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Cloud Strife: The Intertestamental Hero

A Theological Exposition of the Differentiation of *Final Fantasy VII* and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*

Benjamin Jozef Banasik

Abstract

This article focuses on the differentiation between the two representations of Cloud Strife in *Final Fantasy VII* and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*. Investigating the presentation of the imagery of the hero, this article uncovers the aspects of the Hebrew Bible in the original game, then the adopted motifs from the Christian New Testament in the sequel movie. The article tracks through the journey of the hero with the original game focused on a promised land, the revelation of the purpose of the reluctant hero and focus on an enemy as an external force. Alternatively, the movie is shown to focus on the hero that knows a purpose, adopting the imagery of baptism and focusing on an enemy that becomes an internal force. The author argues that this differentiation results in Cloud existing as a hero with two causes, resting between the testaments of the game and movie.

Keywords

Final Fantasy VII; Cloud Strife; Hero; Theology; Final Fantasy; Religion

1 Introduction

“Anyone may claim that he will act in the direst times, yet only a brave man acts in times great and small” – Cloud Strife, *Final Fantasy VII*.

“I'm not fit to help anyone. Not my family. Not my friends. Nobody.” – Cloud Strife, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*.

Despite selling over 10 million units on release and being the most successful Japanese Role Playing Game (JRPG) game ever released by Square (Ervin 2017, p.108), there is very little written about *Final Fantasy VII* in scholarly circles. This is extraordinary for a game that has reportedly reduced gamers to tears (Juul 2013, p.28) and held the very framework of player's lives together in times of great tragedy (Parkin 2015, p.176). When released in 1997, the game stretched the limits of

technology, boasting to be the longest and largest ever JRPG. *Final Fantasy VII* filled three PlayStation CD-ROMs, outgrowing the cartridge technology of the Nintendo 64 (Barton 2008, p.385). The game still features in headlines, most recently recognised as being an inductee to the *World Video Game Hall of Fame* (The strong: National Museum of Play 2018). To date there has been very little in relation to the study of the religious elements of a game that defines a generation. The exception to this, which will be discussed further below, is a chapter by John Mitropoulos on Shinto elements that are evident within the story arc (Mitropoulos 2009). Aside from this chapter there is much that is left unexplored, in particular the Judeo-Christian elements found throughout the series, such as the various motifs which are explored below or even the Churches that were renamed clinics for the Western release of the first game due to fears of censorship. On the eve of the release of the much anticipated *Final Fantasy VII: Remake*, this article aims, in part, to fill this lacuna.

Released in 1997, *Final Fantasy VII* follows the story of the main protagonist Cloud Strife and his journey towards self-discovery, building relationships and ultimately facing a nemesis to save the world. The sequel film released in 2005 and revised in 2009, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, follows a similar story arc. The differences reach beyond the adoption of religious motifs which appear throughout both titles, it is the key differences of Cloud as a character which shows a divergence of being, resulting in the main protagonist existing as an intertestamental figure with an active duality of nature. This article will explore the religious motifs of both the game and sequel film in relation to the main character. I will trace the journey of the hero within both movie and game by using the archetypes of Joseph Campbell's hero while introducing the relevant heroes in the Exodus and New Testament narratives. Through this journey and the reactions of Cloud, I show that a duality of being exists for Cloud Strife who is destined to exist between the testaments in a perpetual state, with his final chapter remaining open. We will see that the producers of the game have made a choice to present a character based on the unrequited desire and perpetual journey who is later replaced with a broken spirited figure who is transformed into the salvific Christ-like redemptive figure at the end of the film. Prior to introducing the religious archetypes and imagery, it is useful to revisit the complexities of the story and highlight the heroic journey of Cloud. I do not intend to give a full retelling of the video game or movie, with the nine main characters and all their interactions. The intention here is to provide an overview of Cloud's particular journey, highlighting the religious motifs and interactions.

