The movie *The Intouchables* is a French film about an unlikely friendship that develops between two very different men when Driss, a man from the projects, becomes the caretaker of Philipee, a wealthy quadriplegic man. They each affect each other’s lives through humor and honesty and end up becoming exactly what each other needed. The purpose of this paper will be to dig deeper into the meaning of this movie by looking at the different worlds of the film. I will analyze each world of the text along with a theological perspective of the film. I will end by looking at how the viewer can take the essence of this film and put it into action in his or her life.

My first step will be to look behind the film, I will do this by looking into what the directors and the main actors intentions were for this film. Directors Oliver Nakache and Eric Toledano first got the idea for the film after watching a documentary that told the story of a friendship between millionaire Philippe Pozzo di Borgo and Abdel, a man from the projects who becomes Philippe’s caretaker. Nackache\(^1\) said that when they first saw it they were not mature enough to take on this project, but Toledano\(^2\) said that they came back to it later because of the theme of a positive outlook on life and a sense of humor in the midst of challenging situations. This positive outlook and sense of humor built in the film was of great importance to not only the directors but also to the real life


Philippe. Philippe told Nakache and Toledano, “If you make this film, it has to be funny. Because this story has to be treated with humor.”

Another important idea built into this film is focusing on the relationship that is built between these two men from different social classes when they allow each other’s advantages to overcome their disadvantages. This relationship can be seen throughout the entire movie. Driss who finds it difficult to support himself economically is able to support Philippe physically by feeding him, cleaning him, lifting him, and doing everything for him that he himself cannot do. Philippe, on the other hand is able to support Driss economically by providing housing, and finances. Each person took a part of their own society and imparted it into the other’s life.

Nakache and Toledano show the background of this movie, which is the real life story of Philippe and Abdel, through environment and through the work of the actors themselves. They worked very hard to make sure everything about this movie drew from that story.

The next step is to look at the film and see how it invites the viewer to participate in the drama. To start off, The Intouchables is a drama and comedy set in modern day France about an unlikely friendship between two very different men. This film is based off of true events and people, because of that this film gives a very authentic view of friendships, which I believe to be a central theme of the film.

The two main characters are two men of very different backgrounds, different cultures, and they lead two very different lifestyles, but they have a friendship that is authentic and real. Driss is a young, fit, Senegal born man who grew up in the projects. At first we see that he lives off the government collecting unemployment benefits, he is reckless, he is violent, and he spent time in prison for robbery. Philippe, on the other hand, is a middle aged French native who grew up in sophisticated society. He is a very wealthy man, he listens to classical music, has a taste for art, and he is an educated man. These two men come into contact because Philippe is a quadriplegic and is in need of a caretaker and Driss is an applicant for the job.

Philippe hires Driss for some reason unseen by those close to him and it is there that this odd but authentic friendship starts, what makes it so authentic is their similarities. Both men are seen as outsiders, not normal, untouchable as the title says. Philippe is an untouchable because of his physical disability and Driss is an untouchable because of his socioeconomic disability. Although they are very different, they are the same. It is this that binds them together in their odd friendship. The underlying topic of this film that I believe the directors are trying to get across is friendship. The film shows that true friendship is not based on what society says, it is based on common factors that bring people together.

Not only is does this film show what true friendship is it shows how necessary it is. These two men needed each other, by my observation they disliked life and the places they were in, but by the end of the film they loved life. Without each other that difference would not have been made, that love for life would not exist in them.
So the next question that we must ask is what happens to the viewer who watches this film and inhabits the world of the text? If the viewer watches the film, views what the film implies as truth then he or she would understand the meaning and importance of friendship. This movie has many values connected to friendship that the viewer can take to heart. One would be that true friendship views its partner as useful. In the film Philippe’s friend tells him that Driss is useless, but Philippe doesn’t see him that way, he sees him as useful. This is very similar to the view that the Apostle Paul had for the slave of Philemon. Philemon’s slave, Onesimus, was seen as useless, his name meant useless but Paul said he has become useful. True friends recognize the qualities in each other and see them as useful when others see them as useless. This is a lesson we need to impart in our own friendships, we must recognize the qualities in our friends that make them useful and work in such a way that will bring out that usefulness not as a benefit for our own life but also for the life of our friend.

