THESIS

A REASON TO BELIEVE:

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF MORMON MISSIONARY FILMS

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2012

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ABSTRACT

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In this analysis, I examine Mormon cinema and how it functions on a rhetorical level. I specifically focus on missionary films, or movies that are framed by LDS missionary narratives. Through an analysis of two LDS missionary films, namely Richard Dutcher's *God's Army* (2000) and Mitch Davis' *The Other Side of Heaven* (2001), I uncover two rhetorical approaches to fostering spirituality. In my first analysis, I argue that *God's Army* presents two pathways to spirituality: one which produces positive consequences for the characters, and the other which produces negative consequences. I call these pathways, respectively, ascending and descending spirituality, and I explore the rhetorical implications of this framing. In my second analysis, I contend that *The Other Side of Heaven* creates a rhetorical space wherein the audience may transform. Specifically, the film constructs a "Zion," or a heaven on earth, with three necessary components, which coincide perfectly with established LDS teachings: God, people, and place. These three elements invite the audience to accept that they are imperfect, yet they can improve if they so desire. Ultimately, by comparing my findings from both films, I argue that the films' rhetorical strategies are well constructed to potentially reinforce beliefs for Mormon audiences, and they also may invite non-Mormons to think more positively about LDS teachings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Media texts such as film may include intentional and unintentional, explicit and implicit, persuasive elements. This is particularly the case with films produced by (and for) a particular community, as evidenced by queer, Black, or Christian cinema. Religious cinema, or films associated with a particular religious community, may include many overlapping layers of intent, including such seemingly innocuous acts as entertainment, as well as more profound goals such as providing spiritual guidance or proselyting.[1] One specific genre of religious-community films can be identified as "Mormon cinema," which includes films produced by and for the Mormon community, or members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as the LDS Church).

In this analysis, I examine Mormon cinema and how it functions on a rhetorical level. I specifically focus on missionary films, or movies that are framed by LDS missionary narratives. My aim is to reveal the lens that Mormons use to understand humanity and how this lens acts as a means to persuade. I analyze these films without *a priori* theoretical assumptions in order to give me the liberty to reveal whatever relevant rhetorical strategies I discover. I simply attempt to discern and discuss how these films work rhetorically in the specific context of LDS culture, as well has how they might function for non-LDS audiences.

Through an analysis of two LDS missionary films, namely Richard Dutcher's *God's Army* (2000) and Mitch Davis' *The Other Side of Heaven* (2001), I uncover two rhetorical approaches to spirituality. In my first analysis, I argue that *God's Army* presents two pathways to spirituality: one which produces positive consequences for the characters, and the other which produces negative consequences. I call these pathways, respectively, ascending and descending spirituality, and I further discuss the rhetorical implications of this framing. The two disparate

modes of spirituality propose that following certain beliefs will be rewarded by becoming more like God. In my second analysis, I contend that *The Other Side of Heaven* creates a rhetorical space wherein the audience may transform. Specifically, the film constructs a "Zion," or a heaven on earth, with three necessary components according to LDS teachings: God, people, and place. These three elements invite the audience to accept that they are imperfect, and that they can improve if they so desire. Ultimately, by comparing my findings from both films, I argue that the films' rhetorical strategies have the potential to reinforce beliefs for Mormon audiences and may also invite non-Mormons to think more positively about LDS doctrines. The films are constructed in such a way as to potentially act as cinematic sermons that may allow the audience to experience spirituality, particularly through the lens of Mormon teachings.

In this introductory chapter, I give a brief overview of Mormon cinema and its rhetorical nature. I then summarize a review of relevant literature, which demonstrates that, not only has there yet to be a rhetorical examination of fifth-wave Mormon cinema or missionary films, but also that there is a need to do so. Lastly, I describe in greater detail the structure, purpose, and nature of my study, followed by a discussion of the context in which the films were made and received. Throughout the study, my analysis is both informed, but also limited, by my personal involvement (and interest in) the LDS Church.

Overview of Mormon Missionary Cinema

Jeff Simpson, president of Excel Entertainment, which distributes Mormon films and music, said, "LDS people see our films as a mirror, but they are also a window into the LDS culture" (Warchol C1). In other words, the genre of Mormon films, like other genres founded through communities or cultures, is laced with history, cultural implications, identity roles, and specific rhetorical purposes. Religious films, in particular, tend to have a "moral of the story."

The films' narratives reinforce the idea that, if a person lives or acts in a certain manner, then miraculous or spiritually exalting outcomes will occur. These narratives, as evidenced in Mormon cinema, include idealized portrayals of Mormon life, interactions with those not familiar or accepted as part of the Mormon community, and evaluations of behavior performed by film characters. Mormon films have become an integral part of the lives of LDS people, especially in the United States, and as such are potentially powerful rhetorical artifacts. The possibility to validate specific experiences within the Mormon community, combined with the crossover effect of producing films for non-Mormon audiences, creates a landscape of rhetorical analysis that is rich in potential insight.

Fifth-wave Mormon films have reinvigorated an already well-established means of Mormon cultural expression. Astle defines fifth-wave Mormon cinema as "independent Mormon productions released on 35mm film in commercial theaters to a paying public" ("What Is Mormon" 19), although the authors also use the term to describe Mormon films released during and after the year 2000. Many of these films have entered into the American Mormon lexicon. For example, *The Best Two Years* (2003) is a film adaptation of a stage play that follows the story of a new missionary in Holland and the spiritual struggles of his assigned missionary companion. The film helped solidify the career of actor Kirby Heyborne, who also appeared in several other popular Mormon films such as *Saints and Soldiers* (2003), *The R.M.* (2003), and *Sons of Provo* (2004). *Saints and Soldiers* has been one of the few Mormon films to cross over to larger, non-Mormon audiences and is consistently ranked as one of the most viewed films on the movie streaming website Hulu.com. Perhaps the most popular fifth-wave Mormon film to attain national popularity with Mormon and non-Mormon audiences is *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004). The lack of clear "Mormon-centered" content makes the film nearly unrecognizable as a film written,

produced, and directed by practicing Mormons. The film's titular character is played by Jon Heder, an active member of the LDS Church. The film lacks any profanity, apart from the mild oaths uttered by the characters Napoleon and his brother Kip. This lack of profanity is an aspect of American Mormon culture that is also parodied in the film *Sons of Provo*.

While there may be a great variety of fifth-wave Mormon films, perhaps the most recognizable type of Mormon film is the missionary movie. What may be considered the first widely acknowledged fifth-wave Mormon film, Richard Dutcher's *God's Army* has spawned a number of other films and several production companies devoted to the sole purpose of creating and distributing Mormon films. *God's Army* not only marked a pivotal shift in what is considered Mormon cinema (Astle, "What Is Mormon" 19), it also is grounded in Mormon missionary narrative structures. The film follows the story of a new LDS missionary from Utah as he struggles with his role as a missionary in Los Angeles, as well as with his own dedication to the LDS Church. The missionary narrative in Mormon cinema is found in other relatively well-known or successful films such as Mitch Davis' *The Other Side of Heaven* and Christian Vuissa's *The Errand of Angels* (2008), and these films serve as a lens to understand Mormon culture. Proselyting missionaries are perhaps the most recognizable characteristic of the LDS Church, and the church teaches that missionary work is one of the most important services performed by members ("Missionary Work"). Therefore, missionary narratives are positioned to reach both Mormon and non-Mormon audiences, a quality that is a distinctive feature of fifth-wave Mormon films.

Independently produced missionary films, and independent Mormon cinema in general, must be distinguished from media produced by the LDS Church, as the church does not endorse such productions and does not involve itself in the creative ventures of its members, even though

the church has a rich media history, including film production. These independent films are directed towards audiences that are already familiar with LDS doctrine, as well as North American Mormon culture. In essence, missionary narratives in independent Mormon cinema form an engaging realm of analysis inasmuch as they are produced by a collective community and culture, instead of directly supervised by a larger organization. Similarities and patterns found among these films would reveal implicit beliefs and desires within the LDS community. These patterns would also demonstrate the distinctive relationship between Mormons and Mormon cinema. Analysis of these similarities has the potential to validate conclusions about how these films' reflect Mormon culture.

A study of Mormon cinema is salient at present because of three movements in the United States' cultural landscape. First, there has been a recent swelling of Mormonism's presence in American life, as reflected in art produced both by and about members of the LDS Church. For example, the recently opened Broadway musical, *The Book of Mormon*, was nominated for fourteen Tony Awards, and won eight awards including best musical (Johnson D1). Parodies of LDS life can be found in prime time or late night television cartoons such as *The Simpsons*, *South Park,* and *Family Guy*. HBO's critically acclaimed drama *Big Love,* or TLC's reality program *Sister Wives* are both popular and recognizable, even though their portrayals of purportedly Mormon polygamous sects are often erroneously confused as being the LDS Church. Productions such as these reinforce stereotypes and misunderstandings about Mormonism. LDS people, however, have begun to produce art and mass media that accurately reflect their own voice. Mormon cinema is a striking example of how Mormons are beginning to reach out to public audiences, as well as to the greater American Mormon community. Much as queer cinema is a catalyst to maintaining and shaping the GLBT community, Mormon cinema

has begun to create boundaries that codify Mormon culture in a social context instead of a doctrinal one. In other words, spiritual teachings are invariant throughout the entirety of the LDS Church, but the cultures of individual communities or regions may vary. Producers have predominantly targeted U.S. Mormon audiences, and therefore most Mormon films contribute to American LDS culture. The recent popularity of Mormon cinema, as evident by a host of films since 2000 (Astle, "What Is Mormon" 63) and the annual LDS Film Festival held in Orem, Utah, is a phenomenon which relates directly to many scholars' concerns about identity, representation, visual rhetoric, and the role of religion as a persuasive entity.

Second, discourse about the LDS church has increased as a result of the growth of the Mormon community in the United States, along with its presence in politics. Current church membership is over fourteen million, with over six million in the United States alone. There are over 52,000 missionaries and over 28,000 congregations worldwide ("Facts & Statistics"). According to the National Council of Churches, the LDS Church is the second-fastest growing in the United States ("Growth of the Church"). In terms of politics, Mitt Romney's presidential bids in 2008 and 2012 have brought national attention to his Mormon faith. Also, national attention was focused on the role of the LDS Church in the Proposition 8 campaign in California to amend the state's constitution in order to ban same-sex marriage. Awareness about the existence of the LDS Church and its members has increased dramatically in the last decade, and many people are now coworkers, friends, and neighbors with LDS people.

Third, there is a general lack of understanding by the majority of the United States' population about Mormonism, which is evident in stereotypes, stigma, tokenization, and other reactions common towards minority cultures. Campbell echoes others in referring to current discussions about Mormonism as a "Mormon moment" (33) in history and calls for increased

awareness and cultural sensitivity when reporting on issues about Mormonism. Otterson

similarly discusses the many overly simplistic, and many times erroneous, representations of

Mormonism within contemporary journalism and argues that basic beliefs should never be

overshadowed by trivial stereotypes (1). The Mormon community continually attempts to define

and maintain itself through the use of media, including cinema; and the cultural boundaries

which separate Mormons from the greater U.S. culture has blurred and blended. Mormon cinema

interacts not only within the Mormon community, but it is also released to--and viewable by--the

general public. The United States' majority culture has been confronted with defining the role of

Mormonism as part of an increasingly diverse population. These three influences, the presence of

LDS culture in American art, the growth of the Mormon community in the United States, and the

general lack of understanding about Mormonism, all contribute to my justification for studying

Mormon cinema. An analysis of missionary films in Mormon cinema would expand current

understanding of mass media's role in shaping co-cultural identity and explore a previously

little-understood film genre.

My interest in Mormon cinema does not only originate from the currently unfulfilled

need for scholars to study and better understand its rhetorical implications, but also from my own

identity as a Mormon. As a practicing member in good standing of the LDS Church and as a

former proselyting missionary in Honduras, I am drawn to understand how my co-culture

situates itself within broader contexts through mediated communication. My experience and

familiarity with Mormon culture, its practices, and its beliefs are valuable tools. They allow me

to provide insight as to how these films communicate to two distinct audiences: Mormon and

non-Mormon. In essence, my positioning as an LDS person allows me to utilize my knowledge

of Mormonism in order to accurately reveal the rhetorical nature of missionary films in Mormon

cinema. At the same time, my personal familiarity with Mormonism presents certain challenges concerning my ability to offer objective commentary. As with the case with other minority groups, however, I believe the advantages of being an insider outweigh the disadvantages.

Review of Literature

My review of the relevant literature demonstrates that, not only there has yet to be a rhetorical examination of fifth-wave Mormon cinema or missionary films, but also that there is a need to do so. Scholars from several fields have expressed a distinct interest in what some are calling the "Mormon moment," and that interest has become manifest in essays about Mormon cinema and communication studies scholars' work on Mormon identity. Previous literature reveals three areas of scholarship that relate to the study of Mormon cinema from a communication perspective. The first area of scholarship consists of literature that attempts to define Mormon cinema and its history; the second is comprised of scholarly reviews of Mormon films; and the third includes articles that attempt to deconstruct Mormon identity through its relationship to media. All three areas contribute to a young and growing field of study and demonstrate that there is a space for my analysis of LDS films.

I. Definitions and History of Mormon Cinema

Burton explains the great diversity that exists within Mormon cinema and states that "the breadth and depth of the Mormon movie heritage" can be seen in "the sheer number of films made by and about Latter-day Saints, their variety and influence, their purposes and settings, their formats and aesthetics, their promotion and reception, and their uses and abuses" ("Establishing Shot" 5). Although many would consider *God's Army* the first Mormon film and the director Richard Dutcher as "the father of Mormon cinema" (Astle and Burton 13), the actual history of Mormon cinema reaches as far back as 1905 with *A Trip to Salt Lake City*, the first

fictional cinematic treatment on Mormonism that depicted Mormon characters. The film portrays a polygamous family in Salt Lake City and the comedic lengths the father goes to provide water for all of his children. This film marked the beginning of the first of five waves of Mormon cinema as defined by Astle and Burton (17). The first wave includes films produced from 1905 to 1929, the second between 1929 and 1953, the third 1953 to 1974, the fourth 1974 to 2000, and the fifth wave occurring from 2000 to the present. Besides the five waves, Astle and Burton also describe four classifications by which to further delineate types of Mormon cinema:

1) Depictions of Mormons in Mainstream Films

2) Institutional (Church) Films

3) Independent Mormon Films

4) Latter-day Saints Working in the Mainstream Industry (17)

Although the authors explain that, of these classifications, "each is more or less prominent in a given period, but all occur in each of the five waves and together they constitute the larger field of Mormon cinema" (17), they do not describe which classification is most prominent in each wave.

According to Astle and Burton, the first wave of Mormon cinema occurred between 1905 and 1929 (18). During the early days of film, the LDS Church was highlighted in eleven silent films. These consisted of "Mormonsploitation" (D'Arc 165) movies produced in order to exploit Mormon peculiarities in a comedic or propagandistic fashion, as well as films produced by the church or those sympathetic to it in order to combat perceivably negative depictions of Mormons. These films were generally 35mm and black-and-white film, and they were "released to a paying public in commercial cinemas" (Astle and Burton 18). Astle and Burton assign as a descriptive title to this era "The Clawson Brothers and the New Frontier" (18) in reference to the

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influence of brothers Chester and Shirley Clawson, two Mormon filmmakers, whom the authors argue "can effectually be credited with creating Mormon cinema" (22). The Clawson brothers directed a host of church-sponsored documentaries on Mormon subjects and events between the years of 1916 and 1929, although the first film produced by the LDS Church was *One Hundred Years of Mormonism* in 1913.

The second wave took place between 1929 and 1953 and consisted of a less public cinematic movement that was defined more by technological innovations such as sound and the cheaper 16mm film stock. Films produced from outside of the church's influence tended to be kinder toward the LDS Church, and private production networks were created that later helped nurture a film culture among members of the church. Astle and Burton explain that "this was a time when all aspects of the medium--distribution, exhibition, and ultimately production--were integrated into Mormon social life and institutionalized by the Church itself" (45). The descriptive title given to this era is "Home Cinema," referring to the general movement by church members to become more independent from market influences and to avoid "over trafficking with Gentiles" (45).

The third wave of Mormon cinema occurred between 1953 and 1974 and is given the descriptive title "Judge Whitaker and the Classical Era" (Astle and Burton 19). The creation of Brigham Young University's Motion Picture Studio by the LDS Church marked the beginning of an era when Mormon films were produced "for multiple purposes and audience" (19), including proselyting and entertainment. The title of this wave is in reference to Wetzel O. "Judge" Whitaker as the head of BYU Motion Picture Studio and the films which were produced during his tenure. Many of these films are deemed classics among Mormons and are still shown privately in church seminaries and institutes of religion. They include films such as *Windows of*

Heaven (1963), *Man's Search for Happiness* (1964), and *Johnny Lingo* (1969). However, as in the first wave, Mormons were once again treated as "objects of curiosity" (19) by Hollywood productions in such films as Otto Preminger's *Advice and Consent* (1962), Edgar Reitz's *Mahlzeiten* (1967), and Joshua Logan's *Paint Your Wagon* (1969).

The fourth wave took place between 1974 and 2000 and saw the advent of increased distribution such as home video. Astle and Burton state that production and distribution of Mormon films were expanded to include organizations outside of BYU and that the church began "distributing its work through a variety of channels including satellite broadcasts, television, VHS cassettes, and destination cinemas at Church-owned visitors' centers" (19). This wave is also known as the "Mass Media Era" (19) which not only reflects of increased diversity in distribution channels but also greater numbers of "Latter-day Saints working in the entertainment industry," (19) a characteristic that allowed for the emergence of the most current era of Mormon cinema.

The fifth wave began in 2000 and continues to the present. Beginning with Richard Dutcher's *God's Army* in 2000, this era is subtitled as the time of "Cultural and Commercial Viability" (Astle and Burton 19). The authors explain that "independent Mormon productions released on 35mm film in commercial theaters to a paying public have established a niche market within American Mormonism" (19). Several independent production studios were created, including companies such as Dutcher's own Zion Films, Excel Entertainment Group, and HaleStorm Entertainment, which all specialize in Mormon cinema. The LDS Film Festival now occurs alongside the acclaimed Sundance Film Festival in Utah and is an outlet for continued independent support of Mormon films, as well as a catalyst for creating a strong community among established and potential filmmakers. The authors aptly explain that "Latter-

day Saints are starting to sense the emergence and importance of their own film tradition, suggesting the beginning of a culturally identifiable (but institutionally independent) Mormon cinema" (20).

As demonstrated by such a varied history, Mormon cinema cannot be defined by a simple description. Astle approaches the definition of Mormon cinema from what he calls a "taxonomical perspective" ("What is Mormon" 19) or one grounded in categorical explanation. By understanding the nuances and contradictions of Mormon cinema, scholars are better able to comprehend "Mormons' self-perception and self-presentation" (20). In order to answer the question "what is Mormon cinema?" Astle first examines an essay by the Mormon film aficionado Preston Hunter, who co-founded the website Ldsfilm.com. Astle explains that, after the release of Richard Dutcher's second film *Brigham City* (2002), Preston Hunter was "the only one writing on Mormon cinema at the time" (22). Hunter essentially established a vocabulary through which discussions of Mormon cinema could take place via the publication of his articles on Ldsfilms.com. The first defining characteristic of Hunter's Mormon cinema is that the films must be publicly released to a paying audience. The second characteristic is that it "excludes films made by Mormons but without Mormon content, like *Casablanca* (1942) and *The Land Before Time* (1988)," or "films about Mormonism directed by non-Mormons, such as *Brigham Young* (1940) and *Orgazmo* (1997)" (23). The third characteristic is that these films must be produced with Mormons as the intended audience. The fourth and last characteristic is that Mormon "cinema must be orthodox: no Mormon villains, for instance" (23). In other words, portrayals of Mormon characters must be positive. This last requirement is founded on the basis of the larger LDS audience accepting and not being offended by the film's narrative or characterizations.

With these four characteristics in mind, Astle infers that Hunter's definition of Mormon cinema is as follows:

> An LDS film is a feature-length (of at least roughly ninety minutes) fictional film released after *God's Army* in mainstream commercial cinemas which is marketed specifically and exclusively to Latter-day Saints, is directed by a faithful Latter-day Saint, and favorably depicts faithful Latter-day Saints or characters based on ancient LDS scripture. ("What is Mormon" 23)

As is obvious from the history that Astle and Burton propose, this definition is limiting and problematizes many facets of Mormon cinema. As being almost entirely exclusionary, Hunter's definition rejects films that could be identified by many as Mormon films. Astle therefore deconstructs this definition and finds a plethora of contradictions which eliminate its exclusionary tone as a possible means of defining Mormon cinema. For example, Astle writes that Hunter's "first exclusion, of non-theatrical releases, is somewhat troubling for a movement that has produced so much material for video, television, subsidized film distribution (in meetinghouses), and other outlets" (24). Writing about the fourth exclusion in Hunter's definition, Astle cites the example of *The Land Before Time* which "demonstrates how an ostensible secular film can indeed contain 'overtly Latter-day Saint themes' and be revelatory of the Mormon experience. The wisdom of excluding such films from the corpus is therefore debatable" (25). Astle concludes that Hunter's definition, along with most generic definitions, is overly reliant on exclusion--defining a genre by what it's not--and therefore does not meet the needs of scholars in discussing the great breadth and variety of the Mormon film experience.

One means of defining a cinematic genre is to highlight the cultural paradoxes that are narrativized within it.[2] Givens explains that the natural tensions "give cultural expression much

of its vitality" and that "Mormon film . . . has come into its own to a large degree as a

consequence of its serious engagement with the paradoxes and contradictions in Mormon

culture" ("Room for Both" 190). Givens describes three of these tensions and how they have

"inspired recurrent and sustained engagement on the part of writers, artists, and thinkers in the

Mormon community" (190). The first tension is the paradox between searching and certainty,

meaning Mormons' religious conviction and knowledge compared to their constant desire to

search and learn more. In other words, LDS people feel a strong desire to be absolutely sure in

their beliefs, without doubt. At the same time, scripture and church leaders teach that LDS

people should always be learning more about their faith and beliefs. The conflict, therefore,

resides in deciding which aspects of their beliefs are firm and immovable and which are subject

to growth and change. The inadequacies inherent in mortality, according to Mormon belief,

create a space in which Latter-day Saints struggle to define those areas of their lives where

certainty exists and where it must necessarily be absent. Givens explains that "Mormons are sure

of what they know, and personally and institutionally it is beyond compromise or negotiation.

But that which they do not know will occupy them in the schoolrooms of the life beyond" (191).

LDS films, consequently, demonstrate the conflict between faith and doubt, knowledge and

belief, known and unknown. For example, *The Singles Ward* (2002) demonstrates this principle

when the main character, who is extremely faithful and sure in his beliefs, turns away from those

beliefs in the beginning of the film. In the film *God's Army*, one of the missionaries decides to

leave his role as a missionary as well as the LDS Church as a result of reading anti-Mormon

books. Thus, Mormon cinema is an area where uncertainties and sureties intermingle and play

out in a mediated sphere.

