A Biblical Approach to Objectionable Elements

(Christian Educational Censorship)

This selection is an excerpt from Christian Education: Its Mandate and Mission

Introduction

Educational censorship remains one of the most controversial issues in public life, linked as it is to political censorship and freedom of the press. The issue is sometimes posed as if it were only religious conservatives who insist on moral controls and apply arbitrary standards in excluding uncongenial elements. Nothing could be further from the truth. Secularist educators, no less than Christian, censor according to their educational aims.

These aims are moral and religious in nature as much as intellectual. To exclude racism, sexism, and all religious coloration from secular teaching and materials is as serious a goal and as holy a cause in the progressive agenda as to develop the child in the image of God is in the Christian educational program. Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is censored in some school districts today for its alleged racism whereas it was censored in conservative schools a century ago for its religious cynicism. The reason is obvious. The shape of the curriculum will affect the shape of society in a nation with universal compulsory education.

Censorship, therefore, whether in Christian or secular schools, is inescapable. Every thoughtful teacher makes choices according to criteria devised to implement specific course objectives, which in turn reflect general educational goals. More and more in public schools, these choices are being made for him. The general goals of public education reflect a liberal social agenda that has moral content antagonistic to Christian belief and traditional values. Recent textbook controversies make clear the determination of the liberal educational establishment not to relax its grip on the content of public education. The issue is not whether to censor but what.

The issue of what to censor not only separates Christian educators from secular but also divides Christian educators themselves. Though united in purpose, they may differ in what they deem appropriate methods and materials for accomplishing their purpose. Is the traditional curriculum in literature compatible with or a betrayal of Christian educational goals and standards? Can Christian students be rendered "culturally literate" without compromising the spiritual objectives of Christian education? These are questions that conscientious Christian teachers and administrators wrestle with. Not only must they justify their decisions to themselves; they must be able to defend them to inquiring parents, pastors, and lay leaders of the church and, perhaps eventually, to civil authorities.

Beleaguered by doubts and conflicting advice, the Christian teacher or administrator turns to Scripture for standards he can confidently apply and uphold. The Bible itself is the most important textbook in the Christian educational curriculum. It not only contains the most important information for the student but also provides a pattern for the instruction. Other textbooks are Christian to the extent they reflect and conform to this spiritual and pedagogical model. Classroom teaching is Christian to the extent that it emulates the objectives, approaches, and methods of the Scriptures.

The Bible speaks of itself when it says, "Every word of God is pure" (Prov. 30:5) and "Thy word is very pure" (Ps. 119:140). Every part of Scripture is free of that which is in conflict with or extraneous to its purpose. The Christian teacher, led by the same Spirit that inspired God's Holy Word, will scrutinize prayerfully his methods and materials to ensure that they likewise are free of that which hinders and diverts from his purpose: the conforming of his students to the image of God in Christ. He will censor for the sake of his students and, in the case of the materials he uses, ascertain whether the necessary censoring has been done by the authors or may otherwise be done by himself.

Censorable elements

In order to do his job of censoring in a Biblical way, the teacher will need to be aware of the common categories of censorable elements.

1. Profanity (blasphemy whether in statements or epithets; all sacrilege)
2. Scatological realism (specific references to excrement or to the excremental functions)
3. Erotic realism (specific references to physical love between the sexes)
4. Sexual perversions (the portrayal of any sexual relationship or activity--such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, or incest--other than that which is sanctified by God in marriage)
5. Lurid violence
6. Occultism (Satanism, witchcraft, necromancy, astrology, fortunetelling, and the like; a representation of the supernatural powers that oppose God in a way that fascinates the reader or implies the existence of a supernatural order other than the Biblical one)
7. Erroneous religious or philosophical assumptions (un-Biblical root ideas or attitudes expressed overtly or covertly, explicitly or implicitly, in theme, tone, or atmosphere; these appear, for example, when a writer invents a fictional world in which no divine presence is felt or in which no moral order is perceptible.)

It is not difficult to spot the censorable elements of categories 1-6 and to miss the often subtler and more dangerous elements of category 7. The practical atheism and antiestablishmentarian attitude of Mark Twain's character Huck Finn, the pantheistic mysticism of Wordsworth and Thoreau, the naturalistic thesis of Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat," and the melancholy pessimism of A. E. Housman's lyric poems would appear safe enough in terms of criteria based on only the first six categories. Unfortunately, it is the un-Biblical premises of a work that are taken least seriously in discussions of censorable elements and in the formulation of policy concerning them. This category, like the others, requires serious attention.

**Positions on censorable elements**

Those who discuss classroom censorship tend to adopt either of two diametrically opposed positions. Each position, by its deficiencies, fortifies the other. A third position results from the first two. All require examination in the light of the Biblical standard.

The **permissivist** view is common among evangelical intellectuals. It is what one might expect to find in an article in *Christianity Today* or in booklets published by InterVarsity Press. Those who hold this view allow at least a degree of the censorable on either of two bases: (1) the existence in a work of compensating aesthetic qualities; (2) the necessity in art of an honest view of life. These constitute what the courts have called "redeeming social value." The weakness of the first criterion is apparent in the uncertainty that has characterized the history of court rulings on censorship. It is too subjective and utilitarian to be an adequate guide for Christians. It requires a judge who, though ignorant himself concerning the aesthetic merits of a work, is competent to identify expert witnesses who are knowledgeable and impartial. His problem is complicated by the circumstance that aesthetic values nowadays tend to be subjective and relativistic, easily affected by extraneous considerations. The aesthetic criterion in censorship rests not on absolute moral principles, which Biblical ethics requires, but on the toleration of the social community.

