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THE BIBLE AND MEDIA LITERACY

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Introduction

It is important to differentiate between a discussion on the 'Bible and the Media' and one on the Bible and Media Literacy. Inherent in a discussion on media literacy is the topic 'The Media' but that discussion must be the focus of another paper. This paper will be limited to a discussion of those issues that media literacy must address. This discussion essentially focuses on pedagogy in the context of a Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education. The reason for this is that I believe that there are tensions that the topic 'the media' raises that must be dealt with in media literacy. This does not mean that the teacher will 'teach a lesson' for example, on whether Seventh-day Adventists should go to movies or not. Underlying this question are the issues that media literacy must deal with and therefore, this is my point of departure for this paper.

Probably, the most simplistic and insulting approach to the media would be to prepare a list of 'do's and don'ts', and of what movies to watch in a church hall and/or television programs or channels to tune in to!! Ignorance is not a virtue, as this simplistic approach does not recognize the powerful and intrusive socializing influence of the media. Media literacy demands thoughtful and prayerful study and investigation of Biblical principles. Attention must be given to the issues raised in the various approaches to the media, as well as those specifically relevant to a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.

My journey begins when my children were small and television had just been introduced in South Africa. I struggled with their appeals to watch what all the children were watching and my view of what the programming was. Neil Postman in 'The disappearance of childhood' explains how the line between adulthood and childhood is blurred by the themes and ways in which problems are solved in the media. Children are exposed to problems such as divorce, masochistic sex and lust before they have enough experience to cope. Robert Blye in "the Sibling Society, explains how adulthood is scorned and how most adults long to remain young and often in competition with their children. Adulthood might not be all that it is cracked up to be, but living responsibly, solving problems and freedom were critical factors that I believed were of prime importance.

The idea of a course called 'Media Evaluation' was conceived during one and a half years of meetings of a study committee at Helderberg College, an extension campus of Andrews University in South Africa. The intent was to deal with the issue of students, the media, going to movies and the rules in the student handbook. One of the recommendations was the design of a course in which the students would be exposed by means of applied theory, to communication concepts and principles, with the goal of educating media consumers. I was asked to develop the Media Evaluation course, which I taught for 20 years. This sparked my interest in the Media but more specifically in media literacy.

There is a risk involved in confronting debatable issues. It is difficult to even discuss such issues. It seems safer to ignore or prohibit but is this a biblical approach? Is this true to the fundamental philosophy of Christian Education? The Value Genesis project identified the attitude of the youth towards the phony response of the church to the issues of the media. It called for a theology of viewing.

Discussion about issues does not mean that standards are lowered. Standards based on discernment and knowledge are superior to rules imposed on unthinking subjects. The irony is that the more students are exposed to the business of the media, its gimmicks and tricks, the more they respond to the development of personal criteria for constructive evaluation, and wise choices about their relationship to the media.

After a 3-credit course, students have made the following remarks:

"I'm not going to allow myself to be insulted again"
"I did not know that there are such meaningful programs!" "Why always so late at night!"
"May I borrow that tape so that I can show my friend?"
"This course caused me to realize that I am a person in my own right and that I must be on the look-out for those who wish to take this away and make me a puppet"
"I did not know that the mass media could have such a negative influence on those that are unsuspecting"
"Why didn't someone help me to see this before I was a teenager!"

Not only did the students become selective, but they testified to the influence that discussions about truth, reality, beauty in relation to the media, had on their Christian experience. One student remarked that all young people want to be different and that he had discovered that the only authentic way to be really different from the mass man is to be a Christian.

Assumptions

The following framework is a reflection of my assumptions:

1. Basic to a belief in God must be the value He places on one's freedom of choice. One must assume the rational nature of mankind. This includes the importance of discernment and wisdom. This often appears to be in tension with the Church's stance of prohibition or guardian with the self-imposed task of providing lists of 'what is acceptable' and 'what is not'.
2. This is not intended to be a commentary on the media, its messages, content, format, advantages and disadvantages but rather an attempt to open a discussion between educators and their students about the world in which they are. The goal of this discussion is to understand Jesus' prayer:

   "I'm not asking you to take them out of the world but that You guard them from the evil one. They are no more defined by the world than I am defined by the world, Make them holy – consecrated – with the truth; Your word is consecrating truth" (John 17:17-).

3. I am specifically investigating the U.S. media culture because of the mass production and global distribution of US media products. I believe that media literacy should be of general concern to all Seventh-day Adventist educators.
4. Communication criticism is learning how to systematically describe, interpret and assess messages. Criticism is essentially discourse about a text (which is part of a work) within

an acceptable frame of reference. The following model presents some of these approaches:

Figure 2.3   Approaches to Communication Criticism
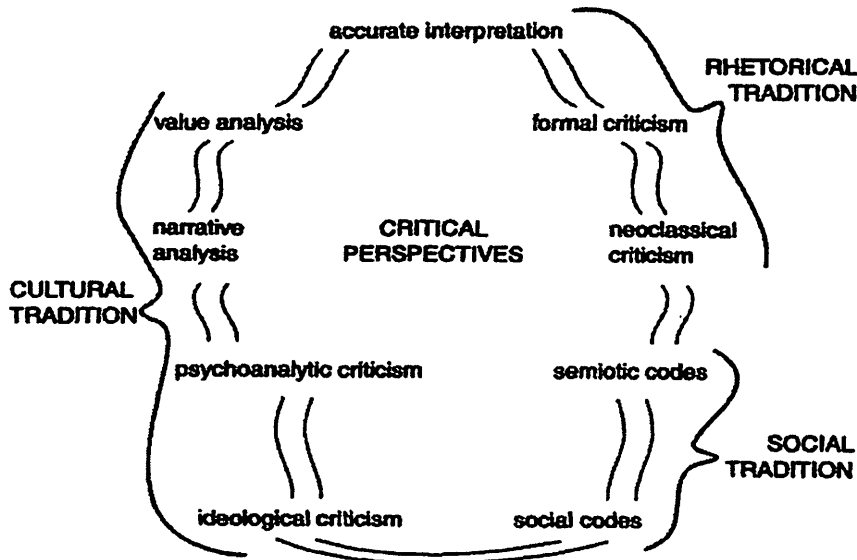
Therefore, media literacy should be founded within this acceptable set of methods. In this paper, I will refer to hermeneutics, semiotics, cultural and ideological approaches. This gives credence to a Biblical approach of the scholarship of media literacy.

I have selected the Message Bible, as it seems to speak to contemporary youth in such a way that they are compelled to listen.

A significant part of my assumptions is the following understanding of the philosophy of Education.

Philosophy of Education

Essentially, the activities of education should be based on a worldview that prizes wisdom and recognizes God as the source of all knowledge and wisdom. In the context of media literacy it is a matter of living one's ordinary, everyday life according to God's principles. Romans 12:1-5 explains this:

> "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you. Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking-around life and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best things you can do for Him. Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you...

The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what He does for us, not by what we are and what we do for Him".

An exegesis (if I knew how?!) of this passage should provide a frame of reference for media literacy. As will be discussed, popular culture is our ordinary lives; it has to do with adjustment without thinking (media enculturation); our identity and salvation and works!!

The dialectics of the media; its messages, meanings and myths is explained by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:20-22, 25:

> "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was please through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe...
> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is s stronger than man's strength" (NIV).

What we learn and teach has to be evaluated in terms of what is foolish, i.e. detrimental, irrelevant and non-essential and what is wise, i.e. the knowledge that will contribute to living a life of meaning in service to God and man.

E.G. White's statement echoes this orientation:

> "Every human being created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator – individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leader in enterprise and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought. Instead of confining their study to that which men have said or written, let students be direct to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation" (1903:17).

Conformism and loss of individuality is one of the major concerns of media literacy. The pedagogy and epistemology of media literacy must confront these issues. Critical thinking is required in dealing with a mass mediated society. In media literacy activities, students are confronted with the norms of a high-tech, anthropocentric society in which the individual may be sacrificed for the sake of the communal good. The ideology of the means to the end in the context of 'progress' is a topic that must be explored (see section on eschatology and technology).

