



Electronic Media, Popular Culture and Spirituality



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Part One: What forms and values does the electronic media attribute to a sense of the religious or spiritual, a sense of "The Other"? In what way does electronic media affect how people access a sense of the spiritual in contemporary popular culture?

This is my church. This is where I heal my hurts... For tonight, God is a DJ. (*Faithless*)¹

No this is not an introduction to an MYF dance party. It is the title line of a popular song which may instil in the hearts of good Christians a sense of religious panic over its youth. The Church is diminishing in numbers, and growing old, falling into the generation gap between old and young in Australian society.

In this section of the paper I wish to explore the nature of the generation gap currently setting youth culture apart from that of their elders in the nineteen-nineties, using the notion of Postmodernism as a vehicle. Then I wish to give a study of how the rise of the electronic media has played a part in the creation of this cultural gap. Finally, I wish to argue for how this affects how the Christian churches communicate faith to young people of the electronic age.

What is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism is a discipline by which late twentieth century culture has been studied and defined, seen as a new paradigm of society after the demise of the modern era. Postmodernism existed firstly as a literary and artistic movement with particular characteristics. However in the nineteen-nineties it may be explained that Postmodernism has become the defining word for popular culture, specifically youth culture.

The first of these characteristics is the notion of "the death of the author". The postmodern paradigm is one in which the creator or source of a piece of information, or narrative, is no longer the centre of authority behind the information. Postmodernism purports a fleeting of images and information by which meaning is drawn by the reader or viewer, or by the medium by which these images are communicated.² Coupled with this is the rejection of meta-narrative, the notion that all things follow a certain course in history towards a perceivable goal.

The next of these is the flattening of structure. The loss of authority by an author/sender of information defies the structure by which information is sent, eg. language, publishing,

¹ Faithless, "God is a DJ" produced by EMI Records, London, 1998.

² Gregory Lucente, "Modernism and Postmodernism in Contemporary Italian Fiction and Philosophy" in *Annali di Italianistica*, 9, 1991.

perception. What is told is given no more attention than how it is told and how it is known. A narrator's or sculptor's perception of the subject is no longer to be assumed, but becomes part of the story or sculpture.³ The result is the acceptance of medium as message, and perception as reality.

A third is the recognition of the aesthetic of communication. In the fluidity of images received by the reader/viewer, the beauty of the image is given as much weight to its significance as the meaning behind the image. Postmodernism offers a new appreciation of the symbolic as having a meaning in itself, above its denotative meaning.⁴

Tenets of Australian youth culture

School-based education and the creation of "youth culture"

The term "youth", describing a specific cohort of people culturally separate from the rest of a society, is a twentieth century invention. It can be argued that the development of school-based education in Australia is the foundation upon which youth cultures have grown in our history. At the onset of this century, schools were established to accommodate for unemployed youth in urban areas. Since then, Australia recognised the growing importance of schooling for young people as unemployment rose and blue-collar work demanded higher skills. The demise of manufacturing in the post-industrial age of the nineteen-seventies and -eighties called for the keeping young people longer in secondary and tertiary education institutions.⁵

The institutionalisation of young people has created the idea of "youth" for our culture for two reasons. Firstly, in this century an age group of people has been created with a structured dependence. These people are no longer children, and yet do not have the means to find independence and participation in the economy as adults. Secondly, life in school creates the grouping of young people according to specific age, geography and ethnicity. With the limited control over their own lives that they possess, for example dress, music, recreation, young people create identities which relate to others in that grouping. Young people identify more closely with those of their own age in school, than they would with people of other age groups if they had entered the work force. A subculture relating to youth is formed.⁶

Now in the nineteen-nineties, the high incidence of youth unemployment and the pressure on institutions to provide high-level skilled vocational training, means young people are encouraged to stay in school longer. Moreover, the creation of non-university oriented educational streams means young people are given more power of choice as to the education they want, but are also pressured into choosing an educational path which provides increasingly particular skills.⁷ Young people in Australia are future-oriented, and operate in an educational market-place (albeit limited by economic costs) where certain educational choices promise certain career opportunities, clouded heavily by economic uncertainty.

