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Encountering Jesus

The glory of Him who moveth everything
 Doth penetrate the universe, and shine
 In one part more and in another less. (*Par.* I)

Dante's *The Divine Comedy* has been described as an allegory of the journey towards God – and it is from that perspective of a pilgrimage towards the Divine (rather than the Pilgrim's specific voyage through the heavenly spheres in the poem's *Paradiso*) that the last section of this book is written. The next three chapters focus, in particular, on the narratives in which Scorsese has explicitly engaged with theological issues and religious rites (most notably in relation to Christianity and Buddhism) and used cinema to support his view that 'God can't be only in the hands of the churches. There are so many obstacles in between us and the spirit' (in Kelly 1996: 179).

As Dante writes in the first person when he takes his readers into the Afterlife in *The Divine Comedy*, academics have long pondered over the question of life/art conflation between the poet and his Pilgrim. Film scholars have also made similar comments about Scorsese. David Sterritt, for example, maintains that 'Scorsese has worshiped at two altars throughout his adult life: the altar of Christianity and the altar of cinema' (2015: 109) and that *The Last Temptation of Christ* is as much about the director as it is about Jesus. In fact, organized religion and cinema have intersected in the director's life from the early days of his devout Catholicism, when he confessed to watching films that were condemned by the Legion of Decency: 'If you went to see a film on the C list it was a mortal sin: if you died after walking out of the theatre you went straight to hell. That was it. You go and see a Max Ophüls film and you're finished' (in Dougan 1997: 21–3). As a child, Scorsese's mother had taken him to see *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor 1946) that was once on the list of films condemned by the Legion of Decency. Having made *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese found himself on the other side of the argument when there was a call for a boycott (see

Keyser 1992: 186). Now Scorsese was the creative force behind a controversial film, rather than a guilt-stricken audience member.

Scorsese has recounted his awareness of Catholic images during his childhood: his grandmother 'had the portrait of the Sacred Heart. Also the niche with the statue of the Virgin Mary grinding the snake under her foot. Also, the beautiful, gigantic crucifix over the bed, with Jesus in brass and the palms from Palm Sunday draped over the crossbar' (in Keyser 1992: 7). *Who's That Knocking at My Door* was partly filmed in Scorsese's parents' apartment and he explains that 'the statuary in that bedroom is my mother's. That's real stuff that I grew up with in my house, especially the Madonna and Child. ... All the religious artifacts were as they were in the film; there was nothing extra-special put in. Especially the crucifixes over the beds – I think I had a little plastic one over mine' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 90). Religious references are detectable throughout Scorsese's filmography, from the first shot in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*. (**Figure 7.1**) The statue of the Madonna and Child shares the space with Catherine Scorsese, who is making a pork-filled calzone that is traditionally served on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a fact that she reveals in her Italian Cookbook (Scorsese 1996: 130). The holy image and accompanying votive candle are combined with the reflection in the mirror of the woman baking food for her family, so that there is 'a doubling of the maternal figures, one secular, one sacred' (Casillo 2006: 148). In the film *Italianamerican* Mrs Scorsese even has her own anecdote about

Figure 7.1 Earthly and heavenly mothers in *Who's That Knocking at My Door*: the first shot that sets the tone.

a fig tree with its obvious biblical allusion (Mk 11.12-14), when she recounts how her own mother cursed the family fig trees after her father had a deadly fall while tending them. When her mother died soon afterwards, the fig trees did not blossom again: 'It was as if she took them with her.'

In *GoodFellas* there is a picture of the Madonna and Child on the wall looking down over the dodgy dealings, reminding the audience of the Catholic background of the crooks. When Henry meets Karen's Jewish parents he explains that he has to hide the gold cross that he wears around his neck – although it is not as large as the one that Karen describes in Pileggi's book *Wiseguy*: 'I mean it was hanging round his neck. It was from his neck to his rib cage' (in Pileggi 1985: 86). When Karen's mother questions Henry on his religion ('My daughter says you're half Jewish'), Henry is ready with a diplomatic reply: 'Just the good half.' Henry wears a yarmulke at his Jewish wedding ceremony, but the chief focus is on the reception with Henry's friends, where the family members of Paulie are called Peter or Paul, and they are all married to women called Marie, with daughters who are also called Marie. However, the Catholic bond is not sufficient. The fact that Henry and Jimmy have Irish blood means that they cannot be 'made', as it is necessary to be 100 per cent Italian so that relatives can be traced back to the Old Country. Several of the guests at the wedding have been killed by the end of the film.

Once explaining that he had 'always wanted to make a film about Jesus', Scorsese said: 'I don't know anymore what came first, the movies or religion' (in Wilson 2011: 146). In *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* the retreatants are called to say the Stations of the Cross at an outdoor shrine that offers a view of a small valley – the kind of countryside vista that Scorsese will film in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* when J.R. and his friends climb a hill. According to the treatment, the boys kneel on the uneven ground and sing the 'Stabat Mater' after each station, and their prayers are accompanied by slow-motion flashbacks of a twentieth-century Jesus, who is wearing a crown of barbed wire and carrying a log through the streets of New York. Rather than being accompanied by Roman soldiers, Jesus is led to his death by a police car with a flashing light. The watching crowd abuse him and throw bottles at him; and his own mother, weeping and dressed in black, watches him pass by. When he reaches the docks, he is crucified with the Empire State Building in the background. Interestingly, Scorsese's idea for a contemporary retelling of the New Testament found an outlet later in *Godspell* (David Greene 1973), *Jesus of Montreal* (Denys Arcand 1989) and *Son of Man* (Mark Dornford-May 2006). It is clear that the youthful Scorsese had a viable creative notion for how to update the biblical narrative, despite the fact that he

thought the moment had passed for an onscreen retelling of the story when he saw Pasolini's *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (1964).

The first crucifixion scene that Scorsese actually filmed was in the original script for *Boxcar Bertha* that Scorsese was given, rather than being the director's own idea for a religious-themed conclusion. Indeed, the Corman exploitation vehicle has its fair share of biblical allusions even before the violent ending. Bill uses religious vocabulary ('It is appointed each man to die ... till judgement'); and he plays a 'saviour' role for his Union colleagues until he is captured, beaten and nailed to the side of a train wagon in a mock-up of the biblical crucifixion scene, with a playing card (the Ace of Hearts) replacing the INRI sign. Bertha takes up her position at the 'foot of his cross' in the Magdalene role.