Another value that can be taken from this film is vulnerability. It was obvious to see that Philippe was physically vulnerable, but that isn’t the main type of vulnerability that enhanced the friendship. The vulnerability that enhanced the friendship was emotional vulnerability. Philippe opened up to Driss; he shared his story of life, love and loss. He tells Driss, “My real handicap isn’t being in a chair. It’s living without her (his deceased wife).” Philippe is open with Driss about his handicaps and in turn Driss becomes vulnerable about his own handicaps. Driss tells Philippe about his life, his past, and his struggle. Because the two open up about their lives they are better able to accept each other. If the viewer takes this value to heart they would be more apt to be vulnerable
with their true friends as well as being accepting of them. Some of the concerns that come with this are that it can be hard to be vulnerable; it is hard to share our deepest pains, deepest struggle, and deepest thoughts. With that concern, some people have a hard time trusting others, we are scared that if we open up about our lives the person we open up to can use our vulnerability to take advantage of us and hurt us.

Another value that can be found in the film is humor. Because the two friends are open with each other and accepting of each other’s backgrounds and handicaps they are able add the value of humor to their relationship. Most people would feel inappropriate making jokes about a man’s inability to move or about a man’s lack of social skills, but in Driss and Philippe’s cases they aren’t hindered by that feeling of inappropriateness. Driss is able to make jokes about Philippe because he has a feeling of comfort around Philippe. We see with the other caretakers that there isn’t that feeling of comfort and as a result any jokes about Philippe’s handicap isn’t humorous but instead it is cruel. If the viewer recognizes this he or she would be able to understand the value of humor in a relationship and how it can enhance a friendship.

Some self-understanding that a viewer would be able to obtain by watching this film is that we all have our handicaps, our things that make life hard for us. To overcome these handicaps we need authentic friendships with others, where we can be vulnerable, where we can trust each other, where we can make jokes about each other out of love instead of hate. If the viewer recognizes and understands these values in a way that allows him or her to put them into action, their lives can be changed and enhanced. However, even though the film shows these values in such a large way there are some
concerns that can arise from some of the concepts in the film. In the film there are scenes with prostitution, vulgar language and drug use. If the viewer accepts these actions as acceptable in their own live it would be unhealthy.

Now that I have done a thick description of the text, the next step is to interpret the film theologically. Instead of looking at the film to find theological themes, I will look at the doctrine of the divine image and see how the film compares and contrasts to that doctrine. But before I can start the comparison I must give a short overview of my doctrine of the divine image.

I believe that God created all people in the image of God. In Genesis 1:27 it is written, “So God created mankind in His own image, in His own image He created them; male and female He created them.” Through the image of God, man is able to demonstrate our ability to have a relationship with not only one another but with God as well. We are also able to love because of the image of God, and we are able to rely on others and God to overcome our weaknesses and struggles. We are also able to trust and forgive others. We are to mirror the image of God by living our lives in a way that represents the loving covenantal relationship that we share with our Heavenly Creator. In 1 John 4:8 it is written, “Whoever does not know God does not know love, for God is love.” So if we are to mirror our creator, who is love, we are to demonstrate that we are created in image of God through our love.

Now that I have given a brief description of the doctrine I will look at the film and see how it compares and contrasts to the doctrine. The film has principles that seem to be along the same line as the doctrine but it also has principles that do not seem to line up
so well with the doctrine. I will first start with the principles from the film that do line up with the doctrine.

Throughout the entirety of the film we see Philippe and Driss demonstrating a principle of the doctrine of the image of God in their relationship with one another. The relationship that these two have is able to stand firm through large social and physical differences that Philippe and Driss have. They are able to weather the difficulties of life that come to each other them because they help each other to handle the difficulties. They are also able to learn from each other about how to better themselves. This relationship that the two share is a great example of the relationship that we as Christians should have with one another. This can demonstrate the relationship that one can have with Jesus Christ and his followers. The lives of Jesus’ apostles show us this, through out Christ’s ministry he was teaching his apostles how to better live, he was calming the storms of life that came before them, both physical and metaphysical. Philippe and Driss have a relationship that is similar to the relationship Christ shared with his apostles, it is an example of the relationships we should have in our own lives.

