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THINKING CHRISTIANLY  
IN A MEDIA-DOMINATED SOCIETY

by

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### INTRODUCTION

In this paper an attempt will be made to describe the essences of a media-dominated information society, in order that the nature of thinking Christianly may be established and consequently fostered. The emphasis will be from an educational perspective. Huxley's statement that brevity 'however elegant and memorable', 'can never, in the nature of things, do justice to all the facts of a complex situation' is an important starting point (1958:7). It is assumed that one of the most important challenges to a Christian teacher is the persuasive, pervasive and insidious influence of the mass media on him/herself and on his/her students as a source of information. It is believed that this topic provides an excellent platform (however controversial) from which to evaluate contemporary society, its various worldviews, the prevalent distortion of Biblical values, while simultaneously providing a contemporary approach to one's world view as a Christian as a visually literate participant within this all-pervasive popular culture. By using the popular culture to expose its own ideology and power to enculturate, one has to participate in and use (discretely and sensitively) the media to expose itself so that discernment can be facilitated. Its own commentary on itself is a vital source of information for evaluative criteria. The particular dilemma faced by the Christian is as follows:

1. Numbness and the possible enculturation into the worldview of the popular culture;
2. The use of methods by Christian culturizers which they may deplore yet use to create their own cultural artifacts;
3. How to live meaningfully as a Christian in contemporary culture;
4. The gap between faith (worldview) and practice and possible inconsistencies, which bear on the dilemma of the youth in the church.

Firstly, a brief, generalized description of the characteristics of contemporary society.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

McQuail links Ito's idea of the 'information society' (1981) with that of Bell's 'post-industrial society' (1973) in which information is a most valuable resource involving the majority of the labor force (about 80% of the USA workforce in the 80's) in activities, viz. the producing, processing or distributing of information as well as the production of information technology (1987:76). The information society theorists do not argue that the mass media are a major cause in the 'transformation of society posited' (having revolutionary potential) although they may differ on the quantitative aspects of power and influence as well as on the dominance of the mass media versus the potential offered by the mass media for the transmission of a diversity of messages for the sake of diverse groups (pluralism) (McQuail; 1987:76). The approach may vary between that of a media-centered (the media is seen as a means of

communication, a force for change) versus a society-centered one (that other forces besides the media, e.g. money and politics within society have an influence on society and on the media) (McQuail; 1987:59). The mass media and its large scale of operations with almost unlimited access to the audience, as a economic power, and in terms in the 'fact that they can shape what we know about the world and can be a main source of ideas and opinions' precludes that it should be studied (Burton; 1990:1). One of the paradoxes relevant to such a study is that while on the one hand, the world is divided by ideology and developmental level, yet the mass media, not merely from a technological point of view, but also by means of the culture it advocates, serves as a convergent medium. CNN claims as a news network, that it can, on an international level serve to make the global village a reality. Those that own the technology have the power to export knowledge as a commodity and monopolize the dissemination of ideas (including the ideologies).

### Prevailing ideologies

The author claims presumptuously, that the contemporary modern world is secularized, i.e. the focus is on the creature and techniques, rather than the Creator, although there is an ever-increasing need for a renewal of spirituality as manifested in the New Age. Contemporary society is individualistic, self-centered and narcissistic although there is also a paradoxical trend towards conformism and self-doubt. The actual challenge faced is that of 'pluralism' which Gill defines in terms of 'multiplicity, variety, diversity, fragmentation, specialization', characterized by speed, novelty, distraction and exhaustion, all of which are antithetical to unity, wholeness and coherence (1989:35). Within the Christian community, this pluralism is dealt with from a dualistic perspective, which juxtaposes good against evil and right against wrong, the sacred versus the secular and the Christian mind versus the secular mind, which actually complicates the problem for the Christian. Eyre identifies the intense need of modern man for meaning but questions the following ideas offered as guides by the mass media (through its images) to personal value:

Secularism - 'I am sufficient without God' so that God is either limiting, limited or absent in one's personal life;

Individualism - 'I am the source of my own value' and that others are only useful for a mirror of myself;

Materialism - 'I am what I own' so that accumulation and affluence and matter are all that matter;

Activism - 'I am what I do'. Life is filled with action so that consuming careers (busyness) and what I do and produce provides life with meaning;

Conformism - 'I am who others recognize me to be' which emphasizes conformity to an image outside of oneself thus betraying an underlying dissatisfaction and discontentment with one's reality;

Relativism - 'I am whatever I want to believe' with an emphasis on positive thinking and a personal definition of ethics and aesthetics (1987:14,15);

Hedonism - the glorification of pleasure for pleasure's sake;

Naturalism - whatever feels good is good (especially if it tickles erotic fantasies);

Narcissism - the idea that living for oneself (excessive self-absorption to secure self-fulfillment) will secure ultimate happiness while looking to others to validate a sense of self (yet afraid of intimacy), with an irrational fear of old age (Mason; 199?:10);

A worldview based on the above ideas is adequately illustrated by Knapp who proposes that the media's image of physical normality of thinness, exercise as discipline and strength so that anorexia, bulimia, over-exercise and depression have become the response to an inadequate physical appearance. Personal worth has become epitomized in glamorized images, (the influence of advertising) which are themselves essentially unrealistic and even ironically a 'disguise'. An individual with a poor self-image who seeks a self-image in this way may actually lose his/her identity. Cindy Crawford (an archetype of 'beauty') comments:

"What is regrettable is that our society is so obsessed with youth and beauty. In a way, because of what I am, I feel to blame for propagating some of these ideas. When I appear on a magazine cover, my image is perfect because it's been done by talented hairdressers and make-up artists. The picture is taken by a great photographer and later retouched very carefully before it's printed. Believe me, that isn't what I see when I look at my unvarnished self in the mirror some days" (as quoted in a fashion guide to Edgar's club; 1992:12).

