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ARTICLE 14

CHRISTIAN ACTION

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN ACTION COMMISSION

The Christian Action Commission of the Reformed Church in America met in regularly scheduled sessions on October 17-19, 1971, and on February 20-22, 1972, in Chicago, Illinois, to deal with the issues properly brought to its attention. The results of the Christian Action Commission’s studies, discussions and decisions are presented in this report for the delegates’ information and/or action.

It might be worthwhile to remind the General Synod that the Christian Action Commission is given the responsibility to speak to the delegates from a studied Christian position, offering guidelines in faith and practice. It is also the responsibility of the General Synod delegates to speak to the various congregations and members of the Reformed Church in America on these matters. Neither the Christian Action Commission nor the General Synod can make the claim of infallibility in such a diverse and difficult arena of social and moral issues. These reports and recommendations are therefore presented not to bind the hearts and consciences of the members of the Reformed Church in America, but to enable them to think and act wisely, and “... not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

Pornography

The General Synod of 1971 instructed the Christian Action Commission to report to the 1972 General Synod on the subject of pornography. The following study has been prepared in compliance with that request.

The Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography concludes that there is no measurable correlation of anti-social behavior and the use of explicit sexual materials (hereinafter called pornography). This was offensive to many churchmen who sought to cast doubt on the conclusions or to rebut them with new data or new interpretations of the Commission data. The supporters of the Commission Report met this act with more data and more interpretation.

The question asked by critics of the Report “Is the Commission Report truth?” may be the wrong question. Probably the report is no more the full truth than any other conclusion at any given time is the full truth for all times and spaces (or even for a particular time and space). Rather, for the church the question which needs asking is: Does the Report indicate any individual or group behavior which should be taken regarding pornography? The answer to this question would only be “yes” if pornography caused some changes in behavior or attitudes which were at a variance with a widely held belief of the church.

There are several levels at which one could deal with cause and effect relationships of pornographic material and behavior, and it is the way one would define the problem as to whether he might see pornographic material as producing behavior which was in conflict with the values which he held. Perhaps two major
distinctions with illustrations from the Commission Report will point up this definition problem. One definition of the bad effects which one might expect to result from the widespread use of pornographic material would be definite sexual behaviors and sexual attitudes. A second major definition of bad effects which might result from widespread use of pornography is that this type of material is part of a wide variety of stimuli which combine to change the way that a person is viewed, particularly viewing a person as a sum of parts rather than as a totality.

The Commission Report has measured and reports on the following effects from pornographic material: It does arouse sexually; although there is not much effect on sexual behavior there is an increase in sexual fantasies; the only seeming effect on a person’s code of morality is an increase in toleration of those who view pornographic material; and there is conflicting data on delinquent behavior, with some types increasing and some forms decreasing. This will be examined in more detail below. That there is an increase in a dehumanized view of people, the Commission Report says very little. It does report that about one-half of the U.S. male population could be called exploitative and that this exploitative male felt more aroused sexually after viewing erotic films. However, their exploitative attitudes were at a lower level 24 hours after viewing the film.

It should be noted that the Commission Report deals with only one aspect of the complex twentieth century man. This is accepted technique because of the intricate problems (both conceptual and mathematical) involved in dealing with a large number of variables which affect behavior in interdependent ways. This partial view of man ignores the reality, and helps to suggest answers to questions as to why there was a dramatic decrease in sex crimes in Denmark following the laws which allowed a wider availability of pornography while in the U.S. the number of forcible rapes has increased and the total number of juvenile arrests for all crimes has increased 100 percent during the period of increased availability of pornography. This Report does not contain information correlating pornography with the increase in venereal disease (300 percent to 500 percent in the past 15 years). The point is that there is evidence on the Commission’s own definition of the problem to raise questions on their recommendations which concern the behavior of certain deviants and potential deviants.

On an intermediate level, between the behavior and the wholistic definition of the problem, is the question of attitudinal changes which might be commented on from a value orientation. One of the major contributors in terms of studies was T. R. Mosher. One interesting study on attitudes was made using pornographic films. Mosher’s conclusions were that the attitudes which were increased from viewing these films were disgust, depression, and a loss of peacefulness and serenity. Increases were also noted in attitudes of impulsiveness, feeling pepped-up, being “driven” and anxiousness. If an individual felt that these attitudinal changes were wrong from his value situation, he would surely conclude that viewing these films was bad.

