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Send out your light and your truth! Let them guide me. Psalm 43:3

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Cinema's Scarlet Letters: the MPAA Rating System and Film Education in the Christian University

Christians in higher education face great challenges in the third millennium. The challenges faced by those in Christian institutions are perhaps no less than those faced by their brothers and sisters in secular institutions. While the Christians at Mammoth State U. may feel they are constantly rowing against the tide, their colleagues at The University of the Believers must judge how best to paddle with the current flowing from the institution itself.

These currents can quickly become whitewater rapids for Christian educators who specialize in the study of film. There may be many reasons for this rough pedagogical water; still, a primary one remains the issue of film ratings, and in particular R-rated movies. The colleague in English can select books for discussion based more-or-less on personal knowledge and judgment of the text, but the film educator faces the knowledge that the movie industry itself places a "Restricted" label on films, and that "Restricted" often translates at his university as "Forbidden."

History and Current Status of Ratings

To understand how this state of affairs arose, a brief examination of how the ratings came to be is in order. Controversy over film content is, if not precisely as old as film itself, at least as old as film education. Film education at the university level can trace its beginnings to the fall of 1915, when Columbia offered the first course in cinema as a part of its adult education extension program (Polan, 2007, p. 35). 1915 was also the year of the Supreme Court decision popularly known as Mutual v. Ohio. As detailed by Jowett (1989) and Wertheimer (1993), the decision denied motion pictures the protection of the First Amendment by ruling them purely a business, not a form of speech.

With no First Amendment protection, the industry was vulnerable when public outcry over Hollywood reached its first peak a few years later. The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America [MPPDA] (today's Motion Picture Association of America [MPAA]), consisting of all the major studios, was founded in 1922 to deal with the problem, but the Association's prior role in offering restraints to the industry was essentially a façade until 1934. At that point, the combination of the Great Depression and the boycott threat of the Catholic Legion of Decency forced the MPPDA's hand. The Production Code Seal was established; all films produced, distributed or exhibited by the major studios had to carry the seal or pay a $25,000 fine (approximately $400,000 in 2009 dollars). Historians are agreed on this basic sequence of events, though there is some disagreement as to whether the Code was malignant (Gardner, 1987, p. xv-xxiv) or essentially benign (Wexman, 2006, p. 122).

The role of the Legion of Decency, and of the Roman Catholic Church in general, is sometimes recorded with condescending or even sinister connotations by later writers. While it is true that all of the men who created and first administered the Code and its Seal were "devout Catholics," as one source put it, it is also true that none of them could fairly be described as provincial or uninformed. Co-authors Martin Quigley and Father Daniel Lord were, respectively, the publisher of *The Motion Picture Herald* and a professor at St. Louis University (Leff & Simmons, 2001, pp. 9-10); Joseph I. Breen, the first head of the PCA during the Seal era, was a foreign correspondent and later public relations agent whose clients had included the World's Fair (Leff & Simmons, 2001, p. 34). The actual code itself was founded on three "General Principles":

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation. (*Motion Picture Production Code*, 2006)

These principles were followed by more than fifty specific restrictions, dealing primarily with depictions of sex and violence and use of language, but also with portrayals of religion and patriotism (*Motion Picture Production Code*, 2006).

This system endured until 1966, when Jack Valenti was elected president of the MPAA. Valenti, a lifelong Democrat, was a top adviser to Lyndon Baines Johnson, and went directly from the LBJ administration to the MPAA (Valenti, 2007, p. 266-280), bringing his progressive mindset to the new position. In his own words, "From the very first day of my own succession to the MPAA President's office . . . I had sniffed the Production Code . . . the odious smell of censorship. I determined to junk it at the first opportune moment" (Valenti, "How it all began," 2005, ¶ 11). Valenti immediately moved to abolish the Code and replace it with a voluntary, age based rating system (Valenti, "The birth of ratings," 2005, ¶ 2). Beginning in 1968, these ratings would be, and still are, voted upon by an anonymous Rating Board, located in Los Angeles, of between ten and thirteen individuals:

> There are no special qualifications for Board membership, except that the members must have a shared parenthood experience, must be possessed of an intelligent maturity, and most of all, have the capacity to put themselves in the role of most American parents so

they can view a film and apply a rating that most parents would find suitable and helpful in aiding their decisions about their children and what movies they see ("Who rates the movies and how does it work," 2005, ¶ 1).

