

# Drawing Aside the Purple Curtain

*The Papal System Today: an Analysis of the News*

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## Jesuits on the Big and Little Screens in 2017

Shaun Willcock

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With a Jesuit sitting in the seven-hilled city as Pope Francis I, and the Jesuit Order holding the Vatican in a grip of iron, the Order is on top of the world, riding a wave of global power and authority and enjoying celebrity status.

The pontificate of Francis I is the reign of Jesuitism.

And in order to further enhance its image worldwide, the Order has seen to it that the motion picture and television media have been harnessed to promote the image of the Jesuits to the masses, at such a time as this. Two movies and a TV series are the result – and millions will be captivated by the work of this sinister and deadly Order, entertained by a sanitised version of what the Jesuits are really all about.

One film is about Jesuit mission work; the other is about the Jesuit founder, Ignatius of Loyola; and the TV series is about the Jesuit pope, Francis I.

### **“Silence”: Bringing Worldwide Attention to the Jesuits**

One of Hollywood’s leading movie directors, Martin Scorsese – a Roman Catholic, sort of – made the movie, *Silence*, in 2016, based on a 1966 novel written by Japanese Roman Catholic author, Shusaku Endo.<sup>1</sup> Described by a Roman Catholic news source as “a thrilling depiction of the persecution suffered by Jesuit priests in 17th-century Japan”, the same news source confidently predicted that “the film is sure to bring worldwide attention to the Society of Jesus, 30 years after the other great film about the congregation: ‘The Mission.’”<sup>2</sup> Bringing worldwide attention to the Jesuits: now *that* is worth winking at Scorsese’s somewhat-less-than-devout Romanism, as far as the Jesuits are concerned. They have always been lenient towards erring Papists, if those same Papists are able to serve their interests in any way.

A renowned United States Jesuit, James Martin, editor of the Jesuit magazine, *America*, worked on the production of *Silence*, coaching the actors to enable them to “understand the Jesuit charisma.” He said, “I was asked to look at the script to see what a Jesuit would say and do in certain situations. I also helped the actors prepare for their roles, especially Andrew Garfield, who plays the lead, I led him through the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius, which was a six month project, and he was very well prepared by the time he was finished.”<sup>3</sup>

Garfield himself said, “I studied with Father Martin all things Jesuit and attempted to crack what it means to be a soldier for Christ. The basis of that was the exercises [Ignatius’ “Spiritual Exercises”] for me.” Although his ancestry is Jewish, Garfield was raised in a non-religious household. He did the 30-day Jesuit retreat, but not in the customary way. The third week was spent at a retreat house in Wales. He described it as “a silent week, and intense”, and added: “Yeah, it was remarkable, really. I was so grateful for the sacred time.”<sup>4</sup> Scorsese also gave Garfield many books and films to prepare him for the role.

What are Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*? They are vital to the training of any Jesuit. “The *Spiritual Exercises* work on the imagination of the candidate, helped by a ‘director’. Various biblical scenes are

‘relieved’ in front of him, beautiful ones alternating with frightening ones. His sighs, inhalings, breathing, and periods of silence are all noted down. After a number of weeks of this, he is ready for indoctrination.”<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that Garfield, even after a modified experience of the *Exercises*, emerged a different man. This is what the *Exercises* are designed to do. The lead actor in this film about the Jesuits had been molded into something of a Jesuit novice himself.

Garfield said that what he took away from the film, personally, was “endless”. “What I’ve been given by playing this role and being with Marty [Scorsese], being with Father Martin, doing the [Ignatian] exercises, it’s impossible to sum up. I’ve been given so many different graces for the whole experience. By the end of it, of filming, I [didn’t] even need the film to come out or for people to like it. The year of preparation, those months making the film, were worth it.”<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, authenticity regarding Jesuitism was important to Scorsese. He went to a lot of trouble to see to it. The Jesuits were very obviously expecting great things from the film.

Before the film’s premiere, Scorsese met with the most famous living Jesuit on earth, Francis I. The director brought his wife and two daughters to the meeting, along with the film’s producer and his wife.