2 The Journey of a hero: Final Fantasy VII

Reluctantly joining in the fray, the opening scenes of *Final Fantasy VII* places the player in control of Cloud, a blond spikey haired young male with a comically oversized sword who is revealed as being a former member of *SOLDIER*. As the gameplay progresses it becomes clear that Cloud is reluctant to get involved in the politics of the mission, he states that he has no affinity to the eco-terrorist *AVALANCHE* group led by Barret who has hired him as a mercenary. Completing the mission at hand is his one motivation and he does not consider the possible consequence of the individuals involved. Nor does he care for the reason of *AVALANCHE*'s existence, namely to save the planet from power plant reactors sucking the lifestream, or *Mako*, from the planet by the *Shinra Electric Power Company*. After the success of the first mission with the destruction of the reactor which destroys part of the city Midgar, he meets with Tifa, a female who he knows from his childhood. It is later revealed he actually only had a few fleeting interactions with her and has a constructed memory adopted from her true friend, the fallen hero Zack.

Convinced by his friend Tifa, he agrees to continue with the party as a mercenary and on his next mission he is thrown from a great height and falls into a church laden with flowers. The flower bed, unusual to the bleak dark and mechanised city landscape that is experienced by the player thus far, is tended by Aerith, misspelt as 'Aries' incorrectly in the original English translation, the flower selling Ancient. Aerith is a clear love interest of Cloud as she offers to romantically date him if he protects her from Reno of the *Turks*, the investigation arm of the *Shinra* company. Cloud agrees to protect, and subsequently rescue, Aerith.

Once Cloud learns of the plans of his nemesis, Sephiroth, to harm the planet and join with the energy of its destruction he commits to his journey. Through this commitment it is revealed that there is a *Promised Land* which *Shinra* are seeking to tap into as an unending font of *Mako*. The motivation for our hero however is not so much a protection of the planet but the search for Sephiroth. Cloud's motivation reaches its zenith with the death of the party member Aerith. The party is wracked by sadness and guilt at the graphic death of Aerith by Sephiroth's sword and gives Cloud the opportunity to step in as a leader and take command. The death of Aerith caused such public outcry that rumours circulated at the time of ways to bring her back to life, players resorted to following falsely constructed and convoluted instructions which were shared online (Parkin 2015, pp.194–195). After her body is lowered into the lifestream of the planet Cloud takes the opportunity to step into the leadership position. Taking over Aerith's attempt to save the planet, which is byproduct of his mission to search for Sephiroth. Cloud says,

“He destroyed my hometown five years ago, killed Aeris [sic], and is now trying to destroy the Planet. I'll never forgive... Sephiroth. I... I must go on... I have a favour to ask of you. Will you all come with me?”

Cloud's love interest and destruction of his life to date by Sephiroth remains the main motivating factor but he fills the leadership position of the hero and journeys to save the planet and implicitly his people.

As the story progresses, it is revealed from a scene within Cloud's psyche that he never had a real relationship with Tifa, his constructed history is an adoption of memories from a fallen *SOLDIER* Zack. In reality, he was a guard of *Shinra*, infused with the cells of the extra-terrestrial lifeform Jenova by Hojo, a scientist working for the science division of *Shinra*. Cast out by Hojo as a reject, Cloud's memories were lost and reformed when first approached by Tifa. The revelation of this information to the player is while Cloud is in a paralysed state and is taken into the lifestream of the planet then guided by Tifa. The revelation of this information closes the link of the story, with Cloud awaking and ready to finalise his journey to save the planet, first atoning for his sin by acknowledging his errors including the adoption of Zack's memories. He then reaches the height of his power, his apotheosis, finally beating Sephiroth with his ultimate attack the *omni-slash*. The culmination of Cloud's adventure is his revelation that the *Promised Land* is a place where he can visit to meet Aerith.

“An answer from the Planet...

the Promised Land...

I think I can meet her... there.” – Cloud Strife, *Final Fantasy VII*.

The next scene shows Cloud and his party propelled from the crater where the battle took place, a meteor stopped by the spell *Holy* and the lifestream rising from the planet tearing the meteor apart. The credits roll and Cloud's journey to the promised land remains unfulfilled. Only the scene of an overgrown Midgar, the city at the heart of *Shinra's* empire, which is overlooked by Red XIII, the talking red wolf-like party member, five hundred years after the events of the game.

