

HOLLYWOOD, GENEVA, AND ATHENS: TOWARD A REFORMED PHILOSOPHY OF FILM¹

Nathaniel M. Claiborne, Bible Teacher
International Community School, Winter Park, FL
Presented in absentia at the 64th Annual Meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society
Milwaukee, WI, 16 November 2012

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: EYES TO SEE

Since the inception of the film industry over a century ago, thoughtful Christians have wrestled with how to think about Hollywood. In the beginning, it was churches who were concerned about the social impact as well as the pedagogical function that film provided.² In response, film criticism was conceived.³ In the many intervening years since the advent of film criticism, there have been many approaches advanced by Christians and non-Christians alike.⁴ Given the prominence that film has in the contemporary culture, being conversant with it is a necessary skill for the Christian theologian. According to Craig Detweiler, “The next generation of pastors, teachers, and therapists must not only learn the language of film but also develop the art of

¹ While I had intended to shorten this to a presentable paper, I decided to offer you the full thesis which was originally submitted in completion for the requirements for a Master of Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, August 2011.

² Robert K Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*, ed. William Dyrness and Robert K Johnston, 2nd ed., Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 186.

³ On churches inventing film criticism, see Richard A. Blake, *Screening America: Reflections on Five Classic Films* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 4 quoted in Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*. See his survey of Hollywood and the church *Ibid.*, 41-53.

⁴ A standard approach is James Monaco, *How To Read A Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For a survey of various Christian approaches, see the categories in Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*, 55-85.

interpretation – seeing and hearing what’s happening on big (and small) screens.”⁵ In order to do this effectively, one must be provided with a matrix for thinking theologically about film. A matrix created by the work of a capable theologian will allow pastors, teachers, and therapists to put film to use in their ministry contexts.

Framing the Shot

Thinking theologically about film clarifies what film in general actually looks like from a distinctively Christian perspective. This entails articulating a philosophy of film. As David Clark explains, “A ‘philosophy of’ analyzes the concepts, goals, and methods of that activity in hopes of achieving more coherent and effective practice.”⁶ The purpose of this paper is to articulate a philosophy of film from three interdependent perspectives. First, film can be studied from the perspective of what it reveals about God. Second, film can be studied from the perspective of what it reveals about the culture it inhabits. Third, film can be studied from the perspective of what it reveals about man himself. In this way, film is seen as a conduit of revelation that the theologian needs to account for in assimilating knowledge of God, culture, and man. The focus of this paper is primarily on epistemology, but in answering epistemological questions, metaphysical ones must be touched on as well (what is film?). Since the argument of this paper entails a certain way that one *ought* to think about film, it has an inherent ethical thrust as well.

For this paper, I will be looking at film from the vantage point articulated in the Reformed stream of Christian theology, specifically the thoughts flowing from John Calvin and some of his recent predecessors. In his book *Reel Spirituality*, Robert

⁵ Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 29.

⁶ David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*, Foundation of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 298.

Johnston notes that while Calvin's own theology may have allowed for appreciating the visual arts, the Reformed theologians coming soon after him "used his rhetoric to distance themselves from the image."⁷ This is echoed by Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor who lament, "religious practices and theological content rooted in the Protestant Reformation often fail to embrace the artistic and the colorful," and, "As a result, Reformation theology as is cannot deal with the arts in a way that incorporates the visual and the material into the spiritual."⁸ Once an idea like this has taken hold in the mind, it is almost impossible to eradicate, but a purpose of this thesis is to redeem the use of Calvin and Reformed theology *as is* for the purpose of thinking theologically about film. So while the goal is to construct a philosophy of film, the approach taken here is highly theological, and is done from the perspective of Reformed theology. This will be accomplished using foundational ideas from Calvin, as well as epistemological tools provided by conceptual architects that follow his thought closely.

In his recent work on the language of thought, Steven Pinker claims that "the nature of reality does not dictate the way that reality is represented in people's minds. The language of thought allows us to frame a situation in different and incompatible ways."⁹ When dealing with a subject like film, there are then even among Christians, multiple ways of framing the topic.¹⁰ Robert Johnston outlines a continuum of five

⁷ Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*, 304n51. Original discussion 102-3.

⁸ Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*, ed. William Dyrness and Robert K Johnston, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 294.

⁹ Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 4.

¹⁰ Pinker would point out "different ways of framing a situation may be equally consistent with the facts being described in that very sentence, but they make different commitments about *other* facts which are *not* being described." Ibid. 260.

different approaches that Christians have typically taken with film.¹¹ They range from total avoidance all the way to viewing film as a place for divine encounter. In the middle are the postures of caution, dialogue, and appropriation.¹² These approaches are primarily for actual film criticism rather than philosophies of film, but in each case, there is some underlying philosophy of film that drives the particular train of criticism. As far as these underlying philosophies go, they can generally be split into two divisions.

The first is exemplified by Grant Horner's work *Meaning at the Movies*.¹³ A big thrust of his book is developing discernment in the Christian viewer.¹⁴ He is writing to offer "an extended meditation on why we have movies at all, why they are so powerful, and why Christians need to think deeply and theologically about film art – indeed, about all human cultural production."¹⁵ His approach is mainly focused on discerning the worldviews within a film. On the question of how to engage culture in general and film in particular, to Horner the answer is clear: "I believe there is only one biblically valid model, and that is to critique culture theologically, bringing Scripture to bear as an object of critical inquiry that dismantles error while also pointing out truth in human cultural production."¹⁶ The underlying philosophy is one of mainly seeing film as a purely human

¹¹ Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*, 55-85.

¹² These five categories roughly correspond to the views of culture in general outlined in H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

¹³ Grant Horner, *Meaning at the Movies: Becoming a Discerning Viewer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

¹⁴ "Discernment is judgment. Scripture in the hands of the wise Christian should open up an effective, sophisticated, and edifying mode of interpretation of the culture surrounding us, and ultimately, enable us to reach individuals with God's truth while minimizing the negative impact of fallen culture on us." *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28. A more nuanced approach to film that is less critical, but still focused on discernment is Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films With Wisdom and Discernment*, 2nd ed. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

product and therefore tainted by sin. This position is characterized by Johnston's paradigms of "caution," with hints of "dialogue."

The second major division of Christian approaches to film is exemplified by Johnston and Detweiler, both of whom are more sensitive to traditional currents of mainstream film studies, yet they still work within a Christian perspective.¹⁷ In *Reel Spirituality*, Johnston's goal is to bring theology and film into dialogue. Though a Protestant, his approach is deeply influenced by Catholic sacramentality and so in regards to the paradigms above, he leans more toward appropriation and divine encounter.¹⁸ A similar position is articulated by Detweiler's *Into the Dark*, which focuses on seeing the most popular films in our culture as means of divine revelation.¹⁹ Both of these approaches have much to offer to the construction of a Christian philosophy of film, but as noted above, both also demur the use of Calvin in film studies and criticism, seeing greater appeal in other theologians.²⁰

In general, the landscape of Christian film studies seems to split along these two lines. Either the philosophy of film lends itself toward a film critical approach of caution and occasional dialogue, or it leans more toward an approach of appropriation and divine encounter. The former division is usually found in distinctively evangelical

¹⁷ Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*, and Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark*. See also Detweiler and Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings*, 155-183. A useful resource is Robert K. Johnston, ed., *Reframing Theology and Film: New Focus for an Emerging Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

¹⁸ Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*. See also Robert K. Johnston and Catherine M. Barsotti, *Finding God in the Movies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004).

¹⁹ "The best movies are revelatory in nature, not just talking about God and ultimate questions but becoming an occasion for the hidden God to communicate through the big screen. Cinema is a *locus theologicus*, a place for divine revelation." Detweiler, *Into the Dark*, 42.

²⁰ Detweiler specifically says that "Hans Urs von Balthasar's imaginative and Christo-centric theology informs much of my methodology." *Ibid.*, 295n.25. He refers specifically to Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982).

approaches focused on worldview and sometimes story, working within a broader *modus operandi* of negatively critiquing culture.²¹ In both cases, assumptions about the nature of film and the nature of God's revelation determine the understanding that results. In constructing the Reformed philosophy of film outlined above, part of the goal is to integrate these two divergent divisions in Christian philosophies of film. It will be demonstrated that the epistemology drawn from Scripture by Calvin and expanded on by his heirs is capable of integrating the strengths of both while avoiding their respective weaknesses.

Focusing the Lens

In contrast to Detweiler and Johnston's opinions of Calvin, a careful study of his writings would reveal not only that his thought is not opposed to using the visual, but that he actually anticipates the general contours of Balthasar's theological aesthetics.²² This is a conclusion of the argument in Randall Zachman's *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, which is built on the idea that an interdependence between the verbal and visual is "not present in a few isolated topics in Calvin's theology, but is central to the way he thinks theologically."²³ Detweiler praises Balthasar, saying that for him "there is no hierarchy within truth, goodness, and beauty. Like the Holy Trinity, they

²¹ As exemplified by Horner. Godawa's view is less negative in its critical approach.

²² Calvin "holds together the revelation of God in the truth of the Word with the manifestation of the goodness of God in the beauty of God's works, in a way that anticipates Hans Urs von Balthasar's attempt to do the same in our own day." Randall C. Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 437. Like Detweiler in *Into the Dark*, Zachman refers specifically to Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*. Space does not allow making these connections explicit, but it would make for interesting further research.

²³ Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, 7. Also of great use in redeeming Calvin's appreciation of the visual and tracing the historical development is William A. Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49-89.

are equal partners, utterly independent,” and that, “He begs for a recovery of revelation as a God-initiated action that emanates from the Spirit. Balthasar places Christ at the center of that revelation, as simultaneously fact and form, the ultimate beauty.”²⁴ But in a more careful study of Calvin, one would find many of those same ideas, while remaining in the stream of Reformed theology. A careful study of Calvin’s writings yields a theological aesthetics that is just as suited for use in a philosophy of film as Balthasar’s is.²⁵

One way of drawing this out briefly is to examine Calvin’s depth of visual metaphors that he used “to describe the ways in which the invisible God makes Godself somewhat visible in the universe.”²⁶ Familiar to most may be his passage of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that speaks of old, bleary-eyed men with weak vision, unable to recognize the beauty of a text and put even two words together coherently without the aid of glasses.²⁷ For Calvin, the Scriptures are the spectacles we need to see the world rightly.²⁸ The Word “clarifies our weakened vision so that we can see more clearly the powers of God set forth in the works of God.”²⁹ Looking through these lenses we see “that this world is like a theatre, in which the Lord presents to us a clear manifestation of

²⁴ Detweiler, *Into the Dark*, 39.

