

Religious Taking Closer Look at TV Medium

By RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

The broadcast media, especially television, is playing no favorites with respect to the religious persuasions of America. Lately, it's rubbing just about all of them wrong.

Whether the problem lies in hiring practices, programming, racial or ethnic irritations, or TV's apparent penchant for violence, and now, sex, the industry is feeling increasing pressure and antipathy from Church-related groups and official religious organizations across the board.

Southern Baptists, for instance, have been concerned with the showing of "X" and "R" rated movies on television. Catholics resented references to abortion on popular prime-time shows, and the Orthodox Jewish community, has recently become outraged at one comedy program's encouragement of interreligious marriage.

Yet, there is another side to the media-church picture.

Some church communications experts have admonished religious agencies, and in some cases the Churches per se, for not fully utilizing the media, particularly television to reach those "outside" the Church.

Other Church media specialists have prodded the Churches to take a leading role in developing new and "more positive" directions for American TV, instead of simply resorting to the role of critic and watchdog.

However, the bulk of Church-inspired reaction to television,

even excluding the question of violence, remains critical.

For instance, a major Protestant denomination, the United Church of Christ, has released a study indicating "systematic discrimination on a broad scale" in the hiring of minority group employees and women by commercial television stations.

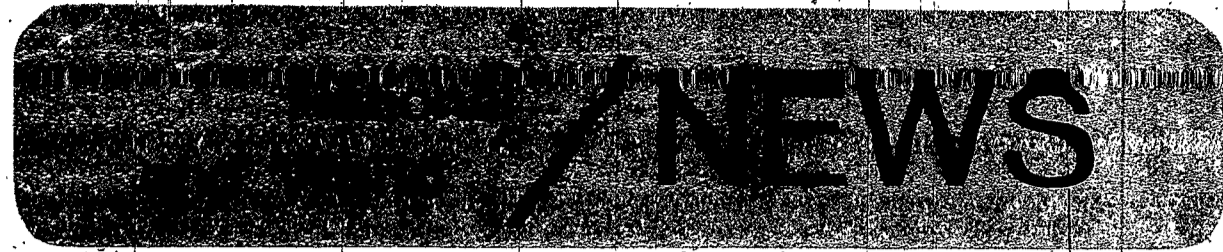
The Public Broadcasting System's privately-sponsored television treatment of the findings of the Presidential Commission on Population Growth and the American Future received a blast from right-to-life groups who object to the commission's recommendations on population control.

Much of the current criticism of television programming has followed the appearance of "All in the Family," the award-winning CBS-TV comedy that has made "Archie Bunker" a household word and a laughable symbol of racial and ethnic bias.

While the "Archie Bunker Syndrome" has been roundly criticized by many religious spokesmen — and still is — other shows which proffer treatment of thorny issues like abortion and interreligious marriage have followed in its wake.

The comedy series "Maude" — an offshoot of the "All in the Family" series — was roundly scored by Catholics, who saw it as endorsing abortion.

Some anti-abortion groups demanded that CBS-TV offer equal time under the FCC Fairness Doctrine to present the "pro-



life" viewpoint during prime time and in a similar format to the "Maude" program.

Last February, the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention condemned the scheduled showing of "X" and "R" rated movies on network television.

Shortly thereafter, the Knights of Columbus lodged protests with CBS and the Federal Communications Commission against the showing of the movie "The Damned" on network TV.

In a letter to the FCC, Supreme Knight John McDevitt said the Knights wanted an investigation of CBS-TV's decision to air the film and added: "We contend that dissemination over the public airwaves of such a conglomerate of brutal violence and blatant sex is a gross violation of public trust."

More than six months later, a CBS executive assured officials of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission that his network had "no intention" of televising "X" or "R" rated motion pictures.

The CBS network, apparently more committed to the treatment of volatile social issues, is continuing to run into religious opposition. Several Orthodox Jewish groups are presently urging that the television series "Bridget Loves Bernie" be dropped.

Calling the series "a flagrant insult and act of disrespect to Orthodox Judaism and . . . most non-Orthodox Jews," the Rabbinical Alliance of America said it could not accept the series' "encouragement of the spiritual genocide of American Jewry through inter-marriage — the main theme of the series."

While some religious groups continue to take television to task for objectionable policies or programming, there are those who are taking Church leadership to task for failing to recognize the "bright hope" television offers them in reaching out to the spiritually needy.

The Rev. William Fore, who heads the National Council of Churches' broadcasting and film commission, in asserting

that the future of American communications, especially television, looks bad, said the Churches have both a moral and practical obligation to help develop a massive response to the problem.

Indicating that more than criticism of policies and programming is necessary, Mr. Fore said religion in America must be concerned because the future of television as a major communications media affects the whole of society.

He said if the Churches are going to stand against oppression and injustice they must get to the "roots" of problems like psychological manipulation and information control.

Among other things, he urged the Churches and their agencies to get involved in determining new regulatory policies for the media, in studying the influence of the media on learning, perception, decision-making, etc., and back a national citizens' organization to give voice to the peoples' interest in the area of mass communications.

