CHRIST FIGURES IN CINEMA: CHANGING RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

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Cinema and religion perform similar functions within cultures. Both seek to communicate acceptable social values within a culture at a given time. In Christianity, the Christ narrative and supportive imagery are used for the purposes of exhorting followers to abide by the example of the religion's namesake, Jesus Christ, in their interactions with each other. Cinema uses narratives of other characters in a similar manner, exploring the interactions among people and determining which are acceptable in society at a certain point in time. My research focuses, then, on the merger of these two aspects of society and culture, the use of the Christ figure in the cinema. By examining Christ figures throughout the history of this popular art form and entertainment medium, I hoped to gain understanding into the complicated relationship of specifically American culture and Christianity. I considered many films from several decades that dealt both explicitly and implicitly with the figure of Christ in a variety of ways. I concluded that although initially, it may seem as though the relationship of American culture to Christianity, as evidenced through films, seems to be increasingly more irreverent, the culture of filmmaking has changed allowing films to be made for smaller and more select audiences. Therefore, many segments of American culture have used the story, making the values and the narrative accessible to modern life via a departure from, a changing of or an adherence to the biblical story of Jesus Christ.