²⁵ While no doubt Balthasar is a useful source in this regard, he will not be consulted in this particular paper since the aims here are to demonstrate the value of Calvin instead.

²⁶ Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, 39. For a historical tracing of Calvin’s development of visual metaphors see 25-54. The pivotal text of Scripture for Calvin in this regard was Hebrews 11:3, but he drew heavily on Romans 1, Acts 14, Acts 17, and Psalm 19 as well.

²⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.6.1.

²⁸ “For by the Scripture as our guide and teacher, he not only makes those things plain which would otherwise escape our notice, but almost compels us to behold them; as if he had assisted our dull sight with spectacles.” John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, ed. John King, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 62.

²⁹ Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*. Referencing *Institutes* I. vi. 3

his glory,”³⁰ and that “this world is a mirror, or the representation of invisible things.”³¹ This, to Calvin, means that the universe is a living image of God: “For God—by other means invisible—(as we have already said) clothes himself, so to speak, with the image of the world, in which he would present himself to our contemplation.”³² Calvin sees the universe filled with “infinite images of God’s power, wisdom, and goodness.”³³ This triad is a recurrent theme in Calvin’s commentaries when he discusses what can be known of God in studying the world around us. For Calvin, knowing God is interdependent with knowing the world.³⁴

In the opening of Calvin’s *Institutes* he states that all wisdom consists of two parts: knowledge of God and knowledge of self.³⁵ On the one hand, our very being subsists in God, so without the knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God, yet on the other hand he says that, “man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize

³⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Corinthians*, ed. John Pringle (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 85. Compare also his comment on Genesis: “After the world had been created, man was placed in it as in a theatre, that he, beholding above him and beneath the wonderful works of God, might reverently adore their Author.” Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 1:64.

³¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, ed. John Owen (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 70. He makes the comment in reference to Hebrews 11:3.

³² Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 1:60. Earlier, drawing on Hebrews 11:3, Calvin said “We know God, who is himself invisible, only through his works.”

³³ John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Henry Beveridge (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 2:166. Similarly in commenting on Hebrews 11:3 Calvin says, “God has given us, throughout the whole frame-work of this world, clear evidences of his eternal wisdom, goodness, and power; and though he is in himself invisible, he in a manner becomes visible to us in his works.” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, ed. John Owen (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 266. Calvin, it also seems, was very clear on who wrote Hebrews.

³⁴ More can be known about God than what can be known through the world, but one cannot know about the world without also knowing about God, even in suppressed form.

³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.1.

himself.”³⁶ While Calvin may not be able to say “which one precedes and brings forth the other,” it is this latter knowledge of God that he makes foundational for his thinking in the *Institutes*. Calvin, following the structure of Paul’s epistle to the Romans, begins his *Institutes* stating that everyone knows God.³⁷ The knowledge of God in Calvin’s thought is a “concept by means of which he intended to bring all of his other concepts into focus, a concept by which he sought to make all his other concepts understood.”³⁸ Since one cannot come to know God without coming to know God’s relations to the world and man, a good theistic epistemology will imply a general epistemology applicable to everything.³⁹ Just as it was shown through Calvin’s commentaries that knowing God and knowing the world are interdependent; when one turns to his *Institutes*, one sees that so are knowing God and knowing the self.⁴⁰

John Frame merely organizes the triad in what he refers to as “generic Calvinism.”⁴¹ Commonly known as “triperspectivalism,” what Frame has developed is an epistemological tool that is capable of being used to analyze any object of study.⁴²

³⁶Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.2.

³⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.3.1. “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity.” This is the same point Paul makes in Romans 1:19. On Calvin following Romans see K. Scott Oliphant, “A Primal and Simple Knowledge (1.1-5),” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, Calvin 500 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 16-43.

³⁸ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁰ Consider Frame’s comments: “The best way to look at the matter is that neither knowledge of God nor knowledge of self is possible without knowledge of the other, and growth in one area is always accompanied by growth in the other.” *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴² Because of the recently published Festschrift for Frame, there is a definitive collection of his ideas and triads in Appendix A and B of John J. Hughes, ed., *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009). For Frame’s own account of the development of his

Perspectivalism, as a general concept is merely an admission of human limitations and a desire to dialogue with other limited perspectives. Often, the approaches from various perspectives will result in an interlinking of the perspectives, which is how the term “triperspectivalism” was coined. For Frame, this system finds roots in the Trinity as well as in the lordship attributes of control, authority, and power.⁴³

Every epistemological endeavor looks at an object of study, norms of evaluation, and a person doing the study. Looking at an object while focusing on the norms of knowledge, particularly the norm of Scripture, is what Frame refers to as the “normative perspective.” It is focused on emphasizing an object’s character as divine revelation.⁴⁴ The objects one encounters to study in the world can be classified under what Frame calls the “situational perspective.” This perspective focuses on a particular subject, “emphasizing its character as a fact of nature, history, or both.”⁴⁵ Lastly, the existential perspective emphasizes the object’s character as part of human experience and an aspect of human subjectivity.⁴⁶ For this study, the next chapter will focus on the revelatory nature of film and how God is both present active through it. That itself will be

thought, see John Frame and John J. Hughes, “Backgrounds to My Thought,” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

⁴³ On those, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 36-102, and more concisely, Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 15-18.

⁴⁴ Or on the methods of knowing. See John M. Frame, “Glossary,” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 1002-28. For extended discussion and development see Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. 62-75, John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 33-37; 131-238

⁴⁵ Or also the aspects of an object that change in different situations. See Frame, “Glossary.”

⁴⁶ It can also focus on the person doing the knowing. See *Ibid.*

done with three perspectives.⁴⁷ Chapter three will focus on film as an object of culture and how it functions in that context. Chapter four will then turn the focus to film and humanity, examining what we see of ourselves in film.

⁴⁷ An opening section clarifying how we are going to proceed (existential), demonstrating a norm (normative), and evaluating how that changes the context of watching movies (situational). The structure from here on will be one of perspectives within perspectives within perspectives.

CHAPTER 2

FILM AND GOD'S REVELATION

In the introduction to *Into the Dark*, Craig Detweiler laments that “Too many film critics and scholars have underestimated (or even missed) the transcendent, revelatory possibilities of film.”¹ This lament is exemplified by Grant Horner in the preface to *Meaning at the Movies*, where he states, without argumentation, that there is not a chance of finding God in the movie theater.² Detweiler attributes this mentality to an under-appreciation of general revelation on the part of evangelical theologians.³ While there may be some truth to this, it certainly is not an issue within the Reformed stream of theology where “nature as revelation is taken most seriously.”⁴ This is particularly clear in the work of Cornelius Van Til, who made general revelation a major emphasis in his writings.⁵ “Van Til’s view of revelation is essentially that of Calvin and the Reformed

¹ Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 30.

² “Are you going to find God at the movies? No. Not a chance.” Grant Horner, *Meaning at the Movies: Becoming a Discerning Viewer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 17. Presumably this is a jibe at Robert K. Johnston and Catherine M. Barsotti, *Finding God in the Movies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), and perhaps also Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*, ed. William Dyrness and Robert K Johnston, *Engaging Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

³ “General revelation is an underappreciated theological category, an underexplored catalyst for revitalizing our faith and practices.” Detweiler, *Into the Dark*. 31.

⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 90.

⁵ John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995). 116. In Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 117-89; 190-222.

tradition, especially including Kuyper, Bavinck, and Warfield.”⁶ Van Til clearly echoed Calvin’s affirmation of the universe as the theater of God’s glory.⁷ Like Calvin, Van Til affirmed, “All knowledge is interrelated. The created world is expressive of the nature of God. If one knows ‘nature’ truly, one also knows nature’s God truly.”⁸ Far from underestimating or even missing the revelatory possibilities of nature, Van Til, along with Calvin before him, saw “the knowledge that we have of the simplest objects of the physical universe is still based upon the revelational [*Sic*] activity of God.”⁹

Turning from revelation in nature to revelation in human culture, if creation is inherently revelatory, it would follow that human cultural creations are also inherently revelatory to some extent. As John Frame states, “Creation is what God makes by himself, and culture is what he makes through us.”¹⁰ Man creating culture imitates and images God who created everything. Man is part of God’s original revelatory creation, and so his cultural creations are derivatively revelatory. For Christian film studies, the movie theater is a theater within a theater. With the eyes of faith and the spectacles of Scripture to correct our vision, we can see pictures of God in the world of film. In what

⁶ Frame, *Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, 115.

⁷ “Scripture constantly speaks of the whole universe as a revelation of the glory of God.” Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 120.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 64. He explains further “all knowledge that any finite creature of God would ever have, whether of things that pertain directly to God or of things that pertain to objects in the created universe itself, would, in the last analysis, have to rest upon the revelation of God, and so “Christians think of the whole of the created universe as a revelation of God.” *Ibid.*, 119. For this reason, the designation “natural revelation” can be misleading since it is revelation found in nature, but it has a supernatural origin. On this point, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). 307-312.

⁹ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. 123.

¹⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 854.

follows, the analysis is looking at film from the normative perspective, looking to see what films can reveal about God's attributes and actions.

God in the World of Film

Some authors are possessed of the radical notion that Calvin and Reformation theology are inadequate for appreciating visual imagery theologically. Taking cues from Catholic writer Andrew Greeley, Robert Johnston observes that “where the Protestant tradition assumes God to be largely absent from creation and human creativity, the Catholic tradition assumes God to be largely present.”¹¹ While I would agree with Johnston that “God can be experienced through film’s stories and images in myriad ways,”¹² his book offers little insight into what attributes of God can actually be seen on the silver screen. It is one thing to argue that finding God in the movies is achievable, but a vague affirmation of God’s presence in the movie theater could be deduced simply from the attribute of his omnipresence.¹³ Craig Detweiler’s approach in *Into the Dark* is more rigorous in explaining how film can be revelatory as he focuses on “the experience of

¹¹ ¹¹ Robert K Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*, ed. William Dyrness and Robert K Johnston, 2nd ed., Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 104. On Greeley’s thought, see Andrew M. Greeley, *God in Popular Culture* (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1988), and Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). It is a misunderstanding on the part of both Greeley and Johnston to place a dichotomy between Protestant and Catholic approaches. What they affirm in Catholic approaches is present in a true Calvinist approach as well. By true Calvinist approach I mean not necessarily approaches advanced by people who categorize themselves as Calvinists but an approach that takes cues from Calvin himself and is consistent with his thought and theologians that have followed him closely.

