

Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Part III)

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ROBERT WISE'S *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* PART III: KLAATU'S HOLY ASSOCIATES AND RIVAL RELIGIOUS READINGS

Abstract

In Part I, Anton Karl Kozlovic documented how the SF cult classic, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, dir. Robert Wise), was traditionally perceived as a UFO film with political, A.I., police and philosophical dimensions, and then argued that it is *best* understood as a religious film. In Part II, Kozlovic explicated the complex subtextual construction of Klaatu as a Christ-figure in the alien Messiah mould. In this third and final instalment, the critical literature was again reviewed using textually-based, humanist film criticism as the analytical lens to explore how Klaatu's associates buttressed his christic construction and deepened its religious resonance. Rival religious readings of the film were also briefly canvassed. It was concluded that *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is even more profoundly religious than hitherto appreciated. Further research into the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film was recommended.

Introduction

Within Part I of the Fall 2013 issue of *Kinema: A Journal for Film and Audiovisual Media*, Anton Karl Kozlovic explicated the 1950s UFO SF classic, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, dir. Robert Wise). He highlighted the film's anti-nuclear Cold War political theme, its A.I., police and philosophical readings, and then argued that it is *best* understood as a religious film. In Part II within the Spring 2014 issue of *Kinema*, Kozlovic explicated the Christ-figure construction of its intergalactic emissary, Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie). However, the film's religious layering did not stop with an alien Messiah who rebuked Earth's xenophobic paranoia induced by rampant nationalism. In Part III of this analytical triptych, it will be revealed that many of Klaatu's associates were also subtextually crafted to buttress Klaatu's christic construction and thus further deepen its religious resonance.

The critical literature was again reviewed and integrated into this text to enhance narrative coherence (albeit, with a strong reportage flavour) utilising textually-based, humanist film criticism as its guiding analytical lens (i.e., examining the textual world *inside* the frame, but not the world *outside* the frame - Bywater and Sobchack 24-47; Telotte, 35-38). This investigation revealed eleven additional religious characteristics and rival religious readings, namely: (1) Prof. Barnhardt (Sam Jaffe) as a Nicodemus-figure, (2) Gort (Lock Martin) as an imposing God-figure, (3) Gort (Lock Martin) as a glowing Angel-figure, (4) Gort (Lock Martin) as a defensive Apostle Peter-figure, (5) Bobby Benson (Billy Gray): Symbolic of children everywhere, (6) Tom Stevens (Hugh Marlowe) as a Judas-figure, (7) Helen Benson (Patricia Neal) as a Mary Magdalene-figure, (8) the bifurcated, corporate and triune figurations, (9) Ezekiel's vision and contactee cults, (10) Joshua and the day the sun stood still, and (11) some inter-Testament confusions. The following is a brief explication of each of them.

1.0 Prof. Barnhardt (Sam Jaffe) as a Nicodemus-figure

Cyndy Hendershot initially considered Earth's leading scientist and Nobel Prize winner, Professor Jacob Barnhardt (see Figure 1), to be a "messianic" (23) figure and then she later downgraded her assessment to "Klaatu as Christ-like and Barnhardt as a faithful disciple" (31). Whereas Krin Gabbard argued that he was a John the Baptist-figure, as follows:

One character in the film corresponds to John the Baptist. Dr. Barnhardt, portrayed in the film by Sam Jaffee [sic], symbolically baptizes Klaatu by verifying his superior intellect and by introducing him to the world's scientists who become the disciples of Klaatu by the film's end. Prior to his encounter with Klaatu, Dr. Barnhardt spent substantial amounts of time calling for a saner world - "crying in the wilderness" as it were. Early in the film Klaatu says to him, "You have faith, Dr. Barnhardt..." (152).⁽¹⁾

However, one would argue that Prof. Barnhardt, "a classic sci-fi scientist" (Saleh 45), the "Einstein look-alike" (Henriksen 53) whose "pseudonymity adds authority to apocalyptic texts" (Shapiro 81) is better understood as a Nicodemus-figure. Nicodemus was a Pharisee (a Jewish sect member), and a member of the Sanhedrin (a governing body of men) who showed favour towards Jesus according to the Gospel of John.

Prof. Barnhardt is certainly no Jesus Christ analogue, let alone a better one than Klaatu, nor is he a rough rustic hermit living in the wilderness as John the Baptist did, especially with his "raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey" (Matt. 3:4).⁽²⁾ Rather, Prof. Barnhardt was an educated, sophisticated, and very respected member of the elite scientific community (i.e., a high priest of earthly science), and thus more closely analogous to the biblical Nicodemus who was a "ruler of the Jews" (John 3:1), "a master of Israel" (John 3:10), an elite member of the Pharisee Jewish community, but who was pro-Jesus in word and deed. Indeed, he was so esteemed that he was allowed to retrieve, prepare and wrap Jesus' dead body (John 19:38-40); but which did not analogously occur within *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

When Klaatu (as Mr. Carpenter) went wandering around Washington DC with young Bobby Benson (Billy Gray), he was inspired by the "great words" carved into the wall of the Lincoln Memorial, and so he wanted to meet another "great man" and asked Bobby: "who's the greatest man in America today," and Bobby answered: "The spaceman, I guess [i.e., Klaatu]." Although pleased, Klaatu corrected him and said: "No, I was speaking of earthmen. I meant the greatest philosopher, the greatest thinker," and Bobby instantly replied: "Oh, you mean the smartest man in the whole world...Professor Barnhardt, I guess. He's the greatest scientist in the whole world."