The second tension is the disintegration of sacred distance, meaning that mortals are closer to God and God closer to mortals than is evident is most other religious traditions. Givens explains that Joseph Smith, the founder of the LDS Church, "rewrote conventional dualism" by teaching that God is "an exalted man, man [sic] a God in embryo, the family prototype for heavenly sociality, and Zion a city with dimensions and blueprints" ("Room for Both" 191). The lack of divine distance allows for mixing "the banal into the realm of the holy" (192) and creates a need to establish humanity's relationship with God that both creates devotion and familiarity.

The third tension exists between isolation and integration or, in other words, "Zion as paradise and Zion as exile" (Givens, "Room for Both" 192). The near-constant and forced migration of thousands of early Latter-day Saints from the eastern United States to the western states in the nineteenth century, along with Mormon doctrine about Zion as paradise from the world, creates a dichotomy between Mormons' lives as inclusionary and exclusionary. Mormons are taught to welcome others and learn outside of their own worldviews, while, at the same time, strictly maintaining boundaries that safeguard their own religious dedication. Givens explains how these three cultural tensions have played out in Mormon cinema and contribute to how these films act as mediated realms of discussion. By showcasing these tensions through characters and narratives, LDS film producers offer opinions as to how these conflicts may play out or how they may be resolved. Mormon art, such as filmmaking, is at least partially defined by how it distinguishes itself from other genres; and that distinction is clearly evident in the Mormon cultural contradictions that are demonstrated within it.

Astle concludes that "no single definition can aptly summarize all Mormon films" ("What is Mormon" 48) and that "Mormon cinema as a genre will continue to depend on the cultural identity of Mormonism as an ethnicity" (61). He continues by say that "subgenres like

missionary films and pioneer films will continue to emerge and evolve as well" (61). Givens writes that "defining Mormon film (or Mormon literature or music), like defining artistic categories linked to any ethnic or religious or cultural group, is a difficult and contentious enterprise" ("Room for Both" 189). There is no simple method to construct a genre that has been historically defined by so many movements and changes. Just as Jewish cinema may or may not include positive or negative depictions of Jewish characters, movies by Jewish filmmakers, and films produced for Jewish audiences, Mormon cinema may or may not include comparable derivations.

Other means of defining Mormon cinema include aesthetics and business models. Lefler and Burton highlight films' ability to do more than just "simply serve an idea; they create vividly felt vicarious experience" (275), and the aesthetics of a movie play an important role in creating that experience. Fifth-wave Mormon cinema has fundamentally altered the LDS film aesthetic by creating a greater variety of types of films and styles. For the first time in Mormon cinema's history, audiences have much greater control over the types of films they will consume as evidenced by the annual LDS Film Festival and rise of amateur and first-time writers and directors. The aesthetics of Mormon cinema have become much more diverse. The authors argue that Mormon audiences have become accustomed to the mainstream Hollywood film aesthetic, and therefore Mormon films may imitate that standard in order to speak the cinematic language of the audience. The authors cite *Legacy* (1993), a church-produced film that was shown for many years at a church-owned theater in Salt Lake City, Utah, as an example of this adaptation to the common Hollywood aesthetic while also demonstrating that this film demonstrates an inspirational style of its own. The aesthetics of Mormon cinema, however, are far from consistent. Fifth-wave Mormon cinema, in particular, is known for its wide variety of production

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budgets and methods, its diversity of professional training and backgrounds of the filmmakers, and the assortment of distribution methods which lend themselves to sweeping cinematic epics to internet short films. Lefler and Burton's arguments show that aesthetics are not the clearest method of defining this genre of film.

Samuelsen argues that aesthetics has little or no relationship to the successful business model that more recent Mormon filmmakers have utilized and that many Mormon audiences have misinterpreted the two distinct aspects (209). The independent production and release method, which has re-stimulated interest in Mormon cinema since 2000, runs in contradiction to many other models that have not been nearly as financially or culturally efficacious. With so many competing models, from the direct-to-DVD model, to the independent film and release model, to the single-theater release, there are multiple methods of producing Mormon cinema. Classifying films based on a categorical delineation of business models may be beneficial to increasing understanding of Mormon cinema's fifth wave.

II. Examining LDS Films

Scholarly reviews of fifth-wave films unveil Mormon values, aesthetics, and narratives, and therefore contribute to the delineation of Mormon cinema as a specific type of film. *BYU Studies*, a Mormon-centered scholarly journal, published a special volume on Mormon cinema that included four such reviews of LDS films. These reviews are by Mormon scholars and therefore shed light on the nuances of the American Mormon experience as it is portrayed in film. Three of the articles review individual documentaries. While most documentaries about the LDS Church are produced either by active members of the church or by non-Mormons, one of the reviews discusses the experimental PBS documentary "The Mormons" which included both Mormon and non-Mormon voices. The fourth review discusses the 2007 LDS Film Festival. The

particular films chosen to be reviewed shed light on how these scholars wish to discuss the Mormon experience. Documentaries purportedly attempt to educate and enlighten. These goals reflect the desire among Mormons to dispel stereotypes and misinformation about their faith and practices, as well as highlight the similarities between Mormons and the rest of society. Even the review of the LDS Film Festival supports this desire. The films chosen for the festival often cover a great variety of film styles and topics, a sense of diversity that Mormons wish to convey about themselves.

Published alongside these reviews is a funding proposal that included a manifesto to Mormon filmmakers. The manifesto advocated a change to the types of documentaries being produced at the time. A group of independent and student filmmakers was in the process of creating a documentary series entitled *Fit for the Kingdom* in the early to mid-2000s, and Dean Duncan of Brigham Young University wrote a funding proposal that attempted to "reestablish Mormon film on an ideological plane" (Burton, "A Manifesto" 268). In other words, the manifesto's goal was to unify Mormon cinema towards a common goal and a cohesive message. Mormon cinema is diverse in many respects, from business strategies to film styles. Duncan wrote the manifesto in hopes of guiding LDS films towards a specific aesthetic and therefore unify Mormon cinema. The series would attempt to move away from Hollywood mores and instead produce documentaries filmed with consumer-level equipment such as point-and-shoot digital camcorders and common editing software found on most computers. Instead of mimicking Hollywood movies and simply adding a Mormon twist, a practice seen in many Mormon films such as *Baptists at Our Barbeque* (2004) and *Mobsters and Mormons* (2005), Duncan's proposal called for a fundamental shift in LDS film themes. These films would show Mormons living their beliefs and "favor characterization over narrative" (267). Instead of the

miraculous, faith-based resolve to the conflict in the plot, the films would instead show the quiet strength of Mormons living everyday lives and overcoming everyday challenges. The entire series is available online ("Fit for the Kingdom").

One of the films within the *Fit for the Kingdom* series is *Angie* (2006), a fifty-minute documentary that follows the story of Angie Russell, "a young mother of three teenagers who is dying of breast cancer" (Astle, "Angie" 324). Astle explains that the poignancy of this film among the others in the series is twofold: its length, which stands out from the five-to-fifteen-minute films by being over fifty minutes, and its semi-professional style. Angie's husband who shot the footage on a point-and-shoot digital camera is a film director and professor at Brigham Young University. The editing style sets *Angie* apart and visually frames the topic between the highly produced, polished look of professional films and the spontaneous, intimate feel of home movies. The film is candid about the struggles of a regular family and rejects overt optimism for honesty. The honesty of the documentary which openly shows the private struggles and quiet hope of Mormon life contributes to its emotionally moving material. *Angie* also resists the common practice of more popular Mormon films to end with a miraculous happy ending. Astle describes the importance of resisting the "miracles-on-screen" tendency because "the life-changing spiritual manifestations, the ones that are so *abundantly* rich and powerful, often come to us through the sparsest of means" (326, italics in original). *Angie* is an example of a movement away from stylized portrayals of Mormons and is a film that frames Mormonism as part of the common American lifestyle.

Richardson's review of *New York Doll* (2005) places the documentary in contrast with the intimate and home-movie style of *Angie*. The film follows Arthur "Killer" Kane, the bassist of the former punk rock band New York Dolls, as he juggles his life as a former drug-addicted

rocker turned Mormon with his return to the rock scene to perform a reunion concert with his surviving band mates. Kane's journey from buying his guitars back from an Los Angeles pawnshop (with money donated from members of his Mormon congregation) to the reunion concert in New York City is documented by director Greg Whiteley who "walks us through the history of rock-and-roll mixing footage of early Dolls shows" (322). Contrary to *Angie*, where characters drive the documentary, *New York Doll* is heavily narrativized to produce a hero who consolidates his "two worlds" (322) of Mormonism and rock and roll in order to emerge victorious on stage. Richardson argues that Whiteley captures "a world in which miracles have not ceased" (322) and produces a "story for people interested in how the gospel works outside the norms that often we associate with LDS living" (323). Richardson further argues that this film resists the cookie-cutter characters of Mormon culture and defines Mormonism in a foundationally doctrinal light instead of a cultural one. This film publically opens the doors to what being a Mormon means to the world as well as to church members.

Depictions of the LDS Church and its culture can greatly vary depending on whether or not the producers are LDS. The differences highlight the need for a comprehensive study in cinematic depictions of Mormon life. Films produced by non-LDS persons often turn a hard eye to exuberantly positive depictions of Mormons and church history. On the other hand, films produced by active members of the LDS church tend to be consistent in regards to history and statistics but ignore imperfections. An example of this conflict is evident in Cannon, De Pills, and Bennett's review of the *The Mormons*, a 2007 documentary which aired on PBS. The authors applaud the documentary's use of multiple perspectives to explain the history and present state of the LDS Church, but cite multiple examples of when these perspectives create disjointed or incorrect depictions of the church (305). By showing interviews with former church

members, scholars, church leaders, and lay members, the documentary creates a cohesive narrative that errs in several instances. The documentary essentially ignores the fact that differing voices frame Mormon life in different lights.

More homogenous representations of Mormonism, as evident in Eash's review of the annual LDS Film Festival held in Provo, Utah, also create conflicting representations of what Mormon life means (331). The varying types of films, including ghost stories, romantic comedies, and heavier dramas, seem to have only two characteristics in common: they are produced by active members of the LDS community, and they lack any significant financial backing. Some films delve into the intricacies of Mormonism and spiritual beliefs, while others completely ignore such topics in favor of narratives that have greater cross-over potential to the general public. Eash explains the seemingly unrelated genres within Mormon cinema by stating "*Fathers and Sons* is reminiscent of a *Saturday Night Live* skit. *Above Average* feels like a prime-time reality show, and *Food Boy* could pass for a Disney Channel tweenybopper pilot" (333). These differences complicate any effort to describe Mormon cinema as a unified movement, and therefore prove the futility of such attempts.

The vast variety of films within Mormon cinema raises the question as to whether common narratives about Mormon life are able to emerge. To compare Mormon films that are only similar in their production origins or intended audience may hide potential nuances that shed light on Mormonism's presence in the United States. A potentially more fruitful landscape of analysis is the myriad of specific sub-genres within Mormon cinema, as demonstrated by Astle's taxonomic definition ("What Is Mormon" 47, also see fig. 1). This taxonomy serves to demonstrate the vast differences in film styles within Mormon cinema while at the same time

emphasizing important similarities that aid in understanding what the Mormon film movement means.
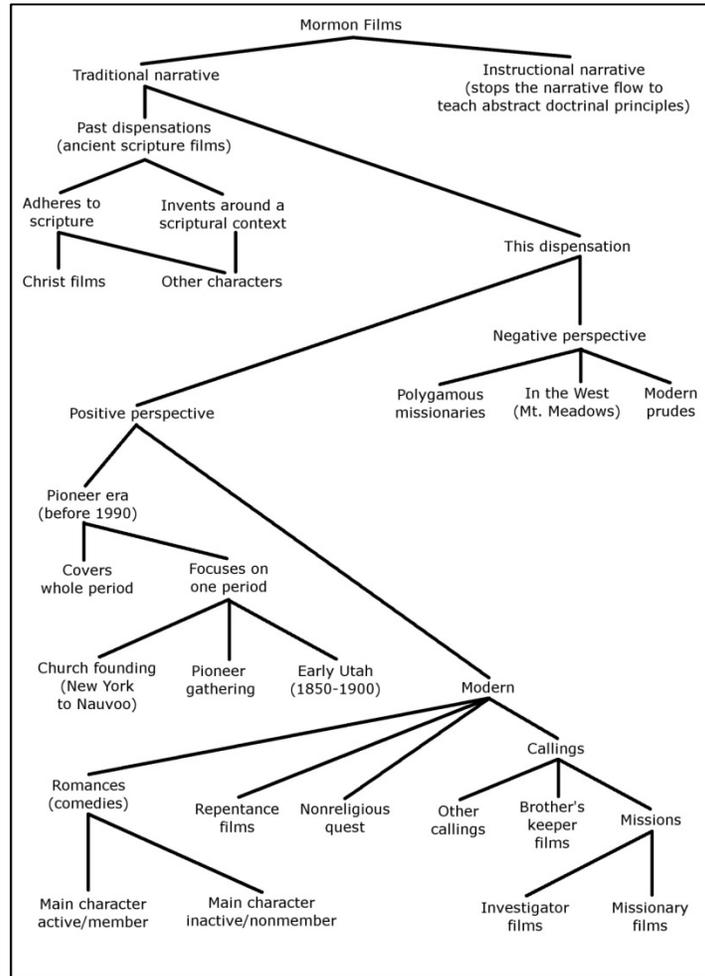
Figure 1: Astle's taxonomy of Mormon cinematic types.

Instead of asserting broad generalizations about the entire movement, scholars may more easily focus their attention on specific sub-genres within Mormon cinema. Drawing upon this methodology, my analysis will examine missionary films which are a sub-genre listed in Astle's taxonomy.

III. Mediated Mormon Identity

Scholarship on media and its relationship to Mormon identity is as varied as definitions of Mormon cinema, but several patterns are still discernible. Three such patterns include

Mormons' relationship with media, the manner in which Mormons are framed in media, and Mormons' self-framing practices. While scholarly work has been done on Mormonism, the following articles relate specifically to the much-less studied area of Mormon identity and how media contributes to Mormon identity formation.

Scholars have identified Mormons' relationship with media as an area of conflict that is constantly negotiated. Cooper and Pease argue that a tension exists between LDS culture and popular culture, as evident in their study on the *Brokeback Mountain* controversy in Utah newspapers (135). Analyzing op-ed pieces and letters to the editor, the authors found two discourses permeate Mormons' interaction with media: defending Zion versus disrupting Zion. In other words, members of the LDS Church attempt to defend their beliefs from the influences that they find corrupting or evil such as the film *Brokeback Mountain*. Stout presents a similar finding in his study on Las Vegas Mormons' defense strategies against secular influences in the media (62). He contends that Mormons construct a psychological barrier between themselves and media messages whenever such messages cannot be physically avoided (67). Both studies emphasize Mormons' cautious relationship with media. Swenson has a similar view of Mormons' engagement with media, but approaches the subject from a positive lens. She argues that LDS Church members can critically engage media such as film with a spiritual dimension and find uplifting messages and spiritual edification in films that may agree with the Mormon belief system (248). She cites films such as *Finding Nemo* as examples of how Mormon movie goers can create a transcendent lens when approaching film. All three articles make a similar argument in that the authors contend that Mormons approach media from a religiously mediated framework in order to defend or edify themselves and the wider Mormon community.

Other scholars have analyzed the manner in which Mormons are framed in the media, including film. Baker and Campbell created a five-factor model in order to analyze Mormon identity representation in media (110). The model's five factors are "the media, the Mormons, other religions, secular influences, and politics or government" (110). The authors constructed this model based on examination of how Mitt Romney and his Mormon faith were presented in the news media during his 2007 presidential campaign. D'Arc approaches Mormon identity from a critical lens by investigating Mormonism as it is represented in the "Mormonsploitation" films of the early 1900s (165). He contends that Mormons were framed as vampires who seduced unbelievers into horrific lives. These films were produced by non-Mormon filmmakers in order to both entertain and warn audiences about the potential dangers of interacting with members of the LDS Church.

The question of how Mormons frame themselves in media for public consumption is addressed in Scott's textual analysis of Temple Square, a visitor-friendly property owned by the LDS Church and located in Salt Lake City, Utah. Scott argues that Temple Square exhibits a "pioneer mythology" and that the "discourse of museumness might help reduce oppositional readings of the site, despite the existence of sometimes contradictory texts" ("Re-Presenting Mormon History" 100). He claims that Mormons frame themselves throughout Temple Square as part of the pioneer narrative and that they restrict other readings of the exhibits (97). Scott further argues in a later essay that Temple Square is a location where many members of the LDS Church may "reaffirm their faith" ("Constructing Sacred History" 201). Media artifacts such the Temple Square serve a public, non-Mormon function in order to frame Mormonism in a positive light, while at the same time serving a private, spiritual function for Latter-day Saints. This duality in purpose may possibly be found in other media forms such as cinema.

In summary, the relevant literature exhibits a lack of rhetorical examinations of fifth-wave Mormon cinema or missionary films as well as a need to do so. Scholars from several fields have expressed a distinct interest in what some are calling the "Mormon moment," and that interest has become manifest in communication studies scholars' work on Mormon identity and essays about Mormon cinema. This analysis addresses both Mormon cinema and identity, and how they interrelate through a rhetorical lens. Cinema, as demonstrated in this chapter, has the potential to accomplish much more than mere diversion. It can fulfill needs, reaffirm belief systems, and present arguments about the nature of humanity. This investigation will provide significant understanding about the nature of community-based cinematic genres and the spiritual function of cinema to those communities.

Method, Context, and Structure of the Analysis

In this analysis, I perform a rhetorical analysis that examines how Mormon cinema frames the Mormon experience within the context of missionary narratives. Such an analysis aims to provide insights into the persuasive strategies of the LDS cinematic experience. For the specific purposes of this examination, I define a Mormon film as one which demonstrates any of the following characteristics: (1) it is produced by active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; (2) the main characters are portrayed as members of the LDS church; and (3) the primary intended audience largely consists of members of the LDS church, with potential to crossover to larger non-Mormon audiences. In more succinct terms, it is a film by, for, or about Mormons. I define missionary films as movies that can be considered Mormon cinema and are chiefly comprised of narratives framed by LDS missionary service. Examples of missionary films include Richard Dutcher's *God's Army*, Mitch Davis' *The Other Side of Heaven*, Kurt Hale's *The R.M.*, and Christian Vuissa's *The Errand of Angels*.

By selecting films which represent the initial stages of the fifth-wave missionary film movement, I believe that I have, for the most part, allowed for insight and specificity over broad generalizations. In terms of fifth-wave Mormon missionary films, *God's Army* and *The Other Side of Heaven* provide two distinct sets of narrative styles, production budget, cross-over potential to non-LDS audiences, distribution and advertising methods, characters, themes, and relevancy to Mormon film culture. The two films I have selected provide a fertile ground of analysis and a foundation upon which to establish future analyses.

In terms of the method I use to approach this study, I follow Black's admonition in *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* that the role of the critic is to "disclose the enigmas of an artistic product," (2) or in terms of this analysis, an artistic and rhetorical product. Black defines criticism as "a discipline that, through the investigation and appraisal of the activities and products of [humans], seeks as its end the understanding of [humanity itself]" (9). More specifically, my goal is to perceive the rhetorical activities of these films, to appraise their value to the Mormon community as well as other critics and non-Mormons, and to study how these films operate in promulgating a specific understanding of spirituality from an LDS perspective (4-5). I do not wish to attempt a close reading of the films, as the very nature of cinema lends itself to extreme detail and nuance. Instead, I wish to broadly approach the nature of the films by drawing examples from specific scenes, characters, visual styles, narratives, and other elements of the films.

These movies, at their heart, are more than just missionary films; they are investigations into humanity through the lens of Mormonism. Citing the play *Oedipus Rex* as an example, Black explains:

One could respond to *Oedipus Rex* purely as a detective story, drawing no

qualitative distinction (or only a slight one) between it and an ordinary mystery

novel; but, of course, *Oedipus Rex* is much more than just a detective story, and

we would regard an interpretation of it in such terms as evidence of the critic's

imperceptiveness. (44)

In Black's example, *Oedipus Rex* is, in fact, a moving story of condemnation and redemption, a

study in humanity's disdain for its ungodliness. There is a moral to the story, and where there is a

moral to a story, there are rhetorical strategies that support the moral. The same is true for

missionary films, which also present their own morals and ideals. Instead of analyzing the films

with a specific theory or method, I attempt to disclose, evaluate, and discuss the rhetorical

strategies which support (or advocate) certain morals or ideals found throughout all two movies.

While there are other missionary films which I could include in my analysis, I limit my

discussion to two of these films, namely *God's Army* and *The Other Side of Heaven*. These

particular movies represent the very beginning of fifth-wave missionary films, and their

contrasting production origins combined with their similar positions in Mormon film history

allow me to draw conclusions about missionary films and the Mormon cinematic experience. At

the point in Mormon film history when these two films were being produced, there was a distinct

lack of public cinema that addressed LDS issues. The very act of publically showing films that

positively portrayed Mormon values or characters was limited to the realm of the LDS Church.

This would occur at various visitors' centers around the world, but most recognizably at the

Joseph Smith Memorial Building in Salt Lake City, Utah. These theaters were run by church

missionaries and were specifically purposed for explicit proselyting, although many LDS people

also attended screenings to participate in the shared cultural experience. Mormon cinema, in

terms of releasing a film for public distribution and a paying public, was mostly unheard of and rarely even discussed. The fifth wave of Mormon cinema brought public attention to Mormon films, and these first movies were produced with the distinct goals of reinforcing and teaching LDS beliefs.

I. Stated Intent and Reception of God's Army

It is clear that Richard Dutcher intended to specifically target Mormon audiences. He did not shy away from using ultra-specific cultural references in order to convey an aura of authenticity, and this attempt at authenticity was meant to demonstrate familiarity with the target audience. At the same time he did not want to completely alienate non-Mormon audiences. He explained this motivation for making *God's Army* in newspaper interviews and the director's commentary on the film's DVD. Certainly, the filmmaker's intent is relevant in assessing the construction of the work and its intended audiences. Although not absolutely authoritative, it nonetheless provides a lens through which we may interpret the film's meanings. Dutcher's remarks about his persuasive intent can be separated into two categories: (1) to devout Mormon audiences, Dutcher wanted to validate their experiences, be they miraculous or mundane, and (2) to non-Mormon audiences, he intended the film to argue how normal and human these Mormon characters are and to give validity to the Mormon experience.

