

# Film Capsules March 2014

*Click onto a title, and you will be taken to the longer review on this site (except for *The Need for Speed*). The *March Visual Parables* journal includes both the reviews and their accompanying sets of discussion questions.*

## [Son of God](#)

Rated PG-13. Revelation 22:12-13.

This newest Life of Jesus film is from producers Mark Burnett and Roma Downey who brought us History Channel's [The Bible](#). Indeed, at least 90% of the film is taken from the miniseries. While not as good as such films as *Jesus of Nazareth* or *The Miracle Worker*, it does have much to recommend it, this Jesus being a warm, compassionate man reaching out to the excluded, such as tax collectors, lepers, and children. Like several other Jesus films of the past couple of decades, Marry Magdalene's role is expanded, the film showing her accompanying Jesus and the disciples. The apostle John narrates the movie, and so it is strange that the foot-washing episode in the upper room is left out, though various snippets of Jesus' words in the gospel are scattered through the story. A good film to see with a group and then meeting to discuss it.

## [Stalingrad](#)

Rated R. Psalm 7:15-16.

Considered by many historians as the greatest battle in history (and the bloodiest with well over a million deaths and countless wounded), the Battle of Stalingrad lasted for five months during the terrible winter of 1942-1943. The film's director is Fyodor Bondarchuk, whose father Sergei Bondarchuk

directed what is probably the most expensive and lavish film ever made, [War and Peace](#). (Reviewed here last year.) The film narrows its focus to five Russian soldiers who become the protectors of a girl about to celebrate her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. On the opposing side are a Nazi captain and his Russian mistress. In spite of the horrific fighting (not since *Saving Private Ryan* or [Lone Survivor](#) has the brutality of war been so graphically depicted!), traces of love and grace manage to shine forth amidst the rubble and killings.

## [That Awkward Moment](#)

Rated R. Proverbs 17:17.

It is also an awkward film centering on three self-centered jerks who vow not to enter into any commitments with the women they invite into their beds. Avoid this one, unless you like penis jokes—although I have to admit at the end there is a tender moment when our “heelro” comes to his senses.

## [Robocop](#)

PG-13. Psalm 8:4.

This is a rare remake that I liked better than the original because it expands its scope from just the city of Detroit to the entire USA (in the year 2028), raising a question about our use of technology (drones today, reconditioned human beings encased in a cyborg body tomorrow). When a policeman whose body is almost entirely destroyed is kept alive on a life support system, his wife agrees to the delicate operation to encase what is left of him—his brain and vital organs—in an armored body. Robocop proves to be very effective at fighting crime, and thus profitable to the tech company paying for the program. The film, like most good sci-fi movies, raises the issue “at what price is to be paid for all of this?”

## [The Lego Movie](#)

Rated: PG. Deuteronomy 30:19. Acts 17:6.

This is another animated film that is just too good to leave for the kids' enjoyment in that it engagingly attacks conformity and resignation to things as they are. When an ordinary construction worker in Brickburgh named Ralph is thought by a rebel group to be The Special who will break the rule of President Business (he is about to glue all of the Lego bricks in place thus preserving the status quo), an exciting odyssey begins, ending in a surprising live action last act dealing with father-son issues. What I had suspected as being just a gross product placement film (and it is!) turns out to be entertaining, challenging, and inspiring. Do not miss this one!

## [Winter's Tale](#)

Rated: PG-13. Ephesians 3:8-9.

This romantic fantasy spans the years of the 1890s through 2014, exploring the themes of love and our intended destiny. There is a mythical birth/infant salvation sequence similar to that of the baby Moses, a white Pegasus-like horse able to whisk hero and heroine to safety, and a crime boss who is a demon in human form, and unexplained time travel. Somehow the film does not add up to a coherent whole, though there is much beautiful photography and the star-crossed lovers to enjoy. People of faith will appreciate the question raised at the end, "What if we are all part of a great pattern that we may one day understand?"

## [Non-Stop](#)

Rated: PG-13. Psalm 7:9.

Liam Neeson is at it again in this twist on a psychically wounded man pushed by the bad guys to use all of his faculties to save the day (as in the two *Taken* films). This time he is a Federal Air Marshall, fallen to drinking too much after the untimely death of a daughter. In mid-Atlantic flight he receives a text demanding that the airline company come up with \$150 million or he will start killing a passenger every 20 minutes, thus triggering a series of thrilling crises, including the charge that he himself is involved in the plot. Very suspenseful!

## **Need for Speed**

PG-13

The only need I saw in this, the worst film that I have seen this year, is to mount up, Paul Revere-like, and spread the warning about this toxic movie. The supposed hero and his buddies love to race in their expensive cars through the streets at night at speeds well over 100 mph, and out on the road over 200, heedless of the potential hazards they create for the sake of their selfish thrills. The movie is fast-paced with stunts that are totally unrealistic. At over two hours in length this story of drag racers is itself to drag!

**On DVD**

## **The Invisible Woman**

Rated R. Matthew 5:27. Isaiah 58:6-7.

This is not the Dickens that we were taught in high school English class, but rather a flesh and blood man who has come to a dead end in his marriage to the woman who could give him 10 children but not the intellectual companionship he craved. The woman of the title was the young actress Ellen "Nelly" Ternan, with whom he entered into a relationship for the last

13 years of his life, divorcing his wife in the process. Director/star Ralph Fiennes gives us a picture of a flawed man who nonetheless did great things on behalf of the poor while flaunting the convictions of a judgmental society.

**On You Tube**

## **He Who Must Die**

### **(Celui qui doit mourir)**

Rated R. Ezekiel 34:2; John 11:48-50

Someone has posted in multiple parts a 1957 film scarcely seen. Based on the novel by Nikos Kazantkakis *The Greek Passion*, it is about a young man named Manolios, chosen to play Christ in his village's annual Passion Play. The setting is during the Greek Turkish War of the early 1920s when both sides were massacring each other. A group of Greek refugees whose homes were destroyed arrive at the village, but the priest and mayor, worried that their Turkish governor will consider them also rebels if they offer help, order the starving group to move on. Manolios, living up to his role, wants to help, setting into motion a series of events ending in tragedy. If you like *Jesus of Montreal*, you will appreciate this more somber exploration of the question, "What would happen were Jesus to come to our town today?"