

THOMAS MORE SOCIAL ACTION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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Volume 2 - No.2 March 2002



Editorial
Issue
IDENTIFICATION

Freedom, not Exploitation!

Would you like the freedom to choose to live your sexuality as a language of selfless, committed love? This freedom is under threat by the entertainment industry, which is out for a quick corporate dollar.

The drive for profits is driving the entertainment industry to exploit the young with reality TV's impulsive, unfaithful sex.

It's time to draw a line in the sand. Shows such as "Temptation Island" make entertainment of the break-up of relationships and the reduction of women and men into objects to be used for pleasure. At the same time, the freedom to regard members of the opposite sex as persons with an inalienable dignity and to form permanent, selfless relationships becomes more elusive, because good examples are hidden or mocked.

Our generation is in the firing line and we need to fire back! We will not stand by while our brothers and sisters are exploited, while profit seeking corporations create, unchallenged, an environment which kills off innocence and selfless love, and encourages us to exploit each other.

Michael Casanova.

Catholic Social Teachings APPLICATION

We have an article on Temptation Island and another on the whole corporate exploitation of the youth cool market. What is under threat? The dignity of teenagers and young adults and their authentic flourishing, their authentic happiness.

Discussion Questions

1. Does being cool bring happiness? What about having a green traffic light for every desire?
2. Is the 'culture of cool' real freedom, or slavery?
3. What sort of freedom is modesty supposed to bring? Freedom from what? Freedom for what?
4. Why should we draw a line in the sand and "purify the social climate" (CCC 2525)?

TMSAG meetings:

Hawthorn
Mon 1st April
7:45 pm
Corner House - 182
Power St

Werribee
Fri 26th March
7.30pm
St Andrew's Pres.

Preston
Tues 19th March,
7:30 pm
St Raphael's Pres,
17 Hardy St

Ballarat
please phone Marie,
5331 9815

Doveton
Sat 6th March, 7:45pm
Holy Family Presbytery
100 Power Rd

Ringwood
Wed 20th Feb, 8pm
16 Leonard Street

Monash Uni
1pm, Mon 11th March

La Trobe Uni
1pm, Wed 13th March
Fr Liam's Office

**ACU Patrick and Melb
Uni**
please phone Rosy.

Further details, phone 9326 5757

Catholic Social Teachings READINGS

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellency, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8).

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2496. The means of social communication (especially the mass media) can give rise to a certain passivity among users, making them less than vigilant consumers of what is said or shown. Users should practice moderation and discipline in their approach to the mass media. They will want to form enlightened and correct consciences the more easily to resist unwholesome influences.

2523. There is a modesty of the feelings as well as of the body. It protests, for example, against the voyeuristic explorations of the human body in certain advertisements, or against the solicitations of certain media that go too far in the exhibition of intimate things. Modesty inspires a way of life which makes it possible to resist the allurements of fashion and the pressures of prevailing ideologies.

2525. Christian purity requires a purification of the social climate. It requires of the communications media that their presentations show concern for respect and restraint. Purity of heart brings freedom from widespread eroticism and avoids entertainment inclined to voyeurism and illusion.

Catholic Social ACTION

Channel Seven has begun the latest in a succession of voyeuristic and gratuitous ratings grabbing 'reality' TV shows with the screening of the first episode of Temptation Island (the Australian version).

The concept of the show involves separating four unwed, but seriously committed couples and sending them to camps on opposite ends of a Fijian island, where they will have their fidelity to their partners put to the test. Each group of partnered men or women will spend two weeks with twelve attractive singles of the opposite sex, whose purpose is to seduce the contestants away from their partners.

Fox Entertainment who aired the American version of 'Temptation' was forced to stop promoting the program during family viewing time, following numerous complaints from parents and organizations, including the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) and PTC (Parents Television Council). The PTC also started a letter writing campaign to discourage advertisers from supporting the program. In the US, the show was dubbed "Prostitution Island" and was considered so morally corrupt that several advertisers withdrew their commercials from the program.

