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The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-figure

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Abstract

Christ-figures are built into many popular films, particular in the science fiction genre, but they are frequently ignored by critics, unappreciated by film fans, or resisted by anti-religionists. Conversely, believers sometimes want to see them where none credibly exist, thus religiously distorting their reading of the films. So, what can be legitimately called a cinematic Christ-figure? Previous calls for research into this area have been overlooked, but given the pervasiveness of Christ-figure films today, it is now opportune to address that scholarly deficiency. Using textually-based, humanist film criticism as the analytical lens, the critical literature is reviewed, the popular cinema scanned, and twenty-five structural characteristics of the Christ-figure are identified and explicated. Numerous examples are used to illustrate the genre points raised. It is concluded that the Christ-figure film is a legitimate pop culture phenomenon, and that as a living genre, its usage will be undiminished in the foreseeable future. Further research into Christ-figures, holy subtexts and the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film is recommended.

Introduction

[1] Barry McMillan (2002, 360) argued that the alien in many science fiction (SF) films can be viewed as "a 'transcendent' being—a benign entity who brings wisdom and knowledge, the imparting of which brings resolution, insight and the beginnings of personal or political harmony." As evidence, he cited *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Contact* and *K-Pax*. However, their transcendent natures were not accidental Hollywood creations, rather, they were deliberately engineered as cinematic transfigurations of Jesus Christ (J.C.) and are best described as Christ-figures, but *not* Jesus-figures. As Peter Malone (1997a) explained concerning this essential ontological difference:

> "Jesus-figure" refers to any representation of Jesus himself. "Christ-figure" describes any figure in the arts who resembles Jesus. The personal name of Jesus (in line with contemporary spirituality, thought and practice) is used for the Jesus-figure. The title "Christ"—the "Messiah," or the "Anointed One"—is used for those who are seen to reflect his mission. In cinema, writers and directors present both Jesus-figures and Christ-figures (59-60).

[2] By their very nature, Jesus-figures are easier to detect. Some famous examples include Max von Sydow in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Jeffrey Hunter in *King of Kings*, and Willem Dafoe in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Kinnard and Davis, 1992; Stern, Jefford and DeBona, 1999; Tatum, 1997). No doubt, Jim Caviezel will be added to this honourable list because of *The Passion of the Christ* directed by Mel Gibson. Conversely, Christ-figures occur when:

> … Jesus is not portrayed directly but is represented symbolically or at times allegorically. Christ figures can be identified either by particular actions that link

them with Jesus, such as being crucified symbolically (*Pleasantville*, 1998), walking on water (*The Truman Show*, 1998) or wearing a cross (*Nell*, 1994; *Babette's Feast*, 1987). Indeed, any film that has redemption as a major theme (and this includes many, if not most, recent Hollywood movies) is liable to use some Jesus symbolism in connection with the redemptive hero figure (Reinhartz, 2003, 189).

[3] Therefore, Barry McMillan's (2002, 360) transcendent beings, the alien Messiahs of science fiction are technically Christ-figures. Why? Because these commercial feature films do not try to copy popular conceptions of Jesus' biblical time, place or image. That is, they are not located approximately 2000 years ago in ancient Judaea. Nor do they star a protagonist who is male, tall, longhaired, blue-eyed, bearded, with WASP features, wearing sandals and a white toga looking like some 20th century hippie. Indeed, hippies frequently fashioned themselves after Jesus Christ to support their own political agendas (Stern and Stern, 1992, 212).

[4] For many Christians, these pop culture representations of Jesus Christ are important holy subtexts (aka sacred subtexts, divine infranarrations) that have to be taken seriously precisely because of their sacred subject matter and undeniable cultural pervasiveness. Indeed, as Ernest L. Simmons (2003, 254) argued: "For many people today, especially the young, popular culture *is* culture, and theology, to remain true to its calling, must take such cultural expressions seriously." Somewhat ironically, given the traditional clash between "science" and "religion," the SF genre provided an unexpected home for religious storytelling. Especially following the decline of the 1950s rash of biblical epics triggered by Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah*, a "watershed film" (Schatz, 1997, 394). As Hugh Ruppersburg (1987, 165) argued: "science fiction films of the 1970s and '80s serve the same function as the biblical epics of the 1950s and '60s." They still perform this function today, and no doubt, will continue to do so well into the post-millennial age. The only difference is that the religious agenda of these SF films is artfully hidden using holy subtexts.

In Pursuit of Holy Subtexts

[5] What exactly are holy subtexts? In essence, a filmic narrative can have a dual nature, namely, an *overt* plot plus a *covert* storyline of varying complexity that is comparable to the metaphorical or symbolic within literature. As Bernard Dick (1998, 129) described this relationship: "the narrative and infranarrative (or text and subtext) are not two separate entities (there is, after all, only one film); think of them, rather, as two concentric circles, the infranarrative being *within* the narrative." Put another way, a holy subtext is "anonymous religiousness" (Gallagher, 1997, 151), or better yet, the pursuit of "overtly religious themes in a secular 'wrapper'" (Ellis, 2001, 304). Through this narratological arrangement, secular films can engage in religious storytelling about biblical characters, ideas and themes *without* appearing "religious." In fact, innumerable Christ-figures and other holy subtexts are hidden within the popular cinema. It is a living genre whose engineering, re-discovery and scholarly criticism grows yearly (Deacy, 1999; Hurley, 1980; Kozloff, 1981; Kozlovic, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2004; Ruppersburg, 1987). Somewhat surprisingly, previous calls for research into the area have been overlooked (Brunstad, 2001; Hurley, 1980), but given their pervasiveness and increasing contemporary importance, it is opportune to address that scholarly deficiency now. Indeed, why do they exist at all?

Christ-Figures, the Hero Cycle and Hollywood Scriptwriters

[6] Neil P. Hurley (1980) had argued decades ago:

I submit that there is a compelling mysterious force within the creative human

> imagination which shapes fictional characters and dramatic plots in the image and
> likeness of the central personage and events of the four Gospels of Matthew,
> Mark, Luke and John (431).

Yet, there is no need to evoke anonymous mysterious forces. Cinematic Christ-figures can exist for a variety of more mundane reasons. For example, in addition to making money, some filmmakers, as committed Christians, have employed the movies to advance their particular faith or Christian culture in general. They used the silver screen as a defacto evangelical tool while operating in a cinematic lay preacher mode. This is how the co-founder of Hollywood, Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959), the master of the American biblical epic, partially viewed his role. As his biographer Charles Higham (1973) reported:

> Bessie Lasky … convinced me that DeMille, so far from being a cynic, was a
> devout believer in the Bible who saw himself in a missionary role, making the
> Scriptures attractive and fascinating to the masses in an age of increasing
> materialism and heathenism. A deeply committed Episcopalian, he literally
> accepted every word of the Bible without question … (ix-x).

[7] However, the real genius of DeMille was that he also used (covert, subtextual) religion *within* (overt, textual) religion thoroughly to infuse his Bible films with a Christic resonance in support of Christendom. For example, he artistically re-constructed the Old Testament/Hebraic figure of Samson (Victor Mature) as a rustic New Testament Christ-figure within *Samson and Delilah*. He did this deliberately as a Christian believer to upgrade the sanctity of this decidedly rogue judge following honourable Christian theological precedent rooted in Hebrews 11:32 (Kozlovic, 2003a). Whether viewers detected this subtextual engineering or not (or were supposed too), they could not help but interpret Samson positively as a hero-figure, albeit, roguish and flawed. Such is the transformative power of Christ-figure engineering and subliminal Christian construction.

[8] Sometimes, filmmakers crafted Christ-figures into their work as a joke (possibly by timid Christians), as was confessed decades later by the scriptwriter for the SF cult classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*:

> … Edmund H. North himself admitted that the parallels between the story of
> Christ and *Day* were intentional: from Klaatu's earthly name of Carpenter, to the
> betrayal by Tom Stevens, and finally to his resurrection and ascent into the
> heavens at *Day*'s end. "It was my private little joke. I never discussed this angle
> with [producer Julian] Blaustein or [director Robert] Wise because I didn't want it
> expressed. I had originally hoped that the Christ comparison would be subliminal
> (von Gunden and Stock, 1982, 44).

Moreover, as North confessed elsewhere: "I didn't honestly expect audiences to pick up the allusion … I never wanted it to be a conscious thing, but I thought it had value being there" (Warren and Thomas, 1982, 26). Similarly, Richard Donner, the director of *Superman: The Movie* had initially disowned the Christian origins of his comic book superhero film. Presumably, due to duress, for as he reported: "I had life threats, because people accused me of approaching Brando as God and his son was Jesus…we had Scotland Yard, the FBI, and the LAPD looking in to them. I literally had people saying that my blood would run in the streets for doing that" (Plume, 2001, 2). However, many years later, Donner freely admitted to the Christic subtext, presumably due to the cultural acceptance of such public admissions, the pervasiveness of cinematic Christ-figures, and their in-vogue fashionableness amongst the knowing. As Donner proudly claimed: "It's a motif I had done at the beginning when [Marlon] Brando sent Chris [Christopher Reeve] to Earth and said, 'I send them my only son.' It was God sending Christ to Earth" (Harrington and Kavitsky, 2000, 7). Although tracking the

historical changes in mood concerning the awareness and acceptance of hidden religious figures within the popular cinema is an exciting area for future research, it is beyond the scope of this work.