First, he intended to create a sense of authenticity in his film as a means of attracting Mormon audiences. Speaking about the perspective of LDS people who saw the film, he said, "This is the first time they've ever seen their stories accurately told" (Bodily), and that he "wanted to tell [his] own story to [his] own people" (Summers). Dutcher expressed his concern that, having been a missionary himself, "no one had ever told that story before [in film] and I wondered why no one ever got around to doing it" (Crall). Seeing a need to tell Mormon stories

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to Mormon audiences, he stated that "what we need . . . is people to start telling their own stories in a personal way" (Wickstrom). He felt as if the best way to tell an LDS narrative was by being truthful and portraying Mormons as humans, complete with imperfections, unfulfilled desires, and a dedication to their faith. "Some people would prefer Mormon propaganda," he said, "and an idealized version of missionaries," (Summers). Instead of idealization, he claimed: "I hope that all my films are solid and true" (Avery). He hoped that, by being truthful, he would validate Mormon audiences' experiences, and thus create a critically and financially successful film. Ultimately, he understood that Mormons were his primary audience. He said: "Even if only the LDS community supports it, it's legitimate and successful, and it will let us make more movies" (Means). He also understood the potential negative implications of targeting Mormon audiences, namely that the culturally specific material might estrange non-Mormons. He said that he knew "who's going to go see this movie. . . . It would be nice to pretend otherwise, but we can certainly live with the situation as it is" (Vice, "God's Army" W1). He felt confident that the film would speak to LDS audiences, but he would be happy if it crossed over to non-LDS audiences.

Thus, his second intent was to promulgate positive portrayals of Mormons to non-Mormon audiences, as well as give validity to the Mormon experience. He hoped that the film would inspire LDS filmmakers to "tell their own stories from their own point of view, and share that point of view with the world" (Wadley W1). Speaking of non-LDS audiences, he claimed that he wanted to show "the world what kind of people we really are, the kinds of things that we do, what missionaries are all about" ("God's Army"). He took inspiration from both Black and gay cinema, specifically mentioning how they managed to tell their stories to people outside of their cultural group. Dutcher said, "The gay community came out in force. When others say there

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was money to be made, they followed suit. Now, almost every weekend, a new gay-themed movie was coming out. Why can't Mormons do that?" (Stack). He continued this line of reasoning when he said: "For instance, I want to see films made by Black filmmakers primarily for Black audiences. . . . And you could take the word "Black" out and put in "Mormon" or "Buddhist" or "gay" or whatever." (Avery) He also wanted to use his film as a means to change how people viewed Mormons. He stated that "one of the reasons I wanted to make the film was because of the way that Mormons had been misrepresented" ("God's Army"), and that he had "always been irritated that Mormons are always portrayed so one-dimensionally, if at all." (England). In reaction to his frustrations, he said, "Being a filmmaker and a Latter-day Saint, I saw myself in the perfect place to do something about it." (Avery). Finally, his hopes were to "see more positive portrayals [of Mormons] on television and in big-budget films" (Walsh). By combatting stereotypical depictions of Mormons, he hoped to normalize Mormons and their beliefs in the eyes of the world.

Ultimately, he intended on attracting Mormon audiences by trying to tell a more truthful or authentic story about their experiences. If non-Mormons viewed the film, he hoped this "truthful" depiction would potentially change how they understood and viewed LDS beliefs. As stated above, to non-Mormon audiences, he wished the film to normalize Mormon characters and to give validity to the Mormon experience. To devout Mormon audiences, he intended to validate their experiences, be they miraculous or mundane. Simply stated, *God's Army* is an explicit attempt at rhetorical communication. It thus merits rhetorical consideration.

Richard Dutcher produced the film for the relatively small budget of $300,000, but it grossed $2.6 million in its nineteen-week run ("Weekly Box Office Results--God's Army"). With a profit of over eight times its budget, *God's Army* was an undoubted financial success. The

critical reviews, however, were generally mixed. Scott Foundas of *Variety* critiqued the lack of interesting performances or characters, claiming that "none of the missionaries develops a distinct personality" and that the performances were "one-note" (Foundas). Lawrence Van Gelder of *The New York Times* called the performances "unpretentious," but panned the film for becoming "preaching that is likely to tax the credibility of the unconverted" (Van Gelder E18). Other critics, however, found the filmmaking, as well as the subject matter, refreshing. Eric Snider praised the film for managing to be "realistic as well as entertaining, and uplifting without (for the most part) becoming emotionally manipulative" (Snider, "God's Army"). He also defended the performances, as well as the realistic plot. Steve Rhodes called it a "surprisingly good film about faith and dedication," while also lauding its treatment of spiritual issues (Rhodes). Overall, the reviews were mixed, but the financial success of the film helped cement it into the vocabulary of Mormon culture and demonstrate that such an approach could find a large audience.

II. Stated Intent and Reception of The Other Side of Heaven

The Other Side of Heaven, like *God's Army*, also was expressed in Mormon cultural currency, but it was much better adapted to non-Mormon audiences. Its budget and production value moved beyond the standards set by *God's Army,* and it included recognizable actors such as Anne Hathaway and Christopher Gorham. The fact that it was distributed and advertised under the banner of the Disney Company allowed non-LDS audiences a greater opportunity to see the film (Davies). Unlike *God's Army*, *The Other Side of Heaven* avoided ultra-specific cultural references so that non-Mormon audiences could understand and enjoy the film as an individual narrative outside of Mormon culture. At the same time, *The Other Side of Heaven* was based on a memoir written by an important leader of the church, John Groberg, and it detailed

his experiences during his mission in several Pacific islands. Groberg's memoir, along with his involvement in the project, gave the film cultural validity among LDS Church members.

Mitch Davis, who wrote, co-produced, and directed the film, explained both his motivations for making it as well as what he intended the film to accomplish. His perspectives can be found in newspaper articles, interviews, and the director's commentary on *The Other Side of Heaven* DVD. Davis' comments about his intent can be organized into three categories: (1) to influence a wide variety of audiences; (2) to make a film with an uplifting message; and (3) to teach and share the LDS gospel. As I will now demonstrate in the following excerpts from Davis' statements, he clearly intended the film to be persuasive to both LDS and non-LDS audiences.

First, Davis specified that the film's intended audience would consist of more than just LDS people, thus delineating the scope of the film's persuasive reach. Understanding the intended audience helps contextualize the movie's rhetorical underpinnings. Both Davis and one of the film's producers claimed that the film "wasn't made for an LDS audience--it was made for the world" (Vice, "A Mormon Movie" W1). The universality of the film's potential reach, combined with its wider distribution by Disney, increased the likelihood that the film could address non-LDS audiences. For example, he often shied away from claiming that his would be a "Mormon" film, but instead would appeal a great variety of people. He said that his "intent was to make a spiritual movie" ("The Other Side of Heaven") and not to focus on one specific religion. He felt as if Mormon beliefs would estrange non-Mormon audiences, so he hoped that any spirituality in the film would not come "from any specific dogma preached by any of the missionaries" (Snider, "'Heaven' Not Just for Mormons"). At the same time, he did not want to discourage Mormon audiences from seeing his film either. He wished "to make a movie

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specifically for the non-LDS audience first, and the LDS audiences second" (Christensen). It is clear that Davis wanted to make a film about the benefits of spirituality in general, while still positively representing Mormonism. He attempted to reach a wider audience than strictly LDS people, perhaps in order to have the greatest possible influence on the greatest number of individuals.

Second, Davis believed that it was his duty to create a film that puts forth a positive, uplifting message. Davis' desire to inspire goodness in the world contributes to the rhetorical nature of the film inasmuch as he designed the movie to propagate positive virtues and inspire others to follow suit. For example, he often claimed that the film's positive message would be beneficial to the world. He stated how people "could use a little bit of magic, and a little bit of hope, and a little bit of faith, and a lot of tolerance" ("The Other Side of Heaven"). He also hoped that *The Other Side of Heaven* would inspire other filmmakers to create films with inspiring themes. For example, he said this film is "an example of the kind of thing we may want to have more of in the future" (Lloyd), namely a film with a positive, uplifting message. He claimed that the heroism of what Mormon missionaries do is "a kind of heroism our jaded world is in dire need of" (Christensen) and that he hopes that the film "increases [our] sense of humanity, that we're all brothers and sisters" (Murdock). In short, Davis intended his film to inspire and propagate positivity in the world.

The third intent of the film, while somewhat contradictory to the previous one, is by far the most explicitly rhetorical. While he positioned his film in terms of general spirituality, he also spoke about its specific ability to proselyte. The film, in essence, "bears testimony," a phrase meaning the sharing of strong personal convictions about the LDS gospel in order to invite others to believe the same. He said that "the scriptures say the Lord speaks to each

generation according to its own language. . . . And for good or for evil, the language of a lot of the youth today and a lot of the world today is movies" (Lloyd). In other words, he wanted his film to be a medium for God's voice. Speaking of cinema, he said that it "will never substitute for the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of the Lord, but it puts people in contact that they just wouldn't have otherwise" (Murdock). Movies, therefore, do not create spiritual change, but they allow access to important concepts and teachings. Even the DVD would have proselyting potential. Speaking about his recording session for the DVD's director commentary, he said in an interview, "I realized I'd been bearing my testimony on the audio commentary that Disney was now going to release" (Hicks W1). The real John Groberg, a prominent leader of the LDS Church, continued this type of language when speaking of the film, saying that he hoped it would influence audiences' attitudes towards God (Evans A1). In short, the filmmakers were very explicit about their desire for *The Other Side of Heaven* to operate as a means to propagate Mormon teachings to both general and Mormon audiences.

Mitch Davis directed the film with the relatively small budget of $7 million, but it only grossed $4.7 million ("Weekly Box Office Results--The Other Side of Heaven"). Although financially unsuccessful, it has found circulation in the DVD market, especially among LDS people. The critical reception, much like the film's gross, was generally negative. Lou Lumenick of *The New York Post* panned the film's plot and writing, claiming that "there isn't much in the way of character development in the script" (Lumenick 42). Carol Cling of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* also critiqued the film's writing by stating that it lacked "a compelling sense of purpose, an energy and edge that might lift it above the merely pleasant" (Cling J40). Edward Guthmann of *The San Francisco Chronicle* felt that the subject matter did not mix well with the dramatic narrative, stating that the film was "slightly awkward in its combination of

entertainment and evangelical boosterism" (Guthmann D3). Overall, most critics did not connect with the film's story, writing, characters, or subject matter. Despite its lackluster financial and critical reception, however, *The Other Side of Heaven* helped inspire a film movement. Like *God's Army*, it has become part of the Mormon cultural lexicon.

With both films' reception and purported intent in mind, the following two chapters are my analyses of *God's Army* and *The Other Side of Heaven*. In the final chapter, I summarize my arguments before addressing the films' similarities, their effectiveness at reaching both Mormon and non-Mormon audiences, and the implications of this investigation. I ultimately argue that their rhetorical styles both reinforce beliefs for Mormon audiences and invite non-Mormons to think more positively about LDS doctrines. They do this through two sets of unique rhetorical strategies. I also contend that the unique medium of film is a ripe area for rhetorical analysis in terms of spirituality, and that what makes film so distinctive is its ability to enact experiential sermons. The films in this analysis provide answers to, and opportunities to discuss, complex and nuanced concerns about the nature of spirituality.

II. Ascending and Descending Spirituality in *God's Army*

> Look at you. You are so afraid that you are just going to disappear.
> Maybe I'd believe a little more too if I had cancer.
> —Elder Kinegar, to Elder Dalton, from the film *God's Army*

God's Army functions on a cultural level as a defining piece of art and has permeated the Mormon lexicon, but is it rhetoric? In other words, does this film make arguments about the Mormon faith? If so, what are the arguments, and how does the film construct them? I contend that the film attempts to make claims about disparate modes of spirituality through the use of characterizations and metaphor. Specifically, *God's Army* presents two pathways to spirituality: one which produces positive consequences for the characters, and the other which produces negative consequences. I call these pathways, respectively, ascending and descending spirituality, and I further explain the rhetorical consequences of this framing. I maintain that these methods attempt to invite viewers to frame their spiritual lives according to the film's morals. By demonstrating the manner to achieve a spiritual "happy ending," the film maps out how it wishes the audience to perform its own spirituality. The contrasting "un-happy ending" conversely shows the unwanted alternative for those who do not heed the film's counsel. To give context to my analysis, I summarize the film's plot and characters.

Plot Description

The film begins with Allen leaving an airport in Los Angeles, where he will be serving a full-time, proselyting mission for the LDS Church. Referred to as Elder Allen for the duration of the film,[3] he joins other missionaries in a beat-up van and is exposed, for the first time, to the sights and sounds of Hollywood. Missionaries work in pairs, and so it is not long before Allen meets his first mission "companion," Elder Dalton. Despite Allen's reservations, they

immediately begin knocking on strangers' doors in order to share their message. At the end of a long day of proselyting, Allen meets the other missionaries living in their house, including Elder Kinegar and Elder Banks. That night, Banks wakes up Dalton to inform him that his "greenie has just gone AWOL," referring, of course, to Allen. Dalton and Banks find Allen in a bus station waiting to board a bus back to his home in Kansas. They convince him to remain in Los Angeles, and the next day Dalton and Allen recommence their work as missionaries.

Allen and Dalton continue their missionary efforts, mostly unsuccessfully. Dalton is hospitalized after he experiences a prolonged seizure in the middle of the night, and Allen begins teaching and talking to strangers with the other missionaries in the house. It is not long, however, before Dalton leaves the hospital without doctors' consent and continues his work as a missionary. One night, Kinegar decides to forsake his faith and leave Los Angeles. Dalton and Allen attempt to persuade him to stay, but they are unsuccessful. Dalton then tells Allen that he needs to find his own faith in order to continue being a missionary. That same night, Allen studies scriptures and prays in the kitchen for a period of time, and he undergoes a spiritual transformation. With renewed energy and faith, Allen and Dalton begin working again and experience several inspiring moments with people they teach. This includes finding Benny, a young man who heavily relies on crutches to walk. Benny was planning on being baptized but went missing for several days. After discovering that Benny was assaulted and unable to pay for hospital care, Dalton and Allen place their hands on his head and quietly give a priesthood blessing, or a prayer, in order to heal him. Benny is healed and is able to walk, even without the assistance of his crutches. After this miraculous event which confirms Allen's faith, Dalton dies in his sleep that same night. The film ends with a baptismal service, where Allen explains with a voiceover what happened to each of the significant characters of the film.

Ascending and Descending Spirituality

Dutcher intended his film to be a movie about spirituality, and what makes this film unique is that it argues about how a specific spiritual path is more advantageous for the audience. The film, in essence, attempts to convince the audience that they should agree with, and follow, a specific brand of spirituality. In my analysis I discovered two representations of spirituality that, while not completely distinct from each other, contribute separately to the rhetorical nature of the film. The first is the dichotomous depictions of Dalton and Kinegar, the former being an example of what I call "ascending spirituality," which I define as spiritual outcomes that the narrative presents as positive, and the latter being an example of "descending spirituality," which I define as spiritual outcomes that the narrative presents as negative. These act as narrative forms which guide the audience's thinking about spiritual decisions and their outcomes. The second phenomenon is the concept of spirituality as a means of growth and progression. This outcome is evidenced in several characters' spiritual struggles and triumphs. The film's characters disclose their past spiritual struggles along with how they overcame those trials. The narrative then allows these characters specific happy endings which correlate with their triumph over their personal spiritual challenges. These acts of self-disclosure, accompanied with the characters' happy endings, influence's the audience's decisions of how to approach spiritual struggles.

God's Army presents spirituality not only in terms of what a person should do, but also what a person should avoid. Spiritual decisions abound in this film, and the characters demonstrate how these decisions lead to specific consequences within the narrative. The consequences demonstrate either ascending or descending spirituality. The significant difference between these two modes of filmic spirituality is that the film positions the former as positive and the latter as negative. When a consequence is negatively framed within the context of the

narrative, there is potential for a persuasive effect on the audience. By the same token, when a

consequence is positively framed, there is also potential for a persuasive effect. The film

attempts to demonstrate the desirable outcomes of living a certain religious lifestyle while, at the

same time, revealing the supposed undesirable consequences of rebelling against set spiritual

norms. The film utilizes three methods of conveying notions of ascending and descending

spirituality. I first discuss the characters of Dalton and Kinegar as representations of spiritual

ascent and descent, respectively. Second, I explain the film's use of light and darkness and how

they relate to spiritual struggles and decisions. Lastly, I describe the manner in which the film

discloses characters' backstories and personal spiritual decisions as examples of spiritual ascent

and descent.

I. Dalton and Kinegar as Ascending and Descending Spirituality

Throughout the film, Kinegar's actions and beliefs situate his character in contrast to

Dalton. During the film, and especially in the first few scenes, Dalton is presented as not only an

ideal missionary, but also as a mature and spiritually grounded individual. He is dedicated,

mature, a leader, well respected, he speaks two languages, he is funny, smart, well versed in the

scriptures, and always stands for righteousness. Essentially, he is the perfect soldier in "God's

army." This idealization is easily determined based on two criteria: LDS audiences' expectations

of what a model missionary looks and acts like, and the contrast the film creates between Dalton

and less experienced or successful missionaries such as Allen or Kinegar. Kinegar, on the other

hand, is presented as the opposite of Dalton. Instead of simply failing to meet the criteria for

being an ideal missionary, Kinegar instead fits a different set of standards for being a terrible

missionary. A terrible missionary fails in his duties, is rebellious to missionary rules, ignores

leadership, embraces doubt, lacks spiritual power, and strives to pull other missionaries down to

his level. Much like the standards for an idyllic missionary, these criteria are set by LDS audiences' expectations and the contrast between Kinegar and more successful missionaries. But as we'll see through the following examples, what makes Dalton's character an example of spiritual ascension is not that he is inherently perfect or more spiritually aligned than other people. In fact, the opposite is the case. The film makes it clear that Dalton's characteristics are a result of dedication, hard work, and correct decisions. At the same time, what makes Kinegar's character an example of spiritual decent is not that he is inherently evil or less spiritually aligned, but that he chose the path that led him to his current state. Allen must chose, during the course of the film, which person to follow: Dalton or Kinegar. The audience, much like Allen, is faced with the same choice.

The very first description of Dalton is offered by the President of the mission, President Beecroft, when he is introducing Dalton to Allen. While both Beecroft and Allen observe Dalton from a distance, Beecroft says "I'm gonna put you with one of my best men." Throughout the story, the other missionaries respect and listen to Dalton, and we learn later in the story that he was put in charge by Beecroft over the small band of missionaries that live together in the house. His position as a leader of those missionaries is complemented by his position as a "trainer" to Allen, who is new to being a missionary. He not only is training Allen, but as we learn later, he has trained multiple new missionaries. He is older than any other missionary in that area of L.A., an important narrative element because, as Beecroft explains to Allen, he is dying of brain cancer and wanted to live his last days as a missionary. Because of his age--29 years old--the missionaries mostly call him "Pops" instead of Dalton. These characteristics construct the character of Dalton as being mature, respectable, successful, and an example to Allen as well as the audience of a solidly spiritual individual.

From near the beginning of the film, we see Dalton as the ideal missionary, as well as a remarkable person. Not only does he sacrifice living his last days to being a missionary, and not only is he a leader that the missionaries respect, but he is also driven to perform his duties with the utmost precision. After shaking Allen's hand for the first time, Dalton vocalizes what will become his catchphrase throughout the film: "Let's do some good" (see fig. 2).

Figure 2: Dalton (left) is introduced to Allen (right).

They immediately begin knocking on doors to share their message, regardless of Allen's desire to go to their house to drop off his luggage. From this we see that doing "God's work" is more important to Dalton than the comforts of going home. The first door that Dalton and Allen approach leads to a short exchange between an older man and Dalton. Dalton demonstrates his prowess in talking to strangers by smoothly navigating the man's questions and even quoting a scripture, eventually leading to the man accepting a pamphlet with the missionaries' contact information.

Dalton's apparently ideal nature stands in contrast to Allen's shy, stuttering attempts at talking to people, leading the audience to understand that Dalton is not only much more experienced than Allen, but is nearly an ideal missionary. It is the contrast between Allen and

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Dalton that allows the film to frame Dalton as an exemplar. These opening scenes also correlate with Mormons' expectations of what a spiritually grounded and experienced missionary looks and acts like. The topic of how to be a good missionary is an oft spoken of subject within the LDS Church. The film continues to position Dalton as an ideal missionary throughout the scenes portraying Dalton's and Allen's proselyting efforts. When two female prostitutes approach Dalton and Allen, Dalton immediately brushes off their advances and leads the discussion to whether they had read the book that he had given them. While the prostitutes are still in the background, Dalton continues teaching Allen about how to be a good missionary without being distracted in the slightest. This, again, is contrasted to Allen who not only begins to look back at them (to which Dalton taps him on the shoulder to regain his attention), but also to Allen asking twice "who were those girls back there?" As they continue in their first day of proselyting together, Allen knocks on a door which is answered by a Latina woman speaking Spanish. Dalton quickly jumps in, introduces himself in fluent Spanish, and begins his normal approach in Spanish as well. Once again, Dalton stands in contrast to Allen who is initially confused and unable to respond to the woman's Spanish. Not only is Dalton the ideal missionary, he is the ideal missionary in two languages. How much more of a perfect missionary could Dalton be? Combined with his intensity and dedication, he also demonstrates a keen sense of humor when he helps play a prank on Allen when they return home.

All of these examples of Dalton's near perfection occur within the first few minutes of the film, and the audience quickly has a firm understanding of his role as the ideal man and missionary. As stated above, he is dedicated, mature, a leader, well respected, he speaks two languages, he is funny, smart, well versed in the scriptures, and always stands for righteousness. His nickname, "Pops," is a fitting title considering that the missionaries refer to God as

"Heavenly Father." He fulfills his god-like presence in the film by giving his life to spiritual work when his brain cancer kills him in his sleep. He was perfect, and in Jesus-like fashion, he dies to consummate his dedication to God's work. The night of his death, the climax of the film, he finds a young man who had been hospitalized after being assaulted. The young man, Benny, is released from the hospital because of a lack of health insurance and is supposedly lying on his death bed. Dalton tosses his pills into the kitchen sink, leading the audience to see his willingness to die. If an ideal missionary is dedicated and is willing to give everything for his work, then Dalton easily fits the criteria as he is willing to give his life in the act of performing his missionary duties. He proceeds to place his hands on Benny's head to give him a priesthood blessing. Such blessings are common in the LDS Church, but instead of blessing Benny with peace, comfort, or spiritual guidance, Dalton tells him to be healed and to walk. Benny, who only walked with the assistance of crutches before the assault, stands up without any assistance and is supposedly healed from his injuries. Considering that Dalton left medical school in order to serve a mission, the healing miracle confirms his role as both a physical and spiritual "healer." It fits the criteria of an ideal missionary inasmuch as it positions Dalton within common narratives shared among LDS people about missionaries' spiritual power. Oftentimes, miraculous events such as a healing are shared within the LDS Church as common manifestations of God's power. In other words, to hear that a missionary has performed some miraculous event is commonplace. Mormons understand, however, that miracles such as this can only be performed through the most obedient and worthy individuals. The fact that the film shows Dalton healing somebody is a significant gesture to how Mormon audiences are to interpret Dalton's nature as an ideal missionary.

