

IN REVIEW
FEATURE

Its corniness aside, *Iron Will* is touching movie

By Gerri Pare
 Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — A youth's chances of saving the family farm and going to college depend upon his *Iron Will* (Disney).

The year is 1917 and the hardscrabble life of a South Dakota farm family gets infinitely tougher when dad (John Terry) dies in a drowning accident and the farm is to be sold to pay off debts.

Dad had wanted his son, Will (Mackenzie Astin), to go to college, but that also is now out of the question — unless Will can beat all odds and collect \$10,000 by winning a grueling dogsled marathon from Winnipeg, Manitoba, to St. Paul, Minn., in the dead of winter and against experienced sledders from around the world.

Almost prevented from entering the contest by its skeptical sponsor (David Ogden Stiers), Will is rescued by enterprising reporter Harry Kingsley (Kevin Spacey), who sees the plucky kid's story to save his family as his own ticket to byline fame.

When the danger-laden, 522-mile race begins, Will finds a fellow racer (George Gerdes) ruthless in his determination to eliminate any and all competition. Will's iron will to win, however, becomes lively news copy and the nation begins to follow his dream even as his luck seems to be running out.

Director Charles Haid has fashioned an old-fashioned, flag-waving film about an underdog and his dogs whipping up patriotic fervor as they race toward victory.

Astin is an earnest and intense Will, in a role strikingly similar to his brother Sean Astin's title role last fall as another underdog, the Notre Dame football hopeful *Rudy*.

Visually, it's an eye-filling treat in the swirling great outdoors. The ears are another matter.

So corny is the dialogue the cast deserves a bonus for uttering it with straight faces. Dramatic exchanges are packed with clichés and the villains are made of cardboard — perhaps so that their blood won't freeze in the frigid settings? Their dogs as well look like devil dogs while Will's look beautifully beatific.

But that is all part of the movie's many contrivances that don't truly annoy, and,

in the spirit of things, become almost endearing. The movie really goes over the top at the finish line when the frenzied crowd motivates half-dead Will and his collapsing canines to continue for honor and glory of all Americans.

Because of some menace and brief violence, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'Cabin Boy'

Cabin Boy (Touchstone) is a waterlogged fantasy in which TV comic Chris Elliott plays a spoiled rich



The Walt Disney Company

A young man's passage from childhood to adult begins when Will Stoneman (Mackenzie Astin) enters a grueling dog sled race.

Book interprets the role of law in today's church

Theology and Canon Law: New Horizons for Legislation and Interpretation, by Father Ladislaus Orsy, S.J.; Liturgical Press (Collegeville, Minn., 1992); 211 pp.; \$17.95 (paperback).

By Father Kevin E. McKenna
 Guest contributor

Shakespeare, in his memorable line from *Henry VI*, Part II recommended a rather drastic solution to the legal problems of the world: "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."

In some respects, canon lawyers and the field of canon law have enjoyed a similar reputation in the contemporary church.

Nonetheless, the last few years have seen increasing interest in canon law's role in the life of Catholicism. Unfortunately, it has been used more often than not as a weapon of choice. Divergent ideological opponents within the church have wheeled out various "canons" to broadside those with opposing positions, using as their weapons those canons which they believe absolutely and definitively defend their opinion.

Father Ladislaus Orsy, S.J., an international expert on canon law and retired professor from The Catholic Universi-



ty in Washington, D.C., attempts to present a case for the place of canon law in contemporary Catholicism. In his work *Theology and Canon Law: New Horizons for Legislation and Interpretation*, Father Orsy encourages a more earnest dialogue between the disciplines of theology and canon law which he believes will better articulate the role of law in the modern church.

His quest in this enterprise will be to answer the question: "How can we find the right harmony between Christian beliefs and the laws governing the life of the community?" Perhaps most significantly in this short work is Father Orsy's development of a new mindset for canonists and all those who wish to utilize canon law in the post-Vatican II Church.

kid just out of finishing school who boards the wrong boat.

Instead of a luxury liner, Nathaniel (Elliott) finds himself on a squalid fishing boat with four soused old salts (Ritch Brinkley, Brion James, Brian Doyle-Murray and James Gammon) who make him their lowly cabin boy.

Known as a cult comedian for his quick skits on David Letterman's show and the short-lived Fox sitcom "Get a Life," Elliott cannot sustain any appreciable level of humor for motion-picture length.

The movie, directed without flair by Adam Resnick, is a shapeless procession of wackos and phony situation comedy material stretched to the limit.

Due to implied sexual encounters, some mock comic violence and occasional profanity and gutter talk, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Towards this objective he develops a theory which he calls the "doctrine of horizon." Father Orsy posits that mental operations in human beings are essentially dependent on and limited by their field of vision. During the past, he suggests, the field of canon law has been too limited by some of the times and cultures in which it has found itself. For example, since the 16th century the whole body of canon law had been placed into the "horizon" of the Council of Trent. Ecclesiastical law had become very narrowly focused, to serve as an instrument of defense against both internal and external enemies.

A development of the Second Vatican Council had been a new theological horizon which sought to embrace the welfare of the whole human family. Canon law has the need to develop a wider vision or horizon, embedded more fully in theology. Father Orsy hopes that in the future canon law will more frequently utilize the insights of theology helping to direct and guide legislation by identifying those values the laws are meant to promote and serve.

The author also suggests that the entire community of the faithful has an important role in the creation of norms for the church. Canon law in the past has principally reserved the community's role to the evolution of "customs" which gain the force of law under specified conditions and the lapsing of time. But, Father Orsy reminds us, the Second Vatican Council affirmed a belief in the Spirit's assistance given to the people of God, "all of them, bishops and laity together, to discover Christian values and find the ways and means to reach out to them" (p.116).

Poet, author and physician Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. is reputed to have admonished his son, the famed jurist, before he began his legal studies: "If you can eat sawdust without butter, you will be a success in the law."

The same imagery might be suggested for reading about canon law.

However, Father Orsy has succeeded in presenting a palatable work that goes a long way towards demonstrating the need and validity of canonical research in the contemporary church. For canonists and any others who wish to know more about the role of the "darker side of the Good News" Father Orsy's book will be a welcomed challenge to explore canon law's role as an expression of the humanity of the church creating laws in the service of Catholic values.

Father McKenna is chancellor and director of legal services for the Rochester diocese.

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