

## And In Other News...

# Faith Like Potatoes, or Biblical Faith?

by Shaun Willcock

In September 2006 a new religious movie premiered in South Africa, called *Faith Like Potatoes*. I say a religious movie rather than a truly Christian movie, because although it claims to be based on the life story of South African farmer and Charismatic evangelist Angus Buchan, it is not a biblically sound Christian film. As it is a South African film and not a Hollywood production, it will have more of an impact in South Africa than perhaps anywhere else, especially as it is being shown not only in cinemas, but in town halls and church buildings across the country. It has been selected for two international film festivals and will thus doubtless make some waves beyond the borders of South Africa, but even so it is not a “blockbuster” like certain religious movies of recent times, notably *The Passion* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and there is no need to write a lengthy critique of it. But what I write may be of help to some, who are given a confusing message of “Christianity” by this movie, and the book on which it is based.

What is the movie all about?

According to the movie’s website, it tells the story of Angus Buchan, “a Zambian farmer of Scottish heritage, who leaves his farm in the midst of political unrest and racially charged land reclaims [in Zambia in the 1970s] and travels south with his family to start a better life in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. With nothing more than a caravan on a patch of land, and help from his foreman, Simeon Bhengu, the Buchan family struggle to settle in a new country. Faced with ever mounting challenges, hardships and personal turmoil, Angus quickly spirals down into a life consumed by anger, fear and destruction. [The movie] weaves together the moving life journey of a man who, like his potatoes, grows his faith, unseen until the harvest.”

After hearing the testimony of another farmer at the local Methodist church, Angus Buchan professed faith in Christ, in 1979. He then began the journey towards becoming, eventually, a Charismatic evangelist, who has now preached to multiplied thousands all over the world.

I have more than a passing interest in this story. Although we have long since parted ways, there was a time, many years ago now, when Angus Buchan and I were good friends. I was a young man, involved with the Methodist institution I had spent some years in but entering in my ignorance into the errors of the Pentecostal movement, and Angus was a farmer in a nearby town who had also professed conversion not long before, and who was preaching on occasions in the local Methodist church. I met him at a camp organised by the church, and we became friends, although he was quite a few years older than me. I started visiting him at his farm, spending time there with him and his lovely family, I preached at the youth service he used to lead, and we would often talk, out in the fields of his farm and into the night in his living room, about our plans, and what we believed the Lord might have in store for us in the future. At one time I even started to build a chapel he wanted to put up on his farm. When my wife and I were married, we asked Angus to lead the worship at our wedding.

But then our paths diverged. It was inevitable, for as he embraced the Charismatic movement and became increasingly involved in it, the Lord was opening my eyes to the unbiblical errors of Pentecostalism/Charismatism, culminating ultimately in my departure from it and utter repudiation of it. And in this can be seen the discriminating grace of God. Separation from all that the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement stood for was what I desired, whereas Angus wanted more of it. Truly, “there, but for the grace of God, go I.” God in His mercy set me free.

In addition, at the same time the Lord was revealing to me, through the study of His Word, the truth about the Great Whore, the Roman Catholic institution, and about the many harlot “daughters” of Rome. I tried to share these things with Angus, but he would have none of it. Like most Charismatics, he was convinced that there were many true Christian people in the Roman Catholic institution. Well has it been said that Pentecostalism is a bridge to Rome! For when the Bible has been set aside as the sole rule of faith and practice, as it has been within Pentecostalism/Charismatism, then the door has been swung open to embrace Roman Catholicism as being of God. Like Romanism, Pentecostalism does not view the written Word of God as the sole authority. Like Romanism, it permits other sources of authority: in the case of Rome, human tradition; and in the case of Pentecostalism, “speaking in tongues” and “prophecy.” Is it any wonder, then, that when Roman Catholics are seen to be “speaking in tongues”, Pentecostals and Charismatics rejoice, and welcome them as “brethren in Christ”? After all, if the Bible is set aside, and if being “one in the Spirit” (as they believe) is all that matters, how could they possibly reject them?

