



# WALL-E

## Pure Love, Robot-style



**F**ebruary, with Valentine's Day, is the month of love and romance. And love is the heart of the gospel (Jn. 3:16), as love is the essence of God (1 Jn. 4:16). To celebrate love, this month's film is a futuristic love story that is simple yet profound. A Golden Globe winner and Oscar nominee, WALL-E is one of my favorite films of 2008 and sure to become a classic. Indeed, it was recently listed as the most redeeming movie of 2008 by Christianity Today.

With WALL-E Pixar has, if possible, surpassed itself. It set the bar high with earlier movies like *Ratatouille* and *The Incredibles* that had wonderful stories and superb animation. But here the animation is simply stunning. Especially in the first half where the movie is set on a desolate and empty earth, it appears so realistic it is at times easy to forget this is an animated movie. Moreover, for the first 40 minutes there is no human dialogue. This is as close as it comes to a silent film in the present age. And it works so well. The visual imagery and absolutely spot-on soundtrack makes this a pleasure to watch.

At the start of the film, the earth is a wasteland. It is a void, not formless and void as in Genesis 1:2, but ruined. The mega-multinational company Buy-N-Large (BNL) has enabled so much senseless consumerism that the earth is one giant landfill, left destitute by the trash dis-

carded by its ex-inhabitants. Humanity has gone, departed more than 700 years earlier. All that is left is a robot named WALL-E, who goes around compacting the trash in an effort to clean things up.

This WALL-E is unlike other models or versions. Over time, he has become a collector, a pack-rat of sorts. As he sifts through the garbage, he saves small treasures. But his pride and joy is a videotape of "Hello Dolly" which he watches on an old iPod. Somehow, he has developed a personality with emotions.

When a spaceship deposits another robot on earth, WALL-E's life is irreversibly changed. One look at EVE, with her shiny white egg-like shape, and he is smitten. This is love at first sight. Without words, it is a beautiful picture of pure unadulterated love. WALL-E is naive but a romantic at heart, having learned of love from

“Hello Dolly,” and acts like a coy teenager trying to win EVE over.

After WALL-E shows EVE the solitary green plant he has discovered, EVE takes it and stores it in her shell and shuts down. As a probe, her mission has been to search for evidence of life on earth, and here she has found it. In a selfless act of protection and love, WALL-E shields her from the elements while waiting for her to reboot. But when her spaceship returns to take her away, WALL-E hangs on to the outside and hitch-hikes across the galaxy while the ship takes them both to Axiom.

Axiom, the jewel of the BNL fleet, is the spaceship that set out on a 5 year voyage and has been traveling for 700 years, filled with the remainder of humankind. But time has not been

kind to them. Because they have been “maided on 24 hours a day” by the fully automated crew and thus “enjoying” non-stop entertainment, fine dining, and constant hover-chairs, they no longer needed to walk. In fact, they do not know how to walk. Nor do they know what real life is all about. Spending their days on these chairs, lazy and obese, they interact with one another via virtual screens in front of them. Though a person may be next to them, they speak to the electronic image instead. They do not know the pleasures of real relationship. They had never enjoyed the simple touch of another’s hand.

In the film’s second half, WALL-E tracks EVE down, and saves her from the reprogramming center. While her mission is to take the plant to the captain, WALL-E’s self-defined mis-



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sion is to win her heart and hold her hand. When the bloated captain sees the plant, he realizes he now has a new mission: “Out there is our home - Home, AUTO! - And it’s in trouble. I can’t just sit here and do nothing. That’s all I’ve ever done! That’s all anyone has ever done on this blasted ship - nothing!” When the auto-pilot, AUTO, disagrees saying, “In space we will survive” the captain retorts, “I don’t want to survive, I want to live!” But AUTO rebels and takes control, leaving the humans to finally rise up, literally, to save the plant, the symbol of hope and the future. Where they could not save the planet, they can at least save the plant.

Obviously there are ecological references. We know the earth must be stewarded; that is a clear biblical mandate from Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:15. Yet, we sow pollution and waste and harvest devastation and despoilment. There are also references to the searing judgment of rampant consumerism. In America, consumerism has become a religion; it is for the 21st century western peoples the opiate of the masses. In contrast, Jesus has commanded his followers to store up for themselves treasures in heaven, not on earth (Matt. 6:19-20).

More interesting is the issue of living versus surviving. The consumer-travellers on the “utopia”-like Axiom take it as axiomatic that life is for fun and entertainment. Through constant recline their bodies have grown fat and unusable. They “enjoy” life via virtual reality. Ironically, this animated movie is lampooning the virtual electronic lifestyle. But these people are not living, they are merely surviving. They are not experiencing life as it was meant to be. They are enjoying a false imitation. Only when the captain sees fresh new life, does he realize he is not living. He has been going nowhere, doing nothing, and merely spinning his wheels. He has been wasting his life. Pastor John Piper, in his book

“Don’t Waste Your Life,” points out the need to live our lives missionally and intentionally. We only enjoy life as we truly have life, life in Jesus (John 10:10). And we only enjoy life as we glorify God and live to make his name known. Are we living for God’s glory? Or are we living for a future trouble-free retirement so we can be entertained in our sunset days?

Fundamental to WALL-E, though, is the picture of love. This is a love story through and through. Since the language skills of the robots, and WALL-E in particular, are limited, Director Andrew Stanton decided to use the scene of hand-holding in “Hello Dolly” as the metaphor for love. This is how WALL-E has learned to say “I love you.” So throughout the film he yearns to hold hands with EVE and is kept from doing so. Eventually, after his love has caused him to protect EVE and to follow her to infinity and beyond, this self-sacrificing love is required. He gets to hold her hand. Then when they kiss, he literally does cartwheels. On his space-walk with her, he is shown to be head-over-heels in love. What a beautiful way to show love. Indeed, after this robot pair experiences the pleasure of hand-holding, two humans inadvertently touch hands and find a similar joy in simple touch. Humanity imitating technology!

WALL-E reminds us of love and the pleasures of touch. Life is for living and for loving. As WALL-E gave himself away for EVE, so Jesus gave himself away for us sacrificially (Matt. 20:28). Are we doing likewise? Are we letting Christ’s love compel us to live and love authentically (2 Cor. 5:14)? WALL-E is an animated parable that love does indeed conquer all; love is indeed supreme (1 Cor. 13:13).

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