

# THE DEFENSE OF MAN

• William F. Lynch •

“While it is surely not its business to discuss the ‘immediately moral’ in terms of case-book decisions, the whole business of art, where it is truly such, is in a sense more truly moral than morality itself when conceived in this traditional sense.”

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The intention of this book<sup>1</sup> has been to affirm that the state of the mass media, especially of the cinema and TV industries, is of essential importance to the life of this nation, and that it involves not only its personal but its final political good; I have been pleading for a collaborative act of positive intervention on the part of critics, artists, and speculative theologians, each of whom would ideally have some competent inward knowledge of the trade of the other; I have been especially concerned to push the proposition that if we restrict our discussions and our work to the immediately moral and to the question of censorship, we shall continue to make little progress with the infinitely more important issue of the total state of the human sensibility in our civilization; thus confronting each other in a negative situation, the forces of theology and art will never be able to muster a common act of the intelligence and of competency, and will be

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continually surrendering the field to the autonomous economies of the great commercial interests who too often and too piously declare that they have a right to please people.

### 1. *The role of the censor*

Censorship and some forms of immediately moral criticism will always be to some degree necessary. But the chief preoccupation of the religious thinker must not be to oversee the work of the artist from the outside of the picture, thus regarding him always as a potential enemy; rather it must be—somehow or other, according to the techniques differently pertinent to the work of artist and theologian—to find ways of collaborating towards a common goal which is nothing less than the building of the full reality of man. Thus put, this goal is a generalization; but I have tried to concretize it in the previous chapters and I shall return to it.

Actually, as we have said, the tasks of the censor and the moral theologian, exercised within their proper limits, will not only not suffer but will be the gainers to a very decisive degree if they come increasingly to be contained within the positive and creative environment we have been talking about. The negative, however necessary, becomes finally nothing but a source of irritation wherever we get the impression that it is the whole of life. On the other hand it is validated, accepted, and understood if it is seen in its proper limited place. It does not unceasingly have to be defending itself if it does not occupy the whole scene.

Nor should the censor or the moral thinker, as he becomes aware more and more of the necessity for the creation of a positive environment as a vestment for his own tasks, suddenly decide that the creation of such an environment is his task. We have agreed earlier that civilization is wonderfully helped when all its different trades stick to their own lasts. Nobody is particularly helped when the baker takes up the tasks of the shoemaker. Plato in *The Republic* was the first to enunciate this cardinal principle for the common good, and it was a principle worth perpetuating. The speculative and the creative theologian knows very well that he may not be very good at solving professional moral problems. But it holds true with equal force that the moral thinker should not take up the task of the positive and the creative. It is necessary to recognize that the censor or the immediately

moral mind works in highly definite and schematized ways which are not the ways of the positive-creative. Each has to locate precise things, situations, and moments that are objectionable; they work by naming, by labeling, by classifying, they compose lists. They may be called an *agency*, and indeed an agency is necessary for the accomplishment of this necessary task. But the word can only be used in the broadest kind of sense, if at all, when we want to describe the forces in society which must finally be responsible for the creation of beauty in the arts, and that goes for the mass media. These forces are located anywhere and everywhere and cannot be pinned down.

There is no difficulty in understanding the Bishops of the United States when they declare that the Legion of Decency and the National Organization for Decency in Literature are the elected agencies of the Church for the accomplishment of a determinate moral task; the Holy Spirit may very well accomplish such tasks through such agencies. And it is altogether true that, wherever their job is well done, they can indirectly assist the creative spirit of a nation. But it is much too convenient for the rest of us to think that the Holy Spirit has ever operated, or will now operate, in the same way for the creation of a really human world of beauty and sensibility: this has never come from anything less than thousands of indeterminate forces.

If we establish a definite group for this purpose, then the rest of us can sit back in complete comfort, knowing that a task has been "assigned" and that we can now evade all the agonies, minor and major, which have always been involved in creative work. No, it has never happened thus and it never will. We have no right to expect that some solution of this wider problem will be conveniently handed to us by fiat from above or by the constitution of a single agency which will handle the matter. All the same, those who rule the Church can help enormously by providing encouragement and sympathy and a willingness to overlook occasional errors over a longer period of time. But during that time the work must be done by the thousand forces we have mentioned: in a sense it will involve the educational development of every one of us; in particular it will involve the individual artistic temperaments who live in the Church, the positive critical mentality which has competence in these matters, the lonely and often isolated maker of poems and images of all kinds.

