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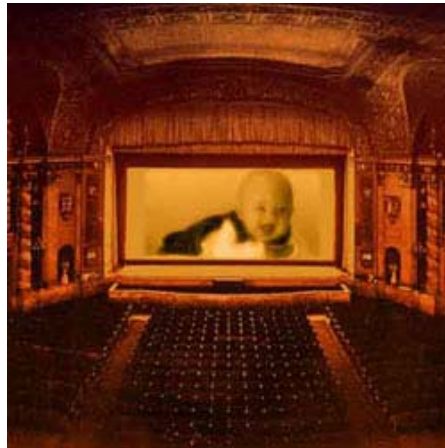
Life's Mysteries Addressed in Film

Cinema Vita Festival Launches in San Francisco

BY VALERIE SCHMALZ
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SAN FRANCISCO — California is where some of the most dangerous, as well as some of the most innovative, ideas originate — and where the battle for life at its beginning and its end continues to be fought in the voting booth and in the state Legislature.



Perhaps most critical is persuasion of hearts and minds of the sanctity of human life. It is with that in mind that organizers are launching the first annual Cinema Vita Film Festival March 7 in San Francisco.

Entries were solicited nationwide, and the festival's sponsors hope interest will increase each year.

Cinema Vita, at the Delancey Street Theater, is sponsored by the San Francisco Archdiocesan Office of Public Policy, the Oakland Diocesan Respect Life Ministry, Marriage for Life, and Ignatius Press. The film festival's judges will include actress Jennifer O'Neill, Dominican Father Michael Morris, professor of Religion and the Arts at the Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology, and Immaculate Heart Radio founder and President Doug Sherman.

Interviewed here is Vicki Evans, one of the main organizers and the founder of Cinema Vita. She is the respect life coordinator for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, a certified public accountant, and a graduate student in Bioethics at the Pontifical University Regina Apostolorum in Rome.

What inspired the concept of Cinema Vita?

I am a graduate student at Regina Apostolorum in Rome. Last summer,

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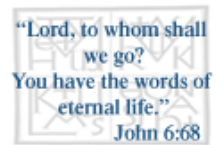
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a course was offered called Cinema Forum. It was a fascinating course because it pointed out how much of a role the popular media and particularly movies play in the life of society.

We would watch movies and then we would critique them. The movies were often disquieting because they were on beginning-of-life issues, end-of-life issues, artificial intelligence issues. It was fascinating to see how having watched a movie, you could be not just swayed by it, but touched by it, influenced by it.

I realized that you can take an individual and put him or her in the audience of a really good speaker but the speaker won't be able to hold their attention like a movie does. With a movie, they'll come away with the message that the movie is trying to deliver. Maybe they'll go home and think about it and either discard the message or endorse and adopt the message, but still the message will be more lasting and hard-hitting.

This is much harder to achieve with a lecture.

What do you hope Cinema Vita will achieve?

We want people to open their minds to the ethics of contemporary issues like embryonic stem-cell research, cloning, assisted suicide, and really think about the moral implications of using life instead of respecting it. The dramatization of abstract theories goes a long way towards helping people understand the importance of these concepts, what they mean in real life.

What will the format of the film festival be? What will audiences who attend the event on March 7 experience?

This is the first year for our film festival. We will show the winning entries in our three categories, high school, college and an open category. In addition, we will show *After the Truth*, an internationally acclaimed German film about the fictional trial of the Auschwitz death camp's "Angel of Death" Josef Mengele.

It was never known what became of Mengele, so the movie picks up after World War II, where Mengele is in South America. Mengele kidnaps an attorney because he wants to go back to Germany and be tried for war crimes so he can tell his story. And his story is absolutely shocking and he tells it with no remorse. This movie is so powerful.

We plan to have a panel discussion after viewing the films in order to talk about the primary theme of this movie — does the end justify the means?

The focus will be on the utilitarian concept of: Is it okay to experiment on human life if it's going to advance medical science and cure disease? This is the question we face today in all the embryonic stem-cell research and cloning debates. Then we'll go on to talk about our three winning films and the value of the messages they conveyed.

What do you want people to take away from the experience?

That the greatest mystery we face on earth is the mystery of life and its significance. There are two moments when this mystery is most profound: at life's beginning and at its end.

We are asking our emerging filmmakers to bring a new twist to this mystery, one that will resonate with society and challenge its thinking about what life really means — and what it means to take it away.

Life is most fragile at its earliest stage, conception, and at its end stages. This is when it needs protection.

Life is not a commodity. It is not something to be experimented with. It has an innate God-given dignity. This is what we want our viewers to remember when popular culture tells them life is disposable.



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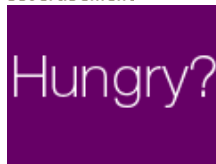
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 #1 - WY 36 at 38 Parishes

AK	0	MS	1
AL	1	MT	1
AR	1	NC	0
AZ	5	ND	3
CA	19	NE	35
CO	25	NH	1
CT	2	NJ	1
DE	1	NM	1
DC	0	NV	1
FL	4	NY	3
GA	1	OH	12
HI	0	OK	0
IA	7	OR	1
ID	0	PA	5
IL	3	RI	2
IN	2	SC	0
KS	15	SD	7
KY	2	TN	1
LA	25	TX	29
MA	3	UT	0
MD	4	VA	2
ME	2	VT	0
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MN	8	WI	14
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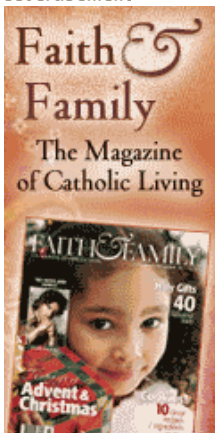
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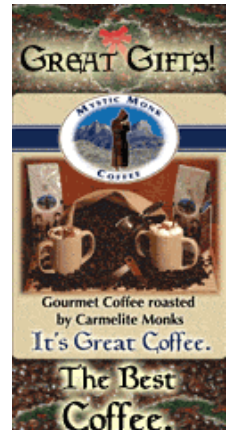
Valerie Schmalz writes
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