

# +St. John the Evangelist Orthodox Church

Antiochian Archdiocese of North America

Metropolitan Saba of New York and all North America

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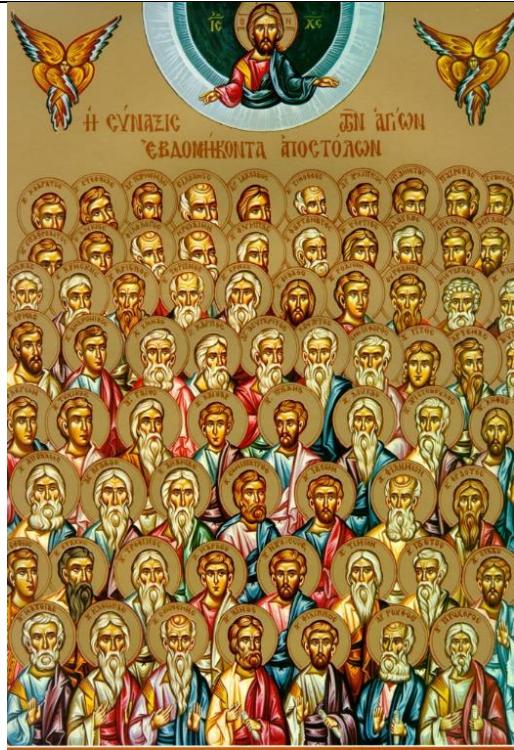
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**SUNDAY, JANUARY 04, 2026**

**TONE 5 / EOTHINON 8; FOREFEAST OF &  
SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY OF CHRIST**

SYNAXIS OF THE SEVENTY HOLY APOSTLES; VENERABLE THEOKTISTOS OF SICILY

**HAPPY AND BLESSED NEW YEAR!**



On January 4 in the Holy Orthodox Church, we prepare to celebrate the Theophany (Epiphany) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we celebrate the Synaxis of the holy Seventy Apostles.

In addition to the twelve Great Apostles, the Lord chose seventy other, lesser apostles and sent them to preach to the Jews. He sent them out two by two before His face, to each town and place, saying: "Behold, I send you as sheep among wolves" (Luke 10:1-5). But as Judas, one of the Twelve, fell away from the Lord, so some among these

Seventy withdrew from Him, not with the intention of betraying Him but from human weakness and lack of faith (John 6:66). The apostles elected new ones to take the fallen apostles' places. These Seventy labored in the same way as the twelve Great Apostles; they were the assistants of the Twelve in the spreading and strengthening of the Church of God in the world. They suffered much torture and malice, from men and from demons, but their firm faith and burning love for the risen Lord made them conquerors of the world and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. On this day, we also commemorate Venerable Theoktistos of Sicily.

## THE EPISTLE

*O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.*

*Unto Thee will I cry, O Lord, my God.*

### **The Reading from the Second Epistle of St. Paul to St. Timothy. (4:5-8)**

Timothy, my son, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.

عَجِيبٌ هُوَ اللَّهُ فِي قَدِيسِيهِ. خَلَصْ يَا رَبُّ شَعْبَكَ وَبَارِكْ مِيرَاثَكَ.

إِلَيَّكَ يَا رَبُّ أَصْرُخُ إِلَهِي.

**فَصَلُّ مِنْ رِسَالَةِ الْقِدِيسِ بُولُسَ الرَّسُولِ الثَّانِيَّةِ إِلَى تِيمُوْثَاوُسِ. (4:5-8)**

يَا وَلَدِي تِيمُوْثَاوُسَ، تَيَقَّظْ فِي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَاحْتَمِلِ الْمَشَقَّاتِ، وَاعْمَلْ عَمَلَ الْمُبَشِّرِ، وَأَوْفِ خِدْمَتَكَ. أَمَّا أَنَا فَقَدْ أُرِيقَ السَّكِيبُ عَلَيَّ وَوَقْتُ اِنْحِلَالِي قَدْ اِقْتَرَبَ. وَقَدْ جَاهَدْتُ الْجِهَادَ الْحَسَنَ، وَأَتَمَّتُ شَوْطِي، وَحَفِظْتُ الْإِيمَانَ. وَإِنَّمَا يَبْقَى مَحْفُوظًا لِي إِكْلِيلُ الْعَدْلِ الَّذِي يَجْزِينِي بِهِ فِي ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ الرَّبُّ، الْدَّيَانُ الْعَادِلُ، لَا إِيَّاهُ فَقَطُّ، بَلْ جَمِيعَ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ ظُهُورَهُ أَيْضًا.

