KYAMBOGO   **UNIVERSITY**

DISCONTENTS OF ADAPTATION IN HOLLYWOOD JESUS FILMS

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15/U/14409/GMAL/PE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the

Degree of Master of Arts in Literature of Kyambogo University

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2021

DECLARATION

I, Atukunda Gilbert, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has never been published or presented to any institution for an award of a degree.

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APPROVAL BY THE SUPERVISOR

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DEDICATION

This research is wholeheartedly dedicated to my uncle, Engineer Twinomujuni Vianny who unreservedly sponsored both my undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Kyambogo University.

To the wonderful MA class of 2015: Ojara, Matsiko, Jakuma and Betty. Those nights of watching film adaptations and going home late are still fresh in my mind.

Let this work also reach out to my mother, Turyamureba Edurida for her unconditional love throughout the years. You have been my inspiration since day one.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to a number of people who have guided and supported me throughout the process.

First, I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Atuhura Dorothy for the inspiration and motivation to carry on at the moment when I was seriously considering to quit the game. Her timely, clear and constructive feedback on every chapter enabled me to effectively bring together this dissertation.

I also acknowledge the academic support rendered to me during my study at Kyambogo University to a number of people. To Associate professor Okaka Opio Dokutum who first introduced me to film studies and inspired this research topic, to Dr. Sr. Nakiwala Frances for the research skills and to Dr. Tugume Benon who always reminded our class to graduate in record time. Guess I rebelled. Ultimately, to Dr. Mukakanya Patrick for the most engaging lectures on theories in literature.

My proofreaders; Aisha Namusosa, Angel Kabera and Emma Burke, your contribution to my work was immeasurable.

Finally, without God, everything would have been impossible.

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Abstract

This study examined how Hollywood Jesus films adapt Jesus and the biblical records into motion pictures and the intricacies of transforming the Bible; a sacred written text to many into a cinematic version. The study was inspired by the films' persistent claim to biblical and historical accuracy which has placed them beyond question and have ultimately been used as reliable mediums of references to biblical truth on one hand, and evangelism tools on the other. Five Jesus films; *The King of Kings* (1927), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), *The Passion of Christ* (2004), and *Killing Jesus* (2015) were purposively selected from different periods ranging from the silent era of the 1820s to the 21st-century high definition 3D motion pictures to facilitate a holistic analysis from differentiated perspectives. Using document analysis, the films were analyzed in comparison with the Bible primarily the gospels to evaluate and validate claims of biblical authenticity, through critical reading, interpretation, and analysis of the literary and cinematic forms of gospel representations. The undertaking was informed by Jacques Derrida's (1967) deconstruction theory under the premise that there is no single meaning to a text rather various interpretations and viewpoints of different readers. Findings of the study suggested that Jesus film adaptations are fictional re-enactments and watching them expecting to realize a comprehensive understanding of the Bible is a blunder. The adaptations were found to be unfaithful to the Bible due to the formal difference between the literary and cinematic forms and the limitations of changing words into images. Chapter one of the study provided the background on the historical relationship between the Bible, Jesus film adaptations, and the interplay between the two forms of expression. It highlighted Hollywood's interest in classical texts including the Bible. Consequently, it provided the statement of the problem, literature review, research questions, and significance of the study. Chapter two investigated the distinct nature of the biblical Jesus and Hollywood Jesuses while chapter three examined the challenges and limitations of transforming the Bible into film. Chapter four unpacked the implication of Jesus films on the Christion doctrine while chapter five synthesized the findings of the study and suggested some recommendations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This dissertation investigated the discrepancies between Hollywood Jesus films and the literary biblical scriptures to assess the films' fidelity to the Bible which they claim to reproduce on screen. The study used Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927), Norman Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* (2004), and Christopher Menaul's *Killing Jesus* (2015) alongside the King James Version. This Bible Version was used because it belongs to the traditional texts that have been proven to have few missing Bible verses compared to other versions ("213b-Battle of the Bibles/Total Onslaught-Walter Veith"). The five films were purposively selected from different periods ranging from the silent era films of 1894/1929 to the 21st-century high definition sound accompanying picture, to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the biblical scriptures against their cinematic representations across different generations. Throughout the comparative analysis of the two forms, I applied film adaptation theories from film scholars such as Kamilla Elliot (2003), Robert Stam (2000, 2004), Thomas Leitch (2007), Deborah Cartmell (2012), James Naremore (2000), James Welsh (2007) and Freek.L. Bakker (2009) among others to clearly understand and evaluate the process of transforming literary scriptures to motion pictures and the intricacies that may be embedded within that process. At the centre of the study was an analysis of the theological implication of the Jesus film adaptation on the Christian doctrine that considers the Bible as a sacred book that decrees not to be tampered with.

In this very chapter, I gave the background on the historical relationship between the Bible and Jesus film adaptations and the interplay between the two forms of expression; one literary and the other cinematic. I highlighted Hollywood's interest in classical texts including the Bible for film adaptation due to their audience appeal that ultimately leads to box office success. I also highlighted the perception of Christians towards Jesus film adaptations since they are the primary target audience. Consequently, the chapter comprised the problem statement, the purpose of the study, objectives, research questions, scope of the study, significance, definition of terms, literature review, theoretical framework, and methodology.

The literature reviewed portrayed various views on film adaptation in detail and emphasis on the formal difference between the written form and the cinematic form stood out as a major theme. However, Jesus films' claim to reproduce biblical scriptures and history as accurately as possible equates the film form to the written form which this study sought to investigate.

1.1 Background

Film adaptation has seen lots of written literature transformed into motion pictures, what Kamilla Elliot (2003) calls incarnation, a phenomenon where ''the word is made flesh, wherein the word is only partial expression of a more total representation that requires incarnation for its fulfillment'' (161). With this concept of adaptation, a view is stressed that any work of literature is incomplete until it has been adapted into film for the readers to witness the ''word become flesh.'' This has seen many classical literature texts such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* adapted into some of Hollywood's greatest films like Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004) and Andrei Konchalovsky's *The Odyssey* (1997). These films are some of the most popular films across the globe due to the popularity that has consistently been attached to the two classical epics. Hollywood's fascination

with adapting such classical works for box office reasons has also led to massive adaptations of Holy Scriptures into film. As Reinhartz Adele (2007) confirms, ''the Bible is the best-selling book of all time, so is Jesus the most popular movie subject in the history of cinema'' (1). This may explain why over a hundred films about Jesus have been produced by different movie companies in different languages, all claiming to reproduce the Bible and the historical Jesus as accurately as possible. In other words, Holy Scriptures have become flesh/film and viewers are made to enjoy motion pictures that give them the ''greatest story ever told'' within a few hours in a theatre rather than scrolling the pages of the King James Bible that will take them several days if not weeks to read. The underlying assumption is that the film form portrays the same message as the Bible thus the Bible reader and the moviegoer have the same biblical spiritual message.

1.1.1 The Interplay of Jesus Films and the Bible

Christians and other moviegoers have seen Jesus and Holy Scriptures on the screen to the extent that it's hard to talk about Jesus or the Bible without the mediation of one film adaptation or the other. Some of the films have been endorsed by Christian denominations for evangelism. In 1977, Pope Paul V1 endorsed Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* to be watched on Palm Sunday (Bakker 2009: 2). After watching Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* (2004), Late Pope John Paul II professedly contemplated on the film's production and concluded that: "It is as it was" (Reinhartz 2007:1). Such a comment is far-reaching in that it does not only appreciate the film but equates the film to what happened biblically and historically.

Christian missionaries, preachers, and evangelists have also used these movies as tools to spread the Christian doctrine to people who may not have read the Bible and specifically to those who do not know how to read or write. This has won them many followers who after a conference, an

overnight or a sermon get moved after watching ''Jesus'' on the screen dying for their sins. As a result, people have come to know about Jesus through going to the theatre or church to watch Mel Gibson's '*The Passion of Christ*' or sermons that are accompanied by a Jesus movie at the end than through opening the pages of the Bible. An example of this is John Heyman's *Jesus Film* (1979) by inspirational films which has been translated into 1,500 languages. Thornton Grace (2017) reports that since its first production in 1979, "the film has been used to make 7.5 billion Gospel presentations in 230 countries, with more than 490 million people indicating a decision for Christ after viewing it". This is the same film that was translated into Runyankore-Rukiga and was my first Jesus movie watched. Like most people, I had never read the Bible before. After that night, it was always impossible for me to think about Jesus Christ without seeing Brian Deacon's white face in my mind. I thought he was the real Jesus after all, he was the same picture on my mother's calendar in the living room. It wasn't until I matured and got introduced to many more Jesus movies with different "Jesuses" that my curiosity was aroused and I started asking questions: Are these Hollywood film Jesuses similar to the one that the Holy Scriptures tell us about? Do they have anything that they share? The book of Revelations says, "for I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev: 22:18). Therefore, is it possible for these film producers to successfully adapt scriptures into film and remain faithful to scriptures that decree not to be tampered with? Is it possible for an actor to take up the role of Jesus Christ and portray who he was whether biblically or historically? Are the viewers of such Hollywood adaptations seeing the Bible, some of the Bible, or Hollywood filmic renditions? The analysis of the selected Jesus films in this study helps in evaluating whether Jesus film adaptations produce the same message as the Bible which decrees its message not to be changed in any way.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Jesus films are popular and desirable due to the Bible and the popularity of Jesus biblically and historically. As a result, the audience watches them expecting a complete realization of the biblical scriptures and the character of Jesus on the screen which they, in turn, adopt and equate to the Bible. This is evident with films such as *The Passion of Christ* (2004), *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), *Jesus Film* (1979), and *The King of Kings* (1927) which have been endorsed by the Christian body as references for both historical and biblical truth and have been ultimately used for evangelism. However, the process of translating written words and in this case written scriptures is a process heavily dependent on the filmmaker's interpretation, creativity, the prevailing culture, and the available budget (see Stam Robert, 2000; Leitch Thomas, 2007 & Elliot Kamilla, 2003). Such issues denote a change from the original text thus it can be argued that Jesus films are more of an artistic piece of work than the cinematic realization of scriptures. It is important to note that the Bible itself bluntly decrees against refashioning its content in terms of addition or subtraction (Rev: 22:18). With most Hollywood Jesus films claiming authenticity to the Bible and history, this study seeks to investigate the films' degree of fidelity to the Bible in terms of scriptures, style, and character representations in motion pictures in mind that film adaptation is a process of reinterpretation. This helps to establish whether biblical records or what is regarded as "truth" is fully realized on-screen or whether the cinematic form should be considered as just another distinct artistic form of expression meant for entertainment.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This study sought to investigate the infidelities of Hollywood Jesus films in the portrayal of Jesus Christ and Holy Scriptures regarding the Bible.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Discuss the difference between the biblical Jesus and the Hollywood "Jesuses" in the selected films.
2. Find out the challenges and limitations of adapting a sacred text such as the Bible into a motion picture.
3. Establish how the cinematic scriptures contradict the literacy biblical scriptures.
4. Examine the significance of Jesus film adaptations on the Christian doctrine.

1.5 Research questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. How are the Hollywood cinematic ''Jesuses'' different from the biblical Jesus?
2. What are the challenges that come up with adapting the sacred text such as the Bible into motion picture/film?
3. In which instances do the cinematic scriptures contradict the literary biblical scriptures?
4. What are the positive and negative effects of Jesus film adaptations on the Christian doctrine?

1.6 Scope of the study

The study limited itself to examining the selected Jesus movies and their infidelity to the "Holy Scriptures". The four gospels of the Bible; Mathew, Luke, Mark, and John were read in terms of plot structure, character, setting, cultural context, and language in comparison with the five selected Jesus films to identify their discrepancies. To understand the limitations that contravene fidelity in Jesus films, the study engaged with film adaptation theories from various scholars to establish the intricacies of adapting what the Christian doctrine considers Holy Scriptures into a film. Furthermore, the study specifically focused on the differences between the biblical Jesus; a son of God, and the cinematic Jesus who Reinhartz Adele (2007) refers to as "a son of screenwriters, producers, camera operators, costume and set designers" (267). This was done by studying the character of Jesus as portrayed in the four gospels in comparison with the five Jesuses as portrayed in the five films. Throughout the analysis, cinematography and the role of the camera were studied to establish how camera shots, angles, and movements were used to narrate Scriptures and find out their contribution to infidelity. Finally, the study looked at the implication of Jesus film adaptation on the Christian doctrine as far as cinematic license in portraying the Bible on screen was concerned. This was done in line with the theological perspective of graven images that the study equated to motion pictures which the Bible decrees against.

1.7 Significance of the study

Many scholars of film adaptation trump the importance of fidelity of adapted films to the master texts and argue that film is a different medium of expression and can be different from their source texts. This research sought to revisit the concept of fidelity especially when it came to adapting the Bible which itself decrees against addition and subtraction. Scholars of film adaptation might use this study to re-examine the importance of fidelity of a text considered sacred to many if truth claims are to be made. Bible scholars might also use this analysis to study how the Bible has been adapted into motion pictures and how the scriptures have been represented on screen. Further, by the time of the study, I was unsuccessful in finding a scholarly analysis on Christopher Menaul's *Killing Jesus* (2015). This study helped to analyse this current addition to the Jesus movie genre. Lastly, the dissertation may be important to literature courses that study the Bible as literature. It may be a resource in studying how the Bible's literary techniques and its enormous variety of genres and interpretations have been adapted into motion picture.

1.8 Definition of terms

> **Discontents**. In the context of this study, the term "discontents" denoted dissatisfaction with the claim of Jesus Hollywood films reproducing the Bible on the screen which has been their main trademark.

> **Adaptation**. A film, television, drama, or stage play that has been reproduced in a film form. This definition also includes forms of adaptation that are based on stories not necessarily written.

> **Box office**. In this study, Box Office was used to refer to everything done to market the film.

Fidelity. The degree of accuracy with which Jesus films have been copied and reproduced in comparison with the Bible; their major source text.

Infidelity. A focus on whether Jesus film adaptations have been unfaithful to the Bible.

Hollywood. The culture of people in Hollywood that has imposed itself on Jesus film adaptations and has, in turn, contributed to infidelity.