Mark Honig, executive director of PTC said, "The whole premise is disturbing... I think of it more like psychological torture... Fox is exploiting people by trying to tempt couples to break apart by parading these hunks and beauty queens in front of them". The serious impact of such a contest became evident when Fox forced a couple to leave

Protest over Temptation Island

the island, after admitting that they had a one-and-a-half-year-old child. The Australian version is expected to push the boundaries even further with one adviser from Fox TV quoted as having said "I've done any number of episodes [in the US] and I've never seen people behave like this before".

Commercial media networks must be made aware that such profit driven, lowering of standards will not be tolerated. The program trivialises commitment in long-relationships by placing them in unrealistic jeopardy for entertainment purposes. It may lead to long-term psychological damage to the contestants and provides a scandalising example to younger viewers by flaunting immorality and promoting behaviour that is debauched and degrading.

ACTION

Express your disgust and concern at the airing of the program on the Seven Network by:

1. Writing to HSV Channel Seven: 119 Wells Street, South Melbourne, Vic 3205. Phone (03) 9697 7777; fax (03) 9697 7888

Website: www.i7.com.au

2. Writing to the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS). 44 Avenue RD, Mosman, NSW, 2088, PH 02 9960 2622, fax 02 9969 3520

3. Expressing your disappointment to the sponsors, Midori Melon Liqueur, website: www.midoriworld.com/ email: info@midoriworld (including where you are writing from)

4. Writing to daily and local press.

The Merchants of Cool – a documentary reviewed by Rosy de Castella.

Last year the American Public Broadcasting System's program 'Frontline' screened an interesting, yet very disturbing documentary entitled "The Merchants of Cool". The program revealed how major corporations are targeting and exploiting the youth market, through the creation and sophisticated marketing of a new youth culture. Basically, this involves a process of intensive market research designed not only to reveal the current demands of teenagers, but further, to create the future trends and associated lifestyles which youths are then enticed to absorb and emulate.

The teen market is seen as a massive empire to be colonised and profited from. The marketers, using ethnographic research techniques, are described as studying the teenagers as an anthropologist would study an exotic native culture. However, corporate machines like MTV don't listen to the young to make the young happier, or so that they can make startling new kinds of products, but very simply, so they can figure out how to pitch what the master company has to sell. And in the cutthroat competition for greater profits between indebted corporations, this means a deliberate lowering of standards brought about by appealing to shock reactions.

Who are the "Merchants of Cool"?

In America (and probably not so differently in Australia) youth culture is sold by about five main corporations: Rupert Murdoch's Newscorp; Disney; Viacom; Universal Vivendi; and AOL/Time Warner. Large-scale business mergers have allowed the development of an intricate web of business relationships, that allow the cross promotion of products between many diverse companies that are actually owned by the same corporation.

A new approach to brand marketing

The corporations recognise that young people are increasingly cynical and often astute enough to know when they are being marketed-to. However, marketers have also discovered the coercive power of 'coolness'. Many corporations utilise the expertise of specialist market researchers to engage in what they term 'cool hunting'. The cool hunters themselves are employed to be the eyes and ears of youth culture, to seek out the 20% of kids who will influence the other 80%. The information gleaned from these youths can be posted to websites to which other companies can subscribe. Thus, they gain an edge on the marketing of new trends and

subcultures while they are still underground.

Deception and coercion

The documentary explains that marketers have also discovered that the trick to marketing lies in disguising the marketing message. Sprite launched a campaign where they claimed to warn kids not to drink the drink just because a celebrity told them to do so. Next, Sprite dared to penetrate the inner sanctum of teen culture by buying the trust of teens through the development of relationships with hip-hop musicians. In this way they sold the fact that they could relate to the culture. Sprite's ability to marry corporation with culture has made it the fastest growing soft drink in the world.