[9] Christ-figures sometimes result because filmmakers have been influenced by the Hero Cycle theories of American mythologist Joseph Campbell (1988), as espoused in his classic work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Some of his famous adherents are George Lucas with his *Star Wars* trilogy and George Miller with his apocalyptic *Mad Max* trilogy (Mathews, 1984, 233-234). Campbell argued that there was a basic structural pattern within myths, sacred epics, national stories, etc., that focused upon the great deeds of hero-figures. Their faces, names and even gender may change over time, culture, story and place, thus initially disguising their identity (i.e., the hero with a thousand faces). Nevertheless, they play the same heroic roles, and they face the same sort of challenges, time and time again. Indeed, everything is completely different except for the fact that it is all the same as the familiar is reimagined. In fact, the Christ-figure can be seen as a special religious subset of the Hero Cycle, and one structural means of identifying a truly religious great (e.g., Jesus) from a lesser heroic figure (e.g., John the Baptist). That is, the Christ-figure is of a far higher order of greatness, power and mystery than other hero-figures. Since Campbell's book is core reading in many scriptwriting classes alongside how-to manuals inspired by it (Vogler, 1998), many Hollywood scripts inevitably manifest a Christic resonance. Therefore, viewers do see and recognise the archetypal Christic pattern on some deep level, if not necessarily the Jesus face associated with it.(1)

[10] Another reason that Christ-figures exist is that Hollywood films are frequently created within a Judaeo-Christian context. Therefore, it is almost a natural response for Western scriptwriters looking for ideas and archetypes to tap into this familiar religious heritage when creating their new heroes. They know the sacred stories and thematic patterns so well (whether consciously or unconsciously) from their own socialisation, enculturation and professional education (whether religious, cultural or vocational). Indeed, as inveterate film-watchers themselves, they are being subconsciously sensitised to this phenomenon regularly, along with numerous other patterns that end up as cinematic cliches, stereotypes and hackneyed formulas (Ebert, 1994). As Alison Niemi (2003) argued regarding one aspect of this cultural conditioning:

> Filmic models can be internalized intuitively instead of consciously because they are conveyed temporally, and therefore emotionally, rather than remaining within the realms of abstract thought. Life lessons and mythic realities are experienced rather than dictated (437).

[11] Of course, the power of the Christic subtext can be greatly enhanced once the filmmaker is aware of it and consciously decides to make that heroic Christ-figure choice; the script almost writes itself. One simply cinematically retells the Jesus story and mechanically connects the plot dots. The real filmmaking skill is in retelling this ancient story as closely as possible using modern garb, employing innovative techniques, and doing it well enough to make it believable (i.e., achieving the willing suspension of disbelief). Hopefully, such filmic efforts will be worthy of a spot in Campbell's ever-growing gallery of heroic faces alongside Klaatu, Superman, E.T., John Coffey, John Connor, James Cole, Prot, etc. This desirable outcome is of course not automatically guaranteed. It is a function of the biblical knowledge, skill and commitment of the filmmakers involved. Furthermore, it is also a function of how much authentic research was done, and the compromises that had to be made along the way (whether pragmatic, financial, artistic, academic, religious, political, spiritual, etc.).

[12] There is also an interesting dynamic among filmmakers who intentionally incorporate Christ imagery in their productions and audiences who will notice it and either embrace or

reject it. This is itself a function of aesthetic intention, knowledge, marketing, critical awareness, viewer sophistication, and thus another fruitful area for further research, but beyond the scope of this work. Besides, a well-crafted Christ-figure film should be received more favourably by Western audiences whose cultural context and conditioning is primarily Judaeo-Christian. After all, how many non-Muslims could detect a subtextual Muhammad-figure if crafted into a Hollywood feature film, let alone the innumerable subtleties of his sacred character, the range of his holy associates, or the nuances of the Islamic faith?

Problems, Approaches and Arguments

[13] Regrettably, such delightful examples of subtextual craftsmanship have frequently been ignored by critics, unappreciated by film fans, or actively resisted by both religionists and anti-religionists for a variety of reasons. This resistance can range from psychological denial, to fear of contamination, to trenchant opposition to the religious mindset, especially by atheists, scientific rationalists and the religiously wounded with unforgiving dispositions. Yet, cinematic Christ-figures are so common today that a certain degree of viewer fatigue has already set in among the knowing. This was aptly demonstrated by film critic Leif H (1999, 2) concerning *The Matrix*. He annoyingly claimed: "This movie is so chock full of obvious Christian symbolism you could choke on it," and then proceeded to identify many of them. Similarly, the eponymously named reviewer Mr. Cranky! (2000) complained about the Scottish warrior epic *Braveheart*:

> … [There is] a really long and protracted moment where the camera lovingly dotes on Mel Gibson [playing William Wallace] as he is taken to a platform to be tortured. It's the kind of moment that makes preschoolers point to the screen and say, 'Christ figure!, Christ figure!' Either that or: 'Look! He's shamelessly grooming himself for the Oscars!' (Oscar committees love Christ figures.) (1).

[14] Conversely, among some believers, there has been a disturbing tendency to see Christ-figures in films where none credibly existed. That is, they attempted to ""baptize" films that did not ask to be converted" to us Linda Mercadante's (2001, 1) words, thus religiously distorting their critical interpretations to conform to these (unwarranted) Christic expectations. For example, the nail that the renegade replicant Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) impaled through his own hand in *Blade Runner* was seen by some as "an obvious crucifixion symbol" (Warner, 1991, 182; see also Palumbo, 1987, 223). Yet, Roy does so "in order to prolong his life, to defer his 'time to die'. Roy is in this and every regard far from Christ-like … [this act and others] are allegorical shots severed from their mythological sources, empty allegories that cannot be redeemed by the Christian narrative" (Pyle, 2000, 126).

[15] Such a forced fate also occurred with the box office hit *Spider-Man*, the latest incarnation of Marvel's 1960 comic book hero. Director Sam Raimi had replaced the typical Christ-figure subtext with an Everyman superhero overlay. His Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) was a pop culture super-saviour who was only tangentially linked to the Superman mythos. Yet, many Christians wanted desperately to see Spidey as a Christ-figure, or at least a spiritualised Christian. For example, Pastor Mike Furches (2002, 1) from Cross Community Church (Wichita, Kansas) claimed that the film is "full of Spiritual references and significance. It is quite possible that Spider-Man is the most Spiritual of all super heroes and this movie adaptation helps prove it, what is even clearer is that his spirituality is rooted in Christianity." Similarly, Pastor David Bruce (2002, 5) argued that: "*Spider-Man* in many ways is a retelling of the story of Superman which is a telling of the life of Jesus Christ." He then provided ten parallels between Spider-Man, Superman and Jesus Christ to justify his assertion. However, not all of Pastor Bruce's assertions are legitimate, justified or sustained. In the final analysis, Spider-Man has only a few Christ-like parallels and some faint Jesus echoes, but he is not a legitimate Christ-figure like Superman (Kozloff, 1981; Kozlovic, 2002a).

[16] Some scholars of religion are concerned about the potential harmful effects while hunting for holy subtexts. As Linda Mercadante (2001, 1) confessed regarding the blessed (or mentally unstable?) Bess (Emily Watson), the female Christ-figure from *Breaking the Waves*: "I worry that when they [students] do find a film with distinct Christic allusions, they may uncritically accept images that have been used to promote or justify destructive human behavior." Notably, Bess's repeated prostituting of herself with the local men in the spiritual (or psychotic?) cause of her paralysed husband, Jan (Stellan Skarsgard), whom she believed will be cured as a result of her (God-sanctioned?) salacious sexual deeds.

Scant Scholarly Research in the Field

[17] Although identifying the complex nature of subtextual holiness within the popular cinema can have potentially serious results, it can also turn film-watching into an enjoyable, religious education equivalent of a "Where's Waldo" adventure or a "Magic Eye" picture book. Alternatively, it can be the cinematic theology equivalent of the ultra-aesthetic game played by the Castalian seminarians in Hermann Hesse's novel *The Glass Bead Game* (aka *Magister Ludi*). Yet surprisingly, despite Neil P. Hurley's (1980, 432) two-decades-old call for "more sustained research," only scant scholarly work has been conducted to date (Baugh, 1997; Bowman, 2001; Deacy, 1999). This is possibly due to the inherent difficulties associated with this subgenre, for as biblical scholar William R. Telford (2000, 35) noted about Christ-figures: "They are, of course, very difficult to define. Like ghosts in the night or faces in the clouds, you can imagine that you are seeing them, when they are in fact not really there." Nevertheless, despite the difficulties and potential dangers, as Paul Otto Brunstad (2001, 151) argued: "To formulate criteria for evaluating the abundance of Christ-figures that have emerged through the first century of film history is a task for further discussion." Now is the time to begin that important task of recovery, discussion and the construction of an evaluative criterion.

Methodology

[18] The critical film and religion literature was reviewed and integrated into the text to enhance narrative coherence (albeit, with a strong reportage flavour). Humanist film criticism was employed as the analytical lens (i.e., examining the textual world *inside* the frame, but not the world *outside* the frame [Bywater and Sobchack, 1989]). A preliminary scan of the popular cinema revealed twenty-five structural characteristics of the cinematic Christ-figure. These were identified and explicated herein using copious film exemplars to illustrate the various genre points made.(2) Of course, not all of these elements will be found in any single feature film, and each element may be interpreted differently depending upon the context, but their putative commonality should at least be the starting point for analysis. Permutations will also abound depending upon the need for thematic authenticity, narrative coherence and the desire for higher audience recognition. Indeed, as Peter Malone (1997b) rightly counselled:

> The [Christic] resemblance needs to be significant and substantial, otherwise it is trivial. It also needs to be understood from the text and the texture of the work of art, be it classical or popular, and not read into the text with Christian presuppositions (76).

[19] Yet, seeing what you want to see (i.e., text-as-reader-construct) can be very difficult to avoid for some viewers, which is why establishing their formal characteristics in a checklist fashion is so important. The following descriptive explication is a useful introductory template for assessing any Christ-figure claim, whether trivial or not, coupled with the judicious application of viewer prudence, pertinence and perseverance in identifying all the constituent elements, however artfully constructed. Conversely, the same shopping list can be fruitfully employed in a prescriptive, cookbook fashion by filmmakers who want to engineer powerful

Christ-figures into their productions. In this way, they can proverbially snowball their audiences into accepting their covert religious argument without the need for blatantly overt arguments. So, what exactly are the basic structural characteristics of the cinematic Christ-figure?

Twenty-Five Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-figure

[20] Although the following twenty-five elements are the primary characteristics of this Christic phenomenon, there will be some minor overlapping and interlocking of categories, which does not seriously detract from the overall utility of the checklist.

