**Biblical Narratives in Interstellar**

**Introduction**

Although scholarly literature may debate the defining characteristics of Western culture, it does reflect a consensus with regard to the institutions, beliefs and major customs which can be legitimately deemed to comprise its beating heart. The political scientist Karl Deutsch exposits eight main components of Western civilization, which include both Catholicism and Protestantism.[[1]](#footnote-1) Western Christianity (beginning with Catholicism and later branching off to include Protestantism) is historically the most important defining component of Western civilization. The Christian faith and culture of the West were in turn based upon the holy scriptures of the Jews,[[2]](#footnote-2) which were disseminated around the various parts of the Roman Empire.[[3]](#footnote-3) Both the Christian and the Jewish religions ergo view the Hebrew Bible as a holy text – as absolute truth, the product of divine revelation, and as such, it is still possible to recognize the imprint of myths and narratives originating in the biblical text, as well as other religious Christian sources, in many Western cultural productions.

Religion is an essential marker of culture; its doctrines reflect the systems of thought and values of any given civilization.[[4]](#footnote-4) Every human society or culture has its own proper mythology, and that mythological heritage constitutes an indivisible part of religion,[[5]](#footnote-5) since some aspects of reality require mythical conceptualization, such as the domain of values and ideals. The myth reflects the organic and holistic aspect of life which we cannot understand using reason or pure scientific method alone. It is a way of imposing order on a world that doesn’t make sense.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Myths, according to Jung,[[7]](#footnote-7) are archetypical projections and therefore have the power to construct the meaning of human activity as well as motivate groups or individuals. He refers to the mythological images that persist in our collective unconscious as “the accumulated deposits from the lives of our ancestors”.[[8]](#footnote-8) Kerényi too views myths as the building blocks of the archetypes that comprise the collective unconsciousness of our society,[[9]](#footnote-9) while Eliade maintains that religious myth not only provide a framework for explaining the cultural behavior of human beings and attest to past experience, they also construct the paradigm for future endeavors and aspirations. In fact, in his eyes, myth may be considered more “real” than “historical truth” in that it has deeper, richer and more long-lasting implications.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The present paper examines the presence of biblical narratives and myths in contemporary cultural productions based on an analysis of the science fiction film Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, US 2014). The film clearly belongs in the science fiction genre, in that it is mainly based on scientific ideas, which I will present in the course of this article; however, as I will go on to show, it also contains religious motifs centered around the main Judeo-Christian narrative which constitutes the foundation of Western culture. In addition, we will see that it is even possible to make the connection between at least some of the scientific ideas explored in the movie and the religious ideas it evokes. As Bergson claims, ethics, law and scientific thought originated in religion, were integrated with it for the majority of our history, and remain steeped in its spirit.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Science fiction, as a genre, deals mainly with futuristic fictional plots that develop existing contemporary ideas and trends in the fields of science, technology, economics and art, among others, and explore their potential repercussions on the future of humanity. The science fiction author Robert Heinlein defined science fiction as “realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method”.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Interstellar follows the space voyage of a team of experts sent through a wormhole to search for a planet fit for human settlement since Earth is in the grips of ecological catastrophe that threatens to wipe out humanity. The film was written by the director’s brother, Jonathan Nolan, who took inspiration from the work of physicist Kip Stephen Thorne, which implies that wormholes in the space-time continuum could be a potential gateway to time travel. In return, Thorne himself attests in the preface to the book he wrote about the film that “as a child and later as a teenager, [he] was motivated to become a scientist by reading science fiction by Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and others”.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Upon its release, the movie was widely praised for its groundbreaking visual effects, eventually winning an Academy Award in this category. It was also lauded for Hans Zimmer’s soundtrack, the cinematography, the acting, the original idea, the writing and the directing, and is considered overall as one of the best science fiction films of all time. However, despite being largely rooted in speculative science, a narrative analysis of the film reveals that it also draws much of its inspiration from Judeo-Christian sources, particularly the narratives of the Old Testament.

**The End of Days and Apocalyptic Era**

The film opens on a reality where Earth’s resources have reached a state of depletion that has forced human society to revert to agrarianism, and even in this state it is on the brink of collapse. It is clear to both the scientists and the laymen presented in the film that things are only bound to get worse and that Earth, or at least its human population, is headed for catastrophe that will spell the end for civilization. At the beginning of the movie, an elderly woman appears on the screen and recounts her childhood memories of dust storms: “We had acres of corn. But…mostly we had dust” (00:02:52). Only towards the end of the movie is it revealed that the elderly woman is in fact Murphy, as will be discussed further on.

