RITUAL, RELIGION AND RONALD

THE POWER OF THE LITURGICAL IN THE CHURCH AND MARKETPLACE

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

LINDA CORCORAN SMITH-CRIDDLE
DONALDSON, INDIANA

2000

Copyright (copyright sign) year approved by student's name

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers of the Dissertations on Disc Library. For permissions write to the:

Graduate Theological Foundation
Post Office Box 5
Donaldson, IN 46513

or e-mail for permission at gtf@skyenet.net

Manufactured in the United States of America.

The author/student retains exclusive and unrestricted copyright of this dissertation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT 1

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 2

GLOSSARY 4

INTRODUCTION 5

Chapter 1
THE PHENOMENON OF POPULAR CULTURE 9

Chapter 2
RITUAL AND LITURGY 32

Chapter 3
REPRESENTATIVE POPULAR CULTURE GENRES;
OR ,
THE CEREMONIES OF AMERICAN CULTURAL RELIGION. 44

Chapter 4
THE MCDONALD'S EXPERIENCE 84

Chapter 5
AN APPEAL TO THE CHURCH 109

BIBLIOGRAPHY 150

APPENDICES (not included on CD)

Chapter 1 American Visions

Chapter 2 Icons of Our Time

Chapter 3 Representative Forums

a.. Television

b. Television Advertizing

c. Hard Copy Advertisement

d. Gender Advertizing

e. Popular

f. Music

g. Gathering Places

Chapter 4 McDonald's

Chapter 5 Salvation Models

ABSTRACT

Just as religious liturgical formularies perform an independent and powerful function in the practice of religion, similar prescribed forms, though devoid of identifiably religious references, are the basis for the appeal and success of popular culture enterprises. In order to support this thesis, the work demonstrates the presence of liturgical characteristics in popular art forms, with McDonald's fast food chain serving as prototype. The final portion of the project is concerned with the relationship between theological constructs and popular culture and an appeal to the church universal to re-imagine the power inherent in its tradition of liturgical expression.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the mid-seventies as a resident of Maumee, a small city in northwest Ohio, whose major claim to fame was the location of a bogus university of the same name appearing in a cartoon series, I found myself developing a certain curiosity about the field of popular culture, despite an innate distaste of a number of its manifestations.

It was serendipitous and my good fortune that just a few miles to the south of my residence is located Bowling Green State University, where Ray B. Browne had labored for so many years to raise the acceptance of popular culture as serious study in the academic setting. Ray was most generous in his consultations and sharing of resources,all of which led to a presentation at an annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association and the development of a six-session experiential seminar, later expanded to a week-long conference format for the College of Preachers in 1979, thanks to the encouragement of the Director, Earl Brill.

For some twenty years I continued my interest in popular culture, following it at some distance, considerably daunted by the likelihood that a serious academic enterprise into such an arena might appear too trivial, or even vulgar, given the pedestrian issues related to such an inquiry. In 1996, at Christ Church, Oxford, it was a lecture by John Fenton at Christ Church, Oxford, and observations by John Macquarrie in the same setting, which gave me the courage to consider the connections between popular culture and religion as a dissertation topic..

I wish to acknowlege certain individuals without whom I could not have completed this project: to David H. Stam, *ordinarius* and editor *extraordinare,* for his cogent and critical suggestions throughout several drafts of the manuscript, without whose contribution this work would clearly be of lesser quality; to Richard H. Lineback for his assistance in the initial phases of the project; to Ray B. Browne for his kind review of my work; to Scott E. Shook who both encouraged and made it possible for me to pursue this and two other graduate degrees during my tenure as chaplain and ethicist at the hospital; to Helen Good, for her diligence and good will in the transcription of original research; and above all, to my dear husband, Arthur H. Criddle, Jr., for his theological and technical assistance, sacrificial support, patient forbearance and understanding of my commitment to a program of study of which this dissertation is representative, I express my heartfelt gratitude.

GLOSSARY

Church: a people who respond radically to life (Matthew Fox)

Faith: the existential acceptance of something transcending ordinary experience (Paul Tillich)

Icon: a material object which stands for, points to or transcends reality

Myth: a story or narrative that attempts to express understanding of the Self and of Being (John Macquarrie)

Prayer: a radical response to life (Matthew Fox)

Religion: a specific way of approaching the totality of reality (Edward Schilebeeckx)

Ritual: repetitive behavior which imputes meaning

Sacrament: a social celebration of a particular mystery of life (Matthew Fox)

Sacramental: The capacity of materiality to embody spirit or the mystery of grace (Gregor Goethals)

Spirituality: one's attitude toward life or consciousness (Matthew Fox)

Symbol: anything which is presented to the mind as standing for something else (John Macquarrie)

INTRODUCTION

It is my intention to 1) present a basic overview of the phenomenon of popular culture, 2) contrast and compare the characteristic themes of popular culture with certain theological, philosophical, and ethical constructs, 3) explore several corresponding symbolic and iconographic elements, 4) explore in detail one popular culture form, namely McDonald's, and 5) make a case for the value to the church and its leadership of a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of popular culture and the implications for the church of the future.

The beginnings of popular culture are associated with the rise of a new middle class as both money and time became more available following the industrial revolution of the 18th century. In more recent times, the rise of new technologies hastened the manufacture and duplication of certain goods which either found or developed a market for entertainment. It is still the case that art forms of popular culture exist primarily to entertain. Popular art forms can be characterized as predictable, mass-produced and consumed, appealing to a desire for instant gratification for the consumer as in popular music concerts, movies, and sports events, novels, magazines and the fast food experience. Experience of any of these art forms will demonstrate

a need for instant gratification. As explained by Earl Brill at a seminar at the College of Preachers in 1979, critics of diverse viewpoints agree in claiming that one of the primary dangers of popular culture is that of a "narcotizing dysfunction," that it deadens the mind and leads to regression of "the adult" and a stimulation of "the child." In Freudian terms, the "ego" is threatened by the "id." A Jungian might say that self-actualization is endangered by the appeal to the more basic or base needs of life. Advertising is perhaps the best example of this possibility, and all popular art forms all inherently embody a commercial connection. They have different characteristics from "high" art forms such as ballet, opera, classic literature, etc., and do not pretend to appeal on that "higher" level. Popular art forms intend to, and in fact, do appeal to the masses and not to the elite.

In order to set the scene for the positions taken in this study of popular culture, I can think of no better example than that produced by Time magazine in its special 1997 issue entitled "American Visions." The stated purpose was to present the development of the American character through representative depictions of significant art works. "American Visions" identifies the following "chapters" or topics. The precis that follow are mine, based upon the brief commentary provided.

The Sacred Mission: to subdue the wilderness and the untamable(in the name of God or in the name of Progress.)

Manifest Destiny: to interpret how we are to incarnate the Maker's will for us as a people to find that which confirms the vision of harmony while honoring the natural grandeur of the land.

Seeking the Spirit: to find that which confirms the vision of harmony in the spirit of a Garden of Eden restored, at the same time desiring to assert a limitless reign over the forces of nature.

Grit and Grids: to be convinced that there is no inconsistency between engineering and great art (to wit: the Brooklyn Bridge.) And since no feat appeared to large to take on unparalleled growth, especially in the urban areas was spawned, bringing about a certain disconnectedness between those characteristics specifically associated with agrarian society or a connection with "the earth."

To Shape a Past: To claim a connectedness to the past which is more than an exercise in nostalgia by wedding traditions born in European culture with a unique American expression.

Breaking the Mold: to embrace the model of European architectural modernism imbued with an unique American exuberance such as that found in the Chrysler Building… a display of economic power and fantasy, with representative radiator caps at its four corners tapering to seven groined vaults pierced by upwards -pointing

triangles of Trinitarian connection, ending in a spire, reminiscent of Gothic cathedrals.

These characteristics of American character are reflected in various popular art forms and provide a convenient groundwork to proceed with a study of connections between the American experience, the psyche of individual Americans, and their involvement and adoption of popular culture in its many forms.

Chapter 1

THE PHENOMENON OF POPULAR CULTURE

The following assumptions underlie this work:

Popular culture forms are neither inherently good nor inherently evil.

Every human experience is value-laden, including entertainment.

Theological concerns such as salvation or immortality are widely mirrored in popular culture, though seldom identified in spiritual terms.

Expressions of popular culture make assertions about the nature of reality.

Certain values are expressed in the form itself, such as the Western film, novel or television series.

The following observations and analyses are intended to provide a framework for understanding the popular culture phenomenon.

The phenomenon of transference or shape-shifting takes place when a creature or object undergoes a metamorphosis. It is important to be aware of the multi-faceted nature of cultural phenomena, their functions and meanings. Television may be entertainment, but it is education as well. Disneyland is a national cultural capital, more exhibition than amusement; McDonald's may appear as a food purveyor, but

is more importantly a landmark and sophisticated "framework for religious impulses."

According to Stewart Hall and Patty Whannel, popular art is "essentially a conventionalized art which re-states in an intense form, values and attitudes already known; which reassures and reaffirms but brings to this something of the surprise of art as well as the shock of recognition." (Dunlop 376)

In a 1953 Diogenes article,“A Theory of Mass Culture,” Dwight MacDonald reminds us that for the last century Western culture has really been influenced by two cultures: the traditional high culture, the elitist world of classical music, ballet, opera, theater, and literature; and mass culture, with its broader appeal to the mass market. MacDonald prefers the term “mass culture” to ” popular culture” seeing the distinctive mark solely in mass consumption. He claims that the growth of mass culture since the 1800's has been fairly obvious, business enterprises having found profitable markets in the cultural demands of the newly-awakened masses, the advance of technology making possible the cheap production of various art forms in sufficient quantities to satisfy this market, and new media, such as movies and television, especially well-adapted to mass manufacture and distribution.

MacDonald characterizes mass culture as "a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions." (62) He also claims that mass culture mixes and scrambles many cultural elements together, producing a homogenized culture. This has led, in his opinion, to a tepid and flaccid middle-brow culture that threatens to engulf everything in its spreading influence. In my opinion, since there is metaphor and parable in all art forms, “high” or “low,” We need to understand them, to stand under them before interpretation. Popular culture may be the bastard son of higher element, but to differentiate between high culture, and the bourgeois culture of folk and pop, it is helpful to look at the characteristics of each.

High culture is self-conscious, generally identifiable, produced for patrons, using sophisticated and complex forms, cosmopolitan in nature. Folk culture, on the other hand, is unselfconscious, anonymous, and local or regional in nature; is comparatively stable, and uses simple forms. Popular culture is entertainment; it occupies one's attention and is widely considered enjoyable. It is commercial, ephemeral, technological, and designed for a mass audience.

In evaluating popular culture, it is essential to develop criteria appropriate to the characteristics of the form itself, rather than using the criteria of high or folk culture. Before we launch into criteria for evaluation of popular culture, it would be well to begin with a comparison of high culture and folk culture.

High Culture	**Folk Culture**
Self-conscious	Unselfconscious
Generally identifiable or attributable	Anonymous
Often involves patronage to individual artists	Often collective indigenous products
Sophisticated, complex forms	Comparatively simple
Cosmopolitan	Local or provincial

In popular culture, the forms are designed for a mass audience, are commercially viable, ephemeral, and technologically based. Popular culture art forms are characterized by undemanding entertainment, often pleasant and easily accessible. Jim Fowles, in *Advertising and Popular Culture*, sees popular culture as expressive content produced, consumed, and delivered through the channels of mass media. Since popular culture typically elicits pleasurable sensations, this pleasure-giving feature is a central aspect of the popular culture experience. Popular culture is entertainment produced by the culture industry, composed of symbolic content, and consumed with pleasure. (11)

Generally speaking, in the definition of popular culture, when the word "mass" is used, it generally refers not to an indication of numbers of persons receiving communication, but rather the fact that there is no direct communication between sender and receiver.

Michael Kammen, in *American Culture, American Tastes*, insists that there is a definitive distinction between "mass" and "popular" culture. He claims that popular culture forms are more interactive while mass culture is more passive and private.

Kammen claims, for example, that the distinction between playing a game of chance at a state fair and playing a video game demonstrates the difference between "popular" and "mass." It is difficult to see the distinction between the two experiences.

There are generally two traditions of art forms in the United States, that which is cultivated and that which is in the vernacular. The cultivated traditions are clearly based on European experience and European-based art forms while the vernacular are what is identified with the United States, such as industrial design, bridge building, and jazz. The popular culture artist wants to express both creativity and make money at the same time. So far as folk culture is concerned, there is essentially little being produced today. In order to evaluate a popular culture, we need to develop particular criteria to do that, appropriate to the characteristics of popular culture and not the criteria of high or folk culture. Harvey Cox observes in *Seduction of the Spirit* that there is no need to despise popular culture or to anticipate a chasm between high culture and popular culture. We must be aware of ivory tower control of high culture. Heritage should be made available to the masses and we can all be a part of "liberating the cultural bastille."

Gilbert Seldes claims that the public arts or expressions of popular culture, differ from all other art, and in his book, *The Public Arts*, he gives the following major marks of identification:

1. Public arts are popular to the extent of being generally acceptable and less likely to be practiced privately.
2. They tend to be produced en masse rather than on an individual basis.
3. They are often produced by teams rather than by individuals.
4. They are by intention ephemeral and temporal, popular but short-lived, not increasing in value with the passage of time.
5. The public arts are offered to the public as a whole, not to any particular segment of it. (297)

It is the last mark of identification which the author feels is entirely new. One of the characteristics of popular art that distinguishes it from others is the ubiquity of television and radio and media which operates in the public domain. Popular arts are entertainment and its creators have the power to create audiences and to manipulate demand. (298)

Public or popular arts which make use of the public domain (such as public spaces or airwaves, are matters of public concern and therefore the populace has certain rights and duties with respect to them. Given the powerful nature and influence of public or popular art, there is a danger of undermining other values embraced by other portions of society. What is needed is a realistic appraisal of the social values of the public arts rather than the contempt of a "snobbish dislike" or from an "exaggerated fear." (302)

"As long as the means of communication are not available for criticism of themselves, as long as we are prevented from thinking about the process by which we are hypnotized into not thinking, we remain at the mercy of our simplest appetites, our immediate and almost childish sensations, and these can be exploited -- for the arts most useful to the public are essentially those which can be most effectively turned against the public good. To know this, to know that we have the right to put them into our service, is the beginning of an intelligent approach to the problems and the opportunities of the public arts.(303)

Recently, the word "culture" has acquired a social context. Formerly, it meant a superior, personal development, but now it more often refers to a state of societal unity or wholeness, an ideology given currency by a common discipline until it becomes a binding force of social order. Ogden Vogt, in *Cult and Culture* cites Clark Wissler's list of nineteen elements which make up the cultural pattern of any society: speech, material traits, food, shelter, tools, weapons, trade, travel, work, art, mythology and scientific knowledge, religious practices, ritual forms, treatment of the sick, burial, family and social systems, property, government, and war. Vogt, however, reduces the content of culture to a triple pattern, three elements by which it implements its standardized and traditional pattern of behavior and conduct. These are physical equipment, a social organization, and a system of ideas. (17) He also cites Arnold Toynbee, whose study of history is a sweeping survey of all great civilizations and who makes a strong case for the flowering of certain societies undergoing the challenge of diversity and the hardship of the environment. He holds the stimulus of difficulty as an essential condition for social progress. Vogt expands

on Pierce Butler's argument that it is the response rather than the condition that is the decisive factor. and that the quality of the culture is dependent upon the total attitude and spirit of those who compose the society. And where does this attitude originate? Does religion account for the differences among cultures? Is religion the chief source of both cultural order and cultural variation? (Vogt,17) In Vogt's view the answer to the last question is a resounding yes and furthermore insists that it is important to ask what it is that we identify as the sustaining power, the perpetual source of social culture. He also refers to James Feibleman's theory of culture. According to Fiebleman, the social spirit of the people resides in the subconsciously held beliefs common to the group. They are not conscious or explicit but rather subconscious and implicit. Customs, functions, tools of culture follow, so far as the conditions of the environment permit, the outlines laid down by the implicit dominate theology. "Religion is the name given to the institution owning whatever myth dominates a culture. The lack of power in a religion sometimes means that the institution has survived its myth. In this case, the institution loses its value and continues to exist but only as a hollow shell and without the domination of a culture. The institution within a culture which is deemed by the members of that culture to have the greatest value, is ipso facto, the religion of the culture." (116)

In *The Theory of Modern Culture*, Fiebleman cites two forces which affected each other and our world as we know it: Protestantism and Capitalism. The Renaissance and the Reformation, as well as the rise of individualism and of Lutheran and Calvinist teaching dignifying the work ethic, provided an acceptable religious backdrop for the expansion of capitalism. While these factors might not wholly

explain, they do illuminate the phenomenon of the emergence of a new middle class that became the commercial or capitalistic class and in which secular forces became enmeshed with those of religion. The capitalistic way of life may be called the American way of life, the way of experiment and progress, freedom of thought and operation, expansion, and development. Fiebleman does not call commerce in and of itself evil, but he does identify two countervailing and counteracting forces that interweave themselves through the long history of commerce and culture: men hungry for food working together to provide for common human needs; men hungry for power exploiting other men for their own gain. His concern is exploitation. Commerce cannot be an element separate from the rest of life.

Fiebleman claims that enterprise and nationalism would, no doubt, have developed without the benefit of clergy, but clerics tended to pronounce benedictions on what was being consolidated as a new social contract, a new *status quo.* They tended to fill a ceremonial role. "Religion and culture… did not go completely separate ways in America. A jumble, a muddle, a 'moraine' remained and remains." (138) In Fiebleman's analysis, spiritual tradition and the ecclesiastical world began to co-exist…which is the whole point of schism: not that one entity is killed but that two go their separate ways, while moving from organic to pluralistic society, from an organic view of nature to a historic view of environmental mastery, from "be content with your status" to "get rich, advance yourselves," from fused church and state to separated church and state. All this happened in the midst of invoking old Biblical texts and creedal points and by creating the impression that no great change was occurring. (138-141)

In "An Afterword About Afterwards," his epilogue in *The Modern Schism,* Martin Marty cites Denis de Rougemont who identified the existential problem for the man of faith who lives in a world "where faith is denied, more or less serenely ignored, or, even worse, where Christianity is accepted and ridiculed under the forms of its traditional deviations, its caricatures." Marty sees three historical courses summarized in de Rougemont's analysis: the denial of the faith on the continent; the ignoring of the faith in the British experience; and "the quasi-religious passage into a new social contract in the United States [which] produce[d] 'deviations and caricatures' of traditional Christianity." (141)

C.W.E. Bigsby in *The Politics of Popular Culture* claims that popular culture is in and of itself is evidence of social dislocation and decadence. Popular culture art forms confront the association of culture with authority, established institutions, and order. They are seen by some as an expression of genuine needs not ordinarily validated by a society which chooses to stress the view of humankind as rational, puritanical, socially determined, and innately moral. The struggle would seems to be between those who would have high culture serve to protect us against a "heedless democratization" and those with a more *laissez faire* approach to the encroachment of popular culture. The debate perhaps reflects our discomfort as a nation with ideas of class and culture while at the same time rejecting as "beyond the pale"those tastes and entertainments of the "lower classes."

Leslie Fiedler in *Tyranny of the Normal* views the popular arts as subversive, anti-authoritarian, and liberating, the discovery by the young of a dimension of human existence formerly denied us by so much focus on technology, but even more so on a persistent puritanism and a bourgeois power structure intent on maintaining its control by outlawing and denigrating those elements of existence over which it has relinquished control.

Bigsby insists that popular culture can be transformed into "high" art by either a critical act of appropriation by high art critics or simply by being accepted in a more massive way by the next generation. "Part of the difficulty over the meaning of the term popular culture arises from the different meanings attributable to the word 'popular' itself. It can mean both intended for and suited to ordinary people, or prevalent or current among or accepted by the people generally. The latter includes everyone; the former excludes all but the ordinary. Hence, popular culture is sometimes presented as that which appeals only to the commonality (mass culture) or to the average (middle brow), thus confirming the social fragmentation of society, and sometimes as a phenomenon cutting across class lines. For some, therefore, it is a simple opiate, for others a subversive and liberating force, linking those of differing social and educational backgrounds." (17-18)

In some settings, popular culture has increasingly come to be regarded as a sub-division of communications. As defined by CECMAS, the Centre d'Etudes de Communication de Masse, and reproduced in the heading of every issue of their journal Communication*s* popular culture is*:* large circulation press, radio, television,

cinema, advertising, songs and popular novels. “Through all these massive channels, the astounding development of which characterizes the modern world, the man of the technological civilization is building up a new culture and the central questions are those which the journal goes on to pose namely: `What are its contents? Its languages? Its functions? Its values? Its effects? How does it define itself in relation to traditional bodies of knowledge and in relation to other cultures?'."

The study of popular culture originally drew from two main traditions: that deriving from the methodology of literary criticism and social history on the one hand, and that drawing on the techniques of the social sciences on the other. The essential difference between the two approaches is that the sociologist deals in value analysis ,while the cultural critic deals in value judgments. The first observes phenomenon with a view to constructing a model of social interaction, while the other evaluates and tests the worth of transmitted cultural values. Bigsby believes that the two approaches have been viewed to some degree as antithetical but that this breach is showing signs of being closed. He cites Richard Hoggart’s view that in some disciplines one must act as though all knowledge were scientifically verifiable, but not in the study of society. Hoggart advocated a close partnership between cultural critics and social scientists reflecting a move towards the consolidation of approaches. Older assumptions that popular culture can be explained solely in terms of commercial or economic structures, or by analysis of the content, have given way to a more pluralistic approach. Bigsby himself believes that these older assumptions must be altered, for the material itself transcends both class and country and certainly crosses the divisions between disciplines.(19)

T. H. Breen, in a review of John Brewer's *The Pleasures of Imagination: English Culture in the Eigtheenth Century,* explicates Brewer's analysis of how the fine arts and literature in England went public during the 18th century and how culture became a commodity, to be possessed as well as consumed. According to Brewer, the transformation was dependent upon a newly empowered self-confident middle class who were able to decorate their homes with affordable engravings and prints and to purchase literature at an affordable price. The commercialization of popular culture that so many critics now deplore had its roots in the society of George Frederic Handel, Samuel Johnson, and Sir Joshua Reynolds. What had formerly been referred to as "high culture" was no longer the exclusive property of the upper classes. Examples could be found in coffee houses, debating clubs, galleries, and concert halls. Newspapers and journals communicated the bourgeois or middle class ideas through an expanding commercial economy. A certain prosperity came about and at least a sense of personal liberty accelerated some of these developments. (Brewer 28, 89) Indeed, Brewer claims that it was the late 18th century which re-discovered Shakespeare and *The Jubilee* organized by Garrick in 1770, was nothing more than "a commercial wheeze"(327), designed to cash in on the Shakespeare Jubilee the previous year, also orchestrated by Garrick.

In *New Dimensions of Popular Culture*, Russel Nye speaks of the appearance of a truly popular culture as a consequence of the industrial and democratic revolutions. One of the conditions for the swift growth of popular culture in the later 18th century was an explosion of population in Europe and the Americas, a popular desire for entertainment and the means to satisfy it. Another factor was the emergence of a

middle class calling for different tastes in entertainment, based on the population at large.

