

EXCLUSIVE!
Behind the scenes with
acclaimed filmmaker
Ken Wales

TED BAEHR

SUSAN WALES

KEN WALES

Producer, feature motion picture *Amazing Grace*

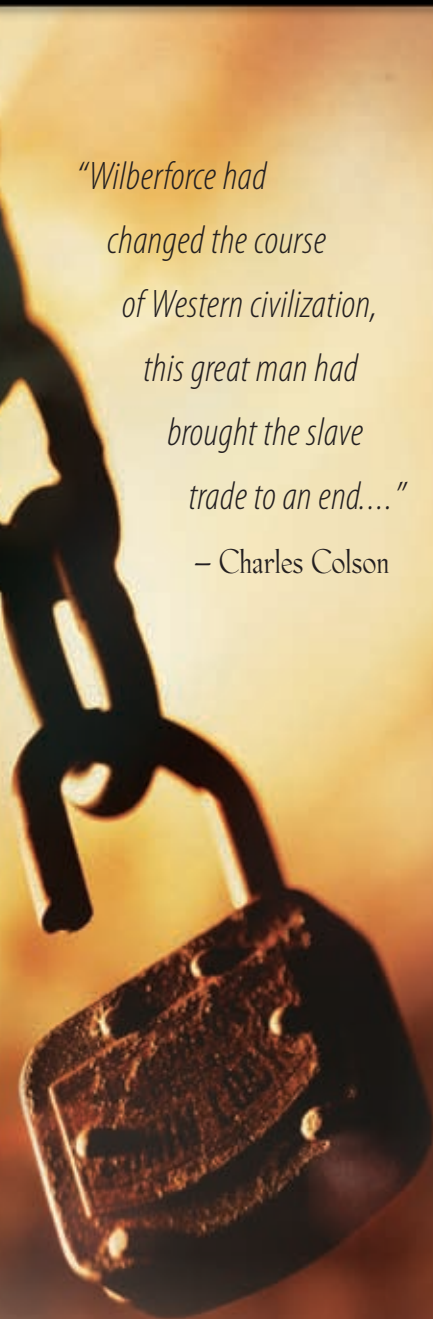


*"Wilberforce had
changed the course
of Western civilization,
this great man had
brought the slave
trade to an end...."*
— Charles Colson

THE AMAZING GRACE OF FREEDOM

The Inspiring Faith of William Wilberforce

the Slaves' Champion



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SECTION

I

I know two things: I am a great

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MOVIE *AMAZING GRACE*

The Incredible Talent behind *Amazing Grace*
and How the Movie Can Impact Today's Culture.

Wilberforce (portrayed by Ioan Gruffudd) is pictured aboard the slave ship *Madagascar* in the English port, surveying with dismay the shackles that were used to tie the hundreds of slaves to the dark decks of the slave ships for their almost endless, despairing journeys. Wilberforce invited members of Parliament and their wives to a seemingly pleasant outing in the harbor and then surprised them with the presence and stench of the actual slave ships.

sinner and Christ is a great Savior. — JOHN NEWTON



Throughout my career, I have considered the opportunity to make a film a great privilege. Creating a movie affords the filmmaker an incredible platform on which to tell a story as well as a great responsibility — making the right choice of a story to tell. First of all, a filmmaker should choose a tale that entertains. The definition of entertainment is from an early Greek source: entertainment — to *inform with delight*. How extraordinarily appropriate is this fine definition! Of equal importance is choosing a story that has the potential to inspire, transform, or redeem the lives of the audience.

When speaking to aspiring young producers, directors, writers, and actors about the opportunities in the entertainment industry, or teaching production classes at my alma mater, the University of Southern California (USC), I have always impressed upon them the importance of these choices. Many of my students and mentorees have made the right choices, and it is very rewarding to see their excellent work on the screen.

It is a great challenge to serve my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in my life's work. I hope that the motion

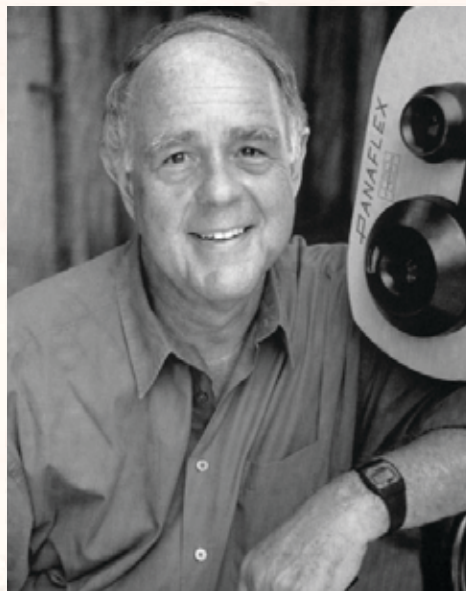
picture *Amazing Grace* will inspire its viewers to change the world just as its protagonist William Wilberforce was empowered by God to make the world a better place by passing a bill that abolished the slave trade and enabled a reform in society of manners, morals, decency, and a return to civility.

