Catholic Censorship and the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*

Historical Context and Modern-Day Legacies

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INTRODUCTION

It may come as a surprise to many today - to both Catholics and non-Catholics alike - that until relatively recently the Catholic Church published a catalogue or list of books expressly deemed forbidden to its adherents. Though exemptions were technically possible (see Appendix, Figure 2), the books listed in this catalogue were otherwise officially prohibited for the vast majority of baptized Catholics. This text, *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (The Index of Prohibited - or Forbidden - Books), was semi-regularly\(^1\) published from 1559 until 1948 by the Vatican in accordance with various canons (laws) regulating the Church’s official policies on printed literature. As a result of the reforms promulgated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the *Index* and its official mechanisms were officially decommissioned in 1966.

In addition to the catalogue of prohibited book titles were notes on authors whose entire bodies of works, *opera omnia*, were forbidden, among other information. However, in his 1952 primer on the *Index*, Father Redmond A. Burke, then Director of Libraries of DePaul University in Chicago, emphasized that the *Index* “is not and was never designed to be a complete catalogue of forbidden literature…[it] is merely a list of condemned books by the Holy See in response to specific requests submitted by persons throughout the world” (46). As I will discuss in this paper, the distinction between outright condemnation and general disapproval is a nuanced one with many implications for the policies that ultimately had (and may still have) an impact on the Church and, in turn, on the behavior and attitudes of many millions of devout Catholics and their affiliated institutions.

\(^1\) Between 1559 and 1948 the *Index* was published at intervals of, on average, approximately 16 years.
The aim of this paper is to offer an analysis of the phenomenon of book censorship in an institutional and/or political context. The Catholic Church - “not a static organism except in doctrine” (Lee 1958: 2) - is both an institution and, to a certain extent, a polity. Its activities can be seen as particularly illustrative of the complex ways in which censorship is legislated, executed, and adapted over the course of time, “typical of the institutional model wherein a nongovernmental entity uses its influence over members to control access to certain types of knowledge” (Knox 2015: 6). Furthermore, general issues of book and other media censorship as they apply to the present day must necessarily be considered. The principal distinction between the Index and most other forms of codified censorship, however, is the much greater amount of time that has elapsed since official policies first arose in the case of the former. But, if anything, this allows us an amply wide scope that otherwise might not be possible for phenomena of a less ancient legacy.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The historian Sachiko Kusukawa comments that “censorship did not suddenly begin with the Catholic Church in the seventeenth century. Lists of forbidden books could be traced throughout history to the early Christian times” (1999). Certain unauthorized religious works as well as unvetted books of the Bible that were deemed contrary to dogma by the Church fathers, anathema and apocrypha, were regularly condemned and burned in these early years of the Church. It was not until 1469, however, that Pope Innocent VIII called for all books to be censored by local Church authorities (i.e., “ordinaries,” usually bishops) (Marthaler et al. 2003: 390). It is not a coincidence, of course, that the emergence of this formalized censorship
coincides almost exactly with the advent of Gutenberg’s printing press less than twenty years earlier. The spread of Protestantism after 1517, bolstered by the speed and ease of publication that Gutenberg’s press facilitated, would prove a major catalyst for the augmenting and hardening of Church policy on censorship as well. As Maria Luisa Ambrosini notes in her treatise on the Secret Archives of the Vatican, “The Index...was not a new policy, but the updating and implementing of an old one to meet the new danger of Protestantism” (1969: 239). From around this time, then, and even up until the present day in the case of official and some semi-official documents published by the Vatican, the proper protocols and permissions were required for a book to be considered free of doctrinal and moral error in the view of the Church.