Ultimately, his character is a particularly vivid example of ascending spirituality inasmuch as his spiritual decisions led to his ascension to "heaven." The film documents his choices and his journey that lead him to giving his life, at the end of the film, for what he believes. As stated above, what makes Dalton's character an example of spiritual ascension is not that he is inherently perfect or more spiritually aligned than other people. In fact, the opposite is the case. The film makes it clear that Dalton's characteristics are a result of hard work and correct decisions, not because of any inherent superiority. When given the choice between what is easy and what is "correct" or "righteous," Dalton chooses the "correct" spiritual course. The most obvious example is that, before the events of the film, Dalton decided to leave medical school in order to serve a mission, even though he was well beyond the normal age of service. A similar example is when Dalton, after being hospitalized because of his cancer, surprisingly leaves the hospital in order to attend a baptism of several people the other missionaries had been teaching. He then continues with his normal missionary labors instead of returning to the hospital. He chose between calmly trying to recover from his illness and entering the uncomfortable life of a missionary. Near the beginning of the film, he chose to immediately begin knocking on doors instead of going home and resting while Allen unpacked his bags. He chose to ignore the advances of the prostitutes. While hospitalized, he chose to stay in contact with Allen by phone in order to continue his missionary work by proxy, ever aware of their appointments and the people they were teaching. Ultimately, he chooses to discard his medication, a symbolic gesture equivalent to giving up his life, in order to demonstrate that his life was less important than the work he was performing. Dalton's character is the ultimate symbol of ascending spirituality.

Dalton's character stands in stark contrast to Kinegar. Instead of simply failing to meet the criteria for being an ideal missionary, Kinegar instead fits a different set of standards for being a terrible missionary. As I mentioned above, a terrible missionary fails in his duties, is rebellious to missionary rules, ignores leadership, embraces doubt, lacks spiritual power, and strives to pull other missionaries down to his level. Much like the criteria for the ideal missionary, these standards are set by LDS audiences' expectations of what a terrible missionary looks and acts like, and the contrast the film creates between Kinegar and other, much more successful, missionaries.

Kinegar plays an important role in exemplifying descending spirituality and is often situated opposite of Dalton in the narrative. The first time the audience sees Kinegar is at the conclusion of the prank on Allen, and it is in these moments when we can see how the film introduces Kinegar as unresponsive, dark, and different from the other missionaries. After stumbling into the house and seeing a camera flash, the film visually introduces the rest of the missionaries living there. There is a prolonged shot of six missionaries on one side of a room, and in front of a window sits Kinegar, head turned down as he reads a book (see fig. 3).

Figure 3: First shot of Kinegar.

While the other missionaries including Dalton laugh, point, and clap, Kinegar solemnly looks up from his book (which we later learn is anti-Mormon literature) and sits silently near the most darkly lit portion of the shot. We immediately recognize that this character, while still unnamed at this point, is different than the other missionaries, especially considering that the audience has been exposed to Dalton for the last few minutes of the movie. Instead of the energetic and talkative nature we saw in Dalton, and now in the other missionaries, this unnamed figure sits still and quietly as if ignoring what is happening around him. While Dalton energetically enters the room receiving congratulations from his fellow missionaries, Kinegar is obscured in the corner, barely reacting. Within a few moments, his gaze returns to his book, while he ignores the rest of the missionaries during their introductions to Allen by Banks.

In contrast to Dalton being introduced by Beecroft as one of his "best men," Kinegar is introduced by Banks as "that funny lookin' spud over there." Kinegar is the last of the missionaries to be introduced, and only after being named by Banks does Kinegar perform any significant movement. He stands up and rebukes the missionaries, saying, "This immature behavior has got to stop," after which he shows Allen his room. Once again, we see a contrast between Kinegar and Dalton. Just as Dalton took Allen under his wing to show him how to work as a missionary, Kinegar takes Allen under his wing to show him his room, the one place Allen wanted to go the entire day. We are presented with two paths that Allen can pursue: one that follows Dalton to hard work, tough decisions, but ultimately spiritual ascension, or one that follows Kinegar down the much easier road of apathy, rebellion, and spiritual descent. This contrast is emphasized later when Kinegar shows Allen his room and says, "I'll watch out for ya, okay?" Allen now has two role models to follow, and he must make a decision sometime during the course of the narrative of whom he will follow. The audience, therefore, follows Allen as his

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struggles with this decision. Kinegar walks with Allen to his room, and they converse for a few

moments. It is not long, however, before Kinegar shuts the door and quietly asks Allen, "What

do you think of, uh, Pops?" referring to Dalton. When Allen responds that he does not know,

Kinegar states, "He means well. I think he tries a little too hard. Ya know? I guess you don't, do

ya?" This statement is significant inasmuch as it is one of the first things we hear Kinegar say in

the entire film. It acts as a means of gesturing to the audience that Kinegar is the sole individual

in the film to antagonize Dalton. This further solidifies, in the audience's mind, the bifurcation

between Kinegar and Dalton.

Throughout the film, Kinegar's actions and beliefs situate his character in contrast to

Dalton. In the morning of Allen's second day, we see Kinegar at the kitchen table again reading

a book. He tells Banks who is sitting at the table with him about an accusation against the Book

of Mormon. Banks, looking annoyed at Kinegar, complains about him reading anti-Mormon

literature and says that it is "as bad as pornography." After defending his reasons for reading

such literature, Banks tells him that he should be reading the scriptures and "not this garbage."

He ignores Banks' suggestions and returns to reading his book. It is obvious from the nature of

the acting that this character is rebellious and defiant. He sneers, glances down, and has an

accusatory tone to his voice. Also, within Mormon culture, it is extremely taboo to read anti-

Mormon books and blogs that attempt to disprove the validity of the church's doctrine or history.

It is nearly unheard of for a missionary to do so. The fact that Kinegar so shamelessly

demonstrates his interest in such material distinguishes him from Dalton who has already been

portrayed as one of the "best men."

The third time we see Kinegar is during a scene where Dalton, Allen, Sandoval, and

Kinegar are eating lunch at a café. At this point the audience knows that Kinegar's missionary

companion is Banks, not Sandoval, so the audience is cued that something is wrong before much has transpired. Also, the first shot in the scene is a medium long shot with Kinegar near the center of the frame. In his hands he holds, once again, what appears to be another anti-Mormon book. The scene begins humorously with dialogue about looking at girls while being a missionary. Sandoval, after talking to the female server for a few moments, gives her a copy of the Book of Mormon, and we see a close shot of Kinegar's face while his eyes follow the book from Sandoval's hands to the server's. He looks calm and mildly suspicious while his eyes slowly rest back on Sandoval, as if he is ashamed of Sandoval for giving one to a stranger. After the server leaves, it is not long before Kinegar interrupts the conversation to start an argument. He makes an accusatory "did you know that" statement about the founder of the LDS Church, Joseph Smith, and Dalton, who is sitting directly across from Kinegar at the table, offers a rebuttal. This leads to a confrontation where Dalton explains, "I'm getting upset because you're wasting your time with that garbage instead of doing your work." He then says that Kinegar is "dragging the rest of us down too." Kinegar then leaves the table to go to the restroom in an act of defiance. The entire conversation contributes to the audience's understanding that Kinegar is rebellious, contentious, and unfaithful in his dedication to LDS teachings. The fact Dalton and Kinegar's beliefs and actions clash against each other, that they sit across from each other, and that Dalton is the one to speak up against Kinegar's statements further underscores their contrasting relationship.

This relationship continues in a later scene when Dalton experiences a seizure in the middle of the night. Allen is startled awake when he feels the bunk bed rumbling. After checking to see if it is an earthquake, he sees Dalton shaking and convulsing. Of all of the missionaries in the house, who does he call for help? He immediately starts shouting "Kinegar! Elder Kinegar!

Kinegar!" Kinegar rushes into the room and calls for the other missionaries. They attempt to give Dalton a priesthood blessing, which consists of two parts. Kinegar attempts to perform the first part of the blessing, but is unable to say anything. Sandoval pushes him aside and performs the blessing instead. While many audiences may attribute Kinegar's failure to inexperience or intimidation during an emergency, Mormon audiences clearly see something different. They understand that Kinegar's inability to perform the blessing is a result of his doubts and lack of faith. This lack of faith relates, once again, to Kinegar's character being an example of a terrible missionary. It is as if Kinegar, in the moment he is about to perform the blessing, realizes that he does not believe the blessing will accomplish anything and that he is a hypocrite for even trying. This scene, of course, is comparable to the climax of the film when Dalton, full of faith and determination, heals Benny with a similar blessing. Once again, Kinegar is seen descending gradually into doubt and darkness while Dalton grows in his faith. The audience surely does not wish to emulate Kinegar's weak, evil, and ineffectual behavior. The film presents Kinegar as being spiritually impotent, a characteristic that a spiritually minded Mormon audience would want to avoid. On the other hand, the film gives a roadmap to following Dalton's example which leads to spiritual power and success.

After Dalton is hospitalized, Allen continues to teach as a missionary, but he must work with the various missionaries in the house. In one scene, Allen calls Dalton from a pay phone to update him about the work they have been doing. Kinegar stands next to the pay phone with headphones covering his ears. Pop music faintly plays from the headphones. This, again, may be interpreted differently by mainstream audiences and Mormon audiences. Mormon audiences understand the strict rules that missionaries follow, including no headphones or listening to popular music. Kinegar is rebelling against mission rules. It is no coincidence that Kinegar is

present while Allen talks to Dalton. This, once again, positions Kinegar and Dalton as opposites. While Dalton is struggling to remain connected to missionary work, even if it is only by phone, Kinegar continues to visually and aurally cut himself off from missionary life. He does this by ignoring rules as well as separating his sense of hearing from the world around him by listening to pop music on headphones. When told that Kinegar is about to accompany Allen to their next teaching appointment, Dalton tells Allen to "take Banks." It seems that Kinegar is even shut off from teaching.

When Allen wakes up in the middle of the night and goes to the kitchen, he finds Kinegar resting his head and arm on the table. Anti-Mormon books, scriptures, a pen, and a notepad surround him as he sits quietly in the dark. After greeting Allen, Kinegar states his clearest expression of doubt in the film. He says:

> What would you think if the apostles and prophets weren't telling the truth? I mean, what if they believed all their lives, worked their way up to the top, and now, they know it's all a big lie? I mean, not just Mormonism, but Christianity, the whole thing. They won't tell us. Damn them if it's not true. Damn them to hell.

The scene ends abruptly after this line and the audience is left to consider his accusations without any response by Allen. The scene functions rhetorically in powerful ways, both through dialogue and image. Kinegar, exhausted, rests limply on the kitchen table, his face moist with sweat, pitifully unsure of his own position on the lingering doubts that pester him. Comparing Kinegar in this moment of both spiritual and physical weakness to the hospitalized Dalton, Dalton's character remains peaceful and strong even in supposed weakness. Kinegar, on the other hand, appears immaturely puny and even childlike in his physical demeanor. This shows, in a very

explicit manner, why the audience would not want to follow in Kinegar's footsteps. In terms of dialogue, the words and accusations Kinegar utters are fearful, accusatory, and angry. The ending sentences, in particular, demonstrate this anger: "Damn them if it's not true. Damn them to hell." Again, this is a far cry from the peaceful power shown through Dalton's character. Even in moments of anger, Dalton seems more in control of his emotions and focused in his intent than the aimless ramblings of a pitiful, crying Kinegar on the kitchen table.

Later in the film, Allen once again wakes up in the middle of the night and goes to the kitchen. Instead of finding Kinegar at the table, there is a neatly organized stack of anti-Mormon books with an envelope resting on top which reads "To Elder Allen." The effect of the anti-Mormon literature on Kinegar is a potent warning, in a rhetorical sense, to the audience. The film, essentially, makes a definitive statement about the evils of this literature and the spiritually degrading effect it has even on missionaries, individuals who are supposed to be the most stalwart and spiritually secure among the membership of the LDS Church. As mentioned above, the film compares this type of literature and the doubts it produces to pornography. Principally, the film claims that anti-Mormon literature is stronger than positive examples or even faith unless the individual turns to God for help overcoming their doubts. As we discover during the final confrontation between Dalton and Kinegar, Dalton also voraciously read anti-Mormon literature before being baptized a member of the church, but he overcame his doubts by choosing to turn *to* God instead of *away from* Him. This reaffirms, once again, the film's overarching theme of agency and our ability to choose a path of spiritual ascent or decent.

The detrimental effects of indulging in anti-Mormon sentiments are evidenced later, in the film's climax, when we find Kinegar in a bus station, about to leave L.A., his mission, and forsake his religious beliefs entirely. It is of interest to note that the bus station where Kinegar is

waiting is the same station where Allen was about to leave L.A. during his first night as a

missionary. Dalton and Banks were able to convince Allen to stay. This time, Dalton and Allen

go to try to convince Kinegar that he should remain a missionary. When they arrive at the bus

station, there is an emotionally explosive confrontation, both verbal and physical, between

Kinegar and Dalton. Their characters, which were positioned opposite of each other throughout

the entire film, come together in a clash of spirituality. But they are not merely fighting against

each other; they are symbolically fighting for Allen's soul. Before the confrontation begins,

Kinegar turns to Allen and encourages him to "read those books I left you. There's a lot of things

in there you should know." Allen stares at the floor without reacting and only then do Dalton and

Kinegar begin pushing and struggling.

Dalton pins Kinegar against the wall, thus symbolically showing the audience Dalton's

spiritual superiority. The fact that Dalton overcomes Kinegar through violent means

demonstrates the power of God within Dalton, a power that he has garnered through obedience

and faithfulness throughout the film's narrative. We also discover, in the final moments of their

confrontation, why these two characters have been so closely positioned throughout the film.

Dalton desperately pleads with Kinegar, "Look, I've read everything you've read and then some.

Why do you think it took me four years to join the church? Because I had to know every stupid

accusation" (see fig. 4). As stated in the previous paragraph, Dalton underwent similar doubts as

Kinegar by reading anti-Mormon literature, but what differentiates Dalton from Kinegar is that

Dalton chose to overcome his doubts by turning to God instead of running away from them.

Dalton and Kinegar are two sides of the same coin. They both have struggled with the same

doubts. They both are driven and dedicated, in their own ways. What differentiates them is that

Dalton made spiritual decisions that led him towards faith and dedication (ascending spirituality) while Kinegar chose to leave his faith and dedication behind (descending spirituality).

Figure 4: Final confrontation between Dalton and Kinegar.

The audience learns in this scene that faith and dedication is a choice and that one person may progress to become one of two completely different people: the one who ascended or the one who descended. The very nature of Allen, often silent in the film's most potent scenes, and especially during the confrontations between Dalton and Kinegar, allows the audience to step into his place. They can clearly witness the dark descent of Kinegar or the ascent of Dalton. The audience, therefore, also must choose which path they will follow.

II. Light, Dark, and Spiritual Struggles

The concept of ascending and descending spirituality is not limited to depictions of Kinegar and Dalton, although it closely follows them. A dominant motif throughout the film is the metaphor of light and darkness. The lighting of scenes and characters reveals the spiritual overtones that the film wishes to convey. The most dramatic shifts in lighting occur when the narrative transitions back and forth between daytime and nighttime. As such, it is useful to categorize which notable scenes take place during the night and which during the day. This

categorization reveals a pattern in how the film conveys concepts about the spiritual state of the characters and their personal struggles. It is important to note that night scenes or darkly lit scenes do not necessarily signify spiritual "evil" or descent, but instead denotes those spiritual struggles, decisions, and actions that are private or hidden from the world. They reveal to the audience what is happening "inside" the characters' spiritual lives. There are scenes, however, that demonstrate the use of darkness or low light to highlight the spiritual descent of Kinegar. There are seven specific instances of nighttime in the film. Some nights last during several scenes while others only occur during a single scene. The first night and the last two nights each occupy a significant amount of the film's running time, over ten minutes each.

The first night finds Allen coming home with Dalton after his first day of missionary work. He is pranked by his fellow missionaries and is introduced to the missionaries in his house. What is interesting about this scene is not merely the fact that missionaries, who can be easily misconstrued as being overly serious or lacking a sense of humor, are enjoying the success of their prank in the safety of nighttime out of the view of the public. It is also important to notice how the character of Kinegar is visually introduced. As I mentioned above, Kinegar sits in a corner near the darkest part of the shot, framed by a window that is dark because of the nighttime. Kinegar's introduction continues this pattern through the next scene when shows Allen to his room. The first shot of this scene shows a doorway of a room without the lights on. Before Kinegar walks in and is able to turn on the light, we see a medium shot of his darkened silhouette (see fig. 5). Of three scenes where Kinegar and Allen (who represents the audience) are alone with each other, two of them introduce Kinegar in darkness and happen at night. That same night, Allen acts out his doubts and fears by sneaking away to the bus stations in hopes of leaving L.A. unnoticed. Banks and Dalton convince him to stay, but his excursion to the bus

station predicts a later scene when Kinegar himself goes to that same bus station to enact his doubts.

Figure 5: Darkened doorway shot of Kinegar.

The theme of nighttime covering the most intense and personal spiritual aspects of a person's life continues during the second night of the film. Allen wakes up to find Dalton experiencing a seizure and he calls for Kinegar for help. Kinegar rushes into the room while fully clothed in missionary attire. Kinegar's clothing is a noticeable and unusual manifestation of his habit of staying up late to study anti-Mormon literature, a custom that the audience will not understand until later in the film. Kinegar enters the room and turns on the light in much the same way he was introduced during the night before, solidifying Kinegar's relationship to darkness. If the audience does not at first relate Kinegar's darkness to doubt or a lack of spiritual power, his inability to perform the first part of a priesthood blessing more clearly denotes this relationship. An ambulance takes Dalton to the hospital and we see a close shot of Allen observing Dalton in his hospital bed. Much like Kinegar's introduction where he was framed by the darkness of a window at night, Allen also stands in front of a darkened hospital window. At this point in the narrative, the audience is aware of Allen's doubts and fears, and therefore this

darkened frame continues to remind us of his own spiritual struggles. The third night consists of a single, relatively short, scene where Allen and another missionary look at photos and pleasantly talk about life after their missions. This scene would not be of much importance, but Allen is once again framed by a darkened window, while he sits talking to a fellow missionary. The lighting shows darkness capping the top of the frame, as if the darkness of his own doubts and struggles continues to weigh down on him, even though he is enjoying a pleasant conversation.

The fourth night of the film is particularly potent and reveals the gravity of Kinegar's doubts as they relate to Allen's own spiritual struggles. Allen wakes up in the middle of the night, a common occurrence throughout the film, considering he does so four of the seven nights. He goes to the kitchen to find Kinegar resting his head on the kitchen table, surrounded by anti-Mormon books and a notepad (see fig. 6).
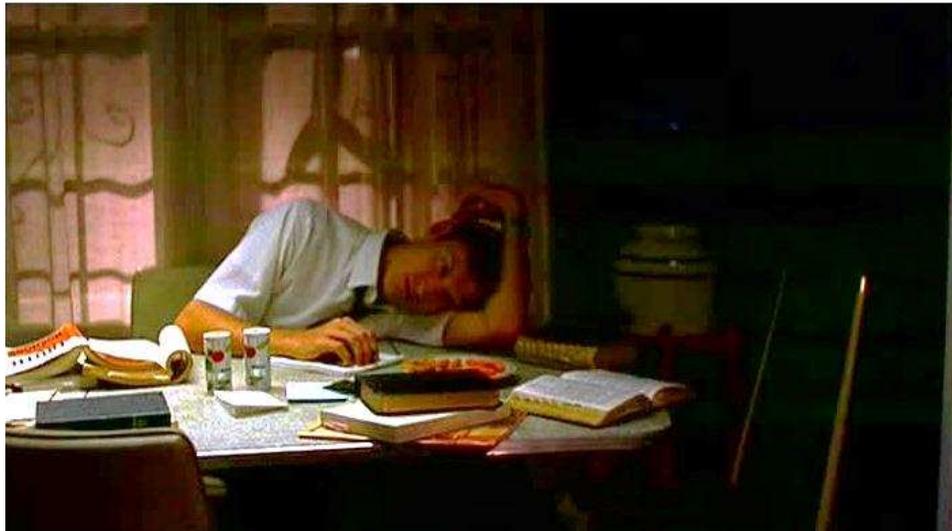
Figure 6: Kinegar in the kitchen at night.

The shot places Kinegar in the middle of his books and notepads, insinuating that he has been intensely studying. His head rests on his left arm, and he is clearly exhausted from staying up so late and studying so intensely. It is obvious through the *mise en scène* that Kinegar is working through his doubts and attempting to understand his spirituality in terms of his religion and

identity as a missionary. His attempts at understanding his own spirituality, an action that foreshadows a later scene when Allen does the same thing, happen at nighttime. Kinegar reveals in a fiercely honest line of dialogue the possibility that his faith and his religion are all just a ruse. These are doubts that can only be honestly expressed in the cover of nighttime, which further continues the theme of darkness as the site of spiritual struggle, hidden from the public eye.

The fifth and sixth nights of the film occupy not only a significant amount of its running time, totaling over twenty minutes, but they also act as the climax of the plot. During the fifth night, Allen reveals the source of his religious doubts to be his father's unfaithfulness. He is a member of the church because his father raised him as such, but his father became a child molester and is now serving several prison sentences. The driving motivation of the film, Allen's spiritual journey, is founded on a part of the character's history that is only revealed in the cover of darkness. Later that night, when Allen again serendipitously wakes up, he and the other missionaries discover that Kinegar has left for the bus station in order to leave L.A., as well as his faith in general. The confrontation that ensues at the bus station is both emotionally and physically combative. The previous confrontation between Dalton and Kinegar occurred during the daytime and was much more subdued. Under the cover of nightfall, however, the honesty of the situation bleeds into the characters' actions, and, therefore, the intensity increases.

One of the most visually significant moments of the film happens at the moment when Kinegar leaves the bus station. After offering one last invitation to Allen to follow in his footsteps, Kinegar turns his back on his fellow missionaries and walks towards the bus station entrance. The audience sees the darkness outside, not obscured by curtains, posters, or any other

obstruction. The glass doors open and Kinegar enters the darkness and is therefore consumed by it (see fig. 7).

Figure 7: Kinegar exits the bus station.

After Kinegar leaves, Dalton and Allen go to a diner, where Dalton tells him that he needs to find his own reasons for being a missionary. In other words, he needs to find his own faith. He must make a decision to enter spiritual light or to enter spiritual darkness. He has to choose between following Dalton or following Kinegar.

That same night, Allen enters the kitchen, previously the location of Kinegar's spiritual studying and later his decision to leave the church, in order to study, pray, and discover for himself the veracity (or falsity) of his beliefs. After turning his chair towards an unidentified light source, he kneels and begins praying. Allen prays mostly without speaking, and the audience is left to sonically focus on the sounds originating from the darkness outside of the house: a car's engine turning as someone tries to start it, a police siren, and a helicopter flying overhead. The sonic metaphors reveal that Allen is progressing from barely understanding why he believes what he believes (the engine turning), to urgently trying to discover his faith (the siren), and eventually finding his faith and soaring spiritually (the helicopter). The beginning of

the climax to Allen's spiritual journey, and the climax itself which happens the next night, transpires in the intimacy of darkness.

The very last night of the film finds Allen and Dalton locating Benny who had previously been missing. Dalton decides to discard his life by throwing his pills in the kitchen sink and gives Benny a blessing. Benny is healed, thus confirming Allen's faith and his decision to follow Dalton's path to spiritual ascent. In a way, Allen's faith in symbolized in his confidence in Dalton, who represents deity through many parts of the film and follows through with his healing ability. Allen is only now privileged to witness this miracle because of his newfound faith. That night, the two of them return home, and the audience sees Dalton alive for the last time in the film. He dies in his sleep, and thus seals his life, his faith, and his miraculous experience with his life.

