



I was sent an advance copy of *SAVING GOD*, with a note that it's still unfinished. The film still needs color correction, sound mixing, and credits opening credits still to be added, this is a bare bones, no frills advanced screener. I was hesitant in watching this; for fear that I might struggle with separating the unfinished work with the real quality of the film itself. So, I waited a few days before popping it into my DVD player, and even then, did so slightly reluctantly, wondering what I was in store for.

What I didn't count on was getting so engrossed in the story; I almost forgot to "review" it through a movie critic's point of view, (which can sometimes be way more critical than your normal movie viewer). I found myself completely seduced by its charm, its characters, and its riveting story line, that I tossed aside all my "critic" duties, and simply enjoyed the movie. I haven't "enjoyed" a Christian movie this much in a long time.

Convicted felon and changed man, Armstrong Cane, returns home from prison to take over his father's church in a neighborhood laced with gangs and drugs. His first project is Norris, a young dealer who attempts to turn his back on a life of crime and mistakes. Can Reverend Armstrong point him in the right direction before it's too late or will the Reverend's criminal past come back to haunt him?

Ving Rhames (*Mission Impossible*, *Pulp Fiction*) brilliantly plays the bold and tough Reverend Armstrong to perfection. His compromised zeal for Christ is mixed with just enough humanity and struggle over his own past failures to make him relatable to Christians and non-Christians alike. He isn't portrayed as self-righteous or pompous, but as a normal man who struggles over anger issues and overcoming his past demons. It's refreshing to see a man of God being played with such realism and respect at the same time. Ving Rhames seems to understand that balance and plays it without flaw.

Director Duane Crichton was able to pull the very best out of the supporting cast as well. Newcomer Dwain Murphy (Norris) has an incredibly bright future ahead of him as an actor, and was able to hold his own against some of the talented television actors who round off the supporting cast; Ricardo Chavira (*Desperate Housewives*, *Six Feet under*), Dean McDermott (*Due South*, *Without A Trace*) & Genelle Williams, (*Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *The latest Buzz*).

Two more factors help in making this Christian film one of my all-time favorites, the script and the directing. While this might be Michael Jackson's (not the singer) very first screenplay to his credit, it comes from someone with incredible insight into what makes a story flow and keep its audience awake and involved. There were enough characters and subplots that kept and held your attention and never once let go. Each sub-plot was blended together to create a well thought-out story, that was beautifully told.

Duane Crichton was blessed to have such an incredible cast and script, but his final touches on the film and incredible direction made all the ingredients tenderly blend together just right to create a film that not only entertains, but leaves your heart singing and your spirit soaring. I personally needed a Kleenex after the final scene that I did NOT see coming, and THAT was refreshing.

One of the biggest struggles for most Christian films is how to present the gospel without slowing the story down or come off as too preachy. But in the case of SAVING GOD, the gospel that is presented IS a part of the story, and it doesn't take away from nor slow anything down. Instead, it becomes one of the feature focal points without shoving it in your face.

'SAVING GOD' has officially become one of my favorite Christian films. For production, talent, and over-all message content, I give it a perfect score.