# The Rev. Donald E. Wildmon's Crusade for Censorship, 1977-1989

By Christopher M. Finan

"What we are up against is not dirty words and dirty pictures. It is a philosophy of life which seeks to remove the influence of Christians and Christianity from our society. Pornography is not the disease, but merely a visible symptom. It springs from a moral cancer in our society, and it will lead us to destruction if we are unable to stop it."

---The Rev. Donald E. Wildmon

The Rev. Donald E. Wildmon has always claimed to be an "average guy." When he first came to the attention of the public, he was the leader of a boycott against advertisers who sponsored "sex, violence and profanity" on television. Wildmon insisted that he was not a censor but an outraged private citizen who was exercising his constitutional right to protest. But, Wildmon is not an average citizen. His ambition is to remake American society. Nor is he content with the instruments of change provided by democratic institutions: he advocates the censorship of television, movies, books, and magazines. During his 12-year campaign for censorship, he has tried to suppress:

* Television series like "Charlie's Angels," "Three's Company," "All in the Family," "Laverne and Shirley," "Love, Sidney," "Taxi," "WKRP in Cincinnati," "Hill Street Blues," "Moonlighting," "L.A. Law," "thirtysomething;"

* Television dramas like "Roe v. Wade," Pete Hamill's "Flesh and Blood," Maya Angelou's "Sister, Sister" and "Portrait of a Rebel: Margaret Sanger;"

* Movies like "The Last Temptation of Christ;"

* Magazines like Playboy, Penthouse and Sassy.

Wildmon is again engaged in a battle to change television. He announced in January that a group he has formed, Christian Leaders for Responsible Television (CLeaR-TV), will lead a boycott against the advertiser who sponsors the worst television shows during the May television rating "sweeps." His aim in 1989 is the same as it has always been: censorship.

Wildmon's campaign began one night in December 1976. At the time, he was an obscure, 38-year-old United Methodist pastor, serving a church in Southaven, Mississippi. But, he had always been ambitious. "Back in my younger days I reached the conclusion that the worst thing that could happen would be to come to the time of death and realize that my life had made no difference," Wildmon said recently.[1] That night in 1976 as he sat watching television with his family, he found the vehicle for his ambitions. He later claimed that as he switched channels he was unable to find a single show that didn't feature sex, violence, or profanity.[2] Wildmon interpreted this as a calling from God to take up the fight for purer television. He resigned his job in June 1977 and moved to Tupelo, Mississippi, 50 miles outside of Memphis, to establish the National Federation for Decency. The NFD struggled in the beginning. According to his son, Wildmon was able to pay himself only $1,800 in the first seven months of the organization's

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[1] AFA Journal, January 1989, p. 2.

[2] Time, July 6, 1981, p. 20.

existence; his wife began working to help the venture to survive.[3]

Wildmon struggled with the problem of how to establish an identity for the NFD. The first effort to attract national attention was a campaign called, "Turn the Television Off Week," which targeted mostly southern cities in July 1977. Wildmon claimed that his survey of television programming revealed that 54 per cent of all shows had sexual content. Wildmon said such a high proportion of sexual programming distorted real life. He was also upset that 90 per cent of the sex was adulterous. "The strategy of so much network programming is to appeal to the prurient interest of man and not to spend money for quality programming," Wildmon said.[4] Yet, while he received some press attention for his television boycott, there was no proof that anyone had actually turned off a set.

Wildmon's problem was how to exert power over the networks with an organization that claimed only 1,400 members. Boycotts of television programs would never work. The number of people who would turn off their sets at any one time would never be large enough to register in ratings. Wildmon decided to try boycotts of advertisers. The sensitivity of advertisers to bad publicity had been established the year before in the controversy over the satire "Soap." Now, in the spring of 1978, Wildmon announced his first boycott of advertisers. He told Sears that his supporters would

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[3] Tim Wildmon fundraising letter, May 26, 1987.

[4] Associated Press, July 21, 1977.

boycott its stores until it withdrew sponsorship of three shows at the top of his hit list--"Three's Company," "Charlie's Angels," and "All in the Family." Although his following was miniscule, Wildmon used it to maximum effect by staging demonstrations outside Sears stores in several parts of the country and in downtown Chicago in front of the Sears building itself. The boycott worked. While denying it was acting under pressure, Sears cancelled its ads on "Three's Company" and "Charlie's Angels."[5]

During 1979, Wildmon continued to make his voice heard. He attacked "Flesh and Blood," a television movie based on a novel by Pete Hamill, because it dealt with the subject of incest.[6] He also attacked, "Portrait of a Rebel: Margaret Sanger," a movie about the leader of the movement for birth control. He struck out at CBS, accusing it of complicity in the murder of a little girl in Wichita Falls, Texas. The four-year-old was murdered by her mother, who had seen a similar crime committed when CBS broadcast "Exorcist II." "CBS must accept partial blame for her death," Wildmon insisted. "They were an accessory to the murder." A NFD picket outside CBS headquarters in New York carried a sign that insisted, "CBS Controlled by Satan."[7]

Yet, the NFD was making little progress. It was firmly anchored on the lunatic fringe of the hundreds of groups trying to

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[5] The Washington Post, May 17, 1978, Section B, p. 1.