Rodin makes an insightful observation on the new social standards as exposed by the media, of which the physical self (the body image) has become the 'premier coin' as a measure of one's social worth:

"The quest for physical perfection is the up-to-date way we barter with the uncertainty of life... In the chaos called modern life, ordering the body to do what we want it to may give us a much-needed illusion of control... "The burden of maintaining a perfect body image is far too costly. Women are crippled by a tragic degree of self-consciousness that limits other aspects of their lives..." (1992:58,60).

Materialism and consumerism are therefore reinforced, as personal inadequacy is believed to be overcome by buying personal worth in terms of advertising images. Wood summarizes it succinctly:

"If your life is unsatisfactory, there's always a new shampoo to try, a new Spielberg movie to see, the next installment of a TV sit-com, the chance of winning a lottery" (as quoted by O'Shaughnessy', 1990:88).

The tragedy inherent in this is the gross disillusionment with reality and the incredible need to be told stories with 'assured coziness', and 'happy endings' in order to survive a harsh, confused reality (Cupitt; 1985:39). Walsh identifies the role of scientism, technism, and economism in the media's worldview, which is perpetrating the progress myth of a technological utopia (1992:16). He concludes:

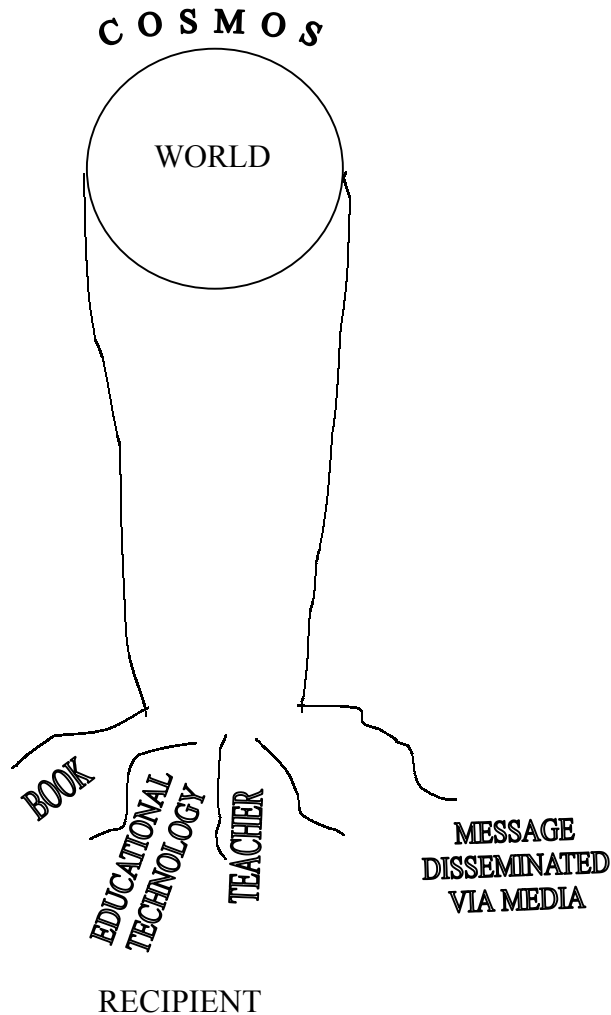
"For us to be liberated to image God in our cultural context also requires a sensitive and discerning reading or diagnosis of that culture" (Walsh; 1992:27).

It is not sufficient to identify evil in the world as evil must be overcome with good by means of individual discovery or by presentation by a trusted authority of something of greater worth (Hill; 1992). Sensitivity to a constructed reality is a pre-requisite to understanding what is really real.

## FUNCTION OF THE MASS MEDIA – THE CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

The following diagram conceptualizes the process of the construction of knowledge in which the generator by means of questions asked (with some significant ones unasked), produces knowledge that reflects a particular world view, ethic and aesthetic, which is then disseminated via various media, with the emphasis here on the role of the mass media

### CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE



Basically, the ideas about the purpose of the media in society center around information, correlation, continuity, entertainment and mobilization as well as the function of mediation (cultural, social and political), which has both negative and positive connotations. Mediation is an attempt to epitomize the nature of the mass media in terms of the content disseminated, as well as the medium used to transmit

that message with its particular technology. It refers to the way in which the media come between the 'audience and the original material' on which their content and message is based so that their version is mere representation, a construction of signs, which is not real but artificial (Burton; 1990:180). Essentially it refers to the way in which the media 'connects' us to reality, which includes the following:

- a window on experience to extend one's own vision in a personal way which may itself be mediated or biased;
- an **interpreter, which** offers an explanation to make sense of fragmentary representations of events;
- a **platform or carrier** of information which is either factual or opinionated;
- an **interactive link, which relates communicators and recipients by**, means of different kinds of feedback;
- a **signpost** i.e. giving instruction and guidance;
- a filter, i.e. selecting out parts of experience for special attention while simultaneously shutting out other parts of experience (either deliberately, systematically or not) (also referred to as agenda setting);
- a mirror which reflects to society an image of itself with some distortion which is what the public demands to see about itself or what is believed to be unacceptable and therefore needs attention;
- a **screen or barrier** which conceals truth for the sake of escapism or propaganda (McQuail; 1987:53).

