



The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration

full version with end notes  
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# Orthodoxy and Television

The effects of television viewing on families,  
social attitudes and spiritual formation

by Fred Krueger

*Train up a child in the way he should go:  
and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

- Proverbs 22:6

*Television has done us great damage. It's especially destructive for children.<sup>1</sup>*

- Elder Paisios of Mount Athos

*Satan has persuaded man to arrange his entire lifestyle so that there is no quiet time, no time for contemplating the past day, week or month. Everything is occupied with entertainment. And in this system of entertainment, television is given the privileged place of honor. The lion's share of free time is 'eaten up' by it, that idol of contemporary civilization. I would call it a cruel despot and tyrant to whom the greater part of mankind is subject in a servitude never before witnessed in the world.<sup>2</sup>*

- Elder Anthony of Russia

THE SAINTS, THE FATHERS AND THE ELDERS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH teach that the physical senses are the doorways to the soul. This is why alert Orthodox Christians have always emphasized the need for great care in avoiding occasions of sin, the viewing

of foul or defiling images, and especially any absorption of situations that convey violence, lurid scenes or images of depravity (cf. 1 John 2:16).

In recent decades Orthodox elders have provided an insightful and startling commentary on how television degrades the soul and inhibits the ability of otherwise faithful church-going people to build up their spiritual life.

While their commentary may not be comprehensive, they sound a warning of how a soul-degrading character exists in the medium of television. In this regard Elder Anthony of Russia says that television induces a hypnotic effect in which a person loses an ability to think for him [or her] self, to perceive in a thoughtful manner the events that are happening, or to form one's own world view. These offenses, he writes, go deep, especially in young people, and have permanent effects.<sup>3</sup>

In a similar way, Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov observes that wrong fixations or sinful experiences while young have long lasting effects because of the depth of the wound to the soul.<sup>4</sup>

Archbishop Vitaly from the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia adds that it is urgent for Orthodox clergy and parents to address the problem of television.

Television... has managed to secure a niche for itself in almost every home. Its powers of persuasion and attraction have proved to be practically supernatural and are coupled with a subtle and awesome ability to corrupt. ... Without exaggeration, a campaign against it must be our immediate and primary concern because every day and every hour its effects are being felt in our own homes.<sup>5</sup>

Elder Anthony voices a further concern when he declares that television... undermines the authority of the Church. "The method is diabolically cunning. It permeates everything — in mocking of the clergy or the rituals, in placing the occult or paganism in opposition to Christianity, in everything there is hatred for the sacred and for Truth.<sup>6</sup> He continues, "Not much more time will pass before they will openly mock Christianity and holy things on television. ... the poison of evil will flow from under the veil of humor or comedy. 'Laughing hell' will assume the work of ridiculing everything Divine and spiritual, all the way to the end."<sup>7</sup>

How should we view these commentaries? Don't these monks practically live in caves, isolated from the world of people and public affairs? Like with everything else, our suppositions have to be tested. It turns out that research scientists have done

extensive studies on television and its social, psychological and even its spiritual effects. If we review these studies, we gain perspective on the revealed perceptions of these holy elders that will allow us to see whether or not their insights are consistent with the analytical perceptions of social scientists. After all Saint Irenaeus declares that there is an “irenic” quality to truth, which means that one thing that is true must be consistent with all other truth.

Research in over several thousand different university studies makes clear that from the standpoints of educational performance, physiological development, ability to hear and relax, the development of cooperative social behavior, and even, as Saint Theophan the Recluse writes regarding the formation of spiritual attitudes,<sup>8</sup> television can be judged as a significant and damaging influence in childhood development.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Cheryl Pawlowski, Ph.D., researcher at the University of Northern Colorado, determined after exhaustive study that television is a significant retarding force in allowing young people to grasp abstract or complex information.<sup>10</sup>

Kate Moody in a summary of many studies for *The New York Times* found much more. Her research shows that habitual television viewing by young people goes deep and affects their basic outlook on life and shapes their sensibilities.<sup>11</sup> It lessens imagination and ability to play;<sup>12</sup> it distorts language patterns and perceptions of others.<sup>13</sup> It predisposes many of them to violence,<sup>14</sup> anti social behavior,<sup>15</sup> and hyperactivity.<sup>16</sup> It lowers IQ scores,<sup>17</sup> and it affects their self-image.<sup>18</sup> Just a little bit of casual TV watching produces an alteration of brain waves;<sup>19</sup> it also reduces critical eye movements which narrows peripheral vision.<sup>20</sup>

Forty years after the first critical reports about the effects of television, thousands of researchers at numerous institutions are realizing that television is not only becoming more ubiquitous,<sup>21</sup> it exerts harmful affects upon the child,<sup>22</sup> while it contributes to a series of radical social, cultural and spiritual effects.<sup>23</sup> When television viewing occupies a significant amount of time for young people, stimulating conversation and interaction with family members goes into sharp decline.<sup>24</sup> Games become less important.<sup>25</sup> Violence increases.<sup>26 27</sup> Respect for other people declines.<sup>28</sup> Social structures, family ritual or regular prayers have less place in the home.<sup>29</sup>

Television cultivates these effects because its pace is faster than real life.<sup>30</sup> Programs accelerate the tempo of events by zipping from scene to scene and speeding sequences to transmit only a skeleton of essential information.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, the pace of normal activities seems slow and boring.<sup>32</sup> Real life becomes drab and uninteresting

because it can never move as fast as the events on television. For children, this creates a love of excitement and sensationalism which lends itself to exploration and a quest for “peak” experiences — but without the discernment and value formation that characterized pre-television society. One consequence is that television reared children have a tendency to jump to unfounded conclusions because their television “pace” leaps over essential elements of judgement. Another consequence is a fostering of experimentation with drugs and promiscuity<sup>33</sup> unparalleled in traditional society.<sup>34</sup>

Not only is the pace of television scene sequencing faster than real life, many researchers demonstrate that the TV medium accelerates the nervous system.<sup>35</sup> This means that the unconsciously speed-addicted viewer develops a poor ability to concentrate<sup>36</sup> because concentration requires discipline and an orderly approach to the world which television does not cultivate nor encourage.<sup>37</sup> No wonder school teachers show a tight correlation between poor performance in school<sup>38</sup> and the amount of time the child spends watching television.<sup>39</sup> The fact that SAT scores for graduating high school seniors have been on a steady downward slide since 1960 has a lot to do with the rise of television as an entertainment medium.<sup>40 41 42</sup>

Commercial television is also a culprit in contributing to the consumer mentality<sup>43 44</sup> and to the materialistic and hedonistic culture which it promotes.<sup>45</sup> Advertising panders to the passionate desires of the young individual<sup>46</sup> and associates products with images of glamour and prestige which encourage the purchase of unnecessary items.<sup>47</sup> All of this works counter to discipline,<sup>48</sup> counter to a striving for virtue, and counter to the selflessness which Christian attitudes should cultivate.<sup>49 50</sup>

Significantly, these consequences hold true regardless of program content.<sup>51</sup> Obviously content which portrays violence, crime and sexual promiscuity does nothing to form healthy attitudes to solve problems of the future.<sup>52</sup> While violent programming should be regarded as a form of visual poison for impressionable young minds,<sup>53</sup> the pace of television is as much the problem as program content. Videos and electronic games, too, regardless of their possibly wonderful content, possess these same features, even though there is no advertising.<sup>54</sup> The internet too, when used as a vehicle for entertainment,<sup>55</sup> cultivates some of these same influences.

The efforts of Congress and private citizens' groups to temper the effects of television have been frustrated by well-funded industry opposition.<sup>56</sup> There is too much money to be made through advertising<sup>57</sup> and maintaining this “drug” of the consumer society to allow relaxation of its hold on society.<sup>58</sup>

Other studies elaborate on these conclusions. They show that television viewing retards learning and lowers reading skills;<sup>59</sup> it reduces the ability of young people to penetrate issues in proportion to the time they spend in front of the television; it inhibits the development of imagination,<sup>60</sup> creativity and sociable personalities;<sup>61</sup> it provides information, but it fails to teach analysis, discernment, initiative or values. It conditions an expectation of instant gratification; it decreases an ability to focus and maintain attention.<sup>62</sup> TV contributes to the problems of inner city poverty, teenage pregnancy, drug use, and the decline of moral standards.<sup>63</sup> Amoral “video values” develop a thick-skinned, cynical, hedonistic and detached attitude toward life which parents are often unable to counter.<sup>64</sup> Older school teachers, who remember an era of higher student performance, remark that television’s influence now requires teachers to be entertaining so that they can compete with the attention-grabbing styles of television.<sup>65</sup> These qualities produce what the fathers call “stony insensibility,” a form of hardness of heart which television cultivates. This also has the effect of causing insensitivity to environmental desecration because without a feeling heart, people become insulated from the pain of others and unmoving at the pain of God’s creation.

