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Missionaries in the Golden Age of Hollywood

Race, Gender, and Spirituality on the Big Screen

Douglas Carl Abrams

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He who takes the imagery out of life deprives
it of its highest pleasure.
—Erasmus

to Rylie Abrams, Wesley Allen, and Gemma Allen
"The LORD bless you and keep you"
—Numbers 6:24

Preface

Movies, as part of the arts, are useful in understanding the past. Art historian Kenneth Clark, borrowing from Ruskin, declared: "Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts, the book of their deeds, the book of their words and the book of their art," and Ruskin concluded, "but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last." Art obviously also changes. In Gothic churches walls served as a frame for the window, openings where light traversed stained glass. In the twentieth century light would "traverse" film and project images on big screens, and those included missionaries.

The Golden Age of Hollywood and the parallel British film era are key historical moments. "Rome ruled the world with that phalanx formation and Britain with the three-masted ship. America has ruled the world with the moving image and the projection of image around the world," filmmaker (and comedian) Mike Meyers observed in the documentary, *The King* (2019). After the Golden Age, Hollywood dominance in popular culture changed with the coming of television. Neil Postman in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) argued, however, that television essentially is about entertainment and not suited for religious content. He claimed that the television screen is secular. One could argue that in the middle third of the twentieth century movie screens, in theaters with organs, cathedral-like or palaces, with screen "goddesses," evoke a different ambiance.

History is about stories and this work is a history of stories. Film, one of the youngest forms of storytelling, will be treated as a historical artifact—what it tells us about the time it was made, as well as the historical context

in the story. While the focus is on narrative, history is also about change over time. Movies, a source of pleasure and learning, fuel the historical imagination and enable the viewer to see the past as people at the time saw it. About fifty movies with missionaries as leading characters or significant supporting ones have been studied: how they perceived themselves and how audiences may have seen them. While this is not an exploration of film theory, certain facets of the art form will be addressed, especially character, believability, and tone. Missionary movies blend well with history: many are about discovery and journeys—literal and emotional—and play with time.

My research discovered three important threads for Protestant and Catholic missionaries, primarily American and British, which reflect the complexity of identity, what film scholars Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin call "intersectionality." Movies served as a tableau for changes in representing race, gender, and a spirituality that included tensions between an earthly kingdom and a heavenly one as well as finding their "place" in society. Most importantly, missionaries in the movies, in addition to religious purpose, struggled spiritually. Some films illustrate more than one dimension and will appear in multiple chapters. I will address content relevant for that theme. *The Nun's Story*, for example, is about gender, nationality, and spirituality.

Studying these films brought some surprises. The image of the missionaries—unlike some history texts—was generally favorable and most of the characters were female. In the silent film *Hypocrites* (1915), the title in a frame—"the broad road or the narrow way?"—preceded scenes of well-dressed ladies struggling up a cliff guided by a monk. "Religion here is earthy. It is toil," declares the narrator, addressing that scene, in the documentary, *Women Make Film* (2018). Perhaps, it was a parable of the trenches in World War I. Missionaries in movies reflected that "dirty" work, the struggles of ministry, intensified by living in a foreign culture. Movies about "good" people are a challenge for directors. Film authority David Thomson notes that film values—wholesome and respectable—compete with the sensational, along with violence, and of course, commercial appeal. Many of these movies succeed as art and entertainment, and missionaries generally remain authentic, in contrast to characters like the "charlatan" evangelist in *Elmer Gantry* (1960).

A few films were unexpected. John Ford, who built a reputation for movies about cowboys, for his last film directed *7 Women* (1966), an artful depiction of female missionaries in China. Both *Lost Horizon* (1937) and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1944), despite a noble effort at a philosophical statement, have not survived as classics, even with remakes. Not a surprise,

China, important in the real world of missions, was also the most popular setting for missionary movies, followed by Africa and the Asia Pacific. Despite the importance of the Raj, only four movies were set in India, only two in Japan.

Measuring the impact of missionary movies, or any movies, is empirically difficult. Filmmaker Mark Cousins' declaration that films are a "mirror and hammer" captures their power. Who was watching? Movies started with a working-class audience and sound brought in the middle class. Producers discovered Catholic moviegoers during the Golden Age, but evangelicals in general, according to one scholar, did not attend movies until the *Sound of Music* (1965) brought them to the theater and their numbers increased with *Chariots of Fire* (1981).

