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November 16, 2014: A Beautiful Movie

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Title: A Beautiful Movie

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11/16/2014—I finally had a chance to see *The Fault in Our Stars*. What a touching, wonderful movie. (And has anybody noticed how much Ansel Elgort's Augustus Waters resembles Jeff Bridges in the 1984 movie *Starman*?)

But I was disappointed that the spiritual/religious theme was not brought to the fore in the movie, when it apparently was in the book. What is life about in the movie? Hazel Grace Lancaster is one tough cookie, and she decides to live the life she has been given. In one of the movie's two climactic moments, she tells Augustus, now that he knows he is dying of cancer soon and is disappointed that he will never make his mark in the world, that he has made his mark. He wanted to be loved and admired and he is, by her and by others. Even though that will be ephemeral, we already know her feeling that all of life is ephemeral—the stars go out too, it is enough. And, Augustus does get this, as his eulogy of Hazel makes clear: we want to be remembered, but Hazel knows the truth—she wanted to be loved deeply by one.

The other climactic scene is with her parents. She is relieved to know that when she dies (not if), they will go on living well. She has no doubt that they love her. She is not disappointed that her death will not be mourned forever. She has the generosity of spirit to want them to live—in a way, for her, who has been deprived of the chance.

Now this is fine as far as it goes, and it contrasts as realism compared to the stylized Christianity of the early scenes in *The Heart of Jesus Church* and to the not-quite-right-anymore version of the 23rd Psalm we hear in the background at Augustus Waters' funeral. In fact, the limits of the Christian story, or any religion's story, among America's young are apparent in this movie. The secularization thesis is alive and well.

The book is different, I hear. (I haven't read it). The book is open to the deep teleology that I wrote about last June—you could look it up on this very blog. Hazel's Dad talks about the universe wanting to be noticed by us.

But the hidden point of the movie's religiosity is not teleology but eternity. I thought it was too subtle to be caught, but maybe I am just dense. The author, Peter Van Houten, played as well as a badly written part can be, by Willem Dafoe, answers the pair of dying lovers wanting to know how the characters in his cancer themed novel do after the book ends, by telling them in essence that the question is stupid. It is a novel. But then he adds a reference to what the author John Green has elsewhere referred to as "Cantor's diagonal argument, [that] the infinite set of real numbers is bigger than the infinite set of natural numbers." Some infinities are smaller than other infinities. Hazel and Gus had a little infinity, as she says in her own eulogy for Gus.

Now, what is this little infinity that they had but the Kingdom of God? When Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you (usually translated in you), he is not referring to himself, but to the presence of the Kingdom right here, and right now. Stop looking for something special—the Kingdom is here in a moment or nowhere.

Grace and Augustus got to taste the Kingdom of God. Therefore their lives are not a tragedy. The tragedy is to die without having tasted the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is a small infinity. Why can't the churches hear the Gospel when it is offered?