Religion, film and youth: a qualitative study of the use of film in meaning-making and religious expression by the young people of St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church

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Thesis Title:

Religion, Film and Youth: A Qualitative Study of the Use of Film in Meaning-Making and Religious Expression by the Young People of St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church

Submitted for PhD Examination
This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD. degree of King's College, University of London, in the Department of Education and Professional Studies, March 2007.

I certify that the present work is original, that all material in this thesis that is not my own work has been identified and that no material has been submitted for which a degree has already been conferred upon me.

Signed,

John S. Gabig
Abstract

This is a major in-depth qualitative study of congregational use of film. The use of film by the young people of St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church, New Martinton, Pennsylvania, signals a convergence of the practice of religion and the practice of cultural consumption. What this thesis shows is that these religious young people are avid film viewers and that film functions in religion-like ways in their lives. Film operates primarily as implicit ordinary religion offering a means by which they orient themselves in the world and in a limited way as extraordinary religion, in that much of the film-watching documented herein, took place in the context of their traditional religious community. For these young people, film is a significant resource for implicit theological themes, role models and vernacular by which they orient themselves in the world and express religious meanings and values. However, although much of their film viewing takes place in the context of their traditional religious community, when assessed in the light of the Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888, which has been affirmed repeatedly as a core doctrine of the Episcopal Church USA for more than 120 years, their traditional religious practice is not explicitly traditional Christianity in its theological underpinnings. Furthermore the data suggests that the leadership of the parish and in particular those working amongst the youth, offered the young people little help for making explicit connections between their implicit theologies found in popular culture and the explicit theologies in traditional Anglican/Episcopal Christianity. As a result, amongst the many potential implications that can be drawn from this study, the research calls for greater intentionality on the part of those who engage in religious work with young people, to educate and equip youth to think critically about the power of popular culture and to dialogue with their religious tradition by cultivating a "critical reflexive spirituality".
Religion, Film and Youth: A Qualitative Study of the Use of Film in Meaning-Making and Religious Expression by the Young People of St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church

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Introduction

Although much has been written in the area of religion and film during the past three decades, there has been relatively little empirical work done on audience use of film for religious purposes. Early studies in religion and film focused on the role of the director. Later studies involved more content analysis examining biblical and theological themes represented in movies. Only recently has research turned to consider audience use of film for religious purposes, much of which has been theoretical or autobiographical. Amidst this turn, two brief empirical studies have appeared in recent years. Rendelman (2002, pp 91-99) offers a study based on a single focus group of an evangelical audience's reactions to sexuality as represented in the film *The Rapture* (Tolkin, 1991). Deacy (2005, pp 106-132) offers a study of audience responses to *The Passion of the Christ* (Gibson, 2004) based upon on-line reviews by film critics, chat-rooms dialogue and web logs, highlighting the disparity in audience reception between those who loved the film and those who hated it.

These are very important contributions to theology and film studies, however each respectively focuses solely on audience responses to one film in one particular moment. Therefore in view of the lack of an extended study of the use of a variety of films by a religious community over an extended period of time, in this thesis I offer a more in-depth report and analysis on the use of film in the religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church, New Martinton, Pennsylvania, USA. I conducted qualitative research in this congregation using multiple qualitative

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4 Rendelman himself was one of five participants in the focus group. Four of the five participants were ministry professionals, not lay persons.
methodologies over the course of two years. This congregational study, as far as I am aware, is the first to investigate this aspect of congregational life.

The research began with the intent of considering the role of popular culture in the religious lives of these young people. After collecting sorting and analysing a substantial corpus of data, it became apparent that film played an important role in this religious community. In my time in the parish I observed the use of film in the congregation as a communal practice in which members often gathered to watch films together, both as leisure practice in movie watching itself and as performative leisure in the re-appropriation of film quotes for comic relief in their everyday dialogue. I also observed that films serve as a set of resources for discourse in the everyday vernacular of the parish, as role models for everyday life and for use in religious expression. In short, the young people of St. Quaratus' drew upon film as a meaningful resource in the everyday vernacular of their communal life in a congregation.

This thesis is about the convergence of religion and popular culture and in particular religion and popular film, which were once considered to be independent and often times adversarial.\(^5\) This convergence has not come about because film and religion have somehow decided to show respect and offer support to one another. Rather it has come about because of the everyday choices of people who draw upon them as sets of resources for everyday living. In this convergence, both are influential but neither holds the sole authority to determine meaning and practice. Rather, the individuals in whom the authority resides increasingly make these determinations. The thesis also shows that the determinations that these young people make, favour implicit

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\(^5\) Johnston (2000) gives a brief history of the tensions between the institutions of religion and film in the USA (pp 31-39).
theologies drawn from popular culture over explicit theologies of traditional Anglican/Episcopal Christianity.

When *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939) was released, it caused a firestorm in America over Rhett Butler’s scandalous words: “Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.” In this instance, religious institutions were at war with the film industry. The Catholic Legion of Decency and the Episcopal Committee on Film for example, condemned the film because it dealt with the subject of divorce. This was the fruit of worldviews that were shaped in the pew before going to the movie theatre, making sense of the movies by the values formed in the pew. Today, when young people come to church or most any religious setting in Western society, they come with a worldview informed by popular culture and movies. Increasingly people orient themselves in the world, making sense of their lives by values formed in popular culture. This doesn’t simply mean that society has become more secularized and the church has lost its powerful influence, although there is some evidence of this. There is evidence at the same time that real religious content and experience are at work in contemporary popular culture. Perhaps the most obvious example is the enormous success of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Some in Hollywood have argued that the days of biblical movies had long passed (Wall, 1970). Gibson’s work demonstrated that this is not so. However, it is interesting to note that the *Passion of the Christ*, which espouses very traditional pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology, was engaging people in theological dialogue and religious practice outside the church. This is but one instance in which religion and film converge. On the other hand, what this thesis shows is that these youth inside a traditional religious community were regularly engaging in the practice of cultural consumption of film without engaging in

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6 See Christianson, Francis and Telford (2005, pp 311-330)
explicit Christian theological dialogue. This is quite a different example in which religion and film converge.

In my personal life and professional experience in ministry,\(^7\) I have seen a convergence of religion and media in that film has served as a significant resource for religious content and practice. It is out of my own life experiences that this present research comes forth. Before discussing the progression of this thesis and the layout of its chapters, I shall first share a bit about its origins.

The influence of film in my religious understanding and practices has deep roots. During the course of the past twenty-two years, I have worked with young people both inside and outside the church. I was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church in the USA in 1995. Across the years of working with young people, I began to notice that when I asked questions about their faith and practices many have responded with quotes from popular culture from music and films. I used to think that in talking about their faith, they quoted the movies and the music and not Scripture or Christian tradition simply because they knew the movies and the music and not Scripture or Christian tradition. The response then on my part seemed simple; I believed I needed to teach them the Scriptures and Christian tradition. I have done that. I still do. Nonetheless, they still quote the movies and the music.

As a minister, this has influenced the ways in which I engage young people and my methods for helping them to engage with God by using popular culture and

\(^7\) In her discussion of the role of locating oneself in the research methodology, Gray writes, “autobiography is... concerned to draw upon our own experience as a resource but also in thinking more analytically about how that can find its place within our epistemological projects.” (2003, p. 114) Johnson et al. (2004) describe this as one end of the “auto/ethno continuum”. They contend, “When we start on a project of cultural research, our first resource is our own lived relationship with our topic area. Where we chose to work on topics close to home, an explicit dialogue can begin between past experiences and new knowledge.” (2004, p. 206) I shall discuss this more in Chapter 2.
dialoguing with Christian tradition. In 1999, we began an experimental form of worship service called *Digital House of God* at the church where I worked on a university campus. *Digital House of God* offered a style of worship that has come to be known as "alternative worship." It had an eclectic and exciting mix of ancient and modern elements. The youth created, organized, and led these services themselves; I saw my role as a facilitator, mentor, and teacher. The services took place in the neo-gothic nave of the large church in the city. The Sunday evening services were dimly lit with candles and subdued lighting. Digital images of contemporary popular culture along with slides of ancient Christian art were projected onto the walls. The music too was a mix of contemporary popular tunes and hip-hop liturgical music written by the youth themselves. We drew upon texts from the *Book of Common Prayer* to guide our prayers and contemporary films to open our eyes to current themes, concepts, and images at play in contemporary culture.

In preparation for these services, it was our custom to gather for discussion and planning by asking a series of questions to frame the conversation and to guide decisions on structuring the worship. We would ask, "What comes to mind when you hear this theme? What examples can you give from everyday life? What does Christian tradition say about the theme? What does it speak to the theme? What do we believe we need to say? How shall we represent it?"

In one particular instance, I recall sitting with a group of twelve young people planning for the next week's service, the theme of which was "pain". As we began our series of questions asking, "What comes to mind when you hear this theme?" one young man immediately responded, "Fight Club!" He then began to recount a scene from the movie in which Tyler Durden (played by actor Brad Pitt) pours acid on the

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8 For more see Baker et al. (2003), Guest (2002), Lynch (2003, pp 42-48).
hand of his alter ego, the Narrator of the movie (played by Ed Norton), saying, “Stay with the pain. Don’t shut this out... This is your pain. This is your burning hand, right here!” (1999, DVD, 102:28-44). The young person went on to explain that to him this meant that we should not hide from our pain and brokenness, nor try to numb it, but to own it, trusting that God will help us and that in our weakness God shows himself strong.9 The conversation turned into a curious mix of Bible study and film exegesis, in which everyone present seemed quite well versed in both. As a result, the group decided that this particular film clip should be used in the service the following week. Reflections on ministerial scenarios such as this one led me to think on my own childhood and the use of popular culture and religious practice. All my life I have been a fan of film. From some of my earliest memories, I recall that my friends and I would save our pennies to spend at the movies on weekends. Throughout the long winter months, I had a preset rendezvous on Sunday afternoons at 3 p.m. at the local cinema. With a bag of popcorn, a large soda, a chocolate bar and another world to explore from the safety of our theatre seats, life was an adventure. Reflecting upon my early practices of movie viewing, I remember the powerful impact of popular films on my faith and religious practices. At age ten my Godmother took me with a number of cousins to the drive-in theatre to see Fiddler on the Roof (Jewison, 1971). It became a particular favourite of mine for its intriguing combination of humour and faith in the midst of dire life circumstances. The film begins in a land that looks quite different from that of my upbringing in the USA. Standing on a dirt road in the middle of a peasant village, the lead character Tevye (played by the actor Topol) playfully addresses the audience, saying,

A fiddler on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But here, in our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to

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9 References to Romans 8:26 and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.
scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy. You may ask, 'Why do we stay up there if it's so dangerous?' Well, we stay because Anatevka is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: tradition! (2:05-3:02)

The first ten minutes segment of the film is a prologue, giving all sorts of background information about the setting of the film and the life of a peasant Jew in the Ukraine in the early 1900s. Tevye goes on to explain his perspective on life: "Because of our tradition everyone of us knows who God is, and what He expects of us." (4:35-45) Without our tradition, our lives would be as shaky as... a fiddler on the roof." (9:22-9:34) This is a movie that I have watched repeatedly over the course of my life. As a youth, I became so familiar with it that I was able to make reference to particular scenes and to quote comic lines.

Although I couldn't articulate it at the time, in retrospect, I was deeply moved by and even angry at the horror and injustice of the pogroms and the threat of war. In their attempt to "scratch out a pleasant simple tune," without breaking their necks, life seemed so difficult. At the same I recall a strange sense of comfort in the way this poor man in such dire circumstances was able to maintain a sense of steadiness by his faith. What impressed me the most about Tevye was his piety. Amidst everything he encountered he had an on-going conversation with God about his everyday life, about things large and small. His sense of the presence of God was so earthy, so playful, and so everyday that I wanted to emulate it. He even joked with God over his disappointments. Listing several of these, he laments that he has only daughters and no sons to carry on the family name. Tevye quips, "I'm not complaining, after all, with your help, I'm starving to death!" (42:04-07)

I find a strong sense of irony at play in the film. Tevye insists that tradition is what helps him keep balance. At the same time his tradition was crumbling all about him. Each of his daughters breaks tradition in their choice of spouses. One even marries a
non-Jew. Ultimately, Tevye is forced to leave his land, his home and country because of his being Jewish. At a young age, it became apparent to me that it wasn’t his tradition that kept his life stable but his relationship with his God. As a result, I wanted to be like him. In the years since first seeing the film I continue to reflect back on its initial impact. I can see the way that my own spirituality has taken on some of the qualities I admired in Tevye. As a result, I have sought to cultivate the discipline of what Brother Lawrence calls “practicing the presence of God” (Lawrence, 1982). It is also a discipline that, as a minister of the Gospel, I want to encourage in others.

Another film that influenced my religious life as a youth was clearly more religious in content yet by no means “churchy”. I recall on a Good Friday at age twelve choosing to go to see Jesus Christ Superstar (Jewison, 1973) rather than going to normal Holy Week services. The film brought certain aspects of the Gospel alive for me. For most of my life I have believed in the divinity of Christ as the Son of God. I was struck, however, by seeing a Jesus who was so human. He wasn’t stoic about his life and death. He had doubts. He brooded. He was moody with his friends, who did not seem to understand Him or what he was trying to do. I thought to myself, “I could relate to that guy.” In Jesus Christ Superstar, I began to see Jesus not only as the Son of God, but also that he was fully human – perhaps even like me, a moody pre-teen.

In the years since my childhood, I continue to enjoy the film and reflect on its powerful representation of the humanity of Jesus. I have come to disagree with some of the theological implications of the representation of Jesus’ humanity in the film. The treatment of the Last Supper shows a meal filled with regret and anguish. Jesus says to his disciples, “For all you care this bread could be my body. For all you care this wine could be my blood. The end, this is my blood you drink, this is my body you eat, if you would remember me when you eat and drink.” (55:05-56:06)
Considering Jesus' humanity, I imagine the meal was filled with regret and anguish, in view of his pending death. The representation of Jesus in the film however, lacks the sense of the sacramentality of the institution of the Holy Eucharist in the way I imagine it to have been. Nonetheless the film still draws into tension the divinity and the humanity of Jesus, which is important to my understanding of Christian faith, a convergence of Heaven and Earth in the person of Christ.

It is out of ruminations on these latent experiences that this present research comes forth.

The thesis begins with background theories on contemporary religious practice in America in Chapter 1, out of which the research questions emerged. Because of evidence in my observations and data collection on the significant use of film by the youth of St. Quaratus', in Chapter 2, I offer a survey of the body of literature in the area of theology and film theory. In this chapter I consider theoretical resources that are helpful for understanding observations of the use of film for religious practice by these young people. In particular, I pay close attention to the methodologies used by a variety of theorists in theology and film. These theories provide helpful tools for understanding the use of film as a resource for religious practice. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research process by which I was able to elicit the data for the study. In it I survey the qualitative research methodologies used in the project, blending Swinton's and Mowat's (2006) methodology in practical theology with Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman-Davis, 1997) and aspects drawn from congregational studies (Hopewell, 1987). In Chapter 4, I offer a portrait of the youth of St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church, New Martinton, Pennsylvania, and some preliminary analyses of the use of popular culture in their religious community. Here I begin to show that film was a significant vernacular resource for meaning-making and expression in the
religious practices of these young people by offering a series of snapshots of the common life. In Chapter 5, I offer some an analysis on the use of film by the youth of St. Quaratus', theological reflection and conclusions, demonstrating that film is a significant resource for cultivating community, for recreation, and as a vernacular resource for performative leisure, meaning-making, and religious expression. In this chapter I discuss a variety of films and their use by the youth of St. Quaratus', noting however that the bulk of the use of film by the young people of this religious community is for implicit rather than explicit theological purposes. The data suggests that the young people rarely link their frequent popular culture references to traditional Christian religion. Nonetheless, in conducting this research and engaging in reflection, I discovered some surprising and transformative uses of film in the making of a movie as a gift for their departing priest by drawing upon popular film clips. Theology and film theories did not provide tools for understanding this phenomenon. In response, I draw upon theories from cultural studies about textual poaching to aid in explaining the surprising use of film by the youth of St. Quaratus'. As a result I argue that the phenomenon of the making of the film as a gift for their priest demonstrates a convergence of religion and film and in particular a convergence of the democratization of religion and the democratization of media. Finally, I offer some broad observations with respect to the theological underpinnings of the religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus'. I note that the data shows that they most often operate in ordinary religion drawing upon stories, language and symbols of popular culture to express meanings and values of their everyday lives, rather than the stories, language and symbols of their extraordinary religion of their Episcopal tradition as spelt out in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Ultimately, I draw upon recent the research of Christian Smith to argue that the theological underpinning of the religious
practices of these youth is rooted in “therapeutic moralistic deism” which Smith insists is the most commonly practiced religion of American teens. In the Epilogue, I highlight some of the implications of this for religion in contemporary American society, recommending that the practice of cultural consumption and in particular popular film are the starting point for understanding the religious practices of young people. I also call for church youth workers to cultivate in their young people a “critical reflexive spirituality” in which they are encouraged to think critically about popular culture and to dialogue intentionally with Christian tradition. I end by making suggestions of areas in which further research ought to be conducted.
Chapter 1 - The Shifting Theories of Religion in America

Introduction

In the Introduction to this thesis I pointed out that this chapter is one of three chapters surveying literature relevant to this project. In order to examine the role of film in the religious practices of the youth of St. Quarutus', I shall establish in this chapter some of the dialogue partners for this thesis. I begin by locating the research in the broader context of contemporary American culture, examining how social scientists look at changing religious practices of Americans. I consider a shift in the study of what constitutes religiosity by examining four characteristics of this shift. I then establish a working definition of religion underlying the assumptions of this project. Lastly, I locate this research amongst these dialogue partners within the broader scope of the study of religious practices of Americans by establishing the research site and discussing the research questions.

A Shift in What Constitutes American Religiosity

During the course of the past three decades theorists have studied the changing attitudes and patterns of religious practice in America, noting a shift towards a broadening of religiosity that extends beyond the boundaries of conventional religion, affecting religious practices both inside and outside conventional religion. What many of these theorists show is that America's religious practices have increasingly adapted to a consumer-orientated religiosity, where the onus of authority lies on the individual. They also point out the important role of the media in the practice of religion as people increasingly draw upon resources from mass mediated popular culture for meaning-making, morals and identity formation. This means that in

10 In discussing religion in this study, I focus primarily on Christian religion, however the same cultural affects will also have a bearing on other religious traditions. In using the term America I refer to the USA.
contemporary American culture (as in the West at large) there has been a convergence of religion and media wherein each affects the other. The study of this shift, leading to a convergence of media and religion, is what drives this project.

In this section I consider four characteristics of this shift: co-existence theory (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000), a democratization of religion, the religious-like qualities of cultural consumption, and a convergence of media and religion. Co-existence theory (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000) holds that strains of secularization and sacralization are taking place at the same time (Hammond, 1985; Martin, 2005; Woodhead & Heelas, 2000). The democratization of religion highlights a shift in the locus of authority from religious institutions to individuals because of an increasing emphasis on personal spirituality or inner experiential religion over institution or outer traditional religion (Bellah, 1985, Brooks, 2000, Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Lyon 2000; Roof and McKinney 1987; Roof, 1992, 1999). The third characteristic highlights the religious-like qualities of cultural consumption (Bauman, 1992,1998; 11 I have chosen to use the term “democratization of religion” to express authority exercised by the people in determining religious meaning and practice, rather than the term “laicization,” which has some similar characteristics. Both allude to a societal and cultural shift of authority from clericalism to the laity. However, the term laicization is often discussed in regard to the separation of Church and State specifically with respect to the role of religion in a welfare state, viz. education, health care and relief for the poor. These were formerly seen as the responsibility of religious organizations. Additionally, the term laicization often carries with it a sense of hostility towards religion, particularly state controlled religion, which historically experienced the protection of the state while also serving to justify matters of state politics, as was the case in the European philosophy of the “divine right of kings”. A prime example of this type of laicization can be found in the separation of Church and State in France by whose constitution is called a “Republique laique”. Under the term “democratization”, religion does not concern itself with the above-mentioned roles but rather with personal authority to regulate religious meaning and practice. Additionally, it does not experience the same sense of state regulated hostility towards religion but rather is relegated to an irrelevant status by the culture. For more see Karel Dobbelare’s discussion of secularization and the welfare state in “Secularization: A multi-Dimensional Concept” in Current Sociology, Vol. 29, (1981) pp 3-213. Jean Baübrot’s Histoire de la Laïcité en France (History of Laicism in France), (2003) and Lyon (2000, pp 29-31).
Gardella, 1998; Lyon, 2000; Percy, 2001, 2005; Ward, 2002, 2005), which now functions like religion by meeting people's felt-needs. Some theorists even claim that the need for religion has in fact been replaced\(^{12}\) by these consumptive practices. The fourth shift is a convergence of media and religion (Hoover 1997, 2002, 2006). In this shift the media affect religious practices and reciprocally religious content is increasingly found in the media. These four characteristics of the shift of religious practices in America will help in understanding the important role of film in the processes of meaning-making and religious expression by the youth and community of St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church.

*First Characteristic: The Emergence of Co-existence Theory*

The first characteristic of the shift in what constitutes religiosity is seen in discussions surrounding secularization theory. In its earliest development, secularization theory was held by social scientists to a be uni-linear or one-directional process in which people's everyday lives were considered to be changing from being religiously oriented to increasingly secular (Hammond, 1995). Recent research increasingly sees secularization theory as having much more complex processes (Lyon, 1987; 2000; Warner, 1993). Some theorists even argue that as strains of secularisation continue, sacralization or growth of religion takes place simultaneously in new contexts (Martin, 1990; 2005, Woodhead and Heelas, 2000). In this section I shall survey some of the theories on secularization in order to consider the ways in which they are changing. I shall then discuss some of the recent theoretical developments, which attempt to explain the complexities.

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\(^{12}\) Earlier social scientific works of Marx (1964, 2002), Durkheim (1995) and Weber (1946, 2001) argued that religion would eventually become irrelevant and would be replaced. Bauman and Gardella argue that this has now in fact taken place.
Giddens notes that secularization theory originated in the works of Marx, Durkheim and Weber. In fact, he holds that “Sociological approaches to the study of religion are still strongly influenced by these three ‘classical’ sociological theorists.” (Giddens, 1989, p.457) Giddens argues, “Traditional religion was becoming more and more marginal to the modern world” and therefore, losing its influence over the various spheres of social life. (Giddens, 1989, p. 470) Describing the emergence of the social sciences, Barbara Hargrave writes,

The Enlightenment was a movement in which everyone seemed convinced that the scientific method was the wave of the future. No longer shackled to old ideologies and theologies, scientists could look at things objectively, fairly and report on what was really going on in society, it was believed. (Hargrave, 1989, p. 2)

Consequently, the assumption of secularization became the dominant theoretical view of religion in the modern world for most of the 20th century. Hammond claims that in the 20th century, it had become the “conventional wisdom of the social scientific study of religious change” 13 (1985, p. 1). Berger’s early work was emblematic of this strain of thinking on “classic” secularisation theory (Warner, 1993, p. 1045, 2001, Woodhead, Heelas and Martin14, pp 1, 87). In The Sacred Canopy (1967) Berger argues that the purpose of religion is to construct a sacred cosmos, a protective and transcendent “sacred canopy” which gives society a unified sense of the nature of reality, thereby protecting humanity from chaos (1967, p. 26). Berger’s thesis is that modern industrial progress and the democratic separation of Church and State destabilize common faith and lead inevitably to pluralism (1967, p. 129). The lack of an ecclesiastical monopoly protected by the State leads to the tearing apart of the

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13 Hammond argues however that although much of this thesis is true, a uni-linear theory is still inadequate to explain religious change. (1985, p. 1)

14 Woodhead, Heelas and Martin hold Berger to be one of the most influential social scientists in secularization theory. They have collected and edited an entire volume of essays by the some of the most noted contemporary sociologists of religion. For more see Peter Berger and the Study of Religion, Woodhead, Heelas and Martin (2001).
coherence of the cosmic sacred canopy.\footnote{Two years later in *A Rumor of Angels* (1969), Berger recanted his earlier insistence on the inevitability of secularisation, making a case for the need for religion. He argues that in religion we find “signals of transcendance" from beyond society’s time and place. He writes “The principal moral benefit of religion is that it permits a confrontation with the age in which one lives, in a perspective that transcends the age and thus puts it into perspective” (1969, p. 121). Even today Berger is a prominent opponent of the theories of which he was the foremost theorist. See: The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics: Berger et al. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1999.} In short, Berger’s thesis posits that increasing pluralism in modern society destabilizes common faith and leads inevitably\footnote{Theorists offer some evidence that secularizing social trends have taken place in American Society. Wuthnow notes the increased role of governments in society that prior to World War II, higher education, hospitals, and social welfare for the poor, handicapped, and elderly were provided by religious institutions. He argues, “Today, most people look to government to fulfil these functions” (1988, p. 17). Bellah’s research reveals the increased use of therapeutic rather than religious discourse in discussion of identity. According to Bellah, therapy in America, has become “a way of thinking rather than a way of curing a psychic disorder” (1985, p. 113). Lyon argues, “People have learned to look to other sources of insight and knowledge than ‘revelation’ in order to give meaning an direction to life.” (1987, p.1) Later he adds, “society has become increasingly rationalized, meaning more crudely that people turn more readily to technique than to prayer or providence to cope or organize life” (1987, p. 22).} to secularization in which religion “comes to be dominated by the logic of market economics” (Berger, 1967, p. 137).

Finke and Stark argue that Berger’s earlier work represents an older “European” paradigm of sociology of religion based on a religious monopoly sanctioned by the State (1992, p. 19). On the one hand, they do not negate the strong influence of secularisation in Europe. To the contrary, they write, “There is ample evidence that in societies with putative monopoly faiths, religious indifference, not piety, is rife” (1992, p. 19). However, they argue this is not the case in contemporary America.\footnote{Finke & Stark based their research on historical records of religious membership, broken down by denomination and region (1992, p. 6).} Their research indicates that religious adherence has consistently risen since the founding of the nation. They document that in 1776, only 17% of the population of the United States were members of a church. However, they claim that by 1980 the
number of religious adherents had grown consistently to 62% of the population (1992, p. 16). These statistics appeared only one decade after Berger lamented the inevitability of secularization. In direct opposition to Berger’s thesis, the primary emphasis of Finke and Stark’s work is that American’s increased participation in religion is facilitated precisely by a free-market religious economy based upon the clear separation of church and state in America. This, they argue, has produced a competitive climate amongst various denominations and religions rather than to weaken religion as Berger suggested. They write,

Where many faiths function within a religious economy, a high degree of specialization as well as competition occurs. From this follows that many independent religious bodies will together be able to attract a much larger proportion of a population than can be the case when only one or very few firms have free access (1992, p.20).

Warner also argues that conventional religion continues to thrive in America because of what he calls an “open market system” allowing for deregulation and competition in a religious economy (1993, p. 1050). In the light of this “open market” Warner argues for a new paradigm for the sociological study of religion:

The emerging paradigm begins with the theoretical reflection on a fact of U.S. history highly inconvenient to secularization theory: the proportion of the population enrolled in churches grew hugely throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, which, by any measure, were times of rapid modernization (1993, pp.1048-49).

For Warner, however, this new paradigm is not defined as much by economic imagery as by the idea of disestablishment18 (1993, p. 1053). Disestablishment allows religion to be highly malleable and structurally adaptable to American culture (1993, p. 1064). This in turn allows for greater response to the needs of religious consumers. Warner argues that because of the lack of a religious monopoly, “American religious

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18 That is, in the separation of church and state no single religious organization was given special rights or protection. According to Warner, this created a “sink or swim” situation leading to religious mobilization and adaptability (Warner, 1993, p. 1051).
institutions respond to both consumer demands and supplier initiatives" (1993, p. 1067). For Warner this new paradigm recognizes new forms of religion, which would not be recognized as such under the former paradigm of sociology of religion (1993, p. 1068). These new forms may not conform to the previously recognizable structures of conventional religion. Warner gives examples of some changes in conventional religion and religious practices such as the roles of women, the development of parachurch movements (1993, p. 1065) and the professionalization of Islamic clerics (1993, p. 1067). All of these examples would likely not take place amongst adherents of the same faith in other parts of the world since other cultures may not embrace the sense of free market economy and consequent adaptability in quite the same ways that these theorists claim America has.

In discussing these seemingly contradictory theories, Woodhead and Heelas offer a four-fold typology of competing secularization theories. This typology categorizes the various religious theories, showing the ways in which these theories are changing to meet a new paradigm and new practices. Their first category of secularization theory is “disappearance theory”, the classic secularization theory discussed above, which is espoused by Berger’s earlier work (2000, p. 307). The second is “differentiation theory”, which asserts that religion does not disappear. Rather, it is pushed from the social domain but still remains somewhat important in private life (2000, p. 307). Third, “de-intensification theory” holds that religion continues in a weakened and insubstantial form, serving as a consumer product for those who wish to partake (2000, p. 307). Fourth, Woodhead and Heelas offer “co-existence theory”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{19} Co-existence theory is one of the primary emphases of this volume by Woodhead and Heelas. They maintain that there are more complex processes at work in society than “unilinear” versions of secularization theory can explain. Although the concept is drawn largely from the work of David Martin (1990) on the explosive growth of
asserting that strains of secularization are at work in particular circumstances whilst at the same time religious growth and vitality are taking place in new forms and in different contexts (2000, p. 308). Growth of religious vitality is a process known as sacralization.

Examples of sacralization can be seen in the growth of a variety of religious practices inside and outside of traditional religion. These include: the New Age movement (Heelas, 1996); alternative spiritualities (Hunt, 2003, Partridge, 2005); 12 Step and recovery groups (Roof, 1999; Wuthnow, 1988); new religious movements and sects such as the Baha’i faith, the Unification Church, and The Latter Day Saints (Hunt, 2003); the growth of Evangelicalism (Finke and Starke, 1992); and Fundamentalism (Wuthnow 1993, p.9). Roof and McKinney note that such growth is occurring while at the same time American mainline liberal denominations have

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Pentecostalism in Latin America, Woodhead and Heelas have given the theory this name.

20 Heelas (1996) offers a sociological account of the growth of New Age spirituality and thinking by means of case studies and discussions of its various manifestations.

21 In his work on the Baby Boomer generation, *Spiritual Marketplace*, Roof surveys and interviews by telephone with more than 1000 people. His findings show that one in four Americans surveyed claims to be part of a small group that is therapeutic in nature (1999, p.39).

22 Wuthnow (1988) dedicates Chapter 6 to the role of a variety of special purpose groups in the restructuring American religion based upon survey and archival empirical data (1988, p. x).

23 Hunt charts the numerical growth of millions of adherents of new syncretic religions based on more traditional world religions (2003).

24 By charting historic membership data, Finke and Starke argue for the continuous growth of America religion since the founding of the nation. Their findings show significant growth in Christian evangelical faith in the USA during the past century. The primary thesis of their work is that the success of religion in America is based on principles of free market economy (1992).

experienced a significant decline in numbers and in social influence since the 1960's (1987).

Woodhead's and Heelas' theory allows for conflicting theories to co-exist, such as the observations of theorists such as Hammond (1985) Giddens (1989) and the early work of Berger (1967), acknowledging the competing influence of pluralization and scientific worldviews with traditional religious worldviews in western society, whilst acknowledging the patterns of growth and adaptability of religion per Starke and Finke (1993) and Warner (1993). Woodhead and Heelas point out that new forms of religious practice in new contexts emerge when older religious traditions fail to meet basic anthropological needs of a society (2000, p. 432).

In Chapter 5, I shall argue that one such new form of religious practice in a different context can be seen in the use of film for the purposes of meaning-making and religious expression by the youth and community of St. Quaratus'. In order to develop a broader understanding of the phenomenon of sacralization, in the next section I shall discuss the second characteristic of what constitutes religiosity, a democratization of religion, in which the onus of authority to determine meaning and religious practices shifts from religious institutions to individuals, both inside and outside of conventional religion.

Second Characteristic: Democratization of Religion – Personal Religious Authority

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26 One such example of co-existence theory is given by Martin in Tongues of Fire (1990), in which he documents the growth of Pentecostalism in the Latin American context as secularisation continues in the European context. Another example is seen in Hadden (1995), which is based upon Warner's argument for a new paradigm of sociology of religion for America. In this article, Hadden responds to the narrow focus of Warner's argument for a new paradigm in the sociological study of religion in America by applying Warner's theory to look at religion on a global scale. Hadden argues that significant growth is occurring globally based upon "open market economy" in the following movements: Global Fundamentalism, Nationalist Movements, Liberation Theology Movements, Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements, and Religious Movements in Post-Communist Societies.
A second characteristic in the shift in religiosity in America that has taken place in recent decades is the increasing role of spirituality in the lives of Americans. Many theorists such as Bellah (1985), Brookes (2000), Heelas (1996), Heelas and Woodhead (2000, 2005), Partridge (2004), Roof (1993, 1999), and Wuthnow (1998) note increased emphasis on and importance of spirituality over traditional forms of religion in identity formation, moral decision-making, and everyday practices. In this section I shall further explore co-existence theory, which asserts that secularisation and sacralization are operative in modern society. I shall first consider theories, which assert that the role of traditional religion in American culture is in fact decreasing, whilst other theories contend that at the same time America has seen a growing trend towards spirituality of individuals shaped and informed by religious symbols in the media outside the control of conventional religion. I shall then consider theories about how this shift has taken place and its impact on the "democratization of religion" in contemporary America.

Contrary to Stark and Finke's assertion that participation in forms of traditional religion in America has continuously increased since the founding of the country, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) contend that a "decline of the congregational domain in the USA\textsuperscript{27} is taking place at a faster rate than is often thought" (2005, p.60). They maintain that polls show that traditional religious practice amongst Americans actually peaked at 49\% of the population in regular attendance at worship during the post World War II era of the 1950's. They argue that the percentage of the population in regular attendance at worship decreased to 40\% in the 1970's, where it remained steady until further decline in the 1990's (2005, p.56). Hadaway, Marler, and Chaves

\textsuperscript{27} The subject of this study focuses largely religious practices in the UK as research was conducted at Kendal in the Lake District of Northern England. They make comparisons however between the practice of religion in the UK and America.
(1993) published a report in the *American Sociological Review* claiming that church attendance in the USA was actually considerably lower than the 40% claim indicated in polls at that time. They estimate that actual attendance was probably closer to about one half that amount. Hadaway, Marler and Chaves argue that the discrepancy is because numbers derived from polls are based upon people's perceptions of participation rather than actual body count in churches (1993). Roof and McKinney emphasise the particular decline in American mainline institutions – Protestants, Catholics and Jews – who were once held to be the group "embodying the American way of life" (1987, p. 21). Since the 1960's there has been considerable decline in membership as well as in attendance (1987, pp 16-18). Nonetheless, even if the claims of Stark and Finke hold true that participation in forms of traditional religion in America has continuously increased to the present, Heelas and Woodhead contend that co-existence theory is at work in Western society (including America) in that the influence of traditional denominational structure is being overridden by the growing influence of spirituality. Heelas and Woodhead argue,

>The declining influence of religion – particularly Christianity – in western societies has been a chief topic of the study of religion for over a century, but in recent years the emergence of something called 'spirituality' has – increasingly – demanded attention. Survey after survey shows that increasing numbers of people now prefer to call themselves 'spiritual' rather than 'religious'... Even a cursory glance around a local bookshop or a stroll around the shopping centre leaves little doubt that Christianity has a new competitor in the 'spiritual marketplace' (2005, p. 1).

Woodhead and Heelas argue that holistic religion or "spiritualities of life" are growing and attracting even the previously non-religious (2000, p. 431).

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28 Roof and McKinney highlight increasing pluralism in American religion, noting the growth of conservative Protestantism as well as growth of "foreign" faiths such as, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam (1987, pp 15-24).
By means of empirical evidence drawn from two decades of research, Roof's work seeks to ground both of these theories: first, that traditional or mainline religion in America has declined in influence and membership since the 1960's (Roof and McKinney, 1987) and, second, that there is growing emphasis on spirituality amongst the Baby Boomer generation (1993, 1999). In *A Generation of Seekers* (1993), Roof argues that the Baby Boomers experienced a shift of religious emphasis from the outward institutional forms of religious practice to the inner spiritual aspects of religion. He contends that various cultural factors of the 1960's, viz. social upheaval, affluence, a gender revolution, education and expanding media, availed a disillusionment amongst Baby Boomers in the institutional church because it was seen as feeble, spiritually and theologically impoverished, and irrelevant to meet the needs of the day (1993, pp 54-55). Roof claims this disillusionment led to a significant decrease in religious participation. He writes,

Clearly something happened to alter the generation's ties with religious institutions. The fact is that religious involvement of boomers changed drastically, and in a relatively short period of time - from when they were children to their early adult years. Nine out of ten people in our survey reported attending religious services weekly when they were eight to ten years old... But by their early twenties slightly more than one fourth were involved to the same extent; the great majority had dropped out altogether or if still attending did so irregularly (Roof, 1993, p. 55).

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29 Roof's research is based upon four methods: general surveys of 2,620 random households nationwide; follow-up surveys by telephone with 563 boomers; 64 in-depth interviews; and 14 group interviews with four to five participants (1993, pp 265-268).

30 Roof cites that Baby Boomers are the post-World War II generation born between 1946-1964 (1993, p. 1).

31 According to Roof, religion has two major components, *spirit* - "the inner, experiential aspect of religion" and *institution* - "the outer established form of religion" (1993, p. 30).

32 That is, cultural factors such as the Cold War with Russia; the murder of several political leaders, such as Pres. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King; riots; the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam (see 1993, pp 37-42).
According to Roof, this “dropping out” of traditional religion made room for new spiritual experiences outside as well as inside traditional religious contexts. He writes,

Jolted out of the established faiths, many turned inward in search of basic answers to life. The so-called ‘new religions’ flourished in the later years of the decade… There was a blossoming of the spirit in a thousand forms – everything from astrology to Zen – simply known as ‘alternative religions’. Later in the 1970’s, there was an evangelical and fundamentalist resurgence. Youth turned to ‘born again' faiths in surprisingly large numbers. No longer defining themselves through the conventional religious labels they had inherited, they turned inward to their own spiritual explorations (Roof, 1993, p. 59).

Roof notes that Baby Boomers make up nearly one-third of the American population (1993, p.2). Therefore the significance of this shift of emphasis towards spirituality affects not only the Boomers but also the religious practices of generations following them. He argues, “American culture as a whole could be profoundly affected in the years ahead” (1993, p.6).

Nearly a decade later, Roof returned to the same group and many of the same participants to continue to map the spiritual landscape of American Baby Boomers (1999). In his second study of this demographic group, Spiritual Marketplace, Roof points out that statistics on American religiosity had not changed dramatically in decades; however, he noted that the subtle “soft undercurrents” of everyday lived religion, and its meaning in the lives of Boomers, had, in fact, changed. Although his findings reveal that for the majority of Boomers, the congregation remains the dominant religious form (1999, p. 298), he found that one-fifth of “born-again” believers included in his study claim they do not relate to any congregation but choose instead a small informal sharing group outside of traditional religious structures. Additionally, he reports that 14% of those involved in this second study on the Baby Boomer generation, can be described as “metaphysical seekers and believers... rejecting religious identity but affirming a spiritual one” (1999, pp 203-4).
In short, Roof’s findings assert that the religious landscape of America was redefined in the 1960’s by the decline of mainline religion and the growth of emphasis on spirituality. He maintains that this occurred amongst those who dropped out of conventional religion altogether in pursuit of alternative religious experience, as well as amongst those who returned to traditional religion, having been changed by their spiritual quest, and looking for a different spiritual experience of traditional religion in Pentecostal and “Born Again” churches rather than older mainline denominations. Bellah contends that spiritual exploration of that era was facilitated by Americans’ participation in what he calls “the cultural sphere” (1985, p. 227). He argues that the separation of church and state established in the American Constitution relegated religion, which was originally an aspect of the public sphere, to the private sphere (1985, p. 220). Bellah proposes that in addition to the generally accepted split between public and private spheres of religion, a “third or cultural sphere” deeply informed and influenced Americans’ religious values and practices (1985, p.227). Bellah explains that the “cultural sphere” is made up of educational, social and political action organizations, as well as media stars of electronic churches. This sphere is part of public life at a level beyond mere traditional denominational structures. He holds that participation in this sphere has had a profound influence on their involvement in the other spheres, both public and private. In other words, participation in the cultural sphere has influenced both the private and public religious practices of Americans. Bellah contends that because of participation in the cultural

33 In his landmark study on American individualism, Habits of the Heart (1985), Robert Bellah and his team researched various aspects of public and private life in America by means of surveys and interviews of hundreds of participants in order to make a cultural analysis of American life (1985, p. vii), “to know what resources Americans have for making sense of their lives” (1985, p. ix).
34 Although the emphasis of Bellah’s study was on American individualism, the same could be said of much of the West regarding this issue.
sphere, many Americans who are not connected with any conventional religious practice or community in the public sphere are independently religious in that they still consider themselves religious in the private sphere. He holds that these individuals had developed personal mystical belief systems that identify the divine with the higher self. They believe that their highest aspiration is "self realization" (1985, p. 234). This means that in Bellah's view, in America, the locus of authority to define the meaning of religion has largely shifted from the institution to the individual and that the highest goal of religious participation has become in self-fulfilment.

In his study of the growth of the New Age Movement, Heelas calls this increasing free form of individualistic spirituality a "celebration of the self" (1996). He claims that "New Age" religion is the spirituality for our times in that it sacralizes the values of modernity by emphasising the autonomy and authority of the individual. Lyon (2000) maintains that the authority of the self, in conjunction with media consumption, has led to the "deregulation" of religion through the abundance of free floating religious symbols in the media. He argues,

"The relative decline of conventional religious organizations in advanced societies has been accompanied by the growth of various kinds of religious association of the 'parachurch kind' that express the increasing individualism of contemporary religious activities and quests, and at the same time do so in a more specialized manner than was typical of traditional churches. This means that religiously significant symbols are available in what is in effect a single marketplace, dominated by the cultural commodification practices of the media industries. At the same time, that marketplace is extremely deregulated, so that signs circulate freely, and personal choice rather than traditional authority determines how they are appropriated (Lyon, 2000, p. 56)."

Lyon holds that this deregulation means that religious symbols have been uncoupled from traditional meanings previously established and controlled by conventional religious institutions.

35 Bellah argues that this type of mysticism is so rooted in individualism that it allows each person to develop his or her personal own sect, such as the example of Sheila Larson who named her faith "Sheilaism" (1985, pp 221, 235).
The result, Partridge argues, is that there currently is a “re-enchantment”\textsuperscript{36} of the West underway by means of the growth of alternative spiritualities informed and disseminated by popular culture (2004, p. 119). The free consumption of religious symbols at play in the cultural sphere has led to a democratization of religion that allows individuals the autonomy and authority to define religion and religious practices for themselves. For Heelas, the contemporary emphasis on the self in everyday life means that how people define religion as well as religious practices has grown “beyond what takes place in churches and chapels” (in Woodhead and Heelas, 2000, p. 451). In view of the increasing emphasis on alternative spiritualities in which religion is being reshaped and relocated, Partridge contends that religion ought be redefined simply as “spirituality” (2004, p. 59).

In short, these theorists assert that the increasing emphasis on spirituality has reshaped the landscape of American religion. This has taken place both by means of deregulation of institutional control over meaning and practices as well as an increased consumption of religious symbols in mass mediated popular culture. This has led to a democratization of religion deferring the regulation of meaning and practice to the authority of the individual. I shall argue later in Chapter 5 that this characteristic of contemporary religiosity in America has facilitated the phenomenon of the use of popular film in the processes of meaning-making and religious expression by the youth of St. Quaratus’. In the next section I shall further consider

\textsuperscript{36} A turn of phrase based upon the work of Max Weber who lamented the loss of awe, mystery, and magic in western society, calling it ‘dis-enchantment’ because of the advance of scientific enquiry, which sought to explain how the world functions. Weber writes, "The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'", using a phrase drawn from the work of Freidrich Schiller (\textit{Science as a Vocation}, From \textit{Max Weber: Essays in Sociology}. Translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. Routledge, London, 1948 p. 155).
the ways in which cultural consumption influences the practice of contemporary religion.

Third Characteristic: The Religious-like Qualities of Cultural Consumption

The third characteristic of the shift in what constitutes American religiosity is found in theories calling attention to the religious-like qualities of cultural consumption. Bauman (1998) and Gardella (1998) respectively argue that consumptive practices are competing with conventional religious practices. Each holds that cultural consumption challenges conventional religion as the means by which people in contemporary society frame their lives and find resources for meaning-making. In this section I shall discuss their arguments, which will shed more light on the religious-like experiences of young people of St. Quaratus' in their consumption of popular culture, specifically film.

Bauman maintains that there is no sacred realm of “ultimate” reality. There is only the experience of those engaged in consumptive practices. He sees religion as merely a human construct. For Bauman, consumption in the post-modern era is the secular replacement for conventional religion, which now orders and gives meaning to everyday life. Bauman argues that consumption is the contemporary participation in what once would have been understood as the sacred, through the cultivation of “peak-experiences” (1998, p. 70) that are uncoupled from religion. These “peak-experiences” offer consumers “this worldly transcendence” (1998, p. 69) promising “life before death” (1998, p.67) rather than after. For Bauman “this worldly transcendence” is the antithesis of religion. He argues that transcendence was once considered the privilege of a selected few (saints, monks, ascetics), supposedly

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37 In an earlier work, Bauman argues that consumption is the “cognitive and moral focus of life, the integrative bond of society...” (Life in Fragments, 1995, p. 49). For Bauman the meaning of life in the postmodern era is found in consumptive practice, much like Geertz’s (1973) argument that meaning is found in symbolic ritual practice.
granted by grace and unmerited favour. However according to Bauman, in the postmodern era, within this worldly transcendence is,

within every individual’s reach, recast as a realistic target and a plausible prospect of each individual’s self-training, and relocated as the product of a life devoted to the art of consumer self-indulgence (1998, p. 70).

Bauman argues that the aim and selling point of most consumer goods (foods, drinks, cars, cosmetics, and holiday packages) is total sensual intensity and experience. What is required of the consumer is training of one’s mind, body and soul, to make all the right choices and so be “fit to receive the full impact of overwhelming sensation” (1998, p. 71). For Bauman, this allows the individual to fulfil one’s human potential in consumption; therefore there is now no longer a need for religion. He argues that this is the function of ‘self-improvement’ movements, promising the development of human potential through exercise, contemplation, breaking psychic blocks, cleansing hidden injuries, and the like. These movements, which he considers the fruit of the ‘counselling boom, function like religious organizations but their aim is the “training of ‘perfect consumers’ ... which the life of consumer/chooser demands” (1998, pp 71-72).

Gardella takes a similar stance to Bauman’s in arguing that the role of institutional religion is now no longer necessary, but he goes one step further than Bauman in actually referring to it as religion or “domestic religion” (1998, p. 1). Gardella argues that consumer values serve functionally as religion, in a Durkheimian sense, providing ultimate meaning and in uniting society into unified moral community. This

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38 Bauman argues that the only true religion in the postmodern era is Fundamentalism, which frees consumers from the “tyranny of choice”. Bauman refers to the adherents of fundamental religion as “the poor of today”. They are ‘flawed consumers’ for they are “unable to take advantage of the treasures displayed tantalizingly within their reach” (1998, p. 73).
is similar to what Berger described as the *Sacred Canopy*\textsuperscript{39} (1967). In Gardella’s case however, the unifying factor is the consumption itself, not the sense of the ultimate reality of a sacred cosmos. According to Gardella, domestic religion is comprised of beliefs and values of everyday life that form “a system of non-rational commitments that hold life together”\textsuperscript{40} (1998, p. 2). He points out that complex systems of beliefs and values govern our behaviour in relation to cultural artefacts such as food, success, drugs, sex, and entertainment. In Gardella’s view, most of these have come to hold spiritual significance in American culture (1998, p. 2). To give an example of this, he discusses the role of food\textsuperscript{41} in contemporary American culture. He argues that amongst any group of middle aged and middle class adults dining in a restaurant, there will likely be several people who are watching their diet closely. Within such a group one might find any combination of the following: a person who counts calories, one monitoring cholesterol, one who is vegetarian, another who refrains from eating sugar, whilst another closely watches sodium intake. Gardella posits that each person is quite principled in their moral choices about foods and each is deliberate in the exercise and discipline of their diet (1998, p. 3). This is one example of the religious-like qualities of consumptive practices by which people frame their lives. In this sense the exercise of the discipline of proper diet functions as a way by which people’s lives are framed, giving hope of good health, longevity, and the good life, all without any mention of the supernatural. In Gardella’s view, domestic religion may differ in appearance from the conventional but it functions similarly to all other

\textsuperscript{39} Berger’s discussion centred on conventional monopolistic religion which commanded societal respect. However, Domestic Religion is a deregulated form of consumer oriented religion, and one could argue that the same dynamic is at work through consumption of popular culture.

\textsuperscript{40} The commitments of domestic religion are considered non-rational, not because they are without reason but because they precede reason.

