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PREACHING IN THE WORLD OF ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY:
IMPLICATIONS FOR HOMILETICS IN THE
MESSAGE OF H. MARSHALL MCLUHAN

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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May 1972

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The study of the theology of preaching, teaching, and evangelism can be supplemented positively by an investigation into the human means by which the church communicates the Gospel. This is also true in this scientific and secular period when the communication devices and techniques of business, industry, advertising, and entertainment have been adopted by the church. The potential of these resources to assist in the task of communicating the Gospel is of serious interest to the church. Lower costs and improved designs have made it possible for local congregations to purchase media systems and programs and to utilize them in Christian education and preaching.

However, the media are sometimes used for Christian communication without a prior realization of the implications of such techniques and devices for either the message or the recipients of the message. Sometimes, media programs are used as substitutes for an absent preacher or teacher. Occasionally they are used with the hope that they will compensate for or detract from poor preparation of a sermon or lesson. In these and similar cases, the media are not used on the basis of their intrinsic capabilities and limitations. The ramifications of the mediated Christian message for the recipient's apprehension of truth, knowledge, God and his Word are not considered or realized.

The contemporary communications environment is described in this thesis for the purpose of determining the ways in which it conditions the learning and perception of modern man. The basic resource is the writing

of Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Director of the Center for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto and author of several books about the media. His understanding of the history of media and his descriptions of the electronic environment and modern man constitute a comprehensive analysis of communications in the current era. McLuhan's background, his expressed assumptions, and basic resources are described in order to provide a better understanding of his writings. Major themes from his works about the media are examined in order to isolate those which have implications for Christian preaching. An overview of positive and negative criticisms of McLuhan's work exposes some of his strengths and weaknesses. Finally, Christian preaching is examined through a historical survey, giving special attention to the homiletic task in the electronic environment. The study concludes with a discussion of ways in which the media assist or detract from the communication of the Gospel. Some practical observations about what the media can and cannot do to aid the task of preaching are made. These place McLuhan's ideas into perspective and draw from him those insights which can assist Christian preachers.

Only recently have several theologians described the implications of McLuhan's work for preaching in the church. Thor Hall, professor at the Duke University Divinity School, has done this in The New Shape of Preaching. Pierre Babin, writer and editor of works in the area of Christian catechetics, has edited a book entitled The Audio-Visual Man which applies audio-visual resources in a McLuhan framework to Christian education. These and other studies serve as references for the discussion of McLuhan's themes as applied to Christian preaching.

This is not an exhaustive analysis of all that McLuhan has written. Its purpose is not to examine his numerous critiques of literature but rather

those works in which he writes as a sociologist, media scholar, and history analyst. The Gutenberg Galaxy and Understanding Media are the basic references, although other writings contributed to the study. Where other communication theorists have built upon McLuhan's basic tenets or have written something parallel to his views, their work has been used. Special interest has been given to those engaged in Christian communication theory and practice.

The analysis of McLuhan is an attempt to understand him on his own terms in regard to his own purposes. His literary style and content are viewed according to what he himself has said that he is doing before considering the views of secondary sources. This approach is often missing in reviews of McLuhan's works. Similarly, McLuhan's personal life and academic career have been surveyed to provide a background against which his writings may be understood. Several collections of reviews of his work are in print, but these do not provide a general summary of critics' reactions. This thesis includes a synthesis of reactions to McLuhan as well as a summary of some areas of consensus in the evaluations.

There are implications for Christian preaching to be drawn from McLuhan's writing. These can only be determined, however, by adapting McLuhan's emphases to a theological viewpoint which places them in perspective and subservience to the Gospel Word. McLuhan's famous aphorism about the medium being the message finds its ultimate meaning in the incarnate Lord of the church.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD OF ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY

The Audio-Visual Environment

In those countries of the world which exhibit some degree of technological development, electrically-powered machinery and instruments constitute an increasingly more significant aspect of the total environment. People depend upon electrical devices as they perform their work or enjoy their play. Electronic communication has become a complex and pervasive reality in modern society. Electronic media are used for mass advertising, education, and entertainment as well as for private business, social, and leisure purposes. A wide variety of hardware and software has been developed to facilitate the use of the available media.

One can study the nature of a particular culture and its population by examining the ways its people transmit information. A society's means of communication make up an important aspect of its physiognomy.¹ Examining these means will not only reveal what media have been devised or adopted for use by people, but will also furnish data for anthropological and sociological study.

The individual in society is conditioned by the various factors in his environment. His methods of cognition and perception are influenced by his culture, his language, the media to which he is exposed, and by various other

¹ José Luis Aranguren, Human Communication. Translated from the Spanish by Frances Partridge (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), p. 91.

factors.² The communications media by virtue of their nature, purpose, and application are a major influence on people.

The contemporary communications environment is aptly described by the terms "electric audiovisual." Its media use electrical power in order to transmit information to the human sensorium, especially to the senses of sight and hearing. Television, telephone, radio, visual projection systems, computers, phonographs and recorders are the most common media.

The communications media form an integral part of technological man's life. His entertainment and selection of goods for purchase are related to media-produced programs and messages. In schools, audio-visuals are integrally related to educational theory and practice as teachers design and use messages which will control the learning process.³ In business, computers and data processors carry out programmed functions almost instantaneously. They organize information and prepare it for application to diverse projects. Within one minute, a data processor can read the information coded on a thousand cards. During the same time, it can also print, report, and merge the cards according to patterns established in earlier programming activity.⁴ In actuality, data processors, computers, and

²John M. Culkin, "Churchman's Guide to Marshall McLuhan," Religious Education, LXIII (November 1968), 459.

³"The Changing Role of the Audiovisual Process in Education: A Definition and a Glossary of Related Terms," AV Communication Review, XI (January-February 1963), 36; as cited by James C. Campbell, "Using Audiovisual Resources," in Communication-Learning for Churchmen, edited by Benjamin Franklin Jackson, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), vol. I of Communication for Churchmen Series, p. 237.

⁴Carl Heyel, Computers, Office Machines, and the New Information Technology (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 21.

communications facilities are capable of doing more than they are now normally programmed to do. Their capacities are constantly being increased by further refinements in their structure.⁵

The use of such electronic facilities is not limited to application to only certain aspects of information of a social group. Information media can be employed at every primary and secondary level of an organization's life, wherever information is available. Such application is called a "total management information system." The following is a description of such a system as applied to the operation of a business company:

The total management information system means that a company's goals, facilities, economic environment, financial flows, personnel resources, operations and innovative capabilities have all been analyzed in depth and linked together in an effective, integrated, computerized information-communications network.⁶

The term "electronic mass media" refers to those instruments which are designed to communicate either electrically-produced information to large audiences gathered in one geographical place or to individuals linked together by their reception of a centrally-produced message on individual receivers such as radio or television sets. Analysts of these phenomena have made various observations about their nature and effect. Edmund Snow Carpenter, anthropologist at San Fernando State College and co-editor with McLuhan of the communications journal Explorations, maintains that media such as film and television are actually new languages with unknown grammars

⁵Ibid., p. 205.

⁶Ibid., p. 176.

which encode reality in ways unique to each medium.⁷ Some believe that the trend in civilization is toward a total visual organization of life.⁸ Others take a broader view and assert that technological culture exhibits a matrix of image, sound, and print. The form of co-expression is multisensory.⁹

The electronic audio-visual environment influences a society as a whole as well as its individual members. The media have brought about an integration in the arts unparalleled since medieval times.¹⁰ Yet certain people are affected adversely. For example, those people who have not grown up with electric information systems find it difficult to adjust to the new audio-visual forms of understanding where new skills and fast reflex action are important. Conversely, men who can treat machines as collaborators will be better adapted to the new society.¹¹ Those who have lived the majority of their lives with the electronic media and who depend on them for a variety of purposes comprise the collective phenomenon known as "audio-visual man."

⁷ Edmund Snow Carpenter, "The New Language," Explorations in Communications: An Anthology, edited by Edmund Snow Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 162.

⁸ Aranguren, p. 220.

⁹ Pierre Babin, "Learning a New Language," in The Audio-Visual Man, edited by Pierre Babin and translated by Claire Belisle and others (Dayton, Ohio: George A. Pflaum, 1970), p. 71.

¹⁰ Peter A. H. Meggs, "Television and the Church," in Television-Radio-Film for Churchmen, edited by Benjamin Franklin Jackson, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), vol. II of Communication for Churchmen Series, p. 28.

¹¹ Aranguren, p. 233.

The Audio-Visual Man

"Audio-visual man" is man of the technological era whose grasp of reality is more sensual and experiential than intellectual and impersonal.¹² He has lived his life in a science-oriented community with the instruments of electrical communication. Before beginning his formal education, he has a vast array of experiences and loosely related facts which have been learned through active sensory involvement and discovery. Most of this has been by means of the communications media.¹³ Television especially influences him with a continuum of audio-visual techniques designed to inform and involve. The experience range of children is broadened in part by their viewing of adult programs. As Marshall McLuhan notes, "The three-year-old standing up in his play pen in front of the TV sees as much of the adult world as anybody."¹⁴ It is the impact of the audio-visual techniques on men of all ages which conditions them to be highly motivated by a need for participation and involvement.¹⁵ Sensory involvement, feelings, and emotions are primary to them.¹⁶ Based on the observation of seventeenth-century Czech education pioneer John Amos Comenius that people learn best through sensory experiences, it may be concluded that audio-visual

¹²Babin, p. 22.

¹³Hayden R. Smith, "Media Men Arise: What if McLuhan is Right?," Educational Screen AV Guide, XLVII (June 1968), 19.

¹⁴Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Culture is Our Business (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970), pp. 51, 58.

¹⁵Marc Peter, "The Audio and the Visual," in Babin, p. 80.

¹⁶William C. Henzlik, "McLuhan and Parish Pastors," Christian Advocate, XI (May 4, 1967), 8.

man learns much and learns well.¹⁷ Pierre Babin says that audio-visual man's understanding is mostly a sensitivity to and an involvement in the world's rhythms.¹⁸ Writing from the perspective of communication in the church, theologian Thor Hall observes that this electronic man is a respecter of openness, honesty, and authenticity.¹⁹ While in the past the majority of man's learning was to a single sense at a time, today's audio-visual man learns through a more complete sight and sound process, a more balanced audio and visual involvement.²⁰

Several things can be said about the responses which audio-visual man makes to the information which comes to him. In the first place, audio-visual man does not reason or reflect on the information coming to him as much as he organizes it.²¹ In looking at visuals, he separates essential and secondary aspects, the subject from the context, and fact from emotion.²² The similarity of such activity to the functions of a data processor is not coincidental. This is not to say, however, that audio-visual man tends toward fragmentation in his active life. Marshall McLuhan observes that young people of the technological age do not want anything to do with the fragmented and specialist society built on consumer values. Rather, with

¹⁷ Gene A. Getz, Audio-Visuals in the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 23.

¹⁸ Babin, p. 31.

¹⁹ Thor Hall, The Future Shape of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 116.

²⁰ Babin, p. 71.

²¹ Ibid., p. 28.

²² Ibid., p. 29.

their store of observations and scanned facts, they desire to forge their own roles and involvement in society.²³ Commensurate with their involvement in sensual perception and experience, they look for total involvement in whatever they do. They do not want goals; they are searching for personal roles.²⁴ They are doing what the data processor cannot do with the information it scans: they are attempting to fashion new and alternate life styles which will incorporate their new understanding of themselves as well as exhibit their new personal value system.²⁵

Audio-visual man's involvement with religion or religious institutions exhibits an emphasis on sensory matters, depth involvement, and personally forged values and relationships. To have faith in this age means choosing and emphasizing selected aspects of reality. It also means viewing things deeply in a new way and setting up links between different dimensions of reality.²⁶ Such emphases can be both partially caused and reinforced in man by that portion of his environment which we have termed the electronic communications media. These media can also serve as the means by which man expresses and proclaims his spiritual life.

The scientific and technological revolutions had their beginnings in the Western European nations whose religious foundations and life were relatively homogeneous. Today the same cultures exhibit a general

²³Eric Norden, "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," Playboy, XVI (March 1969), 64.

²⁴Herbert Marshall McLuhan, "Address at Vision 65," American Scholar, XXXV (Spring 1966), 205.

²⁵Norden, XVI, 64.

²⁶Pierre Babin and Claire Belisle, "Guidelines for Beginners" in Babin, p. 206.

de-Christianization, a diversity of religious faiths, and general agnosticism or atheism.²⁷ The structures of society are unsettled, and man seems destined to live with his neighbors between the poles of successful communication and interaction on the one hand and the threat of total disintegration on the other. This is a dynamic and changing social equilibrium.²⁸ Thus every person attempts to conduct his life in obedience to his unique personal beliefs while at the same time trying to maintain a balance with others in a pluralist society of changing values and relationships.

The role of the electronic communications media in Western modern society poses a specific challenge to the traditional religions and their codified precepts and sources. Theologian and analyst of secular society Harvey Cox, basing his comments on the observations of Marshall McLuhan, asserts that

we could be entering an epoch in which man's perception of God, self and world will be more markedly altered than even the most radical modern theologian can appreciate.²⁹

He later continues,

The deep relevance of this discussion for Protestants lies in the fact that Protestantism is par excellence the religion of the Book. It arose with the development of printing, was characterized by its insistence on the believer's right to peruse the Scriptures, and spread around the world on the wings of tractarian movements, colporteurs, literacy campaigns and Bible societies.³⁰

²⁷ Aranguren, p. 161.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Harvey Cox, "The Gospel and Postliterate Man," The Christian Century, LXXXI (November 25, 1964), 1459.

³⁰ Ibid., LXXXI, 1460.

This is not to say that men in the electronic environment will no longer accept the message of the Christian Gospel. But as one observer points out, life within the Gospel for today's Christians will have little to do with "trivia, mediaeval precedents, pride and tradition."³¹ Considering how audio-visual man's values are derived especially from present experience and personal involvement, such an observation which stresses the contemporary and authentic aspects of religious faith seems accurate.

The complex information media of the technological age impinge upon many aspects of modern man's life. He experiences reality, perceives, and learns in ways which are personal and sense-oriented. His participation in the technological environment also has an effect upon his religious life. Insight into how life in the media environment relates to religious life and to Christian communication may be gained from an analysis of the works of today's media scholars.

³¹Joseph McLellan, editorial in A.D., I (April 26, 1970), 2.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTION TO HERBERT MARSHALL MCLUHAN

Biographical Notes on McLuhan

Herbert Marshall McLuhan has become a leading analyst of technological society. He is considered by some to be the spokesman for man of the electric age. Others criticize him as a generalist and self-styled critic of history and culture. McLuhan's insights into the nature of technological society and audio-visual man and the divergent evaluations of his message make his work worthy of attention and study.

McLuhan is a Canadian citizen who currently serves as the Director of the Center for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto. He was born in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1911. His advanced education was in the field of English literature, and he has an earned doctorate from Cambridge University in the areas of medieval education and Renaissance literature.¹ McLuhan has taught at the University of Wisconsin, St. Louis University, Assumption University of Windsor, Ontario, and at St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto. He also held a professorship at Fordham University.² Between 1934 and 1969, McLuhan published about thirty-seven critical reviews of the work of authors such as Joyce, Pound, Dos Passos,

¹Penry Jones, "Columbus of Communications," Frontier, XI (Spring 1968), 31.

²Hayden R. Smith, "Media Men Arise: What if McLuhan is Right?," Educational Screen AV Guide, XLVII (June 1968), 2.

Poe, Tennyson, and Eliot. Some of these have been published in The Interior Landscape, a collection of his literary criticism between 1943 and 1962.³

The Mechanical Bride, written in 1951, was McLuhan's first public success. This book criticizes the assumptions and exploitations of thought in mass advertising and attempts to alert people to the dehumanizing influence of the arguments in advertising. Several later works have received more public attention, especially The Gutenberg Galaxy and Understanding Media. Other publications such as The Medium is the Massage and War and Peace in the Global Village have a unique combination of visual, literary, and typographic elements used as both central message and supportive evidence.

McLuhan is particularly silent on the subject of himself, even in interviews. One critic of his work suggests that this autobiographical silence is related to the meaning of his central theme. According to him, McLuhan considers personal authorship to be a dangerous carryover from the age of printing.⁴

It is known that McLuhan's religious life has included influences from various Christian denominations. His father was originally a Methodist from Ontario; his mother was a Baptist from Nova Scotia. In Winnipeg where McLuhan grew up, the family attended either the Anglican or Presbyterian church.⁵ McLuhan became a member of the Roman Catholic Church in 1937, and he remains a member of that denomination today.⁶

³ Herbert Marshall McLuhan, The Interior Landscape; The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan, 1943-1962, edited by Eugene McNamara (1st edition; New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), p. v.

⁴ Jonathan Miller, Marshall McLuhan (New York: Viking, 1971), p. 9.

⁵ Robert Fulford, "Protestant Man on the Brink of Extinction," United Church Herald, X (January 1967), 10.

⁶ Ibid.

Dominant Influences upon McLuhan's Message

The most prominent sources in McLuhan's writings are the literary artists and philosophers who provided the substance of his education in English literature. Irish novelist James Joyce is quoted extensively in his writing. War and Peace in the Global Village, an analysis of the relationship of war to the technical inventions of society, uses excerpts from Joyce's Finnegans Wake as a marginal commentary. McLuhan considers Finnegans Wake to be a description of the electric retribalization of the West, a theme which he has adapted to his central thesis.⁷ Richard Kostelanetz, editor of The New American Arts and On Contemporary Literature, describing Joyce's work in his review of McLuhan, observes that Joyce transcended metaphoric relationships in his writing and substituted associations that transform analogies into identities. He notes that McLuhan performs similar leaps in his writing.⁸ In this regard, McLuhan also draws from the writings of the sixteenth century humanist and mathematician Peter Ramus. Ramus criticized Aristotelian logic for being too cumbersome and inconvenient for memorization. He suggested that logical arguments should be cast in the form of manageable dichotomies, thus avoiding the arduous task of memorizing the long lists of Aristotle's pedantically differentiated categories.⁹ McLuhan's mode of argumentation reveals a style of logic which owes in part to Ramus.

⁷Herbert Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, War and Peace in the Global Village (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968), p. 4.

⁸Richard Kostelanetz, "Marshall McLuhan," Commonweal, LXXXV (January 20, 1967), 424.

⁹Miller, p. 9.

