

This is a brief critique of the film. It must be kept in mind that this film is based on an autobiography by one of the main participants and represents his personal testimony. Though some events are telescoped together or depicted in a more brief manner for the film, like all dramatizations of actual events a certain license was taken to represent the events from the viewpoint of Greg Laurie. But many believers who lived through this Jesus Revolution did not have a realization of what else was happening in the country or the world. But this is a fairly accurate representation and partial history of that time in California in the sixties and early seventies. It is an important film for understanding what did happen. It is *not* a prescription for what should happen.

“The Jesus Revolution”

Film Review

By Dr. Robert Dean, Jr.

Yesterday Pastor Greg Allen and I watched the new film “The Jesus Revolution.” I believe this is a film every believer should see. The production, acting, etc., was very well done. The gospel was made clearly evident at least three times. The film is based on the autobiography of Pastor Greg Laurie, pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California, which is his testimony of how he came to believe in Christ as his Savior in the context of what became known as the Jesus Movement, which was labelled by *Time Magazine* in a cover story as “The Jesus Revolution.”

I believe the “Jesus Movement” was part of a much, much larger movement of God the Holy Spirit in the US and around the world which brought millions of young, turned on, tuned in, dropped out young people to salvation. But this film just focuses on one aspect, a significant aspect, but only one part of a complex picture. I believe every believer today should see this to understand our contemporary “church history,” to understand the good and the bad that came out of this Jesus Movement, and to get a perspective on how the evangelical church became so compromised with the culture around us. I am not recommending this because I’m suggesting this is a pattern to follow. I recommend this because it is a fairly decent representation of what did happen in this one aspect of the Jesus Movement, but it had significant consequences which should be addressed. Below is the “rest of the story” that will give perspective.

In the late 80s when I was in the doctoral program at DTS, my area of focus was on the modern charismatic movement and specifically understanding the Vineyard Movement (VM) led by John Wimber and Peter Wagner. The VM had roots in the Jesus Movement as well as the deterioration of theology at Fuller Seminary where Wimber and Wagner taught a course on “Signs and Wonders.” As part of my research I went to S. California, stayed with George Meisinger, and had 2-hour interviews with Pastor Chuck Smith, who is a central figure in the Jesus revival, and C. Peter Wagner, professor at Fuller Seminary. In my opinion, Chuck was a positive figure in the movement and Wagner was one who introduced much evil into the movement.

The Jesus revolution had many, many facets, and produced a large number of positive results. The two most positive aspects were that millions of young people heard the gospel and were saved. Following their salvation, a vast number did end up in solid, Bible-teaching churches. Many also got distracted by the cares of life, and many ended up in churches where the

unbiblical beliefs and practices of the charismatic, Pentecostal movement led to numerous problems including heresy and gross compromise with the world.

The Jesus revolution was truly centered in these events that came out of the hippie movement in California. But other facets involved the ministries of Campus Crusade for Christ in campuses across the nation, the influence of Josh McDowell's lectures across the campuses of America and his books on *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, and the impact of Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*. Many other ministries played a role and saw large numbers of teens and twenty-somethings get saved.

The film tells the story of Greg Laurie's conversion and early Christian life and ministry. This was in the context of the beginnings of the Jesus Movement in California, and specifically the growth and influence of Pastor Chuck Smith and Calvary Chapel. The backdrop is based on the impact of a charismatic, controversial, and very bizarre life of Lonnie Frisbee, who turned out to be at the center of the movement, and at the center of some of the more bizarre transformations such as the birth of the Vineyard Movement (see [his Wikipedia page](#) for more. In my opinion Frisbee was a time bomb that did a lot of damage). In the film, Frisbee gives a good explanation of the gospel. In real life, I believe he did as well, but he was led astray by the teachings and bad experiential theology and emphasis on the charismatic gifts of the charismatic movement. When he began to drift into these areas, Pastor Chuck Smith had the integrity and wisdom to separate from him. This break was not made as clear in the film as it was in actuality.

Frisbee was near the center of the beginning of the movement. His background was a hippie, taking drugs, LSD, reading the Bible, talking about Jesus and flying saucers, etc. but in 1966 at some point he was truly led to the Lord. He returned to where he was living and led two roommates to the Lord. (I interviewed one of them on the phone who later was an elder in Ray Stedman's Peninsula Bible Church—a solid, conservative believer.) These three were integral to many hippies learning about and trusting Christ. (Some readers may need to be reminded of Phil. 1:18).

Frisbee later went to Southern California on a trip and met Chuck Smith and then brought many of his hippie believer friends to Costa Mesa, California and Chuck Smith's church.

Chuck Smith was ordained as a pastor by the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. He was by personality very conservative, he did not have the kind of personality that would be expected of a Pentecostal preacher. Chuck was always oriented to being as biblical as he could be. I have a huge respect for him and his biblical focus. He had a free grace gospel and was dispensational and pre-Trib. From the beginning he recognized these baby believers need the teaching of the Word, and he taught every night to provide a grounding in the Word. Though he believed the sign gifts continued, he did not authorize their use in the church services. In the film, Kelsey Grammer does a fabulous job portraying Chuck Smith.

In my view, part of the bad results of the Jesus movement was that this enormous crowd of baby believers with no real biblical understanding, developed their own style of musical praise to God that basically used the rock music of the culture with all of its unbiblical worldview baggage and wrote shallow lyrics which was all they could produce because they were spiritual babies. They

gave birth to praise and worship music and transformed Protestant worship away from 450 years of being more Bible based, to a self-oriented, superficial, feel good form that has eviscerated the worship of modern evangelicalism.

Two of the biggest music production labels are Maranatha (out of Calvary Chapel) and Vineyard (out of the Vineyard Movement).

This film portrays an important role in what has diluted evangelicalism and led to the vacuous theology dominating the pulpits of America today. Their music radically changed Christian music, an impact that contributed to the theological anemia of evangelicalism. On the good side, millions were saved and a large number of them did mature, but many, many more went the shallow route. Movements like this in our history are often like this, one side of the movement is Bible based, grace-oriented and focused on a biblical understanding of Christ (not the superficial, emotional view) which has had an incredible impact for the growth of the Church. But the other side was a trojan horse that rendered most of modern evangelicalism spiritually impotent due to its compromises with the world system around us.

This film portrays an important part of our history and I recommend it for that reason. We must understand our own history, whether we like it or not. The film should be viewed in light of these details I have brought out.