

“THE VIRGIN SUICIDES” EXPLOITS CATHOLICISM

In last month's *Catalyst*, we flagged a movie that promised to be offensive to Catholics, “The Virgin Suicides.” Tamara Collins, a research analyst at the Catholic League who monitors Hollywood, saw the movie when it opened in select theaters in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

It is a film about five Catholic teenage girls who are reared in a sexually repressive home; all of them eventually commit suicide. Written and directed by Sofia Coppola, the daughter of Francis Ford Coppola (who produced the movie), the film opens with an attempted suicide that shows the blood falling on a holy card of the Virgin Mary with rosary beads in the background.

Throughout the film, Catholic imagery and ritual are prevalent. The repressive parents make their girls virtual prisoners in their own home, making them destroy their rock records after having heard a “spirited church sermon.” The movie opened nationwide in May.

Here is what our review of the movie said:

“The *New York Times* says ‘The Virgin Suicides’ speaks of boys in the movie who seek ‘to free the girls from the prison of their strict Catholic household.’ *Newsday* said ‘The putative villain may be Mom (Kathleen Turner), who runs her house like a convent.’ From the *San Jose Mercury News*, we learn of a ‘guilt-racked Catholic [mother] ready to lock her girls away like so many storybook Rapunzels.’ And so on.

“Our own take on the movie isn't much different: a nexus is crafted, the purpose of which is to tie the teachings of the Church on sexuality to the girls' suicides. Now if this film were about the real world—and not the stereotypical view of

Catholicism as entertained in Hollywood—it would show a Catholic home where the girls lived rather ordinary lives and grew up to be mothers.

“A true story about sexuality and teenage suicide would show what happens to adolescents exposed to a ‘value-free’ Sixties-type home. It is not the kids who learn from the Dr. Lauras who wind up a psychological mess, it is the ones who were told by the Dr. Ruths to act on their own appetites who wind up that way. And oh, yes, the movie’s opening on Good Friday was not lost on the Catholic League.”