During the making of the film, I was stunned to discover that 27 million people in the world are victims of slavery today! The public must become aware of the shocking slave trade that still exists. It is my hope that the film *Amazing Grace* will inspire the audience to stand up and demand that something be done for these victims of human trafficking and slavery in our society.

Making a Movie

I have been in the film business for almost 50 years, and it is truly astounding to me that any film ever gets made! Making a movie is a long and arduous process . . . the early stages are precarious at best.

The first step in the production of a film is — choosing the RIGHT story to tell. The myriad ideas, plans, concepts, and dreams must all mesh into the project. A producer must possess a vision coupled with a deep passion for the story . . . sometimes to the point of total obsession. Despite the many obstacles along the way,



Ken Wales

he or she must be driven to tell the story . . . and believe that the story *must* be told!

The key role of the producer is to be a *shepherd* or guide for the film. He must develop a point of interest so that a company or studio will provide the funding for the production. All this must be done with a keen eye and foresight to determine who the audience will be for the picture, and what company might distribute the film to the theaters. There are many facets that the producer has to deal with before beginning a film . . . its marketability, its capacity for making a profit, its appeal to the audience, and its suitability for distribution.

A filmmaker must never forget that while making a movie is a creative enterprise, it is also a business. All the producer's choices, plans, and decisions must, to the financial decision-makers, make *sense to make cents* . . . or dollars . . . more likely millions, or even billions of dollars!

Hours of time, thought, and research must be put into the production, and attention must be given to every detail. The producer's vision does not always line up with the economics of



This picture is from the 15th annual Heartland Film Festival, where *Amazing Grace* was the opening night gala presentation and won the "Truly Moving Picture" Award. (L- R) Jeff Sparks, President and CEO of the Heartland Film Festival; Michael Apted, Director, *Amazing Grace*, Sharon Swart, senior editor, *Variety Magazine*; Ken Wales, Producer, *Amazing Grace*, Cary Granat, CEO Walden Media.

moviemaking. And keep in mind that no producer ever sets out to make a bad movie — but it does happen!

There were many moments during the course of *Amazing Grace* when I felt discouraged, but I never wavered in my trust in God that the story of William Wilberforce would become a reality.

On a humorous note, after my wife Susan saw the first screening of *Amazing Grace*, she speculated, "Ken, no wonder you wanted to

do this movie . . . you are so like William Wilberforce!" I can't even begin to compare to the great man, but she was referring to my perseverance on the films that I feel God has called me to do.

Help from Friends

Renowned author and theologian Os Guinness was well versed in the extraordinary work and life of Wilberforce and the reformer's concepts. Os is one of the world's truly great thinkers and theologians. He has been a close friend for many years, and he was the first person I contacted when I became a part of the production team. An invaluable consultant and resource to the project, his insights have constantly shed new light on the importance of Wilberforce's faith and mission to change the world.

Early in the film's development process, I also contacted and became friends with William Wilberforce biographer Kevin Belmonte, whose remarkable work on the reformer's life, *Hero for Humanity*, became the "go-to book" for the film's historical reference and "period accuracy."

Twice, I traveled with Belmonte throughout England, visiting many Wilberforce sites, including his beautifully restored birthplace in Hull. In England, Kevin introduced me to Marylynn Rouse, director of the John Newton Historical Project and a key planner for the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade. The story and its characters came alive as Kevin and I traveled with Marylynn and walked in the footsteps of Wilberforce's

journey, visiting his haunts, his homes, his schools, his churches, his memorials, and several museums.

Os Guinness and Kevin Belmonte frequently met with the other members of our production team, advising us throughout the making of the film. It was a delight for me to work with Os, Kevin, and Marylynn throughout my research on the film, and we owe a great deal of the film's authenticity and its historical and spiritual accuracy to these three.

My research was not only invaluable to the film, but also meaningful to me as a Christian as I spent many hours on the Clapham Green, south of London, where the Clapham Circle lived, worshiped, and worked. Throughout the years, I had read many articles about the Clapham Circle that described how this small group of abolitionists influenced the society of their day, ultimately

changing the world. Visiting the church where they worshiped was a meaningful experience that I shall never forget. The pastor, David Isherwood, is an avid Wilberforce scholar and a great keeper of the Clapham Circle legacy. His gracious welcome and insight provided glimpses of the memorable events in the life of William Wilberforce.

