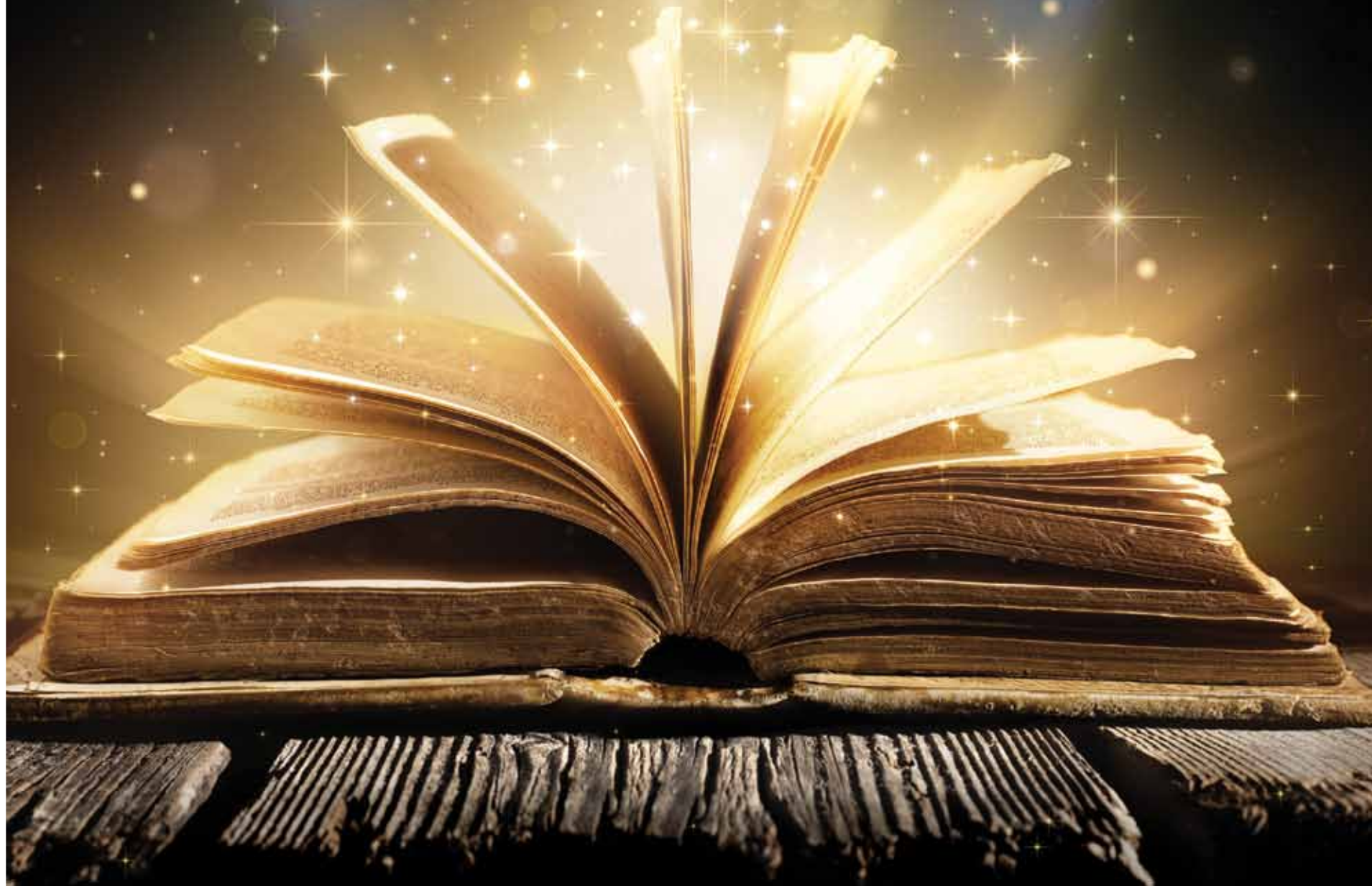


FAITH & FILM II

The (bright) future of faith-friendly films - and filmmaking



A Special Report Prepared by The Washington Times Special Sections Department
with Mastermedia International and Bryan Hickox Pictures Inc.



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Since 1985, Mastermedia International, founded by Dr. Larry W. Poland and now headed by CEO Dan Ruppel, has focused on building bridges of trust to executives in global media in Hollywood, New York, and other media capitals. Key services include consulting on the vast Christian audience, mobilizing prayer for media decision makers, promoting faith-driven content, and supporting believing professionals.



Bryan Hickox Pictures, Inc.

Bryan Hickox Pictures Inc., founded by Dr. S. Bryan Hickox, is a production company currently located in Jacksonville, Florida. Dr. Hickox is an executive producer and producer of more than 80 network television movies and feature films; his films have won seven Emmy Awards and the George Foster Peabody Award.



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My journey of faith and the making of the “Mully” movie



By Dr. Charles M. Mulli

I was born in 1949 in Machakos, Kenya, and grew up as an abandoned child and with a devastating life in my formative years. With the help of well-wishers, I was able to complete elementary education in 1966, but did not proceed to secondary owing to lack of school fees. As the firstborn in a poverty-stricken family of nine children, I grew up experiencing the worst form of poverty and suffering. But one day I experienced an encounter with God as my personal savior that changed the course of my life forever.

I worked as a casual laborer in various firms while upgrading my education through correspondence learning. I worked, exercising diligence and honesty, and used savings from the little income that came my way to set up my businesses. Through hard work and God's immense favor, I continued to accumulate wealth and, as a multimillionaire with businesses in transportation and related commodities, was in a position to acquire everything money could buy.

My encounter with unfortunate street children in 1986 led to a radical decision, inspired by a divine calling as a Christian, to sell everything I had to salvage the lives of the suffering children and families — leading to the foundation of Mully Children's Family (MCF). The full support and commitment of my wife Esther and our biological family, amidst their initial concerns at inception, has impacted immensely on the success of the ministry.

I never knew that my practical life experiences were a movie waiting to be cast to speak to the world and advance humanity. I had not done anything closer to making a movie before, and I had no idea what to expect out of it. But with courage and full of conviction, I resolved to take a step

of faith to tell my story, which was initially documented in my autobiography book.

I directly guided the moviemaking and had to identify actors and support team that would represent sections of my real-life story in the movie. I pay tribute to members of my biological family who played key roles in making the movie, as well as members of the larger MCF fraternity whose roles as actors and support team made it possible for the inspiring production.

What motivated me to make a movie was the impact and different perspectives readers had on my first autobiography book, “Father to the Fatherless: The Charles Mulli Story,” written with Paul H. Boge in 2005. The book became the springboard through which the movie producer from Hollywood whom I met in 2013 learned about my difficult childhood after being abandoned at age 6, work history and financial success, radical forgiveness of parents, and later giving all the accumulated wealth to the poor children, women and men. The producer asked for my indulgence to make the “Mully” movie based on my real-life story and the ministry of the largest family in the world, the Mully Children's Family. I surely did not know how this would come, but I am overwhelmed by the response, recognition awards and impact it has had in the life of people who participated in making it, as well as the hundreds of thousands of people who have viewed it in theaters or other venues.

Ultimately, I wanted the viewers to transform their thinking towards

treating others humanely and seeing the potential in every human being in any part of the world, irrespective of background, origin, race, sex and color. The movie also champions the observance and adherence to the moral imperative to provide assistance to all people in need, regardless of faith and upholding national and



international humanitarian standards and principles.

This movie is about my life and ministry anchored on Christian values, the power of prayer, and the exercise of faith towards others through transformative and compassionate action — preaching peace, unconditional love, forgiveness, humility, endurance, perseverance and unity,



and not coercing any recipient of aid to change their faith. It reflects on the virtues of good stewardship and servant leadership, based on honesty, trustworthiness and determination.

My faith as a Christian has immensely grown in the ministry through making of the movie and its 2015 launch. It has provided a new platform in my life to extend and champion the Almighty God's work and service to humanity. I have travelled to many places and received enormous and overwhelming feedback with viewers one-on-one, on television and radio shows, as well as through amazing and inspiring emails. The sentiments on the transformative impact of the movie to viewers through this feedback have strengthened my faith in the work I do to serve others through Mully Children's Family.

“Mully” received several awards, including the prestigious “Friend of Adoption” from the National Council of Adoption in November 2017.

The viewer feedback I continue to receive confirms that people with different perspectives on the poor, those who see impossibilities in life, people of different faiths, and those with no faith have been inspired, and their mindsets, attitudes and worldviews transformed towards restoring hope in the lives of the needy in society. Continuous correspondence with the thousands of people whose lives have been inspired and encouraged is quite overwhelming. Many Christians have been inspired to believe they can be what they want to be through hard work, dedication, commitment and hope. The producer, as well as the marketer and distributor of the movie, became believers in Jesus Christ through salvation as they continued to make the movie.

Many people continue to request to visit the Mully Children's Family programs in Africa to witness the true manifestation of God's wondrous love as represented in the movie. To date, the programs have rescued more than 13,000 abandoned children and HIV/AIDS orphans from the streets.

Charles M. Mulli, Ph.D., HSC, is Founder of Mully Children's Family, real-life subject of “Mully” (2015), and author of “My Journey of Faith: An Encounter with Christ ... and how He used me to spread His love to the poor” (Castle Quay Books, 2016). “Mully,” directed by Scott Haze, is distributed by For Good LLC, and has been promoted with the help of Focus on the Family and Fathom Events.

