

The Gospel on the Big Screen: How Cinema Serves as a Cultural Touchpoint for the Gospel

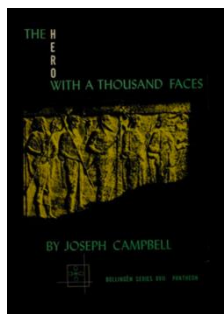
If we look carefully, we will find echoes of the Gospel embedded in many of the great stories and films of our culture. From Marvel's *Endgame*, Disney's *Frozen*, Pixar's *ToyStory*, and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the Gospel is woven into the fabric of these compelling storylines. How can we learn to recognize these Gospel moments? What are their main features? Why do they keep arising, even in secular storytelling? And what would it look like to leverage them in evangelism and apologetics?

Philip Miller is the 17th Senior Pastor of The Moody Church. He and his wife Krista are graduates of Cedarville University ('04) and both hold Th.M. degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary ('10). They live in Chicago with their four children: Claire, Violet, Cora, and Jude. Pastor Philip is passionate about proclaiming God's Word, cultivating healthy ministry, and investing in future leaders. He can be heard on the weekly Moody Church Hour radio broadcast on over 700 stations nationwide. Philip enjoys cycling on the Chicago lakefront, deep-dish pizza, caramel popcorn, and craft root beer.

1. Discovering Christ-figures in Cinema



2. A “Hero with a Thousand Faces” or God’s “Myth-Become-Fact”?



These are all retellings of the archetypal “monomyth” in which the hero “ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won,” following which the hero returns to “bestow boons on his fellow man.” – Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Pantheon Books, 1949), 23.

“Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened:

– C. S. Lewis in a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves (18 October 1931).

“The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens—at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified (it is all in order) under Pontius Pilate.... We must not be ashamed of

the mythical radiance resting on our theology. We must not be nervous about ‘parallels’ and ‘Pagan Christs’: they ought to be there—it would be a stumbling block if they weren’t. We must not, in false spirituality, withhold our imaginative welcome.... For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight.” – C. S. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact” in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1998), 66-67.

3. The *Imago-Dei* as Gospel Pre-Conditioning

4. Gospel Echoes

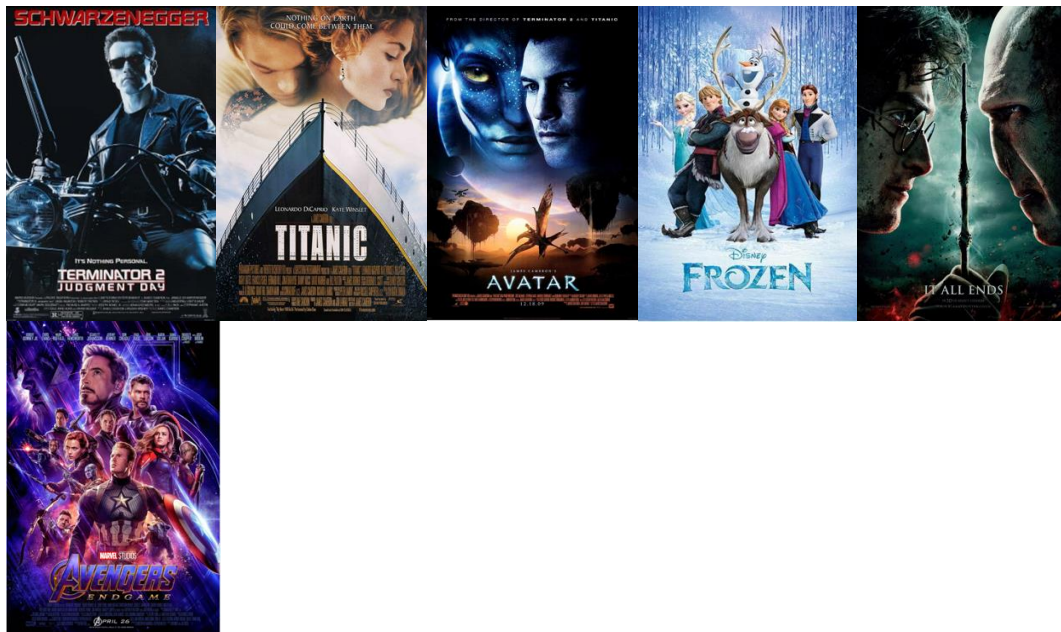
Incarnation

Messianic Promise

Self-Sacrifice

Resurrection

Eschatological Hope



5. Discussion: How can we leverage these “Gospel echoes” in our spheres of influence?

Additional Resources:

Gottschall, Jonathan. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (Boston, MA: Harper Collins, 2013).

Lewis, C. S. "Myth Became Fact" in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1998).

Papandrea, James L. *From Star Wars to Superman: Christ Figures in Science Fiction and Superhero Films* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2017).

Tolkien, J. R. R. "On Fairy-Stories" in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).