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A NEW BABEL?
THE TELEVISION AGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMMUNICATION OF CHRISTIAN TRUTH

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I. INTRODUCTION

When the world's first high definition television service was inaugurated at Alexandra Palace on 2 November, 1936, the BBC ushered in what was arguably the most profound cultural revolution since 1454, when Johannes Gutenberg perfected a printing press that could accommodate movable type.

In 1936 there were 100 TV sets in the UK. Today there are nearly 50 million, 97 per cent of families possess at least one, and most people will spend about 26 hours a week watching TV. Children will, on average, have watched 5,000 hours of TV by the time they start school, and 17,500 hours by the time they reach their teens.[1] TV has changed the way most of us choose to spend our leisure time; but, more than that, it has also had a profound influence on Western civilisation.

> For the first time in five hundred years, the word is no longer the dominant force in shaping our culture. The atmosphere flashes with the rich imagery of television. This does not mean that words have stopped being important, but they do not predominate. The image, chiefly projected through the television screen, is now the most powerful way of transmitting our culture.[2]

Disquiet about the effect TV was having on society was expressed as long ago as 1948. Sir William Haley, then Director-General of the BBC, was able to reassure the British Council of Churches that '. . . we are citizens of a Christian country, and the BBC . . . bases its policy upon a positive attitude towards the Christian values. It seeks to safeguard those values and to foster acceptance of them. The whole preponderant weight of its programmes is directed to this end'.[3]

It is hard to conceive of any circumstance today in which John Birt, the current D-G, would want to suggest that 'the whole preponderant weight' of the BBC's output was directed towards encouraging Christian values, and many commentators would argue that, aided and abetted by the rest of the mass media, TV is having precisely the opposite effect.

The trial and conviction of two 10 year old boys for the murder of toddler James Bulger, allegedly in imitation of so-called 'video nasties'

that had been hired by their parents, pushed the issue of the anti-social effects of TV to the forefront of the news again. A report published by the Child Development Unit at Nottingham University made headlines when its signatories apparently back-tracked on their previously rather cautious attitude to endorse a view that the content of violent TV programmes and videos could be connected to the violent behaviour of children, although they stopped short of identifying direct causal links.[4] Direct links between the content of TV programmes and violent behaviour are notoriously hard to prove and, important as this work is, in this essay we shall be concentrating not so much on *what* TV communicates, but on *how* it communicates, and exploring some possible implications of this for the communication of Christian truth.

The study of the media, and TV in particular, has generated a vast literature. In this brief study, therefore, we shall only attempt to throw some light on a few broad areas, and before commencing the task, we need to make a few preliminary remarks.

1. TV is by no means the only medium to affect people today. Radio, the press, the music industry, all have a part to play in shaping our culture, but TV is undeniably the dominant influence.

2. This essay is *not* about how to make more effective religious TV programmes, but about how to communicate more effectively in the general culture created by TV.

3. Although we shall argue that the 'how' of TV communication is as important as the 'what', this does not mean that the content of the programmes has no importance, and we shall return to the topic at intervals during the essay.

4. Most of the commentators cited in this analysis have been working within the context of TV in the United States. There are significant differences between American and British TV, which cannot be ignored, so we must establish how TV functions within a particularly British context. In fact, five main areas will be considered: (1) The properties of TV as a medium; (2) How TV is constituted in Britain; (3) The role it currently plays in society; (4) The mindset of the TV age, and (5) The way ahead for the church.

In the course of this essay, some tough questions will need to be asked. What is it we want to communicate? Is there any way of objectively measuring the success (or otherwise) of the church's efforts? Difficult as they may be, these questions must be posed as the challenge TV presents to the church in the 1990s is as profound as that presented by the printing press in the 1450s.

II. THE NATURE OF THE MEDIUM

In the early stages of its development, TV was thought of as being 'radio with pictures'. It was generally assumed that the same strictures and

principles that had been applied to radio broadcasts could also be successfully applied to TV. Thus, the early broadcasters and their audiences were purely concerned with the *content* of programmes. One or two visionary voices had been heard previously, but it was only with the work of Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s that *how* TV communicated came to be regarded as just as serious a question as *what* it communicated.

McLuhan coined the now infamous aphorism 'the medium is the message', and remarked that 'the content or message of any particular medium has about as much importance as the stencilling on the casing of an atomic bomb'.[5] It has been noted that McLuhan appears to contradict this rather sweeping statement elsewhere in his work and, as with many other areas of his thinking, it is unclear precisely how far he wished to push this particular epigram; but he clearly feels that, in socio-psychological terms at least, the medium by which a message is delivered has as much impact as the message itself.[6] We must take care not to become preoccupied with the content, as: 'the "content" of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind.'[7]

Latterly, McLuhan's work has been criticised by many commentators, but his underlying point—that the nature of TV is as important as its message—is sound.

> For all the maddening slogans, paradoxes and puns; for all the gross breaches of intellectual etiquette—or perhaps because of them all—McLuhan has forced us to attend to the various media through which we gain our knowledge of the world.[8]

Neil Postman is one contemporary commentator who has recognised the importance of the thrust of McLuhan's thinking. He concurs with him that 'the media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social preoccupations',[9] and argues that different media, because of the different mechanisms of communication they employ, bring their own cultural agendas with them: 'each technology has an agenda of its own. It is . . . a metaphor waiting to unfold.'[10] Thus he modifies McLuhan to read 'the medium is the metaphor'.[11]

Postman draws a sharp contrast between the age of literacy, when the printed word was the dominant medium of communication, and today, when 'electronic media have decisively and irreversibly changed the character of our symbolic environment. We are now a culture whose information, ideas and epistemology are given form by television, not by the printed word'.[12]

How has TV been able to influence our culture so dramatically? In order to answer this question, we need to offer a definition of what culture is. Space does not permit a lengthy discussion of this complex

topic, but Richard Niebuhr has provided a useful definition: 'Culture is the "artificial, secondary environment" which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organisation, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values.'[13] Niebuhr himself recognises the limitations of this definition, but in the light of it, and of Postman's remarks, we can see how any dominant mass medium will influence the elements he feels comprise 'culture'. It is just that TV has had a particularly potent contribution to make.

