

Remarks By
FCC Commissioner James H. Quello
Before the
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Thank you -- I'm pleased to be here and I especially appreciate the ecumenical spirit of this esteemed Gospelrama group -- for you have as your speaker this noon an Italian Roman Catholic, a moderate Democrat and an ardent advocate of broadcast freedom of religion and freedom of speech. I'm especially delighted to share my views of the electronic church, the inspirational gospel service and several current FCC issues, with this perceptive and compassionate forum of gospel and religious leaders.

But first I want to again remind you of my personal experience with an impressive example of the effectiveness of the electronic church. It has a fascinating sequel. I mentioned I was Catholic, but my wife and I are the only Catholics left in the family. We Quellos are really ecumenical. My nieces and nephews are all Baptists, Methodists or Unitarians. Two grandchildren are Lutheran.

One of my sons was an agnostic until his deliverance. Eight years ago he was miraculously transformed by a powerful positive religious force that made him see the light and brought him back to God. At the time I wanted Dr. Schuller to know we had a younger Quello, a family man, that's now a believer and loyal viewer in Palm Coast, Florida to the "Hour of Power" every Sunday morning. And you have a senior Quello here who is both grateful for this salvation and impressed with the positive power of persuasion of the electronic church with its inspirational home delivery service.

The very first dialogue began eight years ago when I was visiting my agnostic son in Florida. Even though we are an unusually ecumenical family, I had always hoped that a Quello would somehow believe in God regardless of what particular gateway he chose to salvation. It was Sunday morning. My son, Dick, was tuning in some religious program. I growled "What have you got, the heretic hour?"

His wife answered "Oh no, Dick always watches Dr. Schuller. I can't talk while Dr. Schuller is on."

Dick looked up, "Certainly you have heard and seen Dr. Schuller?"

I said "I have heard of him but I haven't seen him."
(I have seen him many times since.)

He was annoyed. "Isn't it your job to watch and analyze TV programs? This is great . . . if more religions could tell it like 'Hour of Power,' you wouldn't have to worry about heretics in any family."

I said, "It isn't my job to watch every program, but I'm delighted that you have finally seen the light -- even though it had to be delivered to your home."

The next sequence happened a few years later.

I got an early call from Dick. He said, "Dad, do me and yourself a big favor. I want you to go out today and buy a book 'Tough Times Never Last But Tough People Do' by Dr. Robert H. Schuller. Read it and please call me tomorrow night and tell me what you think."

I said, "Dick, we have thirty-eight Commission items this week and I'll be lucky if I have time to read the top most contentious five."

He said, "Read Dr. Schuller's book first. You will do a better job at the Commission."

I couldn't quite accommodate my son's time schedule, but I did read the book. It is uplifting, inspirational and worthwhile.

And speaking of powers of persuasion, we at the FCC are still unbelievably overblessed with the continual flood of letters protesting an issue that never existed.

The letters received by the FCC opposing atheism and pleading generally for religious freedom on the air totaled over 20 million at the end of 1986! In 1986 alone we received 1.2 million! This unprecedented volume of mail continues to pour in unabated.

This is an overwhelming display of the power and influence of religion, electronic and mainline. This is especially true considering the mail was initially generated by a petition, not to keep God off the air, but requesting a freeze on applications by religious institutions for television or FM channels reserved for educational stations. The petition filed by two broadcast consultants was denied August 1, 1975. You won the war over 11 years ago. But the letters still keep pouring in because the petition has somehow become misconstrued as an atheistic plot to keep God and religion off the air.

Believe me, we God fearing Commissioners have truly seen the light. We are impressed that in 1987 Jesus Christ supported by thousands of gospel believers is still broadcasting's No. 1 super-star with an unbelievable all-time high mail count.

But, seriously, we have to again issue our regular counter-plea -- and this comes unnaturally to a former broadcaster like me. Please don't keep those cards and letters rolling in. We are not administratively equipped to handle them. More importantly, remember that those wonderful but misinformed letter writers have now spent over \$4 million in postage alone! This doesn't count the envelope, paper, time and effort in mailing. This significant expenditure of money and manpower could be efficiently utilized for productive work and live religious issues.

With this power, religious broadcasters have the responsibility of maintaining the highest professional standards to merit respect and support. Unfortunately, you, too, must self-regulate and police yourselves against the greedy, the unethical, the cultists, the intolerant and the fiscally careless.

As you well know, we are in an era where broadcast electronic ministries are suspect due to the unethical conduct of a few. Above all, religious programming must maintain its integrity if its message is to be believable. It must not prey upon religious emotionalism to extract the last dollar from the faithful. Religious programming must remember its roots, its focus, its purpose. In short, religious programmers must remember they are spreading the word of God.

This is a tremendous responsibility. Remember, religious broadcasters must account not only to the FCC licensing authority, but to the ultimate higher regulatory authority.

The overall inspirational and positive influence of your broadcast services must not be tainted by the indiscretion of a very few.

On a different subject, the Commission is caught in a crossfire of First Amendment purists and a growing public outcry for action against indecency on the air. This subject has a full load of journalistic adversarial zeal with editorials criticizing FCC actions in such prestigious publications as Broadcasting Magazine, the Wall St. Journal and the Washington Post.

