

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

single human being, so that all might give themselves to Christ, even though that meant the naked obedience of faith and the abandonment of all else, even culture. But sooner or later one must preach the Gospel to the *whole* of the creature, to the creature in its entirety, to all that is in a man, to all that a man lives by: one must take up everything human, and that word "human" means first of all the culture essential to it. It is culture alone that awakens man fully to that life of the intellect which Faith brings into the presence of the divine Truth. Men share in everything that is human through culture; when culture becomes Christian, then men can give themselves wholly to the obedience of Faith, nothing that is theirs being exempt from salvation. Hence the very obedience of Faith gives them back a hundredfold the very thing it had robbed them of. To the same Corinthians whom he wished to bring back to the humility of the Cross, St. Paul could not deny—however ironically—the claim to new riches: "Everything is for you, whether it be Paul, or Apollo, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the Future; it is all for you, and you for Christ, and Christ for God". (I Cor. 3. xxii sqq.).

Such is the definitive formula of all Christian culture: "Everything is for you". Science and the arts, the riches of tradition no less than of the living community, the world as well as Paul and Cephas: all belong to the Christian. But he will only remain Christian in welcoming them, he will only keep his dominion over them, in so far as he himself belongs to Christ and to God. And he will want to belong to Christ in his totality, with all that he has made his own, with all that is now part of himself. Faith and Charity are realised in their fulness in a Christian culture. To save men's souls means "resuming everything in Jesus Christ, all that is in heaven, all that is on earth, summed up in him". (Eph. I. x).

Only one thing matters to the Church: the salvation of souls. But the desire to save every single man has made the Church feel the need of the culture, from which in her beginnings she held aloof. Indeed, along with the means of salvation which she dispenses, the Church also imparts the means for achieving that culture.

The fact is that the resources of the Church are not fully developed. That may be because of a neglect of the means of salvation, but it can as well be because the means of salvation have not been given their *cultural* value which, paradoxically, can still keep its hold on men who have lost the Faith. A non-Christian society will certainly lack a Christian culture; but a de-Christianised society can keep and even develop some elements of that culture, while a fervent Christian community can be, or become, barbarian. Even holiness is not decisive in this matter. Holiness has shown itself in fact as the force that brings about or inspires the greatest

triumphs, as well as the greatest setbacks, for Christian culture. Just compare Assisi and Lisieux. Grace only "completes" nature if nature does its part.

We must not be surprised or shocked, then, when we occasionally meet a check to culture in the Church: theology hidden away (so that even the founders of a Catholic University have been known to ask if a Faculty of Theology were as urgently needed as Faculties of Medicine and Law); the education of the clergy in "ecclesiastical" learning destitute of any scientific consistency; a type of Christian education forgetful of the body, of initiative, of love; all those dreary catechisms and remote sermons; hideous churches; ghastly singing; ceremonies so fussy as to be meaningless; even the goodwill of "charity" sometimes by-passing the real needs of the community; faith, morals, sacraments, the community—all more or less deprived of their cultural complements. "Everything is for you". Yet that "everything" is according to our capacity: a capacity measured by how far we belong to Christ, how far we have conquered our human nature.

So we need not be surprised by these failures. The Church, in the essential fact of her mission, is not the cause of them. But all the same there is no room for being resigned about them. If we are Christians and if culture is our concern, then it is our business to provide that culture; it is our responsibility. The task is already planned out: it is to recognise the Church's means of salvation in so far as they are instruments of culture, and to make resolute use of them as such. This work has already begun in our time, in all sorts of directions. Theology is once more attracting the interest of Christians, once more the Liturgy is bringing the imagination into play, once more Christian morals are seen to mark a "way of life", once more the Christian community is recognised as a reality of flesh and blood. From the omnivorous intellectual interests of the Greek Fathers right down to the Jocistes of our day working out their problems, at every level of thought and life, Christian culture can be seen at work.

To pursue this spontaneous work everywhere, to promote it amidst vast uncultivated regions, to build the necessary bridges, to link up all the scattered work being done—such must be the task of the Christian in the domain of culture. But there are more pressing tasks, it may be objected: getting enough food, for instance, or simply saving the world. Yet such is the unity of mankind, such the catholicity of the Church and the grandeur of the Christian Faith, that we must attack all these tasks together. "Everything is for you . . . it is all for you, and you for Christ, and Christ for God".

(Translated and abbreviated from an article by PÈRE CHIFFLOT, O.P., in *Foyers de Notre Culture*, Paris, 1942).