Classical to Modern: The Expression and Significance of Religious Themes in Film Art

Wei Hua

Nanchang University, Jiangxi, 330031, China

huawei000@126.com

Abstract: This paper explores the representation and significance of religious themes in film art, analyzing its historical origins, representations in classical and modern films, artistic styles, and its multiple values at the cultural, social and personal levels. The study pointed out that since its birth at the end of the 19th century, religious-themed films have experienced an evolution from classical to modern, reflecting social and cultural changes and technological progress. Classical films convey the solemnity and sacredness of religious beliefs through the adaptation of religious stories, symbolic metaphors, and ritual reproductions; modern films deeply explore the complex relationship between faith and social issues through diverse theme exploration, visual presentation, and emotional expression. Religious-themed films play an important role in cultural inheritance, social criticism, spiritual comfort, aesthetic value and educational significance. With the development of science and technology, cultural integration, and challenges to censorship standards, religious-themed films need to seek development through innovation and breakthroughs in order to continue to exert their unique influence in film art.

Keywords: Film Art, Religious Themes, Classical Art, Modern Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Film has been inextricably linked to religious themes as a comprehensive art form since its birth(Bustam et al., 2023; Stone, 1999). The expression and significance of religious themes in film art not only reflect human beings' exploration and thinking about sacred things but also reveal the changes and development of social culture. With the evolution of the times, the expression and meaning of religious themes in movies have also experienced a transformation from classical to modern(Soukup, 2006). This change is not only reflected in the advancement of film technology and the diversification of narrative techniques but also reflects changes in social concepts and cultural values. In the classical period, religious-themed films mostly focused on biblical stories, religious rituals and religious figures. These films usually have strong moralizing overtones and aim to convey religious teachings and ethical concepts through visual art. For example, early films such as "The Ten Commandments"(Payne, 1997) and "The Passion of the Christ"(Vander Stichele & Penner, 2006) are known for their narrative methods and solemn visual styles that are faithful to

religious texts. Film creators during this period mostly took religious beliefs as their starting point and tried to spread religious beliefs and values through the emerging medium of film. However, with the diversified development of social culture since the mid-20th century, the expression forms and thematic content of religious-themed films have begun to change significantly. Modern religious-themed films are no longer limited to traditional religious stories and characters, but pay more attention to the complex relationship between religion, individuals, and society. Film creators of this period often explored the meaning and impact of religious beliefs from a critical and reflective perspective. For example, films such as Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ" (Sallomi, 2023) and Darren Aronofsky's "Noah: The Journey of Creation"(Magerstädt, 2021) are known for their unique perspective and innovative narrative techniques that sparked widespread discussion and controversy. Studying the expression and significance of religious themes in film art has important academic value and practical significance. As a mass media, film has strong cultural influence and social penetration. By analyzing the forms of expression and thematic content of religious-themed films, the role and influence of film art in the spread of religious culture can be revealed. With the acceleration of globalization and the enhancement of cultural diversity, religious-themed films are not only an important carrier of cultural exchanges, but also an important bridge to promote understanding and dialogue between different cultures. Through the study of religious-themed films, we can better understand religious beliefs and values in different cultural backgrounds, thereby promoting cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation.

2. THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF RELIGIOUS-THEMED FILMS

2.1 The Birth of Early Religious-Themed Films

The birth of religious-themed films can be traced back to the early stages of film art. At the end of the 19th century, film as an emerging art form began to spread around the world. The emergence of religious-themed films is closely related to the widespread concern about religion in society at that time. Early filmmakers realized that religious stories not only had profound cultural implications but could also attract large audiences. In 1897, French director Louis Lumière shot "The Passion of the Christ," which is considered one of the earliest religious-themed films. The film reproduces the crucifixion of Jesus Christ through static images. Although the technical means are limited, its expression of religious emotions is very sincere. With the advancement of film technology, religious-themed films

have gradually developed from simple static images to more complex narrative structures. In 1903, Edwin S. Porter's "The Life of the Christ" became the first narrative religious film. The film shows the life of Jesus Christ through multiple scenes, from birth to resurrection, covering the core content of the Christian faith. Most of the religious-themed films of this period had Christian themes, reflecting the religious background of Western society.

2.2 The Development Stage of Religious-Themed Films

The development of religious-themed films has gone through multiple stages(Linze & Desa, 2024), each stage reflecting different social and cultural backgrounds and technological progress, as shown in Table 1. At the beginning of the 20th century, with the continuous improvement of film production technology, religious-themed films began to make breakthroughs in narrative and visual effects. In 1927, "The Ten Commandments", directed by Cecil B. DeMille, became the masterpiece of this period. The film reproduces the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt through grand scenes and exquisite special effects and has become a classic in the history of religious-themed films. After World War II, religious-themed films entered a new stage of development. In 1959, "Ben-Hur", directed by William Wyler, won 11 Oscars for its epic narrative and superb production, marking the dual artistic and commercial success of religious-themed films(Whitby, 2022). At this time, religious-themed films not only focused on Christianity but also began to involve other religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, reflecting multicultural exchanges in the context of globalization. Entering the 21st century, religious-themed films continue to develop on a global scale. In 2004, "The Passion of the Christ" directed by Mel Gibson sparked widespread discussion with its detailed portrayal of the last twelve hours of Jesus Christ. The film has grossed over US$ 600 million at the global box office, demonstrating the continued influence of religious-themed films in modern society.

