

C. F. S. MOVEMENT IN HOLLAND¹

PART I

CATHOLICS in the Netherlands have always taken a great interest in the film problem. Very soon after the first cinemas appeared (about 1912) there arose among Catholics a movement for the erection of so-called 'White Cinemas,' where only those films would be shown which had been properly censored in accordance with the dictates of moral theology. This movement failed, however, owing to lack of experience and of the necessary funds. Meanwhile, at the instance of the Catholic National Purity League, there was set up a board of film-censors operating mainly at Amsterdam. This committee, however, lacked the authority of an official body, and did not sufficiently meet the just claims of the people outside the big cities.

In 1926 The 'Cinema Act' was passed in Parliament. Among other things it lays down the principle that, in the Netherlands, only those films may be shown publicly which have been passed by the National Board of Public Censors. It also empowers the Board to suppress certain films as being contrary to good morals and public order. The Committee, moreover, reserves to itself the right to forbid the attendance at certain films by young persons under the age of 14 or 18. With the co-operation of the Catholic politicians a clause was added to the law enabling those institutes and societies which have been set up for the prevention or destruction of social and moral dangers in connection with the film industry, to exercise a further censorship on films already passed by the National Board of Film Censors. These institutes and societies may obtain an official authorization for this purpose from the Home Minister. Owners of cinemas may, by submitting to the censorship of these societies, obtain the right to announce to the public that they will exhibit only those films that

¹ C.F.S. signifies, of course, 'Catholic Film Society, which is doing such fine work in England. The Dutch counterpart is actually a separate society.

have been passed for exhibition by the societies in question. Only the 'Katholieke Film Centrale' had been acknowledged as a society in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

The Burgomasters of the Catholic provinces (North Brabant and Limburg) have formed the 'Union of Southern Municipalities.' This Union has entrusted the censorship of all films to be shown in these provinces to the K.F.C.

The Dutch Catholics have endeavoured to work not only negatively, but also positively. In 1930 a few influential laymen floated a company—Eidophon, Ltd.—the aim of which was to exploit the invention of a German priest (Dr. Könemann) in connection with sound films. They hoped on the one hand to introduce the invention (which several experts had declared was superior to existing appliances) into newly erected or already existing cinemas throughout the world; and, on the other hand, to supply their own films to these theatres. The Company pledged itself to produce no films offensive to Christian principles. The application of Dr. Könemann's really ingenious appliance had to be deferred for the time being, but the Company erected a studio at Berlin and began its work of production, releasing among others: *Das Meer ruft* and *Das Lied der schwarzen Bergen*.

By this time over half a million florins had been spent and more capital was required if the Company was to carry on.

Through the efforts of the Clergy and with the approval of the Hierarchy a considerable supply of money was obtained from parish councils and private individuals. However it was not possible to accomplish the ultimate aim of the Company, namely to influence the world-market, whilst the exploitation of Dr. Könemann's invention was not realised. And for lack of funds the apparatus set up for the production of films could not be made profitable. The Company, therefore, went into liquidation and was

converted into the 'Neo-Eidophon Company' with the old object in view: the making of good films.

Thus, although the noble plan was not a complete success, yet the initiative of those who inaugurated it and kept it going for five years under incredible difficulties, deserves to be put permanently on record. They personally explained the aims of Eidophon Ltd. to the highest Authorities at the Vatican and received the greatest possible sympathy and encouragement and even promises of support from that Quarter. But in spite of all this the Company was obliged to wind up, as it did not possess enough working capital to enable it to carry on. Through the generosity of its principal founder 'Eidophon' was enabled to restore in full the money deposited by the shareholders; an act of the utmost importance for the prestige of the Dutch Catholic Film-movement in its future development.

Meanwhile, the Neo-Eidophon Company still had assets at its disposal. Its founder refused to avail himself of these personally, but put them at the disposal of a Catholic foundation in the Bois-le-Duc diocese: the 'Goed-Volkbureau.' By this means it was possible, whilst making use of the great amount of experience already gained, to keep alive the Eidophon ideal (the production of good films even by international co-operation) and to give it a fresh trial as soon as possible. It was further hoped to amalgamate all Catholic film-societies existing in the Netherlands. For by this time many other individuals and groups had started work in the endeavour to find a solution to the film problem; either by exercising censorship or by making propaganda, or even by actually producing and spreading good films. A new and promising field had been opened up by the advent of the home projector, and here many Catholics took a very active part indeed.

The Dutch Episcopate, who were constantly being asked for financial and moral support, had to face great difficulties as a result of the lack of organisation in these matters,

The director of the 'Goed-Volkbureau,' Rector Broekman, after consultation with Mgr. Hendrikcx, V.G., of Bois-le-Duc, inaugurated the 'Oeuvre pour le bon film,' its aim being:

(a) to convince Catholics that it is a matter of conscience for them to co-operate in the solution of the film problem.

