The Art of Creative Scriptural Extrapolation

By Anton Karl Kozlovic

THE ART OF CREATIVE SCRIPTURAL EXTRAPOLATION: BITHIAH, MERED AND I CHRONICLES 4:18 WITHIN CECIL B. DE MILLE'S *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS* (1956)

DeMille: Master of the American Biblical Epic

THE LEGENDARY Cecil B. DeMille[1] (1881-1959), affectionately know as "CB," was a seminal co-founder of Hollywood and a progenitor of Paramount studio who helped turn an obscure Californian orange grove into a major US movie production centre that became *the* synonym for filmmaking worldwide.[2] Not only did this pioneering "*auteur* of *auteurs*"[3] help institute "the Age of Hollywood,"[4] and is today considered "one of the comparatively few filmmakers who might justifiably be described as a 'household name'"[5], but he also earned an international reputation as *the* master of the American biblical epic and awarded such honorific tags as: "King of the epic Biblical spectacular,"[6] the "arch apostle of spectacle,"[7] the "high priest of the religious genre,"[8] "the master of the Hollywood religious soap opera,"[9] and the "king of the Bible Belt"[10] amongst many other tantalizing titles. As Steve Jenkins recently mused: "his oft-proclaimed belief in the moral worth of his epics ('Who else - except the missionaries of God - has had our opportunity to make the brotherhood of man not a phrase but a reality?') may well have been as sincere as his passionate post-Second World War campaign against communism."[11] The writer concurs wholeheartedly with this assessment and will show below just how DeMille truly deserves his claim to fame as Hollywood's preeminent biblical artist-cum-cinematic interpreter of the Bible; particularly via his deft deployment of creative scriptural extrapolation - a grossly unappreciated technique within his arsenal of sacred storytelling tactics.

DeMille-the-epic-filmmaker[12] (along with DeMille-the-private-man) was a "devout believer in the Bible who saw himself in the missionary role of making the Scriptures attractive and fascinating to the masses in an age of increasing materialism and heathenism. A deeply committed Episcopalian, he literally accepted every word of the Bible without question,"[13] and so when the paying public, Paramount bosses and hard-nosed financiers would let him, he shined as Hollywood's leading cinematic lay preacher using the silver screen as his sermonising tool. Cecil was so successful at this neo-proselytizing task that one anonymous Protestant church leader enthusiastically proclaimed: "The first century had its Apostle Paul, the thirteenth century had St. Francis, the sixteenth had Martin Luther and the twentieth has Cecil B. DeMille."[14]

As the producer-director of *The Ten Commandments* (1923), *The King of Kings* (1927), *Samson and Delilah* (1949) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956), all of which were watershed films in their respective days, and cultural touchstones in Hollywood history today,[15] DeMille deserved his industry accolades[16] as genius had met genre, whilst nowadays "televised DeMille is essentially the Bible for the TV generation."[17] As Cecil proudly proclaimed near the end of his life: "*my* ministry was making religious movies and getting more people to read the Bible than anyone else ever has,"[18] which was a goal that he achieved magnificently. For example, *The Ten Commandments* (1956) was "seen by approximately 98,500,000"[19] people circa 1959, and of course many times that figure half-a-century later wherein it is considered "the most renowned of the films drawn from the Old Testament,[20] "a triumph of ingenuity in the era of smoke and mirrors,"[21] and "Vivid storytelling at its best."[22] Not too surprisingly, with his erudite page-to-projector adaptations of Holy Writ, DeMille had also significantly assisted the scriptural exegesis profession. As biblical scholar David Jasper claimed:

> In the Hollywood tradition of Old Testament epics ... the cinema has occasionally contributed in a significant way to the history of biblical interpretations, perhaps unwittingly and most notably in the figure of Cecil B. De Mille in films like *Samson and Delilah* (1949) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956) ...[23]

In essence, DeMille had engaged in what today's theologians would call a hermeneutic of creative imagination in his directorial attempt to make sense of the Bible in his declared role as an avowed pop culture

professional.[24] Feminist theologian Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza described this artistic process as follows:

> A hermeneutic of imagination retells biblical stories, re-shapes religious vision, and celebrates those who have brought about change. To that end it does more than utilize historical, literary, and ideological-critical methods, which focus on the rhetoric of religious texts and their historical contexts. It also employs methods of storytelling, role-playing, bibliodrama, Midrash, pictorial arts, dance, meditation, prayer, and ritual for creating a "different" religious imagination...[25]

Only DeMille, Hollywood's "master storyteller and craftsman"[26] created his "different" religious imagination using commercial feature films as his creative palette.

In that artistic process, and wherein *The Ten Commandments* (1956) became "as grandiose a monument to DeMille's style as the pyramids are to the ancient Pharaohs,"[27] Cecil set the standard for the American biblical epic that his peers desperately tried to imitate (or subvert); albeit, usually unsuccessfully. As American film director Howard Hawks ruefully confessed:

> The only one who could do them [biblical epics] was DeMille - and they'd be so horrible that they were good. *Probably because he believed in them* [said Peter Bogdanovich]. Oh, I'm *sure* he did - that was his whole thing. When you think of some of the scenes he made - and yet when you put them together, they worked. He was by far the most popular director that ever lived - he pleased more people. I think a lot of us would have liked to have made stuff that made that kind of money.[28]

Or as movie mogul Darryl F. Zanuck enviously claimed about DeMille's profit power regarding *Samson and Delilah*, "apparently you can open your own mint."[29] Similarly, film critic Michael Sauter enthusiastically proclaimed:

> The fifties were *the* decade of the religious epic: from *Salome* to *Solomon and Sheba*, from *The Robe* to *The Silver Chalice*. But *The Ten Commandments* was something else entirely. It was a C. B. De Mille religious epic. And with this one, the granddaddy of Biblical schlockmeisters topped even himself. If *The Sign of the Cross* set the standard, *The Ten Commandments* broke the mold.[30]

