

Perfect Type-Casting for Movie: Priest to Play Priest

By JOSEPH McLELLAN
Religious News Service

New York — In a classic bit of type casting, film producer Joseph P. Mawra announced here his plans to make a movie about a Mexican priest with the title role filled by a Mexican priest.

The announcement marks another surprise twist in the remarkable life of Father Humberto Almazan, once a top Mexican actor, presently a missionary to lepers around the world and about to become the star of the film, "Miguel Pro." The motion picture will tell the life story of a Jesuit "underground priest" who was executed by Mexico's revolutionary government in November 1927.

Beatification proceedings for Father Pro were begun in 1946 and formally introduced at the Vatican in 1952.

The film, being shot in Spain on a budget of less than \$1 million, is scheduled hopefully for release at Easter. Negotiations are in progress with a major distributing firm.

At a press conference here, Father Humberto was enthusiastic about his brief, one-shot return to movie stardom but a bit rueful in recalling his life before he decided to become a priest. He emphasized his long-term dedication to work for lepers, from which his religious superiors have given him a leave of absence to make the film. He has already raised the funds to build five leper colonies in various parts of the world. His proceeds from the film will be used to start a sixth in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where he once owned a lavish villa, four cars and a swimming pool as he lived the playboy life of a super-star.

Padre Pro, the son of a Mexican miner, went "underground" when persecution of the Church began in Mexico. Disguised as a worker, he held retreats, heard confessions, said Mass, secretly and worked among the poor for 14 months. He was finally captured, charged with attempting to assassinate the president, General Alvaro Obregon, and shot by a firing squad.

"Miguel Pro," with Ernest Borgnine co-starring, will focus on the universal drama in the story — a man of God conflicting with a military dictator — rather than the Mexican historical background of Padre Pro's life.

The life of Padre Pro, Father Humberto said, is "such a beautiful story, such an exciting story, that I want to tell this story to the whole world. At the same time, I can help my people — my lepers. It's wonderful."

His previous acting career was less satisfying, the priest recalled. He re-

membered his youth, studying drama in Paris on a scholarship, his brief marriage to a young French girl who died in childbirth and his ambition, resulting from intense loneliness, to reach the top in the field of acting.

He fulfilled his ambition. By 1959, he had 21 films to his credit and his name was a household word in Mexico. He was given the Ariel award, the Mexican equivalent of the "Oscar."

Recalling the award ceremony, his moment of greatest triumph in films, the priest also recalled the emptiness of his life.

"Everyone was there," he said. "Everyone was applauding me. I was in glory. Then the ceremony was over and they all went home. Empty chairs, empty tables, empty Umberto."

"I began to think of my life and I remembered the only real happy moments of my life — when I was sharing myself with my wife."

Having decided that sharing him-

self was the way to happiness, the actor asked whom he could share himself with. He thought of the poor and the sick. He discovered that there are 14 million lepers in the world and decided that he would share his life with the lepers.

At 35, after his 500th performance in a long-run stage play, *Las Cosas Simples* (The Simple Things), Humberto Almazan received an offer from Hollywood and, to the amazement of his friends, turned it down. Three weeks later, he sold the house, cars, swimming pool and his lavish wardrobe and entered the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles, an order made up of men who choose the priesthood belatedly after a career in the secular world.

That was 10 years ago — 10 years which have prepared him in a special way for what will probably be the last film of his career, the life story of another Mexican priest who found his joy and his martyrdom through sharing his life, giving his life for others.

'Heart Priest' Dies in Paris

Paris — (NC) — Father Charles Damien Boulogne, O.P., has died here 17 months and five days after receiving a transplanted heart.

With the death of Dr. Philip Blumberg of South Africa, who lived 19½ months after similar heart surgery, Father Boulogne, 57, became the world's longest survivor among heart transplant patients. That designation now goes to Louis B. Russell Jr., of Indianapolis, who received a new heart on Aug. 24, 1968.

The Dominican priest was bedridden with a major heart ailment in May 1968, when the opportunity arose for surgery involving the heart of a 39-year-old customs officer who had died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Father Boulogne's superiors at a Paris Dominican community approved the transplant.

Father Boulogne returned to an active life, offering Mass and pursuing religious studies, though entering a hospital frequently for rest and examination.



