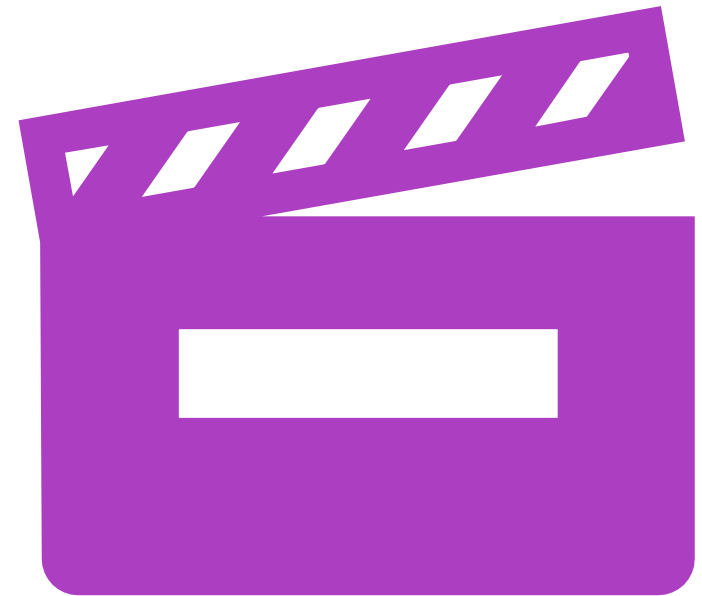
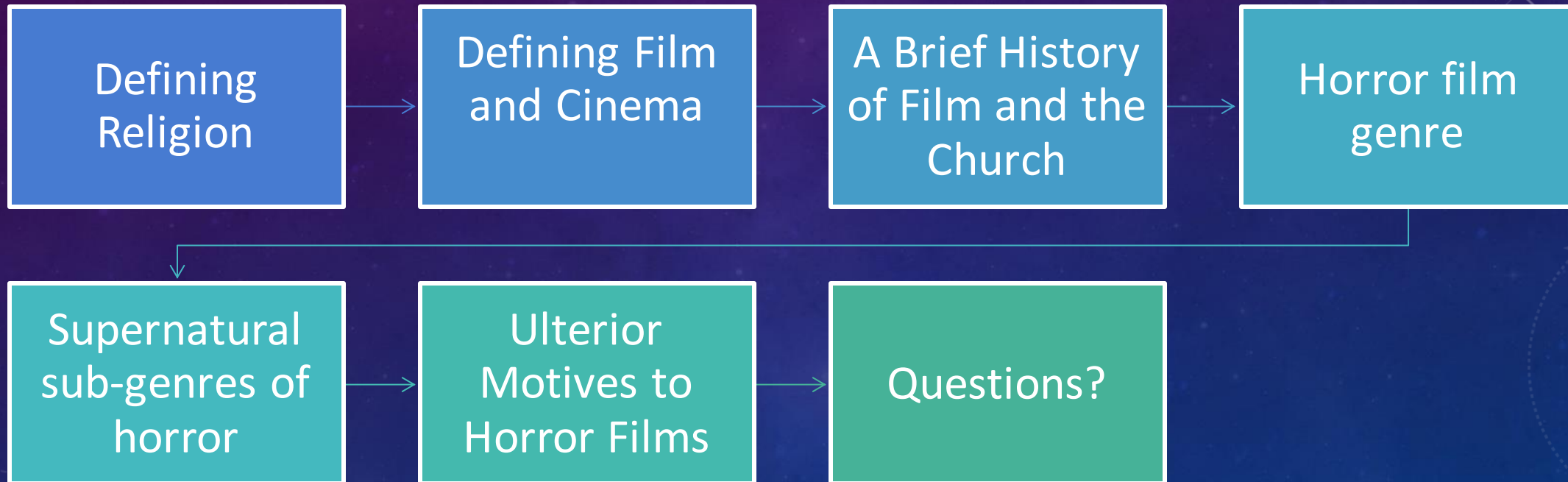


RELIGION IN HORROR FILMS

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CONTENTS



WHAT IS RELIGION?

“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practises relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practises which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them”(1).

