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Legion

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Legion

Abstract

This is a review of *Legion* (2010).

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Legion, an apocalyptic action thriller film, deploys mythology of the supernatural and explores the problem of divine moral ambiguity (through the dual nature of angels), obedience, the suspension of the ethical and prospects of human empathy.

The eternal God loses faith in human beings and dispatches the angelic hosts of heaven to exact divine judgment on earth. However, one angel, Michael rebels against God's command of judgment because of his enduring faith in humankind. The crux of the movie takes place at a diner named "Paradise Falls," with the fate of humanity resting in the hands of seven human beings and one angel, Michael. Michael arrives at the diner intent on saving Charlie's (Adrianne Palicki's) unborn child, a child that will lead humanity out of darkness. Jeep Hanson (Lucas Black), who is in love with Charlie, is willing to protect her and her unborn child, even though he is not the father.

Audience members who are familiar with the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah will be familiar with the internal logic of the film. Sodom and Gomorrah may be more fitting because that story opens us to a side of angels that in our taken-for-granted understanding of them we may not want to accept. In Sodom and Gomorrah, we have to ask whether these are angels sent from God or are they mercenaries? *Legion* raises the same question in which the heavenly hosts are commanded by God to exact recompense upon human beings. Are these angels or

mercenaries? One may argue for the dual nature of such beings to be both angels and mercenaries. This ultimately turns readers and viewers to the ambiguity of not just the angels/mercenaries, but the moral ambiguity of their creator who has them protect on the one hand and destroy on the other.

The angel Gabriel is the leader of the mercenary legion who is willing to carry out the command of God: to destroy human beings at all costs, including Charlie's baby. According to Gabriel, obedience is obligatory. Readers of the biblical text may have difficulty suspending their understanding of Gabriel as the one who announces the birth of the savior child and gives Joseph and Mary the message to flee to safety. However, in such accounts, what is often not accounted for is that while Gabriel does what is necessary to protect the savior-child, in those same stories, the angel does nothing to protect the remaining innocent children in the region. All of the other young born males are collateral damage under Herod's decree with nothing being done to protect them. Again, a moral ambiguous God is at center stage.

Legion climaxes with the ultimate battle between Michael, the rebellious son, and Gabriel the obedient mercenary. Gabriel informs Michael that the loss of his angelic form will cost him his life. He does not want to kill him, but he will, as obedience is obligatory. As Gabriel and Michael set to duel, the three remaining humans, Jeep, Charlie (a modern day Mary), and Audrey flee to protect the child.

Gabriel appears to best Michael in the initial battle and God's judgment appears to have won. Gabriel then proceeds to complete his mission by going after the savior-child to destroy him. He catches them and demands the child be handed over for termination. Michael arrives on the scene in time in his original angelic form (with wings) and defeats Gabriel. Gabriel wonders why Michael is resurrected and he demands that Michael slay him but Michael refuses his request. With Michael's sword at his throat, Gabriel confesses to Michael, "I would not have shown you such mercy." Michael responds, "You gave him what he asked for; I gave him what he needed."

This last exchange is the apex of the mythology of divine moral ambiguity. On the one hand, Gabriel gives God what God asks for, which is judgment and recompense. Michael, on the other hand, gives God what God needs. We are left to interpret what that means. However, given that Michael has faith in humankind we may assume that God needed his faith in human beings rekindled and Michael provides it. In addition to needing faith, Michael's rebellion calls God to accountability to the whole. God's act of judgment would have been for God's self and not for the better of the whole. Michael, therefore, does not "suspend the ethical," in blind obedience to God's command. Rather, he rebels against God's command and calls God to ethical responsibility.

The irony of the film is in its portrayal of human beings as juxtaposed against the divine. While God wants to destroy humanity for their wars based on race, gender, religion, etc., ultimately the film displays that human beings operate out of empathy towards one another. When human lives are threatened, other human beings step in and lay down their own lives for their contemporaries regardless of their race, gender, or religion. The film displays an upper class aristocrat, Sandra Anderson, taking up the cause for a “lower-class” waitress (Charlie); Percy Walker, an African-American male, a diner cook, gives his life in order to save the upper class aristocrat Sandra Anderson; Kyle Williams, an African-American male (although he is deceived) puts his life on the line in an attempt to save what appears to be a father and his innocent son who are Caucasian. Ultimately, when the rubber meets the road, human beings in this morality tale instinctually operate out of empathy. God’s instinct is not empathy; rather, it is destruction. God is persuaded to be empathetic.

Overall, *Legion* does not solve the problem of the moral ambiguity of God (the dual nature of the divine), nor of those traditionally characterized as protectors and guides for human beings, namely angels. The story plays off of Sodom and Gomorrah (dual nature of angels), in which God’s angelic hosts are anxious to exact God’s judgment on humankind; yet one angel (Michael) keeps faith in humanity. While he has faith in humankind, even he is enshrouded with moral ambiguity as

he is only concerned with his mission and is willing to allow some humans to become collateral damage in protecting that cause (much like Gabriel in the biblical account of the announcing of the Christ-child). While this ambiguity is unresolved, the film provides hope that God's mercy triumphs over God's wrath. In the end, human beings are given another chance to begin anew. Thus, the film becomes a morality tale in which God is led to the moment of ethical responsibility for the whole.