

Material Kids

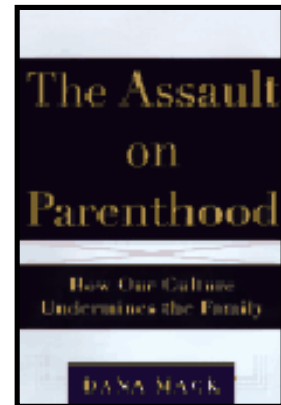
The Assault on Parenthood by Dana Mack (1997)

Materialism is one subject of this chapter; never the case for want, but always *trying to keep up with the Jones'*... Another subject is the media – the mass media that distributes and advertises so as to adversely affect the young folk – even to the degree of desensitizing them to violence – violent acts and aggression. . . Let's learn once again from Dana Mack.

She begins:

Parents resent consumer culture...for destroying the most basic pleasure of childhood – the voyage of discovery that used to be called “play”...And they are especially disturbed by the dependency of young children mechanized entertainment – on videos, video games and other electronic gadgets...

1. First, there was T.V.; that has “conditioned many children to sedentary habits and to the lowest common denominator of adult entertainment.”
2. Second, there were videos that, like T.V. and programming, have become one of few “mechanized entertainment” that blast images and information so as to scarcely leave room for conventional messaging and learning.
3. Third, there were video games that, being interactive, that is the latest frontier of home and mobile entertainment – a habit that entertains and enthralls those young folk for, well, along time...



What's next? Better hurry before we get bored again...

As one father put it: “We live in fast food society...I mean immediate gratification.” Many parents believe that not only is T.V. making the children more materialistic, but it is desensitizing them too.

Of the more insidious form (of media) is music; and while Dana describes some forms with group names and lyrics, the general tone and message is one of sex, violence and the basic denigration of women (called misogyny). This media represents the greatest challenge for parent's efforts to control and protect their children.

The history of such media dates back to the days of Dana's youth; rock-n-roll was in its climax and the “establishment” had been rocked by the counter-culture age of Aquarius – or whatever it might be called. So the basic differences of taste in entertainment and media – is not new. **But this age in which Dana describes such sexual and violent content is unprecedented; and by apparent study, detrimental to the sensitivity and sexual perspective of young folks.**

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In the observation of parents and adults is a sense that this great media – with its growing power and prevalence – is unstoppable, even detainable! To make the matter or campaign more daunting is the always “freedom of expression” and the broad-based inclusion of such media as art – expressions of the artist...

Where does indecency and obscenity cross-the-line of expression and art?

Perhaps the real answer to the above question is not on assessment or parent concern as much as the money to be made (or made) at the expense of devastating impact and influence on children’s lives.

In much detail and discourse, Dana outlines her opinion of what is needed to effectively combat this Leviathan:

It will take a massive campaign for rebuilding of audience taste. In television, this would prescribing a number of hours devoted to the kind of high-minded cultural and educational programming we be proud to not only show our children, but to watch ourselves.

Turning back in time to the early ‘80’s, Dana describes the “dearth of historical knowledge of the creative arts among high-school students.” This absence or lack of awareness (or knowledge) to early forms of art is cause for a very narrow and dim view of the qualities and attributes of art forms. As example is given that students may only associate rap and reggae to “black American” music without any knowledge of contributions made in jazz, blues and other genres.

One reason that educational systems are reluctant to turn back the clock is “the fear of exploring Christianity” in its influence and contribution, according to Ms. Mack.

They (educators) go out of their way to ignore two millennia of Western visual and musical art inspired by Christianity, out of an exaggerated fear of compromising the secular character of public education...

The result is...

The result, however, is that in all too many public school districts children are robbed of an integrated understanding of the Western cultural heritage and deprived of aesthetic models that would help combat the more perverse influences of popular culture.

In her traveling and contact, Dana reports that: “The parents I’ve talked to are bitterly divided on how to interpret the schools’ general retreat from Christian aesthetic heritage.”

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Referring to the opinion of Neil Postman, Dana describes the “exaggerated fear” as hostility toward religion; though the school systems would do well to offer and teach comparative religions – rather than refrain from most...

I say “most” because of the described teaching of Native American culture and the “New Age themes” derived from combination of the past and present.

In the “spiritual transcendence” of New Age is the expressed opinion that:

New Age spiritualism deceives children about the tough demands of life and learning.