Postman cites our preoccupation with current affairs and the 'news of the day' as an example. It is probable that most American citizens could have passed at least the first three or four Presidents in the street and not recognised them; today decisions taken in the White House are beamed around the world in seconds. The ability to deal with complex international affairs has become an election issue. Only a few decades ago politics was dominated by domestic policies—even major wars would have seemed relatively far off events, with news taking weeks to filter through from the battlefield.[14] Niebuhr also contends that culture is largely concerned with 'the realisation and conservation of values',[15] and as we shall argue below, TV has become instrumental in setting cultural values.

Whilst we may not wish to subscribe to every aspect of their work, McLuhan and Postman demonstrate the intrinsic power of the dominant mass media to shape a particular culture, and have provided us with some broad outlines of the nature of TV; now we need to consider its grammar in a little more detail.[16]

Television's grammar is expressed on two levels: the programmes themselves, and the schedules by which broadcasters organise their material to its best effect.[17] The aim of a successful schedule is to keep the audience with a particular channel for an entire evening's viewing. They exhibit a rhythm according to the time of day, week and year. Programmes appear in regular time slots, so audiences know where to find them, and tend to start on the hour or half hour, times which are easily remembered. The schedules are the liturgical calendar of TV— regular, ordered, apparently inexorable. The programmes also exhibit a rhythm of their own. They have a beginning, a middle and an end, and tend to rely on 'stereotypes' for character and plot.[18] Clarity is of the essence: switch on halfway through a programme and it won't take you long to work out what is going on, particularly if you are familiar with the series.

Camera angles, lighting, set design, music and effects are the technical means by which a show establishes its particular mood and inflection. The editing is of paramount importance in this process. On TV, nothing happens by accident:

[S]ince the primary aim of television is to sell products to a mass market, television must design clear programmes that hold an audience up to and through a commercial message. The language of television must be able to capture a potential viewer at any point in the programme and hold that viewer's attention.[19]

Thus, whilst certain individual shows may be challenging, TV for a mass audience—even the news—is generally packaged as entertainment, as many commentators have pointed out.[20] Of course, we need to define 'entertainment', and Snow helpfully lists some of the characteristics it tends to exhibit: (1) Larger than life characters (with a tendency towards stereotype); (2) Engagement in some kind of extraordinary activity (e.g. war in M*A*S*H);[21] (3) Vicarious involvement, as the viewer identifies with the characters; (4) Use of dramatic/narrative devices (e.g. mystery, tension, conflict), and (5) The whole should evoke some kind of emotional experience: laughter, tears, excitement. Failure to achieve this indicates that the programme hasn't succeeded.[22]

Postman in particular feels that entertainment is inimical to any kind of serious debate—TV will trivialise everything it touches.[23] He is not alone in this. Colin Morris comments: 'The shape of the television programme militates against the communication of serious ideas. Programmes are tightly packaged according to the producer's percep- tion of the viewer's attention-span. There is no possibility of digressing or entering qualifications about the main theme . . . the nuances integral to structured thought are excluded.'[24] McLuhan would almost certainly agree with them, but we see no reason why entertainment should necessarily exclude edification, and will seek to argue that case below.

Even though we have differed with them at various stages, our brief examination of the work of McLuhan and Postman and the language of TV has revealed some important points: (1) The dominant mass media in any society will shape that society's culture; (2) TV has profoundly altered our culture's 'intellectual and social pre-occupations';[25] (3) TV programmes are not haphazard constructions. They have a definite language and grammar, to ensure clarity, and accessibility to a mass audience, and (4) The principles of entertainment dominate program- ming.

The above will tend to *reduce*, but will not necessarily *remove*, TV's effectiveness at transmitting complicated or challenging material. These conclusions clearly have implications for those wishing to communicate any set of truth claims, Christian or otherwise, and we shall pick up these issues below, but first we shall see how TV has evolved in the British context.

III. 'TO INFORM, EDUCATE AND ENTERTAIN'

The major difference between American and British TV can be summed up in three words: Public Service Broadcasting (PSB). 'There is no great secret why British broadcasting is generally considered by foreign observers the best there is; and why American television can accurately be described as an efficient method of delivering audiences, with programmes representing the interruptions of the commercials.'[26] Whilst the concept is not unknown in America, it is distinctly marginal and has not formed a central plank of the network's policies as it has in Britain. We have a national broadcasting system that is very different in character and outlook to its American equivalent.

Although it has evolved over the years, PSB is still with us, and we have in Britain today a TV service that does not, in theory at any rate, operate with profit and ratings as its highest consideration. That is not to say that profit and ratings are not considered at all. As well as PSB, competition for mass audiences (as in the US) and political considerations played a part in producing the system we have inherited today.

The principles of PSB were first articulated by John, later Lord, Reith, one of the founding fathers of the BBC. 'Our responsibility is to carry into the greatest possible number of homes everything that is best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement', he wrote in 1924.[27] These ideals—encapsulated in Reith's famous notion that the duty of the BBC was 'to inform, educate and entertain'—sprang partly from his Christian convictions (he was a convinced Calvinist, and son of a Presbyterian minister) and partly from the BBC's monopoly on broadcasting at that time.

Following the Second World War, there was a vigorous debate about whether or not this monopoly should be broken. Concern was expressed that commercial competition would mean broadcasters descending to the lowest common denominator in order to woo audiences, and the dilution of the principles of PSB. The Broadcasting Committee, which was set up by Parliament to consider the issue, recommended in 1949 that the BBC should retain its monopoly for this very reason: 'The duty of the broadcasting authority is not to please the greatest possible number of listeners, but to keep open the channel for communication of ideas of all kinds, popular and unpopular.'[28]

The argument was eventually lost, however, and in 1954 commercial TV arrived in Britain. Regulation ensured that many of the ideals of PSB were retained: for example, the 'sponsoring' of programmes by individuals or companies was forbidden—and similar moral obligations about programming to those imposed on the BBC were placed on independent producers, to be enforced by the IBA. In 1963 the Television Act brought commercial TV fully into the public service framework.[29]

The concept of what PSB entailed also underwent considerable change during and after the genesis of ITV. Reithian ideals were still generally acknowledged, but broadcasters had to recognise that society had changed a great deal since the 1920s when Reith had set up the BBC. Michael Checkland, then D-G of the BBC, summed up this new outlook in 1987:

> Society is more fragmented and uncertain than in the days of Reith and Haley . . . With more uncertainty about moral and economic goals, an alert BBC has to be sure that it is keeping no part of any debate off its screens and airwaves. Public Service takes on an extra meaning. We have to serve the public by ensuring that they have access to all arguments, access to as much information as they can be given to shed light on uncertainty.[30]

It is interesting to note that Checkland saw TV in terms of serving the public—a neutral contributor to the debate, shedding light on all aspects of it rather than influencing people's conclusions one way or the other. In a policy document published in 1980, the creators of Channel 4 spoke in exalted terms about their goals for the station. They maintained that they were interested in 'the pursuit of serious themes . . . a greater variety of subject matter . . . distinctive work to enlarge the scope and reach of religious programmes'.[31]

Today there is still an obligation on programme-makers to produce material that caters for all sections of their audience, even if this results in a loss of potential viewers, and two of our four national channels operate without on-screen advertising, a source of continuing astonishment (and not a little envy) for Americans viewing British TV.

