APOSTOLIC EXHORTATIONS

OF HIS HOLINESS

PIUS XII

TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CINEMA WORLD

I - TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ITALIAN CINEMATOGRAPH INDUSTRY (Audience of 21st June, 1955)

Gentlemen: it is a very great pleasure to welcome into Our presence you, the chosen representatives of the world of the Cinema, the extent and influence of which, in a brief span of years, have attained remarkable proportions, giving, as it were, an impress of their own to our age.

Though at other times and on different occasions We have directed careful attention to the activity of the Cinema, We are glad today to meet personally those whose whole time is devoted to it, in order as Pastor of the Flock to open Our heart to them in which praise for their great achievements is joined to a piercing anxiety for the fate of so many souls on which the Cinema exercises a profound influence.

Rightly can one speak of a special "world of the Cinema" when one thinks of the tremendous dynamic activity to which the Cinema has given life, whether in the strictly artistic field, or in the economic and technical sphere. Towards it are directed the energies of large numbers of producers, writers, directors, actors, musicians, workers, technicians and so many others, whose duties are described by new names, and of such a nature as to create a terminology of their own in modern languages. One thinks also of the vast number of industrial plants which provide for the production of the material and apparatus, of the film-studios, the cinema halls which, if placed in imagination, in a single setting, would surely make one of the most extensive cities in the world - such, moreover, already exist on a reduced scale, on the fringe of many cities. Further, the sphere of economic interests created by the Cinema, and drawn in its turn towards it, whether for the

production of films or for their utilisation, finds few counterparts in private industry, especially if one considers the bulk of capital invested, the readiness with which it is offered, the speed with which - not without considerable profits - it returns to the industrialists.

So, then, this world of the Cinema cannot do other than create around itself a field of unusually wide and deep influence in the thinking, the habits, the life of the countries where it develops its power - particularly among the poorest classes, for whom the Cinema is often the sole recreation after work, and among the youth, who see in the Cinema a quick and attractive means of quenching the natural thirst for knowledge and experience which the age promises them.

Thus it is that to the cinema-world of production, which you represent, there corresponds a special, and very much greater world of spectators, who, more or less consciously and effectively, receive from the former a definite force guiding their development, their ideas, feelings, and - not rarely - their very way of life. From this simple consideration, the need for a proper study of the art of the Cinema in its origins and its effects becomes clear, to the end that it, as every other activity, may be directed to the improvement of man and the glory of God

1. - THE ART OF THE CINEMA - ITS IMPORTANCE

The extraordinary influence of the Cinema on present-day society is shown by the growing thirst which this society has for it, and which, reduced to numbers, constitutes a quite new and remarkable phenomenon. In the statistics kindly presented to Us, it is reported that, during the year 1954, the number of cinema-goers for all the countries of the world taken together, was twelve thousand million, among whom 2,500 million in the United States of America, 1,300 million in England, while the figure 800 million puts Italy in the third place.

What is the source of the fascination of this new art, which, sixty years after its first appearance, has arrived at the almost magical power of summoning into the darkness of its halls, and not gratuitously, crowds that are numbered by the billions? What is the secret of the spell which makes these same crowds its constant devotees? In the answers to such questions lie the fundamental causes which bring about the great importance and the wide popularity of the Cinema.

The first power of attraction of a film springs from its technical qualities, which perform the prodigy of transferring the spectator into an imaginary world or, in a documentary film, of bringing reality, distant in space and time, right before his eyes. To the technical process, then, belongs the first place in the origin and development of the Cinema. It preceded the film, and first made it possible; it also makes it every day more attractive, adaptable, alive. The chief technical elements of a cinema show were already in existence before the film was born; then gradually the film has taken control of them until it has at length reached the point where it demands of the technical process

the invention of new methods to be placed at its service. The reciprocity of influence between the technical process and the film has thus brought about a swift development towards perfection, starting from the shaky retakes of a train arriving, to pass on to the animated film of ideas and feelings, at first with silent actors, then with actors speaking and moving in places filled with sound and music. Spurred on by desire to transport the spectator into the unreal world, the film has asked technical skill for Nature's colours, then the three dimensions of space, and at the present time is striving with daring ingenuity to place the spectator amidst the scene itself.

In looking today at a film of forty years ago, it is possible to note remarkable technical progress achieved, and it must be admitted that, by its qualities, a present-day film - even though only a sound film in "black-and-white" - appears like a magnificent stage performance.

But to a greater degree than from technical finish, the attractive force and the importance of the film derives from the artistic element, which has been refined not only by the contribution made by the authors, writers and actors, chosen in accordance with severe tests, but by the keen rivaliry established among them in worldwide competition.

From the simple visual narration of an ordinary incident, there has come to be carried on the screen, the progress of human life in its manifold dramas, tracing skilfully the ideals, the faults, the hopes, the ordinary happenings or the high achievements of one or more persons. A growing mastery of invention and of the setting of the subject has made ever more alive and enthralling the entertainment which avails itself, moreover, of the traditional power of dramatic art of all times and in all civilizations, nay, with a notable advantage over the latter, by the greater freedom of movement, the spaciousness of the scene, and by the other effects special to the Cinema.

