe to say, even by today's standards, elements of the movie are shocking. Theatres were reporting two to three people fainting and vomiting per screening, with some having to be removed by members of staff. Audiences queued around the block for hours waiting to see the picture (fig vi), and cinemas received record attendances. In the UK, the movie was passed for certification (despite many calling for it to be banned in light of the obscene publications act of 1959¹⁷), though certain county-councils chose to ban the picture locally. This was a result of pressure groups such as the 'Festival of light' who protested to individual councils calling for a local ban when the national call was left unanswered. The 'Festival of light' was/is a Christian run pressure group who aim to bring Christian morality back to society, by extirpating blasphemous and immoral elements from films and the media. Patrons of the group included the infamous Mary Whitehouse who successfully campaigned to "clean up TV" back in the 1960's and campaigned for the rest of her life in bringing Christian morality back into the media. 'The Festival of light' specifically linked the movie to media reports of child abuse and suicides and would send newspaper clippings of these instances to sway local MPs into banning the film in their districts.

Old time moralism called for uproar towards the movie, its images and content were deemed too much for "God fearing Christians". It was fine to fear God it seemed, just not the Devil, and especially not in a multiplex. Reviews of the movie urged Catholics to be outraged by it, provoking those who they suggested claimed to be religious not to stand by idly and allow this film to be shown.

¹⁶ Press coverage at the time, theatre queues in America extract -

http://74.125.77.132/search?q=cache:menIPvD9pUYJ:www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm%3Farticle_id%3D2320+the+exorcist+controversy&hl=en&strip=1

¹⁷ <http://www.statutelaw.gov.uk/content.aspx?activeTextDocId=1128038> – law overview

The movie's power to unsettle does rest with the imagination of the viewer it seems, it's only as powerful as what is brought into the film with it. The narrative relies on faith, and the battle of good versus evil hinges on whether you believe the devil can exist. With its gruesomeness aside, The Exorcist's power to unsettle is much deeper than swearing and vomit, instead feeding off of what has been instilled over the years by religion and faith, and then by questioning that.



fig vi



fig vii

The church, however, was caught in an awkward situation in regard to the movie. On the one hand it showed images of demonic possession of a young girl (fig vii), masturbating with a crucifix and enough blasphemies and sacrilegious images to shock the most hardened of the clergy. Pressure groups were calling for the movie to be banned due to its sinful nature, and general outrage that Hollywood could produce such a film. Yet on the other hand, religion is painted in a good light in the end and the saving grace of the horrors within the film, it is the grand power that defeats evil. Religion comes up trumps. Indeed, many churches approved of the handling and representation of the exorcism in the movie. The two priests in the story represented both old time catholic ways and a more progressive image of the church.

The aftermath of the film actually saw many people returning to faith, with church attendance increasing the years after the film was released¹⁸. One could argue the use of the movie as a propaganda tool for the church, as was the case in Tunisia where the film was banned for that very reason. The film confronts the reality of human suffering, especially applicable at the time with the disillusionment and anger, especially in America with the continuation of the Vietnam War and Nixon's Watergate scandal. The church was seen as sanctuary, and reassured people with the safety of its

¹⁸ <http://www.adherents.com/> - attendance statistics

faith and ways. Indeed, what the church feared the most were increased demands for exorcisms, which; as the movie itself suggested can be more damaging then helpful.

As such, *'The Exorcist'* had the same effect as *'The Passion of the Christ'* in that it was able to bring religion back into the current consciousness and revive what had been regarded as archaic and non-applicable to modern life. The evil in the world was manifested into this one image of an innocent young girl possessed by this demon/devil. The movie makes the viewer question their own faith and beliefs, both those with or without any. As with *'The Passion of the Christ'*, the controversy surrounding the film is less about the content, but what people actually bring to it. Movies and film are targeted as the catalysts of what they can provoke, much less than what they really contain.



Agnes of God

'I know your tribulation and your poverty.'

