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LOOSE CANON ON DECK: HOW CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS REACT TO MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF FAITH, BELIEFS, AND RITUALS

by

MITCHELL L LEOPARD

Under the Direction of Timothy Renick

ABSTRACT

Throughout much of Christian history, the church had predominant control over religious ritual and belief. As early as the 1st Century, institutions representing "orthodoxy" were banning, forbidding or destroying the "heretical", separating it from what eventually would become canon and religious practice. The 21st Century provides new ways for spiritual knowledge to spread, bypassing traditional methods. Modern Martin Luthers can nail a manifesto to an internet door while the media's obsession with non-canonical texts provides no shortage of material for movies and television. A multi-media barrage challenges orthodox concepts and scriptural definition, often blurring the line between religion and entertainment. The initial clash between the churches and media has evolved over the last century to a point where the media may now produce beneficial results, educating many who may have either left the church or never joined it.

INDEX WORDS: Religious beliefs, Spirituality, The Da Vinci Code, The Passion of the Christ, Mass media, Movies, Jesus films, The cinema, Mel Gibson, Belief systems, Film history, Film industry, Religion, Christianity, Controversy

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MITCHELL L LEOPARD

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Master of Arts

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Students were discussing modern spirituality during a class at Georgia State University and considering what might be lacking in American Protestant religion today. The consensus was that there exists a lack of story telling, relaying stories which help the listener and the teller to remember where they have come from and where they are going in their faith. It was suggested that dialogue about such stories is what might be missing in today's church[a] environment. This verbal communication is analogous to the dialogue existing for centuries which allowed groups to share their beliefs and practices. This dialogue has been identified by various names including the oral tradition, tall tales, proverbs, myths, legends, and personal experiences, and was sometimes seen as the way Christians connected to their historical roots. This dialogue sometimes went on to become the myths, the legends, and even the movies of today. But for most of human existence, communication existed solely through speech. When the written word did emerge, it had the potential to change the one-on-one relationship existing between the story teller and the listener. The process of making written thoughts available to others became a turning point in human history. For centuries the stopping and/or controlling of the dissemination of the written word was important to the church in order to maintain authority. In the late 20th century, this control was lost. Even Pope John Paul II acknowledged the media's increasing significance in communication about religion:

> Since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a large extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications.[1]

---

[a] The word "Church" is, admittedly, a less than perfect term used here to refer to organized Christian groups and institutions representing an orthodox perspective. Because of this conflict I will spell "church" with a small "c" throughout.

The American public at large has witnessed constant improvement in the technology which affects how it communicates with its members. Moveable type, the printing press, telephone, television, film, the internet and other developments have each changed the way ideas are shared. Before this new technology, people often relied on the church to convey what was true, at least in regards to religion. The church was primarily responsible for explaining the Bible to Christian followers and declaring what they should believe. As the 20th century began, a challenger was emerging from the new technologies developing in the mass media: films, radio, television, popular books. This new media would begin to address religious events, sometimes interpreting what Christianity and the Bible had to say about various issues. In these forums, the Bible was presented in a new way which might sometimes conflict with what the church had to say.

I have chosen, for this thesis, to concentrate on films which address theological issues, such as Jesus' humanity and/or divinity, as well as political issues, such the Christian's role in society. I will consider how the media can affect and effect religious belief through its writings and productions; the truth or falsity of some of the media's claims; and the impact of the modern media on contemporary Christians' beliefs.

One of the questions I want to answer is whether the relatively mature film industry, a medium which could possibly modify beliefs of religious individuals, does so. I suggest some individuals can be convinced to believe some things previously not believed. I also want to consider if the church, which has guided and instructed for two millennia, can clearly define for Christians what it means to be Christian and whether the media can play a beneficial part in this effort. I will examine how members of one Protestant church in suburban Atlanta graded various media on how well they have dealt with religious issues. The process included the formation and delivery of a Questionnaire (Appendix C p 67. This survey of Berkmar United Methodist Church participants was conducted in December 2006 and January 2007).

This study begins, however, with an examination of relationships which developed between the film industry and religious groups throughout the 20th century. It examines the coexistence of the two groups, looking at how they were at odds as well as when they worked together. Since the church had been at the forefront of teaching religion, it would have plenty to say about the encroachment by 20th century filmmakers into the realm of Christianity.

CHAPTER TWO – THE PASSION OF THE CELLULOID

> In Paris in the winter of 1895 when the Lumiere Brothers projected a series of moving images to a paying audience for the very first time cinema was born. And it was one of the most dynamic and influential moments in cultural history.[2]

I can only imagine the thrill first-time film goers experienced: a special, magical moment, possibly even a religious experience. As a newborn, I was baptized in a movie theatre in 1948, which was not unusual since many churches held services in local theatres. My mother was the ticket seller at the theatre, which sat on the Maryland/Washington, D.C. border. For many years, after I was old enough, she would take me to work with her, the cinema providing an instant (and free) babysitter for her. I would sit in the back row, with a giant 10-cent bag of popcorn, watching several runs of the latest movie, cartoons, and for a short while, newsreels.

After high school (1966) I worked in radio and, happily, it seemed most "on-air" staff had an unlimited supply of free movie tickets. Those free tickets ended some time ago, but visits to the silver screen never did. It calls out, with frequent regularity, and I can understand the awe movie goers experienced over a century ago, anticipating the darkening of the room, a signal that untold sights and sounds (even live musicians) were soon to trigger the senses and the imagination.

It is also understandable that pioneering filmmakers would choose Biblical events as subject matter. Many of them knew the Bible. In fact, Jesus has never been far from the silver screen. Stories of His life, death, and resurrection are among the most powerful of images. If you asked people back then what they knew most about, they might have said religion and/or the Bible. It was representing these religious events, including the celluloid Jesus, which would create tension between filmmakers and religious groups. Some churches were suspicious of what Hollywood might do. Hollywood held an interest in stories represented in the Bible. Ted

Baehr, the Chairman of the Christian Film & Television Commission, recalled some of the early days for me.

> The early film industry was intricately related to the church. First Edison tried to give the patents for the motion picture camera to his local church, they refused it. The first radio station was at a church, the senior pastor kicked it out. But the church was a natural auditorium and the church had a compulsion to communicate the gospel. The story of the first few years of the movie industry is intricately involved in the church.[3]

The movie industry was convinced it could present a great Biblical story despite efforts by some in the church to keep it out of that arena. In the beginning (no pun intended), from 1895 to 1900, eight out of the first ten one-reel films had the word "passion" in the title.[b] (A Passion play is defined as a traditional play about Jesus' death.) Since those early days, hundreds of films, TV shows, and documentaries have been produced. It has been suggested that many more people worldwide have come to learn about Christianity and the historical Jesus through movies than any other modern media. I will comment on just a few films, many considered the "blockbusters" of their age.

There are several types of films which deal with religious issues. The classification system I prefer is one put together by Matthew Page who works with Open Heaven in the United Kingdom. He also writes course material on the study of religious films and is a frequent provider of material to the *Faith and Film Critic Circle* which discusses and reviews religious films. He divides religious films of interest into three categories; 1. Old Testament/Hebrew Bible Films, 2. Jesus Films (which include Passion films), and 3. Other New Testament Films.

From the Manger to the Cross (1912) was the first feature-length movie (70 minutes) made about the life of Christ. With location filming in Palestine and Egypt, this film was a huge success. The film company made money, and the public appeared to sanction, by buying tickets, this new way of presenting the Bible.

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[b] See Appendix 'A' - Early Christian Films 1897 – 1928 p. 55.

One of North America's most famous film pioneers was D.W. Griffith, whose classic, *The Birth of a Nation (*1915*)*, portrayed the Ku Klux Klan in a heroic way after the Civil War (much to the chagrin of the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).[c] One year later, Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) examined bigotry through the eyes of four separate individuals, one of them Jesus Christ. *Intolerance*, like *The Passion of the Christ* eighty-eight years later, did much to provoke Jews and others over anti-Semitism. Both films were strongly criticized for laying Christ's crucifixion at the hands of Hebrew priests and officials. Abraham Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, commented on Griffith's film: "... the issue there was the depiction of Jews on the screen. Again you have a population that's not literate but goes to movies. This is the vehicle of communication. And some of these scenes depicting Jews were in the classical stereotypic Middle Ages caricatures."[4]

Jewish groups made suggestions of how to avoid anti-Semitism. They asked that extra script cards be inserted into the film which might educate movie-goers that not all Jewish leaders and Pharisees were hypocrites.[d] Examples of these cards, called Intertitles, follow:

> (After brief shots showing men seated along a deserted street, one Intertitle reads :)
>
> Certain hypocrites among the Pharisees.
> Pharisee – A learned Jewish party, the name possibly
> brought into disrepute by hypocrites among them.
>
> (The next sequence illustrates this hypocrisy with a focus on two men dressed in Traditional fashion, heads covered, for prayer. One of them prays publicly and Ostentatiously:)
>
> "Oh Lord, I thank thee that I am better than other men." ... "Amen."[5]

B'nai B'rith, another Jewish organization, complained that during the filming, Jews were actually depicted as taking part in the crucifixion.[6]

---

[c] A considerable amount of data concerning various aspects of many of the films to be discussed in this thesis is sourced, initially, from the Internet Movie Database. (http://www.IMDb.com) This material is used with their permission.

[d] These "Intertitle Cards" were held up during the film. The cards serve as dialogue or information for the viewer.

They were not alone in wanting changes. Temperance groups also raised concerns. Prohibition (1920) was only three years away and these groups wanted less alcohol shown on screen. Even the scene where Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding party in Cana of Galilee (John II. 1-11) was targeted.[7] The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had as its goal the protection of children. They wanted to keep younger viewers from getting addicted to movies and joined a growing number of organizations which sought censorship of the industry. For the film *Intolerance* Griffith did make quite a number of changes. It is not possible today to know if there was a connection between the poor box office results and the religious protests which were made, but the movie fared poorly with the public.

In 1915, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to extend First Amendment protection to films,[e] and in 1916, both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Protestant Episcopal Church passed resolutions urging Congress to adopt film censorship.[8] D.W. Griffith became an outspoken advocate for artistic freedom in his fight against censorship and for the life of his industry.

In 1913, Cecil B. DeMille, along with Sam Goldwyn and Jesse Lasky, rented a barn to make what they hoped would be Hollywood's first feature-length movie. It was the beginning of Paramount Studios. DeMille's name would become synonymous with biblical blockbusters, as well as with the friction between the church and the film industry. DeMille directed over 50 Paramount films in the first 10 years, but his first Biblical film, *The Ten Commandments* (1923/silent), would best illustrate the power of Biblical story-telling. His showmanship was exhibited in the thousands of extras, spectacular set pieces, and the parting of the Red Sea made famous in both *Ten Commandments* versions (1923 and 1956). His Egyptian City set (used in the 1923 version), was the largest ever constructed in movie history, and remains buried in California sand dunes (now partially uncovered). In 1927 DeMille's, *King of Kings* was released. Jeffrey Hunter played Christ and for the first time spoke the words of Jesus in a motion picture. It sold out everywhere, and DeMille proclaimed later in his 1959 autobiography that 800 million

[e] In Mutual Film Corporation of Missouri v. The Industrial Commission of Ohio, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 1/23/1915 that Mutual was a business not an art form.

people had seen his movie, so "probably more people have been told the story of Jesus of Nazareth through *King of Kings* than through any other single work, except the Bible itself."[9]

The 1920s witnessed the church in a major revolt against the film industry, whose stars were involved in numerous Hollywood scandals. The church used this opportunity to tell parishioners to avoid certain movies. Pulpit-dictated censorship was something the film industry took seriously. If Hollywood lost the church-going audience, the industry's survival could be at risk. So they took action, seen as cleaning up their own act, when they formed an industry-wide regulatory board. Directed by devout Presbyterian Elder and former Postmaster General Will Hays, the Production Code of 1930 was forged.[f] This "code" would set standards of morality in film. It would define, through 12 categories, what could be seen, heard, and implied on the silver screen in regards to sex, violence, religion (condemning, for instance, blasphemy), language, clothing and other matters. When fully established in 1934, both the church and the industry hoped "the code" would provide a way to control amoral excesses.

Filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille was, however, not the type to follow orders. In 1932, he challenged the tenets of the impending code with his new feature *The Sign Of The Cross*. Father Peter Malone, a spokesman for the World Catholic Association's Communication Division, gave some insight into DeMille's Christian character. "I think DeMille was a very upfront Christian having presented the story of Jesus (and) then got interested in the early history of the church, which lends itself... to spectacle with all the martyrdom scenes."[10]

The *Sign Of The Cross* dealt with the experiences of Christian persecution under the Roman Emperor Nero. The film had many sensational and shocking images, including the throwing of nude Christians to the lions and a so-called "lesbian dance." The industry's new watchdog saw the film and told DeMille the dance would have to go. Will Hays was not seen as a strong leader. DeMille refused to make the required changes. The film premiered unscathed, but the Hays Code eventually did grow teeth and plenty of footage was relegated to cutting room

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[f] See The Production Code of 1930, Appendix 'B' p. 57.

floors. When *The Sign of the Cross* was re-released in 1944, viewers were presented with a much altered film. DeMille had not given in to pressures to drop Ancaria's seductive dance in an orgy scene, but he changed many other scenes regarded as too gruesome. These scenes are now available in a restored original version.[11] The Hays Code remained for 34 years, but in 1967 it was replaced by the MPAA film rating system.

The film industry was soon to face a new rival from within the ranks of the media, and this new guy in town, television, had the potential to destroy it. Hollywood's answer to the challenge came via technology. When *The Robe* came out in 1953, it was produced in Cinemascope, providing an even larger screen for epic viewing. [g]

Now that World War II was over, Hollywood wanted to forge ahead. If their new wide screen was not to lose out t0 television broadcasting, they needed more (and bigger) movies. DeMille suggested that even though WWII was over, the threat of communism was not, choosing to remake *The Ten Commandments* in order to provide a forum to engage public concern over Soviet Russia. DeMille narrated the new film (1956) and explained some of his own religious philosophy on film before the actual movie began.

> Now ladies and gentlemen, young and old, this may seem an unusual procedure speaking to you before the picture begins. But we have an unusual subject. The theme of this picture is whether men are to be ruled by God's law or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Rameses. Are men the property of the State or are they free souls under God?[12]

DeMille's comments were followed by the National Anthem. *The Ten Commandments* was, for DeMille, the Cold War analogy he wanted it to be, and it became the biggest, most expensive, analogy ever made. Shot entirely in Egypt, the 1956 version cost thirteen and a half million dollars. DeMille was quite agreeable to accepting the suggestion he was the only man to part the

---

[g] Cinemascope was advertised as enlarging the width so as to give a panoramic view which the human eye normally enjoys.

Red Sea more times than God.[h] Box office receipts to date, adjusted to 2007, are over $838 million dollars, making it the fifth highest grossing film in history. *The Passion of the Christ* is the only religious movie to surpass it. In 1999, the United States Library of Congress deemed *The Ten Commandments* to have great cultural significance, and selected it for preservation in the National Film Registry.

Had there been an unmentioned truce between the church and Hollywood during the early Cold War days? Possibly, but if people had been willing to accept interpretations of Christianity's Holy Book so far, the 1960s would soon change that, challenging baby boomers' understanding of the Bible. Considering DeMille's on-screen comments in *The Ten Commandments*, one might ask if religion on screen was becoming a political tool.

Film producer George Stevens would attempt to clarify some historical events with his 1960s treatment of the New Testament. Some of the motives were revealed by his filmmaker-son George Jr. who claimed his father wanted the Jesus story retold for the newer generations, while also dealing with the anti-Semitic question.

> The story of Jesus had always been kind of a subtext of anti-Semitism and that the Jews were Christ killers. None of that was based on scholarly interpretation of the Old or New Testament. He wanted to take the mischief out of the story by taking that anti-Semitism out.[13]

To suggest his father wanted to produce a movie because he felt Jews were given a raw deal in the past was significant. The film was *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, and although begun in 1961, the three-hour epic did not debut until 1964. The film dealt with Jesus' life from birth to crucifixion. One big problem for Stevens was how to represent Jesus on screen, a problem for each generation of filmmakers. While more than 50 films have been produced depicting a "Jesus," none so far has been played by a Jewish actor. Ironically, Steven's "reel" Jesus was blond Swedish actor, Max von Sydow, made to look more Semitic for the picture. Father Peter Malone, President of the Catholic Association for Communication, said, "I look forward to the

---

[h] Comments by Film Biographer and Historian Robert Birchfield and used in the Channel 4 (Britain) documentary *The Passions: Film, Faith, & Fury*. 2006

day when there will be a more authentic, Semitic looking and sounding, Jesus in that kind of context."[14]

The 1960s can be said to have been a very busy period for popular culture and change in America. Vietnam was on the mind of many teenaged American males, the civil rights movement was continuing with some successes, and baby boomers were beginning to influence the cultural changes seen in the second half of the 20th century. The evolution of the religious-content moviemakers would be no different, creating new ways of examining religion on screen.