3 The Journey of a hero: Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children

Commencing at the same scene from the end of the game Red XIII looks over the overgrown Midgar, the screen fades and the title prompt announces that the events of the movie are from 498 years ago, or two years after the end of the game. After the events of the game there is no further mention of the *Promised Land*, Aerith has not returned from the afterlife and Cloud runs a delivery company with Tifa called *Strafe Delivery Services*.

After a short recap explanation of the video game storyline, people that are suffering with the black skin disease known as *geostigma* are seen throughout the city. Amongst these is a young child named Denzel, who is staying under the care of Tifa. Denzel, a former resident of *Sector 7*, the section of the Midgar destroyed by the eco-terrorist *AVALANCHE* group, comes to live with the party by a circumstantial meeting with Cloud. Wandering through the wasteland he approaches Cloud's parked motorcycle outside the church of Aeris. He takes Cloud's phone and tries to call his home, the call is refused as the *Sector 7* is destroyed. He then checks the previous calls which reads 'Heaven', dialling the number, Tifa's voice is heard on the line who is then alarmed when Denzel becomes delirious and faints, due to the *geostigma* infection on his forehead. Cloud finds Denzel and takes him under his care, returning home.

In the opening scenes of the movie Cloud is pursued by three brothers led by Kadaj, who resemble and introduce themselves as remnants of Sephiroth. They repetitively ask for 'mother', the remaining parts of Jenova – the alien life form that came to the planet whose cells were harvested and injected into Sephiroth and Cloud during the story arc of the video game. Escaping, Cloud is called on by the *Turks* Reno and Rude who represent Rufis, the leader of *Shinra* who survived the attack on Midgar. Rufis, who is affected by the *geostigma*, seeks Cloud's assistance with the *geostigma* problem. Although Cloud believes he is dead, Rufis considers Sephiroth to be a possible cause of the *geostigma* as he may have entered the very lifestream of the planet. Cloud refuses the request to help find the answer to the *geostigma* due to it involving *Shinra*.

Later, inside Aerith's church Tifa discovers that Cloud is also affected by the *geostigma*. Tifa here states that she believes Cloud will not fight. Kadaj then kidnaps Rufus and reveals his plan to resurrect Sephiroth by having a reunion of those who have *geostigma* and the cells of 'Mother' or Jenova. Meanwhile, the other brothers of the Remnants of Sephiroth, Loz and Yazoo kidnap and gather children who are affected by the *geostigma*, including Denzel. The children are driven in a truck to the *Forgotten Capital*, the abandoned Ancient capital. The children are instructed to enter a body of water, dark with the *geostigma* and drink. They are then informed by Kadaj that they have become 'brothers and sisters' of the 'Remnants of Sephiroth'.

Cloud then returns to the church to find Tifa lying on the flowerbed passed out and then faints from his own *geostigma* injury. Both are returned home by the *Turks* who followed them. When Tifa awakes she questions why Cloud would give up and die. Cloud states that he is not fit to help anyone, essentially having lost all hope. Tifa then tells Cloud to get over it by saying ‘dilly dally shilly shally’, convinced to take action he leaves to rescue the children. Whilst travelling to the *Forgotten Capital* he has a vision of Aerith in the lifestream, he has a discussion and states that he wants to be forgiven. Cloud reaches the Remnants who are protected by children who stand in the way, telling the children he considers Cloud to be the black sheep of the family. Rescued by the party member Vincent, Rufis’ theory is confirmed that the *geostigma* is the cells of Jenova, also referred to the Sephiroth gene. He then has another vision of Aerith and he says he can never forget her death and letting her die, she responds with ‘Dilly dally shilly shally, isn’t it time you did the forgiving’. Aerith says she never blamed Cloud as he came for her and that is what matters. Asking Vincent if sins are ever forgiven, Cloud answers himself by saying he is going to try.

