

Ban lifted on Visions of Ecstasy after 23 years

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Nigel Wingrove's infamous film *Visions of Ecstasy* has finally been given a certificate by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC).

The 19-minute film's notoriety came from it being the only film ever banned in Britain for blasphemy – or potential blasphemy.

The BBFC refused to give a certificate to Nigel Wingrove's depiction of the erotic fantasies of St Teresa of Avila, which meant it could not be legally distributed.

The movie became the focus of anti-censorship and free speech activists and the ban was fought all the way to the European Court of Human Rights, which upheld the BBFC's decision in 1996.

Blasphemy was abolished as an offence in 2008 and the film has now been rated "18". The board acknowledged the film would be "deeply offensive to some viewers," but was unlikely to cause harm, although it is likely to set off another chorus of complaint from Christians who feel they are being persecuted.

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "We can expect to hear the usual anti-free speech voices raised over the next few days as they complain that an equally controversial film wouldn't be made about Islam. In fact, such a film has been made, it was called *Fitna* and produced by the Dutch politician Geert Wilders. That, too, is dogged by controversy wherever it is shown."

He said: "*Visions of Ecstasy* was never prosecuted for blasphemy, so no-one knows whether it really did break the law. The BBFC merely thought it might break the law and so banned it."

All the same, Mr Sanderson welcomed the BBFC's move as a "nod in the direction of society's maturity."

Nigel Wingrove was present at the NSS's celebration for the end of blasphemy law in 2008, when it became clear that the BBFC was ready to change its mind. He told reporters: "I don't believe it should have been banned in the first place. No one in the church thought it was blasphemous. Some believed it could be viewed as offensive but that it fell well short of blasphemy."

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