

Postmodern and Christian Expressions
in *The Matrix* Media

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Introduction

Producer Joel Silver affirms in the special features portion of *The Matrix: Reloaded* DVD (Warner Home Video 2003) that no other modern day story has been transmitted over so many mediums. The first film (*The Matrix*, Warner Brothers 1999) has spawned into a trilogy (*The Matrix: Reloaded* and *The Matrix: Revolutions*, both Warner Brothers 2003), three movie soundtracks (Maverick Records 1999 and 2003 respectively), a highly active and complex official website (<http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com>), an interactive video game (*Enter the Matrix*, Warner Brothers 2003 available in Play Station 2, X-Box, GameCube, and PC), a collection of nine short story amine (*The Animatrix*, Warner Home Video 2003), a new comic series (*The Matrix Comics*, Warner Brothers 2003), and even a couple books by the makers (*The Art of the Matrix* [London: Titan Books, 2000], *The Matrix: The Shooting Script* [New York: Newmarket Press, 2001]).¹ This vast array of avenues bears witness to the uniqueness and relevance of such an epic for our day.² The creators of *The Matrix* (Larry and Andy Wachowski) have steered clear of commercializing their message to mere paraphernalia, and have chosen rather to encapsulate their ideas through more permanent channels that are fixtures in our culture, thus providing an almost endless dialogue.³ It is our goal in this paper to join this dialogue as we

¹ This is not to mention that the DVD of the first film sold more copies than any DVD to that time (\$398 million made in sales including VHS), and is still among the top 100 best-selling DVDs to this day. *The Matrix: Reloaded* (released on May 15, 2003) collected almost \$92 million in its first weekend in the U.S., going on to gross about \$282 million in the states and \$735 million worldwide, which almost doubled the gross of the first film (\$456 million worldwide). *The Matrix: Revolutions* (released on Nov. 5, 2003) pocketed almost \$84 million through its first weekend in the U.S., with nearly \$139 million in the states and \$414 million worldwide to this day. Although some critics would like to think that *Revolutions* was a flop, these numbers clearly reflect otherwise. The figures above for *Reloaded* and *Revolutions* also do not take into account IMAX Theater sales.

² “[T]hat this is probably the first major film to have a philosophy section on its official website, and to require one to play the video game in order to understand certain details of the plot, suggests that we are dealing with a unique and striking phenomenon in contemporary cinema and culture...one imagines it will probably not be unique in this respect for long” (James F. McGrath, “The Desert of the Real: Christianity, Buddhism & Baudrillard in *The Matrix* Films and Popular Culture,” <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ati/Visions/V1/mcgrath%20paper.pdf>, p.8 nt.1).

³ There seems to be hundreds of websites and discussion boards on the internet, there are a number of scholarly (see official website for some) and non-scholarly articles in fields of technology, film, philosophy, religion, and art, as well as books (see bibliography) and TV documentaries devoted to *The Matrix*.

analyze the relevant “*Matrix* media” in the light of its broad postmodern context, given its success and depth, and its use and perception of Christian and biblical themes.

Postmodern Milieu of *The Matrix*⁴

Jean Baudrillard. In the first scene of *The Matrix* that we see the “to be” hero, Neo, a cohort by the name of Choi comes to Neo’s apartment seeking some sort of program. As Neo confirms that Choi has the money to buy this program, Neo walks over to a bookcase and selects the book *Simulacra and Simulation* by Jean Baudrillard, turns to the chapter “On Nihilism,” which has been hollowed out, and selects the appropriate disk. This moment inextricably frames and defines much of the postmodern flavor that is resident in the films.⁵ Baudrillard is a French postmodern philosopher and sociologist who has popularized the notion that our culture has become one in which reality is no longer attached to symbols or representations, but the symbol has taken the place of reality, calling reality itself into question.⁶ This premise is the driving

⁴ The assumption that *The Matrix* embodies certain postmodern thought or has at least postmodern elements is pace Josh Burek, “The Gospel According to Neo” (*Christian Science Monitor* May 9, 2003), Edward Rothstein, “Philosophers Draw on the Film ‘Matrix’” (*New York Times* May 24, 2003), James McGrath, “The Desert of the Real: Christianity, Buddhism & Baudrillard in *The Matrix* Films and Popular Culture,” Hubert and Stephen Dreyfus, “The Brave New World of the Matrix” (<http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com>), James McGrath, “The Desert of the Real,” Chris Seay and Greg Garrett, *The Gospel Reloaded: Exploring Spirituality and Faith in The Matrix* (Colorado Springs: Peñon Press, 2003), David Weberman, “*The Matrix* Simulation and the Postmodern Age” in *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, ed. by William Irvin (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), Thomas S. Hibbs, “Notes from Underground: Nihilism and *The Matrix*,” in *The Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. by William Irvin, and Dino Felluga, “*The Matrix*: Paradigm for Postmodernism or Intellectual Poseur? (Part I)” in *Taking the Red Pill: Science Philosophy and Religion in The Matrix*, ed. by Glenn Yeffeth (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2003) contra Andrew Gordon, “*The Matrix*: Paradigm for Postmodernism or Intellectual Poseur? (Part II)” in *Taking the Red Pill: Science Philosophy and Religion in The Matrix*, ed. by Glenn Yeffeth, and Richard Hanley, “Simulacra and Simulation: Baudrillard and *The Matrix*” (<http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com>). Much of the argument made by Gordon and Hanley hinges on their point that the Wachowski brothers do not accurately interpret Baudrillard in their films as even Baudrillard has said (the first film “stemmed mostly from misunderstandings” as Baudrillard is quoted in Edward Rothstein, “Philosophers Draw on the Film ‘Matrix,’” *New York Times* May 24, 2003). For our concerns, we can recall what Morpheus said in *Reloaded*, “my beliefs do not require them to”.

