

THIS IS A COMPILATION OF MATERIAL FROM THE PAST.

THE POINTS ARE STILL VAILD. THE EXAMPLES ARE GETTING OLDER!

This manuscript may be useful for cinema and spirituality seminars and training.

Part I is an introduction to film language and culture (and is taken from the book, On Screen, Manila, 2001). It also includes some material to help audiences understand how they tick, their sensibilities and their sensitivities.

Part 2 has some chapters which offer some orientation to approaches to cinema and spirituality: church teachings on cinema and religions dimensions, some definition of spirituality, some focus on Jesus on screen, aspects of storytelling and spirituality and a look at basic human drives as a foundation for examining cinema, values and spirituality.

There are some appendices on censorship and classification principles and the outline of a seminar on these issues (which may or may not be relevant to this book).

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SPIRITUALITY ON SCREEN

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INTRODUCTION

Film appreciation and study has not developed as much as educators had earlier hoped. Perhaps film is still too much associated with entertainment. With the 'work ethic' emphasis on productivity and profit, it sometimes seems that devoting study to what is generally seen as a recreational activity is not practically justified.

Many Christians and religiously-inclined people tend to agree with this because of some rather 'puritanical, approaches to life. They add that the arts often portray triviality or dubious morality and so do not merit serious study, let alone provide a good basis for exploring spirituality.

Some educators argue that there are more important areas of study: science, mathematics,

computer technology, history, literature and that the written word is more significant for study than mere images. They kidnap a movie figure to describe such an approach, 'Mickey Mouse study'!

But film appreciation can be formative and informative in itself. It can also provide helpful background to study of social sciences, history, ethics and religion. And, of course, it is practical. Movies mirror society. Occasionally, they shape it. And, whether we are, individually, moviegoers or not, millions of people, especially children and teenagers, watch hours of movies and television every day. We need to help viewers shape and develop their sensibilities and their sensitivities.

But, movies tell stories. Human beings delight in story-telling and story-listening. We dramatise our beliefs and our values in stories and challenge ourselves and our listeners and our viewers to share and delight. Movies have been a means of exploring values for large, even worldwide audiences. These accessible stories provide a resource for exploring spiritual values as well.

Part I focuses on how to look at films.

Part 2 focuses on different approaches to exploring film and spirituality. The chapters on Storytelling and spirituality and Values and spirituality offer specific cinema examples.

The discovery of how values and spirituality are present in films is another example of what John Paul II meant when he spoke of media as 'gifts of God'.

PART I

Chapter 1. CINEMA, FILM, THE MOVIES

The movies

Before television and, of course, before VCRS and cassettes, before DVD and Blue Ray, there were the movies. All around the world, there were huge movie theatres. Some of them were ornate picture palaces. They were often found in the centres of the great cities. But there were also the theatres, large and small, sometimes called 'picture shows', in the suburbs and in the country towns. And, depending on the climate and the weather, they were solid, heated buildings in the US and in Europe, or they could be the open-air seating spaces with a rigged up outdoor screen in parts of Africa, Asia or the Pacific. And most people went to the movies.

Cinema began to be called the seventh art, the art form of the 20th century.

The threat from television

Then the movie theatres began to be pulled down in the 1950s and 60s becoming service stations, or turned into bingo halls, supermarkets or shopping arcades. More and more television sets appeared in shop windows, in the centres of villages and in homes. Television did not cost as much as the movies and eventually, viewers said, most of the movies turned

up on television.

Movies on video

In the 1980s, the video recorder and renting from video shops began to threaten the television networks. Television hit back with the developments of cable and pay-TV, bringing the early-release movies conveniently into the home. Audiences like to choose what they see. The VCR and cable and pay-TV made this much more possible. In the 80s there may not have been television in most of the small nations of the Pacific but there were plenty of video rental shops. And then came satellites over India, the Pacific, over the whole world.

The cinema complex

The renewed popularity of movies in the 1990s caught many by surprise. People are generally extraverted and enjoy going out. While it is handy to be able to watch disks at home at one's own time, pace and leisure, the big screen experience, shared with a lively audience, excites most moviegoers. The 90s saw the experiment of the movie complexes in shopping malls - or built by themselves with plenty of parking space around - expand beyond expectation. First there were complexes of five, even eight screens; then there were ten or more. Cineplex Odeon had 19 at Universal Studios in Hollywood by 1988. In Belgium, cinema city, Kinopolis, had 29 screens and Megapolis in Antwerp had thirty. With simultaneous release on many screens and with huge and constant hype, the movies won back the large audiences. The worldwide popularity of Titanic during 1998 (standing room only in Manila, a season of 20 weeks or more season in Suva, Fiji, and the record for box-office in North America) is an overwhelming reminder of the drawing power of a story that interests everyone, of characters that can be identified with, and special effects that make you feel as if you were there. The Batman film, The Dark Knight, made around one billion dollars at the world box office in just three months in mid-2008 – and then came the DVD sales. Avatar did this even more rapidly at the end of 2009, early 2010.

The continuing popularity of videos and their technical development with laser discs and DVDs has not taken away the allure of the movies. Rather, they have enhanced it. Owning copies of videos means that repeated viewing enhances the taste for movies, develops a knowledge of the movies, of differing genres, of the work of stars and directors. The more knowledgeable audiences seek out more movies.

Into the 21st century

If cinema was the art form of the 20th century, what will be the art form of the 21st? With the development of computer technology, who knows? However, the movies are now a significant part of human experience and human consciousness

and will take their place in the 21st century.

Whether we go out to the movies or not or watch them on television or buy or rent them, we are, most of us, movie watchers. We are image-watchers. And the movies offer us images and symbols for world-wide communication. We don't talk about extra-terrestrial creatures without a glance at ET. Strategic Defenses in space got the nickname which stuck, Star Wars. Any tough guy, good or bad, who donned jungle greens and picked up a gun was a local Rambo. A loner who drove a car and had a gun was a Mad Max.

As has been said, most nations have their film industries and their own movie symbols: Hong Kong martial arts action show, Philippine comedies, Indian soap-operas, serious Swedish drama. Australia was lucky enough to have one of its movie symbols become a world-figure, Crocodile Dundee. Of course, we associate the movies with the USA, with Hollywood - and we are all influenced, for good or for ill, by the film and television images of the American dream.

However, proving that cinema, and the movies, are still alive is one thing. To prove that its productions are worth serious attention is another. The first purpose of this small book is to establish in the reader's mind the reasons why film, cinema, the movies, deserve serious attention - even careful study. Once that is done, questions on the nature and impact of film and the possibilities for watching and discussing films for values and spirituality begin to answer themselves.

The material in this first part of the book is divided into the following sections:

- The importance of film
- The development of film
- The power of film
- The creativity of film
- The meaning of film
- Sensibilities and film
- Sensitivities and film

Chapter 2. **THE IMPORTANCE OF FILM**

In order to discuss film, in order to answer questions on cinema techniques and movies themselves, it is necessary to have some background awareness of the impact of films, not only at present but also the impact in the past. So much of what is said about films is only half informed (or less) and rests on presuppositions about films being sheer entertainment and merely Hollywood and studio productions, that a worthwhile assessment of the importance of film is rendered impossible.

Popular attitudes to movies

You might like to check with yourself, your family and your friends. What are your immediate reaction to movies? What are theirs? 'I want to enjoy myself when I see a movie.' 'I need a bit of escapism.' 'Tickets cost so much these days and I'm not so sure they're worth it.' 'Everybody's seen it, it's the in-thing.' Or, 'Movies today are too permissive, too much foul language, too much violence, sex and nudity. Why isn't there something decent for the family?' Or, 'I like a more serious film. I like a message. A movie should have something worthwhile to say'.

It might be useful to stop and spend some time examining each of these statements to discover the presuppositions behind them, what personal attitudes they reveal, how much valid comment they contain and how much worthwhile criticism. This kind of exercise calls for sharper and clearer thinking and gets us closer to an appreciation of the importance of films.

But, before going into the main areas concerning films, it is probably useful to check on those terms 'entertainment' and 'education' and what we mean by them.

Entertainment versus Education or Entertainment and Education

We usually know what we mean by 'entertainment'. It is anything that pleases us, lifts us out of ourselves, helps us enjoy ourselves. But, sometimes, what we say is entertainment does not really satisfy us in the long run. It can be an easy and quick bit of relaxation - just 'vegging in front of the box' - or simply a time-filler. So much of what we watch on television, movies or otherwise, fits into this description.

But true, genuine entertainment is something that really satisfies us while it does take us out of ourselves – with laughs, with tears, with a fright, with puzzles. In fact, true entertainment is something which helps us to be our better selves.

True 'education' need not be so far distant from that description of entertainment. If we think of education as facts and figures being drummed into us relentlessly we may not be very keen on education at all. But, if we think of 'education' as the process in which we are led out of our ordinary selves into something better, it might seem more attractive. Education is then seen as more satisfying, more pleasing, helping us to become our better selves.

So, true entertainment is not so far from true education. It depends on where we place the emphasis and what we want out of a movie. In a session about movies and values with some 16 year old girls, the popular film of the 80s with Patrick Swayze, Dirty Dancing, came under discussion. What the girls liked about the film was Patrick Swayze himself as the hero and the dancing. When they were questioned about the serious issues, especially when one of the characters had an abortion and Jennifer Grey as a wealthy young girl raised the money for it, many of the girls talked about the serious side of the relationships and the consequences - a mixture of 'entertainment' and 'education'. But a number of the girls looked surprised. They had not remembered or even noticed these issues

at all. They said they went to see the film just for the dancing.

In thinking about the importance of film, three areas need to be considered:
the social impact of film
film as art
film as business and industry.

The Social Impact of Film

The social impact of the film can be considered first. After all, we are dealing with a medium of social communication, not just a medium for solitary individuals or small groups. As we shall see, a great number of people are involved in the production of a film. It is not the work of a single individual. And, because of the financial outlay, most films are geared for wide distribution, world-wide, if possible.

Steven Spielberg's ET has been mentioned. Parents and children all over the world turned out in their millions to enjoy the moving story of Eliot and his extraterrestrial friend, ET. The film has had theatrical re-releases, frequent television showings and enormous video sales. And, look at the Disney movies. The first feature-length animation film from Disney was Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in 1937 and, so many decades older now, it shows no sign of losing its popularity. When, forty years after Snow White, children everywhere thrilled to Star Wars, their consciousness was changed, not just exhilarating action in space, but absorbing the ethos of the hero and the spirit of The Force. Sequels which developed the mythic qualities of the original were just as popular in the 80s, The Empire Strikes Back (1980), The Return of the Jedi (1983). Anybody who was a child in the early 80s does not have to ask what a Jedi is. George Lucas remastered the three films for a 20th anniversary theatrical release in 1997 and the world held its breath in 1999 for the film of the first story in the saga, The Phantom Menace. While it disappointed many fans, the next sequels, The Attack of the Clones (2002) and, especially, the finale, The Revenge of the Sith (2005) were still most welcome.

It is not just younger audiences who are influenced. A trivial example from the 1930s (except for those who were in the clothing industry) is from It Happened One Night (the multi-Oscar winner of 1934) when Clark Gable took off his shirt and audiences saw that he was not wearing a singlet! As we look back at some of the war movies of the early 40s, including Casablanca (1943), we realise that they were designed for morale-boosting and propaganda for Allied audiences against Nazi Germany and Japan.

Over the years, movies have influenced fashion. Sometimes they make their mark with music or with phrases that are repeated and repeated: the ominous themes from Psycho or Jaws; 'this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship' at the end of Casablanca; Michael Douglas in Wall Street with 'Greed is good' or Dirty Harry Callahan taunting some thugs, held at gunpoint after they robbed a diner, to make their move so that he could shoot, 'Make my day'. (Clint Eastwood actually did say it in the fourth Dirty Harry movie, Sudden Impact (1983)).

What is more worrying to people is the influence, especially of violence, on younger

audiences imitating violent actions:

Kung Fu martial arts or those, of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, trying to fly like Superman. Or, what of society's concerns about disturbed minds imitating horror movies, killings or suicides. Child's Play III was cited in the United Kingdom, Natural Born Killers and Basketball Diaries in the US. Lone, crazed gunmen are referred to (erroneously in fact) as Rambo or Mad Max.

While the social impact of movies must never be underestimated, especially in recent years when films on video and DVD seem to be within the reach of most, even children, and we admit that there is a great deal of ugly material readily available that makes demands on a society to discuss and decide how much should be available and the community standards that can serve as norms for these decisions, we realise that most movies do not have such an individual and lasting impact on most people. (Religious movies lead to very few lasting conversions.) But, like many other things (a newspaper headline, a hurtful remark) they can trigger irrational behaviour in someone already disturbed. This is not to argue that it is a good thing to have available, indiscriminately, such amounts of violent and sexually explicit material as there seems to be. Each society has to determine its appropriate controls.

As we look back over recent decades, we see that there are key movies that influence audiences and remain in their consciousness. Some American films quickly illustrate this: Oliver Stone's Platoon (1986) and the impact of the Vietnam war on America, Kevin Costner's Dances with Wolves (1990) and the history of Native American Indians, Jonathan Demme's Silence of the Lambs (1991) and Philadelphia (1993), the first with the horror of the serial killer and the second on AIDS, Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List (1993) and Saving Private Ryan (1998) and World War II and the Holocaust.

While national industries are dwarfed by the American product, it is worthwhile looking at the films of a country and ask what impact they have had locally and how they mirror and reflect the culture.

So, the obvious social impact of cinema all over the world has been in the entertainment field as people enjoy an escape, a laugh, a thrill, a mystery, a song and a dance, a romance. However, the educational impact of films on wide audiences was not lost to early film-makers. Newsreels and documentaries have a long history. The use of films and clips in the classroom became common and television was brought to the school. Even the commercial film-makers realised quickly that we will not enjoy a diet of froth alone. So, the entertainment had to be more personally satisfying. It had to draw a personal response to persons, situations, problems, messages. In fact, it became a process of 'education'.

Film as Art

Consider the skill required in producing one satisfying image (one frame) of a movie. And twenty four of them pass before the projecting lens per second. Add the skill required for producing a satisfying series of images, with balance, contrast, movement (one sequence). Then add the enormous skill required for producing the complexity of a succession of frames and sequences that make up even an average entertaining film, let alone a masterpiece. Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space

Odyssey (1968) has stood the test of time (although, as the year 2001 passed, the central section was not fulfilled). Many consider it a cinema masterpiece. Just a moment's reflection on its beauty, depth, intelligence and power for challenging should leave us in no doubt about film as art. Each country has produced its cinema art: Japan and the work of Akira Kurosawa like *Rashomon* or *Do'deskaden*; France and Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* or *Le Regle de Jeu*; Italy and the neo-realism of Rossellini's *Paisa* and *Open City* and Fellini's *La Strada* or Fellini's flamboyance with *La Dolce Vita* or *8 1/2*; India and Satiyajat Ray; Sweden and Ingmar Bergman...

Consider also the number of people involved, with their particular talents, who are responsible for the art of the film: the director who masterminds the vision and controls the production, the writer's screenplay, the contribution of the actors' interpretations and interactions with one another, and the important work of the set designer, costume designer, make-up artists, lighting experts, directors of photography, musicians, film editors. Many arts contribute to cinema art.

Film as Business

Cinema is a mass medium. It has to communicate to people as well employ many people in its making. Film, therefore, is an industry and it is business, big business - as we also think of the price of that theatre ticket or video rental or the latest gossip about box-office success and failure and how much superstars have earned or spent. Naturally, this has both good and bad features: good that so many films can be made and brought to as many audiences as possible; bad that money should have so much control over people's lives, their inspiration, their desire to communicate, bad that money inevitably means exploitation by men and women whose horizons remain money. It is a sad commentary on the promotion of movies that the huge salary for Julia Roberts or Robert de Niro becomes more important than the film or when the popular press reports that a movie is a 'flop' because it 'bombed at the box-office' without any reference to the critical acclaim it received. Movies like *Citizen Kane* and *It's a Wonderful Life* did not do so well on first release but it would be a very obtuse commentator who would refer to them as flops today.

Thus, in thinking about the importance of film and money, we have to appreciate the huge investments that most big movies are - *Cleopatra* costing \$30,000,000 in 1963, *Heaven's Gate* bringing down United Artists in 1980 overrunning its budget, *Titanic* ready to be sunk by critics but sailing on to extraordinary returns. Copies of the film have to be sent world-wide for distribution if possible. Cinemas have to be rented and schedules for the best screenings of the films arranged. And, since we live in an age of advertising and persuasion, we seem to need commercial prodding to do most things. Promotion (both sober and gimmicky) is an industry in itself with advertising the most important factor. (One danger is that parents, for instance, and those who do not go often to see movies, mistake the trailer they are subjected to on television for the movie itself and judge accordingly.) Films cost, circulate and make money.

Chapter 3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FILM

Do you know or can you guess when the first moving pictures were publicly screened? The 1910s? The 1920s? Many guesses do not go back far enough. Inventors were working on

cameras, projectors and film stock in the 1880s and showed their brief films in the 1890s.

Many books treat excellently the development of cinema and the history of film. Here, only an outline can be given, but a short sketch is necessary to offer a perspective to thinking about film. Films are not produced in a timeless period or in a vacuum. They are influenced by the events shaping the times and the places in which they are made. It is useful to have a background awareness of the development of the techniques of cinema in relation to the advance of technology in the twentieth century as well as to the changing history of the world during the last hundred years and more. Again, the content of films and their styles cannot be separated from the cultural patterns and trends that have marked the changing decades of the 20th century.

A historical overview

On December 28th 1895, in a Paris cafe, the Lumiere brothers of Lyon exhibited their first films. They were short (one minute or so): a yacht leaving its mooring, a train engine approaching a station (and terrifying the audience), the old chestnut of the boy stepping on the hose and stepping off it again when the owner looks at the nozzle to see what is wrong. Prior to this there had been numerous experiments at making pictures move, like the spinning of drawings, each slightly different from the other, so that when they span a jockey is seen to ride a horse. Photography, as well, was in a state of development. Edison was experimenting with electricity (and with film). William Friese Greene in England was developing his 'magic box'.

After 1895, cinema never looked back. Various cameras, projectors and film stock went on the market and distributed widely all around the world. Companies were formed to exploit the new machines and audiences gathered to enjoy the improving inventions for entertainment. The entrepreneurs of those days were enterprising. They were filming in Argentina in 1896 and, in Australia, the Melbourne Cup of the same year was the first film to be exhibited publicly.

The major development in the world's film industries before the First World War were technical. This was only to be expected in a new inventive field with popular potential. The techniques of editing the frames to play visual tricks fascinated film-makers of the early twentieth century. The animation work of Georges Melies are an important example of the work of this period: experiments with double exposure, with fades and dissolves, in cartoons and in versions of some of Jules Verne's stories like *From the Earth to the Moon* (with a rocket stuck in the eye of the man in the moon!).

During this period, the educational power of the new film medium was also realised. An Australian example highlights this. In 1900 an evening's edifying entertainment was devised by the Salvation Army's Limelight Productions. It was a mixed media program with hymns and sermons, slides and short film sequences called *Soldiers of the Cross*. Members of the Army had enacted scenes from the early church and the martyrs in front of hangings on the fences of a tennis court. Although the sequences lasted only a few

minutes, they made an impact and the Salvation Army worked on similar projects as well as filming current events for the next ten years.

But, in the field of entertainment, the movies also developed. In France, in Sweden, in the United States, in Russia and in Australia, short feature films with stories for the mass audiences, began to be produced. Initially, many of them were one-reelers, running for about twenty minutes or so. Famous novels like Tolstoy's *Resurrection* were filmed as were screenplays reflecting the social conditions of the times, like D.W.Griffith's *Simple Charity*. Australia produced the first version of Ned Kelly's exploits, *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, which ran for over an hour. The first western was *The Great Train Robbery* (1902). It was twelve minutes long.

The Silent Era

A major event before the war was the establishing of Hollywood. Film-makers from New York moved west to the clear, bright skies and the climate of California and began a boom in movie production which has prevailed until now despite all odds. And Hollywood led to the legends of mammoth productions and extravagant lifestyles - and fans.

With the war years there were further stages of development which continued through the twenties until the advent of sound. On-the-spot coverage of the war itself demanded dedicated heroism on the part of the war photographers. Their material, seen nowadays incorporated into television documentaries, is extraordinary in its capturing of trench life and trench warfare at close quarters, especially when one considers the comparatively primitive and heavy equipment they had to carry. Realistic documentary was developed in the twenties by directors like Robert Flaherty who lived with the Eskimos and the Samoans to make his silent masterpieces, *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1928).

Hollywood commercial cinema boomed during the years 1914-1929. Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, the Keystone Kops and many others developed highly individual styles of slapstick and the humour of pathos - essentially visual, of course - which still has the power to convulse audiences. Adventure, romance and horror were catered for in movies featuring such stars as Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, Lon Chaney, John Barrymore, Rudolph Valentino, Clara Bow and many other personalities. D.W.Griffith stands out as the earliest director of talent and vision with his American saga, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and his epic *Intolerance* (1916). The Hollywood movies captured world audiences and immense sums of money from the world's pockets. Griffith's films are available on video. However, the 1926 *Ben Hur*, directed by Fred Niblo, still reminds us of what could be achieved in silent film-making and with much less sophisticated equipment and techniques.

Simultaneously in Europe other important developments took place. Defeated Germany produced a series of expressionistic films of madness, defeat, industrialisation, social and moral chaos like *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919), *Nosferatu* (1920), *Metropolis* (1926) and *The Blue Angel* (1929). Hitler and,

especially Goebbels, were so impressed by Fritz Lang, director of Metropolis and M that he was invited to be the official film-maker for the Third Reich. But Lang escaped to America as did many Germans who made their mark in Hollywood like Billy Wilder, Fred Zinneman, Marlene Dietrich.

Lenin and Stalin also understood the power of film. The great Russian director, Sergei Eisenstein, made impressive propaganda features in the twenties and thirties incorporating his principle of dramatic cross-cutting, heightening effect by consecutive shots making dramatic comment on one another, a technique now taken for granted. His Battleship Potemkin (1925) with its famous massacre sequence with the pram on the Odessa steps, is considered a classic. Whether it was by inspiration or theory or simply because there was not much film stock available in the Soviet Union, other Russian directors produced memorable propagandist films in these years.

France (with Rene Clair), Sweden (with Victor Sjöström), England (with Alfred Hitchcock) also had developing industries which prepared them to move into the next phase of development: sound.

The 'Talkies'

The first 'talking picture' was The Jazz Singer (1927) with Al Jolson singing some favourite songs. By 1930, sound pictures, despite much opposition from theorists who thought that the purity of visual cinema would be destroyed, and from theatre managements reluctant to outlay money on new equipment, were here to stay. Sound films required great changes in techniques of filming, of recording sound, of writing screenplays (instead of captions) and styles of acting. Singin' in the Rain (1952) reminds us of the difficulties of the transition in a very amusing way. The movies of the thirties had to begin again and find new sophistication.

The acknowledging of cinema excellence by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts with the Oscars began in 1928. The first Best Picture award went to William Wellman's war drama with Gary Cooper, Wings.

Experiments with colour had been going on from 1898: tinting and two colour processes. The first feature film entirely in Technicolour was the version of Thackeray's Vanity Fair, Becky Sharp (1934).

The beginning of the sound era coincided with the Depression and the American response to the Depression in its movies set a style for what audiences would come to expect from the movies. Other national industries were forced to follow suit to remain in existence financially. The Depression influence can be quickly illustrated by a sequence from Bonnie and Clyde over thirty years later. Bonnie goes to a cinema after a robbery and delightedly watches Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and the song, 'We're in the money!' This was also the era of the American screwball comedy like It Happened One Night (1934) and Shirley Temple comedies with songs.

But there were very popular serious films, biographies (of Emile Zola, Louis Pasteur), social criticism (Frank Capra's *Mr Deeds Goes to Town*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*) and, to take some of the films of the year that critics point out as perhaps the most telling, 1939, *Gone with the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, *Dark Victory* and *Goodbye, Mr Chips*.

So, not all movies were just escapist. John Grierson and others were experimenting with British documentaries. Walt Disney studios were developing animation. The industries in Europe, on the eve of the war, were more serious than Hollywood. But, by and large, the thirties confirmed the tendency of most people to consider movies as primarily entertaining and to be more wary of serious films and be suspicious of experimentation.

Moral concerns

During the thirties there was also a strong American reaction against some of the 'permissive' trends from the twenties. the motion picture industry formed its Code and a strong Catholic religious group, The Legion of Decency, was formed in 1933 to exert pressure on film makers to keep their products moral and pressure on audiences who pledged not to support unsuitable films (as they did in the 50s in boycotting the Jane Russell musical, *The French Line* (1953), and Elia Kazan's version of Tennessee Williams' *Baby Doll* (1957). From 1934, this Code was adhered to and most controversies on moral issues in American films were postponed for thirty years.

World War II reinforced the 'escapist' attitude to the movies as civilians and troops needed entertainment, like Betty Grable musicals. Propaganda and sentiment, both explicit and in general outlook, characterise the Hollywood war years, for instance Greer Garson as Mrs Miniver (1942) and *Fathers and Children* with Bing Crosby and Barry Fitzgerald in *Going My Way* (1944). The studios of Europe were more or less at a standstill or at the service of propaganda.

After World War II

The initial post-war era runs from the mid-forties to the mid-fifties. Relief at the end of hostilities, attempts to re-adjust to a new kind of world, re-fighting the war (with John Wayne and co in the US and with Jack Hawkins and co in the UK), anti-communist fears and the Cold War, the last valiant attempts of the industry to ward off the onslaughts of television, the Hollywood Blacklist and McCarthyist investigations, these are the characteristics of the Hollywood period. Techniques and styles of moviemaking became more sophisticated.

In the meantime the national industries got back on their feet. The most notable of these was the Italian industry with its neo-realism in films like Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). Sweden also began again and produced the master film-maker, Ingmar Bergman. The French industry was revitalised while England had

its romantic melodramas and its Ealing comedies, especially with Alec Guinness. Japan also moved into production on a larger scale.

By this time, the world had accepted the cultural significance of film. Film study increased and there was a boom in experimentation and study of techniques. A cinema vocabulary was being developed. The United States has always been a leader, but in the field of experiment and documentary, Canada took many initiatives, especially under the sponsorship of the National Film Board.

The threat of television

But in the fifties, many thought the cinema might die – not the arts of the moving image - but popular cinema everywhere.

Television was the threat. There were two ways to overcome this. Both have been tried with some success.

The first response to the challenge of television was technical: widen the screens, improve the colour, increase the magnitude of the movies. They were to be bigger and better than the serials and specials on the box! Cinemascope, Cinerama, VistaVision², 3D, the formula still works: from the first Cinemascope film, The Robe (1953) through the cinema epics like Ben Hur, El Cid, Lawrence of Arabia, Doctor Zhivago until the end of the century with Titanic, Matrix and The Phantom Menace. The public goes out willingly and pays up contentedly for a bigger and more spectacular movie.

The second formula has had varying success: leave the escapism to TV and make cinema a real art form, with meaty, substantial and controversial topics. On the Waterfront and Marty won Best Film Oscars as long ago as 1954 and 1955. The British 'kitchen-sink' dramas (like Look Back in Anger) were flourishing around 1960. Bergman, Antonioni, Fellini and many others were well-respected names in the sixties. Since 1955 the content of so many films, even some of the most popular, has been of higher quality than the previous general run of films. Of course, there will always be the movies that aim for fun and thrills.

The later 20th century

A major development of recent years is the loosening of tight religious, moral and legal controls over film-makers. There has also been a great deal of exploitation of language, sex and violence. Along with this has been a backlash against the perceived permissiveness. In many countries, the public has complained that pornography of both sex and violence has gone too far. Campaigns for legislation restricting the availability of such videos have multiplied. Talk shows on radio and television have no difficulty in finding guests and studio audiences who want to have their say.

But movies have improved vastly in utilising the frankness possible on screen. In the late 60s into the mid-70s it was clear that this was the case with the Best Film Oscar winners: Midnight Cowboy, Patton, The French Connection, The Godfather, Godfather II, One Flew

Over the Cuckoo's Nest. It was the same in the 90s with Silence of the Lambs, Unforgiven, Schindler's List, The English Patient.

Besides ranging more widely in content, the moves are now incorporating the rapid strides being made by film students in the practical courses and workshops flourishing everywhere. This historical sketch can do not more than note where film came from, see how it turned into the movies and recognise the influence of the times in which it developed.

Chapter 4. **THE POWER OF FILM**

Horror films are not everyone's drop of blood! But they make very useful illustrations of the power of film. During the popularity of a horror character, Count Yorga, Vampire, in the early 70s, audiences went to see him with the deliberate intention of enjoying the films by screaming all the way through. They really relished their self-induced terror. We can make our own success of anything if we try.

However, one young man took his fiancée to The Return of Count Yorga, a sequel designed for screams. She went well for the first fifteen minutes but one of the Count's eerie flights down a corridor, seemingly aiming straight at the audience, was too much for her. From then on she was no good for anything. Any creaky door opening, let alone the vampire blood-sucking, seemed to terrify her. Not all self-induced. Rather, cleverly designed images had the girl in their power and she screamed.

We may not keep screaming at a film. A comedy, a western, a weepy romance might have done to introduce us to these considerations of the power of film. We are looking at the effect of cinema on ourselves rather than at the technical skills that have gone into making a film. After all, this experiential approach is how we all encountered the movies. We had been watching them for years before we had our first formal lecture on cinema techniques.

Looking at images rather than words

One way of considering this is to contrast our response to looking at words and to looking at images.

Our eye is the principal sense involved in reading (although we may follow the line along with our finger). But, even though the eye is used, its function is mainly mechanical and utilitarian. The words are merely signs and the imagination has to take over and provide the material for our minds and understanding to work on. If we grasp the words, if our imaginations are activated and we understand, then we can get emotionally involved in what

we read. The process runs:
sensory experience, initial intelligence, initial intellectual grasp, imaginative response,
emotional response, intellectual
understanding and evaluation - all parts of a process that are operating simultaneously.

When we respond to moving images, the process is different. We certainly use our eyes at once (and with sound films, our ears) but the images are not merely conventional signs of communication. Design, colour, movement, rhythms, are all presented to us at once. And at once we respond on the level of pleasurable or unpleasurable sense and emotional response. Our primary, or initial, intellectual grasp coincides with this vivid sensory and emotional response. The imagination does not have to work so hard as it does in reading because images are provided to the senses, but the imagination is at work nonetheless, along with emotions, as regards identification with or rejection of the reality presented by the images. It is then on this personal response process that intellectual understanding is based. The process runs: sensory experience, emotional experience, emotional response, initial intellectual grasp, imaginative collaboration, intellectual understanding and evaluation - again all parts of a process that are operating simultaneously.

The difference between responding to words and responding to images lies, first of all, in the immediate sense response.

There is so much more demand on us at once in the response to images. The personal involvement is more immediately greater. The initial impact should be so much more forceful than from words which are read. Since the emotions are involved immediately with our senses, the imaginative collaboration is also felt more emotionally. The value of reading is that, at our own pace, according to our own choice, so much demand is made on our concentration that the work of the imagination seems much more intense; we put more of ourselves, perhaps, into our imaginative response which then calls for our emotions to join in. Ultimately, both experiences bring forth insight and understanding. But the interplay of sense, emotions and imagination is where the differences lie.

An example: Snow

In order to grasp these points and to reflect on our own experiences of reading and of watching films, we need to examine examples. (And here it would be best to have a cassette in the player to watch as well as read. However, books have their limitations as explanations are now offered in words.)

There is a short British film called Snow. A synopsis of the film would indicate that it shows an English express train travelling through the countryside in winter, the various jobs and functions of those who contribute to the smooth running of

the trip being highlighted as well as the contentment of the passengers. You have now read these words, grasped their basic meaning, probably allowed your imagination to work creatively for a moment, possibly has some emotional response to trains and travel, to work, winter, snow and, finally, understood what the film was about.

Somebody else could have written a poem called 'Snow' trying to put into well-arranged words and rhythms the content as well as the impact of the film. Part of the skill and effect of the film lies in a contemporary musical score which perfectly fits the different speeds of the travelling train, moving towards a crescendo of rapidity at the end. The response to the poem would be somewhat similar to the response to the bare synopsis, except that the quality of the words and the contents and would have improved greatly. The choice of words, rhythms, and other poetic devices would have enhanced the contribution from the imagination. Some sounds and rhythms probably evoked some emotional response as well. In studying images in this book, one would not want to underestimate the impact of words.

But the response to the film is something quite different. in a brief space of time, each commenting on the other. A variety of colours, shapes and movements, speeds are also quickly offered to us. Musical accompaniment, clever, witty and engaging, sets a tone to the images. Not a word is spoken. The sensory impressions are manifold and exhilarating. Complex emotional responses are immediate. The imagination comes into play, not creating images, but identifying, comparing images and memories, or rejecting them.

Film and literature

Another way of comparing the response to words with the response to images, especially appropriate for students and lovers of literature, is to compare novels with the film version. The obvious should be stated at once: the films is only a version (one possible version) of the novel and the two works must be judged according to the artistic criteria of their own medium and not merely by comparison with one another. We all know the disappointment of comparing the movie version of a well-loved novel with the novel itself and our complaints that this incident was omitted or these characters were compressed. This is how we feel. But the comments might have very little value in terms of appreciating the film as a film. Jack Cardiff's version of *Sons and Lovers* (1961) is a version of Lawrence, a fairly successful attempt at a fine film, but it is not intending to be or to replace the novel itself.

But, to continue with the comparison of the effect of words and images, we could consider the first appearance of a

character in both novel and film. Lawrence has been mentioned. In *Women in Love* Lawrence can spend pages describing Gudrun or Ursula, Rupert or Gerald. There are details of appearance, expression, clothing. These we can savour over a period of time and imaginatively fill out the details which have not been included in the text. That factor of relishing writing for some time is a point well worth keeping in mind. Cinema is instant and moves on to the next image - although the rewind button on the VCR offers possibilities of repetition not possible at a public screening.

In Ken Russell's film of *Women in Love* (1970), the scene of the first appearance of each character is fairly brief. The film keeps moving. Novel-lovers tend to say that with the entrance of a character, embodied by a particular actor, the imagination is limited and fixed to the unchangeable image on the screen. This seems unfair. What Lawrence can do so skilfully and vividly in several pages taking some time to read, actor, director, photographer and costumer can do almost immediately. A practical exercise to test this would be to look at a sequence or even a still from a film and then try, from memory, to write down the description: character, costume, posture, setting and so on. In one frame of film there can be the equivalent of several pages of excellent prose.

And, in the film, we are presented with live men and women embodying characters. The human face is enigmatic, can be quite mysterious and may need much imaginative response to fathom. Glenda Jackson as Gudrun may need only a moment to embody by a glance, a smile or a sneer that an audience may never be perfectly certain about. If this is true of one or other scene, then how much more of a complete film and its response from the audience?

The running-time of the film

Another factor is the length of the film, its running-time: the scope of *Gone with the Wind*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Titanic*, all running at over three hours; the personal crisis of the sheriff in *High Noon* where it is played out in real time or under ninety minutes. How long does it take to read a book? The time between opportunities to read and the ability to retain the overall view and the continuity of impressions? Watching a film in its continuity (which wandering in and out television watching and piecemeal video watching militate against) gives a satisfaction in completing something undertaken.

It is also useful to remind ourselves of the power of film when it is watched in the company of others. Ours might be an individual response, but it is not isolated or solitary. Laughter is infectious. Fear is contagious. Sentiment can pervade an audience response.

More ideas on the power of film will emerge in the following section on the creativity of film. But this will be appreciated much better if we first reflect on some of the effects the film can have on us.

Chapter 5. THE CREATIVITY OF FILM

Richard Lester, the American born director who made most of his early films in England in the 1960s, spent much of his

early career making television commercials. If anything is part of our daily lives it is the television commercial,

something we endure, hate, 'rubbish', sometimes enjoy and frequently accept deep down in our fairly persuadable psyches.

Good TV directors know the power and impact of images and manoeuvre the few seconds of time and the amount of film or

video at their disposal to interest, stimulate, entertain, annoy, exasperate, cajole and entice prospective consumers. They must know well the techniques of their craft. Lester, in his

Beatle films, *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help*, more than utilised the slick expertise of the

commercial. His swift pacing, cutting and cross-cutting started a trendy exploitation of

technical tricks in commercial movies. He brought the same techniques to enhance his mock-heroic parodies, *The Three Musketeers*, *Royal Flash*, *Robin and Marian*, *Superman II* and *III*.

Many more cinema directors now come from advertising and commercial-making or rely on these for income between movies. The television-conditioned audience is attuned to their

style. Consider the Scott Brothers, Ridley and Tony, with movies such as *Alien*, *Blade*

Runner, *Top Gun*, *Beverly Hills Cop II*, *Crimson Tide*, *Gladiator*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, *Body*

of Lies, *Domino*. With the development of the video clip and the music video (popularised by

MTV and taken up by many TV channels), directors moved to the immediate entertainment

business. Directors as diverse as John Landis and Martin Scorsese, Spike Lee and Gus Van

Sant have all made music videos. This sometimes frenetic style, with its ready absorbing of

experimental techniques, began to shape the image sensibility of younger audiences during the 1980s.

