CC FA İ

The (bright) future of values-friendly films — and filmmaking



DeVon Franklin



Rebecca Ver Straten-McSparran





Amy McGee



INSPITE BUZZ

A Special Report Prepared by The Washington Times Advocacy Department and Inspire Buzz

Faith & Film The (bright) future of values-friendly films – and filmmaking

Table of Contents

Telling the story that faith is the path3 DeVon Franklin	Breaking ground with national, multimedia 'events' for faith and family
Values aren't a niche 6 Matthew Faraci	'Dance' film weaves four stories of hope
Do we have faith in film?7 Dr. Jerry A. Johnson	Faith. Film. And the stories we choose to tell
The (bright) future of faith-based films8 Cary Solomon and Chuck Konzelman	Paul Aiello Why Hollywood doesn't get 'faith' films 24
Viewing faith films as start-ups9 Harrison Powell	Dr. Larry W. Poland Films help us 'face and confront' our core beliefs
Storytelling and the power to change the world12 S. Bryan Hickox	Terry Botwick Behind the scenes with faith filmmaking28
Everybody has a story12 Jess Stainbrook	Dick Rolfe The cinema: Our country's collective 'cathedral'
The five categories of 'belief' movies	Amy McGee
Erik Lokkesmoe 'The Ten Commandments' at 60 years: Still timeless and true16	God loves Hollywood and so should we29 Rabbi Jason Sobel
Brian Godawa 38 years of divine miracles17	Adding more 'salt and light' into filmmaking
Dr. Ted Baehr and Dr. Tom Snyder	The view of a faithful consumer — and devoted dad31 Bryan Schwartz
A film studies view: Let movies mirror life, even if the ending isn't neat18 Rebecca Ver Straten-McSparran (with Kristi Stone Hamrick)	What do Christians want from Christian movies?31 Adam Holz
'The Young Messiah': A daring story that is worth the journey20 <i>Cyrus Nowrasteh</i>	All in the family!
Imagining 'Joseph' as 'the anchor, the rock'	How Hollywood is messing up faith marketing
'Christian stories can be funny — who knew?'21 Dallas Jenkins	Did a 'deadly sin' play a role in faith filmmaking?
Breaking out of the Christian ghetto21 Michael Leaser	Christian films — a blessing and a 'curse 35 Dave Alan Johnson

Inspire Buzz is a Los Angeles-based entertainment marketing agency specializing in delivering the values audience. Founded and led by former political strategist Matthew Faraci, the company motivates audiences, like voters, to turnout for your project. Its motto: "You do the Storytelling, we do the Story-selling." For more information, visit www.Inspire.buzz.

Special thanks to Kristi Stone Hamrick, president of KSH Media, Inc., media consultant, writer, speaker and storyteller, providing clients with an ally who employs strategic thinking and campaign implementation to best share their stories with the media and new markets. Contact her at: kshamrick@comcast.net



Cheryl Wetzstein SPECIAL SECTIONS MANAGER Larry T. Beasley PRESIDENT AND CEO David Dadisman GENERAL MANAGER Patrick Crofoot SUPERVISOR, GRAPHICS

Advertising Department: Thomas P. McDevitt 202-636-3062 CHAIRMAN Adam VerCammen DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING & SALES

Special Sections are multipage tabloid products that run in The Washington Times daily newspaper and are posted online and in PDF form on its website. Sponsors and advertisers collaborate with The Times' advertising and marketing departments to highlight a variety of issues and events, such as The Power of Prayer, North Korea's Nuclear Threat, Gun Rights Policy Conference and Rolling Thunder Memorial Day Tribute to Veterans. Unless otherwise identified, Special Sections are prepared separately and without involvement from the Times' newsroom and editorial staff.

Telling the story that faith is the path...



By DeVon Franklin

Film producer, author and motivational speaker DeVon Franklin has helped bring several inspirational films to global audiences, including this year's "Miracles From Heaven" and 2014's "Heaven is For Real." He recently spoke with Cheryl Wetzstein, manager of special sections at The Washington Times, about the future of faith-based filmmaking.

This interview was edited for space and clarity.

Q: With successes under your belt, and thinking about the inspirations for these kinds of films, what do you see coming down the pike ?

I go back to the Bible and look at the stories in the Bible, and I see how those stories have endured the test of time. And what that tells me is that people are never tired of stories of faith and stories that can inspire them on a personal level and a spiritual level.

So for me, when I look at the future, it's amazing and incredible at the opportunities that will be afforded us to be able to make more stories that can reach people and inspire people in their faith.

I think the goal is to find stories that can organically do that. And, those stories — whether they are modern, whether they are period or whether they are futuristic — if there's an authenticity and a connection inherent in those stories, I believe they will become a platform in which people can be reached.

Q: So the "faith" genre is alive and likely going to grow?

I definitely think so. Without question. Q: Regarding "Miracles From Heaven," why did you decide to go with that particular project?

As a person of faith, when I read the story for the first time in the book form, it motivated me, it inspired me — what Christy went through and the journey of Annabel and the Beam family was just riveting.

So that was a good indicator that that this was a story that could probably translate very well to the screen. It all starts with "Am I reading it? Am I connected to it? Am I moved by it?" Because, as a person of faith who watches a lot of entertainment and reads a lot of entertaining things, the connection is critical and very important. For me, if I didn't really understand it, or if I didn't connect to it, then it's a very hard project to advocate for — for anyone to advocate for.

So I felt a connection to their story, their journey, and that's what motivated me to want to help bring their story to the big screen... I felt it would be a great story to inspire people with the revelation that miracles *are* real, and miracles are all around us and we have to look for them.

Sometimes we are looking for the quote, unquote big miracle. But a miracle of any size is a miracle nonetheless. And we would be surprised how many of them are around us if we would just look. And I thought that story did an awesome job of putting that idea out there.

Q: The movie carried authenticity — I know I and others in the audience believed the people and believed the story...

Going to your point about quality, so much of my background comes from being a former studio executive and having worked with some of the greatest minds in entertainment. And having learned from them, I try to apply what I have learned to (1) how the story is crafted, (2) what production values we have infused in the movie, (3) how the movie is cast and put together, and (4) how the movie is ultimately marketed and distributed.

My goal is to continuously treat films of faith with the integrity and with the care that they deserve. Our stories are big stories. Our stories are stories that can change the world and do change the world. So I always want to approach our stories with the most quality possible and bring in as much attention and awareness and care that we possibly can to them.

Q: I have heard you speak about the next generation and the importance of "building a path to true success." How does that guide you, especially when picking vehicles for film?

Yes, I believe that it's so important to build a bridge to the next generation. And storytelling is an awesome way to do that. I really love the opportunity to do movies that can inspire and motivate and that can also be multigenerational... The awesome thing about "Miracles From Heaven" is that it won the Drama Award from the Teen Choice Awards this year. There were so many other types of films in that category — and "Miracles From Heaven" was awarded the best film for Drama this year. And that said, in and of itself, how films like this can bridge generations.

And for me, being a believer and being in Hollywood, and for whatever







reason, so many times, I come across so many believers who have dreams and aspirations that they believe — but for whatever reason they believe their faith is an obstacle to the manifestation of those dreams.

I believe God has allowed me to be in Hollywood and allowed me to have a certain level of success, not just for my own benefit, but also for the benefit of so many other believers out there to show that faith does work — to show that all things are possible to those that believe and are called according to His purpose. And that faith is not the barrier, it's the path.

So much of the work that I've been fortunate enough to do displays that in so many different ways. Faith *is* the path — it's the path to success, it's the path to "MIRACLES FROM HEAVEN" IMAGES COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT.

happiness, it's the path to peace, it's the path to miracles. And I believe that when we believe that, we will see the impossible happen in our life. And I like to speak on that topic, so that whoever is listening will hopefully be motivated to begin to apply faith in a more dynamic way and see more dynamic results that God has already ordained.

Q: Thank you — last question. We often have favorite Bible verses we turn to throughout our lives. Do you have a favorite Bible verse that you keep reflecting on at this stage of your life?

Yes! It's probably the Bible verse that is also my birthday, Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

.....

De Von Franklin is a film producer, motivational speaker and author of "Produced By Faith" and the New York Times best-selling book, "The Wait: A Powerful Practice to Find The Love of Your Life and The Life You Love," which he wrote with his actress wife Meagan Good. He serves as president and CEO of Franklin Entertainment, a first-look production company with Sony Pictures Entertainment. Images courtesy of Sony Pictures Entertainment.

A film for Christ, not commerce



By Scott A. Shuford

The continued success of bigbudget films with Christian themes like *Miracles From Heaven, War Room, Heaven is For Real,* and *Son of God,* and TV miniseries like *The Bible* continue to follow the trail cut by *The Passion of the Christ* 14 years ago.

Match the most powerful story with the most powerful story-telling medium and you have a shot at success. When Hollywood or New York takes a great story with deep spiritual connections and personal meaning, and does the work to let Christians know their film exists, the audience shows up. That's true of any identifiable market: faith, ethnic, sports, or lifestyle. If they build it, and build it well, Christians will come. In fact, interest in faith and family values from the Bible have broad appeal, not just to Christians. Year after year, the industry research done by my colleague Dr. Ted Baehr at MovieGuide conclusively shows that this content not only has broad appeal, but tends to generate the most revenue.

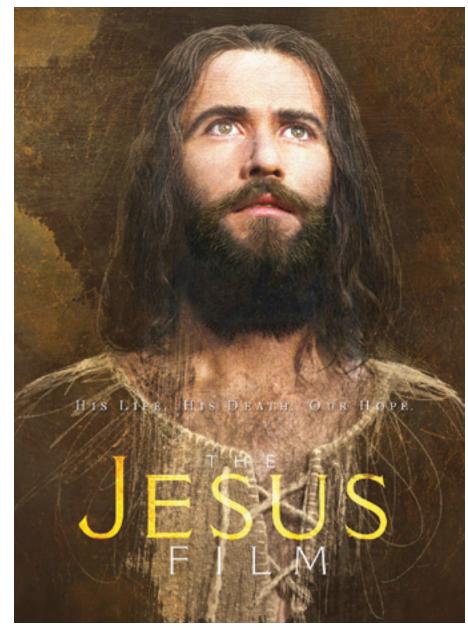
This is not a new revelation for Hollywood, but in these "progressive" days, faith and family values had fallen out of fashion, and were a bit left behind by the Hollywood and New York communities. It's no surprise that the greatest story ever told can make for great film and television, both in terms of actual story content and in values presented through stories like *The Blind Side*, Sarah Drew's gritty portrayal of Dr. April Kepner on *Grey's Anatomy*, or even on *The American Bible Challenge* hosted by Jeff Foxworthy, which debuted in 2012 to become GSN's highest-rated program of all time.

But what you might be surprised to know is that according to the *New York Times*, the most-watched film in all of history is not a big-budget studio film with star-power names attached. It is a Christian film. Yes, you read that right. The #1 most-watched film of all films ever produced is a movie called *JESUS*. The feature-length film *JESUS*, rated G and sometimes called The JESUS Film, first released theatrically by Warner Brothers in 1979 with a "massive" rollout in only 250 theaters. Over the last 35 years, *JESUS* has been translated into more than 1,400 languages and seen by more than 6 billion people worldwide. It has been recognized by *The Guinness Book of World Records* as the "Most Translated Film" in history.

Making a successful film about a beloved historical figure is flat out difficult. This is true for any story, not just Biblical people and stories. With the last 10+ years of successful films proving beyond a shadow of doubt that there is an audience for exclusively faith-based *Kings*) have had varying degrees of success with faith-based adaptations.

But when people have come faceto-face with *JESUS*, when they see him smile and hear him speak in their own language, with their own accent, they have overwhelmingly responded.

The team at The JESUS Film Project believes that movies offer the most dynamic way to hear and see the greatest story ever lived. Films bring story to life in ways that transcends the written word. The power of film is magnified further in oral cultures, where written communication is scarce. When people see the life of Jesus portrayed on screen, it is life-changing. Even in societies where the written word is prevalent,



stories, and sometimes a blockbuster audience, we have seen more major studio portrayals of Biblical people and stories. Some of the most gifted filmmakers of our time like Darren Aronofsky (*Noah*) and Ridley Scott (*Exodus: Gods and* films are surely cultural flashpoints.

JESUS is a factual, historical, nondenominational presentation of the story of Jesus taken directly from the Gospel of Luke. According to critics and church leaders, JESUS is the most accurate portrayal of the life of Christ ever put to film.

In 1979, *JESUS* premiered in 250 U.S. theaters. The following year, the film had its first international showing in Hindi to 21 million Indian viewers. By 1984, film translations had reached 100. In 1985, a non-profit called "The JESUS Film Project" was founded to continue creating new translations and to expand the number of JESUS Film teams who could travel the world to show the film.

By 1993, *JESUS* had been viewed by a half-billion people. Just four years later, the film reached one billion viewings and was translated into a 400th language. Dramatic audio and radio versions were also developed. In 1999, they hit the 500 translation milestone, and *The Story of Jesus for Children* was produced. By 2001, *JESUS* had been shown in every country around the globe.

In 2007, the 1,000th translation of *JESUS* was completed. That same year, a new film *Magdalena: Released from Shame* premiered at the United Nations in New York, and in 22 countries around the world.

For the 35th anniversary of the film in 2014, *JESUS* was remastered for HD and updated with a new musical score, updated sound effects and dialogue, and new visuals. Work was also in process on Version 2.0 of the Jesus Film Media app, which made it easier for people to find videos of Jesus in their own language. That year, The JESUS Film Project set a new goal to reach 5 billion people by 2025. They have already reached that goal.

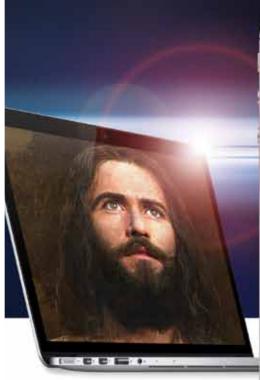
For the first time, *JESUS* has just released for streaming and video-ondemand through all of popular services including iTunes, Google Play, Amazon, Microsoft, and Christian Cinema. If you haven't seen *JESUS*, it's time to catch up. If you have, here's a new opportunity to have your friends over and enjoy *JESUS* together in the comfort of your home.

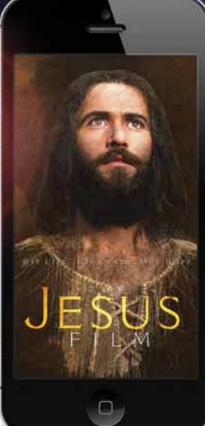
No film in the entire history of film has reached more people, touched more hearts, and changed more lives than *JESUS*.

Scott A. Shuford goes to the movie theater by night and works by day as the Chief Engagement Officer of FrontGate Media. The IAC and WebAward winning firm has served on the marketing campaigns for close to 100 Christian films. Scott has been featured in The Daily Beast, ADWEEK, and other publications, and as a speaker for at the International Christian Visual Media Conference, Visual Storytelling Network, Comic-Con International and more.

Watch JESUS Now On Demand

- According to the New York Times, JESUS is the most watched film in history
- Over 6 billion viewings of the JESUS Film
- Nearly 250 million people have had their lives changed by watching JESUS
- Most translated film in history, in over 1,400 languages
- The most accurate portrayal of the life of Christ ever put to film





What will you do with JESUS?











5

SPECIAL REPORT PREPARED BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES ADVOCACY DEPARTMENT | WEDNESDAY • AUGUST 31 • 2016





Values aren't a niche

"values" encompasses not just faith, but rather everything from "The Blind Side" to "The Pursuit of Happyness" to "The Peanuts Movie" — entertainment that tells inspiring, virtuous stories families can enjoy together.

The values audience is huge — 37 percent of the U.S. entertainment market. That's slightly more than one in every three moviegoers. Are they white? Yes, but less so than the general U.S. population. In fact, this group is much more heavily African-American and Hispanic than the Christians, 3 percent are Orthodox, 2 percent are Mormons, and 2 percent are Jewish. The values audience is more digitally savvy than most of the population, more likely to be parents than adults as a whole and more likely to prefer getting content from Amazon than from Netflix as compared to the general population.

The values audience looks like America — it's young, diverse and, as a famous journalist said to me, "an extremely sophisticated consumer. They are dialed in and you can't fool them;

good lessons.

For this group, it's not just about passing time, it's also about reinforcing values and learning something.

Because the values audience is family-oriented, its members view entertainment as an opportunity to spend quality time together, spurring conversations that extend far beyond a film to the dining room table, the car, Little League games and, yes, Sunday discussions following a sermon.

Hollywood is missing the opportunity to make loads of money in failing to appeal to the values audience. Although it has produced valuesoriented movies that were megahits, it has done so only sporadically.

The problem, ironically, is the industry's fundamental lack of faith.

Fifty-two million customers are enough to carry any project — TV or movie — to success. Trust that the values audience will embrace valuesoriented content, and you'll see more success at the box office and beyond.

When new data like this reveals game-changing insights, savvy folks will want to change their approach. Here's a few thoughts.

If you are a content creator, look for compelling, inspiring stories that can capture an audience's imagination. Hollywood used to make movies like this all the time: "Chariots of Fire," "Mr. Holland's Opus," "Toy Story," "Home Alone," "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, "Rudy," "Forrest Gump," "Field of Dreams," "Rocky" and "Horton Hears a Who?" are but a few examples. You could probably jot down 25 other such titles right off the top of your head. That's the sweet spot. Tell a great story (and keep it clean, please), and you have a winner.

If you're focused on marketing, find the right story first and then market as follows: Respect the audience's intelligence. Create marketing campaigns that communicate clearly why viewers should care about the story and what the value proposition is. You don't have to sell them with a bait and switch; they like their trailers straight up and honest.

There's a massive opportunity for storytellers to share wonderful tales that make the world a better place. Oh, and here's a dirty little secret for the financially minded: Clean sells.

Matthew Faraci is founder and president of Inspire Buzz, the only entertainment marketing agency exclusively specializing in delivering the values audience.

By Matthew Faraci

ar too many in entertainment share the misconception that the so-called "faith-based" audience is a niche market. Sure, you can get

enough folks together to make "God's Not Dead," "War Room," "The Bible" and "Duck Dynasty" big hits, but that's the limit. The "faithbased" audience is otherwise perceived as a small but uber-dedicated segment of aging, white, Chick-fil-Aeating, Southern evangelical churchgoers who look and talk like "The Simpsons" Ned Flanders. It's a group, some believe, interested exclusively in low-budget, preachy, Bible-thumping films.

But a groundbreaking, first-of-its-

Are the members of the values audience people of faith? Of course, but "values" encompasses not just faith, but rather everything from "The Blind Side" to "The Pursuit of Happyness" to "The Peanuts Movie" – entertainment that tells inspiring, virtuous stories families can enjoy together.

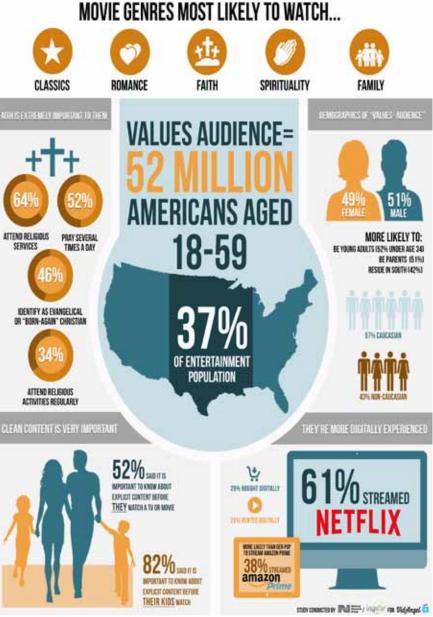
kind study conducted by National Research Group for VidAngel, a hugely popular service that streams filtered content to families, reveals otherwise.

First, a little language lesson. "Faith-based" mischaracterizes the audience. Their real motivator is values — entertainment that fundamentally speaks to the values they

hold dear.

Are the members of the values audience people of faith? Of course, but

WHO ARE THE "VALUES" AUDIENCE?



general population, and includes more Democrats (36 percent) than Republicans (33 percent).

Surprised?

Thirty-three percent are born-again Christians, 22 percent are Roman Catholic, 15 percent are mainline Protestants, 12 percent are evangelical

they know when you're pandering." From their diversity, "E Pluribus Unum" applies in a uniquely American way. Members of the values audience are united by a single, powerful core driver: the desire for clean, wholesome content that, like the beloved sitcoms of the 1980s, teaches



By Dr. Jerry A. Johnson

o we have faith in film? There are two ways to answer this question and both of them matter. Here's why. Asked one way, the

question considers whether film matters. Do we have faith in film as a medium? Do we believe in the power of film?