[6] Associated Press, October 15, 1979.

[7] Ibid, July 7, 1980.

change television to suit their tastes. Wildmon had a new weapon in the advertiser boycott, but he had been unable to secure the backing from larger, more established groups that he would need to launch a national campaign. He began to think that his future might lie in another direction. He ran for a seat in the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1980 but finished a distant third, garnering only 921 votes or 15 per cent of the total cast.[8]

A month after his defeat in the Mississippi House race, Wildmon made another effort to win backing for his advertiser boycott. He met with the Rev. Jerry Falwell in Lynchburg, Virginia. Falwell, the leader of The Moral Majority, was then at the peak of his career as a spokesman for the religious right. As Wildmon later told the story, he held up before Falwell a dollar bill. "The networks don't care about your moral values, but they do care about this," Wildmon told him. According to Wildmon, Falwell didn't require much persuading. "Great," he said. "Let's go with it." Wildmon said later that he believed he had reached a turning point. As he sat in his motel room that night, he was sure of victory. "Now I have the numbers," he recalled thinking. "Now I have the clout. After three years of wandering in the wilderness, I've found a road to the Promised Land."[9]

Two months later, in February 1981, Wildmon announced the organization of the Coalition for Better Television (CBTV), the

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[8] United Press International, November 5, 1980.

[9] Newsweek, June 15, 1981, p. 101.

group that would bring him national recognition. His alliance with Falwell enabled Wildmon to claim that CBTV represented 200 organizations with a combined membership of over 3 million. These three million people were prepared to back a boycott of the three advertisers who sponsored the worst programming on television, he announced. The targets of the boycott were to be selected following three months of monitoring by 4,000 members of the coalition. The monitors would catalogue the offending shows on the basis of "sex incidents per hour," scenes of violence and uses of profanity.[10]

Few people outside of employees of the television networks and, to a lesser extent, the advertising industry, attempted to answer Wildmon. One of them was Peggy Charren, president of Action for Children's Television, a strong critic of the networks. Charren accused Wildmon of wanting to censor television. Sex, violence, and profanity were only the beginning, she warned:

> What will be the next target of the CBTV's censorship crusade. A production of "A Streetcar Named Desire?" A documentary on teenage pregnancy. The News?[11]

For the most part, however, the networks were forced to defend themselves.

The networks struck back in the final weeks of the CBTV rating period by releasing the results of public opinion polls that showed the public opposing the boycott. A poll commissioned by ABC showed

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[10] UPI, February 28, 1981.

[11] Newsweek, June 15, 1981, p. 101.

that 64 per cent of those polled believed that the popularity of a program should be the sole factor in determining what was on television. Only 1.3 per cent said they would consider backing a boycott. The poll also showed that Falwell and Wildmon had little support among their own constituents. It revealed that 55 per cent of those identifying themselves as members of The Moral Majority opposed efforts to force their opinions on others. CBS News reported that one third of the organizations listed as sponsors of CBTV disavowed any connection with the group.[12]

Nevertheless, CBTV was beginning to harvest the fruit of its campaign. Advertisers had begun to crack under the threat of the impending boycott. The first important convert to the cause of CBTV-approved television was Owen B. Butler, the chairman of Procter and Gamble Company, the company which spent more on television annually than any other--nearly $500 million. In a speech to the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences on June 16, Butler announced that his company had withdrawn advertising from 50 television shows over the past year. Butler denied the company had been responding to pressure from Wildmon, but he left little doubt that Procter and Gamble would take his advice in the future:

> We think the coalition is expressing very important and broadly held views about gratuitous sex, violence and profanity. I can assure you that we are listening very carefully to what they say, and I urge you to do the same.

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[12] AP, June 19, 1981; New York Times, June 30, 1981, Section C, p. 15.

Television and advertising industry officials were shocked by Butler's admission. Charren had been expecting it. "Based on what TV advertisers did during the red scares of the 50's, this is exactly what I expected," she said.[13]

Wildmon knew that he had Butler's ear. In remarks to reporters later, he revealed that Procter and Gamble had been speaking with CBTV for some time. "We've had dialogues with P&G over a period of many months," Wildmon said.[14] Nor was Procter and Gamble alone in seeking an accommodation with Wildmon. On June 26, The New York Times reported that several television advertisers had been invited to a meeting with CBTV officials "in the Memphis area." Wildmon confirmed that discussions were under way to reach a compromise that would prevent a boycott.[15] Wildmon told the Associated Press that the boycott threat was having a decided effect. "I've talked with six advertisers in the last week who have pulled 150 commercials off the air in the last four months," he said.[16]

On June 29, at a CBTV press conference that had been scheduled to announce the start of the boycott, Wildmon announced its cancellation. With Falwell and Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum looking on, Wildmon told the press that the boycott was no longer

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[13] Newsweek, June 29, 1981, p. 60.