Television is also a culprit in causing many Orthodox young people to fall away from the life of the Church.<sup>66 67</sup> The problem is that as young people and their parents too become desensitized to the spiritual world, there is little capability for outrage over the loss of Christian moral standards.<sup>68</sup> As young people become weakened in their ability to discern spiritually, they become vulnerable to all sorts of pseudo-religion and psychic allurements in place of their Orthodox heritage.<sup>69 70</sup> To repeat a crucial point, *the medium is as much the problem as inappropriate program content.*<sup>71</sup>

Because the medium is as much of a problem as inappropriate program content,<sup>72</sup> efforts to moderate content do little to protect young people from the pernicious influences of this powerful force for mental and spiritual degradation. A result is that our television-addicted society is producing a generation so used to viewing violence and crime that many young people fall easily into a growing epidemic of aggressive behavior.<sup>73 74</sup> Predictably, they are increasingly hardened to religion,<sup>75</sup> to morality, to civic responsibility or to the plight of created nature.<sup>76</sup>

The use of the word “addiction” is intentional<sup>77</sup> – and often used in the literature analyzing television viewing.<sup>78</sup> Former Under Secretary of Education Dr. Linus Wright affirms this conclusion, declaring, “Television is addicting, like tobacco, and parents should never let their children get hooked.”<sup>79</sup> Studies show that the lure of television is actually most powerful on the lonely and the alienated,<sup>80</sup> and others who

dislike self-examination and confrontation with the root causes of their difficulties.<sup>81</sup>

Television is also a major force in shaping culture. It has already caused a loss of regional diversity, a homogenization of language and increased exposure to profane language.<sup>82</sup> Television influences our vocabulary. In 1950 the average fourteen-year-old had a vocabulary of about 25,000 words, but that has now shrunk to merely 10,000 words in less than sixty years.<sup>83</sup>

While the effects of TV on individual behavior are well substantiated, it also influences attitudes toward consumerism and materialism. It should be clear that television is more than a means for entertainment; it is an instrument of commerce.<sup>84</sup> While simple logic recognizes the value of consuming less, television advertising relentlessly encourages greater consumption. “Buy now!” “Don’t Wait!” In fact, on many channels, nearly 30% of broadcast time is devoted to advertising.<sup>85</sup>

As the leading proponent of consumerism, television is especially adept at creating cultural images of affluence, convincing us that items we once thought of as luxuries have now become necessities.<sup>86</sup> Children are often a prime target of advertisers as they are the most impressionable and vulnerable.<sup>87</sup> “Children,” marketing guru James McNeal bluntly declares, “are consumers in training.”<sup>88</sup>

Using ultra-sophisticated research techniques, television programmers and advertisers conjure up an image of life in America as built around things rather than human relationships. Their marketing techniques distort moral values and skew our vision of prosperity. This leads us further and further away from the way of life of faithful Orthodox Christians. For instance, television programs imply that prosperous people have promiscuous sexual relations more frequently. They promote an illusion of profits and money as more important than honest human relationships. They try to convince us that monetary wealth frees us from social constraints. But they do not show how these unbridled assumptions produce a terrible drain on the planet’s resources and degrade both the individual and the environment.

Even television’s portrayal of nature is distorted. Ron Powers, in *Audubon* magazine, writes that nature programs trivialize the natural world by reducing its wonders to the same formula that sells the rest of the commercial spectrum: violence and sex. He shows that a sizeable portion of nature programming focuses upon predators stalking their prey, the action of the capture, the bizarre and the unique, or even mating rituals.<sup>89</sup>

“Most nature films are like sports highlight films,” notes Bill McKibbin, a

commentator on nature and television themes. “Only the most exciting scenes are shown, but this distorts nature's rhythms, scope and diversity.”<sup>90</sup>

A crucial consideration is that nature moves really slow.<sup>91</sup> As television quickens the human pace, respect and caring for creation becomes harder to connect to our emotional make-up.<sup>92</sup> This is because television synchronizes our internal psychic “pace” to the artificial world of hot rods, freeways, computers, air travel, and everything else that is fast-paced and accelerated.<sup>93</sup> It attunes the human brain and nervous system to the lightning speed of electronic systems. As the human nervous system speeds up, it moves too fast to feel calm, too fast to read, sometimes almost too fast to relate meaningfully to other people<sup>94</sup> or to the upliftment of liturgical services. Nature, by contrast, seems like an old-fashioned slowpoke. Thus television creates people who are handicapped in their ability to relate to the natural environment.<sup>95</sup> This is because they move too fast, expect instant action, and are too impatient. A series of consequences result from this artificial hyperactive condition: For the natural creation, they have difficulty connecting to the slow pace of nature, and so they fail to appreciate its beauty and the richness of its life. For other people, they have a harder time relating to others compared to their peers from an earlier era. Perhaps most significant for their life in a parish, they also have difficulty becoming sensitive to the presence of Christ in the Liturgy.

From a number of perspectives, the evidence is sufficiently clear so that we can make several definitive conclusions: First, if we are going to turn the corner on the deepening problem of weakened spiritual formation, youth migration from the Church, and a growing disengagement from creation, we have to make decisive corrections in our relationship to television.<sup>96</sup>

Second, the holy elders of monastic life are right on! Their prayer and inspiration has led them to identify a crucial force that degrades our homes, renders our young people vulnerable to the materialist messages of society, and weakens our ability to stand fast in the Christian life.

Third, the life of the Church is assaulted through television. This happens not so much through programming content, but the very method of communication.

Therefore, to address the pernicious influence of television, here are ten remedial actions that you can take:

- \* Learn the consequences of television-viewing on behavior, mental

performance, health and sociability. Establish a parish study group. Look particularly at television's social impacts on people, especially young people.

- \* Encourage children into other activities such as going outside or engaging in imaginative play instead of watching television.
- \* Establish a TV diet. For adults especially this means a restriction of television viewing to pre-selected programs, perhaps news, special features, cultural and sporting events and programs of an educational nature.
- \* Balance viewing time with reading, social or outdoor activity time. Make sure that you turn off the television when finished with your pre-selected viewing.
- \* Examine the responsibility of the pastor and the local parish in relation to television. What are the responsibilities? Let parish members participate.
- \* Analyze commercials with children. Help them evaluate the claims made about products shown on television. Teach them to recognize exaggerated claims. Point out that the makers of the products pay for advertising.
- \* Turn off the commercials if you watch TV programs. Their only purpose is to alter your thinking and sell products that you might not otherwise purchase.
- \* Be aware that watching TV violence can be harmful, especially to the mental health of children.<sup>97</sup>
- \* Examine the value of an annual parish TV-turnoff time, perhaps during Great Lent or during times of strict fasting.
- \* Write your political representative and ask that violence and promiscuity be eliminated from TV. You might also request that all advertising which targets and exploits children be halted.

Please recognize that this article is not calling for the elimination of television. It is already too much part of daily life for many parishioners. Besides, studies show that a "cold turkey" approach is not effective and can be counter-productive, especially for young people.<sup>98</sup> Rather it is more effective to temper and moderate its influence.

Besides the influences that are noted in this report, television produces other influences that stretch far beyond the list presented here. These influences include the

sedentary lifestyle that television cultivates, the tendency to not get enough exercise, the unhealthy overweight condition that results, the disabling sleep disturbances that it can cause in young people and adults,<sup>99</sup> and its strong hold upon senior citizens.<sup>100</sup> It also emphasizes new “in” styles and dress fads. None of these effects of television viewing benefit the life and the spiritual striving of the Orthodox Christian.

While the case is clear that television harms young people and adults alike, most parents ignore this information or are unaware of the dark side of its influences. Sadly a 2006 study by the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that the “generation of parents raised on television is largely encouraging the early use of television, video games and computers by their own children.”<sup>101</sup>

If you want to learn more about the problems associated with television, start by reading the books and articles that discuss this problem. This can help you achieve a deeper awareness of television as a powerful, but spiritually crippling communications medium. You might consider encouraging a class or parish discussion series based upon the evidence in this report. The more you study and discuss the implications of television, the more informed you will be and the better you can serve your family, your parish, your community, and God’s good creation.

Importantly, this article does not say that television of itself is evil or that it must be avoided. Rather, its central message is that overuse degrades the soul and corrupts the mind especially for young people and those who habitually watch inappropriate and soul-deadening programs. Those who become addicted to television then become easy prey to a variety of negative and sinful spiritual, social, cultural and environmental actions.

If there is going to be healing change in our society, thoughtful Orthodox Christians will need to set an example of overcoming the addictions of television. This will clarify the mind and aid one’s striving to become a better example of a right relationship to Jesus Christ, our neighbors, and the Lord’s good earth.

