

THE CHRISTIAN AND TELEVISION

By Rev. Alexander Macpherson, Dornoch

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Although television was operated on a small scale in the London area prior to the last war, only after the war was ended did it develop. Into the mass-entertainment media that it is today. Only a few areas in Britain now lie out with its coverage. We refer to it as an entertainment medium because that is its primary function, and so successful has it been that some of its older competitors have been badly hit. All over the country, cinemas and theatres have had to close down. Unhappily these closures do not afford God-fearing people as much satisfaction as they might, for we know that their clientele has not diminished but only retired to the privacy of their homes, where with less cost and effort they can see and hear the same entertainments on the television.

It is true that television does more than provide light entertainment. It gives the news, weather reports, political talks and discussions, popular science and informative programmes dealing with a great variety of subjects. It covers the same ground as sound radio but in a manner which the average person would admit to be more exiting and more easily digested than by the older form of broadcasting. Dramatic effect is aimed at everywhere and is usually achieved because the visual element greatly increases the range of techniques available to the producers.

Programmes commence daily around 10 a.m. and, with intervals, run on to 11:10 p.m. or later. Examination of B.B.C. programmes for five consecutive days revealed a daily average of ten hours' televising. Of this amount we thought that serious programmes which a Christian might view varied from two hours on certain days to five hours on others. During the evenings when most people are freest to view television, serious programmes occupied from one and a half to two and a half hours. It will be seen from these figures that the greater part of the material provided for viewers is pure entertainment, but it must be said that the remaining factual, informative and educative matter is presented in such a dramatic manner as also to be classified as entertainment. So much so, that no Christian with a tender conscience could watch all the serious programmes presented most evenings without feeling

that the little knowledge gained was more than offset by the dulling effect on the spirit of so much that smacked of worldliness.

Television sets are expensive articles but the hire purchase method and the rental system have brought them within the reach of most people. Even poor homes where food and clothing are in short supply, often contain a TV set and the viewing habit has spread like a forest fire. Until a few years ago the people of our church kept aloof from the trend, realising that television was predominantly a form of entertainment whose appeal was so great that few of its users could escape its enticements to enter fields detrimental to the souls of men.

Today there are among us those who possess television sets, and others, encouraged by their example, are acquiring them also. Most of those who initiated the movement give as their reason for buying a television set the view that there is no difference in principle between owning a TV set and owning a radio set. It is easy to switch off when offensive matter appears. That is the argument. Is it sound?

I am now sure that it is not. I have had opportunity to think the matter over and to observe the effects where television was used by several kind of viewers. It is now my opinion that no true believer in Christ can make regular use of television without harming his own soul and encouraging others to take up with the same harmful influence. I would now like to put forward some thoughts on this subject for the consideration of and Christian who uses a television set, and, in addition, I address the unsaved person who possesses a TV set or contemplates doing so.

Firstly, the cases of television and wireless are not identical. The latter reaches the mind through the ear only and demands much more effort and concentration than television, which uses the eye also in conveying its message. The sight affects the mind much more powerfully than the hearing. We read of the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Therefore that which makes so much stronger appeal to the corrupt propensities of the mind by its additional use of the visual faculty, is more difficult to abstain from than that which appeals through the hearing only. It does not follow that because a person can easily restrict his listening in, that he can as easily restrict his viewing. In practice it is found to be quite different, and those who with good intentions begin to use a TV set often find that eventually they are looking at programmes which originally they would not

have considered suitable. I mentioned the television producers' habit of dramatising factual material. Applied to serious subjects this dramatising process is designed to make the bare facts more attractive and digestible, but it also has the effect of preparing the mind to accept dramatised fictional material too. It is an easy step from the dramatised surgical operation to the criminal law case and thence to the half-true detective story and further still by a steady slide into pure fiction containing violence, bad language, drinking and lewdness. These dramatisations of a fictional sort are identical with the plays and films shown in places of public entertainment. As the viewing habit grows it extends to competitions, quizzes and parlour games, all conducted in a vain worldly fashion to the accompaniment of music special effects including jazz. The little curious information gained is paid for at too high a price.

Secondly, there are sometimes younger members of the family to be considered. If they are still Christless, their tastes are not likely to be as limited as your own. If they view in your absence are you certain they are wise in their choice of programmes? Or is it the case that the children you have trained to avoid places of worldly amusement are using the television to look in upon the football match, the screen play, the dance band, ceilidh, boxing match, etc., the sound volume turned down perhaps but the screen picture bright and clear? Where there are children or young people, a television set constitutes a terrible moral and spiritual danger.

Thirdly, you have also to consider that your ownership of a television set has probably influenced others to follow your example. If these are natural, unsaved men and women, they will not have as much will or ability to discriminate programmes as you yourself possess. If you have gone further with your viewing than you thought you would, how far will they go? In their case the television screen is a door into many new forms of frivolity, worldliness and sin, and as their appetite for these things grow, so will distaste of the Gospel. Their use of television entails a further departure from Christ. And as viewing is not actually cheap, so they will tend to seek their money's worth outside of the range of more serious programmes.

Fourthly, consider what effect television is having upon your spiritual life. As the Lord's people grow in grace and in their knowledge of their Lord and Saviour, time becomes more precious. It seems to pass more quickly and has therefore to be laid out more carefully. When all proper duties of a secular sort been given their allocation, how little time remains for the great task of

furthering the life and sanctification of the soul. As Paul said: “and knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” It is often found desirable to curtail reading which has no practical bearing on the soul’s interests. Newspapers are scanned when once they were fully read. The choice of good books is limited to the best only, and the best Book of all, the Bible, is read and studied more than ever before. Time must be found for prayer and meditation. Where now in all this effort to redeem the time does television viewing come in? Have you not found that at the least it is time wasting, and almost certainly it is spirit-deadening? It conduces neither to a good conscience nor to a spiritual frame of mind. It is dangerous to indiscriminating users in your own home perhaps, and it can also endanger the souls of those who are led to follow your example. There appears to us a clear case for applying to the use of television, the principle stated by Paul in I Cor. Ch. 6 v. 12 and Ch. 10 v. 23, ‘All things are lawful unto me but all things are not expedient.’ It may fall upon some as a duty to observe for themselves certain matters shown on television, but as far as the believer with no such obligation is concerned, I feel strongly that it would be in his own and other’s interests to abstain from television viewing.

Lastly, addressing now those who are still Christless, yet have or aspire to have a television set. If it is the example of a professing Christian that you are following, ponder what we have said about the power to resist the attractions of unsuitable programmes. An unconverted person lacks the guidance and power of God’s Spirit. All he has is the light of his own carnal reason and the power of his own depraved will, and those will be cast on the side of the world, the flesh and the devil. If restraining grace be withdrawn you will be left to follow the lusts of your own heart in an increasing enjoyment and using of TV entertainment. Christ will be receded from more and more and your eternal ruin will be imminent. It is not television you have need of to pass the time, but the Word and Spirit of God to save your soul and to set you upon the God glorifying task of redeeming the time. The days are indeed evil.