When Bill and Bertha earlier take refuge in a church called 'Nazarene', there is a mural on the wall that represents Mary Magdalene meeting the resurrected Jesus – an image that Scorsese apparently 'accidently' discovered while shooting in Arkansas (Lourdeaux 1990: 239). (**Figure 7.2**) The painting serves as a poignant backdrop, for it underlines the importance of Magdalene in the New Testament as a follower of Jesus, the first witness to the Resurrection and 'the apostle to the apostles'. It is a reminder of her true status in the Gospels rather than the conflation of several biblical characters attributed to Pope Gregory the Great, and one that Scorsese (along with many directors of New Testament films) continued to disseminate. Magdalene is the woman 'from whom seven demons had gone out' (Lk. 8.2), but she is not the woman caught in adultery or

Figure 7.2 Confused identities in *Boxcar Bertha*.

the penitent whore – the role that Barbara Hershey plays in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In particular, the mural illustrates the scene in St John's Gospel when Magdalene initially fails to recognize Jesus and mistakes him for the gardener (Jn 20.11-18). The identity of Jesus will be a pertinent question throughout Scorsese's career, leading up to *Silence*; and the words of Jesus to Magdalene in the Gospel passage ('Noli me tangere') are an indication of the status of the human and divine Saviour that Dante also addresses in *The Divine Comedy*:

There sang they neither Bacchus, nor Apollo,
But in the divine nature Persons three,
And in one person the divine and human. (*Par.* XIII)

In traditional New Testament epics, Magdalene weeps at Calvary but experiences the joy of the resurrection when she goes to the empty tomb. In *Boxcar Bertha*, the relationship between the condemned man named Bill and his female follower remains unresolved: Bertha is left behind when the train pulls away and her pleas ('Don't take him! Stop it!') are powerless. However, if Scorsese shot the crucifixion scene in order to 'get it out of [his] system' (in Kelly 1980: 20), he was clearly unsuccessful, as the desire to make a film about Jesus himself became part of the obsession 'to get to know Jesus better' (in Schickel 2013).

Talking about reactions to *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese said, 'Well, he's everybody's God, and people approach God differently' (in Greene 2005: 236), although he claims that he did not set out to be controversial: 'We're not looking to do a *Hail Mary* like Jean-Luc Godard or any of that stuff. We're looking to make a film that will make people think, that will make people begin to see that maybe the best philosophy is the way Gandhi took it and to give people something to hope for' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 101). He especially liked the idea of Jesus who had 'the guts to hang around with the outcasts' (Lourdeaux 1990: 240); and, following on from his ideas in the *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* treatment, he has argued that 'Jesus, if he were here, would be on Eighth Avenue with the prostitutes and crack dealers' (in Lally 2005: 167). Reflecting on his difficulties with the Catholic Church ('For instance, it was a sin to eat meat on Friday, and then, suddenly, after a thousand years, it was no longer a sin'), Scorsese claimed, 'Where I think the Church has failed over the years is that they have never gotten across to people the actual concept that Jesus taught in day-by-day living' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 96). While he has talked enthusiastically about memorable scenes in Old Testament films, he has also explained, 'To me, it's important to study the Bible because it permeates everything around us, literature, painting, music, and so on, but ultimately the New Testament is the real challenge, because it shows us the steps we need to take

as a species' (in Wilson 2011: 292). In advocating this approach, Scorsese was also forming a link with the author of *The Divine Comedy* who believed that the Church 'is shaped solely by the form of Christ' (Balthasar 1986: 21).

Scorsese relates that he first heard of the controversial novel *The Last Temptation* (1955) by the Cretan writer Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) through a Greek friend named John Mabros from New York University, but it was Barbara Hershey who encouraged him to read the book when they were making *Boxcar Bertha*. Hershey had to wait until 1988 before she was able to fulfil her own ambition to play Magdalene as interpreted by Kazantzakis. Indeed, the film opens with the caveat that it 'is not based upon the Gospels but upon [Kazantzakis's] fictional exploration of the eternal spiritual conflict'.

Patroclos Stavrou, the literary executor for the estate of Kazantzakis, was impressed by Scorsese's 'great sense of consciousness and responsibility about the task to be undertaken. I saw also in him a sense of absolute honesty, a very honest approach to the book, to the spirit of the book, and even, I would say, to the deity of Christ as such, as it is described by Kazantzakis' (in Kelly 1996: 163–4). When the novel was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books, Kazantzakis suffered in the face of the condemnation he received from the Catholic Church for a book that he 'wrote in a state of deep religious exaltation, with fervent love for Christ' (in Kelly 1996: 166). Likewise, faced with censure even before making the film, Scorsese also expressed the sincerity of his aims and the difficulties that he experienced in an 'attempt to use the screen as a pulpit in a way, to get the message out about practicing the basic concepts of Christianity: to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 101).

The Last Temptation of Christ had a modest budget, providing a connection with the Italian Neo-realist film of Pasolini that Scorsese had so admired. The Sermon on the Mount has a very limited crowd (although the Bible evidently records that Jesus addressed gatherings of 5000, not to mention women and children). As the director did not have access to a crane (just a jib arm), there was a height limit of seven feet for high angles; and the same Moroccan village (Oumna) is used to represent different locations. As a result, there is none of the grandeur of the famous biblical epics such as *King of Kings* (Ray 1961) and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (Stevens 1965), and Barbara Hershey described the shoot as 'like a crusade' (in Keyser 1992: 168). Scorsese wanted a soundtrack that was ancient and contemporary, and Peter Gabriel combined indigenous music and some modern Moroccan tunes, with drums to represent the flesh, and ethereal sounds to evoke spirituality.

One cause for comment in reviews of the film was the use of language – a criticism that Dante himself faced when he wrote *The Divine Comedy* in Italian rather than Latin. In his treatise entitled *On Vernacular Eloquence*, Dante defends the idea of ‘using the common spoken language of men, women, and children – rather than the learned language of Latin – to write the greatest of literary works’ (Royal 1999: 26). Discussing his screenplay for *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Paul Schrader explained, ‘Unless you have them speaking in ancient Aramaic with subtitles, whoever stands behind the camera is going to be doing his “wrong” idea of the dialogue of the time’ (in Corliss 1999: 116) – a view that Mel Gibson apparently took on board by shooting *The Passion of the Christ* in Aramaic and Latin. As Terry Jones points out when discussing *The Life of Brian* (1979), the characters in biblical films traditionally speak in very portentous tones as if they were aware that they were living during an era when something very wonderful was happening, rather than as ordinary folk going about their daily lives (DVD extra). Scorsese himself wanted the dialogue in his film to be plainer and more contemporary, with the apostles speaking in their own North American accents (with the British accent restricted to Satan and the Romans in their ‘bad guy’ roles). The conversational and colloquial manner was intended to achieve a sense of immediacy.