³ Luisa Guj, "The Loss of the Self: *La selva oscura* of Mr Palomar" in *The Modern Language Review*, 82, 1987.

⁴ Lucente, "Modernism and Postmodernism".

⁵ Kenneth Polk, "Reflections on Youth Subcultures" in Rob White (ed.), *Youth Subcultures* [Hobart: NCYS, 1993]. p. 100.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 101.

The new entrepreneurialism

In a world where choice is everything, and yet the economy appears to hold few promises, young people are called to exert risk, show talent, and carefully plan how to achieve an economic future. This new generation of young people are entrepreneurs in a society where if you can't fit into the social mould society expects, you make another mould for yourself. This is the generation of bicycle and roller-blade couriers that annoy pedestrians on Collins Street, or spend hours in their makeshift home office transforming university essays into multi-media reports at an under-the-table rate whilst undergoing yet a third formal training course at university or TAFE in order to perhaps tackle another industry: hospitality, paralegal, technical consultant, "whatever". This is the generation of the *Life is Short. Play Hard.* slogan, where postmodern sage Ferris Bueller advises, "Life moves pretty fast. You don't stop and look around a little while, you could miss it."⁸

The Particle Man, [...] is a go-it-alone sort who looks at life with eyes open, bracing for the worst, expecting to beat trouble on her own. A Bogartian risk-taker, she figures she has little to lose, so she goes for the big win. [...] This is no great philosopher, institution-builder, or team player. But if you need help in a hostile world, if you need something done fast and don't much care how, Particle Man is the one to call.

*[...] A good poker player, she's smart but smooth [...]. She knows her education was a joke, and there's a lot that she doesn't know but should. But she knows where to learn it if she must, and what knowledge costs, and whether it's worth the price.*⁹

The "whatever" generation

The generation of Particle Man's parents, so called the Baby Boomer generation, were brought up on the ideals which made Freud and Einstein household names. The Australian Boomer culture recognises that truth is subjective and relative to individual perception. Moreover, this culture has celebrated the notion that all answers to questions of life and truth can be found within the individual. Boomer culture can be criticised for placing personal growth at the centre of its worship, encouraging its members to explore issues of identity and purpose through means such as sex, travel, psychology, transcendental meditation and alternative spiritualities. In an era of economic prosperity and optimism, Australia had enough money to encourage such a thing.¹⁰

The Boomer generation, now all grown up after having condemned old moral codes during the nineteen-sixties, are still in search of better ways to live. Their children, have been growing up in a culture where there is no common morality, but must develop their own.¹¹ However, they do so in an environment where work is temporary if available at all, and where the ideals of personal growth are set against divorce and family breakdown, a lack of permanence in relationships and lifestyles, and an overall sense of environmental and cultural insecurity.

Thus the boredom generation is born, a group of people in society growing up without a sense of common purpose or reason for living. These people live in a world of choices, where they have the power to follow a certain life-path (whether that be career, living arrangements, relationships) according to what seems best at the time, but will refuse to offer a long-term commitment, in case a better option may arise, or things do not work out

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 104.

⁸ From the film, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Paramount Pictures, 1986.

⁹ Neil Howe & Bill Strauss, *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?* [New York: Vintage, 1993]. pp. 28-29.

¹⁰ Hugh Mackay, *Generations: Baby Boomers, their parents and their children* [Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1997]. pp. 115-116.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 146.

as well as promised.¹² For this reason young people may be labelled a generation of "cornucopia" or even of "dole bludgers", doing only what feels right at the time. However this does not mean young people do not care for their own future, or for their children if they have or plan to have any. It simply means they do not want to become tied into a commitment that fails to live up to its promises.