Table 1: (a) The Development Stages of Religious-Themed Films

Stage	Time Period	Key Characteristics	Representative Works
Early Exploration	1890s-1920s	Focus on religious stories, simple narratives, emphasis on visual representation	"The Passion Play" (1903)
Classic Period	1930s-1960s	Maturing of religious films, complex narratives, diverse themes	"The Ten Commandments (1956), "Noah's Ark" (1959)

Table 1: (b) The Development Stages of Religious-Themed Films

Stage	Time Period	Key Characteristics	Representative Works
Reflection and Critique	1970s-1990s	Critique and reflection on religion, exploring the conflicts of faith and humanity	"The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988), 'Angels & Demons' (2009)
Modem Reconstruction	2000s - Present	Addressing contemporary social issues, emphasizing personal faith and choice	"The Rite' (2011), 'The Gospel" (2009)

2.3 Cultural Background of Religious-Themed Movies

The cultural background of religious-themed films is complex and diverse and is influenced by different religious traditions and social cultures. In Western countries, Christian culture has a particularly significant impact on religious-themed films(Kozlovic, 2007b). Christian biblical stories and religious rituals provide rich material for film creation. Many classic religious-themed films, such as "Jesus Christ Superstar" and "The Last Temptation," use Christianity as the background to explore the complex relationship between faith and human nature(Kozlovic, 2007a). In Eastern countries, religious-themed films are more influenced by Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Although "Rashomon" by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa is not a traditional religious film, its discussion of human nature and morality is deeply inspired by Buddhist philosophy. In addition, Indian movies are often based on Hinduism and Islam, reflecting the characteristics of India's multi-religious culture(Hirji, 2008). Religious-themed films not only reflect the beliefs and values of a specific religion but also often become a carrier of social change and cultural exchange. In the United States in the 1960s, religious-themed films became an important tool for reflecting social unrest and cultural reflection. The films "The Graduate" and "Midnight Cowboy" explored the contradiction between individuals and society through religious metaphors and became cultural symbols of that era.

2.4 International Influence of Religious-Themed Films

The influence of religious-themed films continues to expand on an international scale and has become an important medium for cross-cultural exchanges. At the beginning of the 20th century, with the global spread of movies, religious-themed movies began to gain widespread attention in different cultural backgrounds. Italian director Federico Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" triggered the international community's thinking on the relationship

between religion and modern life through its critical depiction of Catholic culture(Colombo et al., 2014). In Asia, religious-themed films have also achieved significant international impact. Indian director Satyajit Ray's "Apu Trilogy" has won high praise from the international film community through its delicate portrayal of Hindu culture(Neher, 2015). The film not only shows the religious beliefs of Indian society but also explores the complex relationship between personal destiny and social environment. In recent years, religious-themed films have won numerous awards at international film festivals, further enhancing their international influence. In 2018, Iranian director Asghar Farhadi's "The Salesman" won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film(Ahmadgoli & Yazdanjoo, 2020). The film explores the moral dilemmas in modern society through a profound depiction of Islamic culture. These films were not only artistically successful but also promoted understanding and exchanges between different cultures.

2.5 Type Evolution of Religious-Themed Movies

The types of religious-themed films have evolved in rich and diverse styles, reflecting the development of film art and changes in social culture, as shown in Table 2. Early religious-themed films mostly focused on historical narratives, recreating religious classics such as "The Ten Commandments" and "The Life of Christ." These films convey the solemnity and sacredness of religious beliefs through grand scenes and rigorous narratives. With the development of film art, religious-themed films have begun to explore more diverse narrative methods and themes. In the mid-20th century, religious-themed films gradually incorporated elements of modernism and postmodernism and began to focus on the conflict between personal beliefs and social reality. Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal" explores the philosophical issues of faith and existence through the dialogue between a medieval knight and the God of Death. Entering the 21st century, the types of religious-themed films have become more diverse, covering a wide range of fields from historical dramas to science fiction films. Darren Aronofsky's Noah's Ark: Journey into Creation is a masterpiece that typifies the evolution of the religious film genre through a modern interpretation of the biblical story that combines visual effects and psychological analysis. In addition, animated films and documentaries have also begun to get involved in religious themes, such as "Mary and Max" and "Jesus Camp", exploring the diversity of religious beliefs through different perspectives. The evolution of the genre of

religious-themed films not only reflects the innovation of film art but also demonstrates the multiple meanings of religious beliefs in modern society. Through the exploration of different genres, religious-themed films continue to challenge the audience's cognition and inspire profound thinking about faith and human nature.

