

And In Other News...

ROCKY BALBOA: A “CHRISTIAN BOXER”?

by Shaun Willcock

It's getting ridiculous. Mel Gibson's Roman Catholic splatter-movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, set the ball rolling in recent times, and now we are seeing one movie after another being churned out with a supposedly “Christian” theme, or at the very least supposedly “Christian” undertones. The latest to hit the screens – believe it or not! – is *Rocky Balboa*, described as “the final round in the award-winning *Rocky* franchise.”

Yes, you read right: Hollywood actor Sylvester Stallone created the character of “Rocky”, a heavyweight boxer, decades ago, in a movie of the same name; and the first one was followed by a string of sequels. And now he has made, and acted in, what he says will be the last *Rocky* movie. Except that this one is being touted as a movie to build one up in one's “Christian” faith!

Incredible? Astounding? Read on, gentle reader. But prepare to be shocked to the core as you realise the depths to which those claiming to be “Christians” have sunk, when they can praise this boxing movie as containing a “Christian” message that should be studied, discussed, promoted, and even used as an evangelistic outreach tool!

What is the movie all about? Here is the overview taken from a website called RockyResources.com, with my comments inserted at appropriate points:

“*Rocky Balboa* is an inspirational story that depicts a man who honorably answers the call in his life. With the odds stacked against him Rocky finds something left to give [what “call”? – the “call” to punch up another man for fame or money? Has the so-called “Church” reached the stage where the gory sport of boxing is now to be viewed as a *call*, if a man is “good” at it? Apparently yes].

“The greatest underdog story of our time is back for one final round of the Academy Award-winning *Rocky* franchise, former heavyweight champion Rocky Balboa steps out of retirement and back into the ring, pitting himself against a new rival in a dramatically different era.

“After a virtual boxing match declares Rocky Balboa the victor over current champion Mason ‘The Line’ Dixon, the legendary fighter's passion and spirit are reignited. But when his desire to fight in small, regional competitions is trumped by promoters calling for a re-match of the cyber-fight, Balboa must weigh the mental and physical risks of a high profile exhibition match against his need to be in the ring [his *need* to be in the ring? Do certain men actually have a *need* to be boxers? A “need” used to mean food, clothing, shelter. Other things were “wants”. But apparently the fictional character of Rocky has a “need” to be a boxer. Would someone else then have a “need” to be a knife-fighter, perhaps? After all, if a man has a “need” to be a boxer, then really anything is possible. And more importantly, do some *Christians* have this “need”? Apparently yes, if the fanfare about this movie is to be believed – which it will be, by many].

“*Rocky Balboa* motivates us to face our own challenges with perseverance, community support, and prayer [prayer? I shudder to even imagine how this plays out in the movie. Does Rocky pray for victory in the ring? Do others pray for him to win? I don't know and I don't care. It's enough for me that anyone could even think a movie about a boxing champion could ever possibly motivate anyone to face one's challenges with prayer. What has modern-day “Christianity” become?].

“The story presents a dynamic opportunity for insightful discussions about where we find our courage, how we overcome losses and remain faithful, and what we define as victory” [excuse me, but I thought that Christians knew where to go for the answers to these things. I didn’t think any discussion was needed. The Bible answers all these matters perfectly. True courage comes from the Lord; believers remain faithful to the Lord by His grace, for He enables each one of His elect to persevere to the end; and as for overcoming and the true definition of victory, the Bible says: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and *this* is the victory that overcometh the world, even our *faith*” (1 Jn. 5:4). But apparently now we need to hold *discussions* about these things, being *guided by* this movie about a boxing champion! *Not* even a movie about the life of Paul, or Peter, or David, or Moses – a movie about some fictional boxer called Rocky! “The Lord is my Shepherd,” wrote David in Psa. 23:1, and the Holy Spirit guides into all truth, Jn. 16:13. But *Rocky* is going to be the shepherd of vast numbers of blind moviegoers, who will, they believe, guide them, if not into all truth, then at least into a whole lot. Instead of turning to Christ, multitudes of “churchgoers” now turn to the cinema, and to celluloid superstars for answers to life’s problems. And the most tragic thing of all is, vast numbers don’t even see anything wrong with this. Their lives are so dominated and controlled by Hollywood, that they don’t even perceive the problem!].