I cannot but think that in a highly special way the situation will call for a much more thoughtful and creative interest in the culture of the nation on the part of the universities than they have been thus far

willing to display. The universities are not the authoritative forces of the Church, they have not that divine authority which resides in the Episcopacy; but for the creation of the orders of thinking and sensibility they should always be among the prime executive forces of the Church. And if they here begin to take up a task which is perfectly proper to them (they have no right to restrict their work in an over-formal way to the classroom), they will be accomplishing a double good. As a solid phalanx of competent talent and judgment, they will make less necessary the intervention of authority in a positive task whose nature and dimensions forbid that it be executed by authority; they would also make less necessary the intervention onto the scene of a horde of amateur talent indulging in a "campaign" for which they have not the equipment.

But what I have said of the absurdity of expecting that either bishops or agencies solve these broad situations by fiat applies in somewhat the same sense to university and similar situations. We should not expect that the administrative forces of our universities solve our difficult cultural problems from above by fiat, though they may be responsible at critical moments for the supplying of the necessary environment of resources, equipment, and encouragement for study and creative activity. But they will be able to do only so much, and even to that they will have be pushed by their own intellectuals, whether among faculty or students. This surely means that an increasing group of intellectuals and generally competent people must give up what I cannot but interpret as a form of snobbishness in the face of the problems of popular culture and the mass media. In all justice to the directors of the Legion of Decency, whose work is the inevitable object of so much criticism, I have found them unfailingly courteous in the discussion of our present question and insistently concerned for the need of the creation of a positive environment for their own work; but I hesitate to say quite the same thing for university staffs. In my own visits to some dozen colleges and universities, Catholic and non-Catholic, I wish I had been able to detect any positive enthusiasm among them in the interests of this great national task.

This is also probably true of the artists and theologians, who are very apt to neglect the critical importance of this situation. It has sometimes occurred to me that all of these competent groups, like the rest of us, incline, without always being consciously aware of it, to be overwhelmed by the size of the mass media problem, as they are with

the size of the whole technological world within which, for better or worse, we must all live. Faced with such magnitudes I think they are altogether too apt to underestimate their own power. They do not realize what power they have when they speak out, especially when they give indications that they know whereof they speak. But once again, how can they exercise power or influence if they are always engaged in some kind of civil conflict with each other? If the theologians keep harboring some fear of art, and if art out of fear keeps fighting for some false autonomy over against every religious force, then they so weaken each other that the mass media need pay no particular attention to either, even to their most positive cries. They will have been taken care of by each other, and it will need no external enemy of both to reduce their cries to impotence. So that I am crying throughout this book for their collaboration and for a mutual understanding between them.

## *2. Art and morality*

I think this understanding will be helped if each makes an examination of conscience, if each, artist and theologian, examines with the greatest scrupulosity his views about the other's task in civilization. Our earlier chapters have been a kind of examination of conscience in this direction. I should like to review these earlier thoughts again, with some elaborations that properly proceed from the precise point of discussion at which we have arrived.

I begin with the view I conceive the religious mentality should have of the fundamental task of the artist in civilization. Let me only add at the moment (though we should discuss the matter later) that wherever this mentality fails of correctness in this area, I feel that it is at least partially because of its American environment, an environment which has often shown itself deficient in adjusting itself to the arts and the life of the intelligence.

The first necessity that the religious mentality, on its part, must face, is that of removing from itself every exotic and non-human notion it has of the nature of art. If art is basically an exotic and non-human thing, if it is always potentially a beast that is beautiful but in danger of breaking out of its proper confines, then we already have a definition of it and a vocabulary about it which creates an almost insoluble problem so far as essential collaboration goes. If we accept

this understanding of the matter, then we have created a situation where censorship is not an accidental necessity but is of the essence of the religious mind over against the artist. We will have decided that the very nature of the theological interest in art is some kind of guardianship and that the very nature of art is to be something that must be guarded against. That this is certainly not the truth has been the main substance of all our previous chapters. We have said before that if you accept a false vocabulary you accept a solution for a problem before ever looking into it. This I think we have frequently done in the case of art and morality.

I have suggested before that, while it is surely not its business to discuss the "immediately moral" in terms of case-book decisions about divorce, sex, stealing, suicide, and so forth, yet the whole business of art, where it is truly such, is in a sense more truly moral than morality itself when conceived in this traditional sense. Where it is really art, it is its own censor and the truest censor of what is truly human; it therefore need never be on the defensive against morality and should expect an act of collaboration from the latter, because the goals of the two are the same even though their techniques are so different. The artist is perpetually irritated by the reverse understanding of his work. He continually observes the religious mentality protesting against a particular moment in his art (in which, as a matter of fact, that mentality may be quite correct): but in the next moment he sometimes observes the religious man accepting a music and a set of images which are incredibly vacuous and a real offense to the artist's understanding of man and of reality. The theological intelligence, concerned with the movement of the souls of real men, must not take the position that it is against divorce but has nothing to say against crooning. The theologian cannot excuse this double situation by saying that the two matters are incomparable, that one is a matter of morality and the soul's stance before God for life or death, and that the other is a mere matter of taste. What works one way must work two ways. If we propose to judge the artist, and indeed he often very much needs it, then we must remember that he is very often judging us, and on the very same level of judgment, that of the nature of reality.

