

“Infidel” Asks the Scariest Faith Question

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“Infidel” (2020) asks if you would deny your faith to save your life. Because that is the most serious question a Christian may face, I was all the sadder that it came within such a poorly done movie.

Admirably dedicated to Americans in prison in Iran, Jim Caviezel stars as a Christian blogger invited to speak on his faith in Cairo, and it goes north from there.

Related—I did not see the 2008 “The Stoning of Soraya M.” which also featured Caviezel as the French-Iranian foreign journalist who wrote the true story of Soraya’s execution, a book that was banned in Iran.

Caviezel portrayed Christ in Mel Gibson’s stirring and fantastic 2004 “The Passion of Christ,” where he takes the most ferocious beating. In the 2002 remake of Alex Dumas’ 1844 novel “The Count of Monte Christo,” Caviezel is in dire straits again, fighting with God and then seeking revenge as the nouveau riche Count. The Passion and the Count were Caviezel’s best roles, excellent movies.

Caviezel has played in 34 films in the last 20 years, starring in several. He was St. Luke in the 2018 “Paul, the Apostle,” Wyatt Earp in 1994, a fellow prisoner escaping with Sylvester Stallone in the 2014 “Escape Plan,” and a former Green Beret/CIA agent in the sci-fi thriller series “Person of Interest” which ran for 103 episodes. He is a great actor.

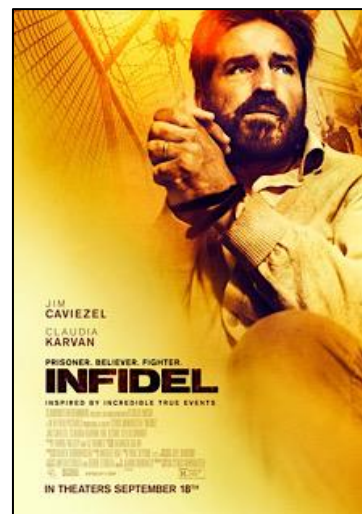
Caviezel’s previous sterling roles overshoot this movie making it impossible for me to separate him from his underdeveloped role in “Infidel” where he is helpless 90 percent of the time in a movie that drags along in unoriginal ways.

Iran is perhaps the richest and most isolated sponsor of terrorism, and it is a leader in abusing civil rights. Iranian leaders consider themselves religiously superior to the world. The combination of religious superiority and absolute tyranny make them increasingly dangerous as they pursue nuclear weapons.

The word “infidel” is what many Americans feel they are called by Muslims, but a deeper reality resonates from the true Muslim. Infidel means unfaithful, yet Caviezel is a faithful Christian throughout the movie. His Muslim “friends” early in the movie do not expect him to convert. So, the movie title kind of forces a misnomer. Caviezel was never “faithful” to Islam for him to become an infidel, per se, and it appears the script or producer used the term to raise audience ire in part, I suspect, for attention or attendance.

“Kafir” is the Muslim word for a “non-believer,” and the more popular term a Muslim would use. Kafir has a clearer resonance in the Muslim worldview. To the Muslim, all persons on earth are under Islam, whether they know it or not. “If Allah wills” is the Muslim phrase known worldwide, reflecting that Allah controls all. Those who do not recognize Islam’s Prophet Mohammed as the true prophet, and Islam as the true faith, and so forth, just have not yet come to see the truth—those are called Kafir in Islamic parlance, a non-believer, or perhaps a not-yet-believer.

Furthermore, infidel has meant barbarians from a Christian view. In the Dark Ages, Protestants and Catholics felt each other were infidels—unfaithful ones—and as government power shifted brutal persecutions were holy endeavors to correct, bring back, or kill infidels who left the



conqueror's version of Christianity. Just like Iran kills Muslim infidels who are unfaithful to Iran's version of Islam.

"Infidel" is a Christian movie, and though I have liked many such movies—and I liked this one, too—I might be considered an infidel for saying that most of the "Christian" movies lack the first-rate editing of higher-budget and more studiously edited movies.

"Infidel" is a grade-B movie, even lower than most. The quality of the filming seemed subpar, with the colors and contrasts not sharp, or of a 21st century resolution. The drama is drab, too, even plain, like it was edited slowly with wasted seconds that sap the strength out of scenes meant to be tense. It could have been much better if more attention had been given to the cinematic craft. It did not have any nail-biting edge.

Unlike first-rate movies and the blockbusters, and unlike Caviezel's unforgettable Christ and the Count, "Infidel" has a preachy man on a mission to Cairo, whose internet blog is followed by secret Christians in Iran, and then he is kidnapped.

