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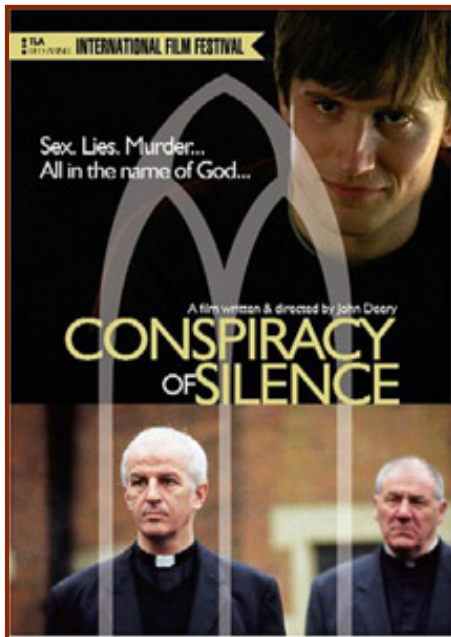
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Conspiracy of Silence

Grade: C-

by Michael C. Sherrin
 EDGE Entertainment Contributor
 Tuesday Jul 19, 2005



Ambition deserves respect but does not guarantee success. Writer and director John Deery's "Conspiracy of Silence" tackles the silent topics of HIV and celibacy in the Catholic Church. His themes are blatant, topical and important, asking if celibacy in the church hurts more than helps and charging priests themselves of living as hypocrites and homosexuals. Unfortunately, this 87 minute movie divides itself among the players in a theme meant to be debated for decades. Deery leaps over vital scenes in order to shove his themes down our throats, forgetting that his interesting but under-developed characters would better accomplish the same.

"Conspiracy of Silence" begins with Daniel McLaughlin (Jonathan Forbes), a young student in a seminary school in Ireland, who gets expelled for being caught leaving another student's room at night. Though nothing happened, the priests cast McLaughlin out without investigation or question. At the same time, a former priest, Father Frank Sweeney (Patrick Casey), commits suicide leading a reporter, David Foley (Jason Barry) to uncovering the secret connection between these two events.

The film breaks up the instant it tries to tell three different stories. Deery tries to show the church's cover-up of their own hypocrisy, McLaughlin's road to being a whistle-blower (without any evidence, in fact), and the reporter's mission to uncover the truth. For extra effort, the reporter has family problems, as does McLaughlin, who also finds a girlfriend once out of the seminary. Full-length movies tell each of these stories alone: "Insider" shows the road of the whistle-blower; "All the President's Men" shows the view from the reporters; and Manchurian Candidate (the original) shows the execution of a conspiracy. 87 minutes cannot accomplish what three full-length movies can.

This helps explain the giant gaps in Deery's story. It seems as if he wrote a better script and then cut out scenes without filling in the blanks in other places. Worst of all, these scenes would like be the most interesting and revealing. We never see McLaughlin first meeting with the reporter. They just instantly trust each other. We never see McLaughlin fall in love. Our first notice is when he announces it on television. Thus, we never understand why he instantly changed his views on celibacy.

On the reporter's end, we never see how he puts this story together. There is a meeting in a car with one photo and uncorroborated statements by bitter priests. These priests, we assume, sought the reporter out, not vice versa, making him more plot device than interesting. His family is so uninteresting; we never learn what happens to them, though he thinks the church kidnapped them.

The church itself appears so evil that anyone affiliated with it becomes stained. Even



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Capote	A
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Wolf Creek	B+
Breakfast On Pluto	B+
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Good Night, And Good Luck	B+
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if the mafia mentality presented is true, Deery's theme would benefit by making the church flawed but good-intentioned and thus sympathetic. He does not seem to want the church destroyed, only changed.

With hollow characters you get hollow performances. Characters who want to philosophize don't have enough time and are left with short, unnatural lines forcing the theme into the plot. Actors have little to react to since little happens. All the interesting stuff happens off scene and is never referred to.

Challenging the church and its stance on sex deserves discussion and Deery's film tried to create some. Unfortunately his ambition took precedent over craft, and he took on more than he could manage and more than was needed. While audiences enjoy simplicity, they are intelligent and observant enough to draw the deepest meanings in the simplest of moments.

Special Features

Special features on a bad movie can make up for lost ground, but the features here are a joke. Apparently inserted as a last minute afterthought, the DVD includes four pages of production notes you have to read in small type on screen. And for those looking to make "Conspiracy of Silence" fan-pages, there are ten stills of scenes just as mundane as when they were moving.

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