

The Relationship Between Superman and Churches

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When future Superman comics editor Mort Weisinger was first hired as a comic book editor in the 1940s, he called his friend Otto Binder for a “crash course” on working in the medium.¹ Binder said it was “very simple,” because in comics, “you get a fight, the hero hits the villain on the head with a lamp and says, ‘Lights out for you!’”² That may be a bit of a simplification. Sometimes, superhero stories endeavour to comment on contemporary politics, have deep literary significance, or evoke religious symbolism. Nonetheless, with reference to the character of Superman, this study will demonstrate that churches have had an evolving relationship with superhero media that connect their stories to Jesus.

In this essay I will track the history of parallels between the comic book character of Superman and Jesus Christ and analyze how such parallels have been perceived in churches in North America. The idea of connecting Superman and Jesus has sometimes been controversial. I will argue that initially some churches and self-professing Christians were cautious or even angry about such parallels, but over time, other Christians began to exploit this parallelism because they thought Superman movies could be used for evangelistic purposes. Even so, in the last decade, the studios behind the Superman films consciously exploited that parallelism to market the movies *to churches*. As such, churches and pastors who participate in such enterprises are left with an ethical question: should they allow themselves to be used as a marketing tool for a multinational corporation trying to sell a superhero film if they believe that in doing so, they can help spread the Gospel to the wider culture?

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Regardless, although the first Superman comic was published in 1938, a notable event in this progression occurred in 1973. In that year, a Pennsylvania pastor named John T. Galloway Jr. wrote the book *The Gospel According to Superman* – though Galloway specifies that his book was *not* written to “find the gospel in Superman,” but “find the gospel where it can best be found – in scripture and in the changed lives of Christians.”³ The book’s back-cover says: “Superman is the perfect man-made ‘god.’ He is available to help in a crisis, he never makes any demands, and he never intrudes into anyone’s life.” Galloway thinks that there are inherent problems with comparing Christ to other figures; he cites an old news article that drew attention to how none other than US president than Richard Nixon was born in a farming community to a father who practiced carpentry!⁴ He thinks that, unlike Jesus, Superman is a man-made “projection,” but only Jesus can bring eternal life.⁵ In other words, Galloway thinks that Superman is a fantasy, but Jesus is a reality who is the only means to salvation. He compares Superman saving people to “foxhole Christianity” – the type of faith that exists only in a time of crisis, but does not last after or result in a consistent commitment.⁶ In the book, Galloway rhetorically asks: “Wouldn’t life be a lot simpler if we had a Superman to do for us what the *Man of Steel* does for Jimmy Olsen? The inner man, left to itself, will produce such a self-satisfying Superman god.”⁷ Galloway recalls that he saw an image of a composite Superman/Jesus figure in public, and thought to himself that, “this younger generation seems hopelessly fouled up . . . How can anyone confuse the powerful steel hero with the meek suffering servant?”⁸ This book is important early evidence for the fact that some Christians were suspicious about comparing Superman and Jesus. It may not be a coincidence that this book was written not long after early productions of the musical *Godspell*, where, as early as 1971, Jesus wore a Superman shirt.⁹

A few years later, in 1978, John Wesley White wrote *The Man from Krypton: The Gospel According to Superman*.¹⁰ White’s book is an alarmist take on the decline of western culture at the hands of Satan. He writes that the antichrist “will both compare and be in contrast to Jesus Christ,” just as “Superman can be both compared and contrasted to both!”¹¹ White does not necessarily prove these claims in his book. The book often takes short anecdotes from the first theatrical Superman film (released in 1978) – usually at the start of a chapter – as a springboard to tangentially critique modern culture with almost no further reference to

Superman. For example, chapter 9 references Superman capturing some criminals, only to spend the rest of the chapter expositing biblical passages about how God will one day judge the world.¹² Compared with Galloway's book, White is not necessarily contemptuous of Superman, but he does not praise the character at length either. In fact, it seems as though his book was using a relevant popular film to talk about Christianity, without engaging the two in much depth. Unlike some Christians in later decades, White does not use Superman's story itself as an explicit evangelistic tool by drawing comparisons to Jesus; he simply wrote a book that reflected the popularity of a film and used it as a *segue* to write about the Gospel.

Other Christians in the 1970s reflect an ambiguous or hostile attitude to Superman and Jesus parallels. For example, in a 1979 interview, the Reverend Kenneth Reichley from a New York Lutheran church said that "the Word became flesh, not steel," and that, "Superman is magic. He manipulates fate and history . . . Jesus is not magic. He works within history."¹³ This quotation is noteworthy not so much for the argument itself, but as further testimony for the fact that Christians were suspicious of comparing Superman to Jesus. Reichley was not the only Christian to see things this way, although some took it much further.

When the first Superman movie came out in 1978, it was intended "to have religious resonance," and on one level, the Christian parallels could make for compelling Sunday school conversations, articles, and editorials.¹⁴ That appears to have been the motivation for using some of the Christian symbolism in that film. In the film, when Superman was a baby, his father Jor-El (Marlon Brando) sent him to Earth in a rocket ship to save the planet – but also because his home planet of Krypton was about to explode. In essence, the use of Christian symbolism in the film was not organic to the Superman source material, but the film used Christian symbolism to generate more attention and discussion in popular culture. Even so, not all of that attention was positive. Some biblical literalists thought the film's implied parallels between Jor-El and Superman with God the Father and Jesus were blasphemous. The film's director, Richard Donner, even received death threats. "Studio security brought them to my attention," Donner said, "Some of them were just nuts, fanatics. There was talk of blood running in the streets."¹⁵ The existence of these death threats demonstrates again that some Christians were concerned about comparisons between Superman and Jesus (even if these threats were from a fringe group). The filmmakers nonetheless included the parallels to have

resonance in popular culture.