Returning to the city Cloud arrives to deliver the finishing blows and defeats the Bahamut summon. Kadaj meanwhile captures the piece of Jenova and is pursued by Cloud into Aerith’s church, during a battle Kadaj cracks the floor of the church where the flowers grow. From the floor a spring of water appears which washes away the *geostigma* on Cloud’s arm, curing him. The voice of Aerith is then heard, guiding him and telling him to go, continuing the pursuit of Kadaj he is now ready to face his final battle alone. Kadaj then evolves into Sephiroth after fusing with the cells of Jenova. In the final battle that ensues Cloud is run through with a sword in his torso, face and hands. He finally defeats Sephiroth who then turns back to Kadaj dissipating into the lifestream of the planet. The rain of lifestream that falls clears the skin of the children in the street and people that are affected by *geostigma*. However, Cloud is unexpectedly shot by Loz and Yahoo, who then blow up the platform they stand upon. While Cloud is gone the scene changes to the children who say that Cloud will return.

As people are seen answering telephone calls and running towards Aerith’s church, Cloud is shown with a divine white background. He hears Aerith and Zack’s voice who say he has no place ‘here’ yet and is resurrected into the body of water of the church. The children still affected by the *geostigma* are invited into the water by Cloud who washes away their disease by pouring water over them with his own hands.

4 The journeys of the intertestamental hero

While it is evident the video game and movie have significant differences of conceptual ideas, the responses of the same figure, Cloud, can be seen to match archetypes from classical religious documents, namely the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. There are many typological motifs that can be found throughout *Final Fantasy VII*. Sequentially examining each of these along Cloud's journey enables us to consider his progression through the story within what Joseph Campbell identified as a hero's journey (Campbell 2004). This is not an exhaustive list of the full archetypal journey of the hero, rather the selection here is to portray the similarities and differences of the relative heroes with brevity in mind. While resisting the allure of a reductionist approach in categorising many religious and mythic journeys into simple archetypes, it is nevertheless useful to engage with Campbell who assists in organising the heroic journey of myth into these stages. The endeavour is to show differentiation in the commonalities of experience, the stages therefore will provide clarity for our respective heroes in what are complex narratives.

4.1 Call to adventure

The call to adventure for all four of the hero narratives come early on in the story. Cloud in both the movie and film are thrown into the action. Moses and Christ likewise grow up in their respective communities, surrounded by the people they must save. However, there are nuanced differences in these narratives. During the video game Cloud's meeting with *AVALANCHE* makes him aware of the need for someone to step in and stop *Shinra*. Cloud is ambivalent to the need of the planet and the damage of the Mako reactors. He cares for little more than the task at hand and when called upon by the group he agrees to help in the current mission but any further proves too much of an effort and not his problem. Similarly, in the Hebrew Bible Exodus narrative Moses leaves his people, the Hebrews, to their lot in life despite growing up in Egypt and seeing their plight. He escapes and raises his own family away from Egypt and away from any personal risk. Called upon by God (Exodus 3), Moses is reacquainted with his people's need. Differentiating from this ambivalence, in the movie Cloud is intimately aware of the effect of *geostigma*, not only affecting Denzel who is close to him it also affects him personally. Further, as a delivery driver and someone who lived in Midgar he would be well aware of the effect of the *geostigma* on the population. Likewise, in the New Testament narrative Christ is intimately aware of his mission in life, he is announced as a child to be a saviour by Simeon in the temple (Luke 2:28-32) and later by John the Baptist as being the one to fulfil the prophesies (Matthew 3:13). He intimately is aware of the plight of the poor, being born in a manger and growing up in Nazareth. He also recognises as a child what is required, leaving his parents to learn in the Temple at twelve years old (Luke 2:49). The

similarities here between Christ and the movie iteration of Cloud have to do with the intimacy of the mission at hand. While the game and Exodus heroes are as close to the mission they require a further leap in order to live up to their mission. As each of our heroes are given the opportunity to step into their called mission, the response, according to Campbell's archetype, will usually follow with a refusal of the mission at hand, to which we now turn.