[14] Ibid, June 29, 1981, p. 60.

[15] New York Times, June 26, 1981, p. 10.

[16] AP, June 26, 1981.

necessary because in their meetings with CBTV officials, advertisers had promised to help "clean up" television. Wildmon refused to identify the advertisers who had made these pledges. While he professed himself satisfied, Wildmon warned that CBTV might institute a boycott in the fall if the shows premiering then were objectionable. Falwell said his organization was "raising funds for a war chest to buy and assist others in buying full-page ads across the nation naming public enemy No. 1 or 2 or 3 or whoever they are and listing their products."[17]

Skeptics raised questions about the decision to cancel the boycott. They suggested that the networks' opinion polls had trumped Wildmon. They said he was afraid of losing. "Let me tell you something," Wildmon said, replying to his critics. "I was raised to know that it was not a disgrace to fight and get whipped."[18] But, Wildmon had at least won a moral victory. The chairman of one of the nation's biggest corporations had promoted his views as important for the nation. Even those who opposed his tactics endorsed his claim that television needed better programming.

But, "better programming" is a subjective judgment. Wildmon insisted that his opposition to shows was based solely on objectively measured levels of sex, violence and profanity. When Wildmon objected to a show because of its sexual content, however,

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[17] New York Times, June 30, 1981, Section C, p. 15.

[18] UPI, July 14, 1981.

it was not always because it was prurient but often because it presented sex in ways he disliked--outside marriage, between teenagers or partners of the same sex. He also opposed the mention of birth control, abortion and, later, AIDS. His criticism of profanity often had more to do with the offensiveness of the subject of discussion than the use of vulgar words. Wildmon's condemnation did not stop at shows like "Vegas" and "The Dukes of Hazzard," but extended to programs dealing with adult themes like "All in the Family," "Taxi" and "WKRP in Cincinnati." (See Addendum for a full list of the television programs attacked by Wildmon.)

Wildmon's extremism clearly guided his attacks on programming during the balance of 1981. He was particularly unhappy about NBC's decision to develop a series based on a movie about an aging homosexual who permits a young woman and her daughter to move in with him. Wildmon, who saw the show as an attack on the institution of the family, said it was "utterly stupid" for NBC to undertake the series at the very moment when concern about television was at its peak. Tony Randall, the star of the proposed series, "Love, Sidney," defended his show. "It's about compassion. It's about love. It's about the need people have for family. And they're saying it's anti-family," Randall said.[19] As the preemptive strike on Randall's show indicated, Wildmon was not waiting for shows to be aired before attacking them. Wildmon condemned a fictionalized treatment of the series of murders of black children

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[19] Washington Post, July 7, 1981, Section C, p. 1.

in Atlanta before the producer had decided to go ahead with the project.[20]

Wildmon's pose as a moderate was undermined later in the year when some of his followers pushed his views about sex on television to their logical extreme. He was forced to apologize to Phil Donahue, the talk show host, for a release issued by one of the chapters of his National Federation for Decency that described Donahue, whose show had won nine Emmy awards, as a "sex activist broadcaster." The release said many of Donahue's "sex shows" promoted abnormal sex and threatened a boycott of Donahue's sponsors. In an appearance on "Donahue," Wildmon apologized for the release. He admitted that a program on breast-feeding should not have been characterized as a "sex program." But, Wildmon soon resumed the offensive, insisting that his monitoring showed that almost half of Donahue's shows dealt with sex. He charged that some urged acceptance of sex practices contrary to traditional Christian morality.[21]

Wildmon's appearance on "Donahue" showed how far he had come from Southaven, Mississippi. The threat of a boycott had given him national exposure. Now he was anxious to see what an actual boycott would achieve. In late 1981, Wildmon decided that the networks had not met his demands and that a boycott would be necessary after all. But, just as Wildmon was preparing to realize

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[20] UPI, July 29, 1981.