\textsuperscript{41} For more on the sociology of food see Beardsworth and Keil, *Sociology on the Menu* (1996).
religions in that it serves as a social coagulant in the Durkheimian sense of religion, binding people of many backgrounds in the midst of American pluralism by the common role of consumption.

The arguments of both Bauman and Gardella in this particular instance are based almost exclusively upon the theories of other social scientists. Much of what they describe are metaphorical definitions of religion based upon second and third generation theories. Although their works contain important and illuminating observations about consumer culture in America, their observations lack grounding in empirical data drawn from everyday life experiences. Nonetheless, similar strains of the emphasis on consumption and on the experience and authority of the consumer can be seen in the empirical works of others theorists. Roof, for example, describes the spiritual climate of the Baby Boomer Generation in America as a "Spiritual Marketplace" (1999). Although the theories of Bauman and Gardella presented here lack empirical grounding, their observations on consumption and consumer culture can ill-afford to be ignored because of the profound influence of these practices on contemporary American society.

As mentioned above, both Bauman and Gardella see the practice of cultural consumption as rivalling or replacing conventional religious practices. Other cultural theorists would not entirely concur with these more extreme positions but would point out that religion has much to learn from contemporary practices of cultural consumption. Lyon, for example, argues that in post-modern consumer culture,

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42 In others too such as: Brooks’ work on BoBos (2000) in which he argues BoBos-The BO-hemian and BO-urgeiosis - now engender a spiritual “flexidoxy”, a hybrid faith of flexibility and freedom with an impulse towards orthodoxy, grounded in tangible reality, rules and rationality (2000, p. 226) and as previously mentioned Bellah’s description of “Sheila-ism” (1985, pp 221, 235).
people find their identity more in their leisure consumption than by what they produce (2000, p. 77). Percy, in his discussion about Christianity and consumerism, argues,

Consumption is... more about meaning than acquisition; consumerism is more about identity than materialism. Strictly speaking, the threat posed by consumerism is not material versus spiritual. It is rather, a competition between systems of meaning and identification (2005, p. 52).

Similarly, Ward holds out shopping as a meaningful practice. He writes,

To shop is to seek for something beyond ourselves. To reduce this to materialism is to miss the point, or more importantly is to miss an opportunity. For this ‘reaching beyond ourselves’ indicates a spiritual inclination in many of the everyday activities of shopping. Rather than condemn a shopper as materialist... church [should] take shopping as a spiritual exercise (Ward, 2002, p. 59).


[C]onsumerism has become central to the social and cultural life of technologically advanced societies in the later twentieth century. Meaning is sought as a ‘redemptive gospel’ in consumption. Cultural identities are formed through the process of selective consumption (2000, p. 74).

In his work on materialism and conspicuous consumption, Twitchell (1999) argues that the reason people look to consumer culture for meaning is that “[c]onsumption of things and their meanings is how Western young people cope in a world that science has pretty much bled of traditional religious meanings” (1999, p.12). In the lack of other-worldly transcendence, people seek “this worldly transcendence”. The problem in all of this is that an understanding of the nature of religion at this point has become

43 The Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church USA defines a sacrament as “an outward and visible sign of inner and spiritual grace” (1979, p. 867).
44 Thorstein Veblen developed the concept of identity through “conspicuous consumption” in his study, Theory of the Leisure Class (1994).
very broad indeed, even to a point of departure from any connection with the supernatural. Potentially anything may qualify as religion, so long as people find it meaningful. Nonetheless, it is precisely the growing importance and authority of the consumer, religious or otherwise, must be kept in mind in order to understand religion in the present era. This is a significant aspect of the democratization of religion that I discussed in the previous section and which I shall attempt to draw out of the empirical data on the youth of St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church as I consider the role of the consumption of popular film and its use for meaning-making and religious expression.

This emphasis on religious-like practices of cultural consumption outside traditional religion leads to the fourth characteristic of the shift of religiosity in America, a convergence of religion and media.

Fourth Characteristic: A Convergence of Religion and Media

The fourth characteristic of this shift is found in the conversation that has been woven through the last two sections concerning the ways by which many religious needs are met outside traditional religion through consumption of mass mediated popular culture. This is a significant point of convergence between the media and religion.

In the early Twentieth century, sociologist Max Weber lamented the loss of awe, mystery and magic because of the advancement of scientific enquiry, which sought to explain how the world functions. Weber writes, “The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’” (1948, p. 155). Contrary to Weber’s lament, some contemporary theorists claim that the Western world is in fact experiencing a re-
enchantment by means of sacralization through alternative religions\textsuperscript{45} and alternative spiritualities represented in mass mediated popular culture (Hunt, 2003, pp 9-10; Murdock, 1997, Partridge, 2004, p. 39). Murdock contends,

unofficial expressions of religious conviction and belief can be widely reproduced and circulated on videotape and audio cassette\textsuperscript{46}... On the one hand these [developing possibilities] offer a powerful ensemble of new mechanisms for extending the reach of the major religious organizations. On the other, a number also provide channels for grassroots initiatives that bypass official structures (1997, p. 100).

Heelas maintains, “The location of religion ... has changed from church and chapel to the culture at large: something very different from comprehensive secularization” (in Woodhead and Heelas, 2000, p. 431). The consumption of religious symbols in mass mediated popular culture is a form of sacralization\textsuperscript{47}

The media serve as one such site where much contemporary religious practice takes place. Mass-mediated popular culture is pervasive in contemporary society. Most who have lived in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century have grown up steeped in mass-mediated popular culture by means of television, film, billboards, advertisements, jingles, the internet, mobile phones and the like. Theorists\textsuperscript{48} claim that mass-mediated popular culture is perhaps the single most worldview-informing factor in contemporary society because it is so much a part of everyday life. Television (Fiske, 1978, 1987; Lyon 2000) and

\textsuperscript{45} That is, religions and spiritualities, which are alternatives to orthodox Christianity, the dominant religion in the West for the past 1500 years.

\textsuperscript{46} In the light of the expanse of the Internet, I would also include podcasts.

\textsuperscript{47} As a parallel to their fourfold typology of secularization theories listed above, Woodhead and Heelas offer a fourfold typology of sacralization: 1) growth theory (by conversion of individuals), 2) deprivitization (re-enchantment and conversion of the public realm and institutions of politics and labour), 3) intensification theory (increased participation amongst the nominally religious), and, 4) co-existence theory, arguing against a uni-linear theory of sacralization (Woodhead, 2000, p. 429). They cite co-existence theory in their fourfold typologies of both secularization and sacralization theories, arguing that it is taking place in both realms at the same time (2000).

\textsuperscript{48} For more on popular culture as a site for religious engagement, see: Beaudoin, 1998; Dark, 2003; Johnston, 2001; McDannell, 1995; Prothero, 2003; Twitchell, 1996, 1999, 2004; Ward, 1999, 2005
Partridge talks about the role of religion in popular culture as “a resource on which people draw, a reservoir of ideas, beliefs, practices and symbols” (2004, p. 84). Lyon however, notes that not only does popular culture serve as a resource for religious symbols but that the meanings of religious symbols have been “uncoupled” from religious institutions. The result is that there are unregulated “free floating” religious symbols available from the pool of references in mass mediated popular culture (Lyon, 2000). He writes,

This means that religiously significant symbols are available in what is in effect a single marketplace, dominated by cultural commodification practices of media industries. At the same time, the marketplace is extremely deregulated, so that signs circulate freely and personal choice rather than traditional authority determines how they are appropriated (Lyon, 2000, p. 56).

According to Lyon, this means that consumers hold the authority to determine meaning rather than to rely on the traditionally prescribed meanings of religious institutions. This is precisely the fruit of the democratization of religion discussed above. Again, Partridge argues,

Whatever meanings are intended by the producers of popular culture, there is little doubt that people are from their own perspectives, developing religious and metaphysical ideas by themes explored in literature, film and music”(2004, p.121).

This process is what DeCerteau calls textual “poaching,” (1984, p. 166) by which people draw from popular culture and subversively re-appropriate its meaning. I shall
discuss this in more detail in the analyses of the role of the consumption of popular film in the religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus’ in Chapter 5.

In *God in the Details*, (2001). Mazur, McCarthy et al. use a cultural approach in the tradition established by Geertz\(^4\) to explore a variety of ways that religious meaning, which would not necessarily be recognizable to traditional, orthodox institutional religion,\(^5\) is being made manifest in American popular culture, in music, on television and film, in food, in sports and even in Disney products. Mazur and McCarthy write,

> For many Americans it seems “religion” is identified with instructional religion, and it is precisely their resistance to those institutions that makes such things as food, sports, music and film attractive alternative sites for meaning-making (2001, p. 12).

In short, given the prevalence of mass-mediated popular culture and the authority of the consumer, religious meanings, which may vary significantly from what is intended and regulated by conventional religious institutions, are being re-appropriated.

In *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (2004), Lynch cites three functions of religion that popular culture increasingly fulfils: the social/communal function, the existential/hermeneutical function, and the transcendent function (2005, pp 31-32).

Lynch points out that with respect to the consumption of popular culture, the social/communal function can be experienced through sporting events, rave and club cultures, and the like. He argues, “Popular culture may therefore form an alternative

\(^4\) Geertz’s essay “Religion as a Cultural System” (1973) argues for religion as cultural system of symbols, values and meanings. For Geertz, symbols play a double role, both expressing and shaping reality through participation in ritual. Geertz’s work has had a profound effect on social scientific research of religion in the contemporary era.

\(^5\) Mazur and McCarthy discuss religious behaviour to define religion following Geertz’s approach. Artefacts are seen as “set of markers” suggestive of religious meaning by the way they are used. Analyses of this collection of essays are drawn from methods of ethnography, participant observation and cultural theory.
means of religion to being drawn into the values and beliefs of particular communities of experience” (2005, p. 31). Second, the existential/hermeneutical function of popular culture provides resources viz. symbol, myth and ritual by which people make sense of and experience, life (2005, p. 31). The third, the transcendent function,\(^{51}\) provides a medium through which people are able to experience the divine through mass mediated popular culture\(^{52}\) (2005, p. 32) whether re-enforcing traditional religious meanings or allowing for more alternative approaches.

The works of Hoover (1997, 2002, 2006) shed light on the role of the media in the co-existence of secularization/sacralization theories, arguing that there are no longer clear boundaries between religion and the media but a convergence. He maintains that in the past religion and media were perceived as autonomous and independent institutions. He notes however,

> Today, we see that the situation is more complex. A good deal of what goes on in the multiple relationships between religion and the media involves layered interconnections between religious symbols, interests and meanings and the modern media sphere within which much of contemporary culture is made and known (2002, p. 1).

Hoover stresses that both spheres affect the other. Because of mass media, religion has become more public and more commodified. Media, at the same time, are increasingly are the site where spiritual and transcendent ‘projects of the self’ take place. Consequently, he writes, “rather than being autonomous actors involved in institutionalized projects in relation to each other, religion and media are increasingly converging... on a common turf: the everyday world of lived experience.” (2002, p.

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\(^{51}\) Transcendence is a mystical in-breaking revelation from another realm. For more on transcendence see *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolph Otto (1959) and *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade (1987).

\(^{52}\) For more, see Beaudoin (1998) who argues that it is not possible to understand Generation X without analyzing their “meaning-making system” of popular culture consumption and Johnston (2000), who sees film as a means of experiencing transcendence.
2) In today’s society, rather than having clear and distinct boundaries, “both the sacred and secular, as traditionally conceived, can be seen to be active in both religion and the media” (2002, p. 3).

According to these theorists, the proliferation of mass mediated popular culture now functions in ways that were heretofore dominated by conventional religion, offering meaning, moral instruction, community, and resources for living. These theorists would argue that the previously perceived non-religious sphere of mass-mediated popular culture has been sacralized and is now experiencing what Lyon calls a “sacred secularity” (1987, p. 96) of religious experience outside the realm of traditional religion holding out both tradition and alternative meanings. It is at this point that the truth of Heelas’ statement can be seen, “The location of religion... has changed from church and chapel to the culture at large” (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000, p. 431).

In view of Hoover’s argument that in contemporary American culture there is a convergence of religion and media, I shall argue in Chapter 5 that the role of popular film as a significant resource in the vernacular of the youth and community of St. Quaratus’ demonstrates a convergence of religion and film.

The four characteristics discussed in this section – co-existence theory, a democratization of religion, the religious-like qualities of cultural consumption, and a convergence of media and religion – represent a shift in what constitutes religiosity in America towards a broadening of religion that extends beyond the boundaries of conventional religion, affecting religious practices both inside and outside conventional religion. What many of these theorists show is that American’s religious practices have increasingly adapted to a consumer-orientated religiosity, where the onus of authority lies on the individual. They also point out the important role of the
media in the practice of religion as people increasingly draw upon resources from mass mediated popular culture for meaning-making, morals, and identity formation. This means that in contemporary American culture (as in the West at large) there has been a convergence of religion and media where each affects the other. The study of this shift leading to a convergence of media and religion is what drives this project. Before proceeding to set out the research questions emerging from these theories, I shall first offer the definition of religion that underlies the assumptions of the research.

Defining Religion

As can be seen in this discussion about religious practices in America, there is much debate amongst scholars over what is meant by the term “religion”. The shift discussed above reflects an ambiguity in defining religion whether institutional or personal, substantive or functional, this-worldly or other-worldly, everyday or exceptional. In her work on American religious history, *America, Religions and Religion* (1992), Albanese offers a helpful descriptive and functional definition of religion that brings many of these theories together. She describes religion as “a system of symbols (creed, code, cultus) by means of which people (a community) orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary meanings and values” (1992, p. 11). For Albanese, “orientation” means recognizing boundaries and living in relation to them. She acknowledges that creed is an important part of a religious system because it “provides an intellectual rationale” for religious practice. Code, cultus, and community on the other hand, are the concrete ways in which religion is practiced. She stresses, “More than a form of belief, religion is a matter of practice, an action system. Body and emotions play as large a role in a living religion as philosophical concepts” (1992, p. 10). This definition emphasizes
everyday practices in relation to creed rather than being primarily the content of a religious system. It does not concern itself with the substance of religion, but with the ways people practice religion in relation to substantive elements of religion. It describes how religion functions in dealing with boundaries and what forms it takes in creeds, codes, cultus, and communities.

Another helpful aspect of Albanese's definition is the inclusion of both "ordinary" and "extraordinary" religion. Ordinary religion is lived in relation to what is unconsciously revered, that which is implicitly rather than explicitly religious, yet orders everyday life. It is more or less synonymous with the culture; "[o]rdinary religion shows people how to live well within boundaries" (1992, p. 6). Like Durkheim's understanding of religion, Albanese writes, "[O]rdinary religion is the religion that enforces the bonds between members of a society, that provides social 'glue' to make people cohere" (1992, p. 7). Extraordinary religion, on the other hand, is concerned with that which is "outside" of the "ordinary" everyday experience of life, challenging people to transcend the boundaries of everyday culture. She writes, "It is specific and particular, easily recognizable as religion and possible to separate from the rest of culture" (1992, p. 7). It involves encounters with forms of "otherness," whether natural or supernatural, pointing to universal realities beyond the material world. Unlike ordinary religion, it is explicitly set apart from the rest of culture and is easily recognizable as religion because of its special language and cultural forms which are different than the rest of everyday life. Extraordinary

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53 In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim studied Australian aboriginal religion, describing it as "the most primitive and simple religion, which is actually known" (Durkheim, 1995, p.1). Durkheim draws the conclusion that within the most elementary forms of religion "we have found all the great ideas and the principal ritual attitudes, which are at the basis of even the most advanced religions" (1995, p. 415). It sees one of the primary roles of religion as a social bond through communal ritual availing a coherent set of morals to a people.
religion concerns itself with what is beyond the boundaries of the everyday, with the intent of influencing the ordinary, within the boundaries of the everyday. Albanese does not suggest that these two forms of religion are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, she is clear that the two are often blended as people live comfortably in more than one system, often using similar symbols and language to express both everyday and transcendent concerns with life.

Albanese's definition brings two seemingly separate realms together, the ordinary realm and practice of everyday religion in which mass mediated popular culture is a common feature, and the extraordinary realm of traditional historic Christian religious practice of the young people of St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church. In emphasizing both the ordinary and extraordinary practices of religion, this definition reflects the convergence of media and religion as Hoover suggests is taking place in contemporary religious practices in the West. It will help in understanding the ways in which the young people of this parish use film both inside and outside of the church as a resource for building community, for theological themes, everyday vernacular, and meaning-making for ordinary and extraordinary religious purposes.

Having established a working definition for religion in the ordinary and extraordinary, I now turn to bring this chapter to conclusion by locating the research and setting forth the questions for the research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I established dialogue partners in the conversation about changing practices of religion in America. I began by locating the research in the broader context of American religion by examining a shift in the religious practices of Americans and how Americans are redefining the meaning of religion to include personal "inner" religion as well as conventional religion. To better understand this, I
considered four characteristics of this shift: co-existence theory involving both secularization and sacralization; a democratization of religion, where the onus of authority lies on the individual; the religious-like qualities of cultural consumption; and a convergence of religion and media, in which the social practices of both institutions are affected. In Chapter 5, I shall show how these four characteristics are at work in the religious practices of the youth and community of St. Quaratus'. Their use of film demonstrates that religious practice is taking place in a new context beyond traditional religion. Here they exercise personal authority over meaning and practice in a convergence of media and religion. I then offered a working definition of religion as "a system of symbols by which people orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings and values" (Albanese, 1992, p. 11). This definition represents a convergence of definitions of religion to include both "ordinary" or everyday orientation of religion as is often found in mass mediated popular culture as well as "extraordinary" or "other-worldly" orientation to religion, as may be found in the transcendence held out by conventional religion.

In view of both my own private life experience, which I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, as well as my professional experience as a religious youth worker during the course of the past two decades, I have found many of the theories mentioned above helpful for understanding contemporary religious practices in America. Therefore, I ask, What constitutes the religiosity of young people in America? What forms does it take in contemporary culture? What are the resources young people draw upon for meaning-making? And how might this affect the practices of those whose primary charge is to work with young people in religious settings? In view of these challenging personal enquiries, I launched a qualitative
research project amongst the youth at St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church, New Martinton, Pennsylvania, to investigate the following questions. What is the role of popular culture in the religious lives of these young people? Do these young people draw upon popular culture for meaning-making and religious expression? If so, how? During my time in the parish I noted that popular culture had a significant influence in the processes of meaning-making and religious expression in everyday life, specifically the significant role of popular film. Before approaching the report of the data in the narrative portrait of the young people of St. Quaratus' in Chapter 4, I shall first offer a survey of the body of literature in the area of theology and film theory in Chapter 2. Here I pay close attention to the methodologies used by a variety of theorists in theology and film. These will provide helpful tools for understanding the use of film by the youth of St. Quaratus'. I shall then turn to frame the portrait which is offered in Chapter 4 by discussing the research process by which I elicited the data in Chapter 3 on methodology.
Chapter 2

Theology and Film Theory

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I established the dialogue partners for this thesis by discussing theories about changing practices of religion in America. In that discussion I noted the influential role of mass media and popular culture in contemporary practices of religion. In my time in the congregation I observed that film played an important role in the religious lives of these young people, as leisure practice, as a communal practice and as a vernacular resource in their performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression. My observations in the parish revealed that film played a powerful part in the lives of these young people. In this chapter I now turn to look at the area of theology and film particularly highlighting methodologies used by a variety of theorists. This will aid in understanding the significant role of film in this congregation in the light of Christian tradition specifically drawn from the body of literature on theology and film. In what follows, I develop an analytical framework for use in Chapter 5, by reviewing a number of key theorists in theology and film studies, considering the development of the methodologies used as well as giving some examples of their use.

This chapter follows a chronology the study of theology and film and is structured around three approaches that have emerged during the past four decades. Here, I survey some of the literature on the critical engagement of theology and film, by exploring theories of theology and film which focus on auteur theory, to consider the theological implications of the director’s “vision” encoded into film, on textual

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54 Hall (1980) argued that a dominant ideology is inscribed by the producer into a media text for a “preferred reading”. This reading however is not always adopted by the consumer, who may instead make a “negotiated reading” or an “oppositional
analysis to examine biblical, and theological themes in filmic text and finally on theories audience use of film in religion-like ways focusing on how films function like religion by providing viewers with myth, ritual, morals and community. Studies in film and theology will provide some necessary analytical tools for use in Chapter 5 in analyzing the role of film as leisure practice, as communal coagulant and as theological and vernacular resources in play, meaning-making and religious expression by the young people at St. Quaratus'.

In an early work in the field of theology and film, Cooper and Skrade (1970) deemed film to be the paragon art form in contemporary society. They write, “If we ask after the art form which dominates our own period, we cannot answer without a consideration of the cinema. Ours is an age dominated by moving images and immediate experience, lights and shadows on the silver screen” (1970, p. 2). In its relatively brief history as an art form, film has become a powerful cultural medium influencing the everyday lives of Americans. Wall holds that the influence of film in contemporary society spreads far beyond the lives of respective viewers. He writes,

"We must be aware that a cultural medium with the potency that film has exercises an impact far beyond the immediate viewing. From superficial things such as clothing styles to profound social attitudes, film affects the public.... World War II films inspired patriotism; the war films of the 1970's reflect the younger audiences' disdain for war and also serve to reassure the young that their feeling about war is correct. And the nonfilmingoing public experiences these changes without ever visiting a theatre (1971, p. 15)."

reading”. For more on the process of the encoding and decoding of meanings in visual culture see Hall’s essay, Encoding/Decoding (1980) in which he discusses the circulation of meaning between producers and viewers of television discourse. Hall developed a framework for the analysis of mass-communication in a “circulation circuit or loop”, describing distinctive stages or “moments” viz. production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction, in a “complex structure of relations” (“Encoding/Decoding”, in Culture, Media Language, 1980, p.128-138).

Johnston (2000) notes that because the influence of film has continued to grow during the course of the past century, while at the same time the social influence of conventional religion has decreased, the film industry and religious institutions have experienced a varied relationship, at times contentious at times cooperative. In view of the powerful presence of film in American culture, Wall, editor of the Christian Advocate in the 1960s and the Christian Century in the 1970s, began to publish film reviews from a theological perspective, encouraging critical engagement of film. In 1964, he wrote what he considered, “a strong attack on Otto Preminger’s The Cardinal, objecting to its distortion of the Roman Catholic Church…” (Wall, 1971, p. 7). Since those early reviews there has been a stream of critical theological engagement in order to cultivate understanding and dialogue between theology (albeit predominantly Christian) and film. I now turn to consider some of the key theories in this area.

**Auteur Theory – The Director’s Vision**

The first approach to theology and film theory that I shall consider is the analysis of the “vision” of the filmmaker present in the film that has come to be known as *auteur theory* (Truffaut, 1954). This will be helpful in considering the Director’s vision encoded into film and in particular I shall consider the influence of director, Peter Jackson’s in the *LOTR* series, which as discussed in the last chapter, played an important role in the lives of the youth of St. Quaratus’.


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56 For more see: Johnston (2000, pp.31-39).
of the director as presented in film\textsuperscript{57}. Truffaut called this "Auteurisme" which has been translated into English as \textit{auteur theory}. According to Keuss, Truffaut's concept created "a whole school of thought that argues that for some film productions, the role of the author is not only central to understanding the overall meaning of the film but that it is vital" (2005, p. 82). Auteur theory looks behind the film to consider its creator's artistic vision\textsuperscript{58} and worldview in an effort to understand the movie in that light. Johnston notes that as a painting by Van Gogh, Vermeer or Miro has features that are identifiably typical of the artist, so too films are recognizably the creation of specific directors. He writes,

One can also speak of a Woody Allen movie or one by Milos Forman. It is not simply marketing that causes producers to include in a movie [a statement such as] 'A Peter Weir Film.' There is in a Weir film a both a unique visual style and a worldview that is expressed in recurring themes (2000, p. 132).

This means that according to this methodology of film analysis known as \textit{auteur theory}, the theological perspective or worldview of the director or producer of a given film is encoded into and disseminated to viewers, influencing their lives and society. According to Nolan (2003) early theorists in field of religion and film in America were taken with European auteur theory, showing a preoccupation with the director's vision. He asserts that this method of analysis led to the development of a 'secular theology' (1998, p. 2) presented in film. Nolan maintains that serious critical

\footnote{Keuss notes, "In current film criticism there is widespread acknowledgement that film are not the product of one auteur or but collective efforts" (in \textit{Cinema Divinite}, 2005, p.82).}

\footnote{In discussing auteur theory, it is worth noting however, that although films often bear the thumbprint of a specific director, no single director can truly take sole responsibility for any project. The influence of the cast and crew also play a role in the artistic and theological values presented in an individual film. Johnston notes, There are producers, writers, directors, camera crew, editors, actors, lighting and sound people, composer, costumers, casting agents and more. The credits at the end of the film speak for themselves. Yet there is often an organizing or unifying force behind a film, typically the director, whose creative vision shapes the story (2000, p. 133).}
theological engagement with film in America began in the 1960s with the work of Hurley and Wall as a response to threats of secularization and “death of God” theories. According to Nolan, these analysts saw popular film as an expression of the cultural values of a generation of young people disenfranchised from the church. Therefore he argues that the intent of the work of these two theorists was missiological and apologetic, a means to reach young people. He writes “Understandably they were concerned with methodology; there was a need to secure a place for film as a legitimate partner with which to dialogue” (1998, p. 2). I now consider briefly the works of each of these theorists.

**Neil Hurley**

Hurley holds that film directors offer a secular theology through movies. He writes, “Movies are for the masses what theology is for the elite” (1970, p. ix). Considering the important role of film in the lives of young people Hurley contends,

> Whether the adult world likes it or not, young people tend to ignore all parental, scholastic and religious influences that bypass their present passionate concerns for Vietnam, racial integration, democratization of education and economic opportunity, a greater participation in the direction of society and politics, more latitude in forms of like style (hair, dress, even drugs), and an acceptance of youth a sexually endowed beings. No one will deny that movies face these issues – now. Consequently, film has become an outlet for transcendental concerns that are rooted in the human spirit: conscience, guilt, freedom and love (1970, pp ix-x).

Although his argument, “young people tend to ignore all parental, scholastic and religious influences”, sounds heavy-handed, he does have a finger on the pulse of the growing autonomy and authority that that Roof later argued began in 1960s America (Roof, 1994). Consequently, Hurley builds a ‘cinematic theology’ based on common, universal themes presented in popular films such as freedom, sex, evil, death, love and the future, he holds, leads to theological dialogue. Hurley promotes an alliance of cinema and theology holding that religious and cinematic audiences both exercise
“transcendence” through the use of conscience, because conscience, “the transcendental arbiter” (1970, p. 70) gives insight for making life choices. He argues, “[M]oviewatchers are often exercising transcendental faculties of insight, criticism and wonder that come remarkably close to what has traditionally been termed faith, prophecy and reverence” (1970, p. x). Using his methodology of transcendence, he moves from the themes presented in film to theological themes in order to interpret the director’s meaning.

What is important for this study about Hurley’s method is his understanding that film speaks of contemporary cultural values. His cinematic theology gives occasion for dialogical engagement because participants in both theology and film exercise transcendence by means of conscience. I shall later argue movies are more than just the means of presenting a director’s secular theology or an opportunity for dialogical engagement with theology but are a set of resources for religious meaning-making and expression by young people.

*James Wall*

Wall, too, focuses on the director’s vision as an expression of secular cultural values that hold significant influence in contemporary society. He contends, “The filmmaker is an artist who presents a vision of reality in his work, a vision that can enrich our own, *whether or not we share it*. And the churchgoer needs to be alerted and attuned to this source of revelation”(1971, p. 13). Because of its powerful cultural influence, he advocates film education through the local church because, “It would be irresponsible for the church of today to ignore an influential medium like film in its educational program on the basis of simplistic division between the religious and the secular” (1971, p. 18). For Wall this begins by viewing film as art on its own merit. He insists, “Our methodology aims at taking films seriously as works of art; that is,
we want to look at ‘film as film’” (1971, p. 29). Film as film sees movies as an art form bearing the theological vision of its director, not as a theological text in itself. Wall presents a methodology for dialoguing with film by proposing a continuum of perception. At one end of the continuum he places “what film is about”, the discursive aspects of film, that is, the plot and message. At the other end, he places “what film is”, the presentational aspects of film which implicitly bear a vision of life rather than mere information (1971, p. 33). The objective of his methodology is to encourage viewers to abandon plot-orientated-viewing in order to experience film as film. He writes, “This is what our methodology guards against - automatic evaluation of a film in terms of ‘What’s it all about?’ It insists that we distinguish between the films overall vision and the structural plot through which the vision is projected” (1971, p. 41). Drawing on the concept of ‘groovin’ from William Kloman, Wall makes the distinction between the discursive and the presentational, between ‘understanding’ the storyline of a film and ‘groovin’ with it. Wall argues “To ‘groove’ with a film does not mean that we give up making moral judgements about it, but that we postpone those judgements until we let the film have it’s final say to us” (1971, p. 44). As an example of his methodology, Wall gives a brief analysis of Kubrick’s film 2001: A Space Odyssey, (1968), which he claims was criticised for being boring and plotless. He writes,

The film’s greatness... lies in the fact that it is boring and plotless on the surface, because Stanley Kubrick is saying that the technological world of the future will reduce men to robots and give robots personality and power. It is not until 2001 does its presentational work on the viewer that Kubrick’s potent vision comes through (1971, p. 49).

In Wall’s Methodology, Kubrick offers the viewing public a secular theology that implicitly challenges viewers’ assumptions about future life on Earth where humans might act like robots and robots have personality and control. The power of this
presentational style of film-making, he holds is in presenting an experience rather than discourse. Viewers catch the Kubrick’s vision through the experience of the film.

What is important about Wall’s methodology for this study is his insistence that through film, the director does more than merely describe the details and information of a story discursively. By means of the medium of presentational films, the truly effective film-maker draws viewers into an experience, which implicitly imparts the director’s vision, by experiencing the medium thereby influencing viewers and shaping society. As I argue later, this is in essence what Peter Jackson has done in the LOTR series. By first allowing film to “have its final say to us” invites implicit or explicit theological dialogue between the director’s vision and the religious viewers.

Both Hurley and Wall have continued to write on theology and film since their early works. They are however, only two of a number of analysts who adopted the methodology centred on auteur theory. Other influential analysts in religion and film for whom the director’s vision is central are found in the collaborative works of literary theorist John May, and in the work of screen-writer Paul Schrader (1972).

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59 Hurley’s works continued with a series of Articles in May and Bird’s Religion in Film, (1982); as well as in his own books such as Reel Revolution, (1987), and Soul in Suspense, (1994). Wall published A Space Odyssey and the Search for a Center, (1992), Hidden Treasures: Searching for God in Modern Culture, (1997) and has continued to contribute articles on religion and film in the Christian Century.

60 May’s collaborative works include: Film Odyssey: The Art of Film as Search for Meaning, (Ferlita and May, 1976); Religion in Film, (1982); Image and Likeness: Religious Visions in American Film Classics, (1992); and New Image of Religious Film (1997).

Auteur theory was a dominant methodology in early religion and film criticism. Although other methodologies for analysing religion and film have been developed since those early days, such as hermeneutical, biblical and ideological frameworks, the tradition of auteur theory has continued to the present. Using *auteur theory* as part of "moment" in the analytical framework of theology and film theory will be a helpful tool in Chapter 5, for understanding the use of film by the young people of St. Quaratus', for a number of reasons. First, as the above-mentioned analysts suggest, film is a powerful medium in contemporary society that speaks of contemporary cultural values. One of my observations about the young people of St. Quaratus' is that they are avid movie watchers. This means that they are in various ways being influenced by the many films they consume. Considering the directors' vision and values that are encoded into and disseminated through the art of film, will give insight into the cultural context in which they live and which bear an influence on their lives. Second, the experience of transcendence found in watching movies, understood as presentational rather than discursive will shed light on the means of the dissemination of implicit values imparted into the lives of these young people by film creators. This will help in understanding their experience of film and how they have chosen to dialogue with director's vision in such movie series as *LOTR*

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62 In *Transcendental Style and Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (1988), Schrader analyses the religious and philosophical assumptions of these directors from various cultures to argue that there is "a common expression of the transcendent in motion pictures" (1972, p. 10).

63 Auteur criticism has continued in works such as Gerrold's *Taking the Red Pill*, (2002), a compilation of articles on the *Matrix* directors, The Wachowsky Brothers; Gervais' *Ingmar Bergman: Magician and Prophet*, (1999), an analysis of Bergman's worldview presented in films, which engage with changes in western thought from existentialism to postmodernism; and Keuss' *Reading Stanley Kubrick: A Theological Odyssey* (2005), which analyses theological themes presented by Kubrick across the course of his directorial career.

64 Hall describes distinctive stages in his circulation loop of mass-communications as "moments" (Hall, 1980, p.128).
and *Harry Potter*. Having briefly considered this "moment" of *auteur criticism* of film analysis, I shall now turn to consider the second moment in this framework of analysis, *textual analysis*, considering a framework for the analysis of biblical and theological themes represented in films.

**Textual Analysis**

The second moment in theology and film theory shifts the focus onto *textual analysis*, which considers biblical and theological themes represented in filmic text. Biblical themes are those themes found in film that relate directly to biblical narrative or are analysed in relation to didactic passages of the bible. Theological themes are themes drawn from systematic theological concepts about God or gods that are found in films. Although biblical themes do not figure substantially in the analytical framework used in the next chapter, I shall nonetheless discuss them briefly since they are an important aspect of textual analysis, before moving on to consider theological themes more germane to this project.

*The Bible and Film*

The first category of *textual analysis* is biblical themes found in film that relate directly to narrative or are analysed in relation to didactic passages of the bible. Nolan (1997) points out that since the 1990s there is growing interest in analysis of biblical themes in film.²⁵ He notes that these have moved in two directions. The first considers the cinematic treatment of biblical narrative itself, such as the life and passion of Jesus Christ or other biblical characters; the second being discussion of

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²⁵ For a few examples of this see: Baugh (1997); Christianson, et al. (2005); Kreitzer (1993, 1994); Jewett (1993, 1999); Reinhartz (2003); Stern (1999); Walsh, (2003, 2005).
biblical themes found in film which are not an explicit recounting of biblical narrative but are analysed in relation to didactic themes in the Bible (1997, p. 7).

The majority of films explicitly representing biblical themes have centred on the life and passion of Jesus Christ. Baugh notes that within the first five years of the invention of motion pictures there were at least six films made about the passion. Furthermore, he writes, "In its first hundred years the cinema produced more than one hundred fifteen films that treated in one way or another ... the story of Jesus" (1997, p. iix). I shall consider here two contemporary examples of this methodology focusing on biblical narrative, in specific on the Life of Jesus Christ, Baugh's Imaging the Divine, (1997), and Savior on the Silver Screen (Stern et al. 1999).

Baugh (1997) offers analyses of a wide range of representations of Jesus and Christ figures in film always examining their representation in relation to canonically approved biblical narrative. Baugh's methodology is closely tied to biblical text in assessing the faithfulness of representation of Jesus according to Christian tradition.

In Savior on the Silver Screen, (1999) Stern et al. use a similar methodology, though with less an emphasis in analysing film solely in relation to Scriptural narrative. Stern looks at nine different Jesus-films ranging from Demille's traditional silent film King of Kings (1926) to Arcand's experimental Jesus of Montreal (1989), a Jesus-story within a story. They study the ways in which Jesus is represented by examining each movie under three different lenses, a scriptural/historical lens, a lens considering the director's artistic vision and a cultural lens. The emphasis of this study is to show how each representation of Jesus is a cultural product of the era in which it was made.

These two examples of thematic criticism linked to biblical narrative of the life and passion of Jesus, are tools for considering explicit biblical narrative represented in film. Although no specific reference to the life of Christ figures significantly in the
analyses of Chapter 5, these theories offer an important contribution in the consideration of prominent role models in films discussed in the parish. I now turn to consider biblical themes found in films that are not an explicit recounting of biblical narrative but themes analogous to the Bible.

Didactic Biblical Themes

A second category of textual analysis of biblical themes found in film are those which are not an explicit recounting of biblical narrative itself in film but are analysed in relation to common didactic themes presented in the Bible. I show here two examples of scholarship bridging Scripture and cinema in the work of Kreitzer (1993, 1994) and Jewett (1993, 1999). Once again these theories do not directly relate to the analyses in the next chapter, however they are an important in part of understanding the overview of literature in this area, therefore I include a brief summary of their work.

Barton notes that there has been a growing interest in the critical engagement with literature and theology; however, Kreitzer was the first to offer critical dialogue between the Bible and literature in filmic adaptation (Kreitzer, 1993, p. 7). Kreitzer is a biblical scholar whose interest is not so much in film criticism in its own right as in the way film can bring fresh insight to the study of the Bible. He recognizes that film has become the primary art form expressing contemporary western cultural values. His methodology is “to reverse the flow of influence within the hermeneutical process and examine select New Testament passages or themes in the light of some of the enduring expressions of our own culture, namely great literary works and their film adaptations” (1993, p. 19). Instead of following the normal hermeneutical flow of using scripture to critique film, he advocates using literature and film to look at

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66 Reversing the hermeneutical flow is Kreitzer's attempt to invite contemporary cultural artefacts, specifically film, to dialogue with the Bible in order to shed light on the context in which it was written. This method is continued in the works of Johnston (2000) and Detweiler and Taylor (2004).
“biblical passages or ideas” (Kreitzer, 1994, p. 13). This allows them to shed new light on theology. Discussing the concept of a ‘hermeneutical circle’ (1993, p. 19), Kreitzer holds that much of western culture and art have been influenced by biblical themes. In turn, these art forms re-introduce culturally adapted interpretations of biblical themes back into the culture and the circle continues. Kreitzer sees that by reversing the hermeneutical flow, “world literary classics serve to help to illuminate New Testament texts as well as our own cultural context ... Janus-like in nature, facing two directions at once” (1993, p. 19). To give an example of his methodology he draws upon Robert Louis Stevenson’s story of The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886). In short, the main character has dual natures, good and evil, represented in the benevolent and respectable Dr. Jekyll and his alter ego the malevolent Mr. Hyde. Kreitzer holds that “Stevenson has borrowed biblical imagery and ideas, notably from Paul, in the composition of his story” (1993, p. 125). He parallels this story with St. Paul’s passage from Romans 7:7-25, which describes the Apostle’s depiction of intense struggle between sinful and redeemed human nature in the life of a believer. He points out that this story was later re-interpreted and represented in numerous versions in film. The usual hermeneutical flow goes from the scripture to Stevenson’s novel to various director’s filmic depictions. In reversing the flow, Kreitzer sees film as speaking a corrective to “the interpretive weight of sexuality sometimes thrown upon” the words of the Romans passage (1993, p. 126). He implies here that the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde films reveal that the passage speaks more broadly of the moral struggle of human nature, that of St. Paul and ours today, than certain more narrow theological interpretations suggest. That is why in Kreitzer’s opinion, “This has helped to make The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr.
Hyde, one of the world's enduring classics, capable of invoking and above all expressing, the human moral dilemma facing its readers" (1993, p. 126).

Jewett like Kreitzer, sees film as a powerful cultural mediator in contemporary society. He contends that Americans are shaped more by popular culture than by education or religious training. As a Pauline scholar, his view is that were Saint Paul alive today, he would likely have been well versed in contemporary film because the Apostle "struggled throughout his career to build bridges between regions and cultures" (1993, p. 3), and to "place himself where other people were in order to communicate the Gospel on their turf. In our day that clearly would involve the movies which are a primary arena for discovering and debating moral, cultural and religious issues" (1993, p. 5). Like Kreitzer, Jewett encourages dialogue between scripture and film that each might shed light on the other. Jewett's approach however, is quite different from Kreitzer's. His view is to honour films, "on the assumption that they disclose truth in their own right and thus qualify as valid conversation partners with Pauline letters" (1993, p. 7), but he is clear that

[W]hile each movie is treated with respect, the Pauline word is allowed to stand primus inter pares. It is first among equals because the inspired text of scripture has stood the test of time by revealing ultimate truth that has gripped past and present generations with compelling power (1993, p. 11).

Jewett seeks to develop a "dialogue in prophetic mode" (1993, p. 7). His method is to develop an "interpretive arch... with one end in the ancient world and the other in the contemporary cultural situation" (1993, p. 9). He seeks to interpret what Paul's letters spoke to their respective first century communities and what films speak to our contemporary communities. Jewett writes, "My method is that of biblical hermeneutics, aiming at the 'fusion of horizons'67 between the ancient texts and the contemporary situation" (1999, p. 4). An example of Jewett's methodology at work

67 As discussed previously, see Gadamer (1991, pp 302-305).
is seen in his correlation of the story behind the writing of St. Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy with the story of *Dead Poets’ Society* (Weir, 1988). Using his “interpretive arch” he gives an account of the situation behind the letter as one in which the Apostle’s original vision for the church that Timothy oversaw had been lost amidst re-interpretations of that tradition. The tradition of St. Paul had taken on a life of its own. Instead the author of the letter calls Timothy to “re-ignite the charisma” because “tradition” makes a difference in the world when infused with “charisma”. Jewett locates the other end of his “interpretive arch” in modern society, lining up the first century world of Timothy with the film’s depiction of the loss of vision and purpose for traditional education at the prestigious Welton Academy. He holds that what Welton was intended to be had been lost in what it had become under the weight of its motto, “Tradition, Honour, Discipline and Excellence”. Jewett sees these core values as having become a stifling influence in the lives of its young students. The formation of the Dead Poets’ Society became a source of charismatic infusion in the lives of seven young men within the academy. The weight of the constraint of tradition however, culminates in the film’s tragic death of one of the member’s of the Dead Poets’ Society. Neil Perry commits suicide because his father defied his passion for artistic expression through drama, insisting instead that he develop a respectable profession in medicine. Jewett argues that Neil’s suicide shows a lack of restraint needed by those who exercise “charisma”. In short, Jewett maintains that the message of the stories behind Second Timothy and the *Dead Poets’ Society* is that tradition needs the infusion of charisma, but unbridled charisma requires the restraint of tradition. In this sense each of these stories speaks to the situation of the other. Although the analyses offered in the next chapter do not directly involve scriptural analysis of film, these theories add to the conversation in their emphasis on a
hermeneutical dialogue between religion and film. The assumption of this type of dialogue is that film is taken seriously and not as a lesser art form, unworthy of theological reflection. Kreitzer suggests that film can in some instances help viewers to see the biblical themes in a new light. On the other hand, Jewett, "dialogue in prophetic mode," asserts that Christian religion also has something of value to speak to films. Having discussed the first of two categories of textual analysis, biblical themes, I now examine the second theological themes in film.

Theological Analysis of Film

The second category of textual analysis is theological. Rather than relating directly to scriptural passages, theological themes are those drawn from traditional Judeo-Christian concepts about God and religion found in film. Two examples of this type of analysis can be found in the works of Bergeson & Greeley (2000) and Deacy (2002, 2005).

Bergeson & Greeley write about theological themes in film from a sociological perspective. They explore theological themes presented in a variety of films that are not explicitly religious in nature. That is, neither depictions of biblical narrative as discussed above, nor descriptions of religious practice. Bergeson & Greeley examine theological themes such as angels, heaven, desire, evil and various attributes of God found in “ordinary mass release Hollywood type movies” (2000, p. 15). They argue that secularization theory is disproved by “the persistence of God in the movies as an ‘unobtrusive’ measure of the importance of religion” (2000, p. 177). Their argument is that religion is based on “hope-renewing experiences... captured in symbols and woven into stories” (2000, p. 15). From their perspective, film offers the same through ‘God is like...’ metaphors, which invite viewers to ponder the attributes of God. They cite as an example Audrey Hepburn as the Angel “Hap” in Always
Hap sends daredevil fire-fighter pilot, Pete, played by Richard Dreyfus, back from the dead to help his grieving soul mate, Dorinda, played by Holly Hunter, to find happiness again. Bergeson & Greeley write, "God is like Audrey Hepburn because she is like love, beauty, grace, caring and tenderness and God is like love, beauty, grace, caring and tenderness" (2000, p. 22). Another example is the wise-cracking George Burns in "Oh God!" (Reiner, 1977), whom they hold is, "loveable, tender, approachable and cares about the world" (2000, p. 22).

Bergeson & Greeley hold that because the intention of film is actually for entertainment purposes rather than religious, viewers, unaware, receptively take in those stories that speak to life experience. Many religious themes in film are represented and absorbed without their being seen as religious. They argue, "Movies then, are one of the most important media through which underlying social and religious beliefs are being expressed" (2000, p. 17). They believe this is, all the more powerful in contemporary culture because movies "are a general art form whose appeal crosses almost all social division" (2000, p. 18). Unlike other art forms of theatre, symphony and opera, for instance, films assume no "particular level of knowledge from their audience, providing a genuine mass appeal" (2000, p. 18).

Ultimately, Bergeson & Greeley argue that films preach religious messages more effectively than many churches. They ask, "Do film makers know something about God that the bishops and theologians do not know? Or do they know something about the basic religious faith of ordinary people that the bishops and theologians do not know?" (2000, p. 176). This understanding of religion is in keeping with Albanese's "ordinary Religion" (1992) discussed in Chapter 1.

These questions bring much to the hermeneutical dialogue between religion and film in this project. What can the church learn from film about shaping the lives of young
people? Bergeson’s & Greeley’s assertion that that viewers absorb messages that speak to life experience without considering them as religious, is an important consideration in this discussion. This is in keeping with Albanese’s ordinary religion as a system of symbols by which people implicitly orient themselves in the world. The examination of theological themes in film from a sociological perspective is helpful in this project in that the emphasis of the project is not theological reflection on film per se but about the social and cultural practice of film-viewing in a religious setting.

Another example of using a theological interpretive framework can be seen in the work of Deacy. In Screen Christologies (2001), Deacy offers far more complex analyses of film as a site for theological reflection on the theme of redemption. His focus is on Film Noir, holding that it is particularly suited to this task. He examines the theme of redemption in a broad range of films noirs but specifically the work of Martin Scorsese. Deacy juxtaposes an escapist representation of redemption in films that enjoy a “happy ending” such as It’s a Wonderful Life (Capra, 1946) and Hannah and Her Sisters (Allen, 1986), with the difficulties of the real world that are often portrayed in films noirs with endings that are generally far more ambiguous. Giving an example of this ambiguity, Deacy discusses the ending of Scorsese’s remaking of Cape Fear (1991). The family of the greedy and adulterous attorney Sam Bowden is redeemed physically from the antagonist, the recently released from prison rapist, Max Cady, whom Bowden had defended. Deacy notes, however, that there is no clear sense that the members of family have been redeemed of their sins and past mistakes, only a physical redemption. He writes, “in the light of the necessarily

68 According to Deacy films noirs encompass several genres such as melodramas, thrillers and gangster films. Their distinguishing feature is found in the tone which runs counter to typical utopian, optimistic, “escapist” films of traditional Hollywood cinema (2001, p. 36).
complex and protracted, nature of the redemptive process, it is sufficient that Scorsese holds out the possibility that the Bowdens may be redeemed for their transgressions” (2001, pp 136-137). This he holds is a more realistic vision of redemption which is always more ambiguous in the real world. For Deacy, the protagonist of film noir is a sort of Christ-figure who finds redemption through suffering. It is this human experience of suffering that “has the capacity to resonate with the lives and experiences of the audience members, that enables such films to be read in theological terms” (2001, p. 10). Although he does not argue that *films noirs* have a deliberately theological agenda, he contends that a Christian theology of redemption is consciously or unconsciously presented to the world through them. He writes,

Diverse cultures around the world have absorbed the Gospels into their consciousness and into their imagination and language with the result that it is not uncommon to find in the medium of film the person of Christ used as a metaphor, a symbol or as an image of certain values which the film-makers wish to explore (2001, p. 77).

For Deacy, redemption is not merely eschatological but is concerned in the here and now. He argues,

The redeemed state amounts in effect to the point at which each individual human being manages to come face to face with their basic human condition and nature, which from the point of view of Christian tradition, entails a confrontation with one’s propensity towards sin and transgression, and a concomitant openness to reform ... the hell of our present existence may be seen to precipitate the individual’s quest towards redemption (2001, p. 136).

Deacy analyses the sub-genre of film *noir* using a theological interpretive framework based on the concept of redemption as discussed by Christian theologians.

Using *textual analysis* as a second “moment” in an analytical framework of theology and film theory offers another helpful tool for understanding the use of film by the young people of St. Quaratus’. Although the films that I shall discuss in Chapter 5 do not contain explicitly biblical content, several have protagonists who represent prominent role models for living in ways like Christ-Figures. Additionally several of
the films discussed in relation to the young people of St. Quaratus’ bear implicit or explicit theological themes such as good and evil, faithfulness and redemption. Later, I shall discuss how an audience may interpret themes represented in films in a variety of ways. However, the representation of these themes in film that audiences consume, is not subject to “textual determinacy”. As I argued in Chapter 1, audiences exercise autonomy to construct meanings from the resources of themes found in popular culture and specifically in film. This means that audiences are in various ways being influenced by the themes represented in the films they consume. Although they may produce a variety of meanings even some that are different from the director’s vision and intent for films, considering the theological themes represented in film will give insight into resources upon which they draw for ordinary religious practices in their lives in response to their consumption of film. This will help in understanding their experience of film and how they have chosen to dialogue theological themes represented in such movies. Having briefly considered these two moments in theology and film studies; auteur theory and textual analysis, I shall now turn to consider theories about audience use of film in religion-like ways.

