

BLACKFRIARS

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EDITORIAL

It was once remarked, perhaps at the time of the Spanish Civil War, that the Church's only concern in secular affairs was to see that every one of her children might be free to receive the Last Sacraments. Certainly in the world we know, even so limited a function as that is going to be increasingly hard to secure. As the frontiers close through half of Europe, as the rumours spread of fresh horrors everywhere, the temptation is to abandon "the world" and all its works. The hermit has never been so envied as now.

But being a Christian is not a private affair. The Church is not a company, limited in its liabilities. The Church touches everything because it is the Mystical Body of Christ, who vouchsafed to use our human nature to redeem the whole of mankind. Nothing that is human can be neutral to the Church, for, as Pope Pius XII has remarked, "God makes use of his Church throughout the ages to perpetuate the work he has begun". This is not to say that the Church provides, or should provide, a detailed plan for politics, science, art or any other human activity. Rather is the Church concerned to direct men towards the end for which they were created, to know and love God. All that helps to lead men to God it blesses: all that hinders, it condemns.

This is the context of any discussion of the Catholic attitude to

the things of this world. So it is that so apparently secular an activity as the Cinema must first be related to the central fact of the Church's mission. In speaking of "The Cultural Responsibility of Christians", Père Chifflot reminds us that the only thing that matters to the Church is the salvation of souls. Yet the Church cannot be indifferent to the material setting of the lives of its members: it seeks to restore all things in Christ, art as well as scientific study, entertainment as well as economics. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Pope Pius XI writing an Encyclical, *Vigilanti Cura*, on the Cinema. Recognising as he did the need of recreation "for people who work under the fatiguing conditions of modern industry", the Pope yet demanded that it should be "worthy of the rational nature of man". And the Cinema, even in 1936 when he wrote, had become the most popular of all forms of entertainment, with great potentialities for good—as well as for evil.

Writing in the same year to the President of the Brussels Catholic Centre of Cinematographic Action, the Pope urged "Catholics of every country to consider it a *duty in conscience* to busy themselves with the question of the Cinema, growing as it is in importance". The need has certainly not grown less for an informed Catholic opinion on the Cinema. And the present Holy Father has recently insisted on the social responsibility of the films. Speaking to members of the Hollywood Motion Picture Executive Committee last July, Pope Pius XII said:

"One wonders at times if the leaders of the motion picture industry fully appreciate the vast power they wield in social life, whether in the family or in the larger civic groups. Eyes and ears are like broad avenues that lead directly to the soul of man, and they are opened wide, often without challenge, by those who see your films. From the screen, what enters into the inner recesses of the mind, where youth's fund of knowledge is growing and norms and motives of conduct which will mould the definite character are being shaped and sharpened? Is it something which will make for a better citizen, temperate law-abiding, God-fearing, who finds his recreation is wholesome pleasure and fun? . . . If it is true, as it is, that bad conversation corrupts morals, how much more effectively are they corrupted by bad conversation when accompanied by conduct vividly depicted which flouts the laws of God and civilised decency. Oh, the immense amount of good the motion picture can effect! That is why the evil spirit, always so active in this world, wishes to pervert this instrument for his own impious purpose . . . It is for public opinion to sustain wholeheartedly and effectively every legitimate effort made by men of integrity and honour to purify films and keep them clean, to improve them and increase their usefulness . . ."

The Cinema industry is here to stay—and to expand. The Catho-

lic function, without prejudice to such excellent ventures as the pre-war productions of the Catholic Film Society, must be primarily one of criticism. But criticism presupposes knowledge, an informed and objective analysis of the thing as it is. What is needed is something on the lines of the DOCIP organization in Brussels, which may be summed up as "formation of public opinion by means of the Press" (cf. article by V. Allaert, O.P., in *BLACKFRIARS*, October, 1932). This Dominican enterprise, along with similar attempts in France and Holland, aims at providing the Catholic public with reliable guidance in its choice of film-entertainment: its positive approach, its lively appreciation of the possibilities for good of the Cinema, have enabled it to educate opinion much more effectively than by a mere censoriousness.

In this country the Catholic Film Society publishes a monthly Bulletin (2s. per annum, from 45 Elm Park Mansions, Park Walk, S.W.10), which, on a smaller scale, is attempting the same work. It deserves much more support than it receives, and it is to be hoped that the easing of war-time restrictions will make it possible for *Catholic Film News* to step boldly into the Wardour Street arena. In the meantime, the present issue of *BLACKFRIARS* provides some prolegomena to the question: what should be the Christian attitude to the Cinema?

THE CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANS

WE must begin by recognising this fact: the Church is not concerned about culture. The Church can only be defined by her fidelity to a mission—that which was given by her founder. And this mission is not a command to be cultured, it is *to save*. "How is a man the better for it, if he gains the whole world at the cost of losing his own soul?" As for that "soul", we must lose it if we would gain it. All the riches of the world, the triumphs of the flesh as well as the triumphs of the spirit, count for nothing in the kingdom of God, which is for the poor. We should be more than happy to sell everything in order to gain that single pearl. *Go, teach, baptise*. Not "baptise" Plato or Aristotle, literature or art, the community or the human personality, but baptise (without inverted commas) all mankind. It is not a matter of "assuming values": it is rather the salvation of our brethren.

"So it was, brethren, that when I came to you and preached Christ's message to you, I did so without any high pretensions to eloquence, or to philosophy. I had no thought of bringing you any other knowledge than that of Jesus Christ, and of him as crucified". (I Cor. 3. 1-7).

"Preach the Gospel to every creature". If one wanted to take this mission seriously, it would mean making Christ known to every