

Harambee Film and Theology: The Sopranos

Questions Raised

Why is The Sopranos so addictive?
What makes a family?
What makes a man/woman?
What makes a villain?
Is it OK to watch shows that are filled with...
-- sex?
-- violence?
-- evil?
Is the Sopranos art?
What is the Sopranos about?



Quotes from the Series

It's good to be in something from the ground floor. I came too late for that, I know. But lately I'm getting the feeling that I came in at the end. The best is over.

Tony Soprano, 'Pilot', Episode 1

It's like fuckin' King Midas in reverse. Everything I touch turns to shit. I'm not a husband to my wife. I'm not a father to my kids, I'm not a friend to my friends. I'm nothing. I don't even know why I come here. Nothing else to do, I guess.

Tony Soprano, 'Isabella', Episode 12

You wanna talk all this old school bullshit about the rules? Well, here's a rule you might remember. I'm the fuckin' one who calls the shots. And you better pay me the respect that I gave your brother, or we're gonna have a problem. A bad one.

Tony Soprano to one of his men, 'Toodle-fuckin-oo', Episode 16

Melfi: With today's pharmacology, no one needs to suffer with feelings of exhaustion and depression.

Tony: Here we go. Here comes the prozac.

Dr. Melfi and Tony Soprano, 'Pilot', Episode 1

Now, you liked Jackie; so you don't want to believe that he did this to himself. So, like a lot of other people you go around looking for boogey men to blame- boogey men with Italian names.

Carmela Soprano

Nowadays, everybody's got to go to shrinks and counselors, and go on sally Jesse raphael and talk about their problems. Whatever happened to Gary cooper? The strong, silent type. That was an American. He wasn't in touch with his feelings. He just did what he had to do. See, what they didn't know is once they got Gary cooper in touch with his feelings, that they wouldn't be able to shut him up. And then it's dysfunction this and dysfunction that and dysfunction va fa culo!

Tony Soprano, 'Pilot', Episode 1

Psychology doesn't address the soul. That's something else. But this is a start.

Carmela Soprano, 'Pilot', Episode 1

Sometimes I resent you making me a victim... Remember the first time I came here? I said the kind of man I admire is Gary cooper, the strong silent type. And how all Americans, all they're doing is crying and confessing and complaining. A bunch of fucking pussies. Fuck 'em! And now, I'm one of them, a patient.

Tony Soprano, 'The Happy Wanderer', Episode 22

We have chosen this life in full awareness of the consequences of our sins.

Carmela Soprano, 'From Where to Eternity', Episode 22

This isn't painful. Getting shot is painful. Getting stabbed in the ribs is painful. This shit isn't painful.

Tony Soprano, 'Isabella', Episode 12

You're not depressed. You're sad and you're angry because you did something stupid and you got grounded.

Tony Soprano, 'Down Neck', Episode 7

Maybe you should explore your own behavior. Maybe you pass out because you're guilty over something. Maybe the fact you stick your dick in anything with a pulse.

Carmela Soprano

What's different between you and me is that you're going to hell when you die!

Carmela Soprano to husband Tony, 'Pilot', Episode 1

You may not love me but you will respect me!

Tony Soprano to one of his men

Death just shows the ultimate absurdity of life.

A.J. Soprano, 'D-Girl', Episode 20

What are you yelling at me for? Even grandma says the world has no purpose.

A.J. Soprano, 'D-Girl', Episode 20

Tony: So he's sitting there and he asks me "if there's no god, why was I born?" He tells me he's got no purpose.

Melfi: How'd you answer him?

Tony: I told him it cost about 150 grand to bring him up so far, so if he's got no purpose I want a fucking refund.

Tony Soprano and Dr. Melfi, 'D-Girl', Episode 20

Melfi: When some people first realize that they're solely responsible for their decisions, actions, and beliefs, and that death lies at the end of every road, they can be overcome with intense dread.

Tony: Intense dread?

Melfi: A dull, aching anger that leads them to conclude that the only absolute truth is death.

Tony: I think the kid's onto something.

Tony Soprano and Dr. Melfi, 'D-Girl', Episode 20

Tony: You know, that "no god" shit, that upset your mother very much.

A.J.: It's not "no god", it's just god is dead.

Tony: Who said that?

A.J.: Nietzsche, he's a 19th century philosopher from Germany. Anyway, that's why I'm not getting confirmed.

