

## CURRENT ISSUES

# Television and Reading

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Articles dealing with the effects of television upon education usually do not cast an approving vote for television. Dominic Martia, an English teacher and vice president for student services at Roosevelt University in Chicago, expressed his concern in an article which appeared in the February 9, 1987 issue of *U.S. News & World Report*. Martia is alarmed by the growing dependence of Americans on television for ideas and information. As this dependence grows, Martia claims, reading skills decline.

Martia says that television is appealing because critical thinking is being done for the viewer. He writes:

The point is that television's seductive and misleading immediacy lulls our critical judgment. Watching TV requires much less effort than reading does. Our preference for TV as a source of information and ideas is a measure of intellectual laziness.

Reading more is only half of

the solution to the problem. Martia continues:

If overreliance on TV has atrophied our reading skill, then reading more should help restore it. But besides reading more, we need to become more-selective and more-critical readers. Much of what we might read isn't worth reading. It panders to the same laziness that induces us to turn on the TV rather than open a book.

That reading is essential to education and to effective citizenship is also asserted by Martia.

Dr. Quentin Schultze, professor of communication arts and sciences at Calvin College, agrees with Martia about the appeal of television. In the *Christian Educators Journal*, February-March, 1987 issue, Schultze claims that a major goal of primary education "is to orient students to the world of books and instill in them a love for reading and writing." About the relationship between reading and television Schultze says:

What can television contribute to this goal? Very little, I believe. Television and the print media are processed differently in the mind and exercise different parts of the brain. In fact, by the time the typical student enters first grade she has already been introduced to the world of the tube, with its visual, sensual appeal. She has learned that watching television is effortless and visually stimulating, that it is fun, and that it is socially expected.

Schulze appears to have chosen the last word in the above quotation carefully. Television viewing is not just socially "acceptable," it has become "expected" of every normal American. Not knowing much or anything about the popular television shows, and certainly not even having a television, is to become something of a social dinosaur. These types simply do not exist anymore.

This is pointed out in an article which appeared in the March 3, 1987 edition of the *Grand Rapids Press*. An 11-year-old boy in

Millburn, New Jersey, collected \$500 from his mother for not watching television for a year. This boy had "watched six to seven hours of TV daily and routinely taped his favorite shows while watching others." It was no small task for this boy not to watch television for a year, especially "because his friends teased him mercilessly."

It is interesting to note that this boy spent more time reading and that "his grades have improved from 'satisfactory' to 'very good.'" The boy doubts that he will watch television as much as before "because by now I've gotten bored with it and I want to read more."

How much television do our children watch? Is the time spent before the television really worth it? Is there something better to do? If we decide to read more, is what we read challenging or is it just more prattle which enters our minds by an alternate route? Should we run the risk of becoming social dinosaurs before our critical reading and thinking skills become extinct?

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It is not the work of the Spirit to tell you the meaning of Scripture, and give you the knowledge of divinity, without your own study and labour, but to bless that study, and give you knowledge thereby. . . . To reject study on pretence of the sufficiency of the Spirit, is to reject the Scripture itself.

Richard Baxter