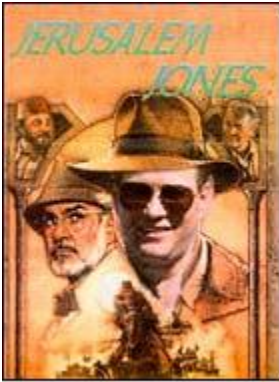


Jerusalem Jones Local Bible teacher's video series makes Godly lessons an adventure

By DIANE MOREY HANSON
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Just picture it, a man garbed in khakis—you know, safari jacket, hat, the works—perched on top of a rock; trudging through the shifting sands of a desolate desert; shrouded in the shadows of the great Pyramids; or uncovering some ancient treasure.

Sound like an episode of Indiana Jones? Close; but this guy should be called Jerusalem Jones, since the adventure he is on is to follow in the footprints of God and reveal the treasure of salvation history and the history of the Catholic Church.

This adventuresome guy is none other than noted Catholic apologist, Bible teacher, and author Stephen Ray. The local family man from Milan, who also founded a highly successful multimillion-dollar Livonia-based office-cleaning business—Distinctive Maintenance—now devotes most of his time to his family and a multitude of Catholic pursuits.

Following the footprints

His latest project is the development of a 10-video series by Ignatius Press called The Footprints of God: The Catholic Story of Salvation from Abraham to Augustine. Steve expects to produce about three videos each year of the three-year project, with the first one—about Peter—due out by fall.

Certainly sounds like a daunting undertaking; but, for Steve, this is the kind of stuff that makes him effervesce with enthusiasm.

"I couldn't have dreamed of anything better, because I love to travel and I love to study and teach the Bible and everything related to the Bible and the Catholic Church," explained Steve, couched in the comfort of his library while nine-year-old daughter Emily played nearby. "And here I get to wrap it all up into one."

Steve went over the production plan for the unique project last November—just before he and wife Janet, a home schooling mom who will be part of the support team as production assistant, jetted off for Israel, Egypt and other Middle Eastern destinations to begin taping the aerial shots. As this story goes to press, they will be traversing Turkey to



REACHING NEW HEIGHTS: Steve and Janet Ray take in the sights during the initial phase of taping. Here they pause a moment on the Golan Heights overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

familiarize themselves with the main Christian sites there before bringing in the filming crews.

"This is really Steve's project," said Janet as she brewed some mint tea. "I'm basically a homebody, but I think this (project) is very necessary because nothing like this has ever been done—teaching at the actual locations. I think it will give so much more depth."

Concept formulation

The idea for a video about the life of the Apostle Peter began formulating in Steve's mind last summer. He had recently completed his latest book for Ignatius Press, *Upon This Rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scripture and the Early Church*. The Ray family traveled to Israel then to check out the work of a priest who was leading a pilgrimage there and taping a documentary of Peter; but it was not exactly what Steve had visualized. Janet suggested, "Why do a documentary on just Peter? Why not do the whole saga of salvation?"

"Why do a documentary on just Peter? Why not do the whole saga of salvation?"

—Janet Ray

Why not indeed?

"Why not do the whole thing starting from Abraham—there's so much to learn there—and Moses and the prophets?" Steve recalled his thoughts as his creative juices began to flow. "We could make it an exciting thing like an adventure series—safari hats and maps, and with an Indiana Jones kind of theme to it. But it would be an intense Bible study; it would be a travelogue; it would be a Catholic catechesis; it would be an adventure and historical story, a biography on the great people of Scripture and Church history."

Quickly Steve wrote down what he thought would make up ten videos. As things began to formulate, he called Rick Sarkisian, owner of Lifeworks, a Catholic video production company that had come to Michigan last winter to film the Rays' life and conversion story for an Ignatius video, *Led by the Light of Truth*.

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The formerly Evangelical Baptist Ray family, including, their four children, Cindy, Jesse, Charlotte, and Emily, now 23, 20, 14, and 9, entered the Catholic Church in 1994. Steve and Janet had launched into an intense study of early Christianity in order to disprove the teachings of the Catholic Church, only to be led to the realization that they were Catholic before either even set foot into a Catholic church. Their journey of discovery and personal revelation resulted in Steve's first Ignatius book, *Crossing the Tiber: Evangelical Protestants Discover the Historic Church*.

