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When the Going Gets Tough the Government Runs to Mum

by Murray McLeod-Boyle

THE PORT ARTHUR MASSACRE has served to bring several issues to the fore within our society, one example being the long and protracted argument over gun control.

As many have already pointed out, gun control in and of itself is going to achieve very little because it does not address the real issues involved. The reason that the real issues are not addressed is because the Government has adopted the 'let's take the easy way out' approach as its official policy.

This policy was again adopted when the delicate issue of censorship was raised.

After Port Arthur, Mr. Howard launched an inquiry into the link between 'television violence' and 'violence in society'. On one program he expressed his view cautiously, but nonetheless concluded that as a "layman" he suspected there was a link.

Consequently, in the last months the government announced its remedy to violence on television and in society. Is it to be a restructuring of the censorship board? Could it be tougher time restrictions for what can be shown when, or the introduction of a better rating system? No! It is V-Chip. That's right, V-Chip! That legendary caped crusader who fearlessly fights crime, filth, obscenity and violence; all this without wearing his underpants on the outside of his trousers! Great, isn't it! Well, not really. You see, a tiny little flaw renders it completely

useless — you have to turn it on, program it, and it will only work on your television.

This is to me like the robots that "coyote" used to buy from the "acme" company in order to catch the "road runner." It might be a brand-new robot that could be powered up and programmed to catch any animal recorded in its memory. It sounded great to coyote, but something always went wrong. The robot may have been 'state of the art technology' but it had inherent weaknesses that rendered it ineffectual. For example, it could run out of power or its setting could be changed so that instead of catching a road runner, it would return and take captive the one who released it.

In a similar way, V-Chip is not an answer to violence because it has inherent weaknesses — it is a compromise from start to finish.

In a (not so) recent addition of *The Age*,¹ a page was devoted to discussing the pros and cons of the V-Chip. Interestingly enough, the page was entitled, "The V-Chip: Mother's little helper or society's cop-out?". With such a heading things seemed promising, but not for long. On the very next line was the caption: "*It all depends on whom you talk to ... and what you want from your TV*".

As with most secular statements they contain only a half truth. While this article seeks answers to certain questions, it inadvertently points to the actual problem that we are facing — namely, the relativising of truth and the advocating of personal preference.

The statement is true because what we watch on television should be determined by whom we talk to. On the other hand, the statement is false because it points towards man as the one with whom we should communicate on such matters, and thereby claims that man can make ultimate moral judgments. However, Scripture's claim is that man is morally bankrupt and incapable of such decision making.²

To whom should we talk? God!

What should you want from your TV? That which God has decreed:

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. (Phil. 4:8, NASB, emphasis added.)

This is the only legitimate starting point. Without this, we will never solve the moral dilemmas that we face. As we have noted in previous articles on the gun debate, there is no room for relativism in moral arguments. We cannot perpetuate or foster an 'every man did what was right in his own eyes' attitude (ultimate individuality) and at the same time expect that man follow a societal code (ultimate society). At some point these two opposites will collide.

Consider J.J. Rousseau's approach to this situation. He sought a society that would be free and uncomplicated with only a minimum of rules. He proposed that there be five rules; 1. Belief in a

1. Friday, 12 July, 1996. A15. There were 3 separate articles included. It should be noted that all quotations, unless otherwise stated, will be from these articles.
2. Jeremiah 17:9-10: "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds; Mark 7:21-22: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness." (NASB, emphasis added.)

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Supreme Being; 2. Belief in the after life; 3. Happiness for the just; 4. Punishment for the wicked (Ultimate Society); and 5. Rejection of intolerance (Ultimate Individuality). Such a society obviously sounded wonderful to Rousseau, but we are forced to ask, 'how would it work'?

How is it possible, for example, to have 'reward' and 'punishment', yet maintain an attitude of *absolute tolerance*. To sum up Rousseau's society, is to state that the only 'intolerable' is 'intolerance'.³ Those joining this society were to obey these laws under pain of death. So, if you would not tolerate tolerance your intolerance was considered intolerable and would not be tolerated by the tolerant who had now become intolerant of your intolerable disposition. This intolerance on your part would then justify their intolerance of you, so that they could declare your intolerance to be intolerable while classifying their own intolerance as tolerable. The end result of this system of ultimate tolerance is that the intolerable would be put to death.⁴

In the argument over censorship, society stands at the cross-roads. It is here and now that we decide whether we are going to be a real society⁵ or whether we are going to be a 'defacto' one modeled on Rousseau's paradox.