Though not a Christian, *Superman: The Movie* writer Tom Mankiewicz said that the film gave “the Christian message: that we should be honest, love one another, and be for the underdog.”¹⁶ That statement is an obvious simplification of Christianity, but it shows that the screenwriter had Christianity in mind when he wrote the film. Marco Arnaudo writes that the film gives a Christological depiction of Superman that is close to “preachiness.”¹⁷ It is not particularly subtle. That observation is proven by the writer’s own statements, as Mankiewicz said, “I tried hard to have Brando symbolize God in that long speech when he sends Clark down to Earth. ‘I have sent them you, my only son.’ If that’s not God sending Christ to Earth, it’s as close as you can get without offending the church-going public.”¹⁸ Later in the film, a hologram of the deceased Jor-El tells his son, “They can be a great people, Kal-El, if they wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all, their capacity for good, I have sent them you . . . my only son.”¹⁹ This phrasing is evocative of the first chapter of the Gospel of John.²⁰ Weldon describes Jor-El’s words as “paraphrased gospel that was the last thing on Siegel and Shuster’s mind when they created their rabble-raising costumed bruiser.”²¹ Weldon’s quote is significant because he recognizes, again, that although this film was imposing Christian language onto the Superman source material, that influence was not there in the earliest versions of the character. It largely originated with this film. Still, as Tom De Haven writes, the overarching Jesus/God connections are not perfect because:

If this is God sending his only Son to the world, then what kind of Supreme Being is Jor-El? . . . He’s about to *die*. He waited too long and didn’t build a rocket large enough for the whole family; yes, he leaves a hologram to give his only son moral instruction upon reaching adulthood, but it’s a *hologram*, it’s not a *father*, or a Father either.²²

These words acknowledge the limitations of the allegory. While Jor-El is supposed to represent God in the film, the fact remains that he is not alive, and speaks to his son only in the form of a hologram; he is thus not like God the “Father” in this regard, or even a living “father.” Superman would not have been sent to Earth if his home world was not going to be destroyed. Therefore, the film’s attempt to add a connection to Jesus in this

part of the story does not fit neatly with the source material, where the primary motivation was simply *survival*. In this regard, Superman's story has a much closer parallel to the sending of the baby Moses down the Nile.²³

While the third and fourth Superman films did not use Jesus imagery, the 2001 pilot episode of the television series *Smallville* (a show about Clark Kent in high school) did.²⁴ I would argue that the decision to include Christian imagery in this series was built on the foundation of the 1978 film. In any case, in that pilot episode, as part of a high school hazing ritual carried out by the football players, Clark Kent is stripped almost naked and tied to a wooden cross as that year's "scarecrow"; he is unable to resist because one of the players unknowingly has a necklace made of Kryptonite.²⁵ The scene portrays the future Superman in a crucified Jesus pose and this image was used in promotional materials for the show.²⁶ Stephen Skelton compares the way Clark is mocked by his fellow high school students to how Christ was mocked on the cross.²⁷ *Smallville* co-creator Al Gough had not expected the show's marketers to emphasize the Jesus image in the show's ad campaign as much as they did; while Gough admitted that the show "heightened" the Jesus parallel, he said that "when we saw that campaign, we were shocked. We thought they were going to crucify *us* for this. But it was really compelling and people remember that campaign."²⁸ Gough's words are notable because they testify to the fact that it was financially profitable to sell Superman as a Christ figure at this time. Having said this, *Smallville* producer Ken Horton said that after the first episode, the show would be more subtle in its use of religious imagery because "we also knew it was dangerous . . . there's a line you don't cross."²⁹ Horton does not define what that line is, but at the very least, it is significant to note that there is no evidence that the *Smallville* staff ever faced death threats for using Christian imagery the way that Donner did in 1978.

The 2006 film *Superman Returns* also used Jesus imagery, repurposing some of Marlon Brando's lines as Jor-El from *Superman: The Movie*, including those with Trinitarian or Christological significance (such as "the son becomes the father," and "I have sent them you . . . my only son").³⁰ Early in *Superman Returns*, Superman falls into his adoptive mother Martha's arms after a return home from space, and director Bryan Singer confirmed that that shot of Superman and his mother "was very much inspired" by the *Pietà*.³¹ Later, when weakened by Kryptonite,

Superman is brutally beaten up by Lex Luthor and his thugs in a manner recalling Christ's flogging by the Romans.³² Luthor stabs Superman with a shard of green Kryptonite, and this is meant to parallel how Jesus's body is stabbed in John 19:34.³³ Jesus had to wear a scarlet or purple robe as he was beaten (Matt 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-20, John 19:2-5), and Superman's cape perhaps fills a similar visual function.³⁴ Luthor has built his own continent using Kryptonian technology and wants to use it to destroy much of the United States. Although Superman throws the continent into space, he is weakened by the Kryptonite, falls to Earth in an obvious crucifix pose, and is rushed to hospital close to death.³⁵ *Superman Returns* has an "overt messianic subtext," as when Superman falls to the earth in the crucifix pose, it is "a deafeningly obvious reference to Christ's crucifixion."³⁶ Superman is meant to be understood as a Christ figure rather than antichrist, since he is the hero of the story. In the hospital, the doctors look at his Kryptonite stab wound as his pulse flatlines; Singer compared this to Christ being taken down from the cross after his stabbing in John's gospel.³⁷ Despite Superman's "death," he "rises," leaving the white sheets in his hospital bed empty – just as Jesus left behind his tomb in Luke 24:2-3 and his linen in John 20:6-7.³⁸ In *Time* magazine, Richard Corliss even titled his review of the film "The Gospel of Superman."³⁹ Singer told *Christianity Today* that Superman was like Jesus because "Superman is a savior."⁴⁰ In the film, Superman left the world for five years and, when he was gone, a bitter Lois Lane wrote an article about how the world *did not need* Superman. But he told her, "You wrote that the world doesn't need a savior . . . but every day I hear people crying for one."⁴¹ While this wording is superficial in some respects, and only references Superman saving people in danger, the use of the word "savior" carries clear intertextual associations with Jesus.

When discussing this film, Singer said, "if you're going to tell that story, you've got to tell it all the way. You've got scourging at the pillar, the spear of destiny, death, resurrection – it's all there."⁴² This quotation is significant because he is saying that the plot of the latter half of the film is deliberately modeled on Christ's passion – much like the death of Aslan in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.⁴³ Singer recalls a conversation with one of the film's screenwriters who had attended Catholic school. After the screenwriter first saw the rough cut of Superman falling in the crucifix pose, he asked,

“Are we . . . ? Are we . . . ? Shouldn’t he open his legs a little bit more? Are we . . . ? Is this too on the nose?” And [Singer] said, “If we’re telling this story, we’re going to tell this story. Some parts are going to be subtle. But this one is not . . . But if there was ever a time to hammer it home, this is it.”⁴⁴

These words prove that the filmmaker deliberately wanted to compare Superman and Jesus. Yet that comparison was not necessarily intrinsic to the comic book source material.