"Nobody is interested in sending a nun to prison."¹⁹ – ***'Agnes of God'***(1985) [dir-Norman Jewson] (also the director of ***'Jesus Christ Superstar'***). Jane Fonda plays Dr. Martha Livingston, a court appointed psychiatrist, assigned to the case of a nun who is being accused of killing her newborn baby after it is found in her wastepaper basket. Livingston encounters the Mother Superior, played by Anne Bancroft, who has Agnes's best interests at heart, seeing the intrusion of Fonda as unnecessary and possibly harmful to Agnes. As the story unfolds, we see Agnes as a naive 'Child of God' who; in light of childhood abuse from her own mother, has a distorted view and take on the world.

The movie fails to answer the question of whether Agnes actually had sex to become pregnant or if it was indeed an immaculate conception, but presents the idea of miracles and other explanations entirely objectively. Released in 1985, it is an adaptation of the stage play of the same name from 1982. It addresses and questions human morality, and the idea of faith and science; be it that also of the loss of faith. This is a good example of a movie addressing social issues of the time, incorporating the theme of religion in view of the wider cultural context. The representation of women in religion and the roles they play in current climates is questioned and shown within the movie, touching upon gender and sexuality.

Again, this film differs from the other movies mentioned so far. There was no widespread controversy with its release however, yet the film does present another take on religion and film through its social discourse. Grossing \$26m²⁰, *Agnes* was a moderate hit in the US. in a time when church attendance was reaching new lows in the 1980's *self-interest* society. Indeed, the movie itself presents Jane Fonda's character as a lapsed catholic, arguing the cause for science against that of faith and miracles. During her investigation, Dr. Livingstone becomes to understand just how isolated Agnes is, having been sheltered her early life by her mother. Upon her death, she is taken into the convent where she remained until the present incident.

In the report to the authorities, Agnes is to have given birth one evening and then strangled the child, hiding the body in the wastepaper basket in her room. As the tale unfolds, we find a cover-up with many people knowing of her pregnancy beforehand (Despite Agnes's own ignorance to the fact), and that the mother superior is actually a relation of Agnes. The movie presents the ideas of miracles and divine conception, asking the audience to open their minds on the possibility of miracles. This is

¹⁹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088683/quotes>

²⁰ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=1985&p=.htm> – box office source

reinforced at the end of the film when the case is closed, we are never made aware of who the father actually is, despite suspicions being thrown to all within the text.

The film presents a stoic view of the church. Although Mother Miriam Ruth (Bancroft) is not the typical tyrannical Mother Superior, having shown to have had a life before the covenant in the form of a job, husband and family; the teachings of the church and the representations it has on the community is presented as being traditional. There is the unflattering view of the male authority figures within the church establishment that are less than helpful, and instead are quite openly hostile. The image of woman, in representation to religion is very interesting in regard to this picture.

The suppression of woman within Christianity has been noted for years. From the very image of the Virgin Mary, who passively accepted her *Immaculate Conception* to the phallogentric writings of the Bible, the docility of women is supported further in the film. Here, we have many images of women. From the Mother Superior who, although traditional, is caring and concerned for Agnes while abiding to the rules of the church which even she at times is conflicted by. Jane Fonda, who as the lapsed catholic, brings science to the table only to discover the power of faith and how it can comfort people and offer them hope. The issue of detachment (of faith) and the idea of science answering religious questions is and was a contemporary issue to tackle.

Also, Agnes herself, despite being the vessel for 'God's love', represents the naivety and pureness of one who embraces God and religion. It questions the role of motherhood and the role women play in society that doesn't have to be based on their sex or gender positions.

This is very much a film about woman as much as it is about religion, and it is the relationship the two have within the text which makes it interesting and thought provoking. In terms of audience and perhaps target-ability, it functions on a level that opens the film up to further areas of society. The genderless association of religion in its 'basic' form does have universal appeal, but when you delve deeper, it is obvious to see the distinctions and separation in regard to gender and how this is reinforced by the religious doctrines. '**Agnes of God**' helps to widen the appeal and effects religion within film can have by representing and targeting overlooked areas of the audience. The notion of 'Avoidance/Caution', which I will go into detail later, seems to be applicable here with the church shying away and trying to cover up less positive images of itself.