[21] AP, September 29, 1981.

his dream, Jerry Falwell withdrew his support for the tactic of boycotting advertisers. The division between Wildmon and Falwell had first become apparent in a television documentary, "Eye of the Beholder," broadcast in late 1981. It was this documentary that first reported Wildmon's determination to proceed with the boycott. It also revealed that Falwell was having second thoughts about boycotts against advertisers. He appeared to take to heart the survey results released in June that showed his own followers rejecting efforts to force The Moral Majority's views on others. Falwell told the interviewer that The Moral Majority had raised $2 million for the boycott but then suggested that his group would not back coercive efforts to change programming. The Moral Majority's resignation from the boycott was confirmed by a spokesman for the group in late January 1982. "Our feeling is that the networks are headed in the right direction," he said.[22]

In the absence of The Moral Majority, Wildmon changed his plans. Falwell had promised $2 million for publicity for the boycott before he backed out, and publicity was critical because the boycott depended upon the consumer's ability to recognize the target's products in the market place. Lacking funds, Wildmon abandoned the proposed boycott of advertisers. At a news conference in February 1982, he announced a boycott against RCA, the owner of NBC.

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[22] UPI, January 27, 1982.

Wildmon also revealed new demands. "Our concerns have been too narrow and will be expanded," he explained. "Our concerns about sex, violence and profanity in programs is valid, but there will be more. We're going to surprise some people."[23] He demanded changes in the way NBC handled 11 subjects. Besides less sex, violence and profanity, he wanted less drug abuse and "racial and religious stereotyping." The network would have to make an effort to portray life as it was lived by Christians, Wildmon said. "RCA-NBC has excluded Christian characters, Christian values and Christian culture from their programming," he charged. Wildmon also wanted to see an improvement in the portrayal of American business. Wildmon claimed that business executive had been painted as "crooks and con men."[24]

During his news conference, Wildmon had demonstrated again that he was not reluctant to criticize a popular show by singling out for attack NBC's award-winning dramatic series, "Hill Street Blues," which he said was full of sexual innuendo. Several months later, he showed that he was not afraid to attack a show with serious artistic intentions as well. NBC was preparing to broadcast a movie that had been written by the poet Maya Angelou. "Sister, Sister," was the story of how three black sisters in North Carolina resolve the differences that separate them. Wildmon had not seen the movie. Apparently reacting to a part of the story in

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[23] AP, February 23, 1982.

[24] New York Times, March 5, 1982, Section C, p. 28.

which a minister committed adultery and stole the church receipts, Wildmon claimed that "negative stereotyping of people identified as Christian in the film is an example of a continuing trend by RCA-NBC and an example of anti-Christian, anti-religious networking programming."[25] The advertisers responded to his complaints: 12 of the 28 sponsors asked to see the program again, and one sponsor, Kodak, withdrew its ads after determining that the film was not sufficiently "family-oriented." Author Jessica Mitford rejected Wildmon's criticisms in a letter to The New York Times. She pointed out that "Sister, Sister" was the type of program that Wildmon had formerly said he approved:

> Psychological drama of the highest order, "Sister, Sister," achieves a stunning breakthrough as a sensitive portrait of a three-dimensional, non-stereotypical black family. No wild car chases, no prostitution, no drugs, no teen-age crime -- in short, no sex or violence (sorry about that Mr. Wildmon).[26]

Wildmon had revealed himself for what he was: a Christian minister who believed that television should reflect his own world view, including his high opinion of Christian ministers. He had also shown himself as a man with an insatiable appetite for change, one change making him hungry for the next. He lost the support of many who had formerly sympathized with him. A day of reckoning was fast approaching.

Judgment day fell at the close of the third quarter of 1982. RCA reported earnings that demonstrated that Wildmon's boycott had

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[25] AP, June 7, 1982.

[26] New York Times, June 11, 1982, p. 30.

not had an effect. Third quarter earnings were $47.6 million, an increase of $152.4 million over the third quarter of 1981 when the company had shown a loss.[27] Wildmon replied by pointing to RCA's weak consumer products division, insisting that this was the part of the corporation most likely to be hurt by the boycott. But, if Wildmon had won a moral victory over the networks in 1981, there seemed little question that he had been defeated in 1982. By early 1983, "Love, Sidney," the series starring Tony Randall that Wildmon had attacked before its premiere, had become a success and was inching closer to acknowledgment of Sidney's homosexuality. Before it had become the target of Wildmon's boycott, NBC had prevented Randall from striking back at Wildmon.[28] Now, Randall dismissed Wildmon as "that ignorant, cynical, Bible-thumping ass in Mississippi."[29] There was no lightning.

For his part, Wildmon had dropped any pretense of being a reformer. He no longer accused the networks of using sex, violence and profanity to gain ratings. The problem with the networks was that they were dominated by a "humanist" view of society. "The humanist point of view is that man came from nowhere, is going nowhere and has no responsibility to others," Wildmon said. Wildmon professed himself an apostle of the Christian view. "The Christian view is that man was created by God and that there's

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[27] Ibid, November 21, 1982, Section 3, p. 21.

[28] Washington Post, July 7, 1981, Section C, p. 1.