PSB is widely acknowledged to be one of the major factors separating British and American TV, but another factor unites them: the pursuit of mass audiences. Commercial pressures are by no means absent—the BBC and the independent companies are in the business of catering for a mass audience, and competition for market share is intense. Game shows, soap opera and light entertainment form a major part of the output of each network, and bring in the highest ratings, as the viewing figures for a typical week demonstrate (see the table overleaf). Even on a channel specifically charged with catering for minority audiences (Channel 4) a quiz show, a soap opera, and an imported American sitcom make up the Top 10 programmes—and although a more 'serious' drama, *The Rector's Wife*, also found itself an audience, documentary programming is notable only by its absence. BBC2 has no soap opera, but does feature two American imports—*Quantum Leap* and *Star Trek*—and a sitcom, *Red Dwarf*. Interestingly, 'factual' programming does sneak in—*Crufts '94, Top Gear, Food and Drink*, and *Gardener's World*.

The top rated shows on BBC2 and Channel 4 pulled in audiences less

Table: TV Ratings for the week ending 13 March, 1994[32]

Millions viewing, Week ending March 13

BBC1		ITV	
1 EastEnders (Thu)	15.95	1 Coronation Street (Mon)	18.61
2 EastEnders (Tue)	15.26	2 Coronation Street (Wed)	18.55
3 Antiques Roadshow	12.59	3 Coronation Street (Fri)	17.96
4 Neighbours (Mon 17.37)	11.93	4 The Bill (Fri)	13.25
5 Noel's House Party	11.59	5 This is Your Life	13.02
6 Neighbours (Fri 17.37)	11.13	6 The Bill (Thu)	12.75
7 Neighbours (Wed 17.37)	11.12	7 Peak Practice	12.40
8 Big Break	11.06	8 The Bill (Tue)	12.03
9 News and Weather (Sun 18.10)	10.88	9 Emmerdale (Thu)	11.69
10 Neighbours (Tue 17.37)	10.65	10 Wish You Were Here (Mon)	11.21

BBC2		C4	
1 Murder Most Horrid II	5.27	1= The Rector's Wife	4.99
2 Crufts '94	5.10	1= Countdown (Wed)	4.99
3 Red Dwarf	4.80	3 Countdown (Mon)	4.62
4 Life With Fred	4.45	4 Countdown (Fri)	4.50
5 Top Gear (Thu)	4.28	5 Roseanne	4.49
6 Grand Slam	4.12	6 Countdown (Tue)	4.41
7 Quantum Leap	3.89	7 Countdown (Thu)	4.34
8 Food and Drink (Tue)	3.83	8 Brookside (Mon)	4.08
9 Gardeners' World	3.38	9 Brookside (Wed)	3.75
10 Star Trek	3.37	10 Brookside (Fri)	3.36

Where programmes appear in omnibus or repeat editions, ratings for the highest single showing only have been included. Source: BARB.

than half as large as those for even the less popular programmes on BBC1 and ITV, and it is here that the tempering effect of PSB can be seen. Were the controllers of BBC2 and Channel 4 having to compete for viewers with BBC1 and ITV we might expect their output to be modified considerably.

Entertainment is still achieved within the remit of PSB: as well as information and education, one of Reith's principles for PSB was that it should entertain, and entertainment, as the ratings demonstrate, is what people want to watch. As a *Times* leader commented in 1985, PSB has become 'a seamless robe . . . there is no point in a daily broadcasting diet at which entertainment ends and the public service begins'.[33]

PSB does not prevent light entertainment reaching our screens at all, but ensures that minority interests are catered for in some part of the 'seamless robe'. It legislates against 'wall to wall *Dallas*', as an MP memorably remarked during a Commons debate about the future of the BBC. Audiences are important, but they are not to be catered for at all

costs. The ratings are not all powerful, and this provides an opportunity to 'inform the moral as well as the democratic process . . . to point beyond the immediate to our continuing search for meaning'.[34]

The tension between PSB—with its threefold mandate to inform, educate and entertain—and the need to deliver entertainment to mass audiences (tempered by PSB) has produced something quite unique; we must not import the opinions of American commentators wholesale, as useful as they might be, without assessing their remarks in the light of the British experience.

Quite what effect the burgeoning satellite and cable TV industry, the 1991 Broadcasting Act, and the continuing debate over the licence fee as the BBC's Charter comes up for review will have on the existing networks is still uncertain, but it looks as if terrestrial broadcasting will continue in its present form until at least the end of the century.

IV. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO STAR TREK

We have noted above how British TV is regarded in general terms, and what people watch—its content. It is here that most Christian responses to the medium tend to stop, but the full impact of TV on our society will become apparent only if we can move beyond concern with the content of programmes to consider TV's wider role in our culture.

We have noted above the tendency of any culture's dominant mass medium to influence that culture: we shall seek to argue that, in our case, this influence has resulted in TV taking over some of the roles traditionally ascribed to religion.

> Television offers public, shared symbols which . . . answer the questions 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?' . . . Thus networks and cable TV, magazines and newspapers combine forces to offer what religious institutions once themselves provided indirectly: icons of exemplary individuals, models of what human life can and should be like, and rituals that help to unify people who are diverse—racially, ethnically, religiously.[35]

This obviously has profound implications for the church's communication strategy, but how has TV acquired this fundamental role in Western society, and what does it do to maintain it? To explore this question we shall look at TV in three areas: as a provider of meaning, as a purveyor of ideology, and as a provider of myth.

