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Religious Television
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JOHN G. P. MADIGAN

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RELIGIOUS TELEVISION
in
LANSING and EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN

By
John G. P. Madigan

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

RELIGIOUS TELEVISION in LANSING and EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN

By

John G. P. Madigan

Religion is a topic of conversation for all seasons. From the smallest of tribes to the greatest of nations, the issue of God and the attending problems be they on the legislative level, on the constitutional level or on the mere community level have been a source of joy and wonderment and a source of bedevilment for the people involved. The question of God within the context of television also crosses the community, legislative, and constitutional arms of society.

This writing will look at the uses of television within the communities of Lansing and East Lansing by groups who call themselves Christian. It will seek to examine the message that is being put across and the people who are framing the message. The writing will also seek to examine the relationship of the audience to the message.

The methodology used will be on site interviews with personnel from Continental Cable, United Artist Cable System(TCI), Channel 39(the Religious Channel) and St. Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic Church which uses public access and commercial T.V. on a regular basis. Specifically we will be looking at the people who broadcast religious programs and their relationship with the prevalent ideology of their

society.

This study is a theoretical and developmental discussion of religious programming on public access and commercial television in Lansing and East Lansing.

Chapter I reviews current writings then situates the question in a theological framework. Chapter II reviews four local sources of religious broadcasting; Continental Cable Public Access, TCI Cable Public Access, Channel 39 Public Access, and St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church. Chapter III discusses a populist culture which nibbles at the art of the preacher and bypasses the preacher's theology for fast food. In Chapter IV, there is a an examination of the architecture of television and televised religious programs. A developmental framework of television viewing stages as they relate to religious television is discussed in Chapter V. The final chapter, Chapter VI, explores the year 2000 and beyond. Religious broadcasting struggles against the "media bite"! Where lies its own identity?

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CHAPTER I

I will make a Star-Chamber matter of it.
I.i.1

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR
William Shakespeare

Stand up! --- stand up for Jesus!
The Psalmist, Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus
George Duffield 1818 - 1888

For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to
go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is
to move.
Travels with a Donkey(1879). Cheylard and Luc

It is incident to physicians, I am afraid, beyond
all other men, to mistake subsequences for
consequence.
Review Dr. Lucas' Essay on Waters p.91 25 Nov 1734
Samuel Johnson 1709-1784

In this introduction, although I have referenced several
of the books that place the whole paper in context, at this
point I would like to highlight just a few. One of the more
specific authors who deals with evangelism, televangelism and
radioevangelism, is Quentin J. Schultze author of several
books Televangelism and the American Culture, is the editor of
American Evangelicals and the Mass Media and Dancing in the
Dark: Youth, Popular Culture, and the Electronic Media.
Professor Schultze teaches at Calvin College in Grand Rapids
in Communications.

A key element that Schultze brings out in his writings is the relationship between the privatization of religion as a result of the influence of American constitutional culture and the rise of religious television that feeds this perception. Professor Schultze does not address religious broadcasting from a theological perspective. Whereas the theoretical, philosophical and theological foundation of a Christian service is vital to this discussion.

A second theme in Quentin Schultze's writings is how religious culture has influenced the shaping of mass media and how, in turn, media has influenced the shaping of modern-day Christian religious beliefs and practices in the United States. Schultze argues, "Televangelism largely reflects the values, sensibilities, and attitudes of contemporary culture,"¹ arguing that instead of preaching the Gospel that the propagators of the Word have bought into a consumer-type Christianity based on individualism. This is also the argument in William Fore's Television and Religion where he speaks of the five types of relationship a person may have from their relationship with God to their relationships in society. William Fore does not address the Christ of culture from a contextual perspective. However, placing the Christ of culture in the context of television and its architecture is necessary in order to critique religious broadcasting at the local level. In "God-watching Viewers, Religion and Television", a research paper on the BBC and religion, the

editors produce some surprising data linking the decline of religious beliefs in general with the continued popular expression of the value of religious broadcasting.

The other books that were reviewed all center on the following points. The rise, and often demise, of religious broadcasting, be it on radio or television. The relationship of the rise and demise of religious practice to culture perceptions of the moment. Thirdly, these cultural perceptions are based on a rise of individualism and an understanding of the privatization of beliefs and the loss of a core belief system. In return, a belief system is accepted that centers on success and private interpretation of values and of our world including our relationship to the world.

We will look at the current situation and see if religious programming at the local level supports this argument. To see if religion through the mass media encourages individualism, materialism, and the belief that God rewards success within a North American cultural understanding of the term success.

The readings on religious broadcasting in the United States speak of the values and techniques that are proclaimed and how they are transferred to the audience. The minister/preacher normally speaks with authority; they are the voice of God in this situation. Remember how Oral Roberts, a couple of years ago, climbed into his tower and there received direct word from God that his life would come to an end unless

he was able to raise so many millions of dollars. They use the scriptures and cannons of their church to describe society as evil and that the individual is engaged in an individual battle for survival on a material and spiritual level. They support the American way of life, its constitution, and the parts of our Cultural ethic that speak heavily on property, rewards for hard toil, and the values that go along with it.

In sum, the readings suggest that the message of the evangelists on radio and television is one of struggle between good and evil and that the good will have rewards "heaped" upon them. It's not unusual to hear preachers talk about people who have donated sums to the evangelist's cause and in return have had riches "heaped" upon them or of people who have been born anew and as a result of this new baptism, this new found faith, have secured good jobs, beautiful spouses, happy families, and riches that continue to grow and multiply.

Jimmy Swaggart's program, until recently, had one of the largest followings in America with his brand of show biz, from his crying to his exuberance, his laughing, his jumping, to his message of success because of belief in the Lord and in particular belief in Jimmy Swaggart's type of belief in the Lord. It is not unreasonable to suspect that the poor, the middle class and the elderly in America, are the first ones to be drawn into this message of easy success sanctioned and sanctified by God. However, this message of individualism and individual relationship with God and a church that is centered

on individualism is in high contrast to most minority cultures even in the United States. The Hispanic-Latino culture, being family and community oriented, would find that the individual who would begin to believe in this message as proclaimed through radio and television would become increasingly isolated from their family and community.

In his book, Televangelism, Razelle Franfl holds that the "converts" that televangelism begot and beget in the United States have in the author's experience found themselves drawn further and further into an American viewpoint on the world be it the American stance militarily, scientifically, or culturally. Televangelism is not an embrace of Christianity as such, it is an embrace of North American Christianity. This criticism of televangelism, however, is tempered by the knowledge that all Christianity carries a cultural coat. The ministers of radio and televangelism assume as special and unique relationship with God which is centered on themselves and in the United States. The message becomes quite attractive to those who are seeking an escape from their present source of trials.

Dennis Smith in The Gospel According to the United States says, "after 100 years of Protestant missionary activity and in 40 years of evangelical religious broadcasting, Central America now has a large number of people who identify themselves as evangelicals. Many sincere people point to transformed personal lives, miraculous healing and material

blessings as fruits of the Gospel. But not all the fruits have been sweet. Bitter secularism, isolationism, individualism, crass materialism and alienation from the historical processes at work in society are also characteristic of Central American evangelicals.²

Robert Fortner's American Evangelicals and National Broadcasting would support the thesis of the cultural imposition and the dependency syndrome that religious broadcasting imposes on the viewer "..... religious programming may be seen not only as politically subversive, but culturally subversive, as well."³ This creates special problems for religious broadcasting including being open to accusations of being supportive of a particular political ideology or policy. This writing will not address this issue directly but will point out that while the intentions of the local broadcasters are in keeping with a call to scriptural Christianity both at the conceptual, format and delivery level they nonetheless imitate present cultural trends. The message that comes across on the screen visually and spoken belies the off camera assertions of local Gospel simplicity. No author is on record who addresses this contradiction in terms of the rise of a populist culture and how in its present form it is opposed to traditional Christianity. However in the study Godwatching by Michael Svennevig, Ian Haldane, Sharon Spiers and Barrie Gunter, the question is asked: Are the goals of the religious broadcasters being met? The answer comes back that

the agenda of the religious broadcasters and the agenda of the viewers is very much the same, both centering the question and response within a populist cultural framework. Stewart M. Hoover in Mass Media Religion contends that the message is being lost in the messenger so that Christian goals are very often the goals of individuals within a church or organization. There is a mixture of message and messenger that is hard to break down. There is a further mixture in the clothing of the message that is North American. If the goal of religious broadcasting is to bring people to Christianity, through the use of television whether it be locally produced programs or programs sent by a satellite, or co-productions, then success seems to have further eluded them as most of these programs go to the already converted.

Yet religious still wish to see themselves as very much the converters of the unconverted. The objectives within the goal of bringing large numbers to Christ, of setting up a church structure with various branches, of bringing education and better lifestyles again seem to have met only marginal success and in recent years, even that success has been questioned because of the scandals that have been associated with many of the televangelical ministers in North America. Ministers have been shown to use little of their resources for the promotion of such things as education and health of their followers or their hope-to-be followers. Nevertheless, there are many good televangelical ministers. There are many

sincere and devout ministries. In the words of Robert Forkner, "televangelicism and radioevangelicism should provide dialogue which is the essence of evangelicalization, dialogue that indicates our resolve to rid our minds of the prejudices and caricatures we may entertain about the other man, the struggle to listen through his ears and see through his eyes so as to grasp what prevents him from hearing the Gospel and seeing Christ. This is perhaps the fundamental cultural problem to make a medium of communication designed for one-way mass communication distribution of information into one that provides for dialogue".⁴ Synthesizing the stages of conversion of Bernard Lonergan and the stages of television viewing of this present work, the question of a new approach for Christian broadcasters will be addressed.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER I

1. Quentin Schultze. Televangelism and American Culture: The Business of Popular Religion. (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker House, 1991), p. 72.

2. D. Smith. "The Gospel According to the United States", American Evangelicals and the Mass Media. Q. J. Schultze(Ed.), (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Academic Books, 1990), p.305.

3. R. Fortner. "Saving the World?", American Evangelicals and the Mass Media. Q. J. Schultze(Ed.), (Grand Rapids, Mi: Academic Books, 1990), p. 319.

4. Ibid., p. 322.

CHAPTER II

WHO IS MAKING WHAT AND WHAT ARE THEY MAKING

Beauty is a harmonious relation between something in our nature and the quality of the object which delights us.
Pascal 1623-1662

Nemo dat quod non habet (I cannot give what I don't have)
Latin Proverb

A nun was being helped across a crowded street by a very small boy scout. "Thank you very much," she said. "You are a good little boy." "That's all right, Sister," he replied with a grin. "Any friend of Batman is a friend of mine.

Anonymous

Channel 39: Lansing's Christian Channel

Lansing's Christian Channel, Channel 39, first took life in 1977. Continental Cable had a public access channel which could be used and built upon to create a public access channel that was entirely devoted to Christian broadcasting. The first attempt was short lived due to finances needed for the making of programs and the personnel needed to produce the programs. The void was filled once religious programming went off the air by Continental Cable and the Christian Broadcasting Network. CBN was put on Channel 27; however,

some members of the local Christian community felt it would be better to have locally produced programs rather than importing a national Christian program. Within nine months, the members were reorganized and were back on the air as Channel 39.

Channel 39 has slowly gone from strength to strength, starting with an hour and a half's programming out of CBN's time slot and then to two and a half hours of local programming and then three and a half hours, and currently Channel 39 is at eight hours a day of local programming, looking to go to 24 hours. The issue of going to 24 hours lies with the city attorney of Lansing and the Cable Advisory Board. As Channel 39 is a chartered channel to Continental Cable by the City of Lansing, the decision to extend programming lies with the city and not with Continental Cable. The City of Lansing has set up a Cable Advisory Board that rules over the public access channels in the Lansing area and it would be this advisory board that would make the recommendations to the city attorney, who then would make the recommendation to the full City Council to allow Channel 39 twenty-four hour programming.

Within the charter that the city has with Continental Cable, Continental Cable is to provide \$70,000 a year for public access programming. Channel 39 is unable to receive any of these funds for its programming as under the agreement that the general services committee of the City of Lansing has with Continental Cable religious groups, and in particular

Channel 39, are excluded from obtaining any of these funds. The types of groups that may obtain the funds would be people who put on programs about dog shows, cat shows, comedy shows, etc. The intent would be to have a broad interpretation of the current doctrine of the separation of church and state. However, Channel 39 in interviews understands the situation that Lansing City Council finds itself in as they are unable to find another city in the country that has an agreement with cable to provide a specifically religious access channel to the Christian community alone.

The actual start of the station, while somewhat normal in Christian modes of operation, appears to those involved nonetheless miraculous. A group of people joining hands and praying. The next day a Christian donor bringing their life savings and within a day and a half the station going on the air. The station is staffed by volunteers and even when the station was broken into and robbed in 1984, the station personnel saw it as a blessing from the Lord. New equipment replaced old equipment, better equipment replaced nonexistent equipment. The station, itself, was a donation from another Christian. Currently pastors who wish to use the station are asked for a stipend of \$20.00 for 1/2 hour to produce the program, with everything provided except the video tape, and a stipend of \$17.50 to air the program. Pastors who bring in tapes ready to be aired are asked for a stipend of \$17.50. The station has membership costs which are \$100.00.

Initially ten congregations came together, including Evangelical, mainline Protestants, and Catholics to participate in the station. Currently Channel 39 has a board and a president who is also the managing director. The board meets annually and may be called together for other meetings as the board members or the chairperson deem necessary. It is a loose structure, one designed for information flow, one that is easily adaptable to change, and one that is open to the movement of the Spirit, taking the station where the Spirit wills. The station is a nonprofit corporation. All members of the corporation have a voice in the government and decisions are by consensus.

What is the philosophy behind the operation of Channel 39? Channel 39 operates on the premise that the love of Christ is calling all people to salvation and that all people can be saved if they accept Christ. But that the normal place of witnessing to salvation is not by watching the television but by going to church. This is in contrast to many national television programs.

What follows is an interview with the president of Channel 39 expressing in her own words the philosophy of the station.

Author: What would you see is the philosophy guiding Channel 39? Is it to return people to a church or to provide a church for them in their home.

Channel 39: Personally, I believe we need to be in a church.

That was the way I always thought things should happen. But it seems to have changed in the last several years and I'm not sure why. Maybe it's the guppy generation or whatever is growing up. They threw out all of our values, if you remember back in the 50's and 60's going to church was one that they threw out. They may have their private belief in God, but they don't really feel that they have to conform to church laws in ways that I was raised. In my time, you went to church on Sunday and you participated by giving the church your tithes and whatever help you could. These were my values. But it seems as though this generation is throwing out a lot of the way things were done in the old days and they are saying, "we don't have to go to church to believe in God. We have a relationship with God in our own way without going to church." The pastors who work through this station as well as myself try to direct the people through our programming back to their local church, because we feel that they need the love and care of a pastor or priest to help disciple them and direct their lives because sometimes they don't see the pitfalls that they are in.

Author: You are saying that the pastors who produce the programs in fact invite the people to return to their churches?

Channel 39: Yes, I hear all the pastors say this in all of the productions that we do. "If you don't have a home church, we welcome you to our church. If you have a home church, we want you to stay in your home church. We just want you to be in a church. We feel this is very important."

Author: This seems to be in contrast with national television programming where one is encouraged to participate in the television program and to tithe either by buying books or tapes, or by direct donation to the actual minister that is on the television.

Channel 39: Yes, I agree this seems to be a message in most of the national religious programs and I'm always a little disturbed by that. I have told you that one of our goals is to build up the local church, not empty it out. If there are Catholics out there we will provide material that will relate to their needs and would inspire them to go back and be part of their congregation. That for Catholics and for all denominations is what we wish.

Author: Again, that's not the feeling I get from watching national religious programming.

Channel 39: I would agree with that. I don't get that feeling either. It seems that they encourage you to send tithes. I don't feel that there's a true evangelist on TV's ministry. Our pastors wish to get to know the person on a person-to-person level. They wish to be good shepherds as in the Psalms. They wish to rub oil into the wounds of the

suffering, and they wish to counsel those in need. I feel that our pastors who use Channel 39 wish to guide the people along the path to Christ and to truly walk with them by knowing them individually.

Author: How do you feel as head of a local television channel about this message from the national religious shows?

