

Ted Turner Talks About His Faith

Throughout the half hour we spent with TIME magazine's 1991 man of the year, Turner repeatedly talked about religious belief: how he lost it, how it appears in the new movie, what he thinks about it.

Turner quickly jumped to his own defense.

"That's the rap on me, that I'm impious. I've read the Bible from cover to cover twice," he said. "I was born again seven times, including by Billy Graham."

Everyone laughed, and thus began Turner's waltz with religious journalists recently assembled in Washington, D.C. to preview Ted Turner Pictures' new Civil War drama, "Gods and Generals."

Referring to the movie, Turner said, "I figured it would do well with the critics, and I knew it would do well with those who had respect for religious beliefs." He then challenged those in the room to name "a major motion picture" in the last decade in the United States that treats religion as respectfully.

If anyone had an answer, they failed to say so. Truth is, "Gods and Generals" is loaded with about as much prayer as it is gunpowder. And Turner said it was "appropriate" because that was part of the history.

But don't mistake the portrayed religious beliefs of Robert E. Lee, Joshua

Chamberlain and Stonewall Jackson with those of Ted Turner.

“I lost my religious belief when my sister got lupus,” Turner said candidly. “She was 12 and she died at 17. I was 15 when she got it. She was ill. It ruined her mind. She became insane. She used to go around the apartment and run into the padded walls and say, ‘God, I’m in such pain. Please let me die.’”

Turner spoke matter-of-factly about the toll her illness, and his unanswered prayers, took on his life.

“How could God let my sister suffer so much? She never did anything wrong,” Turner said. “She was 12 years old.”

He ended his tale about lost faith simply by saying, “I prayed an hour a day for my sister.”

Conversation meandered to more specifics about the film, but it swung back around to faith—and philanthropy.

“Look at my philanthropy,” Turner said, as if making a case for his righteousness. “The Bible says it’s more blessed to give than to receive.” He then mentioned \$600,000 he spent bringing world religious leaders to a conference at the United Nations.

Turner said it again: “Look at my philanthropy—gigantic philanthropy. That’s something that every religion, particularly Christianity, puts as a top priority for everybody during their lifetime here. Contribute as much as you can to help those less fortunate than yourselves, right?”

His case led him to conclude at the religious roundtable, “So I’m living like a Christian.”

One of the writers then joked that if Turner’s salvation were up to him, then Turner would make it to heaven.

“I guarantee you I’ll see you there,” Turner said. “You watch and see. First of all, I’ve been saved so many times. And once you’re saved, always saved.”

That phrase demonstrated Turner’s knowledge of fundamentalist Christian rhetoric, which he jokingly employed to confirm his own salvation.

Though Turner is a self-proclaimed “equal opportunity offender” who has knocked Christians before, he made himself right at home with a table full of them. That may be his biggest accomplishment yet.

When our time ended, Turner stood up and, with a twinkle and grin, said, “God

bless you all.” The room once again burst with laughter as Turner played to his audience.

As he left, he couldn’t resist one more quip: “It’s in God’s hands now.”

For those who follow Jesus, it’s tempting to think that Turner’s quips revealed more than a sense of humor, that they revealed a longing to come to terms with his childhood faith and embrace it again.

Maybe they did, maybe they didn’t. But as Turner himself said, “It’s in God’s hands now.”

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