Oddly, many who would identify most with spiritual figures on the big screen were not in the audience. Liam Goligher, Senior Pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, remembered as a young boy growing up in Scotland, going to a movie theater for the first time. It was dark. He was glad to get outside and see the sun and cars. He went home and was happy to see his parents. He was relieved because "good Christian boys," he was taught, did not go to movies, but he "snuck into a movie theater" and survived. The context for the sermon illustration was the Second Coming and he remembered his mother's warning: "would you want the Lord to find you in a movie theater?" Other conservative Protestants, certainly in the United States, myself included, shared that conservative Protestant culture that shunned "Hollywood movies."

Religious culture, however, American, and European, changes. Even mainline Protestants kept a distance from movies. The 1941 film, *One Foot in Heaven*, told the story of a Methodist minister who wrestled with going to the movies. In the narrative, in 1917, the denomination's "discipline" forbade attendance, placing movies in the same category as gambling and dancing. His son broke the rule, but before punishing him, the pastor/father went to see a western with him and decided that the movie stressed an important moral and encouraged his congregation, in a sermon, to accept the medium. As a measure of the work that Hollywood had to do to change minds, the producer consulted with Norman Vincent Peale and Daniel A. Poling for advice on the film. Movies attractive to Catholics had already appeared in the 1930s.

Movies with missionaries are scattered over the decades of Hollywood's peak, roughly the 1930s through the 1960s. Three silent films connected slightly with missionaries. The first important "talking" picture with a

significant missionary dimension was *Trader Horn* (1931), first of eleven in that decade. While only five featured missionaries in the 1940s, the fifties had the most with fifteen, in a time when religious epics were popular. In the 1960s nine movies included missionary characters as the Golden Age ended.

For decades after the Golden Age of Hollywood, beginning in the 1970s, a few movies and television miniseries with missionaries maintain the legacy of the previous era, in epic style and substance, and are also discussed in relevant chapters. This study of the Golden Age of Hollywood and its aftermath provides an overview of the treatment of certain themes in cinema for almost a hundred years.

Most movies in this study are adapted from novels, by some world-class writers, including Pearl Buck, Rumer Godden, C. S. Forester, James Michener, Somerset Maughan, Alan Paton, Jules Verne, Paul Scott, James Hilton, James Clavell—and a variety of popular writers. The text provides a comparison/contrast of the novel and film. Often the differences reflect change over time—important for historical context. Content popular at the time of the novel's publication is not necessarily true during the release of the motion picture.

Novelist Somerset Maugham proved to be a popularizer of stories with missionaries. Three were brought to the big screen and two of those stories would each be made into a movie three times. Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* would have three movie versions and three other missionary movies would have one remake over the decades. Those numerous remakes speak to the enduring popularity of some missionary narratives. Some directors, however, slighted missionaries in some novels. Frank Capra left out the female one in his 1937 movie version of the novel *Lost Horizon* and more notably Michael Todd in the 1956 picture of the year, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, did not include the Mormon missionary in the American West.

Whether in the movie or in the novel, I have tried to let characters, as much as possible, "speak" for themselves. In addition, in addressing a general audience, I wanted to describe simply what directors put on the screen for the viewers in one of the most important epochs in the history of popular culture.

Greenville, SC, USA Douglas Carl Abrams

Timeline for Missionary Films

1919 *Broken Blossoms* (silent), D. W. Griffith, director
1928 *Sadie Thompson* (silent), Raoul Walsh, director
1929 *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Charles Brabin, director
1931 *Trader Horn*, W. S. Van Dyke, director
1932 *Shanghai Express*, Josef von Sternberg, director;
Rain, Lewis Milestone, director
1933 *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*, Frank Capra, director
1934 *The Painted Veil*, Richard Boleslawski, director;
Grand Canary, Irving Cummings, director
1936 *Klondike Annie*, Raoul Walsh, director
1937 *Lost Horizon*, Frank Capra, director
1938 *The Beachcomber*, Erich Pommer, director
1939 *Stanley and Livingstone*, Henry King, director;
The Rains Came, Clarence Brown, director
1943 *The Amazing Mrs. Holliday*, Bruce Manning and Jean Renoir (uncredited), directors;
Night Plane from Chungking, Ralph Murphy, director
1944 *The Keys of the Kingdom*, John M. Stahl, director;
The Bridge of San Luis Rey, Rowland V. Lee, director
1947 *Black Narcissus*, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, directors
1951 *Cry the Beloved Country*, Zoltan Korda, director;
The African Queen, John Huston, director;
Peking Express, William Dieterle, director;
1953 *White Witch Doctor*, Henry Hathaway, director;
Miss Sadie Thompson, Curtis Bernhardt, director;
Jungle Drums of Africa, Fred C. Brannon, director
1954 *The Beachcomber*, Muriel Box, director

