



Oscar and the Power of American Culture

If you watched the Oscar awards as I did, you might have been awed by this assemblage of the world's most talented actors, film directors, producers, cinematographers, set and costume designers, story tellers, composers, creators of special effects all concentrated in a small area of Southern California known as Hollywood. The impact this cultural powerhouse has on the rest of the world is what has made America the magnet for the talented and ambitious.



In America you still have the freedom to create on film whatever you want provided you can garner the financial backing. Movie making is an expensive business, and if you sit through the end of a movie when the credits are run, you can easily understand the enormous complexity and expense involved in making a film.

Yes, films are made in Britain, and France, and Italy, and in India, but the final arbiter of what is exceptional is in Hollywood. And nothing is more highly prized by anyone involved in film making than the Oscar. And what the world sees at the Oscar Awards is beauty, fashion, ego, and the most talented individuals on the planet.

No other nation can possibly produce such a spectacle. China was able to produce a great Olympic spectacle, but it could never duplicate the awesome power of the Oscar Awards. The language is a formidable obstacle, and the lack of cultural freedom prohibits the development of a creative cultural community like Hollywood.

And that is why American culture dominates the world. Ever since the publication of Shakespeare's First Folio in 1623, the English language has had an advantage over the languages of other nations. In America, where early 20th century immigrants learned English and took advantage of economic freedom, many of them became pioneers in developing the movie industry. Eventually American movies became the conveyors of American ideas, values, stories, and personalities to the rest of the world. And today, American culture, through movies and the Internet, is the dominant cultural influence in the world.

It is not without significance that the best movie of the year is *The King's Speech*, which will be seen around the world. Its subject is English history and the English language. It is the true story of a king severely handicapped by a stammer, which anyone with a similar problem can identify with.

Another nominee was *The Social Network*, which is about Facebook and its young founder Mark Zuckerberg. With Facebook playing an instrumental role in starting the Egyptian revolution, one can see how American culture is now having an even greater impact on the world than could have ever been thought possible. Only a free society could produce the phenomenon of the social networks. Google is now providing the world with access to knowledge that is giving people around the world the freedom



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to know what their dictators don't want them to know.

Another nominee, *True Grit*, tells the story of the American West, and how the pursuit of justice requires courage and perseverance, which brings out the best in human beings. Indeed, many of these films are projecting very positive values. Perhaps Hollywood is learning that films need not be full of sex and verbal obscenities to be culturally successful and great money makers.

Another thing I noticed is that all of these artists are very family oriented. All of the winners thanked their parents, and wives, and children. These very talented individuals are hard workers who see the joys of family life as a respite from the extremely exacting work required of them. You can see perfectionism written on their faces. The glamorous showcase of the Oscar Awards is the façade behind which is hidden the unglamorous arduous work required to produce masterpieces of movie making.

There were no references to religious faith in the proceedings. It was a totally secular production and almost businesslike in its distribution of awards. It was sad to see doddering Kirk Douglas, the great Spartacus, presenting one of the awards. Today's technology permits us to still see these great stars in their younger days. But to see them in extreme old age can sometimes be a bit of a shock, which only reminds us that we are programmed from conception to go through this remarkable life cycle that finally makes us so decrepit that we welcome the end.

Another interesting part of the awards is when the nominees in their seats must watch themselves in the parts for which they are being nominated. They generally show a painful smile at having seen themselves in highly emotional scenes wearing makeup that makes them almost unrecognizable. Their vulnerability shines through, for they know what it took to reach that point in their careers where their performance is being evaluated and honored by their peers.

Of course, the general public is not interested in the technicalities involved in making movies. Their interest is in the celebrities, their sex lives, what they wear, their brushes with the law, their pregnancies. But behind all of that is a large cadre of technicians who lead ordinary family lives but produce extraordinary special effects: spectacular car chases, exploding cities, aliens from outer space, animated characters, horrific monsters. And then there are the agents, the financiers, the promoters and publicists who understand how to titillate the public hungry for entertainment and diversion.

Although we know that the film community is a hotbed of liberalism, none of the nominees or presenters made any controversial political remarks. There was a quick shot of Obama informing us that his favorite song is from *Casablanca*, "As Time Goes By." Otherwise, the proceedings were politically neutral.

Which brings us to another recent Gala Event in Los Angeles with a strong emphasis on faith and Christianity. It was Ted Baehr's Christian Film and Television Commission Award-Giving Event on February 18, 2011, at the Universal Hilton, before a glamorous conservative audience, celebrating the most spiritually uplifting movies of 2010. The Epiphany Prize was awarded to *Amish Grace*. The Best Family and Best Movie Award was given to *Toy Story 3* and *Secretariat*. The Lifetime Achievement Award was given to composer Al Kasha who told the audience that Jesus Christ is his hero.

There is no doubt that Ted Baehr's efforts are having a positive impact on the Hollywood establishment. They realize that in America conservatives are in the majority, and that they too go to the movies. Ted is the founder and publisher of *Movieguide: The Family Guide to Movies and Entertainment*, which offers in-depth analyses of current movies from a biblical perspective. We suspect that a lot of people in Hollywood read the Movieguide for their own private edification.



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The Christian Film and Television Commission, is a non-profit organization that educates the entertainment industry and the general public about the spiritual impact that the mass media has on audiences. It is the only active liaison between studio executives and the general public on issues of faith and morality. The connection is all to the good, and hopefully it will blossom into a general acknowledgment among movie makers that Hollywood has a responsibility to produce movies that are uplifting and positive when dealing with spiritual values. All movies project values. Let American movies project values of freedom and faith that will make the world better.



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