Richard Heffner became the head of the new Classification and Rating Administration; according to Heffner, the ratings board is asked to answer one question regarding each submitted film: "Will most – not will any, a few or some, but will most – American parents think this film most appropriately classified G, or PG, or R, or X?" (Vaughn, 2006, p. 41)

Almost immediately, the new system began undergoing revision (Valenti, "Changes in the rating system," 2005). The latest and, to date, last change was the elimination of the "X" rating as recognized by the MPAA and its replacement with "NC-17." The MPAA trademarked all of its ratings except "X," in order for filmmakers to self-apply an "Adults Only" rating without going through the MPAA process (Valenti, "The birth of ratings, 2005, ¶ 4). The pornography industry immediately appropriated "X" for its own use, to the point that "X" has become synonymous with porn. As Valenti delicately put it, "The X rating over the years appeared to have taken on a surly meaning in the minds of many people, a meaning that was never intended when the system was created" ("Changes in the rating system," ¶ 3).

Today, all of the MPAA ratings are trademarked. Each rating includes a letter or letters, the title of the rating, and a line of explanation:

G: General Audiences; all ages admitted

PG: Parental Guidance Suggested; Some material may not be suitable for children

PG-13: Parents Strongly Cautioned; Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13

R: Restricted; Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian

NC-17: No one 17 and under admitted ("What do the ratings mean?" 2005)

According to the MPAA, "the latest poll results" from Princeton, NJ's Opinion Research Corporation indicate that 76% of parents of children under 13 find the rating system "very useful" to "fairly useful" ("Ratings Today," 2005, ¶ 5). Thus, from the MPAA's point of view, the system works as intended. Whether the system works in Christian higher education is another question.

Use of the Rating System in Selected Evangelical Universities

The evangelical and the fundamentalist factions of the Christian church have had an uneasy relationship with motion pictures since the earliest days of cinema. Bell traces this division to the publication of *The Fundamentals* in 1915 and to the sermons of editor R.A. Torrey of the same time (2005, p. 74-75). More than a century later, most evangelical institutions have communication departments that include film in the curriculum; several have active film departments as stand-alone majors. The unease, though, can still be seen in such institutions' use of the MPAA rating system. A small sampling reveals a wide range of usage in the student handbooks of such institutions.

Charleston Southern University, the Southern Baptist institution in Charleston, South Carolina, makes no mention of the rating system or, indeed, of film as a specific medium in its student handbook. The nearest reference is, "A student may be brought before disciplinary officials for . . . possessing, showing or distributing material . . . of a lewd, profane, or pornographic nature on or off campus" (*Charleston Southern University Student Handbook 2008-2009*, p. 8-9). Regent University, the evangelical university in Virginia Beach, Virginia, has a similar policy; item #8 in its student handbook states, "Lewd, indecent or obscene conduct or expression, [or] involvement with pornography . . . is prohibited" (*Regent University Student*

Handbook, 2008, p. 30). While no specific rating is mentioned, it may be inferred that "NC-17" or "X" rated films are automatically prohibited. Films of other ratings may or may not be, apparently depending upon the degree of lewdness, profanity, indecency or obscenity. This policy allows students and their instructors a great deal of freedom; simultaneously it creates a great deal of responsibility and more than a little uncertainty in negotiating a vast gray area.

Cedarville University, the Baptist institution in Cedarville, Ohio, offers somewhat more guidance to its students in this gray area. It asks its students to use seven specific questions when choosing all forms of media, which point away from films of sexual vice, gratuitous violence and profanity. The key and final question, "Ultimately, what would Jesus Christ think of your choices?" is balanced by one specific rule and punishment, "Attendance at pornographic movies will result in 20 demerits and a suspension. Subsequent offenses may result in dismissal" (*Cedarville University Student Handbook 2009-2010*, p. 18). Again, the only clear rating prohibition is "X" or "NC-17."