1955	*Seven Cities of Gold*, Robert D. Webb, director;
	The Rains of Ranchipur, Jean Negulesco, director;
	The Left Hand of God, Edward Dmytryk, director
1957	*Heaven Knows*, Mr. Allison, John Huston, director;
	The Seventh Sin, Ronald Neame, director
1958	*The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, Mark Robson, director;
	China Doll, Frank Borzage, director
1959	*The Nun's Story*, Fred Zinnemann, director
1961	*The Sins of Rachel Cade*, Gordon Douglas, director;
	The Devil at 4 O'Clock, Mervyn LeRoy director
1962	*Satan Never Sleeps*, Leo McCarey, director
1963	*Lilies of the Field*, Ralph Nelson, director;
	Drums of Africa, James B. Clark, director
1964	*Zulu*, Cy Endfield, director
1966	*The Sand Pebbles*, Robert Wise, director;
	7 Women, John Ford, director;
	Hawaii, George Roy Hill, director
1973	*I Heard the Owl Call My Name*, Daryl Duke, director;
	Lost Horizon, Charles Jarrott, director
1980	*Shogun*, Jerry London, director
1981	*Chariots of Fire*, Hugh Hudson, director
1982	*The Missionary*, Richard Loncraine, director
1984	*Jewel in the Crown*, Christopher Morahan, director
1986	*The Mosquito Coast*, Peter Weir, director
1986	*Shanghai Surprise*, Jim Goddard, director;
	The Mission, Roland Joffé, director
1991	*At Play in the Fields of the Lord*, Hector Babenco, director;
	Black Robe, Bruce Beresford, director
1994	*The Air Up There*, Paul Michael Glaser, director
1995	*Cry the Beloved Country*, Darrell Roodt, director
1997	*Forbidden Territory: Stanley's Search for Livingstone*, Simon Langton, director;
	Men With Guns, John Sayles, director
1999	*Molokai*, Paul Cox, director
2000	*Proof of Life*, Taylor Hackford, director
2003	*Tears of the Sun*, Antoine Fuqua, director
2004	*The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Mary McGuckian, director
2005	*End of the Spear*, Jim Hanon, director
2006	*The Painted Veil*, John Curran, director
2007	*Nanking*, Bill Guttentag and Dan Sturman, directors
2008	*Rambo*, Sylvester Stallone, director
2015–2016	*Indian Summers*, Paul Rutman, creator
2016	*Silence*, Martin Scorsese, director
2020	*Black Narcissus*, Charlotte Bruus Christensen, director

Acknowledgments

While the origin of the idea for this project remains a puzzle to me, I do know my debts to people. William Hutchison, years ago, during his NEH Summer Seminar at Harvard Divinity School, shared with us page proofs of his *Errand to the World*, an excellent overview of missions, as well as the information that his parents had been missionaries to Iran. Teaching a university course in the British Empire, I often used classic film to show the intersection of missions and history. Perhaps viewing *Chariots of Fire* with family years ago ignited an interest in film and missionaries, although about a future one and a movie after the Golden Age of Hollywood.

Realizing that Hollywood missionaries often were far more complex than the ones in some history books, or for example, in Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) motivated me to look at this topic. Two widely acclaimed books stimulated further interest in the subject. Philip Jenkins' *The Next Christendom* (2002) focused on race and Christianity globally and David Hollinger's *Protestants Abroad* (2017) recognized the influence of missionaries on American society.

Edith Blumhofer and Larry Eskridge kindly invited me to participate in the centennial commemoration of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference sponsored by Wheaton College and its Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals. My first foray into film and missionaries was a paper presented at conferences in that connection at Louisville Seminary and Duke Divinity School. I am grateful to them for that formal beginning of the project and to others for encouraging feedback. Markku Ruotsila graciously read a portion of the manuscript and offered

important suggestions, which I appreciate. Elizabeth Rose shared her expertise on writing for which I am thankful. My editor Emily Russell has been a model of professionalism. I appreciate her encouragement and patience with this project.

