

Lights! Camera! Antisemitism? The Cinema and Jewish-Christian Relations

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Introduction

The cinema – not just films themselves, but also the institutions that produce and distribute them, and the audiences who are their consumers – began in the 1890s in Europe and the United States. The first films were extremely brief, consisting of a single shot. Their viewers were seemingly fascinated by the recording of animate and inanimate objects. But as early as 1902 (the year of Georges Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon*) changes of scene and camera position were deployed to tell stories. From its beginnings as a fairground attraction, cinema rapidly developed, as art form and industry. Today, film is a global phenomenon. Countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe have noteworthy indigenous cinemas, although with few exceptions these generally define themselves in opposition to Hollywood, whose products have been dominant internationally since 1918. Throughout this history, cinema has been implicated in Jewish-Christian relations: 'implicated' here flags intimacy and complexity. As will become apparent, films do not simply reflect Jewish-Christian relations but actively participate in or constitute them. Moreover, a film's meaning or significance for Jewish-Christian Relations is not straightforwardly a function of its narrative or visual style. The relationships between history, theology, the cinematic text, and its reception, are highly complex.

This article explores aspects of the relationship between the worlds of the cinema and Jewish-Christian relations. What is attempted is a broad, critical survey, with a number of characteristic examples pinpointed, rather than an encyclopaedic history. Selected films which re-present either biblical texts or works of literary fiction are discussed, as are films dealing with some prominent issues in contemporary Jewish-Christian relations. The earliest work considered in detail is *Intolerance* (D. W. Griffith, 1916), and

the most recent, *The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002). Finally, the rhetoric surrounding the 'Jewish Hollywood' question is described, particularly in relation to the construction of Jewish and non-Jewish (including Christian) identities.

Film's potential as a form of mass communication has on occasion been exploited with the explicit aim of influencing Christian or Jewish attitudes towards one another. The most obvious examples of this approach to filmmaking are to be found in fascist Europe. The *Reichsfilmkammer* was one of the first bodies established by the Ministry of Propaganda following Hitler's accession to power, reflecting Nazi belief in the cinema as a tool for the reconstruction of German culture. Productions like Veit Harlan's *Jew Süss* (1940) and Fritz Hippler's *The Eternal Jew* (1940) were intended to shape audience perceptions of the Nazi enterprise. Distribution was carefully managed. The government bought theatres, and troops carried projection equipment with them into occupied territories. In 1941-1942, Hippler's film (a documentary about 'world Jewry') was scheduled for screening in all Dutch cinemas, whilst Harlan's (a period drama about an eighteenth century court Jew, who is sentenced to death for corruption) was shown to non-Jewish audiences in Poland, as part of the preparations for the Final Solution.¹ There were attempts to predetermine audience responses by printing synopses in newspapers, so that viewers were primed to recognise the film's message before they entered the movie theatre.² However, fascist cinema, whilst not totally divorced from the techniques of more 'respectable' filmmaking, is an extreme case. More commonly, the intentions behind a film are less didactic, but its subject matter may draw makers and viewers into exploration of and engagement with aspects of Jewish-Christian relations. This is perhaps most readily demonstrated in films dealing with biblical subject matter.

Biblical Films

Amongst the earliest films to participate in Jewish-Christian relations were those with specifically religious themes. In its early years, the cinema struggled to position itself as a respectable industry, and keen to appease the middle classes (especially those calling for rigorous censorship) studios and trade publications downplayed the comedies and melodramas that constituted the bulk of production output, and invested disproportionate resources in making and promoting a small number of 'quality' films with biblical-religious, literary and historical subjects. These genres have been

revived periodically, notably when the threats of censorship and restriction have again seemed acute. For example, the biggest box office draw of 1951-1960, a decade during which the film industry endured the attentions of the House Un-American Activities Committee and other investigative bodies, was *Ben Hur* (William Wyler, 1959) with Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956) second and *The Robe* (Henry Koster, 1953) in fourth position.³

Pre-Holocaust, many biblical films propagated anti-Judaism. The first Jesus films were heavily dependent on Passion Plays and inherited traditions of anti-Judaism, alongside those of staging and plotting, from their predecessors. After their commercial runs, such films as *Passion Play of Oberammergau* (Henry C. Vincent, 1898) and the *Horitz Passion Play* (Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, 1897) had extended afterlives in devotional-religious contexts. Customers could buy prints of one or more scenes, and then use them for entertainment in church socials, or as resources in worship and education.⁴ Unfortunately, it is impossible to say how many clergy used this material, and to what extent it did (not) tap into anti-Jewish feeling in its audiences.

Whilst much of the reception history of these screened plays remains inaccessible, that of D. W. Griffith's influential *Intolerance* (1916) is well documented. The life of Jesus is one of four interwoven stories illustrating the theme of intolerance through the ages. Reflecting both the gospel texts and their usual interpretation in Griffith's day, the Pharisees are cast as Jesus' 'intolerant' opponents. There are shades of nuance in some of the intertitles: one suggests that the name Pharisee was 'possibly brought into disrepute by hypocrites among them'. Under pressure from Jewish communal organisations, footage of Jews (played by Orthodox Jews from Los Angeles) nailing Jesus to the cross was re-shot, substituting Roman soldiers.⁵ But Griffith transformed the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Luke 18) into an actual event, and inserted references to Pharisees as haters of love and pleasure into the portrayal of the marriage at Cana (John 2). In doing so, he heightened the gospels' polemic against Jews who opposed Jesus, and placed anti-Judaism at the heart of the film 'canon'.

Intolerance's depiction of Pharisees, coupled with its encouragement to viewers to draw parallels between ancient and modern attitudes and personalities, is especially striking given the fact that the film was presented as a response to African-Americans and white liberals who had condemned

Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) as racist. Indeed, within Film Studies it is commonplace to find critical interpretations of *Intolerance* as either atonement for, or defence of, the earlier film.⁶ Whichever position is adopted, the implication is that *Intolerance*, with its stereotypes of Pharisees, may be read as evidencing a lack of prejudice on Griffith's part – which raises interesting questions about the assumptions of the discipline as much as it does about those of Griffith himself.

Further illustration of the ways in which early directors negotiated – willingly, or otherwise – the sensibilities of different communities is offered by the case of Cecil B. DeMille's 1927 *The King of Kings*. DeMille had Father Daniel Lord, who would later be instrumental in the formation of the Catholic Legion of Decency (a pressure group that aimed to enforce the Production Code, discussed later) say Mass on set each day. He also employed as consultants religious writer Bruce Barton, and Protestant minister George Reid Andrews.⁷ The film takes a conservative approach narratively (the virginal conception and other miracles are presented as historical events) and stylistically (the synchronized score features traditional hymns; visual aesthetics are informed by the popular engravings of Gustave Doré, and Leonardo Da Vinci's famous painting of the Last Supper).⁸ Like the makers of the early Passion films, DeMille struggled to separate Christian piety from anti-Judaism, and like *Intolerance*, *King of Kings* prompted protests, specifically from the Anti-Defamation League, who complained about the presentation of Jews in the trial and crucifixion sequences. Numerous bodies, including Conservative Judaism's Rabbinical Assembly, passed resolutions condemning the film. In a letter to Will Hays, head of the industry's trade association, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA), DeMille hinted darkly that the protests would turn other Americans against Jews, with dangerous consequences.⁹ Nevertheless, changes were made and the re-edited version, still in circulation today, bears the hallmarks of a deliberate, but uneven, effort to move away from the suggestion that Jews were collectively guilty of Jesus' death. The opening titles stress that first century Judea was under Roman occupation, and the trial before Caiaphas is almost totally excised. However, Caiaphas later declares that he alone is responsible for the crucifixion. This is a clumsy move. Seemingly intended to distance the film from Matthew 27:26, it does not fit convincingly with either the historical events or the film's own internal logic.