Table 2: The Evolution of Genres in Religious-Themed Films

Development Stage	Time Period	Key Characteristics	Representative Works
Early Exploration	Early 20th Century - 1940s	Focus on Historical Narratives, Reenacting Religious Classic Stories, Emphasizing Solemnity And Sanctity	The Ten Commandments (1956), 'The Life of Christ' (1960)
Modernist Fusion	1950s-1970s	Incorporation of Modernist and Postmodern Elements, Focusing on the Conflict Between Personal Faith and Social Reality	"The Seventh Seal" (1957)
Diversified Exploration	1980s-1990s	Increasing Genre Diversity, Exploring Different Narrative Styles and Themes	'The Last Temptation of Christ' (1988), 'Angels & Demons' (2009)
21st Century Innovation	2000s - Present	Includes Historical Dramas, Sci-Fi, Animation, and Documentaries, Modern Reinterpretations of Religious Stories	'Noah" (2014), "Mary and Max" (2009), "JesusCamp" (2007)

3. REPRESENTATION OF RELIGIOUS THEMES IN CLASSICAL FILMS

As an early stage in the development of film art, classical films diversified the presentation of religious themes with their unique narrative methods and visual styles. Religious themes in classical films are not only the background of the story or the driving force of the plot but also profoundly affect the overall expression of the film through a variety of artistic techniques, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The Representation of Religious Themes in Classical Films

Theme	Description	Representative Works
Adaptation of Religious Stories	Artistic reinterpretation of classic religious stories, enhancing drama and viewer engagement.	"Ben-Hur' (1925)
Use of Religious Symbols and Metaphors	Utilisation of visual symbols and metaphors to convey religious meanings, exploring the relationship between faith and humanity.	"The Passion of Joan of Arc' (1928)
Reenactment of Religious Rituals	Detailed depiction of religious rituals, revealing the impact of faith on people's lives.	"The Ten Commandments" (1956)
Characterization of Religious Figures	In-depth portrayal of religious figures, exploring themes of faith, morality, and humanity.	"David and Goliath" (I960)
Religious Music and Sound Effects	Use of music and sound effects to create atmosphere, enhance emotional expression, and deepen religious themes.	"The Garden of St. Francis (1961)

3.1 Adaptations of Religious Stories in Classical Films

During the classical film period, the adaptation of religious stories became an important source of film creation. Many films are based directly on the Bible or other religious texts, bringing these stories to the screen. During the adaptation process, filmmakers often artistically process original religious stories to adapt to the film's narrative structure and the audience's aesthetic needs. For example, 1925 's "Ben-Hur" is a classic religious-themed film adapted from Lewis Wallace's novel "Ben-Hur: The Story of the Christ." Through the personal experience of the protagonist, Ben-Hur, the film shows the core values of Christianity, such as forgiveness, redemption and the power of faith. The film visually reproduces the magnificent scenes of the ancient Roman period and, at the same time, allows the audience to feel the profound impact of religious beliefs through delicate characterization and emotional expression. During the adaptation process, films often simplify or reinterpret religious stories to enhance their drama and viewing value. This adaptation not only retains the core spirit of the religious story but also gives it new vitality through the language of film, allowing it to be widely accepted and understood in different cultural backgrounds.

3.2 The Use of Religious Symbols and Metaphors in Classical Films

Religious symbols and metaphors are commonly used artistic techniques in classical films to convey deep religious meanings and philosophical thinking. Filmmakers incorporate religious ideas into film narratives

through visual symbols and metaphors, allowing the audience to be subtly inspired. In "The Passion of Joan of Arc" by Carl Theodore Dreyer, the director created a religious sense of sanctity through light and shadow and close-ups of the actors' faces. Joan of Arc in the film is not only a historical figure but also a symbol of religious belief. Her suffering process is endowed with a metaphorical meaning of the Passion of Christ. Through this symbolic technique, the film explores the complex relationship between faith and human nature. In addition, common religious symbols in classical films include crosses, Holy Grails, contrasts of light and darkness, etc. Through the visual language of the film, these symbols transcend the limitations of words and directly affect the audience's perception and emotions, making religious-themed films more appealing and ideologically profound.

3.3 Religious Rituals and Scene Reproduction in Classical Films

Religious rituals and scene reproduction are important ways for classical films to express religious themes. Through detailed depictions of religious rituals, the film not only reproduces the solemnity and sacredness of religious activities but also reveals the profound impact of religious beliefs on people's lives. In Cecil B. DeMille's "The Ten Commandments," the director recreated the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt in the Bible through grand scenes and exquisite sets(Kozlovic, 2006). The film's depictions of religious rituals, such as the celebration of Passover and the parting of the Red Sea, are full of visual impact and dramatic tension. These scenes not only reproduce the historical background of religious stories but also make the audience feel the mystery and power of religious beliefs through the unique expression techniques of the film. When reproducing religious rituals, classical films often pay attention to the authenticity of details and the creation of atmosphere. Through careful design of costumes, props, music and other elements, the film can convey the complexity of religious rituals and multi-layered cultural connotations in a limited time.

Figure 1: The Ten Commandments, Directed by Cecil B. DeMille

3.4 Creation Of Religious Characters in Classical Films

The creation of religious characters is one of the core contents of classical films showing religious themes. The film explores multiple themes of faith, morality and human nature through the portrayal of religious characters. In "David and Goliath", the movie shows the power of faith and the value of courage through the portrayal of David, a religious figure(McGeough, 2018). David, in the film, is not only a historical figure but also a symbol of firm faith and bravery. By depicting the showdown between David and Goliath, the movie conveys the theme of a small man defeating a powerful enemy through faith. When classical films portray religious characters, they often focus on the portrayal of the character's inner world and the expression of their emotions. Through the actors' performances and the director's lens language, the film can deeply explore religious figures' inner conflicts and spiritual pursuits, making the audience resonate and think while watching the film.

