Hollywood's End of Days: Visions of Biblical Apocalypse and the Transposition of a Secular Science Fiction Film Genre

Antonio Degouveia

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University of East Anglia

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Abstract

Amid the often complex and paradoxical relationship between Hollywood and American Christianity lies the dichotomy between the archaic and the futuristic, and the way in which biblical beliefs have been intertwined into the seemingly discordant realm of science fiction. Hollywood, as an institution that has often been regarded as pronouncedly secular, was once deemed at the opposite end of the cultural spectrum to American evangelical belief – in much the same way that science and religion are often identified as conflicting arenas of ideological latitude. My study lays emphasis to the fact that biblical allegory and religious cabal are now adopted by Hollywood on a frequent basis, and cinematic visions of apocalypse, incorporating ideas of biblical 'myth' and prophecy, are often framed within the machinations of science fiction.

What makes this development all the more intriguing is that, in effect, this represents an ideological inversion of what had not only been an expressly secular 20th century (sub)genre of science fiction cinema, but one which had often incorporated a denigration of religion as a whole. My key conceptual approach is based on close textual analyses of a body of contemporary apocalypse films that most effectively represents this ontological shift. As a cultural backdrop to post-9/11 America over the first decade of the 21st century, I examine the influence of 'premillennial Dispensationalism', or the form of evangelical belief that is intrinsically concerned with the biblical 'endtime', and thus with the future, and is 'hermeneutically hungry' for signs and prophecies that might signal the beginning of the end. Correspondingly, I draw on Hollywood's own accordant fascination with prophetical signs and codes and premonitions of apocalypse, and consider the socio-cultural intersection between premillennialist belief and post-9/11 social structures of trauma, paranoia, and neoconservatism. This thesis ultimately contends that, since the turn of the century, perceptions of Premillennialist endtime belief has become an integral aspect of Hollywood's apocalyptic vision, and this is something that informs a strong religious consciousness already at the heart of the American apocalyptic imagination.

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Introduction

On the 21st of August, 2014, during a news briefing at the Pentagon, America's top-ranked military officer, Joint Chief of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey, described the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State' as possessing an 'apocalyptic, "end of days" strategic vision', and declared that this eschatological ethos identified them as a group that could not be defeated unless the United States and a coalition of partners confronted it head-on.[1] This comment may have come as no real surprise to many political observers at the time, with General Dempsey attempting to underscore what is often perceived as the destructive and nihilistic nature of modern jihadist ideology. The term 'apocalyptic' now seems common within modern parlance when indicating times of global strife, disaster, and upheaval, and has invariably been utilised by the media, often appositely so, in describing much of the desperate and devastating environs today in parts of the Middle-East. The word 'apocalypse', of course, further retains a fixed biblical nexus and derivation. The term itself comes from the Greek, *apokálypsis*: meaning a 'lifting of the veil' or a 'revelation' – a disclosure of something previously hidden. Crucially, it is a word that has always retained *a* degree of biblical mystique in its connection to the final chapter of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation. Sometimes more ominously referred to as the Apocalypse of John, with its cryptic prophecies of doom and salvation, the Book of Revelation remains one of the Bible's true enigmas, and is from where the equally portentous term, 'Armageddon', originates. Though not always consciously acknowledged within tropes of contemporary, secular Western culture, the biblical source text of Revelation continues to infix a concomitant religious nuance to the term, 'apocalypse'.

Going back to the words of General Dempsey, the Book of Revelation is the seminal scripture from which this eschatological concept derived its Evangelical denotation as 'the end of days'. Sometimes also referred to as the 'endtime', these particular phrases emerge from doctrines of Premillennialist or Dispensationalist belief; that is to say, those segments of Evangelicalism that places biblical prophecies of apocalypse at the centre of their faith; and refers more literally to the premillennial perception of a time of 'tribulation' that will signal the end of the world as we know it. That the United States' top General might employ such a specifically evangelical term to depict the burgeoning threat of a Middle-Eastern jihadist sect illustrates perfectly the conceptual magnitude of biblical apocalypse that remains rooted within the American cultural consciousness (to say nothing of the metaphorical parallels this draws between American

[1] Report by Dan Lamothe and Karen DeYoung, 'Islamic State can't be beat without addressing Syrian side of border, top general says', *WashingtonPost.Com*, August 21, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/08/21/pentagon-leaves-door-open-to-strikes-in-syria-to-curb-islamic-state/> (retrieved, August 22, 2014).

Christianity and Islam). In a political context, this kind of Premillennialist rhetoric is nothing new. In 2006, during a nationally televised press conference, President George W. Bush was asked the serious question: 'Do you believe… that the war in Iraq and the rise of terrorism are signs of the apocalypse?'[2] This study, however, is less concerned with the ideological confrontation between Christianity and Islam than it is with the Dispensationalist discourse that underpins this socio-political deportment. In Premillennialist Dispensationalism, aspects of religiously ideological conflict and fundamentalist terrorism are interpolated as prominent signs of the endtime, wherein the expectation of Armageddon – as prophesized in the Book of Revelation – is regarded as always at hand and unnervingly imminent. In this understanding, the 'end of days' will be a defining epoch that will herald the Second Coming of Christ, whereupon only those who are adequately devout and righteous will be bestowed salvation from the horrors of the ensuing apocalypse.

Nonetheless, to many outside the United States, all this 'end times' rhetoric may seem like an overwhelmingly far-fetched millennialist fantasy worthy of Hollywood fiction, as envisaged in the recent *Left Behind* inspired U.S. television series, *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014), and lampooned in the 2013 film comedy, *This is The End* (Seth Rogen & Evan Goldberg). Importantly, Hollywood's visions of 'the end' have traditionally evaded its original biblical context, whereby 'apocalypse' has come to mean something more resoundingly scientific and secular. The tradition of modern apocalyptic cinema stemmed from the real nuclear doomsday nightmares of the Cold War, and this was the context within which Susan Sontag identified an aesthetic of destruction in 'The Imagination of Disaster'. Sontag saw contemporary science fiction films as largely rooted in 'historical anxiety' and the 'inconceivable terror' induced by the threat of nuclear Armageddon.[3] From this emerging sub-genre of apocalyptic science fiction films, Mick Broderick, in accordant response to Sontag's treatise, asserted that this apocalyptic terror later developed into the narrative horror of post-nuclear holocaust survival.[4] Thus, the potential demise of humanity, in fictional terms at least, was connected to our own self destructive nature rather than biblical prophecies of doom or anything to do with God. This, to many, had represented a secular shift in the way America, as signified by Hollywood at least, had come to view the ultimate end; no longer the preserve of divine providence, no longer the biblical Apocalypse of John.

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[2] Mathew Barrett Gross and Mel Gilles, *The Last Myth: What the Rise of Apocalyptic Thinking Tells Us About America* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2012), p. 10.

[3] Susan Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster', *Commentary Magazine*, October 1965, p. 42–48.

[4] Mick Broderick, 'Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster', *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 20, no.3 (November 1993).

This study, however, contends that the secular tradition of apocalypse in American cinema, since the turn of the millennium, has increasingly appropriated more biblical connotations concerning the end of the world. This is something that reached a pinnacle in the period of five years between 2007 and 2012 – on which I focus this thesis. Initially, this can be pinpointed to a shift within Hollywood that occurred towards the end of the 1990s, and that coincided with the surrounding millennial anxieties of the time. During this period, ideas of biblical prophecy and evangelical 'endtime' belief converged with existing millennial tensions and concerns about environmental degradation, and began to reformulate previous secular apocalyptic traditions. Going into the 21st century, and taking into account the changing socio-political climate after 9/11, the unexpected success of *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004) unveiled a previously untapped market for Hollywood with regards to interest in religious themes, and, at the same time, reminded Hollywood of the huge commercial potential of the estimated 30 million evangelical Christians in the United States.[5] While it is possible that Mel Gibson's film may have acted as a catalyst within Hollywood for a deeper engagement with religious subject matter, the unerring success of premillennialist endtime prophecy literature, famously espoused by the best-selling *Left Behind* (Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, 1995-2007) series of books, had already made evangelical beliefs highly marketable across various forms of media. Correspondingly, the subsequent cultural interest in apocalyptic themes may have been regarded by Hollywood as an ideal platform for dramatic biblical notions of Armageddon.

Indeed, Hollywood's dalliance with biblical notions of apocalypse towards the end of the 1990s at times appeared to configure precisely into the evangelical endtime narrative. Films like *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998), *End of Days* (Peter Hyams, 1999), and *The Omega Code* (Robert Marcarelli, 1999), and the apocalyptic scenarios therein, appeared to be pronouncedly accessing the surrounding Premillennialist rhetoric of the time. These and other films tapped into a ready-made apocalyptic mythology that had been perpetuated through the popularity of premillennialist literature and best-selling books like *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Hal Lindsey, 1970), which spawned follow-up titles such as *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (1972) and *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (1980). This was only the precursor to the hugely successful *Left Behind* book series, which sold more than sixty three million copies during the first decade of the new millennium.[6] The pervasive popularity of *Left Behind* sonorously articulated an inherent fascination with prophetic biblical doomsday scenarios, in which premillennialist concepts like 'the rapture': the proposed celestial phenomenon that will

[5] Boyd Farrow, 'Hollywood Missionaries', *New Statesman*, Vol. 134, 21 Nov 2005, p. 39.
[6] Gross, p. 10.

literally snatch believers up to heaven during the endtime, have entered into the everyday mainstream to become part of the fabric of America's mythological 'end of days'. In fact, a 2002 poll commissioned by *Time* magazine found that 59% of Americans believed that the apocalyptic events prophesized in the Book of Revelation would in some way come true.[7] Having moved beyond the scriptural rhetoric of millennialist groups and evangelical fundamentalists, 'an expectation of an apocalypse is not an anomaly in American culture but a view held by the majority.'[8]

However, this cultural interplay between Hollywood and Dispensationalist discourse only partly explains why the idea of biblical apocalypse seems to be so firmly entrenched within the American psyche. Firstly, it is indisputable that America remains a comparatively fervent Christian nation, in which evangelically espoused ideas of the biblical Armageddon appear to be disseminated effortlessly into the wider cultural troposphere. Secondly, it is important to set this apocalyptic consciousness within both a cultural and historical context, especially when lining it up alongside Hollywood's own cinematic representations of the end of the world. In the 1980s, when dystopian conceptions of the impending millennium were beginning to gather pace, fictional or otherwise, a 1984 poll conducted by public opinion analyst, Daniel Yankelovich, found that approximately 40% of a sample population of Americans concurred with the assertion that, 'when the Bible predicts that the earth will be destroyed by fire, it's telling us that a nuclear war is inevitable.'[9] Whether the framework was sacred or secular, it seemed, a substantial number of Americans were ready to accept that the prophesized endtime was imminent. Hence, for many Americans, a period of surmounting Cold War tension had only acted as the looming harbinger of a biblical apocalypse.

In a comprehensively Christian nation, in which the overarching influence of the Bible – in both its literal and 'deciphered' interpretations – is not to be underestimated, this may come as no surprise to some. In America, more so than any other Christian based culture, the concept of the end of the world has been prevailingly shaped from eschatological prophecies – drawn from Revelation, Daniel, and other Christian and Jewish apocalyptic texts.[10] But, crucially, within a cultural context, it has also undoubtedly been shaped by Hollywood. With the turn of the millennium fast approaching, this was a time when an apocalyptic outlook became culturally

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[7] Nancy Gibbs, 'Apocalypse Now', *Time*, July 1, 2002 <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101020701/story.html> (accessed, June 10, 2015).
[8] Ibid.
[9] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 1.
[10] Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 1.

prevalent, and there seemed to be a degree of confluence developing between a traditionally secular Hollywood and evangelical premillennialist beliefs. These two traditionally opposed institutions, who had customarily been at opposite ends of the political spectrum, had long shared a common preoccupation with narratives about the end of the world; the discernable difference was that Hollywood's apocalyptic narratives were usually based on science and self-destruction whereas evangelical narratives were based on divine providence and spiritual redemption. In the eschatological atmosphere of the late nineties, while enigmatic elements of biblical prophecy may have seemed unavoidable for Hollywood – or even perhaps too good to miss – what was imperceptible, at the time, was the cultural impact this was to have once America had safely traversed into the new millennium. What is more, the disastrous events of the early 21st century, in which the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 were to have unalterable consequences for the socio-political environs of the U.S., would furthermore play a vital role in shaping the religious scope and magnitude of the film industry – or at least the apocalyptic parameters within which it would operate.

Hollywood and Religion

Millennial doom or not, the mid-to-late nineties marked a key period of religious re-venture for Hollywood. Before this, from the mid-sixties onwards, Hollywood had started to exhibit a level of 'individualist' alienation from traditional modes of American religious belief. In their comprehensive study of the American film industry, *Hollywood's America*, Stephen Powers, David J. Rothman, and Stanley Rothman, posited that the 'Hollywood elite' maintained a highly critical view of American Christianity, which at best retained a degree of indifference, but overall encompassed a general disdain for religious institutions altogether.[11] Indeed, along with film historians such as Stephen Prince, they argued that Hollywood, from this point, remained 'disproportionately anti-Establishment in its social and political views' throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.[12] Hollywood screenwriter, Coleman Luck, speaking in *Christianity Today* in 1998, stated:

> Christianity is to some degree feared in Hollywood. The only forms of Christianity Hollywood understands are Catholicism and right-wing conservative politics dressed in religious terminology. Also, there is a large Jewish community in Hollywood, and Christians don't have a spotless record when it comes to anti-Semitism. These Jewish filmmakers have understandable reasons to be afraid of institutionalized Christianity. This fear influences the attitudes of Hollywood.[13]

[11] Stephen Powers, David J. Rothman, and Stanley Rothman, 'The New Hollywood Elite: A Profile' in *Hollywood's America*: *Social and Political Themes in Motion Pictures* (Oxford: Westview, 1996), p. 77.
[12] Ibid., p. 46.
[13] 'Why Hollywood Doesn't Like You', *Christianity Today*; Vol. 42, Issue 9, 1998, p. 64.

Perhaps what was more salient, at the time, was that this article – within a popular Christian periodical – was entitled: 'Why Hollywood Doesn't Like You'. In effect, Hollywood, which, as Coleman Luck had highlighted, consisted of a substantially Jewish community, had become an oasis of secular seclusion within a pervasively Christian nation. This evolved during the 1970s and 1980s, when an increasingly 'liberal' film industry presided over a slide in positive religious perceptions, or substituted Christianity with forms of fantasy-spirituality, which often incorporated tenets of Eastern philosophy and minority religions. R. Albert Mohler comments that, 'In the years since 1977, Americans have become primary consumers of Eastern philosophies and ancient mythologies – dumbed down for popular consumption and dressed up for a media age.'[14] For Mohler, the year 1977 is notable for the huge commercial success and popularity of George Lucas's *Star Wars*, with the concept of 'the force' being a noted example of what he perceives as subversive notions of secular spirituality. From the advent of *Star Wars*, Mohler charts a decline in media-related forms of conventional faith, in which he adds that, 'conspicuously absent from Mr Lucas's cosmology is anything connected to biblical Christianity.'[15] Mohler goes on to state that interest in 'pagan mythologies' may have peaked in the 1980s with Joseph Campbell's 'monomythic' approach to global folklore, and argues that Campbell, through books and a television series, 'introduced a generation of secularized and confused Americans to the world of ancient and modern myths.'[16] Again, isolating the same key year as Mohler, Peter Krämer notes that many of the most successful films between 1977 and 1986 had, in part, instituted a drive towards bringing 'spirituality and religion back to the centre of American film culture'.[17] However, as Mohler is keen to observe, this often had little to do with established tenets of Christianity, centred deep, as it was, within 'the guise of fantasy and science fiction.'[18] Otherwise, Christian themes in Hollywood film had been largely sublimated by satanic tales of demonic possession and devil worship (*Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen* etc.). Even here, it is only *The Exorcist* (Wiliam Friedkin, 1973) – where a heroic Catholic priest sacrifices himself to save a girl's soul – that evades any scathing critique or vilification of religion. In comparison, *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) portrayed Christian institutions as powerless in the face of supernatural evil and *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976) actually depicted the Catholic Church as complicit with the nefarious aspirations of the Antichrist.

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[14] Albert Mohler, quoted from 'The Mythology of *Star Wars*: The Faith versus the Force', in, John C. McDowell, *The Gospel According to Star Wars: Faith, Hope, and The Force* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 17.
[15] Ibid., p. 17.
[16] Albert Mohler, 'The Mythology of *Star Wars*: The Faith versus the Force', *AlbertMohler.Com*, May 25 2005
[17] Peter Krämer, *The New Hollywood: From Bonnie and Clyde to Star Wars* (London: Wallflower, 2005), p. 101.
[18] Ibid., p. 101.

Heading into the nineties, and hurtling towards a new millennium, pre-existing apocalyptic anxieties began to surface throughout American popular culture. Millennial misgivings about potential global catastrophe, moreover, began to take explicit narrative form within nineties American cinema. During this period, a millennial fervour of 'apocalyptic dread' manifested itself in films such as *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, 1995), *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996), *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, 1997), *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998), *Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, 1998), *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998), *The Matrix* (Andy & Lana Wachowski, 1999), *The Omega Code* (Robert Marcarelli, 1999), and *End of Days* (Peter Hyams, 1999). Terry Gilliam enigmatically accessed the cinematic potential of millennial dread to be found in eschatological biblical texts, even though, within this body of films, *Twelve Monkeys* is the only film that proposes our impending doom is effected by something deemed less than supernatural or, at least, not of this world. As the 1990s gathered pace, *Twelve Monkeys* kick-started an increasing concern with prophecies of Armageddon in Hollywood. Although other apocalyptic science fiction films like *The Matrix*, *Godzilla*, and *Deep Impact* had touched upon foretold notions of global catastrophe near the end of the 20th century, *Twelve Monkeys* had earlier rooted this idea within a specific biblical context. In the same year that *Left Behind* tapped a reservoir of apocalyptic fascination when, like Gilliam, it gleaned its own interpretation of the world's end from cryptic codes found within the Book of Revelation, Gilliam's film propagated an intriguing blend of biblical prophecy and apocalyptic science-fiction fantasy. In this technological time-travel fable, Gilliam proposed the idea that various ancient prophesiers of doom were, in fact, time-travellers lost in the wrong historic period (here, time travel 'ain't an exact science') and who were merely warning of the global catastrophe that they had witnessed in the future they had come from. In *Twelve Monkeys*, Gilliam affirms his own vision of a doomsday prophecy and, even though, in his typically dystopian brand of 'sci-fi fantasy', humankind is the instrument of its own demise, Gilliam perceptibly borrows from the Bible's most mysterious and apocalyptic text. In the Book of Revelation, there are brought forth 'seven vials', each containing death, disease, and destruction and 'seven angels' appear, who 'pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth' (Revelation 16:1). With similar apocalyptic zeal, *Twelve Monkey*'s glass vials contain strains of a biological man-made virus that effectively wipes out 99% of humanity, and it is an unhinged laboratory assistant – described at one stage as an 'apocalypse nut' – who takes it upon himself to play the role of angel deliverer. Also, earlier in the film, the foreboding auspices of biblical apocalyptic prophecy had already been laid out. During a lecture on 'Madness and Apocalyptic Visions', amid slide-show depictions of medieval purgatory and damnation, Dr Kathryn Railly

(Madeleine Stowe) quotes conspicuously from the Book of Revelation; '…and one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels, seven vials full of the wrath of God'. It is perhaps with more than a note of biblical symbolism that Gilliam transfers this scriptural language to the title of his film, and appropriates the same numerical nomenclature as the Book of Revelation – four beasts… seven angels… Twelve Monkeys – a cryptographic signal of the film's apocalyptic portent. 'We always need a bogeyman, we always need the end of the world,' says Gilliam, 'I think it's the problem of being in a Christian society. It's based on it. If you don't have the end of the world, you don't get heaven and eternity.'[19] Of course, Gilliam's comments specifically reflect the widespread prominence of biblical apocalypse and its eschatological interpretation within American Protestant religion and society, whereas Catholicism, which is often perceived by it European Otherness, and which represents the dichotomy between the Old World and the New, has invariably downplayed the biblical importance of the Book of Revelation – a text that has often been transliterated by American Evangelicals in order to demonise the Catholic Church. In contrast to the Premillennialist biblical belief from which Hollywood and Gilliam take their cue, there does not appear to be the same deleterious appetite for 'the end of the world' within the Catholic faith and many Christian communities outside the United States.

'Born Again' Hollywood

Now a decade into the new millennium, it seems that evangelical doctrines have become a far more pervasive feature in Hollywood's apocalyptic vision, and the fact that the traditionally opposing factions of Hollywood and religion are now confluent in a more deterministic view of the world's end is worthy of further examination. Although the extinction of humanity and ideas of determinism had featured previously in science fiction films, this was more a brand of scientific determinism, invariably wrapped up within time-travel conundrums (e.g. *The Terminator* [James Cameron, 1984], and *Twelve Monkeys*). An important distinction, here, has to be made between scientific determinism and religious fatalism: the concept that there is a prophetical or pre-determined order to the universe or what might be termed 'God's plan'. Hollywood's new willingness to explore biblical and eschatological themes frames a key narrative element whereby fundamental meaning is often searched for within fatalistic modes of perception. For Daniel Wojcik, fatalistic beliefs in American culture 'provide a framework for interpreting events otherwise considered to be haphazard, uncontrollable, or incomprehensible, reducing uncertainty and offering a sense of control for situations in which personal action is

[19] Terry Gilliam interviewed in 'The End is Near as Hollywood Does the Apocalypse', *Today.Msnbc.Msn.Com* <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/33882514/ns/today-entertainment/>

believed to be futile.'[20] This can be described in terms of the 'appeal of apocalypticism', in which the biblical understanding of the 'end of the world' can provide an inclusive structure of meaning; an explanation for otherwise enigmatic and inexplicable events. Films such as M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs* (2002), and Alex Proyas's *Knowing* (2009), provide key examples of a new religious tone in Hollywood's apocalypse films, in which matters worthy of theological debate are contemplated in depth; such as the question of randomness versus determinism in the Universe, for one. In this context, such complex questions of spiritual stratification act as a fundamental reconnoiter of the science versus religion dichotomy, a polemical discourse that had largely been ignored or discounted by Hollywood until the turn of the new millennium.

So what has changed? Religious ideals have unquestionably been an important component within American society and politics, and have been habitually regarded as a necessary discourse for 'the moral development of the nation.'[21] The medium of film has also been used to disseminate religious values, as clearly illustrated in the example of Moody Bible Institute (MBI) creationist science films, which were regularly shown on U.S. military bases in the 1940s and 1950s. These films were commissioned by military leaders who believed that religious instruction and its 'intrinsic' relation to democratic ideals would enhance the character development of their troops: as Eric Crouse explains, 'by offering a "commonsense" interpretation of the world, evangelicals from MBI successfully promoted Christianity to countless servicemen under the auspices of the federal government.'[22] The Reverend Bob Richards, a staunch advocate of evangelical values, maintains that the core ethics of American Christianity were a key fundament in America's post-war period of economic boom. Affectionately known as 'the vaulting vicar', after his gold medal winning pole vault triumphs at the 1952 and 1956 Olympics, Richards declares, 'You don't understand the American psyche unless you realise that capitalism and religion are together.'[23] As Hollywood is increasingly an industry centred round profit margins, is this idea starting to ring true of the film business itself?

Hollywood movie analyst, Scott Mantz, believes that studios are perhaps realising that films with messages of faith are not necessarily limited to niche audiences. According to Mantz,

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[20] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 135.

[21] Eric Crouse, 'Twentieth Century American Culture and the Persistence of Religion', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Volume 29, issue 1, 1999, pp. 123-132.

[22] Crouse, pp. 123-132.

[23] Bob Richards interviewed in 'One Nation Under God', *American Dream* documentary series - part 3, BBC 2, Dec 14 2010.

'Religious-themed movies do well with big stars in front of or behind the camera.'[24] The resounding economic success of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* might well testify to this view; a film that became the highest grossing subtitled film in U.S. history, made on a purported budget of 30 million dollars and taking more than 600 million dollars worldwide. It has been noted that, in light of Gibson's success, 'some major studios saw there was money to be made by reaching out to religious audiences and producing more films with religious themes.'[25] Indeed, one could easily conclude that the success of *The Passion of the Christ* has been a key catalyst for a deeper engagement with religious themes within Hollywood. 'Mel Gibson did us a service,' says Bob Waliszewski, a media specialist with Focus on the Family, one of thirty evangelical groups invited to see an early trailer for *The Chronicles of Narnia*: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Andrew Adamson, 2005): 'Hollywood said, 'I thought the church was dead. I didn't think people cared. Is it possible that we don't know what's happening in state after state?' And the answer is a resounding "yes".'[26] Ben Wilson, of the Church of England communications office, contends that, 'any artistic work that sensitively explores the stories of the Bible will be welcomed by many Christians, but clearly the extent to which any particular film helps to develop an individual's faith will depend on the specific work and the specific viewer.'[27] As for a wholly evangelical viewpoint, speaking on behalf of Christian film campaign group, His Only Son for Us, Brittany Hardy comments that, 'though they still seem to have some way to go, it seems that Hollywood studios may be realising that biblically themed movies that herald justice, compassion and perseverance appeal to audiences.'[28] In the United States, this should come as no real surprise, after all, as Boyd Farrow points out, '70% of consumers of mainstream films in America consider themselves either quite or very religious – it is clear that simply affirming Christian values in non-religious films can only help commercially.'[29]

Farrow also cites the aforementioned *The Chronicles of Narnia* – a clear Christ allegory (written intentionally so by C.S. Lewis, who is lauded by many evangelicals) – as a prime example of a 'resurrection of Christian conservatism in the American mainstream', especially, 'at a time when Hollywood studios are suffering a prolonged slide in admissions.'[30] Farrow

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[24] Scott Bowles, '*The Book of Eli* and Other Films: Hollywood Gets Religion', *USA Today*, January 14 2010.
[25] Bill Berkowitz, 'Religion-US: Will *The Road* be a Tool for Evangelism?', IPSNorthAmerica.Net, October 30 2011.
<http://www.ipsnews.net/2009/11/religion-us-will-the-road-be-a-tool-for-evangelism/>
[26] Boyd Farrow, 'Hollywood Missionaries', *New Statesman*, Vol. 134, Issue 4767, Nov 21 2005, p. 39.
[27] Anne Billson, 'The Return of Religious Films', TheGuardian.Com, March 11 2010.
<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/mar/11/return-of-religious-films-legion>
[28] Ibid.
[29] Farrow, p. 39.
[30] Ibid., p. 38.

explains how ‘Disney had previously shied away from Narnia, partly because, like other secular studios, it thought Christian symbolism would scare off audiences.’[31] However, the unprecedented and unexpected success of Mel Gibson’s *Passion of the Christ*, ‘reminded Hollywood of the huge commercial potential of the estimated 30 million evangelical and fundamentalist Christians in the United States.’[32] Deborah Caldwell maintains that a major factor for the successful marketing of *The Passion of the Christ* among evangelicals, despite what would be seen as some controversial elements regarding its subject matter, was the strategic incorporation of religious groups, particularly where, in the past, evangelicals had felt generally excluded from Hollywood, especially with regard to their values being misrepresented or even ‘lampooned’ by the media.[33] Indeed, as Kirsten Moana Thompson decrees, *The Passion of the Christ*, ‘an eschatological tale of the first order… would surely have withered on the vine, had it not been for the droves of religious fundamentalists who worshipped at this movie’s altar.’[34] This would have no doubt instructed Hollywood studios on the importance of bringing Christian audiences on side, while, crucially, at the same time allowing scope for previously marginalised Christian-produced media to break from its market niche and begin to influence American popular mainstream culture.[35]

Analysts estimate that a film that appeals directly to American Christians, can earn an extra $50 million at the box office, and sell an additional five million DVDs on the back of church endorsements alone.[36] As for the potential staying-power of movies with religious themes and biblical influence, Scott Mantz exclaims, ‘I don't know how long it will last. I think it's cyclical. But considering the times we live in, people are looking for something to believe in.’[37] However, at the same time, Mantz maintains, ‘I wouldn't give Hollywood too much credit for finding religion… when they're not making money off it, they'll lose it again.’[38] Catherine von Ruhland, a film reviewer for *Third Way* (a British magazine offering ‘Christian comment on culture’) holds the perspective that, ‘explicitly religious-themed horror movies have proliferated in times of global crisis and cultural unease.’[39] In the United States, it seems that this is a precept that has gone hand-in-hand with the rise of evangelicalism, which has coincided with Hollywood’s recent triumvirate mix of religion, apocalypse, and science fiction. Perhaps there is some truth in Anne Billson’s remark that ‘biblical themes have only ever been one global

[31] Farrow, p. 38.
[32] Ibid., p. 38.
[33] Caldwell, p. 215.
[34] Thompson, p. 9.
[35] Ibid., p. 9.
[36] Ibid., p. 38.
[37] Bowles
[38] Ibid.
[39] Billson

crisis away'.[40] The apocalyptic context that was cemented by the events of September 11, 2001, and which would irrevocably shape both the political and media landscape in the first decade of the new millennium, cannot be overstated. The world as we knew it, in many respects, perhaps did end on that fateful date. For many inside the U.S., a lingering feeling of post-millennial doom was compounded by a severely faltering economy that would, by the end of the decade, jolt the country into a bleak recession. If this was not bad enough, the shadow of millennial Armageddon would surely have seemed like a reality for some, as, in 2005, Hurricane Katrina (one of the five deadliest Hurricanes in U.S. history) laid waste to vast swathes along the Gulf Coast and New Orleans, creating a national crisis of biblical proportion. An estimated 1,833 people died during the devastation and the severe flooding that followed, as millions of others were left homeless and in total disarray. This was the dark climate of post-millennial portent that, over the first decade of the 21st century, would act as the backdrop to Hollywood's burgeoning visions of apocalyptic disaster.

In terms of apocalyptic cinema, the marketing of movies to Christian groups is nothing new. Since the 1970s, 'beneath the radar of the average filmgoer', there has been a 'steady trickle' of low-budget apocalypse horrors, funded by Christian-backed production companies and often distributed through churches and evangelical missions. This was epitomised by Donald W. Thompson's Premillennialist 'Rapture' trilogy; *A Thief in the Night* (1972), *A Distant Thunder* (1978), and *Image of the Beast* (1981); which marked a turning point in terms of the propagation of Dispensationalist doctrine through modern film entertainment. Anne Billson avers that, 'in the 1990s, that trickle became a flood, though the films were still preaching to the American Bible belt.'[41] By this time, however, evangelical cinema had adopted a new and more professional approach, often employing established actors to play major roles in films with more elevated production values. Nonetheless, the cinematic mission was invariably the same, with films like *The Omega Code* (Robert Marcarelli, 1999) and its sequel, *Megiddo: The Omega Code 2* (Brian Trenchard Smith, 2001), along with *Left Behind*: *The Movie* (Vic Sarin, 2000), operated to underscore the Evangelical message of millennial doom that was pertinent to the period. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Hollywood had tried its hand at a couple biblical fantasy horror films with *The Seventh Sign* (Carl Schultz, 1988) and *The Rapture* (Michael Tolkin, 1991) – in which the rhetorical question is posed, 'Who forgives God?' However, with the turn of the millennium fast approaching, 'Hollywood joined the end times party'[42] with a timely plethora of biblically inspired horror films for the year 1999. In Peter Hyams' *End of*

[40] Billson
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

Days, Arnold Schwarzenegger played an ex-cop attempting to foil the Devil's millennial designs on the planet while at the same time regaining his lost faith in God. Humanity gets entangled in the fallout of an angelic civil war in *The Prophecy* (Gregory Widen); 'clearly an influence on the angel versus angel deathmatch-in-the-desert of *Legion*';[43] and Roman Polanski's *The Ninth Gate*, sees Johnny Depp searching for satanic prophecy in pursuit of immortality.

Nonetheless, once the end of human civilization has been assured, applying Evangelical convention to mainstream Hollywood's 'post-apocalyptic' visions – a dystopian setting traditionally imbedded within secular science fiction – might provide obvious challenges, particularly in terms of the lack of scope for supernatural intervention. Post-apocalyptic science fiction cinema may always retain a foremost association with the late 20th century, but in the new millennium, one might assume a film like *The Road*, in depicting a characteristically bleak, desolate, and violent post-apocalyptic wasteland, might similarly be seen to work against any affirmation of God's divine power on Earth. Not according to A. Larry Ross, who contests that *The Road* presents 'a unique entry point for those in the faith community to share the hope of the Gospel in a hopeless world', adding that the film provides a useful juncture for church leaders to 'participate in a robust spiritual discussion'.[44] To this end, Ross's company had been instrumental in organising 'advance screenings for church leaders nationwide'. Moreover, as was reported by Entertainment Weekly, an exclusive website featuring 'free sermons and discussion guides' was included as part of the film's evangelical induction, as well as 'a special trailer with extra scenes underscoring the film's moral message.'[45] More cynically, Rob Boston of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, said that he was not surprised to hear about Dimension Films' plans to market *The Road* to a Christian audience: 'They would pitch *Saw V* to a Christian audience if they thought they could make money. The studios want as many people as possible to see any film.'[46] Looking at the evangelical perspective, Boston adds: 'Clearly the Religious Right wants to use the medium of film to spread its message of how society and culture should be ordered, they want to go back to the days when movies were wholesome and religion was never portrayed in a negative light. The Religious Right used to rage against Hollywood; now they want to co-opt it.'[47]

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[43] Billson
[44] Berkowitz
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

In a more pragmatic sense, the reason why Dimension Films felt the incorporation of a Christian media company was necessary in the first place remains key in ascertaining Hollywood's eschatological recourse; or a new dimensional premise of cinematic apocalypse. Citing the enormous commercial popularity of religious apocalyptic fiction propagated largely by the *Left Behind* series, David Kirkpatrick, in resonance with A. Larry Ross's evangelical marketing of *The Road*, claims that 'the culture war fits into pre-millennialists' expectation of the end of history – the decline of civilization, the breakdown of morality, a general breakdown of order. The warrior Jesus returns to set everything right again.'[48] Although the trends that lead to the idea of a 'culture war' are rooted in the turmoil of the 1960s, the term itself first began to appear in the late 1980s and was soon thereafter ratified by James Davison Hunter in his book, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991). The term, 'culture war' is largely deemed to represent a symbolic fight for 'the soul of America'; the purported cultural conflict between traditionalist conservative (and Evangelical) values and those considered liberal or progressive. This might appear particularly pertinent in light of the divisive and often vitriolic climate that defined the 2016 presidential campaign between Clinton and Trump, and which appeared to precisely outline the acrid and discordant binary socio-politics of the culture war in question. Since the mid-to-late 1960s, Hollywood has regularly been regarded, in both an artistic and political sense, as a chief exponent of the liberal Left, often much to the chagrin of the Religious Right. Configuring this to a further degree, Kirsten Moana Thompson identifies a new front within the proposed and ongoing culture war, and, compounding Kirkpatrick's idea of a 'warrior Jesus' within a pre-told socio-historical narrative, puts forward the notion that Christian media's representational strategies have 'made Jesus the new action hero.'[49] Placing this idea specifically within a Hollywood context, films like *Constantine*, *The Book of Eli*, *Solomon Kane*, *Legion*, and *Priest* offer examples of films with explicit religious and apocalyptic frameworks, that portray a warrior Jesus/messiah figure; a religious superhero that diligently wages battle on behalf of a righteous God (or rather against 'him' in *Legion*), and this will be the focus of one of the case study chapters within this study. Thompson adds: 'Just as Christian Media has appropriated the generic conventions of horror, the action film, and science fiction, so Hollywood has found itself turning to theological subject matter, and this reorientation also underscores the generic hybridity of apocalyptic dread.'[50]

[48] David Kirkpatrick, 'The Return of the Warrior Jesus', *New York Times*, 5 April 2004.
[49] Thompson, p. 10.
[50] Ibid., p. 11.

Evangelicalism within Hollywood

Internally, Hollywood has undergone its own Christian revolution, of sorts, and this is epitomised by the institution of Act One, a Hollywood program for aspiring Christian screenwriters. Founded by former nun, Barbara Nicolosi, Christian creativity is now often called upon to provide scripts for studios seeking spiritual themed stories. Nicolosi explains the reasons for the program's popularity as partly spiritual and partly economic: 'The movie industry remains affected by post-9/11 national anxiety, and now studio heads want to make movies that "mean something." At the same time, it's well aware of what's known around town as "Passion dollars" – the previously untapped religious audience revealed by Mel Gibson's movie success.'[51] Interestingly, the degree to which Hollywood has overturned its aversion to religion is underscored when Nicolosi reminisces about the nineties. According to Nicolosi, Christians in the film industry seemed almost akin to witch-hunted communists in fifties Hollywood, as she recalls the time CNN requested an interview, but found she could not get any of her faculty to appear on air for fear of outing themselves and losing their jobs: 'Back then people used to joke that it was a sin in Hollywood to admit you went to church.'[52] But after 9/11, everything changed, and studios began to request films that were more spiritual and sombre in tone: 'Act One faculty started coming out of the closet', and, as Nicolosi puts it, in a wholly positive, albeit ironic sense, being 'Christian is the new gay.'[53] Now the Christians in Hollywood are the 'cinematic wing' of what sociologist Alan Wolfe calls 'the opening of the evangelical mind – a cultural renaissance among conservative Christians.'[54] Hanna Rosin informs us that 'Christians can now choose from among a dozen Hollywood prayer groups, including the Hollywood Prayer Network, dedicated to building 'an army of talented professionals to change Hollywood from the inside out.'[55] Some may be forgiven for assuming that an increasing Christian influence in Hollywood might mean a reduction in violent horror/thriller films, replaced with an influx of wholesome family movies with spiritual, uplifting themes (for example), and while many may indeed advocate this direction, there are a significant number of directors who are content with depicting darker evangelical renditions of apocalyptic portent. One of those is Scott Derrickson, a graduate of Biola; an evangelical university based in Los Angeles; and director of such (gothic) horrors as *Hellraiser: Inferno* (2000) and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), as well as his perilously apocalyptic version of a classic fifties science-fiction film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008). Derrickson has

[51] Hanna Rosin, 'Can Jesus Save Hollywood?', *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 296, Issue 5, Dec 2005, pp.161-162.
[52] Ibid., p. 164.
[53] Ibid., p. 162.
[54] Ibid., p. 165.
[55] Ibid., p. 166.

previously drawn criticism from Christian web-sites for 'dwelling in the darkness', but vehemently defends horror movies as the genre that 'deals most directly with good and evil', proclaiming that it 'not only allows but also often demands a religious or spiritual point of view.'[56] By 2005, directly after the release of Derrickson's *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, which itself grossed over $140 million world-wide, Hanna Rosin observed that 'all over Hollywood, spirits and angels were rising up on billboards touting the new fall TV season: *Ghost Whisperer*, *Medium*, *Three Wishes*. And while you can't quite call it Christianity, it's a clear sign that Hollywood is enthralled with the realm beyond.'[57] This having been said, biblical metaphor and mythology has, right back from the mid-twentieth century onwards, been a staple aspect of Hollywood science fiction, albeit in a manner that has been largely averse to the propagation of religious ideology, and sometimes, in spite of it. Nonetheless, secular audiences of Hollywood science fiction have, for a long time, been 'fed a steady diet of Christian symbolism',[58] whether it be the messianic Neo who, after a figurative resurrection, saves humanity from technological purgatory in *The Matrix* (Andy & Lana Wachowski, 1999), or Harry Potter, who equally emerges as humankind's ultimate redeemer; playing the metaphorical Christ figure to Voldemort's symbolic Satan (or Antichrist) in a stupendous battle that approaches biblical Armageddon in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* (David Yates, 2011). In any instance, Anne Billson goes as far to say, 'who needs explicit religious themes when they've been sneaking on to our screens in disguise all along?'[59]

Dispensationalism and the Evangelical Apocalypse

A steadily growing concept at the heart of much Christian belief in America and a thriving business to boot, Evangelicalism has, for a long time, been immersed in its own 'doom industry' of films and literature, as believers joyously look forward to the end of the world and their impending salvation. Kirsten Moana Thompson comments that 'recent apocalypticism emerges out of the increased political and cultural influence of Christian fundamentalism in the last thirty years.'[60] This far-reaching cultural influence was, in part, initiated through the success of Hal Lyndsey's 1970s best-selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which instituted a seemingly boundless interest for biblical 'end time' prophecy, and brought the biblical apocalypse to a much wider and secular audience. Lyndsey's book, which had sold

[56] Rosin, p. 166.
[57] Ibid., p. 164.
[58] Billson
[59] Ibid.
[60] Thompson, p. 24.

more than 28 million copies by 1990,[61] propagated a form of pre-millennialist prophecy belief, commonly referred to as Dispensationalism, which focused on key passages from the Book of Revelation, as well as the Book of Daniel and Ezekiel. Lyndsey predicted the Second Coming of Christ that would occur at the end of history and would instigate a time of tribulation on earth for all non-believers. The faithful, on the other hand, will be rescued from the ravages of the planet and physically rise up to heaven in a supernatural event known as 'The Rapture'. Christ will then battle with the Antichrist, who has deceived the unrighteous into following his rule on Earth, before God's divine army vanquishes the forces of darkness in the final battle of Armageddon. Lyndsey originally suggested the possibility that these climactic events might play out in the 1980s, which he interpreted as one generation from the foundation of modern Israel in 1948, a pivotal event in most conservative evangelical schools of eschatological thought. Lyndsey went on to write several sequels; along with *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* and *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, were further doom-dripping titles like *The Road to Holocaust* (1990), *The Apocalypse Code* (1997), *Planet Earth: The Final Chapter* (1999), and, much more recently, an eschatological investigation into extremist Islam, with the topically titled, *The Everlasting Hatred: The Roots of Jihad* (2011).

Within all of Lindsey's premillennialist literature is the central idea of The Rapture, along with the somewhat paradoxical notion of both apocalypse and salvation at Christ's divine return. These concepts were developed and further established in the Evangelical and American popular Imagination by the *Left Behind* series of books. Even after the best-selling sensation of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the astounding success of *Left Behind* still managed to take everyone by surprise, eclipsing Lyndsey's book as the fastest selling Christian series ever.[62] Made into several minor-production movies, the *Left Behind* mythos is a concept that is readily accessible on-line with a host of inter-related web-sites and forums, and even deals with the dilemma of leaving loved ones behind on Earth, or how one should cope if a family member is suddenly 'raptured'. With such wide-scale proliferation through various modes of media, the *Left Behind* series went on to generate millions of dollars in spin-off sales and merchandise; including *Left Behind: The Game* – in which competing players attempt to bring about the rapture and defeat the Antichrist by answering Bible trivia and performing Tribulation tasks.[63] Amy Johnson Frykholm claims that, for some evangelicals, *Left Behind* came to represent 'a

[61] Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, (Harvard University Press, 1992).
[62] Amy Johnson Frykholm, 'The Gender Dynamics of the *Left Behind* Series', in, Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (ed.), *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (London: University of California Press, 2005), p.270
[63] Lynn Schofield Clark's account of *Left Behind: The Game*, in *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 44.

long-deserved cultural presence' within the U.S.[64] But for academics and scholars of American religion alike, '*Left Behind* is evidence that evangelicalism should no longer be described as a subculture, but perhaps as a cultural dominant.'[65] Frykholm contends that,'the next evangelical blockbuster will find a well-trodden path to Barnes & Noble, and marketers and publishers will be on the lookout for the next *Left Behind*. Evangelicalism has become good business.'[66] Might it be that Hollywood has come to recognise this fact also? Evangelical themes have become highly marketable now through a variety of different media. By the same token, Hollywood's increased interest in apocalyptic themes creates an ideal platform for dramatic evangelical notions of apocalypse. All this suggests that the proliferation of modern 'end time' prophecy in resoundingly successful books like *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and the *Left Behind* series, has helped to shape an irremediable vision of apocalypse within the American cultural psyche, and this is something that is now being played out in Hollywood's own biblically inspired doomsday scenarios.

Neo-evangelicalism in Post 9/11 America

In the days directly following the attack on the World Trade Center, countless people commented that watching the devastating events of 9/11 and the horrifying collapse of the Twin Towers was like watching a disaster movie, simply 'because they had no other referent to fall back on in the face of such apocalyptic destruction.'[67] Hollywood Screenwriter, Lawrence Wright, commenting on the hyperreal nature of the tragedy, went as far to say that the events of 9/11 were 'cinematic in a kind of super-real way. It was too Hollywood.'[68] Correspondingly, in Premillennialist thinking, the events of 9/11 may have similarly induced a certain narrative interpretation and significance; understanding the tragedy as a definitive sign that marks an eschatological progression along a pre-told linear path. To many Dispensationalists, just like a Hollywood disaster movie, 9/11 was the playing out of something already written within a script. The evangelical apocalyptic imagination is centred on deriving eschatological meaning from past and current (and possibly future) world events, and the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001 was emphatically incorporated into millennial 'endtime' prophecy. For believers, such catastrophes are regarded as 'signs' of the 'tribulation' to come, and are key in formulating a deterministic understanding of the surrounding world. Kirsten Moana Thompson puts it thus: 'as a form of premillennial Dispensationalism, this form of Christianity is

[64] Frykholm, p. 279.
[65] Ibid., p. 279.
[66] Ibid., p .279.
[67] Wheeler Winston Dixon (ed.), *Film and Television After 9/11*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), p. 9.
[68] Ibid., p. 9.

intrinsically concerned with the end-time, and thus with the future, and it is hermeneutically hungry for signs and prophecies that might signal the beginning of the end.'[69] Daniel Wojcik adds that 'within this framework of ultimate control in divine hands, suffering, death, and tragedies are not cruel or absurd occurrences in an insensitive universe but have a larger, symbolic meaning as part of a transcendent order.'[70] As well as major global disasters, key political developments and military conflicts are likewise perceived as part of a linear historic process towards prophecy fulfilment, in which current events in the Middle-East, especially those involving the continuing onslaught of the Islamic State group (ideologically and otherwise), will undoubtedly attain special Premillennialist significance and implication. Daniel Wojcik exclaims that, in light of heightened new anxieties, including ecological angst and the threat of Fundamentalist terrorism, American apocalyptic beliefs are being reformulated to the point where 'new endtime traditions' are now taking precedence.[71] The threat of nuclear annihilation, once the great apocalyptic prospect of Premillennialist Dispensationalism, is now an eschatological anxiety of the past.

Wheeler Winston Dixon talks of the 'bleak personal loss, paranoia, and political cynicism' that took hold after 9/11 – that changed the American cultural landscape forever.[72] Even before 9/11, at the start of the millennium, America seemed to be spiralling towards political and societal meltdown, as the century began in less than auspicious terms with a presidency affirmed under 'a cloud of doubt and dissention'[73] as George W. Bush finally took office after a controversially close election. After the shock and trauma of 9/11, the U.S. found itself on the brink of another Gulf War. What was more, the seeds of a disastrous recession had begun to take root, as vast areas of business and industry went into steep decline and unemployment figures began to spike vigorously. By 2004, Dixon describes a nation seemingly in freefall: 'the dot-com crash has cost billions of dollars and thrown thousands of people out of work, pension funds have been looted, the national debt grows at an alarming rate, global warming is melting the polar ice caps, and television "news" channels broadcast an unremitting stream of propaganda that makes *1984* seem tame in comparison.'[74] As if this was not enough, the scourge of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 caused untold chaos and destruction along the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas, and laid waste to much of Louisiana, where the death tolls were highest. In amidst such bleak turmoil and destruction, prophecies of the 'end of days' undoubtedly haunt

[69] Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 24.
[70] Wojcik, p. 56.
[71] Ibid., p. 147.
[72] Dixon, p. 3.
[73] Ibid., p. 3.
[74] Ibid., p. 3.

the cultural consciousness where Dispensationalist doctrines might seem to befit such apocalyptic environs.

In the aftermath of 9/11, terms such as 'neo-evangelical', or, the 'New Christian Right' began to surface commonly throughout American media, and this was both compounded and epitomised by the reactionary political implementations and religious rhetoric of the nation's Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush. The propensity of the use of evangelical doctrine to interpret reality in terms of a Manichean ethos (that is to say, a dualistic coda of absolute good and absolute evil) was encapsulated in the evangelicalized language used by Bush directly after 9/11: 'This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil, but good will prevail.'[75] Later, in a State of the Union address in 2003, Bush declared that the nation must 'confound the designs of evil men' and talked of this in terms of 'our calling' as 'a blessed country'.[76] In a speech in 2002, Bush, with pseudo-evangelical fervour, paraphrased biblical verse (John 1:5) in the build-up to war with Iraq; 'And the light [America] has shone in the darkness [the enemies of America], and the darkness will not overcome it [America will conquer its enemies]'.[77] Bush would, in the end, notoriously define America's enemies as the 'axis of evil' – a term that is as much theologically loaded as it is morally. Lynn Schofield Clark posits that 'evangelicalism has not provided the cause for our concerns with evil, but due to the heritage of the United States, evangelicalism has inadvertently provided a framework for thinking about and representing evil in popular culture.'[78] More acutely, Kirsten Moana Thompson contends that, 'since 9/11, dread and fear have regained prominence in the public sphere and become politically instrumental tools for a messianic Bush administration.'[79]

In 2005, Stephen Healy remarked that renewed attention must clearly be given to the relationship between Islam and the West. 'A good starting point', he says, 'is to view the post-9/11 era as the post-Cold War era. A dimension of the analysis ought to question this us/them rhetorical construction. In the post-Cold War era, "Islam" often is used as a "dyadic other" that replaces "Communism."'[80] Just as with the warring ideologies of the Cold War, Richard Cimino observed that much of the post-9/11 literature from evangelical sources drew sharper boundaries between Christianity and Islam; America and its adopted 'other'; and aimed to assert that Islam was an 'essentially violent religion' in the same way that Communism was castigated as an inherently violent and imprisoning ideology. Cimino suggested that the

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[75] Juan Stam, 'Bush's Religious Language' in *The Nation*, Vol. 277, Issue 21, Dec 22 2003, p. 27.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Schofield Clark, p. 26.
[79] Thompson, p. 17.
[80] Stephen Healey, 'Religion and Terror: A Post-9/11 Analysis' in *International Journal on World Peace*, Sep 1 2005, p.15

evangelical polemic against Islam took three major forms: 'apologetics to prove the truth of Christianity against Islam'; 'charismatic literature applying "spiritual warfare" teachings to Islam'; and 'prophetic literature linking Islam as the main protagonist in end-times scenarios'. Cimino concluded that 'greater and more visible pluralism in American society' was 'challenging evangelical identity, leading to the erection of new boundary markers between evangelicalism and other religions. Such new boundaries can strain interfaith relations, yet they also function to strengthen evangelical Protestant identity in the U.S.'[81]

The dualist absolutism that acted as a core lexicon of evangelical belief, easily transcribed the events surrounding 9/11 in terms of good versus evil, Christianity versus Islam, Democracy versus Dictatorship, which, among more fundamental premillennialist conceptions, will ultimately end with Christ versus Antichrist. Much of evangelical apocalyptic understanding, then, draws prevailingly from an overdetermined Manichean ethos that might be said to fit rather neatly into a Hollywood narrative schema. After all, the battle between light and darkness could possibly not be more clearly and symbolically defined than within the mythology of film like *Star Wars.* This is a film that, in the words of Lynn Schofield Clark, contains 'elements of human drama and futuristic imaginings, a battle between good and evil, horrific consequences for some, and a happy ending for the "good guys"'.[82] This might seem like an earnest enough appraisal of George Lucas's durable plot structure, except, in this instance, it is actually the prophetical endtime narrative of the Book of Revelation that is being described. Schofield Clark maintains that the emphasis on the battle against evil means that evangelicalism holds 'a great deal of appeal for persons who are alienated or distanced from other faith traditions. This may be one reason for its growth. It also provides a reason for why its categories of evil and the "End Times" continue to provide taken-for-granted frameworks that are often found in popular entertainment and even news stories.'[83] By the same token, contemporary media has tended to identify a major factor for the radicalisation of young Muslims (especially in Europe) as those who are 'alienated or distanced from other faith traditions', as well as society in general, and often cites how this has compounded a conviction to join the jihadist cause of the self-proclaimed Islamic State: a fundamentalist group that equally propagates an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil framed within unquestioning religious dogma.

