

# BUTTERCUP

A TeleKETICS Presentation



GLUE THIS SURFACE TO FILM CAN LID

CHURCHILL FILMS  
662 North Robertson Blvd.  
Los Angeles, California 90069

A DIMENSION FILM

## TeleKETICS Presents A DIMENSION Film

to explore the Christian experience  
in religious education and worship

### TEACHING GUIDE

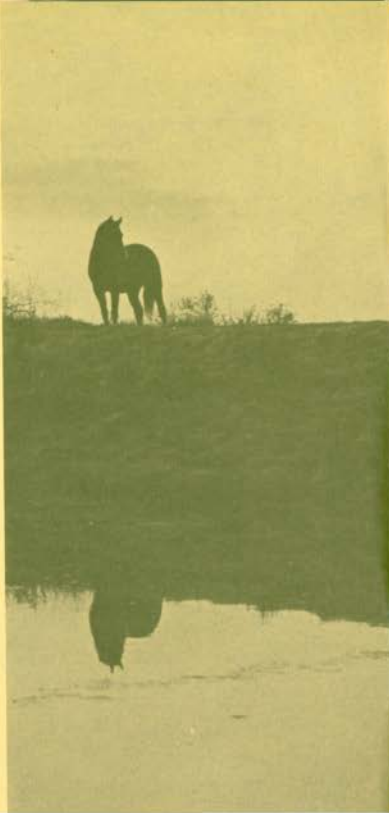
By Jacqueline Middaugh

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The theological problem today is to find the art of drawing religion out of man, not pumping it into him. The redemption has happened. The Holy Spirit is in man. The art is to help men become what they are.

KARL RAHNER

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### STORYLINE

It could be just another nature film. Something good for a rainy day, or to fill a lazy afternoon. Nope. This one's different. First of all, the photography is masterful, the soundtrack superb. There is no real plot, no actors, except for a photogenic flower and a cast that includes a skunk, a raccoon, a couple of frogs, a water-strider, and some horses.

There are obvious ecological implications: a delicate buttercup floats down a glistening mountain stream. Along the way it passes plants and animals which are part of a natural unadulterated wilderness. But, as the flower approaches civilization, the landscape changes. Trees and wildlife are gone, the air is thick with noxious fumes, the roar of factories and machines is deafening, and man himself has become insensitive to the horror, and surveys the scene in hard hat and heavy boots. In the inevitable, jarring conclusion, the buttercup is swallowed in the stench, sludge and garbage of industrial man.

## THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

Theological themes, like freckles, lose most of their impact when you examine them in isolation. Without a nose to march across, freckles are just a bunch of spots; without a worldful of people and bugs and buttercups, theology reveals only a remote and unreachable God. It's context that counts: the intersecting of humanity and divinity, the weaving together of previously unrelated experiences into a pattern that makes sense and becomes for us a sign of God's reality.

BUTTERCUP is that kind of sign. You can't ferret out its theological themes and analyse them one by one without doing violence to the film as a total experience. The water, sky, earth, trees, and animals shout out the sacredness of creation; yet, at the same time, it is impossible to overlook the ugliness and destruction wrought by man, who is, ironically, the most sacred of God's creatures, even sharing with Divinity the care of creation.

In its simple, eloquent way, BUTTERCUP has a lot to say about the rhythms of creation. The sun rises, kindles the full fire of day, and fades slowly into night. The stream brings nourishment to the green and growing things that live along its banks. Even in their violence, these rhythms of nature reflect a pattern that makes sense: living things depend on one another; death is a completion of life

and a continuation of natural processes. For, as Teilhard de Chardin explains, the cyclic process of birth, growth, decay is the means by which the universe struggles toward full union with its creator...all life is holy. "Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, say again the words: 'This is my Body.' And over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, express again the supreme mystery of faith: 'This is my Blood.' "

Like the small golden flower, bobbing and dancing on its way downstream, man witnesses and participates in the birth-death rhythms of creation. But human beings aren't buttercups; they have the freedom, the power, and, it seems, the inclination to break the cycle, change its course, do violence to one another, and ultimately, to destroy even those things which sustain human life. The reasons we give for doing so sound pretty persuasive. What's wrong with progress, for example, or free enterprise? What can be said against self-fulfillment? Nothing, really, unless in pursuing these we lose touch with what is beautiful in ourselves and in the world as it is.

The fragile-yet-resilient buttercup survives plenty of natural hazards — the rapids and rocks and animals along the way, the dark night and midday sun. But it is destroyed, ultimately, by the one creature specially invited by God to be a lover of the earth. If this is what can happen to a buttercup, what then, are we doing to one another?

