

MercyNotes

“For the greatest possible generosity to the needy” Apology XII.174

Media Violence

We live in what many Christian thinkers have called “a culture of death.” While the pop culture glorifies vengeance and violence and desensitizes people to human suffering, Christ has called us to a different way of life, to a sensitive and compassionate life of love toward others, even toward our enemies.

For “while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” (Romans 5:10) As the Lord’s forgiven disciples we seek to help those who harm us, as he taught us to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” And we seek to help those who are harmed by others.

“Thou shalt not kill. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need.”
(Small Catechism, Fifth Commandment)

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), by age 70 the average American will have spent 7 to 10 years watching television. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) reports that American youth spend an average of 4 hours each day with computers, videotaped movies, television, and video games.

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) states that **by age 18 the typical American child will have watched 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence.** The APA also reports that commercial television for children is 50-60 times more violent than adult prime time shows. Some cartoons average more than 80 violent acts per hour. The AAP tells us there are 3 to 5 violent acts per hour in prime time and 20 to 25 violent acts per hour on Saturday morning. Thanks to videocassette rentals and sales, cable

TV, videogames, pay-per-view TV, and interactive Internet programs, today’s children and adolescents view more violent media content than any previous generation. This is particularly harmful to children under age 8 since it’s difficult for them to distinguish fantasy from real life.

The National Institute on Media and the Family reports that:

- **61% of TV programs contain violence**
 - many violent scenes don’t show the tragic aftermath suffered by victims (National Television Violence Study, Smith and Donnerstein (1998)
 - since the 1950s over 1000 studies have been done on the effects of TV and movie violence. The majority concluded that children exposed to a significant amount of TV and movie violence are more likely to display aggressive values, attitudes and behaviors (Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 1999)
 - 60-90% of the most popular video games use violent themes (Anderson, 2001)
 - 59% of 4th grade girls and 73% of 4th grade boys report that most of their favorite video games are violent (Anderson, 2001)
 - violence (suicide, murder, and trauma) is a leading cause of death for children and young adults – greater than congenital problems, disease, or cancer (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001).

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Effects on Children

The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, and American Psychiatric Association warn that children:

- will become more antisocial and aggressive
- may become desensitized to violence and victims of violence
- may see the world as violent and scary and may become more fearful
- will want to view more violence in entertainment and real life
- will see violence as an acceptable way to handle conflicts (Congressional Public Health Summit, 2000).

According to Dr. Victor Strasburger, a professor at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine in Albuquerque, the statistical correlation between media violence and real-life violence is greater than between smoking and lung cancer

(American Academy of Family Physicians, Feb., 2001, Vol. 7, Number 2).

Increased time spent with media decreases physical activity and creativity and increases aggressive behavior.

The March issue of *Developmental Psychology* published a study by Dr. Leonard Eron and associates at the University of Illinois. In 1977 they surveyed 557 Chicago children aged 6-10 about the violent TV shows they watched most, whether or not they identified with the aggressive characters, and whether they thought the violent situations were realistic. Some of the shows watched were *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *Starsky and Hutch*, and *Roadrunner* cartoons. In 1992 the researchers again surveyed 329 of the original study group (now in their 20s):

- The men were more than three times more likely to have pushed, shoved, or grabbed spouses or others. They were also more likely to have criminal conviction records and moving traffic violations.
- The women were over four times more likely to have punched, choked, or beaten another adult. They were also more likely to have committed criminal acts and moving traffic violations.

In a study at Pennsylvania State University, 100 preschool children were observed before and after viewing television. Some watched shows with no violence and others watched cartoons with many violent or aggressive situations. Afterward, the children who watched violent shows were more likely to hit playmates, disobey teachers, argue, and display impatience than those who watched nonviolent programs (American Psychological Assn.).

Violent Music Videos

The Youth Violence Center states that some research has been done on the impact of violent music videos on behavior. Studies have found that violent or antisocial rap videos can increase aggressive thinking. No research has been done on whether these videos cause increased physical aggression.