Biola University, the evangelical institution in Los Angeles, California, has a somewhat conflicted view. In its section on "Entertainment Choices," the student handbook admonishes students to apply serious thought, spiritual discernment, and moral commitment to their individual choices, saying, "Biola University does not presume to be a censoring agency for all activities; it does, however, expect tangible evidence of maturing Christian convictions and discerning judgment"; yet the very next sentence states, "Although the University discourages the use of the industry rating code as a guide in determining which films and programs are 'acceptable' for Christians, films with an 'R' rating are not permitted for viewing in public places on campus . . . ." (*Biola University Undergraduate Student Handbook & Guide to University Policies*, 2009, p. 37). A later section on pornography states, "University policy

forbids exhibition, possession, or distribution of material or representations deemed to be obscene or contrary to the moral standards and/or mission of the University, including, but not limited to, pornography" (*Biola University Undergraduate Student Handbook & Guide to University Policies*, 2009, p. 48). Therefore, despite the disclaimer, the university forbids "X" and "NC-17" material and restricts "R" rated movies to private viewing.

Even stricter in its use of the rating system is Liberty University. The independent Christian university in Lynchburg, Virginia, specifies a punishment of "12 Reprimands + $50.00 fine [for] Attendance at, possession or viewing of an 'R'-rated movie" (*The Liberty Way*, 2009, p. 10), and "18 Reprimands +$250 Fine + 18 Hours Disciplinary Community Service [for] Possession and/or viewing of sexually-explicit material or movies ('X' or 'NC-17')" (*The Liberty Way*, 2009, p. 11). The disapprobation placed on "R-rated" films is even more evident when one considers that a student who accumulates thirty or more reprimands in two consecutive semesters ". . . may be asked not to return to school the following semester . . ." and that *The Liberty Way* applies during all university breaks, including weekends and summers (2009, p. 12). On the other hand, Liberty has recently re-evaluated this section of *The Liberty Way*, at least in part and at least as it applies to the Liberty University library:

> I also recognize the unevenness in the motion picture rating system and realize that there may well be useful instructional elements in some of the films that have received an "R" rating. In such cases, we will support faculty in the ordering of those materials. When the orders are placed with our acquisitions team, we will confirm that the department chair has signed off on the purchase and will then place the order. When these "R" rated materials are received and processed, we will place them in a specially designated

> collection of materials that are restricted to faculty use only. (D. Barnett, personal communication, August 5, 2009)

This marks a definite movement towards increased instructional liberty, no pun intended.

Finally, and in stark contrast, stands Bob Jones University. The independent Baptist college in Greenville, South Carolina, does not make its student handbook available to non-students. However, its Web page *Residence Hall Life* states, "Residence hall students may not watch videos above a G rating when visiting homes in town and may not attend movie theaters" (2009, ¶ 23); since all Bob Jones undergraduates who are single, or under the age of 23, and not living with relatives must live in the residence halls (2009, ¶ 13) and since residence hall students are forbidden both televisions and DVD or videotape players (2009, ¶ 9), all undergraduates are effectively limited to "G-rated" movies only, and those on rare occasions.

Resulting Difficulties in Film Education

As one could imagine, restricting students to "G-rated" viewing severely limits the number of significant films that can be shown to students. Furthermore, even the "R" prohibition can raise unexpected challenges.

The first challenge may be called the "March of Time" problem. As noted, the MPAA rating system has been in place since 1968; to date, there have been forty-two years of film releases under the system. Thus, more than half of American motion pictures in the Sound Era (that is, since the release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927) have been released with ratings. Even if each year brought exactly the same percentage of "R" movies, each year must add to the storehouse of cinema history that is off-limits to the evangelical film student. This is compounded by the fact that each year does not bring the same percentage of "R's"; while approximately 25% of all movies were rated "R" in the first year of the system, by the turn of the

millennium roughly 70% earned the "R" rating (Vaughn, 2006, p. 52). Of course, many of these films, like most works in all media, are not worthy of serious study. As television writer and producer, and evangelical Christian, Dean Batali wryly observes, "If you were forced to listen to every song ever written or look at every painting ever painted, imagine how much garbage you'd have to sift through" (2005, p. 16). Still, the fact that a clear majority of all films are rated "R" greatly increases the likelihood that a greater number of films of artistic or historic significance will be rated "R."