Nighttime is the backdrop of the majority of the film's most pertinent spiritual activities, occupying over forty minutes of the running time. The scenes during the day contribute to the continuity of the story, especially considering that the majority of actual missionary work happens during normal waking hours. There are, however, notable exceptions to this trend. These exceptions do not undermine the nature of the nighttime scenes, but instead support the purpose of darkness in the narrative. If, for example, nighttime is the site of spiritual struggle, then daytime is the site of spiritual rest and normalcy. There are several scenes that not only transpire during the day, but also outside, in the brightness of the sun. These scenes include many humorous interactions between the missionaries, as well as people they are teaching. There are moments when characters reveal their own doubts and spiritual progress, but these are much more subdued than those that occur at nighttime. For example, when Banks shares his own spiritual journey to Allen during a picnic on a rooftop or cement patio, he is reverent and

hopeful. Even scenes when strangers or other individuals reject the missionaries' attempts to teach them are much lighter and sometimes humorous during the daytime.

The moment when Dalton's coffin is carried by the missionaries out of the doors of an airport hangar and into the bright light of the sun is the most striking use of daytime and light as a spiritual metaphor in the film. After a rousing monologue by President Beecroft, in which he summarizes the morals and purpose of the film, the male missionaries carry the coffin--and Dalton--towards the light. The hanger is well lit, but it pales in comparison to the brightness of the midday that awaits Dalton and the missionaries outside. They hoist the coffin to their shoulders as they cross the threshold of the hangar, reiterating the visual argument to the audience that he has spiritually ascended. The physical lifting of his body is a metaphor for his figurative spiritual growth. The light consumes Dalton and the other missionaries, reminding the audience of Kinegar's rejection of his faith and his exit into the darkness at the bus station (see fig. 8).

Figure 8: Dalton's coffin exits into the light.

The doors of the hanger slowly close, and the shadow the doors cast falls on the faces of those left inside of the hanger. The camera cuts to different groups of people, as the shadow gradually

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covers all inside, thus showing us that, even though we may choose spiritual ascension, we still live in an imperfect world that is full of darkness, doubt, death, and fear. The remaining characters, and therefore the audience, cannot choose to live outside of darkness, but they can choose how they will grow within the context of the darkness. This teaching is, ultimately, the purpose of nighttime and daytime as visual metaphors throughout the film. All of the characters, from the most righteous to the most rebellious, must struggle in the darkness and decide whether they will be consumed by it, or if they will use it to grow and progress. They must decide if they will live a life of ascending or descending spirituality.

III. Characters' Spiritual Challenges and Choices

The third rhetorical strategy the film employs to represent ascending and descending spirituality is the use of characters' backstories as examples as to how to effectively make spiritually oriented decisions. Essentially, the film makes an inductive argument about spiritual growth during adversity. It provides several examples of characters who struggled, but emerged victorious. These examples establish an abstract pattern of undergoing a difficult life event, doubting, choosing to believe, sacrificing in order to believe, and then experiencing a happy ending. This pattern is used to support the main rhetorical point of the film. These backstories, and the characters themselves, demonstrate the consequence or "outcome" of living a particular way or making certain choices. Outcome is a powerful rhetorical force that demonstrates to the audience how events "will" take place. The characters of Allen, Fronk, and Banks methodically reveal to the audience how they have used their spiritual challenges as a boon to their faith. Their stories teach the audience how to react to difficulties and which decisions will lead to a happier existence. Essentially, the characters in the film relate their past experiences and choices concerning whom they have become, thus describing a cause-and-effect relationship that the

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audience may choose to follow. Before I further discuss the nature of these backstories, let us first examine several instances in order to clarify my points.

For example, Allen discloses his troubled past in order for us to see a link between his struggles and the moment in the film when he finds his faith. This acts rhetorically inasmuch as it teaches the audience that, by turning to God with our doubts, we may spiritually progress. Allen discusses his past with Dalton in two scenes. In the first scene, Allen instigates the conversation by asking Dalton about his father. After learning about Dalton's parents, Allen begins talking about his own upbringing. He reveals that his dad left when he was seven and that he has hasn't been in contact with him since. He explains that he does not remember much about him except for an incident when his father gave him a signed baseball. Several years later, however, he discovered that the signature was a fake. Allen continues his story in a later scene by explaining his mother married a "Mormon guy" quickly after his father left. His stepfather is the reason he joined the church. Allen then discloses that his stepfather is currently serving a prison sentence for molesting children, crimes that he committed when he traveled for work while Allen was growing up. What troubles Allen the most, however, is that his stepdad is the one who baptized him and gave him the priesthood, religious rites that are traditionally performed by fathers in the LDS Church. Allen then states, "I can't separate what he gave me. I mean, where does the good stuff stop and the bad stuff start?" These moments of disclosure prepare the audience for when Allen prays to find his faith, a scene that ends with his discovery that, even when loved ones disappoint him, he can always rely on his faith in God. Allen's story, and his climactic resolution while praying in the kitchen for faith, teaches the audience how to "grow in the light," or progress spiritually.

Allen's troubled past as revealed through his self-disclosure, and his resolution to those problems near the end of the film, acts as a rhetorical strategy to teach ascending spirituality. The film first reveals that Allen's history is far from ideal, an inadequacy that many people feel. His family problems lead him to experience doubt and fear. The story continues by showing the "proper" way to overcome said doubt, namely turning to God in prayer and seeking His help and guidance. Allen then experiences a happy ending to his story, an act in the narrative that provides further evidence to the audience of his method's efficacy. Essentially, the film makes the claim that, if one desires to spiritually ascend, s/he need only to pray to God. The film utilizes this method in order to provide the audience with a myriad of examples of how to live a spiritually ascending life. These moments of self-disclosure, therefore, act rhetorically in order to support the film's arguments about ascending and descending spirituality.

Sister Fronk's backstory follows a slightly different pattern, but the rhetorical strategy remains markedly similar. She once also had feelings of doubt and inadequacy, and, by choosing to serve a mission instead of pursuing a romantic relationship, she ascended spiritually. She is then rewarded by a happy ending which the film utilizes as a means to influence the audience towards making similar decisions. The story plays out like thus. After Allen sits next to her at a beach after a baptism, Sister Fronk tells Allen of the reasons why she decided to become a missionary. The conversation begins with Fronk offering her story: "Do you know why I came on a mission?" Fronk explains that she grew up with a young man with whom she fell in love. He left for a mission, and she faithfully wrote to him every week in order to maintain their relationship. When he returned home, however, he had changed so much that she felt weak and faithless compared to him. LDS people expect those who serve proselyting missions to leave as "boys" and come back as "men," so to speak. She, therefore, felt as if he had matured much more

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than her during his two years of missionary service. It was then she realized that she did not know for herself that the things she believed were true. She wanted to "be strong like he was." She left for a mission, and, although he wrote her for the first few months, the letters eventually stopped coming. The film insinuates that he was still interested in her because he was committed to writing her much like she wrote him. Her story is very clear in detailing how she was the one who felt as if they had grown apart, not him. She ends her story by telling Allen, "Now I know. I really do." By sacrificing her romantic pursuit, she ascends spiritually and gains a firm faith to replace her doubts. She accomplished her goal of growing spiritually, even though she sacrificed a chance at marrying the one she loved. Like Allen, as well as many of the other characters in the film, Fronk encountered a spiritual challenge. She could let the challenge weigh her down and eventually lose her faith, or she could let the challenge verify to her the important role faith plays in her life. The man she loved stopped writing her, insinuating that he either lost interest or found somebody else. Does she decide that her faith is meaningless without him, or that her faith is more important than romantic love? She chooses the later of the two by becoming a missionary and allowing for the possibility of her boyfriend losing interest in her. Fronk experiences her own happy ending, however, to support the correctness of her decision. The film reveals that Fronk and Allen marry after returning home from their missions, a perhaps too tidy of a happy ending but one that works on a rhetorical level to reaffirm the correctness of these characters' spiritual decisions.

This theme of choosing spiritual growth in adversity continues with Elder Banks' story. About midway through the film, Banks and Allen have a teaching appointment with a Black couple from L.A. The lesson turns confrontational, however, when the couple expresses their disagreement with the church's pre-1978 policy that prohibited Blacks from serving in the

priesthood (or becoming missionaries, for that matter). Banks, the only Black missionary in the film, tries to explain the history of the policy, but the couple rejects his explanations. Later that day, during a missionary picnic, Banks tells Allen that he did not learn about this pre-1978 policy until after he had joined the church. He struggled with understanding its ramifications, especially in terms of his own Black identity. While struggling with his faith, he has a spiritual experience that confirms his knowledge of the veracity of his beliefs. He then tells Allen, "But sometimes I think God does it on purpose. It's like he gives you a hundred reasons to believe, and then he just drops one or two for you not to believe, so that you can choose, to see if you really want to believe." This statement is remarkably significant to the film's overall themes and arguments. This line of dialogue acknowledges the very real, human phenomenon of doubt and its role in religious faith. Instead of denying doubts' existence, the film argues that doubt is a tool to support faith if approached "properly," the proper methods being those presented in the film. Like Fronk and Allen, Banks encountered a challenge to his faith. He needed to discover for himself that his beliefs were true in order to overcome that challenge. For Banks, the church's pre-1978 policy is not a distraction or a reason to doubt, but it is a confirmation of God's desire to provide complete freedom of choice: a person can choose to believe or choose not to believe. The film is very clear in providing a powerful reason to believe, namely a happy ending. Each character that chooses to believe gradually evolves in maturity, likability, and spiritual strength, among others things. This story, therefore, puts the choice in the audience's lap. They can choose to believe and live a happy, faith-filled life, or they can choose doubt and darkness. The narrative enforces the concept that, in order to "grow in the light," a person must first struggle in the darkness and then make a choice.

Each character's story follows a similar abstract pattern. This pattern is relatively clear: each character discloses a difficult moment in their personal history, this moment leads to doubting their faith, they choose to sacrifice something in order to reaffirm their faith, and, after replacing doubt with commitment to their beliefs, they receive a happy ending as a reward for their sacrifice. By providing multiple instances of this pattern, the film provides a kind of inductive argument about the nature of spirituality, an argument that supports the film's overall rhetorical endeavor. This pattern supports the film's claim that, in order to spiritually ascend, one must believe in and choose to follow the specific religious teachings found in the LDS Church. These backstories, however, are able to articulate a particular aspect of the film's arguments that the other rhetorical strategies are not as capable of imitating: the need for sacrifice to bring about spiritual change. Throughout these challenges, each of these three characters must decide to sacrifice something in order to gain their faith. In doing so, the narrative rewards their sacrifice by ultimately giving the characters what they wanted in the first place. For example, Allen symbolically gives up having a good father figure in his life, but he is rewarded with a spiritual relationship with God, his Heavenly Father. Fronk left her fiancé in order to serve a mission and discover her faith for herself, and she gains a romantic relationship in the form of Allen, whom she marries after returning home. Banks gave up his reason "not to believe," although it still exists, in order to gain his faith. At the end of the film, we learn that Banks becomes a seminary teacher to high school age youth after getting a university degree in comparative religion.

The characters in *God's Army* face the decision to grow in the light or shrink in the darkness. The film implicitly teaches that, by forsaking doubt, fear, or other challenges, you will receive your happy ending. The missionaries who chose ascending spirituality over descending spirituality were given a happy ending in the penultimate scene in the film. Dalton is consumed

by light as he is escorted out of the hangar, forever an example to the other missionaries of how to live their lives. Allen gains his faith, gains a father figure, and marries a beautiful wife. Fronk gains her faith and also marries a handsome husband. Banks is successful, both spiritually and occupationally. The audience, then, is faced with a decision at the end of the film. Will they follow the path of Dalton and spiritually ascend or follow Kinegar and spiritually descend? The film teaches that, even though we must all struggle in darkness for a time, we have the ability to turn to our spiritual beliefs and grow in the light.

There is, however, a more comprehensive question at hand, and that is if the arguments presented in the film are effective. The question is not if the director was able to realize his intent, but if the film acts as rhetoric at all. The answer to this question is twofold. First, the film targets Mormon audiences, thus any evaluation of the film's arguments must be framed by this fact. We must contextualize the film's arguments and their ramifications in terms of a Mormon audience's expectations and viewpoints. The vocabulary, cultural references, and even the topics discussed related directly to previously held knowledge of LDS culture and beliefs. Second, the film's arguments may be convincing to a Mormon audience because, fundamentally, they desire to reaffirm their faith. Faith and doubt, along with the implications of living the specific religious guidelines found in the LDS Church, are troublesome and need constant negotiation. Why live these beliefs if they do not lead to greater happiness, maturity, good for others, or other positive ramifications? This film and its teachings may act as a means to reaffirm the audience's preconceived beliefs. This amplifies the film's ability to act as a rhetorical text, inasmuch as the audience enters this particular cinematic experience with a desire to be consoled and re-motivated. The characters' happy endings, while seeming trite or all-too-convenient to more mainstream audiences, have the potential of functioning according to the Mormon audience's

expectations that such happy endings are not only merited, but guaranteed under their notions of just rewards for the righteous. The quote in the epigraph clarifies this point exceptionally well. Kinegar suspects that Dalton's stalwart faith is merely the result of having a reason to believe, namely brain cancer. Under this supposedly false assumption, Dalton believes because he has a reason to believe, while Kinegar does not have such a motivation. In a way, Mormon audiences may follow suit. They have a reason to believe the film's claims because their own religious knowledge is tied into the narrative and its outcomes.

III. Zion as Rhetorical Space in *The Other Side of Heaven*

> There is a connection between heaven and earth. Finding that
> connection gives meaning to everything, including death. Missing
> it makes everything meaningless, including life.
> —John Groberg, from the film *The Other Side of Heaven*

Mitch Davis began writing *The Other Side of Heaven* before *God's Army* was released in

2001. Davis' film had almost everything that *God's Army* did not: a big-name producer, one of

the largest distribution companies in the world, a budget twenty-three times the size of *God's*

Army's, and the closest thing to official church support that an independent LDS film can have.

Davis confessed that he saw *God's Army* a few days before he was to begin filming *The Other*

Side of Heaven, and thus the success of the previous film did not necessarily influence him to

write or direct his film (Santiago). *The Other Side of Heaven* was produced by Gerald R. Molen,

the Academy award-winning producer of *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Schindler's List* (1993), who

happens to be LDS. Moreover, Davis once worked for Disney, and so it is no coincidence that he

was able to convince his former colleagues at Disney to purchase the distribution rights to the

film. The budget was a mere $7 million, but that greatly surpasses the $300,000 with which

God's Army was produced. Because the film was an adaptation of a memoir entitled "In the Eye

of the Storm" (Groberg), Davis first asked for permission from the book's author, John Groberg.

Groberg is a notable LDS Church leader, and he decided, in turn, to receive his superiors'

blessing from LDS Church headquarters before the film could be made (Snider, "Director's

Search Ends"). The appropriate permission was granted, and Davis proceeded to direct the film.

Davis had the means and influence to cast several established actors, such as Christopher

Gorham, Nathaniel Lees, and an up-and-coming young actor named Anne Hathaway. *The Other*

Side of Heaven was in fact Hathaway's first feature-length film, although it was released after

The Princess Diaries (2001). The film was shot in fifty-five days during the summer of 2000, right at the beginning of a new wave of Mormon cinema (Snider, "'Heaven' Not Just for Mormons").

Although markedly different for the above-mentioned reasons, *The Other Side of Heaven* and *God's Army* also exhibit several notable similarities. Both were being conceived and created around the same time without much, if any, influence upon each other. Although *God's Army* was released about a year before Davis' film, both marked the beginning of fifth-wave independent Mormon cinema and missionary films. They are, however, thematically and cinematically different. Most interestingly, *The Other Side of Heaven* approaches spirituality through a different set of visual, aural, and narrative motifs. This approach to spirituality relies much more profoundly on relationships to deity and achievement of spiritual "place," be that heaven itself or heaven on earth, otherwise known among LDS people as Zion. If there are two sides to heaven, one belonging far from the earth where God resides and the other remaining here on earth in the form of Zion, then Zion is very much the "other side" of heaven. The film is very clear on how it wishes to depict the nature of Zion, and each of its aspects creates a rhetorical event for the audience. It is rhetorical inasmuch as film attempts to define and justify what the audience should become and what they should expect, and it provides an example for the audience to emulate. Before I more fully delve into my analysis, I must first describe the film's plot.

Plot Description

The film begins with the protagonist, John, playing the trumpet in a band at a dance. Jean, his girlfriend, dances on the floor. After leaving the dance, he takes her to a swing set next to a pond where John mentions that he will be leaving on a two-and-a-half-year mission. Several

days later, John receives notice over the phone that he will be serving his mission in the nation of Tonga. After John arrives in Tonga and the island where he will be serving, he meets his mission companion, a native Tongan named Feki, who, thankfully for John, speaks English. After a cold reception by the islanders, he experiences culture shock. He has difficulties with the language, and the local protestant minister has told the islanders to refuse to listen to what he teaches. After isolating himself and reading from the Bible in both English and Tongan, he learns the Tongan language. This acculturation allows him to appropriately adjust, and he begins teaching more people.

After a hurricane destroys crops, kills the fish in the lagoon, and makes fresh water scarce, the islanders, along with John and Feki, struggle for survival. The local minister, who had previously been cold towards John, offers his last bit of food as peace offering. The minister dies, and later a supply boat arrives to rescue the islanders. John eventually becomes the leader of several congregations on various islands. John and his assistants build a school, teach and baptize people on many islands, and start several congregations. He learns through the telegraph that his request to continue serving for another six months has been denied. He prepares to leave, and the locals throw a farewell party in his honor. Throughout his mission, he and Jean write letters to each other expressing their hopes and fears. He returns home to find that she had remained faithful to him, and they are soon married.

Zion as Rhetorical Space

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, *The Other Side of Heaven* approaches spirituality through a specific set of visual, aural, and narrative motifs. The arguments of the film attempt to influence beliefs about the spiritual nature of existence, and thus they must be interpreted less as a call to action than a call to thought and a reinforcement of specific doctrinal

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views. This rhetorical method, much less explicit and perhaps more passive than the arguments in *God's Army*, is nonetheless a viable means of persuading the audience, especially a Mormon audience, to think about these topics in different ways. This approach to spirituality relies much more profoundly on relationships to deity, while existing in a spiritual "place," be that heaven itself or heaven on earth, otherwise known among LDS people as Zion. Zion represents two things: the ideal way of living a spiritual life and the paradise that can be achieved as a reward for living that life. *The Other Side of Heaven* constructs a pseudo-Zion for the audience to emulate. Thus, the film acts rhetorically by, first, giving the audience a framework by which they should live their lives, and second, allowing the audience to experience, as spectators, the paradisiacal reward for living that particular way. Specifically, the film makes definitive statements about the nature of God, the nature of spiritual people, and the nature of spiritual life spaces. Zion requires three key elements: God, people, and place. These three elements correspond to LDS teachings ("Bible Dictionary"). In the following analysis I discuss examples of Zion's God, Zion's people, and Zion's physical place, in order to extrapolate the rhetorical function of filmic space in regards to spirituality and rhetoric. For LDS audiences, the film's teachings reinforce their beliefs and encourage them to continue living accordingly. For non-LDS audiences, it shows a paradise that is, supposedly, attainable upon living Mormon teachings.

Using the resources of cinema, the director invites audience members to accept the following propositions. First, the film claims that God exists and is present in our lives, but that does not mean He directly interacts with us. He remains above us, carefully watching and protecting those who follow His precepts. His presence is consistent and oftentimes overlooked, but we should not make the mistake of dismissing His influence on our lives. Second, even the

most faithful people are imperfect, and they are striving to become better. Heaven will not be full

of perfect people, but will be inhabited by those who recognized what they were doing wrong

and endeavor to correct their mistakes. Third, the audience members' lives, associations, and

behaviors create and maintain a space wherein spirituality may abound and God may participate.

They can choose to live within the boundaries of God's protection or to willfully leave, and they

make that decision whenever individuals choose to obey or disobey God's commandments and

counsel. I now delve into the specific methods by which the film encourages the audience to

accept these concepts.

I. Portraying Zion's God

The film depicts God in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most obvious visual metaphor

utilized throughout the film is the moon or sun as God. There are many varied depictions of the

moon, some more explicitly related to God's involvement, while others act more as reassurances

of God's existence and watchful eye. Beginning with the first shot after the opening credits, the

filmmaker sets our visual expectations for depictions of God for the duration of the film. Very

tellingly, the first image is a long shot of a full moon in a dark night sky (see fig. 9).

Figure 9: First shot after opening credits.

This shot is replicated throughout the film as a motif. While such shots would be implicitly read as representations of God's omnipresent and omniscient nature, the scene's dialogue explicitly reveals, near the beginning of the film, how we are to read the moon's presence. After the swing dance, John and Jean run off to a secluded swing next to a pond. When approaching the swing, Jean enthusiastically proclaims, "Oh, it's like heaven!" The shot is saturated with deep blues and greens, and it does, in fact, look heavenly. John quickly turns her attention to the full moon we saw a few minutes earlier at the beginning of the film. He asks her to "look in the water and tell me what you see." After a few swings above the pond, she says, "I see me in the moon." They continue to talk about the moon, almost like the director was winking at a similar moon scene in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). John then reveals the visual role the moon will be playing throughout the rest of the film. He says: "No matter where they send me, we'll be underneath the same moon." The scene ends with an overhead shot of John and Jean as they swing over the moon's reflection in the pond (fig. 10).

Figure 10: John and Jean swinging above the reflection of the moon.

The statement, "No matter where they send me we'll be underneath the same moon," discloses God's visual avatar. The statement could be easily reworded as, "No matter where they

send me, we'll be watched over and protected by the same God." If John's speech is not sufficient evidence for God's presence in the film, then more subtle characteristics support this claim. For example, the moon's position in the sky corresponds with Jean's claim that "it's like heaven." If the pond is like heaven, God watches over heaven, and the moon watches over the pond, then the moon represents God. Also, the fact that the moon, as well as the sun in later portions in the film, is an embodiment of light is a telling feature. Light, in Judeo-Christian belief and especially in Mormon doctrine, is a symbol for God and His role in our lives. I discuss this claim more fully later in this analysis, but for now I return to analyzing examples of the moon as a visual metaphor.

At this very early point in the film, the moon has been seen five times. The reoccurring shot, often repeated throughout the rest of the movie, insinuates that God is ever present in the characters' lives. In the film's terms, we are all "under the same moon." This representation also attempts to teach that all people, no matter their religion, race, age, etc., are all under God's watchful care. Examples abound of this same motif through the rest of the film. When learning the Tongan language, John secludes himself on a beach and reads from the Tongan and English translations of the Bible. One of the scriptures we hear him reading aloud is Psalm 8:3: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained." Shots of the moon are abundant during John's language learning montage, calling attention to God's role in the miraculous event of his linguistic acquisition. There is a long shot of the moon during a scene where John heals a young boy, supposedly restoring him to life. This, much like John's miraculous mastery of Tongan, demarcates God's role in the miracle. When a group of rough-looking Tongan men surround John and Feki, there is another shot of the moon. Tomasi safely leads John and Feki home, and therefore the shot of the moon reflects God's protection.

