

TELEVISION AND THE CATHOLIC WORLD

The International UNDA Conference

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UNDA is not the latest of the initial-words that reflect the multitude of international organizations that have come into being to serve the hopes and fears of the post-war world. It is simply the Latin word for 'wave' and is the convenient name for the co-ordinating body for Catholic radio and television throughout the world, with its headquarters at Fribourg in Switzerland. Last February, the television section of UNDA organized the first international Conference for Catholic television in Paris. It was attended by representatives from most western European countries, as well as Canada, the United States and Cuba, together with observers from UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

In a first gathering, with terms of reference so necessarily wide, the work of the Conference was largely exploratory, but it was soon evident that in many countries the potentialities of so powerful a medium of mass communication as television were already acutely realized by the Church. Indeed the Conference was prefaced by the ordinary Sunday morning religious programme from the French television studios, and the delegates were able to see for themselves how the French Dominicans (to whose charge the programme has been committed) have met the demand for Catholic worship and instruction through the new medium. It was a touching detail that the infant son of the producer of religious television features should have been baptized in the studio before the Mass began—perhaps a symbol of how actual is the inspiration of French religious television, now in its sixth year of active production.

Père Pichard, O.P., Director of the television department of UNDA and the animator of the week's work, opened the Conference with a reminder of the high authority that has been given to the religious use of television by the Pope's recent utterances. A message from the Bishop of Lausanne and Fribourg, the Pope's delegate for UNDA, underlined the opportunity that

awaits a constructive acceptance of television as a means by which the Church can reach whole areas of modern life too usually untouched by a Christian interpretation. M. Paul Levy, Director of Information of the Council of Europe, insisted on the importance of television in creating a sense of the European community. It is a powerful agent of unity, and the Council of Europe has already sponsored proposals to facilitate international exchanges and co-production, so that the work of European information might be extended. Specialist committees are at work on the problems of copyright and technical standards which are serious obstacles to the international use of television. M. Jean D'Arcy, Director of French television, in a description of European exchange programmes, instanced many of the difficulties, and it is perhaps ironical that the forthcoming series of exchanges (to be undertaken by all the existing television services of Western Europe) should include ten programmes televising the World Football competition in Switzerland—the safest of international programmes as yet devised! The enormous cost of television, as well as its extravagant use of material, makes the expansion of international exchanges urgently necessary. At the same time this opening out of television should do much to extend its value as an authentic means of mass communication, interpreting one people and its culture to another. And that, for the Catholic programme planners, presents a wonderful opportunity for revealing the universal role of the Church, transcending and yet fulfilling as it does the individuations of nationality and culture.

The reports of the delegates on the state of Catholic television in their various countries were of great interest, revealing as they did considerable differences of emphasis. In particular the question of the regular television of Sunday Mass was much discussed. The French and Italian practice of weekly transmissions seemed to the German delegates to be scarcely suitable for the religious mentality of countries of mixed allegiance. The German practice is to concentrate on programmes of religious inspiration in the evening, concerned to present a Catholic approach to contemporary problems rather than to provide 'alternatives' to the traditional worship which takes place in the churches themselves. (This, too, seems to be the likely development within the limited opportunities offered to Catholics within the B.B.C.) In Belgium, too, Catholic television programmes (as yet only in their first

stages) concentrate on features illustrating Catholic doctrine and history through films and pictures drawn from Christian art. In Italy, as in France, the regular television of the Mass is accompanied by commentary and a brief homily. But Italian transmissions are usually from a church whereas the French practice is normally to use the studio and thus to concentrate on the medium as such. The French ideal is to build a special studio chapel, fitted up for the specific purpose of televising religious services and thus avoiding the improvisation and interference with regular worship which is inevitable when a programme comes direct from an outside church.

