

THE THIRD ORDER

2 February 2007

Of the Society of St. Pius X

acranshaw@spx.com

88 Alma Rd,
Wanganui, New Zealand

Phone: [64] 6/ 344 7634

Fax: [64] 6/ 344 2087

Not Television Again?!

Dear postulants and professed members,

The school year has begun yet again, and those of you who are teachers, school administrators or parents of school children, will be well aware of just how busy at time of the year this is. Because of my involvement in the school here in Wanganui, I have little time this month to write to you at length. In fact a wonderful article written by Fr Peter Scott in the Angelus several years ago has been sitting in my third Order filing cabinet waiting for the right moment to rear it's head. Now seems to be an opportune time, so without further ado I present to you the wise words of Father Scott:

"Is it a sin for a traditional Catholic family to have a television in the home?"

I do not believe that the question is asked in the correct way, which would be: Is it the will of God for a traditional Catholic family to have a television in the home? I think that simply by rephrasing the question, the answer becomes much more obvious. Nevertheless, let us answer the question as posed. It is manifestly obvious that in itself the television is but an electronic gadget, and the fact of owning such a gadget is neither morally good nor morally evil. It is indifferent. The morality comes from the end for which the television exists in the home, and from the associated circumstances that inseparably accompany the existence of such a gadget in the home.

It is equally obvious, and every traditional Catholic will admit it, that the regular watching of television for children is an occasion of sin, and this not just because of the obvious sins of impurity, but especially of materialism, concupiscence of the eyes, the loss of the Faith and the perversion of the mind by the parading of the false ideals of subjectivism and liberalism continually before the eyes of the young. He who exposes himself deliberately to a proximate occasion of sin commits a sin, and it will be a mortal sin if the proximate occasion to which he exposes himself is of a mortal sin. How much more serious is the culpability of those parents who expose their defenseless children to the perversions presented as ideals by the world of television!

However, there are many traditional Catholics who admit the above principles, but who still feel that they can keep a television in their home. After all, they are intelligent people, and they are perfectly capable of controlling the use of television to only good, approved shows, and it enables them to watch videos which are entirely within their control. Why would this not be licit, they maintain.

Such an abstract consideration of the use of television fails to consider an essential circumstance that substantially modifies the morality of the use of television. It is profoundly addictive, for it panders to our desire for visual self-satisfaction and to our inborn laziness. Any person who claims that he can control its inroads into his own life, let alone his family's life, is sadly deceiving himself. He denies the ugly reality of the wounds of original sin, that we all have to live with. Furthermore, television, in the practical use to which man puts it, necessarily provokes the capital vice of sloth. For it preoccupies man with transitory, visual, material things, paralyzes his ability to think and to elevate his soul to spiritual things, and prevents him from rejoicing in the things of God, in divine truth, and in heavenly aspirations. This is precisely how Saint Thomas Aquinas defines the capital sin of sloth. By promoting sloth, television destroys recollection, the interior life of prayer, and union with God. How rare indeed is that situation in which, in practice, it is not at least an imperfection or venial sin for a traditional Catholic man to allow a television to remain in his home!

Some folks object to this radical conclusion by stating that they only use their television for watching videos, and especially religious videos, and that there is no sin at all in watching such videos. This is all perfectly true, and there may indeed be some families in which there is such strict discipline that there is no temptation to use this means other than for such edifying videos, and in which such audiovisual means are kept so carefully under control that there is no danger of provoking sloth. In such circumstances there is manifestly no sin at all, but we all know how infrequent and fragile such a situation is.

Furthermore, a family that is truly God-centered, a family that strives to maintain an interior life, a family that desires to distance itself from the world, is going to have a horror for this terribly effective instrument for the perversion of modern society. It will realize that the television is a destroyer of all family life, of shared activities of all kinds, as well as of the supernatural life. It will see that the little benefit to be gained by an occasional video is far outweighed by the grave danger of placing such an occasion of worldliness in their midst, and will reject it outright.

It is precisely for this reason that the television is forbidden in religious communities, which furthermore have the discipline that could potentially prevent its abuse. Archbishop Lefebvre was a great example in this regard. After he fought against the introduction of the television into the Holy Ghost Fathers during the 1960's, he had the wisdom to include this very categorical prescription in the Statutes of the Society of Saint Pius X:

'They shall take care to break with the habits of the world, which has become a slave to radio, television, vacations and costly leisure. Hence, there shall be no television set in our communities.... Our true television is the Tabernacle, where dwells He Who puts us in communication with all spiritual and temporal realities.'" (VI, 7)

Note that the Archbishop does not just forbid television in our houses, but also gives the reason why. If such a rule is good enough for the spiritual family of the Society, why would it not be good enough for traditional Catholic families, in which there is much greater danger of abuse?

