

Lord, we know that you are great, and more powerful than all of our fears. Help us to be fearless in confronting the evil one in the world, and in being faithful to you. Amen.

01.2006 Our Faith *In Action*

CONNECTING FAITH TO CURRENT EVENTS

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Lighting a Candle

No doubt now. A month after hitting the theaters *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is proclaimed a success, having made \$474 million worldwide, surpassing the \$180 million of production costs.

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Our Faith *In Action*

The effect of this movie on Hollywood was a surprise to some, because of its “frankly religious element,” as *New York Times* reporter Charles McGrath wrote. “...Not just an undercurrent of all-purpose, feel-good religiosity, but a rigorous substratum of no-nonsense, orthodox Christianity... These stories are all about death and resurrection, salvation and damnation.”

In this lesson we will look at the example of Philip Anschutz, the man behind the box-office hit, and how his motivation and decision to bring Gospel values to Hollywood made this movie a success.



Photo of Philip Anschutz (AP photo)

THE MAN BEHIND THE MOVIE

Philip Anschutz had always been a risk-taker, building a billion dollar fortune through various business ventures. In recent years he has combined this willingness to take risk with a **conviction** to stake out a new course in the business of making movies. “I had been complaining about movies and their content for years,” Anschutz said in a Hillsdale College speech in February 2004. “Four or five years ago I decided to stop cursing the darkness and instead, to do something about it by getting into the film business.”

An idea is not enough if not backed up with enough **determination** to get beyond the obstacles and criticism. “The movie business is not a very good business in many ways. No one with any sense would get into it,” said Anschutz. “My friends think I’m a candidate for a lobotomy, and my competitors think I’m **naive** or stupid, or both.”



Bible Blurbs

He said to them, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” (Mk 16:15)

You are the light of the world. ... Just so, your light must shine before others (Mt 5:14-16)

What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. (Mt 10:27)



MAKINGS OF A GOOD MOVIE

Making a movie that is both value-laden and successful is not easy. Good intentions are not enough. You need a **compelling** script, strong financing, and **professionalism**.

Anschutz chose a good script. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* has attracted readers for years. It is not only Christian in inspiration; it also works as a story. The drama of greatness and weakness makes us identify with the characters. The story’s ability to show that we are not alone but are connected to one another and to God moves us deeply.

CALCULATED RISK

Anschutz put his money where his mouth is. The rights to make a movie of *The Chronicles of Narnia* were up for bid, and Anschutz personally sought them from the estate of the author, C.S. Lewis. Douglas Gresham, Lewis’s stepson, told the *Los Angeles Times* that it was his admiration for Anschutz that made him decide to sell it to him and his company. “I believe he’s a man of **faith**, probably someone who’s had some realizations in his life, and is trying to carry them out,” concluded Gresham.

The additional 180 million dollars to produce the movie also involved a big risk, even for a billionaire. He put up much of that money. Some of Anschutz’s previous movies, such as *Around the World in 80 Days*, have been flops, so there was no guarantee of success. The willingness of Anschutz to risk hundreds of millions of dollars, in spite of previous failure, is a powerful testimony to the **courage of his conviction**.

AN UNLIKELY TEAM

Anschutz also opted for professionalism and **astuteness**.

Two men who had been college roommates in the 80’s developed a partnership with Anschutz. One had been an executive of Dimension Films, and had been responsible for producing less than family-friendly films. The other has been working as a Massachusetts state Senate aide and as a creator of educational software. With Anschutz they teamed up to launch Walden Media, a “family friendly” entertainment company.

Walden decided that producing a good movie required the help of other professionals in the business.

With concern only for the good of the movie, Walden decided to share the glory by choosing a partner to share the costs and the profits. They chose the unlikely Walt Disney Pictures, which had lost its “family-friendly” reputation in Christian circles, but was looking to make a comeback.

Disney in turn opted for **teamwork** with the same Christian marketing firm who made “*The Passion of the Christ*” a success. Together, these companies not only made a successful movie, but joined forces momentarily to make Christian values present in our world.

SAINT OR BUSINESSMAN?

Philip Anschutz, who has his hand in over 100 businesses, was ranked the nation’s 28th richest person by *Forbes* magazine, and the “greediest executive in America.” Some say he is just taking advantage of a market that is demanding higher quality films in the wake of other successful Christian-based themes, and using the Church to sell it.

In his Hillsdale speech, he asked: “Is this preponderance of R-rated films simply—as we hear so often—a response to the market? I would say not, considering that of the top 20 moneymaking films of all time, not a single one is rated R, and of the top 50, only five are rated R—with the remainder being G or PG.” Are his PG-rated films, then, only a response to the market as well?