-Emile Durkheim

(1) Durkheim, Emile: *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* New Translation by Karen E. Fields The Free Press, New York, US pg.24



FILM AND CINEMA DEFINED

Film:

“A story or event recorded by a camera as a set of moving images and shown in a cinema or on a television”⁽²⁾

Cinema:

“The production of films as an art, or industry”⁽³⁾

⁽²⁾ Oxford Dictionary Online: *Film*
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/film>

⁽³⁾ Oxford Dictionary online: *Cinema*
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/cinema>



A BRIEF HISTORY OF FILM AND THE CHURCH

- Thomas Edison (1847-1931) Created the Kinetograph camera & Kinetoscope machine
- Lumière Brothers, first paid exhibition at the Grand Café in Paris December 28th 1895
- 1898 The Brothers produced 'La Passion', the oldest surviving film in history
- Approximately 70 Bible-themed movies shot before World War 1 (4)
- Post-WW1, new morality of the 'flapper' era saw increase in secularization, 'a growing market for the illicit' (5)
- Creation of the Legion of Decency in 1933 & the Production Code (1934) (6)



Figure (1), Lumière Brother's Cinématographe

Figure (1) <https://www.history.com/news/the-lumiere-brothers-pioneers-of-cinema>

(4) Robert K. Johnson *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in dialogue* 2nd edition Baker Publishing, Grand Rapid, US, (2006) Pg 42

(5) Johnson *Reel Spirituality* 2nd edition (2006) Pg 46

(6) Robert Sklar & David A. Cook *History of a Motion Picture* Encyclopaedia Britannica

<https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture/The-pre-World-War-II-sound-era#ref508110>

THE 'HORROR' GENRE

Film maker David Cronenberg “Horror is the genre of confrontation” (7)

- The film genre that is least amenable to religious sensibilities
- The purpose of this genre of film is to offend, disgust, and frighten its audience.

There is a general attitude of disdain for horror films within the industry

Horror isn't taken as seriously as other genres, only 3 horror films made the AFI Top 100 list (8)

(7) Meagan Navarro *The Master of Body Horror: David Cronenberg Retrospective*
<https://bloody-disgusting.com/editorials/3488162/master-body-horror-david-cronenberg-horror-retrospective/>

(8) AFI Top 100 List
<https://www.afi.com/100years/movies10.aspx>



SUPERNATURAL HORROR

In an age that increasingly embraces a scientific worldview and the values of technology, there is a persistent fascination with the supernatural in horror films

Bryan Stone notes the three main themes of the Supernatural genre of Horror, which are as follows:

- 1) That which has died, and returns from the grave
- 2) Witchcraft and Sorcery
- 3) The Demonic and Satanic (9)

(9) Bryan Stone "The Sanctification of Fear: Images of the Religious in Horror Films" in *Journal of Religion and Film* Volume 5 Issue 2, 2001 pg.19

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1788&context=jrf>



THAT WHICH RETURNS FROM THE GRAVE - VAMPIRES

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) novel inspired many films on the subject of vampires

Vampires are one of the two most powerful archetypal monsters of cinema

Significant religious symbolism, use of holy water and crosses to defeat them

Vampires go against the cultural norms, especially those set out by Christianity in Western Culture



Figure (2)

Figure (2), Bela Lugosi as Dracula (1931)

<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/there-is-still-no-better-or-more-important-dracula-than-the-original-bela-lugosi>

WITCHCRAFT, SORCERY & PAGANISM

This sub-genre can be tied to the satanic and demonic due to the medieval view of witches and pagans.

Witches often portrayed as having an aversion to the holy but there is no specific way to defeat them or stop their magic unless they are killed.

In the film, the witch is often interpreted as a manifestation of their paranoia, and religious fervour



Figure (3)

Figure (3): The Witch promotional poster

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2016/mar/14/the-witch-the-blood-the-gore-the-goat-discuss-the-film-with-spoilers>

THE SATANIC AND DEMONIC

This sub-genre most overtly linked to Catholicism and its ideas about exorcism and demons

Have a tendency to be marketed as 'based on a true story'

What does this type of marketing say about the intentions of the Directors/ Producers?

The film grossed over \$319.5 million dollars worldwide (10)



Figure (4) The Conjuring Promotional Poster
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Conjuring

(10) Box Office Mojo: *The Conjuring* <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=conjuring.htm>

Figure (4)

MOTIVES OF HORROR FILMS?

The motives depend on the religious background of the producers/directors.
i.e. The Conjuring was written/produced by devout Christians (11)

Missionary aim or banking on cultural currency?