But to understand thoroughly the power of films, and to make a more exact evaluation of the Cinema, it is necessary to take note of the important part played in it by the laws of psychology, either in so far as they explain how the film influences the mind, or in so far as they are deliberately applied to produce a stronger impression on the spectators. With careful observation devotees of this science study the process of action and reaction produced by viewing the picture, applying the method of research and analysis, the fruits of experimental psychology, studying the hidden recesses of the subconscious and the unconscious. They investigate the film's influence not only as it is passively received by the viewer, but also by analyzing its related psychical "activation", in accordance with immanent laws, i.e., its power to grip the mind through the enchantment of the representation. If, through one or the other influence, the spectator remains truly a prisoner of the world unfolding before his eyes, he is forced to transfer somehow to the person of the actor his own ego, with its psychic tendencies, its personal experiences, its hidden and ill-defined desires. Through the whole time of this sort of enchantment, due in large part to the suggestion of the actor, the viewer moves in the actor's world as though it were his own, and even, to some degree, lives in his place, and almost within him, in perfect harmony of feeling, sometimes even being drawn by the action to suggest words and phrases. This procedure, which modern

directors are well aware of and try to make use of, has been compared with the dream state, with this difference, that the visions and images of dreams come only from the inner world of the dreamer, whereas they come from the screen to the spectator, but in such a way that they arouse from the depths of his consciousness images that are more vivid and dearer to him. Often enough then it happens that the spectator, through pictures of persons and things, sees as real what never actually happened, but which he has frequently pondered over deep within himself, and desired or feared. With cause, therefore, does the extraordinary power of the moving picture find its profoundest explanation in the internal structure of psychic process, and the spectacle will be all the more gripping in proportion to the degree in which it stimulates these processes.

As a result, the director is constantly forced to sharpen his own psychological sensibility and his own insight by the efforts he must make to find the most effective form to give to a film the power described above, which can have a good or a bad moral effect. In fact, the internal dynamisms of the spectator's ego, in the depths of his nature, of his subconscious and unconscious mind, can lead him thus to the realm of light, of the noble and beautiful, just as they can bring him under the sway of darkness and depravation, at the mercy of powerful and uncontrolled instincts, depending on whether the picture plays up and arouses the qualities of one or the other field, and focuses on it the attention, the desires and psychic impulses. Human nature's condition is such, in fact, that not always do the spectators possess or preserve the spiritual energy, the interior detachment, and frequently, too, the strength of will, to resist a captivating suggestion, and thus the capacity to control and direct themselves.

Along with these fundamental causes and reasons for the attractiveness and importance of motion pictures, another active psychic element has been amply brought to light. It is the free and personal interpretation of the viewer, and his anticipation of the action's subsequent development; it is this which procures him, in some degree, the delight proper to one who creates an event. From this element, too, the director draws profit, through apparently insignificant but skilful movements, as, for example, the gesture of a hand, a shrug of the shoulders, a half-open door.

The moving picture has thus adopted, in its own way, the canons of the traditional narrative - these, too, based on psycological laws - the first of which is to hold the reader's attention, awakening his anxiety for what will befall the personages who have already become, in some way, his acquaintances. For this reason it would be a mistake to give at the very beginning a clear and transparent outline of the tale or picture. Indeed, the book, and perhaps even more so the moving picture, because of its more varied and subtle means, draws its typical fascination from the urge, communicated to the spectator, of giving his own interpretation to the story, and which leads him, by the thread of a scarcely perceptible logic, or even through harmless deceit, to glimpse that which is indefinite, to foresee an action, to anticipate an emotion, to resolve a problem. Thus, through application in the film of this psychological activity of the viewer, the enchantment of the motion picture is increased.

Because of this inner power of the moving picture, and because of its wide influence on the masses of men and even on moral practices, it has drawn the attention not only of the competent civil and ecclesiastical authority, but also of all groups possessed of calm judgement and a genuine sense of responsibility.

In truth, how could an instrument, in itself most noble, but so apt to uplift or degrade men, and so quick to produce good or spread evil, be left completely alone, or made dependent on purely economic interests?

The watchfulness and response of public authorities, fully justified by law to defend the common civil and moral heritage, is made manifest in various ways: through the civil and ecclesiastical censure of pictures, and if necessary, through banning them; through the listing of films by appropriate examining boards, which qualify them according to merit for the information of the public, and as a norm to be followed. It is indeed true that the spirit of our time, unreasonably intolerant of the intervention of public authority, would prefer censorship coming directly from the people.

It would certainly be desirable if good men could agree on banning corrupt movies wherever they are shown, and to combat them with the legal and moral weapons at their disposal; yet such action is not by itself enough.

Private initiative and zeal can wane, and do in fact wane rather quickly, as experience shows. But not so the hostile and aggressive propaganda, which frequently draws rich profits from films, and which often finds a ready ally in the inner man, i.e., his blind instincts and allurements, or his brutal and base urges.

If, therefore, the civic and moral heritage of peoples and families is to be effectively safeguarded, it is most certainly right for public authority to exercise a due intervention in order to hinder or check the most dangerous influences.

To you, so full of good will, let Us now address a confidential and fatherly word. Is it not time that a sincere evaluation and a rejection of whatever is unworthy or evil be from the start, and in a special way placed in your hands? The charge of incompetence, of bias certainly could not be made, if with mature judgement that has been formed on sound moral principles, and with earnest intent, you reject whatever debases human dignity, the individual and common good, and especially our youth.

No discerning person could ignore or deride your conscientious and well-weighed judgement in matters concerning your own profession. Put to good use, therefore, that pre-eminence and authority which your knowledge, your experience, and the dignity of your work confer on you. In the place of irrelevant or harmful shows present pictures that are good, noble, beautiful, which

undoubtedly can be made attractive and uplifting at the same time, and even reach a high artistic level. You will have the agreement and approval of everyone of upright mind and heart, and above all the approval of your own consciences.

II. - THE IDEAL FILM

Up to the present We have directed Our remarks to the moving picture as it actually is. In this second part We should like to speak of the moving picture as it ought to be - i.e., of the ideal.

First of all a premise: can one talk of an ideal moving picture? That is called ideal which lacks nothing of what is proper to it, and which possesses to a perfect degree what is due. In this sense can there be an ideal film? Some deny that an absolute ideal can exist; in other words, they affirm that the ideal is a relative concept, meaning something only for a definite person or thing. This difference of opinion is caused in great measure by the different criteria used in distinguishing essential elements from the accidental. Actually, notwithstanding the affirmation of relativity, the ideal will always be found in something absolute, which is verified in every case, though in the midst of multiple and diverse secondary elements, which are demanded by their relation to a definite case.