During the traditional exchange of gifts, Scorsese gave the pope a religious picture, saying as he did so: “This is a Japanese artist from the 17th century, and the original is in the 26 Martyr (Museum). But this is the most revered image for the hidden Christians. This is with the Jesuits. We used this for research in our film.”<sup>7</sup>

Amazing how Scorsese had come back into favour in Roman Catholic circles. This was the man who made the blasphemous movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, back in 1988. When it was released it was immediately opposed by the Roman Catholic institution as morally objectionable, and people picketed outside theatres and boycotted the movie in their thousands. Scorsese, commenting on the film, said: I’ve always wanted to do a spiritual movie but religion gets in the way.” He said that *The Last Temptation of Christ* sought to “tear away all the old Hollywood films... and create a Jesus you could talk to and get to know.”<sup>8</sup> Hardly the kind of statements guaranteed to earn the approval of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Scorsese was certainly unpopular. But now, almost three decades later, here he was being fêted in the Vatican itself, meeting the pope, and preparing for his new film’s premiere to be shown in Rome. The Jesuits now looked with indulgent fondness on Scorsese the black sheep, a man who had once wanted to become a priest. Make a film about the Jesuits and be forgiven and rehabilitated back into the fold, apparently.

The premiere was shown at the Jesuit-run Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, on 1 December 2016, and about 400 Jesuits and others attended. Jesuit James Martin, the man who worked at coaching the actors and keeping tabs on the film’s production, was at the premiere and declared himself to be very satisfied with the final result. “It’s a masterpiece. I’m not embarrassed to say I cried every time I saw it. It’s a beautiful portrayal of the complexities of faith, and one man’s spiritual journey, that I think is really going to resonate with people, believers or non-believers.”<sup>9</sup>

The film is set in the Japan of the mid-seventeenth century, when anti-Roman Catholic feelings were running very high. Two young Jesuit priests travel to Japan to find a fellow-Jesuit, named Ferreira, who, it is rumoured, had renounced the Romish faith under torture and joined the Japanese. Going into hiding, they conduct the Romish sacraments, but many Japanese Roman Catholics are cruelly tortured in order to discover the whereabouts of the two. Eventually they are captured, and despite having to watch members of their Japanese flock being tortured and killed, one of them, named Rodrigues, refuses to renounce his faith. The film contains “much violence, including scenes of gruesome torture and a brutal, gory execution, as well as rear and partial nudity.”<sup>10</sup> But, as I show in my book, *Jesuit Hollywood*,<sup>11</sup> such things no longer offend Jesuits, or Roman Catholics in general. As long as it’s considered a “Roman Catholic movie”, they don’t care what sins are depicted, or what sins are committed in watching it (Rom. 1:32).

Finally, Rodrigues is brought face to face with Ferreira, who had indeed renounced his Roman Catholic faith. Ferreira tries to persuade Rodrigues to do the same. The choice before him is either to die a terrible death, or renounce his faith. And Rodrigues finally does so, trampling on a Roman

Catholic image. He, like Ferreira, then becomes a ward of the State, a Japanese philosopher. He dies many years later in Japan and is buried in a Buddhist ceremony. But his corpse in its coffin is seen clutching a small crucifix.<sup>12</sup>

At first glance it would seem strange that the Jesuit Order would praise this film so highly. After all, two Jesuit priests, the main characters in the film, actually renounce their faith and their Jesuitism, on the surface of it too afraid to face the cruel death which so many of their own flock in Japan were prepared to suffer. Why, then, did the Jesuits praise it so highly? Especially as there is the danger that the film could unsettle many Roman Catholics, not well grounded in their religion – a danger recognised by the Roman Catholic film critic in a Romish newspaper who wrote that this is “not a film for the poorly catechised”; “the paradoxes of the narrative demand careful sifting by mature moviegoers well grounded in their beliefs. Those lacking such a foundation could be led astray, drawing the conclusion that mercy towards the suffering of others can sometimes justify sin.”<sup>13</sup>

But there is more to the Jesuit support for this film than may at first meet the eye. Yes, it depicts the courage of many Japanese Roman Catholics, who refused to renounce their faith even under terrible torture, causing one Papist movie critic to write: “I wonder whether Shusaku Endo (and perhaps Scorsese) was actually inviting us to look away from the priests and toward that wonderful group of courageous, pious, dedicated, long-suffering lay people who kept the Christian [by which he means, the Roman Catholic] faith alive under the most inhospitable conditions imaginable and who, at the decisive moment, witnessed to Christ with their lives. Whereas the specially trained Ferreira and Rodrigues became paid lackeys of a tyrannical government, those simple folk remained a thorn in the side of the tyranny.”<sup>14</sup> But this critic is actually on the wrong track. Although on the surface it may appear, to many, that this film shows the Jesuits in a poor light, this is actually not the case. It is highly revealing that Scorsese had a prominent Jesuit work with the actors and prepare them for their roles (and this man went on to pronounce the finished product “a masterpiece”), and that Scorsese showed the film to Jesuits, including the Jesuit pope himself. It is, then, beyond all doubt, a film that is very *acceptable* to the Jesuit Order. And this being so, it follows that the Jesuits do *not* view those depicted in the film as in any way traitors to their Order, or to their religion.

