

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."

IS PBS ANTI-MUSLIM?

Last night, Catholic League president Bill Donohue saw the documentary, "Islam vs. Islamists: Voices from the Muslim Center," at a private screening in New York City. Originally scheduled to air on PBS as part of an 11-part series dealing with post-9/11 developments, the film has run into trouble with PBS for being "alarmist."

Donohue addressed this issue today:

"The only thing alarmist about this film is PBS: How dare a public entity take money from the taxpayers for an allegedly public service and then spike a documentary that doesn't accord with its politics. In the insular world that PBS officials live in, real Muslims are Islamists—radical extremists who want to kill the infidel (read: mostly Jews and Christians). Yet this documentary demonstrates that most Muslims are not extremists. Which begs the question: Is PBS anti-Muslim for trying to censor this look at the way most Muslims live?

"By casting Islamists as unrepresentative of Muslims, this documentary is able to do more to generate positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Western world than anything PBS has previously aired. To ban it is to contribute

to the invidious stereotype that most Muslims are machete-wielding thugs.

“If there is one criticism of the film that needs to be made it is the unchallenged assertion, made by several Islamists, that they desire to live in Western nations as ‘parallel societies.’ This is absurd: the Amish live parallel to the rest of us—these extremists want to impose *sharia* law on everyone. And on this score, there can be no compromise.

“Pope Benedict XVI was unfairly criticized last year for citing Islam as a religion that too often allows reason to become unbuckled from faith. This film offers proof that he was right. It also shows, as the Holy Father understands, that most Muslims do not incline to violence.”

Contact PBS President and CEO Paula Kerger: pkerger@pbs.org and tell her you want PBS to air this film.