*In the corner [of the home], where the holy icons now hang, there will stand captivating devices which will delude the people. Many will say, 'We need to watch and listen to the news.' And behold, in the news the Antichrist will appear. He will mark his people with the seal, and he will hate Christians.*<sup>102</sup>

- Blessed Elder Lawrence of Chernigov (Russia)

*Just as we injure ourselves by looking at something harmful with our physical eyes, so we injure ourselves by looking at what is harmful with our mind. We must therefore pay special attention to guarding the eye of the soul and take particular care to prevent its being injured, lest its diseased condition become the cause of our spiritual ruin.*<sup>103</sup>

- St. Hesychius of Jerusalem

word count: 11,304

## **Additional Facts About Television Viewing in America**

- \* According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, 99.5% of American homes which have electricity also have television. (Douglas Gomry, "As the dial turns," *Wilson Quarterly*, Autumn, 1993, pg. 42)
- \* The A. C. Nielsen Company says that 95% of the population watches some television every day. (Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, Sierra Club Books, 1993, pg. 76).
- \* The average adult watches thirty-five hours of TV each week. (Jerry Mander, op cit., pg. 77) By contrast 58% of members of a Christian organization concerned with the environment – The Green Cross – watch less than five hours of television over an entire week. (*Green Cross*, "Media and Marketing Information," June, 1997 survey).
- \* The average child between ages two and five watches about three-and-a-half hours of television per day, or 27 hours per week. (Brandon Centerwall, "Television and Violent Crime," *The Public Interest*, Spring, 1993, pp.56-58.
- \* For Black and Hispanic children, the numbers of hours spent watching TV are substantially higher as the children of poor families typically have fewer alternative activities. (J. P. Tangney and S. Feshbach, "Children's Television Viewing Frequency: Individual Differences and Demographic Correlates," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 14, 1988, pp. 144-158).
- \* By the time young people are eighteen years old, they will have spent 15,000 hours in front of a television set, about 4,000 hours more than they have spent in school, and far more hours than they have spent talking with their teachers, their friends, or parents. (Newton Minow, *Abandoned in the Wasteland*, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Hill and Wang, New York, 1995, pg. 5)

- \* The average child sees about 40,000 TV commercials every year. In 1992, children aged 4 to 12 spent \$9 billion, and teenagers accounted for \$93 billion in retail sales. (Laurie Mazur, "Preying on Innocents: Marketing to Children," *Beyond TV*, Winter, 1996, pg. 3.)
- \* Over 70% of U.S. day care facilities use television to keep children entertained. (B. Tashman, "Sorry, Ernie, TV Isn't Teaching," *The New York Times*, November 12, 1994.)
- \* Over 54% of children between the ages of four and six who, when asked to choose between watching television and spending time with their fathers, preferred television. (Benjamin Barber, *Harper's*, November, 1993, pg. 41)
- \* Television viewing has replaced the diverse activities of previous generations such as community events, cultural pursuits and family life. (ibid.)
- \* About 75% of commercial network television time is paid for by the 100 largest corporations. The total spending by these one hundred TV advertisers in 1994: \$140 billion. Because one-half minute of prime-time network advertising is selling for between \$350,000 and \$550,000, only the largest corporations can afford it. (David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 1995, pg. 152).
- \* In comparison with the amount that corporations spend on advertising, the budgets for the federal Departments of Education, State, Commerce, Labor and Justice totaled \$125 billion. (Annamarie Pluhar, "TV, the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Erosion of Righteousness," *Beyond TV*, Winter, 1996, pg. 3).
- \* Around the world, according to *The Economist* magazine, global corporate spending for advertising in 1990 totaled more than \$240 billion. Another \$380 billion was spent on packaging, design and other point-of-sale promotions. In aggregate these expenditures amount to \$120 for every single person in the world. (United Nations, "Report on the World Social Situation," New York, 1993, pg. 43, as quoted in Korten, op cit., pg. 153).
- \* Fifty different studies all indicated that viewing TV violence makes children more willing to harm others and more likely to choose aggression as the preferred response to conflict situations. (*Growing Up on TV*, pg. 81; also Newton Minow, *Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television and the First Amendment*, Hill and Wang, 1995, pg. 28.)
- \* For every level of education, a negative correlation exists between the amount of television viewing and the individual's level of social trust and the number of organizations which he or she joins. (Dr. Robert Putnam, Harvard University, reported in *The Washington Post*, Sept. 3, 1998, pg. A-5.)
- \* There is no shortage of studies documenting the effects of television on children.

TV-Free America reports that over 4,000 different studies have been completed which depict the range of influences television exerts on young people. ("Television Statistics," insert with letter, dated February 28, 1996, TV-Free America, Washington, DC).

- \* "Television is the most violent part of a nation that is itself the most violent country in the developed world." (statement by Newton Minow, former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, in his report, "Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television and the First Amendment," Hill and Wang, 1995, pg. 26).
- \* "Watching bad news on television makes people extra concerned about their own... entirely unrelated worries." (Wendy Johnston Graham, The London Conference of the British Psychological Society, December, 1994, as quoted in *Beyond TV*, September, 1995, pg. 7)
- \* "Through television, Americans have created a cosmology of terror.... Countless studies show a linkage between aggressive behavior and exposure to television violence. Small wonder that the Surgeon General, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the American Psychology Association have all said that such a link exists.... This research consistently shows that television violence contributes to real violence, and to a pervasive sense of fear." (Statement by Newton Minow, *ibid.*, pgs. 27-28).
- \* "As children's material urges are stimulated by advertising, parents become gatekeepers to the world of consumer products. In most households, that means saying "no" a lot. Parents who try to instill other values in their children – such as conservation and thrift – find their voices drowned out by the onslaught of commercial messages. This causes a rift to develop between parents and children who find themselves in opposite and often hostile camps. As one child psychologist testified at a Federal Trade Commission hearing on advertising to children: 'Mistrust results when legitimate authority figures, such as parents, are implicitly silenced or discredited, as they pit their meagre persuasion techniques against the might of television advertising directed at their children.'" (Laurie Mazur, "Preying on Innocents: Marketing to Children," *Beyond TV*, Winter, 1996, pg. 4.)
- \* Percentage of local TV news broadcast time devoted to commercials: 30%; to stories about crime, war and disasters: 54%; to public service announcements: 0.7% (report from Rocky Mountain Media Watch, 1995).
- \* The number of overweight children in the U.S. has doubled in the past thirty years. "Physical inactivity is the cause," according to Dr. Richard Troiano, epidemiologist at the National Center for Health Statistics. Tufts University researcher Dr. William Dietz adds, "Physical inactivity, caused primarily by television, video games and personal computers, conspires with too much high-calorie foods to add unwanted pounds." (Sally Squires, "For U.S. Youths, Weight becomes growing problem," *The Washington Post*, October 3, 1999, pg. 1-A)

- \* A trend is starting to develop. In 1996, over 6,000 schools endorsed a TV turn-off and over one million individuals unplugged their televisions during the first national TV-Turnoff week. (The TV-Free American, Summer, 1995, pg. 1.)
  
- \* "American children, I'm afraid, are addicted to television." (First Lady Laura Bush, *The Guardian Unlimited*, London, UK, September 30, 2003)

## Pertinent Quotes

Just say no! As the TV-Turnoff Network urges, 'turn off TV, turn on life.'

- Senator Byrd of West Virginia on the floor of the U.S. Senate

I had a great time, and my only question is: If this is so great, why don't we turn off the TV for the other 51 weeks of the year?

- Benjamin Loxley, 2nd grader, Lewisboro, New Jersey

We have reconstructed the Tower of Babel, and it is a television antenna: a thousand voices producing a daily parody of democracy, in which everyone's opinion is afforded equal weight regardless of substance or merit.

- Ted Koppel, *NightLine*

TV is the single most significant factor contributing to violence in America.

- Ted Turner

I really didn't like TV-Turnoff Week except I did notice that my grades went up and I was in a good mood all week.

- Drew Henderson, 2nd grader, Donora, Pennsylvania

I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book.

- Groucho Marx

Our family has been TV-free for seven to eight years... Now you couldn't GIVE me a TV. We are better off without it in our house.

- Joe Dolan

In many families the television seems to substitute, rather than facilitate dialogue among people. A type of 'fast' in this area could be healthy.

- Pope John Paul II during a speech calling for a 40-day TV-Turnoff

Given our national television habit, it is no surprise that we are raising the most sedentary and most overweight generation of youngsters in American history. As they grow, these children will run increased risks of heart disease, diabetes, and other health problems -- unless they turn off the tube and become physically active.

- Former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D.

The remarkable thing about television is that it permits several million people to laugh at the same joke and still feel lonely.

- T. S. Eliot

My brother and I participated in National TV-Turnoff Week, and while he would probably hate me for saying this because he loves TV, when my brother isn't watching TV all the time, he's a lot more fun to be around. We actually hung out together and just talked, something we had not done in a long time.

- Beth Lubozhiski, 7th grader, Minneapolis, Minnesota

The one function TV news performs very well is that when there is no news, we give it to you with the same emphasis as if there were.

- David Brinkley, TV News reporter

I promoted National TV-Turnoff Week in our parent newsletter. At the end of the week, a woman called me to say it had been a great opportunity to spend more time with her daughter. She had previously thought she needed TV as a baby-sitter and was delighted to learn that her 4-year-old could help with daily household tasks such as setting the table, folding the laundry, etc.

- Anne Campbell, Portland, Oregon

Television is no substitute for a parent. It doesn't help develop language skills; it's simply background noise.