And what of the man who created and plays the part of “Rocky”? According to Stuart Shepard of Focus on the Family’s Citizenlink.com, Sylvester Stallone considers himself “reborn.” He said this during a teleconference with pastors and religious leaders, as reported on RockyResources.com. But let us delve a bit deeper. Focus on the Family is so ecumenical that it wouldn’t bother to make this distinction, but we must: Stallone is apparently a *Roman Catholic*. At least he was, by his own admission, and we have seen nothing to indicate that this has changed (and if he isn’t a Papist, then whatever he now is, he is certainly not a true Christian, for if he was he wouldn’t have made this movie). So when he speaks of being “reborn”, we have to bear in mind that he evidently means this in the Roman Catholic sense. And what is that? According to Canon 208 of the Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law, one’s “rebirth” is when one is baptised! And Canon 849 says that by Roman Catholic baptism, “people... are born again as children of God”. Thus a Roman Catholic means something *radically different* from a true Christian, when he speaks of being “reborn”!

Stallone said: “I was raised in a Catholic home, a Christian home, and I went to Catholic schools and I was taught the faith and went as far as I could with it. Until one day, you know, I got out in the so-called real world and I was presented with temptation. I kinda like lost my way and made a lot of bad choices.”

Stallone speaks of Roman Catholicism and Christianity as being one and the same: “I was raised in a Catholic home, a Christian home”. This is how a Roman Catholic would talk, of course, and the ecumenicals at Focus on the Family and elsewhere would readily accept Romanists as Christians, but the fact is that Roman Catholicism is *not* Christian, and there is the world of difference between a “Catholic home” and a Christian one. It is the difference between darkness and light.

He now says he realised his fame was not the most important part of his life, and that God can help a person overcome his past. “The more I go to church, and the more I turn myself over to the process of believing in Jesus and listening to his Word and having him guide my hand, I feel as though the pressure is off me now.”

He also said: “You need to have the expertise and the guidance of someone else. You cannot train yourself. I feel the same way about Christianity and about what the Church is: The Church is the gym of the soul.”

One would not think it to look at him, of course, but Stallone is now sixty. And like many people who reach this age, he has doubtless begun to think about death, and the life hereafter. He has doubtless truly realised that fame is fleeting, and that life itself is short, and all the

money and fame in the world cannot take a man to heaven. And so he has turned to a false religion, as so many do in their later years. What a tragedy! May the Lord yet open his heart to the true and only Gospel of the grace of God, the glad tidings of salvation by Jesus Christ!

Sylvester Stallone himself said that the infamous character of Rocky was meant to reflect the nature of Jesus! In the conference call with pastors and religious leaders he said, "It's like he was being chosen, Jesus was over him, and he was going to be the fella that would live through the example of Christ. He's very, very forgiving. There's no bitterness in him. He always turns the other cheek. And it's like his whole life was about service."

It's shocking enough that men calling themselves "pastors and religious leaders" would even bother to *have* a conference with Stallone over this movie and his supposed "Christian faith". Any true pastor, given the opportunity to speak with Stallone like that, would use it to witness to him of Christ the Saviour! But no – these men were talking to him for the purpose of hearing what he had to say about the "faith lessons" of his boxing movie! And people wonder why the youth of today are so mixed up, so adrift.

Yes, that's shocking enough. But then, to read that Stallone compares his character with the Lord Jesus Christ! – there seem to be no depths to which these blind leaders of the blind will not sink, for they did not immediately and vociferously refute such a wicked notion! Stallone says "it's like his [Rocky's] whole life was about service." A *boxer* whose whole life is about service? A *boxer* who "was being chosen, Jesus was over him, and he was going to be the fella that would live through the example of Christ"? Where was the condemnation of such rubbish from the "pastors and religious leaders"? Nothing. Deafening silence. But then again, when one looks at the type of "pastors and religious leaders" whose comments are quoted on the RockyResources.com website, one will not be surprised.

