

Columnists

Tapping the pulpit power of media

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Recently I stopped at Epiphany rectory in Sodus to see Father John Dillon. Besides parochial priesting, he is involved in teaching secular subjects in the local high school. He wears a civilian suit, with shirt and tie rather than clericals, which makes sense in Sodus. He is greatly regarded by pupils, who delight in his volatility, and by the faculty and parents.

On his desk was a book, "Once a Catholic" by Peter Occhiogrosso (1987), narrating the influence of the Church in the lives of prominent Catholics and ex-Catholics.

"Once a Catholic" is a series of interviews of people some of whom left the Church for a while and have returned (e.g. Christopher Buckley, son of William F. Buckley, and Wilfrid Sheed, son of Frank and Masie Ward Sheed). Others either indicate a nostalgia that makes their return hopeful, or have a deep hatred for the Church, usually because of ill treatment or sex difficulties.

Because of the notoriety from the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*, I read the interview with Martin Scorsese, producer of the film, with special interest. It is a cheerful rambling, with enough non sequiturs to realize that artistic ability does not equate to logic in the mind.

Scorsese was born in Queens, N.Y., in 1924 as we entered WWII. Of his parents he said: "My mother and father were never really very religious. They might go to Mass on Palm Sunday — that is my mother might go, my father certainly wouldn't, but my grandparents would go." The family moved to the Mott Street area, where he went to St. Patrick's School, "run by Irish nuns, right from Ireland. The neighborhood was all Italian, so you had a little enclave of Irish mafia religious thinking in the school which conflicted with the home lives of Italian kids. I had had two or three years of public school in Corona, but I had no religious upbringing. So I was thrown into a school with these people wearing black, the nuns."

Many people have delighted in the little comedy, "Nunsense" and enjoy the humor of the nuns of yesterday. Scorsese said: "We can talk about nun stories, and it's cute stuff in a way. The implication is that these nuns are so dumb and so stupid. I don't think that's the case. They have something else in mind, and out of love they really want to help these kids. Even if it kills ya, they're gonna save your soul, and that's it."

The Last Temptation of Christ had not been

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made before this interview, and his thinking, anticipating the production, is of interest. He says: "If and when I get to making it finally, representing an attempt to use the screen as a pulpit in a way, the message out about practicing the basic concepts of Christianity: to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. That's somewhere in the right direction. The rest of the things we can talk about. All these other things, the Mass and this and that for Catholics, we should reject that and start with basics first. Let's get to understand the basics and how we can use them day by day. Maybe *The Last Temptation* could show that Jesus fought with the human side of His nature and let people say, 'Hey, I identify with that.' He had to go through the same stuff we're going through, and that He was able to push through because He was God also! People complain that the film would break people's faith, which is the last thing in the world I want to do, because faith is the most incredible thing you could have."

Father Terrance Sweeney, also interviewed by Occhiogrosso, said: "In 1963 Father Phil Bourett, S.J. gave a talk to a group of us young Jesuits, saying how important it was for Jesuits to get involved in radio and television and film and mass media, particularly in mission countries." As a result, Father Sweeney became deeply involved. He produced 40 television shows and films, and was a consultant for "Thorn Birds" and "The Mission." However he came into conflict with his superiors, left the Jesuits, and seems to be in a clerical limbo, working with communications in Hollywood.

It is significant that Scorsese considers the screen a pulpit reaching millions. Unfortunately he garbled the Christ-message. Now 25 years after Father Sweeney's awakening to the pulpit power of the media, the only potent U.S. Catholic communications project is that of Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network. We decry Scorsese's *Temptation*, but what do we offer in its place?

Measuring more than eyes can see

By Cindy Bassett

My brother, Peter, and I were only simple fishermen before we met Jesus and decided to become his followers. Even so, we knew how to measure the value of something. Or so we both thought until that day at the temple when Jesus taught us how God measures things ...

It had been a long day for all of us. The crowds seemed to follow us everywhere in Jerusalem. Some came just to hear Jesus preach. But, many came to bring their sick to him for healing.

So when we finally arrived at the temple, everyone sat down in the courtyard. From the bench where we sat, we could watch the passers-by come to drop their coins in the collection boxes. This money was used by the priests to help pay the expenses of the temple. These gifts by the people were known as free-will offerings.

As we looked on with Jesus, we saw a wealthy lawyer drop in a lot of coins. One of the temple scribes came in dressed in long, flowing robes. He strode slowly up to the box and dropped in his coins one by one. They clattered loudly.

"Well, that fellow has certainly made a handsome offering, hasn't he Andrew?" Peter quipped to me.

"I suppose that he should," Philip added. "He owns a great deal of land in this region."

"All the same, I bet that his offering is the largest one here today," I said.

I then glanced over at Jesus, who was watching the scene before us with interest. Yet he said nothing to any of us.

A few minutes later, we saw a poor widow approach the collection box. She was shabbily dressed and seemed embarrassed by the large crowd gathered nearby. Nevertheless, before she hurried out of sight, she dropped in two small copper coins.

"Not even a penny's worth," I chuckled softly. "Perhaps she should have kept it for herself?"

"That woman gave more than anyone else here today," Jesus remarked. He was looking directly at me and I felt his rebuke in those sim-

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ple words. My face reddened and I made no reply to him.

Finally, Peter broke the silence, saying, "Lord, it is true we don't have the minds of great scholars. But even we can see that everyone else here today gave much more than this woman. What do you mean?"

"You are measuring things that your eyes can see," Jesus told us. "My Father, on the other hand, knows all that is in the hearts of these givers. The large gifts of the wealthy came from their surplus. That wasn't much of a sacrifice since they first kept the best for themselves."

"This widow gave everything — all that she had to live on. Her gift meant a great sacrifice since what she has left is her faith that God will take care of her. And my Father will. Now do you understand?" Jesus asked us.

"Yes," we all nodded. I felt ashamed of myself.

"There is something else, too," Jesus continued. "These wealthy givers who made a great show of their gift today have already received their reward. For they have heard the praises of the crowd in the courtyard."

"It is those people, like the widow, who give without any thought for themselves, that my Father will reward. Their gifts are the greatest ones of all."

I'll never forget what Jesus taught us about giving that day. It doesn't matter what you give or even how much. For God measures things by what is in our hearts.

Scripture reference: Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4.

Meditation: Jesus gave everything, including his life, so that all who follow him will receive the gift of eternal life.

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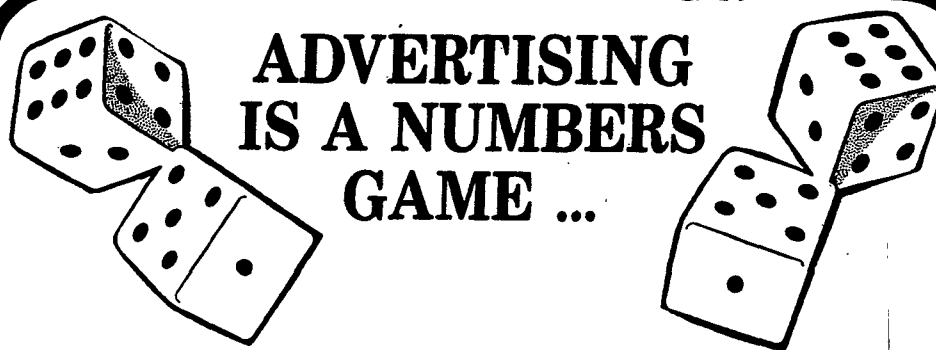
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