

LEISURE

New biography highlights St. Thomas More's beliefs

Thomas More: A Portrait of Courage, by Gerard B. Wegemer. Scepter Publishers (Princeton, N.J., 1995) 307 pp., \$24.95.

Reviewed by Father Richard F. Costigan
Catholic News Service

St. Thomas More continues to attract the admiration of both authors and readers, as he richly deserves, and Gerard Wegemer's new book, *Thomas More: A Portrait of Courage*, is a worthy addition to the long list of books about him.

Thomas More (Feb. 7, 1477-June 22, 1535), surely the most admired man in England in his time, was a very successful and wealthy lawyer, educator, a leader of Parliament, counselor of King Henry VIII, and finally Lord Chancellor of the realm, a post somewhat like prime minister. But when Henry broke away from the Catholic Church, More refused to recognize him as the supreme head of the church in England. For this he was convicted of treason and beheaded.

More is also known for the books that he wrote at many stages of his life, and Wegemer devotes his main attention to the religious and moral ideas expressed in them, creating a valuable and informative "portrait" of More's character. More wrote from experience on marriage and family life, being a devoted husband and father, and on education, having in mind his own children. He wrote on the need for reform in society and in the church, but strongly opposed the doctrines and policies of Martin Luther and other Protestants.

Deeply imbued with the ideals of classical civilization as well as those of the New Testament, Thomas More's writings consistently have a wise, rational, humane and literary quality, and are also memorable for their wit and humor. He has long been admired as a great example of Christian humanism. People liked him personally and would likely agree with the famous Dutch scholar, Erasmus, a close friend of More, that he was "born for friendship."

Wegemer has especially good chapters on the books More wrote in prison in the Tower of London while awaiting his execution. "The Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation," considered by some to be his masterpiece, tells in deeply religious terms the value of all suffering, especially when endured because of false accusations. The hardest thing to bear was that his family, especially his wife, did not support him in his trials. They wanted him to comply with the king's will and rejected his most moving explanations of why he, as a matter of religious duty and conscience, simply could not do so.

Wegemer cites at the end of the book Pope Pius XI's comment, when he canonized Thomas More in 1935 during the heyday of Nazism and fascism, that he was a model of courage in the face of enormous abuse of state power. The book would make very good spiritual reading.

Jesuit Father Richard F. Costigan is associate professor of theology at Loyola University of Chicago.



Paramount Pictures
Steve Dodds (David Spade, left) and Mike Donnelly (Chris Farley) are exiled to a rundown cabin knocked off its foundation in the comedy "Black Sheep."

Two new films merit 'dogs' in titles

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

'Black Sheep' (Paramount)

Inept comedy in which a well-meaning oaf (Chris Farley) nearly ruins his brother's chances to be elected governor, despite the efforts of a campaign staffer (David Spade) to keep the bumbler out of the public eye. A limp script and tepid physical comedy make director Penelope Spheeris' movie look more like an extended TV sitcom. Some slapstick violence, brief substance abuse, minor sexual innuendo, intermittent profanity and an instance of rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference 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.

'12 Monkeys' (Universal)

Convoluted sci-fi tale set in 2035 when the few survivors of a 1997 killer virus seek to learn the cause of the epidemic by sending an expendable criminal (Bruce Willis) back in time to 1996 where a psychiatrist (Madeleine Stowe) helps in tracking the mysterious gang of the title (led by Brad Pitt). Directed by Terry Gilliam, the elaborate narrative gets lost in quirky byways and nasty turns which only obscure what is essentially the story of a youth witnessing his own death as a time traveler. Some nasty violence, sexual situations and rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

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