DeMille's efforts to appease his critics and rid the film of anti-Judaism

concentrated on narrative. But it would be a mistake to focus on this dimension alone when considering the place of cinema in Jewish-Christian relations. For example, DeMille cast Yiddish theatre actors Rudolph and Joseph Schildkraut as Judas and Caiaphas, and used Orthodox Jews as crowd extras, a practice *The Ten Commandments* (1923) repeated. What motivated this decision is unclear. DeMille sought to associate all of his biblical films with reverential scholarship. (This was a strategy commonly deployed by directors attempting to present their films as 'high culture'.¹⁰) It is likely, then, that he believed the Jewish actors somehow lent 'authenticity' to *The King of Kings*.¹¹ However, DeMille did not cast Jews in the sympathetic roles of Jesus and his disciples. The film therefore suggests a problematic continuity (theological and/or ethnic) between Jesus' opponents and modern Jewry. This connection also seems implicit in one of the intertitles, which states that Caiaphas, 'cared more for Revenue than for Religion – and...saw in Jesus a menace to his rich profits from the Temple.' Its claim that Jesus' opponents viewed the world primarily in terms of the cash nexus resonates with anti-Jewish rhetoric current in 1920s America. In short, *The King of Kings* inserts modern antisemitic discourse, specifically its construction of Jewish acquisitiveness, into the narrative of Christian beginnings.¹²

In a Jewish-Christian relations context it might be tempting to interpret such films as translations of Christian anti-Judaism to the screen, which were sometimes modified in response to Jewish lobbying. Things are not so simple. One source of concern for critics of *The King of Kings* was Jewish participation in its production and exhibition: Sid Grauman was censured for showing the film in his Chinese Theater in San Francisco, where it played for twenty-four weeks.¹³ The roles of the Schildkrauts have already been mentioned. Jewish personnel were variously associated with the films criticised for their antisemitic overtones. In a sense these works bear traces of the contradictions that their creators embodied and wrestled. (DeMille himself was a practising Christian with part-Jewish origins.) On the one hand, some Jewish film professionals desired to refute claims about Jewish responsibility for the crucifixion.¹⁴ On the other hand, during the early and mid-twentieth century, they were mostly assimilationist, downplaying notions of Jewish particularity and conscious of a need to cater for Christian audiences. Given this context of production it is, therefore, accurate to speak of biblical films not as cinematic illustrations of anti-Jewish sentiment, nor as manifestations of the exercise of Jewish

control' in the film industry, but as interesting, complex works that refract the ambivalence with which film-makers approached questions of biblical interpretation, religious and ethnic identity, commonality, and difference.

It is only since the mid-1960s – the era of *Nostra Aetate* (discussed in Eugene Fisher's contribution to this volume) and the Six Day War – that some biblical filmmakers have systematically tried to avoid or even confront anti-Judaism. In this respect *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) is noteworthy. Its effort to portray a Jewish Jesus, and its evocation of the tragic consequences of the deicide charge, partly reflect director Franco Zeffirelli's reading of the Catholic documents re-assessing church teachings on Jews and Judaism.¹⁵ The multi-faith panel of advisors who worked on the film included Rabbis Albert Friedlander and Marc Tanenbaum, both of whom were well-known participants in Jewish-Christian dialogue at the time. Accordingly, *Jesus of Nazareth* is the first Jesus-story film motivated by a desire to represent Jesus as a Jew, and to refute the view that Jews were responsible for his death, thereby inviting their rejection and punishment by God.

Mindful of these goals, Zeffirelli's film is more radical than DeMille's. In its efforts to exonerate Judas, around whom much anti-Judaism has developed, *Jesus of Nazareth* posits an additional character, Zerah, who plays a crucial role in Jesus' trial and death, performing functions Christianity traditionally ascribed to Judas and Caiaphas. Zerah is a prominent Sanhedrin member, who engineers Jesus' appearance at a hearing, which, the dialogue stresses, is irregular, being held in haste and at night.¹⁶ Judas appears as naïve and confused, manipulated by Zerah into delivering Jesus to the authorities in order (he mistakenly believes) to give him an opportunity to meet and impress Caiaphas. For his part, Caiaphas is a reactive politician, working within a context of oppressive occupation. He is sympathetic and calls Jesus 'extraordinary', but has little room to manoeuvre once Jesus claims publicly to be God's son. These narrative innovations illustrate how changes in mainstream Christian teaching on Jesus' position within first century Judaism have informed the production of a given film. However, at times, Zeffirelli's didactic ends assert themselves to the detriment of the film qua film. The dialogue in the Sanhedrin 'trial', for example, is stilted, with too many explanatory asides about the constraints on Jewish government during Roman occupation. Moreover, it is questionable whether the introduction of Zerah – a character without scriptural basis – serves the purposes of art or

Nostra Aetate adequately. Can the fashioning of a speculative addition to the gospels form a sound basis for Jewish-Christian understanding?

In addition to a cumbersome handling of Jesus' death, *Jesus of Nazareth* struggles to realise post-war understandings of Jesus as a figure who operated within, rather than against or above, a first century Jewish milieu. Jesus' Jewishness is emphasised via the (anachronistic) depiction of his circumcision and *bar mitzva*, and the betrothal and marriage of Joseph and Mary. Recitation of the *Shema* punctuates the film. There are deliberate efforts to break with the approach of *Intolerance*, and move away from the stereotyping of Pharisees as self-righteous hypocrites who were fundamentally opposed to Jesus. However, in these respects too, *Jesus of Nazareth* leaves questions unresolved. Figures who are depicted positively (e.g. Nicodemus) are presented as being such precisely because they support Jesus. Admittedly, it is hard to realise in cinematic terms the sentiment that 'good people can disagree'. On the screen, action defines character, and it is, for example, difficult to see how a director might differentiate (as some biblical commentators suggest) between 'guilt' and 'responsibility' for Jesus' death.¹⁷ At the same time, scenes in which Jesus (following Luke 4) reads from the prophets to a synagogue congregation, and the crucifixion scene, where Zeffirelli has Nicodemus articulate the New Testament (John 12; Romans 10, etc.) elision of Isaiah 53 into Jesus' death, locates the drama within a context of Jewish suffering and messianic expectation, suggesting in traditional Christian terms that Israel finds its fulfilment in Jesus.

Despite his intentions to produce a qualitatively different kind of Jesus film Zeffirelli falls short of the mark. *Jesus of Nazareth* identifies goodness with recognition of Jesus' Messiahship. Images of Jesus reading Hebrew or wearing a *tallit* do not challenge the fundamental reading of the Judaism-Christianity relationship as one of prophecy-fulfilment. The un-reconciled tensions that characterise Zeffirelli's film raise questions for students of Jewish-Christian relations. (They are echoed in Zeffirelli's own professed desire to show Jesus' message as 'a continuation and a fulfilment' of Judaism.¹⁸) Is it possible to make a Jesus film that is recognisable to a predominantly Christian audience, and at the same time avoids supersessionism and triumphalism? Such issues extend beyond the scope of this essay, to the heart of fundamental debates in Jewish-Christian dialogue, about the status of scripture and its place in community formation, and about the congruence (or lack of it) between the Jesus of

history and the Christ of faith.

Adaptations of ‘Classic’ Fiction

Biblical films constitute a small minority of those produced each year. A much larger number of films, including a majority of those to have collected the Academy Award for best film, are adapted from works of secular literature. Some of these become caught up in debates surrounding the presentation of Jews, Christians, and Jewish-Christian relations in their sources.

Oliver Twist (David Lean, 1948) is an important case in point. The film’s famous opening sequence, in which Oliver’s mother struggles to the workhouse, gives birth, and dies, is an impressive piece of expressionist noir photography, sustained over eight dialogue-free minutes. Dickens enthusiasts have praised the ‘faithfulness’ of Lean’s adaptation (Sowerberry’s coffin-shaped snuffbox is one of many memorable touches). Yet *Oliver Twist* was banned and censored in the United States, and remains controversial, because of its depiction of the fence, Fagin. The film’s reception, juxtaposed with that of Dickens’ novel, highlights changing definitions of anti-Jewishness, and attitudes to cinematic and literary ‘classics’.