In the first article contained in *The Age*, Sam Lipski writes under the title,

"Can Technology Solve our Moral Dilemmas?". He points out that studies in America of "750 music videos" revealed an "average of 20 acts of violence an hour". When MTV, the "most popular and influential" program was examined, the number rose to "29 instances of violent imagery an hour". This I can believe. The other night I noted that the music program 'rage' was given an "M" rating. This then begs the question, 'what are producers doing making video clips that they know will be rated so as to exclude their target audience'?

Moving on from video clips, Lipski also asks about violence on news broadcasts. He notes that out of "12-15" news items "it is not unusual for half . . . to deal with crime and violence". Again Lipski has a valid point. Some months ago, in Melbourne, a service station attendant was robbed. One of his assailants lashed out at him with a knife, stabbing him in the arm. All this was captured by the security camera and replayed several times throughout the news story.

Despite Lipski making a few good points, he ultimately backs away from the issue at hand when he states that, "there is a limit to what the government can do suddenly . . . about the proliferation of media violence". Tell me, Sam, why is there nothing that the government can do? After all, at a moments notice it was able to decide that the amount of guns in society had to be reduced at any cost.⁶ Quick, sweeping decisions, are not foreign to governments. However, when such decisions are made they are usually totally misdirected and impotent.

In the "at least" category, we think Sam deserves *at least* half a cheer for his warning: "Let nobody . . . put too much faith in V-chip. Certainly, it is likely to be some help for parents. But . . . those who are concerned . . . about what their children view need far more help than that".

Therefore, in answering Mr. Lipski's opening question, we must conclude that technology cannot solve our moral dilemmas.

The second article is written by Alan Kohler and is titled "Privatising censorship".

He notes that, "Governments around the world are starting to pull out of controlling what is seen in homes. Instead,

they are passing laws requiring the suppliers of television sets . . . to provide us with the technology to decide for ourselves."

Kholer then moves on to the very heart of the problem: "Once the power of parents to censor is enhanced, much of the basis of the Australian Broadcasting Authority's work in screening what goes to air and at what time — that is, protecting children⁷ — becomes redundant. The government's job is simply to provide ratings information — plus, perhaps, some minimum controls on what can be shown on TV during the day or early evening. Apart from that, anything goes".

Now this does raise some interesting issues. The governments of years gone by have eroded parental control. We have been told that children have rights and they are free to express them. Now the government is (supposedly) handing censorship over to parents so that we can have more control.⁸ How nice. Yet, what happens when little Johnny complains because mum and dad will not let him watch a certain program? I know of a situation where a child who was angry with her parents went to school and told the teachers that her father assaulted her. The authorities were called and the children were taken from their parents. The child became so petrified at what had happened that she confessed to making the story up because she wanted to get her father in to trouble. Granted, this is not a dispute over watching television, but there are similarities. As we noted above we cannot allow two opinions on such matters. Who will be right and who will be wrong? How many years will it take before we have the first child suing his parents because he was not allowed to watch a certain program? — and what will the psychiatrists say?

What happens when Johnny, after rotting his brain and his heart, decides to get even with society and blows up a school bus? Will the government conduct another 'witch hunt' looking for all the harmful elements that caused poor Johnny to do this? Will they tell us once more that society has failed to care for certain minority groups? Will the psychiatrists conjure up their demons of the past and blame everyone who had absolutely nothing to do with the situation. Or

3. We might note the correlation here with Dewey's concept, that the only 'absolute' is that there is absolutely no absolutes.
4. This sounds very familiar, does it not? This attitude is prevalent in our society. The only people not tolerated are those who will not tolerate everyone else's immorality.
5. Established upon the Law of the Lord. Cf Psalm 19:7-9.
6. \$500,000,000 would go a long way to solving the crisis in the public health system.
7. One should note that censorship is about more than protecting children.
8. The real reason is that the Government is opting out of its responsibility. It is not concerned with enhancing parental control, but diminishing its own.

will the government finally own up to being in dereliction of its duty?

In this environment I cannot share Kholer's enthusiasm when he says that, "it's (V-Chip) a terrific thing that will undoubtedly make the world a better place". Particularly when the conclusion to this sentence reads, "but when parental control ends, at whatever age, so does their censorship."⁹

You see, V-Chip is not "mother's little helper". It is, on the contrary, "society's", and particularly the Government's, "cop-out".

V-Chip will never make the world a better place because the illicit materials will still be available elsewhere in society. For example, what happens when my child stays overnight at a friend's place? What are their standards? Do they have V-Chip? If so, at what level is it set? Do any of the children know the PIN number so that they can alter the settings when mum and dad are absent? Such are the questions that need to be answered.