1.9 Literature review

To fully understand the theory of film adaptation and the unending debate on fidelity and infidelity of films to their source texts, the study reviewed mainly literature on the major theories of adaptation by different film scholars and literature that had been written on biblical adaptations including Hollywood Jesus films.

1.9.1 Fidelity and infidelity debates in film adaptation

The debate whether film adaptations should strictly be faithful to the master texts or freely distinguish themselves as independent artistic forms of expression is one that dominates the concept of film adaptation. Kalra Siddhant (2015) argues that in the context of intertextuality where the two forms of expression interact, the debate is not whether the film adaptation is faithful to the master text but rather the producer's ideology towards the text. He underscores this by saying that the emphasis on fidelity ignores and diminishes filmic elements that are absent in the written text yet fundamental in cinema (3). This view is supported by Brain McFarlane who asserts that "fidelity is obviously very desirable in marriage; but with film adaptation, I suspect playing around is more effective" (Qtd in Welsh 35). This denotes that film adaptations can refashion the source texts and reformulate them as much as possible depending on the director's creativity which builds

the idea that "it is impossible to bridge the gap between the two forms" (Kalra Siddhat 2015:3). This distinction is further underscored by Stam Robert (2000) who cites three reasons why fidelity is unnecessary when it comes to film adaptation. 1) Time. He argues that as time elapses, the verbal signals in the text "are not always communicated in the same way in a changed context" (Qtd in Naremore 2000:57). This is because of factors such as language and interpretation change from one context to another leading to many interpretations. As a result, "the greater the lapse in time, the less reverence toward the source text and more likely the reinterpretation through the values of the present" (Qtd in Naremore 2000:57). About this, producers of Jesus films are faced with the task of interpreting Holy Scriptures to motion pictures just as they were 2,000 years ago without using the values of the present time to interpret them. Furthermore, he argues that fidelity is affected by the differences in time needed by the two different mediums of representation. Whereas a written text can describe a detailed plot within few pages, being faithful to it might result in "a thirty hour version of *War and peace*". 2) Political economy. Written texts are easier to produce in terms of the budget compared to films which require huge amounts of money during production. As a result, producers are forced to "compress" and "adjust" the written texts to suit their budget when making an adaptation. He further argues that "the demand for fidelity ignores the actual process of making films –for example, the differences in cost and modes of production. A novel is usually written by a single individual; the film is almost a collaborative effort," (Qtd in Naremore 2000:56). With this illustration, producers of Jesus films may be faced with budget constraints if they are to reproduce the story that involves numerous characters and later alone the production crew. 3) Hollywood's star cast system. Film producers choose the cast that their audience likes for box office returns. This system may affect fidelity in Jesus films since producers may choose a Jesus that their audience will like rather than the one that the Bible portrays. He gives a clear

insight on this when he asks, "should one be faithful to the physical descriptions of characters? Perhaps so, but what if the actor who happens to fit the description of Nabokov's Humbert also happens to be a mediocre actor?" (Qtd in Naremore 57). This emancipates producers to create a character that is interesting even if he or she contravenes the descriptions of the one in the written text. Dudley Andrew (1984) also stresses that "more difficult is fidelity to the spirit, to the original's tone, values, imagery, and rhythm, since finding stylistic equivalents in film for these intangible aspects is the opposite of a mechanical process" (Andrey 32). Consequently, the distinction between the two forms of expression is emphasized by Casetti Francesco (2004) who views film adaptation as the "reappearance" and a "re-programming" (Casetti 82, 85). He asserts that adapted films should not be seen as "a work repeating another work" but rather a reappearance of an idea that has previously appeared somewhere else. He further states that to adapt a text means to reprogram its reception in terms of story, theme and so on which signifies a distinct form from the original.

However, other scholars stress the importance of fidelity in film adaptation. For instance, James Welsh (2007) asserts that ''historical accuracy (which is to say, historical truth) should matter, if viewers or students are to have any authentic appreciation of texican history" (25). He goes ahead to say that ''fidelity, accuracy, and truth are all important measuring devices that should not be utterly ignored or neglected in evaluating a film adapted from a literary or dramatic source"(Welsh 26). Raitt George (2010) further argues that fidelity is a consistent criterion to evaluate a film adaptation due to its longevity in studies comparing between the visual and the verbal arts. He adds that our "secret yearning" for fidelity favors a literary text which is the master/original text. He notes that it is no wonder scholars such as Brian MC Farlane who are fundamentally against

fidelity as an approach to film adaptation studies finally agree to the fact that fidelity is indeed a critical aspect in film adaptation.

In my opinion, the arguments for fidelity argue its importance in film adaptation but do not practically expose how it can be achieved. Harald James (2000) argues for and against fidelity. He argues that a film adaptation which maintains the central theme is faithful to its source text regardless of its distinct nature of representation while an adaptation that only imitates the story of the text may not manifest the aesthetics of film as an art form and cannot boost of fidelity. This argument underpins the fact that a literary text and a cinematic form can be different in the way they are structured yet they are centered on the same theme. In this study, it equates the Bible and the Jesus Hollywood films being structurally different in terms of plot or character but potentially containing the same message. In my view, reconstructing and reinterpreting a theme in a new form may consequently change the fundamental theme thus this approach may not apply to Jesus films that adapt a book that decrees against any addition or subtraction.

1.9.2 Theories of Film Adaptation

Various theories have been designed to explain the process of film adaptation. However, Elliot Kamilla (2003), Leitch Thomas (2003), and Robert Stam (2000) are the most cited thus this study reviews the three to contextualize the adaptation of Jesus films.

Kamilla Elliot a professor of literature and media at Lancaster University and one of the major scholars of film adaptation discusses theories of film adaptation in detail. In her book *Rethinking the Novel/film Debate* (2003), she presents six concepts in which film adaptation occurs. In her first concept which she calls ''the psychic concept of adaptation,'' she asserts that the spirit of the source text is only transferred in a new form which is film but the adaptation preserves the spirit

of the original text and remains faithful to the spirit of the literary source (Elliot 136). This intimates that the story remains the same but in different forms. However, this concept ignores the inevitable changes that may affect the original text due to the formal differences that come with the two mediums; the novel and film

In the ''ventriloquist concept of adaptation,'' the novel's signs (source text) are emptied and replaced with the filmic spirits. The novel becomes what she calls ''a dead corpse" (Elliot 143, 144). Rather than the novel enriching the film, the film enriches the novel. In the context of Jesus films, this means that rather than the Bible enriching Jesus films, Jesus films enrich the Bible which denotes infidelity since they are empowered to add, remove, adjust and correct the biblical records which the Bible itself decrees against.

In the ''genetic concept of adaptation,'' the novel and the film share the same raw materials (story) but are distinguished by different plot strategies, which she calls ''narratorogical approaches" (Elliot 150). In my opinion, this may be the most applied concept in Jesus films. However, it also comes with challenges that are attached to "plot strategies" since producers may create fictional plots that are nowhere in the Bible yet the film is still about Jesus the "raw material."

In the ''De(re)composing concept of adaptation,'' ''the novel and film decompose, merge and form a new composition'', they are joined by other cultural narratives, and the audience gets confused to which one is the novel and which one is film (Elliot 157). This relates to Jesus films in that the Bible overtime has merged with Hollywood's culture since it is the epicentre of film production. The two forms may be accepted as substitutes of each other without a clear distinction of which narrative is faithful to the Bible or not.

In the ''incarnation concept,'' a film is the word incarnated into flesh (Elliot 161). This concept emphasizes the fact that a literary work is incomplete until it has been adapted into film. This concept is perhaps the one that has birthed all film adaptations including biblical adaptations. In the context of this thesis, the Bible was incomplete until it became film. This has helped in witnessing Jesus and Scriptures on the screen which has popularised the story of Jesus though this thesis seeks to understand whether the two forms communicate the same message.

Kamilla Elliot's final concept of adaptation is ''trumping.'' In this concept, films tend to undermine the novels they adapt. They criticize the source texts and try to right what the source texts got wrong (Elliot 175). This underscores the fact that the film form is an independent form that can reconstruct the text. However, this consequently goes against the Bible which warns against any addition or subtraction.

Thomas Leitch (2009) also suggests eight forms of adaptation that are close to what Kamilla Elliot suggests. The first forms of adaptations is what he calls ''celebrations.'' These forms of adaptation attempt to preserve their original texts as faithfully as possible. They try to worship the original texts to maintain the author's spirit. The examples he gives are the BBC adaptations of Shakespeare's plays which renders his plays word for word to celebrate his creativity (Leitch 96).

The second form of adaptation Leitch suggests is ''adjustment'' which happens in terms of ''compression'' and ''expansion.'' During compression, ''a great deal of systematic elision and omission'' is done in order to compress a novel with massive pages into a few hours of a film (Leitch 99). Expansion happens when short stories are turned into full movies (Leitch 99). Like Elliot's ventriloquist concept of adaptation, this form of adaptation contradicts what the Bible decrees in the book of Revelations 22:18. "A great deal of systematic elision and omission" equates to sacrilege according to the Bible.

''Correction'' is another form of adaptation that Leitch suggests. In this adaptation, films correct what they think were the flaws of the novel (Leitch 100). This form of adaptation works similarly to Elliot's trumping in which the film serves as a critique of the source text. Jesus films that employ this form of adaptation seek to correct what they think were the flaws of the Bible and can therefore remove, add and expand all of which makes fidelity impossible. Under ''updating,'' a film transports a classical work to the present to show its universality thus guaranteeing its relevance to modern society (Leitch 100). However, the "updating" may come with new trends of modernity's culture which may be incompatible with what the Bible teaches. An example of this is Terrence McNally's play *Corpus Christi* which was speculated to be released in 2017. According to Pa (2012), this film was to be set in modern-day America and showcasing Jesus and his disciples as homosexuals. Another form of adaptation that Leitch supposes is ''Superimposition.'' This is caused by different film demands like the Hollywood star discourse which imposes film stars discourse on adaptations and in turn may alter the source texts due to their demands and influence regardless of the author (Leitch 100). Applying this to Jesus films means that actors impose on the Bible and the effect may be what Kamilla Elliot (2003) calls "De(re)composing" where actors become "Jesuses" themselves.

"Neoclassic imitations," "revisions" and "colonisation" are other forms of adaptation that Leitch suggests. In "neoclassic imitations," films try to imitate classics but change the setting. Revisions seek to re-write the source text. Unlike Elliot's Psychic concept, revisions seek to alter the spirit of the source texts instead of maintaining it. Like the ventriloquist concept, colonisation seeks to add new meaning to the source text (Leitch 103, 106, 109).

On the adaptations that are ''based on a true story,'' Leitch asserts that they are just historical re-enactments no matter how carefully researched and therefore cannot be considered to be ''historical records'' but rather ''fictionalized re-enactments of historical events.'' Leitch argues that the ''based on a true story'' claim is only meant to advance the film's value not as accurate reproduction but as an entertaining experience that in the process places the film beyond question. He goes ahead to argue that such films based on this claim are both more and less than the truth. He suggests that they are less because of the selection of the truth and more because they have already been constructed as a story (Leitch 281). Applying this argument to Jesus films which claim to reproduce biblical records on-screen intimates that Jesus films are no records of either the Bible or history but just fictional re-enactments. Therefore, their claim of being based on the "true story" of Jesus is only meant to advance them beyond question and increase the box office.

Robert Stam (2000) views film adaptation as a conference of many texts in what he refers to as ''intertextual dialogism.'' This refers to;

> the infinite and open ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, which reach the text not only through recognizable influences, but also through a subtle process of dissemination (64).

This sees the question of fidelity thrown away since an art form becomes a total of many things that may not necessarily be found in the master text. Stam cites Gerald Genette's (1997) different categories of transtexuality which he applies to film adaptation. The first form that he cites is ''intertextuality''; the ''co-presence of two texts.'' Here, the two artistic forms one literary and the other cinematic co-exist in form of ''quotation, plagiarism and allusion'' (65). This emphasizes a co-existence of two texts not a comparison of them. In the context of this study, it denotes a co-

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presence of the biblical records and the Jesus film adaptation without specifying the originality of the message portrayed with renders fidelity unnecessary.

 The second form of adaptation presented is ''paratexuality''; the totality of what is done during and after the production of the film. This may include the remarks by the director at the film's first screening, information about the budget and the cast all of which become part of the film (Stam 65) which consequently advance addition to the master text. Next is ''metatexuality'' in which one text serves as a critique of the other (65). This is relates to Elliot's "trumping" and Leitch's "revisions" concepts of adaptation that seek to criticize and correct the assumed errors in the original text. The fourth form of adaptation he presents is ''architexuality'' which has to do ''with an artist's willingness or reluctance to characterize a text generically in its title" (Qtd in Naremore 65). He argues that whereas some adaptations retain the original book title to take advantage of the pre-existing market, a changed title announces a difference from the original text. The last form that Stam cites is ''hypertexuality'' which is the relationship between a ''hypotext *(father or source texts)* to its hypertext (*the son)* which adds, removes, explains in its continuity" (Stam 66) which further downplays fidelity.

Like Elliot Kamilla and Leitch Thomas, all the forms of adaptations that Robert Stam (2000) cites emphasize the distinct nature of the literary and the filmic forms. If applied to Jesus film adaptations, it can be argued that biblical records cannot be accurately represented in the Hollywood Jesus films. The above-suggested theories of adaptation underscore the distinct nature of the literary form and the filmic form. There is a somewhat relationship between the two forms in terms of the general message or what Elliot Kamilla terms "raw material" but the end product is independent of the other.

1.9.3 Fidelity in Jesus Films

In her book *Jesus of Hollywood* (2007), Adele Reinhartz views all Jesus films as biographical films or what she calls ''Biopics'' since they all possess a historical individual as their subject and protagonist (1). She argues that though the films are set in a historical era and have a historical personality, they are all fictional narratives in the way some films present sub-plots that are nowhere to be found in the ancient sources. She points out Roger Young's *Jesus* (1999) which showcases Jesus as a young youthful man who falls in love with Mary of Bethany. She, therefore, concludes that ''those who watch fictional Jesus movies expecting history are bound to be disappointed" (5). In her study *History and Pseudo-History in Jesus films* (2006), Adele further argues that unlike the gospels which have profoundly shaped the beliefs and ideas of the Christian doctrine for a long time, their representation on screen "always results in a superficial, shallow, simplistic representation of Jesus, his life and his significance"(3). She attributes this to the films' invention of new material not found either in the Bible or in any Christian tradition, invented speeches for Jesus, fictional characters, and fabricated plotlines advanced by the imaginations of filmmakers (2). According to the two studies, she considers Jesus films as sources of entertainment rather than history as it is the overall intention of their producers yet people view such films as sources of information about the historical Jesus and some use them to reflect upon their Christian faith.