McLuhan acknowledges a debt to H. J. Chaytor, Cambridge University professor and author, for his book From Script to Print for giving him partial reason to write The Gutenberg Galaxy. Chaytor's book documents how "literary conventions are affected by the oral, written, or the printed forms."¹⁰ Another influence on McLuhan's work is Harold Innis, a predecessor at the University of Toronto.¹¹ Innis was an advocate of technological determinism as espoused by American sociologist Robert Ezra Park at the University of Chicago. Supporting the contention that McLuhan has borrowed from the thinking of Innis, McLuhan critic Jonathan Miller notes that, "The lesson that McLuhan drew from Innis was utterly deterministic. . . ."¹² This determinism in McLuhan's argument has significance mainly for understanding his ideas on culture and history.¹³

McLuhan's identification with the Roman Catholic Church in private life and teaching career suggests an investigation into his use of Roman Catholic sources. While at St. Louis University, he was a colleague of Walter Ong, a Jesuit priest who has written The Presence of the Word, a study of the nature and history of the word. In The Gutenberg Galaxy, McLuhan drew from earlier observations by Ong regarding changing human sensibility resulting from the rise of print.¹⁴ Significantly, Ong has

¹⁰ Herbert Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1962), pp. 108, 109. Hereafter this volume will be referred to as GG.

¹¹ McLuhan refers to Innis in GG, pp. 63, 65, 196, 199, 258-259 and 283.

¹² Miller, p. 79.

¹³ *Infra*, pp. 22-24

¹⁴ McLuhan, GG, p. 129.

also written several studies on the method of logician Peter Ramus whose work seems to have influenced McLuhan.¹⁵ McLuhan also draws from French Roman Catholic priest and paleoanthropologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. There is an apparent correspondence between the noosphere formulated by Teilhard de Chardin and McLuhan's assertion that electric technology and circuitry are an extension of man's biological nervous system.¹⁶

These observations about various contributions to McLuhan's writing lead to a consideration of religious and philosophical themes in his work. Such themes are not common in McLuhan's writings. They are incidental or secondary to his major concerns.

As a student of both literature and history, McLuhan sometimes writes with reference to biblical and other Christian sources and to the events of history centering in the church. He tends to view such matters with the eye of a cultural analyst and observer of social phenomena, divesting them of any self-contained theological or transcendent meanings. One example is his treatment of the historical rift between Eastern Orthodoxy and the Western Roman Church.

The miseries of conflict between the Eastern and Roman churches, for example, are a merely obvious instance of the type of opposition between the oral and visual cultures, having nothing to do with the Faith.¹⁷

¹⁵Walter Ong has written "Ramus Classroom Procedure and the Nature of Reality" in Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, I (Winter 1961), 178; Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); "Ramus Method and the Commercial Mind," Vol. VIII of Studies in the Renaissance (New York: The Renaissance Society of America, 1961), pp. 155-172; and Ramus and Talon Inventory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

¹⁶W. Richard Comstock, "Marshall McLuhan's Theory of Sensory Form," Soundings, LI (Summer 1968), 180; Miller, p. 119. Cf. McLuhan, GG, pp. 43-44.

¹⁷McLuhan, GG, p. 86.

Similarly, he refers to the "death of God" themes expressed by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the past and by radical theologian Thomas J. J. Altizer in more recent times as the death of the hot god of the print-oriented world, the death of an abstract idol.¹⁸ While he does not consider it the actual death of the actual God of the Christians, neither does he view the matter as having essentially theological meanings. Rather it is treated as a secular cultural phenomenon.

An inquiry as to whether McLuhan acknowledges the reality of the transcendent and objective God of the Christian church can only be answered by noting his continuing affiliation with the organized church and a few expressions he has made on matters of Christian faith and life. McLuhan had an intense interest in religion when he entered the University of Manitoba for undergraduate work. It was there that he read English journalist and author G. K. Chesterton's views on Christianity. Radio commentator and Toronto Star columnist Robert Fulford interviewed McLuhan and quotes him as saying,

I read my way into the church, up to a point. There comes a time when one needs to know more, and the way to learn that is on your knees. Anyone who is willing to test the evidence of Christianity on his knees, by asking for help, is merely being scientific.¹⁹

At another time he commented on prayer by saying, "The most violent form of violence is prayer . . . prayer is petition which consists of banging and slamming on gates until they open."²⁰ In speaking of the incarnation, he writes with greater detachment, stating that its meaning for the Christian

¹⁸Ralph E. James, "Hot Theology in a Cool World," Theology Today, XXIV (January 1968), 439.

¹⁹Fulford, X, 10.

²⁰"McLuhan on Religion," Christianity Today, XIV (February 13, 1970), 34.

is that all matter was reconstituted at one moment in history and is now capable of "superhuman manipulation."²¹ A basic ground of McLuhan's faith is the "ultimate harmony of all being" as expressed in this passage from Understanding Media.

The mark of our time is its revulsion against imposed patterns. We are suddenly eager to have things and people declare their beings totally. There is a deep faith to be found in this new attitude—a faith that concerns the ultimate harmony of all being. Such is the faith in which this book has been written.²²

This further documents his cultural and phenomenological approach to the entire subject of the deity.

McLuhan maintains a critical stance toward Protestantism. This may be documented in the first place by his departure from the Protestant churches of his parents and his adoption of Catholicism at the age of twenty-six. In Fulford's interview with McLuhan, the latter expressed the opinion that Protestantism is another term for the intense individualism which is disappearing from the world scene.²³ In the same conversation McLuhan spoke strongly against moralistic preaching. He does not believe that adherence to a "highly codified blueprint" of laws is appropriate to the electric age, and he adds that strong disapprovals of something can hardly be considered a positive contribution to living. He labels this a Protestant

²¹McLuhan and Fiore, p. 59.

²²Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (2nd edition; New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1964), p. 21. Hereafter this volume will be referred to as UM. Reference to this citation is apparently made by Thor Hall, The Future Shape of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 14; and also by Jones, XI, 35.

²³Fulford, X, 10.

emotion which he believes is disappearing.²⁴ McLuhan has also been quoted as saying that in the past the Gospel has been sold by the aid of the news of hell fire, an indispensable aspect of communicating the Gospel.²⁵ But all such views should be viewed in light of Fulford's suggestion that they are speculations on McLuhan's part.²⁶ It is not his primary purpose to address himself to religious and theological matters.

McLuhan as Cultural Analyst and Secular Prophet

During his lifetime, McLuhan has moved from the roles of literary critic and university instructor to that of public analyst of all culture and history. His earliest writings are studies of select authors and their individual works. Later productions have drawn upon a wide variety of thinkers and events in forming a critique of all of society. As noted earlier, McLuhan's first public criticism of cultural phenomenon was in 1951 with the publication of The Mechanical Bride.²⁷ In this book he applied his techniques of literary criticism and iconography to the print culture, the advertisements, newspapers, comic strips, and magazines of mid-twentieth century America.²⁸ Commenting on the theme of this analysis, he documents his belief that technology and its media determine the social role of man.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵"McLuhan on Religion," Christianity Today, XIV, 34.

²⁶Fulford, X, 11.

²⁷Supra, p. 14.

²⁸Neil Compton, "Cool Revolution," Commentary, XXXIX (January 1965), 79.

But the homogenization of women was finally effected in the twentieth century after the perfection of photo-engraving permitted them to pursue the same courses of visual uniformity and repeatability that print had brought to men.²⁹

The response to The Gutenberg Galaxy and to Understanding Media placed McLuhan into the role of secular prophet. He was one of the first to explore the implications and effects of the new electric media for man.³⁰ Walter Ong, in reviewing The Gutenberg Galaxy, says that it

is prophetic in the classical sense of this term. It is the result of a live realization of a truth which at least partially transcends immediate powers of utterance and which, as uttered, will affect hearers diversely.³¹

One unique aspect of his writing style is the "probe." A probe is similar to a chapter heading or title except that it is in sentence form and contains an element of provocative generalization extending just up to or beyond the known and provable. Frank Dance, Director of the Speech Communication Center at the University of Wisconsin, labels these probes as prophetic in the sense that they are not just academic and theoretical. They open possibilities of consideration which would normally be closed.³² The use of these probes facilitates McLuhan's self-chosen mission to simply observe, pay attention, and to probe.³³

McLuhan's greatest popularity came during the latter part of the 1960's. After an initial hesitancy to endorse his work on the part of some, there

²⁹McLuhan, GG, p. 255.

³⁰Kostelanetz, LXXXV, 421.

³¹Walter Ong, America, CVII (September 15, 1962), 747.

³²Frank Dance, "Communication Theory and Contemporary Preaching," Preaching, III (September-October 1968), 21.

³³Fulford, X, 11.

came a meteoric rise to popularity. Commenting on this fame, Professor of English and Communications at Bennington College Christopher Koch suggests that it was because McLuhan gave his readers a faith based in myth and ritual rather than on theological argument. He says that McLuhan's phraseology and repetitious style builds an iconic structure for people to believe in.³⁴

Following the initial popularity and acclamation, it must now be noted that McLuhan's influence has waned. Literary critic George Woodcock notes that some of McLuhan's earlier devotees have become his critics. Two of them who have recently published studies on McLuhan are Jonathan Miller and Donald F. Theall. The former now almost totally rejects all the assumptions underlying McLuhan's arguments, and the latter adopts a more revisionist stance toward his mentor's message.³⁵

McLuhan's approach to history is mosaic and deterministic. He employs a mosaic or field technique, based on the observation of eighteenth century Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume, that there is no principal of causality in mere sequence. McLuhan says, "that one thing follows another accounts of nothing. Nothing follows from following, except change."³⁶ He presents data, quotations, and insights in a manner other than traditional logical sequence. This, he contends, "offers the only practical means of revealing causal operations in history."³⁷

³⁴ Christopher Koch, "The Cool Totalitarian or the McLuhan Megillah," Ramparts, V (October 1966), 57.

³⁵ George Woodcock, "Inquest on McLuhan," Nation, CCXIII (November 1, 1971), 437.

³⁶ McLuhan, UM, p. 27.

³⁷ McLuhan, GG, p. 7.

McLuhan does not contend that technological inventions result from the changes caused by man or social phenomena. The opposite is the case. Technological innovations cause changes in man and in his environment. The technologies of society are not just a passive backdrop against which events occur, but they are "active processes that reshape people and other technologies alike."³⁸ One example is television. Normally it is considered to be an incidental aid, a simple entertainment resource, and a natural descendent of radio. But McLuhan asserts that this medium has already transformed the learning process of children apart from the influences of home and school.³⁹ It is the changing framework of society, not just the variable picture within the frame.⁴⁰

McLuhan believes that the changes and features of the past age are recognizable to us only from the vantage point of the ensuing era. The characteristics of the earlier mechanical age are intelligible to us during the time when we are experiencing the new electronic and organic age.⁴¹ It is only from the coming future that we will be able to fully understand the technological nature of the present. But here McLuhan would interject that the tyrannization caused by the technology of the present can be overcome through education and understanding.⁴²

The observations of several analysts of McLuhan serve to more completely document his ideas on history and change. Kostelanetz labels his scheme

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹McLuhan, UM, p. 195.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹McLuhan, GG, p. 326.

⁴²Infra, pp. 47-48.

of historical exploration "informational technological determinism," meaning that it is precisely the radical changes in the dominant communications technologies of a period which initiate the force behind human change in society.⁴³ Harold Kuhn, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Asbury Seminary, notes that this approach minimizes the influences which people, geography, and social phenomenon such as economics play in the historical process.⁴⁴ Finally, Albert Rabil, Professor of Religion at Trinity College in Hartford, recognizes two strains in McLuhan's interpretation of history, an artistic and an apocalyptic one. McLuhan facilitates visions by serving as a detached observer of the future against the past. This is the artistic function. On the other side, McLuhan understands that electronic technology can enable man to do what he has not been able to do in the past: bring about social justice, eclipse nationalism, and cause ecumenism in the church. Electric technology is the messianic power of the age. The media of today, beyond the control of men, are the power to save him from alienation.⁴⁵

McLuhan's deterministic approach to culture and history leads to a consideration of his concept of man and human values. In general, he believes that man can overcome the determinism of technology. He has a strong confidence in man.

Personally, I have a great faith in the resiliency and adaptability of man, and I tend to look to our tomorrows with a surge of excitement and hope. I feel that we're standing on the threshold of a

⁴³Kostelanetz, LXXXV, 421.

⁴⁴Harold B. Kuhn, "The McLuhan: Hero or Heretic?," Christianity Today, XII (September 13, 1968), 9.

⁴⁵Albert Rabil, Jr., "The Future as History and History as the End: An Interpretation of Marshall McLuhan," Soundings, LI (Spring 1968), 87-98.

liberating and exhilarating world in which the human tribe can become truly one family and man's consciousness can be freed from the shackles of mechanical culture and enabled to roam the cosmos. I have a deep and abiding belief in man's potential to grow and learn, to plumb the depths of his own being and to learn the secret songs that orchestrate the universe.⁴⁶

In Understanding Media, McLuhan expresses the hope that by understanding media, the conflicts from which they come, and the greater conflicts to which they give rise, man will enjoy a reduction of his conflicts with technology and increased autonomy.⁴⁷

Although McLuhan highly values man and his autonomy, he does not advocate adoption of ethical or moral codes for himself or others. In relation to technology, he maintains that a moral point of view often becomes a substitute for understanding.⁴⁸ Thus it is that he suspends judgment about the communications media. Various of his readers have concluded that he does not highly value anything in the now-past print culture and that his literary expressions constitute a self-contradiction of anti-print views. This is not the position he has taken. In The Gutenberg Galaxy he says, "Far from wishing to belittle the Gutenberg mechanical culture, it seems to me that we must now work very hard to retain its achieved values."⁴⁹ The highest value comes from the detached, non-involved stance which printing has allowed man to assume. Far from denying any good in the previous print culture, McLuhan holds to what is "that most potent gift

⁴⁶Eric Norden, "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," Playboy, XVI (March 1969), 158.

⁴⁷McLuhan, UM, p. 59.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 216.

⁴⁹McLuhan, GG, p. 165.

bestowed on western man by literacy and typography: his power to act without reaction or involvement."⁵⁰

At the twenty-seventh convention of National Religious Broadcasters, McLuhan said, "I never make value judgments."⁵¹ On those occasions when he has been asked to comment on various social phenomena, he has held to that position. When questioned about the problem of drugs or of growing freedom in sexual matters, he has answered with either a disclaimer of the worth of what he thinks or with a desire to understand without making any evaluation.⁵² This refusal to moralize is motivated by his desire to be aware of what is happening in society as technology impinges upon man. Standards of judgment and value systems are the artificial results of the media of any age.⁵³ McLuhan says, "there can only be disaster arising from unawareness of the causalities and effects inherent in our own technologies."⁵⁴ Thus the suspended judgment offers man the best modus operandi for living above the tyranny that the media or any technology might impose on his life. In his work, McLuhan does not discuss the relationship between his amoral stance and the morality espoused by the Roman Catholic Church.

While McLuhan's methodology and assumptions have been criticized, they must be viewed as the approach and understanding of one who considers himself engaged in a pioneering project.

⁵⁰ McLuhan, UM, p. 162.

⁵¹ "McLuhan on Religion," Christianity Today, XIV, 34.

⁵² Norden, XVI, 65-66.

⁵³ McLuhan, UM, p. 179.

⁵⁴ McLuhan, GG, p. 302.

The electric technology is within the gates, and we are numb, deaf, blind, and mute about its encounter with the Gutenberg technology, on and through which the American way of life was formed. It is, however, no time to suggest strategies when the threat has not even been acknowledged to exist. I am in the position of Louis Pasteur telling doctors that their greatest enemy was quite invisible, and quite unrecognized by them. Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot.⁵⁵

Taken on his own terms, McLuhan stands as one with a self-styled strategy for solving a major question of contemporary technological life: how shall we understand the media and what shall be the resultant activity of our understanding? In answering this concern, he has claimed for himself the role of experimenter. "My purpose is to continually experiment. Sometimes I deliberately exaggerate to make a point. Why not? I'm always discovering new things. What I say today I might contradict tomorrow."⁵⁶ In the light of such tentativeness and experimentation, criticism of McLuhan always risks failure to appreciate the contributions of his insights while overemphasizing matters of basic technique and approach.⁵⁷

Marshall McLuhan's background as a student, instructor, and writer reveals dependence upon key individuals in the fields of history, literature, philosophy, and anthropology. The treatment of religious themes is incidental to his work. In his commentaries on technology, he has adopted a deterministic viewpoint, although his goal is to assist man by reducing his conflicts with the media. He considers himself to be engaged in a pioneer work of experimentation and probing as he seeks to understand and to explain the role of media in man's life.

⁵⁵ McLuhan, UM, p. 32.

⁵⁶ Fulford, X, 9.

⁵⁷ Jones, XI, 34.

CHAPTER IV

MAJOR THEMES IN MCLUHAN'S WRITINGS

Having considered McLuhan's background, influences upon his work, his underlying presuppositions, and his role as cultural analyst, we can now examine several of his main themes. We will describe these on the basis of his own observations and explanations. Where other writers contribute to our understanding, they will be cited. A summary of criticisms of McLuhan's emphases and understandings will be reserved for later discussion.

As an analyst of culture and history in general and a student of the media in particular, McLuhan has centered his attention on the media and their relation to man and society. He has a fully-developed concept of the nature of all media. From this, he has postulated theories about related matters, namely the nature of the message or content of media and the relationship of both media and message to man. The following is a description and explanation of McLuhan's ideas regarding the message, the media, and the contemporary man.

The Message

McLuhan's penchant for using the probe to stimulate thought and to challenge that which is known and provable accounts for the provocative and inclusive generality of his assertion that, "the medium is the message." This is the most famous of his statements, an aphorism which is popularly thought to capsulize all of his writing. McLuhan has restated this probe

by changing only one of its letters and then applied it to his book The Medium is the Massage,¹ a later and more visual expression of the ideas expressed in Understanding Media.

"The medium is the message" refers to the consequences or effects of any medium upon an individual or society. A medium is more than just an instrument of communication. It is an extension of man, usually brought about by technology. McLuhan holds that every medium, every extension of human life or action, produces a new scale or new dimension into human affairs.² This new aspect of life and its consequences are the crucial and primary effects of a medium. Translating this into its meaning for the electronic age, McLuhan says,

"The medium is the message" means, in terms of the electronic age, that a totally new environment has been created. The "content" of this new environment is the old mechanized environment of the industrial age. The new environment reprocesses the old one as radically as TV is reprocessing the film. . . . We are aware only of the "content" or the old environment.³

McLuhan's idea of environment as expressed in this context is not some sort of passive wrapping or incidental surrounding. "Environments . . . are active processes."⁴ Thus McLuhan posits a dynamic and organic relationship between media, the environments they create and their social consequences.