## THE GOSPEL

### **The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark. (1:1-8)**

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “After me comes He Who is mightier than I, the strap of Whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

## فصلٌ شَرِيفٌ مِنْ بِشَارَةِ الْقِدْسِ مَرْقُسُ الْأَنْجِيلِيِّ الْبَشِيرِ وَالْتَّمِيزُ الطَّاهِرُ. (1:1-8)

بَدْءُ إِنْجِيلِ يَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحِ ابْنِ اللَّهِ كَمَا هُوَ مَكْتُوبُ فِي الْأَنْبِيَاءِ: "هَاءَنَا مُرْسِلٌ مَلَكِيْ أَمَامَ وَجْهِكُمْ يُهَبِّي طَرِيقَكُمْ قَدَّامَكُمْ. صَوْتُ صَارِخٍ فِي الْبَرِّيَّةِ: أَعِدُّوا طَرِيقَ الرَّبِّ وَاجْعَلُوا سُبْلَهُ قَوِيمَةً." كَانَ يُوحَنَّا يُعْمَدُ فِي الْبَرِّيَّةِ وَيَكْرِزُ بِمَعْمُودِيَّةِ التَّوْبَةِ لِغُفْرَانِ الْخَطَايَا. وَكَانَ يَخْرُجُ إِلَيْهِ جَمِيعُ أَهْلِ بَلْدِ الْيَهُودِيَّةِ وَأُورْشَلِيمَ فَيَعْتَمِدُونَ جَمِيعَهُمْ مِنْهُ فِي نَهْرِ الْأَرْدَنِ، مُعْتَرِفِينَ بِخَطَايَاهُمْ. وَكَانَ يُوحَنَّا يَلْبِسُ وَبَرَ الْإِبْلِ وَعَلَى حَقْوَيْهِ مِنْطَقَةً مِنْ جِلْدِهِ، وَيَأْكُلُ جَرَادًا وَعَسَلًا بَرِّيًّا. وَكَانَ يَكْرِزُ قَائِلًا: إِنَّهُ يَأْتِي بَعْدِي مَنْ هُوَ أَقْوَى مِنِّي، وَأَنَا لَا أَسْتَحِقُ أَنْ أَنْهَنَّيَ وَأَحْلَلَ سَيِّرَ حِذَايَهِ. أَنَا عَمَدْتُكُمْ بِالْمَاءِ، وَأَمَّا هُوَ فَيُعَمِّدُكُمْ بِالرُّوحِ الْقُدُسِ.

### Upcoming Events

January 4th	Sunday January 4th we will have the service of the blessing of water in anticipation of the feast of Epiphany.
January 5th	Monday at 6 pm Evening Divine Liturgy to celebrate the feast of Epiphany. عيد الظهور الالهي (الغطاس).
February 7th	<b>Crab Feed:</b> This year we are proud to have our 44th Annual Crab Feed at our NEW St. John Hall. Saturday February 7th, 2026. Please SAVE THE DATE, and let us celebrate together to make it as successful as possible!
February 15th	1 year memorial on February 15th in memory of George Wahbeh. May his memory be eternal!

### Coffee Hour

January 4th	Samia and Elias Shaheen in memory of Samia's father, Badi Ibrahim, (5 yrs). May his memory be eternal!
January 11th	Nicola family for 6 month memorial service for Najat Nicola
January 18th	Yowakeem and Kashou Family for six month memorial of Aida Yowakeem
January 25th	Jill Norgaard for 3 year memorial of Dwight Underhill. May his memory be eternal!