Tony: Enough with that shit. Your confirmation's this weekend and you are getting confirmed.

A.J.: That sucks my nut.

Tony: Hey! You got a lot of balls, you know that? You go to catholic school and your mother wants it.

A.J.: What does she know?

Tony: She knows that even if god is dead, you're still gonna kiss his ass.

Tony and A.J. Soprano, 'D-Girl', Episode 20

Episode Info

The Happy Wanderer:
Episode 19 -- Tony gets the executive card game

From Where to Eternity:
Episode 22 -- Christopher has a near death experience

Primary Cast

James Gandolfini as
Anthony 'Tony' Soprano Sr.

Edie Falco as
Carmela Soprano

Lorraine Bracco as
Dr. Jennifer Melfi

Michael Imperioli as
Christopher Moltisanti

Vincent Pastore as
Salvatore Bonpensiero
(aka Big Pussy)

Steve Van Zandt as
Silvio Dante

Tony Sirico as
Paulie Gaultieri
(aka Paulie Walnuts)

Nancy Marchand as
Livia Soprano

Robert Iler as
Anthony 'A.J.' Soprano Jr.

Jamie-Lynn Sigler as
Meadow Soprano

Dominic Chianese as
Corrado 'Uncle Junior'
Soprano

John Ventimiglia as
Artie Bucco

Katherine Narducci as
Charmaine Bucco

Drea de Matteo as
Adriana La Cerva

David Proval as
Richie Aprile

Aida Turturro as
Janice Soprano

Federico Castelluccio as
Furio Giunta

Lillo Brancato as
Matthew Bevilacqua

Jason Cerbone as
Jackie Aprile, Jr.

John Heard as
Detective Vin Makazian

Frank Pando as
Agent Grasso

Joe Pantoliano as
Ralph Cifaretto

Joe Badalucco, Jr. as
Jimmy Altieri

Quotes from the Series (cont.)

You tell me he's a depressed criminal, prone to anger, serially unfaithful. Is that your definition of a good man?... You must trust your initial impulse and consider leaving him. You'll never be able to feel good about yourself. You'll never be able to quell the feelings of guilt and shame that you talked about, so long as you're his accomplice.

Dr. Krakower to Carmela Soprano, 'Second Opinion', Episode 33

Jewish Hotel Owner: You ever heard of the Masada? For 2 years, 900 Jews held their own against 15,000 Roman soldiers. They chose death before enslavement. And the Romans? Where are they now?

Tony: You're looking at 'em, asshole.

Jewish Hotel Owner and Tony Soprano, 'Denial, Anger, Acceptance', Episode 3

I'm going to hell, T... I crossed over to the other side. I saw the tunnel and the white light... And I saw my father in hell... And the bouncer said that I'd be there too when my time comes... That's our hell. It's an Irish bar where it's St. Patrick's day everyday forever.

Christopher, 'From Where to Eternity', Episode 22

Melfi: Do you think he'll go to hell?

Tony: No. He's not the type that deserves hell.

Melfi: Who do you think does?

Tony: The worst people. The twisted and demented psychos who kill people for pleasure. The cannibals, the degenerate bastards that molest and torture little kids and kill babies. The Hitlers, the Pol Pots. Those are the evil fucks that deserve to die. Not my nephew.

Melfi: What about you? What? Hell? You been listening to me? No... For the same reasons. We're soldiers. Soldiers don't go to hell. It's war. Soldiers, they kill other soldiers. We're in a situation where everybody involved knows the stakes. And if you're gonna accept those stakes... You gotta do certain things. It's business, we're soldiers. We follow codes... Orders.

Dr. Melfi and Tony Soprano, 'From Where to Eternity', Episode 22

Larry: Why don't we run this thing like a council?

Jimmy: Larry, the old guy set this up as a paramilitary organization. We need a supreme commander at the top, not the fuckin' Dave Clark Five.

Larry and Jimmy Altieri, 'Meadowlands', Episode 4

Melfi: What's the one thing every woman -- your mother, your wife, your daughter -- have in common?

Tony: They all break my balls.

Dr. Melfi and Tony Soprano, 'Pax Soprano', Episode 6

Tony: I took an oath, Carmela?

Carmela: What are you, a kid in a treehouse?

Tony and Carmela Soprano, 'Isabella', Episode 12

Tony: I was proud to be Johnny Soprano's kid. When he beat the shit outta that guy, I went to the class -- I told them how tough my father was.