European filmmaker Pier Pablo Pasolini's black and white film *The Gospel According to Matthew* was an example of the 1960s change. Pasolini was an atheist and Marxist, but the concepts of the sacred and the divine intrigued him. Two years earlier he had responded to a Papal request for non-Christian artists to come to the Vatican. Pasolini agreed, and while he was there read the Gospels, concluding that the story of Jesus was "the most exalting thing one can read." Pasolini felt the Gospel of Matthew best represented Jesus' understanding of people and the poor, and two years later, his film *The Gospel According to Matthew* would present a different way to visualize Jesus. First, he would return to black and white films. Then Pasolini would do what no modern filmmaker had done before, using scriptural text of the Gospel of Matthew as his screenplay. This style actually was coming into vogue among biblical scholars, and would flourish "...alongside the 'second' and 'third' quests for the historical Jesus. 'Redaction criticism' became the name for the discipline that studies how each Gospel writer had redacted – or edited – the received tradition about Jesus in order to identify the theological viewpoint of the individual writer."[15] At least two other films, both converted from stage plays, have used this method, namely *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell.*

In 1973, the first cinematic religious musical *Godspell* (Old English for "gospel") was released, while during the same year Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice were attaching superstar status to Jesus Christ in a "rock opera." Both films would offer believers a new way to look at Christianity and the Bible. Both reflected the youth culture of the time. Both would also

present conflicts and problems associated with a physical relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. *Jesus Christ Superstar* would maintain the story line in the deserts of Israel, while *Godspell* would adapt the story to a New York City scenario. Father Peter Malone of the World Catholic Association recalls of the era: "For many of us, the mid 70's Jesus came very much alive through Jesus Christ Superstar."[16] Sister Rose Pacatte, who directs the Pauline Center for Media Studies in California, said *Superstar* connected many young people to their time. "It was so much of the seventies you know with the hairstyles and everything. I thought it was believable and I thought it was moving, and I could see where you could've touched some people very deeply."[17] The Director of *Superstar*, Norman Jewison, said the theme song itself was exhilarating. "You've got Judas in that 'black panther' power outfit with the giant afro, kind of huge flares...dancing around with his background singers and... spotlights are swirling round."[18] Both films also reflect on another writing of the time; Marshall McLuhan's Understanding Media. [19] His theory that the "medium is the message" was never more obvious than in the presentation of these two films. W. Barnes Tatum said the successes of such differing portrayals of Jesus might stem "... more from 'how' the Jesus story is told instead of 'what' the story is about."[20] A third musical cinematic presentation was released in 1973. Presented more as a documentary, country music star Johnny Cash produced *The Gospel Road: A Story of Jesus* after his conversion to Christianity in 1967/8.[21] His wife June Carter Cash played the role of Mary Magdalene.

That same year, others might have reconsidered attending church after experiencing the fight between good and evil within a 12-year-old girl. While not exactly Biblical, this film dealt with the spiritual message of redemption, the devil, and the problems of faith two priests were experiencing while trying to remove demons from a child.

The movie was *The Exorcist*, based on William Peter Blatty's 1971 book. I did not get to see the film when it premiered, but I interviewed Mercedes McCambridge while she was on a promotional tour. Mrs. McCambridge provided the raspy voice for Regan MacNeil's (Linda

Blair) possessor-demon "Pazuzu" in the film which she reprised in my darkened studio when it was least expected. The hairs on the back on my neck and arms stood straight up, and it took a few seconds to catch my breath and for the color to return to my face. Dr. Marc Newman of *MovieMinistry.com* told me he even heard "pastors talk about their conversion experience coming through watching a film like *The Exorcist* as being very, very scared and seeking God."[22] *The Exorcist* might have been seen as a catalyst to potential church goers sitting on the fence.

The next major "Jesus film" was a made-for-television presentation in 1977. The man credited with influencing British independent television more than any other was Russian Jewish immigrant Lew Grade (not his birth name) who ran ITC Entertainment (a British studio and production company). After a successful career, Grade was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1976.[23] One year later, he came up with the concept for *Jesus of Nazareth* after meeting Pope Paul VI and promising to produce a new program on the life of Jesus.[24] Grade hired Italian opera's Franco Zeffirelli to direct the project which "... many still consider to be the finest Jesus-story film ever made."[25] Its large audience was no doubt helped by a Papal blessing from Vatican Square, Easter morning 1977, when the Pope prayed that all would go home and watch *Jesus of Nazareth* on television. Zeffirelli called his movie "an instrument of missionary penetration throughout the world."[26] In Italy alone the estimate was that 80% to 83% of the population watched the series.[27] "*Jesus of Nazareth* was clearly proof the media could provide a major evangelistic impact to the world."[28]

While *Jesus of Nazareth* was successful, another film two years later would lay claim to an audience of over six billion. Although produced in more than nine-hundred languages, many people have neither seen nor are aware of *The Jesus Film*.[29] Campus Crusade for Christ was behind the project, a film based on the Gospel of Luke. They made the low-budget, limited-release movie for U.S. theatres only, and it did poorly at the box office. Campus Crusade for Christ decided to take *The Jesus Film* on the road as a proselytizing tool, a use which continues to this day. *Focus on the Family's* Media Specialist Bob Waliszewski saw the process in action.

"I was in Guatemala visiting some missionaries who would go into the backwoods, strap a generator, projector, and film onto the back of their motorcycle and go into the backwoods to show *The Jesus Film* to Guatemalan Indians. That has been done in country after country and language after language."[30]

The Jesus Film was added to and modified (March 2000) to produce *The Story of Jesus for Children*. Translated into over 100 languages, this movie looks at the fictional lives of a group of children living in 30 A.D. Campus Crusade still shows its original *Jesus Film* and claims two hundred million conversions to Christianity based on the film's impact. By the late 1970s, the church had finally discovered the power of the cinema as a missionary tool.

With the seriousness of *The Jesus Film* appearing on screens in places without screens, a group of comedians in England would reopen some old wounds in the fight between liberal Hollywood and the conservative church. The comedy troupe called "Monty Python" went to North Africa, filmed on sets used previously to produce *Jesus of Nazareth*, but came away with a very different message in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979). One of the working titles was *Jesus Christ Lust for Glory*. The film's tagline was "a motion picture destined to offend nearly two thirds of the civilized world and severely annoy the other third."[31] As film crews were preparing for departure to North Africa from London, EMI, the production company, finally got around to reading the script, as Terry Gilliam (the only American Python) recalls, and immediately pulled the funding plug. Were it not for the friendship between Monty Python Eric Idle and Beatle George Harrison, *The Life of Brian* would probably not exist. Harrison quickly formed Handmade Films (which would become a force in British movies for over 10 years) to handle *Life of Brian's* funding. Harrison's friendship and speed in putting together the package amazed many people, since the bill would be about $40 million in today's dollars.[32] [i]

---

i Another Beatle, John Lennon, had made a much-publicized statement that his group was more popular than Jesus. Lennon's statement in March of 1966 caused uproar in the United States. The original remark was in reaction to a question about religion during a day-long interview at his English home. Lennon suggested "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink...We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first-rock 'n' roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me."

The movie itself was an irreverent satire of Biblical films and religious intolerances, achieved by following the fictional life of Brian of Nazareth. As the film begins, wise men go to the wrong manger, to that of Brian Cohen, half-Jewish and who is born down the road from Jesus. The rest of the film follows Brian, as he grows up in Roman-occupied Judea. Brian joins an anti-Roman political organization and is mistaken for a prophet, living the rest of his shortened life mistaken for the Messiah. The public outcry against the film was loud. Most news articles, written then and since, suggest *Life of Brian* was banned in the United States' "Bible belt."[j] Exact locations are not cited, and I cannot verify the statement as true. Following the premiere in New York City on August 17, 1979, "Rabbi Benjamin Hecht, speaking on behalf of three orthodox organizations (Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant), dismissed *Life of Brian* as 'blasphemy' and a 'crime against religion.'"[33]

In Ireland, the film was banned for eight years. In Britain, banning the film from local theatres was left to individual councils; the film was precluded from being shown in Harrogate, parts of Surrey, east Devon, and Cornwall.[34] In the town of Swansea, the film remained prohibited up until 1997. For the most part, detractors, including those wanting a total ban in the United Kingdom and Ireland, claimed "blasphemy". In Britain, two of the film's stars, John Cleese and Michael Palin, spent considerable time defending the film in interviews and on television talk shows, reiterating its "lampoon" nature and that it was not an attack on religious beliefs. Anyone wishing to see the film in Britain simply drove a few miles to the nearest theatre presenting it. This would not be so easily accomplished in the larger American "Bible

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(see original citation) In July, an American teen magazine quoted Lennon out of context. Many U.S. radio stations stopped playing Beatles records. Some stations organized bonfires for Beatles records. In Cleveland, the Reverend Thurman H. Babbs threatened to excommunicate any member of his congregation who listened to the Beatles. International reaction was severe as well. On August 11, 1966, Lennon issued an apology at a Chicago news conference. His apologies were accepted by some, including the Vatican, which admitted the remarks were made "off-hand and not impiously...but showed that some subjects must not be dealt with lightly and in a profane way, not even in the world of beatniks." The last American tour by the Beatles finished shortly after the Jesus statement incident.

j The "Bible belt" is an area where Christian Evangelical Protestantism is pervasive. The term was coined in the early 1920s by American journalist H.L. Mencken. It also coincides with the region where the Southern Baptist Convention is strongest. This identifies the entire South and includes at least the following states: Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Kentucky.

belt" if, indeed, a ban occurred on the scale reported.[k] Once again, the public had seen (or maybe not) another way in which the Bible could be understood. Since films about Jesus are seen to reflect and influence the cultural perceptions of Jesus at the time, it is not unusual to expect some people to rise up in protest when what they believe to be the truth is not presented. Such has been the case for many movies which portrayed Biblical events in a less-than-sacred way. But even the concept of "less-than-sacred" can be challenged depending on the culture du jour. Adele Reinhartz suggests in her new book, *Jesus of Hollywood* "that the 'reel' Jesus invariably conflicts with, or is unsupported by, scriptural and historical evidence."[35] [l]

Monty Python's Eric Idle used comedic religious themes to great career and financial success. After *Life of Brian*, Idle produced the Broadway play *Monty Python's Spamalot,* earning more than $100 million dollars in New York alone since 2005. The play follows on from the original film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. It also has been announced that Idle will breathe new life into the old *Life of Brian* saga adapting it to *Handel's Messiah* for a stage premiere in Toronto in June, 2007.[36] The working title -- *Not the Messiah (He's a Very Naughty Boy)* – will continue the comedic approach to organized religion. It must also be referenced that *Life of Brian* was selected in 2006 as the greatest comedy film of all time in a poll for Channel 4 in the United Kingdom.[37] Another film, however, was soon to create an even stronger backlash for filmmakers dealing with religious issues.

The Last Temptation of Christ was originally published in Greek in 1955.[m] Filmmaker Martin Scorsese said it took him six years to read the novel but was convinced he could present

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k Although the question of a total ban within the "Bible belt" for *Monty Python's Life of Brian* cannot be confirmed, there is no doubt concerning the nature of how religious beliefs are considered within this area. A study of the South, "Doing it by the Book," in the March 3-9, 2007 issue of The Economist makes a number of points: "Nearly half of southerners believe the Bible is the literal word of God – twice the proportion in the Northeast or the West. Southerners vote for politicians they judge devout. Some 56% of southerners think God gave Israel to the Jews" (p. 6).

l *Life of Brian* was celebrating its 25th anniversary as Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* was premiering for the first time. It was a marketing opportunity for the distribution company who advertised to potential viewers the choice between The Passion or the Python, the Mel or the Monty. *Life of Brian* distributor Henry Jaglom of Rainbow Films said he hoped it would "serve as an antidote to all the hysteria about Mel's movie."

m *The Last Temptation of Christ* was written by Nikos Kazantzakis and originally published in Greek in 1955 and in English in 1960. (See additional comment in Notes, p. 95.)

the life of Jesus as no one had done before with the help of screenwriter Paul Schrader.[38] The movie suggested Jesus was tempted by notions He was not the Messiah and by a desire to live as any other human. The church had already condemned the book for humanizing Jesus Christ at the expense of divinity. For many critics, the actual rub came over a dream sequence in which Jesus imagines himself married to Mary Magdalene. Scorsese said, "Theirs was an organized movement to tell the faithful of different denominations, present denominations and the Catholic Church, not to see the picture."[39] Kenneth Turan, then religious film critic for *The Los Angeles Times*, said it "... was the first stirring of the religious right, a people feeling that they had ownership over this material and... well free speech is one thing but if you're going to mess with the story of Jesus you're going to be in big trouble."[40] The film's screenwriter Paul Schrader summarized his concept: "It was about who controlled the culture. It was about cultural hegemony, does Hollywood control the image of Our Lord or do we?"[41]

If one had to pinpoint the most strained moment in the up and down relationship between church and film, this might be it. Few Christians would admit to seeing the film. Big money backing for epic-style religious-content movies was drying up. Hollywood was still trying to figure out how to end the slump in 2004 when the answer finally came. New life would energize and electrify the faith-based film market with the release of *The Passion of the Christ*. The news media was fascinated with the movie and its director and producer, Mel Gibson. The news stories would spur a sometimes heated dialogue across faiths and countries. At home, the intrigue initially was over who was leaking which script to whom prior to release. It was creating a furor in the press and academia, but helping Gibson with his publicity.[42]

Almost a year before the film came out, a group of scholars had secreted a copy of the film's script and subsequently issued a scathing 18-page report. The comments were reviewed by Paula Fredriksen of Boston University in an abbreviated summary appearing in the *New Republic*.[43] Problematic for them was the portrayal of Jewish culpability for the death of Jesus and the anti-Semitism appearing in Gibson's new version. The scholarly group's reaction

provided even more energy to the media debate. Newspapers, magazines, and talk shows on radio and television were asking, "Who Killed Jesus?" and "What Did Jesus Really Look Like?", and were linking "Peter, Paul, Mary... and God." To show the Hollywood business community was also interested, journalists reported on "Hollywood Rethinking Films of Faith After 'Passion'." For those interested in how movies affect those who watch them, "Seeing and Believing: A Movie's Power Over Attitudes and Action." The film had grabbed media attention like no other, whether in condemnation or devotion to its fundamental message. Mel Gibson was near the top of Hollywood's hottest-leading-men list. He was also Catholic, albeit traditional Catholic. Gibson knew the film would be an enormous risk, since no one would finance it, so he backed it himself.

At least in theory, the film presented little new material. Everyone already knew the story. Gibson's goal was to bring Jesus' sacrifice into focus as Passion plays had done for over millennia. He also wanted more than just a movie going experience. He wanted a spiritual experience. However, for many viewers, Gibson's method of using horrific violence was a big problem. He portrayed Jesus being viciously scourged between the death sentence and the crucifixion scenes. Verbal and physical protests occurred before, during, and after the movie premiere. Some reaction, as was the case for Cecil B. DeMille and others, concerned the anti-Semitic issue. Father Robert Lauder of St. John's University commented on this:

> If someone says to me this is an anti-Semitic movie, if you mean Gibson is blaming all Jewish people for the death of Christ, that is false and that is not in the movie. If you mean Gibson is blaming the Jews at that time for the death of Christ, that is not in the movie. If you mean Gibson has gone overboard in depicting the villains in the movie as Jewish, I think you probably have a pretty good argument there."[44]

Gibson's father, Hutton Gibson, received much press coverage following his comments critical of Vatican II and with regard to Judaism. Hutton created a firestorm with his remarks

that there had been no Holocaust. Later, in 2006, his son was criticized regarding anti-Semitic remarks he made to a police officer during a drunk-driving arrest in California.

The Passion of the Christ has been listed by many commentators as a defining moment in the media's reexamination of what the Bible does and does not say about certain issues. It premiered during the Easter season 2004, with a global media watching for any new story angle. Gibson used the advance publicity and worldwide reaction to his favor, and it paid off with *The Passion of the Christ* breaking box office records, taking in over $600 million dollars. How did this happen? Gibson's studio, Icon Productions, had been courting the Christian audience for at least a year before the film was released, calling on churches who might want promotional material and setting up test screenings around the country. Focus on the Family's Bob Waliszewski was called early on. "We were part of the very first group to see the movie. The movie came out in February in the United States. We saw it in June of the previous year. Mel Gibson sat right behind me and when the film was over, one of the representatives got up and asked us for some feedback."[45] Another in that audience was Sister Rose Pacatte, "It would not be fair to say that our very mixed group in that room spoke with the same voice. Overall, there were mostly men present and the majority really liked it. I and two other women found it to be too graphically violent; one pastor said that we are Christians because of the resurrection, not because of Christ's agony on the cross or his passion. He was right but Mel wanted to make the film he wanted to make – and he did!"[46] Gibson was in hopes that the year-long effort would insure that, when the film was released, word was already out that all good Christians should support it. On the premiere weekend, viewers flocked to 3,043 theatres in the United States alone.

