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Framing Salvation: Biblical Apocalyptic, Cinematic Dystopia, and Contextualizing the Narrative of Salvation

Abstract

Christian biblical authors used the apocalyptic genre to help contextualize the meaning of salvation for their audiences. Today, dystopian film can serve a similar function. In each case, the narrative diagnoses a sinister mis-ordering of human civilization and attempts to prescribe ways in which it can be overcome. Just as apocalyptic gave biblical authors the ability to make statements about what salvation was salvation from, dystopian narratives can similarly demonstrate what social conditions today remain in need of remediation. When these dystopian narratives do so by making use of symbols and themes associated with Christian soteriology their diagnoses can become the subject of theological reflection and the hope they offer for alleviation can be cast in soteriological tones.

Keywords

Dystopia, Soteriology, Children of Men, Pan's Labyrinth, Valhalla Rising

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Introduction

One of the most powerful ways in which popular culture can aid theological reflection is by providing insight into the meaning that classical theological categories might bear for contemporary society. As an example of such a dynamic, I will in this essay examine the genre of dystopian film and the way it helps frame soteriological understanding. Key to this examination will be a parallel between the commentary made by dystopian imagination on problematic elements of the current human condition and the influence of apocalyptic imagination on the gospel interpretations of the cross. This parallel will assert that in a similar way to how apocalyptic imagination gave early Christians a context for seeing what the salvation of the cross was salvation from, dystopian film helps accentuate specific patterns of contemporary experience from which salvation is needed. In each narrative strategy, sharp accent is placed on the mis-orderings of worldly existence and salvation becomes seen as alleviation from those conditions. This dynamic will be demonstrated through analysis of three dystopian films, focusing primarily on the core engine of each film's mis-ordered civilization¹ and how it reflects a unique problem addressable by unique contextualizations of soteriology—that is, a particular understanding of what salvation is from. The three films of focus will be: Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), as dystopia of disconnection; Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), a dystopia of totalitarianism; and Nicolas Winding Refn's *Valhalla Rising* (2009), a dystopia of triumphalism.

Apocalyptic, Dystopia, and Imaginative Framings of what Salvation is from

My central question of interest is how the traditional theological trope of salvation, centered in Christianity on the cross, can be contextualized to offer perspective on what exactly salvation is salvation from. For the earliest generation of Christians, the apocalyptic imagination that they inherited from Judaism was one important source for framing and answering the question. One of the clearest examples is the use of the “Son of Man” moniker adapted by the evangelists to connect Jesus to the apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Daniel. In Daniel, the “Son of Man” character encouraged its audience to hope for deliverance from oppressive Seleucid rule, while for the evangelists it transferred that hope to Jesus and hope for deliverance from various forces. As will be demonstrated below, for example, its occurrence in Mark 13:26 represents the evangelist adapting apocalyptic to explain how Jesus’ cross will save the early Christian community from the crisis of the Roman War and its aftermath and to vindicate Jesus against other false prophets of the day. Similar contextualization of soteriology can occur poignantly in dystopian film. In the narrative strategy of both New Testament apocalyptic and contemporary dystopian film, sharp accent is placed on mis-orderings of worldly existence and salvation becomes seen as alleviation from those conditions. In the vision of biblical apocalyptic, Christ dies in order to liberate people from particular problems and circumstances. When soteriological elements can be captured in the imagination of a dystopian film’s narrative, it can help deepen and clarify for minds today an understanding of ways in which salvation remains a vital concept.

In his overview of the apocalyptic genre, Greg Carey presents the case that modern scholarship sees it as a flexible and multivalent one that was prominent in Jewish and Christian circles of the biblical period but put to many different uses.² Carey defers for a final delineation to John J. Collins, who asserts that, in general, all apocalyptic attempts “to interpret present earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority,” but that for specific contexts ad hoc historical investigation must be employed to discern exactly what use is being made of it.³ I do not intend to undertake here an extensive historical-critical investigation, as Carey suggests Collins is calling necessary. Instead, I will take advantage of the assessment of Adela Yarbro Collins that “generic,” narrative, literary analysis of gospels may fruitfully, if limitedly, provide valid insight into their use of various strategies and elements, such as apocalyptic.⁴ For example, she writes that “the apocalyptic-historical vision of Mark is best expressed through a theological perspective which attempts to embrace the universe as God’s creation with a ‘developmental history’ and a destiny.”⁵ It is this overall formation of narrative and the place within it for apocalyptic imagination that gives rise to an eschatological arc that will be my focus here.