While responsibility for content is mine alone, endnotes and bibliography show my indebtedness especially to the following scholars: Virginia Nicholson, Maureen Sabine, Dana Robert, Brian Stanley, Andrew Walls, Laura Doyle, Tracy Fessenden, Sarah Ruble, Clare Pettitt, Albert Tricomi, Laura Marcus, Richard Pells, David Cannadine, William Romanowski, David Thomson, David Trotter, Harry M. Benshoff, Sean Griffin, Jaap Van Ginneken, and Nancy Wang Yuen. Brett McCracken's reviews of contemporary films have been helpful with studying classic film.

My interest in missions intensified when my wife and I, with our two children, took university health sciences, education, and ministry "interns" to Kenya and South Africa for nine summers over 17 years, an experience that changed our lives. Missionaries were no longer strangers on furlough presenting their ministries in our local church. We learned as a family that faith can transcend cultural differences.

That opportunity began when Gary and Pat Johnson, missionaries in Kenya, invited me and my wife—along with our two small children—to spend a few weeks one summer in Kenya, with them, along with university students. We accepted and remain grateful for the experiences and their friendship. Their effort in missions is especially commendable: a medical clinic, schools, and churches. I remember particularly a young Kenyan man who needed urgent medical attention for a large tumor on his jaw. They arranged for his trip to the United States for successful treatment. Today he is married, a father, and a pastor in rural Kenya. There is also a connection to movies. Under the brilliant stars of the African night in the village—projector powered by a generator—Gary showed faith films and some secular ones. This young man's favorite was *Shrek* (2001).

Gary and Denise Yoder and Tony and Cathy Payne, as missionaries, also graciously shared their ministries, and occasionally—far beyond the call of duty—their homes with our students in Cape Town, South Africa, for which we are thankful. Working in their churches and communities, we learned so much about the complexities of race from the diversity in that incredible land—more than ever possible from a textbook or a documentary. In addition, for several years I have also had the privilege to serve with women and men as a trustee on a mission board and again see missions from a completely fresh perspective.

A book on movies and missionaries, for me, would not be possible without the legacy of Katherine Corne Stenholm. A contemporary of the Golden Age of Hollywood, she was a film director, a woman, in a conservative Protestant culture, who founded a university film studio in 1950 and produced numerous faith films, including one feature on a missionary. In addition, she created an undergraduate and graduate major in cinema. She studied film at the University of Southern California, won various professional awards, and represented American university film personnel at the Cannes Film Festival and on one occasion delivered a keynote address. Her work in film helped conservative Protestants eventually embrace the art of cinema. As an undergraduate, I had the opportunity of being an "extra" in one of her feature films.

Thanks, and love to my family for enriching my life every day: Jessica, Wade, Wesley, Gemma, Rylie, Benjamin, and Anna-Elyse. The "star" of course is my wife, Linda. In addition to talents as a historian, teacher, and authority in faculty development, she is also a great cook. In Kenya during nine summers, she prepared meals for a dozen or so university students, three times a day, often under challenging circumstances. Together we also succeeded in a special quest: finding where future missionary Eric Liddell won gold in the 1924 Summer Olympics. The site is not a tourist attraction. After research, a lot of walking, and irritating several French with questions, we found it—Stade Yves-du-Manoir in Colombes, France, near Paris, today a rugby venue. We had the same satisfaction then as we have when we watch "that moment" in *Chariots of Fire.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The 1936 adventure film *Rhodes of Africa* represents the historical convergence of missions, movies, and empire. In one scene, a Protestant missionary Reverend Charles Helm mediates between British imperial symbol Cecil Rhodes and Lobengula Khumalo, king of the Northern Ndebele. The missionary is an adviser to the African ruler and knows the African language as the interpreter.[1] That moment in cinema reveals that missions had influence in the imperial world, formal or informal and that a missionary's presence may have softened, just a little, the theater audience's views about other cultures.

Movies, the premier art form of the twentieth century, also more broadly reflect and influence society with its universal visual "language," important for missions, a global enterprise. "Film is the only art beside music that is available to the whole world at once, exactly as it was first made," noted film critic Stanley Kauffmann. André Malraux, French novelist, and minister of culture, took the power of film further: "Chaplin and Garbo have shown that an artist can make the whole world laugh or cry."[2]

[1] *Rhodes of Africa* (film); http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/797, accessed 7-18-22; see Horowitz, *The People's Voice*, xiv for a discussion of "expressive culture" and "broad acceptance."

