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### A quantum leap of faith *Film journey inspires brothers to turn their explorations inward*

By David A. Maurer / Daily Progress staff writer  
October 12, 2006

Some local moviemakers are eyeing a countdown calendar with the tight-jawed resolve and intensity of astronauts who have just received the command to prepare for launch.

Individual pages marking off the days are attached to a clipboard that's kept at the reception desk of Paladin Media Group in Albemarle County. Bold numerals announce the number of days left until the start of the Virginia Film Festival.

The 19th installment of the annual event is scheduled to run from Oct. 26 to 29. Each day until then is important to the Paladin folks, because they're still putting the final touches on their documentary film that will premiere during the event.

Their offering is "Rebellion of Thought," and it ties right in with this year's festival theme - "Revelations: Finding God at the Movies." The picture deals with weighty questions of faith, the Christian church and what roles they might play in a post-modern world.

While some people argue that the winds of postmodernism haven't arrived yet, others are convinced that they have - or at least that the leading breezes are being felt. Regardless of which camp is right, it's hard to deny that our culture is going through remarkable changes, and practically everything from the way we shop to what we think is being affected.

"Back toward the end of 2000, a friend of mine who is a writer said I should do a film on postmodernism," said Kent C. Williamson, president of Paladin Media Group. "My first reaction was, 'Postmodernism what?'"

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"As I started to learn a little about what postmodernism is, I began to realize that there might be room for a film on it. It started out as a film strictly about what postmodernism is and how it's impacting our culture.

"Along the way we started to realize that postmodernism impacts all of us and our daily lives. We don't necessarily say, 'Hey, this is something that's impacting me,' but it does, often in very subtle ways."

The bulk of what Paladin does is related to education. For example, the group's executive producer, Denny King, currently is producing six safety-on-the-job videos for a concrete company. Later this month he will coordinate the filming of an operation at the University of Virginia Hospital that will be broadcast live, via satellite, to hundreds of surgeons attending a conference in Washington.

So making a film on postmodernism and its affect on society didn't initially seem all that daunting. However, when production started in the spring of 2001, the filmmakers quickly learned that they had been handed a sort of Gordian knot to untangle.

The ambitious topic called for asking questions that could have many answers - or answers that, at least at present, simply were unknowable. And although identifying some of the dynamics that are pushing us into this post-modern world - technology and speed of communications, for example - wasn't that difficult, finding out how these things might be rearranging the hardwiring of human thought, if at all, wasn't so easy.

"We started interviewing philosophers, theologians and experts on what postmodernism is and how it impacts our culture," said Kent Williamson, director of the film. He and his older brother, Brad, co-produced the picture.

"We found that this is not a question that even the experts find easy to answer. Part of the problem is that there's a lot of different levels of what postmodernism is.

"I think 'postmodernism' is a name we have applied to a transition our culture is going through. We're moving from the modern world into the next phase of what our existence will be as a people, and we have termed it 'postmodernism' for lack of a better word."

The making of the film ultimately became a journey for the filmmaking brothers as they found themselves grappling with questions about their own Christian faith and beliefs. The deeper the brothers delved into the subject, the more complex it became.

Then, to their surprise, they found they had been drawn from behind the cameras into the spotlight. It had never been their intention at the outset of the filming to become part of the story, but that's how it turned out.

"My brother and I started wrestling with these questions on a personal level when we began to realize that our culture is shifting like sand beneath our feet," Kent Williamson said. "All of a sudden our culture is looking different than it used to look.

"Not necessarily bad or good, just different from what it was before. So we started to ask, 'How does this impact us as a people? How does postmodernism affect me as a person of faith?' "

Williamson said one of the key elements of postmodernism that the experts who were interviewed for the film always seemed to come back to was the absence of absolute truths. When the brothers started thinking about which things hinge on the existence of absolute truths, they realized one of the main ones was faith.

The siblings then reasoned that without absolute truths, such as the existence of a God, faith would be rendered meaningless. These thoughts raised additional

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disquieting questions for the filmmakers to answer.

