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Equilibrium

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Equilibrium

Abstract

This is a review of *Equilibrium* (2002).

Religion is the opiate of the people.
- Karl Marx.

God is dead.
- Friedrich Nietzsche

At its release last December, critics heaped scorn on Kurt Wimmer's *Equilibrium* for being a dull, humorless, and even "stupid" imitation of about a dozen other movies, most notably *The Matrix*. They all noted the wire stunts, the martial arts fighting, the trench coats and, of course, the bloody mayhem captured in stop action and fast frame filming. The film self-consciously notes that it is set in the 21st century so that no one misses the message that republics ruled by "Clerics" and a mind-numbing drug, Prozium, (a Marxian metaphor for dulling faith), pose an imminent danger to civilization as we know it. With the exception of Roger Ebert, the reviewers were distracted by the *Matrix*-like special effects and consequently missed or chose to ignore the film's agenda. In form, it is most like *Minority Report* in that it uses a Christian theological vocabulary to portray an oppressive society. Where *Minority Report* used religious terms such as "priests" and "clergy" for police officers, "temple" for police station, "hell" for jail, and "halo" to describe a brainwashing headset, *Equilibrium* uses a lexicon of "Cleric," "Father," "savior," "faith," and "true believer" to characterize the fascist guardians of religious sensibility who have banned emotion-inducing art, literature, and music for being disruptive to the moral well-being of the state.

The film was shot in Germany which may explain the gratuitous clips of Adolph Hitler and the association of fascism with a religious state. Need anyone be reminded that when it comes to systematized slaughter, there is no religion like secular religion for doing the trick? It took the Spanish Inquisition 350 years to kill several thousand innocents; the "true believers" of the secular left and right murdered 100 million in a decade or two. However, instead of Fuhrer (or Fearless Leader) the omnipotent ruler is called "Father." We subsequently learn he is a dead Father and that the leadership is guilty - surprise - of hypocrisy. There is a Nietzschean lesson here for the polemically-challenged.

While the vocabulary is derivative of *Minority Report*, the iconography is straight out of *Planet of the Apes*, another film with an anti-Christian message. The two films share oppressive religious regimes and fascist costumes. Slavery is racial and physical in *Apes*; in *Equilibrium*, slavery is psychological and emotional. In both there is a rebel underground that is brutally suppressed by the self-righteous ruling class. Both have a savior. In the former, the savior is Simos, the chimpanzee whose ironic advent is meant to delegitimize the film's religion. In the latter film, it is Bale's Revelation-derived character who is called a "savior" and in the end appears (albeit horseless) wearing white clothing and wielding a sword against the enemies of emotion.

In *Apes*, humans are branded with a cross whose bar is bent upward at both ends to mask the obvious symbolism. The ruling symbol branding the ubiquitous television screens of Librian society in *Equilibrium* is a cross which has bars attached to each of the spokes resulting (if you're anti-Christian) in a happy synthesis of a swastika and a cross. Additionally, the symbol on the doors is a giant "T:" the actual shape of the Roman scaffold on which Jesus was crucified and which director Wimmers in the DVD commentary admits is a "thinly disguised cross" (45:16). In *Apes*, we see simian believers worshipping an icon of Simos. In *Equilibrium*, the citizens sit in pew-style seating in a church-like space and are instructed by a speaker standing at a pulpit. The imagery in both is meant to depict believing publics as evolutionarily primitive or mentally impaired.

According to the *Rotten Tomatoes* web site, about 70 percent of the reviewers have panned the film. In fact, it is a dull, humorless, and pretentious movie, but flops like *Equilibrium* need to be seen and talked about because they address vital issues of constitutionality. Under the guise of portraying religious persecution, *Equilibrium* promotes religious bigotry and persecution of religious people and beliefs. Whether one is Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, such films should raise a note of concern because all faiths have in common a belief in right and wrong, in good and evil. It is those distinctives that secularists find so threatening to their desire for behaviors without bounds or accountability and why in recent

history believing nations have had to fight the totalitarian Stalins, Maos, and Pol Pots around the world.

What Dostoevsky could not have foreseen is that the worst thing about a world without faith in God is not only that everything would be permissible, but that everyone would be expendable. Paradoxically, it is a precept that is always put in practice when idealistic totalitarian states oppress religions (or minorities) in order to remake in their own secular image a better and more equal life for everyone. The irony of *Equilibrium* is that in trying to portray a non-existent statist authoritarianism rooted in the symbols of Christianity, Wimmer reveals the residual totalitarianism of communism that it seems will always be with us as a romantic but deadly ideal.