

FEATURE

Church applauds Polish director

Oscars list

Picture:
"American Beauty"

Director:
Sam Mendes, "American Beauty"

Actor:
Kevin Spacey, "American Beauty"

Actress:
Hilary Swank, "Boys Don't Cry"

Supporting Actor:
Michael Caine, "The Cider House Rules"

Supporting Actress:
Angelina Jolie, "Girl, Interrupted"

Foreign Film:
"All About My Mother," Spain

Costume:
Lindy Hemming, "Topsy-Turvy"

Sound:
"The Matrix"

Makeup:
"Topsy-Turvy"

Animated Short Film:
"The Old Man and the Sea"

Live-Action Short Film:
"My Mother Dreams the Satan's Disciples in New York"

Original Song:
"You'll Be in My Heart," music and lyrics by Phil Collins, "Tarzan"

Original Score:
"The Red Violin," John Corigliano

Documentary Short Subject:
"King Gimp"

Documentary Feature:
"One Day in September"

Sound Effects Editing:
"The Matrix"

Visual Effects:
"The Matrix"

Art Direction:
"Sleepy Hollow," Rick Heinrichs, art direction: Peter Young, set direction

Editing:
"The Matrix"

Cinematography:
Conrad L. Hall, "American Beauty"

Screenplay (Adaptation):
John Irving, "The Cider House Rules"

Screenplay (Original):
Alan Ball, "American Beauty"

Oscar winners previously announced:

Gordon E. Sawyer Award:
Roderick T. Ryan, who created a film processor for special effects

Irving Thalberg Memorial Award:
Warren Beatty

Honorary Award:
Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda

By Jonathan Luxmoore
Catholic News Service

WARSAW, Poland — When Poland's veteran director, Andrzej Wajda, collected a lifetime achievement Oscar in Hollywood March 26, church leaders surely joined in the applause.

While not stressing a church affiliation, Wajda has won praise for his skilled expression of Christian ideas and images.

"It's risky to call him a Catholic director," said Father Adam Boniecki, editor of Poland's *Tygodnik Powszechny* Catholic weekly. "But Wajda's work represents an encounter with Christianity on a foundation of supreme values that both respects and is respected by the church."

Born in 1926 in Poland's northeastern Suwalki region, Wajda studied art and film in Krakow and Lodz and made his director's debut in 1954 with "Pokolenie" ("The Generation").

He scored early successes with "The Channel" (1957), a film about the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, and "Ashes and Diamonds" (1958), charting the fate of an anti-communist resistance fighter.

Though seen as a critic of communism, Wajda escaped heavy censorship. This was because of his prestige as a director, but also because his opposition was cultural and moral, rather than directly political.

"Our colleagues from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria or Russia had much more limited possibilities for self-expression," the director told Poland's *Rzeczpospolita* daily.

"Poland was like a crack in the Berlin Wall through which two worlds met, at a time when the West wanted to know what the East was like," he said.

Several of Wajda's films contain overtly Christian images. In one, the protagonist pulls a cross on wheels along a modern highway — implying that contemporary sufferings are not as painful and dramatic as history's.

In most of his films, however, Christian themes are present only indirectly. Father Boniecki thinks this is typical of Poland's best artists and writers.

"Perhaps it's necessary to maintain some distance from the church to portray religious themes artistically," Father Boniecki told Catholic News Service.

"Wajda is deeply enough versed in Polish culture to interpret it without being a self-conscious Catholic. It's precisely in tensions between the individual and God that moments of creative energy are born," he said.

Father Wieslaw Nieweglowski, head of the Polish church's network for writers and artists, agreed.

"All major artists are guided by their own sensitivity, which provides a haven for creativity, rather than serving as a



banner," the priest told CNS.

"Although it's hard to find strictly religious themes in Wajda's films, they nevertheless contain an evangelical message and are saturated with the Christian air which all Poles breathe," Father Nieweglowski said.

That could be particularly true of Wajda's later films.

"Korczak" (1990) tells the story of Jewish orphanage director Janusz Korczak,

who was gassed with his young charges at the Treblinka death camp, while "Holy Week" (1995) examines the complex attitudes of Poles to their Jewish neighbors during the Holocaust.

Both films explore the wickedness of Nazi occupation, as well as deeper questions of guilt and innocence.

Father Nieweglowski thinks Wajda's greatest talent lies in making films which, though deeply Polish, can be understood by foreign audiences.

"Man of Iron" (1981), filmed during the Solidarity strikes, brought Wajda the Cannes Festival's Golden Palm.

"Danton" (1982) portrayed the conflict between idealism and pragmatism during the French Revolution and earned him France's Cesary Medal.

Besides 35 films, Wajda has two dozen theater productions to his credit, from Shakespeare to Durrenmatt.

He was an elected member of post-communist Poland's first Senate in 1989-91 and headed President Lech Walesa's Council on Culture in 1992-94.

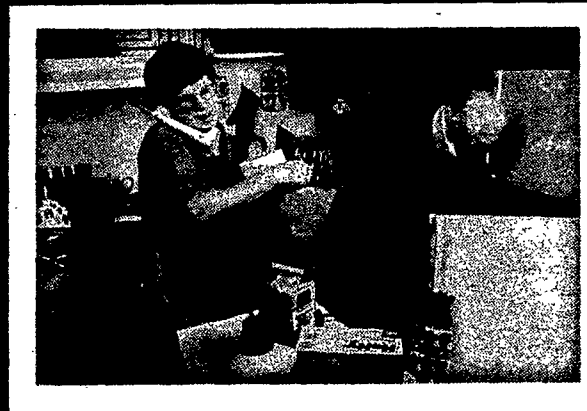
But Wajda says he was honored when Pope John Paul II invited him to show his latest film, "Pan Tadeusz," in the Vatican Jan. 23.

Based on a classic by poet Adam Mickiewicz, "Pan Tadeusz" tells the story of an early 19th-century noble family on Poland's eastern border, caught up in feuds over love and property while awaiting Napoleon's army. Since its autumn release, it has been seen by 6 million Poles.

This was not the first Wajda film Pope John Paul has viewed.

In January 1982, after martial law had been imposed in Poland, a group of Polish Catholics were kept waiting for an audience until the pope had finished watching "Man of Iron."

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