

After discussion and clarification of the budget implications for this Resolution the Moderator called for the final action. It was

77-GS-29 VOTED: The Eleventh General Synod adopts the "Resolution on Black Church Development," as amended.

Resolution on Black Church Development

The Eleventh General Synod AFFIRMS the action of the Tenth General Synod in regard to Black Church Development in the United Church of Christ and declares the continuing need for attention to this matter at every level of the church's life; this action should take the form of new Black churches in the strategic areas of the nation, increasing support for existing congregations; recruitment, development and support of leadership, comprehensive research and program planning.

The General Synod, therefore, COMMITTS itself to Black Church Development as a continuing concern of the highest order.

The General Synod COMMENDS the Commission for Racial Justice, the Office for Church Life and Leadership and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries for their collaborative efforts in Black Church Development during the last biennium.

The General Synod further CALLS Upon the Conferences, Associations and local congregations of the United Church of Christ to emphasize Black Church Development and join in covenant with each other in this pursuit.

The General Synod DIRECTS the Executive Council to monitor and advocate the implementation of this action by the whole church and to provide special funds during the next biennium to facilitate substantial movement toward the achieving of viable goals and objectives in Black Church Development.

5. EXPLOITATIVE BROADCASTING PRACTICES

Mr. Eckert turned to a "Proposed Pronouncement on the Use of Gratuitous Violence and the Exploitation of Sex in Television Programming" which was distributed to all delegates prior to the General Synod. After discussion which included suggestions for editorial changes Mr. Eckert moved the adoption of the proposed Pronouncement. It was

77-GS-30 VOTED: The Eleventh General Synod adopts the Pronouncement on "Exploitative Broadcasting Practices Including The Use of Gratuitous Violence and the Exploitation of Sex."

The Use of Gratuitous Violence and The Exploitation of Sex

BACKGROUND TO THE PRONOUNCEMENT

1. Summary

Programs that embody gratuitous violence and that exploit sex to attract audiences dominate prime time television. Growing numbers of people are alarmed over the effect such programs have on the moral values and actions of adults and teenagers and, more especially, on the understanding that children derive from watching the

adult life and behavior that are depicted. Churches must be concerned over all the content of television, since the medium portrays a way of life that is often at total variance with the Judeo-Christian interpretation of existence and its meaning. When excessive violence and sex are at the heart of television's portrayal of life, a serious threat is posed to all persons in our society. Churches are obliged to oppose such programming. At the same time churches must be equally concerned that their mode of opposing immoral television programming does not violate Constitutional provisions for freedom of speech and of the press.

II. Rationale

A Theological Basis for Issuance by the General Synod of the United Church of Christ of a PRONOUNCEMENT on the Use of Gratuitous Violence and Exploitation of Sex in Television Programming by Harvey Cox, Thomas Professor of Divinity, Harvard University Divinity School.

From the wide-spread sectors of our society today, we hear a growing concern about the misuse of mass media and especially of television. Parents, community groups, political leaders, churches, schools and psychologists have begun to draw our attention to the impact, especially on children, of gratuitous violence and exploitation of sex as they appear on television. We recognize that sex and violence are a part of human existence. Their portrayal is often necessary in a dramatic presentation and can provide audience members with valuable insights into human life. Nonetheless, there is such evident concern from such a wide spectrum of the society that it seems necessary for church people to think through what role the churches should play and what position the churches should take in regard to this question.

It is important to notice that the misuse of television poses a somewhat different problem from issues the churches have faced before in this area. Some churches in the past have supported censorship and the refusal of licensing for films and movies that they found unacceptable. Today, however, churches are moving to the recognition that, since in order to view movies one must normally pay an entrance fee and enter into a theatre, the depiction of violence and objectionable sexuality in films falls into the category of freedom of expression and freedom of the individual to choose his or her form of entertainment. With television, however, the question becomes far more complex. The television set is located in the home and children below the age of discretion have access to it. Also, since the airwaves are more directly the responsibility of government regulatory agencies than are private film theaters, the issue is a subtle one. Those who would introduce regulatory legislation into this area have to be careful to hold two important American values in balance: The first is the obligation of the state to protect the weak and the innocent against threats to their health or well-being from those who are more powerful. Some would hold that this requirement applies to the power of television programmers to damage children and young people who are not yet in a position to make choices for themselves. The other value is the constitutional provision of freedom of speech and expression, and the widespread conviction that in most respects the air waves merit the same constitutional protec-

tion guaranteed for newspapers and other forms of journalistic communication. As citizens of the United States, most members of our churches would want to see both these two values guarded and protected. But we should also make clear that as church people we speak not simply as citizens but from a deeper and more particular perspective which to some extent transcends issues involved in the balancing of rights and responsibilities. What is this perspective?

