

“*Sound of Freedom* Star Is Hollywood Outcast”

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By David Grove

VANCOUVER, B.C., Canada.—In the early 2000s, Jim Caviezel was on the cusp of Hollywood stardom, as Caviezel’s essential truth-telling, quiet charm and sheer unpretentiousness gave Caviezel a disarmingly effective screen presence in the films *Angel Eyes*, *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Frequency*.

Of course, Caviezel gained worldwide fame with his titular performance in the 2004 Mel Gibson–directed biblical drama film *The Passion of the Christ*, which was a great commercial success but sharply divided audiences and critics, largely along political and religious lines, as the film was criticized for being excessively violent and containing perceived anti-Semitic representations.

Despite the fact that *The Passion of the Christ* grossed more than \$600 million at the worldwide box office, Caviezel’s strong identification with the film, and especially the role of Jesus Christ, along with Caviezel’s strict adherence to his Catholic faith, seemingly made Caviezel undesirable in Hollywood.

Caviezel is experiencing much the same kind of dichotomy with his latest film, the independently released child-trafficking action film *Sound of Freedom*, which has become the surprise box-office hit of 2023 but has also been labeled as being controversial and divisive due to the film’s political and religious undertones.

Jim Caviezel’s personal beliefs impacted his career even before he was cast in *The Passion of the Christ*, as Caviezel had previously refused to perform graphic on-screen sexual scenes with female co-stars, specifically with Jennifer Lopez in *Angel Eyes* and Ashley Judd in *High Crimes*, in keeping with Caviezel’s deep commitment to his marital vows.

However, Caviezel’s performance in *The Passion of the Christ* irrevocably changed the trajectory of his career. Indeed, Caviezel has said that the film’s director, Mel Gibson, after offering Caviezel the film’s titular role, tried to talk Caviezel out of accepting the role, as Gibson warned Caviezel of the potential discrimination and typecasting that Caviezel might encounter in the wake of the film’s release.

Of the impact that *The Passion of the Christ* had on Caviezel's career and life, Caviezel said: "I made a choice. What you find out is that some choices are viewed as evil, and I don't see it that way. If there was a comedy out there, I would do it, but, after playing Jesus, you don't really get offers like that anymore. As soon as I did *Passion*, other film offers stopped coming in."

Following the release of *The Passion of the Christ*, Caviezel starred as professional golfer Bobby Jones in the independently released biographical drama film *Bobby Jones: Stroke of Genius* and then appeared, in the role of a terrorist, opposite Denzel Washington in the big-budget action science-fiction thriller film *Déjà Vu*.

Moreover, as many of the film roles that Caviezel received following *The Passion of the Christ* had Caviezel playing grayish-shaded characters in various action and thriller films, his screen persona became increasingly morally ambiguous and sometimes villainous, as evidenced by Caviezel's cold-blooded performance opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone in the 2013 action-thriller film *Escape Plan*, in which Caviezel plays a sadistic prison warden.

Jim Caviezel and Hollywood: A Mutual Separation

While *The Passion of the Christ* played havoc with Jim Caviezel's previously burgeoning film career, Caviezel did subsequently find success on network television as the star of the CBS drama series *Person of Interest*, which aired from 2011 and 2016 and featured Caviezel as John Reese, a former CIA agent and Special Forces soldier who is approached to join a computer-driven vigilante team that aims to monitor, and predict, terrorist activities.

However, while Caviezel received excellent reviews for his work on the series, the cancellation of *Person of Interest* in 2016, after five seasons, heralded Caviezel's break from Hollywood, as, while Caviezel has never again acted on television following the show's cancellation, his subsequent film appearances have been in decidedly non-Hollywood productions, most of which bear a connection to Caviezel's political and religious views.

Prior to *Sound of Freedom*, which was filmed in 2018, Caviezel played St. Luke in the 2018 biblical drama film *Paul, Apostle of Christ* and then starred in the 2020 political thriller film *Infidel* as Doug Rawlins, an outspoken Christian American blogger and journalist who, while visiting Cairo, Egypt, as part of a speech tour, is kidnapped by members of the Iranian regime and then put on trial on a bogus spying charge.

Infidel was executive-produced by prominent conservative author and commentator Dinesh D'Souza, and Caviezel has, in recent years, become increasingly attached to conservative politics and linked to the controversial QAnon political movement, which has expressed total support for *Sound of Freedom*.

Sound Of Silence

In *Sound of Freedom*, Jim Caviezel plays Tim Ballard, a real-life anti-human trafficking activist, and a former government agent, who embarks on a perilous mission to rescue kidnapped children from sex traffickers in Colombia.

As the reaction to *Sound of Freedom* has been so deeply politicized, due not only to the film's content but also Caviezel's and Ballard's alleged QAnon ties, the quality of the film itself has almost become a moot point, as expressions of dislike and support for the film have become the equivalent of wearing a badge of moral and political courage.

Given that *Sound of Freedom* might ordinarily have been dismissed as a fairly routine action film, this controversy has been a blessing, so to speak, for the film, which has presently grossed more than \$140 million at the domestic box office against a production cost of less than \$15 million.

However, for Caviezel, the only effect that the film's success has had on his career is to seemingly further cement his status as a Hollywood outsider. Indeed, as *Sound of Freedom* continues to shatter commercial expectations and norms, Caviezel seems now to be as far removed from Hollywood, figuratively speaking, as he's ever been.