THE MOTION PICTURE: FRIEND OR FOE?
by Mel White

In October, 1889, Thomas A. Edison completed his Kinetoscope, a "peep show" affair that brought a series of still pictures to "jerky" life. The modern motion picture industry was born. Soon after followed the nickelodeon, Charlie Chaplin, "talkies," 3-D, cinerama and John R. Rice's pamphlet, "What's wrong with the Movies?"

To Dr. Rice, writing in 1938, Edison's invention was such "an unmitigated curse...so vile in its influence that no Christian should ever set foot in a movie theater." Twenty years later, Dr. Clyde Taylor, then Secretary of Public Affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals, made it clear, "Evangelical Christians, as a rule, do not attend the movies." Dr. Stephen W. Paine, then President of Houghton College reaffirmed this view in 1957 with his pamphlet scourging the motion picture industry. All three men seem to agree. "The spiritual results of the movies are incontestably worse than all the other results combined."

Few would argue with the tome of Biblical and statistical evidences these men quote in support of their positions. Each has made a strong plea for an eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt not attend the motion picture." This law was born out of a sincere desire to protect modern youth from the admitted bulk of sex, sadism and sensationalism which seemed to predominate on the screen. But let us face the truth. The church cannot build walls high enough to protect modern youth from the pressures of this age.

Television has enabled the motion picture to invade 47 million of America's 53 million homes. According to a survey by Columbia University, the average American youth watches television twenty hours a week or approximately one and one-half months of the year. The most careful parent soon realizes that to regulate the television habits of his teenagers is a difficult if not impossible task.

Couple this influence with the mounting pressures of mass advertising, paperback book publications, the multimillion dollar record and radio industries, and one quickly realizes that to avoid the theater is to avoid the issues. The decision to ban the motion picture may have been valid in 1938, but in 1966 it must be seriously

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EDITORIAL

"A true work of art is but a shadow of the Divine perfection"
Michelangelo

This sensitive statement was made by an artist, a Christian artist, who perhaps knew better than any other painter until Rembrandt what painting as an art could mean to Christian faith. Art—even the best art—is but a shadow. It is servant not master. But it is at least a shadow. And it can be one of man's finest means of religious expression: that of devotion and worship.

In this issue of the opinion we are attempting to stimulate some thinking about the fine arts and Christian faith. Merely scratching the surface of possible thinking along these lines, we are presenting three articles for your consideration: an article on the cinema by Mel White, a discussion of Beethoven's opera, Fidelio by Richard Bower, and an example of creative writing by William Walker. It is hoped that this will be only the beginning of a continued discussion on the place of art in the Christian community.

Poem

The prayers I make will then be sweet indeed
If Thou the spirit give by which I pray:
My unassisted heart is barren clay,
Which of its native self can nothing feed:
Of good and pious works Thou art the seed,
Which quickens only where Thou say'st it may;
Unless Thou show to us Thine own true way,
No man can find it: Father! Thou must lead.
Do Thou, then, breathe those thoughts into my mind
By which such virtue may in me be bred
That in Thy holy footsteps I may tread;
The fetters of my tongue do Thou unbind,
That I may have the power to sing of Thee,
And sound Thy praises everlastingly.

Michelangelo

R.A.E.

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THE MOTION PICTURE: FRIEND OR FOE? (continued)

When Christian youth have the courage to ask, "What does the evangelical church believe about the motion picture?", there are still leaders who mumble something about "violence, sex, and Philippians 4:8" and stumble home to watch Bonanza or Ed Sullivan on TV. Other churchmen legislate morality. They seek to kill or postpone critical judgment and make obedient followers of the youth through an internalization of a condemning conscience. Other churchmen are threatened by the question and avoid giving frank, realistic answers, hoping these questions will somehow go away. When will they realize that questioners, not questions, leave the church?

Churchmen, for the most part, have oversimplified and generalized until they are masters of doubletalk and ministers of a double standard. Youth want to know the truth. It's time we helped them find it. Let us re-evaluate the motion picture question in a spirit of honest quest. The church must neither avoid the issue nor make decisions for her youth. Our task, in the words of John Ciardi, modern poet and critic, is to guide youth to "the ability to make judgments, to discriminate between the good and bad, great and good, good and half good."