Overlooking why a young boy would, let alone, could reliably know such a thing, Klaatu sought personal contact with Prof. Barnhardt that very day, but missed him at his house. So, he (miraculously) broke into the professor's locked room (just like he miraculously broke out of his locked room at the Walter Reed Hospital), and left a unique calling card with Prof. Barnhardt's unexpectedly arriving secretary, Hilda (Marjorie Crossland). Namely, a partially solved celestial mechanics calculation written upon Prof. Barnhardt's half-filled blackboard,⁽³⁾ along with a brief handwritten note containing his "Carpenter" earth name and the street address of his (temporary) earth lodgings.

The two men meet later that night and there was instant (interspecies) rapport whereupon Klaatu revealed his alien origins whilst wearing his impeccable earthman disguise - a neat business suit previously stolen from the real Mr. Carpenter. This earthly professor had quickly perceived the value of Klaatu's mathematical corrections (especially since he had been working "for weeks" trying to solve it) and eagerly talked advanced mathematics with him. He was a quick student skilfully guided by a supreme teacher, which was the scientific equivalent of a theological discussion between them. Analogously speaking, Prof. Barnhardt even acted like Nicodemus, the important Pharisee who displayed great courage, had an inquiring mind, and quickly perceived the truth about Jesus after secretly meeting him at night (John 3:2) to discuss theology (John 3:1-21). Not only was Prof. Barnhardt quickly convinced by Klaatu's superior mathematical knowledge, political passion and space travel deeds, but he promptly became a scientific convert willing to aide Klaatu's earthly mission. Analogously like Nicodemus who acknowledged Jesus' heavenly connection and powers saying: "we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2), and so he became a religious convert and was baptised (John 3:22).

Thoroughly convinced, intensely curious, and without a trace of interspecies prejudice, xenophobia, or irrational fear, Prof. Barnhardt acted as an intercessionary agent and organised a meeting between Klaatu and "men of science" plus "leaders from every field - the finest minds of the world" (i.e., the elite cadre of this worldwide church). As Jerome F. Shapiro put it, Prof. Barnhardt had received a "revelation and then became charged with warning transgressors of the [intergalactic] law [analogously, the divine law]" (81). In effect, Prof. Barnhardt was the earthly high priest of the new alien religion of cosmic peace and harmony, who had protected Klaatu from government interference as required, most notably by lying to and subsequently dismissing Klaatu's military escort outside his study. This act was analogous to the actions of Nicodemus, the good and faithful servant; most notably when he protested against Jesus being condemned without trial (John 7:50-51).

Indeed, Prof. Barnhardt was even supportive of the fear deliberately generated by Klaatu's "the earth stood

still” stunt (i.e., shutting down electrical machinery worldwide for 30 minutes), which he privately tested by asking his secretary: “does all this frighten you? Does this make you feel insecure?...Good, Hilda, I’m glad.” Why? Because as a true believer, it was the fulfilment of Klaatu’s will (analogously Divine will) and a necessary step towards achieving Klaatu’s earthly mission; it was not an intrinsic threat to the professor or any other true believer. Prof. Barnhardt had thus acted like any true believer would in Jesus’ day.

2.0 Gort (Lock Martin) as an Imposing God-figure

As Ingrid Richter perceptively asked: “If Klaatu is a Christ figure, who is Gort supposed to be?” (*online*). Some authors have suggested that this imposing “god-like robot” (Gianos 137-138) was an “androidomorphic god” (Gabbard 152), a “Gort (God...)” (Frumkes 34), whilst Stephen D. O’Leary considered Gort to be the second Trinitarian aspect of God alongside Klaatu, the alien eschatological saviour (see Figure 2). As he argued: “The aliens here appear in the twin messianic aspects of the sacrificed redeemer who must be resurrected to accomplish his mission (Klaatu), and of the wrathful judge and punisher of humanity’s sins (Gort)” (404).



Figure 1: Figure 1: Prof. Barnhardt, Curious Scientist

However, although Gort is physically responsible for operating the spaceship’s resurrection machine that brought the dead Klaatu back to life, he is not the subtextual equivalent of God. Why? Because when the amazed Helen Benson (Patricia Neal) saw Klaatu resurrected she queried: “You mean...he [Gort] has the power of life and death?,” but Klaatu quickly corrected her: “No. That power is reserved to the Almighty Spirit. This technique, in some cases can restore life for a limited period.”