[2] Kauffmann, *A World on Film*, 418; Malraux, *Anti-Memoirs*, 244.

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Recognition as a genre gives weight to movies with missionaries. On March 13, 2019, Eddie Muller on Turner Classic Movies hosted what he called "missionary night." The feature presentation for the evening was *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933). In the lineup also was *Rain* (1932), *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (1958), and *Hawaii* (1966). TCM unofficially at least acknowledged a film genre. Muller praised the feature as one of director Frank Capra's best. From 1934 to 1940 he was nominated five times for best director and won three, but not for this one. The host noted that what interested audiences, "sparks that fuel the film," was the "not so subtle attraction" between a white female missionary and a Chinese man. Moviegoers in the 1930s, however, according to the host, may have seen the relationship as "scandalous."

In the twentieth century, on January 11, 1933, that same missionary movie feature on TCM enjoyed another important cultural spotlight. Radio City Music Hall turned into a movie theater and would become the "most famous" and "most successful" movie palace in the world. The "first offering" was the premiere of *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*. This transformed venue attracted "imposing throngs," according to *The New York Times*. "The acoustics of the great auditorium are suited admirably to the showing of talking pictures," the reviewer noted, aided by a screen "70 by 40 feet." The film, "a handsomely mounted affair," was a "melodrama," the "tale of missionaries, romance and civil war in China."[3]

During the peak of Hollywood's influence, missionary movies treated important identities in western culture—race, gender, and aspects of spirituality. Hollywood participated in the social construction of race as racist casting receded in the movies, along with the taboo against interracial attraction. In the United States, the Motion Picture Production Code banned interracial relationships from 1930 to 1956.[4] For Africa, movies would transition from primitive images to a story of racial reconciliation. Watching movies with missionaries, theater goers encountered race in a soft setting. People of color on the big screen made them more acceptable to whites. Born in Paris in the late nineteenth century in a world of illusion and magic, film could represent race sometimes as illusory, easier to

[3] https://www.nytimes.com/1933/01/12/archives/radio-city-music-hall-shows-a-melodrama-of-china-as-its-first.html, accessed 12-13-20; *Going Attractions: The Definitive Story of the Movie Palace*, documentary (2017).

[4] Yuen, *Reel Inequalities*, 11; Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 87.

change. Chapters 2 and 3 explain race in missionary movies and how Hollywood changed its depiction of it.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the complex reality of gender in films about missionaries. Those movies made the masculine imperial world more feminine. As in the real world of missions, women are the majority on the big screen. Twelve movies featured women, ten for men, but a galaxy of female stars outshines the men. But men run missions and one subplot of gender relations, especially after World War II, is the effort in the secular and religious worlds to "contain" women, who had more opportunities in previous decades. Some films dramatize patriarchy and female missionaries conform. Some women—on their own—chose traditional roles and singleness. Isolation could bring autonomy and opportunities. Female missionaries—even evangelical ones—also pushed for women's causes.

Spirituality should dominate movies about European and American missionaries. Chapter 6 examines how some missionaries on the big screen prioritized a heavenly kingdom over the interests of empire. Worldwide conflict twice in the space of a few decades also complicated ministry and politics. Some missionaries maintained loyalty to their American or European homeland, while some identified with their converts in Asia, Africa, or the Pacific. Only recently have historians captured what films did for decades—telling stories about how some missionaries became cosmopolitan or a globalist.

Missionary movies also undercut traditional class consciousness. Deferential to spiritual authority, missionaries in film struggled with traditional social class roles as an identity. In a strange setting among soldiers, businesspeople, civil servants, and indigenous cultures, many missionaries struggled to find their place. Chapter 7 describes how, for many, navigating hierarchy replaced concerns about traditional social class. Often their participation in that overseas world produced social harmony, not Marx's conflict. Nevertheless, some missionaries could be socially ambitious, snobbish to those inferior socially, or remain conscious of working-class roots. Some characters were aware that Asians or Africans resented their wealth.