1. Television and Meaninglessness

We all need some means of making sense of what befalls us in life, a way of interpreting what otherwise may seem to be a series of random and meaningless events. 'If things are experienced as "just happening" in a chaotic, meaningless string of events, the person literally does not know

what to do. If, however, these events are given meaning, their interpretation implies an appropriate course of action.'[36] This construction of a meaning system is true not only of individuals but also of groups, and ultimately of society as a whole. Eventually, meaning systems come to interpret an entire group's existence.[37]

Attempting to define religion sociologically is a notoriously difficult exercise, but one way of defining it is as just such a framework, providing structure and meaning for our lives:

> Most historical religions are comprehensive meaning systems that locate all experiences of the individual and social group in a single general explanatory arrangement.[38]

At one time, most people in the West looked to organised religion to provide this meaning system for them, but since the Enlightenment the church has become increasingly marginalised, to the extent that today even the most optimistic commentators acknowledge that its influence is distinctly limited. Religion—as we have defined it above—is no longer the dominant perspective used to interpret issues and events.[39]

McGuire has demonstrated that it is impossible for society to function without any 'dominant perspective' at all, so if the church's system has fallen, what has replaced it? We would agree with Snow that 'today the dominant framework [of meaning] throughout the institutional structure of western urban society comes from the mass media'.[40] Why is this so?

As we have discussed above, the dominant mass medium in Western society is television, and Colin Morris points out that religious images have no monopoly on purveying ideas: 'the most evocative secular images of our time presented before the maximum number of people for the longest periods are furnished by television.'[41] TV is a powerful and effective opinion former, as thousands of advertising dollars spent annually testify.

Indeed, the whole mechanism of commercial TV is based entirely on the premise that broadcast advertising can affect what a significant segment of the huge viewing audience will purchase: 'hard-headed corporations will gladly invest millions of dollars in a few thirty-second commercials, secure in the knowledge that even this sort of fleeting exposure can make an important difference in the public's point of view.'[42] An important aspect of this process is that TV communicates values without the audience being consciously aware of what is going on.[43]

> For most people, television is just another of those 'taken-for-granted' amenities: part of our everyday life—like radio, films, newspapers. A welcome diversion. Yet in reality, television is forming the tastes, the opinions and the aspirations of the world.[44]

Which tastes, opinions, and aspirations does British TV seek to instil?

The BBC has always been quick to defend its impartiality and reliability; but some commentators have accused both the BBC and ITV of being partisan, particularly in their news coverage. This is manifest not so much in terms of explicit party political bias, but rather in a tendency to side with the status quo.

> Both the press and broadcasting are active and quite consistent in their support of powerful established interests, and promote a 'social democratic' consensus. Information is both controlled and routinely organised to fit within a set of assumptions about how the world works and how it ought to work.[45]

The same commentators have levelled particular accusations at the BBC, maintaining that even in the days of Reith it developed a close relationship with the state and came to embody 'a form of liberal capitalist ideology'.[46]

Although it may be hard to quantify, they maintain that there is a political ideology at work in the media. Marxist critic Stuart Hall sums up the position well: 'We can speak, then, only of the tendency of the media—but it is a systematic tendency, not an incidental feature—to reproduce the ideological field of society in such a way as to reproduce, also, its structure of domination.'[47]

We must not overlook the fact that the political and ideological convictions of these critics colour their assessment of the media, but nonetheless they make an important point. Whilst any explicit party political bias is (largely) prevented, there is very definitely a political and ideological agenda present in British broadcasting.

2. TV Series as Purveyors of Ideology

Having discussed in general terms the political ideology at work in TV, we shall examine one or two more specific examples from TV's major ideological vehicles—programmes and advertisements.

'Television programmes are things of the spirit, items of expression. They are creations. Nobody knows how to make one out of purely commercial considerations. Somewhere along the line, people have to be hired who are working for more than money. They are working out of belief,' opines Clive James.[48] David Buxton shows that TV series have 'an ideological project or strategy which the narrative attempts to illustrate'.[49] Two examples will serve to illustrate this:

The Avengers

This series, popular in the 60s and now enjoying something of a comeback, is one of the purest examples of art being subordinate to belief. 60s pop psychology features heavily, and according to Buxton,

'ideological themes have been built directly into the characters' design, reducing them to ideological machines, rather than real people. No attempt is made to relate the ideological themes of the series to "human nature".'[50]

Star Trek
A hardy perennial SF series, in which the intergalactic adventures of James T. Kirk and his crew provided 'a utopian, pan-humanist conception of human nature allied to a non-political exploration of present-day moral dilemmas'.[51] One episode in particular had distinctly biblical overtones. In 'A Private Little War' (1968), the Enterprise returns to an idyllic planet it had surveyed years previously (Eden), to find that the Klingons have armed one group of villagers (Evil/The Fall). Kirk and the Federation are able to sort out the Klingons, and restore order (Redemption). The allusions to a 'present-day moral dilemma' (America's role in Vietnam) are not hard to find.[52]

For Buxton, this ideological underpinning renders TV series products of their time, which is why, on the whole, they don't transfer well from decade to decade, and are notable mainly as curios from a bygone age.[53] Even their most devoted fans would acknowledge that *Star Trek* and *The Avengers* are now looking distinctly creaky.

Thus we can see that TV does not replace the ideology of the church with something neutral: it has its own agenda. This is revealed most clearly by the adverts.

> The TV commercial is the epitome of television style. It is a highly condensed story, much like a parable in being sharply observed, uncluttered with superfluous detail and aimed at spurring its hearers into action. Its unspoken pay-off line is strictly biblical —"Go, and do thou likewise!"[54]

Adverts, of course, also have the most explicit ideological agenda. We should note that no medium has a 'built-in' ideology, and TV is no exception to this rule. As the above analysis seeks to demonstrate, any ideological stance is that of the producer, director, or sponsor, and not intrinsic to TV itself.[55]

What makes TV such a potent force for the communication of ideas? We can begin to come to an answer if we consider it as a purveyor of myth.