'Visuacy'

As with any art, the general direction of creative drive lies in the development and the use of techniques and in the

development and presentation of value content. For the complete work of art, as always, the happy blending of the two

makes for the masterpiece. In our study, technique and content can be considered separately

so that a viewing and study of any film, be it documentary, experimental or commercial will

be more rewarding in its application of how content is so incorporated into technique that in

so many ways the medium does become the message.

What we are speaking here is of 'visuacy'. We do not have any trouble advocating 'literacy'.

We want people to be able to

read and to understand what they read. It is a great disability to be 'illiterate'. However,

despite the impact of images for over a century, the general public and those responsible for

education policy do not worry whether people are 'ivvisuate' (to coin a word). There is a great

need for people to be better educated in their capacity to 'read' images and appreciate how

images work.

Photography

The first step for an appreciation of the creative possibilities of technique is to know something of the principles of photography and film projection. Most of us have tried to take a really good photograph and have realised how difficult it is sometimes to frame people properly, position them according to the light, not jerk the camera and blur our photo. We know that there are many types of film stock available and different kinds of colour processes. Developing the film, we know, is tricky and can ruin the photo, overexpose it or give poor reproductions. Of course, in recent times, many of us have improved our skills with our video camera.

Reminding ourselves of the problems involved in taking and producing a snapshot or filming a video can serve as a reminder of the intricacies and care required for shooting any scene or sequence of a movie. When there is a dramatic scene, a delicate scene or a battle or a ball and a cast of thousands, the technical skill required in staging, directing and photographing will be appreciated.

Slide-photographers will be the first to explain how necessary it is to have the right projector, screen, focus, place for viewing to appreciate their work. Film projection is a skill, despite today's computerised programs for commercials, curtains, trailers, feature... One problem for effectiveness of screening is that most audiences, unconsciously likening a cinema to a church sit far too far to the back to experience a film satisfyingly - about a third a way down the auditorium is best because of the physics of the screen width and our eye-focus, otherwise the film is happening beyond, too often well beyond, our eye focus (perhaps the reason for back reviews of films?).

Experiments with film, video and digital cameras

But techniques and machinery are only the beginning. However indispensable, they are still merely basic factors. Some film students become so absorbed in the seemingly endless possibilities for experimentation and effect on audiences that they tend to move away from and despise the popular and commercial aspects of film-making which they see as a sellout to big business (which, of course, sometimes they are). However, there ought to be collaboration of ideas and techniques so that the art of cinema advances on all fronts.

In film-study workshops, an entertaining and instructive practical experiment can be done. Old, used filmstock or metres of blank, exposed film, often used as leads, can be played with: painted, scratched, patterned frame by frame. Frames can also be arranged and spliced together. Each student's section can be joined to the others to make a continuous film and projected, accompanied by music. It is amazing what impact these experiments can make: dancing designs, rhythms of moving colour, bizarre yet fascinating collages of faces, landscapes and painted patterns. The value (and relative importance because of the number of frames that pass in front of the lens per second) of each frame can better be appreciated by this experience. And the whole field of editing metres of film is opened up.

Of course, with video, editing can be done in the camera or by experimenting in an editing suite.

The 'language' and 'grammar' of film

We have arrived at a point where we can look briefly at some of the 'language' or 'grammar' of film, things we scarcely notice until they are drawn to our attention but which are essential for variety and skill in communication and for eliciting and keeping audience attention. There are many books which offer excellent introductions to the grammar of cinema and assist towards greater 'visuacy'. Our purpose here is simply to refer briefly to some of them.

The use of the comic strip is a great help. The cartoonist sets a perspective in each frame of the strip. If they were all the same, say, talking heads, it would be dull. However, the situation might be set up in an overall 'long shot'. There might be a group of people brought to the foreground in a 'medium shot'. The cartoonist might use a 'close-up' of the face of a particular character and then close in on the eyes for an 'extreme close-up'. (When frustrated with the commercials on TV, one can use the time well by identifying each shot in the commercial - which leads to a respect for the director and editor if not for the product advertised.)

Since films are not just comics but moving images, then there is a complexity in these basic shots. They are moving images.

One needs to know a little of how moving shots are taken: whether the camera is on a tripod and can swivel round for an overall 'panning shot' or whether the camera tilts up and down. Sometimes, as in a riding scene in a western, the camera moves alongside the horse and rider and 'tracks' with the subject. Even in a room a camera can track back and forth. To move, especially in outdoor scenes (as, for instance, outside a building, the camera itself can move from medium to long shot on a crane.

The lens of the camera can itself be used in different ways and with varying depths of focus. Focal length might suddenly be changed and, from a long shot, one can suddenly 'zoom' into a close-up and out again. One can focus attention on a person who is close, blurring the background, and then reverse it. Without making a special plea for watching more television commercials, one could readily recommend them as easily accessible 'texts' to note how the filming was done. The possibilities for lighting and composition within each shot, whether it be panning or tilting or a zoom, gives almost infinite scope for a film-maker to experiment not only on what the film looks like, but also how it works on its audience. What is the difference between using close-ups and medium shots, between using a speedy zoom and smooth, slow pan? The pace, rhythm, mood of a film depend on choices like these.

With the more frequent use of video in the last decades and with the mobility of cameras and their decreasing weight far more techniques have come into use, an example being the use of the 'hand-held' camera to give a sense of rough realism to a chase or a fight. With the greater use of computer graphics and actors performing in front of a blue screen (what they get tourists to do at movie theme parks) so that backgrounds and effects can be added later gives the filmmaker more versatility. Spielberg's computerised

dinosaurs in the Jurassic Park films or Mel Gibson using a thousand soldiers in Braveheart and their being computerised to give a much larger army indicate where movie-making will develop in the 21st century. The Toy Story movies, Finding Nemo, Ratatouille, Wall-E, Antz, A Bug's Life, The Prince of Egypt were all computer designed.

Editing

But, if something is not satisfying in the shots, there is still the creative area of film-making that can remedy or enhance: combining the shots, editing.

In many home movies and in home videos, each sequence is more or less tacked on to the next – although computer editing hardware has become much more widespread. This may be one reason why they are so offputting for everyone except the family. Ingenuity in joining the shots, in improving them, playing with their impact on audiences, seeing the possibilities for challenging (or, for manipulation) - these are the materials for the creativity of editing. Some techniques are long familiar to us: fade-in, fade-out, slow dissolves, quick cross-cutting, superimposition and split-screen techniques, the juxtaposing of shots of the same person or situation from different angles. Skill in editing, estimating the appropriate rhythms for a film, utilising the best material from the different 'takes' for a scene is an important part of creativity.

We have concentrated so far on visual creativity. The quality of the sound track is also crucial - whether it be realistic: simply using the sounds that were recorded or whether sounds need to be eliminated and others dubbed; whether it be stylised: with music or with a voiceover being added or the dialogue of the actors having to be post-synchronised with their images on the screen (as, of course, is done with animated films).

This is all applicable to experimental films (where so much of the creativity is in the editing), documentaries, television features and the commercial movie. But the group activity, the number of people employed for most films, especially the commercial movies that we pay to see, must be considered. The film becomes the focus for the work of experts in several art fields to produce successfully a new work of art. Each contributes something valuable. The attitude of each individual concerned makes some mark on the film. While we can do little more than list them here, their work and its contribution is an important part of cinema appreciation.

The film-makers

The main overall contributors to this team are the producer and the director. It is the producer who controls the budget, arranges contracts, takes care of the logistics for locations, supervises the production to keep it within budget. It is the director who has the total artistic perspective and stages and directs the performances and the photographing of the film along with the director of photography and the lighting staff. The director makes the decisions about the shots, coaxes the

performances from the cast and judges how they harmonise with the vision of the whole film. Since films are not usually shot in sequence, this is more important than may at first be realised.

The screenwriter is responsible for the words and for the descriptions of action for various sequences which are then dramatised and shot by the director. Most major screenplays are published and the styles and input of various writers can be gauged. Increasingly screenwriters are becoming directors of their work.

The actors, the cast, perform the screenplay under direction but contribute their own talent, style and personality within their performance. Some actors are cast for their 'screen presence'. Some directors rehearse so that the ensemble is professionally ready for the shoot. Others prefer and encourage improvisation from their cast. A director like Alfred Hitchcock usually had the whole film storyboarded before he arrived on the set. He knew in his head how he wanted the performances and the film to be.

The directors of photography and their assistants are not mere recorders of what goes on in front of the camera. The quality, clarity and tone of black and white or colour photography depends on their experience and sensitivity to the way a camera can catch a scene or a performance for the harmony of the whole. They collaborate with artists like then production and set designers and constructors, the costume and make-up designers, lighting and sound experts.

Then comes the work of the editors and the sound editors and special effects staff.

The director

Before finishing this consideration of creativity, it is necessary to go back to the creative role of the director.

Many movies are advertised by reference to the director or, omitting the director's name, to the director's previous film:

'from the director of...'. French critics in the 50s proposed a theory to highlight the significance of the director, the 'auteur' theory, the director as 'author of the film. (There has been a great deal of criticism of this theory with claims made for creative producers and for the role of the writer to be given appreciation.) The work of a particular director is closely studied: origins, developments and changes, growing sophistication of technique, interest in and elaboration of themes, declines and peaks. A walk along the aisles of any large bookshop which stocks cinema books will show how widely the interest in director's has developed, not just the obvious directors like Hitchcock, Ford or Capra from the US or Truffaut, Fellini, De Sica, Bergman, Fassbinder from Europe. There are many interview series: Scorsese on Scorsese, Lynch on Lynch, Sayles on Sayles.

This kind of approach to directors (while it can be taken so seriously that a director is considered to fail when one film does not conform to the theory) does give some acknowledgment to the role of director. James Cameron was 'the director of The Terminator', then 'the director of Aliens', then the

director of Terminator 2', then 'the director of True Lies', then (with an Oscar), 'the director of Titanic'. And, of course, then, Avatar. Not all acknowledgment is as commercial as that but the director has become more popularly significant.

Creativity of content comes from the director and the screenwriter with the contribution of the cast, an appreciation and probing of human values. This leads us into the next section.

Chapter 6 **THE MEANING OF FILM**

Consideration of the content of cinema, as distinct from techniques, leads to issues of the meaning of film. Some experimental film-makers like to think at times that technique is so much equivalent to, or really is, the content that they feel audiences should grow in their ability to immerse themselves in patterns high-speed collages of seemingly illogical images or else contemplate the same frames for long periods of time. Commercial movies are then seen as sops to popular taste and a lack in an ability to appreciate the film medium.

Stories

But most audiences know that they like stories, they like a plot, some coherence if not necessarily step-step logic and some resolution of issues. Some semblance of narrative is generally required and some presentation of recognisable values, no matter how sketchy or superficial.

All art, no matter what techniques are employed to communicate to and draw responses from a person, present and probes some human values. A clever political cartoon, a painted portrait, an abstract sculpture, a fine building; all are works, of insight, human dignity and form part of a human vision.

Novels and plays probe the human situation, mirroring nature in a heightened realism or a stylised impressionism, freeing human emotions in the response they ask for. In tragedy, human flaws and mistakes and their consequences are probed.

In comedy the protagonist is cut down to size or, rather, is seen at their right size, neither super-heroic nor insignificant, a funny creature of foibles, whims and lovability. Romance, melodrama, historical pageant, adventure: these all, in their own way, have as their content, human values.

To check this, without being over-serious about it and imputing inappropriate depths of understanding to some average commercial director of standard westerns (or whether Jerry Lewis or Jim Carrey have the greatest insights into the human comedy or are merely ludicrous pains in the neck), think about a film and the values that it is actually promoting. Why, on

this level, does it appeal to an audience Along with this kind of understanding of a film's theme, we can also estimate whether human values are being skipped over or neglected.

Stories and values: an example - Rain Man

A film which has been around for some time and well-liked is the Oscar-winning film of 1988, Rain Man. It was directed by Barry Levinson, a writer who took up directing with great success. His films include Diner, Tin Men, Good Morning Vietnam, Avalon, Bugsy, Sleepers, Wag the Dog and Sphere (the sci-fi movie that dented his reputation as an auteur - and there is a book, Levinson on Levinson.

Rain Man is the story of a young Los Angeles car salesman whose father dies and who discovers that he has a brother. But the brother is handicapped in communication, though intelligent. He is an autistic savant. The two brothers are played by Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise.

Many audiences found the film both entertaining and difficult. They enjoyed the interaction of the two men and their journey across America. But they find themselves exasperated as Tom Cruise's Charlie as he tries to cope and deal with his brother. The film makes demands on its audience.

On the level of values, the film engages attention because it is probing of what it is to live, to be, to survive, to die. Questions of identity, what it is to be a person, to exist, are fundamental to us all and films that present and examine this theme are vital to us.

This is a film about the quality of life.

But it is also a film about relationships. Charlie's motives in taking Raymond from the institution were mean, vengeful and greedy. He wanted his share of the money that Raymond had inherited. He was annoyed by having to deal with someone less capable and less flexible than himself. Raymond's routine of meals, menus, TV watching and program timetables grated. And, yet, Raymond needed all this to survive.

Charlie gradually put himself out for Raymond, even going by car when Raymond feared the plane would crash. But it was the revelation that Raymond had sung to Charlie and that Charlie's life had been in danger from the scalding water that drew him to realise his love for his brother. The handicapped Raymond transformed the self-sufficient Charlie.

But the film is a mirror of the wider world of society. And this gives it more interest and significance. The world hustles on, doing deals, planning, phoning, persuading, lying. Time is money. Life is money. But these things are not important to Raymond. His story challenges society to check its priorities: people, the quality of human beings or possessions, status and success.

Stories and basic human drives and values

We often feel that we can never find all the answers to life's problems. Yet, somehow or other, our experiences, our feelings, our ideas, tells us that solutions to problems are often more possible than we might realise: that the mystery of life is inexhaustible, but that it can be penetrated more and more. We can always understand more and we should never give up or opt out. This basic human drive is towards something outside ourselves, a drive for us to transcend ourselves. There are so many signals of transcendence alerting us to move outside ourselves to seek whatever harmony there is in the universe and to see how it outweighs the disharmony.

Thus, in saying that human values are the content of a film we are pinpointing basic drives in us: drives to live, to love, to live socially and to transcend ourselves. If these are incorporated into a film, they then make corresponding demands on an audience and the experience of a film can be a real growth in human awareness.

One could call this 'education' in the broadest sense of the word. A good film can, if we let it, draw us out of ourselves to our better, more aware, selves. And this is not too much different from genuine entertainment, something which deeply satisfies us. We are the better (our better selves) for it. This closeness of true education and true entertainment could be a lead for solving some of the difficulties of people who are wary of some films which look too serious and who retreat from them.

Kinds of stories: genres and their conventions

A difficulty facing many cinemagoers confronted by documentary, short subject or experimental material is that they are not sure what kind of film is being screened. Audiences are still not able to recognise readily the type of film in front of them, its particular genre. This means that audiences tend to take many films literally or merely at what seems to be face value. Realism can be recognised, but subtleties go unnoticed. An audience which thinks it is alert to innuendo and double-meaning can miss almost two thirds of old style Frankie Howerd farce like *Up Pompeii*. In recent years, Mike Myers' spoof of James Bond and the sixties, the Austin Powers' films, has opted for the obvious, in-your-face vulgarity.

Learning to recognise and appreciate different genres of film their particular styles and conventions, will help audiences become more literate and visuate. One of the major consequences of not understanding genres is that audiences find it hard to grasp what values are being probed or presented in the movie, or whether there

are any at all. If we recognise genres, the meaning of a film will become clearer. The most prominent genres are :drama, comedy, romance, western, musical, war film, adventure, suspense, mystery, science-fiction, thriller, historical spectacle, religious film.

This approach to the whole film, its context and its consistency of values within this context is a necessary basis for the moral assessments made of films by parents, civic leaders, especially censors, and church officials. Looking at sequences and situations within the context of the whole film gives a sounder basis for the moral worth of the film rather than a method which simply labels or categorises the contents often without the categoriser having seen the film: murder, adultery and so on are bad; religion, patriotism and so are good, without consideration of the quality of the complete film. An extreme consequence of this kind of evaluation would be categorising King Lear and Macbeth as bad and The Sound of Music as good.

Film stories as parables

A key idea which might help in understanding the meaning of a film is that of 'parable'. A parable is a dramatic story which illustrates the human condition. It may draw a moral explicitly at the end. It may not. However, some kind of moral, be it simple or profound, can be drawn from it. Most commercial feature films which present or probe values can be considered in this way. Not that they should be seen as the equivalent of religious sermons, rather that they can be seen to tell a story in such a way that our interest is engaged, our basic human drives appealed to, and that they are worth reflecting on to make us more sensitive to human beings different from ourselves, to widen our horizons and make us more 'empathetic' to as many types of human beings as possible.

After all, Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son not only to help his listeners become more aware of the gracious love of God, but to make righteous pharisees less harsh in their judgments of wastrels and prostitutes. During the 90s there were parables about the treatment of women (The Piano), of HIV positive people (Philadelphia), of soldiers in war (Saving Private Ryan and The Thin Red Line), of slaves (Amistad), of the unemployed (Brassed Off, The Full Monty), of alcoholics (Leaving Las Vegas), of those on death row (Dead Man Walking, Last Dance, True Crime).

There is a vast resource in the exploration of human values in our cinema, in our movies.

Chapter 7. FILM AND SENSIBILITIES

Psychological insights during the last 100 years or more have enabled us to understand and appreciate the differing sensibilities of individuals, to understand differing personality types. It is worth trying to assess the influence of personality type and sensibility on choices for watching media and for moviewatching. Our predisposition, which comes from ourselves but which, of course, is affected by our social environment (formed by both nature and nurture) can be called our personal 'sensibility'. Sensibility is both given and developed, but it should also be stated that it is 'pre-moral'. If something does not suit my sensibility, this does not make it wrong or immoral.

We need to understand and appreciate our individual sensibility in order to understand and respect the sensibilities of others. We can then see the differences and, therefore, not impose our own expectations on others as we are immediately prone to do. Clearly, we can develop our sensibilities, widen them, but we need to identify the way we 'tick'.

Novelist Jane Austen wrote *Sense and Sensibility*, sensibility referring to the human capacity to feel, an openness to the emotions. However, the meaning of the word has broadened since the early 1800s to refer to interests
tastes
style

of individuals, of groups, of cultures (be they family, gender, race, religious...).

Any sensibility is neither right nor wrong, good nor bad: it is what we do with our sensibilities that leads to moral evaluation as will be discussed.

In practical situations, we can easily see differing sensibilities:

- as regards interests, someone enjoys football, another tennis or someone likes rock and roll and another prefers jazz;

- as regards tastes, this is most evident in literal taste: in food; someone wants to eat chicken, the next person chooses fish; one person is a beer drinker, the next wants Coca Cola;

- as regards styles, in the past women wore earrings, now men wear them; fashions come and go. As the proverb in pre-inclusive language days went: 'One man's meat is another man's poison'.

So, sensibility is a key idea for helping us to appreciate our differences in responding to media and the arts. We recognise the characteristics of our sensibility but cannot impose them as expectations on another: parents and educators to children, children to adults, men to women and vice versa...

This focus on sensibility will use the ideas and categories of psychologist Carl Jung (1875-

1961). He developed them in the early part of the 20th century and published them in 1921, *Personality Types*. In the United States, they were adopted and developed by Katharine Briggs (1875-1968) and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers (1897-1980). They have become well-known through the personality awareness instrument 'The Myers Briggs Type Indicator' (M.B.T.I.) and Isabel Myer's own book, 'Gifts Differing'.

The key focal points of sensibility according to Jung and the MBTI:

- our energy-source: our inner world or the outer world;
- our pace: either decisive or preferring a more measured manner of gathering data;
- our preferred way of observing: through the five senses or through hunches, a sixth sense;
- our criteria for making decisions: either objective or more personally subjective.

1. Energy

Some of us are energised by the world out there, of people, nature, situations. If we are left to ourselves, to be by ourselves for too long, we feel drained and need to seek company or be out and about. (Jung referred to this as 'extraversion'.)

On the other hand, some are drained by having to be 'out there' too long and know that we regain energy by being by ourselves, getting our energy from our inner world of ideas, feelings, imagination. (Jung referred to this as 'introversion'.)

It is not better to be extravert or introvert. They are two ways of being energised. (In Western cultures, it is suggested that a majority of people are extraverted. Perhaps in some Asian cultures, there is a more even distribution, or a tendency towards introversion.)

As regards media, the extravert sensibility responds to what is out there and depictions of people and people in action. Introverts might also enjoy this, but they often respond better to media which does not overwhelm with its action but gives them the opportunity to respond from within, to reflect on what the media is

communicating.

We might think of the response to comedy. Extraverts are more likely to respond well to slapstick and knockabout comedy and comedians while introverts might prefer the more quiet and subtle humour of suggestion. A comic like Charlie Chaplin is able to offer both. It may be better for the mood to watch a comedy with extraverts whose laughter is infectious than with a group of introverts who are all laughing on the inside! It is the same with watching a horror movie with the extraverts more likely to scream out loud!

It would be useful to look at some 'typical' movie excerpts at this stage. Clips which suggest themselves include some Clint Eastwood action shows like Every Which Way But Loose, Any Which Way You Can, with their humorous bare-knuckle fist fights or any of the martial arts movies of Chuck Norris, Jean-Claude Van Damme and the like. They contrast with many continental European dramas, with their long takes enabling the audience to supply their response to what is going on in the drama.

Some of Woody Allen's movies would be useful here. One of his dramas is actually called Interiors.

Statistics seem to indicate that, at least for Western cultures, there are more extraverts than introverts. This means that American movies will be far more extraverted, full of action, full of personal interaction, often quite loud. During the 80s there was a spate of American teenage-oriented movies. Many of them had titles like Spring Break, Fraternity Vacation, Bikini Shop... They were usually packed with teenagers at holiday resorts, especially beaches, loud, raucous crowds. The expectation of the producers was that this kind of movie would appeal to the majority of teenagers - and, for a while, they were big at the box-office.

Some people have a marked preference for extraversion or for introversion. For others, the preference is there but not so marked. If individuals in the group can determine where their preference lies, they will understand more of their sensibility - and how they can differ one from another without being better (or worse) than the other.

2. Pace

Some people are in a hurry. Others wonder what all the hurry is about. We move at different paces from one another. This is particularly true when we have to be decisive.

It would be as well to check with the group how many 'let's get this show on the road' types there are. These are very decisive types. They generally enjoy making decisions – and even when they don't, they know that they still want the decision to be made as quickly as possible.

Does this mean that the rest of the group is more content to gather more information before making a decision? or really does not relish making decisions even when they must be made? Is decision-making a hard, even painful experience? Again some individuals will say that they are somewhere in the middle, but, to gauge the sensibility, it would be helpful to know what they prefer.

When this sensibility of pace (quick decider or slower data-gatherer) is applied to media, we find that the deciders prefer that the movie gets going and doesn't dawdle or delay. They want a rapid pace. The data-gatherers do not have that sense of urgency and can relish what is on screen while it is there. Watching mini-series of television is a useful guide to the sensibility of pace. So many audiences are content, for several nights, to watch the series, sometimes not wanting it to finish. Others like watching a mini-series if they can record it, watch it on one night and use the 'fast forward' control to skip over the slower bits.

A useful exercise to screen the opening minutes of several films and test reactions. A frequent comment is 'I would have turned it off by now (after three minutes) because it looks as though it's going to be boring'. The opposite comment often comes up: 'It went so fast I didn't know who was who or what was going on'.

Commercial television tends to foster the 'get this show on the road' attitude with its regular and frequent interruptions for advertising and belief that the audience has very short attention spans. (And the commercials themselves are always in a hurry - and there are sometimes two versions, the 60 second commercial for use in cinemas and the edited 30 second version for TV. The development of the music video and MTV has also fostered this rapid pacing of images and sounds and enhanced the reputation of the clever editor.

Government supported television channels or pay channels which run their programs, especially movies, without interruption from beginning to end, contribute to the less rushed sensibility and the patience to watch a program from beginning to end and to pay full attention.

It is worth pointing out that the extraverted decisive sensibility is going to choose and like a different range of programs from the introverted data-gathering sensibility.

Obviously, people can't be labelled and put into boxes, but the sensibility information, does help in self-appreciation and understanding and respecting others' differences.

3. Impact on the senses

It is interesting to watch with a group the opening minutes of a film which has a great deal of visual detail. The group is

advised to be alert to what they observe by seeing and hearing. When they describe what they saw and heard, it will be obvious that the detail of time and place, the particular features shown and the sound effects and music will be important to most of the group. However, others will not be so precise. These others will describe a mood or feeling or, perhaps, a general theme that they have noticed. Any details will tend to be in relation to the general impression.

A fine film about adolescence, *The Year My Voice Broke*, with panning rural landscape shots of paddocks, hills, trees and rocks. The sky and clouds and the increasingly brighter light are vivid. The score consists of Vaughan William's *The Lark Ascending* but some bleating of sheep can also be heard, the cries of birds. At the end of the credits there is a caption giving the date and place as 'The Southern Tablelands, New South Wales, 1962'.

The more 'sensitive' types in the group will have noticed most of the detail and will tend to describe it quite precisely and accurately. The less 'sensitive' types will have some detail but will tend to describe it more generally, even vaguely. On the other hand, for some, the caption will jog memories and, instead of paying strict attention to what is on the screen, they will be thinking about the past, perhaps where they were at that particular time and what it meant to them. This response, a response of connections, is much more 'intuitive'.

Jung suggests that there are two ways of perceiving reality. One focuses on the present, the here and now, and builds up a picture from the details: 'sensitive'. The other can notice the here and now but gets an overall impression and then notices detail (or some of them) when they are relevant: 'intuitive'.

This seems to be one of the greatest differences between people. Sensitive types cannot quite appreciate how the intuitive has not noticed some crucial detail right before their eyes. Intuitive types don't feel the need to notice the detail and can be amazed at just how much the sensitive perceives. With the media, we are talking about the sense of seeing and the sense of hearing. In life, of course, we need to add touching, smelling and tasting.

Statistically, there are about twice as many sensitives in western cultures than intuitives. In some Asian or African cultures, there may be even more sensitives.

This factor is crucial in appreciating different sensibilities. Sensitives will respond fully to colour, movement, forms. They will notice so much that is in the frame because it is there. This happens less for intuitives. And the more intuitive they are, the less detail they may notice until they are alerted to it.

It may also mean that a film which relies on sense detail or action may not appeal to much to the intuitive. On the other hand, the more complex (or complicated) a screenplay is, for example a crime thriller, a mystery, a police investigation, the more difficult it may be for a sensate to follow and they may want to give up while the intuitive is enthralled.

Understanding our sensibility here will help us to appreciate the choices we make and whether we continue or give up on a film or a DVD.

4. Making Decisions - Our Criteria

The fourth and last focus for considerations of sensibility is the making of decisions and the criteria we prefer to rely on for these decisions.

According to Jung, some of us are very objective in the way we look at things. We want the truth and we go after it with clear principles and logic. It gives us a more detached view of what is true or false, of what we judge to be right or wrong and we can have confidence in the fairness of the decisions we make.

Others, however, are not attracted to this more 'thinking' approach to decision-making preferring a more 'subjective' criteria. They prefer to be more personally involved in the issue, looking towards goodness and harmony, taking account of values and circumstances that might alter the decision, a more 'feeling' approach. It is not so much a question of true or false, black or white. There might always be a grey area.

Both of these ways of coming to decisions are rational rather than emotional. In fact, we know that there can be quite emotional 'thinkers' and quite restrained 'feelers'.

It is worth noting that, especially in western cultures, it is evident that gender differences are relevant. It is said that twice as many men as women prefer the 'thinking' criteria. It is said that twice as many women as men prefer the 'feeling' criteria. This has been reinforced by stereotyping. But, in the last half of the twentieth century, the differences are lessening. One could ask the question about eastern cultures. In taking Islamic cultures as an example, it would seem that the thinking criteria were even more evident among men and in the legislation of nations such as Iran. (The film of *Not Without My Daughter*, starring Sally Field as American Betty Mahoudy, caught in the customs and traditions of Iran in the 80s and wanting to take her daughter back to the United States, is useful for these discussions.)

For the group to be able to appreciate the differences in sensibility, it is useful to look at a film clip that dramatises an issue and where both criteria need to be taken into consideration. It would be helpful to look at scenes from Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* especially the classroom activities where teacher Robin Williams gets the boys to tear what he considers irrelevant passages out of their poetry text books and, especially where he draws out of a shy and inarticulate boy, a creative poem.

These could be contrasted with the final scenes where the elderly headmaster takes over the poetry classes and gets the boys to return to their text books.

Most audiences responded well to this film, finding an inspiration for more personal styles of education. However, some parents and teachers were highly critical, accusing the film of being subversive and undermining the principles of authority and respect in education. This seems to be a very strong 'thinking' response.

Another useful comparison is that between the dramatising of hypotheses about the Kennedy assassination in Oliver Stone's *JFK* and the listing and analyses of theories in documentaries about the Warren Report and subsequent inquiries. The more objective approach tends to prefer the documentary, valuing the attempts at accuracy, critical of for its inaccuracy and considering it false. The more subjective approach tends to prefer the drama of playing with questions of the validity of the hypotheses, rather than the seemingly dry setting out of facts and figures. The difference in sensibilities here will be evident in response to films which rely on emotional reactions, love stories and stories of illness and dying.

A useful testing of the understanding of sensibilities would be to watch a number of movie trailers to recognise how the advertisers are appealing to different aspects of our personality types - and how they might be trying to exploit sensibilities.

With the development of special effects and stunt work in the 70s and 80s, there is a great appeal to our sensate responses as well as to our liking of fast pace and energy from outside ourselves. On the other hand, when there is a reaction against too much violence, the advertisers go for our 'feeling' sensibility.

Another exercise would be to take some film reviews and analyse the sensibility of the critic in so far as this can be determined - check what is praised, what is criticised and how, and, especially, the vocabulary and phrases that the critic uses.

Many of our media disputes are matters of sensibility, but we sometimes tend to turn them into moral issues. An introverted mother laments her extraverted son's love for Jean-Claude [Van Damme](#) action shows. A slapstick comedy fan sees nothing in Woody Allen comedies. Our sensibilities are varied, but

one is not necessarily better than the other. The more we reflect (and parents and educators reflect) on their sensibilities and how they are like or different from others, the better we will be able to allow others to view what it is to their liking and taste. These discussions seem to be 'pre-moral'.

Chapter 8. FILMS AND SENSITIVITIES

Sensibility indicates our interests, tastes and styles. However, within our sensibility, we are affected differently by the treatment of the material. We can ask why this is so and what are the consequences.

Sensitivity` is a word about which we are sensitive. It indicates how we are effected
affected
by what we see.

'Effected` indicates what something does to us, cause and effect, some kind of change.

'Affected` indicates how we are influenced in our feelings and our emotions, our affectivity.

Some examples illustrate this: we can speak about the effect of loud noise, bright colours, too rapid movement as well as being physically upset by violent scenes, frightened by horror, breaking into laughter through comedy. Sometimes it is just right. Sometimes it is too much.

However, our sensitivity usually refers to our emotional responses. Here we use 'feelings` language. We can be horrified, disgusted, alarmed; we can be delighted, charmed, amused. And we can be reduced to tears.

Sensitivity is a word that we use in relation to 'what we can take`. It can refer to what is 'too much` for us to take.

A brief schema indicates the varying aspects of human sensitivity.

DELICACY

In the moral theological tradition, writers urged the formation of what they called a 'delicate' conscience (meaning fine-tuning rather than the delicacy of a wilting flower). This fine-tuning of sensitivity should lead to this kind of 'delicacy' of sensitivity.

FRAGILITY

But what some parents, teachers and politicians consider delicacy is not delicacy at all. It is

really a 'fragility'. Fragility of sensitivity may appear like a delicacy but, rather, it is a sensitivity that has been over-protected, has not been exposed to harsher human realities - and, when it is exposed without adequate preparation, it may snap (fragile is breakable). It may not know how to deal with ugliness and succumbs to it.

ROBUSTNESS

In fact, in our real world of human evil, the fine-tuning of a sensitivity needs to be robust, able to deal with the brutality as experienced in the 1990s, say, in the republics of the former Yugoslavia or amongst the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and be compassionate to those who suffer (rather than avoiding the issue or, when confronted by it, collapse or become disillusioned).

CRASSNESS

Finally, the sensitivity which is not fine-tuned but wallows in what is ordinarily seen as gratuitous is 'crass'.

Sometimes concerned parents and social commentators worry about what they call 'desensitisation' to language and violence by constant exposure or by overexposure. With children, it might be suggested, it is not that they are desensitised but, rather, they have not been through an adequate training in sensitivity: they are not yet sensitised. This is what is required by education and training at school and by nurture in the home. The curriculum in primary and secondary schools, not only in media studies but in all exposure to literature, history and current affairs needs to place a high emphasis on sensitising the students to humanitarian values and humanitarian qualities of experience.

An overview of the treatment of language, sexual issues and violence in a hundred years of cinema illustrates this area of sensitivity.

LANGUAGE

For thirty years films were silent. The captions inserted for dialogue were usually brief. Often they were straightforward excerpts of talk. The subtlety and tone were indicated by the type face for the words, their size and, often, some framing devices or sketches, especially for comedies. It also meant that poems could be dramatised with the text for audiences to read.

But often there were ironic and facetious tones in the captions. And, very often, they took quite a strong, moralising tone, indicating to the audience how they should judge characters and situations.

With sound and the supervision of the Hay's Office and the Motion Picture Code in the US, the language of movies was plain and straightforward. There was serious discussion about Rhett Butler's saying, 'Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn,' at the end of *Gone with the Wind*. At this stage, characters were not to use imprecations like 'Hell...!'

There was a minor crisis in 1953 with a small comedy, Otto Preminger's *The Moon is Blue*, starring William Holden and David Niven. The film could not receive the official seal of approval because two forbidden words were used, two words that had not been heard in US movies. They were 'pregnant' and 'virgin'. The public of the period were able to accept hearing these two words. The question was raised: could franker words be used? The protesters (and the writers) of the '50s would never have imagined the range of explicit words and swearing that would be heard only twenty years later.

After Otto Preminger's challenge to what words could be used or not be used in films, there was a gradual introduction of 'franker' words but not explicit swearing. This began in the late '60s. However, Mike Nichols' version of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966) was considered a test case for what was permissible or not.

At the time, the American Catholic Film Office was the descendant of the Legion of Decency which was established in the early '30s. Members wanted to acknowledge that, with the advent of television, the movies were taking on much more serious themes than 'mere entertainment' and that the movies were becoming franker. The members of what was to become the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures were invited to a preview of *Virginia Woolf*. They thought it an excellent film but decided to introduce a new classification: 'Unobjectionable for Adults with Reservations'. (Many tended to notice the word 'reservations' rather than 'unobjectionable'.)

With the changes in American society and expressions of freedom, it was only a short time before explicit swearing was introduced. At first, censors' classifications tended to be strict, but during the '70s (as more of the population tended to use this language in everyday conversation), classifications were less stringent.

From the late '60s, American films introduced more explicit swearing, especially four-letter words. As we realise, whether we like it or not, more explicit swearing has become part of everyday life, so less restrictive classifications are given now. This seems to be true of language - which is now referred to as 'offensive language' - in films from every part of the world. Many audiences do find the language offensive, find it an assault. Some films which rely on such swearing lack wit, with swearing being an alternative to intelligence and being articulate.

However, one has to be careful about cultures and customs. A case in point is the swearing to

be found in films written and directed by African-Americans², for instance the films of Spike Lee like *Do the Right Thing* or *Summer of Sam*. Censors outside the United States considered, in 1989, that the quantity of swearing in *Do the Right Thing* merited a more restrictive certificate. Further investigation found that for African-Americans², this was not offensive language.

SEXUAL ISSUES

Early in the 20th century, the British censor issued strict guidelines on nudity in films. However, most of the films for public screening did not cause problems for censors. Obviously, sexual themes were dramatised. But few problems seem to have arisen until after World War I and the arrival of the '20s. By the standards of the '50s, some of the films of this era seem more 'permissive'; by today's standards, they do not. But, by the end of the '20s there was concern, especially in the US, about how far the cinema was going and what would be the detrimental effects on society.

The Hays Office, established in the US in the late '20s, and the publishing of the Motion Picture Code saw quite a change in the early '30s. It was particularly strict in what was allowed in themes, plotlines and treatment. When one looks at the costuming (slight) in, say, the '30s version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* or De Mille's *Sign of the Cross* and *Cleopatra* with Claudette Colbert, one realises how control tightened from that time until the '60s. Only the most straightforward treatments of controversial plotlines were allowed - and it was the period of two single beds for husbands and wives in American movies.

