

First-hand Report 1

PERMISSIVENESS IN SOCIETY

by Lance Shilton

Rector of Holy Trinity Church,
ADELAIDE

PERMISSIVENESS IN SOCIETY

by the Reverend Lance R. Shilton, B.A., B.D., Th.L.,
Rector of Holy Trinity Church, North Terrace, Adelaide.

Trinity Sermon No. D71

National Library of Australia Card number and
ISBN 0 909671 19 2

Published by the

TRINITY PUBLISHING SOCIETY

87 North Terrace,

ADELAIDE, South Australia, 5000

a non-profit organisation within Holy Trinity Church,
working for the extension of the Gospel by Christian
literature.



PERMISSIVENESS in SOCIETY

"His divine power has given us everything we need to live a godly life through our knowledge of the One Who called us to share His own glory and goodness".

(II Peter 1:3)

This message from the Apostle Peter reminded his readers that God has provided believers with all the resources necessary to make spiritual growth possible; they didn't need to look outside Christ's provision so as to grow in Christian maturity. It wasn't a matter for them or for us of experiencing all kinds of evil, to become worldly wise and spiritually equipped.

Peter said, "God's divine power has given us everything we need to live a godly life through our knowledge of the One Who called us to share His glory and goodness".

As we face the challenges of an increasingly permissive society Christians need to be alert to the dangers around, not only so that they may themselves not be subtly drawn into evil, but also act responsibly towards others in danger.

Archbishop Coggan commented recently at York Minster on the muck-raking occasioned by current political and social scandals. Referring to the call girls and the Lonrho affairs, Watergate and drugs, the Archbishop said, "The newspapers have had a field day with the muck rake recently - and the heap stinks". The fact is that there is no need to dig up the dirt; it is obvious all around and it has permeated deeply. A British newspaper editorial observed, "The maggots of moral permissiveness have eaten into all sections of society", and there is plenty of evidence for that throughout the world today, and even in our own country.

Let me make it clear that studying the outcome of permissiveness overseas was only one of a number of issues which were before me, although as you read the press you may get the impression that that was the only thing I did. At the end of a Press Conference in Sydney on the morning I arrived back in Australia, one reporter said, "Now that you have finished your 3 months' study on pornography, what are you going to do with yourself?" I emphasised that my investigation into the permissive society was only one of many aspects of my work, and yet it was very relevant to all the others as well.

Let me convey to you some of my findings in respect to the permissive society. I realise that there are many aspects to the

permissive society which are difficult to define. I shall concentrate on a few of these.

Let us not be deceived by the claims that the pornographic bookshops are patronised only by 'dirty old men' from foreign countries, and that the locals lose interest. Young and old men and woman crowd into these shops, and the people who serve in these shops are pretty young girls. Those who deliberately go into those places may perhaps know what they are looking for, but even they may be surprised by what they find. But the tragedy is that in some countries the sordid is mixed up with the rest and can be viewed by all, some unsuspectingly, including children.

In London at Piccadilly Circus, a place wide open to the public, where thousands of people mill around day and night, there are a number of sex shops crowded with people. Since the Lord Lambton affair there has been somewhat of a clean-up but the shops are still there with their variety of so-called sex aids, their peep shows where a person may put in a coin and watch certain actions on a film for a few minutes; then put in another coin and watch some more, and so on. I believe you could spend two or three pounds in a night.

DENMARK:

Things are rotten in Denmark. The long interview with Police Commissioner Nielsen of Copenhagen was most helpful. He claimed that a minority of Danish people, most of whom were left-wing and atheistic, wanted to alter the foundation of the Danish Constitution; that is, its Christian basis. By continually urging it, like a drop of water wears away a stone, they were successful. Now it is extremely difficult from a legal point of view to deal with the excesses that have come in that country. Today sex shops are interspersed with ordinary shops, even in country areas. Coloured glossy pictures, magazines and movie films are freely available. There is no age limit upon those who may view them. Nothing is banned. Lesbianism, homosexuality, teenage sex set out for various age groups, even sex with children. But you wouldn't believe - sex with babies. And then, as an insult to the animals, sex with animals; group sex, and instructions on how to rape a person. Nothing is considered perverted once you leave the door open. And I venture to suggest that if certain people in this country had their way, with their sophisticated academic arguments about freedom and rights, as soon as one thing is permitted, they will want anything. We do well in this country to be sure we keep that door locked, because once it is opened it will be

extremely difficult to close it again.

