

MOVIES

'Testament,' Horrific and Recommended

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — A family in a San Francisco suburb attempts to cope with the aftermath of a nuclear war in "Testament" (Paramount), an impressive directorial debut for Lynn Littman, whose documentary films have already gained her a reputation for skill and sensitivity.

The Wetherly family of Hamlin, Calif., is an ordinary family, if a happy family can be called ordinary these days. They're not perfect. Tom, the father (William Devane) is a little too tough on his son Brad and a little too taken up with his own physical fitness. Nor does he escape those two common failings of paterfamilias as busy commuter — procrastination on domestic chores and a tendency to turn a deaf ear to his wife's recitation of familial concerns.

The three children, Mary Liz (Roxanna Zal), 13, Brad

QUEST FOR PEACE

(Ross Harris), 11, and Scottie (Lukas Haas), 6, squabble among themselves and disagree with their parents from time to time, but there's never any serious rifts in family harmony.

This ordinary happiness comes to an end one afternoon as Carol and the children are gathered in the living room, with Carol playing back recorded messages from a telephone answering machine and Scottie watching a cartoon on television.

Tom, in an initial message tells Carol that he won't be home for dinner, but in a follow-up call he jubilantly informs her that he will be home early. She has just told her children the good news when the television screen goes blank, and the world

that the Wetherlys have known and taken for granted is gone forever. In Yeats's phrase, all is irrevocably changed, but no terrible beauty is born. And from that moment on, the now fatherless family and their neighbors must cope with an altered, insidiously lethal reality.

Though spared the direct force of the blast that destroyed San Francisco, the people of Hamlin slowly learn the truth of Khrushchev's famous remark that in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust, the living may well envy the dead.

Jane Alexander is superb as Carol, the brave mother who, stricken with grief for the loss of her beloved husband, tries to make life go on for her three children. The

warmth and compassion she embodies makes bearable and even quite moving a story that otherwise might be unbearable. Close behind her are Roxanna Zal and Ross Harris as her two older children. Veteran actor Leon Ames is outstanding in a smaller role as a courageous old man operating his ham radio till the end.

The film spares the audience the more horrific results of nuclear disaster — we see no wounds of any sort, civil disorder is practically nil, and the depiction of the symptoms of radiation sickness is, quite muted — but what it does show and what it implies will be unsettling enough for most people.

In some respects, "Testament" has the nature of a Greek tragedy: The protagonist cannot escape his fate, but he can achieve tragic grandeur by the way that he

endures it. There is one important difference, however, a difference that greatly lessens the dramatic impact of the picture. We can't believe that Carol, like the Greek tragic hero, is in any way responsible for her fate.

The sensitive, literate script by John Sacret Young does make a stab at indicating responsibility by the device of having Carol, before the holocaust, busy directing the "Pied Piper of Hamelin" at Scottie's school. The play comes off after catastrophe has struck, and so its theme of parents losing their children because of a rash and heedless act achieves unwonted force and poignancy.

In terms of fixing responsibility, however, this is not enough. Thus there's a fatalism, almost a passivity about the film that many of those concerned about nuclear war, whatever side of

the issue they happen to be on, are likely to take exception to. And so despite its relentlessly non-political tone, and even because of it, "Testament" (along with ABC's "The Day After") will probably be one of the most hotly discussed films of the year.

My reservations notwithstanding — the kind of reservations you can have only about a serious film — "Testament" is an extraordinary picture, and I urge you to see it.

Because of the nature of the subject matter and because of an extremely well done bedroom scene essential to the story, this is mature fare but certainly suited to thoughtful teen-agers. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-II, adolescents and adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG, parental guidance.

BOOKS

"Voices for Peace Anthology," edited by Barbara Nector Davis. Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center, Rochester, N.Y. (\$4, 47 pp.)

By John Dash

For a number of years in the United States, men and women religious have been generating signs and art to express the experience of "political action" rising from religious commitment.

Some of those signs are more direct than others: to wit, Father Daniel Berrigan's smashing of a missile nose-cone and his subsequent jailing, trial and conviction. In that case, the person, the action, the multitude of interpretations of the action (including Berrigan's own), all become a sort of poem, albeit a messy one; but one having all the juices of a good myth, a good ritual — maybe a sacrament.