- Former First Lady Laura Bush

"Generations of viewers are accustomed to new fall lineups containing shows that might easily be considered horrors, but the 2005-6 season is dominated by a new brood of a relatively new breed: shows that are horrific on purpose, with gore as graphic and grisly as in many a monstrous movie."

- *The Washington Post*, September 18, 2005

[After a time of TV turn-off] Most parents loved the peacefulness and commented on more creative play time, time to talk, more time to read, less arguing and were generally appreciative that teachers pushed them to try this experiment.

-Linnea Brequier, Moorpark, California

Television is altering the meaning of "being informed" by creating a species of information that might properly be called disinformation... Disinformation does not mean false information. It means misleading information - misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented or superficial information - information that creates the illusion of knowing something, but which in fact leads one away from knowing.

- Neil Postman

"Television exposure during adolescence has been linked to subsequent aggression in young adulthood. A 17-year study concluded that teens who watched more than one hour of TV a day were four times as likely as other teens to commit aggressive acts in adulthood."

- The Kaiser Foundation, "TV Violence Fact Sheet," Spring, 2003

Insights from Jerry Mander, advertising executive, Sebastopol, California

**Television:** In his book *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (1978), Jerry Mander (after reviewing totalitarian critics such as George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Jacques Ellul, and Ivan Illich) compiled a list of the "Eight Ideal Conditions for the Flowering of Autocracy."

Mander claimed that television helps create all eight conditions for breaking a population. Television, he explained, (1) occupies people so that they don't know themselves -- and what a human being is; (2) separates people from one another; (3) creates sensory deprivation; (4) occupies the mind and fills the brain with prearranged experience and thought; (5) encourages drug use to dampen dissatisfaction (while TV itself produces a drug-like effect, this was compounded in 1997 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration relaxing the rules of prescription-drug advertising); (6) centralizes knowledge and information; (7) eliminates or "museumize" other cultures to eliminate comparisons; and (8) redefines happiness and the meaning of life.

**Commericalism of Damn Near Everything:** While spirituality, music, and cinema can be revolutionary forces, the gross commercialization of all of these has deadened their capacity to energize rebellion. So now, damn near everything — not just organized religion -- has become "opiates of the masses."

The primary societal role of U.S. citizens is no longer that of "citizen" but that of "consumer." While citizens know that buying and selling within community strengthens that community and that this strengthens democracy, consumers care only about the best deal. While citizens understand that dependency on an impersonal creditor is a kind of slavery, consumers get excited with credit cards that offer a temporarily low APR.

Consumerism breaks people by devaluing human connectedness, socializing self-absorption, obliterating self-reliance, alienating people from normal human emotional reactions, and by selling the idea that purchased products -- not themselves and their community -- are their salvation.

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## Questions for Study Groups and Personal Reflection

- Q: Did you learn anything of value in this critique of television? What?
- Q: What stands out to you as the primary lessons from the commentary on television by the holy elders of the Church?
- Q: What stands out from research by scientists?
- Q: Can you summarize the effects of frequent television viewing?
- Q: Why does frequent television viewing retard the ability of children to learn?
- Q: How is the effect of television viewing different on adults?
- Q: How does television contribute to an attitude that leads to consumerism?
- Q: Can you identify the consequences of consumerism to the larger world?
- Q: We know that television viewing shapes individual thinking. How do you think that television viewing shapes society, its beliefs and its behavior?
- Q: What are the spiritual effects on those who frequently watch television?
- Q: What do you think are the consequences of these effects? Why do they happen?
- Q: The Scriptures and the saints ask us to guard the eyes, as windows to the soul. How might this guidance relate to television?
- Q: How might you reduce the amount of television that you watch?
- Q: What would this action do for your attitudes? Might it make you a better Christian?
- Q: If many individuals could reduce their time watching TV, what might this accomplish?

## End Notes

1. The Blessed Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, *The Spiritual Counsels of the Blessed Elder Paisios*.
2. Fr Constantin Alecse, at [www.Biserica.org](http://www.Biserica.org), Blog-ul in Romaneste, 2007.
3. The Blessed Elder Anthony of Russia, cited in Fr. Constantin Alecse, op cit.
4. Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena: An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1982, pgs. 225-226.
5. Archbishop Vitaly additionally notes “the priests must not ignore the phenomenon of television — a phenomenon unrivaled in the extent of its influence over the human soul.... We simply do not have the strength to tear ourselves away from its extraordinarily seductive spell...” *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 31, nr. 1, 1981, pp. 42-46. Translated from Russian by Alexander Maidan.
6. Blessed Elder Anthony of Russia adds “Everything [in television programming] is saturated with hatred for the Truth. Not much time will pass before they will openly mock Christianity and holy things on television. Broadcasts concerning the Theotokos will especially be permeated with hatred; from everything will flow the poison of diabolic evil. Only it will be under the veil of humor, comedy. “Laughing hell” will take the work of ridiculing everything Divine, and spiritual, all the way to the end. And the end will be in the one who appears and tries to take the place of God. And he will enter immediately into every home. How can a person enter every home at the same time?! We say that that is one of the qualities of God — being everywhere present — even the angels move about and exist in time. But the Church teaches that anti-christ will enter immediately into every home; this seems to be a contradiction.” But now through television we can see how this can be possible. Cited in Fr. Constantin Alecse, op cit.
7. *ibid*.
8. It should be placed as an unailing law that every kind of learning which is taught to a Christian should be penetrated with Christian principles, and more precisely, Orthodox ones.... It is a most dangerous error among us that subjects of learning are taught without any attention to the true faith....  
If one will put in this order the upbringing of a child from his first years, then little by little the character which his whole life should have will be revealed before him.... in St. Theophan the Recluse, *Raising Them Right*, pgs. 54-55.
9. Bishop Irenaius of Ekaterinberg reaffirms the insight of St. Theophan. "The parents must attentively follow their child's moral development.... Many parents err on this point! They seem not to know that they both can and must begin training their children in their infancy....  
“Woe to parents who are indifferent and do not cultivate good habits and the inclination towards good in the souls of their children from their infancy. They will have

to answer for this to God." Bishop Irenaeus, *On the Upbringing of Children*, St. Xenia Skete, Wildwood, California, 1901, reprinted 1991, pgs. 8, 10.

10. "Television's fast-paced images and short sound bites... alter our ability to assimilate large bodies of abstract ideas. Consequently frequent TV viewers may find it difficult to process complex information," in Cheryl Pawlowski, *Glued to the Tube: The Threat of Television Addiction to Today's Family*, Sourcebooks Inc., Naperville, IL, 2000, p. 52.

11. "As we are about to be liberated from the networks' schedules, we may be addicted more thoroughly and blindly than ever to the viewing habit. ... Habitual viewing can affect a young person's basic outlook and sensibilities, predisposition to violence and hyperactivity, IQ, reading ability, imagination, play, language patterns, critical thinking, self-image, perception of others, and values in general. Further, habitual TV viewing can affect the physical self as it can alter brain waves, reduce critical eye movements, immobilize the hands and body, and undermine nutrition and eating habits." Kate Moody, *Growing Up on Television*, New York Times Book Company, New York, NY, 1980, pgs. 6-7.

12. Play may be the best learning activity of all, no matter what its form. Children who develop skills through exercise will participate more in games and sports as they grow older and will not stand off because of a lack of confidence or comfort themselves with hours of undemanding TV viewing. *ibid*, pgs. 134-136.

13. The more children watch television, the more their language patterns imitate the stereotyped jargon, attitudes and habits of television characters. This leads to a situation in which culture is now "handed up." As Moody relates, "Packaged in rock music, situation comedies and TV advertisements, mass media delivers culture to the young who hand it up to adults. Since the 1950's and 1960's, American radio and TV have teased youth into new tastes and values and then played to these in large and profitable dimensions." in *ibid.*, pg. 6.

14. As early as 1954, the Kafauber Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency concluded that TV contributed to the crime rate.

Studies at Stanford University, the University of Wisconsin and Harvard University all showed that viewing TV violence makes children more willing to harm others, more aggressive in their play, and more likely to select aggression as the preferred response to conflict situations. Boys who are the heaviest viewers of TV violence tend to be more aggressive adolescents. Moody, pgs. 79-81.

15. Increasing levels of violent content on television over the last twenty years correlates with a clear pattern of escalating levels of aggression in society. The most violent programs are not prime time action thrillers, but children's cartoons. Cartoon violence is carefully and deliberately designed to play on the child's vulnerabilities, to entice him or her to watch, and to lure the largest possible audience -- all for the purpose of selling products. *ibid.*, pg. 82-83.

16. Hyperactivity is a common response to TV viewing among children. This is often a result of "TV syndrome," a condition which refers to the child who becomes unable to pay attention for more than a couple of seconds and is too restless or hyperactive to sit

still or control his or her aggressive behavior. *ibid.*, pg. 7.

17. Two separate studies, one by Michael Morgan and Larry Gross at the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, and another by Drs. Dorothy and Jerome Singer at Yale University, have correlated TV viewing with low IQ and poor reading ability. *ibid.* pgs. 6 and 64.

