

Selections from the Winter 2006 issue  
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## Refresh

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#### COMMENT by Andrew Dunn

With this issue of Refresh we take a look at spirituality and the cinema and the way engaging with reels of film throws light on life and faith.

There's a growing realisation that film and the cinema is playing a significant role for many people which reaches far beyond entertainment although, as Richard Blake notes, "professional critics, film scholars and reviewers as a group look on religious concerns with bemusement at best, contempt at worst and label such films as sentimental, pious and anachronistic". (*From Peepshow to Prayer*. Journal of Religion and Film (JRF) 6.2).

Despite that long held stance (still around today in some circles) there's a rapidly expanding literature on film and spirituality/religion/theology available in many libraries and book outlets with websites proliferating and courses now being offered in some universities.

There has been a monumental shift amongst churches and Christians in my lifetime regarding film watching. There was a time when in Sunday Schools kids were taught the song which posed the question "What would you say to Jesus if he returned today and found you standing in the cinema queue?" (Frost and Banks *Lessons from Reel Life*. 5). Today film is used in a wide variety of ways to stimulate thought and faith: clips used in sermons, film discussion groups, outings to theatres as social activities as well as serious study of film as comment on society, life issues, theology and religion as much as upon culture, struggle, liberation, bondage, story telling, documentaries and comment on current concerns and political issues. The range is huge and can't be ignored. The cinema is as influential today as the TV networks, radio and the print media, and probably more so with DVD's and videos available for decades after a film first saw the light of a projector.

It has grown from small beginnings in the 1890's when in France the Lumiere brothers first commercial screening of moving pictures took place in Paris in 1895 - at Number 14 Boulevard des Capucines (there's a plaque there commemorating the event). Today there are so many films flooding through our cinemas with both the creators and cinema chains needing to turn a quick profit that it's impossible to see more than a portion of them. As a result really good quality films seem to me to be fewer and farther apart. Film revenue from attendances at screenings is dropping. I read a comment that the Hoyts theatre chain now makes more money from their Candy Bars than from the Box Office for many screenings. Also, with the growth of use of DVD and Video players and home theatres most films are released for sale in DVD/Video format about the same time as films are released in the theatres with predictions that it won't be long before these sales out strip attendance income. So things are a'changing.

Nevertheless cinema plays important roles in people's lives. "I believe", writes George Miller, "cinema is now the most powerful secular religion and people gather in cinemas to experience things collectively the way they once did in church." (Frost & Banks 7). There is something communal in going to a theatre and being drawn deeply into a story that moves and challenges, entertains and invites reflection. But unlike church there's no time to gather around and talk it over with the others who've sat with us in the darkness and followed it through. "Films are like dreams" Miller continues. "We congregate with strangers in the darkness of the cinema, it's a kind of public dreaming, where we possess, most unconsciously, the more insistent concerns of our lives".

The NZ Herald Editorial for Easter Saturday this year discussed the theme of redemption and we include it in this issue. Redemption is not only the central theme of Christian faith but of many good and great movies as well. Indeed a creative question when watching a film is to ask in what ways it is redemptive for its characters and situations and for the viewers.

There are various ways in which Christians can use movies. Some see them as evangelistic opportunities, others as discussion starters, others as ways of engaging with issues of real life that might not otherwise be seen or engaged with. Some see films as "visual parables" (McNulty). What if the act of movie going and watching has become a religious activity for many with its own rituals and temples as John Lyden suggests? I notice how religiously large quantities of popcorn, lollies, soft drink or coffee and icecream are consumed at the cinema, almost sacramentally one suspects! What if the communal aspect of film viewing has become a modus operandi for creating community that has its own life and vigour?

I trust there's plenty of stimulating material in this issue to stir some creative thinking and ways of enjoying and using film to enrich life and faith.

#### FILMS, CINEMA AND FAITH

To some people, Hollywood films are the polar opposite of anything spiritual, as indeed, many of them are. Nevertheless I have experienced some sublime moments in a darkened theatre, moments that are truly spiritual in that they have lifted my spirit, inspired me to live better, reinforced my faith that we are not alone in the universe, or challenged me to see some aspect of life in a new way. For me the presence of the numinous, the mysterious, uncontrollable movement of the Holy Spirit, can take place in the theatre while viewing a good film as surely as in a sanctuary resounding with the music of Bach or Watts.

Edward McNulty. *Spirituality and Film* in The Electronic Great Awakening. P.1.  
www.pcusa.org/ega/more spiritualityfilm.htm

I believe cinema is now the most powerful secular religion and people gather in cinemas to experience things collectively the way they once did in church. The cinema storytellers have become the new priests. They're doing a lot of the work of our religious institutions which have concretised the metaphors in their stories, taken so much of the poetry, mystery and mysticism out of religious belief, that people look for other places to question their spirituality.

Michael Frost. *Eyes Wide Open*. Albatross Books. 1998. 100.

Where do contemporary Americans receive our values and our images of ourselves and one another, of our social world, and of our relation to the natural world? As a society, we do not primarily get our informing images from the walls of church as historical Christians did; we get them from the media culture in which we live. Movies, television, magazines, and billboards saturate us with images, images that have accumulative effects.

Margaret Miles. *Seeing and Believing - Religion and Values in the Movies*. Beacon Press 1996. 3

If the root of art is storytelling, then the taproots are longings. Longings for such things as truth, beauty, romance, adventure. We long to find the true north that will guide us through this life and into the next. We long to see some vestige of Paradise that hasn't been spoiled by sin. We long to love and be loved, truly, purely, romantically. We long for something noble inside us to be awakened, rousing the hero within us to answer the call to adventure. A screenwriter takes these abstract longings and turns them into a series of concrete images.

*Reflections on the Movies*. Cook. 2000. 31.

A cinema, if it's run with the right intention, can do an enormous amount to bring a strong sense of identity to a community. Any art form could do this, but cinema is the easiest one to work with. You can put on a Gilbert and Sullivan - but you can't do it every weekend.

Andrew Pike, Report on country cinemas for the NSW Film and TV Office. In Frost and Banks, *Lessons From Reel Life*. Openbook Pub., Adelaide. 2001. 16.

The interaction between faith and film is more about a dynamic encounter than a critical analysis of fine detail. It is about identifying those points of similarity and difference, comfort and challenge, harmony and dissonance that exist between the film story and faith story of the viewer. This emphasis on encounter preserves the integrity of film and acknowledges its potential to affect a person's spiritual life.

Ian Maher. *Faith and Film*. Grove Books Ltd. No. Ev59 2002. 11.

I don't think we fully understand yet the need of people to gather together to listen to a story and the power of that act.

George Miller.

The question remains: If this is a post-Christian, post-religious secular world, at least in the industrialised West, why do the movies go back to the well of religiosity so often - and at times despite themselves - so effectively and ultimately so profitably? And why do audiences respond so favourably as frequently as they do?

Richard Blake. *From Peepshow to Prayer: Toward a Spirituality of the Movies*. Journal of Religion and Film. Vol. 6 No. 2.

I am not ... the first person writing about religion and film to observe that there is a *religious power* present in the cinema. However, no one has systematically and thoroughly developed this insight as a basis for developing a method for religion and film studies, ... a method of understanding film as performing a religious function. ... I have viewed film as having an independent religious significance (and not simply) as dialogue partner for theology.

John C. Lyden. *Film as Religion*. NYUP 2003 3ff

#### FILMS AS PARABLES by Martin Stewart

We live in an image culture. Moving images are available at the flick of a switch and have been for a good long time now. These images have a huge influence over us. I am wary of them because of this. They can be and often are used to manipulate people. They are very powerful because people believe that what they see is what is true. I don't hold to this view. Images, like word of mouth, are only ever interpretations of events. Lies can be told with images as well as words. But the converse is also true - images can convey truth.

Jesus lived in an image culture as well. He didn't have movie cameras but the stories he told fired the imaginations of his listeners. Living as we do in a moving image culture is quite a lot of fun (I love movies) but it is also costly because something of the imagination is lost whenever we project. A well-told story that we hear enables us to create our own landscapes and people-scapes. Whereas, whenever we project, our imaginations are confined by the film-maker's vision. I enjoyed Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy very much. But I didn't need it. Reading the books several times in the past had been quite satisfying and I could see people and places without the aid of his cameras. And, unlike every female I know, I didn't like Jackson's Aragorn - the voice was all wrong! Nor, for that matter have I ever seen an adequate portrayal of Jesus in the movies. The best one I can think of was in *Godspell*, but I suspect that was only because I liked his tee-shirt!

I have begun in this way because I think that some kind of warning is necessary about what visual stories can and cannot achieve. Films have limitations. Films are not truth, just as stories are not truth. Films are not the definers of morality, thus we can watch them without that expectation! Films are not the determiners of our values, thus we should think and talk about them and help rob them of any false notions they have of their importance. Instead, films give us insights into what it means to be human, and often in provocative ways. We can learn about ourselves and also have other possibilities opened for us.

Alan E. Lewis articulates what I am trying to say very well: "Stories [parables] are extended analogies; and by their nature and form as stories they openly announce that they are *only* analogies, merely approximations and pointers to the truth. The *directness* with which narrative approaches us, is matched by the *indirectness* with which it approaches God. In consequence, stories both acknowledge God is beyond description and comprehension, and yet demonstrate vividly that God *can* be known and understood." (*Between Cross & Resurrection. A Theology of Holy Saturday* p21). Alan Lewis also makes the comment that parables are intended to shock us, shake us, change us and transform us. Film offers us the same possibility that parable does. Jesus, when he walked on earth, didn't have film, but he does now. By his Spirit we believe that Jesus speaks into our lives. What is he saying through film?

Is it reasonable to say that every film has a parabolic possibility in it? Why not? Even a film that is dark and hopeless offers us opportunity to ponder what light and hope could bring into the situation.

Of course some films will offer windows into the ways of God more easily than others. Some will firmly point us to the ways of God in how they address certain issues and the lives of certain people. They will be safer movies for an audience who will only tolerate movies with easily accessed morality themes (and will probably have been made by Disney Corporation!) Most kids movies open up the possibility for discussion about right and wrong. But I hope that there might also be the opportunity to go beyond 'God as the definer of right and wrong.' Can we help our young people to look out for the Christ-like characters in movies? All people can look for the signs in a character's journey that reveal the many ways that God's Spirit of love can and does prompt all of us.

I love the way that movies give us insights into the dilemmas of human life. They can expose the dimensions of evil, temptation, anger and lust, as well as the triumphs of love, loyalty, compassion and hope. Films are also great revealers of our folly (especially within the church) - we meet too few robust earthy Christians in the movies. What does that say about how we come across in society? For my money the best portrayal of God in the movies has been by Morgan Freeman in *Bruce Almighty*. Why does the church not see the deep sense of fun that is in God?

As in Jesus' parables, movies often provide us with insight into the ways of God through the characters of the little, the least, and the lost. Through them we are enabled to face the complexities of our own struggles. They can be prompters for prayer, reflection and growth. What a resource they are for the church to be able to engage with our culture!

Here's a few movies that offer some opportunity for reflection:

**Kind of tame ones:** *Babette's Feast*, *The Man Who Sued God*, *Bruce Almighty*, *Dead Man Walking*, *The Spitfire Grill*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Billy Elliot*, *ET*, *The Power of One*, *Lost in Translation*, *Places of the Heart* (The communion scene at the end is a powerful witness to the final hope we have in Christ in whom all things will be made new), and *Millions* (where hope and imagination act as vehicles for redemption, in contrast to the 'money falling from the sky' nonsense so prevalent in our culture).

**Rougher ones:** (for those who have problems with sex, blasphemy, violence or foul language)

*Love Actually* (I love the way this movie unfolds the complex nature of relationships, people's choices and the possibilities of love... Rowan Atkinson's angel character is wonderful!), *Dead Poet's Society* (Choose life!), *Amelie* (I love the alternative reality she sees and brings about - kind of like Jesus' 'kingdom of God'), *Life is Beautiful* (does the same thing by creating a parallel reality that offers a child hope and freedom), *A Very Long Engagement* (blessed hope!), and *The Village* (can we really live apart from the world, and what does love do with fear?).

**Very provocative movies where 'God' turns up unexpectedly:** *Once Were Warriors* (see what Grace provokes), *Magnolia*, *Dogma*, and *Crash*. I watched *Crash* as I wrote this article and loved the way that hope and redemption came from unexpected places. The opening lines offer some insights into what we lack in modern society: "It's the sense of touch... any real cities you walk you brush past people - people bump into you. In LA nobody touches you... we're always behind this metal and glass... I think we miss that touch so much that we crash into each other just so that we can feel something." What would the church want to say regarding what the transforming love of God is all about?

Why not get a small group together and explore the ways that films can challenge, provoke and even witness to the way that God is with us in Christ. Work out your 'taste' parameters (like, can you cope with the ugliness of the world or not? and are you able to cope with the possibility that God might speak through a film maker who does not respect your traditions, viewpoints and notions of morality?); arrange manageable weekly or fortnightly evenings, maybe in a four session block for a start; and choose a series of movies to watch and talk about setting aside a good half hour after the movie.

Here are some possibilities of things to look for...

What echoes of the ways of God emerge in the film?

What has been Christ-like in what we have seen? Is this a surprise?

What insights have we received into the human condition and our own struggles?

What most challenges us? Have our frames of reference changed having watched this?

Where would we begin to offer theological insight into the situations presented?

In what ways might the church begin to grapple with the worlds that have been revealed to us?

Have fun at the movies!

## JESUS AND PARABLES

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables ...

