

Critics' choices in Christian themed movies

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Hollywood's century-old repertoire of films offers a rich lode of Christian themes, say some observers who see value in mining for them.

While the Oscar-nominated *Tree of Life* may be opaque, it's "one of the most powerful treatments of explicitly Christian themes and rhetoric in popular film," said [Rini Cobbey](#), chair of the communication arts department at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass.

"Obviously, its direct and repeated quotation of Scripture and its visual and narrative exploration of sin, grace, God's nature, creation and redemption put it in the 'explicitly Christian themes' category. It's a gorgeous film, poetic and aesthetically about as far away from my experience of evangelical-Christian-church-audience-directed films as you could get."

The Help, nominated for several Oscars this year, also reflects Christian themes, Cobbey asserted.

"The overall artistry of *The Help* pales in comparison to *Tree of Life*, but its accessibility to a wider audience and its direct and challenging exploration of justice and personal choice make it true and good," she said

Another Oscar nominee, *The Descendants*, is essentially a Christian parable, she added, in its "treatment of revenge, grace, life and death and in the surprising, broken and honest characters and narrative pace moving."

Cobbey also cited older films such as *Dead Man Walking*, *The Visitor*, *Gran Torino* and *Lars and the Real Girl*.

Michael Parnell, pastor of Beth Car Baptist Church in Halifax, Va., and a film reviewer for EthicsDaily.com, called *Tender Mercies* a film with an explicit "evangelical storyline."

Christian themes also are obvious in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Mission*, he noted.

"The Harry Potter movies give so many different Christian themes," Parnell said. "There is the theme of reality that is beyond human sight. The wizard world is right in the midst of the Muggle world. It takes a change of vision to see it."

It's a Wonderful Life, focusing on the an ordinary man's impact on a small town, reminds Christians that "there are no small roles in the body of Christ, and even the cup of cold water given in the name of Christ can change a life," Parnell said.

When a character in *Unforgiven* tells Clint Eastwood a murder victim "had it coming," Eastwood replies, "We all got it coming."

"That's the universal fall of humanity being discussed in a Western," Parnell said.

[Thomas Ward](#), a professor of acting and directing in the theater arts department at Baylor University in Waco, called the 1999 film *Magnolia*, starring Tom Cruise, "full of redemption and hope."

"The Christian themes that interest me when it comes to films and plays are redemption and hope," he said. *Magnolia* has both, he said.

Cliff Vaughn, media producer for EthicsDaily.com, said "some would argue *The Shawshank Redemption* could be labeled a Christian movie by a set of criteria that would include themes of redemption, friendship, hope and brokenness."