Channel 39: I wish to be separated from that kind of show. Honestly, I do. However, I feel there's a lot of people who identify us with that sort of thing and are a little hesitant about watching us because of the image that is projected on the national shows. If somebody is going to pull their congregation out from under a local church like in national religious shows, then I am uncomfortable with that. What I say on my own show is, if you would like to accept Christ "find a church and get in with a church and find a pastor and go and submit to the pastor and get involved in a local church." That's one of my own personal messages. The pastors come in here all have the same exact message. Get involved in a local church. They may not preach it on every program, but they are not trying to pull people into TV. I've always said we are not trying to be a TV dynasty. We are trying to minister to the body and fill up the local churches. Comparing the production of the national religious program versus the production of a local religious program is difficult. Because very

honestly, it would appear the national programmers have a different agenda.

Author: You mean they don't want local religious programming.

Channel 39: There's something about listening to somebody who is far off. There's something more enticing about it. The national television programs seem to carry a lot more glitz and glamour and excitement. They carry a good program that is also entertaining. People like the entertainment, the screaming.

Author: The people want the glitz and the entertainment, would you consider becoming part of a national religious television station?

Channel 39: Personally and in our philosophy at the station, we are independent. We are just local, a local group of churches that have joined together and bought TV equipment and they have appointed me as president. We are not tied to any national organization in any way and we have tried to keep free of that. We had an opportunity to become an affiliate of TIC and we did not take it. We wish to keep our local identity.

Author: Tell me about the different types of programming that you carry.

Channel 39: We have some real different varieties. For instance, there is a pastor who comes in and uses a blackboard and teaches. There is another pastor who comes

in with his wife and they create a stage effect, they have a singer, and the congregation of twelve to fifteen people that we place in front of them. This pastor needs people to preach to, so we have the audience. The pastor and his wife interact out of the Bible. We have another person who comes in who is a singer. She does a type of variety show, a little bit devotional, and then perhaps she will give a recipe, sing some songs, a little bit more devotional. I have a show called, The Windows of Lansing. This production involves an interview. So far I have interviewed the Mayor, people from the Governor's Office, officials on the drug problem, etc. I do believe that our faith life has to be helping out in the community. Other pastors bring in their tapes, ready for the air. They have television equipment in their church. They do their taping and editing on their own premises and bring it in to us to air. Many of these pastors can stand up and preach for an hour or more and don't even feel tired. I am enthused by that.

Windows of Lansing

Windows of Lansing is a program produced by Delores Ferley at Channel 39. She also is the host. The format is an interview and it deals with local people and the issues that are part of their lives. This Windows of Lansing carries the philosophy of Channel 39. The people interviewed are all

local people. It is low key and will deal with topics of drugs and alcohol addiction to city planning issues. The program begins off air with a short prayer service asking for help from the Lord that good works and changed lives may result from the production of this program. The program is thirty minutes in length. It uses an Evangelical, Biblical approach, and is a realistic attempt to look at where the City of Lansing and the people who live in Lansing are at. It does not offer the immediate solutions and miracle approach of national religious programming, but recounts the struggles of a city and its people, their successes and their failures, all the time within the context that the Lord is walking with them. The atmosphere within the studio during the production is certainly one of family and one of mission. Perhaps nowhere else on Channel 39 is the idea of acceptance of one's pain and suffering more publicized than on Windows of Lansing and yet the program is designed so that the viewer will come into touch with what the producers hope is their Savior and the grace of the Savior. Windows of Lansing lacks the glitz and glamour of nationally produced programs, does not carry any nationally recognized names, and does not carry the nationally recognized solutions of tapes or books for purchase or donations. The producers hope they have a program designed for the family room with discussions that are serious, are lighthearted, but always filled with hope in the future and

the Christian belief of salvation for those who believe in the Lord.

The internal contradiction lies in using the scriptures in a literal sense to address the issues of a viewing population the majority of whom probably subscribe to an existential ethical and religious code. The producers ask for a Christian conversion from the viewer. The viewer on the other hand, receives no education in the steps that lead to conversion. The programmer asks the drug user or the city planner etc. to turn their diverse problems over to the Lord. Christ of the Scriptures is the Healer and Savior of all persons and problems. All the viewer has to do is turn to the Lord. A populist society by its definition of self determination cannot accept this simple solution no matter how inearnest those offering such a solution are.

Continental Cable

Victory in Christ is a program that goes out on public access television at Continental Cable. It is a half-hour cable program, and basically takes a preaching format, using one camera, sometimes there is music at the beginning and at the end. Victory in Christ seems to be typical of the religious programs that are produced for public access television and the philosophy is the same as the philosophy of Channel 39. The programmers of Victory in Christ use Romans, as their articles of evangelization. These verses sum up what

seems to be typical of the vast majority of religious programming on public access. The Book of Romans says: "The word that is the faith we proclaim is very near to you. It is on your lips and in your heart. If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved by believing from the heart. You are made righteous by confessing with your lips you are saved." When Scripture says "those who believe in him will have no cause for shame", it makes no distinction between Jew and Greek. All belong to the same Lord who is rich enough. However, many ask His help for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. What they will not ask His help unless they believe in Him and they will not believe in Him unless they have heard of Him, and they will not hear of Him unless they get a preacher, and they will never get a preacher unless one is sent, for the Scripture says, "The footsteps of those who bring good news is a welcome sound".¹

The approach of Victory in Christ is very much the approach of Paul, the Apostle. I have been sent by the Lord, the Spirit speaks through me. Even if you don't listen, I have to preach the Good News. Victory in Christ continues by challenging people to accept a simple message of salvation: Live by the Scriptures, do good works, and avoid the trappings of success for in the words of the program: "we ourselves can

be our worst enemies because of our inclinations for power, for riches, and for material goods".²

Victory in Christ is opposed to the thrust that is found in some of the national religious programming where success is emphasized as a result of living in Christ. "Because there are too many false prophets out there who are speaking the Word but they change it around. They are changing it around to where it fits. It fits their lifestyle so they can get others involved, involved in the things that they are doing, and its, its very serious. That's why it's exciting for people to know that we are not trying to get anything back from them as far as far as money is concerned. We understand that money is hard to come by and the Lord is our provider because he said, I shall provide for all your needs in Christ Jesus. My God shall supply all your needs in accordance to Christ Jesus, Himself. And all we have to do is simply just trust in Him."³

Victory in Christ suffers from the same internal contradictions as Windows of the Lansing in as much as the final solution offered to a populist society is trust in another. The sincerity of the minister is not in question. The belief in an all providing God is not in question. What is in question is that the solution to all problems is trust in Him! This stance by the preacher excludes the stage of growth the viewer may be at in his or her life by calling only for Trust in Christ as the solution to the diverse questions of

life. It speaks to a theology that is miraculous with solutions coming from outside the realm of experience. Modern day society firstly seeks solutions to problems from a subjective stance rather than an almighty external provider(God).

The following is an interview with the head of programming at Continental Cable.

Author: Can you tell me a little about Continental Cable?

Programmer: Continental Cable started in the 60's in the Ohio area and then spread out to pretty much the large markets. The headquarters for Continental is in Boston. It's the fourth largest cable company. This particular system here was started in 1976 and in the Michigan region we have a system in Holland, a system in Jackson, Lansing, Southfield, New Warren Heights and Madison Heights. And our particular system, the Lansing system, has around 60,000 subscribers. We have a franchise agreement with the city of Lansing and that's a big factor in having access channels.

Author: What is public access?

Programmer: On public access, there's no advertising, no soliciting of funds, no copyright infringement, no lottery or contest information and no obscene or indecent material. The air time is free. We have a religious channel, Channel 39.

Author: On the public access channel, what percentage of programming is religious programming.

Programmer: Normally we have, I estimate, like 75% of the time is religious programming.

Author: And that is beside the religious channel, Channel 39?

Programmer: Right.

Author: Who produces these religious programs?

Programmer: The majority of the religious shows that we have here are produced locally by local churches.

Author: On East Lansing Cable(TCI), a lot of their public access religious programming is actually going to the Black Community. Would you say that is true on Continental Cable?

Programmer: Yes.

Author: Why so?

Programmer: It's kind of ah difficult question to answer. I guess maybe it's because of funds. Maybe, it's because they have a message. They want to pass on their message more than other groups do.

Author: As a television person, do you think there's anybody out there really watching religious programming on public access?

Programmer: We haven't ever completed a survey, but I assume that they are really trying to target people within their own community. I know those at Mount Hope have made

mention that they need to reach their own community and public access is a good way for them to do it.

Author: What do you think of the quality of these productions as a television person?

Programmer: It ranges from Mount Hope which is very professional and to the down right amateurish. I just assume that the message is the important part and not the technical quality.

Author: Is there a market for religious programming?

Programmer: Oh, there's a definite market out there. We do have numerous calls for people wanting religious programming like the Trinity Channel or some other.

Author: How would someone go about having a religious program aired?

Programmer: We would make arrangements for them to come in with the finished product. We would view the product. They then would sign a contract stating that they won't use any advertising. Then we would go ahead and schedule their shows. We have either 1/2 hour or hourly time slots. The programming itself starts at 3:30 and ends at 11:30 Monday through Friday and then 3:30 until 11:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. And they are responsible for the rotation of the shows and the content of the shows.

Author: What is your relationship with Channel 39?

Programmer: Well we are a separate entity. We just provide the channel space as required by our charter with the city.

Author: So you have no control over content.

Programmer: No. Continental has no control over its content.

Author: That seems like a pretty unique relationship in that the city would say that you have to carry this Channel 39, a Christian religious channel.

Programmer: Right.

Author: Have you heard of it anywhere else?

Programmer: Not to my knowledge. I don't know of any other system that does.

St. Thomas Aquinas Church

St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, a parish of the diocese of Lansing, of approximately 2500 families is perhaps atypical of the diocesan approach to the media. St. Thomas Aquinas Parish currently is on TV air four times a week and has been for more than two years. It produces the Outreach Mass which is shown on Sunday mornings on Channel 47, and again on TCI Cable on Monday afternoons at 2 p.m. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays St. Thomas produces the Rosary and this is aired at 2:30 on Tuesday and 2:30 on Wednesday.

The approach to broadcasting by St. Thomas Aquinas Parish is twofold. Firstly it sees the use of television as a continuation of its parish ministry. It is an outreach to those unable to attend the parish church. It is not meant to supplement the parish liturgy, it is not meant to replace it, but its broadcasts are meant for those, for whatever reason,

are unable to attend their parish or St. Thomas Aquinas. The second characteristic of the productions from St. Thomas Aquinas are that they are within a traditional catholic theological mold. The Mass that is aired is a regular Sunday mass with little or no accommodation made for television. If pews are not full, the pews are left empty. People are not moved around the church. Cameras are placed in unobtrusive positions, sometimes to the detriment of the television shot that would be necessary for good viewing. The wires and cables are kept out of the body of the church and minimal acknowledgment is made that the Mass is being broadcast. Minimal to the extent that some of the priests will not even acknowledge that there are television cameras present and those who do have usually just a short statement of welcome to the house-bound, the home-bound or to those unable to attend church. The intent of the ministry is to replicate as closely as possible a church mass. Therefore, no creative gimmicks are used, no avant-garde theology or approaches to the sacrifice of the Mass are permitted.

The Rosary is best described as countertelevision. It is the antithesis of action, excitement and entertainment. Here, on television, perhaps for the first time in the Lansing area, is a religious service that is repetitive, that uses no gimmicks, that does not homolize, sermonize, or theologize.

People in St. Thomas Aquinas during the season of advent four weeks before Christmas and during the season of Lent, six

weeks before Easter, produce a series of programs of a slightly different format. These are programs that are designed for members of the church. There is little Evangelization worked into the design of the program. They are usually comprised of members of the parish leading the programs rather than ordained ministers and take a discussion format on the meaning of these two seasons. These programs are not of a reflective nature and are meant to stimulate, provoke and have people ask questions about the world in which people find themselves.

On December 18, 1984, The Outreach Mass issued its first communique which, in part, stated, "the Spirit of Christmas, 1984, will be transmitted to mid-Michigan's population of elderly and infirmed people by the new Outreach Mass Program, developed by St. Thomas Aquinas Church and Lansing's independent television broadcast station WFSL-TV, Channel 47. St. Thomas Aquinas began development of the Outreach Mass Program last year and was joined by Channel 47 in the Spring when Ash Wednesday and Easter services were produced for experimental television broadcast. The Outreach Mass Program employees Apostolic ministers to lead services, singing and distribute communion at remote locations. According to Bishop James S. Sullivan, Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Lansing and pastor at St. Thomas Aquinas, "through this innovation, people unable to attend church in person, such as elderly, infirmed, nursing home patients, can participate in services

as part of the whole congregation."⁴ The Mass is being broadcast by Channel 47 and thus can be received at virtually every location in the Lansing Diocese of the Catholic Church. Since 1984 the Outreach Mass has been continuously on the air. Currently it is at 9 a.m. It is a tape-delayed production. The tape is actually run at the 4:30 p.m. mass on a Saturday afternoon. It is edited and sent to Channel 47 on Saturday evening for airing on Sunday morning.

The response to the Outreach Mass has been continuous and gratifying to the people of St. Thomas Aquinas. This Mass has a small but faithful following of shut-ins and of those unable to attend church. As letters testify, "I am 89 years old and I can't go to church and I watch Mass every Sunday for several years." "Father, your homily on doubt was so significant to me today as I've had serious complications with my surgery."⁵ "April 2, 1991, Dear Father, this is addressed to you as the pastor, but please pass the comments on to the other priests. This service has been such a blessing to me. At 85 years my eyes and ears and vigor have failed badly in the last year. . . ."⁶ "Dear Father, I am writing to thank you for the weekly service that you do on television. As you can see by the stamp on this envelope, I am an inmate in the Branch County Jail in Coldwater, Michigan. Several weeks ago I tuned to your Mass and now every Sunday I watch it."⁷ The Outreach Mass currently receives between ten and fifteen such letters a week. The producers estimate that while the audience is

small, it is an extremely faithful audience. The Mass is unique in its development carrying the following characteristics:

1. It is the taping of an actual parish Mass and not a Mass offered in a studio.
2. St. Thomas Aquinas Church has trained a group of Outreach ministers who visit local nursing homes at the time of the broadcast on Sunday morning at 9 a.m. and help those present who wish to participate in the televised service to do so.

The Outreach ministers assemble the community shortly before the television service begins. Some hymns are sung. The television is turned on, the community follows the Mass on the television, at communion time the Outreach ministers distribute communion to the Catholics present, and at the end of the televised service, those in need are prayed for, and the Outreach minister then returns to St. Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas Aquinas has between 10 and 15 Outreach ministers who do this on a weekly basis and between 100 and 140 people are served by this ministry which is perhaps unique in the annals of televised religious services in that its Outreach component is direct, simple, and appears to be very effective. St. Thomas Aquinas also places the Outreach Mass on public access television on Monday afternoons.

On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, St. Thomas prays the rosary on public access television. This is again a taped-delayed

production. Members of the parish are asked to participate in praying the rosary in the main church at St. Thomas Aquinas. The Outreach television studio provides the technical support. Four cameras are used. Three on the praying community, and one on stills which are inserted into the production at appropriate times. The service begins with an announcement by the leader that includes a welcome and an explanation of the mysteries of the rosary that will be recited. A hymn is then sung and the rosary begins immediately afterwards. At the end of the rosary, the concluding prayers are recited and the hymn is sung, and the credits are rolled. The Rosary is of a different nature to most religious programming. It is a meditative production; it repeats phrases and images and its intent is to calm rather than stimulate, to inspire rather than agitate, to create a Christian atmosphere within the person. To bring people solace and comfort through remembering the trials and tribulations of Jesus Christ and offering their own trials and tribulations to God, the Father, through this association with Jesus Christ.

The following is an interview with the current church minister in charge of the Outreach Programs at St. Thomas Aquinas, expressing in her own words the philosophy behind St. Thomas Aquinas' incursion into television.

Author: Why is St. Thomas Aquinas in the television
 business?

Minister: The end of St. Mathews Gospel says, "Go therefore make disciples of all the nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all the commands I give you. Know that I am with you always, yet unto the end of time."⁸ We are in the television business because we have a direct command from Christ to reach out and to bring the Good News. In our situation, it has two arms: One to bring the Good News to our members, to Catholics, to Christians who are unable to attend their local church, who are unable to participate in their church as they had for numbers of years because of age, infirmity, disease, imprisonment, etc. The other is to have a presence on a medium that influences so strongly the lives of people. We feel by having a presence that hopefully we will touch the lives of some people who have not heard the loving message and the saving message of Jesus Christ.

Author: It is normal, is it not, for the diocese to carry the communications responsibility for the entire diocese?