3.0 Gort (Lock Martin) as a Glowing Angel-figure

Although Robert Torry saw Gort as “the emblem of nuclear weaponry” (15), the hi-tech Gort is better viewed as a glowing New Testament angel-figure rather than the walking symbol of a world-destroying bomb. For example, he has a monochrome silvery appearance, just like the traditional white angels of Christianity (Matt. 28:3; John 20:12). Gort is huge and powerful as one imagines angels to be, especially the Seraphim of Isaiah 6:2-3. Gort is an intimate companion of Klaatu, he accompanies him on important missions, and he looks after him, just like the angels who ministered unto Jesus (Matt. 4:11). In fact, as Jesus once claimed: “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels” (Matt. 26:53). Similarly, Klaatu has only to call upon the Galactic Federation and even more flying robot Gorts will come and do his bidding (within their programmed parameters).

Klaatu is injured by American soldiers using body piercing bullets before he died, just as Jesus was injured by ancient Roman soldiers using a body piercing spear as he hung from his cross before he died (John 19:34). Klaatu’s body is laid to rest inside a prison cell (i.e., a temporary tomb), just as Jesus’ body was

buried in a sepulchre, his cave-like tomb (Mark 15:46), which turned out to be only a temporary abode for the risen Jesus. It is Gort who physically retrieved Klaatu from his cell-tomb leaving it empty, just as Jesus's body was gone from his earthly tomb (Mat. 28:6); presumably in the care of angels (John 20:12). Indeed, when Gort arrives at the cave-like prison he destroys the back wall of the cell with his laser beam to get easy physical access to Klaatu's body "as if rolling away a stone"(4) according to Dennis Saleh. This situation parallels the Jesus account in Matthew 28:2-3: "And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door [entombing Jesus]...His countenance was like lightening, and his raiment white as snow." The silvery Gort also reflects glowing white light when operating the spaceship machinery (see Figure 3). When Klaatu ascended into the heavens through the clouds at film's end, it was with Gort, just as Jesus "was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9) as he headed home.

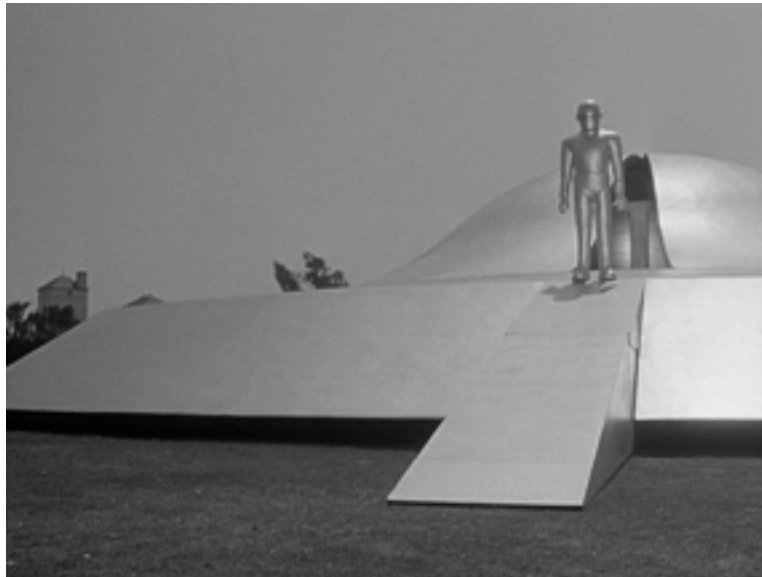


Figure 2: Figure 2: Gort as God-like

Interestingly, there were also many Old Testament resonances within *The Day the Earth Stood Still* in addition to its profound New Testament thematic. For example, Carlos Clarens argued that: "Klaatu is God's messenger come to Earth as in Biblical times to scold the modern Sodom and Gomorrah for their evil ways" (128). Indeed, two angels came to Sodom (Gen. 19:1), just as Klaatu and Gort came to Earth. The angels did not like what they found there and were prepared to destroy the place (Gen. 19:13), just like Klaatu and Gort were prepared to do with Earth, namely: "drastic action...Violent action...Levelling New York City perhaps? Or sinking the Rock of Gibraltar." The angels' method of destruction was "brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen. 19:24); just like Klaatu's final public threat regarding the power of Gort and his heaven-roving robotic peers, namely: "The penalty for provoking their action is too terrible to risk...this Earth of yours will be reduced to a burned-out cinder." Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction eventually came to pass when "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace" (Gen. 19:28). Klaatu-cum-Gort's threat was real but unfilled pending humanity's decision, but one imagines that if Earth chose unwisely, the consequences would involve spectacular devastation and furnace-like smoke-cum-atomic mushroom clouds congruent with the fulfilment of the nuclear fears that fuelled the film's political inspiration and political reading of the plot.

