

# 'Fever': One Man's 'R' Is Another's A-4

New York (RNS) — A quiet battle brews in the homes of many U.S. families these days. Teenagers engage in a skirmish with their elders over the right to go see young America's top idol, John Travolta, in the hit film, "Saturday Night Fever."

As parents agonize over the decision whether to allow their youngsters to patronize the R-rated movie, a similar deliberation occurred in one of the New York offices of the U.S. Catholic Conference when the movie was given a premiere showing in December.

A group of religious, parents, teachers, and media critics gathered in the screening room of the Office of Film and Broadcasting (OFB), the official agency of the U.S. bishops, to give the movie a rating.

Jesuit Father Patrick J. Sullivan, director of OFB said, "We were faced with a situation where we could easily say, 'Look, this has got such language, such explicit scenes, why don't we save ourselves a lot of headaches and time by just giving it a big fat C (condemned).'"

"But we felt that that would be irresponsible," the English-accented media critic said.

Instead, OFB previewed the film before a board of consultants each of whom subsequently submitted personal evaluations in writing.

These critiques were then discussed by an OFB staff of

six including Father Sullivan. And at the end of nearly 10 hours of deliberation, the case of "Saturday Night Fever" was decided.

Reflecting not a "personal but a consensus point of view," OFB called the movie "an often crude slice-of-life film" because of the language and nudity, but added that it is "none the less a vivid portrayal of blue collar youth at play." The movie was rated morally unobjectionable for adults, with reservations (A-4).

It is one of about 200 films that Father Sullivan's crew reviews each year.

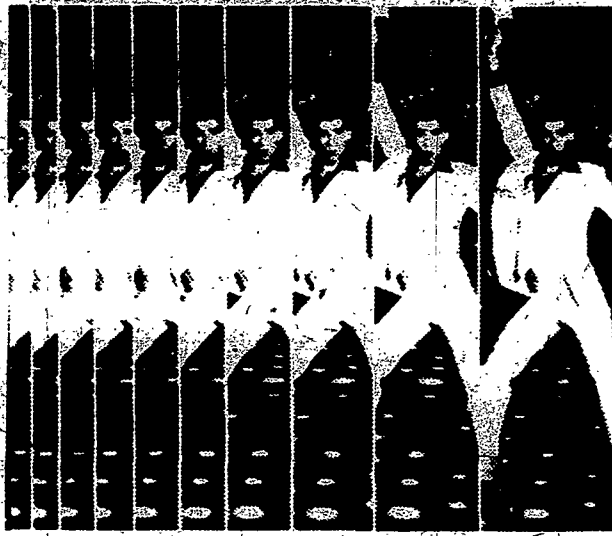
Their reflections and resulting ratings span from A-1 for general audience to C for condemned.

In a telephone interview, Father Sullivan said rating movies is not an easy job.

According to the theologian-media critic, unlike pre-Vatican II days when the bishops automatically condemned a film if there was any nudity in it, official Catholic policy today allows nudity when artistically merited and when not used gratuitously or sensationally.

The bishops before Vatican II condemned it, Father Sullivan explained, "not because nudity was obscene but because once introduced into film, they feared nudity would be exploited by the irresponsible."

However, now that nudity



has become common fare for the American motion picture industry and the Church has changed its policy, judging whether there is enough artistic purpose is difficult and sometimes time-consuming.

Occasionally, OFB will read as many as 60 to 80 personal evaluations from their board of consultants before formulating an opinion.

But experience in literature, theology, and philosophy all of which is reflected in the credentials of the six OFB staff members, has resulted in minimal criticism from the general Catholic population and has prompted the nation's bishops to continue endorsement of Father Sullivan's staff for more than 10 years.

They know producers and

directors, and can often second guess their intentions. Last year, when fundamentalist Christians condemned Franco Zeffirelli's "Jesus of Nazareth" Father Sullivan was urging NBC to preview the film for heads of Churches and religious leaders in the nation.

When asked how he knew "Jesus of Nazareth" was not guilty of the fundamentalists' accusation that it denied Christ's divinity, Father Sullivan replied, "I know Zeffirelli. He's a committed Catholic Christian. And I discussed the film with Father Agnellus Andrews (the Franciscan consultant for the film)."

### STEWARDSHIP

Two pages in the March 15 issue of the Courier-Journal were provided by the National Catholic Stewardship Council.

Motion picture ratings by the OFB most times don't concur with those of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA).

MPAA rates films "G" for general audiences; "PG" for parental guidance suggested and "R" for no one under 17 admitted without an accompanying parent or adult guardian.

Of 81 PG films that OFB reviewed in 1977, only 19 received an A-2 (morally unobjectionable for adults and adolescents), 48 an A-3 (morally unobjectionable for adults), two an A-4, nine a B (morally objectionable in part for all). Three were condemned.

