



February 2015

## I am Michael

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### Recommended Citation

Blizek, William L. (2015) "I am Michael," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 22.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol19/iss1/22>

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## I am Michael

### Abstract

This is a film review of *I am Michael* (2015) directed by Justin Kelly.

### Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



Courtesy of Monica Blizek

***I am Michael***

(2015)

Directed by Justin Kelly

*I Am Michael* is based on the true life story of Michael Glatze, a former gay activist who denounced homosexuality and became a Christian minister. While working for *XY Magazine*, Glatze met Benjie Nycum and they became lovers for about ten years. They co-founded their own magazine, *Young Gay America Magazine*, and co-authored a book on gay life. When Glatze experienced some heart palpitations, he worried that he would die of the same disease that

caused his father's death when he was young. At this point he no longer identified himself as gay and joined the Church of Latter Day Saints. Soon he moved on to form his own conservative Christian church, denouncing homosexuality. (In the movie he tells a young man from the congregation that he does not have to be gay.) Eventually he married Rebekah. They currently live in La Grange, Wyoming.

It's easy to understand why James Franco would be interested in playing the role of a man who goes from being gay and an advocate for gay rights to a man who claims not to be gay and who denounces homosexuality. That's quite a flip. But, the interesting question is, why would anyone want to make a movie about this man in the first place? If the film is accurate, Glatze comes across as a mean-spirited, dishonest, narcissistic jerk. He is hurtful to others, especially his former boyfriend, Nycum. He regularly claims that all he wants to do is to help people, but instead of helping others he continues to seek the limelight in terms of his sexual orientation – I'm gay, I'm no longer gay. We don't know what to make of his assertions about his sexuality and one man's claims do not seem to be adequate grounds for making any claims about sexual orientation in general.

There was talk in Park City about the movie being controversial. I assume that was because Glatze claims in the movie that 'you do not have to be gay' (a very controversial claim), but it's hard to see why anyone would take that claim seriously, especially when it's coming from someone who is always seeking public attention. There was some talk about God leading him to his new found sexuality, but it is interesting that the God who did the leading happened to be the God who does not accept homosexuality. Where might some other God have led him?

What was interesting from the perspective of religion in film is Glatze's role as a minister of his own church. As minister he is once again the center of attention. He also has some power

over those in his congregation – power given to him by virtue of his position as minister. It struck me that becoming a minister may on some occasions be more about being the center of attention and/or exercising power over others than about doing the Lord's work or loving thy neighbor. Why do people go into the ministry? If the answer is "not always for the right reasons," then the movie may have something important to teach us about religion.

Franco's performance is stellar, as is that of Zachary Quinto, as Benjie Nycum. It remains a mystery to me, however, as to why anyone would want to hear this story.