



Volume 61 | Issue 1

Article 21

5-1-2018

Anker's "Beautiful light: Religious meaning in film" (book review)

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Recommended Citation

Bogan, Terri (2018) "Anker's "Beautiful light: Religious meaning in film" (book review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 61 : Iss. 1 , Article 21.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol61/iss1/21>

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Book Reviews



Anker, R. M. (2017). *Beautiful light: Religious meaning in film*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 272 pp. \$28.00. ISBN 9780802873699

The subtitle of *Beautiful Light* aptly describes the broad subject matter of the book as “religious meaning in film.” But what is meant by “religious meaning,” and is there a place for this in film? These are questions the author answers in the introduction to the book. In his introduction, Anker notes the difference between films about religious characters or biblical narratives, and films that grapple with the human condition. It is this latter type of film that is the focus of his analyses as he posits that “the way in which religious notions and experience can address the depths of the human plight” (p. 23) does have a place in film.

Beautiful Light is a scholarly analysis of nine films that have received critical notice and includes titles such as: *Wide Awake*, *The Apostle*, *Dead Man Walking*, and *The Shawshank Redemption*. Each film is analyzed separately in a stand-alone essay that is clear, thorough, and well documented with footnotes. The book also includes a filmography and index at the end.

Anker taught film and literature at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan for many years and has written other books on the topic of religion in film. He is obviously well versed in the topic and, in *Beautiful Light*, has written a thoughtful piece of theological film criticism and analysis. He has clearly shown that film can “display the world as packed with surprise, wonder, and shining, of assorted kinds of ‘beautiful light,’ even unto intimating the mysteries of some measure of divine love” (p. 26).

Beautiful Light is recommended for those libraries that support students of film and religion as well as for the personal libraries of those simply interested in the topic.

Reviewer

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