

discussion guide for

Escape from the Grand Guignol

**NOTE: These discussion topics contain SPOILERS,
so DO NOT READ before viewing the film (as the
film contains several plot twists).**

KEY SCRIPTURES:

1 Corinthians 1:18

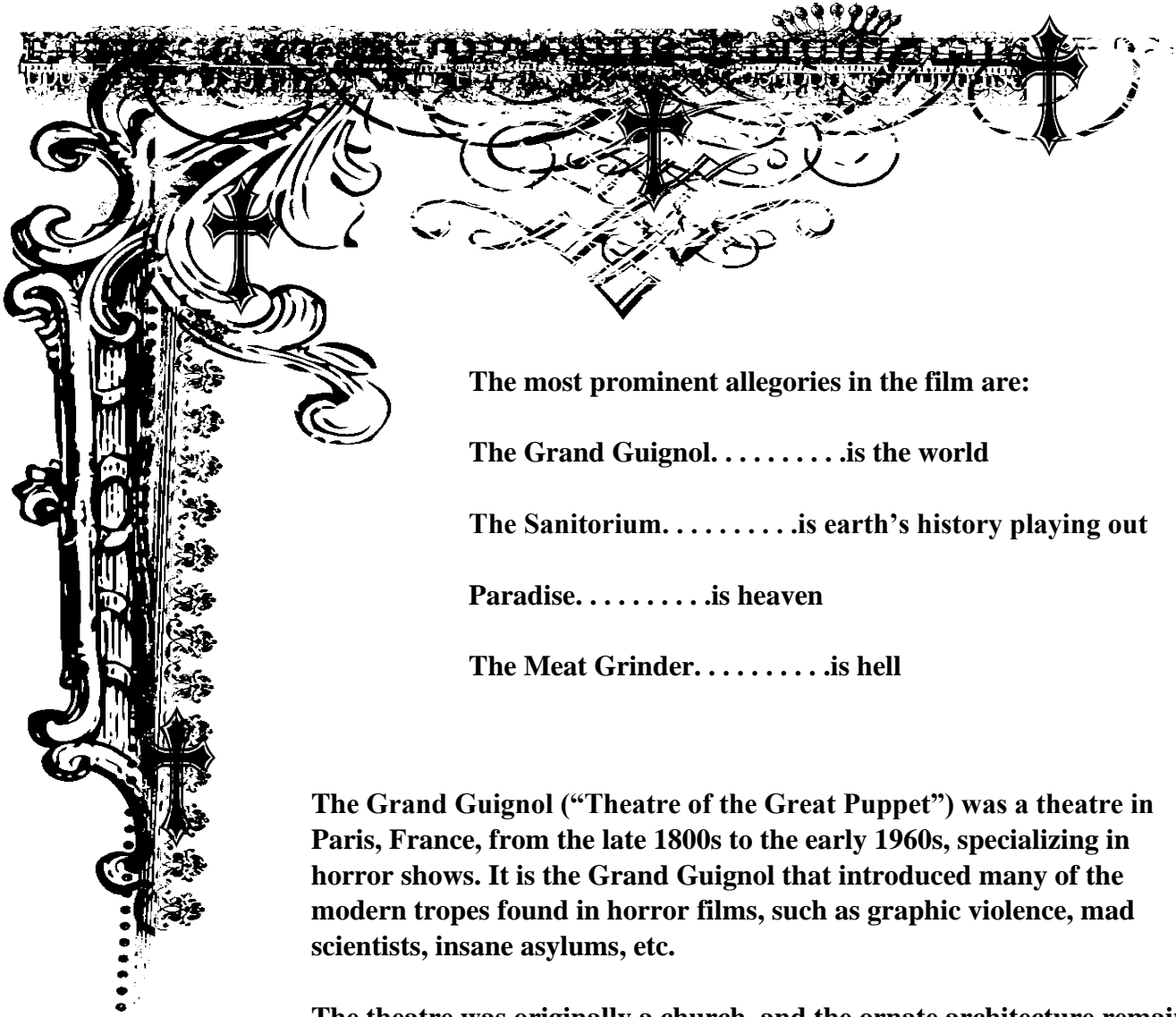
The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are saved it is the power of God. (The rest of this passage is also key, as well as 1 Corinthians 3:18-20)

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.