Nevertheless, amongst all the surrounding religious rhetoric, does Hollywood's own predilection for apocalypse operate to reflect both the psychical and cultural collective trauma

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[81] Richard Cimino, '"No God in Common": American Evangelical Discourse on Islam After 9/11' in *Review of Religious Research*; Dec 2005, Vol. 47 Issue 2, (author's abstract).
[82] Schofield Clark, p. 33.
[83] Ibid., p. 28.

of 9/11 and America's socio-political trajectory thereafter? 'After 9/11, the [film] industry started to change', says Hanna Rosin, 'studio heads began asking for movies that were "spiritual" even if not explicitly religious.'[84] This may well explain the inception behind films such as *Signs* and *Knowing*. Kirsten Moana Thompson furthermore contends that, post-9/11, Hollywood's visions of apocalypse also became conflated with pervasive anxieties concerning the threat of terrorism, which often manifested itself in underlying tensions regarding 'family, patriarchy, religion, and "family values."'[85] This form of apocalyptic dread, says Thompson, 'continues and intensifies after 9/11.' Thompson takes M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs* as an example that provides 'a conservative framework for addressing a crisis of faith' that ultimately unifies and restores the family and its patriarch in the midst of global crisis.[86] Indeed, this is a repeating pattern that can be applied to other apocalyptic films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004), *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005), *Knowing* (Alex Proyas, 2009), and *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009). Nevertheless, what is also perceptively present, especially in films such as *Signs* and *Knowing*, is an eschatological understanding of biblical prophecy, something which has become a central facet of the 21st century American apocalypse myth. Just as biblical scholars decipher cryptic codes in the Book of Revelation, and Premillennial Dispensationalists look for clues of Armageddon inside global events, in Hollywood's 21st century vision of apocalypse, the interpretation and decryption of 'signs' now functions as a prime narrative component.

Mythological Approaches to Film and Religion

The term 'myth' is so laden with negative connotations that it is 'practically unserviceable for the study of religion', says John C. Lyden, who proffers that the use of myth 'persists' and continues to be used in reference to film largely due to its distinct narrative form.[87] Nonetheless, Lyden also recognises that the understanding of myth in this pejorative sense must be transcended 'if we are to fairly assess the religious power of the stories of film (or of any religion for that matter).'[88] Correspondingly, in *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film*, Joel Martin uses the term 'mythological' as an approach to refer to comparative religious studies, and as a method that measures 'how religion both legitimates and challenges dominant visions of the social order.' Martin, who maintains that there needs to be a 'rethinking' in the relationship between religion and film, posits that

[84] Rosin, p. 165.
[85] Thompson, p. 25.
[86] Ibid., p. 27.
[87] John C. Lyden, *Film As Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 56.
[88] Ibid., p. 4.

'religion manifests itself through cross-cultural forms', including both myth and ritual, whereby religion is viewed 'as a universal and ubiquitous human activity.[89] Bruce David Forbes ascertains that films can be examined for the same 'cross-cultural forms', which can provide a gauge through which 'Hollywood reinterprets, appropriates, invents, or rejects' the archetypes of myth, ritual, and religion.[90] In fact, it has been speculated that the cultural power and influence of film can be viewed almost like a formulaic religion in itself, which is the way John C. Lyden sees it; 'like any religion, the "religion of film" will borrow from other religions as it develops its own distinctive forms of myths, morals, and rituals.'[91] Indeed, in connection with one of the most far reaching cinematic myths of them all, George Lucas has commented that he formulated the 'religion' of *Star Wars* by 'taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to distil them down into a more modern and easily accessible construct', which did not represent 'any particular religious system' but rather a 'syncretistic' mix of ideas.[92]

'As a popular form of the religious life, movies do what we have always asked of popular religion' comments Darrol Bryant, 'namely, that they provide us with archetypal forms of humanity – heroic figures – and instruct us in the basic values and myths of our society.'[93] But Bryant also seems sceptical of this analogous role, correlating it with a distinct 'secular' culture, which, at the same time, has divergent agendas to traditional religious belief. Conrad Ostwalt is more explicit in this assertion, and, like John C. Lyden, suggests that American Christianity is crucially predisposed to cinematic sublimation: 'the movie theater has acted like some secular religion, complete with its sacred space and rituals that mediate an experience of otherness.'[94] Ostwalt contends that religion in America is not so much in decline, but, as with Mohler, rather a belief system that is 'being popularized, scattered, and secularized through extra-ecclesiastical institutions.'[95] In his book, *Hollywood Dreams and Biblical Stories* (1994), Bernard Brandon Scott, attempts to address some of these questions by seeking to establish a dialogue between biblical belief and contemporary film. Acknowledging the role of myth within the Bible, while viewing films as myths themselves, Scott maintains that the power of myth is rooted in the 'hidden' or subliminal agency through which 'the fundamental problems of life' are mediated.[96] Scott emphasises the importance of the myth remaining 'hidden', when he exclaims that 'to

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[89] Joel Martin and Conrad Ostwalt, *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995).
[90] Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 12.
[91] Lyden, p. 34.
[92] Ibid., p. 224.
[93] Ibid.,p. 12.
[94] Martin & Ostwalt, p. 26.
[95] Ibid., p. 26.
[96] Lyden, p. 20.

reflect on the presence of the myth is to cut off its power; one will see the illusion it represents and its inability to reconcile the tensions it seeks to resolve.'[97] At the same time, Scott recognises that not all films work as myths, and that there are 'antimythical' films that work to 'subvert the myths of society.'[98] He attests that, without gaining some insight on how these myths operate upon us, 'religion will risk becoming a casualty of the electronic media that will govern how religion is conveyed and understood.'[99]

Interestingly, Scott comments on the negative effect of the apocalyptic myth in both the Bible and film, and its undesirable tendency to separate humanity into the good and the bad – the chosen and the rejected. Scott proclaims that there is a need for this dualism to be subverted in essence, whereby the demonization of 'the other' in the apocalyptic fable must be reconstituted in terms of redemptive reconciliation as 'the solution to chaos'[100] Film is one agency through which the reconstitution of traditional (or biblical) apocalypse might be rendered, although Hollywood may not always view it as conducive to effective storytelling. As conjectured, while Hollywood science fiction undeniably incorporates a magnitude of religious myth and biblical symbolism, which, itself, fits neatly into Hollywood narrative configurations, this is embedded within a strictly secular framework, and where, it can be argued, many of these mythological templates often extend beyond or predate the Bible, as illustrated by Joseph Campbell – and as George Lucas (one of Campbell's devotees) himself, might testify. At the same time, 20th century science fiction, in particular, has often included denigrations of religious faith; such as the mocking of (misguided) religious absolutism in both *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968) and *The Ωmega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971). Although Hollywood has not unduly turned away from traditional, secular mythologies of apocalyptic science fiction, far from it, the question that needs to be addressed is why Hollywood, then, has shifted much of its focus towards explicitly biblical 'endtime' mythologies in much of its 21st century depictions of apocalypse.

The Evolution of the Apocalypse Film

21st century apocalypse movies like *Knowing* and Roland Emmerich's, *2012*, are part of a new trend in films that integrate secular environmental concerns with visions of biblical apocalypse. Within the secular framework of these Hollywood films, echoes of the eco-apocalypse science fiction films of the 1970s reverberate into the millennium. Daniel Wojcik avers that, 'in

[97] Lyden, p. 20.
[98] Ibid., p. 20.
[99] Ibid., p. 20.
[100] Ibid., p. 20.

numerous secular apocalyptic scenarios, worldly destruction is considered immanent in human nature rather than externally prescribed, fulfilled by the actions and character of human beings rather than determined by outside forces.'[101] In the distant future of *Silent Running* (Douglas Trumbull, 1972), for example, all plant life is now extinct, except for that preserved on-board an aimlessly adrift spacecraft. Although it is not made clear whether this eco-extinction is the result of climate problems or other excesses of humanity, this is a film that is adamantly concerned with the damage that humanity is doing to the Earth. In *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973), the culpability of mankind is left in no doubt, as the earth's resources have been depleted to the extent that it can no longer sustain a spiralling human population – with darkly sinister consequences. And in Robert Altman's *Quintet* (1979), a future ice age sees a dying humanity revel in its capacity for self-destruction, as mankind occupies its remaining time playing a form of deadly chess within a frozen cityscape. This was the kind of environmental catastrophe narrative that was to be spectacularly reintroduced in the 21st century by Roland Emmerich with *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004).

Unlike Emmerich's film, the 1970s eco-disaster movies featured explicitly bleak renditions of secular doomsday scenarios, proffering the human race as inherently flawed and irredeemably destructive. This was to remain the underlying tone within the profusion of apocalypse films in the 1970s, none more so than in the man-made virus scenarios such as *No Blade of Grass* (Cornel Wilde, 1970), *The Ωmega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971), *The Crazies* (George A. Romero, 1973) and *Plague* (Ed Hunt, 1978): like the eco-apocalypse films of the same era, and similarly representative of ecological breakdowns, humankind is incapable of saving either itself or the planet in these films. This is in line with the pessimistic timbres of dark cynicism that these films typified, viewing humanity as unworthy of salvation. Though secularly sourced, this damning outlook, in itself, brings these films in line with an expressly evangelical apocalyptic ethos; one that regards human society as innately evil, in a state of sin, and overall undeserving of redemption. As David F. Noble observes: 'beyond the professed believers and those who employ explicitly religious language are countless others for whom the religious compulsion is largely unconscious, obscured by a secularized vocabulary but operative nevertheless.'[102]

The Day After Tomorrow, like Emmerich's later apocalyptic fable, *2012*, along with *Knowing*, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Danny Boyle's 2007 visualisation of solar-apocalypse, *Sunshine*, represents a shift from the 70s model in the evolution of ecological disaster films, in

[101] Wojcik, p. 146.
[102] David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Penguin, 1999) p. 5.

that, not only is the major concern primarily climate crisis, the environmental cataclysms that transpire are sudden and stupendous external events that are beyond humanity's control. This absence of eschatological culpability situates mankind in a position whereby the 'locus of control' is externally determined by forces outside of either individual or collective effort. As Wojcik explains, 'fatalistic beliefs exemplify the notion of an external locus of control because such beliefs are characterised by the assertion that outside forces beyond one's control determine the outcome of events.'[103] In both *Knowing* and *2012*, the elements of biblical apocalyptic prophecy (as well as Mayan prophecy in *2012* – to which the title alludes) acts to underpin the fatalistic conceptualisation that attributes causality to external forces, whether this is down to the haphazard cosmic movement of the planets, or some pre-ordained divine plan. As such, this narrative alignment with evangelical notions of fatalistic passivity and helplessness, in turn, allows for the potential salvation of the planet, and, unlike their doom-laden 70s counterparts, permits humanity room for redemption.

> Dispensationalist prophecies indicate that the present reveals the future and that the future cannot be altered in any way by human action. Characterized by a belief in inevitability and human helplessness concerning certain occurrences, portents and prophecies reveal the fundamental human desire to predict future events and to attribute meaning to that which is regarded as unchangeable or unavoidable.[104]

In seeking to correlate a cinematic schema of biblical apocalypse within a surrounding cultural context, the central aim of this study, then, is to identify a body of apocalypse films that, if not fully supplanted the traditional idea of 20th century apocalyptic science fiction, have immutably attenuated the secular nature of a genre that had predominantly operated outside the realms of supernatural horror/fantasy. To this end, part of the methodological framework for this study looks at the application of the Bible as apocalyptic intertext, while at the same time acknowledging the political and socio-cultural background of each film. Hence, a key conceptual approach relies on the close textual analysis of a selected group of films that perhaps best represents Hollywood's increasing confluence with biblical apocalypse. The basis for three case study chapters, therefore, will be the films, *I Am Legend*, (Francis Lawrence, 2009), *Knowing* (Alex Proyas, 2009), and *The Book of Eli* (Albert & Allen Hughes, 2010). The latter will lead progressively into a following chapter on 'The Religious Superhero'. Although the focus of these chapters will extensively rest on textual readings, various aspects of their narratives and themes will act as natural entry points for certain interrelated apocalypse films to be introduced and discussed.

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[103] Wojcik, p. 135.
[104] Ibid., p. 52.

As proposed, this thesis puts forward the assertion that Dispensationalist endtime prophecy belief has, in the 21st century, become a fundamental factor behind much of Hollywood's visions of apocalypse, and, at its core, is something that informs a prevailingly religious cultural consciousness of apocalypse. To illustrate this, a fundament of my overall methodological approach will be to search for explicit biblical subject matter in each film, and to apply biblical and Dispensationalist prophecy theory, appositionally, to the apocalypse films under analysis. During this process, I will closely engage with Dispensationalist ideas and mythologies, including the key concept of determinism – the idea that there is a pre-determined order to the universe – and how this plays out in contemporary apocalypse films. This also involves a close examination of biblical apocalyptic texts that are pivotal to evangelical endtime belief, especially the Book of Revelation. This is not to say that other biblical texts have not been explored by Hollywood, and in conjunction with the film *Knowing*, there will be particular focus on the Book of Ezekiel, and a specific passage that enacts a central eschatological premise to the film's narrative. Although this highlights an encompassing engagement with biblical texts in contemporary apocalypse films overall, it is primarily the apocalyptic auspices of the Book of Revelation that, as with much Premillennialist prophecy belief, sources an expressly biblical understanding of the term 'apocalypse'. This is a facet that now permeates throughout Hollywood's interpretations of 'the end', leading to what might ultimately be perceived as the innate biblical aesthetic of apocalypse.

It is important to begin the first case study chapter with a film that, perhaps more than any other, encapsulates the transition from secular to spiritual apocalypse. In Francis Lawrence's film adaptation of Richard Matheson's book of the same name, *I Am Legend* (2007), the journey from secular science fiction to religious redemption is made all the more stark when comparing Lawrence's film to the 1971 film adaption, *The Ωmega Man* (Boris Sagal). Both films constitute wholly disparate ideas from the seminal novel, including having lost the vampire theme that was central to the original story. Hence, this chapter partly investigates the reasons for the disappearance of the vampires, and looks at how both narratives have redefined this element to suit each film's specific ideological functions. This involves an exploration into corresponding representations of the (meta)physical human condition within horror/science fiction in both their generic and ideological configurations. More significantly, comparing these films discloses a transference from a prevailingly secular cycle of 20th century apocalypse films to an overtly religious reinterpretation of apocalyptic science fiction in the 21st century. Essentially, the questions that need to be considered are: how can a film based on the same secularly rooted story engender such an inverted doctrinal displacement, and what might be the contributing

socio-cultural factors for such an ideological transfiguration – in which these two adaptations might be viewed as emblematic of a significant generic shift.

The second case study chapter, 'The Coordinates of Catastrophe: Finding Faith in *Knowing* the End', looks at Alex Proyas's 2009 film, *Knowing*; a film about prophesied disasters that signify the end of the world. Here, the focus is primarily on the way the film uses biblical texts to construct a simultaneously theological and science-driven idea of apocalypse. Crucially, Proyas's film also indicates Hollywood's new willingness to explore deterministic notions of the end of the world; an intrinsic element of biblical endtime prophecy belief. This chapter also elucidates its analysis of *Knowing* with reference to a range of other films. Films like *Knowing*, *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, 1997), *End of Days* (Peter Hyams, 1999), and M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs* (2002), can be talked about in conjunction with one another in their connected themes of profound personal loss, subsequent lost faith, and the regaining of this faith during the course of their own eschatological odysseys. *Knowing* and *Signs*, in particular, are linked in their use of a more explicit biblical context. Their meditations upon deterministic themes frames a focal narrative constituent whereby spiritual comprehension is articulated through fatalistic interpolation. Here, part of the process of constructing meaning, in the face of apocalyptic events, rests in the decryption of various signs that herald the (potential) end of the world. *Knowing* precisely exhibits the way in which evangelical prophecy belief is derived from 'decoding' the Bible and it is this form of eschatological elucidation – an apocalyptic consciousness of hermeneutics – that enables the decryption of signs and codes to predict the future and help prepare for the ultimate end. Within some evangelical interpretations, the events of 9/11 were seen as such a 'sign'; an indication of the pre-ordained path to the 'endtime'. The distinct auspices of 9/11 are a prominent feature of Proyas's film (as well as *Signs*), especially in the mysterious manuscript of sequenced numbers, where 9/11 acts as the pivotal key code in deciphering the dates of all other past and future disasters. This prominent link to 9/11 performs a psychological function, which suggests a spiritual need for fatalistic assurance, and places the film directly in line with evangelical prophecy belief. This can be described as the 'appeal of apocalypticism', in which the biblical understanding of disasters and the 'end of the world' can provide a structure of meaning for otherwise incomprehensible apocalyptic events.

In the third case study chapter, 'Blind Faith: Preaching Post-Apocalypse in *The Book of Eli*', there is a continuation of a theme that began in the previous chapter on *Knowing*, regarding the question of lost faith, although, this time not in an individual sense, but concerning humankind overall. I explore how the essential story of the film is intrinsically linked to the biblical figure of Eli, who stands as a metaphor for the lost traditions of Israel. Like the biblical parable, the

film's central protagonist, Eli (Denzel Washington), embarks on a crusade to restore the lost word of God – literally, in this case, with Eli as the guardian of the world's last remaining Bible. *The Book of Eli* also continues a theme from the preceding chapter with the prominence of codes, signs, and symbols. Here, biblical scripture is emphasised as a supreme agency of power and knowledge. In a post-apocalyptic wasteland where books are no more than antiquated artefacts, obsolete tomes which are useless to most, they are nevertheless of immeasurable value to those few able to decipher their secrets. This underlying aspect again participates in Dispensationalist discourse and its eschatological impulse to decipher codes and signs within the Book of Revelation. *The Book of Eli* features as a key discussion within this thesis in that it, again, exemplifies explicit religious context, which, like *Knowing*, includes the incorporation of explicit biblical subject matter in connection to the destruction of the planet, or at least the end of human civilization as we know it. In this chapter, I will take the reader through the narrative trajectory of the story so as to effectively display the textual mechanisms of religious post-apocalypse, through which the importance of hermeneutic signs and codes is clearly revealed. During this close textual analysis, I explore aspects of biblical prophecy (and prophets), themes of resurrection and biblical re-enactment, expressions of the divine supernatural, and the concept of the religious superhero – a central theme which will continue into the following chapter.

The final case study chapter, 'God's Representative on Earth: The Rise of the Religious Superhero', continues with a more detailed analysis of the religious superhero in apocalypse films, where, traditionally, the superhero genre has often incorporated a dystopian or apocalyptic outlook. Here, I explore ideas pertaining to the narrative signification of the religious superhero within an expressly apocalyptic context. Case study examples comprise of the films *Constantine* (Francis Lawrence, 2005), *Season of the Witch* (Dominic Sena, 2011), and two films by Scott Stewart, *Legion* (2009), and *Priest* (2011). Each film provides stories with explicit religious and apocalyptic contexts, which accordingly portray a religiously infused superhero that fights the forces of darkness and the enemies of God. However, together with the familiar trait that features a male protagonist who has become disillusioned with his Christian faith and who is charged with redemption through the regaining of this faith, what this chapter also explores is a somewhat unexpected critique of Catholicism as a religious institution, whereby the Catholic Church is portrayed as either corrupt or impotent, or both. Moreover, adding to this discursive complexity, each film in question features both a female captive/victim and a demonized or monstrous female villain. Both these elements combine to form a fascinating dialectic concerning the narrative significance of religious apocalypse within each

film, operating in tandem with critiques of Catholicism in which both the monstrous woman and the Catholic Church, although often in direct narrative opposition to one another, ultimately function as a dissolute Other within a wider eschatological scheme. In addition, the films, *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006), and *Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (Tim Story, 2007), are also discussed in terms of Hollywood's incorporation of biblical allegory into secular salvation mythologies. Here, it is interesting to position the figure of the religious superhero as something of a decoded element within a traditional movie plot structure. This transfigures into a recognisable narrative pattern that incorporates a 'wide-scale secularization of Judeo-Christian redemption dramas'[105] in which the 'supersaviours' that had previously functioned as symbolic replacements for the 'Christ figure' have become much less opaque or coded as such within increasingly religious apocalyptic parameters.

Lynn Schofield Clark proposes that Christian belief, and 'evangelicalism in particular', is not only widely accepted, it is in fact close to the expected norms of American society, and that evangelicalism is now an important supplier of America's 'cultural tool kit.'[106] This thesis examines the idea that endtime prophecy belief is now, likewise, an important facet of this 'cultural tool kit', and, since the turn of the millennium, this is something that has been appreciably reflected in Hollywood's perceptions of apocalypse. What is perhaps more abstruse to ascertain, however, is the extent to which the apocalyptic events of 9/11 would have on Hollywood's disparate depictions of the end of the world. 9/11 undoubtedly galvanised the apocalyptic fervour of Premillennialist convictions, through which eschatological ideas and endtime portent appeared to gain traction amid a time of widespread cultural anxiety and paranoia. This was only exacerbated by a reactionary Bush administration that was never hesitant in using the language of Revelation to set up a conceptual conflict of good versus evil. However, a compelling indication of the impact 9/11 would have on the film industry, and its apocalyptic imaginings, resides in the auspices of the disaster that continue to recur in many of the apocalypse films discussed in this study. This, in itself, imparts an extra and profound dimension into the linear progression of the apocalypse film and its transformation, in part, from a prevailingly secular genre to an apocalyptic reconnoitre of religion and Premillennialist prophecy belief. This disaster, unparalleled in American history, interposes itself as a further eschatological enigma, and, in conjunction with edicts of the endtime, affixes a fundamental component to the 21st century American apocalypse myth.

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[105] Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 6.

[106] Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.29

Chapter 1

I Am Ωmega Man: Religious Repositioning of the Secular Apocalypse Film in *I Am Legend*

Although *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007) has been previously labelled a remake of the 1971 film, *The Ωmega Man* (Boris Sagal), much of what they have in common is merely the source text of the book from which Lawrence's film takes its name. In fact, as I hope to establish, the differences between the two films are so distant, that I would not attribute *I Am Legend* as a remake any more than I would consider *The Ωmega Man* to be a remake of the first film version, made seven years earlier: *The Last Man on Earth* (Ubaldo Ragona, Sidney Salkow, 1964). The first film adaptation is interesting in itself, but, examined carefully, it can act as a useful counterpoint in discussing the two film versions that followed. Tying all three films together is Richard Matheson's book, *I Am Legend* (1954), and this is a text I will look at closely in relation to narrative shifts from the original text within each film. Through this comparison, we can investigate the way in which historical ideological factors have played a vital role in repositioning important narrative components within each text, and also how Lawrence's *I Am Legend* contrasts against both Matheson's book and the previous 1971 film version in resituating its textual foregrounding of science fiction/horror. *I Am Legend* director, Francis Lawrence, has attested to gleaning inspiration from *The Ωmega Man*, as well as Matheson's book, and even includes in his film the occasional visual homage to the 1971 version.[107] In essence, however, what emerges more than anything else, is that each of the film versions proffer very different interpretations of an idea from the original story. Focusing primarily on the contrast between the 1971 and 2007 versions, in relation to Matheson's original text, I hope to trace the development of textual ideological functions from the first film versions in the 20th century; which I will argue contain, at their core, a very secular representation of the original science-fiction/horror novel; up to the 21st century version, which I will examine as an ideologically religious reformulation of a secular science fiction text.

First and foremost, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend,* for all intents and purposes, is a vampire novel. In fact, on the cover of the modern SF MASTERWORKS edition, Dean Koontz proclaims it to be 'the most clever and riveting vampire novel since Dracula'.[108] The book's exploration into this classic bastion of gothic horror is more than emphasized by the stark accompanying image of vampiric terror, leaving no one in doubt of its chilling content. At the

[107] Interview with Francis Lawrence and Akiva Goldsman, IndieLondon.Co.Uk <http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Film-Review/i-am-legend-francis-lawrence-and-akiva-goldsman-interview> Retrieved January 29 2013.

[108] Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (1954), SF Masterworks (London: Gollancz, 2001).

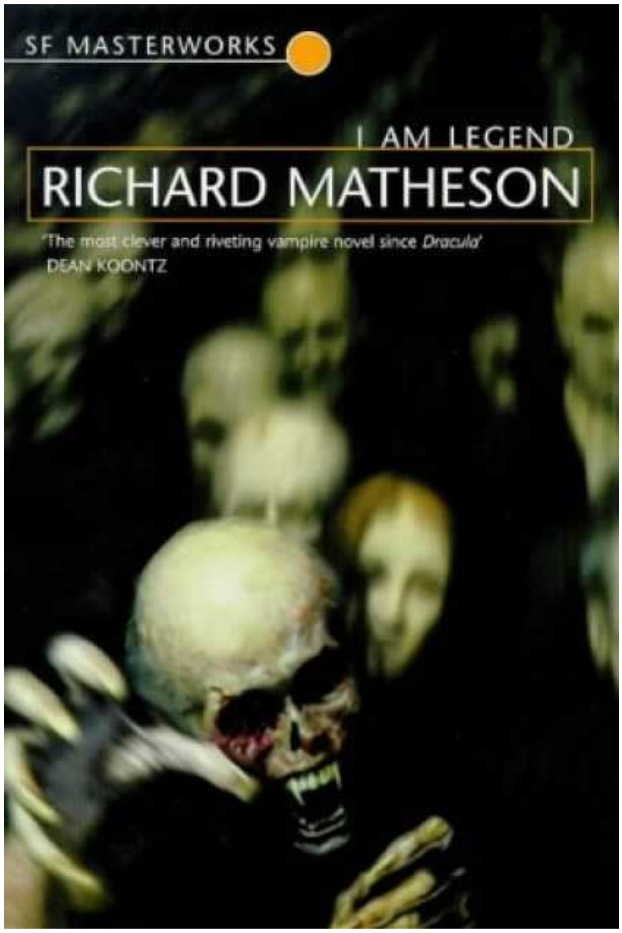

Fig. 1.1 Vampire Apocalypse: the cover of SF Masterworks' edition which leaves no doubt as to its gothic horror antecedents.

beginning of the story, we join the protagonist, Robert Neville, replacing strings of garlic and broken mirrors around the perimeters of his house. He then proceeds to his lathe to fashion some wooden stakes with the intention of killing as many sleeping vampires before the next nightly attack upon his house. From the start of Matheson's novel, it seems clear that we are dealing with a very traditional understanding of the vampire myth. However, during the course of the story, a gradual dismantling of this myth takes place, whereby a secularly rooted revision of the vampire 'condition' is imposed through a scientific and psychoanalytical exploration of the biochemical cause of 'infection'. What transpires is a secular/scientific reorientation of the vampire myth, in which science triumphs over superstition. This incorporates a general debunking of the vampire 'legend', including, importantly, the myth of (Christian) religious power over vampires (the crucifix, holy water, etc.) – something that ultimately transpires to be psychological rather than mystical – albeit a 'hysterical' derangement affecting only those vampires who had been previously religious, or more specifically, Christian. In Matheson's novel, Robert Neville explains why a psychological (and irrational) fear of the cross does not work for all vampires;

> Why should a Jew fear the cross?' he said. Why should a vampire who had been a Jew fear it? Most people were afraid of becoming vampires. Most of them suffer from hysterical blindness before mirrors. But as far as the cross goes – well, neither a Jew nor a Hindu nor a Mohammedan nor an atheist, for that matter, would fear the cross.[109]

Furthermore, Matheson's novel performs an ultimate denigration of religion altogether. In a flashback sequence, Robert Neville remembers the height of public panic after the onset of the plague, and describes being roughly cajoled into a throng of religious hysteria, in which an evangelical preacher feverishly recants prophecies of 'eternal damnation', 'creatures from hell', and 'God's almighty wrath'. Neville concludes this memory by his dry and derisory summation;

[109] Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (1954), SF Masterworks (London: Gollancz, 2011), p. 124.

> In a typical desperation for quick answers, easily understood, people had turned to primitive Worship as the solution. With less than success. Not only had they died as quickly as the rest of the people, but they had died with terror in their hearts, with a mortal dread flowing in their veins.[110]

After which, Matheson extracts all religious superstition from the vampire legend altogether, dispelling the mythic and mystical power of the crucifix (which Neville refers to always as 'the cross');

> And then, Robert Neville thought, to have this hideous dread vindicated. To regain consciousness beneath hot, heavy soil and know that death had not brought rest. To find themselves clawing up through the earth, their bodies driven now by a strange, hideous need. Such traumatic shocks could undo what mind was left. And such shocks could explain much. The cross first of all. Once they were forced to accept vindication of the dread of being repelled by an object that had been a focal point of worship, their minds could have snapped. Dread of the cross sprang up.[111]

After isolating and scientifically studying the germ responsible for the plague (which Neville, in ironical fashion, names, '*Vampiris* Bacillus'), rather than true vampires of legend, Neville describes the infected as 'demented sufferers', wretched victims of a virulent bacteria who, due to the insanity caused by infection, can only cling to the myth of vampirism as a credos for their 'living-dead' existence. The bacteria that causes this condition drives a compulsion for fresh blood so that it may thrive, and this compounds the idea of the vampire legend in the mind of the host – with all its psychological, mythic accoutrements. In essence, Neville (and Matheson) debunks all the traditional and mystical superstition associated with the vampire, and brings the myth squarely into the secular sphere of science. 'Witches, vampires', Neville says to himself, '– in all these feared beings there was an interwoven kinship. Legends and superstitions could overlap, and did.'[112] In terms of genre, Matheson effectively imposes contemporary science fiction over more romantic and fanciful forms of classic, literary horror, and, in doing so, negates all accompanying notions of 'evil' regarding the traditional view of the vampire myth.

Where have all the vampires gone?: textual reorientations of Matheson's *I Am Legend*

As for the first film adaptation in 1964, *The Last Man on Earth* follows on from Matheson's secular repositioning (or re-reading) of the vampire myth, in that the film extracts all mention of religion altogether. The film elects to do away with crucifixes as part of the traditional armoury against vampires, while, quite conspicuously, keeping all the other mythic menagerie of weapons… garlic, mirrors, wooden stakes, daylight, etc. By the time of *The Ωmega Man*, in 1971, the story has altogether lost the vital ingredient of 'the vampire' – something which was

[110] Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (London: Gollancz, 2011), p. 105.
[111] Ibid., pp. 105-106.
[112] Ibid., p. 106.

also a fundamental feature of the first film version, as well as central to Matheson's original text. In Matheson's novel and, to a significant extent, *The Last Man on Earth*, the historical reason for the vampires' existence is largely peripheral, the important aspect is that vampires now dominate the earth. The basis for the plague that wipes out civilization in *The Ωmega Man* is deeply ideological, and this ultimately supersedes the vampire aspect of the novel and first film. Firstly, the reason for the germ warfare that devastates humanity is a 'border war' between the virulent forces of Russia and China. Very much a film of its time, *The Ωmega Man*, through Neville's nightmarish flashbacks, depicts the increasing global tension caused by the escalation of a 'Sino-Russian border war'. At the height of the Cold War, in 1971, the biggest threat to human civilization, it seems, is the scourge of communism – be it either from Russia or China, or, in this case, both. A flashback, blended with an extreme close-up of Neville's anguished face, shows a news report graphic that depicts a hammer and sickle sinisterly descending over a map of the globe. The United States, on the other hand, is portrayed as a non-aggressor that has inescapably been dragged into the conflict. The resulting global germ warfare causes a plague after mutated bacilli form out of the biochemical weapons, destroying civilization and transforming what little that remains of humanity into psychotic mutants that sleep by day and ravage by night. In *The Last Man on Earth*, the reason for the plague's existence is much more opaque. All that is revealed is through a newspaper headline; 'PLAGUE CLAIMS HUNDREDS: is Europe's disease carried on the wind?' Again, the United States, here, is clearly not culpable for the end of the world.

Where the first film version elects to elide any aspect of faith and religion, *The Ωmega Man*, like Matheson's book, effectively incorporates an overall denigration of religious belief. However, rather than do this through a depiction of apocalyptic desperation or the dispelling of myth and superstition, as with Matheson, *The Ωmega Man* instils a secularly sourced ideological standpoint that posits the (American) individual over the community. Not only does the film establish the infected, who refer to their clan as 'the family', as a nihilistically destructive uniform group intent on crushing all forms of non-conformity – a metaphor for communism, as opposed to Charlton Heston's 'everyman' symbol of American individualism – the community of infected are depicted as a deeply religious fraternity, albeit entrapped within their own delusionary and self-destructive code of devout law. Of course, according to the conventions of genre, it would make no fictional sense that vampires could in any way show religious devotion. Hence, any talk of blood-sucking ghouls is written out of *The Ωmega Man* in favour of more ideological intonations – namely, the social threat of the 'communist ideal', married with the danger of religious fanaticism.

Fig. 1.2 The Red Peril: Neville looks back to how 'the scourge of communism' destroyed civilization. This is also a prime visual metaphor in which Neville is the representation of the American individual against the amorphous social absorption of the communism threat.

Moreover, in *The Ωmega Man*, like Matheson's book, there is no inference made to any religious belief on the part of Robert Neville, who, even in the previous world, is portrayed as somewhat of a loner, with there being no mention of friends or family. In essence, Robert Neville seems quite at home in his isolated, post-apocalyptic environs, in which a discernible dialectic, here, is the domestic dichotomy between the lone individual and 'the family'. In contrast, in *I Am Legend*, Robert Neville's prior faith is clearly registered, as well as the palpable loss of this faith after the death of his wife and child – not to mention the eradication of human civilization. *The Ωmega Man* represents a significant departure from the book and others films, in that Robert Neville does not have a wife and child, and therefore does not seem haunted by the death of loved ones from his pre-apocalyptic past. In Both *The Last Man on Earth*, and *I Am Legend*, during Robert's flashbacks, we see that he had a wife and young daughter, and, in both films, we experience Robert's intense anguish as we witness the deaths of both wife and child. However, unlike Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, Robert Morgan (Vincent Price), likewise a man of science, is evidenced as having no prior faith or belief in God, and therefore, the tradition of the crucifix against the vampire is summarily abandoned. Consequently, a recurrent narrative theme of lost faith through the death of the protagonist's wife is only prevalent to Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, and is not applicable to the book and other film versions, as the protagonist, here, has no faith to begin with. This narrative aspect transpires to be a fundamental difference regarding the films' denouement overall, and, as indicated, fits a recurring pattern in several 21st apocalypse films, whereby the lost faith that is instigated through the death of a spouse is reinstated through divine supernatural experiences.

Turning Vampires into Zombies: Ideological representations of the monstrous Other

Matheson, throughout his book, meditates on the vampire as a site of outright abjection, as nothing more than a living corpse driven by base compulsions. Matheson does this as a further way to undermine the somewhat romanticized image of the gothic vampire. Matheson's 'vampires' are figures of disease, 'filth', and defilement; they are symbols of death, decay, and nihilistic destruction. Indeed, Matheson's depiction of vampires is rather more akin to the image of the zombie, in terms of fictional representations of 'the living dead'. In effect, what perhaps emerges is a hybrid of both vampire and zombie. In her book, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (1995), Linda Badley observes that 'modern horror takes little solace from "worn-out platitudes about a heaven and the afterlife". The fear and fascination concerns a lack of spirits, vengeful or otherwise: the horror of nonbeing on the one hand and of the corpse, material death, on the other. The real horror is death's aftermath: decomposition, absence, grief, or as [Walter] Kendrick terms it, "dreadness".'[113] Badley goes on, 'The dissolution of the boundaries of death and life has also destroyed any simple concepts of soul as an "eternal" or essential self. Its loss raises disturbing questions of identity that have fostered new mythologies of the body.'[114] One of these mythologies is the unassailably abject figure of the zombie, as prodigiously characterised in film by George A. Romero's 'Living Dead' trilogy, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and *Day of the Dead* (1985). Other than this subversion of the vampire – downgraded to the hapless and harrowing figure of the lumbering zombie – one of the reasons why Matheson's 'vampire' novel is quite so chilling, other than his clinical dissection of a classic horror myth, is Matheson's almost empirical observation of the abject body. Matheson has his 'everyman' protagonist, Robert Neville, methodically dismantle the romanticized legend of the vampire almost myth by myth. Margaret L. Carter observes that within much related contemporary fiction, 'the vampire often appears as an attractive figure precisely *because* he or she is a vampire.'[115] The vampire is frequently idealized as either a 'rebellious outsider', a 'persecuted minority', an 'endangered species', or as a 'member of a different "race" that legend portrays as sexually omnicompetent'.[116] In short, 'the vampire makes a fitting hero for late twentieth-century popular fiction.'[117] By direct contrast, Matheson's *I Am Legend* does away with any such romanticized notions, portraying 'vampires' as simply walking corpses, enfeebled zombies, biomechanically driven by scientifically

[113] Linda Badley, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 23-24.
[114] Ibid., p. 24.
[115] Margaret L. Carter, 'The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction', in, *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 27.
[116] Carter, p. 29.
[117] Ibid., p. 29.

explained compulsions to survive – much like humans, in fact. For despite Matheson's de-romanticizing of the vampire myth, his story never forgets the human equation, within which a further more poignant feature is the subtext of Robert Neville's pre-plague life, as we find that the leader of the vampires and Neville's chief tormentor, Ben Cortman, was once his close friend and colleague. This is a constant reminder to Neville (and to the reader) that each 'vampire' once possessed friends, family, and loved ones, and this brings further tragedy and pathos, as well as adds to the terror overall, of Neville's seemingly hopeless existence. In Matheson's novel, the vampire as zombie typifies an overall effort to encapsulate the decay and abjection of the reanimated dead body, rather than the fantastical and superhuman physical prowess that is often associated with the vampire of popular fiction. This was also the way in which the vampires were depicted in the first film version, *The Last Man on Earth*, which is by far the closest film adaptation to the book. Linda Badley adds that '*Romero's Night of the living Dead* was horrifying because the "dead" were in the most technical senses living. They were functioning bodies going about the business of survival, en masse. They were the horror of our embodied – consumed and consuming – selves. "They're us," a character in Romero's *Day of the Dead* explained.'[118]

Despite their symbolic representation as zombies, in alignment with Matheson's text, the first two film versions, unlike Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, portray the infected as capable of speech, with *The Ωmega Man*, in particular, featuring a charismatic and eloquent leader in Mathias. As Kenan Malik attests in his book, *Man, Beast and Zombie*, speech is an integral aspect for the symbolic recognition of humans as a social species. Humans, says Malik, 'are symbolic creatures, with language, self-awareness and social existence. These three phenomena are intimately connected. Language can only exist in a social form, but it also helps create the possibility of a social existence beyond simply the kinds of individual interactions that animals experience.'[119] The fact that the 'symbol' of speech is taken away from the infected in Francis Lawrence's film version is telling in terms of narrative function. As with the Matheson's novel, in both *The Last Man on Earth* and *The Ωmega Man*, the leader of the infected represents Robert's chief nemesis, and, in all three texts, this character is roundly explored within the flashback sequences, and, in the process, is effectively humanised as a former close acquaintance to Robert. For all intents and purposes, the leader of the infected represents Robert's own shadow-self; a perpetual reminder of the fate that should have befallen him. Whereas the book and first two film versions work to stress the connection between Robert and

[118] Badley, p. 25.
[119] Kenan Malik, *Man, Beast and Zombie: What Science Can and Cannot Tell Us About Human Nature* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), p. 220.

his nemesis, the fact that this aspect is completely absent in Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, constitutes a clear demarcation between Neville and the infected, and operates to emphasise the dehumanisation (and de-socialisation) of the plague victims – who are no longer capable of speech – instead focusing on their monstrous and animalistic characteristics.

In contrast to *The Ωmega Man*, despite the fact that the infected are shown to group in large numbers, in Lawrence's film, the infected are not depicted as having any social form of community (although this idea is turned on its head within the alternate ending). Instead, Neville dwells on the aspect of their animalistic, subhuman condition, registering their behaviour as a form of 'social de-evolution', and observing that 'typical human behaviour is now entirely absent'. Neville moreover refers to the infected's place of sanctuary as their 'hive' – a term that equates the infected more with insects than with fellow mammal species, and an insight to how they are perceived in Neville's mind. In fact, when the infected attack, they attack in swarms of countless numbers, indeed, more like a plague of insects rather than predatory mammals. In *The Ωmega Man*, Neville refers to the infected's hideout as their 'nest', which is more in keeping with the traditional vampire rhetoric of the original text, and like the traditional vampire of legend, the infected in *The Ωmega Man*, whatever destructive menace they pose, are no less articulate, intelligent, and calculating. However, unlike the original text, despite their ghoulish appearance and aversion to daylight, 'the family' are not typically portrayed as vampiric, insomuch that they do not lust after blood, do not possess elongated canine teeth (as in the novel), and are just as humanly mortal as Neville.

In *last Man on Earth*, although the infected are referred to as 'vampires', they more characteristically resemble slow, lumbering zombies. Though they appear to suffer the same aversions of the fictional vampire (other than the crucifix), the victims of the plague are a dishevelled rabble that are so feeble and frail, Robert fights off their numbers with apparent ease. Conversely, from the perspective of the 'vampires', it is Robert who must seem to possess the superior strength, speed, and agility of a supernatural being. Robert says of the infected; 'individually, they're weak, mentally incompetent, like animals after a long famine. If they weren't, they surely would've found a way of breaking in here a long time ago.' Nonetheless, like *The Ωmega Man*, the infected are still recognisably human, and, unlike the infected of *I Am Legend*, are clearly still capable of speech, as they persistently goad Robert to 'come out' each night, calling to him specifically by name. Similarly, in *The Ωmega Man*, despite their obvious afflictions, the infected are cast as nothing less than human; in fact, what could be more human than the idea of 'the family'? In his book, *Evil and the Demonic* (1996), Paul Oppenheimer

attests that 'vampires, no matter how one wishes to define the term, must at the very least be seen as previously human, presently 'undead' creatures who have plainly surpassed the human by joining forces with death, who have managed to become superhuman by returning from the grave somehow, and who – a nimble point – seek to set up a dominion of converts, a hierarchy of the undead, that will, as they increase and spread, efface humanity altogether.'[120]

In the 1971 film version, rather than dehumanising the infected, as with *I Am Legend*, Mathias effectively serves as Neville's darker double; his equally charismatic shadow-self; as is often configured of the vampire of fiction. In this respect, Paul Oppenheimer describes the traditional role of the doppelganger in film as the 'demonic opposite' or 'the fervid other'; 'the dark twin of the brain animated with rich, destructive purposes.'[121] Likewise, in *The Last Man on Earth*, Robert's former fellow scientist, Ben Cortman, of whom Robert says was 'like a kid brother', as with Mathias, ends up as the leader of the infected and Robert's chief nemesis. Similarly, Cortman represents Robert's own dark double or doppelganger; a constant and unbearable reminder of who Robert would have been had he succumbed to the virus; a disease which unleashes one's most dark and fetid impulses – something that is, again, traditionally encapsulated by the figure of the vampire. What is more, in both *The Last Man on Earth* and *The Ωmega Man*, Robert's 'demonic double' possesses a relentless compulsion to destroy their uninfected opposite, and each, with their ghoulish legions, gather outside Robert's house every night with this sole purpose in mind. Oppenheimer adds that the figure of the 'double-spectre', or doppelganger, is 'far more than a release of smothered impulses and latent, cruel energy. Unwilling simply to share its growing power, it acquires a lethal, demonic independence, gradually coming to tyrannize the initially receptive personality that is its source.[122]

In contrast to the recognisably human plague victims of *The Last Man on Earth*, and particularly, *The Ωmega Man*, Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, conversely, posits the infected as wholly animalistic bodies of abject horror. Grotesquely demonic in appearance, the infected are completely hairless with grey translucent skin under which dark veins are markedly visible. With misshapen, elongated skulls, their monstrous bodies are a snarl of unsightly skeletal and muscular protrusions. What is more, these horrific bodies seem capable of unnatural elasticity, as evidenced by the unsettling sight of their aberrantly gaping jaws, in conjunction with their unearthly banshee-like screams. In direct contrast to *The Last Man on Earth*, the zombie-like infected, here, are phenomenally strong, fast, and impossibly agile, able to leap superhuman

[120] Paul Oppenheimer, *Evil and the Demonic: A New Theory of Monstrous Behaviour* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1996), pp. 91-92.
[121] Ibid., p. 19.
[122] Ibid., p. 20.

heights and distances. The infected also seem impervious to any pain, although, like the other films, they possess a strong aversion to daylight. In addition, the infected's noticeably frantic rate of breathing is more naturally aligned with canine panting than with something recognisably human. Furthermore, as Steffen Hantke has observed, instead of using actors to depict the infected, as with the other films, *I Am Legend* relies predominantly on CGI; a facet that further works to distance the infected them from their 'real' human counterparts. Hantke adds that, 'though the film refers to the fact or process of transformation from human to infected, there is no scene in which we see a CGI creature morph into an actual actor or vice versa: the otherness of the infected is an unalterable fact.'[123] Ironically, the only time we see a creature begin to transform due to infection, it is not a human, but Neville's pet dog, who has been bitten by one of the infected's own demonic hounds. Later in the film, however, there is a reverse transformation, when a captured infected female gradually begins to turn back to human, though not to full non-CGI completion. In stark contrast to the infected of *I Am Legend*, the physical afflictions of 'the family' in *The Ωmega Man* amount to no more than extreme albinism and blindness to light; and whereas the infected in Lawrence's film display no social interaction other than to swarm when attacking, the family are depicted as a radical pseudo-religious cult – with all the human social structure, organisation, and ritual this might entail. Through these disparate portrayals, we have a clear demarcation of what the infected, in both texts, are intended to represent to the viewer; the monstrous de-humanized of *I Am Legend* against the delusional re-humanized of *The* Ω*mega Man*.

Christian symbolism at the end of *The Last Man on Earth* and *The Ωmega Man*

Ultimately, the ironical twist at the end Richard Matheson's book, *I Am Legend*, is that the last human has, himself, become like the vampire of legend. Robert Neville, without realising, has become a real-life Bogie Man; a mythic creature that lives by day and sleeps by night, existing only within the liminal nightmares of the new human society. This original message has largely been lost amidst the various ideological functions of the films, although the first film version perhaps comes closest to this principal idea behind the book. In *The Last Man on Earth*, as in each film, Robert eventually encounters a young woman, who, on the surface, seems healthy and virus free; except, in this case, she is actually part of an organised and growing society of humans that has learnt to stave off the plague through daily injections of a makeshift vaccine.

[123] Steffen Hantke, 'Historicizing the Bush Years: Politics, Horror Film, and Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend*' in, Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller (ed.), *Horror After 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 170.

As with the book, the woman has been sent to spy on Robert by this new sect. The woman, Ruth, tells Robert; 'You're a legend in the city, moving by day instead of night, leaving as evidence of your existence, bloodless corpses.' Robert's grim lethality – to all sides – is echoed again in *The Ωmega Man*, albeit rather more contritely, when Lisa tells Robert, 'Between "the family" at night and you in the daytime shooting at anything that moved, man, we had to stay low.' The first film version, however, is much more aligned with the original text, as Ruth's words closely mirror the original text. She tells Robert that he is regarded as 'a monster' by her people, and speaks of the terror that he has instilled throughout the new human society; 'Many of the people you destroyed were still alive. Many of them were loved ones of the people in my group.' In *The Last Man on Earth*, like Matheson's book, it seems as though Robert has become a kind of inverse vampire; the very thing he has strived to eradicate, becoming, in the process, the titular 'legend' in question.

After curing Ruth of the virus with antibodies from his blood, and from which, presumably, she can now go on to cure the rest of humankind, the new order of humans finally come to rid themselves of this mythic menace. Again, emulating the novel, the new human society send soldiers clad in black with machine guns to Neville's fortified house. Resembling a rather fascistic paramilitary force, they corner the wounded Robert in a nearby church, and, before Ruth can stop them, the saviour of humanity is killed, symbolically, at the alter with an iron spear to the chest; the final metaphorical staking of the last 'real' vampire. In keeping with the religious allegory present within all three films, and which is a recurring trait in apocalyptic science fiction in general – even if it is no less secular in nature – Robert's spear to the chest also metaphorically mirrors Christ's death on the cross, and the Bible's depiction of the Roman lance that pierced Christ's side. In fact, this fits an overall Christ allegory at the film's end, whereby Robert, regarded by some as a supernatural entity, and who offers salvation to humanity with his (Christ's) blood, is persecuted and captured by the new ruling order, and then executed by its soldiers, symbolically martyred beneath the (implied) crucifix of a church alter.

