The Problem of Evil and Humans’ Relationship with God in Terrence Malick’s The Tree of Life

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Abstract

Terrence Malick’s 2011 film The Tree of Life defies any attempt to be summarized in a few pat sentences. The movie tackles significant theological issues as it tells the story of one man’s journey to regain his faith after the loss of his beloved brother and a difficult relationship with his father. At the same time, it is also a film about humankind’s relationship to God, and about the kind of life human beings should strive to lead. In this paper, I will discuss two of the film’s main themes: Malick’s response to the problem of evil (or, as it is also known, the problem of suffering) and his meditations concerning what kind of relationship humans should seek with God.

Recommended Citation

Manninen, Bertha Alvarez Ph.D. (2013) “The Problem of Evil and Humans’ Relationship with God in Terrence Malick’s The Tree of Life,” Journal of Religion & Film: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 34. Available at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol17/iss1/34

- Taken from Terrence Malick’s opening scene in The Tree of Life? Update Cancel. aodl EbFyl fKozxGGeP ooT5 IEtmmopdPrVefSp. What is meant by the ‘Way of Grace’ is a transcendence of the problem of self-conciousness. It is a total surrender to the here and now. A total surrender to life itself and its spontaneous unfolding. The ‘Way of Grace’ is a psychological purification of all that accumulated conditioning that makes human beings suffer. An individual in this state functions almost totally spontaneously, without constantly trying to figure out their next move and without self-seeking. They are literally selfless, like an animal. Terrence Malick’s film The Tree of Life breaks with the apparatus of melodrama, and opens into the non-cinematic-real – the nothing of the cinematic world opened up by the film breaching its own framework. My reading will show how The Tree of Life presents human life as an evolved way of being blocked in a masculinised mode in mid-twentieth century America. The film releases this blocked way of being through the unwilling of the will of masculinised power, shown in visions of nature as the “beyond” of the cinematic real. These visions of nature, appearing through cracks in the film frame, enab