'The Last Temptation' is not a matter of rights

By Mona Charen
Syndicated Columnist

When I called Universal Pictures last week, the phone rang 25 or 30 times before a harassed-sounding secretary lifted the receiver and, without waiting for my greeting, said "Are you calling to complain about the film?"

The film she was referring to, the film which even prior to release caused the switchboards of Universal to light up like, well, like a Christmas tree, is Martin Scorsese's **The Last Temptation of Christ.**

The movie—and its outraged opponents—have provided great fodder for talk show ratings and magazine sales. Those who determine the covers of *Time, People* and *Newsweek,* and who book guests for NIGHTLINE and CROSSFIRE—the high priests of our secular culture—seem to thrive on stories about religious conflict. It's clear that they haven't had this much fun since they parked their mini-cams in Jessica Hahn's backyard.

But while exhaustive attention has been paid to the outrage in the Christian community, the flavor of the coverage has suggested that their concerns are illegitimate. The word "censorship" has sprung easily to media lips, and many saw fit to mention, with almost a smug wink, that the controversy over their movie may serve to "rally the fundamentalist faithful" after the damaging televangelism scandals.

Sadly, one kooky Christian group played right into the hands of an unsympathetic press by staging a vile, anti-Semitic protest in front of the home of Lew Wasserman, chairman of Universal's parent company MCA (they could find no Jews among the producers, directors or writers on the film). Chanting "Wasserman fans Jew hatred," the crowd resembled nothing so much as bigoted religious zealots straight from central casting.

But the protests from the overwhelming majority of Christians have been genuine cries from the heart. What they hold most sacred has been defamed in the most grotesque fashion, and their truth, namely the Scriptural account of Jesus, has been distorted beyond recognition.

Claiming poetic license, the film depicts the founder of Christianity as a confused neurotic who has little concept of His mission. Departing promiscuously from Scripture, the film in one scene depicts Jesus as helping the Romans to build crosses for their victims, and in another as an adulterer.

One of the most ghastly lines, in which Christ says to Mary Magdalene "God sleeps between your legs" was cut from the final version—but almost equally monstrous dialogue remains, including Jesus anguished "I am a liar. I am a hypocrite. I am afraid of everything...Lucifer is inside me."

The "substantive issue here," intoned Ted Koppel on NIGHTLINE, is whether directors have a right to make movies like this and whether the public has a right to decide to go see them."

Not so. Rights are not at issue. Even Donald Wildmon, the Methodist minister who is organizing a nationwide boycott of MCA products and circulating 2.5 million letters of protest, does not contest the right of Martin Scorsese to make an offensive movie. He merely asserts his own right to object as vehemently as he knows how.

This is not a matter of rights but of wrongs.

The film's defenders are so draped in the cloak of the First Amendment that they cannot see through its folds to the more profound issues of sensitivity to the feelings of others. Unquestionably, filmmakers can, under cover of fiction, defame, libel, and ridicule whomever they choose. But in a pluralistic society, that freedom should be informed by compassion and respect for others—even if those offended happen to be the majority.

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Martin Scorsese has professed surprise over the reaction to what is, after all, "only a movie." But this is disingenuous. He knows very well that Hollywood has its pieties, as devoutly observed as any religious rite. It is simply unimaginable that any Hollywood studio, in the exercise of its First Amendment rights, would produce a film which insulted and distorted the memory of the Rev. Martin Luther King or exalted the late Senator Joseph McCarthy. First Amendment or no, some topics are taboo.

Callers to talk radio programs are grieved and tearful at what they regard as the second crucifixion of Jesus. Scorsese and his apologists ought to listen in. It may remind them that when taboos shatter, people get hurt.

Artistic freedom defends 'Temptation'

By Patrick Buchanan
Syndicated Columnist

"Jesus has...sex with his first wife Mary Magdalene and later commits adultery. Judas is a hero, the strongest and best of the apostles. Paul is a hypocrite and liar."

Thus does *Time* begin its cover story on **The Last Temptation of Christ**, the Martin Scorsese-directed film which Universal Pictures just released.

Those who have refused invitations to screenings of **Last Temptation** have been accused of illiberalism, of not having "an open mind."

I plead guilty. Toleration has its limits; and no Christian should be "open-minded" about a cinematic assault on the Son of God without whose sacrifice none of us would attain salvation.

"This is an intentional attack on Christianity," declared Joseph Reilly of Morality in Media. Exactly right, brother. And the proper response to this blasphemous attack is not to sit down and debate theological points with Marty Scorsese and friends, but to counter-attack, to drive the cultural polluters pumping this celluloid sewage out of business, and to drive the pornographer who produced it back under the rock whence he came.

Stunned at the garbage washing up on the Atlantic beaches of New York and New Jersey, Americans have professed universal anger and rage. But what the corporate polluters did, clandestinely, to the ocean is no different than what Hollywood is doing to American culture; they are using it just as that chemical company used Love Canal, as a dumping ground for toxic waste.

When Hollywood rallies behind a film which has Jesus saying, "I am a liar. I am a hypocrite. I am afraid of everything. Lucifer is inside of me," the cement which holds the pluralistic society together, i.e., a mutual respect for one another's deepest beliefs, has begun to crack.

Reflect upon how the First Amendment is being abused and exploited, by its beneficiaries, to undermine the foundations of the Republic.

Under the rubric of academic freedom, college professors, using Karl Marx as their own little Mein Kampf, trash their country, praise its enemies and propagandize on behalf of an ideology that has caused mankind more death and suffering than Adolf Hitler.