Like the opening quote, nobody wants to see a nun stand trial or go to jail, no-one wants to see the pillar of religion seem to have its cracks. It's an ugly view and suggests the depravity that society has stooped to. It is Dr. Livingstone's persistence to uncover the truth and help the young girl that suggests that harsh realities need to be confronted in order for others not to suffer. In this case, the religion

presented in the film is hugely important in reflecting societies' needs, and presents what needs to be altered and rectified in the wider context of society; not just these individuals.



Temptation

'And I saw a beast rising out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads.'

*'Universal is like Judas Iscariot', 'Jewish money, Jewish Money', 'Don't crucify Christ again' and 'The greatest story ever distorted'*²¹ are examples of signs brandished by picketers outside Universal Studios California prior to the release of Martin Scorsese's ***'The Last temptation of Christ'*** (1988). The outcry against the film was like nothing ever seen before, ranging from mere disapproval, to threats against those who worked at, and for, Universal. Based on Nikos Kazantzakis' novel, it tells the story of Jesus Christ using the gospel of Mark as a guideline of the crucifixion, and the Gospel of Matthew with the temptation by Satan.

It continues by presenting Jesus struggling with the temptations of a regular life with a wife and family, and one of the hallucinations he (Jesus) has whilst on the cross. It presents Jesus as a man and not the son of God at some points, tempted by lust, fear and doubt. Williem Defoe stars as Jesus in the film version of the novel. Kazantzakis was ex-communicated from the Greek Orthodox Church as a result of his writings. The book was banned by the Vatican and denounced across the United States for its blasphemous content and supposed atheist theme. It was also banned in some libraries and schools.

The controversies began, and stemmed from, fundamentalists and religious zealots of the far Right who were leaked a copy of the script before the movie had gone into production. A campaign of letter writing, phone campaigns, street protests and radio broadcasts aimed at MCA (Universal's joint/parent company at the time) began, calling for the movie to be scrapped which swept across America. The first stage of campaigning was successful as the original \$15-20m budgeted movie was to be made at Paramount. Scorsese later made a deal with Universal, when Paramount pulled out, in which to offer a commercial movie (in this case a remake of ***'Cape Fear'***) first before making the now \$10m lighter version of the *'Temptation'*.

In a move to reassure the public and play down the controversy, Universal set up a liaison with prominent spokespersons for the campaigns (Rev Donald Wildman from the *'American Family Association'* and Bill Bright from *'Campus crusade'* among others) with a screening of the finished movie. It did not go well, with all those invited being disgusted with the movie and calling for a boycott of MCA. Controversial (they argued) points in the film were images of: Christ kissing men on the lips, the use of the name Jehovah, being tortured by the voice of God and constructing wooden crosses used for crucifixions for the Romans. The main scene that seemed to cause the most problems was one which depicted Jesus having sex with Mary Magdalene who, in the movie, he marries. Within the

²¹ <http://books.google.com/> - The New Censors By Charles Lyons

context of the film it is merely husband and wife having sexual relations, (as some would point out, the church is happy to endorse for the growth of families), but the 'defilement' of this image of Christ; along with questioning his divinity, was too much:

*"The issue is not whether **'The Last temptation of Christ'** can be shown, but whether such a film should be shown..... With **'The Last temptation of Christ'**, Hollywood is assaulting the Christian community in way it would never dare assault the black community, the Jewish community or the Gay community....Christians, America's unfashionable majority, may be mocked; their preachers parodied in book and on film; their faith maybe displayed as superstitious folly."*²²

Pat Buchanan – Philadelphia: Inquirer

Universal remained unshaken though, and stood by Martin Scorsese, releasing an open letter to the press justifying it's right to make and release the movie and quoted America's First Amendment: "...protects the right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression from government interference"²³. The same day, protesters picketed MCA headquarters with banners and shouting demands on MCA. Universal were offered \$10m for the negatives of the movie by the 'Campus Crusade' and Bill Bright who wanted to burn the negatives to 'save' people from: "...blasphemous attack on Christ's divinity, climaxing with a salacious sex scene"²⁴. When the movie was finally released in nine selected cities in America, protesters would also picket movie halls. When it came to the expansion of the film, selective cities opted to ban the film independently.