The Film

To cover 30 years of history in less than two hours was a major challenge of creating the film. The producers, the screenwriter, and the director collaborated on what portion of the life of Wilberforce to depict, and then decided the most efficient way to tell the story, and I believe we were successful considering the amount of material

"I hope we open people's eyes to an interesting story that not many people will know about, and that, while being entertained, they learn something about the human condition: that principles exist in the world, and that things can be changed."

— Michael Apted, director of the film

Amazing Grace





In this pivotal scene, the Clapham Circle is meeting with William Wilberforce (portrayed by Ioan Gruffudd, second from left) to encourage him to remain in Parliament to lead the efforts to effect social reforms in the slave trade. Wilberforce listens intently as Thomas Clarkson (portrayed by Rufus Sewell, standing) demonstrates the cruel use of shackles and other brutal tools used to restrain slaves on the ships. Seated next to Wilberforce is Hannah More (portrayed by Georgie Glen, third from left), the Clapham leader who reminds Wilberforce that “he can accomplish both of his objectives — to remain in Parliament AND serve God at the same time.” During future presentations in Parliament, Wilberforce would repeat this strategy to bring the realities of the slave trade to the attention of an often unaware and uncaring audience.

we had to deal with. Many biopics attempt to go “cradle to grave” with regard to the main character, but two hours, the usual film length, is not nearly enough time to do justice to the significant sequences of the film. Also, we had to work closely with historical consultants to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the events and period. From the director to the costume designers, the hair stylists, and the production designer and his crew, an enormous amount of research was required. It was exciting to see my dream come true with the talented cast and observe the exquisite work by Charles

Wood, the production designer, and Remi Adefarasin, director of photography, all under the direction of the gifted and talented director Michael Apted.

When we filmed the opening scene of Wilberforce stopping his carriage to rescue the beaten horse, the English weather fully cooperated . . . it was severely cold, gloomy, rainy, and foggy, just what the first scene called for. I think one of the more startling scenes in the film involved Toby Jones as the Duke of Clarence. While playing cards with Wilberforce, the Duke requests that his



Ioan Gruffudd and producer Ken Wales, just before shooting the opening sequence of Amazing Grace. Wilberforce stops his carriage while riding through the early morning countryside with Henry Thornton. (Thornton was one of William Wilberforce's closest confidants, and a leading member of the Clapham Circle, a group of Wilberforce's godly, loyal supporters who bolstered his efforts for not only the abolition of slavery, but also for the reform of manners in society and a return to civility.) Wilberforce stops the carriage, and rushes to the place where a farmer is beating his horse mercilessly to the ground. Wilberforce admonishes the man severely and demands he stop beating the horse, reminding the owner to "just let the horse rest a moment and he will return to his good health."

African coach driver substitute as a form of payment. It's a very dramatic moment in the film, a time where a human life is devalued, and it clearly gives the viewer an understanding of Wilberforce's ardent quest.

I did not have the opportunity to tour an actual slave ship, but the very ship that Wilberforce boarded in the film sailed from Cornwall with a Royal Navy escort to Liverpool and Bristol, the two main centers of the slave trade in England. It then sailed through the English Channel and up the River Thames to a mooring in central London as part of the 200th Bicentennial celebration. Other

slave ships in the film that appeared in the distance were created in computer generated imagery (CGI).

The Director

Our creative team compiled a "wish list" of possible directors who might be appropriate to direct a historical film. We focused our search for a British director who was innately familiar with the period as well as the character, William Wilberforce. It was also important that the director have a track record of successful films, and a reputation for being open and collaborative in the

development of the story and the script. In the preproduction phase, we talked to several of the candidates on our list, checking each director's availability. Renowned director Michael Apted was at the top of our list and we were thrilled when we learned he was available.

A British director who resides in Los Angeles, Apted is the current president of the Directors Guild of America, of which I am a member. He is also the critically acclaimed director of numerous films, including the Academy Award nominated *Coal Miner's Daughter*, starring Sissy Spacek, who received an Oscar for her role of Loretta Lynn. Other notable films directed by Apted, many of which received multiple Academy nominations and Academy awards, are *Gorillas in the Mist*, starring Sigourney Weaver; *Enigma*, a World War II drama; and *Nell*, which also garnered an Academy Award for Jodie Foster, who played the title role. In 1999, Apted directed *The World Is Not Enough*, starring Pierce Brosnan as James Bond.