At the outset of his rhetorical analysis of the apocalyptic speech of Jesus in Mark 13, Vernon K. Robbins states, “In the gospel of Mark, apocalyptic discourse creates new boundaries within time and space, gathers turmoil and distress within those boundaries, and replaces the holy from the sacred boundaries of the Jerusalem Temple into the bodies of Jesus’ disciples.”⁶ He then goes on to argue that the rhetorical strategy of the text is to elicit awareness in the audience of their own bodies as the new seats of holy presence, and thus also of concomitant commitment to the role while awaiting the end times that will provoke God to “produce a new

situation that brings an end to the [current] distress.”⁷ Robbins observes that Mark 13 is situated as the final major speech of Jesus; without stating it, he is noting that it is a prelude to the Passion sequence.⁸ Yarbrow Collins draws this connection to the Passion more directly.

To Yarbrow Collins, the fundamental aim of Mark 13 is to ward off Christians from following false teachers.⁹ She notes that this concern was most likely precipitated by the appearance of messianic figures during the Jewish war with Rome preceding the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.¹⁰ Accordingly, she concludes of the passage, “Far from being fanatical, the eschatological discourse of Mark 13 provided a framework of meaning in a difficult situation. It interpreted the original audience’s situation for them so that they could renew their faith and carry on their work.”¹¹ Similarly to Robbins, she thinks this work consisted of maintaining vigilance in commitment to living and preaching the gospel of Jesus, the true teacher and true Messiah.¹² The apocalyptic imagination serves this purpose by giving the audience hope that their presently disordered world will be transformed by the coming of the Son of Man. The justification of this assurance is found in the empty tomb that concludes Mark’s gospel. The apocalyptic hope that is offered in Mark 13 depends upon the validation of Jesus as the Messiah as it is conveyed by that empty tomb, and it defines salvation as relief from the trials faced by the audience in their real world context.

Yarbrow Collins claims that Mark had awareness of the cross having other layers of meaning, such as conceiving it as sacrificial atonement, but that he distinctly maintained a central focus on the Passion as proof of Jesus as the true teacher over against the false teachers of which Mark 13 gives warning.¹³ It is important to recall here Yarbrow Collins’s concession that Mark’s gospel can be adequately studied with a narrative lens. She states also that Mark’s gospel demonstrates a good deal of freedom in how it uses its sources and gives form to its final

narrative.¹⁴ With this in mind, Robbins's observation about Mark 13 as the final major speech of Jesus and Yarbrow Collins's argument that the Passion helps complete the textual thesis that Jesus is the true teacher help show how the author of Mark adapted the apocalyptic motif of disorder-alleviation to craft for his audience a narrative that could provide a richer understanding of the cross, one tailored to the distresses and problems of their immediate situation.

Though Mark's apocalyptic imagination is definitely future oriented, Paul J. Achtemeier argues that the development of apocalyptic vision through the successive compilations of the canonical gospels demonstrates a shift to an ever-more immediate vision of the eschatological fruits of salvation. He argues that from Mark to Matthew to Luke to John the eschatological implications of the apocalyptic framework become gradually shifted from future to present.¹⁵ Ultimately, by the Gospel of John, the Paraclete is introduced as a way of bringing what had been a future reality for earlier evangelists directly into the present.¹⁶ The link between the cross and the fulfillment of apocalyptic alleviation and re-creation is made more explicit. The salvation that Jesus brings means that a new age is actually begun in the present life of the church, not in a deferred future awaiting the return of the Son of Man, as Mark's vision maintains.¹⁷ Thus, the more the evangelistic tradition grew, the more apocalyptic imagination came to emphasize the cross as a dramatic end to one disordered way of being and a salvific initiation of a new, sanctified way of being that was the product of salvation.

