

so called) of the teachings of the *City of God*, for example that perpetrated by Ernest Barker in his introduction to the Everyman edition of the English translation; caricatures that are based on a crass lack of comprehension of Augustine's aims and point of view. He emphasizes the personal, experiential character of Augustine's thought, and makes a most illuminating comparison between its structure in the *Confessions*, the *City of God*, and the *De Trinitate*, a comparison I am proud to be able to say that I made independently in an article entitled 'St Augustusine's Geography of Conversion', in the *Life of the Spirit*, August-September 1959. Both these books do full justice to St Augustine's huge, fascinating, humanity.

## Heard and Seen

### POST PILKINGTON

Now that the dust has settled a little, and the moral lessons so primly spelled out by the Pilkington Report have been assimilated, the future of British radio and television seems as obscure as ever. There is a passion in this country for enquiries and reports - one can think of a whole series of Royal Commissions whose recommendations still await acceptance or even serious debate - which can sometimes appear to be nothing but a concession to a guilty conscience. If a group of high-minded public figures can be persuaded to meet, hear evidence and prepare a report, then something has been accomplished. At least they have had their say and the pressures have been reduced. But when, as in the case of broadcasting, the issues involve acute questions of political manoeuvre, not to speak of the most substantial financial interests, it is unlikely that a Government will act with boldness. The report is there to be read and discussed: but, rather like Stalin's enquiry about the Pope, the Minister's concern is with what armed forces its authors command. In the case of the Pilkington report, the answer is very little. No one thinks that Miss Joyce Grenfell, or Sir Harry himself, can match the millions of the powerful lobbies of the programme companies.

The Report itself did not greatly commend its admirable intentions by a kind of University Extension class vocabulary and a humourless analysis of the monster as though it were a marketing-board. And, bad as though many

British television programmes undoubtedly are, they are still probably the best in the world. One need only look at any one of the seven or eight channels offered in any big American city to be grateful for the mercies of Panorama and some at least of Granada's programmes. Is it realistic to suppose that a mass medium, nourished as it is in the case of the independent network by immense financial gain, could avoid the vulgarity, the lowest common denominator, which so universal an appeal inevitably creates?

The Pilkington answer suggests that the decision to allow commercial television in the first place was a wrong one, that the pattern of a public service established by the B.B.C. was the proper one, and that all that has gone wrong since 1955 is due to allowing financial interests to dominate a medium which should be insulated from them. This is an attractive argument, but it could, one imagines, be applied with equal force to newspapers and even to the cinema. The problem is in essence one of striking a balance between freedom and responsibility, and there is much justice in the Pilkington complaint that the Independent Television Authority has throughout been far too complacent and even indolent in its conception of its function.

It is certainly true that the B.B.C. has in many ways profited from competition. If it has rather pathetically tried to match vulgarity with vulgarity, out-westerning the westerns in order to preserve its audience-ratings, it has at the same time freed itself of some of its civil-service habits. Fearful of giving offence to anyone, it most often gave pleasure to no one, and a free exchange of opinion is essential if the public importance of television is to extend to areas more controversial than gardening or wild life in the Matto Grosso. Perhaps the process has now gone too far, especially in religious discussions in which it seems impossible for any point of view to be expressed without its being submitted to a diametrically opposed opinion. The eternal panel, so ebullient in courtesy and so brutally divided in allegiance, has become synonymous with 'religion'. All it usually reveals, and that ought to be known already, is the existence of widely divergent opinions which half-an-hour of chat is unlikely to resolve.

The Pilkington view of religion was polite but hardly enthusiastic. It may be that the members of the committee were not impressed by the religious programmes they had heard and seen. They certainly represent the least lively element in television, with little evidence of any formula other than the televised service (a sort of ecclesiastical Trooping of the Colour) or the eternal discussion ('would you agree with that?').

There is of course a special difficulty in a society such as ours, with its multiplicity of beliefs or non-beliefs and the perpetual demand by minorities to be heard. Religion is, in its broadcasting image, essentially divisive: an opinion or a spectacle, but scarcely the framework for any creative use of the medium as such. That this should be so is not necessarily the fault of the policy-makers, whether B.B.C or I.T.A. They can after all only provide the facilities; what is done with them is the responsibility of the producers (and of course the

participants, if performers be not the word).

And here much remains to be done to find a means of presenting religion in terms that are intellectually respectable as well as visually interesting. The ghastly gimmicks that seek to make an epilogue acceptable - the unlikely air of spontaneity ('As I was coming along to the studio') or the unsuitable visual aids (Gothic shots or crowds filmed to suggest the toiling workers to be redeemed) - are an example of the sort of superficiality that bedevils religious programmes, as though they could be made palatable by second-hand tricks learned in last year's magazine programmes.

Perhaps the trouble is - and here Pilkington should provide a useful hint or two - that, in trying to reach everyone, the religious producers are reaching no one in particular. Religion is left vaguely suspended in the customary cocoon of 'opinion'. The qualitative approach matters, even though the quantitative is all the planners seem to care about. And if religion is so constantly presented as though it were a matter of 'news' - a more venerable form of vegetarianism - it is scarcely surprising that its television impact is so pathetically slight.

What Pilkington is saying, beneath the verbiage and the message, has its real importance for religious broadcasting. It might be summed up as saying that those who believe in the responsibility of what they are doing should concentrate hard on a presentation that is adult and professionally respectable, even though it may only be a tiny break in the universal cotton-wool cloud of the popular programming. For Christians, the challenge of the new media of mass communication is urgent, and it can only be met if good intentions are matched by intelligence, imagination and sheer technical skill. It means, too, a recognition that religion means more than round-the-table opinion sampling: it means love and destiny and death and all else besides.

A. I.

## Reviews

**MEDICAL ETHICS** by Charles J. McFadden, O.S.A., PH.D. 5th Edition; Burns and Oates; 25s.

**PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS** by John P. Kenny, O.P., PH.D., The Newman Press; Westminster, Maryland. \$4.50.

During the past seventeen years or more Father McFadden's name has been well known in the field of medical ethics by reason of the popularity of his textbooks. It has been a period in which much has been happening in this field. Many new medical techniques and procedures have been introduced, new drugs