¹² Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*, 115.

¹³ In Johnston and Barsotti, *Finding God in the Movies*. Johnston and his wife are on the right track, and I think the contribution they make there is helpful. However, the focus is more on Christian spiritual themes and imagery in film rather than attributes of God *per se*.

God available to all people” through the movie theater.¹⁴ Yet he still falls short in actually laying down in advance what can be specifically revealed about God in the movies.

While Calvin did not comment directly on film, he did go to great lengths to biblically describe and delimit the aspects of God’s character present in general revelation.¹⁵ Calvin may not have been comfortable with the use of film images in the church worship service, but as already noted, he was not against images per se.¹⁶ As Randall Zachman points out, “Calvin consistently and increasingly exhorted the godly – those whose vision had been clarified by the Word and faith – to contemplate the powers of God set forth in the works of God in creation.”¹⁷ For Calvin, what could be known of God in creation was what he referred to as the “powers of God,” specifically God’s wisdom, goodness, and power.¹⁸ If these attributes of God were knowable through creation, it would follow that they are to some extent knowable and displayed through the creation within creation. Image bearers of God cannot escape creating images of God in

¹⁴ Detweiler, *Into the Dark*, 33.

¹⁵ It is here assumed that Calvin’s thoughts on literature, when consistently assimilated with his thoughts on general revelation, give an approximation of how he would think about film were he around to comment today. For Calvin on literature, see Leland Ryken, “Calvinism and Literature,” in *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, ed. David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 95-113.

¹⁶ As William Edgar reminds us “it must never be forgotten that never did the magisterial Reformers issue blanket condemnation of visual imagery or forbid the proper enjoyment of the arts.” See William Edgar, “Calvin’s Impact on the Arts,” in *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary*, ed. David W. Hall, Calvin 500 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 464-86. 477. See also the extremely similar essay William Edgar, “The Arts and the Reformed Tradition,” in *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, ed. David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 40-68.

¹⁷ Randall C. Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 42 commenting on Calvin’s discussion of Genesis 2:3 and the purpose of the Sabbath. See John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, ed. John King, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 1:107-8.

¹⁸ He associated wisdom with God the Son, goodness with God the Father, and power with God the Holy Spirit. Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, 27. Calvin is no doubt drawing on Romans 1 and expanding what God’s eternal power and divine nature would mean in a general revelatory context.

their own creations, even creations that are distorted and dimmed by the effects of sin. In studying film equipped with eyes of faith and the lens of Scripture, one is looking at a derivative world within our world and should see glimpses of God clearly there.

Helpful in unpacking Calvin's power trio is the ordering of the attributes in John Frame's *Doctrine of God*. While there is no explicit statement that he is following Calvin, Frame's major divisions are attributes of goodness, knowledge, and power. He subdivides under each heading according to the lordship attributes: control, authority, and presence. Control emphasizes dynamic attributes that are most readily seen in God's actions in history.¹⁹ Authority emphasizes static attributes that "denote constancies in God's nature, a structure that defines the limits of his possible actions."²⁰ Presence emphasizes involvement attributes that constitute the character of God and are present in his creaturely dealings.²¹ In Frame's understanding, each of God's attributes display his covenant lordship with a perspectival emphasis on control, authority, or presence, but "some are more conveniently described as powers, others as forms of knowledge, and others as forms of goodness."²² It is interesting that the broad categories of Frame's divisions are anticipated by Calvin who saw them as the basic attributes available to all through general revelation. The teaching of Scripture would then deepen one's understanding of the power triad, and when used to view a film, enable one to see a depth of imagery of the divine that others miss. Exploring each of these categories in turn will

¹⁹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 398. Full discussion and exegetical justification of this lordship attribute 36-79.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 398-99. Full discussion 80-93

²¹ While the difference between control and authority may be seen as analogous to the distinction between content and form, presence is a kind of synthesis of dynamic and static, content and form. *Ibid.*, 399. Full discussion of presence see *Ibid.*, 94-102.

²² *Ibid.*, 397. His rationale for ordering along these lines rather than other traditional routes is explained on 394-99.

demonstrate what it means to look at film through the lenses of Scripture with the eyes of faith.

Goodness

To see God's goodness displayed in the world of film, one must consider the framework of related attributes. The dynamic control attributes to consider include: goodness, love, grace, mercy, patience, compassion, jealousy and wrath.²³ Static attributes of authority in this scheme are justice and righteousness, while attributes of presence and involvement are joy, blessedness, beauty, perfection, and holiness. Of the power of trio of God's attributes that can be discerned in the film world, these attributes are the most readily visible since they fall into the more traditional category of God's communicable attributes. From a normative perspective, many film plots center on the theme of justice and good triumphing over evil in the end.²⁴ A film that does this is using an attribute of God's goodness as a norm for story development. Additionally, these attributes are often the targets that characters in the film world aim to develop on an individual basis. Characters that develop and display these attributes are, from an existential perspective, revealing God through their achieved virtue. Films display the genuine goodness of God through characters that love one another, show each other grace and mercy, exercise patience and compassion, and protect their loved ones in righteous jealousy and wrath. From a situational perspective, films with beautifully orchestrated cinematography, as well as overall excellence in production are cinematic demonstrations of God's goodness by incarnating beauty and in some cases glimpses of near perfection. In one way, the

²³ These, and the attributes listed in the following discussion are all charted in *Ibid.*, 399. Wrath may seem an odd inclusion here. Frame pairs it in his discussion with righteousness and see it is an implication of that attribute. See discussion on *Ibid.*, 446-468.

²⁴ I could provide examples, but I am treating this statement as self-evident. A film is unusual only if it reverses this trend.

mere presence of films that promote these attributes of character is a revelation of God's goodness toward us. As Zachman points out, "According to Calvin, the good things of this life are symbols and pledges of God's love and goodness towards us, as well as steps and ladders by which we might ascend from this life to God, the Author and source of every good thing."²⁵ But in examining the actual world of film, we are able to see God's goodness on display within his goodness.

Power

In looking for God's power on display in the world of film, a consultation of the framework is again in order. The power attributes related to dynamic control are eternity, immensity, incorporeality, will, power, and existence. The attributes of static authority are aseity, simplicity, and essence, and the attributes of presence and involvement are glory, spirituality, and omnipresence.²⁶ Since this cluster of attributes overlaps with the more traditional category of incommunicable attributes, it may seem that these would be hard to see these readily displayed in the world of film. However, consider the phenomena of comic book superhero films. Like the gods of Greece and Rome our modern superheroes are "amplified humanity," representing modern culture's attempt to envision beings who have these attributes in some form.²⁷ From a normative perspective, the attributes of God dealing with power must in some ways inform what powers a superhero might have. Looking from an existential perspective, many films present characters who embody attributes of power that dimly reflect the power of God.

²⁵Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, 55.

²⁶ For discussion of the attributes of power see Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 513-616.

²⁷ On the gods of ancient Rome and Greece being amplified humanity, rather than divinity, see Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 85. Quoted in discussion in Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films With Wisdom and Discernment*, 2nd ed. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 62-67.

From a situational perspective, “a very popular device in film narrative is the idea of playing with timelessness, eternity, time travel, and time loops.”²⁸ This shows up not just in the setting of many superhero films, but in many other films as well and turns the viewer’s attention to the immensity of the universe beyond planet Earth.²⁹

In general, Calvin strongly commended the study of heavens that “declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1), seeing the powers of God most clearly displayed there.³⁰ He felt similarly about meteorological phenomena, particularly “dramatic changes produced by the weather which were especially useful in compelling the ungodly to consider the power of God, which they otherwise ignored.”³¹ While films may present an imaginary world, they nonetheless present events, that were they to actually happen in our own world, should cause us to recognize the power of God and his related attributes. The film making enterprise itself is a visual display of man’s derivative power to create. This makes the presentation of phenomenal events and phenomenal characters, displays of power within power: man using his own power to creatively image God’s power.

²⁸ Horner, *Meaning at the Movies*. 36.

²⁹ One could say as well that time travel turns our attention to our relative insignificance in the scope of eternity.

³⁰ Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, 43. Consider Calvin’s comments on this verse: “When we behold the heavens, we cannot but be elevated, by the contemplation of them, to Him who is their great Creator; and the beautiful arrangement and wonderful variety which distinguish the courses and station of the heavenly bodies, together with the beauty and splendour which are manifest in them, cannot but furnish us with an evident proof of his providence.” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, ed. James Anderson, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 1:309.

³¹ Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, 45. In Calvin’s words “when the atmosphere is troubled, we feel a depression of the animal spirits which constrains us to look sad, as if we saw God coming against us with a threatening aspect. At the same time, we are taught that no change takes place either in the atmosphere or in the earth, but what is a witness to us of the presence of God.” Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:271.

Knowledge

In looking through the framework of attributes to help see God’s knowledge on display in the world of film, the attributes of dynamic control are speech and incomprehensibility; the attribute of static authority is truth; the attributes of presence and involvement are knowledge, wisdom, mind, and knowability.³² From a normative perspective, many films exhibit a commendation of virtue and warning against vice that could resonate strongly with similar ideas in the Bible’s wisdom literature.³³ The lived wisdom presented in the world of film draws on the law of God inscribed on man’s heart. From an existential perspective, often there will be a character in most films that is sage-like in their assistance to the main character.³⁴ Additionally, many main characters are faced with a psychological choice in the plot of the film that requires them to exercise wisdom.³⁵ In doing so, the movie usually ends positively. Failing to exercise wisdom many times leads to tragedy. From a situational perspective, truth and wisdom are demonstrated through the dialogue of the characters of the film. As most Christians are comfortable saying, “All truth is God’s truth,” or better put by Calvin, “All truth is from God; and consequently, if wicked men have said anything that is true and just, we ought

³² Some of these may strike the reader as odd inclusions in a listing on the attributes (like speech and knowability). See full discussion in Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 469-512

³³ On this point, see Stanley D. Williams, *The Moral Premise: Harnessing Virtue & Vice For Box Office Success* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2006). Williams is working as a Christian, but is writing to screenwriters from a semi-objective vantage point. Through his doctoral dissertation, he validated this idea by demonstrating that *every* successful film has an underlying moral premise that when dissected, looks just like a proverb we might find in Scripture.