However, these restrictions were not applicable in Europe and more nudity and 'suggestive' films were made, especially in France.

Looking back over the last quarter of the 20th century, it is extraordinary how much has changed in the presentation of sexuality on the screen and the treatment of nudity. With the social and cultural changes of the '60s and the increasingly widespread showing of American films in all parts of the world (and, of course, the video boom which means that almost anything is available almost anywhere), 'community standards' have altered on this subject.

This means that local customs and taboos are threatened but the ready availability of the material (in magazine and book form as well) and that different countries have to deal with problems and controversial issues without much precedent or even much legislation. This is true of some Pacific countries and African countries. It is also a problem for some Islamic countries. And there have been backlash reactions against perceived permissiveness in such

countries as the United States.

Issues of sexual abuse have been highlighted in the media and the cases need to be reported. Sexual atrocities in war cannot be ignored. The question is always to determine 'how' these issues are presented, with delicacy and robustness rather than crassly.

The pornography industry, which has increased with the developing technology and the availability of video, is an example of crass presentation, ignoring the deeply human qualities of relationship so that all that remains is usually a self-indulgent, self-absorbed sensuality.

The movies from all over the world have become far more frank and explicit than they were, This, of course, is not necessarily a bad thing. But it requires a sharpening of sensitivity along with an appreciation of how cultural differences need to be respected - and of how children need to be protected from what is disturbing and how adults are not exposed to unwanted material.

VIOLENCE

Violence has become an increasingly important area of concern, especially for parents. It applies to cinema and video, but discussions are often raised in the context of television.

There is an immediate difficulty in discussing violence. The word seems to cover situations where some exercise of violence is required. For example, if you do not hear a car approaching and I push you out of the way, even quite roughly, I am trying to save you from injury. Perhaps this should not be called violence. However, it becomes a more serious topic when we move to defending of rights of someone who is being threatened. This is seen in the context of war and invasions but, of course, there can be threats at the community and individual level. The root of our word is in the word for 'violate'. So violence which violates a person and rights is to be abhorred.

However, the depiction of violence is not the same as violence itself (although some depictions, of course, can be 'unwarranted' and therefore a violation). For information, for education, we need to be exposed to some reporting of violence, some visual reporting and depictions. Investigations are done as to whether violence depicted on the media screens (movies, videos, television, video games) has an effect on those who watch it. It is clear that not everyone has the stomach to watch depictions of violence even when they are morally neutral (as in a film of surgical procedure). Different tolerance for watching violence, warranted or unwarranted, must be taken into consideration in judging whether the depiction is justified or gratuitous.

But media producers and directors have to take this into account as well. They have to be aware of the effect of depicting acts of violence compared with depicting an atmosphere of violence. They have to be aware of the effect of depicting physical violence and what is called 'psychological' violence (menace, fear, emotional pressure, abuse). It is not sufficient simply to count acts or even to tally the 'body count' to gauge whether the violence is frequent or infrequent or how intense it is.

What audiences react against is 'brutality' in representations of violence. Perhaps we should not be talking about violence on the screens, some of which is warranted, but rather 'brutality'. The discussion about media violence cannot simply be a crusade but needs nuanced contributions.

This means that for an effective discussion about the impact of violence, the context is most important - which means looking at the overall impact of the film or program, waiting until the end until the issues are resolved or not.

PART 2

Chapter 9 SPIRITUALITY AND CINEMA

It is quite extraordinary how 'spirituality' is a word that has become so widely used over the last decade and used the world over. For some people, it may still be something of a fluffy, feel-good sentiment but, for so many others, it is a word that puts a title on their deeper lives and values.

Film directors, during interviews, have hesitated to be associated with the word 'religion' and have hastened to say that, while they are not religious, they were still spiritual.

Spirituality and cinema movements

In the Christian English-speaking world, there was a big movement in the latter part of the 1960s to examine the values dramatised in films, to explore the religious, even the theological dimensions. Perhaps it was taken for granted during the 1980s, but there was not the groundswell of interest that there had been only a decade earlier. From the early 1990s to the present, the movement has begun again. This time the language of writers and workshop leaders has been 'spirituality'.

However, this Christian English-speaking world has not really examined what the spirituality of the other major world religions, the religions of Asia, contribute towards an Asian understanding of cinema and spirituality. Many in the West know that Japanese and Korean

films draw on Buddhist imagery and spirituality. While Bollywood movies may not be the first place to speculate about cinema and Hindu spirituality, there is a body of Indian cinema that is being looked at more closely with so many Indian communities around the world. What does Israeli cinema offer on Jewish spirituality?

Spirituality

So, how can we describe spirituality?

Each major world religion has developed its spirituality over the centuries. Basically, spirituality is a particular perspective on life and its meaning derived from the traditions of the religion. It is a word which covers a person's interior life and awareness and the consequences of this in their daily lives. This is a generic description. Needless to say, as centuries go by, different perspectives emerge to give a range of spiritualities. We find that there is no one spirituality. There are many specific spiritualities – of individuals and of communities, even societies.

As the 21st century begins, we appreciate that, especially in the West, there has been an extraordinary move away from religious affiliation and practice. It would be important to examine affiliation to the other world religions to discover how much was nominal, like acknowledging and ideology and how much was religious experience.

It also means that there is also a 'secular' spirituality and spiritualities where the inner life of individuals (and of communities) is not connected to any religious tradition, where there is no perceived or felt need for the spirituality to lead to God or to be expressed in 'God language'.

A caution: spirituality should not be simply identified with piety or even devotions, no matter how sincere they are. Spirituality goes deeper.

English writer G.K.Chesterton noted almost a hundred years ago that when people gave up believing in God they took up believing in anything. We know the prevalence of New Age interests and trends in the West, some of which are valuable psychological tools while others are reminiscent of superstitious pious practices that those who use them would disdain. During 2006, especially with the release of Ron Howard's film version of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, there were many seminars, panels and discussions about religion and the traditions of Christian spirituality. One of the main questions already being asked because of the extraordinary popularity of the book is how so many innately sceptical people can suddenly believe these figments of Brown's imagination as if they were gospel, seriously consider them and even go on pilgrimage to the places mentioned in the novel - it seems like a verification of the statement by Chesterton.

Spirituality and the experience of 'transcendence'

One of the descriptions of 'spirituality' indicates that, in its cultural context, a spirituality provides a way of looking at human realities and perceiving how they are 'open to something more'. One way of putting this is that any finite experience makes us realise that we have a desire for something more, that we have a capacity for something more - that we are open to the fulfilment of infinite possibilities. This is true of inner-world experiences as well as those in the outer-world. Through a spirituality, the human spirit reaches out to something, someone, who is beyond our ordinary and limited experiences. The word usually put forward

to name this 'beyond' experience is 'the transcendent'. Some religions would personalise this transcendence and call it God.

The richness of the world's major religions in putting forward writings, scriptures, that evoke the transcendent in human experience is wide-ranging: the Jewish scriptures and the God-guided history of the people of Israel, the Hindu traditions with the many faces of the divine, the Buddha with the powerful ethical and self-less spirituality that has become Buddhism, the teachings and life of Jesus at the core of Christian spiritualities, the revelations to the Prophet, Mohammad, and the interpretations of the Koran in leading its followers to Allah. Regional traditions have also contributed to this development of spirituality: animistic worship in Africa or the mythologies of the Australian aborigines and their 'dreaming'. These spiritualities, many over three thousand years old, and their developments along with the more recent phenomenon of more 'secularised' spiritualities mean that spirituality cinema is open to a wide range of films.

Difficulties in identifying spirituality cinema

I would like to illustrate the difficulties in identifying 'spirituality' in films by looking at some of the selection of films in the Spirituality Cinema section of the Fajr Festival in Tehran. Iran is an Islamic Republic yet is one of the first countries to have a festival which introduced the category of 'Spirituality Cinema'. However, the organisers experienced some difficulties and there was some dispute as to whether some of the films really embodied a spirituality in the senses just described. For instance, Luther, the film on the 16th century friar, Martin Luther, seemed to be a biography (some said a bit like a Readers Digest sketch of a life) that focused on the history of the reformer and his clash with Rome and his being exploited by the German princes for their own political ends. Still, a case could be made. However, the festival introduced a number of ghost stories, especially from Asia, identifying a story about 'spirits of the dead' as spirituality.

On the other hand, Le Grand Voyage from France was the story of a secularised young man, of Moroccan descent, who is asked (then forced) by his grandfather to take him to Mecca for the Haj. The young man was nominally Muslim but secularised and self-centred. The difficult journey by car led them through Italy, the Balkans into Turkey and Jordan. As always, the journey can be a metaphor for an interior journey. So, the young man experiences the faith of his grandfather and the challenge to his own 'modern' stances. This was no miraculous conversion story. We don't know what the young man will do with the religion of his forebears - but he has been challenged. This is a spiritual challenge.

The questions about the selection of films highlighted the important issue of whether spirituality has to be 'explicit' or 'implicit'. Obviously, adherents of particular traditions will want to make films with explicit spirituality. One can think of the Biblical epics or the many Jesus-movies. However, the explicit runs the difficulty of simply preaching to the converted or moving into propaganda. The response to any art form often works better when the values are presented implicitly and the viewers are challenged in their responses.

Depths of the experience of transcendence

Some old-style distinctions of terminology might be useful at this point.

Christian theology used to make a strong distinction (probably too strong) between the

natural and the supernatural. The natural is what pertains to this world, the world of nature, the world of human reason. This natural world is enough to satisfy so many people in their day-to-day living.

‘Preternatural’

When something happens that is not in the ordinary and routine experience of life, say a freak storm on land or sea or someone quickly recovering from an illness, we might say that it is somewhat above the natural. The word the textbooks used was 'preternatural', literally 'beside' the natural. Uri Geller bending cutlery by his mind power could be another example. Whether these kinds of experiences should be referred to as spiritual is an interesting question. After all, when two friends pass one another in the street because one has been delayed by traffic and would not otherwise have met, is this simply coincidence? Carl Jung refers to it as 'synchronicity'. Religious people refer to it as 'providence'.

‘Supranatural’

Another word that highlights a distinction is 'supra-natural'. This refers to something over and above ordinary experience, something that cannot be readily explained rationally. An extraordinary and unexpected healing (maybe through willpower) is a good example. What about ESP? Once again, we can ask the question whether it relates to spirituality.

Some of the ghost stories, think of *The Ring* and *The Grudge* or *Dark Water* (all of which were originally Japanese movies and were re-made in Hollywood), fit into the category of preternatural or supranatural and may or may not be open to spirituality. This can, of course, be a fruitful area where film-makers, perhaps unsure of themselves, can portray a search for belief and the spiritual. At least, they can dramatise the need for the spiritual.

‘Supernatural’

In the Christian tradition, the word that describes spiritual experience is 'supernatural'. This means not only over and above the natural but truly beyond the natural. This is the realm of what we call grace and God. Clearly, the supernatural is spiritual. One of the famous Christian shrines of Europe is the French town of Lourdes where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to a young peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. Since that time, miracles of healing are said to have taken place. The important thing is not so much the healing that seems supranatural. Rather, it is the atmosphere of faith and prayer in which the healing takes place (or does not take place) that brings it into the realm of the supernatural. This is the question for supernatural experiences in Hindu, Buddhist, Shinto, Muslim shrines.

Dialogue, understanding and peace

Any wide-ranging discussion of cinema and spirituality has to be characterised by respect. We may not understand aspects of another person's spirituality, may even be repelled by it, but we need to listen attentively to it. This discussion leads to dialogue – and the fruits of dialogue are harmony as well as change.

This is a reminder that each religion has its archetypal stories: the Buddha and his spiritual journey, the many divine faces in Hinduism, Mohammed and his revelations and pilgrimage, Jesus and his sacrificial redemption and resurrection. For those of other faiths and who do not

profess a faith, these stories have become part of the universal heritage and serve as powerful metaphors in storytelling and cinema. The Jewish Steven Spielberg has used the icon of the cross and the crucifix very powerfully in his film of the American slaves in *Amistad*.

The next step (which is where most films actually are) is to look at the dramatisation of values, values that all people can subscribe to and see how they are actually portraying what we might call a spirituality of the secular world. The spirituality is not explicit but implicit. A further step could be to look at particular films representative of different religious traditions to explore how their stories dramatise spirituality, an experience of inter-faith spirituality.

This leads to a creative dialogue between spirituality and cinema.

Chapter 10 **THE CHURCH AND THE MEDIA**

In the popular mind, the cinema is seen as the target of the churches, their role being to caution and condemn. In fact, in the Catholic Church, OCIC (The International Catholic Organisation for Cinema) was founded in 1928 to promote film culture, screenings and positive critique within the church and to dialogue with the industry. Since 1946 it has had a jury at the Venice Film Festival, followed by Cannes in 1948. In 2001, the two audiovisual Catholic Organisations merged to form SIGNIS, The World Catholic Association for Communication. SIGNIS now participates in 37 juries at international festivals as well as local juries. Many of these juries are ecumenical, sharing membership with Interfilm, the Protestant organisation, in association with W.A.A.C. (the World Association of Christian Communication).

But there is some truth in the perception that the churches are suspicious and critical of cinema. The Federation of Asian Bishops published the following schema of three phases of the churches' dealing with media. It highlights the evolving attitudes of the Church:

Attitude Action Position

1. Suspicion Censorship Outside
Rejection Control
2. Irritation Use at any cost Marginal
3. Critical Discerning use Inside
Understanding Compassionate service

The first phase is exemplified by the Catholic Church in the 19th century facing the proliferation of newspapers, journals and magazines. (Former Camaldolese hermit, Pope Gregory XVI, was suspicious of the railway, associating what he heard of steam and smoke with the devil and forbidding diabolical trains in the

Vatican in the 1830s!) Initial reactions to the movies were wary as well as to the dangers of television to lifestyle and to values. Many fundamentalist Churches (and Islam) still express suspicion and rejection.

The second phase can be seen in the 30s' moves to use radio for apologetics and for evangelisation, broadcasting religious services and prayers and 'question box' and sermon style programs. The electronic Church and the tele-evangelists are prominent examples of this, even using the media itself to denounce its evils along the lines of the first phase.

The third phase has been the goal of those who acknowledge the powerful impact and the realities of media and our powerful responses. By working within the media with attitudes of creativity and appreciation, they can produce material, be involved in media education, and offer positive critique which reaches not only Church people but the general public. This is a broader, if more implicit, evangelisation.

The authors note that, while the trends developed successively in time (though at different pace in different cultures), one trend did not necessarily replace the former. Traces of each still remain.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has expressed a much more positive approach to media in its official statements.

Inter Mirifica (tr. Amongst the Wonderful Things...) of Vatican II was the first document discussed at the Council, October 1962. However, it was a brief, transitional document. Clearer and fuller statements on the Media were issued by Paul VI, including *Communio et Progressio* (tr. Community and Progress) of 1971 and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (tr. Of Announcing the Good News) of 1976. It emerged quite clearly from these documents that the Church saw the media, not instantly in a negative light, but positively. Media are 'gifts of God'. This insight is reiterated by many local documents as well as by John Paul II, especially in letters sent out annually for World Communications Sunday and in the document, *Aetatis Novae* (tr. Dawn of a New Era, 1992) which urged bishops to set up a pastoral plan for media in each diocese.

The consequence of this is that the Church is in the Marketplace, not just indoors in the Churches. Like St Paul in Athens at the Areopagus, the Church is addressing the culture of all peoples in offering its Good News. It recognises the qualities and strengths of the culture and dialogues with the aspirations, the symbols of the culture. But this also means that the Church, with its message to the world and its media productions, education and critique is in the 'Open Market', in values competition with secular media, in quality competition with the secular media. The consequence of this is that media are seen as gifts of God, but that our collaboration is to offer top quality for these gifts.

Pope John Paul II's support of cinema and movie-going

Radio, television and information technology receive the most attention from those who discuss the Church's media and communications ministry. Rightly so. Their outreach is enormous. However, for those of us who work in the cinema ministry, aware of how many millions of viewers watch films in theatres, on television, on cassette and disk, Pope John Paul's apostolic letter is of great encouragement. He himself, with his acting background, watched a number of films including the Polish *Pan Tadeusz*, *Quo Vadis* and Roberto Benigni's *La Vita e Bella*.

He states that 'the communications media have acquired such importance as to be the principal means of guidance and inspiration for many people in their personal, familial, and social behaviour'. Inspiration comes from epics like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Narnia*, or *The Passion of the Christ*. Guidance, however, depends on what audiences bring to the watching of films. This can range from ignorance or misguided understandings of moral issues to the powerful exploration and reinforcement of values.

This means that the church has to work in dialogue with cinema: film-makers, reviewers and commentators. Moral classification and advice is important. But, if it remains solely at the level of unnuanced information about inclusion of language, sexuality and violence, then it is at best cautionary or, at worst, an avoidance of a mature appreciation of complex moral issues in art with regard to their context.

Many bishops conferences have classification systems according to the perceived standards of parents and their need for advice. Others offer more detailed reviews which both inform and educate. This is always an alert to the need for media awareness and appreciation.

This is a message that is not always heard or acted upon, especially when Church leaders themselves are not exposed to media like cinema. But Pope John Paul is clear, 'this poses a serious challenge for believers, especially for parents, families and all those responsible for the formation of children and young people. Those individuals in the Church community particularly gifted with talent to work in the media should be encouraged with pastoral prudence and wisdom, so that they may become professionals capable of dialoguing with the vast world of the mass media.'

And he adds: 'The appreciation of the media is not reserved only to those already adept in the field, but to the entire Church Community.'

A particular encouragement along these lines came from Cardinal Mahoney's pastoral letter of 1992. The Pastoral Letter from the Australian Bishops, *Go Tell Everyone* reinforced these views – and, when writing on cinema, they mention quite a number of titles of films that readers will have seen, making their message more real and concrete: *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Bruce Almighty*, *Schindler's List*, *Witness*, *Whale Rider*.

Further to these encouraging words, the Pope adds his comments on global communication and how everywhere media, including films, influence us. 'I limit myself to mentioning the formation of personality and conscience, the interpretation and structuring of affective relationships, the coming together of the educative and formative phases, the educative and formative phases, the elaboration and diffusion of cultural phenomena, and the development of social, political and economic life.'

In recent decades, many church people have been exploring ways of fostering the dialogue

between films and Gospel values, something which younger people appreciate, discovering in the stories they watch on screen the meeting-place with Gospel values and/or the challenge to their values. This is Pope John Paul's view. 'In the communications media the Church finds a precious aid for spreading the Gospel and religious values, for promoting dialogue, ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation.'

Quotations from Catholic Church documents

Since then the cinema is in reality a sort of object lesson which, for good or for evil, teaches the majority of men more effectively than abstract reasoning... (Pius XI, 1936, *Vigilanti Cura*, n.23).

This is a very strong affirmation of the power of cinema - and of its potential place in education and evangelising, 'more effective' than abstract reasoning.

In order, then, that in such conditions shows of this kind may be able to pursue their object, it is essential that the minds and inclinations of the spectators be rightly trained and educated, so that they may not only understand the form proper to each of the arts but also be guided, especially in this matter, by a right conscience. Thus they will be enabled to practise mature consideration and judgment on the various items which the film or television screen puts before them... (Pius XII, 1957, *Miranda Prorsus*, n.57).

Pius XII was not just advocating moral education but acknowledged that moral discernment presupposed that an audience appreciated how the medium created and communicated.

Communio et Progressio referred to the media as 'gifts of God'.

The Cinema is part of contemporary life. It exerts a strong influence on education, knowledge, culture and leisure. The artist finds in film a very effective means of expressing his interpretation of life, and one that well suits his times. The improvement of techniques that increase audience-participation and the general availability at low cost of filming and projecting equipment presage an even wider use of films in the future. Because of all this, it is possible to derive a deeper appreciation and a richer cultural dividend from the film and filming (Paul VI, 1971, *Communio et Progressio*, n.142).

Many films have compellingly treated subjects that concern human progress or spiritual values. Such works deserve praise and support. The Catholic organisations specialising in films should be among the first to support them. They should also promote these films in an organised manner. In this connection, it will be recalled that among films which have been widely accepted as classics, many have dealt with specifically religious themes (n.144).

The listing of a selection of films for the centenary of cinema in 1996 by the Pontifical Council drew attention to this, its list including Bunuel's *Nazarin*, Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. But John Paul II spoke most positively about cinema and values in an address to the Festival of the Third Millennium in Rome.

(Humans) created in the image and likeness of God, is naturally called to peace and harmony with God, with our fellows and ourselves and with all creation.

The cinema can become an interpreter of this natural propensity and strive to be a place of

reflection, a call to values, an invitation to dialogue and communion...

The cinema enjoys a wealth of languages, a multiplicity of styles and truly great variety of narrative forms: from realism to fairy tales, from history to science fiction, from adventures to tragedy, from comedy to news, from cartoons to documentaries... It can contribute to bringing people closer, to reconciling enemies, to favouring an ever more respectful dialogue between diverse cultures. (John Paul II, Address to Festivale del Terzo Millennio, December, 1999).

John Paul was also robust in his optimism about cinema and noted that there was a place for dramatising the shadow side of human experience and its openness, despite appearances, to redemption:

...even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption. (John Paul II, Letter to Artists, 1999.)

Chapter 11 **LENTEN SPIRITUALITY AND JESUS' FILMS**

In Steven Spielberg's 1997 film, *Amistad*, the story of an American slave trial in 1839, Jeremy Northam, playing Judge Coglin, goes into a church and kneels before the crucifix. He is under pressure from President Van Buren to find against the slaves. He prays, looking at the image of Jesus dying on the cross. The next day, as the slaves walk to the court from their prison, Spielberg has the three masts of the ship *Amistad*, almost standing over a roof like the three crosses on Calvary. The Jewish Spielberg is offering us Christian iconography to make his points about slavery, freedom and justice.

Jesus' death on the cross is his complete self-giving in a redemptive act for freedom for every man and woman who has sinned. The Gospels have Jesus voice this self-giving in the first of the traditional last sayings of Jesus from the cross: 'Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing'.

These words are repeated in the liturgies of Holy Week. They are not merely printed words on the pages of the Bible. They are words that invite us to contemplate their meaning and their power, which stand against all human instincts of anger or vengeance. They are words by which Christians, disciples of Jesus, can express their faith and the transforming love of God in their lives.

In Lent 2004, these words were spoken on cinema screens, in Aramaic, by the American actor Jim Caviezel who portrayed Jesus in Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*. They were heard by millions of people in audiences around the world. The film opened on Ash Wednesday in the United States on over 2000 screens. Worldwide release followed.

The crucifixion in art

There is a long tradition of representing the crucifixion in Christian art. At first, there were simple symbols in catacomb frescoes or on Christian sarcophagi. As the need was felt to see Jesus himself, early crucifixes portrayed a priestly Jesus on sculptured crosses in the 4th century or in mosaic apses and decorative art in basilicas. One thinks of the illuminated

manuscripts from the so-called Dark Ages, the icons that developed in the eastern churches. During the Middle Ages, fresco art adorned Churches in Italy. The suffering Jesus on the cross was brought into prominence under the influence of St Francis of Assisi, the cross at San Damiano which spoke to him and his imaging the crucified Jesus with the stigmata in his own body.

The art of the Renaissance and the Baroque eras saw crucifixion scenes grow larger, more majestic, more dramatic, even melodramatic. These Catholic movements were in stark contrast to the austere images allowed by some of the reformers with their iconoclastic tendencies. The Reformed churches had few adornments but, at the centre, they always placed an empty cross which anticipated the resurrection.

When the more colourful visual art was combined with mystical writings in the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a return to the importance of the word, writings describing scenes of Jesus' life and passion in great detail. They were described as 'visions'. Perhaps they are more akin to what spiritual directors and journalling counsellors would describe today as 'imaging'. During the pre-production of *The Passion of the Christ*, Mel Gibson was quoted as saying that he had read the works of one of these more recent mystics, Anne Catherine Emmerich, and was using her descriptions for his film.

Good Friday rituals

In contrast, the churches' liturgical ceremonies tend to be quieter and more subdued at this time of the year. They urge what is called a penitential attitude of mind and heart. The sagas and prophecies of the Jewish scriptures are drawn on so that their fulfilment is seen in Jesus. On Good Friday afternoon, many congregations listen to the powerful fourth servant song of Isaiah 53 and then join in reading the passion according to John.

Purple is the pervading colour of Lent. Sometimes crosses are covered in purple until the cloths are removed on Good Friday for people to venerate the cross.

These ceremonies are particularly stylised. The rituals are formal. The churchgoer celebrates the redemptive act of Jesus in his death on the cross. The mystery of Christ's passion will later culminate in the Resurrection, forgiveness of sins and salvation and new life. Holy Saturday become a day of waiting, of less formal prayer. The Stations of the Cross, which many people pray especially during Lent and on Good Friday, have two stations after the actual death of Jesus: his being taken down from the cross, his mother holding him, The Pieta. So, Christians have the opportunity to pray in stylised forms as well as with their own personal devotion. They can pause and contemplate a painting, staying in its presence as long as they wish, surrendering to the vision of the artist. With statuary, they can stand and they can also move around, symbolic of being on a contemplative journey of prayer.

The cinemagoer, too, has to stay with the pace as the film unrolls in the darkened theatre, has to move with its narrative and the length of time the director wants the audience to see any image. As with painting and statuary, the immediate response is a sense response, followed closely by an emotional response. However, there is a continually cumulative impact which gives the audience the time to reflect on what they are experiencing, a total experience. In this way, the cinema experience is akin to liturgical experience: an immersion in the sense detail of the liturgy, a prayerful emotional response of piety or devotion, of meditation or mystical contemplation, which can be expressed in vocal prayer and hymns, and time to listen to the

words of scripture, of the formulae of prayer, a total prayer experience.

How has cinema developed the representation of Jesus?

At its beginning, it took its cue for images and its religious imagination from the popular devotional representations of the late 1800s, the proliferating holy cards and plaster statues, not the most powerful of religious art. However, they did foster piety and, in the era of the silent films, short reels of Gospel stories, acted like holy cards, were readily available. Unfortunately, very little remains except a few feature films like the Italian *Christus* of 1916 and the culmination of this kind of imagining of Jesus and the crucifixion, Cecil B. De Mille's 1927 *The King of Kings*, with a rather older and austere actor going to his death at the end of a biblical pageant.

The phenomenon of cinema representations of Jesus in moving images, colour, with the spoken words and accompanying musical score is barely forty years old. Although American Protestant film-makers did produce Gospel films in the 1940s and 1950s with an actor playing Jesus, face-on, so to speak, mainstream cinema merely suggested the presence of Jesus - seen at a distance, or only his legs visible during the crucifixion in *Quo Vadis*, *The Robe* or *Ben Hur*. When the cinemagoing public saw Jeffrey Hunter in *King of Kings* in 1961, it was the first time that they heard an actor portraying Jesus actually speak his words from the screen.

Despite the claims of Renaissance painters that their works were 'realistic', in fact, they were not. They were particularly Italian, from the features of Jesus or the Madonna to the Umbrian countryside in which the gospel personages found themselves. They were in some ways, 'naturalistic'. They were easily recognised as real human beings. Despite this, they were stylised representations of Jesus. This is true of crucifixes even though many artists and artisans found ways of showing how cruel were the torture and sufferings of Jesus.

Most of the representations of the crucifixion on screen are also stylised even though most of the directors want audiences to appreciate the terrible pain of Jesus scourged, bearing his cross, nailed to it and dying. In the 1960s as directors like George Stevens (*The Greatest Story Ever Told*) and Pier Paolo Pasolini (*The Gospel according to Matthew*) experimented with how much or how little to show on screen, their films offer the essentials but are also reticent - except for the famous one liner where in Steven's film, John Wayne as The Centurion drawls, 'Truly this man was the Son of God'.

It was during the second part of the 1960s, a turbulent time of challenge for religion and the Churches, that Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber in England and Stephen Schwarz in America were emboldened to write 'Rock Operas'. *Godspell* played with vaudevillian conventions and burlesque to re-imagine communicating the Gospel beyond the Churches. *Jesus Christ Superstar* drew on music theatre conventions to portray the last week of Jesus' life. In the English-speaking world, millions went to see both plays which were released as films in 1973. Ted Neely's climbing a cliff face, a dynamic rendering of Jesus' agony in Gethsemane in the film version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* is still one of the most powerful of screen images of Jesus.

Around the world in Spanish-speaking countries, especially in Latin America, the face of Jesus, the crucified Jesus, was Robert Powell. Director Franco Zeffirelli wanted his Jesus of Nazareth to be as realistic as possible and, for a generation at least, Jesus looked and sounded

like Robert Powell. Slides and film clips were frequently used in the 1980s for meditations and liturgical prayer on the passion.

Which brings us back to Mel Gibson and his intentions.

Pope John Paul II is alleged to have said on seeing part or all of *The Passion of the Christ*, 'It is as it was'. Whether he said that or not, that was Gibson's intention. He wants his audience to go into a darkened cinema and surrender themselves for two hours to a depiction of the last 12 hours of Jesus' life. He wants his film to be as realistic as possible. He uses stylised conventions, of course, with editing techniques, with camera angles, moments of slow motion, the artistic framing of his shots. But he wants us to be absorbed by the person of Jesus agonising, tried, scourged (and this graphic part of the film may be difficult for many to watch), falling under the weight of the cross, nailed, dying. For anyone who saw Gibson's *Braveheart* with William Wallace's torture and execution, they know that he can do it.

Jesus' movies culminate in the passion. Gibson's film is, totally, the passion - there are some momentary flashbacks of key episodes which Jesus might have remembered, especially the Last Supper and his giving bread and wine, visualised as his body is nailed and his blood pours out. Gibson has used subtle moments amid the graphic suffering to ensure that we contemplate his Jesus: glimpses of eye contact between Jesus and Mary, Jesus left alone chained for the night after his trials with the high priests, the 'ecce homo'...

A surprising experience can be watching the passion in other Jesus' films like *The Gospel of John*, a verbatim visualising of the whole Gospel. In other circumstances, the passion scenes might have made a deep impression. But here they looked so slight, so tame, so brief and quick in comparison with *The Passion of the Christ* that we might realise that we have been more affected by Mel Gibson's film than we had thought. His is the Jesus we are remembering and imagining when we contemplated these other images of the passion.

Popular art and the spiritual imagination

Cinema is not always a fine art. It is a popular art. In recent decades, it has taken its place among the artistic influences on the Christian imagination. It has contributed to devotional prayer. It can contribute to possibilities for more contemplative prayer. It can influence our pre-disposition to more ritual and liturgical prayer.

Watching a film is also a public experience. Mel Gibson has made the passion of Jesus available to a wider public than Christians - after all, Calvary itself was a public place and most of the witnesses of the crucifixion were not believers in Jesus.

We have powerful images ready when we hear the first word of Jesus from the cross, 'Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing'.

A post-script: 'My Jesus film'

Perhaps you could discover more about your appreciation for Jesus by doing as I was asked to do: write something on which film is your favourite Jesus film – and why? I had to write for a reading public. Your readership might just be yourself.

This was a Holy Week request for an Easter Supplement in a Catholic paper. The Jesus film

that has meant most to me is Franco Zeffirelli's Jesus of Nazareth. I have a soft spot for the animated story, *The Miracle Maker*, as well as the lesser known 1999 film, *Jesus*, made for television and featuring Jeremy Sisto as one of the most acceptable and agreeable Jesus-figures, capturing the very human Jesus, but also the divine in the human.

But Jesus of Nazareth is the favourite.

Two personal experiences. Robert Powell came to Australia in 1978 to promote it. Catholic Communications, Sydney, decided to make a television program and I was invited to review the film and then interview Robert Powell. In those leisurely days, the floor crew had time off for lunch – just as we were about to start the interview. Off they went. The good news was that we had forty five minutes talking to the actor. The bad news was that the publicist wanted him for his next appointment just as the crew were coming back.

But, God was on our side. The lunchtime discussion was very moving. Powell told us how he had given three years of his life to Jesus of Nazareth: a year in preparation and rehearsal, a year in filming and a year in travelling and promotion. He explained that he was brought up as an Anglican but had not attended church very much. What had been very significant for him, in the light of his memories of Eucharistic celebrations was how awed he felt during the Last Supper scenes. He had to become Jesus saying the words that he had so often heard in his past. He had to communicate the profound mystery as well as help audiences appreciate how Jesus was giving the gift of himself as he anticipated his fearful passion and death. He told us that his had made a profound impression on him.

I was pleased to be able to tell him how his speaking of the parable of the Prodigal Son was one of the great moments of film-making for me. The way that he spoke, the way that he looked, the way that he told that most wonderful of Jesus' stories was just right.

And the interview? Robert Powell is a gentleman. When the publicist urged him that it was necessary to go, I saw him put his hand behind his back and give an indication to the publicist with his fingers, either 'wait a bit' or 'give me five minutes more'. We got our interview.

The second personal experience is this: a retreat experience. One of the most memorable evenings consisted in sitting in the dark while one of the retreat leaders quietly retold the Gospel stories in his own way. On the wall he projected a series of slides from Jesus of Nazareth. We listened. We looked. We contemplated. Robert Powell was the face and the gestures of Jesus. For many people in the 1980s, Robert Powell was Jesus so popular the film and the television series, so popular were the slides and the books.

What is it about Jesus of Nazareth that makes it so memorable?

One of the reasons that I like it so much is that it does not simply use the Gospel text as a screenplay. It combines Gospel text with narrative written for the film by Catholic novelist Anthony Burgess (best known as the author of *A Clockwork Orange*). Peter Ustinov's Herod, for instance, is able to explain the historical situation in Palestine. Zeffirelli and Burgess also create a fictitious character, the secretary of the Sanhedrin, played by Ian Holm. He is able to fill in the background so that the audience understands better the social and religious implications of what Jesus says and does, why the authorities begin to hate Jesus and plot against him.

Three examples of how Jesus of Nazareth works so well for me.

Jesus is at Simon's house for dinner. The Pharisees discuss the greatest commandments telling Jesus he is too strict. Jesus praises Joseph of Arimathea for his insights. Simon, upset, asks, 'Who is my neighbour?'. Instead of telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is disturbed by the sinful woman who comes in, weeps for her sins and anoints Jesus' feet. When you see this scene, watch Robert Powell's face. As you listen you will realise that he acts it as if he had not rehearsed. He is genuinely surprised, moved and full of genuine compassion.

The setting for the Prodigal Son is also well imagined. Jesus has called Matthew to follow him. As tax collector, Matthew has been extorting money from Peter and the other fishermen. When Jesus goes to Matthew's banquet with the sinners, Peter refuses. When he does relent and stands outside the door, he hears the parable, realises that he is the hard, older brother and comes inside, asking Jesus how often he should forgive.

Maybe, St Luke in heaven looking down at Zefferelli's film structure said, 'Why didn't I think of that?'

Finally, on the way to Calvary, a voiceover recites the fourth Servant Song from Isaiah (the song that is read in Good Friday liturgy). The voice is that of Laurence Olivier, so it sounds solemn and clear. But whom did Olivier play? Nicodemus. Nicodemus knew his scriptures, came to Jesus and then took care of his burial. A cinematic way of gathering rich biblical themes together.

These are some of the reasons why Jesus of Nazareth means so much to me.

Chapter 12 A SPIRITUALITY OF CHRIST-FIGURES

In the sixties theologians like Harvey Cox proclaimed 'the Secular City'. Many found it a liberating concept. We are here on earth for the sake of this world itself. It is not merely a stopping-place on the way to heaven. While one of the major consequences of this way of thinking was that many people found themselves 'free' of the Church, others had a renewed sense of the sacred, that there was not necessarily a conflict between the secular and the sacred. This meant that expressions of culture were not to be regarded as merely secular, they could be seen as manifestations of the sacred. And that included popular culture as well. (And disposable culture as well?)

Andrew Greeley says Catholicism has a peculiar allegiance to pop culture:

The other three great [religious](#) traditions [Protestant, Jewish, Islamic](#), each in their own way, are structured on sensibilities that emphasise the radical discontinuity of God and the world... the Catholic religious sensibility sees the whole of creation as a metaphor: everything is grace.

Director Martin Scorsese concluded his three-part portrait of the American cinema, made for the celebration for the centenary of cinema, with a homily-like reflection on the similarities between church and cinema, both places where people can gather to share deep human experiences. He spoke of this spirituality of cinema (and his programs were filled with clips

from a wide range of movies, including many B-budget genre movies, from which he skilfully drew out themes and values) and envisioned it as 'a quest for the common unconscious', 'to share a common story'.

During Vatican II (1962-1965) the spirit of Pope John XXIII's 'aggiornamento' (renewal and updating) meant that the Council's document on the Church in the Modern World spoke of the Church being responsive to 'the signs of the times'. Courses began to be offered in the seminaries on the 'Theology of Terrestria' (theology of earthly things). Philosophers and theologians in the tradition of a transcendental perspective on reality, like Joseph Marechal from Louvain and Karl Rahner, pointed out that every finite experience is limited but is 'open to the infinite'. And experience of the finite has us wanting more. In every finite experience, we realise that there can be more. Every finite experience has the potential for the divine.