Media's persistent Christophobia



By Dr. Larry W. Poland

On July 16, 1988, Hollywood and American media changed forever. On this day, Lankershim Boulevard, which connects Universal Studios to the freeways, was not just busy, it was gridlocked. Some 25,000 people had gathered outside the gates of the studio in the largest protest in the history of Tinseltown.

But the significance of the event was not just its magnitude, it was its cause. Universal Pictures and Cineplex Odeon were planning to release “The Last Temptation of Christ,” a film famed director Martin Scorsese had tried to get made for years. During filming and pre-production, word had leaked out of Universal about the film’s content. In it, Jesus was portrayed as a wimpy, bedeviled character who, in a dream sequence, is

shown having sex with Mary Magdalene.

Mobilized by Christian radio stations and media watchdog groups, the offended faithful from all denominations were at the studio gates on that Saturday, begging Universal not to release a film defaming their Savior. It was not an angry protest; there was not a single arrest. It was an assembly of singing, passionate followers of Jesus asking for respect for their Lord ... and for themselves.

Along with a film producer friend, I consulted with the bosses at Universal and — based on a reading of an early version of the script of “The Last Temptation of Christ” — gave notes to execs Sid Sheinberg and Tom Pollock identifying 80 items in the 120-page script we predicted would be offensive to Christian believers.

Universal ignored our counsel, stonewalled the Christian community and released the film anyway. This was probably the shot across the bow that put the conflict between Hollywood and the faith community into warp speed.

The question remains, “Is there an undercurrent of Christophobia in American media today?” Is this what stirred a major studio to release what was considered “blasphemous” to followers of Christ? Would the same treatment be given to the pleas of Jews, Muslims, African-Americans or the LGBT community? The evidence is clear that animus against the Christian faith is in a category of one.

For example, ABC television wanted to launch a new series in the 2011-2012 season called “Good Christian Bitches.”

The network promoted the show using a sexy picture of woman’s cleavage with a huge cross hanging between her breasts.

Under pressure — possibly with the argument that “Good Jewish/Lesbian/Black or Muslim Bitches” would not have passed muster with ABC execs — the short-lived show’s name was changed to “GCB,” but its Christian-mocking storyline of B-word characters in a Dallas-area church remained unchanged.

Then in 2014, Time magazine editors ran a cover story on an evangelical minister who no longer believes in hell. The editors highlighted a letter to the editor in the “Inbox” section from reader Don Koons that stated, “Hell is easy to define. It would be spending eternity with Evangelicals.” For comparison, ask yourself if Time’s editors would have highlighted a comment saying, “Hell would be spending eternity with Jews, Gays, Blacks or Muslims.”

The above references cover a number of years, but this does not mean that Christophobia has died in recent times.

Earlier this year, Hulu launched an original series based on Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel, “The Handmaid’s Tale,” which has an oligarchy of Christian televangelists and other evangelical leaders taking over the United States after a nuclear holocaust.

Since most women were left infertile by the nuclear fallout, the “Commander” and his comrades implement a reign of terror in which all fertile women are brought at gunpoint into monastery-like enclaves. Once there, the “handmaids” serve as concubines to the oligarchs to repopulate the nation.

In a most vicious assault on Christian beliefs, the leaders of the new regime quote passages from the Bible to justify their treachery. “Blessed are the meek” declares one mother superior-type person as she zaps an uncooperative handmaid in the face with what looks like a cattle prod. In another scene, the beloved Christian hymn “Onward, Christian Soldiers” plays in the background as the “commanders” impregnate a bevy of the handmaids — an evangelical gang rape — in a monthly ceremony.

Then in August, the AMC network execs approved a scene in their original “Preacher” series in which Jesus has sex with a married woman, complete with an explicit portrayal of the act and silhouetted scenes of other sexual positions. AMC issued an apology to their viewers over “spoiler” information released on an episode of another series, but made no apology to 160,000,000 U.S. Christians who had their Redeemer viciously maligned by “Preacher.” The Seth Rogen series was renewed for 2018. How do AMC execs explain this? It is unlikely AMC and Mr. Rogen will do a similar scene involving Mohammed.

Is there any doubt why — in a survey reported by the Baptist Board website — 93 percent of evangelicals mistrust the media? You decide.

.....
Mastermedia International Founder and Chairman Emeritus Larry W. Poland, Ph.D., spent more than three decades consulting with executives in Hollywood and New York media on the Christian community as a market for media products.

‘In the room where it happens’



By Dan Ruppel

In the Broadway megahit “Hamilton,” Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison meet together to decide on foundational policies that would

still have major ramifications today... and all behind closed doors.

On the outside stands the excluded Aaron Burr, bemoaning that he’s not in on the conversation.

When George Washington asks, “What to you want, Burr?” Burr replies, “I wanna be in the room where it happens.”

To have our voices heard, to have the ability to speak into conversations that affect our lives, to be represented, all go to the heart of our democracy. However, in the media world — which consists of private, for-profit corporations — many decisions of cultural impact are being made, and often only the loudest voices get heard.

Second only to profits, perhaps the leading influencer that dictates what the world sees on its screens are the numerous, diverse voices representing many of the demographic threads of the

American fabric. These voices speak for fragments of our culture divided by gender, race, political leanings, lifestyle, ethnic background or other special interests. Some are large and some small, but their objective is the same: to effectively urge, and often vehemently demand, that their factions be favorably reflected in TV and film characters and story lines.

However, America’s largest people group — followers of Jesus Christ — are all too often “not in the room where it happens.” (Seventy-five percent of Americans identify with a Christian religion says Gallup Poll, December 2015)

What is our voice?

1) An absent voice.

Why isn’t the Christian voice being heard? During the infancy of Hollywood, America’s Christian community was the deciding voice. But a few decades later, offended by what Hollywood was offering, many people of faith pushed back

their chairs, walked out of the room and cocooned themselves in the sanctuary of our churches. The generations that followed were discouraged from going to the theater, let alone entering the media business. As the church relinquished the responsibility of providing or supporting positive, life-affirming films, the secular film culture filled the void.

So for many years, the term “Christian media professional” was an oxymoron. The Christian light in Hollywood became dimmed, in danger of being extinguished. But it didn’t go out. As a matter of fact, it grew and continues to grow into a massive flame. Countless Christian believers have entered the media professional ranks. The vast Christian community came back to the theater in record numbers. Over the past decade, the Christian audience has proven to be

» see **RUPPLE** | C5

Not-so-strange bedfellows in media



By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

The Lone Ranger would have been proud. Appearing out of nowhere but just in the nick of time 12 years ago, a modern-day crusader helped others breathe a sigh of relief. His assistance has since morphed into an important friendship, and a working relationship between conservative Christians and Orthodox Jews.

The crisis was the impending 2004 release of Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," which alarmed some Jewish organizations — including the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which I serve as the director of interfaith affairs. Many centuries of tragic history ingrained in Jews a deserved fear of depictions of the crucifixion of Jesus. Under Hitler, for instance, the Oberammergau, Germany, passion plays riled the masses into a violent frenzy against Jews who were depicted as the scheming "Christ-killer" figures.

Jews were in a quandary about what to do about the Gibson film. It would be shown worldwide, including many countries where a primitive, religion-based antipathy to Jews was alive and well, and its unusually vivid depiction of the passion could easily fire up people. Jewish leaders knew, however,

that their arguing against a creative retelling of a New Testament story would be viewed by Christians as the height of arrogance orchutzpah.

My organization faced a particularly difficult predicament. A concerned citizen who had seen a pre-release version of the film said Mr. Gibson's "artistic" choices included ones that consistently portrayed Jews negatively, despite Mr. Gibson's assurances to the contrary.

Jews needed some credible non-Jewish voices to come to the rescue, to cry foul. The very first Lone Ranger was Dr. Larry Poland, who had spent decades reaching out with a message of faith in G-d to the major studios of Hollywood. He responded to the

Studies in Los Angeles. Essentially, Sister Rose's reviews guide Catholic faithful about all things concerning film. She is as aware as anyone about filmmakers who often show hostility to faith; nonetheless, she refuses to reject the entire enterprise. I salute her optimistic perspective, by which she finds tidbits of moral value and instruction where others would come up empty.

What are the takeaways from this rapprochement between two religious? I would point to two.

The first, more obvious, benefit of traditional Jews and Christians getting to know each other is the realization that we should never make statements about the other community without

entertainment is so different. In parts of the Orthodox community, children grow up without any television at all, and many have never entered a movie theater nor streamed a film from the internet. Parents understand that their most sacred role is helping young souls become the best servants of G-d that they can, and they embrace the policy of setting limits.

Traditional Christians understand the sometimes-corrosive power of popular media. In addition to establishing personal and parental boundaries, they have done an excellent job creating healthy alternatives to popular music that are every bit as attractive. In this, traditional Christians and Jews are on the same page.

Rod Dreher's much-discussed "The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation," proposes that negative cultural elements are so overwhelming that they cannot be ignored and pushback is a religious priority. The opening of a dialogue between traditional Jews and Christians makes available a Jewish model to the Christian devout. This model is one that accepts a certain degree of cultural isolation, one that is not afraid to say "no," and insists on creating temples of holiness in the home and in the soul.