This section of the website is entitled "Faith Leaders Respond" (also called "Pastors and Leaders: Their Response"). But one should note the kind of men (and women!) described as "Faith Leaders" and "Pastors". Here are just a few:

Stuart Shepard, Managing Editor of Focus on the Family's Citizenlink.com: "Stallone spoke of being reborn in a teleconference with pastors and religious leaders concerning faith elements of the unlikely sixth (*Rocky*) movie.... I have to confess I was won over by the real-life story of redemption I heard. I'm believin' it."

Well, what would we expect from this particular source? Focus on the Family: ecumenical, riddled with psychology.

Dick Rolfe of The Dove Foundation: "I had a very favorable overall impression of the movie.... One Biblical profanity is the only 'speed bump' in an otherwise compelling movie."

Whoa! This is supposed to be a movie with "Christian" undertones, and yet it contains a "biblical profanity"? And incredibly, this man shrugs his shoulders and says it's just a small "speed bump", nothing to be concerned about, the movie is still great? This is the level to which so-called "Christian" leaders have sunk! Who cares what the Bible says, it's okay to use a little profanity, the movie's great anyway – this is the message such a statement conveys.

The Catholic Digest: "There's a tremendous spirituality connected with the character of Rocky, because the entire thing was based on good Christian values and dilemmas – whether he could persevere through the storms."

So Roman Catholics are considered to be "Pastors and Leaders" as well. Clearly this movie is acceptable to both Papists and "Protestants", in true ecumenical spirit. It therefore cannot in any sense present the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, or be truly Christian.

Francis Maier, Chancellor, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Denver, Colorado: "[*Rocky Balboa*] is a really excellent film.... It's also one you can take the kids to." A little "biblical profanity" and a message that boxing is an acceptable sport notwithstanding. But of course the Papists would praise it.

Roman Catholic nun, Rose Pacatte, of the "Daughters of St. Paul": "One theme that stood out

for me was the whole idea of self esteem. And how important that is to be formed.... That's a good message for people to know and hear."

Apart from being yet another comment by a Papist, under the title of "Pastors and Leaders", this is just nonsense anyway. What does the Bible say about "self esteem"? "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3). Esteeming others better than oneself, in true humility, is the very opposite of the arrogant "self esteem" mantra of modern psychology. But again, this is the kind of thing that would appeal to be a Papist, and to millions of others as well.

The home page of the site is designed to provide "useful" tools to learn about the movie, "and utilize the film as a teaching, preaching or outreach opportunity. If you are a church, school, or small group leader, there are some excellent resources here that will help you 'get in the ring' with Rocky."

When a pastor has reached the stage of using a film about a *boxer* to supposedly "teach" the flock, or an evangelist is using it as an "outreach opportunity", then truly, there are no words to adequately describe the state of what passes for "Christianity" in our times. The Bible has been set aside, and the words and methods of sinful men have replaced it. Truly, truly, the "watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs" (Isa. 56:10). These prophetic words are once again fulfilled: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3,4). They won't read and study the Bible for themselves; but they'll turn to fables, to the movies, and embrace them as the truth; and unless a "teacher" gives them what they want, they won't support him. So there are "heaps" of false "teachers", scratching the ears of these deceived souls and catering to their lust for worldly entertainment. That's where the money is.

There is a "Register for Updates" section on the site, which says – amongst other things – "Tell us how we can serve you:

"– I am a MINISTRY/ORGANIZATION and we would like to partner to promote the film."

It also advertises "Leader Resources" – including a "Leader's Guide" – to "help in creating lively discussions about faith themes found in *Rocky Balboa*. The material includes discussion starters, scriptural references, fun trivia, tools, and effective actions, which could include hosting an interfaith event," etc.

