

**READING FILMS AS HUMAN TEXTS:  
YESTERDAY AND THE DISMANTLING OF  
STIGMATISATION IN A PASTORAL HERMENEUTICS  
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE HIV PANDEMIC**

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**Abstract**

*The paper, based on a masters' thesis, explores the possibility of extending the traditional understanding of theology as fides quaerens intellectum, with its emphasis on knowledge, to fides quaerens imaginem, with its emphasis on imagination. Therefore the important presupposition that, due to the aesthetic dimension of faith, care to people living with HIV should include the aesthetic dimension. If one links fides quaerens imaginem to fides quaerens visum new options can be created for both theory formation and the practice of pastoral care in Practical Theology. In this regard the hypothesis is argued that the visual dimension of life as represented by media, and specifically film, should be utilised as part of HIV anti-stigma strategy, thus playing a role in a comprehensive HIV prevention strategy. The validity of this hypothesis is explored in an empirical study done with a group of farm workers and their families, and using the film Yesterday. It was done with this group as the need for stigmatisation intervention in lesser-educated, disadvantaged communities is fairly desperate.*

**Keywords:** Film, HIV, Stigma, Destigmatisation, Pastoral Care

**Introduction**

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)<sup>1</sup> has reached pandemic proportions in South Africa. But those infected with and affected by HIV are not only exposed to physical suffering. One of the most burning issues in the pandemic is the phenomenon of stigmatisation.

The under-utilising of media in the response to HIV was shown in a two-year study done by Media Tenor, the Institute for Media Analysis. It showed that although the pandemic is growing at an alarming rate, HIV still receives less than 1% of the total media coverage in South Africa (Schreiner, 2006: Online). Yet the role of media, especially film, should not be underestimated, specifically not by theology. Hoover (2006:1) makes the

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<sup>1</sup> In this study preference will be given to the term 'HIV'. The *UNAIDS Editors' Notes for authors* (UNAIDS, 2006: Online) indicate that the term 'HIV' should be used to refer to both HIV and AIDS. The term 'AIDS' should only be used when referring to only AIDS (UNAIDS, 2006: Online). Thus this document will use the term 'HIV' when referring to both HIV and AIDS, unless specifically stated differently. Thus, for example, 'HIV stigma' will be used to refer to the stigma attached to both HIV and AIDS.

following important statement in his book *Religion in the media age*: “Religion and the media seem to be ever more connected as we move further into the twenty-first century. It is through the media that much of contemporary religion and spirituality is known.”

It is hypothesised that film can play a central role in curbing stigmatisation and its resulting evils, due to its inherently spiritual dimension. If spirituality can address stigmatisation, anti-stigma interventions should acknowledge the role of pastoral care with its emphasis on ‘soul care’, i.e. the spiritual realm of life and its connectedness to values and meaning. Furthermore, the relationship between theology, specifically pastoral care, and film is explored as well as the role it can play in the efforts to curb HIV stigmatisation, thus contributing to a general HIV prevention strategy. The study explores the possibility of extending the traditional understanding of theology as *fides quarens intellectum*, with its emphasis on knowledge (the rational), to *fides quares imaginem*, with its emphasis on imagination (the aesthetic dimension of life). If one links *fides quares imaginem* to *fides quarens visum* (faith seeking new ways of visual portrayals) new options can be created for Practical Theology. The research is focused on the question of how one can effectively penetrate the realm of prejudice, blaming, and discrimination, especially with uneducated and disadvantaged groups. Thus the reason for an empirical study which probed into the possible effect that viewing the film *Yesterday* could have on farm workers in the rural community of Vlaeberg, South Africa.

### Film as a Human Text in a Pastoral Hermeneutic

Film can be seen as part of the broader communication, entertainment and media industries. According to the South African Film and Television Industry Report (1998:18) “(the film) industry plays a powerful role in communicating ideas, information and ideology.” Film is an important tool for serving social development purposes (South Africa, 1998:107) and it contributes to a nation’s resources of information, communication and entertainment (South Africa, 1998:19). Film creates a landscape in which people can experiment with the issues they are faced with in their lives, society and environment. Without media entertainment they would be unable to experiment with new models, roles, values, theories and behaviours (Miles, 1996:xv). Hoover (2006:265) draws attention to this role of media in the lives of people by commenting on the ubiquity of media. The pervasiveness and inescapability of media seems to be a universal phenomenon.