3. TV as a Mythmaker

> The mass media—especially television—have taken command of the power of myth; in live coverage of important ceremonies, television has transformed the temporal and spatial dimensions of

ritual. Although the words 'myth' and 'ritual' rest comfortably at home in the scholarly papers of cultural anthropologists, sociologists, theologians, liturgists and philosophers, the real presence of both is found in the electronic media of contemporary societies.[56]

We should pause here to define what we mean by 'myth'. In our sense, myths 'are the public dreams, the product of an oral culture musing about itself . . . television is like myth. It occupies the same space. It is the space of intimate distance'.[57]

For Silverstone, TV's mythological properties have three dimensions. In its reporting of major events that focus the attention of society—coronations, weddings, the cup final—TV presents the content of myth; the narrative and rhetorical methods TV uses to communicate preserve forms of storytelling that are usually linked with oral culture (where myth generally assumes greater importance); and its technology (i.e. the screen) marks out the boundary between myth and reality.[58] It is through TV's role as a mythmaker that its producers present us with their framework of meaning for our lives.[59]

TV has replaced the church as the major repository of meaning in today's society, and in many ways it now performs the role of religion. Its language, grammar, and role in society have all had a powerful effect in decisively changing the context into which Christians wish to proclaim their message.

TV is our modern-day bard, providing the hopes, dreams and aspirations of our society. 'Television today, whether the viewers know it or not, and whether the television industry itself knows it or not, is competing not merely for our attention and dollars, but for our very souls.'[60] The agenda that TV and its moguls provide for our lives is not neutral—evangelism for their particular brand of ideology has been remarkably successful and has gone largely unchallenged.

> Introduce speed of light transmission of images and you make a cultural revolution. Without a vote. Without polemics. Without guerrilla resistance. Here is ideology, pure if not serene.[61]

The electronic media have thrown down the ideological gauntlet, but before we can consider how the church might respond to the challenge of TV, we must first of all examine in more detail the mindset they have created.

V. THE MEDIA MIND

Some understanding of the context within which one is hoping to communicate is a prerequisite for any effective communication strategy.[62] If the church is to be able to communicate clearly, it must

understand the context in which communication is to take place—and as we have outlined above, that context has changed considerably in the last fifty years.

> Under the influence of electronics and new technologies, the functioning of the world has changed. If you want to understand the world, you must change your way of looking at it and the way you perceive its interconnections.[63]

If Christians are unable or unwilling to recognise the impact of the information age and the electronic media, their capacity for effective communication will be greatly reduced. 'The Christian communicator who takes no account of these factors may say that he feels he is talking to deaf ears, but what is really happening is more like talking through an interpreter who mistranslates everything that is said.'[64]

Thus it is of paramount importance, if we are going to be able to communicate Christian truth effectively, to assess the effect on late twentieth-century society of the factors we have already mentioned.

We have already discussed McLuhan and Postman's work on the nature of TV as a medium, and noted that Postman in particular is largely negative about its impact on society. He draws a sharp distinction between the age of literacy and the age of TV: 'the press worked as a metaphor and an epistemology to create a serious public conversation, from which we have now been . . . dramatically separated.'[65] We are now in 'The Age of Show Business'—TV has trivialised every aspect of our culture. 'Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education, and commerce have been conformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without much protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death.'[66]

A 'McLuhanism' as famous as 'the medium is the message' is the term 'global village', by which McLuhan meant that the electronic media have the power to bring events happening thousands of miles away into our living rooms. 'Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both time and space as far as our planet is concerned.'[67]

William Fore provides us with a helpful list of the features that he feels characterise electronic culture:

1. A dependence on mediated, as distinct from face-to-face, communication; more time is spent with electronics, less with people.

2. Individuals are able to pick and choose those messages which reinforce previously held beliefs—aggravating cultural fragmentation.

3. Communication is regarded as a commodity to be bought and sold, rather than as a service function essential to the welfare of the whole of society.

4. A trivialisation of all news, information and entertainment, with the emphasis on information rather than meaning, surface events rather than depth or reflection.[68]

Fred Inglis notes people's increased dependence on TV, seeing it as a product of increased social alienation. As we live less of our lives within an extended family or social circle 'so we turn to and need the many narratives of public communication to keep us, as they say, in touch'.[69]

Paradoxically, despite the huge vistas of information and entertainment TV opens up to us, it has the effect of making us feel increasingly powerless: 'The spectacle of society is drawn past at a distance for us to watch and to envy, but we sit powerless. If anything important happens, it will happen to us.'[70] Cultural critic Os Guiness has also noted this side-effect of the electronic age: 'However it arrives, one by-product of modern technology is a mounting mood of alienation, depersonalisation and dehumanisation . . . alienation is only compounded for more and more people.'[71]

Inglis and Guiness are quite correct in their diagnosis of an increased sense of powerlessness and alienation, which can work against the communication of conviction. However, we should not forget Goethals' comments about TV also providing the 'glue' for an increasingly pluralist society. It seems that whilst providing a corporate framework of meaning, TV increases a feeling of individual powerlessness.

Francis Schaeffer's cogent analysis of twentieth-century society is also relevant here. He maintains that a sea-change has taken place in the way people think. We have passed through what he terms 'the line of despair'.[72] The optimism of the latter half of the nineteenth century, which had no logical underpinnings, has given way to nihilism and hopelessness.

The philosophy that has caused this change is not generated by the media, but they play a part in disseminating it to society, as it gradually permeates through the various disciplines. For Schaeffer, one of the worst elements of this change is that it has happened without people even being aware of what was going on: 'The mass of people have received the new way of thinking without analysing it.'[73] He also maintains, echoing McLuhan, that a preoccupation with the content of communication can be counter-productive. Recalling the furore that surrounded Kenneth Tynan's now legendary utterance of the F-word for the first time on British TV, he comments: 'I would say if we were given a choice *and had to choose*, let us have ten thousand four letter words, rather than the almost subliminal presentation on English television of twentieth-century thinking without four letter words.'[74]

This 'subliminal presentation of twentieth-century thinking' is of particular concern as TV has acquired for itself a remarkable degree of authority: 'Television . . . is considered by most people to be the most reliable source of information available to them.'[75] This is partly

because of the 'caution' of TV news (as opposed to, say, the tabloid press) and partly because TV deals primarily in visual images 'which appear to be open, transparent and authentic, and which establish a consciousness of what Barthes called the subject's "having-been-there" '.[76] In other words, TV presents us with evidence that appears compelling, and gives us the impression that we can, to a large extent, judge for ourselves.

At this stage, we should pause to draw a few threads together. We can see a picture emerging of a society that has been profoundly affected by the media it uses to conduct its conversations. There is an increasing dependence on TV to provide us with a framework by which we can make sense of our lives, and with information by which we may keep abreast of 'the news of the day'.