Critical discussion of the film often raised important issues. The Catholic Church said, "It needs to be reiterated that this is a film [*The Passion of the Christ*] and that the screenplay is a 'version' of the Gospel stories with no claim to be Gospel."[47] Mary Boys, a Professor at Union Theological Seminary and one of the scholars involved in the controversial examination of

Gibson's script, concluded, "One of the problems is that people are going to see this film and are going to conclude that's the way it is because they don't know anything different."[48] She believes, as a result of Gibson's film, "We really have to find ways to educate them [the media] about interpreting scripture more thoughtfully."[49] Writers Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch welcomed films like Gibson's, calling the emerging field of religion and film exciting and one which offers much to education. "Let's face it! The entertainment industry – in particular, film – has changed traditional education and communication in profound ways, and the church had better take notice."[50] Mel Gibson himself hoped people would investigate for themselves, "My intention... is to create a lasting work of art and engender serious thought among audiences."[51] Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is a significant presentation which offers a unique opportunity for religious educators, the media, and the public to question and to build on their body of religious knowledge.

In 2005, in the context of Gibson's success, Cloud Ten Productions decided to do as Campus Crusade for Christ had done in 1979. They took their own movie on the road. One of Cloud Ten's key producer/directors, André van Heerden told me:

> Instead of us going to Hollywood, we said, 'you know what, let's take Hollywood to church.' We suddenly realized that there's a real hunger for these types of movies. But rather than compete with all the big budget movies in the cinemas where you know we don't have the marketing dollars to support it, we said we had the churches to support this, we have more screens and good quality screens, with good audiences, a lot of big churches.[52]

This concept could change the way people view religious or Bible movies. Cloud Ten made three movies based on the successful *Left Behind* book series, which sold over twenty million copies worldwide. Van Heerden said the series' theme was a shortened and modified version of Revelations set in the present day. Late in 2005 the third film, *Left Behind: World at War* starring Oscar winner Lou Gossett Jr., was released, but not in movie theatres. According to Van Heerden:

> We released *Left Behind: World at War* in over 3200 churches across North America on one weekend. Our distribution strategy was fairly simple. Individual churches would pay a licensing fee for the right to show the film (average $100 per venue). This money covered the cost of the screener DVD as well as various marketing materials to help advertise the release. The church then could show the film as many times as they wanted on that opening weekend and any money they took in (through tickets, or popcorn, or donations) was theirs to keep. Basically we covered our costs with this strategy but it did allow us to show our film to a national audience and create buzz for it. The DVD was officially released after that weekend capitalizing on the positive word of mouth generated from that opening.[53]

But while Van Heerden explained why some films are now bypassing the Hollywood production and distribution line, others, like British film critic Lorien Haynes, voiced opposition to this method. "I don't feel very comfortable with the use of film as Christian propaganda because it's terribly exclusive. You know we live in a very multi-cultural society and for Christian rights groups to be adopting films as their message is very exclusive."[54]

It's not just movies drawn strictly from the Bible that stir religious debate. One of 2006's most eagerly awaited movies caused a wide variety of emotional and religious reaction. The film was *The Da Vinci Code,* and I will examine the issues from a number of different perspectives. Father Robert Lauder, Professor of Philosophy at St. John's University in New York, told me *The Da Vinci Code* "... dismisses the central belief of Catholics and Christians very easily and in a preposterous way. If you get a little distance from it, it can be a little amusing. But its dealing with what is central to our faith....Christians felt it was trying to prove the Catholic Church was trying to hide historical events."[55]

To understand the debate, I must summarize the plot. Harvard Professor Robert Langdon (played by Tom Hanks in the film) is in Paris for a speech on his specialty, "Symbology." He is summoned by police to the Louvre to discuss the murder of its curator Jacques Saunière. Clues left by the dying victim lead Langdon and the curator's granddaughter, Sophie Neveu (played by Audrey Tautou in the film), on a hunt for the murderer. In a key scene, Professor Leigh Teabing (played by Sir Ian McKellen in the film) explains how the bloodline of

Jesus Christ occurred and continues to this very day as Jesus fathered a child with Mary Magdalene. The early church is said to have known of Mary Magdalene's condition and to have tried and failed to find and kill her, and the Priory of Sion is claimed to have been successful in its sworn duty to protect Mary and the bloodline through the centuries. Each of these claims was the source of much concern for Christian groups. I'll look at the two latest defining films, *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*, in greater depth in Chapter 4.

Will mainstream Hollywood and the church go separate ways? Films like *The Passion of the Christ* proved that when the church and filmmakers work together there can be a benefit to religious interests. Some film critics, however, think it would be catastrophic for the telling of the biggest, most influential stories ever told to be determined exclusively by religious believers. Others believe it is doubtful Hollywood would allow this to occur, likening it to giving up that which they started. The film industry can be unpredictable—but its recent successes raise new possibilities. There is now a choice between the promotion available to a film distributed by hand to 3,000 churches and that promoted by a major studio. There are now at least two scenarios possible. Some traditional Hollywood filmmakers could jump back into the ring to retake control of the telling of the Bible. Alternately, filmmakers might increasingly pursue new and creative ways to distribute their work via religious organizations, churches, and other unconventional routes. At either end of the spectrum, I believe many changes abound. What could be next for the future of the Bible on film? I will explore this question in Chapter 3.

The purpose behind this Chapter's look at films from the last 110 years has been to identity elements in the creation of story telling by its creators. All of the filmmakers were drawn to tell the story of the Bible and religion. Cecil B. DeMille was the showman while Johnny Cash was a singer and storyteller. Godspell's John-Michael Tebelak was driven by sheer joy in writing the original play (which developed out of his own Master's thesis at what is now Carnegie Mellon University). George Stevens had a goal of correcting the anti-Semitism which he felt had prevailed in many previous Passion stories. Increasingly, films and books raise

questions about the stories Christians have traditionally been told about their beginnings. *The Da Vinci Code* is only one of the latest examples of "new" Christian origin material prompting dialogue on Christianity. What has been the reaction? Many films have been produced by thousands of people for many different reasons, and many individuals have reacted across the spectrum including one person in one blog who said it might take some time to 'forgive' little Opie (Ron Howard) for his involvement in the Da Vinci Code film.

Has the church and the media gotten over the adversarial relationship it once had? Sister Rose Pacatte thinks so and suggests the church must continue to do its job since the media cannot replace Sunday school.[56] But for some there may be no church and the media might be the closest thing to Sunday school.

Story telling is what has been needed by Christianity and story telling is what has been provided by films. Sister Rose works constantly with the media and believes, "There is always the tension in... the media being 'gifts of God' and the dangers of their misuse: the production of films, programs, books, magazines, internet content, advertising, that attack the dignity of the human person, encourage consumerism and a secular life-style."[57] Sister Rose told me she considers herself to be a part of a growing group of people who want to use the media, especially film, as a source for dialogue.

CHAPTER THREE – COURTING CHRISTIAN GROUPS

I was speaking online recently with the godfather of three of my grandchildren. Father John Prinelli is a Roman Catholic Priest in West Virginia, one of those clergypersons who has to cover a large area because of sparse population. Knowing I was looking at the issue, he mentioned receiving a "form letter" from "Edify Media" which identified itself as the Christian outreach for Fox Faith. They offered to put a DirecTV satellite link, for free, in his pastoral office so he could view and convey to them, ahead of time, his thoughts about their upcoming films.[n] My friend hit it on the head: "Essentially, the aim is to have pastors promote the films....I think they realized the *tremendous* impact the Protestant clergy had on the sale of tickets to see Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ,* renting buses and buying out the entire theatre so they can invite, literally, anyone to come in. Only God knows how many millions of dollars were generated by the overwhelming support of the clergy."[58]

The advertising "hook" is "Fox Faith, Films you can Believe In." This phrase is on everything from their letterhead to their website. What exactly does that phrase mean? I can only assume the "hot button" words are "Faith" and "Believe". When a person of faith sees them, he or she assumes something of Christian value is about to follow. When you go to the FoxFaith website (http://www.foxfaith.com), there are four main categories. "Christian Retail Partners" has collectable items for sale from movies they approve of, as well as "special offers, and discounted movie tickets."[59] The "Fox Faith Film Club" and "Fox Faith Movies" represent a means of contacting movie goers and the online movie guide to faith-based movies released by Fox. "Church Resources" is where churches find material Fox hopes will promote their films. Why and how did Fox Faith happen? Because of the enormous success of *The Passion of the Christ,* those familiar with the studio system could see easily new possibilities. Fox, which had

[n] You can view the types of promotions Fox Faith offers to churches by going to their website at FoxFaith.com and clicking on "Church Resources".

previously worked with Mel Gibson, had turned down the distribution rights to the theatrical run of *The Passion of the Christ*. Although later acquiring the rights to distribute the film's DVDs (17 million sold so far), Fox lost millions in the theatre distribution deal. Gibson ran the theatrical distribution through his own ICON Productions, leaving no question as to who would have creative rights in the making of the film. Opening weekend was all it took for Fox to realize the enormity of their mistake. As part of their reaction, the company formed "Fox Faith" from seed money coming in, ironically, from *Passion* DVD sales. Today, the film industry is trying to use the success template of *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*. Film makers want to duplicate it and are accelerating programs which could locate suitable film material. Steve Feldstein, a senior vice president of marketing for Fox Home Video, told the Associated Press late last year that they could "... recognize this as an underserved market place (the Christian demographic) that was hungry for programming that mirrored their values."[60] Such movies might deal with religious issues – contemporary, historical or fictional. But success is not always guaranteed. Look, for instance, at *The Nativity Story* and its poor box office showing in December 2006 (first weekend $8M),[o] and the disappointing earnings of two of Fox Faith's Christian-oriented films, *Three* and *The Last Sin Eater,* both of which were filmed on shoestring budgets. Some of the reasons for the films' lack of success deal with the films themselves, others with company management. To fit Fox Faith's criteria, a project must be of overtly Christian content or derive from a Christian author. Some proponents think faith-based films will now receive treatment as other motion pictures and be provided with larger budgets. But some critics like journalist Mark Joseph disagree:

> These others see it as a step backward, one that will result not in faith driven films going mainstream and reaching a broad, values-driven audience, but rather in the creation of a steady stream of cheaply produced, second-rate products that will then be marketed exclusively to religious Americans as "Christian films' and will not be widely available to more secular movie goers.[61]

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[o] *Variety Magazine,* December 6, 2006.

One group wanting a piece of the faith-based film pie is The Weinstein Company (TWC), an independent film studio founded by brothers Harvey and Bob Weinstein in late 2006. Investment money from Goldman Sachs allowed them to set up shop a mere two months after leaving Disney.[62] Brother Bob said TWC wants to release six movies per year under a faith-based distribution label deal with Christian company Impact Entertainment.

> This is a rapidly emerging and important area in the entertainment industry and this deal fits perfectly into our strategy of acquiring and producing films that target niche audiences.[63]

TWC announced that the first two movies to be produced will be book adaptations of *The Penny* by Joyce Meyer and Deborah Bedford and *The Christmas Candle* by Max Lucado. *The Penny* follows a young girl who finds a penny in 1950s St. Louis and discovers hope during the Civil Rights Era. Lucado's *The Christmas Candle* tells the story of a candle maker visited by an angel in 19th century England. TWC will also be producing its own DVD home video line of films under the Genius label with the release of *Resurrection* in the spring of 2007. *Resurrection* is said to pick up where *The Passion of the Christ* left off. The brothers are working quickly to develop the company by hiring marketing staffs familiar with Christian audiences, including those who can meet pastors even before production of films begin.[64] The Weinstein Company appears to be putting a company together that will deal primarily with niche viewing markets. Besides the faith-based films, it is organizing divisions to handle African-American films, Hispanic themed projects, and Asian films under the label Dragon Dynasty Films.

The successes of recent faith-based films have not escaped the gaze of Hollywood proper. Samuel Goldwyn's *Facing the Giants* and Gener8xion's *One Night with the King* made over $10 million dollars each for the studios.

Another group that targets clergypersons is *Focus on the Family*. They run a film review website for Christians, which its director Ted Waliszewski explained for me:

> It seems a little odd for a Christian ministry to be involved in media reviewing. But it's because of our strong belief in the family and how media affects the family that we're into that. It will say if there's drug and alcohol content. If there is any it'll be listed there. Sexual content, it'll be listed there. Theological content, spiritual content, violent content, summary conclusion. But we'll just list it and then we'll let families make that choice. [65]

Today, *Focus on the Family* is one of hundreds of Christian groups Hollywood surveys when they release a new movie. Film industry revenue in the United States is thought to be about $8 billion dollars per year. Church revenue is thought to be in the neighborhood of $40 billion dollars per year. Hollywood believes there is more potential income to be found in the area of religious programming and filmmaking from those who also support the church. Since *The Passion of the Christ*, the biggest Hollywood litmus test came when Disney produced *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.*[66] The film was promoted to Christians owing to its overt Christian allegory. However conservative Christians were just as busy in their efforts to use the film to evangelize by pointing out that the novel's author was C.S. Lewis, a vocal advocate of Christianity.[p] "Chronicles" books have sold over 100 million copies since publication began in the 1950s.[67] The producers of the film were hopeful the film's religious symbolism would not limit its appeal just to a religious audience. At last check it had made over $500 million dollars. Hollywood needs the Christian audience. The big question today is whether the church needs Hollywood.

Are Evangelical Christians now snubbing their noses at traditional Hollywood with an eye toward reclaiming the Bible for themselves? I asked Ted Baehr how this might play out for the future of the Bible in the media. Dr. Baehr is Chairman of the Christian Film and Television Commission and operator of the web-based *Movieguide.* He said, "In England the church is a

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p The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was the first installment of a 7-volume fantasy series for children written and published by C.S. Lewis in at least 41 languages from 1949 to 1954. It has been adapted for radio, television, stage and the cinema ever since. The Co-producer of the Disney film adaptation, Douglas Gresham, is the stepson of Lewis and has said Lewis sold the adaptation rights for the series before his death. Apparently, C.S. Lewis was not fond of television adaptations and considered them non-realistic. Lewis felt humans wearing costumes of animals did not represent his work properly. But when his step-son Gresham saw the demo reel of C.G. creatures and the advancement of film technology, he gave approval for the film version.

small audience. In the United States the church is, you know, clearly up to sixty percent of the population with eighty-five percent of the population saying they're Christians. So that's a big audience."[68] According to Baehr, regardless of the country, the mass media of entertainment is the primary teacher of our children. "The average child sees forty-thousand hours of media by the age of seventeen, compared to eleven-thousand hours in school, two thousand with parents and eight-hundred hours in church if they go for an hour on Sundays."[69] Bob Waliszewski of *Focus on the Family* thinks this is probably close to accurate and wants films and other media to be more inspirational: "Matthew 28 commands us as Christians, as followers of Christ, to go in and preach the good news. We can do that with our lips and most of us do, but I think the more creative we get in being able to get this message out the better. So I think we have only begun to tap into how film can get that message out."[70]

As the new millennium gets underway, the media impact on Christians is becoming more varied and wide-ranging. Many people interested in learning more about religion now look to non-canonical materials, like the apocrypha or Gnostic texts. Some of them may look to the book of Revelation which has been surfacing frequently in movies and documentary films. The new breed of evangelical films is creating its own theology, so to speak. Three modern films have been particularly influential in shaping the direction of religious movies. It is toward a closer examination of these three movies that I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR – TURNING POINTS:

The Exorcist, The Passion of the Christ and The Da Vinci Code

The Exorcist

It might be difficult for younger people today to understand what all the fuss was about 33 years ago. The idea for *The Exorcist* came from a late 1940s series of syndicated newspaper articles which reported on a successful exorcism. Author William Peter Blatty wrote his book, and claimed it solidified his own belief and faith in God. Blatty felt, however, that to make a movie from his 1971 effort would be difficult. How do you present religious issues without being sidetracked by the special effects required by this type of film? When the 25th Anniversary special-edition DVD came out, Blatty said, "When I first learned about this case (the 1949 exorcism), it struck me immediately that if one can demonstrate credibly the existence of evil spirits—if there are devils and demons—then there can be angels and, at the very least, a spiritual dimension to intelligence."[71]

When *The Exorcist* was released as a film by William Friedkin, news stories reported the occasional scream and fainting spell. Some theatres provided "Exorcist Barf Bags."[72] The manager of one United Artists theatre told *Newsweek's* Ken Woodward, "My janitors are going bananas wiping up the vomit" and that he had to "...replace doors and curtains damaged by unruly crowds." Woodward quoted one San Francisco theatre manager as reporting a patron "attacked the screen in order to kill the demon."[73] One patron fainted and broke his jaw on the seat in front of him, suing Warner Brothers and the filmmakers for the subliminal imagery which, he claimed, caused him to pass out. The studio settled out of court for an undisclosed sum.[74] *The Exorcist* was a huge international success, was nominated for ten Academy Awards, and won two.

