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RELIGION AND THE FILM

by André Ruszkowski



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FOREWORD

This essay which is condensed from a lecture given by M. André Ruskowski in University College, Dublin, on the 23rd February, 1950, deals with a question which cannot be ignored by anyone who is interested in the possibilities of the film as an influence for good. In giving it permanent form the Council of the National Film Institute hopes that it will arouse Christians to a sense of their responsibility where the cinema is concerned, for, as M. Ruskowski points out, each one of us must play his part if the film is to become, in the words of Pope Pius XI, "an effectual instrument for the education and elevation of mankind."

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RELIGION AND THE FILM

By André Ruszkowski

(Secretary-General for External Relations, International Catholic Cinema Office (O.C.I.C.); Secretary-General "International Film Review.")

The predilection for religious subjects in film, which often has its roots in commercial rather than idealistic considerations, is one of the most striking paradoxes of this new-born art form. For even to-day, although the introduction of sound, and therefore of words, has helped the film to express ideas other than through pictures, cinema remains, primarily, a visual medium. The essential factors of religious experience, it follows inevitably, are not easily interpreted by the cinema. For man's relationship with his Creator has its most complete effect in the interior life. Admittedly, the supernatural influence of Grace, which is so closely inter-penetrated with the natural psychological functions of a human being, exerts an important influence upon our external behaviour, and gives spiritual significance to the most humble everyday gestures. But the outsider sees only the exterior shape of things. Two men kneel in a church to pray; two women work side by side in a factory; but the outsider has no means of knowing that only one of the men really prays, or that one woman offers her day's work simply and generously to God, whilst the other considers her labour as a burden imposed upon her by a privileged class.

Moreover, there can be gestures of a religious kind that have no real interior significance whatsoever, whilst behaviour that appears quite insignificant may belong directly to the religious sphere. A purely visual interpretation of religious values, it follows, is beset with many difficulties. Seeing St. Thérèse at prayer, for example, does not mean penetrating to the nature and quality of her praying. In cinema there is always the danger that the exterior and formal thing may be confused with, or even mistaken for, the interior and vital reality.

On the other hand, the cinema may show the day-to-day lives of ordinary people, utterly divorced from any spiritual background, and from spiritual motives, and thus give a superficial and wholly material interpretation of life and its values. The regular cinema-

goer, indeed, may come in time to eliminate the spiritual from everything both in life and on the screen, and thus to acquire a false standard of values in which spiritual considerations are quite irrelevant.

What is a Religious Film?

When I speak of a "religious film" I have in mind, not just a "film about religion," but a film whose significance and message has a bearing on the impact of God on human life. Where you can't find God, there is no religion; and to find God you must look for Him, unless by an exceptional privilege He chooses you for an undeserved revelation. I insist on this point, because it explains why even the best religious film cannot automatically bring about conviction, unless there is some co-operation on the part of the spectator. But a film may help us in our search for God, and a religious film might be described as a film which makes us aware of the Divine presence, and reminds us of the real purpose of our life on earth—the saving of our souls. In this sense any film may be a religious film, if both those who make it and those who see it co-operate in giving it such a meaning.

For example, in the Maurice Cloche films **Dr. Laennec** and **La Cage aux Filles**, which followed his **Monsieur Vincent**, a few slight references and the general atmosphere give religious feeling and significance to stories which, in themselves, have nothing to do with religion. In a similar category is **The Sullivans**, a film which was made in Hollywood during the war, and which gives a wonderful picture of Catholic family life. And since the war the Italians have made several films with a truly Christian background—films like **To Live in Peace**, in which an Italian farmer, asked why he had helped a German deserter, says simply, "Because I am a Christian." Even the Noel Coward film **Brief Encounter**, based on the sin of infidelity, and representing the struggle of two people against temptation, was not without religious significance and spiritual value.

The Audience

In dealing with the problem of the religious film we must not overlook the part played in it, and the difficulties raised by, the audience. For the same film may produce very different reactions in different audiences. **Brief Encounter**, for example, was very favourably received by Catholic critics in some countries. In others, however, Catholics saw in it a glorification of—or at

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least a sympathy with—illicit love. Again, the Roberto Rossellini films, **Rome**, **Open City**, **Paise**, and **Germany Year Zero**, were regarded by European Catholics as pleas for charity and peace, for love of God and love of man, and as a warning to mankind of the horrors of war. In other continents, however, many Catholics were scandalized by the portrayal of moral ruin, cruelty, and brutality. We in Europe regarded these films as a contribution to the struggle for the spiritual rehabilitation of humanity, but it is quite clear that they were not so regarded by our co-religionists elsewhere.