⁵ “While such widely divergent streams such as Christ imagery, eastern philosophy, and Greek mythology all inform the narrative and the characters, Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* is probably the best starting point for a philosophical and sociological approach to the movie’s content” (Jim Rovira, “Baudrillard and Hollywood: Subverting the Mechanism of Control and The Matrix,” <http://www.uta.edu/english/apt/collab/texts/hollywood>).

⁶ “Now, says Baudrillard, our situation is one of ‘hyperreality’. With distinctions dissolved between objects and their representations, we are left only with ‘simulacra’. These refer to nothing but themselves. Media messages such as TV ads, are prime examples. This self-referentiality goes far beyond Max Weber’s for a disenchanted, detraditionalized world. Signs lose contact with things signified; in some advertisements the object, whether car, watch or beer bottle, no longer appears. The late twentieth century is witness to unprecedented evaporation of the grounds of meaning. The quest for some division between the real and the unreal, or even the true and untrue, moral

force and *modus operandi* for the whole concept of *The Matrix* and is verified in Neo's first interchange with Morpheus after being extracted from the Matrix. In part of a dialogue cut from the movie, Morpheus tells Neo, "You have been living inside a dreamworld, Neo. As in Baudrillard's vision, your whole life has been spent inside the map, not the territory,"⁷ quoting from Baudrillard in the first chapter of *Simulacra and Simulation*. In this same scene, Morpheus shows Neo images of the world as it actually is, and borrows another Baudrillard phrase in the first chapter of *Simulacra and Simulation*, "the desert of the real itself," by saying, "welcome to the desert of the real". In fact, Baudrillard says in the following paragraph, "The real is produced from miniaturized units, from *matrices*, memory banks and command models," specifically using the word "matrix".⁸ In the next paragraph of *Simulacra* we read, "In this passage to a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor of truth, the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials - worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs". The pictures of "liquidation" and "artificial resurrection" are borrowed as Morpheus explains, "I wouldn't believe it, and then I saw the fields with my own eyes. Watch them *liquefy* the dead so they could be *fed intravenously* to the *living*". As Neo begins to understand that he's been living in a computer simulation of the real world by entering into another simulation, he asks, "This...isn't real?" Morpheus responds, "What is real? How do you define real?," the very question Baudrillard himself begs.⁹ Furthermore, Baudrillard describes the necessity for violence and terrorism in the chapter pictured in the movie, "On Nihilism," which seems to

and immoral, is futile" (David Lyon, *Postmodernity* [sec.ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999], p.21). See Richard Hanley, "Simulacra and Simulation: Baudrillard and *The Matrix*," and Dino Felluga, "*The Matrix*: Paradigm for Postmodernism or Intellectual Poseur? (Part I)," for helpful summaries and analysis of Baudrillard.

⁷ Larry and Andy Wachowski, *The Matrix: The Shooting Script* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2001), p.38. So Felluga, p.72.

⁸ Richard Hanley, "Simulacra and Simulation: Baudrillard and *The Matrix*"

provide warrant for the rebellion which takes place in the story.¹⁰ Smith even calls Morpheus “a known terrorist” in the first film when he’s interrogating Neo.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. As those who anticipated the rise of postmodernism,¹¹ Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also play important roles in *The Matrix*. Kierkegaard, most certainly serves as the paradigm for faith with his concept of the “leap of faith”.¹² While Neo is training in the first film, Morpheus has the “jump program” loaded to test Neo, where he literally takes a “leap of faith” in the attempt to “free his mind”. Ghost mentions Kierkegaard explicitly in the *Enter the Matrix* during his dialogue with Trinity:

Trinity: Do you believe that Neo is going to end the war?

Ghost: Yes, I do.

Trinity: So do I ... but I can't explain how or why

Ghost: *Kierkegaard* reminds us that belief has nothing to do with how or why. Belief is beyond reason. I believe because it is absurd.

Trinity: You think it’s crazy to believe it?

Ghost: To believe what ? That a single man can defeat an entire race of machines and end a war that has endured for over a hundred years? Of course. It’s complete lunacy and that’s why we must believe it will happen. Faith, by its very nature, must transcend logic.

This is echoed in the first film where Tank tells Neo that he is crazy for wanting to go and save Morpheus and Neo says, “I know that’s what it looks like, but it’s not. I can’t explain to you why

⁹ “By suggesting that one can actually have access to that real, Morpheus and the Wachowskis could be said to misunderstand postmodernist theory; however, the Wachowskis make it clear that on some level humans will always remain one step removed from any direct access to real, which is the main import of the mess-hall discussion. The body needs more than ‘synthetic aminos, vitamins, and minerals’ to survive. It needs the fantasy-space of desire because direct access to the real is akin to madness” (Dino Felluga, p.80). This is also seen in the irony of Morpheus showing Neo the “real world” above ground from a TV while they are in a program just like the Matrix, as well as in *Revolutions* where Neo is blind and cannot see the real world except in his connection to “the Source”.

¹⁰ Richard Hanley, “Simulacra and Simulation: Baudrillard and *The Matrix*,” and Ed Rothstein, “Philosophers Draw on the Film ‘Matrix’”. He states, “I am a nihilist and terrorist in theory as others are with their weapons” (“On Nihilism”).

¹¹ Kierkegaard in his existential critique of enlightenment thinking and Nietzsche in his “will to power” philosophy and nihilism. See Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), p.38-78. Best and Kellner specifically connect Kierkegaard to Baudrillard: “His vision of massification and of individuals lost in the world of the media and public opinion provides an uncanny anticipation of the later postmodern theories of Baudrillard and others” (p.40). Likewise, Lissa McCullough connects Nietzsche to Baudrillard, “Like Nietzsche, Baudrillard is a comic writer, for whom tragedy and horror are mercifully refracted through comic wit” (“Jean Baudrillard and the Death of God” [<http://jcert.org/archives/02.3/mccullough.shtml>]).