[21] **1.0 TANGIBLE:** Some scholars like Donna Bowman (2001) have argued for the existence of absent Christ-figures, but these Christic protagonists are usually tangible, visible and frequently colourful characters, albeit sometimes only partially exposed or mysteriously delayed in progressive revelation fashion (usually done as a dramatic suspense-building device). Their life story is frequently coupled with an odd, unexpected or obscure birth, origin, arrival or creation. Just like Christian believers know that Jesus was real, living among them, and was the product of a virginal conception (Matt. 1:23).(3) His personal life was also significantly obscure, except for a few interesting infant episodes (Matt. 1-2; Luke 1-2) and other childhood incidents (Luke 2:41-52), until the adult activation of his cosmic mission at "thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23). For example, in *God Told Me To*, a weird SF version of the Second Coming, there is a police hunt for a presumed serial killer. Throughout the course of the homicide investigation, the audience expects an adult, Jesus-looking murderer complete with twelve apostles, an inner circle betrayer, a virgin birth, and hippie garb. They are not disappointed! The Christ-as-fallen-angel called Bernard Phillips (Richard Lynch) is actually an alien-human hybrid. He wants to mate incestuously with his Catholic cop, recessive gene, twin brother, Peter J. Nicholas (Tony Lo Bianco) via a vagina located near Jesus' traditional spear-wound site. This makes Bernard the most bizarre Christ-figure in cinematic history, and in Larry Cohen's own assessment: "a dark version of the Superman story" (Williams, 1997, 129)!

[22] Jesus-figures are always male and always human-looking simply because the historical Jesus was male and human, the putative "Son of man" (Matt. 8:20). However, Christ-figures do *not* have to exhibit these characteristics since they need only reflect the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of the life of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the popular cinema has produced a number of female Christ-figures. For example, Bess (Emily Watson) in *Breaking the Waves* (Gudmundsottir, 2002; Heath, 1998; Mercadante, 2001), Sister Helen Prejean (Susan Saradon) in *Dead Man Walking* (Gudmundsottir, 2002; Rike, 1997), and even the brutally raped but forgiving nun (Frankie Thorn) in *Bad Lieutenant* (Hasenberg, 1998). Indeed, director Abel Ferrara deliberately crafted her as a female Christ-figure to exemplify goodness, mercy and redemption accompanied by the obligatory pieta poses, Christ-like stances and multiple Jesus iconography. A notable recent female Christ-figure with a rock-star resonance was Selma (Bjoerk) in *Dancer in the Dark*. Jorg Herrmann (2003, 196) described this film as "a postmodern passion play" where a "touch of feminist re-interpretation of the theology of the cross is mixed with early Protestant family theology."

[23] Human-looking alien Messiahs are very common in SF films. For example, Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie) in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is very regal looking. Superman (Christopher Reeve) in *Superman: The Movie* is both hunky and a mommy's boy. While Prot (Kevin Spacey) in *K-Pax* looks like an average human being, exhibiting normal and abnormal behaviour in keeping with his psychiatric patient status. Conversely, Peter Malone (1997b, 79) calls the Christ-figure Edward Scissorhands (Johnny Depp) a "creature" and not a "human being" because he is "not exactly human," especially with his unnatural prosthetic appendages and gothic monster mien. There can also be non-human-looking alien Messiahs, the most

notable and lovable being E.T. (voice of Pat Welsh), especially with his glowing heart straight out of Catholic iconography.

[24] There have also been a few claims for animal Christ-figures. For example, Lloyd Baugh (1997, 191) considered that the donkey Balthazar in *Au Hasard, Balthazar* was "one of the most theologically-complex, biblically-verified, spiritually-moving and memorable Christ-figures in the history of the religious film." Similarly, Robert Farrar Capon (2002, 45) argued that: "in all the Lassie stories the Christ figure is Lassie, the dog. The dog is the one who makes the plot get reconciled." Similarly, director George Miller argued that the cute pig Babe (voice of Christine Cavanaugh) in the *Babe* movie series is more of a Christ-figure than "Mad" Max Rockatansky (Mel Gibson) from the *Mad Max* trilogy. As Miller confessed to Peter Malone:

> I must say that Babe is much closer to a Christ figure than Max. Particularly in *Babe* (dir. Chris Noonan), he does change the established order. In fact, in *Babe, Pig in the City*, he's much more a Christ figure because he turns the other cheek. He goes to save from drowning the one who was about to kill him. But in *Babe*, he relinquishes his self-interest in order to save Farmer Hoggett [James Cromwell] and to help fulfil the dream for Farmer Hoggett and to show that a pig can, indeed, be a champion sheepdog. He does it in part for himself but it's mainly for the farmer. Yes, he's closer to Christ— not that a pig should be Christ but he's more Christ-like than Max! (Malone, 2001, 89).

[25] Robert Farrar Capon (2002, 57) went one stage further and argued that a Christ-figure need not be an animal, biological or even alive to qualify. Inert, mundane objects could do just as well. For example, he claimed that in "Woody Allen's film, *September*, the house, in which a totally dysfunctional family was brought to act functionally was the Christ figure." Similarly, Glenn Erickson (2001) suggested that the rogue planet Zyra in the SF gem *When Worlds Collide* was a subtextual Jesus. As he argued:

> Devout producer [George] Pal retained the book's Christ metaphor that made the stellar apocalypse into a thinly disguised Second Coming … Bellus, representing the Old Testament Jehovah, will smash the Earth to pulp, killing every living soul. No simple flood this time folks … but Earth has a second chance, of sorts. A few weeks before the arrival of Bellus, its moon Zyra, representing Jesus Christ, will pass close by our planet, causing massive earthquakes, tidal waves and other assorted havoc. Only the Chosen Few technocrats who believe in science and are daring enough to build Space Arks to fly to Zyra will be saved (2).

[26] Not surprisingly, how far one can legitimately go before breaking the bounds of credulity or incredulity is always *the* crucial question in this field!

[27] **2.0 CENTRAL:** Christ-figures are usually central characters of the film, just like the Son of God is central to the second half of the Christian Bible that is boldly prefaced: "The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." These Christ-figures are frequently crafted in either a saviour mode or a redeemer mode. Although this is a subtle distinction, it is important because it can significantly shape the moral tone of the film as well as strongly indicate its narrative trajectory. In essence, "saviour Christ-figures" represent Jesus' rescuing, liberating, leading, transforming or saving functions in the spirit of Mark 12:31: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." A famous SF example of this Christic mode is the Jedi knight Ben "Obi-Wan" Kenobi (Alec Guinness) in *Star Wars*. He "is killed in battle with Darth Vader but returns from the dead in spiritual form to lead Luke in the ways of the Force" (MacDonald, 1991, 30). Ben is a Christ-figure who tells Lord Darth Vader (David Prowse; voice of James Earl Jones): "If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can imagine," just

like Jesus Christ. Similarly, in both *Superman: The Movie* and *Superman II*, the flying man from Krypton (Christopher Reeve) "is a kind of mythical or cultural Christ-figure who reminds us of Jesus because he saves the community from harm" (Malone and Pacatte, 2001, 40). However, he does much more than this, and he is much more Christ-like than one can initially imagine (Kozlovic, 2002a).

[28] On the other hand, "redeemer Christ-figures" emerge from a context of evil or strife to take on the sinfulness of those around them, usually through their own suffering or death. Thus, they leave improved people or situations behind them in the spirit of John 15:13: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." For example, Tommy Tyler (Sidney Poitier) in *Edge of the City* was "one of the compelling Christ figures in American cinema, elaborating the profound theme of redemption through self-sacrificial blood" (Jewett, 1999, 125): "Taylor is playing a kind of Christ role in the film, struggling for the dignity of his young friend and ultimately dying in a effort to protect him from the murderous bully, Charles Malek [Jack Warden]" (Jewett, 1999, 127).

[29] Similarly, Karl Childers (Billy Bob Thornton), the mentally challenged protagonist of *Sling Blade* performs the same redeemer function, but this time as "the Jesus of Revelation" (Roncare, 2002, 283), the "Christ as a warrior-judge" (Roncare, 2002, 286). Karl represents the "apocalyptic image of Christ … [fused] with the humble, earthly Jesus of the Gospels" (Roncare, 2002, 282). Karl is earthy, kind and gentle, but he willingly sacrifices himself to save Frank Wheatley (Lucas Black) and his widowed mother Linda (Natalie Canerday) from the trouble-making Doyle Hargraves (Dwight Yoakam). He does this by violently wielding "the blade of judgment" (Roncare, 2002, 290) and killing Doyle with a sling blade (i.e., a freshly sharpened lawnmower blade). This results in the termination of his freedom and further incarceration at his former mental institution. Appropriately, Karl's use of a sling blade resonates with the Jesus of Revelation coming with "a sharp sickle" (Rev. 14:14) to execute his divine judgement upon the evildoers of the world. Karl also resonates with the Jesus of Matthew 10:34: "Think not that I come to send peace on earth: I come not to send piece, but a sword." In short, both modes of representation (saviour and redeemer) are professional do-gooding of the uplifting sort. Their Christic nature and inherent sacrificial positivity is of prime importance, and everything else constellates around it.

[30] **3.0 OUTSIDERS:** Christ-figures are usually outsiders of their communities, vaguely defined as from "above" or "beyond" or "out there" and thus they are *in* the world but not *of* the world, like "the Word [who] was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John, 1:14). For example, Superman (Christopher Reeve) in *Superman: The Movie* literally comes from another world outside our solar system, the planet Krypton (metaphorically heaven), thus making Kal-El/Clark Kent/Superman a type of holy refugee (but not an accidental tourist) undergoing a cosmic Diaspora. Similarly, the appropriately named alien visitor Starman (Jeff Bridges) in *Starman* uses a bright blue light literally to come down from the stars to visit Earth on his private galactic tour, as does the alien visitor who takes on the Earth name Thomas Jerome Newton (David Bowie) in the even more accurately entitled film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Regrettably, this "lonely, melancholic Christ" (Loughlin, 2001, 42) "reverts from a Christ figure to a drunken alien sot" (Siegel and Suares, 1978, 130) and ultimately fails in his rescue mission. The latter two film titles roughly described Jesus Christ. This is especially appropriate considering that the Bible labels Jesus as the "bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16) who "came down from heaven" (John 3:13) and took on human form as the "carpenter" (Mark 6:3) from "Nazareth" (Matt. 21:11). Another variant of this outsider theme occurs in *The Green Mile*. Defence attorney Burt Hammersmith (Gary Sinise) tells Paul Edgecomb (Tom Hanks) that he cannot find much information about John Coffey's (Michael Clark's) background, and so he suggests that he must have just "dropped out the sky," thus further signalling Coffey's Christic nature.

