

What Pope Francis Thinks About Martin Scorsese's Missionary Film 'Silence'

Pope Francis on Wednesday met Martin Scorsese after a special screening in Rome of the Oscar-winning director's new film "Silence," about Jesuit missionaries in 17th century Japan, the Vatican said.

For Scorsese, who spent a year in a "minor seminary," a high school for boys considering the priesthood, the meeting came almost thirty years after many conservative Church leaders condemned his 1988 film "The Last Temptation of Christ."

The encounter held significance too for the 79-year-old pope, a member of the Jesuit order who as a young priest in Argentina had wanted to go to Japan as a missionary but could not for health reasons.

Scorsese, 74, attended a special screening of "Silence" on Tuesday night for more than 300 Jesuit priests. A second screening was planned for a smaller audience in the Vatican on Wednesday afternoon, though it was not clear if the pope would attend.

"He seemed very pleased with the way it (the Tuesday night screening for the Jesuits in Rome) came off," said Father James Martin, a Jesuit who was a consultant for the film's script.

On Tuesday, Scorsese stayed for an hour after the screening to answer questions from the Jesuits.

"He was very engaged and energetic and really impressed the Jesuits in the audience with the depth of his spirituality," Martin told Reuters.

The film, due to premiere in United States in December, is about two Portuguese Jesuit missionaries who travel to pagan Japan in the 17th century to search for their missing mentor, who is rumored to have renounced the faith under torture.

There the two missionaries face a choice: they can save themselves and Japanese converts from death by crucifixion, burning and drowning if they trample an image of Jesus known as the "fumie."

Martin, the Jesuit priest, hailed Scorsese's spirituality.

"You could not make a spiritual film like that without being a spiritual person. It would come off as empty," Martin said.

Scorsese came under stiff criticism from conservative Christians over "The Last Temptation of Christ" because of a dream scene in which he marries and has sex with Mary Magdalene.

But many Catholics also defended Scorsese, who made landmark films such as "Taxi Driver," "Raging Bull," "Gangs of New York," and "The Departed," the 2006 movie that won the Oscar for best film.

"That film ("The Last Temptation of Christ") was not about Jesus renouncing the faith but about being tempted, and that is part of his humanity," Martin said. {eo}

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