### Day Trip/Pilgrimage to Holy Assumption Monastery: Saturday, January 17th

[Holy Assumption Monastery](#) in Calistoga, 1519 Washington St., Calistoga

#### Approximate schedule

11am: Arrive and explore the grounds (the monastery has birds, cats, ducks, a koi pond and a wonderful bookstore)  
12:15pm: 6th hour  
12:45pm: lunch  
1:30pm: children's activities  
3:30: Wrap-up & group photo  
4:00: Depart

Additionally, there will be a vigil at 5pm and anyone is welcome to stay, but the nuns recognize that with smaller children, it's much easier for families to get home on the earlier side. The monastery will be providing lunch. Donations to the monastery are welcome. Dress is modest. Please [RSVP here](#) so the sisters can make plans for lunch and the craft. If you can include the names of family members attending, along with the children's ages and if there are any food allergies or dietary restrictions that would be helpful. **Please RSVP ASAP by December 17th.**

I hope to see you there! Please let Irene know if you have any questions: Irene Guajardo: 925-413-3242, [iyriini.nino@gmail.com](mailto:iyriini.nino@gmail.com)

## Dave & Buster's Campaign

Our Dave & Buster's champaign got extended so we can maximize on our return. We are currently at \$700.00  
How it works:

1. Place an order using St. John link.
2. 50% of each Dave & Buster's Power Card purchased is donated back to the organization.
3. Visit any Dave & Buster's location to pick up your Power Card and start playing!

## Talent Night

After the holidays I'd like to put together a talent night for anyone who would like to participate. Pianists, instrumentalists, Singers, Dancers etc. I'd like to get an idea if we have any interest in "Putting on a show" in our new hall! Please call me and let me know what your talent is. It's important to share your talents in life, especially with our beloved St John family. All ages welcome. ❤ Lynn Farradj 925-323-5746

### Holy Oblations

This week, Holy Oblations are offered by:

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Nick Nicola, Sandy Dudum, George Messih, George Adranly, Fred Addas, Henriette Hilal, Souhad Halaka, George Cawog, Sam Nassab, Sue Gideon, Rocky Dudum and Norma Khalil.**

Many years!

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Hala (Sandra) Mitry**. Many years!

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Nadia Frangieh** Many years!

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Bradley Youakim**. Many years!

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of all **musicians in our church**. Many years!

† Rania Shuhaber and family for the good health of **Mikhail Shuhaber**. Many years! May their memory be eternal!

† Siham Mitry and family in memory **Donna Potter**. May her memory be eternal!

### Candles for the altar table and in front of the icons of Christ and the Theotokos offered by:

† Ibrahim Fasheh in memory of Hanada Fasheh for one full year. May her memory be eternal!



† Altar Servers:  
Nathan Sweis, Clayton Morgan, Elias Freij, Angelo Freij, Andrew Freij, Mazyn Haddadin, James Dudum, John Dudum, David Evans, Evan Kawar, Mason Kawar, Jonathan Juha, Maron Juha and Zaiden Karanikola



Poinsettia plants to adorn the Royal Doors in Loving Memory of: Nick Sr. And Helen Nicola offered by Nick Jr., Ron Nicola and Georgianna Rishwain and families

**St. John Orthodox Church  
501 Moraga Way  
Orinda, CA 94563**

You could use this QR code for your donation



# FAMILY GAME NIGHT

Potluck

Come ready to play, laugh, and  
enjoy some time together!

ALL AGES ARE WELCOME!

SATURDAY JAN. 10TH  
5:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Bring some games to play and  
your favorite dish  
St. John Banquet Hall



# **Dave & Buster's Power Cards**

## **to Support**

### **St. John Church**



**50% Donated Back**



**December 31**



<https://grouprai.se/davebusters59958s>

## **On Religious Cinema**

*By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)*

With the ongoing rise and spread of movies and television series, the production of religious films follows this trend. The approach to depicting religious events on screen varies depending on the production entity behind them. As the “seventh art”<sup>1</sup> developed, the number of production houses multiplied, and cinematic technology reached levels close to the fantastic. Because religious matters are among the most significant fields of human concern, across religions and sects, it is natural that the dramatic arts would follow religious themes though for different reasons.

Like any art form, religious art is used for purposes of evangelization, education, documentation, and to promote the beliefs upheld by the producers. Neutrality is rare, especially in this field. In our times, both private and public institutions, even official bodies, compete to present this type of art because it attracts large audiences and stirs the emotions of the religiously inclined in general. Thus, it is now almost impossible to find a screen that does not occasionally present something that touches on religious themes, especially in these troubled days, when appealing to religious emotions has become widely popular.

Religion has always been cautious regarding the depiction of sacred scenes, especially those involving the founder of the faith or its principal figures. Depicting historical, intellectual, or artistic topics usually receives greater acceptance. Yet the dominance of imagery in modern culture, the ease of production brought about by technological advancement, the renewed tendency to look to religion as a solution for the sufferings of contemporary humanity, the freedom with which private companies approach religious topics, and the eagerness of people to consume visual productions as they are—without examination or discernment—have all combined to produce serious

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<sup>1</sup> The term "seventh art" refers to cinema, which is considered an art form that synthesizes elements from the six previous arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance, and poetry.

problems, emotional reactions, and impactful (sometimes dangerous) stances, especially in religious societies marked by diversity of faiths and sects.

Cinematic portrayal often diminishes the spirit of reverence and devotion to which believers attach great importance. When a believer sees holy figures, whom he venerates and elevates, embodied by an actor (or actress), carrying the actor's features and personality, no matter how skilled, disappointment is almost inevitable, at least initially. Not to mention that the actor's image may persist in the believer's imagination and influence the purity of his prayer.

It is beyond doubt that learning about the personality of any prophet or messenger—and his teaching—through dramatic art does not allow the viewer to enter deeply into the authenticity and precision of that personality. The difference between encountering a world-renowned story through a book or through a film is immense. Describing emotions, situations, psychological analysis, motives, and the inner workings of the human soul cannot be condensed into approximately two hours of film, nor can they be conveyed with the richness that the writer's pen offers.

Dramatic art also requires sets, costumes, music, movements, excitement, and other elements intended to attract the viewer. When these are applied to a religious film, they inevitably serve the perspective of the producer or director. They may be inappropriate, inaccurate, or even falsified or fabricated. Watching a film is not the same as reading a book; the image remains imprinted in the viewer's mind, confined to the limited time of the screening, and plays upon the imagination in ways that can harm faith and spiritual disposition. Likewise, a wrong image can spread a distorted understanding of the religious doctrine portrayed.

Wherever images appear, whether in cinema, television, or modern social media, they form a vast field for implanting ideas that the producer wishes to promote through his work. Not all viewers can follow, notice, or discern these ideas, nor recognize their falsehood. Such implants are etched into the minds of viewers, who then believe them to be true, while they may be the exact opposite.

For example, in one film about the life of Christ, Joseph the Betrothed is shown as a handsome young man, whereas Christian tradition considers him elderly. The same film depicts the Virgin Mary dancing with him at their engagement celebration!

Cinematic production has become a widely used means to spread biased or incorrect ideas, forming false impressions and shaping public opinion about any subject political, historical, moral, and especially religious. Consider *The Last Temptation of Christ* and the uproar it caused. It is a cinematic rendering of a novel of the same name, written by a famous twentieth-century author who spent his life wrestling with the conflict between the sensual human being and the spiritual human being—between body and spirit. He projected his personal struggles onto the person of Christ—portraying Him merely as a man—while hundreds of millions of believers confess Him as God incarnate.

Believers today, living in an age overwhelmed by propaganda, must remain awake, alert, and discerning in all they see, lest they fall under the domination of the cinematic image and its potentially harmful influence on their faith.

Cinematic production in the West, in particular, has become extremely free, driven by various forces, and at times controlled by producers who are atheists, hostile to a particular religion, or intent on promoting a certain ideology. They insert into the film whatever images, words, music, or elements suit their aims. They may not hesitate to use deceptive methods to spread their ideas.

If we recognize the power that imagery has attained today, especially through modern propaganda, and acknowledge how difficult it has become to distinguish truth from falsehood, particularly in news media, then the necessary awareness becomes an urgent need.

In conclusion, dramatic portrayals of religious matters are often marred by inaccuracies—sometimes intentional, sometimes not. They must be approached with serious critical discernment, not watched naively or casually. You cannot protect yourself from falsehood by silencing the voice of others, but by growing in knowledge and continually seeking the truth.

## حول السينما الدينية

بقلم المتروبوليت سابا (اسبر)

مع انطلاق السينما، وانتشار المسلسلات التلفزيونية، راجت ظاهرة إنتاج الأفلام الدينية، واختلفت طريقة مقاربة الحدث الديني المصور بحسب جهة الإنتاج، التي تقف وراءه، وتعددت جهات الإنتاج، مع تطور الفن السابع<sup>1</sup>، وبلغ فن التصوير السينمائي تطوراً تقنياً وصل إلى حد الخيال. ولأن الأمور الدينية تشكل أحد الميادين الهامة عند البشر، على اختلاف أديانهم ومذاهبهم، فمن الطبيعي أن يلحق الفن التمثيلي بالمواضيع الدينية ، لدفافع مختلفة.

ككل فن، يستخدم الفن الديني لأغراض التبشير، والتعليم، والتوثيق، وترويج الاعتقاد الذي تنادي به الجهة التي تقف وراء إنتاجه. الحيادي نادر، خاصة في هذا الميدان. وقد وصل الأمر، في زمننا الحالي، حدّاً بات فيه هيئات، خاصة، وعامة، ورسمية، تتبارى في تقديم هذا النوع من الفن، لأنه يجذب عدداً وافراً من المشاهدين، ويدفع مشاعر المتدينين عموماً. فبــ لا تكاد ترى شاشة تخلو، من حين إلى آخر، من هذا النوع من ملامسة قضايا دينية، خاصة في هذه الأيام المشوّشة، التي باتت مخاطبة المشاعر الدينية رائجة فيها على نطاق واسع.

لطالما كان الدين حذراً تجاه تصوير المشاهد الدينية، خاصة، تلك التي تصوّر مؤسس الدين والشخصيات الرئيسية فيه. في حين يلقى تصوير المواضيع التاريخية والفكريّة والفنية قبولاً أفضل. لكن هيمنة الصورة، عموماً، على الثقافة الحديثة، وسهولة الإنتاج، بسبب التقدّم التقني، الذي لحق بهذا الفن، وعودة طرح الدين حلاً للكثير مما يعانيه إنسان اليوم، وتناول الشركات الفنية الخاصة للمواضيع الدينية، وحرية تناولها، حسبما يرى أي إنسان، وتلقف الناس للنتاج التصويري، كما هو، دونما فحص أو تدقيق، بات أمراً يستجلب إشكالات وانفعالات وموافق مؤثرة، وخطيرة في بعض الأحيان، خاصة في المجتمعات المتميّزة المتعدّدة الأديان والمذاهب.

يخفّف التصوير كثيراً من روح التقوى والتخشّع الذي يوليه المؤمنون أهمية كبرى. فحين يرى المؤمن الشخصيات التي يبجلها ويسمو بها إلى العلا، متجسدة في شخص ممثّل (أو ممثّلة)، وتحمل ملامحه ونفسيته، مهما كان بارعاً في أداء دوره، فإنه لا بدّ من أن يصاب بخيبة، ولو للوهلة الأولى. ناهيك عن مرافقة صورة الممثّل لمخيّلته، وتأثيرها على صفاء صلاته.

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<sup>1</sup> مصطلح الفن السابع يطلق على السينما التي تعتبر شكلاً من أشكال الفن الذي يجمع عناصر من ستة فنون: العمارة، النحت، الرسم، الموسيقى، الرقص، والشعر.

لا شك في أن التعرّف إلى شخصيّة أيّ نبيّ أو رسول، وإلى تعليمه، بواسطة الفن التمثيلي، لا يسمح للمشاهد بالدخول إلى عمق هذه الشخصية ومعرفتها بدقة. الفارق شاسع بين التعرّف على رواية عالميّة من الكتاب أو من السينما. فوصف المشاعر، والموافق، والتحليل النفسي، ووصف الدوافع وما يعتمل في النفس البشرية، لا يمكن أن يوجز في ساعتين مصوّرتين أو أكثر، ولا يمكن أن يُنقل بالغنى ذاته، الذي ينقله قلم الكاتب أو المؤلّف.

كذلك، يلزم الفن التمثيلي الديكور، والأزياء، والموسيقى، والحركات، والإثارة وما إليها من تشوّيقات تجذب المشاهد. هذه عندما توضع في خدمة فيلم ديني، فإنّها تُستعمل بما يخدم وجهة نظر المنتج أو المخرج، وقد لا تكون مناسبة، ولا صحيحة، لا بل قد تكون مزورة ومزيّفة مرات كثيرة. كما أنّ مشاهدة الفيلم ليست القراءة الكتاب؛ فتبقي الصورة منطبعة في ذهن المشاهد، المحصور بوقت العرض المحدود، وتلعب في مخيّلته، بما قد يؤذّي إيمانه و موقفه الروحي أحياناً. كذلك تنشر الصورة الخاطئة مفهوماً مغلوطاً عن العقيدة التي يمسّها الفيلم.

يشغل الصورة، إنّما وجدت سواء في السينما أو التلفزيون أو وسائل التواصل الحديثة، حقاً واسعاً لإدخال الأفكار، التي يريد المنتج ترويجها، من خلال إنتاجه. ولا يسع جميع المشاهدين متابعتها أو التنبّه إليها، أو معرفة زيفها. تنطبع هذه الإدخالات في ذهن المشاهدين، فيصدّقونها، معتبرينها حقيقة، بينما قد تكون عكس ذلك تماماً.

كمثال نجد في أحد الأفلام التي تروي سيرة المسيح يوسف الخطيب شاباً وسيماً، بينما يعتبره التراث المسيحي متقدّماً في السنّ. كذلك يصوّر الفيلم السيدة العذراء، وهي ترقص معه في حفل خطوبتها!

يُعتبر الإنتاج السينمائي وسيلةً واسعة الانتشار لبث الأفكار الخاصة والخاطئة، وتشكيل الانطباعات المزيّفة، وتوجيه الرأي العام بشأن أيّ موضوع، في السياسة والتاريخ والأخلاق وغيرها، وخاصة وكذلك في الموضوع الديني. لنذكر فيلم تجربة المسيح الأخيرة، والضجة التي أثارها. إنّه تصوّر سينمائي لكتاب يحمل العنوان ذاته، كتبه أديب مشهور، في القرن العشرين، قضى حياته يتساءل حول الصراع بين الإنسان الشهوانى والإنسان الروحاني، وبين الجسد والروح. أسقط مفاهيمه الخاصة، الناجمة عن نزاعه الرئيس هذا، على شخص المسيح باعتباره إنساناً فقط. بينما مئات الملايين من البشر يؤمنون به إلهًا متجرّداً.

يحتاج المؤمنون في زمن الدعاية الطاغي هذا، الذي نحيا فيه، إلى أن يكونوا صاحين، ومتيقظين، وناقدين لكلّ ما يرونّه، حتى يكونوا أحراراً من هيمنة الصورة السينمائية، ومن تأثيرها، سلباً، على معتقداتهم.

بات الإنتاج السينمائي في الغرب وخاصة، حراً جداً، وتحكم فيه أمور مختلفة، وأحياناً، منتجون ملحدون، أو يريدون محاربة دين ما، أو التبشير بمذهب ما، فيدخلون، في سياق الفيلم، ما يناسب أهدافهم، من صور وكلام وموسيقى، إلخ. وقد لا يتزدرون عن اتباع أساليب غير حقيقية، في سبيل نشر أفكارهم.

إذا ما عرفنا ما بلغه دور الصورة، التي توليه الدعاية، اليوم، أهمية عظمى، واعترفنا بصعوبة تمييز الصحيح فيها من الكاذب، وعلى الأخص في مجال الدعاية الإخبارية، سيصير الوعي المطلوب حاجة عظمى.

خلاصة الكلام، إن التصوير التمثيلي للقضايا الدينية غالباً ما يكون مشوباً بمعالطات، مقصودة أو غير مقصودة، يجب إعمال النقد الجدي فيها، لا مشاهدتها ببساطة وسذاجة. لا يمكنك حماية نفسك من المغالطات بإسكات صوت غيرك، وإنما بتنمية معرفتك، وبالبحث الدائم عن الحقيقة.