³⁴ This is detailed in Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure For Writers*, 3rd ed. (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007), 39-48. The specific character archetype is called “mentor.”

³⁵ This is detailed in both *Ibid.*, 135-74 and Williams, *The Moral Premise*, 66-80.

not to reject it, for it has come from God.”³⁶ In this case, there can be much truth presented through the characters of a particular film, whether through what they say, what they do, or what they aspire to be.

Redemption in the Stories of Film

Turning from attributes of God in film to actions of God seen through the window of film, there is still much more to see. The window through which God’s action is seen is the story of the film. As a leading screenwriter in Hollywood puts it, “The art of story is the dominant culture force in the world, and the art of film is the dominant medium of this grand enterprise.”³⁷ Robert Johnston concurs stating, “the nature of film is story,” and “we go to the movies to see stories.”³⁸ Stories however, are rarely *just* stories, but rather, “Storytelling from its inception was expected to be more than entertainment. Through their craft, the first storytellers were expected to teach the culture how to live and behave in their world.”³⁹ Interestingly, this quite often takes the form of a character going on a quest to achieve some kind of redemption. As Craig Detweiler observes, “The most timely, relevant, and haunting films resonate with the shaping story of Scripture: from the beauty of creation, through the tragedy of self-destruction, to the wonder of

³⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. William Pringle (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 300-301. This means of course that the wicked men who make films in Hollywood will at times say, through characters in their films, true and wise things, or will communicate truth about the nature of how the world really is through their storytelling.

³⁷ Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 15.

³⁸ Johnston, *Reel Spirituality*.

³⁹ Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 76. If one takes biblical history seriously, then this observation makes sense of the purpose the first story would have had. In Genesis 2-3 one is presented with what would have been the first story ever told, and it would have presumably been passed on from family to family as a means of explaining how to live in the world they all found themselves inhabiting.

restoration.”⁴⁰ One could easily say that “The essence of storytelling in movies is about redemption,”⁴¹ and, “Movies are finally, centrally, crucially, primarily *only* about story. And those stories are finally, centrally, crucially, primarily *mostly* about redemption.”⁴² In addition to seeing the attributes of God displayed in the world of film, one can also see through the stories of film, images of God’s action in accomplishing redemption.

From a normative perspective, stories are “universally perceived as the best way of talking about the way the world actually is.”⁴³ This in turn implies something about reality itself: “Storytelling is meaningless gibberish unless reality itself is narratable. And reality is unnarratable in a universe without a transcendent narrator.”⁴⁴ In other words, the prevalence of storytelling across cultures is an apologetic for the existence of God. Without a being who fits the description of the biblical God, there is no unity that makes sense of the diversity of storytellers, nor is there a unity of world history itself. Assuming a grand narrator, it would make sense that there is also a grand narrative of which all the individual narratives told by human storytellers are analogical reflections.⁴⁵ Joseph Campbell, who formulated the idea of the Monomyth underlying all

⁴⁰ Detweiler, *Into the Dark*, 257.

⁴¹ Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 86.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 89. Emphasis original. Humanity has an innate longing for redemption from the conflicts we find ourselves embedded in, and movies, as the stories of our day, are one way of expressing that longing. Cultures may differ on the nature of the conflict or what the fall (either the literal one or a metaphorical one) produced within man, but all cultures tell stories of redemption to satisfy a seemingly innate longing all humanity shares.

⁴³ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God*, Christian Origins and The Question of God 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 40.

⁴⁴ Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 70.

⁴⁵ Were Van Til available for comment, he would characterize this distinction by saying that the story of redemption history is archetypal, while human stories of redemption are ectypal. “God is the archetype, while we are the ectypes. God’s knowledge is archetypal, and ours ectypal.” Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 324.

mythologies, was certainly on to something, but in the absence of a Christian perspective, he failed to notice that “Christianity is itself the true incarnation of the Monomyth in history, and other mythologies reflect and distort it like dirty or broken mirrors.”⁴⁶ This being the case, the story of redemption as exemplified in the Christian gospel is the ultimate story of redemption that the redemptive storylines in the movies analogically reflect.

This is in fact how the stories of film would be viewed from a situational perspective. The individual redemptive stories that are displayed in the movies follow the same trajectory as the grand narrative of redemption told in Scripture. They are situational reflections of the divine norm of how redemption really works. As the blueprint for all other redemptive storylines, “The Bible narrates the story of God’s journey on that long road of redemption. It is a unified and progressively unfolding of God’s action in history for the salvation of the whole world.”⁴⁷ This is not to suggest that film-makers are consciously modeling their stories after God’s story of redemption. It is simply to observe that the prevalence of redemptive stories found in movies indicates not only that this type of story is the most satisfying, but that there is an innate human desire for redemption that leads to the creation of “gospel stories” that mimic *the* Gospel.⁴⁸

To see this clearly, consider the stages of Christopher Vogler’s adaption of Campbell’s Monomyth that is used by numerous screenwriters.⁴⁹ In the first act, called

⁴⁶ Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 70. On the Monomyth in Campbell, see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series XVII (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008).

⁴⁷ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 12.

⁴⁸ On this point, see Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 902.

⁴⁹ This is particularly amplified in Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*. And illustrated in numerous films by Stuart Voytilla, *Myth and the Movies : Discovering the Mythic Structure of 50 Unforgettable Films* (Studio City CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1999).

Separation, the stages are: (1) Ordinary World, (2) Call to Adventure, (3) Refusal of the Call, (4) Meeting with the Mentor, (5) Crossing the Threshold, (6) Tests, Allies, Enemies, (7) Approach. In the second act, which can be split into two parts itself, Descent and Initiation, there is the single stage: (8) Central Ordeal. In the last act, called Return, the stages are: (9) Reward, (10) The Road Back, (11) Resurrection, (12) Return with Elixir.⁵⁰ In his analysis of story, Vern Poythress breaks the story of redemption accomplished by Christ into three acts as well.⁵¹ In the initial act (Challenge), Christ is in heaven (his Ordinary World) and is sent by the Father to redeem the world (a Call to Adventure that lacks a Refusal of the Call).⁵² At the outset of Christ's public ministry there is a Crossing of the Threshold.⁵³ From there Christ makes Allies (the disciples) and Enemies (Satan, the Pharisees) and amidst the many Tests (challenges from Pharisees and demons) he breaks away often to meet with his Mentor (God the Father). All the while, Christ has set his face to Approach Jerusalem.⁵⁴ In the second act, it is not a stretch at all to see Jesus' crucifixion and death as the Central Ordeal of the gospel story.⁵⁵ In his death though, Jesus was vindicated and received the Reward, completed the Road Back and was Resurrected from the dead. He then returned to his Ordinary World (heaven) having

⁵⁰“The reason for walking through these elements of the craft of storytelling used in movies is to illustrate how the essence of storytelling in movies is about redemption.” Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 86.

⁵¹ I am synthesizing Poythress' analysis with Vogler's. For the original, see Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language - A God Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 206-208. Poythress does not use Vogler, but rather Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, ed. Louis A. Wagner, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

⁵² Gal. 4:4-5; 1 John 4:14

⁵³ The wilderness temptation, Matt. 4:1-11

⁵⁴ Most clearly brought out in the Gospel of Luke.

⁵⁵ Matt. 26-27

accomplished redemption and made the Elixir available to all who would believe.⁵⁶ From a Christian perspective, even though it happened in the middle of history, the Gospel is the archetype for all stories with a redemptive trajectory. Film is no exception.

From an existential perspective, “All human communities live out of some story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history and gives shape and direction to their lives.”⁵⁷ Stories in the movies are no different and tend to contribute to the shaping of many people’s lives. As Grant Horner observes, “You can learn a lot about a person by ‘talking movies’ with them.”⁵⁸ It is also worth noting that in general, “A Christian testimony of redemption follows the same structure that a movie does.”⁵⁹ In this way, the life of the believer embodies a kind of redemption within redemption, and watching movies involving redemption storylines involves participating in another level of redemption.⁶⁰

By actively entering into the redemptive storyline found in most films, a Christian may come to better understand their own story as well as find an opening for dialoguing with others about true redemption. Seeing the redemption in movies is recognizable because it is a picture, an imitation, of how God has acted in the world. Man

⁵⁶ 1 Tim. 3:16; Phil. 2:8-11; Rom. 4:24-25

⁵⁷ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 12 They add “To be human means to embrace some such basic story through which we understand our world and chart our course through it. This does not mean that individuals are necessarily conscious of the story they are living out of or the molding effect that such a story has had on their thought and actions.” Ibid, 20.

⁵⁸ Horner, *Meaning at the Movies*, 157.

⁵⁹ Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 86.

⁶⁰ In a way, Christ’s life itself is a redemption within redemption since his personal life involved being “redeemed” by his own resurrection which then provided the basis of the redemption of anyone else in the scope of redemption history. This redemption within redemption is brought out by Poythress, *Language - A God Centered Approach*, 209-18.

as an image of God will inevitably imitate God's actions at some level.⁶¹ As God acts on the stage of world history to accomplish his purposes, so man acts on the stage of his own personal history to accomplish his purposes. Stories in their basic form are accounts of a main character's purpose, action, and the result. In this basic sense, all stories are accounts of a man imaging God, who as Scripture teaches has purposes, acts in history, and brings about his intended results.⁶² In a more specific sense though, God does not just act randomly in history, but as stated before, acts to accomplish redemption. This redemption "is at the heart of God's purposes for the world, it is *the* one central story."⁶³ If this is true, then "in the end, all the other stories about working out human purposes derive their meaning from being related to this central story."⁶⁴ If man in general derives meaning as a human from imaging God, at the particular level of stories told by man, meaning there would be derived from imaging The Story. All stories then image the Christian story of redemption, which is another way of saying all stories are in reflections of the gospel.

⁶¹ Gen. 1:26-28, and *Ibid.*, 200.

⁶² Eph. 1:10-11, 1 Cor. 15:28, Rev. 21:1, 22-27

⁶³ Poythress, *Language - A God Centered Approach*, 206.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3

FILM AND CULTURE'S RELIGION

In *A Matrix of Meanings*, Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor draw a comparison between our pop culture and the Old Testament wisdom literature.¹ A more apt comparison is probably between the collected wisdom of our pop culture and the wisdom literature of the Israel's neighbors.² Just as in the ancient Near East the wisdom literature of the surrounding cultures shed light on the beliefs and native religion of Israel's neighbors, contemporary film does much the same for us.³ For many in our popular culture, movies appear to be the "modern arena of ideas."⁴ These ideas though, rather than being presented in a paper, or through glimpse into a character's thought

¹ "Like the Old Testament writings, pop culture is the collected wisdom of our era. It includes explorations of injustice, songs of sorrow, and tributes to women." Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*, ed. William Dyrness and Robert K Johnston, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 11.