[31] Conversely, ascending behaviours frequently occurred as Christ-figures return home to the skies at the end of their earthly missions. Just like Christ, "the Son of man ascends up where he was before" (John 6:62), "taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9) "into heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24; see also Mark 16:19) at the end of his earthly mission. The Apostle Paul certainly expected to be with Jesus and company "together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). For example, at the end of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, both Klaatu (Michael Rennie) and E.T. (voice of Pat Welsh) literally get into their spaceships and rise heavenwards for home. At the end of both *Superman: The Movie* and *Superman II*, Superman (Christopher Reeve) leaves the physical confines of Earth and flies straight into the starry skies to roam around triumphantly—his true home. While in *Starman* and *K-Pax*, both the Starman (Jeff Bridges) and Prot (Kevin Spacey) return to their alien homes in the heavens, but they do so far more mysteriously, and leave behind amazed and puzzled people, as Jesus' amazing but scientifically inexplicable ascension left his earthly colleagues "gazing up into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

[32] **4.0 DIVINELY SOURCED AND TASKED:** Christ-figures usually arrive through some form of deliberate "divine" intervention by a distant God-figure. For example, in *Superman: The Movie*, the biological father (and metaphorical "heavenly Father") Jor-El (Marlon Brando) sends his baby son Kal-El (Aaron Sholinski) to Earth to help the planet progress socially (as well as save his son's life). Just like Jesus, "the Son of God" (John 11:4) who was sent on a sacred mission by his heavenly Father: "for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I myself, but he sent me" (John 8:42; see also John 6:29; 17:3; 20:21). Superman comes to Earth to benefit all humanity, just like "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), particularly "from their sins" (Matt. 1:21), and who knows what other cosmic reasons. Being on a specific mission is frequently the *raison d'être* for the Christ-figure's arrival. Whether it be the stately Klaatu (Michael Rennie) offering Earth membership in the galactic federation in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* or Prot (Kevin Spacey) doing further field research on Earth in *K-Pax* (with both films implying that humanity missed the Second Coming). Or John Connor (Edward Furlong) and James Cole (Bruce Willis) desperately trying to save humanity from desolate futures in *The Terminator* (Boer, 1995) and *Twelve Monkeys* (Dailey, 2000) respectively. If their interventionist mission is not overtly stated, it is frequently alluded too or strongly implied as a direct consequence of their "sudden" arrival at times of strife, trouble or torment.

[33] **5.0 ALTER EGOS:** Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31), especially when acting in divine mode as the being who was "made a little lower than the angels" (Heb. 2:9), but during his non-Messianic duties, he was a mundane tradesman—a "carpenter" (Mark 6:3). Consequently, Christ-figures usually have alter egos, and/or double lives, and/or dual natures, one fantastic and the other mundane. This pronounced duality is especially noticeable in the superhero Christ-figures, but it is not limited to them. For example, Peter Malone (1997b, 81) described Edward Scissorhands (Johnny Depp) in *Edward Scissorhands* as: "He is like ordinary people. He is also not like ordinary people." He is "a creature who is like us and yet not like us" to highlight his dual nature as a Freddy Krueger-style Christ-figure on the one hand and a talented hairdresser, gardener and dog trimmer on the other. The retarded Christ-figure, Karl Childers (Billy Bob Thorton) in *Sling Blade* is also a tradesman who repairs small engines, and prior to that he was an inmate at a mental institution. For that matter, Luke (Paul Newman) in *Cool Hand Luke* and Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) in *The Shawshank Redemption* were both Christ-figures (Stone, 2000, 184, 185) and inmates in their respective prisons. Indeed, Andy the former banker also plied his trade as an accountant and financial adviser to the prison staff. In both *Superman: The Movie* and *Superman II*, Superman, the Son of Jor-El (the God-figure from Krypton) was the bespectacled newspaper reporter Clark Kent (Christopher Reeve) who worked for the Daily Planet when not in superhero mode.

[34] The Christ-figure Neo (Keanu Reeves) in *The Matrix* is an ordinary office worker called Thomas Anderson who wears regulation business suits (like Clark Kent and Klaatu-as-Mr. Carpenter). Indeed, after work he is also the skilled computer hacker Neo, and thus an alter ego to an alter ego. Later, Thomas/Neo is designated the "chosen one," the cybernetic Messiah destined to free humanity from the illusory world created by the Matrix supercomputer and its hi-tech equivalent of devilish imps. By wearing stylish black glasses, jacket and pants that made Neo look like a Eurotrash seminarian (and a creative reversal of the iconic white-clad Jesus), he materially signals his unfolding acceptance of his "divine" mission by using fashionable couture. That is, from "Thomas" (of biblical doubting Thomas fame—John 20:27) to "Neo" (meaning "a new or modern form or development"—Hanks *et al*., 1982, 986) to the "chosen one" (i.e., the liberating master of the Matrix). Neo's career trajectory is similar to the sacred progression of "Jesus" to "the Christ" to the hoped for "Messiah," "anointed one," "saviour" of humanity. In fact, dual identities are also an archetypal feature of the mundane superheroes who are appropriately masked, such as the Lone Ranger, Batman, Robin, Batgirl, Wonder Woman, Spider-Man, the Green Hornet, Daredevil, the Phantom, etc. They are not divine or semi-divine characters but exceptional human beings.

[35] **6.0 SPECIAL NORMAL:** Christ-figures are special, extraordinary beings even though they usually appear as "normal" human beings (aliens, animals, objects) during their mundane, non-superhero times, as Jesus, the divine son, who could walk on the sea (John 6:19) was also the carpenter (Mark 6:3) from Nazareth (Matt. 21:11). Even if normal-looking, they are not quite normal. They live *in* the world, but are not *of* or sometimes even *from* the world. Consider the alien Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie) in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. He is literally an alien from a planet far, far away, but he walks freely among humans unrecognised and undisturbed (albeit for only a short time, like Jesus).

[36] An often thought, but not usually asked question about their normalcy, especially in Jesus' case, is: "Do they have sex?" This question is frequently coupled with a thematic subtext of suspicion about their masculinity, or heterosocial preferences and/or suspected homosexual tendencies. After all, the biblical Jesus had no wife or girlfriend or engaged in sexual practices that are recorded in the Bible, except the common assumption of his celibacy. Indeed, Jesus counselled his followers to make "themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matt. 19:12), if they could, and the Apostle Paul claimed that: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor. 7:1) and so followers should be celibate like himself, if they could (1 Cor. 7:8-9). In addition, Jesus spent most of his quality time with a band of male apostles. He spent his most intimate moments with a select group of men , the inner circle of Peter, James and John (Mark 5:37, 9:2, 14:33). This could faintly imply homosexuality, especially for those wishing to see it. In fact, this same sort of sexual suspicion comically occurred in *Starman* when the alien Christ-figure (Jeff Bridges):

> …walks oddly, being unused to the human body he has appropriated. He is also taken for queer, when, ignorant of the etiquette of human urination, he stands smiling at a urinating man in a gas station rest room [which prompted the following exasperated comment from the bothered man:] "Every God damn place you go" (Loughlin, 2001, 45).

[37] At least the manly walking and talking Superman (Christopher Reeve) with appropriate groin bulge beds Lois Lane (Margot Kidder) in *Superman II*, thereby, proving he was an all-American male and just as randy as the rest of his heterosexual gender. Yet, this is not the usual behaviour of Christ-figures who are traditionally beyond the grip of debilitating carnality, and exactly as Superman ended up at the close of *Superman II* following the repair of his superhero indiscretion. The earthly missions of Christ-figures must always take overriding priority over their sexual desires, as graphically illustrated in the Jesus-film *The Last Temptation of Christ*. While on the cross, the hallucinating Jesus (Willem Dafoe) dreams

of love, sex and family life, but in the end, he rejects this last temptation and fulfils his divine mission by dutifully dying. As one anonymous wit argued, if Jesus had a choice between: (a) sex, a wife and children, and (b) crucifixion, and he deliberately chose crucifixion, then what does this say about married life?! Only that married life and Christhood appear incompatible.[(4)](#)

[38] **7.0 TWELVE ASSOCIATES:** Christ-figures sometimes have the iconic number of twelve intimate friends associated with them, representing Jesus' twelve Apostles (Matt. 10:2-4), as eerily depicted in *God Told Me To*. Even sarcastic, anti-religious films love to re-enact this sacred assemblage, as famously done in *Viridiana* with its Last Supper scene. Luis Bunuel's film was a biting visual parody of Leonardo Da Vinci's painting, done to the strains of Handel's Messiah, as thoroughly degenerate beggars carouse drunkenly before momentarily freezing on-cue into their holy positions. More often than not, there are not twelve figures, just a few archetypal Apostles such as Judas-figures or Peter-figures coupled with other iconic biblical characters such as Baptist-figures, Satan-figures, Mary Magdalene-figures etc. to counterpoint the Christ-figure. Their purpose is to set the scene and glorify the Christ-figure, no matter how indirectly.

