'The Last Temptation of Christ'—the sermon that should never be preached

Donald E. Wildmon
Executive Director
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The other evening I was listening to a broadcast of a discussion about "The Last Temptation of Christ." An official with the National Council of Churches was one of the participants. He was being very candid about his support of the movie. He said that he considered the movie a great work of art. However, later in the broadcast, he said that the movie "had serious theological problems."

Without realizing it, he had, very precisely, made *our* point concerning the movie. To say that it was a great work of art is one thing, to say that it had serious theological problems is something else. Let me explain.

Suppose there was a preacher who was a great orator who could keep his audience spellbound, who was a very entertaining speaker. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that he was absolutely the finest speaker in our society. Indeed, his sermons would be considered a "great work of art."

However, the content of his sermons would urge his listeners to hate others of a different race or creed, and urge them to do bodily or mental or spiritual harm to those of a different race or creed. Would we, therefore, defend him because of his artistry? If one follows the line of reasoning espoused by the NCC official we would. Why? Because to the NCC official the medium is more important than the message.

That is the problem with "The Last Temptation of Christ." It might very well be a "work of art." But, as the NCC official stated, it has serious theological problems.

"The Last Temptation of Christ" is a movie about Christ. It is then, by definition, a sermon about Christ. However, the sermon has no Biblical substance. It is a figment of the imagination. It is not true to what we know of the Biblical Jesus.

Over the years the networks and Hollywood have taken extreme liberty with many historical persons, creating scenes and incidents which not only are inconsistent with history, but which also, in many cases, distort the facts known about those individuals. Now Universal has taken the person of Christ, whom hundreds of millions of persons around the world lift up as the Son of God and as their personal Savior, and created a figment of someone's imagination.

Why did Universal decide to release the movie, even after another production company—Paramount—dropped it after investing two million dollars? For one reason—greed. Judas betrayed his Master for 30 pieces of silver. Universal's price was simply higher. Universal hopes to make millions and millions of dollars from the movie.

The movie is a sermon about Jesus. It is not a Biblical sermon. Therefore, it should not be preached. If Universal proceeds to preach that sermon for the sake of those millions of dollars, Christians should respond by speaking in the only language Universal understands—money.

If Christians make it unprofitable for Universal after they release the film, it will insure that movie-makers are more sensitive to our beliefs in the future. If Christians refuse to make it unprofitable for Universal, it would not surprise me at all to see them release a movie depicting Jesus as a homosexual in a sequal to this "historic" drama.

This time we must not have a short memory, and we must have commitment to the cause.

Don

The attitudes for real servitude

By Randy Proctor
Associate Director

Luke 14: 16-20

In the parable of the great marriage supper three excuses were offered for not attending the feast. These excuses demonstrate, anti-thetically, basic scriptural principles found in "overcomers".

I. RENOUNCE OWNERSHIP

v. 18..."**I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it...**"

Evidence abounds of the great havoc and waste caused by materialism in the church. Be an overcomer! Give away everything you have to God! Live as a steward of God's possessions.

II. CHANGE JOBS

v. 19..."**I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them...**"

The need of the hour is to see Christianity in the marketplace and not just the pew! Whether you push a broom between school terms or serve as President of a corporation, DO WHAT YOU DO AS UNTO THE LORD! Be an overcomer and work for Jesus!

Charles M. Sheldon in that classic book *In His Steps* so aptly portrayed this principle through his characters who asked, before every decision, "What would Jesus do?"

III. DIE TO SELF

v. 20..."**I have married a wife...**"

Relationships, while of utmost importance, must be kept in their proper priority. Jesus said before the commandment to love others that we are to LOVE THE LORD above all else! GOD'S PRIORITIES DO NOT CONFLICT! Jesus must be first and foremost in our lives and then "all these things shall be added". BE AN OVERCOMER!

May God help us all to develop proper attitudes for servitude!

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AFA is a Christian organization promoting the Biblical ethic of decency in American society with primary emphasis on TV and other media.

With local petitions

Theaters plan not to show 'Last Temptation'

As the outcry of indignation swells from the Christian community across the nation, some believe that Universal will find theaters unwilling to schedule the blasphemous "Last Temptation of Christ."