² For a survey of the surrounding ancient Near East literature see John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). 43-86. On the similarities in wisdom literature, see 287-312.

³ This is not to imply that our relationship to our surrounding non-Christian culture is exactly similar to that of Israel in Canaan. Pop culture, despite certain evangelical fears, is not the modern Canaan, and we have not been commanded to slaughter it verbally (by denouncing all of its evils) or non-verbally (by pretending most of it does not exist).

⁴ Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films With Wisdom and Discernment*, 2nd ed. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 254. This is certainly true to an extent, but it is downstream from where the actual ideas are themselves being formulated. As one critic explains, "The filmmaking process is slow and expensive, so movies always the last idiom to respond to social evolution; the finest films from the seventies were really just manifestation of how art and life had changed in the sixties." Chuck Klosterman, *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto* (New York: Scribner, 2003). 163.

process (like one can do in literature) are being presented in story form.⁵ As Robert McKee notes, “Story isn’t a flight from reality but a vehicle that carries us on our search for reality, our best effort to make sense out of the anarchy of existence.”⁶ Stories in our films today retain much of the function that ancient mythology did for Israel’s neighbors in the Old and New Testaments.⁷ As Brian Godawa observes, “Since the beginning of time, humankind has used story to convey the meaning and purpose of life,” which means that, “In essence, story incarnates the myths and values of a culture with the intent of perpetuating them.”⁸ In this way, the stories in film can provide a window into what our cultures believes (worldview) and how it thinks we should live in light of that (ethics). In expositing this, the focus is on what can be revealed about culture through film, and in seeing that more clearly, one is seeing the expression of people’s religion.⁹

Embodied Philosophy

Starting with the beliefs in our culture, one should realize that much like characters in medieval poetry tended to be ‘ideas dressed up like people,’ so today, many films present today present people portraying philosophies.¹⁰ While it is perhaps going

⁵ Consider Vanhoozer’s take on this: “Narratives make story-shaped points that cannot always be paraphrased in propositional statements without losing something in translation.” Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 50.

⁶ Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 12.

⁷ On mythology being used in this way, see Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*.

⁸ Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 61.

⁹ On culture as “lived religion” and an more in depth discussion see Henry Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 25-45. This Van Til is the elder Van Til’s nephew.

¹⁰ “Ideas dressed up like people” is the way it is put in John V. Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969). As quoted in

too far to state that “the study of film is important for Christians because it is the modern day equivalent of philosophy,”¹¹ film does generate its fair share of philosophical discussion in mainstream culture.¹² In spite of this, it can be hard to determine if a given film has a singular worldview informing its ideas. Even Horner, a strong proponent of worldview analysis, points out that “It is an untenable argument to claim that any film or other work of art has only one single valid level and range of meaning.”¹³ Often a film may present competing worldviews between characters, or in some cases, present a worldview as a type of *reductio ad absurdum* argument.¹⁴ Additionally, one can make the mistake of simply misinterpreting the elements and imposing a worldview onto the film that is not there in the form imagined.¹⁵ This seems to stem from misunderstanding worldviews themselves and how individuals hold them. There is then a triad of dangers: misunderstanding the nature of worldviews and how they are used, misinterpreting and

David Lyle Jeffrey and Gregory Maillet, *Christianity and Literature: Philosophical Foundations and Critical Practice* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 158.

¹¹ Grant Horner, *Meaning at the Movies: Becoming a Discerning Viewer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 30. Reiterated *Ibid.*, 35.

¹² As an example, consider *The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture* series, of which most volumes are devoted to either TV series, or seminal movies. However, it should be pointed out that films are picking up philosophical discussions that are started elsewhere, primarily in the works of seminal philosophers but to some extent from current philosophical trends flowing from the academy.

¹³ Horner, *Meaning at the Movies*, 61.

¹⁴ In this case, the worldview the film is determined to have is actually meant to be seen in a negative light. The types of movies doing this can often be aimed at the Christian worldview (usually taking the form of suggesting Christians are all hypocrites, as in *Easy A* [2010]), but consider the recent film *The Lovely Bones* (2009). The film tells the story of a young girl who is brutally raped and murdered by a serial killer who in the end escapes the reach of justice. The film ends with the serial killer slipping on some ice and falling to his death. In other words, it preaches karma, but whether or not it is the intent of the author (Alice Sebold) or the director of the film (Peter Jackson) it does so in a way that seems to say ultimately, “Here’s how karma works, isn’t it kind of ridiculous and unsatisfying?”

¹⁵ As an example here, consider how many evangelicals react to the Harry Potter films. The overall message of the films (love wins) is one that is certainly at home in a Christian worldview (and also books by Rob Bell). Attributes of God are exemplified by many of the characters and the plotline follows a redemptive track that culminates in a sacrificial death in order to defeat the forces of evil. To construe the books (and therefore the films) to be about promoting the occult is to commit a kind of red herring fallacy.

overcomplicating the actual worldview present, and mistaking the presence of the particular worldview for the message of the film. A triperspectival examination of worldviews in film can help avoid these problems.

Defining Worldviews

James Sire defines a worldview as “a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions which we hold about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”¹⁶ He then outlines seven questions to ask in determining a worldview.¹⁷ Many people have made use of Sire’s definition and questions in worldview analysis, however many miss the simplification he offers towards the end of his book: “The fact is that while worldviews at first appear to proliferate, they are made up of answers to questions that have only a limited number of answers.”¹⁸ Even Grant Horner, who fears that “Many Christians fall into the trap of oversimplifying worldviews,”¹⁹ seems to acknowledge this when he says “It is no exaggeration to claim that all the worldviews men have held throughout history are variants of a few basic themes and can be found described to some extent in Scripture.”²⁰ This being the case, Sire concludes that none of the worldviews he surveyed “can adequately account for the possibility of

¹⁶ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th ed. (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 17. Parenthetically in that definition Sire notes that the presuppositions may be “assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false” and they may be held “consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently.”

¹⁷ 1) What is really real? (2) What is the nature of external reality, the world around us? (3) What is a human being? (4) What happens to a person after death? (5) Why is it possible to know anything at all? (6) How do we know what is right and wrong? (7) What is the meaning of human history? *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁹ Horner, *Meaning at the Movies*, 61, also 65, 91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

genuine knowledge, the facticity of the external universe or the existence of ethical distinctions. Each in its own way ends in some form of nihilism.”²¹

From the normative perspective on worldviews then, the only real options out there are Christ or Nietzsche, making distinguishing worldviews slightly less complicated than is usually imagined.²² Since the majority of the films out there are made by non-believers, it seems more conducive to a Christian philosophy of film to sketch out the general contours of unbelieving thought, rather than cataloguing the different ideological options for a worldview.²³ Cornelius Van Til saw the history of non-Christian thought as a dialectic between irrationalism and rationalism.²⁴ For Van Til, rationalism is characterized by “the search for utterly abstract concepts,” while irrationalism is on a “search for utterly uninterpreted brute facts.”²⁵ John Frame has used this idea to formulate a kind of “logic of unbelief,” with the outcome that all such thought is either idolatrous or nihilistic.²⁶ He observes that the unbeliever’s construction of a worldview never quite

²¹ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 248.

²² A philosophy professor of mine in a half remembered dream pointed this out in class often. He was possessed of some radical notions.

²³ This latter option is the approach taken in both Horner, *Meaning at the Movies*, and Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*.

²⁴ There are some things in Van Til’s writings that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction. On the sweep of Van Til’s thought see John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 231-238. For Van Til’s own words on this topic, see especially Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), and also Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1969).

²⁵ Frame, *Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*. 234. As Frame points out, Plato was a synthesizer of these impulses by maintaining rationalism with respect to the world of the forms and irrationalism with respect to the world of actual sense experience. Kant reversed this by maintaining an irrationalism with respect to the world of pure matter (his noumenal realm) and rationalism with respect to the world of sense experience (his phenomenal realm)

²⁶ Or more typically, a mixture of both. See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 60-61; 360-63.

works “since this is God’s world, the facts never fit into his godless system.”²⁷ The only options available to the unbeliever are to jettison his rational impulse to construct a system (leading eventually to nihilism), or to compromise with irrationalism in some way and still seek to construct a system with an idolatrous replacement for God in it. Either way, the result leads to well developed nihilism (Nietzsche) or a stop along the road that will eventually lead to fully embracing the joyful wisdom.

Deconstructing Worldviews

Based on this line of thinking, and more importantly the truth of Romans 1-2 that everyone knows God and the basics of his moral law, the way to deconstruct the worldview of a film is to consider it to be a basic deformity of a Christian position. In other words, every worldview, from a Christian perspective, is formed in opposition to the basic framework of Christian thought. Looking from the situational perspective, the worldviews actually present in most films will essentially be atheistic derivatives of the Christian worldview. To the extent there is still some coherent ideology being put forward by the film, it is exhibiting an atheistic rationalism, eliminating God from the picture, but still retaining a “system” based on some other autonomous criteria.²⁸ In these cases, God does not completely disappear. Because everyone knows God, trying to suppress his presence in a particular worldview only leads to deifying some other aspect of the system. As Frame notes, “all systems of thought include belief in something that is

²⁷ Ibid., 361.

²⁸ It is worth noting that the “system” still usually put forward a set of morals that are really unjustifiable outside of a Christian framework. People who find Christian belief unattractive still seem to be convicted that abandoning the corresponding practice to be a bad idea. Almost every important film still promotes a moral premise that would be at home in the Bible’s wisdom literature.

self-sufficient, not dependent on anything else.”²⁹ Whatever that aspect is, it is the idolatrous replacement for God in the particular worldview in question.³⁰ This would mean that every worldview will attribute “divine” status to some element, making it not dependent on anything else in that worldview. In other words, a purely atheistic worldview is not possible. God merely gets reformed into the image that man desires him to have.³¹

In analyzing a system of thought that counterfeits the Christian worldview, the real question is where the points of departure from the Christian framework are. If God is absent, then the deified aspect of that particular worldview needs to be identified. Most films, unless they explicitly wrestle with philosophical issues through the characters’ dialogue, will more or less present a story that takes place in a naturalized Christian worldview.³² That is, they will contain all the regularities that only fit within a Christian framework (logic, morality, uniformity of nature) but instead offer a counterfeit redemptive story that centers on a hero’s effort to redeem himself from the problems he

²⁹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 56. This is another way of making the point of Rom. 1:23, that human beings know that God has aseity, and in refusing to acknowledge Him, they will give that attribute to something else in the created order.