Indeed, it was DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* that film historian Thomas Schatz considered was a "watershed film"[31] that had triggered the 1950-60s rash of biblical epics, and according to classicist Jon Solomon: "DeMille's parting of the Red Sea in 1956 [*The Ten Commandments*] and his Samsonian destruction of the temple of Dagon [in 1949; *Samson and Delilah*] ... will be remembered as the most representative and iconographical Old Testament depictions of the twentieth century."[32]

DeMille: The Derided, Disparaged and Disdained Director

Regrettably, despite his *bona fide* Hollywood legend status, directorial longevity (1913-1959), and numerous complimentary comments, honours and homages,[33] as indicated above, the breadth, depth and range of DeMille's artistic prowess has still *not* been fully explored by scholars, let alone appreciated by the public. Nor has his second Moses movie given up all its sacred construction secrets; despite the publication of Henry S. Noerdlinger's *Moses and Egypt: The Documentation to the Motion Picture The Ten Commandments*,[34] which itself was "an illuminating compendium of facts, beliefs, and textual histories concerning state-of-the-art scholarship on Moses, the Jews, and the world of Egypt at the time DeMille was filming,"[35] or Katherine Orrison's contemporary oral history *Written in Stone: Making Cecil B. DeMille's Epic, The Ten Commandments*.[36]

Although his Technicolor Testament is today considered "less of a brash pseudo-Biblical charade than might have been expected,"[37] it is ironic that CB was one of the most successful of the Hollywood directors, but frequently devalued by the critics, he was one of the most recognised filmmakers in the world, but one of the least understood, and although he was frequently copied by directorial peers keen to earn similar box office receipts, he was routinely denied his artistic due, and much worse. Indeed, "Of all the great Hollywood pioneers, Cecil B. DeMille has been the one most commonly neglected and slighted, his importance marginalized,"[38] he was frequently treated as "a figure of fun,"[39] his "works have not prompted much critical attention except as triumphs of kitsch,"[40] and even "today De Mille rarely receives the serious

academic recognition and study that he deserves."[41] And yet, as Simon Louvish recently put it: "For such an auteur, of such world-wide renown, the ignorance with regard to his best work must surely be considered peculiar, if not astounding,"[42] thus still making him Hollywood's best known unknown.

Furthermore, "DeMille's reputation as the creator of lurid, sensationalist epics often meant that his considerable story-telling talents were critically undervalued."[43] For example, Preston Sturges considered DeMille to be "a thoroughly pedestrian director,"[44] Robert Tanitch claimed that his epics were full of "colossal vulgarity,"[45] Giannetti and Eyman said that: "It is no longer fashionable to admire De Mille,"[46] Damien Bona argued that there were "never any graduations of character in Cecil B. DeMille's world,"[47] whilst an anonymous reviewer of *The Ten Commandments* (1956) proclaimed that: "Subtlety was not in Cecil B. DeMille's vocabulary."[48] For David Thomson, DeMille was "silliest in his biblical and Roman films"[49] whilst Norman Bel Geddes argued that:

> Inspirationally and imaginatively, CB was sterile. His stories, situations and characters were, almost without exception, unintelligent, unintuitive, and psychologically adolescent. CB was a foreman in a movie factory; he fitted the parts together and demanded that they move as he thought they should. It was an early form of automation.[50]

However, the writer resoundingly rejects these derogatory views because they are fundamentally wrong, grossly unfair and very misleading. Serious film scholarship[51] has only just *begun* to scratch the surface of DeMille studies,[52] with much more academic work needed before all of Cecil's aesthetic accomplishments can be fully revealed, acknowledged and appreciated, but then as Hollywood actor Henry Wilcoxon had accurately prophesied decades ago: "True recognition for DeMille's greatness will come many years after his death [1959]."[53] But why such intense derision and delay within critical and academic circles?

Another serious factor that had dramatically impeded a balanced and fairer evaluation of his films was the "inexplicable hatred and contempt so many reviewers had for Cecil B. DeMille."[54] "No famous film director has ever endured the critical contempt consistently heaped on DeMille through the last thirty-five years of his career."[55] "Indeed, with the exception of D. W. Griffith and Eric von Stroheim, no other director has been exposed to such vicious abuse and character assassination."[56] As such, many critics made the unthinking mistake of confusing DeMille's hallmark signature of contrast, simplicity and clarity with naivety, stupidity and lack of aesthetic sophistication. As actor Henry Wilcoxon opined:

> I think Cecil B. DeMille was always grossly misunderstood and downgraded by the critics ... Yes, he liked his films to make money, but he was a great showman, and the effects he got came from more artistic ingenuity and solid thinking than is realized ... I can tell you that he was a very conscientious craftsman ... though often accused of superficiality and pretentiousness, was actually very simple and direct and uncomplicated in his desire to promote movement and clarity.[57]

Therefore, since the "critics have never acknowledged his artistic merits,"[58] "De Mille's standing as a creative artist has been almost completely obscured,"[59] but the time is now ripe for a renewal of his reputation via a fresh look and corrective re-evaluation of his entire filmic *oeuvre*, let alone his iconic but paradoxically under-valued biblical subset. This proposed investigation will reveal many surprising talents, techniques and contributions to the art and science of filmmaking. After all, DeMille-the-director worked feverishly for nearly half-a-century (1913-1959) in a cut-throat business and was stopped *only* by death having successfully survived the genesis of Hollywood, WWI, devastating *cause celebre* scandals,[60] the arrival of sound films, the Great Depression, WWII, the arrival of colour film, the Korean War, volatile public tastes, changing social fashions, intense censorship, demanding cast-and-crew, shifting demographics, new filmmaking technologies, the widescreen, fickle finances, ill health, innumerable professional jealousies, and the crippling threat of the small screen - television.[61] DeMille developed numerous skills and techniques to survive these multiple challenges, which itself blatantly belied his reputation as an alleged no-talent director.