The new interest in entertainment, of course, presumed the leisure to enjoy it. New allegiances to a more popular culture were wholly dependent upon modern technology, and the ability to duplicate materials in a less costly way than other forms of high culture were able to do. Print was the most pervasive means of communication until the 20th century opened other channels of diffusion, reproduction, and transmission of sound and image -- phonograph, film, radio, and television. Literacy was no longer a sole prerequisite for cultural diffusion or even necessary to become a part of the cultural scene. There were unparalleled opportunities for artists willing to satisfy this newly identified market. Control and support of the arts by a relatively small upper class was giving way to that of a larger growing middle class calling for different tastes in entertainment, based on the population at large. Mass media were present to provide swift and cheap methods of communication.

Popular culture describes those productions, artistic and commercial, designed for mass consumption appealing to and expressing the tastes and understanding of the majority of the public yet free of control by any cultural elite. Popular art forms reflect the values, conventions, and patterns of thought and feeling generally disbursed through and approved by European or American society. Popular art confirms the experience of the majority, embracing a broad audience and a wide cross-section of economic and educational levels. Today, the criterion of the popular

artist's success is contemporary and commercial, measured by the size and response of his public. He expresses not only what he feels, but through what he feels he expresses what many others feel as well. The popular artist deals with the familiar, easily recognizable experiences with which large numbers of people can identify. The popular audience expects entertainment rather than an aesthetic experience. And since the artist hopes to make money, he aims at one thing -- the largest possible audience, his talents directed towards mass response. The popular artist will use those forms to which his audience has the easiest access -- movies, radio, television, records and CDs, the magazine, the paperback book, the popular song, the newspaper, even the comic book, all of which can be most easily comprehended.

In his article, "The Folklore of Industrial Man," Thomas Cripps identifies popular culture as the genre within which popular artists work. Essential to the analysis of popular culture is the identification of the conventions which make up the genre. The analyst must trace the evolution of the formulae within an historical context and ask such questions as who created it, what conventions have remained constant, what modifications have been made, and how the formulae have been altered. Cripps claims that even though scholars cannot agree on the nature of popular culture, they do know its sources. They point to the end of the 17th century when an emerging mass audience, and the first industrial revolution, characterized by cheaper printing and increased literacy, led to the rise of popular literature. (88-91)

Many intellectuals in the 20th century have stood aloof from the study of popular culture, often offended by its excesses, directness, shrillness, and apparent simplicity

as well as its common availability and cheapness. But it is that very popularity that students of popular culture wish to understand. It is the analysis of the popular which allows us to see the reflections of the values and attitudes, "the furniture of the mind," of American society. (88) The interests of popular culture scholars are catholic in the sense of universal, and colloquial, a mirror of social values. "Despite the contempt of many critics, popular culture persists as a lively art and a compelling if unrefined field of inquiry." (88-91)

Cripps also refers to an essay of Paul Goodman, published in 1977, in which Goodman claims that half the population watches hours upon hours of television every week, listening to popular music, and consuming immeasurable floods of printed matter, all with little or no artistic purpose. Goodman believed that people are excessively hungry for these kinds of entertainments and that the daily life of most Americans allows little opportunity for initiative, personal expression in work or politics, that there is neither love nor passion, and that the creative moment is rare. He saw Americans as a passive audience with weak reactions, reluctant to engage in active participation. He characterized this passive reaction as superficial and yet identified it as one to which the American psyche is drawn. "The American popular arts provide a continual petty draining off of the tensions nearest the surface. Their workings can be fairly compared to chewing gum as a means of satisfying an oral yearning for mother love and sustenance." (89)

Other important questions must be posed in analyzing the phenomenon of popular culture: What are the values being communicated by this delivery system? Is the

form delivering what it promises ? What do the themes in a popular culture art form tell us about the workings of the culture from which it derives? Are popular culture art forms as significant a socializing force as the family or school or organized religion?

Religion, according to Robert Reeves, is in itself neither bad nor good, though it may be dangerous, depending upon its use or abuse. For Reeves, there is a grave danger of an unhealthy dependence upon religion. His article on this subject is entitled "Religion May Be Dangerous to your Health." I believe the same danger can be present in individual overindulgence in any activity, including forms of popular culture, fraught as they are with ritualistic patterns and the power to persuade. Every one of these expressions is value-laden and it is necessary to ask the same basic questions of these art forms as healthy persons ask of their religious practice and tradition. Does it enhance one's life or damage it? Does it allow one to be emotionally honest? Does it help one face, accept, and adjust appropriately to reality?

There *are* distinct ways in which individuals are informed by popular culture. Popular culture derives from subliminal roots of culture and illuminates our deepest myths, values, and beliefs. It is most important as an indicator of the choices of a populace. We can respect popular culture without deifying it. The vicariousness of experience and narcotizing dysfunction can be seen as related to the mass media. The gospel of popular culture is necessarily ephemeral and transitory, providing instant gratification as its chief attraction for the consuming public.

One purpose in this investigation is to stimulate interest in the logical connection between popular culture and religion and theology. A theological inquiry into popular culture might begin with questions such as these: What kind of world is offered? What passions are evoked? What values are affirmed? Do mass media reflect rather than lead? Do we go (buy, participate) because we are already there?

Popular culture is, by nature, incarnational in that the forms are reflective of the creative and meet us “where we live,”in the dailyness of life , just as God inserted his creative powers in the historical setting through and in the person of Jesus of Nazareth , incarnational theologians would claim. This is not to suggest that when we speak of popular culture we are necessarily speaking of ‘the holy”, but that popular culture is part of the created world. Critics of popular culture are quick to apply the criteria of elite culture to popular culture art forms. While classical art forms have developed over centuries and perhaps responded to certain standards set by critics of elite forms, popular culture forms are in the embryonic stage of development and so might better be served by being judged against similar genres, e.g., comparing Westerns with Westerns, or rock groups against each other. Popular culture can be fun -- it is entertainment for the most part, but also a serious form of communication. By looking at popular culture, we can keep our fingers on the pulse of the American belief system. As John Nelson said in *Your God is Alive and Well in Popular Culture,* participating in popular culture is to what Americans believe as worship services are to what members of institutional religions believe.

The popularity of any aspect of popular culture is directly proportional to the power that aspect provides in ritual satisfaction.

Karl Rahner has stated that all life is subject matter for theological reflection, and has gone on to say that a theologian who wants to understand the world *must* listen to pop music. In *The Seduction of the Spirit*, Harvey Cox urges us not to seek God in sacred cloister but in secular city, sees no theology without sociology, and believes that secular icons can inspire the same sort of devotion that is ascribed to sacred ones. Icons are the embodiment of both societal and spiritual values. For him, the three symbolic values important to America are common life, science and technology, and nature. A study of popular icons will indicate that which is truly sacred. Levi Strauss, in speaking of icons, says that all sacred things must have their place and that being in their place is what makes them sacred. As we move toward the second millennium, it is apparent to all who would see that sacred spots are not limited to church and monastery. They are also super highways, TV screens, discos, and message carriers -- disc, press, camera, telephone.

Marshall Fishwick in his *Great Awakenings* postulates that these popular forms may indeed serve for us as the present day "mouth of God." Incarnational theology rules the day in this approach to popular culture: creation may be flawed but it is nevertheless good. God reaches into our lives as we experience life to the fullest. Spirituality is rooted in culture. Incarnation is about enculturation. Just as tradition has its value, a serious questioning of inherited values and beliefs can bring about new insights and understandings of reality. The Western mystics often made use of

the pathway to truth known as the *via negativa* (path from or away) by stripping away all that is assumed about God and Truth to come to a more authentic reality. Meister Eckhart, theologian and mystic, prayed that God would rid him of the God of inherited systems. At the same time, we should take to heart New Testament theologian Bruce Metzger's warning of the seductiveness in formulating the concept of God in our own image and in that of our culture, culminating in an "American Pappahood of God.."

Matthew Fox calls for Americans to pray to rid themselves from their American God (gods) in order to know the full God. He holds up before us the slogan, "I buy therefore I am," to mirror the popular American philosophical stance that "we consume, therefore we exist." Commercials inspire lust, envy, and greed. The shopping experience (especially in the mall setting) provides an insidious yet pervasive escape mechanism -- the perfect symbol of consumer-oriented culture, the "cathedral of our decade." Another danger is the sentimentalization of American culture and spirituality, or an overindulgence in emotional appeal with a strong emphasis on nostalgia., or a Panglossian stance that "all is right with the world."

According to Fox, the process of desentimentalizing can be accomplished by means of engagement in an authentic *via negativa.* This is a process of dismantling symbols, structures and self images -- a rejection of cloaked violence, of consummate preoccupation, of titillation, of introverted spiritualities that pit body against spirit, others against self, artists against all, and tempt us to become consumers of ersatz ecstasies. The culture provides language, symbols, and values,

projecting them on all institutions and influencing their doctrinal stance. A living (incarnational and Christian) spirituality demands that we look at culture and media and examine them for their sentimental suppositions. It is not difficult to recognize overt sentimentalization in television leaning heavily as it does on titillation, entertainment, and nostalgia even in the guise of news coverage. In popular programming, sex is depicted as excitement rather than ecstasy, titillation rather than deeply felt experience. As important as it is to be aware of this sentimentalizing tendency in entertainment, it is even more important that those who have a concern for an authentic spiritual life explore sentimentalization in the religious life of the American people. In desentimentalizing itself, spiritually-based persons and institutions can contribute to the desentimentalization of American culture, at least in the context of "church."

Nicolas Berdyaev, the Russian philosopher and theologian, perceived a strong religious dualism in American society and in the church. This dualism further exists between salvation and creativity, the spiritual and the mundane, and the sacred and the secular. Such dualism creates in the Christian a division, a conflicted orientation toward life and living.

We still can see the influence of the Middle Ages, when the supremacy of the "angelic" was at its zenith. As a result of this orientation the Church became a therapeutic institution to which individual souls came for healing. Christianity cannot be reduced to the individual salvation of separate souls. But Christianity is a religion of the transfiguration and transformation of the world. A renaissance

could come from a movement in the world being called to confirm the positive nature of God’s creativity with us as co-creators. Religion is a way of organizing experience in the service of ultimate values. Salvation is the drive for ultimate transformation or ultimate survival. The salvation theology of popular culture holds that: human nature is evil but mutable; humans have mastery over nature; persons are future-oriented; doing is more important than being; Americans are individualistic yet display schizoid-like responses in their attachment to the homogenous in popular culture. The belief system of popular culture deals with control, indeed ultimate control over one's own survival. John Wiley Nelson cites Martin Marty who puts it this way: "Religion holds special potency for people ...so long as [we]... learn the proper rites and formulae by which to appease the powers outside... and to develop the powers within... .” For me, preoccupation with the future (apocalypticism) is perverting what prophecy meant and means in scripture...prophecy has nothing to do with predicting future events or controlling them. Foretelling is not synonymous with forthtelling.

Clyde Kluckhohn in *Mirror for Man* and other writings expresses his belief that the contemporary desire of control over death translates into a belief that survival equates with salvation, rather than with any construct which promises deliverance from "sin and death." The litmus test for adherents of the American belief system is escape from the reality of death, reflected long before the emergence of popular culture, in the search for the Fountain of Youth -- in box or bottle.

The major characteristics of popular cultural religion are: 1) success, which can act as a signpost of survival and an assurance of salvation and provide the means of control; 2) the perfectability of the human person (shades of immortality) and the danger of over-reliance on human potential, raising the red flag of narcissism; and 3) a fix-it mentality based on the technological model of medicine in which the physician performs the priest's functions and the magic rite makes right. Any reminder of human finiteness is met with a quick cure or palliative ("feel good") measure.

Chapter 2

RITUAL AND LITURGY

Having presented in some detail the roots and rise of popular culture, I now turn to explicating the role that ritual and the liturgical play in the power, impact, and success of popular art forms. I will discuss such concepts as ritual time and space (time and space set apart for specific activity), and the icononological aspects (the meaning and impact of visual images) within popular culture forms.

In my view, ritual time can be seen as extraordinary time, transcending creaturely time, transporting individuals beyond self-conscious activity. Ritual space is more often than not a place set apart for group participation. In popular culture, the ritual includes and yet is interrupted by commercials and replays of spectacular activity within the sports model, which have their own ritualistic aspect. According to Dunlop, in "Popular Culture / Methodology," only in the exegesis of particular images are we able to explore the ways in which forms and metaphors disclose and shape the multiplicity of values that are operative in society. He is convinced that images meet both aesthetic and metaphysical needs and that street art or the art of advertising are dominated by no single metaphor but rather by multiple and diverse metaphors. (381)

John Wiley Nelson in his introduction to *Your God is Alive and Well and Living in Popular Culture,* holds that institutional worship services are not intended to give the believer a chance to challenge the beliefs and values of religion. On the contrary, such services are mortar to the bricks of the faith. All religions offer a system of beliefs and values, as does American society; the set of beliefs and values offered by American culture are not beliefs to which we are converted. Every time we watch TV, read popular magazines or detective fiction, listen to country music, go to movies or professional sports events, we are, in fact, attending worship services of the American cultural religion. (v.)

Nelson states that human beings have an innate need to tell and hear stories, to have a story to live by, and it is religion which provides one of the main ways to meet this abiding need. Two genres of stories are especially important as vehicles for religious expression are the autobiographical which includes both the folk religion and popular varieties of collective story of a people; and the religious story codified, systematized, controlled and distributed by specialists. Most of the great religions of the world are a mixture of story and symbol. Stories reflect those forms of human association which blend emotion, value, and history into a binding fabric. Symbols, on the other hand, make possible large scale and complex types of human association where such binding would not ordinarily be possible. The symbols and systems take over the story-telling role.

Harvey Cox, in his *Seduction of the Spirit,* suggests that we need a new way of pursuing the enterprise of theology through iconology and the study of the meaning

of visual images. If we want to understand our culture theologically through the media of films, television commercials, magazine ads, and other examples of popular art forms, we have to come to some understanding as well as recognition of the icons of our cultural faith. (262) It was Tillich in his *Theology of Culture, Science and Religion* who sought to uncover the often obscure or hidden spiritual import of human cultural creations. Cox himself focuses more on images, films, artifacts, patterns, and visible designs and gives more attention to strictly popular culture than does Tillich, who devotes his attention to a higher level of cultural creations.

According to John Cawelti in *The Six-Gun Mystique*, just how popular art accomplishes the dual function of reflecting and shaping attitudes and values is one of the most important and difficult questions with which the popular culture analyst must deal. Cawelti's thesis is that the dramatic pattern of the Western formula grows out of a conflict between types of characters who represent various value systems associated with society and savagery, with the resolution, though sometimes ambiguous, usually in favor of society and its values.. The social and psychological dimensions of the Western formula are those of game, ritual, and collective dream. (381) In the Western formula, according to Cawelti, a three-sided game is being played out -- the townspeople are associated with civilization, the villains with savagery, and the hero is the man in the middle who possesses the skills to act on the side of the group of townspeople. Conflict resolution is the goal of the game, though the hero of the Western invariably faces a predicament which reflects the ambiguities of the ideals of progress and success and actual experience.

Cawelti has not dealt completely with the dilemma of the hero, or the hero's success, in my opinion, because the success of the hero in the Western is not dependent upon his accomplishments, but rather upon the mystery that surrounds him. Mystery and ambiguity are complementary themes.

In "Heroic Style in America," Marshall Fishwick observes that the American folkstyle took root in the virgin land of America. Farmer/planters such as Jefferson, Washington, and Penn set our pattern in politics. The myth of the garden at the end of the 19th century, coupled with the Jeffersonian ideal of the family farm, provided the chief theme of American history. It was Mark Twain who created the last genuinely American folk hero, Huckleberry Finn, according to Fishwick. "The Greeks used mythological metaphors as the basis for heroic style; the Romans depended upon biographical archetypes; the middle ages on hagiography. By stressing a few themes and patterns, each epoch greatly increased the focus and intensity of meaning. There is no such cohesive force in American culture - hence, no such clarity or intensity. We may get it for the first time in the new pop iconography." (17)

Fishwick observes that we live in a society where most traditional myths have lost their power. We do not easily accept these myths, especially those of the Christian tradition. When an old mythology disintegrates, a new one originates. To survive is to remythologize. Instead of discovering and developing new myths, Fishwick claims, we find ourselves participating in those activities masking as myth, such as the divination of celebrities.

Although we do not consider ourselves an aristocratic society, it was Mark Twain who did observe that if America was "fresh out of kings," what we did was to produce scores of kings or queens such as those who reign over sporting events, anniversaries, festivals, and beauty contests. There seems to be a basic yearning for choosing such a focus of our hopes and ideals.

It was 1977 when film maker, George Lucas, aired his first Star Wars film, (reissued in 1997, enhanced by a digitally re-mastered soundtrack and visually enhanced effects). Eric Nash sees Star Wars as a synthesis and treasure trove of American pop culture -- everything from comic strips, pulp fiction, and film. His intra stellar "Who's Who" seems destined to become part of the memory and myth of several generations. For the naming of Darth Vader, it appears that Mr. Lucas went back to the Dutch root for "father" (in this case "dark father"). Luc Skywalker comes from the Greek word for light, an interesting contrast to Darth Vader. (Luke of the Gospels was a Gentile who converted to Christianity, an appropriate name for a boy who discovered the power of the Force.) Princess Leah Organna, reflects the conflict of nature and technology. The name Hans Solo capitalizes on the archaic sound of Jan, a variation of John, to set us into a mythical world. And, of course, Solo is the lone gun who must learn to trust others and identify with a greater cause. The original Star Wars opened on 32 screens in 1977 and the new version on 1,800 screens in 1997. Why the new version? I suggest the box-office appeal of nostalgia, the possibility of making something a bit new with improved technology, and its money making potential are likely reasons. The film was viewed as a seminal one in 1997, and continues to be so in its recent reviews.

George Lucas' entrepreneurial spirit was very much alive and in of November 1999 when a Star Wars exhibit took the public by storm at the San Diego Art Museum, one of several venues scheduled. Stunningly displayed were dozens of life-sized models of Star Wars characters, plus original story-board sketches of individual film scenes. Due to the popular nature of the exhibit, the museum lifted its usual "no photographs" policy and provided a significant amount of floor space for a sophisticated presentation of Star Wars paraphernalia for purchase. It is not unusual for an exhibition sponsor to receive a share of the profits from such commercial ventures, so the designation of considerable space for this purpose was apparently a mutually beneficial investment. It is worth mentioning, I believe, that the admission price to this exhibit alone was $12.00 per person, ages 12-64.

In his 1972 article "The Pop Pantheon," Fred MacFadden suggests that everyone or anyone can be a hero, whether in politics or in the pop pantheon of Wonder Woman, Batman and Robin, Johnny Appleseed, the Lone Ranger, or Charles DeGaulle comparing himself to Joan of Arc, or even in the major figures in cartoon strips and animations. (39)

In 1932 a Cleveland teenager, Jerry Siegel, wrote a short story which, five years later, became the basis of the first issues of "Action Comics." Siegel recalls that Superman represented the strongmen of literature, such as Moses, Samson, and Hercules. Douglas Martin in "Superman Superseded by a Capeless Wonder," claims that Hercules was also known as "Defender against Evil and Tamer of Beasts and

Criminals." (236) Siegel, however, lent to the character of Superman a uniquely American flavor from the beginning. It was long ago on a Kansas farm (strangely enough the same locale as *The Wizard of Oz*) that Clark, the son of the Kents, was destined to wear a skin-tight blue leotard, a flowing red cape and a big red "S" on his chest. In that guise Superman went on to defend "truth, justice, and the American way." But by May of 1977, the man who could once leap tall buildings in a single bound and stop bullets with his body was changed to someone who could transmit himself through phone lines and through whom bullets passed like vapor, and no longer in need of a cape. Reaction was sharp. Fans said, "How dare you do this?" One more icon was being cast aside. Who was responsible for transforming this well known icon into some new image? None other than Mike Carlin, executive editor of Superman comics. He explained that it was an effort to update and to make this super hero more appealing to the general public. In 1999 Superman underwent another make over. Sales were in a slump, so he is now referred to as an "action figure," at least in the imagination if not in the eyes of the beholder.

There is an internal struggle among the purveyors of popular culture between the appeal of the successful past and the profit potential of the future. For example, note the struggle that Coca-Cola has had over the years in deciding how to market its product. This particular soft drink firm, has struggled with the dichotomy found in successful popular culture forms, both the nostalgic and the new. Since 1942, Coca-Cola has tried approximately eight entirely different approaches to packaging their product. The difficulty, explains one of the package designers, is to keep the brand fresh and new without turning things upside down completely. Coke's primary

competition is Pepsi-Cola and that corporation's image is constantly changing. Coke has had to adjust their merchandising and advertising with that in mind. According to some critics, Coca-Cola is hunting for ways to go backwards and forwards at the same time.

Profit and greed are also part of the equation. As Bruce Coad states in “Heroes of Popular Culture,” apropos the Horatio Alger prototype, “money and little else is what makes the Alger hero run. A close reading of the novels provides virtually no evidence to support the claim that public service was ever an integral part in Alger's original formula for success. My contention is that critics who dwell, for example, on the intense idealism of his parables, the selflessness of his heroes, and the kindly benevolence of their patrons have overlooked the larger and more prevalent thrusts of an Alger novel." (50) Coad suggests that in glossing over the hero's singular talents for simply making money, scholars and journalists are adding confusion to an already dimly perceived piece of American literature. He also observes that the distortion of the actual Alger myth in part reflects the efforts of a society that is straining to create traditional heroes in a time when few are to be found.

In “Religious Studies and Popular Culture”, Robert Jewett claims that religious studies and the study of popular culture both treat ultimate issues; right and wrong, life and death, redemption and destruction. Both struggle with faith assumptions. Jewett’s observations of two theological giants on this subject follows: "Eliade’s comparative religious analysis permits deciphering of obscure rituals and myths. Bultman's method of demythologizing is applicable in certain areas... . A recent

insight is that the rites of redemption provide [meaning to the American myth] beginning with a community in a peaceful Edenic situation, suddenly threatened by evil. Ordinary institutions and common sense never prevail. A super hero emerges to redeem the innocent -- either by masculine violence or by psychologically manipulative feminine techniques. Eden is restored, and the super problem-solver moves to the next threatened community or changes back into the guise of every man. These heroes display peculiar traits such as sexual segmentation and selflessness which probably originated in early Protestant piety. To explore the shape, origin, and impact of such mythic patterns is one of the important tasks for students and scholars in the years to come. It will require an interdisciplinary approach in which the fields of popular culture and religious studies mutually enrich each other."

Ritual is the doing of the sacred, in the fashion of hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, seasonally, and occasionally unique events, such as baptism, confirmation, ordination, marriage or burial. Ritual behavior, according to MacFadden, is "the deliberately structuring of action and time to give focus, expression, and sacredness to what would otherwise be diffuse, unexpressed, or profane...an act of concentrated displays with regard to some particular purpose." (95) Ritual is most effective when it removes or isolates distraction and interference. Ritual time constructs its own space: "It is time that has an inside." (97) Ritual time and ritual space are inseparable. Mircea Eliade who described ritual space as being marked by thresholds. Ritual always has a tangible form of expression. There is scarcely any human activity that has not been given some ritual value. Included are such

activities as bathing, cooking, decorating, eating, washing and sweeping. Objects and settings are also part of the sense of ritual, such as hymns sung in church and symbols that are used, such as icons.

Liturgy is a word which is derived from the Greek words "laos" and "ergon," or people at work. Generally, liturgy is theologically focused, that is, God-focused, but liturgical forms may have characteristics similar to church forms even without a basis in religious faith. The chief characteristic that one finds in any liturgical setting is that of a corporate experience, a setting in which the individual is invited to respond and to be involved. Such settings also provide a free atmosphere in which a person has a good deal of latitude and freedom to participate. A characteristic of primary interest is the repetition of various actions or ways of speaking, ways of doing, and ways of being. For purposes of discussion, the terms "ritual" and "liturgy" are roughly equivalent.