Many movie-goers then waited in line for hours to be scared out of their wits, but today's generation is hardly intimidated by the obscenity-throwing, head-spinning, pea-soup projectiles

of character Regan MacNeil. Today's horror aficionados have been anesthetized by decades of movies which provide even more vivid pictures of evil and demonic possession. When the movie was re-released for its 25th anniversary in 1998, die hard *Exorcist* fans in some theatres had to put up with occasional laughter.[75]

The film is often seen as a turning point in filmmaking as well as a continuation of the media's evolution. Scholar Jeffrey Smith sees religious films as evolving from an art form which originally was respectful of the institution of religion to a business which today focuses on maximizing profit.[76] Smith suggests these changes began during the Cold War and would often times keep religion at arm's length from the public. Humor was occasionally used to address the topic (as seen in *Life of Brian*, for instance). For Smith, the movement from respect for religion to business is best evidenced by *The Exorcist*. It could have picked up an X rating, but the truly disturbing parts of the film appeared in context of church ritual. The film "avoids opportunities for theological exposition and can be experienced as little more than a horror show."[77] Smith believes possession movies can and do sometimes provide moralistic endings, but cites those in the "satanic power genre" as providing spectacle which exploit religion. To determine whether Friedkin succeeded in getting his points across can only be determined, according to Smith, by looking through the religious lens. On the surface, one could see significant differences between, for instance, the casting out of demons by Jesus in the Bible and a 12-year-old girl who stabs herself with a crucifix, knocks her mother across the room, and causes one priest to have a fatal heart attack and another to leap to his death. In one updated release of *The Exorcist*, there were scenes added to make it more horrible in an attempt to wake up the desensitized, modern, horror film fan. But there was also added theological dialogue between the two priests outside Regan's bedroom, and a new ending. The latter two points were thought to offer hope and assurance that, in the end, the good guys had won the day. In 1995, on the occasion of the 100th

anniversary of cinema, the Vatican compiled a list of "Best Films" ever made.[78] [q] Perhaps not surprisingly, *The Exorcist* was not on the list.

The Passion of the Christ

The Passion of the Christ is seen by many as another turning point in religious movies, one which might have caused observers to rethink issues involving the cinema and the church. It will influence Christian programming in film and on television for some time. In looking at the Vatican's reaction to the film, one notes it considers *The Passion of the Christ* a "considerable cinematic achievement."[79] In its report, the Roman Catholic Church explained that it examined the film from Biblical and theological points of view. It considered the film from the position of the Eucharist as well as the role which Mary (Jesus' mother) played in the movie. The first duty for the Catholic Church, however, was to deal with Jewish-Christian issues, and it was suggested that institutionalized Christian anti-Semitism emerged in the early 2nd century with clashes between the leaders of Jesus and Judaic religious groups mostly over the status of the Messiah. The Vatican analysis also pointed to Gibson's method in weaving elements from the various Gospels and other books, canonical and noncanonical, to make his story realistic. Some critics thought Gibson took too much artistic license. The Vatican made it clear Gibson's film employed methods similarly used in the "oral tradition" of story telling.

Author Jeremy Cohen suggests in *Christ Killers: the Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* that the anti-Semitism witnessed today has itself evolved from the "myth" that "Jewish leaders and the Jewish mob bear the responsibility for the death [of

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q Sister Rose Pacatte at the Pauline Media Center explains: "The list has mostly older films and is very 'white', 'male', and 'continental' with some US films." The list contains 45 movies with descriptions and is divided into three categories: "Religion," "Values," and "Art." Following a description of the movie, both the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC) and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) lists its classification. In the "Religion" category there are three American films listed out of fifteen. The three were *Ben Hur* (1959) A-I/MPAA-G, *A Man for All Seasons* (1966) A-I/MPAA-G, and *The Mission* (1986) A-III/MPAA-PG. In the "Values:" category we see such American films as: *Intolerance* (1916), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), *On the Waterfront* (1954), and *Schindler's List* (1993). For the "Art" grouping, American films did the best. Among the titles were: *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Fantasia* (1940), *Little Women* (1933), *Modern Times* (1936), *Stagecoach* (1939), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). The "Vatican Best Films List" does not offer any way to determine which they thought was best in each category. We may have to wait for the next centenary to learn if the list will be updated to include newer presentations like *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*.

Jesus]."[80] Cohen states this is a continuation of "myths" through time which point to and lead to such historical events as the Holocaust.

There can be no doubt *The Passion of the Christ* was a "big" cinema news story in 2004 and remains so today. Thousands of words were written concerning the film which was chosen "Top Religion Story of 2004" by members of the Religion Newswriters Association (as reported by The American Academy of Religion). Tying with *The Passion of the Christ* for the top spot was "How the faith of George Bush played a part in his re-election." The *AAR* article suggested "discussion on issues of anti-Semitism, violence, faithfulness to scripture, and the interpretation of the atonement" spurred by Gibson's movie were reasons for its success.[81]

From the shock and awe of *The Exorcist* to a film which personified certain traditional Christian beliefs about the death of the Christ, I move on to a film which challenges Christians over how to view their Christianity and its central tenets.

The Da Vinci Code

The success of Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* cannot be downplayed. More than 40 million copies of his book have sold around the globe. When the movie version was released April 21, 2006, interest in the book was also rekindled.

As of January 5, 2007, the movie *The Da Vinci Code* (which cost $125m to produce) had taken in a domestic gross of $217,536,238 and a foreign gross of $539,126,999 for a total cinema income of almost $800 million dollars. This does not reflect additional income from rentals ($45.97 M), DVD and merchandise sales. It was also announced in early 2007 that the sequel is in the planning stage. Screenwriter Akiva Goldsmith and director Ron Howard will again adapt one of Brown's novels, this time *Angels and Demons* (written before *The Da Vinci Code*.)

The financial success of *The Da Vinci Code* was not due solely to an excellent job of marketing. Many people who have read it call the book a great page turner, difficult to put down, with never-ending puzzles. But for those who have read the book or have seen the movie, the discussion invariably turns to many questions being raised about Christian history. Has the

church for centuries perpetrated a cover-up? Is it true Mary Magdalene was not a repentant prostitute but, in fact, a romantic companion to Jesus and a major figure in His movement? Could it be a royal bloodline of Jesus and Mary continues even today, despite claims by most church authorities it is nothing but a hoax? Church goers I surveyed did not feel it was worth debating since even positive proof of important historical issues would do little to change their opinions and/or beliefs. Regardless, strong opinions were held, and expressed, that *The Da Vinci Code* throws historical accuracy and the master story of Christianity to the wind.

Media response to Brown's book came quickly. Documentary filmmakers and production houses made large amounts of money producing mass media responses by defenders of the faith.[r] Arthur Dewey, in his article "Behind the Da Vinci Code," suggested bookstore shelves were filling up with material quickly produced to challenge author Dan Brown. "By a fictive ruse, the heretical camel has gotten more than a nose under the ecclesiastical tent. That clumsy beast could undermine the whole fabric of faith!"[82] Brown had said publicly from the beginning that the debate was good for spiritual development. At the same time detractors called the book blasphemous. Most of those in opposition and presenting views in the media said it was a threat to traditional constructions of Christian belief and of the origins of Christianity. There was a substantial anti-Brown effort in print, the internet, and on the air, both TV and radio, to defuse growing interest by "cracking" The Code before the movie came out. This most likely served to promote the film rather than detract from it, proving a blessing for the book's publishers and the film company, all recipients of enormous publicity prior to the movie's premiere.

Like the oral tradition of handing down stories from generation to generation, *The Da Vinci Code* took some old stories and forged them into different and maybe more interesting ones. Brown's stories might have been separated by hundreds of years, and seamlessly edited together, unknown to the reader. Issues raised by detractors of the movie included those

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r See Indices section: Appendix 'I': Books, Films, and Documentaries produced subsequent to the release of *The Da Vinci Code* book and movie

dealing with Jesus and Mary, the Knights Templar, and the Priory of Zion, the last two of medieval creation. The Knights Templar was founded in 1118 as the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon. [83] There is much scholarly dispute over how the group started and its purpose, as well as what it did and how matters ended for the Knights themselves. Some agree the Templars flourished as escorts and protectors of Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. It is unknown if Templar wealth came from this service or elsewhere. (There are several theories about the money.)[84] By the thirteenth century, they were at their pinnacle, and political and religious authority in France and Italy was concerned about any threat The Templars might pose. In 1308 French King Philip the Fair ordered an inquisition and by 1312 The Templars were all but extinct. The Knights Templar became the Knights Hospitallers and Philip became wealthier after securing The Templar bank accounts.[85] Some of these events were contradicted by Walt Disney's 2005 film *National Treasure*.[86] Its main theme suggested Templar wealth made its way to America and has been protected ever since by The Masons.

Another issue raised in *The Da Vinci Code* but discredited long ago continues to resurface occasionally. The conflict is with the organization called the Priory of Zion, which, by 1617, had been absorbed by Jesuit priests. The story line associated with this myth was exposed as a hoax. The Secret Dossier, said to be found in the National Library in Paris in 1975, was claimed (like the Masons in America) to include the names of many famous individuals, including Sir Isaac Newton and Leonardo Da Vinci. Someone, it appears, was trying to form a connection between the Merovingian line, the Priory of Zion, and the Knights Templar. This aspect spawned worldwide interest, and less than a decade after the alleged find in Bibliotêchque Nationale de France, the book, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, appeared.[87] The authors insist its contents are all true.

Upon first reading *The Da Vinci Code*, I thought of the earlier book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. In fact, late in 2006, Dan Brown had to defend (successfully) his book in a plagiarism lawsuit brought by the *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* writing group. The "what ifs" in both writings,

concerning Jesus and his connection with Mary Magdalene, go this way: What if Mary was more than a follower? What if she and Jesus had a physical relationship which produced a child? What if the offspring were the ancestor(s) of the Merovingians? Could the Knights Templar have found documents to prove this? What if the Priory of Zion continues to keep the "secret" alive today? Once again as one religious professor likes to say, "It was a real page turner."[88]

Those who deal in historical truth easily peel away erroneous connections made in both books. Defenders of the faith might be forgiven for attempts to derail sales at bookstores, but most new evidence suggests even debating the truth in regards to these historically askew elements appears to dislodge some long-held religious assumptions. It also might be this which propels *The Da Vinci Code* and related books and films to their heights on bestseller lists and box office charts. Just as each decade in the 20th century saw filmmaking change the way the public viewed biblical events, so too do popular books, many fictional, provide yet another way to shape the public understanding of the early church and Jesus traditions. For some who have never considered an alternate possibility of Christian history, such works can be problematic. The novels and films, as far-fetched as it seems, have given rise to serious thought. For some readers and viewers, it may be the first time they have thought to question their faith. In the next Chapter, I will begin to look at how the medium impacts such questions of faith in contemporary believers.

CHAPTER FIVE – WHAT SHOULD I BELIEVE?

The last several decades have seen some unusual shifts in what religious people actually believe. Commentators on religion, as well as several studies, point to the possibility that American Christians are now less aligned with the Bible in their beliefs than they were in the past.[89] People call themselves Bible believers and suggest America is a Bible-believing country, but some evidence would suggest otherwise. Recent decades have seen other religions take part in dialogue on spirituality. Views from Islam, Wicca, secular humanism, Eastern religions and other traditions appear to be making their ways slowly and discreetly into a syncretic faith perspective. In my interview with Ted Baehr, he referenced figures from the Barna survey group that examined Christian church goers who were also movie goers. "The figures are very mixed as to how many Christians there are in the [movie] audience....A Gallup poll says most people go to church once a month, while Barna claims it is closer to 40%, which indicates between 141 million people and 185 million people go to church on a regular basis. I think that every year since we've watched we have seen the numbers slowly decrease so you have about 10 million less church goers than you did ten years ago."[90] Despite declining church attendance, attendance at religious movies is up. Baehr said: "... You see that movies with overt Christian content still do better at the box office. Two years ago, movies with overt Christian content did $106 million dollars on average at the box office, movies with moral content did about $60 million dollars and movies with the antithesis did about $12 million. Those with overt Christian content also do better overseas... even in Muslim countries."[91]

Professor James Tabor, Chair of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, is one scholar taking advantage of the interest in Christian origins. He offers much to speculate about as he assesses the historical Jesus. Professor Tabor believes Jesus was neither the son of God nor of Joseph (husband to Mary). He thinks Jesus was probably the son of Mary

and a Roman soldier named "Pantera" and believes Joseph (Mary's husband) died when Jesus was a young man, leaving Jesus as man of the house over six half-brothers and sisters. After the crucifixion, Tabor thinks Jesus' brother James assumed the leadership role for the beginnings of Christianity. Tabor also believes James' teachings would have been closer to Jesus' than those of Paul who appears to have written much of the New Testament. Most of Tabor's peers do not agree with his theories, which put great stock in the mysterious and missing "Q" document. His assumptions set forth in *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*,[92] are bound to cause comments similar to those made against Dan Brown. We have actually seen this already with Tabor's alignment with the documentary film and book *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* released in March 2007. All the comment and controversy, however, may be a good thing for religion. Tabor's book and *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* documentary, arising as this paper was being concluded, are bound to create a firestorm of controversy and further public discussion of the central tenets of Christianity.

Another area of media impact, sometimes the most controversial, deals with recent media publication of early Christian materials which are not in the Bible. In regards to scriptural material these would be "noncanonical" or in some cases "apocryphal" (strictly speaking it is material not included in the New Testament of the Bible) texts.

In 1992, *The Complete Gospels* was published by the Jesus Seminar, offering more than the four Gospels of which most Christians are aware.[93] Using *The Complete Gospels* you could ask how the Gospel of Peter begins and ends. Why does the Gospel of Mary stop short just when you think you understand? Why is there one Jesus quotation after another in Thomas' Gospel? Is there any structure to these Gospels? Do they relate to each other? Are they the same age? Who wrote them? In short, Christians can ask questions of a sort that have never been asked by the masses before. Maybe there is more to the early stages of Christianity than the Old and New Testaments. More recently, the non-canonical Gospel of Judas was published.

The rush by the media, academia, and the church to discuss such matters has added to the public's interest in religious subjects. It is more than a theological or academic debate. People are talking about these matters in public.

Over the last fifty years, there have been many changes in how believers of a number of different denominations and religions regard their faith. For some, the dogma of that which is "the church" meant an alienation from institutionalized religion. For many, they have not given up on the experience of religion; they just don't like the organizational structure. Sales figures of books and box office receipts can tell a story, revealing what may be behind the phenomenon. Today interested researchers can examine new Biblical translations and versions as they become available. Archaeological updates of new religious finds are followed around the world as they happen. Today much religious material is available for all Americans to see. Off-the-shelf software is available to examine primary texts.

William James argued in *Varieties of Religious Experience* for a re-examination of our behavior, claims and imaginings, providing a method for evaluating these new experiences over a hundred years ago.

> ... distinction must be made between two orders of inquiry concerning anything. First what is the nature of it? How did it come about? What is its constitution, origin, and history? And second, what is its importance, meaning, or significance, now that it is once here? [94]

The flood of materials about non-canonical Christianity give us cause to re-think, re-read, and re-examine Christian traditions. For some, it might fill in the gaps. For others it might signal the beginning of a quest for understanding about why orthodox churches do what they do... and even the beginning of a break from Christianity. Readers and viewers today can appreciate and study unknown writers of "Bibles" written long ago. They tear apart the parables of Jesus to understand what He was really saying. As the investigators continue to strike out against religious dogma in search of beliefs which make sense to them, the inquiries often reveal

their own distrust of the orthodox. Despite the efforts of church hierarchies and censors, the human capacity for judgment cannot be subdued.

In the next two chapters, I will turn to the contemporary beliefs and practices of Christian groups, and I will survey how they react to the growing role of the media in shaping religion.

CHAPTER SIX – THE BARNA GROUP STUDY

Some researchers have begun to examine opinion the popular impact of recent films and books like *The Da Vinci Code*. One national survey conducted by the Barna Group in May of 2006 suggested the novel had a profound effect but perhaps not the one many Christians had expected.[s] It may have helped Christianity.