And so we parted ways. And our lives took very different courses. Angus Buchan became a Charismatic preacher, taking the message of “Jesus the Healer” (in the Charismatic sense) to multiplied thousands of people around South Africa and other parts of the world. He wrote his autobiography, *Faith Like Potatoes*. And now – the book has become the movie.

Angus Buchan is an extremely likeable man. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is brim-full with charlatans, men (and women) in positions of influence behind pulpits who are nothing but liars and deceivers, and they know it, but they’re in it for the money and the fame. They do not believe a word they are saying. But there are also others in the movement who are sincerely convinced that what they are saying and claiming is the truth, the Gospel truth. And I have no reason to doubt that Angus Buchan falls into this latter category. Certainly he would have done so all those years ago, when I knew him and considered him a close friend. He apparently produces his TV programme at his own cost, and distances himself from the American “televangelists”, who (he correctly says) spend 10 minutes preaching and 20 minutes asking for money. I have no reason to doubt that he is very sincere. But as the saying goes, one can be sincerely wrong. And as an enthusiastic proponent of modern-day Charismatic heresy, he *is* sincerely wrong. It is an unbiblical, heretical movement. And this becomes clear in the movie itself:

According to one reviewer, “The film depicts some incredible miracles that God accomplishes through and around Angus. Perhaps, the most awe-inspiring part of the film is the point when, through the prayer of Angus, God raises to life a farm worker who had been struck dead by lightning” (*Africa Christian Action* film review).

Well, that’s to be expected when one makes a movie based on the life of a Charismatic “faith healer.” But let’s get real here. Angus Buchan prayed and a person (in this case a woman) was *raised to life*? Many, many Charismatic “faith healers” have made such astounding claims; but not one of them has ever been truly verified. Nor will it ever happen. The Lord Jesus Christ raised the dead when He ministered on earth, and He, through His servants, raised others to life in the apostolic age after He had ascended back to heaven; but after that? These miracles were among “the signs of an apostle” (see 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3,4), and the apostolic ministry ceased in the first century AD. No one is an apostle today, it was a foundational ministry of the early Church, before the Scriptures were complete (Eph. 2:20). The gift of “working of miracles” (1 Cor. 12:10) was, like the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and miraculous healing, a temporary gift given to the apostles and a few others in the apostolic age; it is not given to anyone today. *Anyone*, today, who claims to have raised someone from the dead is either deliberately lying, or is utterly deceived. I am not saying that Angus was deliberately trying to deceive people by making this claim. Doubtless he really believes that a woman was raised to life through his prayer; but in this he is terribly deceived. It is easy to make the claim that someone has been raised to life; but what solid evidence is there? Was the woman truly verified as being dead? Were there competent witnesses who can attest to it? Not all who are struck by lightning die – but doubtless many would have *felt* like they were dead! From time to time, from all over the world, we hear accounts of people supposedly raised to life by some Pentecostal “healer” or other. But where is the *proof*? Must we just take their word for it? That is simply not good enough.

It is highly significant that in the book, Angus Buchan himself makes it clear that he was uncertain whether the woman was merely unconscious, or truly dead. He relates how lightning struck the hut where some women were sleeping, and all had recovered except one, whom they had left lying in the hut, covered by a blanket. They were all shouting and screaming, and they said to him, "She is dead." He went into the hut, which was dark and smoky, and he could see very little at first. He writes, "*I had no idea whether the woman was dead or unconscious*, but I acted in raw faith, in fear and trembling. I laid my hands on her, closed my eyes and prayed" (pg. 45). He then felt he should lift her up, so he did so and she remained standing. He told her to lift up her hands to God, and she did so.

