

Pornography

Introduction

In October 2000, a number of themes were identified in a position paper Media Ethics, which included brief reference to pornography. A Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB) Media Policy was published in March 2001 and amended in November 2011 as the CFB Policy Statement on Media Ethics. To complement this and to provide specific guidance on pornography from an investment perspective, the CFB Policy Statement on Pornography has now been approved.

A decline in Judeo-Christian influence has weakened intellectual efforts in society to oppose pornographic content in the media, especially where consent is implied. This has been coupled with greater and wider availability and access via digital and electronic formats.

Methodist teaching affirms that we are made in the image of God and that before Him, men and women are equal. Material that undermines this position falls short of the ideal and is a cause for concern.

However, context is important. Accurate, and sometimes graphic, war reportage can be justified in the pursuit of truth and justice as part of conflict journalism. Content that explores a sexual or violent dimension pertaining to human experience or the human condition may also be valid in the arts and literature. The Christian must, therefore, take care in reaching informed judgements. Where produced and distributed for its own ends without appropriate legitimate context, it may not be acceptable; for example, pornographic films or magazines viewed or screened for the sexual enjoyment of consumers rather than for their dramatic or educational content.

There may also be civil liberty issues to take into account. Ultimately, Biblical teaching applies to all, although not everyone will subscribe to that view. The Church is therefore called to interact and engage where pornographic content is available and where there is an insistence on the right to view. Freedom to choose has always been part of the created order, but for the Christian, the prevalence of pornographic material deviates from the ideal, not least when the exploitation of humans is undertaken for commercial gain.

Definitions

The Methodist Church recognises that definitions of pornography and the erotic can be subjective. In the context of this ethical investment policy pornography is taken to mean:

“the portrayal of sexual subject matter in words or images for the primary purpose of sexual arousal. Within this broad definition pornography can relate to less explicit forms of portrayal, often termed “soft pornography”, and which are largely unregulated and widely available in modern society and “harder” forms of pornography, which are generally regulated and often restricted to an over 18 clientele.

Other forms of pornography, such as that involving children or animals or other “extreme pornographic images” (defined in law largely as seriously violent or grossly offensive), are illegal to produce and a criminal act to possess.”

Policy

The CFB will seek to balance competing demands: to reflect in its investment policy that pornography degrades, exploits, manipulates and deviates from the ideal of God's Kingdom, whilst noting that it is also more widely available and sometimes demanded, in ever more extreme forms. Therefore:

1. Companies are expected to operate wholly within the law (domestic and international) and to take swift corrective action to prohibit and proscribe any activity (such as hosting websites) that is judged illegal or criminal;

2. Companies, a major part of whose business activity is engaged in the production, transmission, publication or distribution of pornographic content should be avoided;
3. A distinction between production and distribution/transmission remains valid, except where distribution, transmission, marketing and promotion are pronounced.
4. Companies involved in production will be considered case by case as there are likely to be some instances where the activity, however small, will be unacceptable, in particular:
 - Publishers of pornographic print media;
 - Owner producers of pornographic television channels;
 - Owner producers of pornographic media formats such as film, video and games;
 - Owners of pornographic digital, virtual or online content such as websites.
5. Mobile telecommunication companies that facilitate the transmission of pornographic content will be assessed according to the strength of the controls in place to protect vulnerable groups. Mobile telecommunication companies that seek to derive material revenue from the provision of pornographic content will be subject to greater scrutiny and engagement, which may lead to disinvestment.
6. In keeping with our general policy, companies owning or operating premises providing pornographic experiences or live shows will be subject to investment exclusion.
7. Investment avoidance based on the contribution to company revenues alone is not appropriate and needs to be accompanied by qualitative ethical judgements based on the principles outlined in this Policy Statement.
8. In keeping with CFB policy, engagement will often be the most appropriate response in cases of broadcast, transmission and retail of pornographic material where this is not the main business, and may, in part, be based on the protection of vulnerable groups via age or access restriction. Such instances may include:
 - The retailing and siting of pornographic magazines and print media within high-street store chains;
 - The protection of taste and decency standards including age, access and encryption restriction by broadcasters;
 - The publishing of pornographic and non-educational sexual content in teen and young persons media;
 - The protection of minors via age, access and encryption restriction by premium telephone line providers;
 - The protection of minors via age, access and encryption restriction by Internet service providers hosting web sites, chat-rooms, blogging sites and other social and interactive media.

December 2011