According to Barna research, "*The Da Vinci Code* has been read by roughly 45 million adults in the U.S. – one out of every five adults (20%)."[95] That makes *The Da Vinci Code* unique and second only to the Bible as a book of a spiritual nature in American homes. Barna also suggests some interesting facts about the Christian makeup of the readers.

> American Catholics are more likely than Protestants to have read it (24% versus 15 %,). Protestants, those associated with a mainline church are almost three times more likely than those associated with non-mainline Protestant congregations to have read the book. Upscale individuals - i.e., those with a college degree and whose household income exceeds $60,000 - are nearly four times more likely to have read the book than "downscale" people (i.e., those without a college degree and whose household income is $30,000 or less).[96]

Of those who read the whole book, 24% (11 million adults) said *The Da Vinci Code* was helpful in regards to spiritual growth. To put this in context, the Barna study examined another recent popular novel which dealt with Jesus, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, by Anne Rice.[97] It registered as helpful to 72% of all those who read it, three times that of *The Da Vinci Code,* but enjoyed a far smaller audience. Rice's book will also be adapted for the cinema with production beginning in October 2007. It examines a fictional life of Jesus at the age of seven.

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s The Barna Group. Ltd. Is a privately held, for-profit corporation that conducts primary research, and produces media resources pertaining to spiritual development. It is located in Ventura, California and has been analyzing data in order to understand cultural trends since 1984. Its website is located at www.barna.org The material in this study was gathered from 1003 interviews of adults by telephone in May of 2006 in a random sampling. The sampling was conducted with people 18 and older in the continental United States. The maximum margin of sampling error was +/- 3.2% with a 95% confidence level. Results of this study can be found at the organization's website.

The Barna study also wanted to know whether a book can change people's religious beliefs. Of the 45 million who read *The Da Vinci Code*, 5% (two million adults) reported it had. George Barna who runs the Christian polling organization and operates a web site for dispensing the results, said, "Before reading *The Da Vinci Code* people had a belief system already in place, some firmly held, others loosely. Reading the book, many encountered information confirming what they already believed. Many readers found information that served to connect some of their beliefs in new ways, but few changed pre-existing beliefs because of what they read in the novel. Even fewer approached the book with a truly open mind regarding the controversial matters in question, emerging with a new theological perspective."[98]

Barna found that controversial materials generate discussion but usually do not disturb basic Christian beliefs. "It has not revolutionized the way Americans think about Jesus, the church or the Bible."[99] Two-million people did change their opinions, a number which cannot be considered insignificant: "... any book that alters one or more theological views among two million people is not to be dismissed lightly. That represents more people changing any of their beliefs as a result of exposure to the teaching offered at all of the nation's Christian churches combined during a typical week."[100]

The Barna study suggests Hispanics (17%), women (three times more likely than males), and liberals (twice as likely as conservatives) were most likely to alter an opinion. Upscale adults (college degree and household income over $60,000) were more likely to change a position than those considered downscale (no college degree, household income below $30,000).

This study correctly predicted huge success for the film version of *The Da Vinci Code*, and suggests results of movie-going percentages would have the same effect as books on religious belief. Based on this assumption, it might be anticipated that almost one-million more people could change a religious belief by seeing the film, as box office totals were even higher than predictions.

How do these findings compare with those found in a Protestant church in metro-Atlanta? I will examine this question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN – SURVEY OF BERKMAR UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

This chapter examines the relationship between churchgoers, their church, and the media in regards to religious belief and faith questions. The following study was conducted in December and January of 2006/7, following approval by the Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University in early December of 2006. The IRB sanctioned the Questionnaire, the Consent and Assent Forms, as well as the Methods of Distribution and receipt of results. The congregation of Berkmar United Methodist Church in Lilburn, Georgia was briefed as to the survey's purpose and the methods to be used in conducting a survey on how their beliefs might be affected by the media. Its pastor Tamlyn Collins approved the survey and its goals, and the investigator made appearances in church twice, in five Sunday school classes and in one youth meeting for the purpose of soliciting and informing those who might take part. On two Sundays, distribution of a total of 200 survey packets was made to those who felt they might successfully complete them. Participants were not required to be members of the church nor long-term attendants. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire within two weeks.

Fifty packets were returned (25% of total distribution). None were from youth between 16 and 18 years of age, even though three packets had been distributed to people in this age group. Of the fifty, 22 were men, 26 were women, and two opted not to identify their gender. It is worth noting that 74% of participants had post-secondary education. Of those, 2% had an Associates Degree, 38% had Bachelor's Degrees, and 14% had Graduate Degrees (including one PhD and one MD). Most filled out the form completely, and added additional comments

throughout and at the end.[t] 85% of all participants have taken, or are currently taking, classes concerning an array of religious issues.

Much of the material to be discussed is taken from questions in the main questionnaire; however, a separate chart (Main Media Chart – Appendix D, page 75) also provides more specific questioning solely on the media. In terms of the congregation's media consumption pertaining to faith issues, the members of Berkmar UMC reported that they are exposed to popular presentations of Christianity and the church. Responses show that documentary films of a scholastic nature are less viewed than devotional or fictional films. One might theorize that such spiritual influences would be expected to lead to a trendy and fad-based view of Christianity.

A high number of respondents had viewed movies focusing on religious material and/or theories on the life of Christ. Sixty-two percent of participants felt filmmakers do not present material in historical and factual ways. An additional 10% did not have an opinion. Those surveyed offered a resounding "no" as to whether Hollywood presents religious issues fairly. A variety of excerpts from their written responses helps to illustrate why:

- Filmmakers "romanticize" religion.
- The media often "portrays Satan as a pushover."
- It's impossible to use "Steve Martin as a Faith Healer and Whoopi Goldberg as a Nun and still be real."
- "Too much Hollywood in religious productions."
- "It's Hollywood's take on Christianity."
- "Too sensationalized (the whipping of Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ*)."
- "Too many liberties taken with actual scripture."
- "Christians are not usually portrayed in a flattering way."
- "No one actually knows what happened back then. There is very little documented evidence to back up many of the claims made." (*The Da Vinci Code* was the referenced source numerous times.)
- "Biblical facts are embellished to make it more entertaining (and financially rewarding)."
- "I would rather see films about actual Christians who struggle, pray, worship, and live the Christian life (such as *Facing the Giants*)."
- "The fact and fiction lines are too often blurred."

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[t] See Survey Questionnaire – Appendix C p. 67.

A strong response was given as to whether the media encourages a certain view of God. Most (54%) believe that it does. They indicated that by presenting a view which may be too politically correct, you avoid upsetting those who do not believe but, at the same time, risk alienating Christian viewers. Others felt that when God was dealt with on screen, He is often seen as a distant God who is harsh, but sometimes the opposite was portrayed, with God seen as human and laughable (such as George Burns in *Oh God*). Many responses indicated the media, all too often, picks up on the extreme side of Christianity, going for the fanatical voice or the eccentricities of some fundamentalists. Some respondents felt what is presented on screen is based on the dollar sign, arguing that most films are built on that which guarantees the most income. Others thought films reflected Hollywood's political or social agenda.

One issue participants had to address was the modern media's take on some basic tenets of Christianity. Concerns were widespread concerning historical accuracy of films such as *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*. Participants specifically questioned Gibson's portrayal of Jesus' last day on earth and Ron Howard's portrayal that Jesus was married and that His wife (Mary Magdalene) had a child after Jesus' Resurrection. Most doubted a romantic relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. On almost all of these questions, respondents felt that, if these theories were true, the Bible would have found some way to tell us that they were. However, 72% of all respondents were willing to investigate the sources of information concerning the life of Jesus. And in response to the question "In regards to your own faith what, if anything, do you believe you need to know more about," "Everything" was the response most often given by those wishing to expound.

When I examined questions concerning the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, I found some expected concerns over how the media has portrayed this topic. The subject of Mary resulted in less interest than that concerning the historical Jesus. Over 60% said they were not interested in hearing theories about a Jesus/Mary relationship, although respondents were slightly more interested (54%) in knowing about Mary Magdalene's history.

Many responses to these questions were connected in some way to theories presented in *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Passion of the Christ*. The sales push by Mel Gibson may or may not have been responsible for its resounding success at the box office. Sixty percent of my survey participants went to see *The Passion of the Christ*, some as a group from the church. However, only 32% of participants saw *The Da Vinci Code*. Thirty-two percent also said they had read Dan Brown's book version before the movie came out. They are not the same 32%, as many indicated they read the book but did not see the movie and vice versa. In addition, some who saw the movie are just now reading or listening to the book. In response to the question of sympathy for those who protested the showing of *The Da Vinci Code* film, few would comment except to point out both the book and the film had been clearly identified as works of fiction. Several participants did say, however, they could understand the protests, as "people have difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction."

Two questions which involved challenges to basic Christian tenets caused many participants to write additional material. One question asked, "There are some sources, other than the Bible, which claim to document the life of the historical Jesus. Are you open to investigating these sources?" The other question asked them to explain what they felt was the validity of such sources. Some of the responses were as follows:

- "'I question the lack of corroborating historical information."
- Several indicated "...people who do not have strong religious beliefs might be easily swayed."
- Another respondent said "The Church works best when it is 'under fire'."

The use of non-canonical material in and around church-related liturgy is still new to many Protestant churches. While the Apocrypha has been available for some time, few at Berkmar UMC were familiar with it. Even fewer respondents were familiar with the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Mary or the Gospel of Judas (much in the news recently). Only 18% had read any non-canonical material, including these materials, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Gnostic texts.

According to the survey, most participants get their religious information in the following order of importance:

- The Church
- Television
- Church-related classes (Sunday school, small group meetings, or formal education)
- Radio and Books (tied)
- Internet
- Magazines
- Other (identified as specifically Christian books, songs & hymns, the library, friends)
- Newspaper
- Non-canonical texts

"Movies" was not listed by a single participant as a *source* of religious information in the Media Chart summary. I can only conclude this to be an anomaly as movie references are very common in many written comments about topics to debate. In other words, while some adults said they did not see movies as a source of education, it is clear that they may. In most cases, when respondents indicate "television," they are referring to television programs of a religious nature (usually documentaries) such as those which appear on The History Channel, The Discovery Channel, The National Geographic Channel, to name a few.

In regards to using the internet to search for religious material, 46% had done so, 20% said "no" they had not, another 26% did not answer. This can be connected with the question on whether they might have used the internet to "chat" about religious questions online. 82% said "no" and another 10% did not answer. Many participants had successfully found information via the internet and believe it provides useful information. Some of the material participants sought included the following:

- Historical, archeological finds pertaining to Biblical events.
- Bible verses, inspirational readings and information on Biblical figures.
- Religious clip art, emerging church information.
- Information about religious and spiritual leaders.
- Prayers, including sources for Native American prayers.

The type of media doing the worst job of explaining and/or covering issues of a religious nature is believed to be television, followed by movies, newspapers, radio, magazines, the

internet and books (tied), and lastly non-canonical texts. (It is difficult to explain how non-canonical texts might be included in a listing of media which is not doing a good job of covering current religious issues.)

Lastly, the survey group at Berkmar United Methodist Church expects to get most of its information about religion in the future from (in order of importance) :

- The Church
- Educational Classes
- Books
- The Internet
- Magazines
- Other
- TV and Radio and non-canonical texts (tied)
- The Newspaper

This study suggests that many modern church goers are not resistant to engaging modern media, even if the ideas presented run counter to their own socialized or self-educated religious belief systems. It is clear people attend movies, for instance, that present fictional accounts of religious beliefs that are not those of the audience. Many of those surveyed admit they go simply for entertainment. The survey shows that these participants are considering new possibilities in regards to the nature and beliefs of Christianity. The source of much of this new input is the contemporary mass media. From the variety of surveys examined for this thesis, I can suggest many Christians are exposing themselves to, and willing to listen to, something new, either contemporary teachings about newer religious movements or newer scholarship on old teachings.

Ironically as I was preparing to begin my study, Baylor University Sociologists announced preliminary results from the largest national study of religious beliefs conducted in the U.S.[u] Preliminary results were released at The National Press Club on September 11,

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u Baylor University sociologists surveyed Americans in the fall of 2005. The study "American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the US. he Values and Beliefs of the American Public – A National Study" was, conducted by the Gallup polling organization and, funded by the John Templeton Foundation. 3702 potential respondents were approached with the 16-page questionnaire and 1721 (46%) forms were completed. This represented a margin of error of +/- 4%. Baylor's questionnaire was designed and investigated by their Institute for Studies of Religion, Waco, Texas. It contained 77 questions with over 350 answer choices. The

2006.[101] One of their biggest findings appears to coincide with my own thoughts following the Berkmar United Methodist Church study.

The Baylor study addressed the question of the media. Early indications coincide with my own research that movies and books, with specific themes, have vast implications in America. Baylor's study reported 44.3% of respondents had seen Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* (lower than Berkmar UMC's 60%), and more than 10% had spent over $50 in the last month for religious books and music (more than Berkmar participants). Baylor's early results indicted 28.5% of Americans had read *The Da Vinci Code*; 19%, including 25% of all women, had read Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* and 19% had read at least one book in the *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic novels. For Berkmar UMC, 32% had read *The Da Vinci Code*. The percentage is likely considerably higher for Rick Warren's book, *A Purpose Driven Life*, as the church conducted a months' long book study project on Sundays and in what they call Small Group's (5-10 people who meet weekly to discuss a variety of issues). I have no comparison data on the *Left Behind* series even though it was listed many times among the answers to Question #27 in the survey: "What sources of Information about Biblical events are you aware of OTHER than the Bible?" and Question #34 "Please Give Examples of Christian Novels or 'self-help' books which you have read."

The results of my survey generally reveal that attendees of Berkmar United Methodist Church are being challenged by new media offerings, some being provoked by the media to a point of wanting to know more. The results of this study offered a conundrum to me as the investigator. On the one hand, some respondents suggest that new religious theories, even when presented in a fictional envelop, were watched simply as entertainment, while others were willing to watch and listen to religious concepts never seen or heard before. I believe members of Berkmar United Methodist Church are engaging material (whatever the media) which they believe is beneficial to their spiritual growth. Considering the amount of media material that is

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results are said to be representative of the U.S. population in age, gender, and race. Baylor researchers will conclude an initial 2-year examination in the fall of 2007 and then redo the survey in order to track trends.

available and the breadth of its scope, they will have sufficient amounts from which to choose. As in the Baylor study, additional examination and further questionnaires in the future would be helpful to track the changes Berkmar United Methodist Church and others are sure to be experiencing.

CHAPTER EIGHT – CONCLUSION

How should believers respond and react to the religious movie, novel, or program in the future? One response is to rise up in protest, to express displeasure with points that go against their own belief systems. But it is clear that some of these responses just bring more public awareness and interest to the subject of the protest. Others who may be unfamiliar with the issues concerned are convinced to examine them more closely to see what all the debate is about or at least to determine what protestors are trying to keep from public knowledge. In addition, the media has been known not portray people with such religious concerns kindly, labeling them as favoring censorship.

Should religious people ignore the controversies generated by media portrayals? This, too, may be a problematic response. The media influences people's morals, values and even religious beliefs, and in the last 100 years, there have been many instances when the media has been helpful to religious aims. Even *The Da Vinci Code* became a powerful source to motivate Christians to learn more about their own faith. Ironically, the Jesus of two-thousand years ago left little, in the way of instructions, for his followers. The Jesus of today's media just might. The events that transpired two-thousand years ago left Christians much room to interpret. Today, this same interpretive process continues in the forum of the media. Christianity has a central principle which says truth changes lives. Religious media portrayal offers the opportunity to examine truth claims and to transform lives.

Finally, should this material be used as a means to think and talk about the roots of Christianity? I think media presentations offer a unique opportunity, since 66% of all people discuss, at some point in an average week, events and ideas seen at the movies, on TV, or in print. This is encouraging news as most Americans are lacking in knowledge of Christian origins, the details of the Bible, the distinction between heresy and Biblical teaching, and key

events in church history. If there is a void of knowledge here, one could conclude that even media controversies contribute to our public body of knowledge. It is then possible to look at such controversies as opportunities to fill the void, using the issues expressed in books and movies as a springboard to other topics. The cable network AMC (American Movie Classics) now produces a program called *Movies that Shook the World*. Its goal is to stir social and political debate and provoke controversy. Tellingly, out of the nine scheduled programs for the first AMC series, three films (*The Exorcist*, *Birth of a Nation*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*) are included in this thesis's discussion of religious films.[v]

Some conclusions may also be drawn about the benefits of media attention given to religious material by discussing one of the most recent and possibly controversial media presentations in recent years. In fact, the latest story came out as this essay was beating on the deadline door. With little fanfare and promotion, a news release came out Sunday, February 25th, 2007, stating that a news conference would be held the following day in New York City. This news conference would discuss claims made by film producer James Cameron and director Simcha Jacobovici that they had discovered *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* [102] and that a documentary of the same name would air on the Discovery Channel the following Sunday, March 4th, 2007. In the space of one week, both The Discovery Channel and the filmmaker had established separate web sites with extensive information available online. The news conference was held. A book entitled *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* by Jacobovici appeared prominently at most chain bookstores, and the program itself aired as scheduled March 4th followed by a panel discussion concerning the film's claims. Thousands of articles have been written about the events the documentary portrayed. It is difficult to judge public reaction following these types of "news"

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[v] *Movies That Shook The World* was a series of nine half-hour, made-for-television, and programs looking at nine featured movies considered to have cultural significance. The series was produced by AMC, a division of Rainbow Media Holdings LLC hosted by Actor Jeff Goldblum. The first series included the following films*: The Exorcist (1973), Fatal Attraction (1987), China Syndrome (1979), Do The Right Thing* (1989), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *The Graduate* (1967), *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *American Graffiti* (1973) & *The Last Temptation of Christ (*1988) Other films are in the planning stages, however, it is not know whether the series will continue.

events. The networks (in this case The Discovery Channel) will not reveal (nor do they know exactly) how many people were watching their program. A DVD was available for sale on their website, but the Channel would not reveal the number of orders.