Film is recognised as being a form of media. But not everyone sees film as being art, or at least not legitimate art. The artistic dimensions, achievements or potential of film is often disdained (Smith, 2005:597). The main argument for such a viewpoint is film’s commercialism.<sup>2</sup> Yet the presupposition that art and business should not and cannot mix is false. Film, even though it can generate money, still has the power to move and enlighten, to enrich and disturb. Many other traditionally acceptable forms of art are also profit-making endeavours.<sup>3</sup> The fact that money is made out of art does not make it any less artistic. Theorists like Eisenstein and Arnheim started early in the history of film to advocate for film’s acceptance as an artistic discipline. The basic argument that comes forth in many such theorists’ work is that an artwork qualifies as such if it transforms the world. It cannot

<sup>2</sup> For example, the argument of Horkheimer and Adorno (in Johnston, 2000:87): “Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish that they deliberately produce.”

<sup>3</sup> Ballet and opera (for example) are considered art, yet no-one criticises ballet and opera companies if they make a profit, or choose to do a certain show because it draws a large paying crowd (Johnston, 2000:87-88).

merely be an imitation of it. Film is seen as art as it also has this potential to represent a transformation of the world (Smith, 2005:598-599).

Art is important to theology and the church. In terms of the current emphasis on the visual dimension of life, art becomes imperative for the visual dimension of faith. Jensen states this quite strongly (2004:ix-x): “Unless the church engages the arts both critically and appreciatively, its message will become monotone and irrelevant in a culture saturated with images, music, and drama...” The images produced by film can be seen as an extension of the visual tradition, as it is also used to produce emotion, to strengthen attachment, and to encourage imitation (Miles, 1996:3). Although there are within theological circles different reactions to film,<sup>4</sup> all must recognise and acknowledge that film has the ability, like other forms of media, to stimulate and/or communicate theological reflection. Media is increasingly taking the lead in providing people with religiously and spiritually meaningful resources (Hoover, 2006:268). This could inter alia in part be based on the notion of ‘God-in-everything’ (pantheism).<sup>5</sup> The division between what is religious and what is secular is removed and God can be experienced through anything and everything (Graham, 1997:36-37).<sup>6</sup>

Thus what is suggested is that film is a possible method of approaching and understanding life issues, a sort of analytical hermeneutical tool which reflects and often represents the spiritual realm of life. Assuming the validity of this assumption, the film and media can become an important partner for theology in the following ways:

- by offering a useful and important way in which Christian theology can explore the contemporary relevance of theology’s major themes (Marsh, 1997:33);
- by portraying the public dimension of any Christian theology, as this is done when one uses film in theology (Marsh, 1997:33);
- by assisting Christian theology in doing justice to the emotional and aesthetic aspects of human life while it deals with life’s issues. Film, due to the visual image presented, creates an emotional response and thus film allows theological reflection to begin via an emotional channel (Marsh, 1997:33);
- by raising theological questions. As film is one of the most accessible and influential cultural media, its ability to do this far exceeds that of the church and the ordinary church service (Marsh, 1997:33);

<sup>4</sup> Johnston (2000:41-58) discusses five possible theological reactions to film. These are avoidance, caution, dialogue, appropriation, and divine encounter. Avoidance is a boycotting strategy. Early on it denoted a stance within which all film was seen as evil. Now it indicates a position that argues that films that are deemed morally objectionable should be boycotted. Caution is a more common attitude among contemporary conservative Christians. It does not see abstinence as a viable option, yet it advises care as it is worried about the influence of film. Viewer discrimination is the key to this approach. Dialogue means that Christians should first view a movie on its own terms, before starting a theological dialogue with it. This approach does not see theology as less important, it only wants to create a space in which the film can communicate on its own terms. Within the fourth type of reaction, appropriation, film is seen as having the ability to expand the theologian’s understanding. Film enlarges horizons. Thus the critic must first turn to the film, not to theology. Lastly, within the approach that sees films as an opportunity for divine encounter, films are seen as having the sacramental potential to provide the viewer with a transcendental experience (Johnston, 2000:43-58).