His legendary career not only spans feature films, but also television and documentaries, including his award-winning *49 Up* and the three establishing episodes of HBO's mini-series *Rome*.

Apted possessed all the credentials, as well as the qualities, we desired in a director for our film, *Amazing Grace*. What impressed me personally about Apted was his passion for authenticity in historical films. Most importantly, he shared the vision for the film that Walden Media executives, Cary Granat and Micheal Flaherty, and the other members of Walden and the Bristol Bay Production teams had for the film.

Michael Apted's vision was to tell the story as a political thriller and then show how Wilberforce and his close friends, the Clapham Circle, and his political colleagues, including Prime Minister William Pitt, were able to accomplish their impossible goal — passing the bill to end the slave trade in the British Empire in the 18th century.

Apted sums it up best in these words, "I wasn't interested in making a dull biopic. This is a great period in British politics. I wanted to make a film that showed how heroic and relevant politics can be, and that's impossible to do in a contemporary setting now that politics is so discredited. We have to make politics relevant to our lives — we ignore it at our peril. The only way to do this on screen was to make a film about a topic that no one could argue was anything but a great and wonderful thing — the abolition of slavery. Nowadays, we tend to see politics used for self-interest, but Wilberforce and his associates were able to maneuver their way through that self-interest in their opponents and form alliances to help them reach their goal."

The actors were equally pleased with our directorial choice. After filming *Amazing Grace*, Ioan Gruffudd, who plays Wilberforce, praised Apted. "He is one of the best directors I've worked with, well prepared, with confidence in the actors, the script, and the crew. Every day we knew exactly what we were doing and that inspires actors and gives them confidence to do their best work."

Albert Finney, who played John Newton, said that working with Michael Apted was a pleasure. "He is very well organized — everything moves quickly. Often as an actor you are paid to hang about, but there's none of that with Michael."

Michael Gambon, who plays Lord Fox in the movie, praises director Apted: "He's the best film director I've ever worked with. He films at an alarming rate, and he does very few takes because he knows exactly what he wants. He's charming, talented, and positive."

The Screenplay

"If it's not on the page, it's not on the stage," particularly holds true in a period feature film such as *Amazing Grace*. The historical accuracy and solid content was critical to the success of this project. Without a great script, it is impossible to produce a successful film, attract a good director, or assemble a talented cast. Often, numerous

scripts are written before one is agreed upon. The *three* most important elements in the making of a motion picture are — *story, story, story!*

The Screenwriter

Once Apted was hired to direct the film, he suggested we consider British screenwriter Steven Knight, who had recently received an Academy Award nomination for his poignant screenplay, *Dirty Pretty Things*. This critically acclaimed film depicted the heartrending dilemma of illegal immigrants in London, who were forced to sell their body organs on the black market in an effort to survive. Ironically, Apted had a meeting scheduled with Knight for the following day. Again, God's providence! He explained that they had mutual admiration for each other's work, and were hoping to find a project that they could work on together.

After several conferences with Apted and the creative team, Knight reviewed the salient points of his creative process, and then presented his vision for the film: "When I'm writing an original screenplay, I usually think of a scene and see where that leads me, but with a commissioned script based on actual events, the plot is already there; you know what is going to happen. So I decided to find the protagonist, Wilberforce, at his lowest ebb and see how he deals with it. His struggle took place over many years — he devoted 20 years to the Bill, bringing it back to Parliament over and over again. Europe and America were in turmoil, so we had to find a way to get from the beginning of his story to the end without turning it into a history lesson and without using the characters' dialogue to explain it all. Certain events had to be telescoped by finding a key scene and watching how Wilberforce reacts to what is going on."

"I'd like the film to show that standing up for your rights takes courage and will reap rewards in the long run."

— Ioan Gruffudd



The screenwriter ultimately defined the film story by depicting the drama of Wilberforce's 20-year journey through the years of his "ups and downs" in his Parliament battles, finally culminating in a

vote by the House of Commons that gave him a resounding victory that ended the slave trade throughout the British Empire. The writer focused on the man, who was instrumental in ending the horrors of the slave trade, and how he was called and empowered by God!

Knight also explained that his research gave him many interesting details that he used in the film to depict Wilberforce's everyday life. "Wilberforce was a single-minded man who kept pursuing his goal and plucked success from the jaws of defeat. To most people at the time, the idea of abolishing the slave trade was

ludicrous — like someone today suggesting that we abandon the internal combustion engine right now! At the same time, he was an eccentric. He had a house full of sick animals and could never bring himself to fire any of his staff, so that by the time he was 50, he had a house full of old servants, most of whom did nothing. And he would come home to find his house full of people he didn't know sleeping there."