¹Herbert Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Massage, coordinated by Jerome Agel (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

²Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (2nd edition; New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1964), p. 23. Hereafter this volume will be referred to as UM.

³Ibid., p. ix.

⁴Ibid., p. viii.

These elements exist in an integral relationship, yet each is a separate phenomenon. One piece of supporting evidence for McLuhan's identification of the medium with message is the way in which the "owners of media" always cater to the wishes of the public as to which messages will be conveyed by the media. The message is incidental, so the owners do not dictate the messages transmitted. They simply use the media, which are real power in themselves as well as the media's own essential meaning for society.⁵

In attempting to understand and to draw out the implications of "The medium is the message," John M. Culkin, Director of the Center for Communication at Fordham University, notes four ways of understanding the statement. First, human attention should be directed at each medium, not its content. Secondly, there is a relationship between form and content, that is between medium and message. Form changes content; content favors certain forms of expression. Thirdly, a medium that transmits a message changes the perceptual habits of its users. It does something to the individual psyche of a person and effects his sensory apparatus. Finally, any medium relates to society as a whole as well as to individuals in that society.⁶ Effects of media can be examined both upon individuals and upon society. W. Richard Comstock, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, expands the second understanding of McLuhan's aphorism by Culkin, saying it is "a brilliant example of the capacity of metaphoric expression to call

⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

⁶ John M. Culkin, "Film and the Church," in Television-Radio-Film for Churchmen, edited by Benjamin Franklin Jackson, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), Vol. II of Communication for Churchmen Series, pp. 212-214.

attention to the integral relation between form and content, not the replacement of one by the other."⁷ He continues his interpretation by noting that McLuhan sees no neutral meaning in a message which is not affected by the medium that it accidentally inhabits. As singing and song are integral aspects of one process, so the form of a medium and its content cannot be divorced.⁸ Jesuit instructor of the sociology of communication Neil Hurley relates his commentary on "the medium is the message" to the emphasis expressed in Culkin's third understanding. He revises the aphorism to read, "the medium is the co-message," and explains that the communications matrix in a society give its members a perceptual bias. This in turn validates the point of view of society's members. Their value system is shaped by the communications system through which they look.⁹ These explanations and interpretations all express aspects of what McLuhan is saying. Some understandings of McLuhan's aphorism, Comstock's, for example, take into account the probe form of the saying and seek to interpret it in a way faithful to McLuhan's literary technique.

What then is the role of content or the message in the media? Is McLuhan identifying medium and message so totally that he denies the objective reality of any content? In his own explanation of "the medium is the message," McLuhan said that he was not disallowing any role for content but

⁷W. Richard Comstock, "Marshall McLuhan's Theory of Sensor Form: A Theological Reflection," Soundings, LI (Summer 1968), 167.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Neil P. Hurley, "Marshall McLuhan: Communications Explorer," America, CXVI (February 18, 1967), 241

merely emphasizing its subordinate role. By stressing the content and giving no attention to the medium, we eliminate the chance to understand the impact of new technologies upon man and the environmental changes wrought by new media.¹⁰ Further clarification of this view is expressed by McLuhan when he writes that

it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. Indeed, it is only too typical that the "content" of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.¹¹

McLuhan criticizes the censors of the content transmitted by the media as "semiliterate book-oriented individuals who have no competence in the grammars of newspaper, or radio, or of film, but who look askew and askance at all non-book media."¹² The assumption that content or programs are the main factors influencing outlook and action originates with the book medium with its sharp division between form and content. McLuhan holds that the censor who directs his attention to suppression of certain media rather than to controlling content knows the meaning of "the medium is the message."¹³

The Media

The attempt to describe McLuhan's understanding of the message as conveyed by a medium tends toward an examination of his understanding of the medium. This derives from McLuhan's consistent emphasis on the media even

¹⁰Eric Norden, "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," Playboy, XVI (March 1969), 61.

¹¹McLuhan, UM, p. 24.

¹²Ibid., p. 274.

¹³Ibid.

when discussing the subject of content. While he admits to the reality and role of content and message, they are subordinate in function and effect to the media themselves.

McLuhan's idea of media is broad and inclusive.¹⁴ Those articles or realities which shape and rearrange the social patterns of man are media, or, more specifically, media of communication.¹⁵ They are collectively referred to as the "extensions of man." This terminology indicates an organic understanding of man's inventions and systems as outward expressions of specific human senses, capabilities, or functions. Accordingly, the wheel is an extension of man's foot, clothing and housing of skin and the body's heat-control mechanisms, and languages are "stuttering extensions of our five senses."¹⁶ When languages are reduced to expression by a set of symbols which we call the phonetic alphabet, still another extension is created. This alphabet is a reduction of the use of all senses simultaneously, which is oral speech, to a visual code.¹⁷ With the advent and refinement of the modern media of communication, still other extensions are occurring. The telephone is an extension of the ear and voice, the phonograph is an extension of the voice, and television is an extension of the sense of touch.¹⁸ This last viewpoint requires some clarification.

¹⁴Supra, p. 29.

¹⁵McLuhan, UM, p. 120.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 120-121, 123. See also McLuhan and Fiore, pp. 26-40.

¹⁷Herbert Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man (New York: The New American Library, Inc., c. 1962), p. 59. Hereafter this volume will be referred to as GG. Cf. McLuhan, UM, p. 147.

¹⁸McLuhan, UM, pp. 233-248, 268-294.

In his discussion of television, McLuhan expresses the view that with television the viewer is the screen. The cameras search out the contours of the people and things they are scanning much as a finger would draw their contours. On the receiving set, the moving and changing contour of the thing scanned is made visible by light through, not on, something. Thus the television picture is more like sculpture and icon rather than the still picture that is taken with a camera. The television picture on the receiver presents about three million dots per second to the eye of the viewer. He uses only a few dozen of these dots to form an image in his eye. The eye joins the minute dots to form a recognizable image much as it forms a picture of the small specks of paint in a picture done in the style called pointillism.¹⁹ The nature of the television-produced image of many dots is such that it requires and elicits the in-depth participation of the viewer.²⁰ This in-depth activity, according to McLuhan, most closely corresponds to the tactile, the human sense of touch. Thus television is considered an extension of the sense of touch.²¹

Electricity itself is essentially tactile, and only secondarily visual and auditory. It offers means by which man can get in touch with every facet of being at once, involving him in participation and dialogue just as the brain does. This interplay of all faculties and senses corresponds most of all to the human sense of touch.²²

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 219, 272-273.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 289.

²¹ Ibid., p. 290.

²² Ibid., p. 219.

This overview of McLuhan's concept of television and of electricity provides an introduction to his assertion that electronic technology constitutes an extension of more than just one organ or sense. The matrix of media made possible by electricity is an extension of man's total nervous system.²³ The speed of electric communication is a duplication of the instantaneous transmission of messages which occurs throughout the central nervous system. Such rapidity of signals places man into a field of inclusive awareness in which older forms of acceleration of things or messages are viewed as obsolete and "old patterns of psychic and social adjustment become irrelevant."²⁴

But McLuhan's description of the media is not limited to an organic understanding. In Explorations in Communication, he described new media as new languages and art forms with power to impose their assumptions.²⁵ Media should not be thought of only as means by which we can see the reality of the past. The new media are the present world.²⁶

McLuhan classifies media as either hot or cool. These terms refer neither to matters of physical temperature nor to subjective evaluations made by the slang usage of the same two words. McLuhan best describes his own terminology.

²³ Ibid., pp. 53, 103.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁵ Herbert Marshall McLuhan, "Classroom Without Walls," Explorations in Communication: An Anthology, edited by Edmund Snow Carpenter and Herbert Marshall McLuhan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 2. Cf. Herbert Marshall McLuhan, "Media Log," Explorations, p. 182.

²⁶ Ibid.

A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in "high definition." High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, "high definition." A cartoon is "low definition," simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information.²⁷

He continues,

hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience.²⁸

These distinctions apply not only to the electric media of the technological era, but also to any of the media of history. For example, the spoken word, manuscripts, woodcuts, and cartoons are all low in definition or in data. They invite the participation of the listener or viewer and are therefore cool.²⁹ By comparison, print, though seemingly closely related to manuscripts, is hot. Print or books involve the reader much less than do manuscripts.³⁰ Manuscripts correspond more closely to spoken words and therefore impinge on different senses than the more visually-oriented typography. One of McLuhan's probes says, "manuscript culture is conversational if only because the writer and his audience are physically related by the form of publication as performance."³¹ The Gutenberg Galaxy develops the theme that with the advent of printing by repeatable processes,

²⁷ McLuhan, UM, p. 36.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 148, 278.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

³¹ McLuhan, GG, p. 105.

the western world has gradually been heating up, that is, Western man has become more and more visually oriented during the four hundred years of transmission of ideas by predominantly the print medium.

With this understanding of media, McLuhan develops the thesis that when the media impinge upon man they cause and create a reorganization of his senses. He uses the English poet William Blake as his authority. In the poem, Jerusalem, Blake speaks about changing patterns of perception.

If perceptive organs vary,
Objects of Perception seem to vary:
If the Perceptive Organs close,
Their Objects seem to close also.³²

On this observation, McLuhan builds his concept of altered sense ratios. He interprets Blake to say that man changes when his sense ratios change. This is linked to the idea of media as extensions of man. Sense ratios are changed whenever any function of man is externalized by the invention of a technological form.³³ The media in the environment bring about new sensory patterns and ratios.

With regard to the individual, new sense ratios involve the heightening or stressing of certain forms of perception because of the influence of the new media. Book culture brought about greater stress on the visual; television stresses the tactile. But the fact that the ratio of all the senses is changed by any one new medium implies that those senses not stressed or in ascendancy will exist in a different relationship to the sense being stressed as well as to each other. Their perceptual habits will change,

³² Ibid., p. 314.

³³ Ibid.

and the feelings of the individual as well as his concept of reality will be affected.³⁴ This idea of interior changes in sense ratio relates to McLuhan's organic understanding of the media.³⁵

The new sense ratios also have consequences for the whole of society. This broader aspect is alluded to when McLuhan says that media bring about new ratios "among themselves, when they interact among themselves."³⁶ Culture exhibits the changed sense ratio of its individual members.³⁷

What are some examples of changed sense ratios brought about by media? McLuhan surveys all of history to note the various ascendent or descendent perceptual biases. With the use of the phonetic alphabet, man's visual sense was heightened and the related sense of sound, touch, and taste were lowered. Any literature culture exhibits such an orientation.³⁸ But the expression of the alphabet in manuscript form brings about intensity of the "audile-tactile" senses because of the performance nature of manuscript writing.³⁹ With the Renaissance and with a more pervasive interest in scientific inquiry and invention, the audile-tactile experience of manuscript culture was translated into more visual terms.⁴⁰ The invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in the fifteenth century marks the

³⁴Ibid., p. 35.

³⁵McLuhan, UM, p. 54.

³⁶Ibid., p. 61.

³⁷McLuhan, GG, p. 54.

³⁸McLuhan, UM, p. 87.

³⁹McLuhan, GG, p. 39.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 148.

beginning of four hundred years of largely visual orientation for Western man. Uniform and repeatable type brought about a fission of the senses, and the eye became the dominant mode of perception.⁴¹ That period of visual stress is now over. Due to the speed of today's electronic communication, man's senses are forced to perceive unvisualizable relationships. The heretofore heightened visual sense cannot apprehend their meaning. Man of this age is experiencing synesthesia, the interinvolvement of all the senses.⁴²

As already mentioned, McLuhan believes that the involvement of all the senses can most accurately be referred to in terms of the sense of touch.⁴³ He views the tactile not so much as a separate sense of man as the interplay of all the senses. This explains why the sense of touch becomes less significant when the visual is intensified.⁴⁴ Moreover, the tactile is necessary to man's existence as a whole and integrated person.

More and more it has occurred to people that the sense of touch is necessary to integral existence. The weightless occupant of the space capsule has to fight to retain the integrating sense of touch. Our mechanical technologies for extending and separating the functions of our physical beings have brought us near to a state of disintegration by putting us out of touch with ourselves. It may very well be that in our conscious inner lives the interplay among our senses is what constitutes the sense of touch. Perhaps touch is not just skin contact with things, but the very life of things in the mind?⁴⁵

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 70, 134.

⁴²McLuhan, UM, p. 108.

⁴³Supra, p. 34.

⁴⁴McLuhan, GG, p. 83.

⁴⁵McLuhan, UM, p. 105.

W. Richard Comstock has surveyed McLuhan's ideas about the tactile sense and outlined three understandings: (1) The sense of touch through the skin, that sense related to smell or taste; (2) The haptic sense of organic touch which is experienced through the entire nervous system; (3) The basic interplay of all the senses, "that functional ratio whereby reality is truly 'felt' and 'grasped.'"⁴⁶ This third emphasis is closest to McLuhan's expressed understanding of the sense of touch.

Lewis Mumford, philosopher and analyst of urban phenomena, in 1934 suggested that the mechanical devices of communication were bringing men back to their first kinds of face-to-face communication.

When the radio telephone is supplemented by television communication will differ from direct intercourse only to the extent that immediate physical contact will be impossible. . . .⁴⁷

On the basis of McLuhan's view that the speeded-up electronic media of today involve us so totally that we are experiencing the message by what can best be described as a tactile experience, the physical contact which Mumford assumed to be impossible is, in fact, present.

Drawing again from William Blake, McLuhan further elucidates his theory of reorganized sense ratios by describing the hypnotic effect which occurs when one sense dominates another. He says that "the dominance of one sense is the formula for hypnosis."⁴⁸ Those areas which are affected most by a new medium are gradually numbed or massaged into a kind of

⁴⁶Comstock, LI, 169. Cf. McLuhan, UM, p. 67.

⁴⁷Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 239-240.

⁴⁸McLuhan, GG, p. 93.

narcosis in the perceptual experience. Understanding this effect is prerequisite to a knowledge of media and their technology.⁴⁹

McLuhan explains that because of man's largely visual orientation due to book culture, he has experienced a separation of the visual sense from the others, and his consciousness does not fully apprehend most experiences. This amounts to a hypertrophy of the unconscious.⁵⁰ Comstock also comments on this viewpoint, noting that if McLuhan seems to evaluate visual perception negatively, it is because of the ontological priority which any extended sense assumes over all other senses. McLuhan opposes the kind of hypnotic illusion which the extended sense fosters, claiming to have an exclusive reality which, in fact, it does not possess.⁵¹

What are the implications of the reorganized sensorium and the hypnotic effect of the media for society? McLuhan deals with this matter throughout his discussion on media. Just as individuals can be hypnotized by the domination of one of their senses over the others, so an entire society can experience the same state. Various cultures can properly be termed oral, visual, or auditory. Media can "isolate the senses and thus . . . hypnotize society."⁵² Various literary and academic conventions in a society can be traced to its sensory profile. For example, one cannot make a grammatical error in non-literate society because nobody ever heard one and there is no literature expressed in standard visual symbols and patterns by which to judge. In a society where there are confusions about

⁴⁹McLuhan, UM, p. 138.

⁵⁰McLuhan, GG, p. 304.

⁵¹Comstock, LI, 173.

⁵²McLuhan, GG, p. 322.

what is or is not grammatically correct there will also be oral and visual orientations in conflict.⁵³ Similarly, the sixteenth-century passion for reforms in spelling came from efforts to reconcile sight and sound. War, in McLuhan's view, results from the response of people or a whole society to a threatened change in their identity brought by a new technology or medium. This threat brings pain and hurt so that finally man feels justified in going to war for the purpose of preserving his endangered identity.⁵⁵

To conclude this summary of McLuhan's understanding of media and their effects, the basic differences between the social effects of the heightened visual sense in book culture and those of the more tactile-based experience deriving from high-speed electronic communication are noted. Print is that aspect of alphabetic culture which contributes to man's detribalization or decollectivization. Print places the alphabet into its highest definitive form appealing to the visual sense.⁵⁶ As this medium operates, it has the power to individualize man as he privately perceives both the medium and its content. "Print is the technology of individualism."⁵⁷ With the electric media, which are the equivalent of a whole array of mechanized sensory apparatus, the effects are different. The omnipresent ear and the moving eye of both movies and television have destroyed writing, "the specialized acoustic-visual metaphor that established the dynamics of

⁵³Ibid., p. 286.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Herbert Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, War and Peace in the Global Village, coordinated by Jerome Agel (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968), p. 97.

⁵⁶McLuhan, GG, p. 192.

⁵⁷Ibid.

western civilization."⁵⁸ Now man is beginning to live in the feelings and emotions from which three thousand years of literacy have separated him. "We are back in acoustic space."⁵⁹ With the passing of the centrality of writing, man has gained a cosmic wholeness. He is "a super-civilized sub-primitive man."⁶⁰

Contemporary Man

Our examination of McLuhan's central themes ends with his characterization of contemporary man. As shown above, modern man has an affinity of shared sensory experience with man of the pre-electronic, pre-scientific, and pre-alphabet era. Civilized, audio-visual man is man of the tribal village. The linking of every part of the globe and space by communication media has shrunk the world into a global village.⁶¹ Man who had been individualized by the typographic medium and divorced from his fellows by the overdevelopment of his unconsciousness and by his private knowledge is involved in the concerns of all men by the power of the electronic media. This parallels the experience of pre-literate tribal man. Contemporary media make the human family into a single tribe again.⁶²

The intervening three thousand years from pre-literate tribalism to electronic tribalism, account for the clash between the organizational

⁵⁸ Herbert Marshall McLuhan, "Five Sovereign Fingers Taxed the Breath," in Explorations, p. 208.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ McLuhan, GG, p. 262.

