

TELEVISION

Who Takes Responsibility for TV Violence?

By Liz Armstrong
Washington (NC) — New headlines raised an old controversy recently: Whether TV programming promotes violence or other questionable behavior and whose responsibility it is to do something about it.

The question was back in the news for several reasons: advent of a new fall TV season, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop's claim that the TV industry and its parental and academic adversaries should cooperate in resolving issues of violence on TV and in society, and new proposed legislation mandating educational TV programs for children.

Dr. Koop addressed a conference on TV and violence, saying that just as violence is found on TV, there is an "epidemic" of violence in society. He noted that numerous studies (discounted by the TV industry) have cited a link between violence on TV and real-world violence, but said he did not think such research should be used as an excuse to regulate TV content.

Instead, the surgeon general raised a series of rhetorical questions. One may have been of particular interest to his audience: Why do people watch violent shows in the first place?

That's a slightly different way of phrasing an old question: Why don't viewers, especially parents, simply turn off the TV, refusing to watch violent (or otherwise objectionable) programming or let their families do so.

The conference Koop addressed was concerned with the issue of TV and violence, but the same issues have been raised by church, educational and parent groups in regard to sex and sexually oriented advertising on TV and irreverence toward God or religion. On a broader scope, the issues apply not only to regular TV but to cable TV (with its new offerings of what many critics regard as pornographic and violent fare.) to video games accused of promoting violence and sexual exploitation of women, and to other products of a new telecommunications age.

Koop said that government has no choice but to be concerned about violence in society. Yet, in urging the TV industry and others such as researchers, parents, educators and consumer groups to work together, instead of having to "trade research studies like cannonballs," he suggested something else as well: That it is everybody's responsibility to deal with the many tough questions posed by TV, the telecommunications and entertainment businesses, and their products.

Meanwhile, those parents and teachers searching for an alternative to current TV programming may take heart in new legislation introduced by Rep. Timothy Wirth (D-Colo.), chairman of the House telecommunications subcommittee. Wirth's bill, H.R. 4097, would force commercial TV stations to broadcast an hour of children's educational programming five days a week. The average such programming now carried by commercial stations is 61 minutes

weekly, according to a study Wirth commissioned.

As questions posed by TV programs, cable TV shows, adult videogames, pornographic and sexually explicit materials, and even children's cartoon shows have proliferated, so have groups attempting to deal with them, ranging from political conservatives to feminists to mainline religious denominations to the medical community.

While there is general agreement on many of the problems, the approaches, data and even concern for specific issues vary among the groups in the movement.

For example, two of the better known TV-monitoring groups, the National Coalition on TV Violence, and the Coalition for Better Television, in surveys of spring 1983 shows, agreed on what the top five most violent shows were. But they ranked those shows differently among the top five and disagreed as to the number of violent acts per hour depicted on them.

Also proliferating are TV-related educational materials, to help parents and children become more critical viewers or to help turn the TV into a teacher's aid. One effort is a new TV-related educational package being developed by the U.S. Catholic Conference departments of Communication and Education and published by the National Catholic Educational Association.

Meanwhile, the Boys Town Center, Boys Town, Neb., in conjunction with the National PTA, advises parents in a pamphlet to set a weekly TV viewing limit for their children; rule out television watching at certain times, such as before breakfast or on school nights; agree as a family ahead of time on what show is to be watched and to

turn off the TV set afterwards; and help children devise a list of alternative activities (such as reading, working on a hobby, bicycling) to be undertaken before watching television.

Boys Town has another message for parents, too:

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BOOKS

"God Is New Each Moment," by Father Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, The Seabury Press (New York, 1983). 129 pp., \$7.95.

"Dare to Be Christian," by Father Bernard Haring, CSSR, Liguori (Liguori, Mo., 1983). 159 pp., \$4.25.

Reviewed by
Father Charles Dollen
NC News Service

The name of Dominican Father Edward Schillebeeckx stirs up thoughts of a powerful theological thinker. Many readers may fear that his material is beyond their possible understanding.

Huib Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeveen, two Dutch theologians, engaged Father Schillebeeckx in lengthy conversations to prepare this fine volume. They taped his answers and then edited the tapes for presentation in this book, occasioned by the bestowal of the Erasmus Award. On Sept. 17, 1982, the royal family of the

Netherlands presented the award.

Father Schillebeeckx is questioned on all the major themes that have appeared in his published works. These include his Incarnational theology, his thoughts on the ministry, the feminist movement and the liberation of the poor.

Developed around a dozen or so themes, the conversation provides a more popular treatment than would be found in a formal book of theology. The beauty of this treatment is that it shows how formal, or dogmatic,

theology is translated into actions, the realm of moral theology. It is fascinating.

Redemptorist Father Bernard Haring, the noted moral theologian, has also just published a book titled "Dare To Be Christian" in which he takes the opposite approach. He considers the challenges to the Christian conscience in social matters, applies the moral principles and shows how they are founded in the great Christian truths.

(Father Dollen is the book review editor of "The Priest" magazine.)

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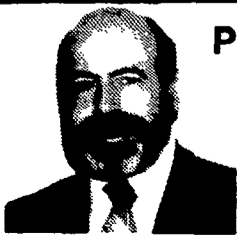
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