There are a myriad of other examples of similar moon shots, but John's dialogue near the end of the film best summarizes their purpose. When John is about the leave the island and his mission, there is yet another long shot of the moon, accompanied by the following voiceover statement by John: "In this life they sail the oceans. In the next they'll sail the skies." And no matter where they sail, heaven or earth, they will be under the same moon. While there are comparable shots of the sun in this film (the sun plays a particularly important role when identifying the redeeming quality of the previously antagonistic minister on the island), the shots of the moon are sufficient to provide a foundation for the function of light as a symbol for deity within LDS doctrinal teachings.

Succinctly, light is not a casual topic or a fleeting symbol for Mormons. This, however, does not negate the film's potential to invite non-Mormon audiences to metaphorically associate God's nature with light. It, in fact, asks the viewers to think about God in a similar way as Mormons. While there are literally dozens upon dozens of references to light in Mormon scriptures, perhaps the passage most relatable to *The Other Side of Heaven* is found in the Doctrine and Covenants 88:7-8:

> This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made; As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made.

According to LDS beliefs, light is both a symbolic and a literal manifestation of God. Shots and references to the moon in *The Other Side of Heaven* cannot be separated from the spiritual rhetoric of the film itself. Just as the moon or the sun watch over all people regardless of location

or culture, God similarly is omnipresent and omniscient. He protects, causes miracles, and can be consistently found if sought. The film is, without a doubt, sermonic in its depictions of the moon.

The moon and light in general, however, are but one method of depicting God. The second strategy the filmmaker uses is the portrayal of people participating in God's work. These characters act in the place of God, and the film does not shy away from drawing explicit attention to this fact. When John is in trouble or needs guidance, certain characters step into the role of God. These characters' presence, much like the moon, reinforces the concept that God is ever present and watchful over human beings. Three instances are particularly useful for discussing characters' acting on behalf of God. Perhaps the most obvious example is that of the minister. While the minister on the island is initially antagonistic towards John and his companion Feki, he eventually gains a deep appreciation and respect for them. This shift is particularly evident in a scene that occurs during the aftermath of a terrible hurricane that wreaks havoc on the island. While the inhabitants struggle to find food and fresh water, John is slowly dying from starvation. After experiencing a hallucination or vision of Jean, John looks towards the sky and sees the minister's head bathed in light (see fig. 11).
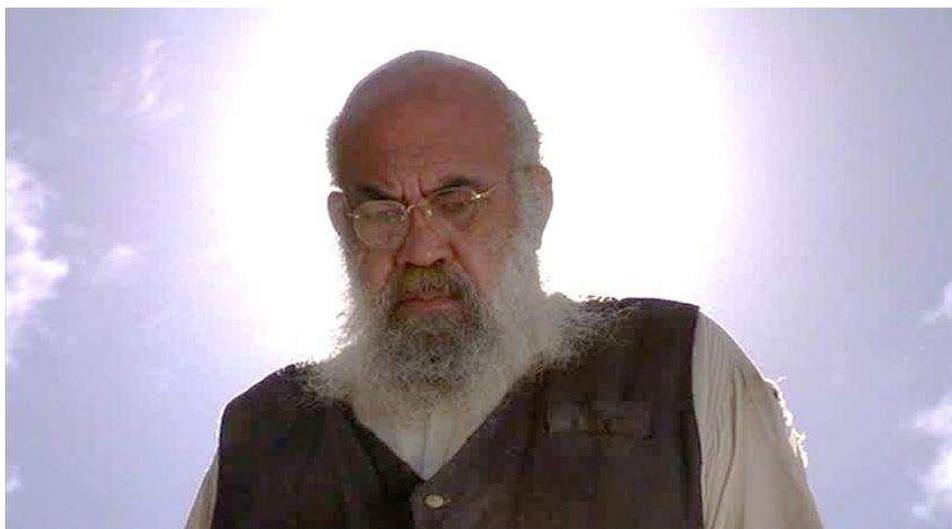
Figure 11: The minister's head in front of the sun.

The sun blares towards the island, and its light surrounds the minister's head and face. After observing the treatment of light in this film, this metaphoric comparison is obviously in reference to deity. At this point the minister offers a deeply felt apology for how he has treated John, and he offers his last bit of food to provide John with much needed nourishment. The story insinuates that the minister could have survived by eating the clam himself, but he instead chooses to offer it to John. Thus, the minister gives his life for John. The obvious relationship between the sun's light and the minister's head, as well as the act of giving his life for John's, direct the audience to understand that the minister is a mortal *type* for God. The fact that the minister protects John from death suggests to the audience that God will do the same for them.

A similar instance that compares a character to God takes place throughout the film, including during John's scenes of starvation and hallucination. John often sees visions of his girlfriend Jean, dressed in a white flowing dress, running along a beach (see fig. 12).

Figure 12: Jean in one of John's visions.

These visions often act as a motivation for John to push through adversity and hardship in order to continue his work as a missionary. His love for Jean, essentially, gives him a reason to endure through difficult physical challenges. During a tropic storm later in the film, John's boat

capsizes, and he sinks into the water. When he is about to drown, he sees a vision of Jean, but

divine intervention saves his life. After seeing the vision, a woman's hand--supposedly Jean's--

plunges into the water and pulls John to the surface (see fig. 13).

Figure 13: Jean's hand saving John from drowning.

When he breaks the surface and gasps for air, nobody is there, and it is understood that God has

intervened to save John's life. The mystical nature of his visions insinuates an otherworldly

presence which watches over and protects him. Jean's white dress makes her look like an angel,

and as such, she intercedes on behalf of John's life. The last moments of the film reaffirm Jean's

role as a stand-in for God. As mentioned above, the first filmic moment of the movie is a shot of

a full moon, a motif representing God throughout the duration of the film. The very last sensorial

moment of the film occurs after a fade to black, and the audience hears Jean's laughter. The

movie, therefore, is bookended by an ever present moon and Jean's voice, thus equating the two

to each other. Jean's character, much like the minister, continues to invite the audience to think

about God as one who watches over and protects those on the earth. The miraculous manner in

which both the minister and Jean save John's life suggest to viewers that God, though

omnipresent, will often use other people to enact His work.

The last character example is Kelepi. At one point in the film, John becomes a district president and sets out to visit other islands. John, his two counselors, and Kelepi lounge about in the boat, while waiting for the wind to return to drive them to their destination. After several attempts at praying for wind, Kelepi decides to take action. There is no wind to propel their ship towards their destination. A small supply boat is tied to their ship, and so Kelepi removes the items from the supply boat, boards it, and asks John to join him. Kelepi then begins to row John to the appointment. John, upon noticing the difficulty of rowing for such a long distance, asks, "Why are you doing this?" Kelepi responds and confirms this action and his character as a depiction of God. He states: "I didn't decide to serve the Lord until I was old and tired. Tired from all the sin. You, you are young and already gave your life to Him. I cannot be young again, but today, I can be the Lord's wind!" As with many other moments in the movie, John is in need of a miracle. He requires divine intervention in order to continue his missionary endeavors. When in need, Kelepi, much like the minister or Jean, steps into the place of God and becomes an answer to John's prayers. John prayed for wind from God, and Kelepi acted as an angel from God by providing the "Lord's wind." These character representations of God, namely the minister, Jean, and Kelepi, not only suggest that God is omnipresent and watchful, but also that the audience should not expect a heavenly visitation in their time of need. Instead, like the examples the film provides, it suggests to the viewers that they should look for manifestations of God's reach in other people. The movie makes the argument that, while God exists and works through miracles, human beings are His most useful tool.

Mormons believe that they have the potential to become like God (Lee). This belief is enacted through the cinematic portrayals of characters acting in God's place. LDS people are consistently taught of the importance of changing, growing, and eventually becoming more like

God. Put more simply, Mormons take the common admonition "what would Jesus do?" and transform it to "I'm trying to be like Jesus."[4] It makes sense, therefore, to see examples of such behavior in some characters in the film. When characters act in behalf of God, not only does it teach the audience about God's nature, but also how they can become more like Him. These characters and their actions, therefore, invite the viewers to follow suit. The movie suggests that the viewers, too, may act in behalf of God and therefore become more like Him. The manifestation of God through characters teaches the audience that the ability to become like God is an achievable goal to those who are willing to sacrifice for it. The minister, for example, had to sacrifice his life in order to demonstrate his willingness to become like God. This is an act that, while significant, is achievable for the audience members. They may also foreground others' needs while selflessly sacrificing their own. Kelepi had to sacrifice his time and energy to demonstrate his determination to follow God no matter the consequences. These examples suggest that the audience may also give up comforts and rest in order to perform much needed acts of service.

The third method of depicting God in the film is the use of sound, particularly music. Several specific sonic cues draw our attention towards God's nature and teach about his role in the audience's lives. Specifically, the film's score cues the audience to how God speaks to people: according to their own culture and understanding. The two most dominant musical themes include a Western, traditional film score, complete with swelling string sections and melodies, and Polynesian choral music which uses melodies from Christian hymns and Polynesian folk songs. In moments of great emotion, the film combines these two musical forms, in order to suggest that culture is not a barrier to God's all-encompassing message. This invites the viewers to think about God and truth as both being universal and applicable to everybody,

regardless of culture or upbringing. I provide three examples of this musical theme and an explanation of their significance in terms of how they persuade the audience to think about God.

The minister's funeral is a powerful moment, when a deep respect between two cultures is forged. The minister's casket is brought to the burial plot, and several islanders place beautiful flowers on top. The Polynesian choral music begins to play, and John accompanies this music with his trumpet. The diegetic music transforms into the non-diegetic film score, as an orchestra takes the place of John's trumpet music. The two melodies, one from the Polynesian choir and the other from the Western orchestra, harmonize and complement each other. The harmony suggests to the audience that two vastly different cultures may coexist and that God loves and watches over all of the earth's inhabitants, regardless of culture or even religious background. The Western music, symbolic of John and his culture, does not try to dominate or overtake the Polynesian choir. The Polynesian choral music, symbolic of the inhabitants of the island and their respective culture, does not distract or contradict the orchestra. The sense of cultural harmony, in both the music and the respect the characters have for each other, propose to the audience members that they too must recognize that God respects all people equally. This music acts rhetorically inasmuch as it attempts influence the audience's perception of God: that He cares for all people and cultures. Just as the moon shines equally on all, so do the two seemingly different musical styles affirm and support each other.

The second example is the scene of Lavania's baptism. Much like the minister's funeral, the same Polynesian choir sings. The islanders are seen singing the popular Christian hymn "Amazing Grace," thus grounding the music in the diegetic space of the film. The Polynesian choral music is accompanied by a prominent piece of the film's score, the same piece of music heard in the minister's funeral scene. Once again, the Western film score beautifully

accompanies and complements the choral music in order to create a well-blended and powerful sonic component of the scene. The two melodies occasionally match, while at other times they harmonize. The music allows the viewers to listen to either melody individually, or to listen to how the two interact. Much like the funeral scene, the melding of the two distinct musical pieces create a sense of God's unprejudiced love and omniscient awareness of everybody on earth, regardless of culture.

As the film continually makes arguments about the nature of God, this reoccurring musical theme proposes to the viewers that God is an individual that communicates to the characters, as well as the audience, in their own cultural language. More broadly, this reaffirms the film's overarching message that Mormon teachings are universal truths, applicable to everybody of every background. The film repeats this same motif during the scenes of John's farewell. At the beginning of this sequence, the islanders produce a jukebox and play swing music for John. They do this to say goodbye and to celebrate his culture. At the end of this sequence, when John is leaving on a boat, the Polynesian choir sings in their own particular style. Once again, they are bidding John farewell, but they do so according to their own cultural traditions. The music becomes a metaphor for language, and the island's inhabitant say goodbye to John in both their language and his. This suggests to the audience, once again, that both modes of communication are valid and that God speaks in all languages.

II. Portraying Zion's People

The film portrays God's people, or those who live in Zion, in various ways. Upon inspecting the actions and progression of many of the main characters, a recognizable theme emerges. Zion's people, as exemplified through the film's characters, are not perfect, but instead are on the road of perfection through progression and change. The characters' imperfection and

progress argue that the audience does not have to be perfect in following their spiritual beliefs, but as long as they are trying to improve, they can enjoy the benefits and blessings of living with God's protection and guidance. This appeals to non-LDS audiences as well, inasmuch as it suggests that, in order to become a believer, they need not become perfect overnight. While the difference between themselves and LDS people might seem daunting, the film argues that everybody, Mormon or non-Mormon, is imperfect. As evidence of this rhetorical strategy, seven of the main characters undergo significant, positive, changes to their personalities and behaviors.

To begin, let us look at the character of Tomasi. Not only is Tomasi the most obvious example of spiritual change--we see his transformation throughout the narrative--but also his change is both internal and external, thus providing a solid framework for the proceeding discussion. His transformation makes the argument that the viewers, be they Mormon or not, may become much better people (healthier, more ethical, more mature, and more spiritual) by following particular religious beliefs. We first see Tomasi in various scenes on the island, but he is not introduced to the audience until thugs are about to assault John and Feki. Tomasi, his hair greasy and unruly, his clothes in tatters with a bottle of alcohol in hand, intervenes on behalf of the missionaries, and he safely escorts them back to their house (see fig. 14). His appearance is not the only characteristic that is startling and notable. When asked by John why he helped them, Tomasi's speech is slurred, rough, and incomplete. He announces that he was baptized a Mormon when he was much younger, but he had long forgotten about that life. Only when the minister had asked the group of thugs to "rough up" the Mormons did Tomasi remember: "I am one!" He has fond memories of the Mormon missionaries who took care of him as an orphan. The statement, "they took care of me," referring to the missionaries from his past is significant,

and it foreshadows the relationship he will have with John and Feki throughout the rest of the film.

Figure 14: Tomasi intervenes on behalf of the missionaries.

The key statement is made by Tomasi when he says, "they took care of me." Through the rest of the film, John and Feki will, in essence, look after and "take care of" Tomasi. Their coaching and guidance will allow him to become a completely different person. His transformation is slow but deliberate, and it will demonstrate that anybody, even a drunk and slovenly Tomasi, can become much greater by following Mormon religious teachings. First, Tomasi recognizes the good the gospel can do when he speaks to John and Feki. He remembers that the missionaries he encountered as a child were kind, selfless, and devoted to service. This sets his expectations of what he may become. Next, John and Feki arrive at his house to bathe him, slightly trim his hair, and dress him in appropriate clothes to attend church. When they first see Tomasi at his house, he is hung-over and barely able to move. By the end of the scene he is smiling, energetic, and excited to attend church meetings. The transformation has already begun as evident in his changing disposition and appearance. This continues the theme of the missionaries, now a metaphor for the transforming power of religion, "taking care" of Tomasi.

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Tomasi later gives up smoking and drinking alcohol, but is only able to do so when Feki jokingly removes a cigarette from Tomasi's mouth, and Tomasi agrees not to smoke. Near the end of the film, Tomasi's hair is short, well-trimmed, and professional; his clothing is decent and clean, and he no longer tries to sneak a cigarette or a swig of alcohol (see fig. 15).

Figure 15: Tomasi near the end of the film.

When saying farewell to John near the end of the film, Tomasi confesses in an emotional and grateful voice, "You took care of me." Tomasi's transformation is, only then, complete.

Tomasi's change throughout the course of the film is methodical and evident in his speech, behavior, appearance, and involvement with John and the church. He acts as a clear example of how to live in Zion. The film claims that everybody, from the characters to the audience watching the story unfold, is imperfect. The argument then clarifies to reveal how the viewers may change: by submitting to the guidance of religious teachings which will "take care" of their lives. It is important to note that, in context of the narrative, he was already a member of the LDS Church. His conversion occurred after becoming a member. This suggests to both Mormon and non-Mormon audiences that, by living according to a certain set of spiritual beliefs,

everybody may improve. How is this change possible? The movie argues that the only way to change is by letting religious practices "take care" of you.

The precedent set by Tomasi's character is continued by other main characters as well. For example, Kelepi, the branch president of the Mormon congregation on the island, has a less than perfect past. When John asks Kelepi's wife why their daughter, Mele, does not speak to or respond to John, she discloses that Mele is not her daughter. She then informs John about Kelepi's past and how her mother "was a bad woman that ran around with my husband, before he was baptized." She then discloses that Mele "punishes herself for the sins of her father." We learn here of Kelepi's sinful and unfaithful past. Kelepi, however, is baptized and eventually becomes the spiritual leader of their small congregation on the island. The film is very clear to point out that what causes the transformation is the gospel. Only upon learning about Mormon teachings and being baptized a member of the LDS Church does Kelepi undergo his metamorphosis. Kelepi's story informs the audience that a magnificent conversion or change, much like Tomasi's or Kelepi's, can only occur by living the principles and beliefs of Mormon teachings. This serves the overall message of the film by continuing to invite the audience to believe along the same lines. In other words, it teaches that the viewers, if they desire to make similar changes, must do so with the help of LDS teachings.

There are many other examples of similar metamorphoses, all somehow related to the stewardship offered by particular religious beliefs. Mele, Kelepi's daughter, flees the island and joins a ship from New Zealand. When aboard the ship, she is raped by one of the sailors, and it is insinuated through a slow motion shot of her looking longingly back to the island that she regrets her decision to leave. During the great hurricane, Mele is washed ashore and is reunited with her father. It is important to note that the two people who found her were Kelepi, who is a church

leader, and John, a missionary and representative of the LDS Church. The film, therefore, draws a comparison between her return and Mormonism, particularly in how the gospel--in the form of its representatives--found her on the beach. Mele's transformation is much less explicit than other characters. While barely speaking in the entire film, the audience sees her choose to reject her family and her faith, regret that decision, and to gratefully return to the arms of her father and family. The audience also sees, through this particular example, that church teachings not only provide changes to personality, but also physical protection. Mele's spiritual journey is somewhat unique, however, inasmuch as it is a demonstration that all people make mistakes and experience regret. This lesson also serves the overall message of the film by reiterating the concept that Zion, as represented by the island, is not populated with perfect people, but by people who make mistakes and who ultimately choose to change and repent of those errors. Mele, Kelepi, and Tomasi all demonstrate vast imperfections, yet they demonstrate a willingness to change. This willingness or desire for transformation, a trait the filmmaker attempts to influence the audience to adopt, is what initiates conversion.

Lavania's journey as a character falls only behind Tomasi's in terms of explicitness. Lavania's mother persuades her to try to seduce John, and she attempts to do so by feigning a sprained ankle. When John kneels down to examine her foot, she removes her skirt and undoes her blouse (see fig. 16). Lavania pressures John by asking if she is not pretty enough and stating, "Then come! Let's make love!" John instead convinces her to go to the beach where they can talk about a kind of love "that never ends." The film explains later that, according to Lavania's cultural upbringing, it is appropriate, and even admirable, to have sex with someone in order to conceive a "half-White" baby. John's upbringing, however, constrains him to only having sex with a spouse. John, later in the film, baptizes Lavania. During John's last night on the island, we

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see Lavania holding a baby, while her husband softly serenades her with a guitar. She thus

adopts John's understanding of sexual relationships. She becomes a member of the church and a

happily married person with a child (see fig. 17).

Figure 16: Lavania attempts to seduce John.

Figure 17: Lavania with her husband and child.

She receives the fruits of living a Zion-like life, namely the love she was initially seeking. This

illustration functions in terms of the overall rhetoric of the film to provide yet further evidence

that, if the audience desires significant changes in their lives, they must follow Lavania's

example by learning about LDS teachings, accepting them, and then living them. By doing so, the film promises unexpected and joyful blessings, much like Lavania finding a husband and starting a family.

The minister provides a unique argument about the nature of those who live in Zion. Unlike the previous examples, he never becomes a Mormon. The film instead demonstrates that there are many in Zion who may not be LDS, but are, nonetheless, examples of how to live divine lives. In other words, not all in Zion are Mormon, and those who are not can demonstrate and teach others how to live Zion-like lives. As mentioned above, the Christian minister on the island is initially antagonistic towards John and Feki. He ignores their attempts at civilly conversing with him. He refuses to let John give a blessing to a dying young man who was listening to the missionary's lessons and wanted to join the church. He tells a group of thugs to beat up the missionaries. The minister embodies the hate and intolerance that is often so evident in the world. These plot developments frame other faiths as being inferior to Mormonism, thus continuing the rhetorical effort to position LDS teachings as those which will bring about positive change. Only during the aftermath of the hurricane, which leaves the island desolate and without food and clean water, do the minister's maturity and Christian values fully emerge. He asks for forgiveness from John, gives him food in order to keep him from starvation, and ultimately gives his life for John's. The minister, now deeply loved not only by the islanders but also respected by John and Feki, transforms from a hateful old man to a mature and loving Christian. The argument that there are many in Zion who may not be LDS, but are, nonetheless, examples of how to live divine lives presents a unique opportunity to invite non-LDS people to feel compassionate towards the rhetoric of the film. Instead of completely alienating audiences of other faiths, the film only initially presents the minister as antagonistic. It then argues that those

who are hateful and angry towards Mormonism may benefit from showing compassion towards LDS people and their beliefs.

Perhaps the less notable example of transformation, but a fundamental example nevertheless, is that of the main character of John Groberg. His transformation is subtle, but he acts as a placeholder for many of the LDS people who watch the film. Many LDS people see their conversions as much slower and more inconspicuous. Thus the character of John allows members to insert themselves into the narrative. The narrative follows his journey from a perspective that many LDS people will understand. His life, in other words, is a generic representation of a basic timeline for important events in an LDS person's life. He goes to college, serves a mission, and returns home to marry and start a family. This life plan follows most Mormon's expectations for their lives. The film portrays his life in a way that shows transformation under the guidance of LDS teachings. For example, by studying scriptures, John is able to miraculously learn Tongan. When the mission president confronts him about not keeping accurate and organized records of his missionary work and accomplishments, he works throughout the night with his counselors in order to correct his mistakes. This behavior demonstrates humility and a willingness to submit to authority, both prominent LDS teachings. He later returns home, marries Jean, and lives in his own Zion (or perhaps just the "other side" of Zion). This, like Lavania's example of finding love and starting a family, is a reward for his diligence in serving his mission and obeying the principles of his beliefs. As mentioned above, these illustrations demonstrate that John's transformation is subtle, but he acts as a placeholder for many of the LDS people who watch the film. One of Jean's letters to John makes this concept explicit. The audience hears Jean, as a character voiceover, and she says: "I can almost feel you stretching. It is hard to imagine how I could possibly keep up." This growth proposes to

the audience members that even LDS people who do not feel a great need to change are capable of improving, much like John. By "stretching," as Jean puts it, the audience can follow John's example and further dedicate themselves to following their beliefs and correcting imperfections. While several newspaper film critics felt that John's character was too "perfect" or "ideal," many LDS people may feel that this is not the case. They may see his transformation as clearly as they see Tomasi's.

