

What's Behind the Recent Success of Faith-Based Movies?

What's behind the recent success of faith-based movies and television programs in Hollywood? The question isn't what, but who?

For 22 years, Ted Baehr and the family-friendly faith-based awards show he and his magazine Movieguide founded have been handing out awards and cash prizes to the best, most inspiring and most faith-friendly movies and television programs released by Hollywood.

Within five years of the first awards show in 1993, Hollywood produced a major movie, *Amistad*, containing an overt presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a major animated movie about Moses and the Exodus called *The Prince of Egypt*, and *The Apostle*, a film about a wayward preacher who finds redemption preaching the gospel.

In 2004, the entertainment world was shocked by the \$611 million blockbuster success of an R-rated movie about Jesus, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.

Following soon thereafter were such successes as *The Blind Side*, several popular movies based on the Christian fantasy novels of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, and smaller independent successes like *Amazing Grace*, *Facing the Giants*, *Fireproof*, *Soul Surfer* and *Courageous*.

Even Superman went to church for answers while Spider-Man went to the foot of the cross in *Spider-Man 3*, Iron Man exorcised his personal demons and Captain America declared (in *Marvel's The Avengers*) "There's only one God."

Then, in 2013, the dam burst when *The Bible* and *Duck Dynasty*, two faith-based programs, set the TV world on fire, and a little movie called *42* showed the world that the man who truly broke the color barrier in baseball and paved the way for the 1960s civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King and his friend Ralph Abernathy was Jesus Christ.

Suddenly, as the old year gave way to new hope, several faith-based movies captured the box office in the spring of 2014, led by the No. 1 movies *Son of God* and *Noah*, followed by the surprising success of *God's Not Dead* and *Heaven Is for Real*, two small movies that stunned the naysayers with box office receipts of \$59 million and \$82 million, respectively.

"This success should come as no surprise," Baehr says.

"As Superman tells Lois Lane in *Superman Returns*, people want and need a savior. They want to see inspiring movies that celebrate the true, the good and the beautiful. They want to see justice prevail over injustice and compassion overcome cruelty. They love heroes who are willing to sacrifice themselves for their fellow human beings, as Jesus did."

Baehr noted that, when you adjust for inflation, two of the top movies are *The Sound of Music*, about a former nun who transforms a family, and *The Ten Commandments*, with *Ben-Hur* not far behind.

"Even movies like *Star Wars* and *E.T.* are redemptive allegories that reflect the story of Jesus," he opines.

Besides holding Movieguide's Annual Faith & Values Awards and Report to the Entertainment Industry every year at Oscar time, Baehr and his staff consult with screenwriters, filmmakers, producers, studio executives, production heads and other industry leaders about their ideas, screenplays and upcoming projects. That includes telling them what people of faith and values, including parents with children, want to see in movies and on television.

"We like to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative," Baehr explains, "so that Hollywood learns that people crave family-friendly and faith-friendly material that inspires them and uplifts them and amazes them, in a good way.

"People's lives are already hard enough," he adds. "So why bring them more misery, more ugliness, more despair? And, if they learn a positive lesson along the way, so much the better!"

He notes there are more than billion Christians in the world and that 50 percent or more of them regularly go to church.

Baehr says he and his group are a Christian ministry. They define the gospel of Jesus Christ, he says, by pointing to biblical passages such as John 1:9, John 3:16-21, 1 Corinthians 15, and Philippians 4:8:

"Jesus died for the sins of every person and was buried, but rose from the dead. He brings true enlightenment to all people and promises eternal life, abundant happiness, and infinite love to all those who believe in Him. Finally, He wants us to focus on whatever is true, noble, good, lovely, admirable, pure and excellent."

Author of many books, including *The Culture-Wise Family* and *How To Succeed in Hollywood (Without Losing Your Soul)*, Baehr is chairman of the Christian Film & Television Commission (CFTVC) and its family guide to movies and entertainment, Movieguide.

CFTVC and Movieguide are an international, nonprofit ministry dedicated to "redeeming the values of the entertainment industry by influencing industry executives and by informing and equipping the public about the influence of the entertainment media."

Each year at the Faith & Values Awards, Baehr presents highlights from Movieguide's Annual Report to the

Entertainment Industry, a comprehensive financial analysis of the movie business showing that moviegoers prefer family-friendly movies with Christian, biblical, traditional, patriotic, freedom-loving, capitalist and constitutional content and values. Every quarter, he teaches a four-day filmmaking workshop teaching students the tools of the trade.