television presents an accurate portrayal of religious institutions and individuals. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents disagreed, with eight percent expressing no opinion.

Is TV 'what people want'?

Industry executives respond that even if television does not accurately portray American society, the small screen is giving people what they want.

"There is an elitist attitude out there. Even though the medium doesn't affect me, it's those other individuals that we worry about," Jankowski said. "Our basic feeling is that television communicates information, and it is up to the people either to accept it or reject it."

After all, while DALLAS has been a hit for a decade in the United States, the program was banned in Egypt because its emphasis on wealth, promiscuity and drinking was offensive to Moslem morality, sociology professor Muriel G. Cantor of the American University in Washington, D.C., noted in a recent issue of *Media & Values.*

The show—with plots centering on greed, selfishness, lies, hatred and disloyalty—was taken off the air due to low ratings in Japan, where the culture holds such values up to ridicule and shame.

Channel 4 President Leslie G. Arries, who has four sets on in his office while he talks to a visitor, said television just gives people what they want.

"Look at daytime television. That's what they want, the more promiscuous it is, the more bed jumping there is, the more popular the show," Arries said.

But Western New Yorkers disagree that the values presented on television are the ones they uphold.

> *DALLAS...was banned in Egypt because its emphasis on wealth, promiscuity and drinking was offensive to Moslem morality.*

More than two-thirds of the respondents to a *News* poll rated television either poor or fair in its communication of good ethical values. In evaluating six social institutions, television received the lowest confidence ratings, with 82 percent saying they have only some confidence or hardly any confidence in the medium.

Television critics and researchers argue viewers don't have anywhere else to turn.

A group of about 100 people in Hollywood produces more than 95 percent of the programs, according to Gerbner.

"People don't have any choice. There's no other programming," Singer said. "Television is just such a powerful instrument that people will watch what is put in front of them. With a little familiarity, they'll grow to like it."

Shaping a TV generation

Shortly after GILLIGAN'S ISLAND went on the air in 1964, the Coast Guard received nearly two dozen telegrams from concerned Americans.

The message: "For several weeks now, we have seen American citizens stranded on some Pacific Island. We spend millions on foreign aid. Why not send one U.S. destroyer to rescue those poor people before they starve to death?"

Few would argue the incident (recounted in William Fore's new book, *The Shaping of Faith, Culture and Values,*) is representative of the American viewing public, but there is a growing body of evidence suggesting the small screen exerts a powerful influence throughout society.

There is "overwhelming" evidence that violence on television leads to aggressive behavior in children and teenagers, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, after analyzing more than 2,500 studies. Television has created a "generation of victims" who out of fear are accepting of violence and are passive in the face of injustice, concluded the 1982 report.

In his years of research, Gerbner has discovered that individuals who watch a large amount of television generally are victims of a "mean-world syndrome." These individuals overestimate the actual dangers they face because of their exposure to the unreal world of television violence, he concluded.

This assessment has "highly volatile" political and social consequences, since heavy television watchers are more likely to advocate giving up civil rights in return for police protection and to favor greater spending for military and police budgets than for social service needs.

Another area of particular concern is the glorification of wealth and materialism, according to the Rev. Richard J. Neuhaus, director of the Center on Religion and Society in New York City.

"The damage has already been done for the poor in our society who were walking a tightrope between any kind of sustainable social life and the abyss," Mr. Neuhaus said. "Hundreds of thousands of them have fallen into the abyss."

Television industry officials dismiss such claims, responding that they are being used as scapegoats for society's ills.

"People create myths, then they blame institutions," Blessington said.

Industry executives offer an alternative: Turn off the tube.

"Vote with your sets as well as with your letters. The public gets what it wants and what it deserves," said Jerry Fedell, general manager of Channel 7. "Don't just sit there and sound sanctimonious about TV programming and then lap up every program that may have dubious values. You can't have it both ways."

Slavish devotion to TV

Participants in the Sunday Bible study classes held at St. George Orthodox Church were asked during Lent to give up one thing that "enslaved" them.

One woman vowed to give up television.

By Monday, she told the Rev. George Timko she felt something was missing in her life.

On Tuesday, her compulsion to turn on the set was so strong that she had to go to the mall to get out of the house.

By Wednesday, she turned the television on, Father Timko said.

"You know, it wasn't me," he recalled the woman saying. "It was like the devil in me. I didn't have any control over it."

The perceived dangers of television have sparked religious communities in the United States into unprecedented cooperative efforts.

The most widespread coalition of Christians ever mobilized, including the top officials of 70 mainline and conservative Protestant denominations and more than 100 Catholic bishops, has been working for the past two years to pressure the networks to reduce sex, violence and profanity and present a more accurate picture of religious life in the United States.

"For the networks to advance the suggestion they are advancing the Judeo-Christian principles is a little ludicrous. I would say anything but," said the Rev. Billy Melvin, the Chairman of CLeaR-TV and executive director of the National Association of Evangelicals. "The only reason we organized is we are being pushed by our constituencies to do something."

This month, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Orthodox leaders hope to start an interfaith television network that will broadcast from 18 to 20 hours a day in the fall on the nation's cable TV systems.

"Values come from the stories people hold in common," said the Rev. Daniel Paul Matthews, board chairman of Vision Interfaith Satellite Network. "What we'd like to do with our television channel is to tell the rest of the story."

