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From the Editor

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From the Editor

Abstract

The Editor introduces the April 2000 issue of the *Journal of Religion and Film*.

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Although the new millennium and its accompanying apocalypse will not officially begin until January 1, 2001, commercial interests and the much touted Y2K problem combined to encourage people around the world to celebrate the millennium this past New Year's Eve. We will leave it to individual readers, then, to decide whether this issue of the *JOURNAL* is too late or too early. In any case, there have been any number of films concerned with the apocalypse or apocalyptic events released in anticipation of the new millennium, whenever you choose to celebrate it (again?).

In this issue, we have collected the five papers on apocalyptic films presented at 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Boston. These papers comprised a session sponsored by the Group on Religion, Film, and Visual Culture. Because there were a number of similar themes and ideas in these papers, originally written independently, we asked Amir Hussain, who presided over the session, to write a commentary for the *Journal* on these papers and films, discussing the respective similarities and differences in their themes.

This session of the AAR meetings attracted the attention of the Religion News Service. Holly J. Lebowitz wrote a story on the session, "Apocalypse films stir musings of scholars." It appeared in at least the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Saturday, November 27, 1999). "More than one scholar pointed out," Lebowitz claims, "that a common thread in cinematic depictions of apocalyptic events is what

one presenter referred to as the 'desacralization' of the apocalypse, draining the religious meaning from the event in favor of a more human-centered interpretation." Yet, "some films are able to integrate mystery or divinity and human agency, such as the *Star Wars* series and the more recent *The Matrix*." Lebowitz also notes that *What Dreams May Come*, starring Robin Williams, presents an alternative view of afterlife and reincarnation based on South Asian religions and she claims that "another popular cultural trend that was taken up was the role of women in this group of apocalyptic films." We applaud Holly Lebowitz's effort to bring these "scholarly musings" to the attention of the public and we are delighted to be able to make all of the papers from the session on "Film and the Apocalypse" available to our readers.

(Note: If you are interested in film and the apocalypse you also might wish to turn to a previously published article in the *Journal* written by Conrad Ostwalt: "Visions of the End: Secular Apocalypse in Recent Hollywood Film," Volume 2, Number 1, 1998.¹¹

Also in this issue we include a report on Sundance 2000. Greg Watkins attended the Sundance Film Festival this year as the director his own film, *A Sign From God*. Since Greg was going to be there and we were not, we asked him to send us a report. Since directors are kept very busy at the Festival, Greg was not

able to see all of the movies related to religion, but he did see several and provided us with some description and reflection.

Sundance introduces many independent films of high quality. Since many of these films will not be shown at your local multiplex, we are delighted to bring some of the Sundance 2000 films to your attention.

¹ Conrad Ostwalt: "Visions of the End: Secular Apocalypse in Recent Hollywood Film," *Journal of Religion & Film*, Volume 2, Number 1, 1998.