[29] Time, March 7, 1983, p. 120.

somewhere to go -- heaven or hell -- and some moral absolutes and moral guidelines to follow," he said. The conflict between the two was irreconcilable. "You have a clash of two distinct value systems," Wildmon said. The networks were trying to remake society in line with humanist values. Wildmon acknowledged that they were winning. "I don't think we have more than five or six years left to stem the tide," he said. "Television is the most destructive force in our society."[30] It was clear that if Wildmon were in charge, television would be dominated by Christian values.

After the failure of the RCA boycott, the Coalition for Better Television lapsed. But, while Wildmon had returned to obscurity, he had not abandoned his ambition to strike a devastating blow at the "humanist" media. He travelled tirelessly in an effort to make his National Federation of Decency a grass-roots organization. The major publication of his organization was the NFD Journal. The Journal, which has changed little in its 12 year history, carries detailed criticism of individual television shows and lists the names and addresses of their sponsors. Its columns explain the demise of American society as the result of divorce, women in the work force and other factors that are weakening the traditional family. It frequently attacks birth control and abortion. Nevertheless, the tone of the magazine is set by the somewhat lurid descriptions of crime that can allegedly be attributed to pornography, television or movie violence and rock and roll music.

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[30] UPI, May 20, 1983.

The April 1989 Journal carries a story in which a mother blames the rock band the Grateful Dead for the drug abuse problem that led her son to take hostages and be killed by the police.[31]

Wildmon knew that organizing local chapters of the NFD would occur more quickly if the organizing occurred within the context of a larger campaign. In 1984, the NFD began a fight to ban Playboy and Penthouse magazines. As always, Wildmon's tactic was not to attack the producers directly. He tried to strangle the magazines' circulation through boycotts aimed at chain stores, including drug and convenience stores, where they were sold from "blindered" racks behind the counter. He returned to the picketing tactic that he had used against Sears, sending demonstrators to 7-Eleven and other stores. While Wildmon experienced some success against the smaller chains, the Southland Corporation, which owned 7-Eleven, and most major chains held firm. Wildmon campaigned for two years with meager results.

Wildmon's return to national prominence was largely the result of actions taken by the national administration in Washington. Wildmon and other "anti-pornography" activists had strongly supported the candidacy of Ronald Reagan because, among other things, they believed that he would take strong measures to curb sexually explicit material. They were disappointed when Reagan took little action during his first term. Wildmon and other advocates of stricter censorship visited Reagan following his

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[31] AFA Journal, April 1989, p. 12.

reelection to urge him to fulfill the promise of his conservative "social agenda." The result was the appointment of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography in 1985. The partisans of the new commission were eager to see it rebut a previous commission's conclusion that sexually explicit material was not harmful to adults. The 1970 report by the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography recommended the abolition of obscenity laws. With the appointment of what became known as the Meese Commission in 1985, the anti-pornography activists acquired an important vehicle for their opinions and Wildmon found another national forum. The Commission was chaired by a former prosecutor who had made his reputation by prosecuting adult bookstores and movie houses.

Wildmon did not waste his opportunity. At a public hearing in Los Angeles in October 1985, Wildmon told the Meese Commission that it must attack not only organized crime, reputed to be the major producer of hard-core obscenity, but also major corporations that were involved in the sale of non-obscene, First Amendment-protect material with sexual content. "The general public usually associates pornography with sleazy porno bookstores and theaters," Wildmon said. "However many of the major players in the game of pornography are household names."[32] Wildmon then proceeded to name names. Of course, the Southland Corporation was at the top of his

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[32] Donald E. Wildmon, "Pornography in the Family Marketplace," attached as an addendum to letter of Alan Sears, Executive Director, Attorney General's Commission on Pornography to various corporations, February 1986. However, the testimony was not attributed to Wildmon at the time. Wildmon's identity was revealed later.

list. But, the list of 23 corporations that Wildmon alleged were involved in "pornography distribution" included CBS, Time, Ramada Inns, RCA, Coca-Cola, three national distributors of magazines and 11 chain stores, including Rite Aid, Dart Drug Stores and National Video, a chain of video stores.

Wildmon's testimony before the Meese Commission became national news when, without being identified as coming from Wildmon, it was incorporated into a letter that the Commission sent to the corporations named by Wildmon. The Commission informed the corporations that Wildmon's characterization of them as "distributors" of "pornography" would be included in the Commission's final report. They were invited to reply to the charge of their anonymous accuser. Instead, several lawsuits were filed to force the Commission to withdraw its letter. Among the plaintiffs filing suits were the American Booksellers Association, the Council for Periodical Distributors Associations, and the Magazine Publishers of America as well as Playboy and Penthouse. They accused the Commission of establishing a blacklist to coerce the corporations receiving the letter into withdrawing First Amendment-protected material. A federal judge ordered the Commission to retract the letter and barred it from issuing any lists of retailers.