It will be interesting to see if this evolving partnership between the two camps — forged in the world of media — will be mutually beneficial as Christians seek the counsel of their "older brothers," as Pope John Paul II called Jews, in formulating new attitudes towards entertainment.

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein is Director of Interfaith Affairs at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles and is co-founder and a featured writer on Cross-Currents, an online journal of Orthodox Jewish thought.

The first, more obvious, benefit of traditional Jews and Christians getting to know each other is the realization that we should never make statements about the other community without soliciting the perspective of an insider... My organization has made it a hard-and-fast rule not to comment about Christian ideas — related to film or not — without first asking a committed Christian for an insider's perspective.

film with a pointed essay that spelled out what Christians and Jews should and should not take away from the film. Beyond its effectiveness, it was an unexpected gift of friendship and concern to the Jewish community.

In short order, Dr. Poland and I made personal contact. In the years that followed, a partnership developed, in which we became a resource for him and his Mastermedia International organization in understanding and connecting with the Jewish community. He did the same for us in evangelical circles. We became extremely good friends sharing our hearts and our views.

Another important relationship was with Sister Rose Pacatte, founding director of the Pauline Center for Media

soliciting the perspective of an insider. Thus, on a number of occasions when a film either impacted upon Jewish life or required a Jewish perspective, Sister Rose invited me to view the film with her, formulate a response and explain my thinking. My organization has made it a hard-and-fast rule not to comment about Christian ideas — related to film or not — without first asking a committed Christian for an insider's perspective.

Here is the more subtle takeaway. The differences between committed, observant Jews and Christians are just as stark in lifestyle as they are in theology. It is ironic that the world of entertainment was the venue for developing some of these relationships because the approach of observant Jews to

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loyal, robust viewers of films that encourage and respect their values. Sadly, these kinds of "faith-friendly" films, while increasing, still remain disproportionately few, leaving the huge Christian audience foolishly underserved.

2) A needed voice

Life-affirming films, sometimes promoted as "the feel-good movie of the year," usually are ones that touch our hearts, bring levity and purpose out of chaos, or make justice prevail. Films whose moving endings conclude with

scenes of redemption ("Les Misérables"), self-sacrifice ("It's a Wonderful Life"), good triumph over evil ("Star Wars"), standing courageously by your convictions ("Chariots of Fire"), "right" winning the day ("High Noon"), or finding that which was lost ("Finding Nemo") have inspired audiences and filmmakers alike.

Isn't it interesting that all of these themes, which so resonate with the human spirit, are values of the Kingdom of God? They give us a glimpse of a world set right. We are reminded of how the world was supposed to be.

In looking at the top 100 highest-grossing films, a majority of the timeless,

treasured films are those that inspire us to be our better selves. Now, more than ever, these films are needed as a positive influence on our culture. "The destiny of the world is determined less by the battles that are lost and won than by the stories it loves and believes in," wrote late author and academic Harold Clarke Goddard.

Entry into "the room where it happens" is earned through compelling creativity, excellence of craft, and being a constant, genial, reasonable, beneficial voice into the hearts of the media's decision makers.

I celebrate the young, passionate, talented generation that is rising up with

the commitment to expand the Christian voice within the cinematic ranks. I applaud the Christian audience that is flocking to films that are worthy of their support. Media world, it is to your and our culture's benefit that you open up a seat "in the room where it happens."

Dan Ruppel is CEO of Mastermedia International, an organization that for more than 32 years has served the leaders and influencers of the entertainment and media industries as a trusted life-changing Christian voice.

Introducing “Turbulent,” Parables’ latest original production

By Rafael Campillo

Hollywood and the mainstream media have put aside faith-based and wholesome entertainment way too often, making it difficult for viewers to have access to quality films and TV content that encourages faith and elevates family values. Surely, we could argue that over the years we have seen remarkable Christian movies that have taken the box office by storm, but they are simply not enough. As Christians, we have access to the greatest story ever told, in addition to a great number of invaluable teachings, and it is our responsibility to share these stories with the rest of the world, to evangelize through thought-provoking entertainment and utilize technology to do so.

So far, collectively, we have done a good job creating and distributing films and TV content for the Christian community, but we need to do a better job spreading our message outside of the Christian circle. We need to find other ways to portray our stories in a way that’s appealing to a wider audience without compromising our faith in the process, which is exactly what Parables has committed to accomplish.

Parables, the digital video streaming service that is edifying, empowering and entertaining, is rapidly evolving, establishing itself not only as a faith-based OTT platform, but as content creator focused on producing films and TV content that’s uplifting, creative, innovative, and most importantly, safe for the entire family to enjoy and learn from. Parables aims to impact the way we enjoy entertainment at home or on the go, offering viewers worldwide more meaningful and life-changing content, which is precisely the type of viewing experience that Parables has carried out with its latest original production.

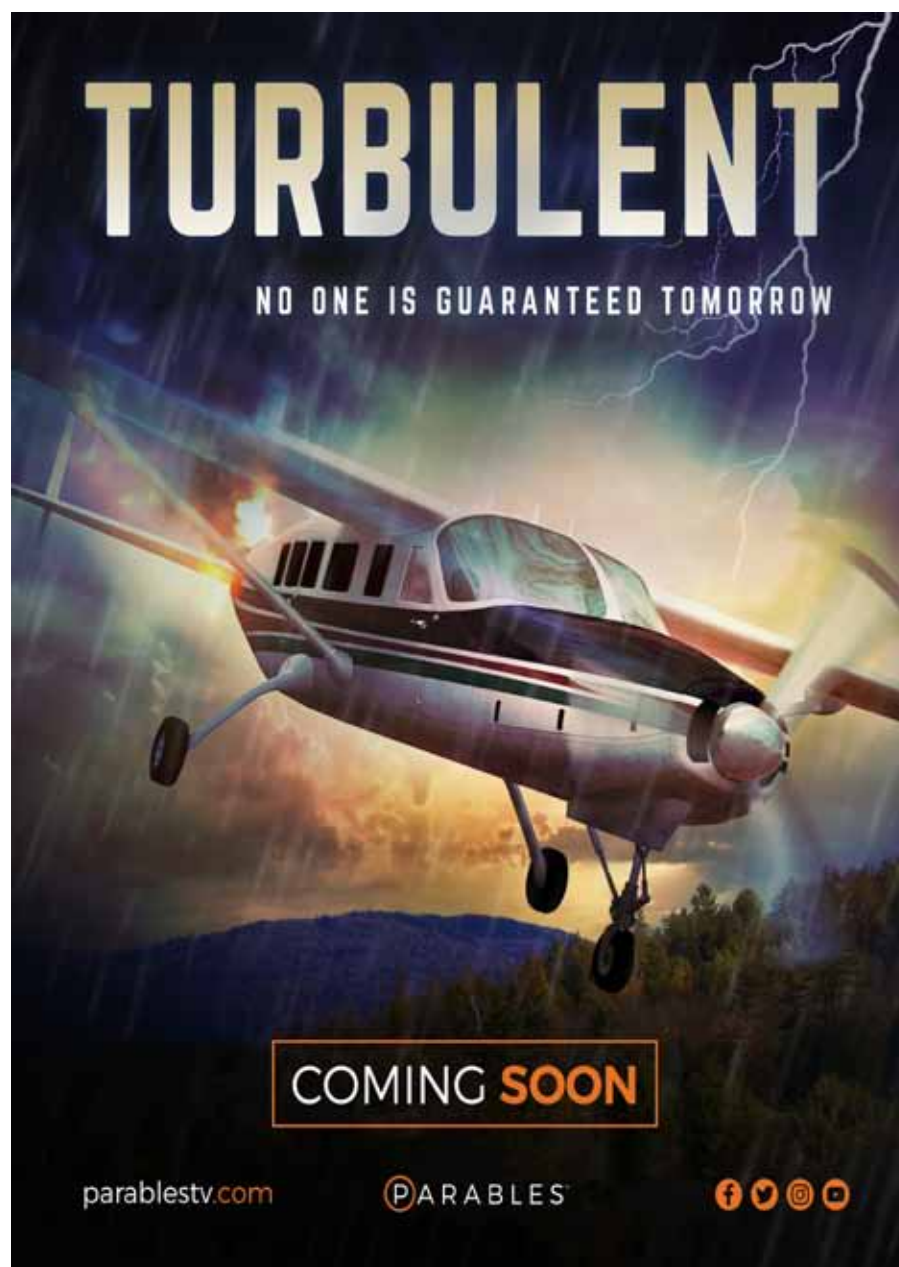
“Turbulent,” Parables’ latest original production, depicts a powerful story of faith, love and redemption. In a last-ditch effort to save their marriage, Richard and Rachel Kline (actors Jeff Rose and Faith Murphy, respectively), booked a trip to a marriage retreat in a remote location deep into the mountains.

After suffering a terrible tragedy, Rachel had been suffering from a state of depression that put a heavy strain on their marriage for the last two years. As she battled her demons, she was finally able to find comfort in Jesus Christ and the church. Her newfound commitment to the Lord served as the ideal support she needed to move on and work her way back to happiness. However, the

strain of Rachel’s depression was particularly tough on her husband. At first, Richard tried his best to be supportive, but his frustration of being unable

to help his wife, soon drove a wedge between them. Angered by the fact that she couldn’t find comfort in his efforts, but was able to find support in her faith,

In order to achieve their goal, Parables is doing much more than focusing on the message. The company is investing considerable resources in making sure that all their stories are well-written and produced by a team of experienced professionals. All this hard work and dedication has resulted in the creation of relatable characters going through real-life situations applicable to all audiences inside and outside the Christian community.



he started a double life, triggered by a profound jealousy of her relationship with God.