Dana expresses her opinion further on arrival and singularity of New Age:

In their treatment of religion and the spiritual quest, school systems seem to working against the rich, pluralist heritage of the public and toward cultural homogeneity.

In her continued dialogue, Ms. Mack sees this “cultural homogeneity” as the mere continuation of what the public school system has been attempting all along: “It has always been a mission of the schools to expedite the process of assimilation and Americanization for immigrant children. But today, they may be divesting all our children of the minimal cultural and spiritual vestments they ring with them from home.”

The churches of our time are not without criticism too; in this regard of the removal of “cultural and spiritual vestments”, the church is perhaps the last vestige of hope. In her interviews and contact with parents however, Dana describes the opinion that:

Some parents observe that in their efforts to be relevant and attractive in a secular society, churches have become practically secular institutions – more focused on providing social activities, political advice, and psychological support than spiritual inspiration and comfort.

She continues (on parents’ comments): **“One of the biggest failures of churches today...is the casual approach they take toward religious education.”**

Why the “casual approach”...to religious education? She continues:

The growing reluctance on the part of clergy and religious educators to confront children with God’s exceedingly tough demands on those human beings who decide to serve Him – specifically, the quite formal and specific demands He make through Scripture – has to take its toll on children’s moral development.

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This “causal approach” may have much to do with the decline in church attendance and participation among our young folk. The book ***Already Gone***¹ by Ken Ham and Britt Beemer goes into depth on this demographic of current society. Beginning in England and continuing to Europe and America, participation in and practice of one’s religion is on the marked decline among the young folks. Dana offers some broad statistics in America covering the period from 1980 to 1990:

- Church attendance high school seniors dropped from 43 to 30%
- The number of seniors who listed religion as important in their lives dropped from 65 to 56%

Citing fear as a possible cause for this “casual approach”, Dana adds:

The churches seem to have taken the cue that it is impolitic to maintain the “truth” of a particular religious faith because it leaves the followers of the faith open to charges of elitism or bias. Many churches back-off from any making pronouncements on morality; for fear that such declarations are too narrow and judgmental...

She continues to cite several examples in this fear; to include refraining from traditional family structure, for fear of alienating members of an already dwindling congregation. She quotes Gilbert Meilaender, professor of religion at Oberlin College; and writes:

Many Protestant churches have side-stepped their moral duties by choosing to view family breakdown as an opportunity rather than a tragedy...What liberal denominations miss by turning away the discussions of family structure...is that **Jesus regarded the family as the very model of communitarian purpose and love on which the Kingdom of God must be built.**

Another influence on the fear of the church is noted as feminism. “Critiques of the Judeo-Christian traditions have led theologians to avoid the familist metaphors and gender specific language.” She concludes:

The transformation of God the Father into God the Parent – surely among the least powerful members of the contemporary human species – can only be understood in the context of the larger movement to marginalize the Christian faith’s most powerful symbol of penance and self-sacrifice; **the cross.**

¹ *Already Gone – Why you kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it*; Ken Ham & Britt Beemer, 2009

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Why this marginalization of Christianity – this deviation or avoidance of the cross of Christ?

The cross represents the suffering of Christ for human sin; it is not about “rewards and reciprocity” alone, but represents the suffering of the faith. In recalling Scriptures of the Bible, the cross can be repulsive to those who oppose or reject the faith; but to the believer, it the symbol of sacrifice – the blood of Christ for the remission of sins. To deny or devalue the cross is to disregard Christ...

Citing another work of the 1970's, “Beyond Christolatry: A World without Models” by Mary Daily, the prediction of the denied or devalued cross in modern Christianity was predicted in these words:

A logical consequence of the liberation of women will be a loss of plausibility of Christological formulas which reflect and encourage idolatry in relation to the person of Jesus.

Though some vestiges of the cross do remain, as she notes, the mainstream loss or removal of this symbol of faith – and the Savior – is “cause for worry.” She follows-up by saying that “for the majority of Americans worship itself is increasingly irrelevant, and with it, the rituals and traditions of faith that have held families and cultures together for centuries.”

In the hope that remains is the affirmation that many of the parents “**continue to view them (the churches) as the greatest hope for re-stabilizing the family and redirecting the youth lost to a culture of violence and vulgarity.**”