As of 10 pm Monday, March 5th, 2007, 24 hours after the program's presentation, there had been 15,678 comments and questions on The Discovery Channel's website concerning the program. Every one of the "bloggers" had to register online (providing a name, address, telephone number and other information) in order to make a comment. The comments themselves ran the gamut from calling the film "rubbish" to detailed responses on how certain facts could or could not be used in evidence in the documentary's proposals. Once again, the media had accomplished what the church sometimes has a hard time accomplishing: getting Americans excited about religious questions.

The media has influence, and movies, in particular, seem to play a special role in the transfer of information. Sitting in the back row of that 1950s theatre, I could inhabit another time and place, imagine myself as someone else, import a philosophy or behavior of someone I might not be familiar with. The intellectual inspiration from movies continues today. One of the opening lines of *The Da Vinci Code* states, "Symbols are a language that can tell us about our past. As the saying goes, a picture can speak a thousand words...but which words?"[103] Should those inspired to seek out these new sources of material facilitate those words and conversations about truth *or* fiction? Can Christians discuss their faith's birth and evolution? Today, many people do not know what to believe, and these people may develop even more questions after watching these movies or reading these books. There is likelihood that, if you are Christian, you might have seen *The Passion of the Christ* in an audience with others claiming a religious faith similar to your own. Do they in fact think as you do? What did they have to say about Gibson's portrayal and how it relates to their faith? The mass media challenges our thinking and our belief systems via these documentaries, films, and books, and it invites us to engage in public forums, amid believers and non-believers alike.

There may not always be fixed rules on how to understand what one finds. They may just be words on a page or on papyrus, scratchings on an Ossuary, or images on a screen. But every religious work, whether ancient text, the latest book, or brand-new DVD, must be examined for a variety of issues including the context in which it is presented, the history it relies upon, and the ideas it explores. What is the information? What does it *mean*? Many have asked, even within my own survey, whether people can live with the creative and artistic license taken in the media's contemporary presentation of religious issues. My response was with a question: "Who would have thought the truth might be found as a result of fiction"?

APPENDIX A

Early Religious Films – Produced 1897 - 1928

Year	Title	Director/Company
1897	*The Passion*	Lear
1897	*The Passion*	Luminere
1897	*The Passion Play*	Klaw
1898	*Passion Play of Oberammergau*	Edison
1898	*The Passion Play*	Lubin
1898	*The Passion Play*	Lubin
1898	*The Passion*	Gaum
1898	*The Passion Play*	Hollaman
1898	*Jésus devant Pilate*	Guy
1899	*Christ walking on Water*	Melies
1900	*The Passion Play*	Topi
1900	*Soldiers of the Cross*	Perry
1902	*Quo Vadis*	Zecca/Pathe
1904	*The Wandering Jew*	Melies
1905	*Life and Passion of Jesus Christ*	Zecca/Pathe
1906	*The Life of Christ*	Guy
1907	*Ben Hur*	Olcott
1907	*The Life of Jesus*	Fr.
1907	*The Life of Christ*	US
1908	*Jerusalem in the Time of Christ*	US
1908	*Salome*	
1908	*Star of Bethlehem*	Edison
1908	*Life and Passion of Jesus Christ*	?/Pathe
1908	*Quo Vadis*	
1909	*Birth of Jesus*	Pathe
1909	*The Kiss of Judas*	
1909	*The Passion Play*	Gaumont
1910	*Herod and the Newborn King*	Gaumont
1910	*The Life and Passion of Christ*	Kleine
1910	*Resurrection of Lazarus*	Éclair
1911	*Jesus*	
1911	*The Miracle*	Eclipse
1911	*The Mysterious Stranger*	Eclipse
1911	*Though your sins be as Scarlet*	Vitagraph
1912	*The Illumination*	Vitagraph
1912	*The Pilgrim*	Casserini
1912	*Satan*	Maggi/Ambrosio
1912	*Saved by Divine Providence*	Pathe
1912	*Star of Bethlehem*	Thanhouser
1913	*From the Manger to the Cross*	Olcott
1913	*The Carpenter*	Vitagraph
1913	*The Crimson Cross*	Éclair
1913	*The Wandering Jew*	Italian
1913	*Salome*	European Feature Films
1913	*Quo Vadis*	

1913	***Three Wise Men***	
1913	***A Daughter of the Hills***	**Famous Players**
1914	***Mary Magdalene***	**Kennedy**
1914	***The Last Supper***	**American Film Man. Co.**
1914	***The Birth of our Saviour***	**Edison**
1914	***Triumph of an Emperor***	
1915	***Business is Business***	**Universal**
1915	***Son of Man***	
1916	***Intolerance***	**DW Griffith**
1916	***Civilization***	**Ince**
1916	***Light at Dusk***	**Lubin**
1917	***Warfare of the Flesh***	**Edward Warren Prod**
1917	***Christus***	**Cines**
1917	***The Passing of the Third Floor***	**Ideal**
1917	***Crossing the Bar***	**Edison**
1918	***Morok***	
1918	***The Wandering Jew***	
1918	***Restitution***	**Howard Gaye**
1918	***Salome***	**Fox**
1919	***What Shall we do with Him***	**Revier**
1919	***Thou Shalt Not***	**Brabin**
1919	***The Eternal Light***	**Catholic Art Assoc.**
1919	***The Eternal Magdalene***	**Goldwyn**
1919	***The Woman of Lies***	**World Film Corp.**
1920	***The Man who Dared***	
1920	***The Great Redeemer***	
1921	***The Servant in the House***	**Federated**
1921	***Leaves from Satan's Book***	**Dreyer**
1921	***Behold the Man***	**Spencer Gordon Bennett**
1921	***The Star of Bethlehem***	**Reinger**
1922	**Crusade of the Innocent**	**Jawit**
1923	***INRI***	**Nemann**
1923	***Salome***	**Allied**
1923	***Salome***	**Malcolm Strauss**
1923	***The Wandering Jew***	**Stoll**
1924	***The Passion Play***	**Buchowetzki**
1925	***Ben Hur***	**MGM/Niblo**
1925	***The Man Nobody Knows***	**LeRoy**
1925	***Quo Vadis***	**Kenepp Ambrosio**
1926	***The Wanderer***	**Paramount**
1926	***Sparrows***	**Beaudine**
1927	***The King of Kings***	**DeMille**
1928	***In Motherhood:Life's Greatest Miracle***	**Blue Ray Prod.**
1928	***The Passion Play***	
1928	***Jesus of Nazareth***	**Ideal**

APPENDIX B

The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code)

If motion pictures present stories that will affect lives for the better, they can become the most powerful
force for the improvement of mankind.

A Code to Govern the Making of Talking, Synchronized and Silent Motion Pictures. Formulated and formally adopted by The Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. and The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. in March 1930.

Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence which have been placed in them by the people of the world and which have made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment.

They recognize their responsibility to the public because of this trust and because entertainment and art are important influences in the life of a nation.

Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking.

During the rapid transition from silent to talking pictures they have realized the necessity and the opportunity of subscribing to a Code to govern the production of talking pictures and of re-acknowledging this responsibility.

On their part, they ask from the public and from public leaders a sympathetic understanding of their purposes and problems and a spirit of cooperation that will allow them the freedom and opportunity necessary to bring the motion picture to a still higher level of wholesome entertainment for all the people.

General Principles

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.

2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.

3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

Particular Applications

I. Crimes Against the Law
These shall never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against law and justice or to inspire others with a desire for imitation.

1. Murder

a. The technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation.

b. Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail.

c. Revenge in modern times shall not be justified.

2. Methods of Crime should not be explicitly presented.

a. Theft, robbery, safe-cracking, and dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc., should not be detailed in method.

b. Arson must subject to the same safeguards.

c. The use of firearms should be restricted to the essentials.

d. Methods of smuggling should not be presented.

3. Illegal drug traffic must never be presented.

4. The use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterization, will not be shown.

II. Sex

The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing.

1. Adultery, sometimes necessary plot material, must not be explicitly treated, or justified, or presented attractively.

2. Scenes of Passion

a. They should not be introduced when not essential to the plot.

b. Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures, are not to be shown.

c. In general passion should so be treated that these scenes do not stimulate the lower and baser element.

3. Seduction or Rape

a. They should never be more than suggested, and only when essential for the plot, and even then never shown by explicit method.

b. They are never the proper subject for comedy.

4. Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden.

5. White slavery shall not be treated.

6. Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races) is forbidden.

7. Sex hygiene and venereal diseases are not subjects for motion pictures.

8. Scenes of actual child birth, in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented.

9. Children's sex organs are never to be exposed.

III. Vulgarity
The treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil, subjects should always be subject to the dictates of good taste and a regard for the sensibilities of the audience.

IV. Obscenity
Obscenity in word, gesture, reference, song, joke, or by suggestion (even when likely to be understood only by part of the audience) is forbidden.

V. Profanity
Pointed profanity (this includes the words, God, Lord, Jesus, Christ - unless used reverently - Hell, S.O.B., damn, Gawd), or every other profane or vulgar expression however used, is forbidden.

VI. Costume
1. Complete nudity is never permitted. This includes nudity in fact or in silhouette, or any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by other characters in the picture.

2. Undressing scenes should be avoided, and never used save where essential to the plot.

3. Indecent or undue exposure is forbidden.

4. Dancing or costumes intended to permit undue exposure or indecent movements in the dance are forbidden.

VII. Dances
1. Dances suggesting or representing sexual actions or indecent passions are forbidden.

2. Dances which emphasize indecent movements are to be regarded as obscene.

VIII. Religion
1. No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith.

2. Ministers of religion in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or as villains.

3. Ceremonies of any definite religion should be carefully and respectfully handled.

IX. Locations
The treatment of bedrooms must be governed by good taste and delicacy.

X. National Feelings
1. The use of the Flag shall be consistently respectful.

2. The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.

XI. Titles
Salacious, indecent, or obscene titles shall not be used.

XII. Repellent Subjects
The following subjects must be treated within the careful limits of good taste:
1. Actual hangings or electrocutions as legal punishments for crime.
2. Third degree methods.
3. Brutality and possible gruesomeness.
4. Branding of people or animals.
5. Apparent cruelty to children or animals.
6. The sale of women, or a woman selling her virtue.
7. Surgical operations.

Reasons Supporting the Preamble of the Code

I. Theatrical motion pictures, that is, pictures intended for the theatre as distinct from pictures intended for churches, schools, lecture halls, educational movements, social reform movements, etc., are primarily to be regarded as ENTERTAINMENT.

Mankind has always recognized the importance of entertainment and its value in rebuilding the bodies and souls of human beings.

But it has always recognized that entertainment can be a character either HELPFUL or HARMFUL to the human race, and in consequence has clearly distinguished between:

a. Entertainment which tends to improve the race, or at least to re-create and rebuild human beings exhausted with the realities of life; and

b. Entertainment which tends to degrade human beings, or to lower their standards of life and living.

Hence the MORAL IMPORTANCE of entertainment is something which has been universally recognized. It enters intimately into the lives of men and women and affects them closely; it occupies their minds and affections during leisure hours; and ultimately touches the whole of their lives. A man may be judged by his standard of entertainment as easily as by the standard of his work.

So correct entertainment raises the whole standard of a nation.

Wrong entertainment lowers the whole living conditions and moral ideals of a race.

Note, for example, the healthy reactions to healthful sports, like baseball, golf; the unhealthy reactions to sports like cockfighting, bullfighting, bear baiting, etc.

Note, too, the effect on ancient nations of gladiatorial combats, the obscene plays of Roman times, etc.

II. Motion pictures are very important as ART.

Though a new art, possibly a combination art, it has the same object as the other arts, the presentation of human thought, emotion, and experience, in terms of an appeal to the soul through the senses.

Here, as in entertainment,

Art enters intimately into the lives of human beings.

Art can be morally good, lifting men to higher levels. This has been done through good music, great painting, authentic fiction, poetry, drama.

Art can be morally evil it its effects. This is the case clearly enough with unclean art, indecent books, suggestive drama. The effect on the lives of men and women are obvious.

Note: It has often been argued that art itself is unmoral, neither good nor bad. This is true of the THING which is music, painting, poetry, etc. But the THING is the PRODUCT of some person's mind, and the intention of that mind was either good or bad morally when it produced the thing. Besides, the thing has its EFFECT upon those who come into contact with it. In both these ways, that is, as a product of a mind and as the cause of definite effects, it has a deep moral significance and unmistakable moral quality.

Hence: The motion pictures, which are the most popular of modern arts for the masses, have their moral quality from the intention of the minds which produce them and from their effects on the moral lives and reactions of their audiences. This gives them a most important morality.

1. They reproduce the morality of the men who use the pictures as a medium for the expression of their ideas and ideals.

2. They affect the moral standards of those who, through the screen, take in these ideas and ideals.

In the case of motion pictures, the effect may be particularly emphasized because no art has so quick and so widespread an appeal to the masses. It has become in an incredibly short period the art of the multitudes.

III. The motion picture, because of its importance as entertainment and because of the trust placed in it by the peoples of the world, has special MORAL OBLIGATIONS:

A. Most arts appeal to the mature. This art appeals at once to every class, mature, immature, developed, undeveloped, law abiding, criminal. Music has its grades for different classes; so has literature and drama. This art of the motion picture, combining as it does the two fundamental appeals of looking at a picture and listening to a story, at once reaches every class of society.

B. By reason of the mobility of film and the ease of picture distribution, and because the possibility of duplicating positives in large quantities, this art reaches places unpenetrated by other forms of art.

C. Because of these two facts, it is difficult to produce films intended for only certain classes of people. The exhibitors' theatres are built for the masses, for the cultivated and the rude, the mature and the immature, the self-respecting and the criminal. Films, unlike books and music, can with difficulty be confined to certain selected groups.

D. The latitude given to film material cannot, in consequence, be as wide as the latitude given to book material. In addition:

a. A book describes; a film vividly presents. One presents on a cold page; the other by apparently living people.

b. A book reaches the mind through words merely; a film reaches the eyes and ears through the reproduction of actual events.

c. The reaction of a reader to a book depends largely on the keenness of the reader's imagination; the reaction to a film depends on the vividness of presentation.

Hence many things which might be described or suggested in a book could not possibly be presented in a film.

E. This is also true when comparing the film with the newspaper.

a. Newspapers present by description, films by actual presentation.

b. Newspapers are after the fact and present things as having taken place; the film gives the events in the process of enactment and with apparent reality of life.

F. Everything possible in a play is not possible in a film:

a. Because of the larger audience of the film, and its consequential mixed character. Psychologically, the larger the audience, the lower the moral mass resistance to suggestion.

b. Because through light, enlargement of character, presentation, scenic emphasis, etc., the screen story is brought closer to the audience than the play.

c. The enthusiasm for and interest in the film actors and actresses, developed beyond anything of the sort in history, makes the audience largely sympathetic toward the characters they portray and the stories in which they figure. Hence the audience is more ready to confuse actor and actress and the characters they portray, and it is most receptive of the emotions and ideals presented by the favorite stars.

G. Small communities, remote from sophistication and from the hardening process which often takes place in the ethical and moral standards of larger cities, are easily and readily reached by any sort of film.

H. The grandeur of mass settings, large action, spectacular features, etc., affects and arouses more intensely the emotional side of the audience.

In general, the mobility, popularity, accessibility, emotional appeal, vividness, straightforward presentation of fact in the film make for more intimate contact with a larger audience and for greater emotional appeal.

Hence the larger moral responsibilities of the motion pictures.

Reasons Underlying the General Principles

I. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin.