O'Shaughnessy compounds this by suggesting that television 'constructs a view of the world but naturalizes that view' and makes it normal by hiding its own means of construction, i.e. the editing, the selection, the lighting, and camerawork. It assumes naturally given values in its 'mode of address' to its viewers and claims that it is the business of entertaining which is supposedly value-free! (1990:97). The messages making up the ideology may appear to be naturalized but the ideology is still there (Burton; 1990:180). The media's own definition of its role is ambivalent, viz. it vacillates between a socially responsible role in the sense of being a 'watch-dog' with its own set of values which are believed to be necessary for the survival of a group and its culture, while simultaneously propagating 'socially acceptable' ideas as norms (in terms of their acceptance by the consensus of society!), that may however, be immoral and essentially detrimental (even fatal) to the survival of that particular group and its culture. Agenda-setting implies that those issues that are believed to be worthy of attention and comment are exposed. The version to be viewed or read is further edited so that the media's own perception of the issue is given. Repetition to the masses signifies the significance of an issue. It is possible that those issues that are inherently serious may be laughed at, mocked or downplayed. Entertainment may mean systematic trivialization and/or conscious control. The mass media serve as opinion leaders and opinion makers. Postman's idea of 'amusing ourselves to death' is relevant as well as his definition of teaching as essentially a 'subversive' activity.

It is important to note the confusion about the function of the mass media as a powerful social institution, its potential influence, with reference to its sense of purpose - whether it is informing or entertaining; the consequences of its activities - 'how much' and 'what' its recipients are 'learning'; the requirements and expectations of its consumers in terms of the responsibility of the media towards its recipients. The

informational purpose can lead to disinformation (intentional or not) and/or misinformation because of bias in selection or misrepresentation. Infotainment and eductainment are two significant concepts as they connote the dangerous mix of that which is relevant, of life and death importance, with that which is trivial and of little consequence so that the attention of the mass man/woman (which would include the anaesthetized, 'uneducated' Christian) is diverted to that which is pleasing. That which is of actual eternal significance to those 'in exile' becomes increasingly unimportant, so that the coming of the Redeemer could be as a thief in the night!

"In sum, youth-oriented popular entertainment constitutes regularly contested ground - contested between generations and contested internally. On the one hand, new media promise freedom, but on the other hand, they contain their own covert system of control that helps to conform youth to a new socio-economic system" (Schultze; 1991:17).

The idea of conformity suggests connotations of 'mass' with significant implications.

### Mass - an ambivalent concept

The concept mass with reference particularly to the mass media and its consumers has both positive and negative connotations. It reflects both the idea of mass production, technological development as well as the large audience that can be reached. An important nuance is the idea of an 'amorphous collectivity in which the components are hard to distinguish from each other', as well as the possible loss of individuality in the mass as aggregate (McQuail; 1987:29). In the context of 'mob' or 'unruly group', there are negative nuances of ignorance, a lack of culture and even of rationality (McQuail; 1987:29). In the socialist tradition there is a positive aspect of strength and solidarity when the masses work together, and quantity suggests mass support, movement and mass action (McQuail; 1987:29). The mass society theory has been built around this concept of mass and proposes that the media is the cause of and maintainer of mass society and rests on the idea that the media offer a view of the world as well as an aid to 'psychic survival under difficult conditions' (McQuail; 1987:63). The implications of the mass or popular culture on mass man and the reality of passivity and mediocrity on the Christian are important.

### MADE IN THE IMAGE OF... the essences of popular culture

The term popular culture is an elusive one to define. According to Rosenberg and White, it is the 'typical content produced and disseminated by mass media' (as quoted by McQuail; 1987:35). Television is the most dominant medium and its marriage with rock 'n roll in the music video are significant forces that in both style and content, reflect the spirit of the age, which therefore need to be understood in terms of influence on thinking and feeling (Myers; 1989:xvi, xiii). It is difficult to assess 'popular culture' because it is not only so deeply rooted in our culture, but there is a desire to deny the 'validity of our own pleasures in these forms (O'Shaughnessy; 1990:91). Historically, entertainment has been seen as 'easy, pleasurable, hedonistic and democratic' in comparison to the more serious, elitist high culture (O'Shaughnessy; 1990:91). McQuail attempts to define mass culture by comparing it with high culture

and folk culture and conclude:

- 1 Mass culture was facilitated by the mass media;
- 2 The media have tended to 'colonize' high and folk culture for content and forms;
- 3 The mass media are implicated in the production of mass culture and provide the channels for distributing it;
- 4 Culture is an important element in the conception of a good society and a desirable way of life;
- 5 Mass culture is mass-produced for a mass market in which technology is used in a planned and organized way;
- 6 Whereas high culture is 'ambiguous, disturbing and timeless' and folk culture is 'unselfconscious' in meaning and purpose and although it may persist in time, it is not universal, mass culture is 'superficial, unambiguous, pleasing, universal but perishable';
- 7 The purpose of high culture is to provide intellectual satisfaction, to enlarge and deepen experience whereas mass culture is to provide immediate gratification and a diversion (1987; 37).
- 8 Fiske suggests that popular culture unlike folk culture is 'evanescent and ephemeral' and is constantly searching for novel evidences and ever-changing resources from which its culture can be produced (1989:171). An important distinction here is that of high versus popular versus folk culture. However, it is important to note that each is different and that one is not necessarily the criterion for judging any one of the others. High culture may not provide criteria for evaluation of the other categories because of its supposed superiority (Seerveld; 1992:). Within each of these categories, that which is of quality should be sought out as a means of understanding God, man, society and others.

