The Christian and The Film Arts

EDITORIAL Karl Neerhof and Jake Van Breda
The Christian and The Film Arts

It is to a money-crazed, fornication-minded film industry that the Christ-follower must present a meaningful alternative. The vulgar, plasticity and "last chance" approach to sexing-up-living research productions, leads the Christian to exclaim in confusion along with Mary Magdalene: “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have placed Him” (John 20:13).

There is a heavy burden upon the shoulders of the Christians who write and produce films and plays. They stand over against the monstrous Hollywood-constructed Baals because they supposedly offer the only alternative to being irrelevant, passed by, for forgotten. The filmmaker, in spite of his exhaustion his energy searching for one character who he can portray for the coming week, or his own ideal from the attributes of several characters. The writer (a) witness to the hope of joy begins as he is allowed, with John Wayne, to ride through the sunshine across an open prairie. The weary housewife, whom ever Geritol can’t help, finds hedonistic heaven in the theatre as she projects herself into the role—a transfiguring ignition of the efforts of scores of men who risk death for the mere touch of her hand. The impact of the two-hour flack on America is awesome.
The Christian, entering the theatre, engages in hand to hand combat with the Devil on his own ground. “Jesus Christ!” ’ “Wasn’t he the star of The Hourflick on America is awesome.”

The Christian viewer of a play or a film also has certain responsibilities. He demonstrates his responsibility by choosing what kind of production he will endorse. He is also responsible for evaluating the production because, as he is a Christian, he can never view a production “neutrally.” Being a Christian makes his view bias-able. He can accept or reject the portrayal of life presented in the productions he views. The productions themselves may attempt to portray reality, but the Christian, being equipped with the tools of discernment, must decide if they are producing meaningful Christian films. Without the backing of Christ their mission would seem hopeless. With little else but faith and a sense of calling to go on, these people keep on trying. They try, in their productions to portray reality the way the Christian sees it, which means that they try to portray life’s spiritual struggle as well as its physical struggle. They have to try to make Christianity an integral part of their production and not something artificial that can be added or deleted from the production without changing the whole thing. Through their productions they have to strive to instruct as well as entertain their viewers if they want to have a truly great production.

by James Koldenhoven

Secondary responses turned primary for the humanist director are many. There is always the box office return in dollars and cents, sometimes the all-devouring incentive for the producers, sometimes a latent but powerful influence on the directors and editors. Not that financial consideration can ever be ignored—but responsibility is necessary here, too. My point is that often the material return gets out of perspective, affecting all the other aspects of film making. Like soliciting the prurient interests of a sick society. If sensationalism will sell, let’s make a triple-X film.

The same critique may be made of the director and producer who plan the superstar in a tripe statement, in a gawdy context, and in an aura of splendor and glamour. Which is the prominent focus? Talent or money? (Note the current run of Elliott Gould films.) Or take the quasi-worship that goes on in films which focus on technical sophistication or current fetishes. One suspects that the technical, wide-screen spectacle of “The Bible” (John Huston, 1966) was intended to draw a large crowd of pseudo-Christian, rather than an honest attempt to make the film representative of Biblical history. The unhinging patriotism of “From Here to Eternity” (Fred Zinnemann, 1953) attracted a large box office nearly twenty years ago. That fetish has been replaced by the anti-patriotic films such as “MASS” (Bob Altman, 1970). A new fetish, a new audience, a new box office.

We are inclined to reduce the focus of the humanist film maker to material and selfish interests only. And there is plenty of evidence for that. However, the variety of secondary and false spirits that lead him on, in addition to those that are mentioned above, are at times incidentally (fragmented, apart from the perspective of God’s Word) valuable: compassion for fellow men, international justice, societal improvement, development of the film arts for the art’s sake, and interest in man as a psychological animal. Incidentally valuable as these may be, and though these foci may have greater integrity than the material focus, they all honor the creation rather than the creator.

And in a sense, all men, Christians included, are prisoners of the creation.

God’s Creational Word surrounds us. Some of the laws in this Word we cannot violate, but obedience to many of the laws is a matter of choice. While you may defy the law of gravity, you will not be able to defy and violate the laws of compassion, marriage, and justice—often without fear of immediate punishment. But respond you will, one way or the other, faithfully or unfaithfully. And that response, even when it is most faithful, can be no more complete than the extent to which the form is developed. If you believe, for example, that a film had to be divided into five acts, as Seneca divided his tragedies, you would be limited. As drama developed, certain limitations were abandoned in the form of expression.