Gospel stories and Gospel images are an intrinsic part of world culture, especially Western culture. The metaphors of crucifixion, resurrection, son of God, miracles are used by believer and non-believer alike. A distinction can be made between the 'Christianity of Faith' and the 'Christianity of Culture'. The former is lived Christianity, commitment (however minimal), belief and an acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord and Saviour, usually in a church community. The latter is an understanding and use of the tenets and stories of Christianity that does not necessarily involve any personal commitment. Film-makers generally use aspects of the Christianity of culture.

However, there has been, since the middle of the 19th century, a terminology related to biblical interpretation and theological study. It is associated with rationalist scholar, Ernest Renan. A distinction was made between the 'Jesus of History' and the 'Christ of Faith'. Attempts were made, in the name of historical accuracy, to establish the facts about Jesus of Nazareth, the 'Jesus of History'. The commitment of believers in the Gospels was to the 'Christ of Faith'. This distinction is still used, but, with the developments in biblical studies and the growth of a personalised spirituality centred on Jesus, it is less useful and helpful than it was. It is not useful in reference to understanding Jesus-figures.

Jesus-figures and Christ-figures

Preference here is given to the distinction between 'Jesus-figures' and 'Christ-figures'. Malachi Martin, in his 1977 book, *Jesus Now*, develops this distinction and uses it to appreciate how Jesus Christ has been presented and interpreted in art and the arts for 2000 years. 'Jesus-figure' is used to refer to any representation of Jesus himself. 'Christ-figure' is kept to describe any figure in the arts who resembles Jesus. The personal name of Jesus (in line with contemporary spirituality thought and practice) is used for the Jesus-figure. The title name, Christ - the Messiah, the Anointed One - is used for those who are seen to share in this mission.

In cinema, writers and directors present Jesus-figures and Christ-figures. One might ask how the distinction between faith and culture relates to these figures, to 'Faith/Jesus-figures' and to 'Culture/Jesus-figures'. (A suggestion has been made that the later might be represented in type in lower case: jesus-figures.) However, it is difficult to assess faith and/or culture in popular cinema since the director may be drawing on faith experience while asserting the portrait is cultural. A useful example is *The Last Temptation of Christ* based on Greek Orthodox Nicos Kazantzakis' novel, Calvinist Paul Schraders screenplay, with Catholic director, Martin Scorsese. Is this 'fictional' portrait a Faith/Jesus or a Culture/Jesus - or both?

The Jesus-figure is any representation of Jesus himself: a crucifix, a statue of the Sacred Heart, a Roudalt Jesus-clown, verbal descriptions as in the theological disputes in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, a 'Negro Spiritual', the music of Bach's *Passion* or Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

It is necessary to note that Jesus-figures can be 'realistic' or 'stylised'. More accurately, all Jesus-figures are 'stylised'. Any representation of Jesus as a thirty year old, first century, middle-eastern man might be realistic, but this is not how Jesus is generally represented. However, most artists seem to have in their minds that they are trying to represent Jesus 'realistically'. The work of the Renaissance painters, the movies of Cecil B. De Mille are all presumed attempts at realism, despite the Umbrian backgrounds or the special effects. Even the much-praised Gospel according to Matthew was an attempt to make Jesus more realistic and less a Hollywood concoction. Jesus of Nazareth offered historical background and explanations to make Jesus more real.

The tradition of literal interpretation of the Scriptures has also reinforced the belief that artists are presenting a realistic Jesus-figure. Pasolini's *Infancy* stories are no more realistic than those of *King of Kings* or *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. They just look starker in black and white and in simpler locations (which are Italian, especially the high mountain of crucifixion, rather than Palestinian). Most of the popular screen Jesus-figures are based on literal, almost fundamentalist, readings of the Gospels.

Which means that almost all Jesus-figures are, in fact, stylised. It might be more obvious to western sensibilities regarding an Aboriginal Madonna and Child or an African Madonna and Child than in contemplating the work of Raffaele, but these images are stylised. The coming of Jesus as *Superstar* at the end of the 60s and in the carnival and vaudeville atmosphere of *Godspell* shocked many devout people, believers or not, but it highlighted how much the Jesus-figure was stylised - and freed artists of the 70s and 80s to be adventurous in the way they dared to portray Jesus. What would Jesus of Montreal be without *Jesus Christ Superstar*?

The range of Jesus-figures indicates how movie-makers have felt freer to use 'sacred' images to dramatise (illustrate or critique) their characters and values.

The Crucifix and The Marginalised

Jesus lived on the margin of the Jewish society of his day, identifying with lepers, attracting the prostitutes and the extortionate tax-collectors, offering discipleship to women, persecuted and finally executed. No wonder that minority groups identify with Jesus. Sidney Poitier's genial Homer, the builder in *Lilies of the Field* (his Oscar-winning performance), showed the American black in the context of the building of a chapel for refugee German sisters, more religious than they.

One of the groups to emerge in the 70s and 80s demanding recognition and respect is the homosexual. With the strong and strict stances taken by the Catholic Church on issues of sexual morality, it is not surprising that gay writers and movie directors have decided to use Christian icons and imagery to make points about their identity and their just treatment by society (Paul Verhoeven's *The Fourth Man* (1983), Derek Jarman's *The Garden* (1991), Terence Davies' *The Long Day Closes* (1992)). Sexuality, religion, infatuation, prayer, homosexuality... It is difficult to elaborate in words the complexities of the images and the

challenges to an audience's moral and religious presuppositions.

Steven Spielberg has highlighted the plight of African slaves in *Amistad* (1997). Spielberg, with his Jewish background, powerfully uses Christian symbols, especially the cross, to dramatise the suffering of the African slaves and offer a means for interpreting its meaning. They were the new Christs. This was a new crucifixion. The slaves identified with the Judaeo-Christian² stories, composed their Negro spirituals and took so readily to literal and evangelical Christianity.

Dead Man Walking, showing the ministry of Sister Helen Prejean, has the guilty man extend his arms as he goes to death. With capital punishment, even the guilty person reminds us that Jesus died on the cross for us all.

The Crucifix and Icons and Symbols

In recent decades, religious icons and symbols are appearing much more frequently, not only in 'art-house' films, but also in mainstream entertainments. They need to be looked at. They need to be studied. One might say that at a time when the Churches are losing attendance, popular entertainment, especially the movies, is taking up religious themes, is taking up specifically Christian themes and asking audiences to respond to them. Crucifixes have already been noted as key to so many movies with Jesus-figures. Because the sign of the cross is so central to Christian faith, it is appropriate and inevitable that much of the focus will be on the crucifixes.

The Gospels and their story and the person of Jesus are part of the world's cultural heritage. They are not the sole preserve of the people for whom they are the word of God. In this sense, we can make the distinction between the 'Jesus of Faith', who is accepted and revered by believers, and the 'Jesus of Culture', the Jesus for whom non-believers have a respect and who are moved by his story and see them as some of the best images of the human condition and human experience. It is in this latter sense that film-makers use religious imagery. Some specifically religious films refer to the Jesus of Faith, especially in catechetical material and documentaries, but the majority of directors are not Christian and are drawing on this heritage of world culture which is Christian.

We need to respond to this use of icons in film. They are the religious images that a majority of people encounter. They are open to explanations - something of a new apologetics, an opportunity for a new explanation and defence of faith. Jesuit Michael Paul Gallagher has cautioned theologians and religious educators that, if they do not respond to this kind of popular culture, they will find themselves talking in an echo-chamber.

Christ-figures

The Christ-figure is any character who resembles Jesus, significantly and substantially. This emphasis on significance and substance is necessary to avoid trivialising the Christ-figure. So, not every Mexican who is named Jesus is immediately a Christ-figure, nor every Mafioso who desperately signs himself before being massacred is a Christ-figure. It almost goes without saying (though not quite) that reading meanings into works of art may be a commendable exercise of piety, eisegesis, but it is not the process for identifying Christ-figures. Exegesis is more appropriate, looking at the 'text' and 'texture' of the art work, in order to discern the Christ-figure.

The Christ-figure is a way of being led back to the Jesus of the Gospels, a way of clarifying and enhancing our Jesus-figures. The Hebrew Scriptural background to the Gospels portrays the ideal Israel (and, so, for Christians, Jesus himself) as the Servant and as the Son of Man. Briefly, this indicates that Jesus suffers and dies for others and that he is raised from the dead to new life and is an empowerer of others to new life. Contemporary discussions on these roles of Jesus indicate (in the light of the Exodus story) how Jesus is a liberator. Christ-figures can be seen as redeemer-figures when they lay down their life for others (Sidney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*), empower others (several of Clint Eastwood's westerns, particularly *High Plains Drifter*, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, *Pale Rider*) and liberate others by suffering or by engaged leadership (Romero, *The Mission*).

In cinema, the spirituality tends to be implicit rather than explicit, a latent spirituality underlying the film and waiting for sensitive commentators to reveal it. Paul Schrader says that it is the role of a critic to identify the religious motif, the role of the theologian to interpret it. A movie may be a product of the artistic sensibility of a writer or director, of deep personal religion and conviction, of faith, but this is not generally known. The implicitly religious material, when it is 'of culture' can be recognised more readily. A popular Martin Ritt Western of 1967, with the already alerting title of *Hombre* (Everyman?), was a variation on the Stagecoach genre. However, the hero (played by Paul Newman) was of Indian, native American, descent, was despised by the passengers but who, when under attack and in danger of death, had to rely on his saving them. He, in fact, had to decide whether he was prepared to die for this selfish group. Put in Gospel language, it is clear that the movie plot dramatised, but did not make explicit, the basic Passion myth.

Biblical Criteria for Christ-figures

The Christ-figures should be interpreted through biblical criteria. The Christ-figures can be seen as redeemers, saviours and liberators. There is a long tradition in the Jewish scriptures of redeemers, those who suffer and die on behalf of others. The most impressive and profound example of this tradition is the prophetic servant of the Second Isaiah,

...he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins.
On him lies a punishment that brings us peace,
and through his wounds we are healed. (53:5)

The Gospel passion narratives rely on familiarity with the servant songs of Second Isaiah, often using detail from the songs as 'short-hand' for describing Jesus' suffering. In Isaiah 50:6, the servant is struck on the face, spat on, his beard pulled and his back beaten. In this same way, Jesus' torture is described in the Gospels (Mark 15: 16-20). The First Letter of Peter, 2:21-4, quotes Isaiah 53 explicitly. In fact, the author uses the language of Christ-figure to exhort readers to be Christ-figures themselves: after speaking of suffering (in a passage about slaves being punished justly and unjustly), he states that 'Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow the way he took' (v.21).

The other tradition from the Jewish scriptures is that of saviours, those who transform others' lives or lead them into a new life. They range from Abraham, the patriarch migrating with his clan, to Moses leading the descendants of Abraham into the promised land. The climax is the vision in Daniel 7, where the Son of Man, representing the faithful people of Israel, comes on the clouds of heaven to receive the reward for those who had remained faithful to God's

promises to Abraham, those who were faithful to the covenant between God and his people. This, of course, is Jesus' reference to Caiphas when Caiphas asks Jesus who he really is (Mt. 26:63-6). Jesus is the Son of Man who, after suffering like the servant, will be glorified by God and lead his faithful into the new, heavenly, risen life. Saviours empower others to a rising to new life.

Christ-figures, men and women (and other creatures of fiction like Hobbits) are 'analogies' of Jesus, images of Jesus, who can assist us in our attempts to depth some understanding of him.

Jesus of Faith and Jesus of Culture

It should be said that theologians who pursue this fruitful exploration of the mystery of Jesus are looking at the Jesus of Faith, the Jesus whom they follow in belief and in commitment. However, many storytellers are not believers or committed to Jesus. And, yet, many of them use Christ-figures, consciously or unconsciously, in their work.

They way that they look at the Jesus of the Gospels is as a Jesus of culture. Whatever the facts about Jesus of Nazareth and his historical reality, Jesus Christ is admired and his words and actions interpreted by peoples of diverse cultures, even within the Christian tradition. Universal culture and, particularly, western culture has absorbed the gospels into its consciousness and into its imagination and language, enabling any creator to draw on the stories and the person of Jesus as a metaphor, as a symbol, as an image of values they are exploring. They are religious analogies in the broadest sense. They are not faith analogies.

The consequent theological insights can be intellectual, remaining at the intellectual level, offering greater understanding or deeper understanding of the truth of the mystery. But the insights are also symbolic, operating on an aesthetic level of appreciation of the beauty of the mystery. The insights (not the precise word for this experience, of course) can be on the level of feeling - desire and feelings - an acknowledgment of the goodness of the mystery.

Theologian Anthony Kelly gathers these themes together:

As expressed in his human existence, the Word has a history. Jesus is born, lives, suffers, dies, rises. As he enters into the heart and mind of man (sic), the Word becomes a story. As projected into the history of all men (sic), in all times, in all cultures, the Word becomes a story told and re-told. The occasions for such retellings are as frequent as the number of the life-stories of men and women who hope that their story is a good story. The Word becomes the way of telling our story, the way of accounting for how we belong together, from the beginning unto the end

The Word becomes the story, the Gospel. He does not become first of all doctrine or dogma or theology. Each of these is only part of his story. And so, it is essential to note the narrative of how the Word lives amongst us and invites us to listen.

Christology

The use of stories, of analogies, means that the Christology we are exploring is 'Low Christology', 'Christology from Below'. Theologians make the distinction between 'High Christology' and 'Low Christology'. 'High Christology' takes as its starting point the divinity of Jesus. Jesus comes down to earth from 'above', from 'the right hand of the Father' and any

theological reflection sees Jesus of Nazareth in this light. John's Gospel and Paul's letters offer 'High Christology'. 'Low Christology', on the other hand, takes the human Jesus as its starting point, trying to understand how Jesus is fully human as well as fully divine.

This is the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels. 'Christology from Below' has its focus on Jesus of Nazareth and his humanity rather than on Jesus as the Christ, the Risen Lord. While this does include Jesus' deep and close relationship with God, with Abba, his father, and the intimations of divinity which are sprinkled through the narrative, the course of his public life shows a gradual revelation of his oneness with the Father and his disciples' realisation that he was the Messiah. This climaxes in Jesus' death but, principally, when the Father, listening to the 'yes' of Jesus given utterly on the cross on Calvary, reaches out to embrace his dead son and loves him into new, risen, divine life.

This makes the study of Christ-figures more credible. They are not (usually) superhuman beings with whom we cannot identify; they are human beings like us who can reveal something of what the Incarnation is and is like. But the Christ-figure is also something more, someone who can reveal our potential to us. We can see the completion of their stories, beginning, middle and end, directions in which our uncompleted stories might go.

It is not fanciful to be linking Hollywood movies to Christology or to be using it as a source for theological understanding. A short statement made by the bishops present at the First Vatican Council, 1869-70, highlights this (though a more modern translation is desirable): 'Reason, indeed, enlightened by faith, when it seeks earnestly, piously, and calmly, attains by a gift from God some understanding, and that very fruitful, of mysteries; partly from the analogy of those things which it naturally knows...'. The other ways for fruitful insight are from the relations the mysteries of faith bear to one another and to our final destiny. Our stories relate and dramatise 'analogies' (metaphors, images, symbols) of those things which reason naturally knows.

Stories and storytelling are integral to human experience. Western culture, especially in recent centuries has tended to give a primacy to intellect and rational or 'scientific' explanations of reality and been suspicious of imagination and 'mythical' explanations. Storytelling has been one of the ways that Christians and aboriginal peoples have been able to communicate. Aborigines have their mythical 'dreaming' and many have been eager to learn of Christians' 'Jesus Dreaming' which they can share. Asian and Pacific theologians are becoming more and more involved in this sharing of stories.

Chapter 13 **SCREEN STORYTELLING AND SPIRITUALITY**

We have a heritage of storytelling in poetry ballads and yarns, short stories and formal novels, drama. It continues today in our films. How can we move to interpreting the themes of our films in the light of the principles of storytelling? Of the religious values of storytelling?

Several writers like John Dominic Crossan have adopted schemas from Claude Levi-Strauss² and other scholars [Crossan, The Dark Interval, Argus, Niles. Illinois, 1975. The subtitle is](#)

'Towards a Theology of Story'. Crossan acknowledges his debt to literary critics, anthropologist and structural philosophers. For myth and parable, Claude Levi-Strauss, 'The Savage Mind' (University of Chicago Press, 1970) and for satire, apologue, action, Sheldon Sacks, 'Fiction and the Shape of Belief' (Berkeley & L.A., University of California Press, 1966).

He explains how different kinds of storytelling create their own fictional worlds which can be compared with our 'real world'. However, each way of storytelling treats its world in a different way, making us draw comparisons with the experience of our own worlds and re-examine them. This works on the level of values and, therefore, on the level of openness to the transcendent, of spirituality.

The schema for storytelling is

Parable
Satire
Action
Apologue
Myth

How does this work? Crossan suggests that:

Parable: subverts its world
Satire: attacks its world
Action: investigates its world
Apologue: defends its world
Myth: creates a new world.

We can take each way of storytelling and examine what it means and then take a film example which can illustrate the way we might use storytelling for opening up a film's spiritual values.

PARABLE

Parable is a story which seems to accept the audience world view but then begins to undermine assumptions by criticism, focussing on characters and situations at unanticipated angles and then questioning, or even disrupting, the values system of the audience. The parable can be both subversive and didactic. The effective parable does not need to highlight any moral or conclusions. These should be evident from the experience of hearing the parable - or some unsettling questions should be evident, even if there are no ready answers. The role of the parable is to provoke, to ensure that complacency is not regarded as a virtue either in individuals or in society. The parable tends to change, question, alter a view or values.

No matter how much we might yearn for it (and even believe it), we do not live in a perfect world. Morality is not crystal clear. We learn to live with moral ambiguity, to know that change takes time and we cannot judge a person solely on their behaviour at the moment. Each person carries the baggage of the past. So, the parable form of story sets up a world with which we are familiar and which might, we hope, dramatise the ideal. But it does not, the ideal values are open to scrutiny, subverted by the ambiguous attitudes and behaviour of the characters. Most of our parables do not offer us answers, but they raise valid and valuable

questions.

Erin Brockovich

Julia Roberts won most of the Best Actress awards for 2000, including Golden Globe and, finally, the Oscar. She plays Erin Brockovich, a twice-divorced mother of three, who loses an accident damages claim in court and demands a job from her lawyer. Untrained, but with hidden reserves of intelligence (which everyone underestimates because of her provocative and sexy wardrobe), she starts asking about an anomaly in the firm's files. This leads to meeting over six hundred people affected by chromium poisoning from Pacific Gas and Electricity in the water. It leads into a class action for more than 300 million dollars and a new life for Erin.

It is a David and Goliath story. Erin also discovered that she was worth something in herself and that with energy and compassion (and some aggression) she could help people, showing up the professionals whose skills were not exactly people-oriented. In that sense the movie is inspiring. With the welter of photos of the real Erin at the time of the movie's release, one is able to say that she is a flamboyant personality. One commentator remarked that, having met the real Erin, he realised that Julia Roberts had underplayed her!

Erin Brockovich comes across as extremely outgoing. She does not seem to have developed an inner life. She is energised by her relationships, by her children, by the effort of keeping going every day with little money to support her. She tries to be inventive during the job application interviews with which the movie begins. And, she can't keep quiet in the court room when she defends herself against slurs in her case for an accident insurance claim. And this is her style throughout the film, sometimes getting into trouble for being too 'out there', but also using this energy in her dealings with the people in the class action.

It is no secret that her decisions are subjective. She personalises everything. Her love for her children and her care for their welfare are the main criteria by which she acts. She brings this same engagement to her contacts with her clients.

What is striking about her is her choice of outfits. Somebody remarked of her blouses, skirts, trousers, sweaters that they are 'trailer-trash' outfits. She is criticised at the legal office for her style and told to lose the clothes. She responds that she wears things because she thinks she looks nice.

Given her interest in the file she was given to put away, her inner life awakens: curiosity, sense of justice, a sense of crusading. Her son complains that she reads documents during the meals. And, she starts to move into action, decisive action to help those people duped by the energy company. Once on the case, her energy seems boundless (which still seems to be true of the real Erin Brockovich).

This seriousness and concern seems to take over in her work. She pursues the documents realising the consequences for the court. She is a woman of her word in guaranteeing the rights of her clients. And with Ed Masery, she becomes a skilled legal advocate. Not that she loses her personalised approach to decisions.

Erin Brockovich serves as a parable because it takes its audience into what it thinks is a familiar world of ordinary people, some down on their luck, others with professional careers

and others who have become victims of environmental fraud. How does Erin Brockovich 'subvert' its world? By revealing the unlikely Erin as a saviour figure, someone who embodies (though she might be surprised to hear it) the qualities of the Gospel.

The story of the Good Shepherd is well-known. Erin Brockovich might be a surprise image of Good Shepherd leadership, but in her dealings with people she showed exactly those qualities.

That sequence already mentioned where Erin and Ed meet the top lawyers in their office, a formal place with formal dress codes and expectations of legal professionalism and the assistant patronises Erin about the details of her files and Erin confounds her by knowing the phone numbers off by heart as well knowing the names of all her clients and the details of their life stories. This is a reminder that leadership is not all objective efficiency but personal affirmation of clients as well.

Her relationships with her clients are the way she exercises leadership. She fulfils exactly the words of Jesus in John 10, the chapter of the Good Shepherd, the voice that is known by the sheep who follow the shepherd. Jesus says they run away from the stranger (which is what the clients do when interrogated by the official lawyer). Erin Brockovich can serve as a model of leadership, Good Shepherd style, a challenge to religious leaders who tend, sometimes, to be 'strangers' with strangers' voices for their flock.

SATIRE

Satire is a black form of storytelling. Of set purpose, the satirist is negative. A caustic moralist, the satirist knows that the real world should be better than it is. Since it is not, the satirist picks the faults, the abuses, the sins and holds them up to the light but then mocks and invites the audience to laugh at them. Some audiences take everything at what they think is face value, interpreting satire too literally and are offended. John Dominic Crossan quotes Sheldon Sacks on the attack of satire: 'A satire is a work organised so that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it'. The satirist wants to offend those who subscribe to the follies, the abuses being attacked but the satirist also implies that there are positive values to be believed in.

Knocked Up

Knocked Up may not be the film that readers would expect in a book about cinema and spirituality. It is blend of the traditional romantic/screwball comedy that flourished in Hollywood in the 1930s. In more recent times, it has become linked with the sex comedy. Many of these films are quite crass in their storyline, visual and verbal expression.

An anecdote: a friend, a nun, told me how a religious leader from another denomination asked for a film recommendation to use for discussion on relationships. She suggested Knocked Up. He was more than surprised and declared that he would not see that kind of film. Eventually he did see it and apologised – and used it in seminars.

However, there have been a number of these comedies which begin like the crass films but, part of the way through, perspectives change. They are satiric in the first part but, while they remain satires, they begin to attack the vulgarity, the macho bravado, the sexism and offer a different perspective on love, sexuality and commitment from that which we might have been

anticipating.

Writer-director, Judd Apatow, who directed *Knocked Up*, has the knack of offering provocative titles for his comedies – at least for those who are alert to sex comedies, either for or against. He also has the skills in creating some crass jokes and allowing his cast to improvise. But he also has the know-how to make his sex comedies moral fables for today's generation which is less puritanical and/or inhibited than some past generations. *The 40 Year Old Virgin* was about love and respect as well as sex. *Knocked Up*'s paean to pregnancy, motherhood, fatherhood and responsibility and family love outweighs the casual sex angle which the title and the opening of the film highlight. Even the final credits show the cast and crew's baby photo album.

So, casual sex and the consequences, decisions for life and the repercussions. This is really a very strong pro-life comedy. Some characters promote and indulge in promiscuity in the early sequences but finally discover genuine and true love and move to committed monogamy. No moralist could complain about that.

Wise religious commentators have noted that every human topic can be the subject of humour, otherwise we put it on a pedestal and it is idolised (or demonised). But, then come the sensitivities and moral discussions: how is the subject presented?

Prudery and permissiveness are in constant debate with each other. For many it is a generational thing. In the past, many of us were reticent in matters of sexuality, seeing it as a matter of propriety. The main difficulty with this, as we have discovered to our great cost, is that this meant that many people were furtive in their curiosity about sexuality and in pursuing that curiosity. The revelations about sexual misconduct and sexual abuse in the churches have scandalised many but have made us realise that a kind of rigid propriety is not enough to control curiosity and urges. The last forty years have seen a broader presentation of sexuality, nudity and more open and detailed discussion in films and television. Which means that many middle-aged and younger people are more open, more explicit about these topics and issues (even in humour). It does not occur to them that their treatment of the topics is objectionable to others. This may be crass. It may also be more honestly earthy.

This is important for a dialogue about a spirituality of sexuality which is needed in today's more open and permissive societies (each in their own way, with their different cultural traditions and religious backgrounds).

Knocked Up is the story of a woman who, after an alcoholic one night stand, finds that she is pregnant. She barely knows the father and he is obtuse, slow on the uptake. But, the journey (full of farcical comedy) enables both of them to look more deeply at their lives and assume responsibility for their child and for their commitment to each other. Because this is characteristic of so many Judd Apatow directed/produced/written comedies, it might be called the current 'Judd Apatow syndrome'

Not all satires are as explicit in their ultimate moralising as *Knocked Up*. Others simply portray a world that the satirist finds wanting and allows the audience to draw their conclusions about a better world.

ACTION

This kind of story is the easiest to respond to. It describes a world and investigates it. Most popular entertainment fits into this category: from the basic narratives of situation-comedy or soap-opera to the dramas that mirror the concerns of contemporary society. While the world of the Action story has its own inner coherence as well as its boundaries, it is readily entered into for acceptance or rejection by large audiences.

Entre Les Murs (The Class)

Winner of the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival 2008

Entre les Murs is a documentary at heart, but offers its audience a compelling narrative. It is not trying to be a parable, subverting the world that it presents. Audiences accept that the picture of contemporary education is accurate enough. The film is in no way satiric, nor is it an apologue for the French education system. It does not create a mythical world. Rather, it shows a school, students and teachers and their problems.

Based on a book by journalist Francois Begaudeau and the experience of following a class through an academic year, the film recreates this situation under the eye of director Laurent Cantet who won multiple awards for his 1999 social drama, *Resources Humaines* and directed the film about middle age and finding one's personal values, *Emploi de Temps*.

The children portrayed in the film worked with the director for the year. Most of the parents are themselves. The group workshoped the situations with the director, finding ways to express their characters, their frustrations, their hopes, for the film drama. Begaudeau himself plays the part of the principal teacher.

He teaches French and the screenplay gives a great emphasis to the meanings of language, asking the group to write their portraits (rather than their autobiographies) and finally gets them all to express something that they have learned during the year.

Francois is generally genial but has a tendency to irony if not sarcasm. He encourages free expression but is definite about decorum and discipline. He is not always in control and some of the students know how to be stubborn or manipulative. When he loses it later in the film and two girls report him for insulting them – he is critical of their behaviour at a staff meeting where they are the student representatives and their breaching confidentiality in letting students know about the discussions – he is in danger of losing his job. We see him in discussions with other teachers, with the principal and with the members of the Board.

The main drama concerns a student originally from Mali, Soulemayne, who has chips on his shoulder, is disruptive in class and is finally reported for suspension or expulsion. Decisions about Soulemayne are tests of how the audience would respond in similar circumstances.

Cantet captures a great deal of adolescent life even though the camera is confined to the school, mostly in the classroom. The film also raises many questions about the nature of education, the processes of learning, class management and discipline and issues of respect. Teachers and students at this age may find it invaluable for discussion.

APOLOGUE

Apologue seems an off-putting term, especially in comparison with the others. Yet from the

point of view of traditional terminology, it has some merit. An old word, 'apologetics', was used in a religious context. It has always been understood as the explanation and defence of faith. Taking the key ideas, 'explanation' and 'defence', we can say that an apologue is a story that offers its audience a world that promotes itself, by explaining or defending itself. Many explicitly religious films can be seen as apologues. Apologue defends world - in the sense that it presents an explanation and defence of a world credible for believer (so to speak) and unbeliever alike.

Letters from Iwo Jima

A less complimentary alternate word for 'apologue' is propaganda. During wars, propaganda films abound, morale-boosting efforts which in hindsight seem to obvious, even preachy. One film that is obvious World War II propaganda for the Allies but has transcended its period is the classic Oscar-winner of 1943, *Casablanca*, a film noir with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. More vigorous apologues can be seen in such films as Mel Gibson's patriotic Scottish story *Braveheart* or Baz Luhrmann's epic tale, explicitly called *Australia*.

However, the example for this chapter is an apologue which works in a different way, Clint Eastwood's *Letters from Iwo Jima*. This is an apologue for the Japanese forces who in the last year of the war in the Pacific had the impossible task of defending the small island of Iwo Jima from the Americans. Clint Eastwood had already made a film (both apologue and satire) on the American heroism on the island and the propaganda exploitation of the flag-raisers to persuade people to buy war bonds for the war effort, *Flags of our Fathers*.

It is interesting to note that the flag atop Iwo Jima is glimpsed only momentarily in the second film and only at a great distance.

Letters from Iwo Jima was written by Iris Yamashita using a book of actual letters by General Kuribayashi, *Picture Letters from Commander in Chief*, to underpin the narrative which shows the Japanese troops preparing for the American invasion, their practical abandonment by the Japanese high command after the destruction of the Japanese fleet off the Marianas, the incessant pounding of the bombardment, the mounting defeat and final attack. Apart from a prologue and epilogue set in 2004 when excavators find a chest of documents in the caves on the island, as well as some brief flashbacks to the lives of several of the central characters, the main action of the film is straight narrative of the attack and counterattack.

For western audiences, this is an invitation to look below the surface of battle and beyond the ideology of the governments responsible for sending thousands of men to fight for them. Each side speaks of the nobility of fighting for country. Each side prays to its God. The Americans are seen as quite pragmatic. The Japanese seem to have a fierce sense of duty – and believe strongly in honourable suicide in defeat.

In fact, Clint Eastwood, with his two films, is offering an inspiration for mutual understanding and for reconciliation.

Towards the end of the battle, the Japanese capture an American. The commanding officer, who had been a member of the equestrian team at the Los Angeles Olympics, talks with him and reads a quotation from the boy's mother's letter: 'Do what is right because it is right'. One of the Japanese soldiers acknowledges that he had never met an American, had been taught that they were all savages but that the mother's advice to her son is exactly the same as

his mother had given him. And the officer, before he kills himself, repeats 'doing the right thing because it is right'.

The commander on Iwo Jima is presented as a civilised man, abhorring some of his men's cruel behaviour, remembering the happy times he had experienced when in the United States. The screenplay enables us to follow his strategies and tactics even as overwhelming defeat is looming.

There are moments of equal brutality by each side, the Japanese angrily bayoneting a soldier who had wielded a flame-thrower at them, an American left in charge of two surrendering soldiers simply shooting them because he can't be bothered staying to guard them.

It is over sixty years since these events. In those days, the war issues were fairly clear cut compared with current wars. Clint Eastwood has done us a great service in portraying the past to help us think more deeply about the present by offering a picture of the Japanese of the past without rancour.

MYTH

Myth can be described as the profound and positive story. It creates world. It creates world in the sense that the story can use for plot and characters real/historical personages or fictitious persons and tell a story where meaning is the important thing. Thus in the classic literature of cultures and religions, there are 'myths' that are the means for getting in touch with and communicating the spiritual meaning of the culture and religion. The creation and development of myths has been influenced at times by oral traditions, literary forms and popular modes of storytelling. There is no reason why contemporary cinema styles and ways of communicating cannot shape myths or reshape old myths.

The Lord of the Rings

Peter Jackson's version of J.J.R.Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings was not the first to reach the screen. Controversial animator, Ralph Bakshi released the first part of an intended series in 1978. While it was a respectable and imaginative attempt to translate the novel to the screen, it was not sufficiently commercially successful and the project was not completed. With the trilogy, New Zealand director Peter Jackson and his producers have been shrewd. The three films in the series were made at the same time even though there was a year between the release of each part - three years of Rings' mania, culminating in the third film winning the 2003 Oscar for Best Film and Jackson winning for Best Director.

Tolkien was a myth-maker, drawing on old European tales but also on the Judeo-Christian² tradition and the Gospel story of sin, redemption, death and resurrection. He dramatises the age-old conflict between good and evil, creating a world of evil and sorcery, a world of battles for survival, symbols of evil like the ring, images of goodness (who are nevertheless tempted) like Galadriel and Aragorn. And Middle Earth is populated by characters who are symbols of life's quests, of larger than life heroism, of friendship and loyalty, Frodo and Sam, Merri and Pippin.

The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring

The Fellowship of the Ring is the first of the trilogy based on J.R.R.Tolkien's classic novel

sequence, voted the novel of the 20th century.

What is impressive is the scope of the movie. Tolkien, like fellow Oxford don, C.S. Lewis, drew on English literary heritage to create a fantasy universe and describe it in meticulous detail. Jackson and his team match Tolkien's vision. They invited two illustrators of the Harper Collins edition of the novel to make numerous sketches which could be developed into sets. This means that the production design, costumes and make-up capture the Tolkien spirit.

The fantasy is mythic. It is an epic portrayal of the struggle between good and evil with huge armageddon-like battles. Yet, the focus of good is on a creature, barely a metre high, Frodo Baggins, a young hobbit. Frodo seems insignificant in his community. He rises to heroism in the crises, supported by friends, by warriors and by the sage wizard Gandalf. While Tolkien created this myth of Middle Earth, he drew on his religious background and his Catholicism to give his story stronger theological foundations.

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

The Two Towers is the interim film in the trilogy. After establishing the characters and themes in The Fellowship of the Ring, this rather darker film, echoing the darker aspects of Tolkien's writing, contribute to the development of the themes, especially Frodo and Sam and the quest for the ring, their journey towards Mordor, the disappearance of Gandalf, the arrival of Faramir. However, one of the most striking features of this film is the major introduction of Gollum. Technically, Andy Serkis acted the role of Gollum and then was altered by computers to the appearance and to the sound that the character has in the film. This is one of the major conflicts in the film, Gollum and Frodo and Sam and Frodo falling out.

The film is also a film of battles with extraordinary special effects as in the first film. Faramir appears to take Boromir's place. Eowyn is introduced. She is a very strong character, loyal to her father, riding out to battle with the men. She is also attracted towards Aragorn who emerges much more strongly as the hero.

Gandalf seems to disappear – reappearing again, fighting in the final battle. However, Saruman makes his appearance (but his role was omitted in the final cut of the third film).

The film does make too much sense by itself, it presupposes all the characters and their issues, it presupposes all the history of the ring. It also builds up its climax with the adventures of Merry and Pippin, the encounter with Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas and the final confrontation with Saruman and the defence of the Kingdom of Rohan.

With the final battle, the film almost ends in mid-action, heightening audience anticipation for The Return of the King.

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

The Return of the King is filmed with light, even brightness, compared with The Two Towers. It still has its dark side as Frodo and Sam are led and misled by Golum in Mordor. In fact, the episode with Frodo and the spider in the cave as frightening as an arachnophobic monster film. The battles, too, are impressive, not only the flying creatures taking up soldiers

in their mouths and tossing them around, but the mammoths and their relentlessly heavy tread as they advance (the sound engineering making them truly alarming).

With three basic plot stories intercutting, *The Return of the King* is easier to get hold of: Frodo completing his mission, Gandalf urging Rohan to war, Aragorn and the king riding to do battle with Sauron's troops. Another advantage of this film is that all of the characters have the opportunity to have a specific dramatic sequence that stamps their presence in the film and in the minds and feelings of the audience. It is interesting that the film opens with Gollum in his human form dramatising his evil choices and his transformation into the split personality villain. The character who comes into his own in this film is Sam.

Tolkien coined the word 'eucatastrophe'. It means a disaster which is played out in all its tragic aspects but which leads to a good outcome. It is the equivalent of the 'happy fault' of Adam that led to the incarnation, of the passion and death of Jesus that led to resurrection. The battle between good and evil on the large scale in the trilogy, the struggle in Gollum which fails, the struggle in Frodo which succeeds are part of this experience of eucatastrophe. After the battles and the restoration of the king, as in Shakespeare's plays, there is the return of social order. Frodo goes on to another land, a hero. But Sam and the Hobbits stay in the shire where all is well.

The Lord of the Rings is a profound mythical story of the mission of one person to destroy evil and save the world. We see traces of the simple stories of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem as well as of the great revelation that the Word of God has been made flesh. J.R.R. Tolkien (who later worked as one of the translators of the English version of the Jerusalem Bible) incorporates both of these traditions in his fantasy. It is not a Christian story as such and does not invite exact parallels. Rather, its themes can be illuminated by the scriptures and its themes help us appreciate what is revealed in the Gospels. As the letter to the Hebrews reminds us, in times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets. In our times, God can speak to us in partial and various ways through such myths of grace and sin, of struggle between good and evil, as *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo can be seen as an image of Jesus, a lowly person who takes on a mission that brings him into a mighty and universal mission.

