

## FILMS AND TELEVISION

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THE publicists for television like to regard the medium as a threat to films, and though the film-makers—or, rather, the distributors—pretend that it is, the connection between the two forms of visual presentation is so close that it is impossible to separate them as completely as either of their advocates would, apparently, like.

For a long time to come television programmes are going to have to depend on some kind of film presentation. There are a large number of newly-formed companies whose sole purpose is to make films for television consumption. Those so far viewed by the critics do not inspire confidence that any significant advance in the art of cinema need be expected. They are patently made as time-fillers and reflect the current lack of policy and sense of ill-at-ease to be seen among the producers of television programmes in this country.

It should have dawned by now upon the minds of both sellers and buyers of television programmes, that whatever the actual merits or demerits of films or telecasts at the present moment, ultimately they will have to differ considerably from each other and also, ultimately, they will have to be good of their kind if the customers are to be expected to continue their patronage of either kind of diversion.

It is interesting to note that, despite the frantic efforts of the film-world to try out various forms of wide-screen and panoramic and three-dimensional films during the past year in order to provide a counter-attraction to television, the films so far shown have not been highly rated by the critics. On the other hand, those films which have, during the past few months, been praised as better than average in technical and artistic value, films such as *The Kidnappers*, *The Cruel Sea* and *Genevieve*, have been made for the conventional screen for which no special apparatus, whether optical or electrical, has been necessary. In other words, good films are the only attraction needed to bring patrons back into the cinema.

Television also is going through the doldrums. The reason is

that programmes have not enough intrinsic interest to maintain the attention of viewers after the novelty of the 'honeymoon' period has worn off. As with the cinema, it becomes evident that the only attraction needed to keep owners of sets satisfied is an intelligent, enjoyable and varied programme.

From the Catholic point of view the problems are not so much material as moral. The French Dominican Fathers who have devised a new approach to the use of film for the purposes of religious instruction in their *Missions Par Le Cinéma*, are convinced that when, eventually, the medium of television has settled down to its own proper method of production and presentation, since the basic product will be still visual, the norms governing the moral approach to television will have to be those invoked in the case of cinema.

It is a curious thing that films which have been previously seen in the cinema seem to lose their special power of hypnotic attraction when seen at home on the television screen. Nevertheless, the power of suggestion proper to the film is still very strong even when seen in the safety of the home circle and it would be unwise to suppose that precautions were unnecessary. Still, it is true that the very fact that what is seen is seen by the family as such means that the impact of the televised show is, to some extent, dissipated.

It has always seemed to me that Catholics might properly resist at least the implication behind much regulation as to the censoring of films. That is to say in principle it is a violation of the right and duty of parents to decide what is good and suitable for their children when public bodies such as the British Board of Film Censors prohibit children from seeing certain films even when accompanied by their parents. In fact, of course, we know that parents are often far from being competent or even concerned about the moral and mental effect of films upon their children and thus it becomes necessary, in the common interest, to impose safety regulations.

The censoring of television programmes is, naturally, something quite different in practice from that of cinema shows. Those responsible for showing films over the television system in this country are, fortunately, aware of their duty in this respect and have, for instance, requested the Catholic Film Institute to keep an eye on the films televised in order to be able to pass a word of warning if and when necessary. They hope to be able to continue

without the need for any official censorship of television. This is, surely, a not undesirable thing, for censorship, in itself, is a negative factor and does little to promote the best interests of the thing censored. But such liberality demands a high sense of moral responsibility on the part of those who make use of the programmes provided. It assumes a high degree of self-control, the capacity to look for and to appreciate the best items among a heterogeneous selection and the will to reject that which is not worth viewing.

Pope Pius XII made it clear, in his recent address to the Italian Hierarchy, that he considered the benefits possible from a right use of television to outweigh the dangers inherent in a system of visual instruction capable of penetrating the sanctity of the home. But he also demanded that those who use television should see to it that no harm comes to anyone through the neglect of proper precautions. Such precautions include an adequate instruction in the appreciation of the medium. It is still for the Catholic a matter of making use of the facilities provided by the various Catholic Film Centres, for the work of these centres is still the 'promotion of good motion pictures' as directed by Pius XI in the Film Encyclical. Such promotion must always imply a sufficient knowledge of the best that the medium can supply. In the past Catholics have been unenthusiastic in their support of official Catholic film action. The words of the Holy Father with regard to television leave no room for any such lazy-mindedness with regard to television. It is to be hoped that a new sense of responsibility will be awakened in the minds of those who make use of television and who will have noticed the positive injunctions of the Pope. It is to be hoped that, as a consequence, a new realization of the potentialities of both cinema and television will develop and that the words of Pius XI with regard to the cinema may be made true of both the cinema and its offspring, the television screen: 'with its magnificent power, it can and must be a bearer of light and a positive guide to what is good'.