The second criterion--the necessity in literature of an honest imitation of life--is the standard defense by modern writers of the sordid and salacious elements in their fiction. But ideas of the world and of life vary widely. Every serious secular novelist invents fictional worlds that vindicate his moral and religious preferences. Moral libertines nurture private world views that justify and reinforce their licentious lifestyles. Even were there an accurate, Biblical consensus of the nature of life and the world, it could hardly be maintained that literature, while imitating reality, need include all of reality. The Bible speaks of some realities we are to flee (I Tim. 6:11; II Tim. 2:22). Moral considerations must override the aesthetic and mimetic in a Christian's perspective on literature and life. That which threatens the moral and spiritual life cannot be justified on other grounds. Permissivism arrogantly elevates human wisdom above divine.

The **exclusivist** view is held by conscientious pastors, Christian educators, and laymen concerned for the moral preservation of their children and for the moral wholesomeness of their communities. They reason that, because evil is evil, any avoidable exposure to it is wrong for even the most praiseworthy of purposes. It follows, they argue, that one should avoid any work of literature or discard any element of the curriculum that contains any amount of any of these elements. A few hold as a corollary that, since the Bible is a sufficient guide in all important matters of life and since there is peril in other reading, we **ought** not to read anything else.

Our spiritual affinities are with those who hold the exclusivist position, and our sympathies must be also. They are the ones with the sensitive consciences, the zeal for what is pleasing to God, the vigilance toward the moral erosion of society. But they should consider the implications of their position. To reject a work of literature or subject of study because of the presence of any amount of these elements within it is, first, to apply a standard that precludes the possibility of a liberal arts education. We forego the
We need to deal briefly with each one. The advocates open to charges of self-contradiction. Obviously exhaustive: portions of the Scriptures themselves. Elements of all seven traditions. The exclusivist view, consistently held, puts the Bible in conflict with itself if consistently held, condemns the manner in which God conducted the preparation of these great men of Scripture or implies that God did not approve of it.

Now if eschewing evil requires foregoing a liberal arts education even in a Christian educational environment, then so be it. No human educational values should be allowed to compete with spiritual. However, we recall that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). Paul, we know, had the learning of the Greeks, for quotations and echoes of pagan writers appear here and there in his epistles. He knew Greek poetry well enough to quote from memory the minor poets Aratus and Epimenides of Crete on Mars Hill. Furthermore, of Daniel and his three friends we are told that "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom" (Dan. 1:17). Evidently, in these cases, the divine preparation for leadership included familiarization with the writings not only of the inspired authors of the Scriptures but also of the poets, scientists, and philosophers of pagan intellectual and literary traditions. The exclusivist view, if consistently held, condemns the manner in which God conducted the preparation of these great men of Scripture or implies that God did not approve of it.

An even more serious implication of the exclusivist position is that it precludes the reading of some portions of the Scriptures themselves. Elements of all seven categories of censorable elements appear in certain ways and to certain degrees in the Bible. The following list is illustrative, by no means exhaustive:

1. Profanity: "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" (John 8:48)
2. Scatological realism: Rabshakeh's coarse language (Isa. 36:12)
3. Erotic realism: Proverbs 5:18-19; Ezekiel 23:20-21; and passages in the Song of Solomon
4. Sexual perversion: the sin of Sodom (Gen. 19); the seduction of Joseph (Gen. 39); the rape of Tamar (II Sam. 13); the liaison in Proverbs 7
5. Lurid violence: Joab's murder of Amasa (II Sam. 20)
6. Occultism: Saul's dealing in necromancy (I Sam. 28:7-25)
7. Religious and philosophical assumptions: the misrepresentation of God by Job's three friends (though in no pervasive sense can such assumptions affect any large portion of Scripture)

Obviously the exclusivist view, consistently held, puts the Bible in conflict with itself and lays its advocates open to charges of self-contradiction.

The exclusivist position is based on a misconstruction or misapplication of certain passages of Scripture. We need to deal briefly with each one.

1. "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes" (Ps. 101:3). This resolution of David may refer to an idol or to some evil device or scheme. It certainly does not refer to all representation of evil, for David read the stories of moral failure in the Pentateuch and, in his capacity as judge, had to scrutinize wrongdoing continually. The sins described in the Bible—for example, David's own adultery with Bathsheba—are wicked, but the descriptions of them in Scripture are not wicked. The examples of Scripture, both positive and negative, are good in the sense that they are "written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4). "All scripture . . . is profitable" (II Tim. 3:16), even the parts that reveal most vividly the depths of human degradation. What is represented is evil, but the representation of the evil is valuable for Christian moral understanding and is, therefore, good.

2. "I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (Rom. 16:19). The Greek word here translated "simple" is translated "harmless" in Matthew 10:16 ("Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves") and in Philippians 2:14-15 ("Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation"). Paul's command echoes a passage in Jeremiah in which the prophet complains of Israel, "They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge" (4:22). Elsewhere Paul admonishes believers, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men" (I Cor. 14:20). The meaning of these passages is clearly that the believer should be clever in ways to do good rather than cunning in ways to do harm. On the other hand, believers should not be "children . . . , in understanding." One of the
meanings of simple at the time the KJV was translated was, in fact, "harmless," and the KJV translators followed Wycliffe in using it in this sense in this verse. The Bible puts no premium on moral ignorance.