The church's role in issues of sex and violence on the airwaves is two-fold. The first tension is that although television is often dismissed as mere entertainment, or at best an informational medium, the fact is that it portrays a total view of life that is often a complete contradiction of the Judeo-Christian vision of existence. In one sense, television "preaches" a religion at variance with the gospel, "religion" here signifying not just a small sector of life but a total world view. This opposing vision can be noticed most vividly in the commercials used on television which pander to the personal anxieties of viewers about the sweetness of their breath or the whiteness of their laundry. The fully blessed human life is depicted with images of people who are rich, powerful, almost insanely concerned with cleanliness and comfort, sated with commodities and uninvolved in any of the pain or tragedy of life. Such a vision is nearly the polar opposite of the biblical portrait of what makes human life blessed. Television conveys values and attitudes, the very stuff of religion. It is a serious mistake to think of television merely as a means of entertainment.

Still, since we do *not* live in a society whose values are fundamentally Christian (despite the public rhetoric that claims they are), it is no surprise to find a basically anti-Christian or non-Christian view of life being purveyed through television. This practice will change only when enough people who are informed by a Judeo-Christian perspective on life choose careers in television and make their values clear in the scripts they write, the copy they produce and the executive decisions they make. Until then, we cannot as Christians expect solely Christian values and meanings to be communicated. We can and must, however, be aware that as Christians we have an *ethical* responsibility, along with other citizens who may not be Christians, to protect the airwaves from being misused to injure others. In this exercise of our public and political responsibility for broadcasting, we will be guided by a set of fundamentals that arise from the biblical basis of Judeo-Christian faith and the values which have been developed by that tradition over the course of its history. These bases will determine an approach to this complex subject by the churches which might be different from the approaches of other agencies at some times, and parallel at others. In either case, these theological perspectives should be fundamental to the church's position:

1) Since God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and of "all things visible and invisible," a belief which is confessed by most Christian churches, God is also obviously the creator of the airwaves, the means by which messages, pictures, ideas and images are conveyed through the atmosphere from the senders to the receivers. It is well to remind ourselves at times that neither the advertisers nor

the viewers nor the networks nor the government regulatory agencies actually *own* the airwaves. The airwaves are first of all a creation of God, and in our political tradition, have been seen primarily as belonging to all of the people, but only temporarily, provisionally, and in trust.

2) Those of use who live within the Judeo-Christian tradition also hold that God has created human beings to use his creation, to manage it, and to bring its possibilities to fruition. In the Biblical account, God creates men and women as the designated stewards of the entire created order. It becomes clear throughout the Biblical record that human beings are expected by their creator to use the good things of the earth, the heaven, the skies and the sea to accomplish God's will: that is, the building of a just and peaceful and loving community, not just among human beings, but among all created elements. Consequently, responsible stewardship is the posture toward the airwaves which seems most appropriate from the Biblical perspective. It is important to remember that the use of the airwaves merely for profit or merely for propagandizing is completely ruled out by this Biblical understanding of stewardship.

3) The Biblical perspective on human life is a realistic one. The doctrine of sin as the refusal to live up to God's expectations or to full human potential suggests that human beings constantly misuse the power God has given them over the creation. They do not use their unique gifts to bring the entire creation into harmony and community, but misuse various parts of that cosmos for selfish, accumulative and vindictive purposes. In most theologically based understandings of human government, one of the roles of government, among other, is to regulate the excessive expressions of this human misuse of power, so that the weak and the defenseless are protected against the powerful and the predator. This protective role is not the only function of government from a Christian perspective. It is, however, an important one, and suggests that the powers of the state are rightly brought to bear to shelter those who, for one reason or another, are not in a position to protect themselves from stronger members of the community who misuse their power for exploitative or damaging purposes.

4) Also basic to the Biblical vision is that God comes into the world to bring newness, innovation and change. "God" is not simply a cipher for that which has been, nor another name for traditional ways of thinking and acting. God is the one who overturns, upsets, illuminates and alters things. This interpretation suggests that Christians and Jews for whom God is a living God cannot accept an understanding of the world which precludes the emergence of the unprecedented, or of undreamed-of novel possibilities. Policies and regulations which prevent the airing and discussing of new ideas, new values and new lifestyles cannot be theologically supported, since such policies might prevent the *novum* from emerging within human life and history. This in turn means that any form of precensorship according to the currently established norms must be viewed with great suspicion as, in part at least, an effort to perpetuate previous standards and previous understanding when new possibilities must always be fairly entertained.

