

Theology at the Movies:

Looking at Film Through the Lens of the Christian Worldview

#1: Introduction and Foundations for Studying Film

I. Importance of Movies in Our Culture

A. Movies are a Powerful Influence on our Culture

I think [the emperor] knows what Rome is. Rome is the mob. He will conjure magic for them and they will be distracted. He will take away their freedom, and still they will roar. The beating heart of Rome is not the marble of the Senate, it is the sand of the Colosseum. He will give them death, and they will love him for it.

—Senator Gracchus in *Gladiator*

B. Movies are a Powerful Reflection of our Culture

C. Thesis: People Love Movies because they love “Stories.” Movies provide the overarching, mythical “Story” which gives meaning and purpose to people’s lives.

As ironic modern worshippers, we congregate in the cinematic temple. We pay our votive offerings at the box office. We buy our ritual corn. We hush in reverent anticipation as the lights go down and the celluloid magic begins. Throughout the filmic narrative we identify with the hero. We vilify the antihero. We vicariously exult in the victories of the drama. And we are spiritually inspired by the moral of the story, all while believing we are modern techno-secular people, devoid of religion. Yet the depth and intensity of our participation reveal a religious fervor that is not much different from that of religious zealots.

—Geoffrey Hill, *Illuminating Shadows*

II. Misconceptions About Movies Among Christians

A. “All Movies are evil and should be avoided.”

Counterpoint: Movies, like other parts of culture, have both fallen characteristics and redeeming characteristics. Christians are free to enjoy film while using discernment and wisdom.

A. “Movies are just harmless entertainment.”

Counterpoint: We must not mindlessly and passively absorb movies, but must *intellectually and theologically engage* with movies, using caution and discernment about the potential negative impact of film.

B. “Christians have an obligation to watch movies to keep up with culture.”

Counterpoint: Although movies are a good way to engage the culture, Christians are not obligated to engage the world only in this way and should not be unduly pressed to do so. There are other ways to impact the world for Christ.

C. “The most harmful things in movies are sex, violence, and foul language.”

Counterpoint: Although moral issues—sex, violence, and foul language—are important issues to address, the greatest dangers in movies are the overall worldview that they promote. We are not just concerned about individual immoral acts promoted in film, but overall macro-truth claims that are promoted in film.

II. Framework for Approaching Film

A. Aesthetic Analysis: Was it a well-made Film?

Story/plot
Acting
Genre
Screenplay
Cinematography
Sounds
Music
Special effects

A. Worldview Analysis: What is its Message?

1. Message/elements that reflect the Christian worldview

- a. What are the elements of this film that reflect Christian truth?
- b. How are the true parts of the film dependent on a Christian view of reality?
- c. Are there images of Christ/salvation/redemption in this film?

2. Message/elements that reflect a fallen worldview

- a. Key Question: How does the movie reflect moral relativism and/or secular dogmatism
- b. Is the movie historically/factually accurate?
- c. In what ways does the film challenge/contradict the Christian worldview?
- d. In what ways is the movie inconsistent with itself and its own claims?

B. Personal Analysis: What impact has it made on me? What response should I have?

- a. How do I feel after seeing this movie? What does it make me want to do?
- b. In what ways is the personal impact of this film good? In what ways is it bad?