That same year (2006) – unlike Galloway’s 1973 book – Stephen Skelton’s book *The Gospel According to the World’s Greatest Superhero* turned Superman into an *evangelistic tool*. While in the 1970s, Christians were suspicious of comparing Superman to Jesus, Skelton (and by extension some of his reading audience) was open to talking about Superman as a means to reach out to non-Christians. As Skelton writes:

the story of Superman bears some incredible parallels to the story of the Super Man, Jesus Christ . . . Perhaps you have mostly thought of Christ as the suffering lamb. Why not the universal Hero? Jesus is both – as we will use Superman to illustrate . . . Because the gospel story is the crucial story by which all humankind longs to define their lives, to the extent that the Superman story corresponds to the gospel story, the superhero from Krypton offers some soul’s illumination, some heart’s preparation.⁴⁵

In an interview, Skelton recalled how a non-Christian friend saw *Superman Returns* and said: “Do you know that movie spoke more to me about Jesus than *The Passion of the Christ*?”⁴⁶ Skelton adds that *The Passion of the Christ* “was obviously about Jesus Christ, and so it was easily dismissed by a non-believer.”⁴⁷ Skelton says of his friend’s reaction that *Superman Returns* “spoke to his heart before he realized what it was saying” and “spoke to him about the one true Savior before he could reject that he needs a one true savior.”⁴⁸ The “one true savior” in question is Jesus. In sum, Christians like Skelton believed that by talking about a Superman movie, they could make people who were initially resistant to Christianity come to appreciate it more. This is an obvious change from John Galloway Jr. or the “Christians” who sent Richard Donner death threats. It seems that by 2006, some Christians were less concerned with the possibility that Superman and Jesus parallels were blasphemous and

more willing to use them to appeal to the hearts and minds of unbelievers to convert them.

The next Superman movie had equally obvious Jesus parallels. Before writing the music for the 2013 Superman film *Man of Steel*, composer Hans Zimmer wrote music for the *History* channel miniseries *The Bible*. When CNN asked Zimmer if there were any similarities between the two, “Zimmer laughed and said, ‘Yes. Yes is the answer. Once you see Superman, you’ll see how close you are with your question.’”⁴⁹ When *Man of Steel* was released in theatres, marketers from Warner Brothers invited church leaders to free screenings of the film and sent pastors nine pages of sermon notes titled, “Jesus: The Original Superhero.”⁵⁰ The sermon notes advised pastors to show the film’s trailer during their sermons and ask people to consider, “How might the story of Superman awaken our passion for the greatest hero who ever lived and died and rose again [Jesus]?”⁵¹ A Baltimore pastor named Quentin Scott said he intended to preach on the film, saying, “When I sat and listened to the movie I actually saw it was the story of Christ, and the love of God was weaved into the story.”⁵² Considering that Superman murders a Kryptonian criminal in the film by breaking his neck, not all of Superman’s actions in the movie fit into that paradigm. Regardless, Scott added, “If you give me another opportunity to talk to someone about Jesus Christ, and I can do that because of your movie, that’s a win for me, because it is about spreading the Gospel.”⁵³ These words are significant because they further reflect the arguments made in Skelton’s 2006 book. Conversely, a deacon named P. J. Wenzel from Dublin Baptist Church in Ohio said, “Any pastor who thinks using ‘Man of Steel Ministry Resources’ is a good Sunday morning strategy must have no concept of how high the stakes are, or very little confidence in the power of God’s word and God’s spirit.”⁵⁴ He added, “As they entertain their congregants with material pumped out from Hollywood’s sewers, lives are kept in bondage, and people’s souls are neglected.”⁵⁵ Wenzel’s point is that using Superman to talk about Jesus shows a lack of confidence in the power of God and scripture, whereas others would argue that a discussion of Superman could be used as a bridge to talk about Jesus.

Despite the reservations of people like Wenzel, it seems that some Christians had no problem with using Superman to evangelize – even though these Christians acknowledged that the sermon notes amounted to a marketing ploy on the studio’s part. Quentin Scott acknowledged Warner

Brothers's financial motivations for sending the sermon notes (the studio had done the same thing for other films), but said: "They're using us but in fact we're using them."⁵⁶ Christian film reviewer Ted Baehr told CNN, "I think it's a very good thing that Hollywood is paying attention to the Christian marketplace."⁵⁷ Hollywood made more of an effort to market to Christians after Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* unexpectedly made \$370 million domestically in 2003.⁵⁸ The success of that film encouraged film studios to market films to Christians in new ways. A Superman film fell in that framework. Again, while the Jesus imagery was not essential to the comic book version of Superman, the studio exploited it to appeal to a wider audience.

Craig Detweiler, the president of the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, wrote the Superman sermon notes. "All too often," Detweiler argued, "religious communities have been defined by what they're against. With a movie like *Man of Steel*, this is a chance to celebrate a movie that affirms faith, sacrifice and service."⁵⁹ Although Detweiler was a piece of the studio's strategy to make millions of dollars off a Superman film, he at least was not being disingenuous. He did believe in what he was doing. In the sermon notes, he wrote: "What Jesus and Superman both give us, through their 'hero' actions but also their 'human' actions – is hope."⁶⁰ In *Christianity Today*, Detweiler defended his decision to write sermon notes for a Hollywood Superman movie by comparing his task to Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dreams (in Daniel 2) or Philip interpreting the Book of Isaiah for the Ethiopian eunuch (in Acts 8).⁶¹ Detweiler compared modern Christians in secular America to the Jews in exile during the Babylonian Captivity (*greatly* overstating the plight of the former), and said he wanted "to affirm" Hollywood's "interest" in Christians:

Hollywood is testing our faith. Thanks to thousands of responsive pastors and congregations, the studios are discovering we are as large, vibrant, diverse, and influential as we claim to be . . . The faith, hope and love that arises along with these stories may even get us back on our feet, marching out of exile.⁶²

Thus, the author of the Superman sermon notes – along with those who used them – essentially believed that Christians should *take advantage* of the fact that Hollywood was marketing to them, in order to bring the Gospel to the surrounding society. Even so, not all Christians would

approve. Ironically, when *Superman Returns* was released in 2006, an anonymous *Christianity Today* writer praised Warner Brothers for *not* targeting that earlier film to Christians, and wrote:

Thank you for not using the church as a money-making vehicle.
Thank you for not hijacking my church's mission to make disciples by using it to make consumers . . .
Thank you for not trying to interfere with the ministry of preaching God's Word by offering pastors rewards for mentioning your film in a sermon.
Thank you for not telling me "Superman Returns" is the greatest outreach opportunity in the galaxy.
Thank you for not asking me to rent an entire theater so our members can invite non-Christians to see the film.
Thank you for respecting the integrity of my faith.⁶³

This anonymous author was likely not amused by the studio's approach to *Man of Steel*. Elsewhere, in *Christianity Today*, Alicia Cohn wrote that "Superman Isn't Jesus" and criticized the parallels.⁶⁴ Such articles demonstrate that while many pastors were quite willing to use Superman as a vehicle to talk about Jesus, not all Christians liked the concept. On that point, Jonathan Merritt wrote that sermon notes for a Superman film made him,

a little uncomfortable because it represents another step forward in the commodification of Christianity. In a land of profit and greed, these trends illustrate once again that unchecked capitalism can leverage anything – even faith, even Jesus – to turn a buck . . . Let's be clear that Warner Brothers isn't trying to spread the Christian gospel; they are trying to make a profit. And, whether we like it or not, religion in America can be a lucrative business. In this case, generating profit means transforming pastors into marketers, hocking movie tickets from their pulpits.⁶⁵

Merritt presents the opposite side of the argument by asking one fundamental question: is it right for Christians to ally themselves with a studio that is interested in profits for the purpose of winning new converts? There is no easy answer. Christians like Scott, Detweiler, or Skelton would likely argue that winning souls for Christ is more important than anything

else, while someone like Merritt would not want to feel like he was being taken advantage of by a multinational corporation. Either way, one comic book website said that it “comes off as a money grab” and asked if making Superman a Jesus figure broke the Ten Commandments (both by making him another god and making a graven image).⁶⁶ This attitude shows that the studio’s marketing aims could be looked upon with cynicism in the wider culture.

The sermon notes for the Superman film must be understood as simply one component in a larger marketing strategy by Warner Brothers. This is because *Man of Steel* partnered with 7-Eleven, Carl’s Jr./Hardee’s, Chrysler, Energizer, Gillette, IHOP, Kellogg’s, LEGO, Mattel, Nokia, Norton, Samsung, Sears, Twizzlers, Walmart, and more than a hundred companies in total to promote the film, and the film itself was notable for its obvious product placements in several scenes – particularly in one fight scene in Kansas where several prominent chains appear onscreen during the battle.⁶⁷ Churches were another part of that moneymaking strategy. In fact, just as certain Christians and churches thought they could use a Superman film to *recruit new members*, evidently, the U.S. National Guard thought the same thing – and the National Guard partnered with the filmmakers and used images from the movie with the tagline “Soldier of Steel” to attract their own batch of new recruits.⁶⁸ In the film, Superman teams up with American soldiers to save the world, so, in effect, the use of sermon notes in *Man of Steel* is similar to the studio’s mutually beneficial partnership with the National Guard. Again, despite the fact that the studio’s transparent motivation was to make money, clearly, many of the Christian speakers I have quoted believed that the larger aim of winning souls to Christ was more important.

Although the film tries to use Christian imagery, some contemporary observers did not see much depth in the portrayals. The journalist Wesley Morris wrote:

The movie is so serious about comparing Clark to the Messiah that it starts to feel like church. Yet the filmmaking and storytelling lack the essential biblicality to bring off a divine incarnation of Superman. We see him perform feats of life saving and enemy pummeling, but they’re so generic that they mean far less than they should.⁶⁹

Similarly, in Richard Corliss’s review, he observed that the film gave

Superman an all-seeing father from afar [the hologram version of Jor-El] . . . the Earth parents; an important portent at age 12 (Jesus talks with the temple elders; Kal-El saves children in a bus crash); the ascetic wandering in his early maturity (40 days in the desert for Jesus; a dozen years in odd jobs for Kal-El); his public life, in which he performs a series of miracles; and then, at age 33, the ultimate test of his divinity and humanity.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, Corliss adds, “All these New Testament allusions . . . don’t necessarily make *Man of Steel* any richer, except for students of comparative religion.”⁷¹ Essentially, Morris and Corliss argue that the Jesus imagery in the film does not enhance the viewing experience.

The reactions of such critics may be proof of the fact that these connections are not essential to the character of Superman but were simply used as shorthand with wide pop culture resonance. The films are aimed at a much wider audience than the comics, so they use imagery that is automatically recognized by the surrounding culture – even by those elements that are not Christian. However, Jeff Jensen reads more into the film, arguing that,

Man of Steel is subversive mythology for atheists that exalt a Superman who behaves the way they think God should but doesn’t. He is also stands [sic] for a generation of emerging Christians who are more interested in social justice, redeeming the culture and tending to the here and now, and less interested in preaching turn-or-burn rhetoric, running away from the world, and punching the clock until they can kick the bucket and go to Krypton . . . errr, Heaven.⁷²

Jensen’s argument is not grounded in any direct statements from the filmmakers, but it is theoretically possible that members of the viewing audience could interpret the film as he suggests. At the very least, his words rightfully reflect that the use of Jesus imagery in the film is not grounded in any attempt to be reverential to Jesus (unlike a C. S. Lewis novel). David S. Goyer, the writer of the film, is Jewish.⁷³

One problem with making Superman a Christ figure is that the parallel might break down to keep up with the demands of a modern superhero action movie. The final fight in *Man of Steel* has a great deal of collateral damage and many buildings are destroyed. As Mark Waid describes the film’s ending (with some exaggeration):

Superman and Lois land in the three-mile-wide crater that used to be a city of eight million people, and the staff of the Planet and a couple of other bystanders stagger out of the rubble to see Superman and say, “He saved us,” and before you can say either “From what?” or “Wow, these eight are probably the only people left alive,” and somehow – inexplicably, implausibly, somehow – before Superman can be bothered to take one second to surrender one ounce of concern or assistance to the millions of Metropolitans who are without question still buried under all that rubble, dead or dying, he saunters lazily over to where General Zod is kneeling and moping, and they argue, and they squabble, and they break into the Third Big Fight, the one that broke my heart.⁷⁴

Waid’s sarcastic depiction of the scene indirectly shows the limitations of making the hero of a violent action movie an allegorical Jesus figure because when Superman “saves” the world, many people are still killed. As a film marketed to Christians to make money it also had to have action scenes because it was a comic book film. Those aims can sometimes be at odds. Hence, on a related point, Barna William Donovan wrote:

The levels of destruction in the film offended many of the target-marketed American clergy. When it came to the climactic killing of General Zod [by Superman], however, the religious viewers were joined in their outrage by the comic book purists, equally offended by the film’s repudiation of the no-killing maxim of the comics.⁷⁵

In sum, a violent action movie does not always easily fit alongside a movie with Jesus parallels. A blockbuster film like this one is intended to have something for as many viewers as possible, but sometimes there are conflicts with those aims. A film that has to have big-budget action scenes will need to make some shifts in tone to also serve as an allegory of the life of Christ.