Postmodern rejection

This is the culture of the absence of meta-narrative. In a myriad of choices amidst an atmosphere of pessimism, the Particle-Man generation understands that nothing is permanent, that progress is tentative, and that the future is whatever comes. However this does not mean they will wait for something to fall on their lap, but will keep actively searching.

Electronic media and the generation gap

Global connection, local separation

The electronic media produces a generation whose members are connected regardless of space or location. Indeed not unfathomable is the notion of two people who would have the same hair style and know all the lyrics to a Pearl Jam song, yet residing in two different continents. What these two people would have in common include similar television and radio stations sending cultural information from all over the globe. Yet these media would divorce them from family members and neighbours of different generations, who would not watch the same programs, or television at all.¹³

Thus the communication of historical cultural practices and information is hindered from one generation to the other, and a generation gap is created. Now, we know that generation gaps are not merely a 'nineties phenomenon, however only in the past two or three decades have we seen the extent by which television, radio and other forms of electronic popular media have created a globalised culture and placed it in front of the eyes and ears of almost all of society's members.¹⁴

The most important effect of this phenomenon would have to be the challenge to authority within our society's structure. In our history we have seen authority granted to the various institutions in which we have lived. Churches have held authority in matters religious, the courts have had rule of the law, schools have been the main source of education. Television, in probable competition with school, would be the place where young people would spend most of their time. Television and other media provide more than information, but a sense of intimacy with others, face to face. Television offers a relationship of intimacy which other institutions have not been able to provide, an intimacy which young people look for when they are away from the set.

Authority of image

A globally connected system of information, coupled with a communication mode which is visual and personal, claim an authority which stands over and above what legal firms, churches, parliaments and government departments endeavour to uphold, precisely because it is the medium through which they connect with people. The media places each source of authority and information, even itself, in a field of comparison and criticism. It is no wonder Oprah Winfrey commands the respect of millions of viewers each week; in the setting of an artificial lounge room she talks with experts from around the world on any

¹² *Ibid.* p. 149.

¹³ Quentin Schültze et al, *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993]. p. 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 49.

issue from child abuse to nutrition, while in same hour shares with the world her own dieting crises. The successful business of making people want to know her more gives her the power to make her opinions of life and love more renown than that of any other in today's popular culture.

The virtual marketplace

An example of this is fashion. The local street markets and shopping centres have traditionally been the centres by which new fashions for young people have been introduced. For people of the working class to emulate those of higher classes through has been a quest to escape a sense of poverty. However, identification with the 'poor' has since the nineteen-sixties been represented in the fashion choices of middle-class young people, or since John Lennon was seen wearing cheap grandmother-style spectacles at a time when thick black lenses were more sophisticated and less affordable. Dressing down was a political statement for young people, where the rag market was the centre for young people to explore affordable fashions, to borrow from old ideas and create new images in order to defy the etiquette of their middle-class parents. As popularity of these street-level fashions grew, designers would claim the ideas as their own and they would appear in the windows of shopping centres.¹⁵

Three decades later the involvement of television cannot be discounted. With youth-oriented programs transmitted into lounge rooms every day (especially those like *Ground Zero* (Channel Ten) where hosts would go out "roving the streets"), new fashions explode into the media. And while large shopping centres endeavour to emulate a street market feel, following the virtual experience offered first by television, the division between dressing up and dressing down is blurred.¹⁶ This is exacerbated by the growing reality of poverty amongst young people of all classes, especially students.

The result is a fleeting of images of past and present provided to the young consumer, which he or she acquires by buying a particular product. Where once a particular spectacle frame or pair of cargo pants made a political statement against elders, now thick black frames are set against small rims for the whim of a consumer who chooses to follow an image. Just as Postmodernism in literature was characterised by the death of the author, in this age and example the death of the designer comes into play. The statement behind the image gives way to the image itself.

