

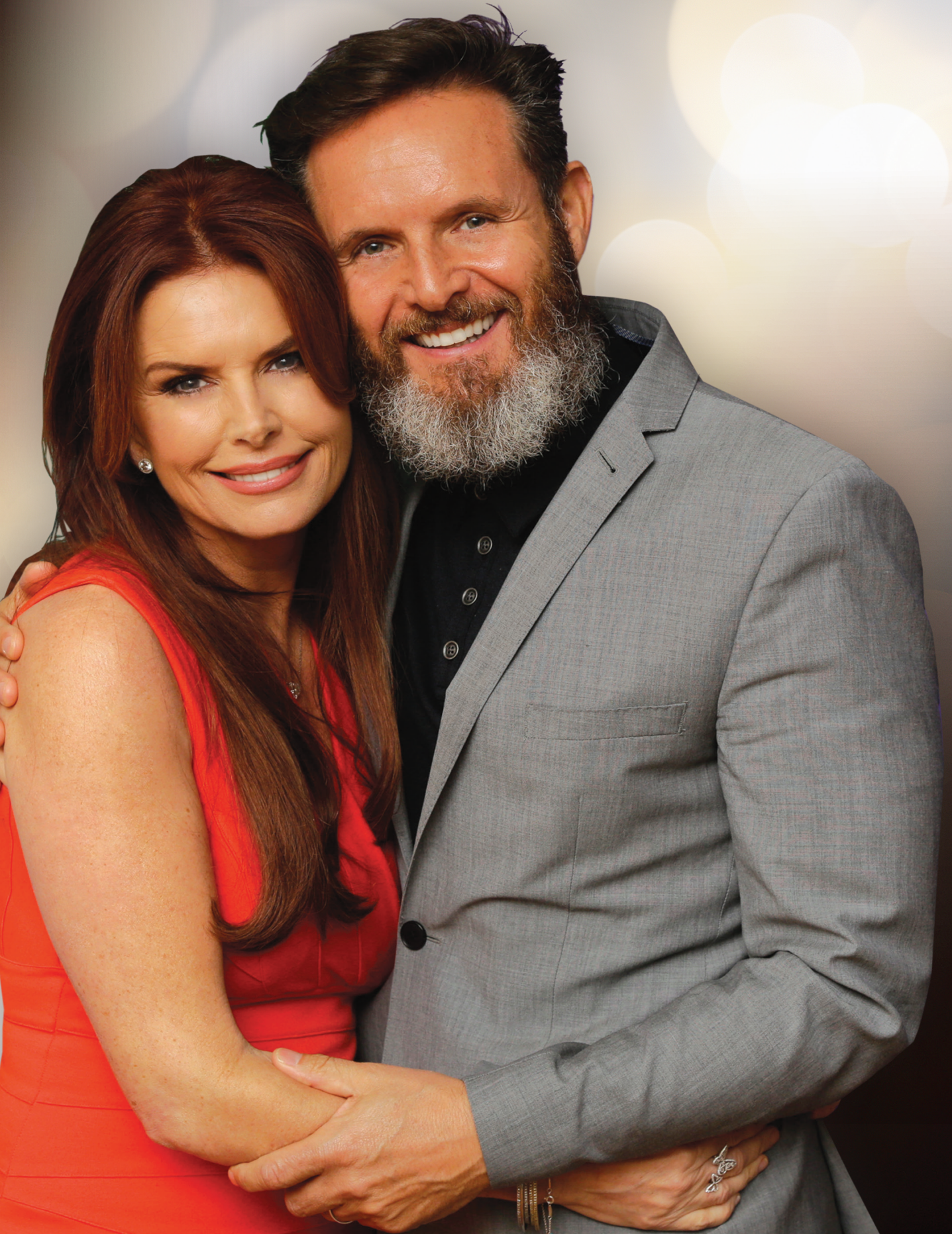
HOLLYWOOD
REPORT

HOLLYWOOD, JESUS & THE HOLY SPIRIT

BY TROY ANDERSON AND ANNE MOUNT

This Easter, the *A.D. The Bible Continues* television series by **ROMA DOWNEY & MARK BURNETT** will bring to life on screen the resurrection of Jesus, the Day of Pentecost and the birth of the church. With the flood of faith films hitting theaters, many say believers have an unprecedented opportunity to spread the Good News. Will Hollywood help Christianity make a comeback, regain its influence in culture and inspire another spiritual awakening?

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It's the Day of Pentecost—not long after Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Suddenly, a cacophony of voices begins to build.

A sound, like a "rushing mighty wind," fills the house in Jerusalem.

As the disciples and others pray in Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew, Parthian, Latin, Egyptian and in Mesopotamian tongues, flames grow brighter and brighter around them.