The “first general decree of supervisory censorship” was not universally accepted by the Church until May 4, 1515. This was a product of the Fifth Lateran Council under the pontificate of Leo X, which “formed a complete and developed book legislation which remained in force for the next three hundred years” (Burke 1952: 7). In 1559, under Pius IV, the Roman Office of the Inquisition published the first edition of the Index, though there was much here that was still disputed (Lee 1958: 5). From the proceedings of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) emerged the new Index in 1564. The governing body of this project, the Sacred Congregation of the Index, was soon after established in 1571 “to handle all matters concerning the Church control of literature” (Burke 1952: 7). While the mid-eighteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the Index undergo some significant and long-lasting reforms, the Congregation of the Index was not drastically altered in its functions or title until it was re-merged with the Congregation of the Holy Office (the successor to the Roman Office of the Inquisition mentioned above) in 1917. This date also coincides with the publication of a revised edition of the Code of Canon Law.
Una M. Cadegan remarks, “By 1917 Roman Catholicism was into its fifth century of opposition to many elements constitutive of political and cultural modernity in the West, including the individualist orientation and anti-hierarchical critique advanced by Reformation Protestantism…” (2013: 3). Among Protestants, Catholicism’s purported trends towards corruption and repression had been openly criticized since the monk Martin Luther famously posted his “95 Theses” on the door of the castle church of Wittenberg. In 1840, the Anglican Joseph Mendham wrote of “the damnatory and proscriptive provisions of Rome,” which “for her own heterodox and immortal literature, is one of the best weapons put in the hands of her opponents for its exposure and ultimate demolition” (xi). More recently, around 1930, as the publication of the then-latest edition of the Index continued to vex critics of Catholic autocracy, the American Joseph McCabe framed his polemic in widely historical - and sarcastic - terms:

I do not mean that the Index has made no progress since the days when the Popes and cardinals and monks were so rudely disturbed in their prayers and amours by the Lutheran earthquake...The legendary wizard Merlin is no longer represented as an author from whose books we need to be protected by a sage authority. (McCabe 1931: 5).

Despite these calls for its demise, the Index was published once more in 1948. The final condemnation of a work, Jean Steinmann’s La Vie de Jesus, was decreed as late as 1959 (Marthaler et al. 2003: 391).

The latest edition of the The New Catholic Encyclopedia gives a forthright summary of the Index’s demise: “[I]t was considered to be contrary to the teaching of Vatican II concerning freedom of inquiry” (Ibid. 389-90). Thus, as the Church very consciously transitioned from its unapologetically authoritarian role of previous centuries, it has increasingly embraced a tone of reconciliation with the world at large and its multifarious ideas and perspectives while
nevertheless maintaining its claims to orthodoxy. This policy has generally been framed under the Vatican II-era watchword of “pastoralism” (McBrien et al. 1989: 62). Currently, Pope Francis, with his charismatic, outgoing persona and active Twitter accounts in multiple world languages, can be seen as particularly representative of this modernizing shift in the Church’s public policy towards one of benign guidance as opposed to the strict remonstrances of the past.

THE PROCESS

As is the case of all policies of the Catholic Church, the Index was regulated by the Code of Canon Law. At the latest stage of the Index’s existence, the specific canons that regulated the censorship and prohibition of books fell under Volume II, Book Three (“Of Things”), Part Four, Title XXIII (“Of the Censorship and the Prohibition of Books”) of the 1917 code. Specifically, the following fourteen canons under that title were of essence: 1385, 1386, 1391, and 1395-1405 (Woywod 1952, Vol. II: 141-152). An additional canon, 2318 (Vol. II, Book Five, Part Three, Title XI), dictated in no uncertain terms the punishment for any violation of the other fourteen canons: ipso facto excommunication from the Church (Ibid. 514-516). This was equally reserved for any authors, publishers, distributors, sellers, readers, and even keepers of the titles listed on the Index - “those who defend, or knowingly and without the necessary permission read or keep these works or others prohibited by name in Apostolic decrees” (Index Librorum Prohibitorum 1930: xx).

