



CHRIS URSO / RANCHO CUCAMONGA VOICE

The Rev. Fred Carter holds one of approximately 350 paintings he created for the production of "The Light of the World."

A film of biblical proportions

Controversial evangelical cartoonist Jack Chick makes film debut with "The Light of the World."

Pam Noles
Rancho Cucamonga Voice

RANCHO CUCAMONGA — Some scenes are drenched with warmth and light as love and wonder play across the faces on the screen. Others are vivid with harsh colors and deep tones, still beautiful, but with a frightful undertone of horror and fear.

This is the dichotomy of the stories in the Bible, and so it is reflected in "The Light of the World," the debut film by cartoonist Jack Chick, screening at 7 p.m. Oct. 11 at Gardner

Spring Auditorium in Ontario. The work tells the story of the triumphs and conflicts of the life of Jesus, and due to the unflinching, evangelical nature of its approach, it's sure to prove controversial.

For more than 40 years, Chick has produced evangelical tracts that have been distributed around the globe. The small comic books, deemed offensive by some, enlightening by others and as pop culture collectibles by still others, are such a part of mainstream American culture that the Smithsonian Institution put them on display.

The film, in the works for 15 years, features 358 original paintings, nearly all created by the Rev. Fred Carter, pastor of The Gathering Place church near Victorville. Carter, a Pomona resident, has been an illustrator for Rancho Cucamonga-based Chick

IF YOU GO

■ **WHAT:** Debut screening of "The Light of the World," a film by Christian cartoonist Jack Chick.

■ **WHEN:** 7 p.m., Oct. 11.

■ **WHERE:** Gardner Spring Auditorium, 1245 N. Euclid Ave., Ontario.

■ **COST:** Free, but tickets must be reserved in advance. DVD and video of the film will be available starting Oct. 13.

■ **INFO:** 373-8103, e-mail mthelms52@aol.com or visit www.lightoftheworldproject.org.

Publications for 31 years.

Like Chick's uncompromising comics, the film is a work with a mission beyond entertainment, Carter said.

"Knowing what it was being used for kept me at it more than anything else," Carter said of the many years spent creating the paintings. "I had pretty free reign on how to do it but he did tell me what he wanted."

One painting, a doomsday image of legions of people trapped in hell, took six months to complete.

Like his cartoon tracts, some portions of the film will be controversial. Graphic and bloody depictions of the scourge and crucifixion of Jesus, and a segment featuring images of Mecca, Buddha and Pope John Paul II while the narration warns against the falsehoods of other religions will upset viewers. It won't be the first time — Chick's frequent attacks on other religions, homosexuality, rock

LIGHT

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music, feminists and others have earned him a legion of critics. In Canada, his works are considered hate literature and have been banned. But he has as many supporters as he does critics.

Chick was unavailable for comment on the film, but a prepared statement reads: "The Light of the World" is an attempt to reflect the biblical crucifixion as it really was, without watering anything down.

"We show the horrible price the creator of the universe paid to wash away our sins, with no punches pulled," Chick wrote. "[It's] to shock the complacent world into realizing the danger people face after death. Today, to even mention hell is considered politically incorrect."

Carter came to Chick Publications after working in a decal factory, as a bus boy and as kitchen help back east. But what he really wanted to do was art, a

childhood passion.

"I had always wanted to use art in a Christian setting," he said. "At my church one of the fellows had a Chick tract, and I saw it and it impressed me because that's what I always wanted to do."

Carter wrote Chick a note and sent some art samples along. Chick wrote back and within three weeks Carter moved from Illinois to Southern California. Carter set to work illustrating tracts, but when he was brought in as the film's primary painter, that became his main job.

Working for the company is "almost not like a job. It's like a ministry I've always wanted to be in," he said.

That feeling is echoed by Mike Helms, president of Light of the World Project, a Rancho Cucamonga-based nonprofit formed to raise money to translate the film into 1,000 languages. A former Navy helicopter pilot whose career sent him to the Naval Air Station Pt. Mugu and Antarctica before he retired, Helms dedicated his civilian life to Christian causes.

He has worked for India Gospel Outreach and Bible Literature International.

"It's been one of the greatest experiences of my life," said Helms of working with Chick. "You have 3.5 billion people in the world that operate primarily or live in cultures that communicate orally rather than through writing or reading. This is visual, it will have a very strong impact. The narration can be an audiocassette. The storytelling of the Bible is the way most of the world communicates."

Light of the World Project will work with hundreds of missionary groups and churches to distribute the film and raise money for translations, estimated to cost \$6,000 per language. The first 50 translations will be aimed at the world's largest population groups; China and India are priorities, along with Muslim countries, Helms said.

As Chick has proven with the worldwide distribution of his comics, a gospel-driven message can find a home in places one doesn't associate with

Christianity, Helms said.

"They're open if people like the message. They're not open if people don't like what's in the message," he said.

The movie features narration by David Jeremiah, a voice-over actor whose credits include the tags broadcast during the 2002 Olympic games, "Star Wars" videogames, and "That '70s Show." The score was composed by John Campbell, who also creates music for the popular Christian children's radio series "Adventures in Odyssey," produced by Focus on the Family.

Once it's released to the public, churches are encouraged to screen the film as many times as they wish, Helms said.

Chick created 25 new tracts as supplements to the film. At 79 and in good health, Helms said Chick shows no signs of slowing down.

"He continues to write new tracts," Helms said. "He doesn't have to work but this is a passion that he has and he continues to get new ideas for further materials."