The answer has to be yes. As the great theologian Jack Nicholson once said, "We learn how to kiss or to drink, talk to our buddies — all the

We should ask ourselves about the faith content of every film. If the content of film has an educational effect, not just entertainment value, shouldn't we want films that are profaith and pro-virtue?

things that you can't really teach in social studies or history — we all learn them at the movies."

While Nicholson is considered one of the great actors, actually not a theologian, his observation reflects a biblical parallel.

Stories matter. Stories have power. The Bible is mostly a book of stories, all of them telling one great story. Those stories, and that story, can change the way we think and live.

As a Christian, I believe the ultimate story is expressed in John's Gospel, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The power of the Jesus story is that it was lived out in a human life. He had been predicted, he was born, he was a carpenter, he lived among the people, he taught, he worked miracles, he was hated, he was crucified, and he rose again. People saw this story play out, not just heard about it.

In a similar way, albeit lesser, movies have an added power over the printed novel. They show, as well

Do we have faith in film?

as tell, the story. Viewers not only identify with a character's story and lines, but also actually see how it is acted out. Film adds visual power to the story. It is not just entertainment power. It is emotional power and educational power.

This is why Andy Warhol said, "It's movies that have really been running things in America.... They show you what to do, how to do it, how to feel about it, and how to look how you feel about it."

So we have faith in film's power as

But will that power be for good or for evil? This is the other way to ask and answer the question, "Do we have faith in film?"

We should ask ourselves about the faith content of every film. If the content of film has an educational effect, not just entertainment value, shouldn't we want films that are pro-faith and pro-virtue? "Good" films should be more than "good" entertainment, but have content about the good, the true and the beautiful.

The best content is obvious.

faith values.

Those faith films should cover almost every genre, but should explore "worldview" questions, such as:

Where did we come from? (The origin of life)

What does it mean to be human? (The meaning of life)

What has gone wrong? (The problems of life)

How can it be made right? (The redemption of life)

Where is everything heading? (The future of life)



IMAGE COURTESY OF NATIONAL RELIGIOUS BROADCASTERS

Roma Downey, president of LightWorkers Media, talks about this year's "Ben-Hur," which she executive produced, during Proclaim 16, the National Religious Broadcasters' International Christian Media Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. NRB President and CEO Dr. Jerry A. Johnson (right) and radio talk show host Bob Lepine interviewed Ms. Downey, Feb. 23, 2016.



a medium. Movies visually carry you into a story and model life for viewers in a moving way. Perhaps we should resurrect phrases like "motion pictures" and "moving pictures." Movies have the power to change. Imagine a movie today that equaled a 1965 cast of Max von Sydow, Charlton Heston, Dorothy McGuire, Claude Rains, Telly Savalas, Shelley Winters, Martin Landau, Roddy McDowell, John Wayne, Sidney Poitier, Angela Lansbury, and Robert Blake.

Those were the actors for the film, "The Greatest Story Ever Told." The gravitas of that cast reminds us that the old story, the biblical story, is the greatest story. There should be no surprise that more films have been made about Jesus that any other human being. We should expect, and want, more films like "The Passion of the Christ," "Son of God" and "Ben-Hur."

But faith is about all of life. To have faith in film does not mean we only want Bible films, or even mostly Bible films. We want films about everything, but we want those films to represent This is the way to have faith in film; it is to have films of faith.

Yes, suspense films can do this. So can drama, comedy, action, sci-fi, and almost every other kind of movie. It takes talent to do this. These movies need to be creative, entertaining and excellent in every artistic way.

Along this line, C.S. Lewis wrote of literature: "What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects — with their Christian talent." Amen to Lewis, and the same goes for movies.

Jerry A. Johnson, Ph.D., is president and CEO of National Religious Broadcasters. The NRB will hold a Film and Entertainment Summit in Orlando, Florida, as part of its annual convention, Feb. 27-March 3, 2017.

The (bright) future of faith-based films

By Cary Solomon and Chuck Konzelman

> hat is it that makes a great faith-based movie? Scriptural citations? A conversion scene? The spreading of

the Gospel? No, none of these.

What makes a great faith-based movie is that it's a great movie. A story so compelling that it must be seen. A movie where after you've seen it, you want to talk about it. A movie that justifies the expense and hassle of going out to the theater and getting overcharged for everything from parking to popcorn.

We, as moviegoers, are willing to endure that. We want to endure that to see a great movie. What we don't want to endure is a bad movie. A movie that leaves us empty. A movie that leaves us despairing or feeling hopeless. A movie that somehow makes our lives worse. Audiences crave morally uplifting movies. Don't believe us?

Industry observer Ted Baehr, a film executive turned spokesman for morally uplifting media, issues the annual Movieguide Report to the Entertainment Industry, which illustrates in stark, statistical terms, year in and year out, that "Movies that succeed with audiences are stories well-told, that have a positive worldview, and are spiritually uplifting." What is the price of ignoring this sage advice?

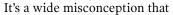
In 2016, the film industry will likely sell the fewest U.S. tickets per person of the past 90 years and the fewest total tickets in two decades.

Why? Because outside of rebooting the next comic superhero franchise, Hollywood no longer deals in the business of telling and selling great entertainment.

Instead, Hollywood tells and sells political ideals: its own. The same machine that created the American dream now is busy creating the American disaster. Morals and values that were instilled into American culture in the 1920s, '30s and '40s are now being replaced with despair and nihilism. Instead of portraying America as the home of the brave and land of the free, Hollywood now tells us it's the land of the greedy and home of the enslaved.

There is just one problem with this: Most Americans love their country and their families and their way of life. And they don't buy into the Hollywood propaganda machine.

Which begs a question: Since we live in a capitalist society, why doesn't Hollywood give the faith-oriented audience what they want?





Cary Solomon (left) and Chuck Konzelman co-wrote and produced the 2014 film, "God's Not Dead" (image below).

Industry observer Dr. Ted Baehr, a former film executive turned spokesman for morally uplifting media issues the annual Movieguide Report to the Entertainment Industry, which illustrates in stark statistical terms, year in and year out, that "Movies that succeed with audiences are stories well-told, that have a positive worldview, and are spiritually uplifting." What is the price of ignoring this sage advice?...

Hollywood's god is money. In actuality, political correctness is the industry's god; money is relegated to demigod status.

How does this play out in the real world? It means that studio executives are tremendously averse to faith-driven fare for two reasons. First, the content itself is anathema, and second, studio executives correctly suspect that makers of faith-driven films (and to a lesser extent, their audiences) tend to skew right along the political spectrum. Either of these reasons is enough to seriously dampen enthusiasm on the part of industry executives. Taken together,



they are a kiss of death.

So, in the same way that secularprogressive fare is likely to get a green light, despite a lack of broad market appeal, faith-driven fare is likely to earn a "pass" from the studios, despite ready and willing faith-based audience appeal.

As with most deep-seated forms of prejudice, those most closely involved in the process (in this case, the executives themselves) vehemently deny that it even exists.

But in the midst of Hollywood filmmakers' efforts to outsludge one another, and in large part as a reaction against it, faith-driven films have emerged as a market force over the past two to three years. The success of a number of these films has proved the existence of an audience eager to see them and means the genre won't be disappearing anytime soon.

So at the risk of trying to prognosticate in a business where, as Oscar-winning screenwriter William Goldman famously observed, "Nobody knows anything," we'll mention where we see the faith-driven film market going in the next few years. Based on our experiences, here is what we believe is reasonable to expect:

• A move away from on-the-nose faith-based stories. This is just common sense. Audiences, including Christian audiences, crave new experiences. In most faith-based films to date, there is a major character coming to faith. Often, it's the protagonist, meaning that regardless of the story's setup, faith is effectively the A-story. But that experience is starting to feel overused, and the audience is already eager for the next big thing.

• A move into genre films. If the film's core story isn't about coming to faith, then it's got to be about something else. That something else will start to look a lot more like other films: thrillers, comedies, sports movies, action films and romantic comedies that portray characters who happen to be believers, rather than stories that are primarily about being believers. In the past, Westerns were traditionally morality plays, albeit with a fair amount of violence. Modern animated films already show a level of valueinfused behavior we rarely see in liveaction films, and these stories resonate incredibly well with audiences. Expect more live-action films along the lines of "The Blind Side" and fewer films where the lead character is a minister.

• Bigger budgets and better casts. Faith-friendly films have been making money. Some of that money will be funneled back into making films with better production value. Even

Viewing faith films as start-ups



By Harrison Powell

love start-up companies. There is a sense of excitement and camaraderie in taking an idea and turning it into a valuable resource for others to experience. It is full of ups and downs, but well worth the effort. At the end of

the day, I believe every film is a start-up company. After all, you have a story idea, a budget, a marketing plan and a team. And you have a lot of risks.

With a significant percentage of films losing money, there are two questions we try to answer for any film project we are potentially considering in order to reduce this risk. These two questions come from Peter Drucker, a leading management thinker of the last century.

Who is your customer?

What does your customer value? I get excited when we discover a great story, wanting to get it out there as soon as possible. However, in addition to telling great stories, a second part of our goal is to give away our profits, something that requires buy in from audiences. I believe that effectively answering Drucker's two questions will help us choose projects that lead us toward that goal.

Who is your customer?

I have attended several panels where leaders reference the "faith audience" as if it is one large group of similar people. However, this pie consists of different denominations, ages, cultural views, marketing outlets and entertainment desires.

In picturing a film as a start-up, we want to hone down the audience to a persona of the ideal viewer.

For example, Sally might be the persona. Meet Sally. Sally is a 28-yearold Millennial, single, shops at Anthropology, attends a nondenominational church weekly, and is working her third job since college graduation. She goes to the movies three times a year, and one of those films will definitely be the next Nicholas Sparks film.

Is this persona the only customer for our film? Of course not. However, it helps us narrow down the focus so we can quickly assess if the project could be interesting in the eyes of the target audience. This leads to Drucker's next question.

What does your customer value?

In using our new persona, we must confidently answer, "Why would Sally want to see this film? Why would she be willing to give up \$10 to \$15 of her hardearned money, along with two hours of her time, when she could use that money and time elsewhere?"

There are various reasons why Sally would say "Yes" to our film and say "No" to all the other opportunities she could use her money and time on. Some of these motivations include:

Entertainment: Perhaps Sally wants

to step away from reality, get caught up in a story and follow a character she loves. She wants to laugh, cry, be surprised and she feels the trailer, poster and messaging promises this.

Inspiration: Perhaps Sally wants to find hope and inspiration, as life is hard and can be confusing at times. Validation and encouragement: a disconnect and a potential for limited market acceptance.

We spend a lot of time and energy in developing a story and team for a project. After all, it is a start-up. We all want that effort to pay off and believe that it can — if we put the same time and effort into identifying our customers and the reasons they would want to see our film.



Perhaps Sally wants to see her beliefs validated on the screen and receive encouragement.

I have noticed that various segments of the faith audience want different experiences out of films. Some want films that offer validation; others want inspiration, and yet others want films that leave them with open-ended questions.

These motivations are not mutually exclusive, and there is no right answer to what value a movie should create for its audience, as long as that is what the target audience actually wants. However, if what the target audience wants and expects is not satisfied by the film or trailer we create, then there will be Harrison Powell oversees the development for Giving Films and is actively looking for and developing projects. Giving Films exists to fund the production and marketing of entertaining stories that spark life conversations. Giving Films donates all of its profits to charity. Giving Films recently wrapped production on "An Interview with God," (see image above) a provocative mystery-drama starring Oscar® nominee David Strathairn ("Good Night, and Good Luck," "The Bourne Ultimatum," "Lincoln") and Brenton Thwaites ("Maleficent," "The Giver," "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales").

GOD'S DEAD

SOLOMON

From page C8

independent producers will have to pony up to compete with studiofunded films. 2016's "Miracles From Heaven" starred Jennifer Garner and was made for a budget of almost \$15 million — substantially higher than most faith-based fare. Expect future releases to look and sound indistinguishable from mainstream films in terms of production quality and audiences to become less forgiving of the films that fail to deliver on this count.

• If the studios can get past their myopia, they will begin using Christians to make films intended for the faith-driven market, even when the budgets are big. Mel Gibson, a believer, directed "The Passion of the Christ," which is still the most successful independent film in history. Conversely, studios hired a not-within-Judeo-Christian-parameters-of-belief director for "Noah" and a self-described atheist to direct "Exodus: Gods and Kings." To anyone without a "west of the 405 liberal" mentality, which seems like a safer bet: hiring someone who understands the demographic they're making films for or hiring someone who's almost guaranteed to offend it by either ignoring or flaunting a disregard for those beliefs?

• Emergence of new production entities. The success of these films will have traditional studios eyeing faithbased filmmaking in a more serious way, but their cultural aversion to the product will likely keep their efforts tepid at best. That means there's room for one or more faith-friendly studios to emerge quickly and succeed, so long as the players understand the audience they're making pictures for.

It's time for faith-driven films to stop fishing in the Sea of Galilee and start fishing in the Atlantic Ocean. That's going to scare some believers, but Jesus Christ was notorious for preaching to sinners. He was unafraid to go out into the world as it was, rather than wait for the arrival of the world as it should be. For those of us who would like to help reclaim a society in desperate straits, maybe we ought to follow his example.

Cary Solomon and Chuck Konzelman are writer/producer/directors. Their recent projects include "God's Not Dead," "God's Not Dead 2" and "Do You Believe?"

Voiceless speaks up for preborn Americans, and those who sacrifice to save them



By John Zmirak

There's a powerful new movie coming out that tells the truth about abortion, and honestly portrays the sacrifices made by hard-working volunteers who give of their time to stand outside abortion mills—winter and summer, rain and shine—and offer women better options. *Voiceless* opens in theaters across America October 7, and you should bring your friends and family to see it.

It's not like most movies that deal with abortion.

Is Abortion Funny?

America's media elites want you to think that abortion is harmless and helpful, even funny. Just two months ago, at the end of June, Comedy Central greeted the Supreme Court decision removing basic safety requirements from Texas abortion clinics with a sarcastic Tweet:

Celebrate the #SCOTUS ruling! Go knock someone up in Texas!

— The Daily Show (@TheDaily-Show) June 27, 2016

"I have heard firsthand the anguish of women whom men abandoned to face the tragic choice of abortion," Movie To Movement president Jason Jones said. "Each year our nation sees a million future citizens, doctors, teachers and firefighters thrown away in dumpsters. The fact that *The Daily Show* thinks this is funny tells us exactly what's wrong with our culture. And it's time to fight back. The movie Voiceless does that, rebuking lies with the truth."

Are Pro-Life Volunteers Bullies?

A month after *The Daily Show's* tasteless Tweet, Planned Parenthood created a virtual reality program for the Democratic National Convention that pretended to give a "realistic" simulation of what women face when they approach abortion clinics. Instead of presenting the actual reality of what sidewalk counselors do across America—quietly pray, sing hymns, and sometimes approach women with compassionate abortion alternatives—Planned Parenthood offered a fictitious horror show. As *The Daily Signal* reported on July 30, 2016:

Pro-life protesters are heard calling the women "whores" and shouting Bible verses, among other aggressive actions.... Penny Nance, CEO and president of Concerned Women for America, told *The Daily Signal* that she personally has watched "kind" and "loving" pro-life activists thoughtfully offer alternatives such as adoption to women considering an abortion.

"I have also stood outside the Supreme Court and watched people from

Planned Parenthood shout vile, nasty remarks at pro-lifers. I have literally felt unsafe around them," Nance said. "So, both sides have a story to tell. It's never right to be unkind, but Planned Parenthood's virtual reality has little or nothing to do with reality."

A Movie That Tells the Truth About America's Pro-Life Heroes

While *Voiceless* is a drama, it is based on the powerful truth that thousands of Americans give of their time every day to stand outside the killing centers that mar most U.S. cities, in the hope of helping women avoid a tragic, destructive, and irreversible decision.

Voiceless is set in an American innercity. Battling his own inner-demons,

voiceless

the ultimate sacrifice

one fight.

Jesse (Rusty Joiner: Last Ounce Of Courage, Dodgeball, "Days of Our Lives") encounters a young, pregnant teen overcome with grief that, after an impulsive abortion, has her family blaming Jesse for more than just her final decision. Jesse's wife Julia (Jocelyn Cruz: Strike One, This Is Our Time) must come to terms with her own choices and decide if she can support her husband as opposition mounts against him. Comedian Paul Rodriguez also stars as Virgil with James Russo as Pastor Gil.

The winner of multiple awards, Voiceless has been honored as Northeast Film Festival's Best Feature and People's Choice for Best Feature Film and Best Feature Film from the California Independent Film Festival.

Jones, executive producer of the influential pro-life movie *Bella* and producer of *Crescendo*, is co-executive producer of *Voiceless* and founder of Movie To Movement. He knows the power of film to change culture. *Bella* inspired countless women to make the choice to keep their baby — over 1,000 women wrote the producers sharing their stories. Jones' short film *Crescendo*, thanks to the tireless work of executive producer Pattie Mallette, raised more than \$6 million for pregnancy centers, and launched a national conversation on the importance of such alternatives to abortion.

Said Jones:

Inch by inch, we are fighting to take back our country's culture from the abortion industry and their surrogates in the mainstream media by supporting filmmakers who strive to tell the truth about love and life. We must help those battling bravely in the legislatures and courts by reshaping the national discourse about love and life. That's what forms the minds of the voters, the legislators, and the judges of the future.

Voiceless is a call to the church. Now more than ever as we see no relief from our judiciary or legislative branches, the church must stand up and take a leadership role in protecting the vulnerable. We are issuing an urgent call to churches and church leaders to recommit themselves to protecting the sanctity of life.

We want to bring *Voiceless* to every city in America. To do that, we need the help of those who care about unborn children and their mothers as much as we do."

For more information on how to bring Voiceless to a theater near you, or purchase discounted group tickets for churches and pro-life groups, visit Movietomovement.com

Advertorial

october 7, 2016 @

"Simply put, VOICELESS is the best Pro-Life movie I have ever seen!" Allan Parker President of The Justice Foundation

voiceless

one man. one fight. the ultimate sacrifice.

VOICELESS is about a young, reserved war veteran who moves to Philadelphia to take a new ministry job and puts his life on the line to stand against an abortion clinic that moved across the street from the church.

Bring VOICELESS To A Theater Near You Opening Weekend October 7!

Learn more at voicelessthemovie.com/grouptickets



Storytelling and the power to change the world



By S. Bryan Hickox

've never considered myself anything more than a simple storyteller ... and all my life I've always believed that storytellers define the culture. After all, they really create the lens through which

we perceive the world around us. They've been doing it since the beginning of time — first with prehistoric drawings scratched into the walls of caves, then on scrimshaws carved in ivory, and even on architectural friezes on Roman and Greek buildings. It then evolved into the great oral tradition, in which stories of history were handed down from one generation to the next in Africa and the Middle East and by storytellers around campfires in the American West. Today those campfires travel with the speed of light, dancing digital images on movie screens, iPads, smart phones and the newest brands of computers we wear on our wrists.

When you stop and think about it, we are all storytellers, no matter the medium. Some of our stories are told with numbers, others with written words, songs, images or even by modeling a life of great character, integrity or truth. We are all storytellers and every day we are defining worldviews through the lives we lead that become the stories that shape the perception of our world ... Those worldviews tell us how we are to view ourselves, as well as others.

Make no mistake, all of the arts have always been shaped by those worldviews. Until the Age of Enlightenment, art was seen as a way of expressing profound truths. Not necessarily literal truth; symbols and metaphors reflecting something true about reality, like portraying angels with wings or saints with halos. Beauty itself was seen as a kind of truth.

Then during the period of Enlightenment, a new theory of truth was born. It said that the only real knowledge derives from what can be seen, touched and measured scientifically. Since angels and halos cannot be seen or measured, out they went. We were told that beauty itself is an ideal that cannot be measured scientifically, so out it went, too — relegated to subjective fantasy.

If art was no longer about truth, then what was it about? Many artists began to define art as the creation of an abstract, idealized world — and from that ideal world they hurled down thunderbolts upon the real world for all its shortcomings. Thus was born the idea that art is about criticism and revolt — a means of shocking conventional society. Filtered down to the popular level, this view of art has inspired movies, rock music and social media tirades that today launch a cacophonous and relentless attack on our traditional values.

The other endemic thing that has happened to our society is the conscious removal of God from the public square, schools, judicial system, political discourse and mainstream media. The result is that an ever-increasing segment of our society has no accountability or the ability to give thanks. When there is no accountability or a Supreme Being to thank for our blessings, the result is chaos. And that is the chaos we find ourselves living in today.

Just think what could happen if each of us tried to live a life of meaning,

significance and truth — if that was the story that each of us had to tell.