SWEDEN:

Sweden gives the live sex shows a respectability by allowing them to be advertised in travel brochures for tourists amongst all the other respectable advertisements, as if this is a way of life which ought to be acceptable to anybody. Contraceptive vending machines are readily available for all, even in remote parts of the country. Delicatessans stock the whole range of syndicated indecent publications, which have become a multi-million dollar business. Sex education is compulsory, causing deep concern to some parents. They object to their children receiving explicit sex information from teachers who cannot help conveying their own personal attitudes, which are non-Christian. It seems strange that where there is so much sex information available, that venereal disease and illegitimacy has reached alarming proportions and where there is a breakdown of family life.

NORWAY:

Norway is under increasing pressure to follow its Scandinavian neighbour. It is a much more deeply religious country, a country which has been through persecution and trial, a country which has the Christian faith deeply embedded in it. But the polluters are at work there, too. They are saying to the Norwegians what they are saying to us - "We ought to do what they do in Denmark; we ought to be enlightened like other parts of the world." But the majority of Norwegians do not want their laws changed. They are writing to their newspapers requesting strong leadership from someone, and a co-ordinated effort is planned for a Festival of Light in Norway in August.

UNITED STATES:

In New York there are effective organisations such as "Citizens for Decency" and "Morality in Media". This latter organisation is headed by Father Morton Hill, who, in association with Dr. Winfrey C. Link, produced the minority report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. The majority report was referred to as the Magna Carta for the pornographer, and this comment made:

"What the American people have here (referring to the majority report) for 2 million dollars, voted by Congress and paid for by the taxpayer, is a shoddy piece of scholarship that will be quoted 'ad nauseam' by cultural polluters and their attorneys within

society."

And that is happening even in this city. You only need to read Letters to the Editor in our Australian newspapers to realise how often the majority report is quoted, but they fail to quote from the minority report. They fail to bring their information up-to-date from 1969 to 1972. They fail to apply it to the local situation here in Australia.

A Gallup Poll in the United States indicated that 85% of adults interviewed said they favoured stricter State and local laws dealing with pornography through the mails. 76% wanted stricter laws on the sort of magazines and newspapers available on newsstands. Don't let us be deluded by the fact that we who stand for the traditional Christian morality in this country, the United States or in Great Britain, are in a minority. As one person said to me in that Press Conference: "What does it feel like to be alone in this?" I said, "I do not feel alone. The majority is with me." The trouble is that sometimes they are too silent.

The great tragedy of the permissive society is that people are treated as things to be manipulated for the pleasure or the profit of others.

David Holbrook, who has written a number of books well worth reading, is not a Christian. He says he is a Humanist, but he is a person who has a deep concern about the problems in society today. He has called the present movement a pseudo-revolution. He has written, "The road to most revolutions has been paved by the scepticism of liberals who are never so quick to see dangers on the Left as they are to respond to dangers on the Right." He claims that the answer is in the attitudes and reactions of ordinary people and their ability to see through and penetrate the double-speak of contemporary language. Are we so liberal in our attitudes that we are saying, "Well, it really doesn't matter. Everybody has a right to be free to please themselves what they do."? Burke once remarked, "All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

We are losing our sense of value for the individual. In the materialistic society in which we are brought up, an affluent society where we look after our family and ourselves first; in a mechanistic society where machines control us, the individual is easily forgotten and treated as if he is expendable. One T.V. personality said to me just the other day: "But there are only a

few who want to go to the sex shops" (I think she was wrong in that, anyway). But the implication was that because there was a few it didn't matter. But immediately it must be asked: "What about the girls and men who find themselves used up by the makers of these pornographic pictures, and have to be doped and drugged to perform their perversions? What about them? What about the blackmail, the disease and the degradation of human personality?" Only a few are involved, comparatively speaking, but for the Christian the few matter.