Father Almazan stopped for photo during recent visit to Rochester high schools.

Service Choirs to Sing At National Shrine

Washington — (NC) — At least 100 bishops will attend a concelebrated evening Mass, Nov. 10, in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception here, marking the 10th anniversary of the dedication of the shrine's upper church and observing Veterans Day.

Singing as a unit at the anniversary Mass for the first time in history will be the Catholic choirs of the

U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, and the U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs. They will join with the National Shrine Chorale and the Catholic University of America chorus in a combined group of more than 400 voices.

The homily will be preached by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, recently retired as bishop of Rochester, N.Y.

Representatives of government, the armed forces, and religious and lay groups are expected to attend the Mass which will come at the close of the first day of the U.S. bishops' semiannual meeting here.

James Francis Cardinal McIntyre of Los Angeles will be the principal celebrant of the Mass, with among the concelebrants will be John Cardinal Dearden of Detroit and Lawrence Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore.

To the Victors Goes the . . . ?

Louisville, Ky. — (NC) — The ancient Order of Hibernians unit solved a problem.

The Irishmen wanted to recognize the winner of the annual Trinity and St. Xavier high schools football game, something of a local classic, with 20,000-plus fans filling the area's largest stadium for the battle.

The AOH problem concerned an appropriate trophy. The winner this year was St. Xavier. The first AOH trophy was presented.

A shillelagh!

Sex Ed Classes Suspended in Newark

Newark — (NC) — Archbishop Thomas A. Boland ordered sex education classes suspended in schools of the Newark archdiocese, except for teacher-training programs.

The affected schools were those taking part in an experimental program inaugurated two years ago. The program was to embrace 20 schools but only a few actually implemented it.

The suspension is expected to remain in force at least until after the issuance of a joint pastoral on sex education which the bishops of the state are expected to publish in November.

GETS VIETNAM POST

Vatican City — (NC) — Brooklyn-born Father John Long, S.J., has been named office head of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity. Father Long, who was among the first persons to work at the Unity Secretariat in 1963, is a specialist in Eastern Church affairs.

He was born in Brooklyn on April 5, 1925, and was ordained in 1955. Before being assigned to the Unity Secretariat, he had been a professor at Fordham University in New York.

Father Groppi Sentenced To 6 Months

Milwaukee — (NC) — Father James E. Groppi, militant civil rights leader, was sentenced Oct. 17 to serve six months in Milwaukee County's House of Correction for violation of terms of his probation, imposed Feb. 12, 1968.

County Judge F. Ryan Duffy Jr. ruled that Father Groppi had "engaged in criminal and vicious practices" when he led a takeover of the Wisconsin State Assembly chambers in Madison on Sept. 29. The 1,000 demonstrators were protesting cuts made by the legislature in the state's welfare budget.

A few hours after being jailed for probation violation, Father Groppi lost another legal round when the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld the state Assembly's contempt citation against him. The citation involves imprisonment for six months without a hearing or trial, according to a 121-year-old law. Its constitutionality was challenged by Father Groppi's attorneys.

Judge Duffy, after a hearing that lasted less than 10 minutes, ordered Father Groppi to jail for six months, saying the priest had "sorely tried the patience of society," in ruling his Sept. 29 action had violated terms of his probation.

The original conviction before Judge Duffy in 1968 followed a jury trial on the charge of resisting arrest during an open-housing march in August 1967. The term was stayed and Father Groppi was placed on probation for two years.

Fr. Groppi Merits 'Moral Support', Archbishop Says

Milwaukee — (NC) — Father James E. Groppi "merits the moral support of any fair minded citizen," but "a priest or religious is no less subject" to basic law than anyone else, Archbishop William E. Cousins of Milwaukee, said in a comment on the priest's jailing.

"The Church must always follow the teachings of Christ in striving for justice and assuring basic rights for all of God's people regardless of racial, ethnic or economic background," the archbishop said.

"Insofar as Father Groppi has sincerely dedicated himself to such worthwhile causes, he merits the moral support of any fair minded citizen. This is true whether or not his methods are always equally acceptable."

Archbishop Cousins said Father Groppi "accepted the risk of legal repercussions." He said the jailed priest, in his zeal as an activist was, "mentally prepared for the present developments."

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