

Protests to frame showing of controversial 'Hail Mary'

By Teresa A. Parsons
 "Hail Mary" the modern-day version of the Annunciation, Incarnation and Virgin Birth, which has incited protests in Europe and the United States and has been condemned as blasphemy by much of the Catholic hierarchy, is coming to Rochester.

On Thursday, July 31, the University of Rochester Summer Cinema series will present director Jean-Luc Godard's controversial film, entitled "Je Vous Salue Marie," at 8 p.m. in Hubbell Auditorium.

Demonstrators, including Citizens for a Decent Community and members of several Marian groups have already begun a letter-writing campaign. During the showing, they plan to pray outside the auditorium in protest against what they term a "blasphemous insult" to the Blessed Mother.

"This is probably the most serious blasphemy that's ever been published," said Michael Macaluso, director of New York State Citizens for a Decent Community. "Beyond

not liking it ourselves, we are concerned about the spiritual repercussions to the people who are showing the film and will be viewing it."

Macaluso and another member of his organization met with University President Dennis O'Brien in June to request that the film be withdrawn. In a letter early this month, O'Brien declined to do so.

University spokesman Robert Kraus explained that the university administration "as a whole" considered the issue, and decided to go ahead with the showing.

"We at the university are quite honestly concerned that the film is offensive to groups of people," Kraus said. "We deeply regret the fact that there are several in the community who find it offensive. But judgments that are made about the film's content and aesthetics can conflict with a very important ideal... Free speech and open expression are very vital principles to institutions such as universities."

When he booked the film, the university's assistant director of student activities, George

Morrison, knew it had prompted widespread protests elsewhere. But he decided to schedule it anyway.

"Jean-Luc Godard is one of the world's great filmmakers," he said. "I have not seen the film, but I have read a great deal about it, and I am aware that it has generated controversy and has gotten mixed reviews."

"For the 10 years I've been here, I have put on a series of excellent films on sometimes difficult subjects. But it has always been done in a tasteful manner," he added. "I don't feel a bit uncomfortable, and I hope no one else does either."

To provide a forum for reactions to the film, the university plans to sponsor a panel discussion immediately afterward in Strong Auditorium. A professional film critic and a theologian will be included on the panel.

Critics have granted the movie mixed reviews. At one extreme, David Denby of New York magazine called it "one of the most

radiant and tenderly religious movies ever made."

On the other hand, Michael Gallagher of the National Catholic News Service wrote: "To put it simply, the grace — grace in every sense of the word — that permeates the Biblical account of Mary is nowhere apparent in this disjointed, rambling and often quite boring movie."

Released and set in 1985, the film tells the story of a teen-aged French gas station attendant and basketball fan named Marie. A street tough named Gabriel arrives via airplane to tell her that she's pregnant, although still a virgin.

Marie's boyfriend, Joseph, a dim-witted but amorous taxi driver, believes another man must have fathered the child until Gabriel beats him up and convinces him to accept the child's divine origin and marry Marie.

Objectionable to many Catholics are scenes in which Marie is shown nude and writhing in bed and the bathtub, "vulgar" language; and

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Cartoon

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Wagner said the cartoon is an affront to Catholics because it "argues by innuendo" that the pope is using his advocacy for indebted South American nations to force Catholics in those countries to obey Church moral teaching.

"We saw that as an attack on his integrity," Wagner said. "Even if we had seen clear-thinking people would see it."

Although they express no agreement with the content of the cartoon, Gannett representatives have consistently defended the right of cartoonist Patrick Oliphant to express his opinion and their right to publish the cartoon.

On Tuesday, July 15, the Opinion Page of the Democrat and Chronicle carried an editorial entitled, "Your right to see, and judge, for yourselves." The editorial offered the following rationale for publication of the cartoon:

"The name of this page is the Opinion Page. We take that very seriously. This is a place for all shades and shapes and sizes of opinion... We think we'd be doing you a disservice if we decided that some opinions are too controversial for you to see."