Minister: Yes, that is traditionally a correct way of looking at how a diocese operates. However, we had a very strong pastor here in the middle of the 1980s who believed that individual churches could aspire and in fact participate in the television medium if the correct people could be assembled. The technical people were assembled, the production people were assembled, and the pastor gave

it his blessing and his driving force and that is how St. Thomas got on the air.

Author: What is the unique aspect of the televising of religious programs from St. Thomas Aquinas?

Minister: Since the idea first surfaced, St. Thomas Aquinas has wanted not just to produce a religious program that would speak at the viewer, but would actually somehow include the viewer in the religious ceremony or discussion.

Author: And you achieve that by your Outreach Program?

Minister: Yes. With the Outreach Mass, we have a team of ministers who go to the nursing homes, to individual homes, to invalid centers as Mass is actually being aired and participate with the inmates of these institutions and the sick and the house-bound in viewing the program, lead them in prayer as the program is being viewed on television and bring them the Eucharist at Communion time. This is a unique aspect and probably is unique to Catholicism for people are allowed to receive the Eucharist and thus physically feel by its reception that they are participating in a church service.

Author: What is your relationship with the Diocese of Lansing?

Minister: We are independent of the Diocese of Lansing financially. However, we do conform at all times with the directives of the Bishop and with the teachings of the

Catholic Church while remaining independent on day-to-day decisions of our programming and its content.

Author: Who produces your programs?

Minister: We have a producer and technical staff who comes from the industry to us every week. For talent we use our own priests and community and then I am the coordinator of the Outreach part of the ministry.

Author: Then the programs are all produced at St. Thomas Aquinas?

Minister: Yes, that is correct. We produce and edit all our programs at St. Thomas Aquinas and then deliver them to the various television stations for transmission.

Author: Are you interested in market size or market share?

Minister: We are not interested in the size of our viewing audience, although it is always gratifying to know that we are being watched. We do believe that we have a faithful following primarily of elderly and house-bound, those in the nursing homes and homes for the elderly and also in the prisons. We get little response from the younger age groups. Our productions are as I have said primarily of service to our elderly community. Hopefully now and again someone will tune in who is flipping through the channels and out of interest watch us and perhaps the Grace of God will inspire them and so they will find peace with their God.

Author: How often are you on the air?

Minister: We are on a commercial channel on Sunday mornings at 9 a.m. and then on public access we are on Monday afternoon, Tuesday afternoon, and Wednesday afternoon, plus twice a year at Advent and Lent we add some additional programming.

Author: Do you see yourself in your programming in competition with the national religious programmers?

Minister: No, not at all. We are providing a local service that is of interest to people in our viewing area. We are not carrying large staffs, our overheads are minimal, and our intent is to help people return to their churches as soon as they are physically or spiritually able to. We do not even compare ourselves to national religious programming either in format of production or in intent of the program. In fact, we don't like to be compared to national religious programming. We are unique because we actually send out ministers to be with the people while they view our program rather than people phoning in and seeking help or phoning in with donations.

Author: Do you ever compare your programming to prime time television programming?

Minister: No, as I have said, our program is designed for the elderly, the house-bound, or those who may tune in. Our religious services are transmitted as they appear in our church to give people a sense of unity with the type of

church that they knew and loved throughout their formative and adult years.

Author: You make no concessions then for the medium and its architecture?

Minister: We continue our services as though they were normal church services and we merely televise these services. We feel that it is important to give people a sense of the church that they knew and loved or that they may someday come to.

The television ministry at St. Thomas Aquinas operates in set formulae. The productions lack freedom. There is almost a narcissistic analysis to the programming. We like what we see. The producer, director and editor are more technicians than creators of a message. Their task is more reproduction with stated guidelines and objectives. There are no productions that are specifically addressed to young people. The knowledge available from the other sciences on people's stages of life are ignored to present programs that speak more to a traditional world view than developmental television stages.

TCI Cablevision, East Lansing/Meridian Township

Immanuel's Temple Community Church uses public access on TCI cable to witness to Christ. It is a program cohosted by the pastor and his wife. It carries a talk show format. The

setting is not particularly churchy and the audience or congregation are not used although present. The production does involve several of the techniques used by national televangelists. The prayer line telephone number is almost continuously on the screen, and the number is often repeated by the pastor or his wife. The pastor and his wife sit around a small coffee table with their Bibles. Occasionally the program cuts to a musical interlude and then comes back for another message from the pastor and his wife. There is no traditional church furnishings. There is rather an attempt or what appears to be an attempt to deliberately avoid any appearance of a traditional church setting. There is an obvious attempt to buy into a format, the talk show format, that has been successful on commercial television. The hosts appear to be successful people, peaceful people, and people who wish to give a message, the message is a traditional evangelical message that if the viewer accepts Christ, they can be saved and acceptance and salvation will bring miracles into their lives. As part of the opening prayer, the minister and his wife say, "We are trusting all to our God to bless every listener who is sitting out there."⁹ The minister, himself, says, "This is the visitation . . . because if God will take the program and not in any fashion for entertainment to minister to needs while you are sitting right there, where you are listening whether you are born again and even if you

are not born again, we are hoping that you will stay tuned and that God will speak to you soon."¹⁰

There is a deliberate message in the program that says God will bless and reward and will listen if the listener will respond to Christ. The minister is but the vehicle of the message. The program differs from the talk show format or from the style of the national religious programs inasmuch as it asks people, the viewers, to attend church on Sundays. It lists the times of its own Sunday services, and it also speaks to the unevangelized, "I have a message for those who don't know Christ and you're hungry and you're tired, and you're sitting there at seven o'clock because there's nothing else on television and you're flipping the channel and you just came across us. My friends, it is no accident. It is no coincidence. God has a divine meeting, a divine plan for you today. We have to come together. We had to meet. You had to tune in And if you are a sinner right now, and you are going to pray for forgiveness, I'm going to ask you that after you pray that prayer that you would call us and let us know that you have prayed the prayer. And you gotta do is bow your head. I'm not going to bow mine because I'm going to look right at the camera and I'm going to pray."¹¹

Immanuel's Community Temple Church makes the most serious attempt to combine a local invitation to worship with national evangelizing techniques. The local invitation to worship consisting of a call to come to the church, to phone in, to be

part of the ministry. The national approach using the talk show format for cutaways for music and the promise of miracles in your life highlighted by the successful set that is presented to the viewer by the camera. The successful set includes a professional image of the pastor and his wife from their appearance, their clothing and then the set involving simple furnishings and props were very artistically placed giving an overall impression of success. This ministry also uses a studio audience who does not participate in the program rather than a church studio type setting. And while the pastor's wife was part of the format, the pastor alone speaks to the camera, his wife always speaks to the pastor and not to the camera.

What follows is an interview with the station manager of TCI Cable in East Lansing and Meridian Township that speaks to religious broadcasting on public access.

Author: Tell me about TCI and Cable WELM in East Lansing/Meridian Township.

Station Manager: Public access in East Lansing began in 1972. We have a franchise with the city and since that time we have provided studios, cameras and training for the public to use public access. The cable deregulation bill of 1984 has not affected this service or our philosophy of providing public access with training and facilities for the public.

Author: What percentage of people who use public access bring religious content to their programming?

Station Manager: About 13%. Other stations probably have a higher percentage. Here in East Lansing and Meridian Township, we represent so many viewpoints. The City is a cultural melting pot. We have a lot of other programming, including public affairs, entertainment, music, comedy, and call-in programs.

Author: The religious programs, are they produced on-site or off-site?

Station Manager: The majority are produced off-site. We have just three shows that use our studios or take out our cameras. The rest have their own equipment, production crews, and use a church or their own studio.

Author: What type of churches are using public access?

Station Manager: We have Catholic, Protestant, and Fundamentalists mainly. We also have two Spanish Evangelical churches. The Evangelical churches make the most use of public access.

Author: Where are the programs coming from ethnically?

Station Manager: Of the 13%, more than half are from the Black churches. For example, Gospel Time is an hour of gospel music from one of our local Black churches.

Author: What is the typical format that these religious programs use?

Station Manager: Until very recently, it was a sermon or a church-type format. The talk show format is now becoming quite popular. The hosts bring in guests to discuss the Bible or some particular church belief.

Author: Who are the audiences for the programs?

Station Manager: Currently, we do not have the capability to do a survey of our own audience. Right now we serve 26,000 homes in East Lansing/Meridian Township and Okemos and Haslett. That is your potential audience.

Author: Are the programs watched primarily by the church's own membership?

Station Manager: Some do target members, especially those who do a talk show format. Mount Hope and First Assembly of God show their services and they target the people who might be looking for a church to belong to.

Author: As a station manager, what is the main message of all these churches?

Station Manager: Definitely, the Number 1 message is: Our church is here. If you need help or counseling, come and see us. Every church whose programs are on the air does place its name and address on the screen. Many of the churches list the times of their services.

Author: Are the makers of the programs asking the people to watch them or go to their local church?

Station Manager: They definitely want the people to go to their local church.

Author: Comparing local public access religious broadcasting to national religious programming, what is the difference?

Station Manager: The big difference is the budget. National programs, such as the National Church of God run multi-million dollar operations out of Pasadena, California. The national programs are very "slick" as good as Dan Rather anytime. The local church is on its own with often as not its one camera. The result is a massive difference in quality.

Author: Is there a difference in the message?

Station Manager: Yes, there is a difference in the message. The people who use public access religious broadcasting, in my opinion, are sincere people wishing to invite those watching the television to come and be a part of a church. Their intent is, I believe, to bring people back to the churches and not so much for the success for their television programs.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER II

1. Romans 10:8-15. The Jerusalem Bible. (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1966).
2. Producer of Victory in Christ. Taped Interview.
3. Ibid.
4. _____. "The Outreach Mass", The Catholic Weekly. (1984, December 21). Diocese of Lansing. p.2.
5. Letter of the Outreach Archives. St. Thomas Aquinas, East Lansing, MI. Excerpts.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Matthew 28:19-20. The Jerusalem Bible. (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1966).
9. Immanuel Temple Community Church. (1992, July 30). Taped 1/2 hour television show on TCI Public Access. East Lansing, MI.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE--WATCHING

Religion is all very well as long as it doesn't interfere with your life.

Lord Melbourne

He cannot have God for his father who refuses to have the church for his mother.

St. Augustine

The church has always been willing, to swap, treasures in heaven for cash down.

R. G. Ingersoll

Not since the Reformation and the break of the Orthodox churches has Christendom been faced with a mass movement that threatens to change a traditional course of direction. Even with the Reformation and the break with the now called Orthodox churches, hierarchical churches in the main were established and the ruling bodies be it clergy or lay counsels still remained in charge of the church's corpus of theology, of its culture, of its understanding of itself, and of its relationship to its members and to the world. Most of the mainline churches have either annual synods, conventions, or counsels and in the case of the Catholic church approximately every 50 to 100 years a counsel of the whole church. These

counsels, synods, or assemblies are still seen by these churches as the protector of their creeds, the mother, of their traditions, and the enunciator of their culture.

The Catholic Church in North America through its Bishops' Conference debates how it will explain to its adherents fundamental church principles ranging from war and peace to homosexuality and economics. These bishops' conferences do not see themselves in a position to change church teaching on these issues, they merely restate it in a language that they believe will be understood in the North American situation. Other churches from the Episcopalians to the Baptists to the Presbyterians would grant their national conferences more freedom to interpret church principles. They see themselves as the people who enunciate the creed of the church who call people to accept its teachings and to demand the allegiance that is necessary to obtain membership in the church. The church be it from the Southern Baptists or High Episcopalian or Roman Catholic have their deliberating bodies. These deliberating assemblies, while trying to speak in modern language, still carry the format and the trappings that were part and parcel of their origination. The churches see themselves as speaking to a society on two levels: They speak to a society that has communitarian aspects and to a society that is made up of individuals.

History has failed to be the burying ground of the notion that the inventor will determine the use of the invention or

that the ruling elite if the inventor fails to determine the use of his/her invention that they, in turn, will determine its usage. As recent as the invention of the motor car, newspapers and people of influence were gauging its possibilities in an industrial society arriving at a common conclusion that the motor car will always be a novelty, that it will never serve a useful function in society, and that it will remain the privilege of a select few. How wrong these prophets have been! Among the many claims of the motor car is one that states: the motor car is responsible for the breakup of the Sunday community meetings after services that sometimes would last all day. The theory being that it was such an effort to get up and get to church on Sunday that once people got there, that they often remained there all day to discuss politics, farming, and the general business and news of the day. The motor car giving greater versatility and allowing people's imagination to roam. The motor car took people down the road of their imagination and over the hill to a new setting. The day-long get-to-getheres on Sundays are now a thing of history.

Television, itself, it was hoped, would be, primarily, an instrument of education for the masses and that its uses would be limited. Again, the prophets failed to take into account a mass culture which was coming into being. In some places, it had already achieved domination over the cultural perspectives of the elite. The elite were also left looking

towards this populous culture for a new ideology. The origins of this populous culture probably go back in this country to the foundation of the New England states. The Congregational minister in these hamlets was an elected minister and usually had a public office as well. In 1833 Massachusetts relinquished for the last time the relationship between church and state. Religion was pushed into the private sphere, of family and the individual. The seeds of the populous culture had been set. The leaders in the community no longer looked to church or tradition for guidance. They were elected officials that responded to the "cry of the people".

A second element in the rise of the populous culture in the United States resulted from the manner in which the push westward took place. Unlike Canada where population growth followed law and order and governmental agencies, the push west in the United States began with a population move followed by law, order, and government. Set into the hearts of the people at the earliest foundations of the country is the belief in themselves that they are the creators of their own destiny. This was a major philosophical change from the way people thought about themselves and it has had unbelievable consequences for the world at large in the last two centuries. The idea of lone heros setting out to win a whole new world for themselves. Surviving and thriving was foreign to the way most societies in the world operated in the 1700 and 1800's, and is still foreign to the way a large part

of world society operates today. The wave of immigrant groups coming into this country in the last decades, particularly the Vietnamese and Hispanic, have been studied from an inculturation perspective that has emphasized language and the ability to scale the ladder of North American success. Their inculturation into the populist culture is only beginning to be studied.

This populist culture has the elements of individualism with its attendant principles of the right to privacy, privatization of lifestyle, community with the responsibilities of and to family - nuclear and the social, and finally the breakdown of the barrier between rights and responsibilities. On another level, the populous culture strives for a real understanding of its world, what the individuals place is in the world, what are his/her rights and responsibilities, what is his/her relationship to community, and in community. The populist culture seeks the dignity of each individual, seeks to create art forms that allow freedom of expression, freedom of appreciation, and freedom from discrimination. The populist culture seeks the right to share its ideas and its values with others. The populist culture is not a negative culture, but it is far harder to define or describe than a culture that was dominated by a small elite. Populist culture is hard to criticize because who will or is allowed to define the standards of the culture. To what are you comparing populous culture? By its own definition,

populist culture is the right of all to share all; to be a part of the process of determining its own culture and to be part of examining itself.

It is to this that religion has to speak. Religion, for better or worse, finds itself a first cousin to culture, and today it is by this culture that religion is partially shaped.

No longer are Catholic, Episcopal conferences the last word in the minds of a Catholic, whether they should or shouldn't do something. No longer are the synods of the Episcopalian church the rule by which Episcopalians will judge their actions. No longer are the assemblies and conventions of the Baptists, the Presbyterians, and the other mainline churches the rule and the standard bearer of the creeds and professions of the faith of their adherents.

The populist culture has allowed people to dream that they are the creators of their own life. In many ways this contradicts some of the fundamental principles of established religion.

For the Catholic Church it would be that a personal relationship with God cannot transcend your involvement with your church because the church is the means by which you have any with God. In the Episcopalian Church, this would also be true and in many of the mainline churches. Evangelism and fundamentalism, on the other hand, are more in keeping with the principles that have grown out of the foundation of this country, their reliance on self, the desire to settle

differences on a local level based on local law if possible, and the hesitation to bring in the rule of law and government - church or civil.

The psyche of the United States citizen has been conditioned for several hundred years. The populist culture that we have today is the culmination of a process begun several hundred years ago. This populist culture has an enormous impact on the way people perceive God and their relationship with God and the structures that that relationship will have or has.