Note that there was no verification that she was truly dead. The women were highly emotional, shouting, screaming, sure she was dead. They had just come from a hut which lightning had struck, and this was a very natural reaction! Their friend was not moving, so they assumed she was dead. No one can blame them for thinking it, but there was no solid evidence. Angus Buchan could not see well inside the dark and smoky hut, and by his own admission he had *no idea* whether she was dead or merely unconscious! Why, then, must *we* believe that she was dead? Why should anyone? We only have the word of some hysterical women, who had just emerged in terror from a dark hut which had just been struck by lightning.

This same reviewer, so enthusiastic in her praise for the supposed "miracle" of raising someone to life, in the very next paragraph makes a most telling admission: "While the heart of the Gospel, that man is a sinner and can only be changed because of Christ's redeeming work on the cross, is neglected, the message that God can transform lives comes through clearly in the film."

Apart from any other consideration, then, how can this be a truly Christian film if the heart of the Gospel is neglected? I am not for a moment saying that the Pentecostal "gospel" is the true Gospel of Christ. It most certainly is not. It is an Arminian, "God loves you", "God loves everyone", "just believe in Jesus" message that is totally unbiblical. But the point is this: this movie *claims* to be a movie about a Pentecostal evangelist, and even within Pentecostalism there is at times a very watered-down, shallow presentation of some fundamental aspects of the Gospel (there is some truth in other words, but nothing like the *whole* truth); and therefore one would expect the movie to at least present this. But apparently, according to this reviewer who is very much in favour of the movie, even this is neglected!

Or perhaps, the Pentecostal/Charismatic "gospel" is itself so watered down these days, that this movie will actually be accepted, *by* Pentecostals and Charismatics, as *indeed* presenting their "gospel"!

One is left with the strong suspicion that the film's makers knew that too "strong" a message would simply not draw the crowds, and thus not make money, to the extent that a more ambiguous message would do. This is why it is so often described merely as an "inspiring story of faith and perseverance." One has to ask: if Angus Buchan truly is an evangelist of Christ, *why* would the very heart of the Gospel of Christ be omitted from a movie about his life?

The suspicion grows stronger when one reads the comments of Frank Rautenbach, the actor who plays the part of Angus Buchan and who had previously starred in a South African soap opera. He said: "It was of paramount importance to me that we should make a real movie and not a 'religious' one.... the most attractive thing to me about this role was the message of hope that the movie brings. Hope in spite of the difficulties of life."

Once again, the ambiguity: a "message of hope". A truly Christian movie would not simply bring a "message of hope". It would uncompromisingly bring the message of *hope in Christ!* This is how Paul preached, over and over: he preached of "the hope of Israel", Christ Himself (Acts 28:20); of "hope toward God" (Acts 24:15); and he wrote, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:13); and, "be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23); and, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27); and, the "Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1).

As the lead actor said, it was to be a "real movie, not a 'religious' one"; in other words, a movie that would appeal to the people of the world as simply "a message of hope", without being too "preachy", without coming down too hard on sinners, a movie that (as the reviewer said) neglects the very heart of

the Gospel!

When the movie premiered in South Africa, it was reported that it did so to a “star-studded line-up”, the “who’s who of South African actors, movie-makers, entertainers, sports people, Christian leaders, and musicians.” Just one question arises here: *Why?* Why was this important to the movie’s producers? Why was it relevant at all? This is merely following the ways of the world, playing to the gallery, glorying in the world of showbiz. Where is humility, and more importantly, *where is the Gospel?* After all, if this film really did present the true, biblical Gospel, would the “who’s who” of the entertainment world have been there? Of course not! The world does not love the truth! Clearly there was little or nothing, really, in this movie to make them feel uncomfortable: no clear message of sin, of total depravity, or of redemption through Christ Jesus alone.

No, *Faith Like Potatoes* is not a truly Christian movie. It is a movie about a fiery Charismatic “faith healer”, a likeable, personable and compassionate man who doubtless believes that the message he is preaching is the true Gospel of Christ. But for it to be a Christian movie, it must present *biblical* Christianity, not the deceptions of Pentecostal/Charismatic error. As a “Christian” movie, then, it completely fails the test.

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