## PROCEDURE ONE

(For Very Young Children)

### BEFORE VIEWING FILM

1. Ask everyone to close their eyes and imagine a very beautiful secret place — in the country, the mountains, the desert — a place where no human being has ever set foot. Have a few volunteers describe their "places." Ask leading questions, like the following:

- What do you see around you?
- Can you hear any sounds?
- Reach out your hands. What can you touch?
- What time of year is it? How do you know?
- Are there any other living things? How can you show them that you are a friend?
- What is the most special thing about your place?
- Would you invite someone else to share it with you?

2. Explain briefly to the group that they are going to see a film about someone else's beautiful secret place. (Try to say as little as possible about the film's actual content. The impact is much more powerful when the audience is able to make its own associations.)

### SHOW FILM

3. Discussion points:

- How big is a buttercup? (As big as a nickel.) How is the buttercup like a person? Does it remind you of anyone you know? Have you ever felt or acted like the buttercup? What would you have enjoyed most about your trip downstream?
- The buttercup passed lots of things along its way that could have been dangerous. Can you name some of them? What was the greatest danger to the buttercup? When in the film did you have a hunch something terrible was about to happen?
- How do you feel when you are all alone in a beautiful place? When you discover something beautiful, would you rather share it or keep it a special secret? Why?
- If you had a friend who was blind and deaf, and you wanted to show him your favorite place, what place would you choose? How would you show it to him?

3. Explain to the group that the film they are about to see has something to do with survival and priorities.

#### SHOW FILM

4. Discussion questions:

- In BUTTERCUP there are two views of life and growth at war with each other. What are they? Which do you think is the better view?
- Are you more at home in the city or the wilderness? What needs do you have that are fulfilled by the city? In what ways do you need the wilderness? Do you have a "prayer place," imaginary or real, where you go to sort things out, where you can talk to God?
- What kinds of violence — actual or potential — did you see in the film? Can life be totally non-violent? Is there a distinction between "natural" and "man-made" violence?

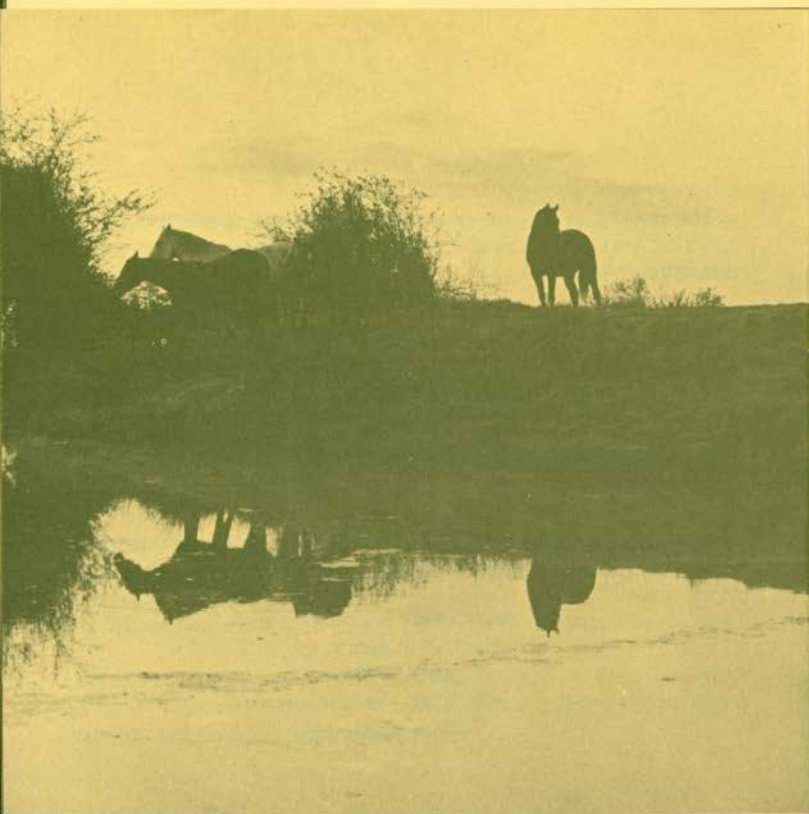
- The buttercup can be seen as a symbol of a person. In what ways did you find yourself identifying with the flower on its journey downstream?

- The buttercup is symbolic also of life in a broader sense — that of the sacred, God-infused natural universe. What does the film seem to be saying about man's attitude and responsibility toward his world?

- How would the story be different if the buttercup were a person?

- How does the quotation from Teilhard which appears at the beginning of the film relate to the meaning of BUTTERCUP?

Over every living thing  
which is to spring up,  
to grow, to flower,  
say again the words:  
"This is my Body."



#### RELATED ACTIVITIES

(For Young Children)

1. Spread everyone around the room. Run the film again, this time with the projector lamp turned off, so that only the soundtrack can be heard. Have the children tell the story of the buttercup — and themselves — by moving with the music.

