

'Last Temptation' is 'inspirational'

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Obviously, some do not share this view of Christ and call the movie blasphemous for interpreting the gospels this way. However, while they certainly have a right to disagree, they miss another point: this is not a film of Gospel truth but of a modern novelist's viewpoint.

The original author was Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis, better known for his novel "Zorba the Greek." He wrote it as an attempt to come to terms with his own beliefs.

Barbara Hershey, who plays Mary Magdalene in the film, introduced the book to Martin Scorsese, a Catholic who had fallen from his faith and left the seminary to later graduate from a film school.

Since the movie is the product of two lost souls trying to make peace with their own divine sides, their savior had to be a tortured and confused man.

In the end of the introduction to his 1955 novel of the same name, Kazantzakis wrote to explain his work:

"This is not a biography; it is the confession of a man who struggles. In publishing it I have fulfilled my duty, the duty of a person who struggled much, was embittered in his life, and had many hopes. I am certain that every free man who reads this book, so filled as it is with love, will more than ever before, better than ever before, love Christ."

A similar quotation appears at the beginning of the film before the credits roll and before a disclaimer that states the film is based on the novel rather than any of the four Gospels.

The spirit of the work is to use the story at the heart of the Christian legend as a basis for interpreting an artist's struggle within himself.

There are plenty of other differences this film has with previous Jesus flicks, and most of them are truly refreshing.

The ancient mid-Eastern culture was much more thoroughly researched than ever before. At times, the view of this very foreign culture is quite spectacular.

Along with the exotic beauty is all the grime of everyday life: dust,

dried blood and sweat. Few if any other films of this period know the culture this well.

On the other hand, the language is idiomatic English to bring the characters closer to the audience, with accents ranging from the proper British of the Romans to Bronx and flat American for the Jews. Sometimes this brought chuckles from the audience, but didn't ruin the ambience of the film.

Harvey Keitel plays Judas Iscariot, the second most important character in the film.

Rather than the craven traitor of most common perception, Judas is a strong, heroic rebel trying to liberate his land from the Roman invaders.

Compared to him, his friend Jesus is the cowering collaborator who literally has the blood of fellow Jews on his hands and face.

Judas is a man normally we would be asked to cheer for, one of Nietzsche's supermen in a battle against both strong foes and weak friends.

But his way is wrong and when Jesus finally finds his purpose, Judas warily agrees to follow. Never truly understanding the man he calls master, Judas becomes the most important disciple with the toughest duty.

The film is shot very beautifully, but its style is sometimes distracting.

Rather than just tell a story, Scorsese apparently feels he has to constantly remind us that we are watching a movie; the camera swoops and pans and dollies often for no reason.

This use of technique without motivation, technique for its own sake rather than the story, is the film and Scorsese's greatest weakness; sometimes the extravagance becomes tiring.

But some of Scorsese's use of technique also brings new life into old cliches such as the 40 days and three temptations of the wilderness, saving Mary Magdalene from being stoned or the raising of Lazarus. The historically accurate version of the crucifixion should make everyone squirm.

The film gets its title from a long dream sequence almost at the end

of the picture.

The scene seems to go on too long (the film has already passed the two-hour mark by the time it begins) but it capsulizes the whole reason why a man (interpreting Jesus as mortal) would make such a sacrifice.

DaFoe as Jesus gives the final word on blasphemy calling himself "the King of blasphemy," which he is. His new way, though not opposed to the old laws, is opposed to the old way of thinking.

He declares further that, "God is not an Israelite" (substitute American, Republican, etc.). A character in the temple tries to dissuade Jesus by speaking for the people on the screen (and outside the theater) telling him that the people don't want the change he brings.

The one thing which Romans and Jewish Zealots agree upon is the importance of stopping a man whose message is love, weapon is pity and army are the crippled and weak.

Today, Pontius Pilate's (David Bowie) words are equally true: His message of peace is much more dangerous than if he carried a sword.

The film ultimately seemed inspirational rather than profane. Though it seems to attack organized religion (Harry Dean Stanton as disciple Paul, primary leader of the early Christian church, looks like a stereotypical religious shyster), sticking by one's own faith and duty is what is important — there is no other choice for one who continues to care about morality.

Much more can and should be said about this movie. For all its flaws, though no one will fully agree with it, it is valuable as a catalyst for discussion. It should provide a good source for in-depth analyzing of both pro and con of the movie's viewpoints.

The film is rated R for violence and nudity. It is not a film for the whole family.

Martin Scorsese has his heart in the right place. For those who truly want something to yell about, or want to see something more truly blasphemous, try seeing Robert Frank's 1961 film "The Sin of Jesus" or Luis Bunuel's 1930 silent "L'Age d'or."

'Elvis' to visit Omaha

"Elvis: A Musical Celebration" is coming to Omaha Nov. 25 through 27 at the Orpheum Theater.

Twenty performers/singers, dancers and musicians exploit the dead man's musical history from his childhood in gospel choirs to his performances in Las Vegas.

The two-hour musical production features costumes of the era, laser

lighting, three 35mm projectors and two motion picture screens.

Broadway's Jules Fisher produced "Elvis," and Pat Birch, known for his work in "Grease," choreographed and directed.

Reserved seat tickets are \$11.25 to \$21.25. The show will be at 5 and 9 p.m. on Nov. 25, 2 and 8 p.m. on Nov. 26, and 2 p.m. on Nov. 27.

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