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From the Editor

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From the Editor

Abstract

The Editor introduces the October 2001 issue of the *Journal of Religion and Film*.

In this issue we have an especially rich discussion of film, religion, and contemporary culture. Two of the articles explore ways in which our modern media culture cripples and confines us rather than providing anything of enablement or freedom. Two others, however, show that some film makers have cut new paths toward a liberating contact with the transcendent in their depictions of music and science. A fifth article shows ways in which a particular kind of film uses religious symbols with great frequency but also with pitifully small significance. And the final article examines filmic efforts to provide reasons to forgive a person whom centuries have seen as the most contemptible of all humanity.

Frances Flannery-Dailey and Rachel Wagner scrutinize the genius of the Wachowski brothers in the tale told by *The Matrix*. They recount the manifold ways in which the film reflects teachings and traditions of Buddhism and of Gnosticism in its picture of human entrapment and of possible paths toward liberation. This article has some parallels with that of James Ford in last year's Journal, but it opens new ground. [See *Buddhism, Christianity, and The Matrix: The Dialectic of Myth-Making in Contemporary Cinema*, (*JR & F*, 4, 2 October, 2000)].

Linda Mercadante finds similarities and differences between two films from 1998, *The Truman Show* and *Pleasantville*. Both of the films provide opportunity for provocative questions regarding the limits of human freedom and the character of human notions about God. Yet the author points out that the films do not

themselves have the resources to provide much in the way of answers to these questions.

Christopher Garbowski is clearly a knowledgeable fan of Martin Scorsese. He analyzes Scorsese's *The Last Waltz* and proposes it to be a clear explanation of the director's claim that the movie house has become today's church. The filmmaker has provided here a feast and festival that reaches out to those dissatisfied with institutional religions and provides them with a prolonged moment of sacramental enchantment.

Gregory Sadlek finds Robert Zemeckis's (Carl Sagan's) *Contact* to be another effort (like Scorsese's) to convey a religious experience and to share a moment of existential consolation. In these ways it is much like Dante's *Paradiso* in the *Divine Comedy*, but it also employs a contemporary understanding of science and the universe that can be embraced intellectually and spiritually by people of today.

Bryan Stone has two previous articles in the *JR & F*. These are his *Religious Faith and Science in Contact* (2,2) and *Religion and Violence in Popular Film* (3,1). This time the genre he examines is the horror film and its use of religious symbols. Providing more questions than answers, he asks what the frequent use of religious symbols in horror films tell us about today's culture. He suggests that the

symbols have been reduced to mere conventions, not truly confronting the fundamental questions and attitudes of today's audience.

Finally and more particularly, Kim Paffenroth finds a dominant theme and direction in seven filmic depictions of Judas. Depictions of Judas have had two sides since the earliest stories told in the Christian tradition, but these films break with centuries of tradition that depicted Judas as the most base of villains. *The Last Temptation of Christ* is the epitome of films that find him to be admirable, or even heroic.