In any event, the 2016 film *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* presents Superman as a godlike or messianic figure as well.⁷⁶ As such, the journalist Graeme Macmillan drew attention to the fact that *Batman v Superman* was deliberately released in theatres on *Good Friday* in 2016, because it is a film that shows Superman dying for the world in a way that is meant to be like the sacrificial death of Christ.⁷⁷ In other words, the

studio again made certain marketing decisions with Christians partly in mind – and not because these parallels were essential to the original character of Superman.

The Jesus comparisons in these Superman films can go only so far: once Superman dies and rises from the dead, what comes next? After all, film studios will want to make movies about such a popular character for a long time. Macmillan asks: “Can the allegory expand beyond where it already is, and if so, can it do so without damaging or subsuming the idea of Superman as an action hero?”⁷⁸ These questions offer no easy answers, but Superman’s “resurrection” in *Justice League* (the 2017 follow-up film) is not Christlike; Superman is brought back to life by some other super-heroes using alien technology (a “Motherbox”), and when Superman wakes up, he does not understand what is going on, goes berserk, and fights the other heroes until his lover Lois Lane calms him down.⁷⁹ The lack of Christ imagery in *Justice League* seems to acknowledge that once Superman has died and risen from the dead (as he has in multiple movies now), there is less iconic Jesus imagery for the filmmakers to use without getting redundant. I will hypothesize that they will give this imagery a rest in Superman films for the foreseeable future for that very reason. Not every Superman movie can have a plot that will lend itself to sermon notes.

Ultimately, in this essay, I have argued that Jesus parallels in Superman films are not always artistically coherent and are imposed on the character often to appeal to a mass audience. In addition, over time, some – but not all – Christians have become more comfortable with using Superman movies to help spread the Gospel. Previously, some Christians had written books criticizing the use of parallels between Superman and Jesus (such as Galloway) or made other types of incendiary responses to such parallels. Even so, there are moral ambiguities when churches are exploited by film marketers and the church is used to sell a product for a corporation. Christians have become a target audience for studios to market to. Yet at this point, it is unclear if there will be more pushback to these marketing strategies in churches if they continue in the coming years. Christians who find themselves targeted by the studios will need to reflect on the ambiguity of their situation.

To that end, in his book *Redeeming Pop Culture: A Kingdom Approach*, the theologian T.M. Moore tells a story about how he once gave a talk related to Christianity where he used examples from the 1999 film *Fight Club*.⁸⁰ After his talk, a college-aged young man said that these

examples had helped his understanding greatly.⁸¹ The young man said: “I was struggling to stay with you up to that point, but when you talked about that film, everything just seemed to fall into place.”⁸² Consequently, Moore writes that “like Paul in Athens,” Christians should take advantage of everyday conversations about popular culture, and use the things people find meaningful to work in references to the gospel.⁸³ Moore adds:

The often cited example of Paul in Athens (Acts 17) is worth reviewing here. As he went about the city and dialogued with people in various settings, Paul came to understand what occupied their minds and filled their hearts . . . When he began to preach to them, he did not regale them with biblical texts or theological premises; rather, having first complimented them for their zeal in spiritual matters, he addressed the crowds in language familiar to them, quoting from their cultural sources and using these to illustrate truths that he wished to make known. He did not neglect to proclaim Jesus, but he built a bridge of cultural identification with them, over which he marched the great truths of the gospel for their review. His example and teaching must be instructive for us as well, as we seek grace to renew and redeem our witness for Christ amid the kudzu of American popular culture.⁸⁴

Moore’s arguments appear to have some relevance to the issue of the churches’ relationship to Superman films. Yet one could argue another way. For example, in 1963, Bishop John A.T. Robinson’s controversial theological book *Honest to God* was published.⁸⁵ Many reviewers criticized Robinson for being too liberal in his theology and for being too willing to accommodate the secular world.⁸⁶ Even so, in the book, Robinson compares his task to Paul’s visit to Athens in the Book of Acts.⁸⁷ Yet when reviewing this book in 1963, the pastor A. Leonard Griffith wrote of Robinson that,

It is interesting that the author should refer to the one sermon that Paul preached in Athens. It was the only occasion where the Apostle tried to meet intellectuals on their own ground, the only time when he started with their presuppositions and moved on to a statement of the Gospel. Normally he began with the Gospel itself and preached so persuasively that his listeners had to alter their presuppositions. Paul did not succeed in Athens; it was the one major city in the ancient

world where he failed to sow the seeds of a Christian Church.⁸⁸

Griffith may have overstated his case and also overlooked other reasons why Paul did not succeed in Athens; after all, Paul did not spend nearly as much time there as he did in some of the other places on his missionary journeys. Yet if nothing else, in applying such a critique to the topic of Superman films, it remains to be seen if Christian churches can be successful in attracting new members by accommodating themselves to the marketing tactics of major film studios as they promote films such as *Man of Steel*.

Endnotes

1. Will Murray, "Superman's Editor Mort Weisinger," in *The Krypton Companion*, ed. Michael Eury (Raleigh: Two Morrows Publishing, 2006), 11.
2. Murray, "Superman's Editor Mort Weisinger," 11.
3. John T. Galloway Jr., *The Gospel According to Superman* (Philadelphia and New York: A.J. Holman Company, 1973), 9.
4. Galloway, *The Gospel According to Superman*, 28.
5. Galloway, *The Gospel According to Superman*, 96-9, 122.
6. Galloway, *The Gospel According to Superman*, 103-4.
7. Galloway, *The Gospel According to Superman*, 41. In the comics, Superman's friend Jimmy owns a watch with a high-pitched frequency only Superman can hear, so that if Jimmy is in danger, Superman can rescue him.
8. Galloway, *The Gospel According to Superman*, 18.
9. See Larry Tye, *Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero* (New York: Random House, 2012), 68; and Michael Eury, "Dennis O'Neil Interview," in *Krypton Companion*, 119.
10. John Wesley White, *The Man from Krypton: The Gospel According to Superman* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1978).
11. White, *The Man from Krypton*, 8.
12. White, *The Man from Krypton*, 149-65. Granted, White compares Superman saving people on a bridge to Jesus making a "bridge between God and man" (171).