In a telephone interview Tuesday morning, Barbara Henry, editor of the Democrat and Chronicle, reiterated that view.

"The people who are protesting this cartoon think that we shouldn't run anything that is contrary to their beliefs," she said.

Henry, who is a Catholic, added that her personal religious beliefs are not relevant to the question of the cartoon's publication.

She noted that one of the techniques of editorial cartooning is the use of satire to make a point. As an example, she cited a recent cartoon published in the Democrat and Chronicle that satirized society's tacit approval of alcohol abuse while condemning the abuse of narcotics. The cartoon showed a father watching television, beer can in hand, stating that athletes who use cocaine should be jailed because they abuse drugs.

"Is every father going to call me to complain that it (the cartoon) made fathers look bad?" she asked.

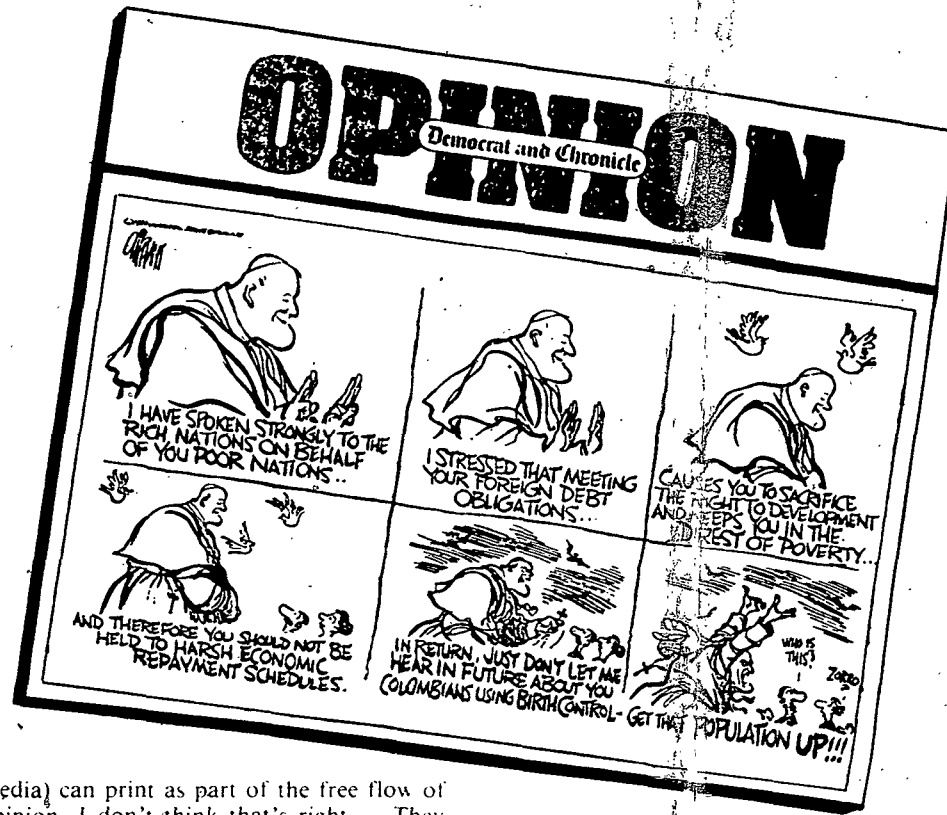
Similarly, Henry said cartoonist Oliphant used the pope to satirize Catholic teaching on birth control. "The pope is a valid symbol for the Church, as Ronald Reagan is a symbol of the United States," she said.

Overall, "Henry concluded — through demonstrations, letters, phone calls and the subscription boycott — protesters "are doing exactly what they say we can't do, which is expressing an opinion."

That rationale doesn't convince protesters, however. Nor has Tuesday's editorial dissuaded them from continued demonstrations.

