

Book review

MARTIN SCORSESE – ANTONIO SPADARO, *DIALOGHI SULLA FEDE* [*CONVERSATIONS ON FAITH*], MILANO: LA NAVE DI TESEO, 2024, ISBN 9788834617311 (REVIEWED BY GYÖNGYVÉR BERECKZI¹)

In 2024, the transcript of conversations between the world-famous Italian-American film director Martin Scorsese and Antonio Spadaro SJ, a Jesuit priest and theologian, was published. These conversations took place over nearly eight years, between March 2016 and January 2024, and were compiled into this small interview volume titled “Conversations on Faith”.

The first meeting is about getting acquainted: the priest reveals the director’s areas of interest and their roots. Their shared Italian heritage provides a common denominator that creates a relaxed framework for a conversation that, for today’s persons, borders on the limits of intimacy: the question of faith. The meetings take place in New York and Rome, and on several occasions Helen, Martin Scorsese’s wife, is also present. She is not an active participant in the conversations, but her presence is not insignificant, as it provides glimpses of information about one aspect of the world-famous director’s everyday life and the atmosphere of their home.

In his childhood, in New York’s Italian quarter (where mostly Italian immigrants lived), juvenile delinquency flourished, but he was surrounded by such a large extended family that this family structure protected him from being drawn into the circle of violence. However, as a child, he suffered from severe asthma and due to his illness, he saw a lot from their apartment window – in a sense, too much – and this is reflected in his films. As a child, he served as an altar boy at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, where one young priest in particular, Father Principe, had a special influence on him: he learned enormously from him, he affirms, for example, to be merciful to ourselves and to others. In time, he realized

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that vocation is a very serious matter, and although the priestly path impressed him, he recognized that this was not his calling and that's when he turned his attention to filmmaking.

What Scorsese says about one of his childhood struggles is thought-provoking for the reader – as a child, he couldn't understand how it was possible that the mystery of Jesus's death and resurrection did not shake the world: despite being aware of it, the world did not change, but everything remained the same. This thought can awaken the reader to their responsibility: any child, even those in our own environment, can be similarly shaken today if they experience that there is no harmony between our faith-practicing personality, the one that participates in the liturgy, and our everyday behaviour.

The volume is not an unusual collection of interviews, nor does it portray a celebrity being questioned about his faith, but rather a director who talks about his life and work, revealing that his interests, worldview, and everyday life are permeated by faith. The change that comes from the touch of grace, compassion, the possibility of a good life in an environment steeped in evil, free will, and the experience of divine love are topics that interest him, which he believes in, and that appear in his films. The volume encourages the reader to watch again Scorsese's films directly related to the topic of religion (at least the *Silence* and *'The Last Temptation of Christ'*) with an awareness of the thoughts that motivate the man behind the camera lens.

Scorsese is shockingly honest about the issue of violence in his conversations: he does not deny or embellish the tendency that resides in humans and is present in our everyday lives. The violence depicted in his films, which he saw as a child through the window of his house, was natural to him, and although he was never in danger of becoming involved, he lived and grew up in that reality.

Conversations on Faith is also a volume about respect, as Scorsese is talking about people, events, experiences and books that have a great impact on his work and personality. One may feel the urge of reading some of the books that inspired him that he mentions in these conversations and find a way of better understanding the messages of his films. The volume is an intense voyage, imbued with the wisdom of a lifetime, but still an ongoing search for Jesus.

The English translation is set to appear later this year: *Conversations on Faith*, New York: Grand Central, 2025. The Hungarian translation appeared at Helikon Publishers in János Betlen's translation (*Beszélgetések a hitről*, Budapest: Helikon, ISBN 9789636204907). The book's high-quality execution deserves

REVIEW

special mention, particularly the sewn-in bookmark, which every seasoned but slow reader will appreciate. The cover features a crown of thorns that gains meaning upon reading the text, as it can be linked to the powerful childhood experience mentioned above.