Of immediate interest is the discrepancy between mainline church services on television and televangelism in the form of fundamentalism or the Bible churches. The mainline churches-- Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran and some Baptist--think of the Bible in a Judeo context, recognizing that the individual is part of a community and that that community comes to worship God as a community. The televangelist speaks to the individual as an individual and their need to be saved as an individual by "The Blood of Christ," and that through participation in the television program and individual practices, then the individual can be saved and does not need the services of the larger community. This difference is fundamental and basic to an understanding of the question: Why mainline churches find themselves on the periphery of television religion and on the periphery of response to their television productions by the population at

large. And why the mainline churches find their influence through television to be minimal?

The place of the individual within mainline Christianity is as part of the community. They are born into a family which is community and this family is part of the larger worshipping community. Fundamentalism and the Bible churches speak a message that is in keeping with populist culture as we see it in the United States and in keeping with the message of parallel television programming that often refers to the lone heroic person standing for truth and justice, the lone mother supporting her child! Standing for truth and justice over and against a community that neither supports those values or despises them.

The intent of fundamentalist televangelism does not appear to be to bring people into a worshipping community, although their services are always within the context of a particular church. The services of the Catholic and mainline Protestant religious programming usually seek to draw people away from their television set and back into the body of the church where they can actually see, feel, cry, share, and experience with other members of the community.

This debate of the individual versus the community in the American psyche as it appears in the last decade of the 20th century under the term, populist culture, is currently been played out in Presidential politics. One sees the expression "viewing the apple's skin from the seed out" coming to

fruition. Republican politics and its leadership stressing smaller government, less involvement by government in the lives of the citizens. The Republican Party of today, finds itself, taking the high moral ground and saying that issues such as abortion are above politics issues such a correct world order and the U.S. role in achieving that, are again above politics. Today there is a very strong communitarian approach coming out from the Republicans on certain issues. A very strong I am my brother's or sister's keeper response from a party that has traditionally stressed the right of the individual to achieve and do and be as they so desire. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, has a platform that says government must be involved in the lives of the people. Yet a party that today is finding itself reluctant to become involved in anything but the rights of the individual, from privacy rights of the individual over abortion issues to reluctance to become involved in seeking a correct world order. Somehow the presentation of both parties in Presidential politics is not reflected in individual policies pursued by those parties.

This is but a reflection of the overall populist culture, and one which translates into the religious realm directly. Individual salvation being offered and touted but under the direction of the super minister, the tel-star minister. The confusion that is within the political process the seed looking at its skin from the inside is reflected in the

minister preaching a religion that is based in community, but only speaking about individual salvation. The Judeo-Christian tradition is that no one is saved in isolation; that it is through interaction in the community that one witnesses to one's beliefs and faith in Christ. Salvation without interaction either to one's neighbor or to one's world is impossible. The American psyche appears to be responsive to the ideology of the "Last of the Mohicans" over and over again. The attempt by Vice President Quayle to give comment on the populist TV series Murphy Brown and his reported questioning of the ability of a single mother to raise a child in today's America, was drowned in a sea of negative attack. A little analysis of Mr. Quayle's position accepted or otherwise would have seen that Mr. Quayle was reflecting a reality that while the individual is to be supported and strengthened in this society of ours, the hard facts are that a single mother has an extremely difficult time in breaking out of the poverty trap in America as it is structured today. The lip service of the mother's right to have her child were aptly spoken to, the reality of the supports and the institutional helps necessary for her to raise her child as she wishes are all but lacking. The tension between the individual and community is played out in all parts of our culture on the street, on television, in the classroom, in the bars, and on the religious television screen.

The approach of the churches to the issue of the community versus the individual is exemplified in a reverse manner. In the book, Media Coverage of the Catholic Church, the authors are looking at the rights of a Church within a community. The authors state, "In recent decades the more overt and virulent forms of anti-catholicism have retreated from polite society in the public square along with other forms of once fashionable religious and ethnic bigotry. In theory, the Catholic Church is now more able than ever before to compete for the hearts and minds of Americans within an atmosphere of religious tolerance. Yet catholic defamation organizations complain of a continuing bias that is all the more corrosive for its apparent lack of self-consciousness."¹ As Michael Schwartz writes: "In Persistent Prejudice, hostility to the Catholic Church functions as the unspoken premise for a great deal of our passes for the intellectual and cultural life of contemporary America. . . . Catholicism is represented alternatively as ridiculous or cruel and oppressive. . . . the mass media image of Catholics is only slightly better than of Nazis."² While this may appear to be a strong response, the issue reflected is nevertheless the same. What are the rights of the individual to the community and the community to the individual. The authors continue, "whatever the success of Hollywood, the church's relationship to the news media has proven even more problematic for both institutions. The news media and the church are in the

business of information gathering and dissemination. The church provides information melded to interpretations based on doctrines that holds to be true and proper. The news media provides factual information and interpretation of its context and meaning without recourse to transient truths".³ The heart of the matter is that the whole of our society struggles to find out what is the relationship, what are my rights as an individual, what is my relationship to the community, what are my privileges within the community, and what are my responsibilities to other individuals and to the community at large.

The church is at the forefront of this struggle because within televised Christianity, the struggle is seen most clearly. In an essay on television "The Critical Review," Claude Gitlin says: "Each society works to reproduce itself--and its internal conflicts--within its cultural order. The structure of practices and means around which the society takes shape."⁴ His intent in the paper is to look at contemporary mass media in the United States as one cultural system promoting that reproduction. Both Gitlin and Michael Parenti in Inventing Reality draw heavily on Antonio Gramsci's notion of ideology hegemony. Gitlin speaks of hegemony as: "The domination of thought, the common sense, the life ways and everyday assumptions of the working class."⁵ Parenti states it in this way: "The state is only the outer ditch behind which there stands a powerful system of fortresses and

earth works. These supportive institutions help create the ideology that transforms the ruling class interest into a general interest, justifying existing class relations as the only natural and workable ones. The preferred and ultimal, although not perfect societal arrangements. So the capitalist class is the ruling class controlling society's cultural institutions and ideational production as well as its labor, lands, and natural resources".⁶

So what is the religious, political, and cultural status quo of the United States? That all men are created equal as stated in the Constitution is perhaps the cornerstone of American society, politically, legally, culturally, and also religiously. However, from the very beginning, the founding fathers, it would seem, had no intention of disposing themselves of the their estates. A 100 years later the debate between Abraham Lincoln and Steven Douglas on this exact issue showed considerable differences of understanding: "Lincoln looked upon the proposition about human equality not as a hypothesis for examination or as a hypothesis for a kind of experiment or as a beneficent sentiment. For him it was a truth affirmed and consider what the United States might have become as a political community had Douglas's position had sway. He held that the signers of the Declaration referred to the White race alone and not the African when they declared all men to be created equal."⁷ As then so now; the question of my rights, your rights and whose

responsibility it is to be their guardian bedevils the civil and religious legislator. A second question follows the first. What do we mean by good, and what do the programmers of religious programs consider good? Religion and consumerism which supports the political and cultural status quo rests its case on the sentiment that this or that thing is good for me. Consider the case of the religious broadcasters that say that God wishes to heal us, to heal you, that God has good things in store for you, that you have been forgiven your sin and your debt, turn to God and you will reap the benefits of a life hereafter that is blessed, but also the benefits that come from a true believer, success in this life. Success being determined on a North American standard and within that the standards of middle-class North American society a society that is consumeristic and transient in values. However, here again the issue of what good means has not been fully determined. Philosophically, we can go from a Machiavellian concept of good to an Aristotelian concept of good. Religious programming is caught in this conflict as is the current political and cultural status quo of the United States.

If the object of religious programming is either overtly or inadvertently to support the cultural status quo of North America, then the question arises, who are the people listening? In Religious Television the American Experience, Peter J. Horsfield holds that people of lower income, lower education, and blue collar occupations watch significantly

more religious programs than do those of higher income, higher education, and in white collar occupations. This was the result of studies done by Dennis in 1962, by Robinson in 1964, by Solt in 1971, and Buddenbaum in 1979.

On the local level, the cable companies supported this viewpoint. In their opinion, the people who watched religious programming on public access cable were of lower to middle income, were usually older, and were already committed Christians. Later in Chapter 12 of the same book, Horsfield says: "The influence of pay time religious television also takes on a wider significance when considered within the broader context of the structures of the mass media in their political and economic dimensions. It is wrong simply to view the owners of mass media as the sole determinants in the shaping of media organizations and messages. They stand within the larger historical context and they are, themselves, played on by historical events and the circumstances these events thrust upon them."⁸ Horace Newcome has noted that the ideas and symbols in American television have not been created there, but frequently have a history in American culture.

"Television is rarely an innovator of social forms or ideas, but is more commonly a preparer and reflector of these forms. Should the television programmers move too far away from what is publicly perceived as historically and socially appropriate, they would soon lose the attention of their audiences."⁹ In his book, All Consuming Images, George Ewen

talks about this lower, middle class and gives a rare insight into the type of person that is involved.

Quoting from Ira Steward in the essay titled, "Poverty," written in 1873 for the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor, says: "But is not the middle class its poverty. The poverty that should incite the most anxiety and the most searching inquiry . . . they are a large majority of the people and their poverty is generally carefully concealed. All who have barely enough to keep up appearance are just the ones to cover up the fact that they have nothing more. They are ranked among the middle classes and their power to cover up their poverty is made to argue that they are not poor. The middle classes have the strongest motives for never making any parade or public complaint of their poverty. To advertise oneself destitute is to be without credit that tides so many in safety. To their standing in society--over the shallow places where ready resources fail, to be without credit and without resources is to be dependent upon charity. Whenever employment fails or sickness prevents employment, and to depend upon charity is an advertisement of one's destitution and poverty that the public is slow to forget. To betray our confessed secrets of one's destitution is also regarded in some measure as a sign of incapacity. For as the world goes, the poor man is an unsuccessful man."¹⁰ Religious programming is geared towards an aging middle class, ones who are supportive of the status quo economically and politically. And while the quotation

just used is harsh and perhaps looks at the middle class in too unfavorable a light, it does allow us the momentary insight into a reality that exists for many.

Herbert, Ungurait and Bohn in Mass Media V: An Introduction to Communication, outline five characteristics of an audience:

1. The audience tends to be composed of individuals who are apt to have shared experiences and are affected by similar interpersonal social relationships.
2. The audience tends to be large.
3. The audience tends to be heterogeneous rather than homogeneous.
4. The audience tends to be relatively anonymous.
5. The audience tends to be physically separated from the communicator.¹¹

Looking at each of these areas for a moment, and putting them within the context of religious broadcasting at the local level, we find that the people who watch religious programming on public access indeed seem to reflect shared experiences. The preachers speak of these experiences, the experiences of suffering, of want, of forgiveness, of repentance, of hope. These are experiences which create a bond between the audience and the broadcaster. That the audience tends to be large is debatable. Several of the programs watched including the Outreach Mass from the Catholic Church do not claim to have

any significant ratings, rather the Outreach Mass would claim to have a faithful following principally of older people. The intent of religious broadcasting at the local level does not appear to be to speak to large audiences. The intent is to speak to the church's congregation and some other witnessing Christians. There is little attempt at publicity, there is little attempt at evangelization. The intent is to produce a religious program that is available if people tune in or turn on.

In contrast to general television audiences, the audiences of religious viewing tend to be homogeneous and denominationally homogeneous. Religious television speaks to a particular type of Christian, to a particular age bracket of religion, income bracket and a particular type of socilaized Christian; be it Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, or Evangelical, etc.

Like commercial television, the audience tends to be relatively anonymous. Victory in Christ believes that its audience is out there but it is known that the majority of the viewers are probably the shut-ins and the elderly. Again, in contrast to the last point that Herbert Unguriait and Bohn make that the audience tends to be physically separate from the communicator; public access religious broadcasting does try to bridge that gap. The Outreach Mass will mention people during the Mass at the prayers of the faithful who may have requested it. Many of the Evangelical pastors put their phone

line number and service times on the screen so that contact can be made. This contact may be minimal, but it is substantially greater than commercial television which is nil. Therefore, in response to what an audience is, religious broadcasting is substantially different in its aim and intent. The aim is involvement, the aim is participation, and from that perspective, it has an uphill battle with prime time television which is specifically for entertainment or general educational purposes.

The aim of religious broadcasting appears to be extremely narrow, compared to commercial broadcasting. Even then the content of that broadcasting remains a problem for the broadcasters or Churches are not immune to cultural trends. Most churches subscribe to what is called "traditional values." Many of the church's problems from Evangelical to Catholic would seem to lie in the area of talking about traditional values. The "traditional" in value is nothing more than a belief with historical dimension. Values in themselves speak to a greater understanding of the meaning of life than can be attached to it from mere human inquiry. Churches are becoming more and more active participants in the discussion about values. Churches find that they speak to a situation, a world that is in a constant state of flux. In 1987 Pope John Paul asked rhetorically when he met with U.S. bishops in Los Angeles how is the American culture evolving today? Is this evolution been influenced by the Gospel, does

it clearly reflect Christian inspiration . . . are all those things which reflect the soul of a nation been influenced by the spirit of Christ".¹² The Pope raised the questions and left the bishops to find the answers.

So, too, the pastors who appear on television at the local level seem to struggle between presenting a Christianity that carries a value system and a society that stresses individual liberty and individual values.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER III

1. Lichter R. Amundson, & D. Lichter, L. Media Coverage of the Catholic Church. (New Haven, CT: The Knights of Columbus, 1991), p. 9.
2. M. Schwartz. The Persistent Prejudice. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1984), p. 137.
3. Lichter R. Amundson, & D. Lichter, L. Media Coverage of the Catholic Church. (New Haven, CT: The Knights of Columbus, 1991), p. 10.
4. Claude Gillin. "The Critical Review": The Politics of Broadcast Regulation. Kransnow, Longley, & Terry(Eds). (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 342.
5. Ibid., p. 344.
6. M. Parenti. Inventing Reality. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 5.
7. New Yorker. (1975, 8 September). p. 43.
8. P. J. Horsfield. Religious Television: The American Experience. (New York: Longman, 1984), p. 122.
9. H. Newcomb. Television: The Critical View. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 63.
10. G. Ewen. All Consuming Images. (New York: Basic Book, 1988), p. 125.
11. Herbert, Unquarait, & Bohn. Mass Media V. (New York: Longman Inc., 1988), pp. 487-489.
12. Our Sunday Visitor. (1992, August 2), p. 15.

CHAPTER IV

ARCHITECTURE OF WORD AND MEDIUM

The boys were asked to draw a picture of the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt for their religious instruction class. All but one drew the conventional picture of the Rocky Mountain path at night with Joseph leading the donkey and Mary sitting on it, holding the infant Jesus. The exception was a small boy who had taken the word "flight" quite literally. His picture showed a modern jet plane flying over the pyramids. Visible in the plane were four figures: three at the back with a halo, one in the front without a halo. Very good, said the minister in charge. But who is the man in front without the halo? Please, sir, said the boy. That's Pontius the Pilot.

Anonymous

The architecture of the medium has to be transferred into the Word. Sometimes the difference between a politician giving a speech and a minister preaching escapes us. There is a difference in content, but style of delivery, and method of delivery, seem to have become one.

Before the advent of Christianity, classical rhetoric was well established, conceived by Plato and analyzed by Aristotle its practical applications were put into writing by Cicero and finally a complete system was built by Quintillion. Classical rhetoric has five parts: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. The aim of classical rhetoric was to give impact to truth and justice as a spoken word.

This was the acknowledged type of rhetoric and debate that was taking place in Greece and Rome at the time of the Apostles. Christ, however, challenged the nature of rhetoric on its internal structure by creating a whole new system that would appeal to the uneducated, the populous at large. In Saint Mathews' Gospel, Christ asks the question of the people: "Have you understood all this? and they said yes."¹ The teaching/message was couched in parables. Jesus was a storyteller, par excellence. Again in Luke, it says: "He came to Nazareth where he had been brought up and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read. And they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it is written. The spirit of the Lord has been given to me for he as anointed me . . . he then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all the eyes of the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them. This text is being fulfilled this day even as you listen."² The style of Jesus was free flowing expressing familiarity with the lives of his subjects and with the examples that he used. In the time of the Apostles, this free-flowing artless type of rhetoric became a homily, a homily coming from the Greek word for conversation. It was a far cry from the eloquence of classical Greek rhetoric. By the time Christianity came out of the Dark Ages, there was a ruling elite somewhat educated that desired something more scientific

and argumentative than the colloquial artless form that had been with Christianity since its birth. And so the Golden Age of patristic eloquence was born.