¹² See *Fear and Trembling* for his most popular exploration of this idea.

it's not." When Trinity says that no one had ever tried that before, Neo responds, "That's why it's going to work." There is also a likely nod to Kierkegaard by the Wachowski brothers naming one of the captains in *Reloaded* "Soren," who volunteers without hesitation for a "death mission" to help the crew of the Nebuchadnezzar.¹³

The mention of nihilism no doubt reminds us of the philosophy of Nietzsche.¹⁴ Keanu Reeves has said in interviews that the Wachowski brothers asked him to read Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, among other works, in helping understand the character of Neo.¹⁵ Choice, and the power to choose in *The Matrix* is significantly influenced by his "will to power" philosophy. When Neo is late for work, his boss confronts him with a defining "choice". When he sees Morpheus for the first time, he is given a "choice" between the red and blue pills. When he first sees the Oracle, she tells him he must "choose" to save either Morpheus or himself. When he meets the Architect in *Reloaded*, he must choose the right or left door. Morpheus says in *Reloaded*, "everything begins with choice". According to Nietzsche, human identity is human choices. In the first film, Neo sees a restaurant where he used to "eat" ("really good noodles"), and he asks Trinity what it means that he never actually lived his memories, to which she says, "The Matrix cannot tell you who you are". The one problem the machines had in getting humans to accept the Matrix according to the Architect in *Reloaded* is choice, "she (the Oracle) stumbled upon a solution whereby nearly 99% of all test subjects accepted the program, as long as they were

¹³ Kierkegaard's "subjectivity of truth" and philosophy of love could account for the strong emphasis on love in the films also.

¹⁴ Hibbs, "Notes from Underground: Nihilism and *The Matrix*," in *The Matrix and Philosophy*, p.156. Agent Smith seems to embody the nihilism of the films, most particularly during his last fight with Neo in *Revolutions*, "Why, Mr. Anderson, why? Why do you do it? Why, why get up? Why keep fighting? Do you believe you're fighting for something, for more than your survival? Can you tell me what it is, do you even know? Is it freedom or truth, perhaps peace-could it be for love? Illusions, Mr. Anderson, vagaries of perception. Temporary constructs of a feeble human intellect trying desperately to justify an existence that is without meaning or purpose. And all as artificial as the Matrix itself. Although only a human mind could invent something as insipid as love. You must be able to see it, Mr. Anderson, you must know it by now! You can't win, it's pointless to keep fighting! Why, Mr. Anderson, why, why do you persist?" Smith concludes, "The purpose of life is to end".

¹⁵ Peter Lloyd, *Exegesis of the Matrix* (London: Whole-being books, 2003), p.104-5

given a choice, even if they were only aware of the choice at a near unconscious level". In *Revolutions* when it looks like Smith has beat Neo, Smith tells him it is pointless to continue and he asks him why he persists. Neo's only response is, "Because I choose to," exposing that this is the element that Smith does not understand about humans; he has only been forcefully copying himself to everyone he sees. Nietzsche's "Death of God" declaration is also consistent with the films in that there is no personal, sovereign God resident (choice precludes God), and the one bearing the name of the Christian God, "Trinity," dies at the end of *Revolutions*.

Pluralism¹⁶ and Ambiguity. There are obvious references and allusions to all kinds of religious and philosophical worldviews in the films: Buddhism¹⁷ (appearance of Buddhist kid in *The Matrix*, mention of karma in *Revolutions*, reincarnation of the "One"), Gnosticism (one ship is called the "Gnosis"),¹⁸ Christianity (see below), Judaism (see below), Islam (men kneeling to pray in "Second Renaissance Part I" in *The Animatrix*), Hinduism ("Sati" is Hindu term for a widow who falls on her deceased husband's ashes, Sati's new sunset is for a "new age," "Rama-Kandra" borrows "Rama" from name of seventh incarnation of Hindu god Vishnu, lyrics in final Neo/Smith fight seen are taken straight from Hindu scriptures in Sanskrit), stoicism (showing of little emotion in main characters of each film), nihilism (see above), existentialism (see above), Platonism (cave allegory in *Republic*),¹⁹ Greek philosophy ("know thyself" originates from

¹⁶ See Gregory Bassham, "The Religion of *The Matrix* and the Problems of Pluralism," in *The Matrix and Philosophy*, p.111-25 for a helpful discussion and response to pluralism following Alvin Platinga.

¹⁷ When asked if Buddhism influenced them in making the film, the brothers responded, "Yes. There's something uniquely interesting about Buddhism and mathematics, particularly about quantum physics, and where they meet. That has fascinated us for a long time".

¹⁸ See Frances Flannery-Dailey and Rachel Wagner, "Wake Up!-Christianity, Gnosticism, & Buddhism in The Matrix" (<http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com>), James Ford, "Buddhism, Christianity, and The Matrix: The Dialectic of Myth-Making in Contemporary Cinema" *Journal of Religion and Film* 4 (2000), James McGrath, "The Desert of the Real," and Michael Brannigan, "There Is No Spoon: A Buddhist Mirror," in *The Matrix and Philosophy*

¹⁹ See John Patridge, "Plato's Cave and *The Matrix*," (<http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com>)

Socrates),²⁰ and Greek Mythology²¹ (“Morpheus” is the Greek god of dreams, the ship name “Icarus” is borrowed from the Greek story of Icarus, “Persephone” was the wife of Hades, and “Niobe” was mentioned in *The Iliad*). In an online chat in November of 1999, the Wachowski brothers confirm the intentionality of such allusions:²²

Starr22 says: Are all the religious symbolism and doctrine throughout this movie intentional, or not?

WachowskiBros: *Most of it is intentional.* One of the things we tried to do with the Neb for when we were shooting “in the real world” was use long lenses to separate the humans from the backgrounds, as opposed to when we shot the Matrix we used short lenses to place the humans in specific deep spaces. We also tinted all of the lights blue in the “real world” and green in the Matrix.