Ah! There we have it. The material can be used to host an "*interfaith event*"! Roman Catholics, Protestants – maybe even others – all joining together as one big happy family, to promote *Rocky Balboa* as a movie with profound "faith themes"! The blurring of fantasy and reality has reached this stage. People are so devoted to the idolatry of the movies, that their whole lives revolve around going to see them, analysing them, and molding their lives according to them. And religious leaders have realised this, and they're cashing in on it. They can't hold onto their flocks by the Bible alone, they feel they must cater to a generation that lives like a parasite on the Hollywood host. Is this an exaggeration? Look around you. *Everywhere, everyone* talks about the movies, talks like the movie stars, and talks as if these movies and their stars have a life of their own, and as if they have profound wisdom which we should all live by. And religious leaders know it. So they are catering to it. Instead of sound teaching from the Bible, they will provide discussions around supposed "faith themes" found in this movie. Instead of biblical separation, they will promote interfaith events around this movie.

One can also order the "Rocky Balboa Outreach Box"! The ad says: "This kit is designed for faith, educational, and community leaders to help tell the story of Rocky – one of courage, faith, and perseverance." It is the task of the true Bible teacher to tell the story of *Christ the Lord*! But these false shepherds, these blind guides, are now going to be telling the story of this

fictional boxing character! – and in doing so, they will feel they have “done the Lord’s work” and “witnessed” to people!

True courage, faith and perseverance are found in the lives of the real men and women of the Bible, as well as in the lives of true Christian men and women throughout history. How possibly could the story of a *boxer*, and one moreover who is *not even real*, convey such things? It is utterly impossible.

On the “Digital Resources” (“Content for Webmasters”) section of the site, for the “Website Administrator Electronic Press Kit”, 2 Timothy 4:7 appears from some Bible version or other: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith!” The King James Version says, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”.

It is true that Paul the apostle, both here and also in 1 Tim. 6:12 and 1 Cor. 9:26,27, uses boxing as an *illustration* of the *spiritual warfare* in which Christians are engaged. But he is not *condoning* boxing with these words! For the Bible says of Christians, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19,20). The Lord is certainly not glorified by a man punching another man repeatedly for entertainment, for “sport”, causing blood to spurt from his face, bruising his body, and even punching him unconscious! This is mindless, senseless violence and does not in any sense glorify God! Many boxers suffer severe injuries, even to their brains. And nor does it bring glory to God for anyone to sit watching such “sport”, enjoying the spectacle. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or *whatsoever ye do*, do *all* to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Boxing cannot in any sense be compatible with such things as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22,23). And it is impossible for one to go from watching a boxing match in a spiritual frame of mind: “whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report... *think on these things*” (Phil. 4:8). Boxing stirs up passions in men. It stirs up anger, hatred, feelings of revenge and retaliation. Self-defence is legitimate; but beating up someone for fun or “sport” is sinful, plain and simple.

To misuse 2 Tim. 4:7, as was done by those promoting this boxing movie as a movie with “Christian” themes, reveals a shocking lack of understanding of the Bible, and of what it truly means to be a Christian.

I recently wrote an exposé of the South African religious movie, *Faith Like Potatoes*. A sister in Christ in the United States suggested, tongue in cheek, that this new *Rocky* movie should be subtitled “Faith Like Mashed Potatoes.”

And just when you thought it couldn’t get any worse... it does. A “Christian Rocky” is bad enough, but it appears as if Stallone is going to inflict the world with a “Christian *Rambo*” as well! Yes, your eyes are not deceiving you. Stallone is most famous for two Hollywood characters, “Rocky” and “Rambo”. His “Rambo” character is a violent one-man army. And now the plan is for Rambo to apparently go to the rescue of Christian missionaries. As reported by Stuart Shepard of Citizenlink.com, quoted on www.infuzemag.com, Stallone said: “He [Rambo] doesn’t believe at first, he’s seen too much. He’s bitter. But when he meets these people and looks into their eyes, he’s swept up in it, and literally he’s just taken on this journey. He’s a Christian warrior! Can you believe it?” And Stuart said in his article: “I’m believin’ it.”

What we believe is that there is now no limit to what professing “Christians” will swallow in their lust for Hollywood entertainment. The true Church, the remnant, will remain separate from all this. But what *passes for* the “Church” these days has gone stark, raving mad. Satan is having a field day.

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