Annemarie de Waal Malefijt in Religion and Culture contends that "rituals are designed both to express belief and to bring about specific ends." (189) "Ritual is a social act in which the participants re-enact their relationship to sacred objects and belief.... (and) consumption refers not only to the ways in which goods are used up, but also to the rules which prosperity and wealth play in the lives of their consumers." (195) Other tangible benefits of consumerism are comfort, security, prestige, status, power, pride, and pleasure. Successful marketing is often closely allied to the choice of a representative symbol or icon. "The use of icons to channel behavior along pre-determined lines has perhaps evolved to its highest form in the

world of fast foods...the right icon is important; and an industry's success in developing them is evident in that they can take on a quasi-sacred quality… . In the case of Ronald McDonald, he is an icon undiminished by time, immortal as he is. We end up being taught a curious blend of philosophies. A clown version of a happy puritan." (252-253) The symbols, the product, and the activity of eating at symbolic places are linked with happiness, success, a job well done, and hard work, whose inference is obvious in the phrase often heard advertising McDonald's "We're doing it all for you," and "you deserve a break today."

In his article "Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture, Ray B. Browne claims that the study of ritual should not be left to experts in fields ordinarily associated with them (such as theology), but should recognize the impact of ritual in society as numerous, complex, fluid, powerful, and important. Even a ritual such as watching a football game on television might at first consideration be viewed as passive, but it has its own considerable power. (252-229)

Professor Browne, former chair of the Popular Culture Department at Bowling Green State University, has emphasized the increased role of ritual throughout the global village, primarily in its ability to transcend geographic, cultural or political entities through its popular art forms.

In *The Contemporary Ritual Milieu*, Frederick Bird views rituals as "culturally transmitted symbolic codes which are stylized, regularly repeated, dramatically

structured, authoritatively designated, and intrinsically valued." (19) Ritual is above all "a means by which persons establish and maintain their relation to what they consider to be sacred." (22) Those things which are sacred are those which are set apart and which are recognized as having a certain type of power. Rituals tend to regulate society, to identify taboos and norms and lay down social boundaries for human activity. Bird makes a distinction between ritual and or ritualism; habitual actions which have become empty, arbitrary, and overly formal should be referred to as ritualistic in that they have taken on the character of meaningless routine.

Now that we have considered the “world of popular culture” and the role of ritual in it, we next turn to representative popular culture genres to determine if the concepts and claims thus far presented can be justified by identifying and demonstrating them in specific forms.

Chapter 3

REPRESENTATIVE POPULAR CULTURE GENRES;
OR ,
THE CEREMONIES OF AMERICAN CULTURAL RELIGION

.

Television: The Family at Worship

We don't just watch TV, we worship there -- same time, same station, week after week, at the altar of our own cultural values. William Kuhns, in his excellent study, *The Electronic Gospel*, distinguishes several religious functions of television. His thesis can be summarized in the following three points:

1.▾Originally, religion functioned to keep human beings safe and secure from a hostile environment. Today it is not the basic needs for food and shelter that are so much threatened as individual identity. We preach freedom, power, and individualism in America, but everyday life is a living contradiction to that preaching. Television not only reaffirms the beliefs we preach, but it also helps to break down the tensions created in us by the looming presence of the impersonal technological environment. The city, whose chaos and confusion overwhelms us, is ritualistically conquered every week by television heros who work to reestablish order.

2.▾Television contains and safeguards morality, belief, and ritual. Religious myth performs this function by the absolute commitment of the believer to the truth and validity of the myth. In the popular media, TV especially, though film as well, does the same thing in the opposite fashion. The audience is absolutely sure that the characters are not real, and that the events never happened. The assumption shifts the action from everyday life to the level of mythical stereotypes. Thus, we can accept outright killing and destruction in TV and films because the individuals depicted are only symbols.

3.▾Ritual is the dramatization of the victory of order over chaos, of structure over anarchy, of creation over nothingness; and, thus, of life over death and of good over evil. Television provides this by formula (in dramatic and comedy shows), by format (in quiz, musical, and interview shows), through reruns, and by the priority of character pattern over plot development in dramatic shows. Kuhns goes as far as to say that watching television is all about getting to see what we want to see. (36-7)

Among what Americans want to see are the following genres:

A. **The Sitcom**

Situation comedies are, by nature, family-based and have one thing in common: the problems with which they deal are never a threat to the continuance of the family-community itself. Episodes in situation comedies are never about the survival of community, per se. The programs are about how problems are resolved and how the

family returns to the harmony with which the programs open. The ending is almost always happy.

Gregory Curtis sees "Ozzie and Harriet" as shorthand for an idyllic America of the past where mothers, fathers, and children lived happily ever after. The program, aired from 1952 to 1966, was set in an imaginary small town where politics were never discussed, where there was no contention or heart-break. Everyone is happy. Everyone is well fed, well dressed, living in a nice house and sharing the same values. Perhaps some of the plots of our family's lives are not so unlike those which were shown in “Ozzie and Harriet.” Perhaps not always so happy, not so idealized, but nonetheless presenting an image of what we would have liked our lives to be.

B **The Soap Opera**

The soap opera fascinates its viewers by unraveling the plot-line development consistently in a setting that establishes its point visually. Here, the medium is truly the message. Soap operas accomplish this by a clever interface of what we see and what we hear. The symbols of being successful, middle-class Americans are integral to the sets. Ninety-nine percent of soap opera action is dialogue. The characters sip coffee or talk on the phone discussing issues of life, death, tragedy, chaos, and sorrow. The amount of humor in soap opera is so infinitesimally small as to be negligible. The problem of the soap opera is not how to share or spread or more fully enjoy some form of happiness, but rather how to deal with the overwhelmed life, the life in which interpersonal relations have been shattered or brought to the

brink of disruptive chaos and confusion. Soap opera characters suffer at the least jealousy, guilt, alcoholism, various sorts of mental and physical diseases, insecurity, infidelity, trauma, and sterility. These characters are never ambiguously the source of their own problems; their suffering is often devoid of meaning because it is incomprehensible, or because it seems tragically unfair or unjust. The despairing pessimism and hopelessness that results, contributes to the fascination by which the soap opera holds its viewers. The soap opera provides three main sources of human problems: first, the deserved tragedy of just retribution for engaging in illicit sex; second, the undeserved, life-destroying tragedy of overwhelming, uncontrollable circumstances; and, third, the unredeemably evil person, usually a woman, the incarnation of evil itself. The message is loud and clear to the housewives of America: you had better stick to the vicarious experience we provide, and keep your own house in order.

C. News

Seventy percent of Americans cite TV as their prime source for news. This is a troubling statistic, because of the authority that the broadcasters present, as well as that which the public grants to them. So much of the news is dependent upon the personality of the newscaster. TV news is a curious hybrid of old fashioned journalism and new entertainment. I believe that readers of newspapers and news magazines are more cognizant of editorial bias, while the TV viewer assumes that he is being shown raw material. It is as if the television picture is reality itself, a form of unedited virtual reality.

In her article "Fallout"in The New Yorker (Jan. 10, 2000), Bobbie Ann Mason writes of her visit to Paducah, Kentucky, known since 1952 as "The Atomic City," whose populace has only recently been apprized of the dangers of the presence and fallout from the uranium enriching plant brought to the city by local son Alben W. Barkley, Vice-President under Harry S. Truman. Among those Mason interviewed was a local librarian who reported that although there had been some concern among the citizens, people were generally not overly concerned about the reported dangers and are more or less "waiting" When Mason asked,"Waiting for what?" the librarian replied: "They're waiting for somebody big to come to town–Energy Secretary Bill Richardson, Tom Brokaw. If Tom Brokaw came, then it would be real."

Jim Stentzel, in "Seeing the World through Christ and Cronkite," (Sojourners, 1978), calls for an examination of the nature of our news, how it comes to us, and how we consume or ignore it. He points out that we are fascinated by events but not by the things that cause events. Most foreign news is geared to crisis. We allow ourselves to be victims of " hit and run" journalism. "We Americans tend to see the world with one eye closed and a very American lens on the other. The media most often serve as a lens filter, heightening or toning down certain colored pictures of the world. … There is a God who acts in history, humbling Americans, Capitalists, Marxists, et al -- just when we think we have a fix on all old and new world realities." (3)

Stentzel claims that we can decide what our world view is going to be. Whether we are going to accept what is produced for us, or go beyond that, "knowing that God

has acted definitively in history through Jesus Christ and that He continues to care deeply for all creation." In his view, a Christian world view is not something just known, but lived, and the world is interconnected, with the center of that world the Prince of Peace, visible in the lives of those who claim to be Christian. Our world view affects the way we live and worship. And the way we live and worship reflects our world view. "Caring for one another is all we have over and against idols which have gone international. Therefore, we need all the awareness of global oneness that God can muster in us." (4)

D. **Advertising**

The market place as an element of social necessity has been a part of community landscape since extended family groupings no longer provided the needs of basic living. When bartering no longer sufficed to obtain sought after goods, common objects were introduced as a means of trade: shells, beads, tobacco, coins, whatever represented some intrinsic value or rarity to those who sought goods incapable of being produced or acquired on their own. Initially, goods associated with the market place were basic and fundamental to survival. As demand for goods requiring certain skills increased, cottage industries developed, the locus of which gradually moved to a central location after that of the original "transient" market place. Entrepreneurial individuals recognized the economic possibilities of being engaged in such enterprises. The general store in the U.S. served as the gathering place and communications center for a good part of its history as a nation. Commercial venturing and specialization was essential to its identity and development.

In a PBS special, “the History of Advertising,” aired in December of 1999, viewers were informed that among the oldest identifiable artifacts of placard advertising were examples hawking wine found at Pompeii. “Criers,”walking and talking advertising, were another primitive form. Proliferation of handbills had to wait for mass production following the advent of the printing press in 1445. Newspaper advertising first appeared in London in 1625 and in America in 1704 in the form of illustrations in Ben Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette.* Color advertising in magazines as we know it did not occur until the late 1800s.

By 1900, the sophistication in understanding the power of advertising grew by leaps and bounds. Some appreciated this power intuitively, like P.T. Barnum, who knew that to attract a crowd, you used “exclamation, not explanation,”hence the circus parade from the train station to the tent in preparation for “The Greatest Show on Earth.” George Gallup was able to demonstrate empirically this power through the birth of opinion research in the 1930s. Advertising became what has been called “the science of persuasion.” An identifiable “brand name,” touted on radio with a jingle and underscored in magazine advertisements was usually a sound bet for a successful campaign. The term “brand”was derived from the “brand” that one could distinguish on early manufactured cookies and crackers. It appears that with the right icon and cleverly created supportive material one can sell almost anything or increase the already successful enterprise. Tony the Tiger really has not a thing to do with cereal, nor does the Marlboro man have anything to do with cigarettes per se... it is his virility that sells and Tony’s friendly animal appeal. As David Ogilvy, the advertising giant of the mid-1900s, “selling is really about emotion.”

It is no wonder, then, that a whole art, a very popular one, has developed to promote the selling of manufactured goods. Professor Richard Simon in an essay on “Advertising,” identifies advertising as "a new religion" with commercials and printed advertisements creating a theology based on the worship of consumer goods with their alleged life-giving qualities. We are being sold a good deal more than products, he claims. The real "sell" is a kind of spiritual well-being that accrues to the individual through acquisition and possession. In the extreme, this preoccupation with self-gratification and self-indulgence is what the opponents of "secular humanism" have in mind in their critique. Ironically, however, the most outspoken foes of secular humanism, at least in the U.S., are more often than not those promoting a type of popular religion in which perfectibility and immortality of the individual is not only within grasp, but guaranteed.

In the 1950’s large corporations such as United States Steel and General Electric sponsored TV programs which brought “live” theatre to the growing number of television owners. The corporations were viewed by many as purveyors of “culture” rather than of their products. In their recently published books, both Roland Marchand and William L. Bird, Jr., cite the success of corporate public relations campaigns in associating big business with public virtue. (Marchand, 3,10)

McLuhan tells us that successful TV commercials usually depend upon the presence of any of the following elements: humor, testimonials, demonstrations, problems and

solutions, talking heads, characters, a reason why, news, and above all, emotion, nostalgia, charm, and sentimentality. For him, TV ads serve as the hieroglyphics of our age and reflect much about our culture, the way we see ourselves, our appetites and ambitions, and our dreams and desires. And while religion tells us from where we came, where we are headed, and how to get there, advertising holds out the promise of what people think they need for "salvation" based on certain basic cultural suppositions.

In "Aristotle and the Advertisers," Martin Esslin contends that any TV advertisement, if not a full drama, will have a basic theme and structure. "The bulk of the major, nationally shown commercials are profoundly dramatic and exhibit, in their own peculiar way, in minimal length and maximum compression, the basic characteristics of the dramatic mode of expression in a state of particular purity -- precisely because here it approaches the point of zero extension as though the TV commercial were a kind of differential calculus of the aesthetics of drama." (98)

First, the problem is posed and disaster threatens, whether it is a headache, constipation, or body odor, or whatever it might be. Secondly, a wise friend or confidant suggests a solution which culminates in a moment of insight or conversion. And third, there is a happy conclusion to what was potentially a tragic situation. Of course, this all is compressed into a span of 30 to 50 seconds and much must be taken in almost instantaneously. The impact is primarily subliminal, suggestive, scarcely rising to the level of full consciousness. Esslin believes that this explains the great effectiveness of the television commercial. "It literally incarnates the

abstract message by bringing it to life in a human personality and a human situation. Thus it activates powerful subconscious drives and deep animal magnetisms which dominate the lives of men and women who are always interested in and attracted by other human beings, their looks, their charm, their mystery." (99) Esslin invites us to note the authority figures that populate the world of the television commercial. The authority figure might come in various guises, from the wise confidant to the pharmacist, doctor, grocer, and on into the realm of film stars and sports personalities. He claims that the higher the degree of abstraction and pure symbolism, the nearer the television commercial as spectacle approaches ritual forms. "If the Eucharist can be seen as ritual drama combining a high degree of abstraction in a visual sphere with an equally powerful element of music, this sophisticated type of TV commercial approaches a secular act of worship: often, literally, a dance around the golden calf." (103) Miraculous intervention is not unknown in many television commercials.

Television advertisements are prototypes for the drama of life, according to Esslin. The plot invariably consists of a threatened disaster, a suggested solution, and a conversion experience (to the product of the advertiser's choice). Seen negatively, the absence of the (naturally longed-for) product is fatal to the attainment of peace of mind, well-being, and ultimately successful human relationships.

Oliver Zunz's *Why the American Century*? ascribes the economic success of the United States to the role of mass consumption, a phenomenon well underway by the 1940s. The majority of the American public "bought into" the concept that material

abundance would produce a more comfortable and egalitarian society. Buying began to be associated with a basic responsibility of citizenship. (xii)

There are two varieties of advertisements, a simple variety where all the content pertains directly to the commodity being sold; and a compound type where besides the commodity information non-commodity material is shown as symbolic elements that constitute the appeal. These are called energizers. Fowles suggests some penetrating questions to consider in exploring the context of advertising: What product category does the advertised commodity fall into, what are the names of some of its competitors, and in which medium does this ad appear? What about the placement of the ad? What is the intended audience for the ad? Consider the aesthetics of the ad -- artwork, photography, or drawing? What is being pushed into the foreground? What is in the background, and why? Precisely what is the commodity that is being sold? What is the ad's symbolic appeal? In taking these items one at a time, what are the meanings of an ad? What can be inferred about the states of mind of the characters in the ad? Space, time, narrative; what is missing? Is this ad idealizing anything? What might this ad be implying about the nature or relationships between people? What does it say about social status or class or cultural beliefs? Which are being promoted ?

Fowles goes on to consider the question of why popular culture is popular. He makes a very simple, but substantial, claim when he says that participation in popular culture is entirely a voluntary activity and is entered into willingly for the gratification that it brings. It is an "opportunity for the indirect release of psychic tensions, or in other cases, for the augmentation of feelings. This is the primary source of popular culture's great allure." (106) He contends that the importance of popular culture cannot be over-estimated. It is nothing less "than a major instrument by which contemporary individuals learn to make sense out of themselves and of the cultural world around them." (106)

Another perspective on the role of advertising is Hayakawa's view in *Language in Thought and Action* that advertising "can either increase or decrease the degree of sanity with which people respond to words. Thus, if advertising is informative, witty, educational, and imaginative, it can perform its necessary commercial function and contribute to our pleasure in life without making us slaves to the tyranny of affective words. If, however, products are sold largely by manipulating affective connotations... the influence of advertising is to deepen the already grave intentional orientation widely prevalent in the public." (286) Furthermore, "the exploitation of sacred words and symbols for the purpose of selling things has become routine in American culture." (269) "The coaptation of these themes often is based on the familiar advertising techniques of investing brand names with desirable connotations, playing on words, and making slogans out of commonplace facts." (282-83) The various themes include those of love, peace, ecology, the natural, interpersonal "honesty," and that of self knowledge. It is not the product that

we are buying but rather the satisfaction that we presume the product will bring us. Another effect of the coaptation by advertising of valued symbols and slogans is a debasement of language itself. What happens to the significance of the word " love," or the concept of love, when it is put into the context of selling something? What has happened is that the most sacred words we have are being used to seduce us.

The intent of advertising, according to Hayakawa, is to "poeticize or glamorize the object for sale by investing it with desirable affective connotations suggestive of health, wealth, popularity with the other sex, social prominence, domestic bliss, fashion, and elegance." (282) David Stam, historian, deplores the implied causations, especially in TV ads, and the total failure of their attempts at logic.

The basic purpose of an advertising image or icon is to evoke a loyalty and conviction from the viewer. In contrast to the fidelity which some would expect for a king or savior, we are persuaded to fidelity towards products. In many advertising images, we are shown individuals with whom we can identify if we purchase certain products. Therefore, we will become "incorporate in the mystical body" of those who have been redeemed somehow from obesity, ring around the collar, bad breath, or some other social ills. Without our realizing it, the image projected by the advertisement becomes part of our memory and actually begins to affect the way we purchase, the way we live, and the way we see the world.

Wilson Bryan Key's *Subliminal Seduction* characterizes most of advertising as being a seductive operation. He claims that use of symbols and images, in order to influence a person's buying patterns, is done in a very conscious way by the advertisers. He sees that advertisers include many seductive messages, especially that of sex, in his estimation, in 95% of all advertising.

As seductive, deplorable, exploitative, deceptive, or illogical as advertising may be, it is a highly successful industry, engendering among the often unsuspecting public a desire for what is available and consumed by those whose life-styles are emulated.

The task of "being me" occupies substantial portions of the waking hours of the average American. Americans desire all kinds of communal fulfillment, from nuclear family to national association, from the two-by-twoing of the mating-dating ritual to massive protest rallies and national conventions. Yet, from the far right to the radical left of the American political spectrum, a fierce and assertive individualism characterizes the American self-image: I am "me" before I am "me and you" or "us." Popular magazines devote their entire attention to merchandising styles of individual fulfillment. The fulfilled woman as understood by Ladies' Home Journal is the homemaker/wife. Her individuality stays hidden behind her function as enabler in the family. Fulfillment as an individual comes in doing things for others, particularly for her husband and children. This idealized woman operates an efficient home, as a sacrificial figure, living not her own separate life, but a life constantly identified in terms of home and family. This image of womanhood is in great contrast with that promoted by Cosmopolitan.

Cosmopolitan is the most expertly packaged belief system available in manual form. The "Cosmo Girl" is fundamentally a sexual creature, a sensuous, pleasure-seeking, man-oriented woman. Complete and fulfilled womanhood for the Cosmo Girl image includes a man, specifically a man with whom one can experience pleasure, most explicitly, sexual pleasure. The designs of the Cosmo Girl do not, however, necessarily include marriage, whatever the level of sexual relationship. The Cosmo ethic is strict -- all women should work outside the home and express themselves in their work. Every woman should be self-supporting financially. While the female image in the Ladies Home Journal finds individual fulfillment in terms of others, the Cosmo Girl, as an ideal, is totally self-contained, self-supporting, completely realized in herself alone. Though her nirvana includes a man, the Cosmo Girl has her choice of many, none of whom is more essential to her fulfillment than any other.

I reviewed the February 1997 issue of Cosmopolitan to analyze the consistency of images of the Cosmo Girl. That particular issue was 403 pages in length, short on text, but profuse in advertisements. Almost all are full page size: beauty products took up 80 pages, fashion 12, personal products 17, autos 11, food 8, cleaning products 6, cigarettes 9, entertainment 8, jewelry 1, and alcohol products 1. Obviously, the beauty products exceeded everything else, appropriately enough, since the self-proclaimed Cosmo Girl is one who is sexy, smart, thin, happy, fun, brave, rich, stunning, classy, and good in bed. In this issue, there were, in addition to many glamorous young women, falling out of their clothes, a special section featuring former Cosmo cover girls, all in abbreviated outfits, bathing suits, sarongs,

lingerie, evening clothes with exposed, at least partially exposed breasts, characterized by come-hither eyes, a straight-on and seductive look. The only person depicted who was dressed in a dissimilar way was Jackie Onassis, who sported a high neckline and obviously did not meet the usual standard, though no doubt her appearance helped sell copies. The entire magazine, one has to say, is certainly consistent. The texts, the photos, the advertisements, all express the same kind of values, the primary value of being sexy.

Like the Cosmo Girl, the Ms. woman supports herself. Unlike the Cosmo Girl, fulfillment for the Ms. woman does not necessarily include a man. She may or may not choose sex. If she chooses a sexual relationship, she may choose either male or female as her partner, an unthinkable option for the Cosmo Girl. The Ms. woman's image of full personhood is communal. The Ms. woman has a strong sense of sisterhood, and a fiercely defensive posture at the least sign of male intruders or critics. An index of the differences in the images of womanhood offered by these three magazines is reflected in the advertising copy as well.

The image of fulfilled male individuality presented in completely packaged form by Playboy magazine includes the following characteristics: affluent, intelligent, urbane, discriminating in taste, stylish in dress and travel, interested in sports of all kinds, (both spectators and participants), philosophically naturalistic and relativistic, and politically libertarian and rightist. But the cornerstone of this massive structure is a modern, hedonistic version of the cool, imperturbable, sophisticated deliverer-hero of the Western form. He has the requisite knowledge of all the contingent

possibilities and ingredients of any and all social situations, so that he feels perfectly at home in every setting and at every event. It is a kind of knowledge most appropriately dubbed "sophistication." The playmate is an interesting, intelligent woman who enjoys sex, and who cannot resist the fully complete Playboy image when he passes by. She is a decent, involved, respectable girl, who is willing and waiting for a cool, imperturbable Playboy man to wrap herself around.

GQ (Gentleman's Quarterly), so far as I am able to discern, projects a slightly more sophisticated and "in the know" playboy… always in control and mysteriously macho. Penthouse could be characterized as less sophisticated and more obvious in what it is selling.

Romance magazines, in spite of their preoccupation with sex, are laced with traditional American moral values. The covers of the magazines promise vicarious illicit thrills, but the stories themselves swiftly reinforce the belief that people who indulge in the illicit have their lives reduced to shambles. These magazines reach out with front-page promises, pandering to lust, while protecting their reader's vicarious participation with strong moral sanctions.