The Last Temptation of Christ contemplates humanity, divinity, sin and salvation – as does *The Divine Comedy*. However, while Dante’s poem is praised for its ‘extraordinary spiritual power’ (Barron 2015), fierce reactions to Scorsese’s film as part of the ‘culture wars’ have been long debated and documented (see, for example, Riley 2003; Middleton 2005; and Lindlof 2008) and its heretical elements have been identified (see Baugh 1997; and Greydanus 2001). Indeed, references to Hell and the devil are prevalent in the words of the film’s opponents. The chairman of Gulf and Western, the parent company of Paramount that was originally going to produce the film, received a letter which condemned the project as ‘straight from the pit of hell. We may as well destroy our country with the nuclear bomb as show this film’ (in Jenkins 2005: 163); and Mother Angelica of the Catholic television station EWTN described it as ‘the most blasphemous, the most disrespectful, the most Satanic movie ever filmed’ (in Lally 2005: 166). According to these negative assessments, Scorsese himself would have been placed in Dante’s *Inferno* with the heretics:

Violence can be done the Deity,
In heart denying and blaspheming Him,
And by disdaining Nature and her bounty. (*Inf.* XI)

Yet, in interviews, Scorsese has striven to explain his sincere reasons for making *The Last Temptation of Christ* and his representation of Jesus: 'He's God. He's not deluded. I think Kazantzakis thought that, I think the movie says that, and I know I believe that' (in Corliss 1999: 115).

In particular, Scorsese 'was interested in developing to the ultimate a crucial, astonishing concept: the word that is made flesh' (in Monda 2007: 159) – an expression of wonderment in the Incarnation that Dante also makes in *The Divine Comedy*:

More the desire should be enkindled in us
That essence to behold, wherein is seen
How God and our own nature were united.
There will be seen what we receive by faith,
Not demonstrated, but self-evident
In guise of the first truth that man believes. (*Par.* II)

The question of the humanity and divinity of Jesus is a theme that Dante embraces in *Paradiso*, in which the mythical Gryphon 'represents the theological concept of Christ, the mystery of the divine and human nature in one' (Reynolds 2006: 311). The Pilgrim meets the Roman emperor Justinian, who had once rejected Christ's humanity in favour of his divinity but came to change his mind:

Caesar I was, and am Justinian,
Who, by the will of primal Love I feel,
Took from the laws the useless and redundant;
And ere unto the work I was attent,
One nature to exist in Christ, not more,
Believed, and with such faith was I contented.
But blessed Agapetus, he who was
The supreme pastor, to the faith sincere
Pointed me out the way by words of his.
Him I believed, and what was his assertion
I now see clearly, even as thou seest
Each contradiction to be false and true. (*Par.* VI)

Justinian's uncertainty over the true identity of Jesus touches on theological questions that are at the heart of *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Was Jesus's human knowledge 'very extensive or somewhat limited? Did it include the fact that he was the Jewish Messiah or that he was divine?' (Gaine 2015: 3). In Scorsese's film,

Judas confesses, 'I thought maybe you were the One,' but Jesus is initially unable to confirm or deny his status.

In an early scene, Mary (Verna Bloom) sees her son tormented by dreams and wrestling with his confusion over God's love for him, and she grasps his convulsing body and strokes his hair, asking the question: 'Are you sure it's God? Are you sure it's not the devil?' (a theme that will come to the fore in the discussion of Rodrigues's actions in *Silence* when he believes that he hears from God before his act of apostasy). Notably, the one occasion that Mary offers public encouragement is when she comes to the defence of her son when the crowd abuse him for helping the Romans. Interestingly (given that Scorsese did not read Endo's novel *Silence* until after making *The Last Temptation of Christ*), it is on this occasion that Magdalene spits in the face of Jesus so that he becomes a living *fumi-e* when he carries out a cross for the crucifixion of a Jewish man. Fujimura (2016) describes *The Last Temptation of Christ* itself as 'a fumi-e-like litmus test to force people to choose sides'.

In approaching the issue of Jesus's identity on screen, a key factor is the choice of actor for the role – a topic that Scorsese addresses himself in the first meeting between J.R. and the Girl in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* when New Testament films come into the conversation. The young couple discuss the fact that one of the actors who appears in *The Searchers* had also once played Jesus. 'Was he Swedish?' asks the Girl, evidently thinking of Max von Sydow in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. However, J.R. is talking about Jeffrey Hunter in *King of Kings* – a film that Scorsese himself has analysed, praising the Sermon on the Mount as a modern-day press conference (in Baugh 1997: 21) but criticizing the crucifixion scene: 'Jeffrey Hunter ... doesn't look as if he's suffering at all and you don't feel it' (in Telford 1997: 134).

The representation of Christ is also at the heart of Endo's novel, *Silence*, in which Rodrigues explains that he was intrigued by the face of Jesus 'because the Scriptures make no mention of it. Precisely because it is not mentioned, all its details are left to my imagination' (Endo 1969: 44). When he contemplates Jesus, Rodrigues thinks of a face 'resplendent with the authority of a king' and 'filled with vigor and strength' (Endo 1969: 22). In the film adaptation there is an overhead shot of Rodrigues, lying on his bed with his eyes open as he muses on the image of Christ: 'He looks as he must have when he commanded Peter, "Feed my lambs. Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep."' Notably, he is remembering the post-Resurrection meeting on the shores of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus tells Peter to look after his flock three times – these are the three requests to

the apostle to compensate for the three acts of betrayal on the night before the crucifixion (Jn 21.15-17). At this point, Rodrigues has no notion that he will one day publicly disown Christ himself.

When filming *Silence*, Scorsese selected a painting by El Greco, 'St Veronica holding the veil' (1580), to illustrate the vision of Jesus that fascinates Rodrigues ('I feel such great love for it,' he says) before he is fully tested. There is an insert shot of the veil at the centre of the painting, bearing the image of Jesus wearing the crown of thorns, with the drops of blood upon his forehead – an interesting choice, as Veronica's veil could be regarded as one of the first sacred 'media' images. There is a great sense of stillness as the eyes of Jesus gaze out into the audience.

Aidan Quinn would have played the part of Jesus if *The Last Temptation of Christ* had gone ahead in 1983 with Paramount, who pulled out in the wake of public protests. When the project was revived with Universal in 1988, Scorsese cast Willem Dafoe. On the one hand, Dafoe is white and bears a resemblance to the traditional Western image of Jesus (as previously represented on screen by Max von Sydow or Jeffrey Hunter), but Scorsese was impressed by the physical and spiritual qualities that the actor manifested in *Platoon* (Stone 1986). Dafoe saw the film as a spiritual exercise, making a connection between his art and spiritual need (DVD commentary), just as Andrew Garfield took the correlation between art and spirituality even further by going through the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises when he was preparing for his role as a Jesuit priest in *Silence*.