Dickens’ characterisation of Fagin blended motifs from Christian anti-Judaism (he is a diabolic figure; a ‘poisoner’ of childhood innocence, whom Oliver first encounters in a fiery, cave-like lair) and the newer discourse of race (Fagin is referred to in reptilian terms; descriptions focus on physiological characteristics that race theory associated with Jewishness, such as a large nose, and matted red hair). Moreover, in the novel’s early (1830s) editions Fagin is repeatedly referred to as ‘the Jew’, suggesting that there is something essentially, generalizably Jewish about his role as a corrupter of young children and coordinator of a criminal gang. Lean depends on Dickens for his depiction of Fagin as devious and energetic, and, like the novel, the film links physiognomy with character. Alec Guinness’ heavy makeup, including an enormous nose, gives Fagin’s face an unnatural, mask-like appearance, which some viewers today find shocking.

Responding to Victorian critics of Fagin, Dickens defended his work, claiming that labelling Fagin as ‘the Jew’ was historically accurate, since fences almost invariably were Jewish. He also stressed that he had caricatured not the Jewish religion – a move, which, following the liberal

view of the day, would have been regarded as being in poor taste – but Fagin’s ‘race’.¹⁹ By 1948, when Lean’s film appeared, liberal tastes had shifted. Any suggestion that race, rather than religion, was being scrutinised, would only exacerbate the controversy. Some favourable assessments of *Oliver Twist* reiterate Dickens’ (unsubstantiated²⁰) points about criminal activity by Jews, whilst others justify the presentation of Fagin on the basis that the film is simply being faithful to a ‘classic’. Additionally, it is argued that viewers can distinguish art from reality, and are not likely to become antisemitic as a result of seeing a film.²¹

Lean claimed that having been raised a Quaker, he was ignorant of antisemitism, and baffled by the furore *Oliver Twist* engendered. Given the film’s timing (the script was completed just months after the execution of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, only three years after the end of the Holocaust) this is perhaps disingenuous. Moreover, Joseph Breen (head of the Production Code Administration, which regulated film content in the United States) wrote to Lean before filming began, warning him of the text’s sensitive nature.²² In such a context, Lean’s decision to present Fagin much as Dickens did appears as (at best) profoundly naïve.

Much debate surrounding *Oliver Twist* today dwells on the fact that unlike the novel, the film never uses the word ‘Jew’. Does this absolve the film of any participation in antisemitism? Arguably, despite his protestations to the contrary, Lean’s deletion of the word is a kind of tacit acknowledgement of the possibility of a connection between art and prejudice (which challenges the assumptions of some of his supporters). Even with this modification, it is hard not to see Fagin as antisemitic. Cruikshank’s famous illustrations of Dickens’ novel, produced for its 1838 edition, are an important source for the film’s design. In a plate captioned, ‘The Jew and Morris both begin to understand Each Other’ Cruikshank depicts Fagin, Charlotte, and Morris seated at a table, on which stand a tankard and a drinking glass. Crosshatching and etching create the effect of the scene’s being lit by a candle or similar undepicted light-source between them. The viewer’s gaze is encouraged outwards from this, to the men’s faces, as each taps his nose with his forefinger. This image illustrates a passage in which Fagin, having met the two run-aways, seeks to draw them into his power. Dickens’ narrator observes that Morris tries to imitate Fagin’s nose striking, ‘though not with complete success, in consequence of his own nose not being large enough for the purpose.’²³ Such imagery is the basis for the organisation of several shots in *Oliver*

Twist. The episode with Morris is not in the film, but in one scene where the Artful Dodger, having just introduced Oliver to his mentor, discusses the day's 'business' with Fagin, and in another, where Fagin and Bill plot a robbery, the *mise-en-scène* closely resembles that in Cruickshank's illustration. In other shots, Fagin is typically shown in profile, with camera angles emphasising his facial features. (Significantly, Rank's press book for *Oliver Twist* juxtaposes Cruickshank's plate and a profile shot of Fagin/Guinness.²⁴) He also speaks with a heavy accent, something that Fagin does not do in the novel. All this brings Lean's portrait of Fagin so close to the negative stereotype that simply deleting the word 'Jew' seems insignificant as a remedial move. Audiences who had previously encountered negative images of Jews, or who had anti-Jewish feelings, would have had no difficulty in drawing for themselves a connection between the retained 'signifiers' and the unspoken 'signified'. Mindful of this, some recent productions (including *Oliver!* (Carol Reed, 1968), and Alan Bleasdale's adaptation for Independent Television (1999) have tried to strip Fagin of features component in negative stereotypes of Jews.

Oliver Twist's implication in Jewish-Christian discourse is significant but incidental; neither Jews in Victorian England, nor their representation on screen, were the focus of Lean's interest. In contrast, Joan Micklin Silver's *Hester Street* (1975) based on the 1896 story *Yekl* by Abraham Cahan, is directly concerned with the processes of Jewish acculturation and assimilation in fin-de-siècle New York. Jake (formerly Yekl) is a recent immigrant, who works as a machinist in a sweatshop. His efforts to re-fashion himself as a 'regular American fella' and a developing romance with dancer Mamie Fein are disrupted by the unexpected arrival of his wife, Gitl, and son, Yossele, from Russia. In the claustrophobic environment of a Hester Street tenement, the couple's marriage disintegrates. After their divorce Jake marries the worldly Mamie, but ironically, it is 'greenhorn' Gitl who adapts best to the changing social conditions. Using Mamie's savings, which she cleverly secures in the divorce settlement, she plans to open a grocery store and marry Mr. Bernstein, a pious scholar who was previously the family's lodger.

As this summary suggests, the narrative premise of *Hester Street* is unremarkable. Nostalgia probably explains some of the (unexpected²⁵) success of the film. Since it ceased to be the centre of American Jewish population in the early twentieth century, the Lower East Side has claimed a central place in Jewish collective consciousness. Today, it is as much a

cultural construct as a physical space - a concrete and metaphorical place within which Jews interpret their history and make sense of the experience of being Jewish Americans.²⁶ *Hester Street*, shot in black and white, and using Yiddish extensively, translates the myth of the Lower East Side onto the screen, offering viewers the chance to see the past through the lens of the present. But the popularity of the film indicates that it had an appeal beyond American Jewish audiences: why is this? *Hester Street* is unusually nuanced in its approach to immigrant life. It highlights, for example, the ways in which women's and men's experiences differed, modifying Cahan's text to suggest that a strong network of emotional and practical support existed among ghetto women.²⁷ A scene in which Jake gives Gitl her get (divorce bill) powerfully dramatises the struggle of a religious tradition to assert its authority against modernity's onslaught.²⁸ Such elements may have appealed to audiences for a number of reasons, many of which are not necessarily related to perceptions of Jewish/non-Jewish relations. Works of ethnic cinema are as much about accentuating common values as they are about maintaining distinctions between groups: they speak to 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.²⁹ Non-Jewish Americans who first saw the film were members of a society still reeling from Watergate, Vietnam, and seemingly revolutionary shifts in the relations between the genders and ethnic groups. On the economic front, surveys indicated a widening gap between rich and poor. In such a climate, *Hester Street's* upbeat ending, suggestive as it is of female empowerment and immigrant progress, is largely one of comfort. It reinforces conceptions of America as a land of opportunity and social-economic mobility, in which ethnic values are emotionally significant but nonetheless subsumed by broader American notions of liberation and newness, economic advancement, and marriage relations grounded in love. For non-Jewish audiences, images of Jews in films like *Hester Street* can, therefore, function as evocations of and support for the American dream.

In the 1890s the Lower East Side was predominantly Jewish, but residents would have come into contact with New York's establishment and other sizeable immigrant groups, especially Irish and Italian Catholics. Interestingly, *Hester Street* shows little of this on screen. As Gitl says, 'The Gentiles keep in another place, heh?' Yet the non-Jewish world overshadows Micklin Silver's ghetto. Significantly, the only scene to foreground non-Jewish characters is one in which, having met Gitl and Yossele at Ellis Island, Jake struggles to communicate with an immigration

officer. Their inability to comprehend one another is telling. For Jake and other Jews, access to American society entails painful negotiation with non-Jewish mores. Conversely, the accommodation of immigrants requires effort from America's established residents.