(b) to give financial support by means of subsidies to efforts made to obtain and maintain an influence for good on the film-industry.

His Lordship Bishop Diepen of Bois-le-Duc, submitted the 'Oeuvre pour le bon film' for approval to the Holy See; and in a document issued by the Secretary of State, dated July 8th, 1936, Mgr. Pizarro informed Bishop Diepen of the Holy Father's satisfaction in the following words:

'Votre Excellence ne pouvait certainement pas proposer une oeuvre plus conforme aux désirs manifestés dans la dernière Lettre Encyclique sur les spectacles cinématographiques et Sa Sainteté vous en exprime, avec Sa satisfaction, Ses paternels encouragements.

'Très heureux de vous faire connaître ces sentiments du Saint Père, je le suis aussi de transmettre la Bénédiction Apostolique qu'il accorde avec effusion de coeur pour vous et pour votre si promettante initiative.'

The 'Oeuvre pour le bon film' is considered and propagated as one department of Catholic Action. The conduct of its affairs has been entrusted to a committee of influential persons, appointed by the Bishops. This committee in the first place brings home to Catholics the importance of the film as a means of influencing the masses. Secondly, it collects moneys for the encouragement and support of every endeavour to produce, spread or censor films of every description. It, moreover, directs, unifies and, if necessary, checks or curtails the activities of all the existing Catholic film organisations and enterprises.

The committee tries to realise the first aim principally by the formation of local branches of the National Centre

and of an international committee which will prepare a working plan for the production of good films. For several months the work of this committee was confined almost exclusively to a better regulation of the various activities among the Dutch Catholics in the domain of films. Needless to say there were many difficulties to be overcome. One of the most difficult points on the programme of concentration was to determine the relations between 'Film Front' and the K.F.A. (Katholieke Film Actie).

The leading function which 'Film Front' had taken in an earlier federation for Catholic Film Action made it difficult to adapt it to the new situation, which had arisen by the creation of the present head commission of K.F.A. 'Film Front' was an organisation with a limited scope which counted several film aesthetes amongst its members and primarily assessed the artistic worth when adjudicating films. K.F.A. on the contrary intended to form an organisation for the masses in 'The Work for the Good Film,' which principally fights the moral dangers of uncontrolled frequentation of the cinema. Hence, superficially there appeared to be more points of difference than of agreement. In reality, however, this was not the case, because K.F.A. and F.F. aim in essence at the same goal. Is not the work, propagated by the K.F.A. and blessed by the author of *Vigilanti Cura*, the 'Work for the Good Film'? Does not the Pope say in His Encyclical that 'it is absolutely necessary to impose on the film those norms, through which all noble and sound works of art are led and controlled?' Should we then by a good film mean something different from a film which is good both in content and form?

'Film Front' some years ago started the campaign for the good film, but only obtained a relatively small hearing; whereas the K.F.A. enrolls thousands upon thousands, forming a legion of fighters for the good film. There was question, then, here of a difference in organisation, in method and circumstances, not in aim. There was no

essential difference.

Some time, however, was needed for such views to develop. When in 1937 the K.F.A. needed a periodical, the interval of time had been too short for the ripening of these views. It was thought, it would be better for K.F.A. to address the masses in its own organ ('The White Screen'). 'Film Front' would continue to address itself to a select group in its periodical of the same name. As a necessary consequence the great army of K.F.A. remained without the assistance of those who already for years had served the cause of the good film by writing.

This is changed now. The conviction that all are striving for the propagation of good films and aim only at one and the same goal, led of itself to the formation of one front: and so to-day one periodical 'Katholiek Film Front' represents all sides. This amalgamation has not been forced. It has arisen from a growing healthy conviction; it is the fruit of intelligent deliberation and disinterested striving to arrive with united efforts at a great end.

'Katholiek Film Front' is not one of those periodicals, which owe their existence to the film-star and the usual fatuous commentaries. On the contrary, it wants to form an exception which makes no compromise with good taste, human dignity, and the relation of good to evil. It speaks out according to the canons of good taste and morality, when a good film asks for praise or an inferior one elicits condemnation. It will follow the film literature at home and abroad with interest and try to instruct its readers also in this domain. In all its speculations it will always seek contact with the historical development of the film, which evolution shows her periods of improvement and deterioration, and with the claims of beauty, which the superior film art requires. In a word, its task will be to open up to its readers the intricate nature of the film as completely as possible, with full acknowledgement of all real values, avoiding all superfluous abstruseness and all aggressiveness.

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