Hermeneutics is an important way of dealing with media information. Understanding that knowledge is based on the assumptions and worldview of the producer, his/her ethics and aesthetics is basic to an evaluation of the ideas inherent in that message (see section on ideology). The model below illustrates the way in which knowledge is constructed and mediated.
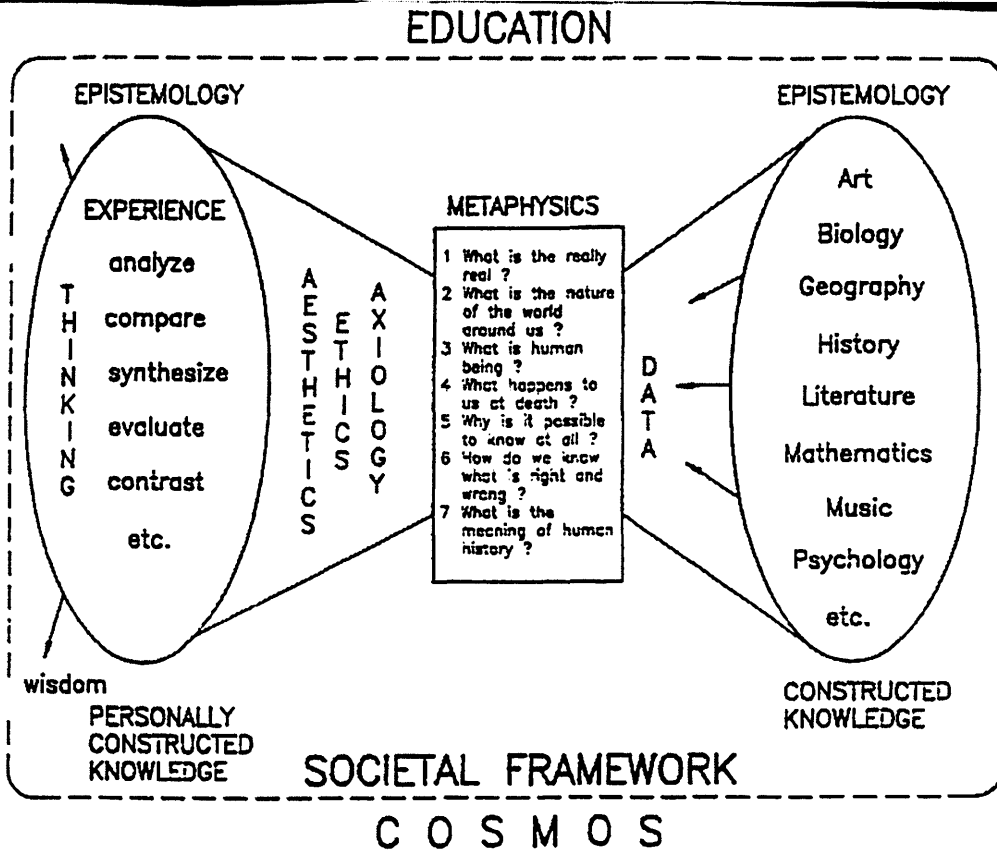
CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE
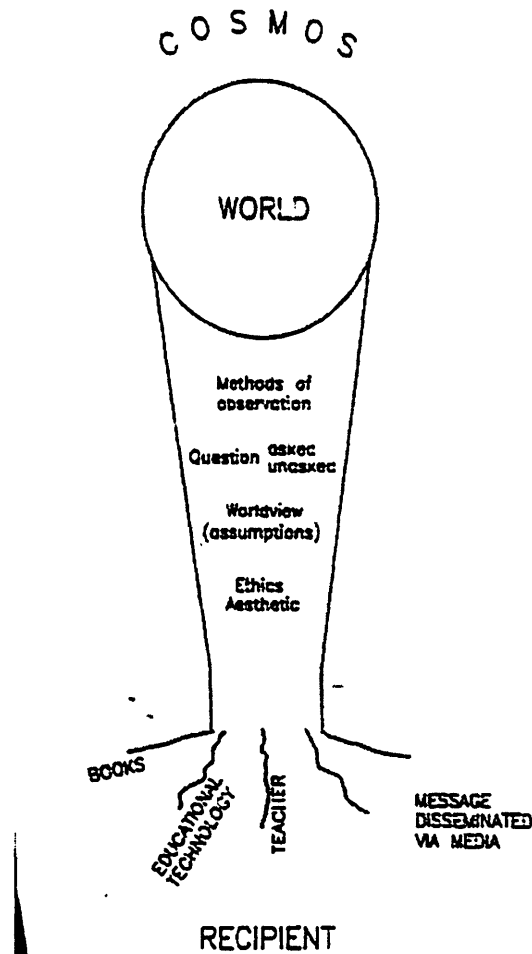
The dominance of science has led to scientism and opened the door to an emphasis on spirituality. The assumptions of spirituality are not always compatible with scripture and yet scripture's account of the history of mankind reveals the battle between God and man's gods. Hopefully, Christians have a foil to the thinking that denies absolute truth, in that truth itself is always infinitely more important than our ideas of it (Londis; 1987:29). Thinking about truth or reality is not enough. We must also feel, intuit, take leaps of the imagination that gamble on a fundamentally different way of seeing things (Londis; 1987:29). The pursuit of truth is the ability to see inadequacies in the existing paradigm/ideology and establishing the need for a new version in the context of God's revelation of truth and reality. Truth is not something one has, it is something one does and something that one is. Truth is independent of what man says and what he researches and it runs like a thread throughout the history of man and his thinking about himself, God and nature.

Students and teachers should be involved in the activities of identifying a credible worldview and the pursuit of truth by debunking contemporary myths. How can we know unless we learn to know God?

The following diagram serves to illustrate the essence of the process of education:

EDUCATION

The diagram shows:

EPISTEMOLOGY ... EPISTEMOLOGY

EXPERIENCE
analyze
compare
synthesize
evaluate
contrast
etc.

THINKING

AESTHETICS ETHICS AXIOLOGY

METAPHYSICS

1 What is the really real ?
2 What is the nature of the world around us ?
3 What is human being ?
4 What happens to us at death ?
5 Why is it possible to know at all ?
6 How do we know what 's right and wrong ?
7 What is the meaning of human history ?

DATA

Art
Biology
Geography
History
Literature
Mathematics
Music
Psychology
etc.

wisdom
PERSONALLY CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE

SOCIETAL FRAMEWORK

C O S M O S

The focus in this model is on the processing of information as delivered by the educator as constructed knowledge, by means of the filter of one's worldview which consists of biblically-based perspectives of the ultimate questions; through a biblically-based morality into a personally constructed body of knowledge. This requires the use of God-given faculties of reason, thought and experience. Education does not emphasize the acquisition of knowledge but rather the application of knowledge to living life with meaning and wisdom. The context is society as well as recognition of the cosmos.

Nature of mediated society

Contemporary Society cannot be conceptualized without reference to the spectacles, bytes and images that are its very fabric. The mass media provide the content from which we develop our sense of self, the nature of our relationship, our view of the world, of us and them, and our deepest values and concerns. The mass media mediate reality and we are often unaware of what is real and what is reality. They are educators about how we should behave, what to think, feel, fear, believe and desire. Bart Simpson remarked to his father, Homer; 'It's just hard not to listen to TV – it's spent so much more time raising us than you have'!

Dealing with the reality of living in a technologically advanced world, the pseudo-reality and realism of the TV and cinema world, the increasing isolation and loneliness of human beings and the breakdown of relationships brings to the surface questions about the benefits of technological advancement. Can we see think more clearly; see, hear and feel more intensely? Have we been duped and doped? Probably, the most critical issue is what has happened to TRUTH in the midst

of the ideologies and myths that permeate the soaps, sitcoms, news reports and films that are a part of our daily lives? Those that own the technology have the power to export knowledge as a commodity and therefore monopolize the dissemination of ideas. What we watch must be prefaced with 'how' we watch. Postman postulates that our culture is where we amuse ourselves to death. Style has replaced substance, violence is the major form of entertainment, human relationships have been commodified and trivialized and technology drives us without analysis or thought (www.media-awareness.ca). He suggests that we should learn to talk back to our television sets. By asking questions one begins to break the spell arising out of the inherent danger of a medium, which will be excessively dangerous if its users do not understand what the dangers are (1987:166). The meanings and myths of the mass media must be debunked. This is an important focus in education.

The development of science and technology has had contradictory consequences. On the one hand it provides the possibility of and access to a culture that promotes a critical and discriminatory sensibility and furthers the possibility of human emancipation, while on the other hand it is constructed according to the laws of capitalist rationality and has ushered in forms of domination and control that thwart the possibilities of human emancipation (Sholle and Denski; 1995:18). These and other contradictions make it difficult for contemporary citizens to actually detect the relevant issues.

It is important to identify reasons for the emergence of media education or media studies.

Why media education/studies?

Media literacy started in the U.S. and Canada in the '60s but it went underground. Australia and Britain kept it alive for 20 years. Canada's Jesuit Communication Project is very active. Canada is advanced in its approach to media education because of its struggles with issues of national, and cultural identity. The Film Boards of Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and other cultural and media agencies have worked together to deliberately promote the indigenous culture and values through increased production of its own media products. There has been a growing interest in media education in the U.S. during the '90s. There are many media literacy centers and projects and the school system is becoming engaged in the movement. There are many different and even dissenting ideas within this movement and it is important to formulate an approach based on the scriptures.

When the average number of hours per student, per year in the US is compared with other English-speaking countries it becomes apparent that there are some factors that need to be taken into consideration, namely, the way in which media, the popular arts and leisure are conceptualized in the U.S. Kubey suggests that the mass exportation of US media products has compelled other countries to confront the problem of cultural integrity in the light of cultural imperialism (2003; 361). It is ironic that those who are most affected by the production of artifacts of US popular culture are those who are least educated in dealing with it and who pay the least attention to its influence. Peter Greenaway of Deakin University in Australia after an extended study tour suggested that in order for one to understand a culture, one must 'go outside of it' and that the Americans seldom do that (quoted by Kubey, 2003; 357). There is little influence of other cultural values and morals because most of programming comes from within

the U.S. Other factors are the nature of the various school systems, the use of textbooks rather than curriculum statements of goals and objectives, the emphasis in teacher certification and graduate school and the dominance of print as medium of instruction.

Principles are 'the beginning or a foundation; that which 'comes first absolutely, in the sense of being before everything else'; 'taking precedence over some things but having other prior to itself' (The Great Ideas; 1952:420). These principles must be based on the authority of scripture. Suggestions of principles of various authors should be evaluated according to this authority.

Masterman identifies the following principles of media education:
1. it is a serious endeavor as society's democratic structures are at stake
2. the unifying concept is representation. The media mediate; they re-present reality and not just reflect it. The media are sign or symbolic systems and these concepts must be explored (see sections on semiotics, representation, reality, realism and mediation)
3. this is a lifelong process which requires motivation and commitment by the student
4. it is investigative and does not impose specific cultural values but explores the polyvalent nature of a mediated society
5. it is involved with the life-situation of both learner and teacher and is in the present while the context remains the wider historic and ideological issues
6. content is a means to the end and the end has to do with analytical tools rather than alternative content
7. effectiveness assumes 2 criteria, namely, the ability of the student to apply critical thinking to new situations and the degree of commitment displayed
8. students become aware of the principles of self-evaluation in terms of development of criteria as well as the process involved (meta-cognition is critical)
9. the relationship between teacher and student is changed as both are involved in reflection and dialogue about media products
10. investigation occurs by means of dialogue more than discussion
11. students are involved in and become aware of their own responsibility for learning thus fostering an open and democratic approach to education
12. learning is collaborative and group oriented
13. it consists of critical practice and practical criticism
14. is an holistic process as parents, media professionals and educational teams are involved
15. continuous change is the result of a continuously changing reality which is characteristic of popular culture which thrives on novelty and innovation, and the absurd and bizarre
16. must be based on a distinctive epistemology as there is no existing body of knowledge that is simply transmitted by a teacher or even discovered by a student. It is beginning and new knowledge is generated within this dialogue (Mediacy; 1995).