If the decrying critics had preventively searched for DeMille's hidden aesthetic accomplishments rather than malign and condemn him in a knee-jerk fashion, or if they had tried to go "beyond the valley of the wise-crack"[62] and other beard-and-bathrobe barbs in (supposedly) evaluating him, his professional standing would be radically different today. For a start, many of his trademark construction secrets would have been discovered; particularly his penchant for engineering sacred subtexts and religious symbolism therein. For ex-

ample, his fashioning of Samson as a Christ-figure,[63] Delilah as a whore of Babylon-figure,[64] the old Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure,[65] Samson as a Moses-figure,[66] and multiple lion symbolism[67] within *Samson and Delilah*, or John McTavish and Moses as Christ-figures within *The Ten Commandments* (1923 & 1956 respectively).[68] Although DeMille's artistic skills have been woefully unappreciated by academia, trickles of his belated appreciation are slowly emerging as indicated by the contemporary confession of his directorial peer, George Cukor:

> A long time ago I thought what he [DeMille] did was a big joke, just preposterous, and I couldn't understand why the audience went for it in such a big way. There were always all sorts of orgies with belly dancers, veils and all the trappings. The eroticism was a joke. Then I saw *The Ten Commandments* ... it was preposterous from the word go but I suddenly saw something new there, something which had escaped me before: the story telling was wonderful. The way that man could tell a story was fascinating - you were rivetted to your seat. That's exactly what he was: a great, great story teller. It was often ridiculous with all those excesses and froth but the man did *tell a story*. That was De Mille's great talent and the secret behind his popular success.[69]

Overall, the above-mentioned scholarly deficiencies are lamentable and in need of urgent correction; in particular, an intimate appreciation of the many innovative techniques DeMille employed to achieve his phenomenal success in his chosen genre.

Figure 1: *The Ten Commandments* by Cecil B. DeMille (poster)

Creative Scriptural Extrapolation: DeMille and the Art of Biblical Cinema
Of all his auteur signature signs and sacred storytelling tactics, DeMille's deployment of creative scriptural extrapolation was selected for explication below to demonstrate some of the depths of his hitherto unappreciated artistry. Inspired by mathematics, "extrapolation" is the art of inferring conclusions drawn from known data through unknown data in such a way that it makes logical predictive sense of the nominated event. When applied to the filmic adaptation of Holy Writ, especially in DeMille's role as a self-confessed "historical dramatist,"[70] it is the creative process of linking together known scriptural facts and then filling in the narrative gaps between them to tell a compelling and rationally coherent story.

Consequently, the critical film, religion and DeMille literature was selectively reviewed and integrated into the text to enhance narrative coherence (albeit, with a strong reportage flavour) coupled with a close reading of *The Ten Commandments* (1956) utilising humanist film criticism as the guiding analytical lens (i.e. examining the textual world *inside* the frame, but not the world *outside* the frame).[71] This film studies methodology assumes that audiences are cultured, accept the cinema and its various genres as fine art, and have seen the movie(s) under discussion. Its main function is to foster critical dialogue and interpretation of its motifs,

symbols and themes; thus making it ideal for guided debate within the classroom, home or pulpit, including the teasing out of its various overt and covert construction secrets.

DeMille's deployment of creative scriptural extrapolation was an auteur trademark that underpinned his filmmaking prowess and significantly enhanced the story-telling power of *The Ten Commandments* (1956). The pertinent and progressive pairing of Bithiah (Nina Foch) and Mered (Donald Curtis) was a key component of DeMille's hermeneutic of creative imagination that was itself the result of the unavoidable paucity of sacred scriptural facts. Somewhat surprisingly, great chunks of contextual background information and other important factual details are frequently missing from the biblical accounts of sacred objects, events or persons. For example, there are *no* physical descriptions of Jesus Christ in the New Testament or Delilah in the Old Testament. Sometimes, only a few tantalising hints are left scattered behind (which may or may not contradict one another), which is a problem compounded by the Bible's frequent telescoping of time, elliptic stylistics and episodic disconnectedness. This unsettling state of scriptural affairs does not lead to the abandonment of the subject matter, but it does leave much to the gap-filling imagination of the reader to discern and disentangle, let alone for narrative filmmakers to simultaneously make cogent and dramatically entertaining.

Furthermore, since a biblical filmmaker must frequently make *explicit* what may only be *implicit* within Holy Writ, DeMille-the-cinematic-lay-preacher was compelled to weld together scant scriptural facts into a partly fictional narrative that made logical, sequential and audiovisual sense. This creative process was neither fraudulent nor inauthentic. Cecil enunciated the basic principle as follows:

> The duty of an historian is to give an accurate report of known and proven facts. The duty of an historical dramatist, however, is to fill in the crevasse between them. The absence of legs from both Alexander and his horse Bucephalus in the damaged Pompeian mosaic of the Battle of Issus is no proof that legless men or horses existed. It is for the dramatist to fill in all the missing pieces of the mosaic of history.[72]

Biblical scholar Adele Reinhartz referred to such creative end products as "the cultural afterlife"[73] of the text in a process she called "the hermeneutics of creativity."[74]

Of course, DeMille did this task most brilliantly within *The Ten Commandments* (1956) via the progressive pairing of Bithiah (Moses' adoptive Egyptian mother-cum-Hebrew-convert) and Mered (a Hebrew slave and Moses' ardent religious follower-cum-partner of Bithiah). Cecil was particularly proud of this biblical fact when promoting the film during a luncheon in New York City. As he eruditely explained to the audience on that PR occasion:

> Many of you who saw the picture may have wondered at Moses' Egyptian mother, Bithiah, going on the Exodus and whether that was the invention of the dramatist [DeMille]. It was not. It is not in the Five Books of Moses. You will find proof of it in 1 Chronicles 4:18 where there is a reference to 'Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh which Mered took' and to the sons whom she bore. Mered could not have married Bithiah, a daughter of Pharaoh if she had not gone on the Exodus.[75]

DeMille-the-Christian-believer-cum-historical-dramatist had accepted this clear biblical fact, and in an act of creative scriptural extrapolation, told this ancient love story by progressively weaving his elongated micro-tale throughout the length of his historical macro-tale.