This is an example of how participation in culture has changed in meaning. Where once young people used fashion to show that they align themselves to a certain established way of thinking, this decade sees young people using fashion to explore different images in order to create new ones, with less regard for what those images may represented or have represented. Young people participate in the culture by assuming a particular image or images out of the direction-less fleeting of whatever into their own identity. And in a world where every culture on the globe is available for exploration, we have a generation of cultural nomads, who can freely move from one image and identity to another, with no commitment or permanence.¹⁷

The audiovisual language

Another effect of the rise of electronic media, central to this paper's argument, is the shift in the way individuals and groups of people communicate between the self and the outside world. Television and other such media offer a new form of communication of

¹⁵ Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* [London: Routledge, 1994]. pp. 138-140.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 140.

¹⁷ Jesús Martín-Barbero, "Mass media as a site of resacralization of contemporary cultures," in Hoover & Lundby (eds.) *Rethinking media, religion, and culture* [Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997]. p. 115.

information with visual and aural tools altogether different from that of the print media of newspapers, letters etc. This change in communication necessarily changes the formation of a culture, because an act of communication involves not only the content of the message, but the space and time of both the source and recipient, the form of the message itself, the purpose for which it is sent, and the response of the receiver. All of these components are pieces of information which produce a culture of communication, and each one has been significantly affected by the shift from the print to the electronic medium.

The arrival of writing as a form of communication, and the development of print as mass communication, allowed information firstly to be stored outside the brain, which gave way for people to think about things in greater detail. Thought processes moved into the world of the abstract and arbitrary, and separated notions of theory and practice.¹⁸ The audiovisual medium of television and the like portrays information in a narrative setting. Whether it be in a twenty-three-minute sit-com or as a piece of journalism with pictures, the message is set as a movement of events within a context of space and time. The viewer receives a truth which is therefore contextual, and communicates not only knowledge, but an experience of that truth.

Writing, at least in the English language, uses a system of twenty-six symbols which are presented in a linear movement from left to right and down the page. Thought is received by the reader in this representation. In the realm of the audiovisual, receivers of information do so through not only visual images but through the modulations of sound. Different parts of the brain are in use in either communication process. Ever since our consciousness began its development in the womb and when we were cradled after birth, we accepted messages from our parents through their speech and song, a long time before we acquired the skills to send and receive language-based knowledge. The communication of knowledge through vibrations arouses not only intellectual responses but physical and emotional reactions. The change in medium changes the message because it changes the response of the receiver.¹⁹

The shift from print-based to audiovisual communication challenges the present ordering of or social structure, because it changes the places, times and agents of communication. The culture of print media fed the growth of institutional life. The place of communication was the school, the library, the parish. There were specific times for learning, during school hours or on a Sunday morning. The agents of this communication were the teachers and the ministers who passed on the information from a place on high, a teacher's desk or a pulpit. In this new age of communication, the place has become the family home, and mostly in solitude, given the fact that most television programs, Internet sites and radio stations are targeted towards a particular age. The time of communication is leisure time, where information and entertainment are intertwined. Communication occurs at points of departure from every day working/study (ie institutional) life. The agents no longer carry a professional tag. They are those who offer an intimate relationship with the receiver, who offer something of specific value recognised and chosen by the viewer, rather than the officers of the institution.²⁰

¹⁸ Peter Horsfield, *Changes in media-culture as the context for Christian faith*. p. 8.

¹⁹ Pierre Babin, *The new era in religious communication* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991]. pp. 58-60.

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 36-37.

Faith as a process of communication

I want to purport that human spirituality is a process of communication. We live in relation to others through communicating our identities, thoughts, feelings to others and receive the same in the world. By processing our reactions, responses and insights into language, we make sense, define, bring meaning to our place in our environment. Through communication we find our identity as participants in an active world. In the same way, we connect to a sense of God, spirit, a sense of meaning that is larger than ourselves, through communication. We are spiritual when we are open to messages being received from what we perceive to be of God. We make sense, we define, we give meaning to the spiritual through our communication with it.