You know not so very many years ago, in medieval times, each king had many castles in his vast kingdom and as he traveled around, his subjects could always tell where the king was because as soon as the king arrived at one of his castles, they would raise the king's flag, signaling that the king was in residence.

Think for a minute if each person in our own neighborhoods, towns, states or our entire country started conducting themselves so that, as people looked at us, through the stories our lives are telling, it would be obvious to them that the King of all Kings was in residence in our lives. We, as the storytellers, producers, directors, writers and filmmakers of this new age, could change the world. You up for the challenge?

S. Bryan Hickox, D.H.L., is an executive producer and producer of over 80 television movies and feature films. His television films have been nominated for 16 and won seven — national Emmy Awards; a George Foster Peabody Award; and more than 200 national and international film festival awards and competitions.

Everybody has a story



By Jess Stainbrook

Movies have the ability to change lives and transform culture. Every movie gives us insight into some value system. The question is, which value system?

I was lucky enough to grow up in a large storytelling family, so it's part of my DNA. I know the value of a good story — it's what I do for a living. I *love* a good story, in any medium.

My value system changed drastically the summer of 1989, when I was "taken" by the KGB while shooting a documentary in communist Russia. Needless to say, I had a radical shift in the way I thought about what was presented as "the truth." (The truth was I was *not* a CIA operative!) I like to say, "What does God have to do to get your attention?" KGB? OK, you have my attention!

That experience was a paradigm shift, literally changing my focus from "all about me" to "How can I influence people with the 'truth' through the skills I have been given in media and visual storytelling?" Not everyone who has faith needs to go through this experience, but we do all have stories, and sharing them in any form can impact people's lives drastically.

"Why is the church always a taillight rather than a headlight?" – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.]

Sports and media are the two biggest influencers of our youth today. In 2013, the Barna Group released data that indicated that two-thirds of Americans said professional athletes who talk about their faith have more influence on society than faith leaders. So with my friend, Roman Gabriel III, I started producing stories around NFL athletes talking about their faith. Why? Because the stories are *amazing*! And my feeling is, if you're going to put someone on a pedestal, know what they stand for what they *really* stand for!

Since 2006, I've been to every Super Bowl, and while everyone else is talking about football, we talk about what really matters in life in order of importance faith, family and football. The great part is that when we start the conversation, players and coaches are excited to talk about their faith. Why? Because the truth is more important than anything else, and we want to use everything we have to share it with others. If faith is believing in what you hope for and stories are the confirmation of those things that have transformed us, well, then we should be excited to tell them over and over again!

"Jesus was not a theologian. He was God who told stories." – Madeleine L'Engle.

My films are covert and overt (hmmm? Sounds very CIA-ish!), sometimes talking about faith straight up, and other times using allegories and parables to make my point in the content I produce. I want them to be high quality, fun, exciting, adventurous. My example comes from reading the Gospels. Jesus walked into a situation, told a culturally relevant story, asked a hard question and then left everyone with the truth. Now you had to figure out what to do with it. Lives were literally changed through his storytelling! What better mentor could I have?

My journey has been an adventure. I didn't start out wanting to make movies, but that's where I've found out that I can have the most impact, again, because I love storytelling. When I became a "believer," I was told that I should become a pastor or a missionary. "But I am a filmmaker!" I thought. "Wait, if I produce even a bad movie, I can reach millions of people. No church is *that* big! And I'm in an industry the church can't get near." And I found my call: to tell stories that appeal to people who wouldn't normally go into a church.

Sports and fantasy seem to be where I'm living right now in the movie world. Here's the great thing about where we are in time: Everyone now has access to "gear" that is needed to make a "film." Use your iPhone if you have to, but be the storyteller you want to be!

Jess Stainbrook is CEO (Chief Entertainment Officer) for FSPN.net, the Faith & Family Sports Programming Network. Jess served as executive adviser on "The Bible Series" and as executive producer for "Seven Days in Utopia." starring

for "Seven Days in Utopia," starring Robert Duvall. Jess is currently in development on "The Kingdom Series," a 12-movie allegorical franchise based on the Bible set in medieval times.

12

The five categories of 'belief' movies



By Erik Lokkesmoe

he era of bad marketing is over, to rephrase President Clinton's famous 1996 State of the Union line. More specifically, the marketing of 2004 is over.

For the past 12 years, movie marketers within the so-called (but grossly generic term) faith-based genre have recycled, cut and pasted, and heralded the importance of the film phenomenon "The Passion of the Christ." Whether the marketer actually ran the campaign or simply designed the promo fliers, everyone claims to have had a hand in Mel Gibson's success.

Then came 2007 and the digital revolution of "ones and zeroes" that changed the way content was produced ("Juno," "Once"), distributed (Netflix mailing DVDs), and connected with audiences (MySpace). Movie marketing became about measurable momentum and activating tastemakers and networks, a strategy deployed best by Participant and Walden Media while saving money and creating direct-to-consumer approaches. One example: The abolitionist political thriller "Amazing Grace" was praised by the Los Angeles Times for integrating a fundraising campaign to end modern-day slavery with a massive petition drive for human rights and organizing 6,000 churches to sing the hymn on Amazing Grace Sunday.

Christianity in America, despite marketers' oversimplification of the category, is akin to the United Nations General Assembly — thousands of beliefs, territories and languages all trying to work together. What worked for the Southern Baptist-led "Fireproof" was the antithesis of art and honesty by the "Christians Who Drink Beer" audience that preferred "Slumdog Millionaire" that year. What works for justice-minded, mainline congregants doesn't work for the "vote with your ticket" audience of "God's Not Dead." "Faith," sadly, has become a term that means everything and nothing at the same time.

The dilution of the term "faith," the every-other-month (or more) release of a faith movie and the outdated tactics of marketing are not serving the audience well. The genre and those who believe in its viability should take a pluralistic "moment of silence" to reflect on the audience trends, the importance of story — and the "why" before greenlighting the next project.

The conversation should begin with an understanding of the five categories of belief films — something we spent over a year researching. The categories are:

• Conversion to belief. Think "War Room" as a film created for the "faithful" and their unbelieving friends and neighbors.

• Confirmation of belief. Think "God's Not Dead" and other bumpersticker movies that rally like-minded Christianity in America, despite marketers' oversimplification of the category, is akin to the United Nations General Assembly – thousands of beliefs, territories and languages all trying to work together.

are universally appealing, regardless of one's faith or lack thereof.

• Conversation around belief. Think "Calvary" or "Last Days in the Desert," the more gritty, ambiguous and layered art house films that haunt the audience long after the credits roll, and therefore are attractive to millennials who, unlike their parents, believe faith should have soft edges and open windows.



In "Last Days in the Desert," Ewan McGregor stars as Yeshua (Jesus) during his 40 days of fasting and praying — and temptations by the Devil (also played by Mr. McGregor). Tye Sheridan plays a discontented son he meets on his journey. Image courtesy of Different Drummer.

people into the theater as a statement to Hollywood, Washington or the wider culture.

• Commercialization of belief. Think "Noah" and "Ben-Hur," where a popular story garners top talent and big financing for a global story, which means everyone will have an opinion and few will feel as if the movie were "made for me."

• Causation from belief. Think "Blind Side" and "Selma." These are stories of human triumph over tragedy that spring from a protagonist's deepest convictions, and as a result All categories have examples of past successes, but only three will be the future: confirmation films, causation films and conversation films. The tragic mistake of "Ben-Hur" — as seen by the marketing tactics and quotes from producers — was to land solely in the "commercialization of belief" category and miss out on the causation of the story and an audience looking for confirmation of beliefs.

No place is this more clearly played out than on the opening weekend of a theatrical release. In politics, the goal is to get millions of people to do one thing on a single day: vote. In movie marketing, the goal is to get millions of people to do one thing on a single weekend: buy a ticket. The strategy should never just be awareness — a 1990s term; the strategy must be action, and that means making the movie personal and the marketing participatory.

Furthermore, theatrical releases work best when "specialty" audiences, i.e, like-minded people, make opening weekend an event. As big as "Star Wars" fans or as narrow as Iditarod Race followers, audiences are moving away from "a dark room with strangers" toward "a full room with friends." Events come naturally to the faith community. What other demographic gathers 90 minutes every week by the tens of millions to sit quietly and focus on a presentation? Eventizing is in the DNA of the church attender.

That is why Fathom and the upstart TheatriCast created one-night experiences in theaters. On Oct. 25, Grammyaward-winning artist Chris Tomlin and six other worship leaders, along with pastors Louie Giglio and Max Lucado, are hosting "Worship Night in America: An Evening of Unity and Prayer for Our Country." Just two weeks after announcement, TheatriCast reported sold-out markets, more theaters added by audience demands and nearly 400 churches raising their hands to be a part of the experience.

Marketing is in jeopardy of becoming a car alarm in a mall parking lot: Everyone hears the noise but ignores it. Nowhere is this more true than with faith films, in which marketers and publicists have tried the strategy of more noise and more activity. Pastors and organizations are ignoring the daily emails from film marketing teams, and the biggest names are being paid to promote from the pulpit.

The current state of marketing directly affects the future slate of productions, so we must get it right. That means:

• Finally proving with real-time data that the marketing actually sells tickets.

• Knowing audience trends and content categories.

• Sunsetting any expectation that what worked 12 years ago (or two years ago) will work today or in the future.

Erik Lokkesmoe is a producer of marketing and distribution with Different Drummer, an entertainment marketing agency known for "smart films for soulful people." He executive produced the Ewan McGregor film "Last Days in the Desert." His latest book, "Different Drummer," was released Aug. 23.

The one strategy that can save America



By Kirk Cameron

Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations?

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, Lord, and grant us your salvation. (Psalm 85:5-7)

When I travel to churches across America I meet thousands who tell me they feel discouraged, concerned, and afraid for the future of America. They often ask, "Where is our hope?"

I understand why so many feel that way. The news is filled with a continual stream of darkness: Political scandals; acts of violence; social confusion; people suffering. Stories that stirred previous generations to action now leave most of us shrugging our shoulders. The outrageous has become commonplace.

If you are feeling exhausted by all of this political mudslinging and moral decay—and if you're searching for hope in a world that sometimes seems hopeless—then I encourage you to join me for a special live event on October 18th in movie theaters across the nation.

It's called REVIVE US.

We've assembled an incredible group of people to help you see that there is hope. In fact, there is one time-tested strategy that has always worked in every generation, on every continent, and never failed to revive nations- morally, spiritually, and economically.

Do you know what it is?

Let's first agree on what it is not. Our hope does not come from who is our next president or on the Supreme Court. Our hope does not come from who governs us, or in the laws they pass. No, our hope comes from only one place: the power of God working in the hearts of people dads and moms, families, churches, communities—reviving a culture *from the bottom up, and the inside out*. As people of faith, we must spend the weeks between now and the election focused on one thing: putting God front and center in our own lives and electing leaders who will reflect His ways in our land.

This presidential election is ostensibly between Trump and Clinton. But, in reality, this election is not really about choosing between left or right, but between up or down. Up, to maximum freedom and prosperity for everyone through responsible self-government under God, or down, down, down, to a government system controlled by elites that determines our quality of life from cradle to grave.

I've heard a lot of people—on both sides of the political spectrum—talking about the role of our next president as He wasn't voted into office. He wasn't elected by the media. He doesn't need a publicist or a press secretary, and He always keeps His word.

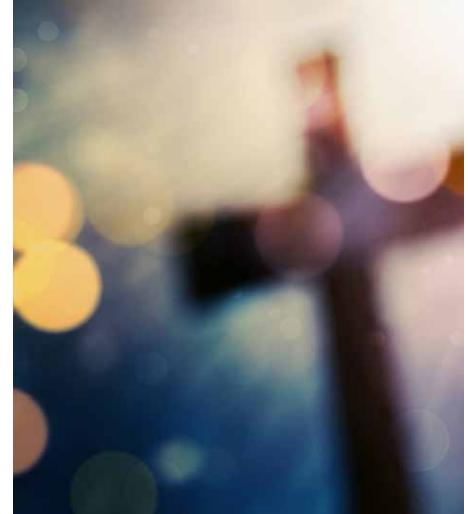
Foreign policy? He's the ruler of the nations. Border control? He gives every nation its boundary and says to the sea, "Here, and no further."

Discrimination? He was treated as an outcast and crucified. Welfare? He feeds the hungry and cares for the needy.

Healthcare? He is the Great Physician who heals the sick and conquered the grave.

We don't need a king; we already have the King of Kings.

What we need is to remember who we are and whose we are, and *elect leaders* who will represent His ways in our land.



if we were electing a king—someone who can snap their fingers and solve all the problems we face. Do you really want a government with that kind of power? Do you want to place that much trust and control in the hands of one fallible person?

Our founding fathers knew better.

We don't need a king; we already have one. His name is Jesus Christ, and

That's what REVIVE US on October 18th is all about: our true Hope, and placing Him front and center in our hearts and our minds as we look for the path forward. Without Him, all roads lead to despair and darkness.

The good news is that God's method of change starts by transforming the heart of man, then the mind of man, and works its way out from there through the family, our neighbors, our churches, our schools, our businesses—all the way up to our nation's top leaders. With God's help, we can revive America and correct our course before we're too lost to ever find our way home.

We kick it all off at REVIVE US by going to work on reviving our families, our communities, and our nation together. We'll be broadcasting live from a historic church in downtown Chicago alongside my family and powerful special guests like Dr. Ben Carson, pastors Francis Chan and Dr. James MacDonald, authors Eric Metaxas and Jennifer Rothschild, and the beloved teacher of effective prayer, "Miss Clara", from the inspirational movie *War Room*. We'll also have amazing musical guests like the Vertical Church Band and Passion... and that's just the beginning!

Most importantly, you'll be there. With your family and your neighbors.

This isn't going to be another convention where everyone stands at a podium and recites from a teleprompter. We've already seen enough of that this year.

This will be an exciting, empowering, and interactive experience that reaffirms the values we share as Christians.

I hope your whole church attends Revive US together because I want to show you that we're all part of a very, very large family of believers that reaches back thousands of years and stretches across the globe in unity.

This event is going to bring hundreds of thousands of people together. You'll be there with family, you'll meet new friends, and we're going to connect you through technology with others in attendance across the country. This will be a night of inspiring speeches, powerful prayer, and empowering conversations - conversations you will actively participate in. And, as the evening winds down, we're going to have a Q&A where myself and the other speakers will answer your questions, hear your thoughts and discuss anything else that's on your mind. Before it's all over you'll have time to gather as a community in your theater for prayer and discussion with other attendees.

My hope is that you walk out of the theater feeling full of hope and courage, and having made new connections with people in your community, empowered to change your world.

Please join my family and me for this very special live event on October 18th. Only through a powerful show of unity can we start the movement to revive America.

For more information or to learn how to buy tickets, visit www.ReviveUs2016.com.

KIRK CAMERON'S REVIVE US ONE NIGHT. ONE HOPE. ONE NATION UNDER GOD.

LIVE OCTOBER 18 IN SELECT THEATERS NATIONWIDE

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW! www.REVIVEUS2016.com

MYFAITHVØTES

FATHOM

'The Ten Commandments' at 60 years: Still timeless and true



By Brian Godawa

s a person of faith reflecting on one of the most powerful and influential biblical films of all time, it is a daunting task to say something fresh, something new about such a well-known classic as "The Ten Commandments." But maybe that's wrong. Maybe that's the problem. At the heart of

Maybe that's the problem. At the heart of our culture is a rejection of all things old, a reception of all things new. The new is the true, the good and the beautiful. The old is out of date, antiquated, archaic, oldfashioned, so yesterday — and therefore irrelevant.

But that couldn't be any further from the truth. Maybe what's so great about "The Ten Commandments" lies in the old that was replaced in our culture by the new that is not so true.

Rewatching "The Ten Commandments" with today's sophisticated movie standards yields mediocre camera work, melodramatic acting, on-the-nose dialogue, heavy-handed narration and unimpressive special effects. Yet it remains celebrated today by both religious and secular audiences in biblical proportions. Why?

The movie was released in 1956 and was the most expensive movie ever made, with the most amazing special effects at the time. It was the highestgrossing film that year, and it's still in the Top 10 of the most financially successful films of all time. It was nominated for seven Academy Awards and has been preserved in the United States National Film Registry. It's one of AFI's Top Ten Epic Films and has a 94 percent Tomatometer rating at Rotten Tomatoes.

Admit it, millions of us believers read our Bibles and still picture Charlton Heston as Moses in our heads whenever we read the Pentateuch.

So, what's the miracle here? The answer, like Moses' robe, has

The answer, like Moses' robe, has threads of different colors. One thread

that stands out to this storyweaver is the movie's superhero motif. Sure, Moses is "the deliverer" in the story. Like a pre-comic book superhero, his quest is the classic reluctant "hero's journey," saving the world from a tyrannical villain. But rather than receiving power from genetic mutation or a radioactive insect bite, his powers come from God. Or rather, his God *is* the power. The only real power behind redemption, freedom and justice.

This is why comic book superhero narratives are so popular in a secular society that rejects the biblical creator. Humanity is made in the image of God, and therefore requires deity to find meaning and create order (law). Without transcendent deity to dictate justice, there is only the power of the strong over the weak, or, in other words, the rule of supervillains — tyrants.

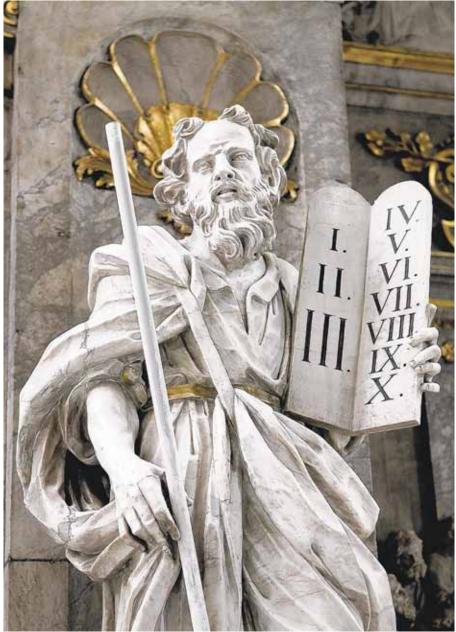
Modern superhero myths fulfill the longing for transcendence, the need for a "higher power," with new gods as projections of man's potential greatness. But this human polytheism is ultimately unable to provide a true transcendent standard for meaning and order, because humanity without accountability to a transcendent standard becomes arbitrary power and devolves into the tyranny of a pharaoh, an Ultron or an Apocalypse.

If a culture will not worship the true God, it will worship the state as god, which ends in slavery. Freedom can only come through the biblical worldview; justice can only come through God's law.

This is a universal reality that legendary filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille understood and that still resonates today, 60 years later. DeMille was so bold as to trumpet his message at the beginning of "The Ten Commandments" with a sermonic introduction: "The theme of this picture is whether man ought to be ruled by God's Law or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Ramses. Are men the property of the State, or are they free souls under God? This same battle continues throughout the world today. Our intention was not to create a story, but to be worthy of the divinely inspired story."

It's your choice. You either have the freedom of God's law or you get the slavery of tyranny.

Forgive me, but like the Decalogue itself, I must clarify good by comparing it with evil. And there is no better way to understand the past than by comparing it with the present. Why is it that this "dated" Bible movie still works and is still a favorite among the faithful, while the newest epic adaptation of the Moses story, "Exodus: Gods and Kings" (2014),



made by an Oscar-winning director, written by an Oscar-winning screenwriter, starring Oscar-winning actors, with superior budget and special effects, failed so spectacularly?

Perhaps it lies in the fact that the new movie was a complete subversion of what made the older movie so great and last so long. (See more at http://godawa. com/movies/supernatural/exodus-godskings-thank-god-aint-noah-please-notking-david/).

Go ahead and call it that "old-time religion," but the Heston movie tapped into a God of transcendence that inspires despite its age. The new "Exodus" movie pictured Moses as an antihero, whose deity was more of a hallucination than a reality, and whose glory was reduced to a temper tantrum-throwing child, ending in Moses fabricating the "law of God."

This atheist subversion of the divine story was a fictional rendition of Richard Dawkins' attacks on the Bible and God, not a faithful respect for the sacred text. It reduced the supernatural to materialist explanations, thus eliminating the transcendent, and with it, all meaning and order, and satisfaction of story. Whether or not religious believers consciously knew this is irrelevant. They felt it. And they fled from the box office.

This is because, at the heart and soul of freedom, is God's law. "The Ten Commandments" captured that eternal truth, and that's why it still satisfies today, despite our secular culture's socialist death wish. Many of us still know, as Founding Father William Penn once wrote, that "Men must be governed by God or they will be ruled by tyrants."