Mark 4:30-34. NRSV 1990

## Psalm 119:19 I am but a pilgrim here on earth:

*how I need a map - and your commands are my chart and guide.*

I watched the film, *Travelling Birds*  
 overwhelmed by beauty  
 awed by design features which see  
 lightweight bundles  
 of bones and feathers  
 brave storms  
 headwinds  
 hunger  
 exhaustion  
 cross thousands  
 of miles of ocean  
 to arrive at destinations  
 planted deep within  
 by you, God

I can get lost anywhere  
 jokingly convinced  
 you put my direction-finder  
 in upside down  
 or that you'd temporarily run out  
 when it was my turn

It helps to allow myself time  
 to get lost at least twice  
 on the way to new places  
 and not to mind the helplessness

of honestly not knowing  
 north from south  
 I think of this life  
 as a long journey, God  
 of times when there seems to be  
 no sense to the road  
 when signposts are few  
 and eyes are weary  
 of searching through dark clouds

But always your voice reassures  
 your smile promising you're with me  
 that you'll never leave  
 but see me safely home

I know when I cross  
 the last border  
 when temporary goodbyes  
 have been waved  
 my pilgrim days will end  
 in the place of your heart  
 the place of deep comfort  
 the place you dreamed of bringing me  
 before the first flower  
 perfumed Eden's garden

Anna Johnstone.  
*Crosswalk*. 2006. P20.

#### "THERE AND BACK AGAIN" by Doyll and Lorolie Andrews

Years ago I listened as my new friend, John Franklin, told my young children stories about his home, New Zealand. The stories fired my imagination and created a longing to see this amazing, wondrous place. For the next 30 years, however, raising four children on a pastor's salary meant that reading about New Zealand and hearing John's stories were the only way I could experience the wonders of New Zealand.

All that changed when Peter Jackson made the Lord of the Rings trilogy. In college I had read Tolkien for the first time. The characters and the land of Middle Earth came to life in my imagination. Even then I could relate to the themes of pilgrimage, fellowship, loyalty, and grace that permeated the books. Then came the day that I stood outside the theatre waiting to see the movie that would bring these two disparate pieces of my life together. As we stood there, I told my wife some of the stories I had heard years before about the country whose land we were about to visit. My heart raced as the beauty of the place unfolded on the screen.

Then last year, God provided us with resources to plan and take a trip to New Zealand/Middle Earth. We prepared. The map we ordered was one that noted the film sites. We secured Ian Brodie's *Lord of the Rings Location Guidebook*. We watched all three movies over again with map and book in hand, paying special attention to the surroundings. What had been for us a "setting" became its own powerful presence, a character in the action, a shaper of the drama. Even before reaching its shores, New Zealand had reached to us.

But we had no idea how the land would unfold in the drama itself. And we had no idea how *The Lord of the Rings* would draw us forth on a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage thirty years in the making.

Our first stop after leaving Auckland (April 12, 2005) was Matamata - Hobbiton - a logical place to start, since that's where Tolkien and Jackson had started their story of the journey. We looked forward to walking the green fields of the Shire. What we discovered was that the original sets were gone. In their place was a tourist site that bore little resemblance to either the story or the Shire. Its poor attempt to re-create the beauty that the master had created is typical of what we humans try to do. We try to recreate what God has created without the Master's help and end up with an empty shell of what had once been. So we decided to simply read the brochure and use our imaginations.

After that disappointment, we arrived at Palmerston North in the dark, in the middle of a rainstorm, and pulled up in front of the house. Out came John Franklin, running barefoot to welcome us enthusiastically, warmly, with dinner, into the fellowship of his family. We were *home* even though we had never been there before. That, too, is how God welcomes - extravagantly, warmly, even when we arrive late, in the dark, in the rain, often lost. We pull up in front of a well lighted house, and the householder runs out, warmly welcoming us *home* to a place we've never been before, but have long dreamed of being.

John and Trish took us to our next *Lord of the Rings* film sites in Tongariro National Park. Mt. Ruapahu, wrapped in clouds, dominated the horizon! We drove up the mountain through fields of rock rubble. We parked, eager to climb to the top of the volcano, but, sadly, 113 km/h winds had shut the chairlift down for the day. Consequently, we explored the areas where the Orks had marched through Mordor, taking Frodo and Sam prisoner. We, too, were taken captive by the dark, ominous, jagged rocks looming forebodingly around us. But the soaring rock escarpment and the beauty of the valley outstretched below snatched our breath away. This monumental place transported us above the world into epic dimensions.

We found the stream where Gollum had fished. The water was low, so I climbed over the fence and, crouching between the boulders, imitated Gollum's movements, remembering how Frodo and Sam had watched Gollum, torn between doubting this misshapen creature and wanting to trust him because he was their only guide.

A few feet farther, the stream cascaded over the brink in a tall, ribbon waterfall, which slashed knife-sharp into the small pool below. It had been in that pool that Gollum's battle with trust had taken place - should he obey Frodo's call? His master said to come to him and trust him. But when he did, he was immediately arrested by Faramir. Writhing, he screamed at Frodo and accused his master of betraying him, not realizing that Frodo had saved his life from Faramir's archers.

Again and again as we traveled and stopped at LOTR sites, the location and the story spoke to us, sometimes loudly and some times quietly, of trusting God. All Gollum had to go on was his master's call to take an action he did not fully understand. For us, standing in that place and reflecting on it later, the lesson resonated deeply. At times in life and in ministry all that is left for us is to hold on to our call and respond faithfully, even if we cannot see where it may take us.

At dusk, we followed the road signs to the Rangitikei River where sections of the River Anduin were filmed. Trusting the signs, we traveled kilometers into the back country over a twisting, seemingly rarely traveled road. At the bridge the gigantic gorge took our breath away. We gazed up at the sheer cliff walls and down at the river which had carved them - flowing some 80 meters below.

As we walked off the bridge, we saw a sign for Bungee jumping. Like the drive to the gorge and the fellowship's sojourn down the river, it was a lesson in trust and commitment. It read, "If you can't jump, turn around and push yourself off." How often in life have I have faltered, not trusting God, afraid to step out in faith. Even after following God's signs, I linger on the edge until I finally push myself off and find I am held and supported by the cords of God's fellowship.

*The trust-lessons kept coming. In the Queenstown area we had dreamed of riding horseback into Rivendale, forest home of the elves. So the disappointment was huge when the stables said, "No horses available." We consoled ourselves with the thought that we could still drive from Te Anau to Queenstown and do the touristy Shot-over River jet boat thrill ride that a friend at home had said was a "must do." While I make phone reservations for that, however, Doyll found a brochure for a jet boat ride there in the Te Anau area. He held out the bright yellow flyer, "How about we take this one instead?" I said, "Fine with me, but Doyll are you sure you want to give up the Shot-over ride?" He nodded, "I think so."*

*So I called Luxmore Jet Boat Rides. Did they have room? "Sure at 1:00 p.m." Ahmm. Anything open in the morning? "Could be. What time? 11:00?" I held my breath: "Like, we're ready now." It was 10:00. "Okay. We'll be there at 10:30."*

*A bright yellow shuttle bus pulled up right on time. The driver greeted us and opened the door for us. We were Mark's only passengers. As we drove along, I spotted some Lord of the Rings film-site books on the console. "Why do you have those books here?" "Well, 90 percent of the people who come on our rides are interested. We show you four film sites."*

*I looked at my husband, "DID YOU KNOW THIS?!" He smiled and nodded yes. I enveloped him with a hug and a kiss. "You knew this! That's why you gave up the Shot-over ride?" Yes. Here I thought he had sacrificed, but he knew there was something better.*

*At the river launch site Doyll told the boat pilot how when we'd cancelled our Shotover Ride, they'd told us we were making a mistake, that this ride couldn't begin to rival the thrill of their ride, and were we sure we wanted to cancel? The boat pilot smiled, "Yeah, we don't claim to be that wild."*

*And he proceeded to give us the ride of our lives. "When I signal like this (he circled his hand in the air above his head), hold on to the bar in front of you." It was a spin, almost 360° - at 50 kilometers an hour! I screamed and laughed, "Could you do it again?" He did. Time after time! We got our thrill!*

*But the rain came, pelting us. "Do you want to go back?" Lex asked us. "No," we said, "We have our rain gear."*

*We proceeded along the Waiau River, used to portray parts of the River Anduin. Lex showed us film spots as we imagined the Fellowship starting their journey from Lothlorien down the same river we were traveling.*

*As we emerged onto Lake Manapouri, the rain had stopped, and across the lake loomed mountains, swathed in mists. Here, for us, were the "Misty Mountains," majestic, mysterious, ethereal. "The grey mist lifted - and we saw in the distance a white shore, a green land..." Lex cut the motor, and we rocked in silence for long moments, the waves lapping at the boat. "I've been on this river 30 years," he said quietly, "And I've never seen it like this."*

*We floated in silence, aware of the amazing way God had brought together Tolkien's story, Jackson's movie, and 30 years of dreams into three weeks of incredibly grace-filled experiences.*

*Here was the highlight of our journey to New Zealand - people, land, rain, river, lake, mountains, and the story all conspiring to draw back the veil on God's plan - blessing us far beyond what we could have dreamed.*

#### HOPE - SAMWISE GAMGEE'S SPEECH

The Two Towers DVD - track 52.

Frodo Baggins: "I can't do this, Sam".

Sam: "I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr Frodo, the ones that really matter. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was with so much bad happened?"

But in the end it is only a passing thing. This shadow, even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stay with you, that meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going because they were holding on to something".

Frodo: "What are we holding on to, Sam?"

Sam: "That there's some good in this world, Mr Frodo, and it's worth fighting for!"

#### YOUNG ADULTS GROUP AND FILM by Digby Wilkinson

I love film. I enjoy escaping to the living room when the kids are in bed, at school or some other place and absconding to the digital world of a talented director. This being the case, it would be fair to say I have seen a few films. However, because I'm in my forties, I'm not completely of the generation that is referred to as 'post-literary' because I also enjoy reading. Yet, I will be honest and declare I like a good movie over a good book because it's visual, audible, emotional and cognitively engaging in very short period of time! Maybe I am just lazy? Yet I think my declaration is in fact one of the great challenges to Christian spirituality in our visual world of digital video.

Experience tells me that the challenge of a good book is more inspiring than any film can ever be, principally because we need to invest so much time and attention to truly engage with a written story. If you like, we are forced to create visual scenes from our own interpretations of the material, thus making the experience unique. This also has the effect of engaging us emotionally, cognitively and critically at much deeper levels than any film requires of us; in film the interpretive work is already done. So, given the sheer volume of films available through cinema, DVD and video, it seemed like a good idea to teach the art of spiritual reflection and critique to the young adults who raid our home on a weekly basis.

A little over two years ago, Jane and I decided to begin a young adult's home group for our church community. By young adult I mean people roughly between the ages of 19 and 30ish. Even though we had run such groups before, we decided that the group activities would need to be multi-faceted in order to both keep people's attention and be effective in facilitating any kind of spiritual growth or nourishment. So, one of the monthly activities is to watch a movie. Actually, film has been an integral part of what we do and has been more than worthwhile if the conversation and ongoing referral back to certain movies is anything to go by. We usually watch a movie one night a month (other nights follow a loose programme of spiritual formation, bible study, guest speakers, social stuff) with reflection happening straight after or the following week.

There are three areas to our discussion of the film we watch. Firstly, what message is being communicated about life's themes? For example - love, hope, hate, the human heart, forgiveness, redemption, joy, celebration, creation, beauty and priorities; all images that are foundational in Christian expression. Secondly, in what way did the film shape the way we 'felt' about ethical behaviour? That is, what were the subtle messages that bypassed our critical thinking? For example, in many movies we noticed that it was easy to accept abhorrent 'means' because good 'ends' were achieved in the story. In such cases our emotions overrode our critical faculties and it was only in later discussion that we could see how a film's values were incompatible with Christian life despite the happy ending. Finally, in what ways were we engaged spiritually? What did we feel about the spiritual themes and what did we think about them? Once again it is the discussion afterwards helps us to see the things we missed along the way. Group insights are the heart of the discussion.

At a practical level we have to confront the reality that most of us don't watch movies to critically pull them apart, rather we watch them for pure enjoyment. This being the case it is rare that we choose something everyone likes. For some people only Jane Austin can spin their wheels. Others are only inspired by Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis, and then there are the few who watch anything - indiscriminately. So, even though we ask the group for ideas about what to watch, we choose on the basis of two purposes. Firstly, we watch film to see what we can discover about God and life as people embodying the life of Christ in the present. And secondly, to learn the art of enjoying and critically evaluating film, acknowledging that useful critique can only be helpful when done with others. Having run our group the way we have for two years now, we can see the benefits unfolding in the group as people discuss and listen, and also for individuals who now reflect more fully on their own experience of media in general.

From my perspective, watching movies and engaging in the discussion afterwards, has reinforced our belief that we cannot do the Christian life in any honest way on our own. Even though I think that I am reasonably aware of my blind spots in life, discussing the values, ethics and spiritual insights

found in movies with people from different backgrounds and ages constantly reminds me how 'defined' my view and experience of daily life is. I observe that this is the experience of those in our group too.

Below is a list of movies that we have watched over the last 18 months. I have excluded those considered abject failures.

- Les Miserables
- Hotel Rwanda
- Born into Brothels
- What Dreams May Come
- Colour of Paradise
- The Station Agent
- I am Sam
- Spitfire Grill
- Maria Full of Grace
- The Legend of Bagger Vance
- Luther

#### APPROACHING THE CINEMA PRAYERFULLY by Edward McNulty

At my film and theology seminars I try to persuade people: to see a significant film at a theater first, rather than waiting for it to come out on video. To enter the theater with the same attitude or spiritual preparation that they enter a church sanctuary. (As with worship, a silent, short prayer for illumination is appropriate; and at the end of the film, if it has turned out as hoped, a prayer of thanksgiving.) To look for some sign or symbol that the same Spirit involved in the process of making the film will also speak to the hearts and minds of the audience as well. And to try to go with someone else, even better, a church group, so that they can share with and enlighten one another concerning what they have experienced. This latter is as important to appropriate fully the film experience as it is for the Christian in specifically Christian worship and study. "All of us will see more than one of us," is almost a mantra for me. Not every film can be a channel for the Spirit to touch our hearts. And not everyone will be so touched by even a visual parable film. There is always the matter of the right, or kairos, moment, which might be different because of our unique backgrounds and personalities. But for those with "eyes that see and ears that hear," open to the gentle stirring of the Spirit, sooner or later, even their film viewing can become a time of spiritual enrichment.