3. "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3-4). Evidently Paul does not mean that such sins as fornication and covetousness should never be mentioned at all, for he has just spoken of them himself, as do the other writers of the Scripture. Mentioning these and other sins is necessary if the preacher is to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2). Every pastor or parent must mention specific sins by name if he is to fulfill his responsibility to God for those under his care. Paul here, as in Romans 2:24, is insisting that the conduct of God's people give no occasion for these sins to be named as existing among them. Their conduct should give cause for thanksgiving rather than for gossip and reproach.

4. "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:22). The commandment has been interpreted in two ways. The first is that one avoid giving any appearance or impression of evil doing. The believer's conduct must be above suspicion and give no occasion to those who would wish to find fault. Paul gives the same command in Romans 12:17 ("Provide things honest in the sight of all men") and in II Corinthians 8:21. Daniel's life was such that his enemies could find no pretext for condemning him in any way to the king. The Bible stresses the importance of reputation as well as of moral character. The more likely interpretation, however, is that one abstain from every form or manifestation of evil. The commandment completes the preceding verse. We are to "prove all things," adhering to "that which is good" and abstaining from all that is evil. One must encounter a phenomenon before he can test it and distinguish the good from the bad.

5. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). This grand prescription for mental, moral, and spiritual health expresses the principle that dwelling on good will help to drive out evil. The believer's main subject of meditation should be the Scriptures--for blessing (Ps. 1:2) but also for protection (Prov. 6:20-24). The Biblical commands to center one's mental life on the Scriptures do not exclude those passages in which evil is described, often graphically. On the contrary, those passages, Paul says, were intended to be pondered as negative examples (I Cor. 10:1-14). The Bible uses both positive and negative examples to enforce its message. Good literature does also. A person whose mind has been fortified by such examples against the evil in his moral environment will be better able to live in that environment with his mind focused on the things of God.

More than four centuries ago, William Tyndale, arguing for the common man's ability to make use of Scripture, addressed the issue of the questionable elements in Scripture:

All the Scripture is either the promises and testament of God in Christ, and stories pertaining thereunto, to strengthen thy faith; either the law, and stories pertaining thereto, to fear thee from evil doing. There is no story nor gest [narrative account], seem it never so simple or so vile unto the world, but that thou shalt find therein spirit and life and edifying in the literal sense: for it is God's Scripture, written for thy learning and comfort. There is no clout or rag there, that hath not precious relics wrapt therein of faith, hope, patience and long suffering, and of the truth of God, and also of his righteousness. Set before thee the story of Reuben, which defiled his father's bed. Mark what a cross God suffered to fall on the neck of his elect Jacob. Consider first the shame among the heathen, when as yet there was no more of the whole world within the testament of God, but he and his household. . . . Look what ado he had at the defiling of his daughter Dinah. . . . Mark what followed Reuben, to fear other, that they shame not their fathers and mothers. He was cursed and lost the kingdom, and also the priestdom, and his tribe or generation was ever few in number, as it appeareth in the stories of the Bible.

The adultery of David with Bathsheba is an ensample, not to move us to evil: but, if (while we follow the way of righteousness) any chance drive us aside, that we despair not. For if we saw not such infirmities in God's elect, we, which are so weak and fall so oft, should utterly despair, and think that God had clean forsaken us. It is therefore a sure and an undoubted conclusion, whether we be holy or unholy, we are all sinners. But the difference is, that God's sinners consent not to their sin. They consent unto the law that is both holy and righteous, and mourn to have their sin taken away. . . .
Likewise in the homely gest of Noe, when he was drunk, and lay in his tent with his privy members open, hast thou great edifying in the literal sense. Thou seest what became of the cursed children of wicked Ham, which saw his father's privy members, and jested thereof unto his brethren. Thou seest also what blessing fell on Shem and Japhet, which went backward and covered their father's members, and saw them not. And thirdly, thou seest what infirmity accompanieth God's elect, be they never so holy, which yet is not imputed unto them: for the faith and trust they have in God swalloweth up all their sins. [Obedience of a Christian Man]

The pragmatic position is held by those who, acknowledging God's standards to be absolute, consider some compromise to be necessary if one is to get along in a fallen world with flawed human beings. Misapplying Paul's concession in 1 Corinthians 5:10, they allow some degree of exposure to the evil of this world, but not "too much." It is inevitable, they maintain, that passing on our way through the world we would pick up some dust. The pragmatist, seeing the bankruptcy of the permissivist view and the impossibility of the exclusivist view, falls back on a rule-of-thumb utilitarianism that makes Christian evaluation entirely subjective. Each person must decide for himself how much evil is too much to be tolerable in a literary work or in material used in teaching. This view is perhaps theologically the weakest of all, for it implies that it is impossible to order our lives according to the will of a holy God or that God will accept from us less than His standards require. In the issue of a Christian response to the censorable in literature or in life, adopting a mean between extremes or a policy of convenience is no solution. Genuine Biblical morality is not a matter of expediency or of proportion and degree, but a matter of principle based on moral absolutes.

Fortunately there is another position, the Biblical, which takes the Bible itself as the supreme literary and pedagogical model. It accepts the Biblical purpose of moral education as stated in Proverbs 1:4: "To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion." It recognizes that the image of God in redeemed man—Christ-likeness—includes moral understanding and that moral understanding requires an awareness of both good and evil and "the end thereof" (Prov. 14:12). It identifies as spiritually "of full age," or mature, "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14).