4.2 Refusal of the call

The refusal of the call is similar in the video game, movie and Exodus narrative. In the game Cloud wants nothing to do with the *AVALANCHE* group beyond the initial mission he is hired to help. He repetitively says he is a mercenary and does not care for the politics or plight of the planet. Approached by the group he continues to refuse adopting their beliefs or understanding. Similarly, as Moses is called on by God he accepts the discussion but continues to ask for someone else as he cannot speak publicly and believes someone else should be chosen for the task (Exodus 4:13). Likewise, Cloud in the movie does not view himself as worthy when he speaks to Tifa and just walks out when asked by *Shinra* to assist. Scenes of Tifa phoning Cloud which are left on his voicemail reveal he is absent from the city and is completing jobs for his business away from everyone. Christ differs with each of these accounts and only falters at one point, during his final days he prays on the Mount of Olives and asks if he may be absolved of his responsibility. In response to his call to the Father, an angel appears in order to give him strength (Luke 22:39-43). Whilst there is a similarity here with both of our Clouds it is in the meeting of the mentor that the story diverges even further.

4.3 Meeting the mentor

The mentor through the game and Exodus narrative are intimately close to our respective heroes, guiding them to their destined role and mission. After refusing to join the party, Cloud has an unexpected meeting as he falls from the sky into Aerith's church. Asked to protect her and then help the planet, Cloud accepts the mission and no further mention of being a mercenary takes place. The guide of the Ancient for Cloud is real in the sense of an actual person he can openly discuss things with, she approaches him for a date and actively wants to be part of the main party character choices by the player. Similarly, as Moses leaves his peaceful life outside of Egypt he is convinced as he is promised that his brother will be his voice and that God will be his active guide. While God is abstract in much of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, God speaks face to face with Moses (Exodus 33:11) and guides the people as a cloud by the day and fire by the night (Exodus 13:21). In contrast to these intimate relationships of the guide in the game and Exodus narrative, the mentor in

the film and New Testament are abstract and removed. In the game Cloud is constantly guided by the visions in his memory of the dead Aerith. She appears as a spirit in the lifestream, often turned away from Cloud or at his back, removed from the physical world and not contactable by any of the other members of the main group. She speaks in short sentences and directs Cloud to act, she does not appear to be as accessible as when she was alive in the game with involuntary visions that come to Cloud. This is akin to the New Testament narrative where the guide of Christ is abstract and is referred to as his Father. It is beyond the scope of this current study to discuss the interpretations of the Trinity and natures of Holy Spirit, Christ and God. Nevertheless, the mentor of Christ is removed or abstract in the worldly sense. Christ does call out to God throughout the scriptures, is guided to complete his mission and is encouraged by angels (Luke 22:43). This is akin to the spirit of Aerith who speaks from the lifestream, answering only at times and encouraging Cloud on his mission as he approaches the first threshold of his journey.

4.4 Crossing the First Threshold

What binds the game and the Exodus narrative is the sense of community and the relationship the hero has with a close group. The death of Aerith ensures Cloud crosses over to take on his adopted role of party leader and hero of the *AVALANCHE* group. This binds him closer with the group and ensures that their mission becomes his own. At no point does the player through the narrative leave the group and they are bound with the story of the hero along the journey. Leaving Midian, Moses is accepted when convinced by his brother Aaron he is then welcomed into the community back in Egypt. While Moses is questioned in the desert during the adversity for the Israelites, he is always accepted by the great acts that surround him, such as the passing over the river when escaping from Egypt (Exodus 14:21). Differentiating from these communal relationships the movie portrays Cloud crossing the threshold alone. Fainting in the church of Aerith, Cloud awakens to Tifa who convinces him to take action, he leaves alone to face the brothers in the *Forgotten Capital*. The journey alone sees him successively return to the city to face the summoned Bahamut, Kadaj and then Sephiroth. This solitary journey beyond the threshold is akin to what Christ must go through in order to cross the threshold. Left alone Christ goes willingly into capture and stands before the priests of the Temple (Mark 14:50). The lonesome journey for both Christ and Cloud in the movie see them making the ultimate sacrifice.