The narrative pays attention to the suffering of Jesus in the face of execution – a theme that will also be played out in *Silence* when the Christians are asked to sacrifice their lives for their faith. The notable contrast is that Kazantzakis's/Scorsese's Jesus is plagued with doubt from the beginning, whereas, in *Silence*, Rodrigues initially expresses complete confidence in his readiness to die for the Cause. As he tells his fellow Jesuit, 'We asked for this mission, Francisco. We prayed for this in the Exercises. God heard us then and he hears us now.'

In *Did the Saviour See the Father?* Simon Gaine asks whether Jesus was 'blessed from the very first moment of the incarnation with the vision of the essence of the triune God in his human mind?' (2015: 3), pointing out that Catholic theologians up until the late 1950s believed that Jesus did have this vision, following the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas. Then the perspective changed: In 1961 Karl Rahner argued that such a view seemed 'to be contrary to the real humanity and historical nature of Our Lord' (in Gaine 2015: 4) and this stance overtook the Thomist teaching in the post-conciliar age. Hans Urs von

Balthasar was of the opinion 'that to introduce the beatific vision into Christ's soul would render it no longer a credible human soul' (Gaine 2015: 129). The New Testament passage that Jesus 'grew and became strong, filled with wisdom' (Lk. 2.40) indicates that there was an acquiring of knowledge.

Following Kazantzakis, Scorsese engages with this very issue as he portrays the developing relationship between Jesus and God the Father in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The film begins with an eye of God shot (as if a bird is flying over the trees, with its evocation of the Holy Spirit) and the audience sees Jesus lying on the ground, united to the earth. Scorsese wanted the film to be visceral and passionate – not with a holy gloss – and the brown and ochre colour scheme visually underpins the humanity of Jesus. As Jesus sets out from home, there is a focus on the landscape, with the magnificent mountains in the background and the lake forming part of the wonder of Creation. However, Jesus speaks of God sometimes as a wild bird digging his claws into his head; but at other times as a cool breeze. There is the sound of footsteps behind Jesus although no one is visible – he is contentiously being pursued by God the Father, as if God were the antagonist.

The fact that Jesus might ever have fallen in love has been a rare topic in New Testament films, despite the fact that such an event would be a very human response. In *Jesus* (Roger Young 1999), there is an evident attraction between Jesus and Mary, the sister of Martha, until the young woman accepts that her childhood friend has a particular mission to fulfil. However, in his desire to represent the full humanity of Jesus, Scorsese goes controversially further by paying great attention to sex and the female body as a site of temptation, with a particular aim to show the effect of Jesus surrounded by sin. Andrew Greeley points out that 'sexual desire is not in itself sinful, and one excludes it from the experiences of Jesus only by denying Him a full human nature' (2000: 73). Nevertheless, Scorsese exceeds Kazantzakis's approach in the scene in which Jesus calls at the house of Magdalene and joins the back of a queue of a group of men who are paying to enjoy the prostitute's services. More problematically, the *mise en scène* allows the customers to watch the sexual acts while they wait – an additional dimension to the transaction that broadens the event from fornication to pornography and was not an element in the original novel. The fact that the clients must be aware that they will shortly be 'on view' themselves, which may not traditionally be part of the bargain, does not appear to be a cause for concern.

Scorsese discussed his decision to arrange the scene in this way: 'And I wanted to show the barbarism of the time, the degradation to [Magdalene]. It's better

that the door is open. Better there is no door. The scene isn't done for titillation; it's to show the pain on her face, the compassion Jesus has for her as he fights his sexual desire for her' (in Corliss 1999: 121). As becomes evident, it is the idea of the proximity of sin that interested Scorsese, and the question of how Jesus, as a man, dealt with his sexuality.

During the 'Temptation in the desert' scene, there is simplicity for the representation of the devil with the snake, lion and flame (voiced by Barbara Hershey, Harvey Keitel and Scorsese/Leo Marks, respectively), with the first manifestations evoking the dangers that will be overcome according to Ps. 91.11-13:

For God commands the angels
to guard you in all your ways.
With their hands they shall support you,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
You shall tread upon the asp and the viper,
trample the lion and the dragon.

Writing about the temptation scene in the Garden of Eden, Ricoeur suggests that it 'would be a sort of seduction from without; it would develop into compliance with the apparition that lays siege to the "heart"; and, finally, to sin would be to *yield*. The serpent, then would be a part of ourselves which we do not recognize; he would be the seduction of ourselves by ourselves, projected into the seductive object' (Ricoeur 1967: 256). By choosing the voice of Hershey/Magdalene for the snake, Scorsese evidently underlines this seductive theme and links temptation to sex – a temptation to which the schoolboy J.R. in *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* could certainly relate.

Scorsese explained his reaction to the novel: 'The beauty of Kazantzakis' concept is that Jesus has to put up with everything we go through, all the doubts and fears and anger. He made me *feel* like he's sinning – but he's not sinning, he's just human' (in Corliss 1999: 115). Indeed, it is clear that Scorsese is 'searching for the divine in a world beset by temptations' (Morris 2005: 174) with a (quite laudable) desire to develop a relationship with Jesus who is fully human and, therefore, to make Jesus more accessible to the director himself and his audience.

However, the Council of Chalcedon proclaimed 'that Christ in his humanity is "like us in all things except sin"' (Gaine 2015: 144) and, as a result, 'it is theologically unacceptable to portray Christ as a sinner, even in his human weakness' (Morris 2005: 172). In *The Last Temptation of Christ* (drawing on Kazantzakis's novel), Jesus claims, 'Lucifer is inside me.' As Steven Greydanus

(2001) stresses in his article on *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a Jesus 'who even *thinks* that he commits sins' and 'who talks a great deal about needing "forgiveness"' goes well beyond Paul Schrader's argument that the screenplay offers 'a healthy counterbalance' to the films that focus on the divinity of Jesus. The representation clearly emphasizes the humanity of the Saviour while failing to demonstrate that Jesus is 'consubstantial with the Father' as stated in the Nicene Creed.

At times, Jesus has confidence that he is on the right path: 'I'll open my mouth and God will do the talking,' he claims. When Magdalene is about to be stoned by an angry crowd (a scene which conflates her character with 'the woman who had been caught in adultery' (Jn 8.3-11)), Jesus defends her ('I don't want this') in the face of the people's derision. During a discussion about *Raging Bull*, Michael Henry asks: 'Isn't that one of the meanings of the parable of the Pharisees? Who are you to cast the first stone? Who are you to condemn her? It's up to the spectator to decide, in his soul and conscience, like at the end of *Taxi Driver* or *American Boy*: is this man a criminal or a brother?' (1999: 90). In asking which one of the bystanders has never sinned, Jesus's words have the desired effect in diffusing the anger and he raises Magdalene to her feet. Zebedee's sons are impressed and want to follow Jesus, as does Peter – a life choice addressed by the Pilgrim in *The Divine Comedy*: 'Truly he nothing asked but "Follow me"' (*Inf*. XIX).