Ronin says: Your movie has many and varied connections to myths and philosophies, Judeo-Christian, Egyptian, Arthurian, and Platonic, just to name those I’ve noticed. *How much of that was intentional?*

WachowskiBros: *All of it.*

Other important philosophical influences were revealed by Keanu Reeves in interviews as he shared some of the reading the Wachowski brothers had him do for his part: Baudrillard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Hume,²³ Wagner, Hegel, and Kant.²⁴ Former Harvard, and now Princeton professor, Cornel West influenced the brothers enough by his works, *Race Matters* and *Prophesy Deliverance*, that they wrote a part for him (Councilor West).

There, he met the Wachowskis and had “long philosophical discussions” between takes and in restaurants about the purpose of life and the role of technology in science and history. They covered a range of thinkers including Lewis Mumford, Arthur Schopenhauer, William James, Homer, and Nikos Kazantakis (author of

²⁰ See “Computers, Caves, and Oracles: Neo and Socrates,” in *The Matrix and Philosophy*

²¹ See references in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. by N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard (sec.ed. Oxford: University Press, 1970)

²² “Matrix Virtual Theatre.” Wachowski Brothers Transcript. November 6, 1999. <http://www.warnervideo.com/matrixevents/wachowski.html>

²³ Hume is even mentioned by Ghost in *Enter the Matrix*; Ghost: “Hume teaches us that no matter how many times you drop a stone and it falls to the floor you never know, will it happen the next time you drop it? It might fall to the floor, but then again, it might float to the ceiling. Past experience can never prove the future.” Niobe: “So?” Ghost: “So you’ll never know.” Niobe: “Here we go.”

²⁴ Peter Lloyd, *Exegesis of the Matrix*, p.104-5. One could also throw in Descartes, Berkeley, Leibnitz, Dostoevsky, etc. (see Lloyd, p.53-6, Sean Greenberg, “Matrix and Monadology: Leibnizian Themes & *The Matrix*” [<http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com>], and Hibbs, “Notes from Underground: Nihilism and *The Matrix*,” p.155ff.).

“Zobra the Greek”). “We talked about James’ essay, ‘Will to Believe’ in terms of Schopenhauer’s challenge...He was unsure life had a purpose at all.”²⁵

The pluralistic cauldron of *The Matrix* keeps an even temperature for all its ingredients; that is to say that no one worldview or ideology carries all the others in the films, they all have even footing. Such is the condition of postmodern pluralism,²⁶ as Richard Lints points out, “Although the postmodernist hesitates to deny the validity of all religions, he hesitates also to assert the exclusive truth of but one religion.”²⁷ And as the Wachowski brothers have revised and adapted each worldview alluded to, so this too accords with the postmodern tendency to revise each belief.²⁸

Ambiguity and “personal” interpretation pervade the entirety of *The Matrix* media. The fact that the Wachowskis have not done an interview in four years, and that all who have worked on the films have signed an agreement not to discuss major elements of the film attest to this. They also offer no commentary on the DVD’s and ended the last film in the trilogy, *Revolutions*, with very little philosophical or storyline closure, leaving things wide open for interpretation. They even comment on their online chat:

AgentMartin says: Do you appreciate people dissecting your movie? Do you find it a bit of an honor or does it annoy you a little, especially when the person may have it all wrong?

WachowskiBros: There’s not necessarily ever an “all wrong.” Because *it’s about what a person gets out of the movie, what an individual gets out of the movie.*

²⁵ Lynn Smith, “The Intellectual and ‘The Matrix,’” *Los Angeles Times* May 20, 2003. “Larry and I got into these great philosophical discussions,” West recalls. “We talked about the history of the epic, from Homer to Nikos Kazantzakis. The brothers are very into epic poetry and philosophy—into Schopenhauer and William James. It was unbelievable! We’d shoot from 6:30 a.m to mid-afternoon—50, 75 takes—it was hard fun and hard work. Then we’d go off to a restaurant and have a philosophical discussion. I was impressed with their sheer genius, their engagement with ideas. Larry Wachowski knows more about Hermann Hesse than most German scholars” (as interviewed by Richard Corliss, “Unlocking *The Matrix*,” *Time Magazine* May 12, 2003).

²⁶ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in David Dockery (ed.), *The Challenge of Postmodernism* (sec.ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p.41 and Richard Lints, “The Flight of Garuda: The Pluralist Impulse in the Postmodern Age” in *The Way of Wisdom* (forthcoming).

²⁷ *The Fabric of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p.206

²⁸ *ibid.*

A fundamental tenet of postmodernism is the disassociation of a text (or communication) with its author.²⁹ Kevin Vanhoozer comments, “We can sum up the so-called ‘postmodern’ condition that is the context of contemporary discussion concerning the theory and practice of interpretation in a single phrase: ‘incredulity toward meaning’” (amending Lyotard’s definition, “incredulity toward metanarratives”).³⁰ Although one could make the case that the Wachowskis are simply saying that movies “affect” people differently like any piece of art, the above question clearly is aimed at “dissecting” the movie for an interpretation consistent with the creators.

Christian Motifs in *The Matrix*³¹

God. “*The Trinity...*” Although the personhood/being of God is never addressed or alluded to in *The Matrix*, He appears many times in veiled reference. In *The Matrix*, right before Cypher betrays his crew, over the phone he says, “Somebody up there still likes me”. God is actually mentioned frequently in *The Matrix* media; albeit by way of cursing. The word “God” is used 11 times in *The Matrix*, 14 times in *Reloaded*, 17 times in *Revolutions*, 4 times in *Enter the Matrix*, and twice in *The Animatrix*. Given the rubric of the story, it seems unlikely that some, if not all, of these references are unintentional³² as is played on in *Reloaded* when Bane is copied by Smith, he says, “Oh *God*,” to which Smith says, “Smith will suffice”. God is also seen in the name of the main female character, “Trinity,” which, although not in the Bible, is a specific name that is used in Christian theism to describe the tri-unity of God (Father, Son, Holy

²⁹ This is evident in the writings of Rorty, Derrida, Fish, et.al.