V-Chip is a cop-out because it does not address any of the broader issues.

Thus, Kholer goes part way to redeeming himself when he says:

But there is a more significant issue. The limitation in responding to massacres like Port Arthur by controlling TV — however it is done — is that, as the networks say, TV violence is not the problem: mass murderers get their encouragement from the local video store or the cinema.

He is wrong in saying that "TV violence is not the problem." However his point about video stores and cinemas should not be overlooked. As all are aware, most movies are available for several years before they can be shown on television.¹⁰ Hence, the plot, the violence level, the coarseness of language, the level of nudity and so forth, are all well known before the parent even has the opportunity of home censorship.

In our society today the problem is not home censorship. It is the general lack of censorship by Government and media bodies that is cause for concern. Take the Government's own policy. We

all think of 'Auntie' (the ABC) when we think of television controlled by the Australian government. Nevertheless, what of SBS? This too, is Government operated. Now look at the double standards. Swearing is limited on the ABC; with SBS it is a case of, how much would you like? There is little nudity on the ABC; SBS is basically soft pornography. Because SBS is supposedly for ethnic Australians it can screen a wider variety of de-censored material, while the ABC is for ordinary Australians, with Christian values, who are just too easily offended?

What this illustrates is that the government is compromised. It shows that the government has opted out of its responsibility to guard each heart and mind from evil.

This can also be seen in the introduction of 'Pay TV'. It is limited at this point

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in time to sport, movies and news, but how long will it be before we have a similar situation to America?¹¹ Pay TV' is just one more step that the Government has taken in relinquishing its obligation to set proper and righteous censorship standards. "Pay TV" is the ultimate in non censorship; you simply pay for the pleasure of rotting your brain with whatever you want and the government does not care because you are doing it in the privacy of your own home.¹² It is one more burden taken off their shoulders; one less thing for which they are to be held accountable — that is, until you self destruct.

In the third article, Pamela Bone starts by saying: "The V-chip will be a useful tool for those parents who care about what their children watch on television . . . It will not solve the problem of violence in our society [for] V-chips cannot decide values". This is right on the mark. V-chip does nothing to address the real issues, therefore, it cannot be a real solution. What are the real issues? Morals, ethics, righteousness, and a disobedient and rebellious society that has

turned its back on God. V-Chip is manipulated by the viewer in order to meet the moral requirement of the viewer and therefore presupposes that the viewer is capable of making moral decisions. Therefore it is condemned to failure.

As a parent who is concerned about what his child watches on television I know that V-Chip will not be of any benefit. You see, I already have V-Chip. Well, actually, I have an earlier model of V-Chip. This is the standard, non-programmable model which has been fitted to most televisions ever built. This device serves a similar purpose though it is not as technologically advanced. It is called the on/off switch. My version of V-Chip might be antiquated, but it is as good as the newer model.

Why? Because not exposing your child to wrong things is only half the battle. You must also teach you child what is wrong, especially on television, and how not to be enticed by it. If all we do as parents is turn the television off, then the child never learns to think issues through for themselves. If this approach alone is adopted, then the child will simply never learn to be able to make Biblically informed value judgments for itself.

To illustrate this let me use the example of children in a different context. Many of us will no doubt know of children who would not dare misbehave in front of their parents. Yet, when their parents are absent they are right little "horrors." The reason for this is that the parent has instilled a wrong values system into the child. Instead of teaching the child to fear God and be obedient at all times because no man can fool God, they have been taught to fear mum or dad.

In a similar way, relying upon V-Chip as a child's tutor in righteousness does not train a child to understand and make Biblically informed judgments for himself. In this environment as soon as the parents or V-Chip are removed from the equation the child is cut adrift without a moral guidance system.

Relying on V-Chip alone is also futile in that there are too many variables, or inherent weaknesses, that make V-Chip a farce. For example, the coded standards for what is being transmitted must be right in the first place. Consider this.

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9. The problem with Kholer's enthusiasm is that it assumes that all parents / guardians will, (a.) use V-Chip and (b.) that those who use it will do so responsibly.
 10. Movies are not the only problem, of course. Yet they are the predominate source of violence. The video is now as destructive, if not more so, than television. Television is still required to censor certain things where videos are not.
 11. Several years ago there was a television show known as the Steve Vizard Show. I remember that he once interviewed the female host of an American pornographic show. At that time "pay TV" was on the Australian horizon and Mr. Vizard offered her an invitation to come to Australia when we were eventually connected to such shows. Even then, whilst the official line was 'news, sports and movies,' it was obvious that some were looking to broaden these categories as soon as possible.
 12. We must be careful of this "in the privacy of your home" argument. Homosexuals have argued this way for a good number of years. In opposition to this we must assert that the four walls of a home do not negate God's righteous standards.