With this as a premise, We think the ideal film must be considered under three aspects:

1) in relation to the subject, i.e., the spectator to whom it is directed;

2) in relation to the object, i.e., the content of the film;

3) in relation to the community, upon which, as We have already noted, it exercises a particular influence.

Since We wish to dwell at some length on this important matter, today We will limit Ourselves to a treatment of the first heading, and leave the second and third to another Audience, if the opportunity arises.

1. - THE IDEAL FILM CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO THE SPECTATOR

(a) The first quality which in this regard should mark the ideal film is respect for man. For there is indeed no motive whereby it can be excepted from the general norm which demands that he who deals with men fully respect man.

However much differences of age, condition and sex may suggest a difference in conduct and

bearing, man is always man, with the dignity and nobility bestowed on him by the Creator, in Whose image and likeness he was made *(Gen. 1, 26).* In man there is a spiritual and immortal soul! There is the universe in miniature, with its multiplicity and variety of form, and the marvellous order of all its parts; there is thought and will, with a vast field in which to operate; there is emotional life, with its heights and depths; there is the world of the senses, with its numerous powers, perceptions and feelings; there is the body, formed even to its minutest parts according to a teleology not yet fully grasped. Man has been made lord in this universe; he must freely direct his actions in accordance with the laws of truth, goodness and beauty, as they are manifested in Nature, his social relations with his fellow men and Divine revelation.

Since the moving picture, as has been noted, can incline the soul of the viewer to good or to evil, We will call ideal only that film which not only does not offend what We have just described, but treats it respectfully. Even that is not enough! Rather We should say: that which strengthens and uplifts man in the consciousness of his dignity, that which increases his knowledge and love of the lofty natural position conferred on him by his Creator; that which tells him it is possible for him to increase the gifts of energy and virtue he disposes of within himself; that which strengthens his conviction that he can overcome obstacles and avoid erroneous solutions, that he can rise after every fall and return to the right path, that he can, in short, go from good to better through the use of his freedom and his faculties.

(b) Such a moving picture would already contain the basic element of an ideal film; but more still can be attributed to it, if to respect for man is added loving understanding. Recall the touching phrase of Our Lord: "I have pity on this people" *(Mark, 8, 2).*

Human life here below has its high points and low, its rises and falls, it moves amidst virtue and vice, amidst conflicts, difficulties and compromises; it knows victory and defeat. Each man experiences all that, in his own way, and according to his own interior and exterior circumstances and different ages, which, river-like, bear him from mountain uplands through wooded hills down to broad plains baked by the sun.

Thus vary the conditions of man's movement and struggle: in the babe, as the first glimmerings of consciousness stir; in the child, as he enters into full use and control of his reason; in the youth, during the years of development, when great storms alternate with periods of marvellous sunshine; in the adult, frequently so completely absorbed in the struggle for existence, with its inevitable shocks; in the aged person, who turns back to view the past with regret, nostalgia, repentance, and examines himself and ponders events as only he can who has sailed afar.

The ideal moving picture must show the spectator that it knows, understands and values properly all these things; but it must speak to the child in language suited to a child, to youth in way fitted to it, to the adult as he expects to be spoken to, i.e., using his own manner of seeing and understanding things.

But a general understanding of man is not enough, when the film is intended for a given profession or class; a more special understanding of the particular conditions of various classes of society is also needed. The moving picture must give to him who sees and hears a sense of reality, but of a reality seen through the eyes of one who knows more than he, and handled with the will of one who stands beside the spectator to help and comfort him, if necessary.

With this spirit the reality reproduced by the film is presented artistically, for it is proper to the artist that he does not reproduce reality in a mechanical way, nor does he subordinate himself to the merely technical capacities of his tools; rather in using them he elevates and dominates matter, without changing it or removing it from reality. An excellent example can be seen in the enchanting parables of Holy Scripture: their subject matter is taken from the daily life and tasks of the hearers, with a fidelity We might call photographic, but it is mastered and raised in such wise that real and ideal are fused in perfect art form.

(c) To respect and understanding ought to be added the fulfilment of the promises held out and the satisfaction of the desires aroused perhaps from the beginning. Moreover, in general, the millions of people who flock to the cinema are driven there by a vague hope of finding the contentment of their secret and undefined desires, of their inner longings; in the dryness of their own life, they take refuge in the cinema, as with a magician who can transform all at the touch of his wand.

The ideal film, therefore, ought to know how to respond to this expectation, and bring to it, not any kind of satisfaction but one which is complete: not indeed, of all desires, even false and unreasonable (the unjust and the amoral do not come into the question here), but of those which the spectator nourishes quite legitimately.

Under one form or another, the expectations are, at one time, relief, at another, instruction, or joy, or encouragement, or stimulus; some are deep, others superficial. The film answers now to one, now to another demand, or else it will give an answer which can satisfy several of them at the same time.
Leaving however to your judgement as specialists what belongs to the technical-aesthetic aspect, We prefer to turn Our attention to the psychico-personal element, to draw from it too, the assurance that - in spite of relativity - there always remains that irresolvable absolute which dictates the principles for granting or denying the answer to the demands of the spectator.

To form an idea of the question, there is no need to turn to a consideration of the principles of filmology or of psychology, which have held Our attention thus far; it is sufficient to let oneself be guided in this also, by sound common sense. In the normal human being, indeed, there is also a psychology, so to speak, not learnt from books, but derived from his very nature, which puts him on the path to directing himself aright in the ordinary things of everyday life, provided he follows his sound powers of reasoning, his sense of reality, and the guidance of his experience; but, above all, provided that the emotional element in him is controlled and directed,- for, in the end,

what determines a human person to judge and act is his own emotional disposition.

On the basis of this simple psychology, it is clear that the man who goes to see a serious instructional film has a right to the teaching it promises; he who goes to an historical film, wishes to find presented the actual facts, even though technical and artistic needs modify and elaborate the form in which they are presented; he who was promised the picture of a story or a novel, ought not to go away from it disappointed at not having seen the unfolding of its plot.