From The Electronic Great Awakening. Spirituality and Film. [www.pcusa.org/ega/more/spiritualityfilm.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/ega/more/spiritualityfilm.htm)

#### THE CAVE by Warren Deason

Many writers on film quote Plato's famous allegory of the cave (*Republic* Book 7).

Imagine, he says, a cave that contains prisoners who are shackled by their hands and feet. Their head is also restrained in such a way as they can only face in one direction, toward the wall of the cavern.

Beyond them is a fire and, between the prisoners and the fire, a walkway upon which are carried all manner of objects. These objects cast moving shadows which play out on the wall in front of the prisoners and the captives take these to be real objects.

Those who carry the objects also speak, their voices echo around the cavernous chamber, the prisoners believing that these voices come from the shadows they see on the cave wall.

The allegory goes on to talk about what might happen if the captives were released and what they would make of the situation if they were led into the light. But it is the first section of the allegory which prefigures in a quite uncanny way the cinematic experience. What seems to be real and often intensely vivid, is really only insubstantial, illusory, a mere shadow on the screen. Yet the power of these flickering images and their capacity to mimic reality is one of film's powerful effects.

As one writer put it, "Films are felt by the audience long before they are understood" (Marsh & Ortiz, *Explorations in Theology and Film*. p38)

*Religion and Film*. Report on sabbatical leave. Westminster College, Cambridge.

#### THE 'WHAT IF...?' OF MOVIES by Jeff Whittaker

Let me confess: While I enjoy watching movies I am neither a movie addict nor a movie expert. I am, however, someone who regularly samples a range of movies, often at the recommendation of my kids. As well, because I lecture part-time for Carey Baptist College in the area of Christian spirituality, I have been exploring how movies deal with spiritual themes. I use clips of movies to enhance my teaching.

What, then, have I discovered as I have reflected on my movie diet? Interestingly, but maybe not surprisingly, many movies deal with spiritual themes. Perhaps if I were to say that movies are inherently mythic, then maybe most or all deal with spiritual themes - like the battle between good and evil - at some level. That's not particularly helpful, and so I've been looking for more obvious parallels between movies and the Christian gospel. In some movies like *The Lion*, *the Witch*, and *the Wardrobe*, the parallels are obvious and intentional. *The Matrix* presents another obvious parallel, though in a darker - even apocalyptic - vein. There was a time when I considered that movies of this ilk would furnish me with opportunities to discuss with sceptical friends the truth of the gospel. The few occasions when this has actually happened has led me to value my movie watching more for the opportunities to explore aspects of my own Christian world-view. In particular, I have found myself asking: What if this view being presented here actually captures something of the gospel that I have been unable to see clearly before now?

It is from this perspective, then, that I would like to describe the impact of four movies. The first is a satire on American evangelical Christianity called *Saved*. Set in a Christian high school, it explores the relationships between a group of Christian teenagers grappling with issues such as faith, teenage pregnancy (interestingly in parallel with Mary's pregnancy with Jesus), homosexuality, conformism, and other issues. As I reflected on the movie, I found myself asking: What if the outcasts actually succeeded in creating a truer community of love than the kids who remained stuck in their undeveloped religiosity? What if our religious structures or behavioural expectations predispose us to hypocrisy, rather than the freedom promised us in the gospel? One powerful image has remained. Just before the end of the movie, Hilary-Faye - the main 'good girl' character, drives her vehicle into a huge plywood image of smiling Jesus. The head snaps off the image, and Hilary-Faye staggers off into darkness. For me, this communicated the beginning of a new stage of Hilary-Faye's spiritual journey, one no longer dominated by a cheesy image of Jesus.

Next on my list is a crazy movie called *Dogma*. The people who made this movie obviously had a lot of fun. (Drawing on my background in sewage engineering, I enjoyed the depiction of the shit-demon, an entity that arose from a festering, overflowing toilet to accost people with excrement projectiles, only to be subdued by air-freshening asphyxiation.) But underneath the almost slap-stick and certainly irreverent humour was a serious question: What if God was put in the position of contradicting justice because of undeserved grace? Would the universe indeed dissolve in the throes of the divine tension? This raises all sorts of questions for me, particularly around issues of heaven and hell. While some may find it tempting to simply assign hell to oblivion, that's too easy a solution which doesn't honour the need our human brains have for thinking in dyadic patterns. (See *The Mystical Mind* by Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg.)

I was alerted to the movie *Contact* by a student to whom I taught Christian spirituality at BCNZ's Christchurch Branch a few years ago. In the past I have tended to be a little impatient with movies that postulate the existence of aliens. What I now realise is that many of these movies allow us to explore issues around divine/human interaction. But what really caught my eye in *Contact* was the struggle the principle character - atheistic scientist Ellie Arroway - had to convince her peers that her contact with aliens really did occur when all the evidence that they had to go on suggested that she could not be right. I found myself asking: What if our efforts to persuade our unbelieving contemporaries is doomed to be like this, until they themselves experience what we have experienced? Have we, in our desire to be absolutely clear in our explanations of how faith works, obscured the opportunity to help people explore their religious experiences. This is the contention of Paul Hawker in his book *Secret Affairs of the Soul*, in which he describes how Christians and churches are often the last place people choose to reflect upon their spiritual experiences because of our perceived intolerance of anything that doesn't fit our models.

Finally, I enjoyed Jim Carey's depiction of being given divine powers in *Bruce Almighty*. The plot revolves around a character called Bruce whose accusations about being able to do God's work better than God land him with the opportunity to do so. The results of course are chaos. Whenever I find myself musing: What if I got the opportunity to straighten out this situation; then we'd see some action? I remember this movie and enjoy a chuckle at my pretensions.

In conclusion of this brief review, then, dear reader, let me state again that I enjoy watching movies. But as well as that, I enjoy movies for the opportunity they give me to reflect on aspects of my own faith that maybe would remain undisturbed otherwise. Maybe you can try the: What if...? experience next time you watch a movie that seems to put forward a spiritual theme.

## THINKING ABOUT MOVIES

Here are some terms and ideas that help in analysing films:

**Characterisation** describes the processes in a film by which characters are introduced to us, through their actions, thoughts, words, relationships, attitudes, and the way these are developed throughout a film.

**Auteur theory** is a French technique of the 1950's for critiquing film which sees the director as the major influence in the development of the film. We could look, for example, at the influence of Woody Allen on all his films and note how different they are from Alfred Hitchcock's; or Nikki Caro's style to Peter Jackson's; or Andrew Adamson's with Roger Donaldson's style. Auteur theory is not centre stage in film analysis these days but is worth some reflection and discussion.

**Reception Theory** argues that meaning is not only inherent in the text but also takes place between viewer and film. Viewer and film do not exist in a vacuum as they both function within their own particular cultural settings which shape the encounter and the meaning constructed by the viewer.

**Historical and technological perspectives** allow us to understand a film in the light of when it was made and the level of technology available to the director at the time. E.g. today the increasing use of computer graphics in Andrew Adamson's and Peter Jackson's movies give them advantages over earlier attempts to make the Narnia film and King Kong.

**Blockbuster** movies, in vogue since the 1960's, enable lavish and quite spectacular productions aimed at attracting huge crowds and so making large financial returns which can then fund films that might make a loss for the production studios.

**Genre** is a term for organising films according to type - western, historical, comedy, romance, avant-garde, documentary, feminist, science fiction, post colonial, thriller, war movie, biographical, romance, religious and so on.

**Conventions** are the standard ways of doing things - the established habits of visual appearance, editing, story structure etc. If these informal rules are broken the film is in some ways *unconventional*.

**Semiotics** is the study of signs, i.e. how films signify what they are saying to us. It can be non-verbal, visual, body language, mood, light and darkness, film angles and shots, the richness or starkness of a scene and so on. Directors use these signs to "speak" to the viewers and pass messages that are often non-verbal. Meaning is often conveyed to us by the relationship built up between the signifier and the signified - e.g. we know we're in London when we see a shot of Big Ben; we know it's about drought when we see the dried out corpse of an animal in sand; that we're in the tropics with a shot of lush growth and a humming bird; or in a Maori pa with a fleeting shot of a meeting house. Poverty can be depicted by an empty fridge or pantry. A more refined use of semiotics is the development of codes used in some films that only the initiated see and understand and which creates a cult following of those in the know.

**Ideology** is a set of values and beliefs depicting a nation, era, culture, religion, society, political stance etc. which underlie a movie.

**Mise-en-scene** is a theatre term denoting the staging of a play. In films it refers to the setting, costuming, lighting, and the collection of things that go to make up a scene in a film and which give scenes their uniqueness. And every item, costume, light angles are carefully selected - even the pictures on the walls, the flowers in the vase, the background in a shot.

Two good books on reading these in films are *Cinema Studies* by Susan Hayward and *Fresh Approaches to Film* by Brian McDonnell (see booklist for details).

## OPENINGS

An interesting thing to do is to watch the first 10 minutes of a number of film videos/DVD's and see these elements in action as the audience is drawn into the story and given enough information to begin to make sense of the movie. There's no end to the ways directors do this with their viewers and it's fun to watch them do it to us, for us.

## CINEMA AND CONTEMPLATION by Andrew Dunn

My earliest memory of going to the cinema was to see the Disney film *Bambi*, probably about 1945. It captured my imagination, gripped me with the story line and frightened me alarmingly (with the bush fire sequence threatening Bambi, the little deer). Then (a few years later) came *Scott of the Antarctic* which did much the same things as well as hooking me into things Antarctic from that day to this. At the same time we began to see the Fact and Faith Films which used time lapse photography, brilliant colour and some of the traditional proofs of the existence of God theory to draw us to faith through a variety of wildlife and creation themes - quite stunning visually, and gripping for thirsty young hearts seeking God.

In hindsight I came to realise that what was going on amidst the gripping newish (for me) medium of film and its artistry and enticements was a feeding of the contemplative side of my nature. Yes, there was intellectual stimulation as well, and the delights of good stories which has never ceased. But a common thread for me has been the expansion of my contemplative nature. And scenes, drama and story in films could trigger this awe, wonder and delight as readily as creation, wildlife, poetry or music and worship! And still does.

Sidney Poitier in his autobiography (*The Measure of a Man*. Simon and Schuster. 2000) writes, "In the professional theatre, audiences are known to have been swept out of their individual realities and transported to imaginary places and to imaginary times that appear as real as any place or time out of their own experience. ... On more than a few occasions I was present, on one side of the footlights or the other, when actors and audience conspired to make magic. Time and again I witnessed some unknown force take hold and keep us transfixed to the evening's end, then release us gently and send us home with gifts of remembrances to last for a lifetime." (p231).

The cinema can do the same.

So how do we use film to help expand our contemplative hearts, develop our contemplative faculties and to adopt a more contemplative stance in life? If contemplation is "a long loving look at the real" then reel gazing and reflection is a wonderful tool for aiding this expansion in our lives. Film makers take all the stuff of life and experience as they craft their *mise-en-scene* which draw the viewers with all kinds of locations, scenes, settings, artistry, costumes, devices and camera work, light and shade on a ride through the writers and directors' views of reality. The power of Andrew Adamson's imagination in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* not only delights the eye but captures the heart and imagination as well, not least for those whose spiritual development was aided by C.S. Lewis' Narnia books.

So the first step is to go to the movies and become absorbed in films, albeit selecting the good and rich viewing from the rubbish.

Conversation about a film after viewing it is helpful - often over a cuppa with a friend or in a group who have seen it. Reflection and journal writing aids the process, as does telling the story or describing the gripping parts to someone.

Below is a format for group discussion. However, it's amazing how these discussions take off without the use for a guide.

Another format we have used is to create a film day where a group gathers to watch a film in the morning and then writes up a few thoughts and reactions. After lunch these discoveries and reactions are discussed for a couple of hours. The discussion guide can include questions about the contemplative and grace-full elements of the film which invariably stimulate insights.

I remember a discussion on film at a ministry school some years ago when the speaker made the statement that all good films have a strong element of grace flowing through them. Quite a thought, and if true it should not surprise us when they trigger awe and wonder at God's grace at work also in the viewing event and afterwards.

In the Men's loo after seeing *As It Is In Heaven* another guy said to me after some (relative) silence, "What an amazing movie?" It was, it is, and it left us both deeply reflective.

Stimulating our contemplative natures does a number of important things:

- it develops the faculty by which we sense the presence of God.
- it opens us up to the love and grace of God.
- it opens us to a wider view of life and faith.
- it expands our understanding of prayer and relationship with God.
- it develops our ability to sense what is shallow, shonky, unworthy, sinful or evil however nicely packaged and presented.
- it challenges our social, cultural, religious and theological prejudices with the largesse of grace.

And all of this aids our growth and understanding of life, people and this world into which Christ came as the living Word of God amongst us.

## FILM DISCUSSION STARTERS

### Themes

- What theological themes caught our attention?
- What aspects of *the human condition* did it bring into focus for us?

### Genre, Precedent and Plot

- What genre or intersection of genres would we describe this film as belonging to?
- Are there other films or stories that this film draws on, makes reference to or develops?
- In what ways does it extend or does it just imitate them?
- How did the plot develop anticipation, tension, and resolution for us?

### Character

- What Psychological or theological archetypes do we see in the main characters, or others?
- Who do we identify with and in what aspects?
- Who would we like to be like, and in what ways?
- Who, and in what ways, can be seen as a Christ figure?
- How are the characters redeemed in some way?
- In what ways is characterization developed?

### Powerful Images and Sacred Moments

- What images captured our attention and with what are they overlaid in our experience?
- Were there any sacred moments for us, and in what direction did they move us?
- What in this film enabled contemplation for us?
- Was there anything that annoyed or disturbed us?

### Afterglow

- When have we thought about the movie since we saw it, in what context, and what connections or insights have grown?
- Which characters have we thought about most since watching the movie?

Which bits would you like to see again?

