

## Religion and the Movies: Teachers' Information Sheet

Note: This resource particularly focuses on the issues of blasphemy, censorship, and freedom of speech in relation to films.

Summary of key points from Dr David Tollerton's lecture:

In 1936, Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Vigilanti Curia* on the use and misuse of films. This reflected the strong influence of Catholics and Catholic morality in Hollywood. There was a strict code enforced by the Catholic backed Motion Picture Association of America and the Legion of Decency organised boycotts of films they considered to be immoral.

In Britain the blasphemy law, which only applied to Christianity, was repealed in 2008 following a thirty year period of relative disuse. The film *The Life of Brian* was produced in the aftermath of the prosecution of James Kirkup for the publication of his poem "The Love That Dares To Speak Its Name." Monty Python were consciously using the film to challenge the issue of censorship and blasphemy.

Muslim attitude to the depiction of prophets is mixed and must be understood in particular contexts. The *Noah* film was banned in some Asian Muslim countries because it depicted a prophet, but *The Passion of the Christ* was generally well received in the same countries. Western coverage of this censorship is monolithic and without nuance – the banning of films fits into a wider rhetoric on the controversy of the film in general. It fits in with a familiar discourse on the intolerant nature of the Islamic faith.

Ideas for using this resource

Watch the lecture given by Dr David Tollerton (available here – from 00:30 – 04:47) to give students background into the Hays Code.

Using the copy of the Hays Code ask students to evaluate recent popular films and see if they would have passed the Code. Students can evaluate the code. They could have a go at writing a modern day code that would satisfy Christian or Islamic teachings.

An able group could watch *The History of Hollywood Censorship and the Ratings System* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ynf8BmfgPtM>) and use the information they gather there to create a 6 section comic strip on Hollywood Censorship. It would also facilitate a discussion on the Catholic influence in American cinema.

Watch lecture by Dr David Tollerton (from 06:45 – 10:19) for a perspective on Islam and censorship in relation to Aronofsky's film *Noah*. Students could also read [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19632673](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19632673) and use it to debate the arguments for and against censorship and freedom of speech.

Using Pope Pius XI's quote (for the full text see [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_29061936\\_vigilanti-cura\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_29061936_vigilanti-cura_en.html)) ask students to consider whether it is true that 'bad' movies damage humans. This would be a good debate question or a practice exam question.