The French film **Monsieur Vincent**, based on the life of St. Vincent de Paul, has been hailed as the most satisfactory achievement to date in the field of hagiographical film, and was an outstanding success in most countries. But not everywhere. It failed in Japan, for instance, because of a complete misunderstanding of the Christian and historical background. But there were failures also in Catholic countries. In several parts of Italy, for example, it was impossible to find an exhibitor to show the film. And in Spain the censors demurred for a time, feeling that, because in one scene the saint cried, "I shall never succeed" (although the film shows clearly that he **did** succeed), this one line might suggest that the saint had moments of despair. Another objection that is brought against this great film is that it deals almost exclusively with the humanitarian aspects of Saint Vincent's life and does not stress sufficiently the sacramental character of his work as a priest. *Any good is sacramental*

Another interesting example of audience reaction is the reception accorded to **Joan of Arc**. Unanimously approved by American Catholics, this picture also met with a quite unexpected enthusiasm on the part of the non-Christian population of Africa. Father Franzidis, Cairo correspondent of the **International Film Review**, reported manifestations which came very near to collective religious hysteria during the showing of this film in Egypt, where it had an unprecedented success. It may be interesting to mention in this connection the rather critical attitude of Arabian Moslem audiences towards most American and European films, which are regarded as quite out of keeping with the traditional moral principles of the Arab.

But **Joan of Arc** is a perfect illustration, not only of the different reactions of audiences belonging to different national cultures, but also of differences existing inside the same national group. In France, for instance, patrons and critics, even Catholics,

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were divided into two camps. A small group of very distinguished intellectuals, included the majority of the Dominicans, saw in this picture a superficial representation, in bad taste, of the saint's life, which gave a false and misleading idea of religion and sanctity. On the other hand, the great mass of the French people received the film with enthusiasm, making it a certain commercial success, and also a very probable moral contribution to the renewal of religious feeling.

Another picture that illustrates this point is **Les Anges du Peche** (Angels of the Streets), a very cleverly produced French picture, with script by Father Bruckberger, O.P., and dialogue by Jean Giraudoux, which tried to present certain aspects of the religious vocation, and dealt with the Dominicanesses of Bethany, a community specialising in rescuing women condemned to prison. Whereas this picture strongly impressed the more educated people—even non-believers—it produced a rather opposite impression in many of the popular theatres. Some of the scenes of the life of the nuns—for instance the “chapter of faults,” when members of the Community accuse each other—seemed ridiculous to audiences unprepared to understand their real significance, and were received with mockery and laughter.

Another important element of audience reaction is the influence of individual members of any cinema audience on the others, since individual emotions during the projection of a picture depend in a great measure on the surrounding audience. Moreover, ordinary effects of crowd-psychology are multiplied by the particular conditions surrounding film projection in a dark room with only one illuminated centre of attention. Camera pictures taken during a film projection give an impressive idea of the kind of mass hallucination moving pictures can provoke.

Individual reactions, too, may produce quite disproportionate results, and we have all experienced the effect of a small group mocking loudly during the most dramatic moments of a serious film. One of the most moving scenes in the last Maurice Cloche production, **La Cage aux Filles**, is the prayer said by a nun near the bed of a young delinquent girl. Unfortunately—and there may have been some weakness in the direction of this scene—the rather sceptical audiences of the Paris boulevards broke into laughter almost every time this scene appeared on the screen. No spectator could concentrate on the religious significance of the scene in the face of such laughter.

Some Difficulties

God is infinitely rich in qualities, virtues, and beauties. Each human soul is capable of understanding and appreciating only a quite insignificant part of these unlimited treasures. And in each soul this reflection of the divine nature is a different one. We are like millions and millions of different instruments in the world-wide and unending symphony which God has created to play the hymn of His glory. Each of these instruments responds to a special vibration, gives an individual tone.