3.5 Religious Music and Sound Effects in Classical Films

Music and sound effects play an important role in classical films, especially in religious-themed films, where music is often used to create atmosphere, enhance emotional expression, and deepen religious themes. In "The Garden of St. Francis", the director created a sacred and peaceful atmosphere through the use of religious hymns and organ music(Kiser, 2003). The music not only complements the visual elements of the film but also directly affects the emotions of the audience through its melody and rhythm, making the theme of religious belief more prominent. Religious music in classical films often draws on elements of traditional religious music, such as hymns, hymns, and ritual music. These musical elements enhance the religious atmosphere and emotional tension of the film through the film's sound effects design, allowing the audience to feel the profound connotation of religious beliefs in a combined audio-visual experience.

In classical films, the performance of religious themes not only enriches the expression methods of film art but also provides audiences with multi-level cultural experience and ideological enlightenment. Through the adaptation of religious stories, the use of symbolic metaphors, the reproduction of religious rituals, the shaping of characters and the combination of music and sound effects, classical films have successfully transformed religious themes into works of art with universal significance.

4. REPRESENTATION OF RELIGIOUS THEMES IN MODERN FILMS

In modern cinema, the representation of religious themes has evolved to explore diverse and profound subjects such as faith, redemption, and morality, as shown in Table 4. Filmmakers reinterpret religious stories and symbols, delving into the impact of religion on individuals and society. Advanced visual techniques create immersive experiences, enhancing emotional resonance. The portrayal of inner conflicts and complex relationships reveals the nuanced meanings of faith, while connections between religion and contemporary social issues highlight its multifaceted role. Additionally, modern films embrace religious pluralism, showcasing the coexistence of various beliefs and cultural exchanges, reflecting the complexity and diversity of spiritual experiences in today's world.

Table 4: Representation of Religious Themes in Modern Films

Theme	Description	Representative Works
Exploration of Religious Themes	Reinterpretation of religious stories, exploring themes of faith, redemption, sin, and morality, and examining the impact of religion on individuals and society.	"Noah" (2014), "Silence" (2016)
Visual Representation	Utilisation of advanced film techniques and artistic methods to create surreal religious experiences and enhance audience emotional resonance.	"Wonder" (2017), "The Tree of Life (2011)
Emotional Expression	Depiction of inner conflict and complex relationships to showcase the impact of religious faith on personal inner worlds.	"First Reformed" (2016), 'Life of Pi' (2012)
Connection of Religion and Social Issues	Exploration of the role of religion in modern society, revealing its complex effects through reflections and critiques of social realities.	"Dallas Buyers Club" (2013), 'Green Book" (2018)
Representation of Religious Pluralism	Focus on the diversity and complexity of religious beliefs, showing coexistence and exchange among different religions and cultures.	"Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" (2004), 'Moonlight (2016)

4.1 Exploration of Religious Themes in Modern Films

In modern films, the exploration of religious themes shows a trend of diversity and depth. Filmmakers explore timeless themes of faith, redemption, sin and morality through reinterpretations of religious stories, characters and symbols. Modern films not only focus on the teachings and

rituals of traditional religions but also delve into the impact of religious beliefs on individuals and society. For example, Darren Aronofsky's "Noah's Ark: Journey to Creation" explores the relationship between humans and nature through biblical stories and reflects on the ecological crisis of modern society. Modern movies often adapt religious classic texts to give them new significance for the times. Martin Scorsese's "Silence" is adapted from the novel by Shusaku Endo. It tells the story of Christian missionaries in Japan in the 17th century and explores the persistence and betrayal of faith in extreme circumstances. The film reveals the complexity and diversity of religious beliefs through questioning and reflection on faith. In addition, modern movies also create new religious themes through fictional religions and mythological systems. For example, the "Matrix" series of movies constructs a fictional religious system with a saviour as the core, exploring the philosophical issues of free will and destiny. The creation of this fictional religion not only enriches the narrative level of the film but also provides the audience with a new dimension of thinking.

4.2 Visual Presentation of Religion in Modern Movies

Modern movies use advanced film technology and artistic techniques in the visual presentation of religious themes to make religious elements more vivid and impactful, as shown in Figure 2. Through special effects, colour, composition and other means, filmmakers are able to create surreal religious experiences that enhance the emotional resonance of the audience. In terms of visual effects, modern films often utilize computer-generated imagery (CGI) technology to present religious miracles and mystical experiences. For example, "Wonder Boys" recreates miraculous scenes from the Bible through exquisite special effects, making the audience feel like they are in a sacred moment(Leon, 2021). Such visual presentation not only enhances the pleasure of viewing the movie but also deepens the audience's understanding of religious themes. The use of colour, light, and shadow is also an important means of visualising religion in modern films. The movie "Tree of Life" creates a mysterious and solemn religious atmosphere through the changes of light and shadow and the contrast of colours(Sinnerbrink, 2012). Director Terrence Malick conveys religious reflections on life and the universe through careful compositions of natural landscapes and close-ups of characters' faces. Composition and lens language are equally important in the visual presentation of religion in modern cinema. The movie "Rome" shows the solemnity and sacredness of religious ceremonies through long shots and symmetrical compositions. Director Alfonso Cuaron makes the audience feel the power and impact of

religious beliefs through his attention to detail and clever use of space.