But, the Meese Commission's letter had set in progress a chain of events that no judge's order could arrest. Wildmon's boycott campaign against the chain stores, like the campaign against the television advertisers, had made them extremely sensitive to

adverse publicity. The Commission's letter was the straw that broke their backs. On April 10, 1986, the Southland Corporation announced that it was pulling Playboy and Penthouse from its 4,500 stores and recommending to 3,600 other 7-Elevens that were owned by franchisees that they get rid of them as well. The statement by Southland announcing the decision suggested that the chain was responding to evidence adduced by the Meese Commission that showed a link between "adult magazines and crime, violence, and child abuse."[33] But, Wildmon questioned Southland's altruism. He claimed that Southland had bent under the boycott. "It is a good example of what can happen when the Christian community stands together with selective buying," Wildmon said. "It took us approximately two years, but our voice was heard."[34] By the time a federal judge issued an injunction against the Meese Commission in July, ordering withdrawal of the letter to the corporations, six of the chains targeted by the Commission had pulled Playboy and Penthouse and 34 smaller chains who didn't receive the letter had followed Southland's lead. More than 10,000 stores had stopped carrying the magazines.[35] By August, the number had grown to 17,000.[36]

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[33] The only magazines carried by 7-Eleven were Playboy, Penthouse and Forum magazines. But, Playboy and Penthouse were explicitly excluded from the magazines examined by the Meese Commission. "Our study did not address magazines like Playboy and Penthouse, Commission Chairman Henry Hudson said on "Meet the Press," on July 13, 1986.

[34] UPI, April 11, 1986.

[35] Washington Post, July 23, 1986, Section B, p. 3.

[36] Los Angeles Times, August 25, 1986, p. 1.

The removal of Playboy, Penthouse and other men's "sophisticate" magazines from stores across the country had a domino effect, causing the removal of other magazines that were controversial for one reason or another. Magazines about rock and roll music, several teen magazines, the swimsuit issue of Sports Illustrated, and issues of American Photographer and Cosmopolitan were removed from sale in some parts of the country in the panic set off by the Meese Commission letter.

Wildmon kept his name in the headlines in 1987 by attacking a controversial disc jockey and a mainstream hotel corporation. Wildmon's complaint against "shock radio" personality Howard Stern was one fact that led the Federal Communications Commission to expand its ban on "offensive" programming. At the same time, Wildmon was directing a boycott against the Holiday Inn hotel chain in an effort to stop it from making "R"-rated films available to guests in their rooms. However, demonstrations scheduled at 100 Holiday Inns across the country on April 18 failed to materialize. Only 13 hotels were picketed; the average demonstration numbered between five and 10 protesters and the demonstrations lasted for only a few hours.[37]

It was at the time of the Holiday Inn boycott in mid-1987 that Wildmon began to make preliminary moves toward resuming his attack on television. He had never abandoned it entirely. The pages of the NFD Journal were full of condemnation for the current crop of

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[37] UPI, April 18, 1987.

programs and the people who sponsored them. In April 1987, Wildmon criticized the networks for dropping their ban on permitting bras to be modelled by live models. He predicted that the next step would be live underwear ads.[38] But, Wildmon had refrained from announcing any boycott of advertisers since his RCA campaign. The first sign of a new campaign came with the organization of a successor to the Coalition for Better Television. Wildmon established Christian Leaders for Responsible TV (CLeaR-TV). Then, in June, CLeaR-TV announced its first boycott, targeting Mazda Motors and Noxell for their sponsorship of television programs allegedly featuring sex, violence and profanity.[39] Four months after declaring a boycott of Mazda and Noxell, CLeaR-TV announced that Mazda had agreed to reduce the amount of sex and violence it allegedly helped promote on network TV. Noxell had previously come to terms.[40]

With the first victories by CLeaR-TV, Wildmon was back on track for another major showdown with the networks. But, there was a diversion on his return to the crusade. Wildmon became a leader in the fight to prevent Universal Pictures from releasing Martin Scorsese's film, "The Last Temptation of Christ." The film was opposed by many religious leaders because it portrayed Christ as a messiah struggling with human weaknesses, including sexual

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[38] Advertising Age, April 27, 1987, p. 75.

[39] Communications Daily, June 1, 1987, p. 5.

[40] Ibid, September 23, 1987, p. 7.

desire. While many Christian leaders condemned the film, Wildmon tried to suppress it. Wildmon asked his supporters to petition their local theaters in an effort to prevent the exhibition of the film and announced a boycott against companies owned by Universal's parent corporation, MCA. He also urged his followers to vote against the Democratic Party in the upcoming elections because Lew Wasserman, the MCA chairman, was a major fundraiser for the Democrats.[41] Among the demonstrations against release of the film, two held in Los Angeles in July were widely interpreted as anti-Semitic. Wildmon acknowledged the incidents as "very unfortunate."[42] However, he contributed to the controversy by demanding to know how many Christians served in top positions at MCA and Universal.[43] The protests over the film culminated in demonstrations in seven cities on August 12, the day of the film's release. The largest demonstration, involving 500 people, occurred outside a theater in New York. Despite the fact that several theater chains refused to show the film, "The Last Temptation of Christ" set a box office record during its first week.