Grasping to the idea that their trip would be a calm and effortless way to settle their differences, their plans go awry when the small plane they are traveling on has a malfunction and crashes deep in the wooded wilderness, killing the pilot on impact. Lost, injured and alone, Richard and Rachel will try to survive their plight while dealing with their personal issues. Will it be possible for both of them to find comfort in God and save their marriage, while also saving their lives?

Directed by Chip Rossetti and Executive Produced by Isaac Hernandez, “Turbulent” is a relatable narrative that resonates with all audiences regardless of their religious background. The film is a heartfelt drama brimming with adrenaline and excitement that promises to captivate the viewer from beginning to end. Exactly the type of emotions that Parables wishes to accomplish with all of their upcoming productions.

Adriana Herran, General Manager of Parables, stated: “My hope is that



everyone who watches a Parables original production walks out feeling full of hope and love. Our main focus is to create new connections between

all our viewers and God, as well as strengthen the faith of all believers around the globe. Parables wants to empower all communities to take a stand and change the way we look at entertainment, and we believe that the best way to do so, is by offering a high-quality and entertaining alternative to all the negativity that’s plaguing our society.”

In order to achieve their goal, Parables is doing much more than focusing on the message. The company is investing considerable resources in making sure that all their stories are well-written and produced by a team of experienced professionals. All this hard work and dedication has resulted in the creation of relatable characters going through real-life situations applicable to all audiences inside and outside the Christian community.

For more information about Parables digital video streaming services and original productions, including the upcoming film “Turbulent,” please visit parablestv.com.

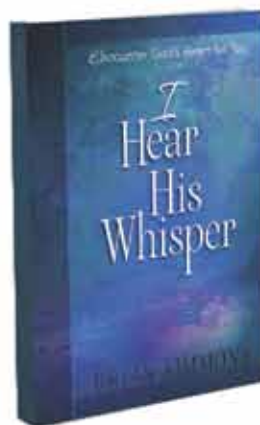
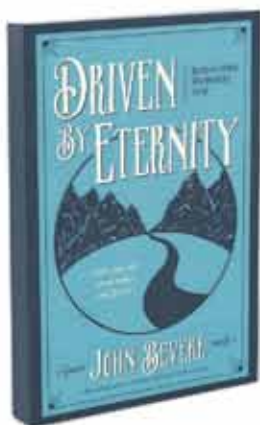
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By Dr. S. Bryan Hickox

The relationship between the “church” and the “media” has been a strange and storied one from the beginning — going from patronage to protest and back again.

At the birth of the cinema in the early 1900s and for several decades, faith-friendly and explicitly Christian stories from the Bible were the most popular. In addition to numerous biblical epics, over 100 films were made solely about the life of Jesus Christ. The most famous director of that era was Cecil B. DeMille, who happened to be an Episcopal lay minister. With the advent of the “talkie” in 1927 and well into the 1930s, the demand for Christian films flourished. Biblical epics like “King of Kings,” “The Robe,” “The Greatest Story Ever Told,” and “The Ten Commandments” were the “tent-pole” pictures of their day.

Then in the 1940s and 1950s, provocative subject matter was introduced. As soldiers returned from World War II, foreign films became available, and stories containing the seeds of secularism, explicit sex and scandals found their way into the local movie theaters.

From the early 1900s up through the 1950s — with the erosion of cinematic morality — the church responded by doing everything it could to stop production of unsavory films. The Hays Commission and later the Catholic Legion of Decency were established to enforce their severe criticism and to exercise censorship. The prevailing thought of the day was that films were the tools of the devil, and in many church denominations, even going to a film was considered a sin. A tragic byproduct of this thought process was that Christian young people were under extreme pressure not to enter media professions. As a result, a whole generation of young people had no opportunity to contribute creatively nor to reserve “a place at the table” in Hollywood.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the church decided to imitate secular Hollywood. Beginning with Billy Graham’s World Wide Pictures, scores of producers and ministudios tried making “church movies.” Distribution companies like Gospel Films sprang up to distribute 16mm prints of these films directly into



The success of faith-friendly media

churches. This strategy had no influence on the secular media; it just provided mostly amateur-quality movies for hard-core believers.

From the mid-1970s to 2000, faith-filled believers got angry about what they considered the morally despicable messaging of films and television — especially the way people of faith were depicted. It was not uncommon to have people of faith denounce television programming as “a Hollywood-built sewer line” directly into their living rooms. Christian organizations mobilized angry boycotts, protest marches, letter campaigns, and sometimes “hate mail” against offending producers, studios, and networks.

Around the turn of the new century, something very interesting started happening.

In May of 2000, CBS aired a two-part miniseries titled “Jesus,” and the first installment garnered 24.1 million viewers, making it the season’s highest-rated miniseries. In Europe, it was one of the highest-rated miniseries of all time. “The Miracle Maker,” “Noah’s Ark,” “The Face: Jesus in Art,” and “Mary, Mother of Jesus” soon joined the “Jesus” miniseries as being some of the most popular programming on television. It seemed like faith-friendly fare was selling.

When surveyed in those years by Barna Research, 75 percent of Americans agreed there was “too much violence in film and on television.” Sixty-five percent said there was “too much sexual activity,” 57 percent said there was “too much adult language or profanity in film and on television,” and 43 percent said there were “too many nontraditional or secular values in films.”

Within a few short years, more than 15 Christian broadcast, satellite and cable

TV networks sprang up to an enthusiastic and growing worldwide audience.

Meanwhile, in the music business, only two genres were experiencing consistent growth: Christian and country and western. Album sales fell almost 29 percent in two years, but Christian and gospel music rose 19 percent, marking 19 straight quarters of growth, Daily Variety said in April 2008. “Christian music,” noted CBS News, “was outselling classical, country and western, and new age combined.”

By 2007, “the market for religious products topped \$8.6 billion in annual revenue,” D. Michael Lindsay wrote in “Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite.” The Association of American Publishers called religious books “the fastest-growing segment in publishing,” while in the nonfiction category, four of the top 20 best-sellers came from Christian publishers, Christian E-Tailing Newsletter said in April 2008.

Today, according to 2017 Pew Research Center statistics, 70.6 percent of America’s 327.4 million population are Christian by some definition. In other words, there is a cumulative audience for faith-friendly media of at least 231.8 million people, who have a combined, disposable annual income somewhere close to \$2.1 trillion.

Tapping into that huge audience of Christian believers who were hungry for films that reinforced their beliefs, Mel Gibson directed “The Passion of the Christ,” which grossed \$83,848,082 on its opening weekend in 2004 and went on to become the highest-grossing R-rated movie up until that time. It eventually grossed more than \$611 million.

In 2005, Walden Media produced “The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion,

the Witch and the Wardrobe,” which grossed \$745,013,158. In 2008, the next in the Narnia series, “Prince Caspian,” grossed \$419,665,568, and in 2010, the third installment, “Voyage of the Dawn Treader,” grossed \$415,686,950.

Since 2010, there have been hundreds of faith-friendly films produced, including high-grossing titles such as “Noah,” “Hacksaw Ridge,” “Heaven is for Real,” “The Shack,” “Miracles from Heaven,” “Son of God,” and “War Room.”

In preparation for this article, I spent the better part of last month analyzing the most current statistical data I could find, starting with the budgets of films containing positive, faith-friendly values and their return-on-investment figures, and comparing them with the budgets and ROI figures of films that contained negative or non-faith-friendly values. The results are that faith-friendly films yield a 7.8 times better return on investment than non-faith-friendly films.

The future seems extremely bright, with many faith-friendly films in the pipeline for release in early 2018: “Samson” (Feb. 16), “I Can Only Imagine” (March 16), “Paul, Apostle of Christ” (March 28), “God’s Not Dead 3” (March 30), and “Mary Magdalene” (also March 30), just to mention a few.

The Christian community has responded by increased moviegoing, and the movie industry has increased its offerings to satisfy this huge market — clearly, a win-win.

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The 15 highest-grossing Christian films

By Dr. S. Bryan Hickox

1. **"The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,"** \$745,013,158, Walden Media.

This Oscar-winning C.S. Lewis adaptation stars Tilda Swinton, James McAvoy and Liam Neeson. Four young siblings travel through a wardrobe to a land called Narnia and discover they have a destiny to free it with the guidance of a mystical lion. (2005)

2. **"The Passion of the Christ,"** \$611,899,420, Icon Productions.

Directed by Mel Gibson and starring Jim Caviezel, this biblical epic depicts Jesus of Nazareth's final 12 hours of life, including his crucifixion in Jerusalem. (2004)

3. **"The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian,"** \$419,665,568, Walden Media.

This Oscar-winning C.S. Lewis adaptation stars Ben Barnes, Georgie Henley, William Moseley and Peter Dinklage. It tells the story of the Pevensie siblings who return to Narnia and are enlisted again to defeat an evil king and restore the rightful heir, Prince Caspian, to the throne. (2008)

4. **"The Chronicles of the Narnia: Voyage of the Dawn Treader,"** \$415,686,950, Walden Media.