A light in the room intensifies, whitening out the disciples, and others in the room cower and cover their heads. The flames gather and swirl around the disciples—now ecstatic—as they recite The Lord's Prayer.

The wind, noise and flames reach a climax and then stop as suddenly as they arrived.

Now there is silence, darkness and stillness as the disciples stand in a circle—shaken by the encounter. They slowly open their eyes. All are out of breath as if they've just run for miles.

Peter then breaks the circle and goes to the shutters, flinging them open as the dark room is bathed in the dawn's light—the light of a dazzling, new Jerusalem. He glows with a supernatural energy as he turns to the room full of disciples and others.

"Now we can leave this place," Peter says. "Now we spread His Word."

For this Easter, the Day of Pentecost comes alive as producers Mark Burnett and Roma Downey's 12-part *A.D. The Bible Continues* television series starts on NBC—featuring an unexpected new star.

"The Holy Spirit is the star of *A.D.*," Downey, best known for her role in *Touched by an Angel*, told *Charisma* during a recent interview at her Malibu, California home overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

"The Holy Spirit is mentioned (nearly 60 times) in the book of Acts and when He arrives in our show it's in a beautiful, incredible Pentecostal scene. You are going to love it when you see it."

As millions of people throughout the world watch this powerful scene this Easter, many are asking whether the

A.D. series and a flood of Bible films and TV shows could help Christianity not only make a comeback and regain its lost influence in the culture, but take the gospel message to a lost and deceived generation.

In recent years, it's seemed as though the world's largest faith has been on the rocks. Overall church attendance is plateaued or declining—though the Pentecostal/charismatic movement is growing rapidly. The percentage of the "nones," the religiously unaffiliated, has soared from 8 percent in 1990 to 20 percent. Meanwhile, the "New Atheists" are declaring the pending death of Christianity, many believe the "Great Falling Away" is underway, and most agree morality is in a free fall.

Amid these disturbing trends, something completely unexpected has occurred—Hollywood has inexplicably stepped up and is releasing a flurry of faith films and TV shows.

"In 2015, Christianity may be making a comeback," says Phil Cooke, a filmmaker, media consultant and an internationally-known writer. "Hollywood apparently saw it coming."

Is Jesus Making a Comeback?

Kate Linder, a longtime actress on *The Young and the Restless* who starred in the recent film *Miss Meadows*, says it seems Hollywood is trying to figure out how it can "get back on track."

"I think what's happening is the world has just gotten a little crazy and people are searching for things to hang onto," Linder told *Charisma* while attending Movieguide's 23rd Annual Faith & Values Awards Gala in Universal City, California. "For me, it's always important to go back to the basics and remember where we have come from."

The *A.D.* television series is just one of many Bible-based TV shows and films coming out over the next few years. Arriving on the heels of last year's record-breaking box office hits *Son of God*, *God's Not Dead* and *Heaven is for Real*, Hollywood is releasing a deluge of faith entertainment. In fact, these films and TV shows were so plentiful—and profitable—that commentators dubbed 2014 "The Year of the Christian Film."

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Roman soldiers watch as a supernatural light shines out of Jesus' tomb



A.D. Producer Roma Downey oversees filming in Morocco



A.D. Producer Roma Downey with Vincent Regan, who played Pilate, on the set in Morocco



Peter, played by Adam Levy, in A.D.

Largely driven by the runaway success of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (\$630 million) a decade ago, *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (\$1.6 billion) and more recently Burnett and Downey's *The Bible* series, which has been seen by more than 100 million people, numerous faith films and TV shows are now on their way to theaters and people's living rooms.

This includes a new film from the producers of *God's Not Dead* entitled *Do You Believe?* (March), Pastor John Hagee's *Four Blood Moons* (March), *Hillsong: Let Hope Rise* (April), *David and Goliath* (April), *Mary* with Ben Kingsley and Julia Ormond (April), Alex and Stephen Kendrick's *War Room* (August), *Captive* (September), *90 Minutes in Heaven* (October), Bill O'Reilly's *Killing Jesus* (2015), *Polycarp* (2015), Anne Rice's *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* (March 2016) and *Ben-Hur* (2016).

Meanwhile, Brad Pitt has mulled playing *Pontius Pilate*, director Ridley Scott is considering a *King David* film and there are plans for a remake of *The Ten Commandments*.

"I think God is definitely working in this," says Korie Robertson, a star

years. It's just unbelievable. It's definitely God at work."

Robertson says Christians "better take" advantage of this opportunity to spread the gospel via the world's most influential medium.

"Don't let it pass us by," Robertson says. "I think it's time for us to jump in there with both feet and do what we are called to do—spread His Word."

Will Jesus 'Change the World' via Hollywood?