⁶² McLuhan, UM, p. 156.

patterns of society derived from alphabet and print culture and those resulting from electronic culture. The past period of expansionist and exploding patterns of society is reversed by the instant speed of electric media.⁶³ Explosion is no implosion, a general contracting of previously fragmented man into a total being again and a reassembling of the mechanized bits of fragmented civilization into an organic whole.⁶⁴ Specialist roles, disparate aspects of social life, natural boundaries conducive to noninvolvement, private viewpoints are all being dissolved in the instant implosion and "interfusion of space and functions" occurring because of the high speed media.⁶⁵ This does not mean that contemporary man is totally divorced from the influence of his immediate past. McLuhan says that "he [western man] still enjoys the results of the extreme fragmentation of the original components of his tribal life," and this fragmentation enables him to "ignore cause-and-effect in all interplay of technology and culture."⁶⁶

The implosion and reunifying of what was previously fragmented has an effect on how man of the electronic age global village views his relationship with others. In fact, the media today bring about a collective consciousness. It is a kind of collective awareness that may duplicate the preverbal social condition of man.⁶⁷ McLuhan says that there is a new

⁶³ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 93, 168.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 237.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

feeling about guilt today. It cannot be conceived of individually but is shared by everyone in a strange way. Our world of total involvement eliminates private guilt.⁶⁸ Other human experiences and feelings are also unified. Electric speed brings together diverse social and political functions in an implosion that heightens human awareness of mutual responsibility.⁶⁹ Here we note an element of moral obligation in McLuhan's thought, a rare emphasis for him.⁷⁰

McLuhan suggests that we are rapidly moving toward the simulation of human consciousness by technological invention.

Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man--the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media.⁷¹

The computerized media of today are duplicating our nervous system and human consciousness on a global scale. In one of his few specifically theological notes, McLuhan calls the inclusive consciousness of the electric age a new interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the body of Christ who, after all, is the ultimate expression of man.⁷²

McLuhan thinks that man is often victimized and dehumanized by media. Such detrimental effects do not come primarily from the message conveyed

⁶⁸ McLuhan and Fiore, The Medium, p. 61.

⁶⁹ McLuhan, UM, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Supra, pp. 25 and 26.

⁷¹ McLuhan, UM, p. 19.

⁷² Norden, XVI, 72.

by the media. He suggests a determined position of arrogant superiority toward the media. Instead of lamenting the media's effects, man should, "charge straight ahead and kick them in the electrodes."⁷³ Such an attack will place the media into a more beneficent role as servants rather than masters of mankind.⁷⁴ This is a cursory expression of McLuhan's deeper belief, namely, that the keys to man's survival in a world so greatly affected by the media are education, understanding, and a vigilant consciousness of the media and their effects. His solution to victimization centers in man's capacity to understand external forces and then control their influence.

The problem for the man unaware of the power of media is that pre-determined assumptions are imposed upon him. This difficulty relates to the hypnotic effect of media which extend a single sense and distort the perception of reality. Man must avoid this subliminal state of "Narcissus trance" by knowledge of what is happening as media massage us.⁷⁵ McLuhan is dedicated to overcoming the disaster of being unconscious of any force's effect upon us, especially forces which man has made himself.⁷⁶

McLuhan presupposes that man can achieve the understanding needed to place the media into his service. He cites British socioeconomist Robert Theobald's observation about controlling economic depressions by understanding their development as justification for the position that media

⁷³ Ibid., XVI, 158.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ McLuhan, UM, p. 30.

⁷⁶ McLuhan, GG, p. 296.

can be controlled in similar fashion.⁷⁷ Such control is not only a secondary concern, for McLuhan links it to man's very survival.

Today, in the electronic age of instantaneous communication, I believe that our survival, and at the very least our comfort and happiness, is predicated on understanding the nature of our new environment, because unlike previous environmental changes, the electric media constitute a total and near-instantaneous transformation of culture, values and attitudes. This upheaval generates great pain and identity loss, which can be ameliorated only through a conscious awareness of its dynamics.⁷⁸

McLuhan expresses the same altruistic interest when speaking about all his work. "The central purpose of all my work is to convey this message, that by understanding media as they extend man, we gain a measure of control over them."⁷⁹ The alternative is that man becomes the servant of technology. McLuhan's view of man includes the belief that he should be the power behind the media rather than the media being in control of man.

McLuhan sees three areas in which man can achieve the knowledge and understanding necessary to maintain control of the technological environment. They are formal education, the arts, and technology itself. McLuhan conceives the goal of all education to be emancipation from the trap of maximal determinism in life caused by the influence of the unexamined assumptions of technology.⁸⁰ He views higher education, once a privilege and luxury, as a necessity for man's survival.⁸¹ This high regard for

⁷⁷ McLuhan, UM, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Norden, XVI, 56.

⁷⁹ Ibid., XVI, 74.

⁸⁰ McLuhan, GG, p. 295.

⁸¹ McLuhan, UM, p. 102.

education explains why McLuhan suggests that continuous education should be the main concern of future society.⁸²

Related to this is his attitude about the arts. They possess a power which anticipates coming developments in society and technology. The arts have a prophetic, predictive ability.⁸³ As various innovations disrupt our lives and our perceptions, the arts can keep men on even course toward their permanent goals in life.⁸⁴

Finally, by using technology itself, especially the computer or other information systems, the shifting sense ratios imposed by media can be analyzed for purposes of determining the nature of a situation and the implications of altered sense ratios for all of society. Helplessness before the media can thus be avoided by the aid of the media in giving us the knowledge necessary for understanding.⁸⁵ Even the disruptions and confusions which have already manifested themselves can be controlled by the programming and synchronization of media which, in general, initiated the imbalance.⁸⁶ This feedback would constitute a safeguard or fail-safe system within the media.

McLuhan assigns a very minor role to the message conveyed by the media. The media themselves constitute the influential reality of society which alter the perceptual habits of man. Only conscious effort to

⁸²Richard Kostelanetz, "Marshall McLuhan," Commonweal, LXXXV (January 20, 1967), 422.

⁸³McLuhan, UM, p. xi.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵McLuhan, GG, p. 220.

⁸⁶McLuhan, UM, p. 93.

understand the media's power can avert victimization of man. These basic concepts about the message, the media, and contemporary man are the central themes of McLuhan's writings and, consequently, are the themes which have received most of his critics' attention.

Secular Critics' Reactions

An analysis of the criticisms of Marshall McLuhan's writings would hardly be a study in itself. Not only literary critics, but also scientists, engineers, as diverse as architects, advertising and religious have responded to the reception of his work and their reactions to it. Several of the most critical essays have been published as well as a few criticisms compiled by individuals. These, combined with occasional reviews and learned articles, comprise a significant body of material.

The purpose here is to present a brief survey of positive and negative evaluations by both secular and religious critics. While the survey does not consider every area in which McLuhan has been criticized, it does bring those points of either approval or disapproval which, in general, are the reaction of several respondents. This survey of critical analyses is a sequel to the discussion of McLuhan's major themes and an introduction to a consideration of the implications of McLuhan's message for the task of Christian preaching.

The very idea of criticizing McLuhan is a subject of interest and controversy. His writings are controversial in their appeal to the more general-oriented of the critics and in their lack of appeal to the more specialist-oriented.¹ As already noted, one of McLuhan's own emphases is the subordinate

¹Neil P. Hurley, "Marshall McLuhan: Communications Explorer," *AMERICA*, CIVI (February 18, 1967) 261.

CHAPTER V

CRITICS' EVALUATIONS OF MCLUHAN'S WRITINGS

Secular Critics' Evaluations

An analysis of the criticisms of Marshall McLuhan's writings could well be a major study in itself. Not only literary critics, but also experts in fields as diverse as architecture, advertising and religion have summarized their understanding of his work and their reactions to it. Several collections of critical essays have been published as well as a few extensive critiques by individuals. These, combined with occasional reviews and journal articles, comprise a significant body of material.

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The very idea of criticizing McLuhan is a subject of interest and controversy. His writings are controversial in their appeal to the more generalist-oriented of the critics and in their lack of appeal to the more specialist-oriented.¹ As already noted, one of McLuhan's own emphases is the subordinate

¹Neil P. Hurley, "Marshall McLuhan: Communications Explorer," America, CXVI (February 18, 1967), 241.

role of any content to the medium in which it is expressed. Thus to criticize the meanings of his message is to scrutinize him on terms other than his own. Nevertheless, such an enterprise must be undertaken if there is to be any meaningful discussion of what he is saying. There is also the difficulty of evaluating writing which, as in McLuhan's case, does not lend itself to critical commentary. The combination of word plays, puns, and innuendoes makes it difficult to decide on what is perhaps whimsey or over-generalization and what is serious exposition.² Nevertheless, it is necessary for any appropriation of McLuhan's contributions to see his work in the light of criticisms pro or con.

Some critics have reacted negatively to the form in which McLuhan has placed his arguments and observations. These are criticisms about his technique or presentation and actual writing style. Regarding the method of presentation, the use of the probe and the untraditional logic in his arrangement of ideas are noteworthy.³ Author Howard Rosenberg and New York critic Ben Lieberman observe that his material is not essentially coherent or of high quality.⁴ This point assumes more than normal significance because of the fact that McLuhan's basic subject is communications. Any lack of adeptness in this area will meet with some questioning. One positive response to

²James W. Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," McLuhan: Pro and Con, edited by Raymond Rosenthal (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969), p. 291.

³Supra, p. 21.

⁴Harold Rosenberg, "He is a Belated Whitman . . ." McLuhan: Hot and Cool, edited by Gerald Emanuel Stearn (New York: The New American Library, Inc., c. 1967), p. 200. See also Benn Lieberman, "The Greatest Defect of McLuhan's . . .," p. 222 in the same volume.

the disorganization of ideas is given in a review of Understanding Media by Dean Frye, instructor at McGill University of Toronto, who suggests that McLuhan's fragmented style may be his way of searching for a form or literary style appropriate to the newly oral age in which we live. The broad tangle of interconnections could not have been given credibly in a linear way.⁵

Literary stylists, therefore, find much to criticize in McLuhan's work. Their comments may derive in part from the interest in English and literature which they share with him. Christopher Ricks, author of Milton's Dream and fellow at Cambridge University, calls McLuhan's style a "viscous fog," expressing material the subject of which is imagination and emotions.⁶ Jonathan Miller, author of a book-length critique on McLuhan's work,⁷ agrees with George Steiner, fellow of Churchill College at Cambridge, that the reason people who study English neglect McLuhan is that his English is poor and violates basic rules of literary esthetics.⁸ Related to this is the accusation that McLuhan fails to use good logic. Neil Compton, professor of English at Sir George Williams University in Montreal, refers to McLuhan's use of the enthymeme or incomplete syllogism. He observes that some literary experts would consider this a very poor manner with which to deal with reality.⁹

⁵Dean Frye, Ramparts, III (October 1964), 64.

⁶Christopher Ricks, "The Style is a Viscous Fog . . .," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 215.

⁷Jonathan Miller, Marshall McLuhan (New York: The Viking Press, 1971).

⁸Jonathan Miller and George Steiner, "As for Blake, McLuhan Is . . .," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 236.

⁹Neil Compton, "Cool Revolution," Commentary, XXXIX (January 1965), 80.

Various of McLuhan's critics center their attention on the general nature of his work. This aspect accounts for two difficulties: first, one cannot readily understand McLuhan because of the wide ranging subject matter on which he writes;¹⁰ secondly, one cannot easily summarize anything that he is saying.¹¹ These critiques at least allow the credibility of what he is saying generally, but there are also those who contend that McLuhan does not have the polymathic mind or experience to present information and facts to support his generalizations. Movie and drama critic John Simon says that McLuhan often writes from the perspective of only one book on a subject while there are many other available treatments of the same topic.¹² At least one critic sees a parallel between McLuhan's generalist approach and his work in the field of English. John Freund, professor of English at the University of Western Michigan writes:

Marshall McLuhan is a professor of English. Perhaps it is his experience in this least specialized of all academic fields which enables him to encompass the wide variety of specialized knowledge in the arts and sciences that was necessary to his undertaking.¹³

It has been said by some that McLuhan relies too heavily on secondary sources. Britain's Dan Davin, Secretary to the Society of Fellows of Clarendon Press at Oxford, cites McLuhan's lack of acquaintance with primary works in anthropology, in Greek and Latin literature, and in medieval philosophy

¹⁰Patrick D. Hazard, "The Analogy Between Print and . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 172.

¹¹George P. Elliot, "McLuhan's Teaching Is Radical, New . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 78.

¹²John Simon, "Pilgrim of the Audile--Tactile," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 97.

¹³John Freund, "The Gutenberg Galaxy . . . Strikes U . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 169.

and theology.¹⁴ Neil Compton offers the same criticism, adding that while much of McLuhan's "out-of-the way" information comes from secondary sources, he should be commended for discovering and perceiving the relevance of this heterogeneous material.¹⁵ These criticisms refer to a matter of basic scholarship, namely, the necessity of using primary sources whenever possible.

McLuhan is also criticized for lack of scientific argument and thinking. This is the point of literary critic and Professor Raymond Rosenthal, who says that McLuhan's books "are not scientific in any respect,"¹⁶ and of California State College history professor Theodore Roszak, who declares that there is no body of "incontrovertible experimental evidence" existing somewhere to support McLuhan's thesis that the medium is the message.¹⁷ The absence of large amounts of authoritative research and scientific finding in the sensory field makes it difficult to assert much about the sense ratios of man. Knowledge about the senses and measuring devices appropriate to them are not well developed.¹⁸ In a related matter, McLuhan supposedly disregards the historical perspective of social happenings. Some see him as one who makes a myth out of all historical causation and sociological conditioning.¹⁹

¹⁴Dan M. Davin, "The Style . . . Prefers to Rape . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, pp. 186-187.

¹⁵Neil Compton, "The Paradox of Marshall McLuhan," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 117.

¹⁶Raymond Rosenthal, "Introduction," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 6.

¹⁷Theodore Roszak, "The Summa Popologica of Marshall McLuhan," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 262.

¹⁸Tom Wolfe, "Suppose He is What He . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 42.

¹⁹Simon, p. 97. Christopher Ricks, "McLuhanism," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 102. See also Tom Nairn, "McLuhanism: The Myth of Our Time," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 150.

If a specialist reads McLuhan, he perhaps will find something pertinent to his area of learning. The same specialist may also discover a lack of creditibility about his area of knowledge in the way in which McLuhan treats it. For example, at least one specialist from each of these areas has noted McLuhan's deficiency in their field of interest: Shakespearian literature, the writings of James Joyce, printing, the cinema, television, and the work of historian Harold Innis.²⁰ In addition, several deplore McLuhan's total disregard for their areas of interest. Both Kenneth Burke, American literary critic, and Christopher Ricks note that McLuhan does not discuss the theater and drama.²¹ All of which says, with Theodore Roszak, that

McLuhan is no sort of specialist at all. Nothing he has to say is based on esoteric knowledge or technical competence. . . . It is the plight of the generalist that he cannot expect anyone to defer to his authority on the subject at hand.²²

This tension between McLuhan's attempt to be an authority on everything yet not fully authoritative on anything is also seen by some as the mark of McLuhan's genius.

McLuhan's thorough-going determinism prompts comments about his presuppositions. Determinism is expressed mainly in the idea of the media as the

²⁰For criticism of McLuhan's references to these six areas, see the following: Shakespearian literature, Elliot, p. 82; Joycean literature, Nathan Halper, "Marshall McLuhan and Joyce," McLuhan: Pro and Con, pp. 58-81; printing, Geoffrey Wagner, "Misunderstanding Media: Obscurity as Authority," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 161; film and movies, Dwight MacDonald, "He Has Looted All Culture . . .," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, pp. 206-207; television, Hazard, p. 172; and Harold Innis' work, Carey, passim.

²¹Kenneth Burke, "Medium as 'Message,'" McLuhan: Pro and Con, pp. 172, 177. See also Ricks, p. 213.

²²Roszak, p. 260.

causes of what we think and do. Miller admits to the effects the media have had, but he emphasizes that there is no reason for McLuhan to ascribe an influence to them which is above all else.²³ Similarly, literary and social critic Richard Kostelanetz says that McLuhan neglects to mention such social forces as money, politics, and sexual drive.²⁴ He labels McLuhan's approach "exclusionary determinism."²⁵ Here it must be recalled that McLuhan derives much of his basic approach from Harold Innis, the Canadian political economist who made the history of mass media the central focal point for the study of the history of civilization. Innis' determinism has had its influence upon McLuhan. University of Illinois professor of journalism and communication James W. Carey has written an essay entitled, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan" which provides a beneficial comparison between these two men, explaining McLuhan's debt to Innis as well as his alteration of Innis' argument.²⁶

Some react negatively to the aphorism "The medium is the message." The succinct and popular nature of this expression generates both flippant and scholarly evaluations. Ben Lieberman says, "The greatest defect of McLuhan's theory, however, is the complete rejection of any role for the content of communication."²⁷ In the light of McLuhan's statement to interviewer Eric Norden in 1969 which clarified that he did allow a role for the

²³Miller, p. 111.

²⁴Richard Kostelanetz, "Marshall McLuhan," Commonweal, LXXXV (January 20, 1967), 425.

²⁵Ibid., LXXXV, 423.

²⁶Carey, pp. 281, 296.

²⁷Lieberman, pp. 223-224.

message or content of the media, albeit a subordinate one, the evaluation by Lieberman may be inaccurate.²⁸ One question which should be addressed to critics of McLuhan's probes is whether they have taken into account the form of the saying, McLuhan's rationale for utilizing that form, and the information which the saying contains.

Reference to one critic who has totally rejected the content of McLuhan's writings concludes this summary of negative evaluations. A onetime disciple of McLuhan, Jonathan Miller, has written an extensive critique in which he seeks to outline the arguments of McLuhan and to show their inconsistency and inaccuracy. In his conclusion he writes,

And yet I can rehabilitate no actual truth from what I read. Perhaps McLuhan has accomplished the greatest paradox of all, creating the possibility of truth by shocking us all with a gigantic system of lies.²⁹

It is that "possibility of truth" which elicits favor by some and dissatisfaction by others. This is a commentary on both the importance of the bias of the reader of McLuhan to his evaluation as well as an indication of the tentative and unverifiable nature of the writings.

There are, of course, those who are in general agreement with McLuhan as well as those who, despite various faults which they discern, still admit to the value and significance of his writings. The latter is the position of most of McLuhan's public critics. Along with Dean Walker, writer for the Canadian magazine Executive, they find McLuhan meaningful when taken on his own terms.³⁰ Generally, the critics agree that The Gutenberg Galaxy

²⁸Eric Norden, "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," Playboy, XVI (March 1969), 61.

²⁹Miller, p. 124.