18. While there has been little solid research on the impact of television on the self-concept of viewers, psychologist Dr. Sherryl Graves' interpretation of existing surveys shows that heavy TV viewers are more likely to report greater dissatisfaction with their self image than do light viewers. The impact is strongest upon members of cultural minorities. Reported in Moody, *ibid.*, pg. 6, 127.

19. In a landmark study with ten children, Dr. Thomas Mulholland at Australian National University, found that even when watching their favorite show, the children's brain waves did not respond to the content, but to the act of watching. Brain waves do not distinguish between "boring" or "exciting" content, "good" or "bad" shows. Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 7, 14-16.

20. Television trains eyes to stay focused on one spot. Eyes move less while watching television than in any other activity in daily living. Loss of critical eye movement is one significant cause of the drop in literacy. This is because there is an essential motor component to reading. Eyes must move in order to read. Because television trains them to be fixed in focus, this inhibits the physiological basis for the eye movement which is essential for good reading skills. See also Dr. Edgar Gording, in Moody, pg. 7.

21. "There's no escaping TV," says reporter Froma Harrop. It's in the doctor's office, the gym and the jury-pool waiting room. It's in the bar, whether there's a game on or not. It's at the airport, where CNN holds everyone hostage.... Even hospital waiting rooms (and even convalescent rooms) are perpetually under television domination. The detainees may want to read, pray or listen to their own thoughts. They are not allowed to. Television must be watched. ...

"Everywhere you go, the TV is in your face," says Frank Vespe, executive director of the TV-Turnoff Network. His group encourages Americans to watch less television. Putting in less screen time, Vespe says, will improve people's health and promote community. The TV-Turnoff Network distributes fact sheets asserting that the average child spends more time in front of a television than in the classroom – and that is not counting the hours playing video games or at the computer screen," Froma Harrop, "Take back America from TV," *The Providence (RI) Journal*, Sunday, January 1, 2006.

22. "Research shows that children who watch excessive amounts of television are less likely to do well in school, and that they are more likely to develop the kinds of health problems associated with a sedentary lifestyle and a diet high in junk food." Newton Minow, *Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television and the First Amendment: A study conducted for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, funded by The Carnegie Corporation of America, Hill and Wang, New York, 1995, pg. 163-164.

23. Moody, *op cit.*, pg. 7.

24. Serious effects on family life result from TV viewing. While an earlier generation had the notion that TV might draw the family together, over 50% of U.S. households now have more than one set, a phenomenon that tends to create a pattern of isolation.... There is no impetus to discuss what to watch, no need to sit in the same room, less chance to supervise what the kids see, no opportunity to interpret content.... Even the illusion of togetherness is lost....

"Television not only replaces family activities, it replaces communication within the family.... The more television takes over family time and conversation, the less time there is to pursue other activities from which to draw subsequent family conversation...."

Testimony before the Federal Trade Commission has shown that TV viewing may actually create active conflicts in the family. Moody, op cit., pg. 122-124.

25. Imaginative play still occurs in children, but it is of great concern to teachers that today's children do not play nearly as much as in the past -- and they do not seem to know how to play. When children do play, it is a very different kind of behavior -- copied straight from the TV screen. Highly structured toys are also culpable in this predicament.... *ibid.*, pgs. 52-56.

26. Social scientists have understood the connection between television and violence for a long time. A 1977 study of 430 boys between the ages of nine and eleven by J. R. Dominic and B. Greenberg demonstrated a direct correlation between television viewing and a tendency to commit violent acts. "The more television violence they witnessed, the more the child was willing to use force as a solution to conflict and to perceive it as effective."

Social psychologist Frederic Wertham observes that children have absorbed from the mass media an idealization of violence: "Not the association of violence with hate and hostility, but the association of violence with that which is good and just...."

Wertham observed a further factor which is that children who have the lowest exposure to television violence are those who are the most emotionally impacted and aroused when they see it. He concludes: "The most important underlying effect, distilled from my observations and examinations, can be summed up concisely: the blunting of sensitivity. Many young people have been hardened." Cited in David Schwantes, *Taming Your TV and Other Media*, Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, 1979, pgs. 80-81.

For further reference, a more detailed study of violence and television appeared in G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubenstein, editors., "Television and Social Behavior," Vol. III: *Television and Adolescent Aggressiveness* (U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.) pgs. 314-335.

27. The nation's first major study on the effects of TV violence was a 1972 surgeon general's report that concluded "Televised violence does indeed have an adverse effect on members of our society." Reported by Rea Blakely, "Study Links TV Viewing among kids to later violence," CNN Medical Unit, March 28, 2002.

28. New York University researcher Dr. Neil Postman argues that television blurs distinctions between children and adults because it gives them equal access to information. This breaks down adult-child distinctions.

Postman shows that children consistently end up watching programs geared for

adults. "In these programs, children are exposed to the issues and conflicts of adults as if they were adult viewers.

"Television also keeps the entire population in a condition of high sexual excitement. It stresses, as Postman notes, 'a kind of egalitarianism of sexual fulfillment; sex is transformed from a dark and profound mystery to a product that is available to everyone -- let us say, like mouthwash or underarm deodorant.'" Quoted from John Whitehead, "The Decline of the Family," *The Stealing of America*, Crossway Books, a division of Good News publishers, Westchester, IL, 1983, pgs. 69-70.

29. According to Dr. Marie Winn, television produces radical cultural effects on the home: ... Ritual and structure are disappearing from the home. When families use television routinely, the social structure and rituals of the group tend to be regulated by its viewing patterns. In all societies, culture is transmitted to its children through rites, rules, rituals, and celebrations of its groups.... But family interaction is declining. in Moody, op cit., pg. 7.

Some studies show that in addition to its negative effect on family living patterns, TV viewing may actually create active conflicts in the family. Expensively produced, persuasive commercials cause unnecessary stress in families and put parents in the position of frequently saying "no" to the children's repeated demands. Moody, pg. 124.

30. One effect of the faster pace of television sequences is hyperactivity. "Hyperactivity is increasing rapidly as a recognized malady in America's nursery and elementary schools." According to a report by Dr. Werner Halpern, Rochester (NY) Mental Health Clinic, ... these hyperactive cases were all children who viewed *Sesame Street*.

When the parents of Halpern's young patients cut out the viewing of *Sesame Street*, these children improved dramatically. He contends that the rapidity and choppiness of the television images prevent reflection and adaptive capacity of children from entering into the learning process. Cited in Moody, op cit., pg. 20.

31. "Basically, TV compresses time -- squeezes it down into smaller portions than we could ever experience in real life... As time is cut up, the brain is conditioned to change at the expense of continuity of thought...." *ibid.*, pg. 46.

32. "Ordinary life is dull by comparison" (to the rapid world of television imagery). Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, "Acceleration of the Nervous System," Sierra Club paperback books, San Francisco, 1992, pg. 85.

33. "Just making small reductions to what kids are exposed to could make a significant difference in how quickly they develop sexually," says Rebecca Collins, Ph.D., a senior author of a new study called "Watching Sex on Television Predicts Adolescent Initiation of Sexual Behavior," *Pediatrics* magazine, September 2004.

34. "Television is a mood alteration system, like a drug. As the mood comes on, they reach for the drug, just like adults reach for a drink -- or the TV -- at the end of the day. So television for youngsters, in addition to being a drug, can be understood as early training for "harder" drugs.... The net result, I think, will be a generation of young people who are less able to act on their own, or to be creative.... So TV not only trains them for drug dependency, it also trains them for commodity dependency." Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, "Acceleration of the Nervous System," Sierra Club paperback

books, San Francisco, 1992, pg. 83.

35. Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, "Acceleration of the Nervous System," Sierra Club paperback books, San Francisco, 1992, pg. 83.

36. Concentration is reduced because television breaks programs into eight- or ten-minute segments and fosters a short attention span. Reading, on the other hand, requires and encourages longer attention spans. This difference is why many teachers see television as the opposite of reading. Quoted from James Trelease, *The New Read Aloud Handbook*, Penguin Books, 1995.

37. In perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to understand what happens to people before, during, and after watching television -- a project that involved twelve hundred subjects in nine studies spanning thirteen years -- Drs. Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi found that television, more than any other leisure activity, is likely to make people passive, tense, and incapable of concentrating. The longer people watch television, the more drowsy and bored they become. As time goes on, they grow sadder, lonelier, more irritable and more hostile. Although it is true that people are relaxed while the television set is on, when they turn it off, they are even less relaxed than before they began to watch.

"...By the time they enter kindergarten or first grade, many children are so accustomed to the visual overstimulation and hyperkinetic pace of television that they are unable to focus, particularly when they're called on to undertake a learning task. For these television-reared children -- nervous, jumpy, impulsive -- school can't compete; it is too poky, dull, and taxing, no matter how skillful and imaginative the teacher." Quoted in Art Carey, "The Decline of Education," *The United States of Incompetence*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1991, pg. 97.

38. Teachers, physicians and parents observe rising numbers of today's children who can't process information as well as they were once expected to do. They say that kids generally can't see, hear, or pay attention as well as most children did in the past. Moody, op cit., pg. 37.