This Oscar-winning C.S. Lewis adaptation stars Ben Barnes, Skandar Keynes and Georgie Henley. This time, Lucy and Edmund Pevensie return to Narnia with their cousin Eustace. After joining



Prince Caspian aboard the royal ship, the Dawn Treader, they face adventures with dragons, dwarves, merfolk and a band of lost warriors before reaching the edge of the world. (2010)

5. **"Noah,"** \$362,637,429, Paramount Pictures.

Starring Russell Crowe, Jennifer Connelly, Anthony Hopkins and Emma Watson, the film follows Noah and his family as they build a mighty ark and prepare to survive an apocalyptic flood sent by God to cleanse the evil world. (2014)

5. **"Hacksaw Ridge,"** \$175,302,354, Summit Entertainment.

Based on a true story from World War II, the Mel Gibson-directed film is about an American pacifist combat medic, Desmond Doss, who refused to carry or use any weapons and became the first conscientious objector to be awarded the Medal of Honor. (2016)

6. **"Heaven is for Real,"** \$101,332,962, TriStar Pictures.

This film, starring Greg Kinnear and Connor Corum, earned an impressive amount at the box office considering the movie's budget was \$12 million. It tells the story of a small-town father who searches for the courage and conviction to share his son's life-changing testimony with the world. (2014)

7. **"The Shack,"** \$96,935,466, Summit Entertainment.

Based on the book with the same title, "The Shack" stars Sam Worthington and Octavia Spencer and tells the story of a heartbroken man who receives a mysterious invitation to go to a desolate cabin to meet God. (2017)

8. **"Miracles from Heaven,"** \$73,883,359, Columbia Pictures.

This film, starring Jennifer Garner, is based on the true story of a young girl who had a near-death experience and was later cured of an incurable disease. (2016)

9. **"Son of God,"** \$67,800,064, 20th Century Fox.

Producer Mark Burnett helped shepherd this story of Jesus that covers his life from birth in a manger, his ministry, and his crucifixion and resurrection.

(2014)

10. **"War Room,"** \$67,790,117, TriStar Pictures.

Released to 1,945 theaters, the film follows a married couple who seem to have it all — great jobs, a beautiful daughter, a dream home. In reality, their marriage has become a war zone and their daughter is collateral damage. With guidance from Miss Clara, an older, wiser woman, wife Elizabeth discovers she can start fighting for her family instead of against them. The power of prayer and Elizabeth's newly energized faith transform her life. (2015).

11. **"God's Not Dead,"** \$62,630,732, Pure Flix Entertainment. College student Josh, who believes God exists, challenges his philosophy professor. Based on its success, Pure Flix released a sequel and has a third coming soon. (2014)

12. **"Soul Surfer,"** \$47,088,990, TriStar Pictures/Film District.

AnnaSophia Robb stars as Bethany Hamilton, the professional surfer who lost her arm in a shark attack. The film also features Dennis Quaid and country singer Carrie Underwood. (2011)

13. **"The Nativity Story,"** \$46,432,264, New Line Cinema.

The biblical epic stars Keisha Castle-Hughes and Shohreh Aghdashloo in a drama about Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. (2006)

14. **"Risen,"** \$46,069,568, Sony.

Joseph Fiennes stars as the Roman tribune Clavius who experiences a life change after being ordered to find the missing body of Jesus Christ, who was said to have risen from the dead. (2016)

15. **"Courageous,"** \$34,522,221, TriStar Pictures.

The independent film, which received mixed reviews but an A+ from filmgoers on CinemaScore, stars Alex Kendrick, Ken Bevel and Kevin Downes. Four police officers struggle with their faith and their families after tragedy strikes; together, they make a decision that can change all their lives. (2011)

Source for data: IMDb.com



Photo Credit: The Washington Times



By Matthew Faraci

When watching movies set in medieval times, have you ever noticed that crowds always gather to view beheadings and other gruesome punishments? I've always wondered why, and hoped I'd have the decency to look away in such a situation. Yet today, we've watched powerful people in Hollywood getting caught for doing bad things, and we keep clicking on these stories for the same inexplicable reason as those onlookers so many centuries ago.

It's been a rough year.

Hollywood suffers blows to its already-sullied reputation almost every day. And this puts me in the odd position of doing something I never thought I'd do in my life... coming to Hollywood's defense.

In filming the second season of "Frankly Faraci," the Dove Channel series I host, I spent time with a number of celebrities, and what I found is surprising. Rather than fitting the stereotype, I visited with seven people who love their families, go to church on Sunday, care about their communities and are dedicated to causes that better

people's lives.

At a charity golf tournament, I met Cedric the Entertainer, who was joined by dozens of friends, including Steve Harvey, Sugar Ray Leonard and Smokey Robinson. Cedric hosts the annual event to raise money to give underprivileged kids a shot at life. The comedy icon doesn't talk about this — in fact, this was the first time he allowed a media crew to document the day in such detail — but it's an area of deep passion for him. His focus was not good PR for Cedric, it's spreading the word — and in turn helping more kids.

A few weeks later, I found myself walking around Busch Stadium with St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Adam Wainwright and was amazed to discover that he sees his Hall-of-Fame-worthy baseball career as a means to do good. Mr. Wainwright supports so many charities it will make your head spin, all driven by his focus on meeting the basic, daily needs of as many people around the world as possible.

Each of these people are motivated by the same foundation. Faith.

In Silicon Valley, Enjoy's CEO, Ron Johnson — who worked directly with Steve Jobs in creating the Apple Store and the Genius Bar — explained that the Apple Store is built on the idea of relationship, what he calls "the art of the human connection." The whole Apple experience is so magical, he said, because it's rooted in a simple principle he learned in Sunday school: Love your neighbor as yourself. Who is your neighbor? It's your customer, it's your colleagues, it's the people you come into contact with.

Hollywood's untold stories of faith, hope and charity

On the set of his daytime talk show in New York City, renowned entertainer Harry Connick, Jr., revealed why he's always so joyful, and why he continues to keep things family-friendly. Mr. Connick's role as a husband and father, and his strong identity as a man of deep and abiding faith, is what matters to him

Bure, who often finds herself in the unenviable role of explaining Christians to Hollywood and Hollywood to Christians. Like the peacemaker at a contentious family Thanksgiving, Ms. Bure encourages folks to get along, and ends up with everyone yelling at her. Her response to the haters? "Kindness

Hollywood suffers blows to its already-sullied reputation almost every day. And this puts me in the odd position of doing something I never thought I'd do in my life... coming to Hollywood's defense.

most. "If I had three wishes," he said, "I'd want to do God's will, I'd want to do God's will, and I'd want to do God's will. That's all I want... that is the premise on which everything else is built."

At a rifle range outside of Los Angeles, I watched Atticus Shaffer, who has played the hilariously quirky character Brick Heck on ABC's "The Middle" for nine seasons, hit target after target like an expert marksman. You might not expect that from a young man who is just 4 feet 8 inches tall with a slight build, the result of a condition called osteogenesis imperfecta, leaving him with fragile bones. Mr. Shaffer has been through unimaginable physical horrors. Yet, you'd never know it from his demeanor. Intelligent, engaging, and hilarious, Mr. Shaffer's secret is Jeremiah 29:11 — "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

I saw the same incredible spirit in actress-producer Candace Cameron

always wins."

Then there's veteran actor Corbin Bernsen, who's made a name for himself 1,000 times over and can have any acting role he wants. Yet, Mr. Bernsen is focused on making engaging films to generate thought-provoking conversations about faith, eternity and relationships.

For every awful story you read, there are 10 stories of hope, faith and charity waiting to be told. I'll keep digging for them, and if you're willing to share these episodes, together we can all give our kids something wonderful on which to focus — real role models.

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Matthew Faraci is an Los Angeles-based producer, marketer and publicist specializing in family-friendly entertainment. He is the host of the hit series "Frankly Faraci" on Dove Channel and Executive Producer of "The Chosen" on VidAngel, the first-ever TV show exclusively about the life of Jesus.

A new 'home' for faith-based content



By Dallas Jenkins

I've never understood the divide between the Hollywood studio system and the faith-based film world more than in the past year or so.

Obviously, there are exceptions — particularly Sony Affirm, which seems to be the one company that has bridged the gap for the most part. But other than that, we're seeing more than ever that the faith-based filmmakers and companies can't seem to get the budgets and quality levels necessary to reach a wide audience, and the studios can't seem to engage the Christian audience when they spend the money.

On the surface, films like "Exodus: Gods and Kings," "Noah," and "Ben-Hur" should be massive successes. But

because faithful audiences are skeptical of nonbelieving filmmakers or actors, they're staying away. Additionally, when you give them an explicitly Christian film with a believing filmmaker — but on a low budget — they say, "We go to the theater for big movies just like everyone else, why do we have to settle for the little ones?"

The marketing for my film, "The Resurrection of Gavin Stone," hit all the right notes, but was met with a collective "meh." I just didn't make a movie even Christians felt they had to rush to the theaters to see.

I considered wallowing in self-pity and blame-shifting, but it only lasted a few minutes. The business is changing

rapidly, and because I need to feed my family, I have to adjust.

It started with my own habits. I realized that some of the best cinema in the world in the last decade has been in television and streaming. And I also realized that I wasn't going to the theater to see movies like mine either. My stories, and most faith stories, are less epic and more personal and emotional, which tend to work best in living rooms, as opposed to IMAX.

