

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

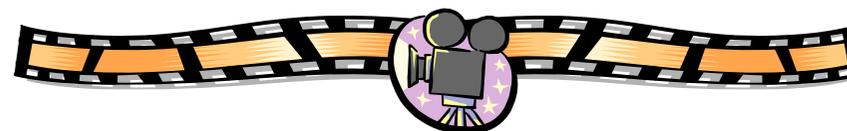
What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

Some facts about the film

- The voice over at the beginning is done by Peter Sellers himself. He also provides one of the voices heard on a television sequence.
- Look out for several well-known 60's British TV personalities playing themselves including Ludovic Kennedy and Malcolm Muggeridge.
- *Heavens Above* is the third in a trio of films satirising great pillars of the British establishment, the other two being *Private's Progress* (the army) and *I'm alright, Jack* (the trade unions).
- The story is based on an idea by Malcolm Muggeridge.
- The film was nominated for a BAFTA for Best British Cinematography in 1964.
- It was filmed at Claremont House in Esher, Surrey, and at Shepperton Studios.
- During the film, we see someone reading the novel *Lolita*. Peter Sellers had starred in the corresponding film, which had been made the previous year.
- William Hartnell, who plays Major Fowler, was to go on to become Dr Who later the same year.



**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

7th Nov The Reader
5th Dec Heaven
9th Jan Toy Story 3 (2.30pm with FEATURES @ Tackley)
6th Feb Departures
6th Mar Heavens Above!
3rd Apr He who must die

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
Islip**

**Further details from Jonathan (Ox 842214)
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Heavens Above!

Heaven's Above is a wonderful satire that pokes fun, not at Christianity itself, but at hypocrites and ineffectual religious leaders, while also taking a swipe at capitalism and the British class system along the way. What happens if a sincere believer attempts to live out the gospel in the middle of a spiritually dead English parish? Unchristian attitudes abound, ranging from the bishop who complains that the Revd Smallwood "keeps bringing God into everything", to the two women arguing over free food they have just received as handouts while telling others (whether the black church warden or those who are not Anglicans) "You don't belong here" while standing under a banner that reads "Love one another".

An impossible dream

In one way, the film gives a very cynical critique of human nature. People are far more interested in themselves than in others. Yet our mission as disciples of Christ is to help build the kingdom here and now. What do you think of the vicar's experiment? Naive, possibly? But what is the alternative? Is "being taken for a ride" part of the price we pay? How much faith do we have in the ability to change human nature? And where does God fit in?

Sanitising the gospel

When the vicar reminds the archdeacon about Jesus' teaching on the difficulties of a rich man going to heaven, he replies that the passage is interpreted very differently these days. There is always a danger that we read the gospel in such a way that we take its comforts but ignore its challenges. What challenges may you be avoiding?

Prejudice

All sorts of prejudice is to be found in the film and it is easy to sit back and think we have moved on. But have we? Are we really as inclusive as we should be—both as a church community and as individuals?

Change

All church congregations long for others to come and join them on a Sunday morning, but how much are we willing to change for that to happen? The townspeople did not want their safe routines interfered with by the vicar, God or anything else. Churches continue to argue about seating, music, styles of worship, times of services etc. Are we any different?

Getting people in

The gypsy family, albeit reluctantly, do at least attend the Bible classes. Is any exposure to the gospel, however inadequate, better than nothing?

Providing opportunities for growth

Matthew is very much on the edge of Orbiston Parva Society. Yet the vicar gives him the opportunity to grow and develop through encouraging him to take on an important role in the church. How often are we willing to do the same? And how often are we reluctant to let go control?

The ending?

The ending is the weakest part of the film. How would you have finished it?

Memorable Quotes

- Lady Despard** Saint Paul was a very queer man.
- Governor** You know what he said? "To be trustworthy, Governor, a man has to be trusted".
- Person 1** We are Christians, there's no doubt about that. I do think the church tries to do good, but I mean, well, you haven't got the time, have you? I'm sure you understand.
- Person 2** Well, I think we are all pretty religious around here—but you can't let it interfere with ordinary life, can you?
- Person 3** Don't have to go to church to be a Christian, do you? Well, I mean, only squares go to church, don't they?
- S'wood** I'm not a good Christian, but I want to be. So I'm trying ... If we want to join Jesus' club, we have to do what he told us and live as he showed us. You can't dodge that fact, so there's no point trying ... This town is full of people who call themselves Christians. But from what I've seen of it I wouldn't mind making a bet that there aren't enough real Christians about to feed one decent lion.
- A'deacon** I'm sorry to have to say this, but the bishop has already received a number of complaints.
- S'wood** That doesn't worry me, Archdeacon. You remember what it says in the Bible: "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you."
- A'deacon** I don't think there is a need to keep bringing God into this.
- S'wood** Well, it's a bit difficult to keep him out, especially when you are working for him like we are.
- Shopkeeper** But you couldn't do that! Where's the profit? I mean there's got to be a profit somewhere for someone.
- Lady Despard** I don't want to make a profit.
- S'wood** Christianity is give, give, give—from the widow's mite to life itself.
- Mika** This good neighbour stunt is beginning to cause real hardship.
- Matthew** I know what you are trying to do is right, man, but this isn't the place for it. I'm getting out—and if you have any sense, Reverend, you'll get out too.
- S'wood** No, Matthew. I can't.
- PM** God knows we must keep religion out of politics. Obviously we have to do something. But it is absolutely vital that we appear to do nothing ... You must find him a nice quiet parish where he can do no more harm.
- Banners** We want jobs—not good neighbours. Business needs profits, not prophets.
- S'wood** What you want, I can't give. And what you need, you don't want.