

# Little suspense found in violent remake

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — For those who saw Dutch director George Sluizer's thriller *The Vanishing*, a French-Belgian film released in the United States in 1991, his same-titled '93 American remake from 20th Century Fox is a sorry stoop to crass commercialism.

The original featured a memorably eerie opening in which a young woman mysteriously vanishes. Three years later her husband is still consumed with finding out her fate. Only then does the audience meet her abductor, who is all the more creepy simply because he appears such an average Joe.

That film's slowly developed emotional complexity and morbid ending was deemed unacceptable to American tastes.

20th Century Fox hired the same director, but this time the action (read violence) gets pumped up and the methodical maniac is immediately revealed, so what vanishes here is the suspense.

All that is left is a pedestrian thriller of flat characters — even the good guys are largely unsympathetic — and the typical horror movie clichés tossed in at the climax.

Kiefer Sutherland blandly plays the obsessed lover, Sandra Bullock, the too-trusting kidnap victim who smiles better than she acts, and Nancy Travis,

the fierce new girlfriend out to outsmart murderous Jeff Bridges, who plays his role with quirky menace and a peculiar, vaguely European accent.

For those who come fresh to this remake *Vanishing*, there may be some suspense — unless they have seen the trailer and TV promos, which casually reveal the one shock in the plot.

All around, the Hollywood version of *The Vanishing* deserves to be buried in the shadow of its superior predecessor.

Due to brief but intense climatic violence, a live-in relationship and minimal rough language, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.



Ralph Nelson-20th Century Fox  
Kiefer Sutherland is Jeff Harriman in *The Vanishing*, a thriller about a man who becomes obsessed with learning his girlfriend's fate after she mysteriously disappears.

## Author stresses that God's face can be encountered in everyday life

*Seek Treasures in Small Fields*, by Joan Puls; Twenty-Third Publications (Mystic, Conn., 1993); 149 pages; \$12.95.

By Bishop Dennis W. Hickey

A prominent local priest recently completed an eight-day retreat outside this diocese. He was so enchanted by the experience that he confided to the director his desire to stay on a while longer at the monastery. Although his wish was not denied, the director wisely remarked, "I am sure you will find God back in Rochester."

In *Seek Treasures in Small Fields*, Sister Joan Puls delineates the many ways God can be encountered in daily life. She would applaud the advice given to the retreat participant as she writes: "Any retreat director worth his or her salt will tell us it is back where we came from."

Sister Puls' book brings to mind and in a way fleshes out thoughts expressed in Monsignor William H. Shannon's *Silence on Fire*.

*Seek Treasures* is composed of 12 brief chapters, each headed by an in-

triguing verse from Scripture. The chapter, "Teach Us to Number Our Days Aright," is preceded by words from Psalm 90: "Seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty, if we are strong."

The author challenges the reader to use the God-given gift of time wisely. Despite our frenzied efforts in trying to use every moment carefully, Sister Puls insists that waiting, too, can be profitable.

"Only rarely do we perceive the value of waiting, its potential for taming us and slowing us down, its ability to shift our perspective from doing to receiving, from self-sufficiency to creaturehood, from dominance to vulnerability," she writes. This is reminiscent of John Milton's: "They also serve who only stand and wait."

The chapter ends with the pithy sentence: "Each moment, if we are open to it, is the time of God's visitation."

Sister Puls emphasizes the need for community in the modern world. "Human beings by nature need one another in order to discover the limits and grandeur of their own personhood," she writes. But she does not allow only for the pleasing parts of

community life. It's all or nothing.

"One is in or out. There are no fence positions. You can't belong up to a point. That is not to belong," she writes. It is not clear if the author approves of the smaller satellite communities now so common among religious. What effect do these have on the large entity? Sister Puls' observations would be interesting.

I found the chapter, "A Charcoal Fire, Fish and Bread," fascinating. Sharing and eating together is depicted as an integral part in building and sustaining a common bond. Sister Puls makes a fine case for every family member being present for one meal each day.

As she puts it: "Even a cursory reading of the gospel highlights the importance of meals in the community life of Jesus' disciples. The experience of sharing food was profoundly connected with the gift of hospitality and a recognition of God's presence among them."

Family members are becoming strangers to each other. A common meal provides the setting for becoming reacquainted. Recall how often Jesus

dined with friend and foe. Barriers often fell as a result.

I am grieved by the author's negative — bordering on vituperative — remarks about women religious congregations before Vatican II. Many felt they were not addressing contemporary needs but at the same time they were the first people in the church to affect real *aggiornamento*. After prayerful discernment the good of the past was retained and others were phased out. It was done in a charitable, spirit-filled way.

Sister Puls does a disservice to all women religious who brought their congregations into the new world. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester have expressed it beautifully in the theme for this year's St. Joseph's Day celebration, "Linking Our Tradition with the New."

Aside from what appears to this reviewer as being too abrasive and patronizing on something which is not germane to the author's theme, *Seek Treasures in Small Fields* will be helpful to anyone seeking the face of God in everyday life.

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