



NORTHERN VOICES

Priest

Priest

Director: Antonia Bird

©: BBC

Production Company: BBC Films

Executive Producer: Mark Shivas

Producers: Josephine Ward, George Faber

Associate Producer: Joanna Newbery

Production Executive: Geoffrey Paget

Production Manager: Paul Judges

Production Co-ordinators: Frances Graham, Mary Hare

Finance Assistant: Tanya Latif

Contracts Executive: Maggie Anson

Location Managers: Lisa Gravelle, Donna Rolfe,

Ann Harrison-Baxter

2nd Unit Location Manager: Bruce Abrahams

Post-production Supervisor: Ruth Mayorcas

Production Runner: Steven Jones

Production Operatives Supervisor: Harry McClusky

Production Operatives: Mike Hennessey,

David Jackson

1st Assistant Director: Brett Fallis

2nd Assistant Directors: Jamie Annett,

Amanda Neal

3rd Assistant Director: Fiona Murray

2nd Unit 2nd Assistant Director: Debbi Slater

Script Supervisor: Cecilia Coleshaw

Casting: Janet Goddard

Script Editor: Anna Price

Screenplay: Jimmy McGovern

Director of Photography: Fred Tammes

2nd Unit Camera: Nigel Slatter

Focus Puller: Nick Turnbull

2nd Unit Focus Puller: Robert Shipsey

Clapper Loader: Alwyn Davies

Lighting Gaffer: Steve Blake

Best Boys: Ronnie McKay, Steve Casey

Electricians: Gary Donahue, Kenny Redford,

Mark Clark, Nigel Woods, Mitch Spooner,

Bill Tracey, Dave MacKenson

Key Grip: John Rundle

Grip: Keith Elliott

Assistant Grip: Steve Martin

Stills Photography: John Jefford, Nicky Johnston

Film Editor: Susan Spivey

Assistant Editor: Maria Walker

2nd Assistant Editor: Kethi Ngcobo

Production Designer: Raymond Langhorn

Art Director: Sue Pow

Design Assistant: Debbie Reynolds

Production Buyer: Lena Kelsall

Carpenter: Denis Fortune

Painter: David Kirkman

Riggers: Clive Andrews, Michael Redmond,

Mickey Seymour, Anthony Rubini

Costume Designer: Jill Taylor

Costume Design Assistant: Jane Hamnett

Dressers: Christopher Bradshaw, Sarah Moor

Make-up/Hair Designer: Ann Humphreys

Assistant Make-up: Carol Galley

Title Opticals: General Screen Enterprises

Lighting Equipment supplied by:

Michael Samuelson Lighting

Camera Equipment supplied by: BBC North, I.C.E.

Films, Video Film and Grip

Originated on: Eastman Color Film from Kodak

Processing by: Technicolor

Music: Andy Roberts

Music Recording Engineer: Tony Philpott

Children's Choreographer: Colette Penlon-Byatt

Sound Recording: Dennis Cartwright

Boom Operators: Kate Morath, Steve Thomas

Dubbing Mixers: Aad Wirtz, Adrian Rhodes,

Priest arrived as the Catholic Church was under intense media scrutiny, with an ongoing 'paedophile priest' scandal and the 'outing' of a number of allegedly homosexual priests by gay pressure group Outrage. *Priest*, though, had a tortured 12-year history behind it, beginning as a rejected storyline for *Brookside*, on which lapsed-Catholic writer Jimmy McGovern served his TV apprenticeship, before expanding to a ten-part take on the Ten Commandments. In 1991, the BBC commissioned a three-part (later four-part) series, only to axe the project after some eight drafts. It was thanks to that rejection that McGovern threw himself so ferociously into *Cracker*, and it was thanks to that series' success that the BBC suddenly rediscovered its interest in *Priest*, now proposed as a cinema feature.

During his research, McGovern interviewed a gay priest, whose sexual and spiritual torment was exacerbated by his extreme political and moral conservatism. His story became that of Father Greg, who arrives in inner-city Liverpool when his predecessor is unceremoniously 'retired' and soon clashes with the older, *Guardian*-reading Father Matthew, who scandalises Father Greg with his openly political stance on poverty and deprivation and his relationship with housekeeper Maria, in breach of his vows of celibacy. Greg's moral outrage, however, is undermined when he finds himself charged with public indecency after a gay fling.

Father Greg's faith, meanwhile, is tested when he learns of a young girl's incestuous abuse but is powerless to stop it thanks to the sacred seal of the confession. Helpless and desperate, he looks to Christ, but sees in His crucified form not salvation but 'a naked man, utterly desirable.' The truth is finally revealed thanks not to divine intervention but human weakness, when Greg, distracted, ends a church meeting early, allowing the girl's mother to return home and discover her husband's abuse. The revelation, however, only isolates Father Greg further.