Romans 7:15-25

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I want to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. . . But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells. . . For the good that I want to do, I do not do; but the evil I do not want to do, that I practice. . . But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity. . . Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God- through Jesus Christ our Lord!



The most prominent allegories in the film are:

The Grand Guignol. is the world

The Sanatorium. is earth's history playing out

Paradise. is heaven

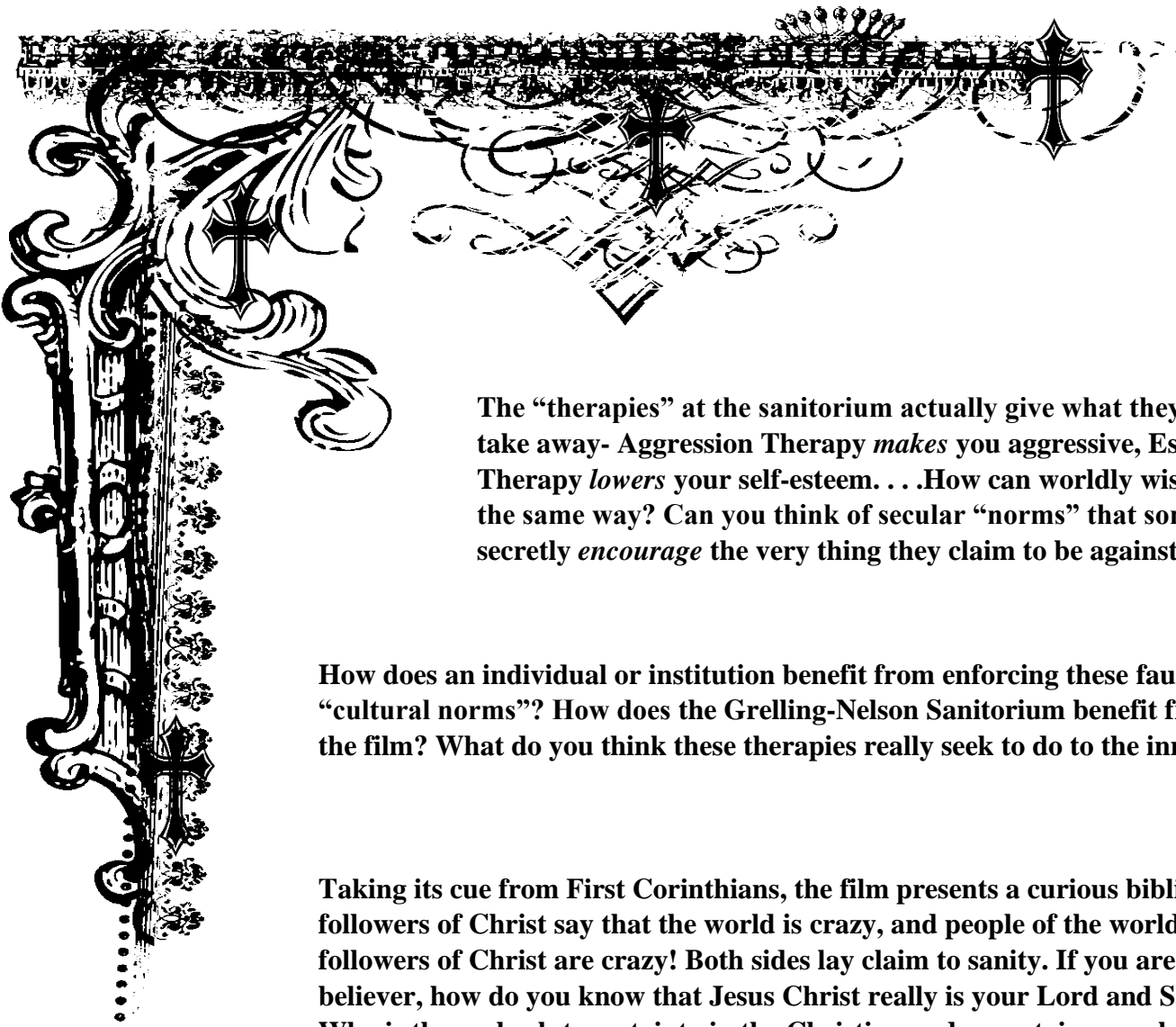
The Meat Grinder. is hell

The Grand Guignol (“Theatre of the Great Puppet”) was a theatre in Paris, France, from the late 1800s to the early 1960s, specializing in horror shows. It is the Grand Guignol that introduced many of the modern tropes found in horror films, such as graphic violence, mad scientists, insane asylums, etc.