³⁰Dean Walker, "Executives Who Want This Man's . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 64. Cf. Hurley, CXVI, 242.

is superior to Understanding Media. They also recognize the value of The Mechanical Bride for broaching the subject of detached analysis of the advertising media. In a positive portion of his generally negative evaluation, Miller credits McLuhan with cunningly appropriating all the standards of critical analysis, protecting himself from the possibility of a cogent rebuttal. He says McLuhan has redefined the notion of inquiry and thereby controlled the factors by which any criticism of him might be made.³¹ While such an observation may not leave McLuhan credible in the traditional sense, it documents the uniqueness of his approach and that, in turn, may say something about the concepts of authority, validity, and logic today.

Neil Compton's "The Paradox of Marshall McLuhan" gives insight into another strength in McLuhan's writing. After a brief summation of McLuhan's role and of factors influential to him, Compton mentions that McLuhan seems like a typical reactionary, seeking less specialization, less urbanization, and generally less complicated life in society. But Compton notes McLuhan's unwillingness to despair, perhaps because of allegiance to literature which fulfills a prophetic role for him or because of his Catholic faith. So, Compton concludes,

he has always insisted upon the absolute importance, first, of recognizing the existence of a crisis that involves us all willy-nilly; and, second, of trying to understand what is really going on.³²

This constructive purpose is evident in McLuhan. His humanistic orientation leads him to be continually vigilant for the sake of helping man in society.

³¹Miller, p. 122.

³²Compton, "The Paradox," p. 111.

Some reviewers readily acknowledge McLuhan's prophetic and stimulating role. It has been observed that he is the first one of this century to work out a quantitative theory of sense efficiencies and the ratio of these to each other, finally applying this approach to all known communications media.³³ Some believe McLuhan's ideas will provide hypotheses for the years to come because he has perceived the crucial role of information processes in social systems.³⁴ Generalist though he may be, McLuhan has gathered the extant materials on a subject like typography and recast them in a way which gives them far greater relevance and expansiveness.³⁵ In line with the functions which we today ascribe to electronic scanners and computers, he has done the task of pattern recognition and configuration conceptualization.³⁶ San Francisco public relations consultant Howard Gossage says,

I believe McLuhan will endure, for the reason that there is an observable pattern in his work building toward a unified field theory. It is reasonable that he should try, for to account for creation is the proper goal of those who are able to envision it at all; it is the name of the game.³⁷

The analysis of Anthony Quinton, Oxford fellow and lecturer in philosophy, is even more substantial and concrete, suggesting that

³³Mary Virginia Orna, Cybernetics, Society, and the Church (Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Press, 1969), p. 54.

³⁴Kenneth E. Boulding, "It Is Perhaps Typical of . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 75.

³⁵Michael J. Arlen, "Marshall McLuhan and the Technological Embrace," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 86.

³⁶Thelma McCormack, "Innocent Eye on Mass Society," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 200. Cf. Wolfe, p. 46.

³⁷Howard Luck Gossage, "You Can See Why The . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 25.

If we ignore his [McLuhan's] anti-linear instructions, we can easily discern beneath the thin camouflage of his expository idiosyncrasies an articulate theory of society and culture, with all the usual apparatus of first principles, explanatory supplements, and logically derived consequences.³⁸

Those who commend McLuhan for making a valuable contribution generally laud his effort to synthesize and to express the broad picture, the trends and directions of mass society. Others have tried the same project, attempting to deal with all of history, especially the many forces operative in the complex technological world, and to construct a unified theory of culture. Some of McLuhan's critics recognize his effort in this direction, and they commend the originality of his work.³⁹

The secular critics have criticized both the form and content of McLuhan's work. They have noted his fragmented and illogical style, his over-generalizations, unscientific approach, and deterministic understanding of culture. Nevertheless, other critics commend McLuhan's attempt to synthesize all of history and culture into one comprehensive philosophy centering in the media. They cite his interest in aiding man's understanding as well as his prophetic function as positive contributions of his work.

Churchmen's Evaluations

Religion writers and thinkers have also responded to McLuhan's writing. Various endorsements of what they believe him to be saying can be deduced from reading adaptations of his thesis and themes in books and articles on Christian communication, especially in the areas of teaching and preaching.

³⁸Anthony Quinton, "Cut--Rate Salvation," McLuhan: Pro and Con, p. 188.

³⁹Rudolph E. Morris, "How Refreshing To See A . . . ," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 88.

Additional evaluations both positive and negative are available in church writers' reviews of his books. The following is an overview of reactions to McLuhan as expressed in some of these materials.

Jesuit John M. Culkin, in his section "Film and the Church" in Television-Radio-Film for Churchmen, has given his interpretation of "The medium is the message."⁴⁰ Afterwards, he has presented an abbreviated summary of McLuhan's writings under five headings: (1) 1969 B.C.--All the senses get into the act; (2) Art imitates life; (3) Life imitates art; (4) We shaped the alphabet and it shaped us; (5) A.D. 1969--All the senses want to get into the act.⁴¹ In discussing these, Culkin presents McLuhan's points without alluding to Christian perspective or application. His ensuing chapters center on film and its use for the church. The conclusion drawn from this arrangement is that Culkin considers McLuhan to be basic for a proper use of the media of film in the church today.

The articles under the editorship of Pierre Babin in The Audio-Visual Man are a serious attempt to apply McLuhan's message to the task of Christian catechetics. The main consideration is the aptness of audio-visual language for expressing faith. The advantages and risks of such communication are discussed.⁴² But, as in the case of Culkin's material,

⁴⁰Supra, p. 30.

⁴¹John M. Culkin, "Notes on McLuhan," Television-Radio-Film for Churchmen, vol. II of Communication for Churchmen Series, edited by Benjamin Franklin Jackson, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), pp. 214-217.

⁴²Pierre Babin, "Is Audio-Visual Language Apt To Express Faith?," The Audio-Visual Man, edited by Pierre Babin, translated by Claire Belisle and others (Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Press, 1970), pp. 33-53

a presentation on Marshall McLuhan is given as one of the introductory chapters of the book.⁴³ The inference is that McLuhan's material is basic to the entire subject of Christian catechetics.

A third endorsement and adaptation of McLuhan by a churchman is in The Future Shape of Preaching by Thor Hall. He divides his discussion into two sections, "The New Context of Preaching" and "Preaching in the New Context," as he seeks to provide theoretical grounding for a new homiletic of tomorrow. His first chapter is a homiletician's view of McLuhan that results in three implications from the new understanding of the media for preaching today: (1) "We may gain a deeper appreciation for the oral-aural qualities of the preaching event"; (2) Communication is a communal event; (3) Preaching is a genuine medium of communication insofar as it has immediacy.⁴⁴ This set of conclusions drawn from McLuhan's emphases provides the starting point for Hall's attempt to forge principles for homiletics in the electronic age.

This short summary of three recent publications indicates a response to McLuhan which considers his understanding of current culture and media to be basic to a discussion of Christian communication today.

Not all churchmen have responded so favorably to McLuhan's work, however. Some reject all or portions of his major writings. Martin Marty of the University of Chicago calls McLuhan's views on the media the

⁴³ Pierre Babin, "Audio-Visual Man," The Audio-Visual Man, pp. 13-31.

⁴⁴ Thor Hall, The Future Shape of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 15. Cf. pp. 15-18 for a discussion of these implications.

"catholic" or "embracing" approach.⁴⁵ He suggests that a correction of this would be a "bi-focal" view which understands those areas in which the media have great power and sway as well as those places where they have minimal effect.⁴⁶ This critique eliminates the broad determinism of McLuhan and submits that man can function as a controller of both media and its effects. Marty observes that McLuhan, Ong, and Culkin are all Roman Catholics, a denomination more ritualistic in its orientation. Their unqualified view of the media may be, in part, a reaction against the more print-oriented Protestant tradition. That is, the catholic view of media is appropriate to Catholic tradition.⁴⁷

Walter Ong, professor of literature at St. Louis University, favorably reviews his former teacher's work. He observes that McLuhan has not dealt directly with dogmatic or liturgical matters but that he has opened many doors for investigation into these and other areas of Catholic life.⁴⁸

Professor of religious studies W. Richard Comstock reflects on McLuhan's theory of sensory form. Responding to McLuhan's categories, he notes that a living relation between the sensory forms basic to simultaneity or to linear sequence should be designed.⁴⁹ In a key statement,

⁴⁵ Martin E. Marty, "The Gospel and Mass Communication," Concordia Theological Monthly, XL (June, July, August 1969), 165.

⁴⁶ Ibid., XL, 169, 171.

⁴⁷ Ibid., XL, 166.

⁴⁸ Walter Ong, "In a Way, the Angels . . .," McLuhan: Hot and Cool, p. 98.

⁴⁹ W. Richard Comstock, "Marshall McLuhan's Theory of Sensory Form," Soundings, LI (Summer 1968), 180.

he suggests that the "task before the philosopher of religion may be to show the dynamic relation between electric simultaneity and a continued openness to some temporal sequential growth."⁵⁰ The secular context of his comment provides material for consideration by the Christian communicator.

This review of churchmen's reactions to McLuhan reveals the same types of responses as given by the secular critics. There are both positive and negative evaluations of McLuhan by secular and religious critics. This again documents the controversial nature of his material. In addition, we have seen that scholarly critics writing apart from or within the context of the church have found valuable material in McLuhan.

⁵⁰ Ibid., LI, 181.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING FROM MCLUHAN:

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE AND VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Having examined the nature of the technological environment and of the audio-visual man, the major themes of media analyst Herbert Marshall McLuhan, and the critiques of McLuhan's message, the remaining task is to apply McLuhan's message and method to the task of Christian preaching. The nature of the resources used in this endeavor and the limits of the investigation must first be clarified.

Marshall McLuhan, while a member of the Roman Catholic Church and a professor at various of that denomination's institutions, does not write directly to Christian or even religious concerns. Consequently, although his major works are about communication and media, he has not addressed himself publicly to the subject of communicating the Christian message, much less to the narrower field of Christian preaching in parish settings. Thus, in order to draw from his writings some implications for the task of homiletics, it is necessary to select those emphases and insights which will clarify the Christian communication task, supplementing wherever possible with secondary material which shows direct dependence upon McLuhan or significant affinity with his ideas.

The term homiletics is here understood in the sense of a habitus practicus, an acquired practical aptitude which has as its basic purpose the communication of the message of God's love in Christ to people

of God engaged in God's mission to his world. Furthermore, this discussion is about parish preaching, with all the general and specific implications which surround that activity in this day of sophisticated and intense communication.

Three themes pertinent both to theology and to the subject of communications media are useful for this study. They are: (1) The message, Gospel Word; (2) The medium, the preacher; (3) The recipients of the message. These topics will be viewed from the contexts of Scripture, history, and Lutheran doctrine before they are examined within the setting of contemporary electronic technology.

Gospel Word as Media

The plural term "media" is here used in conjunction with the singular expression "Gospel Word" in order to convey the plurality of meaning and significance in the latter term. Ultimately, the "Gospel Word" is Jesus Christ who is himself the content of any communication which can be properly designated as God's Gospel for man. Nevertheless, usage of the term reveals various meanings which relate to various types and forms of communication and to various degrees of specificity, as for example in a definition of only the New Testament message or of the entire Scriptural record. Thus we are attempting to acknowledge the rich breadth of this term as it refers to the multiple means in which and by which eternal God has communicated his will and love. Finally, these means begin and end in the one Mediator or Medium between God and man, Jesus Christ.¹

¹1 Tim. 2:5.

The God revealed in the Scriptures is a communicating deity. He conveys his message to man. And while this communication is usually in the form of talk or words, God has also communicated through means such as dreams, natural phenomena and supernatural occurrences. All of these are summarized in the words of Hebrews 1:1, "In various forms and in different ways in the past, God has spoken to the forefathers through the prophets."²

To what does the designation "word" in Scripture refer? In general, we can list these main categories: (1) God himself (Psalms 33:4-6); (2) God's power in action (Hebrews 4:12); (3) Jesus Christ (St. John 1:1); (4) By implication, the Old Testament writings (2 Timothy 3:14-15), prophets (St. John 10:33-37); (5) The spoken messages of Old or New Testament people or of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 2:13); (6) God's will (2 Kings 9:32). These can be grouped as references to the Divine Being, to written or oral verbalizations, and to the plan and power of God. When used to describe God's action, "word" refers to a powerful force (Isaiah 55:10-11; Hebrews 4:12). Scripture refers to the incarnate Son as a word which God has spoken, the embodiment of life and a doer of actions with God (St. John 1:1-14; 1 John 1:1; Hebrews 1:1). As Richard R. Caemmerer, homiletics professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, summarizes, the terms for "word" in the Bible have two simultaneous emphases: (1) Active purpose, force, or activity toward a plan or intention; (2) Communication of action, force, or purpose toward and for people.³

²Exegetical study indicates that it is not the main purpose of this verse to justify the use of various media to convey God's message. Nevertheless, the passage does not eliminate such an understanding as a secondary emphasis.

³Richard Rudolph Caemmerer, "A Concordance Study of the Concept 'Word of God,'" Concordia Theological Monthly, XXII (March 1951), 171.

Judging from the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists, the Word of God was viewed especially as the Scriptural record as a source for Christian doctrine. Athanasius' rejection of philosophical resources is notable in this regard.⁴ Early controversies in the church centered on the nature of Jesus Christ, the Logos, or Word, and his relationship to the Father and the Spirit. While during this early period Christ the Word was considered to be the One who makes God known, this emphasis on revelation and the function of Christ was not developed fully in the histories of the doctrine of that period.⁵

In the writings of medieval theology there is a paucity of expression on the meaning and role of God, in spite of the rich dialectic.⁶ After Augustine's introduction of mystical elements into the theology of the West, there is a noticeable identification of the Word with activities of the intellect. The relationship of Jesus the Word to the Father is related to the way in which words proceed from man's intelligence.⁷ In this way the personal Word is related to human mental activity, and the resultant understanding of revelation and faith is highly subjective. The concept of the Word as expressed in sermons in the Middle Ages is difficult to document due to the possible inaccuracy of the written records.

⁴Bengt Hägglund, *History of Theology*, translated from the Swedish by Gene J. Lund (3rd edition; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 79.

⁵Augustine Leonard, "Toward a Theology of the Word of God," translated by John Costanzo and Philip Merdinger, in The Word: Readings in Theology, edited by Carney Gavin and others (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1964), p. 66.

⁶Ibid., p. 67.

⁷Ibid., p. 70.

For example, the sermons of Anthony of Padua were put into written form shortly before his death. That they are actual transmissions of what he actually preached cannot be determined. Jesuit Walter Ong notes his heavy use of Scripture and the essentially oral quality of his writing.⁸ Allegorizing Scripture, as first exhibited by men like Origen in the Patristic era, played a continuing role in medieval sermons.⁹

The Middle Ages exhibit a theology more centered in the sacraments than in preaching.

"Since the end of the preaching of the Fathers in the pre-Middle Ages, a danger appeared and has persisted, of a Christianity and of a ministry of souls that put the accent on the sacraments and exterior cult while the word of God was overshadowed. The theology and pastoral care of the Middle Ages escape with difficulty the charge of not having established and studied deeply the creative power of the Word of God as much as the 'ex opere operato' of the sacraments."¹⁰

In the period of Scholasticism, when many comprehensive summations of traditional doctrinal teachings were made, we note that Thomas Aquinas never constructed a theology of the Word.¹¹ During this period, the eleventh to the fifteenth century, the authority of both Scripture and tradition is especially stressed.¹² This basic emphasis and the subsequent impoverishment of Word of God theology continue to the time of the Reformation.

⁸ Walter Ong, The Presence of the Word (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 269.

⁹ Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁰ F. X. Arnold, Proclamation de la foi et communauté de foi, translated by F. Ricard (Brussels, 1957), p. 22, as quoted in Léonard, p. 68.

¹¹ Léonard, p. 67.

¹² Ibid., p. 72.

At the beginning of the Reformation, the understanding of Word of God is tied to the enactments of the Mass in the liturgical services for the people. Against this practice and theology, the reformers emphasized preaching based on the Scriptural record, the necessity for the laity to have the Bible for their personal use, and the centrality of Jesus Christ in the church's message. Biblical preaching is understood to be God's speech to man.¹³ In answer to the dearth of Word of God theology, Martin Luther says,

The Word is the Gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies. To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching. Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God...¹⁴

Christ is preached as living Word who by death and resurrection reveals God's heart to man.¹⁵ This teaching and preaching documents the solus Christus and sola Scriptura watchwords of Luther and others.

The Lutheran Confessions strongly identify the Word of God with proclamation, an understanding based on the New Testament concept of kērygma. The Word is not so much a possession as something which is heard. The Confessions identify the Word with Scripture, the Gospel, and the response of faith.¹⁶ Paul Scherer, homiletics professor at Princeton Theological

¹³Gustaf Wingren, The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church, translated from the Swedish by Victor C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 19.

¹⁴Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," translated by W. A. Lambert, revised by Harold J. Grimm, in Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), XXXI, 346.

¹⁵Wingren, p. 77.

¹⁶Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, translated by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 9.

Seminary, observes that the Reformation sought to place the Word of God rather than man into the center of things.¹⁷ This was, in effect, a relocating of Jesus the Word into the crucial position of authority and supremacy in the church.

With the rise of philosophies of religion in the centuries following the Reformation, there is repeated identification of the Word and revelation with reason. Seventeenth-century philosopher Spinoza taught that philosophy is the revealer of truth which has been veiled by revelation or prophecy. Even Christ is depicted as one who knew God and his will from the philosophical insights which he had. Reason became the proof and critic of that which is revealed.¹⁸ In the eighteenth century, philosopher Immanuel Kant reduced the Word of God to the role of introduction to moral faith. Later, Georg W. F. Hegel, the German philosopher, propounded the synthesis of idea and history based on the conviction that Christianity has the character of revelation of the spirit for the spirit.¹⁹

Verbal Word as Transmitter of Gospel Word

Against this tracing of the teachings and practices related to Gospel Word, it is necessary to examine the role and forms of the verbal medium during the same periods.

The times described in the biblical records as well as the periods in which those records were transcribed were generally oral-aural.

¹⁷ Paul Scherer, The Word God Sent (1st edition; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 10-11.

