

“Nothing hinders:” A Crossroads of Catholicism & Professional Values

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Introduction

The idea that “nothing hinders” the publication, dissemination, or accessibility of information is a core, though sometimes controversial, value of librarianship represented by the term “intellectual freedom.” Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has used this same phrase, albeit in Latin as “nihil obstat,” to formally grant permission to Catholic authors publishing Catholic works. The phrase, when viewed in the context of intellectual freedom, is contradictory: an author needs permission from church officials so that nothing may hinder the publication of his or her work. Permissions from the Church are required before publishing a material in order to ensure the quality of the content before disseminating it to the general public, including the Catholic faithful.

This poster seeks to provide an overview of intellectual freedom as an inherent value of librarianship, the history of and religious values associated with Catholic censorship and publication practices, and the juxtaposition of these two perspectives, raising the broader question: How do personally held religious values align with or contradict the professional values of librarianship?

Definitions

Intellectual freedom (IF): James LaRue (2007) defines IF as “the belief in the fundamental dignity of individual inquiry and the right to exercise it” (p. 4). Library patrons have the right to actively explore information.

Censorship: The American Library Association’s (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom (2010) defines censorship as “not only the deletion or excision of parts of published materials but also efforts to ban, prohibit, suppress, proscribe, remove, label, or restrict materials” (p. 13). Censorship is a method used to inhibit intellectual freedom.

Catholic Values: “Lead us not into temptation...”

- **Printed words can harm: The soul, faith, and morals must be protected!**

The *Code of Canon Law* (1983), a source that codifies values for religious and lay Catholics worldwide, states:

“In order to safeguard the integrity of faith and morals, pastors of the Church have the duty and the right to ensure that in writings or in the use of the means of social communication there should be no ill effect on the faith and morals of Christ’s faithful.” (Can. 823 § 1, p. 149)

- **“The Church must state the truth clearly and unmistakably”** (Betten, 1932, p. 28)

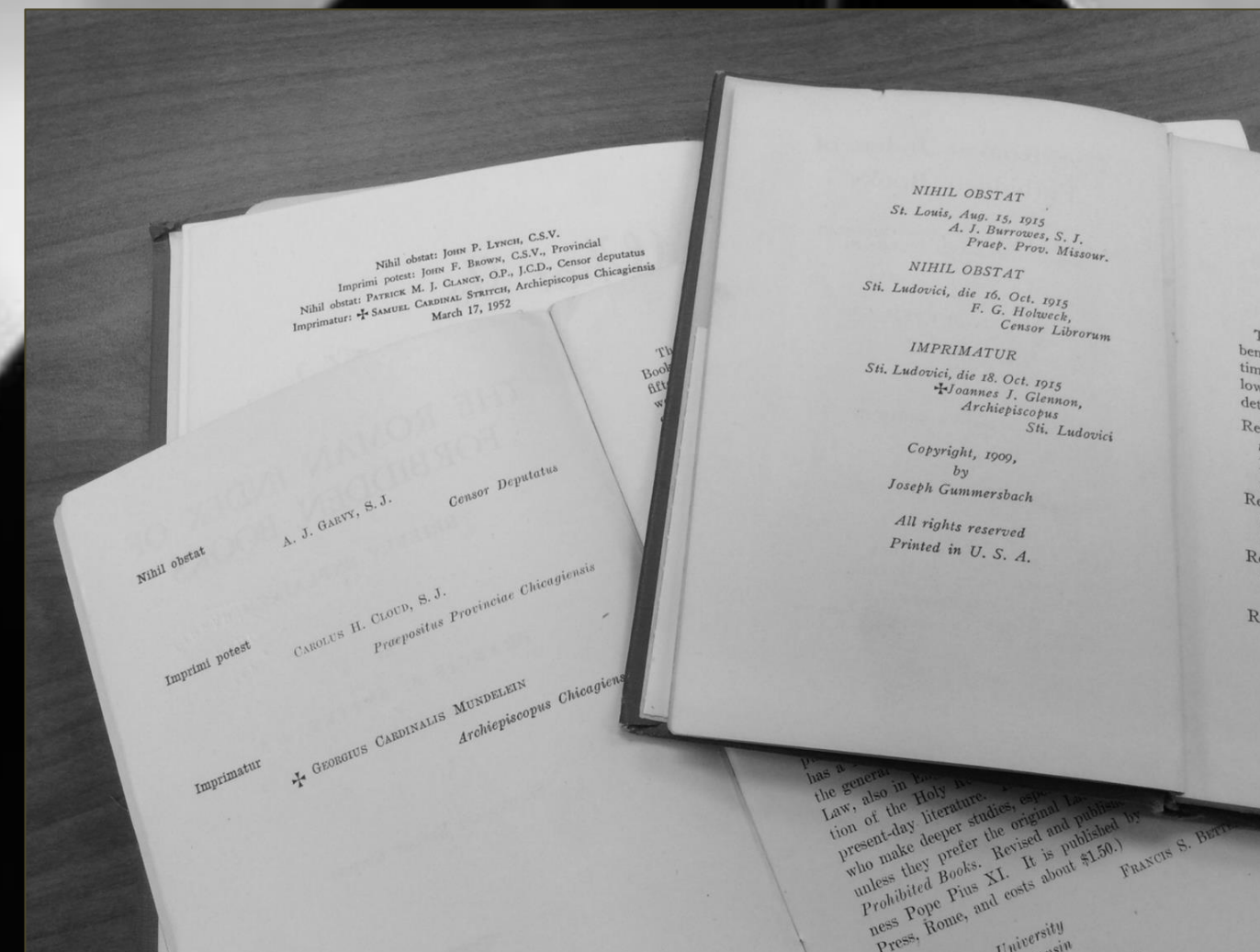
Controlling the publication and dissemination of information about the faith is a method of communicating the Truth.

