

were less aggressive in the picture than in the book.

Neither of these films was really successful in the presentation of nuns. Here is a very real problem crying out to be solved. In real life members of Anglican sisterhoods can almost invariably be distinguished immediately from Catholic nuns, and not only, or principally, by their dress. If it is so difficult for women genuinely endeavouring to consecrate their lives exclusively to God to be convincing as nuns, how much more so for film actresses. Perhaps it is hardly practical to hope for a time when nuns will be asked to "vet" parts of a film, as priests are now. But that seems to be the only way to exclude from the film studio the idea that nuns are necessarily harsh women subsequently softened, or are sanctimonious simpletons.

Priests do fare better. Father O'Malley in *Going My Way* might almost have been educated at the American College in Rome, even to the angle of his hat. Strange to say, Spencer Tracy in *Boys' Town* seemed less artificial as a priest than Monsignor Flanagan himself, who appeared in the prologue; the actor was in his element in studio conditions and the priest was not. The part of Father Fitzgibbon in *Going My Way* was more like a portrait than a caricature. But the implicit impression given in that film that a priest begins a weekday by coming straight from his bedroom to the breakfast table is symbolic of just how the cinema can fail to suggest the very essence of the priesthood, which so clearly distinguishes the sacerdotal vocation alike from the "job" of the layman and the "work" of the Protestant minister.

The reaction of the public to *The Song of Bernadette* has shown that the cinema can afford not to shirk the supernatural. In *Passage to Marseille* one of the characters said that the hoisting of a national flag was "like a benediction, a sacrament". The value of religion as presented in the films lies in the extent to which it directs towards the objective reality of Christian and Catholic truth the vague, distorted idealism, which is otherwise restricted to such inadequate substitutes.

H. A. C. CONNELL.

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II. SOME POSSIBILITIES.

DURING the last ten years in America, a company, formed to produce religious films chiefly of biblical subjects, has already completed ten out of a series of thirty. The producer is a minister of the American Episcopal Church, the Reverend James K. Friedrich, and he has secured the services of John T. Coyle, a Hollywood director who personally directs the production of all these films. They are made at Hollywood, and at the moment a complete replica of Jerusalem is under construction on Iverson Ranch,

some 30 miles from Hollywood. The company goes by the name of "Cathedral Films Inc."

There have been many difficulties in the way of any similar effort being made in England. But a company has been formed in this country under the name "Bible Films Ltd." to help in the financing of the American venture so that the American films can be obtained and used over here. The sole distribution of these films in England is in the hands of the "Dawn Trust Film Library" of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

Four films of the series were shown privately recently in London. The first was on the Birth and Infancy of Christ, the second on the healing of the Centurion's son, the third was the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and the last, under the title "No Greater Power" gave the story of Zaccheus.

There is no doubt that these films are well directed. They will strike the average film goer as equal to any film he usually sees as regards their photography and their general effect. They convey quite successfully the atmosphere of the East, or at least they convey the same atmosphere of the East that one obtains from other films, both in desert scenes and in those of the towns. The dialogue, also, is clear and natural.

But when we come to the primary purpose of the company in producing these films, we are brought face to face with one aspect of a great problem. The purpose of the company is said to be "To proclaim the message and teaching of the Crucified and Risen Christ and in every way to promote the religious and educational advancement of the community by means of Motion Picture Films . . ." In other words the purpose of the company is explicitly Christian propaganda.

But Christian propaganda for whom? For Catholics, for Anglicans or for American Episcopalians? No, say the promoters, it is not propaganda for any sectarian interest. Rather is it propaganda for that body of Christian truth which is acceptable to most Christians. Thus, the story of Christ's Birth and Infancy is given, keeping all the time strictly to the texts of Matthew and Luke; similarly the Parable of the Prodigal Son is selected, which surely will appeal to all men of good will. But is this a good method of Christian propaganda? Or is it not rather a continuation for those of school leaving age and after, of that non-denominational teaching of our council schools, the legacy of nineteenth century liberalism which perhaps, more than any other single cause, has robbed so many of our fellow countrymen of their religious inheritance?

Most of the teaching of this kind given in our schools either inculcates the "natural virtues", prudence, justice, temperance,

kindness, generosity, in which case the subject matter is not *specifically* Christian at all, or it advocates the *perfection* of the Christian life which, St. Paul reminded the Corinthians, should only be preached to those who were already proficient. Hence the average agnostic of to-day inevitably regards Christianity as either a vague ethical system with a mythological background, or as an impractical ideal. These two views are an inevitable result of non-denominational education in religion, and, as I see it, these films are going to help to give young people who see them the same impression.

Now I am not denying that there may well be many truths believed by Christians of different denominations. Let us grant, also, that in spite of doctrinal differences, we have a common front of Christian truth to be defended in the apostolate of public opinion. Yet, even so, in our desire not to hurt the religious susceptibilities of one another, we must not shrink from attacking the common enemy. For the message of Christ is itself a challenge to unbelief.

Would it not therefore be infinitely preferable to concentrate on those parts of the Gospel which show that challenge in all its dramatic force, to put into the mouths of the pharisees and the lawyers the objections of the agnostics of to-day, to show the difference of approach which our Lord used when in the rural surroundings of his first year's public life to the more sophisticated and more intellectual problems he was faced with in the city apostolate of the Jerusalem ministry, to suggest by that telescoping of years, which the film art more easily than any other can achieve, how the men of Galilee are for all time the prototypes of the rural community, how the officials of Jerusalem are for all time the model civil servants, government officials and the like? In this way, one could come to grips with the evils of our age, and the challenge would be alive. What challenge there is in these films, as they are, is to my mind something of the past, and further, something of the East, so that it is as far removed from the ordinary consciousness of the man in the street as is the kind of religion he associates it with.

A few long films well thought out as regards dialogue and presentation, rather than many short ones, might well aim at showing the *dynamic* meaning of the Incarnation as something not merely eastern and historical, but as something true, universal and relevant to the broken world in which we live.

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