³⁰ One definition of “religious belief” is “any belief in something or other as divine,” where “divine” is defined “having the status of not depending on anything else.” Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 21-22. A divine being is then a being with the attribute of aseity. This point found as part of a larger discussion in Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 56.

³¹ Or as the apostle Paul puts it, they “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” choosing “images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” instead of images of “glory of the immortal God.” (Rom. 1:23, 25).

³² A “naturalized Christian worldview” is a similar concept to “moralistic therapeutic deism” described and chronicled in Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). I came to this conclusion independent of examining Smith and Denton’s work, though I have been aware of their concept for quite some time.

encounters and achieve his eschatological hope.³³ If the main character achieves his goal, the film falls into the traditional category of a comedy. If he fails, it is considered a tragedy.³⁴ Either way, the majority of films still retain the basic framework of the Christian worldview.

The films that come off as overtly philosophical are the ones that question the framework itself. These are the films that raise the only relevant question left for contemporary filmmakers: “What is reality?”³⁵ This question often leads to a deeper question (How do we know what we know?) but the only philosophical tinkering will center on one or both of these two questions.³⁶ Most every film that has a philosophical edge to it takes on these questions in some aspect. Interestingly, these films still tell stories with a redemptive arc to them, so that even in their sometimes blatant non-Christian philosophizing, they still assume some elements basic to a Christian

³³ On recasting worldviews as redemptive stories, see Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language - A God Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 219-227. On worldviews as quests for wisdom, see Vern S. Poythress, “The Quest for Wisdom,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*, ed. Jeffrey C. Waddington and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 86-114. As an example, consider Poythress’ retelling of the Enlightenment: “Reason the hero, rescues the princess, Western civilization, from the villain Superstition, who appears in many guises: belief in witchcraft, belief in evil spirits, and belief in mystifying religion.” Poythress, *Language - A God Centered Approach*, 221

³⁴ This is based on traditional genre distinctions and flows from the previous archetypal story analysis in the last chapter. Every story either ends with the hero on a metaphorical cross, or with a metaphorical type of resurrection.

³⁵ Klosterman, *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, 161. Klosterman is a keen non-Christian observer of culture. He is simultaneously profound and vulgar. In this particular article he interestingly states several times that reality is “fixed.” In other words, he sees the intriguing value of questioning how we understand our reality, but still holds ardently that there is such a thing as objective reality, though we all have our own subjective version of it.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 168. Klosterman views the quintessential film in this regard to be Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000). He also argues that films like this cannot be commercially successful. Nolan has since proved him wrong with the release of *Inception* (2010).

worldview.³⁷ A key part of this is retaining the grand narrator idea. While these films question our ability to understand reality, they still are dependent on the filmmaker understanding the reality of what he is trying to present. Christopher Nolan, a filmmaker who consistently creates films that explore these questions explains, “It’s very important for people to understand that I had to know, in my own mind, what the supposedly ‘objective’ facts were....I wouldn’t be able to create a subjective experience that contained multiple interpretations *without hanging it on a consistent story*.”³⁸ This would make these types of films best viewed as non-Christian attempts to escape the implications of living in a Christian world.

Dialoguing with Worldviews

Turning lastly to an existential perspective on worldviews in film, it is worth examining the impulse to diagnose worldviews in the first place. First, for Horner, discerning the differing worldviews in the movies leads us to an “edifying mode of interpretation of the culture surrounding us,” which will “enable us to reach individuals with God’s truth while minimizing the negative impact of fallen culture on us.”³⁹ It is the last part of that phrase seems to be an unnecessary concern. The fear seems to be that if we do not discern the elements of non-Christian thought that may be presented in a particular film, we are somehow opening ourselves up to being dangerously influenced

³⁷ As Douglas Beaumont observes, “Any time a story requires some component of the Christian worldview to make sense, you have a great opportunity to argue Christianity must be true.” Douglas Beaumont, *The Message Behind the Movie: How to Engage With a Film Without Disengaging Your Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 99.

³⁸ Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 82. Emphasis mine.

³⁹ Horner, *Meaning at the Movies*, 30. Some of this is good, but it ignores the fact that our biggest danger is not impact from consuming fallen culture but our own sinful hearts (Luke 6:45ff).

by them.⁴⁰ If Christians in general are that susceptible to having their worldview reframed by watching a movie, the problem does not seem to lie with missing the philosophy of the film, but rather with a failure in understanding their own worldview adequately.⁴¹

Second, if the goal is to diagnose worldviews so that one is better prepared to engage the individuals in our culture in meaningful dialogue, worldviews seem to be a misplaced focus. Everyone in our culture can relate to a story. Not everyone thinks at the philosophical level necessary to start a conversation about a film's worldview. If the goal is to engage the individuals in our culture through our film watching experience, then the emphasis might be better placed on the story of redemption the film offers rather than the philosophic ideas it presents. Godawa, who places a focus on worldviews in his book, still sees that "By entering into the story, we can experience a part of human existence and truth that we cannot reduce to abstract ideas or philosophy."⁴² Considerations of worldview then should be subordinated to understanding and being able to enter into the story, if the goal is ultimately to engage the individuals in our culture. Or, at the very least, worldview analysis would work better if it proceeds along the lines drawn out above and see every film operating in a deformed or naturalized Christian framework.

Lastly, it is easy for the philosophical ideas that are present in the movie to become a red herring that distracts from the message of the film. Again, Godawa is insightful: "All movies inherently contain messages in the very nature of their storytelling. Characters making choices that result in consequences is a 'message' about

⁴⁰ Or worse, mindlessly enjoying a form of entertainment.

⁴¹ Though outside of the scope of this paper, perhaps the danger is having certain other "isms" that are not full blown worldviews (consumerism, materialism, incepted into our thinking from passively consuming culture. On this see Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2009).

⁴² Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 255.

how the storyteller thinks the way the world works.”⁴³ This is not too drive too sharp of a wedge between philosophy and life, but the thrust of the film’s moral premise seems to be much more important to recognize and assess correctly than the abstract philosophical ideas in which it might dabble.⁴⁴ It is also worth recognizing that “we ‘live and move and have our being’ in accordance with the worldview we really hold, not the one we merely confess.”⁴⁵ Character may talk about certain philosophical positions, yet act in a way that contradicts the implications of their dialogue. The importance then is not so much on what ideas the characters talk about, but what ideas they actually embody in their decisions and actions. Film, by showing us “ideas dressed up as people,” provides a window into how people think the world is, but more importantly, it is a window into how they live in light of that reality. Worldviews can then be used as a window into the religious impulses of our culture.⁴⁶

Embodied Morals

The embodied philosophy of culture present in film provides a norm for how culture looks at the world. Films present a worldview that, with a few variations, is more or less an atheistic derivative of the Christian worldview.⁴⁷ If the way culture looks at the world is demonstrated through film (a normative perspective) then the way culture thinks one should act in the world (a situational perspective) would be demonstrated in film as

⁴³ Ibid., 76-77.

⁴⁴ This is not to disparage philosophy in film. Personally, I would rather start a conversation about the philosophy, but I have come to realize most people cannot start there.

⁴⁵ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 245.

⁴⁶ Which makes them a window within a window.

⁴⁷ Or “moralistic therapeutic deism.” Deism though is just less consistent atheism.

well. The window of philosophy opens up the window of sociology.⁴⁸ In many ways, this is the unavoidable purpose of storytelling: “To be human means to embrace some such basic story through which we understand our world and chart our course through it.”⁴⁹ A brief return to the concept of the moral premise will help flesh this out.

In his book, *The Moral Premise*, Stanley Williams observes that “a cursory examination will affirm that psychological moral dilemmas are at the heart of every successful story.”⁵⁰ He goes on to say that “Good stories tell us something that rings true about our experience as human beings.”⁵¹ From this perspective, “the goal of the storyteller is to take the audience through an emotional and psychological journey that reveals a poignant truth about the human experience.”⁵² What this journey reveals about how we should then live is the film’s moral premise. It is essentially the practical lesson of a particular story.⁵³ It has been recognized to some degree by other film critics before Williams, but he is the first to do systematic research to validate the connection between a film’s moral premise and its box office success.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ The analysis could move in either direction. One could look at sociology and extrapolate philosophical commitments. I have instead sketched out the underlying philosophy based on Van Til and Frame’s thoughts which were in turn based on Rom. 1-2 to provide the norm first before then moving to the situation.

⁴⁹ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 20. They go on to observe “This does not mean that individuals are necessarily conscious of the story they are living out of or the molding effect that such a story has had on their thought and actions.”

⁵⁰ Stanley D. Williams, *The Moral Premise: Harnessing Virtue & Vice For Box Office Success* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2006), 17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁴ This was essentially his Ph.D dissertation and a brief summary of the research formula is included in *Ibid.*, 163-64. What he argues is that if a film refuses to integrate a sound moral premise into its

Other writers have expressed the idea differently, for instance as Robert McKee does in *Story*: “the story’s ultimate meaning expressed through the action and aesthetic emotion of the last act’s climax.”⁵⁵ For McKee this is called the “controlling idea.” Elsewhere, McKee has said “Storytelling is the creative demonstration of truth. A story is the living proof of an idea, the conversion of idea to action. A story’s structure is the means by which you first express, then prove your idea...without explanation.”⁵⁶ In Vogler’s analysis, shown above, the equivalent of a moral premise is the Elixir that the hero brings back to the Ordinary World.⁵⁷ The Elixir can be a physical object as well, and those objects would then be considered metaphorical for a lesson learned, which is what Williams argues the moral premise is. As Williams sees it, the moral premise is a kind of natural law of storytelling, and it reflects the natural laws about morality that are wired into the universe.⁵⁸

Typically the moral premise “is comprised of four parts: a virtue, a vice, desirable consequences (success), and undesirable consequences (defeat).”⁵⁹ As Williams concludes, “these four parts can be used to create a statement that describes precisely what a movie is really about, on both physical and psychological levels.”⁶⁰ In this

plotline, it will not do well at the box office. A similar note could be said about movies with non-redemptive plot lines.