Audience Use of Film in Religion-like Ways

The above-mentioned theories on religion and film have focused on various religious aspects represented in the text of film itself. They have considered important moments for analysis in: auteur theory, analysing the director’s vision represented in film, and; in textual analysis of biblical and theological themes represented in film. As I have suggested some of these will serve in Chapter 5 as important tools for considering themes represented in films as vernacular resources for performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression by the young people of St.

69 A term used by Marsh to describe a film’s meaning as located in either its form or subject matter (2005, p.109).
Quaratus'. In this final section I consider a relatively recent development in theology and film studies which emphasizes the ways film performs certain religious functions for viewing audiences by providing resources for everyday living, viz. myth, morals, ritual, and community. The first two sections emphasized theories about religious aspects of filmic text. Here I consider theories of audience use of film in religion-like ways.

Theological, Mythological and Ideological Criticism

Martin and Ostwalt et al were the first to introduce a fully developed functionalist approach to the analysis of religion and film. They write,

Film is an extraordinarily popular medium today, but films do more than simply entertain. Films, as with other cultural forms, have the potential to re-inforce, to challenge, to overturn, or to crystallize religious perspectives, ideological assumptions, and fundamental values. Films bolster and challenge our society’s norms, guiding narratives and accepted truths. In short films can and do perform religious and iconoclastic functions in American society (1995, p. vii).

Martin notes that in his search to understand the powerful role of religion and film in American culture he turned to film criticism and religious studies only to find that scholars in film theory had nothing to say about religion and scholars in religious studies had little to say about Hollywood. (In Martin and Ostwalt, 1995, p.2) Martin promotes interdisciplinary dialogue. On the one hand he writes, “Since these traditions [Judaism and Christianity] have had a tremendous impact on Western culture and all its art forms, theological scholars are positioned to make many valuable insights about the modern western art form of Hollywood film” (1995, p. 6). On the other hand, from a film studies perspective, he also notes, “Studying the ways Hollywood reinterprets, appropriates, invents or rejects inherited archetypes, mythic stories, ritual acts, symbolic figures and spiritual values will teach us a great deal about religion in the contemporary United States” (1995, p. 6). He therefore proposes a “tripartite” methodology for the analysis of religion and film corresponding to three
approaches to the study of religion: theological, mythological and ideological. Martin’s understanding of the influence of these two disciplines, film studies and religious studies, requires analyzing all three branches of religious studies because independently, each approach has limitations.

The first approach, theological criticism, is similar to the discussion above in the works of Deacy and Greeley & Bergeson, which considers theological themes represented in film, such as good and evil, redemption, hope from within a specific theological tradition. Martin & Ostwalt write,

The theological critic will choose these concepts as the window to understand the films intent ... for a theological critic, religious concepts and symbols will hold the key for understanding the real meaning. (1995, p. 14).

The limitation of this approach is that it may fail to consider religion outside the Western society since most scholarship of religion and film is Western and therefore ethnocentrically rooted in a Judeo-Christian perspective.

Second, by means of mythological criticism, they use a comparative religions approach to consider how archetypes and universal symbols of religious myths that are represented in film. They write,

The film critic who operates on the assumption that myth is a predominant component of any particular film wishes to illuminate those characteristics or elements that tap into universal human feelings or reactions. To employ myth criticism is to assume that films have a distinct relationship to archetypes (universal symbols) in such a way as to communicate them to modern audiences in a meaningful way (1995, p. 68).

In this sense Martin & Ostwalt use the example of Joseph Campbell’s discussion of the way the Star Wars series functions mythologically and religiously in American culture. The limitation of this approach is that it assumes that religious archetypes are

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ahistorical and universal, therefore lacking in understanding of historical and cultural contexts of religion.

Third, they present the concept of ideological criticism, considering religion in its social, historical and political context to examine the ways that religion legitimates or challenges social order. This is based upon the work of Louis Althusser who sees ideology as individuals' "way of 'thinking about the social world' about themselves and about their role within that world" (Martin & Ostwalt, 1995, p. 120). They see secularist thinking which assumes that religious ideology is no longer a significant topic for discussion, is in fact naïve. Martin & Ostwalt argue, "Far from being confined to churches... religious symbols and values are diffused throughout popular culture and continue to shape contemporary subjects" (1995, p. 121). This again is in keeping with many of the underlying assumptions of this thesis in the convergence of ordinary religion (of everyday life) and the extraordinary; of religion and the media.

In his essay Redeeming America: Rocky as Ritual Racial Drama (1995); Martin gives an example of the power of religious ideology in "the screening of a scapegoating ritual". He argues that the white, working class, amateur boxer Rocky Balboa neutralises the resentment of his social status through a scapegoating ritual by taking the boxing championship from the black heavy weight champion boxer, Apollo Creed. The limitation of this ideological approach is that it may re-enforce rather than challenge dominant political structures.

In the conclusion to this set of essays, Ostwalt argues for a multi-disciplinary cultural studies approach to religion and film analysis, since the study of both these cultural expressions of religion and film centre on the search for meaning. He argues, "The cultural critic must be sensitive to as many areas of cultural significance as possible, since religion, literature, film, art, media, and other areas are interdependent and
partial expressions of a larger-order reality" (1995, p. 154). For Martin & Ostwalt, the proposed way forward is to consider the interconnected relationships between film and religion; and how they function in society through theological, mythological and ideological criticism in order to assess how each informs the other. In short, Martin & Ostwalt hold that films have much to teach about the role religion in contemporary society and theologians have many valuable insights for Hollywood about the religious role of film in Western society.

Martin and Ostwalt’s multi-disciplinary cultural studies approach to religion and film analysis is an important model for this thesis in that it has embraced multiple methodologies in order to the interconnected relationships between film and religion in the lives of the youth of St. Quaratus’. However, although aspects of theological, mythological and ideological understandings of the ways these young people engage with film appear in the analyses, they are not rendered in a systematic way in keeping with the methodology presented by Martin and Ostwalt.

*Film as Religion*

In similar fashion to Martin & Ostwalt, Lyden (2003) looks at film from a religious studies perspective, holding that film has a very important religious function in contemporary culture. Unlike Martin & Ostwalt however, who promote dialogue between religion and film as two significant cultural forms that ought to inform one another, in *Film as Religion* (2003), Lyden goes so far as to consider film a religion in its own right. The problem he sees in the current debate in religion and films studies is found in discussions surrounding religion and culture, in what is recognised as “religious” and what is recognised as “nonreligious”. He argues,

> It is my contention that there is no absolute distinction between religion and other aspects of the culture and that we have a tendency to label certain sorts of activities as ‘religious’ chiefly because they fall into patterns that we recognise from religions with which we are familiar (Lyden, 2003, p. 2).
In this sense Lyden’s definition of religion is similar to Albanese’s ordinary religion. This does not mean that he considers everything in culture to be “religious”. Rather he argues, “what we have always called ‘religion’ is identified by its function in society and that this function can be met even by cultural phenomena not normally called ‘religion’ (2003, p. 3). In this case, for Lyden, film fulfills the function of religion by providing viewers with resources for the construction of values, ethics and worldview. For Lyden film is not a substitute that has replaced religion, rather, he argues that in contemporary society, it is another religious option. Lyden argues this by working with a definition of religion based on the works of Clifford Geertz which includes three aspects: “myth” or stories presenting an alternate reality that convey a worldview; “morals” or a set of values idealising how the world should be; and “ritual”, the bridge between the ideal and the real worlds. He writes,

[F]ilm in particular ... (like religion) offers methods for dealing with suffering and injustice ... it presents and alternative reality in which we participate during the viewing experience. The viewer may well be aware of the artificial nature of this filmic reality, and yet still it has the power to affect the way we act in the reality that exists outside the cinema (2003, p. 4).

Therefore according to his definition of religion and his argument that film is in its own right a religion, he proposes a methodology of “inter-religious dialogue” between film, and religion. This methodology, he argues,

[S]eeks to free the interpretation of film (from a religious studies vantage point) from some of the conditions that have been imposed upon it such as limiting the dialogue of film and religion to dialogue with a particular religious tradition (2003, p. 34).

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71 For an example of this approach, see John Walsh’s Are You Talking to Me?: A Life through the Movies, (2003), in which the author gives an autobiographical account of the important role of film in providing narratives as a resource for making life choices while at the same time losing his Roman Catholic faith because of the Church’s ineffectiveness at doing the same. Walsh holds that film has in essence replaced religion as an institution providing resources for meaning-making.

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According to Lyden's argument, film, in this sense stands as one of many religious options, which when taken seriously and understood in its own right, considers its myths, morals and rituals, to bring about dialogue with other religions.

In the second part of *Film as Religion*, Lyden analyses a number of films within the respective conventions of a variety of genres to show the breadth of his methodology. He insists that his analyses "do not go beyond what the average filmgoer might discover in a film ... to point to the ways people's beliefs, values and feelings are affected by films" (2003, p.5). An example of Lyden's method can be seen in his analysis of Spielberg's *E.T.* (1982) which he categorises under the genre of "Children's film and fantasy". He describes the audience of this genre, "Children's films are clearly made for children as well as for parents who take them to the movies" (2003, p. 191). Therefore, they are normally made to have a broader appeal for more than one audience age. In view of this broader audience Lyden points out how they work differently for children than for adults. Children's films "often feature small and normally powerless creatures with whom children can easily identify in positions of role-reversal that allow them to be in charge" (2003, p. 192) while at the same time "Parents often learn to be better parents in children's film" (2003, p. 193). He describes the myth or story of *E.T.* (Spielberg, 1982), the small alien left behind on Earth when his spaceship was forced to take off after being spotted by government agents. Elliott with whom he has much in common befriends the alien. His name also begins and ends with "e" and "t". Like E.T., Elliott, too has been abandoned by his father who has left the family to live in Mexico. He hides the alien in his house away from his mother, while trying to help the alien to communicate with his home in the hope of returning there. A deep friendship develops between the two of them. The Earth's environment however, begins to have an effect on the E.T. who becomes
increasingly ill and dies at the hands of scientists. He comes back to life when in grief Elliott cries out, “I’ll believe in you all my life, every day. E.T., I love you” (2003, p. 198). Shortly after his resurrection, E.T. is able to make contact with his home and is reunited with his kind. Elliott too experiences a reuniting with his Mom from whom he had been hiding the alien. Lyden acknowledges that there is a good deal of Christian symbolism represented in the film. The alien comes from the heavens. He develops deep relations with humans, dies, is resurrected and ascends to the heavens, leaving his spirit for those who believe in him. Realizing however, that Spielberg is Jewish he sets this obvious allegorical critique aside to consider the film in its own right rather than to impose a simple traditional Christian reading of the film. He bases his analysis on a more universal theology,

Spielberg utilized the fantasy of a boy meeting an alien as a device for reuniting a family suffering from divorce, in part because he had suffered the divorce of his own parents... This film connected so well with audiences presumably because they could identify with the family and its sufferings, whether they had experienced the loss of a parent or not, and they believed in the power of love to overcome whatever tribulations they met. Spielberg created this mythic narrative to achieve catharsis for himself and his audience, to give hope and convey a belief in the value of family (2003, p. 200).

Lyden describes the role of ritual as the link between the ideal and real worlds. With respect to the ritual role of watching films he writes, “Films offer a vision of the way the world should be (in the view of the film) as well as statements about the way it really is; the ritual of film-going unites the two when we become part of the world projected on the screen” (2003, p. 4). He holds that the ritual of film-going subsequently has an affect on the whole of the viewers real life, “Films and religious rituals involve cognitive strategies to help us deal with life as well as affective release of emotion; to view them as only involving cognition or only emotion would be to miss the fact that such rituals address the whole person in its dimension as a thinking, emotional, moral being” (2003, p. 94).
Lyden is helpful with respect to the religious function of film in contemporary society. Indeed films bear “myth” or stories that hold out a vision of an idealized world. Through the “ritual” of film-watching, viewers gain insight, vicariously participating in that idealised world by identifying with the *dramatis personae* in myth. Subsequently, this influences the “moral” dimension of their lives for in returning to the real world, they are invited to take what they have learned and decide how to live, whether having seen something they wish to emulate or out of a desire to live differently.

The weakness of Lyden’s argument for film as religion however, is related to community. Lyden’s religion is similar to Albanese’s ordinary religion, which is rooted in a Geertzian understanding of religion as a system of symbols circulating within a culture by which people orient their lives. Albanese insists however that religion is a system of symbols by which people, in a community, orient themselves in the world. Lyden’s understanding lacks a sustained community with a coherent set of myths, traditions and morals that link individual viewers, past, present and future. Movie watchers may constitute an audience but an audience is not a community. After the experience of having watched a film together there is no longer a central gathering, no sharing of common life. What is lacking is a shared religious understanding with a collective memory, what Hervieu-Leger calls “religion as a chain of memory” (2000).

What is helpful however, about Lyden’s methodology in the search for understanding the use of film by the young people of St. Quaratus’, is the analysis of the religious function of film, incorporating of the various “moments” of analysis, viz. auteur and textual, as well as analyses of audience use of film. In the discussion of *E.T.*, he considers Spielberg’s vision and intent, as well as textual analysis of themes in the
film, viz. abandonment, suffering, the power of love, triumph over tribulation and family. At the same time he is aware of the audience’s reception of the text. Discussing the influence of film critic Martin Barker on the methodology he has developed, Lyden writes,

He [Barker] suggests that we do not need to choose either textual analysis or audience reception, as if these were opposed, for it is precisely in the interpretation that the text and its reception are connected... we need to analyze what is actually in the film but we also need to consider how the audiences may be receiving it ...(2003, p. 138).

Although this methodology is helpful in framing the analysis in Chapter 5 of the use of film by the youth of St. Quaratus’, I shall now examine a somewhat more balanced approach for use in this project in the work of Marsh (2004).

*What Films Do to People, What People Do with Films*

Marsh (2004) takes a less extreme position than Lyden’s argument that film is in fact a religion in its own right. Marsh affirms Lyden’s insistence that film be “taken seriously in the world of religious and theological studies” (Marsh, 2004, p. 7) but stops short at acknowledging the powerful religious-like function of film in contemporary society. In *Cinema and Sentiment* (2004), Marsh reflects theologically on two key points “what films do to people” and “what people do with films” to explore the contemporary theological significance of film within the broader cultural setting” (2004, p. ix). By comparing cinema going to worshipping, he considers film-viewing as both social practice and at the same time religious practice. Marsh sees four parallel aspects between the two: life structure through rhythmic film-watching or worship; rest and relaxation provided by each; shared experience amongst viewers or worshippers, and geography in that theatre architecture acts like a chapel by gathering participants. Marsh sees film as a challenge to religious
functioning in two ways: in tradition and in spirituality. With respect to tradition he
gives an example in the popularity of the *LOTR* film series arguing,

The popularity of the *Lord of the Rings* both as a book and as a series of films is
surely due to the fact that it supplies a whole mythology in relation to which
readers and viewers can undertake some fundamental reflection on human
living... It functions as a tradition-supplying resource. Cinema is thus one of
the channels that supply narratives for people to ‘live within’ (2004, p. 11).

As for the challenge of spirituality, which he defines as a way that “people structure
their lives”, he contends, “Whether or not people consider themselves religious, they
still have the task of structuring their lives, and adopting and rejecting particular
moral values and philosophical outlooks” (2004, p. 11). In this sense he is very close
to Lyden’s methodology of considering films religious function by providing myths
and morals, with the ritual aspect of film-watching as the link between the two.

As mentioned above, he simply does not go as far as Lyden to consider film as
religion in its own right. Marsh contends, “film-watching and cinema-going will not
ultimately prove to be satisfactory substitutes for religion... [but] religion must re-
find itself in the west” (2004, p. 10). Marsh asserts that because films affect people in
so many ways, psychologically, socially, spiritually, morally, and philosophically
they must be studied carefully. Therefore, he sees film as posing a significant
challenge to religion because film “is getting the supposedly ‘non-religious’ to do a
theology-like thing” (2004, p. 12) namely, to develop a worldview and moral ‘life
structure’. This is close to Albanese’s working definition of “ordinary religion” as a
set of symbols by which people orient themselves in the world (1992). Like
Albanese whose emphasis is on religion as a practice in relation to a creed, the key to
Marsh’s methodology is that he places emphasis on the “practice of film-watching” in
relation to the “content of film” as theological practice in that “theology relates to
religious practices and is not merely about ideas and beliefs” (2004, p. 145).
Ultimately he makes a plea for mutual critiques in the dialogue between culture and theology, maintaining, "The only theology worth bothering with is a culturally informed and culture-critical theology" (2004, p. 146). He insists that theology must critique culture and its products, while at the same time, culture and its products must critique theology in order for it to be an effective social influence, for theology too emerges from the culture.

Like Lyden, Marsh's methodology is a helpful tool for assessing the use of film by the young people of St. Quaratus' in that he insists on looking at the interplay between the content of filmic text and social practice of the audience. Marsh insists however, that this is a site for theological dialogue and not merely inter-religious dialogue because film functions like religion but is not a religion in its own right. In the next chapter, I shall discuss that a good deal of film-viewing by the young people of St. Quaratus' took place in the context of an established religious community and was a part of their communal practice of religion and that film narrative served as a significant set of vernacular resources for play, meaning-making and religious expression within that community.

**Conclusion**

In Chapter 1 I established the dialogue partners for this thesis by discussing theories about changing religious practices in America, noting the powerful role of mass media and popular culture therein. Observing the significant role of the use of film by the youth of St. Quaratus', I have presented in this chapter a chronological survey of the relatively young field of theology and film theory, exploring three foci in the dialogue between theology and motion pictures: *auteur theory*, *textual analysis* and *audience use of film in religion-like ways*. 
Using tools drawn from auteur theory and textual analysis which emphasize core theological elements embedded in film, will help in analysing Marsh’s concept (2004) of “what films do” to the young people of St. Quaratus’. In Chapter 5 I shall first consider auteur theory of the director’s vision to help in understanding what has been encoded into a given film by the directors, screenwriters, etc., which consequently influences the audience’s reading. I’ll then consider theories on textual analysis of biblical or theological themes within the film provide some tools for considering themes represented to the audience, which serve as sets of resources on offer for use in everyday life. Similarly, theories on audience use of film which emphasize the ways in which films perform certain religious functions for viewing audiences, such as providing myth, morals, ritual and community, will serve in the analysis of “what the young people of St. Quaratus’ do with film”, considering their social and theological practices of film-viewing by using these resources in meaning-making and religious expression.

In this chapter, I have examined these three approaches to theology and film theory to survey the landscape of religion and film criticism in order to establish tools for use in Chapter 5 in the theological analysis of the use of film as leisure practice, as communal practice and as a set of vernacular resources for performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression by the young people of St. Quaratus’. Therefore I ask. What is the role of film in the life of this parish? Does film play and important role? How does film affect these young peoples’ religious practices? What are the implications of the use of film in these ways? Before proceeding to the narrative portrait of the young people of the young people of St. Quaratus’ in Chapter 4, I shall first turn to frame the portrait by discussing in Chapter 3 the research process by which I elicited the data.
Chapter 3

The Research: Methodology, Epistemology and Methods

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I discussed theories regarding a shift of what constitutes religiosity in contemporary American culture, establishing dialogue partners amongst researchers whose theories aided in the framing of my research questions (Bellah, 1985; Hoover, 1997, 2005; Lynch, 2003; Lyon, 1999, 2000; Roof, 1991, 1999; and Heelas and Woodhead, 2000, 2005): What is the role of popular culture in the religious lives of young people? Do young people draw upon popular culture for meaning-making and religious expression? If so, how?

These research questions originated in reflection on my experiences of cultural consumption, and religious practices, and more than twenty years of professional youth work. As I reflect upon my time in ministry, I cannot help noting the numerous ways in which I, and many of the young people with whom I have worked, have frequently drawn upon popular cultural texts to understand and express religious meaning.

The interplay between mass media and religion was a common theme in the works of the above-mentioned theorists. Many of these conversation partners share commitments to grounded approaches of research in this area and to the reliability of theories related to practice. In their research, many of these theorists employ multiple methodologies by drawing upon the tools of the social sciences and religious studies. In the case of this project, three particular methodologies complimentarily lend themselves to this inter-disciplinary research, practical theology, congregational studies, and portraiture. Accordingly, I chose common qualitative research methods...
that facilitated my attempts to stay close to the experience of the young audience at St. Quaratus' whilst at the same time allowing me to draw upon the riches of my own personal and professional experience. This has allowed me to examine what the young people do and say as well as to explore underlying religious meanings.

After coding and sorting a substantial corpus of data collected in the parish, it became apparent that popular film played a significant role in the life of this congregation. As a result, I set about surveying key theorists in theology and film studies (Deacy, 2001, 2005; Jewett, Kreitzer, 1993, 1994; Hurley, 1970; Lyden, 2003; Marsh, 1997, 2004; Martin & Ostwalt, 1995; Nolan, 1997, 2003; Wall, 1970) to consider the development of methodologies they used in the dialogue between theology and film. I offered a survey of these in Chapter 2. These theories will be helpful later in Chapter 5 for offering analyses of film as a significant resource in the congregation's vernacular for leisure practices, meaning-making, and religious expression by the youth of St. Quaratus'.

Before proceeding to the thick description of the young people of St. Quaratus' in the portrait in Chapter 4, I shall first discuss in this chapter the interconnectedness of the methodology, epistemology, and methods\(^{72}\) used to elicit insights about these youth and the use of film in meaning-making and religious expression.

**Methodology**

In view of my personal generative enquiries\(^{73}\) underlying this research project, which I established in Chapter 1, and in specific the research questions for the context of the

\(^{72}\) Sandra Harding (1987) defines epistemology as "a theory of knowledge" (1987, p. 3), methodology as "a theory and analysis of how research should proceed" (1987, p. 3) and methods as "techniques for gathering evidence" (1987, p. 2). She argues that these three are intertwined with each other but must be considered individually in order to comprehend their interconnectedness.

\(^{73}\) In Chapter 1, I stated that these questions emerge out of my own life experience as a consumer of popular film and my experience as a religious worker with young
parish: What is the role of popular culture in the religious lives of these young people? Do these young people draw upon pop culture for meaning-making and religious expression? If so, how? I began research at St. Quaratus'. Early in the process I found that Woodhead's theory discussed in Chapter 1, on the blurring of the categories between the sacralization and secularization, provided the initial organizing structure to the process of collecting and sorting data. I noted an important role that popular culture was playing in the lives of the young people of St. Quaratus'. As a result, I started collecting data and sorting data with two initial categories: the "sacralization of popular culture" and the use of popular culture in religious contexts as a type of "secularization of religion". In this process I began to observe a convergence of the practice of cultural consumption and the practice of religion by these young people. As a result, I ask, "What methodology or methodologies lend themselves to an enquiry on practices of the consumption of popular culture and religion within the context of a local parish?" Accordingly, I chose to engage in interdisciplinary qualitative research bringing together three complimentary methodologies practical theology, congregational studies and portraiture, in order to understand the phenomena under investigation in ways that quantitative research does not so readily address. Browning defines practical theology as "critical reflection on the church's dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action towards social and individual transformation" (1991, p. 36). In the case of this project, that means a dialogue people. These generative questions are: What constitutes the religiosity of young people in America? What forms does it take in contemporary culture? What are the resources young people draw upon for meaning-making? And how might this affect the practices of those whose primary charge is to work with young people in religious settings?

74 In particular, natural science models of quantitative research strive for positivist objectivity versus social science models, which allow elements of interpretivism. For more on this see Bryman's discussion (2004, pp 437-450).
between religious practice and the social practice of cultural consumption. Hopewell (1987) locates congregational studies within the broader area of practical theology, emphasizing that the culture of the congregation expresses underlying meanings conveyed through language and stories drawn from the broader culture. The use of language drawn from popular film in the everyday vernacular and stories of the congregation is an important feature of this research. The third, portraiture, developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1985, 1997), is a holistic qualitative methodology combining the rigour of scientific enquiry and analysis with the art of writing engaging narrative in order to speak to an audience broader than merely the academy. It is through these three theories of analysis that I chose to carry on with this the investigation at hand. Before proceeding to discuss these methodologies I shall first consider some issues related to the nature of qualitative research in general and the use of multiple methodologies.

Qualitative Research

Denzin and Lincoln refer to qualitative research as a "bricolage", "a pieced-together close knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in concrete situations" (1998, p. 3). A bricolage of research is produced by the researcher, referred to as a "bricoleur...a jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person’ (1998, p. 3). The researcher as bricoleur uses multiple methodologies and methods or "triangulation"75 as needed, responding to the emergent nature of grounded qualitative research. This is done for the purpose of cultivating a more in-depth, holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Qualitative research as bricolage is an interactive process shaped by the researcher’s pre-understandings or prejudices (Gadamer, 1991), including personal history, biography, gender, class, and

ethnicity. This does not mean that the research allows for a lack of scientific rigor. On the contrary, Denzin and Lincoln argue, “The combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood... as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth and depth to any investigation” (1998, p. 4).

The researcher makes methodological choices in keeping with his or her epistemological perspective. This study on the use of popular film as a vernacular resource in leisure practice, meaning-making, and religious expression by these young people embraces a *bricolage* of methodologies informed by the combination of constructivist and Christian theological epistemologies which I shall discuss in more detail the next section of this chapter.

The grounded qualitative research methodologies at work in this project are in line with what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call “naturalistic inquiry.” This methodological genre emphasizes “naturalistic” rather than “rationalistic” methods of inquiry, posing a challenge to positivist scientific inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry is an emergent methodology in which theory and design develop during the process of research. It is characterised by the “trustworthiness” and “transferability” of findings rather than their generalizability and validity. I refer to this as “grounded” qualitative research rather than “grounded theory” (Glaser and Strauss, 1968). As Charmaz (2006) points out, the objective of conducting qualitative research within the methodological framework of grounded theory is for the generation of new theories emerging from the data. With respect to this project, although the research was emergent in nature and open to the generation of new theories, it cannot be called grounded theory in the strictest sense in that the objective was to test existing theories on the practices of the consumption of popular culture and religion, allowing for the advancement of theories from the themes that might emerge from the research. In the area of naturalistic
I found the methodologies of practical theology (Browning 1991; Swinton and Mowat, 2006), congregational studies (Ammerman, 1997, 1998; Hopewell, 1987) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1985, 1997) to work complementarily and to be open to the emergent nature of the project; and suitable to aid in finding an approach supporting a convergence of epistemological horizons. In the sections below, I shall discuss these three methodologies, considering the aspects that each contributes to this project. I now turn to examine the first of these methodologies, practical theology.

Practical Theology

Swinton and Mowat (2006) note that practical theology is an umbrella term that was generally understood to refer to pastoral theological practices of Christian ministry such as conducting worship, preaching, pastoral care, and catechesis. They refer to this strain of practical theology as “applied theology” whose task “is to apply doctrine worked out by other theological disciplines to practical situations” (2006, p. 6). Recent developments in the area of practical theology have increasingly emphasized ministries and practices related to the practices of a broader range of Christians than merely those of ordained ministers. The strain of practical theology advocated by Swinton and Mowat, however, differs in focus from all the aforementioned practices. They spotlight practical theology as theological reflection grounded in human experience within the life of the church as it engages with the life of the world. They maintain that practical theology has “a perspective on and a beginning point in human experience within the life of the church as it engages...”

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76 For another example of this methodology see Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 1998) in their work with “Narrative Inquiry”.
78 For more on this see Farley’s article “Interpreting Situations” in Pattison and Woodward (2000).
experience and its desire to reflect theologically on that experience” (2006, p. v).

Browning describes a model of practical theology that proceeds from “practice to theory and back again” rather than a classic “theory-to practice” model of theology (1991). Kinast (2000) points out that this strain of practical theology it is often called by a variety of names such as “contextual theology”, “experiential theology” or “praxis theology” (2000, p. 1). Describing the process he writes,

What all these sources and synonyms have in common is a deceptively simple three fold movement. It begins with the lived experience of those doing the reflection; it correlates this experience with the sources of Christian tradition; and it draws out practical implications for Christian living79 (2000, p. 1).

There are many models for doing practical theology80. This thesis draws upon Swinton’s and Mowat’s (2006) model of practical theology. In Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, (2006) Swinton and Mowat emphasize the use of social scientific methods for understanding social and religious practices in the world as it is. Much like Browning’s81 understanding of practical theology, their proposed

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79 Although these theologians discuss practical theology in the light of Christian theology, the same process could also be undertaken in the light of other religious traditions.

80 One example is that of Thomas Groome (1980) whose work represents a model of practical theological reflection. He has developed a five-move process of theological reflection on Christian practice: naming the present practice, reflecting on that practice, considering the practice in the light of the Christian story and vision, engaging in a hermeneutical dialectic between the practice and the Christian story; and deciding how to live out the Christian faith in the world. Rather than seeing Christian education as a merely cognitive exercise, Groome emphasizes an “epistemic ontology” or the link between knowledge and being, as the means of encouraging faith development (1980, pp 80-82). The goal in this methodology is to facilitate a shared Christian praxis in which people orient their lives in relation to others and the world in the light of the Christian story. Groome’s methodology is unsuitable for this present work since the emphasis of his final move in deciding how to live the Christian story in the world stresses the changed practice of individuals and groups by conforming to the tradition. It does not take into account the possibility of transformation of the tradition itself, only its constituency.

81 Browning’s (1991) revised correlational model allows for more mutual dialogue between culture and theology than the work of Tillich (1959). Browning develops a process for practical theological reflection in four movements: descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology and strategic practical theology. The first
methodology calls for what they term "mutual critical conversation." Mutual critical conversation comprises a framework of four stages: current praxis, cultural/contextual analysis, theological reflection, and, revised forms of practice (2006, pp. 94-97). The first stage, "current praxis," is a pre-reflective stage of identifying practice(s) for study and formulating the research questions based upon the researcher's intuition and pre-understandings. This corresponds to Chapter 1 of this thesis, in which I offer a portion of the literature review, establishing many of the dialogue partners by exploring changing theories about contemporary religious practices in America. The research questions about the role of popular culture in then religious practices of young people arose out of this reading and thinking. In the second stage, "cultural/contextual analysis," the researcher enters into dialogue with other sources of knowledge by applying qualitative research methods for the sake of developing a deeper understanding of the situation. It is at this stage that Swinton and Mowat encourage the use of a variety of social scientific methods for collecting and analyzing data concerning the phenomena and practices under investigation. This stage corresponds to chapter 4, in which I explore the situation under investigation by movement is "descriptive theology", which "attempts to analyze the horizon of cultural and religious meanings that surround our religious and secular practices" (1991, p. 47). The second movement he calls "historical theology", which considers the practices that have been described in the light of "traditional disciplines of biblical studies, church history and the history of Christian thought..." (1991, p. 49.) The object of this movement is to reflect on the meaning of the tradition for the current practical situation under investigation. The third, "systematic theology" calls current practices into critical dialogue with Christian tradition. As a result of this dialogue, a course of action is determined, translating the theological reflection into a proposed transformation of current practice. This leads to the fourth movement - "strategic practical theology" or "fully practical theology" - because it completes the process by inviting the community into action. For Browning, the fourth stage is not an end in itself. Rather, the transformed practices that emerge from these theological reflections generate new questions leading it back into the hermeneutical circle of the four movements.

Drawn from the work of Pattison in his article "Bricks for Straw: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection" (1989).
using a variety of methods and social scientific tools to help in entering into dialogue
in order to get a deeper understanding of the situation. The third "theological
reflection" stage calls for critical reflection on the practices under investigation, by
means of qualitative research methods, in the light of Christian tradition, to consider
the ways that the qualitative findings and the tradition compliment or challenge one
another in the spirit of critical faithfulness. Chapters 2 and 5 correspond to this stage
of the research in using theological concepts and tools such as theology and film
theory drawn from Chapter 2 and a theological framework of the Chicago-Lambeth
Quadrilateral in Chapter 5 as dialogue partners in the conversation with a social
scientific understanding of the situation. In the fourth stage, the researcher returns to
the current praxis by drawing together the types of knowledge shown in stages two
and three in order to propose new forms of practice that are faithful and authentic.
This corresponds to the Epilogue in which I levy challenges to those who produce
popular films and to those who engage in church work with young people whose lives
are significantly influenced by popular culture.
Swinton and Mowat's strain of practical theology is in keeping with Denzin and
Lincoln's concept of the researcher as "bricoleur" by encouraging the use of a
multiple-method approach. It draws upon a broad range of qualitative methods, viz.
interviews, observation notes, memos, printed materials, photos and the like. The
researcher is not bound to any one model or set of methods, but employs whatever
qualitative techniques will best aid in answering the research questions. In this way
the use of qualitative research methods provides the practical theologian access to
information about everyday experiences in the cultural and political contexts of the
church and the world to facilitate theological reflection. The key for Swinton and
Mowat is to integrate practical theology and qualitative research in such a way that the integrity of each may be retained.

As with many types of qualitative research, this understanding of practical theology is ultimately a form of action research. In Swinton and Mowat’s view, the intention of the combination of practical theology and qualitative research is not merely to produce knowledge for knowledge’s sake, nor even merely for the world’s sake, but for the sake of understanding the culture and knowing God’s interaction therein more deeply and helping others to do so as well. In this way, they argue, qualitative research is turned toward the serving God’s purposes and theology is turned toward the serving the world. They write,

> These new understandings should draw us into closer communion with God and inspire worship and praise at the intricacies and wonders of creation. It should not only help us to understand, it should enable us to love God and relate more closely to God and to one another (Matthew 22:37-40) (2006, p. 259).

The methodology proposed by Swinton and Mowat is helpful in emphasizing and modelling an integration of social scientific methods and tools with theological reflection. This methodology will aid in understanding the practices of the world as it is in the light of Christian tradition, and in challenging both the church and the world to turn their practices to the service of God and others. In *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (2006), they offer a variety of models, methods and approaches of practical theological reflection on a range of phenomena and settings. These include: research on the personal experiences of people suffering from depression; a study of the mission and ministry of an emergent church; the role of chaplaincy in the Scottish National Health Service; the role of religious communities in pastoral issues related to suicide in the Scottish Highlands; and participatory research in day centres, care homes, and work places, with people suffering from severe learning disabilities.
This practical theological methodology well suited for use in this study because it emphasises the consideration of implicit and explicit theological meanings of social practices, and a four-stage pattern of theological reflection, along with practical models of the use of qualitative research methods. There is, however, another area of practical theology that will add one more important feature to this research – Hopewell’s (1987) congregational studies methodology, emphasizing the study of congregational culture in order to describe empirical situations of the church. I turn now to consider this aspect of congregational studies.

**Congregational Studies**

Hopewell’s methodology is distinct from the broader field of practical theology precisely because of its emphasis on describing congregational culture. He holds that religious communities develop complex systems of symbols, language, and patterns that are peculiar to their own subculture. Drawing upon Geertz’s interpretation of culture as a “web of significance” (Hopewell, 1987, p. 11), Hopewell stresses how words, rituals, and artefacts form a sort of congregational culture of their own represented in language. He argues,

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83 Congregational studies are not a discipline of their own, per se, but a subfield of the area of practical theology, representing the “bricolage” of methods and methodologies that have been discussed throughout this chapter. In their discussion of congregational studies, Wind and Lewis note, “[t]he practitioners represent a variety of scholarly disciplines and are united more by their common subject than by their methods of inquiry” (Wind and Lewis, 1994; p. 3). Congregational studies employ many approaches and methods. Wind and Lewis (1994, Volumes I and II) as well as Finke and Stark (1992) look at the important role of congregations in American religious history. In *Congregation and Community* (1997), Ammerman uses a sociological framework to study the relationship between sociological change and congregational life. Freedman (1993) presents an ethnographic study of a New York inner city black congregation holding out hope amidst racism and poverty. In *Studying Congregations*, Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley and McKinney (1998) study the role of differing perspectives by using a variety of “frames” or “lenses” such as ecology, theology, process, resources, leadership and culture. Hopewell (1987) specifically emphasizes the importance of local culture in understanding congregations.

84 A term Geertz borrows from Weber.
Thus a congregation is held together by much more than creeds, governing structures, and programs. At a deeper level, it is implicated in the signals and symbols of the world, gathering and grounding them in the congregation’s own idiom (1987, p. 5).

As a result, meaning and knowledge of the local culture of a congregation are conveyed through stories, many of which are drawn from a “larger world treasury” (1987; p. 3) and appropriated for use in the local church. For Hopewell, stories are essential to understanding the intricacies of the social experiences of congregational life and identity. He cites three functions of the role of story in the life of a religious community:

1. The congregation’s self-perception is primarily narrative in form;
2. The congregation’s communication among its members is primarily by story;
3. By its own congregating, the congregation participates in narrative structures of the world’s societies (1987; p. 46).

Rather than seeing a congregation as a machine, he understands religious communities to function in terms of their discourse in the symbolic exchange of ideas and values. For Hopewell, the study of a congregation is in many ways like looking at a house:

All studies, including mine, follow lines that are curiously similar to the ways a family examines a house or an apartment in which it might dwell. There are four approaches from which one examines a potential dwelling: contextual, mechanical, organic, and symbolic. To consider seriously the capacities of either houses or local churches, in other words, is to view them as textures, mechanisms, organisms, and means of signification. While all four perspectives are in play in any single instance of inquiry, one of the four generally dominates (Hopewell, 1987; p. 19).

Hopewell’s contextual approach considers the environment surrounding the congregation, demographics, social services, the neighbourhood, etc. His mechanical approach studies the systems of operation, programs, growth, staffing, and leadership to maximize the congregation’s effectiveness. The organic approach considers issues related to unity and community to encourage participation of its members. Symbolic studies focus on the values, views, and motivations of the congregation to understand
its identity. Maintaining that all four are necessary for understanding the life of a congregation, Hopewell primarily advocates this fourth approach.

It is this cultural aspect of Hopewell’s methodology that is most helpful to the methodologies used in this thesis. The young people of St. Quaratus’ use film in a variety of ways; as a communal practice, as leisure practice, and as theological and vernacular resource for the exchange of ideas and religious expression by means of words, rituals, and artefacts.

The portrait of these youth that I present in the Chapter 4 employs each of these four approaches to the study of the congregation. The first three - the contextual, mechanistic, and organic approaches - are addressed in the first section in order to frame the portrait and prime the canvass, if you will. They describe the context of the community in which they live and how the parish operates, and offering a view of the congregation as a whole. This serves as the background for understanding where the youth subculture fits within the broader life of the congregation. Hopewell’s fourth approach, the symbolic, then makes up the balance of the portrait in the following two sections, as I describe their use of popular culture in their religious practices within the context of their own religious community. The second section presents a picture focusing on the consumption of popular culture, particularly film, as a communal practice; as a leisure practice in the viewing of movies; and as a vernacular resource for performative leisure for meaning-making and implicit religious expression. The third section presents a picture of the making of a film by some of the young people of the congregation as a farewell gift for the departure of their priest. It also discusses the viewing of the film by the entire congregation. This picture demonstrates the use of popular film as a resource for explicit religious expression in recounting stories about his life and his involvement in their lives though popular film clips, by drawing
upon what Hopewell describes as “stories common to a larger world treasury to create [their] own local religion” (1987, p. 3). The making, presenting, and viewing of this film represents a convergence of religion and media, in the practice of cultural consumption of popular film in a religious setting. In this sense popular film became a vernacular resource for this religious community.

Having discussed practical theology and Hopewell’s congregational studies, I now turn to consider the third methodology used in this thesis, portraiture, a situated approach to qualitative research.

*Portraiture*

In consideration of the research questions for this project there are three qualitative research methodologies that could lend themselves to the study at hand, ethnography, case study and portraiture. In my review of these methodologies, I have come to see ethnography and case studies as polar opposites on a spectrum in which portraiture lies in the middle. Before proceeding to an examination of portraiture, I shall briefly discuss why I considered ethnography and case studies less apt methodologies for use in this study.

At one end of this spectrum of qualitative research methodologies lies ethnography, a very open and holistic methodology that seeks to engage in research in order to learn about a culture and a way of life amongst a particular people. In an attempt to define ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson write,

> In its most characteristic form, it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data is available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research (1995, p. 2).

Agar cites three goals in ethnography. First, “The ethnographer’s purpose is to learn - to acquire some knowledge that he previously did not have” (1995, p. 127). The
second is “the goal of giving accounts” of that knowledge (1995, p. 131). Third, he writes,

My ultimate goal is to reduce the difference between the two accounts [the researcher’s and that of an informant], so that mine better approximates a group member’s. Anything that helps me do this is a valuable ethnographic method (1995, p. 129).

To this point ethnography could serve as an appropriate methodology for this study. Hammersley and Atkinson insist however, that research should be done for its own sake. They argue strongly that research should not be

directed towards the achievement of particular political or practical goals... [which] would increase the chances of the findings being distorted by ideas about how the world ought to be, or by what it would be politic for others to believe (1995, p. 20).

There are three underlying assumptions of ethnography that make it less suited to this study than portraiture. First, the perspective advocated by Hammersley and Atkinson of research for its own sake may leave ethnographies to speak primarily to the academy. One of the primary emphases of portraiture is to be written in such a way as to speak to a broader audience. Second, the accent on being free from political or practical goals leaves it to reflect the status quo of a situation or phenomenon. This finds itself in direct opposition with the underlying assumptions discussed above, of practical theology as action research. This view could lead to negligence in view of the Christian tradition of advocacy for the oppressed and impoverished. Additionally, with respect to portraiture, whilst advocating reflexivity and caution as regards the politicization of research, portraiture emphasizes solidarity by giving voice to the experience of a people and potential intervention leading to transformation (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 11), in which the researcher may wield power to implement change for the good. Third, as Agar points out, ethnographic methodologies attempt to minimize the presence of the researcher as though his or her
presence has little impact on the context of the research. Portraiture sees this as a more traditional positivistic ethnographic stance, as though the researcher were an objective observer rather than a cautious but situated participant. The situated stance of the researcher in portraiture seeks to strike a balance between both an insider’s and an outsider’s view of the phenomena under enquiry.

At the other end of this spectrum of qualitative research\(^{85}\) methodologies lies the case study. Stake offers his definition: “A case study is both a process of learning about the case and the product of our learning” (1998, p. 87). Unlike the open and holistic nature of ethnography, case studies are generally narrow in focus. Their goal is to bracket a phenomenon in order to test hypotheses. They are bounded studies that relate primarily to the phenomenon under investigation rather than to the culture at large. Stake writes, “The purpose of a case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (1998, p. 104). Bryman notes, “the emphasis tends to be upon the intensive examination of the setting” (2004, p. 49). As a result, they have a definitive task to accomplish in explaining a specific situation. He holds that this methodology is used “in those instances where the ‘case’ is the focus of interest in it own right” (2004, p. 50).

Rather than having a definitive and narrow task, portraiture is evocative of something larger. The intention is not to point back to itself but to understand phenomena in a broader context.

Portraiture is an elegant, multifaceted methodology that lies between these two qualitative methodologies. It is neither so broad as ethnography nor so narrow as a case study. Furthermore, although both of these are good and valid methodologies for

\(^{85}\) Bryman (2004) notes that case studies can also be used in quantitative research.
qualitative research, they are less conducive to the emergent nature of naturalistic enquiry. I now turn to discuss portraiture.

Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot developed the methodology called portraiture, showcasing a new approach to qualitative research in *The Good High School* (1983), her study of six schools that had earned reputations for excellence. In that study, she reflects on an experience of being the subject of a painted portrait, both the experience of being the subject as well as the experience of looking at someone else's interpretation of her. She describes the shock of seeing an image so familiar, yet portrayed in such an unfamiliar light because it included another's interpretation of her. The experience posed a challenge to her self-understanding. Lawrence-Lightfoot sought to translate that experience from portraits that are drawn to portraits that are written. She writes,

> As a social scientist I wanted to develop a form of inquiry that would embrace many of the descriptive, aesthetic, and experiential dimensions that I had known as the artist's subject; that would combine science and art; that would be concerned with composition and design as well as description; that would depict motion and stopped time, history, and anticipated future. I also wanted to enter into relationships with my "subjects" that had the qualities of empathetic regard, full and critical attention, and a discerning gaze (1983, p. 6).

As an educator, Lawrence-Lightfoot expresses that she deeply values the ways that education forms the lives of students in complex and multidimensional ways. She insists therefore that the only way to fully understand the dynamics of education is to study schools in their contexts, paying close attention to their stories, practices, communities and identities. She sought to develop a holistic approach to qualitative research using appropriate techniques to reflect the complex realities of high school education. Portraiture is a holistic methodology that combines the rigour of scientific inquiry and analysis with the art of writing engaging narrative accounts of research.
subjects. In this methodology she melds art and science, in what she calls a ‘demand for accuracy’ and ‘an urgency for poetry’ (1997, p. 37), with the intent of developing a wider audience than the academy. She states, “The attempt is to move beyond the academy’s inner circle to speak in a language that is not coded or exclusive, and to develop texts that will seduce readers into thinking more deeply about issues that concern them” (1997, p. 10).

The stance of portraiture is one of appreciative inquiry. Lawrence-Lightfoot resists efforts to document failure. Rather she insists, “It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections” (1997, p. 9). Portraiture functions primarily out of a paradigm of ethnographic research rooted in phenomenology that also allows for personal interpretations of the researcher as a participant in the research process. It pushes against the constraints of those traditions however, in its emphasis upon empirical and the aesthetic description of the phenomena in question with the goal of reaching a wider audience. Like the epistemological paradigms mentioned above the portraitist highlights both the rigorous discussion of the context as well as personal interpretation. Lawrence-Lightfoot writes, “In fact, the portraitist insists that the only way to interpret people’s actions, perspectives and talk is to see them in context” (1997, p. 11). The situatedness of the researcher is intended to offer an interpretation of a particular phenomenon by allowing researchers to show themselves as participants in the context of the research, with the intention of “capturing - from an outsider’s purview – an insider’s understanding of the scene” (1997, p. 25). At the same time Lawrence-

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86 Lawrence-Lightfoot has continued to build upon this methodology developed for research in education, later using it in research on racial issues (1988, 1994), on respect in the workplace and public life (1999) and parent-teacher relations (2003). It has been adapted by other educational researchers, viz. Hoffman Davis (1996, 2005).
Lightfoot insists that attention must be given to disallow the voice of the portraitist to overwhelm the voices of subjects. This calls for a significant level of reflexivity and closely guarded attention to the assumptions of the portraitist.

In view of the holistic nature of this approach to research, portraiture allows for a broad range of methods of data collection as needed by the portraitist. This is in keeping with Lincoln and Denzin’s assertion of qualitative researcher as “bricoleur” (1998), as well as the methodology proposed by Swinton and Mowat (2006). In particular, portraiture draws upon methods of in-depth interviews and participant observations. The methodology nonetheless lends itself to the complementary use of other methods as well. All of this requires that the portraitist observe, analyse, manage, and describe not only the data drawn from multiple sources but also from their own experience.

For the purposes of this enquiry, portraiture has several advantages. First the methodology of portraiture facilitates a constructivist approach by regarding the subjectivity of both the research subjects and the researcher in order to come to a more holistic understanding of the religious context in which these young people were being observed. It considers the research subjects with their pre-understandings or prejudices as well as those of the researcher; at the same time, it takes into account the context of Anglican religious tradition and contemporary popular culture. This comprehensive methodology, originally used for research with educational institutions, is transferable to the setting of St. Quaratus’. It lends itself well to use in a religious setting in that both institutions share much in common in the complexities of shaping young people for life in the world today. Second, the emphasis of this methodology is on appreciative inquiry. Looking for “goodness” in a situation rather

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87 For more on constructivist methodologies see the works of Denzin (1997) and Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2003).
than failure is an important stance for understanding the significance of popular culture (and, specifically in this case, film) in the religious lives of these young people. Religious analyses of the role of popular culture often fail to take popular culture seriously, resorting to either considering it a lesser art form, underestimating its influence, or recognizing its influence as evil and rejecting it rather than engaging it critically. In the light of the argument from Chapter 1, asserting that people increasingly find religious needs met through popular culture, it is important to listen to how popular culture is being used for religious purposes in order to come to a deeper understanding of this process. The third advantage in founding this study on the methodology of portraiture is in connection to the process of listening. As mentioned above, Lawrence-Lightfoot described a new dimension of self-understanding that she gained in the challenging experience of seeing her own image portrayed in the unfamiliar light of another’s interpretation. This methodology lends itself nicely to a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 1991), in which epistemological perspectives may be “transformed into a communion in which [they] do not remain what [they] were” (1991, p. 379) as proposed by Gadamer. Fourth, in view of the enabling of dialogue in a fusion of horizons, Lawrence-Lightfoot asserts that the intention for the reportage of portraiture is to speak to a wider audience. The findings of this thesis may speak not only to the academy in the disciplines of theology, religious studies, and cultural studies, but also to congregations about the significant role of film in religious imaginations of their constituencies.