Conversely, this has tended to increase our sense of individual alienation. We are probably the best informed generation that has ever lived, but our inability to do anything to influence the situations that we lived, but our inability to do anything to influence the situations that we are so well informed about causes an increasing dislocation from reality. We find that we know the 'price of everything, but the value of nothing'. The agenda for what is deemed to be important is set by somebody else; access to the media is limited, and denied to the general population. Modes of communication previously associated mainly (but by no means entirely) with oral cultures—such as myth and symbol—are increasing in importance, as we have discussed above.

It is in this context that the church is attempting to make herself heard—but is it possible for there to be any meaningful communication of truth whatever, in this brave new electronic world? Some commentators suggest that it is not. Colin Morris, for instance, takes a somewhat pessimistic view:

> Although the heart of Christianity is a story about Jesus, the vast bulk of Christian knowledge, traditional theology, takes the form of abstract ideas—propositional statements about God, humanity and the world woven together in complex chains of logic. Great cataracts of words, arguments powerful and sometimes beautifully stated, counter-arguments refuted—miles and miles of print virtually bereft of any image accessible to the television camera lens.[77]

Another notable pundit who was cautious about Christian communication in the age of TV was Malcolm Muggeridge: 'As a television performer, I see myself as a man playing a piano in a brothel, who includes "Abide With Me" in his repertoire in the hope of thereby edifying both clients and inmates.'[78] He further hypothesised that were Christ to have been offered the use of a TV network in the first century, he would have refused it, as inimical to the message he was trying to convey. 'Our amazing technology has a built in *reductio ad absurdum*,

whereas the word that became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, in the most literal sense, speaks for itself.'[79]

Evidently there are issues here for what we wish to present, and how we wish to present it: 'will a message originating in pastoral Palestine two millennia ago have such luminous meaning that it can strike home in spite of its antiquely rhetorical style—and in competition with countless other messages expressed in the contemporary visual idiom?'[80] But it's not all bad news. As well as presenting us with a challenge, the age of TV also provides us with opportunities.

For instance, although Postman has produced a masterful piece of rhetoric denigrating entertainment,[81] there is no reason why people should not be entertained and educated at the same time. No less a figure than Lord Reith remarked, in 1932, that entertainment 'may be a part of a systematic and sustained endeavour to recreate, to build up knowledge, experience, and character, perhaps even in the face of obstacles'.[82] Inglis also points out: 'the changes from oral to literate forms of thought are not fixed and are not always for the better. The important part of our lives to all of us is that lived in direct exchange with others: a book is no substitute for a body.'[83] Perhaps a return to oral communication methods might turn out to be beneficial in the long run.

Many of the genres that we have identified in televisual communication are already present in the Bible. Recent work in both Old and New Testament studies has concentrated on viewing the texts as narratives, with fascinating results.[84] A survey of the fast-growing field of 'narrative theology' is beyond the scope of this essay, but suffice it to say that pathos, irony, tension, comedy, are all woven into these remarkable documents, as the authors do their best to convince their audience of their point of view.[85] Biblical literature seems to bear more than a passing resemblance to modern-day media texts. Echoes of James Bond have even been identified in the story of Samson and Delilah:

> As a suspense story it has much in common with modern thrillers —the lone hero, witty like Bond, victorious against impossible odds, vulnerable to the age-old tactic—the female enemy agent— captured and taken, apparently helpless, to the heart of the enemy's operations—as in so many Bond films—there to wreak more devastation than in the rest of the story.[86]

Clearly there is no need to be nervous of using 'narrative' methods—the biblical authors utilised them to the full.

In the next section we will suggest a way forward for the church in the new Babel. As Morris writes, TV is not 'outside the range of God's sovereignty or Man's dominion. Human beings have willed it into existence but they are not fated to be its victims. The mastery of it is

theirs, and they dare not forget the fact.'[87] The advent of television need not mean the end of successful Christian communication.

VI. TOWARDS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The challenge to Christian apologists is clear: TV has taken on many of the functions traditionally ascribed to religion, it has altered the way we converse, aggravated the pluralism of our culture, increased the amount of information available to us, yet at the same time increased feelings of powerlessness and alienation.

We should also note that TV is an intrinsically powerful medium. As Fore warns us: 'television cannot be considered simply a "resource" which Christians . . . can use to "advance the kingdom." Television is an amalgam of technology, power and values which is far too resistant to being "used" by any ideology other than the ideology which formed it and which it is designed to maintain: the technological era.'[88]

The so-called 'Electronic Church' provides a clear warning that technology can end up transforming the church, rather then vice versa: 'religion, like everything else, is presented, quite simply and without apology, as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away; there is no ritual, no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence. On these shows, the preacher is tops. God comes out as second banana.'[89]

Our concern here is to respond generally, rather than to suggest how effective religious or evangelistic TV programmes can be made. In response to the challenges and opportunities described above, we shall assess two areas of specific recommendation, and then make some general comments.

1. Fore: Creative Transformation

Fore recommends that we seek creatively to transform the medium in three areas. Firstly, in the area of programming, we need to make programmes that are not necessarily specifically religious, but that 'illuminate the human condition . . . ask meaningful religious questions . . . rediscover religious truths and . . . find new religious vocabulary which can have meaning and power for multitudes of men and women today'.[90]

Secondly, we should seek to reform the structures of TV, using political and economic pressure [boycotts] where necessary.[91]

Finally, we should explore the possibilities of narrowcasting, as opposed to broadcasting. TV could be used for education, ministry to the housebound and so on. 'Employ the newer "narrowcast" media for religious education and the encouragement of the faithful already in the

church.' We can then 'use them in ways which are in keeping with religious values rather than simply meeting the utilitarian demands of the new technology'.[92]

These recommendations are useful as far as they go, particularly the suggestion of using non-religious programming to raise religious questions, but we also need to consider measures that range a little wider.

2. Brooks: Dialogue

Brooks notes that when the public meeting and the printed word were the dominant forms of communication, people became accustomed to sustained exposure to a single point of view. Today, however, a major source of information and understanding is the TV documentary. 'One feature of documentary is that it is built around a hard core of tangible, visible evidence—evidence interpreted in different ways by different contributors to the programme. Tension, dialogue and dialectic are the accepted modes of modern communication.'[93]

Making use of this insight could, for instance, make our preaching more effective. Rather than subjecting people to a monologue, we could attempt to start a dialogue, engaging with other points of view and anticipating the questions our sermon might raise in the minds of a congregation. Documentaries usually leave the viewer to draw their own opinions from the material that has been presented[94]—preachers should also resist the temptation continually to interpret the information for the people.

