

CharisMatters

Hollywood Targets Christians With Film About Kindness

* Is Hollywood doing a good deed with its October release of Pay It Forward?

A star-studded, Oscar-caliber movie with a plot about changing the world through acts of kindness, the Warner Bros. film would appear to be a bounty for “family values.” But as lofty as its producer’s goals may be, this is not a good Samaritan epic.

The enduringly huggable Haley Joel Osment (The Sixth Sense) delivers a gripping, tear-jerking performance as the seventh-grade hero Trevor McKinney. When his social studies teacher, Eugene Simonet (Kevin Spacey), assigns the class a yearlong project, Trevor devises “pay it forward.”

Under the plan, each person in the world does something nice for three people. In turn, those three people perform good deeds for three others, and so forth, like an Amway grid, until everyone in the world has been touched.

Trevor first tries to help a homeless man, which is as close to the good Samaritan story as Pay It Forward comes. His other good deeds include hooking his teacher up with his single

mother, Arlene (Helen

Hunt), and defending a classmate who is attacked by schoolyard bullies.

Unbeknownst to Trevor, the good deeds become contagious. Some of them can be applauded. But others must be questioned.

Angie Dickinson, who plays Arlene's mother, delivers a potent lesson on forgiveness. But one "deed" is helping a burglar escape from police officers. And when Eugene and Arlene do get together, the unmarried couple have sex, albeit offscreen.

While Pay It

Forward is an improvement on the morality scale for Hollywood, this is not a Christian movie. In fact, God is only mentioned when His name is taken in vain, and New Age spiritualism gets a plug.

The film's strength lies in the good deed concept. Author Catherine Ryan Hyde has started a foundation and has designed a "pay it forward" project that can be implemented in American classrooms.

—Steven Lawson

BEFORE JESUS, AFTER JESUS

Drugs and Occultism Give Way to True Faith

* Larry Smith didn't know who he was, who God was, or what his life's purpose was. So he began early to experiment with worldly dangers to find answers.

Smith was born in Baltimore in 1958 and grew up in Laurel, Md. He was the seventh of 10 children. "We didn't think much of our parents' judgment, so we did our own thing, and it tore us apart," Smith said.

At age 12, Smith started smoking pot. At 15, he started abusing alcohol. "I wanted the truth but couldn't find it in a joint or a beer can. So I moved on."

Smith was fascinated by the occult. He read books on witches, warlocks, mind control, demons and witchcraft. He soon believed he had supernatural powers and declared himself a warlock. He stayed absorbed by the occult for three more years.

On a Friday night in 1976, Smith and his pot-smoking buddy Brian went to a wooded area to meet other partakers. As they indulged, friends Paul and Jeff abstained. They were talking about Jesus.

"They told us we were sinners, but they didn't accuse us or look down on us as

though they were 'pure' and we were 'trash,'" Smith said. Then they taught Larry and Brian the gospel.

As their hearts pounded, Smith and his friend prayed to receive Jesus and asked for their sins

to be forgiven. Today, Smith lives in Venice, Fla. He uses his testimony to win others to Christ and offers his phone number to anyone who needs a listening ear: (941) 492-6392.

—Billy Bruce

Even Stooges Need Jesus!

* Slapstick star Larry Fine, still making people laugh in reruns of The Three Stooges, got serious at least once in his life—when he prayed to receive Christ. The Jewish star was led to make his commitment by a young orderly at the Motion Picture and Television Hospital in Los Angeles in the early 1970s, Charisma has learned.

Now an associate pastor at a Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Eagle River, Alaska, Samuel Fields was working at the hospital when Fine was admitted after a stroke. They struck up a conversation one day, and Fields began to share his faith.

“I asked him if he would like to have the kind of relationship that Moses and Abraham had with God, and he totally surprised me by saying yes,” Fields said. He told Fine about salvation, and the actor prayed to receive Christ.

“It was incredible,” Fields recalled. “He got quite emotional. There were tears in his eyes, and he said to me, ‘It gets you right here,’ and put his hand over his heart.”

Fields visited Fine several times before the actor went home—and once arranged for him to attend a meeting by healing

evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman. "He sat through the whole service and really enjoyed it," he said.

Fields, who pastored a church in Germany for 12 years before returning to the United States, said he did not believe Fine—who died in 1975—spoke of his conversion to anyone else. "As far as his friends, I'm sure they didn't know."

—Andy Butcher

Watchdogs Warn of 'Freaky' Link to Witchcraft

* FOX's new TV show Freaky Links has roused the naysayers. Rumors have floated around that it

promotes the occult,

charades as a front for witchcraft, and is evil itself emanating from television and computer screens.

No doubt, Freaky Links, produced by the same people who brought the world The Blair Witch Project, attempts to go where no other TV show has ventured before. No doubt, the format fo

sters discussion of everything strange, including demonic activities.

But FOX Television spokesperson Melissa Wolverton denies a direct connection with witchcraft or endorsement of any religion. Rather, she says, Freaky Links forges new ground in linking television and the Internet.

Watchdogs warn that children will have access to information about the occult, can openly discuss witchcraft and will compare spells. Indeed Freaky Links does not censure the type of testimony recorded, only the language used.

—Steven Lawson

THE NOVEMBER LIST

No. 1 Christian hardback: He Chose The Nails, Max Lucado (Word)

No. 1 paperback: The Power of a Praying Wife, Stormie Omartian (Harvest House)

No. 1 fiction book: The Redemption of Sarah Cain, Beverly Lewis (Bethany House)

No. 1 CD: Mountain High Valley Low, Yolanda Adams (Elektra)