

IN REVIEW
FEATURE

Labor priest issues call for renewed movement

"Organized Labor and the Church: Reflections of a 'Labor Priest,'" by Monsignor George G. Higgins, with William Bole; Paulist Press (New York, 1993); 245 pp.; \$12.95.

Reviewed by James C. O'Neill
Catholic News Service

At a time when many view labor unions in the United States as once mighty but now on the ropes, Monsignor George G. Higgins, the country's pre-eminent labor priest, comes out swinging in "Organized Labor and the Church."

In these eminently readable "reflections," Monsignor Higgins champions anew people's right to organize, defends union demands to have a say in management policy and production decisions, attacks union-busting, and forcefully argues the role unions must have if the country is to remain truly democratic.

Proudly he recalls the history of the Catholic Church in America and its support of the working class to form independent unions to secure a living wage. At the same time, he freely discusses anti-union activities and views of a variety of Catholic institutional employers. He gives Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York good marks for supporting the bargaining right of Catholic hospital employees.

Rejecting current predictions of the union movement's death, he points to new fields of service in need of unionizing and singles out recent signs of life in which "labor and religion have slowly begun to renew their ties."

With a graduate degree in social work from The Catholic University of America, the young Father Higgins joined the Social Action Department of the Catholic bishops' conference in 1944. He was on the USCC staff for 36 years, 25 of those years as director. In effect, he became the liaison between the bishops and the American labor movement. In retirement he continues teaching, lecturing, writing and working with various unions.

His tribute to his father, a post office worker whom he describes lovingly as a



"blue collar intellectual," provides an affectionate insight into the roots of the young priest's affinity for the working person's rights.

This volume, finished shortly before the death of Cesar Chavez, contains a warm appreciation of the work of this son of a Yuma, Ariz., emigrant family who organized the field and farmworkers in the West. Monsignor Higgins uses stories about labor leaders such as John L. Lewis, Philip Murray, Walter Reuther and Lane Kirkland to illustrate points he is trying to make, not as an exercise in name-dropping.

He is a realist when it comes to suggesting how church and labor leaders can work more effectively together. He points out that religion and labor are two very different institutions and should not try to convert each other to the other's agenda.

Women and new immigrants are sectors in American labor today which stand in need of the cooperative efforts of church and labor, says Monsignor Higgins. Yet, he also argues it may be time for the church to strengthen the union movement by training lay Catholics to work within unions rather than using more professional church employees to work from the outside.

"Organized Labor and the Church" is not simply a memoir of almost 50 years of experiences as a labor relations priest. It is a call to action, a call for Christian witness in organized labor's efforts.

O'Neill is a publicist and former head of the CNS Rome bureau.

Available at your bookstore or order prepaid from Paulist Press, 997 MacArthur Blvd., Mahwah, N.J. 07430. Add \$2 for shipping and handling.

Three new movies offer rich banquet of emotions

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

'Corrina, Corrina'

(New Line) Sentimental exercise in which a 7-year-old girl (Tina Majorino) is helped over the trauma of her mother's death by the take-charge housekeeper (Whoopi Goldberg) hired by her songwriter father (Ray Liotta), who slowly comes to appreciate how much the newcomer means to his daughter and, finally, to himself. Despite idealized characters and artificial situations, writer-director Jessie Nelson effectively manipulates viewers' deeply felt emotions about family, friends, romance and race in a story with its heart in the right place. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'Cafe au Lait'

(New Yorker) Zany French farce set in Paris, where a young West Indian (Julie

Mauduech) informs her two lovers — one African (Hubert Kounde), the other Jewish (Mathieu Kassovitz) — that she is going to have a baby which — after much soul-searching — causes the two men to cease their rivalry and join forces in taking care of the woman they love until the baby is born. Subtitles. Unwed pregnancy, occasional comic violence and a character given to rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. Not rated by the MPAA.

'Eat Drink Man Woman'

(Goldwyn) Three grown daughters weather unexpected romances while living under the roof of their stoic, long-widowed Taiwanese father (Sihung Lung), who expresses his love for them by cooking elaborate gourmet meals. Director Ang Lee offers a sumptuous plate of satisfying interlocking stories with full-bodied characters in a narrative richly seasoned with subtle humor and a benevolent view of the human condition. Subtitles. Fleeting bedroom scene. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. Not rated by the MPAA.

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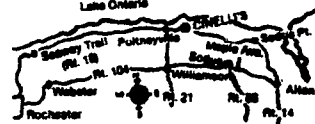
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