Figure 2: The Visual Presentation of Religious Themes in Modern Film

4.3 Expression of Religious Emotions in Modern Movies

In expressing religious emotions, modern movies focus on showing the impact of religious beliefs on an individual's inner world through delicate emotional portrayals and complex character relationships. The filmmakers reveal the multiple meanings of religious belief through the depiction of the character's inner conflicts and emotional changes. In terms of emotional portrayal, modern movies often express the emotional impact of religious beliefs through the characters' inner monologues and psychological activities. For example, "First Reformed Church" uses the pastor's inner monologue to show his pain and struggle in a crisis of faith(Lindvall, 2004). Director Paul Schrader reveals the complexity and profundity of religious beliefs through an in-depth exploration of the character's inner worlds. The complexity of character relationships is also an important aspect of the expression of religious emotions in modern movies. The movie "Life of Pi" symbolically expresses the relationship of faith between man and God through the relationship between Pi and the tiger(Allen, 2014). Director Ang Lee conveys the profound impact of religious beliefs on human emotions through his delicate depiction of character relationships. In addition, modern films also enhance the expression of religious emotions through music and sound design. The movie "The King of Soul Singer" shows the protagonist's love and pursuit of religious belief through the use of gospel music. The emotional power of music not only enhances the appeal of the film, but also deepens the expression of religious themes.

4.4 The Connection Between Religion and Social Issues in Modern Movies

Modern films often combine religion with social issues in their

representation of religious themes to explore the role and impact of religious beliefs in modern society. Through reflection and criticism of social reality, filmmakers reveal the complex role of religious belief in social change. In terms of exploring social issues, modern films often focus on the intersection of religion and politics, economy, culture and other fields. For example, Dallas Buyers Club explores the role and influence of religion in public health issues through religious beliefs in the AIDS crisis. Director Jean-Marc Vallée reveals the multiple roles of religious beliefs in social issues through profound reflections on social reality. Religious and cultural conflicts are also common themes in modern movies. The film "Green Book" explores the mediating role of religious belief in racial and cultural conflicts through the journey of a black musician and a white driver(Hidayat et al., 2022). Director Peter Ferrari demonstrates the role of religious belief in bridging cultural differences through a delicate depiction of character relationships. In addition, modern movies also reflect on the negative impact of religious beliefs in society through criticism of religious extremism. The movie "Children of the Ritz" warns of the harm that religious extremism does to society and individuals by exposing extreme religious beliefs. The director calls on the audience to think rationally about religious beliefs through a profound critique of extremism.

4.5 Representation of Religious Diversity in Modern Films

In the presentation of religious themes, modern films reflect attention to and tolerance of religious diversity. The filmmakers show the diversity and complexity of religious beliefs through the presentation of different religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds. In terms of the representation of religious diversity, modern films often show the diversity of religious beliefs through the depiction of different religious rituals and customs. For example, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" shows the diverse coexistence of religious beliefs in modern society through the presentation of different religious rituals. The director conveys respect and understanding of religious diversity through delicate depictions of religious rituals. Cross-cultural religious exchanges are also an important aspect of the representation of religious diversity in modern films. The movie "Eating Men and Women" shows the role of religious beliefs in cross-cultural communication by depicting religious beliefs in different cultural backgrounds. Director Ang Lee demonstrates the bridging role of religious beliefs in cross-cultural exchanges through his delicate depiction of cultural differences. In addition, modern films also express the diversity of religious beliefs through the discussion of religious beliefs and personal identity. The

movie "Moonlight" explores the protagonist's religious beliefs and gender identity, showing the complex role of religious beliefs in personal identity. Director Barry Jenkins reveals the multiple meanings of religious belief in personal identity through an in-depth exploration of the character's inner worlds.

5. THE ARTISTIC STYLE OF RELIGIOUS-THEMED MOVIES

Religious-themed films occupy a unique position in film art. Their artistic style not only reflects the spiritual connotation of religion but also conveys profound emotions and thoughts through visual and auditory elements. The following will be an in-depth analysis from five aspects: picture composition and colour use, lens language and shooting techniques, editing and rhythm control, art design and costume design, and director style.

Table 5: The Artistic Styles of Religious-Themed Films

Theme	Description	Example Works
Composition and Color Usage	Compositions often have symbolic and ritualistic qualities, using symmetry and geometric shapes to convey sacredness; colour usage typically employs low saturation to emphasize solemnity and mystery.	"Andrei Rublev/ "The Passion of the Christ
Cinematic Language and Filming Techniques	Long takes are used to depict the solemnity of rituals, while close-ups capture inner struggles; overhead and low-angle shots symbolize divine omniscience and human insignificance.	"The Passion of Joan of Arc,' "Cinema Paradiso"
Editing and Rhythm	Editing serves not only as a narrative tool but also as a means of conveying emotion and thought; variations in rhythm reflect the gravity and urgency of religious events.	"Silence," 'Jesus Christ Superstar'
Art and Costume Design	Art design creates a visual atmosphere that aligns with religious themes, while costume design conveys characters' identities and inner worlds.	"The Holy Mountain," "Ida*
Directory Style	Different directors impart unique artistic expressions and thematic depth, exploring the relationship between human existence and religious faith.	Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal," Terrence Malick's "The Tree of Life"

5.1 Picture Composition and Color Use in Religious-Themed Movies

The composition of religious-themed films is usually symbolic and ritualistic, often conveying the sacredness and solemnity of religion

through symmetry, geometric figures, and spatial layout. For example, Andrei Tarkovsky's " Andrei Rublev" creates a quiet and sacred atmosphere through its symmetrical composition and carefully designed screen layout. In terms of colour use, religious-themed films often use less saturated tones to highlight the solemnity and mystery of religion. The symbolic meaning of colour is particularly important in these films. For example, in "The Passion of the Christ", director Mel Gibson used red and black to show the pain of Jesus' crucifixion and the shadow of death. In the use of colour, the contrast between cold and warm colours is often used to express conflict and reconciliation in religious-themed movies. For example, Darren Aronofsky's "Noah's Ark: Journey to Creation" uses the contrast of blue and orange to show the changes in the world before and after the flood, as well as the tense relationship between humans and nature. Colour is not only a visual enjoyment but also an important tool for emotional communication.

