



**THE CASE FOR CHRIST** is a First Quarter LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Here's Kino Ken's evaluation of that dvd film.

**11 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**United States 2017 color 112 minutes live action feature docudrama  
Triple Horse Studios / Pure Flix Entertainment Producers: Brian Bird,  
Erika Christensen, David de Vos, Faye Dunaway, Elizabeth Hatcher-Travis,  
Karl Horstmann, Michael Scott, David White, Alysoun Wolfe, Brittany Yost**

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance  
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

**Points:**

- 2 Direction: Jon Gunn**
- 1 Editing: Vance Null**
- 1 Cinematography: Brian Shanley**
- 0 Lighting: Bob Shuford**
- Special Visual Effects: Monda Ray, Lonny Pelot**
- 2 Screenplay: Brian Bird, based on the book by Lee Strobel**
- Script Supervision: Ben Barker**

- 1 Music: Will Musser
- 1 Production Design: Mitchell Crisp Art Direction: Nathan Jones  
Set Decoration: Natalie Rhooms  
Set Dressing: T. D. Antoine, Paul Correa, Jess Pouncy, Germaine Rigg  
Props: Mark Dillon  
Costume Design: Dana Konick  
Makeup: Julie Hill-Parker (head), Robyn Rebbe (key), Teresa Foshee (key)  
, Bill Johnson, Patrice Coleman, Yvonne Eagle, Dhyana Forte,  
Kimberly Graczyk (head), Gindy Martin, Valerie Patterson,  
Yolanda Sheridan, Nico Sohn
- 0 Sound  
Sound Editing Supervision: Jesse Pomeroy  
Sound Effects: Roberto Dominguez Alegria, Monique Reymond  
Sound Mixing: Mike Filosa  
Voice Casting: Mary Louise Gemmill, Bernie Van De Yacht
- 2 Acting
- 1 Creativity
- 11 total points

**Cast:** Erika Christensen (Leslie Strobel, Lee's wife), Faye Dunaway (Dr. Roberta Waters), Frankie Faison (Joe Dubois), Robert Forster (Walt Strobel, Lee's dad), Brett Rice (Ray Nelson), L. Scott Caldwell (Alfie Davis), Mike Vogel\* (Lee Strobel), Meredith Andrews (Worship Leader), Rus Blackwell (Dr. William Craig), Tracey Bonner (ICU Nurse), Matthew Brenher (Dr. Phillip Singer), Mark Campbell (Judge), Jordan Cox (Bill Hybels), David de Vos (*Tribune* Colleague), Renell Gibbs (James Hick), Jimmy Gonzales (Detective Acosta), Grant Goodeve (Mr. Cook), Mandy Grace (Voice of Nurse), Lisa Gunn (Voice of Phone Operator), Cindy Hogan (Lorena Strobel, Lee's mother), Linda Latona (Julie), Judd Lormand (Joseph Koblinsky), Tom Nowicki (Dr. Alexander Metherell), Paul Reese (Larry Davis), Wayne Pére (Wayne Marlow), Miguel Pérez (Father Jose Maria Marquez), Mike Pniewski\* (Kenny London), Michael Provost (Lee Strobel as a teenager), Jacob Rhodes (Rod Millie), Haley Rosenwasser (j) (Alison Strobel, daughter of Leslie and Lee), Kevin Sizemore

**(Dr. Gary Habermas), Jacob Sooter (Worship Singer), Kelly Lamor Wilson (Leslie Strobel as a teenager), John Jacob Anderson (*Chicago Tribune* Reporter), others**