The following key concepts are on the web at www.pbs.org with classroom activities developed by FRONTLINE to enhance students' critical thinking skills about television. It is suggested that for example, students need to 'denaturalize' violence which television has naturalized by making it seem normal and acceptable. The familiar needs to become strange as a critical distance is necessary for analysis of popular culture.

The key concepts are:

1. **all messages are constructions**
   engaging students in the process and skills of both construction and deconstruction of messages in various media provides them with first-hand experience of what the media does. They become aware of the production values and are able to evaluate the message for what it is; e.g. either artistic or vulgar. It also helps them to become aware of the choices in making media violence, the choice of hero, conflict resolution and the consequences.

2. **every form of communication has unique characteristics**
   Understanding the genres helps students differentiate between e.g. violence in the news, in film and in music lyrics. It also helps with the process of differentiating between fact and fiction. Is the discussion about AIDS in the context of a sit-com or a documentary on Africa?

3. in a church hall
   The context, demographics of the viewer and experience all contribute to interpretation both on the part of the viewer and the producer.

4. **messages are representations of the world**
   The media project a societal view that is normative and is socializing in its effect.

5. **messages have economic purposes**
   The media are largely supported by advertising. Therefore, content must sell so that the advertisers will invest and buy space.

Media education is often considered as just another subject to compete with drug instruction, AIDS, sex, self-esteem, computers, internet etc. etc. It is also categorized as one of the above problems, which means that the approach in the U.S. is mainly protectionistic. Media literacy is also seen as civic entitlement (Shepherd; www.media-awareness.ca).

Why media literacy?

Shaw appealed in his column in Los Angeles Times, 30 November 2003, for media literacy in the nation's schools (www.medialit.org). The basis for this plea is the amount of time and the pervasive nature of the media; the increasing number of media types as well as the fact that an average of 10.5 hours per day is spent on the media (25% of the time using 2 media at once). He quotes a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation that found 68% of children 2 and younger spend an average of 2 hours per day in from of either a television or computer screen. Children under 6 spend as much time in front of the screen as they do playing outside and three times as much on reading or being read to. The amount of time and money spent by 'screen-agers' warrants that some time be allocated to thinking and talking about what they are deeply involved with. One of the important goals of media literacy is to empower one to maintain an independence from the persuasive and pervasive influence of the mediated society within which one eats, sleeps, loves, works etc. It frees one to be able to make decisions about issues, to really know what reality is and to search for truth. Technology is neutral; it is how it is used or abused by human beings that is at the core of the discussion.

A media society dominated by an oligopoly of 5 powerful corporations requires a strong alternative media. Media literacy has to do with media activism and this has to be contextualized. The Frankfurt school has provided critique of the cultural industries and their manipulation practices but there is also the need for ways of resisting these by reading to gain insights into self and society by means of the media itself and therefore to provide alternative forms. The media themselves are forms of pedagogy. Media pedagogy has to develop literacy knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable individuals to create their own meanings, identities and contribute to the shaping and transformation of the culture and society. Essentially there is an ongoing conflict between the values of traditional social institutions, such as the home, the church and the school and those represented in the simulations of the hyperreality of the media. This results in social schizophrenia.

Various Approaches to Media Literacy

The simplest form of media literacy has to do with the media as creator of messages that imposes meaning on the audience. This requires parental monitoring of content and viewing habits and discussing programs with children. Critical viewing skills and cognitive thinking skills were developed to understand the grammar, types of genres and meaning produced (Sholle and Denski; 1995:13). This assumes that there is a link between media and audience; activity and passivity, authoritarian and nurturing. The 'visual literacy' approach is also basically a skills approach. Both assume the ability to judge what is good and/or bad in media content.

But maybe an approach that is more simplistic would that of the Christian who identifies the media with the realm of evil and avoidance would be the sign of a true believer! Sanitized mainstream popular art forms become the focus. Fischer refers to this as 'fromming' (1988:141). He reminds us that the world of the Bible, is the one the Christian finds him/herself in. He asks what Jesus really meant in His prayer when He said;

> "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

The approaches in the Christian world range from condemnation, appropriation to consumption and mindless enculturation. What meaningful contribution can the Christian make to the culture? 1 Corinthians 6:11, 12 has an interesting perspective:

> "Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, I'd be a slave to my whims".

All too often Christians are identified by what they do not do, rather than by what they do do (Fischer; 1988:141).

Critical approaches to media literacy focus on the consumption and production of media as they exist as ideological texts. Meaning is produced on both sides of the communication situation (Sholle and Denski; 1995:14). Media literacy must be conceived within political, social and cultural practice.

The need for media studies is contextualized in the role of the media in the formation of the state. An interesting dilemma as the focus of social collapse versus aesthetic appreciation drives the content of media education. Focus on immorality in relation to the collapse of society could fuel interest as sex education has been questioned as to its influence in teen pregnancy.

An artful/aesthetic approach to the study of film and TV has predominated media studies, especially in Europe. Britain has contributed television to the art forms of the 20th century and is included in public discussion (Kubey; 2003:361). There is debate about the nature of film and TV as popular culture versus art. Some of the discussion about the importance of media education includes the parallel between the study of literature as great works and film and television for cultural and aesthetic appreciation. There is not much interest in developing media education in the context of aesthetic appreciation. However, the attitude that popular culture is a debased version of high culture is based in a class-based idea of society where there is an attempt to equate literature or art to privileged position. It is essentially our culture and it needs to be understood, not merely dismissed.

Social criticism from outside of the U.S. about the influence of US morals and values due to of the mass distribution of media products (media imperialism) has heightened the awareness of media enculturation. There is a growing awareness of a conflict between the values of the parents and various social institutions such as the church and school, and that portrayed in the media. The socialization role of the media in childhood and adolescence is also a concern. Schools, parochial and private, where 'character' education is significant are more likely to use controversial programs for educational purposes (Kubey; 2003:366).

The 'effects' debate on alcohol and drug abuse, aggression, violence and crime, sexuality, materialism and political superficiality is dominant in the U.S. Discussion on media education is polarized between the teachers who want to protect their students against the media's inculcation of immoral behavior in a kind of 'moral panic' based on a 'puritanical streak' versus those who are culturally oriented (Kubey; 2003:363). The protectionist approach is the one that tends to sell media education when it poses as a kind of inoculation against the evils of the youth, and the crisis in society. This approach is favored by funding agencies. Ironically, then media education itself is market driven! Parents in the U.S. would prefer that less time is spent with TV rather than devoting time in school or even homework time, to watch and discuss current TV programs. It is possible that parents may need continuing education to be able to discuss media literacy issues with their children.

The crisis of Democracy has raised issues about the role of the media in this process. The critics of the media outside of the U.S. in particular have raised issues about democracy per se; often in the context of the socialization and 'demoralizing' function of the media. A democratic society needs active participation of its citizens who are informed and therefore able to intelligently contribute to that society. Kellner suggests that the decline of democracy in the U.S. is partly the result of a 'media spectator society where individuals passively consume media spectacles and fail to participate in their social life" (in McLaren; 1995:xvi). Therefore, the emphasis on media literacy is to some an issue of the revitalization and renewal of democracy. In order to accomplish this, the commercially controlled media system must be reformed and alternative

media must be created (Kellner; 1995:xvi). The new media technologies are believed to provide new challenges for this purpose.

It is interesting to note a popular 'Christian' version of this theme. It reflects the ideas of dispensationalism, dominionism and pre-millennial thinking. The idea that Christ will soon return to set up an earthly kingdom for 1 000 years is advocated in the *Left Behind* series. This ties in with concern about democracy and the role of the media. Schultze unpacks the idea of 'Shalom' and the role of humans to co-create culture in order to realize the Kingdom of God on earth through justice, peace and concern for all. Rowanski expresses similar ideas of the transformation of culture, or restoration to its original state, that is 'new' and the return of harmony (2001:52). His question, 'what kind of world do we want to present to the Lord upon His return?' demands a lot of thought.

Schultze (2002) in *Habits of the high-tech heart; living virtuously in the information age,* frames his 'Christian' ideas of Shalom, in order to raise issues for the secularist to ponder, about the need for the 'good life' of Socrates as basic to the ideas of de Tocqueville and Havel. Schultze advocates virtue in virtual living recognizing the increase of moral dilemmas in a milieu of moral insensitivity.

Kubey (2003) questions the value of media education in the light of the lack of research on its efficacy. He emphasizes a student-centered approach as critical in achieving either the goals of inoculation and/or appreciation.

It is necessary to understand the concept 'media' in relation to media literacy.

Media

Media literacy is not limited to dealing with television or even videos. Medium refers to a conveyor of information. Information is the purpose of the media. There are interesting varieties of information, namely, misinformation, disinformation, infotainment, eductainment etc. Understanding the purposes of each helps to develop discernment. Contemporary society is characterized by various media as well as the mass media. Therefore, literacy must include all the media. It will always be important to read and write as well as to understand the nature of the information, the characteristics of the medium and the audience. It is the medium that has challenged our ideas of what there is to read and write; to comprehend and to challenge. Culture expresses itself through the media. The fact that the media is involved in mass audiences suggests that those who watch are part of what they watch. Every message has a meaning. This may be implicit or explicit; that is there are levels of meaning. The denotation is the explicit meaning or first-order. The connotation is that which is implied and what one's experience and history brings to the meaning.

Media messages also convey information that is an expression of the ideas, values and ideologies of the source. The communicator has an intention and that is to share ideas. Terrorism, Politics, and Religion are all mass-mediated. Michael Medved comments on the reason why it is that film makers make movies that do not actually take into consideration that Americans are Christian and family oriented. He suggests that they have ideas that they want to convey. Some of these

examples are: Richard Gere is a Buddhist, Shirley McLaine propagates the ideas of the New Age and Mel Gibson is presenting his Catholic version of the Passion of Christ (see section on ideology).