Unsurprisingly, given the economic significance of the textiles industry for Jewish immigrants, *Hester Street* presents clothing as the site on to which much of the struggle between differing world-views is mapped. Jake, who has swapped his beard and side-locks for a sports cap and fashionable suit, demands that Gitl abandon her *sheitel* (wig) and the *tikbel* (headscarf) with which she first replaces it. He perceives dress to be a mark of the true 'Yankee'; distinctively Jewish clothing must be shed on the way to becoming an American. Yet the film hints that it is not simply religious conservatism that limits the choices available to Jews in the New World. When Jake boasts that Yossele (whom he renames Joey) is a future President of the United States, Bernstein correctly replies that the President must be American-born. In this way, with a realism borne of the struggles of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s, Micklin Silver suggests that the boundaries separating the immigrants from mainstream (Christian) society are not exclusively of their own construction.

Intermarriage and Identity

In keeping with the assimilationist aspirations of many American Jews in the early and mid-twentieth century, Hollywood films of the period that depicted interfaith romance and marriage between Jews and Christians did so in largely positive terms. They suggested that ethnic and religious differences ultimately mattered little: like Jake in *Hester Street*, they focussed on the American that the immigrant could become. *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927) is one example. Many people know that it was the first feature film to include spoken dialogue as well as musical numbers, and that it turned Al Jolson into a star. What is less remembered is that a romance between Jewish singer Jake (Jolson) and a Christian, Mary, is central to its plot. Indeed, *The Jazz Singer* is the first Anglophone picture to use the Yiddish term for a gentile woman, *shikse*.³⁰ At the end of the film, happiness with Mary and stardom in the musical theatre are the twin prizes that Jake gains, having swapped the culture of his Orthodox parents for the values of mainstream society. Narratively speaking, *The Jazz Singer* suggests that Jewishness is a flawed or problematic state, to be resolved through assimilation to Christian norms.

Made two years later, *Abie's Irish Rose* (Victor Fleming; 1929) is similarly 'upbeat' about Christian-Jewish romance, although it admits problems and its advocacy of assimilation is less overt. Soldier Abie Levy and Rosemary Murphy (an Irish Catholic entertainer) fall in love. Each fears the wrath of their respective families, and the resulting duplicity (Abie introduces Rosemary to his family as 'Rose Murpheski') sees them undergoing multiple marriage ceremonies. The couple's eventual discovery leads to argument between the Murphys and the Levys, and a rift that is only healed when Rosemary gives birth to twins – a boy who is named after her father, and a girl named after Abie's dead mother.³¹ This light-hearted comedy is noteworthy on two grounds. The name-play in the film suggests that identity – Jewish or Christian – is not fixed, but more like a garment which one can choose to wear or abandon (like Jake's and Gitl's costumes in *Hester Street*). A fake surname is sufficient for Rosemary to 'pass' as a Jew; and the given names of the babies suggest that the communities may each claim one child as their own. At the same time, the film is striking in its suggestion that offspring are the means to community reconciliation: child rearing is often a source of tension for interfaith couples.

The positive tone of *The Jazz Singer* and *Abie's Irish Rose* is not shared by most more recent films. In the past thirty years, just as interfaith marriage by Jews in the United States and elsewhere has increased, so its portrayal on screen has become less optimistic – an attitude evoked by the tagline to *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1975), which proclaims it as 'a nervous romance'. This shift can be interpreted in relation to a number of ideological contexts. In current discourse ethnic difference is positioned as intrinsic to (American) identity. In the wake of the failure of assimilation to be truly inclusive, plurality has been naturalised as typically American. Within this discourse, intermarriage often functions as a synonym for the (now negatively valued) erosion of Jewish identity through assimilation.

In cinematic terms, the new interest in ethnic and other subcultural identities is played out in an increased willingness to portray Jews on the screen in less negatively stereotyped (not necessarily more realistic!) terms than was generally the case before the mid-sixties.³² In Micklin Silver's *Crossing Delancey* (1988) the protagonist Isabella has unsuccessful relationships with two non-Jews, before finding happiness with Sam Posner, a pickle-seller (food is significant throughout the film) whom she first meets through a *shadchen* (match-maker) hired by her *bubbie*

(grandmother). Although it does not explicitly locate Isabella's difficulties with her 'WASP'-ish partners in their religious or ethnic differences (one is married; the other, an egotistical novelist) the narrative's implication is that marriage to another Jew is a more natural, satisfactory state of affairs. Significantly, Isabella and Sam find romance in bubbie's apartment in the Lower East Side. Like the nostalgic American-Jewish viewers of *Hester Street*, Isabella's life journey takes her back to her 'roots'.

A more complex, ambivalent tone characterises Edward Norton's *Keeping the Faith* (2000). Whereas *Hester Street* constructs New York as a city of discrete, barely intersecting communities, and the Lower East Side as a virtual Jewish-city-within-the-city, *Keeping the Faith* depicts contemporary New York as a web of faiths and ethnicities. The drama centres on the relationship between Brian Flynn, an Irish-American Catholic Priest, and his friend Conservative Rabbi Jake Schram. In an important early sequence editing creates a montage of two scenes (Bryan preaching in his church; Jake addressing the synagogue congregation) to establish parallels between the men and their roles as progressive, charismatic leaders. This device, and the film's main sub-plot (Bryan and Jake's efforts to build a Catholic-Jewish seniors' centre) suggest that what the different communities hold in common is more significant than that which divides them. This idea is reinforced by the impact of the sudden re-appearance of Bryan, and Jake's childhood friend, Anna Riley. Both men fall in love with her: Jake and Anna begin a sexual relationship, which they hide from Bryan and Jake's synagogue. Their inevitable exposure provokes a crisis for both men until Bryan learns that his decision to be a celibate priest must be re-affirmed each day, and Jake finally assesses the relative importance of personal happiness and communal expectation. At the close of the film, all dilemmas are resolved. The three friends and their respective communities unite in a karaoke party at the Catholic-Jewish social centre, and Jake and Anna are set to marry.

From a Jewish-Christian relations' perspective, there is much of interest here. *Keeping the Faith* shows strong friendships across religious boundaries between the pre-adolescent Anna, Bryan, and Jake – something Norton and producer Stuart Blumberg describe as an 'essentially New York' experience. More significantly, Jake and Anna's relationship allows the film to touch on intermarriage. Before Anna and Jake become lovers, it is revealed that Jake's family has disowned his brother Ethan, because he married a gentile. Ethan and his wife never appear on screen. This move

is evocative: they are 'lost' to the family, a haunting precursor of the fate awaiting Jake and Anna. On the other hand, it also lets *Keeping the Faith* off a difficult hook. For, whilst it celebrates pluralism, the film is ambivalent about the blurring of identities and inter-communal boundaries that is one of its inevitable consequences. Ambiguity is most apparent in the final scenes. In a set-piece speech, Jake uses his *Yom Kippur* sermon³³ to declare his love for Anna. Uproar ensues. However, the long-term implications of his love for her need not be addressed. It is soon revealed that Anna has been secretly attending conversion classes: Jake will marry a Jewish bride. Narratively speaking, the film suggests in somewhat idealistic terms that if one keeps faith with one's feelings and emotions, a rewarding dissolution of life's problems will result.

