



## The Priest

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Father Patrick Bryce is being blackmailed from three different sources regarding his pedophilia, for which he received treatment but to which he has returned. His superior, Bishop Mabbley, insists that he head a militant antiabortion campaign that amounts to imprisonment of teenage unwed pregnant girls; a former subject of his pedophilia insists that he apologize to the victims of his pedophilia, one at a time; and another demands that Father Bryce receive a tattoo of Satan on his chest as well as reading the works of a cult science fiction writer with bizarre religious ideas.

While being tattooed, Father Bryce falls unconscious. When he recovers, he finds that he is living the life of Bishop Silvanus de Roquefort in France during the Inquisition. The story alternates between his actions there and Silvanus' experiences in Father Bryce's body. Bryce comes to realize that the church always has been corrupt and filled with scandal. He encounters all the boys he had ever molested, now grown up and awaiting punishment at the Inquisition. He eventually is accused of heresy and punished. Silvanus is taken to the prison for unwed pregnant girls and begins to molest them.

Several chapters concern characters who become involved with Silvanus while he is acting as Bryce. One story line follows Alison, an unwed teen, as she undergoes counseling at Bryce's church, attempts to get an abortion and is convinced not to, and then is sent to the church's center, where she will be imprisoned until she delivers her baby. She meets some of the other girls there and plans an escape.

Disch uses the novel as a device to air opinions about the Catholic church and the actions of its priests as well as to criticize antiabortionists. The story line is suspenseful and intriguing, keeping the reader guessing as to what is reality and what is fantasy in Bryce's mind. The conclusion is likely to disappoint many readers, as it offers too neat a resolution of several of the plot lines and negates much of the mystery and intrigue of the plot.

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