Furthermore, this pairing was logically important in justifying multiple character motivations-cum-reactions and sequentially important in geographically moving the storyline from Ancient Egypt to the Promised Land. In addition to physically introducing Bithiah to Mered, it was religiously important in showing Bithiah's transformation from the Egyptian to the Hebrew faith, socio-politically important in depicting her downward mobility from Egyptian royalty to Hebrew "commoner," and emotionally important in depicting the evolution of these former ethnic strangers into two loyal and long-lived lovers. DeMille's neo-morphing of their characters, motivations and emotions within a sacred storyline of blockbuster proportions via the following eighteen incremental steps is alone indicative of a master filmmaker worthy of his many honorific tags.

Eighteen Step Implementation of the Bithiah and Mered Pairing

Although the following descriptive recounting of the plot steps may be initially difficult to identify and disentangle, especially alongside a sea of other scriptural facts, interlocking subtexts and epic images, once the reader/viewer is sensitised to their existence, function and trajectory, they are almost impossible to ignore thereafter.

Step One: Prince Moses (Charlton Heston) was working incognito in the muddy brick pits alongside the Hebrew slaves when Princess Nefretiri (Anne Baxter) unexpectedly arrived, recognised him and ordered him to her private barge. Therein she asked this rebel prince of Egypt to return to the royal palace, but Moses refused saying: "And hide the truth from Sethi - that I am Hebrew - and a slave?" to which Nefretiri replied: "The truth would break his dear old heart *and send Bithiah into exile or death.* Think of us, and stop hearing the cries of your people" [my emphasis]. Since the widowed Bithiah had hidden the secret of Moses' Hebrew birth origins from her brother, Pharaoh Sethi (Sir Cedric Hardwicke), DeMille had logically identified the circumstances under which Egyptian royalty could fall foul of the Pharaoh and be forced to forego her noble position, wealth and power.

Step Two: In the Egyptian throne room, Pharaoh Sethi dramatically discovered that Prince Moses, the supposed son of his sister Bithiah, was actually the son of Hebrew slaves Amram and Yochabel (Martha Scott). To protect Prince Moses, now a disgraced outlaw and in chains, Bithiah desperately confessed: "Oh my brother - it was I who deceived you - not Moses! He was only a child!" to which Sethi coldly replied: "Leave me. I shall not see your face again" (akin to the dreaded DeMille curse in real-life). Thereby, triggering the circumstances that caused Bithiah to fall out of royal favour, if not exactly exile or death, as well as indicating the seriousness of her crime against Pharaoh, his royal court and her fellow Egyptian citizens. Moses-the-former-royal-Prince became Moses-the-outlaw-Hebrew and was then physically cast out of Egypt into the Shur desert to be tested before beginning a new phase in his earthly career as Moses-the-shepherd. Many decades later, God gave this shepherd his divine commission at the burning bush upon the holy mountain, and then as God's newly chosen ambassador he was tasked with returning to Egypt and freeing his kinsmen, the Hebrew slaves, in his newly minted career as Moses-the-liberator.

Step Three: Upon his return to Egypt and confronting the now Pharaoh Rameses (Yul Brynner), who repeatedly refused to free the Hebrews, Moses began making Passover preparations in Yochabel's home for the forthcoming tenth plague, the arrival of the Angel of Death, when Bithiah unexpectedly arrived at his doorstep and said: "In fear of your God, they have set me free. May a stranger enter?" Moses gladly welcomed her (along with her black bearers). DeMille had indirectly indicated that one of the consequences of Bithiah falling out of favour with Pharaoh was imprisonment (or at least house arrest). It also indicated that the effect of God's previous nine plagues upon the Egyptians was so unnerving that should a deceptive royal sister want to leave Egypt and go with the Hebrews, no one would object (whether for personal, political, family honour, religious, social, or royal succession reasons). The writer imagines (as may have CB and the audience) that many logical and behavioural possibilities could have been raised by the House of Pharaoh, and so DeMille-the-dramatist adroitly squashed these potentially puzzling-cum-distracting issues in this deft dialogic fashion.

Step Four: DeMille had now given Bithiah the logical excuse to move about freely if she chose, and so when Moses told of his plans to emigrate from Egypt after the Angel of Death's deadly deed, she promptly said: "I shall go with you, Moses" (which prompted incredulous comments from Moses' household). This scene logically justified her decision as a "Princess of Egypt" of "The House of Pharaoh" to be included alongside Hebrews slaves during the forthcoming Exodus (whilst simultaneously giving a knowing nod to those viewers who thought this fact incredulous).

Step Five: The domestic scene inside Yochabel's home is also where DeMille-the-*de facto*-matchmaker introduced Mered to Bithiah by having Moses say: "Mered, bring a chair to our table for the daughter of Pharaoh [Rameses I (Ian Keith)]," which he dutifully did (itself a *de facto* DeMillean chair-boy re-enactment, and which also symbolically signalled the relative power positions of the pair). DeMille had *physically* linked Bithiah with Mered in this highly plausible introductory fashion whilst re-emphasising Bithiah's royal Egyptian heritage in that domestic process, in addition to demonstrating a son's acceptance and loving consideration for his adoptive Egyptian mother.

Step Six: During the night-time Passover ritual of unleavened bread and bitter herbs, the lethal effects of the Angel of Death was heard via distant wails, the death cries of the dying, and the panicked dialogue of distraught relatives. In a DeMillean close-up, Bithiah and Mered emotionally reacted to the ongoing devastation, especially when Bithiah painfully said: "They are my people [Egyptians]" but Mered sagely replied: "All are God's people" followed by their caring glances towards one another that forged an intimate bond between them. DeMille had thus *emotionally* linked Bithiah and Mered whilst dialogically fusing her "heart" with his "head" to balance out this complementary pairing (whilst reinforcing traditional female-male stereotypes by DeMille-the-macho-man).[76] Death stalked the land and claimed Pharaoh Rameses' first-born citizens, including his own son (Eugene Mazzola), and so he finally gave in to Moses and his mountain God and freed the Hebrew slaves.