39. "Widespread stress and overload clearly suggest that there are limits to adaptability. Failing to respect the fragility of life, increasingly we are "blowing fuses."

"We now have evidence that habitual television viewing produces major physical effects on our bodies. It can alter our brain waves, paralyze eye movements, immobilize our hands, irritate the central nervous system, assault our nerves, impact us with microwave radiation, and even induce epileptic fits.

"... this is especially true of young children because they are the most vulnerable, and because damage done early in childhood is often irreversible." Moody, op cit., pg. 34.

40. "From 1969 to 1990 the combined SAT score for college bound seniors fell fifty-six points." Carey, op cit., pg. 94.

41. Studies at Harvard University's Project Zero show that it makes a difference whether children learn by the language of pictures (TV) rather than by the language of words (books). Children who learn by words show greater recall of the story than those who

see the same story as a television animation. For young children, the continual visual stimulation of television apparently decreases their attention to the verbal story information. The conclusion is that while TV (or by implication computerized forms of education) can seem like a shortcut to perceptual learning, it may in fact seriously inhibit it. Quoted in Kate Moody, *op cit.*, pgs. 48-49.

42. As early as 1975, a connection was seen between declining SAT scores and television. See "Why Johnny Can't Write," *Newsweek*, December 8, 1975.

Also, "The present decline in Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores among high school students and the apparent inability of young men and women to write coherent sentences is being blamed, at least partially, upon the technological giant. Quoted in Robert Alley, *Television: Ethics for Hire?* Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1977, pg. 26.

43. "The most serious effects (of television viewing), however, of seeing hundreds of commercials each week is that they teach children a lifestyle of consumption. Children learn the 'material-goods-make-happiness' ethic very early." Moody, pg. 105.

44. "Our minds are being addressed by addictive media serving corporate sponsors whose purpose is to rearrange reality so that viewers forget the world around them." Today television is the primary medium through which corporations shape the culture and behavior of Americans. Quotation by Paul Hawken and commentary by David Korten, in *When Corporations Rule the World*, Kumarian Press, Hartford, 1995, pg. 149-150 and 152.

45. "Your system trains children to be consumers; our system trains children to be citizens. No other major democratic nation in the world has so willingly turned its children over to mercenary strangers this way." Quote by a European broadcasting executive, as cited by Newton Minow, *Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television and the First Amendment: A study conducted for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, funded by The Carnegie Corporation of America, Hill and Wang, New York, 1995, pg. 19.

46. "The primary tools which advertisers use to manipulate the human mind are the deadly sins. Pride, greed, anger, lust, etc. when attached to products, are the qualities presented on behalf of products to make them seem attractive and desirable," writes Stephen Muratore in "The ECF Newsletter," Issue Nr. 4, San Francisco, 1984.

47. Broadcasters know that the existing system makes money for them, and because it does, they assert that it serves the public interest. Minow, *ibid.*, pg. 20.

48. "To be consistent about discipline is a tiring though necessary activity. Mothers complain about their 'negative function' in carrying out normal parental behavior. ...

"Having to say 'no' to incessant TV-produced requests adds to the negative function of the mother..." Moody, pg. 100-101.

49. As children's material urges are stimulated by advertising, parents become gatekeepers to the world of consumer products. In most households, that means saying "no" a lot. Parents who try to instill other values in their children -- such as conversation and thrift -- find their voices drowned out by the onslaught of commercial messages. A

rift develops with parents and children in opposite and often hostile camps. As one child psychologist testified at a Federal Trade Commission hearing on advertising to children: "Mistrust results when legitimate authority figures, such as parents, are implicitly silenced or discredited, as they are if they pit their meagre persuasion techniques against the might of television advertising directed at their children." Laurie Mazur, "Preying on Innocents: Marketing to Children," *Beyond TV*, Winter, 1996, pg. 4.

50. A further dimension of the problem is that few clergy or parishes address the problems associated with television viewing. This points to the loss of the traditional cosmological world view and a functional theology of lifestyle which were once integral to Christian formation and behavior. St. Clement of Alexandria outlines clear biblical principles for Christian attitudes to food, clothing, household utensils and management (see "Christ the Educator," Book II). So do St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, St. Ambrose and dozens of other fathers and saints of the Church. If these principles were applied to our day, they would not only shape our attitudes toward television but many other facets of livelihood. The result would be a much more vigorous form of Orthodox behavior and a needed Christian critique of the depravity in secular culture.

51. Children's brain waves do not respond to program content but to the act of watching television. Meditation is often associated with the alpha state, yet that activity is in clear contrast to the "zombie viewer." ... In TV viewing the ideas and images are not internally generated but come from outside. The point is that television does not arouse active attention; rather TV viewing suppresses it. Moody, pg. 17.

52. If current trends continue, says a 1995 report from the Department of Justice, the number of arrests of juveniles for violent crimes will double by the year 2010. Attorney General Janet Reno said that she was particularly dismayed by the finding that the homicide rate among 14- to 17-year olds had increased 165% in the past ten years.

As background, the report cited that between 1984 and 1993, the number of homicides among juveniles involving handguns increased five-fold. Article by Fox Butterfield, "Grim Forecast is offered on Rising Juvenile Crime," *The New York Times*, September 7, 1995, pg. A-6.

53. Minow, op cit., pg. 26.

54. Fundamentally, the problem of alienation and delinquency is much deeper than just television or videos; it is the whole material and technological way of life which fragments the spiritual side of human nature and fosters an artificial hyper-cerebral orientation. In the face of this new environment, spiritual formation falters unless a very intentional critiquing of culture is in place. Here the institutional Church has not yet adequately taken up the challenge of teaching her members the spiritual requirements for preserving a living spirituality in the face of a deadening culture.

Jacques Ellul reflects on this problem: "Technique has penetrated the deepest recesses of the human being. The machine tends not only to create a new human environment, but also to modify man's very essence. The milieu in which he lives is no longer his. He must adapt himself, as though the world were new, to a universe for which he was not created.... He was created with a certain essential unity, and he is fragmented by all the forces of the modern world." Jacques Ellul quoted by Gary Anderson, "The Machine as Technique," *Epiphany Journal*, Fall, 1983, pg. 5.

55. A primary influence of computers when used for education is that they cultivate an artificial either-or mentality in which answers to questions become entirely correct or false. An ability to discern the gray areas in complex issues lessens. When used as a vehicle for entertainment, computers are like television in that they accelerate the nervous system and counter efforts by parents to cultivate sensitivity. The more exposure that children receive to computerized entertainment, the less crafts, handwork, music, rhythm, reading, or other basic forms of early education are integrated. Like television, early computer use contributes to a loss of imagination and concentration ability. See Jerry Mander, *op cit*, especially Chapter Four: "Seven Negative Points About Computers: The Rate of Acceleration," pgs. 51-74.

56. Government and private citizens' groups have repeatedly tried to discover and report the effects of TV on children. They have been frustrated or suffocated by well-funded industry opposition. Two of the largest investigations, the Surgeon General's Report on TV and Social Behavior (1969-1972) and the Action for Children's Television (ACT) probe (1968-1980) had origins in humanitarian outrage at the fact that violence is used in entertainment for the purpose of amassing large profits.

From the beginning, relentless and powerful industry pressure has been exerted to adjust and tone down the reports, first by black-balling prestigious researchers from the committee, and later by insisting on compromises in the language of the summary of the report.

Usually three separate industries team up to suppress information about the effects of television: broadcasting, advertising and manufacturing. These mobilize to combat consumer groups and the Federal Trade Commission. Moody, pgs. 8-10.

57. Advertising runs television and makes them hugely profitable. During the 1970s and 1980s, many television stations routinely have returned profits of 100% annually on their tangible investments. David Schwantes, *Taming Your TV and Other Media*, Southern Publishing Co., Nashville, pp. 23-25.

58. Advertising is very big business. Some key facts: (1) About 75% of commercial network television time is paid for by the 100 largest corporations. The total spending by the one hundred leading TV advertisers in 1994: \$140 billion. Because one-half minute of prime-time network advertising sells for between \$200,000 and \$300,000, only the largest corporations can afford it. (David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 1995, pg. 152).

(2) In comparison with the \$140 billion corporations spend on advertising, the entire budgets for the federal Departments of State, Education, Commerce, Labor and Justice totaled \$125 billion. (Annamarie Pluhar, "TV, the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Erosion of Righteousness," *Beyond TV*, Winter, 1996, pg. 3).

(3) When this expenditure on television advertising is calculated on a per capita basis for 265 million Americans, this amounts to \$528 for every person just for TV advertising by the largest corporations. The total amount is substantially higher.

(4) Around the world, according to the *Economist* magazine, global corporate spending for advertising in 1989 totaled more than \$240 billion. Another \$380 billion was spent on packaging, design and other point-of-sale promotions. In aggregate these expenditures amount to \$120 for every single person in the world. (United Nations, "Report on the World Social Situation," New York, 1993, pg. 43, as quoted in Korten, *op*

cit., pg. 153.)