The films have many sequences of darkness, of grim, dark battles where Frodo is frequently on the verge of being killed. Yet, he always prevails even though he is almost fatally wounded. He becomes, as so many saviours do, a 'wounded healer'. The ring that he wants to destroy might be seen as a symbol of our state of original sin: that there is a propensity for evil in all of us which breaks out in greed and ambition. This ring, this 'original sin' must be destroyed so that all will be graced.

MYTHS AND SACRED STORIES

The use of the category 'Myth' for insight into story in religious reflection has its origins in study of ancient stories, folklore and biblical stories, and 20th and 21st century developments in anthropology and psychology. 'Myth', as applied to contemporary stories with their secular, 'this-world' focus, is used by analogy with its original religious meaning. This is helpful rather than fanciful - although there is always a danger of reading things into the story rather than seeing what is actually there. Our contemporary myths share features with the myths of past ages. In fact, they may be seen to contain deeper significance than at first realised.

One definition of myth is, 'a sacred story of a primordial event that constitutes and inaugurates a reality and determines man's existential situation in the cosmos as a sacred world'. A myth is considered to be, 'a story about the holy', 'an expression of the transcendent, the language of being', 'a story of beginnings'. Myth brings its characters and situations in some way into the realm of our time. It also deals with what have come to be called 'limit-situations', birth, initiation, death. Thus, there is deep truth in myth, truth about the human situation, the human condition. As we know, this is quite a different thing from the historical veracity of the story or the accuracy of reporting.

Chapter 14 **VALUES AND SPIRITUALITY**

Where we find the reality of our spirituality and of spiritualities is in the realm of values and the way they are embodied and dramatised in a story.

One way of categorising these realms of values in focusing on the relationships in our lives, where we identify our identity: There are our relationships to ourselves: I - I

But we move outside ourselves: I – Others

And we are open to realities beyond the ordinary: I – God

St Thomas Aquinas, the medieval doctor of the church whose philosophy and theology have played an important role in shaping the Christian moral mentality. He speaks of the basic drives that govern our attitudes and behaviour.:

to live

to love

to live in society

to God

We can briefly look at the meaning of each drive and consider some films that open up the drives, the values and the spirituality inherent in the values.

TO LIVE

The compulsive yearning of contemporary men and women for some communication which will satisfy makes today's audience respond strongly to a film that concerns our struggle to find ourselves as persons, persons who undergo some maturing process.

Personalist emphases highlight the richness of the self, the fact that personalities are complex, that so many factors of temperament and character as well as of situation, affect the growth and development of the person. We want to understand ourselves.

The focus of attention in an existentialist perspective is not so much on discovering what it is to be a person, but rather on asking what it is to exist. Why is it that we are here in this

world? The key word to understanding this approach and the response it elicits is the word 'meaning'. What is the meaning of life, of the self, of the world, of others, of relationships, of the courage and despair consequent on this questioning attitude? We have a basic drive to preserve our own existence. But what meaning does it have?

- the importance of being alive, the reality of death

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (Le Scaphandre et le Pappilon)

This is a demanding and harrowing film about being alive..

Oscar-nominated writer, Ronald Harwood (and winner for *The Pianist*), was commissioned to adapt the autobiographical book of the same name by Jean-Dominique Bauby. Since Bauby, at the age of 42, a successful editor of *Elle* magazine in Paris, was unexpectedly cut down by a stroke with the consequence of a rare condition, lock-in syndrome, which meant that his only way of communication from his still clear and active mind was through the blinking of one of his eyes, Harwood thought that the screen adaptation was an impossible task. However, he decided to follow the book and tell the story, especially for the first part of the film, from the confined point of view of Bauby.

It is to the credit of the writer, the director, American artist and painter, Julian Schnabel, and the intense control of actor, Matthieu Amalric as Bauby, that this way of storytelling involves the audience fully in Bauby's experience and creates an extraordinary empathy. Later, the film will move a little away from the confinement, but it works so well initially, that this sense of sharing Bauby's hardships and his creativity stays with us.

And his creativity is important. Initially, shocked to find himself so limited, he is tempted to despair. Yet Bauby, tempted by suicide, opts for life. He loses the use of an eye but, when carers realise that they can get his answers to questions by his blinking letter by letter, he begins to communicate intelligently. He lets his imagination wander and he writes, letter by slow letter, his book. He uses the diving bell as the image for his paralysed situation. He uses the butterfly as the image of his unfettered imagination.

If ever there was a film that advocated life and a quality of life, it is *The Diving Bell and the Bell Jar*.

While so much of the film is confined to the hospital, the film is not restricting. And the fine performances from the carers and the women in Bauby's life (awkwardly communicating with each other to know how he is) complement the focus on Bauby. It is an extraordinarily life-affirming film.

- the meaning of life

Into the Wild

In the late 1990s, author Jon Krakauer wrote an article and then a book on the quest of a young man from a comfortable family, Christopher McCandless, who, after graduating college, gave his money to Oxfam, took his old car and went on what was a two year journey in search of meaning, of himself and of America. So much of his time was spent alone, in reading and writing a diary. This itself presents a challenge to a film-maker who has to find

ways of communicating an inner life while keeping the narrative moving.

The cast had many discussions with the family – and their allowing the film to be made is courageous as the parents do not come out of it well. Sean Penn has fashioned a filmic story by working on several time levels to draw the audience into the complexities of the young hero's life and relationships: his timeline of his journey is followed alongside the detail of the final months of his time in Alaska at the end of the journey. Into these stories (along with chapter headings indicating birth, adolescence, manhood and, significantly, the getting of wisdom) flashbacks of childhood are inserted. These have been filmed in home movie style which makes these parts of the story more credible.

Emile Hirsch is the brash young graduate, the individualistic young man in search of meaning, the young man who works on farms and in Burger Kings to support his journey, the idealistic and naïve young man who encounters a whole range of people, especially on the margins of society, and finds warmth and friendship rather than hostility, the emaciated young man who finds himself trapped in an old bus in the snow and ice outside Fairbanks. You might not like Chris, who renames himself Alexander Supertramp, and disagree with his attitudes and behaviour, but Hirsch certainly brings him alive.

Along the way, Chris meets two older hippies and is an unaware catalyst for change in them, the man actually mentioning that Chris was like Jesus.

Particularly impressive is the encounter with an old man, played with conviction by veteran Hal Holbrook (81 at the time of filming). Since this occurs in the final part of the film and we have already had quotes from Byron, Thoreau, Jack London and Tolstoy about nature, beauty, solitude and relationships, we are ready for their mountaintop discussion where the old man helps Chris realise that he is on a quest for God.

This is a wonderful road movie, with vivid pictures of Dakota, Arizona, rapids and the Grand Canyon, Los Angeles, California deserts and communes, the west coast and its mountains and, as the goal of his quest, Alaska.

One thing that Chris, Alexander Supertramp, comes to realise is that we are not meant to be alone and happiness is life shared.

- the quality of life

My Left Foot

While the eugenics philosophy of the Third Reich stands condemned for its theories of superiority of some human beings over others and its experiments, especially with concentration camp victims is atrocious, in an age of ready abortion and medical ability to indicate possible disabilities or diseases of children in the womb, a spirituality of the quality of life, especially for those physically and mentally dependent on carers, is important. My Left Foot offers such a story.

Prologue. Ireland, 1959. Christy Brown, at the age of 27, is a celebrated writer and painter. He attends a fund-raising event attended by his nurse, Mary Carr. She reads his recent autobiography, My Left Foot. Christy Brown has a severe form of cerebral palsy.

The 1930s. The Browns are a working-class family in Dublin, the father a bricklayer, the mother at home with their large family of children. Christy suffers from cerebral palsy and is barely able to communicate. The only part of his body that can move under his control is his left foot. The family assume that he is mentally retarded.

One day, aged seven, he makes the letter 'a' on the floor with chalk between his toes. He then astounds his mother by writing the word 'mother'. His proud father takes his son to the pub, the only way that he can express his love for his palsied son.

Christy grows up, experiencing in his limited way, teenage anguish, like falling in love. He also develops his skills as a painter. Mrs Brown wants Christy to have a wheelchair. She meets Dr Eileen Cole who comes to the Brown home and tutors Christy in speech communication. She introduces him to literature. She also organises an exhibition of his work.

Christy becomes infatuated with her. When he realises she is engaged to the gallery owner, he attempts suicide and falls into depression. A studio is built for him in his home's backyard. After his father dies, he writes an autobiography (typing with his toe). He earns some royalties which are a gift to his mother.

Christy persuades the nurse, Mary Carr, to stay with him. They married.

My Left Foot was one of the surprise commercial and artistic successes of 1989, winning Oscars for Daniel Day Lewis as Christy Brown and Brenda Fricker as his mother won Oscars. Day Lewis is a chameleon-like actor, so completely becoming one with his roles, that many audiences assumed that the man playing Christy Brown was himself suffering from cerebral palsy.

The screenplay was adapted from Christy Brown's autobiography. It tells a heroic story of a child disabled by cerebral palsy, judged to be unintelligent, who gradually communicates via his left foot and becomes a writer and painter. In its story of human courage in difficult Irish circumstances, it can be compared with the 1984 Australian movie, Annie's Coming Out, the story of a 14 year old cerebral palsy patient who is found by a social worker and learns to communicate.

Christy Brown suffers from cerebral palsy. He is a paralytic who needs healing. While he does not walk again, like the paralytic in the Gospel stories, he is healed in soul and comes to life in his creative spirit. This is particularly apt when considering My Left Foot. The movie is not simply the story of an innocent, the story of a handicapped child. It is the story of a man who has suffered in relationships, in love, in depression, in attempting to kill himself. He needs sin to be forgiven and a healing of soul. In Mary Carr, he finds someone whose love will continue to heal him.

Christy Brown is not cured of his palsy. However, since he first struggled to write the letter 'a' at the age of seven and scrawled the word, 'mother', he was offered new opportunities of 'coming alive' more fully. He learned to communicate. He learned to paint. He learned to write. The cured man in the Gospel did Jesus bidding and picked up his stretcher and walked. Christy Brown was still handicapped in his movements, but everyone was amazed and could say, like the crowds in the Gospel, 'we have never seen anything like this'.

- life for others

Schindler's List

Oskar Schindler's life was full of contradictions. He was a forceful capitalist indulging in a luxury life. Gradually, he began to change as the treatment of the Jews entered his conscience. He died honoured by the Jews and is buried in Israel.

As the Jews in Krakow are being driven into the ghetto, Czech businessman, Oskar Schindler persuades the military, with charm and bribes, to allow him to manufacture pots and pans, bringing great profit to himself and to them. He seeks out accountant Itzhak Stern to manage his factory. Schindler employs the Jews, enabling them to leave the ghetto for work. He himself lives a life of luxury.

Krakow commandant Amon Goeth he is cruel and arbitrary in killing prisoners. He oversees the destruction of the ghetto and the transfer of all Jews to the local labour camp. Schindler's factory continues to thrive. However, Schindler has witnessed the cruelty of the liquidation of the ghetto. When he realises that his workers are destined for the camps, he does a deal with Goeth to buy them to work in a new factory in Czechoslovakia. He compiles a list of people to be saved. The men arrive at their destination but the train with the women goes to Auschwitz. Schindler rescues them.

The factory makes munitions during the war's final months but Schindler makes sure they are unusable. As the war ends, he lets the workers go as well as the German soldiers. He is a criminal because he is a profiteer. The workers give him letters of recommendation and a gold ring. He regrets he did not save more Jews.

At the end of the film, in modern Israel, the Schindler survivors and the actors portraying them place memorial stones on Schindler's grave.

With Schindler's List, Steven Spielberg combined his considerable cinema talents with his acknowledgement of his Jewish past. In the years following, he sponsored a video library of interviews with Holocaust survivors.

The black and white photography makes the Holocaust more visually graphic than colour. However, the colour for the initial candle being lit and extinguished as the smoke curls up anticipating the chimney smoke, for the little girl with the red coat, and for the final tribute to Schindler in Israel is fitting.

One does not have to be an outstanding hero to give one's life for others,

- ending life

Million Dollar Baby

Million Dollar Baby was the surprise winner of the Oscar for Best Film of 2004. It is a film which deals with the controversial issue of assisted suicide. Life is important. What is the morality of ending one's life?

Clint Eastwood had already proven himself not only a legendary screen presence but also one of Hollywood's most important directors. After the success of *Mystic River* the year before, it is, at first, a surprise that he has turned his attention to the world of boxing.

He is obviously at home in this world as he plays a grizzled trainer with guilt memories of abandoning his daughter and being responsible for fighters' injuries. In his old age, he is trying to be protective, especially of his champions. He also goes to Mass every morning and spars with the priest over personal spirituality and theological and moral issues. His best friend and sometime confidant is Scrap (Morgan Freeman), former fighter and general manager and cleaner upper of the gym. The gym attracts some good fighters and some oddballs as well, all tolerated by Frank (Eastwood) – except for Margaret Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank) who is from a 'white trash' background but who has a knockout gift for fighting. He says she is not tough enough – girlie! Naturally, she wears him down and mellows a lot of his sourness (although he studies Gaelic and reads Yeats).

The film is narrated by Morgan Freeman in his wonderful resonant voice that he used in *The Shawshank Redemption*. The first two acts of the film focus on Frank, Scrap and Margaret's training. The second act is Margaret's success in the ring. For those who do not know what is to come, the scene of Margaret's knockout at the hands of a vicious fighter is more than a shock. It is disbelief. This means that the third act is not what we might have been expecting. Margaret is a quadriplegic, entirely dependent on nursing and machines. She is abandoned by her greedy hillbilly family but Frank is absolutely devoted. Then she asks him to turn off the machines. Frank's crisis is not only the morality of doing this, but also what effect it will have on him and his guilt about fighters' injuries, destroying a second chance at having a daughter, not being protective enough.

He discusses the issue with the priest who is rather cold yet challenging. This means that the resolution of the film is based on emotional response to the situation, the morality of using extraordinary means to keep a person alive, the request for assisted suicide. It leaves the audience who has gone to see a boxing movie going out of the cinema needing to give more thought to the moral issues, at an intellectual principle level and at an emotional level, to ask whether compassion is the final criterion – and what are the immediate and long-term consequences.

A post-script on *Mar Adentro* (The Sea Inside)

At the same time as *Million Dollar Baby*, a Spanish film was released which also treated the theme of assisted suicide and the meaning of a disabled life.

Mar Adentro is a beautiful, classical and often lyrical film to watch. Once again, it can be seen as a case study. However, the tone is often propaganda-like in its presentation of the plea for legislation to be changed and the emotional reasons for assisting someone incapacitated to die. This is quite clear in a final scene where Ramon, the quadriplegic, drinks cyanide and dies. In the process of taking the drink, he speaks to a video to explain once again what he is doing and why. He has spent 28 years as a quadriplegic, entirely dependent on others. He still has vitality and has a strong capacity for friendship and encouraging others to life. However, he feels that this quadriplegic kind of life lacks dignity. This, of course, is debatable but cannot be simplistically dismissed because we do not agree with it. The film's screenplay, in fact, provides characters who do not agree with the assisted suicide, especially his brother.

Journalistic headlines at the time were not entirely accurate. Mar Adentro is not concerned with euthanasia explicitly. Its focus is on 'assisted suicide', which is not the same thing. Moral discussion is never effective when it is merely based on headlines which may or may not be correct. There are two responses to material with which we do not agree on moral terms. One is polemic which merely repeats strongly the views that are already held. The other is dialogue, a listening to an opposing point of view with respect to see what further light is thrown on the issue in order to find some meeting of hearts and minds.

- destroying life

Vera Drake

Mike Leigh's Vera Drake won the Golden Lion at the 2004 Venice Film Festival, with named as Best Actress.

When it screened halfway through the festival, headlines appeared: a film about abortion. The presumption seemed to be that Vera Drake was 'pro-abortion'. A potential scandal makes for ready copy. This continued in most of the reporting about the film and its awards. The buzz about Vera Drake being a front-runner for the big award led to speculation about how the Catholic Church would respond. Italian journalists are said to have a reputation for being critical of the church, if not stridently anti-clerical at times, so this would provide a field day.

The film is so well written and made that it contributes to a more intelligent discussion which certainly raises the abortion issues but does so in a way that encourages dialogue between opposing opinions. Vera Drake is a fifty year old housewife in North London in 1950. She is generous to a fault. Nothing is too much trouble for her. Everyone says she has a heart of gold. She is the proverbial good woman. The first half of the film is a moving portrait of this woman whom Imelda Staunton's performance makes memorable.

Without any lead in we are shown how she also performs syringe abortions for women and girls 'in need'. She has done this for twenty years or more. Her family know nothing about it. When one girl suffers complications, hospital authorities inform the police and Vera is subject to questioning and arrest.

Mike Leigh's press conference also contributed to a more even perspective on the film and the abortion issues. He was quick to point out that his films treat social issues but never provide unequivocal answers. He provides the equivalent of a case study (something like what seminarians explored in the past during their moral theology course). Leigh noted that, while we bring our own agenda to the story, we are invited to consider a wider range of perspectives. It is not simply, or simplistically, moral judgment by unnuanced application of moral principles. Catholic confessional practice has traditionally urged for more delicacy of conscience and a greater appreciation of what full knowledge and full consent mean in the context of responsibility for actions and for sin. Leigh said that some audiences would view Vera as a saint, committed to assisting women; others would see her as a monster, destroying lives.

Most audiences hurry out as soon as final credits roll. For those who stay, they will see that Leigh dedicates his film to his parents, a doctor and a midwife.

The difficulty with labelling a film 'about abortion' is that this merely tells us the subject, or

one of the subjects, of the film. The Biblical story of David and Bathsheba is about adultery and murder but that is just a labelling description. What we need to know is 'how' these issues are presented. This is the criterion for a moral evaluation of a film. This means, as a correspondent for Vatican Radio was reported as saying on air during the Venice Festival, that Leigh's film is 'difficult and interesting' and 'avoids propaganda and tentative and facile conclusions'. Catholic teaching has always urged the faithful to condemn the sin but not the sinner. Leigh's portrait of Vera Drake contributes to that way of looking at her despite what she does.

- taking life

Dead Man Walking

Sister Helen Prejean, an American Sister of St Joseph working in Louisiana, would never have dreamed when she made her vows as a nun (which we can see in the flashback footage of ceremonies used at the opening of *Dead Man Walking*) that she would have become something of a household name forty years later. Her prison ministry, through her campaigning, her articles and books, the documentaries, the feature film and the opera, became widely-known in the mid 1990s and has given encouragement and hope to those facing the issues of capital punishment. At the Oscar ceremony in April 1996, she sat in the front row of the theatre beside Susan Sarandon, watched worldwide by millions as the actress paid tribute to the nun in her Oscar acceptance speech.

In adapting Helen Prejean's book, Tim Robbins combined stories of two prisoners on death row into the character of Matthew Poncelet (played convincingly by Sean Penn). Poncelet writes to Sister Helen who is teaching underprivileged children and asks her to be his spiritual director in the weeks before his execution. When she goes to visit him, not knowing what to expect, she is caught up in the Gospel teachings of forgiveness of sinners (seven times seventy) and the image of Jesus on the cross pardoning the repentant thief and promising him paradise that day. The priest chaplain is not impressed, preferring to tick her off on the issue of whether she is wearing a traditional nun's habit or not. Her community, however, are supportive, even being prepared to make available one of the order's plots for Poncelet to be buried in. The sisters also join in protests against capital punishment as does the local bishop.

Her ministry leads her in two directions: quality of life, forgiveness and reconciliation.

She is first drawn to the spiritual accompaniment of the prisoners. Whatever they have done, they have the right to pardon by God and to trying to repair in some ways the brutality they have perpetrated. This is a ministry of discernment. Sister Helen has to listen attentively to the words and to the heart of Matthew Poncelet. If she is to succeed in bringing any quality into the final part of his life, she has to be a catalyst for grace. He has to acknowledge truly and profoundly what he has done, the cruelty towards his victims which, in his case, are both the violation of rape and the ultimate violation of life in murder. She has to foster his sense of repentance, of sorrow, of the need for some kind of confession, of absolution from God, from her, from his victims and from their families, for some kind of atonement and reconciliation. Dramatically speaking, Tim Robbins has made a judicious decision to include the flashbacks to the actual crime at this point of the film. They become part of Poncelet's confession. As we see what he did, we know that he is truly remembering and acknowledging the profound and care-less evil of what he has done. It is visually shocking. Confession is not merely a matter of words (which are always easier to hear than the visual impact of seeing crimes like these in action). For Poncelet, this confession to Sister Helen is a conversion in the best

sense. Profound sin can be described as an 'aversion' from right and good and from God. It is a complete aversion, a turning away. Profound repentance can be described, therefore, as a 'conversion' to right and good and to God. It is a complete conversion, a turning towards...

Ultimately, Matthew Poncelet does confess to her and if ever there was a cinema moment when the giving of sacramental absolution by any minister, irrespective of whether that person be a priest or not cried out for blessing, this is it. Yet, as a nun, all she can offer is prayerful forgiveness. Even state rules forbid her to include any hymns in these final prayers before execution because the music could stir emotional response that would be detrimental to the execution processes. When Sister Helen sings one of the hymns by the St Louis Jesuits, *Be Not Afraid*, well known to so many Catholics, it is a scene of love and reconciliation, of courage in faith before death. She tells him to look at her because she will be for him the face of love as he dies.

Dead Man Walking uses a dramatic device to open its audiences eyes to look further than Matthew Poncelet. Sister Helen's eyes are opened in an unexpectedly emotional way. While we are shown the grief of the Poncelet family, especially Matthew's mother and what the shame of the crime and the pain of the execution mean to her, the screenplay at first gives minimum attention to the families of the victims. It is only when Sister Helen goes to see them out of courtesy that she is made to realise that she has neglected her ministry to the survivors of Poncelet's crimes. They assume that, especially as a nun, she has come to comfort them, to be on their side. The Percys are angry with her, accuse her of arrogance and order her to leave their house. So far, the audience has been caught up in her prison ministry and the good she could do for the prisoners. We have overlooked the families, just as she has. The scenes of her dealing with the families, their disillusionment when they judge that she is ministering to 'the enemy' are harrowing for her and for those in the audience who realise that crime affects more than the immediate victims and the perpetrators. Her horizons, and ours, have to widen. Even more demands are made on compassion.

This plot thread comes to its climax when members of the victims' families attend the execution. They have not been able to the same perspective as Sister Helen. Perhaps their feelings for vengeance have been tempered to feelings for justice. Poncelet attempts to convey something of his repentance and need for their forgiveness but they have not reached that point. Before he is strapped, Poncelet extends his arms in the form of a cross. We are reminded of Calvary, that Jesus gave his life on the cross for all – including the repentant thief.

What is significant and is something that gives the film an even greater spiritual depth as well as challenge to the audience is the final sequence. The camera tracks outside a church. As we look in, we see Sister Helen and Mr Delacroix, the father of the boy (who has listened to Sister Helen but has not been able to bring himself to forgive, who has attended the execution) both kneeling in prayer. If the final virtue in the seamless garment of life is reconciliation between those who have been enemies which leads towards peace, then this is a perfect ending to this film.

TO LOVE

THE second basic human drive, according to Thomas Aquinas, is the drive towards union

with another and towards self-propagation. Aquinas, considering human beings by way of definition as a 'rational animal', attributes this second drive to human 'animality'. For most of us, not attuned to conceptual definitions, this stress on animality can sound repugnant. One can almost hear accusations of 'Manicheism', 'fear of the flesh' coming from sensitive quarters. However, Aquinas is not downgrading this urge; he acknowledges it as basic and, therefore, noble. But he emphasises that it is intrinsically bound up with the physical component of human nature.

We are a unity of flesh and spirit (in Hebrew terms) or body and soul in Greek terms) and we act as a unity, as a person. Therefore the physical can never be artificially divorced from the person. The 'animality' that Aquinas speaks of in such abstract terms is human, personal. We can consider our sexual drive and the urge to love only in personal terms. Otherwise there is an unbalanced view, a partial view of a fully human drive and actions. We are dealing with a physical, a psychological, an emotional reality, a richly complex experience that is basic to human encounter and the continuity of the human race.

- intimacy

Shadowlands

Romeo and Juliet is something of an archetypal story of face to face love and intimacy. However, it is a stylised tragedy with the deaths of the young protagonists (used also as the basis for West Side Story). There are also some pleasing love stories highlighting the difficulties as well as the passionate commitment in love, sometimes using ghost stories to highlight the intensity of the love, like that of Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore in Ghost (especially the final few minutes) and Brad Pitt and Claire Forlani in Meet Jack Black.

However, love can take anyone by surprise, so the story of C.S. Lewis in Shadowlands is a fine example. His experience of love for Joy Gresham was profound and, quoting Wordsworth in another context, he entitled an autobiography, Surprised by Joy.

C.S. Lewis, known as Jack, was a bachelor Oxford don, a Professor of English but well-known for his children's fables, the Narnia tales. He was also known as a writer and broadcaster, especially on religious themes. He lived a comparatively reclusive and academic life.

He received a letter from an American poet, Joy Gresham. She and her son, Douglas, were to visit Oxford and he invited them to enjoy Christmas with him and his brother. Douglas did not enjoy the visit and they returned to the US where Joy divorced her husband.

She later returned to England and attended one of Lewis's lectures on Christianity. Lewis agreed to a marriage of convenience to enable her to stay in England – and she stirred the quietly complacent life of the dons.

When Joy collapses, she is diagnosed with cancer. Lewis goes every day to London to see her and gradually realises he loves her. He proposes to Joy and they are married 'before God' by a vicar in the hospital. They later go on a honeymoon trip to the Golden Valley. However, on their return, Joy goes back to hospital where she dies.

Lewis is distraught but gradually returns to his university life and gets support from Douglas

(who eventually managed Lewis' literary estate).

Shadowlands came to the big screen after an initial telemovie, written by William Nicholson, starring Joss Ackland and Claire Bloom as Lewis and Joy. Nicholson then adapted the movie for the stage. Finally, Nicholson adapted it yet again for director, Richard Attenborough.

Anthony Hopkins gives a finely nuanced performance as Lewis. Attenborough creates the atmosphere of Oxford in the 50s and 60s with an eye to detail. Hopkins' performance highlights the don who is almost a recluse, comfortable in bachelor digs with his brother, Warnie. He comes alive during academic discussions in the dining hall or in the pub. He enjoys tutorials but is demanding on students. Expert on the tradition of courtly love, he has also written such children's books. He also searches in literature to penetrate something of the mystery of God in the experience of suffering.

Hopkins' portrayal of a comfortable celibate attracted to his opposite type is beautifully restrained emotional acting, matched by the American vigour and vulnerability of Debra Winger as Joy.

Shadowlands gives the audience the opportunity to see and reflect on the elements which were part of Lewis's faith. As a don, he had an academic appreciation of truth and beauty in poetry and fantasy. As a writer of fables, he had intelligence and imagination. As a Christian, he explored the mystery of God. For Lewis, Jesus was 'the way' and he was 'the truth'. This is clear in the sequences where Lewis gives lectures on Christianity.

However, Lewis had to learn that Jesus was 'the life', not merely the answer to questions, not merely 'the truth'. And the way to learn that Jesus is the life is through our religious experience and our love for others. For Lewis, it came as a surprise. Joy Gresham brought him out of his ivory tower to share her life; through her he learned 'the life' of love. Finally, in her illness and death, he learned what he had written of in theory, the mystery of suffering. His life was transformed.

- family

Lorenzo's Oil

Lorenzo Odone was a young boy suffering from adrenal leukodystrophy, a debilitating disease in brain, blood and limbs. His parents struggled with the medical profession from the mid-80s for support and treatment and learnt to become expert at understanding the disease, even to discovering leads for a remedy, called Lorenzo's Oil.

The Odone's were an ordinary couple living in Washington DC who decided that they would fight for the son's recovery no matter what the cost. As Lorenzo's health deteriorated, his mother spent all her time with him, learning more and more about his condition but also finding out that, despite the disease and his difficulties in communicating, her son was maturing intellectually. She changed her reading choices from children's books. She almost willed him to learn how to blink and move his finger to communicate. She was also a formidable antagonist to doctors.

Lorenzo Odone lived until the age of 28, a different quality of life but one that was sustained by the love of his parents.

Lorenzo's Oil is a fine movie. It is not a so-called disease-of-the-week movie. It is a human drama, a portrait of family, parents and child, as well as a medical case study. The screenplay by Australians Nick Enright and George Miller was Oscar-nominated and is written as a file report on Lorenzo's progress from 1983 to 1992.

The director, George Miller, is himself a doctor and has brought his expertise to bear on communicating on screen the complexities of the illness, on the criteria for testing of treatments and the reaction of the medical profession and the drug companies.

The movie is demanding for mind and for emotions, but is a tribute to the human spirit and the strong binding of family love.

If anyone in movies reminds us of the Canaanite woman and her pleading for a healing of her daughter, it is Michaela Odone and her constant quest for the oil for her son, Lorenzo. The Canaanite woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon has to be one of the most persevering characters in the Gospels. She is reminiscent of the widow in the parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8) who keeps pestering the judge until in frustration at her persistence grants what she asks. The Gospel passages have Jesus urging us to develop a spirituality of persistence in our prayer. The parable of the Unjust Judge is addressed to those who were finding it difficult to pray and wanted to give up.

In this Gospel story, the apostles are annoyed at the woman accosting Jesus and following him with her cries and her loud request that he heal her daughter. When Jesus, acting like a prophet and teaching his message by a dramatic symbolic action, does not answer her, they take her side but only to get rid of her. Jesus continues the drama then with some dialogue, some Semitic bargaining and exchange of wit. And the woman is up to it with her retort about the dogs eating the scraps from the table. Jesus stops in admiration of her faith and grants her prayer.

Michaela Odone is an outsider to the medical profession who seem to have given up on her son. But she has the gift of perseverance. And she pesters. She does her best to learn about her son's disease, blaming herself for transmitting it to him. She challenges the doctors, much to their irritation.

She shows a great faith, with her Catholic background, that Lorenzo will make some kind of recovery. Finally, she is rewarded for her persistence. While the disease has had a lasting effect on Lorenzo, some of his suffering is eased and the knowledge that his mother fought for him can be of benefit for those parents and carers in similar situations. 'Woman, you have great faith.'

- friendship

The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

When we think of films about friendship, we tend to think of adults. This is a film about friendship between children. C.S.Lewis when writing about friendship in his classic book, *The Four Loves*, speaks of friendship as shared experience. Rather than the face-to-face experience of love in intimacy, this is the shared experience of friends together, looking in

the same direction, with their different perspectives, but sharing the gaze.

The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas is a children's film, in the sense that it is about small children (as well as adults) and much of it is directed towards small children (age eight and upwards). This does not mean that it is an easy or delightful entertainment for an outing. Rather, this is a message film, a strong message through a story and characters that they can understand, whom they will feel with. (It would be good for parents and children to see this film together. It is also one of those films which would be helpful in a school or discussion situation.)

It is a Holocaust film.

The Holocaust took place over sixty years ago but it is a 20th century event that should never be forgotten. This was in the mind of the novelist who wrote the story, Irishman John Boyne (born in 1971). For him, the internment and extermination of millions of Jews was something that happened a long time ago. He wrote the story to remind his readers of the horrors so that this should not happen again. This is the intention of the film-makers, especially the writer-director, Mark Herman (who also made *Brassed Off* and *Little Voice*).

It seems important to remember that the story is one that is seen from an 8 year old's point of view. He does not understand what is going on. He thinks that the camp that he can see from his window is a farm and the farmers wear strange clothes, like pyjamas. We see the camp from his limited point of view and, to that extent, the 'realistic' details can be criticised as 'unrealistic'. Adults looking at the film, especially the reconstruction of the camp without too many watchtowers and parts of the fences left unguarded, may be dissatisfied. But that is not the point. This is a fable for children about friendship and the ugliness of cruel power and prejudice.

The little boy, Bruno (Asa Butterfield), is the son of the camp commandant (David Thewliss quietly menacing). The family has moved from Berlin to the camp, to a big house beyond the fences and the boy is lonely without his friends. There is a strange servant in the house, also wearing pyjamas, who is kind to him, a doctor who now peels potatoes and works the garden. Bruno cannot understand why Pavel (David Heyman, the producer of the film) has given up being a doctor for this.

Bruno loves exploring. Which brings him, without his parents knowing, to the camp fence where he sees Shmuel (Jack Scanlon), an 8 year old internee. Bruno asks all kinds of questions about Shmuel and the camp, innocent even naïve questions. Friendship blossoms but, at one crucial point, where Shmuel is working in the house, Bruno denies that he knows Shmuel and accuses him of stealing the food that Bruno had secretly given him. The boys have to work through this betrayal to forgiveness and some atonement.

Vera Farmiga portrays the children's mother – Bruno has a 12 year old sister who embraces the Nazi ideology unquestioningly. The mother thinks that the camp is just a labour camp but is puzzled by the smoke and smell from the chimneys. The adjutant makes a casual remark about the furnaces and what they are really for. This creates a dilemma for the mother and her relationship with her husband (whose father, Richard Johnson, supports his son's necessary work but whose mother, Sheila Hancock, strongly disapproves).

The dialogue does not downplay the bigotry, the arrogance and the ignorance of the Nazi beliefs and aims. The children's father and their tutor mouth the prejudices without a second

thought. The tutor remarks, ironically, that the greatest exploration would be to discover a good Jew. That becomes something of Bruno's goal. Together with Shmuel, he tries to achieve it.

A warning that the ending is not what audiences will expect and is quite disturbing and may need parents' and teachers' help and explanations for some children to deal with it.

- betrayal

The Painted Veil

1925. Walter Fane is an English bacteriologist. He encounters a young woman in London, Kitty, courts her and marries her. She does not really love Walter and uses her marriage as an escape from her routine life.

Walter goes to Shanghai where Kitty begins an affair with a diplomat, Charles Townsend. Walter's reaction is severe and he demands that Kitty accompany him, as a punishment, to a remote village where there is a cholera epidemic and the risk of death. The trip is long and difficult.

A British deputy commissioner, Waddington, lives in the village. He co-habits with one of the local women. They befriend Walter and Kitty. Walter is busy with his work and his research and Kitty is left alone. The local Chinese general is opposed to the British presence but tolerates Walter and his attempts to help the people.

When Kitty encounters the nuns who live and work in the village, she is strongly influenced by the Mother Superior, listening to her story and her sound worldly-wise advice. Kitty begins to help the sisters with the sick. As a consequence, Walter sees her in a new light and she appreciates his work. They fall in love with each other. Kitty is pregnant but unsure of the paternity of her baby.

An influx of people into the village puts a strain on resources and on Walter. He contracts cholera and dies.

Some years later, in London, Kitty with her son, Walter, encounter Charles Townsend but she declines to continue any relationship with him.

The Painted Veil is a film for an adult audience that can be recommended both for its fine technical qualities and for its explorations of themes of infidelity, reconciliation, forgiveness and atonement.

W. Somerset Maugham created several strong female characters in his novels. His Kitty Fane in *The Painted Veil* is a less forceful character than many of these. However, she too is unfaithful but she has the opportunity to redeem herself – and be redeemed by her husband and his work among cholera victims.

This version of *The Painted Veil* was filmed in China. The cinematography of Shanghai and of the mountains and rivers of South China make a magnificent background to the plot. Flashbacks build up the story of the western man and woman being carried through the

countryside on chairs. He is a shy and rather uptight bacteriologist from England (Edward Norton most persuasive in the role) and his socialite and spoiled young wife, Kitty (Naomi Watts proving that she is an actress of skill and substance). We soon learn that she did not love her husband despite his devotion to her and has had a dalliance with a worthless diplomat (Liev Schreiber) in Shanghai. Her husband volunteers to go to a remote village to help in a cholera epidemic and, quietly vengeful, forces his wife to accompany him.

The film develops the themes of colonialist presence in China and the growing resentment and violent protests as well as the themes of Chinese need for contemporary medical practice and hygiene. In the village are a group of French nuns who run an orphanage and who are helping in the crisis, many of them dying. Diana Rigg plays the superior, a practical and devout woman who delivers some very moving dialogue about her vocation, her love of God, her passion for God and how, as she has grown older, they are like an old married couple sitting together, taking each other for granted, a maturing up and down love.

The plot develops as might be expected, especially in the tense relationship between husband and wife, in the hard work of the doctor, in the passive aggression of the military chief who finally breaks through the rituals and pride of the local warlord to change the practices of the people concerning the dead which are contributing to the spread of the disease.

The end of the film is moving, showing that hard circumstances and shared self-giving can transcend bitterness and hurt and that love and forgiveness are not impossible.