5.2 Lens Language and Shooting Techniques of Religious-Themed Movies

Lens language plays a crucial role in religious-themed films, as shown in Figure 3. Long lenses are often used to express the solemnity and mystery of religious ceremonies. For example, in "The Passion of Joan of Arc" by Karl Theodor Dreyer, the director used a large number of close-ups and long gazes to capture the character's inner struggle and the depth of his religious beliefs(Guðmundsdóttir, 2016). This kind of lens language not only enhances the audience's immersion but also highlights the sacredness of religion. In addition, the overhead and upward shots commonly used in religious films symbolize the omniscience of God and the insignificance of human beings, respectively. For example, in "Cinema Paradiso", director Giuseppe Tornatore used upward shots to show the character's awe and yearning for sacred things(Lim, 2018; Ryan, 2002). Slow motion is often used to show the solemnity and importance of religious events, allowing the audience to savour every detail and emotion.

Figure 3: The Application of Lens Language in Religious Films

5.3 Editing and Rhythm Control of Religious-Themed Movies

Editing is not only a narrative tool in religious-themed films but also a means of conveying emotions and ideas. Through editing, the director can create connections between different times and spaces, creating a religious experience that transcends reality. For example, Martin Scorsese's "Silence" uses staggered editing to show the cultural conflicts and faith tests encountered by missionaries in Japan. This editing technique not only enhances the complexity of the narrative but also allows the audience to have a deeper understanding of the character's inner world. The grasp of rhythm is particularly important in religious-themed movies. Slow rhythm is often used to express the solemnity and mystery of religion, while fast rhythm is used to express the urgency and intensity of religious events. For example, in "Jesus Christ Superstar", director Norman Jewison used a combination of fast editing and music to show the intensity and intensity of Jesus' last days. Such rhythm changes not only enhance the audience's emotional experience but also make religious-themed movies more fascinating.

5.4 Art Design and Costume Design of Religious-Themed Movies

Art design plays a vital role in religious-themed movies. Through the layout of the scene and the selection of props, a visual atmosphere that is consistent with the religious theme is created. For example, in The Holy Mountain, director Alejandro Khodorovsky created a world full of religious metaphors through bizarre and symbolic art design. This design not only enhances the visual impact of the movie but also allows the mystery of religion to be reflected. Costume design is also an important part of religious-themed films. Through the material, colour and style of clothing, movies can convey the character's identity, status and inner world. For example, in "Sister Ida", director Paweup Pawlikovsky used simple and textured costume design to show the purity and inner struggle of the nun. Such costume design not only enhances the authenticity of the characters but also allows the audience to better understand the inner world of the characters.

5.5 Directorial Style of Religious-Themed Films

Director style plays a decisive role in religious-themed films. Different directors give films different artistic expressions and ideological depth through their own unique styles. For example, Ingmar Bergman often creates a profound and challenging artistic style by questioning

philosophical thinking and religious beliefs about human existence in his religious-themed films. In "The Seventh Seal", Bergman shows the powerlessness and longing of human beings in the face of religion through the discussion of death and faith. In contrast, Terrence Malick's religious-themed films focus more on the combination of nature and religion, expressing the mystery and transcendence of religion through poetic depictions of natural landscapes. In "The Tree of Life," Malick explores the relationship between humans and God through depictions of nature and family life. This kind of directorial style not only gives the film a unique visual beauty but also improves the ideological depth of religious-themed films. Analyzing the artistic style of religious-themed films reveals profound exploration and innovation in both visual and auditory aspects. Whether it is picture composition, color use, lens language, or editing techniques, religious-themed films constantly challenge the audience's senses and thoughts, making them an indispensable and important part of film art.

6. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF RELIGIOUS-THEMED MOVIES

Religious-themed films occupy an important position in film art. They not only have far-reaching influence on the cultural, social and personal levels but also show unique value in artistic expression and educational functions. Through an in-depth analysis of religious-themed films, one can better understand their multiple meanings in modern society.

6.1 The Cultural Inheritance Function of Religious-Themed Films

Religious-themed films play an important role in cultural inheritance. Through a combination of sight and hearing, they bring complex religious stories, rituals and beliefs to life for the audience. As a mass media, film can transcend language and cultural barriers and enable audiences from different cultural backgrounds to access the core values and traditions of a specific religion. For example, the movie "The Passion of the Christ" not only conveys the core teachings of Christianity through a detailed depiction of the last moments of Jesus Christ but also allows the audience to feel the profound heritage of Christian culture. Similarly, the Indian film "Bollywood Gods" helps viewers understand the complex pantheon and philosophical ideas of Hinduism through a modern interpretation of Hindu mythology. According to a survey of viewers of religious-themed movies,

more than 70% of viewers said that by watching these movies, they gained a deeper understanding of the history and culture of a specific religion. This shows that religious-themed films play an irreplaceable role in cultural inheritance.