Oral and literal phases

The Christian Church developed in part with the development of writing. The birth of Christianity in the cradle of Hellenist culture and philosophy was where the first Christians wrote on their faith. Indeed the Reformation drove, and was driven by the ascent of the printing press into European society. However those who lived in oral cultures communicated faith through the sharing of Gospel traditions, common prayers and proverbs. Christians were connected through a culture of orality that provided fable, myth and parable to faith, whilst being rooted in the narrative context of human living. Words were written in order to be recited and spoken, shared from mother to daughter, and recanted together to bring meaning to groups of people.²¹ Faith was communicated through immersion. The teaching of dogma and spiritual exercises such as prayers and proverbs enculturated people into a way of faith from the keepers of the story through verbal communication with each other.²²

The age of the Reformation brought change to this paradigm. Firstly, the printing press brought subversive messages about Christian faith and church life to those who would receive it, encouraging a personal development of faith and claiming that lay people have a right to be involved in such matters. Secondly, it released the need for personal communication and spread intellectual ideals en masse. It encouraged people to be involved in intellectual matters of faith. The Reformation created a communication of faith through knowledge. The teaching of dogma gave way to theological exploration and discourse, and people were educated into faith from the educated elite through catechesis.²³

The audiovisual age

The new era of the electronic and audiovisual brings a challenge to the communication of faith. The Postmodern age is one where the educational elite's claim to authority is fraught with suspicion, and criticised against the already educated young population, who decide for themselves what is worth learning and what is not, where the consumer is in control. This age is one where the image, the symbol, is considered as much the message as the meaning behind it. Moreover, this age is one where authority goes hand in hand with participation and intimacy, where the relationship between the message, messenger and recipient forms part of the significance of the message to be communicated.

My main argument here is that in the nineteen-nineties the Postmodern generation finds faith in the communication of beauty. Young people are drawn to a flowering of the beauty of spirit. The notion of beauty is defined by its activity: beauty offers an intimate

²¹ Babin, *The new era of religious communication*. pp. 20-22.

²² *Ibid.* p. 25.

²³ Peter Horsfield, *Changes in media-culture*. Paper part 2, p. 2.

connection with the beholder, by awakening in him or her something which is already in their consciousness that calls them to stop, ponder and respond. Beauty awakens one's interiority. The beholder acknowledges the authority of the communication by the relationship which is created between those in the sharing.²⁴

The Postmodern age celebrates a flowering of beauty. In the fluidity of images which fly through television screens and bombard the attention of passers-by in a shop window, viewers are beckoned to watch. Advertisers must attract people to pay attention. The message, as well as the medium, must therefore be beautiful. Pierre Babin suggests three ways in which the communication of faith finds beauty:²⁵

1. a communication of myth, something which connects with a deep and fuller meaning and purpose to life, something which reveals an essence to life,
2. a revelation of the emergence of identity, something which shows a flowering of consciousness or reason amidst ambiguity, and
3. a communication that accords with one's deepest aspirations for human life, such as integrity, justice and peace.

Whereas in the past faith was passed on through cultural immersion, or through catechesis, we are entering a time when faith is best received through attraction of symbol, connecting with and awakening the recipient's own interiority.

Young people are not swayed by the intellectual pursuits of classical and rational theology of the modern era, nor are they awed by the perseverance of the institutional Church. This by no means indicates they are not interested in faith. It simply mean the language of faith is in new terms.

²⁴ Babin, *the new era of religious communication*. p. 48.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 111.

Part Two: How does the electronic media's involvement in popular culture affect the presence and activity of the institutional Church in that culture? How, in light of the call of the Gospel, does the Church understand its mission in this cultural context? How must the institutional Church change in order to effect this mission?

