

## Is Hollywood anti-Catholic?

Sr. Rose Pacatte | May. 13, 2009



(Dreamstime)

For the record, no, I do not think Hollywood is anti-Catholic. Hollywood is a business with commercial interests driven by profit. Profit is often blind, uninformed and fails to ask the right questions.

If profit and consumerism are to have a conscience, we must look beyond Hollywood to the larger political economy that has usurped democracy, not while we were sleeping, but while we were all watching.

I know there are good people in Hollywood because they tell amazing, meaningful stories well. If thoughtful people will look at the record of films that address major social issues and ask for a human and Gospel response, they will find them.

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The story of the ecclesiastically grouchy Los Angeles Times columnist Steve Lopez offers a tale of homelessness and beauty in the recently released *'The Soloist'* and asks: What are we going to do about it? *'Blood Diamond'* (2006) drew our attention to the tragic consequences of the first world's unquestioning thirst for diamonds. *'Innocent Voices/Voces Inocentes'* (2004) introduced us to the plight of child soldiers. The subtext of the latest James Bond film, *'Quantum of Solace'*, told how politics controls access to clean water in developing nations. Kathryn Bigelow's upcoming film *'The Hurt Locker'* lets us feel the dehumanizing addiction to adrenalin experienced by soldiers whose task it is to defuse roadside bombs in the current war in Iraq.

My greatest concern for mainstream Hollywood cinema centers on things like the U.S. military consulting on big-budget influential comic books-into-film like 2008's *'Iron Man.'* Is anyone making this connection when they critique Hollywood?

Is the Catholic church anti-Hollywood?

Not if you read any number of church documents on media, communication, culture and artists that have been published by the Vatican since 1936 with *Vigilanti Cura*, Pope Pius XI's encyclical letter on motion pictures. This was followed by dozens of subsequent documents and statements, such as those for World

Communications Day, instituted by the Second Vatican Council in Inter Mirifica (?The Decree on the Media of Social Communications?) in 1963. Through such publications the church has promoted critical awareness and critical engagement with media.

The church consistently calls the means of social communication ?gifts of God.? However, in church documents such affirmative statements are always followed by a firm ?but.? The church knows that the media are a garden and a minefield, too. At the end of the day, the church respects storytelling and creativity, and the intelligence of people to discern, choose and to make meaning about the media they consume.

Pope John Paul II?s final formal teaching on communication and media, ?The Rapid Development? (2005), was the last document he wrote before his death. A new document on all media was announced earlier this year by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

These documents can educate and form the story-tellers of tomorrow who are in our pews, living rooms and classrooms today, as well as their teachers and parents. They also advise advocacy but not boycotts. The church, at its heart, knows that how one teaches is what one teaches.

The problem is that not enough people read these documents. I think the people of God need for those engaged in the public debate on any level to stop screeching and start teaching and preaching in ways that form, inform and give life. Like Jesus did.

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