Like *The Last Man on Earth*, the end of *The Ωmega Man* is no less religiously symbolic, as Robert Neville is finally killed by Mathias, again, with a spear. After Neville lives just long enough to pass on the cure he has made from his own blood to the new generation of humanity, he dies in a clear Christ pose within a fountain red with his blood. However, far from being any sort of validation of Christian ideology, this image of Christ-like sacrifice in the guise of Neville's mock crucifixion can be viewed as overtly subversive, and perhaps, if anything, might seem nothing short of blasphemous to many fervent Christians – an ersatz of The Crucifixion

Fig. 1.3 End of a Legend: the saviour of humanity dies symbolically at a church alter, as Ruth carries forth his life-giving blood. Interestingly, any depiction of the church's own 'holy saviour' is absent from the shot, having been transposed by the redemptive power of science.

for mere science fiction folly. In fact, what comes out of *The Ωmega Man* overall, other than the explicit subversion of Christian symbolism and imagery, is a clear vilification of religious fundamentalism altogether. Here, the infected, or 'the family' as they are known, represent a regression back to a history when religious ideals once regarded science and technology as satanic or 'evil' – a word frequently used by 'the family' to describe Neville and his scientific and secular values. The family's leader, Mathias, refers to Neville as 'the creature of the wheel', and solemnly decrees a day when 'Neville will come down to "the family" for his judgement – down to punishment for his blasphemies'. Ultimately, this pseudo-religious faction is portrayed as perversely pernicious, with a psychotic self-imposed leader that harbours grandiose delusions that he has been 'chosen' by a higher power to 'cleanse the world' (in *The Ωmega Man*, 'psychotic delusions' are later listed as one of the prime symptoms of the virus). In contrast to Charlton Heston's portrayal of the American 'everyman', 'the family' are depicted as fundamentalist fanatics, and their religiously grounded ethics are corrupted to the point of being nihilistically destructive. Upon being captured, Neville describes 'the family' as 'barbarians', to which Mathias retorts; 'You call us barbarians, well, this is an honourable name. We mean to cancel the world you "civilized" people made. We will simply erase history from the time that machinery and weapons threatened more than they offered, and when you die, the last living reminder of hell will be gone.' The religious signification of the family, other than the clear demarcation of their religious rhetoric, extends to their appearance, which is akin to a monastic order, complete with black hooded robes, whilst often referring to themselves collectively as 'the brethren', and individually as either 'brother' or 'sister'. This clear religious foregrounding is emphasised by the fact that they each have specifically biblical names;

‘Mathias’, ‘brother Joshua’, ‘brother Zachary’. Together, they constitute a group of neo-religious zealots who represent the regression of human civilization to a time of medieval religious hysteria against science and machinery; ‘the evil, forbidden things – the tools that destroyed the world’. Subsequently, when ‘the family’ attempt to burn Neville at the stake, they are effectively attempting ‘burn the witch’ (in fact, Neville is made to wear a pointy hat for his execution). In essence, very much in contrast to *I Am Legend*, *The Ωmega Man* portrays an extremely negative depiction of religious absolutism, and, in the shape of the heroic Robert Neville (indeed, Charlton Heston is the quintessential post-apocalyptic hero in every sense) champions science and secularism over archaic forms of religious cabal.

Fig. 1.4 Christ pose: symbolising Neville’s messianic sacrifice as the saviour of humanity. Awash with the metaphorical ‘blood of Christ’, the circular bottom of the fountain’s central decorative feature functions as a symbolic halo.

Fig. 1.5 Religious frieze: This final shot transforms into a lurid negative to signify Neville’s (spiritual) transcendence – or at least his framed immortalization into legend.

The religious reconfiguration of *I Am Legend*

At the beginning of Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, we are shown a visage of a desolate city landscape. After a series of still settings that depict an utterly deserted and overgrown New York City, the unsettling tranquillity is disturbed by Robert Neville (Will Smith) as we ride with him in his sports car hunting deer through the city streets. During the chase, he approaches an abandoned convoy of military vehicles. After he drives past, the camera slowly closes in on a series of posters on the back of an army tank. 'GOD STILL LOVES US', the posters declare in block capitals. However, in the bottom section of the posters, there is a subverted version of Michelangelo's 'finger of God', which is mimicked in the section above. This time, in photographic negative, a hand with a gun points at God's outstretched hand, with the (counter) question underneath: 'Do we still love God?' Interestingly, the one poster that is predominantly visible appears to have been partly scratched out in the unmistakable pattern of a butterfly. This is in fact an embedded code; part of a reoccurring theme that will be of some profound significance later in the film, and part of a religious subtext that sets *I am Legend* starkly apart from its two earlier incarnations from the sixties and seventies.

As established, the film repeats a narrative pattern evidenced within several apocalypse films since 1999. Dr. Robert Neville is a former Christian who has lost all faith in God, and just as in *End of Days*, *Signs*, and *Knowing*, this loss of faith has been triggered by the profound sense of grief after the death of his wife. Here, the fact that there can be no God is compounded by the destruction of human civilization, for which Robert Neville himself feels partly to blame. We know that Robert Neville had formerly believed in God from one of his flashbacks that provide the back-story to how the 'KV virus' gradually destroys civilization. In one scene, Robert helps

Fig. 1.6 'God Still loves us. Do we still love God?': A scratched out butterfly pattern signifies a recurring motif.

to evacuate his wife and young daughter as the city falls into chaos. Before the helicopter takes off leaving Robert behind, and even though the soldiers warn that they must urgently leave, the family all bow their heads as Robert's wife says a prayer; 'Dear Lord, please watch over Robert and keep him strong for the struggle ahead… please just bring him home safely, Amen.' In a further flashback, Robert watches on helplessly as his wife and child perish in a helicopter crash; the pilot appearing to succumb to the virus. In the post-apocalyptic world, Robert Neville's representation, or as least, premonition, as humanity's (potential) saviour, is symbolically performed in one scene in which he does behind-the-neck pull-ups. His cruciform posture, as well as indicating his status as 'saviour', also signifies the sorrow of his deep sacrifice, as well the heavy burden he personally bears in seeking the salvation of humankind – albeit through scientific endeavour.

Fig. 1.7 Crucifixion pose: Robert Neville adopts a clear cruciform position during his training regimen.

Crucially, just as astrophysicists Prof. John Koestler in *Knowing*, and Dr. Ellie Arroway in *Contact*, Dr. Robert Neville, a leading virologist, has dedicated his life to the advance of science. As in these previous films, Neville uses his scientific ideas and background in order to rationally oppose notions of religious faith and the idea of a higher power. This acts as a direct and confrontational counterpoint to specific questions of Christian faith, which are eventually presented to Robert in the form of Anna Montez. In response to Anna's gesticulation of 'My God', Robert snaps back, 'God didn't do this Anna – we did!' The profoundly religious Anna replies, 'God told me he has a plan – if we listen, we can hear God's plan.' Robert angrily shouts, 'There is no God! – There is no God!'

Neville has, nevertheless, managed to find a kind of residual spirituality in the music of Bob Marley; whose music is heard throughout (both diegetic and otherwise), and a source from which Robert derives both comfort and solace. Even naming his daughter, 'Marley', Robert

views Bob Marley's music as the definitive articulation of humanity's former spiritual and poetic expression, and it is through the music of Bob Marley, rather than the Bible or religion, that Robert seems to arrow his remaining compass of moral integrity. The importance of Marley's music in helping Robert face his harrowing day-to-day life, furthermore acts to connote the ideals of Rastafarianism – a spiritual movement which advocates, among other things, a harmonious existence with the environment and the laws of nature, and which encompasses a large-scale rejection of conventional Western society.[124] We have already witnessed Robert's 'harmonious' integration with his new natural environment in his hunting of deer through the deserted city streets. For Robert – who is racially linked to the Rastafarian movement (steeped in traditions of African religion) – this ethos might seem to possess more spiritual gravitas and relevance over traditional forms of Christianity, particularly within the reflective context of humanity's damnable demise.

Towards the end of the film, Robert, Anna, and the boy, Ethan, are trapped in a reinforced-glass panelled compartment, surrounded by legions of the infected. The leader viciously and repeatedly charges at the glass and it begins to crack. The veined wing pattern that begins to emerge in the cracked glass not only reminds Robert of the butterfly tattoo on Anna's neck, and completes a running theme of symbolic butterflies that began with the ripped poster at the start, but, here, it represents the key religious signification of angel wings. This is embodied by the infected's leader, who, unexpectedly ceases his attack and stands motionless, as though taken over by some other presence. All sound stops as time seems to freeze for a moment. The camera focuses sharply on the outlined wings etched into the glass, while the leader appears as a featureless figure in the background, momentarily devoid of his demonic characteristics. He stands perfectly positioned between the wings which stretch out either side. As if through divine intervention, the demon is transformed into a visage of an archangel. Like the subverted depiction of Michelangelo's 'finger of God' in the poster at the beginning of the film, Robert now finds himself pointing a gun at a symbolic representation of God (in the Bible, archangels are invariably portrayed as messengers from God), and just as in the poster, Robert has to ask himself the question; does he 'still believe in God?' At this very moment, as time stops, we hear calming music begin to play, and in front of the symbolic representation of an archangel, Robert experiences an epiphany. We hear a whisper in his head; 'Daddy, look it's a butterfly' – the last words spoken to him by his daughter before she died. This at once triggers a profound revelation, as Robert turns from the butterfly pattern in the glass to the butterfly tattoo on Anna's neck, which he now seems to identify with an overarching pattern. Throughout the film,

[124] Stephen D. Glazier, *Encyclopaedia of African and African-American Religions* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 263.

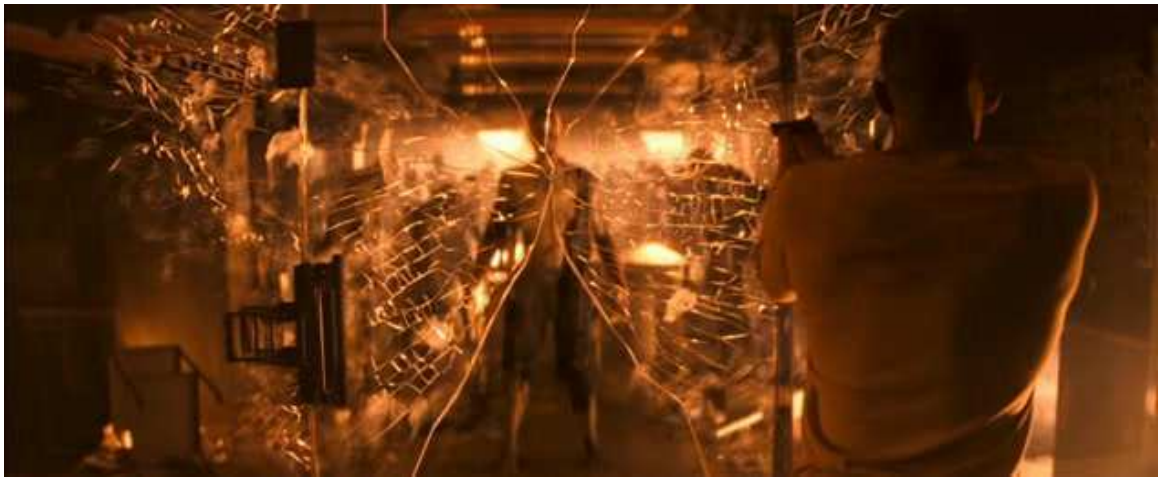

Fig. 1.8 Messenger of God: A symbolic appearance of an archangel provides Neville with the revelation that humanity's salvation rests in his own sacrifice.

the image of the butterfly has repeatedly been linked to God; firstly, the poster that declares that 'God still loves us', the butterfly tattoo of the highly religious Anna, who professes to hear God speaking to her, and finally the butterfly pattern in the glass that transform into the wings of an angel. Like Graham Hess in *Signs*, and John Koestler in *Knowing*, Robert Neville has now decoded the cryptic 'signs from above', and in so doing, like Hess and Koestler, has regained his lost faith in God. Through the aid of these divine messages, Robert finally realises that he holds the salvation of humanity in his own hands. In holding with the film's climactic repositioning into modes of spiritual apocalypse, other than a memory in Robert's mind, his daughter's words can be understood as a form of celestial communication from the afterlife – for which the symbolic appearance of an archangel might act as a heavenly conduit. Similarly, in *Signs,* Graham Hess's wife; in a liminal state between life and death after she is pinned to a tree by a car; likewise acts a conduit for prophetic information from the 'next world'; information that ultimately acts to save Graham and his family. In *I Am Legend,* Robert reinforces the idea that he has received a divine revelation when, after placing Anna and Ethan into safety, he hands Anna the vaccine from the blood of the cured infected female, telling her, 'I think this is why you're here'. Anna asks, 'What are you doing?' Robert pauses in contemplation for a moment and replies, 'I'm listening' (…to 'God's plan'). This narrative shift furthermore reinforces the unshakable evangelical belief of a deterministic order to the universe, something which is directly attuned to God's own eschatological design. Before he releases the high explosive grenade that will annihilate himself and all the infected, Robert Neville now understands, in alignment with Christian beliefs of divine sacrifice and salvation, it is through his death that humanity might now live.

One of the essential differences between *I Am Legend* and *The Ωmega Man*, and another in which Lawrence's movie remains more closely linked to the notion of biblical apocalypse, is that *I Am Legend* depicts the infected populace at large as much more animalistic, or demonic, and who, in an evangelical reading, can easily be inscribed as 'evil'; or the hordes of the Antichrist (during the 'time of tribulation'). In the 1971 version, the infected are merely portrayed as a pseudo-religious cult of mutated luddites, who blame all science and technology for the fall of humankind, and who set about destroying the remnants of technological civilization. Robert Neville, who they see as the embodiment of this 'evil', must also be destroyed, although there is also the element of self-preservation on their part, as Neville hunts and kills each plague victim he finds during the day as they sleep. In Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, the infected seem to have no logical purpose other than the instinctive destruction of the protagonist, the only human that is unlike themselves (indeed, they do not seem interested in killing each other, but, then again, this is a prevailing feature throughout zombie films.) However, there may be another more logical reason why 'the infected' strive for the destruction of Robert Neville, in that he has been capturing individual 'victims' of the virus in order to use them for his experiments. It seems that Robert Neville eventually 'crosses the line' when he apparently captures the female mate of the infected's leader. However, Neville's compulsion to try to save the infected by finding a cure, through which he justifies his experiments (on those he no doubt believes have suffered a fate worse than death), is a distinct departure from the protagonist's role in the earlier film versions. In Robert Sagal's 1971 film, the character of Robert Neville (Charlton Heston) signifies a much more malevolent threat to the infected, in that he, as with Vincent Price in the first film version, represents nothing more than an exterminator of plague victims. In the lesser known of the three films, *The Last Man on Earth* (Sidney Salkow, 1964), there is perhaps a more faithful rendering of the original book, in that those infected by the plague are portrayed as characteristically vampiric. In fact, as well as the infected's inability to exist in daylight – a common feature of all the films – the plague victims of *The Last Man on Earth* symbolise much of the classic representations of the mythic vampire, including the compulsion to feed on blood, and an aversion to garlic, as well as an inherent repulsion of their own reflection. The protagonist, named Robert Morgan in this version, even kills the infected by hammering a stake through their heart. In essence, Robert Morgan is a vampire hunter. The main driving force for the infected is to feed on the blood of those still succumbing to the plague, but, like in all film versions, there seems an extra impulsion to destroy the last remaining immune human. Again, like *The Ωmega Man*, this may have more to do with the fact that they are methodically being hunted and killed by 'the last man on earth'. In Comparison, *I Am Legend*'s Robert Neville is portrayed as a humanitarian scientist who, far

from wantonly attempting to exterminate the infected, is depicted as merely trying to cure them – despite the fact that this has already resulted in many of their deaths.

Religious community versus the secular individual in *The Ωmega Man* and *I Am Legend*

As already established, in *The Ωmega Man* 'the family' stands for the community over the individual, with all the Christian domestic conformity their name implies. Here, the representation of community is a uniform and largely faceless mass, which is tantamount to a form of mob rule that persecutes the individuality that Robert Neville signifies. Sinister in their black hooded robes, 'the family' seem hell-bent on exterminating anyone who does not look like them, or think like them (just as in Don Siegel's figurative parable of paranoia and societal conformity, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1956]) and from which much of their destructive ardour is manifested. In 1971, the ominous shadow of the Cold War remained a prime inspiration for much apocalyptic science fiction, and Sagal's film, having already established the premise of Russia and China as a duel malignant force that is responsible for the destruction of humanity, entails all the characteristic American anxiety and paranoia concerning the rise of communism and its all-encompassing attack on perceived 'bourgeois' notions of 'the individual'. In the 1970s, the idea of the Individual was very much a socio-political ethic represented, in direct opposition to the communist ideal, by America and the West. Hence, a further reading of *The Ωmega Man*, as well as viewing the infected as a negative depiction of religious fundamentalism, sets up the 'the family' as signifying a uniform, arbitrary communal faction (communism); a rancorous, malevolent force whose seemingly sole intent is to eradicate the last remaining remnant of human (and American) individuality.

Interestingly, *I Am Legend* submits exactly the inverse message to *The Ωmega Man*, in which Robert Neville initially fails precisely because he does not embrace the community offered by Anna and Ethan, and their pursuit of the human colony in New England. Slovoj Žižek identifies this idea as the 'geopolitical coordinates of the story', configuring 'the opposition between a destitute New York and the pure eco-paradise of Vermont, a gated community protected by a wall and security guards'.[125] Steffen Hantke further equates this geopolitical aspect with a polemic of right wing American politics associated with the Bush era during which the film was made. In *I Am Legend*, the city is doomed; 'a place of violence and fear, of uncontrollable contagion; it requires constant vigilance and yet may kill you – the urban jungle, literally. It is the place Anna and Ethan must leave in order to survive, while Neville stays and dies.'[126] After

[125] Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010).
[126] Hantke, p. 168.

all, Lawrence relocates his film from Los Angeles – where the original novel and *The Ωmega Man* is set – to New York City, the site of America's worst atrocity of terror. Here, the overhanging anxiety concerning the embattled city remains palpable throughout the film. Conversely, at the film's end, once Anna and Ethan reach the safe haven in Vermont, the film unquestionably posits the community of small town America as the utopian ideal, and the fact that the colony is situated in New England, points to a re-birth of where the nation began (of which the term, 'colony', is complicit). New England links the United States' future with its past, and in so doing projects a specific American ideal, as Hantke comments; 'This future lies in small towns, in the political ideal of what Republican candidates, during the 2008 presidential election, incessantly referred to as "Main Street America", equating it with an equally loaded term, "real America".'[127] A significant scene in *I Am Legend* plays out at the end, when Anna and Ethan enter the fortified town. Firstly, we have a cultural cross-section of American society, as Anna, a Hispanic woman, enters the compound flanked by one white and one black soldier. Prominent in the centre of the shot is a white church with a steeple, from which bells ring out. As they enter the compound, the road that Anna and Ethan walk down leads directly to the church. The American flag is also prominent on the left, while the soldiers, brandishing assault rifles, represent the remaining essential ingredient of this symbolic gated community; military might. Here, in one essential scene, we have a snapshot of what community might mean in Bush's arbitrary America; 'God, guns, and gates.'[128] As Hantke points out, 'the colony up in Vermont is permanently protected by the things Neville is missing: genuine family life, a higher fence, religion, and a well-organised military.'[129]

Fig. 1.9 The road to religion: a neoconservative, arbitrary ideal of the gated community; a prescriptive combination of God and guns.

[127] Hantke, p. 168.
[128] Ibid., p. 167.
[129] Ibid., p. 169.

I Am Legend: the alternate ending

It is through the infected's perceived lack of humanity that Robert Neville is allowed, in an ideological sense, to conduct his medical experiments with apparent moral impunity. However, the fact that the infected may have an equal right to exist as a new human species – a central premise of the original novel – is largely ignored in the theatrical release of *I Am Legend*, and only fully comes to light in the film's much discussed alternate ending. This ending was a feature available with the release of the DVD, in which the film could be watched in full with a starkly alternate conclusion. This ending intersects at the point at which the infected's leader has cracked a pattern resembling a butterfly into the reinforced glass behind which Robert, Anna, and Ethan have taken shelter. Instead of continuing his assault, the infected leader starts to pat his palm against the glass, as if trying to communicate something to Neville. Neville hears the words of his daughter, 'Daddy, look it's a butterfly', as with the original ending, but instead of noticing the butterfly tattoo on Anna's neck, the butterfly tattoo now appears on the formerly infected female that Neville has just cured. Neville suddenly puts down his gun and tells Anna to open the glass panel. Anna, again, asks, 'What are you doing?', and Neville, once again, replies, 'I'm listening' (to 'God's plan'). Upon the panel being opened, Neville, with his back to the infected, slowly wheels out the still unconscious patient, who seems in a state of transformation from infected back to human. Standing directly next to Neville, the infected leader carefully eyes his enemy, but barks out instruction for the others not to attack. Neville slowly reaches into a draw and pulls out a syringe, injecting a serum into the patient that instantly transforms her back to her original infected state. We now recognise that she is clearly the alpha male's mate, as we witness them both exchange gentle affections. It is now that Neville realises the extent of the infected's inherent humanity – as well as a clear social (and hetero-normative) structure – and their right to exist as any other species. Picking up his mate,

Fig. 1.10 Shadow Self: Neville comes face-to-face with humanity's newest evolutionary advent.

the infected's leader takes a last derisory glare at Neville, who, head bowed in apologetic deference, contritely whispers 'I'm sorry'. As the infected leave, Neville slumps down against the glass panel and looks up at the multitude of Polaroid pictures of infected patients who have previously died by his hand. Neville finally realises the genocidal magnitude of his work. Here, in an analogous sense, the parallel between Neville's genocidal experiments and those conducted on WWII holocaust victims, deemed 'subhuman' by their Nazi captors, and, in particular, the medical experiments conducted by Joseph Mengele for which he became known as the 'Angel of Death', emerges as poignantly prevalent. Interestingly, in *The Ωmega Man*, there is a similar reference to Robert Neville's genocidal nature in which he is told by Mathias; 'Last night you killed how many? Three of us? And today?.. We don't know yet. You're the Angel of Death, Doctor, not us.' Christopher Sharrett, focussing on similar ideological factors within Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* (1990), avers that these kind of films share 'a good deal in common with George A. Romero's zombie films and the progressive wing of 1970s horror', in which representations of the (monstrous) Other 'are explicitly linked to the unconscious and are also closely associated with various persecuted minorities (the immediate correlate is the ancient Jews)'[130] Conversely, the theatrical release of *I Am Legend* elides any recognition of of humanity within the infected in order to portray a purely alien and malevolent force, and which obfuscates this crucial aspect of Neville's medical genocide in favour of his religious reawakening and subsequent self-sacrifice. In the alternate ending, unlike the previous film versions, Neville does not die, and drives out of the city with Anna and Ethan destined for the human colony in Vermont. This ending promises the reinstatement of the traditional nuclear family – symbolically returning to Neville the wife and child that he had lost – as well as re-establishes the dominant social order within a patriarchal framework. What is more, this ending still manages to retain a significantly religious reorientation of the text, and Anna's last words are in voice-over; 'Keep your radio on, listen for our broadcasts, you are not alone. There is hope. Keep listening. You are not alone.' This echoes Anna's earlier declaration, when she tells Neville; 'The world is quieter now; if we listen, we can hear God's plan', as well as Neville's affirmation that he is 'listening'. Anna's reassertion that we are 'not alone' can equally be understood in that we are not alone in the universe; that there is a divine higher power watching over us.

[130] Christopher Sharret, 'The Horror Film in Neoconservative Culture', in, Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 265.

Fig. 1.11 & 1.12 Angel of Death: Neville finally realises the genocidal nature of his experiments.

Moreover, in terms of the portrayal of the infected, despite their transition to social (and spiritual) humanity in the alternate ending, it remains significant that the prime site of conflict emerges over the captured infected female, or more specifically, the female body. Here, the infected female, in all her plague-ridden grotesquery, can be viewed as a ubiquitous presence within the horror film genre; that which Barbara Creed has termed, 'the Monstrous-Feminine'. Among other things, Creed views the representation of the monstrous-feminine as an 'ideological project' that, in effect, attempts to 'shore up the symbolic order by constructing the feminine as an imaginary Other that must be repressed and controlled in order to secure and protect the social order.'[131] Not only does Neville cure the woman of her disease, and thus, her symbolic defilement; an effort to reinstate the social (Christian), patriarchal order; but, even when the cure is reversed (in the alternate ending) the woman cannot escape her subordination into patriarchal power, as she passively allows herself to be carried away in the arms of the dominant alpha male. Previously strapped down, prone and semi-naked, the woman, here, is the

[131] Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine', in, Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *The Dread of Difference*: *Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 63.

metaphorical ‘prize of battle’, handed over to acquiesce the (male) victor from violent reprisal, and, in symbolic terms, to restore patriarchal authority – something that had been formerly challenged by the presence of Anna; a woman who wields the all-encompassing authority of God.

Fig. 1.13 The spoils of war: the infected alpha male carries off his female mate, as Neville (with back to camera) and the other infected bow their heads in deference to his patriarchal authority.

Conclusion

Unlike the films, in Matheson’s book, Neville provides no such cure for the plague-ridden remnants of humankind. He is ‘legend’ insomuch that he is the only one of his kind; a mythic spectre of death that haunts the living while they sleep. Neville is no messiah, and certainly no saviour of humanity. In *The Last Man on Earth*, Neville’s ‘legend’ overlaps both that of mythic monster and supersaviour, offering salvation to humankind with his life-giving (Christ’s) blood. In *The Ωmega Man*, Neville – regarded as a menace rather than monster or myth – becomes ‘legend’ purely in his immortalization as humanity’s saviour, dying for the (scientific) sins of humankind so that a new Edenic community might flourish (‘only this time we don’t trust no friggin’ snake’). Like Sagal’s film, Lawrence’s *I Am Legend* entirely forgoes Matheson’s meaning of ‘legend’ to transpose, instead, a sacrificial supersaviour to the myth of Robert Neville. It is here, however, that a total ideological turnaround takes place which substitutes the religiously symbolic endings of the first two films for a religiously ideological one. Though *The Last Man on Earth* and *The Ωmega Man* both depict visions of religious symbolism by co-opting the idea of Christ’s embodiment as sacrificial saviour; Charlton Heston’s ‘Robert Neville’ in a clear crucifixion pose, and Vincent Price’s protagonist, whose symbolic death, at the point of a soldier’s spear, effectively replaces the (absent) crucifix at a church alter; these

symbolically religious endings are nothing more than that, symbolic, and are not part of a larger ideological standpoint. As is pointed out by Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence in *The Myth of the American Superhero* (2002), Hollywood films often employ a 'wide-scale secularization of Judeo-Christian redemption dramas',[132] in which the 'supersaviours' that frequently appear in contemporary science fiction, function as symbolic replacements for the 'Christ figure', and this has been an overriding trait throughout the prevailingly secular cycle of apocalyptic cinema. In terms of the 20th and 21st century cinematic interpretations of Matheson's text, it is clear that, whereas Richard Matheson endeavoured to position the genre of horror – with all the potential religious resonance of the classic horror tradition – squarely into the realm of secular science fiction, Lawrence's *I Am Legend* effectively sublimates the focal syntax of the original text in what Steffen Hantke describes as an overall 'reversal of Matheson's revisionist project'.[133] Hantke exclaims that, 'though the film retains the scientific rationale for the existence of these abject bodies, the loathing and disgust they inspire bring about a return from the mode of science fiction to horror, albeit a form of body horror linked to biological, or, more broadly speaking, biotechnological origins.'[134] In doing so, Lawrence's *I Am Legend* opens itself up to specifically biblical interpretations of 'the endtime' that were neither accessible nor invited in the original text.

Furthermore, in the film's religiously orientated denouement, the human factor regarding the infected is altogether lost, with the infected very much portrayed as the grotesquely pale, emaciated, and rag-ridden depiction of 'living dead' of which we have all become familiar in the zombie film oeuvre of horror. In a biblical sense, they also stand in adequately for the apocalyptic minions of hell; the fabled forces of darkness from the Book of Revelation. As Steffen Hantke observes of the Lawrence's film, 'the infected do not inspire – erroneously, as Matheson would have it – spiritual dread, as vampires would have; they tap into the affective reservoir of the zombie, inspiring physical disgust. However, in Lawrence's film, as with *The Ωmega Man*, just as there is no mention of vampires, there is neither any question that the infected have dramatically come back from the dead, as is a horrific proponent of Matheson's novel. *The Ωmega Man* may not depict any representation of vampires, zombies, or any other supernatural being, but then neither does it include the term 'legend' in its title, and thereby absolves itself of this textual association. Charlton Heston's designation as the 'Ωmega Man' may well connote a sense of the legendary or superheroic; but he is simply the last uninfected human, just as Ω (omega) is the last letter of the ancient Greek alphabet. Having done away

[132] Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 6.
[133] Hantke, p. 171.
[134] Ibid., p. 171.

with notions of vampires and 'the living dead' altogether, albeit with some remaining symbolic resonance – particularly in the portrayal of the zombie-like infected in Lawrence's film – these narratives are bereft of any likewise mythic element or supernatural legend; merely that the infected human populace have been horrifically mutated by an unstoppable pathogen. In essence, Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend* seems to be missing the 'legend', and, in doing so, is clearly missing the point of Matheson's original text. The end of the theatrical release of *I Am Legend* concludes with Anna's voice over;

> In 2009, a deadly virus burned through our civilization, pushing humankind to the edge of extinction. Dr, Robert Neville dedicated his life to the discovery of a cure and the restoration of humanity. On September 9th, 2012, at approximately 8:49pm, he discovered that cure. And at 8:52 he gave his life to defend it. We are his legacy. This is his legend.

The fact that these final words are spoken by Anna, after Neville's death, misses another crucial factor in that, as well as eliding the supernatural aspect of the 'legend' of the title, in Neville's absence, here, there is also no 'I' in *I Am Legend*. As Steffen Hantke points out, 'unlike Matheson's original conceit in the novel, important enough for the author to incorporate it into the title' and whose book concludes with Robert Neville speaking those same words, here, 'Neville is not allowed to be the teller of his own tale'.[135] Indeed, what we ascertain from Lawrence's interpretation of *I Am Legend* amounts to a complete inversion of Matheson's secular fable that pits science against redolent notions of superstition and the supernatural. In fact, Lawrence's film can very well be viewed as the vampire to Matheson's legend, insofar that Neville, in the original story, becomes a legend in the very same way that vampires had; through a profoundly Manichean misunderstanding of the original myth.

[135] Hantke, p. 165.

Chapter 2

The Coordinates of Catastrophe: Finding Faith in *Knowing* the End

The title of Alex Proyas's 2009 film, *Knowing*, together with the movie's tag-line; 'Knowing is Everything', hints at a prophetic knowledge of some kind, something which is laid out at the very start of the film. Amidst the sound of ghostly whispers, the title word fades into a close-up shot of the sun. Outside a school, a young girl is gazing intently up at the sky – her expression unequivocally grim. The unearthly whispers increase in intensity as the girl ignores the hails from her teacher. The sun, the object of her unwavering gaze, suddenly bursts into blinding white light as the whispers escalate to a cacophony. These first sequences, together with the inscription of the film's title barely melted from the screen, portray the sun as a celestial antenna for esoteric messages from above; a metaphorical 'burning bush' beaming down divine knowledge. As it transpires, the year is 1959, and today a school in Lexington, Massachusetts, is commemorating the burial of a time-capsule that will be unearthed in a future fifty years. Deposited within, are an array of colourful drawings from the children of William Dawes Elementary. Also included, Lucinda's page of strangely sequenced numbers, frantically scribbled as though guided by the unintelligible whispering that only she (and we) can hear. As the ceremony proceeds, Lucinda, silent throughout, watches alone from a distance. She holds a bright yellow balloon, symbolic of the sun, on the end of a piece of string. This is also symbolic of a direct link or line of communication. The vivid yellow balloon highlights Lucinda's whiter-than-white dress, signifying the purity that befits a vessel of celestial transmission. As the time capsule is lowered into the ground, it is sealed with a circular iron plaque that is revealed to be the centre of a larger sun motif encircled by spiked rays of light. So we have, in the opening scenes of the film, all the themes, codes, and signs of portent that will enable the viewer to unravel a narrative design of apocalyptic dimension.

In this chapter, I aim to pinpoint the conveyance of religious and biblical elements that occur throughout Proyas's film. This is most effectively accomplished by following the film's linear narrative progression, and by so doing, accompanying the protagonist through his journey of religious (re)discovery. This is perhaps an important aspect of the methodological reading of *Knowing*, as it is, vitally, through the interpretation and revelation of the signs and codes that appear progressively through the film, that the viewer, like our protagonist, can fully comprehend and engage in the eschatological prophecy at hand. I will also examine aspects concerning the aesthetics of apocalypse within films like *Knowing* and Roland Emmerich's

2012 (of the same year) and the extent by which cinematic visions of apocalypse are shaped by biblical 'myths' and religious art and imagery. I will also address similarities in the ecological cataclysms that play out within these films, and how this effects the religious orientation between these, and earlier, more prevalently secular apocalypse films. Moreover, through the film's deliberations on spiritual aspects of determinism, an interesting dialectic between science and religion begins to emerge, in which a distinct alignment with dispensationalist endtime prophecy belief operates as a major factor within the film's premise of apocalypse. However, the relationship between religion and science (fiction) in *Knowing* is much more complex than simply a sublimation of one form over the other, and this will be examined in the final sections of this chapter.

Determinism and the path towards religious (re)discovery

As evidenced previously in Robert Zemeckis' *Contact* (1997), Peter Hyams' *End of Days* (1999), and M. Knight Shyamalan's *Signs* (2002), in *Knowing*, a familiar narrative pattern begins to emerge. As well as the overall theme of apocalypse, all of these films feature a central protagonist who has lost their Christian faith, or who has categorically resolved to reject Christianity altogether (as with Jodie Foster's character in *Contact*). In each case, this loss of faith has occurred in direct conjunction with the overwhelming loss felt over the death of a loved one. Dr Ellie Arroway lost both her parents at an early age in *Contact*, while in *Signs* and *Knowing*, both central characters suffer the loss of their wives in tragic accidents. No faith remains whatsoever for Arnold Schwarzenegger in *End of Days*, after the brutal murder of his wife and daughter. Biblical even in name, 'Jericho Kane' nevertheless adopts his fated role as messianic Christian saviour, despite his religious reluctance. Identifying a repeating pattern of biblical allegory, Mick Broderick has stated that one of the most 'potent myths' of the pre-millennial apocalypse film, is 'the recasting of the Judeo-Christian messianic hero who battles an antichrist and his followers, liberating an oppressed community and thereby enabling social rebirth.'[136] Correspondingly, Hyams' film, as the title suggests, plays upon the same apocalypse fantasies typical of Dispensationalist doom myths of the time; namely, the millennial dawn of the Antichrist (in much the same way as *The Omen* series had done previously).

For the protagonists in all these films, the sense of abject loss has instilled a profound and bitter belief that there cannot possibly exist a God that would allow such internal suffering and

[136] Mick Broderick, 'Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster', *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 20, no.3 (November 1993).

sorrow. In particular, the rejection of prior faith is made acutely visible in *Signs*, where Reverend Graham Hess (Mel Gibson) has abandoned his vocation as an Episcopalian minister in the face of his wife's untimely death. Although this is not quite so directly illustrated in *Knowing*, the absence of religious belief is established early in the film. Professor John Koestler (Nicholas Cage), a professed atheist that has descended into bouts of alcoholism since the death of his wife, is not even able to assure his young (Christian) son that his mother has moved on to a better place. After gazing up at the stars through a powerful telescope, John submits the idea that there is no existence of life beyond the earth. Sensing his son's disquiet, he remonstrates, 'when I said it was just us out there, you know I was talking about space right? I didn't mean heaven or anything. I'm sure where mom is..', his son, Caleb, interjects, 'Dad.. you don't even believe in heaven.' John replies, half-heartedly, 'I never said that Caleb, I just said.. we can't know for sure, that's all.' The camera focuses on a close-up of Nicholas Cage as he looks down at his son – who is out of shot, and verges on a direct address to the audience; 'If you want to believe.. you go ahead and believe, okay'. His tactful answer neatly encapsulates the overall non-committal (and non-offending) stance often espoused by Hollywood to its largely Christian public (a Gallup poll in 2007 approximated that 82% of Americans considered themselves to be Christian).[137]

Tensions between his son's spiritual beliefs and his own bitter atheism are heightened by the fact that John Koestler's immediate family happen to be devout Christians themselves – made clear by the fact that his father is a pastor. Like Graham Hess's desertion from the priesthood in *Signs*, this acts to emphasise the scale of John's fall from grace. Evidently coming from a deeply religious background, John's denial of his faith is made all the more emphatic by his overall estrangement from Reverend Koestler, a 'father' that he has not spoken to for some time. John's familial isolation extends even to his sister, who is also a devout Christian. After failing to persuade John to reconcile his differences with their father, she proposes to pray for her only brother. John's alienation from his both family and his religion is made complete when he sternly rejects her offer, declining to engage in even a passive affiliation with his family's faith.

Like Dr Ellie Arroway in *Contact*, John Koestler is an astrophysicist, and, as with Jodie Foster's character, is a scientist that seems intent on bringing the nature of Christian belief into question. A professor in astrophysics at M.I.T., in one of his classes John provokes a science versus religion debate by introducing the subject of 'randomness versus determinism in the universe'. One of his

[137] Gallup.Com <http://www.gallup.com/poll/103459/questions-answers-about-americans-religion.aspx>

students neatly explains; ‘Determinism says that occurrences in nature are causally decided by preceding events in natural law, that everything leading up to this point has happened for a reason.’ In reaction to this, John places a model sphere of the sun in one palm, and a model of the earth – tiny and almost insignificant in comparison – in the other. He places his arms apart to mock the approximate relative distance from the two, and posits to the class;

> I want you to think about the perfect set of circumstances that put this celestial ball of fire at just the correct distance from our little blue planet for life to evolve.. that's a nice thought right? Everything has a purpose.. an order to it.. is determined. But then there’s the other side of the argument, the theory of randomness, which says it's all simply coincidence. The very fact that we exist is nothing but the result of a complex yet inevitable string of chemical accidents and biological mutations. There is no grand meaning.. there is no purpose.

At that thought, John Koestler, no doubt contemplating the meaningless death of his wife, descends into a brief malaise, until one of his students asks him which of the two theories he believes. Koestler replies, ‘I think shit just happens.. but that’s me.’ The religious ideological significance of the topic is circumvented through the detached, analytical eye of science, but Koestler’s flippant dismissal of the idea of determinism, or, fatalism, to give it a more spiritual guise, mirrors a similar discussion on the nature of the universe that Graham Hess holds with his brother in *Signs*. Watching the lights in the sky that indicate the ominous incursion by aliens, Merrill Hess (Joaquin Phoenix) comments, ‘Some people are probably thinking this is the end of the world.’ Graham tells him that people break down into two groups; the people that see things as pure coincidence, who will look at the lights in the sky with suspicion, feeling that ‘whatever happens they are on their own’, which ultimately ‘fills them with fear’. And group two, the people who see it as ‘more than coincidence’, and see the lights as ‘a sign’ – as evidence that ‘there is someone up there watching out for them’, which is something that ‘fills them with hope.’ Graham asks his brother, ‘Are you the kind that sees signs, sees miracles? Or do you believe that people just get lucky? Or, look at the question this way, is it possible – that there are no coincidences?’ Merrill considers the question carefully, before declaring that he is a ‘miracle man’. He asks his former priest brother which group he belongs to. Graham thinks of his wife and cites her last words; ‘Tell Graham.. tell him.. to see. And tell Merrill to swing away.’ Graham explains to his brother that these words had no meaning or coherence of thought because the nerve endings in her brain were firing as she died, and a ‘random memory’ of them at one of Merrill’s baseball games ‘just popped into her head’. Graham proclaims, ‘There is no one watching out for us Merrill, we are all on our own.’

What is interesting about the discussions in these two scenes is that, although one is approached within a purely scientific context (a physics class at M.I.T.), the other is from the

spiritual standpoint of a former priest, John Koestler and Graham Hess's existential meditations on determinism and randomness, of which the latter is firmly subscribed, underpins their overall worldview that all is attributable to complex factors and random events, 'chemical accidents' and 'biological mutations'. Here, the final 'random' words of a loved one are reduced to the biological malfunction of a dying brain; an electrochemical equation of firing neural nerve endings. However, the fact that these personal philosophies are shown to provide both characters with very little comfort and hope – each in their own spiritual wasteland – foregrounds a central narrative component whereby profound psychical modes of meaning are derived through deterministic, and hence, spiritual stratification. In terms of the thematic context of the two films, this focus on fatalism, particularly amidst cataclysmic events, can be described as the 'appeal of apocalypticism'. As Daniel Wojcik explains, fatalistic beliefs 'provide a framework for interpreting events otherwise considered to be haphazard, uncontrollable, or incomprehensible, reducing uncertainty and offering a sense of control for situations in which personal action is believed to be futile.'[138]

What makes *Signs* and *Knowing* stand out in particular is that this kind of theological debate, consisting of questions of fatalism, and ultimately, biblical prophecy, are largely discounted by Hollywood until the turn of the millennium. Although the extinction of humanity and ideas of determinism had featured previously in science fiction films, this was more a brand of scientific determinism, invariably wrapped up within time-travel conundrums, as in Terry Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys* (1995). Here, the concept of time, and time-travel, is haphazard and theoretically abstract (not 'an exact science'). Nonetheless, by the end of Gilliam's film, a deterministic order has been instated, where the cycle of human history appears destined to play over on an endless loop. John Cameron's 1984 'sci-fi classic', *The Terminator*, proffers a much more open-ended future for humankind. At the end of the film, Sarah Connor contemplates the time-travel paradox at hand; should she tell her son-to-be, John Connor, that as the leader of the resistance in the future war with the machines, he will send a volunteer soldier, Kyle Reese, back into the past – where he unwittingly becomes his father – when Sarah Connor knows Kyle will be killed, but that John will not exist in the first place if he does not; 'God.. a person could go crazy thinking about this!' However, as Kyle Reese had earlier declared; 'The future is not set, there is no fate but what we make for ourselves.' This ethos is again reiterated at the end of Cameron's 1991 sequel, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*; where a voice-over by Sarah Connor narrates to a shot of the on-rushing road; 'The unknown future rolls toward us. I face it for the

[138] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 135.

first time with a sense of hope'. Despite the fact that, in both *Twelve Monkeys* and the *Terminator* films, the future of humanity is caught up in deterministic time-loops and pre-played versions of history, the fact that the future has the potential to be 'unknown', that there may be any number of random outcomes, holds with a very secular kind of viewpoint rooted within scientific discourse. This is the antithesis of evangelical belief in the 'endtime', which relies on the very basis that the future is already written (quite literally). Circumventing the secular and scientific notion of a random universe, Australian director, Alex Proyas, contemplates the nature of existence along more spiritual lines of determinism, and submits this idea as the focus to his film;

> Nicolas Cage's character in the movie starts out believing there is no central meaning to our existence, that the universe functions along chaotic principles, and he discovers that there is actually order and there is actually meaning.. It's his journey back to meaning in the movie, so that, I guess, is the central theme.[139]

An important distinction, then, has to be made between scientific determinism and religious fatalism, and how this operates within modern apocalypse films (since the mid-to-late nineties). Certainly, in both *Knowing* and *Signs*, the factor of fatalism is vital in establishing a spiritual and religious foregrounding to the narratives, and provides central plot impetus through a pattern of linear deterministic functions, as demonstrated through use of biblical prophecy. In *Signs*, for instance, the apparent 'random' and nonsensical words of Graham Hess's wife transpire to contain profound significance, and are eventually interpreted as prophetic instructions of how he and his brother are able to save the family from destruction. This spiritual materialization through aspects of fatalistic revelation, although operating to a less significant degree, is nonetheless prevalent in the films before the millennium, *Contact* and *End of Days*, which similarly affirm the concept that there may be a prophetical or pre-determined order to the universe, or 'God's plan', as it were.

Apocalyptic prophecy and the ghosts of 9/11: decoding the signs of the endtime

In *Knowing*, John Koestler, like Graham Hess, is about to encounter mysterious supernatural events that will lead to a gradual transformation, one which will ultimately guide him towards a revelation of spiritual understanding and regained religious belief. Some fifty years later, after the ceremony of the opening of the time capsule, the gathered school children each receive an envelope from the unearthed container. Caleb opens his to find Lucinda's mysterious page of sequenced numbers. This immediately heralds the return of the ghostly whispers, which only Caleb can hear, and presages the appearance of a foreboding figure in black. When Caleb

[139] Remmy Minnick, 'Alex Proyas: And "Knowing" Is Half The Battle', *ComicBookResources.Com*, 12 August 2008.

secretly brings the half-century old manuscript home, John notices some figures that stand out from the jumble of random numbers, 911012996. He quickly decodes the first five digits as a calendar date, and the last four numbers he finds to be the exact death toll after the attack on the World Trade Center: 9/11/01/2996. Perplexed by this discovery, and after some extensive internet research, John goes on to find that nearly all the numbers correspond to other fatal catastrophes, and, by the end, has matched all the dates to 'every global disaster for the last fifty years in perfect sequence'. This is except for three sets of dates and predicted death tolls that have not yet occurred. What is more, there are further numbers that follow each death toll figure that John is unable to decipher. Continuing the film's undercurrent of religious themes, the artefact of coded numbers, in itself, undoubtedly finds its inspiration from The Bible Code.

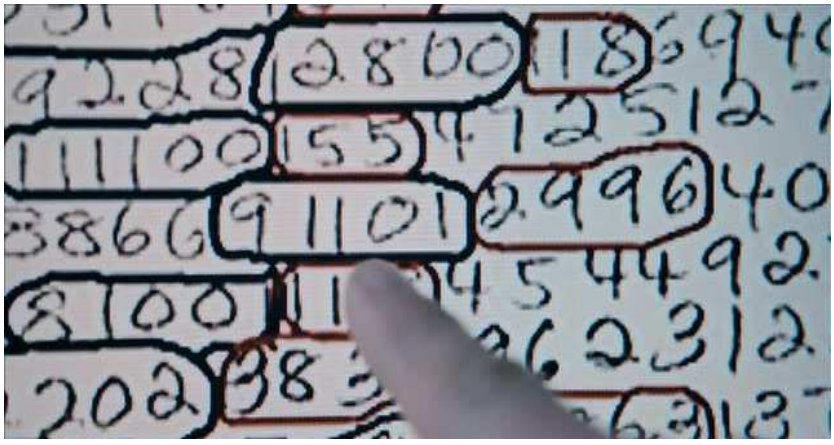

Fig. 2.1 Key to the Code: 9/11 is the enigma that deciphers all other dates of disaster.

Also known as the Torah Code, it is believed that secret messages exist encoded within the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, or the Torah. The hidden code, believed to be revealed by decrypting a sequenced pattern of letters, have allegedly predicted major historic figures, events, assassinations, and disasters, including the 9/11 attacks on the 'twin towers'. To this day, Bible Code scholars continue to predict future disasters, and give credence to the notion that the End of Days is ultimately foretold through a series of predicted cataclysms, as is prophesized in the Book of Revelation. Though attempts to decode the Bible have been practised for centuries, in 1997, the concept was popularized by Michael Drosnin's bestselling book, *The Bible Code*, which quickly established itself within the cannon of premillennial prophecy literature.

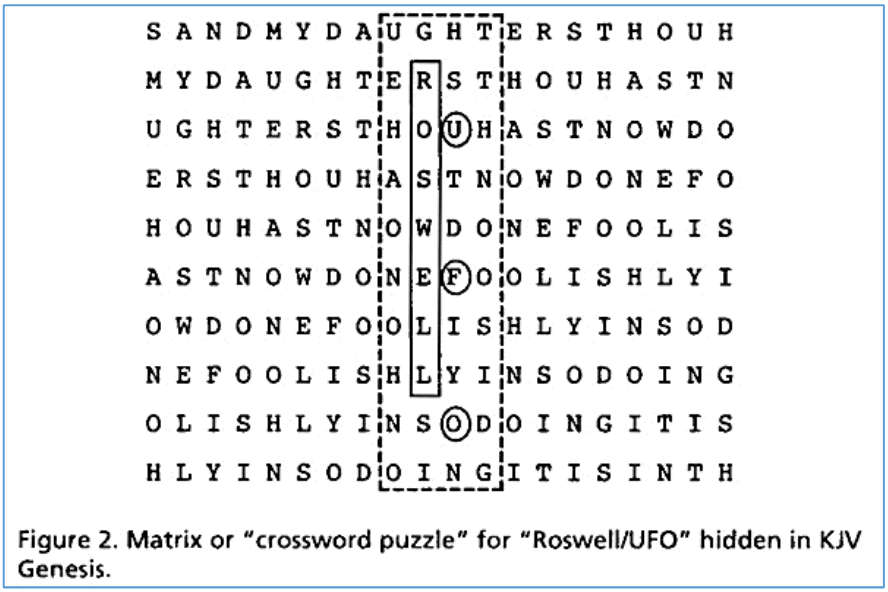

Fig. 2.2 The Bible Code: an example matrix from Drosnin's book purportedly identifies a prophecy of the alleged UFO incident at Roswell.

Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, a former lecturer in psychology and religion at Harvard, remarks that what precipitated a 'dramatic new era' and fascination in the ancient art of biblical decryption was the application of 'formal statistical analysis'; 'Therein lay the confluence of generations of intellectual, spiritual, and scientific endeavours', he says.[140] In terms of a Bible Code, like astrophysicist, John Koestler, Satinover highlights an enduring dichotomy between science and religion, in which, out of the ancient Jewish 'tradition' of kabbalah, the art of cryptography was developed, and from this, he exclaims, emerged mathematical statistics. 'In time', says Satinover, 'success in the making and breaking of codes became a life-and-death matter for nations – and by the twentieth century, for the entire world. Such pressures force-bred the development of computers',[141] as was evident at Bletchley Park during World War II, and Alan Turing's pioneering of electro-mechanical code-breaking machines (largely regarded as the world's first computers). However, like the dialectic between 'randomness and determinism in the universe', scientific application to the decryption of supposed ancient biblical codes has not come without some notable dissention, or as Satinover puts it, some religious voices had expressed grave concern that 'science was treading where it ought not'.[142] 'This dichotomy', says Satinover, 'is the modern form of Cartesian duality, a kind of mental and psychological "keeping kosher" – not with separate plates for meat and milk, but with separate mental repositories for science and faith'.[143]

[140] Dr Jeffrey Satinover, *The Truth Behind The Bible Code* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1998), p. 119.
[141] Ibid., p. 119.
[142] Ibid., p. 119.
[143] Ibid., p. 119.

In *Knowing*, as already underscored by the classroom debate on 'randomness versus determinism', a more internal debate between science and mysticism now prompts a dialectical dilemma within the mind of John Koestler the scientist. John's close colleague, Phil (Ben Mendelsohn), who represents scientific rationale over John's perceived mystical folly, points to the fact that there are host of systems that find meanings in numbers; 'numerology, kabbalah, pythagory.. they are a dime a dozen, why? Because people see what they want to see in them.' Just when John's own scientific reasoning is beginning to accept this explanation, he realises via the GPS in his car that the previously un-deciphered numbers are coordinates of longitude and latitude, which pinpoint the exact location of each disaster. Disconcertingly enough for John, the current coordinates he reads on his GPS correspond to the same numbers that are on Lucinda's manuscript, together with the current date and a predicted death toll of '81'. Sure enough, no sooner has he stepped out from his car, a passenger jet hurtles towards the ground and crashes into flames merely metres from where John stands. What follows is a hellish holocaust of fire and screaming panic, as in one sweeping shot, the camera tracks behind John through a landscape of burning bodies and flaming fuselage. Escaping passengers, hopeful of a miraculous survival, are at once obliterated in a massive fireball explosion. Despite the realisation that yet another de-coded prophecy has come true, John courageously attempts to interject, but can do little to save the doomed victims from their unavoidable fate.

