

'God's Not Dead' and How Christian Films Are Kind of Like Horror Movies

Over Easter weekend, I went to see the film *God's Not Dead*, which by all accounts has become a certified blockbuster in the realm of Christian films. Made for \$2 million, at the time of this writing it has grossed over \$48 million at the box office, which is absolutely incredible. I cannot deny its success. The problem I have is how exactly to talk about this film with others.

There seems to be only two ways to approach Christian films these days. The first is what I call the "kindergarten approach," where everyone is wonderful and everyone is a winner. This, of course, isn't true at all in the real world, but since kids are small and innocent and cute, we go along with it and everyone gets a ribbon for trying their best. Sure, it's not a perfect film, we say, but hey, at least people are getting a dose of God when they go to the movies as opposed to all the other garbage that's out there. Maybe this movie will convince someone not to be an **atheist** anymore. And it's made a lot of money so, you know, it must be good. ...

Then there is the "Christian snobbery" approach, where well-meaning Christians who are sick and tired of seeing Christian movies not stacking up to the quality of their secular rivals simply unload on a movie like this. The acting is bad, the story is lame, predictable and totally unrealistic, and this movie simply reiterates the stereotype that Christians are shallow thinking, unimaginative twits who are afraid of anyone who doesn't agree with them.

Both of these approaches, while well-meaning, aren't very helpful. The first effectively sticks their head in the sand

and the second is mean-spirited and haughty. I would suggest a third approach to Christian films, namely a “level-headed” one.

While filming my new movie, *Holy Ghost* (due out Sept 16), I interviewed Devon Franklin, Senior VP of Production at Columbia Pictures and one of the driving forces behind the new movie, *Heaven Is For Real*. Devon is a friend and an incredibly smart guy, and he’s a very devoted Christian who understands the movie business better than anyone I know. When I asked him for his opinion on the state of Christian films, he didn’t put on rose-colored glasses or laugh at the message-driven slop filling up Christian bookstores. He instead likened **Christian movies** to, of all things, horror films.

Devon pointed out that the Christian film is actually still in its infancy, much like the horror film was in the early 1970s. Back then, horror films had no budget, terrible acting, paper-thin story lines, and existed simply to do one thing: scare you. But as the filmmakers behind these films got better, people started to take notice, the movies started to do good business, and in turn, budgets went up, better writers and actors got involved, and the horror film grew to be a staple in the cineplexes.

Christian films, likewise, are getting better (although they aren’t perfect by a long shot), they are getting noticed, they are making money, and it is only a matter of time before the scales tip and the Christian film begins to draw real talent and tell real stories that reach more than just the faithful.

So is *God’s Not Dead* a good movie? In some ways it is, and in some ways it isn’t. Whatever it is, it is clearly an evolutionary step in the right direction, as is *Heaven Is For Real*, and (hopefully) as is my own *Holy Ghost* which will be released later this year.

If God is glorified through any film, then it is a good thing.

If He is glorified through a good film, even better. But I look forward to the day when He is consistently glorified through truly great films.

Darren Wilson is the founder of Wanderlust Productions and the creator of various films, including *Finger of God*, *Furious Love* and *Father of Lights*. Darren's new book, *Finding God in the Bible*, is available in stores everywhere. Visit his website at .