

## Scorsese warns against 'tossing away' spirituality

Hollywood legend Martin Scorsese said that despite "horrific" conflicts around the world involving religion "we shouldn't toss away spirituality". The Oscar-winning maker of "Taxi Driver" and "The Last Temptation of Christ" told reporters on Thursday that he had to overcome "monumental legal and financial problems" to make his latest film "Silence" about the martyrdom of hidden Catholics and Jesuit missionaries in Japan in the 17th century.

"I was constantly discouraged from making it by Hollywood," said the 74-year-old director, who insisted that the human need for spirituality cannot be ignored. He said his film, which he had been trying to make for two decades, was a meditation on the spiritual reflex. "It does exist. So how do we nurture it? Not necessarily through religion but in the spiritual meaning of being a human being." Scorsese said that while "there are horrific events going on in the world" tied to religion "we shouldn't toss away spirituality".

Scorsese met Pope Francis—who is himself a Jesuit—before screening the film at the Vatican last month. The epic has divided critics with many classing it among his best movies, while others were less moved. The director, who has described himself as a "lapsed Catholic, but I am Catholic—there's no way out of it", said "three or four great actors" had turned down parts in the film because they "couldn't take" its religious subject matter or "put themselves in that position" before Adam Driver and Liam Neeson signed up for the project. But Scorsese, who talked to reporters in Paris as the film opened across Europe, was unapologetic about the film addressing the big eternal questions.

### 'This is who I am'

"There is nothing really to hide. That is who I am. I can't be what's fashionable. I'm 74, this is it, and it has value. Somehow the film was interwoven with my personal life like no other picture," he added. Even the grueling shooting of the film in isolated mountain and coastal locations in Taiwan turned out to be a "mystical experience. It was an ordeal," Scorsese admitted. "I am a New Yorker, allergic to everything, who grew up in tenement corridors and I found myself on a mountain top."

He said he chose to stick with the title of Shusaku Endo's historical novel, "Silence", on which the film is based, because "if we come from silence and that is what we are going to, we should become comfortable with it". "The film demands of the audience a certain concentration," he said. The director said he had auditioned one great actor who later turned down the role on the set of his film "The Wolf of Wall Street", which starred Leonardo DiCaprio. But a spokesman for Scorsese later told AFP that he would not be clarifying who the actor was. — AFP



French actress Catherine Deneuve (left) and US film director Martin Scorsese (right) pose during the photocall of the movie 'Silence' in Paris. — AFP

## Obama aide details Prince partnership in estate case

The political activist Van Jones on Thursday detailed an extensive but quiet partnership with Prince as he asked a court to make him a representative to the late pop star's heirs. A former adviser to President Barack Obama who has become a prominent commentator on CNN, Jones revealed after Prince's sudden death in April that the reclusive rocker had tapped him to support charitable work discreetly.

At a hearing in a Minnesota court, Jones spoke for the first time about his involvement in legal wrangling over his estate as two of Prince's heirs, including his sister Tyka Nelson, now want him to become their representative. A Yale-educated lawyer, Jones has spearheaded several projects to reduce poverty including by teaching computer code-writing to young people and bringing environmental jobs to blighted communities. Sporting a purple tie in the Carver County courtroom, he said that he received an anonymous check a decade ago that kept coming back no matter how many times he rejected it.

A lawyer finally told him by telephone, "Look, I can't tell you who this check is from, but I can tell you—favorite color is purple," Jones told the court. He said he received a call soon after: "Hello, this is Prince. I like what you're trying to build." "People misunderstand him as a musical genius," Jones said. "He had a genius for people, for human beings. The only way he could express that was through music." Prince, whose estate is estimated to be worth \$200-300 million, died from an accidental overdose of painkillers without leaving a will and with no recognized children. The court has been working through the claims, some of them colorful, of people who say they are his rightful heirs.

### Siblings divided

Bremer Trust, a Minnesota institution trusted by Prince, was put in charge of his estate after his death but is seeking to transfer management to Comerica, a Dallas-based financial services company. The court must decide who will represent the family to Comerica. While two siblings support Jones, the others back Prince's longtime lawyer L. Londell McMillan. Speaking to the court, McMillan described himself as an expert on the music industry who successfully extracted Prince from a contract with Warner Brothers in the 1990s—when the pop star famously wrote "slave" on his cheek and changed his name to the unpronounceable "love symbol" to protest his conditions.