In an especially inspirational scene in

with fish, Peter asks Jesus, "How did this happen?"

Jesus tells him, "Come with me." "What are we going to do?" Peter asks. "Change the world," Jesus says.

Since Christ walked the earth 2,000 years ago, He and his followers have certainly done that. Now, many are asking whether Hollywood could be the vehicle through which Jesus radically changes the world once again.

"Are we changing the world?" Morgado asked rhetorically as he fielded questions from *Charisma* on the red



Diogo Morgado, who played Jesus in *Son of God*, and Darwin Shaw, who played Peter, field questions at the 23rd Annual Movieguide Awards



Duck Dynasty star Korie Robertson, left, and her family, pose for a picture with Movieguide founder Dr. Ted Baehr at the Movieguide Awards

on the A&E show *Duck Dynasty* who accepted The Epiphany Prize at the Movieguide gala. "I've been talking to people in the industry who are telling us how their attitudes have changed toward Christianity over the last few

years. It's just unbelievable. It's definitely God at work." the *Son of God* film produced by Burnett and Downey, Jesus (played by actor Diogo Morgado) tells Peter (Darwin Shaw) to drop his nets again even though there are "no fish out there."

After pulling in a net bursting

with fish, Peter asks Jesus, "How did this happen?" "What are we going to do?" Peter asks. "Change the world," Jesus says. "Are we changing the world?" Morgado asked rhetorically as he fielded questions from *Charisma* on the red

carpet. "We're always trying to change the world and for me all that matters is that we keep pushing for good things and for love because the message of Jesus Christ was that—it was being kind to each other and loving each other." Morgado says the world is in desperate need of Jesus' love and the massive popularity of *The Bible* series, the box office success of *Son of God* and the *A.D.* series are "just a reflection of that sense of craving."

"I think the younger generation is a little bit lost sometimes with no sense of direction and so I'm saying there is definitely a new wave of opportunities (with faith-based films and TV shows) that can inspire and touch people—and that's tremendous," Morgado says.

Shaw, who accompanied Morgado on the red carpet, says the doors of Hollywood are open for "re-examining

Is Christianity Making a Comeback? It is in Hollywood

The “New Atheists” say God is dead, but surveys suggest Hollywood and the public aren’t buying it. This year it will be obvious that Christianity is back.

Everywhere we turn today the “New Atheists” are proclaiming that religious belief is dead. After all (as they say), *no one in their right mind could actually believe in God anymore*. But while nonbelieving cultural elites in media, academia and entertainment may be the *loudest* voices in the room, a new Pew Research Study indicates they’re becoming the smallest group in the room. Among its findings:

- » Of all U.S. adults, 73 percent believes Jesus was born to a virgin.
- » Up to 81 percent believes the baby Jesus was actually laid in a manger.
- » And 74 percent believes an angel announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds nearby.

And just when you thought these numbers reflected the Bible Belt, it turns out that 54 percent of liberals believes in the virgin birth, and for adults with postgraduate degrees, 53 percent affirms the virgin birth of Jesus.

So the question is: In what seems to be a secular culture, where has Christianity been?

Early in the 20th century, the church embraced motion pictures and radio, then television and now the Internet and social media. But in the vast majority of cases today, we’re not using those platforms to engage the greater culture, but instead living inside a bubble. From the web, to publishing, to record labels, TV networks, universities and more, the last 50 years have seen a remarkable withdrawal from mainstream culture and a move back to a cloistered, protective bubble.

In all honesty, the church hasn’t been losing its voice, we’ve been giving it away. As a result, we’ve lost remarkable influence in the culture. So while the majority of the population still professes religious belief, will Christianity ever regain its influence in the culture? I believe it can, and there are plenty of signposts:

» Vibrant churches are growing in major urban centers around the United States. Young pastors who have a passion for their cities find it difficult to locate facilities large enough for the crowds.

» A new generation of talented writers, filmmakers, musicians, and other artists are unapologetic about their faith. They’re breaking out of traditional Christian-branded record labels, film distributors and publishers, and finding success with mainstream audiences.

» Episodic television programs like Mark Burnett and Roma Downey’s *The Bible* series broke audience records in the United States. Their new series, *A.D. The Bible Continues*, based on the New Testament book of Acts, debuts this Spring.

» In 2017, the **Museum of the Bible** opens in Washington, D.C. The magnificent, state-of-the-art museum is under construction and will showcase the history, story and impact of the Bible in the world.

» I’m an executive producer of the movie *Let Hope Rise*, a concert feature film on the world’s most popular worship band, Hillsong United. A major Hollywood studio—Warner Brothers—is releasing the film nationwide in April.