This is done:

1. When evil is made to appear attractive and alluring, and good is made to appear unattractive.

2. When the sympathy of the audience is thrown on the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, sin. The same is true of a film that would thrown sympathy against goodness, honor, innocence, purity or honesty.

Note: Sympathy with a person who sins is not the same as sympathy with the sin or crime of which he is guilty. We may feel sorry for the plight of the murderer or even understand the circumstances which led him to his crime: we may not feel sympathy with the wrong which he has done. The presentation of evil is often essential for art or fiction or drama. This in itself is not wrong provided:

a. That evil is not presented alluringly. Even if later in the film the evil is condemned or punished, it must not be allowed to appear so attractive that the audience's emotions are drawn to desire or approve so strongly that later the condemnation is forgotten and only the apparent joy of sin is remembered.

b. That throughout, the audience feels sure that evil is wrong and good is right.

II. Correct standards of life shall, as far as possible, be presented.

A wide knowledge of life and of living is made possible through the film. When right standards are consistently presented, the motion picture exercises the most powerful influences. It builds character, develops right ideals, inculcates correct principles, and all this in attractive story form.

If motion pictures consistently hold up for admiration high types of characters and present stories that will affect lives for the better, they can become the most powerful force for the improvement of mankind.

III. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

By natural law is understood the law which is written in the hearts of all mankind, the greater underlying principles of right and justice dictated by conscience.

By human law is understood the law written by civilized nations.

1. The presentation of crimes against the law is often necessary for the carrying out of the plot. But the presentation must not throw sympathy with the crime as against the law nor with the criminal as against those who punish him.

2. The courts of the land should not be presented as unjust. This does not mean that a single court may not be presented as unjust, much less that a single court official must not be presented this way. But the court system of the country must not suffer as a result of this presentation.

Reasons Underlying the Particular Applications

I. Sin and evil enter into the story of human beings and hence in themselves are valid dramatic material.

II. In the use of this material, it must be distinguished between sin which repels by it very nature, and sins which often attract.

a. In the first class come murder, most theft, many legal crimes, lying, hypocrisy, cruelty, etc.

b. In the second class come sex sins, sins and crimes of apparent heroism, such as banditry, daring thefts, leadership in evil, organized crime, revenge, etc.

The first class needs less care in treatment, as sins and crimes of this class are naturally unattractive. The audience instinctively condemns all such and is repelled.

Hence the important objective must be to avoid the hardening of the audience, especially of those who are young and impressionable, to the thought and fact of crime. People can become accustomed even to murder, cruelty, brutality, and repellent crimes, if these are too frequently repeated.

The second class needs great care in handling, as the response of human nature to their appeal is obvious. This is treated more fully below.

III. A careful distinction can be made between films intended for general distribution, and films intended for use in theatres restricted to a limited audience. Themes and plots quite appropriate for the latter would be altogether out of place and dangerous in the former.

Note: The practice of using a general theatre and limiting its patronage to "Adults Only" is not completely satisfactory and is only partially effective.

However, maturer minds may easily understand and accept without harm subject matter in plots which do younger people positive harm.

Hence: If there should be created a special type of theatre, catering exclusively to an adult audience, for plays of this character (plays with problem themes, difficult discussions and maturer treatment) it would seem to afford an outlet, which does not now exist, for pictures unsuitable for general distribution but permissible for exhibitions to a restricted audience.

I. Crimes Against the Law
The treatment of crimes against the law must not:

1. Teach methods of crime.
2. Inspire potential criminals with a desire for imitation.
3. Make criminals seem heroic and justified.

Revenge in modern times shall not be justified. In lands and ages of less developed civilization and moral principles, revenge may sometimes be presented. This would be the case especially in places where no law exists to cover the crime because of which revenge is committed.

Because of its evil consequences, the drug traffic should not be presented in any form. The existence of the trade should not be brought to the attention of audiences.

The use of liquor should never be excessively presented. In scenes from American life, the necessities of plot and proper characterization alone justify its use. And in this case, it should be shown with moderation.

II. Sex
Out of a regard for the sanctity of marriage and the home, the triangle, that is, the love of a third party for one already married, needs careful handling. The treatment should not throw sympathy against marriage as an institution.

Scenes of passion must be treated with an honest acknowledgement of human nature and its normal reactions. Many scenes cannot be presented without arousing dangerous emotions on the part of the immature, the young or the criminal classes.

Even within the limits of pure love, certain facts have been universally regarded by lawmakers as outside the limits of safe presentation.

In the case of impure love, the love which society has always regarded as wrong and which has been banned by divine law, the following are important:

1. Impure love must not be presented as attractive and beautiful.

2. It must not be the subject of comedy or farce, or treated as material for laughter.

3. It must not be presented in such a way to arouse passion or morbid curiosity on the part of the audience.

4. It must not be made to seem right and permissible.

5. It general, it must not be detailed in method and manner.

III. Vulgarity; IV. Obscenity; V. Profanity; hardly need further explanation than is contained in the Code.

VI. Costume
General Principles:

1. The effect of nudity or semi-nudity upon the normal man or woman, and much more upon the young and upon immature persons, has been honestly recognized by all lawmakers and moralists.

2. Hence the fact that the nude or semi-nude body may be beautiful does not make its use in the films moral. For, in addition to its beauty, the effect of the nude or semi-nude body on the normal individual must be taken into consideration.

3. Nudity or semi-nudity used simply to put a "punch" into a picture comes under the head of immoral actions. It is immoral in its effect on the average audience.

4. Nudity can never be permitted as being necessary for the plot. Semi-nudity must not result in undue or indecent exposures.

5. Transparent or translucent materials and silhouette are frequently more suggestive than actual exposure.

VII. Dances
Dancing in general is recognized as an art and as a beautiful form of expressing human emotions.

But dances which suggest or represent sexual actions, whether performed solo or with two or more; dances intended to excite the emotional reaction of an audience; dances with movement of the breasts, excessive body movements while the feet are stationary, violate decency and are wrong.

VIII. Religion
The reason why ministers of religion may not be comic characters or villains is simply because the attitude taken toward them may easily become the attitude taken toward religion in general. Religion is lowered in the minds of the audience because of the lowering of the audience's respect for a minister.

IX. Locations
Certain places are so closely and thoroughly associated with sexual life or with sexual sin that their use must be carefully limited.

X. National Feelings
The just rights, history, and feelings of any nation are entitled to most careful consideration and respectful treatment.

XI. Titles
As the title of a picture is the brand on that particular type of goods, it must conform to the ethical practices of all such honest business.

XII. Repellent Subjects
Such subjects are occasionally necessary for the plot. Their treatment must never offend good taste nor injure the sensibilities of an audience.

APPENDIX C

Berkmar United Methodist Church Field Study / Questionnaire
Conducted by Mitchell L. Leopard – Georgia State University
Department of Religious Studies – Graduate Office
Institutional Review Board Protocol # H07124 Fall 2006

* This survey is confidential. Your identity will never be released.
* You will be asked to sign a consent form.
* Please circle the "Y=Yes" or "N=No" response closest to your opinion.
* Please fill in the blanks for questions requiring a response.
* If there is not enough space, continue on the back page of this survey.
* All members of a family over the age of 16 are encouraged to take part in this survey. (Parental consent forms will be supplied for 16 & 17 year olds.)

Questions about YOU

Your Name _____
(Your name is only required if you do not mind me calling you for further information.)
Your email address _____
(This could facilitate the need for some follow-up questions, but is not required)
Your phone number _____
(Not required if you prefer not to be disturbed by phone)
Age: _____ Gender: M F
How long have you attended Berkmar UMC? _____years/months.
Marital Status: Married_____ Single_____ Divorced_____ Widowed_____
Level of education _____. Degree Y N Year ____ Major_____

1) Do you believe it is the Christian community's responsibility to explain its history? Y N
2) Do you believe this community does a good job of explaining the history of the church and Christianity? Y N

3) Have you attended Church-related educational programs or classes, which pertain to the Bible or church history? Y N

4) If yes to #3, what material was covered? _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5) Do you discuss "world religions" (inter-faith) with members of your church? Y N With those who are not members of your church? Y N

6) Do you discuss Christianity with those who are not members of your church or religion? Y N

7) What issues do you believe the modern media does not address in regard to your beliefs? _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8) Do you believe most entertainment movies, (seen at theatres) which comment on religious issues, present material in a historical and factual way? Y N

9) If no, please give example(s) of how they were not historical or factual.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

10) How important is it for you to have regular contact with non-Christians?

Very Important _____ Important _____ Not Very Important _____

11) If important, in what context does this contact help you? _____

_____

_____

_____

12) America today has many differing types of Protestant religions, as well as many new non-Protestant religions. How important is this to you?

Very Important _____ Important _____ Not Very Important _____

13) Have you ever read any scripture from a denomination or faith which is not you own? Y N

14) Does one have to be Christian in order to attain salvation? Y N

God, Jesus and the Bible

15) How do you envision God? Strongly agree Agree Strongly Disagree

A. A *creator God only*……

B. *Demands strict obedience now*……

C. *Active, friendly and helpful now*……

D. *Is critical and judges now*……

16) Where did you get these concepts? _____

_____

_____

_____

17) Do you think the media encourages certain views of God? Y N

18) In regards to #17, how does the media encourage a certain view of God?

_____

_____

_____

_____

19) There are some sources, other than the Bible, which claim to document the life of the historical Jesus? Are you open to investigating these sources of information concerning His life? Y N

20) There have been many claims recently (movie, documentaries, books, and magazine articles) concerning a relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Do such claims interest you? Y N

21) In the Bible, there are different descriptions of the background of Mary Magdalene. Does this topic interest you? Y N

22) In regards to #19, #20, and #21 why or why not do they interest you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

23) How reliable do you believe popular media representations of Jesus' life and biblical events are? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

24) What sources are you aware of that discuss Judas Iscariot? _____

_____

_____

_____

25) In connection with #24, have you read these sources? Y N

26) Which of those sources would you consider reliable? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

27) What sources of information about biblical events are you aware of OTHER than the Bible? _____

_____

_____

_____

28) What is your opinion of these sources? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

GENERAL QUESTIONS

29) Have you seen the movie *The Passion of the Christ*? Y N

30) Have you seen the movie *The Da Vinci Code*? Y N

31) Have you read the book *The Da Vinci Code*? Y N

32) Thousands of people around the world (including the United States) protested the release of the movie *The Da Vinci Code*. Why or why not do you sympathize with their concerns?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

33) Have you ever read any Christian books which were not accepted into the canonized version of the Holy Bible, such as *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Judas*, *The Gospel of Mary*, et cetera? Y N

34) Please give examples of Christian novels or "self-help" books which you have read. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

35) Have you viewed any movies which contain religious material, and/or theories on the life of Christ? Y N

36) What programs has Berkmar UMC sponsored which address books or other media that discuss Jesus' life or other biblical events?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

37) Have you attended any of the events mentioned in #36? Y N

38) What was your response to these events? _____

_____

_____

_____

In regards to your own faith, what if anything, do you believe you need to know more about? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

The Internet

39) If you "Google" information, of a religious nature, what were you seeking?

_____

_____

_____

_____

41) What sites do you visit? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

42) What sites do you consider reliable? _____

_____

_____

43) What sites do you consider unreliable?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

44) Do you “chat” online, with people you do not know, concerning non-canonical material or religion in general? Y N

APPENDIX D

The Media and your acquisition of religious information

In "Other Media" on the Right-hand side of the chart, "other" has been written in a number of times and is identified as "Christian Books," "Songs and Hymns," "The Library," and "Friends."

In this section of the questionnaire you are asked to identify how you gain information concerning faith, religion, etc. **Please read the questions in the column below, then check (√) all columns to the right which apply.**	Television	Radio	Movies	Magazines	Internet	Newspaper	Popular Books	Church	Educational Classes	Non-canonical texts	Other media (please specify)
Have you read, heard, and/or viewed stories, concerning religious issues, from any of these sources?	44	33	39	30	21	28	36	44	35	8	2
From which media sources do you receive most of your religious education outside the church?	16	12	0	6	8	2	13	0	14	1	4
Do you spend over $50 per year with any of these media sources?	5	0	2	3	3	1	14	12	7	1	4
Which of these media, if any, have influenced or affected what you believe about your faith, religion, or beliefs?	8	10	3	5	6	2	21	37	25	4	4
Which media has presented material you consider offensive?	34	27	37	18	13	19	16	4	2	4	0
Which media, if any, generally does a bad job of covering religious issues and events?	24	11	20	9	4	16	4	0	0	1	0
In the future, which media sources would you be most likely to use to gain additional information about religion?	4	4	1	7	15	3	19	36	23	4	5

APPENDIX E

Documentary Shows Possible Jesus Tomb
By KAREN MATTHEWS

NEW YORK (AP) – 2/26/07

Filmmakers and researchers on Monday unveiled two ancient stone boxes they said may have once contained the remains of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, but several scholars derided the claims made in a new documentary as unfounded and contradictory to basic Christian beliefs.

``The Lost Tomb of Jesus,'' produced by Oscar-winning director James Cameron and scheduled to air March 4 on the Discovery Channel, argues that 10 small caskets, called ossuaries, discovered in 1980 in a Jerusalem suburb may have held the bones of Jesus and his family.

One of the caskets even bears the title, ``Judah, son of Jesus,'' hinting that Jesus may have had a son, according to the film. The claim that Jesus even had an ossuary contradicts the Christian belief that he was resurrected and ascended to heaven.

A panel of scholars that joined the filmmakers Monday at the New York Public Library addressed that criticism and others. James Tabor, a professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, said that while literal interpreters of the Bible say Jesus' physical body rose from the dead, ``one might affirm resurrection in a more spiritual way in which the husk of the body is left behind.''

But Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said Christianity ``has always understood the physical resurrection of Christ to be at the very center of the faith.''

Cameron, who won an Academy Award for directing ``Titanic,'' said he was excited to be associated with the Jesus film, which was directed by Toronto filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici.

``We don't have any physical record of Jesus' existence,'' he said. ``So what this film ... shows is for the first time tangible, physical, archaeological and in some cases forensic evidence.''

He said that to a layman's eye ``it seemed pretty darn compelling.''

Jacobovici said that a name on one of the ossuaries - ``Mariamene'' - offers evidence that the tomb is that of Jesus and his family. In early Christian texts, ``Mariamene'' is the name of Mary Magdalene, he said.

Most Christians believe Jesus' body spent three days at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem's Old City. The burial site identified in Cameron's documentary is in a southern Jerusalem neighborhood nowhere near the church.

In 1996, when the British Broadcasting Corp. aired a short documentary on the same subject, archaeologists challenged the claims. Amos Kloner, the first archaeologist to examine the site, said the idea fails to hold up by archaeological standards but makes for profitable television.

``They just want to get money for it,'' Kloner said.

The film's claims have raised the ire of Christian leaders in the Holy Land.

Stephen Pfann, a biblical scholar at the University of the Holy Land in Jerusalem who was interviewed in the documentary, said the film's hypothesis holds little weight.

``I don't think that Christians are going to buy into this,'' Pfann said. ``But skeptics, in general, would like to see something that pokes holes into the story that so many people hold dear.''

Jacobovici said the ossuaries did not initially seem extraordinary because the names on them were all common.

But the filmmakers had statisticians calculate the likelihood that any other family in first-century Jerusalem would have had that cluster of names.

``The numbers range from 1 in 100 to 1 in 1,000 that there is some other family,'' said Andrey Feuerverger, a professor of mathematics at the University of Toronto.

Osnat Goaz, a spokeswoman for the Israeli government agency responsible for archaeology, said the Antiquities Authority agreed to send two ossuaries to New York, where they were displayed at Monday's news conference, ``but it doesn't mean that we agree with'' the filmmakers.

The ossuaries do not contain any bones. The bones were reburied after their discovery, as is standard practice with archaeological finds in Israel.

But Jacobovici said DNA evidence can nonetheless be collected from the boxes. He said DNA analysis has so far proved that Jesus and Mariamene, the putative Mary Magdalene, were not siblings and therefore could have been husband and wife.

Associated Press Writer Marshall Thompson contributed to this report from Jerusalem and AP Religion Writer Rachel Zoll contributed from New York

APPENDIX F

Tabor responds to *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* Documentary

February 28, 2007

Dear Jesus Dynasty subscribers,

An amazing storm of controversy has been unleashed by the press conference yesterday in New York on The Jesus Family Tomb. The Who's Who of the world media were gathered in a tightly packed room at the New York Public Library. Two of the ossuaries from the Talpiot tomb were on display. I was there and was part of the panel that fielded the questions. Since that time I have been responding to media requests non-stop. Last night I was on Larry King with James Cameron and Simcha Jacobovici, the producers of the film, The Secret Tomb of Jesus and Larry King paired his guests so that we took the full brunt of some rather strident attacks from a well known New York Catholic and the head of the Southern Baptist Convention. I think we kept our cool and tried to stay with the facts. I knew the story would cause controversy but I never anticipated it would get this crazy. We are getting it hard from the "reds" and the "blues," both sides and the middle. But then again, I guess it really was to be expected.