But there is, on the other hand, the man who, weary of the monotony of his life or weakened by his struggles, looks primarily to the film for relief, forgetfulness, relaxation; perhaps also for flight into a dream world. Are these legitimate demands? Can the ideal film adapt itself to these expectations and seek to satisfy them?

Modern man - it is asserted - in the evening of his crowded or monotonous day, feels the need to alter the circumstances of people and places; so he desires entertainments which, with the multiplicity of images, linked it is true by a slight guiding thread, can calm the spirit even if they remain on the surface and do not penetrate very deeply, provided that they bring relief to his depressing state of weariness and banish his boredom.

It is possible that this may be so - even frequently. In that case, the film can seek to meet such a condition in an ideal form, avoiding, of course, any lapse into vulgarity or unseemly sensationalism.
It is not to be denied that even a somewhat superficial entertainment can rise to high artistic levels, and be classed even as ideal, since man has shallows as well as depths. Dull, however, is the man who is entirely superficial, and is unable to add depth to his thoughts and feelings.

Doubtless, the ideal film is allowed to lead the weary and jaded spirit to the thresholds of the world of illusion, so that it may enjoy a brief respite from the pressure of real existence. However, it should take care not to clothe the illusion with such a form that it is taken for reality by minds which are weak and without sufficient experience. The film, indeed, which leads from reality to illusion, ought then in some way to lead back from illusion to reality with the same gentleness that Nature employs in sleep. That also attracts man, wearied by reality, and plunges him for a short time into the illusory world of dreams: but, after sleep, it restores him refreshed, and as it were, renewed, to the bustle of reality, the reality he is used to, in which he lives, and of which, by his work and his struggle, he must always remain master. Let the film follow Nature in this: it will then have fulfilled a notable part of its function.

(d) But the ideal film, considered in reference to the spectator, has, finally, a lofty and positive mission to accomplish.

Respect for and understanding of the spectator in responding to his legitimate expectations and

just desires are not enough for appraising a film. It must also measure up to duty which is inherent in the nature of the human person, and in particular, of the human spirit. From the moment when his reason is awakened until it is extinguished, man has an image of each single duty to fulfil, at the base of which, as the foundation of all, lies that of disposing of himself rightly, that is to say, in accordance with bright thought and sentiment, understanding and conscience. The essential directing principle to such an end man derives from the consideration of his own nature, from others' teaching, from God's word to men. To detach him from this principle would mean to make him incapable of carrying out his essential mission to its conclusion, just as it would paralyse him if one were to cut the tendons and ligaments that join together and support the limbs and parts of his body.

An ideal film, then, has truly the high office of putting the great possibilities and power of influence, which we already recognise in the craft of the Cinema, at the service of man, and of being an aid to him in maintaining and rendering effective his self-expression in the path of right and goodness. It is no secret that for this, outstanding artistic gifts are necessary in the director, since everyone knows that there is no difficulty at all in producing seductive films, by making them accomplices of the lower instincts and passions which overthrow man, luring him from the precepts of his sane thinking and better will. The temptation of the easy path is great, all the more so as the film - the poet would call it "galley-slave" - can easily fill halls and coffers, evoke frenzied applause, and assemble in the columns of some newspapers reviews which are too subservient and favourable. But all this has nothing in common with the accomplishment of an ideal duty. It is, in reality, decadence and degradation; above all, it is the refusal to rise to worthy ideals. The ideal film, on the other hand, intends to use every power to serve them, even though this means refusal to serve unscrupulous buyers. It does not make an empty show of moralizing, but more than makes up for this lack by positive work which, as circumstances demand, instructs, delights, diffuses genuine and noble joy and pleasure, and cuts off every approach to boredom. It is at once light and profound, imaginative and real. In a word, it knows how to lead without interruption or shocks to the bright realms of art and enjoyment, in such a manner that the spectator, at the conclusion, leaves the hall, more light-hearted, relaxed, and better within himself, than he entered. If at that moment, he were to meet the producer or the director of the writer, he would not fail, perhaps, to take him in a friendly embrace in a burst of admiration and thanks, as We personally, in a fatherly manner, would thank them in the name of so many persons changed for the better.

We have outlined, gentlemen, an ideal without concealing the difficulty of its attainment; but at the same time, We express confidence in your outstanding ability and your good will. To bring into existence the ideal film is a privilege of artists gifted beyond the ordinary; certainly, it is an exalted goal toward which, fundamentally, your ability and your vocation summon you. God grant that all who are capable of it may assist you!

That these wishes of Ours may find fulfilment in this important branch of activity, so near to the realms of the spirit, We call down on you and on your families, on the artists and groups of

workers of the world of the Cinema, God's blessing, in token of which may Our paternal Apostolic Benediction descend upon you all.

II - TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF CINEMA THEATRE MANAGERS AND OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF FILM DISTRIBUTORS (Audience of 28th October, 1955)

THE IDEAL FILM - A POWERFUL MEANS OF MENTAL DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Gentlemen, in extending once more with a Father's tenderness Our welcome to you, who devote your lives to the cinema industry, We desire to confirm not only Our esteem for you as individuals and for your profession, but also the Church's watchful care over a means as important for the spread of opinion and custom as is the Cinema, in order to help raise it to the dignity of an instrument devoted to God's glory and man's full development.