The following general observations should also be borne in mind:

1. Human nature has not changed. Schaeffer has pointed out that with so many people below the 'line of despair', Christian communicators no longer have to dig through layers of groundless optimism to get at the truth. 'A Christian ought to be glad that so many are under the line of despair and are fully aware of their position.'[95] People's need for belonging and a means of making sense of the world has not diminished. What has changed is where they go to satisfy that need. 'The pulpit has given way to the soapbox, and the Sermon on the Mount has been displaced by the theme from Neighbours.'[96]

2. In attempting to communicate in a different cultural epoch, we must think again about what it is we want to communicate. What is the Gospel? How can we accommodate the demands of culture, without emasculating the message? This is profound theological work that can prove to be very uncomfortable, so the church has tended to shy away from it, but posing these questions is imperative.[97]

3. We are seeing a change, not so much from a literate to an illiterate culture, but from a literate to what has been called a 'post-literate' culture. A better term might be 'neo-oral': we are part of a society

which is once again using modes of expression generally associated with oral communication, but transmitted via electronic media. This introduces significant variations from classical oral cultures: the amount of information available and the speed by which it can be transmitted is much greater; the use of image as well as the spoken word. The church is trying to reach an audio-visual generation, but depending in the main on words and books and tracts. This has to change.

4. Story, narrative, myth—all these genres are common currency today. We need to rediscover them and use them in the church's communication.

> Do you want to express the gospel today? Use symbolic language. That was Jesus' language, and is the dominant language of the media today. It adds modulation to abstract words. It is the best way of putting thought on show.[98]

Liebes and Katz have suggested that *Dallas* was popular precisely because it made use of profoundly biblical categories. '*Dallas* is a primordial tale echoing the most fundamental mythologies. . . the brothers in *Dallas*—J.R. and Bobby—are simply variations on Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau.'[99] Scholars have suggested that the mainstay of prime-time scheduling—soap opera—has distinctly theological overtones. 'Religious dogma may never darken their story-lines, but the great themes of Birth, Marriage and Death frequently do, and moreover they provide the staple diet.'[100]

Finally, Roger Silverstone provides us with a note of hope: 'Something we might call science, specialised, inaccessible, literary, often dull and inconclusive, becomes in the hands of Horizon, or Nova, or unequivocally in the hands of Carl Sagan, a drama, an adventure: heroic, powerful, accessible, visual, probably unchallenged.'[101] And what TV has done for science, it can do for theology.

VII. CONCLUSION

The church clearly has its work cut out if it is going to able to communicate effectively in the electronic culture we have described above. TV has profoundly affected our culture, and this will in turn affect every aspect of the church's mission, not just that part of it labelled 'evangelism'.

We have outlined some responses to TV culture in the previous section, but here we shall sum up with some additional general observations.

1. *Understanding*. We must understand the culture that surrounds us if we are to communicate effectively with it. This will almost certainly involve some rethinking of the methods the church uses to train its communicators—theological training is still very book oriented. Most

ministers have read, and continue to read, many more books than their congregation are ever likely to. Video and the language of TV feature hardly at all on most theological education syllabuses.

2. *Education*. One of the most important tasks for the Christian communicator is to rescue congregations from being helpless consumers of whatever is piped into their living rooms. 'It is a little odd that a generation which has grown up to hours of viewing pictures on a television screen has emerged from the process in some danger of being visually illiterate.'[102] Visual literacy programmes should perhaps begin to assume the same kind of importance in churches as those designed to combat the more traditional variety of illiteracy.

3. *Methodology*. The church must use all the communication tools at its disposal. The rise of the electronic 'neo-oral' culture has widened the choice, not restricted it. We must be prepared to use images, symbol, drama, irony, suspense in our communications as well as words. Whatever happened to creativity?

4. *Programming*. We must remember that no particular ideology is intrinsic to TV (or any other medium for that matter); it is in the hands of those who make the programmes. Christians should be prepared to get their hands dirty and get involved at the sharp end of TV production.

5. *Mission Impossible?* No! Above all, the church must not give up. The Age of Show Business is not inimical to Christian communication.

During the inaugural Priestland Memorial lecture, the late Brian Redhead took the church to task for failing in its mission to communicate the gospel to society: 'Heads snug beneath mitres should face up to the fact that they have lost the power to entertain the non-committed. People no longer sermon-hop around London. The pulpit is synonymous with boredom not stimulation.'[103]

There may well be more than a grain of truth in his remarks, but if the challenges of the electronic age are faced up to, there is no reason why this should continue to be the case.

Endnotes

1 Source: *Social Trends* 23 (London: HMSO, 1993).
2 Colin Morris, *God in a Box: Christian Strategy in the Television Age* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), 9.
3 Cited in James McDonnell (ed.), *Public Service Broadcasting: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1991), 23.
4 ' "Naive" experts admit threat of violent videos', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 April, 1994.
5 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Abacus, 1964), 15–30.
6 See Em Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 292.
7 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 26.
8 Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (Glasgow: Collins Fontana, 1971), 131.

