

**IN
DEFENCE
OF
CENSORSHIP**

A CHRISTIAN VIEW

IN DEFENCE OF CENSORSHIP - A CHRISTIAN VIEW

by

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This booklet does not discuss ways in which censorship legislation might be modified to prove more efficient or acceptable. It takes issue with those who wish to see the total abolition of censorship, and maintains the view that there are many sound reasons for maintaining effective censorship. The evidence from history and current research is taken to be consistent with the adoption of a Christian standard of morality.

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1. Censorship As A Positive Influence

Censorship may be defended on the grounds that it has a positive part to play in the formation of attitudes and in the control of society.

Far from merely preventing some from enjoying what they see or read as their legitimate right, censorship has also a protective function both for individuals and society. Judge Windeyer, in an Australian judgement in 1968, stated "it is assumed incontrovertibly by the common law that obscene writings do degrade and corrupt morals, by causing dirty-mindedness, by creating or pandering to a taste for the obscene."

(1)

The man who cries loudly that his personal freedom is infringed by the restrictions of censorship is of course right. But then the responsibility of Governments in the administration of law is the protection of society as well as the well being of the individual: In the event of a clash of loyalties, we must decide whether the interests of the individual outweigh those of society. If not, then constraints must be placed on personal freedom.

Benjamin Spock, in his recent book now says:

"For decades I was an uncompromising civil libertarian and scorned the hypocrisy involved in the enforcement of obscenity laws. But recent trends in movies, literature and art toward what I think of as shock obscenity, and the courts' acceptance of it, have made me change my position ... particularly in view of other brutalising trends." (2)

The positive influence which the law can exert was well expressed in the Wolfenden Report of 1957.

"The function of the criminal law ... is to preserve public order and decency, to protect the citizen from what is offensive and injurious and to provide sufficient safeguards against the exploitation and corruption of others, particularly those who are specially vulnerable..."

(3)

Whether censorship laws achieve that remains to be examined.

2. What is the Need for Censorship?

Censorship is important to the continuation of a viable civilisation. The historian, Unwin, after documenting the rise and fall of 88 major civilisations said: "Every civilisation is established and consolidated by observing a strict sexual moral code, is maintained while this strict code is kept and decays when sexual licence is allowed ... Any human society is free to choose either to display great energy or to enjoy sexual freedom; the evidence is that it cannot do both for more than one generation". (4)

Denis de Rougemont states that "without the sexual discipline which the so-called puritanical tendencies have imposed on us since Europe first existed, there would be nothing more in our civilisation than in those nations known as under-developed and no doubt less", (5)

Paradoxically, those who most militantly call for the removal of censorship restrictions in order to allow personal freedom are often those who will also be most vocal in calling for anti-pollution measures in our battle for ecological survival. There is a very fair analogy between the need to preserve a clean outer environment for physical survival, and the need to prevent psychological pollution by appropriate measures. Consistency demands controls in both contexts.

That society is slow to act in both areas can be explained in many ways: "It would seem that to justify a censorship law one would have to establish a danger - the usual one put forward being moral danger. This concept, however, is not an easy one to define or establish. One might well consider the analogy of pollution. For some hundred years we have polluted the atmosphere and seas with industrial, chemical and household waste. Only recently it has become possible to measure the amount of pollution in the atmosphere, and it is even more recently that the alarms have been sufficient to move to action governments with an eye and a half on the industrial sector of the community". (6)

This comparison with the environmental pollution problem draws attention to several reasons for inadequate censorship provisions:

- (1) The difficulty of being sure a danger exists
- (2) The very gradual increase in the size of the problem which lulls people into a false sense of security. Every student of elementary psychology knows that provided levels of stimulation are raised by small enough intervals, people will fail to avoid even quite dangerous levels of input.
- (3) The further problem of persuading responsible bodies to act when such action risks the unpopularity of the electorate.

In addition to the simple power of the vote, which may discourage courageous legislation, financial interests are also at work. It is obvious enough in the field of physical pollution that controlling legislation relating to smoking and car exhausts, for example, will have enormous repercussions on the economy. Resistance from vested interests will clearly deter legislators. By the same token, there are large sums of money to be made by exploiters out of sexually salacious and other potentially censorable material.