In reverting, therefore, to this matter in this new meeting with the representatives of "the World of the Cinema", We propose, moved by the conviction of their importance, to complete the points We previously set out, the motives of which We then indicated at some length. To some, faced with the grave problems which harass the present age, and which certainly invite Our most earnest solicitude, this question of the Cinema might appear a subject of minor importance, and one not deserving the special attention which We pay to it. Certainly it seems that the Cinema, being by its nature an art and a diversion, ought to remain confined, as it were, to the fringe of life, governed, of course, by the common laws which regulate ordinary human activities; but since, in fact, it has become for the present generation a spiritual and moral problem of enormous importance, it cannot be passed over by those who have at heart the fate of the greater part of mankind and of its future. Above all, then, it cannot be neglected by the Church and Her Bishops, from whose watchfulness no moral question should be withdrawn, particularly if it reacts with consequences beyond calculation on countless souls, and in addition, by all upright men thoughtful for the common good, who are rightly persuaded that every human problem, great or small, goes down to the roots of the spirit more or less in darkness, and that in the spirit, once given light, it is duly solved.

It will perhaps redound to the disgrace of our age that many, particularly if their spiritual formation is weak, are allowing themselves to be brought to adopting behaviour in their private and public

lives, which is determined by the artistic fictions and the unsubstantial shadows of the screen; yet this fact does not cease to be important and worthy of serious consideration proportionate to its effects. In a tomorrow of spiritual and civic decadence, for which the undisciplined liberty of the film would share responsibility, what a reproof would rise therefrom against the wisdom of the men of today, as men who did not know how to direct an instrument so suited to the education and development of souls, and instead left it to be turned into a vehicle of evil.

This confidence which We have in the Cinema as an effective and positive instrument of mental development, education and improvement, moves Us to exhort the makers and producers to spare no effort to free it not only from artistic decadence, but particularly from any share in a lowering of morals, and to present to them in perspective the unsullied regions of the ideal film.

Of this We previously set out the essential characteristics, but only in the first of the three aspects which it offers for examination, namely, in relation to the subject, that is to say, to the man to whom the ideal film is presented.

Now We pass on to explain the second point, viz.

2. - THE IDEAL FILM CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO THE OBJECT, OR TO ITS CONTENT

In tracing the lines of the ideal film with respect to its content, in order to avoid over-stepping the limits with unsuitable demands, and so that the essential elements may be gathered together, it is necessary to keep present the consideration already set forth on the absolute nucleus contained within the relativity of the ideal, i.e. the real essence of the film, its specific goodness, its proper worth. So it is to the point to recall to mind the concept of the ideal, viz. that which lacks nothing of what it ought to have, but which, on the contrary, possesses this to a perfect degree. In so far as the film has reference to man, it will be ideal in content to the extent that, in perfect and harmonious form, it measures up to the original and essential demands of man himself. Basically, these demands are three: truth, goodness, beauty -- refractions, as it were, across the prism of consciousness, of the boundless realm of being, which extends beyond man, in whom they actuate an ever more extensive participation in Being itself. It is true that, in individual cases, he who devotes himself, through art and culture, to provide man with a share in this realm, becomes aware in the end of having very inadequately satisfied his insatiable thirst; yet there remains to him the merit of having known how to divert to his advantage part of the stream of the original fullness of truth, goodness and beauty, in the measure of the possible and free from contamination: in other words, he has reconciled the relativity of the ideal with its absolute concept. Well then, can the film be a suitable vehicle for this triad in the mind of the spectator? Can an excellent means come therefrom, and - within the limits of its own proper method - one which is also perfect? The reply ought to be in the affirmative, even though it is not always verified - even, in the case of a film worthy to be classified as good, but which, by defect of some one of the elements and of the

harmony between these, remains outside the ideal region.

It is clear that the content, or rather the choice of the plot, such as comes from looking with all possible fidelity at reality in its goodness and beauty, is of fundamental importance in the creation of the ideal film; but it is equally recognised by the specialists that not every choice is possible, since - not rarely - obstacles of an entirely practical nature interfere, which check the film maker on the threshold of the ideal, as, for example, the intrinsic impossibility of giving a visible representation to some truths, goodness or beauty. The film cannot presume, nor should it run the risk of challenging plots which escape the control of the objective, which cannot be reduced to images, being rebels, as it were, to scenic representation, for reasons either technical or artistic, or because of other considerations, such as reasons of social or natural delicacy, of respect or of piety, or even of prudence and the safeguarding of human life. Yet, in spite of these limitations, some intrinsic, others practical, the range of plots remains wide, rich, rewarding and attractive, no matter what may be the element of the triad which predominates in the individual film.

INSTRUCTIONAL FILMS

Taking each point in turn, we shall name first the film which sets instruction as its end, of which the principal attraction is founded on truth, in so far as it increases the acquired knowledge of the spectator. There is undoubtedly in this type a possible ideal to follow and its principles can be summarised thus: what it offers in information, explanation, depth, ought to be accurate, clearly intelligible, carried out by a perfect teaching method and artistic forms of a high order
Films solely for instructional purposes are relatively rare; more usually, perhaps out of regard for the varying background of the public, instead of deepening the subject matter, they weaken it and limit themselves to giving the essential notions.

And yet, if one takes account of the thirst for learning which the public shows and of the lack of which there is often complaint, this kind of film, provided it is executed with ideal perfection, would be well received by all, and at the same time - if duly developed and extended - would prove to be beneficial to civil progress.

The proof is given by the frequent production and the success of films based on the natural sciences, some of which deserve the title of ideal film.

Nature, which offers itself to the inspection of the attentive observer, reveals an inexhaustible wealth of goodness and beauty, reflecting back with transparent sincerity the infinite superabundance of the perfection and beauty of nature's Creator.

The film can yield an abundant harvest in its three-fold realm, and can traverse, using the technical means at its disposal, the harmonious paths of creation, opened by the physical and

biological sciences, whether in the heaven's immensity or in the intimate secret places of the world of the microscope.

It is not without emotions of wonder that one is present at films which carry one into worlds unknown and sometimes unsuspected, which no other means can represent more vividly than does the cinema.

