

# NEW “THORN BIRDS” FLOPS

The CBS movie, “Thorn Birds: The Missing Years,” which aired on February 11 and 13, was almost universally panned by the critics and proved just as unattractive to viewers. Unlike the 1983 movie, the “Thorn Birds,” this 1996 version was not based on the Colleen McCullough book by that name, and in fact did not receive the endorsement of the author.

In “Thorn Birds: The Missing Years,” we learn of two bishops who attack the Church for not doing enough about saving Jews during World War II. The subject of the Church’s politics and power—always inflated—is used as the basis for discussing the Church’s role during the Holocaust. Indeed, a Cardinal is depicted as complaining about what a scandal it would be if Catholics learned how much the Church actually spent on helping Jews escape persecution.

Archbishop Ralph de Brissart, played by Richard Chamberlain, is routinely referred to as Father Ralph; he fathered a son by Meggie Cleary O’Neill, though it is not widely known, including to O’Neill’s husband, Luke. One of Luke O’Neill’s major complaints is that his son is being indoctrinating to become a priest.

The courtroom scene was perhaps the most objectionable part of the movie. The boy is interrogated by a judge in a custody hearing and is subjected to lengthy questioning about his interest in becoming a priest. Questions are asked about the Church and the Pope and whether the boy owes his allegiance to the Pope or to “King and country.”

The judge is particularly upset with the boy’s “obsession” with his religion, declaring how unhealthy such a virtue really is. That is why the judge thinks it is important that the boy be sent to a foster home: it is necessary to undo the damage that has been done by his disturbing attraction to

Catholicism.

It is clear that the show bombed with the public, but it is also clear that Hollywood has a fixation on painting Catholicism in a negative way.