

“DOGMA”

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The Catholic League's objections to the movie, "Dogma," rest mostly on our reading of the script. But don't take our word for it, just read what those who have been associated with the movie have said about it. And then read what the film critics have said.

Virtually all of them acknowledge the profanity, violence and vulgarity that marks the movie (it would be asking too much of them to acknowledge the blasphemous elements of "Dogma," though some come pretty close). That they are not troubled by any of this is the subject of another discussion.

So read what the creators, actors and critics have said about the movie. When demonstrating the reality of anti-Catholicism (or any form of bigotry), there's no better evidence than to cite chapter and verse what the offenders, and their sympathizers, have said.

William A. Donohue
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Kevin Smith's Agenda:

Kevin Smith: "My characters are free: no social mores keep them in check."
(*Time*, 6/9/97)

Smith is asked in an interview, "You grew up a Catholic...." He answers: "Oh yeah. I'm a firm believer in God and Jesus, very spiritual. I just don't necessarily agree with any organized religion. I stuck it out as a Catholic for a long time, but in the end—you know, it's called the Celebration of the Mass, but it's no party. No one's having a good time." (*ZUG*, a comedy website, 4/5/99)

The movie "was inspired by Smith's irreverent attitude toward his Catholic upbringing." (Jeffrey Wells, *Boston Herald*, 7/6/98)

On why Smith made the movie: "I made it because I had become disenchanted with the Catholic Church and I had a crisis of faith." (*Daily Telegraph*, 5/22/99, Jessica Callan)

Smith unfurls his logic about the movie: "It's irreverent whilst still being very reverent at the same time."
(www.newsaskew.com/dogmarc/oldnews.html; *Dogma: Rumor Control*; Archived News)

Smith's duplicity exposed: "Miramax and the Catholic League have been brawling for months over *Dogma*, a film about holy men behaving badly, which will hit theaters later this year. But even as the filmmakers invoke artistic freedom to defend *Dogma's* edgy religious scenes, they are quietly considering whether to re-edit other scenes, including one in which a pair of pistol-packing angels, played by Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, bullet-spray a board meeting at a large corporation, and another in which they have massacred a group outside a church. 'There's definitely the question of Columbine to consider,' says director Kevin Smith." (*Time*, 6/28/99, Adam Cohen)

Offensive Nature of “Dogma” Acknowledged

Playboy on “Dogma”: “If members of the Catholic League don’t picket this one, they’re comatose.” (*Playboy*, 12/1/98)

John Pierson, Independent Film Channel host, said, “The Catholic League probably will have a problem.” (*New York Post*, 4/5/99) He also said, “There will be a really intense storm.”

Disney on “Dogma”: A top company executive for Disney said he was dismayed by the movie and labeled it “inappropriate for all of our labels.” (*New York Times*, 4/8/99, Bernard Weinraub)

Miramax on Disney: Harvey Weinstein, when asked about Disney’s reaction (he was at Cannes at the time), said that although no one directly asked him to shelve it, “what they said is: we have a problem.” (*The Independent*, 5/21/99).

Ben Affleck on the movie: Affleck says the most controversial part of the film is the contention “that Mary and Joseph had sex and that they had a kid, and therefore there is a (relative) of Christ on Earth who is a girl, and she works at an abortion clinic.” He then admits that “The movie is definitely meant to push buttons.” (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 6/25/98, Cindy Pearlman)

Affleck lets go again: “It’s a satire on the Catholic Church. It’s Kevin’s take on the perils of dogmatic beliefs and being inflexible.” (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 3, 1998).

Affleck calls it like it is: “It’s a rumination on faith and dick jokes.” (*Entertainment Weekly Online*, 6/14/99, Angel Ayes)

Critic calls it a diatribe against Catholicism: “It’s essentially a jokey diatribe against Catholic and Christian mythology that will almost certainly cause a stir when it hits theaters.” (Jeffrey Wells, *Boston Herald*, 7/6/98)

Wells admits “it does lampoon the canons of Catholicism.” (Jeffrey Wells, *Mr. Showbiz*, 6/25/98)

Celebrity page of *New York Post*: “Miramax may have to dump promising young filmmaker Kevin Smith over his latest movie, which satirizes the Catholic Church and Catholic faith in a manner certain to offend the faithful.” (*New York Post*, Page Six, 4/5/99)

Reviewer says that the movie “has the look of rattling Roman Catholic sensibilities like no movie since 1988’s *Last Temptation of Christ*. What’s to be upset about? How about a trash-talking 13th Apostle? A female descendant of Jesus who runs an abortion clinic? The assertion that Joseph and Mary had sex? A Diety obsessed with skee-ball?” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, W. Speers, 4/6/99)

“A black comedy about Catholicism.” (*Hollywood Reporter*, Dana Harris and Cathy Dunkley, 4/13/99)