## QUIPS ON MOVIE MAKING by Ken Russell - British film Director

### Scripts

*You can get away with indifferent photography, you can get away with unimaginative casting, pedestrian editing and uninspired music, but what you can't get away with in the process of movie-making is a bad script.*

*Pitching scripts in some respects is like a game of cricket. If the pitch is uneven, you could find yourself on a sticky wicket being clean bowled for a duck.*

### Photography

*Where the cinema wins hands down is with the truly amazing device: the close-up - such a bonus when adapting a play to the screen.*

*Your cameraman comes first - he's 'king of the floor'. If the director is God, then he is the Sun.*

### Locations

*Finding locations is fun, and even familiar territory can reveal architectural gems you'd never guess at.*

### Casting

*Casting - I tremble at the very mention of the word. It's like Russian Roulette, walking the plank in shark-infested waters, running over a bed of red hot coals, jumping into a snake pit ...*

### Acting

*... the camera drifts into a close-up of Natasha lying in a hammock silently crying her eyes out - not through ineffable sadness at the loss of her brother to the call of duty, but something far more devastating - the loss of her lines.*

### Editing

I like editing: it's very much a hands-on process, somewhat akin to the art of the potter, who starts off with a mass of raw material and ends up shaping it into a polished object, pleasing to the eye.

... an editor can make or break your movie.

From *Directing Film - From Pitch to Premier*. B.T. Batsford. London. 2000

#### TOP 100 ART AND FAITH FILMS by Digby Wilkinson

Below is a list of movies I have pulled together that others have found useful for discussion. I have not seen all of them. Be warned, they are not all going to be to everyone's liking.

1. *13 Conversations About One Thing*, 2001, Jill Sprecher
2. *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968, Stanley Kubrick
3. *The Addiction*, 1995, Abel Ferrara
4. *Amadeus*, 1984, Milos Forman
5. *American Beauty*, 1999, Sam Mendes
6. *Andrei Rublev*, 1969, Andrei Tarkovsky
7. *The Apostle*, 1997, Robert Duvall
8. *Au Hasard Balthazar*, 1966, Robert Bresson
9. *Babettes Gæstebud* ("Babette's Feast"), 1987, Gabriel Axel
10. *Bad Lieutenant*, 1987, Abel Ferrara
11. *Bad ma ra khahad bord* ("The Wind Will Carry Us"), 1999, Abbas Kiarostami
12. *The Big Kahuna*, 1999, John Swanbeck
13. *Blade Runner*, 1982, Ridley Scott
14. *Breaking The Waves*, 1996, Lars von Trier
15. *Changing Lanes*, 2002, Roger Michell
16. *Chariots of Fire*, 1981, Hugh Hudson
17. *Code inconnu* ("Code Unknown"), 2000, Michael Haneke
18. *Crimes And Misdemeanors*, 1989, Woody Allen
19. *Days of Heaven*, 1978, Terrence Malick
20. *Dead Man Walking*, 1995, Tim Robbins
21. *Dekalog* ("The Decalogue"), 1987, Krzysztof Kieslowski
22. *Dersu Uzala*, 1975, Akira Kurosawa
23. *Dogma*, 1999, Kevin Smith
24. *Dogville*, 2003, Lars von Trier
25. *La Dolce vita*, 1960, Federico Fellini
26. *The Elephant Man*, 1980, David Lynch
27. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, 2004, Michel Gondry
28. *Fearless*, 1993, Peter Weir
29. *Fight Club*, 1999, David Fincher
30. *Le Fils* ("The Son"), 2002, Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne
31. *Fuori dal mondo* ("Not of This World"), 1999, Giuseppe Piccioni
32. *Grand Canyon*, 1991, Lawrence Kasdan
33. *Groundhog Day*, 1993, Harold Ramis
34. *Hell House*, 2001, George Ratliff
35. *Henry V*, 1989, Kenneth Branagh
36. *Der Himmel über Berlin* ("Wings of Desire"), 1987, Wim Wenders
37. *Ikiru* ("To Live"), 1952, Akira Kurosawa
38. *It's A Wonderful Life*, 1946, Frank Capra
39. *Jean de Florette*, Manon des sources, 1986, Claude Berri
40. *Jésus De Montréal* ("Jesus of Montreal"), 1989, Denys Arcand
41. *Jesus Of Nazareth*, 1977, Franco Zeffirelli
42. *Le Journal D'un Curé De Campagne* ("The Diary of a Country Priest"), 1951, Robert Bresson
43. *Ladri di bicicletta* ("The Bicycle Thief"), 1948, Vittorio De Sica
44. *The Last Days of Disco*, 1998, Whit Stillman
45. *The Last Temptation Of Christ*, 1988, Martin Scorsese
46. *Life of Brian*, 1979, Terry Jones
47. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers, The Return of the King*, 2001-2003, Peter Jackson
48. *Ma nuit chez Maud* ("My Night At Maud's"), 1969, Eric Rohmer
49. *Magnolia*, 1999, Paul Thomas Anderson
50. *A Man For All Seasons*, 1966, Fred Zinnemann
51. *The Matrix*, 1999, Andy & Larry Wachowski
52. *Mies vailla menneisyttä* ("The Man Without A Past"), 2002, Aki Kaurismäki
53. *The Miracle Maker*, 2000, Derek W. Hayes & Stanislav Sokolov
54. *The Mission*, 1986, Roland Joffé
55. *Nema-ye Nazdik* ("Close-Up"), 1990, Abbas Kiarostami
56. *The Night Of The Hunter*, 1955, Charles Laughton
57. *Offret-Sacrificatio* ("The Sacrifice"), 1986, Andrei Tarkovsky
58. *On The Waterfront*, 1954, Elia Kazan
59. *Ordet* ("The Word"), 1955, Carl Theodor Dreyer
60. *La Passion De Jeanne D'arc* ("The Passion of Joan of Arc"), 1928, C. Dreyer
61. *The Passion Of The Christ*, 2004, Mel Gibson
62. *Peter and Paul*, 1981, Robert Day
63. *Ponette*, 1996, Jacques Doillon

64. *The Prince Of Egypt*, 1998, Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner, Simon Wells
65. *La Promesse*, 1996, Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne
66. *Punch-Drunk Love*, 2002, P.T. Anderson
67. *Roma, città aperta* ("Open City"), 1945, Roberto Rossellini
68. *Sansho Dayu* ("Sansho the Bailiff"), 1954, Kenji Mizoguchi
69. *Schindler's List*, 1993, Steven Spielberg
70. *Secrets & Lies*, 1996, Mike Leigh
71. *Shadowlands*, 1993, Richard Attenborough
72. *The Shawshank Redemption*, 1994, Frank Darabont
73. *Signs*, 2002, M. Night Shyamalan
74. *The Sixth Sense*, 1999, M. Night Shyamalan
75. *Det Sjunde Inseglät* ("The Seventh Seal"), 1957, Ingmar Bergman
76. *Smultronstället* ("Wild Strawberries"), 1957, Ingmar Bergman
77. *Solyaris* ("Solaris"), 1972, Andrei Tarkovsky
78. *Stalker*, 1979, Andrei Tarkovsky
79. *Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back, Return of the Jedi*, 1977, 1980, 1983, George Lucas, Irvin Kershner, Richard Marquand
80. *Stevie*, 2002, Steve James
81. *The Straight Story*, 1999, David Lynch
82. *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, 1927, F.W. Murnau
83. *Sånger från andra våningen* ("Songs From the Second Floor"), 2000, Roy Andersson
84. *The Sweet Hereafter*, 1997, Atom Egoyan
85. *Tender Mercies*, 1983, Bruce Beresford
86. *Trois couleurs: Bleu, Trzy kolory: Bialy, Trois couleurs: Rouge* ("Three Colors: Blue, White, Red"), 1993, 1994, 1994, Krzysztof Kieslowski
87. *Tokyo Monogatari* ("Tokyo Story"), 1953, Yasujiro Ozu
88. *The Truman Show*, 1998, Peter Weir
89. *Unforgiven*, 1992, Clint Eastwood
90. *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo* ("The Gospel According to Matthew"), 1964, Pier Paolo Pasolini
91. *Vanya on 42nd Street*, 1994, Louis Malle
92. *Le Vent souffle où il veut* ("A Man Escaped"), 1956, Robert Bresson
93. *La Vita è bella* ("Life is Beautiful"), 1997, Roberto Benigni
94. *Vredens dag* ("Day of Wrath"), 1943, Carl Theodor Dreyer
95. *Waking Life*, 2001, Richard Linklater
96. *Werckmeister Harmonies*, 2000, Béla Tarr
97. *Witness*, 1985, Peter Weir
98. *The Year Of Living Dangerously*, 1982, Peter Weir
99. *Yi yi* ("Yi Yi: A One and a Two"), 2000, Edward Yang
100. *Zerkalo* ("The Mirror"), 1975, Andrei Tarkovsky

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*(Cinema) brings back to life the sense of mystery by making us love what is not immediately perceivable, what is beyond appearance and evidence. It suggests the invisible. . . . Thus, cinema binds us again with the poetic and religious expression of humanity. . . . Everything that is human, every relationship to the world and to nature, treated artistically by the cinema becomes a poem, a tale, a re-reading, a proposal of meaning, a celebration - in short, something that resembles a first religious step.*

**Joseph Marty**

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#### WHAT MOVED ME IN A RECENT FILM - Some reactions

##### What The Bleep

###### **Bev Milne**

*What the Bleep do We Know?* is a film about Quantum Physics - a physics of possibilities. It touches into the meeting point between science and spirituality and contains interviews with physicists, biologists and spiritual leaders.

Woven through this is a storyline about a photographer constrained by her past until she comes to a point where she looks into her mirror and says to her reflection: "I hate you. You're worth nothing." Amanda becomes aware of water dripping into the basin. This is a profound moment for her. It takes her back to when she heard a lecture on photographs of the molecular structure of water and what affects it, water being the most receptive of the 4 elements. A scientist photographed drops of water with a dark field microscope. One drop was photographed straight from a dam and the second after it had been blessed by a Zen Buddhist monk. The difference in the structure was remarkable. There is also another series of photographs where the water has been affected by thoughts.

A man nearby says: "Makes you wonder doesn't it? If thoughts can do that to water, imagine what our thoughts can do to us."

Amanda looks at herself and smiles. She starts drawing hearts and patterns all over herself with a sparkly eyeliner. One suspects that it is a long time since she has done something for the sheer fun of it.

So begins the transformation process.

I have for many years been very interested and involved in the ministry of inner healing and can see where science and spirituality can meet in such a ministry.

##### "Joyeux Noel" (Merry Christmas)

###### **Molly King**

Over the past 6 months I have seen the film "Joyeux Noel" twice. It is not unusual for me to see films more than once; something attributable to age as much as anything I guess!

The film is based on a well known event in 1914 during World War I. Christmas became the catalyst to halt fighting, slaughter and the inhumanity of war for an evening and a day. On Christmas Eve in Northern France, officers and soldiers from Scotland, Germany and France, who fought each other from trenches barely 100 metres apart on a daily basis, put down their weapons and called a truce.

The fact that a message of hope, love and divine intervention, as given to us in Christ's birth, could inspire opposing factions to cross deep and divisive boundaries, makes sense of the whole Christian message. Familiarity of the music of Christmas Carols resonated in the hearts of these men even though the language they were hearing may have been foreign to them. Hardened sceptics were softened. Even the Jewish Lieutenant took initiative towards a recognition of the numinous in all that was happening.

Remarkable kindness and deep compassion stirred me. I remembered that Christ's birth, death and resurrection is about me being involved with an incarnational theology that takes the Gospel to the people I am connected with.

### Lord Of War

**Marg Schrader**

I don't go to horror movies and I wouldn't have gone to this except that Amnesty International used it as a fundraiser and the writer and director Andrew Niccol is a local boy and his father is a member of our parish. (*The Truman Show* and *Gattaca* are his previous films).

It wasn't horror in the normal sense of the word used as a word to describe a film genre, but I was horrified and stunned by it. In fact a friend of mine was so moved he drove home leaving his 2 passengers waiting in front of the theatre.

This film is all about war and the cost of selling ones soul. Nicolas Cage plays Yuri a Ukrainian refugee, in the USA. Seeing an attempted mob assassination using illegal weapons he decides he wants to do more with his life, so he begins to obtain illegal arms and sell them to those who want them He starts with one gun and ends up with container loads of AK47s.

Yuri narrates the story and during the opening sequence of the manufacture of a bullet he comments "*there is one firearm for one in every 12 people so the question is how do we arm the other 11?*"

The questions arise around evil and our responsibility to act and not forget.

This film raises huge questions for those who believe that evil prevails when good people do nothing. Andrew Niccol offers us a chilling view of the length to which people will go to get what they want, the machinations of government and the enormously powerful yet hidden forces that work against those who attempt to do justice.

### The Pianist

**Sue Pickering**

There were many powerful moments in this film about the survival of a gifted Jewish pianist in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Second World War. One scene which touched me occurred when the Jewish family to which the pianist belonged were taken to a large enclosed area to await transfer to the concentration camps.

The family's material wealth had been confiscated, their possessions reduced to a suitcase each containing necessities grabbed in haste. As they sat together, the father took out a small amount of food, carefully divided it, and gave a mouthful to his wife and children to eat.

What moved me?

The not-knowing of the family - I knew as I watched the film that they would be going to their deaths - but at this point they do not know. They are becoming powerless. The stripping away of wealth and status parallels a journey I must take, sooner or later, as God leads me into the dark night of detachment and as I approach my own death.

The parallel with the sharing of bread and wine at the Last Supper brought tears to my eyes.

This short section of the film, this 'communion', brought Jesus and the reality of his Judaism to the forefront of my mind in a way I had not experienced before. It has helped me continue the process of experiencing more of Jesus' humanity and my own, and has made me recognise the sacred in each 'breaking of bread'.

### As It Is In Heaven

**Jenny Asmus**

Since seeing this movie I have suggested to numerous people that they go and see it. To describe it in one word I used the word "amazing". Just as the song 'Amazing Grace' was so wondrously sung in the ending of this film, an ending that was so sad but also so wonderful, so this film, I feel, was a real depiction of 'amazing grace'.

