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'Last Ounce of Courage' falls flat, fails to inspire

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NCR Today

Bob Revere (Marshall R. Teague) is a patriotic pharmacist who takes care of a band of benevolent patriotic bikers in rural small-town Mt. Columbus, somewhere in the Rocky Mountains, USA. His newly married son goes off to war, leaving his pregnant wife, Kari (Nikki Novack), behind. When the young man is killed in action, Kari takes her newborn son, Christian, to Los Angeles.

Fast-forward 14 years. Kari brings Christian (Hunter Gomez) to the Reveres' for Thanksgiving, and they stay and get to know the grandparents. Bob is now the mayor who is sad the city had to take down the cross from the mission downtown because it offended someone. Christian watches videotapes of the dad he has never seen. When the teen learns the town can't outwardly celebrate Christmas, he challenges his grandfather to do something because his dad died for their freedom. The grandfather challenges the boy to take a stand and do something, too.

Bob discovers there is no law that says it is illegal for a town government to celebrate the real meaning of Christmas. When he goes for it, a representative from an ACLU-type of organization tries to shut him down. It's interesting to note that the only major role played by an African-American is that of this bad guy with a long German name, Warren Hammerschmidt (Fred Williamson), that means "one who works with hammers."

"Last Ounce of Courage" is poorly written and acted, an unapologetic smash-up of ideas that equate being a patriotic American with being exclusive, white, Christian, mostly male and war-mongering. It's a "them and us" world within and without the country.

This film uses the "war on Christmas" as its point of departure and preys on the sorrow of families who have lost someone in America's wars. The film offers them a reason their loved ones died: freedom of religion or freedom to be Christian, celebrate Christmas and carry a Bible (and a gun). It's a sermon in a can for the choir that is Chuck Norris-approved. It is not art, but a political rally that wants to manipulate people to get out their Harleys, mount a big flag from the back and join the pack to save Christmas.

But here's the real deal about "Last Ounce of Courage": By itself, the film is unimpressive and boring, a typical "Christian" genre film. But if you Google "Last Ounce of Courage website," you will be directed to the film, yes, but the URL is StandUSA.org.

What is Stand USA? The site that sponsors the film describes itself as political, "a social media community for conservative Americans." The thought leaders this online community follows include Chris W. Cox, chief lobbyist for the National Rifle Association, itself an organization the community follows. Others include Focus on the Family, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and so on -- a whole roster of politically conservative groups.

Religious freedom is being challenged in the United States today, but the film treats the issue in a very superficial way as it seeks to engage our inner-biker trigger and react as a herd instead of reflecting on how the very nature of not only religion, but the human person, is being redefined in political and secular arenas in the United States today.

Bob's wife, Dottie, (Jennifer O'Neill) utters the truest sentence when she says Christmas has become "all about Santa and buying things." Ah, finally, a tiny breath of truth whispers and fades: Consumerism-profit is surely the strongest threat to all our freedoms and values.

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Look carefully, if you really desire to spend more than 100 minutes with this film, and see the questions the film doesn't want you to ask, such as: Was the pre-emptive war in Iraq a just war? Did all these Americans and Iraqi (and by extension, Afghan) citizens have to die and continue to die? Do war, motorcycles and an endless supply of American flags define your patriotism? Is a Christian American with a Bible in hand the only real American? Does he or she follow blindly without asking questions? Is war the only way to be an American?

Better films about the U.S. at war in our times require that we think, not just emote: "Taking Chance," "The Messenger," "The Hurt Locker" or "In the Valley of Elah."

"Last Ounce of Courage" is not about American patriotism; it's about solidifying one particular identity and political position. The film's sponsors don't even seem embarrassed that the gun lobby, the single most powerful lobby in the county, informs their ideology or that it is saying that to be a real American you need a Bible and a gun.

If you cannot see yourself in the film, well, there's a reason for that. It's not about you; it's for the few. And in this case, thank God for that.

The film opened in theatrical release Sept. 14 and so far has grossed \$3.3 million.

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