Brian Godawa is an award-winning Hollywood screenwriter and bestselling author of biblical novels. Want to be fascinated? See Godawa.com.

38 years of divine miracles

By Dr. Ted Baehr and Dr. Tom Snyder



here's been a tremendous explosion of Christian faith and values in movies and television programs. Our work in the entertainment industry, especially the Christian Film & Television Commis-

sion and Movieguide[®], has been leading the way.

Back in the late 1970s, I was honored to be elected president of the Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, which produced during my tenure "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," a CBS-TV program that won a Prime Time Emmy Award and was watched by over 37 million people. During that time, I advised: 1) Vincenzo Labella to encourage the addition of a resurrection sequence to "Jesus of Nazareth," so some groups would refrain from boycotting the television movie as too humanist; and, 2) John Heyman, who produced The Genesis Project, from which he extracted "The Jesus Film" with the famous Dr. Bill Bright.

Soon thereafter, I inherited the files from the Protestant Film Office and started Movieguide[®] and Christian Film & Television Commission to help encourage more movies with Christian faith and values.

At that time, there was one movie with Christian faith, "The Trip to Bountiful," and only a handful of family movies. Also, like the church film offices of the 1930s, we helped families teach their children to be media wise and gave them analysis through Movieguide® so they could choose the good, rather than be surprised by the bad. Developing a media-and-culture-wise curriculum started in the 1970s, when as head of the TV Center at City University of New York, I joined with 60 professors to design and test one of the very first media-literacy courses.

Miraculously, since Christian Film & Television Commission and Movieguide[®] began holding the Annual Faith & Values Awards celebrating family movies and movies and TV programs with Christian faith values 25 years ago, the percentage of movies with at least some Christian, redemptive content (which we label C, CC or CCC) has increased from about 25 such movies to more than 160!

Judging by this year's surprising releases, that trend doesn't show any signs of stopping.

Twenty years ago, the Movieguide[®] Awards started handing out its Epiphany Prizes for Inspiring Movies & TV, which celebrate the strongest movies with Christian faith and values.

Faith films soaring to new heights The number of strongly Christian-themed films has skyroocketed in the last 20 years – and their popularity has led to a bounty of ticket sales.

Year	Movies with strong Christian content	Total box office
1996	16	\$0.21 billion
2012	47	\$3.69 billion
2015	65	\$5.35 billion

Source: Movieguide

Movieguide[®] recently studied 128 movies with strong Christian, redemptive content (CC or CCC) released in 1996, 2012 and 2015. We found that the number of movies with such content has increased 194 percent since 1996, and 38.3 percent in the three years since 2012 — from only 16 such movies in 1996 to 47 movies in 2012 and 65 movies in 2015!

Our study also showed that the theatrical box office totals in the United States and Canada for such movies increased from \$208.63 million in 1996 to \$3.69 billion in 2012 and nearly \$5.35 billion in 2015, an increase of 2,463 percent and

44.78 percent, respectively. And that doesn't include the money these movies made overseas or on home video!

Movieguide®'s study didn't just measure successful Epiphany Prize-winning, faith-based movies like "The Preacher's Wife" from 1996 and last year's "War Room." We also studied major Hollywood movies with strong, including overt, Christian content and values, such as Disney's 1996 animated classic "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" and Universal's blockbuster "Furious 7", both of which had overt, positive Christian content and values.

Also included in Movieguide®'s database were small movies with Christian, redemptive content such as 1996's "Citizen Ruth" and 2015's "Captive."

Similar successes are happening in the television industry.

This can be seen not only in the success of such recent Christocentric programs as "Duck Dynasty," "The Bible" miniseries and last year's Epiphany-Prize-winning TV movie "Dolly Parton's Coat of Many Colors," but also in the Christian, redemptive, biblical, and conservative values expressed in such popular TV programs as "Blue Bloods," "Chicago Fire," "NCIS," "Walker, Texas Ranger," and "Seventh Heaven."

What's the secret to this success? Well, each year we publish a comprehensive 150-point analysis of all the major movies released by the entertainment industry, including the major independent and foreign language releases, known as the Report to the

releases, known as the Report to the Entertainment Industry. This annual report shows that movies and television programs with moral, spiritually uplifting and inspiring content usually earn the most money at the box office and on home video, and get some of the highest ratings on TV.

To do this annual report, our staff watches more than 300 movies, and screens more than 400 television programs. We write comprehensive reviews of more than 275 movies each year and at least 50 television programs that qualify for the two or so TV awards we hand out

at our Awards Gala.

Our comprehensive analysis proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that most moviegoers and TV viewers prefer TV programs and movies with Christian, moral, redemptive and inspiring content. They want to see the hero triumphant, as in popular TV programs like "NCIS" and "Blue Bloods," and popular movies like Marvel's superhero extravaganzas. They also want to see good overcome evil, justice prevail over injustice, and truth erase falsehood. And, they want to see their Christian faith and values lifted up, rather than viciously and unjustly attacked.

In reality, our success of promoting and honoring the good, the true and the beautiful in entertainment at the Annual Faith & Values Awards isn't solely our own doing.

No, any success we have had over the past decades is a direct result of the miracles that God has been performing in the entertainment industry, often through us but also through the efforts of countless other people, especially the Christian filmmakers and television artists and others of good will who've responded to our message or who've responded to God's call.

Each year we are amazed by the great things God has done. A lot more work needs to be done to clean the screens, of course, but if we are faithful, God will be for us. If God be for us, then who can stand against us?

Theodore "Ted" Baehr, J.D., is chairman of the Christian Film & Television Commission and publisher of Movieguide® (movieguide.org), a trademarked family guide to entertainment. An awardwinning media authority, his books include "How To Succeed In Hollywood (Without Losing Your Soul)" and "The Culture-Wise Family." Film scholar Tom Snyder, Ph.D., is editor of Movieguide. He is co-author with Dr. Baehr of "Frodo & Harry: Understanding Visual Media and Its Impact on Our Lives."



A film studies view: Let movies mirror life, even if the ending isn't neat



By Kristi Stone Hamrick

reat storytelling embraces the chaos of life and doesn't try to wrap up all crises as the credits roll, observes Hollywood veteran Rebecca Ver Straten-McSparran. As director of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities' BestSemester L. A. Film Studies Center, she leads an innovative program designed to teach people of faith how to tell a story and how to actually make a difference in Hollywood, through artistic achievement. It's a role she landed after forming friendships with some of the most powerful names in the entertainment industry.

I recently talked with Rebecca about what she has observed over the years, the evolution of faith in film today, how Christians in Hollywood are most effective, and why horror films may be the most spiritual films on the market.

Q: You were once a pastor. How did you become head of a Hollywood film program?

I totally backed into it. I was involved in the music industry through my husband David Raven, who has been a drummer, writer, singer and producer for over 40 years, working with artists like Keith Richards, Norah Jones, and Bruce Springsteen. His own music is used on many television shows, so I got to know many people in the entertainment industry first through music. I was a pastor for 14 years, including the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, which is home to artists of all kinds.

Randall Wallace, who wrote "Braveheart," taught our adult Sunday school class and through him and the church I met John Lee Hancock ("Saving Mr. Banks," "The Blind Side"), Ken Wales ("Amazing Grace," "Cagney and Lacey") and many others. I began developing film and arts ministries, such as screenwriting groups, Sunday Night at the Movies events, artist retreats, etc. Those ministries led to opportunities to be on the boards of both the City of Angels Film Festival and Reel Spirituality, a program of Fuller Theological Seminary. A lot of exciting outreach was going on.

For many years prior to the 1990s, there was quite a stigma attached to being Christian within the film industry — people could lose their jobs if discovered. After the controversy of "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988), Christians started gathering and being supportive of each other, so entertainment-related ministries developed and were flourishing by the time I became involved in the late 1990s.

While working with the City of the Angels Film Festival (eventually becoming director) and Reel Spirituality, I left First Congregational to start an unusual church with my husband for artists, filmmakers and thinkers called Tribe of Los Angeles. Since I needed a full income along with this, I became principal of a school for low-income families, adding education to my resume of ministry and artist relationships. I got a call when the position opened up at the L.A. Film Studies Center.

Q: You describe a very dynamic group of believers who meet and talk together and keep each other strong, which contrasts with those who say that when you go to Hollywood, you lose your faith. Have you found that your faith can become stronger in Hollywood?

Yes, it can. The environment is really changing here, but not always in the way people expect.

Many people believe that if content coming out of Hollywood is changed, it will change culture. While that is true to some extent, what we found is that the biggest impact in Hollywood is made by people using their own gifts and skills in the industry and building relationships with industry peers.

I have a salon in my home (a social gathering for purposeful conversation) where people like Phil Alden Robinson ("Field of Dreams"), Scott Derrickson ("Doctor Strange," "Sinister") and David Oyelowo ("Selma") discuss culture, the art of film, career development, theology or ethics. Not everyone is Christian, but we learn from each other.

When you consider the makeup of the dynamic churches in the area and

people who participate in industry ministries, I would say that conservatively there are 8,000 Christians (Evangelical/Protestant and Catholic) at all levels of the industry in Hollywood who can reach out to their community ... so we have found that more than content change comes about through relationships.

Q: In the last few years, Hollywood has taken notice of faithdriven entertainment and the faith-driven audience. Is that a good thing? How has it impacted some of the vehicles chosen?

Overall, Hollywood is much more

it difficult to make a high-quality film. If the films are challenging rather than inspiring, their audiences react negatively, as if the only way to Jesus is through inspiration and hope. This directly contradicts the Gospels.

Also, Christians who finance films too often use people they know outside of Hollywood to write, produce, direct and act in their films, ignoring Christians who have been honing their skills in Hollywood for years and could actually make quality productions and understand the nuances of the industry. And so it can be hard to find great

quality Christian productions.



Jeb Perkins, a student of the L.A. Film Studies Center, calibrates his film equipment. Image courtesy of L.A. Film Studies Center.

open to Christian thinking, and there has been a major shift in content. ... Now some television shows have fascinating theological subtexts and thoughtful or struggling Christians in recurring roles. HBO invited one of our faculty members to be an official blogger for "The Leftovers" from a faithbased approach. Our own program has quite a few strong Christian alumni who write on TV shows and bring thoughtful content to them ...

But there is something different between being open to Christian thinking and being open to faith-based types of films. Studios embrace the genre because it represents a large audience, but they give it little funding, making Q: Hollywood often struggles with telling a faith-based story respectfully. Consider Russell Crowe's "Noah," who wants the world to end or Christian Bale in "Exodus: Gods and Kings," who does not believe the plagues are really signs of the power of God and instead is worried about how people get paid and economic structures. Why doesn't Hollywood tell the story that is there?

They care about the story. But those kinds of changes are the creative license that writers/directors use to tell a different story, either to fit it into the film form that tells it well in two hours

VER STRATEN

(compared to a novel or a different story) or because the filmmaker has that different perspective. Artists are not obligated to an audience.

On the other hand, one problem with Christian filmmaking is that while we could tell the story, we don't do it well. We get too close to it and tell too much or not enough.

"Ben-Hur" is a good example. It's getting poor reviews, and criticized for being too violent or that the main character is physically not strong enough to bear what that character had to undergo. But the biggest criticism is that the story of redemption has been cut out.

Christians try to make films like others, but often don't do it as well. My students are interested in being the best in the business. Right now, for example, our postproduction students are interested in working at companies like Light Iron, a leading digital



Rebecca Ver Straten-McSparran

postproduction company, and we were excited that they specially created a position for a new graduate. Young alumni are winning Emmys for editing, being offered television acting roles or as writers on TV shows. These are the things what my students want to do and it is where they make a difference. Not surprisingly, when you are excellent at what you do, people will want to know what you believe.

Q: Hollywood once included stories with a values component as part of its regular rotation. Films like "Boys Town" with Spencer Tracy or Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life" were not made to pander to a subset of the population, but to provide inspiring entertainment as part of their regular fare. Is this a thing of the past?

When those films were made, Christianity was part of the culture. From the '50s and '60s on, we saw the emergence of a postmodern, post-Christian culture and a radical shift in culture. The sacred became less accepted, less



David Oyelowo (center), who played Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in "Selma" and appeared in "The Butler" and "Lincoln," stands with Rebecca Ver Straten-McSparran (right) and students with the L.A. Film Studies Center. t. Image courtesy of L.A. Film Studies Center.

visible, less present, and people do not know how to access that world.

I think that even Christians from a Word-based, propositional belief structure living in a post-Enlightenment world don't have the tool kit anymore to know how to listen to God and hear God speak, let alone assume that a materially oriented culture does.

That's not to say that there aren't people who do, but a majority struggle with being able to know or feel God's presence. I don't think we have the tool kit for listening to God and to hear him. So, we don't make those films because people in the culture don't understand that worldview as they once did. They don't see it.

I will say that Catholic writers and directors seem to have a capacity for opening up the spiritual world to us that others don't, even if their films are not explicitly religious or they no longer retain their faith, such as Frank Capra, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Alfred Hitchcock.

Richard Blake calls it an "afterimage" or "footprint" of that worldview. Evangelicals, particularly those who fund films and set the parameters are Word-driven and want to beat a message into everything.

Catholics see the world as sacramental and images become tangible evidence of spiritual life: Bread is the body of Christ, wine His actual blood. They seem to be able to deal more richly with the nuances of Christianity and of storytelling. Catholics have a better sense of image. And film is image.

Q: You said previously that a lot of Christians don't know how to mentor artists. Why?

...When it comes to the movies, too often many Christians want to see things that fit within our codes and our views of what we think Scripture to

be....

There is frequently an ambiguity in spiritually penetrating films.

While most people want to watch a film that resolves the conflict in the story and ends well, our brains react in a way that says, "That's done. It's over. Now we move on."

But certain kinds of stories don't have a type of ending and don't resolve the conflict. It's those stories that have the capacity to stay with us and alter us. We have to tell stories we can't forget.

...When we offer inspiring stories that neatly tie up the endings, it's no wonder no one relates or wants to listen: It isn't honest. It's time for Christians become people identified with being truthful, honest and willing to expose our own struggles. So I don't think this is the day for evangelism in the way we've understood it. This is the day for credibility.

The only way we can really address our culture is to become the people known for telling the truth: not tell who we are, but be who we are.

Q: So how can people of faith make better, more memorable films?

To make great films, you need to find the very best people — even if they are not believers.

I've seen people come to Hollywood with all of this money to invest in changing the culture, but I've found that people not in the center of the industry don't always choose the best people. They choose people who think like them.

A lot of the most talented Christians in Hollywood today like working with horror films because you can say there is evil in the world and depict it and grapple with it. "The Exorcism of Emily Rose" is a great example....

I believe "The Devil's Advocate" (that starred Al Pacino and Keanu

Reeves) is one of the most biblical portrayals of the devil and how he could operate.

I was moved by what Scott Derrickson said about horror films. This comes from the book, "Through a Screen Darkly" (2007), by Jeffrey Overstreet:

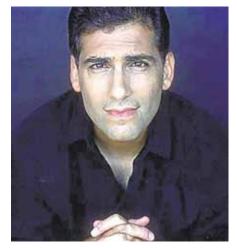
"When I interviewed Derrickson for Seattle Pacific University's Response magazine, he explained his appreciation for the genre. 'There's evil in nature. We're not in control. I think [horror is] the genre of non-denial, and that's fundamentally what attracts me to it. 'Emily Rose' is a movie that takes some of the darkest aspects of spirituality and portrays them in a realistic way. And the value of that is that I don't think you can watch the film without asking yourself if you believe that these things are real...

"It's valuable for the culture as a whole to be asking itself those questions. Because once you're in that arena, you can't ask yourself if you believe in the devil without ultimately asking yourself what you believe about God. To dissect evil is ultimately to define good."

Rebecca Ver Straten-McSparran is director of a semester program for the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities at L. A. Film Studies Center in Los Angeles. She is a mentor and friend to many throughout Hollywood, recently giving a Princeton Lecture on "The Dark Side of Beauty," and the American Scientific Affiliation keynote. She is completing her doctorate from King's College in London, exploring the prophetic voice in art and in film.

Kristi S. Hamrick is a writer, speaker, media consultant and president of KSH Media Inc. @KristiSHamrick

'The Young Messiah': A daring story that is worth the journey



By Cyrus Nowrasteh

Recently, Cheryl Wetzstein, manager of special sections for The Washington Times, interviewed "The Young Messiah" director and co-writer Cyrus Nowrasteh, and Vincent Walsh, who played "Joseph." The movie was based on Anne Rice's novel, "Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt." The interviews were edited for space and clarity.

Q: Why do you work with stories that have to do with faith?

First and foremost, I am attracted to the story ... my faith journey is a long one and a gradual one that goes back many years.

When this story fell into my lap, I

couldn't stop thinking about it. For me personally, it made perfect sense ... this is a story that you should try and tell.

You never know whether you are going to attract an audience or not ... and when you have material that is outside the Bible, it's always risky ...

I felt there was no guarantee that we would have a ready audience for this because of the daring nature of it. We are exploring a time of Jesus' life that we really know nothing about, and I felt there were inherent risks but I felt they were worth the journey for me personally and as a storyteller.

Q: I have read that you are less concerned about affirming people's beliefs and more focused on inspiring people to find faith and look at things a different way ...

That's partly right. I would love to do both — it's fine to affirm people's faith ... but we're going into new territory here.

With any Jesus movie, there's always an element where you are preaching to the choir and you expect those Christians who love Jesus to respond and to at least see the movie and give it a chance.

But you also want to attract and inspire others who may be drawn to a story because it is different than the other Jesus movies that they've seen or are aware of

And this story is "what if" — it

presents you with the compassion and love and forgiveness that Jesus represents, without feeling like it is a sermon.

Q: There have been criticisms e.g., the film doesn't have a strong scriptural basis. What is your reaction?

I can't control how people respond ... This story moved me — I felt there was nothing in there that was offensive; we were very careful to do it with reverence and respect ... That matters the most — how you do it.

I had many, many people come up to me who said things like, "I wasn't sure about this, but upon seeing it, I loved it, thank you for doing it." I had a pastor say to me, "God is happy (with this movie)." And I said, "I think He is, I think God is happy with the movie ... and he said, "I think so too ..."

So I don't think there's anything offensive here ... but you never know ...

Q: I and others were particularly struck by the portrayal of Joseph.

Yes, the film attempts to take you inside the Holy Family ... They are usually portrayed as icons and Joseph is usually given short shrift — he's usually like wallpaper.

I always felt Joseph had to be strong — he was selected for a reason ... and he had to be substantive: He had to be an ideal father in the human sense of the father. I wanted him to have those qualities strength and sensitivity and relatability and I am very happy with Vincent [Walsh's portrayal].

Q: How about the portrayal of Mary?

We were dealing with a fine line we are portraying her in a way that all denominations can accept her and embrace her ... I think we got lucky with casting. We found Sara Lazzaro in Rome; she's Italian ... She has that quality ... both sweetness and strength ...

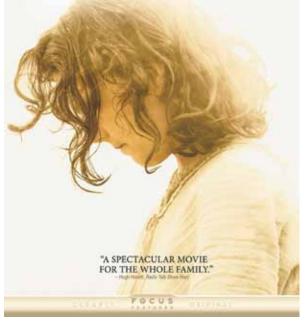
Q: And the young man who played **Iesus**?

This was the biggest challenge, as he had to carry the movie and we had to cast characters around the boy ...

We looked all over and found Adam Greaves-Neal from London ... He comes from a strong family, extraordinary child. I think we have terrific actors ...

BLU-RAY + DVD + DIGITAL HD

the YOUNG MESSIAH



in Jesus' abilities - that came across, correct?

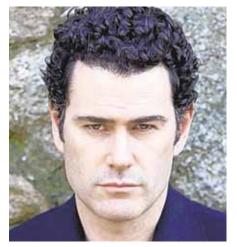
It's evident that he knew that his son was special ... the evidence was clear and reenforced what he believed in. He's saying to Mary, "Did you see? It's true. We've got to go ..."

Q: Final thoughts?

... The movie business can be relentless, but when you get into a project like "The Young Messiah," you remember that's the reason you got into it.

WEDNESDAY • AUGUST 31 • 2016 A SPECIAL REPORT PREPARED BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES ADVOCACY DEPARTMENT

Imagining 'Joseph' as 'the anchor, the rock'



By Vincent Walsh

Q: How did you prepare for this iconic role of playing Joseph in the **Holy Family?**

This was a very special project ...

Putting aside the magnitude of child I was the father of, Cyrus [Nowrasteh] and I discussed [the character]. I wanted to make this as real as possible, as to father and son.