In a subsequent scene, Jesus kneels down and wipes the feet of Magdalene in a reversal of the traditional role in which she is conflated with Mary of Bethany (Jn 12.3). As Jesus washes his disciples' feet on the night before his crucifixion in the Gospel of John, this action might appear to elevate Magdalene to discipleship status, yet it is also a sign of Christian love for everyone. In the New Testament, Jesus says, 'If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do' (Jn 13.14-15). In *Silence*, Garupe follows this commandment when he bathes the bleeding feet of a villager who has travelled from Goto to find the priests.

Jesus is presented as a type of itinerant preacher and he smiles and initially seems more confident in his message: 'Come closer. We're all a family,' he encourages the crowd, with Judas and Magdalene in a front-row position. Unfortunately, the people sometimes misunderstand his teachings in a way that is later evoked in *Silence* when Ferreira tries to convince Rodrigues that the Japanese villagers never really understood the Christian doctrine. Ferreira claims that Francis Xavier had mistranslated the 'Son of God' as the 'Sun' of God and sown confusion. Indeed, there is historical confirmation that there were

some language issues when the Catholic missionaries reached Japan. A Japanese convert named Yajirō, who worked as an interpreter for Francis Xavier, translated 'Deus' as 'Dainichi' (Buddha Mahavairocana, the supreme deity of the Shingon sect) and the mistake was not rectified until 1551 (see Whelan 1996: 4–5).

When Fr Garupe baptizes a child in *Silence*, the mother of the infant asks, 'We now [are] all with God, in Paraiso?' Garupe is frustrated by the parents' lack of understanding, trying to explain that they are not yet in Heaven: 'But God is there now, and forever. He prepares a place for us all, even now.' The Japanese couple bow their heads humbly, but in some confusion. Rodrigues later comments to Garupe that 'the child is safe in the grace of God now, and that is what is important.' However, when Garupe expresses regret at his impatience, Rodrigues calls him 'a bad Jesuit' with a smile.

In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus discovers that his parable of the sower is not understood – a fact that has a biblical foundation, given that his own disciples ask to have the meaning explained in the Gospel (Mk 4.10; Lk. 8.9). Jesus's message is 'Love. Love one another,' but the antagonists in the crowd point out, 'These people are starving. First you feed them, then you talk.' When Jesus gives his own Sermon on the Mount ('You'll all be blessed because Heaven is yours. ... And the rich will be poor forever!'), his words have the wrong effect by inflaming the people with thoughts of violence against the rich – a theme that is found in *Boxcar Bertha* as well. 'I didn't say "death". I said "love,"' he cries. It seems unlikely that Christianity would have flourished if the leader were so lacking in assurance. In fact, Judas is more impressed by the religious ecstasy at the 'wild revivalist meeting' led by John the Baptist, rather than by Jesus's quieter expressions of love – perhaps a comment on the popularity of contemporary evangelism.

Interestingly, when Jesus asks John the Baptist for confirmation of his purpose, the noise of the music and the crowd are cut out as John and Jesus seek to know the will of God the Father, and only the sound of the flowing water remains. It is as if the voice of God has to be sought through the cacophony of noise that surrounds them – a theme that will evidently be addressed in *Silence* some twenty-eight years later. When Jesus is baptized, all the ambient musical sounds return. Later, Judas is watching from above as Jesus asks John, 'Isn't love enough?' John replies that the tree is rotten and must be cut down with an axe, with talk of an angry God and Sodom and Gomorrah.

When Jesus returns from the desert temptation scene, he tells his apostles that he is going to baptize with fire: 'I'm not inviting you to a celebration. I'm inviting you to a war.' At these words he reaches inside his chest and literally pulls out his heart: 'This is my heart. Take it. God is inside of us. The devil is outside us in

the world all around us.' Schrader claims that he added the heart scene (it is not in Kazantzakis's novel) as a sign of the miraculous; whereas Scorsese sees it as a sign of the supernatural. There is evidently a visual link to the popular Catholic image of the Sacred Heart – one of the paintings on the wall in Jake La Motta's home in *Raging Bull* – but here the image is gruesome. Pope Pius XII took the theme of the beatific vision in the encyclical letter *Haurietis Aquas*, in which he 'taught that this Heart is a symbol of the love that was infused into Christ's soul and directs its acts in the light of his most perfect knowledge, which included a "blessed" knowledge' (Gaine 2015: 8). However, in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the blood from Jesus's heart drips into the water; and when he holds up the axe, the impression is warlike rather than loving. Yet, despite these aggressive signs, Jesus continues to spread a message of love and restoration. The healing miracles that take place throughout the Gospels are brought together in one scene, including the cure of a blind man whom Judas leads through the crowd to point out the proof of Jesus's powers.

At the wedding in Cana in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus draws on the paradisiacal imagery that Dante presented in *Paradiso* of a 'wedding feast' (*Par.* XXX). When Magdalene is initially refused entry to the celebration, Jesus responds, 'Heaven is like a wedding. And everyone's invited.' He laughs and dances, showing enjoyment in life. However, while Judas is among the guests, Mary is notably absent, given that she plays a key role in the Cana miracle according to the Gospel of John. Dante memorably honours the Virgin Mary in *Paradiso*:

Look now into the face that unto Christ
Hath most resemblance; for its brightness only
Is able to prepare thee to see Christ. (*Par.* XXXII)

But Mary's words in the New Testament ('Do whatever he tells you' (Jn 2.5)) clearly do not fit with her representation in Scorsese's film as she also appears beset by doubts. As a result, the miracle of transforming the water into wine at the wedding appears more like a magic trick rather than the first miracle in the Gospel of John. In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Mary offers an example of a woman who does not understand her son's mission. When Jesus invites the villagers of Nazareth onto his 'ark', the people laugh at him and threaten him, and Judas tries to drag him away. Jesus says, 'I don't have a mother. I don't have any family. I have a father in heaven.' He kisses Mary and she sobs.