Conrad E. Ostwalt argues that contemporary iterations of traditional apocalyptic thinking have been indelibly impacted by secularization and that being secularized they better present the themes traditionally associated with biblical apocalyptic to a present-day audience which is itself defined by secularization.¹⁸ Ostwalt claims that this shift involves a critique of the biblical form, whereby human agents come to replace divine ones, but he also claims that it involves a

confirmation of the biblical form in that the apocalyptic event structure is maintained.¹⁹ However, this confirmation is not actually a confirmation in that the nature of the event is changed decisively, from one in which salvation is synonymous with *transformation*, as it is biblically, to one in which it is synonymous with *preservation* or *restoration*. Ostwalt's secularized vision of the apocalyptic genre demonstrates a pattern where human evils are the in-breaking forces that threaten current order, which is itself good, and salvation is in people attempting to preserve or restore that order. Biblical authors who used the apocalyptic genre wanted a divine in-breaking to occur and transform the established order. Given this difference, it is my contention that the biblical strain of apocalyptic more closely mirrors what would be classified today as dystopian rather than apocalyptic film. In biblical apocalyptic and contemporary dystopia, a force of good attempts to overcome a sinister mis-order,²⁰ while the secularized apocalyptic described by Ostwalt involves forces of evil impinging upon an order of good. By emphasizing the need for a new order rather than attempting to prevent the fall of an established order, the genre of dystopia better accentuates the salvific nature of social transformation rather than preservation, such as was the hope of biblical authors who used apocalyptic writing.

When the human agents who seek or effect transformation are placed in a narrative that echoes the narrative of Christian soteriology, dystopian film can come to parallel the imaginative force of traditional apocalyptic narrative by attaining to what Robert Pope describes as an "eschatological" dimension of theological imagination, one that can rearrange narrative events into new forms that diagnose problems and reveal possibilities for positive change.²¹ Each film to be addressed here is dystopian in that it represents a case of human order that instead of realizing its intended perfection leads to dehumanization, brutality, sterility, and hopelessness.

But by doing so with explicit references to Christian soteriology, they demonstrate the eschatological imagination that Pope describes, demarcating the sinfulness of the mis-orderings that their various ambitions yield and pointing to ways that humanity can hope for salvation from these still-all-too-real orders of sin.

Dystopian Soteriology in Film

Children of Men

Children of Men's dystopian story is set in London 2027, and its premise is that the whole of humanity has been infertile for eighteen years. The specter of the end of human civilization has incited worldwide panic and anarchy, and an endemic lack of hope. England is shown to function as a police state, mercilessly detaining the mass numbers of refugees flooding it as well as dissidents of various sorts. Citizens, such as the main character, a numb, mid-level government employee named Theo, all plod through the drab scenery like disaffected ghosts, living embodiments of the tale's hopelessness. The critique the film is making is of the tendency in a globalized world by which people can become increasingly insular as they are cut adrift from coherent cultural narratives protected by traditional boundaries.²² Anxiety results as these boundaries are dissolved, and one reaction, one of fear leading to isolation, is to reject the cultural others who are permeating the boundary and militarize, literally and conceptually, the threatened borders.²³ The ambition is to create a purified society that maintains delineation and order, but the result is cultural disconnectedness that yields moribund stagnation. The film calls for a new political and cultural sensibility that can appropriate the pluralism and cultural

discontinuity that result from our contemporary globalized situation and engender intercultural connectedness through which a new global society can be fruitfully nurtured.²⁴ The biological sterility in the film represents a cultural sterility that sets in when human beings are unable and unwilling to see otherness that disrupts their own historicity and ego-integrity. Sarah Schwartzman has well summarized the dystopian situation: “. . . the film presents the end of the world as coming through the human propensity not to recognize or treat ‘others’ as fully human.”²⁵ The alternative is openness to that otherness and allowing one’s own cultural reality to be uprooted and forced into transformation by the encounter. To not allow such otherness to break through into collective consciousness is an injustice in that it leads to gross dehumanization of the other.

