

AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY

The Bible is our record of God's creation of human beings, of the Creator's establishment of a moral code of conduct for men and women, and of God's covenant with the faithful. The Bible is also a record of the failure of humankind to abide by God's law, and Scripture is abundantly full of accounts of sin, including the sins of sexual perversion and sexual violence. There can be no greater evidence than the Bible itself that humanity has distorted and demeaned God's intentions for the relationships between men and women. The Bible writers were quick to condemn those who use sex for lustful or perverted purposes. Fortunately, the Bible is not just a Book of condemnation, but the story of how God redeemed men and women from their sins through Jesus Christ.

The topic of pornography is a distasteful and difficult one for American Baptists, and we seek to approach it in the spirit of our Biblical forebears: mindful of God's law, fearful of God's judgment, and hopeful of God's redemption through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

1. American Baptists join with their sisters and brothers in many other faith groups to condemn the presence of pornography in our society, and to call upon the institutions of society to work toward its elimination.
2. We define pornography as the portrayal of explicit sexual encounters which highlight violence and coercion. Pornography portrays women and men as demeaned sexual objects, and it victimizes and abuses children by enlisting them to act out roles as if they were willing sexual partners with each other or with adults. This kind of "hard core" pornography takes many forms, and is readily available to the public in video cassettes, films, books, magazines, newspapers, phonograph records, "dial-a-porn" telephone networks, the internet and other media, as well as adult sexual "toys." Recent court decisions have taken strong stands against this type of pornography, and the U.S. Department of Justice characterizes it as "illegal obscenity," the existence of which is not protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.[1](#)
3. As Christians, American Baptists are concerned with the adverse spiritual, social, psychological, and public health effects of pornography.
 - a. The sexual disinformation that is prevalent in pornography prevents many persons from understanding that sex is a gift from God to enable God's children to procreate, and to be enjoyed in mutual expressions of love between husband and wife. Any portrayal of sex as an unloving, violent, coercive act is clearly a defamation of God's gift. Any portrayal of sex as gratifying only in the context of domination, humiliation, or pain, is an

outrageous corruption of our understanding of the relationship of women and men in the church, in the family, and in society.

American Baptists believe that women and men are created in the image of God, and that the human body is the temple of God's Holy Spirit. God wants us to care for our bodies, to treat them with respect, and to use them to deepen our understanding of the spiritual side of our nature. We believe that although few of us escape physical suffering in this life, the human body was intended by God as a means of experiencing the joys of God's creation. Sexual intercourse is a joy to be cherished between husband and wife.

Any medium which seeks to provide crude satisfactions which do not gratify the spirit, or which portrays the body in demeaning ways, or which portrays sexual intercourse as a spiritually sterile or violent act, is abhorrent to us.

Pornography which victimizes children is especially abominable. In many ways, "child pornography" is the ultimate affront to God's intentions for the family, and for the spiritual development of human beings from earliest childhood. Jesus used children to illustrate the sort of simple faith He wanted His followers to have. Those who corrupt the innocence of childhood are singled out for special condemnation.

b. Pornography harms the body as well as the spirit. The production, distribution and consumption of this pornography harms both those who produce it and those who consume it. Local outlets which distribute pornography, which often provide private viewing booths in which male masturbation may take place, become potential breeding grounds for venereal disease. Sexual "toys" and implements which penetrate body orifices have a potential for doing physical and mental harm to persons who use them.

Most importantly, the inaccurate information about sex which is spread by pornography causes some persons to conclude that sex is pleasurable when it is coercive, when it is engaged in with an anonymous partner, and when physical violence and sometimes torture is employed in the act. Moreover, studies lead researchers to believe that in some cases, there is a causal relationship between hard core pornography and violent sexual acts.²

4. Pornography has significant law enforcement implications. Local outlets which distribute pornography tend to attract prostitutes, drug dealers, and criminals. Hard core pornography is an \$8- billion industry in the United States,³ and elements of organized crime are intimately involved in its production and distribution.

5. The form of pornography which the U.S. Justice Department describes as "illegal obscenity" is particularly virulent in that it often portrays women, men, and children as engaging in explicit and often violent sexual acts. Some of the actors in these illicit media are injured or killed in the process of producing films, video tapes, or photographs. The injurious effects of illegal obscenity on its consumers and on innocent persons are numerous and profoundly disturbing.