¹⁸ Leonard, pp. 77-78.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

Communication was primarily and essentially conceived of in terms of sound made by the voice and apprehended by the ear. Although writing, manuscript production, and scroll making were present in these times, such activities were too specialized to be considered normative to the basic communication in everyday life. These forms did not detract from the essential oral character of the times. Manuscripts are low in intensity; graphic illustrations served a largely decorative function. There was no exploitation of the visual sense.²⁰ The relations between men and ideas were effected in oral-aural activity. Walter Ong refers to this communication situation as "acoustic space," and he maintains that such a phenomenon implies presence more than the visual.²¹ During the periods of pre-history, biblical history, and post-biblical history up until the invention of moveable type, communication was a spoken and heard reality contingent mainly upon the nature of speaking and hearing and upon the aspect of presence which such communication implies.

McLuhan has said that the spoken word impinges on all the senses without the appeal to the visual sense which is more appropriate to private or individualistic viewpoints.²² Thus these early periods exhibit a more communal awareness and corporate identity than would be true for visually-oriented culture. The oral culture stresses personal matters over things. In relation to Jesus Christ, such characteristics find unique expression.

²⁰Ong, p. 51.

²¹Ibid., p. 164.

²²Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (2nd edition; New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1964), p. 81.

The Son of God speaks words which express the Father's will and presence (John 8:28-30). He himself is the abiding presence of God who will never leave his people (Matthew 28:20). His followers are incorporated into him in a community called the church, and in Paul's concept of corporate personality they share Christ's life. These realities are germane to the essential oral medium of the day which unites men and gives them awareness.²³ The confrontations with Christ in the biblical period have qualities of simultaneousness and actuality which typify the communication experiences of that era.²⁴

After the biblical period, from the time of the Fathers to the Reformation and the use of repeatable type, communication in the church and in secular life retains its predominantly oral-aural character with secondary attention to manuscript and written forms. With the invention of moveable and repeatable type the shift to visually oriented perception begins to dominate.

As the process of duplicating messages by repeatable type became more common and as products of the printing press were more widely disseminated, there was a shift toward an emphasis on the printed word in Western culture in general, and in Christian theology in particular. The Lutheran hermeneutic which developed, although based on theological rather than intellectual principles, was derived from the conviction that God's ultimate

²³Ong, p. 122.

²⁴Ibid., p. 128.

Word is one of Promise which is present in the written Word.²⁵ That "writteness" takes on special significance because of the print process. As Walter Ong points out, to the Reformation-age person the Word was at its best when it was anchored in space by typographical means.²⁶ Bibles were the first materials printed by mass production. People who before received the Scriptural message only in public services could now possess sections or all of the Scripture in printed form in their own homes, regardless of whether they could read or explain what they read. The Protestants' high regard for the Bible served to increase the importance of the print medium. The Roman Catholics' printing of the explanations of the Council of Trent had the same effect.²⁷ Thus there was a shift from primarily oral communication forms to the medium of visual print during this period. Ong observes that within the Protestant church there developed the mentality that without reading or attention to the printed form one could not fully feel the Word of God.²⁸ This is not to say that Protestant man did not confront or believe in Jesus the Word. It simply says that the forms through which information was mediated and through which God could be assumed as working tended toward or included the typographical.

To expand these ideas, print culture is characterized by a dominance of visually-apprehended messages in sequential arrangement. The invention

²⁵ Edward H. Schroeder, "Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?," The Lively Function of the Gospel, edited by Robert W. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 95.

²⁶ Ong, p. 277.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 280.

of the typographic form marked the arrival of visual verbal forms on a mass scale. Where written expressions were earlier confined in the experience of the learned in specialized locations like monasteries, the print medium made tangible copies of writing available to anyone. One could read them privately and interpret them without dependence on the larger community. In short, print greatly modified manuscript and scholastic culture.²⁹

What was the effect of the ascendancy of print upon the communication of the Gospel Word of God? First we must note that, while the oral man of pre-print times perceives the literal as inclusive and composed of all levels of meaning, print man of the sixteenth century, when apprehending the literal, "is impelled to separate level from level, and function from function, in a process of specialized exclusion."³⁰ The successive, linear, sequential nature of literal messages imposed a perceptual bias upon man. Printed books became reference works and sources of verification rather than expressions of the wisdom of the past ready to speak authoritatively to the eager hearer.³¹ This had its effects on the conceptions of truth and religious faith of the times. Typographical technology emphasized revelation or faith as systems of thought, codified formulas for documentation, or as systems of questions and answers. Faith became an ideology fixed in visually verifiable forms.³²

²⁹ McLuhan, p. 156.

³⁰ Herbert Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man (New York: The New American Library, Inc., c. 1962), p. 137.

³¹ Ibid., p. 130.

³² H. Kunzler, "Audio-Visuals and Revelation," The Audio-Visual Man, edited by Pierre Babin, translated by Claire Belisle and others (Dayton, Ohio: George A. Pflaum, 1970), p. 57.

From the Christian perspective, the limiting of concepts of revelation and of faith by the nature of a human medium of communication threatens to substitute idolatry of form for allegiance to God. It confuses the qualities of that which mediates God's message with the nature of God and his Message. H. J. Chaytor notes that the images in the mind of literate man are visual.³³ While he can give oral expression to them, his mental conceptions are conditioned by perception through the eye. Such visual apprehension can have negative implications when the object of perception is the Gospel message.

Writing about the communication situation prevailing at the time of the Reformation, Hendrik Kraemer, former professor of the history of religions at the University of Leiden, observes:

The extravagant and nearly exclusive stress on verbal communication, on preaching and sermonizing, in the world of the Churches, which issued from the Reformation, is a degeneration or distortion of the Reformer's rediscovery of the prophetic character and quality of the Word of God.³⁴

This is not to imply that people of the age did not apprehend the Christ of God in their preaching, hearing, and reading. It merely asserts that attention to the printed medium can condition one's ideas of truth, revelation, doctrine, Scripture, and God. The misconceptions which extreme visual orientation can foster are demonstrated in the biblicism of certain contemporary denominations. Insistence on certain Bible translations and on fixed verbal expressions of doctrinal beliefs reveals a strong visual bias

³³H. J. Chaytor, "Reading and Writing," Explorations in Communication: An Anthology, edited by Edmund Snow Carpenter and Herbert Marshall McLuhan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 121.

³⁴Hendrik Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 27.

for printed expressions of religious truth as authenticated by usage and time. The negative contribution of the typographical to man's reception of the Gospel Word is a visual bias in his concept of reality. This inclination obscures change, flexibility, and non-sequential happenings and imposes limitations on one's ideas of God and of Jesus the Word.

In the history of communications, the beginning of the modern age is signaled by the invention of the telegraph and other early electronic communications devices. Just as oral-aural communication continued while the typographic gained prominence, so the print culture continues its influence in the era of electronic media. Books, libraries, reading and printing are not eliminated by the new media. Yet the monopoly which print had on the storage of knowledge has been challenged by electronic languages and devices.³⁵ Print is no longer the dominant means for preserving information, although it will continue to be used for those tasks which it can do best. The difference from man's past attention to print is that his perception today is conditioned by the new sense ratio imposed by the electronic media.³⁶ His concepts of reality are not the same as those of man in the typographic age. In a commentary based on the writings of both Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan, Frank Dance maintains that there is a mixture of print-mediated influences and electronic oral influences in the current world.

the world is suffused with the spoken word, yet behavior is governed by the printed word. Print has the authority of

³⁵ Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Counter Blast (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), p. 99.

³⁶ Keith Crim, "Non-Linear Bible for the Global Village," Catholic Mind, LXVIII (June 1970), 45.

monologue; spoken word, dialogue. Printed has authority of alienation; spoken word of participation. Print has authority of dependency, spoken word of autonomy. Print has authority of sequentiality, spoken word of simultaneity. "These are the bases for the dichotomy we find when we try to live in a world still governed by the authority of the printed word when to a large extent, it's really a new world filled with the spoken word."³⁷

Technological communication presents man with a word which is agile, quick, adaptable, flexible and efficient.³⁸ Messages are not fixed in space by galley sheets and proofs. They are translated into human feelings, emotions, and voice inflections as electronic recorders faithfully reproduce living sound. Words are not limited to spaced lines on paper pages but are restored to their source in the living speaker as he lives in sound film productions. The objective fixed word of print is transformed into a living message of immediate consequence. A new sense of time and space is created.

It is here that electronic communication gives promise of positive values for communication of the Gospel Word. As electronic devices transmit messages according to their own designed capability, unencumbered by the print medium, they can creatively communicate a world view that transcends the limits of explanations and conceptions typical of the past.³⁹ They can make a positive contribution toward man's awareness of the interconnections between things and of the mysterious presence of sound. The new language favors an inclusive and participational spoken word instead

³⁷ Frank Dance, "Communication Theory and Contemporary Preaching," Preaching, III (September-October 1968), p. 29.

³⁸ José Luis Aranguren, Human Communication, translated from the Spanish by Frances Partridge (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 217.

³⁹ J. P. Bagot, "Audio-Visual and the Creation of Community," The Audio-Visual Man, p. 174.

of the specialist word of print culture.⁴⁰ These are positive aspects for the transmission of the Gospel Word.

Where fixed words have developed a mystique and gained attention which threaten man's concept of the supremacy of God, electric communication can be a tool for retrospective repentance and reorientation of priorities.⁴¹ Audio-visual language can contribute to a new awareness of God as well as to a fresh perception of the world and its needy creatures. The liabilities in concepts of the Word which resulted from an over-emphasis on print forms can be viewed as a valuable lesson for those whose over-emphasis on electronically-mediated messages might cause similar distortions. In communicating the Word of God, no medium should be allowed to usurp the ultimate superiority of the Word himself. As Valparaiso University religion professor David Truemper points out, the Lord must "lord it" over any medium used to communicate God's message.⁴² The electronic media must not be confused with Jesus Christ who himself mediates the love of the Father by the Spirit to man. Raymer Matson of Mansfield College at Oxford University points out that in the case of Jesus Christ, the Medium is truly the Message. He explains,

Christ came to demonstrate God's love for man and to call all men to Him through himself as Mediator, as Medium. And in so

⁴⁰ McLuhan, Understanding, p. 85.

⁴¹ James C. Campbell, "Using Audio-visual Resources," Communication—Learning for Churchmen, vol. I in Communication for Churchmen Series, edited by Benjamin Franklin Jackson, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 235-236.

⁴² David G. Truemper, "Christian Man in a Mediated Environment," Lutheran Education Association Monograph Series, I (Summer 1971), 5.

doing he became in the proclamation of his Church, the Message of God to man. God's Medium became God's Message.⁴³

Thus the electronic media offer the potential for recovering the sense of presence which characterized the pre-print oral period when Christ himself lived on earth. Messages today suggest wider community interpretations and more dynamic interrelationships between things and people. The purpose of God to mediate his love in Christ can be served positively by such media.

⁴³Raymer B. Matson, "The Christian and McLuhan," Dialog, VII (Autumn 1968), 264.

CHAPTER VII

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING FROM MCLUHAN:

THE PREACHER AS MEDIUM OF THE MESSAGE

The Preacher and Preaching in Historical Perspective

In the Scriptures, preaching and preachers are mentioned in various contexts. Jesus himself preached to people in the synagogue (Matthew 4:23) and in informal settings (Luke 5:1-3). His message was the Gospel of God, the announcement of the imminence of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). His preaching was linked with the message of God's prophets of the past as he spoke the good news to the poor (Luke 4:16-30).

After the ascension of Christ, the apostles were emboldened by the Spirit to proclaim a public verbal witness to Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promises. Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14-42) is one of the earliest of the apostles' proclamations. The apostles reiterated the theme of Jesus' preaching, the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:30-31), and they pointed to its beginning in the Christ (Acts 8:5). The earliest preaching of the New Testament church was proclamation of the work of God in Christ and a call for the hearers to believe this witness and be saved.

In the first period of the church's history, the Christians designated certain individuals to carry out the task of proclaiming the Word in public teaching and preaching. These people were named as prophets and evangelists, as pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11-14). They functioned as ministers of the Word by the authority of Christ, the Head of his Body, the church (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The words kēryōma and euaggelion in the New Testament describe the Christian Gospel as the message of a herald or courier.¹ But the Christian proclaimer is not pictured as a town crier who is indifferent to the news he proclaims. The biblical idea of preaching implies that the preacher personally believes what he is announcing to others.² The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the proclaimer of God's message is one who has already been convinced of the truth of God's witness in Christ and who lives in a relationship with him (Philippians 3:12).

After the period of the apostles' life and witness, the quality and fervor of preaching decreased somewhat. This is explained, in part, by noting that the early Church Fathers depended upon the apostolic witness for the substance of their proclamation and could not claim firsthand contact with the risen Christ as did the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:8-9). The Second Letter to the Corinthians by Clement of Rome may be one of the first sermons available to us from the post-apostolic period. It contains a sermonic salutation and ending, quotations from both the Old and New Testaments, and the themes of Christ's love, baptism, the resurrection, and the coming glory. The extant written form of this sermon suggests possible editing, and its length as a spoken message cannot be determined.³ At this early time, preaching and other church functions were not formalized or

¹Gustaf Wingren, The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church, translated from the Swedish by Victor C. Fogue (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 15.

²Philippe H. Menoud, "Preaching," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, A--D, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and others (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 868.

³Yngve Brilioth, A Brief History of Preaching, translated by Karl E. Mattson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), pp. 19-20.

built on long-established traditions.⁴ The uniting factor in the church at this time was a continuing sense of Christian community. This derived, partly, from a sense of historical continuity with the apostles and from the natural dependence of Christians upon one another in a non-Christian society. The activity of preaching, therefore, continued to depend on the authority of Christ as Head of the church, just as in the apostolic period.⁵

The preaching of the apologists, a short time later, was largely a defense of the Christian faith against attacks from outside the church. The preachers exposed the immorality of the pagans and exhorted the Christians to live exemplary lives.⁶ This emphasis continued in sermons of the ensuing years, but the function of preaching gradually shifted from the laity to specialized clerics.⁷

In the fourth century, Athanasius excelled as both a formulator of doctrine and as a preacher. Along with him, men like Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa composed sermons of Scriptural orientation which urged the people to holy living.⁸ One of the most significant of the Greek preachers was John Chrysostom, whose appellation, meaning "golden mouth," documents his gift of classic rhetoric. He wrote

⁴Hugh Thomson Kerr, Preaching in the Early Church (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1942), pp. 80-81.

⁵Ibid., p. 88.

⁶Ibid., pp. 120-121

⁷T. Harwood Pattison, The History of Christian Preaching (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1903), p. 57.

⁸Kerr, p. 164.

what might be considered the first treatise on homiletics. About five hundred of his sermons are available yet today, and while they are sometimes weak exegetically, this lack may be related to his prior emphasis on oratorical form.⁹

After the apostolic period, Augustine was the first writer of great evangelical sermons. His recognition of the centrality of Christ and his comprehension of the biblical concept of grace enriched his messages. Augustine's strong personal confession and his self-sacrificing life lead some to compare him closely to the Apostle Paul.¹⁰

Following these early centuries were a thousand years in which there was a dearth of great preaching. Concurrently there was increasingly greater emphasis on priestly functions apart from the laity as well as a gradual establishment of the sacramental liturgy as the primary act in worship. These factors mark a decline in the practice of preaching and a lack of appreciation of its role and function. All of these explain the low condition of personal religion.¹¹ Of course, exceptions to the decline of preaching can be found, but during this long period there was more significant use of the Gospel Word in proclamation in the mission activities on the European continent than in the worship services in long-established ecclesiastical communities.¹² Anthony of Padua,¹³ Francis

⁹Pattison, pp. 63-65.

¹⁰Kerr, pp. 212 and 216.

¹¹Pattison, p. 76.

¹²Ibid., pp. 76-87.

¹³Supra, p. 69.

of Assisi, Bonaventura, John Wycliffe, and John Huss were some who contributed positively to the church's theology and proclamation during the latter part of this long era.

The pre-Reformation years exhibited sermonizing of four general types. Some preaching was a repetition of sermons which had been composed earlier in church history and were not available for reading or revising. The failure of priests to deliver these in the vernacular often made such classic messages unintelligible for the masses. There were also sermons of the Scholastic tradition which played on words and explored matters of an esoteric and irrelevant nature. A third type of preaching was carried out by the members of the monastic preaching orders such as the Franciscans or Dominicans. Their messages often centered on accounts of saints' lives and legends. Finally, there was some preaching which was designed primarily to entertain or amuse.¹⁴ Such preaching resulted in few opportunities for the faithful to hear the Gospel Word and to receive any sort of pastoral care through preaching.

With Martin Luther and the other reformers, preaching regained its earlier importance and richness. A rededication to the Scriptures and a desire to reveal their long-hidden riches resulted in the powerful use of pulpit proclamation. Luther's use of the vernacular in preaching, his translation of the Bible into German, and his widely used sermons served to reinstate preaching as a primary activity of the church. His prolific sermonizing is in evidence in the 195 sermons produced within 145 days

¹⁴John Ker, Lectures on the History of Preaching, edited by A. R. MacEwen (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889), pp. 142-144.

in 1528.¹⁵ He emphasized that preaching derived its power from Christ, his death and resurrection.¹⁶ One who heard the Gospel of Christ proclaimed heard the living Christ. Preaching was a means by which the living Christ offered life to the hearer. Whereas the Scholastics taught that a text should be explained according to its historical, allegorical, tropological and anagogical meanings,¹⁷ Luther and others insisted on one God-given meaning for the Word.¹⁸ Thus, in the Protestant churches the verbally communicating preacher replaced the priest presiding over sacramental liturgies and mysteries.¹⁹

Luther's sermons were models for other preachers until the appearance of practical preaching books. Melancton was the foremost guide in solving the practical problems of Lutheran preachers. He wrote De officiis concionatoriis, a textbook on rhetoric which exhibits a theory of preaching rooted in the humanistic culture of the day. As a result of the utilization of this and similar guides, the sermon was changed into a doctrinal lecture.²⁰

¹⁵Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 349.

¹⁶Wingren, p. 58.

¹⁷Wilhelm Pauck, "General Introduction," Luther: Lectures on Romans, edited and translated by Wilhelm Pauck, in The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), XV, xxvii-xxviii.

¹⁸Helge Nyman, "History of Preaching (Lutheran)," Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, edited by Julius Bodensieck (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), III, 1941.

¹⁹Edward H. Schroeder, "Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?," The Lively Function of the Gospel, edited by Robert W. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 85.

²⁰Nyman, III, 1941.