Honestly, it shouldn’t be a surprise. When the Iron Curtain fell, we discovered that communism couldn’t silence the church, and despite horrific torture and executions by ISIS militants, Christians refuse to recant. So it shouldn’t be shocking that here in the West, for all the criticism and clatter from unbelievers or advertising campaigns from atheists, Christianity is actually growing.

In 2015, it will be obvious that Christianity is back. But truthfully, it never left.

PHIL COOKE, Ph.D., is a filmmaker, media consultant, and author of *Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media*.



Phil Cooke, Ph.D.

these amazing stories which have shaped the foundations of Western society for the last 2,000 years.”

“I think a lot of people have sort of forgotten these stories and they have been sort of lost to the younger generation,” says Shaw, who played Adam in the remake of the 1979 *Jesus* film that has been seen by billions of people and resulted in more than 200 million decisions to follow Jesus. “So anything that actually helps people ... in this complicated world that we are living in is a wonderful thing.”

Will Billions See *The Bible* and *A.D.*?

Just as the *Jesus* film is considered “one of the greatest evangelistic tools of all time,” Burnett—producer of *Survivor* and *The Apprentice*—believes *Son of God*, *The Bible* and the *A.D.* series will also be viewed by an innumerable multitude. In an interview in early 2014, Burnett said *The Bible* series will be “seen in every country of the world. More people will see this series than everything we ever made together—combined. Billions of people will see this series.”

“What we have here, because we are on network television, is the potential to reach an even bigger audience (than *The Bible* miniseries),” Downey says.

The 12-part *A.D.* series begins on April 5, picking up where *The Bible* series left off, and follows the first 10 chapters of the book of Acts exploring the aftermath of Christ’s death and its impact on the disciples and political and religious leaders of the era—“an impact that would completely change the world.”

At a time when films about the Bible are “often gross distortions of what actually happened,” Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren says, “you can always count on Mark Burnett and Roma Downey to stay true to the Scriptures, treating miracles as actual miracles.

“With a stellar track record of both *The Bible* television series and the *Son of God* movie, Mark and Roma are now bringing *A.D.*, the exciting story of ... Acts, to the screen as a gift to the entire

church,” Warren says.

Number of Faith Films Soaring

The release of *A.D., The Bible, Son of God* and similar films and TV shows is, in a way, the culmination of decades of hard work by such figures as Dr. Ted Baehr, founder of Movieguide (movieguide.org), Karen Covell, founder of the Hollywood Prayer Network (hollywoodprayernetwork.org), John Ware, founder of the 168 Film Project, and many others.

For 23 years, Baehr has prepared the Annual Report to the Entertainment Industry showing that moviegoers prefer “clean, heroic, family-friendly movies with Christian, biblical, redemptive, conservative, and patriotic faith and values.”

For example, 90 percent of the top 10 movies in 2014 contained strong or very strong Christian, redemptive, biblical and moral worldviews, including *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Frozen* and *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*. Last year, movies with very strong Christian, redemptive worldviews following biblical principles averaged \$67 million at the box office compared to \$20 million for movies with very strong non-Christian worldviews.

From 1991 to 2014, the percentage of movies with at least some Christian, redemptive content increased from 10 percent to 62 percent.

“I think God would love to have this happen consistently,” Baehr says. “God is interested in redeeming the media and I just see that He’s been able to get some people’s hearts and minds (in Hollywood) changed so they want to do just that.”

Pat Boone, a legendary singer and actor who starred in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and *The Cross and the Switchblade*, says he’s thrilled by the transformation in Hollywood.

“The films like *Fireproof*, *Heaven Is for Real* and *God’s Not Dead* have done extremely well at the box office and the film industry is realizing there is a huge market out there that doesn’t want zombies, vampires and every kind of violence and depravity known to human beings,” says Boone, who plays “Doc



The legendary actor and singer Pat Boone at the Movieguide Awards

Woods” in the recent faith-based film *Booneville Redemption*.

“Ted Baehr keeps pointing out that if you want to be a success and make money with your films, make something that the whole family can go see. That’s what built Hollywood to begin with.”

Boone says film and television are “so powerful and influential” that God isn’t “going to relinquish them.”

“In fact, I don’t think we came up with (films and TV shows) ourselves,” Boone says. “I think He meant it for good because films like *The Ten Commandments* have always been huge

box-office winners. The biggest ones have almost always been ones with some kind of faith element in them and now they’re coming back.”

Growing Demand for Bible Movies

As demand for faith-based entertainment grows, Hollywood seems to be listening. A recent survey by LifeWay Research found 56 percent of Americans indicated they want more movies with Christian values.

“Faith-based movies are no longer a niche,” LifeWay Research Vice President Scott McDonnell says. “It’s smart economics—if you make a film that appeals to that audience, they will show up.”