The protesting was effective, *Edwardss* theaters who operated 150 sites, and *UA + General Cinemas* who owned 3,500 refused to screen the picture. This was all outside any official censorship, as the movie had received an MPAA certification of an R rating. Despite much critical praise for the film (see below), and an Oscar nomination for best director, the movie was overshadowed and thusly sunk by the controversy surrounding it.

" And yet, despite such maladroitness moments, "The Last Temptation of Christ" finally exerts enormous power. What emerges most memorably is its sense of absolute conviction, never more palpable than in the final fantasy sequence that removes Jesus from the cross and

²² <http://books.google.com/> - The New Censors By Charles Lyons

²³ http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex/First_amendment

²⁴ <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/72>

creates for him the life of an ordinary man....Anyone who questions the sincerity or seriousness of what Mr. Scorsese has attempted need only see the film to lay those doubts to rest.”²⁵

Janet Maslin – New York Times (Aug 12, 1988)

In the UK, 1,870 letters arrived at the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) calling for the film to be banned. To ban the movie in the UK would archive the film in the same league as other ‘video nasty’ titles (a campaign/term spearheaded by *The Sun* newspaper which sensationalized real life stories as a result of or link to movies) around the same time. As the movie was directed by one of America’s prominent directors, and received glowing critical reviews, the BBFC passed the movie as an 18 certification uncut. This did not stop pressure groups attacking the movie, threatening to use archaic Blasphemy laws** to officially get the movie removed and banned. Blockbuster video refused to carry the title when it was released on VHS, and still refused to stock the title even up until its demise.

It was banned in many countries due to its content, and those where it was screened saw violence erupt in extreme cases (in France petrol bombs were used in cinemas showing the movie). The movie still receives complaints when aired on television today, again pointing to the fact that individual interpretations of the Bible are not encourage or accepted by those with deep religious beliefs. This type of ignorance does not allow ideas and notions of religion to move with the contemporary feelings or understandings of a society, keeping the bible and religion locked in its historical position; and yet trying to apply it to today’s climate (A further example of this is the creation VS evolution debate). The movie is currently banned in the following countries: South Africa, Philippines, and Singapore.²⁶

The power to make people react this way lies in cinema’s ability to connect with audiences and to push their buttons. Whether good or bad, *‘The Last temptation of Christ’* had an extreme effect on certain people. Arguably it was the fundamentalists who took the most issue with the movie, but through their media campaigns they were able to rally round everyday people to support their view. Scorsese does not pander to the audience in the movie but presented the text not in a sensational way, but one in which offers a different view for the audience to take on board and make their own interpretation of.

²⁵ <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=940DE3DC123BF931A2575BC0A96E948260>

²⁶ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095497/trivia>

** Blasphemy laws were abolished in the UK in 2008 after somewhat of a revival in the 1990’s. The laws only protected Christians, with the last jail sentence in 1922. In 1979 Mary Whitehouse successfully campaigned for a homosexual poem about Jesus in the magazine/journal ‘Gay news’ to be banned. The laws encompassed anything that Christians deemed ‘ludicrous’ and as such blasphemous. Other notable instances include Salman Rushdie’s ‘*Satanic verses*’ and the *Jerry Springer Opera*.

'The Passion of the Christ', though controversial, was never loathed to the extent as ***'Temptation'*** was. It was able to manipulate the media and controversy and turned it around becoming a must see 'event' movie. ***'Temptation'***, although not a massive failure at the box office, was unsuccessful financially; its initial run failed to retrieve back its budget in box office receipts. An example where controversy did not equal interest at the box office. Though you could argue it was never seen at its inception to be a money-making movie, but more of a passion project for the director. Despite the disclaimer at the start of the movie where Scorsese outlines the movie as fictitious (see *fig viii*), many people were offended and showed their disgust loudly and violently to an alternative image of the 'son of God'.

