A Media Analysis Of “A River Runs Through It”

Posted on August 16, 2023

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Worldviews in A River Runs Through It

People belong to different walks of life, which makes them different and also makes their worldview different. In every part of the world, no matter where you look, you will find numerous worldviews. “A River Runs through It” is a movie that revolves around the Maclean brothers, Norman and Paul, who enjoy a simple life in rural Montana where they spend time fly fishing, which is a fishing angling method used to catch fish. Their father is a Presbyterian minister who taught them to fly-fish, which they did together on the Blackfoot River. The brothers are homeschooled, and their father makes them follow strict moral and educational rules so that they may turn into good men. After this, Norman wants to further his studies and goes to Dartmouth for six years while Paul becomes a skilled fisherman. Their life is shaped by their father and their life experience, which in turn makes their worldview. This paper will explore this worldview and analyze its importance in the movie.

Biblical and Romantic Worldviews

The movie presents two worldviews: one is biblical, and the other is the romantic worldview. The biblical worldview is the one that has been instilled in the brothers by their father, and Norman, the eldest brother, grows up to follow this worldview, making every decision that would please his father. When Norman is young, he wants to become a minister just like his father; however, when he grows up, he becomes a professor, which makes his father very proud. Paul follows his desires and does what he pleases; this worldview can either be placed under romanticism or existentialism. Paul leads a rather sinful life, which gets him into trouble many times. Paul also becomes a rebellious journalist, through which he starts to gamble heavily. He does not see eye to eye with his father and brother but loves them dearly as they love him; “We can love completely what we cannot understand.” (Redford et al., 1992). His rebellious attitude leads him to make a lot of enemies, which eventually leads to his death.

Norman’s Spiritual Reflection and Transformation

As his life journey continues, Norman’s beliefs reform and his worldview changes. The viewers get to witness these changes at the very end of the movie, as the now much older Norman stands alone at the Blackfoot River and has an inward dialogue with the audience, “Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world’s great flood and ran over rocks from the basement of time. On some of those rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs” (Redford et al., 1992). This quote summarizes his understanding and wisdom of everything that has happened, and that will happen. The idea of everything merging into one means that at that moment in his life, everything was like a big picture for him to see, and as he was able to see this picture, he was able to understand each and every aspect of his life, even Jessie, a person both Paul and Norman despised. With everything coming to a standstill, the only thing that flowed and changed was the river that ran through every moment of their lives, recording their words in itself.

Paul and the Existentialist Worldview

After analyzing the movie, the worldview of existentialism becomes evident as the characters go through different experiences that drive them to make different decisions and paths in life. Paul is the biggest example of an existentialist worldview as he follows the desires that lead him to the end of his life. He falls in love with a Native American woman who is deemed inferior by his family and community. He ends up in jail after fighting a man for insulting her. This shows that his needs and desires reigned supreme, and he did not see any logic. He becomes a very angry man who has to keep looking over his shoulder as he has made many enemies. His brother offers him help so that he may get out of this dangerous life and be able to find a more peaceful way of living. Then Paul asks his brother to come with him as he has many enemies and would need his help. Norman refuses, saying that he would never leave Montana. This is the last time that the two brothers speak.

Choice Freedom and the Limits of Existentialism

Existentialism talks about “chance over destiny”, which allows people to take their lives ahead and live according to their will, not according to destiny. This worldview is a belief that people can control their destinies by making decisions of their own free will. They believe that God does not control the outcome of every person’s life. However, with this mindset, people cannot make sense of the pain and struggles that they have to face. After all, according to them, they were in control of their destiny, so why were they in pain? Why are they suffering? This worldview does not define these questions, and so the pain and suffering seem senseless and cruel. It seems that the people who believe in this worldview chose this suffering and pain when, in reality, that is not the case. Here, we bring in the Biblical worldview or Christian worldview that was presented in the movie.

Christian Faith Grace and Human Struggle

In the Christian worldview, everything is centred around God. He has created everything, and He controls everything. The father of both brothers is seen teaching the words of God to his children and his community. His eldest son is the one who can adopt this worldview, and he lives his life to please his father. Every decision that he makes is made so that his father approves of him. When he tells his father that he will be becoming a professor, his father says, “I am pleased” (Redford et al., 1992). This is the phrase that is said to be used by God when he is pleased with the good deeds done on earth. This shows that there is the presence of words of God in this movie, and if a believer is watching this movie, then they would be able to know these words as they are the words of God. After all, God is the One that the believers search for, and He is the One that they will return to (Myers & Noebel, 2015). This movie is interesting as it brings two opposite worldviews without judgment and then presents the outcome of the people based on their worldview in a way that teaches the viewers a valuable lesson. This lesson is that if we follow the words of God, then we will find peace in life, but if we do not listen to Him, then we will always be struggling to find peace and understanding. This peace and understanding will not be found as we would be searching for them in the wrong place. “A River Runs Through It” is a must-watch for people who follow the Biblical worldview to understand the way it allows them to become better people.

References

Redford, R., Sheffer, C., Pitt, B., & Skerritt, T. (1992, October 30). *A River Runs Through It* [Drama]. Allied Filmmakers, Wildwood Enterprises.