We're living in the golden age of quality television, and I'm loving it. The problem is that once again, we Christians are a little behind the curve. We

Christians, Hollywood and my refrigerator magnet



By Karen Covell

I've discovered that since the beginning of the motion picture industry, the relationship between the Christian church and Hollywood has been marked by distrust and suspicion. In the early years, many Christians regarded Hollywood as a godless, sybaritic group of pretentious artists engaged in the manufacture of questionable content dangerous to people of faith. Likewise, many in Hollywood dismissed religious people as old-fashioned, judgmental, ignorant prudes who simply did not understand "The Industry." So it's not surprising to me that creative Christians felt Hollywood was a place to be avoided, not embraced.

Therefore, there were very few Christian professionals in Hollywood and most of them chose to keep their faith under the radar with their industry friends and keep their Hollywood ties under the radar with their church friends. Jesus and liberal Hollywood were a paradox.

But the tide of tolerance shifted into the 21st century. Today, in a time when the decision makers and cultural influencers in Hollywood are

speaking out for more diversity and equality, people of faith are becoming more comfortable expressing their beliefs, thus growing in number and visibility. Even faith-based films are crossing over from low-budget niche films to viable commercial successes, and more filmmakers are publicly expressing their personal religious beliefs. I've found that there's no longer that deep divide between the Christian church and the entertainment

teaching Sunday school classes, Mark Wahlberg attending mass every morning, and Denzel Washington's commitment to his family and God. And those don't even include the thousands of directors, producers, writers, editors, cinematographers, show runners, make-up artists, set designers, costumers, gaffers, key grips and production assistants who have a deep spiritual belief in God.

Seventh-Day Adventist producer

Hollywood is now surprisingly on the forefront of employing people of all faiths within its ranks. But for those who are still struggling with this paradox, consider this thought: To the Church, don't be afraid of Hollywood. To Hollywood, don't be afraid of entertainment professionals who have a faith in Jesus.

industry, which kept people of faith away from Hollywood and Hollywood professionals away from church.

In 2015, IMDb (Internet Movie Data Base) even published a list of 48 Christian Actors/Actresses. (<http://www.imdb.com/list/ls079597244/>). No. 1 was Evangeline Lilly ("Lost"), followed by Jim Caviezel ("Person of Interest"), then Patricia Heaton, Tyler Perry, Elijah Wood and even Ryan Gosling. I found at least 20 more websites, all of which have various lists and even videos of entertainment celebrities who publicly discuss their Christian beliefs — from Chris Pratt to Kristin Chenoweth to Chris Tucker. I've also read interviews about Stephen Colbert and John Grisham

DeVon Franklin ("Miracles From Heaven" and "The Star"), and his wife, actress Meagan Good, ("White Famous" and "Code Black") have even written a best-selling book, "The Wait: A Powerful Practice for Finding the Love of Your Life and the Life You Love," discussing the deep, loving relationship they built while waiting to have sex until after they got married.

It was about 1980 when the tide started turning for Christians in the film industry. Though Hollywood's power brokers have historically been Jewish, more Christians began to join the ranks, despite their parents' or pastors' warnings and pleading. Once they arrived, they started finding each other in churches, Bible studies,

prayer groups and even bars all over the city. They encouraged their talented, creative friends to join them, and from seemingly just a handful in the early 1980s, there is now a growing community of over 10,000 professionals — mostly millennial believers — many of whom attend more than 100 active Protestant and Catholic churches.

Despite our nation's many political, sexual, and religious tensions and divides, Hollywood is now surprisingly on the forefront of employing people of all faiths within its ranks. But for those who are still struggling with this paradox, consider this thought: To the Church, don't be afraid of Hollywood. To Hollywood, don't be afraid of entertainment professionals who have a faith in Jesus. To both, know that people of all faiths can work together as creative professionals, offering their art and their hearts to the world. As a producer and a person of faith myself, I dare to challenge both the church and the industry to embrace the paradox on my refrigerator magnet that says, "Jesus was a Jewish liberal."

Karen Covell is an author, national speaker and independent producer currently packaging the feature bio-pic, "Charley Parkhurst." She is also an active member on the National Board of the Producers Guild of America and Executive Director of The Hollywood Prayer Network (<http://hollywoodprayernetwork.org/>).

JENKINS

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were late to the game with theatrical releases, then we had our moment in the sun, and now we're playing catch up again as the business is shifting. Where's our "Breaking Bad," our "Game of Thrones"?

Lucky for me, VidAngel was thinking the same thing. I'm not a spokesman for them, so I'll keep this short, but their streaming service offers customers the ability to filter out any content they find objectionable. So audiences have a chance now to watch sanitized versions of hit shows if they want. But that still doesn't get us there. As VidAngel agreed, when I so eloquently put it to them, we still need to create stuff that belongs to us.

So we're trying something new. I've seen every Jesus movie and miniseries out there, but there's never been an actual episodic TV show about Christ, with recurring characters and new seasons. VidAngel loves the idea, but as per usual, we don't have the big bucks Hollywood does, so we're doing a glorified Kickstarter where eager audiences can invest (not donate) in the show if they're interested.

How do we get audiences interested? We're giving away the pilot episode for Christmas. It's already on Facebook and is up to almost 2 million views. Which, seeing as how it's a short film about the birth of Christ, feels well-timed. So if people love that, maybe they'll want to see the TV show, which we intend to make next year. And if they don't, then... well, I don't really know; I'm a Christian filmmaker, I'm a little slow to the jump.



The nativity scene is filmed in "The Chosen." Image courtesy of Dallas Jenkins.

Will it work? We'll see. Either way, I can't expect Hollywood to spend tens of millions of dollars on and perfectly execute our stories, and I can't expect Christian audiences to spend \$12 a ticket to see my movie in theaters when a Marvel movie is playing in the screen one door over. It's time to take it right to them, in their living rooms, and they can decide in advance if they want it.

Dallas Jenkins is a Chicago-based filmmaker currently developing a TV series for VidAngel entitled, "The Chosen." It is about the life of Christ, but the characters don't speak in King James Bible verses. You can watch the pilot free at www.vidangel.com/thechosen and on Facebook at /thechosentvseries.

Behind the lines: The rise of Christians in Hollywood



By Dr. Phil Cooke

When I first arrived in Hollywood after college in 1976, it was tough finding anyone who would admit to being a Christian.

Christians were here, but they were hidden away and rarely heard. With few exceptions, the pattern was predictable: If they were concerned about their job, they kept quiet about their faith. If they were at the top of the industry, they felt a bit more free to express their convictions. But only those retired or near the end of their careers felt the confidence actually “to come out” as believers.

The reason for these responses is pretty obvious. The “media culture” was devoutly secular or, in some cases, overtly hostile to the worldview of the devout.

Today, that world has changed. Not only are there thousands of people in Hollywood and New York media who

take their faith seriously, but today, major film studios and television networks are actively pursuing “faith-based” content.

There’s no question that the success of Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ” was a key to that resurgence. Once the studios starting seeing record-setting box office numbers (they called it “passion dollars” back then), they took notice and wanted in.

I remember one influential production company calling me about the issue, saying (and I’m not making this up):

“Phil, we’re interested in producing ‘faith-based’ movies because we hear there’s a lot of money to be made in that new genre. But the problem is, we have no idea what ‘faith-based’ means. We’ve been told that you understand that subject, and we’d like you to read a couple of our scripts and tell us if they’re faith-based.”

Needless to say, I read the scripts. Not surprisingly, they in no way fit the definition.

Fortunately, today that’s much less a problem. While many producers and studio executives don’t know the differences between faith traditions, they at least understand — and in many cases respect — the values this audience represents. Some even hire consultants who know the landscape.

For the most part, that change happened because of the vast number of Christians pursuing careers in the media and entertainment industries. I can name major producers, actors, directors and even studio presidents who were (and still are) professing Christians — mentored and encouraged by insider ministry outreaches like Mastermedia

International, The Hollywood Prayer Network, The Greenhouse, the Act One Program, The Influence Lab and others.

Having a strong personal faith has moved from a reason to be fired to a reason to be promoted.

Obviously, there are plenty of nonbelieving leaders in Hollywood who aren’t interested in any religious experience or in those who profess it — just as there

supernatural. His response: “Can you imagine where that series would have gone had I not been in the writer’s room to influence it?”

Will this interest in faith-friendly media content last?

The answer depends largely on the financial and ratings success of these projects and the talent of the people behind them. I have observed that those

While many producers and studio executives don’t know the differences between faith traditions, they at least understand — and in many cases respect — the values this audience represents. Some even hire consultants who know the landscape.

are in any industry. But right now, there’s no question that we’re seeing a resurgence of men and women who take their faith seriously in all areas of media.

For experienced, successful producers like Mark Burnett and Roma Downey (producers of “The Bible” TV miniseries, “A.D. The Bible Continues,” “Ben-Hur” and the new LightWorkers.com, which “celebrate[s] life while looking for the good in everyone and everything”), this gives faith-friendly projects a new legitimacy, and major players want to be involved. For others, it opens the door to pitch spiritually themed movies, TV programs and other projects.

For still others, it gets someone of faith in the room when major decisions involving this content are being made. One network TV writer who’s a Christian was criticized by other Christians because he worked on a series focused on violent demonic activity and the

who lead with their talent — and not with their faith — see much more success. As King Solomon said, “Those who are excellent will serve the king.”

Christian believers who come to the industry with real talent and the spiritual integrity to pursue a career against all odds will get respect.