There are literally thousands of news stories out on the Web and multiple thousands of Bloggers. It is the good, the bad, and the ugly. I noticed tonight that Time.com had over 3000 comments on their coverage of the Tomb on Sunday. How does one keep anything straight? Is there any way to get on top of it all?

I recommend you read the very fine book by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb* as soon as you can get a copy. It is being released this week. It is exceptionally well written, utterly riveting, and it lays out most of the facts related to the discussion. I think that probably 99% of all the words exchanged yesterday on this subject were between those who had not looked at the book. It just goes to show, you can't believe what you hear, or read. The Discovery TV production airs Sunday night in the US at 9pm EST (check listings for Canada, UK, Europe, and Germany). I have previewed it and it is really a well done production. There is also a wealth of source materials and documentation on the Discovery Web site, with much of it available for download, including some of the scholarly articles on the tomb with lots of details.

The controversy surrounding this Tomb is not going to go away soon. I anticipate that next week, when the TV show airs, the reaction will be monumental, many times multiplied from this week, from all perspectives. I have written an Epilogue to the forthcoming paperback version of The Jesus Dynasty in paperback as well as an update to the Introduction: The Tale of Two Tombs. That should be out in late March. I want to also point you to my Blog which I will be updating regularly over the next few weeks with all aspects of this Tomb story. There I will do my best to keep readers informed of all the latest issues and facts.

We live in interesting times. James D. Tabor

(Reproduced with permission of the author.)

APPENDIX G

Presuppositions, Methods, and Assumptions: The Tomb

March 12, 2007
Filed under: Tabor's Blog — James Tabor @ 4:39 pm

Assessing the Assessments: The Jesus Family Tomb

I have had a good vantage point the past two weeks for assessing the responses to the Discovery television documentary "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," through media interviews, private messages from academic colleagues, and about 3000 e-mail messages. Here are a few reflections from that experience.

It seems to me there are three basic approaches to the Talpiot tomb subject, each of which reflects its own presuppositions, assumptions, and methods in evaluating the evidence.

1. First, there are those who are quite sure the Talpiot tomb is that of Jesus of Nazareth and his family because they want to believe it in order to "bash" Christianity. It took those about five minutes to decide this just had to be right, and that it was too good to be true. Even though the evangelical Christian response has largely drowned out these folk, I have seen this attitude in quite a few Blogs and opinion pieces on the Web, and I have heard it from a few media people. This response includes the proverbial "recovering Catholic" type who might find comfort in this story as a way of supporting his/her own disengagement and disenfranchisement from the Church. Or, it might be from self-declared "atheists and secularists," who for both personal and political reasons are prepared to rejoice at anything that might poke a good stick at the hornet's nest of evangelical or conservative Christianity. As far as I can tell most of these folk are watching more than participating actively in the debate and discussion. Although they apparently "hope" that good evidence emerges to support the idea that the ossuary that held the bones of Jesus and his family have been found, if it turns out to not be the case, they are not overly invested in the outcome.

2. Second, there are those who come from orthodox or evangelical Christian perspectives who have prejudged the evidence, no matter what its nature might be, simply because by definition their faith precludes the possibility that this could be the family tomb of Jesus of Nazareth. Simply put, this tomb can not be what some claim because Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven, literally, up through the clouds (flesh, bones, organs, and all), so obviously his body could not be on earth–case closed. This position, though understandable from the standpoint of faith, is the weakest of the four in that it declares the "end" or conclusion, no matter what might be the evidence. The whole enterprise becomes one of "debunking," not of open and honest consideration of possibilities.

Many years ago, when I was a professor at the University of North Dame, the brilliant philosopher and theologian Philip Devenish, presented a rather provocative paper titled "Can a Christian be an Historian?" in our faculty forum. His essential argument was a simple one: historians ideally, by definition, investigate evidence and follow it wherever it leads; while orthodox Christians are committed to dogmas, many of which rest upon literal interpretations of "events" that are taken to be historical in nature, so that results are predetermined. Of course Devenish was not so naive as to think that all historians somehow stand outside of time and culture and thus reflect some sort of perfect objectivity; nor was he unaware of Christian

historians who do not take such literalistic approaches to the core Christian story. But I think he did put his finger on something very much at work in this Talpiot tomb story and how it has played out in the more conservative Christian circles.

3. Finally, there are those with or without academic training in the field of Christian origins and the other specialty areas related to the topic who would like to see an open and honest investigation of the evidence. No historian can be absolutely objective and all of us need a "place to stand" from which we ask our questions. However, in the academic enterprise there is really no place, even on a topic as sensitive as this one, for prejudging the evidence. And ideally, one should not particularly "care" how it all comes out. In other words any kind of cultural or theological considerations should not come into play in evaluating evidence. In other words, there may be enough evidence to connect this tomb to that of Jesus and his family and there may not be, but the task is clear and singular–an open and undetermined examination of the evidence and a testing of hypotheses.

In my view the first approach is as deficient as the second. But what has surprised me most this week are the ways in which a few academic colleagues, who clearly do not share the theological presuppositions of the second approach, nonetheless, either explicitly or implicitly, support that agenda. One archaeologist, not a Christian, was quoted as saying, "this could not be Jesus of Nazareth because God has no DNA." Another has argued that this could not be the tomb of Jesus because his followers believed he was raised from the dead, yet this scholar clearly does believe that Jesus, as any human being, died and his body decomposed. It is this complex mix of emotions, sensitivities, and confused avenues of inquiry that has, in my view, let to lots of heat and very little light this past week. I remain convinced that the evidence regarding the Talpiot tomb, presented so far in a TV documentary, deserves a fair and honest evaluation. One thing that I find encouraging in all this is that most of my academic colleagues who have contacted me privately, and by far the majority of the 3000 e-mails I have received, largely share the perspectives of the third option. I do indeed think that over the next few weeks and months this topic will be explored properly and the results will become clear to honest observers.

(Reproduced with permission from James Tabor's "blog" of March 12th, 2004 concerning and in reaction to the airing of *The Tomb of Jesus* presented on The Discovery Channel, March 4th, 2007)

APPENDIX H

Films, Books, and Documentaries made subsequent to the release of The Da Vinci Code book and movie

Exploring the Da Vinci Code DVD
Exploring the Da Vinci Code DVD: Henry Lincoln's Guide to Rennes-le-Chateau ... An absolute "must have" for all DA VINCI CODE enthusiasts and devotees of the Rennes-le-Château ...
www.cafepress.com/disinfo.20584824

Origins of The Da Vinci Code DVD
Origins of The Da Vinci Code DVD: Behind the fiction of the novel is a wealth of detail originally uncovered by Henry Lincoln in ...
www.cafepress.com/disinfo.36292672.

The Da Vinci Code Deception, DVD - - Christianbook.com
Christianbook.com (CBD): The Da Vinci Code Deception, DVD 111333 Accompaniment Apologetics Audio Books

Breaking the Da Vinci Code DVD (Dan Brown)
The Da Vinci Code response by the church in a Christian DVD
www.penfoldbooks.com/product/123/885

Purpose Driven - Churches Changing Lives on Purpose
Discussing the Da Vinci Code small group study by Lee Strobel and Garry Poole. Discussing the Da Vinci Code
www.purposedriven.com/en-US/Resources/SmallGroupMinistry/Curriculum/DaVinciCode.htm

Da Vinci Code Decoded, Dan Brown, Henry Lincoln, Dan Burstein .....
www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B0002ZDVFY?v=glance

The Da Vinci Code Chateau - www.beautiful-places
Featured in The Da Vinci Code book and movie,

Exposing the Da Vinci Code
The documentary Exposing the DaVinci Code featuring Stephan K. Munsey as he explains the truth. ...
www.exposingthedavincicode.com

Da Vinci Code Song Project DVD LOUETTA FARRAR & GEORGE ANTONY
Da Vinci Code Song and Angels & Demons Song on DVD. Filmed in Paris, London, Scotland and Rome. ... The Da Vinci Code Song 'Madeleine' on DVD. filmed entirely in the actual story locations
www.davincicodesong.com

A Stroke of Genius (A&E DVD Archives) DVD Da Vinci Code Decoded DVD Rome - Power & Glory DVD 20 in DVD , 1 in Video , and 1 in Books
www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B0000950XR?v=glance

Beyond The Da Vinci Code DVD
Is it the greatest story ever told - or the greatest story ever sold? Is it the greatest story ever told - or the greatest story ever sold? store.aetv.com/html/product/index.jhtml?id=71943

The Da Vinci Code Collection DVD
He is widely regarded as the greatest artist who ever lived.
store.aetv.com/html/product/index.jhtml?id=75215.

Da Vinci Code Ringtones
www.dabombtones.com

Play The Da Vinci Code
The hit novel is now a hit game. Free Da Vinci Code Game Download!
www.bigfishgames.com

Inside The Da Vinci Code
INSIDE THE DA VINCI CODE DVD . Step inside The Da Vinci Code , one of history's greatest cover-ups. Author of Cracking The Da Vinci .. www.crackingdavinci.com/dvd.html
www.crackingdavinci.com.

PBS - Beyond the Da Vinci Code (DVD)
Shop PBS - Beyond the Da Vinci Code (DVD)
www.shoppbs.org/sm-pbs-beyond-the-da-vinci-code-dvd--pi-2036873.html

BREAKING THE DA VINCI CODE (DVD)
BREAKING THE DA VINCI CODE (DVD)
www.lightworksav.com/index.asp?PageAction=VIEWPROD&ProdID=3714

The Da Vinci Code DVD and Book
This DVD and Guide will equip Christians to answer the questions raised by Dan Brown's book. ... will equip you to defend your faith and answer the charges made in Dan Brown's book.
www.truthnet.org/davinci

The Da Vinci Code 3-DVD Resource Kit at The Biggest Christian Movie ...
3-DVD Resource Kit and other Christian movies and Christian videos
www.christiancinema.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=1471

Solve The Da Vinci Code
You've read the book and watched the movie. Now play The Davinci Code
www.realarcade.com

United Methodist Communications
The Da Vinci Code Deception. DVD

bible.org: Unraveling The Da Vinci Code
Teaching DVD: Unraveling The Da Vinci Code ... Description: As the NY Times #1 bestseller for an extensive time period, The Da ...
www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=4014
Human Events Book Service: The Da Vinci Code Deception DVD by David ...

Amazon.co.uk: Unlocking Da Vinci's Code: DVD
Unlocking Da Vinci's Code, Unlocking Davinci's Code,
www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00064X5Z2

HopeTV.org
The Hope Channel is the official Seventh-day Adventist 7 x 24 broadcast to spread the good news of ... The Da Vinci Code Deception DVD.
www.hopetv.org/transaction_detail.php?id=1

Da Vinci Code Hoax Book and DVD Set -Welcome to The Crossroads ...
The Crossroads Initiative and Marcellino D'Ambrosio are taking the initiative to produce ... Da Vinci Code Hoax Book and DVD Set.
www.crossroadsinitiative.com/resource_info/280.html?PHPSESSID=839c72d7efe522c14131e904264f...

Solve The Da Vinci Code
You've read the book and watched the movie. Now play The Davinci Code
www.realarcade.com

Da Vinci Code Generator Download
Da Vinci Code Generator Download Page Free program for generating Da Vinci Code.
www.shareup.com/Da_Vinci_Code_Generator-download-32084.html

Gospel Folio Press-Da Vinci Code
Many people are intrigued by the startling claims of the best-selling book, The Da Vinci Code. This novel represents an excellent opportunity to discuss some critically important issues, and this DVD ...
shop2.mailordercentral.com/gospel/products.asp?dept=52

Extras on the Da Vinci Code 2 Disc Set! in Forums > Discs & Movies at ...
Editing The Da Vinci Code. Scoring. Da Vinci (Film) Codes. Da Vinci Cameos. DVD Introduction From Ron Howard .
www.dvdactive.com/forums/dvd-and-movies/extras-on-the-da-vinci-code-2-disc-set.html

bible.org: Redeeming The Da Vinci Code
help for Christians about the Da Vinci Code ... Redeeming The Da Vinci Code: Decoding the Truth (DVD, approx. 60 minutes) Decoding the Truth explores ...
www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=3993

Davinci Code - Videos -- National Geographic
Is the Da Vinci Code fact or fiction? Explore related Da Vinci Code videos from National Geographic. ... On DVD: Gospel of Judas. National Geographic Magazine. National Geographic Channel
www.nationalgeographic.com/video/davincicode

Koorong: Product Details - Dvd Da Vinci Code Deception, The

Nelson Ministry Services Product Detail : Breaking the Da Vinci Code
Many who have read the New York Times bestseller The Da Vinci Code have questions that arise from seven ... Study/Leader Guides Tweens & Teens Video/DVD Workbooks Specials Academic Conference
www.nelsonministryservices.com/nms/product_detail.asp?dept%5Fid=740&sku=1418519774&ref=DaV...

Amazon.co.uk: Origins Of The Da Vinci Code: DVD
Origins Of The Da Vinci Code, Rykodisc
www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000DZIERS

PBS - Da Vinci and the Code He Lived By DVD
Shop PBS - Da Vinci and the Code He Lived By DVD Description: Painter, sculptor, engineer and scientist, in each field Leonardo da Vinci ...www.shoppbs.org/sm-pbs-da-vinci-and-the-code-he-lived-by-dvd--pi-2296166.html

Amazon.ca: The Real Da Vinci Code: DVD
The Real Da Vinci Code, Kashaf Chaudhry, Tony Robinson, Richard Barber (III), Thomas Bridwell, Kashaf Chaudhry. Edition Details: • Region 1 encoding (US and
...www.amazon.ca/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000EDWLUA

The Da Vinci Hoax: Book and DVD set" from Ignatius Press - Religious ...
turn to The Da Vinci Hoax. The next time someone asks you about The Da Vinci Code , make sure you have an answer. The Da Vinci Hoax DVD
www.ignatius.com/ViewProduct.aspx?SID=1&Product_ID=2846&AFID=10

Conservative Book Club: The Da Vinci Code Deception DVD by David ...
www.conservativebookclub.com/products/BookPage.asp?prod_cd=c6740

Jesus and The Da Vinci Code
Exploring the history behind Dan Brown's best-selling book 'The Da Vinci Code' The 'Jesus and The Da Vinci Code' DVD is now available. www.focus.org.uk

American Vision Online Store - Da Vinci Delusion DVD & FREE Cracking ...
Da Vinci Delusion DVD & FREE Cracking Da Vinci Code Book ... Welcome to American Vision's Online Store: "Equipping the Christian • Strengthening The Family ...
www.americanvision.org/store/pc-435-1-.aspx

Christian Research Institute ~ Home of the Bible Answer Man, Hank ...

Westminster Bookstore - Da Vinci Code
Da Vinci Code Deception DVD $19.95: The Da Vinci Codebreaker: An Easy-To-Use Fact Checker
www.wtsbooks.com/category-exec/category_id/415/nm/Da_20Vinci_20Code

Inside The Da Vinci Code (NTSC version)
This extraordinary DVD examines the secrets that Dan Brown did not know and explores the hidden
www.customflix.com/205733

DVD Talk Review: Origins of the Da Vinci Code
Forum Home ----- DVD Talk DVD Reviews DVD Hardware HD Talk International DVD ----- DVD Bargains DVD
www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/read.php?ID=18669

Answering the Questions Raised by the Da Vinci Code
the Da Vinci Code.
www.ankerberg.com/Articles/historical-Jesus/DaVinci/HJ-Da-Vinci-Code-questions.htm

Press Release
Wednesday 17 May 2006. Catholic Church launches "Da Vinci Code" DVD. The Scottish Catholic Media Office will launch a DVD tomorrow (Thursday 18 May) which aims to tackle many of the myths and ...
www.scmo.org.uk/_titles/view.asp?id=468

The Da Vinci Code Deception DVD
A fantastic educational & witnessing tool. Dan Brown's best-selling fiction thriller The Da Vinci Code ignited a world-wide controversy with his opening statement.
www.evidencepress.com/DaVinci.htm

Games - Da Vinci Code XBOX / Players: 1 / Rating: T
Da Vinci Code ... SEARCH: Entire Shop Shows Artists Music DVD MTV Stuff Games for
shop.mtv.com/Da-Vinci-Code-Games_stcVVproductId4235901VVcatId421438VVviewprod.htm

bible.org: Unraveling The Da Vinci Code
Teaching DVD: Unraveling The Da Vinci Code ... Description: As the NY Times #1 bestseller for an extensive time period, The Da ...
After The Da Vinci Code Movie & DVD: Dan Brown's New Novel Is The ...
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