- altruistic love

The Motorcycle Diaries

Since his death in 1967, Che Guevara has become a symbol of revolution, an icon for all types of protest. There have been a number of documentaries on him, especially his role in the Cuban uprising (with some comments from Castro himself in Oliver Stone's *Commandante*) and a late 60s Hollywood biopic with Omar Sharif, *Che*. Andy Garcia's *The Lost City* is critical of Guevara. Steven Soderbergh's four hour biopic, *Che, The Argentinian* and *The Guerilla* shows his power and his ruthlessness.

Walter Salles' film is based on his diaries, written during a trip in 1952 which took him through his native Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia and ended in Venezuela. It is also based on the book by his friend, Alberto Granado, who shared the journey and who also went to Cuba and still lives there (his old and gnarled face being the final image of the film).

The journey was life-changing for the 24 year old medical student. The film shows nothing of his later life and battles. Rather, it portrays a personal Latin American journey of the early 1950s. What started as an adventure was gradually transformed into the beginnings of social consciousness and a fight for justice. This is the journey that the audience shares.

Using the conventions of the road movie, the film, at first, seems just another buddy experience in beautiful, rugged and remote areas, the usual spills from their old motor bike, bluffing their way into people's homes, flirting along the way. But, by the time we reach the mines of Chile, the Indians in Cuzco and the lepers in San Pablo, Peru, we share the awareness of social inequality and the need for action that is both compassionate and just.

As Guevara, Gael Garcia Bernal gives a fine, generally understated performance, matched by the exuberance of Rodrigo de la Serna as Alberto. The film notes that this is not a tale of mighty deeds but rather smaller and more ordinary action. It is still only too relevant to today and to the countries of South and Central America, a plea for action.

Thirsting for justice means identifying with the poor, acknowledging and fighting against the oppression that Amos and James speak of as well as acting according to the way that Jesus urges his disciples to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the sick and prisoners. This is the discovery that Ernesto Guevara makes in his Motorcycle Diaries.

When the movie opens, it is clear that young adults in the audience, especially young men, will identify with the character of the medical student, Ernesto Guevara. His life and the world are before him. He is part of a comfortable middle-class family. He has had ample opportunity to enjoy life as well as pursue his studies. He is taking a 'gap year' after his studies, an adventure with a friend. What could seem more normal? We know the aftermath of the journey, so it is important to discover how that journey unfolded, how, at the end, Guevara could identify with the well-known teaching of Jesus on compassionate justice.

One of the early experiences of Ernesto and Alberto is to meet the Chilean mineworkers, to see the poverty in which they lived and the unjust way they were treated by the owners and managers. The words of the prophet of justice, Amos, are often quoted. They are particularly relevant here. The Jerusalem Bible translation puts it forcefully, denouncing the exploiters because 'they trample on the heads of ordinary people'. The plain forcefulness of the Revised Standard Version put it, 'they grind the heads of the helpless into the dust' and adds 'and push the humble out of their way'. The dust of Chile is where Ernesto and Alberto find the oppressed. It is a shocking and sobering experience.

In this context of social injustice, the words of James take on even more power than normal. James expands on the words of Amos, even outdoes him in his long and emotional denunciation of the oppressive rich. When judgment is visited on the rich, the words of the psalm so often recited by congregations at the Eucharist and sung in hymns will come true: 'The Lord hears the cry of the poor.'

Che Guevara eventually chose protest and revolution as his way of denouncing and attempting to uproot poverty and injustice. At the same time, within a year or two of his death, the Church of Latin America was stating that the church should live 'a fundamental option for the poor'.

When Ernesto and Alberto meet the Indians in Cuzco in the Peruvian Andes, it is clear that Guevara's life choices for justice are being firmly set.

The Motorcycle Diaries brings the journey to an end at a hospital for lepers in Peru. The institution reflects some of the sterner aspects of Church charity in those times, the Mother Superior for whom regulations have almost top priority (with her forbidding the young men to eat because of their not attending Mass). But, there are other images of church, especially in the kindly nuns and staff who share the birthday party, can sing and dance and share their joy with the poor. This is where Ernesto feels at home, living the injunctions that Jesus speaks of in his vision of the judgment of those who served the poor and those who did not. In a kind of baptismal symbolism, Ernesto swims the river on his birthday and, as the movie ends, begins his new vocation.

- abuse of love

Mysterious Skin

In recent years, sexual abuse of minors has become one of the most potent symbols of abuse of love. This has been highlighted by the number of clergy and religious who have been found guilty of this kind of abuse. Films on the themes, both documentaries and narratives offer a challenging opportunity for reflection as well as an examination of conscience, especially for the churches.

Probably the best film so far to understand the psyche of the abuser is Gregg Araki's *Mysterious Skin* (2004). He has adapted a novel by Scott Heim. It is a secular story rather than a church story. The novel came out in 1995 when charges were beginning to surface more widely in various organisations, secular and religious. This film focuses on two families. The paedophile is the little league baseball coach. The setting is the late 1980s, early 1990s.

The film is strong in its portrayal of sexual abuse. However, Araki keeps a balance between being prurient and showing the dramatic and dire impact of sexual abuse. While some audiences may find it disturbing, it is a necessary disturbance, learning to understand the reality of paedophilia, the psychology of the abuser, the long-lasting effects of the experience on the abused. In fact, the film is visually reticent, the directness being restricted to verbal frankness – which is much easier to absorb than visual explicitness.

The film focuses on two very different boys. Neil (Joseph Gordon Levitt) is a young hustler. Brian (Brady Corbett) is an introverted young man who has no memory of being abused, no idea that he has been abused. He has so successfully created a psychological block that, when he sees a television program about UFOs, he begins to think that the missing hours of his life, that he has no way of accounting for, were caused by his being abducted by aliens. By the end of the film, when the two adolescents come together, they go to the house where the abuse happened and the hustler explains to the innocent boy what actually took place. This is a harrowing experience as the young man realises what has happened to him, the memories come back. This is the moment when the film ends, leaving the future for the two boys and a sense of wonder and anticipation as well as alarm for the audience.

The film is disturbing almost from its beginning. The initial focus is on Neil, speaking in voiceover and commenting on his attraction for the baseball coach and hinting at the implications of this. However, it is the pre-pubescent Neil who is speaking in this way. And this is already shocking in its way. However, Araki is suggesting that for some youngsters, their sexual focus emerges at a young age. This does not necessarily lead to abuse but that in this period, where so much attention has to be on victims, there may be some deep level response to the sexuality but not to elicit abuse. This is an area that has not received a great deal of attention. In this screenplay, it emerges that Neil has been complicit in the sexual behaviour. He has also been seduced into being an ally of the abuser in his activities with other boys. This compounds the evil compulsions of the perpetrator, the abuse of a child and the contamination of another child into being an abuser.

Neil talks about his orientation. He indicates what happened during his visits to the coach's house. Much of this is visualised in the early part of the film – the more seductive aspects rather than sexual activity. While the audience tries to grapple with understanding the

mentality of the young boy, the screenplay portrays the coach as a complex naïve but knowing seducer, who uses the language of games and seeming innocence, who is really an emotionally and morally immature boy. It is on this basis that the abusive sexual compulsions build up. Alarm and disgust at the paedophiles has obscured the need for trying to understand the mentality of the emotionally stunted abusers, their attractions and their exploitations.

Mysterious Skin does not purport to probe all aspects of abuse. Rather, in focusing on the two boys, it shows one who is conscious of what happened to him, his part in it and the consequences, the other who is oblivious but knows there is something wrong with him.

TO BE IN SOCIETY

IN discussing the third basic human drive. Aquinas moves from the 'animality' in his definition of the human being as a 'rational animal' to human 'rationality'. Just as the former drives could be called life drives and love drives, those we are concerned with now can be called social drives, and they culminate in the religious drive. However, before the religious drive is considered, the principle social drives must be the subject of examination, not merely in an abstract way, but as with the other drives, personalised.

- to be in society/community

Of course, there is a very broad scope in highlighting the need for society. The usual quotation given is that from John Donne, 'No Man is an Island'.

There are different ways of being in society: interpersonal relationships, work, community building, politics and government, education... The film considered here touches on most of these areas.

The Pursuit of Happyness. The title is one of the key phrases in American consciousness. This verbal icon from the Bill of Rights is considered a birthright by all Americans. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The spelling in the title here comes from a graffiti statement on the wall of a childcare centre where Chris Gardiner (Will Smith) takes his son (Jaden Smith, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett's son) while he goes out to try to sell the stock of bone density machines he has imprudently bought. The wrong spelling irritates him because he admires Jefferson but wonders whether the intention was to emphasise the pursuit while acknowledging that achieving this happiness might be impossible.

For most of the film's running time, the achievement does seem impossible and the pursuit is so physically, mentally and morally demanding that the temptation to give up seems entirely reasonable.

Chris Gardener, without benefit of college education, has set his sights on becoming a stock broker. He sees himself as good at figures and good with people. And, despite everything, he has a deep-seated confidence in his dream and in himself. And he has an overwhelming love for his son.

The person he is not good with is his wife, Linda (Thandie Newton). Or, he is good, but she can't take the uncertainties, the financial pressures, the hard life. She leaves. Chris then has to

pursue his unpaid internship as a broker, trying to sell the bone machines at weekends (with his son tagging along), working less time than his fellow interns because he has to go across town to collect his son and bring him home and feed him.

And then things really start to go wrong! A genial man, Chris is imposed on by the supervisor and by friends. Tax troubles, an overnight stint in gaol for parking ticket non-payments, traffic jams delaying appointments, eviction from home, queuing and struggling to get into night shelters, a night in a railway station men's toilet for father and son.

Audiences feel the pain of father and son, the bewildered five year old who is supportive but who really does not understand, the father who wants only the best for his son and cannot provide the basics.

Yet, the film seems positive at the worst of hazards, primarily because Will Smith is such an engaging screen presence and communicates a positive outlook on life no matter what. Working with his own son, there is a wonderful chemistry between the two that makes what goes on credible and palatable.

The events are based on a true story, set in San Francisco in 1981. Interestingly, it was the year of the popularity of the Rubik Cube – which becomes a symbol of focus and perseverance as well as intelligence as Chris demonstrates he can solve the puzzle, to the amazement of a top broker, who gives Chris a chance to learn the trade.

So, it is, as they say, an inspirational story. With the pursuit of happiness and happiness, the tone is particularly American. It tends to presume that one can pull oneself up by one's bootstraps no matter what. It urges the audience never to lose sight of their dreams and believe in them. It is more than a touch capitalist in its philosophy while focusing on real and heartfelt social difficulties.

Something of the spirituality underlying this film would be a combination of the Gospel stories of gaining the world and losing one's soul with the parable of judgement (Matthew 25) where the poor, the needy, the hungry and thirsty are identified with Jesus. Helping, encouraging, visiting them, is doing it to Jesus himself.

- the importance of history

The Mission

Those who do not know or understand history are condemned to relive it. It is not a mere cliché to refer to learning the lessons of history. This applies in the church as well as in the secular world. The story of the Jesuit Reductions in Paraguay in the middle of the 19th century led to jealousies on the part of the powers of Spain and Portugal and an appeal to the Pope. The Papacy was a civil power as well as the centre of authority in the Church. Spain and Portugal were allowed to divide the Latin American new world between them, consolidating racial oppression, slavery and colonial greed and mismanagement and centuries of resentment. The episode in The Mission was a contributing factor to the official suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 (though re-constituted in the early 19th century).

In 1758, the Vatican began to take a highly critical view of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay. Complaints about the Jesuits included their involvement in trade activities, their influence on

European rulers, their missionary work among the Indians in South America. Spain and Portugal were particularly antagonistic.

In his care for the Indians in Paraguay, the gentle Fr Gabriel travelled into the mountains, attracting the Indians with his music and drawing them to the settlements. Many began to study.

By contrast, Rodrigo Mendoza, a slave trader, trapped Indians and sold them to colonial families. Mendoza, after a clash with his brother and his death, experienced a conversion and joined the Jesuit community. In a symbolic journey, he literally carried his armour and weapons on his back until he found he had to cast them off, freeing himself physically and spiritually. He found religious obedience difficult, especially when the missionaries had to take a stand against the military attacks by the Spanish and Portuguese.

Fr Gabriel obeys orders not to take up arms and is martyred, standing in solidarity with the Indians outside the Church. Mendoza prefers to go and fight with the Indians. The soldiers also massacre them.

Distinguished playwright and screen writer Robert Bolt wrote *The Mission* (and later adapted it as a novel). His best-known work is *A Man for All Seasons*. Here he combines his love for sweeping saga with his interest in religion, Church and conscience. Filmed on location in South America and with a now-famous score by Ennio Morricone, *The Mission* is impressive for the eye and the ear. It is also impressive in its portrait of 18th century missionary work. It was counter-cultural to the prevailing Hispanic ethos and respectful of the Indians. The missionaries were willing to die with the Indians being oppressed by Spanish and Portuguese military might.

The Mission portrays priests in situations parallel to those of Jesus. Like Jesus, they are being criticised for their ministry. They have to face persecution. The central characters go to their deaths for the people they love and serve. In the language of Jesus prayer (John 17) before he goes to his death, his 'priestly prayer', these Jesuits do not belong to the world. The world turns against them. They are consecrated in truth, the truth of God's word.

Jesus prays not only for his disciples but also those who will hear his word through them. He prays for the 'missionary activity' of his disciples and he prays for those who listen to the word. *The Mission* portrays the gentle witness of faith, with music as its symbol. It also shows the rugged defence of those who believe. This drama mirrors Church disputes of the latter part of the 20th century about how 'Liberation Theology' works in the real contexts of Latin American violence, a reminder that history is repeated and lessons from the past are necessary for the present.

- the experience of conflict and war

Saving Private Ryan

Since the beginning of time (and since chapter four of Genesis and the clash between Cain and Abel and Cain murdering Abel), war is part of the human experience of living in society. Individuals and communities have rights. They also have obligations. Conflict arises when rights are infringed and someone feels the obligation to defend the rights or to protect the person or community under attack.

While there have been many excellent films depicting war, both historical and wars of recent times, one that stands out is Saving Private Ryan – for its dramatic presentation of the Allied landing in France on June 6th 1944, a tour-de-force of the recreation of battle for the screen, but also in its story of a mission to find a soldier, Private Ryan.

D-Day² and the troops land on Omaha Beach in Normandy. One of the platoons is led by Captain Miller who is then asked to lead a group of his survivors on a special mission to find Private Ryan. Ryan is one of four sons in action; when the other three are killed, Washington wants one to survive and go home to his mother.

Miller and six men take on the mission. In an American occupied town they find another Private Ryan. They continue on, encountering a German guard post where a sniper kills one of the men. The translator, Corporal Upham, persuades Miller not to kill the sniper. They eventually do find Ryan in a squad defending a bridge but he refuses to leave.

During an attack, Upham cowers afraid while the sniper whom they had released shoots one of the team. Miller is also killed but US planes save the troops and the bridge is held. Upham confronts the sniper and kills him.

Decades later Ryan and his family visit Miller's grave.

With Saving Private Ryan, critics and audiences alike commented on how skilful Steven Spielberg was in recreating the 1944 Normandy invasion, a vivid visualising and comment on the experience of war. The film opens with the landing and, with handheld camera, skilful editing and special effects, audiences feel as if they had experienced something of that heroic but dreadful landing.

The rest of the film is more familiar, the story of a mission, led by Tom Hanks, to find Private Ryan. The mission has quite a number of encounters with the Germans, again some brutal fights that do not shirk the violence or the aggressive moods and behaviour that war action and the death of friends brings out. But once Private Ryan has been found, the film takes another turn and immerses the audience again in the throes of battle.

The film is often very sad and quite moving in its portrayal of its characters and their dilemmas, especially Tom Hanks whose presence gives the film its strength in a character who wants integrity, even decency, in situations that seem impossible and are horrible. Spielberg has brought passion to this film. It communicates a great deal about warfare, especially war in close-up. Audiences could feel very angry with Hitler and his cohorts that their personal madness and ambitions could wreak such havoc on so many people.

But that, of course, is not the whole story - and Spielberg is providing us with a cinematic experience that involves us emotionally first so that we will give some reflection afterwards to the meaning of war, the rightness of causes or not and the destruction and loss of human life that must follow.

The experience of World War II in this setting and the D-Day² invasion can be seen as a commitment in life and death to break an oppressive yolk. But, in war there must be human stories.

The centre of the movie is Captain Miller played by Tom Hanks. He is the leader of the platoon. He calls his men into action. He knows them and can trust them to do what they have been asked to do. In the dread and suffering of battle, he is with them. When he calls them to the new mission to save Private Ryan, despite initial grumbling, they follow him. When they do not understand his decision to let the sniper live, they have to accept what he says. And, yet, the sniper will be responsible for his death.

It is not difficult to see some parallels between the leadership of the sergeant and the leadership of Jesus. Yet the captain finally reveals that he has been a teacher, an ordinary citizen asked to take command but one who, despite the horrors of war, achieves his task of 'salvation' for the Ryan family. He is also remembered with veneration at the opening and close of the film because not only had he saved Private Ryan, he had laid down his life for his men. Like Jesus, he had disciples, called them and sent them on mission.

- to be at peace

Joyeux Noel (Merry Christmas)

The message of the angels at the birth of Jesus in Luke's Gospel is peace on earth for every man and woman of good will. Joyeux Noel is set on a special Christmas Day almost a hundred years ago but it offers a message of peace and hope in the middle of conflict that is still important for today.

The making of the film was one of international collaboration between France, the UK and Germany, with scenes filmed in Romania. Its setting is World War I, especially Christmas eve and Christmas day, 1914. The bulk of the film is spoken in French (with English subtitles). The Scottish characters speak English and the Germans, German.

Stories have long been told of how the troops in the trenches, often only four or five metres apart, sometimes fraternised during lulls between bombardments. This story focuses on a French troop, a Scottish troop and a German troop. We are given something of their background, the harking back to the styles and codes of 19th century warfare by the French officers who had little understanding of what fighting in the trenches was like. It was the same with the German officers who enjoyed lavish meals and listened to opera singers while their men were in the bitter cold of the trenches. The Scottish story is somewhat different. Two brothers eagerly join up while their parish priest becomes a chaplain. One of the brothers is killed and the other becomes bitter. The chaplain is a fine man and a compassionate minister.

When husband and wife opera singers visit the German trenches, they hear the Scots playing their bagpipes. The tenor sings Silent Night and the bagpipes then accompany him. The result is that all the troops come out of their dugouts, join in the singing, listen to the soprano sing Ave Maria, exchange food and drink and attend, all together, a midnight service led by the chaplain. The screenplay is very strong in highlighting that this is truly the Christmas message of peace on earth to all people of good will. The German officer is Jewish and explains that this is not part of his religion but that he was very glad to be able to share in it.

The officers call a truce on Christmas Day and the men once again show their common humanity. Some play football, others cards. Addresses are exchanged for meetings after the

cessation of hostilities.

Had the film ended with this joyeux noel, this merry Christmas, it might have seemed rather sentimental, even though there are records of this kind of fraternisation happening. (The director has pointed out that photos appeared on the front pages of British newspapers of the time but that the French concealed these happenings.)

To our dismay, the final part of the film presents the official reaction to what the authorities call treason and conduct unbecoming soldiers in war – even ludicrously condemning the cat who moves from trench to trench. The Germans are humiliated by commanding officers and sent to the Russian front. The French would like to execute the men for treason but 200 is too many, so they are transferred to Verdun. The Scots chaplain is visited by his bishop who lectures him on the text that Jesus came not to bring peace but the sword and gives a sermon to the troops on the war being a crusade, on the inhumanity of the Germans and, in the name of superior culture and civilisation, urges the men to kill Germans, all of them.

Director, Christian Clarion, has said that he would like his film to be screened in every country which is involved in war. His humane film, classical in its cinema style, is a wonderful appeal to promoting a culture of peace rather than putting a priority on a crusade of destruction. It appeals to the deepest message of peace from the Judeo-Christian² tradition and the Gospel teaching of Jesus.

- a green environment

An Inconvenient Truth

One of the extraordinary aspects of today's secular society and the alleged loss of faith in religion and institutions is that people still declare they have a spirituality, whatever that may mean – at least they are reaching out to something beyond themselves. One of the causes which has developed an enormous following, one might say a 'faith', is that of concern for the environment. It was a powerful motivation in the so-called 'Greed is good' 1980s, the green movement. With the concern about global warming, it is one belief that is shared by most people around the world, draws an extraordinary commitment as well as political and financial demands for reduction of the emission of greenhouse gases. It ought to be a powerful meeting-place for Christians and other believers and non-believers alike, the re-discovery of a creation theology and spirituality where, men and women, in the image of the creator God, are not despoilers of the earth but its custodians.

Al Gore's Oscar-winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, had its supporters and some critics who attacked some statistics or details but did not undermine the general thrust of the film and its appeal for the safety of the earth. There are many documentaries on film and on television and the issue enters into science fiction fables. The 2008 re-make of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* moved from Cold War warnings for humans to work for peace of the 1951 original, to aliens passing judgment on humans that they could not change from their headlong wilfulness in destroying the planet.

Perhaps many people underestimated the intelligence and capacities of Al Gore while he was in Congress and even when he was Vice President to Bill Clinton. Everyone has views on the 2000 presidential election count in Florida and the juridical decision against Gore in favour of Bush. Gore admits that this was very hard. But, he decided it was time to go back to an issue

dear to his heart: global warming.

An Inconvenient Truth is an expertly made documentary incorporating a great deal of Al Gore's slide show, illustrating the power of power point visuals, on the planet. He has given it all over the world, more than a thousand times. This film brings it to vaster audiences (over \$20,000,000 at the US box office).

Throughout the film, a portrait of Al Gore, man, father, politician and campaigner, is backgrounded. It is interesting, in view of the performances of his rival and president for eight years, George W. Bush, to listen to the articulate Al Gore.

The lecture is quite lucid. The science of global warning is clearly explained. Consequences are presented, at times disturbingly. However, the film is quite upbeat in tone, especially in indicating what means are already available (if there is personal and political will) to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. It urges its audiences to become actively involved.

In fact, Gore speaks about ethics and refers to awareness of this planetary crisis as a 'moral imperative' for action. In answering a difficulty that is so frequently raised, that of economic realities and combating global warming, he has an illustration where a scales has bars of gold on the one side and the planet on the other. The gold looks tempting. And, what is on the other side? The planet itself. If there is no planet, there is no gold. If we save the planet, it will mean that we will survive and there will be economic development. While the answer is as obvious as that, it remains a mystery why so many people cannot accept it let alone act. An Inconvenient Truth with its clarity and emotional persuasion will help to make individuals and groups more alert and aware of our world and of God's creation.

TO THE TRANSCENDENT – GOD

The deeper probing of what we are, and our inner drive to do this, is a contemporary manifestation of the basic religious drive, the drive for fellowship with others and with God. We are not so consciously aware of it as we were in the past, but nevertheless the drive to understand humanity and find fulfilment is a strong basic drive today.

- the divine in the world

2001: A Space Odyssey

Since it premiered in April 1968, 2001 has puzzled, dazzled and intrigued audiences. It brought science fiction films into the realm of cinema art. Prior to 1968, most were B-budget program-fillers. Science fiction had become more 'respectable' in fiction because of the work of Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury and Arthur C. Clarke on whose book this movie is based. Clarke co-wrote the screenplay with Kubrick. 2001 was released a decade before Star Wars changed our conceptions of science fiction and science fantasy.

The film offers us images for a reflection on the world, past and future. A prologue is set 4,000,000 years ago when the earth was a desert. Apes and their prey roam together. Then the apes discover bone tools and use them to hunt and, eventually, to fight and kill one another.

The key to the meaning of 2001: A Space Odyssey lies in a mysterious, perfectly shaped, monolith which suddenly appears amongst them. The apes reverence it. They also begin to change, becoming more human in appearance.

There is the famous transition from the brutality of the apes as they throw a bone into the air and it transforms into a spacecraft to the melody of Strauss' Blue Danube Waltz. It is 2001. Space travel is a sophisticated, computerised experience. Dr Floyd briefs his staff at a space station before travelling to the moon. Rumours of an epidemic are a cover for the discovery of the monolith on the moon. It sends out a radio signal directed towards Jupiter.

18 months later. The Jupiter expedition. Dave Bowman and Frank Poole are in command of a space probe travelling to Jupiter. HAL, an infallible computer, controls the voyage. HAL is programmed to think, speak and simulate feelings. The astronauts become suspicious of HAL's advice. HAL kills Frank. Dave terminates HAL's functions.

Beyond Jupiter and the Infinite. Dave continues the journey. He travels beyond the galaxies through mazes of color until he arrives in a classical mansion. The monolith has been floating through space, accompanying him. He watches himself, aged, eating a meal. He then watches himself on his deathbed. The monolith stands before the bed. Dave reaches out to touch it. A star child is seen amongst the planets, about to be born.

2001 is a combination of cinema poem and cinema essay. The extraordinary visuals and special effects are enhanced by the music of Katchaturian, Ligetti and the unforgettable matching of Richard Strauss's Thus Spake Zarathustra with the images of the murderous ape and the birth of the star child. Johann Strauss's Blue Danube is the perfect music for Kubrick's stunning vistas of space and spaceships. There is some action and human drama, but these are the least gripping parts of the film and, after the actual 2001, this section of the film seems quite unreal.

Kubrick creates a vision of the universe. The prologue is based on an evolutionary understanding of the development of the human race. Our ancestral monkeys roam the desert, hunt and learn to kill their prey with bone tools. Nature red in tooth and claw becomes nature fighting for the survival of the fittest. Into this world comes a perfectly crafted rectangular monolith. Is it a sign of alien intelligence? Or, as seems to emerge as the movie progresses, a sign of transcendent power and intelligence (which we would call, God)? The prologue of 2001 shows the primitive world of creation. Via the symbol of the monolith, Kubrick suggests that there is a power beyond the human, an intelligent and creative power that transforms the animals into human beings.

The master computer, HAL, turns diabolical and destructive. Dave Bowman, the film's 'Everyman' goes on a mystical journey through space and time (a cinematic collage of psychedelia) accompanied by the monolith. The final moments of the film seem to indicate that, as individuals, we humans live our lives in a quest for meaning. We die but, as with the star-child, humanity is continually reborn.

2001: A Space Odyssey is a cinema poem on the wonder of the universe and of God's creation.

- a God of surprises

Bruce Almighty

Bruce Nolan is a forty-year old local television reporter in Buffalo, New York, who is angry at God. He gets no respect and must take all the crummy reporting jobs. Bruce aspires to become an evening news anchor, but loses out to his humourless rival.

Bruce and his long-term girl friend, Grace, live together, and she wants to get married, but Bruce is too self-centered to see the need or her desire. Nothing goes right for him; he gets caught in traffic jams, he gets to work late, thugs beat him up when he helps a poor man, and the dog urinates all over the house. Bruce himself is self-absorbed and jealous.

When Bruce loses his job after deliberately spoiling a story about a historic tourist boat ride at Niagara Falls, it is a very low moment for him. When he gets home, his pager goes off. Bruce eventually calls the number and a man's voice invites him to come for a job interview. The caller knows everything there is to know about Bruce because it is God speaking. When they meet, God gives Bruce his own powers for a week to see if Bruce can do a better job at being God. Bruce, however, cannot tell anyone he is now "God," and he cannot interfere with anyone's free will. As God walks away he tells Bruce that because of free will, he cannot force anyone to love him.

Bruce uses his powers as if they were magic tricks, and then he starts to hear people praying. After a few days God visits him again and asks him what he has done to help people, knowing that he has mostly helped himself. Bruce (mis)uses his powers to get the news anchor job. Grace leaves him. Bruce is devastated. As he finally surrenders his life to God, he gets hit by a truck and thinks he has died. Bruce and God have a long conversation and Bruce wakes up in the hospital. Grace is there.

Film director, Tom Shadyac is a practising Catholic. With the combination of Bruce Almighty's witty script and Carrey's controlled combination of serious humour and manic clowning, they found themselves with a popular film about religion and a box-office hit. It is not easy to make a credible film about God, God's providence, human free will, and prayer, but the team succeeded. Carrey's television reporter, Bruce Nolan, is a latter-day Job who learns some profound lessons.

Morgan Freeman is an actor with great nobility and gravity and a speaking voice full of dignity, and he brings those qualities to his convincing portrayal of God. Bruce Almighty's God also has a fine sense of humour, and some of his witty one-liners invite us and Bruce to see the world rather differently: through God's eyes.

Bruce Nolan complains about God's treatment of him. Only by God's intervention does he learn to be enduring like Job.

"Curse God and die." These are the words of advice that Job's wife offers him when he was afflicted by all kinds of tragedies, loss of children, loss of property, his whole body covered in sores. It is the extreme cry of someone who is baffled by their suffering: God is to blame.

Yet despite his questioning, in the end, Job did not curse God. We speak of the patience of Job or, better still, his endurance. He stayed faithful in the face of horrendous personal disasters, in the face of criticism of his wife and the callowness of his so-called comforters whose theology told them that since Job was suffering so much, he must be a great sinner.

Job was not a sinner. He is the exemplar of encouragement to trust in God no matter what.

Compared with Job, Bruce Nolan's personal irritations, even the loss of his job, are really very small. Yet for Bruce, they seem significant, and he is only too happy to "curse" God. He feels that God had it in for him, and that this is unjust.

Ultimately, Job had a profound experience of God's majesty and power. His final prayer in chapter 42, still stands as one of the best prayers for those who have experienced great suffering. Job says he did not understand God at all. Now that he does, he retracts his bitter questions and offers to repent in dust and ashes. This is the prayer of an innocent man. Bruce Nolan also has an experience of God. Bruce's first meeting with God is rather mundane—they mop floors together—but Bruce does have a cosmic moment with God on the top of Mt Everest. Unlike Job, Bruce is a constant complainer with a short fuse. Even when he experiences God, he is so self-centred (which is a form of taking the Lord's name in vain) that he uses his Godlike powers for his own petty purposes. Only when he starts really listening to people's prayers and tries to pray himself, especially for Grace, does he realize that he can be and must be less selfish. As Bruce resumes his life at the end of the film, it is his small Job-like acceptance of God.

- prayer and faith

La Neuvaïne (The Novena)

This is a film that is religious in the best sense of the word.

Many explicitly religious films fall short of expectations because they exhibit a too earnest proseletysing zeal or depict aspects of piety that many audiences find puzzling, incongruous or simply alienating. La Neuvaïne succeeds in portraying simple faith with great respect and without being patronising. It is also able to portray lack of faith in God in contemporary secular society with sympathy and understanding.

Writer-director, Bernard Emond, is an anthropologist by training. He has worked in Inuit television and has made short films, documentaries and some feature films. He declares that he is a non-believer but he affirms the long tradition of Catholic faith in his native Quebec. He is also concerned that today's Canadians in the province of Quebec are in danger of cutting themselves off from this religious tradition and losing this heritage.

In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the church of Quebec reacted quickly to change in the Catholic Church and many Catholics found themselves rejecting so much of their religious upbringing and practice, eager to throw off what they saw as ecclesiastical authoritarianism. Some of the clearest cinema expressions of this reaction are found in Denys Arcand's 1988 *Jesus of Montreal*.

Emond clearly inhabits the world that Arcand suggests. However, he brings to La Neuvaïne the simplicity of film language that marks the films of Robert Bresson, a plainness and an austerity of style that communicate directly but suggest deeper meanings, especially some opening to what we might call 'the transcendent'. To continue the cinema connections, it could be added that the central character of La Neuvaïne, a non-believing doctor, would be at home in her search for meaning in her life in Kieslowski's *Decalogue*.

The title is something of a challenge. Novenas, even amongst Catholics, are not in vogue everywhere as they once were. They are a feature of popular religious culture. Nine days of continued prayer for a special intention, even some kind of miracle, has been a popular practice over the centuries. In *La Neuvaïne*, François, a young man who personifies goodness in a kindly but down-to-earth way, helps on a farm, works in a small supermarket in a provincial town. When told that his grandmother is dying (she has brought him up since his parents were killed in a car crash when he was very young), he decides to make a novena for her recovery. He goes on a daily pilgrimage to the shrine of St Anne to invoke her assistance. The shrine has a priest, in his vestments, always available in a kind of shop-front to bless the pilgrims. (The credits indicate that the shrine is under the care of the Redemptorists who will be glad of the attention given to their ministry.)

The central character is Jeanne, a highly professional doctor who has experienced the long illness and death of her child. There is no place for faith in her life. She has also taken care of a battered wife and her daughter and experienced the anger of the violent husband. Her recuperation takes her to the vicinity of the shrine and a sympathetic encounter with François.

La Neuvaïne does not push the religious experiences of its characters and does not push religion at its audience. Ultimately, there are no obvious miracles and no obvious conversions. Rather, the audience appreciates François' straightforward faith and piety - and sees that Jeanne's kindness towards his grandmother as she dies, is a real answer to prayer. The audience appreciates the change in Jeanne, that she can continue her healing work as a doctor - she has to respond to a sudden emergency outside the shrine as a man suffers a heart attack - and can minister to the grandmother. Deeper possibilities for hope emerge.

Throughout the film there are interludes of voiceover as Jeanne quietly discusses her non-faith with a probing questioner. It is only at the end, when she stands watching the priest in the blessing room, that we appreciate she has been exploring her life and its meaning with him.

La Neuvaïne was entered in competition in the Locarno Film Festival, August 2005. It received serious attention, packed houses and favourable reviews. This surprised many festival-goers: that a secular audience would be so moved by religious themes, even explicitly Catholic themes. It won the ecumenical award for the quality of its film-making and the skill in its presenting its religious and values content. It will prove a valuable resource for discussions about contemporary faith.

- God through suffering and death

Cries and Whispers

Cries and Whispers is one of the Ingmar Bergman's finest films. It is a film about death and its consequences. Two sisters attend the dying of Agnes (echoes of Agnus Dei, Lamb of God). She has tuberculosis and dies in agony. However, the two sisters are very selfish and as they attend her deathbed, there are flashbacks to show the wilfulness of their lives. Their husbands are little better than they. However, Agnes is presented as truly suffering for others, a martyr. She is cared for by the maid, Anna, and after she dies, Bergman composes a scene where the maid holds Agnes as in a Pieta.

The film won an Oscar for best cinematography by Sven Nykvist. He photographed many of

Bergman's films. The colour is exquisite, especially as the film is set in the late 19th century, the interiors are red (Bergman says that he thought the soul was like a damp membrane, all red) and the film uses red fadeouts. However, the sisters are generally dressed in white.

The film is beautifully acted and the actresses won a number of awards. Harriet Andersson has one of the most moving deaths on screen and the prayer by the Lutheran minister, considering Bergman's Lutheran background and his alleged agnosticism, is most moving.

Agnes can be seen as a Christ-figure. The minister at her funeral prays about the significance of her life and death.

'If it is so that you have gathered our suffering in your poor body, if it is so that you have borne it with you through death, If it is so that you have gathered our suffering in your poor body, if it is so that you have borne it with you through death, if it is so that you meet God over there in the other land, if it is so that He turns His face towards you, if it is so that you can speak the language that this God understands, if it is so that you can, then speak to this God, if it is so, pray for us... Pray for us who are left here on the dark, dirty earth under an empty and cruel Heaven. Lay your burden of suffering at God's feet and ask Him to pardon us. Ask Him to free us at last from our anxiety, our weariness and our deep doubt. Ask Him for a meaning to our lives. Agnes, you who have suffered so unimaginably and so long, you must be worthy to plead.'

Death is a discovery of God – but also a pointer to God to those left alive.

- God beyond Christianity

Kundun

With the passing of the Dalai Lama in 1933, the Buddhist monks of Tibet traveled around the country in search of the new incarnation of Buddha who would become their spiritual leader, Kundun. After some years, a two year old boy was found in whom they sensed the presence of the Buddha.

The boy was taken to Lhasa to be trained in Buddhist spirituality and traditions as the fourteenth Dalai Lama. At the same time he was also introduced to some of the technical advances of the 20th century, including cinema. On his becoming leader, he began to bring the technology to Tibet for the benefit of his people.

When World War II broke out, Tibet was isolated but the people knew about the global conflict through movie newsreels. At war's end, the Dalai Lama had to face social issues concerning Tibet's place in Asia. China loomed as a threat and made advances on the country. The Dalai Lama's advisers were divided in their opinions.

After Mao Tse Tung's rise to power in China in 1949, the Dalai Lama travelled to Beijing to meet the Premier. Mao smiled in public while being photographed with the Dalai Lama. However, Tibet was soon invaded, much of the culture destroyed and the people oppressed. Tibet is annexed by China. The Dalai Lama made his escape to India, becoming leader in exile.

For decades he was a symbol for peace and Buddhist spirituality.

Martin Scorsese is considered one of the great directors of American cinema. His films have received outstanding critical acclaim. He made Kundun out of conviction rather than for profit. Kundun is a politically dangerous movie, especially with Mao Tse Tung being one of the principal characters. The movie's explicit portrayal of the Chinese takeover of Tibet and of the Dalai Lama's being forced into exile proved embarrassing to the Chinese government and to governments in process of trade negotiations with China in the late 1990s.