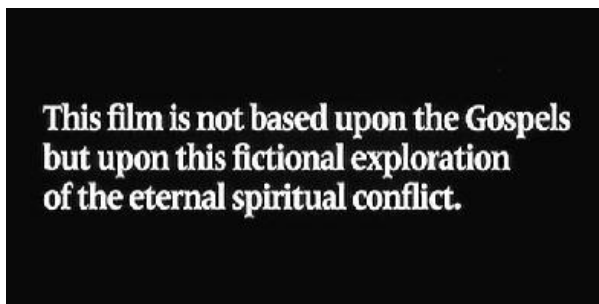


fig viii

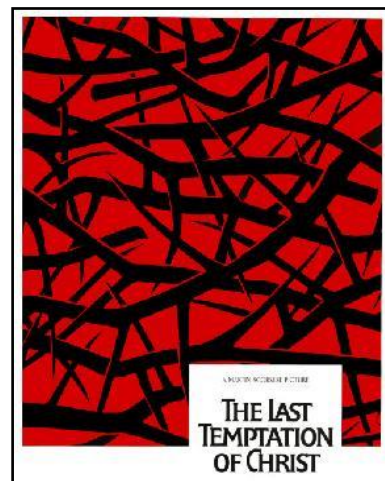


fig ix



Case study

*'And they worshipped the beast saying:
"Who is like the beast and who can fight against the beast?"'*

I

Having focused on the films individually and their relation to *'The Passion of the Christ'*, hopefully it has been shown how movies of certain content can create reactions within the public that are both positive and negative, and more to the point; of an extreme nature. Most of these pictures are older in relation to *'The Passion of the Christ'*, Martin Scorsese's *'Temptation'* being the latest example, released in 1988. I specifically chose the movies in this way, placing them between the end of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1990's. This was because it gives a broader range to the films and their historical context's yet keeping them more contemporary (in the latter half of the 20th century). It is also useful however when looking at movies from a contemporary perspective as it allows incorporation of modern ideas and understandings.

The research, and specifically the reviews, used in this paper have been from around the time of the film's releases, and there has been a consistency with the reviews/sources used. For the case study, a questionnaire was devised²⁷ and given out to a small group of people. The group were asked to view one of the selected films and fill in a questionnaire. This type of empirical evidence would hopefully gain an insight to contemporary views on the films from a varied selection of viewers.

With mass communication the idea of *encoding* and *decoding* images/messages is an important factor in understanding texts (re: Stuart Hall)²⁸. *Reception theory* also tries to explain the relationship between the 'Reader' and the 'Text'.

*"...the process of reading is not one in which the reader and the text meet as abstractions, but rather one in which an intertextuality organized reader meets an intertextuality organized text' within a historically and culturally specific context. Text, context and reader all play vital roles in shaping interpretations."*²⁹

- Tony Bennett – *Reception theory and audience research*

With encoding and decoding, meanings are attached to images, words and visual elements. The 'communicative event', in this case a film, is placed within a context in which to be consumed. A film will connote a certain ideology; for example, those of the studio and the director. The audience who

²⁷ This can be found with the Bibliography at the end of the paper

²⁸ Media and cultural studies – pg 163

²⁹ Reinventing Film Studies – pg 166

consume the film will denote either this or another ideology or set of interpretations. The dominant or preferred readings designed by the director may be lost once the movie leaves the moment of production and enters into general release. If we view *'The Last temptation of Christ'* as an example, Martin Scorsese implied the movie was a none-offensive, alternative interpretation of the story of Christ, and not specifically from a Gospel of the Bible.

This was his *dominant* or *preferred* reading of the text for the audience. But, by using codes and conventions of religious images, which themselves have been encoded already (for years by the church), the use of the universal codes and ones steeped in religious dogma in a different context, has failed to come across to the audience. They have read a different message from the ones intended and have thusly become offended by them.

