

Nicholas Johnson

How to talk back to your television set

Catholic Press Features

Washington—Church groups can be of great help in improving TV, both nationally and locally, according to a Federal Communications Commission member.

In a "how to" book titled "How to Talk Back to Your Television Set," FCC's Nicholas Johnson suggests ways that both individuals and groups can help upgrade TV content, and particularly lauds the United Church of Christ for its "breakthrough" work in influencing TV changes.

Johnson notes that very few people realize that every three years a TV or radio station must apply for renewal of its broadcasting license. The stations are, in effect, "up for reelection" every three years and it is at that time that individuals or groups can challenge a station's right to continue broadcasting.

Such challenges, Johnson argues, can lead to changes in station management or, at the very least, changes in the station's attitude toward public reaction.

Writes Johnson in his book, published in paperback by Bantam:

"A broadcaster is like an elected official, and his license entitles him to no more than a three-year term, after which he must either have his license renewed by the FCC or be turned out of office.

You — his constituents — who are supposed to vote in this election often do not even know it is being held. . . Any local organization with a stake in the quality of broadcasting — church, union, civil rights group, or civic club — can appear as a party in a license renewal proceeding by writing the FCC that it wishes to be a party, expressing its views in writing, or requesting an oral hearing."

Johnson reports that this right to challenge license renewals was established in 1966 when the United Church of Christ joined two Jackson, Miss., Negroes in protesting the renewal of a TV station's license because of discriminatory broadcasting policies.

The FCC at first refused to recognize the complainants, but after a ruling by the District of Columbia U.S. Court of Appeals, "the FCC subsequently held the hearing, admitting the church as an active party at the proceeding, and later

granted the station a renewal — over the dissenting protests of Commissioner Kenneth A. Cox and myself."

"Without blinking," Johnson continues, "the church went back to the court of appeals again, and this time the court, in exasperation with the commission, itself ordered the commission to accept new applications for the station's license. . . Among the many TV projects that can be undertaken by church groups and other organizations concerned about TV is monitoring, which Johnson calls "one of the most important aspects of effective broadcasting reform."

Among the items that can be monitored, Johnson suggests, are number of commercial interruptions, percentage of local programming as opposed to national programming, and number of hours of quality programming for children.

"If you can demonstrate that a given station is not only doing very poorly by your own standards, but is not even performing up to the level of comparable stations," Johnson states, "it should make it much more difficult for the FCC to reject your complaints."

H. B. Warner
Max Von Sydow

Enrique Irazoqui
Jeffrey Hunter

COURIER / Entertainment

Who Played Christ Best?

Catholic Press Features

New York — Which was the best portrayal of Christ on the motion picture screen?

Was it H. B. Warner in Cecil B. DeMille's 1927 "King of Kings," or Max Von Sydow in 1965's "The Greatest Story Ever Told," or the obscure Spanish student in Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Gospel According to St. Matthew" in 1964, or one of the dozen or so other actors who have portrayed Jesus in other films?

A British scholar who studied closely all the performances for a book called Religion in the Cinema claims that Swedish actor Von Sydow's portrayal — in George Stevens' "The Greatest Story Ever Told" — was the most credible, followed by that of H. B. Warner.

The scholar, Ivan Butler, who examined all portraits of Christ on the screen dating back to 1897, observed:

"Warner, for all the beauty, tenderness and dignity of his portrayal, or perhaps because of these very virtues, never quite convinced as the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. Warner was the 'gentle Jesus' of the child's bedside as well as the Teacher, the Healer, the Reformer, the Man of unquenchable will and inner determination.

"Von Sydow satisfies one on all these points, but in addition is also the truder from place to place through the hot dusty countryside, the craftsman's son. The physical strength to undergo the strains imposed on Christ is evident in Von Sydow. With Warner, one occasionally has doubts in this one respect. Von Sydow is a strong, virile, compassionate and even at times a humorous Christ."

Butler expressed dismay that the Von Sydow film had not met with critical approval, while "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," made by a Marxist and featuring Enrique Irazoqui as Christ, was lauded by the critics.

Christ in Pasolini's film, according to Butler, "becomes a strangely unlovable figure; at most, in fact, a bit of a bore at

times, despite much fire, authority and passion.

"Surely, one feels, despite the stern duties before Him, despite the necessity for grave commitment, and knowledge of tragedy to come, surely Christ smiled more often than this?"

Although he ranks Von Sydow's portrayal of Christ as the best, Butler claims Warner's portrayal — perhaps because of the DeMille hoopla surrounding the making of the film (no one was allowed to talk to Warner while in costume, etc.) — has been vastly underrated by film historians.

"H. B. Warner gives a superb performance, wholly inspired and inspiring — in appearance half-way between the silken-haired, fragile, feminine figure of Victorian color supplements and the tougher, more realistic portrayals of later years," Butler commented.