From a non-Asian perspective, Tibet still seems a rather remote and unknown country. Kundun recreates the world of Tibetan Buddhism, its long isolation from the rest of the world. It also shows Tibet's entry into the modern 20th century world.

Scorsese offers his audience both a narrative about and a contemplation of Buddhism. Some of the rituals are beautiful, others alien, demanding an open heart and mind to appreciate this different culture. The succession of actors playing the Dalai Lama are convincing, especially the young adult leader. Nurtured as the Buddha for his times, he moves from a self-confident and self-centred child to a humble and non-violent leader.

Each world religion in its own way honours the transcendence of God (especially Judaism with Yahweh and Islam with Allah) or both the transcendence and immanence of God (Hinduism, Buddhism).

Kundun offers us an opportunity to look at a religion in which God is considered to be beyond all knowledge. However, God's messenger, the Buddha, taught the path to right living. With its belief in reincarnation as a process of purification, Buddhism teaches doctrines which emphasise the holiness of the world and all creatures.

The Dalai Lama has experienced the same fate as many religious leaders who have suffered betrayal, persecution and exile for their faith. Today, not only in Asia but in the West, many Christians are involved in theological and ethical dialogue with Buddhism. They also study its techniques of meditation and contemplation.

Kundun is a movie of beauty and insight, an invitation to explore further Buddhist teachings and spirituality and an occasion to dialogue with the world religions and learn their traditions.

CHAPTER 15. HEARING GOD'S CALL

This chapter follows the outline of an audio project of the Catholic Enquiry Centre in Sydney in collaboration with prison chaplains to provide an introduction to the Catholic Faith. There are thirty sessions with a comment on a film to illustrate the thrust of the session.

1. Introduction Overview: THE BLIND SIDE

Overview of the whole program.

The Blind Side is a football story, about a young black man on the streets, who is adopted by a family who bond well with him. They are a church-going Christian family, strong but not overbearing in their faith, with a sense of values and justice which enables the young man to

develop his gifts and become a champion.

In listening to Leigh Anne Tuohy (Sandra Bullock won an Oscar for this performance), we hear an affirmation of life, of belief, of love, based on the Gospel values. The film shows the possibilities for a committed life.

2. Call in the Old Testament I Abraham and David: ABRAHAM

Stories of call or invitation, taking up a challenge, prayers of lament and prayers of joy

Old Testament history begins with the call of Abraham. The Bible offers words. The film offers story and images. Abraham is seen as a patriarch who experiences something of the presence of God which he interprets as a call to faith as well as a call to move to a 'promised land' with his whole clan.

He offers a pledge ritual with a sacrifice, a covenant to commit himself to the God who has called him. In seeing Richard Harris as Abraham, the patriarch and the events in his faith journey come to life for us.

3. Call in the Old Testament II Prophets: JEREMIAH

Passionate calls to return to covenant fidelity, close and personal relationship with God.

Prophets experience the call in their own lives and feel commissioned by God to urge people to faith and renewal of commitment. Prophets are not usually listened to and are even persecuted. The movie, Jeremiah, is a combination of fact and imagination. While the scriptures tell us of Jeremiah called to speak on behalf of God when young, the film fleshes out his story so that the prophet is not just a voice in the scripture readings but can be seen to be an energetic preacher who has to put up with a great deal of criticism and rejection.

4. Call in the New Testament: THE NATIVITY STORY

Call of Mary, courage to say yes, Call of Joseph stepping out in faith despite confusion, Call of Apostles leaving their nets and following Jesus

The Nativity Story is one of the best films to appreciate the call of Mary (the annunciation of Jesus' birth by the angel Gabriel) and one of the few films to show Joseph as a young, hard-working man in Nazareth who has to cope with the mystery of his wife's unexpected pregnancy.

The actors are young and credible. We see the daily routines of life in Nazareth, reminding us that ordinary life can be the setting for a special call by God.

The film shows Joseph's doubts as well as his call. The long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem reminds us that while we can focus on the call, we have to face living the consequences of the call in hard times as well as good.

5. Story of St Paul's Conversion: PETER AND PAUL

Story of transformation, persecutor, extraordinary experience, disorientation and blindness to

reorientation as an energetic and clear sighted teacher

There are some good movies about Peter and Paul. The legend of Peter leaving Rome at the time of persecution and having a vision of Jesus going into Rome, asking 'Where are you going?' (the movie takes its Latin title from this question, 'Quo Vadis') and the presence of Peter in The Robe remind us of Peter's call and faith (and doubts).

Peter appears in Peter and Paul but the film is best seen as the story of Saul the persecutor of Christians, who is struck down on his way to Damascus, experiences a profound conversion, changing his name to Paul, and spending his life on mission journeys. We see him visit Peter to listen to his account of Jesus' life.

6. Call Stories, Francis: BROTHER SUN, SISTER MOON

Stories of the gradual transformation into servants of God of well-known saints. Mary Mac Killop practical everywomen, Francis archetypical hero- anti hero

There are several films about Francis.

Brother Sun, Sister Moon came out in the 1970s, just after the experience of new freedoms in the 1960s and the flower power movement. Francis is always a significant figure for movements that offer criticism of the culture. He is associated with animals, with nature, with simplicity of life.

He was not always like this and the film shows his more worldly life, his comfortable family and their expectations as well as the challenge to this way of life, his literally stripping himself of everything in Assisi and starting a movement that has borne witness to faith values for centuries.

7. Call Stories: Dorothy Day: ENTERTAINING ANGELS

It is through self-transcendence in service of the other that transformation occurs

A significant 20th century saint who experienced a call in the United States is Dorothy Day. The film on her life is Entertaining Angels. She offers encouragement to people who struggle. Not a Catholic, she lived a bohemian life with two relationships and an abortion. After her conversion, she worked tirelessly for the Catholic Worker movement and for human rights causes. She is being considered for canonisation. Entertaining Angels shows her in action, an ordinary saint in a modern setting.

8. Call Stories: Oscar Romero: ROMERO

Romero, his openness to the cry of the poor and his transformation offer an understanding of what the gospel means.

Raul Julia brings the last years and the martyr's death of Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, to powerful life. A bookish priest, Romero was made bishop at a time of oppression and civil clashes. He comes to realise the plight of the poor and that his stance against injustice will lead to his death. The last five minutes of the film capture all of this as he speaks out on radio against the regime, the killers draw lots for his murder, his death during

the celebration of Mass.

The director of the film, John Duigan, is not a Christian but he is quoted as saying he made the film because practising Christians ask the most interesting questions about life.

9. The Bible: THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Precious text, a gift from God, organised around the story of Jesus Christ

They don't make films about the writing of the Gospels or of the other books of Old and New Testaments. However, a Protestant company had the idea to make films of the Gospels, the complete texts, so that viewers would have an idea of how the Gospels were put together by including all chapters and verses in the film. They did it in the 1990s with Matthew's Gospel. They also made an Acts of the Apostles. Both films are on YouTube[?]. Their version of John's Gospel was more widely seen.

It is a test of strength to watch the film from beginning to end, just as few would read the Gospel from cover to cover. But, looking at parts of it, we see what the Gospel says, what Jesus did, the preaching of Jesus, leading to the Passion and Resurrection.

10. The Bible and the Catholic Church: THE BOOK OF ELI

The Bible as the Book of the Church, the Church as the community of followers of the Word made flesh

The Book of Eli is an unusual film. It is set years after the destruction of America in a nuclear war. People survive despite the poverty, hunger and looting and upstarts ruling towns. Eli, played by Denzel Washington, wanders the country with a mission. It is a biblical mission. He has memorised the Bible and is making for a library which still exists so that the books which have been destroyed, can be written down again as he dictates them and the world will be able to draw on the wisdom of the Bible and create communities anew.

11. The Bible and Prayer (Samaritan woman at the Well): THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Invitation to pray using the text, identification with the 'outsider'.

While the many Gospel films on Jesus bring to life the episodes in his mission, it is The Gospel of John which visualises the complete text. The story of the woman at Jacob's well in chapter 4 is one of the best known stories, the weary Jesus asking a Samaritan woman for water, Samaritans being the enemies of the Jews. She is an outsider in her own community because of her marital behaviour. Yet, it is with her that Jesus talks about living water and the role of the spirit in prayer and worship. The disciples are shocked but have to learn that the call is for all. Watching the story in The Gospel of John offers the opportunity to see the story, watch how the characters, especially Jesus and the woman, behave and hear the meditative words that lead to prayer.

12. One Story Four Gospels: JESUS

One story, four authors, four audiences, four perspectives, four ways of communicating the Good News

While there is one story and four authors for the Gospels, there are many, many Jesus films.

The one that has proven very popular with today's audiences is from 1999, made by American television for the millennium. It is called, simply, Jesus. He is portrayed by an actor, 25 at the time of filming, Jeremy Sisto. This film is quite extensive in its presentation of episodes from the Gospels. What audiences like about this portrayal of Jesus is that he is very human, that audiences like him and can identify with him. But, when this Jesus is quiet and intense, he suggests that he has a deep and prayerful relationship with the father. This portrait of Jesus combines the human and the divine.

13. The Story of Jesus: THE MIRACLE MAKER

Readers Digest version of the story for those with little or no background

Often people ask where they can begin to appreciate and learn about the Gospel story of Jesus. Some suggest the Gospel of Mark because it is the shortest, the most straightforward, with a lot of details in the stories. For a film which serves as a good introduction, the suggestion is The Miracle Maker. What is special about The Miracle Maker is that it is an animation film. Jesus' story is told from the point of view of the little girl whom Jesus raised from the dead, the daughter of Jairus. It is a wonderful introduction, three dimension drawing for the main stories and two dimensions for flashbacks to Jesus' infancy and the telling of the parables.

14. The Prodigal Son (Forgiveness): JESUS OF NAZARETH

Generosity of the Father, recognition of fault, complexity of family relationships, the elder brother resentful.

We can read this parable or hear it proclaimed in the church but it is limited by our own capacity or that of the preacher for dramatising it.

Franco Zeffirelli made a more than six hour version of the Gospels in the 1970s with Robert Powell as Jesus. It is Jesus of Nazareth. His version of the Prodigal Son is one of the best because we see and hear Jesus telling the story. We also see the room where Jesus goes to eat with the prostitutes and tax-collectors. Peter refuses to go in (like the older brother) because Matthew, the host, has taxed Peter. But, after listening to the parable outside, Peter is touched, able to go in and be reconciled with Matthew. He puts the parable of forgiveness into practice.

15. The Church in History (Changes in the Church): THE SHOES OF THE FISHERMAN

Historical sweep from Pentecost to the present, many changes, same historical institution, progress decline and redemption occurring, simultaneously.

The Shoes of the Fisherman is based on a Morris West novel of 1963. It was considered 'prophetic' because it imagined a very different church from that of the 1950s: a Slavic pope from an iron curtain country, a travelling pope dealing with world crises of hunger as well as differing interpretations of Church teaching. The film version was released in 1968 when many of the changes were being put into practice but John Paul II was still ten years away.

The film shows the pomp and style of the older traditions in the scenes of the election of the pope. The TV link-ups with Russia and China and the plane travel show the style of the newer church.

16. The Apostles Creed I: A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Background to the development of creedal statements, community constituted by common meaning.

They don't make films about the development of Church teaching except in documentaries.

However, in looking at A Man for All Seasons, we see a period of history where the Chancellor of England faces a crisis with the divorce of Henry VIII and has to look to his principles, including the creed of faith which sustains his convictions. Thomas More, the man for all seasons, is executed declaring that he was the King's true subject, but God's subject first.

Thomas More was an intelligent and educated man who was faced with a political crisis that was both secular and religious. It was also a time of upheaval in the Church with the Reformation and dissent within the Church and the need for ensuring that the creed and church teaching were clear – and worth dying for.

17. The Apostles Creed II: THE MISSION

What Christians believe

The best Christians are those who practise what they preach, what they believe. They may or may not be able to recite the Creed, but they live what they profess. In a film like The Mission, set in South America in the 18th century, we see Fr Gabriel working with the Indians, sharing life and faith with them. We also see Mendoza, the slave hunter who experiences a conversion, joining the missionaries, holding on to his possessions until he can't carry them any longer and lets them go. This enables him to believe in the Church and its teachings and to go out to fight in solidarity with the Indians against the oppressors while Fr Gabriel joins them as they are killed.

18. The Ten Commandments: BRUCE ALMIGHTY

God meets human ingenuity: These laws are special

The writer and director, Tom Shadyak, has made a film with a difference: he has made a comedy about weak human beings, about God, about conversion and understanding the commandments. It is Bruce Almighty, with Jim Carrey. Carrey represents the selfish and ambitious man who unexpectedly encounters God and learns more than a lesson or two and whose life is changed around.

Since God is played by Morgan Freeman, he sounds rather God-like in the best way, and has a whole lot of lines filled with down-to-earth wisdom that covers all the issues that we have to face and which are expressed in the Ten Commandments.

19. The Beatitudes I: HOTEL RWANDA

You have heard it said of old, but I say to you, Jesus the New law giver

In finding a film about people who are poor in spirit, merciful, peacemakers, who hunger and thirst for justice, Hotel Rwanda is a good example. It is set in recent history, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, with Hutus hounding Tutsis to death. Based on actual events, the film centres on Paul, a Hutu, the manager of a prominent hotel in Kigali. His wife is Tutsi. He is a good man who tries his best to assist those in need, rescue Tutsis, and help people cope with the violence and misery that has disrupted their lives. He stands for what the beatitudes declare.

20. Life after death, communion of saints: MOLOKAI

One life, unique special and eternal, continuous with actions and attitudes as currently lived, invitation to glimpse eternal horizon

Molokai is the story of the 19th century Belgian missionary, Fr Damian. He worked in Hawaii and volunteered to live with the lepers on Molokai which meant that he could never leave because of the contagious disease. In being with them (which is what the film shows), he shows the communion of saints on earth. Because his ministry to the lepers and his comfort of them is to help them to go through this life with faith in the next, he shows us that after this life, after the suffering, there is a fuller life, a fuller communion with one another in God's presence. The film has many scenes, encounters and discussions between Damian and the lepers which brings home these truths.

21. The Lord's Prayer: THE PAINTED VEIL

A model for prayer, blessing thanksgiving, petition for sustenance in body- bread and spirit- forgiveness and forgiving, to pray and work (work and pray) to build the reign of God

We are all trespassers. The Painted Veil is a story of an unfaithful wife who finds herself in a remote Chinese village facing what she has done. She makes a decision to atone for her sin by helping during an epidemic. Her conversations with the Mother Superior of the convent are full of hope and reveal how repentance and forgiveness might be achieved.

22. Sacred Time, Sacred Space, Sacred Things: THE FOURTH WISE MAN

Time, space and things blessed, transposed from the world of commonsense to world of symbolic meaning.

There is a legend behind this film, that there was a fourth wise man who travelled to see Jesus with the other three magi. He was caught up in an experience that meant that he would see the Messiah, that he would find a sacred time and sacred space.

But, it did not work out that way. On his journey, he encountered many people who were in need of his help – and he stayed, and he stayed. In fact, he stayed with them so long that as an old man he finally got to Jerusalem as Jesus was being crucified. But, by being involved with ordinary people in commonsense and practical situations, he had lived out the message of the Gospel without seeing Jesus as he had so wished.

23. Sacramentality and Sacraments : BABETTE'S FEAST

Sign, Symbol and symbolic action bringing about what it signifies

Babette's Feast is one of the best food movies ever. In 19th century Denmark, a group of righteous Christians are treated to a magnificent meal prepared by their French cook, Babette, who used to manage a Paris restaurant. The film shows the preparation of the feast in mouth-watering detail. We realise that the food is both real and symbolic. It represents Babette's total love and devotion, paid for through her lottery win, giving it to others. It is also symbolic food for the guests who tend to be cautious about enjoying themselves because of their rigid beliefs. But the feast transforms them, enables them to forgive old grudges and be reconciled. It is sacramental.

24. The Eucharist: PIECES OF APRIL,

The Emmaus story: did not our hearts burn within us as he broke open the scriptures, they recognised him in the breaking of bread.

In the United States, Thanksgiving and the Thanksgiving dinner are holidays in which Americans appreciate their blessings no matter how hard life can be. Many films show this holiday. In Pieces of April, a young woman is surviving in New York and decides to prepare a dinner for her parents with whom she has some difficulties. When things go wrong, she is helped by her multi-ethnic neighbours. She is able to find some reconciliation with her parents. In this meal, this 'breaking of bread' for April, she is able to discover the real meaning of life, values and reconciliation.

25. Mary the Mother of the Lord: MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

Courage, fidelity and the feminine

In films, Mary is usually presented in her scenes with her son, Jesus. For the millennium, American television made Mary, Mother of Jesus, as a contribution to thinking about the impact of Christianity. The film offers an opportunity to see the episodes in Mary's life, not just the annunciation, visitation to Elizabeth, the birth of Jesus, but Mary's later life and her own following of her son, even to Calvary.

26. History of the Rosary: THE MIRACLE MAKER

Peasants' Psalter: imagination, structure and mantra

When the Rosary became a popular prayer, there were paintings and stained glass windows in the cathedrals and churches to help people know what they were praying about. Nowadays we also have Jesus films which bring the mysteries to life.

A gentle and simple way of bringing some of these mysteries people who pray the Rosary is looking at the animation film, The Miracle Maker. For the Joyful Mysteries, there are two dimensional sketches of Mary's experience with Jesus, annunciation, birth, the loss of Jesus in the Temple. For the sorrowful mysteries there are scenes of the Passion and Crucifixion that have been designed for younger audiences but which we can all appreciate.

27. How to Say the Rosary JESUS

Step by step instructions for DYI prayer practice

Praying the Rosary and the mysteries means contemplating events in Jesus' life and putting ourselves into these scenes. The Rosary can be a prayer of imagination as we recite the prayers.

One of the most powerful of the sorrowful mysteries is the Agony in the Garden. The Jesus' films visualise this for us, like the Agony song in Jesus Christ Superstar as Jesus sings as he climbs a mountain. A striking visual presentation of the Agony can be found in the Jesus film with Jeremy Sisto. As Jesus prays, Satan returns after testing Jesus in the temptations in the desert. He argues with Jesus, telling him his suffering is worth nothing. He shows him scenes from Christian history to prove it and that he should not go through with his passion. The Agony in the Garden is a real testing of Jesus' willingness to suffer and die.

28. The Prayer of the Church: LOURDES

Introduction to DYI liturgical prayer, organising time of day and seasons of year punctuated with special feasts

People pray in many different ways: they go to Church, they pray privately, they may say the Rosary or other vocal prayers, they might take quiet time to meditate and reflect. We can see praying in different ways when they go on pilgrimage and pray together. Lourdes is a film about pilgrimage to the well-known shrine. Some of the pilgrims are devout and pray fervently. Others are just average in their prayer. And there are some who have faith but can be a bit sceptical about the miracles. But, Lourdes, does witness to the way people can pray.

29. The Church in the Modern World: Catholic Social Teaching: ON THE WATERFRONT/ DEAD MAN WALKING

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.

One of the best scenes which combines Catholic social teaching with the experiences and suffering of Jesus comes from the 1954 Oscar-winner, On The Waterfront. It is a powerful sermon from the port chaplain, a no-holds barred criticism of the exploiting bosses, a support for the men and their families, a focus on Christ crucified. Social justice is for women and men, so the scenes in Dead Man Walking between Sister Helen Prejean and the prisoner to be executed, her support for him, her prayer with him enabling him to confess are a reminder the Church should be present even in the grief of a man who is paying for his crimes.

30. Invitation to request "Call and Response": SAINT OF FORT WASHINGTON

It is something of a tall order to find a film that can summarise our reflections on call and response. One popular story, of an ordinary man who has to take a look at his life and his values and respond to a call to change is The Saint of Fort Washington. It shows a kind of 'secular' saint, a young man with mental difficulties who spends time on the streets and in shelters with the range of people in similar situations. But, he is a good man who lives a life of values, care, prepared to lay down his life for others.

CHAPTER 16. FACE FOR THE FACELESS

God has loved us ‘heart to heart’. The Father made his love come alive in the heart of Jesus. This love was seen in Jesus’ life story culminating in his fullness of love in passion and resurrection. This is the love of God in a human heart and in a human story.

Jesus himself loved to tell stories. He knew that his listeners could be touched by the stories. Not only would they hear but their hearts would be touched. His stories have been repeated for two thousand years, stories of a Good Samaritan, a prodigal father, sower and seeds, a pearl of great price..., and they still delight, encourage and challenge.

THE CHURCH AS A PATRON OF THE ARTS

The history of the Church includes a history of the Church as a patron of the arts. For centuries, painters, sculptors, architects, designers and people with all kinds of craft skills have found a place in the Church. Admittedly, some phases of the history are reminders that there has been a constant ‘Jansenist streak’ and a wariness of delight, or a ‘Puritanical streak’ that can make people feel guilty if they are enjoying themselves. But, by and large, the Church is a Church of the arts.

The art form of the 20th century has been cinema, the art of moving images. Once again, the Church encouraged the cinema, although (as with creative writing and the Index of Prohibited Books) there have been cautionary movements and organisations for decency. The Church needs to be aware of the potential for values in films and be in constant dialogue with the cinema professional world, a dialogue that gives it credibility when speaking about cinema.

Screens are everywhere. It is not just the traditional moviehouse screen. Television screens, computer screens, mobile phone screens. Images are transmitted by cables, satellites, internet connections. Moving image advertising is more and more prevalent and pervasive. We have become more aware of security images in surveillance cameras in the wake of terrorist attacks. The danger is to underestimate the range of images we are exposed to.

The other danger is not to learn about them and appreciate them.

One of the cautionary words in recent times is a warning that the screen is not to take the place of the pulpit. This is true. But it also means that the screen can collaborate with the pulpit. The statistics remind us that this can be important in the exploration of values today. The weekly takings at the American box-office alone are over \$100,000,000. Television revenue, sales of tapes and disks and weekly rentals are enormous. The public is avid for the screen. In their imaginative and emotional responses to the stories on screen, they are absorbed by tale-telling, fired with delight and willing to be challenged by values.

In 2004, whether we are in sympathy with Mel Gibson’s spirituality with its focus on the intensity of Jesus’ suffering, we realise that millions of people around the world were moved by *The Passion of the Christ*. (Nine million copies of the video and the DVD were sold in the United States alone in its first three days of release in August 2004.) For three years, audiences worldwide followed the saga of *The Lord of The Rings*, appreciating this interpretation of J.R.R.Tolkien’s classic, caught up in the mythology and the experience of

good versus evil. Homilies can be offered in both word and image. After all, Jesus is not only the word made flesh, he is the image of the invisible God.

This is also a reminder that people committed to Church tradition, especially those who commit themselves to the virtue of Orthodoxy and ‘right reason’ concerning faith and morals, sometimes confine (and limit) themselves to what is ‘true’. But, truth is not the only transcendent quality of our experience. There is also goodness and beauty. We do not live only in our minds. We make choices, we feel emotions, we experience the excitement of our imaginations. Along with truth, there is goodness and beauty. Religious educators have coined words like ‘Orthopraxis’ (right practice) as a description of faith in action – and, quite inventively, ‘Orthopoeisis’ (right imagining and making, right creativity). This can be passionate heart activity.

The film is a significant part of this right creativity.

In western cultures, there is dismay at the loss of values, of the effects of secularisation. As commitment to organised religion and church declines, there is a need for stimuli for values. Cinema has done its fair share in contributing to a prevailing permissiveness. However, it has enormous potential in eliciting a response to values. This is also true in the cultures of Latin America, Asia and Africa, which are more obviously religiously influenced. Everyone enjoys a powerful story, one that stimulates as well as entertains. This is true of the Muslim world where the industry of a country like Iran produces some of the most values-oriented films one could wish for.

So, just as Jesus relied on storytelling for his message of God’s presence, repentance and forgiveness, our films can offer us facets of his message. For believers, Jesus is the Christ of faith. For non-believers, Jesus is the Christ of culture, someone whose person and teachings can be admired, whose life and sayings serve as metaphors for understanding the human condition. Pulpit and screen are not at odds. Rather, there should be collaboration, a dialogue where the film can illumine the Word of God and the Scriptures can reveal the values in a film.

This means that the film and its ways of storytelling provide a resource for heart spirituality.

‘THE LORD HEARS THE CRY OF THE POOR’.

We are familiar with this affirmation of God’s justice from the Psalms. The difficulty throughout history – and in our day – is that it is very hard for the cry of the poor to be heard here on earth, by us.

One of the challenges to modern media is for them to provide ‘a voice for the voiceless’. The development of radio, from small-scale community stations to international networks, has meant that the voice of the voiceless is heard more often than it once was, and more immediately.

While listening to a presentation on religious education in 2004, I was struck by the speaker’s reminder that for the last fifty years the world has been developing visual communication, that those who are in their fifties and under have grown up in a world of images and image technology. While radio certainly remains the number one medium for the broadest mass communication, the voiceless are also the ‘faceless’. Not only are they not heard, they are too

often unseen. This time the challenge for the media, and for religious and church media, is to provide 'a face for the faceless' as well as screening images of these faceless to the affluent and influential who need to see them.

We have only to think of the impact of a person like Nelson Mandela. He makes a powerful impression when he speaks. But, to see a man with his experience of discrimination and imprisonment, of statesmanship and diplomacy, to see him on our television screens, speaking, laughing, dancing as he does, means that he gives an even stronger witness to what he believes.

With the 20th century development of film, video, digital imaging and the internet, there is a parallel need for people around the world to see as well as to listen to the poor. The 2004-2005 experience of the Indian Ocean tsunami was immediately broadcast the world over. The voices and the faces provided an intensity to the appeal for relief.

The film and its way of storytelling can give a face to the faceless. Because the film appeals to the emotions as well as to the mind, it is a medium of the heart, heart seeking heart. It can portray for us the longings of the human heart. It can appeal to the heart. It must find its place in a spirituality of the heart.

The best place to start is a story.

A STORY: CUORE SACRO

While looking through a list of screenings at a festival market I came across an arresting title, Cuore Sacro. It was translated as Sacred Heart, though not in the sense that the devotion uses it. Rather, it meant a heart that is sacred. As I watched the film, and noticed that at one point there was a picture of the Sacred Heart on a wall, I realised that it was touching on the key elements of our heart spirituality.

The film is Italian, from 2005. The central character is a wealthy young businesswoman, Irene, who has inherited a profitable business from her father and is being guided by her entrepreneur aunt. As Irene wins an award, a couple who have lost their savings because of her deals commit suicide. Irene continues to cope but is conscious of her responsibility in contributing to their deaths, especially when the couple's daughter refuses to accept any compensation from her. At this stage, Irene is also about to destroy the family palazzo in Rome to make way for luxury apartments. When she visits, she realises how little she knows about her mother from whom she was taken when young. Her mother, a singer, had remained a recluse in the building, writing strange texts all over her bedroom wall.

The tone of the film changes when Irene tries to save a young girl (Benny) from harassment on the street only to discover that she is part of a scam to rob passers-by. However, she befriends Benny, who is quite outspoken and self-confident. One of the consequences of her friendship with this girl is that she has to go on a round with Benny to deliver food parcels to the poor who live near the Colosseum. This is a mission overseen by a sympathetic local priest, Fr Carras.

When Benny is killed in a car accident, Irene continues to deliver the parcels, meets more of the poor, overcomes her fears and gets to know Fr Carras. As she neglects her business to help the poor, there is a transition in the film from reality to a fantasy - within Irene's mind.

She senses Benny's presence and goes downstairs from her mother's room to a fully-fledged soup-kitchen serving crowds of people. Later Fr Carras takes her to the outskirts of the area to see the poor who are squatting in ancient ruins.

Her aunt also reveals to her that her mother was insane, telling everyone that she had given birth to a saint – and had tried to drown her little girl to make her a martyr. Irene walks from the ruins into an underground station, conscious of people and the poor, and, like St Francis of Assisi, strips herself of everything.

The audience can see in her transition from competent businesswoman to a servant of the poor an image of contemporary sanctity in a heart spirituality. She is also glimpsed comforting a mentally disturbed man, cradling him like a pieta. The film is saying that sanctity is possible in a practical way. Irene, unlike the rich young man, does not turn away but gives her wealth to the poor.

While the film is Italian, the director, Ferzan Ozpetek came to Italy from Turkey and a Muslim background. Yet, he has captured the core elements of the contemporary longings of the human heart and a modern response.

The key to the 'heart meaning' of *Cuore Sacro* comes in the words of her mother that Irene discovers: 'each of us has two hearts but one of them eclipses the other. If each of us could spot, even for a brief moment, the light of his hidden heart, then we will understand that that one is a sacred heart. We couldn't give up the warmth of its light'. The tagline for the advertising of the film was, 'Your secret heart is a sacred heart'.

In fact, we can say that each of us has two hearts, our own and that of Jesus himself (according to St Paul's 'I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me'). We pray that his hidden and sacred heart becomes our heart.

Cuore Sacro was an unexpected find, something of a treasure on a screen.

A SECOND STORY: INNOCENT VOICES

At the annual meeting of the Catholic Academy of Communications Arts Professionals – a rather long name for the US affiliate organisation of SIGNIS which is the World Catholic Association for Communication – there was to be a special screening of the film *Voces Innocentes* (Innocent Voices). The film was experiencing difficulties in finding US distribution because of its subject: the civil war in El Salvador in the 1980s and the critique of the aid, military and financial, that the US government had given to the El Salvador regime. The project had become a personal campaign for the director, Luis Mandoki.

Mandoki had made a moving film in his native Mexico about a mentally handicapped girl, Gaby, in 1987. It starred Liv Ullmann. It also provided an entrée for Mandoki to Hollywood. During the 1990s, he made a string of popular films, American style. They included a story of an alcoholic woman, played by Meg Ryan, *When a Man Loves a Woman*, a sentimental drama with Kevin Costner and Paul Newman, *Message in a Bottle*, and, perhaps his best, *White Palace*, a personal drama with James Spader and Susan Sarandon.

By the beginning of the century, he had become tired of Hollywood projects and wanted to

make something substantial and to work in Latin America. Providentially, he met an aspiring actor in Los Angeles, Oscar Orlando Torres, who had not succeeded in making a career for himself but had a story to tell. He had come from El Salvador with his mother and family.

As a child during the 1980s, Oscar had experienced the abduction of children, boys about the age of ten. They were taken by government forces to serve as soldiers in the military or by guerrilla squads to fight with them. The setting and location is the last town between the guerrilla stronghold and the capital.

The situation is familiar to us from the story of Oscar Romero. We see the hardships of an oppressed population. We experience the violent attacks on the town, the bombings and mutilations and deaths. The focus is on the children, the contrast between their lives at home and at school and the transformation (into killers) as they are trained by the army commanders. It is a sober reminder of the induction of children into armies, especially in Sierra Leone and the contemporary war in northern Uganda. The Innocent Voices are turned into the aggressive sounds of lost innocence.

Watching Innocent Voices and meeting Luis Mandoki along with Oscar himself meant that we could not simply finish looking at the film as 'just a movie'. Caryll Houselander, the English spirituality author, wrote a small book during World War II called *This War is the Passion*. Jesus' heart was pierced and broken at the end of his passion, broken in compassionate love and forgiveness. He has already shared our depths of suffering. After the war, Caryll Houslander amplified her book for the new situation and called it *The Comforting of Christ*.

Films like *Innocent Voices* (and films about Sudan or Iraq or Congo or Zimbabwe or Afghanistan or...) remind us that these wars are the passion for so many people, so many children. In our prayer we remember that Jesus himself experienced terrible anguish and pain. He has a heartfelt awareness and knowledge of what these victims suffer. And, if we offer hope and compassion to those who suffer, we share in the comforting of Christ.

Innocent Voices is the kind of film that gives a face to the faceless.

During the 1960s, sociologist, Peter Berger, wrote about the openness of human experience to what is beyond us. The title of his book was *A Rumor of Angels*. What he meant by that was that all experiences offers us 'Signals of transcendence'. A similar philosophical tradition from St Thomas Aquinas, developed by Joseph Marechal SJ at Leuven in the early 20th century, suggests that every finite experience, even in its limitations, is open to 'something more'. There can always be more. Every finite experience is open to the infinite. Which, as St Thomas would say, 'we call God'.

This is certainly true of every religious experience. To apply it to the spirituality of the heart: in the experiences of our hearts, in love and compassion, especially for the wide range of those men, women and children who are called the poor, we share in the compassion of that hidden heart within us, the heart of Jesus. When we experience the heart of Jesus like this, divine love in a human heart, we are led, with the faceless, into the fullness of God.

Chapter 17. **FROM STEREOTYPING TO DEMONISING**

The power of the screen image is that it can be absorbed, consciously or unconsciously, as a picture that is assumed to be real. Propagandists know that screen images can win hearts and minds. Commentators warn that an uncritical acceptance of such images as real is one of the great challenges to media awareness and education.

By way of personal illustration. Watching the 1939 *Gunga Din* at school, we were all keyed up about the action in the British Raj in India. At one stage, a priest of the goddess, Kali, threatened the heroes with a deadly snake pit. The combination of eager, writhing snakes and the sinister look of the priest meant that any time afterwards when I heard the name of Kali, I had a fearful and negative reaction. No research into the reality of the cult of Kali. Just an ingrained memory of the screen image.

The priest of Kali was 'reel' bad.

Professor Jack Shaheen published a book, *Reel Bad Arabs, How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2006). A 53 minute documentary of the same title was produced in 2007. He raises the problem of deliberate choices in presenting unfavourable images of individuals and of peoples. He also raises the taken-for-granted presentation of these images over a long period and what this might mean in terms of prejudice and, his word, vilification. He sees that Arabs have been portrayed in this way in Hollywood films for many decades. He asks for consciousness-raising to combat these derogatory images.

It is not only Arabs who have been presented in skewed ways in Hollywood. Looking back on the history of American movies, we can see prejudiced images of African Americans (as well as their absence from key roles in dramas until recent decades). Donald Bogle's book had quite a provocative title, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks* (fourth edition, 2001). The Cold War period targeted Russians and Communists. After the fall of the Soviet empire, the Russian Mafia or ex-Stasi operatives were regularly the villains of crime dramas and action shows. There is always debate about how Christians of various denominations have been shown, favourably or unfavourably.

For religious discussions on cinema and its impact, this focus on 'reel' good and bad characters can be very important, not just in noting what happens but in assessing the attitudes behind the presentations and in contributing towards change. This is a matter of fairness and justice. It is important for interfaith discussions since religions which are unfamiliar or not understood can be the victims of such unjust representations. As Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, head of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Social Communications remarked: 'what is important is dialogue and respect – and *The Ride of the Valkyries* is not our theme music!'.

But, how are these demeaning or derogatory images presented?

- Background. In crowd scenes, for example at train stations or airports, or simply in the streets, the film-maker uses many extras. Are they just ordinary, almost anonymous individuals? By and large, yes. However, there is often a desire to make the sequence topical and so some characters who stand out, yet are not too intrusive, are included. Are they people of colour? People of Asian appearance? Middle-Eastern? men and women (wearing veils)? An easy selection, often used, is to have two Catholic nuns walk by – wearing habits no nun wears or has ever worn, something dreamed up by a costume designer who has not bothered

to research what is actually current garb. This comment on nuns makes us realise how easy it is to include an extra and cause potential offence because of laziness and carelessness.

- **Stereotype.** Stereotypes are usually what novelist E.M. Forster called 'flat characters' (one-dimensional) in contrast to 'round characters' (multi-dimensional). Not all characters can be round characters – this would make too much demand on attention, so central characters need to be round with supporting characters flatter. Once again, the easy way out is to serve up a stereotype, a character with characteristics, appearance, manner of speaking, body language, dress that makes them instantly recognisable and identifiable. While this is not necessarily bad in itself, it runs the danger of labelling and boxing in the stereotype character. And, of course, it is easy to mock the characteristics, laughing at the stereotype instead of with it. One can ask what are the presuppositions, the particular angle in putting forward a stereotype. The stereotype, more often than not, is a surface character. This runs the danger of reinforcing the stereotype so that an audience does not bother going more deeply into appreciating and understanding the character. When asked to write a comment on the representation of Anglican clergy in Australian cinema, the author sadly noted that they were generally stereotyped and mocked.

- **Caricature.** It is sometimes a small step from stereotype to caricature. Mockery of the character is the nature of caricature, the laughing at. At times there can be sound satiric reasons (political comment or spoof) which gives a basis and a reason for the caricature. But, when used without discrimination, the caricature can be derogatory and insulting. It can be harmful, reinforcing assumptions in the audience without their noticing. A caricature can be a figure of prejudice. It is very easy to identify because of the exaggerations. The newspaper cartoon comment can be a visual and verbal caricature. The presentation on television or in film of a blonde, brutal Nazi guard or SS interrogator is a caricature which audiences have gone along with. A vicious Native American in the old days of cowboys and Indians was a caricature, something which Hollywood had to tackle in the 1950s to present the Native Americans fairly and with human dignity. Professor Shaheen claims that too often Hollywood has the Arab as a cruel and shifty villain, a terrorist, a wealthy and callous sheikh or a repressed, veiled woman. He cites the lyrics of the opening song in the 1992 popular Disney film, *Aladdin*, which, humorously in intent, describes torture as customary behaviour. In *Taken* (2008), when Liam Neeson's all-American daughter is abducted by Albanian criminals (the evil Eastern European again), she is bid for and bought by a wealthy sheikh.

