

# Wyoming Catholic Register

**CULVER CITY, Calif.** – Walter Cronkite wanna be, Bruce Nolan (Jim Carrey), is truly angry at God. First of all, he gets no respect, just like the city in which he lives and works: Buffalo, New York. According to director Tom Shadyac (Ace Ventura: Pet Detective, Liar, Liar, The Nutty Professor, Patch Adams, Dragonfly), “Buffalo is a city that needs reinvigorating, and so does Bruce.” The real source of Bruce’s anger, however, is that God is all-powerful, but won’t do anything to help him in his everyday life.

Bruce works as a reporter for a local television news station and he gets all the crummy jobs. Bruce and his long-term girl friend, Grace (Jennifer Aniston) live together and she wants to get married, but Bruce doesn’t see it because he is so self-centered. He only sees himself as a frustrated man approaching 40, besieged by his own troubles and ignored by God. If God is so powerful, why won’t he help Bruce who cannot even be kind to the poor without failing?

“ Why do you hate me?” Bruce cries out to God in misery and despair. But Bruce’s image of God and level of faith is underdeveloped to say the least. He thinks that God is like the king of an ant hill who burns off the feelers of the other ants because he can.

Bruce loses his job when he messes up a “Maid of the Mist” story (historic tourist boat ride at Niagara Falls.) It is a very low moment for him. When he gets home, his pager goes off. It ignores the phone number that appears and when it continues to beep, he throws it out the window. It survives being run over by a car and when Bruce walks by its remains in the street later on, it beeps again. He calls the number and a man invites him to come to a job interview.

The “man” turns out to be God (Morgan Freeman) working as a janitor in a warehouse. He knows everything there is to know about Bruce. They talk about the dignity of work, especially manual labor, and God invites Bruce to help, but he declines.

In the end, however, God gives Bruce his own powers to see if Bruce can do a better job. There are two stipulations to this “gift”: Bruce cannot tell anyone he is now “God” and he cannot interfere with anyone’s will. “Can I ask why?” says Bruce. “Yes, you can, and that’s the beauty of it,” answers God. As God walks away he tells Bruce that because of free will, he cannot make anyone love him.

Bruce Almighty is an extremely funny movie. At the advance screening for the press and hundreds of “recruits” (passers-by randomly invited to see the film in return for feedback) the movie had us laughing in the first five seconds with hardly a lull right through the final credits. Not only did we identify with Bruce’s dilemma at being the incarnation of Murphy’s Law, we could appreciate a more mature Jim Carrey as directed by the more mature Tom Shadyac. Yes, the crass bathroom and body-parts

humor is there. The film's perspective is male with little feminine awareness, which is rather typical of Shadyac's work – so far.

But for all its potential minus points, the scale tips to the plus side because it is a positive – and entertaining – witness to the attributes of God who is present to creation and who cares about humanity.

Morgan Freeman as God is believable and an excellent casting choice that invites reverence and faith, even when “God” laughs at our human foibles.

Several major themes emerge in *Bruce Almighty*: the gift of free will, the mystery of human anger toward God, God's sense of humor, and the nature and attributes of the Almighty

Anger is defined as extreme annoyance and comes from Old Norse meaning “trouble and sorrow.” Anger is often synonymous with rage, fury, resentment and invites revenge. Anger is as old as the Garden of Eden and as recent as the workplace and current events.

Bruce is so right when he says that God is all-powerful. The Scriptures, the Creed, The Catechism of the Catholic Church and St. Thomas Aquinas, teach that God is all-powerful, almighty (n. 268), all-knowing, all-present to creation – that God cares. The beauty about a film like *Bruce Almighty* is that we get the experience of what an all-loving, caring and present God is for all people and for each person in particular, without distinction of culture, creed, social status, age or gender. The source of the human dignity of the family of mankind is in a God who is active in the world and loves us.

Bruce is no theologian but he is a person of faith seeking understanding. He doesn't know the difference between magic and miracles, he has to learn. His faith is underdeveloped, but the seeds are there. After all, you cannot get angry at someone you don't believe in.

*Bruce Almighty's* value for the faith community is that it is inclusive and offers much to talk about to help us integrate faith and life. Bruce doesn't do this very well at first, but we can imagine that he's going to continue his journey as the film comes to its Hollywood-via-Buffalo bakery ending. By now it is obvious that there are sacred signs wherever we look and that God is everywhere and in every person.