Popenoe suggests that popular culture offers an alternate life with its own life style, which is in competition (because of its own appeal) with that of the traditional social institutions, including education and religion, thereby putting pressure on the child to be a citizen of both cultures (a type of schizophrenia), having contrary ideas but with no inner commitment to either (1980:385). The idea of popularity can either be an indication of its positive or negative value 'depending on the 'alignment to "the people" (O'Sullivan; 1983:174). Therefore the question arises, are the products of the media 'good' because they are popular, or 'bad' (i.e. 'more means worse') because they're popular? (Ibid.; 1983:174). The ambiguity of this concept has two aspects, firstly, the extent to which the popular culture is imposed on the people (by the mass media or state) or 'derived' from their own taste, experience and habits, and secondly, the expression of the powerless as an alternative way of doing or seeing to that of the dominant or official culture (Ibid.; 1983:175). The popular culture provides many opportunities for enjoying the best of human experience but simultaneously presents itself as an obstacle to enjoying the very best because it is trivial, pervasive, and is the substance of modern life which is often a sad reflection of that which could have been (Myers; 1989:xiii).

Popular culture is a broad concept for thinking about the ideological meaning and pleasures of popular television programmes (O'Shaughnessy; 1990:88). Essentially popular culture has its own way of making sense of the world and therefore offers its own way of understanding society. The cultural critics argue

that because of its orientation towards pleasure and entertainment, the popular culture addresses everyone regardless of age, class, gender so that it must be viewed as a 'crucial site' in which ideologies are produced, hegemony is established and consciousness is constructed (O'Shaughnessy; 1990:90). Popular culture is actually contradictory in its effects: it wins the support of the people while 'maintaining the power of the dominant groups and the oppression of the people'. Ironically therefore, it serves to gratify the people while contributing to their enslavement. The negative view claims it is the new 'opiate of the people' which keeps the masses 'moronically content with their lot and their oppression', whereas the positive view sees it as a form of the people's own cultural values that are separate and more authentic than that of the high culture and which may serve as a means of challenging the status quo (O'Shaughnessy; 1990:90,91). For television to be acceptable (to the recipient or to the disseminator?) it should connect with the actual experience of people in terms of both their real and fantasy lives so that we can each recognize dreams, our desires and ourselves. The way in which television programs negotiate social issues are actually inherently contradictory as they generally include several sets of meanings so that for example, a comedy may be read as socially disruptive, anarchic and subversive (O'Shaughnessy, 1990:94,96). Essentially many of the television programs actually support the dominant group because they neglect to question the power of the group so that ideology works by 'masking, displacing and naturalizing' social problems and contradictions.

There can be no popular dominant culture because popular culture is formed as a reaction to the forces of domination (Fiske; 1989:44). Therefore an important aspect to note is that of the 'interplay of forces' in the 'constant struggle between the power-bloc and the people' so that the cultural context of popular culture items must be analyzed in that context. The practices of popular culture 'constitute everyday life' and that these clashes of social interests are motivated by pleasure, i.e. of producing one's own meaning of 'social experience' and avoiding the 'social discipline of the power-bloc' (Fiske; 1989:47). Fiske uses the example of jeans and shows how that 'whole jeans' connote 'shared meanings of contemporary America' so that fashionable jeans have to be disfigured in order that distancing one's self from these values occurs (1989:4).

The following are believed to be essential characteristics of the popular culture:

1. Consumption and instant gratification so that the consumers have become passive and have developed a taste which may spoil one's taste for something better:

"Popular culture has the power to set the pace, the agenda, the priorities for much of our social and our spiritual existence, without our explicit consent. It requires a great effort not to be mastered by it" (Myers; 1989:xiv).

Schultze remarks on consumption:

"As things now stand, both the entertainment industry and many local authority figures treat youth as mere objects or receptors to be molded by good and bad consumption" (1991:10);

2. Expectation of everything to be immediate and therefore brief and superficial. Time is no obstacle and timelessness (classic) is not valued;
3. Contradictory, so that e.g. jeans can be simultaneously an expression of both domination and subordination, of resistance and of power,

4. Is part of power relations and focuses on the popular tactics by which these forces are coped with, evaded or resisted;
5. Is potentially creative and finds in the vitality of the people, evidence of the possibility of social change and the motivation to drive it. It must be relevant to the immediate situation of the people. Relevance unlike aesthetics is time- and place-bound. Relevance requires relativity, which means that it denies 'closure, absolutes and universals'. One of the pleasures of popular culture lies in the 'perceiving and exploiting these points of pertinence' and in selecting from the range of the commodities of the culture industries, those items that enable one to make popular sense out of popular experience (Fiske; 1989:135). Popular discrimination is determined by realistic hedonism and skeptical materialism (Fiske; 1989:141). It is a culture, which develops from within as it is made by the people;
6. Is found to be meaningful through the activities of buying and displaying products and images so that the mall offers a sense of supposed community as well as identity;
7. Is characterized by its fluidity;
8. Is engaged in entertainment which is not merely intended for fun or pleasure, but has the purpose of developing 'dedicated customers by offering... the keys to knowing oneself and becoming popular' (Schultze; 1991:8);
9. Tends to the excessive which invites its denigrators to attack it as 'vulgar', 'melodramatic', 'obvious', 'superficial', 'sensational'. The popularity of sensational publications is evidence of the extent of dissatisfaction in a society especially felt by those who feel powerless to change their situation. They provide a strange statement (characterized by abnormality), on contemporary norms and provide a macabre fantasy from which to escape the drabness of everyday life (Fiske; 1989:116). Popular texts may be progressive in that they encourage the 'production of meanings that work to change or destabilize the social order' but never radical enough to overthrow that order, because these meanings are formed within the structures of dominance (Fiske; 1989:133). The youth are early 'enmeshed in adulthood, with the eroding of 'shame' as privacy becomes public and the fine line between childhood and adulthood is moved back into childhood (Postman; 1982:85). Madonna is an 'exemplary popular text' because she is so full of contradictions:
 