The children's pageant circuit provides an entirely different context in which to consider advertising, fraught as it is with problematic display of sensuality and sexuality among children. Karen DeWitt, in her *op ed* piece, "Never Too Young to be Perfect" in The New York Times, Sunday, January 12, 1997, made several significant comments concerning the unfortunate death of a six-year old veteran of

the children's pageant circuit, with a half dozen beauty crowns. Such pageants appear to be another example of an America wanting to have it both ways: the innocence of childhood dolled-up with the aura of adulthood. DeWitt's article is sprinkled with quotes from several feminist writers. According to Laura Pappano, a visiting scholar at Radcliffe Institute, there is a good deal of difference between what is cute and what is sensual. In Shelene Hesse-Biber's view, "the commodification of bodies is big business because society reinforces stereotypes of beauty to keep women in their place…. We're afraid of sexuality unless you put tinsel on it and package it in a controlled environment like these pageants, with adoring parents." Camille Pagglia, Professor of Humanities at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, goes further in claiming that pageants mark a deep sexual disturbance in society, "a cannibalizing of youth by these vampiric adults." (E 4)

These extreme measures to embellish children with premature sexual characteristics is, in my view another form of abuse. For an extensive foray into how gender is depicted in its various forms at an adult level, but not disassociated from children's pageants, I recommend Irving Goffman's *Gender Advertisements*. Although one could say that Goffman's work is essentially a picture book concentrating on commercial photographic material from magazines, he avoids sensationalism while presenting a reasonable and responsible view of what goes on in advertisements in the display of gender, particularly the female gender. He sees domination-subordination rituals as similar to parent-child relationships, governed by a basic exemption from full responsibility. He finds that women take on a role of what he calls "licensed withdrawal." He also uses the term "function ranking," referring to

the placement of men and women in ranking order with the male customarily placed at the top of the picture, standing higher and in a position of power. In this ritualization of subordination, one is reminded of the way things were in the past; to quote John Berger, "Publicity is in essence nostalgic. It has to sell the past to the future." (16)

The Classic Western Form

According to John Wiley Nelson, the Western film is the classic ritual form, the "High Mass" of the predominant American belief system. The term "Western" does not exclusively refer to cowboy movies, or films dealing with the American West between 1870 and 1910. The structural elements of the typical American Western may be found in films and other popular art forms set in other periods and employing various types of content. The most significant element in the Western format, and certainly the one without which the Western could never perform its ritual function, is setting. Settled social life, represented by family, church, and school, is the chief value in the classic Western for the sake of which all is done. The problem lies in the threatened break-up of the community. The victory of the hero over the villain is not a surprise or a great unexpected joy for us but rather a reaffirmation of what we Americans believe *should* happen and, therefore, *must* happen.

It is a ritually repeated drama of how we seized the moment, defeated the enemy, and became who we are today. In ritual drama, the last frontier becomes the last frontier in the eschatological sense, and thus becomes definitive for American self-understanding. Sin and evil come to an end and salvation begins.

Adversaries in the Western are simplistically good or evil foes. The delivering-hero is clearly good, morally pure, restrained in his behavior in a socially acceptable way, mannered, clean, and respectful of social institutions and ritual, with style and integrity. The villain is a personification of evil, threatening social conventions. Opponents who square off in the eschaton are the embodiment of good and evil, Christ and antichrist, respectively. In the Western, the hero and the townspeople he defends are good, while the villain is clearly evil. There is usually a violent ending. Again, we see in the Western one of the most consistent principles of the American belief system: the source of evil is always external to those suffering the effects of evil.

Although the ending of most Westerns is inevitably violent, the violence occurs within accepted American standards of law and order. That the ritual setting of the Western is eschatological contributes to our willingness to let the hero's violent activity go unquestioned. In legal terms, we are quickly converted to the verdict of justifiable homicide.

Nelson identifies four different kinds of townspeople in the Western: women, inheritors of the torch, sidekicks or supporting characters, and corrupt politicians and

bureaucrats. With the exception of the last, all are basically good. Women represent civilization. They are the domesticators of men. There are some ambiguous features represented in this symbolic role of woman, but generally she plays a role steeped in the positive values of the established community. Often, she is the fulcrum of the plot. Two kinds of women belong to the Western form : those of positive value, such as the schoolmarm, the rancher's daughter, the farmer's wife; and those of dubious virtue and demonstrable moral turpitude. The latter is the fallen woman, the woman of easy virtue, the dance-hall girl. Her love is free. Often a redeemer-hero is present to save this poor fallen woman from her past, or at least to provide the occasion in which her true goodness emerges.(37)

The inheritor of the torch is almost always a professional person who performs a role upon which the future of civilization depends. Both women and torch-inheritors are supporting characters as are side-kicks. The latter are often members of ethnic or racial minority groups and, therefore, marginal townspeople at best, in the classic Western. They are in an obviously subservient role to the hero.

Finally, there are within the town, persons who represent all that we recognize as wrong with civilization. These are meddling bureaucrats, mendacious politicians, corrupt bankers, land scalpers,and traders who sell guns to the Indians. They may be villains, or they may turn the townspeople against the hero, inhibiting his ability to deal forthrightly with the villains. The most important fact about the villain in the Western is that he is the source of the evil situation besetting the town. The townspeople are, with the exception of corrupt bureaucrats and bankers, essentially

good. The evil situation is not peripheral or incidental -- it is a direct impediment to the realization of everything for which the town was founded and toward which its future is directed. "Salvation" in the Western is the salvation of civilization, defined as family, community, school, church, honest business, free press, and law and order. The villain is the source of evil which threatens to derail "The Salvation Express."

The Western hero assumes two roles in most Westerns. Primarily, he resolves the conflict between the savage villain and the townspeople by destroying the villain. The Western hero is not only the source of good through his resolution of the conflict between townspeople and savage, and thus the deliverer; but he also represents salvation itself. He is the embodiment of a certain image of humanity, the fulfillment of a vision of human perfection within the community context. But, this perfection is an individual one, and herein lie the roots of conflict within the community. For Christians, the normative statement of full humanity is Jesus Christ. For Americans, the normative ritual expression of realized human fulfillment is the Western hero.

To summarize the incisive observation of John Wiley Nelson, an anti-Western is any dramatic presentation within popular culture that criticizes an element or elements of the classic Western form. The anti-Western contends that a particular belief in the system represented in the Western form is untrue, naive, and/or self-serving. It misrepresents the ordinarily accepted "facts of life" in these United States. To be anti-Western is to be critical of the particularly popular view of the meaning of

American life. The growing popularity of the anti-Western film indicates an increasingly widespread disenchantment with the classic form of American self-understanding as represented in the Western. Its popularity has evidenced restlessness and dissatisfaction in the mainstream of Middle America. The anti-Western is almost always negative, pessimistic, despairing and nihilistic. Confidence in the American community as the context of salvation is diminished while the anti-hero assumes the role of representing what the fulfilled life must be like. Films may be both Western and anti-Western, employing traditional affirmations of some essential elements of the classic form in combination with critical rejection of others.

F. Detective Fiction

.

The modern detective story urbanizes the Western, creating a new form by placing the Western drama in an anti-Western context. The development of the Western drama involving the appearance of evil as a threat to the future welfare of the community, the incarnation of good in a deliverer-champion, the justified violence by which this deliverer destroys the evil force, and the restorative hope prompted by the victory of righteousness, is continued in the detective novel. However, the eschatological elements are compromised. Good and evil are still simplistically

differentiated in the detective novel, but the embodiment of good is a stained and tarnished one, and the violent confrontation of the hero and the villain is not the final confrontation: it is only one of a series. The townspeople are no longer clearly innocent and the villains now live in the community itself. Everyone is guilty of something, but the villain is guilty of a lot more than most of us. The victory of the hero does not bring the final purification; we retain much of the guilt and anxious frustration inevitably characteristic of this life.

Nelson identifies the system of beliefs that operates throughout the sixteen books detective novels of John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee series. The self-affirmation of the classic Western belief system merges with the self-hatred, guilt, and bitterness of the anti-Western. The problem situation in MacDonald's books begins with "the ongoing world situation," for which the author holds out very little hope for redemption. He is fond of speaking of "the structured society," structured in two ways, visually by plastic houses and plastic people, and invisibly by structures which mold plastic people "to a life on the run," i.e., every movement, every intention, is designed, discussed, organized, planned, processed, incorporated. His novels typically assume that something has disturbed society's balance. The imbalance can either be direct (illegal) or indirect (legal). The problem situation will always be one in which someone has been robbed, murdered, or defiled, and may include or involve manipulative exploitation as well.

As a direct result of the problem of societal imbalance in the Travis McGee novels, personally distraught and ravaged human beings appear, in dire need of restoration

of their individual health and life spirit. The suffering person is often a sexually attractive female restored to health and happiness by McGee's personal brand of therapy. Defensive and aggressive forms of hypocrisy are everywhere, and throughout McGee shows his impatience with fraud and with pretentious and phony people.

In the Travis McGee series, villains fall roughly into three categories: first, the evil villain who is pure sociopath, nagged by no conscience, having no moral sense whatsoever and virtually unrecognizable in conventional social settings; second, the industrialist-manipulator, whose evil comes from the avarice seen in his exploitative manipulation; and third, the semi-corrupt middle person in league with the other two types and who may be more manipulated than manipulator, inextricably entangled in an evil web of circumstance.

Who can conquer such villains and so rescue the townspeople? Travis McGee, of course, is our deliverer. He exposes and refuses to respect hypocrisy. He is no respecter of professional position, social status, or wealth. He continually demonstrates how we hide from ourselves and use these social devices as fronts. He rambles like a prophet on his favorite issues, such as ecology. Most significant to the plot of any particular book, McGee restores the social balance. When he confronts pure evil in a show-down scene, he destroys it. He saves the victimized person from the villain and from the more generalized conditions of evil in the society as a whole. In theological terms, the victim's "justification" is the defeat of the purely evil villain or the industrialist-manipulator. The additional process of

restoration and personal fulfillment is the victim's "sanctification." In Nelson's words, McGee does not do this latter as "empowered savior;" but rather as "mediating priest." Life itself bears a restorative power about which McGee knows, upon which he draws, and in which he truly and completely believes. It is the life-invigorating power of the health of the natural physical body. Life affirmation is at its best when shared within a caring, ongoing relationship, between two people who are willing to share more than their bodies. Women are often seen as the source of grace. To be restored in spirit by a woman of "a splendid earthiness spiced with innocent wonder" is the embodiment of the perfect and natural woman in McGee's universe.

To sum up the McGee catechism, social balance is restored if not unchanged and there is just retribution rendered. Equally important is a good, healthy body assuring a good, healthy mind, all answering the question of "what is salvation?" The way held out by McGee is that we may not be able to change the world, but we can rearrange our personal space.

G. Music

The basic social unit in country music is again the family. It is the source of stability, peace, rest, happiness, the basic source of salvation, of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. At its center, the source of grace itself, is wife and mother. Threats

to the family circle are alcohol, the honky-tonk, bad companions, adultery, evil women -- all obstacles on the way to salvation. Country music tells us that if we fail to counter and defeat these threats, the family (and thus salvation) shall not prevail.

Ballads in praise of the country are legion in country music. The city is hated as a threat to the country itself in a technological sense; the city is insensitive and cold; it is recognized as a perverter of women; the city is all that is false, artificial, pretentious, and proud in contrast with the country's truth, natural beauty, and humble faith.

Though the family is the dominant salvation motif in country music, the individualist strain in American cultural patterns is still present in country music. Originating with the pioneer and the frontiersman, it was elevated to mythical proportions in the Western form of skilled-gunfighter-as-deliverer. The latest hero is the present-day truck driver, pictured as a rugged individual with a reputation for being tough, aggressive, and self-made. He is a man of some means, successful, on the move.

S.I. Hayakawa, in “Popular Songs Versus the Facts of Life,” observes that popular songs in general tend toward wishful thinking, dreamy and ineffectual nostalgia, unrealistic fantasy, self pity, and sentimental cliches, all masquerading as emotion. The author cites specific areas of emotion about which the songs are written. The first is idealization (the making of impossible and ideal demands upon life), leading to the frustrations of unmet demands leading, in turn, to demoralization (or disorganization or despair). (83) When love is the subject of popular songs,

practically always, there is an unrealistic idealization of the object of one's search. Often one can identify a psychological process called projection which imbues the loved one with the lover's idealized version. In popular music, love has generally a rather unhappy kind of progress which must go on to some kind of resolution. The author raises a concern at the end of his article about whether popular songs, memorized and sung in the course of adolescent and youthful courtship, make the attainment of emotional maturity more difficult than it needs to be. (95)

Larry Rohter's "A Legend Grows and So Does an Industry," describes the popular singer Selena as "Queen of Tejano Music," and one who gained the affection of Mexican-Americans all across this country and Mexico. With her unfortunate death she is now as much of an icon for Latin Americans and Spanish speakers in the U.S. as Elvis Presley has been for rock and roll fans, Marilyn Monroe for film buffs, or Jerry Garcia for one-time hippies. Quoting Rohter, "Selena is an icon because she is both culturally and physically like we are, ...a Latina...between two cultures, two languages, and two sets of values." Selena's gravesite in Corpus Christi, Texas, has become a place of pilgrimage engulfed in memorials and flowers much like Presley's grave at Graceland. People come with their children and with those who are ill and asking Salena to heal them. Images of Selena had also been appearing in religious festivals in Texas and northern Mexico. "As a symbol of good and suffering, she is now right up there with the Virgin of Guadalupe," according to one of her worshipers.

The same theme is illustrated in the following letter to the editor of The Wall Street Journal (June 30,1998): " Regarding your June 8, page 1 article on the teaching of popular culture, I would like to point out that a true fan of the Grateful Dead would find much to enjoy in the stained glass windows of Chartres. Indeed, the tie-dyed outfits worn by many 'Dead Heads' remind me of nothing so much as the rose window patterns. Of course this connection may not be apparent to those with no direct experience of Chartres Cathedral or the Grateful Dead."

H. Sport

Ronald Cummings in "The Super Bowl Society" maintains that the mythic structure of any people is inclusive, that it must accommodate all of our conflicting paradoxical desires. The structure is manifested in the embodiment of our most essential selves, both individually and nationally. The essential aspects of American sport are basic expressions of the American cultural pattern. The author paraphrases McLuhan by stating that the medium of sport is also the message. The very forms of sport indicate domination over time and space. The author cites baseball as a sport that combines the expansive sense of pastoral leisure with a high degree of organization, the reflection of a more interdependent social order, and an urban containment of the natural environment. American football, too, manifests these same elements and "its open conflict and violence, speed and simultaneous action project both fundamental aggressive aspects of the American character imbedded

deep in the puritan sensibility, the hostility of colonial nature, and frontier existence, and a more explicit urban tempo." (104)

Historically, sport has been related to religious rites and festivals through connections with ancient fertility rites. Cummings points out that Thorsten Veblen once contended that initially sport and religion arose from the same fundamental "belief in an inscrutable propensity or a preternatural interposition in the sequence of events." (105)

American holidays combine secular and religious manifestations. New Year's Day, known in the Anglo-Catholic tradition as the feast of The Holy Name, has been taken over by football Bowl games preceded by lavish displays of pageantry in the associated parades and half time spectaculars at every venue. Easter, whose religious focus is the Ressurection is more widely known for eggs and bunnies and few would remember the association of Hallowe'en with All Souls' or All Saints' Day. I have no quarrel with bunnies or Hallowe'en festivities, but the occasions have more to do with display than reflection upon meaning. Thanksgiving Day parades have become commercial in nature, culminating in the arrival of the patron saint of getting and spending, Santa Claus, otherwise known as St. Nicholas, as the reigning patron saint. Christmas is filled with basketball and football extravaganzas.

David Evan's article, "God is my Quarterback," gives a cogent example of this transition: "It is thought that the origin of sport lies in religious cults of preparation for life. From that modest beginning, the sport of football has emerged into an

institution perhaps more influential in some ways than organized religious institutions. However, much of its power is derived from the assimilation of many religious symbols and rituals into the football complex. Thus, many aspects of American religious life can be observed at any football game; and conversely, much of football's influence has spilled over into our nation's religious institutions." (309)

Evans claims that there is something about the importance of winning that is more than just wanting to win the game. He senses that a drive for immortality in which the player is immortalized by fans through feats on the field; thus fans can feel some of the same sense of immortality by identifying with plays and players. The appeal, according to Evans, is that in winning even the fan can vicariously reach “the ultimate goal of the football world [which] is canonization [the sports world's term, not his] in the Football Hall of Fame." (310)

Football and identification with it remains one of the dominant ways of masculine expression in our culture, in claiming that the sport builds character, instills discipline, encourages team work, and thus gives the individual confidence in personal abilities, even in failure. Evans, however, suggests two possible fallacies in this argument. First, the principles upon which the game is built are seldom adhered to. The intent of the game is to win, not to build character. The second fallacy in the claim that football remains an accepted way of proving the masculinity of the young American boy is that many, many young men are unable to meet the physical standards required; those unable to make their way *via* this sport suffer from failure in a “noble” endeavor. In all sports more fail than succeed. For those who do

succeed there can also be a sense of failure, much like the difficulty that survivors of tragedy have in dealing with the fact that they were spared, in this case having “made it” while others did not.

Evans contends that football is supported monetarily and defended religiously by a group of people called fans, an abbreviation for “ fanatic.” Football is not played only for the sheer sport, he claims, but mainly for money. Football is simply big business. Indeed, religious fervor has become a large part of the U.S. sports scene and football is the one game which seems to evoke the greatest religious fervor, "with its sacred groves for Sunday worship where devotees gather to witness a liturgy of violent redemption." (317)

David Whitson, quoted in a Yale Repertoire Theater playbill in1999, connects participation in sports with aggression:” In contemporary Western culture, sport ritualizes aggression and allows it to be linked with competitive achievement and, in turn, with masculinity... sport has become one of the most important sites of masculinizing practices in cultures and within classes... in which direct aggression is officially illegitimate.”

Pamela Schaeffer, in the September 18, 1998, issue of the National Catholic Reporter, sees a similar link between baseball and religion. Breaking a record is “ a redemptive, celebratory moment, a return to innocence, wiping clean for one joyous moment our nation's slate of sins: the tawdriness of the season's politics, the competition, divisions, xenophobia, and greed that mar our national experience. When St. Louis Cardinal Mark McGwire's 62nd home run streaked over the left field

wall, it was liturgy erupting into euphoria, the sometimes interminable drone of baseball lifting us into epiphanies of joy."(1)

In the same article, several cogent quotations supported her thesis:

1. "Next to religion, baseball has furnished a greater impact on American life than any other institution." (Herbert Hoover)

2. "At a ball game, as in a place of worship, no one is alone in the crowd." (John Thorn, author of The Game for all America)

3. "I felt like I was part of something there, you know, like a church, except it was more real than any church, and I joined in the score keeping, hollering, the eating of hot dogs and drinking of cokes and beer, and for a while I even had the idea that ball stadiums, and not churches, were the real American holy places." (Robert Hoover, American author) (3)

Evans in turn notes that the Fellowship of Christian Athletes was organized specifically to take advantage of the relationship between sports and religion. When we speak of sports and religion, we are usually talking about one specific religion, that of Christianity. Evans ends his insightful article by citing certain parallels between the ritualized agenda of a typical church service and the rituals associated with the football game.

The following is my expansion of his observation:

An Order of Worship

Offering -- tickets purchased or redeemed for pew at entrance.

Prelude -- played by marching band.

Introit -- invocation of the wonders of the event

Processional -- visiting dignitaries and team members introduced

Call to Worship -- announcer welcomes fans to participate fully

Opening Prayer or the equivalent presented by sponsors

Hymn -- The National Anthem

Affirmation of Faith -- singing of the *Alma Mater*

Responsive Reading -- cheerleaders lead the cheer and fans respond

Doxology -- “Two bits, four bits, six bits, a dollar, all those for ‘so and so’ stand up and holler.”

Anthem -- bands march and drill teams perform at half time

Announcement of our Concerns -- other games across the country and their scores

Shared Meal -- standard fare for all

Benediction -- the final score announced in the context of fireworks

Postlude -- teams leave field, fans cheer the winning team and then go home.

Continuing Celebration or Requiem -- continues in locker rooms for broadcast.

I contend that it is important to avoid the legalistic moralism reflected in “sports fever,” where “the thing itself” becomes honored rather than the spirit of the game. The equation made between civic and corporate pride and the success of a team is an example of the danger inherent in the worshiping of idols. Competition has to do

with looking for affirmation. Corruption comes with the manipulative aspects of sports -- exploitation of fans, players, and communities. When the affirmation is focused upon skill and dedication, this allows the win/lose situation to be put into perspective. It is the stress on winning, the winning phenomenon, which contains elements of evil.

It is, I believe, essential that we acknowledge how we deal with our own failures and with others who have failed. We tend to avoid acknowlegement of failure. What can we say after we say,"Sorry, you've made such a mess of your life"? By contrast the message we can communicate is: you can fail without being a failure; you can lose without being a loser. We are challenged to watch for a sense of proportion in seeing the game as a game and knowing when it's over.

I Public Architecture, Malls, and Consumerism

Neil Harris, in *Cultural Excursions*, describes the precursors of the mall in the late 1890s, multi-storied arcades, such as one in downtown Cleveland, and of grand department stores with central light wells, often topped by stained glass domes.

According to Ira G. Zepp in *The New Religious Image of Urban America*, malls are much more than what they appear or claim to be. From his perspective, malls exhibit a similarity to religious and ceremonial centers. Human beings have always

organized their lives around sacred centers, and Zepp claims that malls are the latest version of such sacred centers. For better or worse, he says, the shopping mall has become part of our language, methodology , every day life, and culture. From the point of view of the religious person, the mall represents what Eliade would call "an ontological thirst for orientation," something beyond the strictly utilitarian, the pragmatic, and the monotonous. Even mall advertisements contain descriptions of themselves as more than shopping centers, more than marketplaces. Their marketing suggests a mystic experience that can be found only at the mall. For Rob Kroes, in *If You've Seen OneYou've Seen the Mall* "the mall … is the contemporary icon,… the site where American culture appears in its most commodified, commercial, and consumerist form." (xiv)

Zepp , in "The New Religious Image of Urban America," challenges us to consider the similarity of the mall to holy venues by examining the following characteristics. First, the mall is a centered world and a place of festival. Second, the average mall contains both natural and social forces, when we encounter vegetation, water and people, and see a connection with both the urban and the rural. Third, the mall's architectural rhetoric demonstrates an involvement beyond business transactions. Many malls appear to combine the architectural elements of cathedral and castle. Zepp goes so far as to claim the mall as a contemporary counterpart of the cathedral, the center of meaning and value providing definition of "the good life" and the status symbols to which we are drawn. (147-150)

Specially designed gateways usually mark the entrances to mall parking lots, a reminder that we are entering a distinctive space. We walk through an interior entranceway, another effort to mark off "sacred space," showing that we are moving from a disordered world into an ordered one. We experience height and space, eliciting a sense of awe. Light plays an important role in promoting a sense of expansion, freedom and openness, despite the fact that we find ourselves in the midst of highly organized and often crowded spaces. There is music and aromas, similar to what one might experience in a cathedral setting. The mall provides us with a space where we feel safe, a refuge from the tensions of daily life, a sanctuary. The mall plays a contemporary role in serving as a patron of the arts, just as cathedrals did. Alexander Calder or his replicas are represented in hundreds of malls throughout the U.S. The mall is also a tourist attraction. Special flights from all parts of the country make the mall in Minneapolis easily accessible to shoppers and tourists from around the world.