AFA executive director Donald E. Wildmon said, "This kind of news is encouraging, but I hope it does not cause Christians to relax their campaign. Hopefully it will encourage us all to continue to voice our concerns, especially to our local theaters."

Reporter Craig Modderno said in the July 15 Los Angeles *Times* that an informal survey of theater owners has found considerable resistance among even the leading chains.

"Universal Pictures may be hard pressed to find a theater willing to play the studio's controversial 'The Last Temptation of Christ,'" wrote Modderno.

Jim Edwards, spokesman for Edwards Theaters, which operates about 140 screens in Southern California, said they were already getting a lot of calls complaining about the film. Modderno quotes Edwards as saying, "I can assure you we will not show a film that intentionally denigrates the image of Christ."

A spokesman for Mann's Theater chain (447 screens owned by Paramount Pictures, which initially had screen rights for the film, in 1983) said, "...we don't intend to play the film because of the controversy..."

A United Artists Theaters (a chain of 2,000 theaters) representative said, "The movie is tasteless and has a lack of concern for the religious sensitivity of a majority of film goers. It's not worth it for any theater chain to play a film like 'Temptation.'"

Wildmon urged church members, pastors, local AFA chapters and other concerned citizens to redouble their efforts. He emphasized, "Securing commitment from the local theaters not to show the movie is a way that we can all be directly involved in the issue."

Bulletin insert...

Reproduce this insert and include in your church bulletins.

Universal to Release "The Last Temptation of Christ"

Universal Studios has announced plans to release the movie "The Last Temptation of Christ." The script presents Jesus as a mentally unstable person who fights being the Son of God, a sinner who doesn't know who will pay for his sins, a person who angrily lashes out at the sick and poor, a traitor to the Jews, one who lusts after Mary Magadalene, and a bigamist. Donald E. Wildmon, a United Methodist who is executive director of American Family Association, said: "It is absolutely the most perverted, distorted account of the historical and Biblical Jesus I have ever read."

A Universal official said: "Christians will not stop us from releasing this film."

The film follows years of practice by the major studios in Hollywood of depicting Christians in negative stereotypes in movies and television productions. Universal's decision making body is composed primarily of non-Christians. "Universal would never, ever release a film so offensive to blacks, Jews or even homosexuals," Wildmon said. "But they have no reservations about releasing a film so offensive to the overwhelming majority of Christians."

AFA urges Christians and other concerned citizens to do the following: Call Mr. Sidney Sheinberg, president of Universal, and protest the film. Call person-to-person. That way, if you fail to get him the call doesn't cost you. His number is 818-777-1000. Refuse to speak with anyone other than Mr. Sheinberg. If he isn't available, leave your number and ask that he return your call. If the line is busy, continue calling until you get through or try one of the following numbers: 818-777-2345, 818-777-5888, 818-777-4943, 818-777-3087, 818-777-2162 or 818-777-4780.

Protest the film by writing Mr. Lew Wasserman, Chairman, MCA, Inc., 100 Universal Plaza, Universal City, CA 91608.

Call your local theaters and ask them, out of respect to the Christians in your community, not to show the film in their theater. This is vitally important!

Divorce causes increase in suicide

America's high number of divorces is a major cause of the rising rate of suicide among teenagers and young adults, according to a new article by social workers John Wodarski and Pamela Harris.

They write: "The American family has been in a state of flux for the past 20 years, the growing incidence of family dissolutions, and the resulting single-parent households along with the attendant life-style, makes childhood a difficult period."

Increasingly, sociological researchers "view the phenomenon of adolescent suicide as a reflection of this turmoil in American families...there is a trend toward devaluation of family and children and an atmosphere that lacks intimacy and affection. Experiences in environments that are non-supportive and overtly hostile contribute to the development of suicidal personality characteristics." This view is borne out, the authors' note, by studies comparing youths who attempt suicide with those who do not. Among those who attempted suicide, "family disruption and disintegration played a significant role" with the suicidal often feeling that their mothers were less interested in them than did the non-suicidal. Significantly, Wodarski and Harris report that young people who have lost a parent to death do not usually become more suicidal. The evidence suggests that it is not simply the loss of a parent, but the feeling of being rejected by a parent, that moves teens to take their own lives.