

Dean Cain in *The Way Home*

Summer viewing

The Way Home (2010, PG)

Dean Cain (well-known for playing 'Superman' in the TV series *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*) has the lead role of the father Randy Simpkins. Randy's Two-year old son Joe goes missing while he was supposed to be watching him. The story is based on an event in the US in 2000. The theme of community is strong, but the movie is centred on the Christian community, which gathers, prays (a prayer chain is established), and provides support to a family in need and helps to bind a community during a time of crisis. The role of the minister and also lay people in providing helpful pastoral support is a welcome feature. This movie helps one to reflect about what is important in life and also provides a good illustration of the church's pastoral care at a time of need.

Rejoice and Shout (2010, PG)

This documentary has now been released on DVD and available from Heritage HM (movieschangepeople.com). It shows the development of gospel music in the USA from the times of slavery, plantations and its African music roots. Later the social justice connection for the American Black Churches in the civil rights era is developed, illustrating how the singing went to saying (preaching) and vice versa. It has an amazing variety of people involved as well as some major Southern churches. The film and picture references from earlier periods build up a substantial historical record and bring to life influential people such as Thomas Dorsey, Smokey Robinson and the Staple Sisters. This is a specialised

documentary, and while I found it quite interesting, it will probably only appeal to a small group, but if you want an introduction to gospel music and some music to sing-along to, then look no further.

For Further (adult) consideration **The Words** (2012, M)

This film can encourage consideration of a wide range of moral and ethical issues as it concerns a significant case of plagiarism (well an absolute case actually). For the people in this movie, the use of words is critical and the written word fundamental. Words for Christians are of course fundamental too. From the way we speak, preach, write and reflect, and certainly as we consider the written Word. The film helps people to consider their desires, aspirations and hopes. The reflections of the older man and younger man as they 'spar' with words are challenging to many people who live in major cities that seem to offer so much but are ultimately based around an emptiness. Well-known character actor Jeremy Irons is the 'old man'. He last played the God-like figure in *Margin Call* and brings an element to these roles that I believe helps people to pause and think - 'what is it all about'. There is an element of Ecclesiastes in this film as well - for there are many books.

The films of Paul Thomas Anderson

Paul Thomas Anderson has made several high profile films which have garnered interest in religious and critical circles. I thought it would be helpful to briefly profile two. His latest film *The Master* (2012, MA), has received wide publicity, including a

considerable discussion on the ABC TV show *Gruen Planet*. Much of the discussion has centred on the connection to the story of Scientology's founder L. Ron Hubbard.

The director has seemingly now distanced himself from talking about any Scientology connection, saying it was more of a period reference (the early 1950s) and stimulus to the wider themes. The film is a sometimes probably deliberately fatuous and mainly semi-dramatic piece revealing the disparate real life of an influential founder of a movement 'The Cause' and his relationships, especially to one who becomes like his 'right-hand strong man'.

The two dramatic leads, Joaquin Phoenix as Freddie Quell, former WWII 'ordinary' seaman and extraordinary disturbed man who gets caught up in The Cause, and Academy Award winner Philip Seymour Hoffman as Lancaster Dodd the leader of the group are quite amazing. They inhabit characters that are both loathsome and repelling, yet draw one in to try to understand them.

The film is also a historical survey as well, following the post-Second-World-War 1950s when America boomed and many movements, theories, ideas, and groups were formed. In what is becoming the infamous line of the film, the son says to Freddie "You know he's making it up as he goes along." Again like Ecclesiastes it reminded me that "there is nothing new under the sun". I would not recommend viewing the film, but you may see quite a bit of publicity and discussion about it.

An earlier film *Magnolia* (1999, MA) is well-known for its overt religious foundation. One cannot understand this film without reasonable biblical knowledge—there are words, symbols and elements of prophetic reference. The theme of the 'sins of the father' is vitally significant and interwoven in a multi-layered telling of the connected stories of several individuals in San Fernando County in Southern California. A warning though, there is a very strong and offensive scene with Hollywood star Tom Cruise (a Scientologist) playing a seminar leader who teaches men how to pick up women. The media have since honed in on Cruise and his connection to Paul Thomas Anderson (who is not a Scientologist), but who showed *The Master* to Cruise, and said they still have a continuing friendship, with the subtext clearly being that Cruise had some issues.

Peter Bentley