

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?

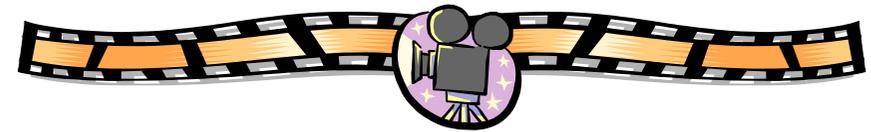
Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

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?

Has the director taken a distinctive approach to filming or telling the story? If so, how does the film benefit from being made in this way?



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

15th Jan*	Bruce Almighty
5th Feb*	<u>The Mission</u>
12th Mar	Shrek
9th Apr	The Last Temptation of Christ
14th May	Bagdad Cafe
11th Jun	21 Grams

**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**

*Please note change of date



The Mission

A very powerful and moving film set in 18th century South America. Based on real events, it tells the story of a Jesuit mission in the jungle which is a safe haven for the local Indian tribe. However, both Spain and Portugal, who rule the surrounding area, are keen to enslave the Indians and force them to work on their plantations. Both countries resent the apparent power the church has over the state. Political manoeuvrings ensure the church is forced to close its various missions and allow the Indians to be taken into captivity. However, the “mission above the falls” decides to hold out, leading to a cataclysmic and ultimately tragic conclusion.

Some key issues

Forgiveness and redemption

There is much in the film about how people can, and are, changed. In particular, there is the journey of Rodrigo Mendoza from slave trader to Jesuit priest. As a mercenary, killing people has been part of Mendoza’s life. However, when he kills his brother in a fit of passion he is tormented by the guilt and enormity of what he has done. There appears to be no future. Yet, in God, there is always release. The scene where he is set free from his penance by the very people he had previously killed and enslaved is one of the most moving in the entire film.

Costly vs cheap grace

Dietrich Bonhoeffer often talked about “cheap grace” - grace without a cross, grace that did not take into account the full measure of the past. The mistaken pity of Father John in cutting Mendoza free of his burden cannot bring the release that only true grace can bring. It is only the unexpected forgiveness from the Guarani Indians of the man who had so wronged them that is able to set Mendoza free.

Fighting the good fight

When is something worth fighting for? And for what do we fight? Is there ever a place for physical violence in the pursuit of justice and of God’s kingdom? Or is the power of love so absolute that it can never countenance taking another person’s life?

The will of the Church or the will of God?

The whole film is sandwiched between scenes showing Altamirano, the Pope’s envoy, writing to the Pope to tell him of how “the little matter ... is settled.” In so doing, the whole issue of the church’s guilt in the events that happened remains in the air, along with the question of the “things that need to be done for a greater good”. Is that ever true—or is it just something we say to salve our conscience? Where does the balance lie between church and state? And, if the church really is God’s instrument on earth, how do we, fallen individuals as we are, determine God’s will?

Some quotes

Gabriel: If I’d had an orchestra, I could have subdued the whole continent.

Mendoza: For me there is no redemption, no penance great enough.

Gabriel: There is. But do you dare to try it?

Mendoza: Do you dare to see it fail?

[Mendoza is repeatedly dragging a load of armour up a cliff as penance for killing his brother]

Fielding: How long must he carry that stupid thing?

Gabriel: God knows.

Gabriel: We are not the members of a democracy, Father. We are the members of an order.

Altamirano: Tell them they must leave the missions. They must submit to the will of God.

Gabriel: They say it was the will of God that they came out of the jungle and built the mission. They don’t understand why God has changed his mind.

Gabriel: If might is right, then love has no place in the world. It may be so, it may be so. But I don’t have the strength to live in a world like that, Rodrigo.

Gabriel: What do you want, Captain? An honourable death?

Mendoza: They say God has left them; deserted them. Has he?

Gabriel: If you die with blood on your hands, Rodrigo, you betray everything we’ve done. You promised your life to God—and God is love.

Hontar: You had no alternative, Your Eminence. We must work in the world. The world is thus.

Altamirano: No, Señor Hontar. Thus have we made the world... thus have I made it.

Altamirano: So, your Holiness, now your priests are dead, and I am left alive. But in truth it is I who am dead, and they who live. For as always, your holiness, the spirit of the dead will survive in the memory of the living.

Relating it to the Bible

Isaiah 6: 5—7; Matthew 11:28

We are reminded that there is nothing from which we cannot be released. It may not be easy but we can all be set free from those heavy burdens which bind us.

John 17: 11—19

In his “priestly prayer”, Jesus prays that his disciples will remain faithful despite the world’s hatred. They are to give their lives for the truth.