"... She contains the patriarchal meanings of feminine sexuality and the resisting ones that her sexuality is hers to use as she wishes in ways that do not require masculine approval. Her sexuality offers both patriarchy and ways of resisting it in an anxious, unstable tension. She is so excessive and obvious; she exceeds all the norms of the sexualized female body and exposes their obviousness along with her midriff. Her equalization of her navel is a parody of patriarchy's eroticisation of female body fragments - she is a patriarchal text shot through with skepticism (Fiske; 1989:124);
10. Is marked by repetition and seriality so that it is perceived as 'easy' and fits in with the routines of everyday life, offering popular meanings and pleasures. 'Popular pleasures must be those of the oppressed, they must contain elements of the oppositional, the evasive, the scandalous, the offensive, the vulgar, the resistant" (Fiske; 1989:127);
11. Emphasizes the generation gap in which many parents hand over the raising of their children to 'Hollywood', to the cultural elite at a critical time in which the family is fragmented so that the youth

are driven to these quasi-parents and heroes for support (Schultze; 1991:5,8). The media serves to 'unite' the youth in a 'generational enclave' while simultaneously disconnecting them from traditional influences and from the broader culture (high and folk) as well as from reality (Schultze; 1991:47);

12. Rewards youthfulness and criticizes maturity so that maturation is not necessarily promoted among the youth and adults pay tribute to the youth culture in their own trendy dress, romantic teenage liaisons and plastic surgery (Schultze; 1991:5,6);
13. Distances the youth from their community and renders the ideal of service ridiculous to the mind of a consumer (Schultze; 1991:11);
14. Serves as a model for Christian culture with some 'cleaning up' of the original versions e.g. of rock (Schultze; 1991:10). Fischer comments:  
"Contemporary Christian music allows hip Christians to roll without straying from the Rock" (1988:141);
15. Confuses the issue of whether life should be leisure or work so that a distortion of leisure leads to the experience of less joy and intimacy with a consequent need to satisfy an insatiable appetite (Schultze; 1991:10);
16. Has resulted in an obsession with images so that how we appear is more important than who we are. The familiarity with images spoils our relationships with real people so that we are *constantly* comparing them with our expectations of their image instead of appreciating them for their own uniqueness. It is possible that when the real person begins to break through the image that disillusionment sets in (Fischer, 1988:44);

However, within popular culture there is an alternative culture which serves as a commentary on contemporary society, on its norms and worldview which may however, not be Christian in perspective, but of importance to the Christian for an understanding of the various dimensions of these contradictory worldviews that are so enticing. The consumers of popular culture are in a symbiotic relationship with the mass media as the media need the youth market and image, and the youth need the media for guidance and support to replace the loss of influence of the traditional social institutions. An important aspect to consider is the power of the media to enculturate.

### Media acculturation

This concept highlights the idea that the media is a powerful social institution having its own culture, with the following implications:

1. Essentially the message of the media cannot assume the characteristics of discourse. The media allow only for the transmission of brief, entertaining, simplistic, over-generalized, stereotypical messages with no time for seriousness or detail. Huxley warns that 'omission and simplification help us to understand' but generally 'to understand the wrong *thing*; for our comprehension may be only of the abbreviator's neatly formulated notions, not of the vast, ramifying reality from which these notions have been so arbitrarily abstracted' (1958:7). Even the news must be newsworthy, that is visual (the emphasis being on the available or simulated images) and *sensational*.

2. Marcuse proposes that the mass media are 'engaged in "selling" or imposing a whole social system' which is both repressive and desirable (as quoted by McQuail; 1987:83). Information may be used as propaganda, but it is also possible that the media may be implicated in the stimulation of and satisfaction of 'false needs' for the purpose of assimilating groups who actually have no 'real material interest in common' into a "one-dimensional society" (as quoted by McQuail; 1987:84). Man has extended himself by means of his media and in so doing has shaped both his world and himself.
3. Enzensberger claims that the media may be viewed as a 'mechanism' for encouraging 'passivity by receivers' (as quoted by McQuail; 1987:84). The underlying principle of visual literacy is inherent in the avoidance of an anaesthetized approach to the mass media.
4. The media's view of the world is essentially a substitute one, that is a pseudo-environment which is not only potentially a potent means of 'manipulation' of the people, but also an 'aid to their psychic survival under difficult conditions' by keeping away the 'real reality'. C Wright Mills suggests: "Between consciousness and existence stand communication which influences such consciousness as men have of their existence" (as quoted by McQuail; 1987:63). Inherent in the idea of the mass media is a centralized control over the individual in spiritual isolation so that the individual does not have a chance to realize his/her own collective interest.
5. The possibility of a direct link between economic ownership and the dissemination of messages, which 'affirm the legitimacy, and value of a class society' is an important assumption. The mass media are 'commonly regarded' as 'effective instruments of power' because of their capacity to do one or more of the following:
  - "Attract and direct attention
  - Persuade in matters of opinion and belief
  - Influence behavior (e.g. voting, buying)
  - Confer status and legitimacy
  - Define and structure perceptions of reality" (McQuail; 1987:82).