It borrowed from classical rhetoric but used as its base the scriptures. St. Augustine, being one of the great fathers of this type of rhetoric gave much advice to his successors in a book called, The First Catechetical Instruction which is a basic document on catechesis and preaching. St. Augustine borrowed heavily from Cicero's triple aims of declamation which were teaching, pleasing, and persuading (docere, delectare, movere). The middle ages saw a decline in the quality of preaching. As Europe moved out of the Middle Ages, the sermon again was taking on a standardized form. First a part of the scripture was chosen and this became the theme. Next came the protheme which led to the invocation for divine help for the preacher and listeners, and thirdly the theme was restated and divided which were then subdivided and developed according to conventional modes of amplification.

The Renaissance Period gave a renewed desire to incorporate classical rhetoric into the theory of preaching. In 1504, Johann Reuchlin published The Art of Preaching. Here the features of perennial rhetoric were established, invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Erasmus(1466-1536) solidified this trend in his writings on preaching. Today the purpose of preaching is to enlighten all persons as to the things that are necessary for their

salvation. The earliest preaching in North America would have followed Catholic Renaissance rhetoric. The settlements of the Spanish in the Caribbean, St. Augustine, in Florida, and in the Texas-California region, Junipero, Sierra, Co-patron of California, would have brought a Franciscan humanness to classical Catholic preaching of the Renaissance. In the north, the Jesuits in their dealing with the Huron and Iroquois nations known as the Black Robes would again have been imbued with a renaissance Catholic approach to preaching.

Concurrently, the Pilgrims with their congregational style of church and of preaching would have made an impact on the New England States. The sermon was extremely long, lasting up to 6 hours. It was very much scripture based. It was delivered to a congregation that used the Bible as their sole directive for life. The impact of the preacher would have been greater than in Catholic preaching where the Bible is seen as one element of the articles of faith.

In the congregational vein, the sermon became the focal point of divine worship and the minister based his sermon on the meaning of Scripture. The sermon, itself, was the living voice of the gospel and Christ spoke in the preacher's words. The new doctrines on justification and the role of Scripture as the sole rule of faith were proclaimed in the sermon. Today only in the evangelical churches has the sermon remained as the preeminent form of worship and it is mainly these churches that are witnessed to on television.

The architecture of the medium was the human voice. The pleasing voice, the interesting voice were two qualities that the successful preacher sought to have. The preacher it was presumed would have posture, presentation, and syntax at a level that was acceptable to both high and low. A popular speaker would often speak to several thousand people. The orator Daniel O'Connell known as the liberator of Ireland, is reported to have spoken to as many as one hundred thousand people on some occasions. These monster meetings, as they were called, demanded special architecture. The speaker would speak and there would be relay speakers within the audience to carry the message to further extremities. These relay speakers had to have the qualities of the primary speaker and also had to know the mind of the primary speaker. Inflections, intonations, and gestures would be known by the secondary speaker and would not have to be necessarily seen to be copied. The architecture of the medium to reach large audiences today is not through a series of secondary speakers but is through the medium of television with its ancillary arm of the microphone or voice enhancement. The preachers that have been observed on East Lansing Cable and Lansing Cable from the Gospel Hour to Victory in Christ carried a similar intent; to preach the Word of God to their listeners. Both the Outreach Mass on the Catholic side and the Evangelical preachers made no concessions for the architecture of the

medium in trying to transfer the message of the Word from their heart and mind to the heart and mind of the listener.

The architect of today will ask, who is this building for? What type of building will it be? What will be carried out within the building and outside of the building? How much would such a building cost? and How much can the owner afford? Overall, the architect is asking the question, What is the philosophy of my patron? The architect, unlike the theologian, does not presume that his or her patron is interested in such questions as: What are the stress capabilities of the building, What will the frame of the building be constructed of, What's the load bearing of the walls. The preaching that appears to be on East Lansing Cable, Lansing Cable does not enter into theological questions. It is more suited to the homily(conversational preaching). The preaching follows the colloquial approach. Gospel Hour, Victory in Christ, Immanuel Temple Community Church and St. Thomas Aquinas use the Scripture to give an explanation of life's problems.

The style and presentation of the Black churches is usually high in involvement with the preacher and with what the preacher is saying. The style of the preaching in the Black churches is exuberant, exhilarating, and very committed(e.g. Gospel Hour). Catholic preaching is quiet, sober, logical. It is the intent of all preaching, though, to create a response in the listener, in this case, the

television audience. Christian ministers preaching on public access and on Channel 39 in Lansing and East Lansing use a mixture of populist ideology and the everyday homily approach of the Apostles and the early Christian period.

In the latter half of the 19th century in America, The Richard's style of architecture became popular. The buildings consisted of a steel frame which gave support to the curtain walls. Current-day American architecture also came from Walter Gropius with his Bahause School³ of architecture which was brought to America by Miles Vander Meis who successfully adapted the Richardson architectural style. Now the building itself became closely allied to the buildings seen on movie sets, the barest minimum of support, supporting walls that could be put in place as a whole and even hung from the steel frame closing the gap between reality and fiction. Many of the buildings that surround us today in America are buildings of this style of architecture. The philosophy behind this type of architecture is "less is more" and form follows function. "Less is more" in as much as the eye can be fooled into thinking it sees greatness when infact it sees cheapness and transitoriness. Design follows the function of the building. Over a period of time this has led to standardization of design and of expectations. This inability to cross design and to dream has also become accepted in the television world. Religious television, even on the local

level is predictable, describable and in the words of many boring.

The architecture of the 70's, 80's, and now of the 90's is moving away from "less is more" and "design follows form" moving back to a more neoclassical approach where more usually is more, resulting in greater costs and greater durability. Where design, function and form can have interplay. However, television on the national level of CBS, ABC, or NBC right down to the local level of public access religious television seems slow to make the full circle back to the mixture that traditionally human nature finds more exciting, more acceptable, more thought-provoking, and certainly more colorful. Preaching, in particular, has learned well from the Bahause style of architecture--a basic steel frame or a simple Scriptural passage on which the rest of the facade will be built around. The content of this basic structure, this facade, in the Protestant and Evangelical tradition, is one that I have a Scripture verse for you today. This is a message from Christ. It is a saving message. You can be saved. Listen to my message. Learn how to be saved. The Catholic tradition uses the Scripture verse to call for repentance, change of lifestyle, and a seeking of grace to persevere. Catholic preaching does not emphasize that one is saved either by listening to the word or by accepting Christ into one's life.

If it is possible to refer to the Scripture passage as the steel frame of the building, then the curtain walls that helped to create the illusion of the building, its strength, its grandeur, its endurability are the preacher and his format. Unfortunately, the intent of the architect is that the building does not endure. The architect knows that the steel frame and the enclosing curtain walls are designed not to last. Architecture understands its fleeting success rate and the fickleness of its patrons. In order to endure and to be successful, architecture has chosen patterns of structure, of design, that will fill the needs of its patrons. The preacher, if he or she watches television, will find that the basic steel frame found in architecture and its curtain walls is the premise on which most television programs are built. The program is designed for success, is designed for the enjoyment of its viewers, is designed to make money for its patrons, and when the program fails, like the Bahause School of Architecture, it's designed to be thrown away.

This is what the preacher is up against. The preacher is coming in from a neoclassical rhetorical tradition which praises style, delights in memory, and is entranced in delivery. The arrangement far from being a steel structure with supporting curtain walls is as flesh is to bone. Each is support and life to the other. Each is necessary for the other.

Robert K. Murton, author of Mass Persuasion (The Social Psychology of a War Bond Drive), first outlined the architecture of the medium. In Mass Persuasion the preacher would readily see the curtain walls that television builds around its steel structure. In this instance the structure was Kate Smith, a television commentator. Murton speaks of the success that Kate Smith had on that day when she raised \$35 million in war bonds, the like of which has not been seen before or since. The first thing that was done, either deliberately or by accident, was that the viewer was privy to the knowledge that an outstanding event was about to take place. Then the viewer was privy to an outstanding event taking place. According to Murton, this created a sense of compulsive listening. Another element was repetition. "The marathon also provided opportunity for effective persuasion through continued repetition. At the close of each broadcast, Smith repeated the Slogan, 'Will you buy a bond?'"⁴ Smith was able in the broadcast to "arouse profound emotions and activated strong sentiments, guilt, pity, sympathy, anxieties. There is abundant evidence, as we shall see, that many of our subjects were profoundly stirred by Smith's appeals; that they felt some of their most important values were involved in the experience, that deep-lying sentiments found expression in the contexts supplied by the broadcasts".⁵ Finally, towards the end of the broadcast, Smith heightened the tension by asking

the question out loud: Would she be able to survive to the end of the broadcast.

Under content analysis, six major themes were found in the Smith broadcast. The first theme was the theme of sacrifice, the second theme was the participation theme, the third theme was the familial theme, the fourth theme was the personal theme, fifth the competition theme, and sixth the facilitation theme.

The six principle themes outlined by Murton in Smith's broadcasts are consistent with the traditional themes of Christianity. The first theme of sacrifice, Smith divided into three: there was the sacrifice of others on the listeners' behalf, the men and women being killed in action on the front; there was the sacrifice of peer group pressure, men and women all over America who were contributing to the war effort by their sacrifice, men and women who were in similar situation to other listeners; and finally, there was the sacrifice of Smith, herself, doing such a marathon show, and letting everyone know what a sacrifice she was making.

This idea of the triangular sacrifice fits fairly and squarely into the Christian tradition. There's the sacrifice of Christ on all our behalf, the sacrifice of other Christian witnesses, the sacrifice of the pastor who tirelessly preaches and does the Word. In all of the programs viewed from the Evangelical to the Catholic, not one program, brought out all the elements of sacrifice.

The Catholics would give reference to Christ dying for our sins; the Evangelical would give reference to being washed in the blood of Christ. The Evangelicals would point to the Christian witness of peers, and so too would Catholics. The Catholics would ask the individual to likewise sacrifice in prayer works or offerings, and so too, would the Evangelicals. Neither the Evangelicals or the Catholic preachers spoke of the sacrifice that they were making on behalf of the Word. Thus, the viewers were unable as in the case of Smith to identify with the integrity of the preacher, the truthfulness of the message was not tested, and perhaps a great part of the appeal, itself, of the Christian message was lost. A question arises, are the Christian ministers sacrificing and living the Word. Are they so humble that they prefer not to speak of themselves? Or is there another reason by which they do not wish to be part of this sacrifice paradigm?

In the case of the Smith broadcast, the sacrifice of Smith, herself, was certainly productive. Many of the respondents to the study claiming that it was a desire to identify with Smith in helping the war effort or the desire to alleviate the distress of Smith that prompted them to support the war effort. In designing the architecture necessary for the successful transference of the Word to the medium of television, perhaps the question of the minister's integrity and the placing of that integrity before the people needs to be emphasized.

In the election of 1960, one of the appeals of John F. Kennedy to the American population was his willingness to sacrifice himself on behalf of his countrymen. A movie was made of his exploits as a Navy lieutenant when his patrol boat was destroyed and his subsequent rescuing of his crew members. The spirit of sacrifice has been a factor in Christianity from the time of Christ. The need for the pastor or the priest to be someone who has suffered, who has sacrificed, on behalf of others, or who perhaps by their very lifestyle is suffering or sacrificing on behalf of others would appear to be an integral part of gaining mass appeal. Now, movie stars, in general, do not have to attain this sacrificial element; however, their appeal is based on a different premise. Their appeal is within a storyline and they are mere actors. The Christian minister or priest is very much the story and their appeal is intimately connected with the message that they are passing on.

In both Catholic and Protestant television preaching at the local level, the preaching did not in any instance identify sacrifice as part of the Christian lifestyle. Evangelical preaching in particular emphasized that we have been saved by the blood of Christ. As a result, our worries, our cares, our frustrations, our lack of worldly goods would be alleviated by this faith in Christ. Sacrifice did not play any role. The ministers, themselves, did not appear to be sacrificing anything, always appearing to be successful.

Christianity, itself, far from being a religion for rejects and misfits and the uneducated, the poor, the lonely, the downtrodden and the suffering appears to be a religion for the middle class, for those who want to be part of the in-crowd, for those who are enjoying the material benefits of this life. The emphasis on healing and the ability to heal is strong. Some programs as much as eight or nine times place their number on the screen encouraging people to call and find spiritual healing.

What the larger production can escape by the quality of its production, the smaller churches, at the local level, may be able to accomplish by people being able to identify with ministers who are sacrificial. The larger religious production houses following the architectural model that has been presented earlier of a building support by a steel frame with curtain walls can be likened to other prime-time television productions that involve sets, outdoor scenes, stage sequences, excellent lighting, costuming, editing, and overall first-rate production. These programs on prime-time television are costing upwards of half a million dollars, something that the local-level church cannot compete with. Preaching, be it as a homily or as a sermon, will demand more of the speaker than is currently being given. The minister or priest as a person of sacrifice needs to be clearly visible. The name and House of God that the minister seeks to glorify

needs to be greater than a Hollywood set or a house with hanging walls.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER IV

1. Matthew 13:5. The Jerusalem Bible. (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1966).
2. Luke 4:16-21. The Jerusalem Bible. (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1966).
3. B. Fletcher. A History of Architecture. (London: Butterworths, 1987), Chapters 40, 43.
4. R. Murton. Mass Persuasion. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), p. 33
5. Ibid., p. 7.

CHAPTER V

FROM THEOLOGY TO TELEVISION

"To God I speak Spanish
To Women, Italian
To Men, French
And to my horse, German"
Emperor Charles V(1550-1558)

Sine cera (Yours sincerely, without wax)
Anonymous

I conceive some scattered notions about a superior power to be of singular use for the common people, as furnishing excellent materials to keep children quiet when they grow peevish, and providing topics of amusement in a tedious winter-night.

Jonathan Swift
An Article Against Abolishing Christianity(1708)

"The word television. The word is half Latin and half Greek. No good can come of it."
C. P. Scott(1846-1932)

The study of theology is more often than not referred to when one wishes to discuss God, the term theology coming from the Greek, Theos, meaning God, and Logos, meaning Word. The sense in which we still use it is in its scholastic form dating from around the 12th century when Appleard spoke about theology as an intellectual discipline that dealt with the

knowledge of God. Theology, when true to itself, is a reflector of the questions of its age; and today finds itself at a crossroads.

From the scholastics onward, theology, both Catholic and Protestant, dealt with the cosmos in an objective manner. They traced back into a philosophical, metaphysical foundation to a first cause. Theology today uses the person as a subject, a far more anthropological emphasis on the nature of being and the explanations that the subject demands from a Supreme Being in an attempt to analogically understand that Supreme Being.

Theology today sees itself as a revelatory science that has a past, a present, and a future. The priority always being the present, but the paradigm needs past, present, and future for a complete synthesis. Theology is always secondary to faith. Theology is the human person at their best in a discursive mode on the questions which befuddle the mind and transfix the gaze on things greater in image but lesser to the grasp. Since the middle of the last century, the Catholic Church is an example of a church which has had to come to terms with the notion that the philosopher is not here merely to understand the world, but to change it. In its theology, the Catholic Church has grasped this notion and seen that the church's mission is not so much to relive the Christ of history, but to actually be the Christ of today. Its theology is deeply engaged in what transpires in the world and is not

something for coffee house discussion and left behind with the tip.

Currently within the Christian tradition and the Catholic Church in particular, (we shall use the Catholic Church as the basis of our discussion for a period in this chapter) theology has been divided into three subdisciplines: fundamental, systematic, and practical theology. Fundamental theology, engaging in critical inquiry, examining truths and claims, using rational argument. Systematic theology assumes belief in religious claims, acknowledges fidelity to a religious confession, is a revealer of a religious tradition, and practical theology concerns itself with the lived experience informed by its own theory and by the practice of the social, political, cultural, and pastoral experiences of those involved in the theological moment.

Television and religious television rarely look at the questions of fundamental theology. More often than not it will look at practical theology relating beliefs and truths to a particular tradition as they would become discursive within a particular society and its ethical goals. Examples of this would be the priest or minister taking a Scripture passage, the priest using Catholic tradition, the teaching authority of the church and Scriptural analysis to relate this particular passage to questions of capital punishment, paying of taxes, divorce, abortion. The Protestant minister of the Evangelical strain using a fundamental, literal interpretation of the

Bible, to say that Scripture says this about divorce, this about abortion, this about capital punishment, and that this is the Word of God unchangeable and unalterable. It is not common for Christian ministers of the Evangelical, the mainline Protestant, or the Catholic tradition to engage in critical inquiry or fundamental theology to examine the truths of God's existence and to use logical, rational reasoning to pursue these matters before a television audience.

