

April 2000 when President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “We announce at this conference that we hope to build a house of the Lord in Aba, Nigeria.”¹² Brothers and sisters, I testify that sometimes “miracles . . . confirm . . . faith.”¹³ The temples of Africa are a magnificent representation of miracles wrought by the faith of so many Saints in the small villages and large cities spread across that vast continent.

I am deeply grateful that I have seen the faith that brought two pioneers in Africa many miles to a temple recommend interview. I rejoice that the temple in progress in Nigeria will bring these women, their families, and thousands more the opportunity to use their recommends as both a symbol and embodiment of their faith.

See afar off with spiritual vision

Sometimes those blessings in our lives that we have yet to receive lie beyond the scope of mortal eyes. I testify that it is always faith that allows us to see “afar off” with spiritual vision all that God intends for His children.

Just as surely as the sisters knew—who walked along that sandy jungle trail—I know that God lives. He loves each of us on every continent and desires to bless us one by one. I know that our faith in Jesus

Christ can sustain us each day as we “do all things that lie in our power,” knowing with the “utmost assurance”¹⁴ that those promises we may see “afar off” will one day bring all the blessings we hope for. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. “A Temple-Motivated People,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1995, 5.
2. Alma 32:21; italics added.
3. Hebrews 12:2.
4. See 1 Corinthians 16:13; James 1:6.
5. Hebrews 11:1.
6. Morris Calvin Phelps, *Life History of Laura Clark* (Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.), microfilm, 3.
7. Hebrews 11:13.
8. Mark 9:23.
9. *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (1985), 187.
10. 1 Corinthians 16:13.
11. “Now Let Us Rejoice,” *Hymns*, no. 3.
12. In Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 111; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 88.
13. Bible Dictionary, “Faith,” 669.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 123:17.

The choir sang “I Saw a Mighty Angel Fly.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Television shows attack values, families

The fall of the year is when television airs its season premieres and introduces its new shows. A friend told me that there are 37 new TV series being inaugurated this fall. As he has read the reviews, he has found few if any of them he would want his children to watch. Most of the sitcoms, dramas, and reality shows contain immorality, violence, and subtle ridicule of traditional values and traditional families. Each

year the new shows seem to get worse, pushing the envelope of what the public will accept. What comes out of Hollywood, off the Internet, and in much of today’s music creates a web of decadence that can trap our children and endanger all of us.

We must respond to threats against family

Church leaders have the responsibility to speak out on moral issues and to counsel individuals and families. The family is

the basic unit of society; it is the basic unit of eternity. Thus, when forces threaten the family, Church leaders must respond.

The family is at the heart of Heavenly Father's plan because we are all part of His family and because mortality is our opportunity to form our own families and to assume the role of parents. It is within our families that we learn unconditional love, which can come to us and draw us very close to God's love. It is within families that values are taught and character is built. Father and mother are callings from which we will never be released, and there is no more important stewardship than the responsibility we have for God's spirit children who come into our families.

Within this context of the preeminent importance of families and the threats families face today, it is not surprising that the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles used strong words in the proclamation to the world on families: "We warn that individuals . . . who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets."¹ One such prophet was Malachi, who admonished parents to turn their hearts to their children and children to their parents, lest the whole earth be cursed (see Malachi 4:6).

To these warnings, ancient as the Old Testament and current as the proclamation on the family, I add my own voice of warning, specifically concerning today's media and the powerful negative effect it can have on families and on family life.

Make wise media choices

Because of its sheer size, media today presents vast and sharply contrasting options. Opposite from its harmful and permissive side, media offers much that is positive and productive. Television offers history channels, discovery channels, edu-

cation channels. One can still find movies and TV comedies and dramas that entertain and uplift and accurately depict the consequences of right and wrong. The Internet can be a fabulous tool of information and communication, and there is an unlimited supply of good music in the world. Thus our biggest challenge is to choose wisely what we listen to and what we watch.

As the prophet Lehi said, because of Christ and His Atonement, we are "free forever, knowing good from evil," able to act for ourselves rather than be acted upon, "free to choose liberty and eternal life . . . or to choose captivity and death" (2 Nephi 2:26–27).