The Biblical position adopts the pedagogical method of the Scriptures in teaching moral understanding. The Bible teaches by means of precept and example. Its examples are both positive and negative. The writers of the Old Testament enunciate emphatically the commandments of God and reinforce them with many examples of right behavior and many more of behavior to be shunned. They associate good or evil consequences with good or evil behavior. New Testament writers draw on these examples, positive and negative, for encouragement and warning.

The Lord Himself made full use of negative examples in His teaching and preaching, citing the degeneracy of Sodom (Matt. 11:23), Cain's slaying of Abel (Matt. 23:35), the debauchery of Noah's generation (Matt. 24:38), and many other instances of wickedness. Paul's warnings to the Corinthians run nearly the full gamut of human depravity, including incest (I Cor. 5:1) and homosexuality (I Cor. 6:9), referring to active homosexuals in "abusers of themselves with mankind," passive in "effeminate." We regard these accounts of wickedness in the same way that the New Testament writers regarded those recorded in the Old Testament: as "ensamples" given to us for our profit (I Cor. 10:11; II Pet. 2:6). Clearly, to exclude the negative example from the Christian educational experience is to depart from the pedagogical method of Scripture.

Does this mean that we must accept in our reading and include in our teaching the full range and extent of the censorable that the permissivist would allow? Not at all. Following the standard of Scripture controls our choice and handling of material in a way that most pragmatists, let alone permissivists, would find overrestrictive. Though defense attorneys in pornography cases can point to portions of the English Bible that seem to violate the Bible's own admonitions concerning preserving the purity of the mind, the Bible is in reality completely self-consistent and purposeful in its presentation of evil. Evil is represented in the Bible in certain ways, for certain purposes, and with certain effects. Understanding the Biblical manner of representing evil is a far surer and more workable guide for the conscientious Christian parent or educator than the subjective criteria and arbitrary lists conceived by some conservative moralists, well-intentioned as they may be.

The basis of a truly Biblical position concerning censorable elements is the following distinction. If a work of literature or other element of the curriculum treats evil in the same way that it is treated in the Scriptures, we regard it as not only acceptable but also desirable reading, listening, or viewing for someone of sufficient maturity as to benefit from comparable portions of the Scriptures (with the qualification that visual or auditory effects are more potent than those of reading). If it does not treat evil in the way evil is handled in the Scriptures, its content is not good. Evil in the Bible appears dangerous and repulsive. Reflections of evil appear in the Bible in the form of negative examples so as to create a defense against what they represent or to give hope to the fallen for forgiveness and recovery from sin.
Criteria of worth

We may draw three criteria from the Scriptures for judging literary and other works with respect to their content.

1. Is the representation of evil purposeful or is it present for its own sake? This is the criterion of gratuitousness. We know that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16-17). Nothing in the Scriptures is superfluous or irrelevant to this high spiritual purpose.

2. Is the representation of evil, if purposeful, present in an acceptable degree? Or is it more conspicuous or vivid than the purpose warrants? This is the criterion of explicitness. No one with a high view of Scripture would charge it with inappropriateness or excessiveness in its representation of evil. The presentation of evil in the Bible is realistic enough to convince us of its threat as a temptation but not so realistic as to become for us a temptation. Some sins are referred to but not enacted in the text.

3. Is evil presented from a condemning perspective? Is it made to appear both dangerous and repulsive? What is the attitude of the work toward it? This is the criterion of moral tone. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil," says the Lord through the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 5:20). A good work of literature does not glorify human weakness or encourage tolerance of sin. It allows evil to appear in a controlled way in order to develop in the reader or hearer a resistance against it. In literature, "vice," wrote Samuel Johnson, "must always disgust." Its purpose is to initiate the reader through "mock encounters" with evil so that evil cannot later deceive him—so that he will be better able to maintain a pure life in a fallen world.

These three criteria are complementary. None is alone sufficient to justify the censurable in a work of literature or another element of the curriculum. Together they work powerfully, because they work Biblically, to preserve moral purity while providing for a developing moral understanding and judgment.

Let us consider how some censurable elements in Shakespeare's plays appear in the light of these criteria. One of the most violent scenes in English Renaissance drama, and one of the most violent in all dramatic literature, occurs in act three of King Lear, when the duke of Gloucester, loyal to King Lear, is charged with helping him escape and is cruelly punished. The cruelty takes place on stage in full view of the audience. Gloucester is tied to a chair, and hair from his beard and scalp is torn out by Lear's daughter Regan. Then her husband, the duke of Cornwall, tips the chair backward onto the floor and with his tall, narrow heel gouges out one eye and afterward the other. The scene, acted realistically, would scarcely survive the liberal television censors of today and, if so, would raise an outcry among conservative viewers. Why did Shakespeare bring this action before the audience and not at least have it reported by a messenger as most other dramatists of his day and before would have done?

In King Lear Shakespeare uses parallel plots, the stories of two old men who undergo severe ordeals because of their moral imperception. Each wrongs his loyal child and favors his disloyal child or children, learning too late that he has misread their characters. Lear's moral blindness is the consequence of his pride. He involves his loyal daughter in a contest of flattery with her two sisters. When she refuses to participate, he disinherits her, leaving himself at the mercy of his two faithless daughters and their husbands, to whom he has ceded the kingdom. Gloucester's moral and later physical blindness derives, ultimately, from a sin of lechery. He has begotten an illegitimate son, who deceives him into disinheriting his legitimate son and eventually betrays him to the enemies of King Lear. Lear's sin is mental, the arch-sin of pride; and his punishment is fitly mental: he loses, temporarily, his mind. Gloucester's sin is physical, sensuality, and his punishment appropriately is physical: he loses, permanently, his eyes. In the last scene, the loyal son remarks to his disloyal brother, whom he has mortally wounded:

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us.
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.