The doing of theology is often what is referred to as religion. Religion meaning to tie or to fasten to connect oneself with. Theology is the science of God. Religion is the act whereby I attach myself to a system. On television the religious minister is normally calling one to hear The Word of God, to have a religious experience. In the words of the Gospel, and so it was "that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins".¹

Religious experience goes through a series of conversions and stages. The Canadian theologian, Bernard Lonergan, outlined different conversions, and it is against these stages that we will test the possibility of theology and television being compatible with each other.

Lonergan outlines four types of conversion: intellectual, moral, religious, and Christian. Conversion is understood as the opening up of a new horizon or a radical difference between a held premise and a new premise. A

conversion is not new knowledge about itself, rather it is entry into a brand new realm of understanding and knowing. Lonergan used these four conversions from a Christian world view and did not apply them to any system other than a Christian one. Lonergan would also hold that all Christians have experienced these different conversions to a certain degree, at least implicitly. The intent is to look at them objectively and to relate them to religious television in the public access mode.

Intellectual Conversion is best defined as knowing what knowing is. Even the cleanest of physical scientists has to grasp the world beyond themselves through the mediation of their operations. Thus the act of measuring something may use objective instrumentality, but the inner meaning, the implicit knowing of what the measurement means is an act of consciousness. The physical scientist in this sense is no different from the philosopher or the theologian who will look at community, democracy, television, economics or culture and see that the operations needed to know these are not visible realities, but rather groups of ideas and values that operate in communities who use the same consciousness streams to know them and to know that they know them. The world then that the physical scientists creates, the anthropologist, the theologian, is a very fragile place. It is a construction of reality by fallible minds. At times the physical scientist or the theologian will fail to ask relevant questions, refuse to

face important questions, will pay little attention to input of others, and more often than not, the physical scientist has been on a par with the theologian for refusing to accept change even when it happens in his laboratory. In all human transactions, there is human bias. The person who goes through a conscious intellectual conversion realizes that they are constructing the world and they are aware of the sets used in the construction, and they are aware that they are the ones who are doing it. Intellectual conversion allows the ability to question reality with known information, theoretical information, and illusionary information the stuff of dreams. For the television minister on public access, this is a direct challenge to ideas, such as community, family, religious practice. In the 1992 Presidential election, much discussion has been given to the state of the American family within a traditional value system. Our understanding being that there is a primary breadwinner, there's a member who stays at home to look after the children. The social scientists have pointed out that the current state of the American family is that one in five families now constitute this traditional pattern. The Lansing State Journal, quoting a report by the Population Reference bureau said: "The Ozzie and Harriet model of 1950's television fame -- a breadwinning husband and a wife who stayed home with the children -- once, the dominant pattern in America. Now, one in five married couples with children fits that stereotype."² The Lansing State Journal

reported about 36% of all American families are married couples with children, but a growing number of those are blended as in "step families." The study went on to say, "valuing the family should not be confused with valuing a particular family form."³ The programs viewed on public access television from the Catholic Outreach Mass to the Evangelical programming spoke to an intellectual conversion that was of a prior age. They spoke, in fact, in the area of family to the type of family that has been discussed in the 1992 Presidential election and as reported by the Population Reference Bureau as being sorely tested. The Population Reference Bureau pointing out that a particular form of family life is not to be confused with the value of family life. The religious broadcasting on public access television fails to address the question of the increasing poverty of mothers raising families by themselves, the increasing inner city crime and drug rates, rising drop out rates in school, on the level of intellectual conversion. Rather, the approach is to seek answers in the realm of Christian conversion. This is like using apples to speak about oranges.

Intellectual Conversion, then, is a process that is open to all human beings, human beings being able to reflect upon themselves and know that they are thinking. Intellectual conversion allows the person to entertain any question, to criticize any belief, and to expand one's horizons to the theoretical, the illusionary, and away from the practical and

the here and now. Public access religious cabling in East Lansing and in Lansing seems to have failed to challenge the viewer to an intellectual conversion as part of the Christian conversion. Religious public access in Lansing and East Lansing has bought into behavior patterns, interpretation modes, and language usage that is stereotypical, expected, and populist. Religious public access television is alive and well in Lansing and East Lansing, but the program producers do not challenge for intellectual conversions. In the course of this study, not one of the program originators spoke about the need to bring their audience to a new level of knowing. The intent of the programmers was to obey the command to preach "The Good News" and the grace of God would do the rest.

The second type of conversion that Bernard Lonigan speaks about is Moral Conversion. And here he is referring to a change in one's basis of choice from satisfaction to value. Christopher Lasch, in The Culture of Narcissism says, "The media give substance to and thus intensifies narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourages the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the herd and make it more and more difficult for him to accept the banality of every day existence."⁴ Later Lasch, in the same chapter, says, "The modern propaganda of commodities and the good life has sanctioned impulse gratification and made it unnecessary for the id to apologize for its wishes or disguise their

grandiose propositions, but this same propaganda has made failure and loss insupportable."⁵

Vice President Dan Quayle, in his famous Murphy Brown speech in May, 1992, said, "Our inner cities are filled with children having children with people who have not been able to take advantage of educational opportunities with people who are dependent on drugs or the narcotic of welfare . . . This poverty is . . . fundamentally a poverty of values".⁶ The Judeo-Christian fabric of American society enshrined in its constitution and the values that it spelled out had, by the 1960s, been so seriously questioned as to be disregarded when a new set of understandings were being forged for the latter half of the 20th century. This new set of understandings were to be the values on which the community of American society would test itself and score itself. However, since the 1960s, no consensus seems to have emerged on what is to replace the Judeo-Christian value system on which America will continue to base its practices and its laws. The talk in this country now is of a culture war, a war in which there are defenders of traditional values and those who take an existentialist approach to the forging of community relationships.

The Christian churches find themselves very much a part of this discussion of a culture war of a value war. The country's id was founded on a Christian-Judeo ethic from which flowed its community relationships, its laws, its value system, its sense of right and wrong. Therefore, when these

elements of the nation's soul are being questioned, the churches find themselves at the heart of the discussion. The voice of the church, Evangelical to Catholic, to Nonconformist is no longer a unified voice on questions such as abortion, homosexual rights, the use of nuclear force, and the distribution of the wealth of the country. They have also found themselves challenged in an attempt to accommodate the voice of cultures that may have been suppressed, such as the African-American culture, and the native American culture. And finally, they have found themselves coming to terms with a population that has come to terms with value-added packaging. This is packaging that is intended to please the eye and fool the intellect, much as the architecture of the country was overwhelmed with the Bauhaus System of building. So packaging has been produced to enhance the meaning of more is less. In the realm of religious life, the churches struggle as they try to offer more consolation and demand less sacrifice. The Christian lifestyle has been reduced to a set of self-satisfying platitudes that give comfort to trying questions and dull the need for intellectual and moral conversion.

As in intellectual conversion, in moral conversion there is a chasm between obtaining satisfaction from some thing or person and seeing the value of the thing or the person in itself and then relating it to the world. If society seems to be obsessed with more is less and packaging is everything,

then, too, the religious minister on public access television seems to have become enamored with satisfaction and failed to bring himself and his audience to the question that moral conversion raises, namely, is there a GOOD over and against which I, the community in which I live, and my world, can judge itself? Religious public access television, as in the case of intellectual conversion, does not seem to raise this question to its viewers. Religious public access television is concerned with bringing Christ to the people. The overall message that comes from Evangelical and Protestant usage of public access television is that we are sinners and that we can be saved by the "Blood of Christ". Some of the actions that are called sins are sometimes mentioned--drug addiction, murder--but these sins are not sins that are based against a moral conversion that sees a universal objective good, rather they are sins that are based against the personhood of Christ and therefore are subject to transient interpretation, depending on the minister's relationship with Christ and understanding of Christ's role in the world. Catholic usage of public access television in Lansing and East Lansing is less extensive and a pattern does not seem to emerge on the question of the universal good on the level of moral conversion. However, practical Catholic Theology would include an understanding of natural law which would, in essence, mean that Catholic preaching and programming would speak to a fundamental objective good. Even then, in the

confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court of the United States, the specter of Thomas's belief in a natural law was raised. Natural law did not become an issue in the hearings, but the commentary that surrounded the discussion was derisive of natural law and spoke to a society that had rejected an objective good in the sense of natural law and was basing its principles on existential ethics.

This is the society to which the minister on public access television speaks. Lansing and East Lansing is but a small part of the cosmos of television in the United States and assuming that it is a typical reflection of communities across the country, then the decline of objective standards for the minister and for the hearer of the word is spoken of, on the one hand, as something to be sadly missed and something that the nation will suffer as a result of its loss, and on the other hand, the question is set forth as in the case of the American family that the value of family must not be misinterpreted for any particular structure that may emerge of a family unit. The religious minister in the preaching and the programming on religious public access seems to have both feet firmly in the air and not know which way to turn on this issue, and as such, the issue is avoided.

A solution to the dilemma may lie in the notion of sacrifice. The elements of self-sacrifice and community sacrifice are not present in the programming and preaching. The ministers shy away from sacrifice because the society of

which they are part and parcel of rejects the notion of sacrifice, rejects the notion of pain, and accepts that "more is less" and that appearance is substance and substance can be bought and sold.

In 1960, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the newly elected President of the United States of America, in his Inaugural Address said: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." The ministers, preachers, and priests on television on a national level are seldom heard to speak about love of neighbor as an element of religion, rather they speak more in the Protestant tradition which tends to concentrate on God's love for us. Since the Middle Ages at the time of the reformation, Protestantism and Catholicism do not look at the notion of love of God in a similar vein. The national evangelical ministers, when they speak about what God can do for you and me in our lives, speak out of their tradition. This tradition is a reaction to the practical theology of the Middle Ages which emphasized sin, doom, death and despair. The reaction being God has such great love for us that we will never be lost if we once acknowledge Him as our Lord and Savior. The first and the greatest of the commandments, then, that Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and thy whole mind does not receive much emphasis on popular religious preaching in Lansing and East Lansing. The approach of the Protestant churches with its emphasis on God's love for us

seems to have won the day. The field is squarely in the hands of the preachers who emphasize miracles for suffering, healing for despair, and blessings for poverty. The Blood of Christ is all encompassing and all saving. The programs from emphasizing that a miracle can happen in your life today, to call this number for help drive home again and again the message that we are the recipients of God's love and to paraphrase President Kennedy, "Ask not what you can do for your God, but what your God can do for you."

Religious Conversion is the third of Lonergan's conversions and falling in love with God. Religious Conversion is a response attitude for we are already loved by God. Religious Conversion outside of television seems to show more unity between the churches as the first commandment to love God is emphasized. It is neglected on television, but emphasized in the local focus. Religious conversion is a love story and love story means that a horizon is shared with another. A panorama that is greater than self becomes exposed and I can become a part of this new vista by acceptance of it. Above all, religious conversion is a dialectic, a painful, creative, and unending dialectic between two persons. God's love on the one hand and the respondent's love on the other. There is a tension in this dialectic and there are levels within the dialectic. God's love of the creature demands a love that is of the inner self and a love that receives meaning and that is motivated by things of value in this

world. The love of God by the recipient inwardly is a commitment and outwardly a storyline for action. The call by the preacher on television to experience the love of God through miraculous events in our lives is to turn the process somewhat upside down. For we know in reality that those who are loved do not necessarily rely on tokens and trinkets as proof or evidence of that love; we have to make a decision of acceptance that we are loved. It's a decision that we believe that somebody loves us. Within our culture, the act of making a decision has been reduced to proofs on a scientific level. However, as we saw earlier, even science relies on the intellect to give meaning to its propositions. It is possible to eliminate objective, scientific variables and replace them with philosophical concepts and feelings and still arrive at a verifiable decision that I am loved without recourse to the trinkets of materialism to provide substantial evidence of my being loved.

Practical theology would base the evidence for its decision that we are loved not on the materials and gifts that we have received, and less today on the order of beauty within the universe, but more on the fact that we ourselves are capable of love. If we accept that we can and do love, then we are called to make a decision of acceptance that we, in turn, are loved and this decision gives value and meaning to our lives. It is based in the intellect and does not rely on the gifts of the preacher or of the television evangelist and

their promises of succor in this world. The problem that religious broadcasting is up against is not so much a problem of the interpretation of theology and the transmission of that interpretation to the viewer, rather it is a problem of populist cultural domination of a medium and the nonacceptance of a deviant viewpoint. Television presents a culture that is highly beneficent, a culture whereby all viewers can participate fully with the amount of talent that they have and the amount of effort that they are capable of. It is a culture as has been stated earlier that is populist, that believes in the transient nature of things and is existentialist in its value system.

For the minister, priest, or preacher to rise against this populist culture in a deviant fashion would require the minister to step outside his or her cultural heritage, possibly his or her traditions and certainly his or her way of life. But perhaps this is what is being called for. The preaching of the early Apostles was in line with the preaching of John the Baptist -- repent, turn away from your sins, and be saved. The Gospel teaches that it is harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Religious programming on public access in the Lansing and East Lansing area, in general, seems to have interpreted its theological foundations in the light of this populist culture and appears to have little to say to the

population at large. Its message seems to lack personal example by the preachers.

St. Mathew's Gospel states, "When the Son of man comes in His glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take His seat on His throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before Him, and he will separate men one from another as the Shepherd separates sheep from goats, he will place the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, come you whom my Father has blessed. Take for your heritage prepared for you since the foundation of the world. I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you made me welcome. Naked, and you clothed me. Sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me. Then the virtuous will say to Him in reply, Lord, when did you see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and gave you drink, when did you see you a stranger and make you welcome, naked, and clothed you, sick or in prison and go to see you, and the King will answer. I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brethren of mine, you did it to me."⁷

Christian Conversion is the acceptance that Christ is God. Here again there is a leap, a quantum leap, a leap into the dark, a leap of faith from God to Jesus. If in an intellectual conversion, the gap between the mind and the real is bridged, then in Christian conversion, the gap between God

and Jesus is bridged. Religious conversion is conversion to a supreme good, a God. Christian conversion names that God. Religious conversion is a falling in love with God. Christian conversion names that love as Jesus Christ. Christian conversion allows the person to authenticize themselves against another person. In Christian conversion, the follower truly encounters God. The encounter is immediate and not remote, it comes packed with relevance, meanings, images, and values that take significance in a particular location in time. For the Christian, Christ is the Alpha and Omega of their religious conversion. The teachings of Christ are the pathways, the doors, and the horizons that the Christian walks on, dreams about, and opens to. The teachings of Christ are very specific in those who are authored the first accounts of his life, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The teachings are specific about how Christ will place a value on a person. The story in Matthew about the Last Judgment speaks to the second commandment, Thou shalt love thy brother as thyself. For Christ, love of God, and love of neighbor were intimately, inextricably found together. The poor and the down trodden were friends of Christ. The Gospels are clear that not all the hungry and the poor, those suffering diseases of mind and body were cured by Christ. Christ probably only healed a few of the suffering people that he actually encountered. To the rest, he gave the command: Love thy neighbor as thyself. Television ministries on a national level and on the local

level in Lansing and East Lansing and public access television seem to have forgotten this part of the Christian message. Rather they emphasize accepting Christ as Savior, being washed in his blood, and receiving the many blessings. This does run counter to the vast proportion of the written accounts of the life of Jesus and his Apostles. Simone Weil once said, "We are well aware that the good that we possess at present in the form of wealth, power, consideration, friends, the love of those we love, the well being of those we love and so on is not sufficient. Yet we believe that on the day we get a little more, we shall be satisfied. We believe this because we lie to ourselves. If we really reflect for a moment, we know it is false . . . we have only to imagine all our desires satisfied; after a time we shall become discontented. We should want something else, and we shall be miserable through not knowing what to want. A thing that everyone can do is keep his attention fixed upon this truth".⁸ Simone Weil, the patriot, the Christian who could never become a Christian, the woman who cried at the thought of pain and grief and sorrow of others. She reflected deeply that the message of the Christian gospel does call for a conversion. Christian Conversion is a radical acknowledgement that we cannot be satisfied with good health, with wealth, with the trappings of materialism or even of friends, that we are not satisfied with all the things that many televangelists seem to offer precisely because we believe in Christ. Rather, we are

satisfied when we renounce the "I" and let go to let another enter in. Televangelism following the line of mainstream television seeks to fill the people with their desires and wants. Entertainment has become the business of television. Entertainment sometimes seems to be the business of religious television, even at the local access level. The idea that one is to renounce oneself, pick up one's cross, be it in personal circumstances or the cross of another, is not the message that universally comes across from religious broadcasting. If the business of television in the United States is entertainment and the business of American culture is entertaining the masses, then it appears that religious television has learned its lesson well, that it is a mirror reflection of the most popular aspects of North American culture and the idea of needing a conversion from self to love of other runs counter to the prevailing religious sentiment that God loves me and I will continue to receive many benefits and blessings if I once acknowledge my sin and my being loved by God.

