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Calvin College Worldview lectures, 2010-2011

Overall rubric: **Reforming Hollywood: American Protestants and the Movies**

Following are possible lecture topics:

1. Persistence of Vision: An Historical Reassessment of American Protestants and Movie Reform

This historical survey reassesses the role Protestants played in the development of the American cinema. The prevailing view that Protestants were determined to impose the rule of censorship on Hollywood ignores their proud and enduring claims to have custody of American civil liberties. The central question was how to involve Protestant agencies directly with the industry in a non-censorial way in order to improve the moral and artistic quality of movies. For the most part, the Protestant thread ends in existing film histories with the advent of the Catholic Legion of Decency in the early 1930s. This narrative counters conventional interpretations that mark Catholic control as the end of Protestant influence in Hollywood, revealing instead the influence of a range of Protestant initiatives ultimately aimed at protecting the freedom of the screen, while also guarding against commercial exploitation of youth.

**Suitable for academic or generally educated audiences with interests in American film or religious history.*

2. Film Criticism and Controversy at the Protestant Oscars

With events after World War II dramatically reshaping the discourse about film, American Protestants struggled with the question of how to support free speech and still advocate appropriate restraints on film content. Two conflicting outlooks emerged. This presentation focuses on events surrounding the 1965 Protestant Films Awards, when a dispute erupted over the biblical epic, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, and *The Pawnbroker*, a gritty, urban film about the effects of the Holocaust on a survivor that included a scene with female frontal nudity. The controversy, which was interpreted by *Variety* as signaling a dramatic shift in the church's conception of its role with the film industry, illuminates two main Protestant approaches to film criticism that endure today.

**Suitable for academic or generally educated audiences with interests in American film or religious history.*

3. Off to See the Wizard: Cinema and Salvation—American Style

The commercial success of movies like *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* put churchgoers on Hollywood's radar in a big way. Taking note of the trend, a national film critic remarked: "Hollywood doesn't necessarily want to make Christian movies. It wants to make movies Christians think are Christian." What might this comment suggest about Hollywood perceptions and the ways "Christians" engage movies? This lively and entertaining presentation looks at roles the cinema plays in our lives and culture and shows how faith perspectives can and do make a vital contribution in this arena of popular discourse.

**Suitable for general audiences with an interest in the relationship between faith and the movies.*