The field of religion and film has grown tremendously over the previous decade. Once the domain primarily of religion scholars, the discipline has attracted an increasing number of dedicated film scholars as well, offering more balance and strengthening the field. Christine Hoff Kraemer’s entry, “Film as Religion,” in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Film traces recent developments at the intersection of film and religion. She also cites Robert K. Johnston’s dialogic model for the relationship between religious people and film, from those who practice avoidance of the medium to those who view cinema as opportunities for divine encounters. Although the former may not be interested in a volume such as this one, those in the latter category (and in between) will find this text a convenient, if incomplete, reference.

With only ninety entries, Encyclopedia of Religion and Film does not quite live up to its title. Filmmakers, the category with the largest number of entries, include the usual suspects associated with religious themes (Robert Bresson, Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovsky) but also filmmakers one might not expect in a volume of this nature (Sergio Leone, Luc Besson, Mel Brooks, Michael Tolkin). Most of the world’s major religious traditions are covered, as well as every continent. Concepts (euchastrophe, posthumanism), religious traditions (Buddhism, Mormonism), genres (horror, science fiction), praxis (holidays, rituals), and characters and symbols (angels, God, Joan of Arc) also garner attention here. Only four films merit their own entries—The Last Temptation of Christ, The Matrix, The Miracle, and The Passion of the Christ. Most entries are roughly two thousand words, regardless of significance (there are more pages for “Voodoo” than “Jesus”).

Besides the entries on the canonical auteurs and global cinemas, some dedicated entries (e.g., “end-of-the-world films,” “missionary films”) address the marginalized Christian film industry, which has hitherto attracted scant research (save for Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke’s recently published Celluloid Sermons: The Emergence of the Christian Film Industry, [NYU Press, 2011], both contributors to the volume under discussion).
Encyclopedia of Religion of Film references almost two thousand films, with a commendable global scope. Despite its 2011 publication, more films from 2006 alone (22) are included than those from 2007 to the present (18), perhaps suggesting a long gestation period for Mazur’s project. Its contributors come from a variety fields as well as religious backgrounds.

The filmography, bibliography, and index consist of almost two hundred pages. In fact, the bibliography and “Further Reading” sections after each entry may be the most helpful features of this volume, pointing readers to the seminal works in film and religion, in addition to those devoted to specific subjects.

While not offering as much breadth in terms of the number of entries, the handy Encyclopedia of Religion and Film is still recommended for academic and public libraries, as well as for scholars of religion and film. Those researching religious elements in cinema from Robert Altman to westerns (or from Arabic cinema to vampires) may find it the best one-stop source of its kind. It is also the first step toward, hopefully, a more exhaustive, multi-volume project in the future.

Zachary Ingle
University of Kansas
ztingle@ku.edu