

'Heroes' shows faith's role in coping with family crisis

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule film reviews from the U.S. Catholic Conference's Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Unstrung Heroes'

(Hollywood) A bittersweet comedy about a 12-year-old who lives with eccentric uncles during the terminal illness of his mom (Andie MacDowell), who is being cared for at home by his emotionally stressed dad (John Turturro). Sensitive performances and distinctive characters keep the mother's loss from becoming maudlin as the uncles teach the child about the importance of family and his Jewish faith in coping with life and death. Contains the death of a parent and occasional cursing. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.



Hollywood Pictures Company
John Turturro (right) and Nathan Watt star in 'Unstrung Heroes.'

appropriate for children under 13.

'Hackers'

(United Artists) Jumbled crime story about a computer expert (Fisher Stevens) who electronically steals millions from a corporation, then attempts to frame teenage computer freaks for the crime. The film relies on zippy pacing instead of narrative logic in an overbusy script. Features ambiguous treatment of white-collar crime, fleeting nudity and an instance of rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be in-

'Angus'

(New Line) Formula comedy in which a tubby teen (Charlie Talbert) must overcome low self-esteem and taunting classmates before finding courage to talk to the girl of his dreams (Ariana Richards). Cardboard characters and dull direction result in a preachy, predictable tale about beauty being only skin deep. Contains some sexual innuendo, comic roughhousing, crude slang and a needless instance of rough 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.

Comparison to encyclical hurts commentary on social violence

"Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads," by Gil Bailie; Crossroad (New York, 1995); 293 pp.; \$24.95.

Reviewed by William Droel
Catholic News Service



Earlier this year Pope John Paul II issued *Evangelium Vitae* ("The Gospel of Life"), the long-awaited encyclical that contrasts two forces in our world today: the culture of death and the Gospel of life. "Violence Unveiled" echoes the same theme.

All societies, Bailie begins, have a conquering hero or other violent mythology that is invoked whenever that society is threatened. This culture of "sacred violence" is used to support war, quash dissent, deter crime and channel what would otherwise be totally destructive ravages of passion.

Whether it is "Pope Urban II declaring that God willed the first Crusade; or Thomas Jefferson saying that the tree of liberty must be periodically watered with the blood of patriots and tyrants; or Lenin saying you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs — cultures have forever commemorated some form of sacred violence at their origins and considered it a sacred duty to re-enact it in times of crisis," Bailie writes.

Jesus' death on the cross, however, has given the world a superior myth — one that is based on active nonviolence. Granted, Jesus' life-giving mythology has not always been accepted these past two millennia. Even his followers and his church have often forgotten its power. And so, "in our world a struggle

is taking place between the power of the (violent) sacrificial and scapegoating myths and the Gospel's deconstruction of them," Bailie observes.

Yet even in the face of Bosnia, the Middle East and other violent parts of our world, Bailie is convinced that the Gospel of life is winning. "The Gospel can be trashed and betrayed and corrupted almost beyond recognition without fatally compromising its inherent demythologizing power," he asserts. Glorifying in violence is becoming less and less acceptable.

Bailie packed his effort with references to literature, linguistics, politics, philosophy and Scripture. Yet for all that, the book is often discursive. Among other detours, it contains a long section on the meaning of the word "metaphor," and another on the bankruptcy of philosophy.

This book is also not meant to be original. It is an extended commentary on the thinking of essayist and cultural anthropologist Rene Girard. On average, Girard is mentioned about once every four pages. (The index is unreliable.)

In that "Violence Unveiled" is inspired by Girard, it seems self-serving for him, on the dust jacket, to call this book "a most significant achievement, and of great importance." In fact, there's too much hype surrounding this book.

In the wake of the tragedy in Oklahoma City, one hopes that our nation will engage in a serious reflection on the nature of violence. This book is very timely in that context. Yet Pope John Paul's encyclical presents the main themes in a more useful fashion.

Droel is campus minister and an instructor at Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills, Ill.

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