It makes sense within this narrative, then, that the fertility that offers hope comes from one who is part of the ostracized other, an African refugee and former prostitute named Kee who becomes pregnant. Theo is thrust into guardianship of her when he is abducted by his ex-wife and her militant group of refugee rights activists because he has family connections that may aid them in getting Kee to a clandestine, international humanitarian organization called the Human Project. When extremists in the group attempt to kidnap Kee, Theo manages to escape with her and sneak her into a refugee camp. In the camp, Theo helps Kee birth her baby girl and gets her to the rendezvous with the Human Project, but then succumbs to a fatal wound suffered in the struggle.

S. Brent Plate notes that much of Hollywood cinema today edits in frenetically short bursts that mimic a world that defines itself as “fast-paced.”²⁶ A result is that no identification with otherness is enabled because no prolonged seeing of otherness is possible. Cuarón directly subverts this stylization and its attendant disconnecting and depersonalizing effects. James

Udden analyzes Cuarón's use of long takes²⁷ in *Children of Men* and other works, and affirms that it succeeds in *Children of Men* at creating verity and objectivity.²⁸ Udden writes that the long take editing, combined with meticulous *mise-en-scène* and strongly conceived cinematography, yields a sense that the world of the film is "hyper-real," revealing a much richer sense of depth.²⁹ In overcoming the estrangement editing described by Plate, Cuarón is able to effectively create an encounter with otherness for the viewer, bolstering the film's central meaning. The viewer is forced to dwell with the world and its characters; he/she is refused the opportunity to have the encounter proceed along the terse, transitory, sound-bite contours that so often mark contemporary experience to isolating and dehumanizing effect. The revelation of meaning comes to be rooted in the reality of the objective other rather than the interiority of the subjective. This drawing out to meaningful encounter and its ability to overpower the potential disconnection of a radically globalized and unrooted age is the salvation that the Christic imagery and tones of the film advance.

Several cues cast Theo's death into a Messianic, Christ-figure mold: the self-sacrificial nature of the death, his tag name ("*theos*," Greek for "god"), and his path being crossed by a random herd of runaway sheep in the refugee camp, evoking the good shepherd imagery of John 10. As the hero then, he points to salvation following the way of the cross; the remedy to the cultural malady is sacrificing an old way of being for a new humanity modeled by Theo himself just as Christ modeled a new humanity with his own cross. This new humanity is one that embraces cultural otherness in the way Theo embraces a new Madonna that exemplifies cultural otherness. The viewer is told, in the words of Katje Richstatter, to "not look away, but to witness the suffering and the mysteries of the world" and heal them with "tolerance, faith, brotherly love, and altruism."³⁰ Sarah Schwartzman notes that even the film's title is itself suggestive of this

cultural salvation—instead of being saved by the Son of Man, we will be saved by a collective, transcendent reconnection of all the Children of Men.³¹

Pan's Labyrinth

Pan's Labyrinth is ostensibly set in 1944 in Franco's Spain, but del Toro builds a parallel narrative directly into the story. The historical narrative is that Ofelia and her widowed mother are being moved to an abandoned mill at the wooded foot of the mountains to live with the mother's new husband, Captain Vidal. Ofelia's age is not specified but she is depicted to be around about ten years old. The mother is pregnant and Vidal fanatically insists the child will be a boy. His single-minded obsession with his son and his treatment of Ofelia's mother as a mere vessel reveal his domineering and exploitative nature. There are serious complications with the pregnancy, and at one point Vidal gives the doctor clear instructions that if there is a choice to be made between the two lives that he should save the child at all costs. The reason they are in the mountain area is that Vidal's military responsibilities send him there in order to root out lingering vestiges of anti-fascist resistance forces. However, Ofelia discovers in the woods a hidden fairy tale world that comes to symbolically mythologize the real world around her, and more importantly its horrors. The sinful structure at stake is fascist totalitarianism—a dystopian mis-ordering in which social control and efficiency mask dehumanization that results from the violent suppression of all opposition. Del Toro uses Ofelia's fairy tale world to comment on such totalitarianism at several levels. This symbolic world aids in dissecting and analyzing the dynamics behind the totalitarian power, and it also mythologizes the idea of totalitarian abuse and oppression so that it can not be isolated to particular historical instances like Franco's Spain

or Hitler's Germany.³² In demonstrating the moral and narrative substructure of such political forces, del Toro shows how the insidious ideologies behind totalitarianism can persist even without official instantiation, such as how today dominant political or religious ideologies can suppress marginalized voices and dehumanize their bearers.³³