The theatre was originally a church, and the ornate architecture remained intact even after its transformation to the Grand Guignol, including angel statues and confessional boxes (which is why ornate gothic architecture became another common horror trope).

Guignol (*geen-yole*) is a traditional French puppet, the French equivalent to Punch from the famous Punch & Judy puppet shows. Grand Guignol is basically “Punch & Judy for Adults”.

The YC film uses the true history of the Grand Guignol as an allegory for God's creation of the world, and humankind's fall from grace in the garden (Genesis 1-3).



The “therapies” at the sanatorium actually give what they claim to take away- Aggression Therapy *makes* you aggressive, Esteem Therapy *lowers* your self-esteem. . . .How can worldly wisdom be the same way? Can you think of secular “norms” that sometimes secretly *encourage* the very thing they claim to be against?

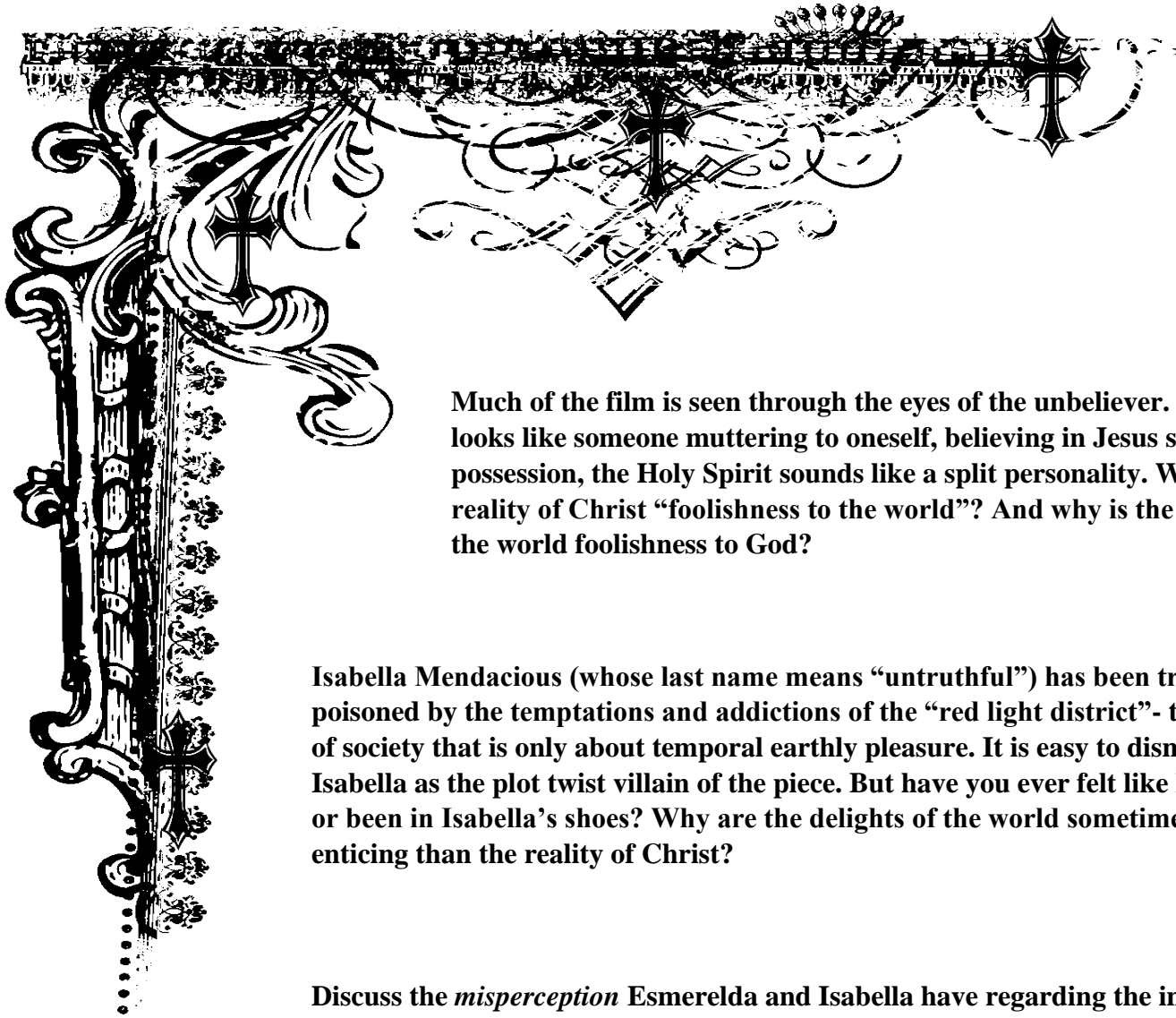
How does an individual or institution benefit from enforcing these faulty “cultural norms”? How does the Grelling-Nelson Sanatorium benefit from it in the film? What do you think these therapies really seek to do to the inmates?

