



Film as Religion

John Lyden

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Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2003 Film as Religion argues that popular films perform a religious function in our culture. Like more formal religious institutions, films can provide us with ways to view the world and values to confront it. Lyden contends that approaches which interpret films only ideologically or theologically miss the mark in understanding their appeal to viewers. He develops an alternative method which shows how films can be understood as representing a “religious“ worldview in their own right. Lyden surveys the state of the study of religion and film, offering an overview of previous methods before presenting his own. Rather than seeking to uncover hidden meanings in film detectable only to scholars, Lyden emphasizes how film functions for its audiences?the beliefs and values it conveys, and its ritual power to provide emotional catharsis. He includes a number of brief cases studies in which he applies this method to the study of film genres—including westerns and action movies, children's films, and romantic comedies—and individual films from The Godfather to E.T., showing how films can function religiously.

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