

MOVIES

# 'Missionary' an Offensive Muddle

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — Michael Palin, one of the stalwarts of the Monty Python troupe, has come up with his very own movie in "The Missionary" (Columbia). He wrote it, produced it and stars in it, leaving the direction to Richard Loncraine.

As the Rev. Charles Fortescue, a Church of England minister who has labored heroically in the vineyard of the Lord in Africa for many years, Palin returns to Edwardian England feeling, so it seems, quite satisfied with himself. On a channel steamer on the last leg of the trip he runs into rich Lady Ames (Maggie Smith), who evinces a keen interest in some phallic symbols he's carrying — parting gifts of his flock. This interest turns out to be a harbinger of events to come.

Mr. Fortescue's entirely

honorable intention is to marry Deborah (Phoebe Nichols), a vicar's daughter with a passion for filing things, and his entirely modest ambition is to take up residence in a comfortable manse in some quiet rural parish. Alas, the bishop of London (Denholm Elliot), the embodiment of muscular Christianity, has something a little different in mind for the unfortunate Mr. Fortescue: opening up a home for fallen women in the slums of London.

Lady Ames, exacting a predictable price, agrees to be his patron. The project becomes wildly successful thanks to the dedicated Mr. Fortescue's willingness to provide each prostitute with the kind of consolation and individual attention not normally dispensed in welfare institutions.

The main problem with

"The Missionary" is that Palin doesn't seem to have been able to make up his mind what kind of movie he wanted to make. As is, he has at least three, each with a different tone.

There is a bedroom farce (wow!) with Lady Ames and her wildly reactionary husband (Trevor Howard) and a dotty butler (Michael Horden), who is forever losing his way in the mansion corridors. There is social and religious satire in the scenes with the bishop and the prostitutes. And then there is a highly unsatisfactory romantic melodrama in which the film turns serious, and true love blossoms between Mr. Fortescue and Lady Ames, who, gallantry aside, seems old enough to be the missionary's mother.

Oddly enough, there is but a single Monty Python touch

— the minister rowing across a lake while men in floppy white tee shirts and shorts run along the far shore to the "Chariots of Fire" theme — and this is totally out of sync since it occurs in the movie's final, earnest phase.

The movie looks gorgeous, with lovely photography and a marvelous re-creation of period mood, but this doesn't help at all to make it any funnier. There are some bright moments, most of them contributed by Miss Nichols, Denholm Elliot as the sports-minded bishop, and Horden as the wandering butler.

Unfortunately, also, there is a rather snide quality to the movie's religious and social criticism side. And there is one incredibly crude exchange between Mr. Fortescue and a tough prostitute, which, presumably, Palin intends as irrefutable testimony to the



Michael Palin, left, plays the Rev. Charles Fortescue to Maggie Smith's portrayal of Lady Ames.

hypocrisy of any religious person engaged in social work.

Another indication of the movie's biased view occurs in a behind-credits opening sequence in which Mr. Fortescue quizzes some black children on the date of Magna Carta and the quality of life in the Middle Ages. This was greeted with hoots and laughter from the critics with whom I saw the film at a pre-release screening. How absurd that an education of that sort would be of any use to Africans! And yet think of all the African leaders of today who are happy about having

gone to missionary schools. (Could it be that some of our hot young critics are not only anti-religious, but anti-intellectual and racist as well?)

"The Missionary" is an at times mildly amusing but rather muddled movie. Because of its use of obscene language in a key sequence and because of its eagerness to treat virtue of any sort as a joke — a dirty joke — it has been classified O — morally offensive, by the U.S. Catholic Conference. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

BOOKS

# Pontiff's Poems Display Remarkable Originality

Collected Poems, by Karol Wojtyla. Random House (New York, 1982). 192 pp., \$9.95.

By Father Christopher Hudgin NC News Service

Pope John Paul II has established a reputation, among believers and unbelievers, friends and enemies alike, as a devout man, a highly astute politician, a skilled linguist and a thoughtful scholar.

There is one aspect of John Paul's genius, however, which may be less well known. He is a poet whose work is remarkable for its originality, verbal brilliance and meditative power.

His poems are now available to American readers in an English translation by Jerzy Peterkiewicz, who provides a lucid and informative introduction. In it he points out that Karol Wojtyla wrote poems from the time he was a young

seminarian until he was elected pope. He wrote, however, under pen names "Andzej Jawien" and "Gruda," the latter meaning "clod of earth" in Polish. Wojtyla chose from the beginning to write cycles of poems, which seem best suited to his style of meditative verse.