According to Zepp, malls are contemporary versions of the age-old combination of commerce and community. They fill the void created by the failure of social institutions to provide centers of ritual and meaning. My own opinion is that malls are concrete expressions of religious impulses, the desire for ritual, and the need for community. Malls may appear to provide such a venue, but fall short of the norms of authentic spiritual experience.

Judith Williamson in *Consuming Passions* claims that the conscious, chosen meaning in most people's lives comes as much from what they consume than what

they produce. Buying is, according to Williamson, often represented as a supremely individualistic act, and yet shopping is at the same time a socially endorsed event, the popularity of any item being an incentive to follow the crowd. "The great irony is that it is precisely the *illusion* of autonomy that makes consumerism such an effective diversion from the lack of other kinds of power… ." (233)

In *Cultural Excursions,* Neil Harris identifies a similar theme of desire for individuality through acquisition of goods. His analysis goes further, however, and identifies a certain bifurcation or ambivalence between the positive response to the desire to acquire and reluctance to do so. Harris sees the contemporary problem reflective of a similar ambivalence among the early American colonists, a moral reluctance to seek after or to display material prosperity, at the soul's peril. Harris contends that there is in America a unique system of consumption, a relationship between an unprecedented range and variety of manufactured goods. This relationship, he claims, is supported by a "set of shopping rituals, and by habits of appropriation, which have become the commonplaces of modern capitalistic society" with beginnings in the late 19th century. (174)

The Cathedral Chronicle, in its issue of September 1981, featured a story on the first anniversary of the Crystal Cathedral in Anaheim, California, a creation of TV evangelist Robert Schuller. This so-called cathedral is a spectacular sight, attracting more than half a million visitors per year. Nearly 1,500 people a day are escorted by volunteers who lead the tour of the 22-acre campus. Most visitors stand in awe and gaze upward at the latticework of steel and glass. The American writer, Norman

Cousins, commented on first viewing the impressive structure that, "that's the kind of church God would build if He could afford it!" Interestingly, The Cathedral Chronicle printed his comment, probably without understanding the irony that lay behind Cousin's witticism. In addition to a motivational article on "Let's Feel Good About Ourselves," and a Christmas Spectacular, staged by a consultant from Walt Disney Productions, the issue includes a photograph of the interior of the cathedral with the largest American flying flag, 90 feet by 46 feet, reflecting Schuller's own self promotion, "I am the American flag." (1-3)

In an article in The New York Times ,"Back to the Beaubourg," Hilton Kramer writes of publicly held initial responses to the Georges Pompidou National Center of Art and Culture, popularly known as the " Beaubourg." In France, the Beaubourg was regularly denounced as "a cultural calamity." Kramer emphasizes the multi-purpose nature of the building, more than an art museum but also a public library, an industrial design center, a cinema, a music research institute, a book store, a cafeteria, and an immense space for temporary exhibitions. Beaubourg was designed with crowds in mind. Kramer contends that popular discontent with this architectural work was based on the conflict between esoteric art and more popular works. "What we are really shuddering about is the democratization of high culture," says Kramer, what he sees as one of the missions of the art museum in our society , and just what the Beaubourg set out to accommodate. The "supermarket" aspect of the exhibition schedule is that what Kramer finds dynamic. What the Beaubourg does is to bring modern art to a broader public than any other effort

previously made, especially in France. As an indication of its final acceptance, funds have been allocated for redesign and renovation as the next century dawns.

Judith H. Dobrzynski, in The New York Times (Oct. 5, 1997), reports on the phenomenal success of museums in the preceding decade. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York welcomes an average of 17,000 visitors per day. Nicholas Fox Weber, a cultural historian interviewed for the article, noted that shopping malls have greatly influenced the desire of people to be drawn to venues where crowds gather, be able to walk around choosing their own pace and to shop as mood strikes. This last activity is very much encouraged by accessible gift shops. The museum experience has become, in my mind, closer to that of mall culture than we might imagine. Many of the same factors are present, especially the choice of "window shopping," looking while walking, at either works of art or the commercial offerings. Americans are used to picking and choosing their own course. A nation of shoppers, we have been shaped behaviorally by that experience and expect a similar type of experience in high culture venues as well.

Having examined a variety of popular culture forms and identified the ritualistic elements embedded within them, and their powerful influence upon American society, we can now turn to a specific popular art form to examine these same elements in more detail and to analyze their role in the success factor of a fast-food enterprise.

Chapter 4

THE MCDONALD'S EXPERIENCE

One phenomenon of popular culture initially identified with the U.S., but now universally recognized as the archetype of purveyors of fast food is McDonald's. That the enterprise is a phenomenal financial success cannot be denied. Founded in 1948 in California, its system wide sales for1994 had reached $26 billion. Why it has been such a successful venture is what interests us, especially since the food produced (with the exception of their french fries, which even Julia Child touts as the best anywhere), has little to recommend it. No one buys a Big Mac for the sole reason of eating it, claims Professor Michael R.Steele. "Instead, the *behavior* is part of the entire *gestalt* in which the consumer participates on a subliminal level... . Along with his Big Mac, the consumer 'buys' a vision of himself at leisure on a well-deserved break."

What is the *gestalt* of the McDonald experience which is so compelling to its adherents/consumers? Let us begin by considering the outward appearance of the outlets which dot the landscape at strategically placed locations. The building is iconographic, with its double gothic arches forming the "M" everywhere associated with McDonald's. It is in advertising research known as the number one "top of the mind" identifiable product symbol. The "golden arches" replicate the arches of the medieval cathedral or later reproductions, no matter how redacted. This icon is the *ding in sich* -- it is immediately identifiable in itself and refers directly to the restaurant itself, where the golden arches are displayed on every item connected with the service, with the exception of the food itself (though we shouldn't underestimate the unmistakable golden hue of the fries).

The majority of McDonalds restaurants follow a standard architectural design. If the community responds negatively to the placement of a building of standard McDonalds'design, however, the corporation will adapt, desiring to be a good neighbor and to be seen as upholding community, family, and patriotic values. The McDonalds' restaurant in Ann Arbor, Michigan, is a fine example of management's willingness "to go along," a two-story brick building, replete with a cloister-like entranceway and a rose window. No exterior golden arches are to be found. The only identifying sign is a tastefully executed wrought iron indicator. The usual American and McDonalds' flags are nowhere to be seen. In this venue one is likely to find a modicum of escape and sanctuary from the pressures and stresses of everyday life, a sequestered place where a kind of spirituality without theological doctrine can be experienced. The client is safe here and enters into a liturgical event

with its accompanying ritual. There are no surprises in this stylized, repetitive and stereotyped atmosphere offering comfort, security, and reassurance. The patron arrives to be fed without any required preliminaries, approaches the “table” to join others lined up at this “altar” to be waited upon by an appropriately vested acolyte surrounded by other servants of both major and minor orders, together exemplifying the values of quality, service, cleanliness, and value. The initial greeting of the acolyte is prescribed and the participant responds in kind and registers his petition. The entire proceeding is overseen by a priest-manager who has been educated at The Seminary (Hamburger University) who inculcates in his staff the belief system of expansion and saturation, all dependent upon a satisfactory customer experience. Its god is that of expansion: the 1998 Annual Report claims 24,800 system wide restaurants, 12,472 in the U.S., 4,421 in Europe, 5,055 in Asia and the Pacific, 1,405 in Latin America and 1,447 in other locales, an increase of 75% in five years. Its missionaries are sent out to stamp out fake prophets (competitive franchises) and to maintain constant vigilance to avoid backsliding on the part of believers. Pastors of individual congregations are responsible for maintaining an image which coincides with Main Street morality. Overseeing the entire missionary effort is the great high priest of McDonaldland, Ronald McDonald, the perpetual immortal clown. This genial Disneyesque character, invites us into a world of fantasy and illusion where happiness reigns supreme.

Just as Disneyworld serves as a mecca for annual American pilgrimages, McDonalds has become a neotraditional religious denomination offering the opportunity of participation in a ritualistically-based communion experience. Non-

theologically based as it might be, the powerful effects of repetitive consumption (and above all, the total experience) in a ritualized atmosphere of total acceptance where a basically puritan ethic is honored cannot be underestimated.

Nor should we underestimate the missionary efforts of the corporation to identify opportunities for community service. In addition to community-based outlets which contribute liberally to local causes, the corporation has defined itself as a "steward of the environment," initiating recycling campaigns in particular. McDonalds’'Foundation has made grants of over $80 million to benefit children through support of healthcare and medical research. The Ronald McDonald House program, providing room and board for families of hospitalized children, services more than 4,000 families each night at their 195 locations in the U.S. and abroad. The intention is to create a positive effect upon those receiving such service and to assure loyalty to the corporation engendered by such efforts.

A few decades earlier, Howard Johnson had established a restaurant chain under his own name, the precursor to all fast food efforts. He opened a string of orange-roofed "roadside cathedrals" along the East Coast in the late 1930's and capped his success by winning an exclusive franchise to provide food service along the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the nation's first superhighway, portions of which opened in 1940. Johnson's mass-produced food was sanitary, easily digested, at least for most persons, and thoroughly consistent, if limited in menu options. Johnson could be said to have been the midwife to the birth of the now-familiar nationalized roadside food complex. It was through the connection with highways that the Howard Johnson

chain became an integral part of the American way of life. When asked his favorite restaurant, President Eisenhower is said to have responded "Howard Johnson's."

Warren J. Belasco, in his article "Toward a Culinary Denominator" observed that response to economic and social disintegration in the 30's, by most commentators, whether intellectual or popular, tended to emphasize commitment over criticism and conformity over individuality. At the popular level, song lyrics tended to stress group participation, mainstream values, and historical continuities. In the Howard Johnson chain, compromise cuisine was served in a quasi-colonial, old fashioned setting. Dietary homogeneity was closely linked to "automobility," as it was called. This identification of the road with national unity helped marshal national support for all kinds of efforts such as future road building and the park development program of the New Deal. Howard Johnson's was seen as an oasis in the middle of an arid, economic landscape; he and others who used common brand names joined consumers in a community that attempted to make travelers feel at home wherever they happened to be. Belasco put it this way: "national travel in a pluralistic society virtually required the establishment of a lowest common denominator in food, lest unification be inhibited. Enter Howard Johnson." (505)

Motoring was often described as a family experience. In the late 1920's and early 1930's worries about family dissolution was countered by promotion family automobile travel as a way to save the family. ("The family that prays together stays together "slogan was a complementary sentiment.) With the demand for family

unity came a desire for home-like accommodations, informal, intimate, comfortable, and domestic.

Another characteristic identified with motoring was the democratic experience, the ability of all sorts of people to meet and experience fellowship in places such as Howard Johnson's. Whether this actually happened, we cannot know, but we do know that these conditions at least were advertised as present. Other conditions imposed by travel were fast service, facilities easily seen from the road, and filling and freshly prepared food with emphasis on fried food, which was able to be prepared rapidly.

Howard Johnson's New England town hall/church architectural environment was a perfect response to public demand, a colonial style attractive to tourists sometimes disoriented by the incongruent styles of other roadside eating places. The Johnson building was advertising enough with its orange steeple and porcelain tile roof. Indeed, I can recall as a child of five being able to identify a Howard Johnson's from three miles away, probably not unusual for any child of the same age.

Johnson was the clear precursor to McDonald's fame in fostering maximum kitchen efficiency and overseeing every aspect of the operation. He was the first to use franchises in order to expand his system rapidly. The company "bible" detailed every procedure involved in the Howard Johnson restaurants from frying potatoes to cleaning the washrooms. For the most part, Howard Johnson was able to give people what they wanted. "His food was sanitary, reliable, and properly priced. The

atmosphere was relaxed, escapist but controlled. Given what had come before, Johnson's system seemed well designed, smoothly scientific and thus well in tune with the decades' tendency to equate mechanical efficiency with democratic progress." (Belasco 514)

David Gerald Orr is an ethnographist in an interdisciplinary field in which the phenomena and documents produced by cultural groups are examined to provide an interpretation of the process of history. Material culture study emerges from this field as an important discipline, especially when one considers the material evidence of systems like McDonald's. Orr approaches the coming to grips of the teleology of McDonald's as a material culture historian. He proposes several categories by which one can attempt the interpretation which he feels important to know and through which on can learn more about American culture in general.

1. Identification and Definition: a taxonomic schema related to the vernacular, traditional, and folk, placing McDonald’s clearly in the vernacular category of material culture.

2. Reading McDonald's Architecture: combining the themes of order, quality, and regularity, an architecture both fixed and variable, structures controlling physical and visual movement, including ingress and egress.

3. The Significance of Antecedental Force: an examination of the historic relationship of McDonald's to immediate predecessors and the end result of a commercial heraldic icon-structure.

4. Documentary Archiving and Cataloguing: examining building plans and photographs of the end product, oral interviews, corporate records, and advertisements on film or in print.

5. Oral History: oral interviews and written questionnaires for patrons as important contributions to the development of an ethnography.

6. Iconic/Symbolic Role-Playing: of McDonalds' iconography Orr asks: What message is being communicated? What service is being provided and what values are being served? How does McDonalds represent the quest for order, structure, and an easily understood social hierarchy?

7. Food Ways: researching the dietary effects of constant fast food patronage at McDonald's and other such outlets, including the variations in menu added as McDonald's response to the criticism of "junk food."

8. McDonald's in the Community: examining McDonald's restaurants as bonafide community centers and supportive of local civic activities, local charities, and athletic teams.

9. Packing Technology: study of advertising promotions such as toys, drinking glasses, videos whether free, free with purchase or for outright purchase.

10. The World of Ronald McDonald: examination of the ephemeral material produced for McDonald's patrons, the illusions and fantasies
referring to a world where people buy hamburger-headed characters and other cartoon individuals. What are the roles of the various Disney-like characters found in McDonald's and the role of the play land connected to many McDonald's outlets?

11.Demography: Regional and Ethnic Eating Patterns: focus on who eats at McDonald's and who doesn't? What ethnic imbalance takes place and what causes it? Who works at McDonald's and in what capacities?

The above headings are what Orr considers the major focuses of any serious ethnographist dealing with the phenomenon of McDonalds. He encourages a detailed examination of all these strands, but at the same time implores us to ”insist upon ample freedom for experiment with any large scale framework of regulated order." (380-384)

Michael R. Steele, author of “What Can We Learn from Ronald?,” believes that the study of McDonald's is a serious undertaking, that McDonald's can be seen as

representing a culminating point of several crucial human developments. The technological line of moveable parts producing a uniform product runs clearly and directly from Gutenberg to Ford to Ray Kroc, the master "engineer" of McDonald's. Economically speaking, McDonald's stands at the pinnacle of franchising capitalism. Mythically, McDonald's has created a cast of characters replacing those fantasy characters associated with Disney which have been on the scene for decades. McDonald's did this in less than ten years. No human activity takes place in a sociocultural vacuum and no single human act is only what it seems to be. A study of Ronald's world must go far beyond the enumeration of production figures and cost per unit analysis. To repeat Steele's observation, no one buys a Big Mac for the simple reason of eating it. Instead the behavior is part of an entire gestalt in which the consumer participates on a subliminal level. Along with the Big Mac, the consumer buys a vision of himself at leisure on a well-deserved break.

A Eucharistic rite in the Anglo-Catholic tradition has long been recognized as an orderly experience for the worshiper in the midst of the secular world, providing a public context within which the worshiper has the latitude for private reflection. A patron of McDonald's also experiences an orderly milieu relieving him from the many stresses of the secular world. In this respect, McDonald's has become a secular religion replete with vestments, ceremony, a sense of cycle, icons, and a communion. We should not be surprised to learn that more Americans go to McDonald's in a month than attend church.

There is an internal consistency in the pattern of success in America. Americans may be said to share in the values and perspectives of religion, sports, and wars. Having historically considered themselves "a chosen people," Americans have always been able to see themselves in a religious light and the super rich, the chosen of the chosen, almost naturally turn to religious language in order to explain their successes to lesser mortals. Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's as we know it, unwilling as he is to give much credit to others for his success, turns to religious language only occasionally. The logical extensions of the sense of religious superiority and the rugged individualism of the American hero are consistent with the language and values of war. Success in war is the secular confirmation of America's role in the world as a self-anointed people as well as being the ultimate playground for the rugged individualist. Kroc, succeeds in sublimating all of these idiosyncratic American values in what he likes to refer to as "hamburger diplomacy." (452)

Winner of the Horatio Alger Award, Kroc asserts in *Grinding It Out* that "each man makes his own happiness and is responsible for his own problems." Kroc's book, which outlines his success in business, is marked by unbounded optimism and enthusiasm and equal measures of egocentricity and pomposity.

Gregory Hall in "The Psychology of Fast Food Happiness" maintains that McDonald's is a form of therapy. Over and over again people describe their time in a McDonald's outlet as an experience. A certain psychological fulfillment is basic to McDonald's success, a feat engineered by Ray Kroc and his subordinates, who

were, in Hall’s assessment, responsible for the transformation of an American institution, the greasy spoon hamburger joint, into a respectable, super clean, standardized, computerized food production machine that also makes people happy.

Escape from the stresses of modern life is sought by many through the use of the automobile; the automobile enables people to make spontaneous decisions to "get away," and to express and experience freedom. The McDonald's ethic is closely allied to values encouraged by the automobile. Its experience, however, is qualitatively different and more varied than the automobile. There is always an element of control associated with personal auto use which McDonald's takes advantage of in its offering of the drive-through experience, in which the driver remains in apparent control of the choices to be made in this highly commercial transaction, overlaid with overtures of friendliness. The drive-through alternative also allows the client continually to experience the warm comfortable, almost uterine-like experience of the automobile by never having to leave it even to find something to eat.

Conrad Phillip Kottak is an anthropologist accustomed to explaining and interpreting the lifestyles of diverse cultures. He asks whether the consumption of McDonalds’ products and propaganda by Americans is more than just eating and watching television, an experience comparable in some respects to a religious ritual. In “Rituals at McDonalds,” Kottak identifies several key features which distinguish ritual from other behavior using the work of anthropologist, Roy Rappaport who sees ritual events as stylized, repetitive, and stereotyped, occurring in special places at

regular times. They include liturgical orders, set sequences of words and actions laid down by someone other than the current performer. Rituals also convey information about the participants and their cultural tradition, translating enduring messages, values, and sentiments into observable action. Although some participants may be more strongly committed than others to the beliefs on which rituals are based, all those who take part in communal public acts signal their acceptance of an order that transcends their status as individuals.(371)

While Kottak interprets McDonalds as a mundane secular institution, he finds that some of the attributes of sacred place are actually represented in the various experiences of the McDonalds phenomenon. What he is impressed by is the relative invariance in act and utterance that has developed in the absence of any distinct theological doctrine. Away from home McDonalds, like a familiar church, offers not just hamburgers but comfort, security, and assurance.

Public devotion to McDonalds rests in part on the uniformities associated with almost all McDonalds settings, the architecture, food, ambience, acts, and utterances. The golden arches serve, for the most part, as a familiar and almost universal landmark absent only in those areas where zoning laws prohibit garish designs.

Behind the counter, McDonalds employees are differentiated into such categories as male staff, female staff, and managers. While costumes vary slightly from outlet to outlet, we can see various divisions among the employees whose utterances across the counter are standardized. The verbal and non-verbal behavior expressed by the

employees is taught at a seminary of sorts, Hamburger University in Oak Park, Illinois. The choice for location of outlets also is based on careful study of where churches are located in small towns.

Even customers who do not normally frequent McDonalds outlets on holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day are still reminded of the franchise through its sponsorship of marching bands or sports or family entertainment programs. It makes a blatant attempt to make you the focus of any advertising; "You deserve a break today", "You're the One", "We Do It All For You". The message attempts to say that you are not simply a face in the crowd. McDonalds advertising de-emphasizes the fact that the chain is a profit-making organization by stressing its program of community projects such as the Ronald McDonalds House connected in many cities to hospitals which treat children with cancer. Amid these secular manifestations, there is no doubt that McDonalds has incorporated, wittingly or unwittingly, many of the symbolic and ritual aspects of religion. It serves as a powerful element in American culture providing common expectations, experience, and behavior overriding region, class, formal religious affiliation, politics, gender, age, ethnic group, or place of residence.

Gregory Hall in “The Psychology of Fast Food Happiness,” claims that this religious experience goes deeper than ritual. For him, McDonalds is the messiah carrying the new theology into a world of chaos: the messiah whose golden arches are symbols heralding the new age of Yankee fast food technology. The McDonalds canon is one of basically puritan values: law and order, cleanliness, purity, hard work, self

discipline, and service. The environment of McDonalds is a cheerily bland atmosphere which many find reassuring, intended and designed to neutralize anxiety. At this level, Hall claims that McDonalds is able to associate the mystery of the computer circuit with the mystery of religious peace. The golden arches become symbol as well as sign. The arches form a letter "M" for McDonalds on an obvious plane, but they also resemble cathedral arches which have long been the architectural equivalent of man's ethereal aspirations. (401)

The rainbow is heaven's ambiguous arch. It promises freedom and fulfillment but it also portends transience and delusion. One could say that the golden markers, or golden arches, are symbolically ambiguous but the ambiguousness is not related to the economic success which the golden arches represents. Constant replication of McDonalds units across the landscape, on the other hand, serve as a sign of stability in the midst of geographic and temporal flux of the mid-fifties and sixties at which time the average citizen drove approximately ten thousand miles a year. "Our theme is kind of synonymous with Sunday school, the girl scouts, and the YMCA," Kroc would say.

By 1961, Kroc had established his so-called university conferring degrees in hamburgerology for managers. By the early 60's the McDonalds corporation became much more obviously competitive as a number of other fast food chains had entered the market with claims being made by what we might call false prophets, such as Burger King and Wendy’s, demanding their share of the franchise market. Given the competition, McDonalds could not be content to minister to the converted. Kroc’s

continual sermon was simple: "When you're green you’re growing, when you're ripe you rot."

The advertising budget for McDonalds first national campaign in 1967 was $5 million; by 1977 it had grown to $60 million annually, making the company the country's largest purchaser of television commercials. A goal of this effort was to reach customers who did not necessarily want to buy a product or service but would appreciate the satisfactory sensory experience he saw prepackaged in 30-second slots of prime time. The "overarching" (!) meaning of McDonalds is conveyed in messages that play endless variations on the mythic themes of permanence and change, just as American society was being shocked by violent social change. In the early 1970's, the theme that was being sold was that McDonalds is “your kind of place, close by, right on your way.” Furthermore, the public "deserved a break today" and if the customer still experienced some trauma at the acceleration of change, McDonalds assurance that they “will do it all for you” was an effort to alleviate the angst of the times. Assisting in restoring order was the smiling clown prince, Ronald McDonald, who introduced a sense of lightness and possibility in the midst of sociological disconnection and impotence.

Ronald McDonald has the three essentials of all clowns: humor, surprise, and immortality. No one knows exactly where or when clowns originated, but their presence stretches back into primitive societies and we find that clowns were entertaining the populace as early as 2500 B.C.E. Clowns filled crucial roles throughout Medieval Europe. By the 17th century clowns were appearing in theatre

and pantomime productions. Clowns were associated primarily with circuses before Ronald McDonald came on the scene in 1966. He has since become a living entity for millions of people, a perpetual and immortal clown, the genial host of McDonald Land with all that implies. What exactly does Ronald do? In the words of the mimeographed “official biography”of Ronald McDonald, produced by “The Firm,” "Ronald does everything kids would like to do, skating, boating, flying around in the air, magic, riding on camels, and best of all going to McDonalds to eat hamburgers, his favorite food. Ronald spends all his time going from one McDonalds restaurant to another to see his friends, the children. If his friends are sick, he visits them at the hospital. Ronald's favorite thing to do is to make children happy, to make everyone laugh."