Describing the scene in which Warner's face is first seen in "King of Kings," through the eyes of a girl whose sight Christ

has restored—Butler remarked:

"In over 40 years the scene has lost none of its power, and it is easy to believe that the American minister who told Warner some time later: 'I saw you in 'King of Kings' when I was a child and now, every time I speak of Jesus, it is your face. I see.'"

Butler criticized early representations of Christ—especially in the original 1926 "Ben Hur"—where only His hands or feet or parts of His robe were visible.

In the "Ben Hur" re-make that starred Charlton Heston, Christ is "pictured more boldly — by Claude Heatter — than in the irritating hand and foot business of the 1926 production," Butler conceded, "but even so He is a vague and unsatisfying figure.

He writes off the 1961 "King of Kings," starring Jeffrey Hunter as Christ, by observing that "the film was reputedly known to the trade as 'I Was a Teen-age Jesus.'"

Franciscans and Mormons 'Sell Love on Radio, TV

Los Angeles — (RNS)—Love will be "sold" on radio and television this Fall in an unusual ecumenical effort between the Roman Catholic Franciscan Communications Center and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Every TV station in the country will receive a one-minute animated public service spot entitled, "The Sounds of Love in Your Life." It is scheduled to appear for the initial time during the first weeks in October.

The video presentation is based on one of the original series of radio spots which were produced by the Catholic center, which was formerly known as St. Francis Productions.

Robert Lake, director of broadcasting of the RLDS Church, heard the radio spot

and came up with the idea of making it into a television vehicle. Working with Father Emery Tang, who heads the Franciscan Communications Center's TeleSPOTS division, Mr. Lake and the priest were able to enlist the effort of two animators at the Walt Disney studios—Harry Hester, a member of the RLDS Church, and Bernie Mattenson, a Catholic.

Production costs of the animation will be paid by the RLDS Church while the Franciscan center will provide the prints and distribution.

The television film will be preceded by the release of a second series of radio spots in mid-August. The short public service announcements will go to 3,300 radio stations in the United States and Canada. The first series of radio "love spots" were distributed last Christmas.

Wednesday, August 26, 1970

As I See It

TV Summer Not All Bad

By Pat Costa



Not much time is left before the networks will unveil their new shows.

Summer replacements and specials, to say nothing of reruns, will vanish at least until January, when important pronouncements will be issued about the "second season" and some of the programs of second-class status will be promoted to first-class attractions, at least in the enticing promotional ads.

Ordinarily, I along with everybody else, look back at the demise of summer offerings with little or no regret. So what that the new fall shows will be disappointments for the most part. They have to be better than what we were just offered! Or do they?

In a mellow mood the other night after watching The Boston Pops with conductor Arthur Fiedler and guest guitarist Chet Atkins, I began to realize the summer had not been all that bad.

True, the Smothers Brothers were back in all their boring inanity and the Everly Brothers and "Happy Days" were not to my taste. Ditto "The Gold-diggers."

On the other hand, the Pops series seen on Channel 21 both Sundays at 10 p.m. and Wednesday at 9 p.m. have been nothing but pure, unadulterated joy. Guests such as Atkins, Teddy Kennedy (in a recitation), Mason Williams and Peter Nero gave added luster to the programs.

Among the summer replacement shows "Comedy Tonight," featuring a host of people you are more accustomed to seeing in commercials has had its bright moments.

Star Robert Klein, who first came to my attention as the deadhead boyfriend in the movie "The Landlord," seldom rises above the mildly amusing,

but the group spoofs of certain national sacred cows has from time to time hit the mark.

Among serious presentations to come our way during the summer, certainly NBC's presentation of the problem of the Migrant Farm Laborer in Florida must rank as tops in TV commitment to remedy of social ills both in scope and attack.

Network newscasts short on news have relied heavily on features and done an excellent job with them.

Then the addition of Dinah Shore to the morning lineup has varied the morning menu with some interesting guests.

On the whole, it's been a summer of TV somewhat better than we have come to expect.

Pa. Film Law 'Unconstitutional'

Philadelphia — (RNS) — Pennsylvania's new law forbidding the showing of previews of X-rated movies in theaters when "family" films are showing has been ruled unconstitutional by a panel of three Federal judges.

The court based its ruling on the language of the bill, noting that the state law used the phrases "suitable for family or children's viewing" and "unsuitable for family or children's viewing," but made no attempt to define the phrases.

The Motion Picture Association of America and 11 movie distributors and exhibitors recently challenged the constitutionality of the law. The law was to have gone into effect last July 1. It called for \$1,000 fine on the first offense and a \$2,000 fine or two years imprisonment on subsequent offenses.