Other groups, ranging from the American Academy of Pediatrics to public schools, also are coming to the forefront of the public debate.

"If a child brought home a textbook that was a simplified version of the Marquis de Sade and another a simplified version of *Fanny Hill,* parents would march down to their local school board," Singer said. "Television is presenting endless variations of the Marquis de Sade to children, and of *Fanny Hill.*"

Nor is television a healthy medium for adults, according to Dr. Thomas Radecki, chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence. His group is lobbying Congress for legislation mandating public service announcements warning of the harmful effects of violence on television.

But the outlook for change is not promising.

Burden on society to act

The uphill nature of the battle hit home for Radecki when he recently invited his neighbor, a leader in the local anti-nuclear movement, to dinner with his family.

When Radecki, a child psychiatrist in Champaign, Illinois, noticed the couple's three-year-old son playing with a "GI Joe" war doll, he started to talk to the child about the harm guns can inflict.

The peace activist's child went to his mother.

"But Mommy, I like violence," Radecki recalled the child saying.

"It's the d--nedest piece of nonsense that people can't look at television and say, 'You know, this is the mark and measure of the degeneracy of this society, and we cannot allow our children to be treated this way, to be manipulated this way, simply in order to accommodate the money-grubbing ambitions of a bunch of hucksters,'" said Boston University President John R. Silber.

Unless institutions such as the churches and schools act, television will continue to consolidate its influence on American society, blurring the difference between the real world and the one depicted on the tube, according to many observers.

"Television today, whether the viewers know it or not, and whether the television industry itself knows it or not, is competing not merely for our attention and dollars, but for our very souls," said Fore, author of *The Shaping of Faith, Culture and Values,* who is also assistant general secretary for communications of the National Council of Churches.

Children will mimic the things they see and hear

By Joe White
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The animals in the Hong Kong Zoo were growing noticeably fatigued, unhealthy, and more edgy and testy with each other as the zoo grew in popularity and became more heavily visited by human observers. So, according to the account in *Newsweek,* the zoo's directors decided to give the animals time off by closing the gates to the public one day a week. The animals showed some improvement, but still there was more fighting and sickness than what seemed normal. Again the directors met, and decided to do what had never been done: Close the zoo two days every week. This time, results were dramatic. Health and playfulness were restored. The animals quit fighting. The directors were amazed.

> *We would never invite a murderer, a rapist, or a sexual pervert into our homes. But it is amazing how many of just such people we let in every day through television.*

There's a lesson there for parents. If your kids aren't acting like the maturing, lovable creatures they were meant to be...try closing the zoo.

If a crowd throwing peanuts can destabilize wild and noble beasts, think what's happening to the young people targeted by the arrows of pornography, violence, degradation and other dangers launched continuously from today's music and media.

I have to say I'm the lucky one. Besides getting to be around my best teachers—the four kids who are spending their growing up years calling me Daddy—I have the privilege of raising kids for a living. Besides being around the thousands who come to our camps every summer, during the other seasons I travel frequently to youth rallies, school assemblies, and other events involving youth. Meanwhile, two blocks from where we live are twenty searching teenagers in a resident care home.

Taken together, these encounters afford me the opportunity to speak with many thousands of teenagers each year. The best moments for learning come when, from out of the crowds, the hurting few approach one by one, seeking emotional help with "Code Three" urgency.

Last weekend, for example, I spoke for ninety minutes to a group of several hundred teenagers at a leadership youth rally. It was followed by two and a half hours listening to a seventeen-year-old girl who already has had her third abortion and probably is headed for more.

This comprehensive exposure to kids has built up in me a mental computer bank with countless bits of information...problems and solutions...things that work and things that fail...knowledge of tears and laughter...of guilt and forgiveness...of frustrations and relief. It's all there. From it have come sound, deep, trustworthy patterns of counsel and teaching.

It all adds up to one overarching observation: **A child becomes what he thinks about. And he thinks about what he sees and hears.** Kids are the way they are because of what they're exposed to, what they fill their minds with.

The human brain was created to be programmed through the senses. The human body was developed to respond to the information stored in the mind. If a child sees and hears often enough about the pleasure of sexual sin, then that is exactly what you can expect that child to do as soon as he or she is able. One plus one **always** equals two.

The family's social and economic background doesn't matter. Our family has enjoyed friendships with families in poor, inner-city situations as well as those who are among the nation's most financially secure people—plus every range between. The background doesn't make a difference. What does make a difference is the number of hours the zoo is left open.

The screen scene

Browsing through the weekly *TV Guide* tonight exposed quickly the underlying script that permeates the networks:

"When it comes to love, everything is relative: (*the sales line below a photo of a thirteen-year-old boy and girl embracing).*

"Her life belonged to one man until he was gone; now she must reclaim it for herself. MISTRESS, a secret life revealed" (*with an inset photo of a foreboding beauty in black negligee, lying across silk sheets).*

"Smart, sexy, fearless—200 years ago in this room a beauty was driven to a crime of passion. Tonight it's about to happen again."

"Prom queen. *Playboy* centerfold. Movie star. Murder victim."

Sex. Passion. Seduction. Violence. Murder. This year, the average