13. George W. Cornell, "Superman/Jesus Similarities Explained," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1979. Magic is actually one of Superman's weaknesses.
14. Tye, *Superman*, 204.
15. Tye, *Superman*, 203-4. See, also, Richard Donner and Tom Mankiewicz, "Audio Commentary," disc 2, *Superman: The Movie*, DVD, directed by Richard Donner (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures), 2001.
16. Quoted in White, *The Man from Krypton*, 13-14.
17. Marco Arnaudo, *The Myth of the Superhero*, trans. Jamie Richards (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 47.
18. Jake Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood: How Fiendish Producers, Devious Directors, and Warring Writers Grounded an American Icon* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2008), 72. Mankiewicz said that there were "obvious allusions to God sending Christ to Earth." See Donner and Mankiewicz, "Audio Commentary," *Superman: The Movie*. Another screenwriter who worked on the film, named David Newman, said: "It begins with a father who lives up in heaven, who says, 'I will send my only son to save earth.' The son takes on the guise of a man but is not a man. The religious overtones are so clear." See Otto Friedrich, "Up, Up, and Awaay!!!" *Time*, 24 June 2001, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,148856,00.html>. (The article is listed with a June 2001 date, but appears to have been written in 1988 to commemorate Superman's fiftieth anniversary.) The film's producer Ilya Salkind commented on the Christological themes, saying, "Brando represents the ultimate good who is sending part of himself to do good things," and even compared Superman's Kryptonian mother to the virgin Mary. See Ilya Salkind and Pierre Spengler, "Audio Commentary," disc 1, *Superman: The Movie*, DVD, directed by Richard Donner (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures), 2001.
19. *Superman: The Movie*, directed by Richard Donner (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1978).
20. Tye, *Superman*, 68, 203-4.
21. Glen Weldon, *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 188.
22. Tom De Haven, *Our Hero: Superman on Earth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 179.

23. Much has been written about the parallels between Superman and Moses. Larry Tye writes: “much as the baby prophet was floated in a reed basket by a mother desperate to spare him from an Egyptian Pharaoh’s death warrant, so Kal-El’s doomed parents, moments before their planet blew up, tucked him into a spaceship that rocketed him to the safety of Earth. Both babies were rescued by non-Jews and raised in foreign cultures – Moses by Pharaoh’s daughter, Kal-El by Kansas farmers named Kent – and the adoptive parents quickly learned how exceptional their foundlings were . . . al-El’s escape to Earth was the story of Exodus.” See Tye, *Superman*, 65-6, 68. See Stephen Skelton, *The Gospel According to the World’s Greatest Superhero* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2006), 46. See, also, *Look, up in the Sky: The Amazing Story of Superman*, directed by Kevin Burns (Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2006); Harry Brod, *Superman Is Jewish? How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 9; Friedrich, “Up, Up, and Awaay!!!”; Anton K. Kozlovic, “The Unholy Biblical Subtexts and Other Religious Elements Built into *Superman: The Movie* (1978) and *Superman II* (1981),” *Journal of Religion and Film* 7, No. 1 (2003): 25-6; Christopher Knowles, *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes* (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2007), 123, n. 102; Simcha Weinstein, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey! How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero* (Baltimore: Leviathan Press, 2006), 15, 26; De Haven, *Our Hero*, 179, 181; Grant Morrison, *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Krypton Can Teach Us about Being Human* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011), 15-16; Greg Garrett, *Holy Superheroes: Exploring the Sacred in Comics, Graphic Novels, and Film*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 19; Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008), 14; David Hopkins, “A History of Violence,” in *The Man from Krypton: A Closer Look at Superman*, eds. Glenn Yeffeth and Smart Pop (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2005), 9-21; Ken Schenck, “Superman: A Popular Culture Messiah,” in *The Gospel According to Superheroes: Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. B.J. Oropeza (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 33-48; David Welky, *Everything Was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 133; Weldon, *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*, 17-18; Jason Cohen, “Bendis Signals a Welcome Return to Superman’s Jewish Roots,” *CBR*, 2 February 2018, <https://www.cbr.com/bendis-dc-superman-jewish-roots/>; Marcy Oster, “DC Comics’ Newest Writer Is Poised to Make Superman Jewish Again,” *The Times of Israel*, 17 February 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/dc-comics-newest-writer-is-poised-to-make-superman-jewish-again/>; Brad Ricca, *Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster – The Creators of Superman* (New

York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 131; Salkind and Spengler, "Audio Commentary," *Superman: The Movie*. Martin Lund acknowledges the existence of parallels to figures like Moses but downplays the Jewish aspects of such parallels and points out that "these figures have long been common to Western culture in general." See Martin Lund, *Re-Constructing the Man of Steel: Superman 1938-1941, Jewish American History, and the Invention of the Jewish – Comics Connection* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 12. Lund argues that Superman's task is more global than Moses and also downplays other Moses parallels (such as Clark Kent's stuttering) (74-8, 182). Lund denies that having Clark Kent's parents tell him to fight for good is comparable to Moses meeting God, as some have claimed (74). To see the case for these claims, see Weinstein, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey*, 26-7. Later Superman writers exploited a Moses connection that was – at the very least, latent. For example, in the 1990s *Superman* animated series, Jonathan Kent shows young Clark Kent the rocket ship they found him in, and prefaces this revelation by saying, "You know how some babies are found in baskets?" *Superman: The Animated Series*, "The Last Son of Krypton: Part II," S01, E2, directed by Scott Jeralds and Curt Geda, written by Alan Burnett and Paul Dini, *Kids WB!*, 6 September 1996. In the afterword to Grant Morrison's 2011 retelling of Superman's origin, Morrison explicitly says that Superman's "rocket is Moses' basket," and artist Rags Morales said that he deliberately tried to draw the *shape* of the rocket ship "a little more basket-y." See Grant Morrison and Rags Morales, "Action Comics Sketchbook," in *Superman in Action Comics*, vol. 1, *Superman and the Men of Steel* (New York: DC Comics, 2012), n.p. Michael Uslan taught the first accredited college course on comics after convincing the dean of Indiana University "that Superman and Moses shared an origin story and a teachable moment." See Tye, *Superman*, 211-12.