At the outset we must admit that motion pictures are built by machinery and equipment, by technical and artistic skills. They are not inherently evil. Some businessmen in their quest to supply the public's demand may have misused and corrupted the art to build an industry. Nevertheless, within that industry artists remain, anxious to communicate truth, eager to produce quality family fare. Let us not condemn the art for the industry's past misuses. Let us not destroy the good in our enthusiasm to eliminate the bad. Above all let us teach our youth the difference.

It is only natural for the home or church to want desperately to protect her youth from the pressures of this age. But to make rules against the pressures of the various media is like voting against a tidal wave. The truth is that the wave is upon us. We must teach our youth to swim.

It is not my purpose to defend the motion picture industry, but to seek realistic ways to aid our youth to more-discriminating use of all modern media. Let us seek to guide each person to built-in self controls as he turns on the television, attends a film or play, picks up a book or magazine, or listens to the radio a record, or a coffee house folk singer.

It will demand a new kind of bold confrontation with the media and may bring criticism and misunderstanding from those who honestly believe their youth are not exposed. Nevertheless, the youth of our churches are exposed, and now the church must act. When a child is exposed to smallpox, a doctor is called to inoculate him with a small amount of live virus to build up his resistance and save him from the effects of this disease. The doctor takes a risk to save a life. And so must we.

There is not enough space in this context to examine the ways we might discover truth together about the motion picture. For some churches it may be a television viewing party with a Christ centered evaluation of popular programs. For another church a film forum with a controversial film shown and evaluated in the church auditorium or
THE MOTION PICTURE: FRIEND OR FOE? (continued)

basement. For another it may be a Sunday school curriculum on the mass media, guest lectures by people in the industry, an interview with a theater manager or film critic, a library shelf stocked with legitimate reviews, criticisms and film commentaries, a worship service dedicating the radio, TV or even the theater for God's glory through the Christian's creative use.

Whatever we do will be criticized and misunderstood, but our youth will understand and appreciate our honesty. It will convince them again that the church really cares about truth and that Christianity really works where people live. It will lead to significant Christian witness and growth opportunities. It may even inspire some of our youth to Christian vocations in the media. For years we have feared the sinfulness of the motion picture. Let us redeem this magnificent tool through a better understanding of its power and our Christian stewardship responsibilities. The motion picture has been our enemy. Let us make it our friend. ///

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO FIDELIO

by Richard A. Bower

O hope, let not thy last faint star,
In dark despair be blinded.

Seldom have words so profoundly set the mood for a story which is to unfold, brutally yet softly, the awesome struggle of a soul to be free. Spoken by Leonora in Beethoven's opera, Fidelio, these words come ringing down through the years, settling with shattering effect upon the anxious minds of men of "fever'd blood." Anxious eyes of us all strive to see the rainbow that "bright against the storm-cloud shows:" the gospel of hope.

Fidelio, Ludwig von Beethoven's only opera, was written and re-written during the years 1805-1814 when he was at his prime. The story, quite conventional and not too inspiring, concerns a valiant young fighter for freedom, Florestan, who has been unjustly imprisoned by his political enemy Pizarro; and Florestan's wife, Leonora, who is disguised as the young lad, Fidelio, in order that she may seek out her husband and free him from the ruthless Pizarro. Leonora attaches herself to the jailer of Pizarro's prison and eventually obtains access to the lower level of the dungeon, the place where her husband is secretly kept. On hearing that the Prime Minister (Florestan's close friend) is planning to visit the prison, Pizarro hastily plots to do away with Florestan so as not to incur the wrath of the Minister. Discovering this hideous plan, Leonora desperately tries to save her husband, and in a dramatic scene in the dungeon chamber, Leonora draws out a pistol she has hidden and threatens to kill the contemptuous Pizarro on the spot. At that moment, the trumpet sound is heard, announcing the anxiously awaited arrival of the Prime

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The sinister tone of evil is set by the heartless Pizarro in his first aria, "Hai welch ein Augenblick!" The forces of evil, crushing down in vengeful bondage, are vividly portrayed in the character of this man.

Hai! Now is the moment come when I may wreak my vengeance... Now is he in my power... His face dark and strained with anger, Pizarro plunges forth, confident of victory. "I'll shout into his ear (Florestan's), 'Tis I who triumph here!"