Ronald can be seen as a modern commercial miracle, symbolizing the world's most ubiquitous fast-food chain. But there is a lot beyond that, according to anthropologist Kottak: "McDonalds has become nothing short of a secular religion, a shelter below the golden arches, a sacred place. One finds here spirituality without theological doctrine." (471) When we enter McDonalds our surroundings suggest that we are in a sequestered place, apart from the messiness of the outside world. Ronald's motto of quality service and cleanliness carries the creed, without the theological underpinnings, of the entire organization.

As for the product, at least the primary product, being sold, it goes well beyond the hamburger. By participating in this form of communion with millions of others, the patron participates in the success-oriented society in which we live. His is no

hamburger joint, but a clean place with a wholesome atmosphere, a similar architectural design cultivating a family image which subconsciously appeals to Americans through a process of identification. The identification is easily made through the visual standards of the golden arches and the American flag all appealing to patriotic leanings. Marshall Fishwick, in “Ronald McDonald,” finds that McDonalds is not just a business but, indeed, a window to our culture. After we are through laughing with or at Ronald McDonald, we must take him seriously.(471)

In *Kinder-Culture*, Joe L.Kincheloe describes Ronald McDonald as a "multi-dimensional clown deity, virgin born son of Adam Smith, the press secretary for free enterprise capitalism." (257) He is "intelligent and sensitive and humanitarian. After all, he has all of these Ronald McDonald houses named after him. Indeed, Ronald McDonald is really the grand salesman of all, who serves Kroc's missionary effort. Consumption of any kind of good, especially that of food, erases differences between persons and conflicts of social life. Business analysts have actually likened McDonalds operations to those of the U.S. Marine Corps, yet the experience of McDonalds for the patrons is continually touted as ‘a family kind of place.’ Despite the effort of Kroc to promote traditional family values, McDonalds actually undermines the very qualities it claims to produce." (265) A meal at Mac’s does not provide a common experience for the family members. A "meal" at McDonalds is not what one would call a leisurely interactive family occasion since no sooner are the choices made than the children are begging to play in the play-land and often it simply turns into an occasion for the children to go off and play with mom and dad having to watch them from afar while the food gets cold. This is not the picture of

the happy family occasion held out to consumers. Kincheloe, however, urges us not to misunderstand or underestimate the power generated by the company's efforts to confirm continually the corporation as "America itself," with children as "consumers in training."

Kincheloe examines the empires of both McDonalds and Disney and sees them as unavoidable features of everyday life in America since the 1950s. Both were founded by self-made persons with a flair for business, creativity, and innovation and both made innovative use of the concept of place supported by a strong bias toward fantasy and wish fulfillment growing out of an ideology easily identifiable with a middle class ethos. Both have applied unique and distinctive solutions to problems and concerns in American life by providing locales of escapism. Order, predictability, and stability all lend an aura of certainty and a sense of enduring, eternal space amidst rapid changes.

Three basic points emerge from a study of the McDonald regime. First, McDonalds was a major contributor to American highway and shopping center architecture, in its contribution to fast food cuisine, and in its displacement of such institutions as the local diner and the soda fountain. Second, its innovations in building design, location, operations, and business customer relations created a complete philosophy of food service which significantly modified public tastes and expectations. McDonalds created a new standard against which other centers of eating and socializing are now, not only judged, but are judging themselves. Thirdly, McDonalds outlook and style have repercussions which extend beyond the limited

scope of food consumption to make various statements about the contributions to the values, attitudes, and beliefs about life, especially about life in America. McDonalds franchises have more recently been expanded into downtown areas, each flying the McDonalds flag identifying these embassies of sanctuary. They provide a definite "known" for both travelers and local patrons in an uncertain cosmos. McDonalds is s system of landmarks marking off on our mental maps the centers of suburban neighborhoods or the areas between neighborhoods as the local church spire used to do in serving as town center and orientation point.

Even for Americans traveling abroad, McDonalds plays a similar role as an embassy of American popular culture, a logical place to encounter fellow countrymen over a milkshake and a Big Mac. It serves also as a reference point in America's mental image as an island of safety, sanity, and order where one can experience a feeling of respite and a sense of being taken care of. In one of the essays in *Kinder Culture* Kincheloe theorizes: "If Disneyland serves as a Mecca, McDonalds has become a neo-traditional interfaith religious order. It has been observed that the golden arches insignia and sculptural symbol (a stylized portrayal of the letter “M”) have a deeper significance as a metaphorical gate to heaven of like design and with a symbolic impact as strong as the gateway arch in St. Louis. [This is not happenstance; both arches or connected arches are replicated upon inverted cantenary curves, traditionally associated with ecclesiastical architecture.] This religious reading of McDonalds is very telling, part of that process in a secular society in which other institutions and individuals take over the sanctified roles of church and priesthood which have begun to recede in cultural importance. McDonalds does, in fact, offer

a sanctuary -- from the mad pace of the highway or from the distresses and pressures of the nuclear family in urban or suburban home. Served by a staff of underling priests presided over by the managing local head priest, and under the guiding spirit of the values of order and efficiency symbolized by the golden arches above, the customer is nourished, rested, reassured, and refreshed. Each of these sanctuaries has a similar iconography along with an identical view of life with its ritual of order and subservice and the litany is prescribed: smiles, thanks, and ‘have a nice day' are the fixed gestures and scriptures." (435- 436)

Kroc was amazingly candid about his dedication to his organization as something far more than a hamburger business: "I speak of faith and McDonalds as if it were a religion. And without meaning any offense to the Holy Trinity, the Koran, or the Torah, that's exactly the way I think of it. I've often said that `I believe in God, family, and McDonalds -- and in the office that order is reversed.'" (126)

Remarkably, each day seven percent of the American population eats at McDonalds, a restaurant with none of the usual complications of a restaurant. There’s no chef, no cuisine to speak of, there's no waiter to tip, no inappropriate way to dress or behave, and everybody eats with their fingers and often with their coats on. From a limited selection, everyone chooses what he likes and it tastes the way it always tastes, though the temperature may vary. There are some things that the corporation is insistent upon, among them are the french-fries, always a quarter-inch square. The customer wants no surprises and there aren't any. The expectation is that everything under the golden arches will be safe, inexpensive, cheerful, and familiar. Stephen

Drucker in “Who is the Best Restaurateur in America?” calls this the Disneyland of food, a land of perpetual adolescence, a carefree kingdom built on happiness.

Drucker contends in his article in The New York Times that the taste of any McDonalds hamburger begins in the television set. In every ad you can count on a picture of a bright, lively, warm McDonalds with smiling families. It has been shown that most children recognize the Ronald McDonald character and the golden arches by the age of two. And, of course, the children have been encouraged to make themselves at home by way of the indoor playgrounds that are, in some areas, the best maintained play areas in the community. Behind all of this is the belief that if the child is happy, the parents will be happy and the family will be happy, and happiness will go on forever.

Although McDonalds counts on familiarity, regional tastes are dealt with very carefully. In Tennessee, the sausage is spicier than in New York, and in Texas more mustard is automatically put on sandwiches than in Illinois. As for the foreign restaurants, Germans can order a McRib with beer and in Saudi Arabia restaurants have separate sections for men and women and close four times a day for prayers.

In The New York Times of October 9,1998, Mark Landler reported that the McDonalds outlet in Hong Kong offered for sale a new Snoopy figure every day, dressed in different national costumes. He describes the numbers of persons coming to purchase them as a stampede, turning a fad into a public safety hazard, according to officials in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Snoopy is a sturdy little beagle-like

fisherman clad in a yellow rain slicker and holding his daily catch. "So pervasive is beagle-mania here, that it has managed to trivialize even the most solemn of the civic rituals. When Hong Kong celebrated China's National Day, there was more talk about the Golden Arches where crowds flocked to buy the China Snoopy than about the Gate of Heavenly Peace where Mao proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic on October 1, 1949." (A4) No one is able to explain the level of appeal of this popular culture item. No doubt it has to do with some sort of iconic appeal which defies explanation.

Rob Kroes, in *If You've Seen One You've Seen the Mall,* offers this response to the European critics of "Amercanization " of their cultures: "Amercanization is but a short hand reference to what is essentially a black box in the simple diagram of cultural transmission and reception… to the extent that American culture has penetrated ever more powerfully through the highly charged field of tension between the poles of Europeanism versus Americanism." (xiii) So highly charged were the French in mid-1999 on this subject that they not only deplored in words the Americanization of their culture, but in action focused specifically on McDonalds, the icon of this phenomenon, dubbed McDomination.

George Ritzer, in his introduction to *The McDonaldization of Society*, cites the fast-food restaurant, especially McDonalds, as "the contemporary paradigm of the rationalization process...an increase in efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control through the substitution of non-human for human technology."(16) This leads, according to Ritzer, to a dehumanization, homogenization, standardization,

and globalization. He seems to suggest that McDonalds poses a threat to thinking rationally or intelligently. What Ritzer is referring to is the robot-like functioning of those who are working within the McDonalds system of delivery. I cannot agree that McDonalds represents a form or example of social determinism.

Richard Munch, in "American and European Social Theory: Cultural Identities Social Forms of Theory Production," criticizes the standardization of sociology and he calls it the McDonaldization of Sociology, especially social theory. Calling upon Americans to avoid "the disease of standardization," sees lack of autonomy as the phenomenon most evident at McDonalds and similar settings. Munch claims that there are five dimensions of McDonaldization, both within the McDonalds empire and in all kinds of other fields: 1) simple tasks are to be performed efficiently; 2) time calculated; 3) work predictable; 4) non-human technologies which control and reduce workers to robot-like actions, and 5) dehumanized work leading to a whole state of irrationality, that is, unable to be autonomous. Could it be that this author is either over-simplifying or being a bit irrational himself by introducing an element of fanaticism into his analysis? I would claim that efficiencies do not necessarily lead to a lack of autonomy. All work, even the most creative, entails some elements of repetition and requirements which preclude complete autonomy. Few employed persons, including professionals, have the latitude of freedom which avoids some degree of accountability.

Now that we have examined how the elements of ritual are interwoven and contribute to the success of McDonalds, we will next turn to the applicability of

these findings to the church, with an eye toward her re-imagining and reclaiming a part of her tradition lost or obscured in recent times.

Chapter 5

AN APPEAL TO THE CHURCH

An appreciation of what Martin Marty calls the Modern Schism is essential to an understanding of the suffering, hopes and strivings of the contemporary Christian, the inheritor of a peculiar Christian tradition with roots in the American popular cultural experience. In *The Modern Schism,* Marty defines a schism as a "division into mutually opposing parties of a body of persons that have previously acted in concert." (98)

In the mid-19th century people in Western society divided into mutually opposing parties; one set devoted itself to religious and ecclesiastical concerns while the other was increasingly preoccupied with the secular ("temporal, worldly"). The secular, however, has never been monolithic, nor has it expressed itself in the same fashion in all cultures. Expressions of secularism developed in the 18th century, characterized as an age of industrial change and religious doubt, especially in Britain. American culture, for the most part, adhered to inherited religions, but transformed them so significantly (if subtly) that one might speak of the change as one of controlled but ambiguous secularization.

After reviewing the continental and English experience, Marty moves to an analysis of how religious symbols were transformed, making them compatible with the American experience. In this setting, religion tended "to address itself to the personal, familial, and leisured sectors of life while the public sectors (political, social, economic, cultural) were to become autonomous or pass under control of other kinds of tutelage. This accepted new contract was a novelty in Western culture, even if it has come to be regarded as normative by many later American Christians, especially the conservatives." (98)

It is clear to Marty that religious leaders in the U.S., in their use of the symbols of religion related to society and personal life, anticipated that radical religious change could occur without disruption in the continuity of these symbols. Superficially, these symbols remained the same, but their substance, or "that to which they purportedly referred, was often altered." (101) Thus schism, or the parting of two vital entities, the secular culture (public) and the churchly (private), was masked or disguised. The custodians of the secular culture "kept their own counsel"for decision-making, while the religious leadership was called upon to sanction the decisions. The two sets of symbolic transformations that Marty concentrates on are those having to do with a culture of enterprise, and those dealing with a theocratic view of the relationship between Church and state. The early 19th-century clergyman "focused on salvation after this life...[while later in the century] a typical Protestant clergyman in the same lineage would focus, without changing his terms, on salvation in this life. But with countless non-Protestants now on the scene there was more fear of seeing a close confluence between Church and state interests. Lincoln

himself reminded the new nationalists (on both sides of the Civil war) that they were no longer ready to see themselves under God, submissive to His mysterious purposes...(but) were beginning to substitute [God's] mission...[and] to be God." (104)

Marty also sees the evangelical revivalist as an important spokesperson in the American experience. The growth of the middle class found the urban revivalist using the same symbols (eternal salvation, redemption, rescue from the world, etc.), his audience now hearing "the virtues of their striving extolled, the results of their industry endorsed, their prejudices against others confirmed." (107) "So successful [were they] at disguising religious change under symbols of non-change that...the business community and political leaders...tended to be conservative. 'God is Dead!' is a cry that could come from Protestant seminaries but not from associations of manufacturers or war veterans!" (108) Such a view throws light on 20th century social analysis in that what is often called "secularization" is nothing more than "a complex of radical religious changes, in which people act and think religiously in ways which differ from the past and from those meanings conveyed by the symbols to which they formerly adhered… a picking and choosing among biblical exhortations and truths." (110) The evangelical 'empire,' having been born out of the First (1730's) and Second (1800's) Great Awakenings, stressed "a personal response to the call of God and an individual appropriation of the gifts of grace in Jesus Christ." (111) As the successful evangelical leader became more and more part of the establishment, he became more and more a part of the "common consensus" and fell into the role of reassurer of his flock and a culture [which] he

"could not have adopted...had he cherished the prophetic stance." (113) "He could attack personal vice. But he broke the implicit pact with his community if he called for a new social contract." (114)

Evangelicalism, according to Randall Balmer in his book and video series *Mine Eyes have Seen the Glory*, can be characterized by the qualities of certainty and simplicity. The attempt to infuse such values in the young of that tradition is captured in Balmer's depiction of "the camp experience" where godliness is found in "the nots," smoking, drugs, alcohol and especially sex.

We can find in the Evangelical movement the same bifurcation and ambivalence in responding to the conflict between financial prosperity and the Gospel call to poverty. According to Balmer, in the 1970s a good part of Evangelical missionary efforts embraced an adaptation to the prevailing culture of what has become known as "the prosperity Bible," based upon a literal interpretation of Matthew 7:7 : "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be open to you." The interpretation: When you pray, you *shall* receive. (Emphasis mine.)

It is not difficult to identify strains of millenarianism within evangelicalism. Among them is the immanency of the Day of Judgment. When this Day arrives, the adherent must be ready to face the consequences of every life choice made. From 1910 on, the five-point doctrinal declaration adopted by the Presbyterian church influenced the Fundamentalist movement profoundly, according to Ernest R. Sandeen in *The*

Roots of Fundamentalism. The five points of doctrine were “the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ (sic), the atonement of Christ, and the miracle-working power of Christ.” (xiv) “But it was [the fifth], millenarianism, which gave life and shape to the Fundamentalism movement.” (xv) The Millenarians’ aim was to awaken the sleeping church to the immanence of judgment and to call sinners to repentance before the day of salvation passed away.” (xvii)

We now return to Marty’s analysis of the transformation of religious thought in the latter 1800s. Threats to the status quo appeared on the horizon in the form of the new immigrants, characterized as alien, infidel, lazy. Other groups which challenged the "old order" were the frontier entrepreneurs, the merchant capitalist, and the very rich. The ultimate sell-out of any residue of Christian theological truth was that voiced by an unidentified Rev. Hunt that "no man can be obedient to God's will without becoming wealthy." Forty years later, The Congregationalists can be credited with "one-upmanship" in the use of a rather bizarre metaphor: “there is no sleeping partner in any business who can begin to compare with the Almighty.'" (123)

In Marty’s analysis, what was called for by American popular culture in the latter 1800's was a sort of "national religion [in that] our only safety consists of having a popular religious sense to fall back upon ... . A lay religion, a radically altered construct, devised right under the noses of the clergy and with their unwitting help, was well on its way to formulation...the displacement of vestigial Christendom in America." (124-5) The clergy, in general, tended to welcome technology as part of God's plan for subduing nature and making individuals rich. They also supported

nationalism in its initial sanctioning of the national domestic market and the building of a base for foreign trade and policy. "Thus the two realms in which major symbolic transformation occurred, enterprise and manifest destiny, were united as issues." (134)

The gospel of popular culture is, by nature, ephemeral, in essential contrast to that of the Christian Gospel which is eternal in nature. Proclaimers of the Gospel invite persons to move and live and have their being in *kairos* as well as *chronos* and so demand a commitment to living out of questions rather than out of answers as poet Rilke exhorted us to do in his collection *Letters to a Young Poet.* The Christian, in the end, is not supplied with answers to the questions, but rather affirms in confidence and faith "Thy Kingdom come...Thy will be done." It was Jesus Christ Himself who challenged us to be totally submissive to the will of the Father, by moving us from *kerygma* to *didache* in living out the promise.

I suggest the following model to represent the dichotomy between the gospels of popular culture and that of the canon of the church.

GOSPEL MODEL

Popular Culture	**Christian**
What do I want? Material object	What do I want? To honor God
How do I get it? Buy it!	How do I get it? By being faithful
When can I have it? NOW!	When will the Kingdom come? In God's good time

Institutional religions do not hold worship services to give the believer a chance to challenge the beliefs and values of religion. On the contrary, such services are mortar to the bricks of faith. All religions offer a system of beliefs and values, but so does American society. And the set of beliefs and values offered by American culture are not beliefs and values to which we are converted. We grow up believing that they are true. Every time we watch TV, read popular magazines or detective fiction, listen to country music, go to the movies or professional sports events, we have these American cultural beliefs and values reaffirmed. We are, in fact, attending worship services of the American cultural religion 15-20 hours a week.

An element of "Culture" is the manifestation of a system of shared beliefs about life's predicaments and their solution. A belief system is a systematically arranged set of answers to basic life-problem questions. All such answers are directed toward

resolving unsatisfactory present experience in the direction of optimum fulfillment. Such resolution s by being overcome by some special source of goodness and grace upon the source of evil or present dissatisfaction. This power is definitive, at least in ritual drama, and, therefore, ; it ushers in a final state of perfected existence, called salvation in Christianity. Nelson suggests the following five basic beliefs that constitute a belief system:

> 1. Shared views of what is unsatisfactory about present experience.
>
> 2. Shared views about the source of that unsatisfactory situation.
>
> 3. Shared views of the nature of the delivering force through which the source of evil is defeated.
>
> 4. Shared views of what a resolved situation would look like.
>
> 5. Shared views of the "way" or the path to follow, to this perfection, if such a catechism is necessary. (21)

The externality of evil remains a characteristic of the American belief system. That is, the people who are experiencing the problem are not themselves responsible for it. They are, in a word, innocent and hence basically good...no one is guilty.

The predominant character in American cultural faith is a messiah-like individual, a prototypical savior with a special power, not super-human or super-natural, but a human with special gifts and abilities honed to razor-sharp efficiency. More often than not, this special ability is combined with an almost uncanny coolness and imperturbable self-control in the face of evil incarnate. In almost every case, popular cultural religion will require the individual hero to dispatch the villain with an act of violence. This is justified by the righteousness of the cause. The individual's deliverance of the community is a self-sacrificing deed, paralleling the life of Jesus, acknowledged by his followers as the authentic Messiah, God incarnate.

The classic Western form insists upon the stabilization of the family and the community, promoted by schools and churches, by law and order, and characterized by peace, tranquility, and domesticity. Women often make it possible. Within the ritual drama itself, there is little room for instruction on the path toward future dreams from present problems.

There is another strong belief system in American culture. Whereas the classic and dominant system pictures salvation within some form of community as described above, a secondary system focuses upon a particular image of humanity as the fulfillment of the individual. The fulfilled individual is able to control social situations through mental and physical preparedness.

According to Cox, in his Seduction of the Spirit, any religion has three identifiable

components. First, they tell us where we come from (myths of origin, creation, and fall). Second, they hold up some ideal possibility for humankind. Third, any religion tells us how to get from our present fallen state to what can be, or ought to be (means of grace). Cox sees similar components represented in mass media. They may be disguised, but we should be aware of the conflicting values and disparate beliefs that they hold up to us and the necessity for taking responsibility for personal decision-making. When signals take over from symbols and pose as stories, then controlling dictates pretend to be freely elicited responses. When external directions predominate, we then have what Cox calls the "seduction of the spirit." Seduction in this sense means to mislead or deceive. In short, the seduction of the spirit is the calculated twisting of people's natural and healthy religious instincts for purposes of control and domination.

Cox believes that the church should become acquainted with ways that electronic media can both be drawn upon and contributed to for the purpose of bringing about what Cox terms a cultural revolution. " To ignore or dismiss such... is to turn one's back on the most salient cultural fact of our era. No theologian with a serious interest in how the study of religion might be delivered from academic bondage to help spark the renewal of culture can afford such a back-turning." (275)

Cox contends that the Bible contains many examples of communication to all sorts of people and, indeed, Cox sees God as the communicator *par excellence*. He is the "Word," identified in His very essence with communication. God speaks but we

have the capability of speaking back. Indeed, the Creator turns man into a responding creature always in freedom. The Church, whose task it is to be the advocate of all persons everywhere, must demonstrate the dialogical form of communication with all its risk and promise. Communication is by any means that one chooses to make the message understandable. It was God who chose the Incarnation to make clear once and for all the message for all. Jesus, Himself, made use of images and stories and types of communication that were common in His day. A theology of the means of communication begins not only in the belief that Jesus demonstrates the essential character of human communication; it also begins with the conviction that individual persons are intended to become communicators. In the biblical view, the purpose of history is the bringing forth of a new community. Communication, however, due to resulting awareness and knowledge can prove to be risky and painful; in the end it may even require a redistribution of both bread and power. Cox makes the following proposals to the churches about what can be done in the face of " the media boom":

1. The Church should avoid the contradiction of trying to make widespread use of media that are technically non-dialogical and which perpetuate passive, quiescent, immature people.

2. The Church should demonstrate its own message through means of dance, film, music, means which elicit rebuttal and response.

3. The Church should bless and support those groups that are trying to alter the monopolistic policy control of the media that is counter to the common

good.

4. The Church should encourage a critical attitude toward mass media. The images and values of the media can be sifted and resisted most easily if recipients have an ample chance to discuss those values among themselves and, most importantly, produce counter-images.

5. The Church can demonstrate, in its own life, a style of communication that is participatory, response-inducing, and vulnerable. This suggests discarding some present forms of teaching and preaching.

6. The Church can encourage further technical development of more community-building types of media and devices more accessible to ordinary people.

7. The Church can work for decentralization of media systems both here and abroad.

8. The Church can use the public interest time provided by media to advocate for the voiceless or powerless. (315)

A theology of the media begins with a vision of what human communication entails.

Such a theology must move on to examine and evaluate what now passes for communication in our world, asking such questions as: What facilitates it? What prevents it? What falsifies it? When a full realization of human communication comes about, we will be less willing to settle for what Cox calls pseudo-communication.