4.0 Gort (Lock Martin) as a Defensive Apostle Peter-figure

One can even read Gort as an Apostle Peter-figure in that he is big and gruff like the fisherman Peter is frequently perceived and portrayed on-screen. Peter was first among the Apostles (Matt. 10:2), just as Gort is first among Klaatu's local cybernetic friends. Peter is the rock upon which Jesus built his earthly church (Matt. 16:18) just as Gort was the linchpin of Earth's new social order of enforced peace. Peter is the holder of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19) and the first Roman Catholic Pope. Just as Gort was in

charge of the spaceship (i.e., a high tech means of entering the heavens) and was the front-line overseer of Earth's peaceful behaviour according to Klaatu's explanation of the new cosmic arrangements. The Apostle Peter was the first male disciple to see the risen Jesus (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), just like Gort who was the first "male" to see the resurrected Klaatu.

Gort was also very Apostle Peter-like in his violent behaviour in defence of Klaatu, especially when Klaatu was threatened (see Figure 4). This was demonstrated when he vaporised the military hardware pointed at them after the nervous soldier shot Klaatu and before Klaatu commanded Gort to stop. It was also demonstrated by Gort killing the two saucer sentry soldiers, and later in his aborted stalking attempt to kill Helen Benson, itself a reminiscent "replay of King Kong and Fay Wray" (Biskind 157). However, Gort was merely doing what he was programmed to do, he was not "ill-tempered" (*online*) as Ingrid Richter erroneously claimed. One speculates that the Apostle Peter would have killed on Jesus' command if instructed to, especially given Christ's divine authority and Peter's utter belief in it, as chillingly depicted in *God Told Me To*, one of the most bizarre SF Christ-figure films made to date.



Figure 3: Figure 3: A Ministering Gort

After Klaatu left the scene, Gort suffered hi-tech imprisonment inside a clear block of "KL93," a new plastic "stronger than steel" surrounded by the military and guarded at night by two armed soldiers.⁽⁴⁾ He dutifully stayed put unperturbed, but after Klaatu was killed Gort re-activated himself, easily melted the plastic block with a bright laser-like light, vaporized the two sentry soldiers and when in search of Klaatu. This incident was analogous to the Apostle Peter's experience when Jesus had left the earthly scene and he was imprisoned, chained and guarded by the ancient Romans according to Acts 12:6-8, namely:

...the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said unto him...follow me.

According to Acts 12:19, Herod personally interrogated the prison keepers, but he was not satisfied and so "commanded that they should be put to death" just like the two dead soldiers that were unceremoniously dispatched outside Gort's plastic prison. Conforming to this scriptural parallel helps explain why only two soldiers were left guarding Gort at night, arguably the most fabulous prize (and potential threat) in human history; and certainly worthy of far greater security measures than was on offer in war-worried America!

When Klaatu first arrived on Earth, a twitchy soldier from the National Guard shot him with his rifle and wounded him. So, the cyclopean Gort, un-requested, responded violently by melting the rifle and surrounding

military hardware with his personal weapon (i.e., a laser-like beam emanating from his helmet when his visor is opened). Klaatu quickly stopped Gort's deadly rampage with sharp words. This behaviour mimicked the events on the night of Jesus' arrest when Jesus quickly stopped Peter's deadly rampage with sharp words. Peter, unrequested, used his personal weapon (i.e., a sword) to violently attack the high priest's servant Malchus and cut off his ear when Jesus was threatened by him and his evil-minded cohorts (John 18:10-11).

Klaatu's control by words occurred for a second time in the now famous monaural instruction sequence: "Gort! Klaatu barada nikto!"⁽⁵⁾ which would stop Gort from destroying the whole world. Off-screen and thereafter, this "magical phrase" (Richter *online*) became a mantra that prompted linguistic awe and wonder among fans and academics alike (Sobchack 146-147), and especially from one whose "command of an earthly language must have been acquired from listening entirely to the BBC" (Canby *et al.* 196). Actor Billy Gray admitting that: "I don't know exactly what it means...I guess it means something like 'Get Klaatu and revive him.' But I don't really know for sure" (Long 27). For Dennis Fischer, it "apparently means something like 'Klaatu's dead, go to plan B'" (686)."

Interestingly, Patricia Neal was advised by Michael Rennie to use the latter phrase to stop annoying reporters (Neal and DeNeut 136). Carlos Clarens thought it had "the familiar ring of the *mene mene tekel upharsin* of antiquity" (126) while Dennis Barone thought that Klaatu had "a New England accent, and he speaks a language to Gort that sounds something like Latin" (208). Not only did the phrase have an alien cadence, but its delivery also resonated with Jesus' instructions to the faithful. Namely: "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:19-20). Just as Helen's words were given by Klaatu who, in effect, spoke through her to Gort. She originally received these deactivating code words and learned them, parrot fashion, at a pressing moment just before Klaatu was killed by the brutish American military (i.e., analogous to the brutish Roman guards at Golgotha).

