

New films provide little to praise

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

'Clifford'

(Orion) Dismally dumb comedy about a devilish 10-year-old (Martin Short in kid-dy clothes) making life miserable over the course of a week for his baby-sitting uncle (Charles Grodin), who wants to impress his fiancée (Mary Steenburgen) with how much he loves children. Director Paul Flaherty fails to produce any laughs from the script's witless, unamusing situations. Mild comic violence, fleeting TV documentary nudity and a few instances of profanity. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'The House of the Spirits'

(Miramax) Impressive adaptation of Chilean author Isabel Allende's multi-generational novel about a wealthy South American family whose cruel, reactionary patriarch (Jeremy Irons) tries to control the lives of his spinster sister (Glenn Close), clairvoyant wife (Meryl Streep) and fiery, defiant daughter (Winona Ryder) who's involved with a peasant rebel leader (Antonio Banderas). Director Bille August's portrait of an impassioned family caught up in



A mischievous 10-year-old boy (Martin Short) who proves to be a genius at creating trouble, is reprimanded by his Uncle Martin (Charles Grodin) for wreaking havoc at a party in *Clifford*.

a half century of political upheaval starting in the 1920s is flawed by the narrative's somnambulistic pacing and Iron's stilted performance, but does succeed in showing the power of love and forgiveness in coping with adversity. Intermittent political violence and some sexual encounters with brief nudity. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'Threesome'

(TriStar) Accidentally assigned to share college dorm quarters with a leering stud (Stephen Baldwin) and a latent

homosexual (Josh Charles), a promiscuous young woman (Lara Flynn Boyle) seduces both, then the trio together explores the limits of lust. Writer-director Andrew Fleming's boring, inept exercise in soft-core male fantasies reduces its vacuous characters to mindless sex objects. Trivialization of sexuality, simulated sex, considerable nudity and much rough language. The USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'Backbeat'

(Gramercy) Tragic story of Stu Sutcliffe (Stephen Dorff), one of the orig-



Orion Pictures

inal Beatles and close friend of John Lennon (Ian Hart), who left the band in order to remain in Hamburg with his fiancée (Sheryl Lee) and hopes of a career in painting, but died months later of a brain hemorrhage. Director Iain Softley's downbeat movie is little more than a routine buddy story, which fails to capture the quirky energy of the Beatles as they first burst onto the international scene. Restrained bedroom scenes, intermittent nudity, brief violence and drug use and much rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

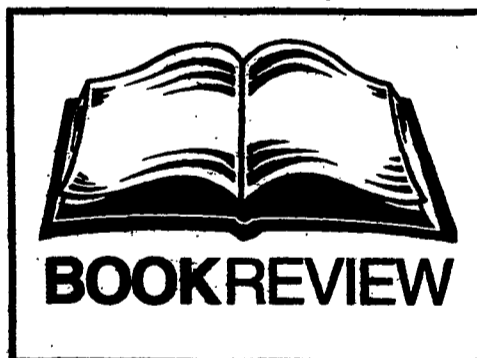
Author predicts gloomy future for women's congregations

Women in the Vanishing Cloister: Organizational Decline of Catholic Religious Orders in the United States, by Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh; Rutgers University Press (New Brunswick, N.J., 1993); 191 pp.; \$35 cloth; \$15 paper.

Reviewed by Brian T. Olszewski
Catholic News Service

There isn't an editor of a Catholic newspaper in this country who has been spared the reader's comment, "Why don't you publish only good news about the church?" Those who want only good news about their church will not like *Women in the Vanishing Cloister* because its findings are not good news — especially for a church that is accustomed to women's religious communities.

In fact, that's where author Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh concludes, "Given the structural changes in religious orders that were initiated by the confluence of exogenous factors in the United States in the middle of this century,



the demise of religious orders in this country seems highly likely."

What is important about this text is that Ebaugh gives the reader a short, accurate history of women's religious communities in the United States. Those who grew up knowing "the nuns were always there" should be interested in knowing how they got "there" and why they will no longer be there.

It takes a lot of concentration and effort to read this book because Ebaugh uses an academic approach in reaching

her conclusion. She reviews the literature that has been written about organizations' decline and about religious life in the United States. Together, these two areas of research provide a thorough foundation from which Ebaugh can launch her thesis.

Further, with help from a community called "Sisters of Service" — a pseudonym for a congregation which served as interview subjects — Ebaugh is able to apply the theory to a practical situation. Some academicians might argue that her sample is not large enough for conclusions to be drawn. However, they are not used as a sample but instead to frame what she is uncovering.

Among the areas she addresses regarding women's religious life are organizational decline, authority, Vatican II, recruitment and retention, finances and feminism. Each of these areas is linked to the others. The development is not linear but multileveled, with differ-

ent areas often crisscrossing each other.

There is a heavy dose of statistics throughout the book. They are necessary if one is to understand the matter Ebaugh is studying. Fortunately, she provides graphs that make the figures palatable.

This book is a must-read for church leaders, and for those interested in the women who have served U.S. Catholics, but who may not — at least within the structure we have known — serve much longer.

All will discover that these women won't always be there.

Olszewski is the editor of the Northwest Indiana Catholic, newspaper of the Diocese of Gary, Ind.

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