

Bless Us Father, For We Bear Witness to ‘Priest’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 13, 2011 - 4:44pm

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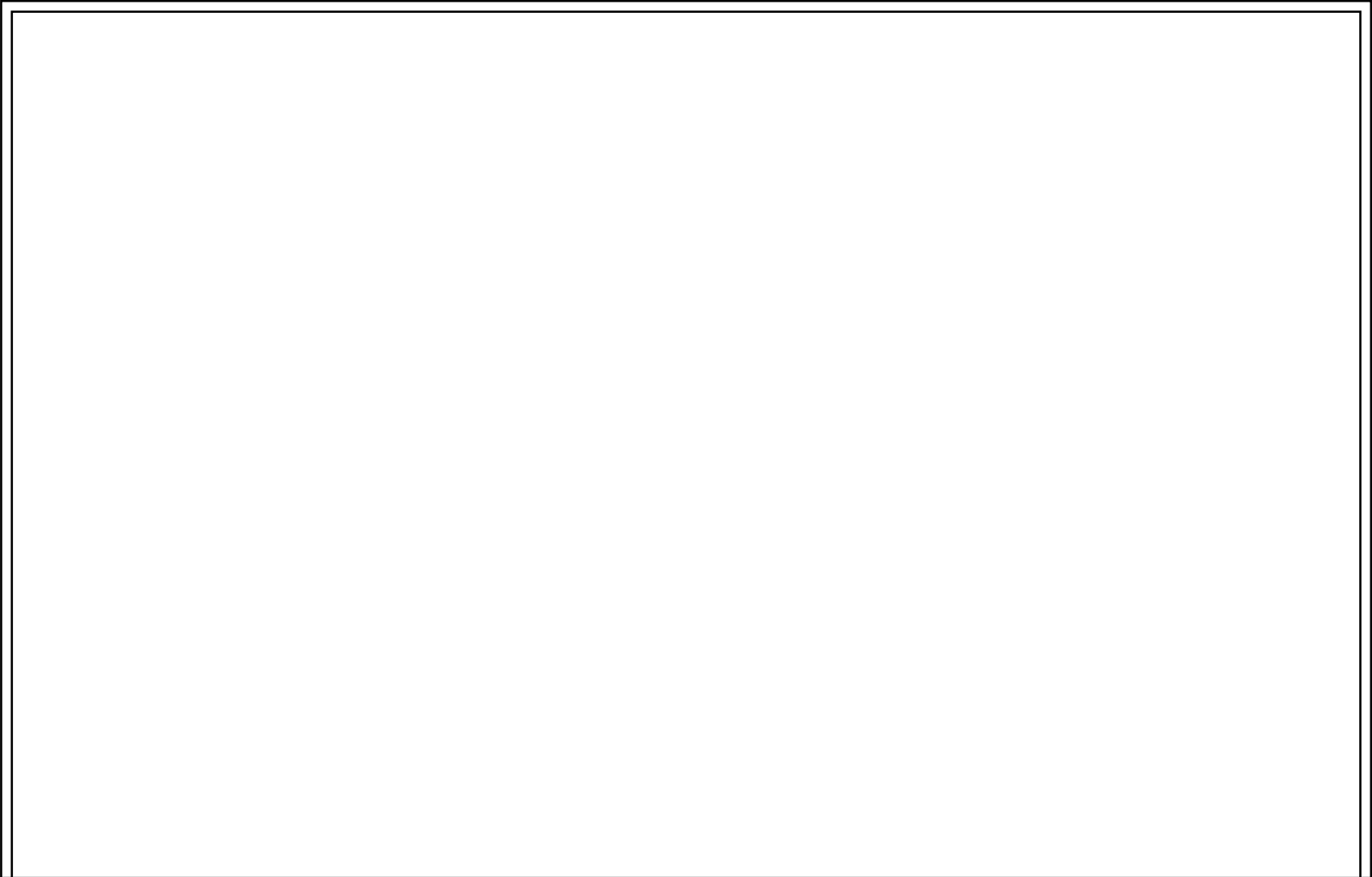
Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The cure for the Recovering Catholic may be obtained in the new film “Priest.” Both symbolic and kick-ass, Priest has a parallel universe that includes the ubiquitous vampire, but with the bonus of their opponents being highly trained Catholic priests.