Joseph Cooper (played by Matthew McConaughey) is a widower raising his two children, fifteen-year-old Tom and ten-year-old Murphy (“Murph”), with the help of his father-in-law, Donald. In the past, Cooper used to be an engineer and test-pilot for NASA; however, at the beginning of the film he is a farmer living on a farm. Growing up on the farm, Tom and Murphy are exposed from early childhood to the scientific experiments their father conducts using weather forecast drones. They also witness the strange behavior of the farming machinery in the fields due to unexplained magnetic phenomena (00:13:52). The overall atmosphere created at the film’s outset is the apocalyptic feeling of looming disaster that could put an end to humanity – the sand storm alarm (00:18:08), the drive through the storm (00:18:30), and so forth. This narrative fits with the biblical timeline that leads from creation to the end of days.[[14]](#footnote-14) The biblical timeline presents event after event in a chronological sequence leading up to the present time; from there the timeline continues directly towards its terminal point – the Apocalypse, the end of days.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In the Old Testament, the apocalypse is mainly the purview of the Hebrew Prophets who depict the end of days as dependent on the conduct of the community and the Israelite nation as a whole. This belief in the end of days made its way into Christianity via the Book of Revelation – the Revelation of John. This book had in turn been influenced by the apocalyptic visions of the Old Testament prophet Daniel, which became the model for all subsequent visions of the end of days: “And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be”.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The descriptions presented in this vision have become the cornerstone of historical perception in Western culture. Nevertheless, the Old Testament sources do not present a coherent picture of final salvation, but rather a series of apocalyptic motifs emphasizing the drive towards salvation and redemption at the end of days. Klausner emphasizes that the Hebrews were the only ancient nation to have a messianic vision of the cosmos.[[17]](#footnote-17) That messianic tradition was then transmitted to the Western world through Christianity. The apocalyptic narratives within that religious tradition have penetrated deeply into the substrata of Western culture and still inform many works of literature and art, as well as science fiction films of the apocalyptic genre, to which Interstellar clearly belongs.

Any disastrous event in the narrative of the origins of mankind and of the people of Israel is presented as a form of censure or chastisement. In other words, it is within the framework of punishment and reward that the biblical narrative recounts the history of mankind, from the very first generation onward. Punishment is doled out not only to individuals, but to entire generations who find themselves punished for the sins of their forefathers: “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation”;[[18]](#footnote-18) “wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead”.[[19]](#footnote-19) The divine order that governs the world, the Bible teaches us, is one of law and justice. Not so in Interstellar; here, even though humanity is heading towards disaster – the annihilation of the species as a whole – it is not described as punishment for “sins” as it is in the biblical narrative.

**The Story of the Spies and Noah’s Ark**

As a child, the film’s protagonist, Murphy, believes her room to be haunted by a ghost following the discovery that certain books had fallen off their shelves during the night, thereby creating blanks in the stacks of books reminiscent of Morse code. The girl thinks that the bookshelf is “talking to her” (00:14:57), and that she is receiving other “signs” such as the sand from the sandstorm which bursts through the window and settles in what is clearly a non-random pattern (00:19:40). Murphy and her father Cooper discover that the Poltergeist[[20]](#footnote-20) must be an intelligent being sending them messages by way of gravitational waves (00:20:54). The message is in fact binary code that transmits a set of coordinates leading to an unknown spot on the map. They travel to the location specified by the coordinates and discover that it is in fact the site of a secret NASA base (00:24:32). Upon being escorted inside, they meet Professor Brand, director of the agency and an old friend of Cooper’s.