Adele's argument against fidelity is in sync with Merz Johannes (2010) who argues that it is difficult to achieve fidelity in Jesus films since scriptures do not give a complete script for producers to cinematize. Important information about people such as dress code, setting, colour, weather, food, norms of people, emotions and personalities lack in the Bible. As a result, producers create "their own culturally and ideologically shaped imagination to fill in the contents of an image

with information not mentioned in the text" (Merz Johannes 2010:3). It can be advanced that this is why Stephenson Humphries-Brooks (2006) in his book *Cinematic Saviour, Hollywood's Making of the American Christ* notes that there are so many adaptations of Jesus' story which at the same time are so different from each other but all alluding to our contemporary culture specifically to America. He for example asserts:

> Jesus in mainstream Hollywood film is a cinematic saviour created in an American image. That is, he can be seen both as American and as a saviour of America, for on film he serves as the projection of America's self-image (Humphries-Brooks 2).

Further, he explains that the cinematic savior is not bound by traditional images of Jesus but is primarily a creation of and a contributor to a visual tradition representing America itself since Hollywood produces its own images, its own storylines and its own expressions" (Humphries-Brooks 13,14). This underscores the fact that Jesus films are only a product of the American Hollywood culture rather than the Bible yet they still claim to be either "faithful adaptations" or based on "true historical events".

Johannes (2010) further argues that the film form comes with inevitable additions such as sound, music, lighting, camera angles and movements, and montage tricks all of which rely on the context of the producer and the purpose for which the film is intended to serve. This intimates that ultimately, the film producer determines the perspective the film showcases the story from. To this, Simkins, William and Reinhartz (2004) argue that in making Jesus films, producers are not only faced with the task of simplifying the story, add visuals and sound but also numerous contradictory versions of the same story since their interpretation of the Bible competes with other numerous sources of the same story. Like Stephenson Humphries-Brooks, they also affirm that Jesus films are faced with the challenge of interpreting Jesus in the cultural lens of modern and

postmodern values. They further argue that the character of Jesus in the films carries the markers of the culture of the period the film is produced.

Lloyd Baugh (1997) also stresses the fundamental role played by the filmmaker when it comes to the degree of fidelity in Jesus films. He argues that the point of view of the filmmaker towards the biblical material regarding Jesus heavily determines what the film portrays. In his book *Imaging the Devine and Christ figures in film*, he pauses controversial questions that help to evaluate the fidelity of the cinematic Jesus to the biblical Jesus. In the process of making the film, "is the artist a Christian believer or not? If yes, then what is the quality of that belief? Is it the faith of the fundamentalist who holds the literal truth of every word of the gospels, or is it a more enlightened belief which recognizes the complexity of literally genres and forms within the gospel?" (Baugh 4). This further underscores the claim that Jesus films are heavily dependent on the producer's creativity and imagination rather than the biblical records.

1.9.4 The significance of Jesus film adaptations on the Christian doctrine

Literature shows that Jesus films play a fundamental role in the Christian doctrine mostly in terms of evangelism. Pamela Grace (2004) asserts that '' at a time when only a small number of people read the Bible and only a fraction of those have any familiarity with biblical scholarship, popular knowledge of the text most central to western culture is increasingly dependent upon representations in movies and television programs"(47). She for example points out that most Americans '' find it difficult to think of Moses without imagining Charlton Heston in flowing robes, and cannot contemplate the crucifixion without hearing Hollywood thunder and music"(47). This conforms to Free.L.Bakker's (2009) argument that "the image a film projects has such a high measure of reality that those in the audience often have the impression that things happen as they

see them. It is reality" (45). The audience's trust in Jesus films in producing scriptures is evident with Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) which was endorsed by Pope Paul VI to be watched on Palm Sunday in 1977 (Bakker 2009: 2). After watching Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* (2004), Late Pope John Paul II professedly contemplated on the film's production and concluded that: "It is as it was" (Reinhartz 1). In the context of this study, this not only appreciates the film but also equates it to what happened whether biblically or historically. It also means that the head of the Catholic Church and the Bishop of Rome approved the authenticity of the film which could have ultimately facilitated its box office for fidelity reasons. Further, Adele Reinhartz (2006) also argues that Jesus Films not only claim authenticity to Biblical and Historical accuracy but also suggest that a viewer who watches them "will have his or her faith forever strengthened"(2). This can be validated by Esheleman's (2002) study *The "Jesus" Film: A Contribution to World Evangelism* which reports that as of 2002, 4,937,942 people had seen the *Jesus Film* in 236 countries and had been translated in an additional 256 languages. As of 2017, Thornton Grace reports that 490 million people have indicated a decision for Christ after watching it.

This digest establishes the impact that Jesus films have on the Christian doctrine. It thus can be argued that they are regarded as visual Bibles.

1.9.5 The theological view of Jesus Film adaptations

Ella Shohat (2004) in her article *Sacred word, profane image theologies of adaptation* views film adaptation as a translation since it is an imitation or a representation of an already existing text. She, therefore, argues that since it is already a translation, it ''already involves acts of mediation, contractedness and representation'' (23). She emphasizes the prefix 're' in the word

'representation' which signifies ''an absence, since representation by definition is not direct, that is, present; it entails invocation of absence through an act of repetition, of presenting a new that which is not present'' (27). When applied to Jesus films, it can be argued Jesus films adaptations only attempt to invoke the Biblical Jesus who is absent in them and presenting a Hollywood version to represent him. Fidelity to the bible is therefore questionable since representing an absent historical figure is impossible. She notes that though adaptation of Holy Scriptures has been greatly censored in Islamic states, Hollywood has enjoyed adapting Christian representation of divine figures. In her argument of ''graven images'' which are equated with adaptation, she presents six controversial challenges in adapting Scriptures in the Islamic dominated states that this study applies in the analysis of Jesus films.

> ''(1) the fear of substituting the images itself for God, and thus committing idolatry-worshipping the object ''standing in'' for God rather than God; (2) the fear of portraying God inaccurately in a kind of failed mimesis or wrongful representation; (3) the fear of embodying an infinite God in finite materials; (4) the fear of portraying God in shapes and forms made by finite humans; (5) the fear of giving 'flesh' to God; and ultimately, (6) the fear of representing the unrepresentable, that which is above and beyond representation,''(26).

Though she mainly centres her argument on adaptations of the life of Prophet Muhammad such as *Al-Risalah* (1976), the six controversial challenges she presents can also be traced back to the Bible, in the book of Exodus which says, "thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth, thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the lord thy God am a jealous God…" (Exodus 20:4-5). This express instruction which is also fundamental in the

Christian doctrine may contravene the adoption of cinematic Christ figures that have become part and parcel of the Christian doctrine which can be equated to the graven image.

1.9.6 Summary of literature

The reviewed literature revealed several findings. 1) The literary form and filmic form are distinct and differ in the way they present a story to the reader. Therefore, to evaluate a film's fidelity to its source text is dependent on the critic's viewpoint of what fidelity is. 2) The suggested theories of adaptation further underscore the distinct nature of the two forms which further makes fidelity problematic. 3) Literature on Jesus films indicates that fidelity issues affecting other film adaptations are also prevalent in Jesus films. 5) Jesus film adaptations have played a fundamental role in the Christina doctrine in as far as evangelism is concerned. 6) The very nature of Jesus adaptation poses theological problems in as far as substituting Jesus (who is considered God) is concerned. To these, this study sought to provide a detailed comparison between the Bible and the selected five Jesus films to establish clear cut discrepancies between the two forms. The literature does not also give a detailed discussion about the significance of Jesus films especially from the theological perspective which this study addressed. Finally, the literature also provides the foundational markers through which the five selected Jesus films were analysed.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by the deconstruction theory. Advanced by Jacques Derrida in 1967, the theory asserts that "language is not the only reliable tool of communication we believe it to be, but rather a fluid, ambiguous domain of complex experience in which ideologies program us without our being aware of them"(Quoted in Tyson 2015: 235). It is based on the assumption that language is more ambiguous and elusive in meaning than we realize (Tyson, 2015). This is demonstrated in

the fact that without changing any word or structure, one sentence can have multiple meanings and interpretations from different lenses of the reader (Tyson 2015: 236). Gnanasekaran (2015) thus concludes that texts have no fixed or permanent meaning but rather irreconcilably contradictory meanings that can be generated by different readers. The above digest demonstrates Deconstruction as a theory that necessitates a thorough engagement in critical thinking from the reader to identify the plausible meanings derived from a text.

Das (2012) as cited in Hossain (2017) explains the essence of deconstruction by stating that "no work of literature whatsoever has been able to express exactly what it wanted to say and thus the critique's business is to deconstruct and recreate them, taking their word as not the root form of their meaning but only the trace of request"(44). Norris (2002) is of the same view. In deconstructing a text, he argues that a competent reader should examine the text to arrive at its meaning by checking their sense of relevance in terms of interpretation and understanding (pg.7). Similarly, Gough Noel (2008:2) argues that deconstruction aims "to undermine the logic of opposition within texts" by paying attention to what a text leaves out, suppresses, disregards, and considers unimportant to come up with new meanings. This open-ended nature of interpretation from the reader is consequently made clear by Rahman (2015) who in deconstruction argues that "a text never reaches a final meaning; rather it signifies a vast field of possibilities" (Quoted in Hossain 2017).

In this study, I applied deconstruction with the view that the process of interpreting the Bible to the silver screen is one full of diverse ideologies that influence producers' interpretation of scriptures. I, therefore, approached the selected Jesus films arguing that in their attempt to cinematize the Bible, there are various interpretations and meanings that can be derived which may be distinct from what the Bible itself portrays. The study paid critical attention to the ambiguities

in the cinematic language, style, and character to establish plausible meanings that may juxtapose the biblical records. With Jesus films' truth/fidelity claims to the Bible, I applied deconstruction with the idea that no film has a fixed/permanent interpretation of the Bible but rather irreconcilably contradictory meanings that can be generated by the film producers. The films have no stable implication but rather a vast field of possibilities that can be established by paying close attention to what they suppress, disregard, and consider unimportant in cinematizing the Bible.

1.11 Methodology

The study employed a documentary analysis method which belongs to a qualitative research design. This method analyses data in the form of qualitative documents, audio and visual materials by obtaining relevant documentary evidence to support and validate facts through critical reading, interpretation, and analysis of the material relevant to the research problem (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John served as primary qualitative documents while films *The King of Kings* (1927), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), *The Passion of Christ* (2004) and *Killing Jesus* (2015) were qualitative audio-visual documents. The four gospels served as raw data concerning the biblical records of Jesus that the five selected Jesus films claimed to incarnate on screen. The selected films represented distinct time periods in an attempt to capture the Jesus filmic representations of different generations. *The King of Kings* (1927) represented the silent era films as the worldwide box office success (Bakker 53), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) represented the musicals that digress from conventional films characterized by normal dialogue. Though set in different periods, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) and *The Passion of Christ* (2004) were primarily selected due to their popularity with the church in the form of evangelism (Bakker 2009:2; Lloyd Baugh, 1997 & Lloyd Jeffrey Staley & Richard G. Welsh, 2007). *Killing Jesus* (2015) was selected as one of the most recent Jesus Film adaptations

to represent the modern representation of scriptures. Through critical reading, interpretation, and analysis, the study unpacked the discrepancies between the gospels and the films by critically comparing the portrayals of scriptures, events in terms of plot development, characters, and style to establish the degree of fidelity and infidelity to the biblical records. Secondary literature primarily theories of adaptation from various scholars were applied to the two forms (literary and cinematic) to evaluate whether the process of adaptation stayed true to the message of the Bible or it ultimately intimated a change that the Bible decrees against.

The study further analysed online secondary interviews taken by producers and cast members of the selected Jesus films, online comments, reviews and media that were influenced by Jesus movies. This was in the view of "paratexuality" concept of adaptation which suggests that a film adaptation is the totality of what is done during and post the production of the film, including the directors' and the casts' remarks, interviews, reviews and comments about the adapted film that become part and parcel of the adaptation process (Stam 2000: 65)). To understand the impact of Jesus film adaptations on both the audience and the Christian doctrine, the study adopted the concept of "paratexuality" with the view that information regarding Jesus films post production was critical in understanding the extent to which they were viewed as references for biblical truth and accuracy.

The researcher read the primary text; the Bible mainly the four canonical gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John. In comparison, he watched the selected five Jesus films while recording instances of infidelity concerning the portrayal of biblical scriptures in terms of plot, character, style, and the cast. Film adaptation theories were used to interpret and make sense of the infidelities identified in the films while applying the deconstruction theory to explain why filmmakers removed, added and rearranged any of the biblical records.

1.11.1 Organisation of the Dissertation

The dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter one covers the introduction, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, objectives, significance, literature review, theoretical framework, and methodology. Chapter two is based on the differences between the Jesus of the Bible and the Hollywood Jesuses in the selected films. An analysis of the Bible to understand the nature of the Biblical Jesus was done to juxtapose the cinematic Jesus portrayed in the five selected films. Chapter three is based on objective two which was to find out the challenges and limitations that come up with adapting the Bible into film. The chapter examined and explained the intricacies and challenges that constrain fidelity in Jesus films. This was discussed alongside the significance of cinematography and its contribution to infidelity. Chapter five is based on objective four which was to examine the significance of Jesus film adaptations on the Christian doctrine. The study comprehensively examined the positive and negative effects of Jesus films on the Christian doctrine and their implication on the Christian faith about what the Bible; the Christian book says.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DISTINCT NATURE OF THE BIBLICAL JESUS AND CINEMATIC "JESUSES"

2.0 Introduction

This chapter studied the discrepancies between the literary and the cinematic portrayals of Jesus; a protagonist of the two forms regarded as the most popular film subject in the history of cinema (Reinhartz, 2007:1). The chapter treated the four gospels; Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John as master texts and raw material from which the character of Jesus is reinvented and reincarnated on screen. While two films; *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Killing Jesus* distanced themselves from the Bible, this chapter compared them to the Bible arguing that Jesus' historical reference has primarily been the Bible (Reinhartz, 2007). The chapter first provides an overview of the literary and cinematic Jesus before delving into the five selected Jesus films to establish his cinematic representation in comparison to the gospels. The analysis was based on the various forms of Jesus; as a superstar/celebrity drawing from Jewson's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), as an ordinary man illustrated by Menaul's *Killing Jesus* (2014) and as a powerful human being in Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977). Further to the analysis is Jesus as a Hollywood hero as showcased in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* (2004) and ultimately, an old miracle worker in DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927).