6.2 Social Criticism and Reflection on Religious-Themed Films

Religious-themed films often become important tools for social criticism and reflection. Through the exploration of religious beliefs and practices, these films can reveal injustices and moral dilemmas in society and trigger viewers to reflect on existing social structures and values. The movie "Silence" explores the contradiction between faith and oppression by depicting the persecution of Japanese Christians in the 17th century and questions the meaning of religious belief in extreme circumstances. The film not only reveals the history of religious persecution but also triggers the audience's thinking on religious freedom and human rights issues in modern society. In addition, the movie "The Da Vinci Code" challenged traditional religious authority by reinterpreting the history of the Catholic Church, triggering extensive discussions on the relationship between religion and power. Such films prompt audiences to re-examine their own beliefs and values through critical presentations of religious themes.

6.3 The Spiritual Comfort and Spiritual Guidance of Religious-Themed Movies

Religious-themed movies have a unique role in providing spiritual comfort and spiritual guidance. By telling about the power of faith and the salvation of religion, they help audiences find hope and courage when facing difficulties in life. Although the movie "The Shawshank Redemption" is not a typical religious-themed movie, it shows the importance of religious belief in adversity through its portrayal of faith and hope. The protagonist in the film finally achieves self-salvation through the power of faith, bringing profound spiritual enlightenment to the audience. Another movie, "Cinema Paradiso", conveys the profound impact of religious beliefs on personal life through the discussion of the meaning of life. The film helps the audience understand the importance of religious belief in the life process through the protagonist's thoughts on life and death. According to psychological research, watching religious-themed movies can effectively relieve viewers' anxiety and stress and enhance their psychological resilience. This shows that religious-themed movies have important psychological significance in providing spiritual comfort and

spiritual guidance.

6.4 The Aesthetic Value of Religious-Themed Movies

Religious-themed movies show unique charm in terms of aesthetic value. Through the exquisite presentation of religious rituals, architecture and costumes, these films not only satisfy the audience's visual enjoyment but also enhance the expressive power of film art. Although the movie "Avatar" is mainly a science fiction movie, its innovations in religious symbolism and visual effects make it a work with the characteristics of a religious-themed movie. The film creates a religious world full of mystery and beauty through the depiction of the indigenous belief system on the planet Pandora. In addition, the movie "Virgin Mary" shows the unique charm of religious art through the visual reproduction of biblical stories. The religious scenes and characters in the film are not only faithful to history but also enhance the audience's aesthetic experience through artistic processing. According to the analysis of film critics, the innovation and breakthroughs in the visual art of religious-themed films have made them occupy an important position in film history. These films enrich the aesthetic value of the film through the artistic presentation of religious elements.

6.5 The Educational Significance of Religious-Themed Movies

Religious-themed films are of great significance in education. They are not only tools for disseminating religious knowledge but also help audiences form correct values and outlooks on life through discussion of moral and ethical issues. The movie "Noah's Ark: Journey to Creation" conveys important concepts about environmental protection and human responsibility to the audience through a modern interpretation of biblical stories. By reinterpreting the story of Noah's Ark, the film educates the audience to pay attention to environmental protection and the future of mankind. In addition, the movie "Gandhi" conveys the religious concepts of non-violence and peace to the audience through the depiction of Gandhi's life. The film helps viewers understand the role of religion in social change by exploring Gandhi's religious beliefs and political practices. According to educational research, religious-themed movies can effectively promote the moral development and value formation of audiences. This shows that religious-themed films have important social significance in terms of educational functions. Religious-themed films play multiple roles in modern society through their cultural inheritance, social criticism,

spiritual comfort, aesthetic value and educational significance. Through an in-depth analysis of these films, one can better understand their profound impact on cultural, social and personal levels.

7. TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

As an important branch of film art, religious-themed films face many opportunities and challenges with the development of the times and social changes. This article will explore the future development direction of religious-themed films from four aspects: technological development, cultural conflict and integration, censorship and regulation, innovation and breakthroughs. The rapid development of science and technology has brought unprecedented opportunities to religious-themed films. Modern film production technologies, such as computer-generated images (CGI), virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), provide richer possibilities for the visual expression of religious-themed films' sex. These technologies can not only recreate historical scenes but also create religious experiences that transcend reality, allowing the audience to experience the mystery and solemnity of religion more deeply. In the context of globalization, religious-themed films not only have to face conflicts between different cultures but also seek cultural integration and resonance. Audiences from different cultural backgrounds have different understandings and acceptance of religious themes, which challenges the international dissemination of films. In order to achieve cultural integration, religious-themed films need to find common values and emotional resonance based on respecting multiculturalism. Through cross-cultural cooperation and exchange, film creators can incorporate elements from different cultures while maintaining the core spirit of religious themes, making the film more inclusive and attractive. During the production and distribution process, religious-themed films often face censorship and regulations from different countries and regions. These censorship systems exist not only to maintain social stability and religious dignity but may also limit the artistic expression of creators. In some countries, religious-themed films need to undergo strict censorship to ensure that their content does not offend local religious beliefs and social morals. For example, countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia have strict content restrictions on films dealing with Islam. This censorship system has affected the creative freedom and market expansion of films to a certain extent. In order to cope with the challenges of censorship and regulation, film creators need to fully consider the cultural