Taking its cue from First Corinthians, the film presents a curious biblical truth- followers of Christ say that the world is crazy, and people of the world say that followers of Christ are crazy! Both sides lay claim to sanity. If you are a believer, how do you know that Jesus Christ really is your Lord and Savior? Why is there absolute certainty in the Christian and uncertain speculation in the unbeliever? (John 14:6; Romans 8:16-17)

The band of inmates are like puzzle pieces that make up an image of the body of Christ (the church). Discuss the symbolism of their names and how they relate to the spreading of the Gospel:

Flint	Angel Rock	Spark
Flame	The Preacher	Mud
Kirk Rock	Thorn	

The Grelling-Nelson paradox and the “Schrodinger’s Cat” experiment are referenced in the film. Look up and explore these paradoxes and discuss how they relate to the story, biblically and within the allegory.



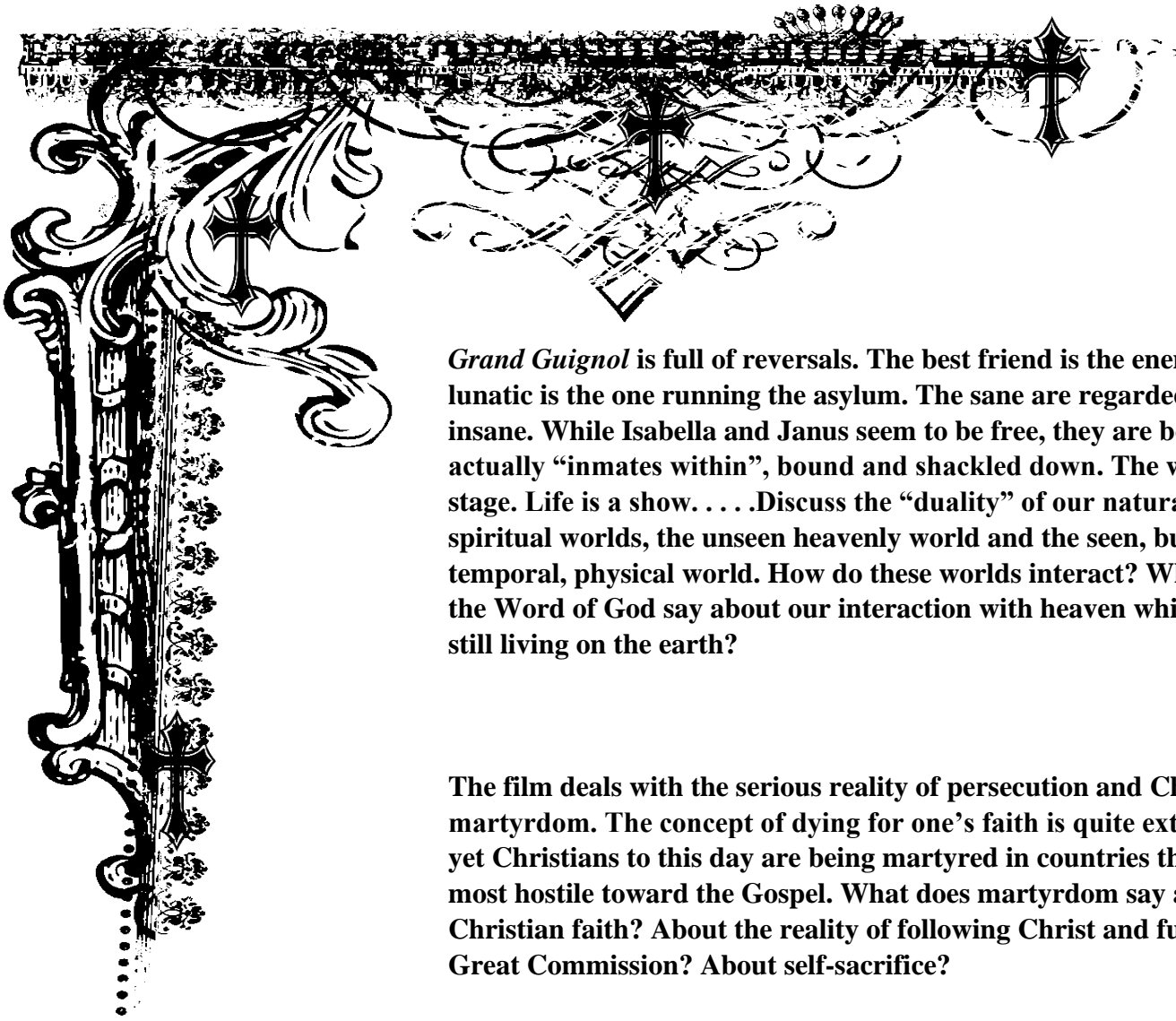
Much of the film is seen through the eyes of the unbeliever. Prayer looks like someone muttering to oneself, believing in Jesus sounds like possession, the Holy Spirit sounds like a split personality. Why is the reality of Christ “foolishness to the world”? And why is the wisdom of the world foolishness to God?