As expected, missionary narratives emphasized spiritual purpose, and Chap. 8 develops those efforts on screen reflecting the peak of empires and missions with Christianity spreading globally in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The movies of mainline Protestants outnumbered Catholics by two to one. A dozen of the fifty or so films studied stressed ministry, with two varieties: social Christianity—serving social needs—and

traditional evangelism. Social service dominated the stories; five films feature Catholics and four feature Protestants. Medical work was the most popular missionary vocation, followed by education and orphanages. Four narratives—Protestant—focused on individual conversions. Two films were set in Africa, one in Hawaii, another in China. *Hawaii* (1966) featured the only prominent male Protestant missionary. These films also contributed to ecumenism. Theater goers, with various religious backgrounds, encountered different types of Christianity on the big screen. Moreover, Jewish, Catholic, and secular directors told Christian, mostly Protestant stories that aided tolerance.

In addition to social Christianity and evangelism, movies about missionaries in the Golden Age of Hollywood engaged two solemn spiritual themes—struggle and apostasy. Chapter 9 relates how Protestant and Catholic—male and female—missionaries wrestled with intense spiritual doubts. By being transparent about their characters' struggles, directors often created empathy for them. Some characters were heroic, others failed spiritually as hypocrites, apostates, or even fakes. Occasionally, these films are melodramatic or have unhappy endings.[5]

These movies, in addition to having religious significance, connected to a unique moment in American popular culture—the Golden Age of Hollywood. From the 1930s to the 1960s, studios churned out movies and controlled their distribution. Art competed with profits in the mass production of movies. From its peep show origins, film had changed from "thrills to stories."[6] In the 1920s, especially with the coming of sound, movie "palaces" enhanced downtowns, competing with churches and businesses. Movie actors became "stars" and "screen goddesses." An Academy Award, like a Nobel Prize, would be attached forever to a winner's identity. In that era, movies influenced millions and Hollywood gave missionaries a global stage. They participated in a world of drama, crime, westerns, musicals, comedy, cartoons, fantasy, and horror.

British filmmakers enjoyed success in the era as well with studios, directors, and stars of their own and also produced missionary stories. The quality was impressive, if not the number, at the apex of film in western

[5] Romanowski, *Cinematic Faith*, 103, 105; Mark Cousins, director, *Women Make Film: A New Road Movie Through Cinema* (2019), "Chapter" 10.

[6] See Cousins, *The Story of Film* (documentary); Stern, *The Brothers Mankiewicz*, 60; see Regev, *Working in Hollywood* and the review by Couvares in *The Journal of American History* (June 2020), 241–42.

culture. *The Beachcomber*, the first version in the 1930s, the second in the 1950s, *Black Narcissus* with high artistic standards, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the 1950s version, with warm human values, *Zulu* masterfully done, and after the Golden Age of Hollywood an inspirational *Chariots of Fire*, all represented the United Kingdom well. Pinewood Studios in Great Britain would have a "heyday" parallel to Hollywood's Golden Age with directors like David Lean and Powell and Pressburger.

The Golden Age would not last. In 1946, its most profitable year ever, American movies garnered $1.7 billion domestically. Hollywood made about 400 movies a year and almost 100 million people attended movie theaters. By 1963, however, the industry produced 141 movies. Television and other recreational activities competed for attention and dollars. By the early 1970s, movie attendance would sink to 17 million a year.[7]

If Hollywood's Golden Age served as a vehicle for telling stories about missionaries, a second key element of the era—colonial empires—provided the setting, and they were contracting. From World War I onward, while Hollywood waxed and waned, western nations surrendered their "imperial vision" as empires ended. The changes affected storytellers. Joseph Conrad, writing about an earlier era from a western perspective, "had to deal with an expanding world." In the twentieth century, storytellers had to wrangle with a tense world, one that was both "shrinking" and "exploding."[8]

That broad imperial context highlighted important ways missionaries intersected with peoples of foreign lands. A colonial setting included the challenges for missionaries of vastly different religions, extreme poverty, and most likely, a foreign language, in addition to race, nationality, gender, and class. In China and India, Americans and Europeans could encounter local elites who were socially superior. The presence of female missionaries also challenged the very masculine imperial world. Directors and novelists in the 1930s onward could portray missionaries as antiwar, as cobelligerents against imperialism.[9] Stories on screen about missionaries

[7] Kirshner and Lewis, "Introduction," *When Movies Mattered*, 1; https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/oct/02/pinewood-studios-75-years-lord-grade-films, accessed 10-13-20; Pells, *Modernist America*, x-xi, 224–25, 266–69, 277–81, 374–76; *The Story of Film*, episode 11.

[8] Brian Stanley, lecture, "Saving the World?" Duke Divinity School, March 25, 2011; Robie Macauley, "Introduction," Ford Madox Ford, *Parade's End*, xx; Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 4, 6.

