

XI. PERSONAL STATEMENT

The desire to be a screenwriter has been germinating inside of me for more than a decade. Ever since I graduated from high school, I have longed to find some way to use the gift of writing to spread the message of the Gospel. In particular, I wanted to be involved in writing film that would somehow give God glory. I can remember distinctly an entry in my journal from December of 1988, in which for the first time I had the courage to put this on paper. The desire was remarkable, because it sprouted up before I had made a firm commitment to my faith in college. It was a risk to reveal the desire in writing because it was so precious to me. I was afraid that exposing the desire to the harsh rays of reality—even in the private forum of a journal—would scorch or even kill it.

I thank God for the timidity he allowed in my life at that time, because I did not have the emotional, spiritual or intellectual maturity to pursue the vocation of a Christian screenwriter. Mercifully, He allowed me to experience the rich blessings of an undergraduate liberal arts education at a solidly Catholic university, the challenge and beauty of Christian friendships, the discipline of study, the opportunity to travel overseas on three different occasions, the chance to work in a variety of different environments, and the purifying trials accompanying the pursuit of a priestly vocation. I believe that no experience in my life has been a waste of time, and that every chapter in my life will enrich not only the story of my own life, but also the stories I create.

Only during the past two years have I gathered up the resolve to begin exploring a vocation to screenwriting. After completing an introductory class in screenwriting last fall, a friend of mine gave me an Act One brochure. Somehow I found the courage to ask my employer for the month of June off so that I could possibly attend the Chicago program. When I received a positive answer to that request, I knew I needed to apply.

I believe screenwriting for film will be my particular avenue for living as an artist in the Church and in the world. I believe God has given me a gift for writing and has blessed my efforts. I fear my pride, but know I cannot run from using my creativity and my gift for writing. The passage from the Gospel of Luke about the lamp and the jar (*Luke 8:16*) haunts me, as does the following passage from Jeremiah:

For me, Yahweh's word has been the cause of insult and derision all day long. I would say to myself, 'I will not think about him, I will not speak in his name any more,' but then there seemed to be a fire

burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not do it.
(*Jeremiah* 20:8-9)

I think the role of the Christian artist today is to offer people the chance to behold beauty, and through beauty, truth. Sometimes the truth will console us, often it will challenge us, but hopefully it will always captivate us and assist us in our pilgrimage of faith. This is what I hope to do with my writing.

I don't believe my scripts must be explicitly religious to serve a spiritual purpose. One of my favorite quotes from John Henry Cardinal Newman is about the Christian writer:

By 'Catholic Literature' is not to be understood a literature which treats exclusively or primarily of Catholic matters, of Catholic doctrine, controversy, history, persons, or politics; but it includes all subjects of literature whatever, treated as a Catholic would treat them, and as he only can treat them.
(*The Idea of a University*: "English Catholic Literature," chapter 1, paragraph 1)

I think that good film will illuminate human and spiritual values. This is no small challenge in the culture in which we live, and requires, I believe, a contemplative point of view. I believe it is my first task as a screenwriter to be immersed in a life of prayer. This is why I have committed myself to formation in Carmelite spirituality. Without a deep, candid and abiding friendship with the Lord, I have very little to offer; everything must stand the test of confrontation with the face of Christ. Pope John Paul II has a passage in *The Gospel of Life* in which he discusses the importance of contemplation for the world today. I return to this passage often because it grounds the whole effort to be a witness in the modern world. The Pope writes:

We need first of all to *foster*, in ourselves and in others, a *contemplative outlook*. Such an outlook arises from faith in the God of life, who has created every individual as a "wonder" (cf. *Ps.* 139:14). It is the outlook of those who see life in its deeper meaning, who grasp its utter gratuitousness, its beauty and its invitation to freedom and responsibility. It is the outlook of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the Creator and seeing in every person his living image (cf. *Gen* 1:27; *Ps.* 8:5). This outlook does not give in to discouragement when confronted by those who are sick, suffering, outcast or at death's door. Instead, in all these situations it feels challenged to find meaning, and precisely in these circumstances it is open to perceiving in the face of every person a call to encounter, dialogue and solidarity.

It is time for all of us to adopt this outlook, and with deep religious awe to rediscover the ability to *revere and honour every person*, as Paul VI invited us to do in one of his first Christmas messages. Inspired by this contemplative outlook, the new people of the redeemed cannot but respond with *songs of joy, praise and thanksgiving for the priceless gift of life*, for the mystery of every individual's call to share through Christ in the life of grace and in an existence of unending communion with God our Creator and Father. (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, paragraph 83)

This is the task of a lifetime. I would be happy to spend my life as a screenwriter adopting this vision according to my state in life.

I am hoping the Act One program can help me to grow as a Christian, a writer and an artist. I believe art must be well executed to be an effective tool of evangelization. My primary

hope in attending the Act One program would be to become an evangelist through the medium of film. I also look forward very much to the opportunity to be mentored by and connected with the world of Christian artists.

Upon completion of the program, I will need to discern my next steps. I am willing to give my life to a career in the world of Christian media, if I believe that God asks this of me. I hope that the Act One program will help me to discern this.