

"Censorship"

by Bill Crews

Censorship -- *"the narrow-minded philosophy and practice advocated by a few bigoted religious fanatics who think that they ought to be allowed to protect society by banning or burning any books, magazines, movies, plays, songs, works of art, or TV programs which they perceive to be obscene, dangerous, wrong, immoral or evil and therefore not good for public consumption."* No, I did not find that definition in an English dictionary -- check yours (look up "censorship" and "censor") and you will find most definitions a far cry from the above. I just made up the definition to fit the concept that many of today's authors, writers, reporters, commentators, and educators have tried rather successfully to give to the word.

Let anyone object to the teaching of some subject or course in a school or college, or oppose the showing of certain photographs or paintings in an art museum, or object to the open, public sale of pornographic magazines or films, or speak out against the selection of certain books as school textbooks, and you will hear a host of people cry "censorship," and by implication they will give it the lowest and meanest definition possible. It is supposed to be thought of as such a vile and ridiculous practice that no one in his right mind would want to even come close to anything that smacks of it.

Well I have news for you. It is usually a case of "the pot calling the kettle black" -- those who decry what they call "censorship," who try to destroy by labels with bad connotations, are usually themselves the worst offenders. In their own way they practice a subtle form of censorship. Any newsman who does not objectively report news, who subjectively injects his own philosophies and preferences and prejudices, who distorts, who misrepresents, who misquotes, who does not allow both sides of an issue to be presented or heard, who prefers to give his own version of what he disagrees with, who gives more coverage or space or better exposure to what he agrees with than he does to what he disagrees with, who cannot even be honest and fair and objective in selecting which "letters to the editor" will be run in his newspaper, **is practicing the very kind of censorship he denounces in others.**

Censorship is practiced and necessary in many areas of life. God has a right to be man's censor, and in His word, the Bible, He censors man, and seeks to get man to voluntarily and wisely censor himself. Parents have a right to censor their children. Teachers have a right to censor their students. Officials of civil law have a right to censor citizens. Employers have a right to censor their own employees. **All within reason and with limitations, of course!** Many prisons censor the mail of some of their inmates. In times of war there are military censors going over the mail that is sent from the war zones, and there has to be some censorship of the news media releases. The movie industry is supposed to have a board of censors (now the movies are simply rated or classified -- a few may have scenes cut out or remade), but the rules have changed so much over the years that the public has been conditioned to accept about anything.

A librarian practices a form of censorship in deciding how to use the limited funds available -- by deciding what books to buy and what books not to buy. If donated books can be either accepted or rejected, put in the shelves or stored in the basement (indefinitely), that, too is a form of censorship. If the librarian knows the contents of a book, it would be a rare person indeed who would not allow his or her own sense of values to affect such decisions. Judging by some of the volumes you find in libraries and some that you will never find (lots of books supporting witchcraft and other occult nonsense, but few against it; looks of books favoring the theory of general evolution, but few favoring creation science), I take it that somebody has been definitely censoring. A textbook committee must decide, from the thousands of books available, what few will become school textbooks, and that, too, is a form of censorship. Any principal, administrator or teacher who has the power to decide what books will be required reading for students or what books will be required reading for students or what books will be recommended reading is practicing a form of censorship.

Truth in any realm has nothing to fear or suffer in any atmosphere of free and fair exchange. It isn't censorship, per se, that disturbs me. It is dishonesty; it is partiality; it is prejudice; it is unfairness; it is the use of double standards; it is secret and underhanded suppression; it is distortion; it is misrepresentation. Jesus said of the greatest of all truth: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:32). We must be sure that we always provide an atmosphere in which truth, in any realm, is accessible and available.

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