

Sanctifying the Tomb of Tarkovsky: 10 Questions for the End of the Semester

"Why do you make films?"

"To sanctify the *tomb of Tarkovsky*."--Sergei Parajanov



I have chosen to end the semester with Sergei Parajanov's 1984 *The Legend of the Suram Fortress* in part because of its sheer iconic strangeness, but also because I think it distills the questions we have been exploring all semester. In watching over 35 movies, we have explored the nature of the heroic and the hero in a number of different ways, looking at cowboys and samurai, as well as warriors in general; looking at the role that saintly figures play in global culture; looking at the mixed-assessment global ideals have about the arts and the artist; touching on the ideals we attach to doctors, to great historical figures, to film directors, and to those who sacrifice themselves for others in general.

We have looked at the American and Japanese ideals of heroism, the nature of death and suffering, creativity in the face of censorship, and the question of violence and courage. We have also questioned whether heroic ideals actually work themselves out in history and contemporary life. And I hope we have asked ourselves repeatedly what does Christian faith have to say to these matters. Let me end with the following ten questions:

1. ***From where do our heroic ideals finally come?*** Are they historical and cultural creations? Do they have any basis in universal values and hopes? Do they have a spiritual or metaphysical origin?
2. ***Under what conditions can we know that a deed is heroic?*** Must it always be sacrificial? Must it always involve suffering?

3. ***Are heroic deeds always deeds done in the body?*** Are there particular reasons we prize actions performed in war or in medicine?
4. ***Should we trust our heroic ideals?*** Can we find them in reality? Can we ourselves live heroically?
5. ***Can societies and individuals be healthy without heroic ideals?*** In other words, what roles do they play in our social psychology that are necessary for us to live well?
6. ***Do all cultures share certain heroic ideals?*** Why and/or why not?
7. ***Do films have anything unique to bring to the discussion?*** Would we have spent the semester better reading treatises on the topic rather than watching films?
8. ***How unique, in the last analysis, are heroes?*** Can they be found all around us? Or are they the special few that we must enshrine?
9. ***Are the different types of heroes ultimately comparable?*** Can warriors be saintly? Can artists? Can cowboys or samurai be artists?
10. ***Is the Christian faith a heroic faith?*** If so, under what conditions and definitions? If not, is there a better paradigm to talk about it?