24. *Smallville* started as a show about Clark Kent in high school and cleverly made the development of his powers a metaphor for puberty. The show would run ten years. For more on this background, see *Look, up in the Sky: The Amazing Story of Superman*, directed by Kevin Burns.
25. See *Smallville*, "Pilot," S01, E1, directed by David Nutter, written by Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, *The WB*, 16 October 2001.
26. See Tye, *Superman*, 68, 275-6; Skelton, *The Gospel According to the World's Greatest Superhero*, 60, 64-5; Brod, *Superman Is Jewish?*, 17; *Look, up in the Sky*, directed by Kevin Burns; Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, 255. The pose drew comparisons to the 1998 murder of the gay college student Matthew Shepard (255).
27. Skelton, *The Gospel According to the World's Greatest Superhero*, 64.

28. *Look, up in the Sky: The Amazing Story of Superman*, directed by Kevin Burns. This image is also on the cover of the DVD boxed set. David Nutter, the director of the episode, stated that he tried to throw in as many Jesus metaphors as possible; in addition to the “crucifixion” scene, he likened another scene where Clark speaks to his father as a “Sermon on the Mount” pose. See Alfred Gough, Miles Millar, and David Nutter, “Audio Commentary,” disc 1, “Pilot,” directed by David Nutter, *Smallville: The Complete First Season*, DVD (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures, 2003).
29. Tye, *Superman*, 276.
30. *Superman Returns*, directed by Bryan Singer (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures, 2006).
31. See Stephen Skelton, “Superman Returns (2006),” *Hollywood Jesus*, n.d., <http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/superman-returns-2006/>. This interview can also be found as Stephen Skelton, “Exclusive Interview with ‘Superman Returns’ Director Bryan Singer ‘The Messiah of Metropolis,’” *Dove.org*, 29 November 2006, <http://www.dove.org/exclusive-interview-with-superman-returns-director-bryan-singer/>. See also Weldon, *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*, 305.
32. See Matt 27:26, Mark 15:15, and John 19:1. See Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 21,
33. *Superman Returns*, directed by Bryan Singer; and Weldon, *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*, 305.
34. *Superman Returns*, directed by Bryan Singer. In this film, the red in his costume is darker than usual.
35. *Superman Returns*, directed by Bryan Singer. Earlier, he has a brief crucifix-like pose as he descends to his Arctic Fortress of Solitude.
36. Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, 294. See also Adam Barkman, “Superman: From Anti-Christ to Christ-Type,” in *Superman and Philosophy: What Would the Man of Steel Do?* ed. Mark D. White, Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 117; Weldon, *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*, 305; and Brod, *Superman Is Jewish?* 17.
37. Mark Moring, “The ‘Savior’ Returns,” *Christianity Today*, 26 June 2006, , <https://www.christianitytoday.comct2006juneweonly/bryansinger.html?start=2>
38. *Superman Returns*, directed by Bryan Singer. See Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 21, 116; Weldon, *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*, 305.

39. See Richard Corliss, "The Gospel of Superman," review of *Superman Returns*, directed by Bryan Singer, *Time*, 26 June 2006. For more on the messianic symbolism but also the film's relationship to American exceptionalism, see Jason Dittmer, "American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post 9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 1 (2011): 114-30.
40. Moring, "The 'Savior' Returns." Singer said that Superman is a "Judeo-Christian" allegorical figure, "right up to the fact that he descends from the heavens." See *Look, up in the Sky*, directed by Kevin Burns. Larry Tye writes that *Superman Returns* tried to show that Superman "still mattered" and the film "revisited the Christ story by looking at whether society still wanted and needed a savior." See Tye, *Superman*, 286.
41. *Superman Returns*, directed by Bryan Singer.
42. Skelton, "Superman Returns (2006)"; Skelton, "Exclusive Interview with 'Superman Returns' Director Bryan Singer."
43. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950).
44. Skelton, "Superman Returns (2006)"; Skelton, "Exclusive Interview with 'Superman Returns' Director Bryan Singer." Before the film was released, *Superman Returns* screenwriters Michael Dougherty and Dan Harris acknowledged that the film would look at the "messianic" and godlike dimensions of Superman and how those concepts transferred to the modern world. See Steve Younis, "Superman Returns Set Visit Report – Part 2 (of 12)," *Superman Homepage*, 28 July 2005, <https://www.supermanhomepage.com/movies/movies.php?topic=set-visit-report2>. They also acknowledged the film's use of "Christian mythology." See Evan Jacobs, "Dan Harris & Michael Dougherty Talk about Writing Superman Returns," *MovieWeb*, 28 June 2006, <https://movieweb.com/dan-harris-michael-dougherty-talk-about-writing-superman-returns/>. Years later, Bryan Singer reflected: "I've always felt that the origin of Superman is the story of Moses – the child sent on a ship to fulfill a destiny. And this was a story about Christ – it's all about sacrifice . . . So what happens? He gets the knife in the side and later he falls to the earth in the shape of a crucifix. It was kind of nailing you on the head, but I enjoyed that, because I've always found the myth of Christ compelling and moving." See Ed Gross, "SUPERMAN EXCLUSIVE: Bryan Singer Looks Back at Superman Returns," *ComicBookMovie.com*, 25 March 2011, <https://www.comicbookmovie.com/superman/superman-exclusive-bryan-singer-looks-back-at-superman-returns-a33821>. Singer also identified Superman as "part Moses, part Jesus," and reflected on how Superman is an alien and an

immigrant. See Robert David Jaffee, “‘Superman’ Director Lives Out His Dream,” 22 June 2006, *Jewish Journal*, <http://jewishjournal.com/culture/arts/13264/>. Even Singer had limits with the Jesus angle though. Jim Caviezel – fresh off playing Jesus in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of Christ* – was a rumoured candidate to play Superman in Singer’s film, and Superman comics writer Mark Millar even laid a \$1,000 bet that Caviezel would be chosen. See Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, 285. While Caviezel lobbied to play Superman, Singer “disliked the on-the-nose parallels with the actor’s previous project, which the media would surely flog to death” (285).