Step Seven: Bithiah and Mered's temporary emotional bond became more formalised during the Exodus preparations when Bithiah was being carried on her royal litter and Mered walked up beside her carrying a feeble old man, Amminadab (H.B. Warner). Bithiah wanted to place him on her litter and both she and Mered offered the frail old man comforting words of hope and futurity. Both Bithiah and Mered had acted spontaneously, unilaterally and compassionately as the proverbial Good Samaritans; DeMille had thus *spiritually* linked them together as one-in-heart, mind and noble intent (i.e. showing their compatibility on multiple levels).

Step Eight: At the start of the Exodus, Mered stood at the base of a sphinx signalling with a banner as the cluttered crowd slowly inched forward out of Egypt and into the history books. In two separate scenes, Bithiah was briefly seen being carried in her royal litter and moving slowly along with the rest of the tumultuous crowd. DeMille had shown Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, to be an actual, willing participant in the Exodus, and on a joyous journey along with Mered (i.e. not forced, or in an unhappy state, although technically a disgraced outcast fleeing home just like Moses had done previously). DeMille had thus *biblically* linked Bithiah and Mered together during this momentous moment of Hebrew history.

Step Nine: When an embittered Pharaoh Rameses reconsidered his release of the Hebrew slaves and ordered his charioteers to go in deadly pursuit of them, the Hebrews started to panic and so Bithiah rushed forward and said: "They will stop for me!," but Mered held her back in a protective fashion and said: "A charging chariot knows no rank." Here DeMille reinforced Bithiah's Egyptian royalty, her bravery, Mered's practicality, their caring interpersonal bond, and continued companionship during their exilic journey. DeMille had thus *deepened* and *consolidated* their physical-cum-emotional bond (and again reinforced the traditional female-male stereotype of "heart" versus "head").

Step Ten: After DeMille had cinematically summoned God's pillar of fire to block the path of the charging Egyptian chariots, a medium shot depicted an amazed Bithiah and Mered standing next to each other staring at that fiery miracle. DeMille had thus made them *one in wonder* concerning the awesome God of the Hebrews, as opposed to the impotent stone gods of the Egyptians (and also to generate awe of DeMille-the-epic-filmmaker).

Step Eleven: After the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, Bithiah was seen walking along with the fleeing crowd through the parted waters carrying a child and holding the hand of another child walking next to her (i.e. she was no longer being transported via her royal litter). DeMille had thus demonstrated her compassion and care of children, even though they were not her children or even her personal responsibility, thus demonstrating her *good heart and motherly propensities* that would have endeared her as a potential wife to Mered (an equally good man-cum-marriage partner). Symbolically speaking, it indicated that Bithiah and Mered were on the same level as they trod the path of life together (i.e. physically, geographically, emotionally, religiously and spiritually). It was essentially a demotion in Egyptian social status for Bithiah, but a desirable promotion in social compatibility with the Hebrew Mered.

Step Twelve: The still-walking Bithiah is next seen holding a small child as she trudged up a hill along with struggling others whilst they continued traversing the parted Red Sea, when suddenly, her accompanying litter bearer stumbled to his knees. She quickly passed the child onto a passing man and stepped in to help support the litter. DeMille had demonstrated Bithiah's *care for children, her selflessness, her concern for servants, and her willingness to do hard work as needed*. Behaviourally speaking, she slowly devolved from Egyptian royalty to caring commoner (thus mirroring Moses' earlier devolution from Egyptian prince

to Hebrew shepherd; both being strangers in a strange land). DeMille had subtly foreshadowed Bithiah's forthcoming domestic qualities that would put her in good stead as Mered's future wife-cum-mother of his children.

Step Thirteen: When the divinely divided Red Sea collapsed and drowned the pursuing Egyptian charioteers, DeMille provided a close-up of Bithiah and Mered huddled together when Bithiah temporarily turned her face away from the devastation. DeMille had thus visually verified her survival and continuing intimate companionship with Mered. DeMille also indirectly indicated *her compassion* for her dead fellow Egyptians, which was consistent with her earlier concern for them during the Angel of Death's devastation during Passover. This miracle would have been another good reason for her growing belief in the God of the Hebrews (and Mered) having previously been an Egyptian princess and presumably a follower of its national pagan gods (e.g. Amon-Ra, Great God of the Nile, Horus, Isis, Osiris, Sokar). Initially, Bithiah appeared to be following the Hebrew cause out of personal devotion to Moses (her much-loved adopted son) and her estrangement from Pharaoh (her brother) rather than a strong personal belief in the mountain-dwelling sky God of the Hebrews.

Step Fourteen: Whilst the freed and slowly emigrating Hebrew slaves were camped before Mt. Sinai, the duplicitous agitator Dathan (Edward G. Robinson) stirred up the crowd over the extended disappearance of Moses, who was communing with God on the holy mountaintop. Dathan was politically wrangling for leadership of the temporarily leaderless group and so Bithiah bravely addressed the fickle crowd and tried to stop his political ascendancy by claiming: "Would a God who's shown you such wonders let Moses die before his work is done?" However, Dathan cunningly replied: "His mother - so beautiful is the hope of a mother. But there are other mothers among you." DeMille had thus formally consolidated Bithiah's belief in the God of the Hebrews to the point where she is publicly defending the faith before less faithful Hebrews (itself a strong sign of her religious conversion) whilst simultaneously *devaluing* the respectful mother-love excuse (which *was* the case previously) in the very act of raising it via the mouth of Dathan, precisely because he *is* a manipulative opposer and not to be believed! Subtextually speaking, "True to McCarthy Era paranoia, Edward G. Robinson's Dathan represents the Enemy Within, trying to corrupt the Israelite nation with godless materialism and licentiousness."[77]

Step Fifteen: After the Golden Calf was constructed and the crowd worshipped it in direct violation of God's will, Dathan's evil brother, Abiram (Frank DeKova) approached the tent of the faithful wherein Bithiah was located and menacingly said: "Are you mourners of Moses afraid to face the new god of gold?" DeMille had clearly demonstrated Bithiah's firm religious allegiance to the God of the Hebrews because she *is* in the tent of the faithful and she firmly resisted Abiram's call for idol worship (i.e. the traditional religious mode of Ancient Egyptians and her presumed former practise as the pagan daughter of Pharaoh).

