

World & Nation

Protests

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He said he was impressed to see young people in the theater more "spellbound" by the film's message than by anything he had seen in a Catholic church in 30 years.

The Rev. Miltiades B. Efthimiou, church and society director for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, led a delegation of priests and lay people at the New York protest.

He disputed claims that the movie was portraying Christ according to Kazantzakis' Orthodox heritage and its conception of Christ's

perfect humanity. The movie scene of Christ's "last temptation" which involved a dream of marrying and making love to Mary Magdalene, represented the Lord not only being tempted, but succumbing to temptation, he said.

The Greek Orthodox archdiocese, in an August 3 statement, decried "the practice of the movie industry which, for financial gain, ignores and violates standard human values of decency and self-respect.

"The film is strictly the fantasy of a sick human imagination which attempts to exploit human weaknesses and temptations — disavowing the Christian belief in a perfect and sinless Christ," the statement said.

The first three shows at the 1,144-seat Ziegfeld were sold out, as were showings in San

Francisco, where 12 protesters picketed in front of the 1,100-seat Northpoint Theater.

Theaters in Montreal, Toronto, Minneapolis and Seattle said opening-day ticket sales were 60 to 80 percent of the theaters' capacities. Ten people demonstrated at the Toronto theater, two of them in support of the film.

In a last-ditch effort to prevent the film's North American release, an estimated 10,000

people protested outside Universal Studios in Los Angeles the day before "The Last Temptation" opened. The protesters carried signs that read: "Don't crucify Christ again," "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," "Stop this attack on Christianity" and "Don't distort his-story."

Universal said it made \$4,500 from the protest by charging \$3 a car for parking.

Reviewer

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(Barbara Hershey), among others, come in and out of focus, shifting arbitrarily between being supporters or nay-sayers of Jesus.

In the title role is Willem Dafoe, who falters in trying to blend some coherence into a character that is part bumbling country bumpkin and part charismatic leader. Complicating matters is the laid-back contemporary style of acting and mumbled accents that massacre the Sermon on the Mount among others of the Lord's words most familiar in the classic English of the King James translation.

Perhaps Scorsese's most egregious offense to spiritual sensibility is his offhanded treat-

ment of Jesus announcing that God wants us to love one another. One would never get the idea from this movie that this message of love is central to Christianity.

Instead, we are shown a leader on the make, winning converts to what seems to be no more than an earthly kingdom. Power more than love seems to be the key to the motivation of Scorsese's Jesus.

The preoccupation with secular power is conveyed by the motif of blood-letting that runs throughout the movie, from Jesus being splattered by the blood of a man he is helping the Romans to crucify at the beginning of the film, to his own brutalization by the Romans in the final reels.

Though some may justify the film's abundance of bloody violence as a realistic depiction of the era, others will question the sincerity of depicting it in such excessively literal, close-up fashion.

This wrong-headed insistence on gore and brutality is compounded by the movie's preoccupation with sexual rather than spiritual love. A scene in which Jesus waits to talk with Mary Magdalene while she services a tentful of patrons is as ludicrous as it is sexually explicit.

Even worse is the movie's suggestion that women have no individuality other than their sex. Though this idea ultimately proves to be that of the devil, it is enough to sway Jesus who lives with Mary and Martha after the death of his wife, Mary Magdalene.

Though some viewers may find one or another provocative spiritual insights in this fictional rendering of the life of Christ, many Christians will find offense in Scorsese's deeply flawed portrayal of the Son of God.

Because of excessively graphic violence, several sexually explicit scenes and some incidental nudity, the United States Catholic Conference classification is O — morally objectionable. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

Herx is on the staff of the USCC's Department of Communication.

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