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5) God transcends human striving. Since there is a qualitative difference between the best efforts of human beings to guide and regulate their common lives and the will of God, who in some measure always goes beyond even the best human effort, it is clear that no "final solution" to problems posed by the misuse of the airwaves can ever be arrived at. Any policy will have to be constantly reevaluated, tested and discussed. All parties must recognize that no party will be completely satisfied with any solution arrived at, and that no solution will fulfill completely all of the competing values which converge on this point.

6) Among the various values which compete and interests which seek expression, however, the Bible is clear that God leans toward the support of those who are poor, weak, impoverished and disenfranchised. Therefore, Biblical people—that is, Christians and Jews—do not seek a merely neutral stance in the use of the earth, including the use of the airwaves. They seek rather that all of the earth's goods, including the "invisible" ones, be used insofar as possible to strengthen the weak, empower those who are poor, feed the hungry and liberate the captives. This last point will mean that in many instances the churches will have to speak for those who have no voice and support, those who are not normally recognized as participants in the political process around issues of the use of the airwaves.

7) Finally, Christians believe that God intends human beings to make the fullest and most complete use of all of the gifts God has bestowed on humankind. This means that Christians should have a positive ideal of how television could be used better, not just a set of complaints about how it is misused today. The churches should not be satisfied merely to oppose gratuitous sex and violence on television. Christians would be just as dissatisfied if—all sex and violence gone—television were turned over to mindless game shows and trivial situation comedies. The positive side, however, need not be an expression of narrow parochial interest. Christians find agreement with non-Christians on a wide range of these positive perspectives.

The foregoing points of theological departure for the role of the churches in discussing the use and misuse of the airwaves suggests that some current solutions are too superficial and in other ways unacceptable. It is clear, for example, that the presence of widespread and gratuitous violence on television programs is directly caused by the need of program producers to hold the attention of the largest audience for the smallest amount of money. This situation in turn is caused by the concern of the programmers to make maximum use of the airwaves as the means of generating profit, creating needs for products and marketing those products. As Senator Warren Magnuson has rightly suggested in his *Congressional Record* insert regarding violence on television, "It is not surprising that there is a great pressure within the television community to produce programs that attract and hold viewer attention as inexpensively as possible. There is great pressure to hold down program production costs of commercial television. Too often, gratuitous violence is used to solve both problems. A large number of violent actions isolated from realistic portrayals of the consequences of those actions on human relationships can be a cheap programming vehicle."

Mr. Magnuson's diagnosis is exactly right as far as it goes. However, when he suggests increasing the regulation on programmers as a means of eliminating violence, it seems from the prospective sketched above to be a merely symptomatic treatment for a much more basic illness. As long as the licensing of the use of the airwaves goes mainly to groups who use those airwaves principally to generate profit, the same cost squeeze will be felt. Although Mr. Magnuson does not say this, it is also clear that the use of questionable portrayals of sexuality and of sex appeal falls into the same category as that of gratuitous violence. Programmers use these devices to hold large audiences so that those audiences can be persuaded that they have needs which can only be met by the products being marketed by the sponsors of these programs. Again, regulations on sexual explicitness treat the issues only at its superficial level and overlook the underlying dynamic which causes the misuse of sexual imagery in the first place.

It is important to add, in any discussion of the role of the churches in confronting a difficult issue of public policy such as the one addressed in this paper, that we live in a pluralistic democracy. The fact of *pluralism* means that the position sketched here will not be the only one, or indeed the only theological position, brought to bear on this issue. The churches will have to enter into discussions with other parties, but many of those parties do base their positions on some version of the Judeo-Christian faith and its ethic. For this reason, one of the responsibilities the churches have is to press various agencies and groups concerned with such a question to the underlying assumptions which inform their positions. The fact that this discussion goes on in a *democracy* means that even if the churches could dictate a policy to be used with reference to problems arising in the exploitation of the airwaves, they should not do so. Our American Constitutional tradition of separation of church and state means that the churches have not only the right but the responsibility to bring to bear their vision and their influence in such matters, but that they neither choose to nor are permitted to enforce the policy they favor.