5.0 Bobby Benson (Billy Gray): Symbolic of Children Everywhere

Other biblical characters also complemented Klaatu's christic construction. As Billy Gray (who played young Bobby Benson - see Figure 5) mused later in life: "You've got Christ [Michael Rennie], Mary Magdalene (Pat Neal), Judas (Hugh Marlowe), the death and resurrection. I guess I was one of the disciples, but I'm not sure I fit well into that scenario" (Long 27). The writer argues that Gray's doubts were correct, he was not analogous to one of Jesus' disciples, but instead, his young, faithful and honest Bobby Benson symbolically represented all of the children that Jesus was so fond of during his earthly sojourn, and whose intrinsic innocence gave them access to the gifts of the Kingdom as Jesus had promised (Matt. 18:3, 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).

This child-Jesus association occurred in the form of Bobby's privileged companionship with Klaatu, which resonated with Jesus' instruction: "Suffer the little children to come unto me" (Mark 10:14). Bobby was also blessed by the knowledge, guidance and wisdom Bobby got from Klaatu as a cosmic father-figure. So, it is somewhat surprising to find that Ingrid Richter had misread the film when she complained that Klaatu's "martyr tendencies emerge as he offers to look after Bobby while Helen goes on a date with her beau, Tom" (*online*). This was not the act of a martyr, but rather, the actions of someone who was kind, considerate and loved children; even if Klaatu was using Bobby as his local Earth guide, he was certainly keen to listen to him. Bobby's possession of two perfect diamonds (alien money), the result of an innocent horse-trade with Mr. Carpenter for \$2 (Earth money), can be interpreted as symbolising the huge material benefits that such a holy alliance had for the spiritually nascent.

6.0 Tom Stevens (Hugh Marlowe) as a Judas-figure

Indeed, these otherworldly diamonds provided one motivation for Tom Stevens (Hugh Marlowe - see Figure 6) to betray Mr. Carpenter. This "whistle blower of the right" (Biskind 154), this insurance salesman who had "the voice of a snake oil salesman" (von Gunden and Stock 47) and was clearly "the worst person in the film" (Biskind 154) acted just like the biblical Judas, the worst person in the Jesus betrayal account. Scripturally speaking, this corrupt member of Jesus' intimate community was the keeper of the Apostles' "bag" (John 13:29)⁽⁶⁾ and the Apostle John accused him of being a "thief" who stole from it (John 12:6). Similarly, Tom held onto (stole?) Bobby's diamonds for his own career benefit and then subsequently compromised Klaatu. Therefore, Tom is analogously "cast as a man who, like Judas, betrays Klaatu and sends the soldiers after

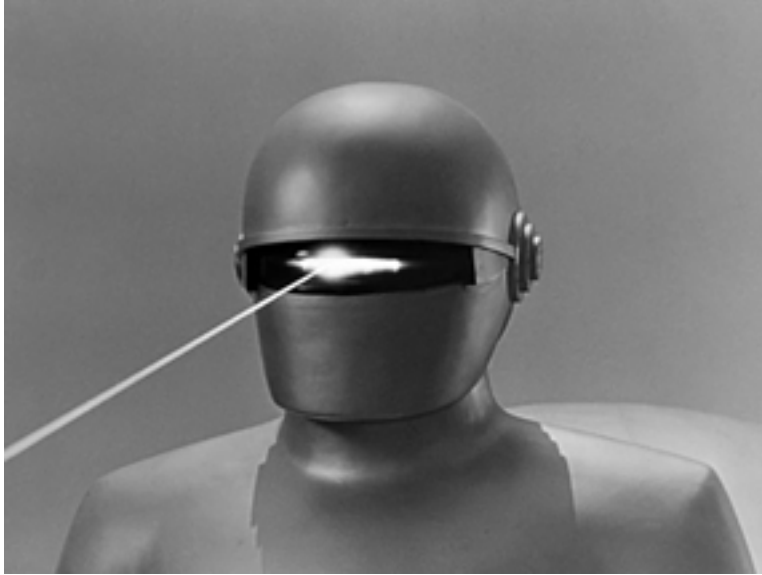


Figure 4: Figure 4: Gort Violently Defending Klaatu

him” (Gabbard 152) in the form of General Cutler (Freeman Lusk), analogously a Roman military authority in Jesus’ day. These otherworldly diamonds now become “the film’s surrogate for silver” (Gianos 136), that ancient reward medium for Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (Matt. 26:15; 27:3).