So many moments and so many meanings. This film could be said to have layers and layers of meaning and symbolism but retains a freshness. I found it significant that when Daniel Dareus, the cantor, was putting each choir member's photograph, each one's image, on the piano, each one who he had said has their own note, each one has their own place, each one in fact becomes cared for. "Having your own note" is multilayered in meaning in the film. The film deals a lot with hurt and healing but it is the healing that predominates and it is from love and care being given generously and received and given back that healing comes.

So much was very moving but I will speak of one that for me was so joyous.

Daniel was bullied and teased and rejected by some of the village children for his love of music and his violin playing. He would practise in the light shimmering wheat fields, he would not be seen, being shorter than the stalks but of course he could be heard by some of the other fellow school boys and so found and hurt. Another time he was made to jump off a high board into the lake with his violin. His mother realized to 'save' him they would have to leave the village. This did 'save' him but it didn't heal him. He in a sense lost himself, lost this child who he was; it had been rejected, devalued and hurt. He did become a well-known musician and conductor but his heart literally was damaged and became weakened from so much exertion. When he collapsed after a performance he chose to return to his childhood hometown, buying the old schoolhouse to stay in. Having a different performing name meant he would not be known as the child who had left so long ago.

It is in this time of his being back in his hometown and his taking on the task of the cantor and relating to others, living, learning (most especially learning to ride a bicycle with the warm and generous spirited Lena) that he not only touches the hearts of others but also it is his heart that is opened and touched and then healed. There are the joyous images of when he 'returns' to the shimmering wheat fields and searching there he 'finds' his child self and lifts him up and holds him close and he - man, child, human being is healed and he knows this and feels it. There is a realisation of the reuniting within himself and he is made whole. It was incredibly moving.

### JANE FONDA'S INTERVIEW WITH KIM HILL

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2006. National Radio.

During the interview between Kim Hill of Radio New Zealand and Jane Fonda the actress, director, feminist, peace activist and fitness guru, Fonda mentioned that she is attending a theology school and reading in the quiet of her Atlanta, Georgia, home. Kim Hill then asked her,

KH. Is Christianity a symptom of your new found peace or a cause of it?

JF. More cause, more cause. I fill the empty space with spirit, with what A.A. would call "a higher power", what for me is a new-found religious belief and it has meant the world to me.

KH. How did that come about?

JF. Oh my gosh! Well, in little tiny baby steps. It's too long a story to tell it all, but it was little by little. It was partly moving to Georgia away from very secular Hollywood into a conservative state where Ted (her husband at the time) may be an atheist but where most of his friends are Christian, and became very interested. I felt, I swear to God, I felt I was being led. I felt I had a guardian angel on my shoulder leading me and little by little I began to feel myself filling with reverence. I didn't need to fill it with food or alcohol, I began to fill with reverence. I decided I was going to, like I usually do, I was going to go for it - I was going to literally make the leap of faith and I became a Christian. Then I thought I had made a mistake because I was finding that the churches were very patriarchal. But then when I began studying more and going deeper into it I realised that there was no contradiction between real Christianity, the core of Christianity and feminism.

KH. And Ted didn't like that side of your life at all, did he?

JF. No he didn't. Well you know I did a terrible thing - I didn't tell him I had become a Christian. We weren't playing on the same team by then. I knew he would talk me out of it he's so brilliant and I felt too raw and vulnerable and it was too important to me I didn't want to be vulnerable to his talking me out of it so I didn't tell him and when he found out he was very angry. As well he should have been.

KH. He sounds a very sweet man in many ways.

JF. He is, he is. ....

H. And you still are, as you describe it, "a work in progress".

JF. I am - a work in progress, thank God!

Jane Fonda's story *My Life So Far* (Random House) 2005 is available in local libraries.

### Spiritual Direction: Waking Up and Recovering Ourselves through Movies by Paul Fromont

*I know what you've been doing... why you hardly sleep, why you live alone, and why night after night you sit by your computer. It's the question that drives us. It's the question that brought you here.*<sup>1</sup>

#### The Matrix<sup>2</sup> and Spiritual Direction

Is there a link between movies and spiritual direction? I believe there is, and to explore my sense of linkage I'd like to reflect on the first instalment<sup>3</sup> of the Wachowski brothers'<sup>4</sup> *Matrix* movie trilogy.

Now, I need to say at the outset, that the *Matrix* is not a movie about spiritual direction - far from it! The themes that this essay seeks to highlight in relation to spiritual direction are drawn from a necessarily limited engagement with what I regard as a central metaphor in the movie - the metaphor of *waking up*.

Further, this essay is an attempt to *both* listen to the Christian spiritual direction tradition, and also for the presence of the Spirit (who *directs*) in the midst of contemporary culture.

The *Matrix* is a modern myth, a myth that draws on many religious and non-religious traditions and practices. It weaves together both orthodoxy and non-orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, *The Matrix* offers the possibility of a parable, one that allegorises a process within which a directee increasingly "wakes up," i.e. becomes wakeful, attentive, and alive to the inner and outer movements of God in their lives. They wake up to the realisation that they are on what Cistercian monk Michael Casey describes as "a journey toward God."<sup>6</sup> *It is a journey of becoming increasingly free.*

Jesuit priests, John Pungente and Monty Williams<sup>7</sup> write, "Each of us, without exception, is trapped in encompassing forms of destruction that distort human freedom and seek to frustrate human desire to love, to be creative, and to create community." And so it is that Neo too, the movie's central character, is likewise initially trapped in the de-humanising and illusory construct known as the "Matrix."

#### Waking Up

**At the beginning of *The Matrix*, a black-clad computer hacker known as Neo falls asleep in front of his computer. A mysterious message appears on the screen: "Wake up, Neo."**

In offering spiritual direction we are inviting the directee to *wake up* to the "real," to their "True Selves."<sup>8</sup> They (and we as directors) wake up to the reality of our having been created to image and relate to God (Gen 1:27, 2:7, 18, 21-23). Through the Spirit's activity they and we are increasingly *freed* and *enabled* to become more fully human.

British author, Margaret Silf writes in her wonderful book, *Landmarks: An Ignatian Journey* that "in our growth-path toward our deepest and eternal reality, we have to make a radical switch of focus. God challenges us to cease from being 'self'-centred, that is, in orbit around our own kingdoms, and to become 'God-centred'." So "waking up" (Rom 13:11, Eph. 5:14, & Rev. 3:2-3) has the additional sense of having to do with a radical (though oftentimes very gradual) switch of focus and orientation in ones life.

In his book, *The Gospel Reloaded: Exploring Spirituality & Faith in the Matrix*, Chris Seay writes of "reversals and surprises," and sleeping becomes a symbol for blindness, for not seeing the "real." It symbolises a lack of authenticity, disorientation, and disconnection. Neo is initially trapped in a 'desert' of the unreal.

Spiritual direction then, is situated within the tension of surprises and reversals, the 'real' and the illusory. The directee, like Neo, is becoming free<sup>9</sup>, is being 're-born', is waking up, and is increasingly resisting the allure of the illusory. Perhaps God has planted within them a God-whispered question? Perhaps this 'question' is a source of restlessness or discomfort? Perhaps, like Neo, it's a question that has awoken in them a need for guidance, for help, or for meaning making? Perhaps they have been woken by the dissonance of a divided or incomplete life; a divergence between what Parker J. Palmer calls their "inner" and "outer" worlds,<sup>10</sup> or what *The Matrix* names as the "dream world" and the "real world"?

**"...Have you ever had a dream Neo, that you were so sure was real. What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?"<sup>11</sup>**

In the movie, Neo *wakes up* to both the truth of his condition, and increasingly to the truth concerning his identity as "the One." In wakefulness he explores the vague yet gnawing disquiet that all is not as it appears, or as it should be. So too this is often the experience of the directee.

*The Matrix*, with its central metaphor of "waking up," illustrates what Thomas Merton describes as "the difficult ascent from falsity toward truth, [an ascent that] is accomplished not through pleasant advances in wisdom and insight, but through the painful unlayering of levels of falsehood, untruths deeply embedded in our consciousness, lies which cling more tightly than a second skin..."<sup>12</sup>

Margaret Silf, already mentioned, suggests that we delude ourselves when we position 'self' at the centre rather than God. "Transformation...happens when we make the earth-shattering, [sleep-ending] discovery...that neither God nor his creation revolves around us, but that we and all creation revolve around, and are centred in God." This is often the first reality that spiritual direction *awakens* us to.<sup>13</sup>

And, as we wake-up, there comes, as Gerald May notes, "a growing ability to risk that God is present, active and welcoming in all situations."<sup>14</sup>

Thus in our waking up we ultimately learn to pray. We learn that prayer in its broadest sense is "everything that touches upon ones relationship with God, including relationships with other people."<sup>15</sup>

In spiritual direction we discover that "no one wakes up once and for all. No one is permanently 'reorientated.' There is no limit to wakefulness, just as there is no limit to aliveness."<sup>16</sup> There is no end to what Walter Brueggemann calls the cycle of "orientation, disorientation, and reorientation."

So, the thought I want to advance, against the backdrop of this important qualifier - "It is not we who choose to awaken ourselves, but God who chooses to awaken us"<sup>17</sup> - is that *The Matrix* invites spiritual directors to work with and to explore the metaphor of "waking up." Spiritual direction is, amongst a number of things, an accompanying role in which a directee is helped to wake-up, to progressively move from slumber and captivity, to freedom, reality, authenticity, wakefulness, and aliveness in Christ Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

#### Journeying

In both the movie and in spiritual direction we are encouraged, in our moments of wakefulness, to respond to God's wooing, to follow Neo's white rabbit.<sup>19</sup> Like Neo, we are led on a journey of becoming *more* rather than less.

Patrick Purnell S.J. describes spiritual direction as an ongoing series of conversations between the director and the directee that are characterised by "travelling and searching." He writes that spiritual direction is about "seeking the right way, trying different approaches, retracing ones steps from dead ends and finding the right places to make enquiries; and searching, seeking and [enquiring] about the will of God..."<sup>20</sup> Neo is both searched *for* and *searching*.

*The Matrix* and spiritual direction are both concerned with a journey, a search, and in that searching we discover that while we might be primarily searching for the living God, we are also searching for our deepest selves. We have somehow come to the realisation, helped perhaps by Thomas Merton, that little is gained in our "sailing to the moon, if we [have not been] able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves." This, Merton tells us "is the most important of all voyages of discovery, and without it all the rest are not only useless but disastrous."<sup>21</sup>

The directee wake ups and they begin or continue a journey.

#### Noticing

Spiritual direction encourages us in our *growing* wakefulness<sup>22</sup> to make meaning and to notice. It encourages us to listen for the deeper rhythms, stirrings, longings and desires that lie beneath the surface of what we take to be the reality of our lives and contexts. We learn how to turn these longings and inner movements into what Margaret Silf describes as "the words...the silences of prayer, [and] the adventure of prayer."

Like Neo in the movie we become increasingly aware, but in spiritual direction that awareness focuses on noticing the deep stirrings of the Spirit within us. Spiritual direction helps us notice the interconnectedness and the *inwardness* that lies at the heart of meaning making.<sup>23</sup>

We learn and practice what Cistercian monk, William of Saint-Thierry describes as being wholly present to oneself and to the realities of oneself, in order that we might more deeply know *who* and *whose* we are.<sup>24</sup>

*The Matrix*, like all well crafted movies, also reminds us that movies often "touch layers of our being that lie deeper than rational thought. They expose us to the heart of God in special ways,"<sup>25</sup> particularly in a visual culture such as our own. Movies help us take notice of and actually *feel* moral outrage, fear, sadness, joy, empathy, and anger. In gifting this to us, they help us to explore the deepest meanings of our lives. Spiritual direction thus needs always to be interested in the images, drama, metaphor, symbol, and music that are woven through a director's life.

The director wakes up, or continues to wake, and they begin to notice.

#### Love is the End

Ultimately though, this increasing wakefulness, this noticing, and this inner exploration has as its chief end the decision to love and receive love - to love and be loved by God, to love self, and to love and be loved by those significant others in our lives.<sup>26</sup> Spiritual direction helps a person grow in love<sup>27</sup> such that love increasingly makes its home in the director.<sup>28</sup>

And so, finally, our wakefulness and therefore the possibility of our spiritual growth, as articulated by Gerald Mays, "is the developing capacity to be vulnerable to our love for God and one another, and to God's love for us, so that we might *be* that love for all creation." Through spiritual direction and the invitations to wakefulness we approach what Mays describes as the "fulfilment of the two great commandments [Luke 10:27] to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbours as ourselves."<sup>29</sup>

"...Won't you be friend of mine to remind me of what is real."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dialogue from the movie, *The Matrix*.

<sup>2</sup> For more on this trilogy see <http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Released in 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Andy Wachowski, born December 26, 1967 and Larry Wachowski, born June 21, 1965.

<sup>5</sup> For example, there is much that draws on Gnosticism.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Casey, *Toward God: The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer*, Liguori Publications, revised edition, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> John Pungente SJ and Monty Williams SJ, *Finding God in the Dark: Taking the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius to the Movies*, Ottawa: Novalis, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> See Thomas Merton, *The Guilty Bystander*, and also Patrick W. Collins, *From Illusions Toward Truth: Thomas Merton's 'True Self' and Gay Spirituality*, in *The Way*, July 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, St. Ignatius came to see that we all live in imagined constructs of reality. Our experiences, our living, our hopes and dreams, our fears, our pain, and our temperaments etc construct these "worlds" within which we are enclosed and in need of God's freeing and healing.

<sup>10</sup> See particularly Palmer's 1999 work, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*.

<sup>11</sup> Dialogue from the movie.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Merton, in Patrick W. Collins, *From Illusions Toward Truth: Thomas Merton's 'True Self' and Gay Spirituality*, in *The Way*, July 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Yet, John Calvin in his *Institutes* helpfully asserts, "there is no deep knowing of God without a deep knowledge of self, and no deep knowledge of self without a deep knowing of God."

<sup>14</sup> Gerald G. May, *To Bear the Beams of Love: Contemplation and Personal Growth*, *The Way* 59 (1987), p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Purnell, *Spiritual Direction as a Process* in *The Way*, No. 54, Autumn 1985, p.6.