Having read of Laurel Arthur Burton's work in theology and popular culture, I wrote to him and he was kind enough to forward to me his unpublished article "Salvation." Burton claims that survival is the ultimate value of much of the American population. Indeed, this survival value is the foundation for the idea of salvation. This may be true in the biological or medical context, but we can also see it in the self-help and human perfectability movements. The ultimate aim of survival is to construct a system that somehow allows the person to transcend death and to gain control over one's finiteness. One way of doing that, of course, is to learn the proper rules for meeting certain standards of perfectability. Burton agrees with Kluckhohn, who,

in a chapter entitled "An Anthropologist Looks at the United States"in *Mirror for Man*, describes the American middle class as believing that human nature is evil but mutable; that humans are meant to have mastery over nature; persons are future oriented; activity is doing rather than being; and, finally, that to display individuality is to be a paragon of virtue. For Burton, survival is the idea of on-goingness, a projected relationship into some future time. Survival and salvation are clearly related in this way.

Success in the American popular mind is a sign-post of survival, the assurance of salvation. Martin Marty has said that religion holds special potency for people who would like to use it for success.

The perfectability of the person is the hallmark of another phenomenon in American popular religions. The self-help movement carries out the same basic theme. Even though we know that such claims are patently illusory and cannot be associated with real salvation, how is it that these constructs of the advertising industry work so well? Is it not that once we are "perfected" we will have “arrived” and we will have an assurance in this (chronological) time that we have been accepted?

Creation-centered spirituality is concerned with integration, wholeness of life, and consciousness. It is Meister Eckhart whom Matthew Fox recognizes *In Becoming a Musical,Mystical Bear* as the initiator of creation-centered spirituality. Fox urges everyone who is seeking to understand the freedom to which we are called, to proclaim in a public way the Good News, the word of creative spirituality. Being at peace for a Christian is, according to Fox, impossible. When he recognized his need to leave a system bent on repressing his gifts of creativity, Fox left his tradition of origin and affiliated with The Episcopal Church in the mid-1990s.

Pop culture exists to entertain. It is important that we avoid the temptation to mimic popular culture in making church services entertainment. The culture of fun and entertainment leads to vicarious participation rather than real participation. Instant gratification is pervasive. It is a narcotizing dysfunction; we find ourselves perfectly

satisfied to be on the periphery of activity solely as observers.

The receiver of any communication, mass or otherwise, can be a creative perceiver. The receiver is a key person in communication in a "natural state." There are exceptions, but most individuals are capable of being creative receivers. The church's mission is to help receivers be true receivers, to see the world through God-colored glasses as John Wiley Nelson is fond of saying. Another challenge is to identify the different "publics" in our congregation.

One view of mass media's impact is that it reinforces and supports people's beliefs in what they already know. Put another way, mass media is a reflection of the mind-set of the people. By examining popular art forms we can be in a position to analyze how their messages are sympathetic or antithetical to the Christian message.

There is no need to denigrate popular culture. Its creation may be flawed, but if all creation can be seen as good and valuable, then it is also good. This particular stance may be reached more easily if there is reliance on an incarnational theology in which the God-Man lived out his life in this flawed creation and who came that all might have life and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10b)

Leonard Freeman, a popular culture observer and writer, has formulated the following "law" of popular culture: "Go where they are and not where you wish they were." His point is that it is important to identify different publics in congregations or other settings so that one is able to communicate on an effective basis with those

persons. Something more than light, fictional fun and games is going on in American popular culture. It is vital to any Christian concerned about the state of his or her own self-understanding, and concerned about the difficult task of helping others to find Jesus Christ.

There are at least two reasons why the study of popular culture is a significant responsibility for American Christians. First, we need to acknowledge that of God in all human persons; analysis of the same is true theology. Secondly, to meet God in our daily lives, we have to be willing to develop and grow in that one characteristic of Christian humanness to which Calvin in his *Institutes* pointed so adamantly, hearing. Our stance before God should be as listeners. We may be surprised to hear God speak to us through a film or a song, or a television program, but we should not be overly confident that we would not hear. Thirdly, we should share the interest of popular culture in communication. We know the message of the Gospel is important and that the issues touched by the Gospel are life and death issues. Do people not care about life and death? Surely they do. But they already in many cases have their questions answered. They are already operating on the basis of functioning beliefs about life and death, about good and evil, about who they are and the purpose of life. Every American, if unconsciously so, already has a belief system, simply from growing up in American society. Until they are able to challenge an unthinking acceptance of the American cultural value system, they will either not hear what we tell them about the Gospel, or they will translate what we say into their already functioning system of beliefs.

Although we may teach and preach the Gospel every week, we have only limited time, at most, when the game is played by “Christian rules.” The rest of the week, as people participate in popular culture entertainment, he alternate worship / liturgy of American cultural religion is reaffirming their cultural belief system with a repetitive force with which the Christian church cannot possibly compete. Popular culture is not nonsense simply because it is not considered to be art. Art challenges one's self-understanding toward self-criticism and insight, raising the possibility that one may choose new options. The primary function of the ritual of worship services is to affirm already held beliefs and values, not to suggest different options. Popular culture, besides being entertainment, is a dramatic ritual enactment of the dominant and subdominant American cultural belief system. It is where Americans worship, where they get their values reinforced, whether they know it or not. If we need to find out what Americans believe in their already active cultural religion, beliefs and values that are being dramatically paraded for us in popular culture media, then popular culture could be the key to more effective communication of the gospel in American society. We will not only know where our own and other persons' real values lie, but we will begin to get some idea of what modes of presentation and what kinds of illustrations might be most effective in getting across our message.

The tendency of American belief has always been to identify the source of evil as external to the community itself. This is true in the Western form, in film, country music, in popular magazines, in television, and even in detective fiction. Those persons identified as being responsible for the suffering of the community are depicted as not human in the same way as other good and innocent members of the

community, e.g., those we throw in jail and those we execute, are not members of our family/community. Our perceptions of other human beings are shaped more by American cultural values than by the God of grace whose forgiveness is manifest in the Christ of the Gospels; a Christ who died, between thieves, on a cross for sinners. We have an opportunity to raise critical questions about the necessary connection of justice and violence, and about the simplistic distinction between good (community) and bad (source of evil), with which we have all grown up.

Nelson, in *Your God Is Alive and Well and Living in Popular Culture,* asks us to remember two points about popular culture in America: first, resist the temptation to dismiss it as trivial. Aesthetically, it may be worthless, but it is far more informative about what we believe as Americans than "art" or "high culture" could ever be. Whether or not we approve of it, popular culture is not going to go away. Lamenting television as a wasteland and shunning its cliches and low humor for the programming of the Public Broadcasting System may be satisfying to your ego, but satisfying your ego may not be what Jesus had in mind. The same holds true for detective fiction, country music, and popular magazines, as well as for professional sports. Cliches like "trash" and "hillbilly" are forms of blindness that only build walls between all Americans. Popular culture is ritual drama; it is not everyday life. To ask the question, "What would I have done as a Christian if I lived in that town during those events?" is a misunderstanding of what is going on in film. The events may be taken from a true life story, but the impact of the film from a belief-systems point of view is the same, whether these events ever happened.

To study popular culture is not to force Christians to choose between being Christians and being Americans. We are both, as long as we live in this country and claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It will never be different, nor should it be. But being an American is a certain way of seeing and valuing life. At times it is essentially the same as that way of seeing and valuing life which we call Christian. We should recognize and point to these interfaces. But we should also be especially aware of those issues, such as the external nature of evil, on which these belief systems have strong disagreement. Pointing out these issues could help people see more clearly what is particularly distinctive about "being a Christian."

By being in touch with popular culture, it is possible to keep your finger on the pulse of American values and to continue to develop the sensitizing process. The value system is changing. If our ministry is going to be effective, we have to keep up on those particular issues within the American self-understanding to which the gospel could most easily speak. Recognizing the characteristics of the American belief system is only one-half of the task. There is a Christian value system, a Christian belief system as well. We should all have some idea what these premises are. Every Christian should be responsible for understanding and being able to articulate to others exactly what the Christian message is all about.

What is the Christian understanding of "community"? What is the Christian understanding of being individually "male" and "female"? Does the church see the "family/community" as a microcosm of the ideal community? Has the cultural identification of family so captured the church's own self-understanding that the

church finds it impossible to direct its ministry to the divorced, separated, or single-parent family? What is the Christian view of justice? Of righteousness? Of sin? Of the sources of good and evil? A study of the American cultural belief systems can stimulate interest in and concern for asking these theological questions.

Langdon Gilkey, in *Through the Tempest,* starts with two assumptions about theology of church. His first assumption is that it is God, through the life of his Son, Jesus the Christ, who creates the community of the church and so is present decisively for all persons and for all time. This is where the community of the Church finds its empowering center. It is also where individuals find their source and center as Christians. His second assumption is that God is manifested in the world and in culture as the source or ground of creativity, of judgment and of new possibility. These two modes of the divine presence, transcendent and immanent, while very different, are inseparable. They are deeply intertwined and interdependent. The theologian, therefore, has a dual role, one churchly and one public. Theology is, as Tillich exemplified in his sermon style, a compound of both the message and of the cultural situation; as such it needs both and it speaks to both. The major role of the theologian is clear: to produce relevant, contemporary, and appropriate constructive theology and to present it to the Christian community. Theology is a reflective task. Its goal is understanding through a valid theory shaped by Christian symbols of the nature and problems of human existence, personal and social, of the nature, activity, and promises of God, and thus of the hopes for personal and historical life. (38)

Studying theology and living out or doing theology are significantly different. Christian theology represents a Christian theory about the existence of God and attempts to understand our thinking about God, whereas Christian life or faith characterizes our existence the way we are and the way we act. Theology's primary goal is to help us understand what we believe, who we are, what our deepest problems are, who God is, and what we believe God has done to reconcile us with one another and with God and what we are to do in obedience and out of love. Theology presents an understanding, and an interpretation of the Gospel in relation to the human situation generally and to a cultural understanding of that situation. For centuries, theology, especially in its doctrinal manifestations, was viewed as absolute, changeless, and universal. Now, however, the prevalent view is that theological truths are not directly God-given but represents a human response to the divine presence. Thus, any given theology is relative and provisional as all our perceptions, apperceptions and analyses are. To believe that theological truths are absolute, changeless, and universal is to forget that theology engages the human intellect and that Christian theology is historically based, primarily upon its founder's life as recorded in the Gospels, themselves necessarily open to influence of historical setting and author's intent.

On the one hand, theology must express the original and central message of the faith and thus point us beyond our immediacy. On the other hand, it must bring that message of God's presence in Jesus Christ to us, and express that message in a form intelligible, credible, and relevant to us in the form of modern concepts, categories, standards, and aims. The fundamental task of theology, therefore, is that of revision

of the mode of presentation and the primary task of the theologian is the revision of the Christian message in contemporary terms, a message addressed primarily to the community of the Church which seeks to live by that message. In order to operate in that sphere, a theologian must know everything s/he can about the present culture. Culture itself is not separate from the religious substance of the culture, but it is different and there is a certain spiritual facet of a culture's life which the theologian must discern. The life of any culture is made up of religious, intellectual aesthetic, scientific, economic, political, and social. It is "permeated by a matrix of crucial symbols drawn from hopes and aims of science, technology, democracy, and capitalism," which altogether make up what we call "the American way of life." (Gilkey 47) It is to the secular mythology that theological self-understanding must be continually related.

Gilkey goes on to explore how symbols hold meaning for us. He quotes Raimundo Panikkar: "Liturgy must express the sacred quality of the secular if it is to be meaningful." (49) The sacred and the secular, separate as they might seem, live in and through the same mystery of divine communication, of reality and power transmitted through symbols. Basic social symbols are symbols shared by a society that structures its life-world upon them. These symbols may be political, economic, social, or individual in content. The set of interrelated symbols defines symbolically a community's total way of life. In our case, the democratic, bourgeois, affluent, materialistic, moralistic, semi-Christian society in which one is involved in incarnating is something called the American way of life. Examples are individual rights, free speech, equality before the law, consent of the governed, emphasis on

personal integrity. These reflective, national, or notional, symbols form the basis for such theoretical disciplines as political, economic, and social theory and ethics. But they can also be incarnated into more concrete, earthly, material symbols such as ethnic peculiarities, historical events, geographical references, all of which culminate in such familiar and potent symbols as the Cadillac, the milkshake, the busy executive, the accomplished and sunny young mother.

One thing is immediately clear from this brief description of the sociology of Americanism: even the most secular society lives by its fundamental symbols. (Gilkey 50) Its institutions as systems of shared meanings and expectations are structured by these symbols. The aims of our lives are symbolically determined. As in religious societies of old, we, in a consumer culture, still live in and through the unseen, an unseen that comes to us in symbolic forms. A whole way of being is expressed in the symbols common to American life. We Americans do not make these symbols so much as they make us: our expectancies, goals, hopes, and fears are determined by them and correspondingly, our most fundamental moves in life, voluntary and involuntary, are shaped by these symbols. They make us who we are. They structure a world in which we find a place and they point out to us the task that is ours, whether making money, being a distinguished scientist, or becoming a Hollywood star, or any other aspiration. According to these norms we are told what humans really are and what fulfills our humanity. They are for us, then, definitive in two senses. They guide and shape our cognitive and moral judgments, and they determine the one life we have, its shape, its destiny, its warp and woof.

Gilkey cites Tillich's wisdom on this front: "Culture and culture symbols do mediate an ultimate concern and possess a religious substance; and the problem of the relation of cultural symbols to Christian symbols has been, and is, a crucial issue for theology and liturgy alike." When religious symbols are completely out of touch with the ordinary shared experience of the community, they tend to weaken in intrinsic power and validity and lose their function and role. At the same time, religious symbols can lose their integrity if they are easily identified with the social symbols that structure the contemporary world. We need to revitalize our theological symbols by putting into Christian form the symbolic structures of a secular society which are congruent and compatible with a Christian faith. The way to do this is to re-awaken through intentional reflection our awareness of ultimate concerns that ground, permeate, and guide our entire life in and out of the Church, and to relate to that ever present desire for connection with Tillich's "Ground of Being," especially through powerful Christian symbols and icons, there for the asking. (Gilkey 54)

Gilkey attempts to develop a sacramental theory of religious symbolism, namely, one in which the divine is mediated to us through its presence within the finite. A widening of the scope and range of liturgy and sacramental action is not a matter of relinquishing this sacramental relation to rebirth in Christ. The tie with special revelation, with Christology, redemptive grace, and ecclesiology, represents that continuity with tradition which we lose at our peril. It is up to us to reduce the gap between the two somewhat disparate symbolic areas of Church and state while being open to our true humanity and responsibility in our human relationships, vocations,

and death as expressions of the mode of perfectedness. Entrance into the center of the secular life-world is necessary for re-invigoration as crucial to reassessment and reshaping of the truly catholic tradition and liturgy in secular America. (65)

Is there a place for evangelism in all of this? Bishop John Spong in “Evangelism : When Certainty is an Illusion” speaks of honest evangelism, calling for the church to follow these approaches:

> 1. To help people in the art and practice of prayer but not by denying the reality of the world we live in.
>
> 2. To help in the task of community building, so that others will be attracted to the quality of love, acceptance, forgiveness, and inclusiveness.
>
> 3. To be teaching centers where faith and tradition can be explored, where cliches such as "the Bible says," or "the church teaches," will not stifle the questioning process.
>
> 4. To bring the prophetic word to the public sector as well. To judge the patterns of oppression based on strength or race or sex or tradition. (11-16)

For Bishop Spong, "A church grows in worthwhile ways by trying to grow. Church growth, if it is to have integrity, must be a by-product when the church is true to its deepest calling, to be the body through which the infinite mystery of God is

confronted and all life is freed from bondage and expanded to its fullness. It must be achieved in the willingness to live in risky vulnerability without defense or security... . Evangelism in the modern world might be done with integrity with effectiveness and above all, without planning to do Evangelism." (11)

Matthew Fox, in his *Religion USA*, concludes that religion is, or can be, anywhere and everywhere in a culture, either positively or negatively. He believes that living religion has revealed itself under the heading of a response to life's deepest felt needs. Three roles that true religion plays are prayer, prophecy, and service. A living religion says "yes" to creation. A dying religion cuts itself off from prayer, prophecy, or service. There exist also ideological quasi-religions such as nationalism. Fox cites specifically the view in this nation, especially prevalent in the 1950's, that the United States is the best of all possible states. Anti-communism is another dying religion which, in the 1950's, was much in ascendence and is still, from time to time, somehow cited if not by name by etiological reference.
Another dying religion that Fox describes is "Goodism." This theory holds that man is good and all that we need to do is to put our confidence in him and his production and all will be well.

Another dying religion for Fox is " Philanthropy," which he calls a soul-saving gratification, a sort of prayer or contentment with one's self and one's noble values. For Fox, to give money away without first considering matters of justice is neither charity or justice. "Consumption" is another dying religion, at least according to Fox. Consumption is seen for many as a promise for human happiness. Again and again

a consumer is approached as the true believer who is offered all sorts of revelation and salvation by way of goods that he can purchase and the effects of those goods on his life. “Individual salvation” is another dying religion that Fox claims is far-reaching in our society. He calls it dying and false because it ignores both service and prophecy, which can only be entered into by way of community. Its sole god, which is oneself, is preached in this purest of all dying religious beliefs, according to Fox. "Any ‘ism’ at all that replaces the search for justice and for the presence of evil is a dying religion by whatever other title it claims status." (416) For Fox, an incontrovertible sign of dying religion is that which masks itself as ideology. For him, a living religion is called upon to create freedom by unmasking and destroying idols and ideologies.

Where is living religion for Fox? For him it is everywhere. Everywhere where men and women live authentically, where the mystery of life as a gift and the mystery of evil and death are allowed their priority in shaping human values, wherever human sharing and community and celebration and struggle for justice are engaged in, and where freedom is real in that an individual will sacrifice for it.

There is in life a supreme concern and discipline where every interest meets every other and all are allotted their due importance in the total design of life. That supreme discipline, according to Fox, is religion. At the same time, guidance by religion will not carry any arbitrary authority of any one church. It will carry only the authority of truth. This truth is found in the spirit and teaching of its founder, not in theological or doctrinal suppositions. A new and authentic world of religion will

embrace the old truth but find new authentication in its irresistible ideas especially those of social justice. Fox sees the role of religion as both to demand from commerce adherence to the spirit of humane justice, and also to supply for commerce the spirit of creative vigor. This is performed not only by pronouncement about morals, but by authentic public witness. (102) The public cult of religion can celebrate the works of nature, the works of God, and the works of human beings. That type of celebration imparts to individuals a desire for creative and fruitful living in private and public arenas. This is the way in which persons become partners with one another, with nature and with God in the works of a creative providence.

Ogden Vogt, in his 1951 work on *Cult and Culture*, claimed that the chief failure of Protestantism is in the aesthetic realm. " The ordinary Protestant church is starved for beauty. It has not utilized the glorious voices of the arts for its communication, it has not cultivated the direct apprehensions of the world that lie in the paths of aesthetic adventure. The offices of its sacraments are thin and its ceremonies unimaginative. Its lectionary has not yet made adequate use of the spiritual treasures to be found in the literatures of disparate cultures. Despite the availability of resources during the last three decades, its services of worship are mostly poor in liturgical materials and careless in form. Some new service books are good collections of old materials but do not convey the powerful ideas of modern philosophy or modern ethics. Protestantism has not taken aesthetics seriously. It has not cultivated the taste for the beautiful. It still needs to be wakened to the untold

goods in the human thirst for beauty and in apprehensions of the infinitely beautiful world about us." (199)

Every culture has an ethic, a system of codes and conduct, customary ways of practical living, a list of taboos and obligations. Its principles correspond with its beliefs. Beliefs and principles are derived from experience and judgments often subconscious. Moral principles are inculcated by the cult. It is the cult which gives them both definition and social force. By the awesome action of the cult, the sense of obligation is lodged deeply within the individual consciousness. The celebrations of the cult stir the emotions of acceptance and loyalty. (Vogt 239)

Vogt closes his study of the cult by citing Daniel Day Williams, philosopher and theologian, who emphasizes a morality derived from conceptions of unity. "If we cannot show the unity of God, then we have no saving truth; for the problem of life is to find that unity and wholeness in the nature of things to which we can give ourselves in single-minded devotion."(245)

The formal cause of Narcissus' death was addiction to the adoration of his own image. The efficient cause was exhaustion. Narcissus was punished for being soul-less, i.e., dead to his humanity with all its limitations. Paul Pruyser in a lecture "On Narcissism" sees narcissistic motives in historical religiosity on the mass level demonstrated by preoccupation with the indestructibility of souls or personalities. The following summarizes his schema of theological concepts adulterated by narcissistic popular beliefs, (not always decried by organized religion):

1. Salvation: salvation is narcissistic when it takes the form of a proprietary concern over one's soul to the utter neglect of redemption of the community, the nation, or the world at large.

2. Providence: when sentimentalized, the self is invulnerable under some sort of preferential divine preference and thus one wallows in narcissistic bliss.

3. Election: a sort of merit expressed in contractual terms; prayers become negotiations with the Creator.

4. Sin: taking pleasure in being the greatest of all sinners and the sole and ultimate judge of one's own life.

The narcissistic trends in modern society can be seen in the rise of self-centeredness and in the claim to certain entitlements. The narcissistic features in current religious beliefs and practices can be seen in the particularly individualistic forms of instant mysticism, sometimes induced by medication or drugs. We also see certain collective disinhibitions characterized by certain states of ecstasy and engendered by group action, whether in the context of an evangelistic revival or in a charismatic community's vulnerability to ecstatic types of response. We can also see examples of obtrusive narcissism in the self-styled leaders of new movements which are more often than not manipulative and self serving, such as the cults led by Jim Jones and David Koresh.

Narcissism is not a trait that is limited to ordinary persons. In John Browning's poem "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" (1845), the vanity or ecclesiastical narcissism of the prelate is apparent. His excellency is preoccupied with the grandeur of his final resting compared to that of another earthly rival.

In *The Frenzy of Renown*, Leo Braudy refers to Bruce Barton's novel *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925) whose purpose it was, according to Braudy, to make business the central calling of American life. Barton argued that "the businessman was a service-oriented idealist whose ultimate model was 'the founder of modern business,' Jesus of Nazareth." In Braudy's analysis, "Barton's image of Jesus the businessman attempted to provide an inner spiritual armature for a material surface that was often indistinguishable from ordinary greed. In a world of advertising and consumption, he proposed a visionary commerce to reconcile the need to sell the self with the self-disgust that such selling had to be done." (514) Barton's connection with the advertising industry is legendary. He was responsible for shaping the corporate culture of companies like GM and GE and was determined to demonstrate through his work that in addition to great wealth and stability that they had a soul. (Marchand 162)

* * *

As interesting a phenomenon as popular culture may be, what, if anything, does it

have to do with the church and its mission? According to John Macquarrie, in a lecture delivered at Oxford University, culture, along with experience, revelation, scripture, tradition and reason, is one of the formative factors which together provide the source of Christian theological enterprise and "seeks to think of the church's faith as a coherent whole. It aims not only at showing the internal coherence of the Christian faith, but also at exhibiting the coherence of this faith with the many other beliefs and attitudes to which we are committed in the modern world."

