

## FILM



**The Railway Man** Eric Lomax and thousands of his fellow prisoners of war were forced to build the Burma railway under barbaric and inhumane circumstances.

# Challenges for POWs and church leaders

## **The Railway Man (2013, M)**

While not an explicitly Christian film, the strong theme of forgiveness in *The Railway Man* will resonate for ACC readers. Colin Firth is Eric Lomax and Nicole Kidman plays his wife Patti Lomax. Some of you may have read his autobiography of the same name (published in 1995). The process of bringing it to film is a story in itself though the film does not deal with aspects of his family life prior to him meeting Patti whom he would marry in 1983.

During WWII British officer Eric Lomax is captured by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore and ends up working on the Thai-Burma Railway. Apart from the general appalling conditions, Lomax (and many others) was tortured, with a particular incident providing the background to Lomax's torture.

The film weaves back and forth from the war times to the 1980s, illustrating his continuing psychological difficulties, particularly its impact on his second marriage. Eric eventually learns of a book published by one of his captors who is now running a tourist-type memorial (not exploiting the time but attempting to show remorse), and he eventually makes a journey to meet him. The former Japanese officer Takashi Nagase (played by Hiroyuki Sanada), from

the prison camp was an interpreter during the torture sessions.

Laura Barnett in *The Guardian* Film News (24 January 2014 9:30 AM) writes: "The torture scenes are terrifying – and completely realistic ... says torture rehabilitation expert Dr William Hopkins. I saw this film with a colleague who knew Eric Lomax, whose memoir it is based on. He had been a victim of torture, too. "We both found it strikingly realistic: the torture scenes are terrifying without being remotely sensationalist, as can sometimes be the case with film and TV. Both Lomax's experience of torture in a Japanese prisoner of war camp and his ultimate reconciliation with his torturer are put across excellently."

Both men had become aware of the need for forgiveness, but as is often the case one person has to take the first step to reconciliation, and Eric knew he had to offer forgiveness as the only way to stop the hatred that had dominated his life and start to live again.

## **Twenty Feet From Stardom (2013, M)**

This is an unusual film and what a fascinating title. Today children often want to grow up to be a celebrity playing a role, rather than being in the actual role itself. Everyone seems to want their 15 minutes of fame

(though it is more like 1.5 seconds in the world of instant communication today).

This documentary considers some of the backing singers to many well-known and famous later 20th century popular singers (and 21st century). The twenty feet refers to where the backing singers often stood on stage. It shows how integral these singers were to the development of many of the popular and significant pop and rock songs in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and how in some cases they received little recognition or were actually 'covered over', with someone else taking the credit.

## **This documentary caused me to reflect on the sometimes increasing celebrity culture in the Christian ... arena**

It is also worth highlighting that many of these backing singers are Christian—having been trained from a young age to sing in churches, especially those in the Southern USA and African-American tradition. It reminded me of why so many contestants on the increasing number of popular talent shows like *Australian Idol* had a Christian background, especially in larger churches. They gained practical experience and ability to sing in the context of a large audience.

Overall, this documentary caused me to reflect on the sometimes-increasing celebrity culture in the Christian parachurch and denominational arena and the danger in having too much focus on any one person to the neglect of the whole body.

We all have a part to play in the body of Christ. For some it will be an up-front leadership role, but with the whole body involved we can sing together.

*Peter Bentley, National Director for the ACC*