Literacy

Literacy, when print was the predominant medium, meant the ability to decode and understand and communicate in print. Now that print is not the dominant medium, it is important to include all forms of media, which will include composition in various formats as well. The medium that is dominant is television but the increasing amount of time spent on the internet and video games means that the whole domain of media must be included. Literacy accommodates a de-politicized rubric for the purpose of being accepted into mainstream public education. It may be that an overt ideological agenda, such as questioning authority or using reasoning for the purpose of making independent decisions, will prevent any involvement in the activities of media literacy (www.media-awareness.ca/).

The next question is what is involved in media literacy?

What is media literacy?

Media education is concerned with all that happens in a media-oriented classroom. One may learn about geography from a newspaper. Media study is the organization of courses in which the media is studied. Media literacy is the outcome of these activities.

Media literacy is 'the ability to sift through and analyze the messages that inform, entertain and sell to us every day' (www.media-awareness.ca). It's critical thinking about all media and asking questions about what is there and what is not there. This includes questions about motives, money, ownership, values and awareness of how these factors influence the content. It includes questions about ourselves and the messages that are being sent to us, where these messages originate and what strategies are used to get attention and make one feel included www.media-awareness.ca). Rick Shepherd says that it is an informed, critical understanding of the mass media. It involves examining the techniques, technologies and institutions involved in media production' It includes the ability to recognize the role that audiences play in making meaning from the messages (www.media-awareness.ca). Bowen perceives media literacy as a way of empowering citizens and transforming a passive relationship with the media into critical, active engagement so that traditions and structures of a commercial, privatized media culture can be challenged. It can provide new ways of discourse and citizen speech (www.media-awareness.ca).

Duncan suggests that media literacy enables one to see both the forest and the trees. Stewardship does not just mean taking care of the planet's physical resources. It includes reflection on our leisure time and what changes are taking place in the cultural landscape. The love-hate relationship that Americans have had with the media over the past 50 years, must be taken seriously. This requires that it should be understood in its entirety; both the potential artfulness and pervasive value messages. The television has become like the wallpaper on our walls; but we have to make it visible. This does not negate the pleasure and enjoyment, but it does require

active participation. Duncan imagines the impact on an immigrant from a Third World Country of the following experience of a typical evening of prime-time diet:

"The screen flashes close-ups of mostly good-looking people fondling each other, punching each other out or laughing their heads off. Cut to car chases in underground parking lots, set to the sound of tires squealing and fenders bashing. Cut to newscasts with short snatches of segments on disasters, murders and wars – mixed with chatter from politicians who reassure us that all will be well. Cut to high-jolts-per-minute commercials featuring persuasive pitches for instant beauty, and relief from constipation, and warning not to leave home without a certain plastic card that offers limitless pleasures. This supermarket of the soul can be truly mind-boggling" (www.media-awareness.ca).

Texts such as ET, The Cosby Show, Friends, 60 minutes etc. provide us with opportunities to explore collective values, our desires, fears and aspirations. What about using resources made available by media corporations, by the industry itself? Are the media capable of assuming social responsibility or is it just part of their public relations campaign? The media is aware of its social responsibility and it is important to let the media speak for itself. Within popular culture is an alternative culture, which reflects on itself and offers criticism of itself as well as the ideologies of contemporary society, e.g. Bono of U2 and Zoo Television, Sting and environmentalism etc.

Here are some good reasons for studying the media:

- it is interesting
- it is our lives and our lifestyles
- to understand its power
- to become aware of its effects
- to understand its messages and their meaning
- to become discerning

Thoman suggests that there are 3 stages towards media empowerment:
1. awareness of the importance of making choices and managing one's media intake which may include reducing the time spent on the media.
2. learning the skills of critical viewing: analyzing and questioning what is in the frame, the way it is constructed and what is not there.
3. moving from the frame to the deeper issues of ideology, motive, the economics and making of meaning from media experiences (www.media-awareness.ca).

Debates and issues in media literacy

1. Does media literacy protect kids?
Postman suggests that media literacy is an antidote for a culture where we continue to amuse ourselves to death and that it can help to transform this flawed culture (www.media-awareness.ca).
Buckingham questions why we see that the children are victims of the excesses and evils of their culture (www.media-awareness.ca). This means that we ignore the genuine pleasure they get from their culture and their emotional engagement. So instead of

protecting them, maybe it's a matter of inviting them to be involved in the community's discussion of the media.

2. Does media literacy require student media production activities?

Constructing media products helps students to experience what all is involved in the process. It also prepares the student for thoughtful deconstruction of media products. They understand why gimmicks and tricks are used to get the right effect and see the effect of the illusion of special effects.

If however, making media products is just for busy-work then it is probably going to mean more time than can be devoted to such an exercise in an already crowded curriculum.

3. Should media literacy have a popular culture bias?

The mass media advocate a culture. Culture is reflected in literature and film. Students are immersed in the culture of the mass media, known as popular culture. Information is socially constructed and an analysis of society, the way in which humans share meaning and the meaning of the messages themselves are critical. The cultural texts of popular culture should be at the center of the curriculum. Cultural texts have a very short history. Currency and immediacy are critical.

4. Should media literacy have a stronger ideological agenda?

Just viewing clips or episodes of videos or films to perpetuate the pleasure agenda by entertaining students is not the intent of any media literacy program. There needs to be an ideological underpinning of such a study. Part of the debate must be whether media literacy is a tool for social, political and/or educational change or is there another agenda that needs to be developed? (www.media-awareness.ca/) An ideological agenda may consider education reform, broadcast regulation, media ownership and centralization, racism, sexism and other social injustices, commercialism in the classroom and renewal of democracy and virtue.

Media literacy may serve various ideological positions; from Bible belt emphasis on inhumanity and violence, to the progressive ideas of Boston in which advertising emphasizes one inadequacies so as to sell products one doesn't need (www.media-awareness.ca/). What is the ideological position most relevant to a Seventh-day Adventist position is the crux of this paper?

5. Where will media literacy be most effective?

Is it in the school, the church, at summer camp, VBS, Sabbath School, Pathfinders, elementary school or academy or in college that such a program will make the most valuable contribution to the youth? Should there be a specific course, a curriculum, a series of workshops, workbooks or should the program be interdisciplinary? Will time spent on the media enrich subjects or detract or even displace important courses such as literature, religious education etc?

6. Is media literacy best understood as a means to an end?

The issues here are essentially ideological. Is it the skill of media production as preparation for a career in mass media world to either provide alternate media or even maintain the status quo, or is it a matter of rethinking one's lifestyle, identity, one's attitude towards society and a commodity culture and responsibility towards others that is the goal? Is it the end that is of more worth than the means?

In the process of defining media literacy, one becomes aware of the issues and approaches relevant to a study of the media. Therefore, a thoughtful consideration of the principles of educating critical consumers, i.e. the pedagogy of media literacy, is important.

Pedagogy

So, we conclude that it is important to claim back our freedom to choose from the program planners of our favorite television channel or movie chain owner. It is critical to develop discernment in order to choose between what is right and wrong, that which is beautiful and that which is crass and vulgar and truth versus myth and lies. So how do we do this?

Studying the world of the media is similar to the condition of schizophrenia; working in the ivory tower while studying the real world. Media educators function in praxis, which is understood as the link between theory and practice or 'practice as action' (Sholle and Denski; 1995:11). The approach consists of both critique and possibility. A different approach to the media is required as it is asking the right questions rather than having the right answers.

The assumptions of the various approaches to pedagogy must be understood in order to establish whether the approach is congruent with the educational philosophy held by the educator. Principles for teaching media literacy are different to those for teaching appreciation of literature. Both focus on the text in the context of works. But in media literacy students are examining the immediate media products of their own culture. It is a matter of self-examination. Masterman reminds that teachers must be most interested in

> "getting people to think for themselves, to think clearly and coherently rather than produce clones of themselves. Otherwise there's no difference between education and propaganda... To being a progressive educational practice one must begin by respecting the values and ideas the kids are actually bringing into school with them (quoted by Kubey; 2003:367).

Media literacy is caught through production and analytic activities. The classroom becomes a 'site of struggle' where meanings are negotiated and critical autonomy is the goal (Duncan; (www.media-awareness.ca).

Media literacy is a matter of dealing with student's tastes, their identity, their lives and lifestyle. Educators need to understand the multiple contexts that shape his/her students, as well as those shared experiences that the students bring to the classroom. In this sense the media is didactic. This means that critical media literacy requires that students should not simply develop the ability to interpret the meanings of the media texts but that they must investigate how they themselves, as agents, affectively invest and consume the media (Steinberg and Kincheloe; 1995:2). Their choices are not free or the product of rational decisions but that 'they are semiotically inscribed by emotional and bodily commitments relating to the production of desire and mood (1995:2). An understanding of the 'manufacture of consent' can lead to the choice to resist the regressive, hegemonic and undemocratic outcomes and power in a 'democratic' state. It is almost incomprehensible that an individual may be more free in a totalitarian state than in a

democratic one. At least in a totalitarian state, the citizens know that the media is used for propagandic purposes.

Critical autonomy is the goal. Each individual must develop his/her own increasingly sophisticated and complex responses to and interpretations of the media (Kubey; 2003:368). A democratic society demands critical thinkers and critical consumers. A connection needs to be made between the hundreds of hours spent by students with the media and reality.

Media literacy presents a challenge to teaching practice: deal with very current material from yesterday or today, deal with contemporary debates and fractures in society. It is not likely that a textbook will work or even the worksheets and activities from the previous semester. But media literacy excites the students. Kellner suggests that critical pedagogy requires restructuring schooling, the media and everyday life (1995:xvi). The new technologies and social wealth that is unevenly distributed, are being used as forms of destruction and domination rather than for the betterment of humans (Kellner; 1995:xvii). Therefore, to some, media literacy includes the issues of progressive politics and radical social transformation. This is of particular interest to Seventh-day Adventist education and eschatology.