From the earliest days of Christianity, those who delved into the writings of the Scriptures and those who would lead, have tried to impress on the followers that the "other" is more important than self that in finding the "self," one has to go through the "other". From its earliest days, Christianity because it drew on the things of this world to speak about the things of another world has opened and closed the pandora box of many of the sciences that are in vogue

today--anthropology, sociology, phenomenology, psychology. Within the realm of Christianity, these sciences take on a holistic meaning. For Christianity alone seeks to offer answers to questions that these sciences, great as their area of examination may be, tend to shy away from. Christianity will draw sociology and psychology together when it speaks of the Christian ideal of community. Christianity alone paints a picture of who we are and the world that we live in that is with us from our conception to our death.

Long before the modern sciences discovered that the solution to many of the problems that it raised lay in the essence of the correctly stated question, Christianity had tried to refine and define the questions which it would answer. Christianity has stated that give me the child until he is seven and I will give you the man, a dictum that has been followed in recent times by both capitalism and communism.

For the minister presenting him/herself on television, an understanding of the stages of growth that his/her audience go through is of equal importance and runs parallel to the different types of conversion that a person may have in their life. Traditionally, the spirituality in the western tradition outlined three stages of growth: the purgative, the illuminative, and unitive. The purgative is a recognition of one's limitations and in spiritual terms of one's sins. The illuminative is a growth stage of bonding and relationship

with another, and the unitive is that stage in which the two become one and either speaks with the mind and heart and love of the other. James W. Fowler, in Stages of Faith, took these traditional stages and applied and cross-referenced them to other developmental sciences, taking Piaget's Intellectual Stages, Erikson's Psychological Stages of Development, and Kohlberg's Moral Development and applied them to stages of faith development. The Christian minister who addresses his community or congregation needs to know that as television has become more audience segmented, that this segmentation can be but a mere reflection of the nature of the human being, firstly, in the developmental stages and secondly in the interest stages.

The remainder of this chapter will look at the interest stages as television stages and relate them to the faith stages of Fowler with some cross-references to Kohlberg's Moral Development Stages, Piaget's Intellectual Stages of Development and Erikson's Psychological Stages of Development. The minister in the pulpit and before the camera can either address the assembled community as one single audience and dilute the message so that there seems to be an attraction for each of the various segments of the audience or can be aware of the segmentation that naturally occurs in the form of development stages and address homily, sermon or lecture to those developmental stages, knowing that parts will appeal to some more than others.

From the type of food that a person likes to the area that one likes to live in to the type of math problem one can solve, there is progression. With the onset of age, sometimes regression in one's capabilities and one's likes and dislikes also occurs. There is likewise growth in television awareness and attitude formation. There are stages in television watching. Stages that the minister should be aware of when he stands in front of a camera, these stages can be paralleled to the faith stages in one's life at a minimum and at a maximum paralleled to other theorists stages of development from Kohlberg, Piaget to Erikson.

Stages of Television Development

Kinetiscopic Stage of Television Viewing

In the kinetiscopic stage, the child is attracted to the television by light and darkness, by color and colors, by movement, by sound, including the human, the musical and robotic. These stimulators are important as precursors of stimuli that will continuously occur in the child's life as they pass through other television stages and will help to frame the environment within which they will live and the use or misuse of their senses, feelings and beliefs. Television at this stage addresses the child's limited attention span through continuously changing sets and scenes, changing colors and changing sounds. In sharp contrast to the known, soothing tones of the parents or other siblings, or even the noises

within the house, like the striking clock at midnight, or the noises familiar of cars passing by on the street. Television offers to the child at this stage an unparralled number and depth of experiences that individuals have not had to embrace since society first started to record its teachings and beliefs and create structures within which it could organize and create order.

Children at this age are experiencing stimuli that their later world will truly reflect in their attitudes, perceptions, feelings, intellectual processes and faith. Very quickly the ego, which is emerging in the child as a result of its willingness to forgo the continual presence of the primary caregiver, is assailed by a multitude of stimuli the consequences of which in today's society we as yet do not fully understand or comprehend.

Traditionally, the result of the loss of the primary caregiver to another room still meant a host of familiar objects and artifacts within the young child's reach and grasp and understanding. Now it is possible for a child of three to be in a room that has a television set on which visually and audibly acts out a murder for every night of their lives. Therefore, the very basic trust that is the first prerequisite in Erikson's first stage of development has been challenged to such a degree that when the minister speaks of love on television, this child has lived through a host of unknown experiences to the minister. These have been incorporated by

television into the development of that child. The child may not respond in a traditionally expected mode to the minister's calling.

The parents of today and the producers of television programs both know that the scheduling of cartoons will draw a large child population to watch the television. These cartoons from Tom and Jerry to the Teenage Ninja Turtles of today discuss the primary issues of good and evil, but in a physical manner using force to ensure that good prevails and evil is dispelled. Likewise, the child watching in a room where adult television programs are being broadcast is subjected to crimes that would be unspoken of a few decades ago. Two issues are being presented to an extremely young mind for consideration. First, that good and evil must struggle in a physical nature against each other, and second, that the hero, the one who is to be trusted, is a deviant that is outside the reach and grasp of the normal human being.

It is to this young person that the television minister or priest addresses him or herself. Not alone has this person had their basic trust challenged, but their faith, simplistic as it may be in their world, is also challenged. Why not then challenge the religious message of the minister, why not put it on a par with all the other stimuli that the young child has to understand and assimilate. Finally, through an act of omission, the young child has heroes and heroines without religious content. Traditionally, this religious content has

been seen as fundamental in the earliest development of a child. Erikson, in Child and Society states:

The parental fate that supports the trust emerging in the newborn has throughout history had its institutional safeguard (and, on occasion, found its greatest enemy) in organized religion. Trust born of care, is, in fact, the touchstone of the actuality of a given religion.⁹

The understanding of the world that the Christian religion has is not shared with the child at the same intensity as other stimuli are allowed to enter its life. The sharing of Christianity with the child is at best piecemeal and in an off-on stance. When things move more slowly, when a person may expect a limited number of stimuli in their lives, especially in their early childhood, then the opportunity for Christianity to have a competitive chance would to have been more real. The minister, when using television, is using a medium that almost suffocates from its vectors and stimuli. The minister on public access religious television in East Lansing and Lansing does not seem to address this question of competing stimuli and their representations of the world.

The child from its earliest moments to the age of seven encounters its first stage of faith, Intuitive Projective Faith. This "is the fantasy-filled imitative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the physical faith of primally related adults".¹⁰ The strength of this stage of

faith is the association of the child with adults and adult type situations.

Our world teaches us firstly through the multiplicity of child programs on television that adults and children even children at their earliest stages, are spending less time together. Secondly, there is not a single program on religious television in public access in Lansing and East Lansing that is addressed to children of this age group. Piaget's functional invariants(cognitive processes that are inborn, universal and independent of age) of accommodation, assimilation, and organization are left to the Hollywood makers of cartoons and children's programs to be capitalized on. The processes that are basic and essential to intellectual functioning, according to Piaget, that are inborn and universal are not addressed at this stage by religious broadcasters in the area. The accommodation to the external world by the child is made to the Teenage Ninja Turtle and its equivalent where children will stand up in front of the screen and become engrossed in the Turtle world, imitating sword fights, calling themselves after the names of the Ninja Turtles, one being Michelangelo and one being Donetello, etc. The child assimilates the attributes and world view of these children's programs, cartoons, Sesame Street and the lonesome hero who bases his/her justice on a situational type value. On an organizational level, the child can be expected to create schema that reflect the schema seen on television. These are

the values and moral concepts that are placed upon the basic building blocks of the child. These intellectual acts are placed in the seat of knowledge, in a larger organization, to be used again and again when the child creates wishes to problem solve. The individual acts or role playing to solve the problem may vary, but the organization and process according to Piaget remains the same. Fowler speaks about the beauty of the birth of the imagination at this stage, imagination that will help in the transition to different stages of faith. Television, on the other hand, while subscribing to the birth of the imagination in the child, seeks to use it for its own end. The child's formation does not seem to be a concern of the religious broadcaster at the kinetiscopic stage of television viewing.

Telescopic Stage of Television Viewing

Telescopic viewing is formed usually at the adolescent stage out of interest and a need for a feeling of mutuality. The young adolescent identifies with particular situations and will use them as a basis for problem solving and for value creation. The adolescent uses telescopic viewing as a measuring stick for themselves and for their acceptance within given peer group image making situations. M-TV addresses telescopic viewing. M-TV uses the speed of cartoon situations by dramatic cuts, camera angles, lighting, music and combines it with the audio wording to express philosophies of life, solutions to situations, and approaches to sexuality,

authority, love, money, family, good, and evil. The stage of faith that closely resembles this telescopic television stage is the Mythic-Literal Faith Stage.

In this Mythic-Literal Stage, the God of immediate and definitive justice appears. Right and wrong are clearly defined. The right will be rewarded and those who commit wrong will be punished. This is a world of symbols and storytelling of beliefs and observances, traditions, and occultic expressions. The mythical is entwined in the real and the story is part of the truth. In this stage, the child learns the stories of the scriptures. It is also possible in this stage that the growth of the person will stop. That a literal interpretation of the Scriptures and the God of good and evil become dominant in one's life.

Television appears to enhance this mythic-literal stage. The telescopic viewer will see the drama of life told in a song or a poem, symbolized in motion or in vision, told through different sounds. This stage is allegorical with the struggle within. It is not the struggle itself, but it portrays universal elements which need individualizing acts to conquer and to tie it to the individual. Thus the individual can begin to come in contact with the I that searches for a reason to be and for a reasonableness to carry on. This is the stage where the rebellious adolescent will refuse to go to church because peer groups are not attending Church. Here the adolescent enters the Formal Operations Stage. According to

Piaget, this stage encompasses having the ability to connect past, present and future in various hypotheses and predictions.

The difficulty in reducing any human being's life development, from childhood to old age, to a series of stages that are closed, is highlighted by Kohlberg and his attempt to look at the person from moral stages. The second stage of faith and the telescopic stage of television viewing do not fit nicely into Kohlberg's moral stages. Kohlberg would hold that in the second stage of development, there is much more reciprocity involved, that the actions of the adolescent are often determined by an attitude of "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours," and not so much by loyalty, gratitude, or justice. However, there are elements of fairness involved and the world is interpreted in a much more pragmatic way than one might imagine. This type of analysis of moral dilemmas is attempted in 21 Jump Street and Quantum Leap. The other television shows that seem to have high interest level for this television stage and faith stage are Beverly Hills 90210 and the game shows. At the other end of the spectrum, you have Married with Children and the soap operas.

None of these programs, while diverse in nature, structure and format, show overtly a Christian perspective on the issues involved. It is as though Christianity is not part of this nation. It is as though the laws that 21 Jump Street seeks to enforce are not founded on the Constitution which, in

turn, is founded on a Judeo-Christian ethic. This fact is ignored on programs like 21 Jump Street and Beverly Hills 90210 and comes directly in conflict in such programs as Married with Children and the soap operas. The minister who appears on public access television is firstly competing through a channel that does not have the drawing power of the networks or of the cable television channels. Secondly, the ministers and the programs on public access that are religious in nature in Lansing, East Lansing, and Meridian Township do not have the finances, do not have the expertise, and do not have the creative story people to compete with national programming, funding, and expertise. By default the minister cannot address the issues that appear on these programs from Married with Children to 21 Jump Street and All in the Family. Yet these are the very issues that appeal to this telescopic group of viewers. The minister when he/she speaks of ethical or moral situations, be they justice on an economic level or sexuality on a moral level, he/she is unable to provide the building blocks necessary for intellectual, moral, religious or Christian conversions.

In the power and limits of a vision, Rozen, commenting on the work of Erikson, says,

I will speak of moral learning as an aspect of childhood: moral learning and of ideological experimentation as a part of adolescence; and of ethical consolidation as an adult task. As we know from the study of psychosexuality, the earlier stages are not replaced, but develop according to a epigenetic principle--that is, they are absorbed

into a hierarchic system of increasing differentiation.¹¹

In Psychology Today, Howard Muson, in an article called: Moral thinking: Can it be thought? says "many experts will agree with Piaget that moral judgment does seem to unfold in a developmental pattern and Kohlberg's theory has provided the most comprehensive effort to describe it to date".¹²

The telescopic stage in television viewing builds on the kinetiscopic stage. The use of public access for religious broadcasting appears to believe that its audience by a process akin to osmosis or the Grace of God will understand where the minister or priest is coming from without actually taking these first two stages of television viewing patterns into account and incorporating them into its format and into the structure of its content.

At the corresponding faith level stage the person has looked at their peer group and made decisions to follow or to beat another path in their television viewing and life orientation. Styles of approach to God, the church, and the world have been formed by the myths of parents. These myths, in turn, have been put against the spotlight of the world that the adolescent has encountered on their own. Sometimes the myth is found believable; other times, the the world teaches that the myth and the morality that surrounded it and the faith of believe in God is no longer acceptable as was first presented in their early childhood. At the third stage of

faith, the person seeks to create their own myths, seeks to create their own world view, and starts to fashion a God that is believable for them. Following the thought of Erikson, there is identity confusion in the person that is transferred into the faith stage. For Kohlberg, this age group would be struggling with issues of law and order, that are again carried over into the faith stage, the person is coming to grips with a vengeful, powerful God, but a God who is also just and forgiving. Piaget sees the person moving into the stage of formal operations, allowing the young person to use the powers of their intelligence to schematize and to build whole pictures of the way their world works and how they can understand it.

Perhaps this is too much for the minister to try to understand when composing his/her lecture or sermon or television show. Nevertheless, this is what the social sciences and psychology seem to be telling him about the building blocks and how they are formed and placed together in the human being. So, too, the faith of the person is responding to these developmental stages and trying to articulate itself through the lived experience of the given individual. The minister, often ill prepared, often lacking education and funding to tackle these issues will not address them on television. The minister, by definition, does not have to address people at this stage of development, but the national programmers are. The sheer weight of programming

that the young adult has to sift through and endure without any support of a religious nature addressing their problems and the identity struggles is too great for most. For most adolescents, the value system that they are trying to fashion and shape for themselves would appear to be left high and dry. And without being able to substantiate the assertion, most adolescents would seem to be absorbing the values, the developmental stages, and the overall world view and cultural taboos and norms of the producers of network programs from All in the Family to 21 Jump Street to Beverly Hills 90210 and to Murphy Brown. At the local level of public access in Lansing and East Lansing, no explicit programming is designed to address the issues, no homilies are prepared, and no lectures given to address the issues as seen through the eyes of a person at this faith and television stage.

Oscilloscopic or Telesis Stage of Television Viewing

Television viewers at this stage are viewers with a fluctuating attention span. These are viewers who can make intelligent decisions on the type of programming they will watch. Selecting the programs that they wish to view on a basis other than peer group pressure, right or wrong, or a selection process that merely repeats the programs that they saw their parents watching when they were young children. This is the age group that roughly corresponds to 18 to 54. The oscilloscopic and telesis viewer is parallel in the

developmental stage to Erikson's stages of intimacy versus isolation and generativity versus stagnation. For Kohlberg this would be parallel to the social contract stage and Piaget would still be in the formal operation stage.

Once again the problem of placing television viewing stages into developmental and faith stages is apparent as different stages from different developmental schools. Erikson's developmental stage from 18 to 45 covers both television stages, the telescopic and the oscilloscopic/telesis stage of viewing. Nevertheless, the comparison remains possible and reliable. The corresponding periods in Erikson's stages are for intimacy versus isolation (within an age range of 18 to 30) which is the question of love; and his generativity versus stagnation stage is often situated in the years 30 to 45 and centers on caring. In these stages Erikson sees the desire for fusion with others and sometimes a significant other. The desire to commit or affiliate with another and the ethical strength for honor and commitment. In the later stages of generativity versus stagnation (care), starts the belief in the species, itself, and the desire for charity toward others. In the television stages, the telescopic and oscilloscopic/telesis patterns of viewing also somewhat overlap and no definitive lines can be drawn between one stage and another. 21 Jump Street and All in the Family, mix with Rosanne, Seinfeld, Roc, and the talk shows of Letterman, Arsenio Hall, and Jay

Leno. Some shows do not appeal as strongly across the lines, an example of which would be Murphy Brown, which is aimed at the Reagan Yuppie carrying the ethics, economic, and moral of that age group as presented by its creators and producers.