Isabella Mendacious (whose last name means “untruthful”) has been tragically poisoned by the temptations and addictions of the “red light district”- that side of society that is only about temporal earthly pleasure. It is easy to dismiss Isabella as the plot twist villain of the piece. But have you ever felt like Isabella, or been in Isabella’s shoes? Why are the delights of the world sometimes more enticing than the reality of Christ?

Discuss the *misperception* Esmerelda and Isabella have regarding the inmates versus the reality of the inmates. Do you think this kind of misperception causes some people to take delight in the world instead of turning to God? Is it the reality of God, or a person’s *misconception* of God, that keeps them away?

Compare and contrast the two father-daughter relationships- Kirk and Angel Rock, and Dr. Ravenwood and Esmerelda.

Discuss Janus, the pessimistic inmate who does turn out to be her own namesake, “janus-faced” (two-faced). What are the dangers of being like Janus, not knowing what you believe in a loud and chaotic world?



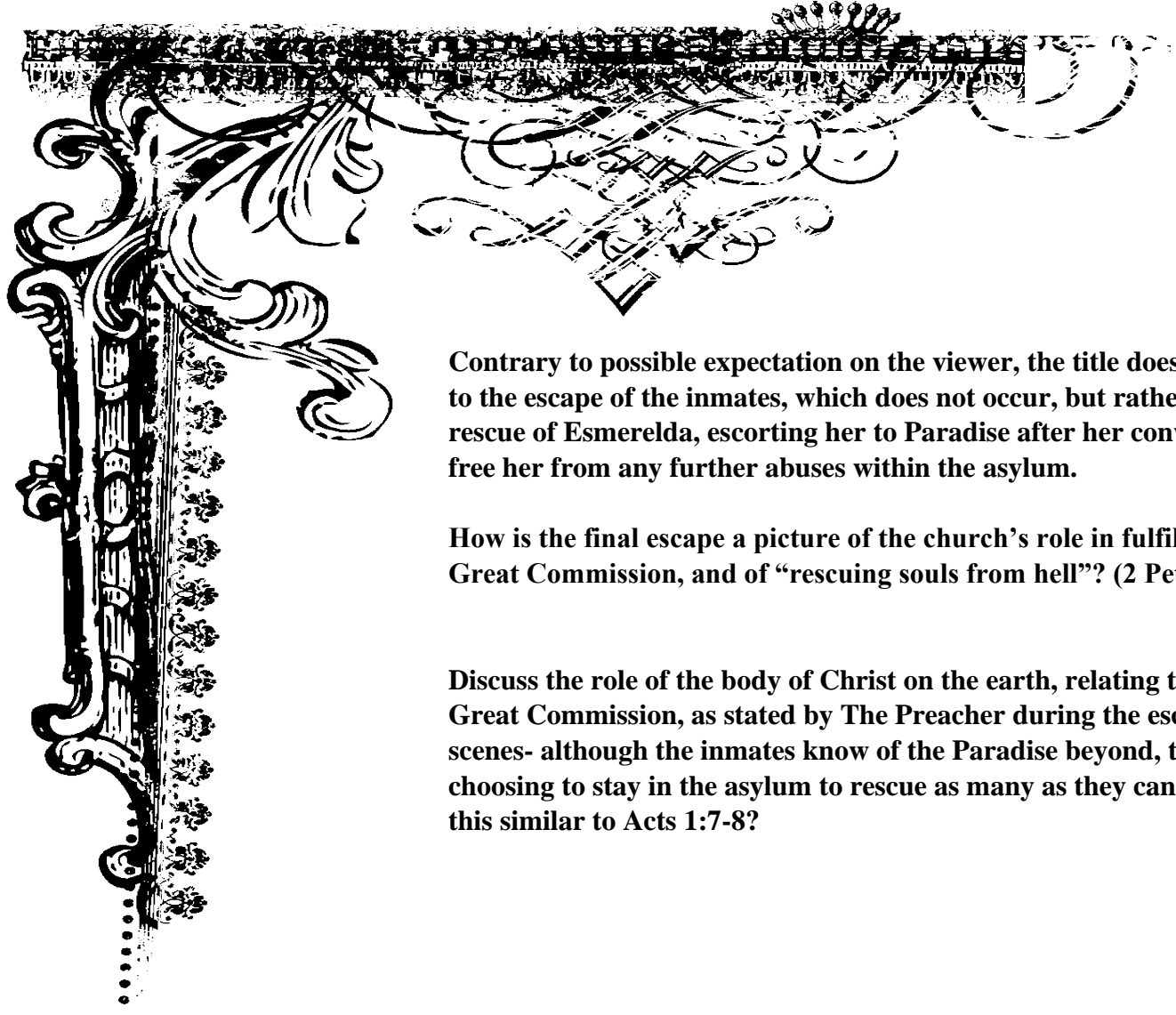
Grand Guignol is full of reversals. The best friend is the enemy. The lunatic is the one running the asylum. The sane are regarded as insane. While Isabella and Janus seem to be free, they are both actually “inmates within”, bound and shackled down. The world is a stage. Life is a show. . . . Discuss the “duality” of our natural and spiritual worlds, the unseen heavenly world and the seen, but temporal, physical world. How do these worlds interact? What does the Word of God say about our interaction with heaven while we are still living on the earth?