Perhaps more puzzling, even disturbing, is the presentation of Anna's journey into Judaism. Although her character is the only one to move significantly (geographically and spiritually) during the course of the narrative, the film's engagement with her is minimal. Anna's surname implies Irish Catholic antecedents, but her family history remains unexplored.³⁴ Whereas Jake is portrayed in familial contexts (at a *Shabbat* meal, by his mother's sickbed, etc.) and Father Havel mentors Bryan, Anna appears rootless. She is depicted several times with Jake's mother, never with her own parents. Whereas Jake and Bryan are settled in New York, Anna lives in temporary accommodation. *Keeping the Faith* thus presents religious conversion as a rather simplistic joining of a community or acquiring of an identity, with little acknowledgement of the difficulties that may be associated with leaving another one behind.³⁵

In its ideological distance from *The Jazz Singer*, *Keeping the Faith* is expressive of the problematics of diversity in contemporary America. Whereas the liberal rhetoric of an earlier age advocated the image of American society as a 'melting pot', the current mood is pessimistic about this ideology's effectiveness as a strategy for managing a diverse population, preferring the 'salad bowl' metaphor of cultural pluralism. *Keeping the Faith* struggles with these competing models. In exploring the obstacles facing Jake and Anna's relationship, it recognises the existence of different communities. Yet in its treatment of Anna's conversion, it argues that boundaries are readily permeable – that identity and belonging are matters of individual choice. In this sense, *Keeping the Faith* speaks enticingly to a post-assimilationist generation of viewers, who wish to re-assert the discourse of difference, whilst continuing to reject the problematic ideology

of race in which it was previously grounded.

The Holocaust

Despite the artistic and ethical challenges associated with representing the Nazi attempted genocide of Jews, the Holocaust and its aftermath has been the subject of countless films.³⁶ Indeed, the cinema is one of the key means by which the Holocaust has been established as a central symbol in western culture. Many people's sense of what the Holocaust is – what happened, and what this might mean – is constructed in relation to its representation on screen. Examining Holocaust films³⁷ provides a way into a consideration of issues such as antisemitism, Jewish and Christian identity (separately and in relation), suffering, and responsibility, during the Holocaust and in the particular contexts in which the films are produced and consumed.

Religious questions relating to the Holocaust are rarely the cinema's focus – films like *The Quarrel* (Eli Cohen, 1990), in which two men debate theodicy and survivor-guilt, are rare. More commonly, religious rituals function as visual devices to establish the identity of a character or characters. For example, *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) the most significant Holocaust film of the 1990s, opens with the inauguration of the Sabbath, signalled by the lighting of candles and the making of *kiddush* over wine. Towards the end of the film, Sabbath candles are lighted in Schindler's factory, after he instructs his workers to prepare for the festival. In numerous films, such representations of (comparatively) well-known practices function as brief 'Jewish moments' enacted by people who otherwise appear to be of pretty indeterminate background.³⁸ Placed as they are in Spielberg's film, the candles serve partly as icons of Jewish identity, and partly as an inclusio suggestive of the extinguishing and subsequent rekindling of Jewish life in Europe (the selective use of colour in these two scenes also encourages viewers to relate them to each other). But Judaism receives scant treatment elsewhere in *Schindler's List*. Indeed, few Holocaust films feature characters for whom Judaism is significant; the experience of *haredi* Jews in particular is rarely explored.

These strategies may be borne of a desire to appeal to a mass audience, including viewers who may be party to antisemitism. Alternatively, they may reflect the view that Jews are defined, not by any intrinsic difference, but because antisemites identify them as such. Such sentiments inform films like Joseph Losey's *Mr. Klein* (1976). In this production, art-dealer

Robert Klein is mistakenly identified as a Jew by the *Gestapo*, and finds himself plunged into a Kafkaesque nightmare that leads eventually to the *Velodrome d'Hiver*, where Parisian Jews were held prior to deportation in summer 1942. *Gentleman's Agreement* (Elia Kazan, 1947) adopts a similar stance. The word 'Holocaust' never appears in the film, but its subject matter and references to the war and military service (significantly, the film's main Jewish character is a veteran, who first appears in uniform) establish it as the drama's context. Commissioned to write a feature on antisemitism, Christian journalist Phil Green poses as a Jew, and finds himself the target of middle class prejudices. Both narrative and dialogue assume a non-Jewish audience for whom Phil mediates the experience of the Jewish 'other'. The suggestion is that Jewish and Christian identities are matters of personal conviction. Phil can switch from Christian to Jew simply by announcing his identification; notions of essential Jewish difference are externally imposed. In this way, the film charts a careful path between challenge and reassurance, with some success. It did well at the box-office and won numerous awards. But *Gentleman's Agreement* was also the subject of a lawsuit in the United States and was initially banned in Spain, on moral grounds.³⁹

Whilst *Gentleman's Agreement* is noteworthy for its focus on a 'non-Jewish-Jew', some films dehistoricise the Holocaust's victims to the point of near abstraction. Alain Resnais' documentary *Night and Fog* (1955) attempted to describe the Final Solution and in so doing, awaken the viewer's conscience in relation to other instances of atrocity. But in its efforts to universalise the Holocaust, *Night and Fog* fails to probe the victimisation of Jews, the complicity of local (non-German) populations and the connections between these events and the history of European antisemitism. The word 'Jew' is spoken only once by the film's narrator (it is absent from the English subtitles) and an image of a *gendarme* ('perpetrator?' 'bystander?') is crudely censored.⁴⁰ Similar trends can be detected in many fictional features. *Life is Beautiful* (Roberto Benigni, 1998) portrays an idyllic marriage between a Jew and a Christian, but makes no reference to religion and essentially uses the Holocaust as a backdrop for a story about familial love.⁴¹

In contrast to these typical examples, a few films portray the Holocaust as a crisis of Jewish-Christian relations. Based on Hochhuth's play, 'The Representative', *Amen* (Constantin Costa-Gavras, 2002) uses the efforts of a German SS officer (a Protestant) and a Jesuit priest to expose Nazi

atrocities against Jews, as an entrée into debates about Vatican silence during the war. These issues are discussion-worthy, but do not translate readily to the screen, and Costa-Gavras' attempts to generate suspense from a historic episode as familiar as the Holocaust meet with only limited success.

In a different vein, Louis Malle's *Goodbye, Children* (1987) deals subtly with Christian collaboration and resistance. Catholic schoolboy Julien Quentin (a fictionalised Malle; the film is semi-autobiographical) doesn't understand why new pupil Jean Bonnet is bullied by the other children, but fiercely protected by the headmaster, Father Jean. In the course of the film Bonnet's real name (Kippelstein) and Jewish identity gradually emerge. Eventually, Jean, two other Jewish boys, and the headmaster, are betrayed and taken away by the Gestapo.

Although unusually restrained (Malle omitted to show the real slap of a boy by a German officer) *Goodbye, Children*, with its images of Christian care for Jews, is not untypical of films touching on Jewish-Christian interaction during the Holocaust. In contrast to prevalent trends in Jewish-Christian relations (on which matter see David Herbert's contribution to this volume), few Holocaust films operate with what might be termed a Jew/innocence-Christian/guilt schema. Given that few Christians opposed the Nazis openly or covertly, a disproportionately high number of films show Christians as rescuers or protectors. Why this should be is an issue worthy of discussion. In the main, perhaps, audiences want to see their values upheld or praised, rather than questioned, on the screen. Images of rescuers are more appealing than those of suffering victims, dysfunctional survivors or cruel perpetrators, because they offer viewers characters with whom they are more likely to engage and identify.

A common strategy in Holocaust films featuring Christian protectors is the depiction of the Jew as a child or woman, or in some other way that presents him or her as weak and defenceless. These images tap into and perpetuate older notions of male and female Jews as stereotypically 'feminine' – that is, innately nervous, passive and hysterical.⁴² *Black Thursday* (Michel Mitrani, 1974) depicts the Jew as child (-like). Its protagonist, Paul (a significant name) is a young Christian who tries to lead a number of Parisian Jews to safety. Much of the film is built around his relationship with Jewish girl Jeanne. Like Jews generally, she is presented as passive, aware of her likely fate and yet unable to help herself. At the end of the film, Jeanne rejects Paul's protection and joins her mother, to await

deportation.

