

New Film Explores Persecuted Church

In persecuted nations, suffering comes along with the faith, says KP Yohannan, author, speaker and founder of Gospel for Asia. "But in America," says filmmaker Daniel Lusko, "we don't know about suffering for our faith. I believe, biblically, persecution is going to happen and we need to be prepared for it."

Lusko is so passionate about the issue of persecution that he is investing his talent, time and soul in a new movie called *The Persecuted*, which spotlights the issue in a Hitchcock-like way. He has produced and directed several docudramas including "Inside the Revolution" and "Epicenter."

"A year and a half ago," says Lusko, "I was praying about what the Lord would have me do after making these documentaries. I felt Him leading me to create a project that would reach the world and the persecuted nations."

"One night I was awakened and sat up in bed, and the whole story was really all there," he says of *The Persecuted*. "It was about an evangelist, like a Billy Graham, [and] at the height of his evangelistic career of spreading the simple gospel truth, America becomes an unwelcoming environment for the gospel."

Lusko believes the movie has a prophetic message for people all around the world and especially in the western world where, he says, "we're sort of melded into the culture as Christians and gain this materialistic comfort—what I call Cadillac Christianity—that suffering isn't something we know."

The Persecuted, says Lusko, who is directing and producing the movie, will take viewers on an action-packed thrill ride. The main character, nationally acclaimed evangelist John Luther,

is the last obstacle in the way of sweeping religious reform in the States. When a U.S. Senator and Luther's own supporters abduct and frame him in the murder of an innocent teenage girl, an unprecedented era of persecution is unleashed.

As evangelist turned fugitive, Luther vows to expose anyone involved with or profiting from the girl's murder; a mission that brings him face-to-face with the coming storm of persecution that will threaten the entire Christian community in America.

It's a story that could be ripped from the headlines—and one that has drawn the interest and participation of some noted film professionals.

Gray Frederickson, whose credits include co-producing the three *The Godfather* films and *Apocalypse Now*, has signed on as executive producer. It's the first faith-based project that Frederickson has worked on.

Kevin Sorbo has just announced he will play the lead role of "John Luther" in the film. He is widely known for the unforgettable role of "Hercules" and in the faith-based film produced by Jerry Jenkins called *What If*. Sorbo was most recently seen in the movie *Soul Surfer* as the man who saves Bethany Hamilton.

"Kevin Sorbo is a trusted actor in the faith community with the most piercing eyes, and frankly he just fits the character of our 'John Luther' down to the bone," says Lusko.

Stephen Baldwin will play a "Judas Iscariot" type character in the story.

Producers are aiming for a strong grassroots following cultivated through the relationship developed with religious organizations such as the Calvary Chapel. Skip Heitzig, Lusko's pastor, says, "*The Persecuted* will bring critical focus to a little-discussed but mounting issue."

Lusko says God has put on his heart that proceeds from the movie should be sent to organizations like the Voice of the Martyrs or Samaritan's Purse, and to countries overseas that really need resources.

"I deeply want to re-invent the way mainstream audiences experience The Gospel through motion pictures," Lusko adds.

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