Society too has its price. It would appear that many who might consider it good to restrict the supply of undesirable material are not prepared to face the costs involved, and we live by a morality of expediency. So Herbert Packer, Professor of Law at Stanford was quoted as saying: "A vigorous campaign of law enforcement against pornography would involve costs in money, man-power and invasions of privacy that we as a society are unwilling to pay". (7)

On an A.B.C. Guest of Honour programme, the subject of censorship was discussed in relation to the present British situation where censorship has been discontinued for a trial period of five years. In that programme, an eminent publisher explained that anyone who was considering publishing faced the risk of prosecution if he were to offend public taste.

His criteria of self-censorship for judging a manuscript were:
"Is it good and is it necessary?" If such an approach were universally applied to books, plays and films, then it would be easier to support the abolition of formal censorship.

Traditionally the law has accepted this responsibility for interpreting community standards even at the risk of infringing individual freedom. As long as the majority was prepared to accept that it was proper for the law to act in this protective way, censorship and similar constraints on freedom of action operated with little question. Today, however, personal freedom is often prized more highly than the good of society more generally, so politicians and legislators are being forced into the position of extending the boundaries of personal freedom so widely that those least able to object suffer most. The law must surely recognise a human right to protection from offence that many anti-censorship enthusiasts have forgotten. In the words of Ruth Brine, "If some have the right to pornography, others have an equal right not to have it foisted on them" (8). Or, as Haynes has put it, "If individual freedom demands that person X can read document A, it also demands that person Y may avoid reading it if he so desires. Thus, there must always be restrictions on the display of material" (6).

Strangely enough, it could easily happen that the minority group seeking the complete abolition of censorship for the sake of person liberty if successful would bring about the very opposite of their intentions. Reo Christenson puts the argument for the American scene succinctly when he says: "Paradoxically, the existence of censorship probably assures greater freedom in America than its absence. If, somehow, the tiny minority (Gallup estimates 5-6%) which wants no censorship were to have their way, it would be an open invitation for vigilante groups to take over. Outraged at the irresponsibles, the Middle American would employ extra legal pressures as a substitute for law. And a sorry substitute they would be. Controlling pornography by legal means and orderly institutions gives us the best assurance that society's concern will be dealt with in a civilised manner" (9).

In asking "Do we need censorship?" we may also ask "What does the community want?" An Australian public opinion poll reported on 3.12.70 showed 55% favour maintaining present restrictions or increasing them and 35% wanting relaxed standards. The fact that we do have censorship would tend to make most people unconcerned. The fact that it is not a very rational system also means that there will be a vocal minority against it. Evidence will be more useful if it comes from a community that has experienced the effective absence of censorship. The U.S. had done this and the evidence there is that about 6% want abolition of censorship. The Harris Poll of 1969 reported that 86% wanted pornographic literature outlawed and in the Gallup Poll of 1969 85% favoured stricter laws on pornography. I believe we should learn from those who have cause to know by bitter experience.

3. Research Evidence: Australia and Overseas

A major landmark in the research literature making recommendations on censorship was the American Commission Report on Censorship and Pornography (9).

I attended the first airing of the Commission's findings at a conference in Miami Beach where a sample of the research was reported. The chairman at that occasion made it clear that the \$2 million grant was allocated to research projects which could be completed in time to allow a report within a three year period. He stressed that the work could not say anything about long term effects of pornographic material. This is a most serious criticism of the findings since the crucial question does relate to long term effects.

Secondly, those reports which were presented in public came in for very heavy fire both in relation to methodology and to the conclusions drawn from the results. Yet the findings of the Commission can of course only be guided by what the various groups reported to have found.

Thirdly, instead of the usual agreement among Commissioners when reports are prepared for Washington, in this case only twelve of the 18 could support the main proposition of the Commission. In the published report of 700 pages over 250 constitute expressions of dissent from the majority position.

