

IN REVIEW FEATURE

Drama, comedy fall short of mark



Tina (Aida Turturro, left) and Angie (Geena Davis) remain close friends through thick and thin, in Hollywood Pictures' *Angie*.

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Angie'

(Hollywood) Soggy tearjerker about

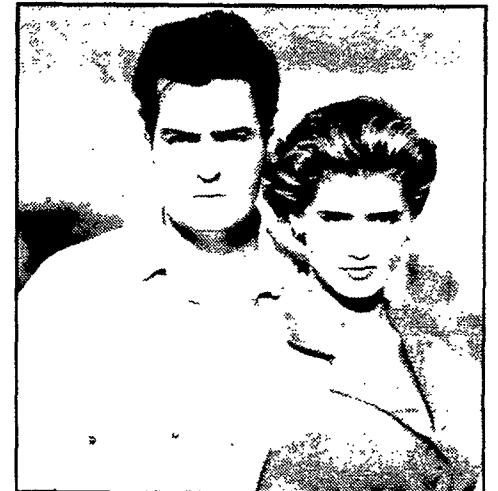
ter the baby is born, leaving her to face single parenthood with the support of loving family and friends. In trying to lighten the melodrama with humor, director Martha Coolidge never gets to the heart of her feminist heroine whose struggle for independence is complicat-

a working-class Brooklyn girl (Geena Davis), who becomes pregnant by her plumber boyfriend (James Gandolfini), then dumps him for an eccentric high-class lawyer (Stephen Rea) who

ed by hostility for her stepmother and yearnings for the mother she never knew, though along the way there are some positive discoveries about the responsibilities of parenthood and the importance of family. Premarital relationships, a flash of nudity, some raunchy humor and occasional rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'The Chase'

(20th Century Fox) Failed black comedy in which a convicted bank robber (Charlie Sheen) escapes from the law by taking a young woman (Kristy Swanson) hostage, then heads for Mexico in her car with hordes of police in high-speed pursuit. Written and directed by Adam Rifkin, the juvenile fantasy miscalculates the viewer's tolerance for endless scenes of reckless driving, car crashes, exploding vehicles, media goons, police cretins, repeated protestations of innocence by



20th Century Fox

Charlie Sheen portrays Jack Hammond and Kristy Swanson stars as Natalie Voss in *The Chase*.

a gun-wielding loser and a feather-headed woman falling in love with her abductor. Comic treatment of violence and life-threatening situations, a restrained sexual fantasy, occasional profanity and much crude language. 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.

Bennett compiles stories by which families can live

The Book of Virtues, by William J. Bennett; Simon & Schuster; \$27.50.

By Joseph R. Thomas
Catholic News Service

If nothing else, the current nonfiction best-seller list speaks eloquently about the hydra-headed nature of the American reading public and the themes to which that public responds. There, cheek-by-jowl with Howard Stern's vulgarities and Jerry Seinfeld's lightweight observations on matters of no consequence is William J. Bennett's moral anthology, *The Book of Virtues* (Simon & Schuster, \$27.50).

How Bennett's tome, aptly subtitled *A Treasury of Great Moral Stories*, was able to earn a place on the list is beyond me and possibly even beyond the publisher. Although long-lived and beloved by book clubs, anthologies attracted little critical notice and limited shelf space. But the success of Bennett's compilation seems to indicate that there is hope for virtue after all, Stern's noxiousness notwithstanding.

The success of any work such as *The Book of Virtues* obviously depends more on content — Is the theme of general interest? How true is the content to the stated theme? — than on the literary skills of the compiler. That's a good thing in this instance because Bennett's commentary is not only lacking in wit but is also sparse and often pedantic.

Nevertheless, the quality of the selections is such that one can dust off for its annual use the chestnut "It belongs in every home" and feel justified in doing so even while pointing to some anomalies and remarking that any number of selections would fail a political correctness test. Especially would this be so of any test administered by feminists, for the femininity on display here would make Bella Abzug stomp on her hat.

Bennett, however, was never one to worry about such things when he served as secretary of education in the Reagan administration so it is not surprising that correctness is not a concern now.

For his anthology, Bennett has divided the virtues into 10, launching out with (what else?) self-discipline and concluding with faith after embracing compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty and loyalty. On a personal level, I thought the section on faith was among the strongest. I was pleased by the inclusion of a piece on Father Maximilian Kolbe, the Franciscan who took the place of a condemned man in a Nazi concentration camp.



Throughout the book, selections run the gamut from the familiar (Aesop and Plato, for instance) to the obscure, from the trite to the profound. Edgar A. Guest, master of the maudlin, finds a place here as does Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shakespeare has more than one entry as does Scripture. So do Martin Luther King Jr. and Helen Keller and Abraham Lincoln, but you'll look in vain for John F. Kennedy and Harry S. Truman, although I would have thought that the

prayer Truman composed and recited every day (it dealt with his view of the public trust) worthy of inclusion.

Some inclusions are puzzling. Given contemporary concerns over crime and violence, for instance, one is surprised to find Robin Hood held up as an exemplar of good sportsmanship for downing ale and making merry with Little John following their silly to-do at the bridge. But perhaps this is being too critical. With hundreds of tales and poems and speeches and essays from which to choose, it is not necessary to read Robin Hood to the kiddies if one is not so inclined.

That is a key point to be made: Bennett chose his pieces with the thought that parents and teachers would use the volume to promote those virtues which "made America great" (he never uses that phrase, but it is what he has in mind) by reading aloud to children and encouraging them, as they mature, to explore some of the more advanced

pieces on their own.

As Bennett puts it in the first sentence of his introduction, "This book is intended to aid in the time-honored task of the moral education of the young." He sees it as a "how-to" book for moral literacy" and says its purpose "is to show parents, teachers, students, and children what the virtues look like, what they are in practice, how to recognize them, and how they work."

Pretentious perhaps, but it is apparent that Bennett has struck an appealing chord. While *The Book of Virtues* may not find its way into every home, there is something reassuring in the thought that ultimately it will find a welcome in more homes than will Stern's offensive exhibitionism.

Thomas, retired editor in chief of *The Christophers* and a former diocesan newspaper editor, is a frequent reviewer of books.

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