Yet apathy toward the existence of illegal obscenity is widespread, and the public has not encouraged public officials and law enforcement officers to take action against it.

In many cases, this apathy is caused by a misunderstanding of what "illegal obscenity," or hard core pornography, is, and what it is not. Some persons hesitate to call for action against this hardcore pornography because they are unaware of the differences between it and erotic magazines, literary erotica, or other media occasionally referred to as "soft porn."

Hard core pornography has absolutely no redeeming literary or social value. It is clearly injurious to the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of individuals. It is so virulent and harmful that we are compelled to focus our full attention on it, and we call upon Christians to do all they can to eradicate it.

Being deeply concerned about the far reaching effects of pornography on persons and on society, we:

1. Commend the U.S. Department of Justice for its stated determination to take effective action against illegal obscenity while protecting the free speech rights of individuals under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
2. Commend the Surgeon General of the United States for his efforts to make the public health dangers of pornography known to the public.
3. Commend the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA for passing a strongly worded policy statement condemning violence and sexual violence in media.
4. Commend the work of the Religious Alliance Against Pornography (RAAP), a broadly based interfaith group composed of Protestants, Jews, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, ecumenical, and evangelical groups who are united in their stand against pornography portraying sexual violence and against child pornography.
5. We call upon American Baptist congregations to take seriously their responsibility for ministering to individuals and families to help them develop an accurate knowledge of sex and healthy attitudes toward it which include an understanding of sex as a gift of God. We also call upon American Baptist congregations to lift up the name and cause of Christ as they take prophetic action in their communities against the presence of pornography.
6. We call upon American Baptist national program boards and the boards of American Baptist regions to help develop resources that will be useful to the churches in carrying out their ministry of holistic sex education among individuals and families, and in the churches' action against pornography in their communities.

7. We call upon law enforcement officials and prosecutors to take strong action in eradicating illegal obscenity.
8. We call upon individual citizens to become directly involved in the distasteful activity of informing themselves about pornography, understanding its effects, and developing strategies for taking direct legal action against it by becoming plaintiffs in antipornography legal proceedings.
9. We commit ourselves as individuals to understand the scourge of pornography, to seek the courage to take specific action against pornography, and to be teachers and motivators of persons who are in a position to be effective opponents of it in our society.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1988

166 For, 1 Against, 1 Abstention

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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Family Life - June 1984

A vision of marriage as monogamous, life-long, one flesh union is affirmed by Jesus...

A vision of the parent-child relationship as one of tender care, mutual responsibility, and mutual benefit...

We affirm children are a gift from God, entrusted to parents for love, care and nurture...

We affirm Christian families as agents through which God's Good News is proclaimed, received, and lived out so that persons might fulfill God's redemptive purpose in history...

We affirm...family groups experiencing conflict within marriages or between generations are...helped to find resources for healing...

We are committed to providing programs of education...to empower parents striving to raise children according to Christian principles...and to sustain parents when young children struggle with sexual orientation...

We are committed to advocating the rights of all families, and especially those with dependent children and aging members, to the necessities of life: shelter, safety, medical care, and education.

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - December 1976

The right to the basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing, and health care...the right to develop family structures, to build mutually satisfying human relationships and to nurture, train and educate children...

The right to grow in mind and self-fulfillment...

The right to follow the dictates of conscience...

The right to privacy in one's home...

The right to human dignity...

American Baptist Policy Statement on Women and Men as Partners in Church and Society - December 1985:

...the father and the mother should model mutual love and respect for the gifts and qualities that each brings to their marriage and the home they have established...It also means that parents should teach their sons and daughters to love and respect all person, seeking to free them from stifling male and female stereotypes and encouraging them to develop skills and talents according to their individual gifts...

We affirm that both men and women in church and society should share concern for strong family units and consistent child care...

1 For example, *Miller v. California* (1973) and other decisions described in the report of the Attorney General's Commission against Pornography. *Paris Theater v. Slaton* (1973) states: "The sum of experience affords an ample basis for legislatures to conclude that a sensitive, key relationship of human existence, central to family life, community welfare, and the development of the human personality, can be debased and distorted by crass commercial exploitation of sex."

2 As cited in the report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography.

3 *Ibid.*