Now Steve and the folks at Ignatius want to bring the excitement of his discovery to everyone. Tony Ryan, in charge of marketing for Ignatius Press, said, "You'd have to be brain-dead not to be excited about a project like this."



PAGAN TEMPLE: Steve in front of the temple to Apollo in Corinth.

Unique undertaking

"I don't think anything like this has been done, certainly not from a Catholic perspective," said Steve. He added that, while the series will cover a time span of more than 2,000 years, from Abraham around 1850 BC to Augustine around 400 AD, each video will stand on its own merits. The videos will not be filmed in sequence, but will start with Peter; the second will be on Mary, the third on Abraham.

The other proposed videos will be on: Jesus; Paul; Moses; the kings David and Solomon; the prophets Elijah and Elisha; the Apostolic Fathers—Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Justin; and four of the key Doctors of the Church—Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Athanasius.

There will be themes or elements in each video: With Abraham, it will be sand to represent his journey through deserts and his family numbering more than the sand of the sea; with Moses, water both of the Red Sea and the water in the wilderness representing baptism and Christ; and with Mary, it will be cloth since she wrapped the baby in swaddling clothes and later in a funeral shroud.

There will be a distinct doctrine or dogma exemplified and explained in each video. Faith and works will be the theme throughout the Abraham tape. With Mary, it will be the Marian dogmas: the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, the Queenship of Mary, and the ever-virginity of Mary. "We will work with those issues and we will use Biblical and Patristic and historical reasons why the Church teaches those things," explained Steve.

Each video will begin with a sweep of such sights as: the Pyramids and the Sphinx; the Nile River and Mount Sinai; the empty tomb of Christ and the walls of Jerusalem; the fishing boats on Galilee; the ruins of Corinth, Ephesus, and Athens; St. Peter's Basilica and the Coliseum in Rome; and the words "Time has not erased it; wars have not destroyed it; come let us go back and discover the footprints of God as He has brought salvation to His people."

While the majority of their time will be spent in Israel, following the footprints of God will take the production crew into Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, Rome and other parts of Italy, and Northern Africa.



GREAT WONDER: The Rays and their film crew took in the aerial view of Egypt, including the Pyramids, from the hold of an Egyptian army helicopter.

"It will be like a detective story," Steve stressed. "We want to do this, not as a Bible teacher standing at his pulpit. We want to do it as a real on-camels riding-in-Israeli-tanks-type production. This is an adventure."

And Steve, who had to take a leave from teaching his highly popular Catholic Bible Study in Ann Arbor in order to produce the video series, knows how to prepare for an enthusiastic presentation.

"I will have to immerse myself in information and study the dogma and history so that I am just bubbling over about Peter, or bubbling over about Mary," he indicated, complete with hand gestures.

"I will be at that rock at Caesarea Philippi (now called Baniyas) where Jesus said to Peter, 'You are rock and on this rock I will build my Church,' " explained Ray. "I might even stand on top of that rock."

He added, "I will have a small Bible here in my pocket and I'll pull it out and read it and, while I do, they will superimpose the camera on that passage. I will be picking things off the ground like rocks and coins like we are discovering them along the way."

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—Tony Ryan, Ignatius Press

Something for everyone

And Steve intends it to be as intriguing to Protestants as it is to Catholics. "It is not going to be an in-your-face Catholicism," he noted. "It will be a discovery—to introduce what Catholics believe, and why."

He also believes it can be done in a very interesting way, "fast-paced and fun enough so you won't feel like you are getting bogged down with a bunch of doctrine and theology. Theology isn't some dry study—it is the reality of the life of God interacting with His people."



ANCIENT COIN: This more-than-2,000-year-old coin depicts the temple to Caesar Augustus which was built on the rock at Baniyas that Jesus pointed to when He told Peter, "You are rock." The coin is just one the artifacts Steve will use in the video series.

This could, no doubt, become an EWTN classic. It could even lead to another series on the history of the Church starting with Jesus and the apostles and moving through the Middle Ages and the Reformation to the present.

But, for now, Steve plans to make the current series fast-paced and interesting enough to appeal to a wide audience, from elementary children to high schoolers, even college students and adults in RCIA classes. Most of all, he wants families to take time to watch the videos together.

"I want to do these films as a legacy for our kids," said Steve after talking about his own children's love for and commitment to the Church. "We need to keep our kids Catholic—bottom line; that is why I am doing this."

For more information about the videos, contact Steve Ray at www.JerusalemJones.com or at sray@rc.net.