Both plots depict the unforeseen consequences of a casual, thoughtless immoral act. The audience takes the moral tally as the chickens come home to roost.

The punishment of Lear recalls God's dealing with Nebuchadnezzar, who because of his self-exaltation lost his reason and was, like Lear, turned out-of-doors to live as a beast until purged of his pride. Gloucester's punishment also has strong Biblical warrant. The aged duke has been ruled by the lust of
the eyes. As he approaches the hovel in the darkness with his lantern, the fool exclaims, with double meaning, "Look, here comes a walking fire." Though the process of Gloucester's punishment is horrible, we may construe the effect as beneficial; for the Scriptures counsel, "If thy right eye offend thee [i.e., cause thee to offend], pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29). Indeed Gloucester seems to understand his ordeal in this light when he acknowledges, "I stumbled when I saw." Like Samson's blinding, Gloucester's is not gratuitous, nor is it, in relation to what Shakespeare means to emphasize, overly explicit. It is part of a scheme of moral consequences, and the moral tone is clear.

In the comedy Twelfth Night, there is some questionable humor associated with the foolish Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Sir Andrew, unwelcome suitor of the countess Olivia, is a companion of the countess's freeloading uncle, Sir Toby Belch, and Feste, her court jester. Their enemy is Olivia's vain steward, Malvolio. Sir Andrew's surname, like Belch and Malvolio, has moral meaning. Aguecheek indicates the effects of syphilis, known as the pox or the French disease. Andrew's face is evidently pock and otherwise deformed from lechery. Andrew also has the thinness of hair and the mental debility associated with the later stages of this disease. When Maria reveals her plan to humiliate Malvolio, Sir Toby exclaims, "Excellent. I smell a device." Andrew, understanding as usual only in part, sighs, "I have't in my nose too." His mental debility (evident in his construing of "device" as "vice") and physical deformity (indicated in his reference to the effects of the pox on his nasal cartilage) produce humor, but humor for a moral purpose.

For Sir Andrew is ruled by the lust of the eyes. When he first appears, he stands transfixed by the sight of Maria, Olivia's fair lady in waiting. Sir Toby, reading his mind, encourages him to "accost" her ("Accost, Sir Andrew! Accost!") knowing well that the word accost is beyond the narrow bounds of Andrew's comprehension. Andrew then addresses her, "Good Mistress Accost, I desire better acquaintance." Maria corrects him: "My name is Mary, sir." Andrew replies, "Good Mistress Mary Accost." In these passages and others, the lust of the eyes is associated, by the intermediate cause of social disease, with physical deformity and mental debility.

The vice of the rotund Sir Toby Belch, as both his name and his amplitude of girth indicate, is gluttony. This vice, one of the seven deadly sins of medieval theology, included drunkenness. Sir Toby detests moral restraints as much as he hates "an unfilled cannikin of ale." He is ruled by the lust of the flesh.

Malvolio's vice is ambition. His name, mal volio, means "bad volition"—that is, "inordinate ambition." As Olivia's steward, Malvolio has risen as high as in the household order as a commoner legitimately can. He is the chief servant, manager of Olivia's house, answerable only to the countess herself. But he is not content. He aspires to marry Olivia, to be Count Malvolio. Malvolio is ruled by the pride of life.

Each of the three characters is humorously yet purposefully degraded in the play. Each is made a fool by his vice and is punished according to the nature of his vice. The sin of Malvolio is, like Lear's, of the mind, and, like Lear, he is punished mentally. His household enemies expose him to the laughter of the court and, having confined him in a dark room, taunt him to desperation. Sir Toby's and Sir Andrew's sins, like Gloucester's are physical, and they, like Gloucester, are punished physically. At the end of the play they have been thoroughly humiliated and appear before Olivia in humiliation with bloody heads. They have themselves become the court spectacle they delighted in rendering the hapless Malvolio.

The humor of Twelfth Night is morally targeted. The references to Sir Andrew's licentiousness, like those to Sir Toby's gluttony and Malvolio's pride, are not gratuitous or, one might argue, improperly explicit, but part of a scheme of moral consequences. Furthermore, they are qualified by moral tone. We are not allowed to admire these characters. The bullying nature of Sir Toby shows itself in the last scene in his ugly repudiation of Sir Andrew's offer of assistance: "Will you help? An ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin-faced knave, a gull." Olivia, indignant, orders the drunken Sir Toby away.

In both King Lear and Twelfth Night, the censorable elements are not gratuitous but instrumental to moral purpose. They condemn evil and uphold a Biblical standard of virtue. The pitiable Gloucester and the silly Andrew Aguecheek appear aberrational and absurd in relation to the morally normative Edgar in King Lear and Viola in Twelfth Night. Reflections of evil in the two plays are a function of their morality rather than of their immorality or amorality. Both plays condemn and enact judgments upon evil character.

Criteria of use

There remains the issue of whether works that do not fulfill the criteria of gratuitousness, explicitness, and moral tone have a place in the curriculum. The same criteria apply to evaluating the censorable as literature that pertain to judging the censorable in literature. Can a censorable work or part of a work function effectively as a negative example? We can put the questions in this way:
1. Is the teacher's or textbook's use of the censorable material purposeful, or is it presented only for its own sake? This is the criterion of gratuitousness.

