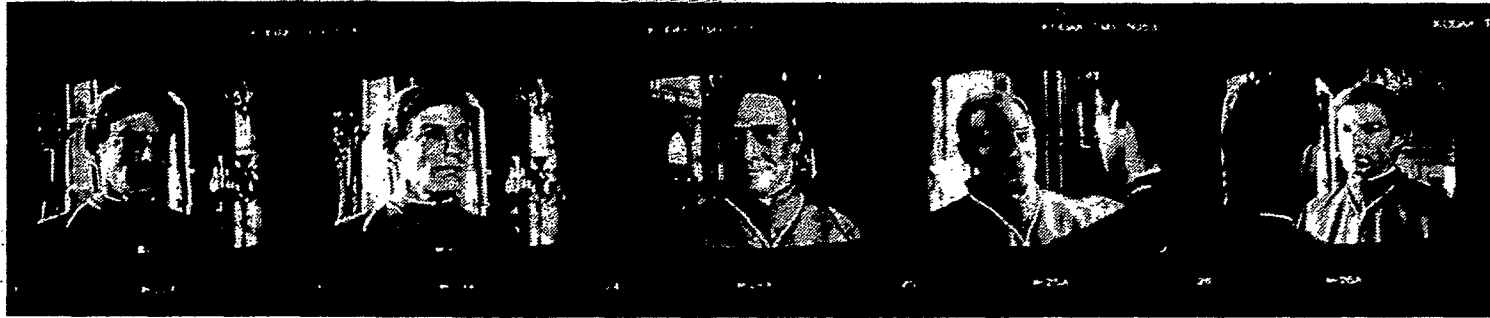


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Media's spotlight casts varying shades on priests

If media and movie portrayals were the only criteria used, a typical priest could be perceived as:

■ The kindly Father Mulcahy, played by William Christopher, in the "M*A*S*H" television series.

■ The courageous Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, portrayed by the late Raul Julia in the feature film "Romero."

■ The late Bing Crosby's benevolent Father O'Malley in "Going My Way" and "The Bells of St. Mary's."

■ Or, perhaps, a real-life situation: Pope John Paul II, gracing the cover of *Time* for his recent honor as that magazine's Man of the Year.

On the more scandalous side, Richard Chamberlain's Father Ralph, a central character in the *The Thorn Birds*, the 1977 best-selling novel by Colleen McCullough which later became a popular TV mini-series, has an affair with a woman.

It's darker portrayals such as Father Ralph's which have been hot topics as of late, thanks to the recent American release of a controversial British film.

"Priest" opened at Rochester's Little Theatre last Wednesday evening, April 19. Meanwhile, several dozen protesters — representing Citizens for a Decent Community and Catholics United for the Faith — picketed outside the five-theater East Avenue complex.

(A United States Catholic Conference review of "Priest" appeared in the *Catholic Courier's* April 13 edition.)

The movie has also raised the hackles of people such as U.S. Senator Robert Dole as well as Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York. In addition, Virgil C. DeChant, Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, issued a statement April 12 saying the Knights have sold their 50,000 shares in The Walt Disney Company, which owns "Priest's" distributor, Miramax Films.

These factions' discontent stems from the movie's depiction of five priests — including the lead character, Father Greg Pilkington (played

by Linus Roache), who struggles with his homosexuality; and his pastor, Father Matthew Thomas (played by Tom Wilkinson), who has an affair with the female parish housekeeper. Other characters include an alcoholic priest, a cold-hearted bishop; and a slightly demented pastor.

"It hurts," said Father Ralph J. Fraats, who serves as parochial vicar at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Irondequoit. "It's under the veil of artistic drama that corruption is being presented. Something like this is not going to help vocations."

Father Fraats was one of two diocesan priests to take part in last Wednesday's protest. The other was Father Dennis M. Bonsignore, parochial vicar of St. Cecilia's Church in Irondequoit.

Father Fraats said he doesn't intend to see the movie.

Neither does East Rochester resident Michael Macaluso, who arranged last Wednesday's demonstration.

"I think the movie is totally against the Catholic Church," Macaluso stated.

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STORY BY
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MOVIE IMAGES
'The Thorn Birds,'
'The Bells of St. Mary's,'
'M*A*S*H Goodbye,
Farewell and Amen'