The Commission conclusion was a very radical rejection of censorship of material except with reference to children. Yet the studies from which the recommendations stem had so many other short-comings that this conclusion must be among the most unsubstantiated ever to appear in such a setting. If you seek evidence against censorship you will not find it here. What is particularly disappointing is the complete absence of studies concerned with sexual violence and studies of imitative learning. This style of learning has been shown to be of importance in the acquisition of aggressive behaviour patterns and fairly certainly the same would have been found in sexual and aggressive-sexual learning.

Hard evidence of direct cause and effect relationships between harmful material and subsequent ill effects is not available and I doubt if it ever will be. The effects are more subtle than this and the consequences are to be seen in various ways.

Long term effects, (i.e. over a generation or two) may well exist but to disentangle these from many other socially significant events would be inconceivably difficult. Moreover, the ways in which effects may express themselves will not necessarily take expected forms.

Reo Christenson, a political scientist, takes issue with the Civil Liberties position saying: "Obviously the A.C.L.U. wants society to consider only short-term effects since it regards long-term effects as unknowable. The truth is that short-term effects are also unknowable... Unhappily all

the major premises on which our society rests derive from the realm of intuition - the viscera" (9). While I feel this is an unduly pessimistic view of the sources from which we may derive evidence, it is true enough when considering the application of experiments in this field.

In our society, the presentation of violence and aggression on T.V. is four times as great as that representing nurturance and care. An Australian study of a few years ago designed to look at the effect of children's comics on violence was unable to find a direct link between exposure to violence and its overt expression. What did emerge, however, was in some ways more alarming, viz. that extensive exposure to violence in this fantasy material led to a gradual acceptance or tolerance of violence when witnessed. Thus what might once have been shocking or offensive, became unremarkable, leading to what has been called "affectlessness".

The American society has a bigger problem than we have in the area of violence. We can look on uncomprehendingly at the degree of aggression that seems to well up out of the American society at the present time. Why is it, we may ask, that they feel they must settle everything by warlike means? One factor is that they have been exposed to more uncensored violence as a nation than any other.

A self-critical American T.V. producer recently wrote this: "The younger generation expects to die soon. The majority of collegians fear they'll be dead within the next two decades! How come? Through T.V. they have been swept into a crescendo of violence that castrates confidence in a future. So much fictional and authentic violence has bombarded them that it becomes hard to distinguish between fact and fiction. When this generation was preschool age only one show (Dragnet) involving guns was among the Top 10 broadcast. Just five years later, seven of the Top 10 programmes were saturated with killing ... The Eisenhower Commission on television violence reported that 80% of all violent conflicts on T.V. are resolved without ever bothering with due process of law" (10).

It is particularly instructive for the purpose of considering the need for censorship that we look at antisocial behaviour where sex and aggression combine. One argument against much of the material that is considered for censorship is that it is exploitative. One criterion for rejection of material would be that it takes no account of the rights of others, that it violates or treats others as objects rather than human beings. If pornography and violence do have such dehumanising properties and if they do convey such attitudes to those exposed to such material, then one would expect to find a high incidence of such activities as rape and prostitution as a consequence.

A letter to the Chairman of the American Commission offered to conduct a survey through police records which would come about as near as is possible to demonstrating a direct cause and effect linkage between sex crimes and exposure to sexually explicit materials. The offer was refused, but the submission included documentation of 26 cases by way of illustration. The links between pornography and subsequent crime are most persuasive evidence.

The relationship is worth examining both in relation to Denmark and America, where a freedom almost the equal of Denmark has existed now for a number of years. It is popularly put about that the evidence from Denmark is against the censorship stand; that sex-crimes have actually gone down. How true is this? The American Commission includes data from three reports by Kutschinsky who studied various aspects of the Danish scene. He reported a decrease in the incidence of sex crimes between 1958 and 1969. The Commission summarised his findings saying, "neither public attitudes about sex crimes nor willingness to report such crimes had changed sufficiently to account for the substantial decrease..." (p.274).