Let us stay a little longer with this vocabulary which deals with the relations between art and morality. We are headed for trouble if we do not get our fundamental vocabulary straight, and in this case the issues are not simple. If we say that art is art and morality is morality, and that these are two altogether different acts and activities of the

human soul, then it seems to me that the state, the censor, and, in his order of activity, the moral theologian, must be perpetually on their guard against the obvious fascinations and powers of art, lest art violate that moral order, whether social or personal, which is thus conceived as external to but threatened by art. We will be saying that, so far as final human values are concerned, art cannot take care of itself, that as a matter of fact it is not even interested. The trouble with an over-sharp distinction, such as this one between art and morality, is that it sometimes creates more trouble than the distinction is worth; and for the sake of guarding a limited philosophical point it blinds us to the marvelous way in which things are in reality intertwined.

Despite my admiration for the great substance of his work, this is one of my concerns about the perpetual distinction which M. Maritain makes around the matter of our present discussion. I think he would want his opinions thrown into the boiling pot of debate with many others, and that nothing would be less congenial to him than to think that certain limited expressions of his views on the relation of art and morality had been somewhat canonized in Catholic circles. I would therefore like to challenge, if not their substance, at least the occasional use to which they have been put. There are, for example, many things with which I agree in the following example of Maritain's classical distinction, but I find it hard to accept it as a total and satisfactory description of art or the artist:

[I]n contradiction to prudence, which is also a perfection of the practical intellect, art is concerned with the good of the work, not with the good of man. The ancients took pleasure in laying stress on this difference, in their thoroughgoing comparison of art and prudence. If only he contrives a good piece of woodwork or jewel-work, the fact of a craftsman being spiteful or debauched is immaterial, just as it is immaterial for a geometer to be a jealous or wicked man, if only his demonstrations provide us with geometrical truth. As Thomas Aquinas put it, art, in this respect, resembles the virtues of the speculative intellect: it causes man to act in a right way, not with regard to the use of man's own free will, but with regard to the rightness of a particular operating power. The good that art pursues is not the good of the human will but the good of the very artefact. Thus, art does not require, as a necessary precondition, that the will or the appetite should be undeviating with respect to its own—human or moral—ends and dynamism, or in the line of

human destiny. Oscar Wilde was but a good Thomist when he wrote: "The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose."<sup>2</sup>

There is fundamentally nothing wrong with such a view of art as this. The trouble with it, as with all our views in these areas, is not that it is incorrect but that it is a temporal and partial understanding of the issue at stake, as indeed my own is. It has served a heroic purpose in winning a separate respect for art and poetry when both badly needed it: there is some truth in this distinction between art and morality, and it was necessary to speak this truth in unequivocal terms. For art is much more than the ordinary everyday act of morality. It is a highly professional act which makes severe demands on a particular form of the professional intelligence and which has always been held in high honor by human civilization. It demands great sacrifice and a rigorous asceticism. It can be ruthless with itself in demanding perfection and beauty, so much so that it will let nothing interfere with that demand and quest. The way a dancer or pianist works at his or her task might well put us all to shame. Certainly every such rigor and asceticism can lead to trouble, for it is not infallible; or else at times it goes further in its act of sensibility than we are prepared for. Every such rigor is a high form of seriousness, and we, who do not like to be overserious about anything, build up various defenses against it.

One of these defenses is to think that, not accidentally but of its essence, art has nothing to do with human morality and can always turn into a beast dangerous to me and to society. Surely it can, but my point is that this must not be our governing principle about it. The plain fact is that anything can become in us or for us a bestial force. Even "morality" can take this kind of turn. It can become ruthless if cut off from Christianity, if it lives without any sense of equity or charity. Even with theology the same thing can happen, if theology separates itself from the natural order and the order of common sense, as we see it do in the case of some single overriding religious preoccupation. And of course art and beauty have to work so hard at technique that they can lay themselves open to the surface charge—but only the surface charge—that, come the test, they will not be blocked by anything human or divine.

