

Koreans differ with Vatican over Avatar

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A poster of the film 'Avatar'

SEOUL ? Korean theologians have differed with the Vatican over the blockbuster movie Avatar saying the film holds a message against greed.

Vatican publications denounced Avatar for pandering to ?all those pseudo-doctrines that turn ecology into the religion of the millennium.?

Father John Song Yong-min, theology professor of Incheon Catholic University, said that the message of the film was not so serious or dangerous as to shake or confuse the faithful.

?The Church teaches God?s revelation through Jesus which is quite different from the movie?s view on divinity.

?But as God is an unknowable mystery, and such a mystery can be differently expressed according to cultures, so there is room for us to understand Him through the Holy Spirit as ?spiritual energy?,? he said.

The film?s action takes place on Pandora, a utopian planet where an alien tribe has been living in harmony with nature until humans arrive to exploit resources there.

?It is true that the movie contrasts economic development with the preservation of nature. In that we can read a message,? Father Song says.

?The focus of the film is the religiosity of a native tribe on a planet whose life is closely connected with nature amid threats from modern people?s greed,? said Father Francis Cho Hyun-chul, theology professor of the Jesuit-run Sogang University.

He said it would be unfair if Christianity claimed other religions, like the fictional one in the movie, were wrong to use Christian language or concepts like an ?absolute God? or pantheism.

Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* and the Vatican Radio criticized Avatar. Vatican spokesperson Father Federico Lombardi said such reviews reflected the Pope?s views on confusing nature and spirituality.

Protestant theologian Reverend Koo Mi-jung rejects the Vatican views out of hand.

She said that it went too far to say the movie incited people to nature-worship or animism.

?We don?t see the scene where the tribe in the movie communes with nature as animism. Rather, we see it as [depicting] God as the foundation of our being, which modern people used to Western dualism have lost,? she suggested.

Avatar, which has been packing cinemas worldwide since it opened in mid-December, has been seen by well over 10 million South Koreans.

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