Sister Beatrice Ganley's part in both the civil disobedience of Oct. 24 at the Seneca Army Depot and the publication of a new anthology of poems, "Voices for Peace," belongs to that artistic genre.

Sister Beatrice, a Sister of St. Joseph, devised the telling of the events to military police as members of Rochester's Catholics Against Nuclear Arms (CANA) dug a hole in the earth with spoons and a small spade, and then wriggled through the wet clay to trespass on federal property. About the only symbolism unnoted in the action was

the dying and burial of the seed to generate the mustard.

Sister Beatrice is listed as assistant editor of the anthology.

Barbara Nector Davis, a Jew, is editor. Sister Kristin Malone, the noted artist, also a Sister of St. Joseph, is one of the contributors to the drawings in the book.

Sister Kristin, by the way, drew a number of pictures from the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice last Summer, sold there to raise funds, and which are sterling examples of an art maturing in both the physical and spiritual sense.

Included in "Voices for Peace" is a horrific scrap by Sister Beatrice, descriptive of the terrible dark gulf that opens up when one's friend gives voice to hopelessness:

"Carthage is to be destroyed.
I am at a loss —
I can find no way
To initiate
To attempt a treaty,
Let alone
Find any hope
For some progress
Toward disarmament."

The other poems are just as grave. There is little lightness in the text.

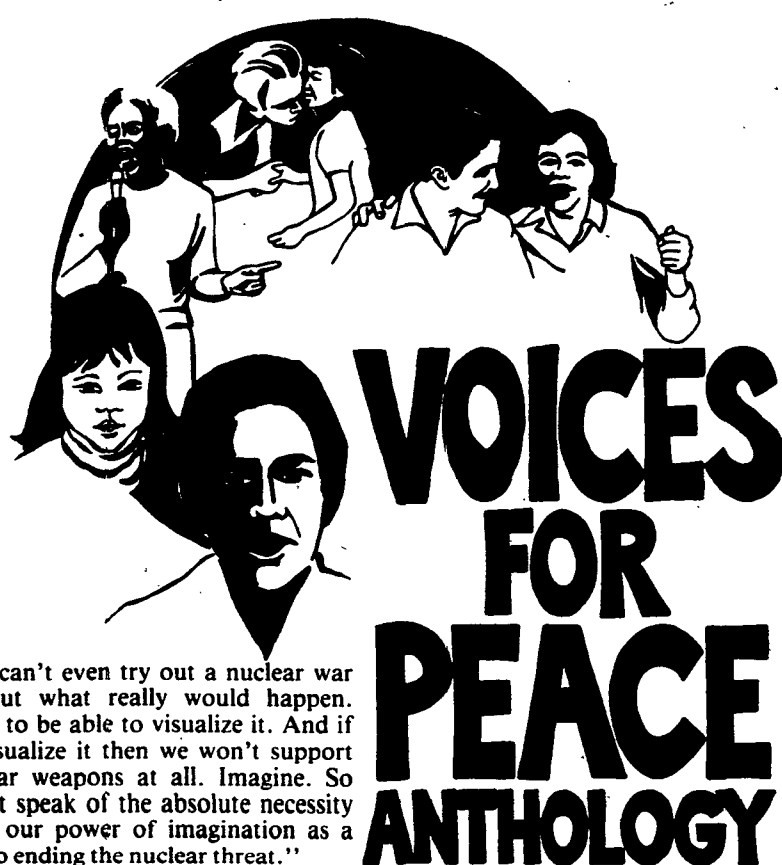
But the point of the book, as summed up by poet David Romtvedt, is:

as if we stood gazing at god and exclaiming: "Wow!" For "wow" expresses wonder and enthusiasm and awe. In going to confession I always use as my examination of conscience guide, the seven capital sins: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, gluttony and sloth. So I started off with "pride", which has to do with my prayer life. After confessing that I had gone backward and become slack in my prayer life: lackadaisical, sluggish, indifferent, Father Trott gave me some suggestions, including a holy hour each day before the Blessed Sacrament, as Fulton Sheen does in his conferences. As he unfolded his spiritual counsel, it dawned on me that I was not putting enough "wow" into my prayers. "Wow" is one reason for the success of the sincere charismatic praying. Here's to more "wow" in our prayer life.

