

Stigmata: A Revelation or Just Eye Candy?

By Nicole Burkholder
Capital Times Staff Writer

Bless me Father, for I have sinned. I have just seen *Stigmata*.

Well, I'm not really confessing a sin. Actually, I'm glad I saw this movie.

Director Rupert Wainwright's new movie *Stigmata* rocked my Catholic mind, for a little while at least.

The movie's message implies that Jesus Christ himself actually wrote his own Gospel, which Christians have not discovered.

It explicitly describes how one should follow the teachings of Christ. Shockingly, the description does not discuss any manifestation of the Catholic Church as the world knows it: no ornate churches, no frightening icons, no patriarchal hierarchy. Hmmm.

So is Rupert Wainwright trying to tell me that the very religion which has structured my entire Irish Catholic family's life for generations is wrong? Ouch!

I have to say that as much as I poke fun at my own religious affiliation, I suddenly had a burst of defensive indignation and support for everything the Vatican has ever stood for.

It made me squirm, and I watched for the bolt of lightning to hit my car as we left Hershey's Cocomplex. But, I liked it.

As I mentioned before, I was only "rocked" for a short while. The flaws in the film lightened up the whole attack on Catholics enough that I could sleep better that night.

The story begins with the death of a certain Father Almeida (Jack Donner), who had discovered the lost Gospel shortly before his death.

From the beginning, cinematographer, Jeffrey L. Kimball, presents visually stunning frames filled with religious icons.

One in particular cries tears of blood. For just about anyone, especially Catholics, tears of blood are just plain freaky. Bloody tears are not the end of this visual overload.

They are accompanied by rosaries, crucifixes, and crowns of thorns and of course a cathedral choir soundtrack to make your skin crawl a little more.

This visual assault is actually what created a paradox for me. It is nothing new to throw a lot of religious paraphernalia at an audience and thread it through a

weird story. It will be controversial and powerful if done well.

This was true. The paradox lies then in this question. If the director stands in any way behind the message he was delivering (i.e., Jesus doesn't like structural, ornamental religion) than why did he use it so much to his advantage?

This is where the controversy was lost for me, because Wainwright seemed to just be trying to make people like me squirm, rather than really slam the Catholic Church.

Another flaw in the movie was the mediocre acting. Most of the characters do not seem genuinely concerned about what is happening.

This is particularly aimed at Patricia Arquette who plays Frankie Paige, the non-Catholic who is experiencing stigmata.

Large, gaping wounds are being dished out to her by an unseen force in the likeness of a religious figure she does not believe in, and she seems only to be annoyed.

Lines like "I just want my life back" just didn't ring sincerity. Maybe it's just me, but I always thought that people would react a little differently when they are slowly becoming a symbolic, sacrificial lamb.

My last complaint lies with the utter waste of two excellent actors, Jonathan Pryce and Gabriel Byrne.

Byrne's rendition of the private-eye priest who is going to uncover the mystery of the lost Gospel falls short of compelling.

Similarly, Pryce is not quite scary as Cardinal Houseman who tries to stop the Gospel from being released, for fear it will dissolve all authority of the Catholic Church.

I don't really blame either one of these actors. The screenplay did not offer any dramatic or original lines to allow these two actors to go down in film history, but nevertheless they did the best they could.

I know I seem to have a lot of complaints about this movie which might seem strange to then give it the B+ grade that I did.

The movie wasn't the greatest thing I've ever seen, but I rather enjoyed myself. I like to be presented with issues that make me feel uncomfortable, so I welcomed the challenge to my beliefs.

Better yet, since Wainwright only offered a meager criticism with little support for his argument, I could win my own debate with little justification, my favorite kind of argument.

MOVIE REVIEW

Stigmata

Starring Gabriel Byrne
& Jonathan Pryce

Nicole's Grade: B+
Dan's Grade: C-

By Daniel McClure

Capital Times Staff Writer

I'll agree with Nicole about the entertainment value of *Stigmata*.

Unfortunately movies can be both entertaining and severely flawed.

It is a shining example of style over substance. The movie is pure eye candy with images of crucifixion set to music.

This is very fitting for a Nine Inch Nails (no pun intended) video instead of a movie which attempts to rock the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church.

Coupling the visuals, there is a techno-industrial soundtrack scored by none other than adolescent angst icon Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins.

It would have been respectful of Billy to at least give homage to Ministry's "Stigmata," since Ministry is far more capable of developing a brooding, angry, industrial sound.

The actual plot of *Stigmata* gives me mixed feelings. It is interesting, but it is carried out poorly on almost every level.

The movie's cardinal sin is failing to follow up on its shocking premise: Jesus did not believe churches were necessary for faith and service to God. This idea is not new. Many literary figures and philosophers shared this idea, so I was interested in seeing how Rupert Wainwright would present this idea through film.

Unfortunately, it is pointlessly presented as a conspiracy within the Catholic Church.

I have no idea why servants of God would want to cover this up, and neither does Wainwright. It

seems as if Wainwright's inspiration came from watching Oliver Stone's *JFK* and a few episodes of the *X-Files*.

To add to the criticism, the acting leaves much to be desired. In the beginning we are shown what a "bad" person Frankie Paige (Patricia Arquette) is. She drinks, goes to clubs, and even has sex with her boyfriend.

She is horribly unconvincing as a "bad person". If you really believe that she is the most unlikely candidate for sainthood, then you haven't been on a college campus lately or watched Abel Ferrara's far superior film *Bad Lieutenant*.

When she begins to experience stigmata, the Vatican's Agent Moulder - Father Andrew Kiernan (Gabriel Byrne) is called in to investigate.

Gabriel Byrne, an excellent actor, unfortunately chooses not

to act well in this film. Having an Arquette in a film is usually a red flag, but I figured the otherwise remarkable Bryne would cancel her out.

The final blow to the acting comes when the chief conspirator, Cardinal Daniel Houseman is revealed. Houseman is played by another excellent actor, Jonathan Pryce, who like Bryne, gives a disappointing performance.

The movie on a whole leaves much to be desired. What could have been a brilliant take on faith and redemption deflates into a two hour long music video filled with uninspired acting, amateurish direction, and a horribly unconvincing story.

Instead of going to see *Stigmata*, I recommend renting two films of religious commentary by underrated filmmaker Abel Ferrara: *The Addiction* and *Bad Lieutenant*.

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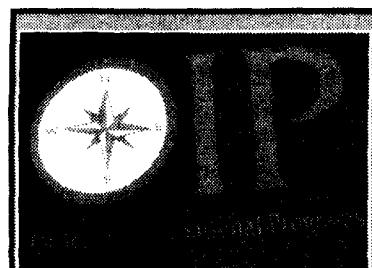
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