But what Kutschinsky actually said in the ten volume report of the original research was "The decrease in exhibitionism registered by the police during the last ten years may be fully explained by a change in people's attitudes toward this crime and towards reporting it to the police." The same applies to the sex-crime of "indecent towards women" (i.e. anything short of rape). The study also goes on to show that while it was true that voyeurism and indecency towards girls reduced in the time span of the study, there was no decrease for rape. Thus it looks as if the incidence of offences is not reduced in the permissive climate, but rather that the same affectlessness seen in the violence studies is at work on a broad scale in relation to sexual behaviour.

The situation in America is now also sufficiently documented to permit some conclusions. The Commission drew comfort from the fact that the increase of arrests for sex offences has not risen as much as arrests for robbery and specifically that arrests for sex offences are no more than 2% of all adult arrests. Comparing rape in 1960 with the same offence in 1969, there was an increase of 116% in reported cases (or 93% allowing for population correction). In the same period the figures for prostitution and commercialised vice rose by 80%. But what a bizarre line of reasoning! Arrests for robbery in the 10 year period to 1969 rose by 177%. Is it a matter for joy that rape did not equal this? Rather than say comfortably that exposure to pornography has not changed things much, I would prefer to say that the combined exposure to explicit sexual material together with unbridled violence has led to a quite alarming increase in social pathology generally. Without invoking a cause and effect relationship here, we can observe a clear trend towards socially and personally harmful behaviour in these two countries where control has been minimal or absent for a decade. I am frankly surprised to see that the increases in statistical terms have been so great in so short a time.

4. Effects of Permissiveness on the Community

In addition to wishing to attack the removal of censorship restrictions on grounds of social pathology statistics, one must take into account the possible impact on the ordinary citizen of having no controls. Most people are not going to run off and commit offences. Most are not even going to be seeing or hearing what has become available at least willingly. But already we see something of the changes occurring with more liberal application of censorship principles. What was a restricted film of ten years ago becomes family viewing on T.V. The values and attitudes become widely disseminated into the community.

No doubt those who reject censorship will say "That's fine, that's just what we want .. let people see, think, talk and be influenced". If so, some criterion for the exercise of censorship is needed to decide whether material is to be freely available or not. E. Van der Haag says: "By definition, pornography deindividualises sexual acts"(6). This criterion is taken more widely by Haynes who writes: "If dehumanising and depersonalising are criteria for censoring, we have a problem bigger than pornography and violence, and I am not sure that we are entitled to apply censorship to some areas only. The whole mass culture exudes ideals and a view of man which contradicts not only a Christian view, but the view of common sense"(6).

A number of serious authors have taken serious exception to the Playboy philosophy and the brand of woman presented by Hefner. As this brand of commercialised, mass-produced plaything pervades ever more widely into advertising and on to the bookstalls, it is no longer something that a small group of the community takes delight in. It is important for us to recognise that this does not really glorify or emphasise sex at all, but quite the reverse. Women's Lib. is right in protesting that the plaything image is a form of exploitation. Harvey Cox presents an entertaining but pungent rejection of the Playboy philosophy as being asexual and arising from a "repressed fear of involvement with women"(11). Rollo May goes further and calls it a repressed fear of involvement. He says "you only have to open an issue of Playboy, that redoubtable journal reputedly sold mainly to college students and clergymen. You discover the naked girls with silicated breasts side by side with the articles by reputable authors, and you conclude on first blush that the magazine is certainly on the side of the new enlightenment. But as you look more closely you see a strange expression in these photographed girls: detached, mechanical, uninviting, vacuous - the typical schizoid personality in the negative sense of that term. You discover that they are not 'sexy' at all but that Playboy has only shifted the fig leaf from the genitals to the face"(12). He develops his argument into showing how this mechanisation and the associated destruction of significant relationships lies behind the increasing acceptance of four letter words. They suffice for nonrelational sex and hence offer a debased currency. The danger to the community at large of extensive exposure to material that deindividualises and dehumanises is shown by Alexander Pope (1705):

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen,
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

There appears, in other words, already to be a move towards relationships becoming more shallow and more transient: towards a tendency for people to use others rather than form relationships with them. Such superficiality, so fully encouraged by much literature at present, must lead to a cheapening of life for normal, healthy people and a disregard for others among those who are emotionally disturbed.