Our holy founder had likewise the same wisdom when it came to writing the rule of the Third Order of obligations of Third Order members. Not only did he list "*to abstain from television*" amongst the personal obligations of the Third Order members, he also listed it again under the obligations of the married, when he described how their home should be, and when he lists television as one of two examples of things that can harm the souls of children. Here is the full obligation: "*To make of the family home a sanctuary consecrated to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary where evening prayers are recited in the family and, if possible, the Rosary. Liturgical life should be paramount on Sundays and feast days. Avoid everything that could harm the souls of children; television, unclean magazines.*"

Surely this means that televisions should not even be present in the home, in the same way that a Catholic man would detest the thought of having unclean magazines somewhere hidden in his home. It is this aspect of the rule of the Society's Third Order that has most discouraged the faithful from joining. They consider that it is too difficult, too radical, too different from the ways of the world. They consider that it would be much easier to join one of the other older Third Orders, which do not have this in their rule, such as the Carmelite, Franciscan or Dominican.

[Ed's note in the October 2003 issue of *The Angelus*: It has been brought to our attention that, contrary to a July 2003 answer in this column, it is not only the Third Order of the SSPX which has in its statutes a requirement that its members abstain from television. The Dominican Tertiaries attached to the Convent of la Haye-aux-Bonshommes in Avrillé, France, also have the same rule in their statutes:

"*Insofar as they are in authority, they will not have television in their homes*" (Ch. IX, no. 43 under "The Obligation to Avoid Worldly Outings and Amusements"). It should be further noted that the other traditional Third Orders are currently under the direction of Society priests, and not priests of their respective Orders (*i.e.*, Carmelites, Franciscans). As these Orders similarly forbid "*worldly outings and amusements*" in their Third Order constitutions, certainly if their Rules had been updated for modern problems (which the traditional Dominican Fathers of Avrillé did), they too would have forbidden television in the homes of their Tertiaries].

They seriously deceive themselves, for if the exclusion of television is not a part of these Third Order rules, it is not that it is any less important for these Third Orders than it is for the Third Order of the Society of Saint Pius X, but simply that the television did not exist when the rules were written. Any person who is serious about his own and his family's spiritual life, and who desires to join a Third Order, will have a great desire to rid himself of the television, and will

consider that the little gain of being able to watch videos is nothing compared to the grave danger of having such an instrument of perversion in the midst of his family.

This elimination of the television from the homes of Third Order members is in fact an illustration of the great value of the Society's Third Order. Not only is it adapted to the real times in which we are presently living, but in addition it unites the laity to the priests in their daily Masses, spiritual life, and sacrifices, so that they can share in the special grace of the Society to fight for the Social Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and contribute their own merits to this combat. May there be many generous families willing to rid their homes of the television, grave impediment to their spiritual life as it is, in order to live the supernatural life of grace more profoundly."

Some words of encouragement

To those of you who complain that overwork interferes too much with your spiritual life, I reply to you the following words of Edel Quinn, a young lady sent by the Legion of Mary to extend its forces of Catholic Action throughout Africa; a feat which she achieved in a mere 8 years, with extraordinary success, but at the cost of her life. In this passage she's writing to a friend who suffered for a heavy work load but was like herself captivated with the desire for sanctity. ***"Do all you can when things are easier, but do not feel tied down when work presses or when you do not feel well. From what one reads, it would seem that meditation is the important thing. So meditate if possible, even if you cannot manage anything else. Do it even for a quarter of an hour. Do not think I always practise what I preach; there are days when I leave everything go by the board. I am not what you think, you know! One must only start again. I think the great thing is not to get discouraged, no matter how much we fail, but always to be ready to begin again. In that way only, will we be sure to persevere. Sometimes it really seems hard to struggle on; everything seems against us. Even if we have the time for it, meditation is very difficult. Therefore, we must only pray for the grace to persevere in spite of ourselves."***

Edel wrote this letter in 1942 at the age of 36. The words could have be those of a lay person or priest written in 2007. Nothing changes, so don't feel that you've got it hard. Finally several people have approached priests of the Society to obtain their reaction to the movie named "The Nativity Story" which screened last December in the Cinemas. Enclosed you will find an interesting movie review written by Marian T. Horvat, of *Tradition in Action*. It was sent to me by a member of the Third Order, you may find it useful. <http://www.traditioninaction.org/movies/009mrNativity.htm>

In Christ through Mary,



Fr Andrew Cranshaw,
Spiritual Director of the Third Order of FSSPX
for Australia and New Zealand

2007 Retreats for Australia and New Zealand

Brisbane. Contact Fr Lafitte on 0403 083 328

Men's retreats: 10-14 September 2007	Women's retreats: 20-24 August 2007
22-26 October 2007	24-28 September 2007
10-14 December 2007	19-23 November 2007

Goulburn. Contact Fr Scott on 02 4829 5177

Men's retreats: 18-23 June 2007	5-10 Feb 2007
	17-22 Sept 2007
	24-29 Sept 2007

Wanganui, New Zealand. Contact Fr Laisney on 64-6-344 7634

Men's retreats: 30 April-4 May 2007	Women's retreats: 10-15 Sept 2007
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