



The Armor of Faith
Topic Summary: The Battle for Our Children
Part IV: News Media



Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Helen is a lay-Dominican, which is also known as the Order of Preachers, and she, along with her husband Dan, are engaged in youth catechesis and music ministry. Sharon is our token cradle Catholic, and, as everyone by now knows, I am simply here to ask questions. Giving the answers is the superpower of our panelists, so welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Discussion:

During our last show, we discussed the question of the entertainment media. We noted it can have both good and bad influences upon the perceptions and value systems of our children. We also noted, as expressed by Saint John Paul II, that parents have an important responsibility as the primary and most important educators of their children. Additionally, we must recognize that we all have a role towards influencing the values systems of our youth. Our objective should be to enable the youth of our day to develop the values system which will not only prepare them for their place in adulthood and as leaders of generations to follow, but also to prepare them with the values system which will enable them to protect their very soul.

We know the evil one will work day and night to take faith away from our children. As parents, mentors, and leaders, we face a fierce battle for our children's souls. The only way we can win the battle is to spend time with our children and engage them. We must provide them the opportunities to be active, to accomplish, to experience failure and how to learn from failure. Still, we must also watch over and protect them from dangers they may not perceive.

If we are to hold the attention and trust of our children, we must observe, as best we can, through the age of their eyes. We must assess what they see and help them with perceptions, analysis, and problem solving. We must help them see how entertainment media influences them, and how they may use their faith values within their own decision making process to make choices which are right and just. What we do or fail to do in the education of our children will determine not only how they will face the world on their own, but how they will be able to put on the armor of God by which to defend their soul.

Today, we will discuss the influence of the news media. Now, some might be tempted to think that children don't really care about the news – “its boring!” - but they become exposed, none the less.

(Question 1: Let's take a moment and consider how our children become aware of news and current events. What are the likely sources through which our children gain knowledge of news and current events?)

- Parents
- School (teachers and fellow students)
- Friends and social circles
- Cartoons
- Social Media (social internet games)
- Print Media (newspapers/magazines/advertisements/posters)
- Digital/Online Media (Internet and Smart Phones)
- Broadcast/Cable/Satellite Media
- Radio/Streaming Media
- Government
- Church

(Question 2: As our children grow in their ability to analyze and comprehend, they must learn the value of keeping up with current events. Such knowledge enables us in many ways, but the presentation of current events can also be designed to politically manipulate us. What are some things we must watch for within news media sources?)

- Partial context
- Partial facts
- Speculation as fact
- Opinion as fact
- Emotionalism

- Political Agendas
- Propaganda (political, ideological, religious)
- Anti-Catholicism/God agendas
- Political Correctness values grooming
- No mention of motive or political agendas of anonymous sources
- Misinformation/Disinformation

(Question 3: The news media are the senders of messages. Our children are the receivers. **What might be the reaction of our children as they process these messages?)**

- Story might skip past their attention or comprehension
- Accept story without analysis or critical thinking (adult sources must be true)
- Partial comprehension resulting in flawed understanding
- Becomes building block for analysis and critical thinking (errors compound)
- Flawed analysis because of limited knowledge of youth (missing information)
- Emotions rule over analysis
- Can cause moral confusion (Politically Correct view versus what God asks of us)

(Question 4: As we mentioned, the news media are the senders of messages and our children are the receivers. **What is the role of parents in this model?)**

- Maintain awareness of what child observes (difficulty increase with age)
- Inquire to child's understanding/conclusions
- Inquire to child's feelings
- Help with gaining proper context
- Teach how to vet sources
- Teach how to assess truth
- Teach how to engage falsehoods (exposing, redirecting to truth, civility)
- Maintain awareness of example set by own use
- Don't put down the views of the child – discuss and lovingly enable their focus
- Discuss how what we hear influences our choices
- Discuss consequence analysis (potential branches and sequels for good or bad)

The media are so much part of us that to recognize their impact, we must step back and consciously think about how they shape our lives and what they are saying. **An intelligent use of media can prevent our being dominated by them and enable us instead to measure them by our standards.**

In this way, even many messages with which we cannot agree, inevitably coming to us from a diverse constellation of media, will not hurt us. **They can even be turned to our benefit by whetting our understanding and articulation of what we believe. It is important for parents to educate their children in the influence of the media, to take responsibility for monitoring what media their children use, and to become role models for appropriate use of media.** (USCCB)

(Question 5: As our children grow and become more independent in their news exposure and consumption, we need to help our children learn how to vet the reliability of news sources. How might we go about helping our children evaluate and find reliable news sources?)