I drew on my own experiences — I have two kids myself, and my son is 12 ... This was very much cathartic in a way ... playing a father in a piece that is so fantastic ... and so awesome. The word awesome is overused, but I use it here — this is awesome for me because of the nature of the piece. It's very special.

Q: Does a particularly meaningful scene come to mind?

Cyrus and I talked about the scene on the hill, where Jesus has questions and Joseph is talking to Jesus about his questions ... It's very much like talking to your own son when they hit a certain stage on their lives — between ages 10 and 13 ... it's a very sensitive time for boys. I related to that character...

"I want Joseph to be strong," Cyrus told me. "He's the anchor, the rock, the guy who's making the decisions." So I did my

Q: What else went through your mind as you prepared for this role?

I decided to just grab the bull by the horns and play him simple, straight, as a father protecting his family, his son, his tribe ... That was my anchor ...the script was beautiful and supported this. There's weight attached to every word ... everyone worked to remain true to Scripture ...

Cyrus said that after a viewing of it, a father came straight up in tears, saying that the portrayal made him "want to be a better father for my son."

Q: It appears that Joseph believed

best to be strong.

'Christian stories can be funny — who knew?'



By Dallas Jenkins

wo factors primarily fostered my decision to make so-called "faith-based" films: One, I grew up in the Christian community and was dissatisfied with the nature and quality of

Christian films, and two, I grew up a big movie fan and was frustrated by the fact that I never saw stories that reflected my life experience.

I found the latter especially odd because a life filled with the drama and comedy of weekly church attendance, daily prayer, an obsessive "wait until marriage" sexual philosophy, and a deep love of Ronald Reagan is, believe it or not, shared by almost half the country.

But evangelical Christians were rarely portrayed in film, and usually not accurately or affectionately. I suspect a similar perspective is shared by current black, gay, "geek" and other subculture-represented filmmakers who grew up with the same feeling while watching movies. There has, however, been a shift in the last decade-plus.

So I felt compelled to make a film that authentically reflected my world without sermonizing about it, the same way these other filmmakers did. A film that would feel relatable, and maybe even important, to evangelicals, but entertaining and authentic enough that outsiders could enjoy it.

Films representing the aforementioned groups have increased in quality and quantity. And that's a good thing.

But to varying degrees, it hasn't necessarily been a smooth transition, and faith-based films still have a ways to go.

I was inspired to make my latest film, "The Resurrection of Gavin Stone," because it seemed many independent faith-based films felt compelled to make a big statement, which often made the movie feel "preachy."

This isn't a bad thing, as there are plenty of great preachy films from all kinds of ideologies. But I was jealous of movies like "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," "Bend It Like Beckham" and "Barbershop" — films that represented authentic cultural experiences and had something to say but didn't carry the weight of needing to be "important." Plus, they were entertaining, even for an evangelical white dude.

And that was the other thing. I was convinced culturally-specific films, even meaningful ones, didn't have to be exclusive to that culture. I never once felt "Schindler's List" was "too Jewish" or "Brooklyn" "too Irish," or "Sister Act" "too Catholic" for me.

If anything, the more specific movies are to their cultures and the settings within them, the less bothersome it feels when the movie does veer into preachy territory. Nuns moralizing to a sinner? A conversion-by-baptism religious ritual? A speech about racism or black politics? I would expect nothing less from movies set in a Catholic church, a Greek Orthodox ceremony and a black-owned barbershop. I, even as an outsider, am not turned off by authenticity; I'm only turned off when messages are shoehorned in where they don't belong.

So I felt compelled to make a film that authentically reflected my world without sermonizing about it, the same way these other filmmakers did. A film that would feel relatable, and maybe even important, to evangelicals, but entertaining and authentic enough that outsiders could enjoy it.

And that's how I ended up directing my latest, a movie that is set in an evangelical church and includes a pastor, a Sunday morning worship service, prayer, a Sunday School teacher as the female love interest, and features scenes of a staged production about the life of Jesus.

And here's the crazy part — it's not only gotten some tears from test audiences, which is par for the course with faith films — it's also gotten quite a few big laughs. Christian stories can be funny — who knew?

But how can a story like that be enjoyable to non-churchgoers as well? Well, the main character has never been to church either, so the comedy and pathos come from his fish-out-ofwater journey into this world.

I'm not so arrogant that I can predict how it will do or claim that my own movie will open new doors. As William Goldman famously said about the film business, "Nobody knows anything." But I'm at least pleased I made a film I would have appreciated when I first loved movies. And hey, if "Barbershop" can exist in the same world as "Do the Right Thing," surely my film can exist in the same world as "The Passion of the Christ."

Dallas Jenkins is currently director of Vertical Church Films at Harvest Bible Chapel in Chicago, following his tenure at Jenkins Entertainment, the production company he started with his father in 2000. He has produced or directed 10 award-winning feature and short films with companies such as Warner Brothers, Lionsgate, Pure Flix Entertainment, WWE Studios, Blumhouse Productions, Walden Media, and Hallmark Channel.

.....

Breaking out of the Christian ghetto



By Michael Leaser

The largest problem with many so-called Christian films today is their inability to connect with audiences who are not already Christian. These Christian ghetto films, such as "Fireproof" or "God's Not Dead," have found success in reaching a segment of the Christian audience, but they have had little impact outside of the Christian bubble they operate in.

Why is that? First of all, many of these films rely on shoddy production values, poor acting and stiff dialogue. Most egregiously, they focus on message before story, which almost always results in a mediocre story that fails to deliver its message.

As a Christian and a filmmaker, I find this appalling. Christians are inheritors of literally the greatest story ever told by the greatest storyteller there ever is, has been or will be. Yet so many modern Christian films play less like "It's a Wonderful Life" or "The Sound of Music" and more like cheap knockoffs of a Hallmark movie.

This current dynamic exists in part because there is a portion of the modern Christian audience that is perfectly willing to support a film of inferior craftsmanship as long as it reflects their values.

Christian filmmakers willing to play along have a decent chance, with an effective enough marketing effort, of reaching this audience, but only this audience. If the budget is low enough, they may even be successful financially.

But by continuing to create product that is only connecting with this segment of the Christian audience, they are perpetuating the public perception that "Christian film" means bad acting, inauthentic characters, and boring, if not uninspiring, stories.

Christians have a religion that is interesting, engaging and challenging. If Christian filmmakers actually want to fulfill the Great Commission, along with reaching the large segment of the Christian audience that puts more stock in a film having some artistic merit, then they should focus on producing films that are good for the soul's consumption *and* true to the (often messy) human condition *and* beautiful in their craftsmanship.

This means creating Christian characters that talk like real people going through real problems. For instance, I was both pleased and dismayed when I

Breaking ground with national, multimedia 'events' for faith and family

By Spencer Proffer

Meteor 17 producer and content creator Spencer Proffer strives to make a difference in pop culture with projects aimed at adding meaning for people's lives. He has recently teamed up with two giants in the faith media community to build a new lane in his overall business: veteran advertising executive Joe Battaglia, owner of Renaissance Communications, which specializes in marketing the most successful faith-based theatrical releases into multimedia platforms; and David Sams, executive director and co-creator of KeepTheFaith, the No. 1 Christian radio program service in America, with more than 650,000 average quarter-hour listeners, reaching 280 stations in 19 of the top 20 markets.

Mr. Proffer recently had a questionand-answer exchange with The Washington Times, which has been edited for space and clarity.

Q: You have a vast background in working with acclaimed music stars, producing scores of gold and platinum recordings, and handling the music for more than 130 films and television programs, dozens of which were nominated for awards. Why are you now expanding your reach into producing special theatrical events, focused on faith and family? And tell us about your "I Hope You Dance" film.

Faith, hope and inspiration defy genres. What does it take to hope? Everything. That is what our film, book and projects convey.

We are blessed to have icons from all walks of life, ranging from the inspirational Joel Osteen to the brilliant talents of Graham Nash, Brian Wilson, Lee Ann Womack and Vince Gill, to the magical words and spirit of the late Dr. Maya Angelou, in one film, "I Hope You Dance."

They address how Mark D. Sanders and Tia Sillers' timeless, classic song has motivated real people to transform their lives, to chase their dreams, to overcome obstacles and to persist in the face of extreme adversity. "I Hope You Dance" inspires and empowers people to achieve more, to live their best lives and to make the world a better place.

Our film, written and directed by John Scheinfeld, profiles true stories of aspiration, second chances, recovery, forgiveness and miracles. Take a look at a brief overview to our film at http:// vimeopro.com/crewneckproductions/ ihyd-doc-sizzle-reel.



David Sams (left) with Joe Battaglia (center) and Spencer Proffer. Image courtesy of CieloScope.

CieloScope, an event production company, kicking off each project in event cinema with media industry veterans Joe Battaglia and David Sams. Why would an experienced music and multimedia producer like yourself team up with two people who are at the top of the faith lane?

Joe and David understand how timeless virtues using multiplatform media work to share hope and faith while entertaining.

I believe you can do good for people while entertaining them and multiple platforms.

Q: CieloScope also has a longterm venture with the two leading media pioneers, Fathom Event founders Dan Diamond and Shelly Maxwell and their KAOS Connect media company. That's a lot of firepower.

I have known, worked and become good pals with Dan and Shelly for over a decade. They blueprinted and oversaw the most successful theater event platform in America, Fathom Events. Their knowledge, passion, great taste

We are blessed to have icons from all walks of life, ranging from the inspirational Joel Osteen to the brilliant talents of Graham Nash, Brian Wilson, Lee Ann Womack and Vince Gill, to the magical words and spirit of the late Dr. Maya Angelou, in one film, "I Hope You Dance."

getting across timeless messages to propel them toward better lives. It is important to me to be able to do that. With the help and guidance of these two faith media leaders, we will bring fresh content to the world, exposed in new and interactive ways, and across

and prowess to motivate audiences to come to theaters for a one-nightonly event, in order to see content not previously available in other platforms, make them the best partners imaginable for our goals.

We all want to bring fresh and

exciting content to the country in unique ways. The KAOS Connect machine, as our theater event production partners, teams us with the best of breed in this area. When you add Dan and Shelly's vision, integrity and fun putting all this together, we are totally pumped to make a difference for faith and family viewers across the board.

Q: Your first project in 2016 was the successful "I Hope You Dance: The Power & Spirit of Song" Night of Hope and Healing, which was held in May in hundreds of theaters nationwide. We are familiar with Lee Ann Womack's Grammy-winning country song, but you uniquely positioned it to go beyond its secular success to reach into the faith community. You even included popular pastor and best-selling author Joel Osteen in the film, along with the late poet Dr. Maya Angelou, music greats Graham Nash, Brian Wilson, Vince Gill and Lee Ann Womack, and the songwriters and stories of people whose lives were impacted by the song. How did this inspiring project come about, and what is next for it?

Dan and Shelly, along with Pam Renall and Pamela Case, worked tirelessly with us. Add the smart executives at Screenvision Media, led by J.P. Partilla, along with Darryl Schaffer, Bernadette McCabe, Craig O'Connor and Michael Golden, and we built a great team. Boy, did we enjoy that experience. Screenvision's 14,000 theater reach became a platform to bring "I Hope You Dance" to America with the zeal and commitment to make a difference.

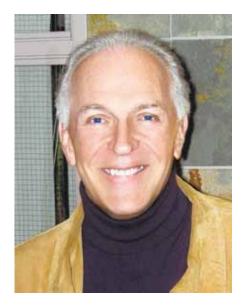
Joe, David and I plan to do much more with this team for sure.

It enables us to use the big-screen platform to exclusively premiere content and become a unique and interactive experience for all who attend.

Our book, which is associated with the project, is curated from the stories seen in the film with expanded and new on-point content. Co-producer Judith A. Proffer documents the birth and life of the song, including four captivating real-life stories of faith and hope. It is a timeless compendium that will move and inspire anyone who reads it, which they can, over and over. Author and life coach Tim Storey wrote a moving foreword that sets the tone for a book millions can enjoy owning. https://www.amazon. com/Hope-You-Dance-Power-Spirit/ dp/1618687913/

22

'Dance' film weaves four stories of hope



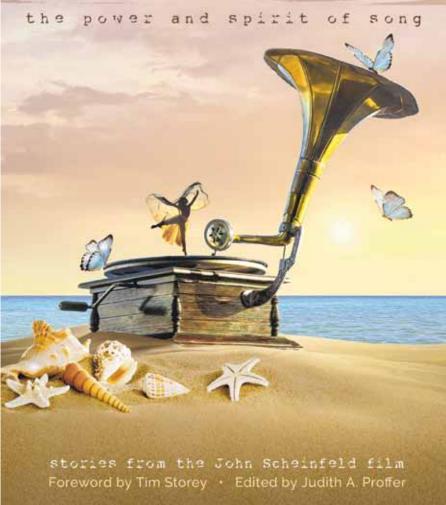
By Spencer Proffer

"I Hope You Dance: The Power and Spirit of Song" is the first full-length film to explore how one extraordinary song transformed some people's lives in profound, meaningful and sometimes-startling ways. It is a film about hope, faith, optimism and the power of music to inspire and heal.

By weaving together true stories of how Lee Ann Womack's No. 1 Grammywinning hit, "I Hope You Dance," has motivated people to chase their dreams, overcome obstacles and persist in the face of extreme adversity, "I Hope You Dance: The Power and Spirit of Song" will inspire and empower people to achieve more, to live their best lives.

The film highlights stories of love,

HOPE YOU DANCE



inspiration, second chances, forgiveness and miracles: a father who honors his daughter's memory by saving four lives through organ donation; a homeless shelter that teaches ballroom dancing, literally getting people back on their feet; a woman who miraculously recovers from a devastating spinal cord injury that should have killed her instantly; a couple who overcome the pain of their respective pasts to find love and redemption; and two Nashville songwriters whose life experiences combine to create a breathtaking piece of music for the ages.

"It's the story of a song that became an anthem, but even more so it's about real people who have overcome real odds. People whose lives have been dramatically altered by the Grammy Award-winning #1 song," wrote Stanley Hainsworth, founder and CCO of Tether, wrote in a November 2015 article for Huffington Post (http:// www.huffingtonpost.com/stanleyhainsworth/i-hope-you-dance-thepowe_b_8612228.html).

The film (previewed at https:// vimeopro.com/crewneckproductions/ ihyd-doc-sizzle-reel) features insightful commentary from best-selling author Pastor Joel Osteen; legendary singer-songwriters Brian Wilson (who performs his classic song, "God Only Knows") and Graham Nash (who performs his worldwide standard, "Teach Your Children"); country music stars Vince Gill and Lee Ann Womack; the late poet Dr. Maya Angelou; and the co-writers of the song, Tia Sillers and Mark D. Sanders.

PROFFER

From page C22

Q: Following the film, you and David Sams produced a 25-minute panel hosted by NBC's Kathie Lee Gifford, featuring Salem talk show host Mike Gallagher; The Dream Center's Caroline Barnett; actress Shari Rigby; and inspirational author, life coach and speaker Tim Storey. Is the panel an important part in drawing a crowd to the theater?

Absolutely. Dan and Shelly pioneered that concept at Fathom, where I produced a number of successful events with them. Each event was followed by panels of personalities who could articulately speak to and enlarge on what the public just saw. Given the credibility of the moderator (here, the wonderful Kathie Lee), and vast visible reach (via social media and otherwise) of the panelists, it pulls in the public to attend the theater event and adds greatly to the understanding and issues presented in the production. It's a fun and powerful way to bring unique content to another level.

Q: Can you speak about any of the 2017 projects slated from CieloScope?

Yes, but only from a 30,000-foot view.

We are super pumped to be working with Linda Hope, James Hardy, Ken Levy and Tony Montalto, the smart and terrific leaders of the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation, to sculpt and produce a major Memorial Day theatrical event (plus extensions) for our troops and country. The spirit and ethos of Bob Hope lives forever, and David and I intend to produce a timeless event, called "Hope 4 America" (tentative working title) that carries on all of Bob's goodness, pushed further forward by Joe's remarkable marketing chops. CieloScope will also bring the remarkable story of one-armed basketball star Kevin Laue to audiences in "Long Shot," a feature documentary directed by Franklin Martin via Screenvision, with KAOS Connect.

Joe, David and I serve as executive producers of "Long Shot" (along with Charlie Loventhal and Dain Blair), which will be an intimate portrait of what the human spirit can accomplish. Kevin is the first special-needs athlete to make it into NCAA ball and become a superstar on multiple levels; he inspires youths with his message that overcoming is winning. I am so proud to be aligned with Kevin, his longtime manager, David Goldberg and this remarkable story.

In closing, CieloScope stands for us reaching for every star in the heavens — with passion and purpose. Our events are intended to change lives. With a project like "Hope 4 America," we will honor the lives of those who have served our nation and made the greatest sacrifice. With a film like "Long Shot," we will honor the lives of those who've battled the odds and won despite the odds. With a film like "I Hope You Dance," we honor lives of people who put their faith in something bigger than themselves and believed that when one door closes, another door opens.

We are all about presenting purpose-filled stories ... stories that can change a life and which will be seen first on a single night at the movie house.

Spencer Proffer is the chief executive of Meteor 17. He is a pioneer in the convergence media integration of musicanchored projects in film and television. His productions and those which he has been integrally involved with have garnered Academy, Golden Globe, Emmy, Grammy and Tony awards and nominations. As a music producer, he has sold millions of gold and platinum records.

Faith. Film. And the stories we choose to tell

By Paul Aiello

Faith (noun)

1. complete trust or confidence in someone or something.

2. strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.

"Film"... for 100 years the reigning heavyweight champ of storytelling. This was not always so.

The best of film touches on our primal fears and greatest victories. We are omnipresent, observing our favorite actors charging across megaplexes, televisions and cellphones. Looking down into their little worlds of make-believe sets and CGI co-stars. Watching their struggles and dreams from afar.

And if the film is good, really cinema-good, we find ourselves inside these characters. Inside their heads and stories as our cinematic avatars span all times, from ancient dramas to future star worlds, and life's great conquests repeat.

And in the best of these... "faith" is rewarded.

In one's self. One's mission. One's team. The first definition.

As our maze-bound doubles confront impossible odds and unbeatable foes, we cheer them on, saving the universe, reaching for glory, winning the war, rescuing the damsel and saving the universe. Again. And again... Entertaining, sometimes. Profitable, hopefully. This is a business after all. But with interchangeable stories

and plots we saw last week, it's no wonder they are dissolved and forgotten like after dinner mints by the time we reach the car.

Faith (noun)

2. strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.

The second definition and the real question here. Can faith of a "spiritual" nature be captured on film?

A question too big to know. Films too pretentious to construct. As pretentious as this article perhaps, for they are unhip. Unmarketable. Flyover stuff at best and certainly not cinema.

Most in power turn away at the thought of making them. And those brave souls who would are soon too burdened and scared to try; life is short and so are careers.

But we can make them. And should try, as God knows this world could use them. And others have somehow. Others have. They turned from the formulas and certain box office with a small spark and wondered how.

And that spark caught fire when they realized the way lies not in them, but in what stories they chose to tell.

Old stories. Stories that can be cloaked in modern dress and times, can have heroes and dragons and demons, but these are not popcorn fluff designed to open big and sell laser toys. These are deeper stories that existed before books or film and invoke a sense of the miraculous. Even God.

Stories that... fictional or true, were once only whispered. Then passed

And if the film is good, really cinema-good, we find ourselves inside these characters. Inside their heads and stories as our cinematic avatars span all times, from ancient dramas to future star worlds, and life's great conquests repeat.

down. Then written down. And now occasionally filmed.

They are most definitely not stories centered on winning the day or the race or the girl, but of initiation and transformation.

Of trial by fire.

Of facing one's shadow.

Of dying for something greater. And rising anew.

Of forgiving.

And recognizing the grace of life. And letting go to it. And becoming part of it.

And God among us...

Stories most find too afraid to tell. But the irony is they are the only stories worth telling for we all seek transformation.

And they are the way we've always learned to reach higher. To fly. And heal.

And the thing that invokes the greatest fear is the underlying question inside these stories. A question that harkens back to the second definition and a purpose that innately draws us to hear and read and see them again and again and again.

A bigger purpose and question outside of all cinema. All books.

A question lurking deep inside these stories. The way they've always made us overcome. Demanded we look to our better selves. To the heavens.

With their feeling of wholeness. And returning home.

And our deepest desire to be good and true.

And end these mortal travails. And eventually we understand the question and ask whence these stories came. And realize... why.

And so we must consider well the stories we choose to tell.

Paul Aiello wrote the story and co-wrote the screenplay for the film "Risen".

Why Hollywood doesn't get 'faith' films



By Dr. Larry W. Poland

The recent headline in Variety said it all: "Box Office: 'Ben-Hur' Flops with \$11.4 Million."