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<sup>2</sup>Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 50–51.



This general view of the matter is, therefore, based on the philosophic doctrine of a dichotomy between art and morality. If taken too literally and too absolutely, it creates the ground for all kinds of "political" and tactical oppositions between the two, but can never establish the basis for a true collaborative act between art and theology.

If, on the other hand, we gallop off without sufficient thought in the other direction and proclaim some kind of immediate moral function for our artists, the results may be just as unfortunate. We will be pushing on them a task which they simply will not accept; indeed, such a suggested vocation will be nothing but a source of profound irritation for them, not because they are not interested in the "salvation of the soul" in the widest sense of that phrase, but because their interest will have to be in their terms and according to their competencies, as is true of every professional gift. By the same token, if the moralists do push the artist toward some quick moral direction, they too will finally become irritated because the artist will have "invaded" their work, where he will be bound to do a poor and confused job, as indeed everybody does when he is out of his own field. Therefore we should not expect art to preach, to prove, to argue, to convince, to present formulas for right action, to be making explicit moral statements, to be solving moral cases.

So far, then, we are in a position where we are rejecting two possible understandings of the work of the artist. We refuse to accept the complete dichotomy between art and morality and, secondly, we should see that it is foolish to go to the other extreme of handing over to the artist the role in civilization of the moral theologian. Is there a third and satisfactory explanation of the artist's task and life which will avoid taking away from him one single iota of his unique professionalism and will at the same time succeed in locating him within the completely human? I think that such a position is and always has been there, and I repeat that it is of such character as to leave endless fields of collaboration open between artist and creative theologian.

For what the artist is essentially interested in is the expression, involving judgments but in the most visible and concrete terms, of the total life and movement of the soul as it engages with the reality of each current moment of history. I do not think it too much to say that indeed the artist wishes to "save" that soul in the sense that he wishes to keep its various acts of sensibility straight and real and ever moving with a freedom that really belongs to the children of God.

He searches for the rhythmic and spontaneous movements that will accomplish the freedom of the soul, for it is not a set of false or cheap eternities or seductions that will win to this great objective. He discovers the human in a thousand corners and is the revealer of the non-human for what it is. It is by the inner light of his organisms that he lights up fantasy as fantasy and reality as reality, and reaches all his power by finding and following the lines of the latter. Therefore his work is a human act in the highest and the fullest sense of the term.

There was undoubtedly a generation when we had to defend the autonomy of art and the artefact, to defend its right to be itself over against every other kind of human performance. In certain circles, especially among the absolute "moralists," this is still necessary. But I think the more overwhelming necessity of these years is not to defend the autonomy of the artefact and the right it has to its own act of self-possession, its own *prise de conscience*, but to recall to ourselves its high human status and relation to reality. A master like Maritain has a right to his vocabulary, because we can always trust him to the hilt; but there are others who use similar phrases and thereby make of art a precious isolated thing, a preciousness, an act of inexplicable freedom, as ready for the axe as for high beauty. They talk as though the creativity of art were endlessly removed from the creativity of life itself. But it is not.

If on the one hand the theologian could more often see that this is so and could become interested in a theological study of creativity, if too, on the other hand, the artist could be helped to see that theology, truly conceived and truly interested in the creative possibilities of art and history, is his strongest point of support in society, then they might together begin to make uncomfortable the "villain" in the middle, the commercial forces of the mass media.

### *3. Artist and theologian*

A theology of creativity. That would be a great goal, to be accomplished only by the united efforts of many minds who would be willing to admit that the problem is crucial and who would be willing to pay the price of making themselves substantially competent in the worlds of both theology and art. There are those among us who will surely say that the net result would be neither professional theology nor professional art, and this may be true, though I am not quite sure that I should admit so much in advance. My real feeling is that this is

a purely technical question which tends to hide the very important fact that religion is not only a body of revealed truth technically expressible in conceptual form but that it is also a living and moving history, always itself in creative movement and always on the way to unpredictable goals in history. It is the actual and substantive living and growing of Christ in the forms of society and history, the filling out of his body, the filling out of his sufferings. God has not placed the work, the competencies, the sensibilities of the artist outside of this movement. In fact it would seem that his work, his making, his light, his insights are indispensable.

I would like to review some of the things that belong to the work of the artist and would ask the reader to remember, as we do review some of these great tasks and competencies of the true artist, that they are precisely the tasks and competencies which in substance are being neglected or despised by the mass media.