Schindler's List also perpetuates images of Jewish passivity and dependence. It was denounced by a number of Middle Eastern intellectuals as a cynical attempt to stir up feelings of guilt in the Christian West, and thereby counter criticism of Israel.⁴³ Certainly, the film might be criticised for its lack of reference to non-Jewish victims, and non-German Gentiles.⁴⁴ But arguably, *Schindler's List* emphasises not Christian responsibility for the Holocaust, but the role of Christian benevolence in Jewish survival. Like *Black Thursday*, it suggests that the relation between the communities is structured largely around Jewish need. The Jewish characters are generally passive, old, or ailing (Itzhak Stern shows courage and determination, but even he is short, slight, and visually impaired) contrasting with images of Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth, each in their physical prime. Schindler is typically shot from a low angle, presenting him as tall and powerful. In relation to him and Goeth, the camera uses standard devices of character focalisation – the shot-reverse-shot, point-of-view shots, and so on. But the camera's relation to the Jewish characters is more 'omniscient' or distancing, visualising them as a mass, and granting them little subjectivity.⁴⁵ Jewish resistance is little explored. Finally, the closing scenes depict the actors and surviving 'Schindler Jews' visiting Schindler's grave in the Christian cemetery on Mount Zion, Jerusalem. Church domes and steeples are visible in the background of several shots. Thus a narrative that begins with images of Jewish ritual practices ends with multiple evocations of the Christian metanarrative.

Similar impulses emerge in Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002) although this film hints that the Jew-Christian relationship is more symbiotic. Based on the story of Warsaw pianist Wladislaw Szpilman, the film attends to Jewish resistance. As a forced labourer, Szpilman smuggles food and weapons; and later, having escaped, he witnesses the ghetto uprising. The dramatic climax of the film is Szpilman's encounter with a German officer, Wilm Hosenfeld, in 1944. Szpilman is scarcely alive, scavenging for food in the war torn city. But on finding a piano in a bombed-out house, he is lifted out of this piteous state by the opportunity to play music. Metaphorically, Szpilman is transported into a previous, 'civilised' age when he performed on Polish radio; more prosaically, Hosenfeld, moved by the performance, feeds Szpilman until the Red Army's arrival. So *The Pianist* posits music as the site of existential encounter, and suggests that while Szpilman needs the German, Hosenfeld needs the Jew's presence, to

remind him of his humanity.

In addition to those films presenting the Holocaust as a moment in Christian-Jewish relations, others which view Jewish experience of the Holocaust through the lens of Christian typology are relevant to our study. *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1965) focuses on Sol Nazerman, a survivor and pawnshop owner in Harlem, New York. Physically alive, he is spiritually and emotionally dysfunctional, haunted by memories of the concentration camp and his dead family. Much of the film is concerned with Sol's detachment from those around him, including his customers, his Latino assistant (Jesus), and other Holocaust survivors. *The Pawnbroker's* climax, which portrays Nazerman's transition from isolation to a new ability to connect with others, resonates with the Christian metanarrative. During a failed robbery Jesus (significantly he associates with Mabel, a prostitute, and refers to the shop's customers as 'children of God') is killed whilst attempting to protect Nazerman. As Nazerman grieves over Jesus' death, a crowd gathers, including Jesus' mother (compare John 19.25). Finally, Nazerman's own cathartic act evokes the crucifixion. Returning to the shop, he pierces his hand on a receipt spike, creating a stigma-like wound. The post Holocaust 'resurrection' of the Jew is assimilated to a tale of redemptive suffering conceived in Christian terms.

Why might filmmakers draw on Christian images and concepts in their depiction of the Holocaust? Is this a simple translation of supersessionism to the screen? Arguably, in turning to Christian-influenced schema, Holocaust filmmakers are not 'theologically driven'. The use of Christian typology and symbolism to impose meaning on Jewish suffering, highly problematic though it may be, is as much about a failure of artistic imagination⁴⁶ – perhaps also about the constraints audience expectation exercises on the film-making process – as it is about Christianity's hubristic claims to narrate or theologise 'the Jew'. However motivated though, it projects ideological themes that implicitly perpetuate notions of Jewishness as requiring resolution through Christianity. It denies the specificity of victim experiences, and obscures the role of some Christian ideologies, individuals, and institutions in facilitating the Final Solution.

The 'Jewish Hollywood' Question

Off-screen, debates about film censorship and regulation have been occasions for antisemitism and for neutral-positive contacts between Jews, Christians and others. Moreover, cineastes are well acquainted with the

claim that Jews 'control' Hollywood. This accusation was established as early as the 1920s and posits a monolithic entity, 'the Jews,' whose quest for influence has led them to seek control over media such as motion pictures. However, the relation of Jews and Christians to the cinema (as individuals, as communities, and in dialogue with one another) has been little studied.

The early cinema was more accessible to immigrants than established industries (is it more meaningful to speak about 'the lack of Jewish absence' from the motion picture industry, than about the Jewish presence within it?) and Jews were among the founders of several film companies including Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, and Warner Brothers. As makers, distributors and consumers of film, Jews and Christians have often worked successfully together, but relations were perceptibly strained during the late 1920s and 1930s, at the height of the Cold War, and in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In the two earlier periods, an antisemitic undercurrent permeating much American social life coloured the calls for increased regulation of film content. Despite his caution to Lean concerning *Oliver Twist*, Production Code Administration⁴⁷ head Joseph Breen (a Roman Catholic) believed that the salaciousness of many popular films was attributable to a Jewish preoccupation with money and sex.⁴⁸ Numerous Protestant and Catholic reformers felt that immoral films reflected the depravity of the Jews who made them. Fears that these manifestations of antisemitism would coalesce into a nationwide Nazi-type movement led the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Anti-Defamation League to join the calls for increased regulation and reform. However, in doing so they unwittingly lent support to the notion that individual Jews bore a collective responsibility for the safety and reputation of all Jews, and that the perceived immorality of the cinema was indeed a 'Jewish problem'. Rather than challenging the beliefs of the antisemites, they effectively reinforced them. In urging producers to refrain from behaviours that could be used against the Jewish community, the CCAR blamed the victims, not the perpetrators.⁴⁹ Interestingly, the CCAR committee on film, chaired by Rabbi William Fineschriber, believed that its work had important potential for strengthening Jewish-Christian cooperation. Joint meetings were held in New York,⁵⁰ but were limited in their impact on either the industry or those who attacked filmmakers as Jews. Nevertheless, the work of Jewish film reformers constitutes an important, little-known episode in the history

of American Jewish-Christian relations.

Filmmakers' assimilationist responses to antisemitism were more significant than the various institutional approaches to shaping film subject matter. Hollywood was reluctant to use the cinema to counter anti-Jewish prejudices. It was only after Pearl Harbour that films began to undermine negative stereotypes and suggest positive models of Jewish-Christian co-existence. Before 1942, Warner Brothers was alone in its production of openly antifascist films, such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak, 1939). Even these works referenced Jewish persecution obliquely. *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942), for example, made passing references to Victor Laszlo's escape from a concentration camp before his arrival in Morocco. But Laszlo makes light of the camp, referring to it as a place where 'one is apt to lose a little weight'. Moreover, he is a Czech resistance fighter, which distances him from Jewish experiences. Focussing on events in American history, *They Won't Forget* (Mervin LeRoy, 1937) followed a different strategy and used a treatment of the 1905 Leo Frank case to criticise racism. The fact that the film de-Judaised Frank⁵¹ indicates the sensitive nature of the 'Jewish Question' so far as Hollywood was concerned.

For many years *The Great Dictator* (Charlie Chaplin, 1940) remained the only mainstream American production to confront Nazi antisemitism. Chaplin, who played both leading roles, also wrote, funded and directed the film, which he hoped would shorten the war. For the Nazis, the project confirmed their suspicion that Chaplin was a secret Jew: *The Eternal Jew* had included disapproving commentary on footage of crowds welcoming him to Berlin in 1931. But although Chaplin's wife (Paulette Goddard) had a Jewish father, his socialist sympathies and opposition to potentially dehumanising aspects of modernity (his *Modern Times* (1936) critiqued mechanised production methods) were his major motivations to anti-fascism. In *The Great Dictator*, a Jewish barber dons military uniform in a bid to escape persecution in the fictional country of 'Tonamia'. He is, however, mistaken for moustachioed dictator Adenoid Hynkel, a confusion that ultimately finds him called to make a speech at a military rally. Throughout, *The Great Dictator* makes explicit reference to Hynkel's (Hitler's) Judeophobia, and details aspects of Nazi antisemitic policy including the concentration of Jews into urban ghettos, the boycotting of Jewish businesses, and deportations. The closing address is a call for 'every one... Jew, Gentile, black man, white... to make this life free and beautiful'.

