catalog the non-political side, highlighting Robertson's shrewd leadership and questionable dealings. He details CBN's ascendancy to its place as a cable giant in the late 1980s, the Kalo-Vita nutrition product scandal of the early 1990s, the enormously profitable Family Channel deal with Rupert Murdoch in 1997, Robertson's involvement with the corrupt government of Liberia, diamond mine investments in Zaire, and the scandal over the diversion of CBN's relief arm—Operation Blessing—in diamond mining interests. In the end, Marley is amazed at how Robertson emerged from these various escapades rich, free, and—most astonishingly of all—relatively un-criticized by his CBN constituency after plowing the well-intentioned charitable gifts of millions of small donors into his personal business and political efforts. In this alone there is much about Robertson, his vision, authority, and his relationship to his audience that could really serve to make us better understand both Robertson and American evangelicalism. Unfortunately, Marley is too often content to convey information and leave much of the analysis up to the next biographer.

For the most part, this book evidences good research and a readable narrative style. However, it could have profited from a firmer editorial hand to weed out repetition and help impose order upon some tortured organization—particularly in the pre-Carter portion of the book. Additionally, a scattering of oversimplifications and errors (for instance, Billy Graham is cited as having founded his own Christian university [101]) mars what is otherwise a competent examination of Robertson's career. Overall, while it could have been more, *Pat Robertson: An American Life* is a useful update to our understanding of an important—but underestimated—figure in recent American religion and culture.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640708001960

Film and Religion: An Introduction. By **Paul V. M. Flesher** and **Robert Torry**. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2007. xiv 306 pp. $25.50 paper.

Paul V. M. Flesher and Robert Torry, a Bible scholar and an English professor at the University of Wyoming, created this book from notes for a course on religion and film. They begin by introducing their method and using it to analyze *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1967 and 2000). They go on to discuss two dozen films (plus many more mentioned in passing) under four

rubrics: the Cold War, films about Jesus, a miscellaneous category, and world religions. Their book does not have a clear overarching argument; it also lacks an index and bibliography (each chapter lists suggested readings, some of which function like footnotes). However, one can discern major themes.

Half the space in the four key sections treats films with biblical settings: *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *King of Kings* (1961), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), and *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). A secondary emphasis is on science fiction. Torry and Flesher discuss *When Worlds Collide* (1951), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977); they also put the latter two in dialogue with *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976).

Methodologically, the book blends plot summaries with efforts to relate films to their cultural-historical contexts—including contexts that are not overt and self-evident (as, for example, when plots about ancient Rome carry meanings about the Cold War). This approach is surely valuable, and the authors introduce it effectively. Of course, any set of priorities implies other roads not taken; in this case, the authors do little to place their material within film history, analyze film techniques, or reflect on audience reception. They state that the filmmakers' intentions are irrelevant to their approach. Importantly, they give little attention to multiple or conflicted contexts of reception—they typically seek one or two contextual factors (often quite abstract) reflected in filmic themes. This is not the sort of introduction that surveys a range of methods; it analyzes the plots of selected Hollywood films and considers how these plots relate to the contexts that Flesher and Torry posit as most salient.

The most important of these contexts are (1) discourses about Communism and atomic bombs in U.S. dominant culture during the Cold War era, especially as this relates to (2) well-worn arguments about how Protestant millennialism fits together with American exceptionalism (that is, the idea that the U.S. has a special divine mission). The authors see the wise alien Klaatu in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and the plot of *The Ten Commandments* as championing tougher anti-Communist policies; they see a contrast between Jesus and Barabbas in *King of Kings* dramatizing rising interest in peacemaking in a Cold War context. As they track the fortunes of exceptionalist ideology (citing Robert Bellah), Flesher and Torry interpret Roman emperors and Egyptian pharaohs as stand-ins for Soviets; neither Western colonialism nor gender plays much role in their analysis of the Cold War. After chapter 5, discussion of these issues fades, but it echoes—notably in suggestions that the "directionless" (135) Christ of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and the demons of *The Exorcist* reflect the erosion of exceptionalist confidence and that *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and the baseball nostalgia of *The Natural* (1984) and *Field of Dreams* (1989) symbolize faith in God and exceptionalism.

