Movie Review: God's Not Dead 2

Shaun Brauteseth 22 September 2016



At the 2016 Republican National Convention, a billboard promoting 'God's Not Dead 2' was banned because of this line: 'I'd rather stand with God and be judged by the world than stand with the world and be judged by God.'

That quote was deemed "incendiary" by the convention organisers, who then allowed an atheist group to prominently display an anti-religious message at arguably one of the most incendiary political conventions in living memory. In an irresistible twist of irony that confirmed the very point of its existence, the movie about a hypocritical attack on the Christian message was subjected to a hypocritical attack because of its Christian message.

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In 2014's 'God's Not Dead', a college student takes a stand to defend his faith against an aggressively atheist professor. 2016's second installment sees a high school teacher (Melissa Joan Hart) fight her case in the Supreme Court after being accused of preaching about Jesus to her class. With the help of her bright-eyed young lawyer (Jesse Metcalfe), she must win over the

jury and defeat her prosecutor (the leathery, shark-grinned Ray Wise). It may be a well-worn variation of the David-versus-Goliath narrative, but it works for two reasons: good filmmaking and good timing.

In the past, faith-based movies carried a reputation for being cheesy, overly obvious and amateurish – good intentions ruined by poor execution. That trend has changed. Today, a new generation of filmmakers are matching their love for the gospel with increasing levels of competence in their craft. In addition, 'God's Not Dead 2' has the advantage of depicting an unfolding situation that is very, very real. The United States, which functioned as the moral conscience of the world for so long, is now turning in on itself. Against all reason, the nation will hand over the nuclear codes to either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, and along with a loss of rational thinking has come an abandoning of the true fear of God. The notion of a teacher facing legal action for speaking about Jesus in an historically-Christian country is not some far-fetched fantasy anymore but an imminent reality.

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Fortunately, the movie displays another reality: Jesus is shown as worth following, no matter what. People are healed or delivered through prayer, but they're also disowned or dishonoured for holding to the gospel message, without some tidy resolution tying up the loose ends. This is what we need to see – the true gospel, not the one diluted by the American Dream. Real people are depicted struggling with real issues. There are moments of grace and breakthrough, and there are moments of great sorrow. This is what it is to serve Jesus, who Himself said that people who follow Him will experience many troubles, but that He's on top of it all in the end.

It felt strange to sit in the theatre of a typical, bustling mall and watch characters on a big screen openly speak about Jesus forgiving sins, but that's the kind of movie that Pure Flix, the Arizona-based production team behind both movies, has made. We might not have movies like this on the mainstream circuit for very much longer, and that's why we need to support them. 'God's Not Dead 2' is genuinely good. It's watchable and compelling, and the main actors put in solid, heartfelt performances. (Indeed, Melissa Joan Hart, best known as Sabrina the Teenage Witch, is a committed Christian herself.)

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These movies need us to support them, and we need their presence in the midst of the insanity

of popular entertainment. When Jesus described His followers as salt on the earth, He wasn't describing something that brings flavour. In the first Century, salt was used to disinfect the ground, and particularly the communal areas used as toilets. The movie industry is not unlike that environment, and the presence of a release like this disinfects some of the ground just by being there. Movies like this will keep being made as long as they prove to be profitable to the industry, and they'll be profitable as long as we get out and support them.

So it turns out that the Republican National Convention organisers were right – the movie's message is incendiary. After all, the dictionary's definition of that adjective describes 'a weapon designed to start fires.'

Let's hope that's the case.