2.1 Jesus' Literary and Cinematic Representation

Adele Reinhartz (2007) suggests that whereas the biblical Jesus is a son of God, the cinematic Jesus or Jesus of Hollywood is " a son of screen writers, producers, camera operators, costume and set designers" (267). This claim proposes that the biblical Jesus and the cinematic Jesus are two different personalities. In reference to the historicity of Jesus, Adele further argues that unlike the gospels which have strongly molded the beliefs and ideas of the Christian doctrine for a long time, their representation on screen "always results in a superficial, shallow, simplistic representation of Jesus, his life and his significance"(Reinhartz 2006:3). This is attributed to the films' invention of new material not found either in the Bible, invented speeches for Jesus, fictional characters, and fabricated plotlines advanced by the imaginations of filmmakers (Reinhartz 2006:2). Merz Johannes (2010) argues that important details about Jesus such as dress code, emotions, and colour are absent in the Bible thus the visual representation is dependent on the cultural context and ideological imagination of the producer. Broughton Geoff (2015) argues that in portraying a historical figure such as Jesus, there is potential controversy and censorship which heavily determine how he is portrayed. He points out that historically, the church has fundamentally determined the moral standard of how Jesus is portrayed. This digest provides a bedrock on which Jesus' portrayal in the Bible incarnates on screen in the films selected in this chapter.

2.2 Jesus the superstar/celebrity

Produced by universal pictures, *Jesus Christ superstar* was directed by Norman Jewson and filmed in the Negev desert of Israel, the land where the biblical and historical Jesus lived. With an earning of over 20,000,000 US dollars, the film was considered to be the "largest grossing film about Jesus made in the sound era" (25) until Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).The producer's

choice of the title deviates from the biblical Jesus. It introduces Jesus as a superstar or celebrity rather than the begotten son of God according to the gospel of John 3:16. This conforms to Stam's (2000) "architexuality" theory of adaptation in which the producer's choice of the film's title announces a difference from the original text. It can thus be argued that Norman Jewson's point of view of Jesus is of a popular human being rather than God incarnated into flesh according to the gospels.

Throughout the film, Jesus is presented as a weak and minor character. Unlike the four gospels where he is the protagonist and other biblical personalities rotate around what he does, Jewson's Jesus is overshadowed by the character of Judas Iscariot. The plot is unveiled by Judas and the entire story is told from his perspective as he tries to keep Jesus from believing that he is a celebrity. Jesus' weakness is underscored by his inability to perform any miracles. In the dessert where the sick surround him for healing, he asks them to depart and leave him alone as they are too many for him. The event is emphasized by the crane shot from above which shows the sick engulfing him as he cries "leave me alone"(47:09) denoting defeat. This contravenes the biblical Jesus who performs a total of 37 miracles across the four gospels including among the many; healing the sick and feeding thousands of people with only two loaves of bread and fish (Mathew 14:13-21), walking on water (Mathew 14:22-36, Mark 6:45-56 & John 6:16-24) and raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44).

Unlike the biblical Jesus who divinely understands his purpose on earth, Jewson's Jesus is clueless on what his earthly purpose is. In the four gospels, Jesus is seen consistently predicting his suffering, betrayal, crucifixion and finally resurrection to fulfill his purpose on earth (Mark 8:31-38, John 13:21-30, Luke 22:1-6 & Mathew 20:17-19). In his final hours towards crucifixion, Jesus cries to God to take away the cup of suffering but still submits to what he considers the will of his

father in completing his earthly mission (Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42 & Mathew 26:39). Contrary, Jewson's Jesus in his human nature is presented as a being without an understanding of his purpose or who he is. Towards crucifixion in the garden of Gethsemane, he complains to God why he wants him dead and asks, "show me there is a reason for your wanting me to die" (1:04:06). He further attacks God and tells him to "kill me, take me now, before I change my mind" (1:05:27). He questions God, "If I die what will be my reward?"(1:03-01). Consequently, he performs the Eucharist without any sense of direction and purpose. He rudely yells at his disciples, "for all you care, this bread could be my body." In the Bible, Jesus motivates his disciples to always carry out the Eucharist in remembrance of him (Mathew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20 and John 6:48-51)

Furthermore, Norman Jewson's Jesus is presented as pessimistic and irrational contrary to the biblical Jesus consistently presented as logical and optimistic. Jewson's Jesus expresses his frustration and anger towards his disciples when he stresses, "I must be mad thinking I will be remembered. Yes, I must be out of my head, look at your blank faces. My name will mean nothing" (58:05). When instructing Judas to hurry and speed up his betrayal, he yells at him, "hurry you fool, hurry and go, save me the speeches I don't wanna know" (59:40). In the Bible, Jesus logically handles Judas even when he is fully aware of his betrayal. He says, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray me" (Mathew 26:21). When Judas comes with the Roman soldiers and kisses him for identification, he logically queries him, "Judas, betrayeth thou the son of man with a kiss?"(Luke 22:28). Jewson's Jesus is also angry with God for wanting him to die. He tells him, "what you started, I didn't start it" referring to the mission of salvation. He angrily confronts God to kill him before he changes his mind (1:04:08). Further, he instructs his disciples to go back

fishing after his arrest. The biblical Jesus is portrayed to remind his disciples about his death and resurrection suggesting that it may inspire his disciples during his absence (Mathew 16:21).

Additionally, the bible demonstrates that Jesus clearly has a relationship with God who he constantly refers to as father (John 16:28, John 6:38, John 10:30 and Mathew 26:39). Contrary, Jewson's Jesus clearly has no evidence of being the begotten son of God. In the garden of Gethsemane, he prays to God not as father but a killer which demonstrates no sense of intimacy and consequently no significance of his death. His angry attack towards God on why he wants him dead portrays God as a killer rather than a sacrificial father according to the Bible.

Finally, whereas the biblical Jesus overcomes death by resurrecting on the third day (Matthew 20:17-19, John 12:23-25, Mark 8:31 and Luke 24:1-12), Jewson's Jesus remains dead. At the end of the film, all actors board the bus apart from the character of Jesus. Judas (played by Carl Anderson) is the last character to enter the bus while his eyes remain stuck on a distant empty cross that may symbolize Jesus' absence and death since he is the only missing character. The film adopts Kamilla Elliot's (2003) trumping concept of adaptation and Thomas Leitch's (2003) correction concept of adaptation in which the adaptation corrects what it deems mistakes of the master text. Rather than God and divine as seen in the bible, Jesus is a human being with human emotions like any other person according to Norman Jewson. The film also conforms to "ventriloquist concept of adaptation" in which the master text is enriched by the adaptation in the form of addition, adjustment and correction. The biblical Jesus is enriched in terms dialogue since almost of what he says cannot be traced biblically. His representation is fictional and superficial since there is evidence of his invented speeches and fabricated plotlines purely based on the director's imagination. It is out of this that Baugh Lloyd (1997) argues that *Jesus Christ superstar* is "a theological disaster. This Jesus has no real prophetic or messianic role. There is no sense of

his Jewishness and so no sense of his continuity and discontinuity with the prophets of the old testament" (Baugh 40).

2.3 Jesus as an ordinary man

Killing Jesus was produced by National Geographic and directed by Christopher Menaul. Though it imposes itself on biblical accounts in its opening intertitles, it is based on the book *Killing Jesus* by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard. The study does not analyze the book but rather focusses on a comparison of the film to the biblical records since its main claim is that it is "inspired by biblical accounts of the life and times of Jesus" rather than the book itself. The film has remarkable nominations too. It was nominated for the prime time Emmy awards for outstanding television movie in 2015 and critics' choice television awards (2015). The film also averaged 3.7 million viewers upon its release (Michael O'Connell 2015).

Firstly, the film casts Jesus through Haaz Sleiman; a Muslim actor of Middle Eastern decent. The casting of a Muslim as Jesus can be interpreted as the producer's move to avoid the Christian bias and underscoring the view that Jesus was a normal human being since Islam contests the claim that he was God. Biblically, Jesus consistently affirms that he is God (John 1:1, John 10:30-33, John 9:35-38 and Colossians 2:9)

Contrary to the Bible, the film portrays Jesus as a man clueless about his divinity and purpose on earth. This is evident in John's struggles to convince him that he is the messiah. He doubts John's claim that he was spoken to by God in the dessert and queries him; "how are you certain that what you believe is true?"(21:49). He further confesses to John that, "cousin, until this day, while I am a man of strong belief, I am a carpenter, nothing more" (21:43). In the Bible, Jesus is shown to know his divine purpose throughout his account. For example, he says, "I am the way and the truth

and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6). At a young age when Jesus gets lost and his parents find him at the temple, he asks them, "why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?"(Luke 2:49). According to the Bible, Jesus understands his divine purpose right from a young age while Christopher Menaul's Jesus is clueless about who he is at the time of his baptism.

Consequently, the film emphasizes Jesus' human nature and suppresses his supernatural ability. His onset miracle of catching fish is a surprise to him evidenced by the way he looks at it and responds with an interjection, "thank God!"(25:08-40). He considers the miracle as a sign that what John told him that he is the messiah could be true (26:38). His human nature is further emphasized in his unsureness to practice what he preaches. When preaching in the synagogue, he instructs people that when their enemies take their cloaks, they should give them tunics too. When asked whether he can practice what he is preaching, he responds, "I will try, try with each breath everyday" (30:10). When David, the demon possessed child dies in the process of resurrecting him, he panics and prays. When David wakes up, there is a sense of relief on his face evidenced by the way he quickly turns to him with uncertainty (33:29). Biblically, Jesus' supernatural nature is portrayed in the way he handles similar incidents with calmness and authority. When resurrecting the widow's son in the gospel of Luke, he commands, "young man, I say to you, arise" (Luke 7:14). In the miracle of catching fish, Jesus instructs the disciples to try one more casting of the net after their countless failures and are rewarded with a great catch (Luke 5:1-11).

Whereas the biblical Jesus is demonstrated as a miracle worker, Christopher Menaul presents a Jesus that shies away from healing lepers. When he meets a boy and a mother with leprosy, he extends pity, compassion, a cup of water and lets them go with their leprosy (51:49). Biblically, all lepers that meet Jesus are healed (Mathew 8:1-4, Luke 17:11-19). Menaul's Jesus fails to restore

Malchus' ear which is cut off by Peter when the Roman soldiers come to arrest him. In the Bible, Jesus miraculously restores Malchus' ear (John 18:6 and Luke 22:51). The film further deletes the resurrection of Jesus on screen and only alludes to it in the form of Peter's catching fish.

Ultimately, the film showcases Jesus as an irrational man easily consumed by rage. When he receives news of John's arrest, he protests, "How do I speak of love, forgiveness, how? I am trapped by the feelings of a man who longs to attack this injustice" (39:09). This statement reemphasizes the human nature of Jesus who is deeply engrossed with the feelings of man to revenge. In the Bible, when Jesus receives the same news, he calmly leaves and goes to a lonely place by himself (Mathew: 14:1-12).

The film's infidelity is embedded in the fact that it is based on a fictional novel *Killing Jesus* by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard yet in film form claims to be inspired by biblical records. Reinhartz (2006) argues that one of the failures of Jesus film adaptations in an attempt to cinematize scriptures and Jesus on screen is their persistent use of resources and material not found in the Bible or in any Christian tradition. Menaul's insistence on biblical records yet the film is based on a novel denotes a failure to the historicity and historical records of Jesus. More controversial is the director's choice of the title. The title "*Killing Jesus"* is made up of a verb "*killing*" [my emphasis]; a continuous endless deliberate action of causing death. Applying Stam's (2000) architexuality form of adaptation, it might as well announce the film's killing of the biblical Jesus and rewriting a cinematic version in the form of a normal human being.

2.4 Not too human, not too divine

Upon its production in in 1977, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) was Emmy nominated on the two successive Sunday evenings of 1977 (Staley and Walsh 2007: 81). As Staley and Walsh (2007) note, "the television setting along with its annual rebroadcast made Zeffirelli's film DeMille's successor as the most popular Jesus movie" (Staley and Walsh 81). Lloyd Baugh (1997) also stresses that the film is considered by many as "the finest adaptation of Jesus' life ever made" (Baugh 72). The film was also endorsed by Pope Paul VI who encouraged people to watch it on the Palm Sunday of 1977(Bakker 2009:2) which boosted its box office success.

After the production of the film, the director Franco Zeffirelli's not only considered himself a successful producer and director but also a moral and religious prophet. As quoted by Lloyd Baugh (1997), Zeffirelli in regard to his film said, "I was interested in the possibility and telling the story fully and clearing up unknown areas in our faith, plus the political stories behind them. I felt that I was putting an end to century's old misunderstanding about Jews and Jesus that I was destroying medieval attitudes" (73). Zeffirelli's comments on his film suggest that *Jesus of Nazareth* cinematizes the original events historically and biblically as accurately as possible from "*his authentic" [my emphasis]* viewpoint. This claim thrived by the Pope's endorsement could explain the success and popularity of the film.