“Smith’s screenplay contains any number of scenes likely to vex the faithful: There’s a trash-talking apostle, a demon made of excrement, a riff on Joseph and Mary’s sex life, and a Skee-ball-obsessed God. In an attempt to make the Catholic denomination friendlier, the church in *Dogma* launches a ‘Catholicism—Wow!’ campaign, featuring a smiling ‘Buddy Christ’ who no longer hangs from the cross but instead offers a thumbs-up salute.” (*Premiere*, John Horn, May 1999)

“The film combines Smith’s beloved dick jokes with the Old Testament.” (*Playboy*, 12/1/98)

A reporter for *Entertainment Weekly*: “The lead character, who goes on to save the world, the kind of neo-Mary, works at an abortion clinic. These are tough things to give an audience and not have some kind of reaction.” (Rebecca Asher Walsh, “Fox Report” with Paula Zahn, Fox News Channel, 6/23/99)

Reporter Mary DeTurrís captures the film’s essence: “Amid a bizarre tale where more characters are angels and demons disguised as humans than actual human beings, there is a constant barrage of Catholic jokes and bathroom humor that brings to mind the work of a couple of fifth-grade boys with too much free time.

“The plot is at times so convoluted that it should come with Cliff Notes. Viewers go back and forth between the avenging angels, Loki and Bartelby, and Bethany and her band of idiots—which includes Rufus, the gutter-mouthed ‘13th apostle’ whom the script says was removed from the Bible because of his campaign to recognize that Jesus was black.

“It would be impossible to list all of the scenes that would offend Catholics, as writer-director Kevin Smith has managed to lay a twisted view of Catholicism over just about every aspect of this film. One of the more offensive scenes, however, is when the muse Serendipity, who has given up her place in heaven to work as a stripper on earth, compares the Mass to bad sex and then says that Catholics ‘don’t celebrate your faith, you mourn it.’

“Smith, who has been reported as saying he is a practicing Catholic and views his film as ‘pro-faith,’ also has a Catholic cardinal declare that the Church is going to replace the crucifix with a smiling, winking Jesus giving two thumbs up.”

(*Our Sunday Visitor*, Mary DeTurrís, 7/11/99)

“The filmmaker clearly selected the subject to shock, offend, titillate and generate publicity.”

(*National Catholic Register*, quote by Rob Long of Cheers!, 7/11-17/99)

Cannes Reviews

Variety, 5/24/99, by Todd McCarthy

“A very vulgar pro-faith comedy rather than a sacrilegious goof....”

“As it currently stands, Kevin Smith’s fourth feature seriously belabors its assault on the established denominations and institutions, in particular the Roman Catholic Church, that he thinks have become too corrupt and calcified to represent the great beliefs they should convey with purity and vigor.”

“Intensely irreverent jokes and incidents are strewn throughout that make those in the much funnier ‘Monty Python and the Holy Grail’ look timid by comparison.”

Bartleby (Ben Affleck)

and

Loki (Matt Damon)

The two fallen angels start a killing spree on their own journey to New Jersey. It makes “for scenes of mass slaughter that will prove even more disagreeable to many U.S. viewers in the context of current events than they would have previously.”

Cardinal Glick (George Carlin)

“Pic gets off to a bumpy start as three demonic kids beat up an older man with hockey sticks, whereupon a cardinal in New Jersey (George Carlin), distressed over the church’s negative rep, kicks off his ‘Catholicism Now!’ campaign by introducing a new image to replace the crucifix, a statue of a jovial-looking Jesus winking and giving the thumbs-up sign.”

Nun (Betty Aberlin)

In the beginning of the movie, right after the Cardinal scene (above), we get this:

“Numerous early cheap jokes, including a nun abandoning her calling in order to pursue the pleasures of the flesh and a man reading Hustler magazine in the church, don’t bode particularly well for what’s to come.”

Bethany (Linda Fiorentino)

McCarthy writes that Bethany is “a Catholic abortion clinic worker who is feeling a crisis of faith due to her disappointments in life....”

Eventually, Bethany “realizes that she is the ‘last scion’ of the Jesus line,” thus does Smith insinuate that Joseph and Mary had sex and left Bethany as their descendant.

Metatron (Alan Rickman)

Metatron recruits Bethany. He is described as “a disgruntled angel.”

Jay (Jason Mewes)

Jay is “obscenely rude and tells Bethany he likes to hang at abortion clinics because it’s a good place to meet available chicks, and sidekick Silent Bob (Smith).”

Rufus (Chris Rock)

There is “a nude black man named Rufus (Chris Rock), who falls from the sky and announces that he was the 13th apostle but was cut out of the Bible because of his color.” Rufus also complains that he is “pissed” about everything that has been done in the name of Jesus and then says, of Jesus, “Nigger owes me 12 bucks.”

Serendipity (Salma Hayek)

“Turning up as a stripper is a celestial muse named Serendipity (Salma Hayek)....”

Azrael (Jason Lee)

Labeled as “a vaguely defined demon,” he “pops up at intervals with his hockey-sticking goons to threaten the group.”

God (Alanis Morissette)

She is labeled “a truly goofy deity.”