In the light of this diversity, the cardinal difficulty of the cinema, with its restricted, visual approach, is clearly seen. When a novelist writes a book, each reader can "visualise" the characters in his own way. His imagination is free to interpret them and to idealize them as he chooses. But when the medium is visual rather than verbal, a very different situation obtains. Suppose, for example, that the Evangelists, instead of using written words to tell us the life of Our Lord, had recorded on sound film some of the scenes which seemed to them the most important. We should then have an extraordinary document, but also a very dangerous document. For the concrete form of talking pictures, giving as it does an illusion of authenticity, lends itself to misinterpretation. Filming supposes a choice. It is selective. It chooses this, and rejects that. It attempts to interpret a natural sequence by means of an artificial sequence. There is always the danger that those who choose will go wrong in their emphasis, and there is also the danger of faulty or inadequate appreciation by those to whom the resulting document is shown. *who write*

Two other factors must be considered: the mysterious capacity of the camera to give a new shape to the material its records; and the fact that the effect which any visual sequence has on the spectator depends (very largely on the viewpoint of those who arrange and edit it.) Thus the propaganda films taken during the famous Nuremberg meetings of the Nazi party have been used, with some changes in the editing and in the commentary, both for and against the Third Reich. In each case they were presented in such a convincing and apparently authentic manner that it was practically impossible for the individual spectator to interpret them in a spirit other than that intended by the sponsors.

These factors may help to explain the extremely violent and exclusive positions people often take in their appreciation of

religious films. One sometimes has the impression that intelligent Catholics do not always make allowance for the fact that there may be other ways of making good religious pictures besides those they would choose themselves.

We have already noticed the difference of opinion about **Joan of Arc**. Critics of this film often contrast it with Carl Drayer's **Passion of Jeanne d'Arc**, a silent film almost entirely composed of "close-up" shots. They forget a fundamental fact: that very few people—perhaps one in a thousand ordinary filmgoers—were capable of understanding the significance of the very beautiful and cleverly taken pictures of Drayer. All the rest remained completely indifferent, or even bored. What can be the religious influence of such a production in the circumstances, even though it remains one of the "classics" of the history of film art?

Another film which has been quoted by the opponents of Victor Fleming's **Joan** is the new Italian picture about the young saint, Maria Goretti, **Cielo Sulla Palude** (The Sun over the Marshes), directed by Augusto Genina. Here the discussion becomes more serious, because though both pictures have a very strong popular appeal, they belong to very different schools of production. Hollywood idealization and Italian so-called "neo-realism" are so different in style and spirit that those who like the one may remain cold or even irritated in the presence of the other. But why should one Catholic assume that all other Catholics should share his taste? Why not admit that different people see problems from different angles? The only answer seems to be that the concrete and absolute nature of screen representation leaves little room for individual interpretations.

This may also explain, in part at least, why ordinary filmgoers in our paganised world have rather a tendency to avoid pictures with religious subjects. They regard them as "propaganda." They fear that the cinema will "trick" them into considering problems to which they proudly—or stupidly—pretend to be indifferent. And the attitude of the public, in its turn, affects the makers of films, and makes them reluctant to tackle religious subjects. Producers fight shy of films which will be shunned by non-believers and almost certainly criticised by some Catholics. Further, when a religious theme is decided upon, the film-makers, in self-protection, sometimes resort to camouflage and dissimulate the religious elements.

It is quite clear that the effects of a religious film upon public opinion depends to a very large degree on the public itself. This must always be borne in mind by those who hope to use the cinema as a powerful means of apostolate.

The Film as a Means of Religious Expression.

But it is time to see how religious films are or should be made in order to fulfil their most important task in the contemporary world. Here again, one is faced with problems which cannot be successfully resolved without a sufficient knowledge of the nature of the medium itself.

Cinema is primarily a visual language: pictures in movement, edited according to a significant rhythm, and giving the illusion of a realistic and concrete representation of authentic or reconstructed events. Events, concrete facts, not general and abstract notions, constitute the elements of film vocabulary.

At a first and superficial glance this might seem to be a condemnation of the religious use of the film. Is not religion, before all, an interior, psychological, and spiritual field, wherein the Creator meets with His creatures? Do not general idealistic concepts belong to the very ground of faith? Perhaps, but general ideas do not constitute a religion, particularly not the Catholic religion. It is not a matter of ideology only, but also and above all, of practice. "By their fruits you shall know them." A faith which does not produce works is a dead faith. "You shall be known because you shall have love one for another."

The greatness and the truth of our religion have to be shown not only by theoretical discussion, but also by the testimony of the actual behaviour of Catholics in everyday life.

Especially in our day, when so many lies have been told by all sorts of false prophets, when great political parties and even official State administrations quote principles which they are the first to violate, people look for leaders who will prove by the example of their lives that they believe what they proclaim.

Modern means of mass communication make possible the world-wide circulation of what before could only be a local manifestation. The cinema, the radio, and television, give Catholics an opportunity which they have never had before of showing the whole of mankind a way of living.