The character of Jesus is played by Robert Powell; a well-known television star of the 70s. Zeffirelli further casts popular film stars in supporting roles in form of Anne Baneroft, Christopher Plummer, Fernando Rey and Anthony Quin. This diminishes the influence of Jesus as a character in the film who is somewhat overshadowed by a bunch of stars in the eyes of the audience. Baugh Lloyd (1997) argues that, "the character of Jesus ought to stand out morally and dramatically"

(78). It can be argued that whereas Robert Powell represents Jesus on screen, he is dramatically a disaster since his influence as a character competes with the film's star persona. The film's cinematography underscores this with close-up shots of famous actors and actresses right at the beginning in Lawrence Olivier as a friendly just man Nicodemus, Anne Baneroft as Magdalene, Yorgo Voyagis as a Hebrew Palestine Joseph and the beautiful Olivia Hussey as the virgin Mary. The diminishing of Jesus as a character is also noted by Brooks Stevenson (2006) who notes that Olivia Hussey is by far the most beautiful mother of Jesus to be cinematized (73). The star cast system not only overshadows Robert Powell as Jesus but also renders the film just another Hollywood cinema conforming to one of the tenets of a classical Hollywood cinema for box office success at the expense of fidelity to the Bible. This is in the view of Broughton Beoff (2015) who notes that the Hollywood star cast system "requires known actors to make a film commercially viable" (5). Morin Edgar (n.d) also notes that a film star in a capitalist atmosphere is meant to boost the box office success. It can thus be argued that regardless of Zeffirelli's fidelity and truth claims to the historical reenactment of Jesus, the desire for financial gain is at the center of the project which consequently inspires his portrayal of Jesus on screen rather than the Bible.

Additionally, Zeffirelli's ideological imagination of Jesus' physical appearance on screen can be argued to be biased by traditional portrayals of Jesus. Peter Schmidt (2000) notes that in the 4th century, Christians depicted Jesus as a bearded man with long loose hair that symbolized divinity (Bakker 55). Mathews Thomas (1999) argues that this portrayal was influenced by the images of Jupiter/Zeus, the king of Greek gods who lived on mount Olympus in the Greek mythology. Zeffirelli's Jesus suits all these descriptors. The character of Jesus played by Robert Powell is a bearded man with long loose hair just as Zeus. The addition of the blue eyes make him more of a German or Anglo-Saxon background than a Jewish. Stevenson Brooks (2006) also describes

Robert Powell's eyes as "the blue eyes of Hollywood" (74) which further emphasizes the re-imagination of the physical Jesus in the contextual lens. Whereas Jesus' cinematic portrayal as a bearded man with long loose hair can be attributed to the Books of Numbers 6:1-21, Judges 13:16 and Amos 2:11 which describe the Nazirite with uncut hair and a long beard, other physical attributes rendered to the character of Jesus such as the blue eyes, blonde hair (which is not specified in the Bible) and his whiteness indeed invoke Greek gods rather than the biblical Jesus. Considering that the Bible does not describe Jesus, the character of Jesus in Jesus of Nazareth carries the markers of the culture of the period the film was produced using the contextual definition of an attractive man of the time.

Further, the film presents Jesus as one not too human at the same time not too divine. This can be interpreted as the director's creativity in an attempt to make a Jesus that is carnally believable at the same time one staunch believers of the Christian doctrine can believe. The film covers the main supernatural events of the gospels thus one might be convinced that it treats Jesus from the biblical viewpoint. Such include Jesus' miraculous catch of fish, the miraculous multiplication of loaves of bread and fish, his preaching, and parables that advance Jesus' divinity from the Christian perspective. However, considering the first gospel episodes, omitted are Jesus' temptation in the dessert, wedding at Cana with the turning of water into wine, the transfiguration, the calming of the storm while on the lake, walking on water, encounters with lepers and his physical suffering. Such omissions minimize Jesus' divinity and reduce him to a rather powerful human being neither too human nor too divine.

2.4 Jesus as a Hollywood hero

The Passion of Christ (2004) was produced by Mel Gibson and premiered in 3,006 theaters and on 4,643 screens in the United States of America (Bakker, 2009:40). Mel Gibson produced, directed, and financed the film himself making him one of the most respected producers of Jesus films in history (see Bakker 2009:40). Unlike other adaptations, the film focuses on the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life from the garden of Gethsemane up to his resurrection with great emphasis on the most extreme violence and dehumanization of Jesus. On its production, the late pope John Paul II was moved by the suffering of Jesus in the film and concluded that "it is as it was" (Reinhartz 2007:1) equating the film to the actual encounters of Jesus. In terms of box office success, the film earned back its production costs within a few days after its premiere and became the biggest box-office success of all the Jesus films (Bakker, 2009: 42).

Mel Gibson's Jesus is not a savior but rather a victim of sadism. The film emphasizes his abuse, mistreatment, assault, and dehumanization at the expense of his divinity and ultimate purpose on earth. The film centers itself on the significance of the book of Isaiah 53:5, "he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities…by His wounds, we are healed." It can be argued that the film focuses on the verbs "wounded and crushed" since Jesus in the film suffers the most extreme brutality on screen without portraying the reason behind the suffering.   No hint of Jesus' miraculous birth but rather a fictitious plot about his humanness as a toddler who used to fall and be helped by his mother. Curiously, there is no single hint that she conceived him virginally. The extreme focus on sadism attracts the audience's emotional attention to violence rather than the intention behind the violence.

Consequently, by focusing on sadism, the film interprets Jesus in the lens of Hollywood's definition of a hero. In popular action films, Hollywood develops likeable action heroes, something tragic happens to them, and they suffer extremely but finally defeat the "bad guys" Tasker Yvonne (2015). Hollywood Jesus films fit into this plot structure. They present Jesus as the Christ who came from heaven, performed great miracles, was betrayed, and suffered at the hands of people who hated him, was killed but defeated the "bad guys" by resurrecting and vanishing to heaven. This film structure gives a happy ending to the viewers who leave the theatre emotionally satisfied with a Hollywood version of scriptures but not the Bible. For example, no Hollywood Jesus film selected in this study presents Jesus as a warrior Lamb of God who will come back to pick his followers and destroy the evil forces and those that oppose him (Revelations 11:18). Similarly, *The Passion of Christ* presents a Jesus who is betrayed by Judas, goes through the most extreme violence at the hands of Roman soldiers, is crucified, dies but ultimately defeats his enemies (bad guys) by resurrecting. The film's last shot is of a glorious naked Jesus who majestically walks out of the grave like an action superhero. The viewers are emotionally satisfied that the action hero who went through great humiliation ultimately won the battle. There is no hint that he is the same person who will come back to judge the living and the dead according to the Bible.

Like Franco Zeffirelli, Mel Gibson's portrayal of Jesus is also influenced by the traditional portrayals of Jesus in Christian art of the 4th century which was inspired by the images of Jupiter/Zeus (Bakker 55). Like Zeus, James Caviezel cast as the character of Jesus is designed as a bearded man with long loose hair. In the last scene of the film where Jesus resurrects from the grave, Free. L. Bakker (2009) compares the naked Jesus to the naked beautiful Adonis (Bakker 42). The traditional Christian art's influence on Mel Gibson's interpretation of Jesus is also evident in the film's major violent events. For example, the turning of the cross with Jesus' still body

nailed on (1:33) was influenced by the visions of the German Augustinian nun Anna Katharina Emmerick (1774-1824) which she wrote in her book *The Dolorous Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Tatum 213-216).

2.6 An old miracle worker

Produced in 1927, DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927) is regarded as the first great worldwide box office success (Bakker 53). The film's first intertitles emphasize the film's fidelity to history and the Bible through the words, "The events portrayed by this picture occurred in Palestine…" (00:43). DeMille's intention is evangelism since he also introduces the film with the intertitles, "He, Himself, commanded that His message be carried to the uttermost parts of the earth. May this portrayal play a reverent part in the spirit of that great command" (01:34).

DeMille casts Henry B. Warner in his fifties at the time to portray the character of Jesus. The viewer's first encounter of Jesus is of an old Jesus in his fifties since the nativity story is not cinematized. In the Bible, Jesus started his ministry in his early thirties (Luke 3:23) thus a youthful Jesus would be expected on screen. Richard Walsh (2003) argues that the representation of an old Jesus in form of "a fatherly son of God" supports the values of the middle class and the established churches (Bakker 50). DeMille therefore casts an older actor to appeal to such an audience for box-office that may easily identity with his protagonist.

Further, the film focusses on Jesus as a supernatural healer rather than a redeemer according to the Bible. The first screen shot of Jesus is seen through a young girl's eyes that has been healed from blindness(19:08) and then we are introduced to "an old miracle worker" with no hint of his virginal birth, his baptism or the holy spirit descending upon him or why he is performing the miracles.

The lack of foundation to his miracles renders him just a miracle worker rather than the ultimate redeemer for mankind.

Like earlier films, DeMille also adopts the portrayal of Jesus from devotional paintings in traditional Christian churches of the 4th century inspired by the images of Zeus (Richard Walsh (2003 as cited in Bakker 2009:50). Just like Jupiter depicted with long hair and a beard, Henry B. Warner has long hair and a beard, an infiltration of the Greek mythology in the early churches not inspired by the Bible.

2.7 Conclusion

The issue of fidelity in the representation of the biblical Jesus is far more complex since the cinematic versions are not inspired by the Bible but rather by non-biblical materials and documents which only advance fiction based on imagination. More complex is the issue of the directors' interpretations of scriptures that are based on their cultural contexts which can neither recreate the historical Jesus nor the biblical Jesus. Such controversies in an attempt to produce a visual Jesus ring true to Reinhartz (2007) who bluntly states; ''those who watch fictional Jesus movies expecting history are bound to be disappointed'' (5).

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF ADAPTING THE BIBLE INTO A MOTION PICTURE

3.0 Introduction

This chapter examined the intricacies that constrain fidelity in adapting the Bible to the silver screen. It studied the general challenges and limitations in film adaptation specific to the Jesus film genre and film adaptation as a whole. The identified limitations were discussed in reference to the five selected Jesus films; *The King of Kings* (1927), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), *The Passion of Christ* (2004), and *Killing Jesus* (2015) to establish whether their claim to fidelity and authenticity to the Bible can be reliable. The chapter firstly examined the films' persistent claims to fidelity and then analyzed the episodes in the four gospels in comparison with the challenges of film adaptation to explain their infidelity.

3.1 The persistent claim to fidelity

Jesus films either claim to produce biblical or historical records of Jesus' story which has consistently attracted the audience to them consequently leading to box office success. Grace Pamela (2004) argues that, "of all films based on written texts, those about the life of Jesus may make the loudest claims of "fidelity" to their source" (46). At the beginning of Cecil. B. DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927), the claim to fidelity is evident in the film's first intertitles;

> *The events portrayed by this picture occurred in Palestine nineteen centuries ago, when Jews were under complete subjection of Rome- even their own priest being appointed by the roman procurator.*

This endorsement underscores the fact that the film portrays the "exact" events as accurately as they were in Palestine during Jesus' time. The use of the verb "***occurred***" denotes reality. The film further indicates that its primary purpose is evangelism by imposing itself on the book of Matthew 28:18-12. Biblically, the scripture instructs believers of the Christian doctrine to spread the message of Jesus all over the universe. In reference to this, the film stresses, "*He himself, commanded that his message be carried to the utter-most parts of the earth. May this portrayal play a reverent part in the spirit of that great command*." The above claims present the film not only as biblically accurate but also a fulfillment of Jesus' command. The proceeds of such fidelity claims saw the film become the most screened motion picture about Jesus during the first half of the twentieth century and continued to be televised up to the 1970s (Grace 2004: 48). It is also still considered the greatest Jesus film ever made by some critics (Grace 2004:48).

Though adapted from the book *Killing Jesus* by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard, Menaul's *Killing Jesus* (2015) rather claims fidelity to the Bible than its source text. The film's first intertitles state that, "*This story is inspired by biblical accounts of the life and times of Jesus.*" The film's first shot is of the physical setting of "Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' birth" intimating historical facts. Norman Jewson's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) distances itself from the Bible and focusses on Jesus as a historical figure. However, the choice of the Negev desert; the land where the biblical and historical Jesus lived as the film's location could be interpreted as the film's attempt to fidelity to both history and the Bible.

The Passion of Christ (2004) opens with the book of Isaiah 53, "*He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; by His wounds we are healed*." This validates Jesus' suffering in the New Testament as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah which Mel Gibson showcases on screen. The film intimates that if Jesus is dehumanized, it is because scriptures say so. The

film's fidelity claims were also boosted by Pope John Paul II who equated its cinematic representation to biblical accuracy (Reinhartz 2007:1).

Franco Zeffirelli's choice of the film's title, *Jesus of Nazareth* announces both biblical and historical setting of Jesus Christ. The director himself claimed the authenticity of the film to history and the Bible when he reported that,

> "*I was interested in the possibility and telling the story fully and clearing up unknown areas in our faith, plus the political stories behind them. I felt that I was putting an end to century's old misunderstanding about Jews and Jesus that I was destroying medieval attitudes*" (Baugh 1997:73).

The film was also endorsed by Pope Paul VI to be watched on Palm Sunday in 1977 (Bakker 2009:2). By fidelity standards, it implies that the head of the Catholic Church and the Bishop of Rome evaluated the film and found it worthy to be watched by followers of the Christian doctrine.

Regardless of the formal differences between literary and cinematic forms, the digest above demonstrates that when it comes to Jesus films, fidelity to either scriptures or history is possible. However, like other filmic adaptations, Jesus films go through a similar process of transferring words to motion pictures; a process that requires interpretation, sound, camera style, and the cast among other components that make up a film (See Adele Reinhartz, 2007; Merz Johannes, 2010 & Humphries-Brooks Stephenson, 2006). This implies that they too are affected by the same issues of fidelity that may contravene the very text they are reformulating.

3.2 Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semisitm is the hostility to or prejudice against the Jews historically rooted in religion, stereotypes and myths that target to harm the Jews (Anti-Defamation League, 2013)**.** Considering that the gospel episodes are predominantly Jewish, producers of Jesus films are faced with a challenge of depicting Jews in a way that does not offend them or perpetuate what could be considered anti-Semitic. In the context of the Bible, Jews are portrayed to have condemned Jesus to the cross. After Jesus had been presented to Pilate who finds him innocent and consequently leaves his fate in their hands, they decree his death saying, *"...His blood be on us, and on our children*" (Matthew 27:25). However, this scripture is considered anti-Semitic as it has over the years been used to portray Jews as enemies of Jesus who out of hatred pronounced a curse to themselves and their generations (Hamm, 2004). Bakker (2006) notes that the accusation of Anti-Semitism "emerged almost every time a new film about Jesus was announced, leading to the film makers to do their utmost to prevent the impression that it was the Jewish people who had ultimately condemned Jesus to death" (3). DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927) fits into this narrative. The director introduces an account not found in the Bible where the high priest Caiaphas falls to his knees and earnestly prays to God that he would hold only him and not the Jews for condemning Jesus to the cross. This plot shifts away the blame from the Jews to Caiaphas. In defense of the Jews, *Killing Jesus* (2015) also creates fiction. When talking to the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, The High Priest begs him to order the release of Jesus from the temple guards by saying, "*Governor, I ask as a devout Jew, do not allow this man to be murdered*." The phrase, "*I ask as a devout Jew*" emphasizes that even in the Sanhedrin, there were Jewish leaders in defense of Jesus which ultimately silences Anti-Semitism.