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<http://www.lcms.org>
<http://www.cph.org>
<http://www.CQ.com>

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Youth Violence

One in twelve high school children is injured or threatened with a weapon every year (National Center for Children Exposed to Violence).

The National Center for Juvenile Justice states that by 2010 the number of youths age 10-17 arrested for violent crimes could more than double. According to the FBI, there was a **249% increase in gun-related murders committed by youths** between 1985 and 1995. Though overall crime in the U.S. has decreased since peaking in 1981, most of the decrease has been due to aging of the baby boom generation and the resulting reduction in teenagers. Teens make up the demographic group most likely to commit crimes in general.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reports there was a 40% increase in murders, rapes, robberies, and assaults between 1985 and 1994. Our youth accounted for 26% of this increase (American Psychological Assn.).

The APA reports:

- **50%** of murder victims are 15-34 years old
- **55%** of people arrested for murder are under age 25
- **1/3 of all** violent crimes in the U.S. are committed by people under age 21.

Adolescents and young adults are part of one of the fastest-growing demographic groups in the U.S. The steadily increasing level of media violence to which young people are exposed is expected to lead to increasing levels of violent behavior.

The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center reports that:

- from 1999 to 2001 serious violence on TV decreased by 17%
- broadcast network violence decreased by 11%
- violence decreased by 65% on premium cable and increased by 20% on basic cable
- top box office film violence remained the same

In a 2001 review, the Center found that:

- **89% of the 70 most popular video games** contained violence
- **49% of all video games contained serious violence**
- **40% of all video games contained comic violence**
- **41% of video games require the protagonist to use violence** to achieve goals
- **17% of video games portray violence** as the primary focus of the game.

Researchers fear that the increasing realism of video games encourages more identification with the characters and more imitation of behaviors portrayed. There have been no studies yet which look at the impact of video game viewing on violent behavior.

Elected Officials Contact Information

To obtain the name of your State Representative and U.S. Senator, you may contact your local elections officer or call the **Federal Citizen Information National Contact Center toll free at 1-800-FED-INFO**

For the most recent information about elected national officials, please log onto the websites or call the following Capitol switchboard numbers:

Senators

202-224-3121

<http://www.senate.gov>

Representatives

202-225-3121

<http://www.house.gov>

To Contact the White House

Comments	202-456-1111
Switchboard	202-456-1414
FAX	202-456-2461

TTY/TDD phone numbers for hearing impaired only:

Comments	202-456-6213
Visitor's office	202-456-2121

E-Mail Addresses

E-mail your Governor

www.emailyourgovernor.com

President George W. Bush

president@whitehouse.gov

Vice President Richard Cheney

vice.president@whitehouse.gov

To read more, log onto Commission on Theology and Church Relations at <http://www.lcms.org/ctcr>. Under *Social/ Ethical Issues* click *Guidelines for Crucial Issues on Christian Citizenship* (1968).

What Parents Can Do

Simply limiting the amount of time children watch television or use other media is the simplest way to reduce exposure to media violence. Encourage them to make a list of other activities they may enjoy. The American Psychological Association says parents may also:

- view at least one episode of programs your children watch to check the content – by watching with a child, a parent’s influence reduces a child’s perception that the violence is real and also reduces the possibility of acting out those violent behaviors later
- discuss violent scenes and the causes of characters’ violent behavior with children – ask children how characters could have handled problems nonviolently
- restrict children to safe programs or ban programs considered too violent – try to

encourage viewing of shows that promote helping others and cooperation

- since you are a primary role model for your children, be aware of how you solve problems and interact with others

- be aware of the message you may be giving when children can access real or toy guns

Keep televisions out of children’s bedrooms. Dr. Strasburger says that 25% of preschoolers and 55% of 12-17 year olds in the U.S. have televisions in their bedrooms.

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that parents:

- limit children’s TV viewing to 1 or 2 hours per day
- don’t use television or other media as a babysitter
- turn off the TV at mealtimes
- be careful about TV viewing just before bedtime so disturbing images don’t disrupt sleep
- limit your own TV viewing and use of media
- monitor music and video games children are exposed to for any violent themes

- teach children alternatives to violence

- ask children how they feel after viewing violent scenes on TV, in movies, in music videos, or after playing video games.