**Based on a popular book by Lee Strobel, the movie version of THE CASE FOR CHRIST illuminates events and tensions leading the author to embrace Christianity and write about his transformative experience from atheism to believer. As the drama opens, Strobel is basking in public praise, a promotion at work, and overbearing self-assurance. Investigative journalism has won him acclaim. He's proud of his achievements, incredulous that some of his newspaper colleagues don't recognize their peer's worth and talent. Chief among critics is Kenny London, a fictional character tired of Lee's abrasively curt dismissal of anyone in the newsroom who doesn't happen to agree with an exclusively empirical view of reality. London challenges him to stop whining about Christian hypocrisy and platitudes. Instead, he ought to research why the Christian community of believers accepts the impossible as truth. The film's fatal flaw here is that ultimately acceptance or rejection of Christianity relies upon faith. For no amount of sensory proof will suffice to validate all its key claims.**

**In order to celebrate ascendancy at his newspaper, Lee takes wife and daughter to dinner, where the girl chokes on a gumball. Coming to the rescue is a nurse who happens to have chosen to eat at that establishment the same evening due to a hunch. On this occasion, the intuition is correct. Her quick response to crisis saves the life of Alison Strobel. Lee shrugs off this serendipity as a random encounter.**

**Wife Leslie sees something more profound in it. She pursues child rescuer Alfie with questions, probing to uncover the why of a situation she believes to be engineered by someone or something beyond the visible. Leslie seeks for an underlying reason below what happened, something a muckraking journalist is content to let drop.**

**Visiting Leslie's fundamentalist church several times, she becomes absorbed in its atmosphere and theology, finding a kind of personal acceptance she certainly doesn't enjoy at home. There, Lee barks and snaps out orders for behavior and acceptable speech like a domestic Napoleon. He can't stand**

opposition anywhere, as even Alfie discovers when he brusquely commands her to stay away from his wife.

To Lee at this point Christianity is a contagious disease to battle and overcome by logic. And, should that fail, male bullying can be employed.

Estranged from his father and a trial to mediating mother, Lee allows bitterness about past neglect to destroy reconciliation opportunities. Until the unexpected death of a scorned parent denies him another chance to salvage their broken relationship. Too late he learns of his dad's pride in assembling a collection of newspaper clippings devoted to commendations of an unforgiving son.

Lee's equally blind about failing connections at home. Belligerent atheism doesn't serve as any security blanket for daughter Alison, who observes it leading to violence against all opposing it, whether mother or child. With spouse, Lee strikes out physically. Adopting a gentler tone for a thoroughly terrified spectator, Strobel offers her a half-hearted apology for flying off the handle. That character trait periodically resurfaces and not just for dramatic storytelling effect. He's insistent about treating Christianity as fairy tale, despite overwhelming evidence neither spouse nor offspring buys that. Their Christian leanings highlight love, something thin-skinned Lee squanders on himself.

Only after two crises shake his bubble of delusional security does Lee seriously start to wonder if the artificial world he's built up for his family is about to implode. He can't understand why death didn't ask his permission before robbing him of Dad or how females in his family can look outside his provisions for security and affection.

Leslie finds those not only in Jesus, but also in Alfie. Who at least will listen to what she says, a skill not practiced by domineering hubby.

Alison is tired of being treated as a particularly naïve child needing everything explained to her by papa. She knows her own identity is something greater than simply Lee's reflected image in miniature.

Topping off disasters on the home front is a precipitous judgment about what really happened in a crime scene situation involving police informant and handler. Lee misreads the clues, making himself judge and jury, mentally convicting a marginal social figure of a crime he hasn't, in fact, committed. Worse still, he permits public media to publish his mistaken assertions as documentary fact, leading to incarceration and mistreatment of an innocent

man. Repentance and apology arrive too late to forestall further injustices. These bring additional shame and discredit to the author of false reportage. They also harm the reputation of the newspaper for which he works.

On the verge of looming divorce from two disaffected family members, Lee turns to a vocational mentor and fellow atheist, proving obstinately unwilling to take advice from anyone within his home. Bertrand Russell's arguments against Christianity fail to convince anyone he supports to recant and fall back into line with him.