- **Loyalty and obedience to Christ and to the Church**

It is the natural duty of Catholics to listen to God and His representation through Church leadership, adhere to the laws of the Church, and to act on their own request in the phrase “Lead us not into temptation” in the Our Father.

Index librorum prohibitorum

The *Index of Forbidden Books* was a list of prohibited titles and classes of books first published in 1559 and, through various revisions, remained a living document under the purview of Church authority until its abrogation in 1966. Catholic readers who knowingly read a prohibited book committed a mortal sin (Burke, 1952; Betten, 1932).



Publication Permissions

Individual texts by Catholic authors treating specific classes of works, including books on theology & religious instruction, must be submitted for ecclesiastical approval *before* being printed. Some books, such as editions of the Bible, are automatically prohibited *unless* they receive the approval of Church authorities.

Past Research

In 1977, Sister Maureen Kehoe, SCL conducted a research study “to determine the attitudes of members of the Midwest Unit of Catholic Library Association (CLA) toward intellectual freedom and censorship” (p. 3). Kehoe sought to understand whether CLA member attitudes aligned with those represented through ALA. To do this, she sent out questionnaires to members of the Midwest Unit of the CLA. Kehoe (1977) concluded that most participants “agreed with the basic principle to include in libraries materials on all sides of controversial issues...” (p. 3). Likewise, the majority of participants agreed that materials should not be “removed from libraries because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval” (p. 138).

Future Research

Based on the long history of Catholic censorship, legislation in the Code of Canon Law, and the fact that 34.1% of American Roman Catholics think that “there is a natural conflict between ‘being a devout religious person and living in modern society’” (Association of Religion Data Archive, 2015), it is worth investigating how modern librarians who are Catholic and/or who are working in Catholic libraries balance their religious and professional values.

My goal is to study members of the entire Catholic Library Association (CLA) in order to ascertain how personal religious values of members of CLA align with or contradict contemporary professional values promoted by ALA. This topic should also be studied on a larger scale. To achieve this end, I plan to survey members of the American Theological Library Association (ATLA), representing a diverse number of faiths and employment situations across all types of libraries (eg. seminary, public universities). The data which I collect from ATLA members will later be compared to future data that I intend to collect about the personally held religious values and the professional values of ALA members.

Librarianship Values: "Openness should be our goal" (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2015, p. 7)

- **Protect patron access to information**

The *Library Bill of Rights* charges librarians to “provide materials and information” regardless of “partisan or doctrinal disapproval” (ALA, 1996). *The Freedom to Read Statement* (ALA, 2004) advocates for patrons stating: “It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people’s freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom...”

- **Beyond bias**

In addition to overcoming external disapproval, librarians must overcome personal conflicts. The *Code of Ethics of the American Library Association* (ALA, 2008) states: “We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.”

55 CE: Book burning of superstitious books at Ephesus under the supervision of St. Paul

496 CE: Pope Gelasius identifies the true books of the Bible inspired by God and forbids the reading of the heretical and apocryphal books

1520 CE: Condemnation and prohibition of the writings of Martin Luther

1559 CE: The first Roman *Index of Forbidden Books* issued by Pope Paul IV

1885 CE: Encyclical *Immortal Dei* issued by Pope Leo XIII stating that “The Church of Christ is the true and sole teacher of virtue and the guardian of morals.”

1938 CE: National Organization for Decent Literature established by the Catholic Bishops of the United States

1953 CE: *The Freedom to Read Statement* drafted and adopted by the Council of the American Library Association

325 CE: Council of Nicea condemns the use of the book *Thalia* by the heretic Arius

c. 1440 CE: Invention of the printing press

1542 CE: Sacrum Officium (the Holy Office) established. This entity drew up the initial list of forbidden books.

1753 CE: *Sollicita ac provida* bull issued by Pope Benedict XIV outlining how publications will be considered for inclusion in the *Index*

1930 CE: “The Suggested Code of Ethics” was developed by an ALA Council

1939 CE: ALA’s adoption of the *Library Bill of Rights*

1966 CE: Dissolution of the *Index*. Though the moral force of the *Index* remained, it no longer had the force of ecclesiastical law.

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