Step Sixteen: During the heated orgy of revelry, another of DeMille's medium shots focused upon Bithiah, Sephora (Yvonne De Carlo) and Miriam (Olive Deering) inside the tent of the faithful. DeMille demonstrated the continuing resolve of Bithiah's new faithfulness by still locating her within the tent of the true (now a micro-geographical indicator of her new religious commitment). Amongst these riotous scenes of law-and-orgy involving spectacle-and-excess, DeMille had visually constructed a trinity of faithful devotion using Sephora (Moses' wife), Miriam (Moses' sister) and Bithiah (Moses' stepmother); all of which were faithful to God and intimately linked to Moses (personally, socially, geographically, politically, religiously, spiritually). These women form part of the much wider group of the faithful who were not physically sucked into the earth (metaphorically Hell) by God when Moses forced them to choose sides before the Golden Calf prior to its own divine destruction.

Step Seventeen: When Moses, now a holy lawgiver, came down from the sacred mountaintop with God's tablets in tow and witnessed the riotous revellers, he was disappointed, disgusted and determined. He asked the crowd to choose sides and those wanting to serve the Lord were to come to him. A mad rush ensued as the crowd split accordingly. Prior to Moses hurling the tablets at the Golden Calf, Bithiah and Mered were seen working their way towards Moses' feet, with Sephora, Joshua (John Derek), Lilia (Debra Paget) and Aaron (John Carradine) around them (another power grouping of the faithful). A publicity shot of this scene positioned the three major protagonists into a pyramid formation with Bithiah and Mered forming the base and Moses as its pinnacle in a Statue of Liberty pose (and well before his more famous Statue of Liberty

pose at film's end).[78] The actual movie scene showed Bithiah and Mered with Moses from a different angle, but still clearly linked together as God delivered death to the Hebrew recidivists.

Step Eighteen: Many decades later near journey's end at the base of Mt. Nebo, Bithiah was part of another group of the faithful as they watched the Hebrews cross the River Jordan into the Promised Land with the Ark of the Covenant in tow. DeMille had thus indicated her continuing adherence to her Hebrew faith and family. She also observed Moses transfer his leadership responsibilities and divine authority to Joshua. Mered is also there holding a pouch containing "five books" (the five books of Moses; the Torah), which he handed over to Moses to be placed "in the Ark of the Covenant by the tablets of the Ten Commandments, *which the Lord restored unto us*" [my emphasis]. This latter Moses comment disarmed any incredulity problems for those viewers who remembered seeing the holy tablets being smashed to pieces upon the Golden Calf a few screen minutes earlier (Exod. 32:19 KJV), and simply because God *did* provide a *second* copy of the Law for the children of Israel (Exod. 34:1 KJV). Bithiah and Mered were then shown watching Moses as he left the leadership group to ascend the mountainside prior to his presumed reward and residence with God. The film (and micro-tale within) ended upon this solemn and hopeful note of faith and futurity.

Conclusion

The above-explicated Bithiah-and-Mered events clearly constituted Cecil's act of creative scriptural extrapolation and easily confirmed Henry Wilcoxon's claim that CB was "a very conscientious craftsman" whose "artistic ingenuity" was firmly rooted in "solid thinking"[79] as he precisely and convincingly integrated the missing information in Exodus into his Moses movie. This dramatic micro-tale neatly nested within his spectacular macro-tale had deftly demonstrated his skills as a cine-biblical artist that, along with his other story-telling devices, helped underpin his reputation as a master of the American biblical epic and formidable people's director with the common touch. Furthermore, not only had this lay biblical scholar turned a brief scriptural verse significantly separated from the mainstream Exodus narratives into a fully integrated sub-sequence, but it was also factually premised, dramatically entertaining and spirit-of-the-law authentic (if only because 100% letter-of-the-law authenticity was *not* possible due to gross textual omissions).

DeMille-the-historical-dramatist had dutifully filled in the biblical narrative crevasses in a logical and innovative fashion overseen by DeMille-the-pop-culture-professional, and so as Brian Britt succinctly put it: "*The Ten Commandments* replicates biblical tradition even by reinventing it."[80] No wonder this indelible film was considered the "jewel in the crown"[81] of the religious movie genre and the "epitome"[82] of the biblical epic, or that DeMille was considered "a master of the film narrative"[83] even if only for his scantly appreciated past efforts and *not* his many still undiscovered sacred storytelling secrets. One wonders what a full and sympathetic analysis of DeMille's entire cinematic *oeuvre* would reveal today for a "real Victorian!"[84] who paradoxically was often ahead of his time and trade.

If not the decrying critics, at least DeMille's industry superiors knew his true professional worth for as movie mogul David O. Selznick privately confessed to fellow movie mogul Louis B. Mayer:

> However much I may dislike some of his [DeMille's] pictures from an audience standpoint, it would be very silly of me, as a producer of commercial motion pictures, to demean for an instant his unparalleled skill as a maker of mass entertainment, or the knowing and sure hand with which he manufactures his successful assaults upon a world audience that is increasingly indifferent if not immune to the work of his inferiors. As both professionally and personally he has in many ways demonstrated himself to be a man of sensitivity and taste, it is impossible to believe that the blatancy of his style is due to anything but a most artful and deliberate and knowing technique of appeal to the common denominator of public taste. He must be saluted by any but hypocritical or envious members of the picture *business*.[85]

As Roy Pickard neatly summed up Cecil: "No-one before or after his death could quite capture that special DeMille touch ... [he] took his special kind of talent with him to the grave."[86] Further research into other notable exemplars of creative scriptural extrapolation, DeMille studies and the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film (aka sacred cinema, spiritual cinema, holy film, cinematic theology, cinematheology, theo-film, celluloid religion, film-and-faith, film-faith dialogue) is warranted, highly recommended and already a long overdue area of academic investigation.