Brand reveals to them that NASA has discovered a wormhole, most likely created by an unknown intelligence for the sake of saving humanity, which could be used to travel enormous distances to uncharted areas of the galaxy and therefore offer humanity a chance of survival by settling on a new planet. This fictional idea of the wormhole, which drives the movie’s entire action plot, is based on the groundbreaking work that American physicist Kip Thorne and his colleagues at Caltech published in 1988, in which he claims that time travel is not just possible, but probable under certain conditions.[[21]](#footnote-21) It was the first paper that saw leading physicists making a scientific claim for the possibility of changing the course of time. “If you could fall straight through to the black hole, there would be another universe on the other side. This is called the Einstein-Rosen Bridge, first introduced by Einstein in 1935; it is now called a wormhole”.[[22]](#footnote-22) Their proclamation was based on the simple hypothesis that an immense gravitational force, in accordance with the general theory of relativity, could potentially bend time-space in such a way as to link two distinct spots in the universe. The resulting “wormhole” would then allow instant travel through three-dimensional space as well as through time, and therefore it could be used as a means to travel back into the past. The only caveat to the theory is that creating such a wormhole would require colossal amounts of energy, far beyond anything our technology could be expected to supply in the foreseeable future.

Despite the general embarrassment that this ostensibly “fictional” idea first evoked, scientists have not been able to find a law of physics that would prevent time travel from being possible. Therefore, the only case against it is that it is highly unlikely in practical terms, despite being theoretically plausible. Thorne claims that since time travel is physically possible, though we may be many generations away from being able to investigate it experimentally, it is no longer the purview of science fiction writers alone. In the past, serious scientists tended to turn their back on an idea that they deemed too farfetched to be given any time or attention, however times have changed, and many physicists nowadays see it as an important subject that should not be ignored.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In the film, it turns out that NASA volunteers who had been sent on a previous exploratory mission through the wormhole, the “Lazarus” mission,[[24]](#footnote-24) had identified three potential planets for human settlement circling around a super massive black hole named “Gargantua”. Those planets are “Miller”, “Edmunds” and “Mann”, named after the three astronauts who had scouted them. Brand, believing that it is too late to save the Earth, lets Cooper in on his vision of how the “end of the world” will unfold (00:29:17). That is why NASA has been secretly planning to build a ship to allow humanity to escape the dying planet and start anew somewhere else. Brand then recruits Cooper to pilot the “Endurance” spaceship, which will venture through the wormhole to confirm the scant data transmitted back by the astronauts of the Lazarus mission (00:29:52).

Brand presents two alternative outcomes of the “Endurance” mission – Plan A involves the return of the “Endurance” with the necessary information to decide which planet if any is suitable for human settlement, followed by a mass exodus through the wormhole using giant space stations. If, however, the “Endurance” can’t make it back to Earth, or the exodus plan cannot be executed for whatever reason, Plan B will go into effect. Plan B involves the “Endurance” crew resettling whichever planet they find suitable for human life with the 5000 frozen embryos carried aboard the ship (00:33:45). This plan implies that humanity will start over on one of the planets on the other side of the wormhole in case there is no way to save the people living on the planet today. The two alternatives (one of which – Plan A – turns out to be false later on in the movie, that is to say, Professor Brand never had any intention of following through on it; he only used it as a means to motivate the crew to risk their lives in the hopes of saving their loved ones) of course bear more than a passing resemblance to the biblical story of the flood and Noah’s ark, even though the biblical flood is framed as punishment for the moral degradation of human society.

Noah, as you may recall, is chosen to ensure the continuation of life upon the Earth after the flood:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth…And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The film mentions three missions undertaken with the aim of saving humanity. The first, the “Lazarus” mission, whose volunteers were the first explorers sent by NASA through the wormhole is reminiscent of the biblical tale of the spies – the scouts sent out to inspect the terrain. In the tale of the spies, God commands Moses to send twelve people from the desert of Paran to Canaan:

that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them[[26]](#footnote-26)…And see the land, what it is, and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not…and bring of the fruit of the land.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The men of the biblical mission, the spies, came back forty days later, bringing with them the fruit of the land as well as news that the land is good but the Canaanite cities are well fortified and the people that dwell within it are strong and plentiful. And even though Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun argued vehemently that the children of Israel can inherit the land, all the others opposed them, saying that it is “a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof”.[[28]](#footnote-28) In the end, the spies and their whole generation, the desert generation, are punished for their lack of faith by never being allowed to enter the promised land – with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, who do enter it and are even granted domains within it.

