

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.

So here are some questions you can apply to any film. Sometimes, you may feel that there is nothing much to say—but that itself can be its own message. Other films can be truly life changing! But whatever film you are watching, enjoy the experience!

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? How does the Bible tackle the issues the film raises?

Some facts about the film

Originally backers, EMI, pulled out when they saw the script and finance was eventually arranged through ex-Beatle George Harrison, who created Handmade Films for this purpose. Harrison decided to fund the production mostly because he thought it would be his only chance of seeing another Monty Python film. He also plays a small cameo role—look out for his name in the credits.

Filmed in Tunisia, the film uses many of the locations and sets used by Zefferelli's "Jesus of Nazareth", which had just completed filming.

The only character to appear in all four Python films (And Now for Something Completely Different (1971), Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975), The Meaning of Life (1983) and this one) is God.

Six cast members play 40 various characters.



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

2nd Jul	<u>Life Of Brian</u>
6th Aug	Crash
3rd Sep	Bridget Jones' Diary
1st Oct	Dogville
5th Nov	The Man Who Sued God
3rd Dec	Cool Hand Luke

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

**10 Bletchingdon Road
Islip**

**Further details from Jonathan (Ox 842214)
Or email info@spiritualityonscreen.org.uk**



Monty Python's Life of Brian

During a promotional tour for *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the team were asked what their next film would be. Eric Idle gave an immediate Pythonesque answer: *Jesus Christ: Lust for Glory*. Although quickly realising that satirising the life of Jesus would be a non-starter, the idea of a “biblical comedy film” remained attractive and *Life of Brian* was born.

The team have always been very keen to point out that this is *not* a film about Jesus. Jesus does appear—but only briefly and simply acts as a backdrop around which the story of Brian is told. Despite the furore caused by its release, it is not blasphemous and was never intended to be. It does not ridicule Jesus but instead pokes fun at the ways Christians have often responded over the centuries to Jesus as their Christ. What the film *does* poke fun at, though, is organised religion, our willingness to hear what we want to hear, our desire for a leader and our fickleness when they don't deliver, and the way things are misinterpreted.

Some key issues

The question of interpretation

The whole opening section with the Sermon on the Mount, along with the classic line about cheese makers referring to any manufacturer of dairy products, highlights that continual problem of hearing, remembering, understanding and interpreting that have divided believers and churches over the centuries.

Hearing what we want to hear

The more Brian tries to insist he is not the Messiah, the more the crowd wants to believe he is. The most ridiculous things are taken as a sign, because that is what people want to believe.

The strong desire to be told what to do

People love clarity. Some of our churches thrive today because what to believe is made black and white—faith becomes simple; that is, until it clashes with an experience which simply can't be made to fit into the nice clear framework. Throughout the film, Brian tries to encourage people to act as individuals—to no avail.

The consequences of our actions

The gospel brings a message of healing and wholeness but that is not always what people want. What do we say to the ex-leper, cured of his disease, but now having no obvious way to make a living?

The absurdity of life

In true Pythonesque style, this is a continuous theme, no more so than at the end with the song “Always look on the bright side of life”. As such, there are echoes of Ecclesiastes here, with its message of all is vanity.

Memorable quotes

- Spectator:** I think it was "Blessed are the cheesemakers".
Mrs. Gregory: Aha, what's so special about the cheesemakers?
Gregory: Well, obviously it's not meant to be taken literally; it refers to any manufacturers of dairy products.
- Mrs. Big Nose:** [trying to hear Jesus' sermon on the mount] Oh, it's blessed are the MEEK! Oh, I'm glad they're getting something, they have a hell of a time.
- Reg:** What Jesus fails to appreciate is that it's the meek who are the problem.
- Ex-Leper:** Okay, sir, my final offer: half a shekel for an old ex-leper?
Brian: Did you say "ex-leper"?
Ex-Leper: That's right, sir, 16 years behind a veil and proud of it, sir.
Brian: Well, what happened?
Ex-Leper: Oh, cured, sir.
Brian: Cured?
Ex-Leper: Yes sir, bloody miracle, sir. Bless you!
Brian: Who cured you?
Ex-Leper: Jesus did, sir. I was hopping along, minding my own business, all of a sudden, up he comes, cures me! One minute I'm a leper with a trade, next minute my livelihood's gone. Not so much as a by-your-leave! "You're cured, mate." Bloody do-gooder.
- Brian:** I am NOT the Messiah!
Arthur: I say you are Lord, and I should know. I've followed a few.
- Brian:** Please, please, please listen! I've got one or two things to say.
The Crowd: Tell us! Tell us both of them!
Brian: Look, you've got it all wrong! You don't NEED to follow ME, You don't NEED to follow ANYBODY! You've got to think for your selves! You're ALL individuals!
The Crowd: Yes! We're all individuals!
Brian: You're all different!
The Crowd: Yes, we ARE all different!
Man in crowd: I'm not...
The Crowd: Ssh!
- Cruciffee:** [Dying on the cross] Cheer up, Brian. You know what they say: some things in live are bad. They can really make you mad. Other things just make you swear and curse. When you're chewing on life's gristle, don't grumble; give a whistle, and this'll help things turn out for the best. And... always look on the bright side of life...