1. In the first chapter we have stressed the fact that art is far from being the kind of creature that is always making well-formed things which have nothing to do with reality, is far from being an exotic phenomenon with a fascinating power that is all right for adults in small doses but always potentially dangerous for young souls. The artist is really as judgmental in his work as is the most judgmental moralist. He demands that we see reality and all the modes in which it differs from fantasy and unreality. He will not abide our self-deceptions, personal or national. And thus he is indispensable to our personal and communal lives. By his images and rhythms he forces us to judge, to judge at the very deepest levels of our being. The moralist can speak to the top of our heads, but the rest of our feeling, acting, being, can often evade him.

The artist, however, is the only man who, if we let him loose on society, will be able to reveal the fantasy-fraudulency of so much of the mass media and of so much of our lives. If, therefore, the Christian God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that is to say, if he is the God of reality, the One who has always worked through the mud and the actuality of history and not through its lies or through dreams, then there is the deepest kind of partnership between him and the gifts he has given the artist. I have suggested that when *this* gift of judging begins to disappear and a fraudulent substitute begins to take its place, then our culture is moving into great danger. For judgment is all. It means so much, it is so much associated with the defense or the discovery of reality, that theology must support it at all costs. It is

only occasionally and by accident, not by substance, that it will need a censor. For it is itself our greatest censor.

If there is a tendency among some groups of religious men to place the label of a vague liberalism on the artists (I always mean the real artists) and, in general, on the thinkers, I think that this tendency is somewhat understandable and has its partial roots in the unfortunate, distorted, and exotic view of the artist that has been given to us by the nineteenth century. We have been taught to look upon him as always seeking for a dangerous and non-human freedom. I shall speak again, a little farther on, of this problem of freedom. But the important thing to say here is that this impression we have formed of the artist, the literary man, and the maker of our images and rhythms is not correct. The religious man has a right to his protests and to his occasional angers at the defacement of the human in our civilization, but he must come more clearly to see that the angers of the artist over the same thing are even greater than his own. The men of imagination can be ruthless about their task of defending or creating the true image of man; indeed they can be far less courteous about it than the theologians.

I have just seen the movie version of *South Pacific*, and I am sure that it is the moralist, not the artist, who would be liberal about such "art." And that is as it should be, because, at least in the case of adults our decisions, where they are social decisions, should err in the direction of a degree of tolerance and the avoidance of an excess of interference or over-protectionism. But that is not my point, as it is not the point of discussion of this book. My point is that the true artist is not at all "liberal," in the unfavorable sense of that word, in these matters. If the true artist were invited to criticize this picture and its silly dream world (the music is wonderful, it is a pity to spoil it), his criticism would be both angry and ruthless. We might, in fact, some day find out that in his reactions he would be coming close to the anger of God.

2. In a second chapter we engaged ourselves with the critical question of the relation of art and the imaginative man to the condition of human sensibility in our civilization. I offered the proposition that this is also a critical theological question. For if religion is a matter of relating the soul to reality, then it cannot but be concerned with the status of men's feelings and the way in which they are dealt with by the arts. We must repeat that it is by our sensibility, by our passions, feelings, emotions, that we relate ourselves to reality, whether

accurately or badly. And it is by the same instruments that we are always appraising reality, accurately or badly.

Here I will be bold enough to say that the artist must be asked to perform a theological task which is beyond the competency of the theologian but which the theologian can at least hold in high honor. The religious man who is not an artist simply cannot do without the artist. Nor can he declare that the world of the latter is not a theological world, for this would not be true. He cannot say that it is enough to find the right acts of sensibility for his acts before God and then consent, in what we might conveniently call the "other" areas of life, to crooning and chatting ways or styles of life. If he does, his religious life will suffer; as a matter of fact it is better to say that it will already have suffered. But it is the perceptiveness and the insights of the imaginative man that will detect the flaws in all the little corners of our lives, and life is nothing but a sum of little corners.

This man of the imagination will not tolerate our living on a mediocre level at the interior of our souls, and therefore will not be able to abide that narrow and flattened emotional range which our mass media are in such large part dictating to us as the conforming essence of human life. Here again the theologian and the religious mentality cannot help agreeing, and here again theology and art are the most natural partners in the world. For they both know, one by revelation, the other by trained and honest instinct, the profound nature of the human soul and of its reactions to reality. These reactions are there, this reality is there, cover up either or both as we will, and they must be taken care of. All the world admits that they have often been cared for superbly within the terms of the Catholic imagination and its different styles of national life, and it is still amazing how many people will fly instinctively to Italy or to Mexico for vacations within a Catholic style of the imagination.