2. Is the censorable material too potent to serve as a negative example in the classroom in which it is to be used? This is the criterion of explicitness.

3. Will the censorable material be presented emphatically as a negative example? That is, will it portray dangerous and repulsive, regardless of the author's intentions? This is the criterion of moral tone.

If so, including this material is justifiable and desirable, for in the hands of a wise and skillful teacher it will create a defense against that which it represents.

There is therefore a place in the Christian English curriculum for a paganistic poem by Robert Herrick or William Blake or a pessimistic novel by Thomas Hardy or Joseph Conrad, if these are taught within a proper context, for a proper purpose, and in a proper way. There is a place in the American-literature curriculum for an essay of Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau or a story by the naturalists Stephen Crane or Theodore Dreiser, if it is intended to show, for example, the result of religious unbelief in nineteenth-century American thought.

We must recognize, of course, that the shocking indecencies of much twentieth-century fiction disqualify it for use as negative examples; for the censorable language and description are often too potently explicit to be offset by a supplied moral tone. For instance, whereas a conscientious Christian teacher might assign a Willa Cather novel to a Christian high school class, he would not assign John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath or Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel for the profanity of the one and the sexual explicitness of the other. There are, indeed, many modern fiction works more objectionable than these, not to speak of poetry. The field of choice narrows progressively and drastically as we apply our Biblical criteria to the writings of recent times.

We also must realize that all literary works assigned as negative examples must be taught rather than just listed for class reading. It is the teacher rather than the student who must supply the necessary moral tone. Furthermore, the teaching should precede and accompany the reading of such works by the students, rather than just follow it the next day. Finally, class discussion must be carefully planned and controlled. Only then can the students be certain to experience a censorable work in a way that will ensure their moral and spiritual benefit rather than harm. (See Chapter 6, pp. 94, 101-6, for an account of how such material can be handled in the classroom.)

A useful analogy for explaining the proper handling of censorable materials is inoculation. The moral purpose of Christian teaching is, minimally, to enable the young to escape the infection of evil. There are two ways of escaping an infectious disease: (1) avoiding contact with it, which of course should be done whenever possible, and (2) developing a resistance. There are two ways of developing a resistance: (1) inoculation and (2) having a nonfatal case. Developing resistance is certainly more desirable than assuming one can avoid contact with infection in a world where contagion constantly threatens. Of the two ways of developing resistance, having a nonfatal case is not the sort of experience that one can plan; and even if one happens to be successful, it may leave him scarred and disabled. Clearly inoculation is superior.

The process, and the advantage, of inoculation is familiar to almost everyone today. Inoculation takes place in a disease-free environment. There the recipient receives a controlled exposure to the disease along with the resistance of the donor so as to fortify the recipient against future infection. The sterile environment and controlled dosage ensure present safety. The resistance of the donor ensures both present and future safety.

The factors determining the success of inoculation are three: (1) the strength of the dosage, analogous to the amount of exposure to evil; (2) the resistance of the donor, analogous to the condemning perspective supplied by the teacher; and (3) the strength of the recipient, analogous to the readiness of the student to benefit from the negative example. Inoculation is inappropriate for a recipient who is weak—either too young (the maturity consideration) or too sick (the background consideration). Factors one and three have to do with explicitness; factor two, with moral tone. The very purpose of moral inoculation satisfies the criterion of gratuitousness.

The book of Proverbs inoculates the reader against sexual immorality by a vivid account of an adulterous liaison (7:6-27). The reader's ability to profit from this account depends on his maturity. But such instruction is an important part of the young man's defense against one of the most dangerous temptations he will face in the world. The story of the strange woman and the young fool illustrates the method of Scripture, which offers vivid accounts of sin and its consequences not for titillation of the imagination but "to the intent we should not lust after evil things" (1 Cor. 10:6).
Motivation

We need always to distinguish between the educational and recreative purposes of reading and viewing. The Christian cannot read for pleasure works or parts of works whose censorable elements do not pass the Scriptural test. The Christian's enjoyment of a work must be determined by the degree to which its form and content approach the Biblical standard. However, the educational purpose requires at times a greater latitude than the recreative. If we are to obey the Lord's commandment to be "wise as serpents" as well as "harmless as doves," we need to know what we are to be wary of. We need to be conscious of events and developments that have a bearing on our service for the Lord and on the well-being of ourselves and those under our care. One cannot read far in even National Geographic or U.S. News & World Report without encountering censorable elements. We are justified, indeed obligated, to expose ourselves to some material that is repugnant to our Christian morality and theology so that Satan may not take advantage of us and ours. This latitude does not extend to idle curiosity; it stops where the recreative interest begins.

Genuine moral education

Christian moral education aims at the moral preservation and development of Christian students. This aim entails teaching them to discern and desire good and to recognize and abhor evil, before they encounter the crucial and often subtle moral choices of adulthood. Most often, in literature as in life, good and evil are intertwined. The older the student, the more easily he can separate the strands, categorizing his responses. Christian education, in home and school, has not accomplished its purpose in the mind of the student and prepared him for life until he has learned to discriminate between the good and bad elements of his experience with the world and to choose the one rather than the other. The Christian educator must not only judge but also teach judging if he is to engage in Biblical moral education.

