



NOW PLAYING:

WIOLENCE AND DEPRAVITY

BY KIRK NOONAN

Sam and Gwen went on a date a few months ago. They got a babysitter, made reservations at a restaurant then ventured into the local cineplex to see a movie, which they mistakenly thought was a suspense thriller. For the first 45 minutes the movie was living up to their expectations.

"But suddenly the movie took a sharp turn and we saw several minutes of graphic, mindless torturing of people," says Sam of the film that is part of a Hollywood trend where graphic gore and violence have supplanted cogent plots, storylines and characters. "I should have read Internet critiques and reviews before we bought our tickets because there was nothing redeeming about the plot. The movie was dark and offensive. We walked out."

Walking away from extreme gore and violence, which have crept into almost every medium imaginable, is not as easy as leaving a movie early. Even more disturbing, experts say, is the negative impact exposure to such fare can have on an individual and his or her view of life and God.

VIOLENCE AND DEPRAVITY

APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

Last year's *Hostel*, which has been described as an exploitation film, raked in nearly \$50 million at the box office. David Edelstein, a film critic for *New York Magazine*, wrote of the movie: "Seen any good surgery on unanesthetized people lately? Millions have, in *Hostel*, which spent a week as America's top moneymaker. It's actually not a bad little thriller, if you can live with the odd protracted sequence of torture and dismemberment."

Videogame makers have also found megamillions creating and marketing gory and violent games. In one popular PC game a reviewer reveled in the fact players could "slice off portions of enemies' faces, or peer into their gaping

abdominal cavities." Other games allow players to murder police officers, sucker-punch elderly people and even watch videos of real women stripping.

Prime time television offers similar fare on programs such as *CSI*. The Parent's Television Council, a media watchdog group, says of the popular program: "A series about crime scene investigators is bound to deal with some distasteful subjects, but *CSI* takes it a step further by providing graphic depictions of decaying bodies, grisly crime scenes, dissections, flashbacks of brutal rapes and murders, and kinky and bizarre sexual fetishes."

Similar — and even worse — content can be found while surfing the Internet, as it is relatively easy to find photos and vid-

eos of real murders and mayhem. Not surprisingly, lyrics in much mainstream and fringe music also glorify murder, depravity, racism, sexism, hate and violence.

"Consumers have become inured to certain levels of graphic and explicit gore and violence in their entertainment," says Melissa Caldwell, senior director of programs for the PTC. "Hollywood feels the need to constantly push the envelope to make things more graphic in order to elicit the same reaction from viewers."

AN ADDICTIVE NATURE

Research indicates viewing graphic violence affects a person like a drug.

"Once a person gets started in any cycle of addiction it re-

quires even more of a stimulant to produce the desired result," says Richard Dobbins, who has worked as a psychologist for more than 40 years and is founder of Emerge Ministries in Akron, Ohio.

According to Dobbins, when children and teens watch visual images of violence they get sadistic satisfaction that provides an adrenaline rush that gives them a highly addictive emotional fix.

"This [viewing gore and violence] creates and intensifies an appetite not only for more of the same," says Dobbins, "but also for graduated forms of it."

David Grossman, author of *Stop Teaching Our Children to Kill* and founder of the Killology Research Group, agrees visual violent imagery has a similar impact

as that of a drug.

Grossman says studies have shown when violent imagery is viewed there is a chemical change in the brain, a tolerance to such material is built, physical withdrawals occur when an addict is cut off from the imagery, and some people crave the imagery long after it has been taken from them.

Just as disturbing, Grossman says, "It's proven that violent visual images cause violence in society."

Caldwell concurs.

"The consensus of the medical/health community is that media violence can lead to aggressive behavior in children," she says. "The consequences are very real."

Dobbins and other leaders say besides becoming addicted to

such material a viewer can also become desensitized to the pain and suffering of others, and his or her view of the importance of life and even of a relationship with Christ can be diminished. Children, Caldwell says, may also strike out at others inappropriately and fear the world more than they should.

Christian leaders believe the spiritual toll is exacting.

