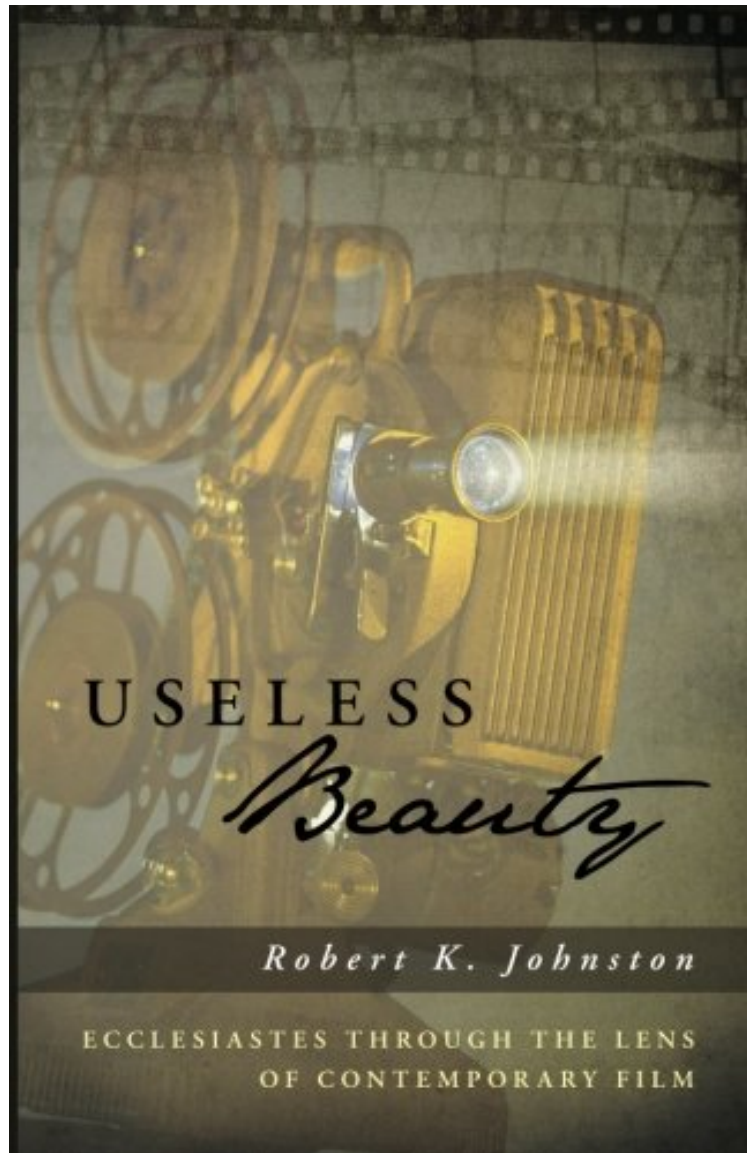


[Download] Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film

## Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film

*Robert K. Johnston*

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**Robert K. Johnston : Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good content, a little tough to get there. By Polly This book raised

interesting discussion for my morning church group. The introduction was tedious. Once specific examples of films were included, it was great. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Useless Beauty By Shirley Council really liked the style that the author used to write the book. It was an easy read for me. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good Movie Reviews but Weak Connections to Ecclesiastes By Steve L Great insights to many very good movies. However, the direct connections to Ecclesiastes are a bit weaker. The book reads like extended movie reviews from a Christian perspective interspersed by verses in Ecclesiastes where relevant. There's no doubt that these movies explore many of the same questions asked by Qoheleth. However, it would've been helpful if Johnston offered a bit more commentary on the specifics of how particular passages in Ecclesiastes speak to the existential issues explored by these movies, rather than just peppering his book with Ecclesiastes verses.

Endorsements: "A wise old adage of faith states, 'Read the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other.' The slogan is an invitation to notice the complex engagement of faith and culture. In *Useless Beauty*, Johnston takes up the interface of faith and culture with specificity and immediacy. His discussion permits an instructive dialogue, whereby we read Ecclesiastes differently, and we read contemporary film with fresh eyes of faith. Neither the text nor the films can be easily dismissed as 'absurd.' Both are thickened, and we are driven deeper in our self-discernment by the process. Johnston's alertness and urbaneness constitute a model for faith that is not simplistic and a model for culture that is not thin or transparent." --Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary "Johnston reads Ecclesiastes with a rich, postmodern hermeneutic--not the more common simplistic, linear, moralistic, or formulaic approach that threatens to drown Bible readers in the shallows. His reading has great value for people seeking new ways to find meaning in Scripture. Personally, it helped me weave my life experience with my viewing of film and my reading of the Bible, and it left me feeling alive and energized." --Brian McLaren, pastor (crcc.org) and author (anewkindofchristian.com) "Johnston weaves the wisdom of Ecclesiastes into contemporary narrative films and vice versa, merging theology and film into a smart and insightful dialogue to enhance understanding of both." --William D. Romanowski, Calvin College, author of *Eyes Wide Open* "Some of the most helpful contemporary interpretation of Scripture comes from those who look at the text with eyes other than those of the biblical scholar. Johnston's interpretation of Ecclesiastes through the lens of film is an excellent example. The text comes to life in the interaction he creates with the narratives of major contemporary movies. They in turn are better understood by the careful theological interpretation Johnston gives them through the lens of Ecclesiastes. The possibilities for preaching and teaching are obvious." --Patrick O. Miller, Princeton Theological Seminary "This book is a well-informed and sensitive example of how, in our uncertain and contradictory times, to engage film and Scripture without denying the integrity of either. It is highly recommended." --Rikk E. Watts, Regent College Author Biography: Robert K. Johnston (PhD, Duke University) is professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author or editor of over twelve books, including *Reel Spirituality* and *Finding God in the Movies*. A past president of the American Theological Society and the recipient of two major research grants from the Luce Foundation, Johnston is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . Drawing the title from a line in an Elvis Costello song about "all this useless beauty," Johnston, Fuller Seminary professor of theology and culture, invites us to consider connections between biblical wisdom literature and film. In particular, he compares Ecclesiastes with films such as *American Beauty*, *Magnolia*, *About Schmidt* and *Signs*. "Useless beauty" refers to the paradox described in Ecclesiastes (and in many of the selected films) of beauty in the midst of a life filled with vanity, futility and absurdity. Although the title promotes Ecclesiastes through the lens of film, it is really a treatment of film through the lens of Ecclesiastes, as Johnston intersperses key biblical passages in italics next to his rendition of film plots and characters showing us the dynamic analogies. Johnston's hope is that this will create a "two-way dialogue" that starts with the film but moves back and forth between the film and scripture. Narrowing in on Ecclesiastes a book embraced by many different religious traditions exposes Johnston to a wide audience, one that includes Christians, Jews, Muslims and even New Age hybrids. That's good for everyone, because Johnston's forte is helping us think more deeply about how God is revealed in popular culture, so that our notion of God is expanded even beyond our traditional understandings. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. About the Author Robert K. Johnston (Ph.D, Duke University) is professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author or editor of over twelve books, including *Reel Spirituality* and *Finding God in the Movies*. A past president of the American Theological Society and the recipient of two major research grants from the Luce Foundation, Johnston is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church.