

# “ELIZABETH” IS “RESOLUTELY ANTI-CATHOLIC”

When Queen Elizabeth I, a Protestant, succeeded her Catholic half-sister Mary to the throne in 1558, England was in the midst of seething Catholic-Protestant conflict. It was spawned by her father, King Henry VIII, who broke with the Catholic Church over the pope’s refusal to sanction his divorce, and persecuted those who remained faithful to Rome—ultimately beheading Thomas More.

A look at Gramercy Pictures’ “Elizabeth,” however, would leave one with the impression that the religious strife was all the doing of the Catholic Church. The film is “resolutely anti-Catholic,” according to a *New York Times* review, complete with a “scheming pope” who sends a priest to plot against and assassinate Elizabeth.

“It does the movie dishonor that the script is needlessly, viciously anti-Catholic,” Mary Kunz wrote in an otherwise glowing review in the *Buffalo News*. “Every single Catholic in the film is dark, cruel and devious. That goes for everyone, from the pope on down. The Anglicans, on the other hand, are rational and humorous, glowing with faith and common sense.” While Elizabeth is portrayed as courageously following her conscience, “nothing is said about the courage and dignity of the Catholic martyrs, most notably St. Thomas More.” As for Henry VIII’s role in initiating the religious strife by persecuting Catholics, “The movie gets out of that with the simple phrase ‘Henry VIII is dead.’”

Did all the reviewers pick up on the anti-Catholicism of the movie? No, but the progressive Catholic magazine *Commonweal* did. What’s that, you say? Well, here’s exactly what they said: “So is this movie anti-Catholic? Yes, but only for the sake of melodrama, not doctrine.” We just

knew there would be a “but.” But (there’s that word again) at least *Commonweal* noticed there was some element of anti-Catholicism in the film, which is more than caught the eye of the U.S. Catholic Conference in its review.