In Chapter 1, I discussed four characteristics of shifting patterns of religious practice in America, co-existence theory involving both secularization and sacralization, a democratization of religion where the onus of authority lies on the individual, the religious-like qualities of cultural consumption, and, a convergence of religion and
media in which the social practices in both institutions are affected. I mentioned that I found theories discussing these issues helpful for understanding my experience in working with young people who would draw upon movies and music to discuss issues related to Christian faith. As a result, I launched a qualitative research project amongst the youth at St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church to investigate the role of popular culture in the religious lives of young people. In this section I have examined three complimentary methodologies that support this research – practical theology, congregational studies, and portraiture. Each brings a different and important dimension to the research. Practical theology helps in understanding the implicit and explicit theologies underlying the use of film by the youth of St. Quaratus' and gives a structure for its analysis and reportage in this thesis. Congregational studies bring an understanding of congregational culture conveyed through the language and stories drawn from film. The constructivist approach of portraiture underscores an appreciative enquiry of the role of popular culture in the religious practices of these young people and the desire to speak to a wider audience than merely the academy. The use of these multiple methodologies is critical for understanding the phenomenon under investigation in that whilst portraiture is open to taking into account the religious context in which the youth of St. Quaratus' consumed popular films, integrating them into their religious practices, its epistemological assumptions do not automatically offer analyses in the light of Christian tradition. Therefore I draw upon practical theology and congregational studies for understanding the phenomena at St. Quaratus'. Furthermore, this epistemological stance is central to my pre-understandings and worldview as I come to this project. Having discussed the methodologies on which this project is founded I now move to consider the epistemological perspectives under girding the research.
Epistemology

In the last section I discussed the practical theological, cultural, and qualitative research dimensions on which this research project is founded. Having discussed these methodologies, I now turn to examine some of the epistemological considerations underlying these methodologies and the potential conflict of interests in bringing together divergent perspectives.

In *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, Denzin and Lincoln (2003), offer an historical overview of qualitative research with particular attention to developments of the twentieth century. They argue that there are seven phases or moments in the history of qualitative research in the North American academy. Each phase advances theories of qualitative research by challenging the assumptions of prior epistemological approaches. These phases move from early twentieth century positivist/objectivist epistemologies to contemporary, post-modern, interpretivist-constructivist, multivocal, and even multimedia approaches. Contemporary approaches emphasize the situated stance of the researcher whose presence affects and is affected by the research context. At the same time, they reject the notion of the researcher

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88 See Denzin and Lincoln (2003, pp 17-29). These moments are: 1) the pre-World War II “traditional” phase emphasising a positivist, objectivist stance; 2) the post-World War II “modernist” phase introduced new interpretive theories such as “grounded theory” and participant observation; 3) the “blurred genres” phase of the 1970s employing multiple new paradigms, methods and strategies such as postpositivism, structuralism, feminism, neo-marxism and constructionism; 4) the “crisis of representation” phase of the mid-eighties emphasising more reflexivity, challenging the ethnographer’s moral and scientific authority in discussing of issues of gender, class and race; 5) the “triple crisis” postmodern phase of the mid-nineties challenging the representation, legitimation and praxis of qualitative researchers in which the search for “grand narratives” is replaced by local small scale theories specific to particular situations; and the current overlapping sixth and seventh “postexperimental” and “the future” phases featuring fictional ethnographies, ethnographic poetry and multimedia texts responding the needs of free democratic society. Since the sixth and seventh phases are currently under way they do not develop these extensively apart from pointing out a number of new methods which they hold are having an influence in the field of qualitative research.
maintaining an objective and neutral perspective as advocated by positivist assumptions in the natural sciences. Moreover, rather than attempting to construct comprehensive laws universally applicable to society at large, many contemporary approaches provide local small-scale theories specific to particular situations. Thus, in place of emphasising the generalizability of theory, they stress the transferability of concepts for use in understanding other similar situations and phenomena. This current project resonates with the interests of this contemporary approach and for this reason has employed portraiture as one of the primary methodological foundations.

In the light of these developments in qualitative research practices, I take an interpretive-constructivist approach assuming that social knowledge is relative. From my perspective, truth and knowledge are never rooted in a pure, objective, stable external reality but are understood through personal and communal interpretations. Meaning emerges from shared interaction and experience within society. Swinton and Mowat argue for "multiple realities" (2006, p. 35), which validly emphasize various interpretations of the same phenomenon. In the case of this study amongst the youth of St. Quaratus', these include both the interpretations of the young people and their leaders as well as my own. Denzin and Lincoln assert the "knower and the respondent cocreate understandings" (2003, p. 35). As a researcher I was not merely a distant observer but an active participant in, and interpreter of, the experiences and phenomena at St. Quaratus', and therefore a "co-creator" and co-interpreter of these phenomena. In this research, I have sought to show the hand of the researcher as a participant whilst at the same time striving not to overwhelm the data with my presence. This is in keeping with Swinton and Mowat's insistence that "within the constructivist paradigm the boundaries between the researcher and the subject of the research process are blurred and interconnected" (2006, p. 35).
Whilst I affirm an interpretivist approach that challenges positivist epistemologies, it is not without some complications regarding my own stance. Constructivist epistemologies presume the relative nature of all knowledge. This perspective puts itself in opposition to Christian tradition, which holds to truth claims about the reality of God and the supernatural order. Nevertheless there are aspects of constructivist epistemology that are germane to this study of religious practice for considering the constructive nature of meaning and religious expression by the young people of St. Quaratus' drawn from the resources of popular film. In the light of this constructive nature of religious meaning, I have drawn upon congregational studies to help in understanding the role of culture, idiom and story in the lives and practices of the youth of St. Quaratus'.

As suggested above, constructivist epistemologies commonly underlying much qualitative research are generally non-foundational. They therefore tend to be sceptical of the prospect of accessing truth beyond the empirical. Furthermore, they find themselves in tension with the theological assumption of objective reality held out by Christian tradition. For this reason, as a believing Christian, I do not wholeheartedly align myself with the view arguing that all reality is merely a social construction (Denzin, 1997). As a result, I used practical theology as another of my primary methodological foundations because its underlying assumptions are founded on Christian tradition. Swinton and Mowat argue that the term 'Christian', "relate[s] to a particular theological framework, a specific historical narrative and a particular set or sets of moral, ethical and metaphysical assumptions" (2006, p. 23). Kinast maintains, "[F]aith is not just a religious emotion; it is also a kind of knowledge... faith-knowledge is a practical sense of how to exist in the world before God" (2000, p. 16). Christian theology offers a perspective on knowledge, truth and the nature of
reality bringing it into conflict with the underlying assumptions of the interpretive-
constructivist paradigm. However, as Percy points out, Christian traditions “are
contained within finite and fallible linguistic vessels... the mystery of God, though
revealed, is never fully known” (2001, p. 352). How then shall I reconcile these two
seemingly opposing epistemologies that inform my perspective on this project?
Gadamer’s representation of understanding as a “fusion of horizons” is helpful in
bringing these viewpoints together. For Gadamer (1991) interpretation is intrinsic to
human nature. Human beings are by nature interpretive creatures. Therefore when
humans interact with a text (or in this instance a phenomenon) they cannot help but to
make an interpretation of it. It is not possible to separate the subject and the object,
the interpreter from the text, since both share a common cultural and historical
context. Interpreters therefore approach texts with “prejudices” or “pre-
understandings” that influence their interpretations. Gadamer argues,

[T]o eliminate one’s own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but
manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to use one’s own
preconceptions so that the meaning of the text can really be made to speak for

He emphasizes the importance of interpreters (with their prejudices) transposing
themselves into the horizon of the text in order to engage in a dialogue and thereby
develop a deeper understanding of the text. The horizon is, “the range of vision that
includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (1991, p. 302).
Gadamer holds this to be a “legitimate hermeneutical requirement” (1991, p. 303) for
understanding the text. The point of meeting between the interpreter and the text is
the “fusion of horizons,” or in keeping with the primary theme of this project the
convergence of horizons, where dialogue and deeper understanding can take place. In
the dialogue, the prejudices of the interpreter are challenged but are not completely
discarded. Gadamer writes,
To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were (1991, p. 379).

In the case of this research, I seek a convergence of horizons wherein theological pre-understandings or prejudices of Christian tradition come into dialogue with the interpretive-constructivist perspectives of religious meaning and expression out of the resources of popular culture so they may be “transformed into a communion in which [they] do not remain what [they] were.”

In keeping with Gadamer’s insistence that the researcher is inevitably a part of the interpretive process, I seek in this study to remain carefully aware of my own prejudices and Christian pre-understanding, whilst acknowledging myself as a situated participant in the research process seeking a convergence of horizons for deeper understanding of the process of dialogue between religion and popular culture, and religion and film in specific. Having discussed the methodological foundations for this project and the underlying epistemological perspectives, I now move to discuss the methods used to elicit data on religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus’ and their social practice of cultural consumption.

Methods

The choice of research methods used in this study flows from the methodological and epistemological considerations discussed above. The study was conducted during the course of two years as I journeyed between the UK and the USA, beginning in Autumn 2003. I spent almost one full year in the USA working in this context of the parish, taking a couple brief journeys to confer with supervisors in the UK. In the second year, my experience was the inverse as I spent the majority of my time in the

89 For another example of this hermeneutical stance in Pastoral theology, see: Elaine Graham (2000) in Woodward and Pattison.
UK, returning to the parish periodically between terms at King’s College to fill in the
gaps of data collection. In what follows, I will address questions of what, how,
where and who, regarding this project.

What to Investigate

In Chapter 1, I noted theories asserting the important role of cultural consumption and
a convergence of media and religion taking place in contemporary religious practices
in America, which have informed this research. As mentioned at the beginning of this
chapter, the initial intent of this project was to consider the role of popular culture in
the religious lives of these young people, asking, What is the role of popular culture
in the religious lives of these young people? Do these young people draw upon
popular culture for meaning-making and religious expression? If so, how? Given the
emergent nature of this type of grounded qualitative research, the focus of
investigation grew clearer as I spent time in the parish. After reviewing, coding, and
sorting the substantial corpus of data that I had collected, it became apparent that
popular film was the significant vernacular resource from which these young people
drew for performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression. This insight
proceeded from my observations of the language used in conversations, and the
activities in which I participated with the young people. Seeing patterns in their
consumption of film and its use as a significant resource in the discourse, I turned my
attention specifically to consider the role of popular film and its use by these young
people. As a result, I set about to survey key theorists in religion and film studies
examining the various methodologies used in the dialogue between religion and film.
I offered a survey of these in Chapter 2. These theories will be helpful later in
Chapter 5 in reflections on the use of film as a significant resource in leisure
practices, meaning-making and religious expression by the youth of St. Quaratus’.
Given my desire to investigate the role of popular culture and the ways it is used by the young people in their religious practices, I sought to pay particular attention to two aspects of the phenomenon of the youth of St. Quaratus'. First, I sought to document and discuss their consumption of popular cultural texts. Second, I sought to understand what it was they did with the films that they had consumed. This is what Michel De Certeau refers to as "secondary production hidden in the process of utilization" (1984, p. xiii). I shall discuss the implications of this in more detail in Chapter 5. For now it shall suffice to say that the choice of methods used for this study was in keeping with the epistemological and methodological considerations stated above and primarily driven by the desire to find answers to my research questions. I now turn to discuss the specific methods used in this enquiry.

_How to Investigate – Choosing Methods_

Denzin and Lincoln refer to qualitative research as a "site of multiple interpretive practices" (2003, p. 9). They stress that qualitative research privileges no single methodology over another and no prescribed set of methods (1998, 2003). Qualitative researchers draw from a broad range of analytical tools and methods, from semiotic, narrative, archival, discourse, and phonemic analyses. They are selected and appropriated to suit the needs of the site and the researcher. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) and Bryman (2004) point out, semi-structured interviews and participant observations are the most commonly used tools of qualitative research. Swinton and Mowat (2006), however, suggest a variety other open-ended research instruments, including: case studies, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, observational historical and visual texts, focus groups, biographies and life histories. The three methodologies described above, which have informed this project, are in keeping with the same philosophy of research proposing the use of a multiple
methods as needed. The three primary research methods used in this study were participant observation (Bryman 2004, Hopewell, 1987, Swinton and Mowat, 2006), radio-microphone recordings (Rampton 2002, 2004, 2005) of the conversations of the young people before during and after worship services and semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2004, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Additionally, I used two secondary methods, a survey about popular cultural and religious practices (Bryman, 2004, Real, 1977, Wasko, 2001) and content analysis of printed artefacts from the parish (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). This use of a broad range of methods facilitated a more holistic understanding of the youth subculture of the church located within the context of the parish.

Roles of the Researcher

Bryman cites four roles for researchers\textsuperscript{90} engaged in the qualitative practice of observation: 1) the complete participant, a covert observer fully participating in an event; 2) the participant-as-observer, the same as complete observer but whose status as a researcher is publicly known; 3) the observer-as-participant, where the observer conducts interviews with little other involvement; and, 4) complete observer, the unobtrusive observer who does not interact with subjects of the research (2004, p. 301). In general, I embraced two of these, participant-as-observer in my attending events with the youth and observer-as-participant in the interviewing process.

Participant Observation

Swinton and Mowat write, “the key to good qualitative research does not lie in technical knowledge alone” (2006, p. 58). They stress that the researcher is the “instrument of choice”\textsuperscript{91} in qualitative research. Although I had never formally participated in qualitative research prior to this project, previous experiences and pre-

\textsuperscript{90} Based on the work of Gold (1958).

\textsuperscript{91} Drawing from the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985).
understandings helped ease my entry into the parish. I have had the opportunity on various occasions to live abroad in cultures where the language spoken was not my first language. I have also had the opportunity to live in English speaking cultures that were not my own. In this context I shared more in common with the host culture but still saw myself as a foreigner. These experiences have helped me to cultivate an awareness of the similarities and differences between my own culture and the one in which I was a visitor. As a result I have taken the habit of observing practices in foreign cultures, at times imitating them and at others questioning the assumptions of the foreign culture as well as my own. The years I have spent in church youth work, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, have functioned in a similar fashion. Although keenly aware of the difference in age and culture, I have often felt relatively at ease in the context of youth culture, church culture and youth church culture respectively. Like my experience in English speaking foreign cultures, in my time in the parish, I resonated and operated within the relative similarity of language and values of a comparable yet different culture but still saw myself as a foreigner. Indeed, St. Quaratus' was like foreign culture sharing an Anglican heritage, language of worship and many similar values, yet to me it was at the same time a foreign culture with new people and different customs and values. I shall discuss this more later when I talk about my reasons for choosing the site.

Because of the intimate nature of portraiture involving the interrelationship between the researcher and the objects of research, I began my time in the parish largely as a participant observer. As when I visit a foreign culture, I wanted to get a good feel for the parish, the youth and their culture by drinking it in before attempting to establish myself by employing other research methods that might seem more invasive. During the first six weeks I attended a variety of events, weekly Sunday worship services, the
Youth Forum informal Sunday school class, Tuesday evening Study Break, a mid-week chance for the youth to gather for fun, and a couple of large fellowship events outside of the church. I tried to keep a relatively low profile as I took in the culture. All the while I carried a small note pad, taking notes of conversations, comments, and behaviours when it seemed appropriate. I wanted to be cautious not to appear as though I was always documenting the young people's every move (although in fact I was), preferring instead to take in the culture before making assessments. If some significant exchange took place and I felt it in necessary to write it down, I would step aside at a convenient time, either into the corridor or the men's lavatory to make notes. As I felt more comfortable and a mutual level of trust grew, I would invite the young people to repeat or clarify a comment or to give an opinion, asking for permission to write it down.

My handwritten field notes ranged from brief key words or phrases, intended to jolt my memory, to more lengthy descriptions of behaviours, comments, approximations of verbatim conversations or memos about my inner experiences of being in the field. The extent of notes taken was dependent upon the freedom I felt to document phenomena in the presence of others. On occasion I would sit by myself in the unused choir loft of the church to observe and document aspects of the worship, the behaviours of participants or something that had taken place that morning. While being up in the loft gave me freedom to write at will, it also took me away from being intimately involved with the youth during worship. Later at the computer I would write out my notes expanding on my observations, documenting personal reflections, emerging patterns, and developing preliminary analyses.

In retrospect I believe it was a very good decision to begin the project in a laid-back mode while on-site. Having observation as my primary objective in that period gave
me the opportunity to assess the contour of this new culture and to get to know the people in ways that I may not have been able to had I attempted to start in with other methods. It also allowed others to get to see me as a person, a participant and fellow worshipper first, as well as a researcher. Having described the use of participant observations as my entry into the process of data collection I shall now turn to discuss the second method used, microphone digital recording.

Radio-Microphone Recordings

After being in the parish for about six weeks I grew more acquainted with the congregation’s culture and the youth. By this time I had documented a good bit of material on the behaviours of the parish in and around worship services and youth events. It was at this time that I introduced the use of radio-microphone recordings. This method has been used in linguistic ethnography, conversation and discourse analysis, as modelled in the work of Rampton, Harris and Dover (2002) and Rampton (2004, 2005).\footnote{Rampton (2005) conducted research on the popular culture in the classroom testing, amongst various other factors, claims that popular media culture is changing the ways that students are listening to their teachers. Although methodologically quite different from my own research, this project was quite helpful in framing this portion of the study.} It is a means of capturing language and conversation in a more naturalistic manner unlike that of interviews.

I began on a Sunday by recording one young man serving as an acolyte\footnote{A term frequently used in the Episcopal Church in America for an altar server in Eucharistic worship.} in the worship service. I contacted him in advance to verify his willingness to participate in the study in this way; prior to this I contacted his parents to obtain their permission. This procedure was repeated with each new participant, always trying to be clear that they were under no obligation to continue as part of the research and that they could retract from the project at any time. In all there were eight such participants, four...
girls and four boys, rendering two or more recordings each, with approximately forty-two hours of recordings in total. Each participant wore a small digital recorder under his or her liturgical garments attached to a lapel microphone. The radio-microphones recorded the conversations of the youth before, during and after worship. The objective was to use this tool as an instrument for triangulation. Observation notes, *de facto*, represent the reflections of the researcher. Interviews and surveys represent the interpretations of the research subjects as they contemplate their religious experiences. Radio-microphone recordings served to capture data in a more natural unreflective light. In brief, my observations represent my interpretations of the experience of practicing religion with the youth. Interviews and surveys reflect their interpretation of the experience of religion. These recordings brought another angle by capturing the ways they were actually practicing religion.

My original intent in using this method was to capture the side conversations of the youth during worship services, along with dialogue and opinions about the practice of worship. I found the use of these recordings of limited value for these purposes. Although there was some evidence that such exchanges were taking place, conversations were most often spoken in hushed or muttered tones. Many were altogether unintelligible. However, they bore substantial fruit outside the context of worship. Worship services generally lasted about one hour. The recorders were able to register two hours and fifteen minutes of content. This allowed for an additional hour and a quarter of recording conversations at normal speaking levels. I would have the participants attach the radio-microphone fifteen minutes prior to the service, allowing for the recording of dialogue during the preparatory moments beforehand. I then encouraged the young people to continue to wear them for the time following the service during the weekly coffee hour and social time. As we became more
acquainted with one another some of these youth with whom I had been working more closely would invite me to join them for afternoon outings following church. On occasion they would wear them during these events as well. Sometimes we watched television or films or played video games together. On other occasions we went out to lunch. The recordings also served as a vehicle to capture what Bryman (2004) calls “opportunistic interviews,” responding to ad hoc phenomena taking place.

I listened to each recording soon after the service, usually that same day or the next, jotting notes about any exchanges or comments that I thought noteworthy, registering the tape number, side of the tape and tape footage-counter number, so that I could easily return to it. Later, in preparation for the reporting of data, I listened to each tape again one or two times in the prospect of culling more data if needed and I then transcribed only those parts that were relevant to the research. The content of these recorded conversations outside of worship services were very informative indeed. I was actually surprised by the ease with which the youth embraced wearing the radio-microphones and spoke freely. The first two weeks of recordings involved less conversation and more questions from others enquiring about the wires and the purpose of wearing them. Eventually, it seemed to be part of the make-up of the Sunday church experience for that year. Although my intention of capturing dialogue during worship services bore little fruit, recording of conversations outside of worship exceeded my expectations.

In reviewing the data collected by this method it was apparent that large portions of the recordings were not relevant for use in addressing the topic of research. There seemed little sense in transcribing these recordings in their entirety. Therefore after
listening closely to each one twice, I transcribed only those portions that I thought were most useful.

Having discussed radio-microphone recordings, I shall now turn to the third primary method of data collection, semi-structured interviews.

*Interviews*

I used interviews as a compliment to the other two primary methods employed in this study. Bryman (2004) notes that there are certain issues that cannot be understood by observation alone but require more in-depth understanding from below the surface. Interview questions help the researcher gain deeper understanding of the interior life of participants and their experience in ways that are not available to the naked eye. They can also provide deeper insight into the naturalistic data provided by the radio-microphone recordings, discussed above, as participants are invited to reflect and reconstruct events of the past. In view of the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of this study I chose to use semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, as opposed to structured interviews using one standard set of question with all interviewees, allow for flexibility in response to issues arising on the part of either the interviewer or interviewee. Semi-structured interviews reflect more collaborative and constructed efforts between the researcher and the respondent as themes and concerns emerge during the course of the interview. At the other end of the spectrum, unstructured interviews also allow for great flexibility. I felt however, that these lack direction and may not provide as much relevant information on the topic of research. Additionally, in view of the age range of the youth in the parish with whom I was working, it seemed apparent that the added direction provided by semi-structured interviews would be more profitable to the project. Providing some
structure allowed interviewees a greater measure of ease in responding to questions by virtue of having a sense of where the interview was heading.

I waited for eight months to conduct the first set of interviews favouring other modes of enquiry first. This gave me ample time to consider and select those I thought might serve as adequate interviewees. I wanted to establish a sense of trust with the teens since interviews are more invasive. I also wanted to have a clearer sense of what was lacking in data before proceeding with interviews. In all, I conducted twenty-three formal, semi-structured interviews. Sixteen of these interviews were conducted with ten teens from the congregation. I took a sampling of five girls and five boys and did ten initial interviews and six follow-up interviews, relating to specific issues raised requiring further discussion. Eight of these interviewees also participated in the radio-microphone recordings. Two more were added for interviews - one boy, Ken, and one girl, Ingrid. They were asked to do interviews because of their articulacy and familiarity with both the religion and popular culture. Each interview began with the open-ended, lead-in question, "Could you tell me what you believe?" In order to get another perspective on the youth, I also conducted two interviews with clergy (the Rector and the Assistant Rector), and three interviews with parents involved in the youth ministry. The lengths varied from fifteen minutes to fifty-five, depending upon how much participants wanted to share. The average interview lasted about twenty-five minutes. Each interview was based on the same set of questions, allowing for variation as topics arose in the course of the conversation. I chose informants factoring in gender, age, involvement in the church, articulacy, receptivity to the study, and suggestions of the youth minister. Initial interviews were transcribed in full. Portions of the follow up interviews were transcribed on an as-needed basis.

\[94\] For a list of standard interview questions see Appendix I
The primary advantage in using interviews is that they provided specific insight into the values and beliefs of the youth as well as clarification on what was meaningful to them. The other two primary methods, observation notes and radio microphone recording, do not avail this sort of information.

Overall, I assess that the interview experience was positive for the interviewer and for interviewees. At the end of each interview I asked the youth if there was anything that I failed to address that they wanted to say or if they had any suggestions for me. Several of the teens thanked me for listening and for asking their opinions on matters of religion. As I point out in the next chapter, some of the interviews were quite fun and filled with laughter.

Having discussed the important role of interviews, I now turn to consider secondary methods used in this study.

**Secondary Methods**

In an effort to get as holistic a view as possible, I also drew on two secondary methods of data collection: a survey about popular cultural and religious practices, and content analysis of printed artefacts from the parish and a cultural text, specifically a video created by the young people.

In my fourth month in the parish I conducted a survey on religion and popular culture based upon studies by Real (1977)\(^95\) and Wasko (2001),\(^96\) who used qualitative forms

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\(^95\) Real argues that there is currently a gap in moral education provided by religion in America. As a result people are being entertained in to a moral framework by means of the mass consumption of Disney products, which function as modern day “morality plays”. For more see Real, M., “The Disney Universe: Morality Play” (1977).

\(^96\) Wasko (2001a, 2001b) has replicated Real’s study on numerous occasions both in an American University setting as well as internationally.
of surveys.\textsuperscript{97} Bryman (2004) notes that some researchers have argued that there are irreconcilable epistemological differences between quantitative and multi-strategy qualitative research methods; therefore, surveys should never be used in conjunction with qualitative research because they are rooted in a positivist epistemological approach most often used in quantitative research. Bryman argues, however, “the idea that research methods carry with them fixed ontological and epistemological implications is very difficult to sustain. They are capable of being put to a wide variety of tasks” (2004, pp 453). In the light of the multi-methods approach of this project, I chose to use surveys particularly because this specific design includes the possibility of gathering qualitative data. Forty teens participated in the survey, which was taken on a Sunday during the \textit{Youth Forum} Sunday School Class. The survey began by posing basic demographic questions. It then proceeded to a series of questions about religious texts and practices, and about products and practices related to popular culture with specific attention paid to Disney, one of the most recognizable American popular culture icons.\textsuperscript{98} In view of the methodological premises of this study, I included information drawn from the surveys, although they were not a central feature of this thesis. They did, however, provide some useful data with respect to the demographics of the youth, and some good autobiographical comments on the importance of Disney films with respect to morality in the lives of participants. Another secondary method used in this study was content analysis of printed artefacts. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) hold that artefacts such as printed material, photos, 

\textsuperscript{97}These surveys contained qualitative questions, allowing for autobiographical responses, as well as quantitative responses more conducive to statistical analysis. See Appendix II.

\textsuperscript{98}Sociologist and Disney analyst Janet Wasko maintains, “Today, Disney films, comic books, toy stores, theme parks and other products are sources of pleasure for many – if not most – young American children, who learn and have reinforced ideas and values that last a lifetime... Disney holds an almost sacred place in the lives of Americans” (2001, p. 2).
historical records, and the like are useful in providing additional background information on subjects of research. Whilst in the parish, I collected a substantial amount of printed material, viz. monthly parish newsletters, a history of the parish, promotional brochures and photos of the church and the community, photos of youth events, schedules, and a DVD of a film produced by some of the youth as a farewell gift for their priest. I shall discuss this film at length in Chapters 3 and 5. Although many of these artefacts were not central to the study, they did provide information on the context in which these young people operate and texts with which they interact.

Having examined the tools used in data collection, I now turn to consider why I chose to use St. Quaratus' as the site for this research.

Where to Investigate - Choosing the Research Site

St. Quaratus' church has approximately 1400 members. At the time of this study there were nearly 400 members in weekly attendance at the Sunday worship services and 49 teens on the rolls between the ages of 13-18, with approximately 32 in weekly attendance. In total, I had the opportunity to work with 40 of the youth of St. Quaratus'. Because of my history and interest in youth ministry, I chose to focus on this age group. I specifically chose to bracket my study with this age group in light of the findings from a national study on faith development in Protestant congregations (Benson and Elkin, 1990), which reports that faith development among youth in America is commonly arrested at the age of confirmation when they begin to experience an adolescent “crisis of faith” (1990, p. 23).

Several factors went into my choosing St. Quaratus' as a research site. First, I was relatively unacquainted with the parish. Because of my history in youth work in the Diocese, both at the parish and diocesan levels, I have become familiar with many of the churches in the Diocese and many of the people involved in youth work therein.
Although I was aware that St. Quaratus' has had a history of professional youth workers since the early 1980s,\(^99\) I had little contact with the parish and with its youth ministers prior to this study. This is in part because of the geography of the parish (located on the other side of the city from where have I served), in part because of my own busyness in everyday youth work, and in part because of theological traditions. Although I was raised Roman Catholic and maintain many catholic sensibilities, I was theologically trained in an Anglican evangelical tradition which espouses a different philosophy of youth ministry than I experienced at St. Quaratus', more of a broad church tradition. Consequently, I shared a different circle of youth ministry colleagues and had little contact with this congregation. My lack of familiarity with the culture and people of the parish gave a creative tension to my familiarity with youth work and youth culture. Interestingly enough, I did know the youth minister who was on staff at the time I began my research from his involvement in diocesan youth ministry events when he was a teen. Second, since I was ordained a Priest in the Episcopal Church in 1995 and have an affinity for Anglican heritage, I felt a both the desire and duty to conduct research that might be of benefit to its understanding of youth and their engagement with popular culture. Third, although the pre-understandings and preferences of the researcher certainly play a role in deciding where to conduct research, these were not the sole or even primary reasons for selecting St. Quaratus'. St. Quaratus’ espouses abroad church theology, being neither definitively liberal nor conservative, but seeking a “middle way” of being faithful in holding onto tradition whilst at the same time engaging the dominant culture. I believed that findings from research conducted in a broad church setting could appeal to a wider audience within the Episcopal Church. Additionally, since my

\(^99\) This is early in the history of professional youth work and St. Quaratus’ was amongst the first Anglican Parishes in Pittsburgh to call a professional youth worker.
understanding of Anglicanism is that it is “reformed Catholicism”, I believed that findings could also benefit other churches, Catholic or Protestant. Lastly, St. Quaratus’ is a predominantly white middle class parish in a predominantly white middle class suburb of America, where predominantly white middle class values and economics have been the mainstay of the American culture. While I am actually a proponent of the need for conducting research on the margins of society for the sake of hearing alienated voices and facilitating change on behalf of the disenfranchised, I intentionally sought to launch this research in the mainstream of American culture by looking at mainline religion and popular culture. In view of the uniqueness of the project, this sets a stake in the ground by beginning in the mainstream. Future projects may then consider popular culture and religion on the margins building on the foundation laid by this study.

I chose a single site rather than multiple sites because the intent of the research was to examine the role of popular culture in the religious lives of youth, not to do a comparative study in multiple contexts. The emphasis was on the consumption of popular culture by young people and their processes of meaning-making and religious expression, not on religious institutions themselves. Focussing on one site allowed me to go in-depth into one specific culture and its processes.

Access and Field Relations

I gained access to the youth to St. Quaratus’ after visiting several different parishes in the Diocese to consider them as research sites. I contacted the Rector to explain the nature of my research and the reasons why I thought St. Quaratus' would be a good fit. He was interested in the topic and felt that he would allow it if the Youth Minister felt it was appropriate. I phoned the youth minister whom, as mentioned above, I knew previously from diocesan youth events when he was a teen. He was actually
enthusiastic about the topic and felt that he would love to see St. Quaratus' as a site for this sort of enquiry. I went to church the following Sunday on a trial basis to take notes and run a pilot project to see if it would be a good site. After writing up my notes and conferring with supervisors, I decided that it was a suitable location. I phoned the Rector and the youth minister, respectively, to inform them that I wanted to proceed. They in turn served as primary gatekeepers and sponsors. With their endorsements I experienced relatively free access to many areas of the congregation's life. Through the parish administrator, I was given access to almost any information that I believed was important, viz. financial records, by-laws, the history of the parish, newsletters, the library, and leadership bodies. However, the appreciable freedom of access that I experienced was not without some resistance from other informal gatekeepers in the parish.

In order to inform the parties involved in the study, I asked the Rector for a cover letter stating his endorsement, sending with it a personal letter introducing myself and describing the project. This information went to the home of every teen, ages 13-18, with a separate letters for parent(s) or guardian(s) and youth, encouraging them to seek me out at church or to contact me if they wanted to discuss the project in more detail. Additionally notices were given at each of the primary worship services on two consecutive Sundays at the very beginning of the study. Some serious questions were raised about my intentions regarding involvement with the youth by parents of two teens. One expressed her anxiety because she felt my theological training was in opposition to her desire for the youth ministry. Another expressed concern of whether I was trying to "work my way into a job". In both cases, it turned out that neither my theological perspective nor status of employment were as much a concern to them as my political views of the state of the Episcopal Church which at that time
was experiencing considerable conflict in the wake of the consecration of a non-celibate Gay man as a Bishop. As a result, I requested permission to schedule a meeting for parents to allow them the opportunity to meet me in person, to present to them the proposal of my work and to give them an opportunity ask questions. The meeting was held on a Tuesday evening two weeks later. Only six people were present: the Rector, the interim youth pastor, myself, the two objecting parents and another parent who was very supportive of the church’s youth program. She said she was “thrilled” that St. Quaratus’ could be involved. I made the presentation and answered questions to what I perceived was their satisfaction. I assured those present that my intention was only to study the youth in order to understand their perceptions and practices of religion. Therefore I told them that I would not engage in a significant leadership or teaching role with the youth as I felt that might compromise the study. I articulated and maintained that position with the other parents, youth and adult youth leaders throughout my time in the parish. The following week I officially began the project. Although the two parents in question never seemed particularly supportive of my work, they offered no further objections. The one who questioned my theological perspective maintained a consistently inhospitable demeanour throughout the study. I simply made every effort to be cordial and to avoid aggravating the situation or adding to her distress.

The youth minister introduced me to the youth at the first event of the academic year featuring a campfire and games at a local park. This event had the largest attendance of any that year, involving about 45 youth and 11 adult volunteers. At that time I was invited to give an explanation of my research and what I would be doing with them during the course of the year. Additionally, I was introduced on several other occasions (in the Youth Forum Sunday School, after worship, at the Tuesday evening
Study Break and at other social events). Serving as sponsor to the study, the interim youth minister assured the youth that I was “OK”, encouraging them to get to know me and to help as they felt comfortable. For the first three weeks I was particularly laid-back, even more than I usually am. Since I was accustomed in these settings to being in charge I had to do some interior personal negotiation to find my footing in this new role as a researcher rather than youth worker. I wasn’t particularly uncomfortable, but I did feel unsure of what would be the most appropriate behaviour for me. Accordingly, I made it my primary task simply to learn names and to talk the youth about their schools, grade levels and extra-curricular activities.

It was publicly known by the youth and adults of the parish, that I had come to St. Quaratus' for the sake of conducting a research project with the youth. It was also known that I was a Priest in the church with a history of work in youth ministry. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note the importance of managing the politics of field relations. Too much self-disclosure can create aloofness and even hostilities if people see the researcher as the “expert”. On the other hand, they write, “It’s hard to expect ‘honesty’ and ‘frankness’ on the part of the part of participants and informants, while never being frank and honest about oneself” (1995, p. 91). At the site, I strove to maintain a delicate balance between keeping enough of a critical distance whilst trying to remain open, approachable, and participative.

Overall, I experienced considerable hospitality in the parish from the youth, adults, and leaders. In consideration of this, I did not want be only on the receiving end. I sought to be open to appropriate ways through I could also reciprocate. Hammersley and Atkinson note that researchers can benefit by using certain forms of “expertise” to their advantage (1995, p. 88). Although it was not my original intent, I found two factors of my own expertise working to my advantage as I sought ways to respond in
kind to the hospitality that I had received. In pursuit of an opportunity to give back, I found I had gained greater access to what Goffman calls the "back-stage" – where the suppressed facts make an appearance" (1959, p. 112). First, I maintained that I would not serve as an up-front leader with the youth, however, I was open to helping in smaller ways, such as being an extra adult on the scene, an extra set of hands in setting up for events, an extra driver when the young people were meeting in a location away from the church. My presence as an adult helper but not an up-front leader gave me greater in-roads and insight into the lives of the young people. For example, in the car I would relinquish control over the music on the radio or CD player, deferring to the preferences of the young people. This not only served as a means of cultivating relationships, but it also gave me insight into their musical choices and opportunities to discuss what they liked and why. As we became more familiar with each other, I found myself being an affirming adult presence, which led to all sorts of interesting conversations and insights that would have been less accessible from an up-front or even a detached observer's position. Second, I found I could help on the level of parish leadership as well. Shortly after my arrival at St. Quaratus’, the youth minister left abruptly in the middle of the school year. In the wake of his departure it became apparent to the parish leadership that it was an important time to rethink the needs of the youth program and to consider finding an appropriate replacement. As a result, I served behind the scenes of the youth program in two ways. I served as a consultant to a team of adults responsible for the process of rethinking the youth program, helping them to assess what had happened, to clarify values, goals and objectives for the program, and to direct them to deployment opportunities for youth workers. Second, I was a resource for the interregnum youth worker. Although I was cautious not to tell him what to do or how to structure the
program, I was able to encourage him in his work and helped him to think through how best to do what he had been called to do for that year by asking questions and pointing him to some appropriate resources. These opportunities gave me back-stage access to the parish leadership, availing deeper understanding of the inner working of the congregation and its culture. All the while the youth were largely unaware of my involvement on this level; therefore it was my perception that the relationships, which had been cultivated with them, remained largely unaffected.

**Analysing and Reporting the Data**

As mentioned previously, contemporary constructive approaches to conducting qualitative research assume that within the project, the voice of the researcher as well as that of the subject should be heard. The voice of the researcher can be heard in several ways: first, in the process of data collection, by what is collected and what is not; second, in the interpretation, which is offered from the researcher's epistemological perch; third, in the reporting of the data, by what is included and what is omitted. All three methodologies – practical theology, congregational studies, and portraiture allow for such assumptions, whilst stressing caution, however. Although the voice of the researcher is present throughout the project, it must be tempered in such a way as to avoid overwhelming the voice of the subjects, since the primary task is to describe the phenomenon at hand. This is accomplished through reflexivity and sensitivity to the subject. In the case of this present project, the interpretive framework of Christian faith which is central to my stance is be tempered by a constructivist understanding of knowledge. This is what Swinton and Mowat describe as being “unalterably theistic, but open to the possibility of learning new things which will develop our understandings of God and the practices of the Church”

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100 Particularly in the practical theological methodology advocated by Swinton and Mowat (2006).
(2006, p. 93). All of this is to say that analysis cannot be separated from interpretation, which in this project includes qualitative research methods and reflection in the light of Christian tradition.

In what follows, I bring to a close this discussion on the epistemology, methodology, and methods of this research project in discussing the last two stages of the research, the analysis and reporting of data.

Analysis

Lawrence-Lightfoot describes the process of analysis as "an iterative and generative process; themes emerge from the data and give the data shape and form" (1997, p. 185). In this project, analysis took place in two stages. Preliminary analysis was taking place during the data collection phase in field notes, journal entries and memos, reflecting on themes of the use of popular culture in a religious context that were emerging from the data.

The later stage of analysis involved more intensive coding and sorting of data. After all the data were collected I re-examined, coded, and sorted all the observation notes, digital radio-microphone recordings, interview transcripts, surveys, and printed artefacts. I noted above that early in the research process, Woodhead's and Heelas' co-existence theory, discussed in Chapter 1, provided the initial organizing structure to the process of the analysis of data. Through the coding of data I began to see the convergence of themes that began to emerge. I returned to my research questions:

*What is the role of popular culture in the religious lives of these young people? Do these young people draw upon popular culture for meaning-making and religious expression? If so, how?* I noted, as was suggested by theorists cited in Chapter 1, the important role that popular culture was playing in the lives of these young people. As a result, I started the sorting process with two initial categories: the "sacralization of
popular culture" and the use of popular culture in religious contexts as a type of "secularization of religion". I sorted data into respective files by means of colour coding the allusions, behaviours, and overt references by the youth to both religious and popular culture texts. A number of subcategories then began to emerge with respect to the varieties of references to these religious and popular cultural texts, viz. scripture, rituals and prayers; and films, music and television etc. I worked through the entire corpus of collected data method by method, triangulating each layer of data to verify a convergence of content. I began to note the frequent use of discourse from film used in the everyday language of these youth for performative leisure as well as for implicit theological purposes of "ordinary religion". It was at this time, as mentioned above, that it became apparent that film was a significant vernacular resource in performative leisure, meaning-making, and religious expression by these youth. Thus although the question of looking at the role of popular culture in the religious lives of youth reflects the original intent of the researcher, I saw that film was a more prevalent resource than many other forms of popular culture in the data.

Reporting the Data

In the melding of these three methodologies, I generated a narrative portrait of the youth of St. Quaratus' in three sections. The first sets the canvass by describing the community, the parish and the youth. The second discusses the role of popular culture and particularly popular film in religious practices of the youth. The third section discusses the use of popular film as a vernacular resource for religious expression in the making of a film as a farewell gift for their priest. I shall offer this portrait in the next chapter.

Practical theology, congregational studies, and portraiture all lend themselves to one another in the reporting of data. Portraiture insists on combining both art and science
in careful empirical grounding, with an engaging, artistic, narrative report of findings for the purpose of reaching a broader audience than merely the social science academy. Hopewell's congregational studies stresses how the congregation's culture is conveyed through language and stories and as a result shape congregational identity. Practical theology emphasizes reflection on the social practices of the youth in the light of Christian tradition. In particular, the methodology advocated by Swinton and Mowat also strives for the use of narrative in reporting since religion is framed, transmitted, and practiced by means of narrative found in Bible stories, traditions of worship and the history of the Church. At the same time, it can to speak to a broader audience by stressing dialogue between epistemologies and methodologies of social science and theology, which can lead to the transformation of both. Narrative accounts of findings are central to all three methodologies.

Ethical Concerns

Before bringing this chapter to a close and proceeding to the narrative account of my findings, I shall discuss some ethical considerations with respect to this research project, three issues with regard to data collection and three in relation to the reporting of data.

Data Collection

First, as mentioned above, introductory letters were sent out respectively to all parents and teens at the beginning of the research project. These letters announced the project and encouraged them to contact me if there were any concerns or questions. The letter stated clearly that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that names of all participants would be kept confidential. Additionally, notices were given by the Rector at Sunday services during two consecutive weeks at the beginning of my time there so that families would have the opportunity to see me as well as having received
the letters. As discussed earlier, a few parents expressed concern and wanted more information, particularly as regarded my intention for being in the parish. As a result, a meeting for parents and the leadership of the parish was scheduled in which I made a presentation about the research, followed by a time for questions and discussion. Although only a few attended that gathering, once again I made clear three points with respect to ethical considerations about the research: that it would be conducted entirely on a voluntary basis and no-one was obligated to participate, that parents would be informed prior to any direct contact with students for recordings or interviews, and that I would respect the anonymity of participants both in discussions about the research within the parish as well as in the report of the data. I maintained these points throughout the process. Second, I mentioned earlier that each person who participated in the radio microphone recordings was contacted in advance requesting their participation. In each case, prior to contacting the participants, I initially sought permission from parents, either in person at the church or by telephone. Additionally, each time I sought to record a young person I would ask if they were willing, emphasizing that were under no obligation to continue. As a result, there were two young people who declined my invitations to be interviewed. The same procedure was used with respect to interviews, always trying to be clear that they were under no obligation to continue as part of the research and that they could retract from the project at any time. Although this is labour intensive way of going about the process, it was in keeping with the intimate and highly relational nature of portraiture. As such, no permission slips were sent out for signing, and all permission was obtained through personal contact. Third, on the bottom of the surveys that were administered, there was a request for a name, email, and telephone number in the event that the
youth were willing to participate in an interview. The surveys included a brief statement assuring anonymity.

Additionally there are two more brief points with respect to ethical concerns. First, in view of the close contact I had with the young of this church and with young people in other churches during the course of the past two decades, it ought be stated that I am a licensed and resident Priest in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and have undergone certified training in child abuse and sexual misconduct prevention. Additionally, I have had police background checks repeatedly during the course of the past decade in order to obtain permission for volunteer work in the City of Pittsburgh Public School System.

Second, the data collected for this study, viz. tape recordings, transcriptions of interviews, surveys and artefacts, are stored in my private study in my home and are not accessible to anyone else. All names have been changed through a name key system that is stored on an external computer hard drive. These data will be stored for at least seven years.

*Ethical Concerns in Data Reporting*

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) links the pivotal role of narrative or storytelling in portraiture with its desire to influence public discourse. She cites two ethical issues at stake in the use portraiture, solidarity and intervention. Grounded social scientific enquiry is an act of solidarity with a people, giving voice to their experience. The second, intervention, she closely links with solidarity in that the researcher exercises power with the potential to affect change. She writes, "We engage in acts (implicit or explicit) of social transformation, we create opportunities for dialogue... we face ethical dilemmas and a great moral responsibility" (1997, p. 11). This is in keeping with the goal of practical theology as action research, leading to transformed practice.
The first ethical consideration with respect to this project is, as suggested by Lawrence-Lightfoot, an issue of solidarity and intervention with young people who seek religious input in their lives whilst living in a culture saturated by mass mediated popular culture. It is my desire that this project might bear influence in availing a deeper understanding of the important role of popular culture and specifically film, in meaning-making and religious expression of young people.

The second ethical consideration is related to concerns of confidentiality in the reporting of data. As a researcher who has experienced the hospitality and friendship of this congregation and the individuals therein, I had determined that in addition to preserving the anonymity of individual participants, I could not with ethical integrity cite the name of the location of the study. There are crucial emotional and relational consequences for consideration at this point, which Lawrence-Lightfoot discovered in the pained responses of participants in her study *The Good High School* (1983). I had chosen to change the names of participants but also the congregation for several reasons. The first is simply the issue of vulnerability. The power dynamics of the researcher and subject call for the utmost solidarity in the sense of protecting those who have make themselves vulnerable in the process of research. Though I never was asked by any of the teens about issues of confidentiality, I made it clear on forms, in public notices and in private discussion with teens and with parents that it was my intention to uphold the confidentiality of participants. Using pseudonyms in the reporting is an expression of respect for the hospitality I was shown. Second, I have some concern about the potential for legal ramifications for some participants because of their manipulation, re-appropriation, and use of popular films as a potential violation of international copyright laws. There is far more to lose than to gain in violating their trust and potentially putting them under legal scrutiny. Finally, the use
of actual names would have suggested that participants were speaking for themselves. As researcher, I have selectively chosen and interpreted the stories and practices of these young people, subjectively offering accounts of my experiences of being with them. Changing the names of participants is a way of stating that although I have sought to honour their voices, I take personal responsibility for the interpretations and insights generated herein.

The third issue with respect to data reporting relates to the process of reciprocity in feeding back findings to the parish. Much of the reciprocity and feedback took place informally and was built into the process of the research through informal conversations\textsuperscript{101} about the findings and patterns I began to see. This was largely because the majority of those with whom I worked most closely have since left the parish. For example, those involved in the leadership, the Rector, the Assistant, and the youth pastor, have all moved on to other employment. Additionally, most of the high school students with whom I worked closely have gone away to university. I have promised however, to provide a copy of the thesis for the parish library after completion.

Summary

In the Chapter 1, I established the dialogue partners in this thesis by discussing the changing religious practices in America, and how Americans are redefining the meaning of religion to include “inner” personal religion as well as traditional religion. I then considered four characteristics of this shift: co-existence theory, a democratization of religion, the religious-like qualities of cultural consumption, and a convergence of religion and media. Each of these characteristics is at work in the use

\textsuperscript{101} As mentioned above I was sensitive to respect issues of anonymity with respect to who and what had been said. These conversations about patterns in turn led to further discussions and ad hoc informal interviews.
of film by the youth and community of St. Quaratus' Church as part of their ordinary and extraordinary religious practices. I shall give a report of the data from the study of the parish in the Portrait in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I have framed the portrait by discussing the research process employed to elicit the data, describing the methodology, epistemology, and methods used in this study.

I began with a discussion on the methodologies chosen which are most suited for this study of the social practice of cultural consumption and religious practice within a congregation in order to address the research questions cited in Chapter 1. Consequently, the methodologies of practical theology, congregational studies and portraiture complementarily support this research. I examined the religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus' parish by means of qualitative research analysed in the light of Christian tradition represented in the body of literature on theology and film. I then turned to discuss the epistemological considerations underlying the project. On the one hand, I have taken an interpretive-constructivist approach, assuming that social knowledge is relative. On the other, I articulated that as a believing Christian I hold to an understanding of reality that is perceived in the light of Christian tradition. Christian tradition offers a perspective on knowledge, truth, and the nature of reality bringing it into conflict with the underlying assumptions of the interpretive-constructivist paradigm. I reconcile the two epistemological perspectives by drawing upon Gadamer's "fusion of horizons," proposing dialogue between the two, leading to transformation of both. The research was conducted using methods that I found most helpful for answering the research questions in accordance with the stated epistemological and methodological underpinnings. The methods I found most helpful were participant observation, radio-microphone recordings of the conversations of the young people before, during and after worship services, and
semi-structured interviews. In addition, I used two secondary methods, a survey about popular cultural and religious practices, and content analysis of printed artefacts from the parish. This was followed by a grounded and discursive approach to data analysis and interpretation, as well as reflections in the light of Christian tradition represented in the literature of theology and film theory.