At the raising of Lazarus, it is notable that Judas and Peter – the two men who will betray Jesus in different ways – help to move away the stone at the moment

that he offers the most obvious proof of his Saviour status. Scorsese did not want the scene to have the aura of a Hammer Horror film, although he emphasizes the smell of rotting flesh. There is the shadow of Lazarus's hand over the heart of Jesus as he realizes that he has performed the miracle, yet there is also the fear of death as he is nearly pulled into the tomb. Ebert notes that the tomb 'is black inside, contrasted with the blinding sun, and then blacker and blacker until the whole screen is filled with blackness, and held for a few seconds. I take this as an emblem of Jesus's experience of his miracles, during which he is reaching into an unknowable and frightening void' (2008: 102).

However, Jesus reveals to Judas 'a terrible secret' that he has received from God. It will explain why he has come to Jerusalem – and it is not for 'the revolution' that Judas desires. Jesus recounts that Isaiah (inconspicuously played by Scorsese in heavy robes) came to him to point out his own prophecy: 'He has borne our faults. He was wounded for our transgressions. Yet he opened not his mouth. Despised and rejected by all he went forward without resisting, like a lamb led to the slaughter.' It is a biblical passage that is particularly significant for the representation of Jesus in *Silence*.

Judas smiles awkwardly in incomprehension before Jesus explains to him: 'I am the lamb. I'm the one who's going to die.' These words confuse Judas, who does not understand why the Messiah would have to perish for the cause: 'Every day you have a different plan. First it's love, then it's the axe, and now you have to die. What good could that do?' Jesus tries to clarify his position: 'I can't help it. God only talks to me a little at a time. He only tells me as much as I need to know' – a direct comment on the treatment of the beatific vision in the film. In the face of Judas's protests, Jesus continues, 'Now I finally understand. All my life, all my life I've been followed by voices, by footsteps, by shadows. And do you know what the shadow is? The cross. I have to die on the cross and I have to die willingly.' When he goes on to proclaim that he will return after the crucifixion 'to judge the living and the dead', Judas refuses to believe him – a stance that will lead to his position in Dante's *Inferno*.

The apostles walk with Jesus to Jerusalem, with Judas still near the front of the procession despite his confusion over the mission. The other apostles talk about their hopes: one wants more sheep, another wants to worship in the Temple without the Roman presence and Thomas admits that he is a coward: 'Have you ever seen anybody hanging on a cross after two days? ... They don't even have eyes. The crows come and suck out your eyes' – a fact that Mel Gibson represented in *The Passion of the Christ*. In *Silence*, Scorsese will depict the Japanese dying

in agony on crosses, with one of the Christians lingering for four days. Schrader maintains the Temple was awash with the blood of animal sacrifices during the time of Jesus, and this gory image is certainly emphasized in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Jesus overturns the stalls in the Temple, praying, 'Lord, I hope this is what you want. Let me die here. Please let it happen fast while I have the strength.' Rodrigues will utter a similar plea in *Silence*, as uncertainty and weakness replace his former pride.

With Peter and Judas by his side, Jesus states that he is 'here to set fire to the world' and continues to stir the crowd: 'I'm here! And I'm going to baptize everybody. With fire!' At this point, people hold up flaming torches and Judas leads the cheering. Despite the appearance of the guards, Peter is also enthusiastic ('He's leading us. Follow him!'); and Judas asks Jesus for a signal: 'Give it, now!' Yet Jesus (speaking to himself) is still unresolved: 'Please. I'm waiting, too. Give me an axe. Not the cross. Let me die like this.' His hands begin to bleed as if from wounds – stigmata – and he asks Judas for help. When they move away from the crowd, Judas puts his hand on Jesus's forehead as if to test the temperature of a sick man. 'I wish there was another way. I'm sorry but there isn't. I have to die on the cross,' says Jesus, and he goes on to explain that it is the way to bring 'God and man together. They'll never be together unless I die. I'm the sacrifice. Without you there can be no redemption. Forget everything else. Understand that.'

In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese does not adopt the long table layout seen at the Last Supper in the famous Da Vinci painting that appears as part of the mise en scène in *GoodFellas*. Instead, Peter and John sit on either side of Jesus; and Judas, who is next to Peter, is present for the breaking of bread, which is the institution of the Eucharist. Most strikingly, there are four women present at the table: Mary, Magdalene and the two sisters of Lazarus: 'The women could not have been sent to the kitchen by Jesus. Not the Jesus we love!' claims Scorsese (in Wilson 2011: 154). Although Mary does not attend the wedding at Cana, she now gives to her son the wine with which he will perform an even more important miracle: 'The Lord's Supper provides a narrative and metaphorical journey into any experience of brokenness. ... Yet at that same time Christ, by instituting the Lord's Supper, promises healing. This profound mystery is played out every time the rite is enacted' (Fujimura 2016).

When Judas gets up to leave, Peter calls out to him: 'We're not finished.' As Jesus restrains Peter and says, 'Let him go,' this moment fulfils the 'What you are going to do, do quickly' command (Jn 13.27) that intrigues Rodrigues in *Silence*

and which might indicate that Jesus is 'complicit' in the deed or resigned (see Stanford 2015: 55). Jesus continues, 'All of you ... I want to tell you something.' However, the audience does not hear the farewell discourse in the Gospel of John, which contains great words of comfort.

There is a shift of focus to the Gethsemane scene in which Jesus goes forward alone and kneels on the rocky ground and prays, 'Father in heaven, Father on earth, the world that you've created, that we can see, is beautiful. But the world that you've created that we can't see is beautiful, too.' He picks up a handful of gravel and says, 'This is my body, too. Together we're going to die.' Claspings his hands in prayer and terror, he cries:

Oh please, Father, I've been with you for so long. I never asked you to choose me. ... You opened the Red Sea for Moses. You saved Noah. You took Elijah to Heaven in a fiery chariot. Now you're asking me to be crucified. Now I ask for the last time: Do I have to die? Is there any other way? You're offering me a cup and I don't want to drink what's in it. Please. Take it away. Please stop. Please, Father, Father. Please.

When Rodrigues is undergoing torment in *Silence*, it is Jesus's suffering in Gethsemane that he remembers. Alongside Mel Gibson in *The Passion of the Christ*, Scorsese offers one of cinema's most searing filmic visualizations of this episode in the Passion narrative, as it shows the reality of the sacrifice for Jesus as a human being who suffers physical pain. (**Figure 7.3**) However, in *The Last Temptation of Christ* there is no response from above but a shot of the sky through the olive trees. Then there is a breeze on the face of Jesus – a breeze being a frequent filmic representation of the Holy Spirit.

Figure 7.3 The agony in the Garden in *The Last Temptation of Christ*: humanity and divinity in conflict.