Under the rubric of press freedom, the ACLU defends the open sale of pornography, while attacking as unconstitutional the posting of the Ten Commandments in the public schools and the placing of Nativity scenes in the public square. And the Supreme Court agrees.

Under the rubric of artistic freedom, Hollywood discovers a constitutional cover behind which to assault the values of faith and country, routinely portraying American soldiers in Southeast Asia as psychotics and sadists, and now, even mocking Jesus Christ as a confused, lustful wimp.

A nation's culture provides sustenance for the soul, food for the heart and mind, it is a well from which we all must drink. Poisoning that well, for material profit, is surely as great a crime against a people as poisoning their lakes, rivers and streams with industrial waste.

Ideas do have consequences. As the great ideas of the men and women who built this country produced America the Beautiful, so sick ideas are producing a sick society. In the corruption of the political dialogue, in the coarsening of our culture, in the pervasive cynicism toward our institutions, in the acts of treason by men charged with keeping America's secrets, and in the statistics of crime and violence, we see the consequences of ideas given currency in the last two decades.

What a change in a quarter century. On Capitol Hill this week, congressmen virtually threatened Japan with economic retaliation, because some Tokyo store used Little Black Sambo as an advertising mannequin. Yet, Hollywood's scabrous, blasphemous assault on the Son of God passes uncommented upon by our Lords Temporal.

The freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights are not simply ends in themselves; they are the means to an end: the good society, the Godly country, the shining city on a Hill. What do decent people do, when their constitutional freedoms are being used to vitiate the ends for which the Constitution itself was adopted?

Film depicts Jesus as a liar, lunatic, bigamist, coward, voyeur, hypocrite

By Mike McManus
Syndicated Columnist

Do you consider Jesus Christ a liar, a lunatic, a bigamist, a coward, a voyeur, a hypocrite, an unfaithful friend, a homosexual, a traitor?

Then go see **The Last Temptation of Christ**. It gives shaky evidence that Jesus is all of the above—a confused, sinful, deluded fraud.

Virtually everyone else should boycott this blasphemous film, boycott the theaters that show it for a year and sell any stock you might own in MCA, which owns Universal Pictures, the company that produced it.

Don Wildmon of the American Family Association, who first called for the boycott, says, "Universal has a right to produce and distribute the film. But in doing so, they are saying, 'We don't care what you think. We will take your God and do what we want with him whether you like it or not.' It is sheer religious bigotry...Christians have the right to protest the film and boycott it and pray for those who are responsible for it."

I saw the film on its opening day in Washington, but wish I did not feel it was professionally necessary to do so. Ghastly images from the film keep reappearing in my mind—ghosts that do not recede, even as I re-read the Gospels for a clear view of Jesus as man and God's son.

We first see Jesus building a cross for the Romans to crucify a Jewish zealot. Judas enters and criticizes him for collaborating with the enemy. Jesus says he is struggling. Judas: "I struggle. You collaborate." Judas is the hero of this film and Jesus is weak and dependent on him!

Jesus actually helps nail a Jew on a cross. Why? "God loves me. I want him to stop. I want him to hate me. I want him to find somebody else."

Several times he falls down in pain, fainting. He hears voices—but doesn't know if it is God or the devil speaking to him. He goes to a brothel and sits down with 30-40 men who watch a whore have sex.

While Jesus doesn't join in, he sits there all day watching Mary Magdalene with one man after another behind a transparent curtain.

When he is the last man left, he says to her, "I want you to forgive me. I've done too many bad things. The worst things I've done are to you." He doesn't explain.

She sneers, "You are the same as all the others but you can't admit it. Here is my body. Save it." He's intrigued, but leaves.

In the desert he tells a monk: "I am a liar. I am a hypocrite. I am afraid of everything. When I see a woman, I want her but I don't take her, for God. That makes me proud. I don't steal or kill because I'm afraid."

"Do you know who my God is? My God is fear. Lucifer is inside me. He tells me I am not a man...more than the son of God, more than that, God."

What heresy! The devil tells Jesus he is God! To this point, the film has no biblical truth. Luke says the 12-year-old Jesus was so bold he met with teachers in the temple for days, "and all who heard him were amazed."

Jesus with Judas comes upon Mary Magdalene being stoned. Jesus saves her by asking the crowd, "Who has never sinned?" Grateful, she looks at him longingly. Unlike the Bible, he doesn't say "Go, and sin no more." Instead he shows her more doubt. "What if I say the wrong thing?"

Thus, even when a form of the biblical story is told, it is twisted unnecessarily. Jesus preaches the beatitudes and begins healing before going to John the Baptist. In fact, seeing him is Judas' idea! In what is a muddy watering hole—not the River Jordan—nude women are wailing and men whip themselves as John preaches. Believers appear to be crazy.

When Jesus appears, John says "Who are you?" Wrong. See John 1:29-34.

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Jesus kisses John (and later Judas) on the mouth, implying homosexuality.

In the desert, Jesus is tempted by a snake with the voice of Mary Magdalene inviting him to bed. Dramatic but wrong. See Matthew 4. His sermons are utterly confused and ultimately incomprehensible: love one minute; an ax, the next; then some "new law" or "baptizing with fire." A man whose life and teaching converted billions—is a babbling idiot.

He tells Judas, "Of all my friends you are the strongest," and asks him to betray him. Bunk. Judas appears in the Gospels only to betray him. At the Last Supper, blood and flesh drip from some mouths.

On the cross, Jesus cries, "Why have you forsaken me?" Suddenly,