The film deals with the serious reality of persecution and Christian martyrdom. The concept of dying for one’s faith is quite extreme, and yet Christians to this day are being martyred in countries that are the most hostile toward the Gospel. What does martyrdom say about the Christian faith? About the reality of following Christ and fulfilling the Great Commission? About self-sacrifice?

Discuss Flame’s tragic death as a symbol of Christ’s sacrificial death for us or as a symbolic image of the church’s sacrificial love toward the world.

“I Said the J Word” exploits a common occurrence in the secular world- you can mention other things, but don’t mention the name of Jesus. Why is Jesus Christ divisive? Why is it important to remember Jesus’ own words from Matthew 10:34-39 regarding this issue?

The hymn “Bringing in the Sheaves” can be heard playing from a music box, and that song highlights the Great Commission from Matthew and Mark. How do the inmates carry out the Great Commission within the story? How are followers of Christ to carry out this commission in daily life?



Contrary to possible expectation on the viewer, the title does *not* refer to the escape of the inmates, which does not occur, but rather their rescue of Esmerelda, escorting her to Paradise after her conversion to free her from any further abuses within the asylum.

How is the final escape a picture of the church's role in fulfilling the Great Commission, and of "rescuing souls from hell"? (2 Peter 3:9)

Discuss the role of the body of Christ on the earth, relating to the Great Commission, as stated by The Preacher during the escape scenes- although the inmates know of the Paradise beyond, they are choosing to stay in the asylum to rescue as many as they can. How is this similar to Acts 1:7-8?