In the portrait in Chapter 4, I offer the report of the findings themselves, in a detailed description of the community, the parish, the youth and their use of popular culture. In specific I describe the use of popular film as leisure practice, as a communal coagulant, as a resource for theological themes represented by characters and as a significant vernacular resource for performative leisure, meaning-making, and religious expression. This chapter will set the stage for interpretations and reflections in the light of Christian tradition that will be given in Chapter 5, addressing the original research questions. Chapter 4 will address, *What is the role of popular culture in the religious lives of these young people?* Chapter 5 will first deal with, *Do the young people of St Quaratus' draw upon popular culture for meaning-making and religious expression?* It then draws upon theories about textual poaching to provide additional theoretical framing for answering the last question, *How do these young people draw upon popular culture for meaning-making and religious expression?* which will then be discussed. This will help to explain the shift in religious practices, discussed in Chapter 1, towards a democratization of religion, and another shift that will be discussed in Chapter 5, towards a democratization of media. Religion and media, in this instance, come to a convergence in the use of popular film in the making and showing of the film as a farewell gift for their priest. These findings will then under gird the proposals to be presented in the conclusion, regarding cultural engagement, religious education and critical thinking.
Chapter 4

A Portrait of the Use of Film in Religious Expression by the Young People of St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church, New Martinton

Uh, my, kid, Frances entered kindergarten in February. I took her to see Disney on Ice - Toy Story on Ice102 - down at the Arena, with ice-skating and everything. And a few weeks later we were at home. And [the kids] do a lot of pretend play and Emma loves to get books and pretend like she’s singing in the church choir. So they’re having this elaborate fiction thing going on in the living room. And she... it’s... it’s a... it’s a combination of church choir and ice show that they have going on. And I said, “Oh!” I said, “She’s making up all these words, holy, holy, holy, and alleluia. And I said, well what’s the name of your show?” And she said, “Saviour on Ice”. Frances’ mom laughs (Interview 15, p. 1).

Five-year old Frances loves church. On Sundays she dresses up prettily and goes to St. Quaratus’ with her family. In Sunday school she plays with the other children, she draws pictures of saints and makes Christian craft projects. In the worship service, she listens to bible stories, voices prayers, sings hymns of praise to God and goes to the altar rail for communion. At home, Emma loves to work with crafts and stickers of Barbies103 and Disney Princesses104. She dances to the music of Hillary Duff, plays with her stuffed puppy dogs as she pretends to be the veterinarian and tirelessly hugs her favourite American Girl doll105, Samantha. Sometimes she even brings her doll to church, proudly wearing her matching American Girl coat. On television she

102 This is a stage/ice show rendition of the 1999 Disney-Pixar film Toy Story 2. See website for more details. http://disneyonice.disney.go.com/disneyonice/ts2.jsp
103 A collection of dolls, games, books, movies and fashion for young girls from Mattel. See http://barbie.everythinggirl.com/
104 A new series of Disney stories and merchandise for young girls based on classic Disney princess characters, highlighting virtues such as friendship, beauty, strength of character. See http://disney.go.com/princess/html/main_iframe.html
105 The American Girl Company began in 1986 with the vision of creating positive female role models for girls, with an understanding that children learn through play. Their extensive line of dolls, are featured in books, films and drama. In addition, they make matching children’s clothing and furniture and have become a holiday destination for moms and daughters, where they and their dolls come to shop, go to the American Girl Theatre and visit the café for high tea. See http://www.americangirl.com/
watches *Dragon Tales*\textsuperscript{106} and the *Disney Channel*. On special occasions she even goes to see the ballet or to shows like *Disney on Ice*. At school Frances learns to read and write with children’s picture books like *Fun with Dick and Jane*, (Grosset & Dunlap, 2004) and *Clifford the Big Red Dog* (Bridwell, 1995). She dances ballet, plays soccer and learns about the latest news from around the world.

Our contemporary world is saturated with mass mediated popular culture and Frances, like most children growing up in the West, goes about everyday life, taking in many cultural referents, drawing from the sets of resources that she is given to make meaning of her life. In this particular scenario Frances’ use of popular culture narrative from the Disney on Ice show is fused with religious narrative from church. The two flow into each other in a convergence of popular culture and religion, giving Frances a set of resources from which she has constructed her own expression of religion.

Following Swinton and Mowat’s second of a four stage process of practical theology, “cultural/contextual analysis”, in this chapter, I offer a portrait of the lives of the young people of St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church, New Martinton, Pennsylvania, focusing specifically on the use of film as leisure practice, as communal practice, and as a significant vernacular resource for this religious community in play, meaning-making and religious expression.

In order to get a sense of the lives of the youth of St. Quaratus’, I shall first frame this narrative portrait by describing the context of the community of New Martinton, a predominantly white, middle class suburb of Pittsburgh, the role of St. Quaratus’ Church in the community, and lastly, the shape and role of the youth ministry within the parish. After discussing the context, I will offer two sections describing the

\textsuperscript{106} See http://pbskids.org/dragontales/index_sw.html
importance of film in the lives of the young people of St. Quaratus' as leisure practice, as a communal practice, and as a vernacular resource in performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression. These practices are not independent but intertwined. Finally, I will describe in some detail an important event in the life of the parish, an event which demonstrates how the two practices of cultural consumption of film and religion are at work in the same event, each flowing into the other. It is the story of the making of a short movie by some of the young people as a gift to honour the departure of Fr. Kitt, a dearly loved priest. It served as their way of telling the story of what God has done in their lives through him, of expressing gratitude, and of doing the important work of grieving. It is also their way of extending their blessing and sending him on in God’s care to his next adventure as they continue in theirs. All of these are tasks, which are normal practices of ordinary and extraordinary religious life, as discussed in Chapter 1. The film functions in giving voice to the sentiments of this community of faith. The production, presentation and viewing of this film was their way of making sense of their own everyday religious lives through the use of film.

Section I – Framing the Portrait

New Martinton

Nestled amidst the rolling wooded hills of western Pennsylvania only a few miles from downtown Pittsburgh lays the suburban municipality of New Martinton. New Martinton sprawls across three hills, covering six square miles. It boasts a diversity of architecturally significant homes and thousands of trees lining its winding neighbourhood streets. The community began to grow in the 1920's, as a semi-rural escape from the industrial fires of urban Pittsburgh’s steel industry. The official
history of St. Quaratus’ parish notes at that time, “It was considered Pittsburgh’s foremost suburb” (History of St. Quaratus’, 2004, p. 11).

New Martinton prides itself on excellence. According to the municipal promotional packet it boasts good municipal services (New Martinton community promotional booklet, 2004, p. 7), caring for its 33,000 residents (US Census, 2000); a healthy business climate along its busy main street, hosting scores of shops, restaurants and services, a newly constructed library with many outreach programs for all generations, beautiful recreational facilities107 at its twenty public parks and an award winning school system, furnished with state of the art equipment, which has won many national awards for their educational, sport and extra-curricular programs. St. Quaratus’ Rector, the Revd Carl Crookes, comments on the community’s reputation for excellence in education, “A lot of people move to New Martinton... that’s in part because of the public school108 system. Uh, ours are a people that value education...” (Interview 1, p. 5). On a promotional video made by the municipality, one mother states, “We just love the variety of the community, the closeness of the library, the schools, the churches and the parks. There are just wonderful opportunities for our children to grow up here” (New Martinton, promotional DVD, 1:27-1:43). A father says, “There’s no better place to raise a family than in New Martinton.” (promotional DVD, 2:38-2:42) New Martinton was featured in the book published for the US, 50 Fabulous Places to Raise Your Family (Giovanoli, 1997).

107 New Martinton promotional video reports that the municipality has sixteen athletic fields, eight basketball courts, twelve playgrounds a nine hole golf course, a swimming pool, an indoor skating rink and award-winning championship tennis courts, spread through the community (promotional video, 7:36-8:03). 108 In the USA, the term “public school” is the equivalent of state schools in the UK, whereas the term “private school” in the States would be the equivalent of British public school system.
The municipality reports, “The average resident is 37 years old, has attended college and enjoys family income of $80,000” (promotional packet, inside cover, 2004). New Martinton is a suburban, white, middle class neighbourhood that could easily serve as the setting for most any American family oriented television sitcom or soap. In so many ways, New Martinton could be considered a model of suburban living.

**St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church, New Martinton**

St. Quaratus’ is one of the largest parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh. The church reports having 1,371 active baptized members with an average Sunday attendance of 341. Three hundred one of the registered members are under the age of 16 and children and youth enrolled in the church Sunday school program number 249, with an average attendance of 155 (Parochial Report, 2004). Its constituency is mostly Caucasian with a very small percentage of the congregation being of Asian descent.

During the course of 2003, the Rector and Vestry of the parish worked to develop a statement describing the purpose and mission of the parish. “In response to God’s saving love in Jesus Christ, St. Quaratus’ seeks to be a spiritually alive community, growing in discipleship and taking the hope of Christ to the world” (Bulletin cover, 9 November 2003). In turn, the statement is printed on all official church communications such as stationary, bulletins, newsletters, and the like as a way of telling the world what they believe and reminding the congregation where they believe they are headed.

As a result, St. Quaratus’ is highly visible in the community. The municipality even promotes some of its many outreach programs, such as the men’s group and the women’s group, which meet monthly in local restaurants to offer fellowship for senior citizens (Community welcome booklet, p. 30). Additionally, it hosts four addiction
support groups each week, which are open to the public, offering support for people struggling with a variety of addiction issues (community welcome booklet, p. 35).

There are many other programs at St. Quaratus’ that aren’t officially promoted by the municipality but are nonetheless, highly promoted by word of mouth. Every Tuesday morning, a group of parishioners gathers in the kitchen to cook and deliver meals for elderly and shut-in residents through its “Home Delivered Meals” or HDM program. The After-School Ministry provides a favourite after-school hangout for many children and teens coming from the nearby elementary and high schools. On their way home from school, between 30-50 youth a day, stop by the church to purchase candies and snacks at very reasonable prices and to visit with friends, the youth minister and volunteers who run the program. Another highly visible service to the community is St. Quaratus’ Nursery School, which began in 1954. It has a good reputation for its morning and afternoon pre-school programs, serving more than 150 children, ages three, four and five. As well, it has the mothers and toddlers play program, allowing mothers to gather for coffee and a chat as their children play together. A local resident and merchant describes St. Quaratus’ as “a friendly and fun loving church” (Observation notes, 15/01/06).

St. Quaratus’ location also makes it highly visible in the community. It is set on a large corner lot of an historic highway route, the main street of New Martinton. The complex of smooth Indiana limestone buildings, numerous gardens and manicured grounds, looks very stately and architecturally well suited for the neighbourhood. Entering through the front doors on Route 19 is the narthex, a well appointed entrance to the building with oak trimmed notice boards and heavy oaken tables laden with printed worship bulletins and nametags for the ushers and greeters. In the centre of the narthex, are two heavy oaken doors in pointed gothic shape with small leaded
glass openings, peering into the nave. The interior of the long nave is an English
gothic reproduction. It is cruciform in shape with an elevated sanctuary at the far end,
giving the sense of stepping into another era or another world. Like the narthex, the
nave is well appointed in light coloured oaken furnishings with matching pews,
pulpit, chairs, organ console, altar and communion rail. The high stucco walls are
painted in an off-white colour, serving as a striking contrast to the tall dark blue finely
crafted stained glass windows, which tell the Christian story in light and colour. The
stone high altar set against the wall, is no longer in use as a newer wooden table and
altar rail have been built further out, bringing the focal point of much of this area
closer to the congregation. Seating for the choir is now located behind the new altar
so that it faces the congregation. My experience is that this newer configuration
softens the austerity of the building’s original design giving a more informal family-
like feel. The beauty of the setting calls the people of New Martinton at St. Quaratus’
to the Psalmist’s injunction to “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm
29:2). Worship as I shall discuss in a moment is a significant value for the people of
this community.

Fellowship and Worship

There are two primary events that regularly take place in the parish, public worship
and fellowship events. A survey of the parish’s monthly calendars during the course
of one year\textsuperscript{109} reveals that there were 330 worship services during the twelve-month
period. In the same period of time there were 282 fellowship\textsuperscript{110} events listed. In the
monthly newsletter, the Rector describes his vision for the parish. He writes, “At the

\textsuperscript{109} From February 2005 through January 2006
\textsuperscript{110} The annual calendar lists 282 social fellowship gatherings in 2005 (more than five
such gathering per week). 167 of these involved food and drink of some sort. 118 of
these social events took place at table over a meal. 50 were suppers and six were
actually formal banquet style suppers.
heart of the vision is the acknowledgement that we are a community that regularly
gathers to give praise and thanks to God. Worship is always the principle ministry of
the church” (Feb. 2004, p. 1). Additionally, he describes the role of fellowship,
“Fellowship... [has] to do with living the Christian faith and life in the context of the
congregation. If you read the Book of Acts or the letters of St. Paul, you discover
quickly that caring for one another within the community was the highest priority for
the earliest church. Fellowship is about getting to know each other and sharing our
stories with one another. Fellowship... [is] the glue that binds us together in the love
of God (Feb. 2004, p. 2). In an interview about his vision, the Rector, links these two
important elements of the congregation’s life, his motto, “Our worship is now
concluded. Our service now begins” (Interview 1, p. 5). Service in this case means
taking care of one another.

That St. Quaratus’ is a congregation that values its worship life together can be seen
in the levels of liturgical preparation, participation and quality of it worship program.
Each weekend there are three services, one on Saturday evening and two on Sunday
morning, with a combined average of about 350 members in attendance. The
principle [family] service of the week has a somewhat flexible schedule. It is an
intergenerational service, filled with families, children, youth and elderly members,
since the service and the Christian education programmes are scheduled in
conjunction with worship services. This service usually takes place between ten and
eleven o’clock in the morning, depending upon the time of year. Before worship, the
many participants in the liturgy line up in two hallways on either side of the chancel.
The service begins and ends with long processional and recessional hymns giving
ample time for the more than fifty liturgical participants (choirs, torch bearers,
acolytes, lay readers, servers and clergy) to process and recess. They come down the
two side aisles, joining together in the back of the nave and proceeding up the centre aisle to take their places in the chancel. There are two choirs, a children's choir of about twenty and an adult choir of equal size. Among the participants in the altar party there are normally seven adolescents helping as crucifers, torchbearers, acolytes, and servers, along with four adult readers and servers and four clergy. Additionally, youth and children also serve frequently as lesson readers.

Most of St. Quaratus' worship services on the weekends are Eucharistic in nature. They have a traditional structure consisting of essentially two parts. The first is The Liturgy of the Word, with its focus on the scripture readings, preaching and the prayers in response. The second is The Liturgy of the Sacrament, featuring the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, comprised of the retelling of the story of creation and redemption by Christ, the prayers of thanksgiving offered over bread and wine and the receiving of Holy Communion.

In spite of all the traditional elements of the service, such as the use of formal liturgy and music, the many liturgical participants, as well as the awesomeness of the space, the service maintains a rather comfortable family-like feel. Within the first few weeks of my being in the congregation I noted several aspects, which gave me this impression. Early on, I wrote,

I arrived early, taking my seat in the left transept ... One observation I had this morning as I passed through the parking lot. It seems that the majority of the congregation entered the building from the lower doors in the parking lot in the rear of the building. They then proceed up to the nave, two floors above, by taking the stairs, entering the nave through the doors in the left transept. I entered through the formal entrance on the street at the front of the building, which I'd estimate 20% of those in attendance also used. In short, it appears that the majority enter through the lower back doors as though entering a family home (Observation notes, 21/09/03, p. 2).

Eucharistic worship services at St. Quaratus' are based upon the rites and ceremonies of the Episcopal Church, USA set forth in the Book of Common Prayer of the ECUSA (1979, pp 355-366).
Another contributing factor to the informal sense of St. Quaratus’ is the manner in which the congregation gathers for worship. Starting in September of 2003, the notices were moved from the middle of the service to the beginning. At this time the principal family service began at 9:50 am starting with five to ten minutes of notices pertaining to the parish’s common life. I consistently observed that as notices began, only as few as half the congregation was present. During the notices people would continue to arrive, walking up and down the aisles (depending upon which entrance they would take) to take their seats. As a visitor, I found it common for parishioners to sit chatting together during the notices, before the service and as well as upon return from receiving Communion as music is played.

St. Quaratus’ hosts a notable music program. Dr. Ed Tones, Organist and Choirmaster, writes much of the liturgical music used in the parish, often creating original, anthem and hymn settings. There are typically twelve sung pieces of music at the principal service including hymns, a Psalm, liturgical settings and full choir anthem, in addition to the prelude and postlude. Dr. Tones is a high calibre organist, a good match for St. Quaratus’ elaborate recently rebuilt organ. In fitting with the informal feel of the congregation, many members linger after the service to enjoy to the organ postludes, which are spectacular classic pieces often, lasting ten minutes or more. These postludes take on the feel of weekly a mini-concert, as parishioners enjoy the sounds and swells of the great organ. This postlude performance most often ends with a hearty round of applause.

Dr. Tones and the clergy of St. Quaratus’ pride themselves on creative liturgical expression. In addition to traditional Sunday Morning Eucharistic worship, there is a variety of alternating Sunday evening services, which encourage creative liturgical expression. *Cornerstone* is a youth-designed and youth-led service using
contemporary media. The Taize service is filled with soothing meditative music and chant. The monthly Evensong service ranges from choral to Jazz-like, such as this one advertised in the church bulletin,

This afternoon at 5:00 pm you won't want to miss a very special service of evensong and recital. Both within the liturgy and during the recital the Sacred Jazz Music of Duke Ellington, John Coltrane and others will be performed by our musical guests the Lee Robinson Quartet: Paul Robinson, Bass, Tim Jenkins, Piano, Dave Throckmorton, Drum and Lee Robinson Saxophone. Immediately following evensong at 6:00 pm a wonderful spaghetti dinner/fundraiser for the EYC [youth group] will be served in the undercroft. At that time soloists from the choir will sing Italian art songs. Make note to come to church to feed your souls (and your stomach) and to help the EYC.
- Edward Tones, Organist and Choirmaster (Church Bulletin, 21/09/03, p. 4).

The many fellowship opportunities over meals and the variety of worship services are distinguishing features of the congregation as compared with other smaller or less affluent Episcopal parishes in nearby communities. These two aspects of worship and fellowship are intertwined and seem to come together seamlessly.

Youth at St. Quaratus

The Youth of St. Quaratus’ generally dress in smart-casual style wearing the latest fashions from casual designer brands like the Gap, Eddie Bauer, Abercrombie and Fitch and Anthropologie. In fitting with the quality school system they are generally rather studious, taking their schoolwork seriously. Good grades and a high score on the SAT\(^{112}\) are common concerns expressed by these youth and their families. The question for most youth in New Martinton is not “Will you go to college?” but

\(^{112}\) The College Board is a non-profit organization that was created in 1900 to promote and facilitate students’ transition from High School to University education. It developed a standardized college entrance examination to simplify the application process for Americas’ many college admissions offices. This standardized examination, known as the SAT or Scholastic Assessment Test, allows students to apply to a number of institutions of higher learning without having to sit for entrance examinations at each one. For more, see, http://www.collegeboard.com
Where will you go to college?" In addition to the busyness of schoolwork, many of the youth of St. Quaratus' are also involved in a variety of extra curricular activities in the community, school, sports, art and church. Ken talked about his playing football. Debra takes evening art classes. Ted is an avid body-builder. Ingrid takes dance classes in Jazz, Modern and Ballet, most evenings of the week. In addition to their school and extra curricular activities, many of the youth of St. Quaratus' are also involved in the many youth programs offered at the church. St. Quaratus' has a history of professional youth ministry. Since the parish moved from Downtown Pittsburgh to the suburbs in the 1920's, there has been an emphasis on Christian education and activities for children and youth. The Revd Nancy Franton, former Director of Children’s Ministries says,

The church sees its children’s Sunday school as St. Quaratus' true mission. It is the primary means of bringing people to the faith. I'm not sure if anyone has ever articulated that, but it has become apparent to me lately that that is what they have done for years. That is their mission (Interview 16, p. 1).

Harold Ingalls, the vestry member responsible for Children’s and Youth Ministries, reports that in the early 1980’s, thirty-year old Assistant Rector, the Revd Cal Norton was called to the parish to establish a more formal youth program, which “evolved pretty rapidly during that time” (Tape 22b, 175-188). Since then the parish has called seven other professional lay Youth Ministers to administer programs to care for teens. Currently there are about 50 young people in the parish ages 13-18. The

113 The municipality reports that 80% of New Martinton homeowners have graduated from college (New Martinton promotional packet, 2004, p. xx).
114 In the mid 1980’s The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh was comprised of 85 congregations. With respect to youth ministry, the Diocese maintained a Diocesan Youth Department Director whose responsibility was to oversee a diocesan-wide youth ministry program. Diocesan archival records do contain information about specific youth ministries at the parish level. According to the current Diocesan Youth Network Coordinator, the Revd Tom Riddle, who has been involved with the Diocesan Youth Department since 1981, six of the 85 congregations had half or fulltime professional youth workers in 1985. Since that time, three of these parishes
youth ministry program is comprised of a number of mini-programs, offering many options. Amidst the busyness of the active lives, students have a variety of options to suit their schedules and preferences, which I discuss below.

The Notice board located centrally in the undercroft gives a visual representation of St. Quaratus' youth activities. Photos cover the board telling of events such as: overnight "Lock-ins", cosmic bowling and serving meals at Incarnation, a local Episcopal congregation who's expressed mission is to care for homeless and addicted of the inner city. There is another photo showing twenty of the youth out in a wooded field, laughing, dressed in army fatigues, bearing rifles and covered with various colours of paint. This photo depicts one of their favourite regular outings, "paintball".

At a gathering of parents, youth and congregational leaders, I asked, "What constitutes good youth ministry at St. Quaratus'?" One of the immediate answers from the youth was "Paintball!" (Observation notes, 08/03/04). When asked "Why?" Ted, another teen told me that playing Paintball has been his favourite youth outing since ninth grade. "It was my first youth event actually, the paintball thing. [Playing paintball] outdoors is so fun ... cause like, I dunno, cause you can go through trees, like you can climb up trees, and like it is so fun... There'd be like twenty [teens] there... yea and like church would like buy a lot of paintballs but you could buy extra. And it's better too [being with the church group] cause like if you go with just a couple friends, like I did one time, you get, like put in a group but like if you go with the church, it's like just you guys" (Tape 28A, 050-070). There are also other programs for the youth. Tuesday evenings host the Study Break, a chance for students to step away from their homework in the middle of the week to stop by the church to

have maintained professional youth ministries *in continuum*. In 2005, the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh was comprised of 72 congregations. Sixteen have half or fulltime professional lay youthworkers (Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, Diocesan Directory, 2005-06, pp. A1-A26).
play videogames, watch films, or perhaps step out for a pizza or ice cream. The Interim Youth Minister reported that between 2003-2005 there were usually eight to twelve teens attending. Additionally, there is often some form of bible study on Monday or Wednesday evening, gathering another six to eight students. On Sunday morning the Youth Forum, brings together about fifteen to twenty young people between the two services, for informal Christian Education based on current discussion topics. Of all that is available for the youth of St. Quaratus’, the most unifying and broadly attended event is worship where the youth play important roles as acolytes and servers. It is the most unifying option for the youth in that it is the most a highly attended event involving the participation of the greatest number of youth probably because of their involvement in the service as acolytes, which I shall now discuss.

I mentioned above the rector’s vision for the parish, “a community that regularly gathers to give praise and thanks to God”. Although in the youth program there are many options for activities to suit the schedules and preferences of the young people, the single most commonly attended event is worship. One reason why it is highly attended lies in their opportunity to participate. After their confirmation most of the young people are invited to become formally more involved in the life of the congregation by helping out in some way. Serving, as an acolyte in worship is the most common entry these young people have for ministry in the congregation. Ken told me “One of the cool things about being confirmed is that you get to acolyte” (Interview 11, p. 8). There are approximately fifty young people between the age of

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115 Between September and November 2003, I tallied an average of 21 teens, ages 13-18, in attendance at the Sunday morning family service.

116 Confirmation is a social turning point in the church for many of these young people. Caroline describes it, “Um, when you’ve kind’ve left your childhood and you become more accepted as a adult into the church” (Interview 9, p. 5).
thirteen and eighteen who are members of the congregation. Forty-two of these actively serve in this capacity. Of the sixteen formal interviews I took, ten with teens, all of whom were listed on the rota to serve as acolytes. In nine of the ten interviews, I discussed the topic of serving as an acolyte. Seven of the nine youth expressed that they enjoy acolyting. Debra said, “Being with people, and uh, like you have time to worship to God …” (Interview 9, p. 6). Laura says, “I like acolyting because you get more of an active role in the service.” Nat says he too likes to acolyte. He expressed that he likes the responsibility but he also expressed that he likes serving for a different reason. When asked “Why?” he says, ‘Um, let’s see. I, I don’t like sitting with my parents” (Interview 7, p. 7). Two of the eleven interviewees indicated that they were not so keen to acolyte but comply with the norm. When asked if she likes it, Mara indicated, “I don’t, I mean I’m indifferent to it. I do it; I had to do it, so… Um, I, I love acolyting during Christmas. That’s the only time I like to acolyte” (Interview 5, p. 6). Ingrid said, “I acolyte because I feel I should (emphasis added) have some kind of ministry here because I am so busy with school and dancing and so I feel like I should and I should be way more than I am…” (Interview 10, p. 8). The majority of those whom I interviewed indicated that they like assisting as an acolyte. As noted in the comments cited above, they have expressed that role of acolyting serves several important functions for the youth of this parish: as a rite of passage after confirmation in which behaviours and expectations of the youth change, as an opportunity to be with friends and other people, as an opportunity to participate more actively in the service and as an opportunity to be away from parents.

Early in my time in the parish it became apparent to me that this was an important role for the young people to which I ought pay close attention. Initially, I was
shocked by what I saw taking place among the acolytes. After processing in at the
beginning of the service, the acolytes would sit in their assigned seats at the very back
of the sanctuary next to the old stone altar. These are far behind the choir and clergy,
and well out of sight of any of the adults in the service. They are nonetheless fully
visible to the congregation. For the first several weeks it appeared to me that they
were laughing, chatting and engaging in full-blown conversations throughout the
service, while paying little attention to what was taking place, apart from whatever
obligations they had to fulfil. Radio microphone recordings of acolytes\textsuperscript{117} confirm
that they were often engaged in conversations about film, football and school
activities. They also indicate that the youth were at the same time very aware of what
was taking place, sometimes discussing activities related to the service itself. Their
conversational behaviour during the services was another trait of the informality of
both the worship and the parish as a whole. As I sat watching these activities a quote
from a former Rector with whom I served, kept running through my head. This man
was often irritated by the behaviour of young people in worship. He would say, “Tom
Brokaw\textsuperscript{118} may not mind if they talk during the news, but I do mind if they talk during
the service!” I wonder if perhaps these young people are so accustomed to living in a
mediated world that it may not occur to them that talking during a service might
distract others around them.

The relative affluence of New Martinton and the privilege that is experienced by those
who live in this community which prides itself on excellence, the beauty and the
informality of the parish and the almost intertwined nature of worship and fellowship
of playing and praying together serve as the backdrop in the lives of the young people
of St. Quaratus’ New Martinton. In the next section we look at the intertwined role of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[117] Made with their consent.
\item[118] A famous American television news anchorman on the NBC network, now retired.
\end{footnotes}
the use of popular film for leisure and communal practices and as a vernacular resource in performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression.

**Section II - The Use of Film as Ordinary and Extraordinary Religious Practice - Leisure and Communal Practice and a Vernacular Resource for Performative Leisure, Meaning-Making and Religious Expression**

Having set the context in which these young people live, I now move to look more closely at the primary intention of this chapter the use of film in the ordinary and extraordinary religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus'. In chapter 1, I discussed Albanese’s descriptive and functional definition of religion as “a system of symbols by means of which people orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary meanings and values” (1992, p. 11). Ordinary religion, as she describes it, is lived in relation to what is unconsciously revered, that which is implicitly rather than explicitly religious, yet orders everyday life. It is more or less synonymous with the culture. Albanese writes, “[O]rdinary religion is the religion that enforces the bonds between members of a society, that provides social ‘glue’ to make people cohere” (1992, p. 7). In my time in the parish I observed that this is a role that film played. It is a system of symbols by which these young people orient themselves. It is a resource for common language. It is unconsciously revered, and it also served as a communal coagulant.

Extraordinary religion on the other hand, is concerned with what is outside of the everyday experience of life. It challenges people to transcend everyday culture. It involves encounters with forms of “otherness” whether natural or supernatural, pointing to universal realities beyond the material world. Extraordinary religion concerns itself with what is beyond the boundaries of the everyday, with the intent of influencing the ordinary, within the boundaries of the everyday. This is the role of that the church and its Christian tradition played in the lives of these young people. It
is also in part the role that film played within the context of this religious community as it converged with their religious practices. In what follows however, there is relatively little evidence of a clear connection between the use of film in this religious community and the understanding of explicit and extraordinary religion on the part of the young people or their leaders.

As mentioned above, this does not suggest that these two forms of religion, the ordinary and the extraordinary, are mutually exclusive. On the contrary Albanese is clear that the two are often blended as people live comfortably in more than one system, often using similar symbols and language to express both everyday and transcendent concerns with life. In emphasizing both the ordinary and extraordinary practices of religion, Albanese's definition reflects the convergence of media and religion as Hoover (2002) suggests is taking place in contemporary religious practices in the West. It will help in understanding the ways that the young people of this parish use film both inside and outside of the church for implicit and explicit religious purposes as entertainment, as a communal coagulant or 'social glue', and as a vernacular resource for play, meaning-making and religious expression. In this section I will consider these uses of film: as leisure practice, as a communal coagulant, and as a vernacular resource in performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression in predominantly ordinary and upon occasions in extraordinary religion.

As suggested above, this is a congregation given to playing and praying together. I shall begin this section by exploring the role of film in the lives of these young people with a series of vignettes in which the young people of St. Quaratus' use film for play, as entertainment and leisure consumption. This use of film continues in an extended
review of the important role of the popular *Lord of the Rings (LOTR)*\(^{119}\) film series, amongst the youth of the parish as performative leisure, using film quotes for comic relief. The section on the *LOTR* then proceeds as I examine the role of the series being used for implicit and explicit religious purposes by the young people in their ordinary and extraordinary religious practices. I then examine some other accounts in which the youth use popular culture in the construction of religious meaning. All this will lead into the account in the next section which shows the convergence of religion and film in the making and presenting of the movie by the young people as a gift for their dearly loved priest, Fr. Kitt in his departure from the parish.

*Popular culture and the Youth of St. Quaratus*\(^{1}\)

The relative affluence of the families at St. Quaratus' affords these young people a broad knowledge of popular culture. Rather than merely being familiar only with what is publicly available through television and radio broadcast, most of these young people watch films frequently either by attending movie theatres or by watching at home. Additionally, they described having access to a variety of upper end, technologically advanced, media equipment such as desktop and laptop computers with broadband Internet access, iPods and MP3 players, mobile phones, videography equipment, and videogame players, as well as rather extensive personal libraries of videogames, DVDs and music. The young people of St. Quaratus' are well versed in contemporary popular culture.

I found that entering into the simplest conversations with almost any of them about their favourite film was a sure way to find myself on the inside of their culture. When I discussed particular texts or enquired as to why this or that, were a favourite, I was surprised to find myself engaged in rather thoughtful, even knowledgeable

\(^{119}\) Hereafter referred to as *LOTR*.  

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conversations with some of them about film. As I shall show, I also witnessed their frequent use of film quotes in everyday parlance for performative leisure, as well as for implicit and infrequently for explicit religious purposes. Furthermore, I found the conversations with these young people about film were often quite enthusiastic. This may have been because of my focused attention to the importance of what they had to say. After all, I find it exciting when someone is interested in hearing what I think or that what I have to say is of importance. This may also be the case for them. It is also likely due to their familiarity with the topic.

The young people of St. Quaratus' indicated that amidst their busy lives including schoolwork, extra curricular activities and jobs for some, they frequently use popular culture for the purpose of leisure. In one interview, I asked sixteen-year old Ingrid, Do you watch much TV? She responded, “Oh yea! Love TV” (Interview 10 p. 12). Similarly, I asked the eighteen-year old Ken how much television he watched daily. His answer: “Too much.... during the summer, probably over four hours” (Interview 11, p. 13). Ted told me, “At college I don’t have time but when I am here I am watching it all the time” (Interview 14, p. 2). Nat says he hates television because of the many commercial advertisements. Therefore, he says, “I’ll download [to his iPod] what I want to watch but that’s it” (Interview 14, p. 2). In a group interview on the subject of media habits, teens admitted to using more than one medium at a time for example music or television at the same time as the Internet. Nick indicated that he is online about fifteen hours a day, periodically checking messages and working with *Photoshop*, image editing software (one of his hobbies) while engaging in other activities (Interview 14, p. 1). Of course not every minute of those fifteen hours would be spent directly on the Internet, but this implies that he has near constant connectivity with the Internet throughout his waking hours. Brent on the other hand,
indicated that his internet use was about only one hour daily for email, sports statistics or playing video games on the Homestar\textsuperscript{120} website (Interview 14, p1). On the survey about media, Disney products and religion, one young person indicated that Disney is meaningful in her life because “I owned a lot of Disney products... and... I see a lot of the films” (Survey 14, p. 3). When asked how many movies he watches weekly, Nick states, “Two to three on average” (Interview 14, p. 2). Again Ted told me, “At college, there is little else to do. Probably it’s like five to ten a week” (Interview 14, p. 2). Nat however claims to watch only, “One every two weeks, maybe” (Interview 14, p. 2). These youth also indicated frequently listening to music by radio and iPods, frequently playing video games and also discussed reading popular literature such as the \textit{Harry Potter} series and other contemporary best sellers. In all, this suggests that in addition to obligations with school, jobs, sports, arts, church and family, these young people consume a lot of popular media forms. The point in this is that entertainment through popular culture provides a system of symbols by which these young people orient their lives. In the following section on the use of film as entertainment, I will offer a series of vignettes to highlight the ways, themes and meanings of film used in the ordinary religion of everyday lives of these young people.

\textit{Film as Entertainment}

In a formal interview with Ken, I asked him his thoughts on popular film. He gave me all sorts of information about movies. The following excerpt gives an example of his keen interest popular film.

\begin{center}
Jack: How ‘bout movies? You go to the movies very often?

Ken: I’m one of the Blockbuster guys.
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{120} Featuring, characters, cartoons, games, and merchandise. See http://www.homestarrunner.com/
Jack: DVD or VHS?

Ken: DVD. I tried to watch a VHS the other day and I didn’t even know how to work it.

Jack: (Laughs) That’s great.

Ken: And it was fuzzy at the bottom.

Jack: Oh, tracking. I haven’t done that in years. (Laughs)

Ken: I don’t know if you’ve ever seen *Swingers* recently? Have you seen that movie with Vince Vaughn and John Favreau.

Jack: Huh uh. (Meaning no)

Ken: Oh. Well, I highly suggest that. By far my favourite movie! Have you seen *Big Lebowski*?

Jack: Mm hm. (meaning yes)

Ken: Yeah, like, I just bought that this summer. I watched it a lot.

Jack: Mm hm.

Ken: John Goodman is definitely one of my favourite actors. Like, even when he plays a bad guy, in like *O Brother, Where Art Thou*? I think he’s so good.

Jack: How many movies do you think you watch a week?

Ken: Six, five

Jack: Hm.

Ken: Probably five, yeah (Interview 11, p. 15).

The interview with Ken was quite upbeat and filled with laughter. We began with a discussion on theological issues about which he was open to sharing his beliefs and religious understanding. When the subject turned to popular culture and specifically film, he became considerably more animated and expressive. As we began to talk about film he leaned in as though saying with his body that this was something in which he was very interested and rather well invested.
The brief exchange cited above reveals a number of points for consideration about his interest in film. First, in this bit of our dialogue I barely had to ask any questions. Ken provided answers before I had time to enquire. The majority of my own efforts in communication were accomplished through nods, grunts and other vocal noises as he simply revealed his interest in film. Next, it is interesting to note how he met older technology viz. VHS, with some reservation, “I didn’t even know how to work it” and “it was fuzzy at the bottom.” This insinuates his preference for more advanced technology, like DVDs and that the type of media he uses is important as well as content. Next, I hadn’t even solicited information about specific films when Ken began to make references to particular movies such as Swingers and The Big Lebowski. What’s more, he immediately began recommending them to me saying, “I highly suggest that.” Moreover, he not only enjoyed the film The Big Lebowski, he also purchased it and watched it repeatedly during the course of the summer. Furthermore, without my asking he explained that he liked the film because John Goodman is one of his “favourite actors”. Finally, when I enquired about how frequently he views films he indicated five to six a week. If a normal film lasts two hours, that equates ten to twelve hours a week spent on viewing films, a substantial investment of free time for a young man who attends high school, was preparing for university, was quite involved with church youth events, and plays on football and rugby teams. My point is simply that these stories or narratives from films such as Swingers (Favreau, 1996), The Big Lebowski (Coen, 1998), and O Brother, Where Art Thou? (Coen, 2000) are of significant interest for Ken, a meaningful source of entertainment, which also form part of a pool of resources for use in his everyday life.
The power of Story

Narrative is a powerful resource in shaping imagination. All religions are based on some form of mythic or narrative recounting the acts of their God (or gods) and the acts of people who sought to live faithfully according to their religious understandings (Smart, 1995, p. 7). These mythic accounts serve to form the religious imagination of adherents in relation to both the practices of “ordinary” and “extraordinary” religion, as discussed in Chapter 1. In order to get a sense of the narratives, which have served as a set of resources for the ordinary religion of everyday life as well as for extraordinary religious practices of the young people of St. Quaratus’, I administered a survey on media, Disney products and religion¹²¹ with 40 teens, ages 13-19, participating. I chose to look at the role of Disney because it is considered by many to be the pre-eminent icon of American popular culture, particularly for children.¹²² This means that most of these youth have likely grown up familiar with Disney media products.

One of the interesting points that the survey revealed was the power of Disney narratives on the imaginations of these young people. One teen wrote about Disney stories,

I usually just think of the films that were a big part of childhood. They were our entertainment and also set up our early heroes/role models. I always liked them for the music and artwork and stimulation for the imagination (Survey 4, p. 3).

She later noted that Mulan was her favourite story because it is about a girl “who makes great sacrifices for her family [and was] able to stand up for herself through adversity” (Survey 4, p. 3). Another recorded, “[Disney] has been a big influence in

¹²¹ It has been argued that Disney functions in many respects like religion in ritual practice and in shaping worldview. For more see One Nation Under Walt (Gabig, June 2005) published by Youthworker online journal online at: http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/culture/walt.php
¹²² For more see Real (1977), Wasko (2001) and Watts (1997).
my childhood, providing both entertainment and moral education” (Survey 31, p. 3). Still another noted, “I loved the movies and wanted to be like the princesses” (Survey 5, p. 3). When asked about favourite Disney stories and why, one girl registered, “Beauty and the Beast - it brings you to a different world, [has] good music, [is] funny yet serious, it gave me hope when I was little and fat” (Survey 20, p. 3). Thirty-one of forty teens surveyed gave specific reasons, like those cited here, of why Disney stories were important to them. These survey responses to Disney films would indicate that Disney, perhaps America’s consummate popular culture icon, and film maker has had a significant influence on the imagination of these young people, providing role models, casting vision for living, influencing morality, giving hope.¹²³ These are also important aspects of religious influence. In fact, Disney products are so formidable that two teens indicated that they share popularity with religious holidays. One reported having recently gone to Walt Disney World Florida for Thanksgiving. Another noted on her survey, “I love Disney, I am going there on Christmas (4 days)” (Survey 36, p. 3).

Knowing the Story

Stories wield a power to shape imagination when they are told, taken in, and incorporated. Disney has become one of the master storytellers of the past century by means of mass media in production and distribution of films (Wasko, 2001). Disney stories are well known throughout the world. Wasko argues that Disney stories have become a “global phenomenon” (Wasko, 2001, pp 3-25). Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of the survey at St. Quaratus’ was that when asked if they have a

¹²³ The survey revealed that more than 31 of the 40 participants indicated that Disney films were meaningful to them as they were growing up. More than half (22) indicated that Disney films were very meaningful. Eight of the 40 (20%) indicated that it was somewhat important. One left the question blank. None responded that they were not at all meaningful.
favourite Disney story, thirty-seven of forty (94.8%) indicated yes. Thirty participants (75%) were able to explain why it was their favourite. Two participants however, indicated that they didn’t like Disney, citing specific stories that they believed offensive and damaging for young children. On the other hand, when asked about a favourite bible story, only twenty-four (61.5%) responded affirmatively. Fifteen of the forty participants (37.5%) were able to explain why it was their favourite story and only two cited where the story was found in the Bible. This demonstrates that Disney, whether by the power of the medium of film, its narrative content or merely by the frequency of viewing, has more effectively and more memorably spoken their stories into the lives of these young people than the church has spoken Christian narrative.

A recent mythic phenomenon in western society is seen in the popularity of the Harry Potter books and films. The following vignette highlights the huge success of mythic transmission experienced by the Harry Potter series. It is the account of an exchange I had with two junior high school students, Jan and Evan, ages eleven and twelve, after a Sunday worship service. On this occasion I was struck by how well versed these two are in the storyline of the Harry Potter books and the films. In the conversation they were quite able to distinguish what was included in the one yet missing in the other. In what follows I draw from my notes taken that morning.

On Sunday morning following the service, I made my way through the crowd as the congregation descended to the under croft for coffee hour. Across the room, I saw the new Youth Minister, Craig Barnes, so I went over to say hello. He was in an animated conversation with two junior high school kids, Jan and Evan, about Harry Potter. During the conversation I noticed that Evan was holding a copy of the book, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (Rowling, 2005) that he brought to church with him. The conversation turned to the film, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (Rowling 2002), which had been released that weekend. At this point, I got in on the discussion. The following is a close approximation of the content of that conversation.

Jack: Did you see the new one this weekend?
Jan: Yea! (Enthusiastically)

Evan: Yea. It was great.

Jack (to Craig): Did you get a chance to see it?

Craig: Yep, saw it Saturday. It was (emphasis) good.

Jack: My wife and I went opening night. I definitely liked it better than the last one.

Craig: Oh, I liked the last one. The shrunken head on the bus... the reggae music, I thought it was really funny. It was like film noir.

Jack: That’s exactly why I didn’t like it. Adding some of those weird little quirky extras lost something for me. I felt like they got back to something in this one that was there in the first two by Chris Columbus.

Evan: But there was a lot they left out from the book, like when Harry’s wand was stolen at the World Quidditch cup, you know, when they first saw the dark mark.

Jack: That was great scene in the movie ... (interrupted)

Evan: And then when Winky gets all drunk and that, in the kitchen at Hogwarts. I wanted to see that.

Jan: I loved getting to see Voldemort with a body. Did you see his head? It was so weird...like, he had no ears and his face was all flat. It made him look like a snake. Ooh. I never would have thought of that from just reading the book.

Evan: How about seeing him as a baby after Peter Pettigrew put drops of Harry’s blood in the pot.

Jan: Spooky. It was so weird ...

Craig: That was one ugly baby!

Jan (to Evan): And the book was 700 pages and you can’t get all that into one movie. I thought it was great.

Evan: I can’t wait to see the one where Dumbledore dies...

Jack: Wait! Dumbledore dies?
Jan: Yea, in book six... gets killed ... and McGonagle becomes Head Mistress at Hogwarts...

Jack: No. You’re kidding. Dumbledore dies? Wait! Don’t do that to me... I’m reading the books as the movies come out. That’s not fair.

Craig, Jan and Evan stood there laughing as I walked away with hands over his ears. Then I quickly slipped down the hallway to the men’s lavatory to copy down the conversation (Observation notes 20/11/05, p. 6).

All of the persons in this conversation show a good deal of cultural knowledge about the characters and storyline of Harry Potter narrative. These two pre-teen boys however, show particular acuity in discussing the differences between what was originally written in the book and what was shown in the film. Evan rightly links the loss of Harry’s wand and the appearance of the dark mark. It was in fact Harry’s wand, in the hands of the one who had stolen it from him, that caused the dark mark. Evan later makes reference to Winky, the character who stole Harry’s wand bringing up her drunken state. The book reveals that her master because of the events at the quidditch cup disowned her. Graciously, she was offered a job in the kitchen at Hogwart’s School. However because of the abandonment of her master she turns to heavy drinking. Although this is an important subplot in the book, there is no reference of any kind to it in the film. Evan has obviously read the book, perhaps several times and he knows the story well. However, as Jan suggests, “the book was 700 pages and you can’t get all that into one movie”. Jan also shows substantial knowledge of the story in his discussion of Voldemort’s body. First in reference to the face resembling that of a snake. This would of course, link him to Slytherin house whose symbol is a snake, and to the Basilisk which he called forth in an attempt to kill Harry in the second of the series the Chamber of Secrets. These connections are found in the film by inference only. Jan has obviously drunken deeply of the
narrative to make these associations. I cannot help but wonder if I were to ask these two boys some references to specific Gospel narratives if indeed they would readily grasp the inferences and make such acute connections. For the moment my intent was to point out the ways these young people have deeply taken in and thought through issues related to the narrative of the Harry Potter series. At the end of this chapter I shall again discuss the Harry Potter phenomenon and in specific the way it filtered its way from ordinary into extraordinary religion in the film made as a gift for the Assistant Rector.

In reviewing the notes I had taken about this occurrence, I was struck by my own reaction to the stories. I entered into the conversation with a level of excitement and intensity equal to theirs. I too am somewhat familiar with the storyline of both the books and film. Nonetheless, I felt like I was certainly no match of wits for these two youth. One of the interesting things to me is my strong reaction in discovering a piece of the Harry Potter Narrative from the book that I didn’t yet know and didn’t yet want to know. My interaction with the boys about the movie and my reaction to my discovery was equally as intense as theirs in the conversation. I too am very much emotionally invested in the Harry Potter entertainment craze.

I discovered however, a significant complication to my theory about the fluidity between film and religion in this account. On the morning of the occurrence discussed above, the interregnum Rector, the Revd Laura Caritas had decided to have an “instructed Eucharist” to encourage the congregation to rethink the meaning of the ritual of Holy Communion that is celebrated each week at St. Quaratus’. The Eucharist is a ritual retelling of the Christian narrative of salvation history, by re-enacting Jesus’ last Passover supper with his disciples. In an effort to make this ancient Christian narrative more accessible and more memorable for the whole
congregation she contemporised some of the language, paused frequently to insert brief anecdotes into the body of the traditional text, adding some surprising actions.

During the series of prayers over the bread and wine before the distribution of Communion, Revd Laura stopped to explain that we are all special to God and that we all need to know that we bear the glory of God. She says, “we all need a bit more of the Glory of God in our lives.” She then paused from the prayers for nearly five minutes, leaving her place at the altar and proceeded to walk down the centre aisle with a bowl of sparkling glitter confetti, throwing the confetti over all the congregants, from the front to the back. There were in excess of 300 in attendance that morning. The reaction of the younger children is surprise and even delight. A boy across from me in the opposite transept (looks about eight-years old) is wide-eyed and grinning. He pokes his friend seated next to him and then tries to catch some of the glitter. The looks on the faces of many of the adults vary from delight to puzzlement, incredulity and shock to disgust (Observation notes, 20/11/05).

In the coffee hour, one teen described the morning as “Weird!” A father of some of the kids in the youth group says to me “I just got up and walked out. I couldn’t handle it. I don’t know, it was a bit too charismatic for me” (Tape 15A, 695-699). In formal interviews and surveys many of the youth at St. Quaratus’ expressed having rather traditional taste in worship style. One young person stated, “I only like the organ and the occasional brass quartets we have for significant services. I hate when people play rock and roll during services like some churches do. I think it’s disrespectful” (Survey 18, p. 6). Another discusses the contemporising influence that Bill, the former Youth Minister, had on worship during his time in the parish, “If I’d be [for] anything, I’d be more toward the conservative kind of service... Bill wanted to liberalize the church...” (Interview 7, p. 10). What I found fascinating was the interest these young people showed in the latest in popular culture and specifically film; yet the same time many insisted on maintaining traditional worship. They expressed a resistance to change in the ancient Christian narratives of worship being contemporised in the service upstairs which was described as “weird” and yet express such enthusiasm and knowledge in this discussion about Harry Potter - a
contemporary mythic narrative, written in classic style and set in ancient surroundings (amidst old buildings in an English style boarding school). The level of excitement in discussing the portrayal of the newer mythic narrative was far more positive with these young people than the older. These narratives have become important features in the shaping of the imaginations of the people of St. Quaratus'.

I now turn to consider another popular culture narrative, which has become very in vogue in American culture, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series of books and the recent film series by Peter Jackson, based upon the books.

*The Cult of LOTR*

Another relatively recent yet ancient styled mythic narrative is *The Lord of the Rings* (*LOTR*) film series. The *LOTR* films (and to some extent books) played an important role in the youth culture of St. Quaratus' as a form of leisure and as a communal coagulant. My very first visit to the parish took place on Sunday 15 December 2002. On that morning, I attended worship services as I had come to run a pilot study in an effort to determine whether or not St. Quaratus' would be a suitable site for this project. My intention had been to have the study take place sometime in the upcoming year. As described earlier, the worship service is comprised of two sections, the first part focuses on the Scripture and preaching and the second on the sacrament of Holy Communion.124 At this time in the life of the parish, the notices pertaining to the common life of the congregation were given in the middle of the service between the two parts. On this occasion there was a lengthy pause of nearly seven minutes in which the Rector gave the series of notices. One notice in particular caught my attention. The Rector announced,

Next Saturday, December the 22nd at 8:00 AM, the congregation is invited to accompany the Youth Group at the Destinta Theatre for the viewing of the

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124 See the *Book of Common Prayer* of ECUSA (1979, pp. 355-366).
second in the Lord of the Rings series, The Two Towers that will be released this upcoming week. The entire theatre has been reserved for St. Quaratus' and the youth invite you to come join them for this special occasion. The cost is only $5. That is actually less than the price of a normal ticket. My family and I will be attending and would love to see you there. If you are interested in joining us, please see our Youth Minister, Bill Martin to reserve your ticket for this fun event (Observation notes, 15/12/02, p. 5).

