

## TV violence prompts call for viewer education.

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— a point even Comstock acknowledges still stirs some disagreement — many Catholic observers inside and outside the industry agree there are better solutions to curbing televised carnage than threatening government regulation.

Father Robert Mahoney, who teaches sociology and criminology at Jesuit-run Rockhurst College in Kansas City, Mo., believes public response is more effective than legislation in influencing the choices available on television.

He proposed establishing and promoting a sort of criticism clearinghouse that would process complaints and comment about television programming — taking calls or letters from viewers, compiling data and passing information along to TV executives and the public.

Father Kieser, who has made a career in television and movie production, has no doubt television violence contributes to the increase in street violence. But he also believes that trying to legislate the creative process would be a mistake.

Depictions of violence have a valid place in entertainment programming, but "we have to show the violent psyche honestly," he said.

"Violent people are sick, disparaging, lonely, hostile and unhappy," Father Kieser said. "We don't have to distort the truth."

Like Father Kieser, Mary Lopocaro wanted to make one thing clear — she is not out to trash the First Amendment even if it protects televised trash.

"I'm not for censorship," insisted Lopocaro, an associate professor of communications/journalism at St. John Fisher College. "We're not going to take on



*Twentieth Century Fox*  
**The Good Son, starring Elijah Wood (left) and Macaulay Culkin, tells the story of a young boy who plays demonic tricks on his friends and family.**

the Constitution — that's stupid. What we want to do is educate children."

"We" is ChildVision, of which Lopocaro is a board member. Prior to being hired at Fisher 16 years ago, Lopocaro, a parishioner at Transfiguration Church in Pittsford, spent eight years writing for *TV Guide*.

According to its newsletter, ChildVision is a not-for-profit research and advocacy organization concerned with the impact television and other media have on children. The organization has five

stated goals:

- To analyze research on effects of mass media on children's welfare.
- To conduct local research on children's viewing and listening habits.
- To advocate for development of media literacy curriculum in schools.
- To empower parents to supervise the amount and kind of media programs entering their home.
- To develop a community network that will bring about change in media policies and regulations that affect children.

Lopocaro presented some of her organization's insights to about 40 people at Transfiguration Parish on Thursday night, Feb. 10. She also spoke with the *Courier* on Wednesday, Feb. 9.

In the pre-TV world, children learned about what life was like — and what it should be like — from parents, schools and churches, she said. Today, however, children learn society's values primarily from "giant conglomerations with something to sell."

And since violence — and sex — are

two of the easiest ways to grab a viewer's attention, it's no surprise that flesh, whether mutilated or exposed, dominates television, every advertiser's dream medium for delivering a message, she explained.

If viewers are tired of what they and their children see, they have to realize that TV is a ballot box, Lopocaro asserted, and that they are the voters. The public must inform the networks, their local affiliates and their advertisers of what it likes and doesn't like, she said.

"There's evidence that the public reaction is beginning to take effect," reported Ellen Leifield, managing editor of Rochester's *Democrat and Chronicle*, and *Times Union*, who also spoke at the Feb. 10 forum.

Leifield noted that only one out of the top-10 prime-time shows in the country was regularly violent. She added that a survey found most citizens have recently turned off some TV show that they found offensive.

One New York City organization, Morality in Media, hoped that those citizens turned their sets completely off last Friday, Feb. 11, on the third-annual "Turn Off TV Day." Viewers were urged to decry gratuitous sex, violence and profanity in letters to the networks and advertisers as part of the day's protest.

Yet most observers know that the sets will eventually come back on — if they ever got turned off in the first place. Hence, like Lopocaro, Patt Shea would require that schools teach media literacy, so children learn the difference between truly dangerous activities and the Hollywood make-believe they inevitably see.

Along with her husband, Jack, Shea is one of the founders of Catholics in Media, a California-based group combining spiritual support with advocacy projects.

"A lot of children don't know the difference between a documentary, a commercial and regular programs," she said. "And we're letting them be influenced four hours a day by something they don't understand."

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Readers interested in learning more about media literacy can contact ChildVision, 716/251-4430, or write the group at P.O. Box 18082, Rochester, N.Y. 14618.

Catholic News Service has also compiled the following list of addresses for the TV networks and major cable channels for viewers to use to send comments about television programming.

#### ABC Television Network

77 W. 66th St.  
New York, N.Y. 10023

#### NBC Entertainment

3000 W. Alameda  
Burbank, CA 91523

#### CBS Television

51 W. 52nd St.  
New York, N.Y. 10019

#### Fox Broadcasting

P.O. Box 900  
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

#### American Movie Classics

150 Crossways Park West  
Woodbury, N.Y. 11797

#### Arts & Entertainment Network

235 E. 45th St.  
New York, N.Y. 10017

#### The Discovery Channel

7700 Wisconsin Ave.  
Bethesda, MD 20814

#### The Family Channel

1000 Centerville Turnpike  
Virginia Beach, Va 23463

#### Home Box Office

1100 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, N.Y. 10036

#### Cinemax

1100 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, N.Y. 10036

#### Lifetime Television

36-12 35th Ave.  
Astoria, N.Y. 11106

#### Nickelodeon/Nick at Night

1515 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10036

#### MTV Networks

1515 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10036

#### The Sci-Fi Channel

1230 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, N.Y. 10020

#### Showtime Networks

1633 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10019

#### The Movie Channel

1633 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10019

#### TBS

One CNN Center Box 105366  
11th Floor North Tower

Atlanta, Ga. 30348

#### USA Network

1230 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, N.Y. 10020.