In the film, the “Endurance” crew, which consists of Cooper the pilot, Brand’s daughter Amelia, Romilly the physicist, Doyle the geographer and two artificially intelligent robots named TARS and CASE, embark on the second mission, the “Noah’s ark” mission since it carries the frozen embryos that will replenish the human race, following that of the “spies” who had sent back information about each planet. The “Endurance” passes through the wormhole and heads towards planet “Miller” (01:00:15). Soon the crew discovers that the extreme gravitational forces this close to the black hole create a severe time dilation which means that every hour spent on the surface of “Miller” is the equivalent of seven years passing on Earth.[[29]](#footnote-29) Cooper, Amelia, Doyle and CASE go down to the surface of the planet only to discover that it is uninhabitable since it is covered in its entirety by a shallow ocean traversed frequently by giant waves – another consequence of the black hole’s gravitational influence. While Amelia is trying to recover the data collected on Miller, a wave hits the crew, killing Doyle and delaying their departure from the planet. By the time they get back to the “Endurance” they discover that 23 years had passed since they had left the ship on their reconnaissance mission to “Miller” (01:17:40). The ship’s fuel is running out and they must now decide which of the two planets they must continue on to, based on the data sent back by the “spies”.

Amelia suggests traveling to Edmunds’ planet where the data seems more promising, whereas Cooper and Romilly prefer Mann’s planet because Mann is still transmitting, unlike Edmunds whose signal had fallen silent years ago (01:25:50). The crew chooses to go to “Mann”. The “Endurance” goes into orbit around the planet and the crew takes a lander pod down to the planet where they expect to find Dr. Mann, one of the original “spies”, in suspended animation (01:35:30). Upon entering the planet’s atmosphere, they discover a world of ice covered in ammonia gas that doesn’t seem fit for human inhabitance. They find and wake up Dr. Mann who confirms that in fact, the planet’s surface, under the ice, is suitable for human settlement (01:39:29). However, he also reveals to the crew that there was never a Plan A to save humanity to begin with – Brand made it all up as a cover story in order to motivate Cooper to undertake the mission (01:42:06).

Meanwhile, the film also follows Murphy, now a grown-up NASA scientist back on Earth, trying to solve a physics problem that has plagued Professor Brand for years: how the giant space station built by NASA could lift off into space without launchers, since the enormous size of the station wouldn’t allow for them. On his deathbed, Brand reveals to Murphy that he had solved the problem years ago, and that in fact it is not possible without additional information that can only come from the singularity of the black hole – information that cannot be obtained (01:32:30). Having concluded that humanity would not be able to escape the dying Earth, Brand put his faith in Plan B, a fact he did not share with Cooper when he asked him to join the mission as a pilot for the “Endurance”.

As it turns out, Mann too had given false information about the planet he’d been sent to explore, just like the “spies” in the biblical story: there is no surface under the ice, the planet is uninhabitable. Mann attempts to kill Cooper (01:51:57), however Cooper manages to call for help and gets rescued (01:57:35). Mann then tries to take over the ship and burns up in it. He is punished and he will not get to enter the promised land despite the long and arduous journey he made for humanity: “Yet thou shalt see the land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel”.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The movie ends with a futuristic version of Noah’s ark finally saving humanity. Cooper returns from the place where he was trapped (the tesseract – which we will return to further on) and discovers that he is in an artificial structure in space – a habitat named “Cooper” orbiting Saturn. The habitat is actually named after his daughter, Murphy Cooper, who had finally managed to solve the gravitational propulsion problem and save humanity by building it a “Noah’s ark”. Cooper reunites with Murph, now an elderly woman on her deathbed, surrounded by family (her children and grandchildren). She encourages her father to go find Amelia who has already begun the mission of settling planet “Edmunds”. Murph stayed behind to wait for him, believing that he would be back. Cooper then goes back to the planet where he had left Amelia with the embryos that will save humanity (02:42:05).

The end of the world in the biblical story of the flood is framed as punishment for the behavior of human beings, and all the plants and animals on Earth are punished because of humanity’s sinfulness. The Ark is God’s way of saving not only humanity but also every living creature that has been punished through no fault of its own: “thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female”.[[31]](#footnote-31) The day of the flood, pairs of each animal gather before the Ark and Noah lets them aboard the vessel. Professor Brand’s original plan in the film (Plan B), on the other hand, does not provide for the rescue of plant or animal species; he only sends human embryos aboard the ship. Western culture, which is built on the foundation of the Judeo-Christian tradition, preserves the belief that the world was created for mankind. Western anthropocentrism has roots in both biblical and Hellenistic sources. This idea was most vividly expressed in the writings of Christian theologians and scholars of the Middle Ages and in the early modern period,[[32]](#footnote-32) permeating the West’s cultural infrastructure from then on.