You place V-Chip into your television. You program it to the lowest setting. As government censorship declines, you find more offensive material being televised. In an effort to correct this, you set the V-Chip so as to screen out more and more. Finally with the V-Chip at its highest setting you feel safe. Yet, the filth and violence increases, so that 40%–70% of the program is rated at the highest level. So now, when you sit down to watch a movie the screen is blank more often than not. Eventually it gets to the point where you enjoy watching the credits, because that is the only time your screen is not blank.

Another scenario is this. You install your V-Chip, and set it to an acceptable level. However, unbeknown to you, the new programmer, who has the job of setting the levels for the program, is a sadomasochist. He sees no problem with children watching all types of bizarre behaviour. So his setting of the codes is always going to be far lower than your standard. Hence, what you would rate as a 10, being the worst, he may rate at 5. Even with V-Chip set to its highest level, under these conditions, it is of little or no value.

Still, if one does not allow for such extreme possibilities, we need only look at the general situation as it is today. I know of Christian women who need their daily fix of "Days of our lives" or "General Hospital." There are others who read *New Idea* or some other magazine more often than they read the Word. Then there is the question of what our children are allowed to watch. Many parents see no problem with that paragon of moral excellence, Bart Simpson. Others allow their children to watch the Satanic "Power Rangers" and still others see nothing wrong with "Home and Away" or "Neighbours." Last, but by no means least, are the comedy shows. You sit

down for a little relaxation and before you know it, you find yourself laughing at concepts that are morally wrong.

What about the movies? Recently, a wonderful father, who just happens to be a good friend of mine, decided to do some bonding with his daughter and in order to achieve this he took her to the cinema for the first time. In trying to be responsible, he chose a G rated film titled "The Muppet's Treasure Island." Well, this friend was horrified to discover that the word b—y was used twice, and that there was a certain evil to some of the content.

Hence, the need in society is for a proper censorship standard to be enforced upon all media and not just some.¹³ Further, the real need is for the individual to have morals instilled in his heart. For only at this point, when the individual is capable of moral decision, will tools like V-Chip be of some use.

We are an immoral and amoral society and our first priority must be to correct these failings from a Biblical view. We have to form a Biblically oriented community that holds to one set of divinely ordained standards. Without this we will be continually groping in the dark, seeking some magic solution while society crumbles round about (Ephesians 4:17-24).

It is time that Christians demand that politicians act properly and responsibly in these areas. Censorship must be imposed in order to protect all of society. As stated earlier, V-Chip presupposes that the viewer has a certain moral capability. Yet many (most) today do not have any such ability, nor do they desire it. This leads to the second point, namely, that we equip ourselves, and our children, with the mind of Christ so that we can make proper decisions.

The responsible parent will screen what a child watches. They will use their antiquated version of V-Chip to protect their children. However, the irresponsible parent, with no moral capability, the very one who should be using V-chip, is the person who will never avail themselves of it.¹⁴

For example, I live in a Housing Commission area. These people are supposedly the "poor and hard done by" of society, yet when "Pay TV" was released in this area it sold like hot cakes. It may be a slight exaggeration, but it is fair to say that every third house in this area would have some type of "Pay TV."¹⁵

When the Government opts out of censorship, it is condoning the free distribution of scissors with which the morally bankrupt can attack and shred the fabric of our society. It is trying to create Rousseau's paradox.

We cannot sustain societal living and humanism's freedom of choice. Without God at the centre, the two are diametrically opposed and are therefore on a collision course. The Lord has given us government so that it might uphold His righteous standards; so that it might protect the hearts and minds of all people—particularly of those who refuse to protect their own.

V-Chip is no crusader of Righteousness, and should therefore not be trusted. As Christians, let us urge our politicians to make real decisions, firm decisions and most of all, righteous decisions.

We can never trust an amoral computer chip to make moral decisions. What we must strive to do is change the heart of sinful man, for only a righteous heart will make a righteous decision.

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13. An example of this was the push to clean up the pornography industry by banning or limiting "violent" erotica. The reality is that pornography, violent or not, is soul destroying. If society is to limit its effect then it must be banned completely; not categorized.

14. Even if they do acquire V-Chip, the fact that they are morally bankrupt will mean that they will be unable to use it in any meaningful way.

15. No prizes for guessing which part of town has the worst reputation, and its not because I live here!?