So often we have to discuss the question as to whether pornography does harm and there have been many letters in the press recently in this regard. Quite apart from the long-term results, which are always difficult to assess, there are the individuals who are definitely harmed now.

GREAT BRITAIN:

Before leaving London I read in a London newspaper, and it may have been reported here in the Australian press, of a judgment given concerning a 16-year-old boy who killed a 60-year-old tramp. Why did he kill him? Because he had read the book "A Clockwork Orange". And others who had seen the film had described it to him. The magistrate said, "If this was robbery it was all for 1½p or it may have been carried out for excitement as a result of the film. If so, the makers of the film have much to answer for." It seemed as if momentarily the devil had been planted in this boy's subconscious.

The irresistible conclusion is that it was the influence of this book. Many people have much to answer for, whether they be authors, film directors, television producers or those who allowed those films to be shown. He continued:

"It has produced a canker among the impressionable young, which all reasonable people desire to see stamped out at once."

Mr. Roger Gray, for the defence, said: "The link between this crime and sensational literature, particularly "A Clockwork Orange", is established beyond any reasonable doubt."

What are the connections, the causal links between harm and pornography? Those questions have been asked 'ad nauseam'. It may be difficult to assess what the long-term results will be; but we can quote these personal cases. What about the boy? Was he harmed? What about the old tramp? Did it matter about him?

Steve Stephens is the Honorary Secretary of the National Festival of Light in London, with whom I had very real fellowship. It was a great joy to be in his home and also to meet Peter Hill of the Festival for Jesus. Our time together was very rewarding, and we shared a great deal of information which I believe will be very helpful in the months that are ahead as we approach our own Festival of Light in this city. They have had a great deal of experience and they can guide us in many issues.

He gave me quotes from some letters in his files, just so that we might know that there are some causal links between pornography and harmful results.

"I am almost fifteen years old and am becoming increasingly disturbed by the rise and display of pornographic literature in the sweetshops in my area. Having had personal encounters with this garbage, prior to becoming a Christian, I fully understand its bad effects and moral destroying capabilities. I feel that pornography should be banned from open and public display. Unfortunately, I am too young to do anything with the law to stop this literature being displayed."

And another letter:

"It was pornography that led me into drugs. I became so completely involved in pornography that I was soon living in a fantasy world and could not establish proper personal relationships. Pornography created in me such an appetite for sensation that it led me into drugs and the fantasies of the drug world. Pornography trapped me and corrupted me. Strong measures should be taken to restrict pornography, especially in relation to its public display."

Research carried out on behalf of the American Commission on Pornography showed that 55% of rapists and 37% of sex criminals whose cases were studied showed that criminal activities had been directly stimulated by pornography.

Quite apart from all the other connections in wrong attitudes towards sex, wrong attitudes towards people of the other sex, wrong attitudes towards marriage and towards other people, the Christian is concerned for individuals, and in the context in which we live, and in the pressures which surround us it is easy for us to forget just that. We need to come back again to Luke 15 and to read the story of the lost sheep, where because one in 100

was naturally lost, the Good Shepherd went out until He found him. The story of the lost coin: Because one coin in ten was carelessly lost, the woman diligently searched until she found it. The story of the lost son: When one out of two was deliberately lost, a father's heart reached out after that person and welcomed him when he returned in repentance and faith.

It is the value of the individual which strikes the Christian, which makes him want to act on behalf of others, and we may well ask, "What are we to do in Australia?"

WHAT TO DO:

First, pray for God's guidance.

Secondly, be positive in the presentation of the Gospel of redemption, and never lose sight of that, because that is our motive, that is our aim; this is what we want people to receive.

Thirdly, deal with the causes in our urban society as well as the symptoms which come from it. Get to the root of the matter, so that it isn't just a matter of stopping a few dirty pictures floating around; but it is a matter of getting down to the philosophies which make people think the way they think - their attitudes and their relationships - and see if we can come to some real understanding of those deep pressures which are emerging in our thinking at this time.