This likelihood has in fact come to pass, in the judgment of the motion picture industry itself. The Academy Award "Oscar" for Best Picture has gone to an "R" rated movie for 22 of the last 40 years ("Best Picture Winners," 2009). The American Film Institute, in compiling its most recent list of the 100 greatest American movies, lists 44 films released under the rating system; of these, 32 are rated "R" (*AFI*, 2007). In other words, according to the members of the industry's foremost preservation society, 32% of the greatest American films of all time, and 73% of the greatest American films of the ratings era, are "Rated R -- Restricted."

Academic sources also reflect the increasing importance of "R" films. Each chapter in the widely adopted text *A History of Film* concludes with a list of important "Films of the Period." In the first part of the book to deal with the ratings era, the chapter on American film from 1963-1974, 21 of 54 listed films, or 38%, are rated "R" (Wexman, 2006, 344-346). The chapter on American film from 1975-1993 lists 75 "R" rated films from a total of 139, or 54% (Wexman, 402-404). The chapter on American film from 1994-2004 lists 93 films, of which 61 are rated "R," or 66% (472-473). In short, if the whole of noteworthy film is an iceberg, the tiny and shrinking tip above water is all non-"R" films, while the enormous and growing mass below the surface is solidly rated "R."

Even instructors who wish to avoid the whole "R" iceberg entirely, by assigning films only released before the MPAA instituted ratings, may still find themselves in unexpected difficulties. *Psycho* (1961) is included in Wexman's "Films of the Period" for 1946-1962 (2006, p. 198), and *Bonnie & Clyde* (1967) is included in Wexman's "Films of the Period" for 1963-1974 (2006, p. 345). Both were originally released with no rating; when re-released after the Ratings Board was established, each was and is still rated "R." It is possible that any other film released under the old system could be made off-limits by a subsequent re-release that necessitates a new rating. And, as Martin (2009) notes, classics of the medium, pre- and post-ratings, are *de rigueur* viewing in film textbooks. With these facts in mind, it behooves the Christian film educator, and the Christian institution that includes film in the curriculum, to understand the arguments both against and for the study of such films.

Arguments Against the Use of R-rated Films in Christian Film Study

Tertullian asked centuries ago, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?" (cited in Poe, 2004, p. 27). Obviously Tertullian was speaking of the scholastic academy, not the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Still, given Hollywood's documented hostility (Medved, 1992) toward conservative values in general and Judeo/Christian values in particular, the exclusion of films that even the secular industry admits are not for youngsters warrants serious consideration.

The first argument against using "R" movies in a Christian film curriculum is the fact that, to a greater degree than any other type of American college, the Christian university still retains much of the once universal "*in loco parentis*" attitude toward its students. Poe notes that the majority of parents and students think of a school that calls itself Christian as one that is

"safe" (2004, p. 19); the students should be kept safe, especially, from the temptations of drugs, alcohol, and sex. This exceptionalist view is encouraged by such institutions. As Chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr. of Liberty University said in a widely reprinted article, "*Parents* [italics added] and students support the university because they believe in its distinctly Christian identity and mission" (2009). This being the case, a reasonable expectation is that films on such an institution's campus should be "safe" as well. Film and television professional Barbara Nicolosi writes, "Many Godly people think that the goal is for movies to be 'non-offensive' in terms of sex, language, and violence" (2005, p. 126). From the academic perspective, Wolterstorff concurs, though not necessarily happily: "We have not the slightest compunction in allowing our children to read [or view] gross paeans of praise to nationalism, to financial success, to humanism, to militarism – just providing they are 'clean'" (2002, p. 41). While this indifference to theme may be overstated, it seems clear many parents do indeed expect the school to err on the side of safety in the areas of sex, language, and violence in entertainment; and, thus, "R" rating is a convenient "unsafe zone."

