

obvious that plural marriage or Church domination of politics would have died out if they were merely left alone any more than that these people will give up polygamy simply because they are not prosecuted.

Some maintain that because Mormons were law abiding they gave up plural marriage after the Supreme Court declared the anti-polygamy acts constitutional.¹⁰ But long after the 1879 Reynolds decision, Church members brought to the bar for sentencing told federal judges that the law of God was higher than the law of the land and deserved prior obedience. The Manifesto officially ending polygamy as Church practice was not issued until 1890, and excommunication for practicing plural marriage did not come until 1904. After 1891, however, the Church did cease to demand adherence to the political policy announced by Church leaders and, as a sign of good faith, broke up the People's Party and adopted the two-party system.

As an historian, I see the problems of the 1870's and 1880's as a conflict of two systems of law, tradition, and morality, which, because they were mutually incompatible, had to be reconciled in some way. As a devoted member of the Church, however, I see in the action of the federal government a manifestation of God's will. The Constitution, which the Church holds to be divinely inspired, demands the separation of church and state. The power exercised before 1890 to compel adherence to the Church's political and economical policies infringed upon that separation. The two principles, which were self-contradictory, could not both stand; and the Lord chose to have the Church abide by the Constitution.

¹⁰ This view is presented by James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith: Being a Consideration of the Principle Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Fortieth English Edition; Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1960), pp. 424-425.

ECUMENICAL CINEMA

Rolfe Peterson

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God is not dead in Hollywood. The phenomenal success of *The Sound of Music* means that nuns are in again, and two current movies give us a choice, according to side-by-side newspaper ads, of Rosalind Russell on a bicycle and Debbie Reynolds on a Vespa, both of them with their habits billowing behind them, and both of them obviously regular guys.

An interesting footnote to this cinematic stampede to the nunnery is that both *The Sound of Music* and Miss Russell's *The Trouble with Angels* feature a girl from Brigham City named Portia Nelson playing one of the nuns. I don't know if it's art, but it's certainly ecumenical.

Despite its winning the Academy Award, *The Sound of Music* is really not a very good movie. It charms audiences, me included, because Julie Andrews is such a winning performer and because Ted McCord's photography is a constant delight to eye. But these fragmentary excellences cannot disguise the intrinsic stupidity of its story and characters. And Robert Wise, who won the director's Oscar for this, has served up a romantic sub-plot involving the eldest daughter and a village lad which, for sheer clumsiness and sticky sentiment, rivals the worst of MacDonald and Eddy. Richard Haydn lurks in several scenes, like the deliverer of epigrams in a play by Shaw or Wilde, but when the moment comes for his witty line, it doesn't turn out to be very witty. Peggy Wood, as a wispy old Mother Superior, borrows the wrong singing voice when she suddenly bursts into "Climb Every Mountain," and the incongruity of this young and powerful mezzo-soprano, the kind that knocks down ushers in the third balcony at the Met, issuing from her frail image on the screen is the funniest cinematic moment of the year. Baron von Trapp's tyranny might have made a fascinating study in abnormal psychology, but treated sentimentally it is simply offensive. And any father who would fill his home with guests and then inflict upon them the cute little songs of his children ought to be horse-whipped.

The best choice for the Oscar was *Darling*. It's a hard, brittle story, peopled by the Godless, but by exposing the shallowness of their lives it does make a spiritual comment, one that is far more valid than the spurious sugar-pills we get in "religious" pictures.

Another Oscar nominee had great spiritual content for me when I read the book. But on the screen *Dr. Zhivago* is somewhat reduced. He is no longer every man of good will. Lara is no longer the very spirit of Russia. They are just a couple of ordinary little people caught in a trite love affair. Ironically, the one artisan who fell down on the job in the making of *Dr. Zhivago*, Robert Bolt, received the Academy Award for writing. The director and the photographer show genius in individual scenes like the funeral procession and burial and the massacre in the wheat field. But Bolt's failure to (1) pull the long time-span and chaos of incident and character into any kind of unity or focus or point and (2) give *Dr. Zhivago* and his friends some dialogue that made them living people instead of stereotypes makes the picture, on the whole, a failure. He even has a World War I soldier yell: "How about that!" — an idiomatic anachronism that would look bad in an MIA pageant. For this they give Oscars?

I was glad that *A Thousand Clowns* didn't win the big award, because it is a sloppily dubbed movie, and because Barbara Harris, who starts out promisingly, turns into a major liability. But it is worth praising in this discussion because one of its many funny lines mentions God:

"Murray, the trouble with you is you think you're God, and everybody has to audition for human being."

It's a superficial comedy, but Herb Gardner's witty lines often convey some fragment of philosophic or spiritual content that places it far above *The Sound of Music*.