3. A publicist phoned me about the latest book co-authored by foreign correspondents, Belgian Armand de Borchgrave and British Robert Moss. The book is "Monimbo", a sequel to their co-authored "The Spike". "The Spike" is a novel based on the actual activities of the Soviet KGB. "Monimbo" is based on the

actual activities of the Cuban espionage in the United States and in the Caribbean countries. Columnist Carl Rowan, who opposes about everything the Reagan administration does, surprised many as he wrote of Grenada in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, Oct. 31. "My concerns about foreign intervention were further diminished by the overwhelming evidence the rapists were not Grenadians with a claim to legitimate power, but ruthless killers, doing the bidding of Havana and Moscow. Leaders of neighboring islands said in so many words: 'We don't want domination by any big power, including the United States. But when Russia and Cuba are actively trying to impose totalitarianism upon us, we don't expect the great power that is our neighbor and friend, the U.S. to watch and do nothing when we cry for help.'"

The Spike" and "Monimbo" are chilling exposes of the espionage of the Soviets and Cubans, but they are heavy in sex. When De Borchgrave was asked about that, he replied rather curtly: "That's the way it is." I do not recommend the books for the delicate, but do for the dauntless and concerned.



"...We can't even try out a nuclear war to find out what really would happen. We've got to be able to visualize it. And if we can visualize it then we won't support any nuclear weapons at all. Imagine. So poets must speak of the absolute necessity to stretch our power of imagination as a first step to ending the nuclear threat."

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Weekly Highlights

1. In front of Holy Trinity Church I met a young professional man, not of our parish. "I was glad you came to the famous 75th birthday party Sept. 7. But was sorry I didn't have a chance to talk to you — or with much of anybody, in fact." He smiled: "It was a great party, and we enjoyed it immensely. But this was the highlight of the party for me." And from his pocket he took out a copy of the little 36 page "Treasury of Prayers". I had had a copy placed at each of the 502 plates, as a souvenir of the occasion. The great sincerity which emanated from his voice and features indicated a real find for his spiritual life. For this, let us bless God. I have sold and distributed so many thousands of this booklet (\$5 for \$1) that it always surprises me when I find people

who are not familiar with it. Suggestion: nice for the Christmas stockings.

2. Fathers Kress, McMahon, Egan and Carmelite Father Tim McGough went on retreat at Auriesville. A Father Jerome Rohrer, SJ, was the retreat master, and the conferences were taped on cassettes, and could be purchased by the retreatants. Father Kress brought back a set for me. On Oct. 31 I headed for St. Augustine's, 30 minutes away, to go to confession to Father Trott, so put in a cassette on prayer in the cassette deck of the car, to listen to on the way. I have always been amused by Father Kress's expression: "Wow!", when he is enthused about something. Father Rohrer said that one of our problems in prayer is that we often do not bring into prayer, that wonderment and awe and excitement which we should have before God. He put it in a homely way. "It's

Cancer Clinic Planned Nov. 13

Elmira — Self-Help Sunday, a free cancer screening clinic, will take place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Nov. 13 at the St. Joseph's Hospital Rehabilitation Center.

Free screening will be offered for six types of cancer.

Tests offered include breast examination, pap smear test, pelvic exam and colon-rectal, testicular and prostate examinations.

Strathallan

Thanksgiving

November 24, 1983

Treat your family to an elegant dinner
"on the avenue" from noon to 9 p.m. Our
regular menu plus this special
Thanksgiving selection:

Caraway Laced Squash Soup
Montrachet Cheese and Grapefruit Salad
Roast Turkey
Wild Rice and Pecan Stuffing
Bread Sauce
Candied Carrots and Pearl Onions
Rum Glazed Sweet Potatoes
Vacherin Filled with Sweetened Puree
of Chestnuts and Whipped Cream

\$15 per person

Children: half portion - half price
Please Call For Reservations

SPECIAL THANKSGIVING ROOM RATES
\$32.50 per person, suites \$37.50 per person Nov. 23-27, 1983
*based on double occupancy

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