9 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Methuen, 1985), 9.
10 Postman, *Amusing*, 89.
11 Postman, *Amusing*, 87.
12 Postman, *Amusing*, 28.
13 Richard H. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), 46.
14 See Postman, *Amusing*, 105–15.
15 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 50.
16 Cf. R.P. Snow, *Creating Media Culture* (London: Sage, 1983), 27: 'Each medium has its own unique grammatical characteristics. From the syntax of press to the rhythm of film, understanding the operation and potential influence of mass media requires an understanding of media grammar.'
17 My analysis here is indebted to Snow, *Creating Media Culture*, 126–38.
18 This is a generalisation, of course. Certain types of programme will be more dependent on formula than others, and there is no reason why employing stereo-type—or 'stock'—characters should necessarily exclude subtle plotting and character-isation.
19 Snow, *Creating Media Culture*, 147.
20 See e.g. Postman, *Amusing*, 101–15; or as Clive James has pointed out: 'For the public, all television is entertainment, even the news. And equally, although this aspect is harder to analyse, all television is news, even the entertainment' (*The Dreaming Swimmer: Non-Fiction 1987–1992* [London: Picador, 1993], 103).
21 'Extraordinary' here can include relatively mundane or normal activities—an affair, a bereavement, an accident—perhaps experienced with greater intensity than you would normally expect (cf. Coronation Street or EastEnders).
22 Snow, *Creating Media Culture*, 21–25.
23 Postman, *Amusing*, 4.
24 Morris, *God in a Box*, 147. We might well want to ask Morris what he means by a 'serious' idea!
25 Postman, *Amusing*, 9.
26 Alisdair Milne, then D-G of the BBC, speaking in 1985. Cited in McDonnell, *Broadcasting*, 88.
27 Cited in McDonnell, *Broadcasting*, 11.
28 Cited in McDonnell, *Broadcasting*, 29.
29 McDonnell, *Broadcasting*, 38.
30 Cited in McDonnell, *Broadcasting*, 113.
31 Cited in McDonnell, *Broadcasting*, 71–72.
32 Source: *Sunday Times*, 27 March, 1994.
33 Cited in McDonnell, *Broadcasting*, 84.
34 Stephen Whittle, 'Values in Television and Radio', *Media and Theology*, December 1993, 3–4.
35 Gregor Goethals, 'Media Mythologies', in Chris Arthur (ed.), *Religion and the Media: An Introductory Reader* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), 28–29.
36 Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (California: Wadsworth, 1992 3rd edn.), 32.
37 McGuire, *Religion*, 29.
38 McGuire, *Religion*, 28. Missiologist Peter Cotterell also concurs with this conclusion; see his *Mission and Meaninglessness: The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder* (London: SPCK, 1990), esp. chs. 1 and 2.
39 See Snow, *Creating Media Culture*, 11.
40 Snow, *Creating Media Culture*, 11. William F. Fore agrees that TV is assuming a profound role in our culture, which involves more than just influencing what we do with our leisure-time: 'television . . . is providing us with the myths, teachings and expressions of our religion, whether or not we recognize it' (*Television and Religion: The Shaping of Values, Faith, and Culture* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987], 25).

41 Morris, *God in a Box*, 174.
42 Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 250. Medved makes a powerful point, but neglects to comment explicitly on whether audiences distinguish between commercials and programmes. The fast-growing industry of 'product placement' (ensuring a certain manufacturer's products are advantageously displayed in the course of a programme or film) would suggest that, increasingly, they don't.
43 We should not forget that other mass media—radio, film, theatre, etc.—also share this characteristic.
44 Gerald Millerson, *The Technique of Television Production* (London: Focal Press, 1990), 17.
45 G. Philo, et al., *Really Bad News* (London: Writers and Readers, 1982), 143.
46 Philo et al., *Really Bad News*, 130.
47 Stuart Hall, 'Culture, the Media and the "Ideological Effect" ', in J. Curran, et al. (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 34.
48 James, *The Dreaming Swimmer*, 138.
49 David Buxton, *From The Avengers to Miami Vice: Form and Ideology in Television Series* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 15.
50 Buxton, *Form and Ideology*, 100.
51 Buxton, *Form and Ideology*, 60.
52 Buxton, *Form and Ideology*, 61.
53 Buxton, *Form and Ideology*, 16.
54 Morris, *God in a Box*, 47.
55 Although technical considerations mean each medium will transmit ideology in a particular way. See Len Masterman, *Teaching the Media* (London: Routledge, 1990), 129–40.
56 Goethals, 'Media Mythologies', 25.
57 Roger Silverstone, 'Television, Myth and Culture', in J.W. Carey (ed.), *Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press* (California: Sage Publications, 1988), 24.
58 Silverstone, 'Television, Myth and Culture', 29.
59 Goethals, 'Media Mythologies', 25: 'One role of myth is to situate us, to define the world and our place in it.'
60 Fore, *Television and Religion*, 24.
61 Postman, *Amusing*, 89.
62 Erwin P. Bettinghaus and Michael J. Cody, *Persuasive Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1987), 6, list *understanding* as one of their 'five basic factors' in persuasion.
63 Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 7.
64 R.T. Brooks, *Communicating Conviction* (London: Epworth, 1983), 15.
65 Postman, *Amusing*, 44.
66 Postman, *Amusing*, 4.
67 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 11.
68 Cf. Fore, *Television and Religion*, 30.
69 Fred Inglis, *Media Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 146.
70 Inglis, *Media Theory*, 188.
71 Os Guiness, *The Dust of Death* (Leicester: IVP, 1973), 147.
72 Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Leicester: IVP, 1990; Trilogy edition, with *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* and *Escape From Reason*), 8ff. All page numbers cited are from this edition.
73 Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason*, 235.
74 Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason*, 255.
75 Masterman, *Teaching the Media*, 141.
76 Masterman, *Teaching the Media*, 141.

77 Morris, *God in a Box*, 141.
78 Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), 12.
79 Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media*, 42.
80 Morris, *God in a Box*, 167.
81 Viz. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.
82 Cited in McDonnell, *Broadcasting*, 55.
83 Inglis, *Media Theory*, 11.
84 See e.g. David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) or R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).
85 For a concise introductory overview, see E.V. McKnight, 'Literary Criticism', in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (eds.), *A Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 473–81.
86 Mark Greene, 'Enigma Variations: Aspects of the Samson Story', *VoxEv* 21 (1991), 76.
87 Morris, *God in a Box*, 165.
88 Fore, *Television and Religion*, 194.
89 Postman, *Amusing*, 119; see also Fore, *Television and Religion*, 72–97.
90 Fore, *Television and Religion*, 116.
91 Fore, *Television and Religion*, 120. This has proved successful in the States, but it is doubtful if it would be as effective in the UK, given the different outlook of the networks here.
92 Fore, *Television and Religion*, 126.
93 Brooks, *Communicating Conviction*, 86, although the contributors to a TV documentary are not necessarily carefully selected!
94 The producers generally leave little room for doubt as to the conclusions they would *like* their viewers to draw.
95 Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 45.
96 Neil Simpson, 'Popular Religion on TV', in Arthur (ed.), *Religion and the Media*, 109.
97 This process has begun in America's highly successful 'Willow Creek' project and some of the strategies formulated there are now being adapted for use in the UK. See Bill Hybels, 'Speaking to the Secular Mind', *Leadership*, Summer 1988, 28–34.
98 Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, 146.
99 T. Liebes and E. Katz, 'Dallas and Genesis: Primordiality and Seriality in Popular Culture', in Carey (ed.), *Media, Myths and Narratives*, 118.
100 Simpson, 'Popular Religion', 102.
101 Silverstone, 'Television, Myth, and Culture', 38.
102 Brooks, *Communication*, 80.
103 Source: *Church of England Newspaper*, 22 October, 1993.