The success of a media literacy program hinges on the teacher's attitude to the mass media and to students who are avid media consumers. The fact that the students bring more information and experience with the media to the classroom than their teacher must be recognized. It is important to start where the students are but to lead them to where they are not.

Teachers who are concerned about their students' identity must understand and sensitively share the complex process of media representation and the control of information and images. Students come to school with hazy knowledge about that which should concern them the most, personal health, nutrition, healthy relationships, sexuality, operation of the state etc. The media does not concern itself with this reality.

Television should be viewed as a pedagogical machine (Sholle and Denski; 1995:21). This means that in learning one must pay attention to the construction of the text and how these texts express contradictory ideological interests and how these might be understood in a way that creates possibilities for different constructions for cultural and political life (Sholle and Denski; 1995: 21). The backdrop of critical media literacy is that of popular culture. This provides a context within which the student can work from experience and at the same time it encourages them to unravel the codes of popular culture so that they can identify the contradictions and complexity of their own world.

The scope of what should be integrated into the curriculum ranges from production techniques and values, to the characteristics of any given medium and how this affects the message, media issues and media influences. Teachers need a critical framework as the field is broad and amorphous. It includes the various media themselves as well as the areas of popular culture such as fashion, toys, celebrities, heroes etc. The teachable moment is critical but there needs to be focus.

The successful development of a media literacy program hinges on the following factors (www.media-awareness.ca):

1. Inclusion as an area of study depends a lot on teacher initiative and commitment
2. Support of educational authorities, a curriculum and availability of resources
3. Well-trained teachers and support from education faculties
4. In-service training and discussion sessions involving those interested in media literacy
5. Experts in media literacy and communication networks
6. Good evaluation instruments suitable to the unique nature of media education (Pungente; 2003).
7.

Commitment to intellectual freedom infers fearless questioning, the importance of informed personal judgment and the ability to assent to that which is of value, but simultaneously aware of the need for dissent to that which is a myth and foolishness. A balance between assent and dissent leads to a spirit of enquiry, which is the essence of education. Londis explains:

> "Educators who wish to create flexible, supple minds open to newness must be courageous enough to expose them to important and 'often uncomfortable, if not initially unacceptable ideas" (1987:5).

The following are key concepts of critical thinking, which is fundamental to developing media literacy (Brookfield www.media-awareness.ca):

1. **critical thinking is a productive and positive activity**
   this is not concentrating on all the faults but rather to think about one's life and the role of the media in that lifestyle so that something positive can be learned and done about the media
2. **critical thinking is a process and not an outcome**
   This starts with questions and one question leads to another. It includes open-mindedness, curiosity, persistence and skepticism. It is basically an attitude, which can be used to understand any text, medium or the issues of life.
3. **critical thinking can be triggered by positive events and negative ones**
   this includes the way in which parents react to the media. Educational programs need not be boring. Children need to talk about their programs.
4. **critical thinking includes reasons and feelings**
   It is possible that after seeing how special effects are used and reality and illusion are counterbalanced against each other, that there will be disappointment and even disbelief. There is great excitement in seeing things in new ways. What we see is general in the mind and the feelings are affected first. What one sees and the techniques all provide a feeling of experience. It is important to understand these aspects.

Media products reflect the dominant ideology of its society and culture. But the full and truth-filled picture of what is happening in the world is much more complicated than how it will be portrayed in any culture. Mainstream news coverage, for example operates according to the following:

- this is how we see it so this is how it is
- this is how to make it believable
- these countries are our friends so they deserve coverage
- these countries are our enemies so they will be criticized
- these stories are newsworthy, will make the news interesting and therefore most important (agenda-setting).

Not every viewer seeks actively to check that truth is the goal of the media producer. This would require mass exposure to the news media, newspapers, various television broadcasters including overseas corporations etc. The uncritical thinker accepts what their favorite station/channel offers. The critical thinker is open to the fact that this may serve our vested interest but what is the truth (Paul and Elder; 2003: cover). Critical thinking requires that there is a reversal of both the way in which the viewer thinks and how the news media work. This is an important principle of media literacy.

Media literacy is inter-disciplinary as it is history, the development of technology and its influence on shaping society. It is contemporary literature and presents us with stories about ourselves. It must include the economics and an investigation of the major industries. The media influence public opinion and politics. It plays a significant psychological role in the development of identity and the way our families function. It involves design, aesthetics and philosophy of who we are and the nature of reality and truth. In classroom dialogue, teachers and students thoughtfully analyze the media, negotiate meaning and generate new knowledge. Teachers and students collaborate as media consumers to seek out teachable moments so that the key concepts of media literacy, namely, how reality is constructed, how media codes and conventions function, the nature of the audience and the industry and the values and ideology are contextualized and understood. It provides opportunity for the pop culture experts to relate their world to the world of knowledge and information. This is key to intrinsic motivation and learning.

Cultural studies includes gender, race, class, hegemony, stereotypes and identity as well as values and tastes. The use of themes in various media types, rather than genre-specific approaches is important. Ethnographic studies are useful and introduce students to research strategies and models. Primary studies are essential in the pursuit for truth. This is what the Bible advocates. The media product should not be an end in itself but rather the vehicle for thoughtful consideration of the larger issues and themes related to living in a mediated society. Develop an awareness of alternatives to mainstream media, in print, in media programs, on the internet etc.

At the center of the pedagogy of media literacy are the following:

- attitude
- reclaiming one's God-given ability to choose
- acquisition of relevant information in order to discern
- development of a cluster of competencies comprising visual literacy which together enable one to make informed choices on the role of the media to shape our lives and the way in which we think about ourselves, God and our relationship to Him.

- Ability to evaluate and the development of principles from a credible authoritative source that is concerned with Truth and Reality, namely the Bible.

Ideology

In section the concept of worldview was defined as one's ideas, views and beliefs about life, society and the universe. Thompson defined 'ideology' as 'the ways in which meaning (signification) serves to sustain relations of domination' (quoted by Sillars and Gronbeck; 2001:262). This means that messages are to be understood in terms of the way in which people are influenced by dominant ideas. These ideas are generally disseminated by those who are dominant, because of their ability, means and mechanism, to send messages. They may have political, social or relational power. This means that there are those who wield and are subject to that power; who are subjugated. Hegemony is the concept used to explain the everyday mechanisms that are used by an elite group or institution to exercise control over others. This 'control' is considered to be normal or 'the way things are done in society' (Sillars and Gronbeck; 2001:174). The process of marking what is normalized (hegemonic) and what has been redefined (counter-hegemonic) is a critical aspect of media literacy (Sillars and Gronbeck; 2001:175). It highlights the nature of popular culture; of that which is popular culture and that which popular culture is criticizing! An example of this is 'Adbusters' and spoofs such as Joe Chemo not Joe Camel. Taking the mickey out of the media is an important pedagogical exercise!

The concept 'ideology' is used here with reference to the dominant set of beliefs and assumptions of a culture. One of the most important sources of ideas and values, especially in the U.S., apart from interpersonal contact, is the television. The impact of this medium can be correlated with the amount of time spent with television and other media. Contemporary society is characterized by individualism, self-centeredness, narcissism, speed, novelty, pluralism, distraction and exhaustion. These are antithetical to unity, wholeness and coherence (Gill;1989:35). In many ways they contradict biblical truth.

The following is a brief overview of the central ideas of the prevailing ideologies of the mass media:

Secularism: 'I am sufficient without God' so that God is seen to either limiting, limiting or absent in one's personal life.

Individualism: 'I am the source of my own value' and others are only useful as a mirror for myself.

Conformism: 'I am who others recognize me to be' which emphasizes conformity to an image outside of oneself thus betraying an underlying dissatisfaction and discontentment with one's own reality. This supports the desire for that which is novel, shockable and bizarre.

Narcissism: this refers to excessive self-absorption to the point of self-obsession in order to secure self-fulfillment. One lives for oneself while looking to others to merely validate a sense of self which includes an irrational fear of old age. Ironically, this comes with a fear of intimacy.

<u>Naturalism:</u> Nature is reality and there is nothing beyond. Whatever feels good is good, especially if it tickles erotic fantasies.

<u>Relativism:</u> 'I am whatever I want to believe'. This is related to naturalism as any absolute is defined by the person and the situation. Ethics and aesthetics are personally defined.

<u>Pluralism:</u> This refers to the autonomy of all groups in that each one's ideology is acceptable to them and must be to everyone else.

<u>Nihilism:</u> Life is viewed as futile and meaningless where all is nothing and there is no permanence.

<u>Hedonism:</u> Pleasure is the principle by which one decides what is good. Life and art are the playground of pleasure and pleasure is glorified for its own sake.

<u>Materialism:</u> 'I am what I own'. Accumulation, affluence, consumerism are all that matter.

<u>Activism:</u> 'I am what I do'. Life is filled with action and busyness so that what I do is what produces meaning in life.

<u>Pantheism and New Age:</u> 'God is in everything'. All is sacred and each is divine.

Personal worth is epitomized in glamorized, picture-perfect images, exaggerated in adverts, film, and billboards. The physical self (body-image) has become the measure of one's social worth. Rodin offers a possible reason for this:

> "The quest for physical perfection is the up-to-date way we barter with the uncertainty of life... In the chaos called modern life, ordering the body to do what we want it to may give us a much-needed illusion of control... The burden of maintaining a perfect body image is far too costly. Women are crippled by a tragic degree of self-consciousness that limits other aspects of their lives..." (1992:58, 60).

Materialism and consumerism are therefore reinforced as it is believed that personal inadequacy can be overcome by buying personal worth offered as exchange value in advertisement images. The good and the viewer become interchangeable so that the seller is selling us ourselves. People are markets and goods and commodities become the focal point for relationships, e.g. toothpaste, deodorants guarantee love! So the ultimate commercial for living life is:

> "If your life is unsatisfactory, there's always a new shampoo to try, a new Spielberg movie to see, the next installment of a TV sit-com, the chance of winning a lottery (Wood as quoted by O"Shaughnessy; 1990:88).

