



Parish evolution

St. Augustine's enters its 90th year as a center of community involvement, offering hospitality to the needy, the non-Catholic, and the physically and spiritually undemourished. Page 6.



Rebuilding season

After two consecutive trips to the sectionals in soccer, Aquinas Institute will look to rebuild this season with a new coach on the sideline and a slew of untested players on the field. Page 9.

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Panel finds 'Last Temptation of Christ' weak, flawed film

By Lee Strong

The Rochester debut of the controversial film *The Last Temptation of Christ* on August 31 produced a repetition of the anger and emotions that have greeted the film in other cities.

An estimated 500 protesters marched outside the Little Theatre, carrying signs and calling *The Last Temptation* blasphemous. On the other hand, reviews in local media praised the movie as a good — even great — film that explores faith and offers an interpretation of the struggle within Christ between his humanity and his divinity.

As so often happens in situations that invite such divergent opinions, the truth appears to lie somewhere in between.

"When you look at a film like this, you have to look at it holistically," noted David Palma, a third-year deacon candidate who saw the film at the request of the *Courier-Journal*. "What is the message? How well did it come across?"

Palma, who was one of the founders of the Youththeatre at Nazareth College and who has done graduate and undergraduate work in theater, judged the "Last Temptation" to be at best an average film, but not blasphemous.

"Theologically, there were many things that I found offensive in it, but I don't think I could label it blasphemous because there is a disclaimer (at the beginning of the film) that this is a personal vision. I don't feel (director Martin Scorsese) was attacking a group or a certain vision or viewpoint."

At the same time, he acknowledged that "there was probably something to offend everyone in it."

Palma said that as a film, *The Last Temptation* is flawed by flat dialogue, poor writing, uneven acting, confusing characterization and slow pacing. He was also troubled by the gratuitous violence and nudity.

"Violence is something Scorsese uses to make points," Palma noted. "I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't correct in a lot of what he was showing — it was a violent time. I just felt there was too much of it."

Palma applauded Scorsese for the sense of realism that he created in the film. "(The movie) did pick up a flavor of the time that's different from typical biblical epics," he noted. He added, however, that "the nod to realism can be an excuse to go too far, and I think he did."

On the other hand, the deacon-candidate said that sensationalism in the film "was in conflict with the realism. The sensationalism — such as Jesus pulling his heart out — seemed to come out of nowhere."

"In terms of the characters, Palma also found a number of portrayals confusing, weak, even offensive. Mary Magdalene, for example, is pictured as a prostitute, while contemporary scripture scholars say that Mary and the prostitute (the woman caught in sin) are two distinct characters. He was particularly disturbed by



Bonnie Trifalet/Courier-Journal

Hundreds of protesters picketed the Little Theatre during the Rochester premiere of "The Last Temptation of Christ." Shown here are a number of people protesting the film and two men (left foreground) protesting the protest.

the treatment in the dream sequence of St. Paul as a kind of con artist, "because Paul is so important to the history of the early Church."

Although Palma was not offended by Willem Dafoe's depiction of Christ, he thought the performance was weak and poorly delineated. "The portrayal of Christ as confused and afraid, someone fighting personal demons, doesn't prepare you for the choice he makes at the end," Palma noted. "The choice (to be crucified) almost doesn't seem to fit the way the character was developed. The choice comes out of nowhere. I was expecting more to the resolution."

Palma acknowledged that the film — and the novel on which it was closely based — was an attempt to make Christ appear more human, but suggested that Scorsese went too far.

"I thought (Scorsese) almost had an ax to grind against the other extreme of making the Jesus all-God, all-divine," Palma said. "I think his vision errs on going to the other extreme. He's gone beyond the line of my personal vision of Christ as a human being."

Mary Rose McCarthy, a social studies teacher at Nazareth Academy, was also disturbed by the characterization of Jesus, particularly by the depiction of him as tormented by God's

call.

"I don't think our God calls people into relationship only to torture people," McCarthy said. "The presence of God in Jesus becomes torturous (in the film)."

"What's missing from the film is a sense of desire for God, a desire to be one with God, a desire to grow closer," she said. "Mystics talk about being filled with fire, but ordinarily in the history of mysticism there's a sense of a great drawing to God. There's no sense of it in here."

She also called the portrayal of Jesus joy-

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Two teachers welcome end of trying summer

By Teresa A. Parsons

Pauline Cleveland and Dianne Wilson have seldom been happier to see the end of summer.

Both teachers have suffered an agony of uncertainty since last June, when they lost jobs of 18 years' duration with the closing of St. James School in Waverly.

The agony came to an end in mid-August as both teachers accepted positions at St. Mary Our Mother School in Horseheads.

"It wasn't a very enjoyable summer," acknowledged Cleveland, who just last year purchased a house in Waverly. "I was applying for jobs everywhere. It's hard to get into the public school system with so many years' experience."

Neither teacher wanted to leave the Catholic school system or the Southern Tier, but both felt constrained to consider virtually any

option after two teaching vacancies for which they applied at nearby St. Patrick's School in Owego were filled — reportedly by recent college graduates — in spite of their tenured status with the diocese.

Wilson and Cleveland were dismayed at the decision — especially after learning that a kindergarten teacher with one year's experience at St. James had been hired at St. Patrick's, along with Loretta Hayton, who was named to replace St. Patrick's outgoing principal, Sister Mary E. Wintish.

Meanwhile, some parents from St. James, outraged by what they regarded as an injustice to Wilson and Cleveland, threatened to start a petition drive urging diocesan officials to intervene.

Diocesan education officials routinely offer

to assist all displaced teachers — especially those who've invested the five years required to earn tenure — in finding new positions with Catholic schools. To date, all but two of the staff members from St. James who expressed interest in continuing to teach in the Catholic school system have been placed: two at St. Mary Our Mother; one at Holy Family Primary in Elmira; and two at St. Patrick's, Owego. However, diocesan officials admit that their influence is limited since hiring decisions are made at the local level, usually by principals and pastors.

Although the invaluable experience of teachers such as Wilson and Cleveland comes at a bargain price in the diocese, their salaries are a disincentive to Catholic schools struggling

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