

Theologian On Censorship: Must Someone Die Before We Label Bottle Poison?

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By FATHER FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S. (Written for N.C.W.C. News Service)

The recent decision of the U.S. Supreme Court against state censorship of certain motion pictures has brought to public notice the whole problem of censorship.

It seems quite probable that future decisions of the Supreme Court will tend to limit further the power of the States in the enforcement of censorship. Under these circumstances it is well to discuss the question of censorship in the realm of the moral law. For if our Supreme Court is going to give decisions on this matter, it is desirable for American citizens to know what the law of God prescribes and shows.

TO AVOID ambiguity, it should be stated that by censorship is meant an official judgment passed on a play, a book, a film, etc., before it is made available to the public. While the word censorship is popularly represented as an unfavorable judgment, in its correct sense it refers to an investigation that may result in approval or in condemnation.

The decision of the Supreme Court did not declare the censorship of motion pictures in itself opposed to our Constitution. It was concerned with particular cases, and was based mainly on the vagueness of such terms as "immoral" and "tending to provoke crime." Two members of the Court, Justices Douglas and Black, expressed the view that all official judgment of the morality of motion pictures prior to their showing is unconstitutional, but the others did not commit themselves on this opinion.

Indeed, in a hearing previous to the decision of the court, Justice Jackson expressed a strong view that would have been in effect a complete ban on all motion pictures. He stated that the government had no right to censor the morality of motion pictures, and that the government should not attempt to do so.

More recently Attorney General William O'Donnell of Ohio stated that the Supreme Court decision against particular films does not remove the state's censorship law. He stated that the state has a right to censor motion pictures, and that the state should continue to do so.



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Five films hitherto banned in that State and expects to review up to 50 more of the same kind of films. Beyond doubt the Supreme Court decision has accelerated this change in attitude.

SINCE THE legal status of the censorship of motion pictures is in question, it is well to consider whether or not a film should be allowed on the screen. Some individuals may protest that censorship, even in a very limited degree, is an infringement of their freedom; but there are some who will object to any restrictive measure. The fact that some individuals protest against the law forbidding the carrying of concealed weapons surely no proof that this law violates personal liberty.

CATHOLICS particularly should have no objection to the reasonable censorship of motion pictures. For the Catholic Church itself has a policy of censorship with respect to books on religious subjects by Catholics. Before publication these works must be submitted to a censor appointed by the bishop, and they may be published only when approved by him. The Church knows that this is an effective way of protecting its members from writings that may present views opposed to faith or morals.

In respect to motion pictures we have the Legion of Decency which though not official in the strict sense, furnishes Catholics with reasonable guidance in regard to the moral aspects of current films. It is to be hoped that future decisions of the Supreme Court will not open the way to films that will foster the spirit of licentiousness and sensuality that is prevalent to an appalling extent among the young folks of our land.

Norway Seeks End Of Ban On Jesuits

Oslo, Norway — (NC) — The Norwegian parliament is expected to vote this year on a formal proposal to abolish a 140-year-old ban against the Society of Jesus. The ban was incorporated in Article 2 of the Constitution of 1814 which stated that "the Jesuit and other monkish orders shall not be tolerated."

It is considered likely here that the proposal will be voted upon by the parliament at its current spring session, or falling that will come before the fall session. A two-thirds vote is necessary for adoption.

The Constitution of 1814 also excluded Jews from the country. However, the ban against the Jews was lifted in 1851, and in 1897 the ban against other monkish orders was rescinded. Meanwhile a movement has developed in many quarters to have the anti-Jesuit provision rescinded as incompatible with the spirit of the United Nations Convention on Human Rights which guarantees full religious freedom and which Norway recently ratified.

The proposal to abolish the ban against the Society of Jesus was introduced in the Oslo parliament last year on the initiative of the Norwegian Cabinet. After newspapers had carried editorials and letters calling attention to it, in Norway the procedure is for such matters to be laid before one parliament for action by the next. This procedure guards against hasty or ill-considered action.



AT HOME HOME—Ravaged by fire, the war's refugees in Hong Kong plead for help. This little boy stands appealingly in the ruins of his make-shift home hoping for aid. He will be one of thousands who will benefit by your generous response to the Bishops' Fund for Victims of War, in dioceses of the United States on Lenten Sunday, March 28.

Moscow Saboteur Courses Described By Former Red

Montreal, Que.—(NC)—John Hladun, a Canadian who became a Moscow-trained saboteur and now is campaigning against Communism in writings and lectures, told a meeting here that a secret "master list" of all known communist contacts in Canada exists in Toronto.

Speaking to a gathering of Canadian Air Force and Army intelligence personnel, he said his greatest ambition was to find that "card index hidden somewhere in Toronto's headquarters of the communists."