4.5 Belly of the Whale

While the heroes of the movie and New Testament narrative continue along alone, the community are left alone for a period and are lost through the game and Exodus narrative. Cloud loses his mind

and is in a vegetative state, his friends believe him to be gone and are lost from their path. The player at this point controls Tifa and is broken away from the regular narrative and focus of the game. Tifa ultimately enters into the lifestream guiding Cloud through his memory to rediscover himself. In a sequence within his own psyche Tifa guides him to recollect his selfhood and return from the lifestream. Although not losing his selfhood, Moses does leave the Hebrews at the base of a mountain as he goes to meet with God, staying away for forty days and forty nights. The community here lose their way and convince Aaron to craft a cow from gold so they may worship (Exodus 24). God guides Moses back down the mountain to return the community back to their path. This break away from the group or community is in sharp contrast to the movie and New Testament narratives. Here both Cloud and Christ are already alone away from their group or community. In the place of the intimate guide of the game and Exodus narrative and the lonesome journey they find guidance through the appearance of angels. Rescued by Vincent standing in the forest in the *Forgotten Capital*, Cloud recognises what he must do, shown by the angelic appearance of Aerith in his vision. Here he faces his demons of guilt and takes ownership of the mission at hand. After Christ's capture any doubt or question of the mission is now left behind who alone willingly faces what he must ultimately do. After asking for absolution of his mission Christ is sent onwards by the strength given to him by the angel (Luke 22:39-43). Our heroes are now ready to for their final journey towards the ultimate battle that they must overcome.

4.6 Road of Trials

Returning to the community and group, both Cloud and Moses now set upon their road of trials. The successive battles with Sephiroth and the planet's *Diamond Weapon* are one of the many steps in the road of trials for Cloud and the party. The zenith of this struggle is the final sequence of battles in order to stop the meteor summoned by Sephiroth coming to the planet. This battle is fought together as a group, until reaching his final apotheosis, Cloud is ingrained into the group. Similarly, Moses' road of trials is long, whilst in Egypt it is not his actions which guide the people, rather the plagues are sent by God as he facilitates these by direct instructions, such as placing his rod in the sea as God orders (Exodus 10:12). His personal trial begins as he comes down the mountain and then leads his people through the desert in an effort to reach the promised land (Exodus 33). In contrast, while all the battles in the movie can be viewed as trials, the battle that Cloud must face alone involves facing Kadaj who then changes into Sephiroth, this culminates in a final trial of overcoming death. The personal journey here is highlighted in the film with his party members looking on in hope that Cloud will succeed. This lonesome final trial is similarly personified with the figure of Christ who, only a few years prior was surrounded by thousands and is destined to hang lonesome on the cross. The battle alone, left to die whilst his loved ones look on,

is only reached after having to drag the cross himself to his place of crucifixion bringing on the culmination of his ministry in a final act, death (John 19:16-30).

4.7 Atonement

Admission of guilt and forgiveness are two distinct motifs that are evident with the four hero narratives. In the game, prior to meeting Sephiroth in the final battle, Cloud admits to the party that he was wrong and made a false representation of a personality and an adopted memory from the fallen hero of Zack. This admission enables him to continue on with his newly found personality built on his own memories, rather than the construction of the personality he has relied upon thus far. Despite guiding his people out of Egypt, through the desert and through danger, Moses cannot reach the promised land. However, Moses gets to see the promised land and is atoned for questioning God by facilitating a successor (Numbers 27:12, Deuteronomy 3:23-29). He then admits this fault of the people and takes ownership of the error (Deuteronomy 4). Both Cloud and Moses are atoned for their sins with the group looking to Cloud to continue to lead through the final battle and Moses is recognised as an irreplaceable leader like no other (Deuteronomy 34:10). In the movie and New Testament narrative there is no guilt by the heroes. Cloud is directed by Aerith's ghost to do the forgiving rather than being forgiven. Her death is not his fault and despite his feelings he is absolved of any error. He is also cured by the *geostigma* by the lifestream, before the children or anyone else is fully cured. Christ goes through a trial and does not please innocence nor seek a deal for release. He commits to the journey which takes him to his final battle with death. As Christ calls out from the cross asking why he has been forsaken he commends his spirit to the Father. This commendation of a spirit enables the resurrection to take place and completion of the mission. Sinless and dying on the cross Christ in death is then declared as innocent by the centurion bystander (Luke 23:67).