Randall Wallace, the screenwriter for *Braveheart*, says Hollywood has discovered there is an influential audience that craves movies that respect and recognize the importance of a spiritual search.

“I intend to do more movies that celebrate our faith because I believe everyone craves inspiration and authentic spiritual connection,” Wallace says.

It seems Hollywood is becoming more receptive to faith-based films,



Beginning this Easter, the *A.D. The Bible Continues* series on NBC follows the events taking place after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ

How to Be an Ambassador for Christ in Hollywood

It's easy to lose your way in the 'world's most influential mission field.' Mimi Sagadin and other believers offer tips on navigating Hollywood.

When Mimi Sagadin got her first role on a Hollywood set as actress Emma Thompson's stand-in, she was ecstatic. She never dreamed God would help her fulfill her childhood dream of becoming an actress. Yet she remembered the real reason she was there when an unbeliever on the set joked that they might as well "hurry up and die to see what's on the other side."

Without missing a beat, Sagadin replied, "I know what's on the other side." The ensuing conversation was a divine appointment that opened the door to sharing the gospel. She recounts a number of similar opportunities, several of which resulted in people making commitments to Christ. Sagadin compares her most recent role as Corrie ten Boom in *Return to the Hiding Place* to Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. It reminded her of her call: to be an ambassador for Christ in Hollywood.

"We want to be infiltrators," Sagadin says. "We want to be the rivers in the desert of Hollywood."

After all, Hollywood is the world's most influential mission field. Few other industries reach as many people groups around the world. Christians making faith-based films have the chance to produce excellent work that impacts viewers with biblical truths, and on secular sets they have numerous opportunities to share their faith.

One young Christian actor, much to his executive producer's chagrin, inspired his co-workers to stop cursing on the set simply by showcasing Christ with a pure life.

Being a Christian in Hollywood, though, is no walk in the park. Some of the biggest struggles are isolation and depression. Few people working in Hollywood can earn enough to live without a supplemental income. Because of the intense competition and frequent rejections for roles, Christian actors can quickly get discouraged.

In response, Karen Covell started the Hollywood Prayer Network (hollywoodprayernetwork.org) in 2001, giving Christian actors and filmmakers an opportunity to connect with a prayer partner. Covell says she tries "to get (believers in Hollywood) connected with other people, to stay strong in their faith, so that they're ready to deal with the spiritual temptation."

This is also why Covell strongly encourages Hollywood Christians to get plugged in to a local church. With that support, they are more effective for Christ in their work and in impacting hearts.

"We will never see a change in the content of Hollywood until we see a change in the hearts of those creating content," Covell says.

Actor, writer and producer Shun Lee Fong also recognizes loneliness and discouragement as major struggles for Christians in Hollywood.

Through Greenhouse Arts & Media (greenhouseproductions.com) and Hollywood Connect (hollywoodconnect.com), he and his peers provide Christians and nonbelievers alike with training in their craft, financial and career advice, networking opportunities and relational support. Fong has a heart for Hollywood because "artists have a prophetic edge in their culture today. Not just locally and nationally, but globally. They're culture-shapers."

Yes, Christians exist in Hollywood, and they desperately need our prayers. They are on the frontlines of a battlefield that Satan does not want to give up. We as Christians can be supportive of our brothers and sisters in Hollywood by getting behind them, giving financially and, above all, interceding for them.

JENNY ROSE CURTIS is a writer and copy editor for Charisma and Charisma Media Group.

says Michael Scott, producer of *Do You Believe?* and *God's Not Dead*.

"Hollywood saw *The Passion of the Christ* come and go and I think this 'stir' is happening a second time, except they saw it in triplicates with *Son of God*, *God's Not Dead* and *Heaven Is for Real*," Scott says.

Scott's hope is that *Do You Believe?* will reach not only the Christian audience, but nonbelievers as well. "This can be our rallying cry," Scott says.

Another indicator of Hollywood's openness to faith-based films is the fact that Tim Gray, president of Gray Media, a media marketing company that promoted *God's Not Dead*, was invited to speak at the Sundance Film Festival about faith on film. It was the first time such a discussion was held, Gray says.

"Sundance is the world's largest independent film festival started by Robert Redford," Gray says. "This panel discussion is a big step. They have recognized, just like the world has recognized, that we are a huge audience. We may be a niche audience, but we are a huge niche."

Ware, founder of the 168 Film Project (168film.com), says the atmosphere in Hollywood presents tremendous opportunities for Christian filmmakers and screenwriters.

"I think if we had 10 amazing scripts to sell that we could sell all of them," Ware says. "We're inviting the church back to Hollywood, which has pretty much excluded it for decades. They are very receptive and that could be a real game changer."

The Passion of the Christ Shook Hollywood

Over the past decade since the blockbuster success of *The Passion of the Christ*, Hollywood has been trying to figure out the Christian market.