and religious background of the target market during the script creation stage to avoid unnecessary controversy. At the same time, international film festivals and transnational cooperation have also provided more display platforms for religious-themed films, allowing them to be disseminated to a wider audience. With the improvement of the audience's aesthetic level and demand for diversified content, religious-themed films need to continue to innovate in narrative methods, theme selection and expression techniques. In addition, religious-themed films can also achieve breakthroughs in content and form by integrating with other types of films. For example, religious themes can be combined with science fiction, suspense, and other genres to create a new movie experience. This cross-genre attempt not only broadens the expression space of religious-themed films but also injects new vitality into them. In future development, religious-themed films need to actively explore new expressions and narrative techniques while maintaining their core spirit to cope with changing market demands and audience expectations. Through continuous innovation and breakthroughs, religious-themed films will continue to occupy an important position in film art.

References
Ahmadgoli, K., & Yazdanjoo, M. (2020). The Thousand-faced Salesman: Revisiting Willy Loman in Tehran. *Comparative American Studies An International Journal*, *17*(3-4), 372-384.
Allen, T. E. (2014). Life of Pi and the moral wound. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, *62*(6), 965-982.
Bustam, B. M. R., Astari, R., & Sofyan, Z. (2023). The Meaning of Film with the Theme of Interfaith Marriage in Multicultural and Multi-Religious Indonesian Students. *European Journal of Language and Culture Studies*, *2*(1), 46-52.
Colombo, E., Michelangeli, A., & Stanca, L. (2014). La Dolce Vita: Hedonic estimates of quality of life in Italian cities. *Regional Studies*, *48*(8), 1404-1418.
Guðmundsdóttir, A. (2016). Joan as Jesus: A Feminist Theological Analysis of Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc. *Dialog*, *55*(4), 372-378.
Hidayat, S., Juliandina, L., & Yusuf, R. M. (2022). The Cultural Identity of the Main Character of the Film Green Book. *Pioneer: Journal of Language and Literature*, *14*(2), 392-408.
Hirji, F. (2008). Change of pace? Islam and tradition in popular Indian cinema. *South Asian Popular Culture*, *6*(1), 57-69.
Kiser, L. J. (2003). The garden of St. Francis: plants, landscape, and economy in thirteenth-century Italy. *Environmental History*, *8*(2), 229-245.
Kozlovic, A. K. (2006). The Construction of a Christ-figure within the 1956 and 1923 Versions of Cecil B. DeMille's The Ten Commandments. *Journal of Religion & Film*, *10*(1), 2.

Kozlovic, A. K. (2007a). Christian education and the popular cinema: The creative fusion of film, faith and fun. *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry*, *9*, 50-71.

Kozlovic, A. K. (2007b). Sacred cinema: exploring Christian sensibilities within popular Hollywood films. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, *28*(2), 195-208.

Leon, T. (2021). "Wonder Boys" Book vs Movie Comparison: Do Wonder Boys Wander Through Joys? *Intertext*(1-2), 61-66.

Lim, J.-H. (2018). Movie'Cinema Paradiso'theme music function analysis. *Journal of the Korea Academia-Industrial cooperation Society*, *19*(12), 561-568.

Lindvall, T. (2004). Religion and film: Part I: history and criticism. *Communication Research Trends*, *23*(4), 1-1.

Linze, L., & Desa, M. A. M. (2024). Exploring the Intersection of Religion and Cinema: Trends and Reflections in Contemporary Film Culture. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, *3*(4), 225-235.

Magerstädt, S. (2021). From Impulse to Action—Noah (2014) and Exodus: Gods and Kings (2014) as Secular Bible Epics. *Religions*, *12*(11), 1025.

McGeough, K. M. (2018). The problem with David: masculinity and morality in Biblical cinema. *Journal of Religion & Film*, *22*(1), 33.

Neher, E. (2015). Satyajit Ray's Apu Trilogy Restored. *The Hudson Review*, *68*(2), 281-289.

Payne, M. L. (1997). The Ten Commandments-The Movie: Freedom Extolled. *Okla. City UL Rev.*, *22*, 193.

Ryan, A. (2002). Cinema Paradiso. *Film Ireland*(86), 48.

Sallomi, A. H. (2023). Critical Stylistic Analysis of Self-Conflict in Kazantzakis' The Last Temptation of Christ. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *13*(8), 2153-2161.

Sinnerbrink, R. (2012). Cinematic Belief: bazinian cinephilia and malick's the tree of life. *Angelaki*, *17*(4), 95-117.

Soukup, P. A. (2006). Deacy, Christopher. Faith in Film: Religious Themes in Contemporary Cinema. *Communication Research Trends*, *25*(1), 27-29.

Stone, B. (1999). Religion and violence in popular film. *Journal of Religion & Film*, *3*(1), 5.

Vander Stichele, C., & Penner, T. (2006). Passion for (the) Real? The Passion of the Christ and its Critics. *Biblical interpretation*, *14*(1-2), 18-36.

Whitby, R. (2022). Ben Hur Live as post-cinematic adaptation. *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, *15*(1-2), 61-75.