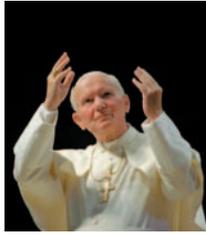
Anyone who works with him knows that he takes a firm stance against sex, vulgar language and violence in his films. He helped to fund the movie *Ray*, but insisted that director Taylor Hackford take out all four-letter words and be less explicit about the womanizing problems in Ray Charles’s life. Though the director was initially hesitant to comply, he was rewarded when his film was nominated for Best Picture, and won the Oscar for Best Actor (Jamie Foxx).

Anschutz’s money doesn’t create his convictions; quite the opposite-- sticking to his convictions actually puts his money at risk. “You need to bring your own money and be willing to spend it,” he said. “Otherwise, Hollywood doesn’t see you as a serious player.”

RAGSTO RICHES

Perhaps his convictions are what motivated him to rise to the top in the first place. Born in Kansas, he had to learn to work hard from an early age to keep his family financially stable.

At the encouragement of his mother, Anschutz began working at 14 as a yard worker, a messenger,



Pope Quotes

“The world of mass media also has need of Christ’s redemption.”
(Pope John Paul II Apostolic Letter *The Rapid Development* January 25 2005)

“The Church is not only called upon to use the mass media to spread the Gospel but, today more than ever, to integrate the message of salvation into the “new culture” that these powerful means of communication create and amplify. (Pope John Paul II, *The Rapid Development*)

“In the communications media the Church finds a precious aid for spreading the Gospel and religious values, and also for defending those solid principles which are indispensable for building a society which respects the dignity of the human person and is attentive to the common good.”
(Pope John Paul II, *The Rapid Development*)

a grocery sacker and a bank teller. “My mother was a strong person,” he said. “She had a strong moral grounding. She greatly valued honesty, religious commitment, and the work ethic.”

From his father he learned “enormous entrepreneurial skill; he taught me about taking risks and the advantages to be found in failure.”

According to his biography on the website *The Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans* he described himself as a mediocre student, until the point when he realized that to make positive changes in his life he was going to have to do it himself. “I came to understand that to be successful you have to get off the bench and onto the field. You cannot be just an observer; you must become an active participant.”

When Philip was 20 and pursuing a career, his father became severely ill and in danger of bankruptcy. Thus he left everything to work and make life secure for his parents, forcing himself into the challenges of adulthood and running a business to provide for others.

As he began several businesses, he was not always successful. “You have to have the ability not to give up or lose **confidence** in what you are trying to do just because it doesn’t work out the first time you try it. You may have to go back and try again, and again, and again. **Persistence** is one quality you need throughout life, and not only in business. I have seldom achieved anything worthwhile the first time I attempted it. It is only by sticking to an objective through **adversity** that a goal can ever be realized... It’s not failure, but the **fear** of failure that stops most people.”

NOT AT ANY PRICE

Now, years later when looking back on his successes, he says that success above all else is wrong. “You must adhere to your basic beliefs,” he says. “Commit



Photo Credit: Pierre Vinet NARNIA™ © Disney/Walden

CATECHISM QUOTES

2500 ...truth carries with it the joy and splendor of spiritual beauty. ...truth can also find other complementary forms of human expression, above all when it is a matter of evoking what is beyond words: the depths of the human heart, the exaltations of the soul, the mystery of God.
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, number 2500)

SAINTS AND HEROES



St. Francis De Sales
(www.holyfamily-security.org)

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES (1567-1622)

St. Francis De Sales lived shortly after the Protestant Reform. He was given the mission trying to bring Protestant Christians back to the Catholic Church in an area of Switzerland which was very anti-Catholic (near Geneva). He was often laughed at, scorned, and driven out of towns. Yet he found a way to communicate. He began writing small pamphlets explaining the Catholic faith (in a charitable way) and slipped them under the doors of all the villagers very early in the morning. He backed up his work with prayer, perseverance, and total trust in God. He was known for being the most charitable and humble man of his time. Little by little people began to enter the Catholic Church. At the end of his life, over sixty thousand Protestants became Catholic. He is patron saint of journalists. ■



Mother Thecla Merlo
(www.daughtersofstpaul.com)

MOTHER THECLA MERLO (1894-1964)

Born in Italy, Teresa Merlo liked to teach catechism to the children of her village. At age 21, she met Fr. Alberione, a man with a special call from God to bring Christ to people through the media. He started the Society of St. Paul, and invited Teresa to help found the Daughters of St. Paul as the feminine branch. Taking the religious name of Thecla, she worked in the "apostolate of the good press," establishing many more communities of consecrated persons who would use social communication to bring a Christian message to the world. Mother Thecla said, "We must be concerned about how we are to reach people and bring them the Word of truth and salvation." They were among the first in many countries to produce Catholic radio programs, records, and audio-visuals. She was proclaimed venerable in 1991. ■

to your family and family values. Be able to say to yourself, 'I'm proud of what I've done.'"