"If our culture is shifting to the point of saying there are no absolutes, and if that impacts faith the way we think it might, what is going to take place in our society? What is going to happen?" Kent Williamson asked rhetorically.

"So we started to look at what this all means to the average person. We did a lot of man-on-the-street interviews all over the country, and always started by asking what postmodernism is and how does it impact your life.

"Then we would ask if there are absolutes. What we found is that relativism has become our god. People would say there were absolutes for them, but not necessarily for someone else."

Kent Williamson said it was amazing how many people didn't recognize that an absolute truth means that it's absolutely true regardless of who you are, where you are or when you are. An absolute truth might be that an absolute truth can't be true only for you.

Brad Williamson interviewed some of the brightest philosophers in the nation for the film. The hope was that they could offer some answers, insights and ways of looking at the world that would help resolve some of the inconsistencies that people are experiencing.

"The more we explored it, the more we realized collectively that we were wrestling with perhaps a much greater issue," Brad Williamson said during a recent telephone interview from his office in Sawyer, Mich. "And that issue is an internal one about ourselves, and living out our own personal faith.

"So I feel I've been in a real maelstrom for the last few years. I've really been unanchored and adrift in wrestling with this.

"This concept of belief is not some button you push and say 'I believe' and all of a sudden everything is right for you. We've discovered it's more of a dynamic, ongoing journey."

One of the questions the Williamsons have grappled with because of the film is how they should live their lives as Christians. They ultimately went directly to the source of their faith to find the answer.

"When they asked Christ what were the greatest commandments, his response was, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself,' " Kent Williamson said.

"What I kept coming back to was if that is the most important thing, why aren't we doing it? And how do we do it? Here I'm driving past my neighbors and I don't even know their names.

"I don't know what they do for a living, what their problems and hurts are, what their dreams are. We experience community in such a different way than what our parents did, and certainly how our grandparents did."

When Brad Williamson put Christ's words into practice, it elicited an interesting response from the church he attends.

"This neighbor of mine is elderly, and when her husband died she was put in a retirement home," Brad Williamson said. "She had belonged to our church, but wasn't able to get there any longer.

"I felt compelled to take my family and visit her on Sunday mornings. We would sit with her, talk, look at her photograph albums, maybe watch a little television. It was very non-church stuff, and yet it was very important to her, and it made a big difference for me.

"Then people started asking why I wasn't in church on Sunday. I had to explain

that I had to give that up, that I missed it, but this other thing was more important to me."

Williamson said his fellow parishioners were of the mindset that you go to church on Sunday morning, and that's all there is to it. His thinking is that he was honoring Christ, and following his words, by showing his love and concern for his neighbor.

The story demonstrates the conflict and friction that can arise when long-established practices encounter new ways of thinking. But the older brother said such experiences have served to make him more tolerant of other people who have beliefs that differ from his own.

The siblings don't claim to present any profound answers in their film, but they hope that asking some of the hard questions will spark many debates. And their quest for answers won't end when the last number is yanked from the countdown clipboard, and their film debuts during the Virginia Film Festival.

In a sense, the journey only will be starting.

"We hope 'Rebellion of Thought' serves as a springboard for conversations to take place," Kent Williamson said. "We hope people of devout faith and people with no faith will come together to explore this issue of 'What does faith mean in today's world?'"

"This is a very intense film to watch. It's a 90-minute barrage, an assault in some ways on our minds and hearts.

"How we tried to set up the story is that we're on a journey. The film begins on a journey, and we're still on the journey when it ends."

The documentary film "Rebellion of Thought" will be presented at 4:30 p.m. Oct. 28 at Regal Downtown No. 2. Tickets may be purchased online at the Web site [www.vafilm.com](http://www.vafilm.com). A complete schedule for the 19th annual Virginia Film Festival is available at the site as well.

Starting Monday, tickets can be purchased with credit cards by calling (800) UVA-FEST (882-3378).

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