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Bob Dylan's Jesus Years Busy Being Born ... Again!

3 Stars – Thought-Provoking

By Cinema In Focus
Christian Post Guest Columnist
Wed, Oct. 08 2008 09:34 AM EDT

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The iconoclastic nature of Bob Dylan's life makes it difficult if not impossible to label him. As an artist, his deepened sense of our spiritual, social and political longings permeates his music and his life. Often described as a different person at different seasons of his life, Dylan's exploration and acceptance of Jesus as his Lord and Savior can be seen as either a true life change or simply another phase in his developing artistic life. In this documentary by Joel Gilbert, the title is itself appropriately ambiguous as he allows the viewer to decide if Dylan is just going through "The Jesus Years" or is in fact "Being Born...Again."

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Dismissed by hard-core Dylan fans when he first produced his album of faith titled "Slow Train Coming," many are reevaluating the music and the message and declaring this work the best of his career. Followed up by the album "Saved," which is considered of mixed quality, this season of Dylan's music is followed by his 22nd album "Infidels" in which he returned to his secular music. Though he never publically renounced his faith in Jesus Christ, many assume this to be his public confession.

The uneven documentary is engaging despite its lack of editing skill and unnecessary length. Beginning with an interview of Bill Dwyer, the Vineyard pastor who was instrumental in bringing Dylan to faith in Christ, we are introduced to various teachers, reviewers, fans and professionals who worked with and evaluated Dylan during this season of his life. Several of the prominent persons include producer Jerry Wexler, music critic Joel Selvin, who wrote of "Dylan's God-awful Gospel," and Oscar award-winning songwriter Al Kasha, who was Dylan's Bible Study leader.

Since Dylan is never interviewed, the film lacks any definitive statement about his true opinions and beliefs now that the "Jesus years" have come and gone. Pastor Dwyer and Bible-Study leader Al Kasha believe that Dylan continues to belong within the fold. But this is never substantiated by Dylan himself. Since Dylan is still alive, it is difficult to understand why Gilbert did not give us an opportunity to hear Dylan in his own voice. As it is, this documentary is a fascinating conjecture of the spiritual journey of a gifted artist. Perhaps Gilbert will follow up with an actual interview with Dylan himself. That would settle the questions this film raises.

Discussion:

1. It is implied by at least one of the people interviewed that Dylan was simply trying to reach a new group of consumers with his Jesus albums. Do you believe this is all that Dylan was doing? Why or why not?
2. The fact that Joel Selvin would change his review of both Dylan and his albums done during the "Jesus years" and be more sympathetic reveals a shift in perspective. Why do you think Joel has become more open to Dylan's Christian albums?
3. The description Al Kasha gives of spending hours with Dylan discussing the Bible implies that he was a true seeker. Do you believe Dylan was a true seeker? Why or why not?

Cinema In Focus is a social and spiritual movie commentary. Hal Conklin is former mayor of Santa Barbara and Denny Wayman is pastor of the Free Methodist Church. For more reviews: www.cinemainfocus.com.

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Perhaps there's a curse of sorts for public figures: Reaffirm what has been the case or else here come the doubters. I certainly don't know Bob Dylan personally, nor claim omniscient abilities, but the public record is there that the guy had a very personal experience with Jesus and in his entire career (4 decades plus) it could easily be argued that the most he ever shared about his personal situation was when he came to Jesus. Maybe it was too much. Dylan has evolved and matured. He's had his joys and sorrows. Who's going to claim he doesn't have feet of clay?

For those interested, I penned a book entitled "Restless Pilgrim: The Spiritual Journey of Bob Dylan" back in 2002 (Relevant Books). Whatever its shortcomings, it delivered a decent blow to the nonsense that Dylan renounced his faith or "returned to Judaism" (re: inference being he renounced Jesus). For what it's worth, I don't think he renounced one iota of his Jewishness nor do I think he tried Jesus on like a pair of pants and then moved on. Shalom, and may the Lord have mercy on us all...

DylanRadio.com Thu Oct 09, 2008 9:53 am 1 0 0 Flag

Personally, I find the very question offensive. The implication that one can or should judge Bob Dylan's faith is the height of arrogance. While he may be a public figure, he is not a pastor, priest or theologian - he is a musical artist/entertainer. The only reason Christians judge him is because he stopped making explicitly Christian albums, and I don't blame him one bit. With even fellow believers standing ready to condemn him, or at the very least question his commitment, it's no great wonder that he went private with his faith. He's never renounced his Christian faith, and as a Christian myself, I'm willing to let him have his relationship with God in relative privacy.

believer Thu Oct 09, 2008 9:38 am 1 0 0 Flag

I believe from the songs he wrote that he had genuinely made a profession of faith. I just don't believe he could fake it when you listen to the words of his songs. By time these albums came out the Jesus Explosion was over and being a Christian was no longer the cool thing to do or be. I'd be interested to discover what caused him to walk away and has he ever come back.

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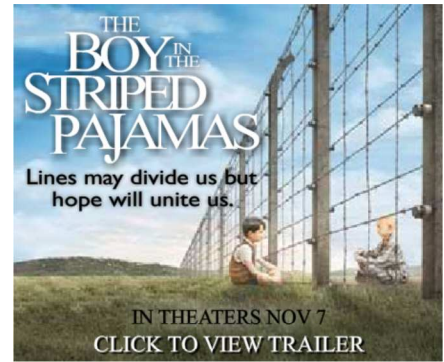
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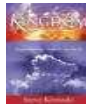
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