In short, the audience is not encouraged to be perfect, but to see how they too can continue progressing, growing, or "stretching" as Jean puts it. This adequately suits both Mormon and non-Mormon audiences. For LDS people, it inspires them to reevaluate their lifestyles and to more closely align their behaviors with their beliefs. For non-LDS people, it proposes that they need not be perfect people in order to benefit from learning about and following LDS teachings. Though Zion is heaven on earth, the people who live there, according to *The Other Size of Heaven*, are not heavenly. They are humans, with problems and imperfections. Zion's people are not perfect, but they want, and try, to be.

III. Portraying Zion's Place

Now that I have discussed Zion's God and Zion's people, the last of the three features is Zion's physical place.[5] The film's depiction of the island includes two rhetorical strategies. First, it invites the viewers to wander throughout the island and observe, through peaceful and un-interrupting glances, how someday they might live a Zion-like existence. The filmmaker accomplishes this feat by including beautiful, heaven-like shots between scenes. Second, it proposes, through the events of the narrative, that only those who remain within the boundaries of Zion will receive Godly protection and guidance. It does this by metaphorically relating the island's boundaries to the behavioral "boundaries" of following religious beliefs. In other words,

those who remain on the island are protected, while those who venture into the ocean without a specific purpose risk the dangers of leaving Zion's borders. Through these two portrayals of the island, it becomes a space of spirituality, a place where God may oversee, bless, and protect His people. It therefore acts rhetorically by inviting the audience to live righteous lives in order to enjoy the beauty, peace, and protection of Zion.

The film often includes beautiful, serene shots of the island between scenes of dialogue or action. These are what I call these "heavenly" shots, and they permeate the film. As mentioned above, these shots make a visual argument that those who live their faith will be blessed with peace and joy as their reward. In essence, they show how someday the audience might live a Zion-like existence. Before delving into specific examples, the following is a brief description of how they occur within the context of the film.

These heavenly shots showcase a variety of stunning visual moments on the island: a breathtaking ocean behind deeply green palm trees, a white sand beach, a sunrise above the trees over the horizon, and many others. They are distinct from establishing shots that portray a time of day, the nature of the weather, etc. For example, one of the first establishing shots on the island is very monochromatic in color: it shows that the wind is blowing, and it is nighttime. This and other shots are distinct from the heavenly shots I am discussing here. These shots not only remind the audience where the bulk of the narrative occurs, but also create a visual ambiance and a sense of place. Put more simply, these particular shots seem to exceed the limits of narrative motivation in order to accomplish other intentions. The beauty of the island can easily be traced to the film's intention to symbolize the optical nature of the "other side" of heaven, or Zion. While not everyone would think of a humid, brutally hot, isolate, buggy island as an ideal existence, these shots do not portray the island in that sense. In fact, the dominant quality of

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these shots is their serene and surreal peacefulness, devoid of the annoyances of living on an island.

Far from being an inconsequential ploy to showcase the island's attractiveness, these particular shots quickly become a recognizable, and often repeated, feature of the film itself. The shots show various parts of the island during different times of day and therefore cannot be constrained to merely establishing the context of the forthcoming narrative sequence. The only other explanation for such shots could be to allow for the passing of time, be it over the space of several days, but this explanation fails to account for the actual visceral beauty of the shots. As heavenly shots, they meet the following criteria. First, they are not shots of small huts, trees, people fishing in the bay, or other possible locations or occurrences. Instead, they are consistently large, sweeping shots of mountains, clouds, sunsets, beaches, and other postcard-worthy locations. Second, they are all extreme long shots. Third, they suggest the divine by portraying unearthly beauty. They present scenes of unusual color, composition, and tranquility. They are not usual or average. They resemble works of art, rather than random views of landscapes. The shots are purposefully edited and color-corrected to remove any semblance of reality.

There are sixteen shots that follow these criteria. The following examples represent four of those instances. After the scene where John and Feki bathe and prepare Tomasi for church, there are three sequential shots of the island. The first is an extreme long shot of the island's mountains, steeped in the deeply colored greens of trees, bushes, grass, and other vegetation (fig. 18). Above the mountains we see a light blue sky, obviously during an early morning or an evening. The white clouds are dispersed among the sky. The second shot shows the bay in an extreme long shot of the pier in the bottom right-hand corner of the frame (fig. 19). The ocean is

dimly lit but the clouds in the sky are aflame with bright oranges as they sit beneath a purple and blue sky.

Figure 18: A heavenly shot of the island's mountains and sky.

Figure 19: A heavenly shot of the island's sunset and ocean horizon.

The reflection of the orange clouds sits softly on the surface of the ocean. The third shot shows eight palm trees, nearly in silhouette against a light pink background of clouds (fig. 20). The ocean appears grey while the clouds radiate a purplish hue. As I mentioned above, these shot share several characteristics: all three are extreme long shots, they all share a high-contrast color

scheme, they highlight pristine parts of the island without human involvement, and they do not directly relate the preceding or proceeding events in the narrative.

Figure 20: A heavenly shot of the island's palm trees and ocean horizon.

The three shots follow each other in quick succession, an act that relates the shots to each other in the audience members' minds. They also must be considered together, as a collection of shots, if they are to be understood as rhetoric. Combined, they all portray a peaceful, remarkably tranquil existence. The shots originate from what appears to be the perspective of an individual inasmuch as it would be humanly possible to stand in any of these locations and see the same scenery. The unearthliness of the shots must be duly noted as well. They demonstrate a romantic, heavily corrected, photographic aura. Such shots function rhetorically as a reaffirmation of why the audience should sacrifice and work towards living the demanding standards of their faith. They invite the audience to assume that, someday, they might live a Zion-like existence, and these shots represent what that existence would feel like: serene and divine.

While the previous examples are notable because they occur in quick succession, individual heavenly shots also interrupt the flow of the narrative to continue to remind the

audience of the possible, Zionistic lives they may live upon following religious beliefs. One such shot is of the pier basking in the diffused light of a white sun behind wispy clouds (see fig. 21).

Figure 21: A heavenly shot of the pier and ocean horizon.

The shot has a monochromatic quality that draws sharp contrast between the intense brightness of the sun and the calm greys and blues of the ocean. It is immensely peaceful and does not complement the much darker blues which saturate the proceeding shots of John and Feki as they discuss the approaching storm. The monochromatic colors create a sense of order and cleanliness. The audience would accept this and the previous shots as divine based on their otherworldly colors and calm, environmental beauty. What makes this shot unique, however, is the strong use of whites, silvers, greys, and blues to suggest to the audience that their lives may become just as pristine, orderly, and calm upon living gospel teachings. Also, the pier seems resemble a pathway to an ethereal world of light and beauty. Much like two moments in the film where characters are encouraged to "go to the light" when dying, the pier invites the audience to walk towards the light of heavenly tranquility.

The images themselves, projected through these transcendent heavenly shots, maintain a unique vision of what a Zion-like existence could feel like. Not very many audience members are

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able to live on beautiful, remote islands, and for many that living situation would be less than ideal. These shots function rhetorically by conveying a feeling of what a "righteous" life could be like. For those viewers whose lives are hectic and overly busy, these shots propose that, upon living a "righteous" life, their lives will be much more calm and orderly. For those viewers who feel engulfed in excruciating monotony and surrounded by a bland physical space, these shots invite them to live righteously in order to feel like life is varied and beautiful.

The island's beauty, as portrayed by the above-mentioned heavenly shots, is not its only Zion-like characteristic. The film also portrays the island as Zion by depicting it as a place of protections from the dangerous and evil influences of the world. This continues the argument to the viewers that Zion represents a reward for living righteously. The island, through its physical manifestation in the film, offers divine protection to those who inhabit it. It still exists, however, within the confines of the mortal experience complete with hardship, temptation, and physical dangers. According to Mormon teachings, an ancient prophet established a city named Zion, and God protected it from evil influences or dangers. It existed in the world under the watchful care of God. Zion belongs to heaven inasmuch as a heavenly people inhabit it and it is protected by God. It belongs to the earth inasmuch as the world still can affect the inhabitants to a certain degree. In accordance with the intercessory prayer of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible, specifically in John 17:11, 14, and 15, LDS people are admonished to be "*in* the world, [but] they should not be *of* the world" (Cullimore, italics in original). The world is something to be tolerated, not embraced. The audience, in order to be persuaded by the film's arguments, must belief in a separation between righteous people and the rest of the world. While Mormon audiences would easily grasp this principle, some non-Mormon audiences might not find the

following claims as believable. The use of this concept may be one of the movie's weaknesses, but it still functions for Mormon audiences.

With these teachings in mind, *The Other Side of Heaven* includes references and representations of "the world" through depictions of danger, as well as the use of the ocean as a metaphor. The above-mentioned heavenly shots, while sometimes including the ocean, continue to represent Zion because the shots always originate from a place on the island. There are, for example, no heavenly shots of the island from the perspective of someone in the ocean. The film's depiction of the island as a safe place and the ocean as "the world" invites audiences to view righteous living as necessarily related to divine protection for both moral and physical dangers. The following are a few examples. Mele, wanting to distance herself from her father's promiscuous past, leaves on a ship from New Zealand. The boat comes from the ocean and the sailors are not natives to the island. They differ in appearance, in origin, and intention. Upon arriving, they deposit three cases of rum on the beach in exchange for three young women on the island. Once they depart, they rape the young women, and only Mele is able to return to the island. In this instance, the sailors represent evil influences, and the ocean from which they come represents the world. The island is Zion, and therefore the sailors only arrive at the edge of the beach. From this position, they tempt the people to join them in the world. Upon leaving the protection of Zion, evil's true intentions are revealed, and the young women who were foolish enough to listen to their temptations are raped. The film implies that the boat was capsized in the hurricane, and only Mele survived. Thus evil was destroyed by itself inasmuch as the ocean and hurricane both represent the dangers of the world. Even though Mele is able to return home, she is obviously hurt emotionally and physically.

This example draws a stark contrast between the protection of Zion and the dangers of the world. The ocean, therefore, embodies the world outside of Zion. This distinction is supported by other moments in the film as well. For example, John and Feki are teaching a young man named Finau. Finau promises to catch a fish for breakfast the next day, so he enters the bay to stab a fish with a sword-like tool. In this scene, the colors are dark and blue, much like the ocean itself. After catching his first fish, he attempts to catch another. He instead slashes his foot and falls into the water. John and Feki carry him to the beach where his father takes him to his home. Finau later dies from lockjaw. Even though Finau subsequently becomes a symbol of faith in the film, this event demonstrates that even the most righteous and faithful of God's people can be affected by the dangers and evils of the world. If he had stopped after catching the first fish, he would have remained safe. Instead, by continuing, he eventually cuts his foot within the ocean. This scene teaches and reinforces important LDS doctrines that I mentioned above. LDS people are encouraged to live in the world but not become part of it. This teaching accepts the necessity of venturing out into "the bay" of the world. All people must engage the evils of the world in one form or another, but the film invites them to leave those influences as soon as possible. In applicable terms, a Mormon may go to the bar to eat with friends, but she may choose to leave the bar before her friends become drunk. While Finau, as a character, was far from being greedy or reckless, he stayed in the ocean (read: the world) longer than he should have. This suggests that both the righteous and the wicked are vulnerable because the world is a dangerous place. After leaving Zion, one must return as soon as possible.

The influence of the world is unavoidable, but how we react to that influence is what defines God's followers. The hurricane is a perfect example. Everybody on the island, from John and Feki, to the minister, to Kelepi, Lavania, and even Mele, all are affected by the devastation

of the hurricane. The storm approaches from the ocean, once again representing the world and its evil influences or dangers, but those who are aware of such influences may protect themselves to a certain degree. Much as those who understood the dangers of leaving on the New Zealand ship were not affected as drastically as those who were not prepared, Feki and John notice the storm's approach and run for protection. They find the other islanders have followed the same course of action. Although the storm destroys much of the island, the people themselves are protected. Those who did not seek protection from the storm on the island, namely those on the New Zealand ship, were not as fortunate. Even though the dangers of the world affect everybody, including those in Zion, the people who remain faithfully within Zion's protective walls will be much better off than those who do not.

The three examples I provided cover three possible scenarios in which the world exerts its influence, be that physical or spiritual danger. In Mele's example, a person willingly leaves the protection of Zion and ventures out into the dangers of the world. She barely escapes with her life and regrets her decision. In Finau's example, he entered the world with correct intentions but remained there too long. He injures himself and eventually passes away. In the example of the hurricane, everybody who watched for the signs of the hurricane was able to find shelter and protection from its ravaging winds. In this instance, the world exerted its dangerous influence and all were affected, but those who were aware of its potential devastation were much better off than those who were not. But what of the person who goes into the world performing God's work? Near the end of the film, John and his district counselors sail to another island in order to perform their church work. When a storm capsizes the boat, and John is about to drown, a vision of Jean saves him. This is a powerful moment in the film that teaches a not-so-discrete message: whosoever follows God's will and performs His work will be protected from all worldly dangers.

Unlike Finau, John was not overstaying his welcome out in the world. He was accomplishing what God had sent him to do. Even though the ocean's storm challenged him, and symbolically his faith, God's "hand" never left him. Sometimes God lets the sailor "swim" instead of calming the storm, as is mentioned by John to his counselors upon safely arriving to the shore, but God's hand is never far away. The film demonstrates that He will lift up His servants from the grip of death, much like he lifted John to the surface of the water.

Upon having discussed the manner in which the film depicts Zion's God, Zion's people, and Zion's place, one might regard the title as misleading. However, upon reflection, the title is actually apt. God remains distant, but watchful. The people are imperfect, but strive to be better. The place is dangerous, but much safer than the rest of the world. This rhetorical space is not heaven, but is the "other side" of heaven. If there are two sides to heaven, one belonging far from the earth where God resides and the other remaining here on earth in the form of Zion, then Zion is very much the "other side" of heaven. The film is very clear on how it wishes to depict the nature of Zion, and each of the three aspects creates a rhetorical event for the audience. It normalizes what they should become and what they should expect, and it provides an example for which to strive.

In summary, and as mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, the following are the main arguments of the film. First, God exists and is present in our lives, but that does not mean he has to directly interact with us. He remains above us, carefully watching, much like a full moon in a night sky. His presence is consistent and oftentimes overlooked, but we should not make the mistake of dismissing his influence on our lives. Second, even the most faithful people are imperfect, but they are striving to become better. Heaven will not be full of perfect people, but will be inhabited by people who recognized what they were doing wrong and endeavored to

correct their mistakes. Everybody is at a different point in their spiritual progression, so judgment should be replaced with an understanding that we are all trying to become more like God. From the drunkard (like Tomasi) to the spiritual leader (like Kelepi) we all make mistakes and live imperfect lives. The choice is ours as to whether we wish to strive to become better. Third, our lives, associations, and behaviors create and maintain the walls of Zion around us. We may choose to live within the boundaries of God's protection or to willfully leave. We all must live within the world and therefore worldly influences are inevitable, but we can choose to limit its influence to the minimum amount. Even God's people suffer the struggles of mortality and the dangers of the world, but they are in a better position to protect themselves than those who willfully leave Zion's borders.

These three arguments saturate the film's narrative, visual style, characterizations, and other motifs. The film, however, is abstract enough to allow the audience, be they Mormon or not, to understand the film's messages as being spiritual. It does not portray a contemporary young man living his life, going to school, and making other seemingly normal life choices within the context of his faith. Such a story might distract audiences with specific, contemporary, examples of how to live their faith. Instead, the film shows a distant time and a distant place within a distinct culture. This temporal, cultural, and physical distance allows for the viewers to see the film as an allegory with a distinct moral of the story. That moral, as mentioned above, is that the audience may inhabit a Zion-like existence by living righteously. The film is explicit in its intent to demonstrate to us how to live in Zion, or the "other side" of heaven.

IV. A Rhetoric of Mormon Missionary Films

> Is it so hard to conceive God with one's senses? Why must He hide
> in a midst of vague promises and invisible miracles? How are we
> to believe the believers when we don't believe ourselves? . . . I
> want God to put out His hand, show His face, speak to me.
> —Antonius Block, from the film *The Seventh Seal*

In this last chapter, I summarize my arguments, before addressing the films' similarities, their potential for rhetorical effectiveness, and the implications of this investigation. I conclude that the films' rhetorical styles both might reinforce beliefs for Mormon audiences and potentially invite non-Mormons to think more positively about LDS doctrines. I also contend that the unique medium of film is a ripe area for rhetorical analysis in terms of spirituality, and what makes film so distinctive is its possible ability to enact experiential sermons. The films in this analysis, like others that came before, may provide answers to complex and nuanced concerns about the nature of spirituality.

The first analysis performs a rhetorical reading of *God's Army* and how it presents two disparate modes of spirituality, namely ascending and descending spirituality. In short, the film utilizes three discernible strategies to represent ascending and descending spirituality: (1) the polar characterizations and narrative outcomes of the characters of Dalton and Kinegar; (2) the utilization of darkness and nighttime to portray inner spirituality, and, (3) the confessions of spiritual struggles and successes. Ascending and descending spirituality are evidenced through the characterizations of Dalton, who embodies spiritual ascent, and Kinegar, who represents spiritual descent. From the initial moments of the narrative, the film presents Dalton to the audience as an exemplar, a hero, and an ideal with whom to pattern spiritual decisions. He demonstrates courage in adversity, dedication amongst distraction, and strength in the face of

spiritual weakness. Even though he is slowly dying of a terminal illness, he pushes through his pain in order to consummate his life's work with his own death. Kinegar, on the other hand, is rebellious, deceitful, a poor influence to Allen, doubtful, and ultimately resigns his faith, and his work as a missionary, by leaving Los Angeles. Dalton and Kinegar, each simultaneously representing and acting out differing spiritual modes, clash in a fight for Allen's spiritual existence. Ultimately, Dalton overcomes Kinegar in a physical bout at the bus station, thus leaving Allen to decide for if he wishes to follow Dalton's example. Near the end of the film, Kinegar's character meets his spiritual end when he exits in the bus station into seemingly eternal darkness, an appropriate visual metaphor for the message the film is attempting to convey. Dalton, on the other hand, exits into the light of a bright California afternoon, while his coffin, and thus his body, is lifted upon the shoulders of his fellow missionaries.

The film not only dichotomizes spirituality through these characterizations, but also through the use of light and dark. The characters' inner motivations and spiritual struggles are revealed to the audience during several different nights. These revelations teach how the most powerful spiritual endeavors occur not in plain sight, but in the privacy of the mind. This is especially true for the characters of Kinegar, Dalton, and Allen as they each confess their private spiritual undertakings and decisions. There is, at least according to *God's Army*, a place where good and evil collide, and that is in the darkness of the individual. Once these decisions and their consequences play out, however, the evidence of those struggles can be seen by all in the light of daytime, such as Allen's becoming a successful missionary and Dalton being consumed by light.

Each main character in *God's Army* explains, in no uncertain terms, their struggles and how those challenges helped them progress. In these confessions of personal development, the characters of Allen, Fronk, and Banks describe their past and how they chose to spiritually

ascend. For example, Allen confronted the nature of his spiritual origins and his relationship with his mother, father, and stepfather. Fronk needed to find her own faith, independent of her former fiancé. Banks chose to reaffirm his faith after learning of the Church's pre-1978 policy regarding Black people and the priesthood. Each character overcame their personal challenges in order to spiritually ascend. These confessions of spiritual struggle and progression reassure the audience of their ability to overcome their own challenges and follow in the successful footsteps of these characters.

Opposed to the rugged individuality of *God's Army*, *The Other Side of Heaven* approaches spirituality from a much more communal standpoint. While, according to the former film, spirituality consists primarily of individual decisions, struggles, failures, and triumphs, the latter film presents a holistic spirituality consisting of Zion as a rhetorical space. Zion consists of three necessary elements: God, people, and place. The film utilizes depictions of each of these elements in order to construct a rhetorical ideal of spiritual existence. First, Zion's God can be seen through the film's use of the moon in both images and dialogue. Because the moon is consistently present in the film, watching over and "protecting" characters, it becomes, in essence, a metaphor for God. The film also portrays God through specific characterizations, the most notable of which are the minister who miraculously appears to provide much needed sustenance for John; Jean, who saves John from drowning in the waves of the ocean; and Finau, who provides faith for John and Feki, while he watches over them.

The film's presentation of Zion's people and place also contribute to this rhetorical space. The people, as represented through the course of the narrative, are imperfect but can improve, progress, and eventually succeed. The character of Tomasi is the most obvious example, as he changes from a slobbering drunk to a respectable religious leader. Other instances include

Lavania, who transforms from a seducer to a loving wife and mother, the minister who converts from an antagonistic deterrent to John's work to a friend who saves John's life, and John himself, who progresses from a naïve, Idaho-bred boy to a mature and understanding spiritual mentor to the people on the island. Zion's place is also less than perfect. The film portrays the island itself as Zion's location, or the "other side" (the mortal side) of heaven. It is a place of solace from the evil influences of the world and protection from the physical dangers of life's storms. It is also a place of beauty. Lastly, Zion's place is shown through heavenly shots that are present throughout the film. Their purpose is to remind the audience of the divine nature of the island and to provide reassurance that the righteous will be rewarded for living their beliefs.

The Films' Shared Themes

The two films, regardless of their unique strategies and arguments, retain several similarities that provide insight into the rhetoric of Mormon spirituality. These overlapping themes include: living the spiritual life, defeating evil, death as spiritual life, and filmic actuality as spirituality.

I. Living the Spiritual Life

Both films present methods of enacting spirituality, not merely as a onetime occurrence, but as a life-altering and continual progression towards spiritual perfection. Several rhetorical motifs validate this characteristic of progression within the films, the first of which is spiritual improvement. As mentioned above, *God's Army* details the decisions and consequences that lead to spiritual ascension. The characters of Dalton, Allen, Banks, Benny, and Fronk all fight for their desire to continually improve, and, therefore, they do not succumb to the denigrating influences of temptation, doubt, fear, or weakness. Allen's journey is particularly poignant, as he acts as proxy for the audience, imperfectly stumbling through the initial footsteps of his spiritual

journey, ultimately overcoming his doubts, and transforming into a powerful and successful missionary. *The Other Side of Heaven* also focuses extensively on characters and their journeys to spiritual improvement. John, Jean, Finau, the minister, Kelepi, Tomasi, Lavania, and others all experience spiritual growth and progression to one extent or another. According to these films, Mormon spirituality is not a state, but a movement; it is a consistent desire and effort for something better.

The films also attempt to validate the spiritual lives of Mormon audiences. Not every challenge is created equal, and often there are characters who are unreliable in their spiritual strength. They are imperfect, but, unlike Kinegar, their imperfection lies in unintentional mistakes, not willful rebellion. Characters such as Banks, Fronk, and Dalton in *God's Army* and John, Jean, and Feki in *The Other Side of Heaven*, act as means for validating the experiences of those who live according to the specific brand of spirituality that the films espouse. In other words, these characters embody a way of telling the audience "you are doing it right."