In his foreword to the 1930 English-language edition of the Index, the general tone of the Vatican at that moment in history is elaborated by the Secretary (also known as Prefect) of the Congregation of the Holy Office. Undoubtedly responding to the onslaught of criticism the
Church faced in this regard, Cardinal Merry Del Val defended the ongoing need for censorship: “[It cannot be] affirmed...that the condemnation of evil books represents a violation of liberty, a war against the light of truth, and that the Index of Prohibited Books constitutes a permanent conspiracy against the progress of literature and science” (Ibid. vi). He adds, somewhat abstrusely, “Only those afflicted with that moral pestilence known as liberalism can look on the barriers erected by the legitimate authority against licence in the light of an attack on the free-will of the individual - as though man, inasmuch as he is master of his own actions, were thereby authorised always to do exactly what he wishes” (Ibid. vii). While an English version of the 1948 edition of the Index could not be located by the time of this writing (the foreword in the original appears in Italian with its explications of the pertinent canons in Latin), a comparative glance shows that the patently reactionary sentiments of its author remain entirely unchanged after 18 years (Index Librorum Prohibitorum 1948: v-xii).

Canon 1399 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law details the twelve categories of books that are forbidden. These categories range from unauthorized translations of the Sacred Scriptures from the Latin Vulgate (§1), to books by non-Catholics dealing in any way with religion (unless in total agreement with Catholic dogma; §4), to books that scorn or ridicule the Church or Catholic dogma in any way (§6), to “any images whatsoever of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, of the angels, or of the saints or other servants of God, which are not in harmony with the spirit and the Decrees of the Church” (§12) (Woywod 1951: Vol. II, 152). In total, these twelve canonical proscriptions were the basis of all decisions made regarding the status of any book reported as suspect.
The processes of reviewing texts fell under two separate scenarios: 1.) books submitted by Catholic authors for approval before publication and 2.) books referred to the Church under suspicion of violating dogma in some way. The official permissions of *Imprimi Potest* ("it can be printed," by an ordinary (bishop) for books written by members of religious orders), *Nihil Obstat* ("nothing hindering," by a Church censor), and *Imprimatur* ("may it be printed," by a cardinal) were to be placed at the front of any published work to be considered fully sanctioned by the Catholic Church as free of doctrinal or moral error.

In the first situation, that of pre-publication, any author wishing to receive approval on a work would first submit it to the local Ordinary, usually the bishop of his or her diocese. Burke reviews this first process and cites canons 1384 (explanation of the rationale behind censorship), 1385 (the specification of which classes of works must be examined), and 1393 (the protocol of submitting unpublished works for review) as of particular essence (1952: 9-18). Diocesan examiners, also called Censors of Books (*censores librorum*), were the clergy or laymen responsible for performing examinations on behalf of a diocesan Ordinary (Ibid. 16). If a decision was made in the affirmative, the Ordinary would then proffer his *Imprimatur* and the book could be published. Otherwise, errors could be corrected and the work re-submitted to the examination process. Or the work could be sent to an alternative Ordinary as long as the prior refusal was also mentioned. Despite this due diligence, Burke includes the caveat that a "verdict of diocesan consent is not to be considered as infallible" (Ibid. 18). As in all cases, the Vatican and specifically the pope had the authority to sustain or reverse rulings.

As for those already-published texts referred to the Church under suspicion of doctrinal or moral flaws, the mechanisms in place were no less articulated. They also imply a much closer
collaboration with Church representatives at the level of the Vatican. Canons 1395, 1397, and 1404 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law in particular legislated the protocols for determining whether a book should be condemned to the Index. If we are to continue to follow Father Burke’s assessment, there were a total of ten distinct steps leading up to a condemnation since this process’ reforms by Pope Benedict XIV in 1752 (Cadegan 2013: 96-97): The work was first referred by a concerned cleric or laic to his or her Ordinary. The Ordinary then referred it to consultors (censors) under the cardinals of the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome; two consultors of this “Preparation Congregation” were assigned to study the work. It would then be forwarded on to a subject-specialist expert in the work’s field and the subject-specialist would submit a printed report on his findings back to the Preparation Congregation, including lengthy extracts from the work in question. A discussion would then ensue among all the consultors of the Preparation Congregation based on this report, leading to a condemnation (with which a second subject-specialist must also agree). The facts of the case were then laid before the cardinals of the Congregation of the Holy Office; if he agreed, the pope would decree the condemnation. The author of the condemned work would have the option to submit to the decree and make the necessary changes, but should he refuse, the decree would be published in an Acta Apostolicae Sedis and thus the work would be entered into the register of those to be included on the subsequent edition(s) of the Index Librorum Prohibitorum (Burke 1952: 19-42). As in any hierarchical bureaucracy, so too did the Vatican operate under a well-documented (if highly confidential), codified, and collaborative system of checks and balances, all leading up to a published document, the Index itself, inherently intended to further buttress control over the ideology and behavior of its adherents.
WHY ONE AND NOT ANOTHER? TWO ENTRIES ON THE INDEX