A RISK THAT IMPACTS THE WORLD

The impact of a single movie goes beyond the theaters, as family-friendly movies normally generate high DVD sales and rentals. Many people have come together to watch the movie with their church communities. Programs based on the movie were held at juvenile detention centers to teach values and involve the youth in a deeper way. In the fall, Walden Media is looking to begin filming the next book in The Chronicles of Narnia series, *Prince Caspian*.

Anshutz shows us that as Christians we often need to take risks to stand up for what we believe. His failures and successes show us that if we persevere through the inevitable failures, God will bless our efforts. It may be easy for some to dismiss the example of Anschutz as a model for most Christians in that he is extremely wealthy and talented. However, God doesn't care how much money or time we give relative to someone else. He calls us to be generous with what we do have.

The success of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* should strengthen our conviction that we too as Christians can have a positive impact on our culture. If like Anschutz we each do our part in mobilizing our talents, resources and time to communicate Gospel values to our fellow man, we will succeed in re-Christianizing the world. ■

Vocabulary

Adversity: Difficulty, obstacle

Compelling: Attention-grabbing, exciting, captivating

Confidence: Firm belief, trust, assurance

Conviction: Certainty, belief

Courage: Bravery, fearlessness. Facing and dealing with anything dangerous, difficult, or painful.

Determination: Resoluteness, persistence, resolve

Persistence: Constancy, endurance, tenacity

Professionalism: Done with thoroughness and high standard

Teamwork: cooperation, unity in seeking a goal

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Instructor Resources



LESSON GOALS:

- To see the importance of addressing the heart of the problem and putting a solution to it rather than just complaining about it.
- To show the importance of motivation and conviction in overcoming obstacles to bringing Christ into the secular world.
- To encourage students to develop their skills and talents to be better equipped for the service of Christ's Kingdom.
- To illustrate for students that the “market” for Gospel values is large, despite the criticism of the secular world.
- To see the value of teamwork in a different perspective, including unlikely people in the cause of furthering Christian values.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. For all who have seen *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, what are some of the Christian themes or virtues that are portrayed to the audience?
2. Although most of us aren't billionaires and movie producers, what are some ways we as students can still follow Anschutz in communicating Christian values to others that may require courage and perseverance?
3. What are some examples in our society of

the “market for virtue”? What other books, movies or music have been popular due in part to the values or virtues they portray?

4. How did Phillip Anschutz decide to make this movie? What are some of the things he may have considered? What are some of the obstacles or difficulties he faced?
5. How did he open himself up to criticism by the people he decided to work with? Why did he risk this?
6. What were the key virtues he learned in childhood that contributed to this moment of making the movie?

WRITING IDEAS:

1. Phillip Anschutz says how he decided to stop cursing the darkness and instead do something about it. What are some things that you see as dark areas, either in your life or in society? What are some things you can do about it?

RESOLUTIONS:

1. Plan a pizza party and a movie forum. Have students watch the movie and analyze the virtues and values of the different characters, the decisions they had to make, and the plot as a whole.
2. Students watch a movie three times, taking note of the different details that come out on each viewing. Each time they should follow a certain character, note the virtues and vices of the person, good quotes, and decisions the person faces.
3. In small groups, students plan and record their own 5 minute movie clip. The movie plot should emphasize Christian virtues, in a way that a secular audience could value them.
4. Students make a journal for themselves, in which they will keep track of successful movies with family-friendly values. Students can make a list of these virtues and values, and make a separate page for each one. Under each heading, they list the titles of movies (and books) that illustrate these values.

ADDITIONAL CHURCH TEACHING:

“To those working in communication, especially to believers involved in this important field of society, I extend the invitation which, from the beginning of my ministry as Pastor of the Universal Church, I have wished to express to the entire world “Do not be afraid!” (Pope John Paul II, *The Rapid Development*, January 25, 2005)

“Do not be afraid of new technologies! These rank “among the marvelous things” – *inter mirifica* – which God has placed at our disposal to discover, to use and to make known the truth, also the truth about our dignity and about our destiny as his children, heirs of his eternal Kingdom.” (*The Rapid Development*)

“I wanted to underline in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* that the first Areopagus of modern times is the *world of communications*, which is capable of unifying humanity and transforming it into – as it is commonly referred to – “a global village”. The communications media have acquired such importance as to be the principal means of guidance and inspiration for many people in their personal, familial, and social behavior.” (*The Rapid Development*)

WEB RESOURCES:

Some biographical details of Phillip Anschutz: http://www.horatioalger.com/members/member_info.cfm?memberid=ans00

Some sources on the original story <http://www.mediatransparency.org/story.php?storyID=97>

Site for the movie itself: <http://adisney.go.com/disneypictures/narnia/index.html>

Site for Act One, a training institute program for Christian screenwriters:

<http://www.actoneprogram.com/>

Pop culture from a spiritual point of view: <http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/>