I was intrigued by the event for number of reasons. I was delighted to see the intentional interplay between the youth and the congregation as a whole. My experience has been that some church youth cultures in America exist as a parallel universe, separate from the rest of their congregations. Additionally, I myself had become rather a fan of the LOTR series after the release of the first film the previous year, so the invitation sounded appealing to me. However the biggest reason that it caught my attention was financial. Among the more than 400 people in attendance that morning in all services combined, there were about 65 adolescents in church, ages 11-18. That is about one sixth of the congregation, a good number of young people. Nonetheless, the rental of an entire movie theatre seemed to me a rather ambitious undertaking. I thought, "How on earth could they afford this? If there isn't a good response by the rest of the congregation they'll lose their shirt." It seemed to me that there was either something about LOTR or about such an event that must be significant to inspire a church to take such a risk in making an endorsement of a movie.

At a later date, I asked Bill about the experience. I wanted to know how the emphasis on LOTR amongst the youth originated and how it was that they came to rent the theatre, inviting the parish to join in. Bill informed me that he saw it as a bridge between his own experience and that of the youth. He said,

...Clearly they had such an experience with culture and I knew them to be constantly dealing with movies and with TV shows that and all sorts of stuff. Clearly I saw this as an opportunity to experience um... something transformative, you know, in a popular culture type situation um... seeing what
I know to have been true about the books, was that Tolkien wouldn’t have described it as a Christian allegory\textsuperscript{125}. But I wanted to highlight the allegorical [elements] that I found to be in the movie. And knowing (pause) having read the books and experienced that stuff, I thought, now here is a chance to get these kids engaged in a cultural thing in a popular movie, um. But that I thought, at least, had some things to be mined from it and an experience that would have at least been a jumping off point to talk more about the Gospel, about what elements they would have seen in the movie that they would have... um ... you know, that they would have experienced about Christ or... How was Aragorn like this? Or how was Gandalf like.... ? I wanted to highlight, ok... how was Aragorn like Jesus? What does that do? You know, so it got to the point where, ah hem (clears throat) we’d got the theatre. You know, we went into the theatre. We’d gotten at least 150 people in the, in the theatre the first uh, the first time and we had a prayer in the movie theatre. And that was just something that stuck with me about that time. And a lot of the kids were like, “I’ve never prayed before in a movie theatre before, like, so... Hmm! (Tape 22A, 077-110).

For Bill the event was an opportunity for cultural engagement in an attempt to bridge a divide between the inside world of the church’s Christian theology and an outside world of popular culture. His intention was to encourage the youth to think about themes that appeared in the films in the light of Christianity.

Five months later, in the spring of 2003, Bill, the former Youth Minister resigned. The tradition that he started, however, carried on\textsuperscript{126} the next year with the release of the third in the series. The following December (2003) when I was actually

\textsuperscript{125} Charles McGrath of the New York Times notes, “The allegorical element in the Narnia books drove J.R.R. Tolkien crazy ... Tolkien, a devout Catholic, thought that religious writing ought to be left to the professionals - to the clergy. He also hated that The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was such a hodgepodge.” (Narnia Skirmishes, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/13/movies/13narnia.html?th=&emc=th&pagewanted=print)

\textsuperscript{126} In 2004 St. Quaratus’ took a hiatus from its cinematic outreach events. This may have been in part due to a couple of reasons, perhaps because the LOTR series came to its conclusion after the release of the third and final part in 2003, or because the Youth Minister had resigned earlier that year and a replacement had not yet been found. It is interesting to note that in 2004, many churches in the USA took advantage of the release of Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ as an opportunity to promote the melding of pop culture and religion by hosting outreach events. St. Quaratus’ however did not. Once again, in 2005, under the leadership of the new Youth Minister, Craig Barnes, a similar but less exuberant effort was made with the release of the Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, the first of the Narnia series written by C.S. Lewis produced by Disney. This gathering drew a crowd of about 100.
embedded in the congregation for this study, the invitation from the youth group to
the congregation was made once more. This time the promotional efforts were even
greater. The release of the *Return of the King* became an opportunity for a broader
outreach event. In addition to verbal notices made in the worship services over two
weekends and notices in the church bulletin, a flyer which included the film’s
production company official advertisement and St. Quaratus’ youth group information
was sent to the homes of everyone connected to the parish. The flyer sounded as
though it were an effort in proselytising the masses to *LOTR* or at least to a *LOTR*
infused Christianity with St. Quaratus’. It stated, “Invite your friends, family, co-
workers and anyone else you pass along the street.” (St. Quaratus’ Newsletter,
December 2003) As the time for the release of the film drew near, there was a good
deal of media hype on the television, in the theatres and in newspapers and
magazines. As the hype grew so the anticipation amongst the youth and the
congregation grew as well. In response to the extra promotional efforts that year, the
turnout also was greater, numbering nearly 250 attending. The event was a huge
success particularly for 8am on a Saturday morning.

Another interesting occurrence with the release of the third instalment of *LOTR* in
2003 was an invitation that I received from a few teenage boys in the youth
group. At the time of the release of the film I had been in the parish for nearly five
months. I had become a familiar face in the congregation and had developed a
relative level of trust among a number of the teens, which resulted in somewhat
amicable relationships. Two weeks before the release of the last in the series, I was
approached by Ted, a sixteen-year old male, asking if I were interested in attending a
local theatre’s “midnight release party” for the *Return of the King* with him, Nat, Kirk
and Brent. I suspect this was in part, due to my being an *LOTR* fan. Perhaps also
they invited me because I have a car and could drive. Whatever the case, I took them up on the offer, Ted bought five tickets and I was the driver. The movie opened on Friday, 17 December 2003. Many local theatres were offering midnight showings for diehard LOTR fans. I met the group at 10 PM for a bite to eat at a restaurant near the theatre just prior to attending the show. The anticipation of all was substantial. It seemed as though everyone in the restaurant that night had the same plans we had. All during the meal we sat discussing and pondering how Peter Jackson would portray Mordor and the destruction of the ring. It was interesting to note that all of the teens with me at the midnight release party (Friday at 12AM) had also purchased tickets to attend with the church the next day (Saturday at 8AM). Seeing the film at midnight on the very day of its release was a sort of badge of honour for all of us.

The actual event of the midnight release party was a show in itself. I had underestimated how excited people would be about the release. Though we were dressed in normal early 21st century street clothes, much of the crowd was dressed in "Middle Earth" garb for the occasion. There was a young woman in a long flowing light blue velvet gown like one of the elves, another dressed like Gandalf in a pointy hat and a number of people resembling Hobbits, walking around barefoot, wearing capes, waistcoats and carrying walking sticks. I found it all quite amusing. Inside the theatre, I sat between Brent and Ted. Throughout the film we swapped comments about various scenes that reminded us of other films such as Harry Potter and The Matrix. I recall discussing the scene where Frodo, Sam and Golom arrive at the Black Gate of Mordor as the armies of Middle Earth are gathering to Sauron. Brent noted that this was reminiscent of the scene in the Wizard of Oz, when Dorothy, the Lion, Tin-Man and Scarecrow arrived at the castle of the Wicked Witch of the West to find the ogres parading about.
The movie was nearly three hours long and we left the theatre about 3:30 AM. Apparently this wasn’t a problem for the teens as they had obtained permission from their parents to miss school on the following day. Ted told me later, “Oh that was fun... [But] I was so unimpressed with the third one ... . The second one I think exceeded my expectations” (Tape 17A, p. 3). Overall, it was quite an event, both to experience the film and the affair. In view of the promotion, anticipation, midnight release party, day off from school, theatre rental and multiple viewings, indeed, the LOTR entertainment phenomenon had become a significant part of the culture of St. Quaratus’ youth. It served as a meaningful form of fellowship by means of entertainment and as a communal coagulant for the young people of St. Quaratus’ both inside the church, as officially sponsored events and outside the church, in the midnight release party with church kids. In this sense it was part of my working definition of ordinary religion.

LOTR in Everyday Language

In the time I spent at St. Quaratus’ I began to notice how in addition to the use of LOTR as leisure consumption and communal ‘glue’ amongst the youth of the parish in viewing the films, LOTR language was frequently interwoven in the conversations of the young people as a sort of participative or performative leisure by imitating the characters. That year, I observed constant eruptions of quotes from the movies, often rendered by the youth in a variety of accents as a form of comic relief. In the following account, I describe an evening spent with several church youth, Sam, Nat, Brent and Nick (some of the same youth who had invited me to the Return of the King release party) to give some examples of film quoting. On this occasion, they had invited me to join them in spending an evening with Fr. Kitt, the Assistant Rector who was soon to leave the parish. Fr. Kitt had become quite popular with the young
people during his three-year career at St. Quaratus'. About eighteen months earlier, Bill the former Youth Minister left abruptly. His surprising departure was very unsettling to many of the youth and it took quite a toll on them. Fr. Kitt became a stabilising force for many of the youth. The evening out was an opportunity to savour their friendship before his departure.

On this particular evening we went to a coffee house in Oakland, in the University section of the city, to play games and spend time with Fr. Kitt. It was a warm, late summer’s evening, so we sat at a table outside. For nearly two hours, we drank coffee, talked and played a dice game called Left, Right, Centre. There was a lot of commotion and the traffic was non-stop. In term time the area is home more than 50,000 University students. Classes began two days previous and students had just returned. One of the things that struck me the most about our time is how LOTR language was a constant part of the ongoing conversation. These guys repeatedly call each other by the names of the characters of LOTR. One of them, named Sam127, they call “Samwise”. He explained to me later that it is a church culture thing and that “only the kids here call me that”. Although he doesn’t particularly look or act like the character in the series, to call Sam “Samwise” is understandable since it is the base of his actual name. They also referred to Brent as “Legolas” the elvish character from LOTR. Brent has a fascination with the character. He explained, “Legolas is my boy.” According to the former youth minister, Bill, “They loved Legolas, uh he was almost other-worldly” (Tape 22A, 122). In a conversation over lunch with some of the other youth, after worship one Sunday, Brent confessed, “I have a six foot cardboard cut out of Legolas in my room... Ah, he watches over me as I, uh, sleep....

127 Sam is the only participant in the study whose name is not a pseudonym in my thesis. Sam has given explicit permission that his real name may be used in this instance.
ha ha! (Interview 16, p. 4). With a chuckle, Nick immediately added, “Staring... like... “The grace of the Elves be with you” (Interview 16, p. 4). Brent explained that the guys came together to buy the cut out of the elf for him as a Christmas gift. In a way the characters of the LOTR series served as models for these young men whether in being other-worldly or comedic.

On our evening out in Oakland, I witnessed another example of character mimicry. That evening several of the guys continuously role-played in the character of Gimli the dwarf in the LOTR series, in a feigned Scottish brogue. They kept referring to Nick as “Gimli, son of Gloin”, each time speaking with a brogue. I gather they called him this, not so much because of his stature (although he is not particularly tall, he is rather slight of build unlike the character in the film) but because of his rapier wit and sense of humour, which served as constant comic relief. With respect to the character of Gimli, Bill Martin explained that amongst this group, “Gimli was a favourite. They loved the comic relief that Gimli provided” (Tape 22A, 120-121). Repeatedly through the course of the evening each time someone would say, “Gimli, son of Gloin”. Nick would immediately go into character and respond in kind with quotes, in brogue, from the Fellowship of the Ring, “Roaring fires. Malt Beer. Red meat off the bone!” (Fellowship of the Ring, 2001, DVD, 145:59-146:11). On occasion he would add the rest of the quote from Gimli saying, “And they call it a mine!” (Fellowship of the Ring, 2001, DVD, 145:59-146:11). Each time the whole lot would break up with laughter. Most of the series of comments were completely non sequitur, having little or nothing to do with the content of the current conversation apart from inciting laughter (Observation Notes, 02/09/04).

Not all of the comic relief LOTR quotes, however, were non sequitur.

As the evening went on we walked from Craig Street about half a mile west to the Original Hot Dog Shoppe for something to eat. As we neared the hot dog
shop there was a distinct smell of French fries and hot dogs in the air. To our amusement, Brent paused, turning toward the group with his nose in the air, made an audible sniffing noise. He then spoke as if he were an Orc saying, “Man flesh!” (Observation notes, 02/09/04, p. 2).

After a quick bite, we stopped into the University of Pittsburgh Student Union to have a look around since none of the guys had ever been there before. A few moments later inside the Union, Brent reached into his pocket pulling out his hacky sack\(^{128}\) giving an impish grin to the group as though to say “Gentlemen. Shall we?” There was a seemingly never-ending game of hacky sack going on in this group, potentially emerging any time and any place there was a lull in activities.

We spent about 45 minutes playing in the lower lobby of the Union, talking, laughing, and kicking around the hacky sack. The group was very gracious with me as I am not skilled with this footbag thing. The game was of course punctuated with more *LOTR* quotes. Once, after missing the footbag, Nick offered a bit more comic relief with another of his Gimli quotes exclaiming, “I’m wasted on cross country. We dwarves are natural sprinters, very dangerous on short distances” (*The Two Towers*, 2002, DVD 13:33-13:41). Everyone laughed as the hacky sack was thrown once more into the air and the game carried on (Observation notes, 02/09/04, p. 3).

These are a few examples of the use of how *LOTR* language had been integrated into the common culture of these youth as a significant source of comic relief through performative leisure and character mimicry. What fascinated me is that these conversations and the use of *LOTR* language were taking place more than nine months after the release of the third film in the series showing an enduring affect of the story on the lives and languages of these young people. These are examples of the meaningful role of film in the lives of these young people. Film is something, as mentioned earlier, in which they are well versed and quite interested. It is something that has provided them with role models and language for use in their everyday lives.

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\(^{128}\) Hacky Sack is a game in which participants use legwork similar to football skills to keep a soft bead-filled footbag from hitting the ground while passing it around a circle to the others participants. For more see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacky_sack
The LOTR film series had become a part of the ordinary religion of these young people as a ‘social glue’ in their communal practice of film-watching and by adding to the system of symbols and vernacular resources by which they oriented themselves in the world with reference to ordinary meanings and values. As suggested above both entertainment and the church community are significant features of the meaning and value systems of these young people. The LOTR films became a reference point and resource for them as they engage their everyday lives. I shall now turn to look at the use of LOTR for extraordinary religious purposes.

*Theological use of LOTR*

In addition to the use of LOTR as leisure pursuit for entertainment and performative leisure, there was also some religious use of the story for predominantly implicit and in a very limited sense explicit theological purposes. In conversation with Bill the former Youth Minister I asked if, based upon his original intent of using the LOTR films as “a jumping off point to talk more about the Gospel” he had actually succeeded in using it for some sort of Bible study or theological reflection on LOTR, wherein the youth would be encouraged to reflect theologically on these films. He responded,

> I think we used it on Sunday mornings [in the Youth Forum Sunday school class] but not as extensively as I probably could have or even should have. It very much impacted the kids as far as the parlance of talk and the quoting that went on. But looking back I certainly could have done a deeper study (Tape 22A, 115-120).

Bill acknowledges the frequent use of LOTR parlance among the youth, like the evening discussed above. He also admits that his theological reflection on and integration of the LOTR phenomenon was not extensive with the youth. There were of course the brief moments of prayer in the theatre that served as a bridge between ordinary and extraordinary religious practices. Additionally, there were perhaps a few
allusions to theological themes made in Sunday school but largely there was no strategic integration of the film series into the extraordinary religious practices of the youth on his part, for use in any sort of explicit theological instruction. This does not mean however that the whole phenomenon was by any means atheological. Some responses included implicit theological reflection although the youth may not themselves have thought about the film in theological terms. In an interview with Nick I asked him what exactly it is he believed. He responded,

Well (sigh) definitely, uh, I'm religious. I follow God. I believe, you know, there was a God, there was Jesus, and I follow His teachings to the best of my ability. Um, I think that also heaven starts now, in our present life. Almost, you have to make the best of what you have and, uh, that some people have so much money or whatever and they can have a terrible life. And so, I think materialistically it doesn't really matter what you have, but it's what you do with what you have (Interview 8, p. 2).

His response “it doesn’t really matter what you have, but it’s what you do with what you have.” Is strikingly similar to a film quote from Gandalf, which I had heard used numerous times at St. Quaratus’ in reference to the present struggles of the Episcopal Church.129 The quote comes from a scene in the The Fellowship of the Ring, which takes place on the western shore of the great river. In it, Frodo laments the burden of carrying the ring. Frodo says, “I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.” Gandalf responds, “So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All you have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to you” (The Fellowship of the Ring, 245:10-22). Nick had surely heard the quote numerous times in his repeated viewings of the film as well as in frequent use in discussion of the politics of the church. It is likely that Gandalf’s wise counsel to

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129 In August 2003, Gene Robinson was confirmed by the ESUSA, General Convention as Bishop of New Hampshire. He is the first openly gay Bishop in the history of the Christian church. Subsequently there has been significant turmoil and division within the Anglican Communion, the Episcopal Church in the USA and at St. Quaratus’, which is decidedly theologically moderate, having many members on both sides of the debate.
Frodo, “All you have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to you” had been taken in, incorporated and re-appropriated to his own faith understanding when he says, “it doesn’t really matter what you have, but it’s what you do with what you have.”

Another example of implicit theological use of LOTR discourse can be seen in a discussion with seventeen year old, Ingrid, a youth group girl. Without specifically naming it as theological reflection, she speaks of several theological themes that she recognises in the books and movies. In an interview, I asked her a general question about her favourite movies. She responded,

Ingrid: “Favourite movies? I just saw Spiderman II, and I really liked that one. I liked, um, I’m a big Lord of the Rings fan. Obviously. Um...

Jack: That seems to be the “in thing” here.

Ingrid: Yeah. Lord of the Rings is popular here (Interview 10, pp 14-15).

Jack: Why do you like LOTR? What was it about that?

Ingrid: Me liking LOTR goes back to when I was in like third grade or something and my dad read me the books for the first time. I think he read me The Hobbit for the first time when I was in first grade, just because he liked the books (she laughs) and like, he wanted to read them, so this was a pretty good opportunity to do it. But I have always loved stories and preferably not tragic stories, I won’t lie. I don’t like being sad all the time, so I tend to go for the happier endings. And there was that... and there was redemption and there were people striving for goals, and it was just a really kind of, uh, neat. In the end it was just so heart-warming even though they had to go through all these trials. So even as a second grader, I could resonate with that.

Jack: Who’s your favourite character?

Ingrid: Ooh, I love Sam. I’ve always ... I do, I love Sam. He’s so sweet and so loyal. He’s always been my favourite.... I like him because he never waivers. He’s just so solid through the whole thing. You can count on him. He’s not going to be tempted (Tape 26B, 086-108).

There are at least five theological themes at play in Ingrid’s explanation of why she likes LOTR that may be considered in the light of ordinary religious practice. The
first is the theme of family, which she encountered in the practice of reading the
books rather than in their content. The memory of her introduction to the LOTR by
her father reading her the books in her childhood, underscores a religious emphasis on
family, which she also discussed was an important part of her faith. The second
theme she articulates is that of story. Religious traditions are generally based on
narrative describing the great actions of God or of the people who have sought to be
faithful to their understanding of God. As discussed above narrative is a powerful
resource in shaping religious imagination and LOTR provided a significant mythic
narrative for these young people. The third is redemption, which she sees in the happy
ending of the LOTR story, even in spite of the many difficulties and trials. The fourth
is loyalty or faithfulness, which she sees in the character Sam. The fifth is temptation,
which somehow Sam is able to overcome. Although Ingrid never discusses the LOTR
in explicitly theological terms, there are in her conversation, several germane
religious themes that she draws from the films. In both of these vignettes we see that
even though Bill had not strategically integrated the LOTR series into any sort of
explicit theological teaching, the youth themselves made implicit connections with
LOTR for ordinary religious purposes. It is worth noting however that in my time in
the parish I had not observed any explicit theological use of LOTR by the young
people to articulate their faith. This would be an interesting area for future research.

Christ the King Sunday - Explicit Use of LOTR for Theological Purposes

Although I had not observed any explicit theological use of LOTR by the young
people to articulate their faith, one brief example of the explicit use of LOTR for
extraordinary religious purposes at St. Quaratus’ can be seen however, in a sermon
given by the Rector on Christ the King Sunday\textsuperscript{130} 2004. Nearly one year after the release of the third and final film in the \textit{LOTR} series (in 2003), the Rector drew upon the imagery of the film as an explicit allegorical correlation in order to highlight the theme of the day. Describing a scene from the film, he explained how after the destruction of the ring, the true king of Gondor, Aragorn, returned to take his rightful throne and to establish justice under his reign. Consequently, his loyal subjects rejoiced. He likened then the \textit{Return of the King} film to the biblical narrative of return of Christ as King\textsuperscript{131} in the second coming to establish true justice on Earth as it is in Heaven. He explained that this imagery from the film mirrors the joy and fulfilment of Christ's followers when Christ "the one true King" returns. Although this is not an example of the use of popular culture for explicit religious purpose by the young people of St. Quaratus', there were a good number of teens present and participating in the worship on that morning. Elsewhere I noted that the young people expressed their enjoyment of participating in the service while also expressing a lack of regard for sermon content. Therefore on the morning in question, I paid particular attention to the activities of the acolytes. Knowing the popularity of the \textit{LOTR} series I wanted to see if they were paying much attention to the sermon. With exception of one acolyte who was slouching, their body language indicated attentiveness to the preaching as most were sitting up with heads turned toward the pulpit. What's more the congregation was uncharacteristically more quiet than usual. Because of the flow of the morning and because my time of being consistently present in the parish had

\textsuperscript{130} Christ the King Sunday is the last Sunday of the liturgical year, which falls at the end of November. It serves as a segue between the end of ordinary time and the Advent season in December. One of the primary themes of Advent is preparation for the second coming of Christ as Lord and King to judge the world. The exultation of Christ as King and Lord on this minor feast day lends credence to the claim that Christ will return to Judge the earth.

\textsuperscript{131} See Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 19:11-16, 20:11-21:8
largely drawn to a close, 132 I had little opportunity to follow up on the responses of the young people apart from one very brief exchange. On the stairs heading down to coffee hour I saw Ted. I asked, “What did you think of the sermon?” His one word response, “Cool.” was neither disdainful nor overly enthusiastic. This serves however to point out three factors in the investigation of the LOTR phenomenon at St. Quaratus’. First, there was in fact some strategic and explicit theological use of the LOTR film series by the leadership of the parish for the purpose of theological reflection. Second, this occurrence took place nearly one year after the release of the film, showing the enduring importance and currency of the film series’ narrative within the culture the parish. This means that for at least three years the film series (and consequently the books) had been in common circulation and use in the parish for the purposes of leisure practice, communal coagulant and as a significant vernacular resource for the community. Third, the use of LOTR for religious purposes did not go unnoticed by the youth of the parish many of whom appeared to have been paying attention to the sermon.

Explicit Use of other Popular culture Texts for Theological Purposes

The LOTR phenomenon serves as an example of use of film for the sake of leisure and communal practice, as well as a significant vernacular resource in ordinary and in at least one instance extraordinary religious practices. Although it has served as a one example, it was however by no means the only reference point used by these young people for theological purposes. 133 In the following section I offer a few vignettes,

132 I spent one year from August 2003 to August 2004 embedded in the congregation. Afterwards, I continued to visit periodically.
133 I also witnessed similar though much less extensive, use of the film The Matrix. I chose not to include this data because although the phenomenon was quite similar to the LOTR, the LOTR example was a much clearer and extensive example.
which exhibit the explicit use of screen media and in particular film, for theological purposes.

In my interview with Nick I asked him why he comes to church. He responded,

Um, I guess from the beginning as most kids start, church is the kind of thing you’re pressured into doing. Why get up on Sunday when you can watch cartoons... I guess now, once I’m starting to understand and get to know my faith a little better, coming to church is a way for me to connect with God and the people who also feel the same way I do. I’m not a firm believer that you have to come to church every Sunday. Um, it definitely offers the better environment for praying and connecting with God and the people who also feel the way I do. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen the movie Simon Birch, perhaps, but uh... He has a good line and he says, “Faith is not in the floor plan.” which I really enjoy that, because basically you can go anywhere and pray and get the job done, but church is just... to me, a little closer connection than anywhere else, I think (Interview 8, pp 1-2).

Nick insinuates that as a child he saw that apart from going to church, his nearest alternative for Sunday morning activity was to watch cartoons on the television. Once he began to take his faith more seriously he found value in coming to church because it “offers a better environment for praying” and for being with other “people who feel the way I do.” He expressed that he found that the church provides him a better environment for praying and connecting with God than staying at home. Perhaps also, he found that the church provides a better environment for praying and connecting with God than watching Bugs Bunny or Speed Racer. Nonetheless, Nick articulates that although he feels a “closer connection” at church, he is not legalistically bound to a specific location for connecting with God. In order to convey this sentiment, he draws upon a favourite quote from the film Simon Birch (Johnson, 1998). In this film the young Simon whose growth is stunted, is convinced that God has a specific plan for his life. By the end of the film Simon becomes a hero to his friend. For Nick the church somehow avails him a better connection to God’s plan and he uses a quote from the film to articulate that.
There are three particular points of interest in Nick’s statements here. The first is to note the inferred dichotomy of childhood perceptions between cartoons and church, screen media or religion, which now that he is older, he no longer seems to espouse. The second is that he links involvement in church as a way accessing more clearly God’s plan for his life with this film, which also treats this theme. Third, now that he has become more mature in faith and is very involved in church activities, he uses the film reference to articulate his refutation of religious legalism. The point is that in order to articulate what has become a meaningful part of his daily life, viz. ordinary religious practice, Nick uses other resources of his daily life found in screen media and in particular, from film.

Another more obvious connection between the explicit use of film and religious expression can be seen in a reference to the 1998 DreamWorks film, *Prince of Egypt*. When asked on a survey, “What is your favourite Bible story?” One young person cited, “Moses – it was really interesting. [I] saw *Prince of Egypt*” (Survey 20, p.8). In this case, the film is an explicit rendition of the Biblical narrative of the life of Moses shown in a medium that has been able to reach masses of people. *Prince of Egypt* was rated the sixteenth top producer in box office revenue in 1998 and continues to generate significant revenues through home viewing sales and rentals of DVD’s and VHS tapes.

(http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?view2=limited&view=domestic &yr=1998&p=.html) The video has been used in St. Quaratus’ children’s Sunday school program and is also available from the church video library. This particular teen’s association of biblical knowledge with this movie infers that it is the means by which this young person has become familiar with the biblical narrative, linking the
two. This film, which is based upon ancient biblical narrative, was the means for this young person’s knowledge of the biblical character, Moses.

Not every example of the use of popular film for explicit theological purposes is quite so straightforward. The following use of popular culture for theological purposes is fraught with ambiguity. Elsewhere I have discussed the interest and knowledge that one of the youth group members, Ken, has of film. In my interview with Ken I asked him about the role of scriptural narrative in his life. He struggled to make sense of it.

The following is an excerpt of a portion of our conversation.

Jack: What, um, what is scripture?

Ken: (Sigh) Scripture is what somebody wrote down a long time ago to try and, um, put some ideas together of what they thought would be good for everyone else to know.

Jack: Mm hm. Why would we, um, make them a kind of a central part of worship services? Why do you suppose they put it in there?

Ken: I mean, there’s lessons in it, and, uh, I guess people think they are, I think it’s, people hear something older and it sounds ‘churchy’ and it kind of gives it validity… some I just blow off.

Jack: Mm hm. Do you read scripture, as part of your life?

Ken: No.

Jack: No. Have you ever been in a small group? Or been a part of a consistent structured Bible study sort of thing?

Ken: Uh, one, with Bill.

Jack: Oh, with Bill, and that was here? Hm?

Ken: That’s it. Once. I guess once you kinda treat it more like a class, like a, you sit down and you, you know, try to do homework, but that you’re never going to do. I mean, you get more out of it, it’s, whatever you put in, you get more out of it.

Jack: So that was helpful or not?

Ken: Yeah, I mean, it, I got pretty busy, and I don’t know, like maybe when I get settled in this fall, try and find something else at Northern [University] to do, but it was, I mean, it was helpful.
Jack: Mm hm. What, what’s it like, I mean for you to, you know, you said, talked about old language and ‘churchy’ language and stuff like that, what’s it like for you when you read scripture?

Ken: It’s kinda like breaking the code. You try and, try and see it, what they’re trying to say, and the whole time you’re reading it you’re trying to put it in your own words a little bit. And I know you and I have, er, we and a group at least have talked about, like, read something in scripture and, like, I can probably equate it to a movie or Family Guy.134

Jack: Mm hm.

Ken: I mean, and then, the same thing, like, Family Guy and the movies, and stuff like that, like all the time will come back and spoof scripture.

Jack: Mm hm.

Ken: So, I just try and put it in my own words. It’s not always easy.

(Interview 11, p. 5)

When I asked Ken what he understands bible narrative to be, he says that it is written because someone a long time ago thought it was something others should know. He asserts that it has become central to Christian worship services because it sounds old and “churchy” which in his estimation is an attempt to gives it validity, but personally he “just blows it off”. Ken talked about being in a formal bible study once but equated the experience with school and “homework that you’re never gonna do.” So when he found himself busy with other things he stopped attending, though he sounds tentative about the decision. He may resume bible study in college. Because it is in the back of his mind he feels it is something that should be meaningful to him. Perhaps he says he might find a Bible study at college because he was being asked by me and perceives that it is of value to me. When asked to discuss his own experience of reading the scriptures, he describes it as inaccessible to his everyday life, “like

134 Family Guy is an American cartoon comedy on the Fox Television Network, which was quite popular and often quoted by a number of the teens in the church. For more see: http://www.familyguy.com/
breaking the code”. Ultimately he explains that he tends to draw upon screen media in television and film narratives. Therefore, he says he tries to put it in his own words by drawing upon familiar popular culture narratives, equating “it to a movie or Family Guy.”

He notes however that there is a problem in drawing upon these because they often “will come back and spoof scripture.” Consequently, as though judging all narratives as equal, he simply tries to “put it in my own words.” It is not merely that Ken doesn’t trust the use of popular culture/screen media to interpret biblical narrative; it appears that he also doesn’t trust the biblical narrative to speak to him either. In the end, he is the arbitrator who alone has the authority to make the interpretation of what he believes out of all the resources available to him.

In this section I have noted that film is not only important in this religious community in leisure and communal practices but also as a significant vernacular resource in performative leisure, meaning-making and expression in ordinary and extraordinary religious practices. I shall now turn to give an account in which film and religion, ordinary and extraordinary, converge.

Section III - A Convergence of Film in Ordinary and Extraordinary Religious Practice - Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire

In the last section I discussed the use of film in the leisure and the communal practices of the youth of St. Quaratus’ and as a vernacular resource in performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression for the community. I continue this discussion in the following account in which I describe in some detail an important event in the life of the parish that demonstrates a convergence of film and ordinary

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135 Family Guy is a cartoon animation comedy of a middle class American family originally created as “Life of Larry” by Seth Mcfarlane. In January 1999 Fox Network picked up the program, running for several seasons. The series often satirically treats religious themes, common in American culture. For more see: http://www.quahog5news.com/index.php?p=history
and extraordinary religion, all in the same event. It is the story of the making of a short movie by some of the young people as a gift to honour the departure of Fr. Kitt, whom in his time in the parish had become an important part of their lives. Through film they tell the story of what Fr. Kitt had done for them through him, express their gratitude and do the important work of grieving. The film also serves as a way of extending their blessing and sending him on in God’s care to his next adventure as they continue in theirs. All of these are tasks, which are normal parts of religious life and religious communities. The making, presenting and viewing of this film was the young people’s way of making sense of their own religious lives through the use of the everyday resources of film in which these young people are have significant interest and knowledge.

Context

Before describing of the film, its production and reception I shall give a bit more background information. Fr. Kitt was about 31 years old at the time of the making of the film. He had been in this parish for almost three years, providing leadership in many areas of the parish such as liturgical experimentation, pastoral care for twenty-somethings, Christian ed. viz. bible studies for adults and teens, and a summertime evening barbeque and education program, as well as a good deal of spiritual encouragement for the youth in the interim period between youth pastors. He was deeply loved by many, young and old alike, and had been a particular favourite with the youth.

As mentioned earlier, the previous youth pastor resigned abruptly in 2003, which took quite a toll on the young people. They were confused because he had quite a strong presence and was very active in the lives of these young people. Suddenly he was
In the interim between losing Bill, trying to make sense of his abrupt departure, and preparing for to find a new youth minister for the congregation, Fr. Kitt was a calm and stable presence for many of the youth. One of the youth group member recounts,

We didn’t have a youth director and yet he seemed like... he made it seem like... he still made it seem like there was a youth director in a way. Like, he had a Bible study that was going on for a while. He was trying to get so many other people that normally, like... didn’t get into the church thing, get into the church thing. And I appreciated it the whole time. Yea! I dunno, like, I was drawn to him because he was somebody that, like, could understand me and like I could talk to, and, that I could talk to about you know... really, you know things and not just, yea... like doctrine... like, real nitty-gritty... everything... yea, he’s a good guy (Tape, Side B, 085-097).

Nearly 18 months after Bill’s departure, Fr. Kitt decided to take a post at a church in England, near where he did his theological training. Many of the youth grieved his departure, expressing their sorrow and regret about his leaving in informal conversations as well as in formal interviews.

As a way of showing their affection and their grief, three young men from the youth group, Nick, Nat and Ted who had grown quite close to Fr. Kitt, decided to make a movie about him. All three of these young men have a creative streak. Two in specific, Nat and Nick are quite cinematically and videographically savvy. Nat, one of the film’s two creators/producers has considerable technical skills in videographic editing. He attended New Martinton High School where there is a laboratory television studio in the school for student use.137 Nick on the other hand, the other

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136 Many of the youth expressed their confusion over what had really happened. Under some difficult circumstances, he abruptly resigned his position at the church, simply packed the contents of his apartment and moved back to Connecticut where his parents reside.

137 New Martinton High School offers a series of courses in television technology, filmmaking, screenplay writing and film-production (New Martinton High School Course Catalogue, 2005-2006, p. 53). Additionally, the community of New Martinton has a CCTV channel on cable that broadcasts the videographic works of
creator, enjoys experimenting with the creative side of things. He had worked on numerous projects during his high school career. When I asked Nick about the origin of the idea for this project, he said,

Jees, I dunno. Uh, Nat and I really wanted to do something for Kitt, I mean, uh, I think uh... we were gonna spend a lot of money on a gift and like ... we decided to use, uh, our creative side and just make a little funny video (Tape 27a, 012-018).

They wrote a script in only a few hours as they made the film, pulled together all the necessary props, gathered the actors, cast all the parts, brought their cameras and computer equipment and across three days filming (and another three days of editing) they made a film about Fr. Kitt’s life entitled *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire*. The plotline is a comic history of Fr. Kitt’s life - childhood, education, arrival at St. Quaratus’ and soon-to-be departure for England. In order to tell the story the producers use a series of fictitious scenes that they themselves penned about Fr. Kitt’s experience at St. Quaratus’, woven together with a number of scenes and allusions taken from various popular culture texts as well as from the *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* series inserting props, dubbed-in voices and dialogue. The film borrows bits of footage from the first Harry Potter film, *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer’s Stone*¹³⁸ (Columbus, 2001). Its title, *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire*, combines the titles from two of the books, the second book in the series, *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1999), and the fourth book in the series, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2002).

I was present at the church on a couple of the days in which the teens were preparing and filming the movie. As an observer, this gave me a behind-the-scenes view of the

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¹³⁸ Released in the UK as *Harry Potter and The Philosopher’s Stone* (Columbus, 2001)
manner in which the film was made. It also availed a lot of insight into their understanding and intentions as producers. Additionally, I was invited to play a comic guest role as "resident academic". In the following I will describe the scenes, action and textual content of this brief film.

The Film

The film opens with the tinkering sounds of the eerie Harry Potter music from the prologue of, *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone* (Williams, Atlantic Records, 2001). Viewers are brought up the centre aisle of St. Quaratus' English gothic revival nave, as the camera wavers slightly. In the far corner one of the creators, Ted, is seated at the organ bench as though he were playing the music, giving an air of mystery about what takes place behind the scenes in this awesome setting. In the first action scene, Fr. Kitt arrives at St. Quaratus' for an interview for a position as Assistant Rector. Fr. Kitt is not seen as it is filmed from his perspective as though the camera were strapped to his chest. Viewers take in the events as through his eyes. Upon arrival he proceeds into the Rector's office for the interview. The camera pans across the light oaken panelled room, to focus on the Rector who is seated at his large oaken desk feverishly tapping information into a handheld device. The Rector, Fr. Crookes, playing the role of himself, looks up and says, "Oh, hello. You must be Fr. Kitt. Have a seat" (0:96-1:00). He proceeds in the interview, with a series of absurd questions about obscure theology, fifth century Moorish chant and Twentieth Century literature. He says,

Well Fr. Kitt, it would seem that you are applying to be our new Assistant Rector here. Everything seems to check out on your application and unlike the other applicants you have no history of wafer-embezzlement. But just one more question to see if you can handle the challenge. Fr. Kitt, contrast the historical correlation between fifth century Moorish chant and the idea of consubstantiation, and finish it with a double Orwellian allusion (1:02-1:48).
Finally he acknowledges that he is only joking about the questions, saying, “Ha, ha, ha, just kidding” (1:49-1:52). He then leans forward and says, “But seriously, tell me about your childhood” (1:54-1:57).

As though ignoring what might be Fr. Kitt’s response, Fr. Crookes returns his focus to the handheld device and resumes his feverish typing. Immediately, the setting shifts from the office to Fr. Kitt’s supposed flashback depiction of his childhood. In order to represent this, the producers draw from the beginning of *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer’s Stone* (Columbus 2001) using a clip about Harry Potter’s difficult childhood as an allusion to Kitt’s childhood. As I describe these scenes taken from *Harry Potter*, I will first put the name of the alluded character being portrayed for example Fr. Kitt, inserting a “/” then writing the name of the character who was actually in the film i.e. Fr. Kitt/Harry Potter.

Using an early scene from the film from the *Sorcerer’s Stone* (Columbus, 2001), Fr. Kitt/Harry Potter is relegated to sleeping locked in a closet under the stairs. He is awakened by his overbearing and sneering, mother/aunt who unlocks the door banging loudly upon it, so that he will wake up to help serve the family breakfast. Immediately following this, his overweight brutish older brother/cousin Dudley bounds down the stairs, pausing to stomp heavily on the staircase, causing a cloud of dust to fall all over Fr. Kitt’s/Harry’s head. In a dubbed voice-over with feigned English accent, we hear, “Wake up Kitt and cook me breakfast and get me the mail. Get out of bed!” (2:05-2:35). Then passing Kitt/Harry in the hallway, the portly brother/cousin hits him, pushes him to the ground, banging his head with the door and laughing, runs away into the kitchen for his breakfast. Nick, one of the creators, told me he chose this clip because “Kitt always complains about his childhood, about his
overbearing mother and his older brother who always beat him up at home” (Observation notes, 30/08/04, p. 4).

The flashback ends, briefly returning to the job interview. The Rector continues to fiddle feverishly over his handheld device. This time we get a look over his shoulder revealing that in fact it was not his work over which he was slaving but, that all the while had been playing a marshal arts video game called Street Fighter on his handheld device, whilst Fr. Kitt was relaying the story of his difficult childhood. The scene focuses for a moment on the videogame. With the press of a button, Fr. Crookes celebrates as he knocks out a massive sumo wrestler, to gain several thousand points.

After this brief interlude, we return to more flashback scenes of Kitt’s difficult childhood by using a later sequence from the Sorcerer’s Stone film. In this scene, Fr. Kitt/Harry leaves the kitchen, proceeding down the hallway to retrieve the morning post. Thumbing through the pile, Kitt/Harry gets an astonished look on his face as he finds that he too has received a letter. The letter in the film was addressed to Harry from Hogwarts’s School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. In this version the teens morphed the address on the letter to Kitt/Harry to read that it came from Wheaton College, a fundamentalist Christian college in Wheaton Illinois where Kitt read for his undergraduate degree. Nat explained that this is a perfect set up because “Kitt always bitches about having had to endure the ‘fundies’ at Wheaton” (Observation notes, 30/08/04, p.) Using his technical skill in computer-generated cinematography, Nat dubbed over the address from Hogwarts inserting:

Mr. Kitt Nicholls

34 Bagend

139 For more on the Street Fighter video game series see wikipedia article at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street_Fighter
West Farthing

Hobbiton, Atlanta.

It is interesting to note that in addition to the use of all the Harry Potter references in this film, the creators it seems could hardly resist some allusion to the LOTR series. The address makes reference to “Bagend” the home of Bilbo and Frodo Baggins and “Hobbiton” the name of the village where these characters lived. These allusions are blended with “Atlanta” near where Kitt actually grew up in the States. As mentioned earlier, the LOTR films and books were a significant form of currency in the cultural capital of these young people’s lives.

As Kitt/Harry begins to open the letter, his bullying older brother/cousin Dudley, swiftly snatches it away. Once again there is dubbed-in dialogue. Kitt’s older brother/cousin Dudley yells excitedly, “Daddy, Daddy, Kitt is applying to college” (3:12-3:46). Kitt/Harry responds in a deadpan tone of voice, “Hey, it’s mine give it back.” The Father says, “What College could this be?” All in the scene have astonished looks on their faces as the mother/aunt says in a disgusted tone, “Wheaton?... (Pause) Religion?” (3:54-3:56). They all stare and gloat at him. As previously mentioned, in the Harry Potter film of course the letter was from Hogwarts School whose teaching about the spirit world disgusted Harry’s aunt who was a muggle.140

The film continues as in the next scene the family heads to the car (in the Sorcerer’s Stone, for a day at the zoo to celebrate Dudley’s birthday). In this scene they use the actual undubbed footage and voices from the film. Standing in the driveway, the father stops, pointing the keys in Kitt’s/Harry’s face to say “I’m warning you boy, any funny business, any at all, and you won’t eat for a week. Get in!” (4:10-4:21).

140 The term muggle was created by J.K. Rowling to refer to “non-magic folk”, as described by the character Hagrid (1997, p. 53).
Immediately, the setting changes to a scene in the railway station where Kitt/Harry pushes his trolley (in the Potter series towards platform 9 ¾) laden with bags, packages, and owl in tow. Kitt/Harry stops a railway attendant along the platform to ask (once again dubbed in a deadpan tone), “Ah, excuse me sir, how do I get to Wheaton?” (4:44-4:45). With a heavily Americanized version of a cockney accent he replies, “We ain’t got no trains to Wheaton. We only go to St. Quaratus” (4:48-5:02). Disgusted, the attendant turns and walks away.

Once again, the scene returns to the Rector’s office where Fr. Crookes continues playing videogames. Suddenly, a bright light shines and the sounds of angel choirs surround Fr. Crookes. Startled, he looks heavenward, and then says enthusiastically, “You’re hired!” implying that Kitt’s coming to St. Quaratus’ was a divine appointment.

Across a blank screen flashes printed text:

Thus Kitt left his home
in Hobbiton, Atlanta,
Journeying to St. Quaratus’....

Sort of...

The scene then changes to show a brightly coloured map of North America. As a way of depicting his life history through the various places where he had lived, a photo of the head of Fr. Kitt appears over Atlanta and begins race about the country to the sound of Can-Can music. First the head moves upward to Wheaton Illinois, then out west to Colorado, eastward to Washington DC back down south to Atlanta, over the Atlantic Ocean to England, where Fr. Kitt attended theological college and at last stopping over Pittsburgh, where he settled at St. Quaratus’.
The last action scene of the movie gives another bit of comic relief. It takes place in Fr. Kitt’s office. Being a doctoral student, the creators asked if I would take a role in the film as the deep thinking “resident academic”. I was given a script, containing a substantial piece of discourse by Nietzsche on metaphysical philosophy. The script contained a list of lengthy, tongue-twisting, sometimes unpronounceable, philosophical terms. In the scene, I appear at Fr. Kitt’s office door saying, “Hey Kitt, just popping in before I go back to England.” I go on, “You know I... I was thinking....” (6:01-6:16). I then launch into a seemingly absurd lecture on metaphysical philosophy, which is given completely out of context. The camera focuses in on my face. After a moment, my voice begins to fade into the background as though Fr. Kitt were blocking it out. The view pans from focussing on me, across the office to Fr. Kitt’s hands typing away at the computer keyboard. After a moment the camera returns once more to my face as I become more animated about the content of my absurd discourse. The focus then becomes blurred, as the camera waivers swaying gently from side to side. The view returns to Fr. Kitt hands at the keyboard, which are slowing. Suddenly they stop moving. My voice fades out entirely and the screen goes black as though he has just passed out from sheer boredom.

Finally, the end of the film has a rather touching means of sending Fr. Kitt on his way to new adventures. It comes to a close with a series of frames of printed text rolling across the screen, some comic, some quite serious. Behind the printed text is the song Gone Fishin’ sung by Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong (Armstrong, MCA Records, 1994). The lyrics were quite explicitly chosen to tell part of their story about Fr. Kitt. The words are,

“Gone fishin’. You ain’t a workin’ anymore. Gone fishin’.... Ah yes, I’m really gone.... There’s a hoe out in the sun, where you’ve left a row
undone.... Gone fishin’.... instead of just a wishin’” (Armstrong, MCA Records, 1994).

It seems to me that this is a way of saying that there is more to be done here but we understand that you need to do what you belief you ought.

Additionally, in what follows, I write the text of each of nine frames of printed text as the song continues:

We know your intentions are well but we’ll miss you Fr. Kitt...

As such we have decided to keep you here by force, courtesy of our team of sextons...

While you were here, Walt (the sexton) took the spark plugs out of your car...

And after realizing that it’s a turbo diesel, he took out some other things…”

Namely, the engine, transmission, tires and steering wheel...

You don’t believe us? Look outside to see the remains of your Audi A3...

What? You drive a Volkswagen? So who’s… did we… oh… crap...

But seriously, we wish you the best as you take the next step in your spiritual journey...

This is really not goodbye forever. I’m sure we will both make correspondence as we cross the pond, especially with ‘Bonus SkyMiles February’ coming...

We love you Kitt, so make us proud… (7:36-10:00).

These nine frames were the culmination of what the young people wanted to say to Fr. Kitt, expressing their love and grief through comic relief. However before they could arrive at this point they first drew upon the resources of popular film to tell the story and make sense of Fr. Kitt’s life, his childhood, his conservative Christian education, his many moves about the country and the world, through the resources of popular film found in Harry Potter and LOTR.

It gave the means by which to express, their fondness of Fr. Kitt. As mentioned earlier he was seen by many as the “wonder kid” priest who was a stabilising force in
their lives in the loss of their Youth Minister. He touched them spiritually. The use of Harry Potter speaks as though to say that He is able to see into a realm beyond what they see. Perhaps they see themselves, as mere “muggles” while Fr. Kitt was a “wiz kid” wizard. What is more, references to “Bagend” and “Hobbiton” in LOTR, the home and community of Frodo and Bilbo Baggins seems to underscore Fr. Kitt sense of being called into a life of adventure and always moving on.

The film gave voice to the young people’s need to express their grief over his departure, to say thank you, to say we love you and to bless his going on the next part of his adventure. In short the use of the popular film references were the set of resources by which to make sense of their religious experience with Fr. Kitt and to express gratitude, grief, love, awe and well wishing in a way that they may not have otherwise been able to express. The making of this film gave voice to the sentiments of the whole community as well, as Fr. Kitt was loved by the young and old alike.

A few days after the writing, casting, filming and editing of Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire, Fr. Kitt spent his last day in leadership of St. Quaratus’ New Martinton. On Sunday, 5 September, Fr. Kitt took his last opportunity to preach and preside over the worship at St. Quaratus’. Following the worship there was a reception to honour him for being among them and going out from them into the next thing God had for him over in England. As part of the celebration that day, the rector, Fr. Carl Crookes, instructed the young men who created the film as their farewell gift for Fr. Kitt, to set up a large screen and projector in the nave of the church. Following worship that morning, they gave the premiere showing of the film for Fr. Kitt with the whole congregation present. The congregation laughed heartily at the ways in which these young men poked fun at the Rector as though he spent his days playing video games. By the end many of the parishioners sat teary-eyed, particularly the youth of
the parish, as the film came to its close with the series of slides bearing their well-wishing and expressions of love and gratitude. When asked about his impressions on the film, Fr. Kitt responded, “It certainly was an act of love, an act of appreciation, um, I was amazed... for these kids to take the initiative to make a movie like that. I was amazed by it. And to get adults involved the way they did, was, (pause) so many of the people...” (Tape 27a, 288-301).