Hladun, a farm boy who joined the communist party during the 1930 depression, was one of a group of Canadians picked to attend a special eight months course in Moscow.

Hladun was sent to Russia to take a special course in "the art of organizing strikes and causing trouble." He found Russia "very miserable" and the Russian plans "diabolical, beastly, having no respect for the individual." He decided to leave the organization as soon as the opportunity presented itself, once he was back in Canada.

Hladun said there were 20 Canadians and 6,000 others taking the sabotage course at the Moscow university when he was there. The course began with indoctrination lectures "where we were told to prepare for an eventual world revolution."

This Could Be Trouble

Washington — (NC) — When the word gets around, as doubt the attention of the nation's Catholic grade school youngsters will be glued on Chicago from April 19 to 22.

There at the 51st annual National Catholic educational Association convention, educators are going to express some ideas about the ever-present bogaboo — the report card.

Mrs. Frederick C. Hochwalt, NCEA secretary general, announced that the sessions of the association's elementary school department have the following discussions scheduled: "The Functional Value of the Report Card" by Brother Columban, F.S.C., of Brooklyn, N.Y.; "New Use of the Report Card" by Father Jerome W. MacFaddin, Lansing (Mich.) diocesan superintendent of schools and the "Value of Parent Conferences" by Mrs. Joseph Bell of Winnetka, Ill.

Bishop Kellenberg Installed In Ogdensburg Diocese

Ogdensburg, N. Y. — (NC) — Bishop Walter P. Kellenberg was installed as sixth Bishop of Ogdensburg at solemn rites yesterday (Mar. 25) at St. Mary's Cathedral attended by 27 members of the hierarchy, including five Archbishops and 22 Bishops.

The new Ordinary was installed by His Eminence Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York, whom he had served as Auxiliary Bishop. Bishop Kellenberg's 73-year-old mother and his two sisters and two brothers, as well as a host of priests, Religious and lay from New York and Ogdensburg, attended.

Attending from Rochester were Bishop James E. Kearney and Auxiliary Bishop Lawrence E. Casey.

The congregation heard the Bishop praised as a man with "a priestly zeal, a fatherly kindness and complete dedication to the interests of God in the lives of his people." This tribute came from Bishop Kellenberg's predecessor, Bishop Bryan J. McEntegart, who resigned last year as fifth Ordinary of the Ogdensburg See to become rector of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D. C.

DELIVERING THE sermon at the installation, Bishop McEntegart declared: "You will note that the new Bishop has come to live among his people on the Feast of the Annunciation in this Holy Year of 1954. And confidently he ascends his throne in this cathedral, which proudly bears the title of Saint Mary."

"It is altogether fitting that the Bishop should come to his flock on this day and in this place. For the sacred office which he holds, finds its very source in this great feast and the diocese he is to rule renders thanks for his choicest blessings to the beloved patronage of the Immaculate Mother of God."

IN ADDITION to lauding their new Bishop, Bishop McEntegart also had high praise for his old flock. "No words of mine can pay full tribute to the goodness and the holiness of these wonderful priests, Religious and people," he said. "But in a very real sense, that goodness and that holiness are summed up and symbolized in this glorious cathedral. Like a great prayer in stone, it expresses perfectly their loving vibrant faith in God and His Blessed Mother." The new Cathedral was built under Bishop McEntegart after he ruined the former cathedral in 1947.

Iron Curtain Escapees Flee To Austria

Vienna—(NC)—At least 1,700 persons in communist countries managed during the last year to escape oppression—including religious persecution—by crossing the border into Austria, according to figures released by Austrian authorities.

Not included in the total are those who were picked up by Austrian police in the Russian-occupied zone and had to be handed over to Soviet authorities, nor the presumably large number killed trying to cross the mine fields and barbed wire entanglements "protecting the freedom of the People's Democracy."

TWO-THIRDS of the 1,700 came from Yugoslavia. The rest, almost even divided, were from Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Between them nearly all races and nationalities subject to communist rule were represented.

Most appear to have left their home countries primarily because they could no longer bear the general conditions created by communist oppression, and not for political reasons strictly speaking.

Cardinal Newman 'Flower Girl'

Cleveland, O. — (NC) — The Intercollegiate Newman Club of Cleveland discovered a link to its founder here, Mrs. Mary Neiding was flower girl for the late John Henry Cardinal Newman when he visited St. Winifred's convent school in a Shropshire town in 1859.

Telling the Newmanites of their founder, Mrs. Neiding recalled: "He was a saintly looking man with a shock of white hair. When I gave him the bouquet of flowers he smiled and I still can see the happy wrinkles around his eyes. Then he put his hand on my head and blessed me!"

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