



Christlike? The Man of Steel

# Summer viewing

## A Parable on Film

*Prodigal* (2011, PG)

Levi Layton is 18 years old when he suddenly receives a 'windfall' inheritance and has the opportunity to go off on his own, away from his perceived restrictions of the town, church and especially his father, who is the local pastor.

This contemporary re-telling of The Prodigal Son is a helpful family drama. Adding the church dimension provides a new context and link especially to the Christian film industry in the USA. The film was part of the Faith on Film Sundays during 2013. Available on DVD from Heritage HM (<http://www.movieschangepeople.com>)

## Christ Figures in film

Peter Malone in his book *Movie Christs and Anti-Christs* (1990) surveyed a range of symbolic figures as well as considering some historically-based films. It is not surprising that Hollywood uses Jesus imagery and ideas. A striking example is found in the latest Superman film, *Man of Steel* (2013, M), where Superman is profiled in a church and interacts with the priest. The Warner Brothers synopsis of the film is illuminating:

A young boy learns that he has extraordinary powers and is not of this Earth. As a young man, he journeys to discover where he came from and what he was sent here to do. But the hero in him must emerge if he is to save the world from annihilation

and become the symbol of hope for all mankind. Warner even provided notes for pastors and leaders to use in film discussions. A film that should provoke discussion.

In Malone's latest book *Screen Jesus: Portrayals of Christ in Television and Film* (2012) he provides an overview and comment on specific historical portrayals of Jesus that could be a helpful resource for youth leaders and pastors.

## Intriguing and Challenging

*Heaven with a Gun* (1969, M)

The saying 'only in America' comes to mind with this film starring Glenn Ford as Pastor Jim who comes to small town Vinegarroon to set up a church. The idea that a former gun-slinger and felon could now be a preacher is not unique and the townspeople generally provide him with an element of grace when they find out his past.

However, he still carries a gun and in one dispute lets people know if anyone is going to use a gun in his church it will be him. In our culture the idea of the preacher wearing a pistol is difficult to comprehend, though of course this American setting is also in a different era. Another interesting aspect is that the 'moral' or wise figure in the film who gives advice to Pastor Jim is the local madam in the saloon. At one point she even tells him he has to choose his path: heaven (preacher) or hell (the gunman).

*Leap of Faith* (1992, PG)

Comedian and actor Steve Martin is Jonas Nightingale, a new and yet 'old-time evangelist' and basic charlatan who puts on 'shows' in the larger towns throughout rural America, drawing in people so they can give to the Lord, but ultimately it all goes to Jonas and his team. Due to a mechanical problem, the group are stranded in a smaller town, so he decides to give the town the full Jonas treatment. This is a well-constructed film that considers the faith of the ordinary town members, the nature of healing and God's healing, with a perhaps surprising twist. A secular film with a Christian message. The film's tagline is "Are you ready for a miracle?"

*Lore* (MA, 2012)

This film was awarded Film of the Year by the Australian Catholic Film Office. While made in Germany, the director is Australian Cate Shortland, known for her first film *Somersault*. This film considers the complexity of post-Nazi life as the five children of a Nazi couple, led by older daughter Lore attempt to find their own way to a new life. Confronting at times, it raises considerable ethical and moral issues in an era of post-war chaos and lawlessness, the film brings to the fore the depths to which human beings can sink (though it is not gratuitous), as well as showing occasional glimpses of common grace. *Peter Bentley is National Director of ACC*