

**New movies
insult viewer**

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

'The Scout'

(20th Century Fox) Down-on-his-luck baseball scout (Albert Brooks) in the hinterlands of Mexico discovers a phenomenal switch-hitting pitcher (Brendan Fraser) who, after being signed by the New York Yankees, is diagnosed by a psychiatrist (Dianne Wiest) as repressing terrible memories of childhood abuse and badly in need of therapy. Director Michael Ritchie begins with a comic premise, then turns darkly serious until copping-out in a slick feel-good finale. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'The Specialist'

(Warner Bros.) A former CIA explosives expert (Sylvester Stallone), hiding from a murderous colleague (James Woods), is lured into the open by an icy seductress (Sharon Stone), who persuades him to murder a trio who slaughtered her parents years earlier. Every character is despicable in director Luis Llosa's atrociously acted, totally trashy, soft-core revenge melodrama, in which brutal violence is seen as the immediate solution to any conflicts. The USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Pope's book mixes anecdotes, analysis

"Crossing the Threshold of Hope," by Pope John Paul II; Alfred A. Knopf (New York, 1994); 244 pp. \$20.

Reviewed by Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

In light of Pope John Paul II's well-known propensity for dense, difficult prose, I was happily surprised that much of his unprecedented book of personal essays, "Crossing the Threshold of Hope," is quite readable.

This is especially true in the later chapters, where he more often slips in personal anecdotes and talks about experiences that shaped him — his lifelong friendship with a Jewish schoolmate, a prayer to the Holy Spirit that he has recited since childhood, how the challenge of postwar Marxism in Poland turned his attention to central ethical questions of human rights and dignity.

Apart from the book's content, its appearance itself is a story. First, there is no precedent in modern church history for a reigning pope to publish a book of personal writings — writings that stand strictly on their own ground with no official status as church teaching or policy. Second, the book itself is a major publishing event. It was released Oct. 20 in 21 languages in 35 countries. Knopf says it shipped over 1 million copies to U.S. bookstores before the release date. Papal royalties, which the Vatican says will all go to charity, are expected to exceed \$10 million.

The text has its origins in a series of written questions posed to the pope by Italian journalist Vittorio Messori. They were meant for an interview on Italian radio and TV to mark Pope John Paul's 15th anniversary as pope in October, 1993. The broadcast special fell through because of the pope's busy schedule. But a few months later a Vatican official gave Messori a handwritten manuscript in Polish, the pope's answers to the questions posed.



Those who want a better understanding of Pope John Paul's agenda for the church should read carefully his comments on the continuing importance of the Second Vatican Council, his hopeful views on the future of ecumenism, and what many may consider a surprisingly positive assessment from him of the quality of church renewal since the council in many places, including America.

His moral passion almost flares off the page when he is asked if he isn't too "obsessed" with abortion: "The legalization of the termination of pregnancy is none other than the authorization given to an adult, with the approval of an established law, to take the lives of children yet unborn and thus incapable of defending themselves. It is difficult to imagine a more unjust situation, and it is very difficult to speak of obsession in a matter such as this, where we are dealing with a fundamental imperative ..."

In an interesting juxtaposition he says that Islam "completely reduces divine revelation" and "is not a religion of redemption" — but adds that Muslims, with their "fidelity to prayer," put most Christians to shame.

When asked how he as pope prays, Pope John Paul begins his answer: "You would have to ask the Holy Spirit! The pope prays as the Holy Spirit permits him to pray." Few could dare make such a claim, but to millions who have seen this pope entirely absorbed in intense prayer, it has a ring of conviction.

In some passages he expresses an exalted concept of the papacy, but then he adds — as every Catholic should know, but few do — that his title as "vicar of Christ" is one that properly belongs not just to the pope but to every bishop. And he comments, "On further reflection, 'Christianus' (Christian) has far more significance than 'episcopus' (bishop), even if the subject is the bishop of Rome."

The potential reader should be warned that parts of the book — especially chapters on great human questions about God, salvation, human destiny, evil in the world — are heavily philosophical, reflecting the background of the man who regularly taught philosophy courses at the University of Lublin right up to his election as pope.

Few readers without some background in the field will easily get through papal comments such as: "Cognitive realism, both so-called naïve realism and critical realism, agrees that 'nothing is in intellectu, quod prius non fuerit in sensu' ('nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses')." Or, "We are witnesses of a symptomatic return to metaphysics (philosophy of being) through an integral anthropology."

But those who are willing to plow through some ponderous thought in order to understand better Pope John Paul II's vision of the church and the world will find "Crossing the Threshold of Hope" a book worth reading.

Random House, owner of the Knopf imprint, is also issuing the book in Spanish for \$20, in compact disk for \$45, in a large-print edition for \$22, and in Random House AudioBook, English or Spanish, for \$20.

"Crossing the Threshold of Hope" is available at your bookstore or order prepaid from Alfred A. Knopf, 201 East 50th St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Please add \$2 for shipping and handling.

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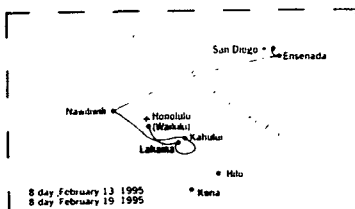
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