Figure 2: *The Ten Commandments* in a modern context

Notes

1. Many scholars have spelled Cecil's surname as "De Mille" or "de Mille" or "deMille" however, the correct professional spelling is "DeMille" which will be used herein (unless quoting others) - see Cecil B. DeMille and Donald Hayne, ed., *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (London: W.H. Allen, 1960), 6.

2. See Robert S. Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Cecil B. DeMille and Donald Hayne; Anne Edwards, *The DeMilles: An American Family* (London: Collins, 1988); Gabe Essoe and Raymond Lee, eds., *DeMille: The Man and His Pictures* (New York: Castle Books, 1970); Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co, 1985); Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Charles Higham, *Cecil B. DeMille* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973); Phil A. Koury, *Yes, Mr. DeMille* (New York: Putnam, 1959); Simon Louvish, *Cecil B. DeMille: A Life in Art* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2008); Henry S. Noerdlinger, *Moses and Egypt: The Documentation to the Motion Picture The Ten Commandments* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1956); Katherine Orrison, *Written in Stone: Making Cecil B. DeMille's Epic, The Ten Commandments* (Lanham: Vestal Press, 1999); Gene Ringgold and DeWitt Bodeen, *The Complete Films of Cecil B. DeMille* (Secaucus, NJ, 1969).

3. Gore Vidal, *Palimpsest: A Memoir* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1995), 303.

4. Camille Paglia, *Vamps & Tramps: New Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 12.

5. Steve Jenkins, "DeMille, Cecil Blount," in Justin Wintle, ed., *The Concise New Makers of Modern Culture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 179.

6. Joel W. Finler, *The Movie Directors Story* (London: Octopus Books, 1985), 32.

7. Walter C. Clapham, *The Movie Treasury. Western Movies: The Story of the West on Screen* (London: Octopus Books, 1974), 21.

8. Ronald Holloway, *Beyond the Image: Approaches to the Religious Dimension in the Cinema* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977), 26.

9. Roy M. Anker, "Lights, Camera, Jesus: Hollywood Looks at Itself in the Mirror of the Messiah," *Chris-*

tianity Today 44, 6 (2000), 60.

10. Minta Braasch, *Dear Hollywood: I Think I Love You. Yours Truly, Minta Braasch* (N.p.: West Coast Print Center, 1977), 133.

11. Jenkins, 179.

12. There is not one DeMille persona but many DeMille personas. His career was so long, complex and multi-faceted that to describe, let alone justify each aspect would be prohibitive. Therefore, concise hyphenated compound terms will be used throughout to help disentangle his various roles and avoid needless repetition, redundancy and reader boredom.

13. Higham, x.

14. Helen Manfull, ed., *Additional Dialogue: Letters of Dalton Trumbo, 1942-1962* (New York: Evans, 1970), 357.

15. See Birchard.

16. See Essoe and Lee, 245-247.

17. Douglas Brode, *The Films of Steven Spielberg* (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 1995), 68.

18. Orrison, *Written in Stone*, 108.

19. DeMille and Hayne, 379.

20. Foster Hirsch, *The Hollywood Epic* (New Jersey: A. S. Barnes, 1978), 74.

21. Ryan Gilbey, ed., *The Ultimate Film: The UK's 100 Most Popular Films* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 89.

22. Leonard Maltin, ed., *Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide 2010 Edition* (New York, NY: Signet, 2009), 1380.

23. David Jasper, "Literary Readings of the Bible: Trends in Modern Criticism," in David Jasper, Stephen Prickett and Andrew Hass, eds., *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 51.

24. Cecil was proud to admit this fact - see DeMille and Hayne, 195.

25. Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 181.

26. Kathryn Bernheimer, *The 50 Greatest Jewish Movies: A Critic's Ranking of the Very Best* (Secaucus, NJ: Birch Lane Press, 1998), 49.

27. Lawrence Bassoff, *Mighty Movies: Movie Poster Art from Hollywood's Greatest Adventure Epics and Spectaculars* (Beverly Hills, CA: Lawrence Bassoff Collection, 2000), 82.

28. Peter Bogdanovich, *Who the Devil Made It: Conversations with Robert Aldrich, George Cukor, Allan Dwan, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, Chuck Jones, Fritz Lang, Joseph H. Lewis, Sidney Lumet, Leo McCarey, Otto Preminger, Don Siegel, Josef von Sternberg, Frank Tashlin, Edgar G. Ulmer, Raoul Walsh* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 354.

29. Mel Gussow, *Darryl F. Zanuck: Don't Say Yes Until I Finish Talking* (New York, NY: Da Capo, 1971), 81.

30. Michael Sauter, *The Worst Movies of All Time or What Were They Thinking?* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1996), 72.

31. Thomas Schatz, *History of the American Cinema. 6. Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1997), 394.

32. Jon Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001),

175.

33. See Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Hollywood, DeMille and Homage: Five Heuristic Categories," *Trames: Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, 1 (2009), 64-82.

34. Noerdlinger, *Moses and Egypt.*

35. Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 54.

36. Orrison, *Written in Stone.*

37. Gilbey, 86.

38. James M. Welsh, "C. B. DeMille: 70 Annotated Films," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 32, 4 (2004), 317.

39. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, "The Fashioning of Delilah. Costume Design, Historicism and Fantasy in Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949)," in Liza Cleland, Mary Harlow and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, eds., *The Clothed Body in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 14.