Awareness of these ideas and values helps students to 'see' for themselves what values and ideas are embedded in the text of ads, lyrics of pop songs and themes of sit-coms and soaps etc.

Ownership and economics

An important aspect of ideology is the question of ownership. ComCAST is hoping to buy Disney; so what? The media industries are concentrated into a small number of conglomerates known as an oligopoly. Not only does limit the voice of the people, it places enormous power in the hands of the media monopoly, which results in hegemony and limits the diversity of perspective and information. Media is big business. Fallows suggests that Rupert Murdoch is not driven by ideology but by a concern for the bottom line. His goal is to build a media network that spans the world. He already owns newspapers and magazines abroad, a publishing house and satellite systems in Britain and Asia. He is seeking federal approval to buy a one-third share in DirecTV, the leading satellite-broadcast system in the U.S. Fox News Channel has beaten CNN for more than a year in the cable-news rankings (2003:81). Even though this appears to be simply a matter of business, it is also a matter of profit and what makes a profit. This is where the ideology can be unmasked. Fallows remarks:

> "Murdoch is usually happy with whichever show on Fox – or headline in the Post, or topless Page 3 model in The Sun – draws a big audience. He has done voice-overs for an appearance on The Simpsons in the role of a grasping plutocrat" (2003:107).

This takes an understanding of the logic of capital. Wealth is a given when considering the media market. This is the perspective from which media products are produced. This assumes that there may not be a real connection with the lived experience of the majority of people whether in the U.S. or the rest of the world. Analyzing video clips includes an understanding of the 'connection between hegemonic social relationships, manifestations of power, and the production of our individual ways of seeing' (Steinberg and Kincheloe; 1995:4). Critical media literacy may be the shortest path to an understanding of the humanization of inhumanity and the destructiveness of post-industrial western civilizations (Steinberg and Kincheloe; 1995:3).

Investigation and discussion should lead to an unmasking of the ideology of the media and potential hegemony!

The Christian's dilemma

It is apparent that the ideas in the media are challenging in themselves especially to Christians. But this is further complicated by issues relevant to the Christian and the media. An additional complication is the spiritual and religious ideas of the media producers. Firstly, Christians spend an average of seven times more hours per week watching television than on spiritual activities. They donate half as much to the church as they spend on entertainment (Romanowski; 2001:12). Christians need to become media literate.

Value Genesis suggested the need for a theology of viewing. Dudley's following remark is an important consideration:

> "The doctrines need to be created afresh in each new generation. It is not enough that we can assemble and organize the necessary 'proof' texts. The teachings must address the

needs and problems of youth today in ways that respond to the contemporary situation." (1992:94).

With the same fervor and seriousness manifested by the pioneers, the youth need to discover for themselves the timeless principles by which to live as a disciple of Christ in a contemporary, modern world. Learning and beliefs need to be personalized in order that these can become internalized as principles by which to live Christianly.

So what is the church's relationship to the 'world' in a cultural sense? Is there a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular? Is there any place for pleasure or must the attitude be that of protectionism. How to be in the world and yet not of it is a fundamental question that both student and teacher should grapple with. All of these are inherent in the topic. Bible and the media but media literacy has to do with the ideology, ideas and views in the media itself. It is important to identify recurring themes and ideologies that characterize contemporary thinking and especially those that are show-cased via the media. Romanowski has an interesting concept of how humans respond to God's command to cultivate the creation. This is a provocative perspective on culture, the Christian and what we do with God's world, our imagination and talents.

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1995:3) identify that reality has been misrepresented the student's own ideological relationship to the material conditions of existence and the creation of a democratic public space. What is truth? This is a key question in dealing with the media, its realism and myths. I suspect that we believe what we see to the extent that we have a mediated view of the end time (apocalypse), the passion of Christ, a savior etc. Freedom has to do with knowing the truth. "I am the way, the truth and the life", said Jesus (John 14:6, NIV).

But, probably the greatest challenge to the Christian is the religious ideas underlying the media products. There is a significant trend towards spirituality, spiritism and eastern thinking. Schell suggests that spiritual searching among the celebrities is second only to making money (2000). Steven Seagal says; 'I do films because I can put little seeds in them that can become spirituality' (Schell; 2000). Oliver Stone, Harrison Ford and Richard Gere openly speak of their links with Buddhism (Schell; 2000).

Eschatology and Technology

Man is paranoid about progress. Walsh suggests that the western story/worldview is the myth of progress:

> "This myth, which is the implicit religion of Western culture, see history, beginning way back with Egypt and Greece ... as a story of cumulative development leading up to modern Western society... ... progress is inevitable, if we only allow human reason freely and scientifically to investigate our world so that we can acquire the technological power to control the world in order to realize the ultimate human good, that is, an abundance of consumer good and the leisure time in which to consume them" (19:15).

It is his technological sense of progress that has given him the idea that he is his own savior and that he will, if given enough time, make enough technological progress to solve all the problems that he has made for himself. The irony is that it is in man's progress that his difficulties have evolved. He has used technology to supposedly extend the capabilities of his mind and his senses, to conquer space and time. Inherent is the hope that the eternal, perfection, paradise and the omniscient may be achieved. Allenby explains that the rise of technology in the West was believed to be a way for humans to demonstrate that they were worthy of salvation through their works (www.att.com/ehs/ind_ecology/articles/eschatoloty.html). The ability to move e.g. to a new world was a type of redemption which was facilitated by technology. Technology is not just a means but it has become an environment, it characterizes the 'good' life, that which is modern and superior and a way of life. It includes status symbols. Nobel argues that the core of technology is religious millenarianism (1997).

It is startling to study the ideas of technological determinism in relation to the few insights that we have about the Tower of Babel. Firstly, they planned to build higher than the flood level. This took technological ingenuity, and engineering expertise. E. G. White adds that they aimed to reach the clouds (SR 73). They were not only interested in future security, but they wanted to rule over the people as gods. They were searching for the origin of the flood in the clouds. This was an act of rebellion. Robert Bauval (2000, MNet Carte Blanche SA TV) suggests that there was a definite correlation between the building of the pyramids and the religious beliefs of the Egyptians, namely, the immortality of the soul. The amazing technological achievements of early civilizations, brings one to a stark realization of how contemporary man relates his success to his technological achievements. Joy (Wired; 2000) entitles his article 'why the future doesn't need us' and considers nanotech, robotics, and genetic engineering a threat to humans in making us an endangered species. Bill Joy, the cofounder and Chief Scientist of Sun Microsystems, in discussion with his fellow scientists, contemplates the issues surrounding the future of IT and 'knowledge-enabled mass destruction'. It is a sobering article.

Determinism suggests that there is something that dictates to us; that predetermines and happens in spite of us. Adding technology to this idea, suggests that by creating our technology, we create our future, which cannot be avoided. This is a commentary on media as it is implicated as a power to impact society. The assumptions of technological determinism are evolutionary by nature as change is interpreted as 'progress'. Social change has taken place through a fixed sequence of different technological stages; e.g. age of machinery, atomic age, space age, electronic age. This assumes a linear history. Technological progress and social progress are associated with each other. Status is an issue. Purcell says; "the notion is that a kind of invisible hand guides technology ever onward, and upward, using individuals and organizations as vessels for its purposes but guided by a sort of divine plan for brining the greatest good to the greatest number. Technological improvement has been the best evidence for progress so far' (1994:38). This myth is embedded in our thinking and attitude. It is very strange for students with their MP3, flat screens, digital everything to conceptualize that man before the flood was technologically superior. And now we move on from wireless to wire-less technology (Wired, January 2004). Graham Hancock, starting with the assumption that early civilizations were technologically superior, provides evidence of that fact.

Inherent in this discussion of technology is the issue of, 'is man going to save himself by his inventions' or 'is it maybe his inventions that will prevent him from preparedness for the coming of His Savior'. Allenby, vice-president of AT&T and EH&S, states, 'Christian eschatology matters because it is embedded in both the environmental and technological discourses that are now dominant' (www.att.com/ehs/ind_ecology/articles/eschatoloty.html).

> "Firstly, both technology as a cultural practice, and environmentalism in its dominant, developed countrary form, embed within themselves a vision of their ultimate end" (Allenby, www.att.com/ehs/ind_ecology/articles/eschatoloty.html).

Langdon Winner reminds us that 'it is not uncommon for the advent of a new technology to provide for flights of utopian fancy'. Advancement in science and as applied in technology give the illusion that given time, man will 'redeem' himself. I believe that these ideas of technology are interrupting any thought of the need for an imminent return of Jesus, our Savior. Our things; tools and toys have turned eschatology into a myth.

The following concepts are believed to be basic to media literacy. They provide a framework for both the development of a curriculum and an approach to media education.

Made in the image of...

Wired magazine, January 2004 has a picture of 'man' (Adam) from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel reaching out to his own image (instead of God as in the painting) with the caption; 'and man created man in his own image'.

Semiotics: Signs and codes

Semiotics is basic to an understanding of media messages. It is the process of constructing a message by using signs that stand for something, what is the referent or that which is sensorily perceptible or the real, the **signifier** and the meanings generated or the **signified** (Danesi;2002:3). The meaning that can potentially be extracted is known as the **signification.** A message is a signifier and its meanings are its signifieds. The concept 'sex' can be represented (presented again) in come physical form, e.g. two people kissing romantically, a poem, an erotic movie etc. Each of these is a signifier as sex has a physical form. The meanings captured by each is the signifieds. Signification is affected by social conventions, cultural norms and is somewhat open-ended. This is especially so in the case of symbols. Symbols are signs that have no meaning but the meaning attributed to them, e.g. a light bulb for bright idea.

However, a communicator intends to state and especially in audio-visual media, what he/she wants the recipient to understand. Constructing a message using signs and codes gives an opportunity to understand the process involved in sending messages via the media and deals with the following questions:

- **What** does a certain structure, text, genre (type or style of message) mean?
- **How** does it represent what it means?
- **Why** does it mean what it means? (Danesi; 2002:23).