<sup>5</sup> Pantheism should be differentiated from pantheism: everything *is* God. Pantheism means God ‘in’ creation. This should be understood pneumatologically. See Moltmann in Louw (1998:113-116).

<sup>6</sup> This pantheistic stance should be viewed in the way Louw (2000:112) explains it by quoting McFague: “...it is a view of the God-world relationship in which all things have their origin in God and nothing exists outside God, though this does not mean that God is reduced to things.” Such a pantheistic model does not assess concepts in terms of matter. It acknowledges and embraces both the transcendence and the immanence of God (Louw, 2000:112).

- by assisting theology in accomplishing its desire to be relevant (Marsh, 1997:33)
- by illuminating the spiritual realm of life and reframing the human quest for meaning in a postmodern society
- by becoming a tool for deconstructing outdated theological paradigms and reframing the role of the Christian faith in a secular society.

Thus theology ought to work with film in a creative way. Whether churches recognise it or not, theological discussion can indeed be stimulated and activated by film. Through film theologians can enrich their understanding, and/or they can review the contemporary relevance and effectiveness of certain aspects of Christian theology (Marsh & Ortiz, 1997:2).

### The Spiritual Dimension of Film

For many people, film (and television) plays a central role in determining meaning, identity and spirituality. Increasingly films serve as the most prominent and accessible spiritual and moral reference points in culture (Rossiter, 2007:2-4). Popular films implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, address the issue of how human beings should live. They give different answers, some ambiguous, others dubious, and others maybe even profound (Miles, 1996:7-8). Verbeek (1995:29) also sees film as having this potential to evoke human spirituality. "... (F)ilm art creates within a narrative perspective contemporary icons that mediate between the transcendent ideal and broken human existence... (It) is able to represent what in our scientific systemisations and in our daily experience is unrepresentable". Thus film has the potential to engage with human spirituality. It opens human rationality towards "the Other, the Transcendent" (Verbeek, 1995:29). Film is better than any other medium in dealing with the realm of the metaphysical (Deacy, 2001:14). Thus film functions within the realm of spirituality.

Rossiter (2007) argues that the potential film has for affecting people's meanings, identity and spirituality is usually not related to only one film. In other words, usually one film on its own would not have the ability to determine/change the individual's meanings, identity and spirituality. It is more likely that the culture of films will achieve this. Over a long period of time a subtle influence on the spirituality of the audience, from the films they watch, can be predicted. It may thus not be the social reality of one particular film, but rather of the culture of films, that changes the viewer.<sup>7</sup>

Hoover (2006:279) agrees that the media can be a rich source of symbolic resources. How fundamental the influence of a film, or of the culture of films, is in as far as it concerns the individual's spirituality is an open question. Yet one must be aware that, in order to watch and enjoy a film, the viewer must be able to access the worldviews and value systems present in the film, in other words have some inkling of the spirituality present in the film. This is picked up from clues in the narrative. If the viewer is unable to do this, the film would be impossible to follow. When the film is over, the viewer disengages from the story. For most people, this would mean disengaging from the spirituality they had to accept during the film in order to understand and follow the story.

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<sup>7</sup> This is illustrated by films such as *Knocked up* (2007), *Wedding Crashers* (2005), and *Zoolander* (2001). In these films, casual sex is considered the norm. In *Zoolander*, the two main male characters are shocked to hear that the leading female character had not had sex in years. Thus they promptly all have sex. In *Wedding Crashers*, the two leading characters look forward to 'wedding season', as they can bed a different girl (whom they meet at the weddings where they turn up uninvited) every night. In *Knocked up*, the two main characters meet in a club and have a drunken one-night stand. These films target the same audience. As such they create a culture of films, one which normalises casual sex.