But let’s put the matter positively. Stereophonic sound has opened up new psychological possibilities in the film. The Fellini notion that every man is a potential actor in the wide screen of impres-
Alec Baldwin had said his piece. He had warned people about God’s wrath and the awful torments of Hell. He had even managed to get in some words on Truth and Justice—but he didn’t follow his own advice. What a hell of a way to go! He morbidly judged Judas’s home in the devil’s fold is quite different from the other place. Yes, there is another place—and the people from this other place.’

Truth.

But they, I think of them pause.

Why am I here? G

I wasn’t crying (Continued on page 3)

The Fine Arts Festival will include a strong emphasis on film. Besides bringing a number of creative films to the campus during the next two months, the Fine Arts Festival Committee is arranging for a speaker who has been involved in the production of Christian films, and is encouraging students to produce original films.

The Fine Arts Film Contest will offer $200 in cash prizes for films in two categories: high school and college. A number of area public and private high schools are being contacted and encouraged to submit entries for the Festival, and arrangements are also being made for a film contest on the college level.

Rules are much the same for both the high school and the college categories:

1. Films entered in the high school contest must be 8mm or Super 8. Films entered in the college contest may be entered in either the 8mm-Super 8 division or the 16mm division.

2. Films may be silent or accompanied by tape-recorded sound.

3. No length or subject restrictions, but the Fine Arts Festival Committee retains the right to disqualify films that it decides are “offensive in nature.”

4. Student (or students) must produce the creative aspects of the film without professional help.

The Committee has expressed the hope that lack of experience in working with film will not discourage anyone from submitting an entry to the film contest. Since there are a few students in this area who could be called “experienced” in film production, the prize money will probably go to individuals who have never made a film for the first time. Creativity and ambition are the main requirements for this contest!

Winning films will be shown publically during the 1971 Fine Arts Festival sometime between April 26 and May 5.

Deadline for the contest is April 10. For more information or to submit an entry, contact Dave DeGroot, 782 4th Ave. N.E., Sioux Center; 722-1531. A small 8mm camera can also be rented from D. DeGroot.

Even monotonous can praise God in their songs.

MAKE A NOISY JOY TO THE LORD ALL YE LANDS! Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before Him with Thanksgiving!

With this last burst of praise, David turned again to the throne of glory and joined in the praise to the Lamb.

by David Cummings

Valentino wore a fake beard as a publicity stunt, but another example of add to the list would be the death of Marilyn Monroe, an occurrence that was mentioned in just about every speech that happened on many Christian Reformed pulpits.

These screen heroes are powerful stuff. Handle with caution!

Since I’m a lousy judge of things that go on in other people’s heads, I try to make the main idea of the article be a discussion of the power of film. I think one’s mind to suggest the intense power of film. Speaking personally, I can say that I tend to identify strongly with the people I see represented in movies, especially when I’m egotistical enough to think I can see a little of myself in them. In any case, Omar Sharif, playing Yulii in “Dr. Zhivago” touched me deeply, as did Sergio Bondurac’h in the Russian version of “War and Peace.” I felt like I had been hit in the brain when Rato (Dustin Hoffman) died at the end of “Midnight Cowboy,” and I really felt big-hearted when the Pope (Anthony Quinn) dedicated all the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church to world peace in “The Shoes of the Fisherman.” (I am not trying to defend these films, and I am certainly not suggesting that everyone should see them or would react to them the same way that I did: I mention these stories as examples of just a few of the effects of film that happened to me.)

Last fall I discussed “Easy Rider” with a long-haired friend, and I was struck by what he thought of the oppressed, brutalized, and finally murdered star of the show, Peter Fonda. “Man, I was Peter Fonda!” was the response. Last year a young man traveling by motorcycle across the Midwest stopped for a night in Sioux Center, and mentioned that he had gotten his cycle two weeks after seeing “Easy Rider.” And everyone has seen the highly modified “choppers” made popular by Captain America in the same show. Some pretty intense reactions!

No matter how loudly we protest that movies have no deep psychological meaning for us, we have to admit that they can incite action or serve as catalysts to set off a reaction that has been churning around inside of us. So what happens when we sit back in a theater (with the sole purpose of being entertained) and watch the Pope Hand Luke (rebelling, proud, and discontented with authority), Arlo Guthrie (arrogant and biting cynically), Captain America, Myra Breckinridge, Benjamin the “Graduate,” or James Bond? Whatever reactions these characters could elicit would probably be unhealthy. Granted, all these characters are easily identified with a godless life because they flautt blatant things like drugs, sex, or violence, but we can’t say that characters in “Q” or “GP” rated shows are better servants of God because they don’t display shocking forms of immorality. (What about the revenge theme in “Ben Hur” or the careless, god-denying morality in “Airport” or “Paint Your Wagon”?) As Christians, we cannot afford to be influenced easily by every movie we see. In fact, we had better be extremely cautious about being influenced by any movie!

