

TWO FALSE ALARMS

Media reports about two possibly anti-Catholic films reached us this summer. “Brideshead Revisited” and “Hamlet 2” appeared likely to be affronts to Catholic sensibilities and thus we went to see them so we would be prepared to respond, if necessary. While Hollywood is still not religion-friendly, not every film focusing on religion, particularly Catholicism, merits the response we provided for “The Golden Compass” or “Dogma.”

“Brideshead Revisited” is based on the classic novel by Evelyn Waugh. It tells the story of the Flyte family, all of whose members are portrayed as dysfunctional because of the mother’s rigid Catholicism. The son is a gay alcoholic; the daughter is torn between her faith and her atheist lover; the father is driven into exile with his mistress because of his wife’s repressive Catholicism. Yet, in the end, the beauty and necessity of the faith shines through as the daughter and father both repent, leading to hope that the atheist will follow suit.

While not as overtly Catholic and positive as the book, the movie managed to critique aspects of Catholicism without being anti-Catholic.

The other film, “Hamlet 2,” did not turn out to be anti-Catholic; rather, it is inappropriate in its portrayal of Jesus. It tells the story of a failed actor turned teacher who puts on a musical to save the school’s drama department. In the play, he portrays Jesus with his class singing and dancing with him. The intent is not to mock Jesus, but to make him a celebrity, who is the object of the other characters’ admiration and worship. The film also tries to be politically incorrect in poking fun at stereotypes of gang members, the ACLU, and others.

Neither movie was particularly well done nor did the films find significant audiences. The films have troublesome elements but overall were not as offensive as we initially suspected.

Since the films did not flagrantly attack Catholicism, we used our discretion in not making public statements, which would have drawn unmerited attention to these movies.