Most people would be able to disengage with their own meanings, identity and spirituality intact (Rossiter, 2007:20-22). Yet this is not always the case. Sometimes people keep the worldviews and values that were present in the film. This can be due to different reasons. If a viewer's beliefs and values are not firmly developed, or are fairly fluid, then he/she will be more vulnerable to influence from film. It is also possible that an individual may not have clarified his/her own spirituality and moral code. Then the value systems as projected by the film can (directly or indirectly) become his/hers by default. The chances of this happening increase if the individual is exposed to a culture of film that presents the same 'reality'. If the same spirituality is repeatedly presented, the viewer may lapse into this for lack of a better option (Rossiter, 2007:20-22). It is also possible for the value matrix of a specific film not to be the sole source of values for the individual, but to serve as reinforcement of the values the viewer already has. This potential of film to influence spirituality is all the more powerful the more it remains unnoticed (Rossiter, 2007:20-22).

### Film's Influence on Behaviour

Graham (1997:38) stresses the power of film to stimulate, convince and affect viewers. As film engages the viewers' feelings and emotions before it does their logic and rationality, it is much more immediately affective. Film has the ability to make many emotional and value-laden issues more accessible (Rossiter, 2007:39). This is why film can have such a considerable influence. The visual takes precedence over both the written and the spoken, and therefore the influential power of film should not be underestimated (Graham, 1997:38). This is supported by Deacy (2005:5) referring to Ostwalt's claim that there is evidence to suggest that a good part of the millions of people who view films are affected or changed to some extent by what they see, and that films can exert influence on attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.<sup>8</sup> Opinions opposing film's ability to influence ideas, attitudes and behaviour do exist.<sup>9</sup> But many studies have shown that film does have an influence on the viewer's ideas, attitudes and behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The *Heartlines* initiative is an example of an initiative that relies on the power of media to influence attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. It presupposes that values must change for the better in order for South Africa to change for the better, and it uses media in order to change people's values.

The *Heartlines* initiative, established by the Mass Media Project, is based on the presupposition that people's values should be changed in order to address some of the key issues of South African society, such as HIV, crime, and poverty. *Heartlines* uses "the power of media to promote good values" (Heartlines, 2007: Online). It uses television, radio and print media in order to tell stories that stimulate South Africans into talking, thinking and acting on values (Heartlines, 2007: Online).

In July 2006 the first phase of the campaign was launched. Eight *Heartlines* films were broadcast, each addressing and focusing on a particular value (acceptance, responsibility, forgiveness, self-control, perseverance, honesty, compassion and second chances). The films were supported by print and other media components (Heartlines, 2007: Online).

A post-intervention evaluation was launched. An estimated 26% of the South African adult population watched one or more of the films and audience numbers doubled from the first to the last film. An estimated 4, 5 million additional values-related conversations occurred due to the watching of the *Heartlines* films. Furthermore, the films had a positive impact on decreasing stigma towards people who are HIV-positive (Heartlines, 2007: Online).

This initiative was based on the presupposition that media, specifically film, influence people. If one looks at the response to the films, as well as the post-intervention evaluation, the presupposition was accurate.

<sup>9</sup> Miles (1996:189), for example, believes that film does not influence the audience in such a way that they wish to appropriate, incorporate, and/or embody the characters' qualities, characteristics and behaviour.

<sup>10</sup> For example: studies on the effect of violence and smoking in media show that media directly influences people. Since 1975, scientific proof and statistical evidence has increased to such an extent that a clear positive link between violence in the media and increased violence among youth can be deduced

Like other forms of art, film has the ability to propose, and thus make possible, new behaviour, thoughts, and/or attitudes. Communications scholar James Carey (in Miles, 1996:xv) sees this as the ability and utility of media entertainment in general. It is a site of imaginative possibility, with which people are given the opportunity and ability to try new models, roles, theories, and behaviours. This concurs with what Miles (1996:xv) sees as the ability of film to formulate, for consideration and interpretation, the “competing issues of public and private life in a pluralistic society”.