Predictably, the film was banned in Germany and German-controlled territories (although Hitler himself probably saw it privately). Surprisingly, perhaps, in America the Catholic Legion of Decency refused to recommend the film for children, because in one scene the barber fails to affirm God's existence. (When asked about his beliefs, he pauses and begins, "Well..." but is interrupted.)⁵² For different reasons, Chaplin himself later regretted making *The Great Dictator*: in 1940 the Final Solution was not yet implemented, but conditions in the European ghettos had already become far worse than he imagined.

In the later twentieth century, just as few religious Jews would shun the cinema (*haredi* Jews who interpret Exodus 20.4 to prohibit any reproduction of human images are in the minority) so Christian opposition to secular film has largely issued from conservative fundamentalist circles. In the 1950s, conservative discourse no longer regarded Jews as money-grabbing capitalists but as 'Godless Communists'. Mississippi Congressman John Rankin (a conservative alluded to in *Gentleman's Agreement*) a key figure in the House Un-American Activities Committee, which placed Hollywood professionals accused of holding left-wing views on an employment blacklist, equated Jewish heritage with Communist sympathy.⁵³ More recently, some usually philosemitic figures (for example, evangelist Pat Robertson) have associated what they perceive to be the permissiveness of the industry with the influence of Jewish intellectuals and media activists. The making of *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese, 1988) provided an occasion for antisemitism targeted against the chair of MCA, which released the film.⁵⁴ Some critics of the marginalisation of African-Americans in the cinema have also denounced Jewish filmmakers (especially Spielberg) as responsible for the suppression of black liberation – a view that overlooks the history of African-American and Jewish co-operation in lobbying against the *Birth of a Nation* (Griffiths, 1915) and for modifications to the screenplay of *Gone With the Wind* (Fleming, 1939).⁵⁵ (This discourse is also manifest in the work of some African-American directors: Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992) sidelines some problematic aspects of its subject's life but retains, unchallenged, his antisemitism.⁵⁶)

Such debates about the role of Jews in filmmaking, the so-called 'Jewish Hollywood' question, raise issues for Jewish-Christian relations. They illustrate the changing character of American antisemitism. On the one hand, discourse about negative Jewish influence on the cinema taps into

old stereotypes rooted in Christian theology: Jewish filmmakers are poisoning Christian society through their promotion of depraved images. As destructors of Christian values, they recapitulate Judas's crimes on the ideological plane. On the other hand, the early Cold War search for 'hidden Jews' in the industry echoes the modern conception of the Jew as *parvenu*, resonating with broader debates about ethnicity and national identity. The elasticity of 'Jewish Hollywood' discourse also points to larger questions beyond the scope of this piece. Some critics have hinted that the search for a dictating presence behind the movies is a distortion of the real puzzle, namely, the difficulties associated with explaining the source of film's ability to move and affect viewers. Focussing on Jewish control is an anthropomorphism of this much harder problem.⁵⁷ Alternatively, questions may be raised about the nature of antisemitism. Do the changing meanings attached to 'Jewish Hollywood' indicate that once established in the collective psyche, the negative image of 'the Jew' functions somewhat independently of actualities, and becomes a vehicle onto which more diffuse fears and longings are projected? If so, the task of undoing the legacy of Christian anti-Jewish teaching becomes a problem extending far beyond the modification of problematic theologies.

Finally, accusations of negative Jewish control over Hollywood and philosemitic explanations of a Jewish presence and contribution in Hollywood share a tendency to assume that Jews perennially act as Jews, that 'whatever a Jew is... a Jew will always behave like a Jew'.⁵⁸ This article has instead suggested that analysis should be based in an historical, rather than an essentialist conception of Jewish identity and cultural production. Studying and critiquing this aspect of Hollywood's 'Jewish Question' contributes not only to the context for interpreting cinema history, but also to fundamental debates about Jewish and other (including Christian) identities.

Conclusion: Cinema Studies and Jewish-Christian Relations

The cinema has been little studied as a locus of Jewish-Christian relations. Film Studies is only beginning to move beyond a schema that conceives of Jewish and Christian engagement in the cinema in simplistic terms of 'control' or 'protest'. Aside from oft-questionable historical treatments of 'Jewish filmmaking', and occasional acknowledgements of the antisemitic motivations behind censorship campaigns, most scholarship has focused on a small number of individual films. Conversely, activity in

Jewish-Christian relations remains focussed on (certain kinds of) written texts, and has largely failed to engage effectively with mass culture.

A brief article such as this one can only be suggestive – describing questions that future research might explore, and hinting at the conceptual tools and models that could be deployed in their study. It will have been successful if it has demonstrated that the worlds of cinema and Jewish-Christian relations have much to gain from dialogue with one another, and has prompted some reflection on the means by which such encounters might proceed. Those seeking to understand the dynamics of Jewish-Christian interaction miss much if they ignore the cinema, the modern medium par excellence. Indeed, the insights derivable from such work are not limited in their application to the present day. As they develop and describe anew relations between art and audience, commerce and culture, they may suggest insights into earlier moments in Jewish-Christian relations.⁵⁹ For its part, Cinema Studies is enriched when it reads both art and industry against the experience of Jews and Christians, individually and in relation with each another.⁶⁰

Notes

1. David Welch, “‘Jews Out!’ Anti-Semitic Film Propaganda in Nazi Germany and the ‘Jewish Question,’” *British Journal of Holocaust Education* 1 (1992), pp. 55-73; Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 186; Roger Greenspun, ‘Cinema and Television’, in Walter Laquer (ed.), *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.120.

2. Nancy Thomas Brown, ‘The Holocaust in Film: Christian Ideology, the Enigma of Indifference and the Portrayal of the Jew’, in John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell (eds), *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide. Volume Three. Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 695-697.

3. Melanie J. Wright, *Moses in America: The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 114-117; Bruce Babington and Peter W. Evans, *Biblical Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 5-6.

4. Charles Musser, ‘Passions and the Passion Play: Theatre, Film and Religion in America, 1880-1900’, *Film History* 5 (1993), pp. 419-456.

5. Simon Louvish, 'Burning Crosses', *Sight and Sound* 10 no. 9 (September 2000), pp. 12-13 describes the incident.

6. William M. Drew, *D. W. Griffith's Intolerance. Its Genesis and Its Vision* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1986) judges the film's values as being 'as old as civilisation' and its message as a relevant, 'priceless legacy', pp. 167, 168.

7. Wright, *Moses*, p. 38.

8. William R. Telford, 'Jesus Christ Movie Star: The Depiction of Jesus in the Cinema', in Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz (eds), *Explorations in Theology and Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 115-139 discusses *King of Kings* and other Christ films.

9. DeMille to Hays, October 13th 1927, quoted in Richard Maltby, 'The King of Kings and the Czar of All the Rushes: The Propriety of the Christ Story', *Screen* 13 no. 2 (1990), p. 210.

10. Wright, *Moses*, p. 93.

11. Discussing his use of Jewish extras in *The Ten Commandments*, DeMille suggested that their 'deep feeling of the significance of the Exodus' and 'appearance' would lend a special quality to the performance – a justification blending the discourses of 'race' and theology (Cecil B. DeMille; Donald Hayne (ed.), *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (London: W. H. Allen, 1960), p. 213.

12. Note also the striking elision of present into past in DeMille's suggestion to Hays that the Jews who opposed his film would 'crucify Christ a second time, if they had an opportunity' (Maltby, *The King of Kings*, p. 210).

13. Felicia Herman, "'The Most Dangerous Anti-Semitic Photoplay in Filmdom": American Jews and The King of Kings', *Velvet Light Trap* 46 (Fall 2000), p. 18.

14. David O. Selznick tried to have *Golgotha* (Jules Duvuvier, 1936) banned on the grounds of antisemitism. See Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History Up to World War Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 198.