In the midst of the controversy over "The Last Temptation of Christ," Wildmon was able to claim a victory over the networks when the creator of the "Mighty Mouse" cartoon agreed to cut 3 1/2 seconds of an episode that Wildmon had protested. The creator,

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[41] AP, August 5, 1988.

[42] Los Angeles Times, July 23, 1988, Part II, p. 1.

[43] Facts on File, World News Digest, September 9, 1988, p. 656 F3.

Ralph Bakshi, had fallen under suspicion because of his role in making an X-rated animated feature, "Fritz the Cat." However, Bakshi had also won an award for "Mighty Mouse" from Action for Children's Television. In the disputed episode, Wildmon charged Bakshi with portraying Mighty Mouse as experiencing drug-induced exhilaration after inhaling the petals of a flower. Mighty Mouse had sniffed cocaine, Wildmon contended. Bakshi defended his cartoon, insisting that Wildmon had interpreted the scene out of context. However, Bakshi said he was removing the scene because of his concern that the controversy might lead children to believe that what Wildmon was saying was true. Wildmon interpreted the cut differently. "This is a de facto admission that indeed Mighty Mouse was snorting cocaine," Wildmon said. "We have been vindicated."[44]

The decisions by Mazda, Noxell, and CBS whetted Wildmon's appetite for another full-scale battle with the networks. For a time in mid-1987, Wildmon had been preoccupied with the financial problems that plagued the NFD in the wake of the scandal over evangelist Jim Bakker's sexual encounter with a Long Island church secretary. Like other organizations that depended for funds on evangelical Christians, the NFD was hurt by the drop in contributions that followed Bakker's disgrace. The problem became so critical for Wildmon that he quietly folded the NFD at the end of the year. As he closed the 10-year-old NFD, Wildmon opened the American Family Association and resumed business as usual. By the

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[44] AP, July 26, 1988.

end of 1988, he had established AFA on a firmer footing than the National Federation for Decency had ever enjoyed. He was projecting a budget of $5 million for the next year.[45] In December, the representatives of CLeaR-TV, Wildmon's television group, agreed to announce a boycott of the worst advertiser at the conclusion of the sweeps period in May.

The announcement of the boycott threat in January had the same chilling effect on advertisers in the spring of 1989 that it had had in 1981. Kimberly-Clark and Tambrands announced they would not advertise on the show "Married...with Children." An Advertising Age story reporting the controversy over "Married ...with Children" noted that a growing number of companies were reviewing the programs they sponsored more carefully.[46] Less than two weeks after Kimberly-Clark and Tambrands acted against "Married...with Children," two advertisers who had been pressured by Wildmon pulled their ads from "Saturday Night Live." Ralston-Purina Company cancelled $1 million in ads because one of the shows "crossed over the line of good taste." General Mills withdrew an undisclosed number of commercials.[47] A month later, Domino's Pizza also pulled out, citing the efforts of the American Family Association as a factor in its decision.[48] At about the same time,

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[45] Wall Street Journal, April 7, 1989, p. 4.

[46] Advertising Age, March 6, 1989, p. 1.

[47] AP, March 17, 1989.

[48] Advertising Age, April 17, 1989, p. 81.

Wildmon scored a technical knock-out over Pepsi which, after initial resistance, bent to a demand that it sever its connection with Madonna because she had starred in a music video that used imagery that he disliked.[49] Advertiser fear had grown to such an extent by May that ABC was unable to find sponsors for sequels to two shows based on dramatizations of actual crime and other real events that had received respectable ratings when they were broadcast. The inability to attract sponsors was described as unprecedented by industry officials. Wildmon's blast at a movie dramatization of the Roe v. Wade case, which the critics praised for its even-handed treatment of the abortion controversy, cost NBC as much as $1 million in lost advertising revenue.[50]

Yet, there are significant differences between 1981 and 1989. Existing anti-censorship groups have expanded and new ones have been created. One of the new groups, the Americans for Constitutional Freedom, which was organized in 1986 by the American Booksellers Association and the trade associations representing magazine distributors and wholesalers, promised a stiff fight against Wildmon. "Wildmon doesn't want to make television better," Oren Teicher, the executive director of ACF, said. "He wants to make it reflect his world view: he wants to make television in Donald Wildmon's image." Teicher observed that a major difference between 1981 and 1989 is that much more is known about Wildmon

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[49] UPI, April 6, 1989.

[50] Newsday, May 17, 1989, Section II, p. 2.

today. In 1981, he was able to pretend that he was only concerned about too much sex, violence, and profanity. "Today, we know what Donald Wildmon wants," Teicher said. "Donald Wildmon wants censorship."