A continuation of theme, the horrific plane crash immediately evokes the harrowing auspices of 9/11 – an event that the film has already referenced (and has psychologically instilled) through the de-coding of the numbers. However, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) – pronounced 'Noah' – yet another biblical reference, declares that, far from being a terrorist attack, the crash is thought to be the result of an 'electro-static burst from the sun'. This, in one sense, begins to place *Knowing* within a model of apocalypse films that reflect the environmental concerns of its time, as with *The Day After Tomorrow*. Much more related to *Knowing*, however, was Emmerich's follow-up film of ecological devastation, *2012*. Released in the same year as *Knowing*, solar flares from the sun, again, cause catastrophic carnage; this time 'superheating' the planet's core to cause 'Earth Crust Displacement', heralding an apocalypse of truly biblical proportion. Danny Boyle's *Sunshine* (2007) projected an equally fatal future regarding the Earth's dependence on the Sun, with humanity on the brink of extinction as the Sun, contrary to the film's title, burns itself out. When asked whether his film was a metaphor for current global concerns, Alex Proyas responded;

> The reason I like science fiction is because I always see it as being hugely relevant to the times that we live in.. in that it's always talking about stuff that, I hope, people are concerned with right now…

> all the concerns that we have, and the ideas that we have about the direction we are heading right now.[144]

In his Book, *Disaster Movies: The Cinema of Catastrophe*, Stephen Keane observes that the disasters in these films 'have the effect of bringing existing social and political themes to light, issues independent of pure *zeitgeist* and characteristic of the period as a whole'.[145] It is interesting that both Proyas and Emmerich should bring out films in the same year about Earth's destruction in the face of unstable solar activity, which, at the same time, mirrored valid concerns by some scientist about the unpredictable nature of solar flare bursts. Only in 2010, scientists warned of the impact that radiation from solar flares could have on Earth's technological global networks, potentially bringing down communications systems, satellites, and power grids, as well as possessing the capability to wreak ecological havoc in polar regions of the planet. Bill Murtagh, of the Space Weather Prediction Center at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, explains that solar activity tends to happen in cycles, saying, at the time, that the next major cycle was due in 2013, although he believes that any disruption from solar flares are more likely to cause electronic chaos than anything geological; 'It could be ugly: a storm could disrupt credit card and ATM transactions, cell phone networks could go, the entire power grid could get zapped, which could cause trillions of dollars of damage.'[146] Considering the theoretical solar scenarios in *Knowing* and *2012*, many might be relieved if this is ever the most humanity has to fear from the Sun's portentous power.

Following the plane crash, John suppresses his own scientific inclinations and instead begins to accept the revelation of prophecy at hand; 'It wasn't coincidence. I drove past at the exact moment the prediction came true – it's no coincidence.' However, Ben continues to try and explain the mystifying events in terms of scientific rationale; 'So what are we calling this – synchronicity? Two unrelated events; digging up the time capsule, a plane crash – combine to create a significance with the subject – you. We don't have a frame of reference.. there could be multiple meanings to consider.' Nonetheless, John is convinced that the numbers are warnings that are specifically intended for him. Indeed, in an explicitly evangelical reading of the film, John has been given the gift of prophecy, where the numbers can be viewed as portents of the endtime; a series of signs for John to decode, interpret, and ultimately fulfil his divine calling. In a modern psychoanalytical sense, the delusion of knowing the future, only to endure the anxiety of being disbelieved, is something that has been termed the Cassandra Complex. This

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[144] Interview by Paul Fisher for *Darkhorizons.com*, 6 August 2008.
[145] Stephen Keane, 'The Sense of an Ending', *Disaster Movies: The Cinema of Catastrophe* (London: Wallflower, 2001), p. 74.
[146] Marketplace.com, <http://www.marketplace.org/topics/tech/scientists-warn-solar-flares-could-disrupt-power-grid>

transpires to be a more than apt term for John Koestler's growing psychological dilemma. Cassandra, in Greek mythology, was granted the gift of prophecy by Apollo, but when she failed to return his love, she was cursed so that no one would ever believe her predictions of the future. As well as no one willing to believe John's own declarations of portent, this was a fate that, in the end, proved too much for Lucinda to endure. The Cassandra Complex; 'the agony of foreknowledge combined with the impotence to do anything about it',[147] was a premise that was utilised to key effect in Terry Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys*, in which time-travelling agents from the post-apocalyptic future become marooned in the past, and show up in historical texts as mysterious doomsayers that warn of a plague that will eventually wipe out humanity. Like the cryptographic rendering of The Bible Code, Lucinda's enigmatic manuscript is just as much a signification of apocalypse. The numbers on the manuscript, like the mysterious crop circles and radio-static communications in *Signs*, and the cryptic satellite messages from space in *Contact*, follow the same model of eschatological interpretation present in the deciphering of many biblical texts. Indeed, the Bible's most apocalyptic text, the Book of Revelation, is packed full of mysterious symbolic imagery, cryptic signs, and buried codes. Kirsten Moana Thompson observes that 'as a consciousness of the end of the world, apocalyptic or millennial thinking reflects and depends upon *hermeneutics*, or the interpretation of signs to predict and prepare for the future.'[148] Within much evangelical understanding, these signs extend to modern day global disasters, ecological cataclysms, and social turmoil, which are often interpreted as portents of the beginning of the end of the world. In terms of Hollywood, modern disaster and science fiction films tend to display an anxiety and ambivalence about the future that is displaced onto the specific 'dread' of supernatural or monstrous manifestations which Thompson suggests, 'dramatizes a compulsive eschatological need to perceive and decode signs.'[149] A firm Antagonist to this kind of pre-millennialist thinking, Ben tells John, 'Right now my scientific mind is telling me to have nothing more to do with this.. and yours should too.'

Post-9/11 paranoia is once again evinced (both diegetically and otherwise) as we hear from a news report that a terrorist attack on a major East Coast city may be imminent. John sees that the coordinates on the manuscript, saliently enough, pinpoints the centre of downtown Manhattan as the next site destined for destruction. Assuming this location is the planned target for terrorists, John actively seeks to prevent the prophecy of disaster by calling in an

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[147] Quote from Doctor Kathryn Railly (Madeleine Stowe) during her lecture on 'Madness and Apocalyptic Visions' in *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, 1995).

[148] Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007) p. 5.

[149] Thompson, pp. 2–3.

anonymous warning to the authorities. When he sees this has been ignored, John takes matters into his own hands when he identifies a likely looking terrorist in a Manhattan subway. He pursues the suspect, only to find that it is a wild goose chase that leads directly to his own part in the unfolding prophecy. John, at this point, almost seems to be the catalyst for the disasters himself, as once again he finds himself at the coordinates of catastrophe. Forces unknown seem to be at deadly play, as the train lines inexplicably switch, forcing a subway car to derail at high speed. Utter carnage ensues, as the car smashes through into another carriage, eradicating swathes of passengers as it slides screeching across a commuter filled platform. The death toll we already know will be 78.

As well as continuing the central themes of prophecy and disaster, the imbedded trauma of terrorism within *Knowing* is again underscored, as, not only is Manhattan pointedly the scene of a major catastrophe, the subway disaster transposes the 7/7 London Underground terrorist attacks directly to the site of 9/11. Once again New York provides the setting for tragedy, mirroring a tradition of disaster/apocalypse films that, preceding 9/11, had presented audiences with numerous images of the city's destruction. In the 90s, Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996) featured aliens obliterating the Empire State Building, in *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998), a huge tidal wave flattens Manhattan, and *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998), and *Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, 1998) both feature the destruction of the Chrysler Building and Grand Central Station. The destruction of New York has long entered 'into the shorthand geography of end-of-the-world films'. Before 9/11, the pre-millennial fascination with destroying the city is clearly palpable, as Stephen Keane observes; 'In trying to come up with the largest disasters possible, the attractions of a city like New York are obvious, but in 1998 watching New York getting destroyed became standard fare.'[150] As for post-9/11 Hollywood, the tradition of attacking New York may have altered in tone, but clearly has not stopped altogether. Following on from a frozen New York in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), Roland Emmerich again revels in annihilating America in *2012* (2009), as New York suffers the same ecological fate of all major cities when it is consumed by a massive tsunami caused by 'earth crust displacement'. In *Knowing*, the timbre of post-9/11 sensitivity is more evident. Though the film situates a major catastrophe in the heart of New York, all of above-ground Manhattan is left untarnished with the disaster restricted to beneath the city. Even the site of the earlier plane crash in the film (though this time in Massachusetts) is significantly away from any built up areas, conveniently out by an unpopulated stretch of freeway (although possible budget constraints may well have had some bearing in these decisions).

[150] Keane, p. 101.

Despite apparent efforts to limit the re-opening of painful wounds, the aftermath of the subway disaster is vividly reminiscent of both 9/11 and 7/7, or a culmination of the two, as fire-fighters in oxygen masks struggle through the disarray of panic stricken crowds. Shell-shocked survivors, covered in dust and ash, are evacuated by the emergency services from the smoke strewn disaster area. Sombre stringed music plays as the camera slowly rises up from this scene of devastation, past the American flag that momentarily engulfs the screen with the Stars and Stripes. The camera continues up beyond the flag (in this instance, a symbol of national trauma as well as national unity) as a glimpse is gained of the Manhattan skyscrapers beyond – psychologically transporting the audience to 9/11's traumatic point of impact. A myriad of frantic news reports are heard over the sombre score as the next scene slowly dissolves into view. A close-up of a television set reporting the devastating news, with 'emergency landings at La Guardia and JFK', absorbs the ghosts of 9/11 back to the point from which they first appeared for most us – the television screen. Kirsten Moana Thompson comments that the cycle of horror, disaster and science fiction films, focusing explicitly on the approaching millennium, had reached a 'hysterical peak' of 'apocalyptic dread' in the late 90s. Thompson continues, 'after 9/11, this dread took new forms with anxieties about the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism and terrorism from within.'[151] However, this was only after a sufficient period of grace in which Hollywood was initially reluctant to tackle the trauma directly after the event, and which culminated in Hollywood's religious apocalypse emerging between the years 2007 and 2012, of which *Knowing* is an integral example.

Psy-Kids: supernatural and psychic children in the horror/apocalypse film

Incorporating several key genres, of which the disaster movie is but one, elements of supernatural horror in *Knowing* become starkly vivid in one particular sequence, in which Caleb experiences a disturbing vision of prophecy himself. Outside the Koestler's decidedly gothic looking mansion, surrounded by forest, the camera slowly pulls back to reveal a shadowy figure watching the house. A close-up shot of Caleb's face, asleep, sees him slowly wake as he senses something awry. An eerie music score adds to a mood of ominous tension. Caleb sits up to find a spectral figure standing at the foot of his bed. We recognise him as the mysterious man in black, who seems to have been shadowing Caleb throughout the film. High stringed notes become strained and discordant as we begin to hear the first mutterings of ghostly whispers. The indistinct figure, backlit and shadow-obscured, slowly raises his arm to point as the whispers increase in intensity. A medium shot reveals Caleb's large attic bedroom, while in the foreground

[151] Thompson, p. 2.

the stranger points to the circular centrepiece window that dominates the room. The window begins to glow, filling the room with an incandescent aura of orange light. In a dream-like state, Caleb, disregarding the stranger's presence, slowly approaches the glowing disc of light – another symbolic sun. Piercing high pitched notes, loud and unsettling, sound out as Caleb cautiously peers through the window. What greets his gaze is a vision straight from hell – the woodland landscape has transformed into an endless sea of raging fire, while torrents of satanic smoke blacken the sky. The entire forest is ablaze, as animals in flames desperately run out from the burning trees. Looking from outside at the house, which is itself ablaze, the camera pulls back from Caleb's horrified expression inside the circular window. As the camera draws back further, Caleb is depicted as though trapped within the symbolic disc, engulfed by flames. As we will witness, this is a portent of the prophecy at hand.

Fig. 2.3 Hell on Earth: a vision of the apocalyptic nightmare to come in *Knowing*.

With *Knowing*'s apocalyptic vision ultimately laid out (which John merely puts down to a nightmare), the revelation is set for the mysterious ghostly stranger to turn out to be no less than four identical looking men in black raincoats. The implication is that a different one of the four had been witnessed each time throughout the film. Later, as John and Diana investigate Lucinda's remote forest home, the children, who have been left outside in the car, once more detect the characteristic unearthly whispers as the sinister strangers surround their vehicle. By now, the association between these spectral figures and the fabled 'men in black' becomes inescapable. 'Men in black', or MIBs as they are commonly termed, refers to instances of alleged calls upon UFO witnesses by strange visitors dressed in black – an enigma made famous by the film of the same name, as well as providing the basis for the 'machine agents' in *The Matrix*. Supposedly making vague or sometimes specific threats to stop

Fig. 2.4 ‘What’s through the round window?’: Caleb, framed within the figurative fiery disc.

witnesses from talking or sharing information, speculation ranges from MIBs being government agents – as is the premise in the film, *Men in Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997) – to actual alien entities themselves. Indeed, one prominent aspect of the ‘myth’ is that they are often said to look uncannily alike, and appear quite emotionless. This stands as a more than suitable description of *Knowing*’s own MIBs, as, ethereal and slowly deliberate in movement, they surround the car and peer in at the helpless children in the back seat. As this unsettling event unfolds, for the first time, a barely intelligible utterance is heard from amidst the jumbled whispers; ‘Come with us’.

The encounter in the forest, like the visit from one of the black-clad clones in Caleb’s room, specifically links the children to the mysterious ‘whisper people’, as Abby calls them, and highlights yet another trait common in many supernatural-science fiction films. Caleb, who has minor hearing difficulties, has throughout been receiving whispered messages that he has partially dismissed to a faulty hearing aid. Like Lucinda, and her granddaughter (played by Lara Robinson, who, significantly, also plays Lucinda), it seems ‘the whisper people’ can only make themselves heard to children – albeit only those with the ‘gift’. Similarly, in M. Night Shyamalan’s *Signs*, Graham Hess’s youngest child, his daughter Bo, possesses, not so much a ‘sixth sense’, but most definitely a ‘second sight’. Bo claims she has witnessed events before; ‘I dreamed this’ she says at one point. Another time, she says to her brother, quite randomly; ‘I don’t want you to die’, when later he suffers an asthma induced death-scare. *Knowing* and *Signs*, together with Shyamalan’s earlier success, *The Sixth Sense* (1999), along with films such as *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), and both Brian De Palma films, *Carrie* (1976) and *The Fury* (1978) – all

feature children linked in some way to psychic, supernatural, or extraterrestrial forces. This is without including the demonic cycle of films, such as *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*.

In terms of *Signs* and *Knowing*, it could be said that the children have been given the godly 'gift' of prophecy, by which they are charged with the interpretation of signs that will safely guide them through the tribulation of the endtimes. In these texts, the innocence that the children symbolise, transcribes them as suitably pure for such a divine task, and worthy of their proposed place in heaven, as yet uncorrupted by the world's evils. In *Signs*, Bo, the picture of innocence herself, fulfils a role in which she will eventually facilitate the safe guidance of her family through the apocalyptic 'test of faith' that the aliens represent. Indeed, the appearance of the aliens as linked with some divine examination of human faith is suggested at the sight of the first crop circle, when Graham's son, Morgan, announces 'I think God did it'. Bo's representation as a figure of divine deliverance is ultimately attained when, after all, it is one of the half-drunk glasses of water that Bo deposits throughout the house that eventually destroys the alien; as if she was always uncannily aware that this peculiar practise would serve as an act of providence (holy water). For Caleb and Abby in *Knowing*, it is their uncanny understanding of the portents at hand and their own safe deliverance through the impending worldly cataclysm that is imperative for the survival of the human race.

Interestingly, the children, here, also represent a trend in recent apocalypse films whereby the habitually broken family is reunited in adversity by the spectacular events that threaten humankind and the planet. Within this pretext of familial reconciliation, Kirsten Moana Thompson avers that, featured invariably within these apocalyptic scenarios, 'a monstrous figure, the uncanny double of what the family has repressed, emerges and threatens apocalyptic vengeance because of the specific crimes for which the family are responsible. Produced by the repression of specific traumas, yet disavowed, these narrative monsters continue to repeat themselves as pathological symptoms, figured through the uncanny.'[152] In both *Knowing* and *Signs*, this disavowal is not only transfigured through the repression of loss in the face of the wives' deaths, but also in the repression and rejection of the protagonists' prior faith. In *Signs*, Graham Hess is quite literally confronted with 'a monstrous figure' in the shape of a malevolent alien – which can stand for the 'uncanny' embodiment of the trauma he has ardently suppressed. In both Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow*, and *2012*, the familial 'crime' is one of paternal failure. Like *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005) and to a lesser extent, *Knowing*, redemption lies in the rediscovery of the paternal role, and places the dysfunctional

[152] Thompson, p. 3.

nuclear family at the centre of the crisis. At the same time, the survival of the family unit is linked to the fortunes of mankind and the survival of the planet. Thus, in *The Day After Tomorrow*, *2012* and *War of the Worlds*, the family is reunited and the proper paternal role reinstituted after the successful negotiation of the global threat. So too in *Signs*, where the Reverend Graham Hess quite literally returns to being a 'father'. In a religious context, the affirmation of institutionalized core Christian values, here, remains fixed and unchallenged. With this in mind, Thompson points out the more problematic aspects to this narrative pattern, when she indicates that 'the ways in which the eschatological, and the supernatural are mapped out across the family and projected across the monstrous body of each horror story only suggest an apocalyptic return to an idealized fantasy of family values, and to a deeply conservative notion of history that can only understand the future in theological and eschatological terms.'[153]

In *Knowing*, as John and Diana's fates become increasingly intertwined, along with their children, a familial reformulation similarly occurs, as one family unit begins to emerge out of two broken ones. However, linked to the fortunes of the planet as they indelibly are, the lifespan of the burgeoning new family is destined to be transient. Accepting their respective paternal roles within the nuclear family unit, John chases the 'the whisper people' away from the children, while Diana stays to comfort them. Catching up with one of the spectral figures in a forest clearing, a gun toting John demands to know what he wants from his son. His back to John, the dark figure with slicked-back blonde hair slowly turns to face him. Unnaturally pale and otherworldly, he slowly opens his mouth from which a blinding white light instantaneously emanates. After being dazzled into submission by this miraculous event, John looks back up to find the mysterious entity has vanished. The fact that, instead of words, it is light that comes out of the entity's mouth, infers a literal conceptualisation of biblical metaphor in which 'light' stands for divine truth or the word of God. This once more correlates the 'whisper people' to angel-like beings operating within some sort of divine configuration, and further adds to the film's intensifying element of biblical apocalypse – in which angels herald the end of the world.

The 'external locus of control': the eco-apocalypse film and redemption through passivity

The nightmare vision in which Caleb witnesses the world ablaze – a conceptual 'hell on earth' – could be a scene straight out of the book of Revelation itself, which, among other visions of torment and damnation, repeatedly mentions 'a lake of fire' that is 'burning with brimstone' (Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 20:14-15; 21:8). Largely representative as a place of post-death

[153] Thompson, p. 153.

punishment for the wicked, the vision of a lake of fire, in keeping with the connection of Christianity to ancient religions, also notably appears in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, as a 'pool' of 'fiery liquid' encountered on the hazardous journey through to the afterlife. Passages such as these in the Book of Revelation, along with Dante's medieval envisioning of the underworld, have of course shaped much of the modern imagination concerning ideas of hell and purgatory, but another interesting point of reference can be found in what 18th Century author and philosopher Edmund Burke called 'the terror sublime'.[154] Art critic, Andrew Frost explains that one of the oddities of modern apocalypse films 'is that their visual language is drawn directly from the imagery found in Romantic and Gothic paintings of the 18th and 19th centuries.'[155] Just as Burke theorised that one could experience the sublime through works of profound art, the highest level of the sublime experience, he proposed, was through the unmitigated imagery of terror. Frost cites John Martin's 1851 painting, *The Great Day of His Wrath*, which he says 'looks stunningly like concept art for *2012*, with the Earth heaving up and tipping entire cities into the abyss, lots of tiny little people falling into the void.'[156] The striking scenes of worldly destruction depicted in *2012* and *Knowing*, for Frost, are 'riffs' on historical images of the biblical apocalypse, of which Martin and others derived evocative scenes straight from the Book of Revelation, which, Frost says, provides a perpetual link in our minds to 'our imaginary apocalypse.'[157]

However, as has been put forward by some observers, many of the themes of recent end of the world scenarios could be understood in terms of a secular brand of millennialism, consisting of genuine scientific concerns to do with environmental degradation or the misuse of technology – rather than part of a divine master-plan. This would certainly seem the way Malcolm Bradbury views it, who comments that 'the ends of the millennia are notorious for the rise of apocalyptic fear, and though our Einstein's monsters change from nuclear threat to ozone depletion and global warming, the consciousness of uncertainty is with us again.'[158] Nevertheless, Frost is at pains to point out that 'the "man-made global warming equals secular religion" argument misses the point that the art of the sublime, and its contemporary manifestation in Hollywood cinema, and with it our imagining of the end, is an expression of Western Christian belief not of some pop culture neurosis.'[159]

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[154] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 96.
[155] Andrew Frost, 'It's the end of the world but not as we know it', *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 4 2009
[156] Frost
[157] Ibid.
[158] Quoted in, Philip Melling, *Fundamentalism in America: Millennialism, Identity, and Militant Religion* Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p. 168.
[159] Frost

Fig. 2.5 *The Great Day of His Wrath*, John Martin (1851).

Fig. 2.6 A typical scene of devastation from Roland Emmerich's, *2012*.

Andrew Frost may make a valid point, but like Emmerich's *2012*, *Knowing* encompasses a trend of films that integrate both secular environmental concerns with visions of biblical apocalypse. Within this secular framework, echoes of the eco-apocalypse science fiction films of the 70s abound into the new millennium. Daniel Wojcik states, 'in numerous secular apocalyptic scenarios, worldly destruction is considered immanent in human nature rather than externally prescribed, fulfilled by the action and character of human beings rather than determined by outside forces.'[160] So, in the distant future of *Silent Running* (Douglas Trumbull, 1972), all plant life, except for that which has been preserved on board a spaceship, has been made extinct – although it is not made exactly clear whether this is the result of climate problems or from the excesses of humanity, but most probably both. In *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973), the culpability of mankind is left in no doubt, as the earth's resources have

[160] Wojcik, p. 146.

been depleted to the extent that it can no longer sustain a spiralling human population, with sinister consequences. In Robert Altman's *Quintet* (1979), a future ice age sees a dying humanity revel in its capacity for self-destruction, as mankind occupies its remaining time playing a form of deadly chess within a frozen cityscape. This was the kind of environmental catastrophe narrative that was to be spectacularly reintroduced in the 21st century by Roland Emmerich with *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004). Earlier, the 1995 movie, *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds), had already depicted a future in which the polar ice caps had melted, plunging the Earth into a perilous flooded existence – with obvious biblical overtones.

The Father, the Sun, and the Holy Spirit: scientific and spiritual solar activity

Within their ecological grounding of apocalypse, *Knowing* and *2012* reflect specific existing anxieties, not to mention a large degree of scientific speculation, concerning the future impact that the sun may have on our vulnerable planet. In 1998, the dramatic tele-film, *Inferno* (James Remar), portrayed the crisis caused by intense solar activity, with the tag line: 'Earth's Last Days in the Sun'. Also, Danny Boyle's *Sunshine* – itself rich with religious overtones – projected a future where, to ensure the planet's survival, a dying sun must be re-ignited with a radioactive 'payload' from a spaceship. Within the overall focus of this topic, this apocalyptic preoccupation with the sun incorporates a substantial degree of religious significance. It is well documented how some early civilizations underwent various expressions of sun-worship; as with the Mayans, Aztecs, Incas, and the ancient Egyptian veneration of the sun-god, Ra. This was to be later taken to another level with the Pharaoh Akhenaten (famously the father of Tutankhamun), who controversially banished the worship of all other gods in favour of the 'sun disc', the Aten, from which the Pharaoh derived his name. The Aten was symbolically represented in hieroglyph form as a disk with rays of light that terminated in the hands of the king. In general, it is perhaps no surprise that such high religious reverence may have been directed towards the sun; the giver of life and bringer of light.

However, these various forms of celestial worship, as has been speculated, may well have contributed to ideas that factored significantly towards the fledgling roots of Judeo-Christianity, particularly the notion of monotheism. Although this idea remains somewhat controversial among some religious scholars, the success that Ahmed Osman has achieved with his internationally bestselling books; *Out of Egypt: The Roots of Christianity* (1998), *Jesus in the House of the Pharaohs* (2004), and, *Christianity*: *An Ancient Egyptian Religion* (2005), reveal widespread interest in the probable link between ancient religions and orthodox Christianity. Indeed, Osman

establishes the idea that the monotheistic tenets of 'Atenism', or the sole worship of the sun, are directly related to the onset of Judaism, and highlights distinct parallels, including the forbiddance of idol worship, as well as the similarity between the name Aten and the Hebrew 'Adon', or Lord'. Within his theoretical framework, including, *Moses: Pharaoh of Egypt* (1990), Osman even conjectures that Moses and Akhenaten may have possibly been the same person. This is an idea that had already been examined by Sigmund Freud, who, in his book, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), hypothesizes that Moses was not in fact Jewish, but actually born into ancient Egyptian nobility, and may have been a disciple of Atenism, or was even the Pharaoh Akhenaten himself.[161] Despite some intriguing connections between ancient monotheism and Judeo-Christianity, the early authors of the Bible would have no doubt wished to distance their teachings from sun-worship and other forms of pagan belief. Nevertheless, the close and primal connection between the sun and the early history of organised religion also extends towards established tenets of Christianity. Here, the sun is found to hold a symbolic degree of magnitude within some principal biblical texts.

From the onset of Genesis, in the very first chapter, it is decreed that the moon and the sun are thus appointed as 'signs' to separate light from darkness. There also seems a great deal of significance in the sun turning dark, though this is perhaps unsurprisingly rooted in some of the Bible's more 'apocalyptic' texts. Revelation 6:12 talks of the sun becoming 'black like sackcloth', but also Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24, Isaiah 13:10 and Joel 2:31, all speak of a 'darkened sun' in a time of tribulation. Revelation 12 describes a woman that is 'clothed with the sun'. The sun, here, is a symbol of the woman's divine knowledge and the testimony and 'commandments of God' (Revelation 12:17). In biblical scripture, the term 'light' is most often a metaphor for truth or God's word (the 'light of the lord'), and this passage from Revelation implicates the sun directly as a celestial source of spiritual light and divine truth (which, apart from being specifically relevant to Danny Boyle's *Sunshine*, brings us once more back to the beginning of *Knowing*). The term celestial, meaning of heavenly or divine origin, as well as pertaining to an astronomical body such as the sun, perhaps has closer connotations with one another than first imagined. In this metaphorical context, the subsequent references that warn of the sun becoming dark may in fact be a signification of God's lost light: a Christian truth, belief, or knowledge that becomes somehow flawed or forgotten, becomes darkened.

[161] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Random House, 1996), abstract.

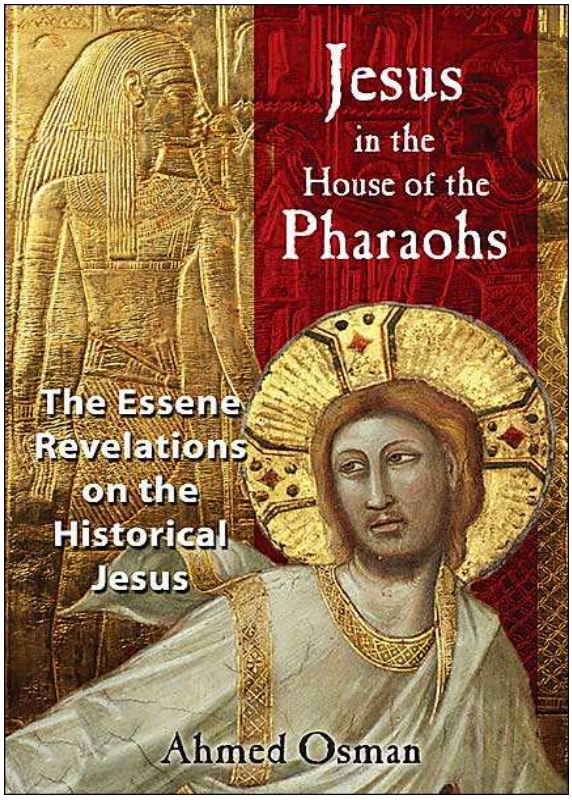

Fig. 2.7 Sun God: Some portrayals of Jesus depict him with a 'sun disc' halo; as though an inherent coding of the connection.

A central feature of *Knowing* is within its own biblical transcript of celestial portent, and one which acts, along with Lucinda's numbers, as a divine means of prophecy by which to foresee and interpret the unfathomable events to come. After learning that Lucinda, amid overhanging depression and mental instability, had committed suicide some years earlier, John teams up with Lucinda's daughter, Diana, and granddaughter, Abby (who is the same age as Caleb) in a quest for some meaningful answers. Their visit to Lucinda's abandoned woodland home unearths a room covered with wall-to-wall newspaper clippings of all the predicted disasters over the last fifty years. Amid the articles, a picture catches John's eye; a black and white illustration from the Bible. The picture is from Ezekiel 1, and depicts Ezekiel's dramatic vision of celestial visitation. The camera slowly closes in on the image before focusing on each important element in close-up detail. First, Ezekiel is shown kneeling down and receiving a parchment (or manuscript) handed down to him from above. All around him seems ablaze with fire. The camera moves to the top of the picture, showing the heavens open to reveal God as a bearded man in robes sitting upon a celestial orb with shining rays of light. Down to the right, four winged creatures are portrayed similarly ablaze with light – one of which distinctly resembles a man, or angel. In the centre of the picture is what looks like a large wheel with spokes. The wheel is within two outer intersecting metallic rims, which makes the strange looking sphere appear as in a state of mechanical motion. Like the winged seraphs, the sphere also radiates with fire and light. 'She used to stare at this picture for hours' says Diana, further denoting the narrative significance of this scriptural tableau, and that of the biblical reference it signifies.

To add to this foreboding 'sign' of things to come, and in keeping with the film's theme of cryptic codes and hermeneutic symbols, John discovers that the final number, or death toll, at the end of Lucinda's manuscript, 'ƎƎ', is not what it seems. Diana points out that it is not the number 33, as John had assumed, but in fact a childhood quirk of her mother who used to write

the letter ‘E’ backwards. ‘Abby used to do this sometimes’ says Diana – a telling link between her mother and daughter. ‘E E? Initials? Someone she knew?’ John speculates. However, when John notices some black pebbles underneath Lucinda’s bed (earlier Caleb had received one such pebble, which functions as yet another ‘sign’, from the mysterious stranger) the full horror of Lucinda’s ‘playful’ abbreviation hits home – in maniacal manner, repeatedly scratched into the bottom of her overturned wooden bed, the words; ‘EVERYONE ELSE’.

Fig. 2.8 Ezekiel 1: in *Knowing* the sphere on the right swaps position with the seraphs in the centre, presumably so that more emphasis will be placed on this device. (Illustration: Matthäus Merian, *Iconum Biblicarum*, Frankfurt, 1627)

The Sun, which has been an ominous underlying presence throughout, is finally pronounced as the apparatus of apocalypse when John finds Abby at play colouring in the picture of Ezekiel that he had taken from Lucinda’s home. A close-up shot of the biblical tableau shows that Abby has coloured the glowing orb that God sits upon yellow; ‘It’s the sun’ she innocently proclaims, although this is once more evidence of her supernatural link to prophetical knowledge. Now, a merging of science and religion begins to takes place, as with this sudden realisation, something clicks within the mind of the astrophysicist. A trip to the M.I.T. Haystack Observatory is immediately undertaken. Here, John reminds Phil of the paper that he published on ‘extra solar activity’, in which John had found evidence of a series of super-flares from a distant star. ‘The readings were off the chart’, Phil remembers. John explains that Lucinda’s numbers are indeed a warning, not just to him ‘or any random group’ however, but to everyone: ‘A super-flare in our own solar system. A one hundred micro-tesla wave of radiation that will destroy our ozone layer – killing every living organism on the planet.’ A graphic computer simulation shows the sun, a vast ball of fire, discharge a super-flare that menacingly engulfs the tiny spec that

represents Earth. Phil declares ‘we have to let everyone know… we have to call the N.O.A.A…’ John interrupts ‘they already know, the announcement will come any time now.’

Fig. 2.9 Divine Visitation: The Sun, in Ezekiel, depicted as God’s celestial vessel

John stands up and stares out at the sun, becoming a shadowy silhouette in the midst of its forebodingly brilliant haze. A close-up shows his face bathed in the sun’s incandescent light: ‘I thought there was some purpose to all of this’, John deliberates, ‘Why did I get this prediction if there’s nothing I can do about it? How am I supposed to stop the end of the world?’ Of course following an evangelical transliteration, the point is that we are not supposed to stop the end of the world. Evangelical acceptance of the end appeals precisely by placing current crises within a pre-determined divine pattern. This kind of fatalistic attribute operates directly in conjunction with inherent knowledge of the bible. Here, such hermeneutic ‘predictions’ espouse an assurance that everything is in ‘God’s hands’, and that ultimately acquiescing to God’s plan ‘is a means of participating in the power of the deity, as well as knowing the concealed fate of human history.’[162] The title, *Knowing*, then, implies this very same ‘concealed fate’ as prophesized in biblical scripture. In the film, this evangelical outlook is encapsulated by John’s own devoutly Christian father, who is representative of the same religious deference to deterministic forces of fate.

Contemplating ‘the end’ back at his home, the Earth’s impending doom finally prompts John to, at long last, make peace with his hitherto estranged father. Out in his garden, as he makes the call, he is swathed in sun beams that create a circle of light where he stands (an indication of heavenly guidance), after all, John is about to commune with a man of God. He begins by reminding his father, a practising pastor, of something he once taught in church; ‘That sermon you preached every

[162] Wojcik, p. 143.

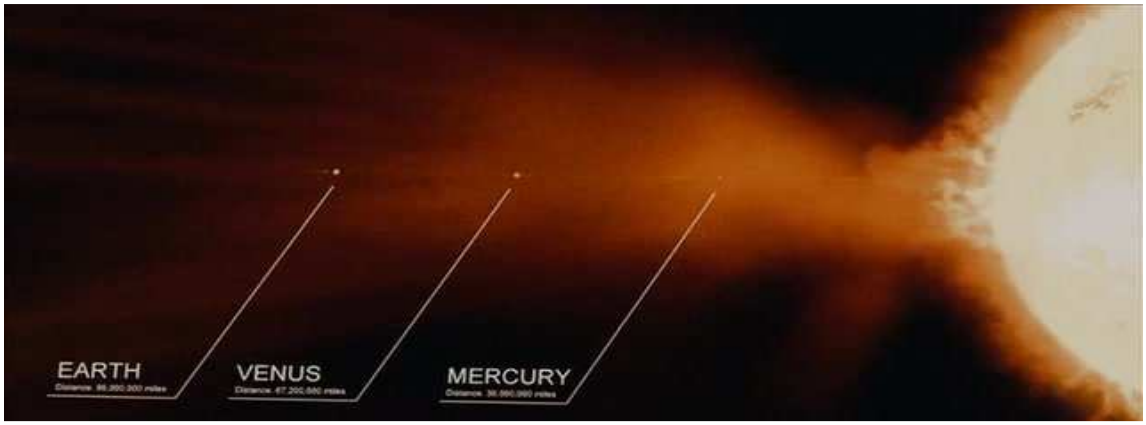

Fig. 2.10 Solargeddon: This time, it is science that foresees Earth's apocalyptic fate.

year at Pentecost, about the gifts of the spirit – one was the gift of prophecy.' For now, just a voice on the phone, his father replies, '1 Corinthians 12, yes I remember it', adding, '…the church should always respect the prophets.' John announces, 'I have a prophecy, it's about to be proven accurate, I need you to respect it, and receive it as the truth'. Foretelling the end of the world as we know it, John instructs his father to get himself and the family to safety below ground in order to evade the coming cataclysm. His father, now shown for the first time; a sagely looking man, tells his son, 'I appreciate your concern, but if it's my time… it's my time. I'm ready whenever the good lord calls me.' He then asks the question of his son, 'are you?' The emphasis on Reverend Koestler's passive resignation to the celestial forces from above, again highlights the 'external locus of control' that characterises much evangelical thought. Along with the notion that all apocalyptic events are fated, and are part of a wider celestial plan, 'religious apocalyptic beliefs explicitly address feelings of helplessness and uncontrollability, converting them into an optimistic vision of worldly redemption and salvation.'[163] To those of devout faith, this simultaneously provides both hope and comfort in the midst of inexplicable and overwhelmingly cataclysmic events. This is in stark contrast to John's characteristically secular 'internal locus of control'.[164] John continues to believe that through his own individual efforts he will be able to save himself and his family from the cataclysmic events to come.

One final coded prophecy from Lucinda awaits to be deciphered if John and his new family are to have any chance of survival. In 1959, on the day of the time-capsule burial at William Dawes Elementary, Lucinda, who had gone missing, was finally found cowering in a school store cupboard where she had scratched, with bloodied fingernails, a series of numbers into the door. Now this very door holds the key to salvation. As John frantically blow-burns away the layers of paint to get to the numbers underneath, he explains to Diana; 'she knew the co-

[163] Wojcik, p. 142.
[164] Ibid., p. 135.

ordinates to this last event, she tried to write them down. The teacher said she was interrupted.. ran out of time, so she scratched them into this door… she tried to tell us where to go. The numbers are the key… to everything!' As an integral theme, evangelical interest in numerology, something which can be framed within the context of 'mystical theology', remains a crucial facet from which a believer can determine the 'signs'. As Michael Lieb exclaims, within the evangelical universe, 'to know history is to decipher its code, to understand its signatures as they are revealed numerologically.'[165] Other that the significance that numbers play in the Bible, and in particular, the Book of Revelation (666: the number of the beast), there is a vested preoccupation with numbers within Dispensationalist prophecy belief. In the endtime mythology of *Left Behind*, guided by 'signs' within the Book of Revelation, much has been made of the significance behind the number, 216, for example, which the authors suggest is the true 'mathematical equation' and theological source-code behind the number 666.[166]

Diana, unconvinced and troubled by John's irrational behaviour, and who had always doubted her mother's 'gift', decides she should escape with the children while she can, abandoning John to what she believes to be his misguided and meaningless quest for the final code. En-route to the underground caves where Diana feels they will be safe, she stops at a gas station to refuel. Here, an emergency broadcast transmission finally warns of the looming danger that the solar flares represent. A government spokesman advises people to stock up on water and remain indoors until further notice, adding 'if possible… seek out fortified underground shelter'. Amidst the ensuing panic, two 'men in black' take the opportunity to get in Diana's car and drive off with the children. Earlier, Abby had told her mother that the whisper people 'always know where we are'. A horrified Diana hijacks a car and promptly gives chase. This only leads to a colossal crash with a juggernaut truck, and ultimately to Diana's death – on the date that her mother had always predicted.

In the midst of this catastrophe, John finds that the coded coordinates scratched on the door are none other than the location of Lucinda's remote woodland home. As previously highlighted, another cryptic sign throughout the film had been the reoccurring symbol of a smooth black pebble – one of which Diana was found to have clutched in her dying hand. A link to the final revelation, John stumbles upon a path of such black pebbles outside Lucinda's house. They lead him directly to a forest clearing, where John discovers the children being harboured by the four 'men in black'. Caleb tells his father that they have to go with their new

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[165] Michael Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of the End Time* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 227.

[166] Left Behind.Com <http://www.leftbehind.com/03_authors_testimonials/viewAuthorInteractions.asp?pageid=987&channelID=79>

friends. The whisper people are henceforth revealed and signified as the children's own guardian angels when Caleb explains, 'they've been protecting us all along dad.' Caleb's language becomes more profound and 'biblical' as he continues, 'they sent a message ahead of them… to prepare the way. And now they've come for us.' The four 'men in black' stand watching, motionless. Suddenly, a thunderous roar from above breaks the tense silence, as bright beams of light pierce through the dark clouds. Just like Ezekiel in the picture, John sinks to his knees, as a huge spinning sphere descends from the heavens. 'It's time to go dad', Caleb proclaims, 'they've chosen us so we can start over – so everything can start over.' From the cacophonic lightshow above, a smaller orb with spinning inner spheres descends out of the larger. The resemblance of this astounding event to the biblical tableau depicting Ezekiel's divine visitation, at this point, becomes unmistakably clear.

Angels as aliens: transfiguring science fiction to 'sermon fiction'.

As Daniel Wojcik affirms, 'Ezekiel's vision of spinning or revolving wheels making a rushing noise is frequently interpreted as a spaceship' and points to the countless UFO enthusiasts who make the claim that 'so-called' angels and various saints were in fact 'space beings'.[167] However, while the film's underlying elements of science fiction begin to be played out, the auspices of biblical prophecy that have formed a pervading sense of the film's apocalyptic vision is finally revealed in a literal transcription of a biblical event. In Ezekiel 1, there is described 'a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The centre of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures.' The passage goes on to pronounce that 'in appearance their form was that of a man' and that all four of them had faces and wings. The passage continues;

> Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.
>
> Ezekiel 1:26

In *Knowing*, the four MIBs finally shed their human guise and, as described in Ezekiel's vision, reveal themselves as ethereal beings of shining light. Still human-like in shape, their likeness to archetypal angels is more than apparent. The glowing strings of light that cascade from their

[167] Wojcik, p. 185.

backs might easily be mistaken for seraphic wings by ancient prophets. Reflected in translucent light, the angel-aliens are imbued in rainbow circles of radiance.

Prevented from joining his son in the spacecraft, the aliens telepathically communicate through Caleb, who tells his father, 'only the children must go... those who heard their call'. Urging Caleb to leave him and go with their alien rescuers, John undergoes a spiritual transformation, telling his son, 'we're gonna be together… we're all gonna be together… and mom's gonna be with us too – I know it. I know that now.' John's affirmation of the concept of an afterlife, represents a complete turnaround from his cynical stance on the idea of heaven that he had espoused at the beginning of the film. Now, the aliens, taking each child by the hand, enter into the globe of spinning inner spheres. The metaphysical orb begins to rise towards the mother-ship – a larger sphere of even more celestial magnitude. This is also from Ezekiel, which describes a strange vessel like a wheel with intersecting wheels, and which 'sparkled like chrysolite';

> Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.
>
> Ezekiel 1:19

Again referencing the biblical Noah's Ark, the children each symbolically hold a white rabbit, and are indeed about to step through the 'looking glass'. They levitate upwards with their shining angel saviours, enveloped by glowing spinning spheres that transport them to the shimmering orb above. This scene furthermore invokes the evangelical idea of The Rapture, a Dispensationalist interpretation of a prophecy in which the chosen will ascend up to heaven during the endtime to be greeted by Christ and his angels. In *The Late Great Planet Earth*, for those who believe, Hal Lindsey assures evasion from the trials and terrors of the apocalypse by very means of The Rapture; 'Without benefit of science, space suits, or interplanetary rockets, there will be those who will be transported into a glorious place more beautiful, more awesome, than we can possibly comprehend.'[168] And so, without the need for 'space suits' (at least), the children ascend to the stars, as the metaphysical sphere transforms into abstract spikes of light that launch up towards the heavens. As the spaceship leaves the Earth's atmosphere, dozens of identical craft are now shown leaving the doomed planet. Presumably, each vessel contains two children taking two of each species of animal. As the flotilla of spaceships vanish into 'hyper-space', John sees the last vestige of light extinguished in the black night sky. A long point-of-view shot looks

[168] Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (New York: Bantam, 1970) p. 126.

down at John gazing up, casting a lone figure amidst a sea of black pebbles. It only acts to emphasize that John is now most categorically one of those to be 'left behind'.

The manner in which Hal Lindsey deliberately distances the 'divine' workings of The Rapture from methods of science and various 'interplanetary' escape, further compounds the 'religion versus science' dichotomy, and remains typical of evangelical understanding as it relates to the end of the world. This characteristic viewpoint, nonetheless, makes *Knowing*'s own vision of earthly transcendence all the more intriguing in its merging of biblical transcript and science fiction. But there is an obvious point of influence, here, that would have crucially informed this key scene in the film. Along similar lines to Erich Von Daniken's, *Chariots of the Gods?* (1969), which featured the tag-line: 'was God an astronaut?', Josef F. Blumrich's book, *The Spaceships of Ezekiel* (1974), acts as the likely source of inspiration in *Knowing*, in which science theory blends with biblical transliteration. In his book, Blumrich asserts that Ezekiel's account in the Bible was not a description of a meeting with God in a prophetic vision, but a description of several encounters with ancient astronauts within interplanetary shuttlecraft. Written while he was chief of NASA's systems layout branch, within the program development office, at the Marshall Space Flight Center, Blumrich claims that he initially set out to disprove allegations of alien visitation in the Bible. However, as he examined Ezekiel's detailed descriptions more closely, Blumrich concluded that the type of machinery being described could theoretically operate as rocket and rotor-blade technology. Blumrich states that 'since his revelations were written down long before the advent of flying machines or rockets, the only way man could interpret Ezekiel's enigmatic statements was through religion and, especially, mysticism.'[169] Blumrich takes, for example, Ezekiel's assumption that he sees 'faces and wings' within the 'living creatures', and proposes that the wings he describes may in fact be rotor blades in operation ('spinning spheres'), and points out that even within modern space technology, citing the NASA Gemini space capsule and Soviet Lunokhod 1 in particular, face-like features and shapes may be easily discernible. So convinced that Ezekiel was depicting space craft technology, Blumrich went so far as to patent a design for an 'omnidirectional wheel' inspired by Ezekiel's descriptions.[170]

In fact, Blumrich's book is a prime example of the link between religion and space flight evidenced frequently within NASA itself, where the connection between technology and divinity can translate into an expression of spiritual transcendence. Former NASA administrator, James Fletcher, at the time of his tenure, envisioned space exploration as 'an intellectual frontier of

[169] Josef F. Blumrich, *The Spaceships of Ezekiel* (London: Corgi Books, 1974), p. 3.
[170] Noble, p. 136.

expanding knowledge and the progress of understanding about nature by extension, about divinity.'[171] In 1979, Bruce Murray, director of NASA's jet propulsion laboratory, declared that 'the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence [and by association, more technologically advanced intelligence] is like looking for God'; the kind of 'space odyssey' that may well conjure up Kubrick's vision of space exploration and metaphysical transcendence in *2001* (1968). In the same year as Kubrick's film, the astronauts of Apollo 8, the first manned mission to the moon, acknowledged what they deemed to be the profound religious significance of their achievement by broadcasting back to Earth their reading of the first ten lines of the book of Genesis.[172] In his book, *The Technology of Religion* (1997), David F. Noble maintains that, as modern technology and religion have evolved together, technological enterprise has always been, and remains 'suffused with religious belief'. Nowhere, he says, 'is the intimate connection between religion and technology more manifest than within the United States, where an unrivalled popular enchantment with technological advance is matched by an equally earnest popular expectation of Jesus Christ's return.'[173] Noble adds that, in the United States, 'technology had come to be identified with transcendence, implicated as never before in the Christian idea of redemption.'[174]

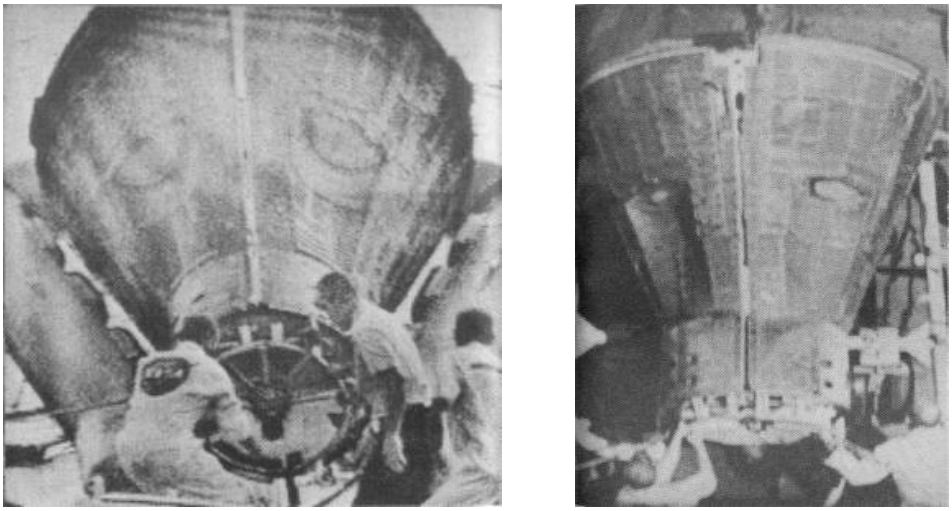

Fig. 2.11 & 2.12 Face capsule: photo examples of the Gemini module shown in *The Spaceships of Ezekiel*.

As for *Knowing*'s own drama of redemption which, likewise, fuses space technology and religion with the climactic appearance of the aliens, Alex Proyas seems comfortable in the controversy this key scene has stimulated, and remarks;

> The ending of the movie, which is highly controversial, and it's gotten the most extraordinary reactions from people, is very open-ended. I've had people say to me this movie is the work of an

[171] Noble, p. 134.
[172] Ibid., p. 134.
[173] Ibid., p. 5.
[174] Ibid., p .9.