"Abortion, graphic bloodletting on TV and in the movies, and yes, the showing of videos of the beheading of Americans in Iraq is an evil strategy right out of hell in an attempt to take away the enormous sacrifice the Lord made for us [dying for the sins of all humanity]," contends Larry Hazelbaker, a professor at Southeastern University in

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VIOLENCE AND DEPRAVITY

Lakeland, Fla. "Jesus came, lived, died, and was resurrected so we might have life and have it more abundantly."

Dennis Bounds, chair of the master of fine arts program in script and screenwriting at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Va., says the new breed of hyper gory and violent media of late has gone too far and is used like comedians use profanity — the only goal being to shock people.

When Bounds' students speak of interest in seeing the latest horror film, he asks them a practical question: Do they think they can handle seeing such material?

"It [gore and violence] becomes part of their visual memory," he says. "You can't erase some of those images because they are going to be stuck there."

With all the drawbacks of viewing violent visual images, why do people put themselves through it?

A BLIND EYE

Stephen King, a prolific and successful novelist, wrote that good horror stories fulfill the pri-

mary duty of literature, which in his view is "to tell us truths about ourselves by telling us lies about other people who never existed."

Whether that is true is debatable. Regardless, television, music, video game and movie producers are relentlessly heaping gore and violence into their products.

"With few exceptions the gore makers have run out of ideas," says Bounds. "They don't respect the audience enough to be sophisticated in the way they do their films."

Mel Gibson is one of the exceptions. Gibson purposely used extreme gore and violence in *The Passion of the Christ* to drive home the point that Jesus did in fact die a sickening and excruciating death, as recorded in the Gospels, so all of humanity would have an opportunity to spend eternity in heaven.

Which brings up another point. If the consumption of extreme gore and violence is so bad, what are Christians supposed to do with the Bible? After all, it

has many graphic stories people might find scary and offensive.

Grossman says there is much difference between reading about a rape, murder and dismemberment of a concubine as recorded in Judges 19 and seeing the event played out on screen.

"There's all the difference in the world between reading it and seeing it," says Grossman. "The Bible has not been identified as a causal factor in half the murders in the United States."

As an example he draws a scenario where a child's dog is run over and killed. If the parent tells or writes a letter to the child informing him of the death of his dog, it will be far easier for the child to process the death and deal with it than if the parent videotaped the dog being hit and played it over and over again for him.

So why do people, including a lot of Christians, watch violent visual images?

According to Grossman part of it has to do with each person's natural instinct to learn how to protect himself. For some people

it has to do with a yearning to feel a thrill felt as a child when something was seen that scared the person.

"People [who watch violent video images] are feeding an urge that was created in them at a young age," he says. "They're seeking the rush, but they will never find it because it's elusive."

WALK AWAY?

Like all trends, many experts believe the average consumer's blood thirst will eventually be diverted. For many parents and cultural watchdogs that time can't come soon enough.

Grossman says people are beginning to realize how destructive media violence can be for children and society. Because of the newfound awareness, he says, some educators and parents are working together to limit children's exposure to media violence by introducing curriculum into public schools that implores children to turn off their televisions and do something fun and constructive instead.

Caldwell says the PTC's research indicates Hollywood is wrong when it comes to consumers' wants.

"It's not necessarily the marketplace that is demanding these kinds of products so much as it is the entertainment industry that is trying to sell it," she says. "People need more than just violence to connect with a story."

If Caldwell is right, consumers are going to have to show the producers of gore and violence that they aren't interested. Many experts believe the best way to do that is to avoid the stuff and not spend another dime on it. **tpe**

KIRK NOONAN is associate editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

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ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

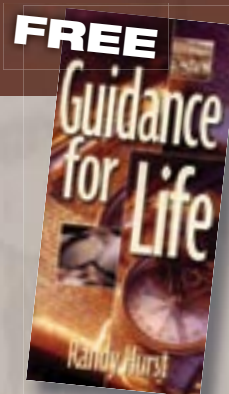
Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.



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