40. Louis Giannetti, *Masters of the American Cinema* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 19.

41. Eric Smoodin, "Cecil B. De Mille," in Tom Pendergast and Sara Pendergast, eds., *International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers - 2. Directors*, 4th ed. (Detroit: St. James Press, 2000), 251.

42. Louvish, xvii.

43. Geoff Andrew, *The Film Handbook* (Harlow: Longman, 1989), 74.

44. Diane Jacobs, *Christmas in July: The Life and Art of Preston Sturges* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 180.

45. Robert Tanitch, *Blockbusters!* (London: B. T. Batsford, 2000), 64.

46. Louis Giannetti and Scott Eyman, *Flashback: A Brief History of Film*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 40.

47. Damien Bona, *Starring John Wayne as Genghis Khan* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1996), 55.

48. Gilbey, 88.

49. David Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995),182.

50. Jonathon Green, *Dictionary of Insulting Quotations* (London: Cassell, 1997), 191-192.

51. As opposed to asides in biographies, actor reminiscences, coffee table books etc., and the considerable angst of the hate-DeMille cult for slights real and imagined - see Joseph Feldman and Harry Feldman, "Cecil B. DeMille's Virtues," *Films in Review* 1, 9 (1950), 1-6.

52. For example see Higashi, *American Culture.*

53. Henry Wilcoxon, "The Biggest Man I've Ever Known," in Gabbe Essoe and Raymond Lee, eds., *DeMille: The Man and His Pictures* (New York: Castle Books, 1970), 276.

54. I. G. Edmonds and Reiko Mimura, *Paramount Pictures and the People Who Made Them* (San Diego: A. S. Barnes, 1980), 48.

55. James Card, *Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent Film* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 114.

56. Feldman and Feldman, 1.

57. Lawrence J. Quirk, *Claudette Colbert: An Illustrated Biography* (New York: Crown, 1985), 68.

58. Higham, 60.

59. Feldman and Feldman, 1.

60. Most notably those in the 1920s involving Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Wallace Reid and William Desmond

Taylor amidst a sea of lesser industry *contretemps* - see Carl L. Bankston III, ed., *Great Events from History: Modern Scandals 1904-2008* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2009), 3 vol.

61. For a survey of this roller coaster career see Charlene Renberg Winters, *DeMille as Phoenix: The Rise, the Fall, and the Rise of an American Director* (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1996).

62. Bruce Babington and Peter W. Evans, *Biblical Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1.

63. See Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Have Lamb Will Martyr: Samson as a Rustic Christ-figure in Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949)," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 3, 1 (2003), viewed 24 October 2009 at:
http://reconstruction.eserver.org/031/kozlovic.htm.

64. See Anton Karl Kozlovic, "The Whore of Babylon, Suggestibility, and the Art of Sexless Sex in Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949)," in Dane S. Claussen, ed., *Sex, Religion, Media* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 21-31.

65. See Anton Karl Kozlovic, "The Old Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure in DeMille's *Samson and Delilah.*" *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture: A WWWeb Journal* 8, 3 (2006), viewed 24 October 2009 at:
http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss3/2/.

66. See Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Samson as a Moses-figure in Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949)." *Americana - E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary* 5, 1 (2009), viewed 24 October 2009 at: http://americanaejournal.hu/vol5no1/kozlovic.

67. See Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Samson, Cecil, and Lion Imagery within DeMille's *Samson and Delilah.*" *Journal of Media and Religion* 8, no. 3 (2009): 158-171.

68. See Anton Karl Kozlovic, "The Construction of a Christ-figure within the 1956 and 1923 Versions of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments,*" *The Journal of Religion and Film* 10, 1 (2006), viewed 24 October 2009 at:
http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol10no1/KozlovicMoses.htm.

69. Robert E. Long, ed., *George Cukor Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 27.

70. Albert Johnson, "The Tenth Muse in San Francisco," *Sight and Sound* 24, 3 (1955), 154.

71. See Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, *An Introduction to Film Criticism: Major Critical Approaches to Narrative Film* (New York: Longman, 1989), chapter 2.

72. Johnson, 154.

73. Adele Reinhartz, "The Happy Holy Family in the Jesus Film Genre," in Jane Schaberg, Alice Bach and Esther Fuchs, eds., *On the Cutting Edge: The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds. Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 124.

74. Ibid, 123.

75. Cecil B. DeMille, *Why I Made The Ten Commandments: An Address by Cecil B. DeMille at a Luncheon at the Plaza Hotel Just Prior to the Opening of his Motion Picture Production at the Criterion Theatre in New York City* (N.p.: USA, 1956), 5.

76. See Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Cecil B. DeMille: Hollywood Macho Man and the Theme of Masculinity within His Biblical (and Other) Cinema," *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* 2, 2 (2008), 116-138.

77. Alicia Ostriker, "Wither Moses? Movies as Midrash," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 42, 1 (2003), 144.

78. See Ringgold and Bodeen, 357.

79. Quirk, 68.

80. Brian Britt, *Rewriting Moses: The Narrative Eclipse of the Text* (London: T & T Clark International,

2004), 52.

81. Katherine Orrison, "Prologue," in Henry Wilcoxon and Katherine Orrison, *Lionheart in Hollywood: The Autobiography of Henry Wilcoxon* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1991), xi.

82. Gerald E. Forshey, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 123.

83. Douglas Gomery, *Movie History: A Survey* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 80.

84. Jesse L. Lasky Jr. in Orrison, *Written in Stone*, 42.

85. Rudy Behlmer, ed., *Memo from David O. Selznick* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 400.

86. Roy Pickard, *The Hollywood Studios* (London: Frederick Muller, 1978), 80.

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Author Information

Anton Karl KOZLOVIC (PhD Flinders) researches in the Screen Studies department, School of Humanities at Flinders University (Adelaide, Australia). His interests include religion-and-film, computer films, and the biblical cinema of Cecil B. DeMille. He has published in journals including *Australian Religion Studies Review, Belphegor: Popular Literature and Media Culture, The Film Journal, Journal of Contemporary Religion, The Journal of Religion and Film.*