Fourthly, associate with others in a corporate effort to do what we can together by the grace of God. There is a wonderful opportunity for that immediately before us in this Festival of Light here in Australia. You have already heard that it was a great joy for me to meet Mary Whitehouse, the dynamic leader of the National Viewers and Listeners Association. Perhaps the image you have of her is the one which has been created for her by the media - funny, fussy, old-fashioned, fuddy-duddy, who wears silly old hats. That's not true. When you meet her you find that she is vivacious, intelligent, convincing, winsome, not at all like the prudish image which has been deliberately created by those who are opposed to her. She said recently: "The civil libertarians object to censorship on the ground that no-one has the right to interfere in the private affairs of others. 'Let a man go to hell in his own way', they say. But who do they take with them, and what rights do the victims have?"

See that you associate, then, with others in this corporate effort before us.

Fifthly, be concerned for others in the community, as well as for yourself and for your own immediate family. Our responsibility is as wide as the world.

Sixthly, stand up and be counted. Let it be known that you are Christ's man and Christ's woman, that you are motivated by the Spirit of God, that you have before you the standards of the Scriptures, and because of your compassion for others you want to share your faith with them.

In a recent article in "The Times", Lord Longford, Chairman of the group responsible for the compilation of the 520-page report on pornography in Great Britain, called for courage on the part of the leaders in Church and State to speak out much more unequivocally and persistently than they had done in recent times. He said, "Loving the sinner is one thing; failing to condemn the sin is another, even while we remember our common sinfulness."

I bring you back to the text with which we began. Allow this Word of God to speak to your hearts, and bring you a message which will inspire you into action and allow the Holy Spirit to strengthen you in your resolve and give you that firm confidence to stand up for Jesus Christ and for the rights of others.

Peter wrote this to the Christians of those days, at a time when all around them were great pressures:

"His divine power has given us everything we need to live a godly life through our knowledge of the One Who called us to share in His own glory and goodness. In this way He has given us precious and very great promises, in order that by receiving what He has promised we may escape from the destructive passion that exists in the world and come to share the Divine Nature. For this very reason do your best to add goodness to your faith, and to your goodness add knowledge, and to your knowledge add self-control, and to your self-control add endurance, and to your endurance add godliness, and to your godliness add brotherly love, and to your brotherly love add love. These are the qualities you need, and if you have them in abundance they will make you active and effective in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is so shortsighted that he cannot see, and has forgotten that his past sins have been washed away."

A PRAYER

LORD GOD, You know that not one of us could pick up the first stone, because every one of us is guilty of permissiveness in one way or another. We have chosen our own way rather than Your way. We have pleased ourselves what we have done and failed to follow Your Will. But we come, O God, in genuine repentance. We are sorry for our neglect, for our apathy, for our indifference and for our lack of compassion for others. Inspire us afresh with the grace and power of Your Holy Spirit, that being filled with that same Spirit we may be ready and equipped to witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and bring others who are lost into His fold, that they may know the security of His love, the strength of His power and the provision of eternal life; for Christ's sake. AMEN.

PERMISSIVENESS IN SOCIETY

During his 12-week overseas tour, Lance Shilton gathered an immense amount of information through discussions with leading Christians in various fields. This first of the three first-hand Reports presents the conclusive evidence that pornography and moral laxity damage a nation, and that Christians are obliged to resist those who are undermining our society with spurious appeals to so-called freedom.

ISBN 0 909671 19 2

Recommended price: 10¢

Read the other two in this series:

THE JESUS MOVEMENT (D72 - 10¢)

a fascinating account of this spiritual revolution, its strengths and weaknesses.

THE MESSAGE THROUGH THE MEDIA (D73 - 10¢)

How can Christians best use the various media available today to communicate The Message? Here is the fruit of Lance Shilton's worldwide research.

Build for Christian maturity with literature from the

TRINITY PUBLISHING SOCIETY

87 North Terrace,
ADELAIDE, South Australia