John is lying on the ground asleep but he suddenly appears to be standing next to Jesus in the role of the angel who comes to strengthen him (Lk. 22.43). In the New Testament, Jesus once asked James and John: 'Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' (Mt. 20.22), and this appears to be an answer: John drinks from a cup and then hands it to Jesus. 'All right. Just please give me the strength,' says Jesus. He then reproves the three apostles for falling asleep. At that point the guards arrive, led by Judas, who greets Jesus with a kiss on the lips and an embrace. When Peter cuts off the ear of one of the guards, Jesus remonstrates with him ('No, you live by this, you die by it') and the knife falls to the ground. As Jesus miraculously heals the wounded soldier, Judas looks straight at him, as it is a clear sign of the divine power of the man he has now betrayed. Jesus does not resist and says, 'Take me with you. I'm ready.'

As Rodrigues is a prisoner in *Silence*, he contemplates the night that Jesus was arrested. In the novel, Endo writes: 'To calm his anguished trembling that night the priest thought earnestly about a man who had been dragged from the Garden of Gethsemane to the palace of Caiaphas' (Endo 1969: 79). When he is forced to squat in the courtyard he thinks of Jesus's agony: 'Reflecting earnestly on how Christ must have looked at the time of the scourging he endeavoured to distract his mind from the pain in his knees' (Endo 1969: 107). In his cell he ponders again on Gethsemane: 'This was the face that was now before his eyes. Hundreds and hundreds of times it had appeared in his dreams; but why was it that only now did the suffering, perspiring face seem so far away?' (Endo 1969: 137). He asks himself, 'On that night had that man, too, felt the silence of God? Had he, too, shuddered with fear? The priest did not want to think so. Yet this thought suddenly arose within his breast, and he tried not to hear the voice that told him so' (Endo 1969: 137).

In the onscreen conversation with Pilate (David Bowie) in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus explains, 'My kingdom, it's not here. Not on earth. ... All I'm saying is that change will happen with love. Not the killing.' As Jesus makes his way, wearing a crown of thorns and carrying his cross, he is surrounded by mocking faces. When Rodrigues is captured in *Silence*, he travels on a horse in a procession of shame, observed by the curious and the scoffers, in a reversal of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey but in a manner that evokes Jesus's journey to Calvary.

By making *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scorsese finally had the chance to transfer the Good Friday imagery of torture that he had envisaged in *Jerusalem Jerusalem!* to the screen. He consulted documents about the reality of crucifixion

during Roman times, and the nudity and the position of Jesus's body on the cross are in line with his own historical research. Jesus looks around and asks, 'Mother, Magdalene, where are you?' The camera adopts his point of view and alights on four women (his mother, Magdalene, Mary and Martha). Only Magdalene remains standing. Jesus says, 'Mother, I'm sorry for being a bad son' (another reason for outrage in the opinion of the film's critics) while Mary cries, revealing a lack of comprehension on either side as to the purpose of his mission.

As the nails are driven into his hands, Jesus prays, 'Father, stay with me. Don't leave me'. Balthasar (2004) writes that 'it is the reality that the God-forsaken one experienced in an eminent way because no one can even approximately experience the abandonment by God as horribly as the Son, who shares the same essence with the Father for all eternity'. Then Jesus says, 'Father, forgive them.' In *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice explains to the Pilgrim 'that if the nature assumed by God in the Incarnation is considered, no penalty was ever so just as the Cross; but if the Person who suffered is considered, no penalty was ever so unjust' (Reynolds 2006: 351):

Therefore the penalty the cross held out,
 If measured by the nature thus assumed,
 None ever yet with so great justice stung,
 And none was ever of so great injustice,
 Considering who the Person was that suffered,
 Within whom such a nature was contracted.
 From one act therefore issued things diverse;
 To God and to the Jews one death was pleasing;
 Earth trembled at it and the Heaven was opened. (*Par.* VII)

The polemical 'temptation scene' then follows: the cross tilts and the light changes, and the world falls silent – although this time it is Satan who breaks the silence in the form of an angelic-looking girl who invites Jesus down from the cross and tells him he is not the Messiah. It is an episode about which Eleni Kazantzakis had some criticisms:

People should understand that there is the Christ on the cross, and all this is imagined. And I thought it was too long. But Nikos did the same thing. I told him while I was typing the manuscript I thought the temptation scene was too long. When you have a nightmare, you see it for one minute, one second, and you think that you have been the whole night with it. But it is not true. It takes seconds. ... So it was not Mr. Scorsese's fault. (In Kelly 1996: 239)

In the temptation sequence, Jesus marries Magdalene. She bathes his wounded body and there is a marital sex scene that Scorsese intended to show 'mutual tenderness' (in Wilson 2011: 155) but that was one of the major sources of scandal. Greydanus (2001) argues that the fact that it 'was part of a "temptation" scene doesn't mend matters at all; the sheer force of the image is greater than its context'. While Scorsese maintained that 'the temptation' is for a normal life with a wife and children, Jesus lives with the sisters Mary and Martha after the death of Magdalene and fathers their children – not in a traditional marriage. When questioned on this matter, Scorsese replied: 'I don't know that it's adultery. It might have been polygamy' (in Corliss 1999: 122). It could also be viewed as an aspect of the devil's machinations, as the dream is part of Satan's plan.

As Ricoeur explains, 'The structure of the poetic image is also the structure of the dream when the latter extracts from the fragments of our past a prophecy of our future' (1967: 14). In the hallucination on the cross, there is evidence of Jesus's divinity in which he sees the future, including the burning of Jerusalem. Within this dream, Jesus meets Paul, who reveals that he persecuted and murdered. 'I killed anyone who broke the law of Moses. And I loved it.' But Paul explains his conversion on the road to Damascus and that he now understands that Jesus 'was the Son of God. ... He was punished for our sins. Our sins. Then he was tortured and crucified. Then three days later he rose up from the dead and went up to Heaven. Death was conquered.'

When Jesus claims that these words are all a lie, Paul retorts, 'Their only hope is the resurrected Jesus. I don't care whether you're Jesus or not. The resurrected Jesus will save the world and that's what matters. ... I created the truth out of what people needed and what they believed.' Jay Cocks (DVD commentary) makes the point that Paul has the idea of 'Print the legend' – a Fordian reference to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Ford 1962). Paul continues, 'If I have to crucify you to save the world, then I'll crucify you. And if I have to resurrect you, then I'll do that, too, whether you like it or not. ... You see, you don't know how much people need God. You don't know how happy He can make them. Even make them happy to do anything. Make them happy to die, then they'll die all for the sake of Christ.' The martyrs in *Silence* will confirm the latter point.

