

Messiah movie misses

The Last Temptation of Christ
Odeon Pictures

review by Roberta Franchuk

The *Last Temptation of Christ* is really a miraculous movie.

Imagine, being able to tell the entire life story of Jesus Christ, one of the largest religious figures in the world, in a mere two hours and forty minutes. Pretty amazing, huh? Do you want to know how they did it?

Actually, it was really very simple. The filmmakers just took out all the conventional stuff like character development

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and coherent plot, leaving lots of room for all the existential angst and anguish necessary to show the audience what a rough time Christ was having.

This movie has, of course, engendered a lot of controversy. Christian groups all over the place are denouncing or boycotting it, claiming it is dangerous, misleading, and/or blasphemous. This is not quite true. The film is merely boring, repetitious, and confusing.

I'm sure it is possible to be deeply touched by the movie. For this to happen, however, it is necessary that one have a very thorough grounding in Christian theology. The filmmakers apparently assumed

that everyone who saw the movie would already have a very definite idea of what motivated Christ to do the things he did. This assumption is the total effort made at character development, so anyone without preconceptions is out of luck.

To do a plot summary of a movie like this would be bordering on the ridiculous. Suffice it to say that this is indeed the story of Christ, complete with miracles, visions, apostles, and the obligatory sex scene. (Obligatory for a Hollywood movie, that is; an utter fabrication, the theologians assure us.)

The cinematography is excellent, as are costumes and makeup. But you can only make one-dimensional characters look so good for so long, and the window dressing does nothing to disguise the complete and utter lack of character development. Director Martin Scorsese and writer Paul Schrader attempt to hide this rather large cinematic flaw with seemingly endless monologues and dialogues detailing the awesome internal turmoil that the characters are undergoing. It doesn't work.

The actors can not really be faulted, for it seems that they were trying hard. Willem Dafoe emotes his guts out as Jesus, but since we are never brought to care about his anguish, we could be watching someone debating whether or not to buy Oiler season tickets for all it really matters to us. Harvey Kietel's Judas almost turned into a real person once or twice, but David Bowie's role as Pontius Pilate was a throwaway, and Barbara Hershey spelled Mary Magdalene 'b-i-m-b-o'.

The makers of this movie are obviously hoping that the controversy that surrounds it will bring people flocking to the theatre. Give them what they deserve. Stay home and rent a copy of Monty Python's *Life of Brian* instead. It's a much more interesting messiah movie.



David Bowie as Pontius Pilate . . .

his appearance is a three minute throwaway role. None of the actors in *The Last Temptation of Christ* can save the movie from becoming a showcase for cardboard characterizations.



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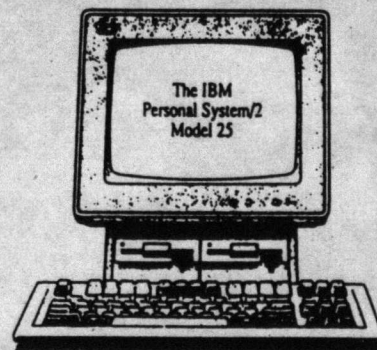
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