Education, then, is preparation, and preparation implies a process. There are two notions of moral education that are not really education at all, for they involve no process:

1. Immediate immersion (immediate exposure to the evils of the world). The permissivist secular view assumes there exist from the beginning the capabilities it undertakes to teach.
2. Ignorant innocence (complete seclusion from the evils of the world). The exclusivist view provides for no development of discernment and resistance to the evils of the world. This view is what Christian educators are often charged with holding and what, in fact, some of them actually think they hold.

Neither concept of moral education allows for any process of preparation for confronting and resisting the deceptions of the world. In reality these conceptions are not moral education at all, but moral noneducation. If we wish to educate a person to survive in water over his head, we may, of course, push him in suddenly (the method of immediate immersion) and trust his innate swimmer's intelligence. We can, on the other hand, try to keep him away from the water (the method of ignorant innocence), though we cannot be sure that he may not someday be trapped in a flood or on a sinking vessel. The better way, we think, is to teach him to swim. We will introduce him to the water gradually with someone present to instruct him so that someday he can survive on his own.

Two Special Problems

In order not to leave doubts unanswered, we need to give special attention to the two censorable elements that are most flagrantly prevalent in the modern moral environment and yet that are not absolutely condemned in the Scriptures: erotic and scatological realism. Occurrences of these elements in the Bible suggest two mutually qualifying principles in the divine attitude toward them: (1) the goodness of nature as God created it and (2) the propriety of concealment because of the fall. The human bodily functions are part of the divine creation that God approved and blessed: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Since the fall, the body has shared the corruption of the fallen nature even in redeemed man, and the redemption of the body will be the last step in God's restoration of man to what he has lost. However, it is clear that the human physiology itself and the physical desires created in man by God are not to be despised but to be regarded with respect as part of His handiwork. "I will praise thee," wrote David, "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Ps. 139:14).

Both the procreative and excremental functions are recognized in the Scriptures and are mentioned without any sense of shame. They are, however, regarded as private: in the case of the marriage union, to preserve its meaning to those involved; in the case of the excremental processes, to prevent offense to others. Modern thinking typically supposes, on the one hand, that the goodness of nature justifies the flaunting of nature and, on the other, that the impulse for concealment implies shame. The divine view
combines high respect and secrecy. Upon those parts that fallen nature regards as uncomely--those kept clothed--God, says Paul, has bestowed "more abundant honour" (I Cor. 12:23-24).

**Erotic realism**

Eroticism in the Scriptures is both fervently approved and vehemently condemned. Physical intimacy within marriage is not only tolerated (as in Roman Catholic theology) but also commanded and celebrated (I Cor. 7:3-5; Song of Solomon, passim). Physical intimacy between the sexes outside marriage is fiercely denounced and threatened. "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). The measure of the divine approval of the sexual relationship in marriage is the measure of the divine disapproval of its perversion outside of marriage. Also, in the command to "flee . . . youthful lusts" (II Tim. 2:22; I Cor. 6:18) is a recognition of the power of perverse sexual desire to destroy the spiritual life. "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" asks Solomon (Prov. 6:27-28). Divine wisdom in Proverbs juxtaposes accounts of licit and illicit eroticism with exhortations to enjoy the one and shun the other (chapters 5-7).

The Biblical view of the marriage union is both more idealistic and more realistic than the common view today even among Christians. In both Old and New Testaments, the marriage union images the relationship between God and His people. Christians throughout the ages have seen in the celebration of the physical loveliness of the bride and the fervent desire for physical consummation in the Song of Solomon a picture of Christ's love for His Church. The prophets depict the love of Jehovah for Israel and His grieving over Israel's rebellion in terms of the marriage relationship. Ezekiel represents the broken relationship in strikingly erotic terms (chapters 16 and 23). Spiritual infidelity is represented as harlotry from the prophetic books to the Revelation. The defilement of the temple in Jerusalem by the heathen, a consequence of Jehovah's abandonment of Israel to her lovers, is described as a sexual violation of a once-holy sanctuary (Lam. 1-2). The use of this imagery to express the relationship of God and His people indicates the high value He places upon the marriage union, including the physical experience, and the favor with which He regards those who preserve it undefiled.

But combined with the idealistic perspective of the Scriptures is also the realistic. The Scriptures speak matter-of-factly about the "duty of marriage" (Exod. 21:10), "the natural use of the woman" (Rom. 1:27), and the need to "come together" regularly to avoid the temptation of the devil (I Cor. 7:5). Discussions of marriage today tend to be either idealistic or realistic rather than both. The result tends to be either sentimental or coldly practical. Both the highest idealism and the most practical realism combine in the Biblical view of the marriage union, whose purpose is severalfold: human happiness, the replenishing of the species, and a defense against incontinency. A fourth purpose, often neglected, is to produce "a godly seed" (Mal. 2:15)--in the words of the poet, "Of blessed saints for to increase the count" (Edmund Spenser, _Epithalamion_, I. 423). The function of the erotic in each of these purposes is obvious.

The representation of the erotic in the Scriptures exceeds what in literature would be the tolerance threshold of many moral conservatives but is less obtrusive and graphic than its manifestation in modern literature generally. Its level of explicitness in the Scriptures varies somewhat according to whether the Holy Spirit is depicting virtuous or vicious love, whether (in the case of virtuous love) the perspective is ideal or practical, and whether the eroticism is being rendered metaphorically or is the metaphoric vehicle of another idea--namely, the relationship of God to His people.