Sometimes one is enchanted and overcome by the majesty of towering mountains, at other times by the irresistible fury of the ocean tempest, the solitude of polar glaciers, the vast stretch of virgin forests, the melancholy of the desert sands, the loveliness of flowers, the limpid quality of water, the violent rush of waterfalls, the distinctive beauty of the Northern Lights, - visions all, which, reproduced with fidelity, and accompanied by a restrained commentary of words and music, impress themselves on the mind like the pictures of a journey. Greater astonishment and wealth of knowledge are offered by the unfolding of life in the films - and these are not infrequent - which reveal the secrets of the animal kingdom, and are obtained by expert photographers and producers after exhausting days and months lying in wait and observing, carried out in uncomfortable conditions in forests and in inhospitable deserts, on rivers and in the depths of the sea. What a testimony to the richness and manifold variety of nature, no less than to other activities, is drawn from such films, to soothe, recreate and refresh the spirit.

With equal pleasure and instruction, other films can look carefully at man himself, in whom the organic structure, the functional behaviour and the therapeutic and surgical processes for restoring him to health, offer objects of deep interest.

If then one passes to the works of man, subjects suitable to being artistically elaborated and for the spreading of learning on a large scale, are equally plentiful. Those films are appropriately called educational which describe the different races, customs, folklore, civilizations, and, more in detail, the methods of work, the agricultural systems, the traffic routes by land, sea and air, means of communication, types of houses and residences in different ages, gathered from the objects in many stages of their development, which includes the movements from the primitive huts of leaves and branches and goes on to the stately dwellings, the architectural monuments, the lofty skyscrapers of modern cities.

These indications are enough to show that the instructional film, provided it is treated according to the exact range of scientific data, presented in a new light and enlivened by a fresh breath of art sufficient to drive away the idea of a rigorously scholastic instruction, can, with respect to the content, offer with ease to the spectator, all that he expects from an ideal film in this class.

ACTION FILMS

On the other hand, it is difficult to present the end proposed in action films that is to say films, which represent and interpret the life and behaviour of men, their passions, longings and conflicts. In this kind of subject matter, the ideal film is no everyday affair; and yet such films are numerous, and by far the most common. While that shows that a similar type is much in request and appreciated by the public, it at the same time demonstrates the serious difficulties with which the ideal film is confronted in actual production.

We showed previously - speaking of the importance of the Cinema and studying the matter from the point of view of the spectator - in what consists the attraction of the plot films, what influences are exerted on the mind and what psychological reactions are thereby produced. The same considerations now return for review, dealt with, however, in their causes, the first of which is certainly the content or the matter which is chosen for treatment.

Now it is precisely in the choice of content that the difficulties begin for the author or conscientious producer who puts before himself the ideal film; some of them come almost immediately from the shaping and the fixing of the limits of the matter itself, especially in the most important moments; others again, and these sometimes insuperable, from the availability of the actors who would be capable of giving humanly and aesthetically perfect expression to the chosen subject.

Is it possible, then, for every matter capable of representation to be accepted by one who sets before himself the ideal film? Some reasons for exclusions have already been indicated: they are based on moral, social, human considerations which of necessity restrict absolute freedom of choice.
Two particular questions, however, deserve to be treated with greater care.

FILMS ON A RELIGIOUS SUBJECT

The first: in the plot-films, is it permitted to take religious topics as subject-matter of plot-films? The answer is that there seems no reason why such topics should be, in general and on principle, excluded; the more so, since experience, tested in this type, has already given some good results in films whose content is strictly religious.

But further, when the theme is not expressly such, the ideal plot-film should not pass over the religious element. Indeed, it has been noted that even films morally above reproach can yet be spiritually harmful if they offer the spectator a world in which no sign is given of God or of men who believe in and worship Him, a world in which people live as though God did not exist. A brief moment in a film can sometimes be sufficient, a word on God, a thought directed towards Him, a sigh of confidence in Him, an appeal for divine help. The great majority of people believe in God, and in their lives religious feeling plays a considerable part. Nothing, then, is more natural and more suitable than for due account to be taken of this in films.

On the other hand, we must recognise that not every religious action or occurrence can be transferred to the screen, because either a scenic representation of it is intrinsically impossible, or piety and reverence are opposed to it. Moreover, religious topics often present particular difficulties to authors and actors, among which perhaps the chief is how to avoid all trace of artificiality and affectation, every impression of a lesson learnt mechanically - since true religious feeling is essentially the opposite of external show, and does not easily allow itself to be "declaimed".

Religious interpretation, even when it is carried out with a right intention, rarely receives the stamp of an experience truly lived and as a result, capable of being shared with the spectator.

Another question to which it is difficult to give a definitive answer is whether the portrayal side by side of different forms of religious belief is a suitable or opportune topic for a plot-film.

Examples of such films are not lacking, produced with the purpose of representing the various types of religiousness, derived either from real actions or from scenes portrayed with that end in view.
In every case, whether films of an instructive nature are handled, or the intention is to offer the spectators the drama of struggle between two lives religiously different in their orientation, there is need of considerable finesse and depth of religious sentiment and human tact, in order not to offend and profane what men hold sacred (even though they be motivated by objectively erroneous thoughts and feelings).

The same precautions and needed limitations are imposed in historical films which treat of men and events at the core of which are religious quarrels not yet completely calmed: the prime requisite here is truth, which however must be united with charity in such a way that one does not suffer at the expense of the other.

FILMS AND REPRESENTATION OF EVIL

The second question about the content of the ideal film of action concerns the representation of evil: is it lawful to choose, and with what precautions must one treat, evil and scandal, which without doubt have such an important part in the lives of men? Surely human life would not be understood, at least in its great and momentous conflicts, if our eyes were closed to the faults which often cause these conflicts. Pride, unbounded ambition, lust for power, covetousness, infidelity, injustice, depravity -- such, unhappily, are the marks of the characters and actions of many, and history is bitterly interwoven with them. But it is one thing to know evil, and to seek from philosophy and religion its explanation and cure; quite another to make it an object of spectacle and amusement. Yet for many there is an irresistible fascination in giving artistic shape to wrongdoing, in describing its power and its growth, its open and hidden paths, and the conflicts it

generates or by means of which it advances. One might say that for a basis of story and picture many know not where to look for artistic inspiration and dramatic interest except in the realm of evil, even if only as background for good, as shadow from which light may reflect more clearly. To this psychological attitude of many artists corresponds an analogous one in the spectators, about which We have spoken previously.

