

TV should clean up its act

The Super Bowl's offensive halftime incident was of little surprise to me. A stunt like the tearing off of Janet Jackson's costume — exposing her right breast — by Justin Timberlake as he sang the words "Got to have you naked by the end of this song" was bound to happen.

For more than three decades, TV programming featured increased amounts of sex and violence. But over the past several years, writers, producers and advertisers have sunk to new lows.

Melissa Caldwell, director of research and publications for Parents Television Council, said, "They are continuing to push the envelope." She told me networks and many cable companies are showing fewer family programs, while increasing the amount of sexually explicit and violent content.

Commenting on the report "What a Difference a Decade Makes," Caldwell said that sexual content in TV programming in 1999 was three times as frequent as in 1989. References to pornography increased 300 percent; to masturbation, 700 percent; to genitalia, 650 percent.

All of this is especially bad news for children!

An American Academy of Pediatrics document titled "Sexuality, Contraception and the Media" says numerous studies "illustrate television's powerful influence on adolescents' sexual attitudes, values and beliefs."

Caldwell said, "There is a growing body of evidence



Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

stating that kids who watch programs containing sexual content become sexually active earlier and are more likely to have multiple sexual partners."

Even more disturbing, Caldwell said the depiction of violence even during the evening family hour — 8 to 9 EST — increased 41 percent from 1998 to 2002!

The American Psychological Association (APA) reports that violent programs lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch those programs. "Psychological research has shown three major effects of (television violence): Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others; children may be more fearful of the world around them; and children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others."

Eli Rubinstein, former adjunct research professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina and chairman of the 1971 "Surgeon General's Report on Television and Social Behavior," told me that positive programming induces pro-so-

cial behavior as effectively as negative programming induces anti-social behavior.

He explained: "The problem is that most television writers know action and violence hold an audience better than more positive, softer themes. As they say in television news, 'If it bleeds, it leads.' Getting them to change is most difficult."

The APA suggests parents ban programs they find violent or offensive and that they remove bedroom televisions. Caldwell said that more than 50 percent of American youth have television sets in their bedrooms and that "when young people are unsupervised, they often watch violence and sex."

Warning, "Silence gives consent!" Caldwell stressed the importance of contacting networks, local stations, cable companies, advertisers and, most important, the Federal Communications Commission.

The Parents Television Council (www.parentstv.org) provides e-mail links and addresses for television executives and advertisers. Their Web site also makes it easy to file a complaint with the FCC.

In his recently released 2004 World Communications Day message, Pope John Paul II encouraged families to be "outspoken in telling producers, advertisers and public authorities what they like and dislike."

Tony Magliano is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

Finds panel missed point on 'Passion'

To the editor:

I attended the seminar/discussion at Transfiguration Church on Thursday, Feb. 26. I viewed the movie, "The Passion of the Christ," on Ash Wednesday, and I have to say that I was extremely disappointed by the negative reviews the panel gave this extraordinary endeavor by Mel Gibson. I wanted to get up and say to them, "You've missed the whole point." Questions were not properly answered, and most of us left wondering what movie they saw. The panel seemed to be walking on eggshells so as not to hurt our Jewish friends. But let's be real — Jesus was a Jew — so were the apostles, and furthermore, it was a Jewish community, governed by Rome.

I don't care that Caiaphas had a larger role than he should have, or that Pilate's character was toned down, that the high priests costumes were incorrect, that the flashbacks were out of sequence, that Mary's human feelings were so real, that Jesus fell off a bridge, that Judas suffered more for his betrayal than I had ever seen before, the devil being everywhere always ready to take His soul, or that a raven pecked out the bad thief's eyes. This is a director's creative prerogative, and I thank him for his

innovative interpretations from the Bible and other sources. Who's to say Mel Gibson wasn't inspired by the Holy Spirit to make, direct and produce this movie? Certainly, not this panel!

I did, however, think the scourging extremely violent. But I know now, that only someone Divine could have withstood the continual beatings — oh, how he suffered to save humankind!! This movie will be shown for centuries!

Betty Miller
Blackwell Lane
Henrietta

All religions aren't equal

To the editor:

Once again, I'm amused by liberal theologians — and those with liberal political views. They seem to preach a doctrine of tolerance — until we conservatives say or do something out of line. Then, we get a taste of how intolerant our liberal brethren can be. I refer to the Feb. 12 column by Father Richard McBrien on Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion of the Christ."

Not only does Father McBrien refer to Peggy Noonan as a "hyperkinetic columnist," he assumes that "raising so much as a word of caution about the film is subject to sharp attack." The further tone of his column seems to imply that Mel Gibson and others are rabble rousers for using the phrase "anti-Christian."

I have not seen the film. I do intend to see it. I fail to believe that any sincere Christian would view any film that was anti-Semitic. But please, Father McBrien, even though Jesus and his initial followers were Jewish, and as Christians, we need to look at that faith for our roots, we now possess the truth — our sins killed Him!

Furthermore — and this is my own thinking — tolerance is a wonderful virtue, but I think we need to avoid watering down the truth with consoling doctrines. One religion is not as good as another. Christianity

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