

Lukes the prodigal son and hollywoods perception of the gospel



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Luke's the Prodigal Son and Hollywood's Perception of the Gospel

Interpretation in art forms are common and if the object that is interpreted is a well known classic or time tested creation then the perception of the interpreter reflects not only the psyche of that individual but also the outlook of the society at that point of time and space. Interpreting a classic from a text form to a visual form is no different. Here we are considering two Hollywood movies with an insight into their elucidation of the gospel.

The Last Temptation of Christ (1988), directed by Martin Scorsese is an adaptation of a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis where the screenplay is written by Paul Schrader. Here, at his execution, Jesus is tempted by an alluring image of a peaceful and pleasant life with Mary Magdalene to try to get him to refuse the sacrifice he must make. The carpenter Jesus of Nazareth, tormented by the temptations of demons, the guilt of making crosses for the Romans, pity for men and the world, and the constant call of God, sets out to find what God wills for him. But as his mission nears fulfillment, he must face the greatest temptation: the normal life of a good man. This movie is actually not based on the Gospels, but on Nikos Kazantzakis' novel of the same name. But in a sense, whether it is a movie or a novel, this ideology of a common and insignificant life is more of modern conception of self-help motives driven by (apparently) hazard free market economy. Jesus is shown at the outset as a lonely, masochistic soul full of self-contempt, tempted to leave the cross for the life of an ordinary man who knows the felicities of marriage, sex, and family: this is the "last temptation" that nearly wrenches away the meaning of his sacrifice. But here is a perception that invokes the feeling of a common man who wants the world to be ideally trouble free and simple.

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Alternately, *Godspell* (1973) written and directed by David Greene based on the novel by John-Michael Tebelak is a modern-day version of the gospels, opening with John the Baptist calling a disparate group of young New Yorkers from their workaday lives to follow and learn from Jesus. They form a roving acting troupe that enacts the parables through song and dance, comedy, & mime. Jesus' ministry ends with a last supper, his crucifixion in a junkyard, and, the following morning, his body being carried aloft by his apostles back into the world of the living on the streets of New York.

Greene chooses a cast that mimics the American melting pot of cultures with inclusion of Caucasians, African-Americans, and characters of Hispanic and Italian decent. Greene wrote the screenplay during the height of the social unrest associated with civil rights movement and the Vietnam War; therefore, it may be argued that this is why no other single film personification of Jesus Christ is more overtly affectionate to men and women while preaching the virtues of loving thy enemy as thy brother, and treating others as you would have them treat you. In the words of Stephen Schwartz, *Godspell* lyricist and associate writer, " There's a necessity for us to pull together as a community instead of dividing even more into armed camps and niches. This is the most mean-spirited time I've lived through if you care about how people treat other people". This is again at par with the concept that any art form is but the reflection of the contemporary society with its economic, nationalistic ideology and pseudo-paranoid view, or the urge to be anti-incumbency, of its existing government or state. This is the reason in *Godspell* the vibe of the movie tends to flow towards the vision of love, relationship and sorority.