Television Programs Attacked by the Rev. Donald E. Wildmon
Because of their Content

A Different World
A Man Called Hawk
All in the Family
Alf
Almost Grown
Anything for Love
Amen
Benson
Bronx Zoo
Cagney and Lacey
CBS Schoolbreak Special
Channel 99
Charlie's Angels
Cheers
Crime Story
Dads
Dallas
Dear John
Designing Women
Dukes of Hazzard
Dynasty
Empty Nest
Facts of Life
Falcon Crest
Family Ties
First Impressions
Flamingo Road
Full House
Gimme a Break
Golden Girls
Growing Pains
Head ofthe Class
Heatbeat
Heartland
Heart ofthe City
Highway to Heaven
Hill Street Blues
Hogan Family
Hooperman
Hotel
Houston Knights
In the Heat of the Night
Jack & Mike
Jake and the Fat Man
Knight Rider
Knots Landing
LA Law
Laverne & Shirley
Let's Make A Deal
Live-In
Love Boat
Love Sidney
Magnum P.I.
Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman
Matlock
Maude
Matt Houston
Miami Vice
Midnight Caller
Mike Hammer
Moonlighting
Mr. Belvedere
Mr. T.
Murder, She Wrote
Murphy Brown
My Two Dads
Nancy Walker Show
Night Court
Nightingales
Nothing in Common
Outlaws
Remmington Steele
Riptide
Sara
Saturday Night Live
Scarecrow and Mrs. King
Scooby Doo
Shadow Chasers
Simon & Simon
Sixty Minutes
Slap Maxwell
Sledge Hammer
Soap
Sonny Spoon
Smothers Brothers
Spenser for Hire
St. Elsewhere
Stingray

Johnny Carson
Kate & Allie
Tattinger
Taxi
The Cavanaughs
The A Team
The Equalizer
The Newlywed Game
The Thorns
Thirtysomething
Three's Company
Three's a Crowd
Tour of Duty

Sweet Surrender
T.J. Hooker
Trapper John, M.D.
TV 101
Twenty/Twenty
227
Under One Roof
Valerie
WKRP in Cincinnati
Webster
West 57th
Who's the Boss
Wiseguy
Wonder Years
World of Disney
Year in the Life

Corporations Criticized by Wildmon For

Sponsoring Programs or Material He Has Opposed.

Abbott Labs
Ace Hardware
A.H. Robins
Airwick Corporation
Alberto-Culver
American Airlines
American Cyanamid
American Express
American Home Products
American Motors
ATT
Anheuser Busch
Apple Computer
Armstrong Industries
Avon Products
Beatrice Foods
Beecham Corporation
Bristol-Myers
Burroughs Wellcome
CBS
Cadbury-Schweppes
Campbell's Soups
Carter-Wallace
Circle K Corporation
Chanel
Cheseborough-Pond
Chrysler
Citibank
Clorox
Coca-Cola
Colgate Palmolive
Combe, Inc.
Corning Glassworks
Cosmair
Cumberland Farms
CPC International
Dairy Mart
Denny's Inc.
Domino's Pizza
Dow Chemical
Dunkin' Donuts
Eastman Kodak
Farley Industries
Ford Motor Co.
Fuji Film
Gallo Wines
General Electric
General Foods
General Mills
General Motors
Gillete Corp.
Georgia Pacific
Grand Met Consumer Products
Gulf & Western
Hallmark Cards
Helene Curtis
Heinz
Hershey Products
H.I.S. Clothing
Hilton Hotels
Holiday Corporation
Honda
Hormel
Hyundai
Hyatt Corporation
ITT Corporation
Johnson & Johnson
Johnson Wax Company
K-Mart
Keebler
Kellogg's
Kimberly Clark
Lever Brothers
Levi Strauss
McDonald's
Marriott Corp.
Mars Candy
Mastercard International
Mazda Motors of America
Mennen
Metropolitan Life
Miles Lab
Monsanto
Nestle
Nissan USA

North American Philips
Noxell Corporation
Parker Brothers
Pepisco
Penney's
Phillip Morris
Pfizer
Pillsbury
Playtex
Procter and Gamble
Prudential Insurance
Quaker Oats
Quality Inn
Ralston Purina
Ramada Inn
Rayovac
RCA
Revlon
RJR Nabisco
Richardson Vicks
Ryder Trucks
Sara Lee Corporation
Sandoz
Schering-Plough
Searle
Sears-Roebuck
Sharp
SmithKline Beckman
Sterling Drug
Tambrands, Inc.
Thompson Medical
Time, Inc.
Topps Chewing Gum
Toyota
Tru-Value Hardware
Tyson Foods
Union Carbide
Warner Communications
Warner-Lambert
Wendy's
Wrigley's
Yamaha Motor Corporation
Zenith