

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?

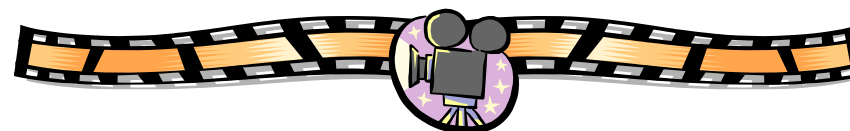
What issues did the film raise for you?

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

Some facts about the film

- The title of the film comes from the fact that UN peacekeepers used to shoot local dogs that fed on the decomposing bodies of the genocide victims.
- In the State, the film was released with the title *Beyond The Gates*.
- One of the producers and writers on the film was David Belton. In early May of 1994, Belton flew to Rwanda to cover the genocide for BBC's Newsnight. Rwanda was extraordinarily dangerous and Belton and his team often feared for their lives. It was only with the help of a Bosnian priest named Vjeko Curic, who gave them shelter, and protected them from the extremist Hutu government, that Belton and the Newsnight team managed to survive. Curic stayed in Rwanda throughout the genocide. It was on their last night with Curic that the priest confided in them that he was sheltering many Tutsis from the militias. He was also secretly ferrying Tutsi women and children out of the country in the bottom of his lorry. Vjeko Curic would later become the inspiration for the character of Father Christopher.
- The United States and the United Kingdom, and many others, refused to call mass slaughter in Rwanda a genocide for fear that they would be obliged to intervene. This failure of the Western world to act resulted in nearly a million deaths and was what compelled Belton and his collaborator Richard Alwyn to begin chronicling the ETO massacre. Belton explains: "In a sense, the whole Rwandan genocide was about failure. There was the failure of the International Community to react. I felt I had failed as a journalist. Certainly I knew of others who felt the same way – teachers who had left, diplomats who had run, UN soldiers who had been ordered out, NGO workers who had got on the first plane out of there – leaving behind their Rwandan friends, many of whom were killed. Even the Security Council showed moral cowardice. At the time that the UN was bolstering its forces in Bosnia, it was running away from Africa. It was clear that there were two rules for international intervention: if you were white or you had something the West wanted, you'd get the interest of the Security Council. But if you were black or poor – forget it. You were on your own."

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

30th Mar	The Queen
27th Apr	The Simpsons Movie
1st Jun	<u>Shooting Dogs</u>
3rd Aug	The Pursuit of Happyness
7th Sep	Dead Man Walking
5th Oct	This is England

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

**10 Bletchingdon Road
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Shooting Dogs

Based on a true story, *Shooting Dogs* gives a glimpse of the horrendous events that took place in Rwanda in April 1994. After the airplane carrying the Hutu president is shot down, Hutu militias begin slaughtering the Tutsi population. In the Ecole Technique Officielle, a Catholic priest and a young idealistic English teacher find themselves harbouring 2,500 refugees, under the protection of a small Belgian UN force. Outside the gates, the Hutu militia begin to gather. In the end, they must choose whether to stay with the Tutsi refugees or flee for safety.

Choices

The characters in the film have some agonising choices to make. Those choices are compounded by the decisions made by others—people half a world away; people who refuse to get involved. Reflect on the choices made by: Charles (the UN commander), Joe, Father Christopher, the TV crew, the Tutsis who take refuge in the school, those who try to flee, François and the other Hutus. If you can, put yourself into their shoes and ask yourself: “What would I have done?” We often like to think that we would have done something different, but would we? Even the Hutus, who it is easy to demonise, were under great pressure. They had been indoctrinated for years by extremists and faced their own death if they did not take part. Mob behaviour is very strong—and, albeit in far less extreme ways, continues to affect us all as we allow ourselves to be influenced by the societies of which we are a part.

Futile gestures

Is there a point when we have to recognise that there is nothing more we can do, even when we know that the result is going to be great pain? And, if so, is it right to look to the future and withdraw? Or should we never abandon those in need? Charles, Joe and Christopher all have different constraints and different responses to this question. Is staying to die ever really helpful? Or is it just a futile gesture? Should we not, instead, aim to live to fight another day?

Betrayal

There is betrayal at all levels throughout the film—from the international community, from neighbours, from friends. How do you respond to being let down? Is it possible to forgive? And is it sometimes the lesser of two evils (eg. Joe makes a promise he feels he cannot keep)?

Where is God?

Father Christopher has a very powerful answer to that question. Do you agree with him? Or, in face of tremendous suffering, is your gut reaction (as opposed to what you “know” Christian theology tells you) to accuse God of being absent or, indeed, non-existent?

The power of the Mass

For Father Christopher, everything revolves around the Mass. When he can do nothing else, he can at least do that. Joe is unconvinced and would like to be getting on with more practical things. On which side of the argument would you come down on? How important a part of your spirituality is Holy Communion?

Christ figures

There are some people who, by their words, actions or simply their presence, enable us to catch a glimpse of Christ. And sometimes it needs a crisis for that to happen. Father Christopher has been a priest in Africa for many years. In some ways he has become tired and weary, even cynical. But within this crisis he once more discovers his soul—and we see something of Christ. However, it doesn’t need such extreme circumstances for Christ to “emerge”. Take a moment to reflect on your own life. Who have been the Christ figures for you?

Memorable quotes

François	Hutus must protect themselves or die.
Christopher	But you’re UN peacekeepers, Charles. Surely you’re here to prevent bloodshed.
Charles	Peacekeepers? No! Our mandate is very clear. We’re here to monitor the peace. That’s all.
Charles Christopher	It may become untenable to provide security for this many Tutsi. Humph. Around here we just call them Rwandans.
Christopher Joe	I’ll see to that after Mass. Mass?
Christopher Joe	I’m a priest in a Catholic country, Joe. This is what I do. Yeah, sure. But do you think it is the best time for that?
Christopher Joe	In times of stress, people need to commune with God. I think maybe they’d prefer some food, water, a spot of reassurance.
Christopher	Well, come to Mass—get all three on the same ticket.
Joe	Don’t go—it’s not safe. I’ve been out there and its falling apart. They might already be dead.
Christopher	That’s not the point.
Marie	Does God love everyone? Does he even love those men on the road outside?
Christopher	God doesn’t always like everything we do. That’s our choice. But he loves all his children.
Marie Christopher	You’ll never leave us? Papa Christophe? Terrible things may happen in this world, Marie. But however terrible they are, you are in my heart. And you’ll remain there until I die.
Joe Christopher	And now there is nothing we can do. Oh yes there is. There children might die without taking Holy Communion. We can do something about that.
Marie Joe Marie Joe	Joe, where are you going? I’m sorry. You promised! I’m sorry.
Joe Christopher	Why are you doing this? You asked me, Joe, where is God in everything that is happening here, in all the suffering? I know exactly where he is. He’s right here. With these people. Suffering. His love is here. More intense and profound than I have ever felt. And my heart is here, Joe. My soul. And if I leave I think I may not find it again.
Christopher	Do you know what’s so strange, Julius, even now? When I’m looking at you, into your eyes, the only feeling I have inside me is love.
Marie	I remember Father Christopher saying: “Sacrifice is the most you can love someone.”
Marie Joe Marie	Why did you leave us? I was afraid to die. We are fortunate. All this time we have been give—we must use it well.