- Compare and contrast multiple sources
- Research source bias (allsides.com, mediabiasfactcheck.com)
- Consider track record of a source concerning:
 - ➔ Amount of emotional jargon and labels (name calling)
 - ➔ Balance of context (what does one report relate another does not?)
 - ➔ Presence of emotionalism (designed to inform or persuade?)
 - ➔ Evidence of political leanings (what time is given to each side of issue?)
 - ➔ Substance → opinion or fact (supporting evidence?)
 - ➔ Handling inaccuracies and errors (do they own up and how, where?)

As entertaining and useful as the media can be, they should not be accepted uncritically or thoughtlessly. In subtle and not so subtle ways, most media convey moral messages. Reflect on what ethical standards the media are using. What is portrayed and why? What is it saying about human existence? How does it relate to Christian faith and moral belief? If something seems shocking, is anything of value also being conveyed? Is comedy used for genuine amusement or merely as a put-down? How are you and your family reacting to your media choices? Are you benefiting from them? (USCCB)

(Question 6: Perhaps the key recommendation here is the need for us to help our children evaluate what they hear or read. How can we go about helping our children with critical thinking skills which will help them evaluate the news to which they are exposed?)

- Compare and contrast multiple sources
- Look for emotional jargon and labels (name calling)
- Look for motivation of author, anonymous sources, witnesses, subjects
- Look for balance of context (what does one report relate another does not?)
- Look for political leanings (what sides are represented?)
- Is the substance opinion or fact (supporting evidence? Original text/data?)
- What moral message is present (compare with what God asks of us)
- What are potential consequences (impacts to child/family/community/etc)
- Research source bias (allsides.com, mediabiasfactcheck.com)
- Use Fact Checking Sites (truthorfiction.com)

(Question 7: As our children are exposed to the news, it may also come up in conversation with friends or teachers may ask for feedback during class discussions. How might we advise our children about how they share their opinion during such conversations or in response to inquiries?)

- Don't be too quick to take sides → Is all the information considered?

- If appropriate, ask for source and details (apply critical thinking)
- Assess what I know versus what is being told to me
- We don't always have to have a response → Oh, that's interesting
- What is the consequence of my opinion → Is this the place to share it?
- Questions can enable critical thinking by others
- If it turns into an argument, it is not about winning, but sharing truth
- If it turns into an argument, might be best to switch subject or disengage (preserve the opportunity for another conversation)

Quotes:

Be aware of the potential for receiving partial information or biased views. No communication medium can supply all details about anything. The Internet, in particular, offers a vast amount of unevaluated information. You and your children need to use a variety of media sources to learn about the world in which we live. When using media, be ready to ask what aspects of life are being neglected, what issues are being ignored, and whether bias or manipulation is involved.
 – USCCB (*Family Guide for Using Media*)

Conscientious reflection on the ethical dimension of communications should issue in practical initiatives aimed at eliminating the risks to the well-being of the family posed by the media and ensuring that these powerful instruments of communication will remain genuine sources of enrichment. A special responsibility in this regard lies with communicators themselves, with public authorities, and with parents.

– Saint John Paul II (23 May 2004 - "*The Media and the Family: A Risk and a Richness* ")

Above all, parents should give good example to children by their own thoughtful and selective use of media.

– Saint John Paul II (23 May 2004 - "*The Media and the Family: A Risk and a Richness* ")

Final Thoughts:

During our discussion today, we reviewed sources through which our children learn about news and current events, source biases, possible perceptions and reactions of our children, the role of parents in navigating the muck, how to help children evaluate sources, how to help children with critical thinking and analysis, and how to help our children engage others about the news.

On the surface, this seems to be like hooking up to the fire hose in trying to figure out how to help our children to navigate all the potential mine fields, but we should also keep in mind that this is an ongoing activity and is not accomplished in just one sitting. We should also keep in mind that it is a good practice to periodically assess how we are going about the task. Our effectiveness will increase as we gain experience with information tools and we receive feedback from our children.

As we engage our children, we must also consider our own emotions and bias. The most important question we must ask ourselves as we engage and help our children is whether we understand what God asks of us. Again, the more we know about our faith, the harder we make

the job of the one who tries to take it away from us. As we help our children know and understand our faith, we help them to put on the armor of God which will not only enable them to protect their soul, but will also enable them to do what is right and just as they engage the world about them. What we do or what we fail to do in this regard will not only impact the future of our children, but also those who cross their path and potentially generations to follow.

Wrap Up: Well, our time has come to an end. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we take a look at Public High School and University Systems.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: The Battle for Our Children – Part V: Public High School and University Systems

References:

Saint John Paul II; (23 May 2004); “The Media and the Family: A Risk and a Richness;” Vatican; http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20040124_world-communications-day.html

USCCB; (1999); “Family Guide for Using Media;” USCCB; <http://www.usccb.org/about/communications/family-guide.cfm>

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