⁵⁵ Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 115

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 113. As Williams notes, McKee is “trying to tell us...that storytelling is basically a philosophical pursuit wherein we explore what is true and false, and how to live our lives better and happier.” Williams, *The Moral Premise*, 98.

⁵⁷ This is detailed in Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure For Writers*, 3rd ed. (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007).

⁵⁸ Williams, *The Moral Premise*, 49-50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

structure, a comedy is where the protagonist is confronted with the virtue in a “moment of grace” and embraces it to find the success he has been seeking. A tragedy is where the protagonist is similarly confronted with the virtue in a moment of grace, but embraces the vice instead, leading to defeat.⁶¹ These elements can be brought out by taking note of the story’s spine, which connects the physical quest with the psychological quest of a particular story.⁶² In a way, the visible story is a metaphor for the invisible story; or the psychological goal of the protagonist is revealed by the physical goal; or again, “the protagonist’s inner journey is shown to us in the protagonist’s outer journey.”⁶³ In this way, the journey to redemption as noted in the last chapter contains a practical application for the here and now. Since “The redemption in a particular worldview or belief system is its proposal for how to fix what is wrong with us,”⁶⁴ it necessarily implies some kind of action on part of the audience. That action, or the moral premise of the film, sheds light on how our culture believes we should live in our world.

Because man is by nature an image bearer of God and because he knows certain things to be right and wrong (Rom. 1:32), the moral premise of most films, if it is to achieve the natural law status that Williams sees as necessary, will actually be in accord with the teachings of Scripture. Many films can usually be applauded as upholding biblical virtues, albeit from a non-Christian standpoint. There will usually be a tension given the worldview that informs the moral premise. As argued earlier, many films present a naturalized Christian worldview that still has the framework intact,

⁶¹ Ibid., 74.

⁶² Ibid., 68. In the particular analysis pursued here, the physical quest is detailed more explicitly under the Story heading, while here under Ethics we are dealing with the psychological quest.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 24.

including the moral impulses. While the moral premise may be exemplary and even fit well into a Christian worldview, it may often contradict the philosophical vantage point of the actual film. The fact that many people will still find the moral premise compelling, given the worldview of the film, suggests further confirmation of Scripture's teaching in Romans 1 and 2. When God has been jettisoned from the picture, there is no inherent reason why anyone should have to follow an exemplary virtue, other than the desirable results offered. But people still want to live the good life (for the most part) and look to film either explicitly or implicitly for guidance on how to make sense of living in the world. What they see on the screen is the embodied morals of the surrounding culture, and what the Christian should see is further evidence for the truth of the Christian worldview.

CHAPTER 4

FILM AND MAN'S RESPONSE

Having discussed film from the normative perspective (what it reveals about God) and the situational perspective (what it reveals about culture), the last vantage point to survey is the existential perspective (what it reveals about man). In some ways, elements of this perspective have been present in the preceding discussion. This is in part because of perspectival overlap, that is, if one were to exposit fully everything from a given perspective, it would include the insights of the other perspectives as well. In the presentation of this paper the knowledge has been parsed out into the various perspectives in order to bring out elements that are often overlooked, as well as to demonstrate the usefulness of Frame's triperspectivalism, being as it is "generic Calvinism." To offer a truly Calvinist philosophy of film, a triperspectival approach is the best framework available. In that case, the focus here will be on how film demonstrates man's response to God's revelation. First, film demonstrates man's normative response to God's revelation is to create and image God. Second, film demonstrates that man's situational response to God's revelation has been tainted because of the fall and man now necessarily suppresses the truth about God in his cultural activity.

Creatively Imaging God

In *The Liberated Imagination*, Leland Ryken observes that "human creativity is rooted in divine creativity."¹ This he says, "affirms human creativity as something good

¹ Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly About the Arts*, The Wheaton Literary Series (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989), 65.

since it is an imitation of one of God’s own acts and perfections,” thus making the impulse to create an expression of human likeness to God.² He then concludes “the biblical doctrine of the image of God in people is thus the theological reason why people write literature and paint pictures and compose music.”³ If this is true for those activities individually, it is certainly true for film which is “is a rich combination of storytelling, painting, philosophy, history, and politics wrapped in technology.”⁴ The creation of film is another avenue of evidence for the truth of the Christian worldview, since it embodies an activity that one would expect given the Christian teaching about man’s nature. No other worldview provides an adequate justification for why man delights to create. Economic factors may explain the perpetuation of the film industry, but they cannot account for why anyone would invest themselves into it initially with little hope of financial gain.

It is helpful here to return to Calvin in order to gather his thoughts on man’s creativity. This is in order to lay a theological groundwork for how films reveal a man’s basic nature as he was created by God. Leland Ryken summarizes well the general contours of Calvin’s thought about man’s creativity.⁵ First, because God is creator “all the arts emanate from Him, and therefore ought to be accounted divine inventions.”⁶ Second, artistic ability is a gift from God and “whatever ability is possessed by any emanates

² Ibid., 67.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Grant Horner, *Meaning at the Movies: Becoming a Discerning Viewer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 27.

⁵ Leland Ryken, “Calvinism and Literature,” in *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, ed. David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 102.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, ed. John Bingham and Charles William Bingham, (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 3:291.

from only one source, and is conferred by God.”⁷ Third, artistic ability that people have is evidence of God’s image.⁸ Fourth, because human beings image a creative God, they are capable of genuine creation.⁹ These boundaries set out by Calvin’s thought on the arts keeps one from deifying man’s creative ability on the one hand (as seen in the Romantic movement), and from denying man has genuine creative ability on the other hand (as seen in some corners of evangelicalism).¹⁰

While this helps explain in a general sense why people take time to invest themselves into the creation of a motion picture, more could be said about how filmmakers specifically image God in their role beyond the mere act of creation. Not surprisingly, John Frame uses a threefold division to describe how man images God.¹¹ Corresponding to his lordship attributes of control, authority, and presence, Frame sees the image of God having a physical, official, and ethical dimension. By being physically present, man is able to image God’s attribute of control; by ruling and having dominion in an official aspect (as God’s vice regent) he is able to image God’s authority; by reflecting God ethically in his knowledge, righteousness, and holiness man is able to

⁷ Ibid., 3:291-92.

⁸ “The many pre-eminent gifts with which the human mind is endowed proclaim that something divine has been engraved upon it.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.15.2. Craig Detweiler demonstrates a general ignorance of Calvin’s position on this point and associates a Calvinistic belief in total depravity with a belief in annihilation of the imago Dei. Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 72. Luther held the position Detweiler has in mind. For clarification see Michael S. Horton, “A Shattered Vase: The Tragedy of Sin in Calvin’s Thought,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 151-67.

⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.14.

¹⁰ Ryken, “Calvinism and Literature.” 102-3.

¹¹ John Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg N.J.: P&R, 2006). He is relying on Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999).

image God's presence. One finds a similar threefold division in Calvin in "what is perhaps one of the most distinctive features" of his theology: "the threefold office of Christ as prophet, king, and priest or the so-called *munus triplex*."¹² Relating these to the lordship attributes, Christ as prophet images God's authority by bringing the true word of God; as priest he imaged God's presence by becoming the personal sacrifice for our sin and mediating God's presence to us; as king he images God's control by ruling and reigning.¹³

If Christ himself is the express image of the invisible God, then one way in which God's created images image him may be by imitating Christ in this threefold office. Normatively, filmmakers image God's attribute of authority¹⁴ and Christ's office as prophet by revealing images of the divine in their films. They do this as well by attempting to proclaim truth in their films. While it is not meant to denigrate their activity in this office, many times filmmakers are false prophets in the "truths" they try to proclaim. The activity itself though nonetheless images God's authority to speak truthfully. Situationally, filmmakers image God's attribute of control¹⁵ and Christ's office as king by creatively constructing a world from their imagination that they then "rule." Sometimes the "ruling" is part of a collaborative team of people, but whether singularly or collectively, the creators of a film world are directly involved in creatively exercising control and ruling over that world. Existentially, filmmakers images God's attribute of

¹² Derek W. H. Thomas, "The Mediator of the Covenant," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 205-225. 220. Calvin's discussion is in *Institutes*, 2.15.1ff.

¹³ See Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*.

¹⁴ Or one could say omniscience. One who knows all has the authority to speak the truth about reality.

¹⁵ Or one could say omnipotence.

presence¹⁶ and Christ's office of priest by both investing themselves personally into their creative efforts and trying to mediate to the people a new way to live. By incarnating images from their own imagination onto the screen, filmmakers are putting their own presence into the final product. Additionally, one could say that filmmakers sacrifice their time and effort in order to provide new life for their audiences through the way of life suggested by the moral premise of their film. Because of the ethical dimensions of the moral premise, they are trying to provide a kind of redemption through their storytelling, exhibiting a kind of priestly activity on behalf of the audience.

In a world without sin, this kind of threefold imaging of God would reflect God perfectly. In light of God's common grace, all people, Christian and non-Christian have a "capacity for the true, the good, and the beautiful."¹⁷ Because of God's common grace, man as God's prophet still has a capacity to recognize and speak the truth.¹⁸ Because of God's common grace, man as God's vice regent (king) is able to rule and exercise dominion over matter, making creations that are legitimately beautiful to behold.¹⁹ Because of God's common grace, man as God's priest still retains the impulse to mediate the good life to others.²⁰ However, the situation in this present world fractures

¹⁶ Or to completely the omni- tried, omnipresence.

¹⁷ Ryken, "Calvinism and Literature." 104. Ryken also notes that nearly all of the writing in this area has been done by those in the Calvinist tradition, specifically, Calvin, Hodge, Berkhof, Kuyper, and Van Til.

¹⁸ Remember Calvin's thoughts on all truth being God's truth. He also states that "If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God." Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.15.

¹⁹ "But man has not lost his cultural urge, his instinct to rule, his love of power, his ability to form and to mould matter after his will." Henry Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 58.

²⁰ "By virtue of their creation in God's image, by virtue of the ineradicable sense of deity within them, and by virtue of God's restraining general grace, those who hate God, yet in a restricted sense know God and do good." Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 65.

man's ability to image God correctly and so while these impulses can still be seen with eyes to see, they are not always used properly. The image God of still shines through, even when man actively tries to suppress it.