Jones told the court that he negotiated Prince's return to Warner Brothers in 2014, which brought the artist's master recordings back to him. But Jones cast himself not so much as a businessman but as a guardian of Prince's social mission. "I get enough attention in other parts of my life," he quipped. Jones held a short-lived position advising Obama on the green economy, resigning under pressure from Republicans who objected to his controversial past statements. After he quit, Jones said that Prince called him up and invited him to his Paisley Park estate. Jones said Prince told him to go to Jerusalem for two weeks and pray and then to write up things he wanted to do, promising to get them done. "He changed my life," Jones said. "That kept me going because I was depressed." Jones emerged on Election Day in November as a leading television critic of President-elect Donald Trump, calling his victory a "whitelash" against progress by minorities. — AFP



This file photo shows Van Jones arriving for the 102nd White House Correspondents' Association Dinner in Washington, DC, on April 30, 2016. — AFP

## REVENGE OF THE FEMALE HORROR FILMMAKER

Spine-tingling teaser footage for "The Bye Bye Man" has delighted fans of horror with its offering of all the delicious tropes of a great spooky story. Ahead of its US release on Friday, its trailers have been serving up a bloodcurdling blend of slash, splatter, jump scares, terrified teenagers and a havoc-wreaking ghoul at the center of it all. But it departs from the average run-of-the-mill ghost story in one significant way—the gender of its director, Stacy Title.

Women flock to horror movies—in greater numbers than men, according to various box office surveys—yet until recently a female director was as rare a sight in the genre as a working cellar light or a cell phone with a signal. Over the last few years, however, a small but exhilarating new wave of critically-acclaimed breakout hits made by women have subverted expectations about what high quality horror should look like. From Jennifer Kent's "The Babadook" to "A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night," directed by Ana Lily Amirpour, women are elevating the genre beyond the scope of the traditional male-directed slasher.

The worldwide film industry has churned out many thousands of horror movies since Frenchman Georges Melies directed "Le Manoir Du Diable" ("The Devil's Castle") in 1896. Yet the gender balance remains so out of whack that most user-generated lists of horror films directed by women since the early 20th century on the Internet Movie Database mention fewer than 100.

### Lost generation

"There's a lost generation of very talented women that aren't working because unfortunately, or fortunately for men, it's a sexist business," Title told AFP. Set in 1990s Wisconsin, her movie follows three students who move into an old, off-campus house, where they find themselves preyed on by "The Bye Bye Man," a malevolent supernatural entity that terrorized unsuspecting victims decades earlier. The story comes from occult historian Robert Damon Schneck's 2005 compendium of the spooky and downright weird, "The President's Vampire: Strange-but-true Tales of the United States of America."

Schneck claims his story recalls the real-life experiences of a friend in Wisconsin, who told the author about encountering the



Stacy Title, the youngest woman ever nominated for an Oscar for directing a short movie, directed "The Bye Bye Man". — AFP

menacing supernatural being after playing with a Ouija board. The film boasts established stars like Faye Dunaway and Carrie-Anne Moss, but it is carried by Douglas Smith ("Ouija," "Terminator Genisys" and "Miss Sloane") playing an insecure teenage genius who investigates the Bye Bye Man myth. "I didn't seek out the movie because there was a female director but it was an interesting angle once I was already interested and in the audition process," Smith told AFP. "She was really artistically respectful. She really wanted to rehearse and just have long conversations and get our opinions."

### 'Groundedness'

The 47-year-old Title started out as an editor and investigative journalist, and was the youngest woman ever nominated for an Oscar for directing a short movie. She directed Cameron Diaz and Courtney B. Vance in 1996 black comedy "The Last Supper" and cultivated her horror chops directing "Snoop Dogg's Hood of Horror." "I hate to say it, but you close your eyes and imagine the president, it's a man. Whatever you think of Hillary Clinton, you know that she got hit a lot harder than a guy would've got hit," Title told AFP.—AFP