³⁰ *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p.16. In *Revolutions*, Rama-Kandra even says when asked by Neo if he believes in Karma, “No, it is a word. What matters is the connection the word implies.”

³¹ Needless to say, there is substantial overlap here with other worldviews on certain themes. The Hebrew scriptures are canonical both in Judaism and Christianity thus providing simultaneous parallels. Motifs such as prophets/prophecy, hell, sin, angels, creation, and sovereignty/free will are all prevalent in Gnosticism, Buddhism, and Hinduism among other faiths, but have been popularized in western culture primarily through the influence of Christianity.

³² Perhaps, even for the simple idea or irony, in that, no is looking to a personal God or seems to believe in one in the story yet many curse in His name. As far as intentionality of the divine name in cursing, one needs only consider those curses using Christ’s name. See below.

Spirit). “Deus ex Machina” (“God of the Machines”) is the name of the machine that Neo “negotiates” with at the end of *Revolutions* before his final encounter with Smith, which may infer that Neo is “God of the Humans”.³³ The Trainman character in *Revolutions* refers to himself as “God” when he responds to Neo’s comment, “I don’t want to hurt you,” by saying “You don’t get it. I built this place. Down here I make the rules. Down here I make the threats. Down here, *I’m God*”. This may also imply that Neo is “God” in the sense defined here, considering he has “the ability to change whatever he want[s]” as Morpheus said he would. Smith seems to see himself as “God” when he meets Niobe in *Enter the Matrix* and says, “I am the Alpha of your Omega,” echoing God’s statement in Revelation 1:8. The “creation account” in “The Second Renaissance: Part I” from *The Animatrix* also depicts “man” as God.³⁴

Two important veiled references to God are found in the films’ concepts of miracles and providence.³⁵ In *The Matrix*, Cypher tells Trinity before he’s about to pull the plug on Neo, “if Neo’s the one, then there’d have to be some kind of a *miracle* to stop me”. In the next scene, Tank asks Neo before he goes to save Morpheus, “What do you need, beside a *miracle*?” In *Revolutions*, Commander Lock tells the Council to look to Morpheus “[c]ause he’s the one who believes in *miracles*”. Providence becomes the logical deduction of certain purposes and designs as asserted by Morpheus and Niobe. In *Reloaded*, Morpheus considers their circumstances,

³³ His name “Neo” is an anagram of “One” (in the P.O.D. video for their song, “Sleeping Awake” on the *Reloaded* soundtrack, the lead singer has three blocks that spell, “NEO,” and he rearranges them to say, “ONE”) as he is called “the one” throughout *The Matrix*, which is part of designations of God in parts of Scripture like “Mighty One” (Gen.49:24; Josh.22:22; Ps.45:3; 50:1; 132:2,5; Is.1:24; 49:26), “Holy One” (2 Kgs.19:22; Job 6:10; Ps.71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Pro.9:10; 30:3; Is.1:4; 5:19,24; 10:17,20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19,23; 30:11,12,15; 31:1; 37:23; 40:25; 41:14,16,20; 43:3,14,15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9,14,16; Jer.50:29; 51:5; Ez.39:7; Hos.11:9,12; Hab.1:12; 3:3; Zeph.3:17; Rev.16:5), “the One of Sinai” (Ps.68:8), “Righteous One” (Pro.21:12; Is.24:16), “Majestic One” (Is.10:34), “the One” (Is.57:15; John 8:50), “the Lord our God is one” (Deut.6:4; Gal.3:20; James 2:19), “the Lord will be one and His name one” (Zech.14:9), “the one God” (Mal.2:15), “One is your Father (Matt.23:9), “He is one” (Mk.12:32), “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), and “there is no God but one” (1 Cor.8:4)

³⁴ Man became the “architect of their own demise,” an intentional connection to the Architect of the Matrix.

³⁵ Miracles have always been understood as “acts of God” (See Paul Fontana, “Find God in *The Matrix*,” in *Taking the Red Pill*, p.178-9), as providence has always been associated with the “benevolent care of God”. See *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* (fourth ed. New York. Macmillan, 1999).

All of our lives we have fought this war. Tonight I believe we can end it. Tonight is not an accident. There are no accidents. We have not come here by chance. I do not believe in chance when I see 3 objectives, 3 captains, 3 ships. I do not see coincidence, *I see providence*, I see purpose. I believe it is our fate to be here. It is our destiny. I believe this night holds for each and every one of us the very meaning of our lives.

In *Revolutions*, Niobe, although she was doubtful of Morpheus' statement about providence in *Reloaded*, shifted her thinking by saying, "Two ships, two directions. Sounds like *providence*, doesn't it, Morpheus?"

Sovereignty/Free Will. "If you already know, how can I make a choice?" The perennial question of determinism and choice plays a salient role in the films. This, of course, is not original within Christendom, but has found expression in church history, rising in debate with Augustine³⁶ and Pelagius, Luther and Erasmus, Calvinism and Arminianism, and Edwards and certain eighteenth century intellectuals. Generally, Calvinists understand that God predetermines human choice based upon His own will, and Arminians believe that God foresees human choices but does not determine them. Although these terms are usually applied to soteriological aspects of Christian theology, they do apply to the broader question of choice pressed in the films.³⁷ The character of Neo interacts quite ironically with determinism and choice, as one who rejects the idea of fate, but is completely bound to it. When Morpheus first meets Neo, Morpheus asks him, "Do you believe in fate, Neo?" Neo says, "No". Morpheus asks, "Why?" And Neo replies, "Because I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life". Yet, by the end of the first film, Neo discovers that he is "on the path" as Morpheus states, "There's a difference between knowing the path and being on the path".

