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The Tempter in the Child's Bedroom — Television

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For good and obvious reasons, Americans have spent a great deal of energy and research in identifying and removing contaminants and dangers from the lives of children. Lead was once a common ingredient in paint for homes, but the danger lead posed to children became known and a crusade to remove lead spread across the country.

Beyond lead in paints, crusaders looked for any toxin or danger that might be found in the pajamas, furniture, and toys that might be in a child's room. But it seems that many have missed a most obvious danger — the presence of a television in a child's room.

The New York Times published a most interesting report on this issue just this week, claiming that the mere presence of a television set in a child's bedroom is a direct threat to the child's health. As the article documented:

Children with bedroom TVs score lower on school tests and are more likely to have sleep problems. Having a television in the bedroom is strongly associated with being overweight and a higher risk for smoking.

The numbers of children with a television in the bedroom are staggering. According to one study, 70% of third-graders had a television set in the room — we are talking about *eight-year-olds*.

Reporter Tara Parker-Pope also points to the obvious fact that one danger is simply that children and teens will watch more television. As she reported:

In a study of 80 children in Buffalo, ages 4 to 7, the presence of a television in the bedroom increased average viewing time by nearly nine hours a week, to 30 hours from 21. And parents of those children were more likely to underestimate their child's viewing time.

"If it's in the bedroom, the parents don't even really know what the kids are watching," said Leonard H. Epstein, professor of pediatrics and social and preventive medicine at the School of Medicine and Biomedical Science at the State University of New York at Buffalo. "Oftentimes, parents who have a TV in the kids' bedrooms have TVs in their bedrooms."

Consider that picture of family bliss — each member of the family ensconced in his or her bedroom with a private television. That's just what we need. Parents who watch too much television set bad examples for their children and teenagers. Then, adding insult to injury, some then facilitate more viewing by putting a private television set in the child's room.

More:

But in 2002, the journal "Pediatrics" reported that preschool children with bedroom TVs were more likely to be overweight. In October, the journal "Obesity" suggested that the risk might be highest for boys. In a study among French adolescents, boys with a bedroom television were more likely than their peers to have a larger waist size and higher body fat and body mass index.

The French study also showed, not surprisingly, that boys and girls with bedroom TVs spent less time reading than others.

*Other data suggest that bedroom television affects a child's schoolwork. In a 2005 study in *The Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, researchers looked at the television, computer and video game habits of almost 400 children in six Northern California schools for a year. About 70 percent of the children in the study had their own TV in the bedroom; they scored significantly and consistently lower on math, reading and language-arts tests. Students who said they had computers in their homes scored higher.*

In its concluding analysis, the paper reported that middle-school children with televisions in their bedrooms were twice as likely to start smoking — even with all other variables taken into account.

As Tara Parker-Pope concludes, “So while many parents try to limit how much television and what type of shows their children watch, that may be less than half the battle. *Where* a child watches is important too.”

Television, like all other forms of mass media, represents great potential for good and great potential for evil. Add to this the fact that a great deal of what television brings us is marked more by banality than anything else. Human eyes are attracted to those moving pictures and the noise of television, but the brain is inadequately stimulated.

For Christian parents, a proper concern must move from the more generalized effects of television as a communications medium to the content of the communication — the message and the medium. Television is a soul-contaminator, training young souls to want the wrong consumer goods, value the wrong moral goods, laugh at the wrong places, and emulate vacuous and immoral celebrities.

This point was driven home in an eloquent sermon preached by Cornelius Plantinga, President of Calvin Theological Seminary, back in 2006. Preaching from Revelation 2:17, Dr. Plantinga reminded his congregation that Christ promised the authentic believers at Pergamum a “white stone” with their new name written upon it — a symbol of their conversion and transformation in Christ.

Then he said this:

I think we've been losing ground to popular culture. Not everything in popular culture is evil. Of course not. In fact, some of it is delightful. But there is also real evil in it, and the trouble is that a lot of the evil is aimed at young people and children. The trouble is that when you're ten you can't always tell the difference between what's good and what's evil—and especially not if evil is made to look very, very attractive.

Do you know that even conservative Christian parents buy TV sets for the bedrooms of their ten-year-olds and then let them watch pretty much whatever they want? They buy a TV set for their fifth grader, hook it up to the cable system, hand their child a remote, and let their child close the door.

And now, day by day, night by night, their child's soul is in the hands of the Philistines. The Lord wants to give our children a white stone with their true name on it, but our children are finding out who they are from people to whom Lord is just another four-letter word. Every sick joke about God; every celebration of lust or revenge; every cynical assumption about the motives of good people—all this pours into the soul of a ten-year-old just as if her parents had hooked her up to an IV serviced by a profiteer. All the worse if parents buy premium channels such as HBO whose comedians pump sludge. I mean a comedian who mocks Jesus Christ because he didn't understand that compassion is for losers. He didn't understand that wimps get crucified just as they should. I mean a comedian who takes a hand-held mike and starts banging it rhythmically on the stage floor in imitation of hammer blows, and then grins at the crowd as he says, “Sound familiar Jesus? Sound familiar?”

This is a prophetic critique, and Dr. Plantinga's closing words are worthy of close attention: “I hope you and I come to understand one of these days that our battle is not with flesh and blood, but with the powers, with principalities, with the princes of this present darkness. The church at Pergamum was in danger of caving in, and so are we. It sometimes seems *that Satan lives here too.*”

Yes, and it seems that sometimes the tempter in the bedroom is the television.

We will discuss this issue on today's edition of *The Albert Mohler Program*. Listen and call with your comment. As always, tell us what you think by writing us at mail@albertmohler.com.

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