<sup>16</sup> David Steindl-Rast.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, A New Directions Book, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> This is an important reality that needs to be clearly stated. This is not a "waking up" to what is hidden, in some kind of Gnostic sense. This "waking up" is our increasing responsiveness of God revealed in Jesus Christ and present in the person of the Holy Spirit - "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Eph. 5: 13-15).

<sup>19</sup> I read the "white rabbit" as a metaphor for God as the wooing Spirit.

<sup>20</sup> Patrick Purnell, *Spiritual Direction as a Process* in *The Way*, No. 54, Autumn 1985, p.5.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, A New Directions Book, 1970, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Waking up, by way of spiritual direction, is a *process* - a journey. *The Matrix*, being a three-part story, i.e. a trilogy, reinforces this sense of journey. Much work and exploration occurs around the gap between inner realities and external appearance or context; in the case of *The Matrix*, (and often in our own lives) this external appearance is often an illusory context. It represents unreality.

<sup>23</sup> St. Ignatius' *Examen* is a wonderful prayer resource for developing the wakefulness and God-sensitivity that we need as both director and director. For a very readable introduction see Sue Pickering, *Glimpses of Grace*, in *REFRESH: a Journal of Contemplative Spirituality*, Winter 2005 Vol. 5, No.1, pp. 48-50. [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz) Or see chapter 12 "How to Pray with the Gospels - The Ignatian Way, in John Pritchard's book, *How to Pray: a practical handbook*, London: SPCK, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> William of Saint-Thierry, *Exposition of the Song of Songs*, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Silf, *On Prayer*, Lion Hudson Plc, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> This is a critical outcome of engaging with Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. The first annotation, as contemporised by David L. Fleming, S.J., concludes with these words, "[the Exercises] are good...for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond ever more faithfully to the love of God." And again, in the *Foundation: Fact and Practice*, Fleming's contemporisation recognises as important our "growth as loving persons...everything has the potential for calling forth in us a more loving response to our life forever with God." Echoing 1 John 3:18 Fleming concludes his contemporary reading with this important reminder, "love ought to show itself in deeds over and above words." David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises, A Literal Translation & A Contemporary Reading*, St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996, pp. 5 & 27.

We increasingly see this self-less movement in Neo, although we might want to stop short of calling his ultimate selflessness an act of sacrificial love for the sake of others - see *The Matrix: Revolutions*, the final instalment of the series.

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, from an Ignatian perspective, Michael Ivins, it seems to me, makes a useful connection when, in his commentary on *The Spiritual Exercises*, he notes that *the contemplation to attain love* is a paradigm for "the spirituality of finding and loving God in all things which is the lasting outcome of the Exercises" (p. 169). In a very real sense the *Spiritual Exercises* are a *journey*. Spiritual direction too, is a journey, the

purpose of which is a conversion of the heart resulting in a new quality or a new direction in life. It a 'turning to' and a 'turning from.' Ivens writes, "... 'turning to' in the language of the Exercises consists in seeking and finding the will of God, while the correlative 'turning from' is the process of getting free from the influence of 'disordered' drives and attachments that stifle love and impede integrity of intention." This same sense of "conversion" can be seen in Neo, the principal character in *The Matrix*. He awakes from illusion to reality and embarks on a journey of self-discovery and vocational discernment.

<sup>28</sup> Here I think of lines from *my First Principle and Foundation*: "...Teach me to take up residence in a life of love,

Love, have the run of my house, become at home and mature in me.

Teach me to love others so that your love may become complete in me - perfect love!

May that other-love not be just words or mere talk, rather let it be real and active.

*Strengthen me in love to love..."*

<sup>29</sup> Gerald G. May, *To Bear the Beams of Love: Contemplation and Personal Growth*, The Way 59 (1987), p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> James Blunt, [sound recording] *Back to Bedlam*, Track 6, *Out of My Mind*, Atlantic Recording Corp & WEA International Inc, 2004.

### THE POWER OF LOVE by Val Roberts

Love is a theme that features in most stories and some of the greatest films portray the power of love in overcoming the odds in life. They are so often a tool that God uses to touch me deeply and challenge me as my spirit connects with the characters and their stories.

One such movie that continues to speak to me in different ways each time I watch it is *Forrest Gump*. Famous for the opening quotes "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get", it takes us through a journey of many tastes - both enjoyable and bitter-sad.

Forrest's mother's belief in her son and her advice to him to go get what he wants in life and that being different is no reason for opting out encourages me to remember that we have a God who believes in us, no matter how different we are.

Forrest's childlike, uncomplicated view of the world challenges me to be more childlike in trusting God. His ability to see only good in people and situations forces me to look afresh at my judgmental, and sometimes vindictive attitudes towards people and circumstances that seem unfair and cruel.

The way in which Forrest repeatedly welcomes Jenny back after she rejects his love is a reflection of God's unconditional love for us whenever we venture off on our own adventures without Him. I am reminded of Hosea who remains faithful in his love to the woman who turned to other loves. Forrest's unwavering belief in Jenny and his acceptance of her just the way she is leaves me with a desire to be more like that. Like the Father of the prodigal son, Forrest lets her go when she needs to find out who she really is and what life is really about. How hard that is for me as a mother and wife! Forrest's friendship with Bubba and his loyalty to his friend reminds me of Naomi and Ruth's friendship and challenges me in my relationship.

Lieutenant Dan represents that darker side of us that we often don't want to acknowledge. The anger, mistrust, envy, bitterness and hopelessness we may feel toward people, life and God is so real. How God eventually shows up unexpectedly in the storm never ceases to impact me as does Forrest's part in his change for the better.

Jenny's death is a poignant reminder that life's pleasures are tainted with pain and struggle. At one particular point in his grief, the brief appearance of a butterfly speaks to me of God's tangible yet often unrecognised presence. I completely missed even seeing the butterfly the first time I saw the movie!

The ending, with Forrest and his son encourages me not to forget that with loss there is also gain, and that when we look beyond ourselves we can live life with meaning and purpose.

### LOVE AND FEAR by Joy Cowley

The writer of the second John letter knew profound truth when he wrote: "There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out all fear." (1 John 4:18)

Those words speak to us in a powerful way that reaches beyond our cultural conditioning. The tension between love and fear is at the very heart of our experience and we know well the insidious disguises that fear can adopt in our lives.

Years ago, I heard an old Hassidic story about fear, that meant a lot to me. I'd like to share it with you.

*Once there was a holy man who planned a long pilgrimage. When he departed, he left his house open, and a fierce pack of demons moved in and made themselves at home.*

*After a year, the man returned; but when he opened his door, the demons rushed at him. The man slammed the door shut, prayed and again opened his door. This time, as the demons attacked, the man bowed low and acknowledged their presence. An amazing thing happened. Half the demons disappeared. But the half that were left, were the biggest and most ferocious. As they rushed to devour him, the man offered them hospitality and asked if he could cook them a meal. At that, the other half of the pack disappeared - all except the chief demon. This was a huge creature with sharp teeth and it was not going to be deterred. It gave a great roar and opened its huge jaws. As it advanced, the man walked towards it and put his head in its mouth. The chief demon also disappeared, and the man had his house back.*

I found that story useful in the context of the verse from the St John letter. It has helped me acknowledge and accept the demons that fear creates in my life, and it's astonishing how quickly they disappear when they are recognised. My demon chief is more difficult. This creature is the way I judge people whose lives and values are different from mine. I have to deal with this demon on a daily basis. But we know each other well, and these days, thank God, I believe it is losing some of its teeth.

### SPEECHES

Now here's an idea worth trying. Collect a few videos/DVD's of films you know have excellent speeches in them, and then watch these speeches and the way they are presented and the results as they make their points in the movements of each film's action and development towards its climax.

Speeches in films often encapsulate the wisdom of the film, the whole point of it and are often rich in emotion, content and quality acting. Many of them are well worth seeing again and again. Collect them and return to them. They make for a refreshing and enriching hour or two of remembering and reflection!

*Film can touch the depths of our being. At its best, film confronts us with sublime truth about being human. Robert McKee, exploring the power of story, speaks of film as a two-hour metaphor that says: Life is like this. ... If life is portrayed in a film it confronts us with the challenge of how we should live.*

*Maher. 12.*

### REEL JOURNEYING - Reflection on films used on a Film Retreat

1. If you were the producer of this film what title would you give it?
2. What feelings did the film evoke in you?
3. What questions did the film raise for you?

4. How does the film's narrative/story connect with your story?
5. How does the film's narrative/story connect with God's story?
6. Did you identify with any character/s in particular? If so, why?
7. Did you find any God/Christ images that struck you?
8. What are the invitations for you in this film?
9. What did you find most difficult?
10. Were you surprised by any of your reactions to characters or incidents in the film? What does this suggest to you?
11. What moments and actions of grace do you discern?
12. How does this film connect with other experiences you are having on this retreat?

#### REEL JOURNEYING FILM RETREAT

October 8-15 at Houghton's Bush Camp, Muriwai, Auckland. A seven day directed retreat which is self catering with the usual silence, direction and daily Communion.

Details from Carole Hunt, [sgm@clear.net.nz](mailto:sgm@clear.net.nz).

Ph. 04 233-0714

*We take the view that film is both entertainment and a form of communication, and that the best films communicate by entertaining. Some films fall into the category of being an art form, but they should not be seen as being at the opposite end of the spectrum from entertainment. And we take the view that the role of story, whether films are entertainment or art, is central.*

**Michael Frost and Robert Banks.**  
*Lessons From Reel Life. iii.*

#### THE ART OF FACILITATING RETREATS by Jocelyn Dale

(A Spiritual Growth Ministries workshop led by Sue Pickering, Sheila Pritchard and Andrew Pritchard at Mercy Spiritual Life Centre, Auckland, May 1-3, 2006.)

Set in leafy Epsom... Lovely lunch-time walks and beautiful gardens to enjoy... Children next-door playing with full energy... A sunny room, stones of deep meaning, and a prayer walk through the rain...

Twenty-four participants from New Zealand and Australia braved week-day Auckland traffic to immerse themselves in the art of facilitating contemplative retreats. Gender aside, we were a diverse group. The considerable skill-base in the room was acknowledged at the outset, and I appreciated the opportunity to identify and chat with experts as the week unfolded, and I mean the participants. The leaders came with great credentials and experience, and proved to be excellent role models for retreat leading as we saw them at home practising their art. Sue brought a wealth of clear notes; I admired Sheila's interest in learning from us; and Andrew's descriptive graphs were memorable. Their anecdotes, asides and ability to laugh at themselves were much enjoyed. But most of all, the leaders did not dominate: they facilitated.

Each day started with some contemplative space, using a variety of resources and approaches. Then we covered many aspects of three types of retreat: one- or half-day retreats; 2-5 day retreats; and the retreat in daily life/week of guided prayer. Sometimes we brainstormed, other times we went over handouts or interacted in small groups. It was more than OK to challenge any perceived paradigms, and this helped us all think outside the square.

For those who like to collect resource ideas, the leaders were generous, opening their troves of music, books and leaflets.

As a relative newbie to retreat leading I appreciated the attention to practicalities, such as how much time is needed for team meetings; the wisdom of delegating detailed admin if you don't enjoy doing it; acknowledging the 'shape' of different stages of a retreat; the musts of supervision; and the suggestion to prayerfully wait for the resources to come to you.

The best learning occurred for me in the second half of the meet when we divided into groups to plan a retreat, using the ideas gleaned so far. Suddenly we had only a few short hours to work out what would happen and then present an outline of what we had in mind. It was difficult and easy, challenging and exhilarating, working mostly with people we hardly knew before, and as we had been warned, God *did* provide some very apt resources. To see the presentations, there was so much variety, and content of deep integrity! I don't think that anybody developed a retreat that fitted exactly the types that had been described earlier in the week. Each group adapted the principles beautifully for their particular purpose.

As I write this a month after the workshop, I feel that the lasting benefits are two-fold: to learn practical skills enabling me to facilitate retreats more competently; and to be reminded humbly of how much this retreat work is the Holy Spirit's. We *can* depend on God for resources, venue, co-leaders, supervisors, time availability, retreatants, theme. And our co-facilitators can help us more clearly see God's invitations as we plan our retreats.

Thanks be to God.

#### FILM REVIEWS

##### AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Director: Kay Pollak. Sonet Film 2004

Reviewed by Maureen Lamb

Every so often you see a film that really stirs your emotions and speaks to your heart. *As it is in Heaven* is one such film. Simplistically, it is a Swedish romantic drama that explores the healing, redemptive and unifying power of music. It is this and so much more. It is a film about coming home and finding healing and wholeness rich in metaphor and biblical archetypes. Spirituality and religiosity are contrasted. Complex themes are woven into a very human story. The cost of intimacy with self, God and others is high, out of fear and the dogma of years some refuse to pay the price.

Daniel Dareus is an internationally acclaimed violinist and conductor whose dream is "*to create music that opens peoples' hearts.*" Childhood experiences of loss and trauma haunt him. Music is his life and passion. In spite of fame and a calendar packed with engagements Daniel becomes restless and starts listening to his life. Like Rosa Parks, he recognises the tiredness of his soul and chooses to make a stand, little knowing he is about to start a revolution!

Deteriorating health catapults him into the Hero's journey. He leaves 'home' and crosses the threshold by exchanging the frenetic world of success and glamour for uncertainty, anonymity and a return to the village of his youth. His old school house with its 'wilderness like' starkness becomes his home. Here in the pregnant silence he yearns to listen. Following his dream but in a very different and sometime hostile environment, he encounters his demons when he offers to take up the role of cantor in the local Lutheran church. The pastor although initially welcoming, questions Daniel's motives and sadly fails to recognize or validate his inner call. Intense battles ensue before Daniel is able to rename and reclaim his identity and truth. Three choir members, mirroring the Gospel Marys, minister and support Daniel as he struggles in his desert and battlefield. However, as the relationships develop, gifts are reciprocated.

Music is the metaphor through which transformation occurs. Harmony is achieved when individuals recognize and share their uniqueness. Dissonance occurs when pharisaical attitudes override redemptive love.