There are certainly other factors besides star identification which effect movie-viewers, but an
FILM ACCIDENTS (Continued from page 1)

FILM ACCIDENTS (Continued from page 2)

adequate presentation of them is too involved to consider at this time.

Acted upon by, a variety of factors, audiences are moved by films. When one of the first full-length feature films, "Birth of a Nation" was re-served in 1914 it caused riots in many American cities. The director of the show, D. W. Griffith, was a die-hard Southerner who presented the Ku Klux Klan sympathetically and saw Negroes as Jack droids or Uncle Toms. Early in the century, Linn stated that "of all the arts, the cinema is the most important for us." The result of his idea wasleased in 1914

Landfeature films, "Birth of a Nation" was removed by the Russian government sank tens of millions of dollars into the production of a high-quality, seven-hour monster, "War and Peace.

Young American Shoppe

SUE MAATMAN

FILM ACCIDENTS (Continued from page 1)

Cannon

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Comments and opinions about the ideas expressed in this publication are welcome. Address correspondence to Cannon, 782 4th Ave. N.E., Sioux Center, Iowa 51250.

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D. R. D.

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Ihy am I here' God.

He came to the people from the other place. Yes, there is a gracious God who took me by the hand and lifted me up—the Lord of Justice and might in battle was also a merciful Lord.

No, Nathan had said his peace. He had warned people about God's wrath and the awful torments of Hell. He had even managed to get in some words on Truth and Justice.

It is God who is all good and merciful. We could use it to get at the fountains of life and new and world-changing action. Meanwhile the preacher-theologian will rejoice for the help he is getting in promoting the health of the Christian imagination. Without this inner life and integrity of the Christian cannot be nourished and developed in joyous spontaneity.

Perhaps we should acknowledge that it is often a blissful delight to be settled with God.

Look what it got him—HELL!

By Nick Van Til

Sence and Sensibility

By using the above title I don't mean to poach on the preserves of Jane Austin. Rather, I am using it as a plug for the development of the film arts among us. I believe we can use the media of sense to touch and change sensibilities. The best way to change the direction of action is to change the direction of feeling. This can be done best by those media which most effectively affect feeling.

For example, in John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath or the movie version of the book, you undoubtedly had your sensibility as to the flight of the Dust Bowl migrant changed to one of greater sympathy and consideration. Today the social criticism is so general that it assumes we are caught in the malaise of a completely enveloping "establishment" which must be remodeled because it is also completely impermeable and diffused. Some feel so frustrated that they can only react in rage.

To use another figure, some have concluded that the social fabric is so flawed that it must be taken apart and put together from the ground up. Where do we begin? What pattern shall we choose? And how shall we do the job?

Since most visible and concrete terms, of the life and movement of the soul as it engages with reality outside itself, especially with reality of each current moment of history. I do not think too much to say that the artist wishes to 'save' that soul in the sense that he wishes to keep its various acts of sensibility straight and real and ever moving with a freedom that really belongs to the children of God.


It seems to me that Christians have too long neglected the potential of the film arts in this vital area of human life. Of course, nice pat answers will be no boon to the solution. But, in general, more are moved more by feeling than they are logical formulations and mathematical calculations. So we can use films to suggest the fundamental creational order and sin-drenched disorder of life in the world by presenting the rich and strangely irreducible particulars of existence. It is the perennial mystery of the arts that they say something radically singular, concrete and individual about some aspect of reality, but at the same time present it in such a way that this concrete singularity becomes resonant of the whole of reality.

So we could use a presentation to the senses which reflects a sensitivity that is God-fearing and God-praising. We could use it to get at the fountains of our emotional life to refresh and invigorate us to new and world-changing action. Meanwhile the preacher-theologian will rejoice for the help he is getting in promoting the health of the Christian imagination. Without this inner life and integrity of the Christian cannot be nourished and developed in joyous spontaneity.

Surely, the preacher needs all the help he can get from artistic men and their effective media to liberate modern man from the deadening weight of the "establishment's" materialism, scientism, secularism and all the further "isms" which would put a blight on his soul, make him a pedestrian plodder, and blind him to the glories and his Creator and the creation. With his sensibilities drenched by the perpetual assault of erotic sights and raucous sounds, man's sensibilities cannot be tuned to hymn the chock-full- of-praise life that he should live. Only Christianly directed films can present the darkling shadows of sin in sufficiently sombre hues so that the glory of grace will shine forth in all its splendor.

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