There are several ways of bringing this message.

First there is the ordinary documentary film. I think for instance of a film like **Crucifers to Walsingham**, which includes

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many striking shots of groups (bearing crosses and walking barefoot) to give testimony that men are still willing to suffer and die for Christ. I think of **Visitation**, which shows the wonderful activities of the Medical Missionaries of Mary in Africa, and of the Fatima film made by the Catholic Film Institute.

Second, there is the historical film. This type presents very special difficulties, and very few historical films can be considered satisfactory, even when they deal with political, social, or romantic themes. In a book it is possible to give a fragmentary description, leaving aside details which are unnecessary to the story, while fully explaining the particulars for which existing documents give sufficient verification. In a film, on the other hand, every detail of a historical scene must be reconstructed. Yet the rhythm of a moving picture does not allow any longer explanations of the events. This factor operates strongly in films with a religious background, and raises special difficulties in films about saints, or the Lord's Passion, or films treating of miracles.

Films About Saints

There is no universal prescription for films about saints. Lives of saints are so different one from another, and types of sanctity vary so much, that each case has to be considered separately. But there are still some common problems in all such films. The first concerns the aim of the film. If one tries to exercise only technical and artistic skill, with a saint's life as a pretext, I am afraid one must fail. The essential condition for a hagiographical film is to establish a spiritual communication between the public and the saint in order to give us a psychological shock which not only provokes contemplation but also provides an impulse for one's religious regeneration.

There was certainly such a shock for most of us during the projection of **Monsieur Vincent**, with its wonderful dialogue. Thus we had St. Vincent saying "When God wants some innocent being to die for the redemption of mankind, it is His own Son. He sends." And again, "It is only for your love's sake that the poor will forgive you the bread you give them."

These are not strictly authentic words, but an artistic transformation of various texts found in St. Vincent's correspondence. Without such an artistic transformation it is not possible to induce the corresponding sentiments in the mind of the modern film-goer.

As the painter of a portrait has to interpret his model in order to concentrate in a still picture the essential characteristics of a

living person, so the film director has to interpret the historical data about a saint in order to give us a synthesis corresponding to the essentials of one man's way to God.

The second problem then will be the problem of style in this artistic transformation. As in other art forms, one can distinguish different styles of screen interpretation. **The Song of Bernadette** and **Joan of Arc** are examples of the Hollywood technique; **Monsieur Vincent** is certainly a product of French literary and theatrical style; and **Cielo Sulla Palude**, the Maria Goretti film, belongs to the post-war Italian school, known under the title of Italian neo-realism, which may be compared with the British social documentary school developed during and after the war. All these were praiseworthy efforts, and we should not exclude any of them just because we may not personally approve of them.

The dramatization of the plot, so indispensable for screen presentation, is a delicate problem. Some saints led lives so full of dramatic events that the difficulty comes from a wealth of material. But what about a life that St. John Baptist Vianney, the famous "Curé d'Ars"? All his ministry was passed in a small country parish church, (with twenty hours daily in the confessional.) And what about other mystics, whose way to heaven was purely interior, without any spectacular external events? It really seems that film technique is not yet mature enough to interpret material of this kind.

But steady progress is being made. We have moved on from those early films in which a saint seemed to be a saint from birth, and in which the most heroic virtues seem to be achieved without any difficulty, without the slightest effort to overcome the natural weakness of human nature.

Film makers now understand that the first step necessary to make a saint's character acceptable to modern audiences, and to inspire a religious reaction in these audiences, is to show it as human. It is not by destroying human nature that we get back to God, but by elevating it to the supreme heights of (the) Redemption. The dramatic struggle between our human weakness following original sin, and our divine destiny, is the key problem of every individual existence in this world, and saints were always in the first battle line.

To portray such a struggle, a particular skill is needed on the part of playwright, director, and actors. Without Pierre Fresnay's acting, **Monsieur Vincent** would never have achieved its astonish-

ing success. Ingrid Bergman in **Joan of Arc**, Jennifer Jones in **The Song of Bernadette**, the little Italian peasant girl, Ines Orsini, as Maria Goretti; Georges Rollin as the Curé d'Ars—all these experienced the difficulty of giving a visualised impression of intense spiritual experience, and of intimate communion with God, amidst the disturbing atmosphere of film production, with so many technical distractions.