Holland presents a unique broadcasting system, in which the almost equally divided Catholic and Protestant populations are served by separate organizations representing the different cultural and religious groupings of the country. Television is so far financed by five such organizations, though government assistance is now becoming available. The Catholic programme is designed for the whole population, none the less, and the inspiration of its programmes is not necessarily directly religious. Thus the television of the Mass is likely to be only occasional, and the enormous cost of television for such a small country as the Netherlands means that much must be hoped for from exchange programmes and the use of telefilms. Fr Agnellus Andrew, in a comprehensive survey of the British system, described the reactions to the Catholic programmes so far televised by the B.B.C. As with sound broadcasting, the Catholic contribution to a national programme must be addressed to a large majority which has little firm religious allegiance. This creates special difficulties, and special opportunities too, and such programmes as the television of the High Mass from Leeds Cathedral last January present the challenge of Catholic faith in new and inescapable terms. The astounding growth of television in the United States was brought home to the Conference in a paper read by Mr J. Keefe, director of a Chicago television station, who instanced the twenty-eight million sets and the daily average five and a half hours viewing in each home as proof of the influence television has now achieved. Telefilms of such programmes as Bishop Fulton Sheen's 'Life is Worth Living' (a 'non-denominational, inspirational' programme seen by fifteen million viewers every week) underlined Mr Keefe's claim for the religious possibilities of television apart from

the (necessarily limited) programmes of direct Catholic inspiration.

Père Roguet, O.P., most experienced of liturgical apostles and a frequent television preacher, dealt with the whole question of the television of the Mass. He began by listing the usual—and formidable—objections. ‘It creates overfamiliarity’: yes, but it is not a substitute for the worship of the parish church. It is a means of instruction, a part of the apostolate, directed towards those who cannot or will not go to Mass. ‘It is distracting to the priest’: no doubt, but the Mass the priest offers is never simply *his* affair. A televised Mass, like any other, is for the people of God: it represents the sacrifice of their redemption, and its purpose is more than to foster the personal piety of its celebrant. ‘It is a profanation of the sacred’: but this objection betrays a misunderstanding of what the sacred really is. Television, in a remarkable way, makes the sacred available in a world that is too often unaware of it. A sacrament is a mystery and a sign: it is not merely the concealing of the holy, but rather its evocation under the form of a significant symbol. It is the presence of the faithful that makes a place sacred; the *ecclesia* is what matters, and in every televised Mass the faithful are present and are seen. ‘The televised Mass takes people away from the Mass itself; it is a substitute and an alibi for the lazy’: rather is the televised Mass a new and wonderful opportunity of bringing people back to the sense of religious obligation. The emphasis on explaining what the Mass really achieves, aided by the capacity of the camera to penetrate into the rhythm of word and gesture so often concealed from the faithful at Mass, has, Père Roguet maintained, already done a great deal for the re-education of indifferent Catholics and has been a complete revelation to many unbelievers. Because the televised Mass has no canonical validity that is not to say that it has no religious value: the formalities are different. It is a supreme opportunity for a pastoral apostolate: the very genius of the medium is made for the exposition of a mystery which is enacted in terms of significant gesture.

Père Louvel, dealing with some of the practical problems of religious television, underlined the role of the faithful. The ‘production’ of a televised Mass can indicate the variety of function within the Mass: it is a symphony which converges on the altar. The Church is to be revealed to the world, and television

enables this to be done most eloquently. There is, too, the opportunity of educating Catholic opinion, and transmissions, for instance, of various oriental rites have done much to enrich the sense of the Church as universal. Père Lintanf, describing the French Catholic magazine programmes on television (which he edits), made the same point. Here is a valuable means of showing the wealth of Catholic action in the world, and much subsequent discussion at the Conference was concerned with the possibility of international Catholic exchanges which would deepen the understanding, for instance, of missionary work and new methods of the apostolate in Europe.