The viewing of the film on Fr. Kitt’s last day at St. Quaratus’ was a touching moment filled with laughter and tears, grief and blessing. It was a moment in which the whole congregation was invited to try to make sense of their lives and religious experiences with Fr. Kitt, and to do so by using resources drawn from popular film, taken in, re-appropriated and re-represented by this small group of media savvy teens. These young men drew from popular films that they know well to express their deep and perhaps even uncharted feelings. It was the way these young people could retell the story of who Fr. Kitt had become in the life of this religious community. It was their way to express gratitude and grief. It is also their way of giving him their blessing and sending him on in God’s care to his next adventure. All of these tasks are normal parts of everyday religious life and religious communities, part of ordinary and extraordinary religious practices. The making, presenting and viewing of this film was these young people’s way of making sense of their own religious lives through the use of popular entertainment in film. The consumption of film served as a leisure practice. It served as a communal coagulant in bringing the congregation together through movie viewing. Film also served as a vernacular resource for meaning-making and religious expression in the context of this religious community. Most amazing to me was that Fr. Kitt’s last official religious function in the parish took place neither in the pulpit, nor at the altar, but on the silver screen, as the ordinary
religion (symbols, community, meanings and values) of these young people’s everyday lives and the extraordinary religion (symbols, community, meanings and values) of their church converged with the media in the use of film.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered a “contextual/cultural analysis” of the youth of St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church, New Martinton, Pennsylvania, in a series of snapshots of their lives, focusing specifically on the use of film in ordinary and extraordinary religion as leisure and communal practices and a vernacular resource in play, meaning-making and religious expression. I set the context by describing the community of New Martinton, the parish and the youth ministry within the parish. I then offered a series of vignettes about their use of film, and an extended review of the important role of the LOTR series in the youth culture at St. Quaratus’ as well as other accounts of the use of popular film as a vernacular resource in performative leisure, meaning and religious expression. Finally, I described an important event in the life of the parish, which demonstrates a convergence of ordinary and extraordinary religion and film, in the story of the making and viewing of a movie to honour the departure of Fr. Kitt. The movie functioned to give voice to the sentiments of the community by telling the story of Fr. Kitt’s life and involvement in their lives. It was their way of doing the important religious work of expressing gratitude, grieving, giving blessing and releasing him.

The making, presenting and viewing of this film was their way of making sense of their own religious lives through the use of film. How are we to understand the powerful role that film plays in the lives of these young people? Is this phenomenon common in contemporary culture? What does this say about the religion of young people in contemporary America? In order to address these questions I now turn to
offer analyses of the use of film by these youth for ordinary and extraordinary religious purposes in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

Analysis of the Use of Film by the Youth of St. Quaratus', Theological Reflection and Conclusions

Introduction

In Chapter 1 I established some of the dialogue partners for this thesis in discussing various theories about changing practices of religion in America and about how Americans are redefining the meaning of religion. I considered four characteristics of this shift: co-existence theory involving both secularization and sacralization; a democratization of religion, the religion-like qualities of cultural consumption; and a convergence of religion and media. Additionally, I offered a working definition of religion as "a system of symbols by which people orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings and values." (Albanese, 1992, p. 11) As a result, I launched a qualitative research project amongst the youth at St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church, to investigate the role of mass mediated popular culture in their religious lives. Almost immediately upon arrival in the parish, I noted that film played a significant role in the life of this religious community.

Therefore in Chapter 2, I surveyed a body of literature in the area of theology and film theory, paying close attention to the methodologies used by a variety of theorists as tools for understanding the use of film by the youth of St. Quaratus'. In Chapter 4 I offered a narrative portrait of the youth of this parish, considering the significant role of popular culture in their religious practices. The portrait highlights their use of film as a communal practice, as a resource for role models for everyday living and as vernacular for religious expression. The portrait draws to a close with the most clear example found in the parish of the convergence of religion and film in the making, screening and viewing of the film Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire. It shows the
significant role of film in the life of this religious community. In this present chapter I bring together the various strands of the conversation between these dialogue partners, the situation under investigation amongst the youth of St. Quaratus' Church and Anglican Christian tradition. This chapter represent Swinton’s and Mowat’s third stage of practical theology, offering “theological reflection” and an analysis of the use of symbols, stories and language (per Hopewell) drawn from film by the youth of this religious community. This study is, as far as I am aware, the first in-depth look at this aspect of ecclesial life.

The chapter begins by drawing upon theology and film theories established in Chapter 2, to analyse the key ways that film operates amongst the youth of this congregation. The first section is ordered by Marsh’s two key points “what films do to people” and “what people do with film” (Marsh, 2004) which help to explain the interplay between the content and use of film by these young people. Second, I turn to examine the convergence of religion and film in the making and viewing of the film Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire. I note a gap that theology and film theories do not explain, the subversive use of film as seen in the making of this movie by these young people. Therefore in the third section of this chapter, I draw upon theories about textual poaching in the works of DeCerteau (1984) and Jenkins (1992), to explain this phenomenon, which has become increasingly common in contemporary media culture. In the fourth section, I argue that the making of this film is not only a convergence of media and religion, but also of a convergence of the democratization of religion and the democratization of media, as authority to determine meaning and practice has shifted from these institutions onto these individuals. In the final section I offer observations about the young people’s theological use of film noting that whilst it is clear that the young people of St. Quaratus’ avidly use film for meaning-
making and religious expression, they do so almost primarily in the realm of ordinary religion. In this case film serves as a means by which these youth “orient themselves in the world”. Apart from the frequent use of film in official church sponsored functions, there is relatively little evidence of the integration of film into any explicit articulation of Christian identity, beliefs or theological statements related to extraordinary religion as expressed in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 which for more that one hundred years has served as an articulation of religious identity for the Episcopal Church. This, I argue is an example of “therapeutic moralistic deism”, Smith’s (1995) assessment of the religious practices of American teenagers asserting that American teenagers are avid practitioners of religion however, in its essence the religion that most American teens practice is not traditional Christianity. This argument leads to the challenges that will be levied in the Epilogue for those who produce films and for religious youth workers.

What Films Do to People and What the People Do with Film

In Chapter 2, I surveyed theology and film studies by looking at three approaches to the analysis of theology and film: auteur theory, textual analysis and audience religious use of film. Auteur theory and textual analysis emphasize core elements found in the director’s vision and in theological themes in the filmic text itself, which serve as resources for viewers. Audience use of film emphasizes the ways films perform certain religious functions for viewers, such as providing myth, morals, ritual and community. The work of Marsh (2004) brings these two approaches together as he reflects theologically on two key points, “What films do to people” and “what people do with film”. The key to Marsh’s methodology is that he places emphasis on the interaction between the “content of film” as a theological resource and “the practice of film-watching” as theological practice. In the following section, I consider
the three approaches mentioned above to offer various levels of analyses on the content and practices related to the use of film by these youth. In view of the ways that film functions in the lives of these young people, the sections ends by addressing the question *Is film religion?*

*What films do to the young people of St. Quaratus’*

In this section I examine “what films do to the young people of St. Quaratus’” in order to offer an analysis of the theological content of films used by the congregation. I consider a variety of films and in particular, paying close attention the important role that the *LOTR* series played in the lives of these youth because these films were current at the time of the research and were in circulation within the congregation for an extended period during the course of three years. Additionally, because of its currency the *LOTR* serves as the most obvious example of the interplay between content and use. Films provided powerful mythic narratives, role models of characters, theological themes and concepts, and vernacular resources from which the youth and the congregation drew for everyday life. As Lyden (2003) suggests, films bear myths that hold out a vision of an idealized world. Through the ritual of film-watching, viewers gain insight, vicariously participating in that idealised world by identifying with the characters. Subsequently, in returning to the real world, they are invited to take what they have experienced and decide how to live, whether having seen something they wish to emulate or desiring to live differently. This is what Marsh (2004) calls “life structure” and what Albanese refers to as “orientation” in the world. These films served as a set of resources for everyday living for the youth of St. Quaratus’.

In the following discussion of what films do to these young people, I consider two levels of analysis: the director’s vision encoded into film, as well as specific
theological themes present therein. Taking these approaches to look at film will help in understanding what these films do to the youth of St. Quaratus' and in turn, will aid in understanding what the young people of St. Quaratus' do with the content of the films with which they interact.

Director's Vision

In Chapter 2, I discussed theories emphasizing the importance of looking behind films to explore the directors' art, vision and values that are encoded into and disseminated through film. Johnston (2000) suggests that filmmakers like other artists have recognizable features that are identifiably unique to their work. Hurley (1970) insists that directors offer a sort of "secular theology", arguing that movies do for everyday people what theology does for the elite. Wall contends that filmmakers present audiences their "vision of reality". Because of their accessibility and mass appeal, movies impart the creativity, worldview and intentions of the director. In this section I consider some specific examples of directors' visions encoded into films that have imparted some measure of influence upon these youth.

Although rarely discussed explicitly with the young people, the various film directors' art, vision and values did not go completely noticed by the youth. In our conversation about film, Ken made several recommendations to me about his favourites. He cited three films, informing me that John Goodman, who starred in two of the three, was his favourite actor. Whether or not Ken was aware of it, the Coen Brothers directed the two films featuring Goodman\textsuperscript{141}, which he indicated were his favourites. Whatever it was, something about their artistic vision appeals to Ken and he acknowledges that these have become his favourite films. Another example of the interplay between the director's artistic vision and the youth's consumption of film is

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{The Big Lebowski} (1998) and \textit{O, Brother Where Art Thou?} (2000)
found in my discussion about Harry Potter films with the two junior high school boys Jan and Evan and their new Youth Minister, Craig. I noted the acuity with which they discussed the differences between the books and the films, as well as some of the directors’ artistic affects. Craig discussed the comic relief of the shrunken head and reggae music on the “night bus” in the third Potter film. Jan said he loved seeing the snake-like affect of Voldemort’s body, which he could never have envisioned from only reading the books. Evan lamented what the director left out of the fourth Harry Potter film. In retort, Jan noted that a movie could not possibly include all of the contents of the 700 pages into one film. Albeit largely implicit, these are examples of the ways that director’s choices and artistic visions in making films affect with these young people’s consumption of popular film.

With respect to the director’s theological vision and intent encoded into film, Peter Jackson’s work in the LOTR series is perhaps the most evident example amongst the films in circulation during my time in the parish. In what follows I consider Jackson’s vision for staying close to Tolkien’s work, highlighting the importance of mythic narrative and stressing the accessibility and applicability of myth to everyday life. These will give insight into the powerful theology-like affect of the director’s vision into film on the youth of St. Quaratus’.

Included in the Special Extended Edition of the LOTR (Jackson, 2004) series are six additional DVDs with more than 17 ½ hours of appendices providing background information on the story, the film and its production. In the appendices, Jackson

142 A relatively recent phenomenon in film-making is the inclusion of commentaries, documentaries and appendices about the production and meaning of specific films. This gives contemporary film-viewers greater insight into the director’s vision for a given film. Peter Jackson has provided ample information about his vision in the making of the LOTR series.
insists that his desire in making the series was to remain faithful to Tolkien’s passions and to his work. Jackson says,

As filmmakers, as writers, we had no interest in putting our own junk, our baggage, into these movies. We just thought we should take what Tolkien cared about, clearly, that we should take these and we should put them into the film. This should ultimately be Tolkien’s film. It shouldn’t be ours (Appendix I, Segment 1, 22:05-25).

Although the film is Jackson’s interpretation of Tolkien’s work, scriptwriters insist that they sought to stay close to the books. Along with his associate scriptwriter, Phillipa Boyens, Jackson recounts their condensing the more than one thousand pages of text written in the three books, to a ninety pages treatment of the story. This was their way of “cracking the code of the LOTR” (Appendix I, Segment 2, 1:47). Their determination was to hold strictly to the basic storyline in which Frodo, who inherits the ring of power, carries it to its destruction in Mordor. Although the books contain many subplots, a decision was made to leave out any themes that did not advance the basic story line. As actors worked, with scripts in one hand and the books in the other, they increasingly owned their characters and the scenes morphed into what was kept in the film. Jackson describes the process, “The interesting phenomenon with our script writing was that with every draft we wrote, it was closer to the book. It became nearer and nearer to Tolkien” (Appendix I, Segment 2, 18:51-19:02).

In the interview with Ingrid I asked her about her favourite films. She responded that she was a big fan of the LOTR. Once again, although the director’s vision was not central to our discussion, the director’s choices for filming have had an influence on the Ingrid’s consumption of the film. It is interesting to note that her immediate response to my question about her favourite film was to discuss the books rather than the film as though there were no difference between the two. Her equation of the two
suggests, in this instance, that Jackson was successful in his desire to remain close to Tolkien and to the books.

In keeping with the desire for the film to stay close to Tolkien, the LOTR Appendices stress the importance of myth to the author. Rayner Unwin, Tolkien’s publisher insists, “He felt deeply that England lacked a mythology” (Appendix I, Segment 1, 3:30-34). Jackson goes on to argue, “He really mourned the fact that any mythology that England may have had was basically eradicated by the Normans in 1066. That was a vacuum that Tolkien wanted to fill” (Appendix I, Segment 1, 4:04-09).

The appendices recount that Tolkien’s creation of “Middle Earth” began in his adolescence when he studied philology and Norse mythology in school. As a hobby, he created a “second world” which includes its own fictitious languages, maps, characters and thousands of years of history. This second world was a lifelong project for Tolkien that continued till his death in 1973 at the age of seventy-five. Even upon his death, his final unfinished work, the Silmarillion (1977), was left for his son to complete. Jackson stresses that what appears in the LOTR books and as a result in the films was only the tip of an iceberg of his second world, which was rooted in nearly sixty years of Tolkien’s life-work. He comments,

> It gives the LOTR its enormous depth and that is what somehow makes it transcendent, a piece of fiction that does feel much more authentic. No author who writes a piece of fiction would spend this amount of time, especially a lifetime creating the work behind the fiction (Appendix I, Segment 1, 7:26-46).

Co-scriptwriter, Phillipa Boyens holds that the popularity of Tolkien’s myth is the fruit of its depth because myth is timeless. She says, “This is why it made it so accessible to many people” (Appendix I, Segment 1, 21:59-22:04).

The LOTR series is not a traditional allegory in the sense of having a one-to-one correspondence of details in the story to details of history. In his foreword to the LOTR Trilogy, Tolkien writes, “As for any inner meaning or message, it has in the

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intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical” (Tolkien, 1965).

Furthermore, Tolkien expert Patrick Curry\textsuperscript{143} contends,

Its part of the genius that he didn’t write an allegorical book. That is, new generations can find can find new meaning for their own lives from what he called ‘applicability’ to enable you to fill in the precise meaning of the various things you are reading about, from your own experience (Appendix I, Segment 1, 12:41-13:03).

Jackson holds that it is because of the applicability of the story, which presents a variety of themes fundamental to human existence, that the \textit{LOTR} series, both the books and the films are so popular. He cites several key themes common to human existence that the books treat and that the films sought to uphold: hope and hopelessness, courage and fear, the struggle of good and evil and the struggle of being faithful to your values in the face of great temptation. In the next section discussing theological themes in the film, I shall examine the young people’s some of the uses of these themes that the various characters represented in the \textit{LOTR}.

These three aspects of the Jackson’s vision are encoded into \textit{LOTR} films: remaining close to Tolkien’s themes represented in the books, the desire to provide a myth for the English speaking world, and the timeless sense of accessibility and applicability of myth to everyday life, have theology-like qualities. They are important aspects of the director’s vision for understanding the significant role of the \textit{LOTR} series amongst the young people of St. Quaratus'. Although using modern technology and drawing upon a corpus of \textit{LOTR}-inspired artwork from the past forty years, Jackson insists that he strove to honour Tolkien’s work. He sought to accomplish this by emphasising the importance of providing mythic narrative for the English-speaking world, which he sees as having been bled dry of such meaningful narrative and by highlighting the applicability of that myth to the everyday lives of viewers.

\textsuperscript{143} Patrick Curry is author of \textit{Defending Middle Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity} (1997)
These three aspects are similar values to those expressed by the leadership of St. Quaratus' who seek to honour the revelation of God in the person of Christ in staying close to the Christian tradition by emphasising biblical narratives and their applicability to the everyday lives of believers. The parallels are strikingly similar and, as suggested by the scriptwriters and commentators mentioned above, explain, at least in part, the reason for the popularity this film with this religious audience. These films have religion-like qualities and serve as rich theological resources by intention of the director albeit implicit theological resources in the practice of ordinary religion. In the portrait of Chapter 4, I discussed that the clergy and lay leaders of the congregation worked for nearly a year to develop a parish mission statement which emphasised being rooted in the Christian spiritual tradition, growing in everyday discipleship and taking the Gospel into the world around them. This mission statement touches on these very ideas of remaining close to the tradition, emphasising mythic narrative and its applicability to everyday life. What is more, I showed that the youth of St. Quaratus' regularly participate in worship services that hold to this pattern of maintaining Christian tradition, presenting Christian narrative in the texts of scripture and the Book of Common Prayer; and emphasizing its applicability to everyday life through the preaching of sermons, Bible studies and Christian education programs. Furthermore, this can be seen in the Rector's vision for the parish cited in Chapter 4. He emphasised the centrality of traditional Christian worship rooted in biblical ideals as "the principle ministry of the church". He articulated that as a result of their participation in worship, members' share fellowship by loving and caring for one another. Stating his motto, Fr. Crookes says, "The Worship is now concluded. Our service now begins." In short, the content of director's works and in this instance, Peter Jackson vision for the LOTR series functions in certain religion-like ways by
providing implicit theological resources for viewers' use in their everyday lives. It is worth noting however, that these young people rarely used popular film in their expression of explicit religious faith statements.

Having discussed the importance of the director's vision in the making of a film, I now turn to consider theological themes presented in the filmic text.

Theological Themes in Films

In the last section I considered one level of theological analysis in the importance of the director's artistic vision and values encoded into the film. I suggested that a director's vision has certain religion-like qualities in bearing implicit theological resources for use in everyday life. I now turn to consider the second level of analysis drawn from theology and film theories in content analysis of filmic text. In Chapter 2, I cited two types of thematic content analysis that bear some influence on an audience's practice of film-viewing and meaning-making, biblical and theological themes. Although few of the films discussed in the portrait involve direct biblical content, many represent implicit theological themes as well as role models for everyday living in the moral realm. Therefore, the analyses offered here do not directly involve scriptural analysis of the films but rather focus on implicit theological themes represented in the films.

Bergeson & Greeley (2000) argue that the primary intention of film is entertainment rather than religion; therefore, theological themes in film are represented and absorbed without their being seen as religious. This is precisely in keeping with the role of Albanese's ordinary religion. For Bergeson and Greeley religion is based on "hope renewing experiences... captured in symbols and woven into stories" (2000, p. 5) as a result that film functions similarly through 'God is like' metaphors. This
argument provides another reason why films exercised a significant role in the life of this religious community.

In Chapter 4, I discussed several characters that for a variety of reasons were seen as role models to the youth of St. Quaratus'. In the light of Bergeson's & Greeley's assertion that religious themes are represented and absorbed by means of bearing "hope renewing experiences" in stories, I shall briefly examine a number of characters to consider implicit theological themes they represent.

The young people described a number of characters from films that served as important models for them. Several youth commented on Disney characters. I noted in particular that one teen surveyed wrote that Disney stories were a big part of her childhood setting up our early heroes/role models. She cited Mulan as her favourite character because she made great “sacrifices for her family” and stood up against evil. Another said she loved Belle from Beauty and the Beast (Disney, 1991), who was an important role model because the character gave her hope when she was “little and fat”. Additionally several of the girls commented that in their childhood they wanted to be like Disney princesses.

Another youth, Nick, drew upon Simon Birch (Johnson, 1998) as a model for his faith. The underdog of the film, Simon, is convinced that God has a specific plan for his life, which is, at least in part, fulfilled by the end of the movie. Somehow for Nick, Simon represents God’s mysterious working through the circumstances of our everyday lives and coming to church helps him to discern this.

These characters from various film narratives served as role models by which the people of this religious community oriented their lives in some way. They represented for the youth of St. Quaratus’ a number of theological themes such as sacrifice,
family, good and evil, hope, beauty and faith, which they articulated were important to their everyday lives.

Once again, I return to consider characters from the *LOTR* films as strong examples representing important theological themes to these youth. I noted earlier that a number of the youth would often refer to each other by the names of *LOTR* characters. Brent was often called “Legolas”. I understood this to be because of his fascination with the elvish character. He would refer to Legolas as “My boy”, a colloquial term of endearment in the USA, almost as though he knew him well. In the film series Legolas is calm and level headed, fearless and quite skilled in warfare. He was one of the nine members of the Fellowship of the Ring, who swore allegiance promising to protect Frodo on his perilous mission to carry the ring of power to its destruction in Mordor. Even when the fellowship had begun to break after the death of two members\(^{144}\) and when Frodo and Sam had parted company from those remaining, Legolas maintained his fierce allegiance, protecting the lives and honour of the five who remained. Bill, the former youth minister, said the youth loved Legolas because of his “other-worldly” nature. I mentioned previously that during lunch one Sunday following the worship service, Brent jokingly confessed to having a six-foot cardboard cut out of Legolas in his room that watches over him as he sleeps. To this, Nick immediately interjected that Legolas was bearing the “grace of the elves” to him. The cut out was a Christmas gift to Brent from his friends.

Brent’s fascination with Legolas was seen in many ways. He was called by the name of the character. He repeatedly referred to the character with an endearing term, “My boy”. His friends bought him a cardboard representation of the character that he keeps in his bedroom. What is more, he jokingly asserts that the elf watches over him as he sleeps.

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\(^{144}\) That is Gandalf and Boromir.
sleeps. Whatever the reasons for Brent’s fascination with the elvish character, Legolas is a significant role model for him. In these films, Legolas represents many of the qualities extolled in Christian tradition about the nature of God, protective, skilled, committed, fearless and watchful as well as being a friend. In keeping with Bergeson’s and Greeley’s (2000) assertion that films bear religion by offering “hope renewing experiences” through stories, for Brent, Legolas represents many god-like qualities. However, Brent never offered any clear link between Legolas and any explicit Christian theology. All of his comments remain implicit and within the realm of ordinary religion.

Another role model discussed, in Chapter 4, was in an interview with seventeen-year-old Ingrid. I had enquired about her appreciation of the LOTR films, asking her if she had a favourite character. She responded that she loved Sam because he is loyal, solid and does not give into temptation even under trial. In the film series Sam is one of the heroes because of his faithfulness as he travels with Frodo to Mordor in order to destroy the ring and its evil power. In spite of the difficulties of the journey, and Frodo’s attempt to undermine him by sending him away, Sam remains faithful to his friend Frodo, to the quest of seeing the ring’s destruction and to his ideal of defending good in the world. Again at this point, the discussion with Ingrid was not centred on theology and she does not discuss the films in explicit theological terms. Nonetheless her comments were punctuated with theological themes, specifically that of loyalty or faithfulness. As Marsh (2004) asserts film was getting her to “do a theology-like thing”. She was doing theological work through the resources of film although she may not have sought to do so intentionally. She articulates that her favourite character is Sam because he remains faithful. She then spells out in detail, her understanding of faithfulness seen in the character Sam. He is constant, strong and
reliable; and he does not succumb to temptation. Sam serves as a model of the value of faithfulness, which is important to Ingrid.

Another important aspect in faithfulness is the issue of stewardship. In an interview with Nick I asked him what he believed. He began by stating that he believes in God and tries to follow the teachings of Jesus, he then proceeded to say that in regard to the issue of faith it doesn’t really matter what you have, but it’s what you do with what you have. As I noted in Chapter 4, his response is strikingly similar to a film quote from Gandalf, which I had heard used numerous times at St. Quaratus’ in reference to the present struggles of the Episcopal Church. The quote comes from a scene in the *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001) as Gandalf responds to Frodo’s complaint about the burden of bearing the ring. Nick had surely heard the quote numerous times in his repeated viewings of the film that I had on occasion watched with him. The quote was also frequently used in discussions of remaining faithful by making the best of the tense political climate of the church. As I suggested, Gandalf’s wise counsel to Frodo, “All you have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to you” had been taken in, incorporated and re-appropriated to his own faith understanding of stewardship of resources when he says, “it doesn’t really matter what you have, but it’s what you do with what you have.” In asking Nick what he believes, the issue of stewardship of God’s gifts was close at hand in that it was one of the first topics discussed in response to my question. In this instance the film serves as a resource of an important yet implicit theological concept for Nick, as a resource of language to express that concept and as, source of spiritual encouragement to offer one’s best by administering God’s gifts faithfully.

Last and most obviously, another role model discussed in the portrait was Aragorn who served as the only explicit theological use of the *LOTR* films. Aragorn was
featured in a sermon given by the Rector on Christ the King Sunday in 2004. Christ the King Sunday is the last Sunday of the Church year occurring just before the season of Advent. On this day the primary theme is the kingship of Christ. It serves as a segue into the season of Advent which highlights preparing for the second coming of Christ. On that day, the Revd Carl Crookes, drew upon the imagery from the film *The Return of the King* (Jackson, 2003) highlighting the return of Aragorn, the true king of Gondor. He used this imagery in an allegorical correlation to the return of Christ as the one True king. He explained that in the film, after the destruction of the ring, the true king of Gondor, Aragorn, returned to take his rightful throne and to establish justice under his reign. He likened the return of Aragorn to take his rightful throne to the biblical narrative of the return of Christ as King in the second coming to establish true justice on Earth as it is in Heaven. As mentioned elsewhere, the sermon was well received. It also was given more than a year after the release of the third *LOTR* film, once more pointing to the enduring currency of this film series within the culture of this congregation.

In each of these instances, the characters serve as role models for everyday living in the moral realm representing implicit theological themes to the youth and community of St. Quaratus’. Mulan in her sacrifice, Belle in holding out hope, Simon Birch in faith, and Legolas with his other-worldly, watchful nature, each serves as a theological resource for the youth of St. Quaratus’. Sam portrays the faithfulness of a true friend to the very end. Gandalf offers wisdom for living a life by making the best use of resources. Aragorn represents the establishment of justice. As Bergeson & Greeley (2000) suggest, each character represents a “God is like” metaphor for these young viewers that was absorbed without being see as religious, thereby providing role models for their everyday moral lives.
In keeping with one of Marsh’s key themes “what films do to people”, I ask what did the LOTR series do to the youth of St. Quaratus’? These films provided a powerful mythic narrative, role models of characters, implicit theological themes and concepts as well as vernacular resources for the everyday living, from which the youth and the congregation drew to orient themselves in the world. As Lyden (2003) suggests, films hold out a vision of an idealized world from which viewers gain insight, and as a result decide how to live. In short, what films do for the youth of St. Quaratus’ is to serve as a set of resources for everyday living for the youth of St. Quaratus’.

In this section I considered two approaches drawn from theology and film theories of “what films do” in the lives of the youth of St. Quaratus’ through the director’s vision and theological themes represented in film. I turn now to consider “what these young people do with film” by considering the use of film in this religious community.

What the Young People of St. Quaratus’ Do with Film

Marsh (2004) emphasizes the interplay between the content of film and the practice of film-watching, hence his two key points in reflecting on theology and film are, “what films do to people” and “what people do to film”. The second of Marsh’s two key points in reflecting theologically on film is to consider “what people do with film”. He argues that the habit of film-watching has a religious-like function in four ways, 1) in providing “life-structure” (Marsh, 2004) or “a means by which people orient themselves in the world” (Albanese, 1992, p.11), 2) through the regular habit of film-viewing, 3) in serving as a means of recreation from daily work, and 4) in providing a communal “shared-experience” and environment, as theatres function like chapels drawing together participants consuming life informing texts. In the last section I explored the first of Marsh’s four points “life structure” by discussing the ways the youth orient their lives through the practice of film-viewing. Marsh’s methodology
emphasizes the practice of film-viewing specifically in cinemas. With respect to his fourth point, "theatre environment", the portrait of the youth of St. Quaratus' described their film-watching practices in scenarios, both private and public. Since the viewing of films described above took place in a variety of venues viz. church, homes and theatres, I shall not treat his fourth point in this discussion. In what follows, I shall discuss Marsh's two remaining points, recreation and communal "shared experience" considering the important role that language plays in each.

**Leisure and Recreation**

In Chapter 4, I described the busy lives of the young people of St. Quaratus' suggesting that most are involved in a variety of activities in school, arts, sports and church. I demonstrated that film-viewing served as a significant form of leisure both in private venues as well as in the cinema. Their common practice of film-viewing served as a form of relaxation and recreation from their busy lives. It was common practice for the youth to attend movies, as described in various outings, at the Tuesday evening *Study Break* fellowship, in spontaneous Sunday afternoon viewings following services, at official church sponsored events such as the annual *LOTR* viewing, or as in the case of the *Return of the King* (Jackson, 2003) release party to which I was invited. These various film-watching opportunities took place in a variety of venues, in cinemas, homes and in the church's youth room.

Marsh suggests that film, as recreation may be an important feature in religious life.

[A] potentially religious aspect of the cinema-going habit is the acknowledgement of a need for rest and relaxation...It is puzzling... that religions have not been able to turn their respect for the need for relaxation into an appropriate lens through which to 'read' the world of entertainment. When people go to the cinema, whatever else they are doing, they go to enjoy themselves... Like most contemporary entertainment, the practice of cinema-going functions as a form of 'Sabbath rest' for people who need a break (Marsh 2004, p. 1).
The point is simply that these young people were sharing a common practice of recreation in watching films. Although certainly not all of their movie watching was exclusively done under the auspices of the church, however, in their time together film had become a shared practice that was supported and encouraged by their religious community.

In addition to this practice of film-viewing as recreation from their busy lives, these youth also used the films as a vernacular resource for another form of rest in the performative leisure in their playful use of language drawn from films. The portrait described the on-going use of LOTR film quotes as performative leisure and character mimicry. In jest, the youth would call one another by the names of film characters such as “Legolas”, “Samwise” or “Gimli, son of Gloin”. In addition, various quotes from the films were also used for momentary comic relief in a variety opportune moments, bringing levity to boring and tense instances. I observed the use of LOTR language throughout my time in the parish, even as long as an entire year after the release of the third film. This shows its enduring power in the culture of the congregation. Use of film for recreation and performative leisure in the comic use of language was a significant feature of the culture of St. Quaratus’, providing pause, rest and recreation in the busyness of the everyday lives. Again I stress that these practices had become, as Hopewell suggests, part of the shared culture and identity of this religious community. This can also be seen in Sam’s comment about his nickname “Samwise” which he says is only used by the youth at church.

In addition to using film a set of role models, implicit theological themes and concepts, vernacular resources for meaning-making and religious expression, film discourse gave them opportunity to step away from the busyness of live, for reflection, rest and recreation.
Community

The second of the religion-like aspects of film proposed by Marsh is communal “shared experience” among film-viewers. He notes that films are often viewed with friends. In this setting the shared experience of viewing film takes place with friends from church and often in church, which serves as a community builder. Community is central to Christian tradition in weekly gatherings for worship and in the sharing of lives with people of similar belief. Throughout my time in the parish, the youth underscored how important the community of St. Quaratus’ was to them. Additionally, I have been discussing throughout this thesis, they repeatedly commented on how important film is in their lives. In this parish, the shared experience of film-viewing and religious practice comes to a convergence.

Elsewhere, I described the role of film-viewing and in some detail, the role of the 
LOTR films, as a communal practice. Considerable efforts were made by the church leadership to prepare for the annual events of going to see of the LOTR films as each was released. Reservations were made to rent the theatres. Tickets were sold. A good deal of promotion and advertising was undertaken by means of posters, flyers and newsletter articles sent to the homes of all the teens. Notices were prepared and given for weeks in advance encouraging the whole congregation to join with the youth group. The youth were encouraged to invite friends and family. Overall there was a significant amount of effort, finance, planning and leadership that went into these occasions. They were not merely passive events but ones, which involved appreciable anticipation and participation on the part of the leadership and the youth.

In addition to these larger promotional events, there were also the smaller communal events such as the Return of the King release party described above that I attended with four of the boys form the youth group, as well as repeated viewings in the church
youth room and numerous private home viewings. The result was that this religious community was brought closer together by their shared experiences in the practice of watching movies. That is to say the practice of cultural consumption of film also served as a communal practice in that much of their coming together was for the purpose of recreation. This is in keeping with Fr. Crookes’ assertion that fellowship is the “glue” that binds the church together. In the case of the youth of the parish it is fellowship brought about through the communal practice of film-watching. In short, these young people used film as a communal coagulant.

**Vernacular Resources for Meaning-Making**

In addition to this aspect of shared experience in the practice of watching films together, common language drawn from the films also served as a bond in the community. The communal viewing of these films provided a set of language resources, words, phrases and concepts, for discussing themes central to human existence as well as for playful comic relief, as demonstrated above. The young people used films as meaningful language resources for meaning-making and expression that were incorporated into the everyday vernacular of the parish.

In conversations, the youth would draw upon discourse from film to give voice to their own life experiences of faith. In discussing how he makes sense of scripture Ken indicated he tries to put in his own words. In order to do so he told me he first draws upon concepts from everyday life found in film or television.\(^{145}\) For another example of this, I return to the conversation with Nick about why he comes to church. He explained it to me by using a quote the film *Simon Birch* (Johnson, 1998) saying “Faith is not in the floor plan.” In this film the young underdog Simon is convinced

\(^{145}\) As discussed in the portrait, he acknowledges that he is cautious about this because film and television sometimes spoof religious meaning. Nonetheless, he articulates that this is his first step in trying to understand scripture.
that God has a specific plan for his life. In the end he becomes a hero rising to the occasion by helping his friend in dire need. For Nick the church somehow avails him a better connection to God’s plan for his life and he uses a quote from the film to articulate that.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the use of film for meaning-making and religious expression is seen in the creation, filming and viewing of the movie *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire*. The film was made as a gift for the departure of their much-loved priest. Through a combination of comic and serious refrains, they tell the story of Fr. Kitt’s childhood and the divine appointment of his coming to St. Quaratus’. In the film, they express their friendship, devotion, grief and blessing as they send him on his way. In addition to using quotes, discourse and clips from films, the creators used the actual medium of film itself to give voice to the sentiments of the community on the important occasion. I shall address this film in a more in-depth manner in discussing another aspect of meaning-making and religious expression in the next section on the role of textual poaching. However, for the purposes of this part of the argument, it can be said that film was indeed a significant resource for the youth of St. Quaratus’ in making and expressing meaning.

In keeping with Marsh’s second key theme of “what people do with films” I ask what did the youth of St. Quaratus’ do with the *LOTR* series? These youth used the resources: themes, concepts, language and characters represented in the content of films as resources by which they oriented themselves in the world making sense of everyday life. Their use of these films served a means of rest and recreation, as play and a significant tool for unifying their community through common experience and common language. The films played a significant role in the ordinary religion of the lives of the young people of St. Quaratus’. It is worth noting that they played a role in
their extraordinary religious lives only in so far as that a good bit of their film-
watching took place at church or at church sponsored events. Films were rarely used
to formulate any substantive explicit theological claims or statements about religious
identity or beliefs.
These findings are rather straightforward. The young people discussed here are not
merely passive recipients of meaning encoded into filmic texts but active participants
in making-meaning of their lives from the resources of popular films. Although they
are not subject to textual determinacy of meanings presented in these films, there is
however a strong correlation between the content, viz. the director's vision encoded
into film and the theological themes represented in the film; and a religion-like
function of the practice of film-viewing. These findings confirm what many of the
theorists in religion and film have proposed in Chapter 2.

Film as Religion
Hurley argues that movie directors encode films with a sort of “secular theology”
(1970), an implicit theology outside the domain of conventional religion, which
invites viewers and in this case, these youth, into dialogue with the themes
represented which they in turn apply to everyday life. What is more, there are many
implicit theological themes represented in film that have served as a means by which
these young people orient themselves in the world. As a result, their practice of film-
watching does have religious-like qualities in that these films do more than, as Martin
& Ostwalt suggest, “just entertain” (1995). Watching movies provides these young
people with the resources of myth, moral and ritual like religion. After entering into
the fictitious world of popular film, they return to the real world, taking what they
have experienced and applying it to how they live (Lyden, 2003). This is so because
there is an intimate relationship between the content of filmic text and social practice
of the audience. In this instance therefore I ask, "Is film religion?" My answer is at once both yes and no. In order to address this I shall return to Albanese's definition of religion that has under girded much of this project.

Albanese describes religion as "a system of symbols (creed, code, cultus) by means of which people (a community) orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary meanings and values" (1992, p. 11). I have argued, according to Albanese's definition of the meanings and values of "ordinary religion" which are implicitly religious and synonymous with culture and everyday life, that film does serve as a system of symbols by means of which these young people orient themselves in the world. It also serves as a 'social glue' by which these young people 'cohere' through a common practice of film-watching and a shared vernacular drawn from film. In this sense film operates as "ordinary religion" in the here-and-now lives of the youth of St. Quaratus'.

On the other hand however, Albanese argues that meanings and values of "extraordinary religion" are explicit, distinct and recognizable as religion, in the way they stand out from the background of "the ordinary circle of society". "Extraordinary religion" is concerned with "otherness" and "transcendence" beyond everyday life with the intention of influencing everyday life. In this case, no, film does not operate as "extraordinary religion" in its own right. "Extraordinary religion" is more in keeping with what would be considered traditional or conventional religion such as that which is on offer at St. Quaratus' in their traditional worship and Christian education programs. Nonetheless, Albanese maintains that the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary religion is often blurred difficult to separate. The frequent use of film within the context of this religious community as well as the brief
moments of prayer in movie theatres\textsuperscript{146} is evidence of this blurring. This brings me back to main theme of this thesis that of convergence of ordinary and extraordinary religion found in the convergence of media and religion in the use of film by the young people in this religious community. These young people frequently draw upon film for the ordinary religious work of orienting themselves in the world. They draw upon film for extraordinary religious use in a limited way however, only in that it is sanctioned and used frequently in the context of their gathered religious community even in worship services. It must be noted that their use of film rarely involved much articulate expression of religious belief or identity that is explicit, distinct and recognizable as historic Christian theology represented in the Book of Common Prayer, the Bible or the historic Creeds of the Church, all of which are central to the traditional worship offered at St. Quaratus'. I shall return to discuss this more at length later in this chapter.

Albanese's definition brings together two seemingly separate realms, the ordinary realm of everyday life and everyday religion in which mass mediated popular culture is a common feature, and the extraordinary realm of traditional historic Christian religious practices of the young people of St. Quaratus' Episcopal Church. In emphasizing both the ordinary and extraordinary practices of religion, this definition reflects the convergence of media and religion as Hoover (2002) suggests is taking place in contemporary religious practices in America. It also underscores Woodhead and Heelas' assertion that the "location of religion... has changed from church and chapel to the culture at large" (2000, p.243). It aids in understanding the ways that the young people of this parish use film both inside and outside the church as a significant resource for building community, for implicit theological themes and

\textsuperscript{146} As described taking place at each respective event for the \textit{LOTR} films.
concepts, communal vernacular and meaning-making in their ordinary religion and in a rather limited way in extraordinary religion.

I now move away from the discussion of the use of popular films in general to consider a more transformative aspect of the use of film in the religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus'. The making of the film *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire* demonstrates a convergence of religion and film and ordinary and extraordinary religion.

**Convergence of Religion and Film**

In the last section, I discussed the key ways that film operates as primarily implicit theology in ordinary religion amongst the youth of St. Quaratus' parish. I also noted that it operates as extraordinary religion only in so far as that it was frequently used in church sanctioned events. I noted that film was rarely integrated into the expression of any distinct and explicit theological claims of religious belief or identity. I analysed this phenomenon in the light of theology and film theory to argue for the convergence of religion and film. I intimated that the clearest evidence of this phenomenon is found in the making of the film *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire*. In this section therefore, I examine the role this film played in giving voice to the sentiments of the community at the departure of Fr. Kitt. The film represents a convergence of media and religion.

In chapter 1, I argued that theories about religion in America have been in flux during the course of the past three decades. I cited Heelas' assertion (2000) that the practice of religion has "changed from church and chapel to the culture at large" (2000, p.243). I also considered Hoover's thesis (2002) that there are no longer clear boundaries but a convergence between the institutions of media and religion. Hoover stresses that each sphere influences the other. He holds that in a world dominated by
mass media, religion has become more public and more commodified. Media, at the same time, are increasingly the site where spiritual and transcendent ‘projects of the self’ take place. Therefore, he writes, “rather than being autonomous actors involved in institutionalized projects in relation to each other, religion and media are increasingly converging... on a common turf: the everyday world of lived experience” (2002, p. 2). This occurs in the making of the film by these young people.

Film is important in the religious practices of these young people. The making and viewing of Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire underscores its importance for a number of reasons. I shall examine three of these here. First, the use of this film is a means of religious expression. Second, this film was a meaningful gift of personal expression from the young people to their much-loved priest. Third, it served as a social coagulant for in giving voice to the sentiments of the community.

Resources for Religious Expression

First, as I have argued elsewhere that film is a significant vernacular resource in meaning-making and expression. It provided the youth with role models, themes and language for talking about their lives. It is also a resource for recreation and performative leisure in tense and difficult moments of emotional labour. In this instance, the making of this film served as the means of religious expression.

Recounting the stories of important religious figures whose lives and witness have had an impact on the faith of others is an important aspect of religion. These young people draw upon resources from popular films as well as other popular culture texts, to tell the story of Fr. Kitt’s life through film. They drew upon resources that they saw visualized in the Harry Potter films to give voice to the stories that they had heard about from Fr. Kitt’s own childhood and life history. In one of the early scenes, I
described Fr. Kitt/Harry Potter who was relegated to sleeping locked in a closet under
the stairs and was repeatedly bullied by his mother/aunt and brother/cousin. Nick,
one of the creators, told me he chose this clip because “Kitt always complains about
his childhood, about his domineering mother and bullying brother who always beat
him up at home.” The portrait of the youth of St. Quaratus’ recounted several such
scenes that draw upon the Harry Potter films to help in telling Fr. Kitt’s story.\textsuperscript{147}
Their repeated viewing of the Harry Potter movies brought to mind the accounts of Fr.
Kitt’s life that they then used as the means for retelling his stories. The young people
expressed that Fr. Kitt had become an important spiritual influence in their lives after
the loss of their Youth Minister. The retelling of the story of his life and how God
brought him to St. Quaratus’ is an important task that they have undertaken in their
process of making sense of his departure.

The film conveys an ironic tone, poking fun at various aspects of their religious
community and making use of comic relief in several of the scenes. The creators re-
appropriated film clips to tell the story of Fr. Kitt’s life history in an amusing way.
They poke fun at the Rector insinuating that he spends his days playing video games.
Their comic use of bright lights and angel choirs insinuates a divine intervention in
the calling of Fr. Kitt to St. Quaratus’. The use of irony and comic relief seems to
serve as the means to break the ice, as it were, in the difficult work of expressing their
grief, loss and blessing. This process comes to it culmination in the use of a series of
frames of printed text rolling across the screen at the end of the film. The series of
frames ends with an expression of their love and devotion, “We love you Kitt, so
make us proud…” In addition to the ironic retelling of the story of the divine calling

\textsuperscript{147} Such as Kitt’s/Harry’s receiving of the letter from Wheaton College/Hogwart’s
school and the enquiry to the attendant regarding the Platform for the train to
Wheaton/Hogwart’s.
of Fr. Kitt, mentioned above; the work of grieving, blessing and expressions of love and devotion are important aspects of religious practice in which these young people participate in church on a regular basis in worship services. This film gave voice to their specific needs for expression in celebrating this important occasion in their life. The second important aspect in the making of this film was that it was a meaningful and personal gift. When I asked Nick about the origin of the project, he explained that rather than spending a lot of money to buy a gift the youth sought to create something more meaningful. Nick was the same teen who discussed issues related to stewardship in the last chapter. In this scenario, his implicit theology of stewardship is broadened to include not only material wealth but also time and talent. The two boys who were the primary initiators behind this project decided that, rather than spending a lot of money, they wanted to express their love and appreciation for Fr. Kitt in a more personal way. This indicates that not only was film-viewing important in the lives of these two, but also film making.

The two creators embody complimentary talents in film production. Nat used his skills in the technical aspects such as editing, whilst Nick worked on the creative aspects of the movie. Together they wrote the script, gathered props and actors, cast the parts, filmed and edited the scenes, sounds and music and funded the project. This was a lot of work intellectually, creatively, physically and personally. The entire project was accomplished in only three days time. It was a very personal sacrificial gift. It was not only an expression their love but also of their identity, shown in the giving of themselves in their time, creativity, skills and money.

The third important task of the film is that not only was the use of this film a means of religious expression; and a meaningful and personal gift, but it also served as a communal coagulant by bring together, symbolising and giving voice to the
sentiments of the whole community. The filming and production were completed three days prior to the departure of Fr. Kitt. The boys who had produced *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire* were instructed by the Rector to set up viewing equipment in the nave of the church immediately following the service on his last day. That Sunday, Fr. Kitt was scheduled to preach and preside at worship. After the service had ended the film was shown to the entire congregation that was present. The combination of comic relief and touching sentiments in the film availed a range of emotions in the viewing audience. There was hearty laughter and there were many tears from young and old alike. The movie was thick with symbols and language drawn from films and other popular texts that were easily recognizable and had become part of the vernacular of the parish. It served as a social coagulant by means of its symbolism, story, language and comic content, helping the congregation to make sense of their lives and religious experiences with Fr. Kitt. The film gave voice to a range of themes and emotions. This was an important aspect of their religious practices in that it shared a common message, viz. love for Fr. Kitt through a common medium, film. This was the last official religious event in this community for Fr. Kitt. It wasn't mediated through the pulpit nor the altar but on the silver screen through the viewing of a film.

I have argued that film is a significant vernacular resource in performative leisure in meaning-making and in religious expression. The making, presenting and viewing of this film shows the co-existence of secularizing and sacralizing forces at work at the same time, in this culture. The medium of film that was once under the close scrutiny of religious institutions has in this instance come to be a powerful tool in the

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148 Examples of the scrutiny of the film industry by religious institutions can be seen in the creation of an office by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1924 for self-censorship with attention to religious audiences,
ordinary and in a limited way the extraordinary religious practices of these young people, in a convergence of media and religion as suggested by Hoover (2002). As mentioned earlier however, theology and film theories have provided helpful tools for understanding the use of popular film by the young people of St. Quaratus’ but these theories are not necessarily comprehensive for explaining the surprising and subversive use of film as a set of resources for religious expression as demonstrated in the making of the film *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire* by a number of St. Quaratus’ young people. Is meaning in a text predetermined by the author? Is meaning determined by themes present in the text? What is the role of the audience in determining meaning? Is this subversive use of film common practice in contemporary culture? In the next section, I draw upon theories from cultural studies to examine the process of textual poaching (DeCerteau, 1984; Jenkins, 1992) in order to address these issues and to understand the convergence of media and religion in the creation of the film for Fr. Kitt.

**Textual Poaching**

As suggested above in the area of theology and film studies I found no set of theories nor helpful model to explain the surprising and subversive use of film as a set of resources for religious expression these young people in their making of the film *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire*. Therefore, in this section I look to cultural studies considering briefly the process of textual poaching in order to help explain this phenomenon. I then proceed to show the ways that this phenomenon is occurring in other areas of contemporary culture. This will lead to the subsequent discussion of the

as well as the Catholic Legion of Decency in 1933 and the Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures 1934 which developed preliminary rating systems to inform their constituencies of films that were not acceptable for religious audiences. Johnston (2000) argues that there was considerable confrontation between the religious and film institutions. For more see Johnston, 2000, Chapter 2, pp 31-39.
shift of authority from these institutions to individuals in a convergence of the
democratization of religion and the democratization of the media.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) De Certeau creates an economy of meaning,
looking away from the producer or even the products (or texts) of popular culture, in
the case of this thesis - film, to argue for the autonomy of the consumer (or reader).
De Certeau contends that readers exercise autonomy to appropriate and re-appropriate
meaning to popular cultural texts in the social practice of ordinary life. He writes,

> The purpose of this work is to make explicit the systems of operational
> combination (*les combinatoires d’operations*) which also compose a ‘culture’
> and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as
> the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are
> either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term ‘consumers.’
> Everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of
> others (1984, pp xi-xii).

He argues against the common assumption in Western culture of hegemonic textual
determinacy of authorial intent over the reader of a given text. In the interplay
between production, representation and consumption of mass media texts, he
contends, “The presence and circulation of a representation... tells us nothing of what
it is for its users” (1984, p. xiii). In the case of this film, these youth have poached
and re-appropriated a variety of film clips as well as other popular culture texts in
order to tell a story that is different than what was intended by their original
producers.

De Certeau refers to producers of cultural texts as “writers”, the institutionally
sanctioned guardians of authorial intent. He refers to consumers as “readers”, who by
means of “tactics” poach from the authorial property of the writers to produce their
own meanings. He sees readers and writers as having distinct social milieus. In De
Certeau’s economy of meaning, readers silently and invisibly consume texts and
manipulate them to generate new meanings in a process that he calls “secondary
production”. He writes, “Far from being writers... readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields that they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (1984, p. 174).

