

## Excessive violence renders film 'universally' repugnant

By Gerri Pare and Henry Herx  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Brutal butchery and continual killings are the only constants in the vile and violent *Universal Soldier* (TriStar).

The story is immaterial — two soldiers who killed each other in Vietnam are secretly regenerated by the government for use as mindless killing machines called universal soldiers.

The movie's whole point is to see musclemen Jean-Claude Van Damme and Dolph Lundgren go one-on-one with bone-crushing ferocity. But that

occurs an hour and a half into a glut of non-stop graphic violence in which people's heads seldom remain intact with their bodies. If you get the picture, why attend this picture?

Its dehumanizing images of degradation and death are intensified by a sick sense of humor that only makes the movie more repugnant.

Due to excessive violence, some nudity and much rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.



Jean-Claude Van Damme (left) and Dolph Lundgren star in the Carolco action-thriller *Universal Soldier*. TriStar Pictures

## Editing, word choices and stylistic woes undermine author's intent

*A Way Without Words: A Guide for Spiritually Emerging Adults*, by Marsha Sinetar; Paulist Press (New York, 1992); 192 pages; \$9.95.

By Father Sebastian A. Falcone  
Guest contributor

In the final chapter of her first book, *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics*, Marsha Sinetar aimed a direct barrage at our boom-box generation.

Entitled "Solitude and Silence in the Development of Wholeness," the chapter offered a counter-culture challenge to anyone — regardless of "age, living or economic circumstances," — to reintroduce "solitude, privacy and silence" into daily life in an "honest, accepting and self-trusting way."

The actualized person, Sinetar insisted in the 1986 book, needs to be saturated "with a richness, a surplus, a superordinate awareness." For inside the human personality, she argued, there "is a profound, mysterious power which pervades our existence and which can heal, guide, and inspire us."

She concluded, "... anyone who wishes to embody in thought, word and action all that he truly loves ... comes to know and to be his ideally balanced, most wholesome and generous self: his highest Self."

Seven books later Sinetar coaxes the lingering echoes of her first book and its final chapter into *A Way Without Words*. Apty subtitled, *A Guide for Spiritually Emerging Adults*, this new

book presents a rational and a regimen for reflective self-integration.

The underlying thesis is that spirituality represents "our own ineffable animating essence, that unseen energy, awareness or source that lives in us." As such, spirituality pervades and tempers all of "our thoughts, feelings and actions." Because it is "the pure objective awareness of being," it is "without words." In short, spirituality functions as "a higher intelligence."

Part I's nine expository chapters develop variations on Sinetar's preferred themes: social transcendence, self-transcendence, reconfigured lifestyles, stewardship, solitary revolution, relinquishments, and, of course, "resistance" (explored from a half-dozen angles). All of the idioms awash in contemporary psychology as this drifts toward fuller dialogue with spirituality.

The author's favorite glossary is in evidence: whole-sightedly, real-life, sub-self, right livelihood, and "our best good." New notations, however, enrich Sinetar's melody line: the Psalms (derived through Merton), occasional phrasings from John of the Cross, Therese of Lisieux, Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas a Kempis, as well as from Walt Whitman, e.e. cummings, Dag Hammarskjöld, and T.S. Eliot.

She also didn't forget her old standbys such as Richard Bucke, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Swami Vivekan-

anda, Max Picard, and Martin Buber.

Each of Part II's seven "sessions" follows a uniform method for doing the readings and journal sessions. They are: the quieting-down period, opening reading, self-reflection, issues analysis, Scriptural reading, ecumenical/interfaith insights, closing discussion and follow-up. To be sure, this is a no-nonsense agenda for the committed seeker.

The reader should be warned that the book is not without flaws. The Introduction, for one thing, has been misplaced under Part I. Even so, its 19 sections make for confused reading. The reader is advised to plunge into the book and then try to "hear" what the Introduction struggles to convey.

The seven-phrase method applied to each session strikes this reviewer as too regimented — neither helpful nor congenial to one who follows more spontaneous inclinations.

An Appendix reveals that three major sections in Part II were omitted after the book's final editing. So much for revealing editorial negotiations. More puzzling is the repetition found in three opening paragraphs of each of the seven sessions.

Stylistic clutter has not been avoided, either. Double parentheses burden a number of sentences. Tripletations occur by the score — a stylistic feature where three words are used when one will do. One paragraph alone (on p. 119) has five such instances.

This practice dloys, distracts and amuses. (It also gets contagious, one may notice.) This reviewer rests his case by inviting the earnest reader to re-read the quotes in the first two paragraphs above.

In two places (pp. 102 and 103), Ps. 107:35 is made to refer to "a city for habitation" (sic). An amazing updating of the biblical text.

A self-introduction in *Ordinary People* states: "My day-to-day work is that of an organizational psychologist, mediator, and educator, who for several years has been increasingly interested in the adult choices, life-styles and personalities of fully human, actualizing people ... (M)y clients often are purposeful, wholesome and actualizing."

This book attests on page 31: "As we grow sensitive to the sacredness of our own life, we realize that *all* life — animals, plants, indigenous cultures — is sacred, intertwined, unitive. Shifts in collective consciousness are usually gradual and depend on individual awareness being heightened, cultured, and transformed. This takes time, energy and, simultaneously, out of time."

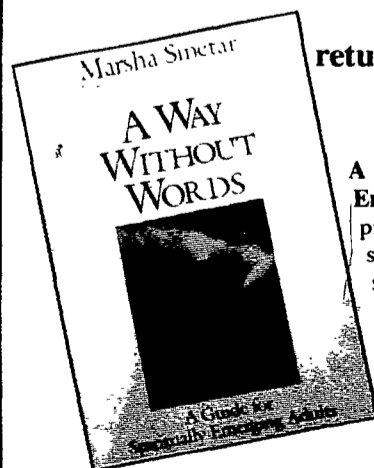
In more ways than one, *A Way Without Words* is a sequel to *Ordinary People*. Sometimes, however, words have no way in *A Way Without Words*.

Father Falcone is professor of New Testament Studies at St. Bernard's Institute in Rochester.

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