There are flames in the background as Jerusalem has been set on fire. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante refers to this historical event of the destruction of Jerusalem by Emperor Titus in the year 70, accepting 'the view of the

historian Orosius that by this act Titus avenged the death of Christ' (Reynolds 2006: 351):

Because the living Justice that inspires me
 Granted it, in the hand of him I speak of,
 The glory of doing vengeance for its wrath.
 Now here attend to what I answer thee;
 Later it ran with Titus to do vengeance
 Upon the vengeance of the ancient sin. (*Par.* VI)

Accompanied by Nathaniel and John, Peter comes to the deathbed of Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ* and he boldly tells the devil, who is present in the room: 'Out of the way, we were sent here.' Judas has not committed suicide in the hallucination (unlike in the New Testament narrative) and he arrives next. He has grown old and uses a walking stick, but it is clear that he has continued to fight because his hands are scarred and bloody. His first word is 'Traitor!' and he has no sympathy for Jesus: 'Your place was on the cross. That's where God put you. When death got too close you got scared and you ran away. You hid yourself in the life of some man. We did what we were supposed to do. You didn't. You're a coward.' When Peter remonstrates with the apostle for his lack of respect, Judas reveals:

Rabbi, you broke my heart. ... We held the world in our hands. Remember what you told me? You took me in your arms and you begged me, 'Betray me. Betray me. I have to be crucified. I have to be resurrected so I can save the world. I'm the lamb,' you said. 'This is the door. Judas, my brother, don't be afraid. Help me go through the door.' And I loved you so much. I went and betrayed you.

Interestingly, during the shooting of this scene, it was Scorsese who lay on the pallet while Keitel acted out his role (see Kelly 1996: 230) and berated him. Judas continues: 'What business do you have here with women, with children? What's good for men isn't good for God. Why weren't you crucified?' The same question could be asked of the two priests in *Silence*, Rodrigues and Ferreira, who are not martyred but are forced into marriage by the Japanese. Observing Jesus in the 'dream' sequence, Lloyd Baugh describes him as 'an empty, emotionless zombie, going through the motions of living and loving but deriving no real joy from them' (2005: 184) – a representation that resonates with the characterization of Ferreira and Rodrigues as empty shells after their apostasy in *Silence*.

Peter is now the more compassionate of the apostles (as he is in *The Divine Comedy*) and he protests, 'Look at his wounds, Judas, they're bleeding. You're hurting him. That's enough.' It is Judas who is still angry ('He was going to be the

New Covenant. Now there's no more Israel') and puts forward the key argument: 'If you die this way, you die like a man. You turn against God, your Father. There's no sacrifice. There's no salvation.' It is a dilemma that must affect the apostate priests in *Silence*, who turn against God and die as unbelieving men (at least in the eyes of the society in which they live) rather than as soldiers for Christ.

It is at this point that Judas begins to release Jesus from the dream, revealing that the 'angel' is Satan in disguise, so that his actions have the effect of returning Jesus to the cross. In both the dream and the reality, by betrayal or by shaking Jesus awake, Judas ensures that Jesus is crucified and saves humankind. As Jesus responds by crawling off the bed and onto the floor, Satan uses his last gambit: 'There's nothing you can do. You lived this life. You accepted it. ... Just finish it. Die. Die like a man.' In response, Jesus then pleads with God within the hallucination:

Father, will you listen to me? Are you still there? Will you listen to a selfish, unfaithful son? I fought you when you called. I resisted. I thought I knew more. I didn't want to be your son. Can you forgive me? I didn't fight hard enough. Father, give me your hand. I want to bring salvation. Father, take me back. Make a feast. Welcome me home. I want to be your son. I want to pay the price. I want to be crucified and rise again. I want to be the Messiah.

In the dream he has become a Prodigal Son, who is welcomed back by a kind and loving father. As he opens his eyes to find himself (in reality) back on the cross, his final words are joyous: 'It is accomplished. It is accomplished.' (**Figure 7.4**) The film appears to run out as if damaged by light exposure – a genuine accident to the film reel that created an image that Scorsese interpreted as symbolic of the Resurrection.

In the words of St John's Gospel: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life' (Jon. 3.16). Dante explains the Divine plan in *Paradiso*:

For God more bounteous was himself to give
To make man able to uplift himself,
Than if he only of himself had pardoned;
And all the other modes were insufficient
For justice, were it not the Son of God
Himself had humbled to become incarnate. (*Par. VII*)

Discussing the film's ending, Scorsese expressed a similar idea in more prosaic language: 'Go see *Last Temptation*! He transcends; he goes into heaven. What

Figure 7.4 'It is accomplished!' The triumphant ending of *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

more could you want from life than salvation? For all of us! You'll feel great!' (in Hodenfield 2005: 183).

Although *The Last Temptation of Christ* remains one of the most controversial productions in the history of cinema, there have also been some more positive reactions to the film over time – a situation that Dante envisaged in relation to his own work:

For if thine utterance shall offensive be
 At the first taste, a vital nutriment
 'Twill leave thereafter, when it is digested.
 This cry of thine shall do as doth the wind,
 Which smiteth most the most exalted summits,
 And that is no slight argument of honour. (*Par.* XVII)

Roger Ebert, who later admitted that the article by Steven Greydanus (2001) had opened his eyes to the blasphemous issues in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (2008: 102), stated, 'I cannot think of another film on a religious subject that has challenged me more fully. The film has offended those whose ideas about God and man it does not reflect. But then, so did Jesus' (2008: 95). Deacy argues that Scorsese may 'be inviting audiences to respond to Christ as an *exemplar*' and that 'the intrinsically *human* dimension of Jesus' struggle necessarily has import for a contemporary audience for whom, as in the case of Jesus, redemption is no sudden and easily attainable activity but the product of an often painful and

protracted confrontation with one's basic human condition' (2001: 89). Students have 'reported that watching the film made them contemplate the precise nature of their beliefs and doubts about the Christ-story on both historical and theological grounds, about the role of the church in retelling that story, and about the mystery of Christ's dual nature' (Knowles and Whitney 2005: 197).

Scorsese also revealed that he had received 'letters from people who said the film brought them back to their faith, and I'm very happy about that' (in Ehrenstein 1992: 114). He once suggested that anyone who went to certain areas of New York and preached the Sermon on the Mount would be 'robbed, or beaten up, or killed. But if you go there and grab people and say, "Look, I want to tell you about Jesus; I want to tell you about something He just said," then it's a confrontation' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 127). There is no doubt that, in adapting Kazantzakis's novel, Scorsese achieved that 'confrontation'. As he explained, 'When I made *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the actual making of the film was like a prayer, the way certain composers in centuries past dedicated their work to God. And the ritual of filmmaking is akin to a religious ritual. ... There is a certain magic, definitely, but you have to go through hell to get there' (in Behar 2005: 188).