



Signs

Mel Gibson is a priest who has lost his faith after an apparently random accident while killed his wife. Convinced that her last words to him are meaningless he decides that life is purposeless and that God does not exist. We are looking at a post-Christian who is in the dark with no guide or help. What does such a person believe in?

But then crop circles appear in the field by his house and in other places in the world. Are these natural phenomena, or people playing tricks, or are they signs, do they have meaning? The question arises – is there someone up there watching over us? We see aerial shots of empty sky, and then shots from the sky of a space shaped like a cross and the spire of a church. Does God see us?

At first he is sceptical, but gradually becomes persuaded that they are indeed signs, but signs of menace and despair, for they are the landing signs for an alien invasion.

The critical conversation of the film then takes place between Mel Gibson and his brother. Gibson's character claims there are two kinds of people in the world, those who believe in signs and the possibility of miracle whose lives contain hope and those who see the random and the meaningless, who think luck and coincidence are just that. These people have no hope, just fear. He categorises himself as having become just such a person.

More questions arise. What do non-believers believe in? Gibson's daughter has 'bad feelings' – should they be listened to or acted upon? His son buys a book on extra terrestrials, - should the book be trusted, - what does the book say? Should we trust the TV and the opinions and views offered there? People are talking about the end of the world – a girl asks Gibson to hear her confession. He himself refuses to pray – I have wasted too much time in prayer.

So the family descends into fear and terror. They retreat from the aliens deeper and deeper into the basement and deeper into the darkness. There they go through a death experience and the dark night of the soul. Mel Gibson, at rock bottom, speaks again to the God he has rejected. The personal relationship, full of anger and hatred, is nonetheless restored. Yet they make it through the night and find the spare lightbulbs. But the ordeal is not yet ended.

Morgan is taken. How can he be saved? But then Mel Gibson remembers finds that the random meaningless babble of a dying woman contains a message. The witless foible of his little girl provides a weapon and his son's affliction becomes the means of his salvation. A clue is provided when he speaks to the man who killed his wife 'it was meant to be'. Graham discovers purpose in purposelessness. There is purpose even in evil and senselessness. At the end of the film, Graham has recovered his faith and returns to the priesthood.





Some questions are highlighted by the film:

What kinds of events or circumstance drive people away from Christian faith? In this case it is a meaningless death – I know clergy who have had exactly the same experience. But what other barriers to belief are there? This has often preoccupied MTAG.

What do people outside the Christian faith believe in? We are offered the crop circles, but also layers of superstition, the supernatural, extraterrestrials, conspiracy theory, hidden codes and signs.

Where do people find value, meaning and purpose? What is the point of life, and in the face of the end of the world, what do people both inside and outside the church think about ultimate destiny? The newsreader comments that people who see the lights in the sky are heading for temples mosques and churches. And we do see this in time of crisis (9/11 and Soham). What of people who find no comfort in religion? At the point of deepest terror, Mel Gibson recalls the births of his children and his feelings then, and this remembered joy prevents him from ultimate despair.

Is it true that faith means there are two kinds of people in the world? The people who can see and recognise signs and by this obtain hope and the people for whom there is but chance and random event? Do we see purpose and meaning more readily if we have a personal faith and is that a good thing? What about finding purpose in evil (nb September 11th)?

Does prayer have a value? At the climax of the film, prayer is recovered.

Also, the aliens are killed by water. At the cathartic moment of the film, we see the alien (the devil) being baptised and by this means is overcome. There are powerful associations with sacramental understanding of good triumphing over evil, but also of cleansing and purging.

What will be the effect on people of seeing this film? At the end Christian faith is triumphant, - he is a priest again, but will people be convinced? Is SIGNS a film of apologetic and does it try to do what we cannot, speak to people of their inner fears and preoccupations and challenge them as to what they really believe. Or is it exploitative of a Christian past, - the whole thing has a backwoods, long time ago feel to it.

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