Dealing with the problem of pornography on the level of dealing with a person as a totality rather than as a collection of subsets of behavior — the sexual man, the working man, the playing man, etc.—the Christian view of a person is that an individual is a human reflecting God. A person is a whole and cannot be considered as body without mind and soul. While the Christian views man in this way, art, literature, businesses, unions, churches, schools, governments, movies, or any individual or institution has the power to treat or depict a person as less than the totality that the Christian believes that person is.
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It is rather well accepted that the attitudes of individuals are affected (if not formed) by the system which surrounds the individual. Thus, a society which is constantly reinforcing the members of the society with a view of the individual which is partial rather than wholistic represents a viewpoint which a Christian cannot support and would attempt to change. It is this aspect of the problem, which is the aspect which is of most concern to the church, which is really not dealt with in the Commission Report. One can speculate that there is some interplay between pornography and violence as both tend to treat the individual as of little worth, but no real in-depth study from the behavioral increase or decrease of “humanity” as discussed has been undertaken. In the absence of this type of study, the church will have to act or not act on the basis of its interpretation of whether other social institutions are dealing with the individuals in less than wholistic ways which are acceptable to the church.

It would seem logical from the Commission Report that a Christian encourage sex education classes. In light of both the report and the church’s attitude toward the person, it would be imperative that the course deal with a great deal more than sex “techniques.” In reality all such courses in our schools do. The concerned Christian might well request that the main part of the course should develop the attitude that the individual is more than a sexual playing thing. He might further insist that students achieve at an exceptional level in their understanding and observable behavior in this area before they are allowed to discuss “technical” aspects of sex. While this undeniably is interference with the teacher’s right to teach, it seems justifiable as a political move to present the philosophy of the Christian segment of the community (after all the schools are, among other things, a reflection of the community).

In the area of literature and art, action quickly involves itself into judgment. Judgment is not a dirty word; people do have to make judgments. The Christian should be encouraged to judge as acceptable those materials which, though sexy in tone and description, do in the main try to picture most of the individuals as total beings. He would judge other materials as unacceptable. This approach would tend to rule out the numerous “Positions of Lovemaking” as mechanistic but rule in “Fanny Hill” as dealing with real persons. It would also tend to rule out “James Bond” and rule in “The Naked and the Dead” and so on. A system of judgment will always be frail enough to be attacked by those who hold different values. But, from a Christian viewpoint of the individual, it would be better than no system at all or a vague system of judgment which relies on “appeals to the prurient” senses as the Supreme Court of the U.S. now uses to judge. Perhaps someone could come up with the aspects of the individual which must be treated in art: greed, compassion, humor, frailty, love, and so on. In any case, the thrust of the Christian action is not censoring “dirty words and filthy pictures” but offering their voices to the criteria by which art and literature could be judged.

Finally, other institutions and individuals should be judged by the same standard. A business or other employer who terminates employment without regard to the impact on the total individual is worthy of censure (boycott?) also. An institution which deals with so many people that they are identifiable only by numbers (Social Security, insurance, Student I.D., Army Serial, etc.) is also worthy of censure. Particular strategies are appropriate for different situations and do not have a place in this paper. These further problems are suggested only to alert the Christian to the degree to which society has allowed the individual to be atomized and to suggest
that these institutions with their approaches to the person as less than a whole, may have to share the responsibility for the present popularity of the atomized sexual attitudes which make up the approach of the Commission Report.

The Christian Action Commission continues to study the influences on human character development and on attitudes, including sexuality, which may lead to recommendations to future Synods.

Busing

R-1 The Christian Action Commission RECOMMENDS the adoption of the following statement: (ADOPTED)

THE CONCERN: The General Synod wishes to address itself to the urgent concerns of racial imbalance and the related tensions and turmoils of required busing in our public schools.

THE OPPORTUNITY: We celebrate the fact that the racial balance plans instituted in many school districts provide an immediate opportunity for Christ’s people to become reconcilers in the midst of many of the demanding issues before us in this country.

WE BELIEVE that the primary function of the Church of Jesus Christ is to witness to the love of God for all peoples. We also continue to believe as stated in the 1957 Credo on Race Relations that “the Supreme Court decision on the ordered gradual desegregation of the public schools of our land represents an effective legal expression of the Christian attitudes and convictions at the present time. We believe that we should support and implement the intent and content of that decision.”

WE CONFESS

1. sharing in processes which have established segregated neighborhoods and segregated schools which have resulted in unequal education and opportunities;
2. that our reluctance to live with people who are different has passed this burden on to our children;
3. our need to learn how to live together in a way which honors our differences and encourages our unity; and
4. our expectation that within our public schools we, with our children, have one of the greatest opportunities to experience the rich diversity of all God’s people.

THEREFORE, WE ENCOURAGE THE CHURCHES AND MEMBERSHIP OF OUR DENOMINATION:

1. to use their corporate endorsement and human resources in the support of organizations, judicial and legislative bodies, state and local school boards which struggle to develop and enact racial balance plans in their effort to achieve quality education for all in their divided communities;
2. to express patience, faith and vision as we live with the inconvenience of busing because we believe the overall quality of education is immensely enhanced within an educational setting which develops human dignity through the experience of diversity;