Figure 5: Figure 5: Bobby as Innocence Personified

This personal betrayal of Klaatu was coupled with Tom’s hope for heroic public fame, power and fortune. As he defensively boasted to Helen: “I can be the biggest man in the country. You’ll feel different when you see my picture in the papers.” Not only did Tom succumb to the lure of fame and fortune, but he also wanted to eliminate what he mistakenly thought was a romantic rival for the attractive, war-widowed, Helen Benson, his now wavering-cum-abandoning girlfriend. Furthermore, Tom effectively mirrored his society writ small. As Tony Magistrale put it: “At the end of the film, Helen learns a painful truth about her fiancé that parallels her government’s response to Klaatu: Compassion is reserved only for those we recognize as being exactly like us; any one else is exterminable” (84). One imagines that after Klaatu’s heavenly ascension, Tom

would come to regret his betrayal, but whether it resulted in his hanging suicide (Matt. 27:5) is open-ended as his regret-cum-death was not screened in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

7.0 Helen Benson (Patricia Neal) as a Mary Magdalene-figure

Krin Gabbard argued that: "Patricia Neal plays a widow who befriends Klaatu. Like Mary Magdalene she goes to the space ship/tomb and is the first to see the resurrected Klaatu" (152). Prior to that iconic moment, Helen Benson-as-Mary Magdalene is currently romantically involved with Tom Stevens, and was a sexually experienced woman having borne a son to her now dead military husband. She does not quite know how to express her feelings for the charming, restrained and noble Klaatu-Christ, in keeping with mainstream Gospel traditions of their close but restrained relationship. But just like the Bible's passionate penitent, Helen was described by *The New York Times* critic as "a lady susceptible to love" (Canby *et al.* 196). Not surprisingly, given Klaatu-Christ's cosmic mission, he is cool, cerebral and detached with no time for a love life with Helen or anyone else on Earth, or as Kevin McCorry (npd) put it: "Symbolic of the immaculate nature of Christ, Klaatu's people appear to be far in advance of Earthman [sic] in impulse-control and rejection of vice."

However, there is "one scene where Klaatu gestures goodbye and Mrs. Benson's [sic] eyes light up, and you realize that there *could* have been something, but they just never get together" (Long 27). That "sad but loving final glance" (Cranny-Francis 84) was not consummated on or off the screen (see Figure 7). Anne Cranny-Francis suggested that the film's muted sexual politics was due to the "desire for a life not founded by (McCarthyite) paranoia and the violence to which it leads - the violence that led to Klaatu's shooting and that means he must now return to his own planet in order to survive the attack" (84).



Figure 6: Figure 6: Tom Stevens Informing on Klaatu

Although a plausible if somewhat strained reading, a better interpretation is that Klaatu-the-Christ-figure, like Jesus Christ himself, maintained his alien asexual purity and never condescended to sexual gratification before his heavenly ascension (temporarily overlooking the potential biological incompatibilities, disease issues and reproductive problems resulting from an Earth female, alien male coupling). As Bonnie Brain described the structural properties of this character stereotype (which aptly describes Klaatu himself):

Like domesticated guardian angels, these extraterrestrials are both nice enough to be part of the family and powerful enough to save you in a difficult moment. Seemingly ageless, they possess the wisdom and discipline of adults but have never lost the innocent vision of childhood. The efficacy of their science is not dependent on technology or even other scientists but on individual ability. Isolated beings, beloved by, yet genetically independent of, human family, they suggest both emotional neediness and spiritual self-sufficiency. Wise, often asexual, they offer the possibility of safe intimacy, of symbiotic closeness without the complicating elements of emotional contrariness,

or sexuality...They are the desirable, and skilled, immigrants, attractive in their difference yet reassuring in their adaptiveness to human (and American) culture (227).

This is also a good description of Jesus Christ and other Christ-figures.

8.0 The Bifurcated, Corporate and Triune Figurations

Other authors read different issues and even more religious parallels within the film. For example, Margaret Tarratt saw Klaatu through psychoanalytic eyes as a man divided: "He is a man whose "baser instincts" or id, in the figure of Gort, are held firmly under control. The film suggests a concept of an ideal man separated from his most primitive instincts, using them only as a source of energy to aid his "higher" civilized aims" (340). Phillip L. Gianos considered that some of the film's main characters were analogous to a bifurcated, corporate human being. As he argued:

The film's heroes are thus creatures of cool intellect - Klaatu and Barnhardt - supported by a woman and a child, forming a family with the male characters dominant, the alien Christ-like Klaatu and the human Dr. Barnhardt the head, and Helen and Bobby Benson the heart (136).

However, one can see a mystical, triune interpretation that is just as applicable using the same characters, namely, Klaatu represents the spirit, Prof. Barnhardt represents the intellect, and Bobby and Helen Benson represent the heart. Indeed, the heart can be further divided into two developmental stages, namely: (a) youthful innocence, fragility and playfulness (i.e., Bobby), and (b) mature strength, loyalty and love (i.e., Helen). This overall Trinitarian pattern is also reflected in the following religious formulations of: (a) Father, Son and Holy Ghost; (b) Spirit, Mind, Matter; and © I, Me, Myself.