One more "swords and sandals" epic

with Jesus content needing a resurrection after its first weekend in the theaters.

One more chapter in a mystery that has been a head-scratcher in Hollywood for decades. Why do some faith-focused movies make gazillions of dollars and become classics and others trip over the threshold at the theater and fall flat?

Millions of people still watch the original "Ten Commandments" on ABC television annually — the one in which a young Charlton Heston parts the Red Sea like he has done since the movie was released in 1956. Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" has brought in more than \$700 million since its 2004 release — not including DVD sales, which were worth \$30 million for 20th Century Fox in the first month.

Yet, the string of faith-driven bombs is equally impressive. DreamWorks' Jeffrey Katzenberg did an incredible amount of homework in the production of what he thought would be an animated blockbuster, "The Prince of Egypt." He interviewed Christians, Jews, Muslims and even Egyptians to get input on the final cut — and he listened to them. It didn't matter. The movie opened to less than \$15 million, although it did go on to do better.

Then there was David Putnam's 1981 "Chariots of Fire," which was stunningly successful with believers. It didn't do well at the box office but won the Oscar for best picture. Go figure.

Why can't Hollywood figure this out? If there is one axiomatic principle in Hollywood, it is that no one has figured out all the factors in *any* movie's success or failure. As one studio executive said decades ago, "In Hollywood, nobody knows nothin'."

Then, when you factor in stories from the Bible or stories with faith-focused

storylines, you hit another gaping hole of knowledge. In Hollywood, "nobody knows nothin" about religion or, assuredly, the Bible.

The vast majority of people in entertainment jettisoned any religious notions or practices in college and never went back to them. When Ben Stein wrote his book on Tinseltown values in 1979, "The View from Sunset Boulevard," he concluded, "In Hollywood, religion is a nonissue."

By and large, the prevailing worldview in filmland is devoutly secular: God doesn't even factor into creation or origins. Darwin "proved" that.

Third, Hollywood doesn't know anything about devout Christians or, for that matter, Orthodox Jews. I spent 35 years explaining evangelicals to media executives in some of the top film studios

Films help us 'face and confront' our core beliefs



By Terry Botwick

et me begin this discussion about how faith and film relate to each other by making an observation. People always act based upon what they truly believe, not what they say they believe. For instance, when Y2K was ap-

proaching and some were declaring the end of the world, it might have led to some extreme behavior. If one believed that the world was ending and that the Lord was returning to rapture the faithful, there would be no reason not to climb to the top of the Empire State Building and jump because the Bible says that when the Lord returns, we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye and caught up together with the Lord in the air.

However, the core belief in gravity might prove stronger than the belief that the world was ending and that this was the *exact* moment in history to put to the test that caught-up-with-the-Lord-in-the-air belief.

When I consider the core belief of my faith in God, I bring certain

experiences to it. After all, much of the Bible is made up of the recorded accounts of people's experiences of God. For full disclosure, I am a Jewish man, attended Hebrew school as a boy, had my bar mitzvah and came to know Jesus as the Son of God through personal experience in 1975. I believe He is the Messiah. As a living, breathing person, I must ask myself some core questions: Do I believe in God as creator and sustainer of life, or is all of this an accident? If I believe in God, is He personal, knowable or some impersonal energy? If I believe in him and believe he is personal, then what does he expect from me?

I bring questions to how I integrate my personal faith and view of the universe into story expressed through film. It is also my conviction that story and film both influence and reflect the human experience and global culture. What is important is what is true, authentic and ultimately common in our human experience. This has been the basis for story for thousands of years. Every story is about something, whether dramatic, comedic or some other genre. It is always about something, and it resonates when we see ourselves in it.

In the United States, faith has become a market, a business, and many are making movies to appeal to that market. But it must be said that the defined market is primarily a Southern, evangelical community that is vocal about media, politics and a range of other things. That is fine, but, by definition, that market excludes many more people than it includes and so the market is limited. It is driven by a doctrinal position that differs from many other sincere, believing people, whether of other mainline denominations or Catholic, let alone everyone else. I have studied the Bible for decades;

it is a wonderful, poetic and honest book. When I die and come face to face with God, I am pretty sure I will not get a test of my doctrine. And if I do, I will probably fail. The Bible is full of stories that are honest to the experiences of the people who lived it. They are challenging and difficult, not tied up in nice, tidy bows and, for that reason, it is the best-selling book of all time, requiring us to wrestle deeply with the human experience. That is the stuff of story.

Life can be messy; life is full of mystery and, if I am honest, leaves me with many more questions than answers. In that is the stuff of conflict, which is drama, which is story.

My fear is that what has now been defined as the "Christian market" may confuse a couple of important points.

The first is that all our energy should be about evangelism and so film must be a tool for conversion. That leads to beginning the story with an agenda imposed upon it. I wrote earlier about the importance of stirring up questions that cause us, as humans, to wrestle with core beliefs. Often, "Christian" films are answering questions nobody is asking.

The second is that the culture war, if there is such a thing, is about morality and so it is easy to confuse wholesome with biblical. The Bible is "R" rated. To me, faith-related in film is not at its core about wholesomeness. Not every film is for all ages. Stories must ring true. An actor will know if a scene does not feel truthful, and an audience will know as well. We should hold ourselves to standards of good taste, not be gratuitous or exploitive, but commit to the truth of our common experience, where we all huddle in a dark room and wrestle with life and what it means to be human. It seems to me that our morality reflects our values as a community of people at a particular time and that our values emanate from our core beliefs. Film helps us face and confront our core beliefs.

I recently produced a film called "Captive" with two wonderful actors, David Oyelowo and Kate Mara. It was based upon a true story that took place in Atlanta in 2005, when Brian Nichols broke out of jail during his trial for a rape he claimed he did not do, killed four people and took Ashley Smith hostage in her apartment for seven hours. During that time, each was confronted with life and death, purpose and forgiveness. It was not squeakyclean. It was authentic and rough but, in the end, quite powerful. It rang true to the struggle of a single mother fighting drug addiction and a killer who felt like life had victimized him. In that mutual brokenness, they found a connection, Ashley found redemption and Brian decided to live.

My challenge and hope is that we all see movies and TV, laugh together, feel together, hope together and wrestle with the questions of our common human experience.

Terry Botwick, CEO of 1019 Entertainment, is a producer and former television executive, and has held leadership positions at CBS, Vanguard Films & Animation, Big Idea Productions ("VeggieTales"), Hearst Corp. and The Family Channel. Most recently, Mr. Botwick produced "Captive," starring Kate Mara and David Oyelowo, which was acquired by Paramount Pictures.

faith-focused movies remain elusive,

Larry W. Poland, Ph.D., founded Mas-

termedia International to consult with

leaders in global media about the faith

His 35 years of quietly building trust

relationships at the top executive lev-

els of entertainment have provided a

published his perspectives in his book

"Chasm: Crossing the Divide Between

Hollywood and People of Faith."

unique perspective on faith and film. He

community, specializing in evangelicals.

learn — if they wanted to.

there are some things Hollywood could

POLAND From page C24

and TV companies on the planet. After all, I argued to them, any constituency numbering as many as 100 million and spending \$2.1 trillion a year should be worth understanding. When I deconstructed the evangelical community, its demographics and its values, media executives responded like I was describing Martians. They were stunned to discover that these "born againers" were not just little old ladies in the Bible Belt — they actually run Fortune 100 companies, coach Super Bowl championship football teams and even, sometimes, occupy the White House. Even Orthodox Jews are viewed as inscrutable to the many Jewish power people in media.

Four, Hollywood, with few exceptions, has a prevailing worldview in which God and faith are completely irrelevant. Creative work, if it does nothing else, reflects two things — the creator's personal character and worldview. One does not, typically, create content or promote messages in conflict with personal values and understanding of life.

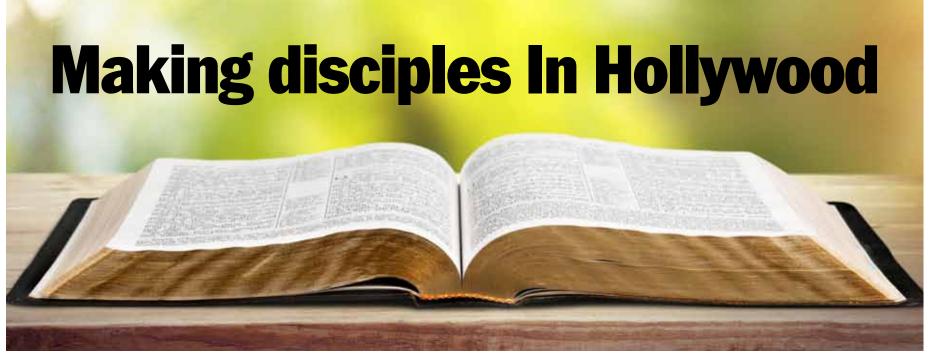
Then, in this age, what I call *philo-sophical* correctness — because it encompasses far more than one's politics — dominates. If carbon emissions, not

some higher power or even Mother Nature, are the deciding factor in global warming, what's all this nonsense about divinely appointed seasons, wind currents and cyclic temperature patterns?

Finally, Hollywood doesn't know what people of faith want — and don't want — in entertainment. In 1988, in a totally boneheaded move, Universal Pictures released "The Last Temptation of Christ," including a scene in which Jesus had sex with Mary Magdalene. Universal executives expressed fear and shock when 25,000 Christians showed up at the gates to beg the studio not to release the film. They released it anyway.

Even if formulas for success in

A SPECIAL REPORT PREPARED BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES ADVOCACY DEPARTMENT | WEDNESDAY • AUGUST 31 • 2016





By Rev. Joel Pelsue

One of the greatest needs within the Christian community today is clear thinking about how the Bible relates to entertainment, the arts, and Hollywood.

Why is there so little Christian influence in Hollywood?

Over the last century, the Christian church primarily had two basic approaches to mainstream culture. On one hand Evangelical Christians saw it as the something dangerous which we should avoid, at times responding with boycotts, and complaints that content does not fit our worldview. On the other hand, Christians in mainline denominations often embraced the culture, without enough discernment, and eventually compromising their faith in the process.

Evangelical Christians pursued purity, while abandoning the culture. Mainline Christians pursued relevance, while abandoning the gospel. Both of these options failed to be redemptive, biblical, or transformational in their approach to the culture.

Hollywood saw our only visible 'witness', and understood Christianity through both approaches. In short, they observed the gospel as being irrelevant. The Evangelical Church was irrelevant because it was completely disconnected, and the mainline church was irrelevant because it was merely a social club. In short, we failed to be salt and light.

How can we make a significant difference today?

The good news is there is a third way to approach Hollywood. The great theologian, Jonathan Edwards, already provided us with a model. Edwards taught that a vibrant understanding of the gospel will be founded on three core components.

First, we must have *Orthopathos* (right passions). This is seen in our understanding of how the gospel relates to our heart, to our life of prayer and our devotions. It is essential that we have a personal relationship with God that is vibrant and meaningful.

Second we must have *Orthodoxy* (right doctrine). This is more than simply knowing the gospel. It is seen in our understanding of who God is, who we are as people made in His image, and what God expects of us. If we don't have solid theology we can easily be led astray from the gospel.

Third, we must have *Orthopraxy* (right practice). This is seen in the way the gospel drives us to be salt and light within our communities and the broader culture. Good theology will drive us to care for the poor, for justice. I will also motivate us to care for the artists speaking to our communities and the content being created in Hollywood.

If we only care about ourselves, and hold simply onto *Orthopathos*, we will have piety that fails to be salt and light. If we only care about theology, and hold simply onto *Orthodoxy*, we will be ivory tower theologians who know Greek and Hebrew, but who have lost the ability to communicate effectively to others. And if we only care about *Orthopraxy*, or 'practical applications', we may care about behaviors and activist causes but slowly drift away from our personal relationship with Christ.

Jonathan Edwards showed us that we need all three. We need a personal relationship with God, while also growing in our understanding of who He is, while at the same time growing in our understanding of what it means to be salt and light in our world.

For years Christians have come to Hollywood to make films, while lacking such a robust approach. We have seen sincere Christians come to Hollywood who love Jesus, but lack the solid theology to weather the storms. Sadly, they end up compromising their faith, or creating films that look no different than the mainstream. The reality is this. It doesn't need to happen this way.

Real discipleship for Filmmakers, Artists, and Academics.

We started Arts & Entertainment Ministries in 2004, because we saw a great need. We had both grown up in the art world. My wife had been a professional actress since she was 15, and I had started playing woodwinds in orchestra pits at age 14.

We understood the life of artists and creatives because we, ourselves, are artists . We also cared deeply about honoring God with our talents. The challenge was finding resources to speak into the intersection of these two passions. Over the last 20 years we have created our own model for discipling artists. We have used this model to disciple artists across Los Angeles and New York, as well as in London. Joel has spoken for universities, arts groups, and churches all over the world.

A foundational part of our teaching is this: God's heart is for redeeming not only individuals, but also entire communities, cities, and cultures. Authentic Christianity does not compel us to create our own subculture, rather it inspires us to engage our world and work for the good of the city in which we live. It empowers us to stand firm in our faith and our worldview while we love and have grace for people who think and act differently than we do. It inspires us to create art which echoes the hope, justice, and love of God while wrestling with the sins and fragility of our own humanity.

Christians who live this way possess a hope that comes from a spiritual life which beckons them to become a redemptive agent in the world around them. In short, our commitment to Christ does not take us away from the culture around us. Instead, it equips us to be a redemptive force within it.

To utilize the most powerful medium in the world, and have a lasting impact, Christians need to be equipped and grounded in biblical principles. We invite you to join us in this mission: Help us train men and women to remain firm in their faith as they seek to influence the world through great film.

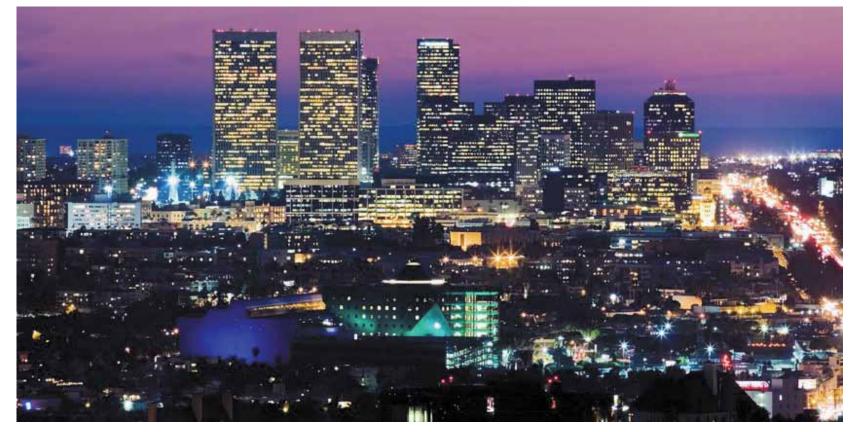
Invest in the work of AEM (Arts & Entertainment Ministries).

Invest in the discipleship of Christians working in Hollywood today.

www.A-E-M.org

Joel Pelsue is the Co-Founder and President/CEO of Arts and Entertainment Ministries as well as the Arts & Entertainment Institute. He is a Presbyterian minister, pastoring now for over 15 years both in New York and in Los Angeles. He has a B.A. in Philosophy from Westmont College in Santa Barbara, and his M.Div. from Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando. Joel lives in Los Angeles with his wife Michelle, and their three children.

How can YOU Influence Hollywood?



INVEST in the Christians already working there!

Christians in Hollywood need more than great talent and training, they need solid Bible teaching and deep theology to create a masterpiece .

And YOU can make that happen.

INVEST today in Arts & Entertainment Ministries (AEM), a ministry dedicated to offering solid Bible teaching, theological training and meaningful fellowship to filmmakers in Hollywood.

Donate Today : www.A-E-M.org



Behind the scenes with faith filmmaking



By Dick Rolfe

Although my articles are usually written for moviegoers, I thought it would be interesting to pull back the curtain and let you see what's happening behind the scenes with faith and family filmmaking.

This topic is foremost on my mind since I just returned from Variety magazine's "Family Entertainment and Faith-Based Summit" in Beverly Hills, California. I'm preparing to moderate a panel of film producers and distributors at the Park City International Film Festival in Park City, Utah, also home of the Sundance Film Festival.

Key topics being discussed at these gatherings center around faith and family entertainment:

• Telling a good story.

• Gaining sufficient financing to produce a quality product.

• Getting to the right audience with a solid distribution plan.

As any experienced filmmaker will tell you, getting these critical pieces together in one place at one time is like herding cats. (I addressed a related topic in my July article, "Dear Aspiring Filmmaker.")

While all of the above ingredients are critical to a film's success, the story is most important when it comes to this particular audience.

Parents are by nature discerning and demanding in what messages and content they will tolerate in their entertainment diet. Without diving too deeply into this element, the word that comes up more than any other in surveys is "authenticity," meaning that the story must ring true, especially in the case of biographies and Biblebased stories.

Distribution is the next most important consideration. No one wants to make "the greatest story never heard."

Just a few years ago, there were only three basic channels of domestic distribution: theatrical, television and home video. You were considered a genius, very rich or very lucky if your project hit on all three cylinders. Today, the digital revolution has forever changed the paradigm and caused everyone to return to the wild, wild West.

Digital technology has brought about both benefits and complications. The benefits come from the ability to reach larger audiences at lower cost. Theatrical releases are enormously expensive and risky. Frequently, the marketing and promotion budget eclipses the production budget.

DVD sales are also costly to manufacture and distribute. Keeping inventories large enough to meet demand without overdoing it is an art.

With digital copies, inventory does not exist, so demand levels can be met immediately without overhead. Another benefit is the cost of managing a library of active titles. Formerly, a studio would release a limited number of older titles on DVD/Blu-ray at a time. Now, an entire studio's film library can be made available digitally.

One important issue that indie filmmakers should not overlook is what I call "narrow-casting" or serving a small, specific audience segment with a targeted story compatible with their interests. Major studios still seem to focus on a few big-budget formula films ("Tentpoles") designed to appeal to the largest audience possible. One reason kids' G-rated fare has been "upgraded" to PG is the belief by studio execs that a little mature content is required to keep Mom and Dad entertained while little Sally or Sammy are hopefully oblivious to the adult double entendres salted throughout the story. Even with films of faith, studios make the mistake of trying to be all things

Parents are by nature discerning and demanding in what messages and content they will tolerate in their entertainment diet. Without diving too deeply into this element, the word that comes up more than any other in surveys is "authenticity," meaning that the story must ring true, especially in the case of biographies and Bible-based stories.

to all people, which has created epic failures. Films like "Exodus: Gods and Kings" and "Noah" failed to reach their potential due to the lack of, here's that word again, authenticity.

Recently, Hollywood seems to be "repenting" and listening to people of faith. Studio films such as "Risen," "Miracles From Heaven" and "Ben-Hur" are evidence of their eagerness to faithfully serve that audience.

Digital delivery systems are widely diverse but divided into three distinct methods. One is to purchase a digital copy from a cloud-based storage service. Then there's video on demand, where you pay for an online rental for a limited time. The most cost-effective method is OTT, otherwise known as "over the top" (no set top box required). This is now the most dynamic technology shift since the invention of television. With OTT subscription services, you can choose a narrow category of content, such as sci-fi, documentaries, British television reruns, etc. This is truly the best form of "narrow-casting." It solves a dilemma for those who feel captive to their cable systems, which force subscribers to carry channels they have no interest in or whose content they find offensive.

The Dove Foundation, along with Cinedigm Corp., now offers Dove Channel, an online OTT subscription service. It offers the largest library of faith and family films in a "walled garden," safe for the family to watch without fear of being assaulted by any unsavory surprises. Check it out.

Dick Rolfe is co-founder and CEO of The Dove Foundation, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to encourage and promote the creation, production, distribution and consumption of wholesome family entertainment. This article was originally posted on The Dove Foundation's website (dove.org) on Aug. 9.

LEASER

From page C21

saw this authenticity at work in Randall Wallace's "Heaven Is For Real" (2014) — pleased because it was present, dismayed because of its rarity in the cinematic landscape.

It means telling otherwise secular stories that include authentic Christian characters, such as Shia LaBeouf's Boyd "Bible" Swan, a devout and respected member of a tank unit in director David Ayer's World War II film and Brad Pitt starrer "Fury."

It means finding new ways to engage people in the story of Christ, such as the theologically respectful, yet creatively imaginative "Last Days in the Desert," which starred Ewan McGregor in the dual roles of Christ and Satan.

It means dealing honestly and creatively with challenges facing the church today, such as in the superb drama "Calvary," which shows Brendan Gleeson's good priest tackling the Catholic Church's sex abuse crisis head-on in a personalized, yet synecdochic, catharsis.