This has not yet occurred for the United States, though that does not mean it will not or cannot. We have successfully fought off the danger of becoming a ghetto in the United States in the order of politics, and we are understandably concerned that that should never happen again. But this kind of concern must never be allowed to mount to the stage where we are afraid to be completely ourselves and completely Catholic in those areas where the national culture would be most helped by our being ourselves, and by fearlessly tapping the expressive resources in art which beyond cavil have always been at the

command of the Catholic imagination. And this would not be an act of ghettoism but a sheer act of national mercy.

For under the weight of the confining images and feelings which we have been discussing for many pages, there are complicated and powerful drives being bottled up in the national consciousness which are contributing to our present wave of anxiety and which very badly need a set of great realities outside of themselves to receive and take care of their energies. Man cannot live by bread alone, nor can he feel with the chatterers alone. The crucial question is becoming, who and what will take care of these drives and energies. It will never be enough to say that God must be this object and this provider, as though, with this statement, a *Roma locuta est, causa finita est* had been uttered. For the fact is that Rome has never said this and never will. The world is an analogical world in time and space, and there are many intervening steps and moments between our present anxieties and inactivity on the one hand and God on the other. For what is creativity save that which will keep our souls and our civilization in free movement toward that which both should become. We should not define Americanism by what it is, for it is partially fixated in a distrust of art and intelligence, but by what it should perpetually be striving to be. Let us, therefore, be careful never altogether to consent to the state of our national sensibility at any one time as though this were to be our permanent condition.

3. This problem of freedom and creativity has brought to us what was the subject of our third chapter. It is for me the subject of the most central importance, and I have suggested that it is the question which has been defaced and debased more than any other by superficial matters and tricks of vocabulary. I will put the matter briefly and will discuss it briefly again. The theologian, by pure tricks of vocabulary, is in danger of being led into a position of opposition to *the freedom of the imagination* when, altogether contrarily, such freedom should be almost his abiding preoccupation, as it is the preoccupation of the saint and every true artist.

Opposition to freedom is a position which he can under no circumstances afford to accept, for it is contrary to his whole status among the many vocations of human kind. His status, his vocation, is nothing less than the liberation, the feeling, and the keeping free of the human soul. But it is difficult to see how the soul can be free where the imagination is becoming fixated on a large scale

I have suggested that a clever vocabulary has pretty well succeeded in keeping this discussion of freedom riveted to the question of sex. And very often and ironically the defense of the freedom of the imagination from certain quarters has resolved itself into a matter of defending the right to fixate the imagination, to prevent its normal spontaneous movement onward. We have agreed, therefore, that the discussion should be enlarged so that we can really see what goes on, both technically and in the world of ideas, when the imagination is free and when it is fixated. And I think that my two positions would come down to this: that, first of all, the artist is a man whose whole trade in the concrete is to free the imagination and with it the whole human personality; this is more true of him than of anything else in the world outside of the direct order of grace. Secondly, the speculative theologian in his turn must be primarily interested in speculatively carving out, in its fullest range, from the bottom to the top of its scale, the freedom of the human soul. If this is so of these two figures (and if it is most dubiously true of the present personnel of the mass media), then once again artist and theologian must be natural partners.

a) The artist is a liberator. In our chapter on freedom versus fixation there was only time to hint at the series of studies that might be begun in this direction. Other people will be able to suggest in a hundred ways how much the artist is able to create freedom in the deepest and most sensitive parts of man, exactly in those regions which are most susceptible to the slaveries that are the favorite pastime of false art. The men who know music from the inside could indicate to us the differences between bad and good music, how one ties us slavishly to a sound it seeks to exhaust, how the other is creating those movements which help the soul to move with spontaneity in and out of fixities, creating that sense of ease and release which is identical with freedom. As for good and bad camera technique in the movies and TV, surely it is clear to most of us the extent to which the bad technician roots us to the movement and is creative only in creating fixities, but how well the good camera technician knows how to move us from insight to insight.

One of the fundamental principles behind this fixed technique is contempt. It is difficult to imagine a Hollywood director executing the last moving scene of *Gervaise*, more than likely he would decide that "we the people" would never understand and the mother would still be caught drinking at the bar.

b) Theology as study of freedom. In trying to work out a collaborating relationship of the theologian to the artist in the creation of freedom for our civilization, we are not asking the theologian to become an artist, a musician, an active director, or cameraman. I have a number of times heard the objection that when we talk of collaboration we are asking the theologian to become something other than what he is. That is not so. All that we are saying is that freedom of the soul is an indivisible thing, that you cannot agree to have it in one area of the soul's life and not have it in another, that, therefore, the theologian must be creatively interested in all major structures of civilization.