> atheist and I've had people say to me this is the work of a religious zealot. It can't possibly be both, but it's very interesting that people can read it either way. People ask me whether I believe in God or not and my answer to that is I'm agnostic, I can see pretty much the veracity of both sides of the argument and I, like Nick's character, am on a search for truth and for meaning. I'm not there preaching from the pulpit or whatever. I'm there throwing out some ideas and it's about the exploration.[175]

Nevertheless, with combined elements of science fiction and science theory, courtesy of both the Bible and Blumrich, mixed in with rich overtones of biblical symbolism and established eschatology, it has been claimed that Proyas's film may well preside over a transfiguration from science fiction to 'sermon fiction'. One critic even went as far as to label the film 'a thinly veiled version of Calvinist theology-cum-end-of-days-evangelical-fantasia'.[176]

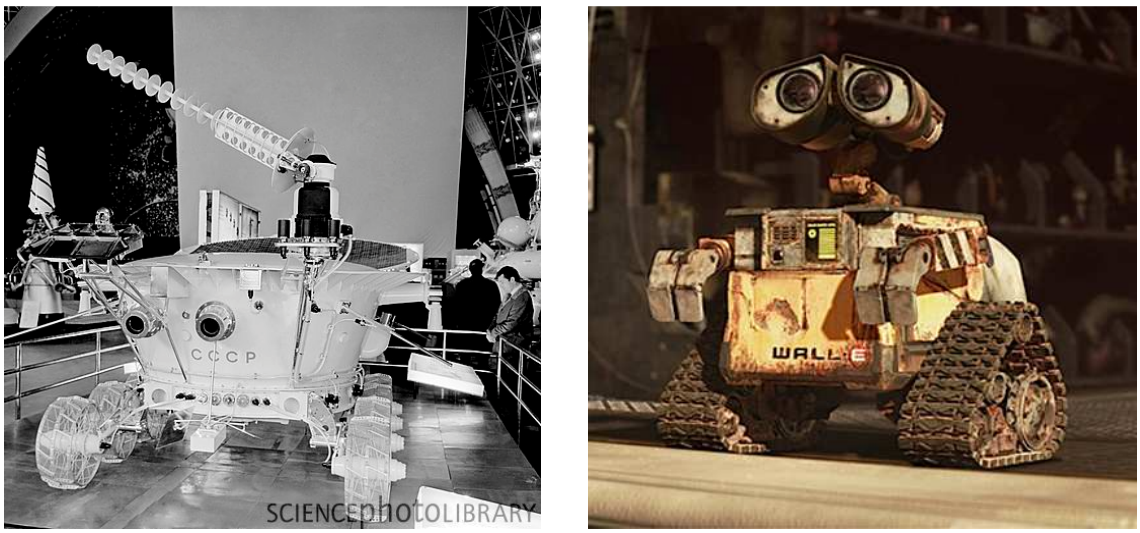

Fig. 2.13 & 2.14 Space oddity: like Pixar's Wall-E, the anthropomorphic Lunokhod 1 could be ideal for traversing a toxic post-apocalyptic Earth, and looks almost as quirky.

These expositions aside, it can be easily understood how *Knowing*, in a major sense, can be viewed to retain certain concurrences with evangelical doctrine, particularly within its disparate scenes of serenity and devastation. Here, the End is connoted to be an act of divine providence. After the alien evacuation of the planet, John drives back through the city, which is now an urban landscape of carnage and chaos. Plumes of smoke billow from burnt-out cars and buildings. A tracking shot shows a main city street to be a rampaging sea of panic-stricken people. Calming classical music plays as John stoically drives through the unfolding turmoil. The soothing music, in juxtaposition to the frantic panic surrounding him, is a signification of John's new-found inner peace. The camera slowly draws back from the dissipated city and its smouldering skyscrapers, depicting it as a burning Babylon on the verge of collapse. Amidst falling ash in the sepia hue of the sun, John arrives at his family's home. He receives a

[175] Alex Proyas interview for *Play* Magazine (Australia), April 2 2009.
[176] James Walling, review of *Knowing* in *The Prague Post*, August 12 2009.

reassuring embrace from his father, who tells him; ‘This isn’t the end’. In a final acceptance of his newly regained faith, John acknowledges, ‘I know’. As his mother and sister join in the embrace, the once fractured family is made whole again through John’s return to the religious fold. The intensifying light from the window signals the beginning of the end, but can be interpreted as a sign of the spiritual transcendence to which the family resoundingly submits. Outside, a spectacular tsunami of fire sweeps through the city. An awe-striking event of pantheistic magnitude, the wave of fire obliterates everything in its path. The final view of the planet cuts from the carnage of apocalyptic destruction to the tranquil silence of space. Just as Ezekiel’s biblical tableau depicted the sun as representing God’s divine dominion, we witness a dead shadow-sphere in the face of a vast engulfing sun from which emanate similar plumes of brilliant light. It is both a figurative link to Ezekiel’s prophetic vision and symbolic of a shining celestial power that is far greater than that of this earth.

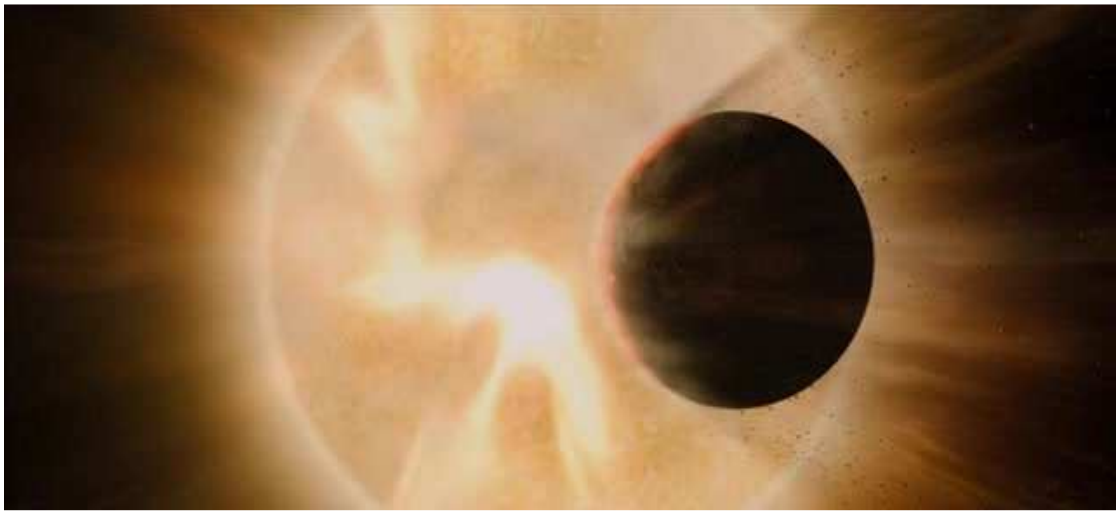

Fig. 2.15 Death of a minor planet in the Solar System: a charred Earth is engulfed by its vast sun.

As the planet goes through its death throes, on another world, Caleb and Abby lay down white rabbits in a golden field of waist-height wheat – or something that resembles it. Notably now clothed in white, symbolising their own heavenly transcendence, they watch on serenely as their alien/angel protectors depart from their new home. The symbolic white rabbits signify that the children have indeed crossed the liminal threshold into Wonderland. Snow-like wisps of floating fauna (as used to great 3D effect in *Avatar*) contribute to the magical aura of the new planet paradise; ‘a glorious place more beautiful, more awesome, than we can possibly comprehend’.[177] In a further symbolic, and ironic, link, the snow-flake fauna of humanity’s new home mimics the falling ash back on the doomed planet Earth. The children run towards a solitary oak-like tree in this Eden of Elysian fields. Indeed, although this utopia could stand for

[177] Hal Lindsey, p. 126.

a number of mythological netherworlds or associated visions of the afterlife, the strong biblical symbolism of the creation myth, and the fable of Adam and Eve is inescapable, and the huge tree that the children are drawn towards is undoubtedly representative of the ‘tree of life’, or ‘tree of knowledge’ referred to in the Book of Genesis. As they run towards the tree, dozens of alien craft are seen in the background leaving from different locations around the planet. Sin-free and without corruption, the children herald a new age of innocence in an unspoilt Eden – presumably in the hope that they will put right the first attempt at human civilization (although one always suspects this to be a cyclical shortcoming on humanity’s part). Here, at the film’s resolution, what takes place is an amalgam of biblical fables as, together with a clear creation myth allegory, the children and their pair of white rabbits (Abby in wonderland), along with other animals no doubt brought in the other spaceships, symbolises the reoccurring fable of Noah’s Ark – except it is a flood of fire that destroys all life on Earth. Moreover, closely guided by ideas in the Book of Revelation, and, correspondingly, Dispensationalist prophecy belief, the children represent the blessed chosen that have escaped the tribulations of apocalypse and have ascended to the stars (The Rapture). Leaving the ‘unrighteous’ behind to perish (and burn in the symbolic fiery lake), they have transcended their earthly lives to begin a new level of human existence in a heavenly paradise bestowed to them by supreme beings (angels/benevolent alien protectors). Just as in the Book of Revelation, the last judgement of history, so it transpires, is a rebirth and new dawn for humankind.

Fig. 2.16 Genesis revisited: the children are irresistibly drawn to the biblically symbolic ‘tree of life’.

Conclusion

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, *Knowing* partly embodies a group of films that emanated from the turn of the new millennium, and which began to exhibit, if not explicitly religious, certainly spiritually orientated presentiments regarding the end of the world. Like *Knowing*, by the end of Robert Zemeckis's *Contact*, atheist astrophysicist, Dr Ellie Arroway, discovers a newfound spiritual awareness after her metaphysical encounter with extra-terrestrial beings; who are, likewise, presented as celestial entities with characteristically angel-like powers. Similarly, in Peter Hyams' *End of Days*, Jericho Cane, who had lost all belief in God, ultimately submits to an act of holy martyrdom, and bears the redemption of humanity in his prevention of the Antichrist's rule of the coming millennium. M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs*, which holds the greatest comparison to Proyas's film, exhibits the same compulsion to decode the prophetic 'signs' of the endtime, and most explicitly portrays the rediscovery of lost Christian faith in Graham Hess's return to the priesthood. In each of these films, the death of a loved one coincides with the beginning of apocalyptic events, at once instating a psychological connection between familial loss and global crisis. For the protagonist, the eventual recognition of a higher power, in whatever form this may take, replaces the existential meaningless that had been inflicted by the trauma of loss with a new and profound spiritual understanding of the surrounding universe. As evinced before, this frames a key narrative element whereby fundamental meaning is searched for within fatalistic modes of perception. This spiritual awareness also becomes a method through which to make sense of cataclysmic occurrences, just as both *Signs* and *Knowing*, each in their own way, exhibit an attempt to address the collective cultural trauma induced by the events of 9/11. At the same time, this deterministic effort to make sense of apocalyptic destruction, or the threat of such, operates in exactly the same way as premillennialist endtime prophecy belief, which imparts the assurance that the future of humankind has been pre-ordained by a higher power. This translates exactly into the 'appeal of apocalypticism', where fatalistic beliefs act to interpret catastrophic events as part of a grander scheme, and offer an appealing and inclusive structure of meaning; an 'explanation for otherwise enigmatic events.'[178] In Carl Sagan's book, *Contact*, on which the film of the same name is based, Sagan speaks of the aliens' 'imminent secular revelation' that religious leaders fear will undermine and eventually supplant all forms of faith on earth.[179] Although *Signs*, *Knowing*, and *Contact*, begin from this same religiously pejorative standpoint, the secular notion of a random, mystifying universe, and the unknown/unknowable elements therein, is finally circumvented in favour of religious divination and demystification. In *Signs*, for instance,

[178] Wojcik, p. 143.
[179] Carl Sagan, *Contact* (London: Guild Publishing, 1986), p. 186.

everything from a child's near fatal asthma attack to the seemingly nonsensical final words of a dying wife, transpire to have profound meaning and significance towards the Hess family's eventual salvation. Thus violence, death, and disaster become an acknowledged and necessary element of God's master plan, where human history is transcribed into an overall eschatological understanding of our foretold fate – as with the prophesized disasters and destruction of the planet in *Knowing*. The integral aura of 9/11 that manifests itself within *Knowing*, and that is linked to the coded numbers, becomes directly attuned to this aspect, and suggests a psychical inflection, through apocalyptic fantasy, of a culturally spiritual need for fatalistic assurance. This is something that Kirsten Moana Thompson has also identified as a key component within *Signs*; 'The prominence of the visual dimension of 9/11 closely aligns itself with the central theme of *Signs*: that the crop circles signify the end of the world, and that the alien invasion of the planet is a global test of faith'.[180]

Moreover, like Emmerich's *2012*, the nature of apocalypse in these films derives from outer 'celestial' forces, over which humanity has neither control nor culpability. This is a further alignment with evangelical prophecy belief, which is made explicitly clear in *Knowing*'s utilisation of biblical apocalyptic texts and Ezekiel's prophetic vision. The preoccupation with interpreting signs and codes place these films further in line with evangelical belief in the 'endtime', where such hermeneutic themes implicate a film like *Knowing* directly into the premillennialist fixation with eschatological decryption. The fact that the Bible may be deemed to possess secret knowledge of humanity's fate goes back to the original meaning of apocalypse, derived from Greek: *apokálypsis*; meaning a 'lifting of the veil' or 'revelation'; a disclosure of something hidden from humanity. In *Knowing*, as well as *Contact*, the aliens represent the angel-guardians of this secret knowledge, which also ties into Dispensationalist belief in The Rapture; which translates, in the film, as a cosmic ascent to the stars. In *Knowing*, and to a lesser degree, *Signs* and *Contact*, apart from fronting the theory that biblical descriptions of angels may have really been aliens, the fact that the appearance of the aliens coincides with the end of the world, also stems from the Book of Revelation, where angels act as heralds of the apocalypse (as the aliens clearly do in *Knowing*). As for the fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of prophecy, and the merging of science fiction and religion, even this may seem permissible within premillennialist prophecy belief, as Hal Lindsey decrees in *The Late Great Planet Earth*:

> There will be seven signs signalling the Endtime: war, revolution, plague, famine, earthquake, religious deception, and 'strange occurrences in space.'[181]

[180] Thompson, p. 140.
[181] Ibid., p. 6.

This would certainly incorporate the extra-terrestrial events in *Signs* and *Contact*, as well as the cataclysmic solar activity of *Knowing* and *2012*. Moreover, the fascination with 'overdetermined' narratives, paranoid conspiracies, and hermeneutic decoding, as displayed within films like *Signs* and *Knowing* – and which a text like *The Spaceships of Ezekiel* directly taps into – are equally informed from the same kind of themes present in evangelical prophecy belief, and, as we will find, are an integral and interconnecting feature within a number of key films discussed in this study. Espoused by popular Dispensationalist literature like *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *Left Behind*, premillennialist perceptions of the endtime have become a pervasive feature of the American apocalyptic imagination. So too, it seems, it has continued to inspire Hollywood's own visions of The End well beyond its millennial convection.

Chapter 3

Blind Faith: Post-Apocalyptic Preaching in *The Book of Eli*

What stands out first of all about *The Book of Eli* (Albert & Allen Hughes, 2010) is that the title itself is unambiguously religious. Purposeful in its wording, 'The Book of Eli' denotes a clear biblical inference. In direct congruence with any number of chapters from the Bible; 'The Book of Daniel', 'The Book of Isaiah' etc. (there is, incidentally, no Book of Eli), the inevitable determination is epic in tone, and biblical in significance. This is made even more so by the fact that the name 'Eli' itself is a variant on the name of God as spoken in Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic (the 'I' suffix indicates first person singular possession, i.e., 'my El' or 'my God'). Eli can also stand as a shortened form of the name Elijah, who, in the Bible, was a prophet of high esteem in 9th century BC Israel. According to the Books of Kings, Elijah defended the worship of the Hebrew God Yahweh over the more popular pagan God Baal. Hence, in Hebrew, Elijah means 'my God is Yahweh'. The name 'Eli', itself, is also featured in the Bible. According to the Book of Samuel, Eli was a Jewish high priest, and one of the last Israelite Judges before the rule of kings. Eli, the high priest of Shiloh, stands as a figure that represents the lost traditions of Israel. The Book of Samuel tells how the old beliefs are replaced by new arbitrary forms of law and governance under the rule of kings. The prophet Jeremiah seeks to restore the ways of the Shiloh tradition to the people of Israel after the kings become dissolute and 'wicked' – defiling the temple, and the word of God. Initial advertising for *The Book of Eli*, promoting its release, emphasized and played upon the film's biblical connotations. Original poster designs included the tag line, 'DELIVER US' (from 'The Lord's Prayer'; '..deliver us from evil'), on which the film's release date was displayed like a Biblical passage reference; (The Book of) ELI 1:15:10. Even before the film begins, Eli is thus presented akin to a biblical prophet.

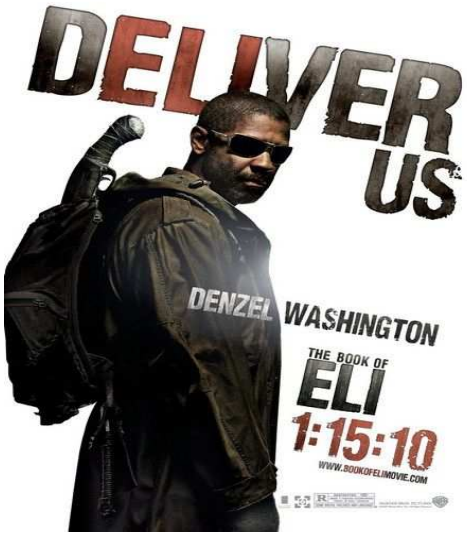

Fig 3.1 Post-apocalyptic prophet: a promotional poster for *The Book of Eli*.

The Book of Eli opens to a dream-like forest of tall trees and gently falling snow; a hazy vision saturated in faded green. Like the forest-Eden of *Avatar*, or the planet paradise in *Knowing* (paradise status signified by floating wisps of snow-flake fauna) it seems like this could be yet another eco-wonderland that we are about to venture into. Except, as the camera tracks along the forest floor, this peaceful vista is disturbed by the sight of a revolver lying on the ground. A background of eerie wind and warped gong sounds add to an incrementing air of ill-omen, and warn that this is far from a fairy tale. This feeling is firmly cemented when the camera continues to track along the corpse of the gun's previous owner, lying face-up amidst the dead autumn leaves. In fact, far from being an eco-paradise, the appearance of snowfall within an autumnal forest suggests something amiss with the ecosystem. Into this scene of post-tragedy, scampers a skinny Siamese cat. As the starving animal sniffs at the exposed toes of the dead body, the camera slowly pans across the woodland to stop upon a crouched, hidden figure. As the camera moves in, it reveals the menacing visage of a gas-masked spectre in the distance. The sinister figure sits motionless, with crossbow aimed, waiting for the exact moment to strike. A close-up of the cat's face, which has now noticed the watching threat, is cut to a close-up of the ghoulish gas-mask and the cavernous sound of heavy, stifled breathing. The arrow is unleashed and cuts rapidly through the air. In slow-motion to sudden real-time, it finds its target with the stark finality of a crunching thud. One violent death upon another, the green-hued forest dissolves to white.

The scene re-opens to a lone figure trekking across a desert road in a barren landscape utterly devoid of colour. The camera tips up to show a dramatic cloud strewn sky as the title of the film fades in – 'The Book of Eli'– written across the heavens. The camera tips back down to re-join the man in green combat jacket and sunglasses, as he comes across a burnt-out car containing the charred, skeletal remains of the driver. Checking there is nothing of interest, he continues down a road that is littered with rusted burnt-out vehicles on either side. What looks like the possible aftermath of a nuclear bomb strike, the remaining corroded carnage points to an event that happened long ago. The bleak, arid terrain, bleached of colour, is all but a desolate post-apocalyptic wilderness. Venturing off-road, the traveller chances upon a dilapidated house in which he finds the decayed remains of a suicide victim hanging from the ceiling. Unfazed by the gruesome discovery, the man takes the boots off the corpse and is delighted to see that they fit. Deciding to take shelter for the night, and unravelled from his protection from the harsh environment, the traveller is finally revealed to be none other than Denzel Washington. As he settles back to feast upon the Siamese cat that now roasts over a fire, feeding a piece to a passing rat – in an ironic reconfiguring of the food chain ('you'll like it.. it's cat'), he digs out a

battered i-pod, and selects Al Green's, 'How Can You Mend A Broken Heart'. As the relaxing tones of this soul classic play over the soundtrack, he sharpens a huge looking blade, checks his automatic handgun, and washes himself with a KFC wet-wipe. After this ritual is performed, he carefully uncovers an ornate, old book from its cloth wrappings, and begins to read, mouthing the words.

Having already witnessed him with said book, we can now comfortably assume that this man is the titular 'Eli' (if also having observed corresponding poster advertising). The next day, continuing his journey on the road, still a monochrome wasteland, he encounters a woman in disarray on the other side of a shadowy underpass. Wearing scraps for clothes, she squats by a broken shopping cart containing her belongings. 'Don't hurt me', she pleads, offering him a tin of food. 'I'm not going to hurt you', Eli says, 'that's what the last guy said', the woman replies warily. Seeing that Eli cautiously keeps his distance, the woman, also wearing sunglasses, plays helpless and asks for Eli's aid in fixing the broken shopping cart. In an obvious attempt to lure him in further, she rises up on her knees and sweeps away her wild hair from her chest to reveal the skimpy rag she wears for a top (think Raquel Welch in *One Million Years B.C.*) 'can you help me?' Unconcerned with the woman's attempts at seduction, Eli scours the area, sensing something awry. 'You know, the only thing about no soap', he yells to no one in particular, '…is that that you can smell hijackers a mile off.' Sure enough, at this remark, the gang of would-be hijackers emerge from their hiding places. 'I am impressed', declares their bedraggled leader, '…this man smells us, from thirty feet away… what does that say about our hygiene?' A medium shot shows the gang of six men begin to close in around their newest victim. In the background, a yellow sign on the underpass stands out amid the colourless landscape. Written on it, the numbers 14: 6 – referring, no doubt, to the maximum height limit for vehicles. Although, tellingly, these numbers also reference a specific passage from the bible; when Jesus proclaims, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' (John 14: 6) The precise and conspicuous nature of this message from the bible, and the fact that it is highlighted in yellow – in a vista of virtual black and white – suggests that the appearance of these numbers are more than just a coincidence. Again, here we have, in practise, another hermeneutic code to decipher, a fulfilment of the eschatological 'need' to perceive and decode signs.

As the gang of hijackers adopt their positions around Eli, each are shown to wear dark goggles. In fact, in this post-apocalyptic netherworld, all are compelled to wear some form of eye protection, as it seems the Earth's ozone layer – or what's left of it – offers scant protection for the planet's inhabitants. Earlier, the song, 'How Can You Mend A Broken Heart', featured

Fig. 3.2 Biblical passage: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14: 6)

the key line, 'how can you stop the sun from shining', sung as the dawn dissolves in against Eli's profiled face. The relentless glare from the sun, it would appear, has scorched the entire surface of the planet, and would do the much the same to unshielded retinas. The gang leader, armed with a metal pole, asks Eli what he has in his backpack. 'Nothing' replies Eli – despite the fact that the butt of a shot-gun visibly juts out of the top. 'You've got a gun', observes one of the gang, 'well shit it ain't it loaded', assures the gang leader, adding forlornly, 'they never are'. He asks Eli to open up his pack and tip its contents on the road. 'I can't do that', declares Eli almost apologetically. Stepping up his intimidation, the gang leader pushes Eli in the chest, demanding the backpack. 'Put that hand on me again and you won't get it back', warns Eli. 'Can you believe this guy?' the leader says to his gang, amused by the bold threat from his unarmed and outnumbered opponent; 'Alright.. if you want to do it the hard way'. But as the hijacker grabs at him, Eli, in one swift movement, despatches the blade (tucked out of view) from under his backpack and slices off the hand of his assailant. 'What d'you do that for?', utters the gang leader in disbelief, slumping to the ground. The rest of the gang, visibly jolted, look at each other, unable to comprehend the rest of his unintelligible rambling. 'He's in shock' explains Eli, stepping back into the black shadow of the underpass, '..I think he meant – kill him'. Framed within the rectangle of the underpass, the six figures, in black silhouette, begin combat. Eli, it transpires, is a martial-art master of the blade, and expertly vanquishes the five remaining hijackers in true Samurai fashion; a cartoon-form kung-fu fight of shadow figures – more attuned to a comic book style Manga movie.

Indeed, initial comic book style concept art for the film found its way into subsequent promotional material, even inspiring posters for the annual enthusiasts conference, Comic-Con. This was in no small part due to two prominent comic book illustrators being drafted in to

design story boards and concept art for the film; Chris Western – famed for Judge Dredd in *2000 AD*, and Tommy Lee Edwards – whose notable comic credits include *Batman*, *Hellboy*, *Daredevil*, and *The Matrix*.[182] Both designed poster art for Comic-Con 09, and are accredited with helping to create the overall look of the film – as well as imbedding a pervasive appeal to fans of the comic book genre. The Hughes brothers themselves had already some involvement in the field, having co-directed *From Hell* (2001), a stylised fable of Jack the Ripper based on Allen Moore's gory cult graphic novel of the same name. The brothers' fascination with comic books, it seems, has not wavered, and were reputed to be in negotiations with Warner Bros to direct the live-action adaptation of the 80s Japanese anime film, *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988).[183] Albert Hughes comments; 'That last movie we did was about Jack the Ripper, so we

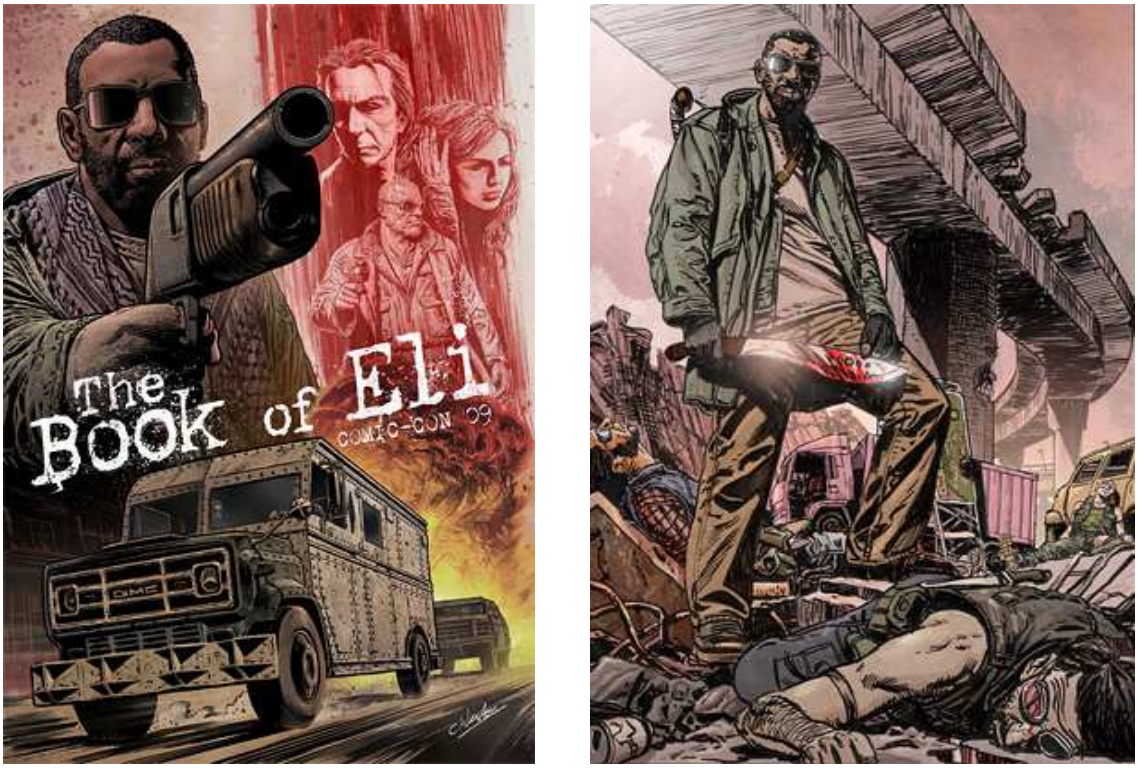

Fig. 3.3 & 3.4 The comic book of Eli: examples of Chris Weston's concept art for the film.

researched those movies which had come before, and try to get rid of the clichés and make new things that work. Then we go to comic book material, which is kind of ironic for this one because it wasn't based on a comic book. We use a lot of those artists to help us with the look of the movie.'[184] Though *The Book of Eli* is what may be deemed an 'original' story – not based on any comic book characters per se, the film's genesis was sparked from the post-apocalyptic

[182] Review of Chris Western's poster and concept art for *The Book of Eli*, *FirstShowing.Net*, July 13 2009. <http://www.firstshowing.net/2009/07/13/check-this-out-chris-westons-book-of-eli-comic-con-poster>
[183] 'The Book of Eli's Hughes Brothers Helming Live-Action *Akira*', *FirstShowing.Net*, February 10 2010. <http://www.firstshowing.net/2010/02/10/the-book-of-elis-hughes-brothers-helming-live-action-akira/>
[184] 'The Hughes Brothers Talk About *The Book of Eli*', *CraveOnline.Com*, August 6 2009. <http://www.craveonline.com/entertainment/film/article/the-hughes-brothers-talk-about-the-book-of-eli-82437>

imagination of screenwriter Gary Whitta; a self-professed 'geek' raised on comic books, video games, and sci-fi television,[185] whose more recent credits include co-writing the story for Rogue One: A Star Wars Story A long-time writer for computer game magazines, and founder of PC Gamer, Whitta recalls, 'It was very satisfying when I got my first job writing about video games and could go to my mother and say, 'see, I told you!'' Inspired by the style of his personal screenwriting 'hero', David Goya, of *The Dark Night* (Christopher Nolan, 2008), and *Blade* (Stephen Norrington, 1998) – both adapted from popular comic books – Whitta engaged in writing super-hero stories of similarly dark and apocalyptic amplitude.[186] His idea for *The Book of Eli*, however, was born from a somewhat unusual source – something which we will come back to further along the film's narrative progression.

Fig. 3.5 The comic book of Eli: Tommy Lee Edwards' poster for Comic-Con 09.

Although Eli's sword-wielding heroics fit figuratively enough into the lore of the Samurai film, Denzel Washington somewhat baulks at using the term 'sword', preferring to describe the blade as more like a 'machete' that he has fashioned into a weapon.[187] In labouring this point, Washington is assiduous in distancing Eli from any inferred code of honour; not only the Bushidō code of the Samurai – for which the sword (or katana) was of such vital ritualistic significance – but also any sense of chivalric honour with which a sword may be associated. In Eli's world, no such virtue can exist without some form of civilization to begin with.

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[185] Interview with Gary Whitta, *ComicBookResources.Com*, April 2 2010. <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=25539>

[186] Ibid.

[187] Interview with Denzel Washington at Comic-Con 09, *TrailerAddict.Com*, Retrieved June 28 2010. < http://www.traileraddict.com/trailer/the-book-of-eli/comic-con-interview-denzel-washington>

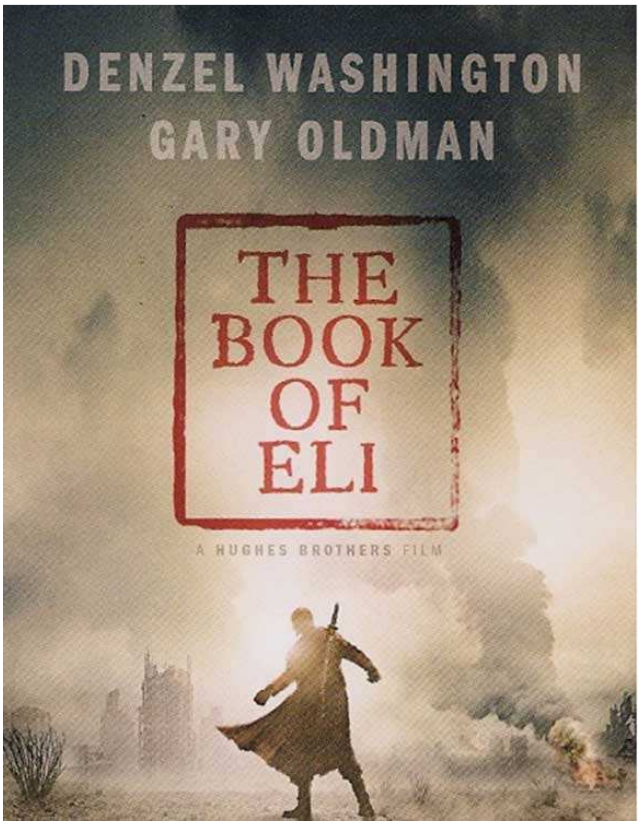

Fig. 3.6 Ronin Warrior: an original poster for the film.

Interestingly enough, Gary Whitta's original script for the movie initially described Eli's weapon as a 'samurai sword'. And one movie poster further played upon Eli's Samurai affiliation, depicting him with a Japanese katana style sword, trussed upon his back in the traditional Samurai manner (katana, in Japanese, means 'backsword'). After his deadly 'swordplay', Eli walks over to the hapless gang leader, who gropes for his severed hand in bemused shock. 'I told you, you wouldn't get that back', affirms Eli, kicking the hand out of reach. 'Who are you?' the gang leader asks. Eli, saying nothing, puts the maimed miscreant out of his misery; cradling his head with a degree of compassion, he thrusts his blade deep in a deadly embrace. Having despatched the final gang-member, Eli goes back to the underpass to check the freshly slain bodies for anything of use. Again, in medium-shot silhouette, Eli gets down on one knee amidst the corpses, and bows his head as though in prayer for the deceased. The woman, still crouched in her position as ambush bait, informs Eli that the gang's intention was to kill him and eat him. As Kim Newman denotes from the plethora of post-apocalyptic films in the seventies and eighties; 'The common denominator in these movies is savagery. Our world may be unfair and self-destructive, but when it goes up in smoke things get a lot worse.'[188] As Eli begins to walk away from the scene of slaughter, the woman asks where he is going. Eli replies without breaking stride, 'West'. This at once suggests one of the key generic factors beginning to materialise both narratively and stylistically. 'Can I come with you?' the woman asks, tentatively beginning to follow, 'No' replies Eli, not bothering to look back. Even though the world in which Eli exists is a bleak, desolate wilderness, where women appear in sparse numbers – so much so that they are used to lure unsuspecting travellers – Eli nevertheless rejects the woman's offer of companionship. Here, we get the sense of a man who is devoutly resolute and focused upon his mission – whatever that may involve – and one who is not willing to let any potential distraction regarding the opposite sex sway him from his path. This concerted resolve is further

[188] Kim Newman, *Apocalypse Movies: End of the World Cinema*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), p. 182.

emphasized when he encounters a man and woman travelling by foot on the road. Eli watches, out of view, as they are set upon by a marauding gang of bikers. The man is instantly gunned down, and as the gang begin to rape the woman, Eli looks away, telling himself, 'stay on the path.. it's not your concern.' As the screams continue in the background, Eli repeats the phrase over again like a mantra, 'stay on the path.. it's not your concern.'

Already, we have the stark sense of a post-apocalyptic hell-on-Earth; a nightmare world presided over by blood-thirsty biker gangs and killer cannibals. However, some semblance of civilization is shown to exist, when Eli eventually arrives upon a human settlement. In the remnants of what was once a town, Eli draws suspicious glances from its down-beaten inhabitants, as he walks down the rubble-strewn dirt track that passes for the central street. On the dilapidated buildings on either side, men with rifles oversee the settlement from the roof tops. We have witnessed the scene before; a horseless stranger arriving in a western frontier town. In fact, the post-apocalyptic future seems to have regressed, in general, to a state more akin to the 19th century and the American Wild-West. Accordingly, *The Book of Eli* has been duly categorised by some as, quite specifically, 'a post-apocalyptic western'. However, Albert Hughes rather offsets this view when he says;

> I think it was almost like somebody said it once and it caught on. Studios are scared of westerns so they're like, 'Don't say that.' But at the same time, some of the influences of the Eli character come from The Man With No Name.. some of those movies, stylistically, as far as what we researched. But I wouldn't call it a Western. It takes place in the West, but this story could very easily take place in the East Coast.[189]

Albert Hughes, in his apparent distancing from the genre, is perhaps all too wary of the 'studios' and their uncomfortable stance on the Western tag. Nevertheless, the film's comparisons to the Western genre remain clear and unmistakeable. This is none more evident than when Eli enters the town's one and only watering-hole. One can almost hear the interrupted imaginary piano as Eli is cautiously eyed by the bar's motley congregation of misfits (one of whom characteristically wears a Stetson) – a more than worthy cast for a Western saloon bar. In case there was any remaining doubt as to the genre reference, outside, among the throng, somebody inadvertently whistles the pan-fluted tune from *Once Upon A Time in America* (Sergio Leone, 1984); 'Cockeye's Song', composed by Ennio Morricone – whose music is indelibly linked with Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns. Albert Hughes, in the end, acknowledges what he describes as a 'tip of the hat to the Western'; 'I think we're greatly influenced by Sergio Leone and the simplicity of his filmmaking, but also the startling

[189] 'The Hughes Brothers Talk About *The Book of Eli*', *CraveOnline.Com*, August 6 2009.

imagery.'[190] The post-apocalyptic wilds that make up the film's own 'startling imagery', make a perfect parallel to the Western frontier wilderness; undiscovered worlds both violent and unforgiving, and Eli – embodying the spirit of the frontiersman and the drive to push further west. In another 'tip of the hat', the Hughes brothers' film has already emulated the ending of another classic Western. In *High Plains Drifter* (Clint Eastwood, 1973), the nefarious gang leader, his gun hand already having been incapacitated, asks the mysterious stranger who has just annihilated his gang, 'Who 'are' you?' Receiving no answer, he is then unceremoniously executed by a brooding Clint Eastwood in his reprising of the 'Man with No Name'. It comes, then, as no surprise that the Hughes brothers should mention Eastwood's anti-hero as a seminal factor in the shaping of Eli – an equally mysterious traveller of the post-apocalyptic plains.

Back in the saloon bar, after an inevitable altercation with one of the regulars, the scene is set for a good-old-fashioned bar room brawl – albeit within the sub-pretext of a martial-art movie. It is here that we witness the film's first adornment of religious auspice (at least the first that doesn't require decoding). 'I don't want any trouble' Eli informs the belligerent biker, who is obviously looking to start some himself. However, Eli is left with no choice but to incapacitate the drunken miscreant, who, as so happens, is the leader of the biker gang that had earlier attacked the defenceless couple on the road. Smashing his face into the bar-top, Eli whispers into the ear of the transgressor; 'I know who you are.. a murderer of innocent travellers on the road. You are going to be held to account for the things you've done.. do you know that? Do you?' In this lawless land of brutal disorder, where there is clearly no form of legal justice; Eli can only portend to the Christian covenant of a higher judgement. This is a sentiment that is soon to be left in no doubt. After the biker gang leader collapses in a state of semi-drunk unconsciousness, Eli turns to leave, but is prevented from doing so by the rest of the gang. Surrounded by what seems like the entire compliment of the bar, Eli puts down his backpack and begins to ready himself for combat. As he does so, like an evangelical preacher, he begins to recant a passage from the bible;

> Cursed be the ground, for our sake. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for us.
> For out of the ground we were taken for the dust we are.

Ever dauntingly dramatic, Eli swipes out the vicious looking blade before completing the passage; '..and to the dust we shall return.' As though performing the last rites on those about to die, Eli's oration is a paraphrased passage from Genesis 3: 17-19; in which God presides over the fall of mankind after Adam and Eve have eaten the forbidden fruit. No more such delights for the sinful pair as God condemns them to ever-suffering mortality;

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[190] Ibid.

> By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.
>
> Genesis 3:19

In his pre-fight sermon – with overtones of Samuel L. Jackson's pre-execution speech in *Pulp Fiction*, full of God's wrath-fuelled vengeance – Eli metaphorically condemns to death those he sees as having transgressed against God's law. What ensues is a choreographed battle of martial-art-movie magnitude. A whirling warrior of flashing steel, Eli despatches endless attackers from every angle, until all are left dead at his feet.

Now, with his fully revealed religious impetus (including, in retrospect, his earlier prayers for the dead he had slain) Eli, other than a Samurai, can be likened to something of a warrior monk. In this way, he can be equated to the Christian sword wielding zealots of the Crusades; like the Templar Knights (or the 'Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon' to use their full designation) – ordained monks who took oath upon the bible, and cut down all before them in the name of God. Likewise, Eli can also be compared to that sect of Shaolin monks who originated the art of Kung Fu – or at least a combination of martial-art prowess and religious ardour. This idea of the warrior monk also configures neatly into Eli's self-imposed chastity. In fact, as a composite figure, Eli is reminiscent of David Carradine's character from the popular 1970s television series, *Kung Fu* (1972-1975). A Western with Eastern flavour; *Kung Fu* followed the travels of a lone Shaolin monk across the American gun-toting wilderness of the mid-19th century – equipped only with his spiritual training and mastery of martial-arts.

In an expressly biblical frame, the character of Eli has even been likened to Moses – as a figure who brings the (forgotten) word of God out from the desert. This association operates in tune with the tag-line, 'DELIVER US', as Moses delivered his people, first, from slavery, and then out from the wilderness. In response to this comparison, Albert Hughes exclaims;

> There's a lot of that in there. That's marketing right there. I think they did a great job of marketing. Then there's the passings that came from *Kung Fu*. He's a monk but he's not preaching to people to act, he's preaching people more to be a pacifist. There are these great wanderers who impart wisdom — to us Eli was more of a pacifist. He's delivering certain information. Some people have brought up Moses before, because he's delivering certain information behind a certain faith or belief in something. But to us, he's more of a monk. 'I'm going here to do this, but if someone gets in my way, I'm going to have to use violence, but I'm not going to throw the first punch.' And that was the sort of stuff we grew up with. Even Clint Eastwood's The Man With No Name.. he wasn't looking to shoot somebody in the back.. somebody always brought it to him first.[191]

[191] 'Is *The Book of Eli* A Christian Movie? We Ask The Hughes Brothers', *io9.Com*, July 4 2009. <http://io9.com/5447710/is-book-of-eli-a-christian-movie-we-ask-the-hughes-bros>

As intimated earlier, inspiration for the character of Eli was born from unlikely beginnings. Screenwriter Gary Whitta was invited to attend a friend's annual Halloween party, of which the theme was post-apocalyptic films. Finding himself at a loss, Whitta explains, 'I asked myself, 'what post-apocalyptic character would I go as?' and realised there weren't that many that I liked all that much… what are you gonna do? Go as "The Postman?"'[192] His solution was to don a priest's collar, and, describing himself as a prototypical 'Fat Eli', attended the party as a machete-armed, Bible-wielding warrior of the wasteland. Afterwards, Whitta became so absorbed with this idea, and he worked on 'toning down the pulp' and bringing out the humanity in the character.[193] 'If you really know your theme, that will be the lighthouse that will always guide you back to what the story is about', Whitta exclaims; 'With 'Eli', the idea was that faith is what you make it... once you have that, the narrative is just a way to deliver those ideas.'[194] When Whitta turned in his first 'Eli' draft to his manager, he recalls the first question was immediately, 'When did you become a Christian?' This is a topic that Whitta has been careful to avoid during all his interviews for the film for fear of tainting the audience's interpretation of his story.[195] This was also a point of contention for the film's studios; Alcon Entertainment, and Silver pictures; who had from the very beginning displayed some disconcertment with the story's more religious elements. The studios continuously asked Whitta to tone down the religious aspects of his script, to the point that he no longer felt comfortable with the film he was making. These difficulties, and the obvious clash of approach between Whitta and the studios, led to him eventually being replaced with a different writer. However, Denzel Washington, who was attracted to the project for the very elements that Whitta advocated, demanded that he be reinstated, allowing Whitta to see the script through to the final stage.[196]

Of course, with every (super) hero comes an arch-villain, and amid the Western-style melodrama, we are introduced to the film's bad guy; gang boss and town overlord, Carnegie – played by rent-a-rogue, Gary Oldman. Sitting with feet on desk, immersed in a book about Mussolini – signifying his instant connection to a tyrant/dictator – Carnegie, along with Eli, is presented as the only other individual in the film with the rare talent of literacy. A practise that has long since died out, reading seems one of the few pleasures that remain for both men inside a barbarous, uncivilised world. As for Carnegie, this has also instilled, or further compounded,

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[192] Silas Lesnick, 'Gary Whitta on *The Book of Eli*', *ComicBookResources.Com*, April 2 2010. <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=25539>
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.

a sense of superiority over all who surround him. Interrupted from his book, Carnegie is duly informed by his chief henchman, Redridge (Ray Stevenson) that a gang of road-raiders have returned with some illicit plunder. 'Books?' Carnegie asks eagerly; 'a whole bag of them', Redridge is pleased to inform. As the hoard of books are unloaded onto his desk – including *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and more notably, *The Da Vinci Code* (another religious reference) – the leader of the biker gang asks, 'The one you want.. it ain't there?'. 'No' replies Carnegie dejectedly. However, the raiders have recovered another preciously rare item, a sample-bottle of shampoo. For this, Carnegie rewards the raiders with drinks-on-the-house – enter Eli. Evident already that Carnegie is searching for a specific book, Redridge tells him; 'You're sending guys out who can't even read, to look for one book.. no wonder they never find anything.' 'I use the tools I have at hand', says Carnegie. Redridge looks at the books on the desk and asks, 'What about these?' 'Burn them', orders Carnegie. In this post-apocalyptic wasteland, where books are no more than antiquated artefacts, such obsolete tomes are useless to most, and only of value to those few able to decipher their secrets; secrets that Carnegie would rather destroy than let fall into the hands of others able to interpret them. This underlying aspect again participates in the eschatological impulse to decipher codes and signs; something that is emphasized by the conspicuous appearance of *The Da Vinci Code*. As already observed by Kirsten Moana Thompson, 'as a consciousness of the end of the world, apocalyptic or millennial thinking reflects and depends upon *hermeneutics*', or the fundamental capacity to interpret signs.[197] This is something that has, of course, plenty of religious resonance; not so much with *The Da Vinci Code*, but rather the principle of The Bible Code; as a book that is imbedded with symbolic imagery, cryptic signs, and buried codes.

Moreover, Carnegie's 'book-burning' – with overtones of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 541* – reveals his own fear and forbiddance of 'thought through reading', and the autonomous consciousness that such knowledge could instigate. Carnegie's act to destroy the books, like Bradbury's figurative fable, and which also echoes the cultural barbarism of the Nazis, is demonstrative of his desire to suppress society through perpetuated ignorance, prohibiting the knowledge of prior civilization. Books, as symbolic of mankind's collective body of artistic expression and cultural intellect, are tools for Carnegie to control and manipulate, for Carnegie knows (as he would have read) that whoever controls this knowledge, has the power to manipulate the masses. As for Eli, the butchery of the bar-room-brawl ensures that he comes to the close attention of Carnegie, after his men apprehend him at gunpoint. In comparison to the

[197] Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007) p. 5.

dilapidation around him, Carnegie's seat of power is a lavish monument to art deco; an extravagantly carpeted room with intricate iron railed windows, finished off with ornate glass ceiling and chandelier. From the matching wrought iron balcony above the saloon bar, like a dissolute Roman emperor presiding over gladiatorial combat, Carnegie surveys all beneath him, and has witnessed Eli's skilful butchery. 'And who are you?' he asks Eli, 'Nobody', he replies. 'Oh I doubt that' Carnegie says, seemingly unconcerned about the bloodshed below, '..the men you killed in my bar.. *they* were nobody.' Carnegie addresses Eli from behind a huge wooden desk, upon which lay several large books – the currency of his knowledge and power. Dressed in black, Carnegie leans upon his throne-like chair. Behind him hangs of a large framed map of the world. With Carnegie's earlier affiliation with Mussolini, and his own small army at hand, we gauge a picture of a deadly dictator with grand designs upon the world (or what is left of it). From his sumptuous surroundings, while all others suffer in squalor, Carnegie plans, with ruthless ambition, his post-apocalyptic world order. He tells Eli, 'This is a civilized town.. we don't eat humans.' Eli, saying nothing, continues to wipe the blood from his hands. 'We don't see too many people from before.. not any more' exclaims Carnegie; although the apocalyptic event that is inferred, up to this point, remains unexplained. Sensing both a threat and an affinity, Carnegie asks Eli, 'Do you read?' Eli answers, 'Every day'. For the first time, Carnegie's expression momentarily switches to one of veiled concern; 'Good for you, me too.' However, Carnegie already knows that Eli's intellectual acuity is a direct threat to his secret knowledge, and as such, to the current social order of his fledgling society. Or, to use the appropriate 'Western' anachronism, he knows 'this town ain't big enough for the both of them.' Carnegie tells Eli, 'You know it's funny, as old as we are, people like you and me... we're the future.' Eli asks, 'What do you want with me?' Carnegie declares 'You're not just educated… I never saw anyone handle themselves the way you did, I don't know where you learned it but I sure as hell could use it.' In a glimpse of his future aspirations for himself and humanity, he tells Eli; 'This little town… It's just the beginning, I'm about to expand. I need expert help… I could use someone like you.' Despite Eli's superhero-like fighting skills, both men – relics of a long-vanished advanced civilization – wield a more venerable power in an underworld of ignorance; a world where knowledge and literacy are the new currencies of control.

Carnegie, who thinks of himself as humanity's 'future', in essence, harbours a grand concept to rebuild human civilization; albeit under his own questionable ideals and corrupted authority. Allen Hughes remarks;

> Carnegie's not a bad guy in the traditional sense. He's trying to restore civility, for lack of a better word. He wants civilization to be civilized. And he's demented, obviously, and he's distorted and demented, he's delusional. But I think he's in it for the right reasons. Jim Jones was in it for the right

> reasons, and then thousands of people ended up dying from poisonous Kool-Aid.. Doctors do it all the time, they get God complexes.[198]

Like the books he burns, Carnegie is aware that Eli, and the knowledge he represents, is something he will either have to control or destroy. In an effort to subdue this new threat, Carnegie attempts to enlist Eli's aid in expanding his small empire. Eli, however, respectfully declines; 'Thank you, but I got somewhere I need to be'. 'Where?' asks Carnegie. 'West', Eli replies. Carnegie tells him, 'There is nothing West'. 'I've been told different', responds Eli. In the hope that Eli will change his mind; in what he sees as an obvious upgrade to the 'tools' he has at hand; Carnegie offers his hospitality in providing a place for the night – an offer that Eli is urged not to refuse. Not wanting any further trouble, sensing that he has already caused enough for one day, Eli accepts the invitation.