4.8 Apotheosis

The zenith of both Cloud and Moses' journeys end with a reference to the promised land. Yet, their final action does not see either reach these places, rather the culmination of their efforts is an action so perfect that it is unlikely to be repeated. After meeting and defeating Sephiroth's many forms, each more removed and monstrous from the original person he knew than the last, Cloud can only defeat the final boss by reaching his peak and using *omnislash*. This ultimate attack is against the Sephiroth character, returned to the human bodily representation that he once knew. After defeating the final representation he tells Tifa that he can meet Aerith in the *Promised Land* and that he should go there. Moses' apotheosis is reached by finally seeing with his own eyes the land that will be

given to his decedents. This is only given to him after he delivers the commandments and instructions at length to the people, forming the final books of Moses (Deuteronomy 33). It is in these books and the very words that pass on as the Torah which is the perfection of Moses. As stated in the final words in the books of Moses, there is and never has been a leader like Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10). The references to the promised land are absent from both the movie and New Testament, instead the apotheosis is the stunning resurrection of both heroes. After winning a battle with Sephiroth, Cloud is blown up by the two remaining remnant brothers. He only reaches this end after being tortured by Sephiroth, being physically run through with a sword and injured in the hands and face. The victory is then taken away from the hero as his body is consumed in an explosion and he dies. As his spirit enters the lifestream he is returned and is resurrected from in the water inside of the church of Aerith, here he cleanses children by pouring water on them in a scene that looks like a Baptism. The water that he pours on the children purifies their *geostigma* and cures their state. Similarly, after his crucifixion and death on the cross, Christ is resurrected and appears to his Disciples. The baptism motif returns to the New Testament narrative as Christ reaches his apotheosis and promises to send his Spirit to return, telling the disciples they will baptise with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). The difference here can also be termed in conclusiveness. The game and Exodus narrative end with a perpetual look towards the *Promised Land*, unachieved but promised, the heroes journey do not reach the finality which was sought throughout the narrative. Alternatively, the movie and New Testament narrative deliver a conclusion and the apotheosis of our heroes is through the redemption of their community, delivered by their resurrection.

5 Shinto and Judeo-Christian interpretations of our hero

It is evident there are a number of religious motifs along the hero's journey for both of our Clouds. Beyond these hero motifs there are nods to Judeo-Christian understanding of God and religion. Cloud's home with Tifa is referenced as 'Heaven' on his phone and the names of Sephiroth and Jenova are similar to terms from the scriptures. There is also the abstract understanding of the Trinity which can be seen in the parallels of the cells of Jenova, referenced by Vincent, as the 'Jenova or Sephiroth gene', which then becomes the embodiment of physical beings on the planet. This Judeo-Christian reading of the narrative however is not the only interpretation that can be made from the complex story arc.

As noted earlier John Mitropoulos has written a comparison of the Shinto elements found throughout the narrative. While Mitropoulos argues that Jenova, the alien enemy, of the game is reflective of the Japanese experience post the Second World War (Mitropoulos 2009), it is evident

that the internalisation of the movie and the existential battle that Cloud has with the guilt, and ultimate forgiveness has more to it. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the obvious linkages to esoteric early Christian and Jewish traditions. It is not possible to gloss over the linkage such as Sephiroth, with his name very similar to both the Seraphim (Isaiah 6:1-3) are which the angels which cries from heaven and the Hebrew Sephirot (סְפִירוֹת) meaning ‘emanations’ in the Kabbalist tradition (Likutey Moharan 1). The arrival for Jenova, with a similar name to the Judeo-Christian God Jehovah, for Mitropoulos is paralleled with the arrival of Christianity to Japan. He then goes on to recognise the motifs adopted from the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as the broader field, such as Sephiroth’s mother Lucretia named after the woman raped by Sextus Tarquinius causing the rebellion which ended the monarchy of ancient Rome (Mitropoulos 2009). Although there are parallels with Japanese Shinto culture and the recognition of an overtaken statehood, the cure given through the game and movie are using Christian motifs. Furthermore, as demonstrated the parallels between Moses, Christ and both Clouds are clearly adopted motifs, evident throughout the respective journeys of the hero. There is also the evidence of the Gaia hypothesis of biological and ecological science matching that of the planet’s energy in the game elucidated by Jay Foster, in the very same volume as Mitropoulos’ chapter (Foster 2009). The point is that we should not be so reductionist when approaching the complexities of a game such as *Final Fantasy VII*. It is evident that the producers have created a game which is both the product of their own cultural upbringing, however, the motifs are not from this perspective in absentia.