5. Why is Censorship being Challenged?

Why should it be that such a long-established institution as censorship is being so called in question at this time? Can it be that all previous generations were wrong or misguided? Some would no doubt say "Yes!" Could it be that people are reacting not against censorship but bad censorship? For many the answer to that is "No." There is a genuine questioning whether the restraints imposed by society can be tolerated by the individual. There is a clamour for personal freedom that seeks to throw off all restraints. Such a widespread and forceful clamour deserves understanding. Certain trends in psychology have a bearing on this.

The present young adult population started life in the years from 1940 onwards and hence spent formative years in the post war period. That in itself could explain why an attitude of rejection of authority of parents and governments might spring up. But more particularly, the period of the 50's and 60's saw the heyday of free expression as an approach to child rearing practices. The theories of Freud were widely accepted especially in intellectual families and the concept of repression was one seen to be particularly dangerous to healthy emotional development. The prevailing belief that repression was fundamentally bad has now found its way through to a generation which has become adult and rejects controls even more vigorously.

If Freud was right, and the generation of parents that followed his ideas was right, then the present generation is also right in resisting any attempt at repression of emotional material. It appears to follow fairly readily that censorship would have to be resisted as a kind of collective superego to be overcome. In other words, rejection of censorship seems entirely consistent with an acceptance of Freudian theory.

So we must ask, how well has the view stood up that our neurotic problems will be resolved if we allow free expression to the Id, fight against the superego and counteract the harmful effects of repression?

Since the clearest evidence regarding the effect of removing repression is seen in the results of psychoanalytic treatment, we may ask how much benefit has accumulated over the years by this period.

Professor Wolpe of Philadelphia, once an analyst, now a behaviourist, writes: "... the American Psychoanalytic Association appointed its now famous Fact-Gathering Committee to survey the results of psychoanalytic practice. The Chairman of this committee ... subsequently stated ... that his association made no claims of therapeutic usefulness for psychoanalytic methods" (13).

Professor Mowrer, from the position of learning theory, goes further in his rejection of the Freudian model. He contends that neurotic reactions arise not from an oversevere superego bringing about undue repression but quite the reverse. Rather he argues "that the superego has itself been repudiated and repressed" so that treatment aimed at weakening the superego will not simply prove ineffectual; it will actually make people worse. For ten years now he has been writing to the effect that psychoanalysis is basically antitherapeutic and there are now many to agree with him (14).

Thirdly, the existentialist, humanist, Rollo May, writes of the disappointing effect of overcoming repression. "In an amazingly short period, we shifted from acting as though sex did not exist at all to being obsessed with it ... partly as a result of this radical shift, many therapists today rarely see patients who exhibit repression of sex ... in fact, we find in the people who come for help just the opposite: A great deal of talk about sex, a great deal of activity, but what our patients do complain of is lack of feeling and passion ... so much sex and so little meaning or even fun to it" (12).

Fourthly, the late Professor of English at Oxford and Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, wrote: "They tell you sex has become a mess because it was all hushed up. But for the last twenty years it has not been hushed up. It has been chattered about all day long. Yet it is still in a mess. If hushing up (repression) had been the cause of the trouble, ventilation would have set it right. But it has not. I think it is the other way round. I think the human race originally hushed it up because it had become such a mess" (15).

The final objection can be derived surprisingly enough from Freud. Although he strongly advocated the removal of repressive influences for the individual, he did not extend this principle into the social setting. "Freud believed that the disciplining of eros was necessary for a culture, and that it was from the repression and sublimation of erotic impulses that the power came out of which civilisations were built" (12).

6. A Christian View

To this point I have defended or attacked the censorship issue referring only to evidence and lines of argument that are open to general discussion. Although the Christian would see the protection afforded by censorship as contributing to the spiritual welfare of individuals, it would be quite improper to invoke the law for such a purpose. In this connection, a useful statement was issued in the Archbishop of Canterbury's Committee Report on Divorce:

"Any advice that the Church tenders to the State must rest, not upon doctrines that only Christians accept, but upon premises that enjoy wide acknowledgement in the nation as a whole" (16).

