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SBC Christian Life Commission Urges Legislation on TV X-Movies

NASHVILLE (BP)--Urging Congress to pass legislation prohibiting the showing of X and R-rated movies on television, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission advisory committee adopted a statement petitioning the U.S. Senate to conduct a hearing to investigate the showing "of morally offensive movies on television."

The action came in response to a resolution adopted two weeks earlier by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention asking the Christian Life Commission, the denomination's social action agency, to take steps to implement Baptist opposition to showing of X and R-rated movies on television.

In their response, the commission also urged Baptists to write letters to television networks about the matter, suggested "selective buying" to resist sponsorship of offensive movies on television, called on the Federal Communications Commission to prohibit network distribution of "morally offensive movies," and urged social action agencies of other denominations and states to take action to oppose such movies.

Suggesting "selective buying" to resist sponsorship of such movies, the commission urged its members and other individuals to communicate with local sponsors of offensive TV movies and to ask them to stop supporting such programs, "and if the sponsors refuse, to publish the names of these offending companies in newspaper ads. . . .

"Programs which degrade sex, glorify violence, and deny moral decency have no place on the airwaves which belong to the people or in our homes which belong to God," declared the Christian Life Commission statement.

"We endorse network programming which provides wholesome entertainment, and we vigorously oppose programming which undermines moral standards without which no nation can long endure," the statement continued.

The commission claimed that Columbia Broadcasting System "has broken a barrier" by releasing for the first time for showing on television an edited version of "The Damned," a previously X-rated movie.

Thus, the statement added, "There is imminent danger that offensive movies may now be channeled more frequently into American homes."

Foy Valentine, executive secretary of the Christian Life Commission, said he had spoken at length with Tom Swafford, CBS vice president for program practices, who pointed out that "The Damned" was the only one of a 167-film package CBS purchased recently for late night television which had been previously rated "X" in the theater version. Swafford said the movie "was cut to clean it up some" and to shorten it up for television showing.

Valentine pointed out, however, that CBS chose to show "The Damned" at the front end of the package rather than in the middle or near the end, and that the film was chosen to lead off the third week of the series (slated for network telecast Monday, Feb. 28).

According to Swafford, nine of the 166 other films were R-rated, and of these, five have been rejected by CBS and the other four have not yet been previewed, Valentine said.

Valentine further pointed out that both CBS, and local CBS affiliate stations have the right to reject any movies they feel are unsuitable.

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The commission's statement quoted a televised editorial broadcast by WBTV, Charlotte, N.C., which refused to show "The Damned," as saying that the network had removed the worst parts of the movie, "but enough remains to make the picture thoroughly unfit for home viewing. . . . X-rated movies even partially cleaned up are not the sort of thing that young people should be watching."

Valentine pointed out that one statement in the resolution adopted by the SBC Executive Committee saying that CBS had announced the purchase of "a large number of X and R-rated movies" was in error, since the 167-film package included only one X-rated film and nine R-rated films. He added, however, that no list of the films has been provided by CBS, even though it has been requested.

Suggesting actions for opposition to showing of "morally offensive movies on television," the commission group said that "we declare ourselves in favor of a congressional bill to prohibit the showing of X and R-rated movies on television, and we pledge ourselves to work to secure its passage."

"We also petition U.S. Senator John Pastore, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, to conduct a hearing to investigate the showing of morally offensive movies on television, and we request that the Christian Life Commission be given the opportunity to present testimony against the showing of these movies," the statement added.

The commission further urged Southern Baptists and others concerned about TV programming to write letters to the networks in support of wholesome programming, and called on the FCC "to do its duty to protect the public interest by prohibiting any television network's distribution of morally offensive movies."

It further urged social action agencies of other denominations to "join in opposition to offensive programming by enlisting their members to express themselves through letter writing and selective buying practices."



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