



PORNOGRAPHY

(A statement of the Seventh General Convention of The American Lutheran Church adopted October 12, 1974, by action GC74.12.48, as a statement of comment and counsel addressed to the members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church to aid them in their decisions and actions.)

1. Pornography often is equated with obscenity. Pornography indeed may be obscene, but so are other matters not related to sex. Violence, war, double talk intended to deceive, exploiting or treating any other human being as a thing, engaging in manipulative selling, placing material interests ahead of human values—these too are obscene. Christians make a mistake when they leave the impression that it is only sex-oriented obscenities, not the whole range of offenses done to other human beings, which arouse their opposition.

2. Appeals to clamp down on pornography cause problems for Christians. They understand pornography to be material that depicts or describes erotic behavior in ways deliberately intended to stimulate sexual excitement. They regard human sexuality too highly to see it trifled with as a thing for the market place. Thus Christians easily respond to calls for sexual purity and morality in print, on the screen, and on the stage. However, deeper questions are involved in the usual efforts to curb pornography, such as:

—is it either right, necessary, or salutary to use civil laws to set standards for thoughts, tastes, and attitudes toward sexual practices?

—how can persons and communities be protected against sex-saturated materials and outlets which offend the sensitive or exploit the gullible?

—what room is there, with both freedom and responsibility, to explore issues and problems in human sexuality even though they run counter to current taboos and standards?

—why is so much of the sexual relegated to the realm of the forbidden and why is it made so difficult for people to appreciate their sexual selves and their sexual feelings?

—how does the Gospel liberate the believer from crippling enslavement both to prevailing sexual stereotypes and to self-centered pursuit of erotic pleasures?

3. Christians as citizens need to give thoughtful consideration to the issues involved in pornography. Two recent major events served to focus public attention on these issues. The first was the 1970 *Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*, including the vigorous dissents registered by minority members. In summary, the Commission advocated "the right of adults who wish to

do so to read, obtain, or view explicit sexual materials." It recommended legislation both to regulate "the sale of sexual materials to young persons who do not have the consent of their parents" and "to protect persons from having sexual materials thrust upon them without their consent through the mails or through open public display." Beyond these exceptions, the Commission recommended the repeal of all legislation prohibiting "the consensual sale, exhibition, or the distribution of sexual materials to adults."

4. The second major event was the June 21, 1973 series of decisions by the Supreme Court of the United States reaffirming previous decisions that "obscene material is unprotected by the First Amendment." Acknowledging "the inherent dangers of undertaking to regulate any form of expression" the majority of the Court agreed to "confine the permissible scope of such regulations to works which depict or describe sexual conduct." The Court set three guidelines: "(a) whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest . . . (b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and (c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value." Far from settling the situation, the Court decisions raised further critical issues yet to be resolved.

5. Persons seriously interested in attacking the evils associated with pornography wisely would consider such points as the following:

a. Pornography is big business, supplying a product for which there is evident demand. Refusal to buy the product, and withholding patronage from those who offer the offending goods or services, strike at the profit core.

b. By most standards pornography is a low-grade, low quality, overpriced product that prostitutes the sexual side of human life. Good judgment and good taste argue against spending good money for inferior, shabby, degrading products.

c. Pornography preys on sexual ignorance, fears, and frustrations. Positive acceptance of oneself as a sexual being, and healthy attitudes and orientation to human sexuality, reduce the lures of pornography.

d. The influence and example of parents and other trusted adults in their reading, viewing, leisure-time, and entertainment habits communicate powerfully to children and youth. Parental guidance, to be effective, needs reliable information concerning issues, materials, and curiosities currently in tension.

e. The law, the police, and the courts are the legal resources available for combating pornography. Cooperation between citizens and personnel in law enforcement systems is essential if a specific alleged violation is to be given its due judicial decision.

6. The church has the opportunity through the Spirit of God for creating new human beings who are free and responsible to live and act because of the power of the Gospel. The church teaches, on the basis of the whole of God's counsel, the importance of controls arising from within because of a person's relationship with the Living Lord. It stresses a person's right to make free choices, under God, accountable to God, considerate of the neighbor. Such choices take civil law into account, but take even more seriously God's Law and the Gospel revealed

in His Son. Human freedom of course carries the risk that some persons will misuse their freedom. Human freedom also insures opportunity for many persons to grow in wisdom, knowledge, and favor with God and neighbor. Such freedom, applied to pornography, carries risks of misuse and exploitation. Such freedom, applied to pornography, also insures opportunity for many persons to grow in understanding and appreciation for God's gift of human sexuality.

7. For civil legislators the difficult task is (a) to balance freedom and responsibility, (b) to protect the sensitive and the gullible, (c) to assure a climate for open and honest discussion of issues related to human sexuality, (d) to define clearly that which is a scandal and an offense to standards of morality and integrity, and (e) to provide channels for adjudicating between competing sets of standards and values. How to achieve these goals is a perplexing exercise in political realities. Christian citizens will offer their counsel, their prayers, their support for what is good and wholesome, and their energies to correct what is evil and destructive in public policies dealing with pornography.

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