Equally important is Flesher and Torry's emphasis on how films rework biblical texts. They recall the tradition of creating *targums*, or translations of scripture from Hebrew to Aramaic that translate words literally but also add material to clarify and embellish the text, with enough scope to introduce new meanings. The authors demonstrate the value of approaching biblical films as a variation on this method, in which "targumic" additions address emerging cultural concerns. By extension, the authors' broader propensity to focus on how films rework tradition informs their discussion of other films. At times they give considerable attention to the sort of abstract exposition of doctrine featured in religious studies survey texts, even when this weakens their analysis of cultural contexts during the years when the films were screened. For example, their contextualization of *The Last Temptation of Christ* gives far more attention to early Christian disputations about Trinitarian theology than to U.S. culture in the 1980s.

Insofar as any single argument unifies the book, it is an effort to bring the analytical threads I have noted—the Cold War, exceptionalism, and targumic reworking of scripture—into dialogue with the above-mentioned films about the Bible, science fiction, and baseball. Although the argument is not systematic, most chapters address at least one or two of these things.

The remaining pages, including four of the last five chapters and sizable parts of earlier sections, are more of a grab bag. Among the key contexts they posit are a challenge to orthodox belief within modernity (with special attention to psychological interpretations of religious claims) and growing religious diversity (through immigration—the authors give limited attention to race). One chapter discusses *Agnes of God* (1985) and *The Apostle* (1998), stressing their psychological dimensions and approaches to forgiveness. Another treats the representation of Buddhism in *Little Buddha* (1993) and ideas from the *Bhagavad Gita* in *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000). Two chapters discuss Jewish identity in the context of modernity and the Holocaust (using *The Chosen* [1982] and *The Quarrel* [1991]), and the relation between Islam and "fanaticism" in *Destiny* (1997) and *My Son the Fanatic* (1997). Flesher and Torry say little about the role of Jews in the history of Hollywood. Their chapter on Islam moves outside Hollywood entirely, thus sidestepping films like *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Malcolm X* (1992), and others that reference Islamic terrorists or the Israel-Palestine conflict. They reason that "films dealing knowledgably with Islam are not yet made in the American market" (280).

As they do all this, Flesher and Torry offer many stimulating observations and generally make workmanlike contributions. Their relatively weak scholarly apparatus and sometimes oversimplified arguments about context will limit the book's value for researchers; these factors plus the lack of a clear overall argument may also limit its value in classrooms. However,

for some courses its blend of analytical simplicity and relatively broad scope may be an advantage—providing a lucid and accessible, if sometimes contestable, starting point for further discussion.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640708001972

Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism. By **David Smilde**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. xviii + 264 pp. $22.95 paper.

Only a sociologist will love certain stretches of this book, but it provides a keen sense of why millions of lower-class Latin American men take refuge in a religion that seems antithetical to Latin American culture. The best thing about David Smilde's book is his portraits of lower-class Venezuelan males and the violent milieu they inhabit. Some choose to save their skins through evangelical religion (here mainly pentecostal), and some do not. In the context of Latin American studies, where political correctness often inhibits full disclosure, Smilde's candor about the lives of his friends and subjects is refreshing. The not-so-good thing about David Smilde's book is his interruption of these men and their travails with arcane debates among his fellow sociologists about instrumental versus substantive rationality, intentionality, and agency versus structure. I don't see the point, given that the author's sympathetic reporting of his subjects' lives should be enough to refute mind/body dualism.

As a case in point, consider Jorge the drug-addicted *asaltante* or stickup man. After some of his victims almost kill him, he sensibly decides to accept the Lord and make his living as a door-to-door salesman. When Jorge explains his decision in terms of "I was against the wall, I was cornered" (4), this strikes Smilde as instrumental rationality, a term many sociologists and anthropologists wish to avoid because it is reductionist. Smilde would prefer to explain why Jorge converted "for religious reasons, not for the nonreligious rewards" (7). Yet as Smilde is quick to acknowledge, naked instrumentalism is exactly how many Latin Americans explain their decision to join evangelical churches. "Can people really *decide* to believe in a religion because it is in their interest to do so?" Smilde asks (7). Of course they can because, in his own words, "they feel a deficit of control over some aspect of their lives . . . and want to gain a sense of agency. Evangelicalism can portray their issues and provide them with a project of change" (86). The genius of evangelical strategy is that it projects persons' internal