

Saints Sinners Sisters

Compiled by JANINE DE VILLIERS

Publications and Promotions

Followers of the Christian faith regard this time of the year as one of the highlights on their religious calendar as they celebrate the birth and crucifixion of Christ. They reflect on their personal spiritual lives, values and philosophies and attempt to communicate a spirit of peace and goodwill to their fellow men.

Quite remarkable, as the different followers of the Christian faith have been involved in religious upheavals, intrigue, conflict and persecutions since the earliest times. Various religious leaders have come to the fore during these troubled times and their stories still continue to fascinate.

Seeing that the Christian faith is currently in the spotlight, interesting material from the Central Video Collection featuring various aspects of this religion is highlighted here.

Saints

The Company: Inigo and his Jesuits / producer and director, Joseph D Fenton.

Since it was founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540, the religious order known as the Society of Jesus has been both loved and feared. Once regarded as the spiritual elite of the Roman Catholic Church, the Jesuits have always played a prominent role in educational matters, while at various times in history they were much involved in political intrigue. This programme, made to commemorate the birth of St

Ignatius in 1491, first provides an overview of his life and then discusses the changing fortunes of the order over the last five centuries. Particular attention is paid to the aims and achievements of what is the largest private educational system in the world, with some of the footage having been filmed at Stonyhurst College in England. It attempts to shed light on what motivates the Jesuits, with comments from a number of individual members of the order. The programme is presented by actor Cyril Cusack.

Il Poverello: the story of St Francis of Assisi / producer and director, Peter Batty.

Some 800 years after his birth, St Francis of Assisi (1181/82-1226) is still venerated as one of the world's most remarkable religious figures. Though born the son of a wealthy cloth merchant, he embraced poverty and, together with his first disciples, attempted to live according to the gospel. Through his itinerant preaching and

dynamic leadership he reached thousands of people and his teachings had a profound influence on the religious thinking of his time. This film presents his story against the background of the annual Calendimaggio festival, during which the citizens of Assisi remember their medieval heritage. It also relates the founding and growth of the Franciscan orders of men and women, discussing the difficulty of living up to the ideals of St Francis today. Finally it reflects upon the continuing appeal of his philosophy and depicts the influx of pilgrims and tourists who visit the various shrines associated with him.

Saint Patrick: the living legend / producers, Catherine Tiernan and Frank Stapleton; director, Justin McCarthy.

St Patrick was a fifth century bishop who converted Ireland to Christianity. Beyond that, relatively little is known about him, except what he reveals about his personality in his 'Confession'. Despite this, he is now the patron saint of everything Irish and this programme takes a look at someone who, over some 1 500 years, has become an icon. While many of the faithful still undertake pilgrimages in his name, for many more he is the emblem of the St Patrick's Day parades, which are especially popular in the United States. The film examines his changing image over the centuries, discussing such influences such as the Norman conquests and the Reformation. It is based on the book **The living legend of St Patrick** by Alannah Hopkin.

Sisters

Hildegard / director, James Runcie.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was one of the most remarkable women of the Middle Ages. Born of noble parents, she was beset by extraordinary religious visions from an early age. As prioress of the Benedictine cloister of St Disibod on the Rhine, she recorded, painted and dramatised these visions, as well as setting them to music, some of which survive to this day. This programme dramatises a key period of her life, when the befriending of a young, persecuted girl and the care she shows for a



dying, but excommunicated crusader, leads her into conflict with her abbot. Forbidden to take communion and singing the divine service, she takes her case to the Archbishop of Mainz and is eventually acquitted. It ends with her, some of her nuns and her priest, leaving the monastic community to found a new convent. The leading roles are taken by, amongst others, Patricia Routledge, Peter Vaughan and Janet Suzman, and the makers make extensive use of Hildegard's original songs and illustrations.

Behind the veil: nuns / producer, Signe Johansson; director, Margaret Wescott.

As with their counterparts in secular life, the accomplishments of women in the Roman Catholic Church have generally been ignored. Even today, nuns must struggle to be heard by the exclusively male hierarchy and are seldom allowed to play the leading roles to which their numbers and abilities should have entitled them. This two-part film offers a perspective on the turbulent history and remarkable achievements of women in religion, from pre-Christian Celtic communities to the radical sisters of the 1980s. Part I contrasts the experiences of activist nuns with those of a young woman whose search for spirituality in the 1960s led her to a Trappist monastery near Rome. It also explores the roots and manifestations of the denigration of religious women. Part II reviews exceptional periods in history when women did wield power in religious life and focuses specifically on early Christian experiences in Europe. Today many nuns are challenging the status quo and seek some measure of influence in church decisions. The film-makers have interviewed a number of very eloquent individuals who speak of their commitment to this cause, as well as of their religious vocation and the role of the nun in modern society.

The burning times / producers, Mary Armstrong and Margaret Pettigrew; director, Donna read.

In pre-Christian Europe, many pagan religions held sway and in most of them women, especially older ones with a

knowledge of healing, played a dominant role. As the power of the male-dominated church spread, these women were regarded with suspicion, especially as the influences of ancient traditions were slow to die out. The church regarded these remnants of female power as resistance to its authority and, over the years, there was a concerted effort to identify even positive aspects of paganism with devil worship. As a result, countless individuals, the majority of them women, were persecuted and killed as witches. This programme takes an in-depth look at the history of these persecutions. In the process it analyses the reasons for such witch hunts, discussing both its religious and political implications. Made from a strongly feminist perspective, it reveals details of a previously neglected part of social history and argues for an attempt to regain the knowledge and spirituality that has been suppressed for so long.

Related titles

Shadow on the cross / producer, Ray Bruce; director Malcolm Feuerstein.

This programme traces the history of Christian anti-semitism, the role of the church during the Nazi period and the tentative path towards reconciliation between the Jews and Christians during the post-war period.

The Old Believers / producers, Joe Macdonald and John Paskievich; director, John Paskievich.

In 1973 members of an archaic sect of the Russian Orthodox Church settled in a remote settlement in Northern Alberta. They see themselves as the last Christians left and by avoiding contact with the outside world, they hope to preserve the purity of their faith. This film offers an insight into a way of life that is a perpetual act of worship of great moral certainty.

Glastnost film festival. Programme 4. [The temple].

By visiting both giant cathedrals and humble village churches, and talking to believers ranging from the Patriarch of Alexandria to a young monk, the film reassesses the role of religion in Soviet society.

These titles are very relevant during this period and will certainly enhance displays in any library!

Note: Reviews by Freddy Ogterop, Film / Video / DVD Selector, Western Cape Provincial Library Service.

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