

Comic approach at odds with film's tragedy



Dr. Leo Sturgess (Ray Liotta, left) and Dr. Peter Morgan (Kiefer Sutherland) contemplate their futures with the Veterans' Administration hospital in the film *Article 99*.

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The serious business of caring for patients at a beleaguered veterans hospital is taken to comic extremes in *Article 99* (Orion).

Procedures at the V.A. hospital startle newly arrived intern Dr. Morgan (Kiefer Sutherland) and cardiac patient Travis (Troy Evans).

Under the dictatorial hospital director (John Mahoney), patients are the lowest priority and bureaucracy prevents the vets from getting needed care. Deftly cutting through the red tape to perform unauthorized operations and pilfer necessary supplies for them is surgeon Sturgess (Ray Liotta), the director's nemesis.

Morgan learns from Sturgess to hide cardiac patient Travis on various floors to prevent him from being discharged before getting an urgent but unapproved bypass operation.

Meanwhile Dr. Sturgess is skating on even thinner ice as the director plots his discharge by catching his

rules violations on camera. When he succeeds, Sturgess supporters take drastic action, taking over the hospital, locking out the director and calling in the press.

Director Howard Deutch's movie raises the pressing social issue of veterans' rights and comes down clearly on the side of the many men and women mired in bureaucratic morass and being denied adequate health care.

Unfortunately, Deutch's rapid-fire direction turns it into a semicomical approach that is at odds with the tragedy of neglected veterans. In essence the movie works better as drama than as broad comedy.

Given their fairly shallow characterizations, Mahoney is deliciously rotten as the rulesbound director and Liotta and Sutherland attract total sympathy in their heroic poses. Lea Thompson and Kathy Baker don't get to contribute much as their throwaway love interests at the hospital. On the other hand, Keith David and Eli Wallach extract the most from small roles as a savvy, wheelchair-bound amputee and a doomed patient.

Most of the film revolves around an exaggerated picture of the crazed hospital routine where nothing gets done unless the system is subverted.

Due to brief violence, recurring rough language, an instance of sexual innuendo and several graphic shots of open heart surgery, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

Merton life provides personal portrait

Living With Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton, by Jim Forest, Orbis Books, (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991); 226 pages; \$12.95.

By Monsignor William H. Shannon
Guest contributor

Thomas Merton, whose untimely death some 24 years ago shocked the world, remains very much alive in our contemporary world. This is the result of his own many writings and through the memories and reflections of countless people who have been and continue to be tuned into and turned on by America's most famous monk.

The existing 700-page bibliography of writings by or about Merton — already in need of updating — contains books, articles and dissertations by many people who know Merton only through his writings.

Jim Forest's *Living With Wisdom* offers us the reflections of a man who had the advantage of knowing Merton personally, whose correspondence with Gethsemani's monk runs to several hundred letters and who has kept abreast of current writings on Merton.

An American now living in Alkmaar, Holland, Forest has for many years been actively involved in working for peace and justice through non-

violence. He has had long connections with *The Catholic Worker* and with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, of which he served as general secretary for a number of years.

His social ministry has been strongly inspired and deeply influenced by Merton. It is a very special gift, therefore, which Orbis Books offers us in publishing Forest's book.

This is not a research biography nor a literary analysis of his works nor an in-depth study of his spiritual doctrine. It is also not a simple series of personal recollections.

Drawing on his own contacts with Merton and his familiarity with the Merton literature, Forest has put together a highly readable story of the monk's life.

The straight-line story from birth to death gives the book a unity that keeps the reader focused on the story's significance. He also possesses a flowing style that is always clear, concise and lively as well as often gripping and exciting.

Living in Wisdom is not just a revision of Forest's earlier *Pictorial Biography of Thomas Merton*. Rather, it is a completely new book. Its content shows Forest's enthusiasm for Merton and offers at times a deeply personal picture of the monk whom the author

came to know so well and to love so deeply.

Both the knowing and the loving are obviously evident. Yet Merton is never put on a pedestal. It is his appealing humanity that shines through.

The book's photos, together with the text and captions that identify them, constitute almost a biography by themselves. The book offers many more photos than the earlier work. In fact, this is without doubt the largest collection of Merton photos ever assembled.

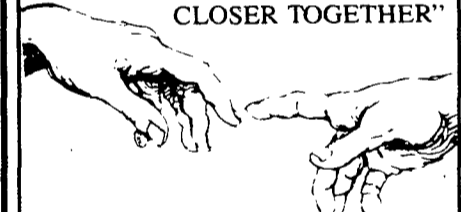
In addition, the book's layout is unique. It is an inch or more wider than an ordinary book. This makes possible a kind of double entry pagination. About two-thirds of the page constitutes the text. The rest of the page offers photos or apt quotations, which fit the text and help to illustrate it. This unusual textual arrangement makes for easy reading and should call forth a large reading public.

As a friend of Forest, I am especially happy to introduce this book to *Catholic Courier* readers. I promise them an enjoyable reading experience and an insightful look into the life of one of the great religious phenomena of our century.

Monsignor Shannon is professor emeritus at Nazareth College of Rochester.

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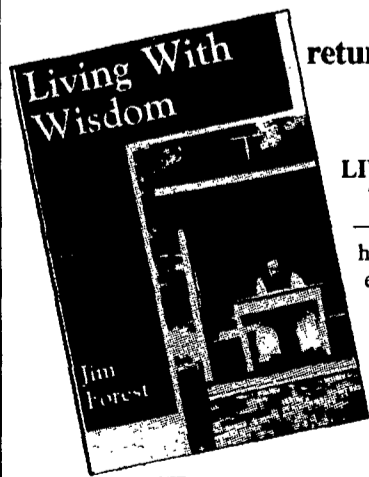
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