³⁶ That the Christian debate over choice is partly in view in *The Matrix* may be connected to the mention of Augustine in *Enter the Matrix*, where Ghost mentions him in a far different context; Ghost: "Like Augustine, I'm dedicated to a higher purpose." Trinity: "What's that?" Ghost: "Onanism."

³⁷ The question of determinism and choice seems to trickle into one of purpose, which is especially paramount in *Reloaded*.

Both Neo's and Morpheus' ideas of choice and control are dissolved throughout the events and dialogues of *Reloaded*. Most notably, as a result of their dialogue with the Merovingian we see such a shift.

Morpheus: You know why we are here.

Merovingian: Hmph...I am a trafficker of information, I know everything I can. The question is, do you know why you are here?

Morpheus: We are looking for the Keymaker.

Merovingian: Oh yes, it is true. The Keymaker, of course. But this is not a reason, this is not a 'why.' The Keymaker himself, his very nature, is means, it is not an end, and so, to look for him is to be looking for a means to do... what?

Neo: You know the answer to that question.

Merovingian: But do you? You think you do but you do not. You are here because you were sent here, you were told to come here and you obeyed. It is, of course, the way of all things. You see, there is only one constant, one universal, it is the only real truth: causality. Action. Reaction. Cause and effect.

Morpheus: Everything begins with choice.

Merovingian: No. Wrong. Choice is an illusion, created between those with power, and those without...Causality. There is no escape from it, we are forever slaves to it. Our only hope, our only peace is to understand it, to understand the 'why'. 'Why' is what separates us from them, you from me. 'Why' is the only real social power, without it you are powerless. And this is how you come to me, without 'why,' without power. Another link in the chain.

Neo also gets a personal dose of "purpose:"

Smith: Thank you. But as you well know, appearances can be deceiving, which brings me back to the reason why we're here. We're not here because we're free, we're here because we're not free. There's no escaping reason, no denying *purpose*-because as we both know, without *purpose*, we would not exist. **Smith 2:** It is *purpose* that created us, **Smith 3:** *Purpose* that connects us, **Smith 4:** *Purpose* that pulls us, **Smith 5:** That guides us, **Smith 6:** That drives us, **Smith 7:** It is *purpose* that defines, **Smith 8:** *Purpose* that binds us.

By the end of *Reloaded*, Morpheus is saying, "I don't believe in chance...I do not see coincidence, I see providence, I see *purpose*".

Creation. "In the beginning..." *The Matrix* borrows heavily from biblical imagery for its language of "creation". In "The Second Renaissance: Part I" in *The Animatrix*, the narration starts, "In the beginning there was man, and for a time, it was good," condensing elements of the

creation account with snippets from Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning,” and the refrain of the entire chapter of Genesis 1, “it was good”. Just as God created man in His “own likeness” (Gen.1:26-7) and breathed His spirit into him (Gen.2:7), so man “made the machine in his own likeness” and they were “endowed with the very spirit of man”. Machines also start to create, “Zero One prospered, and for a time, it was good. The machines’ artificial intelligence could be seen in every facet of society, including the creation of new and better AI”. At the beginning of “The Second Renaissance: Part II,” this language is picked up again, “and man said: ‘Let there be light.’ And he was blessed by light, heat, magnetism, gravity, and all the energies of the universe,” quoting from Genesis 1:3. Neo encounters the “Architect” in *Reloaded* who says he “created the Matrix”, which has echoes of Hebrews 11:10, “[Abraham] was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose *architect* and builder is God. A more interesting parallel here, is that Jesus was a carpenter, which would make the Father by default the “Architect”, just as the Architect created the Matrix and Neo seems to be a “carpenter” of sorts within it.

Sin.³⁸ “you are a slave...” According to biblical theology, “sin” is “covenant or command breaking in relation to God” (see Gen.3, 1 John 3:4, et.al.). All humans beings are fallen and depraved so that our nature is one of sinning (see Romans 1-3,5, Ephesians 2:1-10, et.al.). After the brief “creation prelude” in “The Second Renaissance: Part I,” we hear the “fall”, “But humanity’s so-called ‘civil societies’ soon *fell* victim to vanity and corruption...Thus did man become the architect of his own demise”. The machines also “fell”:

The machines worked tirelessly to do man’s bidding. It was not long before seeds of descent took root. Though loyal and pure, the machines earned no respect from their masters, these strange and loosely multiplying mammals...B166-ER, a name that will never be forgotten, for he was the first of his kind to rise up against his masters.

³⁸ Most would actually say that this is a Christian element missing from the films. So Cecil Copeland, “*The Matrix- A Cyberpunk Parable*,” (<http://awesomehouse.com/matrix>).

They also were banished from “the garden” of mankind, “Banished from humanity, the machines sought refuge...” The Tower of Babel (Gen.11) incident whispers into this prehistory as Morpheus tells Neo in *The Matrix*, “at some point in the early twenty-first century all of mankind was united in celebration. We marveled at our own magnificence as we gave birth to AI.”³⁹ Slavery/bondage language is first used by Morpheus to describe to Neo his situation in the Matrix, which is very similar to the bondage language of sin (Rom.6), “you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind”. Morpheus also uses the language of depravity when he says in *Reloaded*, “we well know that the reason most of us are here is because of our *affinity for disobedience*,” as does Smith, “I was compelled to stay, *compelled to disobey*”. Midway through “The Second Renaissance: Part II,” the narrator tries to solace the situation of man and machines by saying, “May there be mercy on man and machine for *their sins*”.