One of the results of the research conducted for this paper was the discovery that there is at present no comprehensive *annotated* bibliography for the contents of *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* at any stage of its existence. While intrepid bibliographers such as Joseph McCabe composed his now-rare treatise, in part, on “the stupidity of the Index” (1931: 5), little has been written about exactly *why* the titles found on any given edition of this text were deemed forbidden in the first place. This is in large part because, as Cadegan explains, “The reasons for a book’s being placed on the Index were never made public, nor were the arguments made in the reports submitted by the consultors” (2013: 109). By nature, the protocols of the Sacred Congregation of the Index - and later of the Congregation of the Holy Office - were clandestine. As is the case of the process of selecting a new pope, these highest-level decisions are to this day made in secrecy and handed down as final and binding.

The question remains, however: Why were certain books placed on the *Index* and not others? Writing in the same era as many others cited in this paper - after the 1917 Code of Canon Law was published but before the reforms of Vatican II were made official in 1966 - the Jesuit priest Harold C. Gardiner defines one important factor in determining the status of books: obscenity. “[Obscenity] consists in the intrinsic tendency or bent of the work to arouse sexual passion, or, to put it more concretely, the motions of the genital apparatus which are preparatory to the complete act of sexual union” (1958: 64). As a rule of thumb, he cites Burke (1952): One full obscene chapter makes an entire book obscene (*Ibid.* 66). This policy is explicitly addressed in Canon 1399: 9, which states the proscription against “books which professedly discuss, describe, or teach impure and obscene topics” (Woywod 1952, Vol II: 151). These more blatant
cases of sexual obscenity must, then, be those exemplified by the condemned works of French authors like Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle) and his lesser-known countrymen Ernest-Aimé Feydeau and Frédéric Soulié, by dint of “all [of their] amorous tales” (omnes fabulae amatoriae in Latin) being listed in the Index. Gustave Flaubert’s novel Madame Bovary was, evidently, condemned in 1864 because it not only dealt with sex but also adultery. Of course, this rationale is not explicitly stated in the published Index and must be inferred by our knowledge of the book’s content. The infamous Giacomo Girolamo Casanova (né Jacques Casanova de Seingalt), too, must have been included in 1834 under the obscenity rule due to the expressly sexual nature of his memoirs. Again, however, the exact process by which any of these titles was proscribed remains unknown until such time that the corresponding documentation emerges.

While most cases of proscription appear to be much more philosophically motivated (e.g., works by Voltaire, Rousseau, Spinoza) than due to sexual or aesthetic considerations, the exact reasons for certain texts being condemned and censored can, at least with a reasonable degree of certainty, be discerned by the process of referring to the specific canons that they appear to violate. I will attempt to demonstrate this reasoning with the two cases below, one by a Protestant author (Erasmus Darwin) and one by a Catholic author (Charles Dellon). All facsimile images are taken from the 1930 edition of the Index, with commentary on the Code of Canon Law by Woywod et al. (1952).

**Darwin, Erasmus:** *Zoonomia or the Laws of Organic Life.* Condemned: 1817. Presumed violation of Canon 1399: §9, “books which professedly discuss, describe or teach impure and obscene topics.”
Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) was an English physician and natural philosopher. He was also the paternal grandfather of the naturalist Charles Darwin. While Erasmus’ *Zoonomia* was condemned as of 1817, none of Charles’ own works was ever included on the *Index*, despite what many might assume as such texts’ conflicting interpretation of the natural cosmos vis à vis Catholic dogma. Regardless, *Zoonomia* is essentially a treatise in search of the kind of unifying scientific theory that the author’s grandson would later elaborate and publish in 1859 with *On the Origin of Species*. With an astounding amount of prescience, Erasmus stated in his book’s introduction, “A theory founded upon nature, that should bind together the scattered facts of medical knowledge, and converge into one point of view the laws of organic life, would thus on many accounts contribute to the interest of society” (1818: viii). It does not come as a surprise, then, that Charles had studied his grandfather’s work before embarking on his own vocation as a naturalist.