Some of the names I have mentioned make me think about the very special moral responsibility of an actor who has played the part of a saint. (All his private life should be dominated by the sense of this responsibility.) One remembers the terrifying words of Christ about those who have scandalised the innocents. How many millions of modern innocents have been scandalised, losing their faith in the true character of the saintly figures they admired on the screen, when they learned afterwards of the public scandals, broken marriages, and other offences against divine and human laws committed by those who had personified these figures? The question is even more grave when it is Our Lord's life which is represented. How painful it was to French Catholics to learn that the artist who played the part of Christ in **Golgotha** was condemned for treason during the Nazi occupation, after having also accepted several disgusting parts in other productions. We must be thankful to American Protestants, who arranged that H. B. Warner, who played Christ in the Cecil B. de Mille production, **The King of Kings**, should not appear in any part which would mar the memory of this interpretation.

The Life of Our Lord

Films dealing with the life of Christ provide one of the most discussed and controversial issues among Christians, and among Catholics in particular. It is impossible for me to handle it in an adequate manner in the course of this general survey. But here is what seems to be the provisional attitude taken in this matter by the International Catholic Film Office. We strongly believe in the artistic and educational possibilities of the motion picture, and we do not think it wise to refuse the services this powerful means of expression can render to make our contemporaries more acquainted with the divine figure of Our Lord. What has been allowed on the stage, and we think particularly of the mediaeval mystery plays, and of the Oberammergau Passion Plays, what has also been admitted and appreciated in literature, in painting, and in sculpture (and not restricted to masterpieces only),

should certainly be allowed—under necessary safeguards—on the screen.

The most important condition should be a respectful treatment, with thorough examination of the script, and (theological) supervision before and during the production. But this does not mean that all artistic invention should be banned, and that the producers have to follow closely the biblical texts. We believe much more in the effectiveness of a kind of visual poem inspired by Our Lord's terrestrial life, but, like the liturgical spirit of the Church, soaring above time and space. Film technique permits such presentation; it can be ubiquitous in space and in time; it plays in a kind of fourth dimension.

An important undertaking of this nature is to be attempted in France by Abel Gance, the famous pioneer of motion picture art, who directed the classic pictures of *La Roue*, *J'accuse*, and *Napoleon Bonapart*, associated with M. de la Grandiere, the producer of *Monsieur Vincent*. Under the title of *The Divine Tragedy*, and with financial contributions from subscribers in many different countries, they will produce a film in which the pictures of the historical Passion of Our Lord constitute a kind of continuous parallel to the present day situation in the world, where the Cross is the only true way to salvation for the humanity of the atom bomb century. Although numerous artistic, moral, technical, and even financial risks are involved in such a tremendous undertaking, we wholeheartedly support it, and we should be glad if it finds supporters in all Catholic countries, because there is a chance here of an exceptionally important achievement in the field of the screen apostolate.

Now for an important question—(should films about Our Lord be made in co-operation with other denominations?) In my opinion, this is something in which Christians *should* co-operate. We must, of course, represent Jesus Christ as the Son of God and according to the truth which is contained in the Catholic Church's teaching about the life of Our Lord. But as it is impossible to give a complete representation (with rigorous theological detail,) we think it wise to concentrate on those aspects of Our Lord's life and teaching which are considered as authentic by most Christians. Certainly it is important to consolidate the faith of our brethern in religion. But it is perhaps still more important to reveal the existence of God and the unparalleled beauty of His truth to those ~~who~~ ignore Him completely.

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When missionaries go to a primitive pagan country they do not begin with a full, rigorous, theological concept of God, but use the most suitable methods to make themselves understood and believed by the natives. And if, through the film, we are to reach the pagans who crowd into cinema theatres, not only in primitive lands, but also in most civilised industrial cities, we must use a language they are able to understand.

Miracles

It would be interesting to comment also on the problem of "miracles" in religious films. Many directors have used trick photography to give representations of apparitions and transfigurations; and even in **The Song of Bernadette** the Holy Mother is shown appearing to the little saint in Lourdes. One would like to repeat with G. K. Chesterton that "miracles are not to be had so cheaply," and it is certain that this treatment is fraught with dangers.

But this does not mean that the cinema must always avoid the miraculous. The first miracle scene in the *Curé d'Ars* film **Le Sorcier du Ciel**, shows a little cripple who visits St. John Vianney in his empty church, asking him for "restitution" of his legs (the boy's parents had accused the priest of having taken his legs by a curse before his birth). The intensity of the saint's prayers, and the confidence of the child in this man who seems to support him with some supernatural strength prepare us perfectly to accept the first physical movements by which the boy's legs come back to life, and even the most sceptical people have been deeply impressed by this scene. Again, the outstanding scene in **Joan of Arc**, when the saint discovers the Dauphin in spite of the masquerade organised by his clown, is another example of how an intelligent, reverent approach can give conviction to screen representations of the miraculous.

