Despite the systematized approach described above, the points Anker makes or questions about each film regarding plot, camera angles, music, casting, etc. and their relationship to the movie’s religious significance are particular to the individual film. On the one hand, this seems like an implicit and intelligent acknowledgement of the fact that a work of art must be taken on its own terms; on the other hand, those readers hoping to emerge from the book with a more definite and concise understanding of how to view films from a religious perspective may be disappointed. Anker himself describes Of Pilgrims and Fire as “a guide [that] offers one set of organizational goggles for making some sense of the considerable variety of films that we might label in some way ‘religious.’” Anker may not give us “goggles” exactly, but the word “guide” accurately describes the book, which feels like it grew out of a class on religion and film. (I suspect it did, as Anker is a professor of literature and film at Calvin College.) The book might best serve those who would like to teach such a class and are in search of ideas for either content or structure. But Of Pilgrims and Fire is also a well-written investigation into the profundity of a fascinatingly idiosyncratic selection of films ranging from popular works like E.T. (1982) to lesser-known foreign films like The Color of Paradise (1999). As such, it is enjoyable in its own right and serves as a much-needed corrective to the view that only explicitly religious or Christian films may illuminate truth.

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Sterrett sees Shakespeare as responding to the post-Reformation “intense dispute about the method and manner of prayer.” “And the more strident and intransigent the disagreement, the more prayer itself was devalued and belief eroded. . . .” One person’s prayer was another person’s blasphemy. Catholic prayer was accused of idolatry, and Protestant prayer of heresy. (The prayers associated with Helena in All’s Well That Ends Well reflect these varying provenances of prayer.) The Reformation
division entered deeply into the interior experience of prayer with the new consciousness that what had been traditional was now controversial. Claudius's impotent confessional prayer in *Hamlet* is a reflection of this divided religious estate. The controversy could be felt overtly in the case of public prayer, no longer a simple expression of universal belief, but now a tendentious assertion of a position about the Reformation. Or so it might seem at times.

Shakespeare's use of prayers in his plays participates in this Reformation context and reflects his own agenda, sympathetic to Catholicism but open to religious reconciliation. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ends with Oberon performing a faery version of the asperges (the ritual sprinkling with holy water at the start of the Mass), over the marriage bed, an act which seems as Richard Wilson says, "‘designed to reinvest validity in ritual.’" Prayer, especially unheard prayer, "begins in the early plays to parallel fairly clearly the appeals of Catholics to Queen Elizabeth for religious toleration...." Because Titus's prayer is unheard by the king, it draws attention to itself as a "social display," to be overheard by others. Here Titus parallels Catholic recusants, like Robert Southwell, with his published prayers to the Queen, unheeded prayers which thus make Elizabeth seem like "an absent or hidden god who 'seemeth' to scarcely hear... the cries of her suffering people." Thus Titus: "I tell my sorrows to the stones." Lear is the ultimate Titus in this respect. "‘In general,’" as Susan Snyder notes, "‘prayers go unanswered so regularly that asking for a divinely initiated action just about guarantees it will not happen.’" "Lear's howl and, indeed, the play itself are, therefore, a plea directed beyond the play, a kind of power of prayer for poetic if not social justice." Though Sterrett is cautious about asserting Shakespeare's Catholicism, this analysis of *King Lear* seems to assume that the great wrong not corrected and not heard in Elizabethan England is the persecution of the recusants. The unheard prayer becomes a "political appeal" marking "a desire for a just and merciful relationship with the monarch. The unheardness of these appeals is a measure of the perceived failure of these spiritual and political relationships." Titus's arrows are aimed at Astraea, the goddess of justice, who has fled.

The prayers in the late romances are more successful, however, and reflect Shakespeare's hopes in the irenic policies of King James.

Sterrett's discussion of other Shakespeare plays seem less relevant to the religious division, and more concerned, as in *Love's Labour's Lost* with the general after-effects of post-Reformation anxiety about the nature of prayer.