Marx pointed out that the class which has the means of material production also controls the means of mental production which makes it the ruling class, to which the others are subject. Hegemony refers to the 'ruling ideology' and the way in which the victims are shaped (McQuail; 1987:65).

6. Cultural imperialism or media imperialism refer to the way in which fashions, styles, cultural values of the dominant nations are 'exported' by means of films, TV programs, records, news, and advertisements from 'a highly restricted number of internationally dominant sources of media production (notably the USA) to media systems in developing national and cultural contexts' (O'Sullivan et al.; 1983:63). The local cultures therefore fear the domination of western culture and the displacement of their own cultural values.

Each of the media codifies reality differently and therefore each makes its own statement in its own way because of its unique qualities. The media have been categorized into hot, cool and cold 'mediums' according to the amount of sensory involvement by the recipient (viewer/reader) in terms of 'being filled with data' so that hot media are low in participation and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience (Morgan and Welton; 1986:118). The film is therefore 'hotter' than the novel and the television is considered a 'cool' medium in comparison to the film. A medium that requires participation by the audience diminishes its manipulative implication, as its views are not merely imposed on the viewer (Morgan & Welton; 1986:48). Ironically, then participation is invited while simultaneously directing the viewer to new ways of seeing! Psychological closure is the action of the viewer who takes a minimum of clues and mentally fills in non-existing information in order to arrive at an easily manageable pattern so that gaps are closed (Zettl; as quoted by Steyn; 1990:3). Therefore meaning comes also from the white spaces and the gaps, which are left open to the suggestibility and participation by the viewer. The mass media pay lip service to the distinctiveness of the individual by providing images of customization while propagating the belief that personal worth is founded in consumerism - love is like toothpaste and can be bought or disposed of - thus causing massification. This detracts from the individuality of each human being.

### Mass man

Ellul refers to the process of massification, which is the result of the propaganda of the new technology as follows:

"Man becomes a mass man in the new framework imposed upon him because he is unable to remain for very long at variance with his milieu" (1964:333).

The mass man is defined as follows:

"...the ordinary man who rebels against his own true destiny, and dares to stress, with pride, his mediocrity" (Ortega; as quoted by Steyn; 1990:16).

Information has become a commodity and the private, intimate thoughts of human beings can be circulated to a mass audience. The media may make changes in the cognition, norms, values, attitudes and behavior of the individual by bringing each one into contact with new identities and aspirations, as portrayed in glamorized images or 'looking-glasses', of what one would like to be. The individual has been brought into the sight of 'larger, higher reference groups - groups, real or imagined, up-close or vicarious, personally known or distractedly glimpsed' (Mills as quoted by Steyn; 1990:16). This 'public' serves to represent everybody and yet no one in particular so that a personal viewpoint becomes irrelevant as only public opinion is relevant. A frightening consequence is that the standard of comparison becomes the statistical average of the majority to which the individual is expected to conform. Mass man therefore refers to the member of the masses who regards himself as a typical specimen, no different from anyone else and having no special worth. Ironically, therefore the mass media tell man who he is, what he wants to be, how to get to be like that and then provide him with an escape so that he feels that way even if he does not. Therefore modern man has access to volumes of information, filtered through the mass media

system and is therefore on the one hand better informed about those issues deemed to be of significance by the perpetrators of mass messages, while simultaneously possibly less informed about those matters that are of great concern to his future and a life of meaning.

Parents may encouraging the participation of the youth in this process of massification by directing their beauty and energy towards materialism and consumerism while they actually are in need of guidance and support and evidence of the Christian mind in the adults (Schultze; 1991:2).

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHRISTIAN MIND

The assumption here is that acquiring the Christian mind is a lifelong process of 'bringing into captivity every thought' in which efforts are directed towards the following six characteristics:

1. Theological mind - the focus of the mind on God (Prov 9: 10), which presupposes an openness of mind and a 'both-worldly' (rather than 'other-worldly' or 'this-worldly') orientation to one's reality, which requires that many viewpoints, be considered;
2. Historical mind - contemporary culture is essentially existentialist which fosters a hedonistic, momentary orientation, thus limiting one's historical sense in terms of both the past and the future;
3. Humanist mind - the Christian mind goes beyond selfish narcissism, impersonal and predatory relationships to an intense concern for persons and the valuing of human life;
4. Ethical mind - this suggests an ethical sensitivity to good and evil which is Biblically-based (Rom 12:9,21);
5. Truthful mind - a recognition of both subjective and objective truth as claimed by Jesus in John 14:6, and the consequent responsibility of the knower about the known truth which also provides a wholeness, integrity and unity for life;
6. Aesthetic mind - a concern for that which is beautiful and lovely which requires a transcendence of one's own taste or preference in order that something better can be attained (Gill; 1989:68-75).