[9] Hynes, *A War Imagined*, 166–67, 442–49

often reveal how western imperial establishments marginalized them. Businesspeople, colonial officials, and the military knew about their alienation from empire, and maybe resented them. Missionaries in the movies, therefore, could be subversive to empires.

A third feature of this time blended with the world of movies and empires—missions. As historian Brian Stanley observed, in the twentieth century, Christianity "shifted decisively from north to south and from west to east." When movies were booming, mainline Protestant missions declined, but evangelicals and Catholics turned their attention increasingly to the Global South. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Hawaii, the South Pacific, Burma, and Madagascar were the most popular mission fields but in coming decades would yield to India, China, and Africa.[10] Hollywood would follow this trend. Only one feature missionary film showcased Hawaii, another the South Pacific, but major ones were set about equally in India, China, and Africa. Narratives presented on screen reflected missionary work mostly in the middle third of the twentieth century. Missions also aided in cultural accommodation between westerners and non-westerners. In the nineteenth century, written accounts celebrated missionaries and became for many westerners the first source of knowledge of foreign cultures; in the twentieth century, movies made Asian and African worlds accessible visually to westerners.

Until recently, the image of missionaries has generally fared better in Hollywood than in academia. William R. Hutchison, historian, and son of missionaries, concluded they "have on the whole remained shadowy figures in narratives of religious and general history." They had suffered from neglect, stereotypes, or uncritical adulation. In the 1970s, however, secular scholars began treating foreign missions "as a worthwhile subject for … inquiry and classroom discussion." By the 1980s, attention expanded to include women, groups beyond mainline Protestants, and the people they served. Missionaries' identity, was "especially complex," with "balancing its various elements," however, they "insisted that their Christian identity transcended any other."[11]

Other academics, in line with movies, recognize positive aspects of the missionary's image—not all missionaries were agents of colonialism. Sociologist Robert Woodberry found that globally in the areas where

[10] Coffman, *The Christian Century*, 217; Robert, *Occupy Until I Come*, 45; Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 17, 307, 309, 316.

[11] Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 2–4.

"conversionary" Protestant missionaries had labored there was striking statistical evidence of the development of liberal democracy and improvements in quality of life. On the other hand, not many were "in any way social reformers," according to historian Joel Carpenter. He concluded that "they were first and foremost people who loved and served other people."[12] Historian David A. Hollinger's *Protestants Abroad* (2017) at last recognized the importance of their legacy in recent American history.

Missionaries captured important popular attention with Hollywood stars bringing them to the silver screen. Starting with Barbara Stanwyck in the 1930s, female missionaries were often portrayed as screen goddesses. Casting Ingrid Bergman as Gladys Aylward in the 1950s was controversial but effective. The list of stars who portrayed missionaries is impressive: Deanna Durbin, Katharine Hepburn, Susan Hayward, Audrey Hepburn, Angie Dickinson, Julie Andrews, and Peggy Ashcroft, who was in two features. Deborah Kerr starred in two major motion pictures as a missionary. Greta Garbo would have played Sister Clodagh in *Black Narcissus* (1947), instead of Kerr, if Michael Powell had gotten his way, but Emeric Pressburger won the argument.[13] Candice Bergen was a missionary in a supporting role. Mae West played a fake, yet sympathetic, one, and after the Golden Age of Hollywood even Madonna would give it a try—unsuccessfully. Some missionary characters also appeared alongside stars: Joan Crawford played a victim of one and Anne Bancroft's character sacrificed her life for several female missionaries.

Top male stars would also portray missionaries. Cedric Hardwicke, venerable English actor, brought Livingstone to life, with Spencer Tracy as Stanley. Tracy also played a missionary priest in another film. Sidney Poitier performed in two missionary movies. Gregory Peck and Max von Sydow had perhaps the weightiest missionary roles. Michael Rennie, William Holden, and Jack Hawkins—quite an impressive list of actors during Hollywood's prime—represented missionaries in less memorable roles. Humphrey Bogart, like Mae West, was convincing as a fake missionary and accompanied another one.

Missionary storytelling also attracted world-class film directors over several decades—Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic. If missionaries spent

[12] https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/january-february/world-missionaries-made.html, accessed 1-27-2014; https://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/fmmovement.htm, accessed 2-28-20.

[13] Alicia Malone, TCM host, 1-12-20.