Now then, can the ideal film take such matter for its theme? The greatest poets and writers of all times and of all peoples have grappled with this hard and thorny theme, and will continue to do so in the future.

To such a question a negative answer is natural, whenever perversity and evil are presented for their own sakes; if the wrongdoing represented is at least in fact, approved; if it is described in stimulating, insidious or corrupting ways; if it is shown to those who are not capable of controlling and resisting it.

But when none of these causes for exclusion are present; when the struggle with evil, and even its temporary victory, serves, in relation to the whole, to a deeper understanding of life and its proper ordering, of self-control, of enlightenment and strengthening of judgement and action; then such matter can be chosen and inserted, as a part of the whole action of the film. The same criterion applies here that must rule any like artistic medium: novel, drama, tragedy, every literary work.

Even the Sacred Books of the Old and New Testaments, faithful mirrors of real life, contain in their pages stories of evil, of its action and influence in the lives of individuals, as well as in families, and peoples.

They too allow a glimpse of the intimate and frequently tumultuous world of those men, telling of their failures, their rise, or their final end. Though strictly historical, the narrative frequently has the pace of fine drama, the dark colouring of tragedy. The reader is struck by the unusual artistic and liveliness of descriptions, which even from the merely psychological point of view, are superb masterpieces. It is enough to recall the names of Judas, Caiphas, Pilate, Peter, Saul. Or from the age of the Patriarchs: the story of Jacob, the events of Joseph's life in Egypt, in the house of Potiphar; from the Book of Kings: the choice, the rejection, the tragic end of King Saul; or the fall of David and his repentance; the rebellion and death of Absalom and numberless other happenings.

Their wrongdoing and guilt are not masked by deceitful veils, but told as they really happened; nay, even that part of a world stained by guilt is enveloped in an aura of uprightness and purity, produced by an author, who, while faithful to history, does not exalt or justify, but clearly urges the condemnation of wickedness; in such wise the crude truth does not arouse disordered passions or impulses, at least in mature persons.

On the contrary: the serious reader becomes more reflective, more clear-sighted, his mind, turning

inwards, is led to say "take heed lest you too be led into temptation" *(cf. Gal. 6, 1)*"if you stand take heed lest you fall" *(cf. I Cor., 10, 12).*

Such conclusions are not suggested only by Holy Scripture, but are a legacy of ancient wisdom and the fruit of bitter experience.

Let Us leave, then, the topic that an ideal film can also represent evil, sin and corruption; but let it do so with serious intent and in becoming manner, in such a way that its vision may help deepen knowledge of life and of man, and improve and elevate the soul.

Therefore the ideal film should flee from any form of apology, much less of glorification, of evil, and should show its condemnation through the entire course of the film and not merely at the end; frequently it would come too late, i.e. after the spectator is already beguiled and entrapped by evil promptings.

Such are the points We wished to expound to you on the ideal film in relation to its object, i.e. its theme. There remains only for Us to add a brief word concerning the ideal film in relation to the Community.

3. - THE IDEAL FILM SEEN AND CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO THE COMMUNITY

When, at the beginning of this discourse, We remarked that the film producer, in a short span of years, has practically given our century its characteristic mark, We implicitly affirmed the existence of a relationship between him and the community. From this immense influence on the community and on the common good, We drew strong arguments to stress the importance of films, and the duty of the community to exercise a lawful watch over their moral quality.

Now it is time to consider the relation between films and the community itself, in whatever they have that is positive, or, as is more commonly said, constructive; this in conformity to Our purpose, which is not to make empty accusations, but to bring the cinema to become an ever more fit tool for the common good. What can an ideal film offer of value to the family, the State, the Church?

a) The family

The family. In subdividing Our discussion, let Us give first place to the family, also because it is often called on to assist at showings of films from which, however, it does not always return with its high and sacred dignity unsullied. The family was, is, and will remain the source and channel of the human race and of mankind. Masterpiece of the Creator's supreme wisdom and goodness, from Him has it received the laws, the prerogatives, the duties which open for it the road towards the fulfillment of its own high destiny. Based on love and for love, the family can and should be for

its members: spouses, parents, children, their own small world, refuge, oasis, earthly paradise in the fullest measure attainable here below. Thus it will be in reality, if it is allowed to be what the Creator willed, what the Saviour confirmed and sanctified.

Meanwhile, much more than in the past, today's confusion of mind, as, also, the not infrequent scandals, have induced not a few to belittle the vast treasury of good the family can dispense: hence its praises may easily be listened to with a smile tinged with scepticism and irony.

A useful study would be to examine the degree to which some films have helped spread such an attitude, or whether they merely servilely adopt that outlook to satisfy such desires, if only with fictions. Surely it is deplorable that some films are in agreement with the irony and scepticism directed at the traditional institution of the family, by exalting its erroneous conditions, and especially casting empty and frivolous disdain on the dignity of spouses and parents.

But what other human good would remain for man on earth if the family, as ordained by God, were destroyed? It is, therefore, a lofty and delicate task to restore to men an esteem for and trust in the family.

The motion picture which every day shows such great interest in and efficacy with regard to this point, should consider as its own that task, and perform it, portraying and spreading a concept of the family which is naturally correct and humanly noble, describing the happiness of spouses, parents and children, the great worth of being united by the bonds of love in repose and in struggle, in joy and in sacrifice.