Film affects the imagination. It stimulates the imagination by providing many images that can be recalled. It is possible that it is through this effect on the imagination that film exercises its subtle, relatively unconscious influence (Rossiter, 2007:28-29). The individual can activate his/her own imagination to explore alternative possibilities, which may lead to personal changes. But this impetus for change in behaviour and/or personal development may also be subtly conditioned by external cultural elements like film. Imaginations of the self that come from outside of the individual are important for the development of identity (Rossiter, 2007:29-30).

Thus film should be assessed as an incredibly influential factor on the level of opinion formation, the establishment of perceptions and the transformation of paradigms and life views. If this is the case, this potential and ability to infiltrate and to transform should be utilised in HIV anti-stigma interventions. HIV stigma has proven particularly hard to address. If film has the ability to change attitudes and behaviour, it can play a pivotal role in specifically anti-stigma interventions and in HIV prevention in general.

### Stigmatisation: the HIV Pandemic

Recently, many studies have been done on the relationship between spirituality and coping with HIV.<sup>11</sup> These studies have shown that spirituality is a vitally important resource for those who are HIV-positive. Yet, as so many people have been rejected from their faith communities due to being HIV-positive, it is important not to equate spirituality with religiosity, especially within the field of HIV. Many HIV-positive individuals have spiritual beliefs, but do not affiliate themselves with any religious institution.<sup>12</sup>

HIV and those infected with and/or affected by it is stigmatised all over the world. Dovidio *et al* (2000:3) describes stigma as a social construction with at least two fundamental components. Stigma relies on the recognition of difference between people based on some distinguishing characteristic which, secondly, leads to a consequent devaluation of a person because of the perceived differences (Dovidio *et al*, 2000:3). Within disease stigma

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(Bushman & Anderson, 2001:477). With smoking the same obvious link between observing smoking in films, especially if done by favourite movie stars, and youth starting smoking, can be made (Tickle, *et al*, 2001:16; Dalton *et al*, 2003). Villani (2001) reviewed the research published within the past ten years regarding the impact of media on children and adolescents. Film was among the media categories included in the study. Conclusions from this study included that the primary effects of media exposure are increased violent and aggressive behaviour, increased high-risk behaviour, and accelerated onset of sexual activity.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Grimsley (2006), Tarakeshwar *et al* (2005), Siegel & Schrimshaw (2002), Tuck *et al* (2001), Somlai & Heckman (2000), and Sowell *et al* (2000).

<sup>12</sup> Thus Le Roux (2008:17) uses the following working definition of spirituality: “Spirituality must not be equated with religion. Although the two can stand in a mutually beneficial relationship, spirituality can be present in non-religious circumstances. Spirituality refers to the deepest dimensions present in a person and consists of the core values by which the individual creates meaning in life (Kourie, 2006:22). Inherently part of spirituality is the awareness of an Other or Absolute, with whom the individual is in a relationship. This ‘Other’ can be conceptualised in many different ways (Waaajman, 2002:1). The individual’s spirituality guides and informs choices regarding morally appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.”

a link is created between the presence of a biological disease agent or any physical signs of a disease, and certain negatively-defined behaviours or groups within society (Deacon *et al*, 2005:19). The disease thus receives social meaning within a specific political and historical context (Deacon *et al*, 2005:9).

Stigma is a social process. Through this process people use shared social representations to distance themselves and their in-group from the risk of contracting a disease. They do this by construing the disease as preventable and controllable, by identifying immoral behaviours which cause the disease, by associating these specific behaviours with carriers of the disease in other groups, and by thus blaming others for their own infection and justifying punitive action against them (Deacon *et al*, 2005:23).

The blaming model of stigmatisation<sup>13</sup> explains why people stigmatise. The blaming model is:

...a fundamental emotional response to danger that helps people feel safer by projecting controllable risk, and therefore blame, onto out-groups. Stigmatisation thus helps to create a sense of control and immunity from danger at an individual and a group level. These socially constructed representations only result in discrimination and the reproduction of structural inequalities when other enabling circumstances (such as power and the opportunity to discriminate) come into play (Deacon *et al*, 2005:18).

The blaming model of stigmatisation thus shows how individuals use stigma in order to create a protected identity that is safe from the threat of HIV, regaining control and reducing anxiety. This process of othering and blaming is universal, and is universally used in response to danger (Joffe, 1999:54).