[39] **8.0 THE HOLY AGE:** Sometimes the Christ-figures begin their "divine" mission when they reach the mystical age of thirty, the biblical age when Jesus started doing his Father's will (Luke 3:23). For example, in *Superman: The Movie*, Clark Kent walks into the Fortress of Solitude as a physically fit but troubled eighteen-year-old teenager, and twelve years later, at age thirty, Superman flies out and starts saving the world professionally. Superman's age was not specifically mentioned in the film, it being deliberately avoided to protect his identity, so one had to calculate it (i.e., 18+12=30). However, in the various screen tests attached to the special edition of the movie, Superman clearly states that he is thirty years old, thus leaving no doubt of his Christic nature. Indeed, for Malone and Pacatte (2001, 40), "Superman's early life can be seen as a metaphor for the Incarnation" while "Clark Kent's life in Smallsville [sic] and in the Arctic parallels the 'hidden life' of Jesus" (38). Everything else thereafter is part of his holy mission.

[40] **9.0 A BETRAYER ASSOCIATE:** One of the intimates and/or acquaintances of the Christ-figure plays the Judas-figure, that is, a close friend or associate who betrays him for unwholesome reasons, like Judas Iscariot handed Jesus over to the authorities (Matt. 10:4; Mark 3:19; 14:10) and was subsequently tagged a "traitor" (Luke 6:16). For example, in *The Matrix*, Cypher (Joe Pantoliano) betrays Neo (Keanu Reeves) to the Matrix's enforcers in return for a "better" illusionary life. In *Brother Sun Sister Moon*, Paolo (Kenneth Cranham) is a close friend of Francesco (Graham Faulkner), but he betrays him to the religious authorities (willingly and eagerly) out of personal concern, political envy and a desire for career advancement. In *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Prof. Nathan Bryce (Rip Torn) betrayed Thomas Jerome Newton (David Bowie) to the authorities after Newton confessed his alien origins and mission. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Tom Stevens (Hugh Marlowe) betrays Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie) to the military authorities for fame, glory, and to eliminate what he mistakenly thinks is a romantic rival. He also has covetous desires for Klaatu's "diamonds, the film's surrogate for silver" (Gianos, 1999, 136), that ancient reward for Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Matt. 26:15, 27:3,9). In *Hannibal*, the Italian cop, Inspector Rinaldo Pazzi (Giancarlo Giannini) plays the Judas role opposite the Antichrist role played by Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins). Not only does Inspector Pazzi betray Hannibal for three million dollars (i.e., a multiple of the thirty pieces of silver that Judas earned), but he is also killed in exactly the same manner as Judas. Namely, by being hanged (Matt. 27:5) and then having his bowels spill out (Acts 1:18). To underscore this biblical association, Hannibal gives a history lesson about Judas Iscariot!

[41] **10.0 A SEXUALLY IDENTIFIED WOMAN:** There is frequently a Mary

Magdalene-figure floating around the Christ-figure, a sexually tagged woman who is related to him in some close way, but who does not know how properly to express her sexuality with him. For example, Lois Lane (Margot Kidder) in *Superman: The Movie* is a journalist who is in love with Superman (Christopher Reeve), the film's Christ-figure (Kozlovic, 2002a). She writes newspaper copy about sex maniacs and in a personal interview she asks Superman how "big" he is (i.e., not how "tall"), and both are embarrassed by this obvious sexual innuendo. She asked Superman to tell her what colour her underpants are (i.e., pink—iconic of girls and romance), thus physically inviting Superman to examine her sexual wares via his x-ray vision. In *Superman II*, she goes undercover with Clark Kent inside the Honeymoon Hotel and uses even more sexual innuendoes until Superman comes out of the superhero closet. They eventually consummate their physical love in the Fortress of Solitude.

[42] Other notable Mary Magdalene-figures include Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) in *The Matrix*, Mireille Fontaine (Catherine Wilkening) in *Jesus of Montreal* and Mary-Lou (Candy Clark) in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Even Helen Benson (Patricia Neal) in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is such a figure, being sexually experienced as a widow with child. In accord with Mark 16:9, as the subtextual "Mary Magdalene she goes to the space ship/tomb and is the first to see the resurrected Klaatu" (Gabbard, 1982, 152). There is even a "scene where Klaatu gestures goodbye and Mrs. Bensen's [sic] eyes light up, and you realize that there *could* have been something, but they just never get together" (Long, 1990, 27)—like the Jesus and Mary Magdalene non-event according to Scripture. Sometimes the Mary Magdalene-figure is overtly signposted, as in *A Short Film about Love* featuring the sexually promiscuous Maria Magdalena (Frazyna Szapolowska). Given Krzysztof Kieslowski's choice of her character's name and salacious behaviour, subtextually she is the supposed penitent of Scripture (Matt. 27:56,61; 28:1; John 19:25). Lloyd Baugh (2003, 552) describes the film as "the story of a love-relationship that is authentic, committed and redemptive, a love-story that is nothing less than an elaborate metaphor of the redemptive-salvific encounter of Jesus Christ and the sinner." Especially considering that the link between the unnamed sinner of Luke 7:36-50 and Mary Magdalene is a popular belief, although it has been academically discredited.

[43] **11.0 A POINTING PROPHET AND BAPTISM RITES:** Sometimes there is a John the Baptist-figure who identifies and/or points the way to the Christ-figure, and fades away in the tradition of John 3:30: "He must increase, but I must decrease." For example, the frail, old, Story Teller (Francis J. McDonald) warns the bulling Philistines about the young and virile Samson-as-Christ-figure (Victor Mature) in *Samson and Delilah* (Kozlovic, 2003a) and then we see no more of him. Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) in *The Matrix* seeks, tests and verifies Neo's (Keanu Reeves) Messianic status (although his continuing presence in the sequels mitigates this identification). In *Jesus of Montreal*, the on-screen stage actor Pascal Berger (Cedric Noel) refers to another actor greater than himself, Daniel Coulombe (Lothaire Bluteau), the Christ-figure who later acts the part of Jesus in his redesigned Passion Play. Similarly, in *A Man Escaped*, director Robert Bresson gives the Christ-figure Lieutenant Fontaine (Francois Leterrier):

> …a precursor, a kind of John the Baptist who prepares the way for him, in the person of Orsini [Jacques Ertaud]. Orsini's ill-fated attempt to escape gives Fontaine the information he needs to escape. As they hear the gunshots of Orsini's execution, the old man Blanchet [Maurice Beerblock] says to Fontaine: "He had to fail so that you might succeed," echoing the dynamic of John the Baptist and ultimately, of the redemptive salvific mission of Jesus, who died so that we might live (Baugh, 1997, 229-30).

[44] Sometimes a watery baptism physically occurs to underscore the protagonist's Christic credentials. This happens in *Sling Blade* when Karl Childers (Billy Bob Thornton) formally requested it and so:

> In the next scene Karl is baptized in a muddy river as the congregation sings "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling." The first part of the refrain to this song is notable, "Come home, come home, you who are weary, come home," because the baptism appears to be part of Karl's preparations before the murder that he knows will lead to his return home to the mental institution…This notion is strengthened when Karl tells Frank [Lucas Black] in their final conversation that he is "real tired" (i.e., weary) (Roncace, 2002, 292).

[45] However, a far more dramatic and visually disturbing baptism occurs in *The Matrix*. The Christ-figure Neo (Keanu Reeves) is disconnected from the neural network and is subsequently rejected by the supercomputer. He then "awakes" while in the process of being flushed into a watery grave before being rescued by Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), the John the Baptist figure. Neo successfully passes his rite of passage from one level of awareness into another, so Morpheus takes a backseat to Neo in the tradition of "he that cometh after me is mightier than I" (Matt. 3:11). Morpheus had proclaimed Neo the "chosen one" and charged him with liberating the rest of humanity from the Matrix's unholy grip, a devastating consequence of their past technological sin, as Jesus was commissioned with saving humanity from their past behavioural sin (Matt. 1:21; 1 Tim. 1:15).

[46] **12.0 A DECISIVE DEATH AND RESURRECTION:** Christ-figures are commonly involved in some form of sacrifice, usually involving bloodshed, suffering and death (i.e., the embodiment of Christ's passion), especially in their redeemer mode. They frequently "die," like Jesus Christ who suffered death (Heb. 2:9) at his crucifixion where "he gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46), leaving behind empty tombs, spaces or places, where the followers of the Christ "found not the body of the Lord Jesus" (Luke 24:3). Later, the Christ-figures are miraculously resurrected, the ultimate Christic identifier, in the tradition of John 20:9: "that he must rise again from the dead." Once resurrected and restored, they leave for their various homes in the tradition of John 20:17: "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God."

[47] This death and resurrection event dramatically occurs to the Christ-figures: Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie) in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, E.T. (voice of Pat Welsh) in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and Neo (Keanu Reeves) in *The Matrix*. *Jesus of Montreal* contains a very postmodern resurrection scene. This "cinematic analogue of resurrection" (May, 2001, 54) occurs when the organs of Daniel Coulombe (Lothaire Bluteau) are farmed out to grateful medical recipients. That is, Daniel literally gives of his body so that others may live, analogous to Jesus' cosmic gift of life to humanity (John 20:31; Rom. 6:23). Interestingly, Daniel is a professional actor who plays the Jesus-figure role in a revitalised Passion Play on the grounds of a Catholic Church, at the behest of its priest, for the benefit of the faithful, at a ritually important time. Thus, the film is pervaded by religious resonances. The iconic death and resurrection event is usually coupled with strong hints of incredulousness and/or uncertainty by witnesses, whether they be friend, foe or the disinterested in the tradition of doubting Thomas (John 20:24-29). Sometimes it also involves misidentification. As John Ralston Saul (1995) noted concerning the Vietnam War film *Platoon*:

> The film rises through two successive apocalypses. The first ends with the Christ sergeant [Sgt. Elias (Willem Dafoe)] behind abandoned to a swarm of Viet Cong while the company rises above him in helicopters in the care of the devil sergeant [Sgt. Barnes (Tom Berenger)]. It is a false resurrection. A betrayal. We last see the good man who died for them on his knees with his arms out as if on a cross [Sgt. Elias] (235-236).