In the fairy tale world, Ofelia is revealed to be a long lost princess and is assigned by a faun, who serves as gatekeeper and guide to the fairy tale realm, three tasks by which she must prove her identity. The events of Ofelia's fairy tale struggles clearly come to represent her real world ones; for instance, she must flee the threat of a monstrosity who devours children, just as she must avoid the wrathful control of Captain Vidal. But through this mythologizing technique, a third parallel is inferred, one in which the narrative of totalitarian control that Vidal represents destroys the identity narratives of all that it seeks to control. Particularly highlighted in this case is the destruction of childhood and oppression of the feminine. The horror that Ofelia experiences, in reality and in the fairy tale realm, confronts the violence of the fascists, a violence that is the natural tool of such totalitarian control. Vidal's victimization of Ofelia and his exploitation of her mother demonstrate a mythic connection between totalitarian social control, violence, and masculinity. Kam Hei Tsuei further elaborates this connection by praising *Pan's Labyrinth* for depicting the interrelation of industrialization, rationalization, and cultural hegemony, the social and economic engines of fascism, with constructs of masculinity that imply suppression of the feminine.³⁴

Del Toro's mythologization also enables the recognition that dehumanizing systems like totalitarian fascism require resistance at the narrative level. Ofelia's active resistance to Vidal's power over herself and her mother literally results in the crafting of a narrative of resistance.³⁵ Her story as the princess becomes a story of soteriological liberation. At the story's climax,

Ofelia's mother has died in childbirth, and Ofelia is left to shield her baby brother from the corruption of Vidal's control and power. She allows herself to be killed by Vidal while trying to save the brother, but is resurrected in the fairy world as her royal self and enters the throne room occupied by her deceased parents—a resurrection enabled by her sacrifice itself, which marks her successful completion of the faun's final task. Del Toro offers here a view of the eschaton where the sacrifice of Ofelia has undermined the terror of Vidal, which is reflected in the real world by his death at the hands of the rebels who then adopt the son, an event precipitated by Ofelia's sacrificial moment. Ofelia's tale demonstrates how totalitarian narratives threaten and harm and dehumanize, and as a Christ-figure her saving death demonstrates that salvation in today's context requires active resistance to such narratives for the sake of building new and liberating ones that can alleviate the illusive peace of cultural totalitarianism that is built upon the oppression and terrorization of the innocent and vulnerable.

Valhalla Rising

Refn's *Valhalla Rising* offers a vision that places Christianity itself directly at the center of its dystopia. The film begins in pagan Scotland in 1000 AD. It starts with a mysterious, mute warrior known only as One-Eye being held captive by highlands clans and forced to engage in life-or-death battles for entertainment sport. One-Eye manages to free himself, sparing and taking on as a ward the young boy who had been his caretaker. The two run into and eventually join a group of Viking crusaders en route to the Holy Land. In this introduction, the crusaders are seen to have massacred a whole pagan clan and are holding all the women captive, naked and bound. The party embarks for the Holy Land, but when they set out to sea they end up adrift in

fog and eventually lost in what, unbeknownst to them, is an inland estuary in undiscovered North America. At this point, the leader's militant interpretation of the Christian faith leads him to re-orient their aims to conquest of this new land and its primitives. He assumes their getting lost as God's will, and on finding a native burial site claims he will "show them a man of God has arrived."

What is seen through the vision of these crusaders is a microcosm of Christianity being inculcated to societies in which militant violence is a central element. The passivist character of the gospels is filtered into an illiterate world where the hero-story of Jesus becomes understood by the culture's own warrior-hero myths, and so evangelization and Christian mission become violent conquests of heathens by which these Christians attain to the glory and eternal life won by the victory of the Jesus-hero. Allegorically, the model serves to critique any form of Christianity that sacrifices the peace of Christ for similarly violent and triumphalist expressions of mission. Such expressions seek to install Christian faith as a social order, but it is dystopian mis-order in that the installation is one of destruction and domination rather than life and peace, and one that, as Refn demonstrates, is annihilating of even itself.