This is a truth which is far more native to the Catholic than to the Protestant religious thinker. The Protestant, in his order of speculation, is much more inclined to believe that if the soul is free "before God," in some esoteric religious corner of itself, then it is totally free spiritually, and it will not particularly matter theologically what is occurring in other "non-religious" areas of the soul. Not so with the Catholic mind. It does not believe that some corners of life have a theological relevance (or a relevance for spiritual freedom) and others have not. It does not believe there can be a completely autonomous order which would have no repercussions in making men free or slave spiritually.

Thus too with the order of political structures in which the theologian has no choice but to be theologically interested. For one of the essential requirements of a political structure is that it should not dare to absorb within its levels the whole of human life; it must be such a concrete structure as leaves the spiritual free, and this is the prime requirement for the fundamental solution of any Church-State controversy. One cannot be a slave in the political corner of one's mind and life, and free in a hypothetically separate theological corner. Things just do not work out that way, except speciously for those who wish to deceive themselves. It remains, then, only to interpret our point about the relevance of the state of the human imagination and human sensibility in the arts to that spiritual freedom which is properly the preoccupation of the theologian. I think it is no more possible to divorce this question from the full reality of what constitutes theological or spiritual freedom than it is so to divorce the economic and political orders. We cannot say too often that freedom is indivisible. But the kind of freedom we are now discussing is not the limited kind which we may call freedom from sin and which would be the serious



and necessary concern of the “moral” thinker; rather it is the kind which demands creativity, the making of a set of images and rhythms which will help the soul to move on and on into that fuller world of being and sensibility which it is always groaning for under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The more mankind is on the proper move under the collaborative help of creative theology and art, the less will be the burden of intervention for the moralist and the fewer will be the points of fixity or sin.

Nothing, therefore, in this or any other section should be interpreted as an appeal for an intervention, on a grander scale, of concerned moralists, moral theologians, or external censors into the world of art or the mass media. The “intervention” of the religious mind into the world of men will always be what we call “analogous,” which means that it should be according to the reality and the necessities of the situation in which it “intervenes.” There *are* situations in which the religious mind has to live in the world as a worried moralist. But it would be absurd to think that this even begins to exhaust the work of theology, of the religious thinker. There are the vaster areas where the “intervention” (unhappy word) is no longer intervention but a collaborative and creative act interested in the making of all those new worlds which will help the soul toward an even greater freedom.

Does that mean that the religious mind will not tolerate the professional autonomies of other men? It does not. For this merely brings us back again to the problem of a specious vocabulary. The theologian merely objects to autonomies which are really declarations of the right to fixate, and has no worries about this protest because he knows the artist will protest louder than he. Only let them shout and work together, on the inside of art, against the same enemies.

4. There is a very definite connection between the whole issue of the freedom of the imagination and the subject of our fifth chapter. For there we were severely critical of “the magnificent imagination,” especially of the more pretentious Hollywood version of the quality of magnificence, and we entered a plea for the restoration of that kind of imagination which would follow the more real, if smaller, *lines* of a truly human sensibility and of actual human histories and environments. You have but to see a picture like *The Lady in the Portrait* (where the lines of development of a friendship between two lads are *faithfully* followed) or a play like *The Diary of Anne Frank* to understand the issue that is here at stake.

It is by following the developmental lines, not of pretentiously enormous experience but of real experience, that we will win to the incomparable sense of the possession of freedom. For what is freedom save freedom from the fixation which ties us to some one point on the line of the development of human life and experience, or from those pseudo-magnificences (our dream images and musics, our horror industry, our gigantic epics) that wipe out our humanity and sense of knowing our way. Here we are talking about nothing else but the true albeit the moving architecture of human experience, inside and out, which it has been the perpetual business of men of imagination to construct and create in new forms in every age.

In its turn the religious mind of Catholicism will always find itself ultimately in the closest sympathetic relationship with this enthusiasm for the preservation and the creation of the true lines of human experience. The moralist is often a source of irritation to the artist, but even he will never be understood by the artist until the latter is brought slowly and calmly to examine the ultimate passion of morality for the lines of life and reality. But this, as we have said, is only a beginning, on the somewhat negative side of the artist with the same intentions.

I will go one step further in this connection and say that there will finally be the same understanding bond between native Catholic thinking and all the best developments in psychiatric studies of the last two generations. For, it seems to me, the basic intent of these studies and accomplishments is to reduce those elements in man that are allegedly monsters to the status of visible, viable, and manageable human realities. I like to think of the Catholic imagination, to the degree that there is formally such a thing, as occupying a midway ground between two other imaginations, one of which loves to repress the strong reality of human feelings out of existence (being afraid to face them), the other of which has a secret passion for exalting those feelings to the level of monsterdom, the magnificent and the unmanageable.<sup>3</sup> Both of these forms of imagination are forms of evasion.