The first poetic cycle is entitled "Song of the Hidden God," in which the poet restlessly searches for a God who will be found in the inner recesses of the attentive and responsive human heart:

"I thank you for giving the soul a place far removed from the din and clamor, where your friend is a strange poverty. You, Immeasurable, take but a little cell, you love uninhabited places and empty."

In another cycle, "Song of the Brightness of Water," the poet employs the dramatic monologue in a manner reminiscent of Robert Browning and T.S. Eliot. The

Samaritan woman at the well reflects on her encounter with Christ in a poem entitled "Later Recollection of the Meeting":

"To see like this, inwardly, none of us dares. His recognition was different. He hardly raised his eyes. He was a great gathering of perception — like the well blowing the brightness of water into a face."

Wojtyla chooses another scriptural persona, Simon of Cyrene, as the central figure in a later cycle of poems. He discerns a modern-day Cyrenean in the figure of a "Melancholic":

"I would not carry it. And now this pain — how much longer is it to last? — feebly accepted at first, now like the moth slowly eating its way through the fabric of imagination, or like rust wearing out iron."

The striking juxtaposition of images as well as its honest introspection give this poem a

thoroughly modern flavor.

Wojtyla's poetry is perhaps at its most powerful and poignant when he reflects upon the sufferings of his native Poland. These sufferings are the subject of a 1956 cycle of poems called "The Quarry." (Wojtyla himself worked in the quarries outside Krakow in the early days of the German occupation of Poland.) In one poem the poet considers the relationship between love and anger in the heart of a stone worker who has been killed in an accident:

"Should his anger now flow into the anger of others? It was maturing in him through its own truth and love. Should he be used by those who come after, deprived of substance, unique and deeply his own?"

He sounds a similar theme in his last collection of poems, entitled "Stanislas," written in 1979 in honor of the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of Poland's patron saint:

"The land of hard-won



## Treasure Shown

The original St. Peter was known for sinking beneath the waves and being rescued by the Lord's challenge of faith. This medal depicting the rapture of St. Peter of Alcantara a 16th century discalced Franciscan who was known for his preaching, his poverty and his mysticism, is one of a number of religious artifacts from the wreckage of the ships Tolosa and Guadalupe, now on display in the exhibition "Treasure of the Quicksilver Galleons," at the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

unity, of people seeking their own roads; this land so long divided between the princes of one clan, this land subjected to the freedom of each mindful of all. This land finally torn apart for six generations, torn on the maps of the world, torn in the fate of her sons. And through this tearing united in the hearts of the Poles as no other land.

This is a necessarily meager

sampling from a total of 91 poems which contain political commentary, theological depth, dramatic imagery, and faith in the poet's hidden God which is as durable as the rock of Krakow's quarries.

(Father Hudgin, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, teaches English and theology at Bishop Verot High School in Fort Myers, Fla.)



"St. Luke Painting the Blessed Virgin," an early oil by stained glass artist Jim O'Hara, is on display this month at George Frederic Gallery.

# George Frederic Hosts 'Spiritual Art' Show

"Spiritual Art," an invitational mixed-media exhibit at George Frederic Gallery through Dec. 23, demonstrates the range of meaning the word spiritual has for 18 artists, among them Sister Virginia Taylor, RSM, a chaplain at Monroe Community College, and Sister Katherine Nicosia, SSJ, director of religious education at St. Mary's, Elmira.

The show includes painting, photography, prints, collage, metal relief and handmade paper, and, according to Nina

B. Muffally, gallery director, the show gives evidence that "for some, spirituality has overtly religious connotations, while for others, it takes a very personal and often abstract form.

"For example," she said, "for Ira Srole, a series of documentary photographs of the Leopold Street Shul, Rochester's only black Jewish congregation, represent spiritual art in an overtly religious sense. . . [whereas] A more abstract interpretation can be seen in Audrey Bernstein's rather mystical black

and white photographs."

The show also demonstrates changes in an artist's approach. "Guest artist Jim O'Hara, best known for his superb work in stained glass, reveals his earlier work as a painter with two small oils that depict scenes from the Bible in a 20th century setting," she said.

Other artists in the show are Adele Wynne, Roslyn Rose, Virginia Braun, Drew Harty, Vlad Pejovic, Sabra Richards, Antonio Petracca, and Rem Bahaudtin.