



4-1-1997

From the Editor

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Recommended Citation

Blizek, William L. (1997) "From the Editor," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.01.01.01>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol1/iss1/1>

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From the Editor

Abstract

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

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Welcome to the first issue of *The Journal of Religion and Film*. For those of you who have watched the *Journal* come online, you will notice that we are still in the process of making changes. We expect this process to continue until we feel that we have things the way we and our readers want them to be, and we will continue to make changes as new technology permits us to improve the *Journal*.

Several years ago we listened to Rev. Andrew Greeley talk about the images of God in popular movies. We immediately rushed out and rented the movies Fr. Greeley had described to see if we could find those same images of God. Sometimes we did, and sometimes we did not, but in either case we found the consideration of religion and movies to be fascinating and enjoyable. Since we were having such fun and learning about both religion and film, we decided that our students would like to share in this experience, so we decided to teach a course on religion and film.

We did not limit the course to images of God, but opened it up to the larger topic of religion in general. Most of our students were excited about connecting religion and film and we hope that they learned something about each discipline from that connection. Our discussions were lively and intellectually stimulating in ways that the discussions in other classes were not, and so we wanted to continue to explore issues of religion and film. Unfortunately, there was no single source we could turn to in order to find out what others were thinking and saying about

religion and film. The result of this is the establishment of *The Journal of Religion and Film*.

We have put *JR & F* on the Internet for several reasons. First, we believe that an Internet journal will have wider circulation than a paper journal. This is especially important in an area that crosses disciplinary boundaries. We want to encourage participation in the *Journal* by scholars and other interested parties from all areas of religion and film. Second, we believe that an Internet journal will provide greater opportunity for interaction between readers and authors and other readers. We have included, therefore, several possible sources of interaction.

Finally, since seeing is believing, we think that it will be important in many instances for authors to show some portion of the movie they are discussing. Technology makes this possible at the present moment, and we hope that legal constraints will make this a commonplace in the *Journal*.

In this issue...

In this, our very first issue, we are delighted to have a version of the talk that we heard Father Greeley give several years ago. In this essay, Father Greeley identifies some of the many images of God found in the movies, images that are often quite at odds with the usual religious or theological images of God. As a sociologist, he then tells us what he thinks the appearance of these images in the

movies tells us about our culture, especially our cultural concerns about life and death.

The second essay is by Carl Greiner, a psychiatrist at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Carl was one of the guest lecturers in our course on religion and film. What we found particularly interesting about Carl's interpretation of *The Rapture*, was the predominantly theological character of his interpretation, in contrast to the more strictly psychological interpretation we expected. What makes Greiner's interpretation so interesting to us is that the classification of the movie as one of horror depends in large measure upon the religious perspective presented in the movie as being itself "horrific." Since this view of religion (Christianity) is so unlike the "isn't everything wonderful" perspective, it does serve as a significant challenge to the more popular view of religion.

The third essay, by Mike Gillespie, is different from the first two because it takes up the issue of how film can increase our understanding of a religion in a way that language cannot. Gillespie's warning, however, should be taken seriously. Although film can help us to understand religion better than text, it cannot be a substitute for the religion itself. It will be interesting to see if other authors take up the issue of the difference between film and text.

Finally, Gregory Robbins provides an interesting interpretation of the film, *Amadeus*, in terms of the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. Here it is the

Biblical story that gives us a mechanism for understanding the film, rather than the film providing an understanding of religion, as in the case of Gillespie's *Bohdi-Dharma*.

We encourage authors to think of religion and film in a variety of ways and not be limited to a single perspective. Again, welcome to *The Journal of Religion and Film*. We hope that you will find it an important source of ideas about both religion and film.