

From My Viewpoint

John Cardinal O'Connor Archbishop of New York

Every once in a while a movie reminds you of how lucky you are, especially if you don't even have to go see it. Michael Medved's reviews are usually good enough for me. When he calls a movie blatantly anti-Catholic, I usually don't bother checking further. This time, out of curiosity, I read Anthony Lane's review in *The New Yorker*, Don Feder's in the *Boston Herald*, Jack Garner's in the *Gannett News Service* and Barbara Reynolds' remarks, in passing, in *USA Today*.

No doubt whatsoever. The movie "Priest" has to be as viciously anti-Catholic as anything that has ever rotted on the silver screen.

So why feel lucky? Because I'm the Archbishop of New York. Five out of five of the priests in the "Priest" is twisted in his own way, a thoroughly unsavory character, with fewer redeeming features than a black beetle in a bowl of black bean soup. In the Archdiocese of New York, we have so many good, well-balanced, faithful priests to the square inch that any single one gone wrong gets headlines, big, black, lurid.

But let me not be chauvinistic. In a life getting longer by the minute, I have traveled the world more than somewhat, and seen the world's priests at work in mudholes and cathedrals, in classrooms and soup kitchens, in confessionals and hospitals and leprosariums. For every nasty caricature of a "Priest" kind of priest, I have met a hundred, a thousand, God knows how many, celibate, loyal, self-sacrificing men of Christ. They are not gods, they are human beings, tempted at times, slipping on occasion, never pretending to be perfect, never blaming the Church because they are imperfect. The overwhelming number of priests I have known in almost fifty years of being one are realists. They are at ease with their

priesthood, they accept the celibacy that goes with it, they accept life as it is.

Every priest knows he's a volunteer. Nobody forced him to be ordained. Nobody has a gun in his back to keep him "in the league." He's not a whiner.

He knows that married men and women have their problems, their temptations, their hard knocks, their agonies often far worse than any priest celibate, as do many single people in the world.

I have known rogue priests, too. Some have been very evil characters, really evil. Some have simply been weak. Some have wreaked havoc on other human beings. Some have been walking tragedies. Anybody who knows one of them knows that he's an aberration. To paint him as the norm is ludicrous.

"Priest" is ludicrous. "Sister" Maria Monk was infinitely more convincing in her day, when she illicitly told the world the sordid story of life behind convent walls. Maria's main problem was that she had never been behind convent walls, primarily because she had never been a nun.

I'm disappointed by Disney, of course, owner, I'm told, of Miramax, distributor of "Priest." As to Miramax itself, and everyone who had anything to do with this basically childish pout at the Church, what can be said but, "Grow up"? Your movie is little more than the kind of thing kids used to take delight in scrawling on the walls in men's rooms. Call it art, go into ecstasy over its sophistication, exult in exposing the "horrors" of Catholicism, ladies and gentlemen of Disneymax, if you will, but what you have done is cheap and odorous. You may attract enough curiosity seekers to the box office to pay for the movie, but what you make in the bananas you will almost certainly lose in the coconuts, and far, far more.

It's hard to wash your hands of this kind of thing, Disney and company. Pilate has been trying unsuccessfully for two

thousand years.

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