The only hope he can see of patching up familial cracks is to collect irrefutable arguments about the fallacy of Christian theology. These he decides should come from living experts in various branches of science. Surely scientists will share his cynicism about Christianity's key principles.

To his amazement, none of those he meets shares his blind faith in atheism. Even though they rely upon less than unassailable proofs regarding centuries-old customs and oral traditions, none wishes to err on the side of doubt, realizing the stakes are literally life and death, as Pascal succinctly pointed out. Better to hedge bets about the unknowable than to deny its existence outright.

What comes out clearly during the course of Lee's search for answers is that Christianity and its ethical precepts do make for more loving, generous, and altruistic behavior in adherents. Viewers see Lee progress from a first-class, all-around jerk into a responsible human being willing to cooperate with others to make life more comfortable and purposeful for fellow humans. He learns to recognize the right of others to personal uniqueness in belief and character. Though determination not to become an angry carbon copy of his father comes tardily it is not so delayed as to fail outright. Second chances are what Christianity is all about.

Lee requires them just like the rest of humanity. He is not an island unto himself, but part of the mainland, set on this planet like everybody else for certain ends, which he may or may not envision without assistance. Similarly, to behave solely according to dictates of self-interest is in the long-term a royal road to self-destruction, taking along to ruin often the very people it's incumbent upon him to protect from injury.

Christianity makes Lee a better husband, father, and journalistic collaborator. It won't guarantee perfection. But an ideal person has no need of reform or salvation by some outsider. Anything less is simply a work-in-progress, clay still

requiring shaping to final form. So if the current model isn't working, why not go to real experts and let them tinker with it? That should at least guarantee some measurable improvement.

Lee Strobel was initially a severely dysfunctional human being in need of serious sustained overhaul. This Jon Gunn's drama transparently reveals. Coming to realize that truth was his protagonist's most significant achievement. Learning to look beyond himself paradoxically changed a condescending, obnoxious personality into someone far more useful to his circle of associates.

In the lead role of Lee Strobel, Mitch Vogel covers all bases with fiery conviction. He doesn't flinch from presenting a before-and-after case study in personal transformation. Whether data acquired from Biblical searchings or pressures from inside his own family impel him to change his conduct is irrelevant. As an actor, it is only necessary for Vogel to depict fluid alterations in mannerisms. This he accomplishes adroitly without making any fumbles.

Faye Dunaway, though severely limited in screen time, capitalizes on what she does get to portray an agnostic psychologist with psychiatric proclivities who bares Lee's hidden resentment of his father's disparagement as a rationale for militant atheism. Her own doubts, though real enough, don't rest on evidence. Nor does she believe Lee's are any better founded, making no bones about telling him so.

Also standing out in the cast is Mike Pniewski, whose affability as a Christian editor camouflages a sincere desire to guide Lee towards pursuing finer goals and less adversarial interactions with people surrounding him.

Coherency and timely dramatic beats of Brian Bird's scripting keep audiences thoroughly engaged while amateur detective Strobel looks for tangible documentation of Christianity's origins in a secular world. His screenplay doesn't explicitly evangelize. Instead, it substitutes gradual character development.

Nor does it attempt to score points with strategically inserted witticisms. For none of these characters are professional stand-up comics. Dialogue rings true to its period and the class membership and educational backgrounds of speakers.

Nothing special is evoked by cinematography or production design here.

Major upgrading of sound and lighting would have made the film a stronger candidate for favorable reception. Though low-key lighting is appropriately

atmospheric for film noirs, this movie is not an exemplar of that genre. It could have well used more intense illumination. With respect to sound recording and mixing, poorly placed mikes and ineptly integrated music work against effective delivery of speech.

Nonetheless, **THE CASE FOR CHRIST** should be a satisfactory viewing experience for adults. Its searing domestic violence is too intense for teens.

This Pure Flix Entertainment dvd includes ten music videos running over thirty minutes altogether, a four-minute featurette summarizing the film's key themes, and a two-minute promotional overview of The Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C.