The message of this film is encapsulated in the song Daniel wrote for Gabriella. In it he expresses his own longings. It is the cry of humanity...

"I want to feel I'm alive all my living days...

I want to feel ...that I was good enough.

I have never lost who I was;  
 I have only left it sleeping...  
 All I want is to be happy being who I am,  
 To be strong and to be free,  
 to see day arise from night...  
 I want to feel that I've lived my life."

Within the choir, true community evolves. It is a place of healing, generosity, inclusiveness, respect and celebration. 'Eucharist' is celebrated, stories are shared, diversity is welcomed and revered, creativity is released, true self is found; honesty is valued and forgiveness and redemption experienced. While ecstasy and pain are allowed to co exist, transformative love abounds.

Sadly, the film also reveals the flaws of the 'church.' The damaging effects of religiosity, power and control are rampant and true spirituality is quenched. Projection of fear, anger and guilt in relentless criticism, physical abuse and even symbolic crucifixion fractures marriages and relationships.

As the film concludes, Daniel becomes aware that the gift of the journey has been that music has opened hearts and this community of broken people has awakened in him the capacity to love and not fear death. In a surprising way, the film manages an ending both free of sentimentality and full of, well, joy actually.

#### THE NOTEBOOK

John Franklin

This 1994 movie starring Ryan Gosling, Rachel McAdams, James Garner and Gena Rowlands received mixed reviews. Some reviewers thought it pure schmaltz - a cheesy chick-flick redeemed only by good directing and outstanding acting. Others regarded it as a profound story of love's faithfulness.

*The Notebook* is the story of a boy from the poor side of the tracks who - predictably - falls for a beautiful, rich girl. What is not so predictable is how far he'll go to prove they were meant to be together - to the end.

It is an epic love story centred around an older man who reads to an older woman with a memory loss. From a notebook, the old man brings to life the story about a couple who is separated by classism and World War II. The man's reading is the prompt for what we see. As he reads, she remembers snatches, and in the occasional lucid moment, she fully understands.

It is adapted for the screen from a novel by Nicholas Sparks by Jeremy Leven, and what Leven told New Line Cinema (the Producers) was that they needed to tell it - a story of faith.

New Line agreed. "My novels," says Leven, "and a lot of my screenplays," he's quick to add, "basically deal with love and faith, and religion." So he assumes, when asked by a studio to write for them, that love and faith is what the studio is after, not something else. "That's all my work," Leven insists.

It comes through in *The Notebook*. In one critical key scene, the young man, Noah, asks Allie, "What do you want?" She is completely conflicted wanting to please, not wanting to hurt those who are important to her. Noah challenges her to listen to her heart and access her own deep knowing.

I found this moment powerful as there is often pressure to abandon ourselves, accommodate and adapt to the needs of others or to what may be expected of us. But it seems to me that at the heart of 'vocation', at the heart of 'call' is the energy of what we really desire. God calls in our heart's desire for that's where passion, commitment and faithfulness lie.

The answer to Noah's question is not immediate, but Allie has faith in her heart's knowing and the story takes a turn that this viewer was not expecting.

And faith breeds faithfulness. The old man (James Garner) is there, patiently, lovingly wanting to be in relationship with this woman who sometimes knows him and sometimes regards him as an intrusive stranger. Family suggest that he would be better off leaving her to her degenerating condition, but this man follows another drummer, love's heartbeat.

In one scene he discusses the medical condition of his elderly companion (Gena Rowlands). The doctor is not optimistic, but the old man assures him that after science has had its go at treatment, "Then there's God."

"I'm glad they left that in there," says screenwriter Leven. "That's me. I'm glad I got it in." Yes, then there's God the faithful One. This is the only place where God is mentioned, but as a physicist I heard said, "Where is God not at work?" If those who live in love live in God, then we may look and wonder at God's sovereign grace at work in acts of love.

I found the movie's affirmation of faithfulness and commitment to be a moving experience. Moving too were the surprising moments of truthfulness where characters like mother - who had withheld 365 letters from Noah - confesses what was really going on for her in her opposition to this young love and the consequences of the choices she had made.

I thought the poignant ending may have been a little contrived, but it worked because it was a declaration of the unity that love creates. There was also an echo in the ending that God will bring to completion what he has begun.

For an experience of superb acting, excellent cinematography (it is really beautiful to look at) and a reassurance that the movie industry has not lost access to fundamental human values, I would recommend it. It was richly rewarding to see a story of how the love that God is, is working out in human life and how human beings may reflect the attributes of their creator in whose image they are made.

#### NOOMA FILMS

Murray Talbot

One Sunday last year I was going to be speaking on the whole area of suffering - looking at the way God uses it in our lives. The intention was to help people look beyond the "here and now" and try and see suffering and pain from a larger perspective.

Having a wife who suffers from some congenital health issues meant that we could both speak from some limited degree of experience. In thinking about how best to communicate the truths and wanting to give people something to go and reflect on, I remembered I had purchased a set of NOOMA DVD's. I scrolled through them and found one that fitted perfectly. It was entitled "rain".

It is a movie clip that lasts for 9 minutes. The speaker (Rob Bell) walks with his infant son on his back-pack through the forest and it begins to rain. As the camera shows him walking, Rob Bell is speaking about the event. His little son in the back pack begins to cry because he is getting wet, so Dad takes the son and places him close to his chest under his own jacket - whispering words like - "It's alright, we'll soon be home - Daddy won't let you go". It then closes with a very poignant concluding thought (which I won't share as you need to watch it) as the backing music comes to the fore.

This is one of several NOOMA DVD's I have used, and each time they have ministered effectively to people. They are professionally produced, range from 9-11 minutes in length, can be used to highlight a point in sermons or initiate discussions in home groups.

There are now 12 in the series - I purchased 10 for \$175 from Max Palmer in Christchurch (see [www.irn.org.nz](http://www.irn.org.nz) on the Web). Manna Book stores also act as an agency for them.

If you want some more details or sample clips, you can go to [www.nooma.com](http://www.nooma.com)

The topics covered include suffering (rain), love (flame), evangelism (bullhorn), self belief (dust), discipline (lump) and various others. I recommend them as tools which can be used in a variety of ways.

#### BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

Peter Murnane op

The summer Ennis and Jack spent working together as shepherds up on *Brokeback* was that special youthful adventure, remembered fondly all their lives. Jack's friendliness gradually thawed the shy, withdrawn Ennis. Camaraderie deepened to intimacy, leaving Ennis - soon to be married - confused. Four years later they meet again and begin a long series of infrequent "fishing trips" together, although Jack has also married and Ennis' wife Alma is tormented, knowing what goes on.

Set between 1963 and the 1980's this superbly presented film portrays deep friendship between two gay men who drift into shallow marriages. Those who see every expression of homosexuality as intrinsically evil will give it their own label, but the story is actually about the abyss of loneliness that threatens us all.

It is a tragic film. Ennis and Jack's homophobic contemporaries might say the tragedy was that they were "queer". Others, more conscious of human difference, will hear Jack's almost unbearable pain at missing Ennis and see tragedy in that they could never set up house together.

But is the true tragedy that hell of loneliness that we inevitably create when we are not truthful to ourselves and each other? The bleak Wyoming landscape is a powerful symbol for this. Vast, windy spaces and shabby towns frame this masterful portrayal of the moral struggles by which we create or destroy each other.

The real blight in Ennis and Alma's life is not that he is gay, but that, ill-prepared for their dubious match, he is not able to be "straight"- i.e. honest - with her until deep pain has been inflicted. Here is a morality deeper than sexual behaviour.

After Jack's death Ennis visits Jack's parents. The bleak farmhouse and sad old couple would shrivel anyone's spirit. But such places are shaped more by the absence of love than by the cold wind sweeping the level horizon. Jack's father nurtures unresolved bitterness for his son. Here lies the true tragedy of his - or any - life.

The psychiatrist M. Scott Peck found that most of our troubles come from not facing the *necessary* pains of life. Is this Ennis and Jack's failure, clinging for twenty years to the romantic memory of their "golden age"? When they *do* face their "necessary pain" - Ennis defending his family against two obscene hippies; Jack standing up to his bullying father-in-law - they know moments of true redemption.

In a final poignant scene Ennis puts aside his own needs and promises to attend his daughter's wedding. She drives off into the desolate landscape. Ennis stands in his dreary caravan holding the cardigan she has forgotten and looking at Jack's empty shirt and jacket. Such moments of acceptance bring nobility to us ordinary, flawed people. Is it these thin threads of human truth - woven by Grace - that alone will save us from the mire?

#### LIVE AND BECOME

Director: Radu Mihaileanu.

Hopscotch 2005

Reviewed by Andrew Dunn

This powerful film of escape from Sudan to Israel in 1984 by an Ethiopian Christian boy (9 years old) won the Audience Award at the Berlin Film Festival last year. His mother thrust him into a line of Jewish (Falasha) Ethiopians being taken by plane to Israel (code-named *Operation Moses*) to be integrated into life there in order to escape the poverty of their homeland and the refugee camps. "Go, live and become" she urged him. The film is the story of this attempted integration, education, training as a doctor in France (dealt with briefly), his return to Israel to serve in the army, marriage and eventual return to Sudan to work in the refugee camps.

The central issues focus on the problems of integration into Israeli society, family life, language learning and education. The hurdles are almost insurmountable - loneliness, racial prejudice against Africans, religious struggles both in how to be accepted as genuine Jews and, for this Christian boy and young man, how to pass himself off as Jewish.

Israel's struggles to survive in her homeland are sharply presented and the contrast between religious and secular Judaism ever present. Time spent in a kibbutz offers Schlomo respite and gives an attractive glimpse of rural life.

The whole gambit of life as a refugee, adoption, faith and religious practice, falling in love and marriage is traversed and powerfully presented with no easy resolutions used. The use of the moon as a symbol of his mother's presence and walking barefoot on the soil and grass add very poignant, reflective almost prayer-full moments of being in touch with home, with Jesus and with himself.

The languages used are French, Hebrew and Amharic with English subtitles. Length: 140 minutes.

#### BOOK REVIEWS

##### JESUS AT THE MOVIES:

A Guide to the First Hundred Years

Author: Tatum, W. Barnes. Publisher: Polebridge Press © 1997

Reviewed by Kathleen Dixon

This book details all the Jesus-story films produced from the beginning of cinema, with a 1912 movie *From the Manger to the Cross*, to the 1989 production *Jesus of Montreal*. The author differentiates Jesus-story films from Christ-figure films, describing the former as films that narrate the life and ministry of Jesus, while the latter recall, but do not narrate, the gospel story of Jesus. An appendix briefly covers some dozen films from the 1950s and 60s which fit into the latter category - it would be interesting to read a book devoted to these.

Barnes Tatum is a long-time Biblical scholar, and has taught a course at Greensboro College entitled "A Cinematic Quest for Jesus." He writes this book in a very scholarly manner - each film is covered in the same pattern; he introduces it with some details about the production company, the screenwriter and other key figures in the making of the film, then summarises the film, discusses how it portrays Jesus, and finally outlines public and critical reaction. The summaries also include comparisons to some of the other films, and comments are made throughout which quote directors' viewpoints or intentions, and which give explanations to set the production in the social context of the time.

As a small-time Biblical scholar and an avid movie-goer, I particularly enjoyed this book. I feel almost ashamed to admit that I have seen only 2 of the 13 films, though I hasten to defend myself by saying that I was neither a Christian nor interested in Biblical study until after the last of these films was released (and it may not be possible to view some of the earlier ones at all, though they may have been put onto DVD...). I also hope to redeem myself at some time in the future by either following through and viewing as many of these films as are available, or (much more interestingly) leading a study that perhaps uses this book as a guide or bounce-board.

What I found particularly interesting is the way the author tells us of the "type of Jesus" that is portrayed. Different films reflect Jesus as the suffering-servant, a reluctant messiah, a man of good deeds, a victim, healer, crucified redeemer, the messiah of peace, the incarnate Word, apocalyptic prophet, prophet as sage, and *the* unique person. These different reflections are shown by the period of his life that is focused on and the gospel texts that are used.

Reading this book has caused me to re-evaluate my own willingness to explore others' views. I chose not to view Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* because I had heard of its narrow focus and its no-holds-barred approach to the painful, physical experience. However, this book has made me aware that any portrayal of Jesus reflects the beliefs not only of the director but of a good portion of the population of the time, and it is in knowing what and how others believe that we can develop more understanding and the ability to communicate honestly and with respect. Also, I am very interested in using visual media to add to the spiritual experience. The last century has seen a growth of the visual in the form of film and television, and the visual engages the right-brain (from which also comes the intuition) in a way that the written and the aural cannot, and it is with the intuition that we truly know God.

##### The Cross Walk

by Anna Johnstone

Available from Pleroma, 0800 988 988. \$25.00 + postage

Reviewed by Sheila Pritchard

Easter was a wonderful time to be reading this third book of Anna Johnstone's reflections. As the title suggests, the focus is Jesus' journey to the cross and what that means for our own cross walk. As she says in the introduction:

"I want to better understand  
what your life means, Jesus  
what it cost you  
what it will cost me."

In her prayerful journaling Anna helps all readers to better understand both the life and death of Jesus. We are drawn into the journey with contemporary idiom and turns of phrase that give a refreshing perspective. I loved the image of a tandem bike ride as a new way to think of being yoked to Jesus!

We are led steadily towards the cross with meditations that don't let us escape its awful reality:

"You used spit  
to give one man sight  
they used spit  
to rain down hate"

The reflections skillfully blend the agony and the love that are inextricably woven in the cross walk. In facing the agony we are led to see more fully the extent of love. "...your body laid down that we might walk across it into love."

Publishing one's own prayerful journaling takes courage! There are hints of the author's own cross walk on many pages. This is a gift - and an encouragement to be just as honest about our own journey.

"I said we'd pray  
but there are no words  
to wrap this agony  
in manageable proportions  
the ocean not big enough  
to hold the hurt"

As readers of Anna Johnstone's previous books will know, the photographs on almost every page provide a visual meditation to complement the words. It is a book to savour with heart, the mind and the eyes. *The Cross Walk* is a great resource for personal prayer, reading in Church, using on retreats - and giving away!