Later, locked in his room and under guard, Eli is brought food and water by Carnegie's concubine, Claudia (Jennifer Beals) – who happens to be blind. As she is about to leave, we receive the first clue of what laid waste to the planet, when Eli asks; 'D'you get blinded in the war? Or by the sun after?' Claudia replies, 'I was born this way… I think probably I'm lucky because I was already used to being like this by the time it happened.' Presumably, the people who were not used to it have long since perished. Something we have not witnessed for some time is a reprise of the post-nuclear-war apocalypse film. A genre not seen since the demise of the cold war era, Kim Newman observes; 'The Atomic wars of these movies have usually taken place in the distant past. In *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968), *Genesis II* (John Llewellyn Moxey, 1973), *Logan's Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976), and *Deathsport* (Roger Corman, Allan Arkush, Henry Suso 1978), the devastation is hundreds of years old by the time the stories start and we are shown alien societies that have sprung up in the ruins of our world.'[199] However, in this case, *The Book of Eli* has closer affiliation to *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979), or more precisely; *Mad Max II: The Road Warrior* (George Miller, 1981) – a film to which *The Book of Eli* is highly indebted in the overall look and feel of its post-apocalyptic landscape. Like the *Mad Max* films, *The Book of Eli*, to some extent, is also a post-apocalyptic road movie, and is similarly set at a time when survivors from the original cataclysm still roam the earth, albeit after a nuclear war that possibly happened decades in the past. Continuing the trend, John Hillcoat's *The Road* (2009), from Cormack McCarthy's novel, takes up from a time-point that is more recently after 'the flash'. As already observed, most modern apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives, up till this point, had favoured ecological

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[198] 'Is *The Book of Eli* A Christian Movie? We Ask The Hughes Brothers', *io9.Com*, July 4 2009.
[199] Newman, p. 181.

disaster scenarios, or biological catastrophes, such as *Twelve Monkeys*, and *2012*. *The Book of Eli* places emphasis on both nuclear war and, as a direct result, long-term ecological devastation. Like an inverse version of *The Matrix*, where a war prompts humanity to scorch the sky black, preventing the sun's life-giving rays from reaching the earth; this time, a war has destroyed the one layer of protection the planet had from the sun's deadly radiation. The unleashed power of the sun now ravages the planet and indiscriminately destroys the sight of those who do not protect against it.

The theme of blindness, in a post-apocalyptic sense, retains deep echoes of John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* – made into a film in 1962, *Invasion of the Triffids* (Steve Sekely), in which most of the planet's population has been made blind by watching the spectacular invading meteor shower. But also, the Spanish post-atom-bomb film, *Planeta Ciego* (Leon Klimovsky, 1976) in which a group of survivors emerge from their shelter to find almost all the earth's inhabitants horrifically blinded by the blast, eyes burned white (just as 'the family' in *The* Ω*mega Man*). The plight of the survivors is chillingly encapsulated by the film's English title, *The People Who Own the Dark*. In both scenarios, the planet becomes a hellish underworld where the desperately groping blind are left to fend for themselves, and in the case of the latter, begin to organise themselves into something much more sinister. Before Claudia leaves, Eli says to her, somewhat coyly, 'I like your perfume'. Claudia smiles and says, 'It's just shampoo… but thank you.' Eli's seemingly innocent comment will turn out to hold much more significance later in the story. In the meantime, Carnegie has a scheme to use Claudia's daughter, Solara (Mila Kunis) – another reference to the Sun – to seduce Eli into staying; 'It's about time I got better use out of her'; Carnegie's response to her mother's clear duress. However, Eli, full of saintly virtue, refuses the girl's advances. The earth having become such a barbaric, spiritual wasteland, there is a sense gained that lesser men would be easily susceptible to the temptation of the opposite sex; a currency that usually accompanies the amoral terrain of the post-apocalypse film. But as we already know, Eli is no ordinary man.

Again, we see another instance in which a woman is used as a temptation to ensnare the protagonist. Corresponding to the film's religious undertones thus far (and perhaps taking into account scriptwriter Gary Whitta's own possible biblical influences) this is also a reoccurring theme in the Bible, which has its own fair share of 'temptresses' stemming back from the notion of 'Original Sin'. From the very beginning, so the Bible decrees, Eve tempts Adam into eating the forbidden fruit – something that has already been referenced by Eli and his reciting from the Book of Genesis. But then the Bible goes on to comprise a litany of tempting women,

including figures such as Jezebel (Book of Kings 16 and Revelation 2: 20), Salome (Mark 6 and Matthew 14), Delilah (Book of Judges 16), and Judith – who even has her own book (The Book of Judith), in which she plays herself as the hero who saves Israel after she, first, seduces an enemy general, and then decapitates him in his sleep (the first biblical femme fatale?) This has plenty of resonance throughout cinematic history also, beginning with Cecil B. DeMille's, *The Ten Commandments* (1923). When the heyday of the biblical epic reached its zenith in fifties and early sixties – by which time romance scenes had become more 'steamy' – the figure of the 'temptress' had adopted a much more central role, no doubt gleaning inspiration from the 'femme fatale' that had emerged from the forties. This included Cecil B. DeMille's remake of *The Ten Commandments* in 1956, and was further evidenced in biblical epics such as *David and Bathsheba* (Henri King, 1951), *Solomon and Sheba* (King Vidor, 1959), *The Story of Ruth* (Henry Koster, 1960), *Sodom and Gomorrah* (Robert Aldrich, 1663), and *Esther and the King* (Raoul Walsh, 1960) – the latter exhibiting a young Joan Collins at her temptressing best. These were all films that largely dominated the box office during their time. Of course, Eli's self-imposed chastity (taking the assumption that he is of a heterosexual proclivity) offers further affirmation of his monk-like status, but in his refusal to succumb to temptation, Eli also affiliates himself with one specific story from the Bible. Mark 1:12, Matthew 4:1-8, and Luke 4:1-13, recant the story of how Jesus fasted in the desert wilderness for forty days and nights, while at the same time resisting all temptations offered to him by the Bible's own super-villain, Satan (Eli was also in the wilderness when he was tempted for the first time). The biblical re-enactment of resisting temptation from Carnegie's own symbolic 'evil', together with his stoic Christian virtue and his preaching from scripture, further correlates Eli with the guise of a biblical prophet, or even as a 'messiah' figure – something that the title of the film, and its corresponding advertising, suggests from the very beginning.

The significance of religion in the film now begins to adopt a more prominent position. As Eli ushers Solara out of his room, she pleads to stay, telling him that her mother will be punished if Carnegie believes she has not fulfilled her devious task. Allowed to remain, Solara wastes no time in asking Eli some searching questions, beginning with how old he may be; "It's just that I haven't really seen too many people your age come through here before." Eli, somewhat taken aback, answers, 'Well… it's been thirty winters since the flash… I really don't remember." Solara then asks him what it was like "in the world before?' Eli tells her; 'People had more than they needed. We had no idea what was precious… what wasn't. We threw away things people kill each other for now.' As the pair talk, sitting on the bed, Solara discovers the book that Eli

Fig. 3.7 Let us Pray: Eli solemnly gives thanks in one of a series of promotional posters for the film.

was reading before she had entered, and which he had quickly tried to conceal under the bed cover. 'You have a book!' Solara shrieks excitedly, 'Can I see it?' Eli grabs the book from her hands and tells her quite emphatically, 'No you cannot'. But Solara, who seems used to getting her way, does not let the matter drop, informing Eli that she can't even read. Eli stands firm however. 'What is with you?' Solara exclaims, '…it is just a book!', to which Eli replies sharply, 'It's not just a book.' Solara, pausing for thought, asks, 'What do you mean it's not just a book?' Eli tells her, 'Look… no more questions about the book… alright.' Eli protectively tucks away the book, still not clearly visible, back into its cloth wrappings, and zips it up in his rucksack. In an effort to appease the sulking Solara, Eli invites her to join him in eating the food brought earlier by her mother; 'We can share it… you know… like old people used to.' However, Solara is in for one last surprise, as before she is allowed to eat, Eli holds her hands across the table and asks her to close her eyes as he begins to say grace;

> Dear Lord, we thank you for this meal. We thank you for a warm bed, and a roof over our head on cold nights such as this.. It's been too long. We thank you for the gift of companionship in hard times like these, Amen.

Solara, clearly having heard nothing like this before, asks perplexedly, 'Now we eat?' Eli confirms, 'Now we eat.'

Matters begin to come to a head however, when, the next morning, Solara meets her mother for breakfast in Carnegie's bed chamber; while Carnegie, himself, receives a shave from another blind concubine. Carnegie's favouring of blind women, the only people he seems to allow to his close proximity and into his inner sanctum (with the exception of Solara), is undoubtedly because they are viewed as no threat, and can be easily controlled. In return, because of their dependence (else suffering the fate of their post-apocalypse film predecessors), the blind have no choice but to obey and trust in their master. But, more tellingly, it may also be the ultimate assurance that the blind cannot read, and by the same extension, neither can Solara. Back at the breakfast table, Solara holds her mother's hands and asks her to close her eyes,

exactly how Eli had demonstrated. Her mother seems equally puzzled, but does as her daughter asks. Solara mimics Eli's saying of grace by beginning; 'Dear Lord'. At hearing these words, Carnegie stops in his tracks, and begins to listen attentively. Solara continues, 'We thank you for our food, thank you for my mother, thank you for the roof over our heads, and our new friends, and er… I guess that's all for now. Carnegie says, 'Amen', and tells Solara, 'that's the word you're looking for.. Amen. That's how you stop.' Solara had already told Carnegie, in an attempt to seem convincing, that she and Eli had not done much talking. However, Carnegie is now more interested in whether they did any reading. Seeing that Solara has fallen silent, Carnegie threatens her mother, grabbing her hair, demanding that Solara tell him whether she heard Eli reading from the book. 'You're hurting your mother Solara… he said he read every day – did he?' Unable to endure her mother's screams, Solara admits Eli was reading – something of a cardinal sin in Carnegie's town. He demands to know what kind of book it was. Solara, sobbing, tells him, 'I don't know… It had some kind of thing on the front of it.' 'Show me', Carnegie demands. Solara tentatively fashions the sign of the cross with her forefingers. Her mother is released.

Solara's sign of the cross signals (literally) the true subtext of the film. Now that we know that Eli's book is the Bible, some prime character objectives begin to emerge more clearly. After Carnegie discovers that Eli has somehow miraculously escaped from his locked room – for which his guard pays for with his life – Eli is tracked down in the street making his way out of town. The spirit of the Western is once more evoked, as Eli hears rifles being cocked from around the rooftops. Dust swirls on the wind, as the town-folk begin to clear the street. The post-apocalyptic future appears to have reverted to a kind of lawless Western frontier, as Carnegie crosses the street with his gun-toting gang. Motioning to the shotgun in Eli's backpack, Carnegie asks, 'Is that thing loaded?'. 'Only one way to find out', Eli replies defiantly. 'I don't think it's loaded', proclaims Carnegie, echoing the sentiments of the earlier gang leader ('they never are'). With a Mexican stand-off well and truly in place, and the two sides poised to draw, the scene is set for a classic 'high-noon' gun-fight. However, having already witnessed Eli's death defying abilities, Carnegie adopts a more diplomatic approach. 'Look, I need that book', he tells Eli, 'If you make me choose, I'll kill ya… I'll take the book.' Eli asks, 'Why do you want it?' Carnegie explains, ''I grew up with it… I know its power. If you read it, then so do you. That's why they burned them all after the war.' Carnegie walks towards Eli, arms outstretched, attempting to appeal to his Christian sense of morality;

> Just staying alive is an act of faith. Building this town is an even bigger act of faith, but they don't understand that, none of them can. And I don't have the right words to help them, but the book does. I admit, I've had to do things, many, many things I hate, to build this.. I confess that. But if we had

> that book, I wouldn't have to. Imagine how different, how righteous this little world could be if we had the right words for our faith. People would truly understand why they're here and what they're doing, and they wouldn't need any of the uglier motivations. It's not right to keep that book hidden away – it's meant to be shared with others, it's meant to be spread – isn't that what you want?

Eli replies, 'With all my heart and soul.' He tells Carnegie that he always believed that he would find a place where 'this book belonged', and 'where it was needed.' Carnegie nods in anticipation, as Eli declares, 'But I haven't found it yet.'

'Men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.' (Timothy 3:8)

Despite Carnegie's apparent aim to use the Bible 'to make the world a better place', one always suspects that his true intentions are somewhat more sinister. And it may even be the case that, in his desperate desire to possess the Bible, Carnegie harbours an underlying intent to ignite the kind of religious fervour that is often associated with extreme fundamentalist belief. This is something that Albert Hughes touches upon, when he talks of Carnegie's fixation with the book;

> I think if you applied it to nowadays, even misguided people who truly believe in one word over the other, think that their word is better than another person's word and they want to build a bomb and go run into a place and kill people. I think his character realizes how powerful that is. It's so powerful that it makes people even kill themselves over one word or one type of faith. His character says, 'Ha, I've never seen anything that powerful that can move people to do things that are crazy, or move people to do things that are good.' Depending on how you use that tool, which his character considers is a tool, you can either use it to manipulate in a good way or manipulate in a bad way, or not manipulate at all.[200]

But Carnegie's true motivations are made more transparent when he later tells Redridge; 'It's not a book – It's a weapon. A weapon aimed right at the hearts of the weak and the desperate. It will give us control of them. If we wanna rule more than one small town – we have to have it. People will come from all over – they'll do exactly what I tell them – If the words are from the book. It's happened before, and it will happen again. All we need is that book.' Now we know why Carnegie so anxiously seeks to get his hands on the last remaining Bible, to use it as a tool of conquest and control; for which the Bible has a well-documented, notorious history. And if knowledge is the new currency of control, then Carnegie sees the Bible as the ultimate source of knowledge and power. But, more than this, Carnegie speaks of the Bible almost as though it were some kind of mythical spell-book with magical powers. Indeed, one observer commented, 'The film treats the words in the Bible as if it's simply saying them that matters, not understanding them. So those magic words are sought after like a nuclear bomb, as if the

[200] 'Is *The Book of Eli* A Christian Movie? We Ask The Hughes Brothers', *io9.Com*, July 4 2009.

scripture contained within it will instantly heal all the world's ills through ownership of it, even though the entire planet has pretty much been turned into dust.'[201]

The reference to the Bible being like 'a weapon' is interesting in itself, and brings up the idea of the last remaining Bible as a divine religious relic with supernatural powers. This idea, of course, is nothing new, and conjures up various religious artefacts, mythical or otherwise, that were said to be invested with amazing occult powers. With the exception of the Holy Grail; which can be regarded as a 'true' myth, by which it has no 'real' historical basis for existence as a genuine artefact; the most famous of these biblical relics (that reputedly exist to this day) are the Ark of the Covenant, and the Spear of Destiny (also known as The Holy Lance). The Ark of the Covenant, described in the Bible as the vessel that contained the original Ten Commandments, was said to be 'a direct communication line to God'. Made famous by Stephen Spielberg in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), the Ark was said to be carried at the head of ancient Hebrew armies in battle, and when did so, ensured that they were never defeated. However, the Bible's description as a 'weapon' perhaps places a better correlation to the Spear of Destiny, the Roman lance that was said to pierce the side of Jesus on the cross. The Holy Lance (also of central importance in the 'angels vs demons' film *Constantine*) may be further suited as a parallel, in that it is a religious relic that, throughout its mythological history, has been pursued and highly sought after by those with ambitions of world domination. Another associated story, linked to the reoccurring theme of blindness, has the figure of Longinus – the Roman soldier who pierced Jesus with the spear – as being virtually blind, but when his eyes came into contact with Christ's blood, his vision was immediately restored, and, instantly, he knew what he had done. Longinus supposedly carried the spear for the remainder of his life (the relic is known also as the Spear of Longinus). But the next step in the legend of the Spear of Destiny is perhaps the most intriguing in terms of *The Book of Eli*. In the 3rd century, it is said that the Holy Lance was in the possession of Saint Maurice, then the leader of the legendary Roman Theban Legion. Maurice, an African Christian from Thebes in Egypt, is a highly venerated saint in the Coptic Orthodox Church. What is more, Saint Maurice is renowned for being the first conceived knight, and founder of the code of chivalry, subsequently becoming the patron saint of all knights. Like Maurice, Eli – who is also African in 'origin' – is the guardian of the only holy relic of its kind, and in paying service to its constant protection, is no less than a Christian knight himself. Further parallels are maintained with the next alleged owner of the spear, the Emperor Constantine – historically regarded as the person who brought

[201] *The Book of Eli* reviewed by Josh Tyler, CinemaBlend.Com, retrieved 14 September 2010. <http://cinemablend.com/reviews/The-Book-of-Eli-4401.html>

widespread Christianity to the world – an objective that is undoubtedly shared by Eli in the film. It is said that Constantine, with the spear in his possession, conquered all before him, and presided over both the Western and Eastern Roman empires (which had previously been ruled separately). Consequently, Constantine became one of the most influential rulers of Rome, and, in the process, made Christianity the dominant religion throughout the Roman Empire and the Western World. Some historians would suggest that his allegiance to the Christianity, which, at the time of Constantine's rise to power, was a fledgling religion, was more than indebted to Constantine's possession of The Holy Lance. Subsequent owners of the relic reputedly range from Charlemagne to Napoleon, but perhaps most notoriously, Adolf Hitler, who was allegedly fascinated by the occult – something played upon in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* – and was purportedly seduced by stories of the spear and its fabled powers of invincibility. In The *Book of Eli*, like an amalgam of the Ark of the Covenant and the Spear of Destiny, the Bible – the film's own Holy Grail – is perceived as a religious artefact imbued with mystical powers. Intoxicated by the aura of the occult that Christianity represents, like the seekers of these relics before him – and Hitler (along with Mussolini) as an affiliated evil – Carnegie craves to control its supernatural force. One promotional poster for the film depicts Gary Oldman as Carnegie, with the striking tag-line; RELIGION IS POWER. Indeed, through possession of the Bible, Carnegie sees his route to absolute power and domination; his destiny.

Fig. 3.8 Message loud & clear: Gary Oldman as Carnegie.

However, first Carnegie must get hold of the book. Back in this post-apocalyptic version of the 'Wild-West', keeping true to the genre, Carnegie is about to spark off a good old-fashioned gunfight. As Eli walks off down the street, Carnegie instructs chief henchman, Redridge, 'Shoot him, please.' Redridge aims and fires his handgun. A bullet whistles over Eli's shoulder. Eli stops momentarily, then, without looking back, he continues walking. Redridge looks down at his gun as though it is faulty somehow. This time, using both hands, Redridge takes more careful aim. His bullet strikes the top of Eli's backpack, making him stop in his tracks. The next few moments are perhaps best summarised in the film's original

script; 'time hangs perfectly still for a second… and then ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE.'[202] As bullets begin to fly, Eli draws his handgun, and with pinpoint accuracy, takes down no less than seven opponents before he runs out of bullets. Moving on to his pump-action shotgun (it was loaded after all) Eli spectacularly takes two out with one shot, dropping one gang-member in full flight, while wounding Carnegie in the leg with its ricocheted shot-blast. Throughout, Redridge stands motionless and watches in astonishment. In the end, the confrontation comes down to just him and Eli. Like old-time gunslingers, they stand facing each other in the middle of the town's single dirt-track street. Knowing that Eli has run out of ammunition, Redridge once more takes careful aim as his adversary stares back unarmed. This time there is no chance he can miss. However, as the pair gaze at each other, it seems as though a profound moment of understanding is exchanged, and, almost in reverence for what Eli has just done, Redridge lowers his gun, and allows Eli to walk away.

By now, Eli's astounding skills in both shooting and swordplay might identify him as some sort of religious superhero – divinely chosen as the guardian of the sole remaining Bible on Earth. However, this religious element suggests there is more at play here than simply fighting prowess. Eli's uncanny exploits thus far have been nothing short of miraculous, including his earlier detection of unseen ambushers, as well as his vanishing act from a locked and guarded room. In terms of the Western genre in which the film is firmly entrenched, there are two particular precedents that echo notable parallels to the Hughes Brothers' movie. In *High Plains Drifter*, 'The Man with No Name' seems able to bend reality to his will, displaying almost miraculous powers; whether this means shooting a man's ear off from distance, or hanging a man by the neck with one lash of his whip. Eastwood's seminal figure seems almost supernatural in some way, and by the film's end, the strong inference is that he was the spectre of the town's murdered marshal come back from the dead. Again, in Eastwood's, *Pale Rider* (1985), there is yet more religious resonance in tone with the Hughes Brothers' own 'apocalyptic' Western. At the beginning of Eastwood's film, a biblical passage is recited by a young girl; 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me' – Eli will later recite from this same biblical passage. In *Pale Rider*, amidst close-up shots of a dramatic thunderous sky, the young girl's prayer; a plea for protection, heralds the appearance of Clint Eastwood riding his horse through the mountains. Later, the girl, at home, reads from the Book of Revelation; '…and when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, 'come and see', and I looked, and behold; a pale

[202] Gary Whitta, *The Book of Eli* (unspecified draft), 'The Screenplay Database', ScreenplayDb.Com, June 21 2007. P. 60 <http://www.screenplaydb.com/film/scripts/bookofelithe20070621/>

horse'. At this same point, Clint Eastwood rides into shot through an open window on a pale grey horse. The girl continues; '…and his name that sat on him was death… and hell followed with him.' Hence, Eastwood's character is linked to one of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation; an angel deliverer of death and punishment. Containing a similar element of the supernatural, *Pale Rider* ultimately follows the same narrative pattern to *High Plains Drifter* – a mysterious and nameless stranger apparently returns from the dead to wreak revenge on those who had killed him – while at the same time protecting a defenceless community from the brutality of those same villainous men. In *Pale Rider*, other than his clear affiliation with biblical scripture, Eastwood's character is indeed a man of God, and turns out to be none other than a 'preacher', complete with clerical collar. Although, Eli does not wear a collar to signify his service to God, the parallels between him and Eastwood's character are more than apparent; Eli – protector of the innocent and bringer of death to the sinful; a heaven-sent supernatural force to contend with a godless brutal wilderness. The influence of Eastwood's westerns on the Hughes Brothers is palpable to say the least.

Like 'The Man with no Name' (and, as yet in the film, Eli has not divulged his name) Eli performs astonishing feats of marksmanship, picking off any foe almost at will. This is simply an augment to Eli's overall invincibility, demonstrated by his remarkable sword-fighting skills that vanquish every attacker. And like Eastwood's characters, Eli seems to possess a kind of supernatural aura. Like a superhero, aspects of the superhuman are conveyed through his stupefying acts of combat, where, among other things, Eli can walk away completely unscathed from a bullet-strewn battle-zone. But more than this, and in tone with the film's religious pretext, it is as though Eli receives divine protection from a higher power, making him impervious to both bullet and blade. This is a notion that is later reflected by one of Carnegie's cohorts, when he says, 'It's like he's protected somehow… like there's nothing that can touch him.' Lynn Schofield Clark attests that certain evangelical factions 'have historically emphasized that supernatural power is available for all believers because of faith, and that power may be expressed in miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit.'[203] It is perhaps one such 'manifestation' that sees Eli even possess the power to sway his enemy's actions, as with Redridge when he inexplicably lowers his gun, as though he is in the presence of something greater than he can comprehend. Spiritual powers of mind manipulation might well conjure up ideas of 'the Force' in *Star Wars* ('these aren't the droids you're looking for') – a film that may, in fact, have a more significant bearing on the Hughes brothers' movie than first envisaged.

[203] Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 27.

Indeed, when one begins to think about the certain parallels between *The Book of Eli*, and *Star Wars*; for example, Eli's guise as a kind of spiritual Samurai can be more than likened to a Jedi knight; spiritual soldiers who, by the same token, are themselves coded as warrior monks. This, along with the Samurai theme (in both films), posits a further degree of spiritual Eastern influence – or a mixture of Shaolin and Chivalry shall we say. A master of the blade, Eli also shares the same insuperable sabre-swiping ability; and in a wild-west frontier where the law of the gun reigns, like the Jedi (who shun 'blaster' weapons), Eli tellingly favours the use of his symbolic sword ('an elegant weapon for a more civilised time.') Also like the Jedi, Eli seems to possess supernatural powers of manipulation – over both mind and matter – but as Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke Skywalker, 'The Force can have a strong influence on the weak-minded'.[204] Taking the first *Star Wars* film in particular, both movies are highly indebted to the Western, and exhibit their fair share of gunfight showdowns and bar-room brawls, not to mention metaphorical representations of the Western frontier wilderness. But it is in the mode of spiritual fantasy where *The Book of Eli* perhaps takes its lead from Lucas's seminal sci-fi classic. In Eli's post-apocalyptic world, the Bible, like 'the Force', represents a long forgotten religion, a lost faith. In the first *Star Wars* film, 'Ben' Kenobi tells his young apprentice, Luke; 'For over a thousand generations, the Jedi knights were the guardians of peace and justice in the old Republic… before the dark times.' But as we know (if only through the series of prequel films), the Jedi were much more than that. Obi-Wan Kenobi is no less than a metaphoric monk charged with perpetuating the 'light' of human spirituality – in danger of flickering out – when he instructs his young 'disciple' in the forgotten faith of 'the Force'. Similarly, Eli has been bestowed with the responsibility of bringing the forgotten word of God back to humanity. In essence, he is committed to keeping alive the dying flame of faith and spirituality. Luke's Jedi development has, in itself, been likened to Christian discipleship, just as Eli takes on his own Christian disciple in Solara. Like Luke Skywalker, Eli has become the champion of his faith. In the post-apocalyptic 'dark times', like a Jedi and their symbolic light sabre, Eli is a warrior of 'light' – symbolic of God's word (Jesus: I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' John 18:12). Both Luke and Eli are the last remaining hope to fight the ever enveloping force of 'the dark side'. Allen Hughes states; 'let's not split hairs over who God is or what God is, we're all going to assume coming in, even non-believers, that there's something going on. There's some energy, life force or interconnectivity we all have.'[205] Indeed, as Obi Won Kenobi elucidates, 'It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together'.[206]

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[204] *Star Wars: Episode IV– A New Hope* (George Lucas, 1977)
[205] 'Is *The Book of Eli* A Christian Movie? We Ask The Hughes Brothers', *io9.Com*, July 4 2009.
[206] *Star Wars: Episode IV– A New Hope*

Although, at first glance, the *Star Wars* mythology may seem like a universe away from a film like the *Book of Eli*, just as Joseph Campbell – whose ideas famously inspired Lucas' story – converged corresponding world mythologies to create the archetypal 'hero's journey' (or the 'monomyth'), *Star Wars* has subsequently become a contemporary template for myth-making itself – a modern 'monomyth' for the late 20th century and beyond. Dick Staub comments that, 'A myth is a story that confronts us with the "big picture", something transcendent and eternal, and in so doing, explains the worldview of a civilization. Given that definition, Christianity is the prevailing myth of Western culture and *Star Wars* is a prevailing myth of our popular culture.'[207] This having been said, John C. McDowell recognises the fact that Lucas does not 'coercively evangelise on behalf of a new pop-religion'; 'Far from introducing anything new, *Star Wars'* creator aims to distil the essence of the old in new packaging.'[208] Correspondingly, the name Luke, like Eli, is, of course, a significantly biblical name; one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, Luke was a major prophet, and one of the foremost authors of the Old Testament. Although possibly a self-referential play on the name 'Lucas', Luke, interestingly enough, happens to be the only recognisably biblical, or 'Christian' name to be featured throughout the series of *Star Wars* films, while being the most central character of the first three. To further verify the religious ethos at the heart of *Star Wars*, Dick Staub talks of his ideas in terms of helping the next generation to become 'Jedi Christians'[209] – a term that may quite literally befit Eli himself.

Visions of *Mad Max II: The Road Warrior* are once more evoked, as a convoy of customised armoured vehicles sets out in pursuit of Eli and his book. Indeed, as Allen Hughes avers; 'As far as *Mad Max,* I prefer *Road Warrior*', while admitting, 'our movie has a bit of *Road Warrior* in it.'[210] As the armoured convoy leaves the town, so too does the genre – from 'Western' back to 'road movie' – as we see Eli, the 'walker', continuing his journey down the endless stretch of asphalt ahead. Amidst a monochrome landscape still saturated of colour, Eli once more exhibits his super-sensory abilities as he proclaims; 'I don't like being followed.' Solara, previously unseen, catches up to Eli's unrelenting pace. At first, Eli forbids her to follow, until Solara offers to take Eli to the town's source of clean water. This is sufficient to allow Solara to tag-along, for now. However, once they reach the enclosed spring, and Eli has replenished his water stocks, he bolts the door and locks Solara in, telling her; 'The road's no place for you – it's

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[207] Dick Staub, 'On the *Star Wars* Myth', interview with Stan Guthrie, ChristianityToday.Com, May 16 2005. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/mayweb-only/22.0b.html>

[208] John C. McDowell, '"Feeling The Force"- Star Wars and Spiritual Truth', BeThinking.Org, retrieved, Oct 10 2009. <http://www.bethinking.org/culture-worldview/intermediate/feeling-the-force-star-wars-and-spiritual-truth.htm>

[209] Dick Staub, 'On the *Star Wars* Myth'.

[210] 'Is *The Book of Eli* A Christian Movie? We Ask The Hughes Brothers', *io9.Com*, July 4 2009.

much worse than you think.' Eli's warning, however, goes unheeded, as Solara, like Carnegie, will not be deterred from her pursuit so easily. Back on the road, Solara has the misfortune to stumble across the same ambush that had earlier been laid out for Eli. Seeing that she is just a young girl, the woman by her broken shopping cart warns Solara to run, but to no avail, as she is set upon by two raiders. This attack, however, merely serves Eli the chance to display another element to his astonishing skills – or another string to his bow, as it were – as he proves that, along with his mastery of the sword and phenomenal marksmanship, he is also an expert archer. With remarkable accuracy, Eli shows he can guide an arrow to the exact point he chooses. The first penetrates through the unbuttoned fly of Solara's would-be rapist (from behind no less) – something of a visually symbolic 'gag' as well as comeuppance. The second shot skewers his accomplice attacker straight through the throat. Later, Eli aims his bow up to the sky. Moments later, a large bird drops to the ground, miraculously shot in mid-flight. Eli's hand is divinely guided, it seems, as sustenance – for God's agent on Earth – obligingly falls from the heavens.

Once again re-united, Eli and Solara take shelter for the night in an outcrop. It is during this time we receive some illumination regarding Eli's divine mission. Solara asks, 'Do you really read the same book every day?' Eli replies, 'Without fail'. Solara asks if Eli could read some to her. Eli obliges by reciting (from memory) from Psalm 23;

> The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he makes me to lie down in green pastures, leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.

'That's beautiful', remarks Solara, ' Did you write that? Eli looks at her earnestly and says, 'Yes I did.' 'Really?', Solara asks. 'No', Eli says, laughing for the first time; 'No… that was around a long time before you and I got here, that's for sure.' Solara asks, 'What did you mean when you said it's not just any book?' Eli carefully considers her question, nervously tapping the top of the book. He kisses the book before placing it in its protective wrappings and tells Solara; 'It's the only one.' He explains; 'After the war, people made it their business to find and destroy any that the fires didn't get already, some people said this was the reason for the war in the first place… anyway it's the only one that survived.' Now, crucially, we find that it is religion that is ultimately blamed for humanity's downfall and the devastation of the planet. With all but one Bible having been purposely destroyed, overtones of *Fahrenheit 541* resurface once more; where the book's teachings have led to deleterious thought, and has contributed (directly or not) to the demise of human civilization. This being the case, one would presume that the Koran and the Torah would have been subject to the same fate as the Bible. In any case,

a narrative plot that involves a religiously invoked World War III would certainly seem indicative of current global tensions regarding conflicting religious beliefs. Interestingly, however, if the apocalypse has somehow been brought about by influence from the Bible, then, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy in itself. This poses some interesting theological questions regarding the film's narrative thus far. Primarily, that the post-apocalyptic setting of the film could yet represent the time of 'tribulation' as prophesized in Matthew (24:21) and predicted in The Book of Revelation. The 'tribulation' is said to be a period of unspeakable hardship for humankind, in which a time of great evil and suffering will culminate in the rise to power of the 'Antichrist'; widely interpreted to be a man who becomes an all-powerful dictator on Earth (Revelation 13:1-10). In *The Book of Eli*, this figure is, of course, obligingly represented by Carnegie. The Book of Revelation prophesizes that Christ will return to Earth after a global conflict – such as a nuclear war – so that the battle between good and evil might conceivably take place amidst Earth's post-apocalyptic ruins. Whereas secular beliefs concerning nuclear war might elicit an overall sense of 'universal doom', the idea of nuclear annihilation has been readily accepted into evangelical notions of Armageddon. As Daniel Wojcik explains, religious apocalyptic belief systems are prone to mythologizing nuclear conflict as 'a meaningful event', namely, 'the fulfilment of a divinely ordained plan for the redemption of the world'.[211] This explicitly biblical reading of the film would posit Eli as the messiah figure; the 'Second Coming of Christ'; come to save humanity from incarnate evil, and 'deliver' mankind to spiritual salvation. Eli recites from Psalm 23, which includes the significant line, 'though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.' Curiously, Eli initially tells Solara that it was himself that wrote this passage (before thinking better of it). Here, it is interesting to note that the passage chosen for Eli to recite has no known author (although there is surrounding speculation); and is a further signal, or code, to Eli's overall representation as a biblical prophet; a parable from the Book of Eli. So the question has to be asked, how did Eli come to be in possession of the last Bible on Earth? Eli provides some further back-story in describing the final days of 'the world before';

> They said that the war tore a hole in the sky.. sun came down, and burned everything.. everything and everybody. You were lucky to hole up and hide in a place like this, or underground. Most people weren't lucky. So a year later, we started coming out. People wandered around. Not knowing what I was gonna do, trying to find a place just to survive. One day, I heard a voice. It's hard to explain, but it was like it was coming from inside of me. But I could hear it as clear as I can hear you talking to me now. It led me to a place where I found the book, buried under some rubble. The voice told me to carry the book out west. Told me that a path would be laid for me, that I'd be led to a place where the book was safe, told me that I'd be protected.. against anyone or anything that stood in my path. I've been walking ever since.

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[211] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism and Apocalypse in America* (New York University Press, 1997) p. 4.

As if Eli's prophet status was ever in question (if he is in fact sane), he has been bestowed a divine calling, affiliating him to other biblical prophets such as Ezekiel, who himself claimed to have received a divine visitation from God. Solara exclaims, 'And you did all that because a voice in your head told you to?' 'Yes I did', declares Eli, 'I know what I heard. I know what I hear, I know I'm not crazy, and I know I would have never made it without help.' Eli's answer indicates that 'the voice' continues to talk to him – or even talks through him. During the night, Solara tries to sneak a look at the book while Eli sleeps. She is caught however, and Eli warns her that no one touches the book except him. Eli tells Solara, 'You said you don't know how to read anyway, it's no use to you.' Solara replies, 'Yeah… so teach me.' And so, with this remark, Solara adopts her role as Eli's disciple.

Again, touching upon popular mythologies, the Bible, an artefact of such dangerous mystical force, it is already deemed responsible for the decimation of the planet, has obvious comparisons (in narrative terms) to 'the ring of Sauron', the mysterious artefact of unspeakable power in *Lord of the Rings*. *The Book of Eli*, to some degree, shadows the story of 'the ring'; the forces of 'light' and darkness battle for possession of the artefact that can change the course of civilization, and which, at all costs, must not fall into the wrong hands. When Carnegie, who has long been searching for the Bible, sends his raiders after the book, it is to fulfil the all-consuming need to possess its unremitting power. His compulsion mirrors Sauron, the Dark Lord of Mordor, who for eons has sought the ring, and who sends his 'dark riders' out in its relentless pursuit – for what will ultimately be the final component to his domination of Middle-earth. Carnegie might have similar intentions for middle-America, as he finally tracks down his long-sought-after prize. After laying siege to the house in which Eli and Solara have taken refuge, the pair surrender, and Carnegie finally has the world's last remaining Bible in his grasp. 'Ask and you shall receive' he proclaims in mock evangelical prose. Carnegie caresses the book and indulges in smelling its lavish leather cover. 'God is good is he not' he tells Eli. 'All the time' Eli replies. 'Not 'all' the time' Carnegie declares, before shooting Eli in the stomach at point-blank range. God demonstrates his profound ire, as lightning momentarily flashes in the background. 'You see... what did I tell you', Carnegie tells his watching gang, '…he's just a man.' With Eli on his knees, Carnegie unceremoniously pushes him to the ground with his boot, asking; 'Where's your protection now?' As Eli lies struggling for breath, Carnegie menacingly leans over him and says, 'Pray for me… I mean it.' The gang then clear out, taking Solara with them, and leaving Eli to die in the unrelenting sun.

As the convoy of vehicles heads back to the town, Solara proves her resourcefulness by making a daring escape bid. Situated in the last vehicle of the convoy with Redridge, she garrottes the driver, causing the car to roll over at high speed. With the driver dead and Redridge incapacitated, Solara is clearly touched by Eli's indestructibility, as she emerges from the wreckage virtually unscathed. Now that Solara is a disciple of the faith, perhaps she too receives divine protection from above. Grabbing a hand grenade out of the car, she hurls it towards the other vehicles heading back towards them. Carnegie's truck swerves out of the way, but the other vehicle is spectacularly blown up. Getting back into the armoured station-wagon , Solara is about to drive away when she is grabbed by Redridge. It is then she notices that Eli's machete (which Redridge had triumphantly been toying with earlier in the passenger seat) is now jammed fully into his chest. Even in his absence, it seems the unseen hand of Eli is miraculously at work. Redridge stumbles out of the car and drops to his knees. With head bowed, he dies silently in front of the on-looking Carnegie. With barely enough fuel to make it back to town, Carnegie's one remaining gang-member asks if they should continue the pursuit. As Solara speeds off in the background, Carnegie, who has possibly had enough carnage for one day, declines the chase.

Upon arriving at the site of Eli's 'death', Solara finds that he is nowhere to be seen. Continuing back down the road, heading west, she discovers Eli, remarkably, walking along the highway, albeit in 'banged-up' shape. Add 'coming back from the dead' to Eli's continuing list of miracles. In fact, the biblical reference, here, is not lost, and not only is Eli's 'resurrection' a further signification of his divine 'saviour' status; Solara's return to find him disappeared from the scene of his execution, is a re-enacting of Mary Magdalene's discovery of Jesus' body missing from the tomb after his crucifixion at the hands of the Romans. This, of course, preludes the vision of Christ's resurrection from the dead. What is more, Solara's link to Mary Magdalene, here, may be more than significant. And on the same theme, perhaps the conspicuous presence of *The Da Vinci Code* earlier in the film, was not so coincidental after all. The irony is not lost that Dan Brown's book prevails when all the Bibles in the world have perished (all bar one). A key premise of Brown's text, as well as books like *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, & Henry Lincoln, 1982) – from which Brown gleaned much inspiration – is that Mary Magdalene may have been a much more principally integral figure during the founding of Christianity, and, taking into account various notions of the 'sacred feminine', was possibly much more. The figure of Mary Magdalene was, for centuries, demeaned as a prostitute by the Catholic Church, a slur that was later found to be unsubstantiated by any real truth; a fabrication made by a deeply patriarchal institution,

threatened by what might be the prominent role of a woman in the Bible. This was later compounded by the discovery of the Gnostic Gospels, a series of 'biblical' scriptures that were discovered over a period of different times. One such scripture, unearthed just before the turn of the 20th century, was found to be the Gospel of Mary. Widely thought to be written by Mary Magdalene herself, this gospel has since caused consternation, in that it may portray Mary Magdalene as a major prophet in her own right, and one of the principal disciples of Jesus. In *The Book of Eli*, Solara is, likewise, initially painted as a woman of 'ill-repute', when she offers herself to Eli upon Carnegie's bidding. However, her exposure to Eli, instead, opens her eyes to his faith. Solara 'sees the light', and, eager to be taught God's word, becomes a devout disciple. This is especially significant if Eli is transcribed as a prophet, or as a messiah, or even as the Second Coming of Christ (the New Testament depicts both Jesus and John the Baptist to be in spiritual affiliation with the prophet Elijah, and are even thought by some Biblical interpreters to be manifestations of Elijah).

Back on the road, heading west, Eli's extra-sensory perceptions again kick into action, as he smells the salt upon the air from an unseen ocean. This means they are close to their destination. In fact, Eli's destination turns out to be San Francisco, as they weave between burnt-out cars on the Golden Gate Bridge. More specifically, Eli's objective is to get to Alcatraz, and the pair head out to the island fortress in a rowing boat. Alcatraz turns out to be humanity's last protected vestige of 'the world before'; a sanctuary of books and cultural artefacts upon which humanity will attempt to rebuild civilization – much like the fortified compound in *I Am Legend.* In fact, in a theological sense, both the New England colony in *I Am Legend* and the safe haven of Alcatraz in *The Book of Eli*, effectively represent a figurative 'city upon the hill'; a biblical phrase from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, which, with its historical association as a term identified with America's Puritan foundations, has come to represent a Christian based utopian ideal; an untainted community metaphorically built high above the previous remnants of a failed, corrupted, or irreligious society (or at least a non-Protestant one). However, now that Carnegie has the King James Bible in his possession, it is unclear what Eli now has to offer the sanctuary's repository of human knowledge. The curator of Alcatraz, a wizened, white-haired Malcolm McDowell tells the pair 'we've been doing this for a long time now.' As they walk through the rows of cultural artefacts amidst the former prison wards, Eli comments that it 'feels like a museum'. The curator tells them 'oh… no, it's much more than that… this is where we're going to start again.' He explains that they have a printing press that will be operational very soon, 'We're going to teach people about the world that they lost…

help them start to rebuild it.' The curator turns back to the question of the Bible, 'May I ask what condition it's in?', Eli replies, 'It's beat up… but it will do the job.'

In the meantime, Carnegie has employed the skills of the local engineer to unpick the locked King James Bible. Once this is done, Carnegie eagerly opens the book, only for disappointment to flatly fall on his face, 'It can't be' he says to himself as he frantically flicks through the pages, 'It's impossible.' The scene switches back to Alcatraz, where Eli has requested some paper, 'lots of paper.' He instructs the curator, 'pay close attention, and write down everything I say, exactly as I say it.' As Eli narrates the first words to be written down, his words are paralleled with a view of the open Bible resting on Carnegie's table. The camera closes in on the book as Eli speaks; 'The first book of Moses, called Genesis, chapter one, verse one', The book on Carnegie's desk is now revealed to be written in Braille, and as Eli continues to speak, the camera steadily nears to a close-up of Eli's eyes; eyes that now betray the strange opaqueness of someone who is blind. This development puts Eli's accomplishments into even more astonishing perspective, and undoubtedly indicate his skills and achievements to be nothing less than divinely inspired miracles. This also explains Eli's highly attuned senses; smelling hijackers 'from thirty feet away', and hearing vehicles in pursuit that might be miles in the distance. On the other hand, Eli's blindness might be one reason why he was so easily able to resist the temptation of the opposite sex. This narrative aspect is born out of a tradition of 'blind Samurai' films in Japanese cinema. Most famously, the character of Zatoichi, a blind sword-master that fights only by his sense of hearing. This popular figure spawned a host of films from the early sixties up to Takeshi Kitano's commended 2003 version, *Zatoichi: The Blind Swordsman*. Inspired by the enduring popularity of Zatoichi, a blind female sword-master was incarnated in the *Crimson Bat* series of four films, made between 1958 and 1970, from which perhaps the most definitive is *Crimson Bat: The Blind Swordswoman* (Sadatsugu Matsuda, 1969). In terms of Hollywood, the 1989 film, *Blind Fury* (Phillip Noyce), based on Zatoichi, featured Rutger Hauer as a blind Vietnam veteran who is adroitly trained in martial-art swordplay.

In his headquarters, Carnegie attempts to make Claudia read the Bible in Braille. She tells him that it's been so long, she doesn't remember. Although through her brief smile of recognition when she touches the stamped paper, one senses that this is not entirely true. She tells Carnegie 'You worked so hard for that book, you sacrificed so much, so many men. More than you could spare. Now, all those people who were too scared to even say your name… they're downstairs tearing up the bar right now, did you now that? And there's no one there to stop them. I can't

imagine what it must feel like to have what you want so close, and it might as well be a million miles away.' With that, Claudia sidles away and leaves Carnegie to his fate. At Alcatraz, the final miracle is that Eli is able to recite the Bible in its entirety. The enigma of the Bible lies scribbled down amidst stacks of paper, as Eli continues to narrate. Eli would, no doubt, be unable to accomplish this miraculous feat were it not for the divine voice that he purports to hear. Ritually shaved of head, and now coded fully as a figurative prophet, Eli lays bare-foot in white robes recanting the word of the Gospel. The ending, however, is somewhat ambiguous. As we see the newly printed King James Bible put away on a storeroom bookshelf – directly next to the Koran no less – it seems a somewhat undistinguished end (the Koran included) for a relic that has been so relentlessly pursued and has cost so much bloodshed. After all the effort it took to re-write the Bible, one would have at least assumed that it would have taken pride of place in a shrine-like section somewhere. In fact, the manner in which it is casually stored away amidst a row of other books, of scaling cultural value, is reminiscent of the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; where the Ark of the Covenant, packed inside a wooden box, is wheeled into a mountainous isle of identical boxes – potentially never again to see the light of day.

Safeguarding their supremely holy relic, in the face of overwhelming odds, Eli, along with Solara, literally 'deliver' God's word to humanity; the dawn of a spiritual re-awakening for humankind; a new Christian Eden upon Earth? Speaking of which, Eli and Solara can be likewise transcribed as a symbolic Adam and Eve; in that they are, ostensibly, the first man and woman to seed the germ of mankind's spiritual rebirth. In their overriding efforts to deliver God's word, however, their legacy is not to be their own offspring, but rather, 'God's children'. Indeed, a clue to this biblical metaphor is coded in a poster depicting Mila Kunis as Solara – now in her guise as a belief-inspired warrior disciple (Jedi Christian) – with the message; BELIEVE IN HOPE, and completes the set of posters with this reoccurring theme. However, in the word, BELIEVE, tellingly juxtaposed next to one another are the names, Eli and Eve. Again, as a feature, the name Eli is emphasised in red, and only serves to highlight the juxtaposition of the two names. It now seems more than coincidence that the character of Solara, as the symbolic Eve to Eli's Adam, should be selected for this particular poster; yet another encrypted hermeneutic code to be deciphered – in practise.

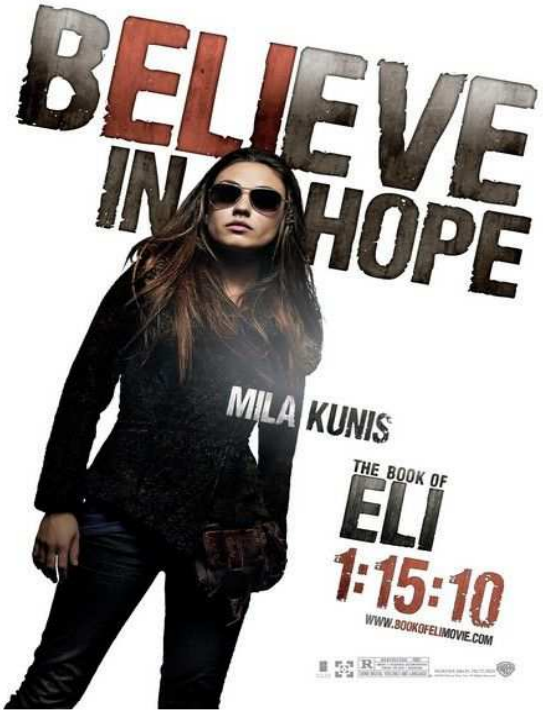

Fig. 3.9 Eli's Eve: Mila Kunis' poster with its imbedded hermeneutic code.

A devout disciple to the end, Solara is shown to be present throughout as Eli recites the Bible while it is written down. With Eli's work accomplished, it is time for him to depart, and we see Solara kneeling down at Eli's grave. She takes up Eli's (symbolic) sword, and in doing so, now takes up his mantle. Wearing Eli's characteristic khaki jacket and rucksack (with the familiar site of his shotgun jutting out of the top), Solara leaves the sanctuary of Alcatraz and heads out on the road. A new holy warrior, Solara is to be the female founder of a new dawn of Christianity. The key symbolism of the sun, a conspicuously looming presence throughout, now comes into key focus at the film's end. In the Bible, Revelation 12 describes a woman that is 'clothed with the sun'. The sun represents the woman's divine knowledge and testimony (Revelation 12:17) Solara – meaning of the sun – references this very same symbolism. She has taken Eli's place as a Christian prophet, and with this divine knowledge, she heads back on the road to spread God's word. In the bible, a 'darkened' sun is often a metaphor for lost faith, or God's forgotten word. *The Book of Eli* acts almost as an inversion to this apocalyptic premise, with the unleashed power of sun drenching the planet in brilliant light. With her name – symbolic of her a link to the sun and all it perceives – Solara walks down the long road and begins to evaporate against the distant landscape; she is literally absorbed into the huge glow of the sun. In biblical terms, if the sun is symbolic of God's power and 'light', as is indicated in Ezekiel's vision in *Knowing*, in *The Book of Eli*, the brightness of the sun is all-consuming; a radiating light too brilliant to gaze upon.

Ultimately, the essential story of the film goes back to the name, Eli; the biblical figure that stands as a metaphor for the lost traditions of Israel; and like the prophet Jeremiah, Eli, in the film, attempts to restore the lost faith and traditions to a people who have become spiritually dissolute. When the Hughes brothers were asked whether they thought *The Book of Eli* would be regarded as a Christian movie, Allen Hughes answered;

> We specifically directed a movie to pitch you the way a book — like the Bible, or the Koran or the Torah, or any sacred words — that whatever you bring to it, that's what you're going to come out of

> it with. If you're that dogmatic about what your thoughts are about things and you want to have preconceived notions, then one will come out and say 'this is a Christian movie,' and they'll either be happy about it or be pissed about it. But if you're open minded and you sit back and watch it, maybe watch it again because there are so many subtle things that are happening that are worthy of a repeat viewing. I don't think you'll walk out with that feeling at all.

However, one nagging uncertainty remains about his film; if religion was primarily responsible for destroying the world in the fictional past, the question has to be asked; why would religion fare any better in the fictional future? Unless, of course, it is part of the age-old cycle of death, decay, and re-birth, destined to play over again. Or it still may be part of a biblical prophecy of apocalypse that is yet to be fulfilled – the time of 'tribulation', and an endurance of extreme hardship, war, famine, pain and suffering' that will eradicate much of humankind before the final denouement of the Second Coming – again, a mythology into which the figure of Eli fits implacably. Be this so, decades after the event that devastated the planet, the Bible, referred to as a 'weapon', continues to be a source of carnage and bloodshed within the post-apocalyptic hell on earth that it helped spawn in the first place. Charles Strozier henceforth exclaims;

> If all the bombs go off or we choke ourselves in a haze of pollution, the human story will die in ways that will make little sense in a theology based on the compassion of the Sermon on the Mount. The focus on violence by way of tribulation gives the traditional Christian story the edge it needs to fit our crumbling and maybe dying world.[212]

Nevertheless, congeneric to premillennialist doctrine, *The Book of Eli* consists of a myriad of hermeneutic signs and codes for the viewer to decipher and make meaning of, and one of the most cryptic may well be the paradoxical ideological dichotomy that rests at the heart of the film.

[212] Charles Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p.89.

