

OBITER

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. Up to a week or so ago the last film I had seen in which Moses was, so to speak, the star was the wonderfully effective puppet film made by Père Pichard, O.P., for T.V. which was shown in this country two or three years ago. Designed, obviously, on the smallest scale and put across with deliberate understatement except for the sonorities of an actor's voice, reading the biblical words as the passionless puppets made vividly explicit the tremendous story of the struggle between Moses and Pharaoh, this short film made an impression so deep that the years have in no way lessened it. The contrast could hardly be more striking between this modest, cerebral production and Cecil B. DeMille's enormous, spectacular, star-spangled new production of *The Ten Commandments*. I am charmed to have seen both, for each has real, though disparate, qualities and each broadens one's apprehension of the hidden drama that seems to lie everywhere behind the life and mission of Moses.

The DeMille picture has everything that one has learned to expect from a DeMille picture over the years. It has, as usual, a cast of thousands; it has great set-pieces of spectacle, often of massive size, that by their sheer magnitude compel one's delighted approbation that the old maestro has done it again, and sometimes—as in the splendid episode of the crossing of the Red Sea—make one realize that in fact no one else can do it so well. The great cliffs of boiling, toppling water that menace the exiguous pathway through which first Israelites and later Egyptians toil over the boulders are impressive by any standards. The acting is often extremely good, and the cast is full of stars who seem almost as surprised to find themselves there as we are to see them. Sir Cedric Hardwicke as the second Pharaoh is very agreeable to watch, and an admirably decadent performance is given by Vincent Price as Baka, the Egyptian Master-BUILDER who owes less than nothing to Ibsen. The young ladies, Yvonne de Carlo, Anne Baxter and Debra Paget look very decorative and wear some astonishing clothes, and Yul Brynner as Rameses makes his presence felt a great deal. Charlton Heston as Moses himself gives an honest undistinguished performance which occasionally rises to quite a height when necessary. The film has, of course, some interludes of such outstanding vulgarity that even after all this time one is slightly taken aback; but what is so surprising about it is that it has a serious, if curious, sense of purpose. The story, we are told over and over again, is founded upon Holy Scripture and where this fails, for one reason or another, the lacunae are filled in by authors with O.K. names like Philo, Josephus and Eusebius. The end result is a theme that seems to

smack simultaneously of anti-colonialism and, at the same time, a kind of divine Marshall-Aid. Not quite what one had expected, perhaps, but very exciting all the same, and well worth seeing in spite of its truly epic length. I had quite meant to leave at half-time and yet found myself eagerly going back after the interval to find out what really did happen in the end. Let me urge you not to falter, for the second part contains not only the Orgy (round the Golden Calf), which is in the best old-fashioned tradition of such things; but also the delivery of the Commandments to Moses which is both imaginative and impressive. The Almighty, who has appeared to Moses earlier on in the Burning Bush as a not very convincing incandescence, here is a tall, swirling Pillar of Fire, and as the echoing, noble Abraham Lincoln-type voice intones each commandment in turn, a jet of fire leaps out and cuts the Hebrew characters on the granite like some celestial rock-drill, and finally, the Decalogue completed, leaps out once more, even more violently, to cut the very tablets themselves out of the living stone: if you are going to attempt the impossible, that is a very good way to do it.

It would be a mistake to miss this film through any false feelings of aesthetic superiority; it has some wonderful things in it as well as being often moving and sometimes very jolly.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

THE RELEVANCE OF PRIMITIVE RELIGION

CORNELIUS ERNST, O.P.

IT IS NOT EASY for someone who is not a professional anthropologist to read a work of social anthropology. The difficulty is of a quite special kind: it is not merely the difficulty someone who is not a botanist may find in reading a study of plant morphology, or someone who is not a theologian in reading a discussion of the instrumental causality of the sacraments. The difficulty is the problem of human relevance. These people about whom the anthropologist is writing are human beings: the detail of their activities should be humanly intelligible; and yet, on the one hand these activities in their detail are often meaningless and sometimes disgusting, and on the other, without a sympathetic grasp of the detail the whole work of interpretation and synthesis offered by the anthropologist would become meaningless in its turn. And the anthropologist has nothing to refer to but the information