

Cinemas and DVDs

One of the most frequently asked moral questions is this one: "Is it right for a Christian to go to the cinema or movie house?" If the answer given is no, as it invariably is, the next question is: "Well, if it is not right to go to the cinema is it right to watch the same movies on TV at home?" Simple questions but with complex answers.

One of the first observations that must be made is the matter of reality versus imagination. The world is replete with written novels which, while they may have a basis in fact, are imaginary stories. Classical literature abounds with these and they are taught in our schools. There is usually a real moral lesson behind the imaginary story. The Bible itself uses vivid imagery to get the truth across.

However, human imagination coming from a sinful heart can be very dangerous and immoral. Hollywood lives mostly in a world of unreality as actors live out imaginary roles. The need to hold audiences by shock treatment grows with time until it has become a cesspool of the worst iniquity. The bottom line is that not all fantasy is bad, but much of it is.

A distinction must also be drawn between the movie and the documentary. The latter is a video document of something real. Sometimes movie makers get it right, as with the *March of the Penguins*, an outstanding presentation of the life of the Emperor Penguin. A biographical film of the life of missionary Eric Liddell, *Chariots of Fire*, is another case in point. There is therefore a great need to separate the good from the bad. In today's entertainment world good films are like tiny diamonds in a vast amount of filthy clay.

Even in the documentary one must be very careful. Revisionism, or the altering of the facts to suit some film producers biased opinion

of the subject in hand reduces what is, ostensibly, a worthwhile production to a useless pile of tape.

There are basically three positions that a Christian can adopt with regard to television and, by extension, movies. Some practice total abstinence and that position is respected, although consistency here can be a problem. They may have no TV in their own home but are quite happy to watch it in the homes of others. The second position is the other extreme - total disregard for any moral restraint and drinking in whatever immorality the medium throws at them. That will inevitably lead to family disaster.

The middle ground is careful discrimination of what is suitable for viewing. David made a vow before God, "***I will set no wicked thing before my eyes.***" Psalm 101:3. Some Christians have that text framed and sitting on top of the TV as a constant reminder to restrict their viewing to that which is good and wholesome. The good is in increasingly short supply today.

Now say a Christian decides he wants to see the *March of the Penguins* and to marvel at their amazing God-given instincts. Does it matter if he goes to the local cinema, or gets a DVD and watches it at home?

In the early days of films the cinema was quite an elaborate architectural theatre and usually showed one main film with a shorter one. Anyone who saw a Christian going into the theatre would know exactly what he was going to see for the film promotional material was clearly displayed outside.

The modern cinema is much different. It is usually a complex made up of maybe eight theatres, plain boxy structures that could seat maybe one or two hundred people.

Outside there will be the listing of the films in the complex most of them being Hollywood 'blood and

guts' and sexual excesses. But there is also the *March of the Penguins*.

If someone sees a Christian going into such a place the question then arises, which film is he going to see? The observer has no idea that the believer is going to see the one film that could be profitably watched but would wonder if it was one of the other seven abominations he was interested in.

It becomes therefore a matter of testimony and your visit to the movie house could be an encouragement to others to be less discriminatory that you might be.

If you absolutely must see the *March of the Penguins* then in that case it would be better to hire the DVD and watch it at home.

However, always keep in mind that by viewing it at home your neighbour will not see you going into a public cinema but the Lord sees all that is going on in your home. I fear there are believers who, in the darkness of their home, are watching that which will destroy their minds and families.

Just as our bodies are conditioned by the sort of food we eat so our minds react to the sort of mental images we ingest. Make no mistake about it films are mood altering and never more so than in the minds of impressionable young people who may not have reached the age of being able to making intelligent choice between the subtleties of right and wrong.

I say subtleties for a reason. In the early days of movies good invariably triumphed over evil. Now the 'good guys' are not so good and the 'bad guys' are not so bad with the result that the world wallows in an amoral swamp.

Should a Christian go to a cinema? The short answer is no. Should a Christian watch a DVD in his own house? Maybe, but within very strict limits as to what is acceptable and profitable viewing. □