Finally, faith is the substance of things hoped for. An important contribution which a Biblical vision can make to this enormously complex discussion is that the various parties should not lose hope that some workable solution, if not perfect solution, *can* be found. Christians and Jews believe that since God is not absent from history, but is always present, opening up new and unforeseen avenues of human development and growth, even issues which appear to be intransigent and impossible of solution may not be as impossible as they appear. This note adds a dimension of patience to a discussion which can disintegrate into panic, despair and unseemly urgency. It is indeed urgent that children and young people be protected if their weakness is being exploited in the interest of profit. It is also urgent that measures taken to protect them do not become weapons in the hands of those who would restrict the freedom of the press and freedom of expression, not just because these rights are guaranteed by the Constitution, but because a society which allows itself to be so fettered is not as open to the new promptings which come, Christians

believe, from the living spirit of God, as societies which do remain open.

As church people, we can best advance the current debate by insisting that the airwaves were created for a purpose, and that purpose was not just turning a profit. We can point to responsible stewardship and the forging of a just community as the purposes which those who use the airwaves should advance. And we can position ourselves with the hurt and wounded people of our time who are largely deprived of a voice, while maintaining a sense of confidence that reasonable people can arrive at workable, if temporary, solutions to seemingly intransigent problems.

III. The Pronouncement

BE IT RESOLVED that the Eleventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ:

1. *Affirms* that the airwaves derive from God's creation, as do the technological systems and human organizations that have been developed to make use of the electronic spectrum. All are subject to the same requirements of stewardship that apply to other forms of creation. Users of the airwaves are trustees of a valued public resource which is entrusted to them only temporarily and on condition that they operate responsibly in the interest of the whole people, not just for private gain or self serving objectives.

The public interest requirements for operation of broadcast frequencies are clearly set forth in the Federal Communications Act. These requirements are often violated by the broadcasting networks and the licensees of individual television and radio stations through a combination of desire for excessive profits on the part of broadcasters, lack of knowledge of its rights in broadcasting on the part of the public, irresponsibility in filling its regulatory role on the part of the Federal Communications Commission and indifference to the public's interest on the part of Congress.

There is enough material broadcast on television and radio that is entertaining, witty, educational and informative that the potential of these media for expanding intellectual capacities, deepening human sympathies and increasing dignity is readily apparent. This potential is overbalanced by degrading treatment of whole classes of people, especially in the sexual stereotyping of women and men; by manipulation of audiences for profit, and by the teaching of false systems of value, especially to children. The predominant values expounded by television are poles apart from the Christian understanding of the human potential and God's purpose for what has been created. Television has a pathological preoccupation with gratuitous violence and exploitative use of sex.

Children and young people are especially threatened. It is urgent that they be protected from exploitation in the interest of profit. It is also urgent that measures taken to protect them do not become weapons that can be used by those who would restrict freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of religion—not just because these rights are guaranteed by the Constitution, but because if our society allows itself to be so fettered, it will no longer be open to the new promptings which come, Christians believe, from the living spirit of God.

2. *Calls* upon the Office of Communication to collaborate with other appropriate agencies to produce resources and aids, such as study guides and faith exploration materials, which will enable local churches to:

- a. understand the aspects of broadcasting which distort a holistic view of persons and the quality of human relationships; and be sensitive to the excessive, inappropriate and degrading use of sex and violence.
- b. educate the people of the local church to their responsibility under the FCC rules and policy to communicate with local broadcast station managers with regard to the quality, values and messages contained within the programs and commercials they broadcast.
- c. educate and encourage the people of the local church to be more selective in their television viewing and become better stewards of the time God has made available to them.

3. *Calls* upon all elements of the United Church of Christ to interest themselves intensely in the governmental and private policies that determine what is broadcast on television; to resist vigorously the use of gratuitous violence and the exploitation of sex in programming, and to demand programs that portray human life realistically and honestly in all its facets, including conflict and sex.

4. *Calls* upon the Office of Communication, individually and in cooperation with other Church bodies, to take appropriate actions, consistent with freedom of speech and of the press, to discover and eliminate the underlying causes for the misuse of violence and of sexual imagery in television programming.

5. *Calls* upon the Office of Communication, individually and in cooperation with other Church bodies, to protect the interests of all people who are now the victims of exploitative broadcasting practices, and to oppose the misportrayal on the air and continue to press, by legal means, for access to the air by all elements of society.

6. *Calls* upon Congress to impose the necessary oversight on the Federal Communications Commission to make that body fulfill its statutory requirement to have television and radio stations determine the needs, tastes and desires of their communities of license and to program to fulfill them.

7. *Calls* upon the Federal Communications Commission to meet its responsibility to the public by regulating broadcasting to make station licensees responsive to the needs of their communities of license.