Casting Wilberforce

After the director is hired and the screenplay is written, the casting process begins. In this process, all the producers and executives presented their "wish list" of actors for the role of William Wilberforce. We approached a few actors, but when our exceptional casting director, Nina Gold, suggested that Welsh actor Ioan Gruffudd (pronounced Yo-an Griff-ith) play the role, the decision to hire him was unanimous! Gruffudd, who had trained at the



William Wilberforce (portrayed by Ioan Gruffudd). Wilberforce, in the House of Commons, presents the very long petition with thousands of signatures demanding an end to the vicious slave trade that was supplying the usual commerce. Ioan gives a virtuoso performance.

Royal Academy of Arts in London, possessed all the characteristics needed to play Wilberforce, and was hired immediately.

I had first become acquainted with Ioan when he appeared in the role of Admiral Horatio Hornblower in the PBS series *Hornblower*. He was outstanding in this role, and his performance alone proved that he could play Wilberforce with passion and perfection. More recently, he appeared as Mr. Fantastic in the blockbuster Marvel Comics adaptation, *The Fantastic Four*, and

through that performance I identified many more qualities that proved to me he was our Wilberforce.

After Gruffudd was cast to play Wilberforce, he explained what had attracted him to this specific role: "It was the combination of the director, the script, and the story," he replied. "It's very rare to find all three of such a high standard in the same project. I was convinced that I could play this role and that I'd be skillfully guided by Michael Apted."



Ioan Gruffudd and Albert Finney, portraying William Wilberforce and John Newton, respectively. In this scene, the repentant former slave captain is confronted by Wilberforce, who begs for his help in making the people aware of the horrors of slavery. Newton, who has renounced his former career, intends to live out his life quietly in a country parish. Wilberforce, however, persuades him to write down his account of slave trading, and this document proves a decisive key in overturning opposition to the efforts of Wilberforce in the House of Commons.

Gruffudd admits he knew a little about William Wilberforce and his place in history, “I was naïve about his many achievements. Reading about his struggle against the world of his time — it was likened to trying to take away the defense budget or ban the use of oil in the UK today.”

The actor said he read extensively to prepare for the role of Wilberforce. Explaining how he immersed himself in the period, he said, “I found William Wilberforce to be a likeable man, constantly conflicted between his faith and his work in Parliament, but at his

core he was a humanitarian, filled with compassion and courage. At only 5’4”, he had a towering presence and an incredible voice.”

Ioan’s exceptional talent and abilities coupled with his charisma, innate charm, and wit made him a splendid and authentic Wilberforce. He brought the necessary passion to the role, which was no easy task, especially considering how absorbed Wilberforce was in the call that God had for his life. I believe you will find Ioan Gruffudd’s performance in the movie is truly passionate and superb.

The Cast

British casting director Nina Gold did an exceptional job in casting the film. First, she presented a list of actors, and in a collaborative effort with the production team, Michael Apted selected the cast for the film. Affirming Nina Gold's fine work, Ioan Gruffudd accurately describes the importance of casting: "It really bolsters up a project when every role is cast so brilliantly."

To everyone's delight, legendary actor **Albert Finney** was cast in the role of John Newton. Finney has amassed a plethora of impressive credits and awards throughout his long, illustrious career, but he is best known today as the curmudgeon lawyer, actor Julia Roberts' boss, in the Academy Award-winning film, *Erin Brockovich*. Finney is absolutely brilliant in *Amazing Grace* as John Newton, the former slave trader turned preacher.

In his own words, he describes his character: "Newton was a sea captain who profited from the slave trade until, aged 45, he suffered a crisis of conscience and left the sea to enter the Church. There he remained and wrote over 200 hymns, including 'Amazing Grace.' Newton was a mentor to Wilberforce, who turned to him at a time of personal conflict. Newton advised Wilberforce to pursue his dream of the abolition of slavery."

In the movie, Newton says in a poignant scene, "There are two things I have learned from my life — that I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior!" Screenwriter Steven Knight extracted this line directly from John Newton's memoirs, but I can't imagine Newton himself saying the words with as much impact as Albert Finney does on the big screen! The moment Albert Finney delivers the lines is a defining pinnacle in my career as a filmmaker. It just doesn't get any better than this!

Michael Gambon, a distinguished veteran of stage, screen, television, plays Lord Fox. Gambon describes his character, "He's an MP and a member of the British aristocracy who initially opposes

the abolition of slavery, but then he changes his views and backs Wilberforce."