Melfi: Do you think that's how your son feels about you?

Tony: Yeah, probably. And I'm glad, I'm glad he's proud of me. But that's the bind I'm in 'cause I don't want him to be like me.

Dr. Melfi and Tony Soprano, 'Down Neck', Episode 7

Tony: You know everyone thought Dad was the ruthless one, but I gotta hand it to you. If you'd been born after those feminists, you would've been the real gangster.

Livia: I don't know what you're talking about.

Tony Soprano and his mother Livia, 'Down Neck', Episode 7

[On Psychiatry] That's what people do when they're looking for somebody to blame for their life, isn't it?

Livia Soprano, 'Down Neck', Episode 7

You know, Tony, it's a multiple choice thing with you. 'Cause I can't tell if you're old-fashioned, you're paranoid, or just a fucking asshole.

Carmela Soprano, 'A Hit Is A Hit', Episode 10

No more sex talk, okay?... Out there it's the 1990's but in this house it's 1954... So now and forever, I don't want to hear anymore sex talk.

Tony Soprano, 'Nobody Knows Anything', Episode 11

You are sinking this whole family into your misery with your wallowing and your complaining, while I spoon-feed you and bathe you. All it takes is a 1/2-inch of another woman's thigh to get your ass out of bed--what do I look like, a fucking idiot? If I had an ounce of self-respect I would cut your dick off.

Carmela Soprano, 'Isabella', Episode 12

Someday soon, you're gonna have families of your own. And if you're lucky, you'll remember the little moments, like this. That were good.

Tony Soprano to his family, 'I Dream of Jeanie Cusimano', Episode 13

I am living in the moral never never land with this patient. Not wanting to judge but to treat. But now I've judged. I took a position God Damn it and I am scared.

Dr. Melfi, 'From Where to Eternity', Episode 22

Charmaine: If you do this Artie, if you chose Tony over me...

Artie: What, you're getting a divorce?

Charmaine and Artie Bucco, 'Another Toothpick', Episode 31

Tony Darrow as
Larry Boy Barese

Robert Patrick as
David Scatino

Frank Pellegrino as
Agent Frank Cubitosa

Michael Rispoli as
Jackie Aprile

Steve Schirripa as
Bobby 'Bacala' Baccalieri

Paul Schulze as
Father Phillip Intintola

Mackenzie Trucillo as
Danielle Cautella

Patrick Tully as
Noah Tannenbaum

Mike Nichols as
Dr. Krakower

Peter Bogdanovich as
Dr. Elliot Kupferberg

Quotes on the Series

I still think one of the great fallacies of Christian thinking is this kind of garbage in/garbage out mentality. You know, I remember being 16 years old and being taught that kind of thing. "Stay away from culture because what you think you will absorb. See, your brain is a sponge, you'll absorb whatever you hear and see." // And I began to study Scripture and I read passages like that in Daniel, where Daniel was educated by sorcerers, magicians, pagan priests, and astrologers. It says at the end of chapter one that he became ten times wiser in those things than the people that taught him. And yet, clearly, he wasn't a pagan priest or a sorcerer. Scripture was his guide through all of the mess of his own pagan culture that I find to be very similar to our culture.

Chris Seay, Pastor & Author of 'The Gospel According to Tony Soprano' in a 9/23/02 Christianity Today interview

If your temptation is to become a mob boss killer, and that's a major temptation for you, maybe you should avoid the show. But I do not believe that this show, in particular, glorifies violence or deviant sexuality. I think you see how bankrupt and how sad a life that most of these people lead.

Chris Seay, Pastor & Author of 'The Gospel According to Tony Soprano' in a 9/23/02 Christianity Today interview

If you watch any of this, if you listen to music, whether it's on your Christian radio station or any other, or you go see any film, you're foolish if you turn off your mind. We can't afford to do that. Just because Mariah Carey sings about love songs does not mean she's an expert on love. We have to be critical thinkers.