Mass produced stereotypes

The program explains that this debaucherous form of marketing is not reflective of young people themselves, but identifies what they want as customers. The crass male stereotype, 'the mook', found in South Park and in personalities like Howard Stern 'capitalises on the testosterone driven madness of adolescence. He grabs them below the belt and reaches for their wallet.' And for the girls, there is an equally degrading stereotype dubbed the 'midriff'. She pushes a message to teenage girls, 'flaunt your sexuality even if you don't understand it', 'be a sexual object and be proud of it'.

Frontline's documentary reveals the destructive power that corporate controlled entertainment holds over the shaping of a generation, culturally, morally and spiritually. It critiques the contracting world of media competition, leading to domination by a few powerful players, with tentacles spreading throughout the industry. It describes a commercially saturated culture where a need for fast and cheap effects has allowed profanity to replace the need for creativity and originality. While many of the issues raised are not new to us, the fact that this culture no longer emanates from, but is systematically produced for and consumed by the youth represents a new approach to corporate exploitation. The proliferation of individualism and materialism, and the decaying sense of integrity are effects that pose serious concern for the generations that these values infect.

The video of the Merchants of Cool is available for viewing. We also have a more detailed review of the documentary, which we can email or send to you. If you would like more information please contact the Thomas More Centre, 9326 5757, and ask for Rosy.

The Thomas More Social Action Groups will be launching the
Ring-A-Granny Campaign

**With a meeting and a moonlight movie (Lord of the Rings)
at the Royal Botanic Gardens**

Meet at the ticket office:

Enter via D-Gate, Birdwood Ave, South Yarra

Time: 6:00pm

Date: Saturday 16th March

Cost: adults \$14, concession \$11

Bring a plate or some munchies to share and BYO drinks, pillows, doonas, rugs etc...(armchairs will be confiscated at the gate!)

Note: as this is a popular screening, we have been advised that tickets are likely to sell out the previous day (or earlier).

To ensure you don't miss out we recommend that you buy/book your tickets by Thursday 14th March, through Ticketek 132 849

Contact on the day: Rosy 0415 218 526 or Michael 0438 501 117

We are all called to generously work for the common good, each in whatever way we are able.

There are presently many people, old and not so old, who want to give a donation towards stopping cloning and the other work for the common good that comes out of the Thomas More Centre. But there are not enough helpers to visit or phonethese people.

We in the Thomas More Social Action Groups are going to give a hand to these people so that they can give a hand to make our country more Christian.

Why not advertise in our
Newsletter?

\$40 a month.

This Newsletter is read by
enthusiastic
and active young people.

Here is an opportunity
to promote your business
and support a great movement.

National Civic Council meetings near you.

The NCC has meetings every month in venues near our T MSAG meetings and in other areas too. There is a strong emphasis on action and understanding what we can do in a clever way to improve Australia's political and social environment. Highly recommended! Details: Anthony Cappello, 9236 5757.

Thomas More Social Action Group Newsletter

Editor: Michael Casanova. Sub-Editors: Rosy de Castella, Catherine Sheehan, Anthony Cappello, Eilis O'Reilly, M.J. Donnellan, Laura McCormick.

The Thomas More Social Action Groups are bringing together young people to be formed in the Catholic Social Teachings and to move on to activism and evangelisation.

If you are interested in knowing more about the work of the TMSAGs please call the Thomas More Centre on 9326 5757.

Please note: It is important to submit any published letters or any replies arising from the actions proposed in this newsletter. The editor also

encourages contributions and comments.

Hard copies of the Newsletter are also available – simply call the Thomas More Centre. Other journals available from the Thomas More Centre are: *AD2000*, *News Weekly* and the *Thomas More Bulletin*. Please call the Thomas More Centre for subscription details.

PLEASE NOTE: IN ORDER TO CONTINUE THIS WORK THE THOMAS MORE CENTRE WELCOMES DONATIONS- C/O The Director 582 Queensberry St. North Melbourne 3051