Popular culture and its pervasive values have entered the pattern of modern life in such a way that even if we do not directly participate in one form or another, its several expressions have informed our attitudes, expectations, and belief system. Except perhaps for those in cloistered communities, no one is exempt from the constant bombardment of, say, advertising and its promises of youth, beauty and personal fulfillment. We must be clear about the salvation alternatives presented by the Church vis-a-vis Popular Culture. To understand better and to de- and re-mythologize the tenets identifiable in popular culture's various expressions is not a frivolous undertaking for those of us responsible for communicating the Gospel to this and future generations in a meaningful and effective fashion.

I do not mean to suggest that we adapt either the formularies or the value system of popular culture in our interpretation of the Gospel, but rather take seriously the context in which most of our people live the vast majority of their lives and not underestimate its cumulative power. The contemporary theologian, Karl Rahner, concluded that all life is the subject matter for theological reflection. McLuhan's

observation that the “medium is the massage”is especially apt with regard to the expressions of popular culture. The medium of television is a prime example. There is probably no other medium which influences the lives of our people to such a degree. Exposure begins at an early age, as a seemingly innocuous background to family life. In many households there is a television set placed to "preside over" every human activity imaginable -- even the bedroom formerly associated with the principle of privacy. Even there, the sitcom, news broadcasts, court TV, and the late show intrude. For many, their daily schedule is regulated by one offering or another, interspersed with advertisements promising "the better life." The product is not always "secular," for that matter. Televangelists of one brand or another offer their own brand of instantaneous salvation. Television, as in most other forms of popular culture, is a one-way street in terms of communication. It seldom calls for reflection and response, but rather incorporates the viewer into a preordained world of make-believe.

A prime example of this fantasy world is that of the "soaps," prefigured in the radio soap operas of the 1940s. The world of television soaps is more invasive than that of audio, adding as they do fixed images rather than allowing the imagination of the responder to elicit comparatively unique images. And if a fan of the medium should miss an episode or two, most newspapers, in the U.S. at least, provide a synopsis of the most watched series, a bit redundant since even several weeks' worth of missed viewing would scarcely make a difference in a plot so essentially fixed, and scarcely distinguishable from others. The viewer is seduced into a land of artificial intimacy, in which details of life experience, especially sex and interpersonal confrontation,

are presented in a romanticized version, the resolution of which lies in the hands of some unseen manipulator. The life issues are basically not so different from those which the viewers face, if in a less glamorous setting. This may be the reason why so many initially find this medium compelling. Their viewing loyalty may be based on the easy-resolution factor in which reflection and personal responsibility of the characters are inconsequential. This is the real life hope for the viewer, that the angst associated with living an authentic life can be overcome by the power of something other than their own growth in self-consciousness and personal responsibility. The world of the "soaps" is indeed one of make-believe where "blessed assurance" is of the sort that was depicted in *The Wizard of Oz*, whose "God" is the "God of the Gaps," so to speak, a behind-the-scenes manipulator and one who is sought only *in extremis* and one who can be characterized as the ultimate "Mr. Fix-It," requiring nothing on the recipient's part. This mythological construct is one which those who would attempt to convey the Christian message need to comprehend, and speak to it and from it, if only obliquely.

There are signs among inveterate consumers of popular culture that God and God's power is evaluated on the ability of God to "deliver the goods," to relieve pain, or to provide a definitive sign. Not to disparage the possibility of spontaneous physical healing (I, myself, have seen examples in hospital ministry), there lives within popular lore certain beliefs associated with particular healers. Indeed, one television evangelist has urged viewers to lay their hands on the receiver to be healed, along with the requisite appeal for funds. The recent phenomenon of angelology (with no acknowledgment of St. Paul's warning in Chapter 5 of Galatians) is another example

of the phenomenon of misinterpreting the character of God by expecting God to respond directly through special agents to the demands of the supplicant. Another phenomenon which has crept into popular lore often among church-going people lies in Christian belief in reincarnation. In this cosmology, certain figures of the past provide a mediator role, primarily to assist the "supplicant" with an understanding of her role and significance in history. The seeker is assisted in identifying a "channel" by an intermediary who might be compared with a spiritual director in more orthodox terms, or a shaman in Eastern religions. The entire effort represents a search for significance and meaning in an existence characterized by meaninglessness.

Where is the Church in this interpretation of life as apparently meaningless? We need not look far for examples in the Christian tradition of those who, in the face of repression, oppression, and even rejection, have found meaning in existence. We need to look no further than Him who we claim to be Lord and Savior, Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps too often we proclaim him "Lord and Savior" stressing his divine nature to the detriment of declaring his humanity as Jesus of Nazareth who was born, lived as one of us, and suffered and died a real death. The pathos of Jesus the man is too often neglected. As John Macquarrie said in one of his lectures, Jesus' ministry was not an idyllic one. Nor is it necessary to interpret his death on the cross as some sort of preordained event in which Jesus served as a pawn, the price to be paid for the salvation of humankind. If we mean to subscribe to the Chalcedonian formula of "true God and true man," Jesus was in every way, like us. Macquarrie urges us to consider the psychic agency of Jesus in Gethsamane rather than focusing

on Golgotha. "The Cross" need not be taken as literally as we might be wont to do. Beyond strictly theological considerations, it would seem that more people would easily identify with the angst of Jesus in the garden than his death on the cross. Even Jesus' carrying the cross, as liturgically honored on Good Friday, can be sentimentalized by falling into the docetic trap of reducing his suffering to that experienced by someone less than truly human, more God-man than man-God, thus relegating his sacrifice to a level alien to real human beings. Any conclusions to such inquiries such as "What did Jesus know? And when did he know it?" are, at best, provisional and should be acknowledged as such.

Indeed, Jesus' struggle to make the ultimate ethical decision *for* life (*all* life) strains our credulity, our 20th-century mind set, since only in "losing" his life did he "find" it. Is it possible that Jesus was a utilitarian? Could He be anything else? Did he not challenge again and again, as recorded in the Gospels, the constraints of the then-pervasive deontological ethic of the Pharisees and Sadducees? Picking grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12,1), challenging the money-lenders in the Temple (Matt. 21:12), justifying healing on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:10-12), teaching in the Temple (Mk. 1:21-22), are just a few examples of Jesus' willingness to challenge the duty-driven ethic of those who held to the *status quo*, those who would uphold an assumed orthodoxy. Do we not have in Jesus of Nazareth an exemplar of one willing to take the risk of ultimate rejection by those who would insist unto death the unassailability of the Law as heretofore interpreted? He was, we claim, willing to lay down his life so that others “might live and live more abundantly.” His ministry and teachings altogether point to a desire that *all* persons should share in the benefits of his life,

which in essence is to bring the message of acceptance into God's Kingdom here and now and in what we have come to know as heaven or the life beyond both realized and eschatological happiness, the "already" and the "not yet."

Do we not owe it to the receivers of the Gospel message in our day to speak first, and often, of Jesus' ethic of love? Too frequently this primary message is paradoxically submerged in the mistaken presumption that Jesus came to interpret the Law rather than to fulfill it. Too much is made of the metaphor of Jesus as a "new Moses" whose legacy was a new rule book. Television evangelists and other adherents of the "look it up in the Good Book" school hold great appeal in a culture oriented to self-help manuals and a "fix-it" mentality. Jesus' message is simple but not simplistic. His teachings, especially those presented in parables, are pointers to the truth. His responses to direct questions were more often than not enigmatic, challenging the hearer to find the truth within it.

The basic human desire to find meaning in existence and a modicum of peace in it is no less present in our day than it was millennia ago. Two significant factors, however, have radically influenced how one seeks after well-being in our day. They are: the influence of humanism, and the influence of the market place, to use Sister Marie Henry's terminology in a lecture at Oxford University in 1996.

The humanists of the fifteenth century would no doubt be shocked that the term "humanism" has not only survived but that save in learned circles is preceded by the term “secular.” "Secular humanism," when invoked by a fundamentalist, is the

embodiment of evil, a necessarily depraved orientation to life. It is the equivalent of a battle cry in a holy war. If, as most original eminent humanists intended, the well-being of the individual was the focus of concern, the addition of "secular" would seem to be redundant. Concern for ethical living as modeled in the teachings of Jesus and desire for the elimination of religious superstition through the use of reason leading to peaceful co-existence and the empowerment of society in general are in themselves temporal concerns. Should a concern for the temporal necessarily eliminate concern for the eternal? It would seem that what the humanists of the Renaissance and even some contemporary ones seek is a balance between the temporal and the eternal.

One is not necessarily obligated to "throw the baby out with the bath water," as so many critics seem to imply. To dismiss by a derogatory label those who seek their own well-being or that of society does not, I would claim, reflect the mission to which Jesus calls us, which is above all an inclusionary one. The Kingdom of God to which he pointed was not limited to the eternal. Mustard seeds and yeast have everything to do with the temporal. Analogies they may be, but these and bread and wine have to do with the here and now. While pointing to the eternal, the temporal is all we know in this life and hopefully momentarily envision the beatific from time to time.

We have identified some characteristics associated with popular culture art forms, their pervasiveness in contemporary culture, and have inferred the power of their message. We have yet to present a thesis which would account for their

extraordinary influence upon the American psyche in the late twentieth century. My proposition is this: that the purveyors of popular art forms make use of images and icons which subliminally tap into the unconscious, evoking a positive response to the possibility or promise of transcendence. These images and icons are little different from those which the church made use of in the development of church architecture, ritual, and ceremonial accoutrements. Only the setting has changed. The seductiveness of the image or icon remains the same. The most successful advertisements appear to be those that make use of those symbols and icons which are part of the "collective unconscious," to put it in Jungian terms. I do not believe we need make moral judgments about the persons engaged in advertising or the commercial worlds of popular culture. Our focus as theologians should be on analyzing the form the message takes, on identifying the archetypes within, and determining as best we can the inner *meaning* conveyed. Using this methodology, we can learn at first-hand what it is that motivates our constituents to respond to the symbolic images presented in advertising and other popular art forms. We who claim the skill of hermeneutics need not rely totally upon sociologists and other experts in allied fields to interpret contemporary culture. In this venture, we might also become reacquainted with the iconography of the church, once the primary means of communicating the essentials of the faith in pre-literate times.

As we conclude this overview of popular culture in general and McDonalds in particular, the inquiry remains: What in all of this is of value to the church? I would like to reiterate my position with regard to popular culture and its forms: There is little value in either deprecating or praising the phenomenon in general ; the value

for the church is that church leaders understand the phenomenon so that we are better able to communicate *our* message of the *real* Good News to our people everywhere, surrounded as they are by competing messages, offering a salvation of sorts even if ephemeral in nature.

The church need not feel victimized by popular culture phenomena. When we note how McDonalds has prospered throughout the planet, we have only to consider the reasons for such success. We should not limit ourselves to considering its financial success but its social implications as well. McDonalds has provided, through the promotion of its peculiar creedal formulas, liturgical format, and ritualistic behaviors, that which every person basically seeks, respite from the chaotic and the insecure experience of living, making some sense of life and to find meaning in it. I am not suggesting that *real* meaning, in the strict sense of the spiritual, is to be found in the McDonalds experience, but that we in the church have for too long underestimated the power of icon and symbol which is our very heritage, those symbols which *point to* the truths which we hope to inculcate. As John Macquarrie said in a lecture at Oxford University: "We should be far from despising symbols for they have an indispensable part to play in our knowing, providing the only way in which we can attain insight into and talk about Being." We need to return to the sources (myth, analogical imagery, etc.) and take notice of our rich heritage of art (architecture, stained glass windows, etc.) in order to transmit in as powerful way as possible the revelation given in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

I suggest that we can make one of three choices: one, to dismiss the phenomenon

of popular culture out of hand as not worthwhile; two, to see it as the enemy; and, three, to consider it as an opportunity to see more clearly the prevailing culture and how it affects the populace. I would claim that we have the most to gain from the last choice. We are not thereby obligated to embrace the values of popular culture, but rather to distinguish them from and contrast them with Christian values. Condemnation is easier than investigation. We who would live by the ethic of love, as personified in the life of Jesus Christ, owe it to the church and to our generation to *do* the hard work of theology. If theology is to be intelligible, it has to use the language of the culture within which it is undertaken. If we as theologians are serious about our role as co-creators in the transformation of individuals and society, we need to learn the language of the context in which we live and work without being seduced by their implicit values. We need to look no further than Jesus' sayings and parables to remark his use of symbol and imagery in terms immediately understandable to his hearers. If a dozen or so of his disciples were able to communicate to others in a living language a message of hope so powerful as to forever transform people's lives two millennia ago, how much more we who have made public our commitment and who have at our disposal skills of hermeneutics, are obligated to transform as we are able the lives of our contemporaries in this corner of God's Kingdom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Belasco, Warren J. "The Public Arts" The Journal of American Culture – Volume 2, No. 3 Fall – 1979

Bigsby, C.W.E. "The Politics of Popular Culture" Approaches to Popular Culture, Edited by C.W.E. Bigsby Bowling Green Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio - 1976

Boyd, Malcolm. Crisis in Communication: A Christian Examination of the Mass Media. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957.

Breen, T.H. "The Pleasures of the Imagination" New York Times Book Review, 10/26/97

Brill, Earl H. The Future of the American Past. New York: The Seabury Press, 1974.

Brill, Earl H. "Development of Popular Culture" Unpublished Notes

Browne, Ray B. and Larry N. Landrum and William K. Bottorff, ed. Challenging American Culture. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular

Press, 1970.

Browne, Ray B. "Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture" Bowling Green Popular Press, 1980

Burton, Laurel "Salvation " (Unpublished Manuscript)

Campbell, Bruce "Putting Moral Handles on Media Matters" Trinity News, Fall, 1994, Pp. 40-42

Casty, Alan. Mass Media and Mass Man. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968.

Coad, Bruce E. "Heroes of Popular Culture", Ed. Browne, Fishwick, & Marsden Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green, OH - 1972

Coles, Robert. Harvard Diary: Reflections on the Sacred and the Secular. New York: Crossroad, 1988.

Cox, Harvey "The Seduction of the Spirit: The Use and Misuse of People's Religion" Simon and Schuster 1973

Cripps, Thomas "The Folklore of Industrial Man" TheWilson Quarterly,

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Wash, D.C. - 1978

Cummings, Ronald. "Heroes of Popular Culture", Ed. Browne, Fishwick & Marsden Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, Bowling Green,OH- 1972

Curtis, Gregory, "Leave Ozzie and Harriet Alone" The New York Times Magazine, January 19, 1997

DeWitt, Karen, "Never Too Young to be Perfect" New York Times op ed.

de Waal Malefijt, Annemarie "Religion and Culture: An Introduction to Anthropology of Religion" The McMillan Company, New York, 1968

Douglas, Ann. The Feminization of American Culture. New York: Avon Books, 1977.

Drucker, Stephen, "Who is the Best Restaurateur in America" New York Times Magazine, March 10, 1996

Dunlop, Donald Journal of Popular Culture Volume 9, No. 2, Fall 1975

Eliade, Mircea. The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion. New

York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1959.

Eliade, Mircen. Symbolism, the Sacred & the Arts. Ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. New York: Continuum, 1992.

Eliade, Mircen. "Symbolism, the Sacred & the Arts" Crossroad, New York, 1986

Esslin ,Martin,"Aristotle and the Advertisers: The Television Commercial Considered as a Form of Drama" The Kenyon Review

Evans, David, "God is My Quarterback: Theology and Football in America" Theology Today, Vol. 27, October 1971 (Pages 309-320)

Farb, Peter and George Armelagos. Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating. New York: Pocket Books, 1980.

Fiedler, Leslie. Tyranny of the Normal: Essays on Bioethics, Theology & Myth. Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1996.

Fishwick, Marshall W. Great Awakenings: Popular Religion and Popular Culture. New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995.

Fishwick, Marshall "Heroic Style in America" Heroes of Popular Culture, Ed.

Browne, Fishwick, and Marsden Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio - 1972

Fishwick, Marshall "Ronald McDonald" The Journal of American Culture, Vol. 1, Summer 1978, No. 2 Pages 336 - 471

Fletcher, Joseph. Situation Ethics: The New Morality. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966.

Fore, William F. "Myth-Makers: Gospel, Culture, and the Media" Friendship Press, 1994

Fowles,Jib "Advertising and Popular Culture" Sage Publications, London 1996

Fox, Matthew. On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear: Spirituality American Style. New York: Paulist Press, 1976.

Fox, Matthew. Religion USA: Religion and Culture by Way of Time Magazine. Dubuque: Listening Press, 1971.

Fox, Matthew Interview by the Author in 1970's Unpublished

Galanoy, Terry. Down the Tube. New York: Pinnacle Books, 1970.

Galloway, John T. The Gospel According to Superman. Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1973.

Gilkey, Langdon. Through the Tempest: Theological Voyage in a Pluralistic Culture. Minneapolis: Forbes Press, 1991.

Goethals, Gregor T. The TV Ritual: Worship at the Video Altar. Boston: Beacon Press, 1981.

Goffman, Erving. Gender Advertisements. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979.

Goffman, Erving. Gender Advertisements. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA

Grossberg, Lawrence and Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, ed. Cultural Studies. New York: Routledge, 1992.

H. Richard Niebuhr. Christ and Culture. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1951.

Hall, Edward T. Beyond Culture. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1977.

Hall, Gregory "The Psychology of Fast Food Happiness"
Journal of American Culture, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1978

Hammel, William M., ed. The Popular Arts in America. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972.

Hayakawa ,S. I. "Language in Thought and Action - Second Edition"
Harcourt, Brace and World, New York - 1964, Page 269

Hayakawa ,S. I. "Popular Songs Versus the Facts of Life"
ETC., Vol. 12 (1955), Pp. 83-95

Hays, Edward. Secular Sanctity. Leavenworth: Forest of Peace Books, Inc., 1984.

Hudson, Winthrop S. Religion in America. New York: Charles Scribiner's Son's, 1981.

Hughes, Robert. American Visions. Special Issue of Time, Inc., 1997.

Jacobs, Norman, ed. Culture for the Millions? Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1961.

James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience. New York: New

American Library, 1958.

Jewet, Robert "Religious Studies and Popular Culture" Journal of Popular Culture Volume 9, No. 2, Fall 1975

Kammen, Michael. People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Keck, Leander E. The Church Confident. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Key,Wilson Bryan "Subliminal Seduction"

King ,Margaret J. "Empires of Popular Culture: McDonald's and Disney" Journal of American Culture, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1978

Kottak ,Conrad P. "Rituals at McDonald's" Journal of American Culture, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1978

Kramer, Hilton "Back to Beaubourg: A Modern Exposition Palace"

Kroc, Ray. Grinding It Out: The Making of McDonald's. New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1977.

Lasch, Christopher. The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978.

Landler, Mark "Hong Kong Journal: McDonald's is in the Dog House (Snoopy Did It)" New York Times, New York City, October 9, 1998 (Page A4)

Lipset, Seymour Martin. American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996.

Littell, Joseph Fletcher. Coping with the Mass Media. Evanston: McDougal Littell & Company, 1972.

Lohof, Bruce A. "Hamburger Stand: Industrialization and the American Fast Food Phenomenon" The Journal of American Culture - Volume 2, No. 3 Fall - 197 -- Pages 519 - 533

Love, John F. McDonald's: Behind the Arches. New York: Bantam Books, 1995.

MacFadden ,Fred "The Pop Pantheon" Heroes of Popular Culture, Edited by Browne, Fishwick, and Marsden Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio - 1972

MacDonald, Dwight "Mass Culture" Diogenes, No. 3, Summer 1953, Pp. 1-17

MacDonald, Dwight "A Theory of Math Culture"

Martin, Douglas "Superman Superseded by a Capeless Wonder"
The New York Times, Sunday, January 12, 1997

Marty, Martin. The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969. Pages 98,101,104,107,108,111

McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. New York: New American Library, 1964.

Moore, Sally F. and Barbara G. Myerhoff, ed. Secular Ritual. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, Assen, 1977.

Mulder, John M. and John F. Wilson. Religion in American History: Interpretive Essays. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978.

Myers, Kenneth A. All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians & Popular Culture. Westchester: Crossway Books, 1989.

Nachbar, Jack and John L. Wright, ed. The Popular Culture Reader. Bowling

Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1977.

Nash, Eric P. "The Names Came From Earth" The New York Times Sunday, January 26, 1997

Neill, Stephen. A History of Christian Missions. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Nelson, John Wiley "Your God is Alive and Well and Appearing in Popular Culture" The Westminster Press 1976

Niebuhr, H. Richard. The Kingdom of God in America. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1937.

Nix, Elizabeth. Why Don't You .... New York: Cosmopolitan Books, 1996.

Nye, Russel B., ed. New Dimensions in Popular Culture. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972.

Nye, Russel. The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America. New York: The Dial Press, 1970.

Nye, Russel "Notes on a Rationale for Popular Culture" Popular Culture Association, Michigan State University

Oglivy, David "Oglivy on Advertising" Crown Publishers, Inc.

Orr, David Gerald "The Ethnography of Big Mac" Journal of American Culture, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1978

Packard, Vance. The Status Seekers. New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1962.

Pruyser, Paul "Narcissism - Meninger Foundation" Lecture, Unpublished Manuscript, Ann Arbor 1981

Read, Herbert. To Hell with Culture. New York: Schocken Books, 1964.

George Ritzer "The McDonaldization Process" Sage Publications, California, 1998

Riesman, David and Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney. The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1953.

Robinson, John A.T. Honest to God. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963.

Rohter, Larry "A Legend Grows and So Does an Industry"
The New York Times, Sunday, January 12, 1997

Rubin, Charles J., David Robert, John Farago and Rick Stark. Junk Food. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1980.

Schillebeeckx Edward. On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987.

Schillebeeckx Edward. The Mission of the Church. New York: The Seabury Press, 1973.

Schaeffer, Pamela "McGwire's Blast Brings Redemption"
National Catholic Reporter 1998 (Pages 3&4)

Schroeder, Fred E.H. Outlaw Aesthetics: Arts and the Public Mind. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1977.

Seldes, Gilbert "The Public Arts"
Simon and Schuster New York - 1956

Smith, Linda C, "Cosmo Self Observations"

Smith, Linda C. "Liturgy"

Smith, Linda C, ""Popular Culture"

Smith, Linda C " Popular Culture and the Patient"

Smith, Linda C. "Seminar on Religion and Popular Culture"
College of Preachers Washington, D.C. 1978

Smith, Linda C "Theology and Popular Culture" Post Oxford Response Paper.

Sobel, Robert "News Manipulation"
T.V. Book

Spong ,John Shelby "Evangelism When Certainty is an Illusion"
The Christian Century, January 6-13, 1982, Pp. 11-16

Steinberg, Shirley R. and Kincheloe, Joe L., Editors
"Kinder-Culture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood"

Steele, Michael R. "What Can We Learn From Ronald?" Journal of American
Culture, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1978

Stentzel ,Jim "Seeing the World Through Christ and Cronkite"
Sojourners, September 1978

Taden, William E. "Religious Worlds"
Beacon Press, Boston, 1988

Trimmer, Joseph F. "Enter the Wizard" Journal of American Culture, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1978 Page 348

Unknown, "Cathedral Chronicle" September 1981

Unknown, "Dominus al Dente, or: When Jesus Appears in the Pasta"

Unknown, "Popular Music" Letter to the Editor Wall Street Journal, 6/30/88

Vogt, V. Ogden. Cult and Culture: A Study of Relgion and American Culture. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951.

Wolf, Naomi. The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991.

Wolniewicz, Richard Journal of Popular Culture, 11:4, Spring 1978, Pages 877 - 894

Zepp, Jr. Ira G. "The New Religious Image of Urban America" Christian Classics, Inc. West Minster, Maryland - 1986