The truth is, the Jesuit Rodrigues, when he gives in and tramples on the Popish image, does so (as one Roman Catholic film critic put it) “in order to save his faithful who are being tortured”. He “believes that act of official apostasy is, in reality, a higher form of faith because, by sacrificing his own soul, he is saving the lives of others.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, this is precisely the message that Scorsese himself was seeking to portray in the movie. He said: “It’s almost like a special gift to be called on to face that challenge, because he is given an opportunity to really go beyond and to really get to the core of faith and Christianity.”<sup>16</sup> He was not portraying the Jesuits in a poor light at all!

Although this is not true biblical Christianity in any sense, it *is* Roman Catholicism, and in particular Jesuitism: in order to save many from torture and death, the Jesuit publicly renounces his faith – and this is seen as a noble act by Roman Catholics and others.

The Jesuits have always been “all things to all men”. In India today, for example, many Jesuits have blended Romanism with Hinduism, in order to attract more “converts” to Romanism. And they did the same thing in China and Japan. There were Jesuits in those countries who gave the impression of renouncing their faith, and taking on the trappings of another faith, and yet who remained devoted, albeit secret, Jesuits for the rest of their lives, working undercover to advance the Roman Catholic institution even while pretending to fight against it. It is a very old Jesuit tactic. To be a “good” Jesuit, to advance Roman Catholicism, they have frequently pretended to be what they are not. And they see nothing wrong with this, for to them, the end always justifies the means. In essence, they are instructed as follows: Go out and conquer the world for the Papacy, and use whatever tactics you may deem necessary – even if you have to publicly renounce your faith, trample on your Romish idol, and publicly embrace a different religion!

This is why the Jesuit Rodrigues, in the film, still clutched a crucifix even as he was being buried as a Buddhist. He was a faithful Jesuit to the last.

## ***“Ignatius of Loyola: Soldier, Sinner, Saint”*: “Jesuitising” Young Moviegoers**

Following hard on the heels of *Silence*, it was announced that a new feature film about the Jesuit founder and Roman Catholic “saint”, Ignatius of Loyola, had been made. Entitled *Ignatius of Loyola: Soldier, Sinner, Saint*, it was produced by Jesuit Communications Philippines (known as JesCom), released in the United States by the Jesuit Order’s Ignatius Press, and its executive producer was a priest – so naturally, there could be no doubt about its bias!

The film was described this way by a Roman Catholic news source: “This feature film opens with a brief glimpse into Ignatius’ early life and family discord before plunging into the life and times of Ignatius as a young man, revealing a brash, hot-headed soldier in a time of political upheaval in Spain in the 1500’s. Ignatius went from living a life of brutal violence and debauchery, to becoming one of the greatest saints in the history of the [Roman Catholic] Church. This film chronicles his torturous struggle to turn from darkness to light – a struggle that nearly destroyed him, but also gave him the key to a spiritual weapon that continues to save lives to this very day.” And: “The film also shows how Ignatius wove the trials, errors, and lessons of his eventful life into the fabric of his masterpiece, the ‘Spiritual Exercises’.”<sup>17</sup>

The film was, unsurprisingly, praised by Roman Catholic leaders, Jesuits and otherwise. Jesuit priest James V. Schall, professor emeritus at the Jesuits’ Georgetown University in the U.S., said: “This account of Ignatius’ early life is both gripping and moving, not to be missed.” Priest Donald Calloway, M.I.C., said: “an absolutely stunning portrayal of one of the greatest saints of all time! This film will inspire many to turn away from the illusory things of this world and seek to become knights of heaven and saints!” Nun Dolores Hart, O.S.B., said: “The movie is a masterpiece. It uses the power of modern film making to show the interior greatness of a man whose mission in life was truly to conquer death itself.”<sup>18</sup>

The film’s executive producer, a priest named Emmanuel Alfonso, said: “There is a need for this new material on St. Ignatius of Loyola, especially because the young people now are very visual.”<sup>19</sup> Clearly, then, it is aimed at young people, to *jesuitise* them. One of the most evil men of all time, the founder of the most diabolical religious order ever to disgrace the face of the earth, is presented to the world, via this film, as one of the greatest “saints” and heroes.

