

Saviors of the Night (2009)

Rated PG-13. Our Ratings: V -2; L -1; S/N-3. Running time: 1 hour 35 min.

*The Lord loves those who hate evil;
he guards the lives of his faithful;
Light dawns for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.
Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name!
Psalm 97:10-12*

Dutch filmmaker Ludi Boekin's *The Spiegel* family leaves film is based on Marga Spiegel's their home the night before 1965 memoir that pays tribute to they a German peasant family that are to be shipped off with saved her and her young daughter their Jewish neighbors to the Karin during the last round up East, of Jews in Westphalia in 1943.

The German title actually means © 2009 Menemsha Entertainment "Among Peasants," and it is its depiction of rural life in Germany that sets it apart from other Holocaust films. Both German-Jewish peasant Siegmund "Menne" Spiegel (Armin Rohde) and farmer Heinrich Aschoff (Martin Horn) had won decorations for their valor in the German army during World War One. When, on the eve of the deportation of Jews to an eastern camp, Menne encounters his friend on the road, Heinrich does not hesitate in inviting Menne's wife Marga (Veronica

Ferres), and daughter Karin (Luisa Mix) to seek refuge on their farm. Marga is tall and blond, and thus would easily blend in—but the obviously Jewish Menne will have to hide elsewhere, which he does, another sympathetic farmer hiding him in an upstairs room in his barn.

The film shows well the development of character, especially in the mother Maria (Margarita Broich), and teen daughter Anni (Lia Hoensbroech). Maria, already burdened by having to give shelter to several refugees from an Allied bombing raid that had destroyed their homes, is not enthusiastic in her welcoming of the new tenants. She is also distracted by the departure of her oldest son Klemens (Marion Kittel) to the eastern front. She also is very upset that Heinrich is not home when the boy takes his leave. Apparently a reserved woman, she surprises Klemens with a kiss on the cheek. What she does not know is that Heinrich has arranged a meeting with Klemens at the local tavern where he can send off his son with a toast—Maria being highly disapproving of the boy drinking.

As Marga and Karin settle in and work with the family, Maria warms up to the pair. When she has to let Anni in on the secret identity of their lodgers (who now call themselves the Kronens), she has to work hard to persuade the girl that they are doing the right thing, Anni being an ardent member of the Hitler Youth and attracted to Hitler Youth group leader Erich (Daniel Fliieger), had bought into the Nazi ideology. The entire family is thus pulled in opposite directions. On the one hand, they all have been supporters of their country, and Anni especially of Hitler. But they also are Christians, as we see in a scene in which they and their boarders attend mass at their Catholic church. Fortunately for the Spiegels, the

values of their hosts' faith win out over their sense of duty to their government.

The film never sensationalizes or over dramatizes the plight of the characters. Menne does sneak back to his village to witness the Nazis rounding up his Jewish neighbors and distant relatives, but there is little of the brutality that is shown in such films as Schindler's List. What is well depicted is the tension of all concerned that suspicious neighbors or officials might discover the identity of the the Spiegels. When a local official visits the Aschoff's and is taken by cute little Karin, asking her a few questions, Marga stands by anxiously. And Menne's host is the father of Erich. The youth strongly suspects that his father is hiding someone, but does not venture up to the room where Menne is housed. One of the most affecting scenes is near the end when Menne, forced to spend long boring hours all by himself, is scarcely able to talk when reunited with Marga and Karin.

It is good to learn that not all Germans strongly supported the Holocaust, but it was a tiny minority that resisted it. We are told that of the 70 million Germans, just 485 have been enshrined by Israel as "Righteous Gentiles." There is a touching prologue in which we see the real Marga (95 at the release of the film) and her longtime friend Anni visiting the set and meeting the cast. When this is released on DVD it should find the large audience that it deserves.

Note: Discussion questions are available with this review for those subscribing to the Visual Parables journal. The journal also includes many extras—book reviews, the use of films for church seasons, a lectionary related column, and more. Hundreds of old reviews are also available in the subscribers; section. Check out the [sample issue](#).