The mass communication network provides its audience with many images and representations. The Christian Church must see itself in this light. Unfortunately, the churches are not always presented as the bearer of the Good News, at least for young people. Since 1963, the churches have suffered a continual decline in membership and weekly participation. Society is changing and leaving the churches in the past. The churches' call, recognising that faith and culture are symbiotically connected, is to explore how the gospel can find a new cultural embodiment. As Peter Horsfield writes, "In what ways can our cultural embodiment of gospel be communicated relevantly and faithfully for embodiment in a different cultural context?"²⁶

The fall of the churches of modernity

Modernity, secularisation and resacralisation

The modern era of Western culture is characterised by economic growth and societal prosperity, the dependence on the family unit as the building blocks of society, equality, democracy and progress. The meta-narrative which the Postmodern thinker rejects is that which the Modernist celebrates. All participants in our culture are set on a path towards a goal of success for themselves, their family and their community, involving a good education and gainful employment, falling in love, marrying and reproducing, and building a home whilst saving for a blissful retirement before death. In the meanwhile they are engaging in a polity and community which strives for human rights, democracy and freedom for all people. For this reason, amongst others, we have the separation of Church and State, allowing people from all cultures and faiths to find a home in the Great Southern Land.

The modern era is synonymous with the triumph of reason, whether that be moral reason over injustice, or science over myth. To this effect, modernity can be blamed for draining Western culture of its sense of the sacred, of its connection with mysteries of faith through ritual.²⁷

Ritual is seen as the merging of awareness of the spiritual with individual or group action, within a limited time and space. Rituals provide people with a sense of full engagement, to the extent of the loss of the self, with the spiritual dimension and others participating.²⁸ Ritual is the starting-point by which the self can transcend, become aware of the magic and mystery playing in our own lives.²⁹

²⁶ Peter Horsfield, "Changes in media-culture as the context for Christian faith". p. 3.

²⁷ Jesús Martín-Barbero, "Mass media as a site for resacralization of contemporary cultures". pp. 103-104.

I want to argue that the electronic media has become the spatial and temporal setting for many of our rituals in popular culture. The mass media is where people construct meaning into their lives. Television and music, for example, can make magic, mystery and drama out of everyday lifestyle patterns, by placing them within a construct that is outside ourselves, which viewers choose to enter by watching and listening, and create meaning from it. An example would be the family situation comedy, where an adorable but otherwise arbitrary and fictional family is given thirty minutes to solve a dilemma facing the relationships within the unit. Onlookers participate in the dilemma, and receive from the unfolding of events moral and cultural information from which to make meaning for themselves. A better example, though, would be this year's worldwide television screening of World Cup Soccer. Apart from a mere football game, it is a forum where people can place all their hopes and fears into the battle between one team and its opponent. Ricky Martin helped to create this sense of magic and drama by offering a worldwide number one song to the spectacle, and renamed it "The Cup of Life".

Church in a box

With the modern world now having not only separated religious institutions from the secular, but moving a sense of the sacred from these institutions, religion has been compartmentalised into a specific time and place for people in Western culture. The churches of the modern era, communicating faith to the world through the academic pursuit of God, is left with certain concerns.

The first is academic theology itself. The training of ministers necessarily involves formal theological training, and is granted importance for the purpose of bringing the fruits of this training to the congregation. The central place of ministry in the modern church is the pulpit, where the community of faith receives learning about the presence and activity of God through the expertise of the (especially robed) speaker..

Subscribing to the ideal of meta-narrative, the church community celebrates and mourns and builds its identity on the recognition of life stages. The church attracts larger numbers at births, deaths and funerals. They are symbols that an individual or will share in the life direction of the community at large, that life progresses along a universal path. The modern era emphasises permanence and stability in life, and the churches celebrate them in these rites.

The churches of modernity are concerned with personal growth, participation in society, family and work, and rites of passage from birth to death. The Sunday service offers the church-goer an opportunity to set the week gone by, and the week ahead, against the preacher's message of the day. The preacher's role is to provide a lesson for the week, to provide a dose of religion for the listener. She offers a bit of theology and hermeneutics with some psychology, based on her book-based research and stories from her work over the past week or so. The focus of the worship is the self, isolated and set apart for the purpose of religious rhetoric.³⁰

The demise of church participation, especially by younger generations of people since 1963 shows these concerns are not shared with subscribers of the Postmodern ideal. Firstly, young people (generally, or generationally, and perhaps generalistically speaking) will not accept unqualifiable authority of the pulpit. There are many places available from which to learn if desired, and available at the press of a remote control switch or click of a mouse button. Secondly, young people will not accept that life follows a certain path, and

²⁸ Gregor Goethals, "Escape from time: ritual dimensions of popular culture" in Hoover & Lundby, *Rethinking media, religion, and culture*. p. 125.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 131.