Our lives may mirror our media choices

The choices we make in media can be symbolic of the choices we make in life. Choosing the trendy, the titillating, the tawdry in the TV programs or movies we watch can cause us to end up, if we're not careful, choosing the same things in the lives we live.

If we do not make good choices, the media can devastate our families and pull our children away from the narrow gospel path. In the virtual reality and the perceived reality of large and small screens, family-destructive viewpoints and behavior are regularly portrayed as pleasurable, as stylish, as exciting, and as normal. Often the media's most devastating attacks on family are not direct or frontal or openly immoral. Intelligent evil is too cunning for that, knowing that most people still profess belief in family and in traditional values. Rather, the attacks are subtle and *amoral*—issues of right and wrong don't even come up. Immorality and sexual innuendo are everywhere, causing some to believe that because everyone is doing it, it must be all right. This pernicious evil is not out in the street somewhere; it is coming right into our homes, right into the heart of our families.

To be strong and happy, families need to be nourished by the truths depicted in the thirteenth article of faith—by a belief “in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men.” Gratefully, there are many like-minded men and women of all cultures and faiths who also seek that which is “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy.”

Oppose offensive, destructive media

But we live in the “perilous times” to which the Apostle Paul referred when he warned about our day as one when “men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, . . . false accusers, . . . despisers of those that are good, . . . heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1–4).

Conspiring men and women, intent on gain rather than goodness, “stir up the people” to “all manner of . . . wickedness” (Alma 11:20), preventing the noble uses to which the media could be employed.

The new morality preached from the media’s pulpit is nothing more than the old immorality. It attacks religion. It undermines the family. It turns virtue into vice and vice into virtue. It assaults the senses and batters the soul with messages and images that are neither virtuous, nor lovely, nor of good report, nor praiseworthy.

The time has come when members of the Church need to speak out and join with the many other concerned people in opposition to the offensive, destructive, and mean-spirited media influence that is sweeping over the earth.

Negative effects of bad media

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the percentage of television prime-time shows with sexual content jumped from 67 percent in 1998 to 75 percent in

the year 2000.² Media with this kind of content has many negative effects. It fosters a callous attitude toward women, who are often portrayed as objects of abuse and not as precious daughters of God who are essential to His eternal plan. The long-cherished values of abstinence from intimate relationships before marriage and complete fidelity between husband and wife after marriage are denigrated and derided. Children and youth are confused and misled by the deviant behavior they see demonstrated by so-called stars they admire and want to emulate. In the moral confusion created by the media, enduring values are being abandoned.

We see a rapid increase in cyberporn, involving sexual addiction over the Internet. Some become so addicted to viewing Internet pornography and participating in dangerous online chat rooms that they ignore their marriage covenants and family obligations and often put their employment at risk. Many run afoul of the law. Others develop a tolerance to their perverted behavior, taking ever more risks to feed their immoral addiction. Marriages crumble and relationships fail as addicts often lose everything of real, eternal value.

According to one social observer: “Television . . . has replaced the family, the school, and the church—in that order—as the principal [instrument] for socialization and transmission of values. . . . Greed, debauchery, violence, unlimited self-gratification, absence of moral restraint . . . are the daily fare glamorously dished up to our children.”³

We must be concerned with the violent and sexually charged lyrics of much of today’s popular music and the relatively new “art form” of the music video. According to industry observers, 40 percent of the music video audience is under the age of 18.⁴ One study reports that approximately three-fourths of all the music videos that tell a story utilize sexual imagery, and nearly half involve violence.⁵ And the fashion trends spawned in their

images are about as far away from being “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” as you can get. Ours surely is a time when men “call evil good, and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20).

Family is the main target

Let me say again that the family is the main target of evil’s attack and must therefore be the main point of our protection and defense. As I said once before, when you stop and think about it from a diabolically tactical point of view, fighting the family makes sense to Satan. When he wants to disrupt the work of the Lord, he doesn’t poison the world’s peanut butter supply, thus bringing the Church’s missionary system to its collective knees. He doesn’t send a plague of laryngitis to afflict the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He doesn’t legislate against green Jell-O and casseroles. When evil wants to strike out and disrupt the essence of God’s work, it attacks the family. It does so by attempting to disregard the law of chastity, to confuse gender, to desensitize violence, to make crude and blasphemous language the norm, and to make immoral and deviant behavior seem like the rule rather than the exception.