The second argument is related to the first; "safety" by avoiding "R" rated films is important because of the powerful modeling effect of movies. As early as the 1930s, Dorothea Brande wrote, "The moving picture house is the church of the modern adolescent . . . ." (cited in Gaebelein, 1995, p. 8). Decades later, Wright notes that the American decline in religion is concurrent with the expansion of film and media (2007, p. 2), and Poe agrees, stating that values in our culture are created and transmitted through mass entertainment far more than the church or the school (2004, p. 81). Wolterstorff goes even further, claiming that the modeling effect of film is almost equal to viewing an action "live" (2002, p. 121). While many researchers would dispute this, few would argue that motion pictures do have some effect on viewers, and that younger

viewers have fewer defenses against such influence. Again, forbidding "R" rated movies is an expedient way to add to that defense.

The third argument concerns the defenses of the institution itself: the "slippery slope" argument. This may be applied to film study thus: if "R" rated films are permitted, then "NC-17" and even "X" or "XXX" must inevitably follow. This idea is less risible when one observes that academic study of pornography has already taken root in secular universities, to the point that the proliferation of such courses was publicized in *Time* magazine (Cullen, Friedhoff & Ressner, 2006). Further strengthening this concern is the phenomenon of "ratings creep." As documented by Thompson & Yokota (2004) and Leone & Houle (2006), the rating of films has become progressively more lenient, so that a 1968 "R" rated film would probably be "PG" or "PG-13" if released today, while today's "R" films would probably have been "Adults Only." Ratings head Heffner relates what may mark the beginning of this trend. From 1968 to 1976, one use of the "f-word" would earn a movie the "R." In the Bicentennial year, *All the President's Men* (1976) was released. The artistic value and cultural significance of the film moved the board to relax this rule, and the relaxation led to elimination (Vaughn, 2006, p. 47-50). As if this were not enough cause for concern, Heffner says studios consistently lobby for less restrictive ratings, successfully as often as not (Vaughn, 2006, p. 109-121); if such lobbying efforts are not successful, studios have been known to submit one version of a film to get a desired rating and then release a different and more intense version in the theaters (Vaughn, 2006, p. 58-63).

Arguments For the Use of R-rated Films in Christian Film Study

The heart of the "slippery slope" argument is that eventually, as Cole Porter once wrote, "Anything Goes." If, as Diekema maintains, "Most Christian scholars locate in Christian colleges embracing Christian worldviews because they share that worldview" (2000, p. 70) this

should not be the case in the Christian university (and certainly the author is not arguing that it should). Wilson notes that the Christian academy has been dealing for centuries with a literary canon that "includes prophets and lunatics, saints like Bunyan and scoundrels like Whitman" (Wilson, 1996, p. 175-176). This is a logical outcome of Haile's principle, "Christian thinking and behavior is always concerned with excellent [sic], whether it is in personal relationships and societal structures, or in art, literature and scientific inquiry" (1994, p. 393), and Gangel's assertion, "Wherever truth is found, if it is genuine truth, it is ultimately traceable back to the God of the Bible (1994, p. 397). Wolterstorff recommends approaching the canon recognizing that in an impure world, all things are impure (2002, p. 43). In other words, the nuggets of truth must be panned from the preponderance of silt. To quote Haile again, "His [God's] ear is always open to what we have to say, however inane and unreasonable it may be. And to be Christian, we've got to be like him" (1994, 393).

While these thoughts certainly support Christians engaging the canon of a given subject, each accepts as a given the idea that such a canon exists. Fortunately for Christian film scholars, work has already been done to establish a cinematic canon. Frances Taylor Patterson, in her pedagogy and publications at Columbia University, was compiling lists of cinema classics as far back as the 1920's (Polan, 2007, p. 62). The first of much more substantial efforts toward compiling a canon was begun in 1935, when New York's Museum of Modern Art began its Film Library (Polan, 2007, p. 15). The current work of compiling and communicating the canon by academic historians such as Wexman and industry institutions such as the American Film Institute has already been noted. Independent and popular critics have also done significant work in the cause. Roger Ebert is perhaps foremost of these; his "Great Movies" list of over 300 films is drawn from all eras and most nations in filmmaking – and includes 77 "R" rated films, a

quarter of the total (2009). Of course, the existence of such lists is only a first step; the idea of the canon implies strong agreement about "great films" amongst various sources. Happily, when one compares the efforts of Wexman, Ebert, and the American Film Institute, one observes that 31 of the 32 "R" rated films on the Institute's list are on either Wexman's list or Ebert's list; of these 31 films, 22 are on all three lists (see Appendix). In other words, an "R-rated canon" is already fairly well established; the Christian scholar need only work with it.