Contact corporations that distribute violent video games, movie, and television programs. Tell them you expect clear warnings about violence in their products.

You and your children can help create a less violent culture. Log on to <http://www.medialit.org> (The Center for Media Literacy) for “20 Ways to Create a Caring Culture.” A few of the tips are:

- work with teachers to help kids design games to submit to a computer software company
- write to Nintendo, Sega, or Genesis with ideas for new nonviolent video games
- establish a youth board of directors at a local school and seek local TV station sponsorship – the board could serve as creative consultants to advise media.

Everybody acts as if God gave us children for our pleasure and amusement, gave us servants merely to put them to work like cows or asses, and gave us subjects to treat them as we please, as if it were no concern of ours what they learn or how they live. No one is willing to see that this is the command of the divine Majesty, who will solemnly call us to account and punish us for its neglect, nor is it recognized how very necessary it is to devote serious attention to the young. If we want qualified and capable men for both civil and spiritual leadership, we must spare no effort, time, and expense in teaching and educating our children to serve God and mankind. We must not think only of amassing money and property for them. God can provide for them and make them rich without our help, as indeed he does daily. But he has given and entrusted children to us with the command that we train and govern them according to his will; otherwise God would have no need of father and mother. Therefore let everybody know that it is his chief duty, on pain of losing divine grace, to bring up his children in the fear and knowledge of God, and if they are gifted to give them opportunity to learn and study so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.

Luther’s Large Catechism, Fourth Commandment.

From The Hill

- In May the House and Senate passed the HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act of 2003 (HR 1298), a bill to stop the international spread of HIV and AIDS. President Bush signed the \$15 billion, five-year bill on May 27. Provisions added include mandating that one-third of the funds be used for abstinence programs. Monogamy and condom distribution programs were also added. Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ) added a “conscience clause” that will allow faith-based groups with AIDS contracts in Africa to opt out of the condom program (and still receive federal funds for other programs). Conservative legislators added a requirement for programs teaching men and boys respect for women and girls.
- On April 30 the U.S. Agency for International Development awarded a \$10 million contract to Abt Assoc., Inc., a Massachusetts consulting firm, to help provide basic health care to Iraq’s 25 million citizens within a year. Three Representatives (Diana DeGette of Colorado, John Dingell of Michigan, and Sherrod Brown of Ohio) want the Bush administration to show the same compassion to uninsured Americans. Rep. Brown says two-thirds of the states (including Ohio) have cut essential health care services due to budget deficits.
- Attorney General John Ashcroft filed an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court asking it to overturn the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals 2002 decision banning the Pledge of Allegiance. Ashcroft is confident of the outcome because the Supreme Court has already issued two decisions that the Pledge is constitutional (Traditional Values Coalition).

Dear Readers,

Grace and peace in Jesus! I pray you are well in Christ, and that whatever trials and challenges you currently face are helping you to grow in faith, hope and love. Dolliene Raabe has put together another “smashing” issue of Mercy Notes. Our culture is extremely violent, especially our media culture. As I reviewed this issue I was taken back by the stats, and forced to begin to re-think, or simply *begin to think* about how heavy a dose of violence my own children are exposed to on a daily basis, WITH MY CONSENT. I’m no pacifist, and remain a firm believer in positive aspects of playing “army” and “cowboys and Indians”. But the huge growth in the video game industry, which sports one more graphic and violent game after another, and an entertainment industry which caters to our desire for “blood and guts,” does give one pause to consider just what is being pumped into the minds of our children. I can’t make parenting decisions for you, and I won’t do so. We offer this issue as grist for the “mill” which is your own sanctified common sense. If we’ve simply highlighted an issue and brought about some greater awareness, reflection and encouragement to act at home and in the civil realm, mission accomplished. As a parent I rejoice to know in Christ yesterday is forgiven, and I’m freed to begin the task anew tomorrow. Thanks be to God.

God bless you all,

Matt Harrison
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bi-weekly from:
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