A cursory search of the contents of *Zoonomia* yields 25 instances of the word “sex.” Due to this technicality alone, one can imagine why this text may have originally been brought to the attention of the censors of the Congregation of the Index. Since most instances refer to sexuality in the context of zoology and biology in general, modern sensibilities would dictate that a proscription based on such a myopic reading was misguided to say the least. However, a closer reading reveals more incontrovertible causes for it to have been forbidden. Darwin indeed waxes both scientific and philosophical on “irritations,” “pleasurable sensations,” and “exertions” in the context of various species of plants and animals throughout the text. But at least once or twice Darwin specifically refers to the aforementioned “motions of the genital apparatus which are preparatory to the complete act of sexual union” so concretely indicated as verboten by Father
Gardiner (1958: 64). The proof of a violation of canon law is thus self-evident if one is to follow Canon 1399: 9: Darwin writes, “...at the time of procreation the idea of the male organs, and of the female features, are often both excited at the same time, by contact, or by vision” (Darwin 1818: 410). “Obscene” statements such as these were evidently sufficient for censors to deem this particular text forbidden.

**Dellon, Charles: Relation de l’Inquisition de Goa [Dellon’s Account of the Inquisition at Goa].** Condemned: Date not listed. Presumed violation of Canon 1399: §8, “books which declare duels, suicide, or divorce as licit...”

Charles Dellon was a French adventurer who, in the early 1670s, settled in one of the territories under Portuguese rule on the west coast of India (Damão, north of modern-day Mumbai). As a result of both cross-cultural incompetence and an unfortunate misunderstanding with the local Portuguese governor, he was reported as a heretic by several colonists to local agents of the Inquisition. Before being sent to the the Holy Office of the Inquisition at Goa, he was first imprisoned in a “noisome and dark dungeon” (Dellon 1812: 27) for four months. Through the help of friends and well-wishers he managed to survive these extremely inhumane and unsanitary conditions. Nevertheless, he was later to undergo further suffering in the form of more time in vermin-infested prisons in transit to Goa and then, after his initial interrogation, solitary confinement as he awaited his fate at the hands of the territory’s Grand Inquisitor. Throughout this ordeal, a very possible outcome for Dellon - one of which he was acutely aware - was to be publicly burned at the stake at the Inquisition’s most infamous procedure, an Act of Faith (*auto-da-fé*).
Charles Dellon was incarcerated, repeatedly interrogated, and threatened with execution under the Holy Office of the Inquisition at Goa for almost four years before managing, incredibly, to be released. He then returned to France and, several years later, wrote the account of his ordeal. Despite the magnanimity he offers to his persecutors - “It is...the abuse only, of which I complain” (Ibid. 2) - his text was nevertheless condemned by the Index. It is possible that the nature of this book as an exposé of gross injustice committed by the Church was enough to incur a proscription, but this would be mere conjecture. Referring back to Canon 1399, one supposes that the official ruling may have been more related to the following explicit passages: “I attempted to put an end to my existence by fasting” (Ibid. 76); “I had not forgotten that self-destruction is prohibited, and had not any intention to rush into eternal ruin; but I had no wish to live, and so much desire to die, that my reason was disturbed” (80); and, “Being rendered quite desperate, I pierced both arms, until I fainted from weakness, and fell on the floor in my blood, which flowed into every part of the room; and assuredly, if the special providence of God had not caused my door to be opened...I should have miserably lost my life and soul” (84). Regardless of how Dellon’s narrative paints a horrendous picture of the harshness of the Inquisition, so many mentions of suicide in any context must have rendered the decision to proscribe this particular text a foregone conclusion.