Much time was taken up with the 'Missions par le Cinéma', a new development in French Catholic life which at first sight seems to have little connection with television. But the purpose of these programmes of religious films, now being increasingly shown throughout France, is closely linked up with the apostolate of religious television in the sense that the films have so far been first shown in television programmes. Their subsequent showing during 'missions' helps to provide the financial backing necessary for their production, for religious programmes on French television are not subsidized: the facilities of studios and technicians are made available by the Radiodiffusion Française, but the production of the programmes is the financial responsibility (and serious difficulty) of the Dominican team in charge of them. During the Conference two new films were shown: *Terre Sainte*, a documentary on Palestine, and *Ordinations*, a film on the sacrament of Holy Orders, directed by Agostini, in the tradition of the lovely *Nuit de Pâques*, which it is hoped will be shown on B.B.C. television this Easter. The delegates were also shown the earlier *Moïse*, an exciting evocation by means of puppets of the story of Exodus which is a perfect companion piece to the *Nuit de Pâques*, recounting the liturgical mystery of which the story of Israel's deliverance is the fore-shadowing. The 'Missions par le Cinéma' have already done much to educate French Catholic opinion in the visual medium, which later on television will make universally available.

The question of television as an aid to education was not the least important of the many subjects discussed. Mr Cassirer, director of the radio and television division of UNESCO, gave details of that organization's plans for using television as a means of basic

education. The French television service has for some time been conducting an experiment in rural education on behalf of UNESCO, and it is already evident that isolated communities can be greatly helped by programmes which are directed to their real needs. Especially important is the intimacy of television, which can stimulate discussion: a programme seen by a small group is (or should be) *shared*. The dangers of television as a substitute for the discipline of formal education were fully discussed, and the effect on children of a wholly secular (and visually oversimplified) presentation of history, for instance, was seen as a development which Catholic educationalists must anticipate.

A whole day of the Conference was devoted to the technical problems of Catholic television programmes. The lecturer was M. Chartier, who has for some years been the producer of the religious programmes transmitted by French television, and is also editor of the excellent weekly *Radio-Cinéma*. Television, M. Chartier maintained, is a 'privileged' medium because of its direct and personal contact with the viewer. It does not merely report; it 'bears witness'—and therein lies its power as a means of religious education. The problem is to find the expert who combines an exact theological perception (and who has the capacity to transmit it in contemporary terms) with a real sensibility for the medium he is using. The television preacher has to be an interpreter in the truest sense. The producer in his turn is an intermediary, and his discretion should prevent (for instance) the transmission of the Mass from ever becoming a matter of technical virtuosity instead of a presentation of the Christian sacrifice. Some of the detailed suggestions were of great interest: that, for example, the shape and colour of vestments is more than a matter of aesthetic choice, since amplitude and simplicity are qualities that enhance the visual, and thus the religious, effect of what is done. The liturgy is itself the perfect type of what the television producer should be achieving. It is always significant; its economy of gesture and depth of symbolic meaning are the pattern of what a religious television programme should aim to reproduce. Telefilms of many French programmes gave ample proof of M. Chartier's thesis, and the intelligent and sympathetic handling of such a service as the Easter vigil in a small country parish was a moving illustration of television's power to evoke the hidden springs of worship.

The final session of the Conference emphasized the great need for constant Catholic co-operation on the international level if the religious possibilities of television are to be fully realized. Special commissions are to be set up to deal with such matters as Catholic exchange programmes (and in particular a regular magazine programme of Catholic actuality which will draw on material provided by the different countries), educational films, missionary films (of which many exist, in isolation as it were, but which could be of great value if made internationally available) and the setting up of a library of telefilms. The Pope's warning, that special vigilance is necessary in the case of television since 'its performances penetrate the sanctuary of the family', is a reminder that Catholic opinion should not be content with a merely negative attitude. The first UNDA Conference was encouraging evidence that there are already available Catholics with a knowledge and respect for the new medium who may be trusted to do all they can to give a positive and Christian direction to its immense potentialities.

TELEVISION AND RURAL EDUCATION

A UNESCO Experiment in France

THE French television service, in collaboration with UNESCO, is at present carrying out an experiment in the form of transmissions intended for rural viewers gathered for collective viewing, or 'Tele-Clubs'. The general purpose of this experiment is to discover, on the basis of concrete evidence, to what extent it is possible to put a completely new instrument like television at the service of popular education, and to make use of it for the material and spiritual progress and the international understanding that UNESCO wants to help its member-states to promote among their peoples.

Television, that latest of the new instruments of information and of intellectual communication, has its own characteristics, methods, and rights, which set it in a category apart from radio