Virtues such as honesty, truthfulness, hard work, moral character and loyalty — which are central to the core beliefs of followers of Jesus Christ — are appreciated everywhere. It is thousands of men and women with these values who are impacting the industry in a positive way and will continue to do so.

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Phil Cooke, Ph.D., is a filmmaker, writer, and media consultant based in Los Angeles. His new book is “The Way Back: How Christians Blew Our Credibility and How We Get It Back.” Find out more at philcooke.com.

The ‘Weinstein strategy’ v. ‘flyover’ values

By Dr. Larry W. Poland

Hollywood has discovered a new and highly effective way for a high-profile player to become a household name around the world. This is significant because in Tinseltown building name recognition, being in the press, and having constant public visibility are key components of the game.

The bad news is that this “surefire” strategy for recognition will not only put your name in lights, it will get you “surely fired.”

I’ll call it “the Weinstein Strategy.”

It was launched in October by Harvey Weinstein, co-founder of the highly successful entertainment company Miramax, aka The Weinstein Company. The strategy is disarmingly simple: Use

your power and prestige as a wealthy Hollywood film producer to intimidate, harass, assault, grope, flash, abuse, rape and otherwise sexually exploit the beautiful — and often very vulnerable — young women who come into your world. The strategy can work very well, as long as the exploited ones keep their mouths shut. Substantial cash payments may work to facilitate the silence ... for a while.

Actually, I mistakenly said Harvey launched the strategy. Truthfully, the more than 50 women who surfaced with allegations of sexual abuse against him launched the strategy. The seemingly endless parade of women to the microphones and TV cameras of America started a tsunami of accusations, which now has touched not only Hollywood

and New York media, but also the Washington beltway.

I need not add to the growing list of men with targets on their backs and resignation letters or pink slips in their pockets. Ironically, it was Miramax, the company which produced “Sex, Lies, and Videotape,” that dismissed Harvey.

Meanwhile, millions of people — condescendingly referred to in the LA/NYC axis as “those from the ‘I’ states” — follow the now-daily revelations of sex abuse with their own forms of shock and awe. Even in a nation now clearly “post-Christian,” there is a common sense of national decency about the way men should treat women, about socially acceptable behavior of those with power toward the vulnerable — including children — and even deeply held,

faith-and-Bible-based convictions about sexual morality.

It is here that we find the razor-edge of conflict in this discussion. For 36 years, I worked the freeways of Los Angeles and the taxis of New York building and tending relationships with the power brokers of global media. Most are decent people, using the most expansive definition of the word. But in the earliest years of my research into the values of Sunset Boulevard and Sixth Avenue, I learned that their moral consensus was light years away from what I was taught in church in the Midwest and in the community outside the church.

My Judeo-Christian culture even used different words — words that are

» see **WEINSTEIN** | C13



By Mark Joseph

What happens when you've been selling a certain product for 70-plus years, have an established business model, a customer base and suddenly millions of new customers show up and expect you to make, market and sell that product differently?

That's exactly the scenario that unfolded in February 2004 when 10 million or so Americans that I like to call UFGs (Unidentified Film Goers) showed up opening week to watch "The Passion of the Christ" in theaters.

What resulted was a seminal moment in Hollywood history because the film overperformed in ways that were nothing short of stunning. The Los Angeles Times and Variety are two publications that typically forecast box office performance with generally accurate outcomes, but on that particular week, they were beyond way off — what they had predicted to be a \$15 million to \$30 million haul turned into a five-day box office bonanza of \$125 million.

As the producer of the film's inspired-by soundtrack who also worked on marketing, I saw what did — and didn't happen — behind the scenes that produced such massive numbers. The film would go on to gross \$370 million in the United States, but why

Will Hollywood come to terms with the Unidentified Film Goer (UFG)?

the audience responded as it did seems to still be a mystery to some — and the misunderstanding of these consumers continues to this day. Or it may be willful ignorance on the part of people who are concerned that if it means what it appears to mean, they may have to radically change the way they do business.

When producers and marketers subsequently attempted to make a film for this audience and failed to connect with the UFGs, like clockwork they often tried to get reporters to write follow-up stories that often went something like this: "We made a film for you people and you didn't show up, so we're done trying to please you!"

Variations of the above were lobbed at various flops with this audience, including "Noah," "Last Days in the Desert," "Exodus: Gods and Kings," and others. In the same way that a Portland foodie might down-talk a guy from Arkansas who prefers Chick-fil-A to a filet mignon, these responses by Christian hipsters attacking Christian hicksters are both condescending and entirely predictable.

But people like what they like. And no amount of shaming can force conservative Christians into watching things they don't. After all, it's their money, and money is tight these days. They have definite tastes, and they really do deserve to be at least understood before they're mocked or ignored.

And it is those tastes that are often misunderstood. For one thing, just because this audience is willing to patronize low-quality films starring actors who were big in 1979 doesn't mean that's what they truly want, any more than it would be fair to say that you liked moldy bread if I offered it to

you and you hungrily ate it after being denied food for three days. The point is, rather, they are so desperate for content that doesn't insult their values, that they will watch content below typical standards of Hollywood quality if they must.

I had to explain this once to one of the most powerful moguls in Hollywood, who, shortly after "God's Not Dead" made \$62 million at the box office, called me into his office and said he too wanted to get in on such a fantastic business model. "I want to spend \$2 million and make \$60 million like that film," I remember him bellowing. When I suggested he spend \$10 million or \$15 million and up the quality level instead, he seemed deflated and quickly lost interest. Somehow he had learned the wrong lesson: that this audience craved low-quality movies.

I'll go out on a limb here and say that the soon-to-be-released film, "Mary Magdalene," is going to completely miss this target audience next year. I haven't seen the film, and can't judge its artistic merits, but I can already spot the chatter among this crowd, notably a Facebook friend who is in this demographic who posted this last week: "I expect this to be rife with blasphemy and heretical viewpoints. I have zero trust in these filmmakers and from the IMDB page and surfing around this looks like an agenda film and not for Christians. I hope I'm wrong."

This is the level of sophistication among many in this audience, and they watch and listen carefully, noting the personal views of those involved in crafting a movie and deducing (often correctly) that the film will follow those views.

The traditionalist moviegoer is

among the most misunderstood species in the world today. The love/hate relationship between this audience and Hollywood has been well documented by many, but the many misunderstandings about them, including what they do and don't want to see, as well as how they are reached continues to baffle many in Hollywood. For decades, this demographic simply didn't participate in filmgoing in any meaningful way. For reasons that ranged from being told that all movies were evil to believing that filmic depictions of Jesus Christ constituted blasphemy, they often didn't participate as consumers.

Now that has all changed, and they are ready to go to the movies if we'll have them. But if they're to stick around beyond one movie, we will need to better understand their likes, dislikes, interests, hopes and dreams, what they do and don't want to see on the big screen, who they want to see crafting these films and how they want to hear about them.

A key question remains: Do we really want to understand them? Or are we afraid that if we do, then we'll be forced to make movies differently?

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Mark Joseph is an award-winning music and film producer, marketing expert, author and founder of MJM Entertainment Group. He has worked on the development and marketing of 53 films and served as a producer on "The Vessel," "Max Rose," "America," "Japan: Searching For The Dream," "Frank vs. God," "Doonby" and "The Unknowns." His next projects are "Silence Patton" and "No Safe Spaces," starring Adam Carolla (which will release in 2018), and book, "Rock Gets Religion: The Battle for the Soul of The Devil's Music," releasing Jan. 23, 2018.

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out of vogue and even offensive in politically correct worlds. For instance, we did not celebrate being "sexually active." We used now-obsolete words for this behavior like whore, whoremonger, scarlet woman, libertine man and being promiscuous. I once heard a prominent Hollywood actress on a talk show declare, "I don't consider myself promiscuous. I've only had 12 men." Hardly a definition of "chaste" where I come from.

Call us stupid, but we believed God created two sexes. We knew people unlike us had different bedroom behaviors

and "sexual identities," but the ideal for us was marriage to a person of the other gender after walking the aisle of a church to solemnize a contract, "a sacred vow" of loyalty and faithfulness until separated by death.

We didn't have guidelines about not sexually exploiting another person. We didn't need them. The central ethos of our lives was not to exploit anyone ... in any way, at any time, anywhere! To do so would be an affront to the life and teachings of our Savior. We didn't need 50 whistleblowers to punctuate the fact that such behavior was, well, evil.

Even in something so basic as dress, we were not from the same galaxy as the Filmland folks. Our people were

not Amish or Old Order Brethren and were not from the Bible Belt. We were garden-variety Catholics, Protestants and "Metho-Bapsterians. But it would have been absolutely unthinkable for one of our women to show up at the annual Kiwanis Club dinner dressed with less fabric than a Victoria's Secret model. For us, some award-show female fashion approaches soft porn.

So suffice it to say, there is a chasm between the Hollywood culture and the world of what was once called (unfortunately) the moral majority in flyover country. We are light years apart.

Final note: I used the past tense in describing the norms of the "flyovers." I shouldn't have. There are millions of

believers in the nation and thousands of believers in media who still espouse and personify these virtues and this faith. And the believers in media are creating films, TV shows, novels, video games, websites, blogs and other content extolling these virtues and the spiritual redemption at their heart. Watch and see.

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Larry W. Poland, Ph.D., is the Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Mastermedia International, and spent more than three decades consulting with executives in Hollywood and New York media on the Christian community as a market for media product.