[48] On other occasions, significant precursors to their death and resurrection are enacted to reinforce their Christic nature, as in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. The alien Christ-figure,

Thomas Jerome Newton (David Bowie) is coming to the end of his earthly mission. Therefore, according to Gerard Loughlin (2001. 42): "As Newton lies prostrate and naked on the bed, in a room suddenly grown dark, he has become the deposed Christ, lying in the tomb, awaiting his anointing for burial." If there is not a fully-fledged resurrection story, then at least there can be a hint of a new life or a fresh start. As Peter Malone (1997b, 84) suggests regarding the ending of *Edward Scissorhands*: "Edward has disappeared. He has gone back to his father's home. For the people, he is dead. But he is alive. He has gone beyond the ordinary world. Edward has no spectacular resurrection story, but it is a new life story, nonetheless."

[49] **13.0 TRIUMPHALISM:** Christ's death results in triumphal victory, even if it seems a Pyrrhic victory at the time. As the Apostle Paul claimed: "we believe that Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thess. 4:14), "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23) and "so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:17-18). Christ-figures offer similar benefits to warrant their cinematic saviour identification. For example, the resurrected Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie) in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* gives Earth a second chance to join the galactic federation of peaceful planets. Jedi knight Ben "Obi-Wan" Kenobi (Alec Guiness) in *Star Wars* dies at the hands of Darth Vader (David Prowse; voice of James Earl Jones), only to become far more powerful than ever before in his ethereal form. In the *Return of the Jedi*, once the evil Emperor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid) is defeated, we see a happy ethereal Ben alongside the ethereal forms of Jedi master Yoda (Frank Oz) and the now redeemed former Jedi, Darth Vader, who form their own trinity. The resurrected Neo (Keanu Reeves) in *The Matrix* is now a committed warrior for human liberation (like Jesus), and thus a very serious threat to the domination of the Matrix supercomputer. Such a perceived loss is usually considered one-off, extraordinary and purposeful (as Christians believe that Jesus' death had the same characteristics).

[50] **14.0 SERVICE TO "LESSER," SOMETIMES UNGRATEFUL OTHERS:** The Christ figure's sacrifice and/or death is specifically for others based upon higher principles, and it is usually done with honesty, sincerity and nobility (i.e., not trite, selfish or deluded reasons). Those saved are usually of "lesser" worthiness, ability, talent, power, etc., than the Christ-figures themselves. After all, what human being of *any* rank can even compare to the status, power or divinity of God or Jesus, "the prince of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5)? For example, in *The Green Mile*, John Coffey (Michael Clark) elects to die in the electric chair despite having miraculous healing powers of priceless benefit to humanity (like Jesus [Acts 10:38]). However, many of these saved others are ungrateful and even turn against the Christ-figure, like what happened to Jesus when Barabbas was freed instead of him (Matt. 27:1-26). For example, after Superman flies away from the unholy Kryptonian triumvirate in *Superman II*, the public quickly turns angry and disillusioned because of their failed expectations for a saviour. Some claim (unfairly) that Superman has "chickened out" and is therefore a "phoney" (actually, it is a stratagem to lure the evil trio to the Fortress of Solitude to be neutralised).

[51] **15.0 A WILLING SACRIFICE:** Having assumed the mantle of Christhood, Christ-figures are frequently empowered to choose sacrifice out of their newfound knowledge, status, position, mission requirements, etc. Jesus knew that he was to die as a ransom or sacrifice for humanity and even instructed the betrayer Judas: "That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27). Frequently, dying is the *best* thing they can do, and they really *want* to do it, usually against the protests of loving others. For example, Neo (Keanu Reeves) in *The Matrix* battles the rogue supercomputer despite the concerns of his fellow hacker-warriors. Why? Because he had pierced the illusionary veil of deceit and grasped the true nature of "reality" (i.e., mundane life is actually an interactive neural simulation), and so acted decisively upon it, whether causing his own death or not! Similarly, the "good" T-800 Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* voluntarily steps into the furnace to be melted down to destroy the advanced computer chip inside him, thus, protecting the future from supercomputer domination. This, despite the heart-felt protests against his immanent

demise by Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) and her son John Connor (Edward Furlong), the Terminator's former adversaries.

[52] **16.0 INNOCENT:** Although Christ-figures are frequently accused of, or are even found guilty of crimes, they are innocent and are often treated unfairly. For example, Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) in *The Shawshank Redemption* is not guilty of the murder of his wife, but is "Innocent and meek as a lamb" (Stone, 2000, 184), but he was convicted anyway. As Pontius Pilate said about Jesus: "I find in him no fault at all" (John 18:38; cf. John 19:4,6), yet Jesus was condemned to death. Somewhat frustratingly, these Christic protagonists may not profit from these pertinent facts (just as Jesus did not protest his innocence while a prisoner, but calmly accepted his fate—John 19:9-11). For example, John Coffey (Michael Clark) in *The Green Mile* did not kill the small children, but he still goes to his painful death willingly, taking this vital knowledge with him. Similarly, the munchkin-like E.T. in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and the regal Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* are not guilty of any crimes. Yet, both are relentlessly pursued and killed because of the unfounded fears of others. Mr. Carpenter even protects humanity from its assured devastation prior to his execution. He willingly gives Mrs. Benson (Patricia Neal) the code words to stop Gort, his robot policeman companion (Lock Martin) from destroying the planet because of his death. He used the now immortal monoaural instruction: "Gort! Klaatu barada nikto!"—a mantra among SF fans worldwide.

[53] **17.0 A CRUCIFORM POSE:** Christ-figures are frequently displayed in cruciform poses, an unmistakable visual emblem of their Christic nature. This pose can be represented very subtly, as with Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie) in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* when he is machine-gunned to death by the military. However, he does not fall to the ground in a dishevelled heap, but in a cruciform posture complete with splayed arms and bent knee! Similarly, in *Cool Hand Luke*, "Luke, on a dare, eats fifty hard-boiled eggs, he lies exhausted on a tabletop with arms out-stretched, his body a classic image of the pose of the crucified" (May, 2001, 57). In *Taxi Driver*, the mad Messiah Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) is full of religious zeal and so he saves the twelve-year-old prostitute, Iris Steensman (Jodi Foster), for whom he was willing to die. To further underscore his Christic nature, after "the sacrificial bloodbath, the camera angle gives us a direct overhead shot, with the arms of the wounded Travis stretched out in messianic agony, a view quite similar to Dali's surrealistic painting of the crucified Christ" (Hill, 1992, 285). Conversely, this cruciform-tagging process can be done more openly, as in *Brother Sun Sister Moon* when Brother Francis (Graham Faulkner) turns into a living cruciform on three separate occasions: by spreading his arms and becoming a human cross upon a steeple rooftop after his spiritual awakening; by spreading his nude arms (and body) as he leaves the Assisi gates, thus signalling his Christic status, mission and profound spiritual rebirth; and at the film's end, when he again spreads his arms in a cruciform pose mystically to embrace God and nature (Kozlovic, 2002c).

[54] Similarly, after his starship crash-landed in *Superman: The Movie*, baby Kal-El (Aaron Sholinski) emerged totally naked with his arms outstretched in a cruciform posture to visually verify his Christic nature (Kozlovic, 2002a). Indeed, the cruciform pose can be done very openly, graphically and meaningfully as in *Jesus of Montreal*. Daniel Coulombe (Lothaire Bluteau) plays the role of the crucified Jesus in his revamped Passion Play for the Canadian Catholic Church. Simultaneously, he is also a Christ-figure, which prompted John R. May (2001, 54) to call him "one of the most distinctive Christ figures in recent fiction." At the end of *The Omega Man*, military scientist Robert Neville (Charlton Heston) literally gives a pint of his biochemically altered blood to save the world. It contains an antidote to make a curative serum to save humanity, decimated by plague resulting from biological warfare. Neville then dies and slumps against a statue in a cruciform posture, the result of a deadly spear wound from an enemy (like Christ's side was pierced by the spear of a Roman soldier [John 19:34]). As Charlton Heston confesses:

As for the continuing Christ reference, it was not meant to be taken seriously as many people took it. There are fragments of the analogy throughout the film. The business of the blood of the redeemer, the survival of the innocent, the crucifixion pose, and all that (Rovin, 1977, 204).

[55] Yet, as Heston later confessed: "The analogy to Christ as Savior is inescapable, though there's no such reference in the script. Still, there were irresistible spins I added in performance … I'm surprised at how often people mention the Christ analogy in the film" (Heston, 1995, 443-444).

[56] **18.0 CROSS ASSOCIATIONS:** Sometimes Christ-figures are accompanied by cross imagery, the signature sign of Christianity based upon the Roman instrument of execution (John 19:19). This occurs in the classic Western film *Shane*, starring Alan Ladd as the former gunfighter turned pacifist Shane:

> On his final ride into the town to confront the hired gunfighter, there is a remarkable piece of editing by which his Christ-like role is visually underlined. He passes again through the cemetery and instead of a cut to the next scene where he is silhouetted alone against the sky [director George] Stevens dissolves into it in such a way that one of the graveyard crosses appears for a time to follow along behind him as he rides (Banks, 1997, 62-63).

Similarly, in *Sling Blade,* cross imagery is deftly crafted to reinforce Karl's Christic nature while he stands high up on a wooden bridge:

> He is perched directly over one of the vertical pillars—which forms a T-shape with the horizontal planks—as the sun shines brightly in the sky. As this shot wonderfully suggests, Karl's portrayal has similarities both to the crucified Christ and to the Son of Man who will come in the sky in glory, a reflection of the diverse images of Christ in the New Testament (Roncace, 2002, 291-292).

This T-shape is the "Tau" cross, alternatively known as "the Egyptian cross, or cross of St. Anthony" (Matthews, 1990, 50).

[57] In another example, *Cool Hand Luke* stars Paul Newman as Luke, the incarcerated Christ-figure (Stone, 2000, 185). Near the end of the film while Luke is dying, "the camera withdraws from the place where Luke's disciples are working, providing a helicopter view of a crossroad's inverted cross" (May, 1991, 90). This closing image is symbolically apt because the "cross can also be understood as a sign for the crossroads, as the place where the paths of the living and the dead cross" (Matthews, 1990, 50). The filmmakers artistically fuse an actual crossroad with a cross image as seen from a heavenly viewpoint, and link it with Luke, the Christ-figure, at the time of his undeserved death.