One further quotation in this context demonstrates the position that a Christian may adopt in approaching legislation in the moral area. "It is the duty of a Christian to support the authority of the State. It may be his duty also to labour for the reformation of the laws of the State. In doing, this, he has no right to put aside what he has learnt as a Christian, and in the quality of citizenship to act as a mere natural man. Such a division of personality is intolerable. But neither is he bound to insist that the laws of the State, in regard to marriage or in regard to anything else, shall conform exactly to Christian teaching. Not all the subjects of the State are Christian and the State must legislate for all" (16).

In rather marked contrast to so much negative legislation defining what may not be done, the Christian has very clear positive lines of guidance over the suitability of material. "Fill your minds with those things that are good and deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honorable" (Phil. 4.8.). While others may be content with less, this, I suggest, is the Christian's ideal standard. The emphasis here as elsewhere in New Testament teaching is less on the external stimulus than on the individual's reaction to it. The censorship laws also make the same stand, seeking to judge not simply the artistic or literary merit but also what will be the effect on individuals. Such a position makes objective criteria for legislation almost unattainable, but nonetheless worth striving for. Jesus' teaching was that "There is nothing that goes into a person from the outside which can make him unclean ... It is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. For from the inside, from a man's heart, come the evil ideas which lead him to do immoral things, to rob, kill, commit adultery ... etc." (Mk. 7. 15, 20, 21.) This emphasis places maximum responsibility on the individual for his own conduct - he is not entitled to blame external events for his own misdoings. Taken alone, this might sound like a strong argument against censorship, but another principle must be taken into account to find a true balance.

This is the principle which emphasises that each person must exercise a responsibility for the welfare of others. This may be at the very heart of such disagreement as exists between Christians and others over censorship. Those who seek permissiveness can say "I will see what I please", and, if any sign of harm is apparent in others, though he remains unharmed himself, he may say, "What if that other person does have a problem; what if pornography does deprave him? That is no reason to prevent me enjoying myself. That's his problem." or again, "Why should the fact that a few people get perverted interfere with the freedom of the majority?"

For the person who has no belief in God I can see a certain reason in such a stand. But the Christian must take a different stand. The summary of God's law in the New Testament was to love God and your neighbour as yourself. Concern for the welfare of others is to be at least as important as self-concern. In practical terms, this means that, however much I might find pleasure or fulfilment in a play or film or book, I must be prepared to renounce it if my own participation could harm another.

The Christian position would be that exposure to evil must lead to evil effects and hence is committed to resist anything which allows evil to exist. And secondly, the Christian cannot stand by while those who are particularly vulnerable are exploited even if he himself is safe. The Christian is unashamedly committed to minding other people's business and especially is this so when it comes to the underprivileged, the minority groups and children. Their rights must be protected. The Church has been concerned with this for centuries where Civil Liberties has only recently come into the same arena.

Differences in approach towards what should be available to people spring from quite fundamentally different views of human nature. Whereas it appears popular to be optimistic about man's potential for good if only he is freed from all restraints, the Christian has an entirely opposite view - namely that man is basically sinful so that unless restraints are provided, he sinks into degradation.

Although in some ways the spiritual arguments could be presented as the most compelling for censorship of unacceptable material, they are best set in the context of other evidence since it is no function of the law to defend the Christian faith. What is significant, however, in evaluating what may be the evidence of a need for censorship is that commonsense and Christian principles agree with the accumulating evidence that the removal of censorship restrictions leads to harm at an individual and community level.

7. Finale

The fact that present censorship practice in Australia can be criticised as irrational or illogical is an argument for its improvement but no argument for its abolition.

While for some, the debate concerns "Where shall we draw the line?" ; this question is becoming irrelevant in the face of increasing pressure to have no line at all. To wait and see what the effect of this might be would be to wait too long - it will be almost impossible to reverse the on-going process of "Liberalisation" (i.e. pollution).

If we continue to base our standards on imitation of America, we can reasonably expect our problems to become similar. Should we not rather learn from their mistakes and use positive criteria of control?

The present permissive trend is a product not of increasing maturity but apathy. The trend will only be checked if those who are concerned take positive action.

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