

Daughter of St. Paul casts critical but caring look at Hollywood

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Rose Pacatte, a Daughter of St. Paul

WASHINGTON -- Sister Rose Pacatte, a Daughter of St. Paul, has a resume 13 pages long -- in 11-point type. Listing the personal credits of this writer, reviewer, blogger, author and promoter of film would last nearly as long as the closing credits of today's theatrical features.

Her latest honor is the Board of Directors Award from Catholics in Media Associates presented in February for her 15 years of casting a critical but caring look at Hollywood.

But as much as she loves the visual arts, Sister Rose, director of the Pauline Center for Media Studies in Culver City, Calif., loves reading every bit as much. Her favorite is 20th-century Southern Catholic novelist Flannery O'Connor, and she quotes her frequently. One of her favorite O'Connor quotes: "The two worst sins in fiction are pornography and sentimentality. One is too much sex and the other too much sentiment. You have to have enough of either to prove your point but no more."

Catholic News Service conducted an interview with Sister Rose by e-mail in March about her life and movie ministry. (Sister Rose writes [media reviews and commentary for NCR](#) [1].)

Q: What did you think of the Oscar winners? Where did you agree or disagree with the Academy?

A: The Oscars went pretty much [the way I predicted](#) [2]. ... I did think that "Avatar" would have won more than three and was very pleased that "The Hurt Locker" won six! The very best of 2009 films received at least one Oscar, and well-deserved.

Q: Can you give me some examples of movies that would have been worth seeing for their message, but severity and/or quantity of objectionable material got in the way?

A: I think it is futile to approach films by content only, unless parents are checking for what may be appropriate

or not for children of different ages. When we are adults, as Flannery O'Connor said so often in her letters and lectures, we do not need to be treated like 15-year-old girls. The problem, Flannery would say, is that in many 75-year-olds there lingers the mind of a 15-year-old girl.

"The Hurt Locker," "Avatar," "Up," "Up in the Air," "Precious," "The Cove," "Food, Inc.," "District 9," "The Blind Side," "Crazy Heart" all have depth and provide an ample "space" for reflection and conversation from the perspective of human and Gospel values, and in particular Catholic social teaching beginning with human dignity. ... We experience films through the filters of our life experience, education, faith and family formation -- and no one sees the same thing in the same way.

Q: How many movies do you see a year?

A: I see at least six, seven films a month for my reviews for St. Anthony Messenger and article for the National Catholic Reporter. ... I see an additional 10-12 at the end of the year when so many films are released in view of the Academy Awards. ... In 2009 I saw more than 100 films because so many were released in December. If I take part in a festival, add in another 20-25.

Q: How many movies a year did you see before you entered religious life?

A: In the theater I probably saw from six to eight once I got into junior high because I had to depend on my parents to take us to a drive-in. During the year before I entered (religious life) (my sophomore year in high school) I saw more films because I could go on my own on the bus with friends. I went whenever I could -- and had the money to do so. ... The last film I saw was before entering was "The Dirty Dozen." I begged my mom to take me because I thought it would be the last time I would get to see a film (but she was the Lee Marvin fan). (I also chewed 50 sticks of gum -- at the same time! -- the day before I entered the convent because I thought that would be the last time.)

Q: When and how did you first catch the cinema bug?

A: I think I always had it; I don't recall ever not liking movies! What a treat when we were young. I saw my first film in a theater when I was 7, on Christmas Day.

Q: While the Daughters of St. Paul has a communications charism, did you have any idea that film would be your contribution to this charism going in?

A: I did not really understand the charism and mission for a while. I wanted to follow Christ. ... The opportunity to become more involved in cinema came about after I earned a degree in education media studies (media literacy education) in 1995 and had become more involved in international Catholic communications events.

Q: What don't people know about Hollywood that, if they did, would give them a better understanding of how Hollywood works?

A: Real people work in Hollywood, people of faith and good will. Real people with families who go home at night. What people don't recall is that Hollywood is an industry, a business for profit. ... There is no anti-Catholic bias in the entertainment industry that I have detected in almost eight years living and working and interacting with people in the industry. ... Balancing the freedom of artistic expression with the responsibility of human dignity that profit often ignores is the challenge. There are so many groups -- Catholic, Protestant and others -- working in Hollywood to support actors, writers, television and film producers, all along the production line, to inspire, to offer opportunities to pray and understand the faith and art.

Q: Why is it important that Catholic Church even be engaged with the film industry, the role of filmmakers and the place films have in society and the nation's popular culture?

A: Because cinema, indeed all media, tell us who we are and who we ought to be. Media-makers tell the stories, and therefore, they own the culture. The culture is this overarching bundle of ideas and ideals that guide our lives. Without mindful people of faith engaging in media culture critically (not negatively) then we remain unaware of the very water we are swimming in, the air we are breathing. ... The media makers of tomorrow are in our living rooms, classrooms and pews today. How are we forming and educating them to be people of character first of all?

The Catholic Church is engaged in the media. We have a wonderful tradition of involvement in contemporary media from 1936 on.

Q: Is it possible for Catholics to enjoy the current crop of film features at the multiplex or on video? ... What should they know before they go?

A: "Do not be afraid," Jesus told the disciples. Pope John Paul II told the whole world this in "Novo Millennio Ineunte" ("At the Beginning of the New Millennium") (2000): We have to risk putting our boats into the depth of the culture -- as Jesus did.

Those of us who are leaders in faith formation, who are catechists, pastoral ministers, and clergy, can engage in a media mindfulness approach to the culture if our point of departure is that God is good, creation is good and that people are essentially good. ... The theater is a place where we can encounter God in the dark, where we can exercise our Catholic imaginations. And how we need our imaginations to be nourished and exercised!

Q: What signs within the film industry give you encouragement?

A: Jesus was a storyteller and to the extent that any film tells a story that reveals the face of God in humanity, that is a worthy film that encourages me. ... How well these stories are told depends on the writers and the visionaries who make the films. When I meet people who are passionate about telling stories that transcend our daily lives and make us want to be better people, I am encouraged.

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