In the Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century, the preaching of the Gospel is described as one of the earthly evidences, along with the administration of the Sacraments, of the church.²¹ These documents do not give an independent or unique role to preaching apart from the functions of the Scriptures and the Gospel. Preaching is linked to the Bible and its Gospel.²² Proclamation is held to be the center of the doctrine of Scripture and the fundamental basis of the Confessions themselves. "Confession [church dogmatics] presupposes preaching and, again, leads to preaching."²³

The seventeenth-century period of Lutheran orthodoxy reveals a variety of preaching characteristics. There were publications on how to structure the sermon and on what methodology to use in working with a text. It was considered necessary for a sermon to contain the five elements of instruction, reproof, exhortation, correction and encouragement.²⁴ There was also a greater emphasis on preaching the Law than was common in the century before.²⁵ During the period called Pietism and in the sermons of its representative theologian Philip Jacob Spener, preaching was oriented to the purpose of saving the individual. It was thought that man must be guided to a personal apprehension of righteousness. This concern resulted

²¹ Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, translated by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 217.

²² Ibid., p. 9.

²³ Ibid., p. 314.

²⁴ Nyman, III, 1942.

²⁵ Ibid. III, 1947.

in a shift away from the earlier interest on textually sound messages. Preaching in this period did have a positive concern for matters of personal language and communication style.²⁶

During the eighteenth century Enlightenment many preachers realized that the language pertinent to biblical times was not necessarily helpful to present day hearers. They began to approach biblical terms and concepts with the intention of expressing them in more contemporary words.²⁷

The nineteenth century inaugurated a period of great social change. At this time the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher tried to demonstrate the authenticity of Christianity as a religious experience apart from reason or moral experience. This basic emphasis found some expression in the public popularity of certain contemporary preachers. Sunday revivalistic preaching became important in many communities, but sermons were often no more than general religious talks using biblical referents.²⁸

While some significant radio preachers and a few great evangelists have appeared in the twentieth century, this period is not one of exceptional homiletic activity. Sermons have become shorter and, in many cases, more socially respectable as they reflect the rapid rate of change and increased secularity. Biblically sound preaching does survive in this time as it has to varying degrees in all the preceding ages. Yet during

²⁶Ibid., III, 1943-1944.

²⁷Ibid., III, 1945.

²⁸Ibid., III, 1947.

the contemporary period of technology and electronic communication, preachers face a formidable challenge regarding their role and their adaptation to the new media.

The Preacher and Preaching in the Electronic Age

Throughout the Modern Age, the sermon and preaching have retained a form similar to that of immediately preceding years. Since the Vatican II Council, the Roman Catholic Church has displayed a renewed emphasis on the spoken word and preaching.²⁹ Homilies now are a regular part of worship services. Increased secularization and continued improvements in technology, however, draw attention to a basic concern about the forms in which modern man might best apprehend the biblical witness through preaching.³⁰ Implied in this concern for appropriate forms is the related question of the preacher's role in the era of electronic technology. How does he fulfill the role of medium for the Word of God? In what sense is he the message or expression of that Word? In a day of communication to many senses, how does the preacher communicate to the full sensorium? And finally, should the contemporary preacher be, in effect, a communications media expert? How would such a role relate to his obligation as spokesman for God's Word. The following discussion of these concerns will further delineate the implications of the electronic media for homiletics.

²⁹ Walter Ong, The Presence of the Word (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 294.

³⁰ Nyman, III, 1949.

The current discussion of contemporary homiletics does not predict the demise of Christian preaching in this age. Princeton homiletics professor Paul Scherer asserts his personal conviction that there will never be a substitute for preaching in the church.³¹ Another instructor of preaching and theology, Thor Hall, contends that the church's life today obviously and unequivocally needs preaching.

No other single ministration of the church's ongoing confrontation with the gospel is so important to the church's life. But to be so, it shall have to issue in an actual preaching event which is truly communal, truly representative, truly bifocal, and truly theological.³²

Lutheran campus pastor at Harvard University, Henry E. Horn, cites the continued presence of the laity at church services as evidence of their expectation for messages from the Word. He says that the Scriptures are their only charter of identity and seal for Christian integrity.³³

These observations do not imply that there is no need for evaluation of the preaching ministry today. McLuhan and Ong have suggested that what we express vocally or in print today may be determined by the shape given to social organization and human life by electronic technology.³⁴ Their studies have drawn attention to the theoretical implications of the new understanding of the media for preaching. Drawing from these media experts, Hall lists three implications: (1) A deeper appreciation for

³¹Paul Scherer, The Word God Sent (1st edition; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. xi.

³²Thor Hall, The Future Shape of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 110.

³³Henry E. Horn, Worship in Crisis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 84-85.

³⁴Ong, p. 89.

the oral-aural nature of the preaching event; (2) A better understanding of the role of preaching in a corporate awareness of meaning; (3) A realization that the immediacy of preaching is essential to its certification as an authentic word event.³⁵ These implications relate to both the theological bases for proclamation of the Word and to the principles of modern electronic communication.

Marshall McLuhan's assertion that the medium is the message provides a helpful concept for understanding the preacher himself as medium for the message which he proclaims. What does it mean that, as medium of the Gospel Word, the preacher is the message? This question directs attention to the character of the preacher and to his life as communication which speaks to men apart from the preacher's addressing them in verbal form. This aspect of the preacher's proclamation was stressed in the New Testament era when Paul gave guidelines for the effective ministry of Timothy by advising him on right living as basic to his task of witnessing the Word (1 Timothy 4:11-16).

It is a basic fact of all communication that action has a primacy over words in convincing people. The making of words is, of course, an action in itself. But evaluation of human character is based more on observance of their activity than on attention to their language activity.³⁶ Richard R. Caemmerer notes that the element of love for people must exist side-by-side with good public address technique and the Word of God in order to

³⁵Hall, p. 15.

³⁶José Luis Aranguren, Human Communication, translated from the Spanish by Frances Partridge (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 29.

deliver the sermonic message to the hearer.³⁷ This means that the preacher's everyday activity of loving people is integrally related to his effectiveness as a preacher of God's message. Reuel Howe, author of several volumes which demonstrate the importance of dialogue in the pastoral ministry, says,

we are being called to take part in a life with God and man in which we, both clergy and laity, dare to say with our Lord: I am the message. Of course, the message is more than we are or have, but in a very real sense we are the message or there is no message for those who would listen to us.³⁸

The personal life and public witness of the man who preaches is not only a large portion of the message which he proclaims but also a certification or denial of that message in the eyes of the non-Christian. The preacher is himself, to a degree, the message.

It is not enough, however, for today's preacher to live an exemplary life if he is not also personally involved in growth relative to theology, especially in regard to homiletics. He must engage in study and in exercise which will place him close to the biblical material vital to his life and preaching. Duane Mehl, professor of Practical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, reminds the preacher that the meanings or capacities of words cannot be taken for granted today. One who intends to reach people verbally must be adept at exposing and explaining those great words in which the Christian message is stored. This presupposes an ability to work with the original biblical languages and an acquaintance with basic

³⁷Richard Rudolph Caemmerer, Preaching for the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 111.

³⁸Reuel L. Howe, Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), p. 101.

Christian concepts according to their past and present meanings.³⁹ Thor Hall says that no theologizing about preaching can be done without first involving oneself in a rethinking of the presuppositions of theology. He states that contemporary preachers cannot assume that the ecclesiology of past tradition is valid for today.⁴⁰ The theological growth of the preacher is a prerequisite for effective communication of God's Gospel in his life and in his formal proclamation.

Attention to non-theological resources which aid in an understanding of communication will also aid the contemporary preacher. Through the writings of men like McLuhan and Babin he can learn about the new epistemology pertinent to the electronic age. Sociological studies can assist the preacher in ascertaining the place and relative importance of preaching in the lives of Christians today. While previous ages give evidence of the importance of public preaching for the laity, we live in a time when preaching and other public proclamation are received with greater skepticism and incredulity by Christians and non-Christians alike.⁴¹ Non-theological disciplines and techniques will help the preacher gain an understanding of how God's people regard their current witness to the Gospel and the relationship of public preaching to that witness. The preacher's application of new understandings will enable him to minister better through his public sermons and through his total pastoral activity.

³⁹Duane Mehl, "Mass Media and the Future of Preaching," Concordia Theological Monthly, XLI (April 1970), 210-211.

⁴⁰Hall, p. xvi.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 98.

Media experts and communications theorists can provide special help to the preacher who desires to communicate to the full sensorium of man. The preacher must be aware that no one medium of communication is intrinsically superior to others but that each one has its own value and capability for specific purposes. Knowledge about the comparative suitability of a medium for a certain communication project will help the preacher communicate effectively to the variety of senses and perceptual biases in people.⁴² Research has already proven how a message is more efficiently communicated when it is repeated by means of a different medium.⁴³

Primary to effective communication to the full sensorium in a formal speaking situation is the preacher's use of the visual message of his own public behavior. Personality is conveyed more through one's facial and body movements and mannerisms than through his words.⁴⁴ His physical appearance and activity before, during, and after his actual addressing of people are elements of his total image in the minds of the observers. If their eyes do not validate what their ears hear, the visual communication will undermine the verbal.

Today's preacher must also have an awareness of how various media can help him communicate in a way which addresses and enhances the wholeness

⁴² Benjamin Franklin Jackson, Jr., "Introduction," Audio-Visual Facilities and Equipment for Churchmen, vol. III in Communication for Churchmen Series, edited by Benjamin Franklin Jackson, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 8.

⁴³ William F. Fore, "Communication for Churchmen," Communication—Learning for Churchmen, vol. I in Communication for Churchmen Series, edited by Benjamin Franklin Jackson, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 43.

⁴⁴ James E. Alexander, "Sound in the Church," Audio-Visual Facilities, p. 112.

of persons. Christ communicated the Father's will not only through verbal proclamation and teaching but also by healing which restored full physical and sensory capabilities to men. He thus dealt with men in a comprehensive ministry to their whole being. This approach took into account the way in which the Father created man as a total being, fashioned of the clay of the earth with the breath of God enlivening him (Genesis 2:7). God has dealt with man in ways which acknowledge man's unique wholeness and which have redeemed all aspects of his existence. By exploiting the capabilities of electronic media, the communicator of God's message can address the full sensorium of man and communicate in a way which recognizes a healthy balance among all the senses. The constant danger is that the overemphasis on messages to the visual sense which came with print culture will be replaced by an overemphasis on the new aural communication which has been introduced by the electronic media.⁴⁵ But the risks of overcommunication to one sense at the exclusion of others must be taken in the interest of some positive gain. By attempting to address the rearranged sensorium of modern man the preacher can help the hearer to detect new tones and inflections in the Word of God and to apprehend new insights and riches from the revealed Message. With regard to the ministry of the Eucharist, there can be a greater recognition of mystery and unity in the church by means of this Sacrament today because of the increased importance attached to taste and touch.⁴⁶

⁴⁵H. Kunzler, "Audio-Visuals and Revelation," The Audio-Visual Man, edited by Pierre Babin, translated by Claire Belisle and others (Dayton, Ohio: George A. Pflaum, 1970), pp. 65-66.

⁴⁶Raymer B. Matson, "The Christian and McLuhan," Dialog, VII (Autumn 1968), 265.

But the limitations of the electronic media and audio-visual facilities must also be acknowledged. The preacher is obligated to ascertain the risks and liabilities of electronic and audio-visual communication. Lack of clarity, precision, structure and synthesis are some of these.⁴⁷ Commenting on the use of audio-visuals in Christian catechetics, Pierre Babin and co-author Claire Belisle stress the need for investigation beyond obvious realities and expressions in life in order to perceive the deeper spiritual significance of reality so that it may be expressed effectively in the use of the media. This requires much critical evaluation and reflection both in regard to audio-visual documents used and in regard to life and the Gospel.⁴⁸ These suggestions also apply to preaching. The goal of the preacher who enlists the resources of the media and audio-visuals should be to provide new insights, heightened awareness of relationships, and a sense of liberation which are all related to God and his Gospel.

In the past churchmen and preachers have reacted negatively to the electronic media and mass communication. Some of these reactions have, no doubt, been justifiable. Nevertheless, there have been critics of the media and modern communication which have viewed them as being in opposition to God's Word and the task of the church.⁴⁹ Such appraisals fail to consider the positive contributions of the media when used in the service

⁴⁷ Pierre Babin, "Is Audio-Visual Language Apt to Express Faith?," The Audio-Visual Man, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁸ Pierre Babin and Claire Belisle, "Guidelines for Beginners," The Audio-Visual Man, p. 200.

⁴⁹ Michael Bell, "Preaching in our Mass Media Environment," Preaching, IV (January-February 1969), 5.

of the Gospel. Sometimes professional churchmen do not understand the media and communication and do not know the pertinent questions to ask about them.⁵⁰ Such a deficiency may result in a negative attitude toward the use of any technological means of communication for expressing the Christian message. The challenge then becomes whether the church will lag behind the world in using the gifts of media from God. Will the proclamation of the Word of Christ be at the pace and in the style of yesterday's man?⁵¹ This question continually confronts the church and individual preachers as they live in the midst of an increasing array of technological innovations for communication.

While living at a time removed from the first oral-aural period of history and immediately after the typographic era, the preacher of the electronic age has at his disposal a record of God's communication to man throughout several periods of different communication emphases. He can analyze and reflect upon these periods for the purpose of appropriating the positive contributions of each of them in his present ministry. He can intelligently recognize the strengths and weaknesses in various modes of communication when used for the Gospel. In the midst of today's communication explosion, he will be aware that the medium he uses at any time is only one of many which are affecting the church and society.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., IV, 4.

⁵¹ Pierre Babin, Methods: Approaches for the Catechesis of Adolescents, translated and adapted by John F. Murphy (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 18.

⁵² Bell, IV, 15.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING FROM MCLUHAN:

THE RECIPIENTS OF THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL

Receiving the Gospel in Pre-Electronic Cultures

From the time of Jesus' ascension, the apostles were to use the power of the Holy Spirit to preach and bear witness to the Christ. Their activity was to begin at home and extend to the nearby cities and distant places of the earth (Acts 1:6-8). The result of the preaching and healing miracles of the apostles was that many men and women joined the ranks of the Christians (Acts 5:13-16). The work of proclamation and teaching continued daily in private and in public (Acts 5:42), and as the Word of God spread to other locations, the church grew (Acts 6:7). The Scriptural account of the effect of the Spirit-brought Word in those days is dramatic.¹ It indicates that the church was brought into existence and sustained by the Word mediated by God through the messages of his people. The apostles, prophets, and teachers who did the formal preaching and teaching were gifts of God to the church for the purpose of publicly announcing the Good News of Christ (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28). The New Testament church also had the offices of elder and bishop for the purpose of speaking the kērygma (Titus 1:5-9). Some of those who had earlier received and believed the Word were specially set apart for continuing a formal ministry of the Word.

¹In addition to Acts 6:7, the following passages also document the spreading of the Word by the Spirit in the early church: Acts 9:31; 12:24; 13:49; 16:5; 19:20; and 28:30-31.

Following the apostles' deaths, the early church continued to grow by the Word. But the witness to the Gospel was more and more a testimony to Christ by men who had little or no living contact with those who had viewed the risen Lord. In addition, the philosophies and social forces of the world challenged the Christians to defend the uniqueness of their Lord and of the apostolic tradition. The accounts of bold witnessing to Christ and of persecution in the post-apostolic era indicate that the Word was deeply rooted in the early Christians. Many were faithful to Christ in face of adversity, and some, like Polycarp and Ignatius of the second century, suffered death for their witness.²

In the hundreds of years to follow, the Gospel proclamation continued to bear fruit among its receivers. The mission outreach of the Middle Ages resulted in men of many nations coming to faith. Those who led the church as spokesmen in doctrinal controversies and as skilled preachers were heard regularly by the laymen. The great preacher-orator Chrysostom sometimes preached twice a day and apparently repeated his sermons on different occasions for the crowds who came to hear.³ But the institution-izing of the church in these years often resulted in preaching which served the past traditions and heritage of the church rather than the needs of the people. Many sermons were preached in Latin to people who didn't understand it. Such a situation was not generally conducive to growth in the Word.

²Hugh Thomson Kerr, Preaching in the Early Church (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1942), p. 50.

³Yngve Brilioth, A Brief History of Preaching, translated by Karl E. Mattson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 34.

In the years before the Reformation great numbers of people also gathered to hear preachers like Anthony of Padua, who at times preached to crowds of twenty to thirty thousand.⁴ But this was the era when an over-emphasis on liturgical forms preempted the centrality of the Word in worship. People heard few clear expositions of the Word. The fact that it was still read in the appointed lessons of the services was of little value since the vernacular of the people had not been adopted by the ecclesiastical organization.

In contrast, the Reformation leaders brought the message of the Scriptures to the hearers in their own tongues in public services on a frequent basis. Preaching thrived as the chief medium for the spread of the reformers' teachings. The laity heard messages which explained the texts of the Bible and urged them to discipleship. Without such preaching of the Word, the reformers said, man's very source of life with God was gone. Although the reformers were dedicated to the centering of all things around the Gospel and Christ, their direct appeals to the laity and their obvious concern to communicate to them in their language made the recipients of the preached Word especially important. This was also the time when men could personally own and study printed copies of the Scriptures from the printing presses.

For the Lutherans, preaching was not considered as an alternative to the Eucharist. Luther was convinced that the proclamation and the Sacrament

⁴John H. C. Fritz, "History of Christian Preaching," Lutheran Cyclopedia, edited by Erwin L. Lueker and others (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 837.

were essentials not in competition with each other, and he maintained them as the twin focal points of the public worship service.⁵

In the Lutheran confessional writings, preaching is described as the way by which the Gospel of forgiveness is announced among the people. This and the sacramental ministry constitute the elements necessary for the establishment and identification of the church.⁶ The people are gathered together by the work of the Spirit through preaching and Sacraments.⁷ A group of Christians who gather to hear and believe the Word in any location are the church of Jesus Christ fully and really in that place.⁸ The relationship of the believers to God and Christ is solely dependent upon the Gospel Word which is heard and believed. The Confessions themselves as "doctrine of the church" are a model for the preaching heard regularly by the people of the church.⁹ These people, the church headed by Christ, call a man to serve as pastor and preacher among them. The Word proclaimed by the called preacher is not to be regarded as the word of men, but is the voice of God himself from heaven.¹⁰

⁵ Helge Nyman, "History of Preaching (Lutheran)," Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, edited by Julius Bodensieck (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), III, 1940.

⁶ Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, translated by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 198-199.

⁷ Ibid., p. 200.

⁸ Ibid., p. 203.

⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 244-247.