The biblical text tells us that God is positioned at the top of the hierarchical ladder, followed by man, created in His image, who is then followed by all the other creatures further down the ladder. Among historians and environmental experts, there are those who believe that giving humans control over animals and placing them as the highest in the hierarchy, has set Western civilization on a path of destruction.[[33]](#footnote-33) Augustine maintains that the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”, does not apply to creatures devoid of reason, who are not members of the community of sentient beings, and therefore the Creator of the world sees fit to subjugate their lives and deaths to our needs.[[34]](#footnote-34) Moreover, the idea of what it means to be human in the West has been defined in terms of the absence of animal qualities or animal behavior. This view prevailed until the beginning of the modern era in Christian Europe and was based largely on scripture.

In the film, the “ark” that ends up saving humanity, based on the calculations and designs of Murphy Cooper, contains an entire biosphere where both animal and plant-life are preserved – similarly to the way they are preserved on board Noah’s ark at the end of the flood: “And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark”.[[35]](#footnote-35)

**The Present and the Ability to Influence the Future**

With little fuel left after the accident, Cooper and Amelia plan to use the black hole "Gargantua" as a gravitational slingshot to project them in the direction of Edmunds’ planet. Once they’ve gathered enough speed in orbit around the black hole, Cooper and TARS manually operate the engines of the two landing pods to push the “Endurance” out of the black hole’s gravitational pull. Once they’ve completed the task, Cooper and TARS detach themselves from the “Endurance” (02:17:18), and are sucked into the black hole where they find themselves in the tesseract structure.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In this structure, time appears as a physical dimension. Cooper is trapped in the four-dimensional cube, but soon enough he realizes that the tesseract is in fact constructed of an infinite number of versions of his daughter's childhood room (02:21:50). Through the bookcase, he can see her at different points in time, at different ages – as a child and as an adult – and he tries to communicate with her by pushing books out of the shelves to spell out “Stay” in Morse (02:23:55). He sees himself in the past telling Murph that he is about to go on the “Endurance” mission and realizes that she was trying to make him stay because the “Poltergeist” had told her to do so. As an adult, Murphy looks at all the sketches in her notebook, the signs she had written down, and understands that her father was the “spirit” speaking to her through the bookcase all along. Using gravitational waves, Cooper transmits the information TARS has collected from the black hole to the older Murphy. Using this information, Murphy is then able to complete Prof. Brand’s equation, to evacuate the earth and save humanity.

Cooper in turn realizes not only that the “Poltergeist” has been himself talking to his daughter from a future time, but that the extraterrestrial beings who opened up the wormhole must be human beings from the future and that they must also have created the tesseract to enable him to communicate with Murphy in order to give her the information required to save humanity. TARS says to Cooper: “They saved us” (02:27:00). "Who the hell is they? And just why do they want to help us?" Cooper asks in response. The robot doesn’t know exactly but claims that they constructed this three-dimensional space inside their five-dimensional reality expressly so that Cooper could understand it and send the message back to his daughter who has been “chosen” to save humanity. Gravity, the robot claims, can cross dimensions including the dimension of time, but they must find the exact moment to transmit the data to Murph when she is old enough to understand it, which they finally do with the use of the watch Cooper gave her before he left Earth.

The idea that man can change the future or influence the future is at the basis of monotheistic faith. Biblical time is linear, external to us (like Newtonian time), following a direct course to the final event, the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.[[37]](#footnote-37) Nevertheless, the prophets assure us that we have a decisive influence on this outcome and that it is not a future set in stone: “For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings…then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever”.[[38]](#footnote-38) Man in the Bible exists within time; at any moment he may be tested to see whether he succeeds or fails to fulfill the will of God,[[39]](#footnote-39) and the actions of man in the present, according to the Bible, will affect the unknown future. This view contains no element of deterministic fate, for there is a possibility of influencing the future derived from present behavior. In the ancient world, the future is determined by necessity and fate, and man has no sway over it whatsoever. The idea that our actions in the present day can affect the future, first presented in the Bible, was revolutionary in the ancient world. The film, on the other hand, takes the idea of our influence over time one step further, in presenting yet another revolutionary and controversial new concept: that we can actually affect the past from the future.