Chapter 4

God's Representative on Earth: The Rise of the Religious Superhero

In one way or another, popular comic books and graphic novels have often incorporated apocalyptic elements as a narrative fundament. However, during the 21st century, it became something of a trend to employ biblical 'endtime' language to suggest more supernatural modes of apocalypse that, in a number of fundamental aspects, went against traditional and secular themes within apocalyptic science fiction. Looking at Marvel's *X-Men* graphic novel series, for example – following on from *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*, first published in 1982 – some post-millennium issues took on doom-laden names of biblical magnitude, such as; *Uncanny X-Men* (*The New Age*)*: The End of History* (2004), *Young X-Men*: *Books of Revelations* (2009), or playing on evangelical endtime terminology as in *Uncanny X-Men: End of Greys* (2006). When

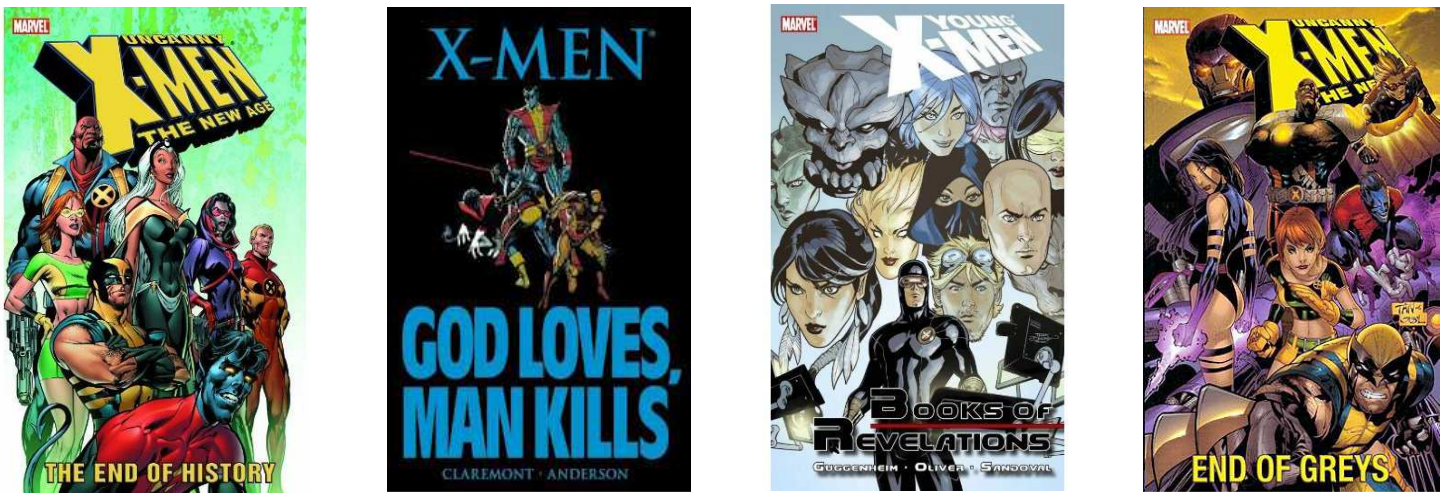

Fig. 4.1 Cataclysms of biblical proportion: popular graphic novel titles that convey the religious nuance at the heart of much American apocalyptic fiction.

we recognise that the seemingly most powerful super-villain within the X-Men comic book universe is named, 'Apocalypse', complete with his insidious accomplices, the 'Four Horsemen' (Death, Famine, War, and Pestilence), the biblical resonance that stems from the apocalypse of the Book of Revelation is palpably clear. This perhaps should come as no surprise. In terms of literary antecedents of the superhero figure, there are clearly some mythic precedents, or, some would say, superhero 'archetypes' – be it with or without superpowers – within both biblical parables and classic mythology . In his book, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (2006), Peter Coogan affirms that 'specific conventions of the superhero genre have definite roots in stories of mythological and legendary heroes', and cites the biblical figure of

Samson (in the Book of Judges) as a prime example.[213] As others have similarly observed, Samson's superhuman strength seems to serve as a direct inspiration for Superman's, and Samson's one weakness, his hair, parallels Superman's own vulnerability, Kryptonite. Other 'mythological strongmen' do not have such weaknesses, says Coogan, 'because their strength is inborn and generally comes from a blood relationship with the divine, as is the case with Hercules as the son of Zeus for example.'[214] This kind of mortal fallibility, or potentially fatal weakness, is a characteristic that continues in the guise of the modern religious superhero, a figure that will be explored within this chapter, in which the link to the divine is expressed quite differently to that of Greek mythology. Firstly, the religious superhero needs to be defined as something inherently different from conventional cinematic superheroes. Typically not possessing superpowers (to speak of), these figures can be categorised as superheroes in their capacity to combat destructive and eminently evil supernatural forces and, as such, emerge as supreme supersaviours that ultimately save humankind from apocalyptic devastation.

Yet, considering the prevalence of biblical references of apocalypse in modern comic books and graphic novels, this religious resonance is something that has not spilled into the movie versions of popular comic book franchises, including that of *X-Men*. Instead, this kind of eschatological profundity is invariably confined within the margins of less well established avenues of apocalyptic exegesis. Like the other chapters of this study, it is the connection between religion and apocalypse that remains of central interest, and the films looked at here, each of which feature a figure who can be deemed a 'religious superhero', are no less apocalyptic in scope than those discussed in previous chapters. Firstly, however, in terms of the superhero genre, it is perhaps best to start with a prime example of how religious allusion and analogy is often typically employed within the apocalyptic superhero narrative by looking at two films from 2007, *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (Tim Story) and *300* (Zack Snyder). These texts will be examined in contrast to a much more specifically religious framework that begins to take root within apocalyptic narratives at around the time of these films, and falls in with a specific trajectory of religious apocalyptic themes that begin to emerge after the turn of the millennium, and which, around a decade into the 21st century, become recognised as suitably established subject matter for the end of the world.

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[213] Peter Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (Austin: MonkeyBrain Books, 2006), p. 117.
[214] Ibid., p. 118.

The biblical allegory of apocalypse in *300* and *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer*

Although, on the surface, *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* seems to have no explicit premise concerning religion, the allusion to biblical parable, and the apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Revelation, emerges as a predominant factor, and provides an evangelical tincture to its concept of Armageddon. The Silver Surfer (Doug Jones/Laurence Fishburne [voice]) is no less than a celestial being who emerges from the primordial heart of the Universe. His appearance on Earth coincides with a series of global cataclysms and disasters, as well as dramatic changes of climate. Like the seven angels of Revelation, the Silver Surfer heralds the beginning of the end of the world. He is announced as 'The Destroyer' – the bringer of death – as he chillingly declares; 'All you know – is at an end'. He is ethereal and otherworldly, from a celestial realm not of this earth; an angel in any other form. As it transpires, like the angels of biblical scripture, the Silver Surfer serves a much higher power, and just like the role of angels as harbingers of doom in the Book of Revelation, the Silver Surfer is merely the messenger of apocalypse. Ever the prophet of perdition, the Silver Surfer's language is suitably biblical and profound: 'Take joy in the last few hours you have left – for he is nearly here.' This force of darkness is represented by a vast thunderous storm cloud that slowly begins to envelop the Earth. The fact that this malevolent presence is referred to only as 'he', further denotes this evil entity as (traditionally) symbolic of the Devil, who, pre-ordained to fulfil biblical prophecy, comes to instigate Armageddon.

True to the biblical endtime of Revelation, the planet's destiny is not assured without a symbolic battle between the forces of light and darkness. The Silver Surfer becomes the true redeemer when he elects to turn against his master and save the planet from destruction. To add religious nuance to his status as the planet's saviour, the Silver Surfer prepares to repel the dark entity by resolving to sacrifice himself; 'this is the end for us both', he declares, as, arms outstretched, he submits himself to a cruciform position. The Silver Surfer's messianic role as humanity's salvation had been previously alluded to when, in what contributes overall to a clear Christ allegory (a reoccurring feature in apocalyptic science fiction) he is captured and persecuted by soldiers; mocked and tortured at the hands of the U.S. army – in very much a similar vein to Scott Derrickson's remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008) – which also chimes strongly with Evangelical endtime allegory. After the Silver Surfer adopts the mantle of messiah, he performs a miracle of biblical proportions in bringing one of the Fantastic Four, Susan Storm, back from the dead. In direct correlation to the biblical parable of Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus, this he does by the mere 'laying on' of his hand. Moreover, in a mixing

of biblical metaphor, his prior signification as a 'fallen angel' is literally transcribed when he is physically separated from his supernatural surfboard and falls to the ground. Separated from his celestial realm in the skies, the Silver Surfer becomes both powerless and mortal. Like the archangel Michael in *Legion* – when he plummets to earth from heaven – this represents a symbolic shift when the Silver Surfer switches allegiance away from his celestial master and towards the salvation of Earth and humankind. The Silver Surfer emerges as humanity's champion, where his shimmering silver appearance, together with his Fantastic Four cohort, the blazing Human Torch (Chris Evans), codes the superhero allies sufficiently as the symbolic forces of light; a righteous army to ultimately vanquish the looming force of darkness that has descended upon the planet; akin to the apocalyptic cataclysm prophesised in the Book of Revelation. The end of the world is figuratively expressed, here, as an enveloping black cloud of pure evil that attempts to consume the Earth. Moreover, throughout, the imperious Doctor Doom duly takes up the metaphorical mantle of the Antichrist; tricking America's armies into performing his bidding, but all along in league with the celestial force of evil. Not only does this correspondingly fit into the biblical apocalypse of Revelation, but furthermore appropriates the recognisable endtime enigma of the *Left Behind* mythos (derived similarly from the last chapter of the New Testament), only, this time, placed within the context of a popular superhero franchise.

Fig. 4.2 'I am the light of salvation': the Silver Surfer prepares to sacrifice himself in order to save humanity.

In Zack Snyder's historical fantasy, *300*, we witness a battle of truly biblical proportion; an epic conflict between forces of good and evil that is resoundingly apocalyptic in scope. The invading Persian armies of Xerxes, at the gates of the besieged Greek city-states, threaten to extinguish the fledgling germ of modern civilization itself. Xerxes' countless hoards are

portrayed as diabolic, blood-thirsty war mongers – mercilessly brutal and barbaric. They are both grotesque and demonic, as the narrator says of Xerxes' most feared warriors, 'The Immortals'; 'they have served the dark will of Persian kings for 500 years. Eyes as dark as night, teeth filed to fangs… soulless'. On another occasion, we see terrifyingly huge, battle-dressed elephants with lethally sharpened tusks – hellish goliaths never before witnessed by the beleaguered Spartans; a 'grotesque spectacle coughed forward from the darkest corner of Xerxes' empire' – an evil dominion that, for all intents and purposes, stands for Hell itself. Indeed, in a figurative sense, here are the biblical forces of darkness – with the Persian king, Xerxes (Rodrigo Santoro), unquestionably cast as the Devil – or the Antichrist to Leonidas' sacrificial supersaviour. Xerxes' personification of evil is compounded by his seemingly supernatural visage and innate otherworldliness; a bejewelled, demonic titan with a cruel and wanton lust for power. Parallel to the Devil in the Bible, Xerxes tries to tempt Leonidas (Gerard Butler) with offers of wealth and power – mirroring the biblical parable of Jesus in the wilderness:

> Again, the Devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'
>
> Matthew 4: 8

In *300*, Xerxes, who refers to himself as 'a god' with 'divine power', summons Leonidas to a cliff top and tells him; 'I'm a generous god, I can make you rich beyond measure. You will carry my battle standard to the heart of Europa… your Athenian rivals will kneel at your feet – if you will but kneel at mine.' The referential echoes of Matthew's parable, here, is beyond question, and clearly defines both characters in terms of their proto-biblical representation. Interestingly, a link to the historical Xerxes and the myth of his inherent evil may be rooted in the Bible itself, where he is most likely the Persian king identified as Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther – a nefarious invader from the East who attempts to enslave all of Greece.[215] Moreover, in *300*, the immediate opposition between the Greek city-states – representative of Western society and civilization, and the invading Persian army, not only possess the opposing correlation of East versus West, but more significantly, the symbolic resonance of Christianity versus Islam – whereby the conflict between the Spartans and the Persians can readily be viewed as an inverse precursor to the invading European armies into the Holy Land during the Crusades; something which holds an incumbent relevance throughout this chapter.

[215] 'Ahasuerus', *Jewish Encyclopedia.Com*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/967-ahasuerus>, Retrieved, September 13 2014.

In direct contrast to the iniquitous Xerxes, Leonidas is portrayed as a messianic martyr; defender of the known free world and the sole hope of its redemption. Set in an ancient pre-biblical time – the Battle of Thermopylae, 480 BC – and based on historic events (albeit events that have since been embellished into legend) in which a mere 300 Spartans were said to have blocked Xerxes' path to Greece by defending a strategic narrow mountain pass against a vastly outnumbering army, *300* can take further and undoubted inspiration from any number of bloody battles found within the Bible. These legendary conflicts would have undoubtedly inspired the writer of the Book of Revelation himself (thought to be John of Patmos) to envisage the final battle at the end of the world, Armageddon. In fact, the origin of the word, Armageddon, is a Greek translation from the Hebrew, *har məgiddô* (הר מגידו); a word used to describe a site for the gathering of opposing armies during the 'end times' of Revelation, and which has been often used figuratively to describe 'a mountain or range of hills'. More pertinently, the Hebrew translation is also taken to mean a specific place, Mountain of Magiddo; identified as 'a frequent battleground throughout the ages because of a strategic pass'.[216] This provides yet more evidence that the epic battle in *300* appoints an apocalyptic exigency that can be evangelicalized very much within a Manichean ethos – not just a conflict between two warring factions, or two opposing cultures (which, historically, it was), but as a highly contrasted view of good versus evil, and, within its pronounced auspices of apocalypse, can be easily interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the biblical battle of *Armageddon*.

Fig. 4.3 Touch of evil: the devilish Xerxes attempts to seduce Leonidas with the promise of unimaginable wealth and power in *300*.

Both *300* and *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer*, are just two examples of how mainstream 'secular' Hollywood cinema have incorporated and embraced modes of millennialist and biblical apocalypse into its often fantastical visions of the end of the world.

[216] David Robert Palmer, *The Revelation of John: A new English translation from the Greek*, 'Revelation 16: 6' Bible Translation.Ws, April 8 2006. < http://bibletranslation.ws/trans/revwgrk.pdf>

Moreover, as Peter Coogan has pointed out, 'specific conventions of the superhero genre have definite roots in stories of mythological and legendary heroes',[217] and this unquestionably incorporates stories of biblical fable. This link is clearly illustrated by Jerry Siegel and his idea behind the creation of Superman: 'All of a sudden it hits me. I conceived of a character like Samson, Hercules, and all the strong men I ever heard of rolled into one, only more so.'[218] These two film examples are furthermore indicative of the two models of superhero prowess: *300* as representative of the *Batman* model of non-supernaturally enhanced physical fighting skill, against *Fantastic Four*'s more conventional example of superheroes endowed with superpowers – like many of their mythological antecedents. More importantly, the superheroes in these films represent a classic archetype that is now a familiar figure within the science fiction universe: a sole messianic saviour who prevents, if not the end of the world itself, then something that approximates Armageddon enough to facilitate the redemption of humankind. This messianic model, as we have investigated and established, is a prime ingredient that has become a central narrative feature of apocalypse films both secular and otherwise. However, in terms of what can be described as a superhero genre, these films encompass what is now a conventional understanding of eschatological themes in 21st century fiction, often incorporating and intertwining biblical, secular, and historical perceptions of apocalypse, albeit with the characteristic intervention of supernatural agencies. In *The Myth of the American Superhero,* John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett attempt to address the enduring prevalence of such film narratives, and their significance in contemporary American culture; 'The superheroes thus provide a secular fulfilment of the religious promise articulated in the endings of many established films and television series. They cut Gordian knots, lift the siege of evil, and restore the Edenic state of perfect faith and perfect peace. It is millennial, religious expectation – at least in origin – yet it is fulfilled by secular agents.'[219] This chapter, then, is concerned with the transformation of this 'monomythic' archetype from a secular configuration to an expressly religious one, in which the following sections of this chapter focus on a selection of 21st century apocalypse films, from 2005 to 2012, that bind the superhero figure to a resoundingly religious syndication, and portray the superhero, among other recognised and associated traits, as a form of Christian Crusader against eschatological evil.

I will be analysing four 21st century films that each encompass varying degrees of apocalyptic foreboding: *Constantine* (2005), which is another film from *I Am Legend* director, Francis

[217] Coogan, p. 117.
[218] Ibid., pp. 116-117.
[219] John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 46.

Lawrence (and is based on two story strands from within the *Hellblazer* comic book series), *Season of the Witch* (Dominic Sena, 2011), and two films from the same director/star combination (Scott Stewart and Paul Bettany), *Legion* (2009), and *Priest* (2011), which have similarly overt religious themes and symbolism, as well as an incontrovertible connection to comic books and Japanese anime. The major themes that constitute these religious superhero films include some now familiar traits identified within previous chapters of this study, albeit with some significant thematic embellishments. These elements conjoin to form the basis of a cohesive narrative throughout each film, and can be broken down as follows;

a) A male protagonist who has become disillusioned with his Christian faith

b) Redemption through the regaining of Christian faith

c) A critique of the Catholic Church as a religious institution

d) A female victim/captive

e) A demonised or monstrous female villain

f) The religious superhero as characteristically bereft of 'superpowers' – something which is normally a key signifier of the conventional superhero, and which often forms the foundation of his or her origin.

Although these films are chosen because they each feature the arrival of a religious superhero within an expressly apocalyptic context, what emerges, interestingly, are elemental themes incorporating an overall critique of religion. In particular, Catholicism frequently comes into question in these films as an institutionalised and spiritually transformative form of Christianity; whereby the (Catholic) Church is made to look either corrupt or impotent, or both. What is more, each of these films feature a monstrous or subversive female who stands in opposition to the male religious superhero; a figure who is often portrayed as both victim and monster, which, in combination with critiques of Catholicism, feeds a fundamental tenet behind the films' apocalyptic machinations that are key in translating and understanding the religious superhero narrative.

The dark divine: critiques of God, religion, and the Catholic Church

Whether the audience might be secular or otherwise, the films looked at, here, characteristically elicit strong audience empathy and identification with the religious superhero protagonist. However, considering the religious foregrounding of these principal characters, it remains

curious that, in all the films discussed, there is a manifestly critical perception of 'the church' as a governing and hierarchical institution; more specifically, the Catholic Church. It is perhaps best to begin in a historical context, with a portrayal of the medieval religious superhero in the 2011 action-adventure horror, *Season of the Witch* (Dominic Sena). Very much continuing the comic book heritage, *Season of the Witch* producer, Charles Roven, already noted for producing Christopher Nolan's 'Dark Knight Trilogy' of Batman films, is accredited for the recent movie incarnation of Superman; *Man of Steel* (Zack Snyder, 2013). Befittingly, as Peter Coogan has pointed out, 'Superman and Batman provide the two primary paradigms of superherodom: the superpowered superhero and the non-superpowered superhero.'[220] Curiously enough, although often having to engage with supernatural creatures of eminent evil, the religious superhero predominantly consists of the Batman prototype and is therefore bereft of any superpower; solely having to depend on their mortally human capabilities. This being so, like Batman, the religious superhero possesses supreme combat skills that champion them above all others, and this is something exemplified within the guise of the medieval religious superhero in *Season of the Witch*. The film's central protagonist, Behmen (Nicholas Cage), is a Teutonic knight during the time of the Crusades in the mid-14th century. A masterful warrior, this heroic knight – with the symbolic Cross of Christ emblazoned on his tunic – expertly vanquishes all under the banner of Christianity.

Fig. 4.4 Knights of Christ: the Crusader, Behmen, slaughters all before him under the emblem of the Cross.

However, as we follow Behmen and his fellow Crusader cohort, Felson (Ron Pearlman) cut a brutal and bloody swathe through the Holy Land, Behmen becomes increasingly disenchanted with the Crusader army's supposed divine cause. The crucial moment of doubt comes when Behmen, amid the confusion of battle, accidently kills an onrushing woman fleeing for her life as her city is stormed by the blood-thirsty Crusaders. This slaughtered innocent is not the first female victim caught between the competing (but just as culpable) factions that represent God and, as we discover later… the Devil.

[220] Coogan, p. 200.

The pre-credit sequence at the start of the film begins in the previous century in 1235 A.D., and sees three women accused of witchcraft and 'consorting with the Devil' unceremoniously hanged at the hands of a pious priest. However, it appears that one of the women is not entirely innocent as charged when she later comes back to life and, in characteristically demonic demeanour, wreaks terrible revenge upon her holy executioner. Thereupon begins a new dark age of evil or, 'the season of the witch'; a lingering malevolence that has been at large up to the point where we meet our heroes more than 100 years later. This sequence at the film's beginning neatly encapsulates both the victimisation and demonization of women that runs as a principal theme throughout the film, and this is something that is invariably exacted at the hands of a brutally oppressive and overtly patriarchal Church.

Of course, during this pre-Reformation period, the Roman Catholic Church remained unchallenged as the one supreme representation of Christianity. In *Season of the Witch*, the ruthlessly authoritarian and all-powerful nature of the Church is starkly pronounced, and so too is its deathly intolerance to any faction or religion that questions its authority as the sole agency of God's word. Immediately before the massacre of the city, a priest had whipped the Crusader army into a blood-thirsty frenzy of slaughter; 'They are Godless people… Infidels', the priest cries against the backdrop of a large, ornate gold crucifix; 'they have sinned against God and against his only son, Jesus. They must be punished. Do not fail him, strike down with his vengeance – let none survive!' After his unintentional killing of the defenceless woman, Behmen finally recognises the Crusader army for what it truly is, as the priest pronounces the horrendous massacre as 'a glorious day for the Church'. Appalled at the atrocity and ashamed of what he has become, he publically denounces the priest as the ordained and undisputed mouthpiece of God's will; 'You call this glorious… murdering women and children'; and he and Felson symbolically turn their back on God and the Church by their unlawful abandoning of the Crusade.

This same indignation at authorial (and ultimately corrupt) Church power is also a chief factor of the 2011 film, *Priest* (Scott Stewart), which similarly explores the kind of unbounded religious zealotry that was a key factor behind the Crusades. In fact, although the film is set within a dystopian alternate reality in which a war with vampires has left a post-apocalyptic wasteland outside the surviving human cities, the allegorical context of Crusader knights could not be made any plainer. After a brief introductory sequence, in which a raid by humans on a vampire 'hive' ends with one their number being captured, the film begins in earnest with an anime style animation sequence. 'This is what is known', begins the narrator, '…there has

always been man, and there have always been vampires. Since the beginning, the two have been locked in conflict.' The animation depicts humankind's war with the vampires through history, and mirrors the real human evolution of war – from the cavalry charge of a medieval Crusader army, to the mechanised warfare of World War II. The iconic image of Crusader knights immediately positions the vampires as the symbolic 'enemies of Christ', as Crusader doctrine would have it, as well as fitting well-worn modes of Gothic horror, and traditional notions of good against evil. The narrator continues: 'the vampires were quicker, stronger, but man had the sun.' The advantage of the sun, however, was 'not enough', as the animated sequence depicts the horrific human slaughter that is the result of each conflict whereby the vampires are shown to eventually overcome each human advance in technological warfare. 'And so it went like this over many years', the narrator explains; 'the two races destroying not only each other, but the world itself. Facing extinction, mankind withdrew behind walled cities under the protection of the Church. And then the ultimate weapon was found… the Priests.' The Priests are a specially assembled band of highly skilled soldiers, clerical commandos, as it were; 'warriors with extraordinary powers, trained by the Church in the art of vampire combat'. The denomination of the Priests, who are each marked with an indelible cross on their foreheads, parallels the Crusader knights at the beginning of the sequence, and the red crosses on their foreheads are uncannily reminiscent of the cross of the Knights Templar: warrior monks with an equally devout code of faith. Like Behmen in *Season of the Witch*, along with his Templar brethren, The Priests are sworn to the duty of the Church and the expulsion of all its enemies.

Fig. 4.5 Holy War: the recognisable charge of a Crusader army immediately posits the vampires as 'the enemies of Christ' and, at the same time, sets the historically problematic paradigm of a symbolically iniquitous Islam. This Holy War is verified by the emergence of the Priests, and their own religiously infused 'crusade' against the vampires.

To this end, the spiritually religious devotion of the Priests, like Shaolin monks and their devout practise of Kung Fu, is something that appears to assert a distinct edge over the faithless vampires. In fact, similar to Eli's combination of Samurai skill and Kung Fu, with their martial art fighting style, solemn religious countenance, and preference for medieval steel weaponry, the Priests are, in essence something of a cross between Crusader knights and Shaolin monks. 'They alone turned the tide for man', says the narrator, as we witness the almost superhuman fighting ability of the Priests, along with the ensuing slaughter of the vampires. With the vampire threat finally extinguished, the remaining vampires were placed on isolated 'reservations', but, as the narrator reveals: 'fearing the power of the weapon they created, the ruling clergy ordered the Priests disbanded; the former warriors to be integrated back into a society that no longer needed them. And as the years passed, the few surviving Priests faded into obscurity, like the vampire menace before them.'

Yet it appears the vampire threat may not have entirely dissipated, as, out in 'the wastelands', we witness a small family of frontier settlers face a deadly attack from unseen assailants. As for the humans within the walled cities, it appears that living 'under the protection of the Church' amounts to nothing short of a stiflingly dystopian nightmare. Within the enclosed and ultra-security conscious confines of Cathedral City; dark, polluted, and claustrophobically overcrowded; we hear whispered voices declaring, 'repent' and 'absolution is the only way'; part of a series of subliminal messages repeated on loudspeakers throughout the city. In this darkly despotic future-world, echoes of Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* (1982) abound, as dishevelled and downtrodden crowds trudge through the industrialised, technological landscape. However, the overall suffocating mood and atmosphere of the city is unmistakably indebted to George Orwell's *1984*, as exemplified by the manifestly Orwellian slogan; 'FAITH, WORK, SECURITY', which appears to be inscribed throughout the city. This is balefully compounded by repeated chants over the loudspeakers: 'God protects you. The Church protects you. The city protects you'. Both verbal and written mantras converge to directly reference Orwell's own chilling 'party slogan' from *1984*: 'War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.' At the sign of a chiming bell, the crowds in the streets all stop and turn towards the church-like spire at the centre of the city. Atop, it bears the emblem of the Church: a cross within a circle. All citizens make the Sign of the Cross, before continuing on their way. As if the sinister, Orwellian tone was not adequately entrenched, Cathedral City also appears to have its own version of Big Brother, as a close-up of a man's face on a large screen declares: 'Remember, to go against the Church is to go against God'; yet another indoctrinated refrain devised to instil outright obedience. Already we get the sense of 'the Church' as an oppressive,

all-controlling autocracy; a kind of ecclesiastical police-state, complete with paramilitary enforcers, who, with intimidatingly large guns and full body armour, menacingly patrol the streets ensuring that the populace are in full, obedient compliance with the edicts of the ruling clergy.

However, like Behmen in *Season of the Witch*, one man dares to go against the will of the Church; a former 'Priest' (Paul Bettany), an elite warrior monk, just as many medieval Crusaders (the Templars themselves were a monastic order). The Priests are now feared and shunned within human society; frightful relics from a time that humanity would much rather consign to history. Although notably devout in his faith, the Priest has clearly been forsaken by the Church. This is articulated in one scene in which he enters an automated confession booth. Clutching Rosary Beads as a sign of his devotion, the Priest, wracked with anxieties and self-doubt, turns to the church for guidance and absolution, but instead we witness the hollow indifference and duplicity at the centre of 'the Church'. The Clergy member on the monitor screen is clearly a pre-recorded image, and dispassionately responds to the Priest's pleas with nothing but pre-assigned platitudes and stock responses. The Priest is dismissively sent on his way with instructions to say 'three Hail Marys and four Our Fathers', and is reminded; '…to go against the Church is to go against God.'

The officious and unsympathetic nature of the Church is again highlighted when the Priest requests permission from 'the council of the ruling Clergy' to have his 'authority re-instated'. This he requires in order to leave the city and discover what happened to his brother's family (those who had earlier been set upon at their frontier settlement), whom the Priest suspects were the victims of a vampire attack. Entering a grand chamber, the Priest kneels before a predictably patriarchal council who look down on him from above, and whom he addresses as 'Monsignors'. As an honorific title specifically given to members of the Catholic clergy, this cements what has been, up till now, indisputably Catholic-coded modes of religious practise, ritual, and ceremony. The ruling Clergy dismiss the attack as the work of 'wasteland bandits', and refuse the Priest's proposed mission to rescue his missing niece, categorically stating that there is no longer a 'vampire menace'. Moreover, the head Monsignor (Christopher Plummer) tells the Priest: 'The citizens from the cities have complete faith in the Church's ability to keep them safe – you will not shake that faith.' The Priest, with the first real sign of sedition, replies, 'What good is that faith when it's a lie.' He is reminded that, 'questioning the authority of the Church is absolutely forbidden'. The priest is furthermore warned that if he were to leave the city, it will be construed as 'an act of aggression against the Church', whereupon he will be

'stripped from the order and excommunicated.' Nonetheless, this is exactly what the Priest resolves to do, and, breaking his sacred vow to the Church, sets out to find his abducted niece – the female victim at the centre of the Priest's anguish. Again, like Behmen in *Season of the Witch*, a formerly devout servant of God, one who has killed in his name, turns his back on his faith and the Church; where, in both instances, religious faith and the institution of the Church are socio-politically designated as being one and the same.

Perhaps one of the reasons that both these films situate Catholicism, specifically, at the centre of their visions of religious tyranny, is because of Catholicism's medieval history of ruthless and often brutal enforcement to the obedience of God. This is perhaps less surprising in *Season of the Witch*, incumbent, as it is, with the bloody history of the Crusades, and the atrocities that were performed in God's name, not to mention the religious hysteria surrounding 'witches'. However, as illustrated, despite being set within an alternate, futuristic dystopia, *Priest*, at the same time, figuratively looks back towards a medieval past in which the power of the Church was absolute, and this gives license to explore equally sinister forms of religious dominion. Steve Bruce avers that, 'The Catholic Church, with its Roman and Spanish inquisitions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, could be brutal in punishing deviation.'[221] However, just as these films intimate, religious power has often been prone to being manipulated for the far less sanctified purposes of socio-political control, economic exploitation, colonial conquest, and the persecution of rival sects. Hence, despite both the piety and violence behind previous Catholic campaigns intended to enforce religious devotion, Steve Bruce adds that, often, 'the motives were rarely entirely theological; mundane conflicts could often stimulate a particular concern for orthodoxy.'[222]

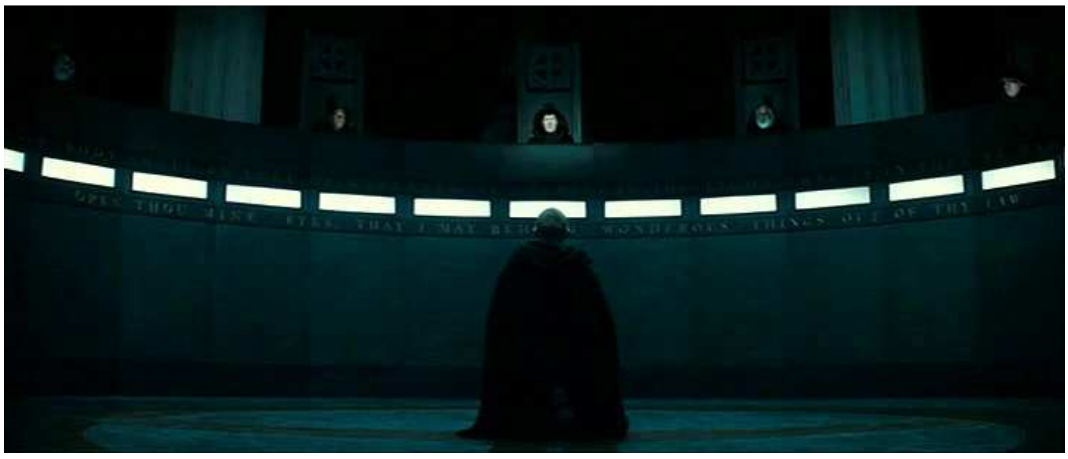

Fig. 4.6 'Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law': reads the inscription beneath the council of the ruling clergy; a setting designed to instil not only reverential deference, but also maximum intimidation.

[221] Steve Bruce, *Politics and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 164.
[222] Ibid., p. 164.

Interestingly, the film, *Priest*, was not the first collaboration between director, Scott Stewart, and lead actor, Paul Bettany, as they teamed up a year earlier for the 2010 fantasy-horror, *Legion*. Here, Stewart also deals with expressly religious themes, and conveys the concept of a religious apocalypse, although not in the way many viewers might anticipate. *Legion* goes further than merely demonizing religion or the Catholic Church with the demonization of God himself. Far from the biblical apocalypse of Revelation, which is something instigated by the rise of the Antichrist, this time, God, without any biblical profanations, has decided that the human race must come to an end. God, in his infinite wisdom, has adjudged that humankind has become a scourge upon the earth, and, for the sake of the planet, must henceforth be eradicated. This narrative amounts to a clear form of millennialist subversion in contemplating that God might be the instrument of humanity's destruction instead of its saviour. Despite this move away from established narratives of apocalyptic prophecy, *Legion* manages to retain an overall biblical bearing in its conventional notions of heaven and hell, no less so in the shape of the archangel Michael (Paul Bettany), who is not in agreement with God's plan for humanity's extinction, defects from heaven and plummets to earth to try to save humanity from their pre-ordained fate. A literally fallen angel, Michael renounces all his divine supernatural power by symbolically slicing off his angel wings, thus becoming just as mortal (and Godless) as the humans he has come to save. Priority protection goes to one unsuspecting pregnant waitress, Charlie (Adrianne Palicki), who is about to give birth to a child who, as Michael knows, can ultimately bring about humanity's salvation (echoes of Sarah Connor and *The Terminator* are clearly in play here).

The method that God has chosen to bring about humanity's demise, like a personal homage to George A. Romero, is to transform the majority of humankind into demonic zombies, as Michael expounds, 'the weakest willed are the easiest to turn'. These unfortunates are summarily commanded to seek out and kill off any remaining human survivors. To elaborate further on *The Terminator* analogy, the fact that we have a mother with an unborn child who is apparently destined to be the saviour of humanity, with a legion of zombies (instead of machines) bent on preventing this occurrence in 'their war to exterminate mankind', might leave little doubt from where *Legion* gains much of its apocalyptic inspiration. Furthermore, certain elements of *Legion*'s narrative could be usefully compared to the plot of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, in which we also have a 'supernatural' protector of a mother and child, who was once in the ranks of the enemy, but is now their only hope for survival. The cyborg saviour in 'T2' (Arnold Schwarzenegger) is not human, though human in appearance, and he crashes through to earth from another dimension or realm of reality. In essence, *Legion* operates as a

kind of religious reworking of *The Terminator* film series; sublimating a secular, apocalyptic science fiction fable into the realm of supernatural religious mythology. Continuing the 'Terminator' link, in terms of apocalyptic films we have already looked at in the context of this study, *Legion* effectively amounts to an exact inversion of the earlier millennialist fantasy, *End of Days*, where Arnold Schwarzenegger, as ex-cop anti-hero, Jericho Cane, although having lost all faith in God, is charged with keeping a young woman free from the clutches of Satan if humanity is to be saved from a millennium of darkness. In *Legion*, by contrast, a young woman must be protected from the clutches of God and his minions if humanity is to survive.

While holed up in a diner in the remote Mojave Desert, and under siege by zombie hoards 'possessed' by angels, Michael explains to a group of hapless survivors that it is never a good idea to make God angry; 'The last time God lost faith in man, He sent a flood. This time, he sent what you see outside' (read: God is back… and this time it's personal). Of course, the idea of a wrathful and vengeful God is nothing new, and there are various passages in the Bible that articulate God's potential for divine terror;

> For behold, the lord will come in fire and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.
>
> Isaiah 66:15

What is more, some representations in the Bible align the idea of God with the kind of unforgiving religious zealotry that was witnessed during the Crusades, likewise presenting God as a blood-thirsty, sword-wielding warrior, keen to slaughter all unrighteous infidels;

> For the lord will execute judgement by fire, and by his sword on all flesh, and those slain by the lord will be many.
>
> Isaiah 66:16

This brutal aspect of heavenly power is personified in the figure of the archangel Gabriel, who, resplendent in medieval armour, represents Michael's arch-nemesis and operates as the right hand of God (who remains an unseen entity throughout the film). *Legion*'s climax features a final confrontation between the former archangel Michael, humanity's new protector and champion, and the archangel Gabriel, representing the supreme dominion of heaven and the divine (super)power of God. Further implanting the idea of a vengeful God and his unforgiving indifference towards humanity, the film concludes with a closing monologue by Charlie, repeating her narration at the beginning of the film, except, this time, with one final denouement; 'When I was a little girl, my mother spoke of a prophecy, of a time when all the

world would be covered in darkness, and the fate of mankind would be decided. One night I finally got the courage to ask my mother why God is so mad at his children? I don't know? She said, tucking the covers around me… I guess he just got tired of all the bullshit.'

Continuing the theme of angels and demons, the 2005 film, *Constantine*, again combines *I Am Legend*'s director/producer team of Francis Lawrence and Akiva Goldsman, which, in turn, may indicate religious apocalypse as something of a recurring theme within a certain condensed group of filmmakers, as evident with the Scott Stewart and Paul Bettany director/actor partnership. Like Scott Stewart's *Legion*, *Constantine* similarly constitutes a religious apocalypse that is partly fashioned by heavenly forces. Despite this parallel, *Constantine* perhaps has more in tone with Stewart's other film, *Priest*, as well as *Season of the Witch*, in which the film's stark critique of Catholicism as a presiding institution begins when the Catholic Church is forced to summon unholy intervention in the shape of John Constantine. Based on the character from DC Comics' *Hellblazer* comic book series, Constantine is a self-styled 'occult detective' who employs his arcane knowledge of magic and the occult to banish demons (who have transgressed into entering earth's realm) back to the hellish oblivion from whence they came. In the opening scene, a bumbling and obese Catholic priest (an unmistakable metaphor for the impotence of the Catholic Church) clearly feels way out of his depth when he calls upon Constantine to perform the exorcism of a demonically possessed young woman within his diocese; who is the first female casualty in a film that depicts the majority of its female characters as victims in need of rescue from evil forces. Here, the Catholic Church is forced to call in outside aid in order to deliver its community from the grip of evil, and it appears that this is a regular arrangement when it comes to preventing evil incursion. What is more, without a crucifix or a Bible in sight – the usual paraphernalia of the ordained exorcist – it is clear, as the priest himself has conceded, that the 'unholy' practise of occultist ritual and magic is a more effective defence against the enemies of God. For Constantine, although the use of religious symbols and holy artefacts are, as we later discover, an essential part of his armoury, it is obvious that he does not put much stock by 'traditional' Catholic sacraments.

In fact, in addition to the seeming ineptitude of the Catholic Church, Constantine himself displays a barely concealed contempt for all forms of religious belief and institutions. This attitude is the antithesis of the outlook adopted by Angela, a beleaguered police detective who is prone to disturbing visions, whose path converges with Constantine's one day at the headquarters of the Catholic clergy. The devoutly Catholic Angela is there to entreat the clergy

for a Catholic burial for her twin sister, who had taken her own life amidst mysterious circumstances. However, she is unceremoniously rebuffed by a priest and reminded that this is not possible because her sister committed suicide, which is 'a mortal sin' against God. Constantine, who, in addition to his extensive knowledge of the occult, possesses the ability to see through the supernatural disguise of the angels and demons that freely walk among us, has come to the home of the clergy to lodge an equally personal plea. Due of his copious smoking, Constantine has been told he only has a short time to live, and he seeks some assurance that, when his time comes, he will end up in heaven rather than hell. We see the object of Constantine's gaze at the far end of the vast chamber. Constantine walks through the grand and lavishly decorated room – a symbol of the opulence and bourgeois riches of the Catholic Church – continuing down a regal strip of red carpet towards the mysterious figure by the fireplace. As Constantine nears, the mysterious person suddenly sprouts mighty angel wings; yet, far from an expression of celestial majesty, this unsettling visage rather appears grotesque and darkly sinister. This is, as we will find out, yet another prime signification of monstrous femininity. Despite this startling image, Constantine remains unflinching in his approach, and

Fig. 4.7 No Angel of Mercy: Gabriel spectacularly exhibits her divine rank and badge of office, but her huge dark wings are also a further expression of her monstrous femininity.

it appears that only he can see this divine adjunction. We view, for the first time, the face of the archangel Gabriel, played in typically and deliberate androgynous fashion by Tilda Swinton. Gabriel, in the Bible, of course, is regarded as a male celestial being – in the Book of Daniel, he is referred to as 'the man Gabriel' (Daniel 9:21) – and this mythic masculinity is accentuated by Swinton, albeit in a very modern context, wearing a pinstripe business suit with a crisp, smart shirt and tie. Though her hair is cut boyishly short, it remains just long enough to be deemed feminine. Yet, despite Gabriel's clear androgyny, combined with Swinton's

identifiably epicene acting persona, Gabriel, with added angelic countenance, is still both visually and audibly distinguishable as female, and this is something that, later on, has greater significance regarding the depiction of gender in the film, and is important within the overall context of this chapter. 'I know what you want, son', Gabriel says, still staring into the flames. Just as in *Legion*, it transpires that Gabriel operates as the mouthpiece of God, as well as a celestial entity who stands as an opposing obstacle towards the goals and machinations of the central protagonist (the religious superhero).

Fig. 4.8 Asexual archangel: Tilda Swinton plays on the gendered biblical derivation of Gabriel.

Constantine proceeds to tell Gabriel about the 'unusual soul traffic' that he has encountered recently, and argues that this might be reason enough for the higher powers that be to consider giving him 'an extension' to a life that will soon be cut short. '…You still trying to buy your way into heaven?' remarks Gabriel. Constantine points out the number of minions he has sent back to Hell, stating that this alone should guarantee his entry into heaven. Gabriel tells him, 'that's not the way this works.' Constantine remonstrates, 'Haven't I served him enough? What does He want from me?' Gabriel replies, 'Only the usual… self-sacrifice… belief.' Constantine is left exasperated by God's 'impossible rules' and 'endless regulations'. Gabriel tells Constantine; 'Everything you've ever done you've only ever done for yourself – to earn your way back into his good graces.' Constantine, however, senses some kind of divine conspiracy, exclaiming, 'Why me Gabriel? It's personal isn't it?' Gabriel looks down at him in pity and explains; 'You're going to die young because you've smoked thirty cigarettes a day since you were fifteen – and you're going to Hell because of the life you took.' Gabriel pauses, draws her face close to Constantine's, and informs him quite sincerely; 'You're fucked.' Here, the rejection and indifference of both Gabriel and the clergy to Constantine's and Angela's heartfelt pleas is yet another signification of the apathy and maladroitness of the Church towards those

who desperately require its aid and intervention. Both Constantine and Angela's sister, according to Catholic doctrine, are consigned to hell for their mortal sin, for, as it transpires, the life that Constantine took was his own, when, after briefly experiencing death from his suicide attempt, he was brought back to life. In both cases, the 'suicides' were acts of desperate despair, in which no aid or comfort were offered by the Church, which now appears to have turned its back on both Angela and Constantine in their hour of need. This is despite Angela's undying devotion to her Catholic faith, and Constantine's service to God in vanquishing errant demons. Like *Priest*, Constantine's lack of faith in a seemingly unfeeling and autocratic system of religion is now perhaps understandable, and this cause for disdain constitutes an overall jaundiced perspective of the Catholic Church (for both Constantine and the viewer) as the compassionate and spiritually transformative institution that it professes to be. This demonizing depiction of an overtly officious and callous Catholic Church is a theme that runs throughout the majority of films discussed here.

In a socio-ideological sense, Catholicism may stand out as the obvious choice for Hollywood in terms of critiquing Christianity. Firstly, within a pervasively Protestant nation, Catholicism stands as a comparative minority religion, and thus an explicit critique of Catholicism in these films is a much safer bet in terms of reducing the risk of widespread public offence and condemnation. The fact that this furthermore draws on a history of dogmatic disdain between the two competing factions within Christianity is an inescapable surfeit of subject matter. Despite being one of the first Western states to be established without an official state church, as espoused by Erin K. Wilson, 'several narratives developed about the place of religion within US society, identity and culture, in particular Puritan narratives regarding the establishment of the American settlement and some of its defining characteristics. According to this narrative, many of the settlers in America had fled religious persecution in Europe and the United Kingdom, stemming from the wars of religion between Catholics and Protestants.'[223] This narrative may, however, remain as a puissant construct of America's cultural consciousness.

Of course, Catholicism has traditionally been at the heart of Gothic and horror fiction, however, it is also as a deeply ritualistic and highly symbolic form of Christian practise which, together with its Gothic heritage, has always seemed ideal for cinematic and visually figurative purposes. Together with its strong ideological conceptions of good against evil and Heaven and Hell, Catholicism appears to be the go-to religion for Hollywood for either purposes of religious critique or for religiously refrained modes of Horror. In terms of a continuing

[223] Erin K. Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 119.

tradition of Catholic critique, what may compound matters further still, is the fact that Hollywood has historically had an uneasy relationship with Catholic institutions. The Catholic Legion of Decency, from the 1930s and well beyond Hollywood's post-war years, once 'struck fear in the heart of every Hollywood producer' with its excessive calls for censorship in its self-ordained capacity as guardian of public morals. As Gregory D. Black avers in his book, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (1994), there was a time when 'no film could be produced or exhibited without PCA (Production Code Administration) approval, and Hollywood did not dare to challenge Catholic authorities.'[224] Though not nearly so powerful and influential in recent years, criticisms of Hollywood from Catholic groups have far from diminished, and perhaps there should be no real surprise at Hollywood's often cynical portrayals of Catholic institutions.

Although it can be argued that these films use the Catholic Church as a means to critique religion and more autocratic modes of Christianity in general, there remain clear demarcations of ideological division between Protestant and Catholic persuasions, and this leads to possible nuances of socio-political rhetoric. For instance, Steve Bruce has observed that 'although the values promoted by the Roman Catholic Church normally fit more easily with the political right, Catholics in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States have tended to support the political party most closely associated with the labour movement because the history of Irish and south European migration to these countries meant that Catholics entered the labour market at the bottom.' Even though, in all four settings, these Catholic groups largely prospered, Bruce maintains that 'the traditional ties with the left were slow to be eroded.'[225] Set this against the traditional political bias of the religious right in the United States – where polls show a lingering 'God gap' between America's two political parties – 'more Americans believe the Republican Party respects their faith and values than does the Democratic Party', proved by the fact that 'an overwhelming proportion of white evangelical Protestants – close to 70 percent – voted for Republican presidential candidate, John McCain in 2008.'[226] This is not to affirm that the films in question have a particular pro-protestant or pro-right agenda in their critique of Catholicism. On the contrary, these type of Catholic critiques within Hollywood more likely stem from what Philip Jenkins describes as a branch of 'American anti-Catholicism' centred within (though not restricted to) a 'middle-class and elite movement that is generally associated

[224] Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 2.
[225] Bruce, p. 4.
[226] Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), p. 15.

with leftist or liberal political opinions.'[227] Although American anti-Catholic sentiment may emanate from traditional and well-established Protestant views where, 'as so often in the past, Catholicism symbolized the forces opposing Americanism', from the mid-twentieth century onwards, Jenkins avows that, 'this time progressives were attacking the Church for its repressiveness and anti-modernity, and its alleged sympathy for totalitarianism.'[228] This criteria of Catholic criticism is acutely pertinent within the socio-political positioning of the film, *Priest*. Other than this, in terms of an American audience, Catholicism further represents a distinctly more exotic and European mode of Christianity, an enigmatic Other, and, as such, is more cut-off or distanced from traditional or more conservative forms of American Protestantism. This also makes Catholicism much more suited for purposes of theological fantasy. Nonetheless, along with its exotic 'otherness', the rich visual symbolism and ritualistic nature of Catholicism provides a key raison d'être for it as a familiar and repeated cinematic representation of Christianity.

Women as both Victim and Monster

As previously established, one of the key narrative themes within all these films is 'the woman as victim', and this is an aspect that seems to be tied into the surrounding apocalyptic environs of each film. In *Constantine*, the demonically possessed Hispanic woman at the beginning of the film is closely followed by another female victim, as we witness Angela's twin sister, Isabel, throw herself off the roof of the psychiatric hospital where she was a patient. However, moments before her apparent 'suicide', Isabel forebodingly gazes back as if there were some malevolent presence on the roof with her, leaving the viewer with the distinct impression that she is the victim of circumstances beyond her control. Towards the climax of the film, Angela is snatched away from Constantine by mysterious unseen forces. We soon learn that Satan's son, Mammon, requires Angela's psychic ability in order to enter Earth's domain. It transpires that Angela's twin sister had killed herself to prevent Mammon from acquiring this same shared psychic ability. Angela later reappears at the site of her sister's death, except she is now fully demonically possessed by Mammon. This brings sharply into focus a vital paradox that resides at the heart of both *Constantine* and *Season of the Witch* and their corresponding representations of gender. Angela's demonic reappearance after being perilously pursued then kidnapped by evil forces, highlights the dichotomy of the female as both victim and monster, and, at the same time, sets into motion the apocalyptic auspices at play.

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[227] Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 32-33.
[228] Ibid., p. 33.

In the context of *Constantine's* religious themes, the once religiously devout and virtuous Angela (a name meaning 'angel' after all) is now transformed into an expression of abject evil and vociferously sets about attacking the film's eponymous hero in a hospital swimming pool. Of course, within the same gendered religious context, on top of the victim-monster dichotomy, there is also applied the parallel symbolism of the 'virgin-whore'. In this context, Angela's abject fall from grace is amplified by the film's overall religious context, whereby Angela not only represents a feminine expression of devout Catholic faith, but is also, at various times, figuratively aligned with the Virgin Mary herself. This is exemplified in one scene in which Angela, after a supernatural attack by a flock of hell's minions, backs towards a shop window where she becomes symbolically embraced by the welcoming, outstretched arms of a statue of the Virgin Mary. In this one shot, Angela's symbolic and gendered affiliation with the mother of Christ is clear, and, other than a signification of her pure and virginal virtue, markedly indicates that she is under divine protection from the evil at hand. Philip Jenkins observes that 'it is exactly the veneration of Mary that is often taken to symbolize the [Catholic] Church's anti-feminine stance; this figure, so quintessentially passive and virginal, negates any positive or realistic view of womanhood. For Catholic theology, it is claimed, the only good woman is a mother, ideally one who has never had sex.'[229] This is something that sets up a crucial premise of the psychology behind the virgin-whore dichotomy, and which is why, in psychoanalytic terms, it is often given the specifically religious adjunction of the 'Madonna-whore' complex. As a definition, Gerd Ludemann argues that 'male fantasies which style Mary a pure virgin in order to master sexual problems are unable to sublimate sexual drives in the long run. These drives discharge themselves by refunctionalizing, if not Mary herself, at least other women, as whores.'[230]

Fig. 4.9 *Sacred Feminine*: Angela receives a divine embrace from the Virgin Mary, with their symbolic and spiritual link signified by the crucifix at the right hand of the statue and the one around her neck.

