

Rationalism and Liberalism, namely the cartesian *point de départ*. This appears to be shown in an unpublished essay by Newman, entitled 'Proof of Theism', which begins with an analysis of the consciousness of self. But man is not just a thinking substance for Newman: he is a 'unit made up of various faculties'. And one of the most important of these is conscience: men have an awareness of their own existence and of duty and sanction at the same time. Newman says 'this feeling is analogous to that which we have . . . towards a person whom we have offended. . . . If the mind tries to explain this feeling, it will reasonably come to the conclusion that its object is an invisible father.' In conscience men meet God person to persons and in this relationship they must go beyond themselves and give the assent, of faith to the Person of God.

W. A. STEINER and E. STEWART

### HEARD AND SEEN

'CANST thou', demanded the Lord God of Job, 'draw out leviathan with an hook?' and faced by the sheer size of William Wyler's *Ben Hur* one feels rather the same kind of inadequacy. For the first thing to realize when considering this film is that it is very big: moreover it was intended to be very big and it is idle to condemn it for the lack of subtleties which may well be the chief decorations of smaller works. One cannot measure an epic in inches without missing the whole object of the exercise, and it must stand or fall by its consistency of scale. No film that lasts for nearly four hours, it is safe to say, can be a masterpiece, and if you do not care for religious epics, then do not go and see it. But as big films go *Ben Hur* is very good indeed, and its defects are almost always the defects of its *genre* rather than the fault of its brilliant director; while its successes are more telling, because more intelligently integrated into the story than is at all usual with this kind of picture.

And the story itself is well worth considering. As a piece of pure narration Lew Wallace's book is extraordinarily good, and it is easy to see why it has been a perennial temptation to the film industry, with its splendid set-pieces and the way in which the central struggle between Ben Hur and Messala is developed against the wider conflict between Jews and Romans. General Wallace had a deep moral purpose in writing this 'Tale of the Christ', as he sub-titled it, and this sense of dedication is what gives not only weight and dignity to the main plot, but also significance to the admirably detailed background against which that plot is played out. The book begins with the journey of the Wise Men and ends with the Crucifixion, and it is a tribute to the author's skill that the three levels on which the story is developed—the conquered Jews, the conquering Romans and the life of Christ—remain clear and comprehensible from start to finish. The style is neither pompous

nor dated and the dialogue contrives to be both lively and noble: it is a simple, honourable book, and of its kind quite remarkable.

The astonishing thing is how much of this comes through in Wyler's film, and when one remembers the vulgarity of *The Ten Commandments* or the fatuity of *Solomon and Sheba* and *Samson and Delilah*, the self-discipline accepted by MGM and Mr Wyler can only be admired, but some at least of the credit must go to Lew Wallace for the decorum of the film.

It even begins with circumspection. Before a single credit title flashes upon the screen, we see a long file of sullen Jews rolling in to Bethlehem, giving their name and tribe to an impatient Roman N.C.O. at the improvised check-point, among them a good-looking carpenter and his young wife, riding on a donkey. And so—still without any commercial interpolation—to the stable, shepherds, star and arrival of the Magi: only then do we get the credits, and who shall blame the hubris that sets them against Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam'? The casting is generally good and occasionally inspired, and it was a stroke of genius on the part of the director to use British actors for his Romans and Americans for his Jews, thus imposing national distinction by an implicit homogeneity of accent and manner. Charlton Heston, who had survived even *The Ten Commandments* with dignity, is excellent as Ben Hur, for his bony good looks, grace and ease of manner make him readily acceptable as a prince. Stephen Boyd as Messala is not quite in the same class, but Jack Hawkins as Arrius, the Roman duumvir rescued by Ben Hur in the sea fight, gives one of the best performances in the film. Looking like any of a dozen Roman portrait-busts he gives an impression of professional competence and personal integrity that perfectly suggests a Roman naval O.I.Q. Quite the best performance in the film, however, is given by Hugh Griffith as the Sheik to whom belong the fabulous horses with which Ben Hur eventually takes his bloody revenge over Messala in the chariot-race. He has the crispest dialogue in the script and makes the most of it. This question of the script is capital to the special quality of the film, and is one of the main reasons for its superiority; its shaping was shared between men of the calibre of Maxwell Anderson, S. N. Behrman and Christopher Fry, and the result is that not once is one jarred by the anachronisms that occur so disastrously in epics of the coarser kind. Simple, unaffected dialogue is used with extreme nervous effect, and never more so than when dealing with the episodes in which Christ appears or is suggested. The whole treatment here—so integral to the story—is executed with humility. We see Joseph telling a customer that his son is walking on the hills 'and working all the same'. We see a pair of hands, a white figure outlined against a hillside, a suffering stumbling prisoner bowed under the weight of the cross, and from the effect of his presence on others we deduce the power. It is a *serious* attempt to solve the problem in visual terms and has never, I am persuaded, been better done in any picture of this kind. The crucifixion has one moment of real inspiration—the horrifying 'clunk' as the beam falls into its prepared socket, racking one's own muscles in sympathy—and the final thunderstorm and earthquake for once justify stereophonic sound. Round and round rolls the ominous rumble as the

darkness grows: the miracle which cleanses Ben Hur's mother and sister of their leprosy may fall a little flat, but that is how Lew Wallace wanted it and in that eerie light one was prepared to accept. Of the two other great moments—the chariot race and the sea fight—enough has already been written, but for myself the chariot race, nine times round a circuit with two Tattenham Corners per lap, was as exciting as a major classic at Epsom and my audience-participation was total.

Much could be cut with advantage from this film and more could be speeded up, but it is an honest piece of work and demands an honest response; even those opposed from experience to this kind of grandiose religious epic must agree that here there is an intelligence, sensitivity and lack of vulgarity that is quite exceptional. It is, in fact, so good that it almost forces one to judge it as a real work of cinematic art.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

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### RELIGIOUS SOCIOLOGY

THE growing realization that so new an academic discipline as sociology can be of service to the Church is reflected in much Catholic discussion in Europe. In England, apart from the admirable work being undertaken by the Newman Demographic Survey, a scientific study of the special factors that affect the Church's mission in its social setting in England has as yet scarcely been attempted. Such questions as the welfare of immigrants (and especially those from Ireland), the incidence of crime among Catholics and the effect of Catholic education in terms of subsequent religious practice—which, among many other questions, are constantly debated—need that measure of simple information and interpretation of the known facts which must precede any useful exercise of the Church's social function.

An excellent example of the value of such a survey, in a necessarily limited field, can be found in the recently published proceedings of the international symposium on vocations to the priesthood, held at Vienna in October 1958. (*Die Europäische Priesterfrage: Le Problème Sacerdotal en Europe*), obtainable from the Newman Demographic Survey, 31 Portman Square, W.1, price 26s. Text in French and German, with some English communications.) The evidence from the various countries is impressively presented, and a discussion of general problems is followed by detailed discussions on such subjects as late vocations, the special difficulties of countries where Catholics are in a minority, preparation for the priesthood and, of course, some serious thinking about Italy and Spain and their traditional methods of recruitment and education. There are numerous maps, diagrams and statistical tables.

Of special interest to readers of this journal will be the contributions of Mgr Charles Tindall of Ushaw (on the situation in Great Britain) and Dr Jeremiah Newman of Maynooth (on Ireland). The British statistics show