Extending that work to students, of course, brings up the question of behavior modeling. Certainly no Christian instructor wants all of the behaviors of all characters in "R" rated films modeled by his or her students. On the other hand, all Christian film instructors want their students to be able to model the professional behavior – the skills and craftsmanship – necessary to produce such films. In other words, Christian film instructors want to prepare their students for careers in the motion picture industry.

This means, first, that students must have knowledge of the history of the medium. Poe says, speaking of history in general, "The postmodern generation, however, has no historical perspective" (2004, p. 87); Schaefer, referring specifically to film history, concurs: "Students' general historical knowledge seems to decrease year after year" (2007, p. 96). If this is the case for secular students, how much more so may it be true of students for whom large sections of the historical record are cordoned off with a "Restricted" sign. Students must at least be made aware of how much the "R" rated past is influencing the industry at present.

Second, to learn the techniques of film's masters, students must go in depth into the masterpieces. Gaebelein sees Philippians 4:8 as "an invitation for Christian education to range over . . . the beauty of music and art . . . all the best that has been thought and said and done by men" (1995, p. 54-55), not just Christian "men," but all people. Wright takes this a step further;

writing from a religious studies perspective, he stresses the importance of study of film technique, specifically the shot and the edit, to fully understand the film (2007, p. 22). Nicolosi, herself a Christian, states flatly:

> We need to humbly acknowledge as a Christian community that we do not have "masters" of the screen art form in our midst. We should be driven to work with the pagans not just to bring Christ to them but also, frankly, to learn from them. (2005, p. 119).

No scholars seriously dispute this. That being the case, Christian film scholars and students must seek out "the best that has been done," even if the MPAA has deemed it worthy of the "R." Haile (1994, p. 393) and Gangel (1994, p. 397-398) strongly believe that the Christian can do this fearlessly, relying on the doctrine of common grace to discover God's truth in all areas. Having done that, the student can apply the truths of technique to the Truth of the Gospel; conversely, even if students choose secular careers, they will be better positioned to apply the Truth back to their technique. As Gaebelein put it, "A youth has made real progress in spiritual living when he understands that all honest work, well and faithfully done, is a service for God and is in that sense Christian" (1995, p. 78).

This understanding is of course unlikely to come unassisted. Thus, the third argument for using "R" films in Christian film study; the ability, and the necessity, of the instructor to guide the student in distinguishing great filmmaking from great meaning. Poe stresses the necessity of scholars being educated enough to defend their own disciplines (2004, p. 14), even when confronted by challenging works. To be sure, as McEwan (2007) noted in his "Introduction" to the *Cinema Journal* issue dedicated to the problem, secular scholars have "difficult" films with which they have to engage. However, difficult films require even greater forethought and care of

the Christian scholar, for two reasons: there are far more difficult films from a Christian perspective, and the Christian scholar is not afforded the luxury of simply ignoring them. Diekema states, "The committed Christian scholar also feels the obligation to engage alternative points of view in order to learn from them, to be challenged by them, and to bring a Christian witness to bear upon them" (2000, p. 63). The first and most important part of that Christian witness is the instruction the Christian educator conveys to her or his students. Trueblood says the most important thing in Christian education is the "penetration of central Christian convictions" to all subjects (1994, p. 376); Gangel uses the analogy of a mental "theological sieve," which filters all subjects through the absolute Truth of Christ (1994, p. 399); and Fisher focuses on specific examples, noting that a Christian professor might cite the positive aspects of Socrates, Plato, and Rousseau, while also delineating their points that, from a Christian point of view, are either mistaken or diametrically opposed (1989, p. 44-46). Though none specifically mentioned it, those subjects include film. The shared idea makes the instructor's role essential, and the necessity of Christian instructor involvement requires bringing "Restricted" films into the study. Once again, Gaebelein states it pithily, "Must we have nothing to do with any culture except that of the Bible? Obviously not. A clear differentiation of values, not a retreat to obscurantism, is the solution" (1995, p. 123).