Another similarity between the film and the doctrine is love. One of the ways that love is demonstrated in the film is through forgiveness. In the beginning of the film Driss steals Philippe’s Fabergé egg, later Philippe confronts him about the theft and at the end of the film Driss returns the egg. Although Driss never asks for forgiveness in a verbal way the viewer can tell that Driss desires to be forgiven by Philippe, and when he returns the egg there is a sense of forgiveness even though Philippe never speaks a word about it. I believe that Driss desires to be forgiven for his actions because he cares deeply for his
friend and he doesn’t want his friend to see him as a thief. This love is represents how we are made in the image of God.

Near the middle of the film Philippe asks Driss if he can count on him and Driss responds by saying yes. I believe that this interaction converges with the doctrine of the image of God. It aligns with the doctrine because Philippe was relying on Driss, he could not do anything himself, and he needed Driss to take care of his daily needs. Philippe needed Driss to clean him, change him, feed him, exercise his muscles, and do everything that Philippe could not physically do himself. Philippe was completely relying on Driss, he put his entire trust in to Driss, and he put his life into Driss’ hands. This principle of trust and relying on others relates to how we as Christians must trust and rely on one another and upon Christ. Christ tells us in Matthew 11 to rely on him and his great power. As we mirror the image of God we are to set an example of how to trust and rely on God as well as being someone whom others can trust and rely on.

Now that I have looked at how the film aligns with the doctrine of the image of God I will look at how the film diverges from the doctrine. One way that the film diverges is represented in how those close to Philippe first view Driss. We can see in the beginning of the friendship that those who care for Philippe do not think Driss is a good person to have around Philippe; they don’t like him, and don’t trust him. The principle that is represented here is judgment. If it had been up to Philippe’s friends Driss would never been allowed to work for him because they judged him as a bad person, but Philippe held back from judgment. Because Philippe did not initially judge Driss he was able to get to know him and truly come to love him. Judgment does not align with the
image of God because it drives other people, as well as ourselves, away from the Kingdom of God.

Another area in which the film diverges from the image of God is that both Driss and Philippe are outcasts, or untouchables, because of their handicaps. By society they are both seen as useless, as not important, and because of that they are pushed aside. But it isn’t our physical abilities or our social status that shows we are made in the image of God. The ability to love and live in relationship with others shows that we are made in the image of God. Yes there is no doubt that these men are handicapped but there is also no doubt that these men are capable of loving and living in relation with others. If we look at the example of Christ we see that he did not call the “normal” people of society but he called the outcasts, the lame, the blind, the poor, the untouchables. If we are to live in the image of God we should live according to the example Christ set, not the example that society set.

Through the film we see that it converges with and diverges away from the doctrine of the image of God. It converges with the doctrine in the way that it demonstrates the relationships and love that people need to have with one another and with God. We need to have vulnerable relationships with other Christians and with Christ himself. We must demonstrate our love for them through our actions and through the words that we speak. We need to show forth the love to others that Christ showed forth to us. The film diverges from the doctrine of the image of God in the way that it shows characters allowing judgment and inequality to take charge of their words, thoughts, and
actions. Judgment is not apart of the image of God and neither is seeing people as useless and untouchable.

After watching this film and interpreting it in a theological manner I believe there are certain principles that I can put into action in my own life. One is that I need to invest in authentic friendship with those around me. I do this by being vulnerable with them and allowing them to be vulnerable with me. I also do this by putting my trust in them and relying on them. Not only do I need to put my trust in my friends but also in my God, I need to rely on Him in the hardships of this life. I need to trust that His abilities can overcome and transform my disabilities. Another thing that I need to do in my own life is not myself higher than others. When I do this I am pushing others down, I am setting them off to the side. By doing this I am saying that I believe they are useless and unimportant. So instead of this I need to seek those who are considered untouchable and find a way to serve them, I need to find a way to show them and society that they are in fact useful. I can do this by simply being in relation with them and by allowing them to enhance my own life, they and others will see how useful they can truly be. After watching this film there is a question that has stuck with me that I would like to share. Have my actions caused someone to see himself or herself or another person as untouchable, and if so, how can I remedy this?
Work Cited:
