

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?

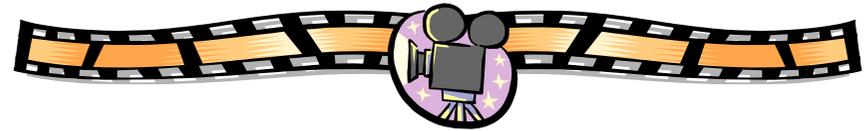
What issues did the film raise for you?

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 director, Mark Dornford-May, worked in the theatre in England for 25 years before being mesmerized by the wonderful talent he came across in South Africa. In 2000, he moved there and set up a theatre group which later became Dimpho Do Kopane. He was raised a Methodist and remains a regular churchgoer. He is married to Pauline Malefane, who plays Mary and is a trained opera singer.
- Dornford-May's first film with the group was a contemporized version of Bizet's opera "Carmen". Called *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, it won the Golden Bear for Best Film at the Berlin International Film Festival 2005. This is his second film.
- The cast members of the group all came of age under apartheid, an experience that proved useful in making "Son of Man." As the director has commented: "They could draw on their terrible memories of the past. When you're working on those scenes in the film, you don't need to say, 'Imagine what it's like to be chased by a policeman.'"
- The language of the film is Xhosa.



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

4th Jan Juno
1st Feb The Kite Runner
1st Mar Son of Rambow
5th Apr Son of Man
3rd May WALL-E
***14th Jun Into the Wild**

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

**10 Bletchingdon Road
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Son of Man

Son of Man takes as its starting point recent African history, with its record of civil strife, bloody conflicts, corrupt politicians and the oppression of the majority by those manipulating power, and asks the question “What would Jesus have done if he had been born into this?”. The result is the film concentrates on Jesus' humanity and, unlike Martin Scorsese's *The Passion of Christ*, rather than focussing on Jesus' suffering, takes as its guiding principle Jesus' struggle for peace and justice and the way he pursued that through non-violent means.

The setting for the film is a fictional sub-Saharan nation called Judea where warlords, dictators and famine are the norm. At the beginning, Herod oversees a near-fascist militia and is paranoid about insurgents and rebels. When Herod dies, a so-called peace keeping force from a neighbouring country, led by Pilate, takes over and maintains power by manipulating local gangland leaders Caiaphas and Annas. Amongst all this, Jesus finds no shortage of people who are poor, hungry, terrified and desperate to hear a message of hope.

Things to reflect on

The director deliberately interprets the gospel story as not only a spiritual one but also a political one, “with a message of humanity and equality. I find it amazing that the church spends any time debating whether gay people should be priests when people are dying of hunger and sick people can't get medicine.” Unfortunately, in this country we increasingly live in a culture where religion and politics have become separated. In the film, Jesus continually says: “This is my world”, a statement which is both political *and* theological. How does this image of Jesus, and the way he is portrayed throughout the film, coincide with your own thoughts and beliefs?

Those who are familiar with the story of Steve Biko (eg. as portrayed in the film *Cry Freedom*) will see several parallels between Biko and Jesus in the film, including the way Jesus' body is carried to his grave in a *bakkie*, a South African truck.

Judas uses a video camera to collect evidence against Jesus. The director tells how he struggled for some time as to how to depict the miracles, including raising people from the dead and healing the sick. His solution was to use the video camera so as to force the viewer to look at Jesus through the eyes of his betrayer. How effective was this for you?

Look out for the way the director reinterprets key works of Christian painting. Early on there is the classic image of Jesus as a child sitting on Mary's knee. Much later there is the traditional “Pieta” pose, in this instance in the back of a truck. Meanwhile, throughout the film Jesus' actions are recorded and celebrated in murals on walls in the township, putting the stories about him in accessible language and allowing the news about Jesus to spread. What sort of picture would you want to paint, or what story would you want to tell, if you were to capture what Jesus means to you?

In passing, notice the way the director allows the camera to dwell on the incredible scenery that surrounds the townships, comparing the beauty of God's creation with the unsightly shacks that humanity has left some of its members to live in.

Crucifying Jesus on a cross would obviously not have been appropriate in this setting. Instead, Jesus is made to disappear in a way similar to the way many “enemies of the state” have disappeared in recent years. It is Jesus' mother who puts Jesus' body on a cross, as a way of announcing to the world what has happened. The cross then becomes a rallying cry for those left behind, a symbol to the powers that be that their days are numbered and that they cannot simply just get rid of those who stand up for justice and truth. What does the cross mean for you? And how do we best express that understanding to others within our communities?

There is much talk in the film of solidarity, of how people on their own have no hope against the state but that if they work together all sorts of things are possible. Indeed, the scenes around the cross demonstrate just that and there is a very real sense that the spirit of Jesus lives on in the community he has formed and in the sense of togetherness within that community. Do you think that is the only way in which Jesus lives on? In what ways, if at all, does the film touch on the resurrection?