While according to Newton the universe is like a giant clock that God set in motion at the beginning of time and its mechanics are based on causality (in other words, consequences follow causes, and not the other way around), Richard Feynman, a physicist interested in the idea of ​​travelling back in time, formulated antimatter as regular matter moving backwards in time. For his research into advanced wave functions, Feynman ended up winning the Nobel Prize in 1965.[[40]](#footnote-40) The possibility of time travel has also been examined by famous physicist Stephen Hawking, who claims that there must be a law that makes time travel impossible. In his famous statement, Hawking argues: “If time travel is possible, then where are the tourists from the future?" Nevertheless, despite their efforts, physicists have as of yet not been able to discover a law that would prevent time travel from being possible.

**The mission and the “chosen” one**

At the beginning of the film, when Professor Brand is trying to convince Cooper to accept the and embark on a risky journey with an unknown outcome in the attempt to save humanity, the Professor tells Cooper: “Something sent you here. They chose you” (00:30:58). Cooper therefore presents the mission to his family as something he must accept. That kind of commitment requires devotion and faith, and only at the end of the film do we understand that Cooper was in fact chosen to help the one truly “chosen” to save humanity – his daughter Murph (02:29:50). “They” chose her when she was still just a little girl, just like the prophet Jeremiah was chosen before he was even born: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations”.[[41]](#footnote-41) In talking to TARS, Cooper realizes that “they” have access to time but “they” need him in order to find the exact right moment in time to transfer the information TARS collected from the black hole. When asked by TARS how he could get the message across, Cooper replies: “Love, TARS…it’s the key” (02:30:30). Just like her father, Murph too has faith and love. She believes her father will come back to save humanity, which is what allows her to receive the message (02:32:15). She carefully writes down the movements of the watch hand (02:32:32), translates the Mors code and finally yells “Eureka!” (02:33:05). Once the solution is found “they” start to collapse the tesseract, a structure created specifically for Cooper.

The sense of mission and being chosen for a mission is something felt in the movie by Cooper, Amelia and Murph. That sense of mission is a motif that appears countless times in the foundational texts of the Judeo-Christian narrative. Research pertaining to the process of a man’s sanctification for prophecy in the Bible presents a clear literary model for an almost fixed sequence of events.[[42]](#footnote-42) Even though every sanctification story has its own specificities, it almost always begins with God surprising the chosen one by unexpectedly revealing himself to him in one way or another. Many prophets hear “voices” of instruction, the most famous of which is the voice heard by Moses coming from a burning bush:

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro… and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed…And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Analogously, in the film, Murph receives signs and messages from the bookcase which appears to be “talking” to her. Another step in the process of sanctification is the stage at which the prophet expresses opposition to his appointment – the prophet recoils from the task he is chosen for and is reluctant to accept it. So it is with Jeremiah, who says: “Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child”.[[44]](#footnote-44) An exception to this rule is Isaiah who, in his prophetic vision volunteers to accept the mission of prophecy willingly: “Then said I, Here am I; send me”.[[45]](#footnote-45) Murph, however, like most prophets chosen by God, is opposed to the mission her father is charged with and resents him for accepting it for a long time, even into adulthood.

The prophet is then delivered from his reluctance by words of encouragement from God. “Certainly I will be with thee,” says God to Moses as he is being sanctified.[[46]](#footnote-46) To Ezekiel, God says: “Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house”.[[47]](#footnote-47) In the film, Cooper encourages Murphy through the veil of time with the words “Love, TARS…it’s the key” (02:30:30), and she does indeed manage to decipher the signs. There are also signs and tokens that herald the prophet’s ascension into his role, such as God touching Jeremiah’s mouth: “Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth”.[[48]](#footnote-48) Moses, upon being sanctified is given special signs to convince his people of his prophetic status, such as turning his staff into a snake: “And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent”.[[49]](#footnote-49) In the film, with Professor Brand’s death, all the signs point to Murph being finally ready to assume her role as the “chosen” one, such as her understanding that Brand had made up Plan A as a cover story and that she alone can now save humanity. Finally, there is an emphasis placed on the significance of the prophet’s mission. Jeremiah describes his role according to the word of God: “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant”.[[50]](#footnote-50) Murph’s mission is to become a scientist and to save the world and humanity.