All that can be gotten without many words, but with fit pictures and by developing attractive situations: now, of a man, endowed with a strong character, who does his duty, who dares and struggles, who knows also how to endure and wait, how to act manfully and firmly, and at the same time maintain and prove an unshakeable fidelity, sincere conjugal love and the constant solicitude of a father; again, of a woman, in the worthiest and noblest sense of the word, wife and mother of stainless conduct, open-minded, capable within and without the family, and at the same time devoted to home and its intimacy, because she knows how to find there all her happiness; and again, of children, respectful to their parents, earnest in their ideals, serious in searching for the better things, always lively and jovial, but at the same time obliging, generous, intrepid.

An action film, which translates all that by lively and interesting plots, by perfect art forms, such as experts are not incapable of producing, would be, in what concerns the good of the community, an ideal film in the full and true meaning of the term.

b) The State

Let Us briefly study the ideal film in its relationship with the State. It is helpful to agree on the

meaning of this word, and determine that here there is question of deciding how the film, which more or less expressly concerns itself with subjects treating the political community, can play a part in attaining the good of that community.

We prescind, therefore, in Our remarks from the so-called political films, those of parties, classes and such, which are propagandistic in purpose, or even foment struggle, and serve a given political aim, a party, a class, a system. At the bottom of all these exists the natural institution of the State, whose concept is distinct from the various forms which in the concrete express its development; forms which come and go, which change, which often are repeated at intervals in the course of history, along with the modifications and adjustments brought about by new conditions. The State, however, is something stable and necessary in its nature and essence; it remains, despite the vicissitudes of its concrete variable forms. To this essence, which is good in itself and a source of good for every member of the community, We now turn Our thoughts.

The State is of natural origin, no less than the family; this means that in its essence it is an institution willed and given by the Creator. The same holds for its necessary elements, such as power and authority, which flow from nature and from God. Man, indeed, is inclined by nature, and hence by God, to unite in society, to collaborate for his fulfillment through a mutual exchange of good deeds, to organize a social body in accordance with the variety of individual aptitudes and actions, to strive for a common goal, which consists in the realization and preservation of the true common good through the harmonising of individual activity.

Men, therefore, are obliged to acknowledge, accept and respect the State, its authority, its right to direct the common good as its proper end. Yet, because in this field also, the confusion of minds frequently begets hindrances or even repugnances, it will always be to the point to lead the minds of men to strengthen the true bases of social life.

The film producer can give important help in this matter, too, though it is not his first and most important task. Still, with that effectiveness peculiar to it, his activity can usefully enter to block divisive tendencies, to remind men of whatever good has been neglected, lead them to esteem correctly what has been falsely valued. That can be done when state institutions or activities, such as the provisions of legislation, of administration, of justice, are touched on and are aptly portrayed, as nature has designed them and in accordance with her norms.

Using the artistic resources at their command, capable authors and producers, can, without stopping at abstract teaching, easily show and bring before the spectator's attention what is helpful to all, what truly protects and aids them in the community of the State, the reasons for exercising or not exercising State authority. Did We perhaps fail to point out forcefully enough how profound is the influence of a well made film, and how much it bends men's minds to what it intends? Well then, an action film, such as the one described above, would calm and instruct the mind, would lessen selfish and harmful attitudes in the community, would spread a more firmly based

awareness of the need for cooperation, and larger ideas, helping men, in the interest of the public good, to rise above errors that otherwise might be inevitable and perhaps irremediable.

Thus the cinema, without renouncing its own characteristics or suffering any loss, can fulfill its role to the community's advantage, strengthen the sense of loyalty to the State, and promote its progress. Such a film would be far indeed from political films, those of party and class and even of a given country; it could be everyone's film, because serving the fundamental nature of every State.
Our development of the ideal film in its relation to the community would not be complete without a word concerning its relation with the Church.

c) The Church

Christ's Church, unlike the family and the State, does not owe its origin to nature, but rests on the positive foundation of the Redeemer, Who has entrusted to her His truth and grace, that she may be the light and strength of men as they journey through earthly life towards the heavenly country.

Such a noble organism, which embraces a whole spiritual and supernatural world, completely escapes any artistic portrayal, since it transcends the very possibilities of human instruments of expression. Yet a basic awareness of her presence will assure for her that respect and reverence she deserves. If it should happen - as not infrequently occurs - that a film deals with events in which the subject of the Church enters with more or less importance, then the film should treat that subject according to truth and knowledge with religious tact, simplicity and decorum. For the rest, We have already expressed Our thoughts when treating in general the choice of religious themes. Now We add only one suggestion: if a film, especially an action film, wishes to be faithful to the ideal in whatever touches the Church of Christ, it should, besides being perfect in artistic form, be conceived and executed in a way that inspires in the spectator understanding, respect, devotion to the Church, and joy and love in her children, and a holy pride in belonging to her.

It is not impossible that historical motives, demands of plot, or even sober realism make it necessary to present failures and defects of ecclesiastical persons, of their characters and perhaps also failures in the performance of their office; in such cases, however, let the distinction between institution and person, between person and office, be made clear to the spectator. For the Catholic, especially, that film will be ideal in which the Church emerges radiant in her title of "Holy Mother Church"; Holy Mother, in whom he trusts, to whom he clings, in whom he lives, from whom his soul and innermost being draw human perfection and eternal happiness.

That, Gentlemen, is what We wished to say to you about the cinema, to which you have dedicated your activity, your talents, your daily labour. We would like now to close Our discourse on the importance of the cinema and on its ideals by revealing to you Our deepest feelings. As We spoke, there came before Our mind the immense crowds of men and women, of youths and of

children, to whom daily the film speaks its powerful language; We gathered up their longings and hopes with love and fatherly solicitude. The majority of them who are, in the depths of their souls, good and sound, ask no more from the cinema than some reflection of the true, the good, the beautiful: in a word, a ray of God. You, too, listen to their plea, and answer their expectations, so that the image of God, stamped on their souls, may always glow clear in the thoughts, the feelings, the deeds inspired by your art.

With this wish, which is also a new proof of the esteem and interest We have in your work, We call down on you the blessings of heaven, and as their pledge We give you, from the depths of Our heart, Our Paternal Apostolic Blessing.

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