"I don't think the secular media should hold itself competent as an arbiter of truths that are revealed to a religious body," Helen Ann Wagner said Tuesday. After speaking with her husband, she stated that protests would continue.

John Wagner said Monday he considers Gannett's rationale to be "a misperception that any opinion is an opinion that we (the



media) can print as part of the free flow of opinion. I don't think that's right... They (editors) need to have some standards."

"Baseless innuendos have no place on the editorial page of a newspaper," he continued. "Innuendo is not the way to a reasoned debate."

Whether Tuesday's editorial will lessen impetus for the protest is yet to be seen. John

Wagner is still optimistic about the group's ability to attain a complete apology. "We don't want this (issue) to go away for fear that similar things will happen without any thinking on the part of the D and C."

Gomez

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according to supporters.

INS officials would not comment on whether the Gomezes were being watched.

In his letter, which was apparently written from the family's destination, Gomez wrote: "It is the first night that I have seen my children (aged 7 to 15) in the street without fear and terror. It makes me feel like I have made the correct decision because life is above all else, especially the lives of four children."

Gomez also told supporters that he believed the resources devoted to his complex legal battle could be better used in the struggle against violence and oppression in Central America.

But sanctuary supporters don't believe he intended to discourage them from harboring other Central American refugees. "We eagerly await the opportunity to welcome those refugees who will follow the Gomezes into sanctuary here in Rochester," they stated.

"I think what he was referring to was his own legal fees. It was getting so complicated

and time-consuming and all of us were focusing on that," said Christine Garrison, a sanctuary committee member.

Before they left, Gomez and his wife were awaiting the continuation of their asylum hearing before Immigration Judge Gordon S. Sacks. The hearing resumed in Buffalo June 4, and was scheduled to begin in August.

Both Alejandro and Leticia Gomez testified at the hearing that they were affiliated with the communist party in El Salvador more than 20 years ago and had taken military training in Cuba. Leticia also said she traveled to the Soviet Union in 1963 to attend a youth conference.

INS officials have alleged that the Gomezes deceived sanctuary supporters by not revealing their past communist affiliations.

But Morrison denied Monday that the Gomezes misled them by concealing either their backgrounds or their plans to leave the country. "The INS didn't have that strong a case," she said. "Remarks like that were made to discredit us."

The family fled El Salvador after Gomez, a union leader, was arrested, imprisoned and tortured for 15 days in 1983. Offered

sanctuary by the Downtown United Presbyterian Church and Corpus Christi Parish; they came to Rochester in June, 1984.

In January, 1985, Alejandro and Leticia were arrested in a nation-wide sweep of sanctuary workers and refugees. A year later, both were subpoenaed to testify at the trial of 11 sanctuary workers in Tucson, Ariz.

From the beginning, sanctuary committee members knew that the Gomezes had been politically active during the 1960s, Morrison said. But, she recalled, they were neither

curious nor concerned about the details.

Likewise, supporters have realized that the family might leave the country ever since Gomez's arrest in May. "We thought it was safer to know as little as possible... for all of us," Morrison said.

Asylum applicants do not often give up in mid-process, according to Ferro. "I can't remember an occasion when a person who was seeking benefits wouldn't pursue a decision through the process," he said.

Adirondacks to be location of retreat for deacons, wives

The Society of St. Lawrence will be hosting a retreat for deacons and their wives on the weekend of August 1-3 at Paul Smith's College, in New York's Adirondack region. The theme of the sixth-annual retreat, which will be led by Father Bernard Kellogg, is "Some Views from the Mountain."

The retreat's primary goal is to help all ministers — those serving in formal roles as

well as those wishing to deepen their faith in the home or marketplace — to explore their pastoral identity, theological assumptions and faith convictions. All ordained deacons and their wives are invited to attend.

For more information, contact Deacon Frederick R. Olst, The Society of St. Lawrence, 19 Bernard St., Saranac Lake, N.Y. 12983.

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