His wife became an agnostic of sorts after an accident forced a miscarriage, so she is bitter to God and skeptical of her husband's risks. She works for the U.S. State Department, somewhere, though her job is a mystery. What kind of agent was she? She empowers him with an encrypted flash drive to send secret messages, but she does not have enough "agent" status to have any clandestine assets in Cairo, Lebanon, or Iran.

When Caviezel is kidnapped in Cairo, shuttled to Lebanon, then to Iran, his wife pursues more as a lost housewife than any kind of agent—blah!

The movie trailer shows Caviezel facing a firing squad, and he does not deny his faith. That scene is also where the movie starts. Then we are taken backward six months, and the movie proceeds to take us on a rather predictable ride to the firing squad scene.

It might be a spoiler to simply ask, "How do you think the firing squad turns out?"

Why does the spoiler start the movie? Maybe it was thought the firing squad was the movie's grip. Normally a firing squad is serious, yet the lack of emotional artistry in the script did not allow the great skills of Caviezel to make the movie's seminal scene truly tense.

It would have been a better if the firing squad remained a mystery, excluded from the trailer and not given up front. Yet, that also tells you a lot, for there were not many other tense scenes to use in an advertising promo or movie trailer. Not just low budget, but also lazy.

Instead, with the spoiled scene, there was nowhere to go viscerally. You felt as though your lemonade lost its zing.

The plot is decent, but lacks the tension of Sally Field's true-to-life 1991 "Not Without My Daughter." There, Field's skill relived the real-life woman who escaped from tyrannical Iran with her daughter after her duplicitous husband changed from an American saint into an abusive dictating jerk. If Caviezel's skill had been tapped as Field's was with as riveting a script, we could be moved.

"Infidel" is said to be "inspired" by true events. At the end of such "based upon" movies, we expect something. The latest "Wyatt Earp" with Kevin Costner gave how Earp and wife and his brothers finished their lives. In "Australia," they closed with the how the country finally acknowledged the lost generation. "Inspired" was used loosely, and I dare say deceptively, for the movie failed to reveal a single tragedy of the many hanged and beheaded in Iran. What a shame.

The movie's website said it was filmed on location in Jordan. But does the Hezbollah work in Jordan, too? I missed the Jordan part, as the movie said Lebanon. There are apparently a few clips of real Iran. Yet we know that no American wants to go to Iran to film a Christian film, and especially Caviezel who was in a previous film exposing Iran's hideous civil rights and who played Christ. What a media boon for Iran if they could behead a false Christ!

Perhaps the movie's double agenda helped make it drab. The first was to attempt a thriller escape movie, and the second was to expose again what everyone already knew about Iran.

There you have it, a Dinesh D'Souza film intends to further expose the evil of Iran against Christians and Americans. Everyone knows Iran wishes "Death to America," but even that was not evident in the film. Did D'Souza even read the script.

D'Souza did Republicans a service in his several political documentaries. I could name them. But given the incendiary times their mention would distract here. I have not yet seen any of his movies, and I did not need to. Likewise, Michael Moore did a service for the Democrats. D'Souza and Moore are useful for those sitting on the fence. For me, and others of either party, I go to see a movie to be challenged on a personal level.

"Infidel" stretched credibility several times. Whether the writer or D'Souza added the few F-bombs, the best movies do not need them. This movie did not need any, as most devote Muslims do not even drink alcohol, and most devote Muslims and Christians despise use of F-bombs.

In retrospect, where credibility of the actors' angst is everything, it irritated me that Caviezel's Doug Rawlins was not a memorable character, which was direly needed for the conviction "Infidel" was attempting to convince. When the F-bomb was used, it cut credibility more. Caviezel does not use it at the firing squad; yet when Christian Caviezel does use the F-bomb, credibility flew the coup.

The man who played Christ, and a fantastic Count, now represents Christian Americans held in tyrannical Iran. His unshakable "Christian" character is the movie's *raison d'être*. And then there is a contrived redemptive point toward the enemy near the end, even distractingly Christ-like, but that point was so poorly done that reality took flight again. His character should have thought more of the life of his wife and taken the helicopter rather than waste precious time—stupid of him or lazy of script.

When Caviezel is before the firing squad, we now have seen this for the third time: the trailer, the intro, and at the climax. Caviezel being a bigger character than his Doug Rawlins character not just distracted but caused one to wish his skill had been fully tapped.

He is a Christian asked to deny his faith or be shot. He is willing to die for his faith. That is a courage most Christians wish, hope, and pray they will have in such an hour.

After all, the greatest incredulity in this drab movie was the shallowness of character meant to be solid. Come on now, is a Christian willing to "die for his faith" going to give an F-bomb?

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