[229] Jenkins, p. 68.
[230] Gerd Ludemann, *Virgin Birth?: The Real Story of Mary and Her Son Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), p. 25.

This dichotomy is in direct correspondence to Angela's physical transformation. Under the bodily possession of Mammon, as well as her demonic features, she postures like a predator, her still recognisably female sexuality defined fervently in a wet white shirt that clings to the contours of her body and translucently reveals the dark undergarments beneath. She sizes up her (male) prey before launching into a relentless and animalistic attack. The fact that Angela has lost possession of her body, submitting it to conceivable and unfettered forms of violent or carnal subjection, further corresponds to a Cartesian mind/body split that often aligns the feminine with the sexualised physicality of the body. The dualistic conception of humanity as split into the body and soul is consistent with Christian and Catholic doctrines; as Darryl Jones avers, in orthodox Christian thinking, 'when Adam and Eve fell after tasting the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the flesh fell with them and is now rightly the property of Satan; that in us which is exalted, the soul, belongs to God. Thus, it is ingrained into

Fig. 4.10 Devil's daughter: Angela under the demonic possession of Satan's son.

Fig. 4.11 *Monstrous Feminine*: physically violated as a victim, at the same time, Angela embodies another vivid representation of iniquitous femininity.

Christian orthodoxy to deny or even mortify the flesh, which is sinful or evil, particularly as it is manifested in sexuality and sexual desire.'[231] In *The Exorcist*, for instance, 'once Regan's body becomes sexual, it becomes evil: the Devil, taking possession of her flesh, contorts, disfigures, and scars it.'[232] In comparison, when Satan's son takes possession of Angela's 'flesh', it is rather the other way round: when her body becomes evil, it then becomes sexual.

Similarly, *Season of the Witch* underscores another prime example of women both as victim and monster, as well as perhaps an even more fervent example of the 'virgin-whore' dichotomy. Although derived from biblical terminology, the Madonna-whore dichotomy is not, as a concept, an invention of the Catholic Church, although it may well be a symptom of its veneration of virginal femininity, coupled with archaic beliefs in the sinfulness of the flesh. Vladimir Tumanov talks of this dichotomy in terms of 'an evolved aspect of the male psyche.'[233] He states that, despite the fact that the Madonna-whore complex is a concept that has been born out of 'the evolution of the human mind, the Madonna image is borrowed from Christian discourse', and this discourse 'carries with it a conceptual framework of behavioural extremes: the Madonna represents an extreme form of sexual behaviour – an impossible point of reference with immense ideological weight.'[234]

In *Season of the Witch*, the young woman accused of being the Black Witch insinuates to Behmen that she is being physically and/or sexually abused by the priest, Debelzeq (Stephen Campbell More), who is supervising the party's journey to the monastery on behalf of the Church. However, beneath the visage of what first appeared to be an innocent girl victimized and violated by the religious zealotry and superstition of a patriarchal Church, there is clearly a much darker design at work, as, through her apparent use of dark sorcery and deception, she begins to kill off members of her prison escort one by one. During the course of the film, the young women (Clare Foy) gradually casts off her initial façade of vestal innocence. At one point, after the death of one of Behmen's colleagues, she says to him, 'I can see his death weighs heavily on your mind', before she reaches out her hand alluringly and propounds; 'allow me to ease your pain.' If the sexual overtness of her offer was in any doubt, she follows this with more pronouncedly suggestive comment; 'Some good deeds can be done… even behind bars'. Her sexually explicit remarks literally stops Behmen in his tracks, and, from this point onwards, his initially protective sentiments towards the girl takes a dramatic turn. The

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[231] Darryl Jones, *Horror; A Thematic History in Fiction and Film* (London: Arnold, 2002), pp. 187-188.
[232] Ibid., p. 188.
[233] Vladimir Tumanov, 'Mary versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Women', in *Neophilologus: International Journal of Modern and Mediaeval Language and Literature*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (New York: Springer, 2011), p. 522.
[234] Tumanov, p. 523.

girl's sexual invitation appears to instil irremediable feelings of dark suspicion within Behmen, in which her sexual incitement (which figuratively signifies the loss of her innocence and virtue) aligns the girl with female sexual sin, and symbolically substantiates her guilt of black witchcraft.

Fig. 4.12 'Allow me to ease your pain': the demeanour of virginal innocence and victimhood is dropped to reveal the guise of a beguiling temptress, as the Black Witch begins to sense a spiritual weakness in Behmen.

What is more, for Behmen, it appears that such close exposure to the 'Black Witch' begins to take its toll. This comes to the fore when, one night, he experiences an erotic nightmare, in which he revisits the horrific moment when he killed the woman during the Crusader massacre; except, this time, the woman's pain and anguish suddenly turns to laughter and (sexual) ecstasy as she suggestively licks the blood from her fingers and begins to sensuously smear blood from her mouth down her neck. This dream sequence clearly encapsulates a further aspect of the virgin-whore dichotomy, where, in one shot, the woman transforms from virgin/victim to seductress/monster; a blood smeared zombie/ghoul, seeming to gain sexual pleasure from being penetrated by Behmen's phallic sword. The woman here, as a symbolic corpse who revisits Behmen after her death, is a projection of 'the body without a soul'.[235] As Barbara Creed argues, the corpse is utterly abject and the dead body, as a form of waste, 'represents the opposite of the spiritual, the religious symbolic'. Creed adds that, in relation to the horror film, 'it is relevant to note that several of the most popular horrific figures are "bodies without souls" (the vampire), the "living corpse" (the zombie), and the corpse-eater (the ghoul).' Creed also includes the figure of the witch, stating that one of the many crimes of these 'ancient figures of abjection' was that the witch 'used corpses for her rites of magic'.[236] There is some evidence that the Black Witch, here, represents something similar, as her capability for mind manipulation had already caused the death of one of her guards. Through the ongoing schema

[235] Creed, p. 39.
[236] Ibid., p. 39.

of figures such as the vampire and the witch, the horror film continues to construct and confront us with not only 'the fascinating', but also the 'seductive aspect of abjection.'[237]

Fig. 4.13 Bloody Nightmare: here, the woman's blood symbolises her female abjection at the same time as her soulless living corpse becomes a vessel for her sinful sexuality.

In terms of recurring representations of the monstrous-feminine, the proliferation of woman's blood, in this sequence, is also highly figurative, whereby the blood is specifically emblematic of female abjection. Barbara Creed uses the example of Brian De Palma's classic horror, *Carrie*: referring to the climactic scene in which (pig's) blood 'runs down Carrie's body at a moment of intense pleasure' and where Creed indicates the symbolic parallel to her menstrual blood. Like *Carrie*, the woman's blood in Behmen's dream, signifies her 'horror, shame, and humiliation' at the point of her gruesome death and her ultimate defilement. Moreover, in Behmen's dream, the woman's sexually suggestive smearing of her blood over her mouth and neck identifies her with an 'order that has defined women's sexuality as the source of all evil and menstruation as the sign of sin.'[238] This is particularly pertinent when analysing representations of female sexuality within the religious discourse of Catholicism. Moreover, Christopher Sharrett talks about the symbolic association with blood and diseases, particularly in terms of vampires, whereby blood is invariably used to signify 'the lasciviousness of female sexual desire', which, in turn, denotes 'the determined conflation of sexuality and apocalypse.'[239]

In the film, *Priest*, monstrous female abjection is also transmitted through the representation of female blood. When the Priest is finally confronted with the human vampire (Karl Urban), he

[237] Creed, p .39.
[238] Ibid., p. 44.
[239] Sharrett, 'The Horror Film in Neoconservative Culture', p. 267.

tells the priest: ‘In the depths of that hive, I crossed the threshold between life and death, and do you know what I found… the queen we had come to kill… my angel of mercy. She turned me into something that had never existed in this world… a human vampire.’ During his speech, we witness a flashback sequence depicting how the diabolic queen vampire slices her arm to allow her blood to trickle into the mouth of the helpless, half-dead Priest. The human vampire makes a final proposal to his former Priest colleague: ‘join me, accept the blood of the queen, and together we can return to the cities, as brothers.’ Again, The queen vampire’s monstrous femininity and outright abjection is represented through her unholy blood, and who has further transgressed in passing her female blood into the previously sanctified male Priest, transforming him into a figure of unrelenting evil. Her symbolic ‘birth’ of the human vampire signifies a maternal challenge to the patriarchal ruling order (represented by ‘The Church’) whereby her transgression is represented as a sin against both nature and God.

Fig. 4.14 Lair of the vampire queen: the defiled priest lies prostrate and helpless on a symbolic alter, as the queen vampire allows her unholy blood to spill into his mouth.

The human vampire, a former Priest and close associate of our religious superhero protagonist, undoubtedly represents his own ‘shadow spectre’, a demonic double who harbours all the latent venal cruelty and avaricious desire that the Priest has supressed through his devout monastic discipline. Just as with Robert Neville and his ‘vampire’ nemesis in Matheson’s *I Am legend* – together with its corresponding film versions – Christopher Sharrett points to René Girard’s notion that ‘all interchange, all language, all systems of belief spring from the imitative desire to possess what the Other has, to become a double to the Other, to destroy the other as mimetic desire inevitably degenerates into rivalry and violence.’[240] In *Priest*, the ‘desire to possess what the Other has’ operates in a twofold context; initially, the human vampire abducts

[240] Sharrett, p. 257.

the Priest's daughter (the progeny of an illicit relationship while in the 'priesthood' – in which his daughter's abduction can be viewed as a punishment for the Priest's 'sin'), in turn, the Priest relentlessly pursues his symbolic Other in order to repossess what he has taken from him – that which his double invidiously covets.

In *Constantine*, *Priest*, and *Season of the Witch*, patriarchal authority, in each case represented by the Catholic Church, is threatened by a powerful and monstrous female figure. In *Constantine*, this figure is represented by Gabriel, as well as the demonically possessed Angela. In *Priest*, it is the vampire queen who is ultimately behind the resurgence of evil that threatens human extinction and in *Season of the Witch*, the Black Witch, among other things, attempts to replace the symbolic law of the Church with an unyielding law of evil. These demonic females endeavour to usurp male power through apocalyptic destruction of the ruling patriarchal order; and this, in *Constantine*, includes the celestial authority of God. Of course, in each instance, the nihilistic desires of the monstrous female are overcome and patriarchal law is emphatically reinstated. Barbara Creed identifies this aspect of the 'the monstrous-feminine' as 'an attempt to shore up the symbolic order by constructing the feminine as an imaginary other that must be repressed and controlled in order to secure and protect the social order. Thus, the horror film stages and restages a constant repudiation of the maternal figure.'[241]

In *Legion*, the (literal) maternal figure presents us with an altogether different mode of matriarchal opposition to the dominant social (and celestial) order in the unassuming figure of Charlie and her symbolic representation of the woman as mother; or, a Barbara Creed would term it, 'the archaic mother'. This is to say that Charlie effectively represents 'the image of the mother in her generative function – the mother as the origin of all life'.[242] This is very much in accordance with a film largely indebted to the legacy of *The Terminator* films and the prominence given to the consummate maternal figure of Sarah Connor. Interestingly, in *Priest*, the queen vampire represents the same, albeit monstrous, representation of the archaic mother, spawning an entire 'hive' of vampire progeny, and giving symbolic birth to the human vampire. In *Legion*, Charlie, in the process of giving birth to the saviour of humanity, represents a direct matriarchal challenge to the patriarchal law of God, and is a metaphor for the hope and rebirth of humanity in the face of heaven-sent destruction; an apocalypse sanctioned by God's ultimate and most supreme expression of patriarchal rule. The fact that this maternal challenge succeeds and the celestial forces of destruction are ultimately abated (albeit on God's own terms) might

[241] Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous Feminine', in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 63.
[242] Ibid., p. 48.

seem contrary to traditional configurations of the maternal within a masculinist symbolic order, particularly in the context of horror cinema. However, as Barbara Creed argues, 'the concept of the parthenogenic, archaic mother adds another dimension to the maternal figure and presents us with a new way of understanding how patriarchal ideology [usually] works to deny the "difference" of woman in her cinematic representation.'[243]

Within the religious discourse of these films, it is imperative that the religious superhero defeats the supernatural monstrous female without the aid of superpowers. Here, the conventional superhero, bestowed with supernatural powers, is resoundingly imbedded within a secular framework; even more so in that it is often only through the conventional superhero that the redemption of humankind can be fulfilled through their selfless and sacrificial endeavours. This not only makes the conventional superhero a characteristic metaphor for Christ-like salvation, but also, in essence, a redemptive replacement for Christ, and, ultimately, a secular substitute for God. Moreover, what is interesting about these films is the generic and dualistic intersection between the superheroic male protagonist and the monstrous woman, in which female figures of abjection; a demonstrative evil Other; essentially represent a social regression from Robin Wood's assumption of a progressive discourse within contemporary modes of horror. Wood stated that, far from validating the dominant social order, the monster instead acted as a subversive intercessor that challenged the 'legitimacy of capitalist, patriarchal rule', and, in doing so, had become 'an emblem of the upheaval in bourgeois civilization itself… thus dissolving further the Self/Other dichotomy.'[244] Within the context of the religious superhero, although this idea works up to a point within these films, this previously progressive approach is effectively sublimated by the figure of the 'monstrous-feminine' Other, who is effectively disavowed within the context of an expressly religious discourse. At the same time, the male religious superhero is valorised through the eventual destruction of this figure; an obliteration of the subversive female challenge to the religious patriarchal rule which, in itself, becomes part of the process towards the regaining of the religious superhero's faith. This, in all, communicates an overturning of the properties of radicalisation previously incumbent in the shape of the monstrous Other, and signals the reinstatement of the Other as a means to reassert the dominant patriarchal order; something which is positively magnified in the destruction of nihilistic, monstrous femininity. Lianne McLarty states that, 'contemporary horror seems doubly dependent on images of the feminine for its postmodern paranoia: it simultaneously associates the monstrous with the feminine and communicates postmodern victimization

[243] Creed, p. 48.
[244] Sharrett, p .254.

through images of feminization.'[245] As reflected in these films, this seems bound and encapsulated within an overall dichotomy that subjects the woman as both victim and monster, where McLarty adds that,

> the figure of the female victim/monster indicates not that Otherness has disappeared in postmodern horror as 'one's own body [is] rendered alien,' but that 'traditional concepts of 'Otherness' have emerged in a 'new form'. When the monster is also the victim, the figurability of the feminine becomes doubly important. It seems that to evoke the feminine is the most economical means of demonstrating postmodern paranoia toward both the social world and its horrific effects on us. It is, however, precisely this feminine Other that dulls postmodern horror's critical edge.[246]

At the same time, the male religious superhero is valorised through the eventual destruction of this figure; an obliteration of the subversive female challenge to the religious patriarchal rule which, in itself, becomes an aperture towards the eventual regaining of the religious superhero's faith. This, in all, communicates an overturning of the properties of radicalisation previously incumbent in the seditious shape of the monstrous Other. Together with the reinstatement of the Other as a means to reassert the dominant patriarchal order; something which is magnified in the specific destruction of monstrous femininity; in a religious context, Bernard Brandon Scott argues that biblical mythologies have been 'instrumental in supporting women's subordination'. Scott maintains that cinema, inspired by these mythologies, has both perpetuated the myth of 'female embeddedness' as well as critiqued it, and that 'biblical texts have done the same'.[247] Christopher Sharrett identifies much of this as a symptom of contemporary American neoconservative culture, and sees it as 'evidence of capital's further colonization of the consciousness.'[248] Sharrett argues that,

> the sexual politics of postmodern genre cinema can be understood fully only when one focuses on the larger project of the restoration of the Other, itself a component of neoconservative political economy. The relegitimation that this economy undertakes necessarily reinstitutes gender, class, and racial polarization and subjugation while allowing and even advancing discourses that reveal the bankruptcy of such manifestations of capitalist society.[249]

Of course, expressions of institutionalised religious dogma is another component of American neoconservative political culture, and, speaking in terms of contemporary cinematic portrayals of Catholicism, these films are perhaps not submitting anything new. Following a historical trajectory of Protestant anti-Catholic rhetoric, and 'and several hundred years of anti-papist imagery',[250] in some way analogous to Sharrett's evils of the 'neoconservative political economy', Philip Jenkins observes that, 'somewhere in the 1980s, Hollywood decided that

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[245] McLarty, p. 234.
[246] Ibid., pp. 234-235.
[247] John C. Lyden, *Film As Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 21.
[248] Sharrett, p. 254.
[249] Ibid., pp. 254-255.
[250] Jenkins, p. 167.

senior Catholic clerics made reliable stock villains, as predictably evil as corporate executives or drug kingpins.'[251] Importantly, within all these films, the (monstrous) woman as Other seems to operate in correlation with the catholic Church as both a dissolute and dissident Other. In much the same way as the monstrous woman is disavowed to reinstate the patriarchal order, Catholicism as Other functions to validate the cultural idea of a non-institutionalised and non-hierarchal 'civil religion'; foreshadowing the desired absence of a 'corrupted' and non-American Catholic Church. This is steeped in ideas and representations of the New World, with its associated concepts of religious freedom, against the religious rigidity and repressiveness that came to be related with Catholicism as representative of the Old World. The concept of an American 'civil religion' is also relevant here, as this is the established idea in which American national identity is articulated and defined beyond one singular religious belief or denomination, towards a collective and ritualised idea of American nationhood, albeit a nationhood defined prevailingly through Christian doctrine. This may well be regarded as the antithesis of Catholic belief, through which Catholicism is further articulated as an exotic or European Other. Maria Verena Siebert, discussing the popular US television series, *Lost* (ABC, 2004–2010), conceptualises an idea of American civil religion whereby 'a hegemonic American national identity and a dominant religion are blurred', and where it 'appears as a universal form of faith, a faith that is much wider and less dogmatic than, for instance, Catholicism, which is depicted as "other" and not "typically" American in the series.'[252] Siebert maintains that, within the overall context of the series, and read in this way, '*Lost* can be understood as a conservative reaction to the crisis of 9/11 that helps code a secular national catastrophe in terms of a quasi-religious test for the chosen American people.'[253] This imbedded protestant notion of American divine providence is yet another culturally defining attribute that rails obdurately against counterpart codes of Catholicism.

The monstrous woman and the Catholic Church as corresponding Others, converge again within the Madonna-whore dichotomy, except, this time in an inherently apocalyptic context. This goes back to the very antecedents of apocalypse within the New Testament, and the enigmatic entity referred to as The Whore of Babylon: her full title given as, 'Mystery, Babylon the Great, The Mother of all Harlots and Abominations of the Earth' (Revelation 17:5). A mysterious and maleficent figure, her advent within the Book of Revelation appears to usher in the impending end of the world. Hence, monstrous femininity appears to be at the very crux of

[251] Jenkins, p. 167.
[252] Maria Verena Siebert, 'Religion in *Lost*: Managing a National Crisis on U.S. Television', in Kornelia Freitag (ed.), *Apocalypse Soon?: Religion and Popular Culture in the United States* (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2011), p. 85.
[253] Ibid., p .85.

Christian concepts of apocalypse, in which these cinematic expressions of monstrous women, which often incorporates the woman as symbolic 'whore', seem to hold a cabalistic dimension that feeds directly into archaic fears of abject destruction. More intrinsically, Philip Jenkins points out that, 'at least through the nineteenth century, many Protestants accepted that the Roman church was the monstrous creature prophesied in the Book of Revelation, Babylon the Great, the "mother of harlots" clothed in purple and scarlet, who held in her hand "a golden cup full of abominations." The Pope, evidently, was the Antichrist.'[254] This anti-Catholic outlook been taken on as an established extension of premillennialist endtime rhetoric, but also, interestingly, sets up an inexorable Protestant/masculine–Catholic/feminine dichotomy that aligns monstrous femininity and iniquitous Catholicism as an adjoining, dissolute Other which are both seen as inextricably linked to apocalyptic portent. At the same time, paradoxically, the Catholic Church stands for the symbolic patriarchal order that is challenged by subversive femininity. In terms of the idea of the Catholic Church as the metaphorical 'Mother of Harlots' in the Book of Revelation, and in reference to conspiratorial tenets of premillennialism, Jenkins maintains that, 'though now rarely heard in respectable discourse, these ideas have never entirely vanished, and they survive today. Isolated propagandists continue to circulate anti-papal and anti-Catholic mythologies, presenting the Church as the hidden hand behind the world's governments and financial systems.'[255] Perhaps driven by the same echoes of Dispensationalist dogma, it would appear that some of these 'anti-Catholic mythologies' are still firmly perpetuated within Hollywood's contemporary and religiously infused visions of apocalypse, and this must say something about American cultural self-perceptions of both a Protestant and pseudo-secular religious identity; where even the Devil, who effectively saves the day in *Constantine,* is deemed a preferable antihero to the Catholic Church.

[254] Jenkins, p. 24.
[255] Ibid., p. 24.

Conclusion

'When death becomes the center, then religion begins', writes Harold Bloom in his book, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*. For Bloom, deep-seated interest in religion is cultivated primarily through the fear of death, and what more profound expression of death is there than the concept of apocalypse; connoting the earthly demise of the human race and/or the ultimate destruction of the planet. Although Bloom's assertion of America's 'religiously mad culture'[256] may be overstating it somewhat, Bloom succinctly identifies the way in which religion 'institutionalizes strategies that individuals use to obscure the reality of death and provides a context for human existence and meaning.'[257] Correspondingly, Travis Sutton and Harry M. Benshoff argue that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, 'forcefully brought Bloom's configuration about death and religion into the American consciousness', and moreover propounded that, according to Bloom's theory, the 9/11 attacks would cultivate an enduring 'need for religion' upon the traumatised populace.[258] At the same time, the attack on the Twin Towers was widely perceived as a religiously motivated act executed and orchestrated by Islamic extremists, thereby revealing 'religion's capacity for cruelty and violence'.[259] Sutton and Benshoff aver that 'these ideas introduced a potential tension in the aftermath of September 11: people became attracted to religion as they recognized their mortality, while, at the same time they feared religion and its potential for destruction.[260] This type of ambivalence might in fact address some of the more equivocal issues surrounding aspects of institutionalised religion that have featured in many of the apocalypse films discussed. The figure of Constantine and the eponymous hero of *Priest*, as well as Behman in *Season of the Witch*, operate ostensibly as instruments of God in their fight to eradicate evil from the earth; that is, despite the obstacles of either impotent or oppressive religious institutions. In *The Book of Eli*, human civilization has been destroyed by a religious war resulting in a post-apocalyptic backlash where virtually all physical reference to religious doctrine has been purposely extinguished. However, out of the ashes of religious apocalypse, Eli brings the hope of spiritual salvation through the perpetuation of the Bible, as the living and literal embodiment of the word of God.

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[256] Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 29.
[257] Travis Sutton & Harry M. Benshoff, '"Forever Family" Values: Twilight and the Modern Mormon Vampire' in, *Horror After 9/11:World of Fear, Cinema of Terror* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 201.
[258] Ibid., p. 201.
[259] Ibid., p. 201.
[260] Ibid., p. 201.

Together with films like *I Am Legend* and *Knowing*, these narratives provide examples of a religious reconfiguration of a previously and prodigiously secular cycle of apocalyptic science fiction and horror. Previously, in the 1970s and 80s Cold War era, apocalypse films prevailingly demonstrated what Daniel Wojcik calls 'unredemptive apocalypticism'[261] – characterised by the nihilistic view that worldly destruction was all but imminent, and would be invariably instigated by nuclear war or some other ill-conceived technologies – or, failing that, some man-made ecological disaster or biological misadventure could also appear plausible. Either way, there is no redemptive schema for a divine plan or superhuman agency that can intervene and save humanity from itself. The end of history would be solely determined by humankind's hopeless propensity for self-destruction. As the 1990s progressed and the millennium approached, it is no real surprise that Hollywood jumped on board with their own interpretations of millennial doom, this time entertaining ideas of a more eschatological nature in tandem with Dispensationalist doctrine. Although always having had an enduring preoccupation or fascination with the end of the world, and regardless of the fact that contemporary Hollywood and American religion have traditionally been on opposing sides of the Culture War, this is the point at which apocalyptic science fiction and Evangelical Christianity appear to converge. Here, films like *Twelve Monkeys*, *Devil's Advocate* and *End of Days* tapped into premillennialist ideas of biblical prophecies and diabolic conspiracies, themes which seemed particularly pertinent amidst the best-selling popularity of *Left Behind*, as premillennialist notions of the endtime gained increasing traction towards the year 2000. Despite all the apocalyptic hype, however, the 21st century announced itself rather uneventfully, and one could only assume Hollywood's dalliance with religious themed apocalypse would have surely withered had it not been for one fateful date the following year.

What appears to be evident is that the catastrophic events of the 11th September, 2001, occurred precisely at a time that would assure the perpetuation (or a prolonging) of the millennialist myth of biblical apocalypse. In searching for a method to both address and begin to heal the collective cultural trauma that was left in its wake, Dispensationalist discourse not only pointed to the disaster as a prophesised sign of the endtime, but seemed, for a period, to be culturally confluent in articulating a shared socio-ideological requirement for eschatological understanding. Hence, the films with religious apocalyptic themes that followed, in part, appeared to fulfil a cultural desire for a spiritual translation to the unrelenting trauma at hand – in order to both sooth and make sense of the unfathomable scope of apocalyptic destruction. In

[261] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World as we Know it: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 211.

her book, *Trauma Culture*, E. Ann Kaplan denotes that 'nations, like individuals, sustain trauma, mourn and recover. And like individuals, they survive by making sense of what has befallen them, by constructing a narrative of loss and redemption.'[262] As Kaplan identifies, an integral aspect of this narrative construction concerns the idea of 'family trauma', where part of the narrative articulation of this 'loss' resides in a stark sense of familial loss and fragmentation. 'According to the media formula', says Susan Faludi, 'the 9/11 "left behind" were all women – preferably women left alone with babes in arms. *U.S. News & World Report's* incantation of the attack's victims was typical of how the press narrowed its focus: "wives without husbands, mothers without sons, and children without parents." Surviving husbands and fathers had mysteriously dropped from view.'[263] Conversely, this was far from the case in Hollywood's religious apocalypse, where, perhaps in an effort to redress the balance of the 9/11 'media formula', a recurring theme concerning the untimely death of the protagonist's wife showed husbands and fathers were the ones who were painfully 'left behind'. In any case, this represented an inescapable projection of the construction of cultural trauma articulated through unabated narratives of familial loss and mourning. This extends to *I am Legend* (2007), where, despite the eradication of human civilization, the specific trauma of Robert Neville's familial loss is clearly palpable (as opposed to the Neville of *The Ωmega Man*) as it is too for Dr. Ellie Arroway in *Contact* (1997) with the loss of her parents. At the same time, this familial trauma provides an important narrative agency whereby the protagonist eventually regains their lost faith, often via physical or symbolic sacrifice, through which individual spiritual redemption is intrinsically tied to humanity's ultimate salvation.

In terms of the post-millennial lineage of religious apocalypse in film and fiction, Kirsten Moana Thompson refers to the return of the demonic cycle of films that lead up to the turn of the millennium, and the dynamics of gender that foregrounded 'female characters whose bodies are central to theological prophecy.'[264] Thompson notes that 'whether through pregnancy, motherhood, or masochistic suffering, these women restore the faith of male characters, in order to save the world for Christianity.'[265] This, she says, became part of a larger context where the family was placed at the centre of apocalyptic science fiction/horror, where social anxieties became 'figured through narratives in which the family was under attack, whether from monsters, aliens, or diabolic children.'[266] Thompson avers that as the 20th century ticked into

[262] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 136.
[263] Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008), p.90
[264] Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 16.
[265] Ibid., p. 16.
[266] Ibid., p. 16.

the year 2000, 'the new millennium was greeted variously with theological fervour, social apprehension, or bored indifference',[267] and despite the transition into the new century passing quite innocuously, since 9/11, 'dread and fear have regained prominence in the public sphere and become politically instrumental tools for a messianic Bush administration.'[268] Correspondingly, Susan Faludi talks about 'the various impulses' and the polarisation of gender that surfaced after 9/11 – 'the denigration of capable women, the magnification of manly men, the heightened call for domesticity, the search for and sanctification of helpless girls', which, she says, 'might seem random expressions of some cultural derangement. But taken together, they form a coherent and inexorable whole, the cumulative elements of a national fantasy in which we are deeply invested'; part of an 'elaborately constructed myth of invincibility'.[269] Part of this 'national fantasy', which heralds from the same socio-political quarters, and which is just as 'elaborately constructed' is also the myth of biblical apocalypse, which, put together, sets a curious paradoxical duality of both socio-political defiance and eschatological resignation.

Stuart Croft remarks that 'much has been written about the influence of neoconservatism on the administration of George W. Bush; perhaps as much if not more needs to be written on the influence of Evangelical Christianity itself.'[270] Croft, here, alludes to the fact that Bush's cabinets were filled with self-proclaimed Evangelical Christians, including the president himself.[271] This brings into prime focus the way in which 9/11 also instituted politically ideological processes that directly corresponded to the American Religious Right and aspects of evangelical doctrine, particularly in framing America's response to the atrocity in the eminently divisive terms of good against evil. As Stuart Croft exclaims, the crisis of 9/11 was 'narrated to advance primarily neoconservative, but also premillennial sets of ideas over others, given that both had achieved a position of discursive prominence in America's political and popular cultural debates in 2001.'[272] Sutton and Benshoff concur in so far that Bush shaped the burgeoning conflict as 'a holy war between good Christians and evil Muslims' which invariably created paradigms of us and them; 'the projection of an Other who lies in wait to destroy the one true church, the one true god, and the one true religious ideology.'[273] In an eschatological sense, and in terms of the (literal) demonization of the Other, Bernard Brandon Scott argues that apocalyptic themes in both the Bible and films tend to have a sociologically negative effect

[267] Thompson, pp. 16-17.
[268] Ibid., pp. 16-17.
[269] Faludi, p. 14.
[270] Stuart Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.32
[271] Ibid., p. 32 (accompanying footnote).
[272] Ibid., p. 57.
[273] Sutton & Benshoff, p. 201.

in their propensity to separate humanity into the chosen and the rejected. This corrosive dualism, he says, 'is an option we no longer can afford', whereby we must 'see beyond the demonization of the Other to a recognition of love as the solution to chaos, which is acknowledged by both biblical apocalyptic and films with apocalyptic themes.'[274]

In a major sense, the proliferation of horror films about 'zombies, killer viruses, and urban apocalypses since 2001' (all of which feature in *I Am Legend*) can be 'read as metaphorical commentaries on the political climate in the United States following 9/11.'[275] Given the added religious rhetoric of the Bush administration to this volatile socio-political backdrop, we can identify and include the demonic apocalyptic horror of the 21st century in films like *Constantine*, *Priest*, and *Season of the Witch*. Each can be viewed as examples that isolate this idea of the evil Other and their pernicious quest to destroy 'the one true religion' which, if it were ever to fall, would amount to the destruction of human civilization altogether (as is perhaps the underlying post-apocalyptic principle behind *The Book of Eli*). Apocalyptic horror has often been recognised as an allegorical response to surrounding political anxieties, particularly during the Cold War era. However, as Laura Frost points out, 'given horror film's history of engaging – however perversely – contemporary sources of fear, anxiety, and political strife, it is not surprising to see this genre responding to 9/11', whereby 'critics have paid increasing attention to horror films [apocalyptic or otherwise] responding to national trauma.'[276]

'Particular interpretations of religion create discursive contexts in the United States that are different to those in other parts of the world',[277] in which Stuart Croft states that 'the impact of 9/11 was read in that very different context; the imagery of memorialization was heavily religious; and pre-existing faith understandings created policy expectations' from the existing Bush administration.[278] As with many of the films discussed, *I Am Legend*, in particular, precisely reflects this socio-political homily, as a film on the right of the political spectrum' in its 'return to an idealized, utopian past' as its ultimate solution, 'its faith in church and military as the foundations of social order and security', and 'its insistence on the absolute otherness of the enemy.'[279] It is within this socio-political climate, also, that apocalyptic science fiction/horror appeared to traverse from women playing a crucial and transformative role in the restoring of male religious faith, and the affirmation of Christianity within global human

[274] John C. Lyden, *Film As Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p.21
[275] Laura Frost, 'Black Screens, Lost Bodies: The Cinematic Apparatus of 9/11 Horror' in, *Horror After 9/11:World of Fear, Cinema of Terror* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 16.
[276] Ibid., p. 16.
[277] Croft, p. 29.
[278] Ibid. pp. 29-30.
[279] Hantke, 'Historicizing the Bush Years', p. 172.

salvation. Instead, in the post-millennial cycle of religious apocalypse, as 'The Religious Superhero' chapter divulged, women are often delineated as an evil and monstrous Other as a means towards the reinstatement of the dominant patriarchal order (*Constantine*, *Priest*, *Season of the Witch*). Even in *I Am Legend*, the disappearance of the vampires from the narrative points towards a reinstatement of the religious heterocentric patriarchal norms that were associated with the post-9/11 Bush era in which the film was made. In traditional horror fiction, vampires represent the embodiment of evil and the antithesis of Christianity, opposed through Christian symbols such as holy water and the crucifix. The vampire myth represents an unholy inversion of the Eucharist and the symbolic drinking of Christ's (immortal) blood. As with the representation of monstrous women, this underscores the cultural affiliation between Christianity and (Gothic) horror, and the symbolic resonance of blood and bodily fluids, especially in correlation to women and sexuality.

Just as the vampires' lascivious penetration of the neck in drinking human blood is inexorably linked to modes of deviant sexuality (including aspects of bisexuality), concomitant representations of violent and bloody penetration of the body are likewise linked to forms of transgressive and degenerate sexuality which are invariably (and forcefully) transposed onto the subversive, sinful, or monstrous woman. Interestingly, with the extraction of the unholy vampire from the text of Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, a heteronormative construct is rather put in place, and the infected remainder of the human race categorically submits to a patriarchal hierarchy within a heteronormative social structure. This is evidenced through the hierarchical order and command demonstrated in the infected's leader, and his unrelenting pursuit to reclaim his female mate from the clutches of Robert Neville. Even after humanity has been reduced to a light-shunning hoard of ferocious zombies (the 'Dark-seekers') their leader's consuming quest to recapture his female mate nonetheless institutes and reinforces the idea that traditional, heterosexual, monogamous fidelity is still of prime social importance to the new sub-human order. Neither is there any suggestion that the infected crave after the blood or the flesh of surviving humans; like *The Ωmega Man*, they simply seek to physically destroy Neville, not physically consume him. This fits into the film's narrative of the leader, as well as representing Neville's symbolic infected double or 'shadow-self', as a direct male rival for ownership of the victimised female captive, as well as for territorial power over the desolate city streets. The fact that Neville hunts down members of the infected's 'clan' for his experiments, like the mythical bogeyman (that non-specific embodiment of terror) who steals away children while they sleep, is yet another strong motive for his desired demise, and is ostensibly the reason behind his

'Legend' of the original book. This integral aspect behind the shared title is something either wholly missed or disregarded by the makers of the film, and ultimately works to undermine Matheson's secular text and the overall secularization of the vampire myth. In eliding the ironic inversion of Neville himself having become a plague upon human society (or, at least, what human society has become), Lawrence's *I Am Legend* propagates a narrative platform for the film's eventual religious re-substantiation of the text. Like Bloom, Daniel Wojcik identifies Evangelical apocalyptic traditions as having an obvious appeal that addresses 'fears of collective death by offering the promise of salvation and the assurance that a divine plan underlies history.'[280] In terms of this 'appeal of apocalypticism', *I Am Legend* stands as a prime example of the religious transfiguration of a secular apocalypse film cycle. Consisting of eschatologically transformative agencies rather than those that solely warn of imminent self-destruction, films such as *I Am legend*, *Knowing*, and *The Book of Eli*, evidenced the extent to which more poignant apocalyptic themes concerning ideas of spiritual redemption supplanted the 'unredemptive apocalypticism' of the 20th century, and which appeared to reach its zenith in the focal five years between 2007 and 2012.

One could consider this time frame as demonstrative of a sort of grace period after which the catastrophe of 9/11 could begin to be articulated through film narratives. In the years leading up to this point, Hollywood's reluctance to directly address the trauma was evidenced in the way that images of the Twin Towers had invariably been edited out or digitally erased from films that had been in production prior to the tragedy. Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* (2002) had notoriously depicted a villains' helicopter trapped in a huge spider-web suspended between the Twin Towers as a centrepiece to the film's trailer. After the disaster, this scene was unsurprisingly cut, and the iconic ending of the film where Spider-Man hangs on a flagpole with a huge American flag atop a vast skyscraper was added as a patriotic response to the attacks, and this, instead, became the overriding image in later trailers for the film. Nevertheless, films like *Zoolander* (Ben Stiller, 2001), *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2001), *Serendipity* (Peter Chelsom, 2001), and *Men in Black II* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 2002), were noted examples of the retouched Manhattan skyline which featured the jarring absence of the towering landmark. Even scenes with buildings that resembled the World Trade Center or reminded of its destruction were cut from a host of films in the early part of the 21st century. Steven Jay Schneider sees this as a form of cultural capitulation where, instead, a stance of American defiance would have been a more appropriate response. To him, the absence of the

[280] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 213.

Twin Towers in these films is 'open to interpretation as a lame and uninspired attempt at repressing or denying some very recent, very painful history – a way of pretending that 9/11 never happened by removing all visual reminders of the attack's hardest hit target.'[281] In a way, Schneider views Hollywood's response to the disaster as finishing the job that the 9/11 attackers had started – by erasing these iconic symbols of American industrial and economic might from recorded history.[282]

After 2007, films began to confront the trauma head-on, exemplified by the 2009 film, *Knowing*, which directly addresses 9/11 as a historical event within its catalogue of prophesised disasters. Pushing this further, not only does the film include a major terrorist alert in New York, but features a horrific subway crash in the centre of Manhattan, which also references London's 7/7 Underground terrorist attacks – transposing the disaster directly to the site of America's 'ground zero'. The film also depicts the harrowing aftermath of a plane crash on the outskirts of an American city. As has been widely commented upon, while the imagery of 9/11 – crashing planes and collapsing buildings – were reminiscent of action movies or disaster films, Laura Frost points out, 'the mood in New York and in the nation became much more psychological and internal, shifting to the more insidious and subtle dynamics of paranoia and dread.'[283] 'This new psychological landscape', Frost says, was less appropriate to action films and more to horror films, which center on the drama of the unknown and the unreal.'[284] These metaphysical elements are correspondingly attuned to prophecies of biblical apocalypse, where one could also describe the cryptic machinations of the Book of Revelation as certainly 'unknown and unreal'.

These two elements of horror and religious apocalypse conjoin within Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend* (2007), where the post-apocalyptic portrayal of a ruined New York City is equally evocative of 9/11. Whereas *The Ωmega Man* stayed faithful to Richard Matheson's novel by situating the story in Los Angeles, and an unspecified American city was the basis for *The Last Man on Earth*, Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend* took us directly, and very purposely, to the site of the national trauma. As we know, the cinematic tradition of destroying New York had been established long before the events of 9/11; since the half buried remains of the Statue of Liberty in *Planet of the Apes* (Franklyn J. Schaffner, 1968) kicked off the apocalypse film cycle of the 1970s and ingrained a cinematic fascination for humanity's seemingly boundless potential for

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[281] Steven Jay Schneider, 'Architectural Nostalgia and the New York City Skyline on Film' in, Wheeler Winston Dixon (ed.), *Film and Television After 9/11* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), pp. 38-39.
[282] Ibid., p. 39.
[283] Frost, p. 15.
[284] Ibid., p. 15.

self-destruction. Nevertheless, in supplanting Matheson's story to New York City, *I Am Legend* appears 'very precise in its use of apocalyptic urban imagery',[285] where Steffen Hantke singles out the flashback sequences, in particular, that culminate in the US military blowing up bridges leading out of the city. Here, 'the spectacular explosions and the slow-motion collapse of landmark structures' resonate profoundly with the memory of 9/11.[286] This inescapable connection is further emphasised by Robert Neville's frequent references to New York as the site of 'ground zero', 'a none-too-subtle reminder that the apocalyptic fantasy we are watching feeds off post-9/11 anxieties.'[287]

Once this is established as a theme, Hantke identifies other details as falling into place. The suicidal element of the 9/11 attacks, for instance, becomes played out in the way that the infected, when attacking in a state of rage, use their bodies as weapons without any seeming concern for self-inflicted damage, to the point where 'it is not difficult to see in them the right-wing rhetoric of the so-called War on Terror: subhuman enemies, incapable of rational decision making, flinging themselves at us in a grim and never-ending attempt at destruction.[288] In this context, together with the harrowing visual echoes of 9/11, *I Am Legend* undoubtedly provides an added 'allegorical subtext that visualizes, dramatizes, and ideologically justifies' the Bush administration's unmitigated War on Terror and the outright destruction of those who might do America harm.[289] More importantly, in tone with the surrounding political rhetoric of the film, *I Am Legend* stands as a prime example of a film that demarcates a homologous shift from an expressly secular cycle of 20th century apocalypse films to an explicitly religious reformulation of apocalyptic science fiction in the 21st century. Here, the imbedded religious expositions within the film culminate to question the protagonist's unwavering faith in science, which is ultimately responsible for humanity's downfall, and, subsequently, by the end of Lawrence's film, science has been effectively replaced with the redemptive power of religious faith – as well as the supernatural power of God.

This is not to say that, before the 1990s and the approach of the millennium, the preceding decades of the 1970s and 1980s were not without the surrounding cultural rhetoric of Premillennialism and evangelical apocalypse. On the contrary, as outlined in the introduction, the popularity of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the book that 'nearly single-handedly launched

[285] Hantke, p. 172.
[286] Ibid., p. 172.
[287] Ibid., p. 172.
[288] Ibid., p. 173.
[289] Ibid., p. 173.

the commercial Christian publishing industry in the United States,[290] demonstrated the widespread interest in biblical interpretations of global events, and provided palatable answers to the contiguous cultural angst of the 1970s. Hal Lindsey's book was 'a paranoid and pun-filled tome that found its way onto the book shelves of more than fifteen million Americans',[291] yet, the religious apocalypse, as popular as Dispensationalist doctrine appeared to be, was not mirrored in the films of the time – at least not in the same way that the theme of religious apocalypse would materialise at the dawn of the millennium and reach its apex towards the end of first decade of the 21st Century. Hollywood's apocalypse films of the 1970s would invariably reflect the socio-political strife of a discordant era; the Cold War and the looming threat of nuclear annihilation, spiralling crime, inner-city decay, energy crises, the Watergate scandal, and the disastrous war in Vietnam – all signs of the endtime, according to Hal Lindsey. Nonetheless, the apocalypse films that routinely expressed these anxieties were unremittingly secular and, if anything, often incorporated anti-religious themes, even when within the explicitly biblical context of a film like *The Omen* (1976).

Just as *The Late Great Planet Earth* had done in the 1970s, in the lead up to the millennium, the 1990s had its own reassertion of Premillennial Dispensationalism with the best-selling success and cultural fascination of *Left Behind*. Undoubtedly compounded by the impending date of prophetic doom that was the year 2000, Matthew Barrett Gross and Mel Gilles attest that, crucially, what made the late 1990s and the first part of the 21st century different from the 70s – 'or from any other period of upheaval in American history that has spawned apocalyptic fever – was that the teens and twenty-somethings who had clutched copies of *The Late Great Planet Earth* in the 1970s now held the levers of power and media', to the extent where 'the delusional was no longer the marginal'.[292] This being so, this generational apogee would have no doubt extended into segments of the film industry also, as well as, more significantly, into seats of political office, as exemplified by the overwhelmingly evangelical Bush administration – where, for the first time in American history, 'ideology and theology held a monopoly of power in Washington.'[293] Gross and Gilles' assertion of a power generation of Hal Lindsey inspired apocalypticians would, in part, offer a feasible explanation as to the continued fascination with Premillennialist literature represented by *Left Behind* – akin to the excitement (and eventual disappointment) of a vast generation of 1970s *Star Wars* fans in anticipation of George Lucas's first prequel to his epic space saga in 1999.

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[290] Mathew Barrett Gross and Mel Gilles, *The Last Myth: What the Rise of Apocalyptic Thinking Tells Us About America* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2012), p. 33.
[291] Ibid., p. 32.
[292] Ibid., p. 33.
[293] Ibid., p. 33.

In American cultural terms, Gross and Gilles refer to the first part of the 21st Century as 'the apocalyptic decade'; a time when a multitude of Americans, finding themselves among burgeoningly turbulent events (as in the 1970s), increasingly turned to biblical prognostications of the end as a means to understand or interpret unfathomable occurrences – 'a prism that the media reflected back on the populace'.[294] This came to a head after the horrific and incomprehensible events of 9/11, upon which the background murmur of the evangelical End of Days that had perhaps began to dissipate somewhat after finding that humanity had entered the new millennium without so much as a Y2K bug, now turned into a deafening cacophony of apocalyptic providence from which would eventually emanate Hollywood's own eschatological interventions. On top of this, the cultural prominence of neoconservatism after 9/11, as exemplified by the Bush administration, meant that, not only did affiliates of the Christian Right effortlessly link the war on terror with their own geo-political objectives, but, within the 'demonological perception' of the terrorist threat, 'apocalyptic myths that had been dormant re-emerged'.[295]

This may well be the juncture at which America came to be discussed in terms of a 'post-secular society', and while the ascendancy of the Christian Right has projected a socio-political divisiveness at America's cultural core, 'it also confirms America's unrivalled religiosity.'[296] The U.S. may technically constitute a secular regime, but, as John Gray posits, 'unlike nearly every other long-established democracy, America lacks a secular political tradition.'[297] Gray adds that, 'though the separation of Church and State is a pillar of the constitution, this has not prevented religion exercising enormous power and influence over American cultural and political life.'[298] In terms of American culture and society, what perhaps often misleads us is that we tend to look at America through the insulated prism of Hollywood. In this instance, we know which side of the Culture War Hollywood traditionally stands, and, as well as being an industry renowned for having a large Jewish community at its centre, along with its prevailingly secular outlook, Hollywood is by no means the most accurate gauge in ascertaining the attitudes and beliefs of a fervently Christian nation. What sets America irreducibly apart from other Western societies are the apocalyptic traditions that provide comprehensive cultural systems of belief and understanding. These eschatological codes of belief, as the astounding popularity of *The Late Great Planet Earth* in the 70s and *Left Behind* in the 90s go a significant way to prove, have, for a long time, been a key underlying determinant of modern American culture, and

[294] Gross & Gilles, p. 34.
[295] John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 117.
[296] Ibid., p. 119.
[297] Ibid., p. 119
[298] Ibid., p. 119.

appear to be intrinsic in fulfilling a series of important religious functions and psychological requirements. For many Americans, it perhaps seemed only natural that George W. Bush would utilise the language of biblical apocalypse when describing what was perceived as a clear conflict between the forces of good and evil (just as the Book of Revelation said it would be), and this would presumably be the same 40% of the American populace who professed to believe that a sequence of events presaging the end times was already underway' (according to a 2006 poll by the *Los Angeles Times*),[299] along with the quarter of polled Americans who believed that the events of 9/11 were predicted in the Bible.[300] Parallel to Hollywood's secular apocalypse, America's religious apocalypse, though not nearly so tangible, was always there; not merely a response to feverish millennial fervour or a spiritual remedy to the trauma of 9/11, but a cultural discourse that was already ingrained in the cultural fabric. The contiguous proximity of the fateful events of 11th September, 2001 to American Premillennialists' own figurative 'ground zero' at the dawn of 2000, meant that the Evangelical apocalypse was primed for maximum cultural impact during America's 'apocalyptic decade', to the point where even Hollywood could no longer ignore the signs of the endtime.

[299] Gross & Gilles, p. 34.
[300] *Time*/CNN poll, *Time*, July 2002. Cited in, Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy* (London: Penguin Books), p. 96.

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Akira (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988)

Armageddon (Michael Bay, 1998)

A Thief in the Night (Donald W. Thompson, 1972)

Avatar (James Cameron, 2009)

Blade (Stephen Norrington, 1998)

Bladerunner (Ridley Scott, 1982)

Blind Fury (Phillip Noyce, 1989)

Carrie (Brian De Palma, 1976)

Constantine (Francis Lawrence, 2005)

Contact (Robert Zemeckis, 1997)

Crimson Bat: The Blind Swordswoman (Sadatsugu Matsuda, 1969)

David and Bathsheba (Henri King, 1951)

Dawn of the Dead (George A. Romero, 1978)

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Deathsport (Roger Corman, Allan Arkush, Henry Suso, 1978)

Deep Impact (Mimi Leder, 1998)

End of Days (Peter Hyams, 1999)

Esther and the King (Raoul Walsh, 1960)

E.T. (Steven Spielberg, 1982)

Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer (Tim Story, 2007)

From Hell (Albert & Allen Hughes, 2001)

Genesis II (John Llewellyn Moxey, 1973)

Godzilla (Roland Emmerich, 1998)

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 (David Yates, 2011)

Hellraiser: Inferno (Scott Derrickson, 2000)

High Plains Drifter (Clint Eastwood, 1973)

I Am Legend, (Francis Lawrence, 2009)

Image of the Beast (Donald W. Thompson, 1981)

Independence Day (Roland Emmerich, 1996)

Inferno (James Remar, 1998)

Invasion of the Triffids (Steve Sekely, Freddie Francis, 1962)

Knowing (Alex Proyas, 2009)

Left Behind: *The Movie* (Vic Sarin, 2000)

Legion (Scott Stewart, 2010)

Logan's Run (Michael Anderson, 1976)

Mad Max (George Miller, 1979)

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No Blade of Grass (Cornel Wilde, 1970)

Once Upon A Time in America (Sergio Leone, 1984)

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Pale Rider (Clint Eastwood, 1985)

Plague (Ed Hunt, 1978)

Planeta Ciego (Leon Klimovsky, 1976)

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Poltergeist (Tobe Hooper, 1982)

Priest (Scott Stewart, 2011)

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Rosemary's Baby (Roman Polanski, 1968)

Season of the Witch (Dominic Sena, 2011)

Serendipity (Peter Chelsom, 2001)

Signs (M. Night Shyamalan, 2002)

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The Seventh Sign (Carl Schultz, 1988)

The Shining (Stanley Kubrick, 1980)

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Sodom and Gomorrah (Robert Aldrich, 1663)

Soylent Green (Richard Fleischer, 1973)

Spider-Man (Sam Raimi, 2002)

Sunshine (Danny Boyle, 2007) UK

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Wall-E (Andrew Stanton, 2008)

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