Similarly, Zeffirelli in Jesus *of Nazareth* (1977) creates a fictitious character Zerah not found anywhere in the Bible to reduce anti-Semitism. Being a member of the Sanhedrin, Zerah blackmails Judas to hand over Jesus to them so as to inquire and prove whether he is the Messiah or a false prophet. When Judas agrees to the plan, Zerah betrays him and informs him that the trial is for blasphemy not a mere inquiry. This means that Zerah becomes directly responsible for Jesus' arrest and finally death which shifts the blame from the Jews to a fictitious character not found anywhere in the gospels. Like DeMille, Zeffirelli also downplays Anti-Semitism by indicating that not all members of the Sanhedrin were against Jesus. Nicodemus, one of the members of the Sanhedrin comes to warn Jesus to stay away from public places as the Sanhedrin is planning to arrest him. He also confirms that whereas he has many enemies there, he also has many friends inside who believe in him. As a devout Jew, Nicodemus tells Jesus, "…*you are a teacher come from God, for no man can show the signs or have the words to impart unless God be with him*." In the meeting, one of the high priests warns the Sanhedrin that Jesus might actually be the Messiah. When it comes to Matthew 27:25 where the Jewish crowd condemned Jesus to the cross, Zeffirelli indicates that there were some Jews in the same crowd in favor of Jesus as voices can be heard saying, "*free Jesus, he is a true prophet*."

In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Jewson downplays Anti-Semitism in the way he presents Jesus, Judas and all his characters as contemporary modern day people. If the Sanhedrin condemns Jesus, in no way is it Jewish since it has nothing in common with the Jewish culture. They are just rock and roll religious leaders with black capes and leather headgear. It is too contemporary to be Jewish thus no one can claim Anti-Semitism in the film. Mel Gibson in *The Passion for Christ* (2004) maintains the famous chant in Matthew 27:25 which branded the film Anti-Semitic. But even when

he maintains the chant, Bakker (2009) notes that the sentence is shouted by a crowd of Jews in Aramaic but the English translation in the subtitles is deleted (Bakker 2009: 72).

For the fear of anti-Semitism, Jesus films create alternative accounts to either tone down the fact that Jews condemned Jesus to the cross as the Bible portrays or completely remove it from the plot. Consequently, one can conclude that their claim to fidelity is a stunt to box office success since they cannot afford to offend a certain group people for fear of being rejected.

3.3 Emplotment

Emplotment is a term developed by White Hyden (1973) as "the act of re-organizing the raw material of reality into a coherent fictional story" (12). As he argues, "all narrative history, oral, written (and visual) have elements of fiction embedded in them by the nature of their textualized production" (12). From the bible, the story of Jesus is told from four different perspectives based on the four apostles of Jesus. As a result, there are variances in their accounts since some events are found in one account but are missing in the other. Consequently, Jesus films that cinematize Jesus' story according to the four gospels have to reorganize various events from the four gospels into a coherent story which in the process embeds some elements of fiction. Events from the four gospels are refracted and re-organized in the process of scripting to create a narrative with a cause and effect chain which may also necessitate a twist in the events. Such is evident in DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927). In order to connect Mary Magdalene to Jesus, DeMille creates a fictional plot not found in any of the four gospels. Mary is angry because Judas; her lover has abandoned her in pursuit of Jesus. Deeply convinced that Judas will not resist her womanly charm, she sets out to win him back. She finds him with Jesus whose fatherly look haunts her of her sins. Jesus in turn casts seven demons from her and consequently becomes a staunch follower. To create a

coherent story of how Mary met Jesus and became her staunch follower, DeMille creates a fictional plot that primarily is not in the Bible through emplotment.

In the *The Passion of Christ* (2004), Gibson constantly creates fictional flashbacks to explain the role of Mary as a mother in Jesus' upbringing and their attachment to each other. After his arrest, Jesus witnesses the making of his cross which triggers his memory to his early years as a carpenter playing with his mother while making a table. On his way to crucifixion, he falls down and Mary remembers how she used to help him back up whenever he fell down as a toddler. It can be argued that though it is reality that Jesus and Mary definitely had a mother- son relationship, Gibson creates coherent fictitious plots to present the same reality that is not explained in the bible which conforms to emplotment.

In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Norman Jewson re-organizes the film's plot by starting with Judas Iscariot who is concerned and complains about Jesus' belief in his followers that he is a Savior. The story is told from his perspective trying to help Jesus stay a humble human being rather than the myth of his followers that he is a Savior. The choice of Judas as a major character creates a distinct plot that juxtaposes the bible where all the other events and characters rotate around Jesus.

 In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Zeffirelli reconstructs the story of Jesus by merging the four gospels. In the process, the film becomes quite longer compared to other Jesus films. But even when it is 282 minutes long, it constructs the enmity between Matthew and Simon Peter not found anywhere in the gospels. Peter is portrayed as a fisherman who hates prophets like Jesus and tax collectors like Mathew. When Jesus is hosted at Matthew's place, Peter sees this as utter hypocrisy from the self-proclaimed prophet. According to the film, Jesus uses the parable of the prodigal son with Matthew representing the rebellious son and Peter representing the faithful son. It is the parable that reconciles the two which sparks off their journey as Jesus' disciples. Biblically, Jesus finds Simon

Peter and Andrew fishing and says to them, "*follow me. I will make you fishers of men! At once they left their nets and followed Him*" (Matthew 4:19-20). To Matthew, Jesus finds him at the tax collector's stall and instructs him to follow him. Matthew gets up and follows Jesus immediately (Matthew 9:9-13). Whereas the historical reality is that Matthew and Peter were indeed Jesus' disciples, Zeffirelli through emplotment reconstructs their prior relationship which adds fiction to the narrative.

In *Killing Jesus* (2015), Menaul reconstructs the resurrection of Jesus. Peter and other disciples go back to fishing after Jesus' death. The only available evidence of Jesus' resurrection is Peter's successful fishing session after meditating on Jesus. To reduce the divinity of Jesus and make him a normal human being, the film omits any reference to the actual resurrection of Jesus which contravenes the biblical records.

Through emplotment, Jesus films reorganize the biblical events across the four gospels to cinematize a single coherent story. Because of the distinct nature of some events, fictional plots are created to form a realistic plot with a cause and effect chain which all sees fidelity to the bible impossible. The reconstruction of a single story from the four gospel accounts conform to Leitch's (2009) "adjustment" theory of adaptation that occurs in the form of "compression" and "adjustment". Adjustment in the sense that fictional plots are created to form a suitable narrative and compression in the deletion of some events in the gospels. This intimates that fiction is part and parcel of biblical adaptation which renders any claim to fidelity in Jesus films highly contestable.

3.4 The believability of Miracles

Miracles by nature are extraordinary, supernatural and surpass natural order and human understanding. They cannot be proven by observation or even science thus questioning their authenticity maybe valid. The subject of Jesus also comes with such a divine, miraculous and supernatural paradigm. Graig Blomberg (2016) notes that the credibility of Jesus' miracles is oftenly contested by similar stories and myths from other religions. They are incompatible with modern science with a cause and effect chain thus could also be categorized as myths from the Christian tradition.

When dealing with Jesus' miracles, producers of Jesus films are faced with screening what the modern audience and science may consider myths and legends that are scientifically impossible. Pamela Grace (2004) argues that adaptations concerning Jesus are constrained with screening Jesus' biblical miracles that "most respected biblical historians now regard as pure inventions inspired by passages from the Hebrew bible and intended to prove the divinity of Jesus" (Grace 46). In my view, this is because the Bible presents a world view that is scientifically and carnally incomprehensible to modern people. As a result, producers of Jesus films either cinematize what the audience considers fiction and fantasy or restage the biblical story without miracles at all. Among the 37 miracles shown in the gospels, there are three that in my view producers must contend with; 1) the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1-44), 2) Jesus' walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33), and 3) Jesus' resurrection from death and ascension to heaven (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24 & John 20). In *The King of Kings,* DeMille cinematizes Lazarus' resurrection and the restoration of the young girl's sight. Missing is Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14:22-36, Mark 6:45-56 and John 6: 16-24) yet the film constantly merges all the four gospels its intertitles. Whereas the resurrection of Jesus is shown, the ascension to heaven is constrained by technology.

Jesus' medium range shot is only magnified and remains stunted in one place while looking at the city beneath it. Applying deconstruction, it can also mean that the film fails to show Jesus walking on water and ascending to heaven for fear of contravening the scientific law of gravity.

Norman Jewson's *Jesus Christ Superstar* disregards any miracles and treats Jesus as a normal human being. In place of a divine Jesus, the film presents a weary Jesus who retires to the desert full of lepers and is too tired to heal any of them. He cries to them, "*there is too many of you*!" He is engulfed and the scene ends with Jesus' outcry, "*leave me alone*!" The film also ends with the death of Jesus and all actors go back to their bus and drive away. It is emphasized that Jesus was just a popular figure who got famous, died and his story just happens to be popular.

Jesus of Nazareth (1977) omits Jesus walking on water. Even when Lazarus' resurrection is showcased, the producer uses an extreme long shot in a high angle camera position which somewhat diminishes the miracle as Lazarus is minimized and can barely be seen. In *The Passion of Christ*, Mel Gibson focuses on Jesus' suffering and minimizes miracles. The film only screens two miracles; Jesus' restoration of Malchus' ear and Jesus' resurrection. However, Jesus' resurrection only advances Jesus as a Hollywood hero who has triumphed against his enemies by walking out of the tomb (Bakker, 2009). Further, the film's disregard of his ascension to heaven makes his resurrection pointless.

Similarly, *Killing Jesus* (2015) screens two miracles; the miraculous catch of fish after six years of failure according to the film and the resurrection of David; the young demon possessed child. After the miraculous catch of fish, Jesus himself looks surprised and informs Peter that it is because they prayed. After David's deliverance from the demons, Jesus gives a sigh of relief intimating that he was unsure whether the boy would be delivered. Like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the film shies

away from Jesus' resurrection. He remains dead and his resurrection is only symbolized by Peter's additional catch of fish.

Films in the silent era were constrained in terms of technology thus it could be argued that the screen incarnation of some miracles was technically difficult. However, films after the 1960s were produced with the advent Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) which could help in realizing such miracles. It can be argued that the choice to leave some miracles and selecting others heavily depended on the producer's purpose and aim of the film. Either way, every miracle illustrated in the bible and is omitted in the film consequently renders fidelity claims futile.

3.5 The influence of culture

The customs, ideas and lifestyle surrounding a person heavily influence their interpretation of a certain phenomenon. Likewise, Jesus films are influenced and interpreted in the lenses of the cultural contexts in which they are produced. Robert Stam (2000) contends that "the verbal signals are not always communicated in the same way in a changed context" (57). This means that Jesus films can be interpreted differently in various contexts. Robert Stam further argues that as time elapses, source texts are more likely to be reinterpreted through the values of the present (Stam 2000: 57). In Jesus films, this denotes a change in the representation of scriptures every time a new film is produced due to change in the environment and culture surrounding the production crew. Humphries-Brooks Stevenson (2006) is of the same view. In his analysis of Jesus in the American cultural lens, he argues that there are so many distinct adaptations of Jesus' story but all alluding to America's contemporary society since the bible is interpreted using the values of the present day America (Humphries-Brooks 2). This argument rings true to the selected Jesus films examined in this study.

In *Jesus Christ superstar*, Jesus is interpreted in the values of the 1960s secular culture which sought to interpret him as a normal human being rather than God. He is interpreted as a Superstar as opposed to the biblical son of God who is a Savior. Jesus sings rock and roll; one of the "coolest" music genre of the American people at the time. The modern cultural lens is further evident in the way his followers contract his name. Instead of Jesus Christ, they refer to him as **J.C**. When following him to Jerusalem, the crowds question him, "*Hey, J.C; would you die for me?*" The followers turn into Jesus' fan base since he is a Superstar. The peak of the cultural infiltration is witnessed in the temple where Jesus fights and chases away money lenders. Biblically, the episode is in the book of Matthew which says,

> "*And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all of them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves*" (Matthew 21:12).

The book of John also gives the same account.

> "*and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money and overthrew the tables*" (John 2:15).

Though slightly different, the two accounts share trading of goods and money changing. In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Norman Jewson creates a modern market distinct from what is portrayed in the gospels. Traders deal in postcards, drugs, military weapons, contemporary foreign currency and prostitutes who erotically seduce potential buyers.

Jesus Christ superstar conforms to Kamilla Elliot's Ventriloquist concept of adaptation where the source text becomes a "dead corpse" and is enriched by the film (Elliot 143,144). The four gospels

are dead corpses which are enriched by the modern society of the 70s. Bakker (2009) argues that by using the form of the musical and modern music, the producer's intention was to give a new contemporary interpretation of Jesus.

In *King of Kings*, DeMille's interpretation of scriptures is influenced by the cultural values of the middle class and traditional churches. Richard Stern et al as cited in Bakker (2009) note that "DeMille's portrayal of Jesus reminds one of the Jesus as portrayed in Sunday school: the first sequences show a soft featured, welcoming man, bathed in light. He is the Jesus of our intimate thoughts." (Bakker 4). It is argued that this portrayal is inspired by the conservative traditional church that sees Jesus as a father. This can further explain why the director casts a fifty year old Henry Warner to portray the character of Jesus rather than someone who would portray Jesus' actual age.