Reception theory suggests that the historical contexts of the (in this case) movie further affects the consumption of the text. For example, as stated previously, *'The Exorcist'* was released in 1973 in America, around the time of the Watergate scandal with Richard Nixon and the problems arising from the Vietnam War, not to mention the civil rights movement and general sense of disassociation. This environment of unease and disillusionment can, and probably did, effect the population and their reactions to a movie which is intended to disturb and unsettle.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, used with reception theory, it can be said that people bring other attributes and meanings to and from the movies they go to see. This is helpful in light of the small case study involving the questionnaires and the movies already discussed.

II

'It opened its mouth to utter blasphemous words against God.'

As already mentioned, the research was only on a small scale. I hoped to get a brief glimpse at contemporary reactions to the movies focused upon and to see if they presented similar ideas touched upon in the research. I used around ten people of mixed attributes and backgrounds; and then asked them to view one movie and give feedback in the form of a questionnaire. From a research point of view, the case study is flawed in some ways due to the construction of the questions, movies used, and of the individuals involved. What I really wanted though was general feedback in light of the research attained on my own and some audience interaction that I could see for myself. These were my findings:

All but one person believed in God. None went to Church regularly. Majority were of Christian faith. And all enjoyed the movies they saw, admitting they wouldn't have chosen to view them on their own.

- | | |
|--|--|
| Jesus Christ Superstar - | <i>Thought the film was progressive and realistic. Felt it opened up the story of Jesus more and made it more emotionally engaging. Did feel the representation of women was still that of second class citizens. <u>Did not take offense to any religious portrayals.</u></i> |
| The Exorcist - | <i>Felt the church was represented badly despite being the tool to vanquish evil. Again, women seen to rely on men to be 'saved' and also the cause of the horrors. <u>Did not take offense to any religious portrayals.</u></i> |
| Agnes of God - | <i>Liked the idea of science versus religion, and the representation of the processes of the church. Felt it showed the church in a truthful light, and that of brainwashing and old fashioned. Mixed representation of female characters as realistic. <u>Did not take offense to any religious portrayals.</u></i> |
| The Last Temptation of Christ - | <i>An enjoyable telling of the Christ story, overdone in parts. Interesting in a different portrayal of Jesus. Good to get another perspective. <u>Did not take offense to any religious portrayals.</u></i> |

Though on a small scale, it was interesting to see; predominantly, if anyone took offense to the images represented. Although disturbed by some of the images in the horror movie, none were moved to be outraged or disgusted by any portrayal of Jesus or anything else. Indeed, I got the feeling that from a contemporary perspective, those of the more religiously inclined welcomed any feature film in relation to Christianity.

I was glad all enjoyed the movies despite admitting they probably wouldn't have selected them for themselves to view on their own. I did not screen *'The Passion of the Christ'*, for the reason stated before of the criteria of context (historical). Though the responses were limited, and the overall questionnaire was flawed (stated above), the focus seemed to shift away from the messages or readings of the film and moved more into being about the entertainment factor. Obviously, this is an overarching intent for movies, but it was interesting to note that in the context of entertainment, little offense was taken in regarding the portrayals of religion. Indeed, it seemed to me they were viewed through the lens of 'only a movie' as opposed to a call to arms or anything deeper.



Conclusion: Hollywood's contrition

*'Then, I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
and I heard a great voice from the throne saying...'*

Having started this paper asking the question '*How and why is religion successful within film?*', it seems many things need to come together for a movie to move out of regular religious circles to be culturally important, and that there are also a number of films which successfully use religion and theology to a moderate extent in entertaining and informing. '***The Passion of the Christ***' was a phenomenon around the world, and specifically in the United States, by capitalizing on its controversy and media attention. It also offered the audience something different: a foreign language film using special effects and copious amounts of gore and violence to tell the story of the crucifixion. By seeking an approval from the church, it was able to tap into a large populace of potential cinema goers to earn huge amounts of money.