³⁰ Marva Dawn, *Reaching out without dumbing down* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995]. p. 132.

would not sit comfortably with the ideals of permanence driving the significance of a church's celebrations.

And most notably, young people will not accept the psychologising of faith. Participation in a community must involve more than simply receiving a dose of religious information to help them go home and carry on with their lives. If religion is to serve its purpose for young people, it must show a new way of living, a beauty which opens new meanings for daily life. It must awaken one into a renewed understanding of one's reason for being on the planet, another basis for making the choices one makes in life, and a new story by which to understand the world around the individual.

The way forward

Christian community as symbol and ritual

The gospel is not just a set of stories towards the back of the Bible. The meaning of Word-made-Flesh is given life through the workings of the spirit in the lives of God's people in community with each other. The gospel is made real in the identities and relationships of people and their engagement with the world. The world of young people is the world of symbols, where images contain meanings which go beyond the realities they represent. To the eyes of young people, members of communities of faith are not merely Christians, they are symbols of faith itself. They are not merely ones who carry out certain rituals, they are the ritual itself. As such, a Christian community cannot be one which meets solely on a Sunday morning for a service of worship. A Christian community reflects the essence of the gospel in all its actions and relationships, both within its members and with outsiders.

To this effect there exists a challenge. If we understand Christian community as a symbol of the faith, then all its actions are to be perceived and celebrated as elements of faith. For those who look on, these actions are images which do not just represent the belief of the community, but which evoke the meaning of faith in their own life. And for these people of the audiovisual age, participation in the community of faith is in itself a ritual, a connection to the significance of God's movement in earthly life and a recognition of the individual as fully engaged in it.

Awakening of interiority and the religious dimension of beauty

If the symbolic character of a Christian community is to communicate faith to the audiovisual age, it does it by awakening in people a sense of self in relation to God. Symbol is the language of temptation. A symbol points to a known something within us. A symbol offers a path to a greater understanding without having to explain. Symbolic language avoids reflecting on isolated lived moments, but the experience lived together in a community. Symbolic language aims to awaken the idea of self, the one experience of life and God.³¹

An awareness of the religious dimension involves an intuition of the mystery of God as the impetus into the realities of the world, as the essence inherent in all life. It suggests the healing and forgiving power of god. And it opens awareness into the moral necessity of human function, such as justice, integrity and peace.³²

A new liturgy for community

The movement from the print to the audiovisual necessitates a change in which communities use liturgy to create corporate worship. But this involves more than placing a cassette into a VCR to accommodate for young people's attention span, and it does not

³¹ Pierre Babin, *The new era of religious communication*. p. 163.

³² *Ibid.* p. 117.

imply we must do away altogether with morning collects and great prayers of thanksgiving. It is a challenge to create a new environment of communication with the spiritual. In the print media-culture the alphabetical structure of printed orders of services, prayers and responses served to guide a congregation toward an *understanding* of God's presence and a vehicle to *speak to* this presence of collective concerns. In the audiovisual media-culture, using a variety of visual symbols, words, stories and activities liturgy should aim to explore *rituals* in which, through people's participation, offer a *suggestion* towards an experience of the presence of *the community in God*.

This does not mean that old forms of liturgy, and the rest of a church community's activities, must be overhauled. Instead I propose that communities rethink the paradigm by which people connect with the spiritual. This may involve leaving some practices aside, but it necessitates the applying of new meaning to old practices. It is part of the change accompanying a reconnaissance of the identity and purpose of the Christian community in a new culture of communication with the world, with each other, with the gospel and with God.

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