[58] **19.0 MIRACLES AND SIGNS:** On occasion, the Christ-figure is identified by other iconic Jesus behaviours, e.g., exorcising demons (Luke 8:2), raising the dead (John 12:1), miraculous healings (John 5:5-9), turning water into wine (John 4:46), and particularly, Jesus' mastery over physical nature. This includes the calming of wild winds (Matt. 8:26, 14:31-32), the quelling of sea tempests (Matt. 8:23-27) and most famously of all, walking on water (Matt. 14:25, 28-31). Indeed, walking on water is a defining moment in *Being There* when Chance, the gardener (Peter Sellers) does so on a lake at films end, thus clearly signalling his Christ-figure status. Similarly, Truman (Jim Carey) walks on water as he steps into the ocean near the end of *The Truman Show*, while Selma (Bjoerk) walks on water as she crosses a flowing steam in *Dancer in the Dark*. Conversely, walking on walk can also be used to signal the anti-Christ, as in *Superman II* when General Zod (Terence Stamp) first arrives on Earth from outer

space (metaphorically heaven) and descends straight into the middle of a stream. Zod levitates slightly and walks on water to get to the nearby shore. Interestingly, in *Touch*, the former Franciscan missionary-now-miracle worker Juvenal/Charlie Lawson (Skeet Ulrich) becomes a stigmatic and develops tactile healing powers. However, this Christ-figure "is flawed and struggles with the burden of his power to touch others. Ultimately, he disappoints because he cannot walk on water" (Malone and Pacatte, 2001, 239), especially when he is challenged by the media to do so (physically and symbolically). There were also other signs that Jesus performed but which were not documented (John 20:30).

[59] **20.0 SIMPLICITY:** Christ-figures frequently appear as nerds, klutzes, bumbling simpletons, mentally unbalanced, or fools in the tradition of 1 Corinthians 3:18: "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." Alternatively, they display cognitive innocence and child-like trust in the tradition of Matthew 18:3. Namely: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." For example, Francesco/Brother Francis (Graham Faulkner) in *Brother Sun Sister Moon* is variously described throughout the film as "mad," "berserk," a "simpleton," an "idiot boy," a "cringing idiot," a "lunatic" and "a raving bloody lunatic." He is spiritually reborn when Brother Sun mystically illuminates his soul to make him *the* Christ-figure of the medieval age, and a popular saint still respected today by (especially Catholic) Christians and pagans (Kozlovic, 2002c).

[60] Conversely, Chance, the gardener (Peter Sellers) in *Being There* is actually mentally retarded, but his pithy statements are mistaken as sophistication, perceptiveness and condensed analytical wisdom. Similarly, Karl Childers (Billy Bob Thornton) in *Sling Blade* is intellectually challenged and he has actually lived in a mental institution for decades. The evil Doyle Hargraves (Dwight Yoakam) maliciously refers to him as a "retard," but subtextually, Karl is the equivalent of the Christ Child, and this nature is subtlety encoded in his surname "*Child*ers." Clark Kent (Christopher Reeve) in *Superman: The Movie* and *Superman II* is often a klutz, which itself becomes the central trait of his alter ego, Clark Kent. The alien visitor (Jeff Bridges) in *Starman* displays a child-like wonder about Earth that is charming and loveable, as is Klaatu's "playful and endearing curiosity about Earth objects and customs" (Long, 1990, 27). Frequently, the simplicity of Christ-figures is misread as stupidity, their saintliness confused with simple-mindedness, their tolerance and compassion mistaken for weakness and wimpishness, and so their critics often must eventually reverse their opinions.

[61] **21.0 POVERTY:** Frequently associated with Christ-figure simplicity is their poverty; alternatively, this is rendered as either a lack of wealth, or the troubling question of what to do with money if available. This is reminiscent of Jesus who was poor (socially, politically, economically), powerless, and claimed: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). For example, Brother Francis in *Brother Sun Sister Moon* actively chose poverty by giving away his wealth, social privileges and fancy clothes (to the point of public nudity) to become a humble monk dedicated to the poor. Chance, the gardener has little money, he loses his house and is gently evicted from his secure world of comfort and predictability. Karl Childers is poor and from a poor family. Indeed, "the small indentations in the dirt floor of the shed [show] where Karl used to sleep, conjuring images of the manger" (Roncace, 2002, 289).

[62] In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter has no Earth money at all and so he gives away perfect diamonds to young Bobby Benson (Billy Gray) as a legitimate business trade. Theoretically speaking, Superman can make diamonds by crushing carbon with his bare hands, or mine for gold with his super strength, or find sunken treasure with his X-ray vision. Instead, he works as Clark Kent the reporter with the *Daily Planet*, mimicking Jesus who works as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), although he is offered the kingdoms of the world by Satan (Matt. 4:8-11). In *Jesus of Montreal,* Richard Cardinal (Yves Jacques), the Satan-smooth

media lawyer takes Daniel/Jesus high up in a skyscraper (Matt. 4:5) and offers him dominion over the (media) kingdoms of the world saying: "This city is yours, if you want it" (Matt. 4:8-9; Luke 4:5-7). Indeed, "the glib, charming Cardinal offers Daniel the modern commercial city's equivalents to a deal with the devil—media fame, a book contract, talk-show appearances, good lunches" (Testa, 1995, 104). No wonder Tom O'Brien (1990, 47) considered this scene "a modern temptation in the hi-tech wilderness, a glitzy version of Matthew 4."

[63] **22.0 JESUS' GARB: PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL:** Many cinematic Christ-figures are clothed to look like popular image of Jesus in his iconic white robes (i.e., the colour of purity and holiness). For example, when the sick Francesco in *Brother Sun Sister Moon* was bed-ridden, he wears a cloth over his face that is reminiscent of the Catholic legend of St. Veronica. This image represents Christ hidden in suffering and humiliation. When he completes his spiritual transformation and is reborn as the Christ-like Francis of Assisi, he wears an ethereal white bed garment in public, thus further cementing his Christ-figure status. In *Jesus of Montreal*, Daniel Coulombe portrays the crucified Jesus naked on the cross, with pronounced marks of scourging. Most cunningly, the diminutive alien E.T. is placed in a bicycle basket, his head covered with a white cloth. No wonder when "the film was released, people joked that after the O.T. (Old Testament) and the N.T. (New Testament) came E.T., the Extra Testament" (Malone and Pacatte, 2001, 31)!

[64] As part of their spiritual garb, Christ-figures are also associated with holy auras and effulgent lights, like Jesus whose face "did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:2) during his transfiguration. For example, to visually tag St. Francis' Christic holiness in *Brother Sun Sister Moon*, director Franco Zeffirelli had Francis' head fleetingly surrounded by a yellowish halo. This was a cinematic Glory Gloriole, that saintly hallmark of Christian iconography that symbolises divinity, rank and sovereignty (Matthew, 1990, 93). This sort of visual Christic tagging is done more cunningly in *Starman*. As Caron Schwartz Ellis (1995, 91) noted regarding the visiting alien Messiah (Jeff Bridges): "As he speaks he is driving through the Arizona desert with a golden sunrise haloing his head, as if to emphasise his purity." Dennis Saleh (1979, 47) describes a similar light-filled scene in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* when: "Klaatu's head glows in the rings of the resuscitation machine as though halos shine at his forehead."

[65] **23.0 BLUE EYES:** Cinematic Christ-figures are frequently depicted with blue eyes; not Semitic brown eyes as one would expect from an ethnic Jew with a Jewish mother living in the rustic, desert environments of Judaea. Superman and the mysterious boarder (Jurgen Prochnow), the Jesus of the Second Coming in *The Seventh Sign* both have striking blue eyes, like the traditional Jesus-figures Jeffrey Hunter in *King of Kings* and Robert Powell in *Jesus of Nazareth*. This blue eye colour for both Jesus-figures and Christ-figures is now a defacto Hollywood convention. Biblically speaking, blue is the symbolic colour of "the heavenly origins of Christ (as the sky is blue)" (Owen, Grist and Dowling, 1992, 9). Symbolically speaking, blue is also "the color of the divine, of truth, and of fidelity (in the sense of clinging to truth, as well as with reference to the fixed firmament of heaven) … blue is also a purity symbol" (Matthews, 1990, 25). Therefore, it is understandable why the colour blue was chosen, and especially considering that Jesus' "eyes must have been remarkable. Time and again we are told that 'He looked,' and the look seems to have been enough" (Dow, 1974, 279-280). This is an effect that piercing blue eyes can do exceptionally well. While simultaneously avoiding the negative connotations associated with yellow, red or black eyes, itself cinematic code for sickness, the demonic, and evil or bad aliens (i.e., the Greys).

[66] **24.0 HOLY EXCLAMATIONS:** Someone, either directly or indirectly, on-screen or off-screen, refers to the Christ-figure protagonist as God or Jesus by literally saying: "My God!" or "Oh God!" or "Jesus Christ!" or "Jesus!" or "Christ!" or "Gee!". This last word is a

euphemistic corruption of "either "Jesus!" or "God"… the origins of this word are known to few of its users" (Spears, 1982, 168). These verbal identifiers are not random or accidental, and they are usually delivered as either a curse, astonishment, disgust or fear. In any case, they are designed to link the Christ-figure protagonist with the Divine in case anyone should miss the other subtextual artistry involved. For example, in *The Green Mile*, Paul Edgecomb reads the court transcripts of John Coffey, the film's Christ-figure, and then cries out in horror, "Jesus! Jesus!" In *Platoon*, Sgt. O'Neill (John C. McGinley) complains behind the back of Sgt. Elias (Willem Dafoe), the Christ-figure, and says: "Guy's in here three years and he thinks he's Jesus fucking Christ or something!" (three years being approximately the length of Jesus' earthly ministry [France, 1988, 338]). As Avent Childress Beck (1995, 46) noted regarding Sgt. O'Neill's comment: "Nothing has yet justified this association, but the rhetoric prepares us for the climactic allusion in Elias' later death," that is, Sgt. Elias is a Christ-figure.

