

# Salt & Light

Winter 2004

The Newsletter of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

*Educating and informing the church body in light of biblical principles*

You are the salt of the earth...  
You are the light of the world...

*Mt. 5:13-14*

## Editorial Note:

This issue of *Salt & Light* is devoted to the visual media and the profound influence they have on us and our families. The issue opens with a look at the way that television in particular shapes our values, often in unsettling ways. In the following article, video games are on display. Do they simply provide innocent fun for a limited number of kids, who don't take them seriously? Look again. The third article focuses on the challenge for us to be discerning in selecting the movies we watch. If the task of managing the influence of visual media in our lives seems daunting to us, there is plenty of help available. The final article points us to the resources we need. The ultimate resource, of course, is already and always close at hand: "The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1John 4:4b).

## The Media and the Mind

**From: Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor***

Next to sleeping and working, Americans devote more time to the media than to any other daily activity. In a typical day the average American spends eight hours on the job, seven hours sleeping, and nearly five hours absorbing media messages. Television has become a staple in the American diet, and Americans have a firm commitment to the media. Social analysts widely agree that media have a tremendous impact on our values, attitudes, behavior, and perceptions of the world.

If I were the enemy, I would challenge God's standards. I would use the most powerful forms of communication at my disposal: movies and television. I would want to impact you intellectually through your emotions. I would dramatize life, open you up emotionally, then drive my point home. I would use the thousands of murders, rapes, and bedroom scenes to keep pounding away at you until you were desensitized to certain forms of evil. If I were the enemy, I would want you to echo my words to Eve in the Garden of Eden, "Hath God said?" I want to confuse you; I want to fuzz the line between fantasy and reality.

Television is discipling America. "When a disciple is fully taught, he will be like his teacher" (see Luke

6:40). The media erode the moral base of our land, desensitizing you and me to evil and blurring the line between right and wrong.

The people sitting in the pew are products of television more than the Word of God. Their world views are not scripturally based; rather they are disciples of their culture. When the media mention responsibility, they are not talking about moral responsibility, but about using contraceptives. Termination of pregnancy (murder) is the woman's right; being sexually active (fornication) is all right as long as you practice safe sex; having an affair (adultery) is expected sooner or later in normal, uninhibited people; narrow-minded extremists (Christians) are dangerous to have around schools and public buildings—and you wouldn't want one for a neighbor.

The people in the pew do not believe everything they hear, but the Christian community is slipping away from moral absolutes. What the pastor declares rubs against the cultural grain. The Word of God is abrasive when clearly presented in the present atmosphere. The American mind has become soft; it does not think critically, therefore, many parishioners have self-contradictory belief systems. †

# Video Games: Just for Fun?

**From: Eric Tiansay's article in *Charisma*, November 2003**

The video-game industry has exploded in recent years to become the most popular form of entertainment in the country. Video-game sales grossed nearly \$12 billion last year. In comparison, \$9 billion in movie tickets were sold in 2002.

"Once seen as a boy's hobby, electronic games have grown into a \$25 billion global business that many see as a cultural force on a par with movies and books," *The Los Angeles Times* observed this summer.

According to the Lion and the Lamb Project, a nonprofit, independent organization based in Bethesda, Maryland, more than 145 million Americans—or 50 percent of the population—play video games, including 65 million gamers under 17 and 20 million who are 12 years old or younger.

Video games have evolved from the rudimentary game *Pong* in the '70s to the cartoonish *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong* in the '80s to the current *Enter the Matrix*, the spin-off of the hit movie, and the combat realism of *Battlefield 1942*.

No longer relegated to arcades, electronic games are now played on fancy hand-held units, cellular phones, the Internet and game consoles such as PlayStation 2, GameCube and Xbox, which have become standard entertainment toys for young people as well as adults.

Despite being wildly popular in today's culture, video games have a checkered reputation.

For example, Acclaim Entertainment Inc. sparked debate last year with a game called *BMX XXX*, which contained a video showing five seconds of frontal

nudity. Major U.S. retailers, including Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Target Corp., refused to carry the title.

The teen shooters of deadly school rampages in Littleton, Colorado; Paducah, Kentucky; and Pearl, Mississippi were all avid players of violent video games, including *Quake* and *Doom*. The families of the slain victims sued the game companies, but their cases were either dropped or dismissed.

Pro-family groups say sex and violence in video games are at all-time highs, with Congress and critics urging legislation to protect children from the largely unregulated industry.

Additionally, video games have been criticized for their addictive pull, even among believers. Ministries, Christian video-games producers and Christian parents are also troubled by the apparent

proliferation of occult themes in games, which feature satanic imagery and symbols.

Christian electronic-game company owner Ralph Bagley says at least 30 percent to 40 percent of the new games previewed in Los Angeles last May during the Electronic Entertainment Expo—the world's largest video-game trade show—were occult-based.

Bagley supports legislation on policing video games, but he believes the responsibility is ultimately up to parents.

"I know many parents who may not let their children go to R-rated

movies, but they'll get them an M-rated video game, which contains mature content," says Menconi, 57, an ordained minister with the Evangelical Free Church.

