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# Box Office Governs Movies on Religions

In reporting the formation of a Protestant Film Commission charged with raising \$1,000,000 to produce 16 religious short and documentary films, and with setting up of a public relations committee for the purpose of screening writers to produce stories reflecting "the Protestant point of view," a *Masses* newspaper has inferred that this is an answer to "Hollywood's present policy."

Some have gone as far as to suggest that the move is intended as a Protestant answer to some sort of Catholic challenge. Editors who approve this false slant on the subject should know that, in fact, Hollywood claims no policy in the matter other than the purely commercial one of making films which



W. H. Moorhead

experience proves are in popular public demand.

No Catholic film producers were not invited by any Catholic authority to film such stories as "The Sign of the Cross," "The Keys of the Kingdom," "Going My Way" and "The Birth of St. Mary's." They did so because it occurred to enterprising individual film producers that the stories might be successful at the box office. That they were far and away more successful than these same producers had dared to hope, may have led to a search for similar subject matter; but this, again, is neither promoted nor inspired by Catholic leaders.

It obviously cannot have been at the suggestion of Catholic authority that Producer Frank Rosa in 1913 purchased the screen rights to Lloyd C. Douglas' best seller "The Robe" — long since a problem from the point of view of universal appeal — or that Paramount re-edited their Cecil H. de Mille picture "The Sign of the Cross," rated objectionable in part by the Legion of Decency.

Mr. Douglas became a Luther, an minister in the early 1900's then transferred to the First Congregational Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan, later retiring from religious life to devote himself entirely and successfully to writing.

Society For Probs

Mr. de Mille, also a non-Catholic, repeatedly has acknowledged that, whether he were filming "The Sign of the Cross," the "Story of the Blessed Virgin," or "Julian Pacific," his objective would be profitable entertainment and not religious or social propaganda.

There has, in fact, been no sign at all of Catholic propaganda in any Hollywood film as I pointed out some time ago. The issues upon which Protestants first separated from the Church, and many on various occasions separated one from another, have never been made the subject matter of any motion picture. Nor has any entertainment film ever dealt with Catholic dogma or argument.

This same cannot be said, with absolute accuracy of certain films which have dealt with separated Christian sects. "Brigham Young" presented arguments of polygamy. "One Foot in Heaven" and "Seven Days in May" in which Protestant worship was pictured, offered scriptural quotations, sermons and extemporaneous prayers not acceptable to the Catholic mind. "Brigham Young" was a complete box office flop. Catholics didn't like it.

There were, however, no protests from Catholic movie-goers who naturally accepted these movies as purely reportorial in character and promptly rejected any heresies they may have detected in them.

The only organized activity by Catholic leadership in connection with the production of motion pictures has been and still is exercised through the National Legion of Decency. It is aimed simply and solely at safeguarding Christian morals and accepted standards of human decency insofar as they are reflected in, or affected by, movie entertainment. Protestant support in this activity insofar as unity of purpose could afford it, was ever welcome.

If Hollywood producers choose to produce a screenplay, or any number of screenplays, in which the characters happen to be spiritual leaders of separated Christian communities, they are unlikely to encounter the opposition of the Catholic hierarchy whose one desire is that the screen may be used to elevate the minds and characters of all its spectators.

As long as evil is not misrepresented as good, and movie audiences are not offered the subtle mental and spiritual

poisons of false philosophies, nothing the Protestant Film Commission should desire could awaken among Catholics anything but the highest approval and support.

The box office, as the Protestant Film Commission will surely discover, is "the big boss"; and universal understanding, even more than universal acceptance, is the passport to public movie preference.

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