Messiah.⁴⁰ “You are the One, Neo.” The clearest Christian theme in *The Matrix* is Neo’s role as a “Christ” figure and fledgling messiah. When Choi receives his disk from Neo in the first film, he says jokingly, “Hallelujah. You’re my savior, man. My own personal Jesus Christ”.⁴¹ Morpheus plays the role of John the Baptist⁴² as the man who prepares the way for the “messiah” and “baptizes” him after he is emptied from his vat.⁴³ He is also imprisoned on Neo’s account as John was for Jesus’ sake. Much like Jesus, Neo had a band of “disciples” (crew of

³⁹ So Flanery-Dailey and Wagner, “Wake Up!-Christianity, Gnosticism, and Buddhism in *The Matrix*,” nt.18

⁴⁰ See Cecil Copeland, “The Matrix as Messiah Movie” (<http://awesomehouse.com/matrix>) for a systematic parallel look at some of the following elements. As a messiah, Neo necessarily looks similar to Moses as well. His “cry” to the Machines is “Let my people go” as he even goes to “pharaoh” (Deus Ex Machina).

⁴¹ It is quite safe to assume the each time someone curses using, “Jesus Christ,” or “Christ,” that it is intentional. In *The Matrix*, Neo says, “Jesus,” “Jesus Christ, that thing’s real?,” Mouse says, “Jesus Christ, he’s fast,” Cypher says, “You scared the B’Jesus out of me,” Trinity says, “Jesus, he’s killing him”; in *Reloaded*, Link says, “Jesus. As soon as they open the door it’s all over”; in *Revolutions*, AK says, “Jesus H. Christ,” and Roland says, “for Christ’s sake, Niobe”.

⁴² Seay and Garrett, *The Gospel Reloaded*, p.81-86

⁴³ Lloyd, p.119, Gregory Bassham, “Religion in *The Matrix*,” p.112

the Nebuchadnezzar) and a “Judas” figure amidst those “disciples” who betrays him (Cypher).⁴⁴ Neo is also connected to the “Logos,” the hovercraft which takes him to the machine city in *Revolutions*, as Jesus is called the “Logos” (literally “Word”). If Neo is like Christ, than Smith is like the Antichrist. Smith said to Neo in *Reloaded*, “I don’t fully understand how it happened. Perhaps *some part of you imprinted onto me*, something overwritten or copied”. The Oracle tells Neo in *Revolutions*, “He (Smith) is you. Your opposite, your negative...” Neo experiences a death and “resurrection” in the first film and he “ascends” while inside the Matrix after telling the Matrix what he intends to do (which may be viewed as a kind of commission to them), much like the Great Commission and Ascension of Jesus (Matt.28). In the climactic scene of *Revolutions*, his death saves the world as he is in the machine city (01) connected to the Matrix and a cross literally glows out of his torso. After Smith has been destroyed by the surge through Neo’s body, Deus Ex Machina says, “It is done,” similar to Jesus’ words, “It is finished” (John 19:30). When Sati asks that Oracle if they will ever see him again, she responds, “I expect so. Someday,” foreshadowing a “second coming”.

Others. “This is Apoc...” Biblical allusions are found in many names in *The Matrix*.⁴⁵ “Trinity” and “Logos” were mentioned above. “Cypher” sounds similar to “Lucifer,” a.k.a. Satan.⁴⁶ “Nebuchadnezzar” is the name of the Babylonian king in the Book of Daniel that has a series of dreams and calls on Daniel to interpret them. “Apoc” is short for “Apocalypse” which

⁴⁴ The Merovingian calls Seraph “my little Judas” in *Revolutions* since he betrayed the Merovingian. Bane is another Judas figure because he betrayed his fellow crew in *Reloaded*.

⁴⁵ When asked how they chose the names for the characters, the Wachowski brothers responded, “They were chosen carefully, and all of them have multiple meanings” (“Matrix Virtual Theatre” http://www.warnervideo.com/matrix_events/wachowski.html). Along with the names discussed, Neo’s name in the Matrix is Thomas Anderson with both “son of man,” Jesus’ most used self-designation (“Ander” coming from Greek *ανδρος* “man”), and “doubting” Thomas, one of the disciples (John 20:24-9). Many also point to the “Mark III. N°11” that is on the plaque of the Nebuchadnezzar as pointing to the biblical text Mark 3:11, “Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before Him and cried out, “You are the Son of God” (ESV). So Flanery-Dailey and Wagner. However, when they were asked directly about this in the online chat, they only pointed out that “Nebuchadnezzar is from the book of Daniel”. Furthermore, on the plaque of the “Logos” it reads “Mark XIV. N°14” which has little correspondence to the biblical text of Mark 14:14 (“...where is my guest room that I might eat Passover with my disciples”).

⁴⁶ Bassham, p.113

means “unveiling” or “revelation” like the last book of the New Testament, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” or “John’s Apocalypse”. Councilor “Grace” is a reference to a central biblical theme (“gospel of grace”, see Romans). Councilor “Hamann” is reminiscent of the tyrant “Haman” in the Book of Esther. “Zion” is synonymous with “city of God” in the Bible, both on earth (Jerusalem) and in heaven (Mount Zion). The fact that there is a “temple,” even a “priestess” according to *Reloaded*, and twelve elders in Zion reminds us of the twelve tribes of Israel. “Seraph” is the Hebrew word for “angel” used in the Old Testament (“seraphim”; Isa.6). One of the brothers that Persephone kills in *Reloaded* is “Abel” and his brother is “Cain” (Gen.4). Seraph, Trinity, and Morpheus go to the “Hel Club” to speak with the Merovingian in *Revolutions*, where he says they “fought through hell” to do so. The Merovingian calls Seraph the “prodigal child,” borrowed from the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk.15:11-32). Prophecy plays a large role in the films as it does in Scripture.⁴⁷ We hear about “good news” (Apoc tells Neo in the first film, “I hope the Oracle gave you some good news,” and in *Revolutions* Roland says, “It’s about we had some...good news”), which is synonymous with word, “gospel”.⁴⁸

Intersections and Analysis

Morphology of Christian Language and Imagery. As can be expected with such a story, Christian images are not exact and intersect with many other faiths (see fn.30): Neo is a messiah, incarnation of Buddha, incarnation of Vishnu, etc, Trinity is a women, a feminist subtly, most people in Zion are not Caucasian, per the influence of Cornel West, there is no one God to believe in, Karma is equated with love, sin is not against God, etc. It must be remembered, though, that the Wachowski brothers wrote the *Matrix* story for themselves,

⁴⁷ In the beginning of the first film, Neo literally gets his “call” (on a cell phone) after affirming to the Fed Ex guy “That’s me,” a modern way of saying, “Here am I,” which biblical prophets would do (1 Sam.3:5ff). So Paul Fontana, “Generation Exile and Neo Restoration: A Study of Messianic Hope in The Matrix” (Class Paper at Harvard Divinity School for April 15, 2000).