Gambon shared Gruffudd's enthusiasm over his fellow cast members. "I knew Ioan's work. He's young, intelligent, and handsome, and I enjoy working with him. I've known Albert for over 40 years and have done a couple of plays and a film with him, so it was good to see him on set. I've loved every minute of my time on the film."

Newcomer **Benedict Cumberbatch** relished his role as William Pitt the Younger, Britain's youngest ever prime minister, and said, "It is initially daunting to take on the role of someone with such iconic stature in British history. I was vaguely aware of the history and had seen some portraits and gained some useful insights from a recent biography of Pitt written by William Hague, former leader of the Conservative Party. He invited us to the Houses of Parliament, and it's a potent and powerful place, which gave me an idea of Pitt's passion for politics and how intoxicating it would have been for him. His father was prime minister before him, and it seemed natural to Pitt to channel all his energy into his parliamentary career. In the film, Pitt starts out as prime minister in his twenties and we follow his relationship with Wilberforce to his deathbed, so I wanted to understand the whole stretch of the man's life. He also suffered from ill health and had been told by doctors to drink two to three bottles of port a day, which obviously took a terrible toll on his health and made him an alcoholic. He was incredibly intense and fiercely intelligent but physically awkward, tall and gangly. His body suffered the ravages of a peptic ulcer, which eventually killed him."

Romola Garai plays Barbara Spooner, Wilberforce's wife, whom he married after only a two-week courtship. She explained how the shortage of material on Barbara Ann Spooner presented a challenge for her: "Michael was keen that we had background material on the period, but little is known of Barbara's life before she married William Wilberforce. In those days, women were still regarded as

someone's daughter, wife, or mother, rather than noteworthy in their own right. But as soon as she married Wilberforce, she became part of his movement for abolition, and they remained married for 35 years, till Wilberforce's death in 1833." Romola has a rich background in theater and film, and appeared in *Vanity Fair* and Woody Allen's *Matchpoint* and *Scoop*. She has a delightful energy and fabulous range for portraying a variety of film characters.

Actor **Rufus Sewell** describes the character he played, Thomas Clarkson, a contemporary of Wilberforce: "As a student, he won an essay competition on the subject of slavery and became interested in the subject. Then he traveled the length and breadth of the country, canvassing against the slave trade and gathering information. He joined up with Wilberforce and became the *man in the field*. He was a religious man, but hung out with the wrong types because they would give him proof of the iniquities of the trade."

Sewell emphasized the relevance of the story for today's audiences, "People who do good are not necessarily totally clean-cut and wholesome. The abolitionists were a very mixed bunch of individuals. There is good and bad in everyone, so it's worth

appealing to the good in people. This is a film about real human beings doing something good."

Favorite Scenes

Ioan Gruffudd describes one of his favorite scenes. "Wilberforce sings 'Amazing Grace' in a gentleman's club in a very aggressive manner to show his peers who he is and what he stands for. It's a very startling image and an arresting moment in the film."

This scene of Wilberforce making a dramatic public confession of faith by standing and singing "Amazing Grace," reminded me of a time when we were filming the CBS series, *Christy*, and Judy Collins, whose version of "Amazing Grace," is a favorite, performed the song on the series. It was a dream

"William Wilberforce was a man of faith who considered retreating from the world to devote himself to religion. With a very strong moral drive, based on his religious beliefs, Wilberforce moved in the real world and could form alliances with people he didn't totally approve of in order to get closer to his goal. He proved that although he was driven by a divine purpose to rid the world of this iniquitous slave trade, to execute this mission he needed to be strong, worldly, smart, and political. A combination of Christian visionary and skilled politician, his overwhelming tenacity eventually allowed him to reach his goal."

— Michael Apted, director, *Amazing Grace*



of mine to have Judy sing and she appeared as a blind mountain woman, whose character was the cove's "keeper" of their music. This was the last episode we filmed before we wrapped for holidays, and the cast and crew were exhausted and anxious to finish the show, so they could go home for Christmas! The temperatures had dipped to almost freezing in the mountains of Tennessee, just as Catherine Marshall had described in *Christy*, the book that the series was

Lord Tarleton (portrayed by Ciaran Hinds). In his debate with William Wilberforce, we sense the tension between these lions, so different from each other in this crucial moral question. Wilberforce was determined and spent his entire political life in the pursuit of the abolition of the slave trade. It would be 26 more years before slavery itself ended in the British Empire. Wilberforce died three days after this, his life complete. The bicentennial of this seminal event will be observed in 2007.



based upon. It was not the great day on the set I had envisioned. But as Judy Collins began to sing, the atmosphere suddenly changed! Silence pervaded the room . . . it was almost as if that moment in time was frozen as her beautiful voice and the words of “Amazing Grace” pierced the hearts of the cast, the crew, and our guests. It was as though a supernatural peace fell upon the set. No longer was anyone anxious, tired, or cold . . . I saw tears in the eyes of everyone — all faiths, young and old, adult and child, man and woman. It doesn’t matter who you are. Hearing those words penned by John Newton will stir your soul!