Will it work? Will it succeed in jesuitising moviegoers, especially the young? Of course it will. The mesmerising power of the big screen will see to that.

## ***“Call Me Francis”*: Advancing the Jesuit Pope’s Image as a Global Celebrity**

In early 2017 there appeared a Netflix TV mini-series on the Jesuit pope, Francis I. Entitled *Call Me Francis*, it was originally produced as an Italian feature film, and then re-cast as a series of four episodes.

The series was described in a Romish newspaper as “a textured, honest, yet sympathetic portrait of our current pontiff before he was pope.”<sup>20</sup> Yes, well, they would say that, wouldn’t they? And of course, huge numbers will be fooled. The popularity of Francis I will receive another massive boost.

## ***Conclusion***

As was said at the beginning of this article, the Jesuits are on top of the world at present. They have their own man as pope, they rule the Vatican – and now they are making use of the medium of film to make them appear still more heroic and wonderful in the eyes of a public who knew almost nothing about them prior to the ascension of Francis I to the papal throne. How times have changed. Just a few short years ago they were in the shadows, unknown, unseen for the most part, and now they, their history, and their pope are the subject of films in which they are glamourised, praised, and held up for universal admiration and awe. And so Roman Catholicism continues its strident march across the world, its pope grows daily more popular in the world’s eyes, and four centuries of work by the Jesuit

Order pays off, in all kinds of ways, for the sons of Loyola.

And the “Protestant” churches sleep on, oblivious, ignorant, blind, stupefied, singing and shouting about “revival”, mesmerised by a Whore pretending to be the Bride (compare Rev. 17:1ff. with Rev. 21:9ff.).

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**Shaun Willcock is a minister, author and researcher. He runs Bible Based Ministries. For other articles (which may be downloaded and printed), as well as details about his books, audio messages, pamphlets, etc., please visit the Bible Based Ministries website; or write to the address below. If you would like to be on Bible Based Ministries’ email list, to receive all future articles, please send your details.**

### ***ENDNOTES:***

1. *The Southern Cross*, April 19 to 25, 2017. Article: “‘Silence’ Reviewed: Violence and Graces.”
2. *Rome Reports*, December 8, 2017. Article: “Check Out Thrilling New Hollywood Superproduction about Jesuits in Japan.” [www.romereports.com](http://www.romereports.com).
3. *Rome Reports*, December 8, 2017.
4. *The Southern Cross*, April 19 to 25, 2017.
5. *The Jesuits: the Secret Army of the Papacy*, by Shaun Willcock, pg. 12. Bible Based Ministries, 2012. Available from: [www.biblebasedministries.co.uk](http://www.biblebasedministries.co.uk).
6. *The Southern Cross*, April 19 to 25, 2017.
7. *Rome Reports*, November 30, 2017. Article: “Film Director, Martin Scorsese Meets Pope Francis.” [www.romereports.com](http://www.romereports.com).
8. *Catholics in the Movies*, edited by Colleen McDannell, pg. 321. Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, 2008.
9. *Rome Reports*, December 8, 2017.
10. *The Southern Cross*, April 19 to 25, 2017.
11. *Jesuit Hollywood*, by Shaun Willcock. Bible Based Ministries, 2015. Available from: [www.biblebasedministries.co.uk](http://www.biblebasedministries.co.uk).
12. *Zenit.org*, December 28, 2017. Article: “Bishop Barron on Scorsese’s ‘Silence.’”
13. *The Southern Cross*, April 19 to 25, 2017.
14. *Zenit.org*, December 28, 2017.
15. *The Southern Cross*, July 5 to 11, 2017. Article: “Scorsese: Church Shaped Me.”
16. *The Southern Cross*, July 5 to 11, 2017.
17. *Zenit.org*, January 6, 2017. Article: “Feature Film about St. Ignatius of Loyola’s Life Now Showing in Select Theaters.”
18. *Zenit.org*, January 6, 2017.
19. *Rome Reports*, June 17, 2017. Article: “A New Adventure Film is released on the Life of St. Ignatius of Loyola.”
20. *The Southern Cross*, February 8 to 14, 2017. Article: “‘Call Me Francis’: TV Series Looks at Pope’s Early Life.”

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# Bible Based Ministries

[info@biblebasedministries.co.uk](mailto:info@biblebasedministries.co.uk)

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*WORLDWIDE CONTACT FOR BIBLE BASED MINISTRIES:*

## **Contending for the Faith Ministries**

695 Kentons Run Ave

Henderson, NV 89052

United States of America

[BBMOrders@aol.com](mailto:BBMOrders@aol.com)