Join others in raising voices against evil

We need to remember Edmund Burke’s statement: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”⁶ We need to raise our voices with other concerned citizens throughout the world in opposition to current trends. We need to tell the sponsors of offensive media that we have had enough. We need to support programs and products that are positive and uplifting. Joining together with neighbors and friends who share our concerns, we can send a clear message to those responsible. The Internet Web sites and their local affiliates will have their addresses. Letters

and e-mails have more effect than most people realize, especially those like one sent by a Relief Society sister that stated, “I represent a group of over a hundred women that meets every week and often talks about the harm your program is doing to our children.”

Do not support inappropriate media

Of course the most basic way to protest negative-impact media is simply not to watch it, see it, read it, or play it. We should teach our family members to follow the First Presidency’s counsel to young people. From the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet, their instruction regarding entertainment and the media is very clear:

“Do not attend, view, or participate in entertainment that is vulgar, immoral, violent, or pornographic in any way. Do not participate in entertainment that in any way presents immorality or violent behavior as acceptable. . . .

“Have the courage to walk out of a movie or video party, turn off a computer or television, change a radio station, or put down a magazine if what is being presented does not meet Heavenly Father’s standards. Do these things even if others do not.”⁷

Brothers and sisters, refuse to be used. Refuse to be manipulated. Refuse to support those programs that violate traditional family values. We may be a small voice to begin with; nevertheless, let us speak out and encourage a more uplifting, inspiring, and acceptable media.

How to minimize media’s negative effects

Besides making our voices heard, let me conclude with seven things that every parent can do to minimize the negative effects media can have on our families:

1. We need to hold family councils and decide what our media standards are going to be.

2. We need to spend enough quality time with our children that we are consistently the main influence in their lives, not the media or any peer group.

3. We need to make good media choices ourselves and set good examples for our children.

4. We need to limit the amount of time our children watch TV or play video games or use the Internet each day. Virtual reality must not become their reality.

5. We need to use Internet filters and TV programming locks to prevent our children from “chancing upon” things they should not see.

6. We need to have TVs and computers in a much-used common room in the home, not in a bedroom or a private place.

7. We need to take time to watch appropriate media with our children and discuss with them how to make choices that will uplift and build rather than degrade and destroy.

May God bless us with courage and wisdom in doing what each one of us can to help turn the tide in the media away from darkness toward truth and light. And may God bless our families to be strong and true to the principles of the gospel is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. See Dale Kunkel and others, *Sex on TV 2003: A Biennial Report to the Kaiser Family Foundation* (2003), 40.

3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Weak Ramparts of the Permissive West,” in Nathan P. Gardels, ed., *At Century’s End: Great Minds Reflect on Our Times* (1995), 53.

4. See National Institute on Media and the Family, “Fact Sheet,” Internet, http://www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts_mtv.shtml.

5. See Barry L. Sherman and Joseph R. Dominick, “Violence and Sex in Music Videos: TV and Rock ‘n’ Roll,” *Journal of Communication*, winter 1986, 79–93.

6. Attributed in John Bartlett, comp., *Familiar Quotations*, 15th ed. (1980), ix.

7. *For the Strength of Youth* (2001), 17, 19.

The choir sang “A Child’s Prayer.”

President Monson

The choir has just sung that beautiful number “A Child’s Prayer.”

Our concluding speaker at this session will be President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency.

Following President Faust’s remarks, the choir will sing “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” We are truly grateful to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they have provided this morning.

After the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder H. Aldridge Gillespie of the Seventy, and the conference will be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

As you leave the conference, we ask you to obey traffic rules, use caution, and be courteous in driving.

President James E. Faust

“Help thou mine unbelief”

This morning I would like to bear a humble testimony to those who have personal struggles and doubts concerning the divine mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Many of us are

at times like the father who asked the Savior to heal his child with the “dumb spirit.” The father of the child cried out, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”¹ To all those with lingering doubts and questions, there are ways to help your unbelief. In the