Suppressing the Truth

Turning from man's normative response to God's revelation as revealed through film, we are now in a position to discuss the situational aspect of man's response in light of his sin nature. Often discussions on this subject move too quickly to the negative elements present in man's cultural creation without establish a norm for man's creative activities the pre-dates the fall.²¹ Michael Horton observes that "If we begin with total depravity rather than creation, the former can easily lose the tragic element; sin too easily then becomes confused with our humanity as such rather than with its corruption."²² The suppression on the part of man directly expressed by Paul in Romans 1 should be seen as a corruption of man's response rather than his inherent norm. This is not to downplay the situation we find ourselves in now, but rather to ensure a proper baseline before looking at cultural production through the lens of depravity, something that is unfortunately essential in cultural analysis.

In fully developing a Calvinistic concept of culture, "the question of sin and its effect upon man and his world is of supreme importance."²³ While some have held that the image of God is erased in man, Calvin and most in the tradition that followed have

²¹ Detweiler characterizes this as starting in Gen. 3 rather than Gen. 1. See Detweiler, *Into the Dark*, 252.

²² Horton, "A Shattered Vase: The Tragedy of Sin in Calvin's Thought," 156.

²³ Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 57.

held it remains but with distortions.²⁴ As Michael Horton notes, “The image must be suppressed because it is still there. Like a mirror that reveals a reflection that we do not want to see, it must be distorted, covered over, smeared with mud.”²⁵ In terms of the apologetic import, no one has done more to develop this line of thinking than Cornelius Van Til, who placed it at the heart of his epistemology. Using Romans 1, and Calvin’s thought as starting points, Van Til was quick to affirm that “man has the sense of deity indelibly engraved upon him. He knows God and he knows himself and the world as God’s creation. This objective revelation to him.”²⁶ Because of this, the psychological activity of man, “insofar as it is in the activity of a creature of God, cannot help but display the Creator; while insofar as it is the activity of a sinner, it cannot help but display man’s hatred of the Creator.”²⁷ This divisive nature of man’s thinking plays itself out in non-Christian thought processes in general. Given the amount of conceptual activity necessary to make a film, evidence of this truth should emerge in careful reflection on film.

In relation to the effect on film, few have done more to develop this line of thinking than Grant Horner, who observes that “the recognition of truth elements in cultural artifacts helps us to do two things: we can better interpret and understand our culture, and we can see that even rebellious human culture demonstrates to us that we are

²⁴ Detweiler fails to grasp this point and considers a “hardcore Calvinist” one who is “committed to total depravity and annihilation of the imago Dei.” Detweiler, *Into the Dark*, 72. Calvin was apparently not a hardcore Calvinist.

²⁵ Horton, “A Shattered Vase: The Tragedy of Sin in Calvin’s Thought,” 158. This is where Calvin and Luther parted ways (or at least one way).

²⁶ Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 65. Few Calvinists are more “hardcore” than Van Til, yet he affirmed an intact imago Dei.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

exactly as God says we are.”²⁸ Following Calvin, Horner sees the universe as the theater of God’s glory and within that sees film as a theater of extra-Scriptural truth that demonstrates the truth about man’s true nature.²⁹ If God made man in his image, we tend to make films in ours, and that necessarily reflects our fallen nature at this point.³⁰ Horner sees the central passage of Scripture in this regard is Romans 1:18-24, however, he pushes his analysis too far and sees the suppression of truth as the origin of culture, rather than the corruption of culture.³¹ In spite of this weakness, Horner’s overall thoughts on the suppression of truth, and the suppression of that suppression reflect a depth of theological thinking about film that many other analyses lack.

Throughout his book, Horner seeks to make the connections between the truth of Scripture in Romans 1 and the relation to film more explicit, and he does so genre by genre. He hones in on the particular genre of film noir, pointing out that it “may be the most fascinating area of movies history for Christians interested in thinking about theology and culture.”³² The reason for this is that unlike any other specific genre, film noir illustrates man’s activity of truth suppression. Not only does man try to suppress the truth about God within him, he often tries to erase the truth about himself, but “while we convince ourselves we are good (or at least not depraved), *our most powerful aft form is*

²⁸ Horner, *Meaning at the Movies*, 127.

²⁹ Ibid., 24-25.

³⁰ Ibid., 31.

³¹ This is highly problematic, if for no other reason than that it ignores God’s command to Adam (and later Noah, and others) to produce culture. The mere production of culture then, cannot be the result of suppressing the truth. Horner’s position from early on in the book is that all cultural production stems from the suppression of truth. If this thesis is true though, it would apply equally to Horner’s book as well as other cultural productions such as symphonies and sermons and even translations of the Bible. This seems odd, but it follows logically from the thesis that all cultural production has suppression as a basis.

³² Horner, *Meaning at the Movies*, 165. Film noir comes from the French and means “black film” or “dark film.” Numerous movies have seen major success in this particular genre recently, and several filmmakers such as Quentin Tarrantino and Christopher Nolan have mastered it.

built upon the revelation that this is a lie."³³ The irony that emerges is a whole category of films that vividly illustrate the biblical truth about man's condition.³⁴

Film then presents a mirror that reflects back to man the real truth about himself. His condition is a fallen sinner who suppresses his own knowledge of God and status as an image bearer. This is reflected back to him in his own cultural productions and his attempts to exchange the glory of the true God for images resembling mere mortal man. At the same time though, his true nature as image bearer of God still remains intact. In man's cultural productions, and even his attempts to create images that entertain and captivate and reveal his own glory, the glory of God still shines through, and man's knowledge of God also betrays his attempts to rebel. One may go to the movies for many reasons, but when one goes there looking with the eyes of faith through the lenses of Scripture, it is hard to find a more powerful medium for the message of truth about how the world really is. Man may attempt to escape through the darkness of the theater, but the light of God's glory still shines through and welcomes him to the real world.

³³ Ibid., 168.

³⁴ Ibid., 190

WORKS CITED

- Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. 7 vols. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982.
- Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Beaumont, Douglas. *The Message Behind the Movie: How to Engage With a Film Without Disengaging Your Faith*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009.
- Blake, Richard A. *Screening America: Reflections on Five Classic Films*. New York: Paulist, 1991.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Edited by James Anderson. Vol. 1. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010.
- . *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*. Edited by John Owen. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010.
- . *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. Edited by John Owen. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010.
- . *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Corinthians*. Edited by John Pringle. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010.
- . *Commentary on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Edited by William Pringle. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010.
- . *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*. Edited by John King. Vol. 1. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010.
- . *Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*. Edited by John Bingham and Charles William Binghamd. Vol. 3. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010.
- . *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*. Edited by Henry Beveridge. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010.
- . *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.

- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Bollingen Series XVII. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008.
- Clark, David K. *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*. Foundation of Evangelical Theology. Wheaton: Crossway, 2003.
- Clouser, Roy. *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991.
- Detweiler, Craig. *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Detweiler, Craig, and Barry Taylor. *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*. Edited by William Dyrness and Robert K Johnston. Engaging Culture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Dyrness, William A. *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Edgar, William. "Calvin's Impact on the Arts." In *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary*, edited by David W. Hall, 464-486. Calvin 500. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010.
- . "The Arts and the Reformed Tradition." In *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, edited by David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett, 40-68. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010.
- Fleming, John V. *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Frame, John M. *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995.
- . "Glossary." In *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, edited by John J. Hughes, 1002-1028. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009.
- . *The Doctrine of God. A Theology of Lordship*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002.
- . *The Doctrine of the Christian Life. A Theology of Lordship*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.
- . *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God. A Theology of Lordship*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987.

- Frame, John. *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. Phillipsburg N.J.: P&R, 2006.
- Frame, John, and John J. Hughes. "Backgrounds to My Thought." In *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009.
- Godawa, Brian. *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films With Wisdom and Discernment*. 2nd ed. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009.
- Greeley, Andrew M. *God in Popular Culture*. Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1988.
- . *The Catholic Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Horner, Grant. *Meaning at the Movies: Becoming a Discerning Viewer*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Horton, Michael S. "A Shattered Vase: The Tragedy of Sin in Calvin's Thought." In *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, edited by David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, 151-167. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.
- Hughes, John J., ed. *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009.
- Jeffrey, David Lyle, and Gregory Maillet. *Christianity and Literature: Philosophical Foundations and Critical Practice*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011.
- Johnston, Robert K. *Reel Spirituality*. Edited by William Dyrness and Robert K Johnston. 2nd ed. Engaging Culture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Johnston, Robert K., and Catherine M. Barsotti. *Finding God in the Movies*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.
- Johnston, Robert K., ed. *Reframing Theology and Film: New Focus for an Emerging Discipline*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Kline, Meredith. *Images of the Spirit*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999.
- Klosterman, Chuck. *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto*. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

- Monaco, James. *How To Read A Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper & Row, 1951.
- Oliphant, K. Scott. "A Primal and Simple Knowledge (1.1-5)." In *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, 16-43. Calvin 500. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.
- Pinker, Steven. *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*. New York: Penguin Books, 2007.
- Poythress, Vern S. *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language - A God Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009.
- . "The Quest for Wisdom." In *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*, edited by Jeffrey C. Waddington and Lane G. Tipton, 86-114. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.
- Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Edited by Louis A. Wagner. Translated by Laurence Scott. 2nd ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
- Ryken, Leland. "Calvinism and Literature." In *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, edited by David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett, 95-113. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010.
- . *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly About the Arts*. The Wheaton Literary Series. Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989.
- Schaeffer, Francis. *How Should We Then Live?* Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982.
- Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. 4th ed. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004.
- Smith, Christian, and Melina Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Thomas, Derek W. H. "The Mediator of the Covenant." In *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, edited by David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, 205-225. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.
- Van Til, Cornelius. *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*. Philadelphia: P&R, 1969.

- . *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*. Edited by William Edgar. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007.
- . *The Defense of the Faith*. Edited by K. Scott Oliphint. 4th ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008.
- Van Til, Henry. *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin. *The Drama of Doctrine : A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure For Writers*. 3rd ed. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.
- Voytilla, Stuart. *Myth and the Movies : Discovering the Mythic Structure of 50 Unforgettable Films*. Studio City CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1999.
- Walton, John H. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Wilkins, Steve, and Mark L. Sanford. *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives*. Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2009.
- Williams, Stanley D. *The Moral Premise: Harnessing Virtue & Vice For Box Office Success*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2006.
- Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and The People of God*. Christian Origins and The Question of God 1. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Zachman, Randall C. *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.