Given the technological theme of the film, especially with Klaatu as an accomplished flying saucer operator and superior mathematician (compared to the Nobel Prize winning scientist, Prof. Barnhardt), some authors have argued that humanities salvation was not rooted in religious mysticism but science. As Jerome F. Shapiro put it:

...salvation does not come through the power of the individual to find the inner path to God, as was expected of the oppressed Jews of antiquity. That is to say, however reflective of the Old or New Testament the narrative may seem, the film forwards the message that salvation is gained through the power of the liberal institutions of science and technology, or, at least, the power of scientists to lead us into a world of righteous living (82).

And yet, even though science and technology helps achieve this noble end, the meeting of the "men of science" included "leaders from every field - the finest minds of the world" prior to Klaatu's departure, which included a black religious minister amongst other sacred servants (see Figure 8).

These persons are valuable intellectual resources that add flavour to the sterile soup of scientific dogmatism. Furthermore, Klaatu unequivocally acknowledged that life and death is the domain of the "Almighty Spirit." This implies an alien religion unexplored in the film, and therefore the existence of mysteries beyond the power of even Klaatu's superior science.

9.0 Ezekiel's Vision and Contactee Cults

Other authors saw Old Testament incidents reflected in the film. For example, Dennis Saleh reported that: "Klaatu comes on a mission from the skies, in a great glowing wheel of a saucer" (39-40) which the anonymous critic of *The New York Times* referred to as: "one of those awesome contraptions that comes whirring in from outer space, humming and glowing like a gigantic neon sign" (Canby *et al.* 196). These descriptions of Klaatu's saucer resonated with the scriptural account of Ezekiel 1:4. Namely: "And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it" (see Figure 9). Interestingly, this Scripture convinced many UFO buffs that the Prophet Ezekiel had a close encounter with an alien (e.g., Alschuler and Zimmerman 132-135; Blumrich; Vallee 4, 6).

Conversely, some UFO researchers attribute *The Day the Earth Stood Still* with helping condition the movie-going populace into accepting and colouring contactee perceptions of UFOs, extraterrestrial sightings, and alien abductions (e.g., Alschuler and Zimmerman 141; Craft 217; Randles 43-44, 79; Spencer 93). As UFO



Figure 7: Figure 7: A Hopeful Helen



Figure 8: Figure 8: A Black Religious Minister

researcher Peter Rogerson argued: "The first great contactee came, not from the Californian "saucerites" of happy memory, but from Hollywood; in the form of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*...In its wake the contactee cults grew and flourished" (1-2). Nigel Watson similarly argued that: "The depiction of the flying saucer, and Gort, are probably the best re-constructions (or creation?) of how people at that time imagined the technology of UFO beings" (334). And as James R. Lewis put it: "Friendly extraterrestrials approaching earthlings with a message of concern about our potential for nuclear holocaust was a central theme in much of the flying-saucer contactee literature of the 1950s and 1960s" (101).

10.0 Joshua and the Day the Sun Stood Still

Another more subtle Old Testament reference is reflected in the very title of the film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. A biblical event in which normal earthly events were miraculously stilled involved the Israelite Joshua warring against the pagan kings of the Amorites:

Then spake Joshua to the Lord...and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon: and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed...Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it... (Josh. 10:12-14).

The day the sun stood still was analogous to Klaatu making the Earth stand still when precisely at noon he caused electro-mechanical contrivances throughout the world to grind to a halt (but even more miraculously, *except* for airplanes in flight, hospitals etc.). His neutralising of electricity for thirty minutes (see Figure 10), which had never occurred in human history before, was a planned demonstration of his planetary might, which was quickly over, as he privately predicted to Helen Benson. Thus making Klaatu at this time a *de facto* Joshua-figure wherein both persons had employed nonviolent but impressive means to demonstrate the immense power at their disposal; and which made humanity's pitiful power pale in comparison.



Figure 9: Figure 9: Klaatu's Brightly Glowing Saucer

Furthermore, this miraculous incident reinforced to the entire world that "we are not alone;" itself a catch cry of alien science fiction, but also the extraterrestrial basis for the emancipation and redemption of humanity. In a very real sense, the alien *is* the message. Klaatu-the-alien is a man that you cannot ignore, just like Jesus Christ, the man you cannot ignore according to Christian proselytizing rhetoric. Indeed, technically speaking, Jesus is a human-alien hybrid whose birth resulted from a coupling between the Earth woman, Mary (Matt. 1:16; Luke 1:31), and the non-human, Holy Ghost (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35).

11.0 Some Inter-Testament Confusions

Sometimes authors confused Old Testament and New Testament subtexts within *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. For example, John Brosnan disapprovingly claimed that: "the climax of the movie was more Old Testament than New in tone...Klaatu's speech suggests that his people are on the same moral level as humanity. It is ironic that he threatens to destroy our planet unless we stop behaving violently" (61). Similarly, Robert Torry argued:

With Bobby at Arlington National Cemetery, he laments the wasteful barbarity of war that has deprived his young companion of a father. From the point of Klaatu's initial declaration that he has a message of great importance to deliver to mankind [the Good News?], we are invited to imagine a communication in keeping with his apparently saintly character, perhaps a Christ-like admonition to cease our planetary strife and learn to love one another. This, of course, is precisely what Klaatu's message does not provide. Instead there is merely the stark warning that to extend earth's violence beyond its planetary borders will result in total annihilation (14-15).

Pierre Kast considered *The Day the Earth Stood Still* to be primarily "about evil and violence" (69). However, it appears that Brosnan, Torry and Kast, as lay biblical scholars, have forgotten that the Bible *is* full of evil and violence, and that at Jesus' second coming as the end time prophet, he will pass final judgment on the whole human race (Matt. 25:31-46). Those subsequently found wanting will: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matt. 25:41) "into everlasting punishment" (Matt. 25:46) so as to realise His kingdom of peace, love and righteousness. This is scripturally described as a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13) and where "the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

This ancient biblical prophecy about a violent Jesus is akin to Klaatu's warning that if humanity chooses injudicious behaviour, the Earth will be reduced to a "burned-out cinder" coupled with his invitation to "live in peace" with the rest of the Universe under heavenly guidance; but a guidance that otherwise does not care how humans run their own planet or affairs. This cosmic edict jibbed with Patrick Lucanio's interpretation of Klaatu's closing speech being designed to "signal the closing of a way of life and the emergence of a new life for humanity" (45), and analogous to what Jesus is going to do.

Indeed, scripturally speaking, while on Earth, Jesus could be testy at times - consider his unreasonable loss of patience-cum-cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21:19), which Klaatu's loss of patience with the President's representative, Mr. Harley (Frank Conroy), was an analogue. Jesus also perpetrated acts of holy vandalism against the businessmen in the Temple (Matt. 21:12) via the releasing of their animals, the dispersing of their money, the upturning of their money tables, and the on-the-spot making of a "scourge of small cords" (John 2:15) to whip them with (see Figure 11); whilst Klaatu's acts of vandalism consisted of stealing Mr. Carpenter's suitcase and clothes and breaking into Prof. Barnhardt's study.

Since "violence" and "divinity" are not mutually exclusive categories in the New Testament or even the Old Testament (consider Samson-the-holy arsonist, Philistine hitman and suicidal terrorist - Judg. 13-16), why not expect violence from Klaatu-as-Christ-figure and his starry coworkers to ensure both earthly and intergalactic peace?

Conclusion

As demonstrated within all three parts of this analytical triptych, the religious dimensions of this SF classic are real, substantial and deliberately crafted, and thus the best interpretative lens for gleaning far deeper meaning from the film. This lens is certainly not the result of some fanciful (or desperate) desire to find faith and Jesus hidden in popular film fare, and which also vindicates Phillip L. Gianos's claim that *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is "an extraordinary mix of science fiction, religion, and political philosophy" (137).

Further research into the fascinating 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, warmly encouraged, and certainly long overdue, particularly the search for other Christ-figures alongside Klaatu and his SF peers, notably: E.T., Prot, Neo, Starman, Superman, and James Cole. Discovering these hidden holy characters can turn film-watching into the adult equivalent of a "Where's Waldo" adventure and be just as much fun for those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear (Ezek. 44:5; Matt. 13:16) whilst exploring the contemporary religious imagination in this second century of the age of Hollywood.



Figure 10: Figure 10: Neutralized Electricity Stoppages



Figure 11: Figure 11: The Violent Jesus in *The Gospel of John* (2003)

Notes

1. The exact Klaatu film quote is: "You have faith, Professor Barnhardt" not "Dr. Barnhardt." He is referred to by his professorial title repeatedly throughout the film, and so he will be tagged likewise herein (except when quoting others).
2. The Authorized King James Version of the Bible (KJV aka AV) will be used throughout, unless quoting other translations, because most of "the biblical phrases that are embedded in our culture are from the King James Version" (Taylor ix), and it is one of "the most widely used English translation of the Bible" (Taylor 71).
3. As scriptwriter Edmund H. North reported: "all of the formulae on the blackboard...were legitimate computations [in Celestial Mechanics]" (Duncan and Bohus *online*); "the work of the film's technical adviser, Dr. Samuel Herrick of UCLA" (von Gunden and Stock 45).
4. For Lee Pfeiffer: "it strains credibility that the alien spaceship would be left in the middle of an open field in the centre of Washington DC protected by two inept National Guardsmen!" (182).
5. There is some confusion over exactly what words constitutes the sequence of the stop command. Klaatu uses all four words "Gort! Klaatu barada nikto," but there is uncertainty over whether the first word was used to attract the attention of the robot followed by the three stopping words, or that all four words were required to halt him.
6. The Apostles' "bag" (John 13:29 KJV) has also been variously translated as: "the money" (John 13:29 NIV), "money box" (John 12:6 NWT) and "the common purse" (John 13:29 NRSV).

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Filmography

- The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, dir. Robert Wise)
- God Told Me To* (aka *Demon*) (1977, dir. Larry Cohen)
- The Gospel of John* (2003, dir. Philip Saville)

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