With its powerful themes, *Priest* was bound to provoke. Barred from Liverpool churches, director Antonia Bird (who had shown a taste for confrontational material with her 1993 homelessness drama, *Safe*) filmed some scenes in London. The American Catholic League issued an 11-page condemnation of the film, accusing it of attempting 'to convince the public of the Catholic Church's malevolence,' and launching a boycott against Disney, parent company of *Priest*'s US distributor, Miramax. The UK's Catholic newspaper *The Tablet*, however, thought it 'well-made, honest, courageous and sensitive'.

Mark Duguid, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

'Priest': a contemporary review

Snorting like a bull limbering up for the matador, an elderly priest levels the wooden beam he's carrying and charges full-tilt at the elegantly diamond-paned windows of the Bishop's palace. His improvised battering-ram is a five foot crucifix. Outrageous, powerful and brutally funny, the pre-credit sequence of *Priest* gives fair warning of what's in store: a none-too-subtle but trenchant assault on the smug hypocrisies of our time, using organised religion, and specifically the Catholic church, as the chosen blunt instrument.

Hugh Strain
Sound Editors: Roger Mitchell, Mark Auguste
Assistant Dubbing Editors: Jan Cholawo,
 Gordon Brown, Derek Lomas
Fight Arranger: Gareth Milne
Cast:
 Linus Roache (*Father Greg Pilkington*)
 Tom Wilkinson (*Father Matthew Thomas*)
 Robert Carlyle (*Graham*)
 Cathy Tyson (*Maria Kerrigan*)
 Lesley Sharp (*Mrs Unsworth*)
 Robert Pugh (*Phil Unsworth*)
 James Ellis (*Father Ellerton*)
 Christine Tremarco (*Lisa Unsworth*)
 Paul Barber (*Charlie*)
 Rio Fanning (*Bishop*)
 Jimmy Coleman (*funeral director*)
 Bill Dean (*altar boy*)
 Gilly Coman (*Ellie Molloy*)
 Fred Pearson (*Patrick*)
 Jimmy Gallagher (*Micky Molloy*)
 Tony Booth (*Tommy*)
 Guiseppe Murphy (*man in lift*)
 Kim Johnson (*Mrs Gobshite*)
 Keith Cole (*Mr Gobshite*)
 Adrian Luty (*Jehovah's witness*)
 Mandy Walsh, Stephanie Roscoe,
 Ann Haydn-Edwards, Mike Haydn (*guests at wake*)
 Bobby Martino (*Bobby*)
 Victoria Arnold (*girl in confessional*)
 Gareth Potts (*boy car thief*)
 Ray Williams (*boy with stutter*)
 Valerie Lilley (*Sister Kevin*)
 Kevin Jones (*boy at beach*)
 Michael Ananins (*charge sergeant*)
 Mickey Poppins (*reporter*)
 Matyelok Gibbs (*housekeeper*)
 John Bennett (*Father Redstone*)
 Charley Wilde, Euan Blair (*Tommy's sons*)
 Rupert Pearson (*man on skateboard*)
 Marsha Thomason (*nurse*)
 Mauricio Venegas (*Chilean band leader*)
 UK 1995©
 105 mins

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Jimmy McGovern, here making his debut as a feature film writer, has never scrupled to show his hand, and the sermon he puts in the mouth of the radical Fr Matthew makes it clear enough where he thinks the Church should be standing: 'If you exploit your workforce, shut down schools and hospitals... aren't you interfering in Creation and spitting in the face of God?' 'That wasn't a sermon, it was a party political broadcast for the Labour Party,' comments Greg sourly. But the film pitilessly exposes the futility of his own attempts at priestly duties, gabbling Last Unction over an insensible body on a speeding hospital trolley, or embarking on an ill-fated round of pastoral visits. (Gratified at last, after countless slammed doors and obscenities, to be invited in, he finds himself faced with two Jehovahs Witnesses eager to make converts.)

Not that *Priest* attacks religion as such; if anything, it affirms the validity of faith by setting it against a backdrop of those who abuse it, the time-servers and bigots – recalling G. K. Chesterton's comment that Christianity wasn't tried and found wanting, but found difficult and not tried. The film never descends to facile anti-religious jibes, and even – by tight cross-cutting between Greg's desperate prayer and Mrs Unsworth catching her incestuous husband in the act – hints at the possibility of direct divine intervention. In the final reel Greg, forgiven by the abused child Lisa, achieves something close to a Bressonian grace.

Bressonian austerity, though, is in fairly short supply. This final scene already packs a massive emotional punch: garnishing it with a solo piano rendition of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' might be thought to verge on overkill. Still, lapses like this scarcely matter, given the fury and savage humour of McGovern's writing and the energy of Antonia Bird's direction. Bird draws from her cast – especially Tom Wilkinson as Matthew and Christine Tremarco as Lisa – performances of raw intensity, but the film's most chilling moment goes to Robert Pugh as Lisa's father, justifying himself ('It's the one thing we'd all like to do') with wet-lipped relish. The Catholic hierarchy probably won't be any too pleased about *Priest*. They should be, though – if only for a film that pays religion the compliment of taking it so seriously.

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, March 1995