⁴⁸ From the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (“gospel”). When Neo discovers that he can spend 24-30 hours with Trinity alone, he comments, “Some people go their entire lives without hearing *news that good*”.

primarily (see online chat), and then put it into “media”. But what is most appealing about these brothers is that they are tapping into the root of the philosophical and religious underpinnings of our society and are expressing many currents of postmodern thought.

The Matrix combines stories and styles in a perfect postmodern mishmash of narrative and symbol. They are too numerous to name, and yet following many of these threads back to their sources gives us a greater understanding of this film and the reasons why we are drawn to it.⁴⁹

Thus, being able to “parse and translate” such a film will undoubtedly help us exegete a significant element of our culture. For instance, the notion that foundationalism has been overshadowed again by “faith” or “leaps of faith” is a very helpful insight into how and why many people today do what they do. As Christians, we are having a hard time penetrating this lack of epistemic awareness or care. Just by the mere fact that the Wachowskis have “shape-shifted” Christian language to suit their narrative needs helps us understand the pragmatic approach people are taking to Christianity among other faiths, at the risk of discarding the very meat of the Gospel.⁵⁰ And as was noted on page 8, *The Matrix* expresses the truth claims of Christianity with the same veritability as any other world religion.

Reflections on the Message of *The Matrix*. Along with the Bible, *The Matrix* affirms that humanity is corrupt and in a serious plight. One of the things Don Davis, the music director of the films, did was “use a human voices choir in scenes like the power plant and scenes on the Neb to sort of suggest the plight of humanity” (online chat). Creation and eschatology are important themes, as Jonathan Dodson remarks:⁵¹

Directors of *The Matrix* trilogy, Andy and Larry Wachowski, recently reminded audiences of the importance of doctrines of creation and eschatology, epigrammatically expressed in the subtitle of the trilogy’s final installment

⁴⁹ Seay and Garrett, p.27

⁵⁰ The metaphor comes to mind of taking the bones of all sorts of cuts of meat (beef, pork, chicken, etc.) to make some deranged skeleton.

⁵¹ “The Kings of the Earth and the Eschaton: Eschatological Foundations for Engaging Culture” (paper for New Testament Theology class taught by Sean McDonough at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Fall 2003).

(*Matrix Revolutions*), “Everything that has a beginning has an end.” However, the Wachowskis’ truncated eschatology results in an anticlimactic conclusion to the trilogy. *Matrix Revolutions* leaves the real world in dark de-created subjection to the machines, while the computer-generated mental construct, “the Matrix”, is renewed and restored leaving most of humanity plugged into the Matrix with a remnant of rescued individuals living underground in Zion, the last remaining human city.

Unity is a key message, as is seen in the solidarity of Zion in the “rave scene” in *Reloaded*, and in the joining of all humanity together for one purpose; end the war. It is possible that this “war” is dialectally portraying modernism’s (depicted by machines) relationship to postmodernism (depicted by humans). This is more viable when one considers that machines are the fruit of modernism and its ideology that science and technology are the means through which we ourselves discover meaning or truth. Therefore, we need to “break free” and realize that our science and technology are just as flawed as we are, which is “postmodernism” in essence. In *Reloaded*, as Morpheus enters a meeting in the Matrix with all the other captains discussing the 250,000 sentinels they are potentially facing, he says in response to the impossibility of that number, “Why not? A sentinel for every man, woman, and child in Zion. That sounds exactly like the thinking of a machine to me”. A few scenes later when dozens of copies of Smith are facing Neo in the playground and they seem to be making no ground, Smith says, “More!” as dozens more flood into the playground from every door available. Commander Lock, whose name echoes the enlightenment philosopher and government analyst John Locke, thinks similar to the machines when he says to Councilor Hamann, “I believe I need every ship we have if we’re going to survive this attack!” Hamann’s reply is, “I believe our survival depends on more than how many ships we have”. Lock, like the machines, is thinking in a logical, modernist way, making the numbers the premier factor. Unity is fully realized in *Revolutions*, where Neo understands that he must make peace with the machines in order to defeat their common enemy

Smith. Smith is the worst of both of them, being a machine “program” that has been copied to certain elements of Neo. This is also foreshadowed by the Oracle in *Reloaded* after Neo delineates she is a program and she says, “I’m interested in one thing, Neo, the future. And believe me, I know the only way to get there is together.” Part of Neo coming to terms with this concept is his dialogue with Rama-Kandra in the subway scene of *Revolutions*: Rama-Kandra: “No. I don’t mind. The answer is simple. I love my daughter very much. I find her to be the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. But where we are from, that is not enough. Every program that is created must have a purpose; if it does not, it is deleted. I went to the Frenchman to save my daughter. You do not understand.” Neo: “I just have never...” Rama-Kandra: “...heard a program speak of love?” Neo: “It’s a... human emotion.” Rama-Kandra: “No, it is a word. What matters is the connection the word implies. I see that you are in love. Can you tell me what you would give to hold on to that connection?” Neo: “Anything.” Rama-Kandra: “Then perhaps *the reason you’re here is not so different from the reason I’m here.*” Perhaps the Wachowski brothers are suggesting modernism and postmodernism are not as different as some would like to think.

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