



Come Sunday



Come Sunday (2018) M

Starring: Chiwetel Ejiofor, Gerard Catus, Allie McCulloch

Written by: Marcus Hinchey
based on a radio story from WBEZ's This American Life

Directed by: Joshua Marston

This is a fascinating and well-made film about the challenging and sobering story of Bishop Carlton Pearson (played by Chiwetel Ejiofor - the lead in 12 Years a Slave). Pearson established and grew a large church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and was one of the leading African-American preachers in the 'fundamentalist' tradition established by Oral Roberts, having been mentored by Roberts during his ministry training. Oral Roberts is convincingly played by Martin Sheen.

The film follows the basic story of Pearson's ministry and influence and the dramatic (almost overnight) change of belief where Pearson basically explained to his congregation one Sunday that he had had an 'epiphany' and woken up no longer believing he could reconcile judgment with a loving God. Leaders and members of the church tried to explain, rationalise and wrestle with his thoughts, but it was soon evident he was promoting a form of universalist reconciliation, and soon there was a large exit of members. Pearson was declared a heretic by his colleagues in the Joint College of Africa-American Pentecostal Bishops in 2004, and moved onto different churches and arrangements, including Unitarianism and New Thought faiths.

The film is in need of some editing for length and repetition, especially as it is a bit didactic in the sense that the director is trying to make Carlton Pearson into more of a martyr for the liberal cause than he patently deserves. I leave you with some of Pearson's words.

"I'm an atheist who is a theist," he chuckles. "I still believe in God but not 'a' God or 'the' God. Just God."

Peter Bentley



I'm in Love with a Church Girl (2013) PG

Starring: Stephen Baldwin, Zahn McClarnon, Michael Madsen, Ja Rule, Martin Kove

Written by: Galley Molina

Directed by: Steve Race

I admit I was intrigued to see this film (available on Netflix) mainly because of the title. It is a professionally produced new style of Christian film in that it is aimed at a broader audience than the typical church group, namely the wider US nominal Christian audience.

Miles Montego is a former drug dealer, and now wealthy investor and event organiser, though still with strong 'street' connections. At a party held by his stockbroker and the stockbroker's wife, he meets a group from the wife's bible study, including Vanessa Leon. Miles is interested in Vanessa and soon they are seeing each other as friends and this leads to questions about where the relationship is heading. Vanessa clearly outlines the importance of having a husband who has a relationship with God. Miles is so keen on Vanessa he starts to attend church, read the bible and talk with other Christians. He meets Vanessa's parents, and there are some strong scenes with her mother who is clearly not as keen on Miles.

Stephen Baldwin plays a DEA agent who has been trying to catch Miles out, but is also intrigued at the change in lifestyle and then his connection with the church. The film is based on the director's own story (Galley Molina), who actually wrote the material as a book in prison. Molina was keen to also have well-known American Christians like Adrienne Bailon (who plays Vanessa) and Stephen Baldwin to bring a strong sense of authenticity to the Christian roles.

While there may be a few 'twice' moments, this is an encouraging and faithful story, and illustrates how someone's life can be transformed by the gospel, and the role that ordinary people play in sharing the gospel.