45. Skelton, *The Gospel According to the World’s Greatest Superhero*, 22. Elsewhere, the Roman Catholic priest John Cush endorsed Superman as a Christ figure and a Catholic cleric in Texas named Bill Necessary was known at his church as “Superdeacon” for his habit of wearing a Superman shirt underneath his clerical attire. See Tye, *Superman*, 69, 267-8. Bud Collyer, who played Superman on the radio in the 1940s Superman radio show (as well as various Superman cartoons), taught Sunday School, and “his Sunday School classes were populated by children eager to hear the testimony of Superman.” See Rossen, *Superman vs. Hollywood*, 4.
46. Hannah Goodwyn, “Superman and Jesus: Superman’s Origin and Parallels to Jesus,” *CBN*, 2016, <http://www1.cbn.com/movies/superman-and-jesus-supermans-origin-and-parallels-jesus>
47. Goodwyn, “Superman and Jesus.”
48. Goodwyn, “Superman and Jesus.”
49. Jennifer Vineyard, “*Man of Steel*: Not the Familiar Superman (Fan)fare,” *CNN*, 5 April 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/04/05/showbiz/zimmer-man-of-steel>
50. Eric Marrapodi, “Superman: Flying to a Church near You,” *CNN Belief Blog*, 14 June 2013, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/06/14/superman-coming-to-a-church-near-you/>. See, also, “*Man of Steel* Marketers Target Christians by Sending Pastors Prepared Sermon Notes That Compare Superman to Jesus Christ,” *DailyMail.com*, 17 June 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2343165/Man-Steel-marketers-target-Christians-sending-pastors-prepared-sermons-compare-Superman-Jesus-Christ.html>
51. Marrapodi, “Superman: Flying to a Church near You”; “*Man of Steel* Marketers Target Christians.”
52. Marrapodi, “Superman: Flying to a Church near You”; “*Man of Steel* Marketers Target Christians.”

53. Marrapodi, "Superman: Flying to a Church near You" "*Man of Steel* Marketers Target Christians."
54. Marrapodi, "Superman: Flying to a Church near You"; "*Man of Steel* Marketers Target Christians."
55. Marrapodi, "Superman: Flying to a Church near You."
56. Marrapodi, "Superman: Flying to a Church near You." The studio had done the same thing for the films *Les Misérables* and *The Blind Side*.
57. Marrapodi, "Superman: Flying to a Church near You."
58. Sharon Waxman, "The Passion of the Marketers," *The New York Times*, 18 July 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/18/business/media/the-passion-of-the-marketers.html>
59. Marrapodi, "Superman: Flying to a Church near You."
60. Quoted in Marrapodi, "Superman: Flying to a Church near You."
61. Craig Detweiler, "Superman: Sermon Notes from Exile," *Christianity Today*, June 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2013/june-online-only/superman-sermon-notes-from-exile.htm>
62. Detweiler, "Superman: Sermon Notes from Exile."
63. "The Second Coming of Superman: Finally, a 'Christian' Movie Not Marketed to Churches," *Christianity Today*, June 2006, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2006/june-online-only/second-coming-of-superman-finally-christian-movie-not.html>
64. Alicia Cohn, "Superman Isn't Jesus," *Christianity Today*, 19 June 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2013/june/superman-isnt-jesus.html>
65. Jonathan Merritt, "Superman Spirituality: Is Hollywood Manipulating Christians?" *Religion News Service*, 18 June 2013, <https://religionnews.com/2013/06/18/is-hollywood-manipulating-christians>
66. Matthew Meylikhov, "Jesus Christ, Superman: How Warner Bros Is Marketing *Man of Steel* to Pastors," *Multiversity Comics*, 17 June 2013, <http://www.multiversitycomics.com/news/jesus-christ-superman-how-warner-bros-is-marketing-man-of-steel-to-pastors>

67. Ryan Pumroy, "Recruiting Soldiers of Steel: The Cross-Promotion of *Man of Steel* and the National Guard," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48, no. 4 (2015): 76-75; Asawin Suabseng, "How the National Guard Is Using *Man of Steel* to Recruit You," *Mother Jones*, 14 June 2013, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/06/man-of-steel-national-guard-product-placement>
68. Ryan Pumroy, "Recruiting Soldiers of Steel"; Suabseng, "How the National Guard Is Using *Man of Steel* to Recruit You."
69. Wesley Morris, "Jesus Christ Superman: *Man of Steel* Flies for Our Sins," *Grantland*, 13 June 2013, <http://grantland.com/features/man-steel-flies-our-sins>
70. Richard Corliss, "*Man of Steel*: Super Man . . . Or Human God?" *Time*, 12 June 2013, <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/06/12/man-of-steel-super-man-or-human-god>
71. Corliss, "*Man of Steel*: Super Man . . . Or Human God?"
72. Jeff Jensen, "Superman as Jesus – Christian Imagery in *Man of Steel*," *Entertainment Weekly*, 17 June 2013, <http://ew.com/article/2013/06/17/man-of-steel-jesus>
73. See Michael Aushenker, "Man of Action," *Jewish Journal*, 28 March 2002, <https://jewishjournal.com/culture/arts/5719>
74. Mark Waid, "*Man of Steel*, since You Asked," *Thrillbent*, 14 June 2013, <http://thrillbent.com/blog/man-of-steel-since-you-asked>
75. Barna William Donovan, "A Superman for Our Time: How the *Man of Steel* Tries to Make Superman Relevant Again – and Why It Succeeds," *Cinephile* 9, no. 2 (2013): 24.
76. *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, directed by Zack Snyder (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures, 2013).
77. Graeme Macmillan, "'Batman v. Superman': The Problem with Turning the Man of Steel into the Son of God," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 25 March 2016, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/batman-v-superman-ending-problem-878463>.
78. Macmillan, "'Batman v. Superman': The Problem with Turning the Man of Steel into the Son of God."
79. *Justice League*, directed by Zack Snyder (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures, 2017). Zack Snyder is the only credited director on *Justice League*, but Joss Whedon filmed a substantial portion of the movie after the tragic death of

Snyder's daughter; Whedon's material has a notably different tone.

80. T.M. Moore, *Redeeming Pop Culture: A Kingdom Approach* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2003), 142.
81. Moore, *Redeeming Pop Culture*, 142.
82. Moore, *Redeeming Pop Culture*, 142.
83. Moore, *Redeeming Pop Culture*, 125.
84. Moore, *Redeeming Pop Culture*, 128.
85. John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963).
86. See the reviews collected in *The Honest to God Debate*, ed. David L. Edwards (London: SCM Press, 1963).
87. Robinson, *Honest to God*, 125-7.
88. A. Leonard Griffith, review of *Honest to God* by John A.T. Robinson, in *The Honest to God Debate*, ed. David L. Edwards (London: SCM Press, 1963), 103.

