



10 Films: 10 Commandments

In advance of the release of a major new DVD resource for schools, Brian Holmes went to meet film-maker Ian Cottage and executive producer Mike Kelly, to discuss their film *EXODUS 20*.

To listen to the full-length version of Brian's interview with Ian and Mike go to: www.exodus20.org.uk



Film-making

The lure of celebrity and fame is everywhere today, from *Big Brother* to *The X Factor*. Everybody wants to be a star; to have a hit single, to be on the TV or to be in a movie. Imagine the thrill when you get the chance to write and star in your own feature film...

Well, that's exactly what happened to 120 kids in the North East in the summer of 2004. As part of an education and arts project funded by Creative Partnerships, film-maker Ian Cottage went to work with ten schools to explore the meaning of the Ten Commandments. Drawing inspiration from a Finnish film on the same subject, Ian set out to involve as many school children as possible in the film-making process.

The involvement of children was integral to the vision of Creative Partnerships, which was keen to support a process whereby art could be created by building a relationship between the artist (eg the film-maker) and the subject matter (eg the children themselves).

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10 schools: 10 stories

Ten schools were given one of the Ten Commandments each. Teachers and children were asked to explore its meaning and relevance for today and to write a story set within their own life-experiences. After receiving the stories, Ian set about converting them into scripts. These were read to children who then gave feedback.

According to Ian, involving children at various points in the creative process helped to give the films a 'gritty realism' by using the authentic language of young people to give voice to their concerns.

Once the scripts had been finalised, Ian and his professional film crew set to work filming the stories. Children from the schools which had worked on the stories and scripts then acted them out in front of the camera. In most cases it only took two days of filming to finish each story. As Ian says: 'Part of the idea was to get the kids to work with a professional crew and to understand that the process of film-making isn't glamorous at all. It's about a lot of hard work and concentration.'

Once the ten individual stories had been filmed they were edited into a single 65 minute feature. This film is about how twelve young people, of various

ages, deal with the real-life concerns and pressures that face today's school-children. Spanning a whole weekend, from a Friday afternoon at school through to going back to school on Monday morning, ten mini-narratives come together to tell one story.

Tough topics

Bullying, knife-culture, under-age drinking and other tough topics are dealt with without sensationalism. In some films these unsettling themes are at the heart of the story; in other films they are present but much further in the background – there to help locate the action in real-life.

I asked Ian what appealed most to him about the project. He replied: 'What I was interested in was the way in which the Ten Commandments are so interwoven into our society that, even if we don't know it, we are constantly working within the framework they provide. Also for me, there was the psychology behind it. How do kids interact? How do they go about their lives? How do they build relationships or lose relationships?'

I asked about the significance of setting the films in the North East of England. Executive Producer, Mike Kelly of Airship Films, explained: 'The North East is a good home for the film.' He continued: 'These are ordinary stories about ordinary people from the North East. They speak with a very

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strong indigenous local voice. The stories are not set in some kind of generic, anonymous place; they have a strong identity because they are rooted in the local communities in which they were shot. The North East of England helps to set the “voice” of the film. It provides both a visual back-drop and an ambience.’

World premiere

The *EXODUS 20* feature film had its premiere at the Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle. Then the *Making of...* documentary was aired on Tyne Tees TV.

From the perspective of the children, their time in front of the camera seems to have had a positive impact. Ian remarked: ‘Their confidence grew from it. I’ve been told recently that one of the girls in *EXODUS 20* was originally bullied and now, after doing this film, she carries cameras around and is the school film-maker. Her confidence has grown and other kids react really positively to her.’

With regard to the future of the film, Mike is interested in exploring ways in which the material could be developed and presented in different ways. He is keen, for example, to encourage schools, churches and other organisations to use *EXODUS 20* to help people think and talk about the ‘age-old moral dilemmas’ at the heart of the Ten Commandments.

Lesson plans

An *EXODUS 20* lesson pack has been published by Active Media Publishing in association with Airship Films and supported by The Bible Society, The Baptist Church, The Methodist Church and The Church Army. Suitable for students aged 11–14, the pack includes the original 65 minute feature, the *Making of...* documentary and – more significantly – all ten shorts together with a series of RE lesson plans as well as suggestions for harnessing the films to teach PSHE and Citizenship, and ideas for using them in assemblies. Each mini-film is just five to ten

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The *EXODUS 20* lesson pack is due to be published on 1 October 2006, priced £40 (inc VAT). All *ACT Now* readers can save £5 if they order before the publication date. See page 2 of this issue for details.



minutes long; perfect for inclusion in a lesson. It also includes a bonus video clip of Rob Lacey (author of *The Word on the Street*, formerly known as *The Street Bible*) performing the Ten Commandments on a hilltop.

The various lesson plans and activities were generated by a working party of practising Christian teachers and schools’ workers, who trialled them in the classroom. Feedback from children and evaluations from the teachers was then used by Alison E Cannon (author of *Voices for Today* – reviewed in *ACT Now*, Summer 2006) and Rupert Kaye (Editor of *ACT Now* and Chief Executive of the Association of Christian Teachers) as they worked to edit and expand the materials for the pack.

Exciting and relevant

Excited by this project, Richard Armiger of Active Media Publishing says: ‘As soon as I watched the film, I could see the possibilities. Not only is *EXODUS 20* edgy and culturally relevant in a way that few Christian resources are, but it’s brilliant to see children engaging with one of the most significant parts of the Bible! Hopefully, it will inspire young people, and their teachers, to see the Bible as being both exciting and relevant.’

Rupert Kaye comments: ‘One of the most challenging aspects of *EXODUS 20* is the way it encourages children and teachers to try and work out exactly which commandment is being explored. It’s not quite as straightforward as you might think. As each of the short films show us, commandments are rarely broken one at a time!’ He continues: ‘It is not often children get to watch a film with an open Bible in front of them and are truly motivated to connect with the text.’

■ Brian Holmes