An analogy of the characteristics of the popular culture and the characteristics of the Christian mind reveals a tension which will give credence to the dilemma of contemporary man as expressed by Paul in Romans 7:24. Therefore thinking Christianly is essentially an operative term in which the goal is the restoration of the image of God in the mind of modern man/woman, enabling him/her to identify the distortions in the images of the reality presented by the mass media as well as being criticized by the mass media, while simultaneously living 'comfortably' and yet not numbly, as a relevant modern man/woman, with an empathic approach to the needs of the mass man/woman.

### MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD...

#### Thinking Christianly

The above discussion has exposed a number of areas that need to be addressed in a Christian Seventh-day Adventist educational context:

1. The clash between the world views of the media, the ambivalence and the double-standards needs to be compared with a worldview that is Biblically-based for the purpose of non-contradictory joy and to reveal that which is real, true and good (Phil 4:8, Romans 12:2). As suggested above, the media-mediated view of reality and truth is inherently unrealistic and deterministic especially to the Christian and the search for the Truth, which makes one free, becomes a necessity (cf. 1 Cor 2:14, 2 Cor 3:14, Phil 2:5, 2 Cor 10:5, Col. 3:2). It is probable that the unthinking and fragmented individual is more susceptible to the degrading and destructive manipulation of the advertiser, propagandist and demagogue. Therefore order that comes from a Christian worldview and the ability to filter *through* the messages that are disseminated from the media are essential aspects of the Christian mind (Gill; 1989:29).
2. The development of a Christian aesthetic with an underlying motive to empathically understand the 'mass man/woman' who are insensitive to the influence of the popular culture (ironically as a result of the inherent nature of the popular culture) on his/her thinking and worldview. One of the real problems of the thinking Christian is the gap between what he/she believes and how he/she lives, especially with reference to his/her involvement with the mass media. Christian communities vary in their outlook toward the media, but independent of that, daily personal choices need to be made that will reflect a cultural transcendence and a culture transforming approach rather than an attitude of escaping from the world. Fischer describes the dangers of 'fromming' as follows:  
 "The question is simple and straightforward. Are you in the world or are you escaping it? The issue is black and white. You are either walking into the world and into reality or you are walking away from it and into fantasy - because there's only one world and it's an ugly one... Jesus instructed Christians to be in the world and not of it. This position demands a discriminating awareness and yet, to date, the church's response to contemporary culture has been for the most part either reactionary (resulting in retreat) or non-existent (resulting in unconscious involvement)" (1988:129).

Thinking Christianly about the information-saturated world entails far more than listing suitable films, magazines, music or television programs for Christians to watch or listen to. Basic to this approach is the idea in Jesus' prayer of John 17:15:

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one". Jesus did not come to create a world within a world but He came to understand the prostitute, the leper, the criminal, and the crazy maniac and to sensitively, where they were, reveal to them the love of God and the promise of salvation. Christian escapism as an undesirable mark of Christianity; that is Christians are known by what they do not do rather than by what they do and warns of the consequences of this attitude as follows:

"When our only distinctiveness in society comes from avoiding certain things, we can easily fix our gaze on the evil and view the rest of the world judgmentally" (Fischer, 1988:141).

Jesus has not saved from the world but rather to the world just as He came into the world, not to condemn it but to rather be a Friend of sinners. Developing fragile Christians who live in a controlled, censored environment is not the answer to the sin problem. The sacred/secular distinction is actually a matter of

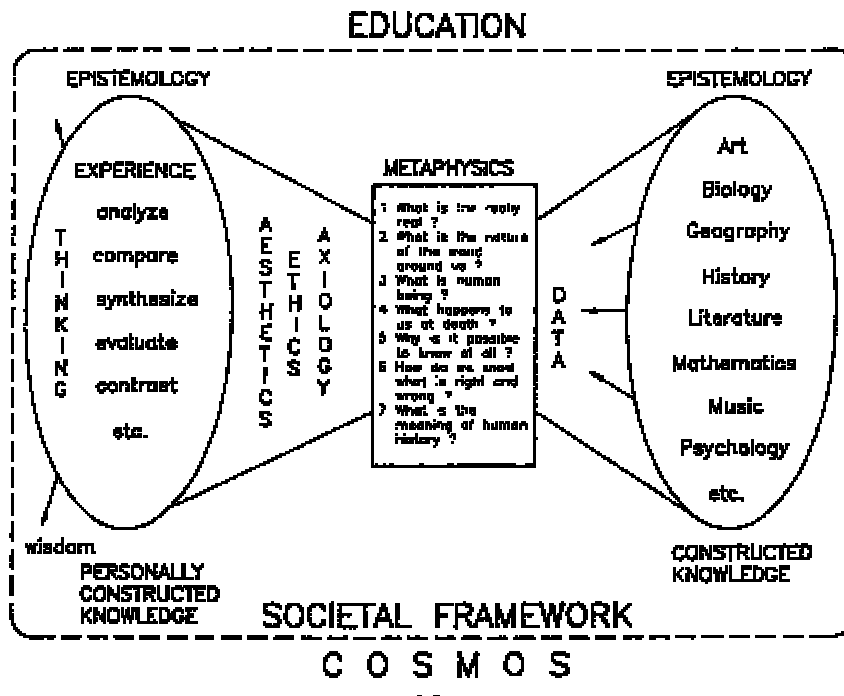
eyesight and we always find what we are looking for (Fischer, 1988:153). What we need then is a deep look into the Word of God so that our eyesight is reconstructed in order that we can see things correctly rather than having to be protected from it:

"A pure heart comes from knowing Jesus Christ and having Him recreate our hearts and minds through His Word. It's strictly an inside job. Once that process of change has begun, we begin to see differently. The Word of God becomes a compass that points us toward truth. With our new-found eyesight, we begin to shift out truth from wherever we find it - even in the most unlikely places. "To the pure, all things are pure" (Fischer, 1988:153).