Another pattern that contributes to the rhetorical element of living the spiritual life is the concepts of individual and communal spirituality. As mentioned very briefly above, *God's Army* is much more individualistic in its portrayal of spirituality compared to *The Other Side of Heaven*'s communal approach. According to *God's Army*, spiritual ascension only occurs if the individual decides to face their struggles alone and unfettered by the distracting presence of others. This ascension is particularly evident in the prayer scene, when Allen finds his own faith amid his doubts. On the other hand, John's and other characters' progression in *The Other Side of Heaven* seems undoubtedly connected to other people and their willingness to help each other along the path of righteous spirituality. The very fact that the majority of the film's action takes place on a single island, where everybody is seemingly involved with each other's lives

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(especially during the scenes of survival after the hurricane), contributes to this notion of communal spirituality. In other words, according to this film, you cannot achieve spiritual progression by yourself.

As mentioned in the analysis of *The Other Side of Heaven*, the notion of living in the "world" while avoiding its evil is very prominent among LDS teachings. Living the spiritual life is merely an attempt to follow that teaching by separating oneself from worldly influences. According to these films, as well as LDS culture, there is no lifestyle more separated from the world's evil than being a missionary. These films exalt the missionary life to the position of the ultimate spiritual existence. While other characters live their lives, care for their families, and labor in their jobs, the missionaries in both of these films are entirely dedicated to the very concept of spirituality. They simultaneously fight for their own spiritual progression, while attempting to aid others. If anything, the very fact that these films portray missionaries instead of regular (albeit LDS) people is a rhetorical act to demonstrate what a dedicated spiritual life looks like. These missionaries' stories are ideals towards which the audience can look as motivation to live even stronger spiritual lives. These missionaries do not have jobs; they do not actively pursue romantic relationships; and they do not participate in hobbies or other diversions. Whether such an existence only exists in fiction does not negate the fact that LDS people in the audience believe that such an existence is possible, and non-LDS people must decide to suspend their disbelief in order to understand the films' narratives.

II. Defeating Evil

Second, both films present methods for defeating evil. The approaches are markedly different between the films, and examining these differences allows for understanding divergent views of the nature of evil and the means to its eradication. The technique employed by *God's*

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Army is the "destruction" of evil individuals, while *The Other Side of Heaven*'s is "changing" evil from within the individual. In *God's Army*, Kinegar becomes a symbol for rebellion, angst, and contention. As discussed in my analysis of the film, Kinegar represents evil, while Dalton symbolizes good. The character of Banks, however, also acts as a force for good in the film. Throughout the narrative, there are three clashes that occur between Kinegar and either Banks or Dalton. Near the beginning of the film, Banks accuses Kinegar of wasting his time and energy, as well as engaging in inappropriate behavior, by reading anti-Mormon literature. Banks goes so far as to state that it is "bad as pornography." This confrontation does not escalate further, but, when a similar accusation is made by Dalton at a café, Kinegar fights back. This escalates to the point of Kinegar leaving the group for a few minutes. The last confrontation is both verbal and physical. Dalton pins Kinegar to the wall of the bus station, thus overcoming Kinegar and allowing the film to make a definitive point about the nature of good versus evil. In *God's Army*, evil is something to be destroyed by those who stand on the side of God. This stance on evil involves direct action by those who feel a desire to eradicate it. For example, if a strip club opens down the street, do you avoid entering into it or do you start a petition to have it removed? The latter of the two choices is reminiscent of the aggressive stance towards evil that the film espouses.

 The Other Side of Heaven takes a much more liberal approach to evil by teaching that there is evil inside of each of us, and we need help in order to change. Through this approach, evil is not destroyed, but instead is changed, transformed, or converted into good. As explained in the analysis, several characters embody this type of change. Tomasi changes from an alcoholic and a bully into a force for good and a leader among the LDS people on the island. Lavania changes from a seducer to a mother and a person in a loving relationship with her husband. The

minister converts from enemy to savior. These characters, however, were not able to make these changes on their own. Throughout Tomasi's changes, Feki and John are consistently there to aid him, counsel him, support him, and even wash him. Lavania requires John to teach her about the nature of "true" or "eternal" love, which leads her to desire a marriage relationship and a family. The minister only changes upon undergoing the deep duress of starvation after the hurricane. According to this film, change is not an individual act, but requires external forces. This aligns very closely with the film's overall tendency to promote communal spirituality over individual spirituality.

These films, although they approach defeating evil through different paradigms, are remarkably similar in that they both agree that evil exists and that it must be defeated. The means or methods of defeat might differ--*God's Army* taking a more conservative or aggressive standpoint and *The Other Side of Heaven* aligning itself with a more liberal or relaxed approach-- but the overall message remains the same. Evil, according to these films, is a force that needs to be both recognized and eradicated. Both films present methods for defeating evil and encouraging the audience to follow suit. They argue that spirituality is often dependent on an individual's or a community's ability to overcome evil and further strive for good.

III. Death as Spiritual Life

Third, the films' depictions of death promote sacrifice in the name of spirituality, which ultimately benefits the individual. In other words, as we sacrifice our lives, either in terms of our time or literally dying, we exalt ourselves in the eyes of God. Both *God's Army* and *The Other Side of Heaven* include two examples of this concept.[6] In *God's Army*, the only physical death occurs at the end of the film, when Dalton's cancer causes him to pass away in his sleep. The film frames Dalton's death not as a tragedy, but as an example to the other characters in the film

and to the audience. Having nearly died earlier in the film, this occurrence was expected by Dalton, as well as by other characters. When the missionaries escort the coffin from the aircraft hangar to a plane, we see the coffin consumed in the bright light of the midday sun. Dalton's legacy lives on, as we see the faces of those left behind, looking hopefully towards the hangar door, apparently eager to be able to secure the same fate by giving everything for their beliefs.

The film, however, does not claim that Dalton's was the only life that was given. When the character of President Beecroft says a few words before the coffin is carried away, he does so with the weight of the film's entire meaning within his monologue. His character must explain, in succinct terms, not only what Dalton's death means to the characters, but also what the entire film is about. In this monologue, he explains how the missionaries give their lives by sacrificing their time and their civilian lives by serving missions. Through obedience, hard work, following the missionary schedule, and performing the duties of a missionary, these young people are performing a sacrifice just as significant as Dalton's. The monologue serves to encourage the audience to be willing to sacrifice everything for their faith, an act that is supposedly tantamount to giving their lives. As framed by the film, this is the ultimate act of spirituality. There is nothing more a person is able to give as a gift back to their God besides their life.

The Other Side of Heaven directly addresses death and its relationship to spirituality at least two times during the narrative. It argues that death is not an end, but a necessary step towards much greater spirituality. For example, Finau, a young man that John and Feki are teaching, cuts his foot in the bay while catching fish. These leads to an infection, and he soon shows symptoms of lockjaw. When John offers to give him a blessing, the minister refuses to let him. Finau gradually succumbs to death, and John bitterly and vocally cries in mourning. Before he dies, Finau describes seeing a light and John tells him to follow the light. His description of

the light can be understood as Finau accepting spiritual ascension. This is not, however, the end of Finau's character. When Finau dies, he leaves behind a pearl that John had given him during their lesson about faith. John retains this pearl for the rest of the film. When John is dying of starvation after the hurricane, he looks up to see Finau's face, surrounded by a halo of sunlight. Finau smiles and urges John to head towards the light, thus harkening back to when John gave Finau that same counsel. Finau's face is replaced by the minister's, and the minister gives lifesaving food to John. Finau, therefore, is not a lost cause or a tragedy, but has gained in his spirituality and perfection through death. His angel-like appearance to John signifies Finau's spiritual authority and progression.

The film closely positions Finau and the minister with good causes. Not only is the minister present at Finau's death, but when Finau appears to John, his face is quickly replaced by the actual arrival of the minister. The minister gives John a clam on which he can survive starvation. The minister eventually dies, thus giving his life for John's. The minister's sacrifice is preceded by an apology for the evil he had perpetrated against John and Feki, and the film portrays the minister's funeral in an honorable way. In this case, the minister follows the same path as Finau by dying, and by doing so, he attains much greater spirituality than he could ever achieve in mortality.

Death is a significant theme in both of the films, and their portrayals of death suggest a need to be willing to sacrifice everything for the cause of righteousness. Death is the world's necessary change agent, and in these movies, death begets change. The films, therefore, do not portray death as a tragedy or even a necessary evil, but as a spiritually exalting experience that frees us from the evil of the world. Death allows a degree of spiritual progression that can only

be achieved after this life. Essentially, the films frame death as a positive and necessary experience.

IV. Filmic Actuality as Spirituality

Perhaps one of the most poignant films about spirituality is Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). As quoted in the epigraph, the protagonist, Antonius Block, questions why God must remain silent and invisible, instead of revealing physical evidence of His existence to the faithful. The films in this analysis attempt to respond to that concern by cinematically materializing spirituality. They do this in order to possibly reassure and motivate audiences, especially LDS audiences, to continue living spiritually and religiously oriented lives. The banality of existence, full of pain, boredom, and existential angst may be ameliorated through the reassurance that the daily decisions and sacrifices for living spiritual lives are not in vain. These films show a lifetime's worth of grand spiritual experiences, great miracles, and beautiful teaching moments, all compacted into a feature-length film that is easily understood, consumed, and shared with others.

Because of the engrossing nature of film, the audience may live through these moments of magnificent spirituality by proxy of the main characters. By so doing, they might feel reassured as to why they are living the way they are living, and may continue to cope with a life engulfed with much more subtle spiritual experiences. Films are capable of accomplishing much more than just diversion, and the spiritual nature of these particular films opens the potential for very powerful rhetorical forces to be enacted. Much like my parents, who suggested that my brother and I watch *God's Army* in order to encourage us to decide to serve missions, these films, and others like them, are means of not only *understanding* spirituality, but *experiencing* spirituality. The strategy of getting viewers to experience spirituality creates a situation that has

the potential to be persuasive. While a documentary may teach someone to live a certain way, a spiritually oriented film--especially one that already aligns closely with that person's closely held beliefs--is a gateway for living and consuming spirituality. *God's Army* and *The Other Side of Heaven* simultaneously portray spirituality, as well as attempt to provide a spiritual experience to the audience.

The Films' Potential for Rhetorical Effectiveness

As mentioned in the introduction, both filmmakers intended the films to be rhetorical. Regardless of those motivations, the rhetorical design of the films can be evaluated for their implied efficacy, be it intentional or unintentional. Dutcher desired his film to be primarily targeted at Mormon audiences, while Davis felt a need to focus his film on non-Mormon audiences without alienating LDS viewers. The specific rhetorical strategies found in the films, along with their overlapping themes, suggest that both directors constructed rhetorical texts that were well designed to enact their avowed persuasive purposes. Essentially, the films' rhetorical structures, arguments, and styles are aimed at potentially reinforcing beliefs for Mormon audiences and inviting non-Mormons to think more positively about LDS doctrines.

God's Army presents an argument for why LDS people should work through their challenges, such as doubt, loneliness, disease, or disagreement, in order to progress towards spiritual ascension. This method is well-adapted for Mormon audiences inasmuch as it is cushioned within the cultural symbols and norms of their culture. Dutcher does not explain the intricacies of characters' behaviors, but LDS audiences may recognize and interpret the film through the lens of their own beliefs and cultural familiarity. At the same time, it invites non-Mormon audiences to experience or "see" an ostensibly candid view of Mormon beliefs in action, thus allowing a newfound familiarity with Mormonism to perhaps offer more positive

feelings about LDS beliefs. *The Other Side of Heaven*, on the other hand, continually winks at Mormon audiences, but mostly attempts to reach a much broader viewership. Unlike *God's Army*, it avoids ultra-specific cultural references so that non-Mormon audiences can understand and enjoy the film as an individual narrative outside of Mormon culture. Neither film estranges Mormon or non-Mormon audiences, but each film primarily targets one or the other.

The overlapping themes above also contribute to the films' potential effectiveness. The shared focus on living a spiritual life invites audiences to reevaluate their faith and their priorities in order to more diligently live according to their beliefs, be they Mormon or non-Mormon. The concept of defeating evil suggests that evil exists and must be either destroyed, as argued in *God's Army*, or changed, as suggested in *The Other Side of Heaven*. This argument is constructed effectively inasmuch as each film identifies evil in a way that is easy to understand, and the solutions they propose seem possible to implement. The notion of death as a means to spiritual life works to inspire hope, a feeling that can be shared by LDS and non-LDS people alike. Lastly, the films portray spirituality in a way that presents an "experience" to the audience. This experience may provide an impetus to change, a desire to continue living a certain way, or a better understanding of LDS beliefs for those not familiar with them.

Implications of the Analysis

This study raises the undeniable burden of supplying an answer to the omnipresent question of "so what?" In answer to that question, I now address three implications of my analysis: spirituality in film, spirituality as rhetoric, and how this analysis may apply to both the academy and the Mormon community. The films in this particular investigation are explicitly spiritual in nature, but are scholars capable of examining spiritual themes in films that are not explicitly spiritual? In other words, while an LDS audience may approach films such as *God's*

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Army and *The Other Side of Heaven* with a degree of expectation regarding their own spiritual involvement with the narrative, characters, and themes, do other types of films provide similar spiritual involvement without the need for audience expectations for spirituality? Swenson discussed this principle when she argued that LDS people can critically engage media such as film with a spiritual dimension, and therefore find uplifting messages and spiritual edification in films that may agree with the Mormon belief system (248). She came to this conclusion when she found herself using themes in *Finding Nemo* (2003) in order to lift her mood and encourage diligence in her beliefs during times of discouragement. Kenneth Burke makes a similar argument when he calls literature, or, as I argue, all fictional art forms, "equipment for living" (Burke 293). Such an application is not entirely expected by most audiences, but she implies that films without explicitly spiritual themes may still be interpreted spiritually. In other words, viewers may extract spiritual lessons according to their beliefs by purposefully expecting and looking for spirituality.

Other, perhaps less family-friendly, films might be examined for spiritual themes or have spiritual implications for audience members. As a personal example, the 1978 made-for-TV film *Les Miserables* with Anthony Perkins as Javert was a common centerpiece for spiritual discussions in my home when I was growing up. The story not only taught determination to remain righteous among great discouragement and to be patient when undergoing life's afflictions, but the performances also taught spiritual themes. My parents often mentioned Anthony Perkin's performance of Javert, a police officer and the film's primary antagonist, as a reason not to judge other people for their seemingly poor decisions because their motivations may be as pure as our own. Another, less personal, example is *The Matrix* (1999). While winking at, and perhaps parodying, traditional notions of Judeo-Christian spirituality, *The Matrix* could

be interpreted as a moving spiritual story. The audience may follow the protagonist, Neo, as he ascends from the banality of the everyday through an apotheosis, thus spiritually progressing by sacrificing for the good of the community. This reading of the film's spiritual themes may be particularly well-suited for Mormon audiences. For instance, near the middle of the film, Neo visits the Oracle to learn of his fate. While such a belief is common in many forms of spirituality, very few religions still enact such a practice today. In LDS beliefs and customs, any young person or adult who is deemed sufficiently spiritually mature may visit what Mormons call a patriarch to receive a special spoken blessing which includes personal guidance for the rest of their lives (Wagstaff).

While these examples relate to Mormonism, other rhetoricians may find their ability to provide meaningful insight about an artifact through the lens of their personal and cultural experiences. This is especially the case when investigating something as nuanced and private as spiritual themes in film. I argue that scholars may engage film vis-à-vis their own spiritual beliefs in order to draw out meaningful insights. Such analyses may reveal how large segments of the population read films, and it may allow scholars and others access into those modes of communication. Analyses of this nature may also contribute to the continued legitimation of spiritual films within the academy, as well as the greater public. As we continue to understand religious and spiritual lenses of communication, we also provide additional tools to understand how and why we communicate.

The second implication is how spirituality, when communicated, transforms into rhetoric. If spirituality is an aim or a goal--such as in LDS conceptions of spirituality--then it is also a motivation to change and a means of persuasion. Both films present ideals for spirituality. Individuals' lives may be framed as spiritual ideals, such as with the characters of Dalton or

Banks in *God's Army* or John, Jean, or Feki in *The Other Side of Heaven*. The film itself may present an idealized emotional existence, such as the rapturous emotions felt when viewing the landscape of the island in *The Other Side of Heaven*. It may also set a standard of dedication or belief in order to achieve miraculous outcomes. These examples, plus many other strategies of spiritually engaging an audience, can reward the audience for living a particular type of spiritual life.

Spirituality acts as rhetoric on two fronts. First, it has the capability to reassure an audience that the lives they are already living are not only praiseworthy, but are also sufficient to bring them the type of salvation their beliefs offer. By offering moments of validation, an audience may further strive to live according to their beliefs. One example is the missionary film *The Errand of Angels*. While not the most stunning display of cinematic dexterity, there is a sense of genuineness that permeates the film that invites moments of deep emotion and contemplation. The quiet strength emulated by the main character suggests a feeling of calm reassurance, and it denotes the need not to drastically change behaviors, but to continue on with a hope for a brighter future. Another missionary film example is *The R.M.* (which stands for "return missionary," or someone who has finished their mission and has returned home). The protagonist undergoes several disheartening events after returning home from his mission, including losing his job, his girlfriend, and his car. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, he decides to make the best out of the situation, and he is rewarded for his diligence and positive attitude. He finds a girlfriend and a job. The film plays off of the experiences of other returned missionaries who can empathize with the protagonist. It reassures those returned missionaries that if they continue living as they are living now, with faith and a positive outlook, they too will be rewarded.

Second, spirituality as represented through media has the potential to create dissatisfaction with those who feel as if they are not living up to their own beliefs. This is only possible if the viewer espouses the beliefs being presented by the film. Experiencing the beauty of seeing the character of Lavania holding a baby, while her husband serenades her in the back of their house may be invigorating and reassuring to those with young families (hence the first mode of spirituality as rhetoric that I discussed), but it may also create guilt for those who had previously negated such a lifestyle, or anger on the part of those who do not desire to be parents or spouses. In LDS beliefs, getting married and starting a family is not only encouraged, but it is taught as a commandment from God, not to be put off or ignored (Kimball). Viewing that scene may inspire negative emotions for waiting to get married or not pursuing romantic relationships as seriously as others. Another example is the character of Dalton and his mastery of scriptural knowledge in *God's Army*. In LDS teachings, personal scripture study is a commandment, and scriptural knowledge is highly valued and encouraged (Bednar). This may validate those who diligently study LDS scriptures every day, and thus further encourage them to continue this practice, but it may also create dissatisfaction for those who feel that they should follow that practice, but have not been as dedicated as they would want to be. Spirituality as rhetoric has the potential to be both inspire positive behavior, but also stir some negative feelings that might be off-putting for some viewers.

Third, these findings may be applicable to both secular scholars, as well as those in the Mormon community. In terms of the academy, the growing population of Mormons, as well as the emerging presence of Mormonism in politics, media, and other areas of cultural expression, deserves further explorations in communication and rhetorical studies. Comprehending this cultural group's communication merits consideration, along the lines of the scholarship

concerning the GLBT community, the Black community, or women's studies, among many other examples. Church membership continues to increase at consistently high levels, usually at a rate of more than double the world population growth rate. This is a community that is increasing its presence in the lives of many individuals worldwide, and their communication deserves consideration and investigation. With a community greater in number than the population of Missouri, the LDS community in the United States comprises a distinctive culture that merits further study. Discussions about the nature of Mormonism continue to permeate television, newspapers, and other fields of discourse. The Mormon culture includes unique life expectations, behaviors, ideologies, symbols, and vocabulary. Unlike many other cultural groups or even religions, the LDS Church is focused on proselyting and bringing new members into the organization. This provides many public, oftentimes media-centered, opportunities to understand the nature and implications of Mormon communication.

The implications of this analysis to LDS people are primarily focused on the role of media in their lives. Namely, Mormons can approach media, particularly film, for more than just entertainment or proselyting. LDS films allow Mormons an opportunity to examine themselves and their beliefs. For example, a person may ask questions such as: do these beliefs reflect my own? Do they reflect the teachings of the LDS Church? What does this reveal about LDS beliefs? What are these films idealizing, and what are they neglecting? Questions such as these inspired portions of this analysis, especially when discovering the overlapping themes of the films. Anytime a film is produced by, for, and about members of a culture, it can be analyzed as a possible concrete manifestation of seemingly ambiguous and difficult concepts.

Mormon cinema allows LDS people to express themselves to themselves, thus turning an entertaining film, or even a good film, into a culturally important film. It contributes to creating

community, and it opens a medium of expressing concerns to people who will understand and empathize with those concerns. It articulates the complexity of Mormons' lives and provides an opportunity to work through problems related to belief, spirituality, and culture. For example, *God's Army* is an excellent example of a film addressing the difficult challenge of doubt. It treats doubt not as a disease to be avoided at all cost, but a necessary step to gaining belief and faith. Several main characters confronted doubt and overcame it, without ignoring its consequences or nature. Other similar challenging concepts that these films address are death, repentance, and faith, each notion rife with contradictions and nuanced complexity. Belief is far from clear-cut and stain-free, and these films open a door towards discussing spirituality in a public space.

In closing, spiritual films have the potential to be sermonic. A sermon teaches, motivates, and ultimately shows, through embodiment of the person giving the sermon, how to live the ideal spiritual life. These films act as experiential sermons. They are the total embodiment of a sermon, allowing the audience to live in another world for ninety minutes. As such, they are rhetorical. We can ask questions such as what is the ideal being presented, how is that ideal communicated, and how do these teachings relate to conceptions of spirituality in other belief systems or religions? I argue throughout my analysis that *God's Army* and *The Other Side of Heaven* promote specific spiritual ideals in hopes of reassuring Mormon audiences of their beliefs, while simultaneously promoting Mormon thought to non-LDS audiences.

This study attempts to instigate discussions of how people use their own spirituality as a lens for viewing, consuming, and sharing mass media. This not only relates to film, but also television, literature, music, and even interactive electronic entertainment, or video games. As we further investigate the communicative nature of spirituality, these insights may be used not only for understanding communication, but also for increasing awareness of how spirituality

influences many complex issues. As a final thought, perhaps the reason *The Seventh Seal* remains such a fundamental and widely revered film is that it tackled seemingly universal questions about why and how people believe in spirituality. Antonius is keenly mindful of his own fears and doubts. He feels the existence of God, but he cannot easily explain or justify those feelings. Regardless of their difficulty, he struggles to communicate them anyway. This is the nature of spiritual films. They struggle to put into visual and symbolic terms the nearly inexpressible issues of faith, existence, and belief.

ENDNOTES

1. I utilize the word "proselyte" throughout this analysis instead of the more commonly used "proselytize." I purposely chose to use this wording out of respect for the LDS community who use the term "proselyte" to describe missionary efforts.

2. For a more comprehensive discussion about this topic, see Terryl L. Givens' comprehensive book *People of Paradox*: *A History of Mormon Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

3. "Elder" is a title used by male LDS missionaries while serving missions; "Sister" is the title used by female missionaries.

4. "I'm Trying to Be like Jesus" is a popular children's hymn in the LDS Church.

5. Even though the film depicts the island as Zion, the fact that John, as a missionary, inhabits it reinforces the notion that Zion's people are continually attempting to further align their lives with gospel teachings.

6. The moments in *God's Army* and *The Other Side of Heaven* where death is avoided, such as Dalton's hospitalization or when John heals the young boy, seem to focus much less on death but more on the dangers of mortality, as well as God's power to protect and heal.

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