In the case of virtuous love in particular, the privacy associated by the Scriptures with the physical union is reflected in a certain tacit with which manifestations of it appear in the sacred text. This privacy, as indicated above, is not because of shame but for the protection and honor of an exclusive relationship. The purpose of figurative expression in the Song of Solomon is both to protect from profanation and to glorify the reality to which it refers. There is frank description to a certain degree and figurative representation thereafter. In its affirming the goodness of the marriage union, this description is the very antithesis of the pornographic in purpose and effect.

As the metaphoric vehicle, rather than what is rendered metaphorically, eroticism appears with greater explicitness, particularly in the prophets' denunciation of Israel's disloyalty to Jehovah. Israel, charged Ezekiel, "doted upon their paramours [the Babylonians], whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses." This Israel did as in "the lewdness of thy youth, in bruising thy teats by the Egyptians for the paps of thy youth" (23:20-21). The loftiness of the ideal of virtuous love in the Song of Solomon permits less explicitness than the searing scorn of Ezekiel toward the profaned relationship of Israel with Jehovah. Idolatrous Israel had nothing left to conceal.

The explicitness of the practical perspective in the Scriptures appears in Paul's commands concerning the physical obligations of the marriage relationship in I Corinthians 7. Paul is straightforward and specific in answering the questions of the Corinthians. The passage is a model of spiritual advice. An even bolder explicitness appears in Paul's discussion of circumcision in Galatians. Angered by the
Judaizers' insistence upon circumcising the Gentiles, Paul exclaims that castration might quickly allay their concerns: "I would they were even cut off which trouble you" (Gal. 5:12).

The Christian turns to the Bible for his standard in evaluating erotic realism in literature. Is the Biblical moral perspective present? Is there an affirmation of the good and the true and a condemnation of the evil and the false? If so, is there also a mutually qualifying idealism and realism in the presentation of the good? Is there a controlled and purposeful explicitness? On this basis the Christian can reject the overwhelming majority of instances of explicit erotic description without condemning those instances, rare as they be, that conform to the practice of Scripture.

**Scatological realism**

Scatological realism, like erotic, is more apparent in the Scriptures than most moral conservatives would find tolerable in literature but less apparent than in much of modern literature. References to excrement or to the excremental functions appear usually in passages implying divine contempt or disgust. Divine indignation appears in the language with which the Lord has the prophet Ahijah address the disguised wife of Jeroboam in I Kings 14:7-10. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.

A similar contempt appears in the Lord's message to the wicked priests through Malachi (2:1-3).

And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.

Paul, comparing the acquired capabilities and credentials which he once valued so highly (and which, by the way, the Lord continued to use after Paul's conversion) to his present concerns and goals, said that he counted them "but dung" that he might "win Christ." He used some of the strongest available language to express contempt for his former values. Expressing God's contempt for Israel's facade of respectability, Isaiah wrote, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (64:6). The reference is to discarded menstrual napkins. To the Laodicean church, the Lord Jesus has John write, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). These and other references assume the obnoxiousness of excrement to civilized man. They also associate moral and spiritual purity with physical cleanliness. To leave human excrement uncovered in the camp of Israel was to offend the sensibilities not only of man but also of Jehovah (Deut. 23:12-14). This offensiveness exists presumably when excremental references gratuitously cover the pages of literature or appear in conversation. Both speaking and writing are social acts liable to moral censure. The most naturalistic of writers have not considered descriptions of urination and defecation necessary, in fiction or nonfiction, to ensure realism. Gratuitous scatological references are quite properly regarded as defilement in verbal communication—all the more so when they are used to degrade and desecrate the pure and noble. By most of today's writers they are not used to portray the vileness of a thing as it appears in the eyes of God.

Should Christians judge acceptable the kind of rough language used by God in the Old Testament in response to Israel's degeneracy? The criteria of gratuitousness, explicitness, and moral tone apply here as elsewhere. Is the occasion analogous to those that elicited this language in the Scriptures? Is the target of the language spiritually and morally detestable to a degree that would be equally disgusting to God and His people and incur a similar rebuke? Is such expression similarly motivated? Will it be similarly received? Are social sensibilities today such that similar expressions will have a similar effect, or will they complicate the impact in a way that will cause confusion? Advanced societies with sanitary conveniences live farther from "nature" than do less well-developed societies and become more fastidious about such matters. The Biblical model together with a sensitivity to social norms will be a sufficient guide for judging instances of this type of the censorable.

These considerations must also control our own practice. Nature, as God created it, is not evil, but neither is concealment, whether for protection of the precious or for accommodation of others' sensitivities. Extreme wickedness merits strong but not reckless language. The believer's speech should
be "seasoned with salt," not salty; it should communicate "alway with grace" (Col. 4:6). The enemies of Jesus tried but failed to "catch him in his words" (Mark 12:13)--words that had keen edge but also graciousness (Luke 4:22). The Biblical standard, today as then, is "sound speech, that cannot be condemned" (Titus 2:8).

Conclusion

The Christian concept and practice of censorship is an outgrowth of the Christian philosophy of education. (See Chapters 1 and 2.) All non-Christian material in the Christian classroom functions to make a Christian point. It is godly to present ungodliness in a Biblical manner, for a Biblical purpose, and to a Biblical effect. It is ungodly to use what might seem the freedom of Scripture as a cloak of licentiousness (cf. I Pet. 2:16). Genuinely Christian teaching, permeated with Scripture and directed by the Spirit of God, remains morally and spiritually well-targeted in its choice and use of materials. It meanwhile does not deny accountability to the trustees, administrators, principals, and parents it serves.

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