

PBS TO AIR DOCUDRAMA ON INQUISITION

On May 9 and 16, PBS will air a four-part docudrama called "The Secret Files of the Inquisition." Catholic League president Bill Donohue raised some concerns today:

"PBS will not air a movie that its officials say paints Muslims in a bad light, 'Islam vs. Islamists,' but it has no qualms about showing a flick that Catholics have every right to question. This film is advertised on PBS's website with an eerie black background depicting all the 'T's' as crosses. All that is missing is Dracula's voiceover. 'For over half a millennium a system of mass terror reigned,' it says, and 'Thousands were subject to secret courts, torture and punishment.' This is plainly dishonest.

"As British historian Henry Kamen has shown in his magisterial work, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, almost all the conventional wisdom about the Inquisition is wrong. By comparison with secular courts at the time, the Inquisition's methods were more humane, e.g., defendants could be represented by an attorney. Edward Peters, another student of the period, says, 'Modern historiography has completely blown the old Inquisition propaganda out of the water. No one seriously contends that hundreds of thousands or millions were killed, or that the Protestant countries were any more humane than Spain was.' Indeed, scholars today refer to the old school mythology as 'the Black Legend,' a tale of lies spun by Elizabethan England. No wonder that in 1994, BBC/A&E aired 'The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition.'

"Here's what we know. Of the approximately 125,000 cases tried by the Spanish Inquisition, 1 percent resulted in the death penalty. Of the so-called witch hunts, where women were burned at the stake, secular courts executed 50,000 (not all of whom

were women); less than 100 were killed by the Inquisition. Solzhenitsyn once compared the killings that took place in the Soviet Union in 1937 and 1938 to the killings that took place during the Spanish Inquisition and found that 20,000 were killed per month in the U.S.S.R. and 10 were killed per month during the Inquisition. But don't look for such comparisons on PBS. To do so might get in the way of the truth."