

# Noah takes Scripture seriously and is very artful

Russell Crowe, star of the *Noah* film, attended Pope Francis' weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square on March 19 in Vatican City. *CBS News* reported that Crowe shook hands with the Pope. Crowe tweeted that he had received his blessing.

Before it happened, the media reported the event as a cheesy attempt to get a photo-op with the Pope in order to promote the *Noah* movie. Word was that the Vatican had declined the offer of a private screening for the Pope along with a private meeting. However, Crowe, director Darren Aronofsky, and Paramount executive Rob Moore were still hosted in the official VIP section of the general audience.

The pope gave a talk on fatherhood since the audience occurred on Father's Day in Rome. The topic was fortuitously appropriate, since the theme of Noah's



Global Theatre  
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role as an earthly father is highlighted in the film in a most beautiful way.

Crowe is not Catholic, but he was reportedly moved by the experience. About the Pope, Crowe said at the U.S. premiere of *Noah*: "the thing that was most significant for me was the kindness shown. We had an incredible experience. It was humbling. It was beautiful. I've never really felt

any connection with the Pope before. This guy is different."

It's not the Pope's job to review movies. But Francis has expressed a love for good films in recent interviews. No doubt for diplomatic reasons he cannot be seen as endorsing current

films that are controversial or being banned in some places. Moreover, the Vatican surely wants to set no precedent that would inspire Hollywood to regularly send delegations for public relations stunts.

However, in 1995, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the first showing of moving pictures (by the Lumière brothers in Paris in December 1895), the Vatican did issue a list of 45 great films (see sidebar). Perhaps in 2020 the Vatican will issue another one, for the 125th anniversary. I suspect *Noah* will make the list.

We should not be so quick to attribute bad motives to Crowe and the filmmakers for their pilgrimage to Rome. It would be charitable to assume that they are serious human beings who, after investing a great deal of time, money, and effort into making a movie about God and humanity, about the struggle between good and evil, made a sincere religious gesture in St. Peter's Square and lifted up their hearts to the Creator.

Even if their hearts were still full of questions about their lives, even if a bundle of mixed motives brought them to that moment, they still placed themselves into a position where they could be receptive to learning more about the grace and mercy of God. The father Noah, in their unusually thoughtful film, goes through a similar experience, as he likewise honestly acts in order to fulfill what he thinks God's meaning for his life is.

The movie is a towering work of art that takes Scripture seriously. It implacably demands viewers to return to the text to meditate again on themes that they may not have noticed previously or contemplated adequately. Aronofsky, in an interview with Peter Chattaway, insisted that he and his co-writer/co-producer Ari Handel were faithful to the text: "we treated Genesis as the word of God, as complete truth. We were trying to bring that story to life so we didn't want to contradict anything. We wanted to represent everything that was there and let it inspire us to tell a dramatic

story with the themes and the ideas that are in there."

Most of the reviewers of the film I have read are either insensitive to literary symbolism and thereby misunderstand or misinterpret what the film is saying, or they are mean-spirited and arrogant, criticizing the film for not being a different film, the imaginary one they themselves have never made. Two Catholic reviewers who stand opposed to the flood of negative reviews are Steven D. Greydanus and Father Robert Barron. They give intelligently positive reviews and take the film's artistic depth and richness seriously.

Go see the film for yourself and be open to taking it as a starting point for your own contemplation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture. St. Ignatius of Loyola encouraged the sort of prayer where imaginative engage-

ment with the text happens. Surely the greatest art will help us to do likewise.

The filmmakers of *Noah* have resisted the tide of stupidity that rages against integral artistic works. Those who would condemn the film as heretical should think twice about arrogating to themselves the rashly judgmental role that the Pope himself declines to play.

In his April 4 homily, the Pope spoke on the theme of persecution and noted how Christians who appoint themselves as judges of other people are frequently completely wrong about what

they think they know with complete certainty:

"How is it, though, that he, who yesterday was a heretic, is today a blessed of the Church? It is because yesterday, those who had power wanted to silence him because they did not like what he was saying. Today the Church, who, thanks be to God, knows repentance, says, 'No, this man is good!' Moreover, he is on the way to sainthood: He is a blessed."

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## The Vatican's top 45 films (1995)

For the 100th anniversary of cinema, the Vatican named its top 45 great films in 1995. The movies were named in three categories: religion, values and art.

### Religion

1. Andrei Rublev (1966).
2. Babette's Feast (1987).
3. Ben-Hur (1959).
4. The Flowers of St. Francis (1950).
5. Francesco (1989).
6. The Gospel According to St. Matthew (1964).
7. Vie et Passion du Christ (1903).
8. A Man for All Seasons (1966).
9. The Mission (1986).
10. Monsieur Vincent (1947).
11. Nazarin (1959).
12. Ordet (1955).
13. The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928).
14. The Sacrifice (1986).
15. Thérèse (1986).

### Values

16. Au Revoir Les Enfants (1987).
17. Bicycle Thieves (1948).
18. Burmese Harp (1956).
19. Chariots of Fire (1981).
20. Dekalog, jeden (1989).
21. Dersu Uzala (1975).
22. Gandhi (1982).
23. Intolerance (1916).
24. It's a Wonderful Life (1946).
25. On the Waterfront (1954).
26. Rome, Open City (1945).
27. Schindler's List (1993).
28. The Seventh Seal (1957).
29. The Tree of Wooden Clogs (1978).
30. Wild Strawberries (1957).

### Art

31. Citizen Kane (1941).
32. 8 1/2 (1963).
33. Fantasia (1940).
34. Grand Illusion (1937).
35. La Strada (1954).
36. The Lavender Hill Mob (1951).
37. The Leopard (1963).
38. Little Women (1933).
39. Metropolis (1927).
40. Modern Times (1936).
41. Napoléon (1927).
42. Nosferatu (1922).
43. Stagecoach (1939).
44. 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968).
45. The Wizard of Oz (1939). □