8. *Calls* upon individual station licensees to fulfill the statutory requirement to be responsible for everything broadcast over their stations by refusing to air network and syndicated entertainment programs until they have determined that such programs are in accord with the tastes and needs of their communities of license.

9. *Calls* upon the United Church of Christ churches, conferences, and national agencies:

- a. to initiate the development and sponsorship of programs that are true to life and that include the possibility of hope and healing for the problems of a broken world.

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- b. to consult among members of the United Church of Christ and other religious bodies who are active in communications industries to share concern for the ethical standards of their industries.

10. *Calls* upon the Office of Communication, the United Church Boards for World and Homeland Ministries and the Office of Church in Society:

- a. to continue to foster the education of persons from developing countries and under-represented social groups—including the church itself—for careers in communications.
- b. to engage in a continuous study of constitutional rights, regulatory codes and procedures, and freedom of access by publics (U.S.A. and other nations) relating to the electronic spectrum.

Responsibility for Implementation

Implementation of this pronouncement shall be referred to the Office of Communication which will, in turn, involve such other UCC agencies and elements of other churches that have the resources to help implement it.

6. TELEVISION PROGRAMMING

Mr. Eckert then presented the Overture to General Synod 11 on Television Programming submitted by the Northwest Association of the Ohio Conference.

The delegation from Ohio did not support the Overture.

WHEREAS television programs have a tremendous impact on the morality and immorality of our nation, and

WHEREAS the present trend in our society is toward shocking immorality, and

WHEREAS television programs have a responsibility to people and to the nation as a whole because of their unprecedented capacity as a communication to promote the general welfare of our nation;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 14th Annual Meeting of the Northwest Ohio Association of the Ohio Conference, United Church of Christ, meeting at Pilgrim Church of the United Church of Christ, Toledo, Ohio, April 22-23, 1977, Overture the 11th General Synod of the United Church of Christ, as a participating member of the National Council of Churches, to establish a Reaction Committee that will:

A. Receive and review documented complaints of television programs from local congregations; and

B. Publish a list of programs so reviewed along with the reactions of local congregations; and

C. Provide leadership in promoting a Voluntary Viewing Ban of television programs that

1. contribute to delinquency, and
2. contribute to mental depression; and

D. Urge members of local congregations to write letters of protest to sponsors of violent programs, and urge boycott of the products of these sponsors.

It was 77-GS-31 VOTED: The Eleventh General Synod defeats the Overture submitted by the Northwest Association of the Ohio Conference.

7. VITALITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Mr. Eckert called attention to the "Report on the Vitality of the Local Church" for the Eleventh General Synod (Advance Materials Section II, pp. 74-75) and the Recommendation submitted by Division F, Small Group 2. It was

77-GS-32 VOTED: The Eleventh General Synod receives the "Report on the Vitality of the Local Church" and adopts the following recommendations.

Recommendation on the Vitality of the Local Church

Concern for the vitality of the local church has marked the history of the United Church of Christ. The Constitution affirms that the local church is the basic unit of the life and work of the United Church of Christ. Previous General Synods, in their designated priorities, have included a concern for the vitality of the local church.

Each local church, as a community of faith, carries out a double ministry. It ministers to its members, and it ministers to the world. As it carries out this double task, the local church is not an isolated reality, but is dynamically related to the denomination. The local church is enabled in its ministry, both to its members and its world, through its denomination, and is supported in that ministry by the denomination. Thus, the vitality of the local church and the vitality of the denomination are interrelated.

In order to develop a future vitality of the local church, it is necessary to establish a working foundation which includes the following factors:

1. Nurturing of present *membership* and enlistment of new members.
2. *Worship* that celebrates the common life of the people.
3. A program of *pastoral care* and nurture to encourage growth in faith.
4. The pursuit of *mission* through which the congregation reaches out into the world.
5. Effective lay and clergy *leaders* who have the ability to fulfill the congregations' needs.
6. A functional organizational structure that provides adequate *facilities* and *finances*.

In response to the priority of the Tenth General Synod, various programs and activities in these areas have been created and implemented by national agencies and Conferences. However, we *CALL UPON* those national agencies, Conferences and Associations to critically evaluate how effective their programs have been in building a viable base of local church strength.

While the issue of vitality is closely related to these fundamental matters, it is nevertheless necessary to distinguish it from them. Viability relates to that which is necessary for existence. Vitality relates to the quality of the life of the local church, to its spirit. A description of a vital local church would include:

A congregation whose members

- have a positive image of their local church,
- are related to the wider church,
- can articulate the local church's purpose, its mission, its view of what it is that God is calling it to be and to do,