The sense of mission has to do with faith and the desire to influence the future, even though most of the time it is a journey whose is outcome is unknown. This conception is expressed in God’s speech to Abraham when he charges him with his mission: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great”;[[51]](#footnote-51) “I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice”.[[52]](#footnote-52) Similarly, Moses’s mission too carries with it an expectation of future success. In a non-static world it is possible to change the course of events and disrupt the existing human order. The twelve apostles, Jesus’s disciples, were charged after his death with the mission of spreading Jesus’s word far and wide. All of the apostles, with the exception of John son of Zebedee, died unnatural deaths in fulfilling their mission. The twelve are in fact directly chosen by Jesus out of all the other disciples to carry out this mission, as described in the Gospel of Luke: “And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles”.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The narrative of the “chosen” one can be found not only in the religious Judeo-Christian texts. Socrates too is charged with a mission by a God (Apollo), a mission communicated to his friend Chaerephon by the Oracle of Delphi: his mission (should he choose to accept it), is to “awaken” the denizens of his city, Athens. Socrates tried to resist this fate, at least that’s what he claims in his defense at his trial, as described by Plato: “For know that the god commands me to do this, and I believe that no greater good ever came to pass in the city than my service to the god…something divine and spiritual comes to me…I have had this from my childhood; it is a sort of voice that comes to me and when it comes it always holds me back from what I am thinking of doing”.[[54]](#footnote-54)

In the biblical text, God is the one who chooses his prophets for humanity and for the people of Israel. In the film, those who choose Cooper and daughter Murph, are called "they". Not unlike the biblical idea of “I am that I am”, we don’t really ever know who “they” are but we imagine “them” as beings with superior intelligence and therefore super-human powers. “They” have the ability to control nature and open up an artificial wormhole in the universe, as well as somehow generate the structure of the four-dimensional tesseract, an ability similar to divine creation. “They” are likened to God as described in the Bible – a superior being that is outside of nature, a creator who is able to create and control nature at will. God can stop the celestial bodies in their tracks: “He said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon”[[55]](#footnote-55); “Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees… So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down”.[[56]](#footnote-56) He can stop the seas from overflowing: “Tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it”.[[57]](#footnote-57) “Their” divine ability to create is matched by their ability to “see” the future and take steps to prepare the grounds for humanity’s salvation, all qualities that equally apply to the God of the Old Testament. “They” have the ability to “search the heart [and] try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways”[[58]](#footnote-58) in order to choose the right apostles for their mission. “They” recognize Murph’s potential and choose her when she is still a child, the same as God chooses many of his prophets long before their mission can begin.

**Conclusion**

The apocalyptic narrative of the “end of the world”, a narrative rooted in religion, dominates Western culture and provides inspiration for art, literature and cinema, especially in the genre of science fiction, such as in the film Interstellar; however, it is also of interest to scientists and researchers in various fields. Bertrand Russell lamented that we cannot preserve life, and that all the majesty of humanity is destined to be extinguished with the death of the solar system.[[59]](#footnote-59) Although religion and science are of course fundamentally different, it is possible for the rational, the mathematical and the observational to encounter the emotionally powerful myths that provide an explanation for the impenetrable and the mysterious in cases where the attempt to understand scientific data is based on patterns derived from religious worldviews.

A clear example of this kind of encounter can be found in the discourse surrounding the Big Bang theory. The standard model of modern cosmology posits a singular event at the beginning of the universe, some 13.8 billion years ago, the Big Bang – a narrative, if we think about it, not so dissimilar to the story of creation. The initial theory was inspired by the astronomical observations of Edwin Hubble in the 1920s. The Hubble Law proposes, based on observations, that all the galaxies in universe are steadily getting further away from each other. The conclusion this then leads to is that the universe is in a constant state of expansion. The Big Bang, in the model, is at the origin of this expansion and therefore the very beginning of time. This is because time before the Big Bang cannot be defined. The Catholic Church has actually adopted the Big Bang model and declared, in 1951, that it was in accordance with the Bible, that is, with the biblical arrow of time. The first iteration of the Big Bang theory was in fact proposed by a Belgian priest named Henri Lemaître.