6 Conclusion: Cloud, the tale of two heroes

“...if we were to make a sequel, we would have to be very careful not to disturb fans' own individual picture of that universe.” – Yoshinori Kitase (Kitase and Toriyama 2011).

The care of the franchise that is held with such high importance with so many gamers has created a situation for Yoshinori Kitase with the upcoming *Final Fantasy VII: Remake*. In over twenty years the technology has changed significantly. Dialogue is no longer presented with single lines, prompting the player to click through and read at their own pace, characters on screen are closer to resembling real life people than ever before and gaming is providing more in-depth experiences. As demonstrated, the differences between the movie and video game iterations of Cloud are significant and go beyond the responses of a character who has grown over time. The Cloud from the game at the end of the narrative is full of optimism, ready to journey towards the *Promised Land* and meet his friend Aerith. This is dismantled in the movie to a character who fails to step in and assist his

friends, full of guilt at his friend's death. This Cloud is broken socially and purposefully distant, he is evidently a different person entirely.

Yoshinori Kitase, the Director of the original game and Producer of the movie and the remake has a decision of the representation of the character of Cloud. In 2011 he was hesitant to touch the franchise as he did not wish to disturb the narrative that fluidly rests in the fanbase' mind. The reasons for Kitase's decision in altering the character for the film could be on aesthetics, or the time limitations of the film which forces a concise story line, a struggle for anyone to show a perpetual journey of a Moses like figure. It could also be an assumption by Kitase of the fan base's desire for a more redemptive figure. This may never be clarified as he has been hesitant in the past to comment at any length about the game beyond the structure and technological advancement of the creation. This is compounded in the past few years, as the release of *Remake* has been delayed and fans eagerly await any news of the release. At present, as Kitase has recognised, fans are creating their own narrative with the complex storyline that his portrayed in a game over two decades old that relies on nostalgia and fleeting memories of players (Kitase and Toriyama 2011). The intertestamental figure of Cloud who now exists, torn between the game and movie, needs to be conclusively set using a single archetypal line. I would argue that it is the unfinished perpetual journey of the character at the end of the game that solidifies the experience for players. Likewise, it is the redemptive and resurrected Christ-like figure in the movie is what many fans would hold dear. The decision for Kitase therefore is to either return to the original narrative, as problematic and complicated it is, or to dismantle the memory and rebuild the narrative at the risk of alienating a fanbase. Time of course will tell.

For the moment we can conclude that there are significant differentiations of both Clouds from the original game and movie sequel. Examining these with the lens of the Judaeo-Christian tradition enables us to see the archetypal journeys that are significant in their own right. It is clear through the journey of the hero that Cloud from the game reacts with similar, if not a directly parallel, response to that of the Exodus' narrative hero Moses. Both are ambivalent to their respective people's causes before being called upon and shaken from their state. They require intimate personal prompting from a guide throughout their lives in a journey towards the promised land. Along the way they try to refuse the call but are brought into the fold through the intimate personal relationship with their people. Bound together as the respective leaders of their communities, both Cloud and Moses are then subsequently removed from their group who are lost without their leadership. They are called back to set upon their final task but are still held within a group the entire way. They seek atonement for their errors and finally reach the apotheosis with the perfect act that is unlikely to be repeated, whilst never reaching the promised land that they sought.

These similarities are contrasted by the linkages with the movie and the New Testament Christian motifs. Forgiveness, the solitary journey of the hero, absolution of sin and resurrection all

feature in the film which is laden with Christian images. Both Cloud of the movie and Christ have an intimate knowledge of their mission with their mentors removed and abstract. This abstraction compounds the lonesome battle that the heroes face, willingly facing the battle with the strength of the motif of the angelic guide. Facing the ultimate sacrifice as both Cloud and Christ are able to deliver forgiveness and achieve the final victory over their own death. Where the film and New Testament deliver a finality of the hero's journey, it is unlikely for there will be a finality or a bridge to be made between the two Clouds and the upcoming *Final Fantasy: Remake*. We eagerly await the next chapter of Cloud and the journey of yet another archetypal hero with a comically oversized sword.

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Biography

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