It also means wrestling with difficult questions that Christians and non-Christians alike can relate to. For instance, why does God appear to be silent in the midst of suffering? What does it mean to stay faithful to something you passionately believe in, even when you are severely persecuted for that belief? Director Martin Scorsese's forthcoming adaptation of Japanese Catholic Shusaku Endo's classic historical novel "Silence" tackles these questions, among others. "Silence" tells the story of two young Portuguese priests, played by Andrew Garfield and Adam Driver, who sneak into Japan in the early 17th century to minister to the persecuted Japanese Christians in hiding — and to find a long-lost mentor, played by Liam Neeson, who has reportedly renounced his faith.

According to recent Pew numbers, interest in spirituality among the populace at large is rising, so the harvest is real. God willing, there will be enough workers to launch a Christian film renaissance.

Michael Leaser is vice president of

Cave Pictures, which has invested in "Wildflower," "The Ticket," "Waiting for the Miracle to Come," and Martin Scorsese's "Silence." He holds a master's degree in theological and religious studies from Drew University. Mr. Leaser has written 50 film reviews and culture articles for World magazine. He has also worked for The Philanthropy Roundtable and for Michael Novak at the American Enterprise Institute.

The cinema: Our country's collective 'cathedral'



By Amy McGee

hat does it mean to be both a moviegoer and a person of faith in today's society? Most faiths have some kind of a ritual of communal storytelling. Every weekend for thousands of years, worshipers of all faiths have gathered together for weekly service, often to ponder about and revel in the most epic stories of all time, like Noah's Ark or Moses crossing the Red Sea; teaching lessons about life and faith.

One could imagine that this tradition of captivating weekend audiences around profound storytelling planted the seeds for modern cinema-going, because remarkably, today this ritual of seeking community, captivation, education, elevation in all houses of worship, Friday through Sunday, may be as familiar to nonbelievers as it is to the devout.

The cinema, after all, is a cathedral to millions - 235 million last year, according to the National Association of Theatre Owners — and despite many secular movies' attempts to explain, elicit, evoke and elevate through metaphor and morals, faith films continue to gain enormous traction in cinemas, demonstrating a critically commanding ability to drive family and religious values beyond the houses of worship. While moviegoers seek entertainment, some of us also strive for something more; something spiritual, and faith films can deliver profound impact, for they are empathy-building machines.

The celebrated street artist, Banksy, noted, "Film is...probably the best option if you want to change the world,

not just redecorate it." And, the cinema, rather than the church or synagogue, provides a neutral and less intimidating environment for a secularist to first open his or herself to ideas about the impact of faith and spirituality. We've seen a tremendous surge of faith films driving gross box office over the last decade-and-a-half. Independently made faith films have gone from representing a total box office gross of roughly \$30 million at the turn of the century to \$500 million today, and the individual box office return of a faith film went from averaging \$2 million in 2000 to \$10 million, presently. All the while, the annual total gross domestic box office has stayed relatively flat. An increase of faith films in cinemas is driving more people to experience the force of tolerance and brotherhood, family and religious values, and redemption, which is ever so important given our turbulent climate today. Nelson Mandela said, "If (people) can learn to hate, they can be taught to love." Where are people learning to hate and where are they being taught to love? No doubt that dynamic is being played out on our TV and movie screens every day. Let's bombard our cinemas with stories of faith and healing, love and laughter, righteousness and soul.

So how do we do that when there still is a dearth of positive choices in the cinema? Congregate[™] is enlisting the power of the people to pull content to our communities that isn't otherwise being programmed, traditionally. Using online tools we have democratized theatrical distribution, empowering audiences to crowdsource screening events. When communities get together to watch in this way, Congregate[™] is able to further leverage their collective consumer power to convert their screenings into events with opening remarks and post-screening sermons, discussions and Q&As. The direct results of being able to accommodate multitudes of organic "pop-up" screenings in this fashion are sustained awareness, found revenue, substantive engagement, and further validation and credibility, while the indirect results are a closer-knit community, more tolerance and a greater likelihood of an acceptance of the faith and values

embodied by the films.

During a "Faith over Fear: Choosing Unity over Extremism" discussion held at the Washington Hebrew Congregation's main sanctuary, its Senior Rabbi, Bruce Lustig quoted Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' excellent book, "Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence," "...when others become brothers and conflict is transformed into conciliation, we have begun the journey to a society as a family and the redemptive drama can begin." The redemptive drama can play in our cinemas for millions of people to access, everyday. Content can be a catalyst for impact and for faith. We don't have to be simply moviegoers. Instead, we can make lifestyle choices to join others of like minds in order to use film and the cinema as a vehicle to galvanize our communities around faith, friendship and tolerance.

..... Amy McGee is of head of corporate communications and brand strategy at Gathr Films. Congregate™ is a soonto-launch consumer platform destination for faith-based films that utilizes Theatrical On Demand[®] to drive its theatrical business. It is owned by parent company, Gathr Films, pioneers of Theatrical On Demand[®]. Gathr is revolutionizing theatrical distribution for independent films and documentaries by enabling movie-goers to crowdsource screenings of films to theaters near them. The Audience Has Spoken.™ Learn more at www.Congregate.net.

God loves Hollywood and so should we



By Rabbi Jason Sobel

There is transformative power to stories. The stories that we tell as individuals and as a nation define us and help shape our destiny. You can change a life or shift a nation through stories that are told, received, and believed. Movies and the entertainment industry, in general, are powerful for this reason. Film and TV are great influencers on moral values and cultural norms.

Media as medium for transformation

Since its inception, Hollywood has played a significant role in both shaping and shifting the values of our nation. In fact, the American Dream was largely an invention of the Jewish studio execs that ran Hollywood at the time. Why? The majority of these Jewish Hollywood moguls had been born in Eastern Europe and had experienced years of suffering, hardship, and anti-Semitism. Several of these Hollywood pioneers, like Louis Mayer, for example, clearly understood that movies had the ability to transmit and instill values that could positively impact the cultural fabric of America. The movies of the 1940s and 1950s championed values such as freedom and equality, portraying America as a place where the underdog can overcome, the outsider can belong, and if you work hard, your dreams can be achieved, no matter your background. In short, the founders of Hollywood realized that films were a profound moral as well as spiritual force and guide.

People of faith must better understand that media is a key medium and tool for transformation. For better or worse, TV and film mold our imaginations and sway the stories we tell ourselves, which in turn impact our identity, both individually and nationally.

Since identity is destiny, we cannot underestimate the power of these mediums. It is time for people of faith to utilize the power of the media in greater measure to ignite change and transformation in our nation and our world at large.

Responsibility

People of faith have a responsibility to catalyze transformation through arts and entertainment, instilling positive values, such as equality, love, justice, faith, and hope. But too often, spiritual

Adding more 'salt and light' into filmmaking



By Barry Landis

hristians have been trying to "co-opt" the arts for decades for evangelistic purposes. Back in the 1930s, Christian magazines and confer-

ences were launched, and shortly afterwards, Christian radio programs and stations. In the '50s and '60s, Billy Graham and Oral Roberts started having crusades that were televised, so we started into television, birthing the PTL, CBN and TBN television networks in the '70s.

Christian music grew in the first part of the 20th century, and then exploded in the second 50 years, through the Christian Bookstore network.

The movie space, however, was a different story.

While Billy Graham's Worldwide Pictures made movies back in the '60s and '70s, it was very difficult for Christians to understand the Hollywood machine. Matt Crouch of Trinity Broadcasting Network began to have some success with multiple films in the '90s, but overall Christians had not yet figured out how to use movies for ministry.

In the early 2000s, however, things

began to change for two primary reasons:

1. Movie production became affordable. As Chris Anderson said in his book, "The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More," the "tools of production were democratized." No longer did it take expensive cameras to make movies. In 2006, Stephen and Alex Kendrick of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia, made their breakout hit, "Facing The Giants," on a \$100,000 budget - unthinkable by most Hollywood standards. The movie went on to gross more than \$10 million.

2. Movie distribution became accessible. Mel Gibson "cracked the code" of how to distribute a movie independently, when most of Hollywood refused to release his movie, "The Passion of the Christ." By figuring out how to "rent bookers," Gibson taught many in the faith market how to proceed with a movie independent of a major studio (and the value of the "last in, first out" P&A fund).

I used to run the Christian music operations for the Warner Music Group and the problem I see now is a problem I experienced 20 years ago.

The pressure to make money drove us more and more "into the core" of the marketplace - trying to get more and more juice out of the same orange.

After reading a book called "Roaring Lambs: A Gentle Plan to Radically Change Your World," I was motivated to start a joint venture with Warner Bros., where the idea wasn't to produce Christian music for Christians — it was Christians who wanted to produce music for the world. That was a very different business plan — and actually more evangelical than just serving up Christian music to Christians.

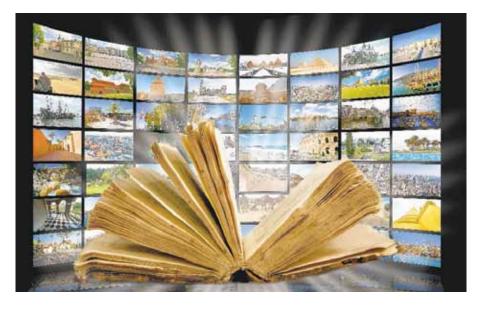
I see the same possible thing happening in the faith film world right now.

Producers are trying harder and harder to make something "the market" will want, when "the market" wants everything that everyone else wants - great stories told in entertaining ways. I wish I heard more real-life stories of people overcoming incredible odds, or a story that makes me laugh or cry, than trying to dial up more JPM (Jesus Per Minute).

I'm all for the "on the nose, sermon in a movie" kind of film; I believe they have a place, just like worship music has a place.

now we have chapters in Atlanta and Los Angeles as well. There are over 3,000 people who belong to our Facebook pages, and about 300 of them gather each month to hear industry speakers and to network with like-minded individuals.

I think if we can continue to grow groups like these, and if we can continue to learn from the experts in the industry who have the experience and awards, the faith film marketplace has an exceptionally bright opportunity to



But I also believe Christians are called to be "salt and light," and that we should be trying to produce the best art and stories we can possibly produce that are on par with the best movies being made anywhere.

I think central to this happening is to "demystify Hollywood" to Christians who are interested in making more competitive movies. Towards that end, we started the Nashville Faith In Film Breakfast Club several years ago and

make competitive movies and add to the cinematic tapestry of the world.

Barry Landis is president and CEO of Ribbow Media Group, a full-service, digital marketing firm in Franklin, Tennessee. His career has included executive positions in film marketing, book publishing and the recording industry, as well as founding roles in the Nashville Faith In Film Breakfast Club and The Briner Institute, an entertainment industry think tank.

SOBEL From page **C29**

people and leaders, in particular, see Hollywood as the root of the problem and not as part of the solution to our moral and spiritual aliments. This misguided perspective leads to extreme criticism of Hollywood and active discouragement of their co-religionists from working in the entertainment industry.

I believe God loves Hollywood! What Hollywood needs is a new generation of Christians and Jews who allow their faith-driven Judeo-Christian worldview and values to penetrate their work in the industry. Let's encourage and equip our spiritual creatives to stand strong in their faith as they pursue their dreams in entertainment.

God is on the move in Hollywood! This might sound shocking, but I am continually meeting Christians and Jews that believe that God has placed them in Hollywood to make a difference. They feel called by the Almighty to create redemptive and entertaining content that brings positive values to the world.

Another sign that God is on the move in Hollywood is the increased number of successful faith-based films being produced. Synagogues and churches need to find ways to champion movies like "Miracles from Heaven," "Risen," and "God's Not Dead." We have a responsibility to support these types of films by praying for their success, sharing about them on

social media, talking about them in sermons, and organizing congregational outings to the theater. Hollywood will make them if we come! The faith community has a duty to engage and utilize media as a means of transformation, which communicates our Judeo-Christian worldview and values to the masses.

Unity

America's origins were anchored in a Judeo-Christian foundation. This truth has been seminal to making America great. These values and perspectives have been slowly eroding through the years. Much of TV and film promote a materialistic view of reality. One of the keys to bringing transformation to our nation is a restoration of our Judeo-Christian heritage. For this to occur,

Jews, Christians, and people of all faiths that share the values upon which this nation was founded must unite to create and support faith-and-familyfriendly content that strengthens the moral fabric and spiritual foundations that have defined our nation as a beacon of light, hope, and inspiration to many. God loves Hollywood and so should we, because it is one of the great gifts that has been granted to us to touch the world.

Rabbi Jason Sobel, president of Fusion, is a speaker and teacher who is restoring the lost connection between ancient Jewish wisdom and the New Testament, reconnecting Jewish and Gentile believers, and reigniting a 1st Century movement that changed the world and will again. His website is RabbiJasonSobel.com.

The view of a faithful consumer — and devoted dad

By Bryan Schwartz

I am writing this piece not as a creator of film content, but rather as a passionate consumer. I am a husband, father of seven (ages 8 to 20), former NFL middle linebacker and devoted follower of Jesus Christ. And I am a sucker for a well-made movie that contains a redemptive plot.

One of my favorite movie series is "Rocky."

"Rocky" is not considered a faith film, yet it contains content that I consider real-life, positive and faithful. As a dad, I wanted to experience "Rocky" ("Yo, Adrian, I did it!") with my four sons without compromising our core beliefs, but some of the content in the movie was mature and what I deemed out of bounds.

As a frustrated father, I began to search for a service or company that could take a movie like "Rocky" and clean it up. In my pursuit, I uncovered VidAngel, a video-streaming service that allows consumers to filter out content that they deem personally inappropriate. I was able to watch the series of "Rocky" movies with my sons without the stress and worry of them consuming content that I, as a parent, deemed inappropriate. After we would finish a film, I was able to have engaging and real-life conversations with my sons that I could not have had otherwise. As a dad, I love creating



opportunities for memories. "Rocky" went from being on the "no watch" list to a shared memory.

I am pumped that the studios and Hollywood are producing specific, targeted content for the faith community. I'm even more pumped that as a consumer with strong beliefs, I now have the ability to take high-quality, wellmade existing films and filter out the objectionable material. This empowers me to hold on to my convictions while having a life-engaging experience with my family. Services like VidAngel enable a consumer to watch movies whenever and however they want, without compromising their core values.

Before I am a consumer, I am a father. As a parent, my roles and goals are to protect my children and empower them to make right decisions when it comes to consuming entertainment. Many faith films also contain mature content that I will not expose my younger children to, so the ability to filter movies has enabled us to watch these films as well.

As a person of faith, my goal is not to run from our culture, but rather be a transforming part of it. Our family wants to be a part of the conversation. The majority of the people who watch and go to movies do so because their friends went and they have a "fear of missing out." Services like VidAngel can become tools for people of faith because they enable these consumers to watch films that they normally would avoid and allow them to become a part of the greater cultural conversation.

The community of believers many times has been labeled as irrelevant and out of touch. Because entertainment is a massive part of our pop culture, as people of conviction, we have a responsibility to at least be up-to-date when it comes to what is being consumed by the masses. Like it or not, the faith community needs to learn the language of our culture in order to help positively influence it.

As was the case with my sons, entertainment can now become a part of how I weave my beliefs into the conversations I am having with others. For me, faith in film is not about specific "faith films" as much as it is about me sharing my faith with others using the medium of films.

Bryan Schwartz and his wife, Diane, are co-founders of Family Goals, a nonprofit dedicated to applying the lessons of sports toward creating winning families. They believe that with the right game plan and consistent training, every family can achieve new levels of excellence, happiness and influence.

What do Christians want from Christian movies?



By Adam R. Holz

In 2004, Mel Gibson did something remarkable: He detonated Hollywood's expectations of what a "Christian" movie could do.

"The Passion of the Christ" was a watershed title that, by dint of its \$370.8 million domestic haul (a staggering sum for any R-rated movie, and still a record), challenged major studios to take the Christian moviegoing demographic seriously.

Since then, two trends have emerged in response.

First, mainstream Hollywood has tried to recapture Gibson's lightning in a bottle. There have been some successes — "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" tops the list. It made nearly \$300 million domestically and another \$450 million globally.

But big-budget, faith-oriented hits have been the exception, not the rule. Other high-profile efforts have bombed, including Darren Aronofsky's "Noah" and Ridley Scott's "Exodus: Gods and Kings," both released in 2014. And in the last two weeks, the Mark Burnett and Roma Downey-produced remake of "Ben-Hur" has also flamed out, despite good word of mouth. No doubt there will be more postmortem analyses on why it failed.

Second, independent Christian

filmmakers, such as Stephen and Alex Kendrick of Sherwood Pictures, have pioneered the production of Christian movies largely outside the mainstream system (though they rely on Sony's Provident films for distribution). Their success with "Facing the Giants," "Fireproof," "Courageous" and "War Room" — the latter of which was made for just \$3 million and generated \$67.8 million, according to Box Office Mojo — has inspired other Christian filmmakers to try their hand at making movies aimed

at a faithful audience. Some, such as "God's Not Dead," have again stunned. That film, about a Christian college student debating his atheist philosophy professor, multiplied its \$2 million budget into \$60.8 million. But for every film like that, or similarly successful afterlife-oriented flicks such as "Heaven Is for Real" (\$91.4 million) and "Miracles from Heaven" (\$61.7 million), there have been many Christian indies that have barely cracked a million

dollars.

Which begs the question: What do Christian audiences want in a movie? Based on what we've seen in the marketplace the last decade or so, I'd like to proffer some observations.

• Christians want movies that represent their theological convictions. Ridley Scott and Darren Aronofsky may have crafted films that some mainstream critics found daring, tampering as they did with beloved Old Testament tales. But their attempt to "reimagine" these stories came at the expense of the faithful's interest. Making movies for Christians requires, at the very least, an understanding of, and sympathy for, the Judeo-Christian tradition and its core theological ideas.

• Christian audiences don't mind message-oriented movies that mainstream audiences might find preachy. Many of the most successful films,



By Hallie Todd

ur family loves movies, all kinds of movies: art-house indies, blockbuster sci-fi, action thrillers, epic historical dramas, documentaries and last but not least, animated musicals. We love films. We love watching them, discussing them, and for as long as L can remember we

and for as long as I can remember, we have wanted to make them. Together. As a family. My husband Glenn Withrow and

daughter Ivy and I began writing together a few years ago. Our very first effort as a team was a screenplay we wrote, produced and placed with Lionsgate Entertainment. It received favorable critical reviews, was sold on all of the major outlets and platforms including on Redbox where it was ranked in the Top 10 for its genre for one month and in the Top 20 for two months.

When we started the journey for our family to create a full-length feature film, Glenn and I had written before, but not together as a team. He had gone to film school, been through the writing process several times, and even had his first screenplay optioned by a major studio, but neither of us had ever been produced.

I grew up in a Hollywood family. My mother, Ann Guilbert, was a successful character actress ("The Dick Van Dyke Show," "The Nanny") and my father, George Eckstein, was a prominent television writer/producer ("The Untouchables," "The Fugitive" and "Duel.") The

All in the family!

language of screenwriting and story was always spoken in my home, but at the time I planned on following in my mother's footsteps, and so I only listened from an actor's perspective.

As for our daughter Ivy, she was 15 years old at that time, and of course totally green, but what she lacked in experience, she made up for in passion, creativity and smarts.

Those were our only credentials moving forward as a writing-producing team. We had no reason to believe that we could pull it off, but what we did have was enormous, what some would call ridiculous: faith.

For our first film, "The Mooring," we chose a tried and true entry-level genre: Horror. We set out to make the scariest movie possible — like those 1970s excessive gore.

Our innocent protagonists ran through rivers and creeks to escape the madman, and I'm happy to report that there is not a single "wet T-shirt" moment in the movie. Most of the violence happens off-screen. There is very little blood, and because of the style of direction and the organic performances, it is very effective. Let me be very clear: I definitely wouldn't recommend "The Mooring" to young or faint-hearted audiences because it is indeed very disturbing, but overall, it is a "clean," yet truly scary movie, and was a great first project for our family production team.

There's a saying that movies just don't want to get made. On any film set, the obstacles are numerous and unrelenting, and that was true for us. It was an



B-movies that always scared the-youknow-what out of us, but a film we could, in good conscience, write and produce with our teenage daughter.

It is impossible to measure how much we learned through this experience about process and patience, and about each other. To try to expand on it at all would make for a book, but one key discovery we made was that it is indeed possible to make (and sell) a dark, harrowing, frightening drama about young girls fleeing a deranged killer in the woods, and to do so without the use of profanity, nudity, sexual violence or arduous process. Our team has often said that the behind-the-scenes story of the making of our film would make a great movie in its own right, but instead of a horror film, I think it would be an actionadventure-comedy with a very happy ending.