15. Franco Zeffirelli, *Zeffirelli: The Autobiography of Franco Zeffirelli* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), pp. 273-74. Joanne Pearson and Steve Moyise link the characteristics of Zeffirelli's Jesus to Jewish finance in the person of producer Lew Grade. This assessment reads the film in simplistic terms, perhaps drawing unhelpfully on the rhetoric of Jewish agency, discussed later. See their 'Jesus in History and Film,' in

Gwilym Beckerlegge (ed.), *From Sacred Text to Internet* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 43.

16. This reflects the scholarly consensus, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah. Volume 1. From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 357-364.

17. See Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, pp. 391-397.

18. Zeffirelli, *Zeffirelli*, p. 274.

19. Charles Dickens, letter to Eliza Davis, quoted in Deborah Heller, 'The Outcast as Villain and Victim: Jews in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*,' in Derek Cohen and Deborah Heller (eds), *Jewish Presences in English Literature* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), p. 42.

20. When Dickens characterises the receiving of stolen goods as a Jewish brand of villainy he is probably generalising from the example of Ikey Solomons, a London fence who was transported in the early 1830s.

21. Pointer, *Charles Dickens on the Screen*, p. 68 espouses the 'historical fact' defence, but seems uncertain as to whether Jews are a 'sect' or 'race'. See also Morris U. Schappes, 'Oliver Twist and anti-Semitism', in David Platt (ed.), *Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from the Birth of a Nation to Judgment at Nuremberg* (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1992), pp. 83-89.

22. See Al McKee, 'Art or Outrage? *Oliver Twist* and the Flap Over Fagin', *Film Comment* 36 no. 1 (January/February 2000), pp. 40-45.

23. Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Penguin, repr. 1985 [first published 1837-9]), p.382.

24. The press book (a marketing tool aimed at potential exhibitors and reviewers of the film) is available online at the British Film Institute's David Lean website, <http://lean.bfi.org.uk/index.html>.

25. See Joyce Antler, 'Hester Street', in Mark C. Carnes (ed.), *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 178.

26. Beth S. Wegner, 'Memory as Identity: The Invention of the Lower East Side,' *American Jewish History* 85 no. 1 (1997), pp. 3-27.

27. Sonya Michel, 'Yekl and Hester Street: Was Assimilation Really Good For the Jews?,' *Literature/Film Quarterly* 5 no. 2 (1977), p. 144.

28. Compare Alex Gordon, 'Descendant Dybbuks: Yiddish Cinema and The Hollywood Continuum', in Sylvia Paskin, (ed.), *When Joseph Met Molly: A Reader on Yiddish Film* (Nottingham: Fine Leaves Publications,

1999), p. 292.

29. Lester D. Friedman, 'Celluloid Palimpsests: An Overview of Ethnicity and the American Film', in Lester D. Friedman, *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 19.

30. Joseph Greenblum, 'Does Hollywood Still Glorify Jewish Intermarriage?: The Case of *The Jazz Singer*', *American Jewish History* 83 no. 1 (1995), p. 461.

31. Alan Gevinson (ed.), *Within Our Gates: Ethnicity in American Feature Films, 1911-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 3-4.

32. See Alan Spiegel, 'The Vanishing Act: A Typology of the Jew in Contemporary Film', in Sarah Blacher Cohen (ed.), *From Hester Street to Hollywood: The Jewish-American Stage and Screen* (Bloomington, Ind.: Bloomington University Press, 1983), pp. 264-67. Spiegel points out that an increase in Jewish characters does not necessarily entail more 'Jewishness' on screen: contemporary films often deploy 'the Jew' as an exemplar or symbol of some wider aspect of American culture.

33. Is it coincidental that *Yom Kippur* is also the crisis moment for Jakie in *The Jazz Singer*?

34. In early versions of the screenplay, Anna is Brian's sister, supporting her identification as (lapsed) Catholic.

35. At the beginning of *Keeping the Faith*, Anna's independence and active pursuit of a career pose a threat to gender boundaries, realised visually through her slender physique and wearing of trouser suits. Her conversion domesticates her, placing her (literally and ideologically) within Jake's embrace. For Jake, the romance affirms his identity and potency (early scenes in the film problematise his inability to find a wife). A gentle style belies the film's complex approach to religion, ethnicity and gender politics.

36. Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) lists 170 titles of films made since 1989 alone, pp. 313-355.

37. This phrase does not imply that films dealing with the Holocaust constitute a discrete genre.

38. Compare Jon Stratton, *Coming Out Jewish: Constructing Ambivalent Identities* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 291 on ethnic identification in sitcoms.

39. Sources close to the Board of Film Censors claimed that the

difficulty lay in what the board's ecclesiastical member had termed 'theological errors', including its claim that Christians were not superior to Jews, and its suggestion that the Christian message of love should embrace Jews. The board's President gave a different rationale, claiming that Spain had no experience of antisemitism or ethnic conflict, and that he wished to prohibit a film that would introduce to the country a disturbing, alien idea. (See Gevinson (ed.), *Within Our Gates*, p. 379).

40. Richard Raskin, *Nuit et Brouillard by Alain Resnais. On the Making, Reception and Functions of a Major Documentary Film* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1987), p. 31, reproduces the images.

41. Melanie J. Wright, "'Don't Touch My Holocaust: Responding to *Life is Beautiful*", *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 9 no. 1 (2000), pp. 19-32.

42. Judith Doneson, 'The Image Lingers: The Feminisation of the Jew in *Schindler's List*', in Yosefa Loshitzky (ed.), *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 140-152 discusses this in more detail.

43. Mariam Shahin, '*Schindler's List* – ghost movie', *The Middle East* 234 (1994), p. 42.

44. Clearly, one cannot expect a Holocaust film to 'do everything', but *Schindler's List* presents itself as a master narrative of the *Shoah*, as reflected in the cinematography, intended to evoke a documentary like quality in the drama.

45. Ora Gelley, 'Narration and the Embodiment of Power in *Schindler's List*', *Film Criticism* 22 no. 2 (1997), p. 22.

46. So Ilan Avisar, 'Christian Ideology and Jewish Genocide in American Holocaust Movies', in Sanford Pinsker and Jack Fischer (eds), *Literature, the Arts, and the Holocaust* (Greenwood, FL: Penkevill Press, 1987), pp. 21-42.

47. The Production Code, issued in 1930 and re-asserted in 1933, detailed subjects which filmmakers should avoid or handle only with extreme caution. The PCA was founded to enforce the Code.

48. Geoffrey D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies 1940-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 70.

49. Felicia Herman, 'American Jews and the Effort to Reform Motion Pictures, 1933-1935', *American Jewish Archives Journal* 53 nos. 1 and 2 (2001), p. 22.

50. Herman, 'American Jews', p. 26.

51. Frank was tried for child murder in 1913 and convicted on

inconclusive evidence (he was pardoned in 1986). In 1915 he was kidnapped from a prison farm and lynched. The event prompted the founding of the Anti-Defamation League.

52. Herman G. Weinberg, 'Chaplain's *The Great Dictator*', in David Platt (ed.), *Celluloid Power*, p. 347.

53. Wright, *Moses*, p. 116.

54. Harold Brackman, 'The Attack on "Jewish Hollywood": A Chapter in the History of Modern American Anti-Semitism', *Modern Judaism* 20 (2000), p. 6; W. Barnes Tatum, *Jesus at the Movies: a Guide to the First Hundred Years* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 1997), p. 163.

55. Drew, *D. W. Griffith's Intolerance*, p. 9.

56. Julius Lester, 'Black Supremacy and Anti-Semitism: Religion in *Malcolm X*', *Cineaste* 19 no. 4 (1993), pp. 16-17.

57. Sklar, quoted in Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, p. 10.

58. Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, p. 10.

59. Compare Colin MacCabe, *The Eloquence of the Vulgar: Language, Cinema, and the Politics of Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p. 29.

60. Bill Telford, Senior Lecturer at Durham University and editor of *Cinema Divinité* (forthcoming: SCM Press).