A favorite scene of mine in *Amazing Grace* is Albert Finney’s declaration as a sinner. Another favorite scene is an exchange between Wilberforce and his butler, played by Jonathan Swift, laced with both humor and truth. When the butler finds Wilberforce rolling around in the grass, his embarrassed master tries to explain that he was praying. “Oh, so you’ve found God, Sir?” the amused butler asks him. Wilberforce chuckles, “I think it’s more like God found me, and I must say, I find it quite inconvenient!” These lines are priceless. Just as Jesus said, “take the narrow gate . . .” but it’s rarely convenient, is it? It’s usually a struggle, but oh, what peace we find there!

Aspire to Excellence

Jesus Christ calls us to aspire to excellence in every area of our lives — faith, family, friendship, and career. Producing is no exception! In spite of the generic and budgetary differences between film and television production, I think you will find excellence in the CBS series *Christy*, even though the budget was less than that of a feature film. While producing a feature film is far more exacting than producing a television show, the real luxury of film is that it allows the filmmaker much more time to tell the story. A film can

take months to make, whereas a television show can be wrapped in a week or two.

Yet film does have its challenges . . . while a TV series has a chance to build an audience to increase its ratings, a film has only a few days at the box office to be successful. Today, DVDs are an additional source of income for film and television. However, it's very important that films like *Amazing Grace* do well immediately at the box office because high revenue convinces the studio executives to produce more inspirational and redemptive movies.



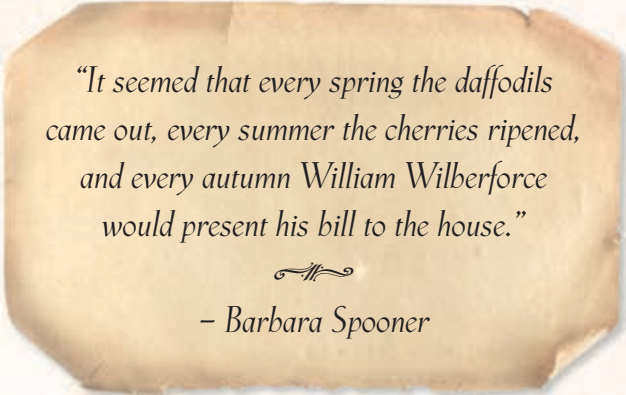
Barbara Spooner (portrayed by Romola Garai). William met her late in life after being introduced by Marianne and Henry Thornton. The Thorntons became “active matchmakers” as they plotted, schemed, and literally pushed the two to spend time together, encouraging them to take long walks in the garden. William and Barbara shared a great delight as they discovered in each other an enormous passion for actively pursuing an end to the slave trade. She became his staunch encourager and was an abolitionist.

Amazing Grace . . . The Film

The day I arrived on location, it was exhilarating to see the dream come alive as I observed the talented cast and crew. Charles Wood, the production designer, Remi Adefarasin, director of photography, Rick Shaine, the film editor and Jenny Beavan, the costume designer, all under the direction of Michael Apted, did exquisite work on the film.

Charles Wood, the production designer, faced many challenges. There are no Parliament buildings from the 18th century existing in London today, so Wood and his team had to recreate the House of Commons so we could accurately depict the debates and meetings. To accurately reconstruct the original Parliament structure, Wood had to locate a building that would accommodate the member benches, which were located on the ground floor, with the additional gallery created by a U-shaped balcony above. Scouting locations throughout the area, he finally located a deserted church south of London that was built in the 18th century. Again, God's providence!

Taking the structure, Wood used a vintage sketch by an artist from the period who had drawn several scenes of the actual Parliament sessions in the House of Commons, to design the interiors. Wood was astounded to discover William Wilberforce standing in debate in one of the drawings! He also identified many of the Members of the Parliament in the sketches who would be portrayed in the film — Lord Fox, Lord Tarleton, the Duke of Clarence, and many others who were prominent in the slave trade debates. What a treasure!