"Parents are abdicating their responsibilities to the enemy," adds Menconi, whose ministry Web site features video-game reviews from a Christian perspective. "It's not the responsibility of the government to raise our children. It's up to parents to set up guidelines. Children must prove their entertainment is worthwhile."

Menconi adds that Christians are "in a spiritual war and the entertainment industry is supplying the majority of ammunition aimed at their families in

this war."

"We must teach our children how to think in this spiritual war," says Menconi, whose ministry is based in

***"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."***

**Philippians 4:8**

Carlsbad, California, near San Diego. "They're just sitting targets." Sadly the battle language is far from merely symbolic.

A former West Point psychology professor and author of *On Killing*, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, retired Army Lt. Col. David Grossman says that violent games desensitize young people toward violence in real life.

"Violent video games are not games of fun," Grossman, 47, who educates police, the military and educators nationwide on the impact of media violence, told *Charisma*. "These are

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## Watch What You Watch

From: Bethany Torode's article in *Citizen*, November 2002

The most popular defense I've heard Christians give for movie consumption is that, like the Apostle Paul preaching on Mars Hill, it will enable us to better "speak the language" of our culture when evangelizing. (To give just one example: A couple years ago, my husband heard an Easter sermon on how the longing in Madonna's sexually explicit lyrics is fulfilled in the love of God.) Paul did speak using examples that his culture could understand, but he quoted the great Greek philosophers, not sordid entertainers. In his letters, Paul does not allude to the saga of the Emperor's latest female conquest to illustrate Caesar's "search for Everlasting Love," nor does he speak of the temple prostitute's "hunger for the Lord," revealed by fornicating with Artemis' pilgrims. Instead, Paul writes in Ephesians that "it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret."

Certain things are so corrupt we

should stay as far away from them as possible, and a vast amount of our culture's entertainment has probably reached that level. The less we watch, the better equipped we are to actually see those around us (including singers and movie stars) as images of God. Our patience, kindness and compassion toward all human beings will grow as we distance ourselves from how they are portrayed on screen.

The further away I've gotten from television and movies, the more remorse I've felt over the trash I've put into my head, and the more I see how much of a hold it still has on my attitudes and outlook.

"I will set before my eyes no evil thing," writes David in the Psalms. "Religion that God our Father considers pure and faultless is this:...to keep oneself from being

polluted by the world," says the book of James. "Purify your hearts," Jesus instructs us. How? By purifying our eyes—the two are inextricably connected.

Christianity is not a pair of glasses you put on to filter the world through. It is a complete change of your life itself, a rebirth of your very body. *Christ in you*—and when He's competing with a constant influx of Hollywood, He will be limited in how much He can change you. That is the result of free will, and that is why He instructs us to repent and draw near to Him.

Carefully monitoring what we watch is one way of doing so. "The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness (Matthew 6:22, 23a)." †

***"[You are] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."***

**Ephesians 4:23-24**

## Video Games: Just for Fun?

(Continued from page 2)

mass-murder simulators. Nine-year-olds are practicing killing people in their homes for hours every day.

"Everyone knows computer flight simulators can teach you how to fly," adds Grossman, a Southern Baptist and author of the best-selling book *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*. "These mass-murder simulators teach you how to kill. So when a few kids go out and execute what they've been practicing, we

should not be surprised."

David Walsh, Ph.D, a child psychologist and president of the National Institute on Media and the Family, believes video games have a greater impact than other forms of entertainment because "a player is not a passive observer."

"[The player is] an active participant directing the action of the game," Walsh, 57, a Catholic, told *Charisma*.

Noting that the military has created *America's Army*, a shooter video game designed to train U.S. troops, Christian gaming entrepreneur Ralph Bagley adds: "Games are totally interactive. You participate in the violence and sexual and occult activity. You're not a passive third party to it. Your level of immersion is so much deeper than watching a movie or listening to music." †

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## Time to Act

**Adapted From: The Childcare Action Project (CAP) website ([www.capalert.com](http://www.capalert.com))**

If visual images don't affect our behavior, then why do companies spend billions of dollars every year for 30- and 60-second ads? Apparently, successful businesses believe visual images influence behavior.

What will it take to wake up America? How many innocent children need to suffer before we face the ugly truth about a subject most of us would prefer to ignore? How much longer will we tolerate sex and violence on TV and in the movies? The ultimate solution rests with us. We can no longer wait for someone else to stand up for our children. That someone else is us and the time is now. Only we can effect change in our communities, schools and homes. When will we say, "Enough is enough"?

For specific steps you can take, see CAP's web site (noted above) and Morality in Media ([www.moralityinmedia.org](http://www.moralityinmedia.org) or 212-870-3222). To control Internet visuals and content, see the National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families ([www.nationalcoalition.org](http://www.nationalcoalition.org) or 513-521-6227) and especially their site [www.filterreview.com](http://www.filterreview.com). For a ministry that prays for and reaches out to

***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."***

**Romans 12:2a**

media celebrities and leaders, see Master Media ([www.mastermediintl.org](http://www.mastermediintl.org) or 909-335-7353).✝

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