Mark Joseph, the founder of the MJM Entertainment Group who helped produce the rock soundtrack for *The Passion of the Christ*, explains it this way:

"Essentially, 9 million people showed up on opening week to see this movie and Hollywood didn't know who they



Karen Covell, founder of the Hollywood Prayer Network

were! Think of Hollywood like Coca-Cola. They've been making Coke for 50 years and all of a sudden 9 million new people show up who want a little bit of a different flavor and they are wondering what to do," Joseph says. "So it's taken Hollywood 10 years to try to figure out who these people are and what they want, exactly. They are now in the middle of this process."

Joseph, who has films in the works about President Ronald Reagan and the friendship between *The Lord of the Rings* author J.R.R. Tolkien and *The Chronicles of Narnia* creator C.S. Lewis, adds:

"For the past 50 years, Hollywood has made this extraordinary effort to tell stories, minus the faith. It's a bit bizarre, so if anything, there's a movement to correct that. Faith is nothing to be afraid of. It's often the driving force in a character's life."

Terry Botwick, producer of the *Captive* film about a convict who shot a judge and other court personnel and broke into the home of a woman who read Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* to him and was freed, says there have always been films that resonate with people of faith. These kinds of films

have a long history in Hollywood.

"We can think of movies all the way back to *The Ten Commandments*, as a biblical story, and *It's a Wonderful Life*, when it comes to the value of someone's life," Botwick says. "I think the difference now is there's a demonstrable market, a way to reach people of faith, and this has caught the eye of the studios and networks."

What About Independent Christian Films?

In an effort to assist independent Christian filmmakers, former U.S. Senator and presidential candidate Rick Santorum is using a unique new model to allow churches to premier faith-based films.

"Movies have a way of impacting the culture like no other medium; and we want to empower these churches with great faith-based films to be one of the instruments of change that our culture so desperately needs," says Santorum, chief executive officer of EchoLight Studios (echolightstudios.com and echolightcinemas.com).

Hollywood is receptive to independent films, but Santorum recognizes the entertainment industry is a tough business. One of his films is *Hoovey*, the true story of Erick "Hoovey" Elliot, a star basketball player who must learn to talk and walk again after a brain tumor surgery.

"With most movies, you put your film out there and its success rides on getting enough audiences to see it in the first two weeks at theaters, but with our system, in premiering *Hoovey*, churches can sign up to show it by going to our website," Santorum says. "We give the churches a two-month exclusive so they have a period of time to show this movie and other films. Our goal is to reach 1,000 churches with *Hoovey* and build from there."

Could Hollywood Ignite an Awakening?

Given the new receptivity to faith-based films and TV shows in Hollywood, many believers are beginning to recognize that this phenomenon is opening a "big door" to spread the

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Movieguide Is Transforming Hollywood—and It Needs Your Help

How to help Movieguide finish its new headquarters and encourage the entertainment industry to make more faith-based films and TV shows

Nothing succeeds like success.

Movieguide and the Christian Film & Television Commission (CFTVC) have had such tremendous success over the years, encouraging the entertainment industry to make more family-friendly and faith-based movies and television programs that they plan another expansion this year into a new building for their headquarters in Southern California.

When Movieguide (movieguide.org) and CFTVC started in 1985, there were few movies marketed to families and even fewer movies with any Christian values, much less any references to Jesus.

For example, in 1985, there was only one with clear Christian content and perhaps only two, and arguably three, major movies that had any faith elements related to Christianity at all. Last year, however, more than 62 percent of the 280 major movies released by the entertainment industry had at least some Christian content or values.

Also, since Movieguide and CFTVC began, only about 6 percent of the major movies were marketed to families, but today, at least 30 percent of the major movies are marketed to families or were deemed relatively family-friendly by Movieguide's biblical standards.

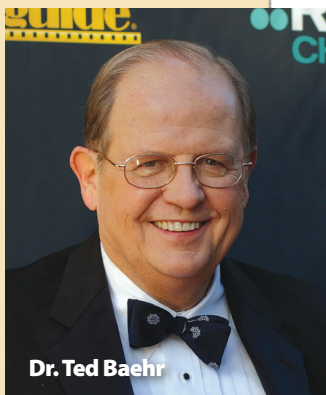
Best of all, family-friendly movies with Christian, redemptive values regularly make more money than any other kind of movie.

This success didn't just happen all by itself. It took years of working with established artists, beginning artists and key players in the entertainment industry to make movies like *Fireproof*, *The Passion of the Christ* and *God's Not Dead* or TV programs like *The Bible* miniseries a reality.

The new building for Movieguide's expanded headquarters will double the space that the ministry now has. The building is paid for, but funds are still being raised for the building's interior, which will cost \$750,000 to \$800,000.