- **Demonising.** We know from propaganda films that an enemy can be portrayed beyond stereotype and caricature so that they can be seen as the embodiment of evil. The way they look, the way they speak, their manner and mannerisms are, in some ways, hellish. Just as stereotypes and caricatures can be a means of scapegoating, the demonising of enemies can offload all the anger and hatred of a people on to the enemy. This can be conscious but it can sometimes be unconscious and Professor Shaheen offers film clips, especially from the film *Rules of Engagement* (2000 and before 9/11), where women and children are demonised as violent aggressors. With demonised characters, we can examine the depths of dislike to hatred and the incitement to violence, physical or, at least, psychological, against the demonised. Cate Blanchet starred as Queen Elizabeth I of England in *Elizabeth* and in the 2007 sequel, *Elizabeth, the Golden Age*. As the Armada sailed towards England in 1588, Elizabeth stands on a cliff, blonde hair blowing in the breeze as is her ethereal dress, looking like a pre-Raphaelite spirit. She is being 'angelised'. On the other hand, Philip II of Spain, is dressed in black, surrounded by black-habited monks in a dark Gothic church, chanting, and moving in procession, crouched like a spider. He is being demonised. That was history.

Demonising is a damaging example of prejudice when applied to contemporaries – and is generalised.

One might note that many film critics and commentators demonise Hollywood itself, as a place where the industry is completely commercial rather than artistic, can be over-influenced by government agencies, is ruled by happy-ending storytelling and indulges in simplification and sentimentality. (Though as W. Somerset Maugham noted, sentimentality is only sentiment you don't approve of.)

The demonising process in cinema leads to the realisation that human nature seems to feel the need for an enemy (US nationalism has always found an enemy, Spanish, German, Communist, Chinese, North Korea, Iran, 'the axis of evil', or, at the time of the 1960 presidential election, the fear of Catholic John F. Kennedy taking orders from the Vatican). One can see this demonising of financiers and bankers in the 2008 credit squeeze and subsequent recession. At times, politicians, journalists, police and clergy have all been demonised, let alone stereotyped and caricatured in the movies.

As regards religions, it is interesting to note that the Judaeo-Christian² tradition can take a humorous approach to some of its most serious aspects in a way that Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam do not. Mostapha Akkad's 1979, *The Message*, the story of Mohammad, notes as it opens that reverence for the Prophet means that he is not visualised in the film. It cites the opinions of scholars and institutions as supporting this. On the other hand, films like the *Monty Python Life of Brian*, despite some protests, especially from North America, can parody biblical films and appeal to a Christian audience. Abel Ferrara can portray a corrupt policeman screaming, Munch-like, in a church as he castigates God in four letter invective for not coming to his help, then repents, in *Bad Lieutenant* (1992).

American films have deplored anti-Semitism generally so that the questions about Mel Gibson's anti-Semitism (or insensitivity) with *The Passion of the Christ* seemed an exception. Another difficulty with the reception of *The Passion of the Christ* was the superior (colonial?) attitude taken by some western audiences and a number of western theologians who tended to caricature if not demonise members of other cultures (Philippine, Polish, Lebanese, elderly Christians with a tradition of focusing on the sufferings of Jesus) who were criticised as having an inferior theology and piety to that of the critics.

Christianity, on the other hand, can be criticised often with outlandish comment and impunity, ridiculed so that generalisations against Christianity can be widespread (as in Bill Maher's *Religulous* – the combination of religion and ridiculous). Catholic clergy have been targeted in recent years because of sexual abuse scandals. Ordinary Christians are often presented as Sunday worshippers whose life during the week bears little relationship to their Sunday observance. Fundamentalist Christians are presented sometimes as bigots with their literal interpretation of the Bible (especially Creationists and their reading of Genesis 1 or pro-life or campaigners against homosexual unions because of their quoting of biblical texts).

Where a faith is unfamiliar and not researched, easy generalisations are made – which can also stereotype, caricature and demonise. The issue of demonising sends us back to the films to look again, to examine cultural and religious ignorance, cultural and religious prejudice, cultural and religious presuppositions. This is a matter of justice as well as a contribution to reconciliation, harmony and peace-making.

Chapter 18 **THE LIGHTS CAMERA FAITH... METHOD**

This chapter is a collaboration between Peter Malone and Rose Pacatte from their introductions to the Lights.... Camera... Faith series.

Many of us are scientists. Many are mathematicians. Many philosophers. All of us are storytellers. We like to hear and tell stories.

When we read any book, sacred to secular, it is part of a long tradition, coming from St Benedict and his Rule, and is called *Lectio Divina*, Spiritual Reading, even Divine Reading. I wish I had thought of this years ago, but a Benedictine Nun, Kym Harris OSB, responded to watching film clips with the name, *Visio Divina*, Spiritual Watching, even Divine Watching.

Visio Divina underlies the Lights... Camera... Faith... Method of this chapter.

When the Word was made flesh, Jesus appeared on earth, one might say, in story form. He was born. He lived quietly in Nazareth before embarking on a mission of preaching the good news of repentance, forgiveness of sin and the coming of God on earth. He suffered, died and, as an extra dimension to the human story, he was raised from the dead. In dying, he said the ultimate 'yes' to his Father's will and the Father, receiving it, could only love him back into risen life.

That is our Christian story.

A friend suggested in 1998 that it might be a good idea to find films with links to the Sunday Gospels. That is an interesting idea but how do you highlight the link? The link is dialogue, a conversation between the film and the scripture texts. This is the core of the method. Sometimes the parallel of themes is quite obvious. Sometimes this is not so clear but ideas bounce off each other. The films are chosen because they portray the real-life struggles people experience: human struggles that demand a human (and humane) response. The human struggles in the film encounter the Gospel story and its redeeming hopes.

Sunday by Sunday, feastday by feastday, we listen to chapters of that story. Some of it is familiar, some of it seems a little strange at times. We need to be able to open up our scriptures to fuller understanding in order to deepen our faith.

The Gospels

Lights Camera Faith... is designed to help us to appreciate the Gospel stories as well as the other readings that have been selected to accompany them. As has been suggested, the method is taking a popular movie story and creating a dialogue between the movie and the Gospel. The movie story and its themes can illuminate the Gospel, sometimes paralleling it, at other times providing a contrast. The Gospel story can help us to find deeper levels of meaning in the movie.

In Cycle A (2001), the Gospel readings were principally from St Matthew's Gospel. Many of them were selections from the Sermon on the Mount and other sermons which form so much of this Gospel. The movies often illustrated Jesus' teaching rather than events in his life.

With Cycle B (2002), it is rather different. The readings come mainly from St Mark's Gospel, although during the course of the year, there is a five weeks' series of readings from John 6 on the bread of life. Mark's Gospel is the most direct of the four in its storytelling. It is direct, vivid and detailed in its portrait of Jesus. It is also what one might call 'tough'. Mark's Gospel includes episodes where Jesus confronts devils, stories of demonic possession, of taking up the cross as a disciple, of hostile interchanges between Jesus and the religious leaders of his time.

This means that some of the movies chosen correspond to this 'toughness'. In faith terms, we could say that these Gospel stories and these movies offer us a challenge to a stronger and more resilient faith. For some congregations or groups, watching the whole movie might be too difficult. However, leaders could select sequences which contain the essentials of the movie but which could be watched by all.

In Cycle C (2003), we read principally from St Luke's Gospel. Traditionally, Luke's Gospel is considered to be the Gospel of compassion. The Jesus we see in this Gospel has a warm humanity, not so didactic as the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel, not as plain and plain-spoken as the Jesus of Mark's Gospel.

The Infancy narrative in Luke is longer and far more detailed than the narrative in Matthew's Gospel. The parallel between John the Baptist and Jesus is highlighted with the stories of the annunciation to Zechariah and to Mary, the two births. There are stories of Jesus' childhood, the naming, the presentation, the finding in the temple, Jesus going back to Nazareth, obedient to Mary and Joseph.

Many characters with whom we are familiar appear only in Luke's Gospel: the widow of Nain, the ten lepers, Zacchaeus, the Good Thief. It is a Gospel where Jesus encounters many women: Martha and Mary, the woman who was the sinner in the city, the group of women who ministered to Jesus, the women of Jerusalem on the way to Calvary, Mary Magdalene and the women who came to the tomb. The well-known story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is the principal resurrection story in Luke.

Several of Jesus' best-known parables are found only in Luke: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Pharisee and the Publican, the Unjust Judge.

One might say there is a more nuanced and humane portrait of Jesus in Luke's Gospel.

In selecting the movies for *Lights Camera Faith...*, it was hoped that they would appeal across the board. Some have classic status, others are popular entertainments. Some may not be the best movies ever made, but their themes are particularly relevant to a celebration and its readings.

After the completion of the three volumes of the series *Lights, Camera ... Faith! A Movie Lectionary for Cycles A, B, and C of the liturgical cycle* (following in great part the revised Common Lectionary), there was a request for the next topic for a book that promoted dialogue between life and faith, movies and the scriptures. Because homilists and religious educators from a variety of Christian faith traditions form the greatest part of the audience for *Lights, Camera ... Faith!*, the four themes of The Catechism of the Catholic Church could frame a whole new conversational approach to the dialogue between theology, spirituality

and cinema. The themes of the Catechism are Creed, Sacraments, the Commandments/Beatitudes and Prayer. The Ten Commandments seemed the obvious theme to begin with because of the role of morality in faith development, so in 2006 *Lights, Camera... Faith! The Ten Commandments* was published. Catechists and religious educators then urged a follow up with a treatment of the Beatitudes and the Seven Deadly Sins. This continues the realm of morality and supplements the work on The Ten Commandments. It also offers material that is not confined to the Catholic Church or to the mainstream Christian Churches, but is of general interest as well.

Beatitudes and Deadly Sins

The emphasis in writing on the Ten Commandments was that "... we need to know what they mean and explore how to live them in our daily lives as individuals, communities, and societies. In doing this, we will understand more fully the role and formation of conscience, the nuances of their injunctions, the consequences of not following the commandments and the blessings that come to us when we do."

The Decalogue is a succinct statement of moral principles that appeals to the mind and to our understanding. However, we live by the exercise of our free will and we draw on conscience and our sense of responsibility which is formed by both head and heart. We need, therefore, to have further guidance on how to live our lives morally and spiritually.

While there has been a strong tradition of forming consciences by the tenets of Natural Law, the developments in moral teaching over the last forty years or so have guided us to look more closely at the Law of Christ, that is, the law of love and justice of the Gospels. This, in turn, sends us more deeply into the Jewish scriptures, the Word of God that was at the core of the teachings and spirituality of Jesus Christ and that in turn permeates Gospel teaching. The core expression of this Law of Christ is, of course, to love God with our whole minds, souls and hearts and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

The classic expression of this Law is the opening of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-12. Jesus also speaks a great deal of repentance during the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel (Mt 5:13-48). This change of heart is called *metanoia* in Greek and it is the sign of God's reign in our world, the kingdom of heaven. Jesus does not make a list of deadly sins as he does of the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel but condemns the double standards and the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his times in Matthew 23. However, in the abbreviated version of the Beatitudes in Luke 6: 20-23, Jesus levels woe on those who are complacent in their wealth, are filled, who laugh and those of whom people speak well (cf. Luke 5:24-26).

The Deadly Sins (called "capital sins" in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1866) belong to a Church tradition that was identified as early as the 5th century by John Cassian (360 – 435) and amended by St. Gregory the Great (540 – 604) in the 6th. John Cassian was a deacon who was later ordained a priest and who was the first to introduce the rules of Eastern monasticism to the West; he was never formally canonized. He lists eight sins or principal faults which he attributes to an Abbot Serapion:

There are eight principal faults which attack mankind; viz., first *gastrimargia*, which means gluttony, secondly fornication, thirdly *philargyria*, i.e., avarice or the love of money, fourthly anger, fifthly dejection [envy](#), sixthly *acedia*, i.e., listlessness or low spirits [sadness](#), seventhly *cenodoxia*, i.e., boasting or vain glory; and eighthly pride. (see Conference 5. Conference of

Abbot Serapion. On the Eight Principal Faults.

Pope St. Gregory the Great (from 590- 604) listed seven sins (Moralia in Job 31, 45) and he deletes the sin of listlessness or low spirits. Regarding these The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in n. 1866:

Vices can be classified according to the virtues they oppose, or also be linked to the capital sins which Christian experience has distinguished, following St. John Cassian and St. Gregory the Great. They are called "capital" because they engender other sins, other vices. They are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia.

The seven deadly sins have appealed to the Christian conscience, as well as to the imaginations of writers and film and television producers who continually come up with productions that illustrate them.

Why juxtapose the Beatitudes with the Deadly Sins? Because great drama is created in stories that pit virtue and vice against the other and allow our moral imaginations to consider right and wrong, virtue and vice. The Beatitudes are reward for choosing to do good and the deadly sins express the deliberate choice to offend God by failing in love for God and neighbour. "The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus' preaching" (CCC, n. 1716) and "respond to the natural desire for happiness." (CCC n. 1718). They are the promised reward for virtue, the habit of doing good, for living a virtuous, moral life. They are also the expression of God's mercy toward the repentant sinner.

"Sin," says The Catechism of the Catholic Church, "creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts (n. 1865)...." Deadly, or capital sins, are called thus because they bring about other sins.

Virtue and vice exist within the realm of Christian morality, that is, living in a way worthy of our dignity as human beings and children of God (see 1 Peter 1:15-16).

The core of the books on the commandments and the beatitudes and deadly sins is a consideration of each beatitude and each sin with a brief introduction that highlights scriptural roots as well as contemporary aspects and relevant themes.

At its heart this method is a means to create a dialogue between the scriptures and the movies. Therefore, scripture readings have been chosen which relate to each commandment, beatitude and sin beginning with a reading from the Old Testament followed by one from the Letters or other books of the New Testament. The key reading is from the Gospels. One advantage in choosing readings that relate specifically to the beatitudes and sins or related themes is that they can serve as a basis for catechesis and religious education, retreats, homilies, prayer experiences, ecumenical or interfaith gatherings or spirituality and film events.

Listed for each film are

- The credits
- A synopsis for ready reference and refreshing memories
- A clear statement that integrates the film and the Scriptures
- A list of three key scenes and themes
- Material for conversation and reflection
- A final prayer

Presenting the Human Condition

Dealing with the beatitudes and sins in conjunction with stories that are told through film means that confronting many issues: the complexities of moral dilemmas, various levels of conscience development, the universality of the human condition. Some of the sins have parallels in the Bible itself but nonetheless are difficult or disturbing to probe.

Yet understanding the nature of a particular way of being blessed or a particular way of transgressing and finding ways for forgiveness and reconciliation, is the very mission and work of the Church. A number of these movies could be considered controversial, as are so many of the moral dilemmas that people face in everyday life.

The principle employed in choosing these films and examining them through the lens of the beatitudes and deadly sins is to make the distinction between “what” is presented on screen and “how” it is presented. This means that there is no limit to the topics that can be examined. All human experience, no matter how wrong or evil, is a legitimate subject for a movie.

As we read through both the Old and New Testaments, we realize that the Bible tells stories about virtuous and sinful behaviour mixed with a wide range of human inconsistencies about good people who choose what is sinful rather than what is right and good. This is life and it can also make excellent drama. In going back into the Old Testament, probing Jesus’ own spirituality, we go back to the testament itself, the Covenant on Mt Sinai (Exodus 19). The qualities of that Covenant, God’s unilateral promise of love no matter how often his chosen people turned away, include justice, loving kindness and fidelity.

These qualities found beautiful expression in the oracles and images of the Prophets. In introducing each beatitude, the vision of a particular prophet is highlighted to illustrate the meaning of the beatitude. Amos is the prophet for those who thirst after justice. Jeremiah is the prophet for those who are persecuted. To illustrate the continuity between the testaments, a Gospel example for each beatitude has been chosen, in fact, women characters, like the widow of Naim who mourned and the meek woman with the haemorrhage whose self-esteem allowed her only to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment.

A different approach has been taken for the deadly sins. An Old Testament sinner has been exposed for each sin. On the other hand, from the New Testament, a parable of Jesus has been chosen to introduce the particular sin.

The Second Vatican Council said that the description and presentation of moral evil should be presented in such a way as to lead to a deeper understanding of the human person and the value of truth and goodness (Inter Mirifica, n. 7.) And this can, indeed, occur in film.

The limits for the presentation of sinfulness arise when we ask “how” the material is presented.

Each family and culture has developed sensitivities and particular norms (though often unarticulated) concerning what is acceptable or not regarding how visual media presents and deals with dark and disturbing. As individuals, we all have a conscience. Pastoral theology and practice encourage teachers, homilists, and ministers to respect these sensibilities and norms. In dealing with movies that are open to such wide interpretations about controversial

and sometimes disturbing issues, we, the audience, need to have both a delicate or well-tuned sensitivity to morality as well as a robust attitude about life and faith that does not wilt under pressure. Often, a viewer can determine the difference between a film that treats difficult topics in a mature way and one that has the ability to exploit the audience by grappling with the artistry and technical achievements and gauging the intensity of the presentation of difficult material. On the other hand, every individual sees and interprets these elements differently, so at times it is challenging to arrive at a consensus. Seeking information and guidance from film reviews or checking film ratings is always an excellent way to prepare to view a film.

In addition, not every person is obliged to see every movie. We all have particular emotional responses, interests, tastes, styles, and values based on our family and faith formation, life experience, and education that form our viewing lens. Because of our particular lens we may choose not to watch a film, no matter how useful for a faith and culture dialogue it may be. This applies, of course, to presentations of violence, sexuality, and the use of alcohol and drugs, as well as the language that the screenplay employs. To discern and judge “how” a movie tells its story, we are called upon to use our mature powers of discernment, to consider the context in which objectionable behaviour appears, and to gauge the artistry and intensity of the portrayal.

Dialogue between Scriptures and Cinema

Cinematic evil manifests itself in the malicious attitudes of a character’s (the protagonist or antagonist) mind and heart and their subsequent behaviour. This is why it is useful to establish a dialogue between the scriptures and popular movies that dramatize very real moral dilemmas. The beatitudes are written on our hearts, and if we are theologically and spiritually attuned and open, they can help form our viewing lens. Our consciences are sensitive to the deadly sins. Once again, if we are attuned, they give a probing perspective to our viewing lens.

From our own experience, we know that the moral life is dramatic. By its nature, morality is dynamic and dramatic, for we are always confronted with the choice between good and evil. The films in this volume mirror the drama, pain and joys of all human living through the presentation of temptation, choices, motivations, consequences and often the ambiguity of what constitutes the good and just response to a situation.

Why ought we fulfil the beatitudes and avoid the sins? The first motivation is love; God revealed the Sinai covenant in love and Jesus himself and his love are the new covenant. Love for God is the only reason for a moral and spiritual life that transcends our human limitations. In this book, we will treat the dilemma and moral tension of choosing between that which is good or bad.

Cinema as a moral laboratory

The contribution of this book to religious and moral education is through theological reflection and discernment as presented in the moral laboratory of popular, contemporary cinema. Through the exercise of our moral imagination, we can explore what moral theologians call “case studies” and learn to appreciate the complex nuances of moral behaviour. By considering real or hypothetical cinematic stories, we can see people and issues from the different perspectives of responsibility, sinfulness and guilt as well as how the characters have formed their consciences to begin with. Hopefully, we will learn empathy and, at the same time, “fine tune” our consciences through the process of listening, dialogue,

and action. We can compare and contrast our own moral norms and values with those of the Church, the scriptures and our culture so we can choose rightly and walk justly in the light of the Lord.

The formation of conscience is a challenge for people of faith. Some people only want to be told what to do, or to have their views confirmed. They have found a place of moral safety and feel it comforting to obey blindly. This often leads to a loss of empathy for others. Other people seem to base their moral decisions on what feels good and right to them regardless of moral and ethical arguments that might counter their views. This leads to moral relativity: if it feels good or right, no matter what anyone says, just do it. Film-makers who give voice to conscience in their movies often use this kind of moral relativity to create the dramatic counterpoint to the protagonist's struggle.

Movies are the dramatic moral case studies of today. The aim of this book is to explore the issues, motivations, choices and consequences involved in the stories we have chosen, not to re-articulate laws that people already know. Movies tell stories and enable us to identify with the characters and their struggles. As the films tell their stories, they offer us images, metaphors, symbols and analogies that open up our intellects to more concrete meanings than mere abstract reasoning could offer (cf. *Vigilanti Cura*, n.23).

These film stories, although they do not cover every aspect of each beatitude or sin, give us quite a bit to reflect on both emotionally and rationally. Sometimes the stories have happy endings with repentance, reconciliation and restitution. At other times, the more complex moral stories do not give us easy solutions. They take us "into the depths" (*de profundis*) with the sinner and immerse us in the protagonist's struggles and the choice to do evil rather than good. We can call these "*de profundis* films." Nevertheless, these stories continually remind us how much human beings are in need of redemption. Psalm 130 reminds us that it is from the depths that those in need of redemption cry out so that God will hear their voice and be attentive to their pleading. At the same time, there are films with the lighter touch, the entertainment touch, which also deal with the struggles between good and evil decisions. Paralleling the depths, they might be called 'from the shallows' films. But all these films open up spirituality for us.

APPENDIX I

FILMS AND CENSORSHIP AND CLASSIFICATIONS

One of the greatest difficulties in talking about the public and the public's response to the media, to classifications and to censorship is that there are many publics. Which of them is the public that determines community standards? Which is the public written about in controversial and polemic articles or in correspondence to the newspapers or to offices of Classification? Which is the public which possesses and exercises the power in our society?

The 'publics' for film

There seem to be, at least, three groups of adult publics. And there are the children.

One public is the older, established public, those who were educated before the coming of television or during its earlier years, who have a 'book' education and have great regard for literary and literate culture and media and whose values were formed before, say, 1960. They include the 'older generations' and some of the 'baby boomers'. They tend to be traditional in their expectations of media and are wary about what is presented on screen, appreciating reticence and decorum. They regret that there is so much 'privacy in public'. This public tends to be in positions of authority in family, in churches, in education, in government. They exercise enormous influence in the public forum and have power.

A second and quite different public is the, say, 18 to 30 year old group. They have been away from school just over a decade at most. They are children of the electronic and visual era. They are, often, more 'visuate' than literate. They have inherited the greater 60s-and-after freedom (or permissiveness depending on one's stance) and take it for granted that the media should present its subjects frankly even if some of the treatment is potentially offensive. This public may not be in positions of influence (though a number of them are) but they are the coming generation and the influence of their spending power at a variety of box-offices is considerable.

In between, there is a third public, ranging from young adults to adults in mid-life, those who have settled down and are moving towards the stances of the first group as well as those who have absorbed the ethos of freedom and are not willing to lose any of it. This public ranges from the parents of children and adolescents to the high flyers who are trying to make their mark on society and, often, on the media.

Community Standards

So, if 'community standards' are to be used as norms for guidance in classifying media and issuing certificates from censors' or classification offices, whose standards?

It would seem that when issues of classification and censorship are raised, it is the standards of the first public which are considered normative. The heritage of the American Motion Picture Code and of such groups as the Legion of Decency or the Festival of Light) forms a basis for judgments about what should be seen and heard and what should not be seen and heard. Changes are reluctantly made and are often seen as regrettable concessions to permissiveness. This

engenders a hostile attitude to media and the felt need to 'make a stand' at times, with a particular movie or television program being targeted (rightly or wrongly) fundamentalist Christians calling for the banning of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, groups calling for stricter classifications of *Silence of the Lambs* or *Cape Fear*.

Clearly, the influence of this group can be beneficial, as with the discussion leading to the introduction of more nuanced classifications for television, movies and videos and the appropriate times for screening such material on television.

But what about 'community standards' for the second group, the younger group, which is not so concerned about reticence. Should classifications be geared to these standards? (In fact, of course, there has been reconsideration of standards over the last thirty years.) But, in public discussion and in debates fostered by the media, the standards of this group tend to be dubbed more permissive and are decried while the more traditional group's standards are dubbed more appropriate.

There needs to be more constructive and respectful discussion between representatives of each public to sharpen critical perceptions and opinions.

To take an extreme example, Pasolini's *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975). While the film was freely shown in the United States, despite several appeals it was not released in Australia until 1993. When it was eventually screened publicly, some reviewers took the Board of Review (who had passed the film) to task, many groups (film unseen) sent letters of protest, article writers capitalised on its release to lament the end of standards in the country. Reasonably sized crowds of young adults went to see *Salo* often laughing nervously and then in disgust. They were puzzled when the film seemed suddenly to end and one would not be certain that they noticed the Christ's words that Pasolini gave to some of the victims, 'My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?'

Some commentators stated that the film was too disgusting - but audiences have frequently seen much more visually explicit sex scenes and violence, although the verbal explicitness and the excremental emphasis were of high intensity. Part of the reason in singling out *Salo* is that in recent years many countries around the world and the mainstream churches have experienced horrendous revelations and court cases where religious men have abused office and power and have sexually abused children and teenagers in a way that most people had never imagined. So, how unreal or exaggerated is *Salo*? Not that everybody needs to see it, but it does have something to say and to show about abuse of power and about sexual abuse.

The third public dramatises the conflicts indicated by the comments on *Salo*: the parents who

become concerned for their children and become more protective in contrast to the business people who are concerned with career, freedom and with profits.

As a footnote to these comments on publics, one of the great drawbacks to useful discussion on standards and classifications is the widely accepted premise that the visual media are almost exclusively for 'entertainment'. 'I go to a movie to be entertained, not for any message.' 'Why does a movie have to be so heavy...?' 'The visual media are for escapist relaxation.' The consequence of this premise is that anything that upsets easy entertainment (language, sexual explicitness, graphic violence) is considered to have no place in such entertainment. Were this premise to be rejected, a more mature discussion of what community standards might follow.

This means that the approach of bodies responsible for the availability of films is one of classification and consumer advice rather than censorship in the usual understanding of banning and prohibition. This approach was endorsed by Cardinal Roger Mahoney, the archbishop of Los Angeles who has Hollywood in his diocese:

With you, I reject censorship, so I am not proposing a code today to govern what film makers may create, nor do I wish to dictate what intelligent viewers may see. Rather, I offer certain criteria which I hope will help guide both film makers and viewers as they struggle to answer these questions and make these decisions.

This endorses the philosophical approach to censorship that sees it as a 'necessary evil' (having to be exercised sometimes to protect people's rights) rather than, as some concerned exponents would claim, 'a necessary good' (something to be exercised whenever authority thinks its subjects might be harmed no matter what they, the subjects, think). Censorship, as banning, is a last resort; censorship as classification with the offer of consumer advice with the criteria continually under review respects both freedom and rights.

Which brings us to that special public group, children. Most people would agree that the protection of children from harm requires a possible foregoing of adult rights or the imposing of some limitations and restrictions on adults.

Again, Cardinal Mahoney put the caution succinctly,

Given the power of film, what might be a tasteful and realistic portrayal of a significant human experience for a disciplined and mature adult, can result, for sensitive and vulnerable young people, in self-destructive, anti-social behaviour.

'What' is presented and 'How' it is presented

The way into moral areas and the appropriateness of censorship and classification is the basic distinction between 'what' is presented and 'how' it is presented. To state it forthrightly, it seems that there is no limit on 'what' can be presented in the arts and on screen. Every human experience is a legitimate topic for the arts (just consider the Bible, the book of Genesis, for instance, with its blasphemies, brutality and sexual violence). Many people in the first public discussed earlier ('the older generation') seem unable to make this distinction. They focus on the 'what' and become alarmed. The Silence of the Lambs is about a serial killer, a cannibal - this sounds frightening and so the film is considered bad, if not dangerous. The Accused about rape. Pulp Fiction is about professional killers. The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert is about transvestites.

There is little constructive discussion to be had when the attention is solely on the 'what'. If the 'what' is not approved of, then any authority which allows its screening is considered reprehensible.

The important issue is 'how' the topic is presented. For someone who is alarmed about the topic of incest being seen on screen, they will discover the importance of the 'how' in a telemovie like Something About Amelia with Glenn Close and Ted Danson which is a film which can be recommended to a wide audience for its restrained but honest dramatising of a disturbing social and family issue.

An old standby example might serve to illustrate this use of 'how' the topic or issue is presented: a decapitation. In Coppola's Apocalypse Now there is a graphic decapitation, but it comes after over two hours of the film where the audience has been led on a quest up river in Vietnam and has been exposed to the horrors of the war. The decapitation has a context of war and violence. Soon after Apocalypse Now, James Glickenhaus's The Exterminator was released. There was a decapitation, graphically filmed, during the credits. No context, no means for interpreting, it was sensationalist if not exploitative.

This approach has been used by some offices of film classification as a basis for the consumer advice that they issue along with the classification certificate. (It is required to print this advice on posters, advertising and on the videocassette jackets.) The developing ability in adolescents and adults to apply the distinction between 'what' and 'how' is a development in 'sensitivity'.

If parents and educators can assist in the understanding of sensibilities and sensitivities and can develop a strong application of the distinction between 'what' and 'how' material is presented in cinema, we will have a better informed public who will appreciate consumer advice.

APPENDIX 2

SYNTHESIS OF A THREE DAY SEMINAR ON FILM AND CLASSIFICATIONS

The seminar's objectives were to learn some basics of the theory and language of the film medium and acquire some skills to develop proper attitudes in evaluating and classifying films. The practical outcome was to establish a Board of Classification.

At the outset, the recommendation was that a Film Classification Board should:

- have a sense of responsibility, representing people for people;
- be a professional group, with responsibility to and relationship with the cinema industry;
- to sustain a spirit of service and ministry for people.

Three basic models for classification boards could be considered:

- a Church group which issued classifications, ratings and guidelines, eg the Catholic Church in Canada in Montreal, the US Bishops' Committee in New York and Washington;
- government offices which issue classifications (sometimes binding by legislation) staffed by government public servants as in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom;
- private groups which have standing in the community like the Motion Picture Association ratings in the United States.

DAY ONE: OUR SENSIBILITIES

The day began with the importance of knowing our own personal response to films. The more we know and are able to acknowledge about how we feel and think while watching a film, the better our reviews and classifications will be. We all respond differently.

Movie clip:

The bike chase sequence from Terminator 2: Judgement Day.

Questions to be answered and discussed:

- Physical response: how did the clip make us feel physically, where and how? (Note, this includes what we see, hear... music, camera movements and editing...).
- Emotional response: what were the emotional feelings and where were they focussed?
- Intellectual response: were we stimulated by ideas, themes, issues?

This exercise has its limitations because it is taken out of context (although explained). We need to see the complete film if we are to make classification judgments or write reviews and

reports.

These responses are 'pre-moral', they are the responses of how we are. It is what we do with the responses that introduces moral issues.

A framework for assessing our sensibilities (that is, our interests, our tastes and our styles):

Energy - extraverted or introverted

Pace - decisive or data-gathering

Perceptions - sensate or intuitive

Decisions - thinking or feeling

CINEMA LANGUAGE

A functional knowledge of film production is required for a classifications board member if they are to be professional and credible. The credits at the end of a film - what do they mean? to what jobs do they refer?

The process of transforming ideas into films on the screen:

Producers

Directors

Writers

Actors

Directors of Photography/Lighting

Production designers

Costume designers

Sound engineers

Editors

Composers

Special Effects artists

After the film is completed:

Marketing

Distributing

Exhibiting

The Language and Grammar of Film (Visuacy parallelling Literacy) (with clips to illustrate these points)

Shots

Sequences

Camera Movements

Effects

Editing Techniques

Score

Soundtrack

A full-length movie to be screened solely for estimating our sensibilities and assessing how

the film 'works'.

DAY TWO: OUR SENSITIVITIES

The content of films and their appeal to basic human drives and values.

Cinema narratives, like all stories, appeal to basic human drives:

- the drive to be, to be alive, to be a person, to be a person of worth and dignity (and stories of the threats to life and the taking of life).
- the drive to love and be loved, in intimacy, in friendship, in family and in children (and the threats to love).
- the drive to be in society, to experience a culture (and the threats to society and culture); themes of history, patriotism, politics, war, social struggles...);
- the drive towards what is beyond us, to the transcendent, to what people call 'God'.

There is a reticence in the cinema industry in talking about God; there is often a hostility to talk of church and institutional religion. However, there is a great openness in using the word 'spirituality' and in speaking about personal spirituality and values.

In reviewing films, we need to be able to identify the basic human drives dramatised in the narrative.

Storytelling has developed and created different types of stories which audiences recognise. These are the 'genres' of storytelling. They include westerns (and oriental actioners), war films, historical romances, science-fiction, musicals and different types of comedy and drama.

Each genre has developed in its own way so that audiences recognise and take into account what can be called the 'conventions' of the genre.

Film genre and its conventions are another context for reviewing and classifying films accurately.

What is the role of a classifying authority?

- to control?
- to protect?
- to inform?
- to guide?

The key distinction to make in asking questions about classification is:

- WHAT is presented?
- HOW is it presented?

There is no limit to WHAT can be presented, any human experience, no matter how

disturbing can be the subject of art.

It is in the way the 'what' is presented, the HOW, that the limits arise.

The areas for concern in classification are usually:

- language
- sexual issues, including nudity
- violence
- other areas like drugs, emotional stress.

To be able to cope with moral and social issues (and their treatment) that the film reviewer and classifier are exposed to, they need to develop:

- a 'Delicate' sensitivity that is morally fine-tuned
- a 'Robust' sensitivity that is strong and resilient no matter how difficult the material is.

(A delicate sensitivity is not a 'fragile' sensitivity which has been over-protected from reality and could easily crack or break under pressure. A robust sensitivity is not a crass (or 'desensitised' sensitivity) which accepts everything indiscriminately.)

DAY THREE CENSORSHIP AND CLASSIFICATION

There is a tradition of censorship in most cultures, the intervention of a governing authority to prevent some material from being available to citizens. The Churches previously exercised censorship as regards the arts.

The first half of the 20th century saw Fascist governments and heavy censoring intervention. Since World War II, governments have moved to more democratic modes, with the end of the century seeing the fall of the Soviet Empire and the opening of China. The Churches have also experienced greater participation of the laity which has changed the exercise of authority. At the beginning of the 21st century, authority has to be seen to be earned and commands have to be credible.

There has been a shift from censoring films to providing classification information and guidance, consumer information for parents and others to gauge the suitability of a film.

For a classifications board there should be a wide spread of members:

educational background
varying fields of expertise
gender differences
varying sensibilities

AN AUSTRALIAN MODEL FOR CLASSIFICATION AND CONSUMER ADVICE (required for all advertising, posters, video jackets)

Classifications:

G. For general exhibition (not a category for children; it simply means that there is nothing to

disturb children under 12).

PG. Parental guidance is recommended for children under 12; the material is judged as suitable (in the sense that the material would not disturb) for children 12 and over.

M 15+. Recommended for audiences 15 and over.

MA 15+. Recommended for audiences 15 and over; however, by law, children under 15 must be accompanied by an adult.

R 18+ Recommended (and obligation by law on patrons and on cinema management or video store owners and staff) for audiences 18 and over. [This classification covers what is considered to be softcore pornographic material, which is simulated sex activity or hardcore material cut to appear as softcore.](#)

NVE. This classification is for non-violent erotica (violent erotica is forbidden) which is hardcore material (actual sexual activity) banned in the Australian states but available in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.

Note: some cultures prefer the age of 16 rather than 15 for the mature audiences classification and 21 rather than 18 for the adult classification.

Other countries have variations on these classifications which are government administered except the United States where a less developed system is administered by the Motion Picture Association.

Consumer advice:

Note: abbreviations for L

Language: L

Sex: S

Violence: V

1. Frequency of coarse language, sex or violence:

Frequent: f

Infrequent: i

2. Intensity of the treatment whether frequent or infrequent:

Low: l

Medium: m

High: h

3. Opinion of the board whether the material was appropriate in context:

Gratuitous (which means 'unjustified'): g

Justified: j

[Continuing media education will develop capacities for gauging who the film works and how controversial material can be judged gratuitous or justified.](#)

The Australian Film and Literature Classification Board regularly reviews its standards for

consumer information according to 'community standards' and publishes these standards. The classifications and consumer information reasons are available to the public and any review of the Board's judgments by the Review Board is published in the form of a report.

The next step is to watch a controversial movie so that small groups can be formed to do the work of a classifications board, giving a classification and giving the reasons with consumer advice and writing a report on the judgment.

[This synthesis is based on the work of Sister Consolata Manding FSP.](#)