Chris Seay, Pastor & Author of 'The Gospel According to Tony Soprano' in a 9/23/02 Christianity Today interview

We see Tony Soprano as he really is. He's a sick man, and yet he's a beautiful man. There are all of these things present with him. And I think most characters that we get in popular film and television are not very real to life. Most of the ones that we have emerging from Scripture are very real when you read them in Scripture, but we have distorted them. We've tried to make them into morality heroes, which they are not. These were really broken men and women. They were very messed up, very sinful. The beauty of the story is that God continues to meet them there. // I don't think that Christ ever fixes it all. He definitely didn't for the people of Scripture. These were not people that were somehow fixed by God. I don't think we are either. The hope is that we don't have to take our sin to the point that Tony does. Redemption takes place in us much quicker.

Chris Seay, Pastor & Author of 'The Gospel According to Tony Soprano' in a 9/23/02 Christianity Today interview

Quotes on the Series (cont)

He's the ultimate anti-hero. He does really sick and mean things and yet he loves his wife, he loves his family, he loves the people that he works with in this criminal family.

Chris Seay, Pastor & Author of 'The Gospel According to Tony Soprano', 9/23/2002 Christianity Today interview

Tony's brutality is all the more disturbing because it erupts from within a social framework of apparent normalcy.

Stephen Holden, The New York Times on The Sopranos (New York: iBooks, 2000), pg. XI.

The original kernel was that life in America had gotten so savage and selfish that even a mob guy couldn't take it anymore... He's in therapy because what he sees upsets him so much... He and his guys were the ones who invented selfishness, they invented "me first". They invented "it's all about me" and now he can't take it because the rest of the country has surpassed them.

David Chase, Sopranos Creator, video interview from Season 1 DVD.

My conception of the series has always been that it's a show about a bunch of people... who have made a deal with the devil.

David Chase, Sopranos Creator, The New York Times, 'Critic's Choice, A Times Talks Series' video (TimesTalks Online).

She's the first one going to hell. I don't mean that there was a guy with smoking horns. I mean that of everyone in the show, [Carmela] has made this compromise to go along with this for her own agenda.

David Chase, Sopranos Creator, when questioned about the eternal destiny of the matriarch of the Soprano clan, Carmela, The New York Times, 'Critic's Choice, A Times Talks Series' video (TimesTalks Online).

It's about an American man in his middle years who has a certain degree of success, and his unhappiness with it.

Michael Imperioli, the actor who portrays the Soprano nephew Christopher Moltisanti, when asked to describe The Sopranos, Excerpted from RS 865, March 29, 2001

I think it's accurate in the sense that nothing changes because of it.

David Chase, Sopranos Creator, when questioned about the whether the Sopranos is an accurate portrayal of psychotherapy, NPR Roundtable with Sopranos writers from 7/29/1999.

Every character is always blaming other people for their problems. No one takes responsibility for anything... They always are saying "It's your fault, it's your fault, it's your fault." That's sort of what it's about.

David Chase, Sopranos Creator, NPR Roundtable with Sopranos writers from 7/29/1999.

Chase: Were you ever in therapy?... Did it really change your life? // Interviewer: It probably helped me justify the things I was going to do anyway. // Chase: Well, that's what's happening with Tony.

David Chase, Sopranos Creator, NPR Roundtable with Sopranos writers from 7/29/1999.

Therapy, in this country, is the ultimate place of non-accountability. [They say] whatever you did is OK. It's all about you. It's all exculpatory. They never take a moral position. I don't think there's any accountability having to do with anything in therapy.

David Chase, Sopranos Creator, NPR Roundtable with Sopranos writers from 7/29/1999.

It's a family show - it's about a mother, a son, an uncle, a wife and children, and all the ramifications, and then the guy's job, which happens to be hustler, con man and a killer. It has nothing to do with gangsters - it's all about society.

Dominic Chianese (Uncle Junior), 'Shocking Family Secrets!', Rolling Stone, 3/29/2001.

I heard David Chase say one time that it's about people who lie to themselves, as we all do. Lying to ourselves on a daily basis and the mess it creates.

James Gandolfini, (Tony Soprano), 'Shocking Family Secrets!', Rolling Stone, 3/29/2001.

Quotes on Issues Raised

To look at a man with both eyes open is terrifying and wonderful, like a roller coaster ride. It yields a great sense of depth, a third dimension, just as two physical eyes do."

Peter Kreeft, Christianity for Modern Pagans (Ft. Collins: Ignatius Press, 1993) pg. 51

My notion is that religions should be robust enough to trust their members. A religion should arm you to go into the world, not wall you off from it.