Based on a Min-Woo Hyung graphic novel – which has become the latest go-to storyboard for mainstream films – Priest takes all of the intensity of the Catholic faith and combines it with the fanboy worship of the gratuitous and highly trained warrior. Against the oblique enemy that is the vampire, it takes the dudes and dudines with large crosses to “take out the garbage.”

In this alternate world, man has battled vampires since the beginning of time. Vampires, with their abject strength and desire for life sustaining blood (which gives a whole new meaning to “casualty of war”), had the upper hand for many millennium, until the age of the “Priests.” Combining religious fervor, creative use of crosses as weaponry and the strategy of vampire burning daylight, the Priests put down the blood-sucking uprising and created walled-in villages of “church states” for the surviving humanity. Loyalty to the church is loyalty to God, according to an oft-repeated blessing.

Rumors of a vampire attack in the outer “waste lands” peaks the interest the greatest warrior Priest (Paul Bettany), because it involves his sister, niece and brother-in-law. The vampires, led by a half human mutant called Black Hat (Karl Urban), have kidnapped niece Lucy (Lily Collins) and hold her as bait to call out the Priest and his associates. Against the wishes of church leader Monsignor Orelas (Christopher Plummer), the Priest is on the case, and brings along a waste land sheriff named Hicks (Cam Gigandet), who happens to be in love with Lucy.





Father Chaos: Paul Bettany is the Title Character in 'Priest'
Photo credit: Screen Gems

Together they seek to avenge the attack and kidnapping of the Priest's family, plus stem the tide of another apparent vampire uprising. This is a war fought both against their natural enemies and against the Church itself, which seeks to remain powerful by maintaining loyalty through the perpetuation of fear. Sounds eerily familiar.

The religious angle is the percolating element in Priest, which overcomes a sometimes stilted performance sphere with a logical narrative and crazy action. The onward-christian-soldiers theme, both in symbol and action, makes sense when taken to this extreme. The vampire enemy is evil, but also represents the freedom from the restrictions of the church. One bite, as the Black Hat expounds in the film, can lead to a life free from struggle and much more fun.

Paul Bettany does an excellent job as the stoically heroic Priest, and has some secrets that add to the character. Like any comic book film creation, he must believe the circumstance in his performance as not to give anything away. It is actually some of the surrounding supporting cast who has a hard time getting into it, including the Priestess (Maggie Q) who recites some of her lines as if she doesn't know where she is, and the Black Hat whose delivery has a copycat "I'm Batman" snarl surrounding it.

But all this takes a back seat to some decent action sequences, reminiscent of a old timey western. Lawless towns, a runaway train and a black hatted enemy feels as comfortable as a saloon with those swinging doors. It evens has a sheriff in Hicks, who gets to growl the best catch phrase in dialogue, a statement regarding going from one place to another. The Priestess gets the best quality kill, by a creative use of the whirling lariat.

The Cross symbol, while shown in various absurd incarnations, manages to elicit both smiles and horror in the form of throwing stars, a special knife weapon and an overt crucifixion scene. The other Priests, besides Bettany's main character and the Priestess, manage to get their moment in a high noon showdown with the Black Hat, and later get the Mount Calvary treatment, which despite the cliché still manages to be chilling.



Fear Personified: Karl Urban (Black Hat) in 'Priest'
Photo credit: Scott Garfield for Screen Gems

This isn't the type of film to be analyzed in Movies 101, but points must be rewarded for its references to the superstition of religion, the fear generated against the unknown "other" and its assertion that "we have met the enemy and they are us." In a compact 87 minutes, Priest manages to combine all that with some explosive action eye candy, which is also fun in the optional 3D imagery.

The power of the church is nothing more than power generated by obedience, and when the Priest disobeys by putting the this-time-it's-personal dominion over religious leaders, he strikes a blow for both humanity and our earthly rewards.

"Priest" opens everywhere on May 13th. Check local listings for 3D show times and theaters. Featuring Paul Bethany, Karl Urban, Cam Gigandet, Maggie Q, Lily Collins and Christopher Plummer. Screenplay by Cory Goodman, based on a graphic novel by Min-Woo Hyung and directed by Scott Charles Stewart. Rated "PG-13"



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