It strikes me as paradoxical that so many writers and commentators critical of the FCC's comprehensive deregulation, lack of enforcement or the FCC unwillingness to enforce its regulatory mandate are the most vociferous in demanding full First Amendment protection for purveyors of indecency and obscenity on the air.

I want to emphasize that we are simply enforcing an established law. We are not creating a new law. We are finding means of enforcing a statute prohibiting the broadcast of indecent or obscene speech and material.

Previous FCC decisions interpreted a former Pacifica case so narrowly that they had the practical effect of obstructing or preventing the prosecution of patently indecent or obscene language on the air. We are re-interpreting the Commission's legal precedent in a broader more practical manner to enable us to act on egregious violations.

As a strong First Amendment advocate and former President of the Michigan Association of broadcasters, I am personally wary of government intrusion in programming. We are all well acquainted with Section 326 and the prohibition against any form of government censorship.

Then too, I normally should be the least likely of any of the current Commissioners to lead a charge against obscenity. I served in the Army for over five years. I served overseas for 33 consecutive months, finally as a combat infantry battalion commander in France and Germany. I assure you that I heard all variations of expletives in the heat of battle. As far as the most commonly over-used sexually oriented single word is concerned, I heard it. We all have heard it. But there are places, occasions and times where it is improper and even disgusting. Of course, I have to admit that I now prefer playing R rated movies backwards because at my age, I like to see people get dressed and go home.

Seriously, the recent FCC action was in response to a growing public outcry for corrective action. The Mass Media Bureau estimates that over 20,000 complaints were received in 1986 regarding obscenity or indecency on the air and the FCC was picketed for one month. This pattern of complaints has accelerated in 1987. The actions taken against indecency and repulsive language would be overwhelmingly approved by the public at large. The FCC action strives to encourage constructive social values and maintain reasonable decency in the most accessible and pervasive of all media - TV and radio.

Another controversial subject before the Commission is the subject of minority preferences. We have issued an inquiry into the Commission's comparative licensing, distress sales and tax certificate policies.

I'm not a lawyer but I believe we have broad discretionary authority to regulate broadcasting in the public interest. I believe reasonable minority representation in broadcast ownership in America serves the public interest. Now that a Court has questioned our policy, I must critically examine the issues, but reserve final judgment. I really think minorities have arrived in America and I am pleased with the great progress the past 20 years -- they play a vital role in serving their country in the armed forces, elect important officials,

receive widespread public acclaim and great wealth for their professional and executive attainments and also for their achievement in the sports and entertainment industries. They play an overall critical role in supporting American democracy. However, they still need added opportunities to own a chunk of the influential communications rock to become fully integrated into society.

Eventually I hope we can arrive at the millennium where all Americans have equal opportunity without special preferences. All of us today favoring minority preferences must face the reality that it is an inherently sensitive issue evoking strong pro and con expression. It tends to breed resentment from other Americans not benefitting from special treatment or not fully appreciating its social value.

However, we have not yet arrived at the millennium. We still have some "catch up" to do. In my opinion, there is still need for added minority incentives like tax certificates, preferences in lotteries and comparative hearings and also in economic aid to stimulate the desired diversity in ownership. As I said before, I simply believe reasonable increased minority representation in communications ownership serves the public interest. I remain committed to the Commission's longstanding goal of encouraging and assisting minority and female entry into broadcasting. I will carefully examine the comments submitted in their inquiry, but I place the burden of proof on those that would challenge the constitutionality of our longstanding Commission policy of minority preferences.

I believe increased minority ownership is good for broadcasting. More importantly, it is good for America!

Now back to religion and the gospel, I'm personally delighted to see evangelists, gospel ministries and the gospel DJs popularize and glorify God on TV and radio by utilizing modern show world type production techniques. Particularly, the Black gospel, with its superb voices is so universally accepted that it is attracting and inspiring thousands of new people of all races and denominations.

In fact, Dr. Ben Armstrong, Executive Director of the prestigious National Religious Broadcasters Association, took pride in telling me that the largest record attendance for a single convention meeting was the Black Gospel Concert at the opening day last year. It was also the most inspirational with the huge chorus of beautiful voices singing the praises of the Lord. He described it as the most moving experience of the convention. You are all to be congratulated for your inspiring musical tributes to God. And today I give special thanks to Dr. J. Morgan Hodges and Dr. Henry A. Thomas.

In my opinion, the ultimate test for evangelical, gospel or any religious entity is its ability to inspire positive moral and social values. Does it inspire a loyal following to have faith in God and a belief in religious virtues that result in a better way of life? Does it make for a more decent, better and stronger America?

I believe the gospel ministries and gospel radio personalities along with most evangelists are attracting millions of Americans to religious faith and a better way of life. You are bringing religion to millions in their homes who might not otherwise be reached or influenced. I'm glad to see the impressive public acceptance and support inspired by ministries who build monuments to God that will serve mankind for years to come.

So, do you serve mankind and the public interest? The answer must be a resounding yes! So to the gospel singers and all the preachers onward and upward! God bless you.