One-Eye is crafted as the living exemplar of the Jesus-hero the crusaders envision. In his fighting scenes he is depicted to be mythically undefeatable, his origins are ambiguous even to himself, and he possesses supernatural abilities of foresight. However, One-Eye remains in constant tension with the Christians, making him an ironic and almost sarcastic foil to their triumphalism. When the violent drives of the crusaders begin spiraling into self-destruction under the weight of mysterious assaults from hidden natives, the crusaders come to believe they are not in a new holy land but rather hell.³⁶ The opposition and criticism embodied in One-Eye allow the audience to see it as a dystopian hell of the crusaders' own making.

It is here that the genuine Christ-imagery of One-Eye builds as a salvific force against the self-destructive depravity of the crusaders. The leader offers as a salve for the group's angst a psychotropic drink that fuels an Agony in the Garden as envisioned by Hieronymus Bosch. One of the men begins stabbing the ground with daggers aiming at unseen hallucinations, one grasps at his sword in an ecstasy between prayer and battle-cry, and one rapes another in a pit of mud. As these others spiral into despair and savagery, One-Eye, wracked with clairvoyant foreknowledge of his own death, painstakingly builds a Norse death cairn. The group's final dissolution occurs when One-Eye, the boy, the son of the group's leader, and the group's priest all stop on a mountaintop to contemplate their plans. The scene becomes reminiscent of the Transfiguration of Jesus; bug's-eye-view angles of One-Eye wreathed by bright sky contrast with bird's-eye-view angles of the remaining group members who look to him now as a true sage. The son of the leader mournfully turns back to find his father, a decision understood as sure death and rejection of One-Eye as savior. The priest remains on the mountain to succumb to his wounds, but encourages the boy to stay with One-Eye, whom he now knows is true and good. Only the boy goes on with One-Eye to find deliverance. The two reach a beachhead from which a journey away from the new land can be begun, but they are confronted by a full band of the natives. One-Eye offers himself as a passive sacrifice to save the boy, demonstrating that the true heroism of Christ is in self-sacrifice and not violent victory.

The crusaders all are undone as the violent triumphalism that they seek is proven impotent, but the one character with truly mythic power and supernatural ability lays down his life for the sake of a friend. Christianity today is not foreign to triumphalist strains of mission that may or may not be overtly violent, but remain as similarly power-hungry as Refn's Viking

crusaders, and subsume that power drive in the narratives of Christian faith.³⁷ The true cross was an opposition to such violent power, and a Christianity that adopts violence or power-seeking into its heart rots from the inside and does immense harm to the society that it inflicts itself upon. A real context in which salvation is often needed today is purification of such strains of Christian triumphalism, and the violence-renouncing, self-sacrificing nature of Christ's death, as mirrored by Refn's *One-Eye*, is a call to such salvific purification.

Conclusion

To the evangelists, apocalyptic motifs were a tool for helping their audiences understand what it was that Christ was saving people from. These motifs allowed the evangelists to demonstrate the sinful orders of society—political, economic, religious—that Christ's self-sacrificial love was meant to overcome. In a similar way, the contemporary film genre of dystopia, defined as a mis-ordered system that masks sin with structure and excuses evil with efficiency, helps reveal continuing cultural and social maladies that require salvation. The evangelists used apocalyptic to help their audiences contextualize and connect with the meaning of the cross, and dystopian film today can similarly provide a powerful way for helping contemporary audiences contextualize and connect with the ongoing meaning and relevance of salvation.

¹ I am following here an understanding of dystopia as “a sinister perfection of order” as described by Benjamin Kunkel (“Dystopia and the End of Politics,” *Dissent* 55:4 (2008): 90). So the vision is not one of “disorder” *per se*, it is rather a “mis-ordering,” order marked by malice, sinfulness, dehumanization, etc.