For more information, or if you would like to make a donation, please call Movieguide and the CFTVC at (805) 383-2000.

DR. TED BAEHR is the founder and publisher of Movieguide and the chairman of the Christian Film & Television Commission, as well as a noted critic, lecturer and media pundit.



Dr. Ted Baehr



Jesus, played by Juan Pablo di Pace, in a scene in the *A.D.* series on NBC

good news.

“I just feel like we are in desperate need of another spiritual awakening,” says Andrew Erwin, the producer of *Woodlawn*, a film based on the true story of a 1970s high school football game in the midst of the Jesus Movement and racial tensions in Birmingham, Alabama. “The only way to overcome a lot of pain that is going on right now on a national scale is to have a greater law to overcome hate and that greater law is love.”

Stephen Kendrick, producer of *Courageous*, *Fireproof*, *Facing the Giants* and *War Room* coming out in August, says all believers must pray for another spiritual awakening in America.

“We asked the Lord what our next film should be about and we believe He directed us towards the topic of prayer,” Kendrick says. “When we look at the persecution going on of believers around the world and how desperately our nation and the church in America

is in need of revival and spiritual awakening, we believe that God is calling His church to their knees in prayer.”

Covell, founder of the Hollywood Prayer Network, believes Hollywood is “the world’s most influential mission field.” Over the years, she has seen the power of prayer as celebrities and others have given their lives to Christ. She estimates about 10,000 Christians are working in some way in the entertainment industry in Hollywood.

“What we are seeing today is not just the result of one generation of Christians here, but several generations,” Covell says. “It’s been a long journey to see a spiritual impact, but we are getting to the point now after people have been working here faithfully for 20, 30, 40 and even 50 years that God is opening doors, the Christian community is growing and the mindset of people in Hollywood is changing. It’s now a place unlike it ever was before.”

In the same way as the Holy Spirit is

the “star” of *A.D.*, Covell says the Holy Spirit is sweeping through Hollywood.

“I think He’s revealing Himself in miracles,” Covell says. “We are seeing many miracles. I’ve watched the Holy Spirit coming in a way that is so powerful. I believe it’s a result of years and years of praying for us to see miracles here and for us to see a revival. I believe we are seeing the beginning of it.”

‘A Blessing in the Sky’

Just as miracles purportedly occurred during the filming of *The Bible* series, a supernatural sign also accompanied the making of *A.D.*—a potential indicator of the Holy Spirit’s participation in the miniseries, Downey says.

During the filming of the scene about the trial of apostles John and Peter, Downey says a single cloud in the form of a cross appeared in the sky.

“It was totally blue skies and a clear skies’ day,” Downey says, “and suddenly a member of our crew pointed to the sky and everyone looked up and there, out of nowhere, had appeared a cloud and the cloud was in the shape of a perfect cross. It was just extraordinary. Everyone stopped.

“Cell phones, iPhones and iPads were pulled out. It was just a moment of well, you know, it felt like a moment of reassurance—that here we were in the middle of the desert (in Morocco), in the middle of nowhere, and it just felt like something approving or like a blessing in the sky. It was really lovely.” ◀

TROY ANDERSON is the executive editor of *Charisma* and the *Charisma Media Group* and a Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist, author and speaker. He spent two decades as a reporter, bureau chief, editorial writer and editor at the *Los Angeles Daily News* and other newspapers. He’s also written for *Reuters*, *Newsmax* and *Human Events*.

ANNE MOUNT is an award-winning journalist and screenwriter, and a *Literary Guild* author. Her articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *Reader’s Digest*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Redbook*, *Parents*, *McCall’s*, *Hollywood & Vine*, and many other publications. Her current screenplay, *Terror by Night*, is a true, modern-day *Job* story.

mycharisma.com

Christian Entertainment Ministries

To help you stay abreast of the world of movies and media, here is a list of a few websites:

The Dove Foundation	dove.org
Focus On The Family	focusonthefamily.org
Movieguide	movieguide.org
Family Christian	familychristian.com
Christian Cinema	christiancinema.com
True Story Christian Movies	truestorychristianmovies.com
Hollywood Prayer Network	hollywoodprayernetnetwork.org

Rediscovering the Divine in Today's Cinematic Sagas

Believers in Hollywood are also spreading gospel metaphors and moral truths with 'Trojan Horse' films

There is perhaps no richer communal experience than that of telling stories. While the vehicles through which individuals exchange understanding have grown increasingly complex, the power of story to affect hearts and minds has remained constant. In today's culture, movies have become the most effective medium to not only inspire, but also transform.

