

# EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed

3 Stars – Thought-provoking

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Only time will tell whether the type of “docuganda” this film represents is going to be helpful or harmful to the pursuit of truth. Joining the ranks of films like Michael Moore’s “Fahrenheit 9/11,” Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Truth,” or Ewing and Grady’s “Jesus Camp,” Ben Stein’s “Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed” will be appreciated primarily by those who already hold the beliefs espoused by the film. If you believe that science and religion should have no wall between them and if you find your faith being supported by scientific inquiry as it discovers how God’s creation operates, then you will agree with Stein’s premise. But even if you agree with that premise, you may be uncomfortable with the lengths he goes to in making his point.

However, it is easy to understand why filmmakers are shifting to make this more obvious and entertaining format of a docuganda rather than a documentary. Even-handed documentaries that explore an issue from both sides are often experienced as boring. And it is true that, however diligent an effort is made to be fair, most documentaries do in fact present the director’s and writer’s biased point of view. So, creating films that are obviously lopsided with clear juxtapositions that characterize the opposing viewpoint with horrendous villains, arrogant positions and illogical beliefs is far more entertaining. And to create an artificial “war” that needs our participation is far more engaging, whether we are talking about global warming or scientific and religious freedom.

The comedic style of Stein is perfect for his task of interacting with some of the world’s leading academicians. With deadpan humor that made Stein famous in “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off,” Stein questions Richard Dawkins about his beliefs concerning the origin of the world. Arrogantly proclaiming that anyone who believes in God is ignorant and deluded, Dawkins is deftly questioned by Stein into admitting that there does seem to be intelligence within the design of life on earth. Then asked where that intelligence comes from, Dawkins posits that it could have come here by an alien life form which “naturally evolved” from some other place in the universe.

The fact that life is seldom understood in simple black and white categories does not undermine some of the concerns Stein raises. Entertainment and excessiveness aside, there are several truths explored by this film to which most of us would agree. The first is that academic and scientific inquiry requires the freedom to follow the evidence where it leads. When some answers are forbidden by either political correctness or academic conformity, then we will not find the truth we need to survive. Secondly, we would agree that ideas can lead to beneficial or horrendous consequences. We have seen this in our own country when eugenics was used to justify sterilizing 50,000 Americans against their will from 1907 to 1970, and we saw it in Germany when 6 million people were killed in an arrogant belief in racial purification. Ideas produce political and social action and must be examined not only scientifically but also morally. Thirdly, we would agree that human beings have purpose and when we decide there is no purpose in life, no reason to love the poor and the powerless, then we will create societies in which taking human life for convenience or economic reasons becomes increasingly accepted.

What is needed in our day is intelligence, not just our own but also the transcendent kind that both created our world and gives us meaning and purpose each day. That is a message we dare not miss.

Discussion:

1. The creation of an artificial war between religion and science is encouraged by films which pit the two against one another. Do you believe there is really such a war? Why or why not?

2. When the evidence of scientific inquiry points toward an intelligent designer, there are implications that many don't want to accept. However, the belief that there is no designer and life has no ultimate purpose also has implications. What do you think are the implications of both beliefs?
  
3. The freedom to pursue truth wherever it leads is one of our protected rights as Americans. However, there are many forces which try to keep us from being able to do so. Where do you experience the removal of your freedom to pursue truth?

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Cinema In Focus is a social and spiritual movie commentary. Hal Conklin is former mayor of Santa Barbara and Denny Wayman is pastor of the Free Methodist Church. For more reviews: <http://www.cinemainfocus.com>.