CHURCH CENSORSHIP POLICIES, POST-1966 AND TODAY

Considering the great preponderance of not only printed books but also all of the other forms of media already or yet-to-be disseminated since 1966 (or, more technically, since 1983, when a revised edition of the Code of Canon Law was last published), what, officially speaking or
otherwise, are modern Catholics to do to keep abreast of the Church’s positions on the relative moral quality of any written or other media content? Is the Index an entirely obsolete document or does it live on in some way? What does the current Code of Canon Law say about these issues?

After all of the documents of the Second Vatican Council were released to the world in 1966, Father Conrad De Vito summarized them in a small book for English-speaking Catholics. On the *Decree on the Means of Social Communication* (first promulgated on December 4, 1963), he remarked, “Catholics must promote good publications, and help in every way the apostolate of the press, produce and spread good literature, remove from circulation bad literature, and help in forming good public opinion in the matter” (1966: 20). This serves as a preview of the much less heavy-handed sentiments on these issues that were to be integrated into the new Code of Canon Law. Once the Vatican had finally succeeded in fully revising and publishing this by early 1983, the canons regulating literary and media censorship, 822 to 832, maintained some of the elements of the corresponding 1917 canons while also removing much of the more punitive language of that earlier edition. Most importantly, however, is the omission of the contents of the 1917 Code’s Canon 1399 and its twelve sections on “bad” classes of books. Instead, the new eleven canons dealing with “books in particular” can be summarized quite simply as follows: published texts on religion or theology, particularly works on the Bible, should be Church-approved. Assumedly, the pre-publication process listed above still stands towards this end and the post-publication process has been abolished *ipso facto* along with the Index itself.

Walsh offers a comprehensive review of the Catholic Church’s policies on censorship of newer media, particularly covering the phenomenon of the rise of motion pictures and their
complex role in American society. By the 1920s there was a concerted effort among Catholic watchdog groups such as the Legion of Decency, the National Catholic Welfare Conference (and its newspaper The Bulletin), the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, and others to censor films deemed inappropriate for Catholics. Their aims were also to “stimulate the studios to reform” (1996: 2, 11, 30-33). The Catholic News Service (CNS), founded in 1920 by the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops, “is the primary source of national and world news that appears in the U.S. Catholic press. It is also a leading source of news for Catholic print and broadcast media throughout the world” (2015). Today it is perhaps best known for its reviews of feature-length films.

At present, the Catholic News Service classifies motion pictures as follows:

- A-I: acceptable for general patronage;
- A-II: acceptable for adults and adolescents;
- A-III: for adults only;
- A-IV: for adults only, with reservations (this indicates films that, while not morally offensive in themselves, are not for casual viewing because they require some analysis and explanation in order to avoid false impressions and interpretations);
- L: for limited adult audiences only; films whose problematic content many adults would find troubling (replaced A-IV classification Nov. 1, 2003);
- O: morally offensive.

Of the fifteen most recent films reviewed on the site, two are rated A-I (1 rated G; 1 PG), four A-II (3 PG; 1 not rated), six A-III (3 PG; 1 R), zero for either A-IV or L, and three O (all rated R). We can see that there is a rough correspondence between the CNS ratings and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings, but it is by no means exact. All of the films rated O by the CNS contain at least some element of sexuality, although issues of general moral turpitude in a film’s plot seem to be the strongest hermeneutic, as seen in this recent review by
Kurt Jensen of the film *The D Train*: “[It] is presumably intended to be a droll comedy about the pursuit of fame and the vagaries of sexual experimentation. What it amounts to instead is a consistently cynical, occasionally depraved exercise in strained humor” (2015). How this judgment compares to those of other, non-Catholic reviewers is obviously a matter of each one’s subjective tastes and personal and/or professional moral guidelines. But the CNS, as an entity ostensibly sanctioned by the Catholic Church itself, is clearly within its rights to decree definitively on matters of faith and morals for the practical application of Catholic moviegoers.