59. The study of Dr. Neil Postman shows that habitual TV viewing may be counterproductive to analytical thinking and the mental processes needed for reading. Moody, "Can TV teach reading?" op cit., pgs. 66-67.

60. Habitual television viewing denies the imagination the opportunity to flourish by its usual means. ... Daydreaming and imaginative play promote the child's perceptual maturity, emotional growth and creative development in ways that television does not. Imagination is the capacity of the mind to project itself beyond its own perceptions and sensations.... Ironically, the prime time for the development of imagination -- between the ages four and seven -- is precisely the time when children's minds are most captured by TV viewing. Moody, pgs. 51-52.

61. TV distorts reality by selecting certain kinds of images and omitting others. See Moody, pgs. 110-114.

62. "Children entering kindergarten today exhibit markedly diminished listening skills and attention spans. Both are closely associated with the development of reading skills." Moody, pg. 62.

63. Virtually all of the research... consistently shows that television violence contributes to real violence, and to a pervasive sense of fear. The most famous of these studies is the 1972 Surgeon General's report, "Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence." Cited in Minow, op cit., pg. 28.

64. "Nothing about mass media makes us more uncomfortable than the idea that the quantities of video violence produced in America and consumed around the world might be contributing to the growing epidemic of aggressive behavior.... A parade of inquiries and reports since the 1954 Kefauver Senate Subcommittee... have concluded that TV contributes to the crime rate." Moody, pg. 79.

65. "Countless teachers have told me how young people are utterly unable to maintain attention. They become bored after only a few minutes of the same subject. They need constant change. And they need the teacher to "perform" rather than teach, to deliver material with snappy punch lines." Mander, op cit., pg. 86.

66. In 1997, fully 80% of young people born into Russian and Greek Orthodox families left the Church by the time they were 26 years old. While there is no data which correlates this to television viewing, this shows that the present education which most Orthodox children receive is not sufficient to address the serious de-spiritualizing forces of the secular world. This also shows that something radically different has to be done in the way the parish addresses the chasm between the life of the Church and parishioner participation in the life of the fallen world.

67. Weekly liturgy with perhaps one hour of Sunday school is not enough to sustain most young people in the face of a relentless onslaught of commercial messages and amoral programming which continually undermines Orthodox doctrine and striving. The only effective alternative is to turn the television off. There may be cultural and peer

pressure to watch some programs, but the lesson of many studies is that parents cannot both preserve virtue in their children and allow them to watch unsupervised TV.

68. "Desensitization is perhaps the most serious effect of all of widespread TV violence. Psychologists say that the TV child develops a thick-skinned detachment, a cynical outlook." ...

Dr. Erik Pepper has said: "The horror of television is that the information goes in, but we don't react to it until later when we don't know what we're reacting to. When you watch television, you are training yourself not to react and so, later on, you're doing things without knowing why you're doing them or where they come from." With desensitization, there is no outrage over destructive aggression." Moody, pg. 91.

69. Many Orthodox young people are lost to the Church because their parents and pastors alike pay too little attention to the virulent anti-Christian content in schools and television. Franky Schaeffer offers pointed commentary on this problem: "Some Orthodox have taken a head-in-the-sand attitude in regard to the effects of secularism on their children and them. Rather than confronting the secularizing and pagan realities of American culture, they have tended to accommodate them. This has resulted in second and third generation Orthodox being insufficiently trained (or forewarned) regarding the anti-Christian onslaught they face in the larger world. The sad truth is that a whole generation of Orthodox have been and are being lost because their parents, and perhaps their priests, have put a greater priority on "success" and being "good Americans" than they have on being good Orthodox Christians." In *Dancing Alone: the Quest for Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religion*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, 1994, pg. 305.

70. A chilling condemnation of contemporary television is the seemingly insatiable appetite it creates for amusement of all kinds without regard for social or moral benefits. Quoted in Quentin Schultze, *Redeeming Television: How TV Changes Christians -- How Christians Can Change TV*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1992, pg. 41.

71. Malcolm Muggeridge, in *Christ and the Media*, makes the point that a television camera cannot easily communicate truth. "Unlike written words, which must be composed by someone in particular, the televised or filmed image 'is machine made.... it is seeing with not through, the eye; looking but not seeing.... It's very nearly impossible to tell the truth in television...." Quoted in Schultze, op cit., pg. 24.

Jacques Ellul, a French commentator on ethics and technology, goes further and declares that television always promotes evil -- even in the hands of Christians -- because the tube necessarily conveys a distorted perspective. "The consequences for the Church," he says, "are devastating when believers put 'religion in this false reality.'" Schultze, op cit., 24.

72. Violent, promiscuous or otherwise inappropriate program content damages spiritual formation in children as well as adults. According to St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807 - 1867), "Even conversation and contact with thoughts belonging to the realm of satan, even without accepting them, the mere contemplation of thoughts and fantasies offered by demons, injures the soul.... St. Hesychius of Jerusalem says: 'Just as we injure ourselves by looking at something harmful with our physical eyes, so we injure ourselves by looking at what is harmful with our mind.'

"We must therefore pay special attention to guarding the eye of the soul and take particular care to prevent its being injured, lest its diseased condition become the cause of our spiritual ruin." St. Ignatius goes on to relate how the effects of wrong fixations while young have long lasting effects because of the depth of the wound to the soul. Quoted in Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena: An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1982, pgs. 225-226.

73. "Through television, Americans have created a cosmology of terror.... Countless studies and reviews over the past decades have argued that there is a link between aggressive behavior and exposure to television violence. Small wonder that the Surgeon General in 1972, the National Institute of Mental Health in 1982, and the American Psychology Association in 1992 have all said that such a link exists.... All of this (body of research) consistently shows that television violence contributes to real violence, and to a pervasive sense of fear." Quoted in Newton Minow, former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, in his report, *Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television and the First Amendment*, A project report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Hill and Wang, 1995, pgs. 26-28.

74. A study reported in *Science* magazine (March, 2002) shows that adolescents who watch more than three hours of TV daily are far more likely to engage in aggressive behavior as adults.

Researchers tracked 700 boys and girls over 17 years. After accounting for factors such as family income, parental oversight, and the possibility of neglect or psychiatric disorders, the link between watching violent television and behaving aggressively as an adult remains.

A *Science* magazine editorial in the same issue in which this study was reported, indicates that the study probably underestimates the effects of TV on violence. Reported by Rea Blakely, "Study Links TV Viewing among Kids to Later Violence," CNN Medical Unit, March 28, 2002

75. "Christian viewers must become far more discerning about how stories influence their lives and shape their faith. Too many Christians wrongly believe that the tube is merely entertainment for mindless diversion. Every story is not just a diversion from the world, but also a door to another world...." (and to a radically different set of assumptions about morality and ethics). Quoted in Quentin Schultze, *Redeeming Television: How TV Changes Christians -- How Christians Can Change TV*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1992, pg. 59.

76. "Something insidious happens when you get most of your nature through television, ... the 'real' nature around you, even when it's intact, begins to seem dull.... This is because nature documentaries are as absurdly action-packed as the soap operas, where a life's worth of divorce, adultery, and sudden death are crammed into a week's worth of watching." Bill McKibbin, *The Age of Missing Information*, Plume Books, New York, 1993, pgs 75 and 77.

77. "Excessive cravings do not necessarily involve physical substances. Gambling can become compulsive; sex can become obsessive. One addictive activity, however, stands out for its prominence and ubiquity – the world's most popular leisure pastime, television. Most people admit to having a love-hate relationship with it. They complain

about the 'boob tube' and 'couch potatoes,' then they settle into their sofas and grab the remote control. Parents commonly fret about their children's viewing (if not their own). Even researchers who study TV... marvel at the medium's hold on them personally." Quoted in Robert Kubey and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Television Addiction Is No Mere Metaphor," *Scientific American*, February, 2002.

78. Cheryl Pawlowski finds that television viewing does act like an addiction. "Not unlike drugs or alcohol, the television experience allows the participants to blot out the real world and enter into a pleasurable and passive mental state." Pawlowski, *Glued to the Tube: The Threat of Television Addiction to Today's Family*, 2000, p. 53.

79. Dr. Linus Wright, "Television and American Parents," *The World and I* magazine, May, 1990, p. 573.

80. Researchers at the University of Chicago found that the highest levels of television viewing occurred among those who felt the most alienated, particularly those who had been divorced, separated or abused. Researchers speculated that these distraught viewers turned to television to avoid examination of their conflicts and inner turmoil. In Pawlowski, op cit., p. 54.

81. Dr. Richard Kubey writes "Television programs and commercials after all provide para-social experiences and are constructed to keep the viewer's attention focused on the TV and not on the self." R. Kubey, "Television Use in Everyday Life," *Journal of Communication*, Summer, 1986, p. 120.

82. "Nearly half of all shows on prime-time TV now contain profanity, and on some networks, such as UPN, NBC, and Fox, that number surpasses 70%." Such language shows up most often on shows that target teenage and young adult audiences. In The Parents Television Council, "The Family Hour: Worse than Ever and Headed for New Lows," Special Report, August 31, 1999, as reported in Pawlowski, op cit, p. 73.