Roger Ebert, The Movie Answer Man column for 10/20/2002

Freud, in 'Civilization and Its Discontents', asks why we are not happier than our ancestors, since our technology has made us like gods and fulfilled nearly every fairy tale wish and wishful thinking that invented the gods in the first place. He simply can't find out why we wielders of godlike knowledge and power are not happier than our ignorant and impotent ancestors.

Peter Kreeft, Christianity for Modern Pagans (Ft. Collins: Ignatius Press, 1993) pg. 169

Notice that the Christian and his art have a place for the minor theme [the abnormality of the revolting world] because man is lost and abnormal and the Christian has his own defeatedness. There is not only victory and song in my life... Christian art needs to recognize the minor theme, the defeated aspect to even the Christian life. If our Christian art only emphasizes the major theme, then it is not fully Christian but simply romantic art. And let us say with sorrow that for years our Sunday school literature has been romantic in its art and has had very little to do with genuine Christian art. Older Christians may wonder what is wrong with this art and wonder why their kids are turned off by it, but the answer is simple. It's romantic. It's based on the notion that Christianity has only an optimistic note.

Francis Schaeffer, 'Eleven Distinct Perspectives On Art' from the book Art and the Bible, published in the USA by InterVarsity Press. 1973

I condemn equally those who choose to praise man, those who choose to condemn him, and those who choose to divert themselves, and I can only approve of those who seek with groans.

Blaise Pascal, Pensees 405, 1660 A.D.

The only thing that consoles us for our miseries is diversion. And yet it is the greatest of our miseries. For it is that above all which prevents us thinking about ourselves and leads us imperceptibly to distraction. But for that we should be bored and boredom would drive us to seek some more solid means of escape, but diversion passes our time and brings us imperceptible a to our death.

Blaise Pascal, Pensees 414, 1660 A.D.

Both the illusion of truth and the unavoidable substance of truth require evil to be present in fiction. Almost from the first moments of consciousness, human beings are aware of the fact that the world isn't always nice... // The painful lessons are only beginning. As we grow older, we learn that people die, even when we love them very much. Friends that we counted on cheat us. Family members that we love hurt us. People we never harmed commit crimes against us. // But we aren't always victims. It's sometimes a terrible discovery that we ourselves are the perpetrators of evil, but it's one we all make at some time or another. The world is often ugly, and uglier still is the realization that in our own small way we have darkened it for others, and for ourselves. // Nature, other people, and our own desires conspire to bring sorrow into our lives. No one is immune to that. No one is so good that he is untouched by evil. // And if that is life, how can a fiction writer honestly write without depicting evil in the lives of his characters? // The illusion of truth demands that there be evil, or his readers will cease believing in his characters and toss the book away. // And his own inner demand for the substance of truth requires that there be evil, because what in the world can a writer say about a character if he does not tell about the character's struggles against suffering? If the writer knew a way for a human being to live without evil, without suffering, without sorrow, he would go and live that way, and forget writing. But the writer-no, let's forget the third person-I know of no way to live untouched by evil, and so the characters that I write about will also confront evil. It is impossible to write any other way.

Orson Scot Card, Award winning science fiction writer of 'Ender's Game' (and non-Christian Mormon theist), Lecture - 'A Mormon Writer Looks at the Problem of Evil in Fiction', 3/13/1980.

Links

Official Site – <http://www.hbo.com/sopranos>

Sopranoland (transcripts of most episodes) – <http://www.sopranoland.com/episodes>

The-Sopranos.com (quotes by episode) --

<http://www.the-sopranos.com/allquotes.htm>

Mainstream Publisher 'The Gospel According to Tony Soprano' –

<http://www.penguinputnam.com/Book/BookFrame/0,1007,,00.html?id=1585421944>

Christian Publisher 'The Gospel According to Tony Soprano' –

<http://www.relevant-books.com/main.html>

Christianity Today Interview with Chris Seay, Pastor & Author of 'The Gospel According to Tony Soprano' --

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/137/21.0.html>

NPR Roundtable with David Chase and other Sopranos Writers from 7/29/1999 --

http://freshair.npr.org/day_fa.jhtml?displayValue=day&todayDate=07/29/1999

Orson Scot Card, Author of 'Ender's Game' (and non-Christian Mormon theist), 'A Mormon Writer Looks at the Problem of Evil in Fiction', 3/13/1980 --

<http://www.nauvoo.com/library/cardtalk.html>

