

“Man of the Year”, “Jesus of Nazareth” or “The Gospel of John”

by Carol Duerksen

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Get the movies “Man of the Year” and “Jesus of Nazareth” or “The Gospel of John” and make plans to view them in someone’s home. Movie industry regulations do not allow showing a movie in a public building without paying a fee. Note: “Jesus of Nazareth” is 6 hours long so you may need to break this up into several sessions or a retreat.
- 2 Copies of the movie review at the end of this article.
- 3 Newsprint or chalk board.

SESSION OUTLINE

- 1 View the movie “Man of the Year.”
- 2 Read the movie review. Discuss: which areas do students agree/disagree with the review?
- 3 If you are in the United States, ask students to make a list of the candidates for President that they would be willing to vote for in the 2008 election. Discuss the leadership qualities they like about the candidate of their choice. If you have students who consider themselves to be pacifists, ask: Is it possible to have a pacifist President? Why or why not?
- 4 View “Jesus of Nazareth” or “The Gospel of John.”
- 5 Discuss: What kind of leader was Jesus? Why did people follow him? Why do people follow him today?
- 6 Read the last paragraph of the movie review again. How does this paragraph apply (or not) to Jesus?
- 7 Close with this responsive prayer:

Leader: Lord, help me to be the person that you know I can be.

Students repeat.

Leader: Help me to become the leader and the follower that you call me to be.

Students repeat.

Leader: Lead me on your path of grace and truth. Amen.

Students repeat.

WITH MOVIE REVIEW: “MAN OF THE YEAR”

By Kyra-Lin Hom

Man of the Year (2006), starring Robin Williams, proves that writer and director Barry Levinson is anything but. Advertised as a brilliant and hilarious comedy satirizing the modern American political system, the film comes across more as a confused '90s thriller than a sidesplitting laugh-fest. Nevertheless, Levinson does make many jarring political points.

The story goes a little something like this. Tom Dobbs (Robin Williams), a talk show host who gets his ratings from making fun of the news headlines, is essentially the fictionalized Jon Stewart (host of *The Daily Show*). One night, a member of his audience stands up and says that Dobbs should run for president. The idea sticks with both the audience and Dobbs. He soon announces his candidacy for president of the United States.

Eleanor Green (Laura Linney) is an overzealous employee of Delacroy, the company that owns exclusive rights to the American electronic voting system that will be first implemented this election. While running a last-minute diagnostic on the voting program, Green discovers a glitch. She voices her concern to the head of the company, Alan Stewart (Jeff Goldblum), via e-mail, but the glitch is ignored for economic reasons.

Thanks to the glitch, Dobbs becomes the first Independent president in America's history. This officially ends the political commentary section of the film. From here on out, it's all scandal and peculiar romance. To say the least, it is an odd transition from upbeat documentary to poorly written suspense thriller.

Once Dobbs wins the election, you could turn off your DVD player and leave it at that. The meat of the film is watching Williams get riled up during the campaign and spew his famous stream-of-consciousness humor—this time jabbing his finger at the political system. (According to the special features section of the DVD, most of the dialogue was actually in the script, so credit also must be given to Levinson.)

All you need to know about the rest of the film is that Delacroy goes after Green, Green contacts Dobbs, a cheesy romance blooms, lame writing has Green “solve” the program glitch, morals must be deliberated, the good guys live happily ever after, and the bad guys get what they had coming. (For those who actually are willing to watch this film from beginning to end, I left out most of the spoilers.)

Advertising this movie as a hilarious comedy is truly a sham. The comedy is half-baked and limited; the romantic twist is implausible—as are the main characters; and the technological mystery is phony and not well-planned or well-executed.

Linney is as serious as Williams is energetic, and their very different characters seem as off-kilter from one another as their respective subplots. It's as if Levinson lost track of his point halfway through. He provided the nail but was unable to bring down the hammer.

That's too bad because, at the start, the character Dobbs is a great leader, a person people want to follow. He refuses to use media advertising as part of his presidential campaign, pointing out that candidates who do indulge in the big money methods always end up owing *somebody* favors

(i.e., big businesses). He speaks for the people and for true democracy. His methods and style are completely unorthodox, having roots in comedy, but they are effective. *People want to hear him.* Dobbs also makes the rather unusual policy of complete honesty, being nothing and no one but himself before the media.

One scene I'm particularly fond of is where Dobbs is being hounded by reporters trying to antagonize him with scandalous questions about his previous misconducts. How does he react? Dobbs gives a short, quick speech divulging every misdeed he can remember all the way back to childhood. His point is that everyone has faults and that hiding them from the public is childish and unnecessary. Presidents are, after all, people just like everyone else.

Leaders don't have to be perfect men and women. Leaders are people with something to say and the strength and passion to say it. Normal individuals gravitate toward these pillars of energy and willpower because it is their natural inclination to do so, not because anyone forces them to. When you decide to become a leader of any kind, that is who you are. Overaggressively *recruiting* followers or pressing your message upon another gets you nowhere. Be the person you know that you can be, and people will come to you.