At the equivalent faith level, James Fowler questions the ability of many to move into his fourth stage, "the self . . . claims an identity no longer defined by the composite of one's roles and meanings to others". "It expresses its intuitions of coherence in an ultimate environment in terms of an explicit system of meanings."¹³ In this faith stage, the person is willing to be reflective on their own identity and their position in the world. They are able to ask the questions of philosophy, who am I, where am I going, what do I need to get there, and what do I expect to find when I have arrived? If the person is courageous enough to enter into this stage that involves many questions, and if one is further courageous in following through on the questions, the normal experience is disillusionment and the ever-greater complexity of life begins to weigh on the person. Solutions are difficult, if not impossible to many of the deeper questions of life. The seeking of the solutions is a task of herculean proportions that demand great energy and the ability to reflect at ever deeper levels. Unfortunately, the ministries of religious television in Lansing and East Lansing do not enter into this fourth level of faith or third level of television viewing.

The literal interpretation of the Bible, in many instances, is the best solution offered. The promise of miracles in one's life to combat the evil that may be surrounding a person is another solution offered. The joining in a prayerful service or the simple reflection on a Biblical passage and applying it at a nominal level to the questions of life seems to be what religious television is offering. From the Gospel Hour through Victory in Christ to the Outreach Mass to Immanuel's Temple the minister or priest has failed to lead people into this mythologizing stage of faith. The ministers following commercial television, fail to challenge the viewer.

The oscilloscopic viewer or the telesis viewer with fluctuating attentiveness on specific interests are addressed by Murphy Brown, All in the Family to Murder She Wrote. Programming that seems to accept a community that does not wish to think about thinking (Piaget, Formal Operations) a community that does not want to go beyond the social contract, moral stage (Kohlberg) and a community that does not want to go beyond intimacy versus isolation (Erikson).

Religious television at the local level, religious television at the national level, and programming on commercial television on the national and local level have stayed at the entrance door of this third stage of television's viewing the oscilloscopic and the telescopic stage.

Teleological Stage of Television Viewing

The teleological viewer is one who watches television for a purpose, to try to find meaning to a life that they know is in decay, and to try to find a vision of a life on some other level. The teleological viewer is seeking an answer to the meaning of life and trying to avoid the conclusion that life collapses with death. On the surface, it would appear that religious television is directly answering this viewer's needs, that questions of the meaning of life, who am I, where am I going, how do I get there and how do I know that I have gotten there when I eventually arrive? However, they are being addressed under the guise of self-realization and within a culturally populist milieu and ideology of religion. This self-realization relies very much on what God can do for the individual, leaving out the hard work that the individual has to do for him/herself, for the family community and the world. It is a self-realization which through its message of instant salvation tries to bypass the stage of conversion and seems to deny the traditional values of sacrifice and self-abnegation.

The medium with its conditioning of the viewer into an expectation of instant gratification and half-hour solutions to perennial problems has created a barrier for the minister or the teacher when they address the questions of a universal, ethical principle (Kohlberg) or address the question of integrity versus despair (Erikson). The questions of a universal moral good cannot be addressed and a solution found in the time it takes to cook three hamburgers. The question

of integrity or despair is a on-going question that goes through successively deeper levels within the person and makes for intense committed television viewing. The hope and pain at this stage is difficult even for professionals to translate from a feeling into a visual or from despair into a medium that also wants people to buy the products that come at the commercials.

The pastors and the producers of religious programming in Lansing and East Lansing likewise do not address these issues. Fowler offers one insight into a possible solution of why the fundamental questions of life are not addressed on religious access television when he tells us that at this faith level (conjunctive faith) "symbolic power is reunited with conceptual meanings. Here there must also be a new reclaiming and a working of one's past. . . . Importantly, this involves a critical recognition of one's social unconsciousness."¹⁴ The calling of an individual to the reworking of his/her life to a rebirth of a new naivete to the world that surrounds him/her. This is what is not addressed by commercial television and not addressed by public access religious television. The teleological viewer is offered balm for his wounds but no "eternal" solution.

The question does arise: Is this too major a task to expect from television? Television, our friend, our companion in solitude, our relief bringer, the image maker and solver of problems similar to our own, seems incapable of addressing

these more basic of life's questions. The cycle of information intake in the individual begins with the auditory and appears to end with the auditory. In the teleological viewer, the image is not of extreme importance. The television person is listening for the word which has life in it which speaks to them joining their own visions and memories and creating an approach to the question of integrity and despair that is internal and eternal. This does not need the visual for sustenance or resuscitation.

Religious broadcasting in the area speaks to the teleological viewer of an age in their life that was fuller with symbols and myths and an understanding of right and wrong that was simpler. An understanding of God that was also simpler and a knowledge of their place within creation that was defined by law but lived within love. The teleological viewer in Lansing/Meridian Township have religious programming that speaks to them with a certitude that was familiar in their childhood, that they would have heard in their churches as they grew in age, and perhaps that they rejected as their life progressed.

The kinetiscopic, telescopic, oscilloscopic/telesis, and teleological viewers in the main are failed by religious access television. However, the jury is still out as to whether some of the issues that need to be addressed or the different stages of television viewing are capable of being translated into a kinetiscopic, telescopic,

oscilloscopic/telesis or theological framework. The medium is vociferous in its ideological claims, is consistently biased, while claiming to be unbiased, and refuses by its reliance on statistics and sales of sponsor's materials to look at itself in any other light than an entertainment medium that subscribes to the current philosophy and in turn creates the current philosophy. The kinetiscopic, telescopic, oscilloscopic/telesis, and teleological viewer is a viewer who is segmented, is a viewer that has programs produced for its particular stage, but not by local church broadcasting.

CHAPTER V--FOOTNOTES

1. Mark 1:4. The Jerusalem Bible. (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1966).
2. Lansing State Journal. (1992, August 25), p. 1.
3. Ibid.
4. C. Lasch. The Culture of Narcissism. (New York: Warner Books, 1979), p. 55.
5. Ibid., p. 56.
6. Our Sunday Visitor. (Indiana: Huntington Press). (1992, August 2), p. 5.
7. Matthew 25:31-40. The Jerusalem Bible. (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1966).
8. D. Allen. Three Outsiders. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1983), p. 106.
9. E. Erikson. Childhood and Society. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1963), p. 250.
10. J. Fowler. Stages of Faith. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 133.
11. P. Roazan. Erikson--The Power and Limits of a Vision. (New York: The Free Press, 1953), p. 153.
12. Howard Muson. (1979, February). Moral Thinking. Psychology Today, p. 57.
13. J. Fowler. Stages of Faith. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 182.
14. Ibid., p. 198.

CHAPTER VI

YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND

We cannot bring ourselves to believe it possible that a foreigner should in any respect be wiser than ourselves. If any such point out to us our follies, we at once claim those follies as the special evidences of our wisdom.

Anthony Trollope
1815-1882
(Only Firm, Chapter 18)

Alas, oh Lord, to what estate dost thou bring those who love Thee?

St. Teresa Avila
1512-1582
Interior Castles

Use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
Matt:7

Oh, Lord, from statistics, deliver me.
Anonymous

The story is told of a British officer in the last century who wished to know which of four roads was the way to Dublin. He pointed to one that looked as though it ran north and east, and asked the peasant if the road would take him to Dublin. The peasant replied, "Yes, sir. It will take you to Dublin." And the British officer promptly marched his men up the road. The road, in fact, was a road to the northwest of Ireland, but if one traveled on it long enough and stayed on it, eventually it would take one south and east to Dublin.

The view of the countryside of Ireland would be extensive and very comprehensive. The officer did not ask which is the direct road to Dublin. The peasant answered the question that was asked, while knowing that the question, itself, was wrong.

In the course of this study, the analysis has stepped outside the bounds of simply recording what is happening, although that has been covered. The area of study avoided the pitfall of burying the people of God in statistics and tried instead to find a middle road whereby the question of religion and television could be examined from a theological perspective.

Malcolm Muggeridge, the former editor of Punch magazine and a latter-day convert to Christianity felt that Christianity was at a loss when trying to adapt itself to mass media. By its very nature, it was reflective and long term versus the medium which was instantaneous and short term.

The people like Quentin J. Schultze speak of the use of mass media and television in particular by the church and lament the church's use of the medium. Schultze suggests such things as obtaining greater control over the televangelists by appointing boards of directors drawn from people who hold positions of respect and authority in public life and also speaks of the need to educate the people in the pew to critically view televangelism and to contribute to it in a constructive fashion. This study has tried to avoid the defeatism of Malcolm Muggeridge or the types of solutions that

Quentin Schultze offers and instead has looked at the way the Word is spoken. Secondly, the study has, through a series of comparative steps, looked at what it takes to become a Christian in the age of information and applied these stages of conversion to the popular sciences of today. Thirdly, the study has proposed a series of stages in television viewing that future students of religion and the media may use as a basis for comparison to faith and human development.

A major obstacle that the theologian pastor has to come to terms with and overcome when he/she uses the media is best summarized by Rubert Murdock when he said, "that part of the result of the communications revolution is that it has not produced an information society, but a media society in which vast amounts of repetitive information are confined to a narrow spectrum of thinkable thought. . .".¹

The ministers, in their struggle to get people to ask fundamental and philosophical questions about the nature of their being. Then to use these questions as a stepping stone into the large question of their place in the universe, constantly run against this society where vast amounts of repetitive information are confined to a narrow spectrum of thinkable thought. Politicians, including the wives of politicians, Hilary Clinton, being an example, in a recent interview on 20/20 on NBC, spoke of her need to speak in sound bites that were no longer than thirty seconds. Otherwise, the media would chop and change her sentences. She had learned

the hard way, her statement on the role of women in the home would always be reduced to laundry and making cookies if she didn't learn the art of the thirty second sound bite.

This runs directly against the purpose of classical rhetoric which takes a developmental approach to a problem slowly unravelling the questions that will lead to the answers and over a period of time of hours to years offering a solution that is livable. Secondly, the minister is up against a medium where most of the people with the power, the producers, share little of the value system of Christianity. A study reported in the Catholic League Newsletter reported that the men and women who are responsible for creating the visual image of America that is shown on television have little in common with the pastors who stand and preach the Word of God. This study from the Center for Media and Public Affairs said that out of one hundred TV producers and executives who were questioned, 93% rarely go to a place of worship. Two-thirds thought that TV entertainment should play "a major role in promoting social reform"² and of the institutions which should influence society, religion, government, and the military finished at the bottom.

The religion, the government, and the military are all in the business of information at various levels and from various perspectives. Whereas television does not necessarily have to be in the business of information, but rather may be, as Rubert Murdock said, be in the media business. Secondly,

television does not have to bring authority to its imagery, rather television has become a populist medium. In the words of Time Magazine, which proclaimed Ted Turner the Man of the Year for 1991, saw CNN's role as to provide "the raw materials of the story, and let the viewers form their own opinions."³ The church, by its very nature is not in the business of everybody forming their own opinions. The church is hierarchical, whether it is Protestant, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, or Baptist. Some churches have varying degrees of doctrinal freedom, but almost all churches are hierarchical and it is not their intention that everybody makes up their own minds about the teachings of Christ, the scriptures, and the dogmas of their churches. The minister is battling a culture that is populist, that seeks to give the freedoms of forming opinions to all individuals without also giving the educational and analytical tools necessary to make truly independent decisions. The majority of these opinions that are expressed seem to be within the parameters of the information provided by the culture. Most of that information that the culture relies on comes from the television media itself. The dog seems to be eating its tail and enjoying it.

The producers who are partially responsible for creating and sustaining a populist ideology have a world view which undermines in many instances the world view that the religious broadcaster wishes to convey. In a study that examined the media coverage of the Catholic Church during three five-year

time blocks from 1964 to 1968, and 1974 to 1978, and 1985 to 1988 using content analysis, it was found that long-term trends in the coverage were unfavorable to the church. Over time, official Church teachings were reported less frequently and were challenged more often when they did appear. This is from Media Coverage of the Catholic Church, a study by Robert Lichter, Daniel Amundson, and Linda S. Lichter, published by the Knights of Columbus in 1991. This constant portrayal of the Catholic Church in an unfavorable light in the media highlighting the controversies within the church and playing down the area where the church is doing good was a common trend in all of the news media. This is what the pastors who use television are facing when they speak theologically.

Areas where the church came out on the losing side of the reporting included the controversies of birth control, clerical celibacy, the role of women and minorities in the church, and the response to internal dissent on issues involving freedom of expression. The major exception to this pattern involved "ecumenical efforts which the media treated as a kind of motherhood and apple pie issue supported by all people of good will."⁴

The recent media coverage of the scandals in the Evangelical churches has also impacted that church's image. Specifically, the scandals associated with Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Baker have created a problem for people like Robert Schuler, Oral Roberts, and Jerry Falwell, and even Pat

Robinson. All of these people in an Arbitron number of households viewing report suffered severe losses. Arbitron reported that in 1986 Robert Schuler had almost two million viewers by 1988, this was reduced to just over one million. Oral Roberts, after the press finished its stories on his retreat to his tower to be with God, dropped from approximately one million two hundred fifty thousand households in 1986 to 561,000 households in 1988.⁵

Religious broadcasting has an extremely difficult time competing with commercial television on a production level, but secondly, it has an extremely difficult time because commercial television, itself, appears from the result of the study done by the Knights of Columbus to be biased against the church and thirdly, it has a difficult time with commercial television from the amount of air time that it uses compared with the incessant, unrelenting use of air time by commercial television.

It is important for pastors and religious people who use television to understand the nature and the architecture of the medium. Religion, by its nature is reflective and introspective. Religion is community and socially orientated. Television is a medium that speaks in sound bites where little reflection is needed and instantaneous gratification is assured. On television, the constant repetition of a single message over a variety of programs guarantees its inclusion into populist culture. The pastor may well decide that

television is not a medium for religion and the use of television in fact may diminish the pastor's hope for a real spreading of the Gospel. However, the medium cannot be ignored and must be used in a countercultural manner. The success of the religious broadcaster at the local level which is not an issue. They are not appealing for large funds, they do not hope for mass audiences, they merely wish to preach the Gospel. This, in fact, may be the simple answer to the question: Can religion use the medium of television?

The success stories of national evangelizers with millions of households watching them and raising millions of dollars seems to be at odds with the message of the Gospel which is not a populous document, but one which speaks of a God who created all. As a result, all people have responsibilities and privileges because of that Creator's love for them. For public access television at the religious level to be successful, it needs to be countercultural; it needs to speak a simple, forthright message, and perhaps be a voice like John the Baptist of "one crying in the wilderness". It also needs to be aware of the ever-ready pitfalls to which it may fall into, seeking for greater and cleverer styles and forms of production. The Church needs to be aware of the pitfall of imitating the materialism of North America in its interpretation of its Scriptures and of its church teachings and of its message. The Church needs to be careful not to judge its success by the standards of commercial television.

Public access television at the religious level must analyze the world that it lives in, analyze the prevailing culture, and how it permeates every aspect of people's lives and it needs to combine that analysis with an understanding of the development stages of the human being, and the television stages that a human being goes through so that when it does present its simple, clear Gospel message, that this message will speak to people in a way that it will be relevant to them. People need to be able to implement the message as they can with commercial secular television. The message has to reassert itself over the medium, the messengers need to be believed by simplifying their lives, and making their lives more in tune with their Gospel message. The minister needs to understand one's self and personal cultural bias. The minister needs to understand the developmental and faith stages as well as the conversions that a person goes through in his/her life. In terms of this paper, the minister must also be aware of the television stages that a person experiences in order to make the message, the simple Gospel message of love of God and love of neighbor effective for all age groups and the unevangelized.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER VI

1. Guardian Weekly. (1911, January 13), p. 12.
10. 2. Catholic League Newsletter. (1991, July/August), p.
3. Time. (1992, January 6), p. 26.
4. S. Lichter, D. Amundson, & L. Lichter. Media Coverage of the Catholic Church. (New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus, 1991), p. 5.
5. Arbitron. (1988).

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