In South Africa anti-stigma strategies exist on three levels: legal measures, participation of community members in anti-stigma efforts, and information-based awareness programmes. Yet these anti-stigma strategies have not proven to be effective, or at least not effective enough.<sup>14</sup> The reason for this is that stigmatisation implies more than basic social interaction, more than impressions. At its core it is linked to paradigmatic components, therefore interactive patterns of thought within socio-cultural contexts. The blaming model of stigmatisation argues that stigmatisation is due to people's fears. Stigmatisation operates, therefore, on an existential level and affects the spiritual realm of life, i.e. our human quest for meaning, identity and value. This is an existential spiritual issue. Thus it must be addressed on a spiritual level. In order to address the issue of stigmatisation, an intervention strategy must heed the interactive link between paradigmatic thought structures and the forming of perceptions. Within this dynamic the whole question of meaning plays a conclusive role. Therefore the connection between meaning and spirituality, and spirituality-formation, can make an important contribution to an intervention strategy.

The researchers are of the opinion that film is a medium that can address the individual on this spiritual level. In film life's realities are simulated within the contextual existing paradigms. Therefore film functions within the framework of meaning in life. Media, specifically film, is an important and unique medium for addressing the issue of stigmatisation. Stigmatisation is not merely a rational, cognitive process and an effective intervention demands action on both an emotional level as well as a spiritual level. The above-mentioned presupposition has been assessed within the following case study of Vlaeberg.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Joffe (1999) and Crawford (1994) offer this model. It is also discussed in Le Roux (2008:30-32).

<sup>14</sup> See Le Roux (2008:38-40).

<sup>15</sup> One of the researchers was present at the screening and facilitated the focus group discussion. It was clear, through the focus group discussion as well as the individual responses in the questionnaires, that the audience

### **Empowerment: The Case of *Yesterday* and Vlaeberg**

In the light of the assertion that film can (and should) be part of a comprehensive HIV anti-stigma strategy, an empirical study was conducted, using the film *Yesterday*. It was done in order to illustrate the possible impact of film on people's perceptions and life hermeneutics, i.e. the way they interpret and understand life issues.<sup>16</sup> The aim of the empirical research was not to create statistical evidence, but to illustrate certain trends and tendencies, so that one can be sensitive to them; thus the choice for a qualitative approach in terms of methodology.

*Yesterday*<sup>17</sup> confronts the viewer with all kinds of issues related to HIV: poverty, gender inequality, inadequate healthcare, ignorance, stigmatisation, discrimination, rejection, etc. What makes it all the more poignant is that that which is portrayed in the film is exactly the situation faced by so many millions of South Africans. It tells the story of *Yesterday*, a young woman with a 7-year-old daughter, who lives in a rural area in Kwazulu-Natal. Unwittingly she is infected with HIV by her migrant-worker husband. Though he beats her for telling him this, he comes back to her when he is dying of AIDS. As she takes care of her husband almost everyone in her village rejects her, yet she bravely carries on, fighting to stay alive until her daughter is old enough to go to school.

*Yesterday* was chosen for this study for many reasons. It is a film by South Africans for South Africans, set within South Africa. It has a very positive outlook on life with HIV, without ever minimising the dark realities of it, and it shows how one can assist those living with HIV. The film was chosen as it starkly points to the unfairness and cruelty of stigmatisation and discrimination. Yet it is never sensational. It tells a simple story in a simple way. The film was also chosen because of its accessibility. It is in Zulu, with English subtitles. Yet it can be followed and understood even if the viewer does not understand Zulu or English, or if the viewer is illiterate. The characters do not speak often and the film depends on its strong visual imagery.

### **Vlaeberg**

Lesser-educated people are very vulnerable, especially in relation to HIV. The study wants to explore whether film can be an effective medium of addressing, educating and influencing such people at their level. Thus it was decided to use Vlaeberg, an area outside of Stellenbosch, South Africa, for the empirical study. The respondents were mainly Coloured farm workers and their families. The reasons for this decision were twofold. Firstly, the researcher had access to this community, as she had been working with a congregation in the area for a year. HIV, and the stigma attached to it, has been shown to be

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understood the film and was able to follow the story, even though it was in Zulu with English subtitles. Thus, even though some of the respondents have limited English abilities, the strong visual imagery of the film (and the fact that the characters in any case do not speak a lot) was enough to enable the respondents to fully understand the film.

