

CENSORSHIP II

By D.B. Knox

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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You may have read in Friday's newspapers the comments of a Victorian judge, which he made when sentencing a young man who had been convicted of rape. Counsel had argued that the crime had been triggered off by the film "The Clockwork Orange" which depicts violence and rape and which is being freely shown at present in Australian cinemas. The judge confirmed the effect of this film, and said that judges all over the English speaking world had found that it incited to violence; but the judge added these important words: "the community accepts it. This community is prepared to let pictures of violence, rape and sex and all the rest of it poison the minds of the young and then it expects judges to forget that a community is so free thinking and restless of censorship." He went on "The community allows crime to be portrayed as something pleasurable and enjoyable". The judge is quite right. How can you be severe on a man for rape when you yourself entertain yourself by watching rape depicted on the screen.

There is an absurd contradiction in the community's attitude and the contradiction is, of course, due to the sinful hearts of men and women. Though we do not approve of violence and sexual sins, we take pleasure in watching it. There is a further contradiction, that on the one hand the community should pay for the suppression of vice as it does through the paying of police, judges and prison warders, and at the same time make it a policy to allow people to entertain themselves by watching the actions which it pays money to suppress. If the actions are wrong to do, it is wrong to entertain yourself by watching people do them. We had a glaring example of the inconsistency a short while ago. The state recently imprisoned "Mr. Brown" who obtained one million dollars from Qantas through threatening to blow up an aircraft, but a film showing someone doing the very same thing was shown readily throughout the state and made money for its exhibitors. The policy of the Federal government is to allow any film to be shown in Australia and any book to be sold, and to abolish all forms of censorship. It is a policy which fails to recognise the realities of human nature.

Our sinful, self-centred nature needs the scaffolding of restraints. It needs the aids of censorship which the government is on the point of abolishing.

The modern attitude of permissiveness flies in the face of facts, which are that our wills are sinful and that we must discipline them. Self discipline is, of course, best but the state has the obligation of imposing an external discipline as well. Christians ought not to entertain themselves by watching or reading of actions which God hates. And in society in general the state has the obligation to restrain people from entertaining themselves by watching or reading, and to restrain businessmen from making money from portraying, actions in book or film, which the state itself forbids or regards as vicious and harmful to society. It is a foolish argument which is sometimes put forward, that literary and artistic merit should excuse a book or picture. The more artistic the picture or the more literary the book the more certainly it ought to be banned if obscene, because these characteristics will not only make it the more successful in influencing the mind, but it is also quite wrong to encourage artistic or literary genius to be used in depicting actions which the state forbids and spends a lot of money in endeavouring to suppress. There are innumerable subjects for the exercise of artistic genius in film production or literary genius in book production through which gifted people can act creatively. We should not encourage these gifts to be prostituted for unworthy ends by allowing artistic or literary merit to be a consideration in whether we allow something which is wrong in itself.

All intimate depiction, whether by picture or language, of sexual acts is wrong because it is always wrong to intrude as a third party into the privacy of those personal relationships. But, of course, it is not always wrong to act violently but to enjoy the enactment of violence is always wrong, and to identify oneself with the violence for the sake of the pleasure should always be forbidden.

It is sometimes right to be violent, but it is wrong to watch it for the macabre pleasure. It is interesting to note how the Bible reflects these principles. For example the bible describes the sexual sin of David but only in the most general terms; or again, it describes the violence of battles, but again only in general terms. The purpose in both cases is not to entertain the reader by description of the details, but simply through the events to show how right is vindicated and wrong judged. Classical western movies vindicate the "goodies" by the punishment of the "baddies". But the violence is not set out in detail in a way to provide the entertainment. But modern films have abandoned this reticence and they have you looking through the key-hole at sexual sins, or looking down the barrel of the gun or, as it were, wielding the knife yourself in scenes of violence. Such photography should not be allowed, on the simple principle that the state should prohibit the portrayal of actions for the sake of entertainment which it forbids in society.

But Christians must act even if the government does not. They must be their own censors of what they see and read themselves. They should ask their booksellers or newsagent to remove pornography out of their sight. Why not? It offends God. It should offend them. If a T.V. programme entertains through showing vice, Christians should turn off the switch and protest to the station. If a film you are seeing turns out to have this character you should walk out. It cannot be right to continue to enjoy and entertain yourself by watching the depictions of actions which God detests. God's word is clear. God will judge those who do these actions in reality, and He will also judge those who take pleasure in those who do them.

Turning to the area of legislation it is a crime to live off the immoral earning of another. But the concept is too narrowly applied at present. The government's duty is plain. It should make it an offence to make money out of purveying immorality and vice through print or screen. And it should prosecute booksellers,

T.V. stations and cinemas which offend and it should confiscate and destroy offending items. Besides prohibiting it, it should take the profit out of it. For society is acting most inconsistently, as the Victorian judge pointed out, to punish those who do the things which it freely allows people to enjoy watching. If it spends money stamping out vice, it should not allow other interests to make money by the enticement of watching it. For ourselves personally, Jesus Christ can cure you and me of this inconsistency if you accept His Lordship in your entertainment as in every other aspect of your life.

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