This piercing shout still ringing in our ears, we come to the aria of Leonora, Komm, Hoffnung. This aria is a miracle of beauty, warmth and hope, in an otherwise desperate moment. Who could have said, as did Leonora, "O hope let not thy last faint star, In dark despair be blinded."

What kind of soul could pierce the gloom of hopeless bondage and sing, "Fair light, point me the way afar, that love may safely find it."

Soon after Leonora's aria comes the Prisoner's Chorus, "O welche Lust in freier Luft." Words are far too inadequate to recreate the tenderness of this moment. From their dark, dreary dungeons the Prisoners slowly and gratefully rise to the courtyard for a walk in the garden, a privilege seldom granted to them. Enthralled simply by the purity and brightness of the light and air around them—beauty they've almost forgotten—they sing a hymn of joy:

How pure and bright the air and light around us, Here life again has found us.

Suddenly the Prisoners remember the freedom that once was theirs. Intoxicated by the thought of freedom, they raise their voices in longing desire asking that question, ... that forbidden question—Oh freedom! Will it yet be ours?

And sadly they return to their stone and iron graves.

Perhaps the most moving aria in the entire opera,—the aria in which Beethoven pours out his sensitive soul, as one who himself has been "imprisoned in the cell of a dark, dank, sordid, uncomprehending—

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO FIDELIO (continued)

world." --is the first aria of Florestan. Sitting on a stone, with a large chain around his body, gazing about at the ruinous condition of his damp, dark cell, and of his own life, Florestan begins to sing. And his song shatters the indifferent silence of the unhappy hour. In his brief recitative, Florestan thinks about the horror of the dark, the silence, and the cruel loneliness he feels. Yet, "doch gerecht ist Gottes Wille:" still the will of God is just. He will not complain.

But the pain of his sorrow is deep. He knows too well the joy of freedom, of love and hope. No darkness can cover the light of that life he once knew. So with one of Beethoven's tenderest melodies, Florestan sings about the poignant yet quiet sorrow of his life:

Here my life is half completed,
all that gave me joy is flown:
Words of truth too boldly spoken,
Brought me here to die alone.

Suddenly, the mood changes. The pace quickens. A new melody emerges, one that is gay and yet sad, as if the gaiety of the melody were trying to outrun its sadness, but is not quite able. It is the melody of a man in ecstasy. Florestan sees a vision of an angel of light come to deliver him. "Ein Engel Leonora," "zur Freiheit, zur Freiheit:" an angel Leonora... to freedom, to freedom. The intensity of his emotion increases as hope appears closer and closer. "She leads me to freedom and heavenly life."

Then all is quiet as he sinks to the floor exhausted. The courage of this man is spent in his fantasy.

The rest of the opera is superfluous, perhaps. Truly, it ends in joy and redemption, but are not the seeds of this joy found in the tragedy itself? In the wretched Pizarro, in the compassionate Leonora, and in the suffering Florestan we find the meaning of our story. The contrast of bondage and freedom, of hate and love, of darkness and light, of sorrow and joy: all are hauntingly pictured in this drama. Indeed, the outcome seems somewhat a deus ex machina. Yet this outcome expresses a hope that was very real to Beethoven. The painful agony of bondage seemed to imply an ultimate redemption. The people and Prisoners in the last chorus sing:

Hail, happy day, day of rejoicing!
So long desired, so long denied,
When Justice comes, with mercy joining,
the prison gates to open wide.

The acts of faith, the vows of duty, the defiance of injustice, the human pity: these were man's part in the drama. Yet this alone was not sufficient; in a final chorus Florestan sings:

Oh wondrous hour of pure delight!
'Tis God alone defends the right.
And sends us after darkness, light.


1. Fidelio, Act I, Scene 2.
2. Ibid., Act II, Scene 1.

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THE ENIGMA OF TIME
by William Walker

Two men walked along a dusty path in the foothills of Judea... One a master and the other a youth. And as they walked they became caught up in a crowd of people Which gradually streamed into a much larger crowd of about five hundred. They were sitting and standing about one man And some were weeping.

"Who can this be that has attracted so much attention in the way-parts of the desert?" wondered the old man. And then they were close enough to see who it was.