*"It seemed that every spring the daffodils
came out, every summer the cherries ripened,
and every autumn William Wilberforce
would present his bill to the house."*

— Barbara Spooner

Researching the film, I visited several historical sites, including Wilberforce's home in Hull, but the most memorable of these tours, was my visit to St. Mary Woolnooth, the church in the center of London where John Newton was the pastor. I walked down the aisle and climbed the stairs to the very pulpit where Newton once

delivered his Sunday sermons. Standing in that sacred spot, I closed my eyes, imagining him in this church. Suddenly, the front door opened, startling me, and in came the members of the church choir. I watched them file into the pews to begin weekly practice with their director. To my astonishment, the first piece of music they rehearsed was none other than "Amazing Grace"! Tears filled my eyes and I was transported back in time to when John Newton lived. I shall never forget that moving visit!

Why Wilberforce?

William Wilberforce is a man that Abraham Lincoln once said, "every school child in America should know," yet he is virtually unknown in the 21st century. It is a privilege and an honor to be a part of this excellent production team who introduces Wilberforce to the world today. Society owes a great debt and immense gratitude to this courageous man and the work he accomplished in his lifetime. His life serves as an example for what one man can do when called by God . . . *His wonders to perform*. I hope everyone throughout the world will come to know William Wilberforce through this film and that they will be inspired to seek God for His purpose in their own lives. It is my dream that the life of Wilberforce, as depicted in the film *Amazing Grace*, can become a model of faith for women and men so that they will know that God can equip them, just as

he did Wilberforce, to do the job that He has called them to do. In Catherine Marshall's book *Christy, Miss Alice*, the Quaker lady who ran the mission where Christy taught school, encouraged the disheartened young teacher when things became too hard for her bear, "If we don't do the work that God has given us to do . . . then who will do it?"

Romance

I am a romantic who believes that every film needs a good love story! Much to my delight, the writer and director depicted Wilberforce's courtship with Barbara Ann Spooner in several scenes of the movie. This romantic encounter brings us into the hearts of the main characters. Costume designer, Jenny Beaven, explained that since little was known about Barbara Spooner, she used fashionable clothes to establish the character's personality. Actor Romola Garai, who played Spooner, reiterated, "Because the subject matter is politics, we could have gone the dowdy route, but we all decided that she was a stylish woman with a strong personality and should wear her clothes accordingly."

Romola Garai is both appealing and charming as Barbara Ann Spooner, and it's delightful to watch the matchmaking attempts of Henry and Marianne Thornton in the film! Before his conversion, Wilberforce was quite a *bon vivant* about town. Following the call on his life, he became so incredibly driven to abolish the slave trade that he no longer had time for a social life, much less a romance. At one point during his career in Parliament, he entertained the idea of

a romance with the sister of one of his political cronies, but when he discovered her desires in life were far different from his, he abruptly ended the budding relationship. Wanting no distractions in his work, he became even more absorbed in his goals, but that all changed when his friend Henry Thornton married Wilberforce's childhood friend, Marianne. Observing Henry's love and passion for her, Wilberforce was filled with a sudden longing for a relationship. When he and Barbara Ann Spooner were introduced, they discovered they shared the same passions and goals in life. Two weeks later they were married!

Purpose

There is a special niche for period films as evidenced by the success of the hit film *Pride and Prejudice*. Many other classic films have won Oscars — *A Lion in Winter*, *Chariots of Fire*, and *A Man for All Seasons*. In addition, Mel

Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* revealed the overwhelming power of an audience of faith! *Amazing Grace* attracts all of these audiences. This adds up to an entertaining film and compelling experience for every audience.

There were very memorable moments throughout the production, but perhaps the most significant was the first day of filming when I realized that this incredible story of a man who truly changed the world and made it a better place, was the culmination of a dream. William Wilberforce, a man of his time, will become a hero of our time.

"At the moment he's not well known in our society, but I'm hoping and praying that the movie will change that! I hope that after seeing Amazing Grace each and every filmgoer will be encouraged to seek God's purpose for their lives so they can go out and change the world just as Wilberforce did in his time!"

— Ken Wales



So, the question is, what will you do with the gifts you've been given? Will you put them in a drawer and pursue a comfortable life? Or will you choose to defy the odds, step out and confront the injustice in the world? Many choose mediocrity because it's easier than reaching for greatness. My prayer is that you will internalize the life of William Wilberforce and make a difference in your world, whoever and wherever you are.

William Pitt the Younger (portrayed by Benedict Cumberbatch). A close friend and ally of William Wilberforce, Pitt was first elected to the House of Commons in 1781 and forged a solid friendship with Wilberforce; two years later, Pitt was elected prime minister at the early age of 24. Cumberbatch magnificently depicts Pitt in his tireless battle to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire.

In William Pitt's final scene in the film he is visited by Wilberforce as he lies dying. Pitt reaches for Wilberforce's hand and says, "I wish I had your faith."