Father Sullivan charges that the MPAA's classification has deteriorated into an "almost anything goes" philosophy.

On the other hand, he says, "Our own ratings are predicated upon a Catholic Christian evaluation of films where we take into consideration the way in which the subject matter is treated, the values that are being communicated, and the values that are being presupposed."

According to the priest, whether or not violence and nudity are objectionable depends on "how each functions within the context of the story or drama."

## Fr. Peters From 1



FR. PETERS

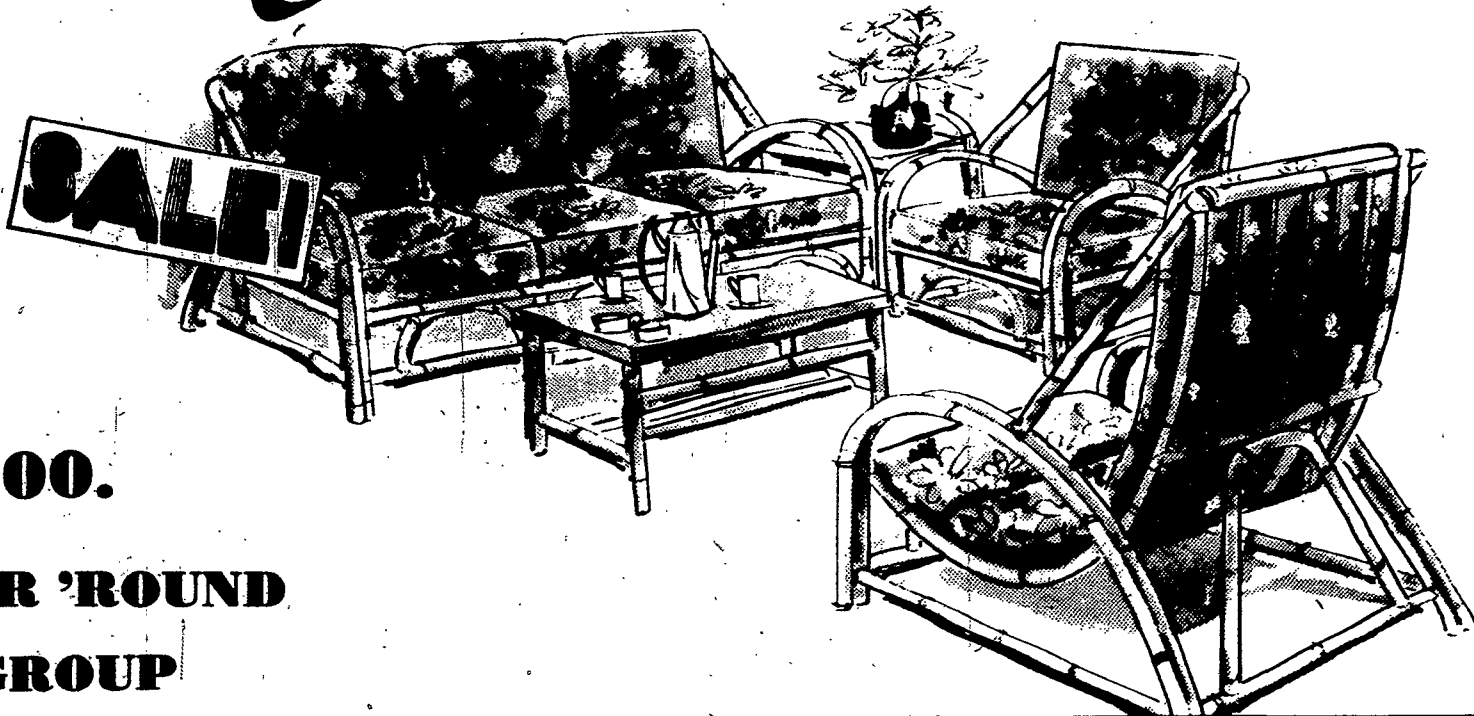
preparation for the priesthood he worked with the Teen Seminar, taught CCD classes at Holy Ghost, worked with the Family Camping program at Camp Stella Maris and served as assistant chaplain at St. James Mercy Hospital in Hornell.

He served at St. Augustine's Church while participating in the Field Education Placement Program and his Clinical Pastoral Education was done at Danvers State Hospital in Danvers, Connecticut.

A reception at St. Thomas the Apostle's school hall will follow the ordination. Father Peters will celebrate his first Mass at 5 p.m. Saturday at

St. Thomas. At 12:15 p.m. Sunday, he will celebrate Mass at Holy Ghost and a reception will follow in the school.

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