"Why, it is that same Jesus!" exclaimed the youth. "But can it be possible?" "Has he not been dead these twenty days?" "Surely, this can not be that same Jesus?"

"Ah, but it is, youth," replied the master. "For this indeed is the same man we debated in the temple, For there is none other like him. Remember how we marveled at his words And of the compassion in his voice Toward we who tried to fault him and prove him wrong."

"But how is it possible that a man come back from the dead?" questioned the youth. The old master could not answer quickly, for the words he would utter were sacrilege.

"He, indeed, must be the Son of God."

They stood and listened and marveled at the words that were spoken For they had suddenly taken on a new meaning And they realized the truth of what he was saying. Soon they too were kneeling For their hearts were moved within them And they believed.

As they left the scene of this confrontation with the risen Jesus The youth spoke fearfully of the time when there no longer would be witnesses of this event

"Will they continue believing our report?" queried the youth. CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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THE ENIGMA OF TIME (continued)
The master could only shrug his shoulders at the insight of the youth.

"Perhaps" was his reply, "For if they can not believe our report
Then whose will they believe?
For, we have seen with our eyes that he is risen."

He reflected further on why men might not accept their report in the future
And then he realized that only those would believe
Who were willing to be humbled by the realization
That they of their own merit
Could never cross that infinite gulf
That lay between God and them
Without some bridge of Divine construction between.

Certainly, reasoned the master, this Jesus must be that bridge
For otherwise why should he say
That he was the way the truth and the life
And that he was come to give life and give it more abundantly
If it was not to give a life to man which he did not already possess.

And why should this person, Who in truth must be the Son of God,
Submit himself
To the spittings of the mob
And the injustices of his tormentors
If, indeed, he had no more serious intention
Than enjoying the prospect of becoming a spectacle.

For this old master considered a resurrection from the dead
to be a most unusual, if not, unheard of event.

And he believed in his heart that which before
Had been incomprehensible
And irrelevant to him.

Turning to the youth whom he had ignored in his musings, he asked,

"Youth, why do you weep for that which is your delight?
Which yet can be your meat and drink?
For you are yet young enough to live in the new life
Of...that which has been spoken."

And the youth replied,
"I weep not only for the joy of having this burden of doubt
lifted from my brow
And for the knowledge that I am loved in spite of my devisiveness
But also for those who are yet to come
Who may not believe our report
And who following their own devises
Will never know of the new life made possible
Through this being called Jesus.

And the old man wondered that these things would ever come to pass.
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THE ENIGMA OF TIME (continued)

There have been many masters, many youths, and many conversations
Which culminated in one final stroke of brilliance
Across the turning pages of the twentieth century.

One particular youth asked his master
To tell him of the uniqueness of this man, Jesus
And the new life of which he claimed he was the bearer

But the master's reply gave little encouragement to this seeker
of wisdom
For he said that
"Jesus, in the knowledge that he was the coming Son of Man
Laid hold of the wheel of the world
To set it moving on that last revolution
Which was to bring all ordinary history to a close
It refused to turn...
And he threw himself upon it
Then it did turn...
And crushed him.
The wheel moves onward
And the mangled body of one immeasurably great man
Who was strong enough
To think of himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind
Is hanging upon it still.

That is his victory
That is his reign."*  

And so in despair this youth turned his hand to something else
To something far more satisfying and captivating
Than the life of a deluded fanatic
To whom he could never owe allegiance.////

*Schweitzer

EMIL BRUNNER--A LOSS LONG FELT
by Dr. Paul K. Jewett

Though most men leave this earthly scene "forgotten as a dream
dies at the opening day," the departure of some is a loss long felt
beyond the circle of immediate family and friends. Such is the case
with Emil Brunner, who died last month in Zurich where for many years
he had been University professor of Dogmatic Theology. Brunner was
the first major European theologian to lecture in this country on
the Theology of Crisis and the early translation of his works into
English gained for him a wide influence in America. In 1953 he
enlarged the scope of this influence by accepting a post at the
International Christian University of Japan. But the impact which he
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EMIL BRUNNER (continued)

made was not primarily due to the geographical scope of his lectures (there are many Fundamentalists who have lectured around the world.) It was rather the quality of his thought and the challenging clarity with which he expressed it.