<sup>16</sup> This paper wants to show how film can be used as a hermeneutical method or tool. The research done here looks at whether film can establish a link between viewers' perception of HIV and the frame of meaning within which the film puts the issue of HIV, and whether there is an awareness of this happening. Although the empirical research done here showcases an instance of the positive effect of film, the aim of the study is not to illustrate the positive effect of film, but rather to illustrate the hermeneutical abilities of film. The recognition of the hermeneutical abilities of film inherently includes the recognition of the fact that this ability can be used both positively and negatively.

<sup>17</sup> *Yesterday* was written and directed by Darrell James Roodt and produced by Anant Singh. It is the first Zulu-language film made for the international market and in 2004 it was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign-Language Film (Soares, 2004: Online).



a problem. Secondly, the need for stigmatisation intervention in lesser-educated, poorer communities is fairly desperate. This is a vulnerable group of the South African population. By making them part of this intervention, they are sensitised to the HIV situation and empowered. Their human dignity and worth is acknowledged, supported and strengthened. Thus it was decided to assess the effectiveness of this intervention strategy within just such a community.

Two questionnaires were prepared, one for before the film screening, and one for after. This was done in order to assess what the target group's preconceived, fixed ideas and perceptions regarding HIV were, and to see how it changed with the watching of the film, if at all.<sup>18</sup>

The reason for a pre-film questionnaire was that there could be some insight to what the perceptions and views on HIV were before the viewing of the film. Otherwise no assessment could be made into how the perceptions and views had changed, if at all. Film has such an insidious way of influencing people that they often do not realise that their perceptions and views have changed. The pre-film questionnaire had only two questions.<sup>19</sup>

- What do you think about HIV and AIDS and about people who are HIV positive?
- What do you know about the HIV-situation in South Africa?

In order to make the post-film questionnaire valuable and to assess and interpret the empirical data, certain assessment categories for benchmarking had to be built into the questions. The post-film questionnaire had six questions as the researcher wanted to assess responses against the following benchmarks: feelings, identification, perceptions, text/message, theology (understanding of God/God-image), and reaction (dimension of responsibility and ethics). These six categories were identified in order to assess the existential and emotional impact of the film as text was understood, how the individual understands spirituality, how he/she understands theology, and how the film affected the individual (if at all). The questions were as follows:

- (1) How do you feel after you have watched the film? Why? – *feelings*
- (2) With which character did you identify the most? Why? – *identification*
- (3) Did the film
  - (a) confirm any of your existing ideas, convictions and beliefs? Explain
  - (b) challenge any of your existing ideas, convictions and beliefs?
 Explain – *perceptions*
- (4) What was the film trying to say? – *text/message*
- (5) Now that you have seen the movie, do you think differently about God? Why? – *theology (understanding of God)*
- (6) Now that you have seen the movie, what are you going to do? Are you going to do anything differently? – *reaction (dimension of responsibility and ethics)*

The film screening took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> August 2007, at the Vlaeberg Tennis Club, which is also the church hall of the Vlaeberg Congregation. Although 55 people came to the

<sup>18</sup> The questionnaires were first tested in a pilot study. Due to the results attained from the pilot study one change in wording was made to the pre-film questionnaire. The importance of a well-facilitated post-film discussion was also realised.

<sup>19</sup> Due to the sample group's limited levels of education it was decided to reduce the questionnaire to the minimum.

screening, only 23 people (11 female, 12 male) could be used as respondents.<sup>20</sup> A focus group discussion followed the screening of the film, as an open discussion can bring important insight into how the film was experienced and understood.