Hollywood Reporter, 5/27/99, by David Hunter

“Celestial beings without genitals, demonic bar bullies made of human excrement, an almighty God who likes to visit Earth for kicks—the gory, giggly church of Kevin Smith has opened its doors wider than ever with ‘Dogma.’”

“Smith’s often crude and silly gospel won’t amuse all parishioners.”
“With many rude and offensive jokes, the movie is obviously too hot a tamale for corporate mother church Disney....”

“Sure, Catholicism is the object of withering satire that lets few opportunities go by to subvert the canon, but the cumulative effect is no worse or no more mean-spirited than Monty Python’s ‘Life of Brian.’”

LA Weekly, 6/1/99, by Manohla Dargis

Dargis describes it as “comedy of the lowest order (anal sex) and highest (the Apostles).”

New York Times, 5/22/99, by Janet Maslin

She says of the movie that it “is as smart and articulate as it is wildly irreverent.” Maslin says there are “a few gratuitous gross-outs” that “dilute its effect.”

Entertainment Weekly, 6/4/99 by Rebecca Ascher-Walsh & Jeff Jensen
Movie labeled a “raucous satire on Catholicism starring Matt Damon and Ben Affleck as homicidal angels.” They also reported that one of the prospective distributors, a studio executive, “summed up his opinion of the two-hour-plus comedy by sticking his finger down his throat.”

Newsday (FanFare), 5/30/99

Movie labeled “Smith’s thoughtful but rather irreverent exploration of religion?”

Houston Chronicle, 5/30/99, by Shelley Pannill

Movie labeled as one which “pokes often-grisly fun at Catholicism.”

USA Today, 5/24/99, by Harlan Jacobson

“The fast and witty result may incite protest by Catholic groups that do not see Scripture as a jumping-off point for art—language, sex and a walking pile of excrement sent from the devil to carry out the wayward angels’ mission. A lot of films, including Antonia Bird’s *Priest*, have drawn fire for less.”

Washington Post, 6/1/99, by Sharon Waxman

Labeled “an irreverent take on Catholicism.”

She also notes that “Reviewers who saw ‘Dogma’ in Cannes concluded that the film, while not an advertisement for the Vatican, was basically pro-Catholic.”

The Independent (London), 5/21/99, by Roger Clarke

Clarke reports that comparing the third script to the fifth, “it is clear that some of the most controversial sequences have already been jettisoned after earlier Miramax objections. One, in particular, is a South Park-style cartoon advertising ‘Hosties’ breakfast cereals—cereal in the shape of communion wafers, no less, being eulogised over by altar boys who confess to masturbation.”

Daily Telegraph (London), 5/22/99, by Jessica Callan

“The film is punctuated by four-letter words and toilet humour.”

Ottawa Citizen, 5/22/99, by Craig MacInnis

“More than a few critics here found that *Dogma*’s theological reach exceeded its sophomoric grasp. Fart jokes are interspersed with arcane biblical allusions and the script is chock-a-block with stoner humour, ‘70s TV show references and rich, red arterial blood. The latter ingredient spurts from a variety of characters who are brutally dispatched—and the humour is just as blunt.”

Boston Herald, 5/23/99, by Stephen Schaefer

“It’s basically a teen-style study of faith, with lots of ‘*South Park*’-style grossness and bawdy jokes.”

Los Angeles Times, 5/22/99, by Kenneth Turan

“crude adolescent humor”

“wacky”

“irreverent”

New York Post, 4/7/99, by Rod Dreher

“Bethany (Linda Fiorentino), a lapsed Catholic who works at an Illinois abortion clinic, is visited by a seraph named Metatron (Alan Rickman), who tells her she must go on a quest to stop Loki and Bartleby before they pass through the arch. If she fails, God will have been proven fallible, and the entire structure of the universe will collapse.

“Bethany, whose pro-choice views are compared favorably with Catholic pro-life ‘crazies,’ is aided on her quest by Rufus (Chris Rock), a foul-mouthed ‘13th Apostle’ who tells the ‘truth’ about Biblical events.

“Though Christ was celibate, Rufus claims, the Apostles had active sex lives. Mary was a virgin when Christ was conceived, but not always. Says Rufus, ‘Believing a wife never humped her husband—that’s just gullibility!’ Pro-abortion Bethany learns she is descended from a child of Mary and Joseph.

“A stripper-muse named Serendipity (Salma Hayek) compares the Catholic Mass to bad sex: ‘Up, down, up, down, kneel, leave. And the whole time you’d rather be watching TV. You people don’t celebrate your faith; you mourn it.’ And later: ‘It doesn’t matter what you believe in—just that you believe.’”

Dreher also notes that there is a commercial for a breakfast cereal tie-in called “Hosties” that “will strike some as a brilliant parody of modernist Catholic clerics’ attempts to desacralize liturgy and sacraments to appeal to popular culture.”

Perhaps the most revealing comment of all, unwittingly stated, was that of Roger Ebert. After seeing the movie in Cannes, he offered this observation:

Chicago Sun Times, 5/21/99, by Roger Ebert

“There was much laughter and no visible outrage.”

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