The *via media* which he sought between the objectivity of an infallible Bible and the subjectivity of a religious faith which lives by its own insights, drew criticism from both the theological left and the theological right. Some of this criticism was deserved and some due to misunderstanding and intractible prejudice. But only a closed mind could read Brunner and not gain something, no matter where the reader found himself in the theological spectrum.

If I were to venture an opinion, I should judge his Divine Imperative his profoundest work and his Divine-Human Encounter (or Truth as Encounter as it has been recently translated with a new preface) as his most provocative and original work. The former probes the question of the law-love dialectic and the latter is a sort of outline of theological method or perhaps we might call it a prolegomena to dogmatics. In this work Brunner pioneered in applying the personalistic categories of Ebner and Buber to a restatement of the major themes of theology. Here is good reading to counter both "ground-of-being" theology and "God-is-dead" theology.

Brunner's personal life was tinged with sadness. The controversy with Barth left its scars. In 1952 he lost his second son in a railroad accident (the occasion for writing his Eternal Hope) and in 1955 on the trip home from Japan he suffered a stroke which virtually ended all writing and teaching activity. Since then his influence has waned and his latter years have been lonely ones. He was blessed with a faithful and talented wife who not only traveled with him to foreign lands, but also sat in his classes along with the ministers, postmen, barbers, burghers, Germans, Americans, Frenchmen, Orientals, Indians, et al, who came to listen and to learn. Now we can no longer listen to his voice, but we can still learn from his writings, and it is my hope that young ministers will continue to do so for many years to come.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Upon reading Ron Ohlson's article on "God is Dead! Thank God!" and the letter to the editor of David Donaldson in the last issue, I have been disturbed by the strong outburst of misjudgment towards Dr. Bromiley's position. Analysing Dr. Bromiley's letter in response to Dr. Wright's article on the "Death of God", I find no mark of what Donaldson conceives to be "contemptuous of the intellectual efforts of a fellow professor" or to have "a sarcasm which does not reflect a sensitive regard for people." In fact, Dr. Bromiley's opening words of the letter show the spirit of respect to Dr. Wright when he says, "...we may be grateful to Dr. Wright for some instructive psychological insights in his article...." Thus, we must admit that Dr. Bromiley's CONTINUED ON PAGE 11
LETTER TO THE EDITOR (continued)
letter merely serves as a corrective to Dr. Wright's article which unquestionably presents some possibility of anthropologizing theology, although we would wish that it had been more elaborate and positive in its content.

I agree with Dr. Wright and Mr. Ohlson on the idea that the slogan, "God is dead", is an acute expression of the inward spiritual emptiness and self-contradiction of the modern man. But this modern man cannot be inclusive of representing all men, i.e., Christians and non-Christians alike. To me, only the non-Christians can shout that God is dead. Indeed, only the fool says, "God is dead". Thus, it is a mistake to thank God for the fool's blasphemous statement. To agree with the fool at this point makes oneself also a fool.

The "God is dead" slogan is a manifestation of the stubborn rebellious nature of the godless man against the reality of God. It can never be a proof for the unreality of God. To the Christian, the reality of God is not measured by the yardstick of man's own human concepts of God. God is; and His existence is not determined by what or how man feels about Him. God is who He is to man in His own works and actions, particularly in His Incarnate Son Jesus Christ. We know and speak of God only insofar as we know Him through the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, in the Word of God. In the Bible, the revealed Word of God, utterances of who God is are to be considered in this Christological context. They are not mere symbolism or mythologies. They are not mere empty words without realistic designations. But they are words of the saints who have seen the acts of God in the history of the redemption of man. Therefore, all concepts of God are to be conceived from the standpoint of our biblical evidences. For these evidences are the result of the witness to the revelation of God. Theological formulations are never divorced from theological assumptions. And our assumption which provides our valid and true ground for speaking about God is found in the revelation of God Himself. This is the way in which anthropologizing theology may be prevented.

In conclusion, I wish to commend Dr. Wright and Mr. Ohlson for their earnest desire in trying to make us aware of the predicament of the modern man who is caught up in a nihilistic philosophy of life. I wish to thank also, Dr. Bromiley for his sincere effort to direct us to a right theological understanding of nature of the modern man who is in need of the true knowledge of God in order to have the true knowledge of himself.

Yours truly,
Leon Yao

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