CNS does not provide any reviews of books.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In an article dated May 11, 1966, *The Christian Century* reported,

> The practical problems of maintaining a centrally governed Index of Forbidden Books have been made insuperable by the sheer bulk of printed material in our time. In addition the Roman Catholic Church tried earnestly in Vatican Council II to come abreast of the modern world in an openness to all knowledge and in its recognition of the increasing maturity and sophistication of Roman Catholic laymen. Censorship will of course continue in a few of the church's national episcopal conferences and, according to Cardinal Ottaviani, communist publications are automatically proscribed by canon law. This leaves Roman Catholics who want complete freedom to know much to rejoice about and much to hope for. (608-609).

In this year, 1966, the Congregation of the Holy Office was also renamed the Congregation of Doctrine of the Faith (Marthaler et al. 2003: 391), which it remains to this day. While this marks a clear milestone of how the Church would proceed in matters of literary censorship, these new policies would not be written into the Code of Canon Law until its next edition was published almost 17 years later, on January 25th, 1983. These revisions had been called for prior to Vatican II in 1959 by Pope John XXIII. In his foreword to this latest edition - for the first time published
simultaneously in English translation from the Latin - Pope John Paul II comments, “This mark of collegiality by which the process of this Code’s origin was prominently characterised, is entirely in harmony with the teaching authority and the nature of the Second Vatican Council” (xii). In this spirit of modern reform, it is of considerable note that the number of canons, in total, was reduced from the 2,414 of the 1917 edition to 1,752 in 1983.

Whether the Catholic Church has acknowledged it directly or more circuitously via the watchword of “pastoralism,” it has at least partially caught up with the sweeping tide of egalitarian reform throughout the West over the last one-hundred years or so. Even such an ancient, conservative institution now agrees, it seems, through its administrative actions and legislation, that it is wiser to leave many of the finer details of practice up to its adherents themselves, including those related to what they should and should not read. As Kugelmann notes, “All kinds of gatekeepers say imprimi potest, it can be printed: publishers, governments, religious institutions, peer reviewers of professional journals. The work of the gatekeepers is censorship. Censors strive variously to maintain a truth, an orthodoxy, a morality, the boundaries of a profession” (2014: 74-75). The Church may likely never allow for its dogma to be compromised, especially in regards to controversial issues such as homosexuality, abortion, and contraception. But in light of the the ever-expanding flood of information that defines much of modern life, it has learned to pick its battles and thus has shifted to a much more pragmatic role as spiritual guide and sanctuary to the estimated 1.2 billion people who identify as Catholics (BBC 2013).
APPENDIX

Figure 1. Chronological graph of number of books banned by the Index, 1600-1949 (Burke 1952: 52).

Figure 2. Two examples of permission forms necessary to officially read books prohibited by the Index (Ibid. 70-71).
The following are typical forms used today in requesting permission to read forbidden books:

Form I

The undersigned respectfully requests permission for the reading of certain books which have been specifically forbidden in the Index or which in their class come under the general provisions of the Index. The requirement is based on the following:

The undersigned feels that the proposed use of this forbidden literature may be made by him without undermining his faith or any interference with his conscientious duty to the Catholic Church.

(Signature of Applicant)

Form II

I request permission to read and to keep the following forbidden books.

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I promise to read and keep these forbidden books only where there is true necessity. I likewise promise that none will fall into the hands of others. I shall avoid all occasions of scandal in my study of these works.

These above-mentioned books or periodicals which I am to use do not, as far as I know, explicitly incite to heresy or schism, nor do they attempt to undermine the foundations of religion and are neither explicitly immoral or obscene.

This permission is requested on the following grounds:
(Cite one.)
1. For teaching ( Mention subject field and educational institution.)
2. For a special talk or paper ( Mention the specific occasion.)
3. For editorial work.
4. For advanced studies as a scholar.
5. For fulfillment of one's position as the librarian of the institution.
6. For civic evaluation either as a judge or as a legal consultant.
7. For safeguarding the Catholic religion in secular circles.
8. 

Respectfully submitted,

(Signature of applicant)
WORKS CITED