It was also able to change the tact of the church's stance on religion and film, that of either 'Avoidance or Caution' regarding movies that are not made by themselves (though increasingly done), maybe be narrow-minded. Indeed, by suggesting either films should be avoided and banned in view of their representation of Jesus and the church, or caution cinema goers to the un-sanctioned views of some movies seems a fundamentally flawed approach.

The film also spoke to people outside the constraints of organized religion, offering a 'spiritual' experience by showing the suffering of one man against an authoritative force. It is hard to read the reactions to those who do operate outside the 'organized' system of religion, but judging from the admissions for '*The Passion*', many people seemed to have been affected by the movie in some way; and those outside any organized state.

'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy, for the time is near.'

"The [movies] are the organ of the devil, the idol of sinners, the sink of infamy, the stumbling block of human progress, the moral cancer of civilization, the Number One Enemy of Jesus Christ."³⁰ Hyman Appleman, Evangelist writing in the late 1940's. The Church thankfully has moved on from this way of thinking. Now, movies are used as religious tools in order to teach as well as entertain. Mormons, for example have successfully moved into the feature film market, producing a number of films that have achieved moderate box office success (for example, *'The Omega code'* [1999]).

Others have tried to capitalise on Passion's initial success such as the release of *'The Nativity story'* (2006) [Catherine Hardwicke]. Even *'The Passion'* was re-released a year after it opened, hoping to become an annual event (with little success however). What has finally happened, it seems, is the loosening of the Church's control over the representation of itself and that of Jesus Christ. It's seems more tolerant to progressive or different portrayals than those just of the Bible. Sadly, I fear this is because of the money involved and how lucrative such movies can be. Still, religion is an important area in both the wider context of society and in film and will probably continue to be until the second coming.

'I am the alpha and the omega. The first and the last. The beginning and the end.

Amen'



³⁰ Hyman Appleman – The Religion and film reader – pg 314

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1. ¹ King James Bible – Revelations 1:3
2. ¹ http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html + <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/religion/> + http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/rel_chu_att-religion-church-attendance + - figures specifically for 2005 to present.
3. ¹ <http://business.pearlanddean.com/marketdata/admissions.html>
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7. ¹ The Religion and film reader – pg343
8. ¹ http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/2004/02/24/2004-02-24_gore_s_the_crime_of__passion.html
9. ¹ <http://www.tldm.org/News6/PassionOfChrist.htm>
10. **This is not drastically unusual with many American movies succeeding more so domestically than abroad. However, 'The Da Vinci code' (2006) [dir.Ron Howard], a more mainstream blockbuster but still religiously inspired, reversed this notion taking 70% of its revenues from the international market.*
11. ¹ <http://www.songmeanings.net/songs/view/126677/>
12. ¹ Interview on Jesus Christ Superstar [dvd], 2002 Universal
13. ¹ Press coverage at the time, theatre queues in America extract - http://74.125.77.132/search?q=cache:menIPvD9pUYJ:www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm%3Farticle_id%3D2320+the+exorcist+controversy&hl=en&strip=1
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23. ¹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095497/trivia>

- 24 ** Blasphemy laws were abolished in the UK in 2008 after somewhat of a revival in the 1990's. The laws only protected Christians, with the last jail sentence in 1922. In 1979 Mary Whitehouse successfully campaigned for a homosexual poem about Jesus in the magazine/journal 'Gay news' to be banned. The laws encompassed anything that Christians deemed 'ludicrous' and as such blasphemous. Other notable instances include Salman Rushdie's '*Satanic verses*' and the *Jerry Springer Opera*.
- 25 ¹ This can be found with the Bibliography at the end of the paper
- 26 ¹ Media and cultural studies – pg 163
- 27 ¹ Reinventing Film Studies – pg 166
- 28 ¹ Hyman Appleman – The Religion and film reader – pg 314

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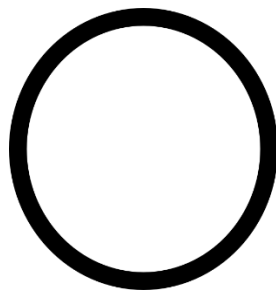
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