

## A Christian Boot Camp for the Silver Screen Barbara Nicolosi's Act One Prepares Writers to Work in Hollywood

HOLLYWOOD, California, NOV. 19, 2003 (<http://www.zenit.org>) The program director for a Christ-centered film school has been in show business long enough to know that she can't fix Hollywood.

Instead, Barbara Nicolosi and a growing group of Christian artists are dedicated to representing their worldview in the mainstream and making the kinds of movies they themselves want to see.

In less than five years, more than 200 aspiring writers have gone through Act One's boot camp and emerged with the training and tools they need to be competitive for mainstream jobs -- and the friendships they need to create a Christian community in Hollywood.

Nicolosi shared with ZENIT how the film school tries to show that holiness of life is not incompatible with excellence of craft and depth of content.

Q: Why was Act One established?

Nicolosi: Act One was founded on January 25, 1999 -- coincidentally the feast of the conversion of St. Paul -- by a group of Hollywood screenwriters from a variety of Christian backgrounds.

The [program](#) was a response to the overall dreadful dramatic writing that we were seeing coming in to the industry from godly people. It was clear that people of faith were failing in their attempts to find inroads into the entertainment industry. Act One was founded to be a bridge for people who want to come to Hollywood to do good and not harm to the global audience.

We identified four principle problems in Christian writers starting out in the entertainment industry that invariably stop them from getting a legitimate hearing for their work: a lack of artistry and a failure to understand the real power of the medium; a lack of respect for the industry and its professional standards; the absence of a network of like-minded professionals to form, mentor and hire the next generation; and the lack of a specific Christian spirituality and ethics to address the particular challenges of the artist's vocation.

Act One is designed to address these four problems.

Q: How do you help prepare Christians for jobs in mainstream Hollywood?

Nicolosi: The keynote program of Act One is a four-week boot camp experience that focuses on mastery of craft, entertainment ethics, and spirituality. The program is the initiation into the community of Act One writers and producers, and is followed up by continuous mentoring and ongoing formation.

When a writer has achieved a certain level of proficiency -- and if they are a good ambassador of the Gospel -- we are very happy to help them obtain entry-level jobs in the business as well as writing assignments from our network of production companies.

Act One also operates the APEX Script Critique Service for writers who may not be able to attend Act One, but who would like the principles of the program applied to their work.

Q: How does faith relate to the artist and the writer?

Nicolosi: As Pope John Paul II noted in his 1999 [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii LET 23041999 artists\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii LET 23041999 artists_en.html)

letter to artists, creative people have a special relationship with God as beauty.

As they pursue beauty, they instinctively move into solitude and seek to connect with the transcendent as the source of their creativity. This is why everybody in Hollywood describes himself or herself as "spiritual." Of course, they are also quick to say they are not religious. Part of Act One's message to the industry is to try and reveal how being spiritual but not religious is an absurd and futile effort.

Q: What has been Act One's growth trend? What are the reasons for its growth?

Nicolosi: Act One has grown from a faculty of four professional feature and television writers to about 80. We have trained more than 200 young writers,

about half of whom are working in the entertainment industry in all different levels.

They form a wonderful new community of thoughtful, prayerful artists who are all passionate about Jesus and the power of the screen art form, and who support and encourage each other to produce work that will be good for the world.

We have grown because God is responding to the collective cry of his people, which has been rising up in groans about the terrible state of the arts in the last century. Act One is a smart, effective and long-term strategy that emphasizes the training of people over the production of projects.

We are attracting attention because we are seeking to engage the culture as our own -- instead of rejecting it and cursing it, which has been the strategy of many Christians towards media since at least the sexual revolution.

We aren't trying to fix Hollywood. We are just a group of artists who want to represent our worldview in the mainstream. We want to make the movies we want to see, and we will. We are attracting attention because we are pretty much the Church's only game in town that is trying to do what we are doing.

Q: What advice do you have for Christian artists and writers who are seeking mainstream jobs in and outside of Hollywood?

Nicolosi: For the writers, the best advice I can give is to apply to Act One. It is a very competitive program and if you get in, it will be a sign that you have talent and potential. For those who want to be actors, producers and directors, I would encourage them to aspire to mastery of their particular craft.

Too many people come to Hollywood and focus prematurely on getting an agent and breaking in. The first step to breaking in is to have something to market that people will want. It has to be more than just talent -- although minimally you have to have talent to work in this field.

It is unfortunate we don't have any film schools in the Church that are competitive with the best secular schools. Going to one of the top film schools is a tremendous advantage, but they also tend to be bastions of Marxism and the most radical left-wing agendas. It's a hard call as to whether

it is worth it to go to learn your craft at a place where everything you believe will be fodder for professorial ridicule.

On another level, anyone who comes to Hollywood should have their spiritual act together. This is a very difficult place to make your living, primarily because it is so dependent on being an entrepreneur. Everyone who is working is thinking of the next thing they will have to sell. Everyone who isn't working is trying to get somebody to buy from them. This turns every relationship into some kind of transaction. It adds a rejection factor to the everyday life here that most people outside of the business don't experience in a decade of work. Finally, this is a thoroughly secular environment in which many of the operative values – power, celebrity, Mammon – are completely antithetical to the Gospel. You have to have a close personal relationship with Jesus, and a strong sense of vocation to weather this missionfield.

Q: In what ways have you seen Christians influence Hollywood?

Nicolosi: There aren't a lot of happy, committed Christians in places of real power in Hollywood who can green light or approve what goes on the screen. But there are a lot of people on the front lines who go to work every day and find clever and creative ways to keep damaging content off the screen. These are victories known only to God.

In the last five years, the landscape has really started to change - probably mostly because people in the arts seem to have exhausted themselves with unbelief. Also, Christians are approaching the industry with a much more patient and effective strategy. Act One is part of that. Our students and faculty members are a wonderful new network that will only continue to grow in influence in the future.

Our goal is to form a community of talented artists whose first witness will be to their fellow artists in showing that holiness of life is not incompatible with excellence of craft and depth of content.

<http://www.actoneprogram.com>

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