

## Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals, 2nd ed.

John C. Lyden

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Although studying film in the religious studies classroom and studying the religious content of film in a cinema studies classroom are neither surprising nor new, seeing film as religion strikes a different chord. Sixteen years after the publication of its first edition, the second edition of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* continues to assert that film, even films without explicitly religious content, functions religiously. John C. Lyden makes his case by identifying how film appropriates aspects of Clifford Geertz' definition of religion.

For example, like religion, film provides symbols in order to “mediate worldviews as well as systems of values” thereby establishing certain moods and motivations. Even more, film, like religion, forms an order of existence that attempts to deal with chaos and, like religious ritual, creates “a sense of reality that points to a different way of viewing the world from that provided by ordinary experience.”

Part I of the book connects elements of religion such as myth, ritual, and morals to the moviegoing experience. Ultimately, Lyden claims that the dialogue between religion and film is “another form of interreligious dialogue.” The author admits that Part I is largely unchanged from its first edition despite his nod to Kent Brintnall's challenge that “religion is just as suspect popular culture.” Taking heed of this caveat could have yielded updates to Part I.

Conversely, the changes in Part II indicate a helpful suspicion of “films that may reinforce prejudices or provide support for status quo hegemonies.” This second part of the book offers an examination of how distinct genres of film (e.g., gangster, romantic comedy, science-fiction) function like religion. The concrete changes for the second edition include, for example, adding subcategories for some film genres and adding the genre of war movies. Most importantly, Lyden incorporates his increased appreciation for a cultural-studies approach that “actually pays attention to the diversity of ways in which viewers may interpret a film.” Unlike Part I, which unfortunately is not updated to include new and more diverse scholarship in religious studies, Part II seems to make use of a diversity of contemporary voices in film studies.

The conclusion of the book is new and confidently restates its assertion that examining films as one examines religion can help to more clearly “evaluate their power and the ways in which they influence us.”

The book is sure to benefit the religious studies classroom as it encourages the reader to consider deeply what makes a religion religious. Even more, it pushes one to examine possible religious aspects of the secular realm. The reader is helpfully cautioned against quick generalizations in favor of deep examination of specifics. (Geertz, with his claim that all religion is local, would be pleased.) Lyden's second edition of *Film as Religion* provides some insight into why “moviegoing” is increasing and “churchgoing” is decreasing.