

Top Five (2014)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 42 min.

Our content ratings (0-10): Violence 1; Language 8; Sex/Nudity 7.

Our star rating (1-5): 3.5

*Happy are those who find wisdom,
and those who get understanding,
for her income is better than silver,
and her revenue better than gold.*

Proverbs 3:13-14

But when he came to himself...

Luke 15:16a

Written and directed by Christ Rock, this funny film a few years ago would have been given an NC-17 rating because of the great amount of street language, nudity, sex, and drug use. This is definitely not the film to choose for the next session of your church film group, unless the rating system is the topic—and participants are strongly warned in advance.

The plot is rather artificial, but it makes a good story, especially if one wants to see what a talented writer and cast can do with Woody Allen's theme in his delightful *Stardust Memories*. Woody Allen's film dealt with a director of comedy films attending a film festival celebrating his work but who wants to shift gears and direct more serious dramas. Chris Rock's Andre Allen is a wildly successful stand-up comedian who made a series of silly films in which he played Hammy the Bear, films that were huge commercial hits.

In this film, Rock's Andre Allen has just directed what he

sees as his great work, *Uprize*, a historical drama based on the Haitian Revolution in which the slaves massacred 50,000 white settlers. He is in New York to attend its premiere. Allen is the only one of his entourage that is unaware of how awful it is. While making the rounds of interviews in Manhattan, he is upset that both reviewers and fans keep asking when he is going to make another Hammy the Bear flick. The reporters obviously do not want to ask about *Uprize*. Allen is about to marry reality-TV star Erica (Gabrielle Union) out in L.A. She is gorgeous, but we quickly discern that she is not the one for him. She intends their wedding to be televised with lots of celebrity guests in the audience, and she unilaterally makes changes that he discovers after the fact. She is obviously more concerned about her image and welfare than his.

Enter the even more gorgeous Chelsea Brown (Rosario Dawson), a *New York Times* reporter whom we later see harbors a secret. Allen at first refuses his agent's plan to have her interview him, his reluctance due to the fact that the paper's film critic has savagely attacked even the idea that the star of Hammy the Bear series could make a serious film. (Shades of *Birdman*!) Of course, he gives in, and for the next few hours the two talk and bicker a bit as they stroll the streets, the reporter even introducing him to her bizarre family (the latter scenes include some hilarious trash talk that definitely make this a hard R movie). They are strongly attracted to each other, but then Chelsea's dark secret is accidentally revealed, and...

The film's R rating elements will be too offensive for many, but for those who can stand them, and especially for Chris Rock fans, the film offers escape from reality—although the theme of discerning and accepting one's call in life might make viewers to stop and reflect upon their own choices.

This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the Feb. 2014 issue of Visual Parables.