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27 January 2011

### “Was Blind, but Now I See”

For nearly two hundred years the English slave trade existed while the English turned a blind eye on the inhumane treatment of these people. The film *Amazing Grace*, directed by Michael Apted, retells the struggle in helping the English to finally see the cruelty of their ways. Behind the political story lies a depth of understanding that is told through the use of light and dark themes that are incorporated into the conflict within William Wilberforce.

From the onset, Wilberforce is established as a character of compassion when he confronts a man beating his exhausted horse. The man is portrayed as a heartless master trying to force his animal to do its work. Wilberforce's confrontation with this man is not one of allegations, rage or demands of sympathy, but one of genuine logic and appeal to the man's rational. He simply tells the man that if he “leaves his horse alone for an hour he might recover.” The master reluctantly understands the wisdom and drops his whip in the mud. This scene foreshadows what Wilberforce went on to accomplish as he led Parliament to abolish slavery. His compassion for all of God's creations was the guiding force in his cause, bringing to light the facts of slavery and working to persuade his countrymen to do the right thing.

Doing the right thing is a conflict that plagues Wilberforce throughout the film. This struggle is captured in the use of lighting. His pessimism is easily felt in the darker and earlier stages of his quest, where he is repeatedly cut off and knocked down. The emphasis of light in the later stages of the timeline represent his optimism as he meets his future wife and sees the new possibilities of passing his legislation.

The realization of these new possibilities is portrayed in a simple scene with Barbara. The relationship between light and dark were effectively depicted as Wilberforce explains his rising doubts in passing anti-slavery motions. While speaking, he takes a candle, melts the bottom over the dying flame and sets the new one in place of the old. This image visually emphasizes Wilberforce's drive. The replacement of one strategy with another, the renewal of the struggle, the need to shed light on injustice, the power of just a little light: all of these thoughts are reflected in this simple action and use of light.

Finally, the theme of light and darkness is used in the interaction with John Newton, the former slave ship captain turned preacher and author of the renowned hymn “Amazing Grace.” The well-known line “Was blind, but now I see,” was used in the film to continue the light and dark theme. Newton physically loses his sight but tells Wilberforce of his spiritual ability to see. This side story reinforces the dark and blinding side to the slave trade, and the ability that the light of Christ gave to the blind sinner. Newton was a strong example of each person's need for a Savior.

The dark realities of the slave trade and the new light of respect and equality contrast each other in such a way that the audience is able to truly feel the depths of despair and the light of a new time. The film's use of light and dark effectively help to portray the conflicts of the battle that William Wilberforce eventually won.