I believe that one of the roles of film in today’s society is the same as that of myth in ancient societies. Both seek to explain in everyday terms the meanings and mysteries of life and death. Every film in some way does this, but those such as *The Matrix* and its recent sequel *The Matrix Reloaded* stand apart from the rest. In the Journal of Religion and Film (October 2000), James Ford states, “It is impossible to know what narratives will become the foundation myths of our culture. But epic films like *The Matrix* are the modern-day equivalent of *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the epic of *Gilgamesh*... I know it may seem presumptuous to give such honor to a film that has not yet stood the test of time; however, I do think *The Matrix* saga addresses in an important way the ancient Christian heresy known as gnosticism.

Writing for a popular website www.killingthebuddha.com, Robin L. Zebrowski has compared the ideas presented in *The Matrix* to the ancient gnostic belief that “the creator of our world...is not the creator of the God of the great monotheistic traditions popular today. Instead, there was originally both a male and a female deity. The Mother, Sophia (“wisdom”), wanted to produce another creation, but did so on her own rather than with her partner. The resulting Demiurge was an abomination...[who became]...the creator of our world. He trapped the Spirit in matter, and mankind has been trying to escape, to get back to the true God, ever since.” Such a belief system led to an emphasis on knowledge (“wisdom”) over matter, with the result that matter (and thus flesh) was regarded as evil and in need of being overcome.

Today’s society, though, has no room for meddling deities, and so in the movie it is the machine called *The Matrix* that blinds the world and its inhabitants to true reality. Through knowledge, Neo, the protagonist, frees his mind and escapes the clutches of the machine. He begins to understand himself as the prophesied one who has been sent as a messiah to end the reign of the matrix and to free humanity from its clutches. Even though the god is different—machine instead of deity—the message in the context of gnosticism is still the same. Life is illusory, brief, and inconsequential and through special knowledge alone can be overcome.

There are obvious dangers, in the context of bioethics, in viewing our humanity as a machine in need of fixing and blood as irrelevant. The danger of gnosticism—and an underlying message of *The Matrix*—is to see our life in the flesh as irrelevant and to believe that real knowledge will enable us to get beyond our bodies, to stop or at least destroy them, and to treat the state of molecules that make up our body as less valuable than the mind. There are many reasons why *The Matrix* is fascinating. One is that it makes us confront the question of who we are and what we are becoming as a species.

Embryonic Stem Cells Used to Create Eggs (Constricting a belief long held by many that gametes could not be grown outside the body, a team of US and French researchers have grown mouse embryonic stem cells to produce mouse eggs. The researchers indicated that this is the first time embryonic stem cells have been shown to be capable of giving rise to develop blastocysts, the first stage of babyhood in both humans and mice. The researchers said that the research is an important step toward the goal of making human embryonic stem cells that can be used to generate human embryos, thus opening up new possibilities for research into ways to treat human diseases.)

Another transhumanist is a professor of cybernetics at the University of Reading in England. His name is also familiar to most—Cloning, Assisted Suicide, & Other Challenges in Bioethics (Tyndale, 2003). Available from CIBIO (see p. 7 of this newsletter) or the publishers.

The Church and a Truly Human Future

The Church is not the only one which has addressed the question of what it means to be human. The church must mount a massive campaign to educate the public about the consequences of genetic technology.

News from the Field

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