This is the process undertaken by some of the young people of St. Quaratus’ in the making of the film Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire, as a gift for the departure of Fr. Kitt. As discussed in the last chapter, many of these young people attend church regularly and are somewhat well versed in the Christian story. They are also rather well versed in the “field” of popular film-viewing in which they “operate”. Furthermore, their lack of use of traditional religious language and symbols in their religious expression of this significant occasion suggests that they are perhaps more interested in the resources of popular culture than traditional religion for making sense of their lives. In their leisure consumption, conversation, meaning-making processes and reflections, they appropriate and re-appropriate the texts of film, which they have consumed blending them with the stories from their religious community. As a result, at the departure of Fr. Kitt, they negotiated original dominant meanings of the texts of Harry Potter and LOTR films as well as other cultural artefacts to adapt them “to their own interests and their own rules” for the sake of writing their own film which functions in telling the story about Fr. Kitt’s involvement in the life of their religious community. This was their way of doing the religious work of making meaning, expressing gratitude and devotion and saying good-bye.

De Certeau’s theory of textual poaching was a very significant development for communication theory in challenging the assumptions of the textual determinacy of authorial intent. In Textual Poachers (1992), Jenkins draws heavily upon De Certeau,

149 They are not per se well versed in the Scriptures but in the cycle of stories presented through the liturgical year.
theorizing about fans and fandom in order to facilitate his own ethnographic studies of television-fans and fan-produced texts. Jenkins’ work provides a practical model of textual poaching in his examination of the making of music videos based upon characters from the American television series *Star Trek*. These considerations are helpful for this project.

Less than a decade after De Certeau’s work, Jenkins advanced De Certeau’s theory in two significant ways. First, Jenkins maintains that in De Certeau’s theory, reading is an individualised endeavour and “readers are essentially isolated from each other” (1992, p. 45). To the contrary, Jenkins argues that the creation of fan clubs, on-line chat rooms, and conventions, show that fans are readers who engage in a community of similarly devoted people. He writes, “Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of new media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community” (1992, pp 45-46). Additionally, he holds that in De Certeau’s economy, subversive meanings are generated for the moment, then quickly discarded when no longer useful to the reader. For Jenkins, the poaching and re-appropriation of texts works because in the fan community, texts are not discarded but recycled. He writes, “The videos tap into the viewers’ pre-existing fascination with these characters, relying on their familiarity with the core narratives to construct a context where the sequence of shots makes sense” (1992, p. 238). This, he argues, can only effectively take place within the context of a fan community where popular texts are commonly known and circulate freely. He writes,

What the videos articulate is what fans have in common: shared understandings, their mutual interests, their collective fantasies. Though made of materials derived from network television, these videos can satisfy fan desires in ways that their commercial counterparts all too often fail to do, because they focus on those aspects of the narrative that the community wants to explore (1992, p. 249).
This describes the social and religious tasks of these youth in their use of popular films, specifically with the *LOTR* and *Harry Potter* series, which provided a common set of symbols and language in the youth culture of this community. These films were part of the common language base in the congregation. When re-appropriated and used to bear new meanings, they were effective predicated on the familiarity that the community had with characters and narratives of the original stories.

Jenkins' second advancement in the theory of textual poaching is that, he points out that De Certeau's theory makes a sharp separation between readers and writers. For Jenkins this is not the case, he argues, “Fandom does not preserve a radical separation between readers and writers. Fans do not simply consume pre-produced stories; they manufacture their own fanzine stories and novels, art, prints, songs, videos, performances, etc.” (1992, p. 45). Here there is a convergence between readers and writers. One is neither reader nor writer, but both. From the resources of their avid consumption of popular film these young “readers” became “writers” of religious expression in this film that they have made.

By means of textual poaching these young people re-appropriated fragments of popular films and other texts to create new meanings and tell a different story than the one intended by the creators of the Potter film (Rowling, 1997 and Columbus, 2001) and the *LOTR* films (Tolkien, 1965 and Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003). In short, the making of this film shows that the youth were not subject to textual determinacy of the content of the film but through their reading of the content of the film and subversive “tactics” of textual poaching, they have used the resources of film and other popular texts, re-appropriating them for use in their own religious expression and religious practices.
Textual Poaching of Popular Film in the Broader Culture

In order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, taking place amongst the youth of St. Quaratus', I shall briefly consider here similar incidents at work in the broader culture. The phenomenon of textual poaching of film and re-appropriation of meaning is not unique to a few devoted fans as discussed by Jenkins, nor even to the young people of St. Quaratus'. There is ample evidence of this in contemporary society found in websites such as YouTube.com and IFilm.com, on which amateur filmmakers blog, discuss, view, post and download their creations. These websites host numerous videos, short films and mock movie-trailers created by filmic textual poachers.

The Youtube website was created by Chad Hurley and Steve Chen, two young men in their twenties who became friends while working together for eBAY. In January 2005, they combined their creativity and technological capabilities to create YouTube. BusinessWeek Magazine reported on April 10, 2006 that the YouTube website was showing 30,000,000 such videos each day. That is a significant cultural phenomenon to take place in little over a year's time. On 28 June 2006, National Public Radio's

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150 One videographic example found on YouTube is Brokeback to the Future, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfODSPIYwpQ), a video based on the fusion of the recent movie Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005), starring Jake Gyllenhal and Heath Ledger, and Back to the Future (Zemekis, 1985), starring Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd. The producer of this comical, mock film-trailer, has spliced several of the Western genre scenes from Back to the Future making it appear that the characters of Marty (played by Fox) and Dr. Brown (played by Lloyd) were having a homosexual relationship. This occurrence was not part of the original film. IFilm, hosts a similar video spoof, Brokeback Mount Doom (http://www.ifilm.com/ifilmdetail/2699711), another mock movie trailer. Brokeback Mount Doom plays on the intimate scenes between Sam and Frodo in the LOTR series as though their dangerous travels to Mordor were merely an excuse to profligate a sexual romance. These are but two examples of this increasingly common practice of textual poaching of popular film to create new meanings and expressions that are available on the Internet.

151 See: “YouTube: Way Beyond Home Videos”, BusinessWeek, April 10, 2006 http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_15/b3979093.htm?chan=tc&chan=technology_technology+index+page_more+of+today's+top+stories
Morning Edition reported that, “Fifty million videos are posted on the site at any given time”\(^{152}\) and that 60,000 new amateur videos are added to the website each day. USA Today\(^{153}\) reported, “The average [YouTube website] user watches 30 minutes of videos a day, though the average length of each video viewed is about 2 minutes” (Maney, USA Today, 13 June 2006). This means that amateur video-making and viewing is becoming a significant force in leisure consumption and entertainment. It also indicates as Jenkins suggests that many such video-readers are becoming video-writers, as is the case in the making of the film by the youth of St. Quaratus’ for Fr. Kitt.

In addition to on-line leisure consumption and at St. Quaratus’, this phenomenon of textual poaching and re-appropriation of meaning is also taking place elsewhere in religion. The website for Vintage21 Church\(^{154}\) hosts a number of examples of textual poaching of popular films for religious purposes.\(^{155}\) Vintage21 is a church in Raleigh, North Carolina whose primary target audience and constituency is young adults. The


\(^{154}\) See: http://www.vintage21.com/

\(^{155}\) In video number 4, (http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6638432503810462338&q=vintage21) Vintage21 Church shows Jesus approaching the temple riding on a donkey. He arrives at the gate surrounded by a crowd welcoming him, waving palm branches. As he dismounts the ass, Jesus motions to the crowd as the dubbed-over, deadpan voice says, “Alright. Stop! Stop! I walked on water, I think I can walk to the door.” Then the scene continues as Jesus enters the Temple. The look on his face indicates shock at the behaviour of merchants and moneychangers. He pauses, calmly saying, “What in the name of Me (emphasis added) is going on in here?” (Vintage21, Jesus Video No. 4). The use of humour in these videos serves as an aid in breaking preconceived ideas of the nature of Christianity for the congregation. Subsequently, through the preaching and teaching of the congregation’s leaders, members are challenged to think about the life, words and actions of Jesus as presented in the gospels, in a new light. These are example of the common practice of textual poaching and re-appropriation of texts and meaning for the creation of videos bearing new meaning, for religious purposes. For more see: http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-8304756378019746541&q=vintage21
Church has developed many such videos for religious purposes, by poaching popular religious films for use as teaching tools for the church. In the spring of 2003 the church offered a series of sermons about the works and words of Jesus' earthly ministry. The series was supplemented by videos depicting the life of Christ in a comic tone. They drew upon a series of films in the biblical narrative genre of traditional Jesus movies featuring images of desert scenes, characters in first century dress and Jesus as prophet and popular teacher, to make new videos for use in a series of sermons. Like the film created by the youth of St. Quaratus', in these videos the original voices are dubbed over to include strange voices an ironic tone and comic dialogue, in this case between Jesus and other biblical characters. The videos are intended to challenge "preconceived notions" of Christian faith as represented in what they call stereotypical "staunch Sunday School classes" by adding humour to the dialogue. Although these videos were created and sanctioned by the leaders of Vintage21 Church for the purpose of teaching; the process, content and intent of expressing explicit theological themes is similar in some respects to the work of the youth of St. Quaratus' in the making of their film. There is a significant difference between the two situations however. The film made by the youth of St. Quaratus' was is an example of personal media created by youth who hold little authority in the congregation, rather than the church's leaders. The leadership of St. Quaratus' only sanctioned the public viewing of Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire after the film was already created for other purposes.

Paul Saffo discusses the growth of the significance of personal media in his essay *Farewell Information, It's a Media Age* (December 2005). Saffo, a technological

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156 See: http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6638432503810462338&q=vintage21
157 See: www.saffo.com/essays/idex.php
business forecaster and strategist at the Institute for the Future, in the Silicon Valley of California, argues that this as an increasingly common phenomenon in all forms of media. He contends that the media are being democratized in what he calls the “personal media revolution”. He argues,

The Mass Media revolution 50 years ago delivered the world to our TV’s, but it was a one-way trip – all we could do was to press our nose against the glass and watch. In contrast Personal Media is a two-way trip and we not only can, but also expect to be able to answer back (December, 2005, p. 2).

Saffo gives contemporary examples of this phenomenon in the way that blogs and chat-rooms function within on-line communities. Bloggers expect to have an opportunity to consume but also to participate. He notes, “Amazon relies on user reviews as a key part of its model” (December 2005, p. 4). Additionally he points out that, “Once encyclopaedias were written by professional writers and editors; today they are created by amateurs logging into wikis like Wikipedia” (December 2005, p. 5). Saffo’s work primarily emphasises the economic dimensions of this phenomenon and its impact on large media corporations. He sees the consumption and production (reading and writing) of amateur video as posing a significant economic threat to entertainment industry. This of course was not the emphasis behind the work of Jenkins; however, Saffo comes to the same conclusion that in today’s “personal media revolution”, media readers have become writers. He writes,

The advertising potency of the 1950’s mass media world of TV led to a retail revolution that not only turned us all into consumers, but also made consumers the most important players in sustaining the economy. The message to viewers was very much one of shut up and watch – and then go and buy. Consumption remains hugely important today, but the two-way nature of personal media is turning once passive consumers into active creators as well (December 2005, p. 5).

Using theories of textual poaching and Jenkins’ practical model in amateur video-making helps in understanding and explaining the subversive use of film for religious expression by the young people of St. Quaratus’. This phenomenon that is taking
place in the culture at large in many forms of media. It is also at work amongst the youth of St. Quaratus' in their use of film. Their avid consumption of film with its symbols, stories and language and the common currency of these narratives in the church community availed their production of new religious meanings and expressions in the creation of the film *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire*.

The Convergence of the Democratization of Religion and the Democratization of Media

In Chapter 1, I cited theories asserting that there is increasing emphasis in contemporary American culture on personal spirituality or inner religious experience rather than institutional religion. I argued that this constitutes a "democratization of religion" meaning that the onus of authority has shifted from religious institutions to the people for determining religious meaning and practice in everyday life. In the process of textual poaching there is a similar principle at work in that the authority to determine meaning shifts from the producing media institution onto consumers. I noted that the phenomenon of textual poaching of film and re-appropriation of meaning is not unique to the fans discussed neither by Jenkins or even to the young people of St. Quaratus'. There is ample evidence of textual poaching of film in the broader culture, this as seen on websites such as YouTube.com and others, on which amateur filmmakers blog, discuss, view, post, upload and download their creations. This phenomenon of textual poaching of film and re-appropriation of meaning is also taking place in other religious settings such as Vintage21 Church, which has developed a number of videos series for religious purposes, by poaching popular religious films for use in sermons and as teaching tools for the church. I also pointed out that business strategist Paul Saffo (December 2005) argues that the world is undergoing a "personal media revolution" where, as Jenkins (1992) has suggested, the
lines between readers and writers are blurred. Saffo gives various examples of the
growth of personal media on-line, such as YouTube, cited above, and Wikipedia, an
on-line encyclopaedia whose entries are generated by amateur academicians who have
the opportunity to edit the entries of others and Amazon.com, which relies on book
reviews written by its customers. Saffo also maintains that bloggers expect to have an
opportunity not only to consume but also to participate. This hints at a significant
shift from the authority of major media producers to media consumers who are also
amateur writers. This, in turn, constitutes a democratization of media.

I have argued that the making of the film *Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire*,
constitutes a convergence of media and religion, and of ordinary and extraordinary
religion. This film also demonstrates a convergence of the democratization of
religion and the democratization of media. These youth have textually poached
various films and other popular cultural texts, read them through the lens of their
religious experiences and re-appropriated meanings that were neither solely in the
content of the media texts nor solely in the content of their Christian tradition. *Kitt
Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire* is a very personal text specific to the culture of St.
Quaratus'. In the making of this film, these youth are exercising their personal
authority over religion and media, in the textual poaching and re-appropriation of
meaning out of the resources available to them. They generated new religious
meanings from the resources of commonly shared symbols, stories and language of
film, and as a result give voice to the sentiments of the larger community. Indeed in
this parish, film serves as a significant resource in the practice of ordinary religion,
and in a rather limited way, the extraordinary religion of the youth of St. Quaratus'.

*Can we say however, that in its theological essence, the extraordinary religious
practice of the youth under investigation in this parish is indeed Christian religion as*
understood by Anglican tradition in the Episcopal Church? I shall address this in the final section of this chapter.

**Therapeutic Moralistic Deism**

This thesis has shown that amongst these young people there is a convergence of religion and media and a convergence of the democratization of religion with the democratization of media. It has also shown that the consumption of film is a significant feature and resource in their practice of ordinary religion and in a limited way extraordinary religion. I am led to enquire therefore about the theological nature of the religion in which these young people participate.

Albanese's definition of religion has been a helpful guide in this discussion about the religious practices of the youth of St Quaratus' Church. As described throughout the thesis, ordinary religion is implicit. It is most often equated with the system of implicit symbols, meaning and values of everyday life at play in the culture at large. This includes the language, the many symbols, stories, values and meanings incorporated into the implicit theologies at play in the consumption of popular culture and in this instance, popular film by the youth of St Quaratus'.

Albanese's definition for extraordinary religion on the other hand, is that which is explicit, distinct, and recognizable as religion in terms of its symbols, stories, language, meanings and values that are under girded by explicit theologies. These are set apart from the rest of the culture. As I have suggested, this is more in keeping with the traditional Sunday morning worship and Christian education programs offered by St. Quaratus’, the basis of which is described in the church mission statement and in the Rector's vision for the parish discussed above. What is the basis on which these programs are founded?
Amongst the many sources of authority in the Episcopal Church there are four sources of ecclesial authority that are foundational to the church's doctrine. Theologians have suggested that these are the basis on which Episcopal identity is founded (Wright, 1988, 1989, Fairfield, 1990, Pritchard, 1991). In this last section of the chapter I shall first consider the four points of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (1888) as a measuring rod against which to assess the theological implications of the use of film in the extraordinary religious practices of these youth. I shall then offer some broad observations about the theological implications of the young people's practice of extraordinary religion. Finally, I shall end the chapter by asserting that although these young people regularly engage in traditional Christian worship, the religion in practice amongst the youth of St. Quaratus' is not, in its theological underpinnings, traditional Anglican/Episcopal Christian religion as spelt out in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Rather, it is more in keeping with the findings of the research of the National Study of Youth and Religion of 2001-2005, conducted under the direction of Christian Smith (1995). Smith argues that "therapeutic moralistic deism" is the most common religious practice of American teenagers today.

The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral

Fairfield argues that the Episcopal Church USA has established in its ratification of Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral a "core doctrine" and set of beliefs at its centre, which have been repeatedly affirmed by the General Convention\(^{158}\) (1990, p.8). In order to understand this doctrine as a significant authority he offers a bit of background to its creation. Fairfield explains that amidst the social pressures of the

\(^{158}\) The General Convention of the Episcopal Church USA is a triennial bicameral legislative gathering of the American House of Bishops and the House of Deputies (comprised of clergy and lay delegates) which meets to ratify canonical regulations and approve the church's budget. For more see: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/53785_ENG_HTM.htm
industrial revolution in Nineteenth Century America, conversations arose about the prospect of creating a national church in the USA to address the needs of industrial workers; and amongst other issues, to ply moral and governmental controls on the profiteering corporations and industrialists of the day (1990, pp 9-10). Pritchard notes that because of their involvement in US federal governmental politics, Episcopalians believed they could play an important role in the formation of such a church (1991, p. 188). A key leader in this movement, clergyman, William Reed Huntington drafted a document outlining four basic elements that the Episcopal Church would require if they were to unite with other Christian bodies in the creation of a national church.

These elements are: the Holy Scripture, the Nicene Creed, The two Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and the historic Episcopate. His argument was that these are the baseline for Episcopal ecclesiology. In 1886, the “Quadrilateral” was ratified by the American House of Bishops. In the end, a National Church for America never came to be. The Quadrilateral however, proved to be a rather useful tool in ecumenical dialogue by helping the Episcopalians to clarify Church identity.

Two years later Huntington’s Quadrilateral was presented at the third Lambeth Conference159 in London, England. Pritchard notes, “When Anglican Bishops from throughout the world gathered... they were well acquainted with the import of the proposal that Huntington had made. Before the session ended they adopted Huntington’s four principles with a much abbreviated introduction...” (1991, p.190). Additionally, Pritchard indicates that later Conferences again endorsed these fundamentals of Anglican Christian faith in subsequent years, viz. 1920, 1930, 1948,

159 The Lambeth Conference is a gathering of all Bishops in the Anglican Communion throughout the world approximately every ten years for prayer discussion consultation on contemporary issues in Anglican Christianity. The first such Conference was called by Archbishop Longley of Canterbury. For more see Chadwick in Anglican Episcopal History Vol. LVIII No.3 September, 1989, pp259-277.
1978. The official Lambeth-ratified form of the Quadrilateral is now featured in the American *Book of Common Prayer* (1979) as follows:

Lambeth Conference of 1888
Resolution 11

That, in the opinion of this Conference, the following Articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards Home Reunion:

(a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
(b) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
(c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself--Baptism and the Supper of the Lord--ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.
(d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, pp 877-878).

For more than one hundred years Huntington's four elements have served as a helpful tool not only in American ecumenical dialogue but also in the broader Anglican Communion for dialogue between provinces of the Communion as well as for conversations with the Roman and Orthodox Churches which share common historic roots.  

Although the Quadrilateral has repeated been affirmed by the Lambeth Conference, Wright points out that the work of the Conference carries "moral" authority only. It is not a binding force for Anglican provinces around the world. Citing statements from the introduction of the reports from the Lambeth Conferences, he highlights,

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160 In 1998, the one hundredth anniversary of the resolution of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, J. Robert Wright, Ecclesiastical Historian from General Seminary in New York wrote *Quadrilateral at One Hundred* (1988). In this treatise celebrating the centenary of the Quadrilateral, Wright observes among other things that the Huntington's Quadrilateral contained the three elements of authoritative apostolic teaching that St. Irenaeus had identified in the 190s, viz. the Canon, Creeds and Apostolic Tradition via the episcopate. Additionally, that the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, were seen as tangible guarantees of the promises of God in the other three. Wright argues that the Quadrilateral represents a very ancient understanding of how Christian teaching took shape in the one hundred and fifty years after the Ascension. For more see Wright 1988, pp 8-46.
"The function of the [Lambeth] conference being consultative and advisory, its findings are not to be interpreted as having legislative force throughout the Anglican Communion. No Resolution of the Lambeth Conference is binding upon any part of the Anglican Communion unless and until it has been adopted by the appropriate canonical authority" (in Anglican and Episcopal History, 1989, p.280).

In 1895, seven years after the Lambeth Conference of 1888, the General Convention of Episcopal Church adopted the resolution. With regard to its authoritative role in the Episcopal Church, Pritchard notes however,


Even as recently as the General Convention of 2003 the Church has continued to emphasise these basic principles of Anglican Christian faith as a foundational source of Episcopal identity and authority in presenting Resolutions to the Convention such as Resolution Number 2003-C051\(^{161}\). Therefore on various occasions the General Convention of the Episcopal Church has committed itself to a statement of essential beliefs, which are summarized in the so-called "Lambeth Quadrilateral" as Fairfield (1990) suggests above. These essentials are the Holy Scriptures as the rule of faith, the Creeds as statements of the faith, the two Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as pledges of the faith, and the historic episcopate as the living tradition of the faith. It is against this "core doctrine" affirmed by the Episcopal Church that I shall now consider the theological implications of the extraordinary religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus'.

**Overarching Observations**

In view of these fundamental Anglican beliefs that have been repeatedly recommended by the Lambeth Conference of Bishops and endorsed by the canonical

\(^{161}\) For a full report on this resolution see: http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2003-C051
authority of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, I return to the question raised at the end of the previous section of this chapter. *Can we say that in its theological essence, the extraordinary religious practice of the youth under investigation in this parish is indeed Christian religion as understood by Anglican tradition in the Episcopal Church?*

In an effort to address the question I offer here a number of broad observations on the data collected by culling from that which has been addressed above with regard to the convergence of film and the practice of religion in the lives of the young people of this congregation.

First, it is clear that the youth of St. Quaratus' are very religious with regard to extraordinary religion. They exhibit significant levels of involvement in various church-related activities and above all in their regular participation in traditional Sunday worship. Even amidst the many other extra-curricular activities and options available to them, they still participate regularly and actively. Second, there is at the same time, abundant evidence these young people orient themselves in the world by finding meaning and value in their use of film as ordinary religion. Third, as Albanese suggests, there is a blurring between the two categories of the ordinary religion in their use of popular culture and the extra ordinary religion of traditional church activities. The youth effortlessly seem to move between these two realms using popular film both inside and outside of traditional religious practices. Fourth, apart from a few brief moments of prayer in the theatre prior to the beginning of the church sponsored *LOTR* events and the congregational viewing of *Kitt Nichols and the Chamber of Fire* during the farewell celebration for Fr. Kitt, there is little evidence of explicit integration of film into the theological essence of their extraordinary religious practices. Fifth, The making, screening and viewing of *Kitt Nichols and the Chamber
of Fire bears the most explicit connection between traditional or extraordinary religion and film. However, in the case of this film most of the references to religion are made in factual, comical or ironic ways. Again, there is little evidence of the use of popular film in the construction of substantive theological statements or claims. Sixth, the data in this thesis shows that whilst the young people frequently use language, symbols and stories drawn from film in the expression of ordinary religious meanings and values, they appear rather inarticulate in their use of traditional religious language, stories and symbols drawn from their extraordinary religion to express those religious values, meanings, beliefs and identities. Seventh, the data of this thesis suggests that these young people are more interested in the ordinary religion of popular culture than in the extraordinary religion of traditional Christianity as set forth by the leadership of the parish and in particular as expressed in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral advocated repeatedly by the Bishops of the Anglican Communion, and endorsed and re-affirmed on numerous occasions by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church USA. They rarely, if ever made any unsolicited reference to Scripture, Creeds, Sacraments or Episcopal authority in expressing personal religious meanings or values. Eighth, The empirical data of this research reveals little evidence that these young people were instructed or helped by the leadership of the congregation to make the explicit connections between the ordinary religion of popular culture and the extraordinary religion of traditional Anglican Christianity as received by the Episcopal Church. This means that in the light of Albanese’s assertion that religion is at once both a matter of “creed” as well as an “action system” (1992, p.10) that concerns itself with the ways that people practice extraordinary religion in relation to its substantive elements, the religion that these young people practice in the context of their traditional church is in its theological
essence not traditional extraordinary Christian religious belief as endorsed by the Lambeth Conferences of 1888, 1920, 1930, 1948 and 1978; and ratified by the Episcopal Church in 1895, 1907, 1922, 1949, 1961, 1973, and 1982. Therefore I ask, *How has this disconnection of implicit and explicit theology come about? Is this phenomenon of actively participating in traditional or extraordinary religion whilst failing to embrace the creedal tenets of its tradition unique to the youth of St. Quaratus'? In order to address this I now turn to the findings of Christian Smith in his book *Soul Searching* (2005) which is gleaned from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) conducted between 2001 and 2005.

**The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)**

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) is a major sociological study of the religious lives of American teenagers conducted between 2001-2005 by Christian Smith of the University of North Carolina and a team of seventeen researchers. The description of the study and the findings of the research are presented in Smith’s book *Soul Searching* (2005). The project consisted of two major phases, the first, random digital-dialed surveys taken by telephone of 3,290 teens and their parents, and the second, 267 in-depth interviews taken in person. The research represents the religious beliefs, values and identities of young people from 45 of the 50 United States. *Soul Searching* (2005) offers a combination of careful statistical analysis and extensive narrative descriptions offered in the words of the teens themselves. Many of the findings of the study are very much in keeping with the phenomena under investigation in the lives of the youth of St. Quataus’ and are helpful for seeing these young people in the broader context of American teenage religious practice.

Contrary to what Smith describes as “decades of theorizing” that young people are rebellious and uninterested in religious matters, Smith contends,
“[T]hat impression is fundamentally wrong. What we learned by interviewing hundreds of different kinds of teenagers all around the country is that the vast majority of American teenagers are exceedingly conventional in their religious identity and practices. Very few are restless, alienated, or rebellious; rather the majority of U.S. teenagers are basically content to follow the faith of their families with little questioning” (2005, p.119-120).

The youth of St. Quaratus’ as seen in the portrait given in Chapter 4 and as suggested above, are quite religious. This is seen in their regular and active participation in the life of their religious community and its religious events. Additionally many expressed quite conventional views about their preferences in traditional Sunday morning worship. The disconnection however, is found in their apparent preference for drawing upon the symbols, language and stories from popular culture to express the values and meanings of their everyday lives and the lack of theological content drawn from traditional Christian symbols, stories, language in their religious expression.

Another significant theme that Smith’s research revealed was that of individualism and personal autonomy. He underscores the elision of two strands of this which have been a central the theme in this thesis that of religion and that of mass media. Smith contends that religious individualism and personal authority in teenagers are the fruit of American mass-consumer capitalism. Discussing the underlying assumptions in the teen’s interviews he writes,

“In a mass consumer capitalist-shaped society. Authority increasingly resides not in the church, nor in the millennia of tradition, prayer book, theological experts or the scriptures. Rather, authority resides in the individual self. Religious knowledge and authority thus become increasingly privatized, subjectivized, customized and therapeutically psychologized around the controlling authority of individual selves, and not religious communities, traditions and institutions... In this way, the religious assumptions and options available to American adolescents are shaped by the context of the reigning economic order” (2005, p. 177).

Closely tied to this phenomenon is the expansion of digital mass media. He argues that the prevalence of access to mass-mediated imagery and information has greatly
influenced religious practice of young people as they have more access to a variety of religious ideas and systems than in previous generations. Therefore American teens in his study exhibited a pastiche of belief, largely lacking any coherent set of any tradition religious beliefs. He writes, "Youth socialized into the new digital order may therefore find the substance of historical religious traditions difficult to assimilate" (2005, p. 180). Additionally, Smith holds that the locus of authority to determine meaning and values found in the media also lies with the individual.

"New communication technologies produce a world of information and images that is more disjointed and fragmented, that does not always hang together as an organized whole. Anyone can, for instance post for global consumption almost whatever content on the Internet, unregulated by traditional standards gatekeepers, without having to account for its relation to everything else on the Internet. Stated differently, new technologies open up greater opportunities for unfettered authorship, for more reciprocal flows of information, and for multiple horizontal connections through hyperlink structures instead of more linear and hierarchical structures of traditional texts and producers. Authority over standards of knowledge thus become radically democratized and decentralized... Discernment is left up to the individual (2005, p.180).

This is very much in keeping with the democratization of religion and the democratization of media, discussed above, which is taking place in the context of the religious lives of the youth of St. Quaratus'. As this thesis has shown in the film, Kitt Nichols and the Chamber of Fire, the readers of popular filmic texts became writers of new religious texts and religious meanings out of the resources available in the media. Smith argues that the teens amongst whom he conducted his research were "incredibly inarticulate about their faith", particularly teens in mainline Protestant churches (2005, p.131). He asserts that this is so because the locus of authority in matters of religion lies upon the individual, and the youth draw substantially from media to construct meaning. These assertions of Smith's research shed light on the lack of articulacy I have noted amongst the youth of St. Quaratus' in discussing their traditional extraordinary religion. Smith writes,
“It became clear that most religious teenagers either do not really comprehend what their own religious traditions say they are supposed to believe, or they do understand it and simply do not care to believe it. Either way, it is apparent that most religiously affiliated U.S. teens are not particularly invested in espousing and upholding the beliefs of their faith traditions, or that their communities of faith are failing in attempts to educate their youth, or both... In the end, many teenagers know abundant details about the lives of favourite musicians and television stars or about what it takes to get into a good college, but most are not very clear about who Moses and Jesus were. This suggests a strong, viable, salient, or intentional faith is not operating in the foreground of most teenagers’ lives (2005, p.134).

In this sense, I argue that the young people of St. Quaratus’ orient themselves in the world by operating out of the implicit theologies found in popular culture of their ordinary religion rather than the theological foundations of their extraordinary Christian religion.

What Smith holds throughout the book is that American congregations founder in educating youth in the tenets of traditional religion, failing to help teens to navigate the turbulent waters of their culture. He argues, “Our distinct impression is that very many religious congregations and communities of faith in the United States are failing rather badly in engaging and educating youth” (2005, 262). Again Smith’s assertions are very much in keeping with the observations of this present research, mentioned above, that there was little evidence that the leadership of St. Quaratus’ and in particular those who work with the young people, were instructing or aiding the youth in making explicit connections between the implicit theologies of their ordinary religion and explicit theologies of their extraordinary Christian religion.

According to Smith, most U.S. teens are operating out of a religious system that he calls “therapeutic moralistic deism” which holds out a religious vision of “divinely underwritten personal happiness and interpersonal niceness” (2005, p. 171). The underlying assumption of this religious system is the belief that God wants humans to live a good and moral life, to experience personal happiness and to get along with
others, but makes no particular demands of individuals. Smith claims that “therapeutic moralistic deism” is a shared American religious system that is analogous to Robert Bellah’s American civil religion (1967). In the light of Smith’s research and in view of the data discussed above, I would argue that “therapeutic moralistic deism” is the theological basis out of which the youth of St. Quaratus’ operate, rather than Episcopal tradition as spelt out in the core doctrine of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Furthermore, as Smith suggests there is little evidence that these young people are being educated in such a way as to make explicit connections between their ordinary and extraordinary religion; and between the implicit theology of popular culture and the explicit theology of Anglican/Episcopal Religion.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have woven together the various strands of conversation, between the many dialogue partners, the phenomenon under investigation amongst the youth of St. Quaratus’ and Anglican/Episcopal Tradition. The chapter began by drawing upon theology and film theory to analyse the key ways that film operates amongst these youth. Following Marsh’s (2004) pattern, I discussed what films do to the youth of this congregations and what these youth do with films, noting the ways that film functions amongst these young people as a communal coagulant, and as a set of resources for role models and vernacular to express meaning and values of their everyday moral lives. I then turned to examine the convergence of religion and film in the making, screening and viewing of Kitt Nicholls and the Chamber of Fire. Noting a gap in theology and film theory that fails to explain this subversive use of popular film, I drew upon theories about textual poaching, which as I showed, has become a common practice in contemporary culture. I then argued that the making of this film is also an example of the convergence of the democratization of religion and the
democratization media, as authority to determine meaning and practice has shifted from these institutions onto individuals. Finally, I offered some broad observations with respect to the theological underpinnings of the religious practices of the youth of St. Quaratus'. I noted that the data shows that they most often operate in ordinary religion drawing upon stories, language and symbols of popular culture to express meanings and values of their everyday lives, rather than the stories, language and symbols of their extraordinary religion of their Episcopal tradition as spelt out in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Ultimately, I drew upon recent the research of Christian Smith to argue that the theological underpinning of these youth is rooted in "therapeutic moralistic deism" which Smith insists is the most commonly practiced religion of American teens.

What are the implications of this for the practice of religion in contemporary America? Who might be challenged to consider the powerful religion-like role of popular film in contemporary society? What should be done? In the Epilogue, I shall levy challenges for two audiences for those in the film industry, and in particular, in view of this present research, for those engaged in religious work with young people whose lives are influenced by popular culture and in particular popular film.
Epilogue

In the Introduction, I indicated that during the course of the past twenty-two years of working with young people both inside and outside the church, I have noticed that many youth I have known have used quotes from popular culture, from songs and films to orient themselves in the world and to express meanings and values of their lives. My assumption had always been that they did so because they were not familiar with Christian tradition; therefore they used what they knew. In response, I sought to teach them the Scriptures and the traditions, which I continue to do. Nonetheless, I have found that many still use the movies and the music to make sense of their everyday lives, as has been the case amongst the youth of St. Quaratus". Popular culture is a powerful resource for meaning making. It is my belief and proposal that those involved in church related youth work should be intentional in encouraging young people to critically engage popular culture by entering into dialogue with their religious tradition and to critically engage their religious tradition by dialoguing with popular culture. In this way they can help young people to orient themselves in the world by drawing upon the resources of both.

This journey began long before this research project in reflections of the way popular culture and film in specific, has played a significant role in my own practice of religion. The thesis began by examining background theories on religious practice in America in Chapter 1, which constitutes Swinton and Mowat's (2006) first stage of practical theology “Current praxis” exploring the nature of the situation for research. There I noted a democratization of religion and a convergence of media and religion in which people increasingly engage in religious practice both inside and outside traditional religious settings through the use of popular culture. Out of this, the research questions for use at St. Quaratus' emerged: What is the role of popular
culture in the religious lives of these young people? Do these young people draw upon popular culture for meaning-making and religious expression? If so, how? As a result I engaged in a qualitative research project amongst the youth of St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church. Almost immediately upon arrival I noted that film played an important role in the lives of these young people. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I surveyed a body of literature in the area of theology and film theory, in order to understand the use of film in the religious practices of the young people of this religious community. These theories provided helpful tools for understanding the use of film as a theological resource in religious practice. In Chapter 3, I discussed the research process by which I sought to elicit the data for the study. In Chapter 4, I offered Swinton’s and Mowat’s second stage of practical theology, a “cultural/contextual analysis” in a report of the data from the research site in a narrative portrait of the youth of St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church, New Martinton, Pennsylvania. The portrait also offered a description of the use of popular culture and in specific popular film, in their religious community. The young people of this parish used film in a variety of ways to make sense of life and to give voice to the community. In Chapter 5, I offered the third stage of Swinton’s and Mowat’s practical theology, an analysis and “theological reflection” on the key ways that film operates in this parish, to demonstrate that film is a significant resource, as a communal coagulant, as recreation and as implicit theological and vernacular resources for performative leisure, meaning-making and religious expression. The chapter shows that film functions in religion-like ways in their lives, primarily as implicit ordinary religion by which the young people orient themselves in the world and in a limited way as extraordinary religion, in that much of the film-viewing documented therein, took place in the context of their traditional religious community. For these young people, film is a
significant resource for implicit theological themes, role models and vernacular by which they orient themselves in the world and express religious meanings and values. Additionally, I noted that although these youth are active participants in conventional extraordinary religion, the data suggests that they are inarticulate with respect to the traditional symbols, language and stories of the explicit theological resources of their Christian religion. Although much of their film viewing took place in the context of their traditional religious community, when assessed in the light of the Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888, which has been affirmed repeatedly as a core doctrine of the Episcopal Church USA for more than 120 years, the theological underpinnings of their traditional religious practice is not explicitly traditional Christianity. Furthermore, the data suggests that the leadership of the parish and in particular those working amongst the youth offered the young people little help for making explicit connections between their implicit theologies found in popular culture and the explicit theologies in traditional Anglican/Episcopal Christianity. Consequently, I argue that although these teenagers are engaged in conventional religion they are actually practicing an implicit religion that Smith call “therapeutic moralistic deism” (2005). Smith’s study contends that this phenomenon is not an isolated to the youth of St. Quaratus’, rather, American congregations in general are failing to engage and educate youth. Chapter 5 offered these conclusions from this study. Therefore, since these conclusions were brought together in the last chapter, I have chosen to call this the Epilogue, offering one last word to the conclusion of this study. Here, I now come to the fourth stage of Swinton’s and Mowat’s practical theological reflection, “formulating revised forms of practice”.

In Chapter 3, I pointed out that one of the reasons I chose to use portraiture as part of the combined methodologies in this thesis was because, as Lawrence-Lightfoot
suggests, it is designed to speak to a broader audience than merely the academy. Within the academy, I indicated that findings of this research might speak to academic disciplines of theology, religious studies or cultural studies. In addition to the academy I can envision two audiences that might be challenged by the findings of this research: those in the film industry, and those charged with the responsibility for religious formation and education of young people whose lives are shaped by popular culture. In the following I would like to ever so speak briefly to both of these audiences.

Film Industry

The first audience that I shall address are those engaged in the film industry. Although as discussed previously, the Director’s vision and content of films do not exercise a complete hegemonic power of textual determinacy, this thesis has shown that they do significantly influence the audiences’ use and reading of films. The Director’s vision, values and artistic choices encoded into films function in religion-like ways by holding out implicit and at times even explicit theological resources upon which audiences draw for use in their everyday lives. As Martin and Ostwalt (1995) suggest, “films do more than just entertain”. Similarly, the content of films bear themes, concepts and role models holding out implicit and at times explicit theological resources. As Bergeson and Greeley (2000) have argued, these themes are powerful because they are represented and absorbed without being seen as religious. The findings of this research indicate, as many theorist have suggested, that film is a power tool which functions in religion-like ways by influencing the everyday moral lives of viewers. Therefore, those involved the film industry, and particularly in presentational aspects thereof (Producers, Directors, Script Writers), are ethically bound to consider carefully the choices made regarding the content encoded into
films. In view of the power that filmmakers wield, careful considerations regarding of representation gore, violence, prejudice, discrimination sexual exploitation and other such societal ills, should be made with great intentionality and purpose. The content and representation in films can serve as a means of speaking prophetically for good in the building up of a just society, rather than merely as a means of generating greater box office sales.

Religious Youth Workers

The second audience that I address here is made up of those who in religious education and formation of young people. As with those involved in the film industry, religious youth workers should understand that popular culture and functions powerfully in religion-like ways. Therefore I present here briefly, five challenges for religious youth workers.

First, religious youth workers do well to recognize that religious institutions are not the only place where young people gather and develop religious and theological ideas, concepts and role models. Contemporary media hold out a vast array of religious and theological ideas that are unsystematic in terms of bearing a coherent set of ideals for orienting one's life. Religious youth workers should also be aware that the power of contemporary media is not only in serving as a means of disseminating religious ideas but also serves as a form of religious participation therein. As discussed in Chapter 1, contemporary media challenge traditional religion in many ways, in the representation of traditional religion outside of traditional contexts, viz. televangelists and TV masses, and in the viewers' consumption of deregulated representation of free-floating religious symbols, stories and language in media disconnected from traditional meanings. In this instance, discernment is left up to the individual who
likely rarely thinks through its implications. This, as suggested, would leave young people to operate only out of implicit theological resources of ordinary religion.

Second, those charged with religious and spiritual formation of young people should educate themselves to be somewhat knowledgeable of the culture in which those under their care live. In order to help young people make good decisions and perhaps even serve as a prophetic voice in their lives, religious educators should have some knowledge of the popular culture in which young people live. They should also develop skills to think critically about popular culture in order to understand the influences in the life of their constituencies.

Third, because of the unsystematic way that religious ideas are represented in popular culture, most young people are unable to think critically and dialogue with it in the light of their own religious tradition. Therefore, religious youth workers must be intentional and systematic in engaging young people in religious education of their particular tradition.

Fourth, in view of the power of popular culture and mass media, religious educators can harness media with which young people are familiar, using them as powerful tools for religious instruction. This can be done in a number of ways, by using film for biblical or systematic theological reflection or as a vehicle for more didactic education.

Fifth, those charged with religious formation and education of young people do well to incorporate all the aforementioned challenges into cultivating and equipping young people to embrace what I call a critical reflexive spirituality. With an awareness of the power of popular culture, religious educators should educate, foster and support in young people, skills of spiritual discernment. Religious young people should be helped to develop critical skills for analysing and understanding popular culture and
its profound influence on life in contemporary society. Subsequently, they should encourage and model for young people a reflexive practice of considering one’s own participation in the broader culture and its influence in their own life. Further, they can then help young people to dialogue between popular culture and Scripture in the light of their religious tradition, in order to move towards transformation of their own practices of cultural consumption, their religious practices and the broader society around them.

**Future Research**

In closing, I shall briefly areas for future research in the light of this study. This qualitative research project has largely focussed on the implicit theological uses of film by the youth of this religious community. It has considered only peripherally any explicit theological use of film. As a result, I would recommend two areas for future research in the area of theology and film. The first would be to make an in-depth qualitative enquiry of the explicit theological use of film by church leaders for the extraordinary religious purposes of teaching and worship. The second recommendation for future in-depth qualitative research is to examine the explicit theological use of film by religious audiences. This would lead to a greater understanding of the convergence of religion and film and the use of the cultural resources available to those who practice religion in contemporary society.
Appendix I

Formal Interview Questions

The following are the set of questions guiding the formal interviews with youth and adult leaders at St. Quaratus’ Episcopal Church. The interviews were semi-structured, covering a series of core topics about religious practices, whilst allowing for flexibility on a range of other topics for discussion. Although all of these questions were addressed to each interviewee in some fashion, the interviews were adapted to each person according to the shape of the conversation.

- Would you tell me your name please? Where you are from? Where do you go to School?
- Could you tell me what do you believe?
- Why is it you come here?
- From your perspective what is worship all about?
- What is the most important aspect of a worship service to you?
- What is most important to you about church in general?
- What is Scripture? Do you ever read it outside of church? Frequently?
- What is Holy Communion? Is it an important to you? Why or why not?
- Were you confirmed? When? What does Confirmation mean to you?
- Are you an acolyte? Is that something you enjoy? Why or why not?
- Is music important to you? What type? What about the music in Church?
- What do you think about the Episcopal Church?
- What do you do for fun outside of school and/or church?
- Do you watch much television? Movies?
- Do you have a sense of what I am doing here in my research?
- Do you have any advice for me?
Appendix II

Youth Survey on Disney and the Church

For statistical purposes, would you please fill in the following.

Date ______________________

Age ___ Grade ___ Sex ___

Ethnic Background:

African American ___ Asian ___ Caucasian ___ Hispanic ___ Native American ___
Other ___

Number of Parents at home ___1 ___2 Are they? ___ Married ___ Divorced ___ Remarried

Number of Brothers/Sisters at home ______

Please answer the following questions by circling the answer or number (on a scale of 1 to 5) that best reflects what you think or by filling in the questions asking your feedback. You can write as much or little as you want but please try to fill out the whole survey.

Disney Information

1) How easily can you recognize Disney products? (Please circle one)

Not at all 1 2 3 4 Easily 5

2) Do you own any Disney products? (Please circle one)

None 1 2 3 4 A lot 5

3) When were you first exposed to Disney products?

4) Have you ever been to a Disney theme park? (Please circle one)

Never 1 2 3 4 Many times 5
5) Do you think going to a Disney theme Park is (or would be) fun? (Please circle one)

Not at all          Very Much
1       2       3       4       5

5b) If yes what is fun about it? If no, why not?

6a) Was Disney meaningful in your life in elementary school? (Please circle one)

Not at all          Very Much
1       2       3       4       5

6b) If yes, how was Disney been meaningful in your life?

6c) Is Disney meaningful in your life Today? (Please circle one)

Not at all          Very Much
1       2       3       4       5

6d) If yes, how is Disney meaningful in your life today?

7) What is your favorite Disney story? Why?

8a) Will you plan to take your children to a Disney theme park someday? (Please circle one)

Yes.....No

8b) If yes why? If no why not?
9) How much you feel you know much about the man, Walt Disney? (Please circle one)

None 1 2 3 4 A lot 5

Church Information

1) How long have you been a part of this Church? (Please circle one)

All my life.... 10 years or more ... 5 years or more ....less than 5 years....less than 1 year

2a) If you belonged to another church previously, how long were you there? (Please circle one)

10 or more years.....5 years or more.....less than 5 years.....less than 1 year

2b) If you belonged to another church previously, in which denomination? (Please fill in)

3) When did you first have contact with Church?

4) How often do you attend Church? (Please circle one)

Weekly...... Monthly......3-4 times a year...... almost never

5) Do you have any Christian or Church memorabilia in your home? (such as crosses, medals, artwork, books, videos, music, etc.)

None 1 2 3 4 A lot 5

6a) Do you think going to Church is Fun? (Please circle one)

Yes.....No
6b) If yes, what is fun about it? If no, why not?

7a) Was Sunday morning worship important in your life as an elementary school child? (Please circle one)

Not at all
1 2 3 4
Very Much
5

7b) If yes, in what way?

7c) Is Sunday morning worship important in your life today? (Please circle one)

Not at all
1 2 3 4
Very Much
5

7d) If yes, in what way?

7e) If there has been a change — either that Sunday morning worship has become more important or less important in your life — what happened?

8a) Are the physical surroundings inside the Church Building (like colors, images, candles, symbols, architecture, etc.) important to you? (Please circle one)

Not at all
1 2 3 4
Very Much
5

8b) If yes, in what way?
9a) Is the Church Community important to you? (Please circle one)

Yes......No

9b) Individuals in the community? (Please circle one)

None
1 2 3 4 5
Many

9c) The Community as a whole? (Please circle one)

Not at all
1 2 3 4
Very Much
5

9c) If yes, in what way?

10a) Is Music at church important to you? (Please circle one)

Not at all
1 2 3 4
Very Much
5

10b) If yes, in what way?

10c) What are you most likely to do during the hymns? (Please circle one or more)

Sing.....Close your eyes...Look at other people...Look at religious symbols.... Look at the choir...

Stare at the floor or ceiling...... Zone out........Other ________________________
(please indicate)
11a) Are the Scripture Readings at church important to you?

Not at all  
1  2  3  4  Very Much  
5

11b) If yes, in what way?

11c) What are you most likely to do during the readings? (Please circle one or more)

Listen attentively .... Close your eyes...... Look at other people....... Look at religious symbols....

Look at the reader... Stare at the floor or ceiling... Zone out.........

Other __________________________ (please indicate)

12a) Is the preaching at church important to you? (Please circle one)

Not at all  
1  2  3  4  Very Much  
5

12b) If yes, in what way?

12c) What are you most likely to do during the sermon? (please circle one or more)

Listen attentively .... Close your eyes..... Zone out ......Look at other people.......

Watch the Preacher ......Look at religious symbols.......Stare at the floor or ceiling.......

Other __________________________ (please indicate)

13a) Are the prayers and the congregation’s responses from the Prayerbook important to you?

(Please circle one)

Not at all  
1  2  3  4  Very Much  
5
13b) If yes, in what way?

13c) What are you most likely to do during the prayers? (Please circle one or more)

Listen attentively .... Close your eyes...... Look at people...... Look at religious symbols....

Look at the person leading prayers...... Stare at the floor or ceiling...... Zone out........

Other _______________ (please indicate)

14a) Is receiving Communion important to you? (Please circle one)

Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very Much 5

14b) If yes, in what way?

14c) What do you do after receiving Communion? (Please circle one or more)

Close your eyes...Look at people....Look at religious symbols.... Stare at the floor or ceiling

Sit quietly and Zone out.....Sit quietly and pray .....Talk with family or friends......Sing .......

Other _______________ (please indicate)

15) What is your favorite Bible story and why?

16a) Will you plan to take your children to Church someday? (Please circle one)

Yes.....No

16b) If yes, why? If no, why not?
17) How much do you feel you know about Jesus? (Please circle one)

None 1 2 3 4 A lot 5

Thank you for helping with this research. Your information is very valuable.

Each person has their own experience and understanding of both the Disney and the Church. It is my observation that both organizations function in society in similar ways. I would like to understand your impressions of both Disney and the Church but of course, no questionnaire can fully reflect your experience. If additional input is needed would you be willing to give a brief interview? Interviews generally last about 20 minutes; however the length, scheduling and location would be entirely up to you. If you are willing, please provide contact information below:

Name __________________________________________

Address _______________________________________

_____________________________________________

_____________________________________________

Phone _________________________________________

Email _________________________________________

Questionnaires and interviews are strictly confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Your answers will remain completely anonymous and your name will not be published. Thank you very much!
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