The approach suggested is therefore that a curriculum should be established in which various courses will be taught with the aim of developing Christian thinking about the world as exposed by the mass media. What follows is a suggested framework.

Philosophy

Based on the idea that students should be taught to think rather than to be mere reflectors of other men's thoughts (White; 1903:17), the following diagram serves to visualize a suitable philosophy of education by which to approach the world of knowledge and to filter the data received through a biblically-based metaphysic and axiology.



## Method

A significant observation on the mass media is that it presumes that it has assumed social responsibility by revealing its own particular methods of mediating reality to the masses so that there are ample examples of this, which can be obtained from the media to be used as subject matter for discussion in classes. The suggestion is that class sessions consist of viewing media excerpts relevant to the topic under discussion followed by discussion in which students exercise their visual literacy, critical thinking and discernment skills and relate it to their own worldview. Thinking Christianly is essentially exploring visual literacy and the development of a Christian aesthetic with the following suggested objectives:

## Knowledge of

1. A definition of reality and truth compared to the mass media's messages and meanings, which includes mediation and realism;
  - 1.1 the role of and nature of fantasy and entertainment and infotainment
  - 1.2 The use of gimmicks, stunts, introvision, montage, glass illusion, simulation, animation and body doubles in order to establish the nature of constructed reality
  - 1.3 prevailing ideologies, the popular culture and the value systems represented
  - 1.4 the study of signs (semiotics) and images, their denotative, *connotative and* ideological meanings (signification)
  - 1.5 the codes and conventions used to represent reality namely, kinesics, proxemics, non-verbal communication, editing, construction of sound, cinematography, the objective and subjective use of the camera, the use of various lenses, angles, vectors, composition
  - 1.6 Psychological closure
2. The concepts of communication including feedback, which are essential for achieving intersubjectivity
3. Conformity and the mass man
4. Stereotypes and myths
5. Empathy as the ability to perceive as others perceive in an attempt to understand their world in order that they may be reached because they feel understood
6. The various media and their unique characteristics and the nature of the message of each
7. Media power, monopoly and acculturation
8. Agenda-setting
9. The relationship between the media and society
10. The audience
11. Media policy and ethics, and censorship
12. Various genre, style and themes
13. Presenters, stars and personalities
14. The production of news
15. The production of narrative
16. Advertising and persuasion

17. The effects of the media, e.g. on children and violence
18. The historical development of any one of the noted film directors to establish his worldview and statements on reality, truth and what is meaningful.

### Skills

The student should evidence the following skills:

1. Critical thinking, which allows for the suspension of judgment until the message, as intended is believed to be understood
2. Discernment the ability to identify the denotation, connotation and ideology being espoused
3. Evaluation of the meanings of the message
4. Judgment of that message in terms of his/her own worldview
5. Empathy in which there is openness to the reality of another so that one's perception of reality and truth is continually being refined, modified and yet reaffirmed in terms of Truth
6. Aesthetics - an understanding of the use of the techniques of the media to construct reality in order that an analysis may be made of the message and the medium.

### Valuing

Because the media is concerned with social issues it forms the basis for virtually any issue for almost any discipline as it is a major source of information. The following are a few examples:

1. The value of time is a prime consideration as the suggestion is that most American people, apart from eating, sleeping, and working, spend about 80% of their entire lives in the television world (Fore; 1987:16). This infers the quality use of time and of leisure and a balance between escapism and reflection.
2. The value of intimacy and the role of the family in society are important because of the double standards in the portrayal of love, romance and sex. The idea that love can be bought and disposed of as espoused in the advertising must be evaluated. Therefore it is essential to evaluate reel love versus real love. Films such as 'Dangerous liaisons' and 'Shirley Valentine' are powerful investigations of the results of unrequited love and disappointment over a lifestyle of promiscuity, which shows up the consequences of following a lifestyle based on the ideology of 'I want your sex'.
3. Human dignity and the worth of human beings in terms of their personhood rather than their image is essential to the development of sound relationships to offset the loss of identity and personal worth, isolation and loneliness which leads to conformity.

## CONCLUSION

If education is to be redemptive, and its focus is on the restoration of the image of God in man, then a study of the mass media must be given a place in the curriculum as it is believed that it has assumed the role of the priesthood in the secular society and must therefore be counterbalanced with a Christian perspective on reality and truth. Its portrayal of salvation is not redemptive but rather it is essentially damning in terms of its functional and pragmatic utilitarianism and relativism. Technique has become a morality and a method of problem solving and image has become the norm for success in politics, in business and socially. Images are believed to be 'proof of what they represent' as well as of 'currentness' and yet the fact that we prefer to see reality through its images as encoded by someone else denies our own dignity and individuality because the person 'who emits and controls images produces conformity' (Ellul; 1985:142). Ellul concludes:

"The spectacle-oriented society makes a spectacle of itself, transforming all into spectacle and paralyzing everything by this means" (1985:115).

This availability and multiplication of images thus results in a demand for everything immediately as well as the 'dread of the end of the world' (Ellul; 1985:209). The only answer to these problems lies in a biblically-based view. The ultimate aim of education is service that is the dissemination of hope-saturated information about a Savior-hero to a media-dominated world so that life can be lived with meaning and wisely.

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