These 3 questions and an investigation of the role of the signs and the referents, supports the process of deconstruction and understanding of the various levels of meaning in media texts.

There are 2 aspects that must be noted:
- The relationship between a sign and its meaning
- The combination of signs into codes.

Codes are the ways in which signs are combined and the network of interconnected meanings (Danis; 2002:27). It is the technique or recipe by which signs are combined; like the grammar and rules of visual communication (Morgan & Welton; 1986:67). The cover of a magazine is an example of the use of signs and codes to give the message that this magazine is meant for women etc. etc. Codes include the elements of non-verbal communication, cinematographic techniques. Knowledge of these enables one to become a competent communicator as well as a knowledgeable consumer. It is the 'stuff' of media literacy and brings pleasure and enjoyment both from the process of analysis as well as from a consumer/viewer perspective.

Representation

The construction of messages involves both a process of selection as well as rejection of signs and codes. Representation refers to the selective re-presentation of reality in the various media. Television tries to provide an account, which gives the illusion of having been there and 'breaking news' is intended to give a sense of the present as in immediacy, and presence as in proximity. The goal is realism, participation, authenticity and credibility. The demand to produce the illusion of reality is one of the interesting aspects of the study of visual communication. It stretches the ingenuity and creative expertise of film and video producers to produce that which is credible and believable. And yet, ironically, their credibility is at stake when it is discovered that the houses are actually small scale models and replicas of actual houses and that fires are actually burning behind glass and that walls are being towed behind stationary cars to give the illusion that it is the car that is moving. The question remains; whose version is being re-presented and what is the reality (Hart; 1991:83)?

People can be represented in three ways, each of which puts them into a category (Burton; 1990:86,87), namely:
Types – a typical character in a story or book that appears in a specific context without repetition
Stereotypes – a simplified representation of human character, appearance and beliefs. It is recognizable because of the key details that represent the character, which has been reinforced by repetition, i.e. by typing according to physical appearance, race, occupation, gender, behaviors, actions and relationships. This oversimplified representation serves as a model of how things ought to be. Stereotypes promote myths. However, this may be a distortion, result in prejudice and deny the dignity and uniqueness of the individual.
Archetypes – these are types that are embedded in our culture. They are projections of our deepest beliefs and values, traditions and portray qualities of courage, goodness and even evil.

There is also the hero archetype; which may be the good guy or the pseudo-hero who is not substantially mature or struggling with integrity or authenticity (Johnston; 2000:12). Lawrence and Jewett identify the motifs of superheroic redemption and the relationship with the despair,

tensions and hopes about democracy that is current in American consciousness (2002:5). This includes heroic violence. They term this the American monomyth, which can be seen in popular culture artifacts:

> "A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity" (Lawrence and Jewett; 2002:6).

What is significant to the Christian, is that this derives from tales of redemption but secularizes the Judeo-Christian dramas of community redemption. They combine elements of the 'selfless servant' who gives his life impassively for others with the 'zealous crusader' who destroys evil.

> "The supersaviors in pop culture function as replacements for the Christ figure, whose credibility was eroded by scientific rationalism. But their superhuman abilities reflect a hope for divine, redemptive powers that science has never eradicated from the popular mind. Figures such as Neo in *The Matrix* seem explicitly designed to offer contemporary moviegoers this new Christ – one who has dropped the ineffectual baggage of the Sermon on the Mount. Instead, he, and his shooting partner Trinity carry a duffel bag full of pistols, guns, and explosives needed to destroy the command center of political evil" (Lawrence and Jewett; 2002:7).

These authors raise some important issues for serious reflection. One of them is that the American myth system contains some elements of truth and that these are basic to the existence of democracy. This does not negate the need for public scrutiny of these ideas. This is a fact that must always be present in media literacy.

Apocalypse

One of the archetypes of human history is that of the apocalypse or way in which the world will end (Johnston; 2000:16). Each of the worldviews has its own explanations of this phenomenon; whether it is through flood, fire, the triumph of evil and darkness before renewal or final judgment in history. Evil is omnipresent. This is portrayed in the media in the genre of disaster films and in the many forms of the monster of the technology god (Johnston; 2000:17). These are often taken from the fears of e.g. nuclear weapons. The advancement in technology has increased this shadow within our culture. One wonders what impact these visuals have had on the minds of those who anticipate the 'end of the world'? The Bible presents a picture connoting victory and home-going.

Fundamental to an understanding of media messages is that representation is a mediational process (Danesi; 2002: 17). It is therefore, someone's re-presentation of ideas.

Images and Identity

Image is the mental re-presentation of something that is not there; it is illusionary. It is like choosing what one wants to see in the mirror looking back at one. Images are used in the media to create conformity and to sell products. The images include the perfect woman, the grown-up image, archetypes, the hero archetype, the superhero and the stereotype. Images define beauty, age, the perfect human being and ethnicity. Essentially they define us. This is a confrontation with individuality, the plan of salvation and our identity.

James Twitchell remarked:

"In the beginning was the Word, but in the end it will be the image" (1999:50).

Jean Kilbourne has surveyed over a period of time, contemporary advertisements to examine, how, why and to what affect the images have on young women. She is interested in the relationship between these images and the actual lives of these people. Her claim is:

"that advertising simultaneously reflects, exacerbates and exploits deep-seated personal and social anxieties about femininity, masculinity and this country's continued ambivalence about shifting gender roles – undermining the way girls and women see themselves, while normalizing the violence done to them by men. She identifies the issues of objectification, dismemberment, the obsession with thinness, silencing, the trivialization of power, and sexualization of teenagers (www.mediaed.org/videos/Mediagenderand diversity/Killing us softly3/studyguide).

No wonder there is a need for the restoration of the image of God in man (and woman). Images become our source of identity rather than what the cross means in terms of our worth. What a wonderful sense of relief is expressed here in Luke 12:1-8:

"Don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or if the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your inner life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the ravens, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God. And you count far more.
Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? If fussing can't even do that, why fuss at all? Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don't fuss with their appearance – but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don't you think He'll attend to you, take pride in you, do His best for you?
What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God's giving. People, who don't know God and the way He works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how He works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself".

Mediation

Mediation has to do with the content of a message, the formulation of that content as well as the medium used to transmit that message. It refers to the way in which the medium comes between the audience and the original event, opinion or material. The message is merely a version or mere representation of that original material. It is a construction of signs operating in codes, which means that the message is not real but artificial (Burton; 1990:180). Signs never tell the whole truth as they mediate reality. They constitute selections that refer to reality. These are the various ways in which the media 'connects' us to reality:

- a window on experience so that one's vision is extended in a personal way. This may be biased in the sense of having been mediated.
- An interpreter which offers an explanation to make sense of fragmentary representations of events
- A platform or carrier of information which may be factual or merely an opinion
- An interactive link which relates communicators and recipients through various kinds of feedback
- A signpost, i.e. by instructing and guiding
- A filter, i.e. the media tends to select parts of experience for special agenda. This implies that parts of experience are omitted, neglected or shut out (either deliberately, systematically or not) Agenda-setting is an important aspect of understanding the media.
- A mirror which reflects to society an image of itself. The public also demands a particular image of itself and dictates that which it believes to be unacceptable or worth attention.
- A screen or barrier which conceals truth for the sake of escapism and propaganda (McQuail; 1987:53).

Therefore, television constructs a view of the world while simultaneously naturalizing this view by hiding its methods of construction and the codes used e.g. the camerawork, lighting, editing etc. By suggesting that it is in the business of entertainment and therefore messages are value-free is part of its ideology and a statement of values (see section on ideology).

Realism and reality

The debate about what is real is an ontological one. The real world is out there. Mediation and representation are key concepts in understanding television and its relation to reality. It provides the viewer with an indirect experience of reality. It is realistic. Ironically, this fact is not generally accepted as television is seen as a model of reality and a model for behavior. The media producers incorporate elements of realism to ensure that their messages are believable.

Fiske and Hartley suggest that realism tends to produce a consumerist, non-critical attitude in the audience:

"All the different drama series, soap operas, situation comedies, and all the news and current affairs programs reinforce and reiterate the same connotated meaning: that the world is, naturally and of itself, what the mind-originated conventions of realism say it is. Realism seems to demand of us that before we can be entertained by a comedy or police

drama, we must first concede that the mode in whish the fictional story is presented is not constructed, but is merely the natural representation of the way things are: a story may be fictional, but the way it is related tells it like it is" (1978:161, 162).

What is not on television is considered to not be real!

Television relies on a distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Its genres are a result of this distinction. But currently, the tabloid and its influence on print, the news and breaking news of television has become an issue. Journalists are grappling with this breakdown of the line between fiction and non-fiction and the influence of simulations and sensation. The tabloid also 'scavenges the video garbage can for any and all images – home video, handheld camera shots, police video, answering machines, pornography videos etc.' (Sholle; 1995:160). This sense of being there brings the pleasure of voyeurism but also has the effect of 'fusing image and reality, i.e. the 'live' (Sholle; 1995:160). The result is that representation does not stand in for the object in reality; but rather overwhelms that reality. It is essential to understand the influence of the tabloid.

The genre of 'reality television' has responded to the 'unreality' of television by producing programs like 'Survivor'. It used real people (not actors), there was no script, no direction but carefully edited filmed real events. This hybrid of fantasy and reality is believed to have changed television forever (New York Daily News, 18 February 2000 quoted by Slade; 2002:207). In a debriefing show *Survivors-Reunion* two of the players claimed that their mutual attraction as seen on the televised show was not real. They had made it up because they thought the viewers would expect this sort of thing! This is one of the dialectics of the media that needs to be explored.

In a comment on the future of television:

> "Seriously though, I do believe that one day TV entertainment will get to the stage where you see people dying live on TV. As the Romans knew, people killing each other is great entertainment" (www.kuro5hin.org/).

The tabloid and reality television are essentially outcomes of the ideas of popular culture.