Order Outlines Father Phil's Social Role

Baltimore (RNS) — The anti-war Roman Catholic priest, Father Philip Berrigan, whose parole began Dec. 20, will be able to resume his social activism, according to his superior.

Father Matthew J. Rourke, a superior general of the Josephite Order to which Father Berrigan belongs — and his parole sponsor — added, however, that the 49-year-old priest will be specifically assigned to research the needs of blacks. The order is dedicated to helping blacks.

Father Berrigan was scheduled to spend an approved Christmas leave in New York with his family, including his older brother Daniel, a Jesuit priest and also an activist, following his release from federal prison at Danbury, Conn. He is to return to Baltimore Jan. 27 to begin his work.

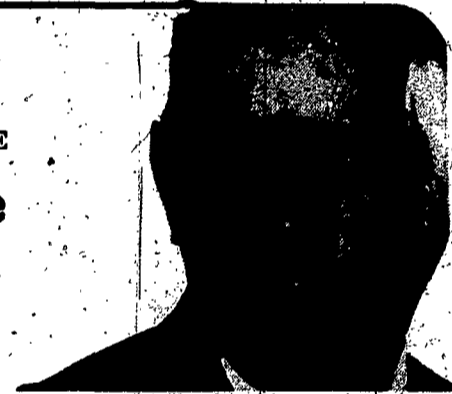
"He will live here at the Josephite House of administration and do research work relevant to our aims," Father Rourke said. "I don't anticipate any restrictions on his speaking or activities from our point of view," he added.

"But under parole conditions, he is restricted to Maryland unless he gets travel permission from his parole office," the superior general said.

Father Berrigan served a little more than three years of a six-year term for mutilating draft records in a raid on the Selective Service office in Baltimore in 1967. He also served part of a concurrent 3½-year term for the so-called "Catonsville Nine" raid on a suburban draft board with his brother Daniel and others a year later.

BOB CONSIDINE

On the Line



Carl Foreman, writer-producer of "Young Winston," the film about the early years of Sir Winston Churchill, likes to say "I have survived on my own terms without losing dignity."

Foreman was a casualty of McCarthyism, the House Un-American Activities Committee, and the frightened motion picture industry's blacklisting of writers, actors and directors who were branded as pro-Communist. By the time the committee subpoenaed him as one of the "Hollywood 10" in the early 1950s, he had long since cut his ties with Communist causes, and served a hitch in the Army, had returned to Hollywood and had become one of its top creative artists.

The committee, which included an already renowned young anti-Communist crusader, Rep. Richard M. Nixon, demanded that Foreman reveal the names of other Hollywood film figures he knew to be in the party. Foreman refused, at the risk of being declared in contempt and later convicted and sent to prison, as were several of "The Ten." He testified that the party briefly won his support because it hated Hitler.

He was spared, and returned to Hollywood. But he found himself in the film capital's Coventry, which could be as restraining as a prison term.

When all studios closed their doors against him and his producer's credit was erased from "High Noon," starring Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly, Foreman decided he could no longer make a living in his native land. So he moved to London. To his dismay, he discovered that no British company would use him for fear that if his name appeared on the screen the film might be boycotted by U.S. distributors.

Foreman was forced to write

under assumed names until 1954, when Sir Alexander Korda, a film-maker of great prestige, boldly announced that he had employed him as an assistant. The State Department was asked by several anti-Communist societies to revoke Foreman's passport. His attorney, Sidney E. Cohn, successfully fought that proposal, and Foreman was free to fly to Ceylon to work on the script for "The Bridge on the River Kwai," without a byline. But industry insiders knew how much he had enriched that classic.

By the time the picture unfolded triumphantly on U.S. and foreign screens, a change had taken place in the ideological climate. President Eisenhower planned to be host to Nikita Khrushchev, Vice President Nixon, incredibly, would visit Moscow, Leningrad, Novosibirsk and Sverdlovsk. Columbia Pictures took a deep breath and informed Foreman that he was strictly persona grata at its shop.

Foreman told me the other day over a martini at Shor's that the beginning of "Young Winston" came eight long years ago when Sir Winston summoned him. Seems that the old gentleman had thoroughly enjoyed "The Guns of Navarone" and felt that Foreman might be just the man to do a picture on his early life. One of the regrets of Foreman's life, he said, is that Churchill died before he could see the film.

Before Foreman entered into negotiations with Sir Winston's attorney, he informed him of his bygone difficulties in America. "We know," the lawyer said with a smile. "We have a large dossier on you." Later, Sir Winston said to him, "When I was a young man I was considered a radical, too. With Lloyd George I helped to introduce Britain's first old age pension and first medical aid. In a sense I started the welfare state. . . . But it's not being run as well now as then."

Tasting Freedom

Father Philip Berrigan, SSJ, tastes freedom for the first time in 39 months as he walks out of the Danbury, Conn., federal correction institution accompanied by his brother, Father Daniel Berrigan, SJ. The principal defendant in the famed Harrisburg conspiracy trial held earlier this year, Father Philip Berrigan was paroled after serving more than half his six-year term for anti-war draft board raids in Maryland. (RNS)