## Findings

The empirical study showed that the film communicates very effectively on the level of perception formation. Due to their viewing of the film new attitudes and beliefs developed, which the respondents acknowledged. For example, they admitted to a new awareness of the feelings of those with HIV and of a realisation of the importance of supporting those with HIV. The open discussion had the added benefit that it made the respondents themselves realise that although they blame ignorance for their and others' stigmatising beliefs and behaviours, they actually stigmatise because they are afraid of HIV. The film also made a difference on an educational level. Although the respondents were aware of the danger and prevalence of the virus, and even though education was not the aim of the film or screening, the film still educated many about the factual realities of HIV. In terms of perceptions it became clear that there is a very clear connection between HIV and a *promiscuous* sex-life.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly enough, the respondents also voiced a conviction that they must now communicate what they have learnt to others. They felt that, after having seen the film, they are now messengers who must tell others about what they have learnt.<sup>22</sup>

What the empirical study illustrated is that film is a medium which operates on the spiritual level of meaning as well. Viewing the film had a profound effect on the values, presuppositions, attitudes, and ideas of the audience. In illustrating this, the need for a paradigm shift was demonstrated.

Furthermore, film is a valuable anti-stigma strategy and important to any comprehensive anti-stigma intervention. This is an important realisation for theology in general as well as for those involved in designing and implementing measures for addressing HIV stigma. Stigma is not a rational or cognitive process, but rather an emotional process. Film influences the viewer on an emotional level. It engages feelings and emotions. Thus film functions and addresses the audience on the same level as where stigma develops and functions. The findings of the empirical study supported this hypothesis. The influence of the film *Yesterday* was investigated and it was shown that viewing *Yesterday* had a definite influence on the stigmatisation and stigmatising tendencies of the respondents. Viewing the film touched the audience on a very deep, emotional level. This made them able to access their stigmatising thoughts, beliefs and behaviours, and gave them the ability to change these.

The empirical study made it clear that when pastoral care wants to operate on the level of community development and probe into the realm of perceptions, it should be done within the dynamics of group interaction and in-depth discussion. The post-film discussion proved this point. A post-film discussion can have the important effect of entrenching the spirituality present in the film, as the viewer is forced to acknowledge and rethink it. Thus it would be less easy for the audience to distance themselves from it. In the questionnaires of

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<sup>20</sup> The rest were either too young (there was about 20 very young children), had to leave early, or were illiterate.

<sup>21</sup> The film does address this perception, making it clear that an individual can be HIV-positive without having led a promiscuous sex life.

<sup>22</sup> When asked in Question 6 about what they were now going to do and/or do differently, many respondents said that they will now tell others the truth about HIV, that having HIV doesn't mean you are promiscuous, and/or that you must support those with HIV.

the empirical study, few people were willing to admit to possible stigmatising and discriminatory behaviour and attitudes. An open discussion was necessary for them to realise their attitudes and behaviours, to admit to it, to realise the alternative offered in the film, and to bring this in relation to their own lives. Stigma and stigmatising tendencies are so deeply entrenched that such post-film discussions are a must if a film is to be used in anti-stigma interventions.

Spirituality is a dimension that connects all people. It is also the key to addressing issues caused by one of the most serious pandemics ever. The spirituality inherently present in film can be the way to reveal and address the stigma and stigmatisation of those who have HIV. The spiritual dimension present in all individuals can very effectively be addressed via the spiritual dimension in film. Film and the film-culture is not an opponent of theology. Acknowledging and recognising the dimension of *fides quarens visum* within theology is necessary in order to embrace a useful and important collaborator. Film might be a modern invention, but that does not make it an evil one. Theology must recognise the importance of the visual, and also the importance of film as a form of visual art. It has the ability to influence spirituality. This ability can be channelled and utilised in certain directions and areas. In this study, the spiritual dimension and abilities of film was explored in the realm of HIV stigmatisation. Film has the power to influence people in the way they perceive and treat those with HIV. It could therefore be posed that if Practical Theology wants to expand its understanding of the human praxis (the intention of human actions within the realm of meaning and significance) it should supplement the notion *fides quarens intellectum* with *fides quarens imaginem* and *fides quarens visum*. Such a paradigm shift can open up new avenues for Christian spirituality and its effectiveness in an age of digital and visual communication.

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