Some years after the Reformation, in the period called Rationalism, there was considerable preaching which withheld the Word and the Scriptures from the hearers.

Some preachers, unable to find in the Bible, as they read it, topics of sufficient interest, gave lectures upon economical or social subjects, such as agriculture, vaccination, and the making of wills,—or upon subjects taken from the natural sciences, such as the structure of fishes and birds. Most of this school, however, a very numerous one, took to "moral preaching." Sometimes they changed the language of the Bible, in order to make it, as they said, more rational. For conversion or regeneration, they spoke of amendment of life; for justification, of forgiveness on condition of repentance; for the Holy Spirit, of the exercise of the higher reason; for the atonement of Christ, of the spirit of sacrifice which He has taught us by His example, and so on.¹¹

Such messages were not Scripturally oriented and sometimes even failed to address religious matters. The result was the impoverishment of the spiritual lives of the laity.

In the preaching of Schleiermacher in the eighteenth century the laity heard talks intended to awaken religious feelings but not to instruct or to move to action.¹² This rationalistic approach further deprived men of a powerful witness to the Word in sermons. Such periods of widespread non-biblical preaching contrast sharply with the dynamic Word-oriented lives of the Christians in the New Testament church.

A broad overview of the situation of the laity in regard to the history of Christian preaching does not adequately express the fact that there were countless people who were taught and moved to lives of discipleship by the Word proclaimed. At times, this personal growth in the Lord was in spite

¹¹John Ker, Lectures on the History of Preaching, edited by A. R. MacEwen (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1889), p. 247.

¹²Fritz, p. 838.

of the types and contents of preaching for the day. Nevertheless, the Spirit continued to build the church upon the witness to the Son of God and upon the proclamation of his death and resurrection as first expressed by the apostles.

Participating in the Gospel in the Electronic Age

The technological culture of the present century with its mechanized living, rapid pace, and specialization of roles provides a unique environment for the expression of a witness to the Word. Communication today is a science developed and studied in the secular world. The church has at its disposal electronic tools for amplifying and duplicating sound, for projecting still and moving visuals, for reproducing print forms in unique ways, and for transmitting messages over great distances. The Sunday sermon is often mediated by electronic devices to the worshippers in the sanctuary, to the shut-ins listening to their radios, and to recorders which will preserve the message for use in house calls.

What are the implications of such methods of communication of the Word? In what ways do the media implement the believers' participation in the Gospel? These questions can be answered by indicating the ways in which the media and the communications environment can help the Christian to share in the proclamation event, to change his attitudes and be better equipped for discipleship, and to assist his extension of the Word into the Global Village.

Marshall McLuhan has referred to the "simultaneous field" of electric information structures in society today. He contends that this field is more appropriate to participatory and dialogic communication than to

specialized private expression.¹³ Using McLuhan's terms for describing media, Thor Hall says that the sound-based sermon of the church is essentially a "cool" medium.

As an event in sound, on the other hand, the sermon is alive, inclusive, immediate; it facilitates--in fact it does not happen without--participation, involvement, and commitment. The hearer is confronted with a medium of low definition; it is present, ad hoc, transitory. In its most authentic form, the sermon is a "cool" medium.¹⁴

These observations provide insight into the contemporary believer's opportunity to share in the proclamation of the Word.

One principle of learning and communication is that communication does not take place unless there is a common field of shared experience. This is necessary so that a message may be truly heard, understood, and responded to.¹⁵ This shared experience can be initiated or implemented in the preaching situation by the participatory nature of the communications environment and by the use of dialogic methodology. In order for the hearers to fully share in the preached message, the preacher must prepare his message with the people and their possible response in mind. Proclaimer and people should be partners "in the discernment and proclamation by the word and action of the Word of God in response to the issues of our day."¹⁶ The use

¹³Herbert Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man (New York: The New American Library, Inc., c. 1962), p. 172.

¹⁴Thor Hall, The Future Shape of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 115.

¹⁵William Wickenkamp and David E. Deppe, "A Communication Model" (Unpublished Study Paper, St. Louis University, St. Louis, 1969), p. 4.

¹⁶Reuel L. Howe, Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), p. 5.

of audio-visual documents and techniques can aid the exchange of shared meaning because their non-directive nature elicits the response of communicator and receiver alike.

A principle of the psychology of communication is that people are best convinced or persuaded of something when they share directly in the process of conclusion or deduction. Consequently, preaching that utilizes verbal or non-verbal techniques which enlist and engender the participation of the hearers in the questions of faith and life will be more persuasive.¹⁷ One important aspect of participatory communication and dialogic preaching is listening.¹⁸ Both preacher and people need to listen to the Word, to one another, and to the world. If the dialogic propensity of the present simultaneous field of communication structures in any way assists people in learning how to listen, it will have served the proclamation of the church.

The second way in which the media environment can serve the believer's participation in the Gospel is in regard to changing attitudes and helping to act. One hope of the preacher is that his words do not stand as obstacles to the reception of the Gospel Word.¹⁹ The hearer's inattention or antagonism either to the type of communicating being done or to the message of the communication can also be obstacles for the preacher to overcome. Here the use of electronic media can facilitate drawing attention

¹⁷Frank Dance, "Communication Theory and Contemporary Preaching," Preaching, III (September-October 1968), 31.

¹⁸George William Jones, Sunday Night at the Movies. (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1967), p. 14.

¹⁹Richard Rudolph Caemmerer, Preaching for the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), pp. 41-42.

to the proclamation or sustaining interest. The media serve better as reinforcers than converters; they are better at motivating than they are at injecting new ideas.²⁰ They can thus serve to reinforce what has been taught and stimulate to action. It is in this regard that a correct concept of the nature of Christian communication is important. It must be intrinsically faithful before it can be considered effective.²¹ This means it must be faithful to the Word who is Christ, to the Scriptures, and to the Spirit alive in God's people.

The aptness of the media to reinforce remembering can also be a positive contribution to the goal of changing attitudes through preaching. Learning accompanied by audio-visuals impresses the mind and senses in a way which facilitates remembrance, a phenomenon which may help the child of God to recall God's mercy and promise.²² Edmund Carpenter explains that a new language such as audio-visual communication lets us see with new eyes sensitive to the joy of discovery.²³ Enlisted for the Gospel's sake, this benefit may help the man of God to again recognize the wonder of life with God and of daily forgiveness in Christ. As is demonstrated in the television broadcasts of sporting events, some media can replay the images of the momentary past. Video tape, motion picture film, and

²⁰Robert Garmatz, "Communicate Christianity Electronically," Issues in Christian Education, II (Summer 1968), 17.

²¹Michael Bell, "Preaching in our Mass Media Environment," Preaching, IV (January-February 1969), 26.

²²Gene A. Getz, Audio-Visuals in the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 41.

²³Edmund Snow Carpenter. "The New Languages," in Explorations in Communication: An Anthology, edited by Edmund Snow Carpenter and Herbert Marshall McLuhan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 175.

recording tape can preserve a record of events from the near or distant past. When used to store a record of the activities of God's people in worship, witness, fellowship, or exercise of vocation, these may help to evoke gratitude for past blessings or increased recognition of the communal nature of the church. The result may be a resolution to repeat specific acts of service or sharing.²⁴ The media may also assist in providing an in-depth involvement with issues which leads to new thinking and expression in the Christian life.²⁵

The special sensory development about which the media experts write suggests that stimulation of the reorganized sensorium is a prerequisite for action.²⁶ On the basis of this, the preacher may enlist the media to address audio-visual man with a message from the Word which will lead to a specific action. His proclamation of Christ's enabling love may be followed by audio-visual documents which highlight the world's needs. This combination may help to activate the Christian to apply God's love to the expressed need. While such depictions of need are never the Gospel, they can serve to inform and document particular situations which might otherwise go unnoticed.

If the church desires to proclaim the Christ who empowers men for involvement in and for the world, the audio-visual idiom, fast becoming the most natural form of modern expression, must be used. That idiom emphasizes

²⁴J. P. Bagot, "Audio-Visual and the Creation of Community," The Audio-Visual Man, edited by Pierre Babin, translated by Claire Belisle and others (Dayton, Ohio: George A. Pflaum, 1970), p. 179.

²⁵Pierre Babin, "Audio-Visual Man," The Audio-Visual Man, p. 15.

²⁶Ibid., p. 24.

involvement; literary culture stresses "detached intellectual reflection."²⁷ The rapidity and shallowness of many of today's electronically transmitted messages may, however, appear to vitiate the in-depth involvement desired by the church. Yet there can be a positive factor in this situation. Depth involvement can easily degenerate into exaggerated individuality or service of self. It can lead to preoccupation with private interests and goals. But the positive acceptance of the speed and shallowness of life in technological society provides the church with opportunities to serve people in brief pleasant experiences. Strategic use of film vignettes, radio and television spots, succinct object lessons, and visual montages will exploit these opportunities. This approach to contemporary culture is better than a defensive attempt to capture the past which may have been more conducive to depth experience.²⁸ Its value is in its offensive stance with an eye to positive goals for the church.

The electronic environment can also assist the church in carrying out Christ's commission to witness to the world. McLuhan's global village concept has relevance in this respect. The new tribal awareness provides a secular referent which can remind the church of its corporate personality with Christ and its nature as his Body.²⁹ The church in the global village is still called to reveal the meaning of all things as they are summed up in Christ (Colossians 1:15-20). The secularity of the times provides opportunity for using secular documents in audio-visual language together with

²⁷Marc Peter, "The Audio and the Visual," The Audio-Visual Man, p. 77.

²⁸William C. Henzlik, "McLuhan and Parish Pastors," Christian Advocate, XI (May 4, 1967), 9.

²⁹Keith Crim, "Non-Linear Bible for the Global Village," Catholic Mind, LXVIII (June 1970), 47.

verbal clarification of their relationship to God in Christ.³⁰ As Christ entered time and culture, so the Word must be mediated to this generation and age. Here the media are positive resources for the Gospel's confrontation with the world and its redemption of the same.

The present environment also poses limitations to communication and to Gospel proclamation. The global village has not given evidence for believing that all men in technological society are communicating with one another or that they even want to. While electronic communication may involve and unite on some levels, it can also intensify regional differences and cause people to value more highly the traditions which afford them security and identity. Separateness, isolation and denominationalism in the church may be implemented rather than overcome by greater attention to uniqueness and individuality.³¹ There may also be a tendency for Christians to substitute dependence on mechanical communication for personal witnessing which can only be done in face-to-face verbal exchange. Even in the electronic era this remains the most common mode of communication. Personal conversation has an inherent dependence on the give and take of human relationships and is the most indispensable form of communication.³² Verbalizing the Word and its implications is not obsolete in the technical age.

In several respects, McLuhan's categorization of certain media as cool applies to Jesus Christ. He taught and preached using techniques

³⁰Pierre Babin, "Catechetical Criteria," The Audio-Visual Man, p. 170.

³¹Raymer B. Matson, "The Christian and McLuhan," Dialog, VII (Autumn 1968), 265.

³²Carpenter, p. 173.

which elicited responses from his hearers. He lived a witness to the Father which called for a response of faith to complete his purpose and life. Raymer Matson suggests that the "coolness" of today's environment is conducive to apprehending the "cool" Christ. Jesus, the Medium of God, can be communicated in a unique way to people of an essentially cool era.³³ Perhaps the Scriptures, initially in manuscript form in the early oral-aural period, can be better understood in some respects by man of the new aural time. Today's man, it is said, is in a better position to appreciate this message than those whose lives were totally immersed in print culture.³⁴ Here it must be noted that communication forms cannot in themselves create faith. Yet they can serve as a means by which the Spirit builds the church through the Word.

In the final place, only Christ gives life and wholeness to men. If the media are used with the intent of explicitly mediating the Gospel of the Father's love in Jesus Christ, they may well enhance and enrich that purpose. Ultimately, the Spirit will bless the proclamation of the Gospel, electronically mediated or not. The Word of the Lord will also grow in the global village.

³³Matson, VII, 264.

³⁴Crim, LXVIII, 46-47.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

The complex matrix of communication devices and systems is an integral part of modern life. Whether on a private or public level, the electronic media encode reality in a unique way for modern man and condition the way he perceives and learns. Technological man learns more by experience through total sensory involvement and balanced audio-visual perception than did his predecessor of the print era. These ways of learning also relate to modern man's apprehension of religious reality and truth. Subjective investigation and verification, depth involvement, and a broad sensory experience characterize audio-visual man's religious life. The media shape the way he views religious matters and may be the means by which he expresses his spiritual life.

Herbert Marshall McLuhan has analyzed the media environments of history and given special attention to the electronic age. His background includes advanced study of English literature, professorships in several colleges, and a career as a literary critic. He has disclosed little of his personal life to the public.

With regard to McLuhan's writings about history, media and contemporary man, he has been greatly influenced by author philosopher James Joyce, Peter Ramus, author H. J. Chaytor, Canadian historian Harold Innis, and others from the fields of literature, sociology, and history. His writing reveals a dependence on the work of Roman Catholics Walter Ong and Teilhard de Chardin, but his work is not essentially religious or Christian in

orientation. He treats religion sociologically in the manner of a detached analyst. His personal religious beliefs do not find expression in his work.

All of history and all the inventions of man are the objects of McLuhan's observations. He believes that technology and the media, the extensions of man, determine man's social role. History is viewed deterministically, with man subjected to the ways in which media transmit reality to him. The effects of the media environment of any period of history upon the perceptions of its people can be understood only in retrospect. Yet man has the capability of overcoming technology's tyranny through intellectual understanding. McLuhan is dedicated to helping man comprehend the powers of the media so that he is not enslaved by them. This humanistic concern does not result in any expressed system of ethics or values on McLuhan's part however. He avoids judgmental statements, preferring to see himself as a pioneer and experimenter trying to help man understand the media and live intelligently with them.

McLuhan considers messages or content secondary in importance to the media which transmit them. He says that concern for content is a carry-over from the print age. Actually the media themselves are the shapers and molders of man's perceptions and behavior. Man must understand the media and their powers more than the messages they convey.

When the media impinge on man's senses they rearrange his sensory apparatus. Media cause a perceptual bias, altering man's conception of reality according to the sense to which a particular medium communicates. The print era was characterized by a highly visual bias. Today, the electronic media involve man in synesthesia, the interplay of all the senses.

The result of extending any one sense over another is a hypnotic effect which numbs the other senses' perception of reality.

McLuhan says that the contemporary communication environment involves man in a global village situation. Men are aware of the world community, and they participate in a collective consciousness. The time is coming when human consciousness will be simulated by technological invention. In face of such a possibility, man should approach the media with a determination to understand their effects and to make them serve him. His very survival as an autonomous and independent being is based on whether or not he understands the media.

McLuhan's ideas have been appraised positively and negatively by both secular and religious critics. His style and logic, the deterministic approach to history, the general nature of his assertions, and his lack of clear expression are cited as weak aspects of his work. On the other hand, he is regarded as creative, prophetic, and original in the project he has undertaken and in his observations. His attempt to draw upon all of history and culture in order to produce a unified analysis of man as conditioned by the media is valued highly by some secular and religious critics. Men engaged in endeavors of both secular and Christian communication have adopted his views on man and the media.

The writings of Marshall McLuhan have implications for three aspects of homiletics: The Gospel Word or Message, the preacher who mediates the Word through human communication forms, and the recipients of the Word.

The spoken word as a medium of communication relates more to communal awareness and corporate identity than does the medium of print. Nevertheless, when used in Christian preaching, overattention to the speech medium

or to any other medium of communication may result in idolatry of form and relegate the Gospel to secondary status. On the other hand, as McLuhan warns, inattention to the medium by which a message is transmitted may result in a lack of awareness of the limitations of that medium to communicate certain aspects of reality. The perceptual bias caused by a medium may not be realized. Words mediated electronically can contribute to an awareness of interconnections between realities as well as assist in eliciting a participational response. Today's aural communication contributes to new concepts of time and space. Yet no medium or communication process is the Gospel message nor can they substitute for the incarnate Message of God who is Christ.

The preacher mediates the Gospel through human forms of communication. There is also a sense in which he is the message he transmits, although he is never the Gospel. He is the message in the sense that he addresses men by the actions and words of his life which witness to the Christ. As a public proclaimer of the Word, the preacher must not only mature in his personal witness to his Lord but he must also grow theologically, in his personal communication skills, and in his ability to use the media appropriately. He should know the limitations and benefits of the media he employs so that their use is faithful to the Gospel which they communicate or serve. The contemporary preacher has the benefit of the history of communication to aid him in choosing and using media wisely.

The people of God are formed and sustained as the church by the Word who is Christ. These same people are called by God to continue the proclamation of the Word to others. The electronic media are resources available for use in assisting that proclamation. They can be used to encourage

participation in the message and to elicit dialogue and response. They also may help to influence people to change their attitudes and their actions by providing opportunities for depth experience, better remembrance of the past, and realization of specific areas of blessing or of need. The global village formed by today's media provides a secular referent to the unity of men in sin as well as to the unity of believers in the Body of Christ.

The secularity of the times provides a framework in which secular audio-visual documents can be used in service to the Gospel proclamation. These and the media which transmit them must never supersede the explicit message of Christ's love however. Neither can they substitute for the personal verbal communication which remains basic to all human encounters. Ultimately, no medium of communication can replace Christ, and all media employed in proclamation must serve him.

This thesis has demonstrated the value of a study of the history of communications for understanding how the message of the church has been conveyed, received, and responded to in different ages. Marshall McLuhan's media-centered approach focuses attention on the perceptual biases caused by all forms of communication, even when used in Christian proclamation. His determinism, however, eliminates the role of God in controlling history for his glory and man's welfare.

McLuhan's analysis of message, media, and man can be recast theologically and adapted for the homiletic task. Such a reinterpretation views the Gospel as both a distinct message which can be mediated through various methods of communication as well as a message tied integrally to the specific medium which transmits the message of Christ's love at a specific

moment to people. The identification of the medium with the message is best applied in a Christological framework where God's love is embodied in Jesus Christ, the Mediator between the Divine and the human. There is also a sense in which a human witness to the Gospel is both medium and message.

In regard to the preaching activity of the church, no medium can supplant the Gospel. But every medium used in service to the Gospel has an effect on aspects of man's receiving, sharing, understanding, and remembering of the Message, as well as his response to it.

God has created his people by his Word revealed in messages conveyed by human means of communication. The electronic media of the technological era are also means through which God mediates his Gospel and elicits the response of man. But such media are useful for proclamation only insofar as they are faithful to Christ.

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