

But What About Those Which 'Glorify Crime and Criminals?'

New York—While most of the controversy over recent films has been centered on their bolder treatment of sex, a major trend in new movies has gone unnoticed—namely, the increasing number of films which show that theft, larceny and other such crimes not only pay but also can be great fun.

In the last year or so, no less than seven major films have been in this category, and in commenting on two of them recently—"Kaleidoscope" and "Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round"—Life's film critic Richard Schickel noted:

"Moralists will observe that in neither film is crime punished with the traditional Hollywood retribution of jail or death."

Along with "Kaleidoscope" (the hero devises a novel way to cheat at cards; he assures himself of a marked deck by breaking into a printing plant and tampering with the plates that will produce the cards) and "Dead Heat" (about a bank heist), other recent films of this genre have included:

"A Big Hand for the Little Lady" in which a clever but dishonest conspiracy allows the

heroine to win a huge pot of money in a poker game; "How to Steal a Million" in which Audrey Hepburn attempts to steal a phony sculpture from a museum before authorities can learn it was made by her father, a compulsive forger of art masterpieces, and "Assault on a Queen," about an attempt to loot the Queen Mary.

The trend was touched off by "Topkapi," a suspenseful film about a plot to steal a famed jeweled dagger from the Istanbul Museum and which stressed what Newsweek recently called "that splendid cinematic diversion, the logistics of larceny." These logistics—the nerve-fraying details of pulling off "the big caper"—are featured in the latest film to seek audience empathy for the criminal: "Gambit."

"Gambit," which stars Michael Caine and Shirley MacLaine in a plot to steal a valuable piece of sculpture from a Middle East collector, ends with the plot proving successful. ("Go ahead, tell the end—but please don't tell the beginning," says an ad, alluding to a surprise opening sequence.) But neither "Gambit" nor any of the other above-mentioned films has been classified as morally

objectionable by the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures. In fact, "Gambit" has not only received an A-1 family rating but has been singled out by NCOMP's Catholic Film Newsletter in its "best of the new films" department as pleasant entertainment.

The extent of NCOMP's change of attitude toward such films is indicated by the fact that ten years ago the grand-

daddy of all recent "big caper" pictures, "Rififi," was given a B rating—morally objectionable in part—because it "tends to arouse undue sympathy for criminals and criminal activities."

Although "Gambit" and the other caper films are often played for laughs, audiences still go to see them, says critic Schickel, for "the vicarious pleasure they afford us when we see some well-laid

plans work out for a change." There is also, he adds, "the current sociological theory which holds that theft in a prosperous period where money is controlled by faceless institutions, is no longer the moral outrage it was in more depressed times."

But at the core of NCOMP's lack of serious concern over such films is its changing opinion about Catholic moviegoers and the possibility of their be-

ing overly influenced by the evil they see portrayed on the screen. When a reader complained that recent NCOMP ratings were not helping the "average layman" avoid occasions of sin, a moral theologian writing in the December issue of "Sign" magazine questioned the reader's moral integrity rather than that of NCOMP. Wrote the Rev. John Cousins, CP:

"If adult Christians are not pure enough in mind and heart—and I am not referring to purity in an exclusively sexual sense—to be able to contemplate the evil that is so much a part of human existence without themselves succumbing to that evil, then something is terribly wrong. If they cannot place such incidents within the context of the entire work of the artist and judge it in terms of that context, then one must wonder how they manage to live maturely in a very sinful world."

"If adultery and grand larceny are so attractive to adults that a suggestion or portrayal of such activities in a film excites them to desire or perform such activities themselves, their virtue is frail indeed, and I would not want to wager on their chances of perseverance in virtue. Maybe the real problem is that many adults are still very immature and childish in moral matters."

While NCOMP has accordingly been adjusting its once rigid stance toward morality in films, many protests have been received from Catholics who insist that NCOMP continue to "condemn indecent and immoral motion pictures," in the wording of the opening sentence of the Legion of Decency's old pledge. However, it has been noted, that opening sentence also contained the phrase, "...and those which



LOGISTICS OF LARCENY—Shirley MacLaine and Michael Caine go over and down between anti-burglar electric eyes in plot to steal a valuable bust in "Gambit."

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Abortion Seen Goal of 'Drive'

St. Louis — (RNS) — The man who has written a definitive book on the history of the Roman Catholic Church's stand on birth control said here that he detects "almost an organized campaign" to change the laws of abortion.

He also said observers abroad feel the U.S. does "coerce" foreign governments into promoting birth control.

John Noonan, professor of law at Notre Dame University and author of "Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists," told the St. Louis Review in an interview that he did not think that a change in the Church's birth control stand presaged a change in its attitude toward abortion.

"I have been to many conferences with non-Catholics who do not see the difference between abortion and birth control," he said, "and this difference is basic."

Dr. Noonan said that in the case of abortion there is a papal pronouncement as well as New Testament references which call it a grave sin.

"There are also some people who cannot distinguish between the different methods of birth control," he said, "and I think that this is the single most important reason for the Pope's delay on this subject—the fear that people would think that if artificial birth control was possible, abortion would be possible."

In speaking of birth control, Dr. Noonan said that it would be simplistic to say that Pope Paul's difficulties with the birth control question stem from a reluctance to admit a "mistake" by the Church.

"That is not the issue as I see it," he said. "To me it seems that the real question is this: The Church's past teaching was an appropriate moral rule for another time; now what is the appropriate moral rule for today?"

He said that the Second Vatican Council recognized that their may be in today's world a conflict between the expression of love and the responsible procreation of children. It is the recognition of that conflict, he held, that led to the Pope's appointment of a study commission on birth control and contraception. "Some solutions, such as infanticide and abortion, the Council rules were terrible crimes and could not be considered."

Dr. Noonan said that while this is being studied, there is a norm and that it must be obeyed.

The significance of the recent U.S. bishops' statement on birth

control and U.S. government programs was skown, he said, in the words "whatever the moral law may be" which were included in the text.

"Five years ago you wouldn't have found them admitting that there could be any doubt about the immorality of artificial birth control," he said.

That part of the U.S. bishops' statement which raised the most controversy—that the U.S. is forcing birth control on poor people—found credibility with Dr. Noonan.

"It is the impression of many foreign observers that the United States does coerce foreign governments to accept and practice birth control," he said.



Noted Cellist at Birthday Mass

San Juan, P.R. — (RNS) — Pablo Casals, world renowned Spanish cellist, marked his 90th birthday (Dec. 29) by attending a special Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Mercy celebrated by Archbishop Luis Aponte Martinez of San Juan, Puerto Rico. Mr. Casals and his 30-year-old wife, Maritza, are shown with the archbishop after the service, attended by some 30 close relatives and friends.

Historians Pick Jesuit

New York — (RNS) — Father Robert I. Burns, S.J., of the University of San Francisco, received the 1966 John Gilmery Shea Prize from the American Catholic Historical Association at its 47th annual meeting here. He was cited for his book, "The Jesuits and the Indian Wars of the Northwest," published earlier this year by Yale University Press.

Father Walsh To Vatican

Maryknoll — (RNS) — The Catholic Foreign Mission Society has appointed 63-year-old Father Thomas S. Walsh to be the society's procurator general at the Vatican.

The new representative of the Maryknoll Fathers in Rome is a native of Kokomo, Ind. He succeeds Father John M. Martin of Mequon, Wis.

Father Walsh was among the first group of Maryknoll Fathers to begin mission work in Chile in 1943. A year later, he was appointed regional superior there.

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