A very interesting experiment has been tried by the Italians in a film on the Loreto pilgrimage, **La Porta del Cielo** (Heaven's Gate). Individual life stories of several persons travelling on a train for sick pilgrims, culminates in the intense prayer before Our Lady's miraculous altar. The feeling of religious faith is so intense that it is communicated to the audience, and so prepares them for what was to come that the re-birth of confidence and energy in the sufferers is utterly convincing and seems natural and inevitable. An audience in this frame of mind, seeing an unbeliever abandon his thoughts of suicide and leave his pistol

on the altar, is likely to accept the incident (which is not, strictly speaking, a miracle at all) as a very moving illustration of Grace in action. By achievements such as this the cinema has shown that it is suited to illustrations of the supernatural, always provided that it does not descend to the trick effects of realistic presentation.

The Secular Film

I hope that my references to films on the lives of saints, Passion films, and miracle films, will not give the impression that the Catholic film organizations wish to see a very great number of pictures of this kind. This would be rather disastrous. Even the most pious people do not go to the cinema as one goes to Church, or to school. The cinema is primarily entertainment, and no film can produce any sound influence if this first condition is forgotten. Given a few exceptional productions, carefully prepared and distributed, what we want are good, morally healthy, entertainment films for normal current distribution. (It has been shown by experience that even what may be described as secular films can help to give people a Christian sense of life and true notions of life's ultimate purpose.)

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What is important is that in all films made with a right intention, whether specifically religious films, or films dealing with our common nobility and frailty, it must be made clear, by direct visual and aural suggestion, that only a strong Christian background can "properly" interpret human conduct. And we must remember the powerful influence of the material of a film, which is sometimes too strong for the mood given to it by the producer. To show the truth about human nature, for example, and to give a really convincing idea of the victory of virtue over sin, film producers are often tempted to present very realistic paintings of vice, but the experience of our weakness should warn them that many of us will be more affected by the almost physical influence of such scenes than by the idealistic conclusions the producers wish us to draw from them. Under such conditions the making of a really human film requires an enormous amount of psychological experience, artistic talent, tact, and above all, of a kind of comprehension which only charity can give.

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Each Has His Part

If the difficulties are so great, and if the present situation of

the film industry is so far from our ideals, should we perhaps abandon all hope of using motion pictures as one of the instruments of Catholic apostolate? This, I suggest, would be a hopelessly defeatist attitude, and a kind of desertion. If Our Lord has allowed humanity to discover this new language—the language of animated and talking pictures—we Catholics are responsible for having it used for His glory. It is not the business of others who do not believe in God, or who cherish false idols, to glorify God by the films. It is our duty, and we must accept it all the more seriously when the difficulties are so numerous.

Each one of us has some part to play, be he film specialist, film critic, or film-goer. Even if one never goes to the cinema, one's attitude is an element of the general situation. Suppose no Catholics went to the cinema—would it be astonishing then if no Catholic pictures were made, or that producers tried to satisfy the taste of non-believers, who would be their only possible clients?

Each of us in his own sphere, has a problem of responsibility and of conscience, which must be solved. But it cannot be solved without an actual effort, and without studying the particular nature of the cinema. This study should begin with a careful examination of the wonderful Encyclical Letter of Pius XI on motion pictures, published in 1936 under the title *Vigilanti Cura*, and still ignored by many Catholics, in which the Holy Father expressed the wish that the cinema be transformed into "an effectual instrument for the education and elevation of mankind." Catholics may no longer ignore the cinema, or regard it as a strange and dangerous monster whom one can only try to keep away from one's home. We are in duty bound to study the cinema, to speak our minds on it, to do what we can to lessen its influence for evil and increase its influence for good, so that eventually, as Pope Pius XI hoped and prayed, this powerful propagandist medium may be transformed into an instrument for the elevation of mankind. And should we doubt that, if we do our duty in the natural sphere, Our Lord, in His mercy, will use the new film language for the supernatural scheme, continuing His everlasting work of revelation and redemption? May we not hope to see some day inspired motion pictures, just as there have been inspired books and inspired paintings? Dare we not hope that, if we play our part, the cinema may yet be, for many, the channel for that gift that illumines and purifies, that comforts and strengthens—the gift of Grace?