A surprising new trend in movies



By Simon Swart

You may not have noticed, but there is a lot of change going on in the media business.

The most visible evidence is the availability of more movies, more TV shows, more channels, more of everything! You may not have noticed because you were too busy watching something on YouTube, Netflix or Amazon Prime ... and if you aren't, your kids are. You, the audience, have an explosion of options. Not complete control yet, but options.

With this more of everything, there is a new trend buried within the overall trends — more faith-based programming. It may even be one of the fastest-growing segments in media.

Why? Read on.

About 20 years ago, while a senior executive at 20th Century Fox, I realized there were some movies generating significant business and flying beneath the “industry radar,” with titles like “Left Behind” and “The Omega Code.” These small movies were selling like much bigger box office movies. They were punching above their weight class!

I was responsible for selling and marketing major blockbusters and studio movies. On the date of a big blockbuster release, we would tour the market to review the execution and impact of our marketing efforts. We created impressive displays of product and merchandise designed to stop customers in their tracks. Invariably, there would be a significant display for these faith-based movies that I didn't know existed. Nonetheless, the buyers informed me that they were selling very well.

With further research, I discovered that there were many movies that had been produced and then could not get proper “traditional” distribution. These were lower-budget movies that had a very strong evangelical Christian message, but their sales signaled an

extremely underserved market ... and an opportunity. We started to offer distribution to these “stranded assets,” which allowed us to gain valuable insights into this newfound audience.

Until then, studios had very little interest in so-called faith-based movies. As large public companies — like any other public company — they had to be selective about overtly agenda-driven content, and this was a constituency that was risky and hard to understand. Essentially, these were difficult, “niche” movies. It used to be that the shortest pitch meeting in Hollywood started with

“faith-friendly audience” is very loyal, affluent and sophisticated — when targeted properly. This makes them unique and highly sought after in today's attention-deficit, instant-media world of personalized mass distraction. More important, they spend more — a lot more. Not just on media, but on everything — movies, popcorn, sodas, water, diapers, dog food, technology and everything in between. Evangelicals alone have \$2.1 trillion of discretionary income!

Despite some spectacular misses like “Noah,” “Exodus: Gods and Kings,” and “Ben-Hur,” the market for faith-friendly

from Heaven,” “Wonder,” “The Lego Movie,” many superhero movies and many Disney movies.

This is an important distinction to make: Both types are economically viable, but their DNA is fundamentally different — from script, financing, production, casting through to releasing, marketing, and distribution. Failing to understand the full impact of this distinction can have disastrous consequences in the acceptance of the movie and its success.

The challenge for all marketers is the increasing difficulty to break through the competing marketing messages and daily “noise” with any brand campaign. This is true of the faith audience too: Even pastors and megachurches, who have been the “seedling advocates” of the traditional “grassroots” marketing campaigns, are being overwhelmed with requests to endorse movies.

With an increasing number of faith-targeted movies of both varieties, the competition and risk also increases. However, a true understanding of this audience will pay off handsomely to the studios, networks and platforms with leadership that takes the time to engage and understand it. While their principles and values remain constant, their media demands are changing. Misunderstanding or ignoring this audience can be costly.

Ultimately, in the faith-based media space, quality, authenticity and reliability will win. And the prize belongs to those who understand this audience and lead with powerful stories that are well-told.

From the very beginning of the movie business, movies have been used to promote a variety of causes — whether to promote tolerance and justice or to present alternative views of how the world could be or how we wish it to be. To be effective, it still has to be entertaining and connect with the audience.

It's a brave new world, and audiences will find what they love, especially faith-focused ones! They have choices, and they will vote with dollars and time.

As a film executive, I am committed to helping studios, networks, creators, distributors, and marketers develop programming that unites and inspires audiences. It's not just the right thing to do, it's also a great business when executed properly!

Simon Swart is 30-year veteran of the entertainment industry working at Warner Brothers, Disney and 21st Century Fox. As a senior executive at Fox, he managed the development and release of hundreds of programs from Fox, MGM, Dreamworks and Relativity, including “Avatar,” “Star Wars,” “Ice Age,” “The Passion of the Christ” and “The Bible.”



It used to be that the shortest pitch meeting in Hollywood started with “I am here to pitch a faith-based movie.” Not anymore.

“I am here to pitch a faith-based movie.”

Not anymore. Because of the financial success of these niche movies, many studios and networks have seen the light ... or the dollars.

Today, there are so many different ways to release a movie, other than traditional wide releases in theaters. Options include the various forms of digital distribution on all of our new devices — Netflix, Amazon, Apple, etc. The competition for the audience share of time and wallet is intensifying. All consumers are more tech-savvy and selective about how their time and money is spent. They are also becoming more difficult to reach. There must be effective marketing.

With this audience fragmentation, the industry is realizing that the

and faith-based content is undeniable. The opportunities for affirming, positive, inspiring content is substantial. The global demand for media that inspires and entertains is at an all-time high. These movies and TV shows are a lot more profitable as a result. Just ask the Hallmark Channel.

But it's not that easy.

There are two very different types of “faith-based” or “faith-friendly” movies.

The first type is the “message” movie with an overt Christian agenda, directly and obviously biblical — movies such as “God's Not Dead,” “War Room,” “The Case for Christ” and “The Star.”

The second type is the “broad” commercial movies that reflect Judeo-Christian values — movies such as “Soul Surfer,” “Hacksaw Ridge,” “Miracles

Faith-based films coming of age, despite artistic challenges



By Harold Fickett

In the climatic scene of the R-rated “Gran Torino” (2008), Walt Kowalski (played by Clint Eastwood) puts his hand in his inside coat pocket only to be riddled with bullets from the gang members occupying every window in the house before him. The gang fires because they believe that Walt’s pulling a gun — as he knows they will — when he’s only reaching for his cigarette lighter.

Walt Kowalski gives up his life to protect his next-door Vietnamese neighbors who are targeted by the violent gang. His death solves the problem, as the gang members are led away to jail, presumably for life.

I doubt many people think of “Gran Torino” as a “faith-based film,” despite its being about the redemption of a hellish situation through one man’s sacrificial atonement — the last shot of Walt has him lying in a cruciform posture, a worthy imitator of Christ.

Similarly, in “Hacksaw Ridge” when the army company of Medic Desmond T. Doss (Andrew Garfield) waits to go back into battle on Okinawa because Doss hasn’t “finished his prayers,” we realize that we have encountered another follower of Jesus, whose authenticity matches his Medal of Honor gallantry.

Film depictions of faith have now gone beyond mocking stereotypes like Robert DeNiro’s sociopathic Max Cady in “Cape Fear,” or Will Ferrell’s treacly and not-funny prayers to the “little, baby Jesus” in “Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby.”

Instead, there are utterly compelling films like “Of Gods and Men,” “Silence,” “Risen” and “Ben-Hur.” Or TV shows like “Greenleaf” (starring the wonderful Keith David) and one of the smartest, most telling sitcoms in years, “The Jim Gaffigan Show.”

Industry executives seem to be recognizing that “faith” and the questions



What stories can do is inspire longing and imitation. How many children have zoomed around their living rooms after watching “Superman”? “Hacksaw Ridge” makes me want to be a person who can draw a deep courage from my faith; it also wants me to possess a faith so palpable that others, who don’t believe in anything at all, can at least respect it.

faith addresses are simply part of life. Much of the credit for this recognition goes to Christians who have moved into positions of power within the entertainment industry.

For example, the faith of screenwriter/director Scott Teems broadly influences the AMC miniseries “Rectify,” and the commitments of Mel Gibson and Jim Gaffigan are well known. Other Christian business beachheads include Mark Burnett, Jr., and Roma Downey’s Light Workers Media as part of MJM, Sony Faith, Walden Media and Giving Films. Pure Flix, a production company and streaming service, is moving into distribution. The Dove Channel is developing original programming. These productions and the growing business infrastructure supporting them constitute the good news.

Still, with the possible exception of “Risen,” the titles I’ve so far mentioned

are not what people generally mean by “faith-based films.” What I’d like to suggest is that “faith-based films” follow the lead of a “Gran Torino” and eschew the self-imposed predictability that seems to stifle success.

By predictability, I am referring to two conventions: 1) someone, somewhere in the film always presents the “plan of salvation,” as evangelicals understand it, and 2) they stay in a PG box.

I share the weariness of F-bombs and gratuitous nudity, but what you can’t do is present gangbangers talking like missionaries.

What stories can do is inspire longing and imitation. How many children have zoomed around their living rooms after watching “Superman”? “Hacksaw Ridge” makes me want to be a person who can draw a deep courage from my faith; it also wants me to possess a

faith so palpable that others, who don’t believe in anything at all, can at least respect it.

So even as faith-based films are coming of age, I think some audiences will still say they are “not for me.” I’d therefore like Christians in entertainment to consider the idea that this may not be a prejudiced judgment but simply an accurate one. That might lead us to concentrate our energies in the broader and more helpful directions of “Gran Torino” and “Hacksaw Ridge.”

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Harold Fickett is CEO and Publisher of SCENES (<https://scenesmedia.com>). The parent company, Scenes Media, produces content for multiple platforms, as well as for its own digital magazine. Scenes Media provides a Main Street perspective on entertainment and culture for the mainstream.

Raise a glass
(or 6...)

Levin 

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