



Ben Glass-20th Century Fox
In *My Cousin Vinny*, Joe Pesci stars as Vincent Gambino, a feisty Brooklyn lawyer who finds himself trying his first murder case in a small Southern town.

'Vinny' funny, despite thin script

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — When a college kid accidentally pilfers a can of tuna and ends up getting charged with murder he turns to *My Cousin Vinny* (20th Century Fox) for legal defense.

An attorney for only six weeks (having failed the bar exams five times) Brooklyn-bred Vinny Gambini (Joe Pesci) and fiery fiancée Lisa (Marisa Tomei) arrive in small-town Alabama in matching leather jackets. He must defend his cousin Bill (Ralph Macchio) and buddy Stan (Mitchell Whitfield), who are both accused of shooting a grocer, though all they did was forget to pay him for tuna fish.

The kids know they are in trouble when the judge (Fred Gwynne) jails

leather-clad Vinny for contempt on his first-ever day in court. The stuttering public defender (Austin Pendleton) fares even worse for them so they give inept Vinny another chance with their lives. Prodded by street-smart Lisa, Vinny begins to strut his stuff and look more like a legal eagle.

Director Jonathan Lynn makes a passable courtroom comedy out of Dale Launer's thinly written script.

Macchio and Whitfield are just the set-ups to enable the coarse Pesci to take centerstage as the fish out of water in shark-infested legal seas.

Nearly stealing the movie out from under him is Tomei, whose tart tongue and outrageous outfits mask a committed relationship with Vinny that gives the movie its heart and vibrancy.

Otherwise the comedy falls back on

stereotypes of Southerners and thickly accented Brooklynites, with an unfunny stuttering scene thrown in for bad measure.

Visual design of the movie is unremarkable save for the costumes — the funniest being a rented raspberry tux Vinny is forced to wear in court. Gwynne helps to enliven the clash of cultures as the courtly courtroom autocrat, while prosecutor Lane Smith is less effective.

Casual gutter expressions are overdone throughout, but by and large *My Cousin Vinny* is relatively funny.

Because of much rough language, a few double entendres and an implied pre-marital relationship, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

Handbook has right emphasis, but editing is flawed

Who Will Teach Me? A Handbook for Parents, by Joseph F. Girzone, Richelieu Court (Albany, 1982); 76 pages; \$8.95.

By E. Leo McMannus
Guest contributor

Dr. Samuel Johnson, the celebrated 18th-century lexicographer, novelist, poet, essayist, critic and trenchant observer of the passing scene, once observed, "In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath."

The same is true of publishers' blurbs, such as those for this manual, which — according to the publisher — "has been compared to a religion version of Dr. Spock."

Given the limited experience with children of Father Girzone, of later *Joshua* fame, the claim is a tad exaggerated. He cites his "experience with the family I have been friends with, particularly the little ones," Peter and Joey, who "provided me with a wealth of insights...."

This thin volume — with its 29 simple "lessons," ranging from "Molding Attitudes," through "God," "Sin," "Sex," "Tolerance," "Jews," "Other Churches," "Holy Communion," and others, to the final "The Bible and the Church" — is designed to guide parents to mold "their children into really beautiful people fashioned after the pattern of Christ."

There are several weaknesses with this text — despite the author's good intentions — which a capable editor could have helped to avoid.

The very first lesson, "Molding Atti-

tudes," could have been strengthened by sloughing off the facile definition of religion as "the sum and total of a person's attitudes toward life." Taken literally, that would make both Mike Tyson and Mother Teresa equally "religious." As the author sees it, "everybody has a religion of some sort."

Besides this, there are some infelicities of style. One is his fondness for "beautiful," in a manner that is almost irreverently suggestive of the American novelist and short story writer F. Scott Fitzgerald and his "beautiful" people.

So, almost like a mantra, we have a "beautiful view of God," a "beautiful friendship with Jesus," Christ's "beautiful attitudes," the "beautiful place where God lives," the "beauty of relationships with persons of the opposite sex," "beautiful" faith, Jesus's "beautiful sense of compassion," and children, finally, who "become the beautiful, free people that Jesus wants them to be."

Thirdly, a good editor would have helped the author avoid his other,

perhaps quite unconscious, penchant for the masculine gender in his writing, which may be the result of his experiences largely with Peter and Joey. Except for a few anecdotes involving his sisters, every "child" is male: the child is "taught that girls are special," "it is not easy to teach a child to do his own thinking ... and to respect the convictions of others who think differently from him," and, in the lesson on "Courage," "if he has been trained to be patient ... he is well on his way to becoming a man of courage, and a leader of men."

Apart from these criticisms, the volume offers some sound preparatory lessons from which concerned parents can profit.

Certainly pivotal in the manual is the centrality of Jesus for the young

boy or girl — the attractiveness of Jesus as a person; the kindness and courtesy of Jesus; and the compassion of Jesus in dealing with the poor, the sick and the oppressed as a means of teaching us to be considerate of others, their differing opinions, and their very persons.

The emphasis throughout is upon the love of Christ as preeminent, rather than on legalisms. Although in "The Church" he might unnecessarily evoke a wince or two from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the author reaffirms in the final lesson that "we can be sure that what the Church teaches has the stamp of Christ's approval, and the seal of the Holy Spirit's promised guidance."

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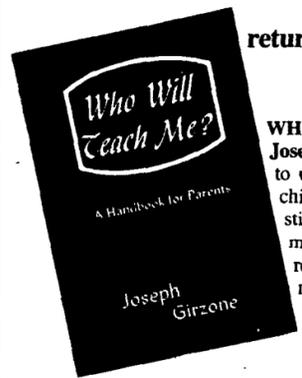
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WHO WILL TEACH ME? A Handbook For Parents by Joseph F. Girzone is a valuable help to parents who would like to understand Christianity better so they can teach their own children the basic values of faith. There is no one who can substitute for parents in teaching children religion. The real motivating forces in a child's life, which become the child's real religion, are taught all day long, even though the parents may not realize that they are teaching their children religion. If parents used this book as a guide it could help produce beautiful human beings.

—Richelieu Court Publishers

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