2. Have each child make a large (crayoned or painted) buttercup with their own name on it. Explain that the buttercup is a sign of themselves, and ask each person to think quietly for a minute to decide what to do with his buttercup. (It can be given to someone as an I-love-you present, or put in a special secret place or hung on a bush outside — the children will come up with beautiful ideas.) After everyone has thought a while, some volunteers might want to tell the group what they decided.

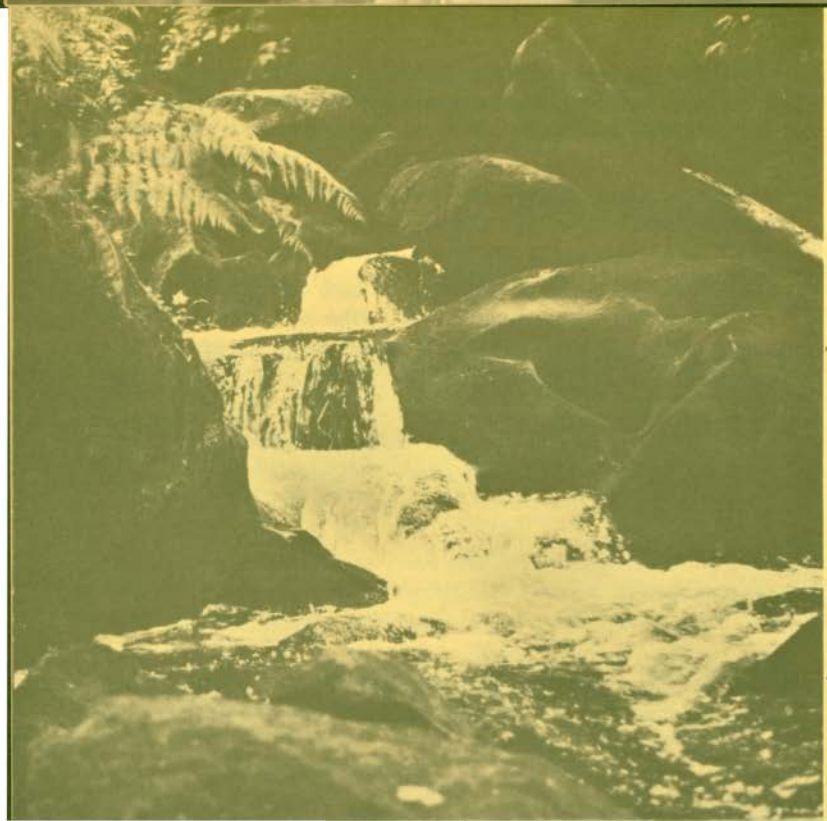
(For Adolescents / Adults)

1. For LITURGY or PRAYER: use BUTTERCUP in a setting of nature psalms, as a theme-reading for an ecology liturgy, as a meditation for a penitential rite.

2. Read aloud (or distribute copies of) "God's Grandeur" and "Pied Beauty," two poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Discuss how the poet's view relates to BUTTERCUP.

- If you were alone in the woods, how would you survive? What would you be afraid of? If you were alone in a big city, how would you survive? What would you be afraid of? In which place do you think you'd be happiest?

- If you could write a thank you note to God, what would you say? Do you have a "prayer place" where you can go, to think and be peaceful inside, and talk to God? Where can people go to find God and listen to him?



- When you hear the word "beautiful," what pictures or ideas pop into your head? When you hear the word "ugly," what do you see in your mind?

- Are factories good or bad? What would it be like if there were no factories?

- If someone gave you a garden to take care of and went away on a long trip, what would you do? Who is responsible for taking care of the wilderness? How do people harm the earth? How are these actions harmful also to other people?

- Have you ever felt like the buttercup when it was whirling and bobbing in the water? Have you ever felt like the buttercup at the end of the film? What kinds of things make you feel that way?

- Sometimes people use the earth and ruin it, just to get money and power for themselves. Sometimes people "use" and hurt each other too. Can you think of ways that people hurt one another?

- If you could make one change in the world so that what happened to the buttercup in the film would never happen again, what would you change?

## PROCEDURE TWO

(For an Adolescent / Adult Group)

### BEFORE VIEWING FILM

1. Distribute paper and pencils. Give everyone two minutes to list all the things they would absolutely require in order to survive in the city for one year. Allow two more minutes for each person to make a second list of things needed for a year's survival in the wilderness.

2. Exchange lists, so that no one has his own. Then explain that each person is to cross out anything that strikes him as unnecessary on the list he now has. After everyone has had an opportunity to do this, ask volunteers to read the lists they have and explain any deletions they may have made. Encourage discussions that arise regarding the relative merits of items listed. See if the group can reach a consensus on what they consider "basic necessities." (You may wish to note that there are both tangible and intangible necessities.)