A final question, though not precisely an argument, on the side of inclusion of the "R" film is the question of academic freedom. In his extensive discussion of the subject, Diekema notes that academic freedom is "always a contextualized freedom and a responsible freedom" (2000, p. 4) and "a means to other ends; namely, the pursuit, discovery, and promotion of truth within the context of the academy and for the benefit of society" (2004, p. 72). The context, in this case, is the context of the Christian scholar in the Christian institution. While this author

agrees with Gaebelein, “A Christian faculty must . . . be free to exercise consecrated scholarship” (1995, p. 76), the key word in the sentence is consecrated. Christian scholars should first consider their scholarship as service to Christ. In consequence, as Fisher says, believing teachers in a Christian institution “find their freedom in faithfulness, becoming the bondservants of Christian commitment” to the purposes of their school (1989, p. 102). While Diekema also notes that boundaries in the academy may be altered or removed, it is only after the process and within the bounds of civil discourse and solid scholarship (2004, p. 41); persuasion, not rebellion, must ever be the course of the Christian professor in Christian academe.

Conclusion

The question of what films of which ratings to include or exclude in the curriculum of a Christian university is one of ongoing and peculiar sensitivity. Perhaps this is because films themselves have become such an integral and yet still provocative part of our culture. For example, in a recent film, a hardened criminal experiences an astounding event and as a result renounces his evil ways, saying,

> This was divine intervention . . . What happened here was a miracle . . . Now whether or not what we experienced is an according-to-Hoyle miracle is insignificant. But what is significant is I felt the touch of God. God got involved…. Basically, I’m gonna walk the earth . . . until God puts me where he wants me to be. (Bender & Tarantino, 1994)

This is a line, not from an evangelical film, but from *Pulp Fiction*. Even more astonishing, the plot of the picture, taken as a whole, shows that Jules, the criminal, was exactly right in his epiphany and his repentance. But, unfortunately, the film was rated “R.” Poe, reflecting on his years chairing his undergraduate institution’s film committee, says:

> I now realize that all films are religious films. They may not teach doctrine or explain the Bible . . . but they deal with the stuff about which religion is concerned. All films have a perspective that reflects a religious attitude. This attitude may be positive or negative, but religion is already there. (2004, p. 20)

If that is the case, requiring Christian students first to encounter the religious attitudes and concerns in "R" rated films away from the influence of Christian instruction would seem to be a problematic position. Simply opening the floodgate to any and all films, on the other hand, is equally problematic. As Lockerbie proposed in his "A Covenant for Excellence," "Be it further resolved . . . that our students . . . be provided with examples of excellence worthy of emulation [and] by the finest quality of human endeavor . . . ." (1994, p. 412). Or, as Jesus himself might have put it, we need not cast before the swine the pearls that are our students (Matthew 7:6) in order to bring from the fallow field of Hollywood whatever pearls may be found there (Matthew 13:44-45).

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Appendix

The "R-Rated Canon": 22 Restricted-Rating Films Selected as Significant

by Ebert, Wexman, and the American Film Institute

Apocalypse Now (1979)

Blade Runner (1982)

Bonnie & Clyde (1967)

Chinatown (1974)

Do the Right Thing (1989)

Easy Rider (1969)

The Godfather (1972)

The Godfather: Part II (1974)

Goodfellas (1990)

The Last Picture Show (1971)

Midnight Cowboy (1969) (rated "R" upon re-release)

Nashville (1975)

Network (1976)

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975)

Psycho (1960)

Pulp Fiction (1994)

Raging Bull (1980)

Schindler's List (1993)

The Silence of the Lambs (1991)

Taxi Driver (1976)

Unforgiven (1992)

The Wild Bunch (1969)