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A Sign From God

Abstract

This is a review of *A Sign From God* (2000).

Greg Watkins, memorable for his work on numerous independent films, including the highly praised feature *A Little Stiff* and the Best Short at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival, *A Small Domain*, directed, wrote and co-produced *A Sign From God*, a contender in the 2000 Sundance Film Festival. Zahedi, the film's lead actor, in addition to its co-producer and editor, plays Caveh, a filmmaker, who struggles to make a living. Throughout the plot's duration of one day, Caveh faces many professional, financial and personal obstacles, but does not become discouraged by them. Even when he hits rock bottom at the day's end, when his girlfriend, Laura (Laura Macias), tells him that she can no longer handle his irresponsible lifestyle and wants to break up with him, he remains hopeful. The notion that keeps Caveh's spirits high is that all mishaps are "a sign from God." While Caveh makes reference to God frequently in this context, he does not offer any reason why a sign from God is sufficient justification for such impediments in his lifestyle. Thus, it is unclear if Caveh simply needs to rationalize his optimism or truly feels a strong connection with God.

In an interview, Watkins said that he hopes that viewers focus on the film's overall spiritual mood more than speculate how specific scenes comment on social ethics. Specifically, Watkins intended to emphasize the importance of the final scene, which captures the mystified expressions of Laura and Caveh as they gaze at a mass of incoming fog. While Watkins does not think that the conclusion

resolves the dispute between the couple, he hopes that it "casts the whole controversy in a bigger light in a beautiful, not philosophical, way." More than perform as a peaceful moment, Watkins hopes that the film's finale expresses his own understanding of God "as a way to refer to the mysterious other greater thing which has the power to change." Though Watkins concentrated his analysis on the conclusion, he did not discredit the previous scenes of Laura's and Caveh's struggles. In fact, he mentioned that by representing their situation as a comedy, he attempted to motivate viewers to put their own choices into perspective and "challenge the boundaries they have made."

In effect, the film successfully adheres to Watkins's most passionate objective: to create an ending about "peace in the face of not knowing." Ironically, the film's clearest message is made in this ambiguous conclusion. As Laura and Caveh communicate only with dispassionate facial expressions, a viewer cannot presume how they feel about their future relationship. Even Laura's and Caveh's body language is unrevealing. For example, one viewer might believe that the minimal distance between Laura and Caveh symbolizes a loving understanding between them. However, another viewer might concentrate more on the fact that their arms are crossed over their chests, rather than focus on the distance between them, and thus conclude that they are isolating themselves from each other. While, this scene does not provide any answers, it does not instigate anxiety; the soothing

sounds of nature, accompanied by the fog's gentle roll create the ultimate tranquil experience.

Unfortunately, Watkins' primary vision is lost during several scenes that contradict, or at least undermine, his religious convictions. For instance, in contrast to Watkins's attempt at avoiding to declare a winner of the argument, Caveh clearly triumphs. Directly before the conclusion, Caveh asks a couple if there is any message (which can be perceived as a "sign from God") that they want to give him. It is only after the woman tells Caveh to go on top of a certain hill that Caveh invites Laura up there with him. In effect, Laura and Caveh experience this uplifting moment only because Caveh puts all his faith in this sign. Since it is this faith that Caveh and Laura argue about that brings them to this moment, Caveh's beliefs conquer Laura's.

In further contrast to Watkins's intentions, the film comments on the ethics of abortion. When Laura learns that she might be pregnant, she considers having an abortion. One cannot help but notice the connection between Laura's minimal faith in God (as compared to that of Caveh) and her approval of abortion. Consequently, this connection suggests that abortion is unacceptable from a religious perspective.

Despite the occasions when the plot strays from Watkins's intentions, the film nevertheless reveals a unique and daring effort. By portraying God as an

existence other than the traditional man in the sky, *A Sign From God* challenges its viewers to question socially accepted understandings of religion and to respect their own beliefs. This message greatly contributes to the film's inspirational power.