

Film Set In Inquisition Goes Too Far

"Goya's Ghosts," an English-language film released in Europe in 2006, opened in the United States on July 20. Set in Spain in 1792, the story recounts the fate of Inés, a young woman (a friend of the painter Francisco Goya), who is arrested by the Holy Office of the Inquisition after being accused of secretly practicing Jewish customs. The Catholic League's Kiera McCaffrey viewed the movie to see how the Church was portrayed. Here is what she saw:

Brother Lorenzo, the fiery antagonist of the film, is disturbed by the fact that the Church isn't doing enough to lock away and kill those who are not faithful Catholics. Lorenzo chiefly targets is those individuals who are "Judaizers" and secretly retain some of the practices of their Jewish ancestors. Brother Lorenzo appeals to the bishop and the other Spanish clergy, who put him in charge of renewed efforts in the Inquisition. Lorenzo teaches the priests how best to catch Jews, by ways such as being wary of any naked man who shields himself from view.

Two of Lorenzo's disciples take their duty of observation to a local tavern, where they spy the beautiful young Inés having dinner with her brothers. After Inés refuses a pork dish, she is soon summoned to appear before leaders of the Inquisition. Seated in a dank dungeon, Inés is accused of being a heretic and practicing Jewish rituals. Insisting she just doesn't like pork, Inés jumps at the chance to "prove" it. She doesn't realize that this involves "the Question," a method of interrogation involving tying the suspect's hands behind her back and lifting her off of the ground by her wrists. Moaning in pain, Inés continues to insist that she is a good Catholic. The Church leaders implore her to tell them the truth. Seeing no other way out, Inés asks them to tell her what the truth

is—she'll agree to anything. She soon signs a "confession" for the crime of being a Judaizer, and is sent to prison.

After Inés' rich father tries to bribe the bishop to release his daughter, the cruel bishop takes his money and keeps the girl locked away. To free her would mean admitting that "the Question" can provoke false confessions, and the Church has great faith in "the Question."

While rotting in prison, Inés is repeatedly raped by Brother Lorenzo, and gives birth to a daughter who is taken from her and sent to a convent school. (The girl runs away and becomes a prostitute.) Inés is eventually freed when French forces release the prisoners of the Inquisition and jail the clerics, but she is now mentally unbalanced and physically disabled.

The general subject of the Inquisition itself is not a problem. Certainly grave sins were committed by leaders of the Church during that time, and this is not something that should be forgotten by Catholics or anyone else. In 1998, Pope John Paul II himself called for the Church to take an objective look at the historical truth of the matter and make an "examination of conscience" about the actions of certain members of the Church.

The issue with "Goya's Ghosts," however, is that every member of the clergy in the film is shown to be cruel and vengeful. All the priests are hungry for blood, and are more concerned with controlling the attitudes of the public than looking after the spiritual well-being of the faithful. The viewer is not provided with one redeeming member of the clergy. Anyone knowing little about the Catholic Church would walk away from the film thinking there is nothing at all positive about the faith.

In the United States, at least, there haven't been many people even walking into the theater. Panned by critics throughout the country as laughable and poorly melodramatic, "Goya's

Ghosts" didn't meet with as much enthusiasm as it did in Europe, and failed to make a dent in the box office. It's refreshing to know that painting the Church as corrupt and brutal isn't enough by itself to pull in paying customers.