² Greg Carey, “Introduction: Apocalyptic Discourse, Apocalyptic Rhetoric,” in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse*, eds. Greg Carey and Gregory L. Bloomquist, 2-10 (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

³ *Ibid.*, 11. For Carey, this justifies a turn to rhetorical analysis that allows one to examine the specific way a particular text is trying to “influence both the behavior and the understanding of the audience.”

⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, "Narrative, History, and Gospel," *Semeia* 43 (1988): 145-153.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶ Vernon K. Robbins, "Rhetorical Ritual: Apocalyptic Discourse in Mark 13," in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse*, eds. Greg Carey and Gregory L. Bloomquist, 97 (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 118-119. See also 101, where Robbins makes clearer that what is at stake is an opposition to the current historical environment of the immediate audience.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹ Yarbro Collins, *The Beginnings of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 81.

¹⁰ Yarbro Collins, "Composition and Performance in Mark 13," in *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honor of Sea'n Freyne*, eds. Zuleika Rodgers, Margaret Daly-Denton, and Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley, 551 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹¹ Yarbro Collins, *Beginnings*, 91.

¹² Yarbro Collins, "Composition," 555.

¹³ Yarbro Collins, *Beginnings*, 118. See also Yarbro Collins, "Mark's Interpretation of the Death of Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128:3 (2009): 545-554.

¹⁴ Yarbro Collins, "Composition," 543.

¹⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, "An Apocalyptic Shift in Early Christian Tradition: Reflections on Some Canonical Evidence," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 231-248.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁸ Conrad E. Ostwalt, "Visions of the End: Secular Apocalypse in Recent Hollywood Film," *Journal of Religion and Film* 2:1 (1998), §3-4. <<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/OstwaltC.htm>> Accessed 8/28/2012.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §3.

²⁰ See Kunkel, 90 for this definition of the contemporary dystopian genre.

²¹ See Robert Pope, *Salvation in Celluloid: Theology, Imagination, and Film* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 41.

²² Sarah Schwartzman, "Children of Men and a Plural Messianism," *Journal of Religion and Film* 13:1 (2009): §23. <<http://avalon.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol13.no1/ChildrenMen.htm>> Accessed 3/7/2011.

²³ *Ibid.*, §16-18, 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, §19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, §23.

²⁶ S. Brent Plate, *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 43.

²⁷ James Udden, “Child of the Long Take: Alfonso Cuarón’s Film Aesthetic in the Shadow of Globalization,” *Style* 43:1 (2009): 29. Udden calculates that the average shot length in *Children of Men* is just over sixteen seconds, which he contrasts with the fact that many Hollywood studio films today can average less than two seconds per shot.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36. However, Udden’s full thesis is that the successful artistic result in this case should not mask the fact that the use of such long takes was highly contrived in the film and is likely linked to a desire to further Cuarón’s own auteur ambitions, which Udden argues has been a repeated motivation for long takes in cinema history.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁰ Katje Richstatter, “Two Dystopian Movies...and Their Visions of Hope,” *Tikkun* 22:2 (2007): 79.

³¹ This is what Schwartzman refers to with the “Plural Messianism” in her article title.

³² Kam Hei Tsuei, “The Anti-Fascist Aesthetics of *Pan’s Labyrinth*,” *Socialism and Democracy* 22 (2008): 231.

³³ See Tsuei 244, although this point is also the primary focus of the article as a whole.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 242-243.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 244. See also Roger Clark and Keith McDonald, “‘A Constant Transit of Finding’: Fantasy as Realisation in *Pan’s Labyrinth*,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 41 (2010): 59.

³⁶ Refn uses chapter titles within the film, and the section when the crusaders first reach North America is titled “The Holy Land,” and after they realize their error and have a crewman killed by a native arrow, the ensuing section is titled “Hell.”

³⁷ A recent example would be the way Christian ideology influenced and motivated the Bush Administration during the War in Iraq, such as with the inclusion of biblical quotations on military intelligence briefings. See David E. Sanger, “Biblical Quotes Said to Adorn Pentagon Reports,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/18/us/18rumsfeld.html>> Accessed 8/29/2012. For images, see an online slideshow published in June 2009 by GQ: <<http://www.gq.com/news-politics/newsmakers/donald-rumsfeld-pentagon-papers>> Accessed 8/29/2012.

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