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<sup>3</sup>Humility is one thing, but making man six inches tall in the face of himself, his own feelings, and the world is another. The "magnificent imagination" has always been driving in this direction, but at last the idea has been made completely explicit. The prospectus for a new TV series called *Fantastic* had this to say about its six-inch hero, secret agent of a government agency known as The Bureau: "To the tiny mite a simple rainstorm is a death-dealing flood, a harmless alley cat becomes a raging twelve-foot tiger, a vacuum cleaner is a lethal

Nationally and for the moment the Catholic imagination has been strongly influenced by both, but historically and perennially it has always found itself on the side of that kind of self-knowledge which believes that the human reality can be a successful and manageable home. The links, therefore, between itself on the one hand and art and psychiatry on the other are there to be painstakingly developed.

These, therefore, are the four problem areas of the mass media which may be presented to the positive collaborative interest of the intelligent critic, the speculative theologian, and the artist: the crisis of fantasy versus reality, the collapse of the area of human sensibility and freedom, the problem of the freedom of the imagination versus its fixation, and the over-development in our time of what I have chosen to call the magnificent imagination.

These are only my personal versions of what I consider to be our most critical mass-media situations, and I have only been able to give sketchy versions of them. Other people would have put the matter differently and I attach no great importance to the vocabularies I have chosen to describe the moment in which we stand. These things having been said, I do not waver in thinking that the content of these chapters is solidly right. And I would hope that better hands and better minds would not so much correct these opinions, though there must be a share of that, as say them better and in a wider evidential framework.

Of two things we may be certain. The first is that we are dealing with a question of the largest national moment when we talk of the present and future state of the mass media among us. We have arrived at a crisis in our history. Those who wish to live with the

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instrument, a pane of glass a death trap! Almost any aspect of normal life is a challenge to the 'little man,' whether it's the turning on of a hose, a tipped bottle of glue, the closing of an icebox, the turning on of an electric light—each in its way is a monster or a monstrous situation for the 'little man.'"

The program chief explained the program in the following way: "The Fantastic is an answer to the need for something new and different in TV. What it amounts to is a new setting for man's never-ending dilemma. Here audience empathy is created on a primitive, infantile, emotional level, coupled with a threat to the viewer that actually cannot be realized in his real life. It recreates an infant's world to a greater degree than the popular Westerns do. We give here all the problems of an infant, complicated by his being an adult in a giant world."

Here at least is honesty. Adulthood is branded as a "complication."

ostriches and to deny this fact are free to do so, but whatever history lies ahead of us will put them down as children for their denial. We are a great people, capable of very great things, but the fact is that the truth of what is being asked of us is being concealed from us in very large measure. We are engaged with a great enemy, and we will find ourselves increasingly engaged in every corner of our souls. The conflict is more than military and economic. It is and will be primarily intellectual and spiritual. It will be ultimately a conflict between two states of the imagination. If we consent to a mediocre and contemptible state of the national imagination, we may have allies for a battle but not for the campaign of perhaps the next hundred years that lies ahead of us. We are already at war, but it is the first war in human history that must be fought everywhere. The responsibility of our mass media within this engagement is so great that it is almost incalculable, so powerful is their control over our most intimate and everyday images and, therefore, over our final attitudes and decisions.

It is doubtful whether the present commercial masters of these media will live up to that responsibility unless the most valid and most powerful pressure, not of the "censor," but of the national intelligence is brought to bear against them. I have suggested that this kind of pressure can be brought to bear by the common sympathetic action of the critics, artists, theologians, and the universities. The issue is much too big for inaction or snobbishness on the part of any of these forces.

The second and final certainty is this, and here I speak as a Catholic priest. I believe that the Catholic Church has enormous resources within its own history, spirit, and desires for the playing of a great and positive role in the creation of a national imagination which will win the respect of the world. Here it should be fearless in being itself. It should always fear to be a ghetto on the level of the political, but there are levels of the spirit and the imagination where the national community will some day be grateful if American Catholicism achieves a self-identity. It is all very well to be "American" but there are many Americans who will be eternally grateful if the Church does not consent (as it never finally will) to be American in any of the vulgar senses of the word. Such a consent would mean, among many other things, that we accept the mass media as they now stand. This we cannot do. And this we say, not as censors, but as men interested in overcoming the present burden of inactivity that lies heavily upon the national spirit.

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