Prior to 2004, faith and family films had garnered a reputation for mawkish storylines and poor production values. With the release of *The Passion of The Christ*, Mel Gibson and Icon Productions upended expectations by elevating the genre to an art form, and identified a receptive affinity among faith audiences that "primed the pump" for mainstream audiences to follow in order to reach the box-office critical mass.

The film struck a nerve within the church, and the nearly 190 million Americans who consider themselves Christian—both Protestant and Catholic. This previously unrecognized—and thereby underserved—new market also created a wave for others in Hollywood to replicate.

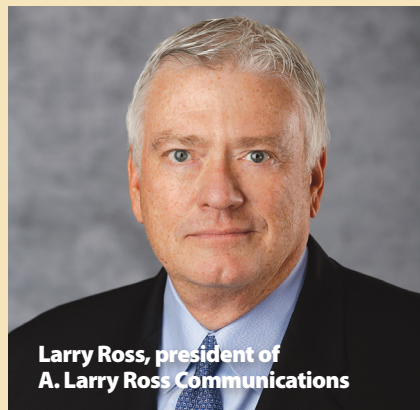
Fast-forward a decade, and media outlets as diverse as *Relevant* magazine and *The Daily Beast* proclaimed 2014 as "The Year of the Christian Movie." Indeed, numerous qualifying titles in that category were released, such as *Son of God*, *Noah*, *Exodus*, *Heaven Is for Real* and *God's Not Dead*, with more on the way this year. Some are based (albeit, at times, loosely) on the Bible, while others represent morally themed or religiously oriented films designed to reinforce and confirm strongly held biblical beliefs among the faith community.

Which begs the question "What is a Christian Movie?" Does good intent trump quality content? Do biblical themes transcend epic Bible adaptations? Can people of faith leverage truth in a storyline—even when not intentional or intended by a filmmaker—to start a spiritual conversation in their neighborhood or marketplace?

Just because a film is labeled "faith-based" does not guarantee success. Moviegoers expect and demand a storyline that not only challenges but also entertains. Some titles exhibiting a didactic, moralizing approach

to the Christian message do well with church audiences but fail to crossover to the mainstream.

Other movies incorporating authentic characters and uplifting storylines might be considered "faith light," but in a good way—celebrating a Christian worldview while not overtly preaching it. They also tap into emotions and affect the heart—more than



Larry Ross, president of
A. Larry Ross Communications

the brain—and it is out of the heart that actions spring.

Since Christian leaders and pastors have a ministry rather than a marketing mindset, they will support or endorse a film for one of two reasons: if it edifies their constituency or congregation or if it provides an outreach opportunity to the local community.

However, while providing publicity and marketing support of faith and family films for nearly two decades, I have realized there is a third "Trojan Horse" approach that includes projects in which spiritual themes are subtly woven into the very texture of a movie. Further, moral truths—even gospel metaphors—emerge as subtext, rather than overt messages, providing occasion for audiences to engage, explore and apply them according to their personal worldview.

The resulting impact is less about the answers given than the questions raised, and takes place not on the screen, but over coffee afterwards as believers discuss and interpret elements of the story with a friend who might never accompany them to church, but will go with them to the theater.

According to Barna Research, "From the injustice of slavery in *12 Years a Slave*, to the

effects of narcissism on our relationships in *Her*, to the idolatry of greed in *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *American Hustle*, many of (2013's) Best Picture nominations explored profoundly moral questions. For better or worse, movies are often considered to be significant societal influences."

Producers and directors who are Christians are becoming more talented, and studios that recognize the interest in and import of spiritual themes are more commonly releasing such films into the marketplace.

At the same time, fellow believers can be similarly open to Trojan Horse entertainment projects that contain spiritual messages or meaning—whether or not intended by the producer or director. A film should not be discounted merely because it isn't perceived or positioned as "Christian."

People outside the church are flocking to see today's tent pole blockbusters and independent releases. Many motion pictures—from *Interstellar* to *The Hunger Games* and *Iron Man*—have sometimes obvious but often oblique storylines that represent allegory to the gospel or address moral questions and inspirational themes that can provide a springboard for authentic spiritual dialogue using the cultural lexicon.

Filmmakers are among the guardians of the Zeitgeist who set the "spirit of the times." Guided by the Holy Spirit, people of faith who attend movies have an unprecedented opportunity to identify spiritual "ahas" or leverage the "divine moments" in movies their friends and neighbors are already attending—or go with them to the cinema.

Hollywood may unknowingly be doing the church a favor, as we "seize the day" and take what some may say is intended for evil, and use it for good—and for God.

LARRY ROSS is president of A. Larry Ross Communications, a full-service agency providing crossover media liaison at the intersection of faith and culture. With more than 38 years experience influencing public opinion, Ross' mission is to "restore faith in media," by providing Christian messages relevance and meaning in mainstream media. Follow him on Twitter @alarryross.