In *The Passion of Christ*, Mel Gibson exploits Hollywood tradition of sadism and plot structure in which the action hero faces extreme torture but becomes a victor in the last phase of the film. Jesus in the film is a hero that is scourged but becomes a victor in the end. Whereas Jesus' brutal scourging can be traced in Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15 and John 19:1, Gibson's emphasis of sadism as a central focus of the movie minimizes the reason behind the scourging and emphasizes sadism. This denotes that Jesus' teachings, miracles and purpose on earth is not as paramount as his suffering. The structure of a Hollywood narrative is further evident in the last shots of Jesus. The producer juxtaposes the close up shot of his face and his scars to emphasize victory. With no hint of what is next, Jesus stands up and walks away. This fits into Hollywood's star persona that never dies and always wins the battle (Ruth O'Donnell, 2012)

Menaul's *Killing Jesus* (2015) evidences the contemporary American/Hollywood secular culture which produces Jesus films as biopics that regard Jesus as historical figure rather than God as the

Bible portrays him. The emphasis of Jesus' humanness and the silencing of his divinity suggest that the producer's cultural lens is centered on history rather than the Bible.

While Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* is acclaimed to have brought a new canonical Christ who appeals to a broad cross section of traditional people composed of mainly Evangelicals and Roman Catholics (Bakker 2009), the Hollywood culture is evident in its restaging of the character of Jesus. The physical attributes given to the character of Jesus demonstrate the idea of a true male in an American context. Just like an ideal man in pop culture images, Jesus is seen to have blue eyes, blonde hair and is definitely white.

It is evident that Jesus films present the biblical records in the mirror of the culture surrounding their production. This explains why they are distinct from each other yet they are based on the same biblical material. It can thus be argued that the filmic renditions of the Bible tell us more about the culture they were produced in rather than the historical culture of Jesus and the bible. This ultimately makes the films' fidelity claims unauthentic.

3.6 Funding and the political economy

Quality film projects require heavy investment. This is attributed to costuming, make up, set design, creativity, editing, special effects, great locations and a good script all of which require huge amounts of money. It can thus be argued that the more funds available for the producers, the better the quality of the film produced. Robert Stam (2000) is of the same view. He argues that the film form requires a huge budget due to the nature of its production that involves "a crew of four or five people and at a maximum, a cast and crew and support staff of hundreds" (56). This is in contrast with the literary form that predominantly is manned by a single author. In the production of Jesus films, Bakker (2009) notes that during the early period of Jesus films, "film makers were

always preoccupied with obtaining funding for their projects. If they did not find people willing to invest in their projects, they were cancelled" (2). He further contends that this affected fidelity to the Bible as the desire to please the audience was the producer's aim rather than strict adherence to the Bible as investors were interested in regaining their money.

In reference to DeMille's *The King of Kings*, it can be argued that the representation of an old Jesus was intended to attract an audience that would identity with Jesus as a fatherly figure. In the mirror of this approach, later Jesus films adopt a similar interpretation of the history and biblical reference of the Jesus depending on the target audience that would facilitate box office success for investors to regain their returns. *Jesus Christ Superstar* screens a rock and roll Jesus to appeal to the 1960s American culture with its continuing swing in faith and religion to secularism. Tim Rice; one of the script writers of the film reported that the it was titled *Jesus Christ Superstar* because the word "Superstar" was " a hot new buzz word" which made Jesus the rock star and was the engine behind the film's success since it resonated with people and culture of the time (Pirovich Ivo, 2015). The desire to connect with the culture of the time intimates audience appeal for box office success. Franco Zeffirelli's and Mel Gibson's emphasis of the role of Mary in the life of Jesus identifies the Catholic Church and Catholics as the target audience that propels the financial success of the films. Their emphasis of Mary is referred to as "Mary's symbolic connection with Jesus as co-redeemer, following the Roman Catholic theological perspective that Mary participates in salvation of mankind" (Staley and Walsh, 2007: 153). Mel Gibson himself frankly accepted that he used extra-biblical material, specifically the many details taken from *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by a Roman Catholic Augustinian Canoness (Grace 2005:54)

Like other films, the success of Jesus film adaptations depends on the degree of investment into their production. This makes them business projects since investors have to regain their cash back

by the end of the project. This ultimately means that the films have to appeal to the target audience rather the bible if they are to make sales. As evidently seen above, Norman Jewson's target audience was the rock star audience of the 70s, DeMille targeted the traditional church of the 20s, Zeffirelli and Mel Gibson targeted the Catholic Church. The desire to connect to the targets audience at the expense of strict adherence to the bible sees fidelity in Jesus movies an impossible task.

3.7 Time limitation

Like all film adaptations, Jesus films are prone to time limitations. Literary texts face no time limitations since they are written by a single author with a luxury of writing as many pages as possible to narrate a single story. Contrary, film makers condense written words of the same story into a screen play script to be filmed within a few minutes or hours. Robert Stam (2000) exemplifies this in reference to Leo Tolstoy's novel, *War and Peace* (1869). He argues that if a film maker is to adapt it while following every detail, it would be transformed into a thirty hour film. Accordingly, film makers condense the plot to create a motion picture of at least two hours. Jesus films contend with cinematizing one of the four gospels while paying close attention to every event, character, setting and atmosphere. Alternatively, they can cinematize the four gospel accounts into one film. Franco Zeffirelli in his *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) produces a six and a half hour film in an attempt incorporate all the four gospels in one film. However, due to time constraints, a number of events from the four accounts are omitted. Such is Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness and temptation (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12-13 & Luke 4:1-13), Jesus' life after resurrection (Mark 16:9-15; Luke 24:10-12; Luke 24:13-35 & John 21:1-25). Regarded as the longest Jesus film ever made, significant events in the four accounts such as these are omitted which can be attributed to time limitation.

Relatedly, DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927) runs for 155 minutes while incorporating the four gospel accounts as evidenced through direct quotation of scriptures from the four gospels in the intitles. However, deletions that the bible depicts as important in the ministry of Jesus are made. Such is the nativity of Jesus in the accounts of Matthew and Luke and the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:1-28; Luke 3: 1-20 & John 1:15-36). Mel Gibson in *The Passion of Christ* (2004) limits the plot to only Jesus' arrest, trial before Caiaphas, trial before Pilate, the unbearable scourging, crucifixion and a glimpse of the resurrection in 126 minutes. *Jesus Christ Superstar* screens the life of Jesus in 107 minutes. There is no Jesus' nativity, no single miracle performed and no resurrection at the end of the film. Christopher Menaul's *Killing Jesus* runs for 132 minutes and too omits Jesus' nativity and grossly shies away from his resurrection.

The above instances of shortening and restructuring the biblical material to fit into short motion pictures that can be watched within a few minutes or hours further conform to Leitch's (2009) ''adjustment'' theory of film adaptation. In the process of turning a text into a motion picture, he argues that there is ''compression'' where ''a great deal of systematic elision and omission'' is done in order to reduce a text with many pages into a few hours of a film (99). Jesus films subscribe to this theory since they are compressed to fit into a reasonable time frame that movie goers can persist. Ultimately, producers should not claim fidelity or authenticity to the bible since a lot is omitted from the bible.

3.8 Producers' viewpoint and interpretation

When reading the bible, every person draws a position or perspective from which they think and understand it. It is from their individual understanding and interpretation that they draw their viewpoint of what they have read and can then share it to the rest through various mediums and in this case through film. This denotes that there can be a myriad of viewpoints from various readers. Lloyd Baugh (1997) argues that the point of view of the film maker towards the biblical material regarding the bible heavily determines the degree of fidelity to it. In the process of making the film, he probes;

> "Is the artist a Christian believer or not? If yes, then what is the quality of that belief? Is it the faith of the fundamentalist who holds the literal truth of every word of the gospels, or is it a more enlightened belief which recognizes the complexity of literally genres and forms within the gospel?" (Baugh 1997: 4).

The above probing suggests that a film maker's viewpoint predetermines what is cinematized regarding the bible and the style in which it will be presented which helps to explain the various viewpoints of Jesus movies. In Jesus Christ Superstar, the artist's viewpoint is the one that recognizes cinematic license and creativity in style while approaching Jesus' story. The artist reinvents Jesus as a singer, superstar and human in the mirror of modernity. Whereas DeMille's, Zeffirelli's and Mel Gibson's viewpoints can be considered close to be biblical reality, their cinematic interpretation recognizes the complexity of literally genres and forms within the gospels. They concentrate on plot structure, coherence and development which sometimes leads to fiction. To create plot coherence between Juda Iscariot and Mary, DeMille creates a fictitious life style of Mary in the brothel. Mel Gibson creates flashbacks of Jesus' life with his mother to evoke pity and sympathy from the viewers while Zeffirelli creates a fictitious character in Zerah to betray Jesus.

Manual's viewpoint of Jesus is one of a human who lived and faced life's difficulties like a human being. The fact that a film depends on the film maker's quality of viewpoint and interpretation constrains fidelity since it may be wrong or biased.

3.8.2 A Clash of Viewpoints

In the event that the film production is in the hands of various stakeholders, it intimates a clash of viewpoints which is the case for Jesus films. Joshua Q. Axe (2015) argues that during the process of making a film adaptation, "it is an apparent and a logical assumption that there needs to be an agreement between the parties involved as to the degree of change and the form it will take"(Axe 2015). Jesus films' stakeholders may include producers, the directors, the audience, religious leaders, the cast and the crew who directly and indirectly determine the degree of alteration to be made in a film. Pamela Grace (2004) reports that during the production of The *King of Kings* (1927), DeMille faced consistent opposition from Jewish groups and pro-Jew American citizens who pressured him to eliminate or at least reduce the negative portrayal of Jews (Grace 2004:48). Evidently in the final production, DeMille attributes the death of Jesus to the high priest Caiaphas rather than the Jews according to the bible. Like DeMille, Mel Gibson faced accusations of Anti-Semitism during the shooting of *The Passion of Christ* (2004) and was too tasked to tone down his portrayal of Jews. In his interview with Dave Cooper at Rock Church in August 2010, Jim Caviezel who played Jesus in the film confessed that Mel Gibson constantly received calls confronting him about Anti-Semitism while at the set. Due to the power of stakeholders, later films conform to the standards set by *The King of Kings*. Whereas the four gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John who individually wrote their encounters with Jesus, DeMille, Mel Gibson, Franco Zeffirelli, Norman Jewson and Christopher Menaul negotiate with their stakeholders to determine the degree of change and the form it will take in their final film adaptations.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter set out to investigate the challenges and limitations of adapting the Bible into a motion picture. From the findings, it is evident that the process of transforming the Bible into film is one full of intricacies that lead to fiction, a great deal of deletion from the Bible, and ultimately, addition from extra materials that are based on neither the Bible nor the Christian tradition. The consistent claim to the Bible can thus be seen as a marketing tool to place the films beyond question. Without authenticity, not even the Bible, Jesus films too become blockbuster entertainment like other Hollywood movies. This underscores the difference between the literary text and the cinematic form that should be treated distinctly without claiming authority to the other; one of the debates of this study.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE IMPLICATION OF JESUS FILM ADAPTATIONS ON THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

</div>

4.0 Introduction

This chapter examined the impact of Jesus film adaptations on the Christian doctrine. It studied how Jesus' cinematic portrayals from Jesus films have influenced and inspired the audience's visual and supernatural interpretation of who Jesus is. The chapter further examined Jesus films from the Christian biblical theological perspective to establish the controversies between what is considered the divine inspired Holy Scriptures and their cinematic interpretations. It was not only based on the selected five Jesus films but also interviews and comments by actors and producers about the films. This was in the view of "paratexuality" concept of adaptation which suggests that a film adaptation is the totality of what is done during and post the production of the film, including the directors' and the casts' remarks, interviews, reviews and comments about the film that become part and parcel of the adaptation process (Stam, 2000: 65). To understand the impact of Jesus films adaptations on both the audience and the Christian doctrine, the chapter adopted the concept of "paratexuality" with the view that information regarding Jesus films post production was critical in understanding the extent to which they were viewed as references for biblical truth and accuracy. From the theological perspective, the chapter engaged other biblical books such as *Exodus* and *Revelations* apart from the gospels to understand the theological interpretation of Jesus films.

4.1 The Audiovisual Power of Jesus Films

The power of Jesus films on the Christian doctrine is remarkable. This lays in the power of the visual image that brings words to life and viewers are able to comprehensively respond to what is written. This power of Jesus films is rooted in Kamilla Elliot's (2003) incarnation concept of adaptation which underscores the fact that any written text is incomplete until it has been transformed into a film (Elliot 161). She argues that in written word is "partial expression of a more total representation that requires incarnation for its fulfillment" (Elliot 161). Bakker (2009) is of the same view in as far as the power of film is concerned. He argues that "the image a film projects has such a high measure of reality that those in the audience often have the impression that things happen as they see them. It is reality" (45). Pamela Grace (2004) further advances that most people "cannot contemplate the crucifixion without hearing Hollywood thunder and music" (47). This intimates that what viewers see on screen influences their perspective and understanding of who the biblical Jesus is. It can thus be argued that many Christians witnessing their savior on screen dying for their sins has led them to reflect on their faith.

Drawing from Robert Powell who acted Jesus in Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), the power of Jesus films as a reality to Christians can be demonstrated. In January 2016, Robert Powell cried out to people to stop idolizing and worshipping him as Jesus. In his own words he said,

> *I never cease to say and I repeat it to the world since 1977. I am not Jesus Christ, I am just an actor and British comedian. I am tired of seeing my photos displayed in places of worship. I just make a film for a living. Burn my picture and worship the only God in truth! I am just an actor……Jesus is Lord! (The News 2016).*

In an interview with Dave Cooper at Rock Church in August 2010, James Caviezel, an actor of Jesus in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* (2004) also reports that he is referred to as Jesus whenever he is walking on the streets. Throughout the interview, James Caviezel as a person is

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used interchangeably with Jesus. He speaks with authority to the congregation using the pronoun "I" to refer to himself in place of "He" to refer to Jesus. He ends the interview by inviting the congregation to Jesus is Aramaic; the language that was spoken by Jesus. This denotes reality. Jesus himself is inviting them to receive him.

Further, during the production of *The King of Kings* (1927), Henry B. Warner who played Jesus was treated like Jesus. He always took his meals alone and traveled to and from the set in a closed car when in costume so that he could fully be in the spirit of Jesus (Grace 49). In a way, he became Jesus on and off the set. In an interview with *TheGlobalDispatch* (2015), Haaz Sleiman; a Muslim actor in Killing Jesus (2014) claims that his connection to God became stronger after acting Jesus in the movie.