John Lynden: “horror allows us to deal with our own evil impulses, to reflect on them as well as to gain cathartic release from them, just as religions do” (12)

Melanie Wright: “film shapes and reflects a range of cultural, economic, religious and social practices and positions in modern society.” (13)

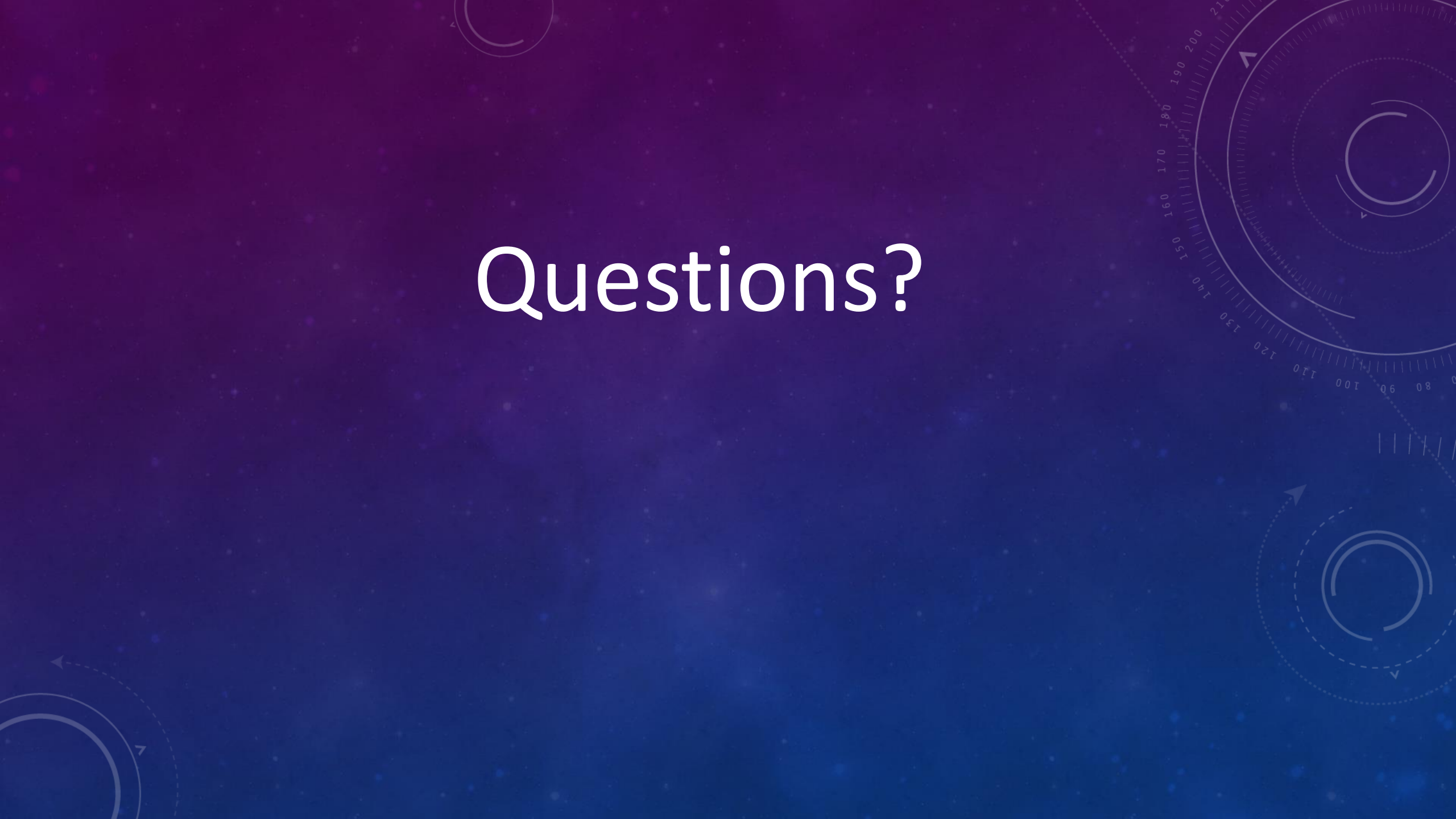
(11) Hanbury, Aaron Cline *Meet The Christian Brothers Behind The Conjuring* 10/06/2016

<https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/film/meet-christian-brothers-behind-critically-acclaimed-conjuring-films>

(12) Lynden, John C. *Film as Religion* New York University Press, New York (2003) pg.240

(13) Wright, Melanie *Religion in Film: An Introduction* I.B. Taurus, London, UK, (2007) pg.1





Questions?

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