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Calvary

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Calvary

Abstract

This is a film review of *Calvary* (2013), directed by John Michael McDonagh.

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Author Notes

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Calvary

(2013)

Directed by John Michael McDonagh

Premiere



After the allegations of child sexual abuse against some members of the Catholic clergy, can we ever look at a priest in a film, book or television show as a blank slate

again? Can we ever wonder what sort of character the priest will be, or will we immediately see the priest character as a potential pedophile? Writers and film makers have been playing with the conventions around the priest character for over 15 years, but *Calvary* deals with this issue head on, when a "good" priest in a small Irish town is threatened with death by one of his parishioners. What is this priest's crime? In this case, it's simply being a Catholic priest. The parishioner was sexually abused by a priest who died, and, seeking closure and payment from the Church, or perhaps God, he decides that a suitable exchange for his suffering is for a good priest to die.

The film follows the priest for this week. In typical Irish/English film dramatic comedy style, there are light moments (some of the scenes between the priest and the altar boy are priceless) and heavy ones (suicide, death, and animal abuse). As the week rounds out, we see that many people in the community are

quite anticlerical. They are disillusioned with the church, and yet, still crave the priest's input and guidance. *Calvary* provides a good entry point into the discussion of what the modern parish might look like, and an opportunity to reflect on the role of the priest in the community as it evolves and reacts to modernity. While most of the parishioners seem to have rejected religion, and punish the priest in some way for his religiosity, they still seem to need him in order to function individually and as a community.

Although one would think that the threat of the priest's impending death would crush the film, it does not. The depiction of him as he carries out his services, home and hospital visits and interacts with the various unique personalities in his community keep the film from getting too morose.

The priest's faith is tested in the film, as he goes through personal crises as well as parish ones, returning to alcohol as a means to cope within this week. As his own humanity is exposed, so too are the sins and needs of the parishioners, and even those that have been dismissive and aggressive to the priest end up requiring his services. Several of the church members flaunt their sins or intents to the priest, perhaps hoping that he will stand up to them and judge them harshly. Instead he supports them and sacrifices for them to the full extent of his ability.

— Jodi McDavid