The digest above demonstrate the power of Jesus films as reality in as far as representing history, the bible and Jesus are concerned. It is evident that Jesus films provide a visual representation of Jesus whose physical appearance is not described in the bible. As result, the cinematic creation has been adopted as a biblical one and the two are actually used interchangeably. This is quite relevant to Kamilla Elliot's (2003) "De(re)composing" phenomenon of adaptation where "the novel and film decompose, merge and form a new composition"(157). According to this study, the Bible and Jesus film adaptations have decomposed, merged and formed a new composition. Kamilla Elliot further argues that the new composition is oftenly joined by other cultural narratives and the audience gets confused to which one is "the novel and which one is film" (157). In this study, there is a confusion to which one is the biblical Jesus and which one is the cinematic. Either way, there is suggestive evidence that both forms are used in the Christian doctrine.

4.2 Jesus Film Montage in Gospel Music Videos

Another aspect of the Christian doctrine that I find dependent on Jesus film adaptations are gospel music videos. Gospel music videos adopt cinematic Christ figures in Jesus film adaptations to spread the gospel to the target Christian audience. Through montage, the music videos assemble images from different Jesus films to accompany their lyrics for effectiveness of their message to the audience. An example of this is *O praise the name* (2015) by Hillsong edition for 2015 Easter. The video interplays its lyrics with images from Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* (2004). One of the passionate scenes in the video is when the editor showcases James Caviezel's bloody face with a crown of thorns alongside the lyrics, "His body bound and drenched in tears, they laid Him down in Joseph's tomb". The implication of this is that the audience unconsciously contemplates on James Caviezel's face as the Jesus being sung about by Hillsong. In the song, *Mary did you know?* (1984) Aiken utilizes a young Jesus from Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*. The singer asks, "Mary did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?" The lyrics are interplayed with a young blue eyed Jesus from *Jesus of Nazareth* implying that this is Mary's son the singer is asking about. Other music videos I found that utilize this same technique are Casting Crowns' *Who Am I* (chabel1982 YouTube Version) and *You Raise Me Up* (boleyz YouTube Version).

The lyrics which are brought to life by moving pictures from Jesus films emphasize Pamela Grace's (2004) viewpoint that Christians find it hard to contemplate about Jesus without the mediation of Hollywood depictions of the character of Jesus. This is reliable since video producers targeting a Christian audience to market cannot also think of a more believable Jesus in their content than the one in Hollywood Jesus films.

4.3 Jesus Film Montage on Social Media

Consequently, the cinematic portrayals of Jesus have also become a trend on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Images directly cut from Jesus films or ones that imitate Hollywood's Jesuses as shown in Jesus films are used by Christians to preach, encourage and meditate on their faith. The pictures below retrieved from Facebook posts and WhatsApp displays help to demonstrate this viewpoint.

Picture 1: An image of inspiration and motivation

Picture 2: A Jesus requesting to come into someone's life

Picture 3: Jesus Christ getting baptized

Picture 4: A comforting Jesus

Though the above pictures retrieved form social media are not directly cut from the selected films in this study, they mirror the nature of Jesus from a Hollywood lens which underscores the study's

claim. Peter Schmidt (2000) notes that in the 4th century, Christians depicted Jesus as a bearded man with long loose hair that symbolized divinity (Qtd in Bakker 55). Mathews Thomas (1999) argues that this portrayal was influenced by the images of Jupiter/Zeus, the king of Greek gods who lived on mount Olympus in the Greek mythology. As seen in the above four pictures being used to represent Jesus, he is bearded and has long loose hair

4.4 The Theological Implication of Jesus Films

The Christian doctrine is based on the Bible and considers every word in it as express instruction from God. Throughout the Bible, visual representations are highly condemned in favor of the written scriptures. This is embedded in the Ten Commandments and specifically the first two which warn Israelites against graven images. The first commandment states, "thou shalt have no other gods before me"(Exodus 20:3-4) which is followed by "thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth"(Exodus 20:3-4). My emphasis is on "graven images" which denote created pictures that should not be made imitating the spiritual nature of God. In film making, we deal with motion pictures which are created by a film producer to make a continuous flow of pictures that tell a story. In other words, Jesus film producers create moving cinematic images to represent the likeness of Jesus (who is considered as God) on screen which the bible itself prohibits.

Ella Shohat's (2004) study advances theological arguments against graven images which present a series of challenges in portraying the nature of God's image.

> ''(1) the fear of substituting the images itself for God, and thus committing idolatry-worshipping the object ''standing in'' for God rather than God; (2) the fear of portraying God inaccurately in a kind of failed mimesis or wrongful representation; (3) the fear of embodying an infinite God in finite materials; (4) the fear of portraying God in shapes and forms made by finite humans; (5) the fear of giving 'flesh' to God; and ultimately, (6) the fear of representing the unrepresentable, that which is above and beyond representation,''(Shohat 2004:26).

Theologically, Jesus film adaptations are faced with similar challenges in an attempt to portray God through motion images which contravene the Bible's express instruction on graven pictures. Applying Shohat's theological viewpoints to Jesus films, there are a number of controversies between the bible and Jesus films as motion pictures in Jesus' cinematic representation.

4.4.1 Worshiping the Object Rather than God

Ella Shohat's first argument against graven images is "the fear of substituting the images itself for God, and thus committing idolatry-worshipping the object ''standing in'' for God rather than God" (Shohat 2004:23). Hollywood images of Jesus have in the long run substituted the image of the biblical Jesus. Robert Powell, an actor of Jesus in Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* proves this claim when he tells his followers to stop worshipping him rather the real Jesus*!"(The News 2016).* James Caviezel who played Jesus in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* also claims that he is always referred to as Jesus whenever he is seen on streets. During the production of *King of Kings* (1927), Henry B. Warner a character who played Jesus was treated like a god. He always took his

meals alone and travelled to and from the set in a closed car when in costume (Grace 49). From the theological viewpoint, the three actors substitute Jesus since they are worshiped in place of the biblical Jesus: an act equivalent to idolatry according to the first and second commandment.

4.4.2 Portraying God Inaccurately

Shohat's second, third and fourth arguments create related challenges against Jesus film adaptations. "the fear of portraying God inaccurately in a kind of failed mimesis or wrongful representation; the fear of embodying an infinite God in finite materials and the fear of portraying God in shapes and forms made by finite humans." The striking contrast between the Hollywood Jesuses and the biblical Jesus suggest that Jesus is inaccurately represented. Jesus films give the audience a tangible visual body inform of actors selected to portray Jesus thus "embodying an infinite God" in finite carnal bodies on one hand and edited cinematic images on the other. Further, the costumes and make-up designed for actors who portray Jesus create "a god made by humans".

4.4.3 Representing the unrepresentable.

The fifth and sixth theological arguments presented are: "The fear of giving 'flesh' to God; and ultimately, the fear of representing the unrepresentable, that which is above and beyond representation.'' All Jesus characters in Jesus films are in the flesh of human beings that represent God who is beyond representation. In *King of Kings* (1927), Jesus is in the flesh of Henry B. Waner who is deceased as of 2019, in the flesh of Robert Powell in *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), In *The Passion of the Christ* in James Caviezel who later takes a role in the hit series *Person of Interest* (2011-2016) as a police officer. He is the superstar in form of Ted Neeley in *Jesus Christ superstar* (1973). He is a Muslim in Haaz Sleiman in *Killing Jesus* (2015). In these portrayals, Kamilla Elliot's concept of incarnation where the word becomes flesh is evident. Jesus is incarnated in

different forms of flesh and is visually accessible. Whereas Shohat's theological perspective condemns representing that which is beyond representation, Jesus is represented.

4.4 Addition and Subtraction

This Bible strongly condemns any subtraction and addition to scriptures written in it. The Book of Revelation bluntly states;

> ''for I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev: 22:18).

It goes further to say;

> ''and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev: 22:19)

Evidently, by the nature of film adaptation, Jesus films add and remove from the Bible. As discussed in chapter three, Jesus films are constrained by time and budget in creating a film that covers all the gospel episodes. As a result, producers condense the plot to create a reasonable film in a reasonable time frame to show what they want the audience to see or know. In that process, a systematic deletion is done. Further, in their attempt not to portray Jews as responsible for the Jesus' crucifixion, the selected Jesus films either add a fictitious plot to put the blame away from them or remove the scripture completely (refer to the fear of anti-Semitism in chapter three). Theologically, producers of Jesus films have both added to and removed from the bible which announces divine punishment for it.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to investigate the impact of Jesus film adaptations on the Christian doctrine. The findings suggest that Jesus films have had a significant impact on the Christina doctrine. This is rooted in their visual power of incarnating what is written in scriptures on screen for the Christians to witness scriptures in flesh. Consequently, the films have been adopted in the doctrine as references for biblical truth. Filmic Christ figures represent the biblical Jesus as they are used to preach, motivate and meditate. However, the theological perspective based on the bible decrees against the very films that purport to represent the bible and equates them to idolatry.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 Introduction

This study set out to investigate the infidelity of Hollywood Jesus films in the portrayal of Jesus and scriptures on screen. In order to do this, four research questions were constructed; How are the Hollywood cinematic ''Jesuses'' different from the biblical Jesus? What are the challenges that come up with adapting the sacred text such as the Bible into motion picture/film? In which instances do the cinematic scriptures contradict the literary biblical scriptures? What are the positive and negative effects of Jesus film adaptations on the Christian doctrine? In this chapter, I summarize key findings and suggest recommendations in as far as Jesus films and fidelity to the Bible is concerned. I further suggest areas for further studies and finally draw a conclusion of the research findings.

5.1 Summary of findings

Findings are summarized as the distinct nature of the biblical Jesus and cinematic "Jesuses", the challenges and limitations of adapting the bible into a motion picture and finally, the implication of Jesus film adaptations on the audience and the Christian doctrine.

5.1.1 The distinct nature of the biblical Jesus and cinematic "Jesuses"

The findings suggest that the filmic representation of Jesus is unfaithful to the bible since his cinematic versions are not inspired by the Bible itself rather the producers' creativity and imaginations that are based on their viewpoint and cultural contexts.

From the selected Jesus films analyzed, Jesus' human nature is emphasized at the expense of his deity. The human nature is portrayed through human emotions like anger, irrationality, pessimism, unbelief, frustration and his inability to perform miracles. It is further underscored by his failure to resurrect. This contravenes the biblical records which showcase him as God incarnated into flesh, the only begotten son of God, the redeemer, the beginning and the end, miracle worker and he who overcame death through resurrection.

The study further established that the portrayal of Jesus on screen is inspired by ancient portrayals of Zeus in Greek mythology as a bearded man with loose hair (Peter Schmidt, 2000 & Matthews Thomas, 1999). Ultimately, he is portrayed as a Hollywood hero who overcomes humiliation and torture not as a Lamb of God who will come to judge the living and the dead.

5.1.2 The challenges and limitations of adapting the Bible into a motion picture

The study established that the process of transforming the Bible into film is one full of intricacies that lead to fiction, a great deal of deletion from the bible and ultimately addition from extra materials based on neither the Bible nor the Christian doctrine. Due to the fear of anti-Semitism, Jesus films shy away from portraying that Jews condemned Jesus to the cross thus they delete Matthew 27:25 on screen. The films reorganize biblical events across the four gospels to cinematize a single coherent story through emplotment which leads to fictional plots created to form a realistic plot with a cause and effect chain. Furthermore, the study establishes that films shy away from some miracles in the Bible and choose to cinematize others depending on the producers' purpose and interpretation of the scriptures. More complex is the issue of the cultural influence as Jesus film producers cinematize biblical records in the mirror of the culture surrounding their production. Films tell us more about the culture they are produced in rather than

the biblical historical Jesus. The study further establishes that the fidelity of Jesus films depend on the degree of investment into production which makes them business projects since investors have to regain their money and its returns. This ultimately means that the films have to make sales. Consequently, the films are prone to time limitations. They shorten and restructure the biblical material to fit into short motion pictures that can be watched within a few minutes. As a result, a lot is omitted from the bible further contravening fidelity. Finally, the study also finds that a film maker's viewpoint predetermines what is cinematized regarding the bible and the style in which it is presented. This explains the various distinct cinematic portrayals of Jesus and scriptures yet they are all based on the same bible. Clashing viewpoints amongst film production stakeholders influence the degree of change that the film adaptation takes. These issues portray the consistent fidelity claim to the bible is one only meant to place them beyond question and can be considered Hollywood blockbuster entertainment rather than visual bibles.

5.1.3 The implication of Jesus film adaptations on the Christian doctrine

The study established that Jesus films have had a significant impact on the Christian doctrine. This is rooted in their visual power of incarnating what is written in scriptures in flesh. Cinematic Christ figures are used to represent the biblical Jesus as they are used to preach, motivate and meditate. However, the biblical instructions from the books of Exodus and Revelations, the Bible itself decrees against the very films that purport to represent it on screen and equates them to idolatry.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, I suggest the following recommendations regarding Jesus films and fidelity to the Bible and areas for further research.

5.2.1 To Jesus films and fidelity to the Bible

It is evident that the cinematic form is distinct from the literary form thus the two cannot portray the same account in as far as Jesus and scriptures are concerned. For Jesus films not to be charged with issues of infidelity to the Bible, the producers should deviate from claiming biblical accuracy and instead defend their films as individual artistic forms of expression. Within the context of the Christian doctrine, Jesus film adaptations especially those used for evangelism should be portrayed as support material that visually aid the understanding of the Bible rather than Bible equivalents.

5.2.2 For further research

This study limited itself to examining Jesus films that are generally based on the four gospels. Further studies can be conducted on Jesus films that are based on specific gospels with a word for word production approach considered as a marker for fidelity. Such include Philip Saville's *The Gospel of John* (2003) and Regardt's *Visual Bible: Matthew* (1993). Further research can also be made on other biblical adaptations such as *The Visual Bible: Acts* (1994); a word for word adaptation of the book of acts and other Old Testament adaptations. This will broaden the debate of fidelity in as far as film and the Bible are concerned.

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