Television and Adolescents

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Do we care who teaches our children?

Presumably we do; at least many of us pay thousands of dollars for Christian teachers. Many of us look to teachers and schools to help us in the task of nurturing our children's growth as Christians in a largely secular world. We want teachers who can enlarge in children a sense of wonder, who can inspire a vision of their infinite value and dignity through Jesus Christ, and of their high calling to glorify God through the best of what mind and hands can create. We want teachers who can engage students in intellectual pursuits, in aesthetic discernment, and in spiritual reflection. We want good teachers.

But what does this have to do with television? Television, after all, is an entertainment medium, not an educator. Or is it?

Nicholas Johnson, a former FCC chairman and now a formidable critic of commercial TV, claims that television always educates, and very effectively too. That gives us pause. If television teaches as it entertains, and if we care about *who* teaches our children and *what* they learn, then we will also care about the ideas and concepts and values young children and adolescents learn from television.

At its best, TV can be a desirable teacher. Some of its offerings have nourished the imagination, sensitized the emotions, and provoked significant thought. Through occasional presentations of excellent drama, music, art and documentaries lives have been enriched.

But there's the other side.

Moments of excellence have been few in the history of television. There is nothing now to give us hope for change. Besides, the most popular programs, with some notable exceptions, have always been the most insipid and, increasingly, the most offensive ones. Children and young people in millions of

homes, Christian homes too, watch such favorites as "Starsky and Hutch," "Charley's Angels," "Laverne and Shirley," "Love Boat," "Three's Company," as well as countless movie reruns, few of which merit a spot on the recommended list for adolescent viewing or anyone else's.

Not only is the regular viewing of this fare an incredible waste of an adolescent's time (time lost for reading, music lessons, daydreaming, socializing, schoolwork, hobbies), but it also tends to saturate a young, largely uncritical mind with a life-view that is almost totally antithetical to the Christian faith and vision. For plots, characters, and themes of programs carry messages; they may take on a variety of forms, but they "teach" essentially the same thing. And what they teach is hardly an indifferent matter, for many children spend more time learning from television than from church and school combined.

For one thing, television promotes the new morality. According to its code, intercourse is normal even between adolescents—if they want it and feel ready. Sex is not an intimate integrated part of a complex, long-term relationship between husband and wife; it is the instant gratification of momentary lust. Sex knows no privacy or dignity; it is demeaned through seductive use of female bodies, countless ribald jokes, double entendres, and endless innuendo. Laugh tracks are provided for those who might miss the humor of it all. *Newsweek* aptly indicted such programing for pandering to prurience in the most cheaply exploitative manner.

Related to the "new morality" is the cult of the individual, promoted in commercials and programs. The popular hero is one who looks out for number one, who is often violent and profane, who breaks laws if it serves his purpose, who suffers no guilt because he lacks a conventional conscience, who drinks frequently for courage and for good times, and who yet endears himself to the adolescent viewer because he has power, looks and charisma.

Television does more than merely entertain; it also influences behavior and shapes values. It often trivializes serious issues such as crime, marital fidelity, justice, personal integrity, family conflicts, bigotry, and individualism. Television is, indeed, more often a bad teacher than a good one. Many of its most popular but tasteless programs that entertainingly teach adolescents over a period of years hardly contribute to mental and moral growth. In fact, they hinder such growth. And that is of

concern.

At a time when critical sensibilities and spiritual maturity begin to develop, adolescents need good teachers and good models. At a time when a secular society threatens to desensitize all of us to the radical call of Christian discipleship, we need to intensify our attention on Him who is the Truth, the Way, and the Life.

Do we care who teaches our children? If we do, we will not allow television to play a major role in the education of our youth.

SEEDTIME . . . . AND HARVEST

by Miss H. J. Kuiper
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"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." II Corinthians 9:6.

Again, it is spring. Breezes carry fragrances far and wide, clouds float across a deep blue sky, flowers flaunt their myriad colors, birds cascade their songs through the air -- all speak of a renewed life after a cold, lifeless winter. Yard and garden enthusiasts compare seeds, fertilizers and plants -- and another season of growth begins.

We, as Christians, respond to this rebirth in nature by assessing our spiritual growth. We contain many seeds, some good, some bad; some are good thoughts, deeds, qualities and gifts we wish to cultivate; but they are so few. Others are of the weed variety: mischief, laziness, greed, evil-speaking, lusts, etc. These we wish to "weed out", eliminate; and they are so many. By studying God's Word and listening attentively each Sabbath as the Word is preached, we learn how to cultivate our private garden patch, how to chop out willful sins, how to grow in grace