Using Film in Mission

'…some filmmakers are interested in more than just making money… as genuine artists they invite us to explore the pain and the joy of being human, to look deeply into ethical issues and dilemmas, and at times to enter into worlds far different from our everyday experience…such films help us to understand a little better what it is to be a human being and, in a few cases, even to see a little more clearly the emerging kingdom of God.' (Edward McNulty, *Praying the Movies).*

1. Initial considerations for a planning group

<u>The Aim</u>

It might be to encourage and equip existing church members to engage contemporary culture with the Gospel or to develop a new Christian community around a regular film event. It is vital to be clear about purpose from the beginning:-

- if you are aiming the event at those outside of the existing church community, advertising using words like 'spirituality' and 'meaning' will likely be more effective than mentioning 'church'.

- If the aim of this event to develop a regular Christian community around it then forward planning is key and some understanding of /training in the Fresh Expressions approach will be useful.

- If the event is aimed at church people then the more the merrier. If on the other hand un-churched people are the audience then a few committed Christians attending will be important to help the discussion but too many and with the best will in the world debate may be stifled, and contributors inhibited.

<u>The Film</u>

In choosing films, there are a number of issues to consider:-

- Will the film's certification be a barrier to some attending? It is important that young people are not inadvertently invited to films with an inappropriate age certificate *whether the content is inappropriate or not.*

- How long is the film - Can it be watched and discussed in reasonable time? Some long films are best presented in two parts (close together). For the event to be successful, there must be time and space for unhurried discussion.

- In preparing, what are the issues the film explores and the Gospel themes therein? The purpose of the event is presumably not to make trite and forced links with Christian faith but to give an opportunity for discussions about spirituality and meaning and the Gospel has an abundance of insights into the themes found in any film ever made! Thorough and prayerful preparation is vital to be able' *to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have…with gentleness and respect'* (1Peter 3.15)

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<u>The Discussion</u>

It is helpful to decide in advance how the discussion in going to take place after the film has been shown:-

- If it is to be an entirely free one, it is good to nominate someone to take a lead and to decide which themes it would be fruitful to explore.

- If questions are to be used, will they be prepared by someone in the planning group, or sourced from elsewhere? There are some excellent resources available (see below), but it is good to try any questions out amongst the group first to see how the language and line of questioning feel.

2. Copyright Guidance (approved by the BFI)

If you wish to show film as part of a faith event, or in a faith setting, it is important to ensure that you have adequate permission.

For a one off event you can seek (for a fee) a Single Title Licence. This is usually easily obtainable directly from the copyright owner (often the films' production company). If you are not sure, or cannot contact them, directly then try contacting Filmbank. This is a joint venture company owned by Warner Bros. Entertainment and Sony Pictures Releasing. It represents many of the leading Hollywood and independent film studios in the area of film usage outside the cinema and home.

For further information on their services see the Filmbank website:- http://www.filmbank.co.uk/

If you wish to use film more often then it may be worthwhile investing in a more general licence like that offered by the Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI). The cost of the licence depends on your average aggregated attendance and how you wish to use the film. There are two kinds of licence available: to use film clips to illustrate sermons and to use whole films for entertainment or teaching.

For more information on the scope of the CCLI, the production companies it covers and the cost of the licences please see the CCLI website:-

http://www.ccli.co.uk/licences/churches_showing-films.cfm

3. Useful Resources

<u>Websites.</u>

- www.cmu.ca/library/faithfilm.html - Canadian Mennonite University site –excellent collection of resources, reviews, links etc

- www.movieglimpse.com – US site linking films with Gospel themes

- www.bethinking.org/culture-worldview/ - designed primarily for students with some useful film articles.

- www.scriptureunion.org.uk/search/152.id?sid=8&searchfor=connect&Site=1&page=1 – Scripture Union shop, where 'Connect' Bible studies on a number of films are available

<u>Books</u>

- Anker, Roy M. 2005. *Catching Light: Looking for God in the Movies.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- Johnston, Robert K. 2000. *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

- Marsh, Clive and Faye Ortiz, eds. 1997. *Explorations in Theology and Film.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

- Stone, Bryan P. 2000. *Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema*. St. Louis: Chalice Press.

- Vaux, Sara Anson. 1999. *Finding Meaning at the Movies*. Nashville: Abingdon.

- McNulty, Edward 2001. Praying The Movies: Daily Meditations From Classic Films. Westminster John Knox Press

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