#### ANCHORHOLD

The Prayer of the Heart in Daily life

Raymond Pelly. St Peter's Publications

Wellington 2005. pp 55. \$10-\$12.00 Available from: The Cathedral Bookshop, PO Box 12 044, Wellington. Email: [giftshop.cathedral@paradise.net.nz](mailto:giftshop.cathedral@paradise.net.nz)

Reviewed by Rosemary Blackwell

This book arose out of Raymond Pelly's experience of responding to a solitary vocation within the context of marriage and family life, and of the adventure of building an anchorhold onto one end of the family home as "a home-based space to pray". "Dropping anchor into the love of God" was what Raymond found himself needing to do, and in writing this book has shown how a call to prayer can be successfully adapted to modern circumstances.

I learned that there is no set pattern about being a solitary - only a willingness to follow the guidance and promptings of the Spirit - and that some real life situation (like a family) is as good a place as any (p30).

More importantly, you need a heart of prayer; but it helps to have a place of prayer (p30).

The aim of the book is to lead readers into the depths the heart, the place where we encounter God and are transformed by the experience. This prayer of the heart or contemplative prayer, he explains, ideally leads to deep personal conversion within the context of daily life.

If we want to pray we have to learn to feel and intuit with the heart as much as think with the mind. Prayer, we could say, is a kind of emotional intelligence (p27).

Raymond shares deeply from his own journey as a solitary. Not only is this helpful in a practical sense for those called to deepen their spiritual lives, but there is also rich nourishment to be had in the various chapters that began their life as Retreat Addresses. Amongst other things, he writes about the necessary conditions of silence, solitude, stillness and simplicity for the spiritual life, along with insights relating to intercessory and other aspects of prayer.

I personally found this book helpful and nourishing and would recommend it to those seeking to live a more serious life of prayer within their own circumstances. A useful, inexpensive resource for spiritual directors and those they direct also.

*The question ... "Is my life meaningful or meaningless?" is one that is finally answerable only 'in God'; or, in Christian terms, as we in some way identify with (or recapitulate) the life experience of Christ. In this identification we find our identity; in that lived recapitulation, the meaning of our story.*

*Yet this is no simple process because the life of Christ, both in its anguish (the bitterness, the gall - Lamentations 3:19) and in its transfiguring joy, will always remain a mystery.*

Raymond Pelly. Anchorhold P52.

#### RESOURCES

##### BOOKS

George Aichele and Richard Walsh (Editors). Screening Scripture - Intertextual Connections between Scripture and Film. Trinity Press International 2002. Pp 334.

Susan Hayward. Cinema Studies - the Key concepts. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Routledge Press. pp528. 2000.

Robert K. Johnston. Reel Spirituality - theology and film in dialogue. Baker Academic. 2000. Pp 236.

John Lyden. Film as Religion. New York University Press. 2003. pp287

Ian Maher. Faith and Film. Close Encounters of an Evangelistic Kind. Grove Books. Cambridge. Ev59 2002. pp28

Margaret Miles. Seeing and Believing - Religion and Values in the Movies. Beacon Press Boston. 1996 pp254

Joel W. Martine and Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr (Editors). Screening The Sacred - Religion, Myth, and Ideology in popular American film. Westview Press. 1995. Pp. 192.

Brian McDonnell. Fresh Approaches to Film. Longman New Zealand Ltd.1998. Pp 206. A very readable book from a New Zealand perspective.

James Monaco. How to read a film. Oxford University Press. 2000. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Pp. 672.

Mark Pinsky. The Gospel According to Disney - Faith, Trust and Pixie dust. Westminster John Knox Press 2004. pp 286

Ian Pryor. Peter Jackson - From prince of splatter to lord of the rings. Random House NZ. 2003. pp 352. An excellent biography.

Richard Walsh. Reading the Gospels in the Dark. Portrayals of Jesus in film. Trinity Press International 2003. Pp 209.

Margaret Dewse. Reflections of God. Wordsell Press, Pakuranga, NZ. pp 45. Available from [books@wordsell.co.nz](mailto:books@wordsell.co.nz). Meditations on Scripture passages with excellent photos.

Melanie Wright. Religion and film: an introduction. I.B. Taurus, London. 2006.

Lee Stroebel and Garry Poole. Exploring The Da Vinci Code. Zondervan 2006. An Issues book, a Study Guide and a DVD for small group discussions. Excellent in opening up the key historical and theological issues raised by the Da Vinci Code book and film. An Evangelical response.

N.T. Wright. Decoding Da Vinci - The Challenge to Historic Christianity and Fantasy.

Grove Biblical Series. B39. 2006. pp28. Wright is a New Testament scholar and the Anglican Bishop of Durham.

Tim Allen. Ed. The Da Vinci Deception. 100 Questions About the Facts and Fiction of The Da Vinci Code. Ascension Press. 2006. A very readable Catholic response.

#### WEBSITES

[www.unomaha.edu/jrf/](http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/)

Journal of Religion and Film.

<http://movieguide.crosswalk.com>

Crosswalk.Com. the Intersection of Faith and Life.

[www.christianitytoday.com/movies/](http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/)

Christianity Today at the Movies offering "Biblical perspectives on contemporary cinema".

[www.pcusa.org/ega/more/spiritualityfilm/htm](http://www.pcusa.org/ega/more/spiritualityfilm/htm)

For the electronic Great Awakening, a newsletter and comment on spirituality and film from the Presbyterian church of USA website.

[www.visualparables.net](http://www.visualparables.net)

Ed. McNulty's website for subscribing to the journal *Visual Parables* and other materials for teaching, services and preaching based on films.

[www.hollywoodjesus.com](http://www.hollywoodjesus.com) Describes itself as "pop culture from a spiritual point of view".

<http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/Real2Reel/realreel.htm>

Jesus: Real to Reel Bibliography and Web Resources For Religion/Theology and Film.

<http://www.cmu.ca/faculty/gmatties/Religion%20and%20Film%20Bibliography.htm> (Religion & film. A Selected List of library and information resources)

<http://www.crosscurrents.org/Alston0204.htm>

Film making as spiritual practice and ministry.

<http://www.ntgateway.com/film/> Celluloid Jesus: The Christ Film Web Pages

[www.nooma.com](http://www.nooma.com)

Nooma film clips for preaching, teaching and discussion starters. See review in Film Reviews.

#### JOURNALS

**Parabola.** A quarterly journal published by the Society for the Study of Myth and Tradition, Inc. Website: [www.parabola.org](http://www.parabola.org). US\$7.00 a copy. pp120

#### STUDY LEAVE REPORT

**Religion and Film.** Warren Deason. Report on sabbatical leave, Westminster College, Cambridge. May/June 2006. [deafam@orcon.net.nz](mailto:deafam@orcon.net.nz)

#### SGM NEWS

Andrew Pritchard

It is with deep sadness that I acknowledge the passing of Canon Clarice Greenslade.

At the March meeting of Workgroup we received communication from Clarice saying that she was reluctantly resigning from Workgroup, recognising that after her treatment for cancer she had diminished energy and was reducing her commitments. While we were saddened by the thought that Clarice's cheerful, creative and supportive presence would no longer enliven our meetings we fully understood, supported her decision and were happy for her. Clarice sounded positive and was pleased about retaining less demanding commitments. It was a real shock on May 12 to learn that Clarice was in hospital and an even greater shock to hear only a few days later that Clarice had died on the morning of May 16.

Clarice was a fantastic Workgroup and Formation Advisory Group member. She was cheerful and positive, and a great supporter of SGM over many, many years. Clarice had a wonderful ability to think both inside and outside the square! She had a gift of being able to see things that may otherwise have been overlooked, often from a new perspective that clarified, and deepened the discussion. Clarice was able to challenge - but in ways that were constructive and loving, easy to hear and receive.

Clarice was a people person. Business and strategy did not divert her from genuine interest and concern for those she met. At one of my first Workgroup meetings as Convenor I shared about some areas of the role that I thought I might find particularly demanding. Clarice has quietly enquired about how I have been finding it at every meeting over three and a half years since then - I will miss her! Sue Pickering is overseas as I write this. I know how deeply Sue has valued Clarice's support for her in her role as Coordinator of the Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme and would join me in this tribute.

2006 saw eighteen participants commence year one of the Formation Programme. Late July will see us at Waikanae for the "Waikanae Week" ... with the two participants coming from Singapore already wondering how they will cope with the cold!

At the beginning of May Sue, Sheila and I facilitated a three day Workshop on 'The Art of Facilitating Retreats'. There is a report on this from a participants perspective elsewhere in this journal. From a facilitators perspective it was a wonderful event to share in ... good teamwork and twenty-one great participants. BUT WHERE ARE YOU ALL, MEN? Me and twenty-three women ... not that I minded at all! There was one participant from Australia and the rest from Whangarei to Wellington. A repeat in Crusaders territory may be possible in 2007.

Finance continues to be a challenge. Barring a substantial increase in general donations, or success with trust funding, this year will see a substantial deficit. Because of hard work and prudent management by previous Workgroups this is manageable, but not sustainable long term. Please stand with us in giving, prayer and discernment until we discover a way to increase income or cut costs without curtailing the ministry that SGM provides.

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Doyle H. Andrews, Jr. is a Presbyterian pastor currently serving Zion United Church of Christ, Dyer, Indiana, USA, where he and Lorolie Brown Andrews live. Lorolie is a United Church of Christ pastor, doing spiritual direction and editing books on psychology and spirituality in Chicago, IL.

Jenny Asmus lives in Mairangi Bay on Auckland's North Shore.

Rosemary Blackwell is a singular religious and spiritual director living in Hamilton.

Joy Cowley is a wife, mother, grandmother and writer who lives in Wellington.

Jocelyn Dale lives in Hamilton where she engages in family life, offers spiritual direction and dabbles in various creative arts.

Warren Deason is minister of Albany Presbyterian Church and has recently completed a two month study of religion and film at Westminster College, Cambridge.

Kathleen Dixon is the mother of two young adults and loves music and the arts. She teaches literacy at Unitec, and is currently applying to her church (Methodist) to be trained for ordained ministry.

John Franklin's diverse ministries are in spiritual direction, ministry supervision, preaching, workshops and tertiary teaching and research.

Paul Fromont of Cambridge, NZ, has many interests including spiritual direction. This provides the content of his 4-year old "blog" - *prodigalkiwi(s)* His website <http://prodigal.typepad.com> includes a collaborative journey with Alan Jamieson from Wellington.

John Hebenton works for Anglican Youth Ministries and lives at Mt Maunganui.

Anna Johnstone is the author of *The God Walk*, *The Freedom Walk* and the recently published *The Cross Walk*. Anna is a member of the Albany Presbyterian Church family.

Molly King balances a passion for attending films with being a mother and grandmother, with work as a spiritual director. She lives in Waikanae where she and her husband enjoy coastal life and "absolutely, positively" Wellington.

Maureen Lamb finds films a rich tool for her own spiritual journey and practice as a Spiritual Director and in Mental Health Chaplaincy at Hutt Valley Hospital. She is learning how to play.

Bev Milne is a spiritual director and supervisor who lives in Tauranga where she enjoys Latin, gardening, birds and "being".

Peter Murnane is a University chaplain and Dominican priest living in Auckland and working around the country with preaching missions and social issues courses in Catholic schools.

Sue Pickering co-ordinates the SGM Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme, and is a spiritual director, supervisor, retreat facilitator, writer and Anglican Priest who lives in New Plymouth.

Sheila Pritchard enjoys a self-employed lifestyle offering spiritual direction, supervision and retreats, with seminars and some teaching, and enjoys walking the North Shore's beaches.

Marg Schrader is semi retired on the Kapiti Coast. She is a grandmother, a golfer, a spiritual director, counsellor and film lover.

Val Roberts of Palmerston North is married with two teenage children and a foster mother of two primary age girls. She is now a tutor with Methodist Social Services. She enjoys exploring a contemplative style of prayer and worship.

Martin Stewart is minister of Maori Hill Presbyterian church, Dunedin, married to Anne and father of three. He's interested in music, gardening and the comedy of God, and rates SGM retreats as some of the most influential moments in his spiritual formation.

Murray Talbot has been Senior Pastor at Hornby Presbyterian Community Church, Christchurch, for the past 18 years. He is married to Janice and they have 4 children and 2 grand-children.

Jeff Whittaker, a spiritual director and supervisor who also contributes to SGM's Spiritual Director Formation Programme, pastors Bryndwr Baptist Church in Christchurch and lectures in Christian Spirituality for Carey Baptist College in Auckland.

Digby Wilkinson lives in Tauranga with his wife Jane and three children. He is Associate Preacher at Holy Trinity Anglican Church.

### Listen to the Longing

I need to train my mind and heart to listen constantly to the divine longing.

When I practice this contemplative listening in both my praying and living,

I experience what the author of Ephesians expressed when he wrote,

"(There is) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:5-6).

Through such listening, I have come to realize the truth the psalmist uttered:

"Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there"

(Ps. 139:7-8).

Thad Rutter. *Where The Heart Longs to Go*.

Upper Room. 1998. 105

### GOD by John Hebenton

Quiet vibration agitating the cosmos

superstring on which all has its being

embracing vast energy fields that

span universes

remembers all that has been

eternal anamnesis

Infinite possibility

In all that is known

all that can be known

Beyond all that is known

all that can be known

Is God

Discovered in daily life

divine background print

opening eyes

opening minds

opening hearts

inviting the journey deeper

into life

into life in God

Gentle still point

Silent place of knowing

In all that is imagined

all that might be imagined

Beyond all that is imagined  
all that might be imagined  
Is God

In my imagination  
God dreams a world  
full of justice  
overflowing in peace  
where self consuming anger and hate  
is buried beneath ringing laughter  
children at play  
bellies full  
safely cocooned in love  
given a place now  
and for the future

In all that is fervently hoped for  
all that might be hoped for  
Beyond all that is desperately hoped for  
all that might be hoped for  
Is God