Human thought proceeds according to patterns that we have grown into, and which are often invisible to us; therefore we are unaware of them. Thus, our attempts to understand the physical world around us are also made along those patterns that we have absorbed through our culture. Western culture assimilated the religious thought patterns of the Judeo-Christian narrative, along with its perception of time as a linear movement that proceeds from the beginning to the end of days, and the concept that the universe began from one singular event, which is in fact the pattern of “Genesis”. In addition, we have inherited the understanding that God is outside and above nature, and that humans can create their world just like God because we were created in his image and are supreme in the hierarchy of all creatures. These patterns appear in both cultural and scientific contexts. Our human free will to see beyond our daily existence and to understand the universe, creation and society is paradoxically the motivation behind both religion and science.

As a work of science fiction, Interstellar relies on the work of the physicist Kip Thorne, however, as we’ve seen, in addition to its scientific subject matter, the film is also replete with biblical narratives such as the apocalypse, Noah’s ark, the tale of the spies, prophecy and the tasking of the “chosen” one with a mission, signs and miracles, the ability to control nature and to create elements within it (such as the artificially generated wormhole), the idea of punishment in the form of being denied entrance to the promised land, and so on. However, Judeo-Christian religion is not the only form of spirituality represented in the movie; it also draws on some of the spiritual ideas of New Age thought. The “they” are presented as beings of superior intelligence in place of God. The new society engineered by Murph is presented in the film as the New Age ideal of a peaceful and loving community – the opposite of the alienation and detachment[[60]](#footnote-60) that were characteristic of the old community, personified by Professor Brand and Dr. Mann whose actions were manipulative and selfish.

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1. Deutsch 1981, 51–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. הכהן 2006, 23; אליאב-פלדון 1997, 30.[reference missing from reference list] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. מלכין 2003, 44. .[reference missing from reference list] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Durkheim 1971, 418–421. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Niebuhr 2011, 125. [trans.: I couldn’t find the reference in the English version. This is the closest thing I found in the book] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. May 1991, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jung 1949, 38–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jung 1975, 452. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Shoham 2002, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Eliade 1959, 42–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bergson 1954, 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Heinlein 1969, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Thorne 2014, ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Dan 2000, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Zeligman 1992, 102–103. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Daniel 8:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Klausner 1926, 199–200. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Deuteronomy 5:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Jeremiah 2:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The word Poltergeist comes from a combination of the German words *poltem* (to make noise) and *geist* (ghost), and thus can be loosely translated to mean “noisy ghost”. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Kaku 1994, 19–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Kaku 2008, 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Thorne 2014, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The name given to the mission attests to the presiding sentiment about Earth’s impending fate and the chances of coming back from it. In the Christian tradition, Lazarus was a man Jesus raised from the dead. This account of one of Jesus’s most famous miracles finds Jesus staying in a village where he is told of a gravely sick man – Lazarus, or Elazar. However, Jesus doesn’t cure him, and Lazarus dies. Only four days later, when Jesus returns to the village and goes to visit the man’s grave does he perform the miracle: “And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:43–44). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Genesis 6:5–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Numbers 13:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Numbers 13:18–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Numbers 13:30–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The time dilation described in the film, which accounts for the differences in the passage of time on the spaceship and on the planet’s surface, is in accordance with Einstein’s theory of relativity. Thorne 2014, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Deuteronomy 32:52. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Genesis 6:18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Serpell 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Patterson 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Augustine 2003, 31–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Genesis 6:18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. A tesseract is a hyper-cube, or a cube in four-dimensional space. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Leibowitz 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Jeremiah 7:5–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Rauch 1978, 10–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Kaku 2008, 278–280. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Jeremiah 1:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Simon 1997, 57–82. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Exodus 3:1–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Jeremiah 1:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Isaiah 6:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Exodus 3:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ezekiel 3:8–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Jeremiah 1:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Exodus 4:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Jeremiah 1:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Genesis 12:1–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Genesis 22:17–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Luke 6:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Plato 2005, 109–115. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Joshua 10:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Isaiah 38:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Jeremiah 5:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Jeremiah 17:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Kaku 1994, 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Wexler, 2000, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)