[67] In *Superman II*, deputy sheriff Dwayne (Peter Whitman) in a moment of panic directly refers to the anti-Christ General Zod (Terence Stamp) as "Jesus H. Christ!" However, one of the most intense concentrations of holy exclamations involving "Jesus" and "God" rhetoric occurs in *Path Adams* to identify Hunter "Patch" Adams (Robin Williams) as a Christ-figure. Jeffrey L. Staley (2002, 223) documented four divine interjections, which he wittily calls "kuriosities":

- The night before Carin [Monica Potter] dies, she says, "God, Patch, it's amazing just what you've done with this place…

- The next morning Truman [Daniel London] exclaims exasperatedly to Patch, "We don't even have any gauze, for God's sake."

- Then, the following morning when Dean Anderson [Harve Presnell] is forced to tell Patch of Carin's murder, he says, "Christ, Patch, I'm sorry."

- The fourth use of God language comes just when Patch has decided to abandon his free hospital. Truman vehemently reacts to Patch's leaving with, "God, you're so self-indulgent!" (222-223).

In this way, the Christ-figure is plainly pointed out to all those who have eyes to see and ears to hear (Ezek. 44:5).

[68] **25.0 J. C. INITIALS AND "CHRIS" REFERENTS:** Sometimes, the names of the Christ-figures literally have the initials J. C. (**J**esus **C**hrist). For example, **J**ohn **C**offey (Michael Clark) in *The Green Mile*, or **J**ames **C**ole (Bruce Willis) in *Twelve Monkeys*, or **J**ohn **C**onnor (Edward Furlong) in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. At other times, they are called "Chris" or "Christopher"—Greek for "one who carried Christ" (Livingstone, 1990, 107). Sometimes the physical word "Christopher" or another similar word is partially blocked to give the visual impression of "Chris …" indirectly to tag the Christic nature. Sometimes, filmmakers fuse these various elements together, as in *Twelve Monkeys* when James Cole wears a top with the letters "Chris" on it. That is, he is a putatively named J.C. who is an SF Christ-figure wearing a "Chris" top, sent from another world to try and save this world for the benefit of all humanity. Filmmakers can be very cunning in this way.

Conclusion

[69] There are many ways cinematically to signify a Christ-figure, and the inventiveness already demonstrated is truly astounding. Christopher R. Deacy (1999, 326) is right that "the medium of film constitutes a fertile, if unexpected, repository of christological significance." It is also quite illuminating to see that a seemingly non-religious film on its first reading can subsequently reveal so many Christic parallels upon deeper inspection. This point is

wonderfully illustrated by Sarah L. Higley's (1993) renewed understanding of the romantic gothic fantasy *Edward Scissorhands*:

> … I am dissatisfied with Edward [Johnny Depp] as a Christ figure, although with some critical cutting and snipping he certainly might be read as such: a son of sorts, fashioned by a creator of sorts, through a virgin birth of sorts. He comes down from on high to the materialistic world below, beloved by women (especially the mothering Peg [Dianne Wiest] and the promiscuous Joyce [Kathy Baker], though not the pharisaical Esmerelda [O-Lan Jones]), suffering punishment for others' sins, and vying with a violent character for the love of a beautiful soul, eventually turning her away from narcissism and toward himself. He is castigated and driven out; he expels the devil from his house; he is presumed dead by the populace when shown the false sign of his demise in the form of a substitute hand with its cross pieces (like St. Andrew's cross); and his legend is kept alive by a witness who does not know but "believes" that he is still up there. Finally, he pours down his Holy Spirit in the form of snow at Christmas, the icy shavings from his angelic making (440).

[70] The cinematic Christ-figure is certainly a legitimate character, a valid pop culture phenomenon, and a living genre; what Neil P. Hurley (1980, 427) called a "meta-genre," and whose career looks undiminished in the foreseeable future, even if it is frequently unrecognised by viewers today due to a decline in general biblical literacy. This regrettable state of affairs is exacerbated by the decline of Scripture study in the classroom, home and pulpit, in addition to the unnecessary reluctance of clergy to use popular culture in their traditional religious services, although this is slowly changing (Bausch, 2002). Therefore, many people do not recognise biblical characters as easily as they once did, let alone seeing subtextual figurations hidden within popular films.

[71] This is one good reason why feature films should be employed as part of a postmodern religious education, and why religious themes should be pointed out in the secular pulpit of the cinema during traditional film appreciation classes: to reintroduce Western society's own foundation myths, in media garb easily identified during this "Age of Hollywood" (Paglia, 1994, 12) and the undisputed reign of the moving image. However, much more work remains to be done. Further research into Christ-figures, holy subtexts and the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film (cinematic theology, celluloid religion, theo-film, film-faith dialogue) is recommended to creatively reapply Jesus' command to this exciting new field: "What I tell you in the darkness, that speak ye in light …" (Matt. 10:27).

Notes

1) In Jungian terms, these patterns are akin to archetypes, while in Christian circles they can be seen as Christ-figures. However, I am not suggesting that all of Campbell's heroes or Jung's archetypes or Christian Christ-figures are the same or are automatically interchangeable. Rather, these have been different labels and explanations applied to similar phenomena and so some may intersect and coincide, while others may not.

2) Two precursory attempts to define the structural characteristics of the Christ-figure have been attempted by the author (Kozlovic, 2003c, 2004).

3) The Authorized King James Version of the Bible (KJV aka AV) will be used throughout.

4) Of course, the avoidance of carnality is not limited to Jesus-figures or Christ-figures. It is also a significant signature sign of mundane superheroes, as dramatically enacted in *Spider-Man*. Throughout most of Peter Parker's (Tobey Maguire) life he is in love with the girl-next-

door, Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst). After his initial transmutation into Spider-Man, he still has strong romantic feelings for her that involve at least one very passionate kiss (while he is literally hanging upside down). However, by the end of the film, things have dramatically changed. When he accepts the immense burden of being a superhero, Peter Parker consciously, painfully and actively rejects Mary Jane's heart-felt offer of romantic/erotic love to pursue his superhero career. He only wants to be a "friend" (and nothing more) from then on. He willingly sacrifices personal happiness for a nobler cause—selfless service to the community, the mundane equivalent of saving the world. Indeed, this thematic is also reinforced using Tarot symbolism. The upside down hanging Spidey is a cinematic re-enactment of the Hanged Man, card number 12 in the Major Arcana. Traditionally speaking, this Tarot card represented: "*Spiritual Independence*. Isolation, surrender, initiation, sacrifice, transition" (Karcher, 1997, 152), all the qualities that Spider-man now comes to represent as a mundane superhero.

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A Man Escaped (1956, dir. Robert Bresson)

A Short Film about Love (aka *Do Not Desire the Wife of Another*; aka *Decalogue Six*) (1988, dir. Krzysztof Kieslowski)

Au Hasard, Balthazar (1966, dir. Robert Bresson)

Babe (1995, dir. Chris Noonan)

Babe, Pig in the City (1998, dir. George Miller)

Babette's Feast (aka *Babette's Gastebud*) (1987, dir. Gabriel Axel)

Bad Lieutenant (1992, dir. Abel Ferrara)

Being There (1979, dir. Hal Ashby)

Blade Runner (1982, dir. Ridley Scott)

Braveheart (1995, dir. Mel Gibson)

Breaking the Waves (1996, dir. Lars von Trier)

Brother Sun Sister Moon (aka *Fratello Sole Sorella Luna*) (1972, dir. Franco Zeffirelli)

Contact (1997, dir. Robert Zemeckis)

Cool Hand Luke (1967, dir. Stuart Rosenberg)

Dancer in the Dark (2000, dir. Lars von Trier)

The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951, dir. Robert Wise)

Dead Man Walking (1995, dir. Tim Robbins)

Edge of the City (1957, dir. Martin Ritt)

Edward Scissorhands (1990, dir. Tim Burton)

The Empire Strikes Back (1980, dir. Irvin Kershner)

E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982, dir. Steven Spielberg)

God Told Me To (aka *Demon*) (1977, dir. Larry Cohen)

The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965, dir. George Stevens)

The Green Mile (1999, dir. Frank Darabont)

Hannibal (2001, dir. Ridley Scott)

Jesus of Montreal (1989, dir. Denys Arcand)

Jesus of Nazareth (1977, dir. Franco Zeffirelli)

King of Kings (1961, dir. Nicholas Ray)

K-Pax (2001, dir. Iain Softley)

The Last Temptation of Christ (1988, dir. Martin Scorsese)

Mad Max (1979, dir. George Miller)

Mad Max 2 (aka *The Road Warrior*) (1981, dir. George Miller)

Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (1985, dir. George Miller and George Ogilvie)

The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976, dir. Nicholas Roeg)

The Matrix (1999, dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski)

Nell (1994, dir. Michael Apted)

The Omega Man (1971, dir. Boris Sagal)

The Passion of the Christ (2004, dir. Mel Gibson)

Patch Adams (1998, dir. Tom Shadyac)

Platoon (1986, dir. Oliver Stone)

Pleasantville (1998, dir. Gary Ross)

Return of the Jedi (1983, dir. Richard Marquand)

Samson and Delilah (1949, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)

September (1987, dir. Woody Allen)

The Seventh Sign (1988, dir. Carl Schultz)

Shane (1953, dir. George Stevens)

The Shawshank Redemption (1994, dir. Frank Darabont)

Sling Blade (1996, dir. Billy Bob Thornton)

Spider-Man (2002, dir. Sam Raimi)

Starman (1984, dir. John Carpenter)

Star Wars (1977, dir. George Lucas)

Superman: The Movie (aka *Superman*) (1978, dir. Richard Donner)

Superman II (1981, dir. Richard Lester)

Taxi Driver (1976, dir. Martin Scorsese)

The Terminator (1984, dir. James Cameron)

Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991, dir. James Cameron)

Touch (1997, dir. Paul Schrader)

The Truman Show (1998, dir. Peter Weir)

Twelve Monkeys (1995, dir. Terry Gilliam)

Viridiana (1961, dir. Luis Bunuel)

When Worlds Collide (1951, dir. Rudolph Mate)