What fills me with the most gratitude? It's not the Lionsgate logo that opens that first film. It's not even the film itself. It's the miracle of actually sitting down together as a family and finishing the first draft of the script (let alone all the rewrites.) It's creating something from scratch and seeing it through from conception to delivery. It's problemsolving as a team, working to get along with each other (not always easy) when things get stressful (which they did), and treating each other (most of the time) respectfully as industry professionals and as a family. It's seeing our daughter learn the filmmaking business first-hand and watching her mature into the film artist and business woman she has longed to be. Ivy is now the third generation adding to our family's Hollywood legacy.

As I said, we've loved and shared all different genres of movies, but we have always been especially moved by films with great underdog characters. As a team of filmmakers, we want to write and produce something that other families can watch and enjoy together, the type of family-night movie that has become harder to find in recent years.

Our next film is "The Last Champion" and is in pre-production now. It is an inspirational, family, sports drama and deals with themes of repentance and forgiveness. This film will have its own unique challenges, including a higher budget, a larger cast of characters and a more complicated story to tell. We believe it has the potential to really touch peoples' hearts and as a family, we are working together to get it right.

Actress and producer Hallie Todd ("Top Ten TV Moms," CNN Entertainment) is currently working on "The Last Champion," which is in pre-production through In House Media Film Partners. IHMFP was born when Ms. Todd, husband Glenn Withrow, and daughter Ivv Withrow were inspired to create a family production company after Glenn's experiences working with Francis Coppola on five films, starting with "The Outsiders." This is the family's second feature film working together. Ms. Todd is best known for her role as Lizzie's mom, Jo McGuire, on Disney Channel's "Lizzie McGuire" and "The Lizzie McGuire Movie." She most recently starred in "American Girl: Lea To The Rescue."

HOLZ From page **C31**

including those from Sherwood Pictures and the two "God's Not Dead" offerings, have emphasized a strong message and a corresponding call to action. "Fireproof" exhorted men to deal with the issue of pornography. "God's Not Dead" painted a picture of Christians under assault in secular academia and encouraged viewers to engage with the subject of religious freedom. While some have likened these films to sermons, many Christian movie fans apparently resonate with this messageoriented approach to storytelling.

• Christian audiences haven't embraced edgier, grittier faith-oriented fare. One criticism of the Christian movie genre is that it's been too sanitized, that it hasn't effectively told messy stories. That said, the Christian marketplace has largely rejected films that have tried to go in that direction. "Captive," for example, recounted the remarkable true story of Ashley Smith being kidnapped by a criminal on the lam in 2005, then reading Rick Warren's book "The Purpose Driven Life" to him. The movie wasn't gratuitous, but it didn't shy from depicting her drug problem. Audiences, however, shied away from this otherwise inspiring story.

For every generalization about what's "worked," however, it should be said that the Christian moviemaking realm is hardly static. As more believers get involved with moviemaking, we're seeing stories that hew closely to orthodoxy without being quite so overtly message-oriented. This year's "Risen" and "The Young Messiah" are representative examples of that trend, as are 2011's "Soul Surfer" and 2014's "Mom's Night Out."

Moving forward, we can expect more outside-the-box surprises — as well as more movies attempting to leverage the generalizations identified here.

Adam R. Holz is senior associate editor at Plugged In (pluggedin.com), a publication and award-winning website at Focus on the Family that is visited 1 million times a month by people looking for detailed information about popular movies, videos, television, songs and games.

32

How Hollywood is messing up faith marketing



By Jeremy Irion



ver since the recordsmashing success of Mel Gibson's "The Passion Of The Christ," Hollywood, who initially avoided the film like a leper with AIDS, has been clamoring to tap

into America's largest demographic the faith audience. Since then, dozens of "faith" titles have released with wildly varied results, leaving Hollywood perplexed. Some historically overachieved ("Fireproof," "God's Not Dead") and some historically flopped ("Exodus: Gods and Kings," "Ben Hur").

So why are churchgoers so difficult to galvanize at box offices? After all, their

ideals are widely known and they're eager to share them, if you ask. With so much money on the line and built-in advertising avenues — radio networks, print publications, websites, television networks — and churches ready and willing to spread the word, Hollywood should be savvy enough to reliably tap into this market, right? Not really.

We've spent nearly a decade at Wing-Clips.com providing church leaders with inspirational and illustrative scenes from popular films and tracking their results, and we've been promotionally involved with the majority of faith-based theatrical releases since our launch. Here are a few things we've learned along the way that Hollywood doesn't quite understand:

1. For us by us

Faith audiences prefer to support their own. And, conversely, are immediately wary of throwing support (\$\$\$) in the direction of Hollywood. The most successful faith movies were all passionately made by believers, for believers. Regardless of Mr. Gibson's now tarnished reputation, the prevailing story when "The Passion" released was that Mr. Gibson. a devout Catholic, felt so compelled to bring his vision of Jesus' sacrifice to audiences that he shelled out tens of millions of his own money to fulfill this calling. Furthermore, Alex Kendrick, the creative mind behind the independent sensations "Facing The Giants," "Courageous" and

"War Room," produces his movies using a cast and crew primarily consisting of his own church staff. These behind-thescenes underdog stories propel faith audiences not only to buy a ticket, but to spread the word like wildfire and organize local showings like it's their duty as fellow believers.

2. The veracity of Scripture

To its followers, the inerrancy of biblical text actually matters and is unchangeable. Scripture is often referred to as "The Word Of God." This is not hyperbole. If you are telling a biblical story and need the support of its adherents, be very careful in taking too much creative license in the storytelling ("Exodus: Gods and Kings," "The Young Messiah"). And, certainly, don't twist the clear underlying message of one of the most well-known biblical stories to seemingly support a progressive, environmental agenda. I'm looking at you, "Noah." If you miss the boat here, believers won't only silently shun your film, they will actively discourage their sphere of influence to do the same.

3. Transparent pandering

While Hollywood rightfully views the faithful as a demographic, churchgoers don't want to feel like a demographic. And, they do. Just because a film is based on a biblical story or contains biblical themes, and its marketing efforts and promotional resources are specifically schemed to engage the faithful, that alone will not resonate enough with believers to translate into ticket sales. The heart and soul of the film need to shine through in its marketing and within the individuals tasked to carry out that marketing.

4. Quality above all

Too much is made about producing and marketing faith movies to faith audiences. The truth is, churchgoers show up for mainstream movies (even R-rated ones) just as much as secular audiences, and love them just the same. Ask a fervent believer their favorite films, and you will likely hear familiar titles: "Forrest Gump," "Rudy," "The Dark Knight," "Braveheart," "Despicable Me," etc. Focusing on finding a story worth telling and executing it well is the greatest barometer for success, even within the faith demographic. And when marketing to the church, there's no need to clumsily force-feed the same religious messages they've heard time and time again. Stories that celebrate the triumph of the human spirit are already "faith" stories. And, Hollywood, we all could use more of those.

Jeremy Irion is a co-founder and vice president of operations at WingClips. com, a company that provides movie clips that illustrate and inspire to church leaders and educators."

Did a 'deadly sin' play a role in faith filmmaking?



By Brad Slager

Hollywood's interaction with faith over the generations has been very fluid.

In the middle of the past century, there was a level of reverence and a desire to apply the proper level of splendor to stories of a biblical scope. The counterculture 1960s began the departure for studios, giving way to outright opposition toward faith as the independent film mindset of the 1970s.

From then on, dismissal or contempt for faith-based fare was the entertainment industry standard. The Catholic Church frequently issued rebuttals and calls for boycotts towards particular titles that were antagonistic to either the Church or faith in general. Hollywood would shrug with a smug self-satisfaction and generate more provocative fare. But then a realization came to the studios.

By openly displaying apathy for the religious demographic, they subtly were telling them to not attend movies in general. In telling these swaths of the devout "your kind is not welcome," they were also telling them they did not care about their money — and that is not the Hollywood manner. In the past generation, it dawned on some in the industry they were repelling potential ticket buyers. Slowly a change came to the landscape, and Hollywood became led to appreciate the religious audience ironically, due to greed.

Mel Gibson tapped the vein of religious ticket buyers. When studios would not fund his celluloid testament to Christ, he decided to pay for it himself, reaping millions of dollars as a result. In the wake, small studios began offering up independent religion-themed pictures. Self-financed and released through a cobbled list of small distributors, they found an audience and, more surprisingly, profitability. Soon the majors began looking into this burgeoning market. A successful formula of releasing smaller, faith-focused titles was hit upon. Studios now even have marketing departments that seek out churches as promotional targets, and offer pastors with messaging on how their films can be woven into sermons or Bible study classes.

So today Hollywood has a more open mindset toward the religious ticket buying. That is because they have been shown a path toward profitability. Ironic that it took one of the Seven Deadly Sins to bring them over to the side of faith.

Brad Slager has covered the business and marketing side of the entertainment industry for outlets such as The Federalist, MovieLine and Mediaite. His knowledge of bad films is far more extensive, and far more ignored.

The power of film to unite people of faith



By John H. Armstrong

The modern era has been so rapidly altered by advances in technology that it is genuinely difficult to appreciate how constant such changes have been for human life over many centuries. Technology has always shaped our lives, from the discovery of how to control fire to the invention of the wheel. With each new advance our lives have changed. Now we are living in an age where technological changes alter how we live and work on a daily basis. The computer and Internet have altered life and commerce at a mindboggling pace, like nothing before.

In the fourteenth century the most amazing new technology was the printing press. Johannes Gutenberg, a goldsmith by profession, devised a hand mold to create metal movable type, and adapted screw presses and other existing technologies, to create the prototype of all printing systems. From this beginning everything began to change.

In 1800 a new technology began to take shape. An attempt was made to create what we call a photograph. It wasn't until the 1820s that success came, but only on the most elemental level. In 1839 photography was introduced commercially. Then, in the late 1880s a new photographic process was created that allowed for a sequence of photographic images to be put together into what we call a film.

So what is it about film that "speaks" so powerfully to modern people? I am not sure there is a single answer yet I am fully persuaded that film has *uniquely* marked the last century of American culture. Now, in the modern global era, films mark other cultures as well. I saw one example of the power of film in India in the 1980s when I traveled through towns in India over several months. I keenly remember my amazement watching the pour out of large theaters late at night.

But what has film to do with faith?

The Apostle John, near the end of the first century, said that Jesus Christ is "the Word [who] became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). At the center of the Christian faith is a person. A person who is both fully Deity and fully human. A deity who experiences all human emotions, has all the familial ties and stresses that come with them, and who is keenly aware of His God-given purpose to be the climax of all of History. That is a dramatic story!

A story can be told in many ways. "Once upon a time . . . In a large deep forest long ago . . ." In the Bible we read, "In the beginning . . ." The Christian story is told in this same way. Historical events are presented in forms that shape how we see and *understand*. Seeing and hearing creates lively response. Narratives are found in all forms of human communication, whether in prose, myth or poetry. But here is the point that many have missed. Story is also told through genres like role-play, drama, music and film.

Shakespeare said, "All the world is a stage." Film has become the preeminent modern stage upon which the actors of our world situate themselves within the great drama of modern life. I am persuaded that this idea of story and metaphor is what makes film so powerful.

Film has a unique and powerful ability to speak into the most complex issues of our day as it communicates to the listener in ways few other mediums can by adding emotion, movement and faces to the story. Film can bring tears to a love a story; it can humanize the hated; it can bring us from the couch to the front lines; it can bring clarity to ambiguity; and it can bring unity to disunity.

One of the most common features of our social, political and religious life is our disunity. We are divided by faith, politics, race, ethnicity and broken families. Yet Jesus prayed for his followers to be united in faith (cf. John 13:34-35; 17:21-24). Can film help people of faith recapture something of this unity?

The new video series, *This Changed Everything: 500 Years of the Reformation*, does precisely this in a remarkable way. This documentary includes stunning scenes, an outstanding musical score and the sonorous narrative voice of the esteemed British actor, David Suchet. The series immerses the viewer in the world-changing events of 500 years ago. On October 31, 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther posted a series of theses (disputations) on the door of the University Church in Wittenberg. Within weeks his challenge to discuss church practices sparked crowd-sourced gatherings when the masses read his words in simple German.

A century before Martin Luther, the Bohemian church leader Jan Hus issued

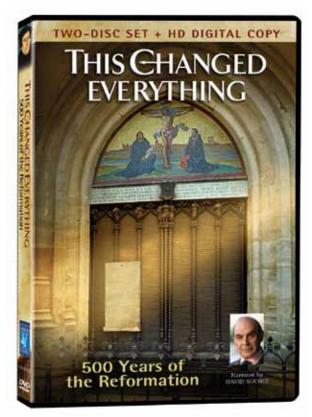
a similar challenge but nothing changed. But in 1517 a movement was launched that changed the world. Why? The technology of Gutenberg's movable-type printing process changed everything! This thrilling new documentary series uses greatly enhanced technology to penetrate the mind and imagination of the viewer. In This Changed Everything you will hear leading Protestant and Catholic scholars provide fascinating insights and pose vital questions about unity, truth, and the future of the Christian church. During the next year, as multitudes remember these events which changed the church and culture dramatically, this film series will help people engage with historical events

that unmistakably shaped our modern world. These films will also make this story come alive in new ways, as good history always does.

But how can the story of the sixteenth-century Reformation bring about unity when the Reformation brought about such diversity and division? The answer will take you full-circle, back to the future. Here we see again the power of good film. This documentary draws you into living history through narration, images, metaphor and probing questions. It shows you how we were separated and reminds us of the importance of the questions and debates that marked the sixteenth century. But, as great film does it will lead you into metaphor and imagination through a well-told story. By focusing the questions of the modern era on what unites us, even while recognizing the nature of our formal divisions,

This Changed Everything has the power to frame a future that unites people of faith. This future is not Christianity lite! It is a robust, theologically-alert and personally-engaging future. But it is a future that can bring people together in a broken and divided world that sees religion very differently than Europeans did in the sixteenth century.

Many events and documents will mark the remembrance of the 500th



anniversary of the Reformation. This film series can help you engage with our shared past, present and future. Could it be that film is the Gutenberg press of our age? If so this film series could provide both the understanding and power that is needed to unite people of faith who have long been divided by bitter debates.

Dr. John H. Armstrong is an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the Reformed Church in America (RCA). He founded and became the first president of the ACT3 Network (Advancing the Christian Tradition in the Third Millennium) in 1991. He is the author/ editor of fourteen books (including the forthcoming title, Costly Love, 2016) and a Senior Advisor to Christian History Institute. John is married to his wife Anita and lives in suburban Chicago.

WEDNESDAY • AUGUST 31 • 2016 | A SPECIAL REPORT PREPARED BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES ADVOCACY DEPARTMENT

Christian films — a blessing and a 'curse'



By Dave Alan Johnson

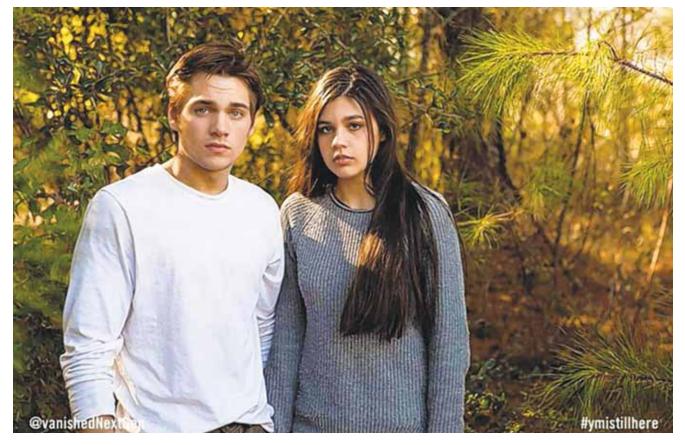
decade ago, something happened in the filmed entertainment world that I believe has been both a blessing and "a curse": The advent of the modern "faith" film.

A few films which were clearly "sermons on film" got made and had very substantial box office returns. That's the blessing. They had wonderful messages and were very well received by many in the church. That was also a blessing. Those films touched many lives and I am thankful for them! However, suddenly overnight, a philosophy of thinking began, which held that the only way "faith" projects could succeed is if they were filled with "on the nose, overt faith messages," appealing to very few outside the church. That is where the "curse" comes in. People began telling us it was impossible to attract both a faith audience and a mainstream secular audience with the same content. But we knew that wasn't true. Suddenly, history was being rewritten.

Over 20 years ago, I co-created a mainstream prime time television series for NBC, ("Against the Grain"), which got amazing reviews in virtually every secular newspaper and outlet in the nation. Newsweek called the pilot of the series "a true dramatic gem." The Kansas City Star said, "If Norman Rockwell were alive and could write scripts as well as he paints, this is the script he would write." The Hollywood Reporter wrote, "A cut above. The script sparkles." And a well-respected Christian organization (labeled by many on the left as a "rightwing" group) said essentially, "This is a great show and every Christian should watch it."

What!? Organizations as disparate as those agreed on the quality of an entertainment program that clearly had "faith" and Judeo-Christian principles at its core? Yep.

And I've been blessed to have had the same experience for two other very successful television series I've co-created



("Doc" and "Sue Thomas: F.B. Eye"), as well as several movies my team and I have written, produced and/or directed.

Those projects have impacted millions and millions of people around the world with our message, but if they had been made only for the choir, they wouldn't have had that kind of impact. Something must first be received (and watched) before it can have impact! The notion that a film or a television show can't cross faith and cultural lines was false then, and it's been false ever since.

I hope (and believe) we're coming back to the idea that the quality and artistic value of the content are as important as the message — and that all messages aren't required to "hit us over the head."

Our soon-to-be released film, "Vanished/Left Behind: Next Generation" is playing as well with non-Christians as it is with Christians. We're thrilled about that. We're even more thrilled about how young audiences (teens and tweens) feel about the movie! The hundreds of kids who've seen "Vanished" say they view it in the same vein as "Twilight" or other YA films they love. They've told us, "Don't call this a Christian film! It seems like a regular movie. We love it." We're very happy to take their advice!

I'm not saying people should stop making films that are only for Christians. There will always be an audience for them and some do a great service – touching and changing lives! They continue to be a blessing. But I hope we also recognize that it's important (I personally believe, even more important)



After millions of people disappear, those who remain try to figure out their next steps in "Vanished/Left Behind: Next Generation," which comes out Sept. 28. Echolight Studios, Salt Entertainment Group and Triple Horse Studios are production companies.

for the church to support films and television shows that are more nuanced — ones made for a broad audience — as well. Of course our content can't just be "nice" either. There needs to be a reason it exists beyond entertainment, something valuable for the audience to experience. But let's acknowledge that doesn't always need to be a "conversion scene." We must believe that if we have something of value and truth in the film, the audience will find it. My hope is that we can again trust the power of filmed entertainment and good storytelling — and the well-known adage in our business: less is more! If truth goes out, it will be received. Any day that happens is a blessing.

Dave Alan Johnson is a writer/producer/director who has created over \$400 million of content — both film and television — in Hollywood. His newest film, "Vanished / Left Behind: Next Generation," is in theaters nationwide for a special one-night event on Sept. 28. You can find a theater near you at TheVanishedFilm.com.

THIS CHANGED EVERYTHING 500 Years of the Reformation

In anticipation of the fast-approaching 500th anniversary of one of the most important events in world history, Christian History Institute presents a new documentary: This Changed Everything: 500 Years of the Reformation. Narrated by actor David Suchet (PBS's Poirot series), This Changed Everything explores the fruits of the Reformation while grappling with difficult questions about its legacy of division.

Leading scholars from a broad range of perspectives tell the dramatic story of the Reformation, analyze its effects, and address vital questions about unity, truth, and the future of the church. Includes 3-hour program, five hours of bonus material, a comprehensive companion guide, and access to HD Digital copy.

回飞端回 Scan code to download or stream

2-Disc DVD + HD Digital Copy #501646D \$29.99

www.ThisChangedEverything.com



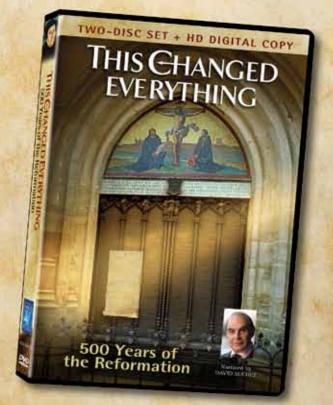
Dr. Michael Horton

Distributed by Vision Video

PO Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490

Please use source code WT0916 when ordering and include \$3.99 for postage.





Mark Galli

Dr. John Armstrong

Dr. Horace Six-Means

Bishop Robert Barron