83. "Far from enhancing understanding, the [decline in language] trend may be eroding our ability to communicate." Cited in "The Problem with Kids TV," The Center for Educational Priorities, 1997, and quoted in Pawlowski, op cit., p. 74.

84. Television "...is controlled by people whose interests lie not in preserving cultures or natural resources, but in introducing... the culture of consumerism. ... The ultimate goal of television appears to be the creation of "a global mall." G. Gerbner, "Study Guide to the Crisis of the Cultural Environment," The Media Education Foundation, 1998, in Pawlowski, op cit., p. 76.

85. "At the current rate of television viewership, average Americans will see more than two million commercials over the course of their lifetime." Cited by TV-Free America, "Television Statistics and Sources," 1999.

86. It is no accident that the deadly sins – greed, lust, pride, anger, envy, gluttony, and covetousness – are precisely the levers through which products are presented to an unsuspecting audience. Champion consumers find it difficult to also be faithful Christians who practice the virtues and strive for the ascetic values that bring spiritual

freedom and growth. Editor's observation.

87. With some \$27 billion in discretionary money to spend, marketers spend \$3 billion a year on advertising that targets kids. A result is that kids are increasingly assaulted by commercial pitches. What is so disturbing about this is that kids are the most unsophisticated of all consumers; they have the least and therefore want the most. Consequently they are in the perfect position to be taken." in James Steyer, *The Other Parent: The Inside Story of the Media's Effect on Our Children*, Atria Books, New York and London, 2002, p. 103.

88. "The increase in the number of children in the audience and the amount of their disposable income is fueling a marketing mania directed at young people. In 1998 four-to-twelve-year-olds were responsible for some \$27 billion in discretionary spending – about four times the amount that they spent a decade earlier."

"Even more important, they influenced another \$500 billion in spending by their parents. Each year some four million of these "rookie" shoppers enter America's marketplace.

"When marketers think about children, he advises, they should think of KIDS – Keepers of Infinite Dollar\$" – whose income has been growing 10 to 20 percent a year, much faster than that of their parents." James V. McNeal, *The Kid's Market*, Paramount Marketing Publishing, Ithaca, NY, 1999, p. 97.

89. Ron Powers, "The Medium IS the Message," *Audubon* magazine, September-October, 1994, pg. 78-79.

90. Bill McKibbin, quoted by Ron Powers, in *ibid.*, pg. 79.

91. Mander, *op cit.*, pg. 86.

92. Mander, *op cit.*, pg. 86.

93. Mander, pg. 86.

94. Mander, pg. 86.

95. For human beings the synchronization of our internal process to... electronic speeds is the worst possible combination of influences. It puts our brains into a passive alpha state, zapping our thinking processes and destroying our creative impulses. Simultaneously, it speeds up our nervous system, making us too fast to feel calm, too fast to read... and too fast for nature. Mander, pg. 86.

96. Guidelines for television viewing are not a new idea. Back in 1957 when information about subliminal advertising techniques to influence the subconscious attitudes of individuals first became well known, the editors of *The Christian Century* magazine responded with clarity to the challenge. They forcefully declared: "Massive retaliation is in order. We have drawn up a list: Turn off the TV. Buy no brands that do not display a "No subliminal projection advertising" affidavit. Refuse to discuss ways for the churches to redeem this thing for their own use. Plan a down payment on some sort of Walden Pond." Quoted in Kyle Haselden, *Morality and the Mass Media*, Broadman Press,

Nashville, 1968, pg. 143.

97. "Children and television violence," <http://www.abelard.org/tv/tv.htm#index>, 2006

98. Setting strict TV rules about what children can and cannot watch at home may actually encourage them to watch forbidden programs elsewhere, according to recent research at Ohio State University. Experts found that this type of approach may wind up damaging parents' relationships with their children. "Unfortunately, parents' good intentions may backfire and contribute to children watching more of the programs they shouldn't see," says Amy Nathanson, Ph.D., assistant professor of journalism at Ohio State University. Nathanson and colleagues determined that studies show that talking to older children about issues – rather than merely restricting access to television – is more likely to influence what their children watch. Quoted in Jennifer Warner, "Strict rules prompt children, teens to watch banned TV elsewhere," *Human Communications Research*, Ohio State University News Release, January, 2003, and reported on WebMD Medical News, January 29, 2003

99. Most television-viewing practices examined were associated with sleep disturbance. Despite close parental monitoring of television-viewing habits, one quarter of the parents reported the presence of a television set in the child's bedroom. The television-viewing habits associated most significantly with sleep disturbance were increased daily television viewing amounts and increased television viewing before bedtime, especially in the context of having a television set in the child's bedroom. The sleep domains that appeared to be affected most consistently by television were bedtime resistance, sleep onset delay, and anxiety around sleep, followed by shortened sleep duration. The parent's threshold for defining "problem sleep behavior" in their child was also important in determining the significance of the association between sleep disturbance and television-viewing habits.

A conclusion is that health care practitioners should be aware of the potential negative impact of television viewing just before bedtime. Parents should be questioned about their children's television-viewing habits as part of medical screening for sleep disturbances and as part of anticipatory guidance in regards to healthy sleep habits in children. In particular, the presence of a television set in the child's bedroom may be an under-recognized, but important, contributor to sleep problems in school children.

American children spend almost as much time per week watching television (~25 hours) as they spend in school. Children's television-viewing habits have been reported to be associated with a variety of significant behavioral consequences, including obesity and poor eating habits, decreased physical activity and physical fitness, and impaired school performance. An association between children's exposure to violent images on television and subsequent aggressive behavior also has been documented repeatedly in the literature. Extended and frequent television viewing has been shown to decrease the time and opportunity available for social interaction within the family.

Clinical experience with both adults and children with sleep problems strongly implicates television-viewing habits as a significant influence on sleep behavior. For example, a retrospective chart review of patients evaluated in our Pediatric Sleep Disorders Clinic revealed that television-viewing habits (such as falling asleep in front of the television) were mentioned specifically by parents as contributing to sleep problems in over 25% of children diagnosed with behavioral sleep disorders....

Despite a clinical basis for an association between television viewing and sleep disturbances in school children, few studies of risk factors for sleep problems have included any examination of television-viewing habits. Adults with insomnia have been found to engage in increased amounts of television viewing compared with normal sleepers. In contrast, one pediatric study showed no correlation between increased amounts of television viewing and shortened sleep duration. However, a 9-month prospective study showed that the introduction of television viewing into the lifestyle of children in India was associated with an increased incidence of sleep disturbances. Reported by Judith Owens, MD, MPH, Rolanda Maxim, MD, Michael Msall, MD, and Anthony Alario, MD, at the Departments of Pediatrics and Child and Family Psychiatry, Hasbro Children's Hospital and Brown University School of Medicine, Providence, Rhode Island, "Television-viewing Habits and Sleep Disturbance in School Children," in *Pediatrics*, Vol. 104, No. 3, September, 1999, p. e27.

100. "Older citizens far and away watch the most television. A 1996 study of 4,800 households showed that those, 50 years old and older watched the most television. Generally the older a person, the more he or she watched television. Individuals 65 years and older watched the most television — on average 253 minutes per day. Men 65 years and above are the heaviest weekend TV watchers; older women followed closely behind with an emphasis on broadcasts late in the afternoon and early in the evening. A conclusion was that the affinity of the elderly for television can be explained by its potential for offering entertainment, information, and companionship as a substitute for interpersonal communication and as a tool for structuring time patterns and keeping up the rhythms of long-established rituals. On the one hand, television serves as a 'lifeline' and a 'window to the outside world' for people with little opportunity for direct, unmediated social contact. On the other hand, prolonged TV use is an indicator of loneliness and neglect." Quoted in Andreas Grajczyk and Oliver Zööllner, "How Older People Watch Television," in *Gerontology: International Journal of Experimental, Clinical and Behavioral Gerontology*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 1998, pp. 176-181.

101. This 2006 study by the American Academy of Pediatrics found parents sorely misinformed about the effects of television on their children. Many provided television as a reward for good behavior. Some started their children on television before they were two years old. The pediatrics research group made a point to recommend that "no TV or other electronic media for kids younger than 2" – advice that just 26 percent of parents followed... They also recommended no more than two hours of total 'screen time' daily for older children. In closing the researchers emphasized that they are "not anti-TV." Dr. Daniel Broughton of the Mayo Clinic, who wrote large portions of the Academy's recommendations, explained, "before the age of two is the time of the brain's most rapid development, and interaction is crucial during that period." Reported in "Parents Ignore Warnings About TV," by Lauran Neergaard, Associated Press, Santa Rosa Press-Democrat, May 25, 2006, p. A-7.

102. The Blessed Elder Lawrence of Chernigov, *Spiritual Counsels of the Blessed Elder Lawrence of Chernigov* (Russia)

103. St. Hesychius of Jerusalem, quoted in Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena: An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1982, pgs.

225-226.