Popular Culture

A discussion of contemporary society must deal with popular culture or the culture of the mass media. It has its own way of making sense of the world and offers a distinctive way of understanding society. Popular connotes that the masses are involved and therefore impact is an issue. Has it been imposed on the masses by the cultural elite (hegemony) or is it derived from the habits, taste and experience of the people? Does more mean 'bad'? It is juxtaposed by some against high and folk culture, in order to determine its value and therefore whether it is good or bad. Popular culture is contradictory; it wins the support of the people while it maintains the power of the dominant elite, who oppress the people by its ideology of materialism and consumerism etc. It keeps the masses 'moronically content with their lot and their oppression

(O'Shaughnessy; 1990:90,91). It may therefore mask, displace and naturalize the social problems that concern the people.

Its integral nature is what is of importance in media literacy. It is entertaining at heart. Pleasure is its goal. Besides fun, is the purpose of knowing how to be popular (Schultze; 1991:8). The following are essential characteristics:

1. consumption and instant gratification. Consumers have developed a taste, which may spoil a taste for anything better. Life is meaningful because of the activities of buying and displaying products and images to sense community and identity.
2. emphasis on immediacy, brevity and superficiality. Timelessness is not valued.
3. contradictory. Jeans are both an expression of domination and subordination as well as resistance and power.
4. potential creativity within the vitality of the people and the possibility of social change. Relevance requires relativity, which denies closure, absolutes and universals.
5. fluidity and a sense of disposability.
6. excessive. Therefore, seen as vulgar, melodramatic, sensational.
7. repetition and seriality. It epitomizes daily life and its routines (Fiske; 1989:124, 127).
8. emphasizes the generation gap so that the youth seek parental guidance from the media and heroes from its icons.
9. rewards youthfulness and criticizes maturity so that maturation is not a primary goal.
10. confuses the issue of whether life is work or leisure. The distortion of leisure and emphasis on lust, leads to the need to satisfy an insatiable appetite (Schultze; 1991:5,6,11,47).
11. Narcissism or obsession with image. How we appear becomes more important than who we are. This tends to spoil relationships with others as we compare them with our expectations of their image instead of appreciating them for their own uniqueness (Fischer; 1988:44).

The images and myths of the mass-mediated society characterized all societies since man rebelled against God. The Bible provides some very accurate descriptions of our own world and one wonders if there is anything new? The fact that the commandments deal with 'making images' suggests that this will be a universal and historic issue. Judges 21:25 raises the issue of individualism:

"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit".

Individualism, narcissism, hedonism and materialism are challenged in the following passage:

"Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world – wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important – has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from Him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out –but whoever does what the God wants is set for eternity" (1 John2:15 –17).

Identification of Themes in the Bible to support a Biblical approach to media literacy.

Made in the image of God

The creation story provides a backdrop for identity and purpose. The fact that, in the beginning, man was made in God's image challenges the 'progress' ideas of technological determinism as well as descriptions of the history of man from the Flintstones to Sci-Fi man-machines. This is essentially a challenge to the embeddedness of our technological culture and feelings of immortality and goals of perfection. Technology advancement contributes to evolutionary ideas that man was primitive and that we who are modern, are advanced!

Living in an image-conscious society where everyone is concerned about their image requires a dismantling of many of the myths of the media. It is not the celebrities, nor the advertisements but the image of God that defines reality. We are not slaves of the gods as we, the ordinary men and women, can image God in creation (Walsh; 1992:21).

Seeing

The adage, 'Seeing is believing' seems to be adequate proof for many of what is truth. However, a closer look at and understanding of visual communication soon convinces one that 'seeing' is something that must be explored. Flory defines 'seeing' as

> "a complex conceptual process that depends on our having learnt the relationships between our tactual definition of physical objects and our perceptions of those same objects, much as we learn... to relate verbal definitions to the referent" (du Plooy; 1989:12).

The process of perception implies awareness and interpretation of surrounding stimuli or events as well as the selection of data from the world. This implies that what we 'see' is also what we choose to see, our attitude towards what we see and past experience. The power of visual stimulation and the importance of developing the ability to 'see' are important aspects of media literacy. Images must be talked to and questioned. The ideology of the message source must be understood. Insight is basic to discernment. This process frees one from conformity and a conventional response. It brings into focus, the tension between reel and real, and truth and myth. Jesus told parables in which He used signs and symbols so that people would understand. When asked by the disciples why he told stories, He replied;

> "But you have God-blessed eyes – eyes that see! And God-blessed ears – ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to her what you are hearing, but never had the chance" (Matt 13:16).

In the context of the ideologies that prevail in the media, I believe that Jesus' message to Laodicea is a confrontation with materialism, individualism, relativism, secularism etc. and emphasizes this ability to 'see':

"I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot – far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit. You brag. 'I'm rich. I've got it made. I need nothing from anyone', oblivious that in fact you're a pitiful, blind beggar, threadbare and homeless.
Here's what I want you to do: Buy your gold from me, gold that's been through the refiner's fire. Then you'll b rich. Buy your clothes from me, clothes designed in Heaven. You've gone around half-naked long enough. And buy medicine for your eyes from me so you can see, really see…"

Jesus often talks about 'seeing' in the context of understanding Luke 11:27-41:

"The mood of this age is all wrong. Everybody's looking for proof, but you're looking for the wrong kind. All you're looking for is something to titillate you curiosity, satisfy your lust for miracles… Your eye is a lamp, lighting up your whole body. If you live wide-eyed in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. Keep your eyes open, your lamp burning, so you don't get musty and murky. Keep your life as well-lighted as your best-lighted room".

Proverbs 4:25-27
"Keep your eyes straight ahead; ignore all sideshow distractions. Watch your step, and the road will stretch out smooth before you. Look neither left nor right, leave evil in the dust".

Psalms 101:3
"I refuse to take a second look at corrupting people and degrading things. I reject made-in-Canaan gods, stay clear of contamination".

Romans 13:14
"… let Christ through His Spirit completely dominate your life so that you leave no room to gratify the sinful desires of your fallen nature".

Elijah's experience with his servant who was overwhelmed by the sight of the Aramean army, horse and chariots that surrounded the city, and the prayer that he prayed; "O, Lord, open his eyes so that he may see" (2 Kings 7:14) God's army. This experience is an interesting example of the levels of reality and God's view of what is real.

Whetmore's model below, shows the relationship between constructed, perceived reality and real life. It seems obvious that real life should provide the foundation for perceived reality but there is a recognition of the fact that it could be that the media's version of reality as depicted in constructed messages, may ultimately become the benchmark for judging what is real and true rather than actuality. Spending hours with the reel will determine how we define the real! This is a sobering reality.
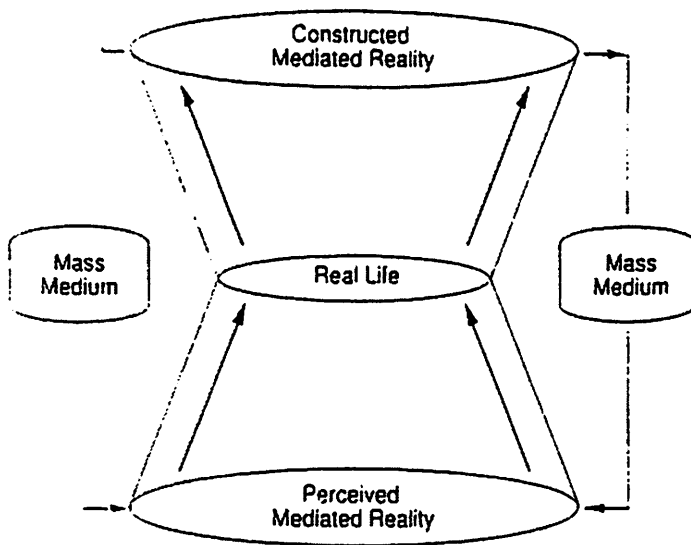
Figure 16.1 The cone effect. SOURCE: From *Mediamerica*. 3rd ed., by Edward Jay Whetmore. © 1985, 1982, by Wadsworth, Inc. Used by permission of the publisher.

The media cannot present reality as it is; it is merely re-presented. Reality television is probably the most unreal genre.

An important distinguishing theme is that of the Great Controversy. Recognition of the importance of this theme is fundamental to media literacy.

The Great Controversy: The Ideological struggle

This theme provides a wholistic approach to the history of mankind and his technological endeavors. It has a starting point, a unifying idea and helps to make sense out of the chaos of man's own ideas about his existence. The unifying idea is the heart of the philosophy of education, namely, 'the restoration in the human soul of the image of God' (Douglass; 1998:14). The purpose is to vindicate the character of God (PP 68). It is a description of the ideological struggle between Christ and Satan for the purpose of restoration and redemption of fallen mankind. There is harmony in heaven, a rebellion, a perfect creation, a fall, redemption, second coming (eschatology), and consummation at the end of the millennium (Rasi; 2000:6). These ideas may be portrayed in a truthful or deceitful manner and this is at the core of an understanding of the messages of the media. Therefore, the Bible is necessary as a guide and benchmark for truth.

The beginning of this conflict is initiated by Lucifer, the 'light carrier' who questions God's sovereignty in the context of creation. It emphasizes the superior nature of mankind at the creation. However, due to pride and selfishness, Satan extends his questions to Eve. These are still basic assumptions of the prevailing ideologies – you will not surely die and God has not told you everything. The ideology of wanting to be a god plays out in the whole Bible. This is an identity apart from God. A study of this struggle, as played out in the Tower of Babel, Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Daniel in Babylon and the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2), Christ and the religious leaders of His day, John and the symbols and signs of

Revelation provides a helpful background to idolatry, ideology and truth. It is a battle between man, his gods, images to these gods and God and His plan to redeem and restore His image in man. Idolatry appears to provide a sense of meaning and fulfillment. An idol is a creation that can be controlled by the maker. Idols are generally represented by images. This representation is valued in place of God.

The following cartoon illustrates the ideological struggle. It is suggested that visuals such as these can provide students and instructor inspiring time in which to take the Bible and explore these themes and then apply them to life in the context of a Christian worldview (see appendix 1). This text provides an important theme for this discussion.
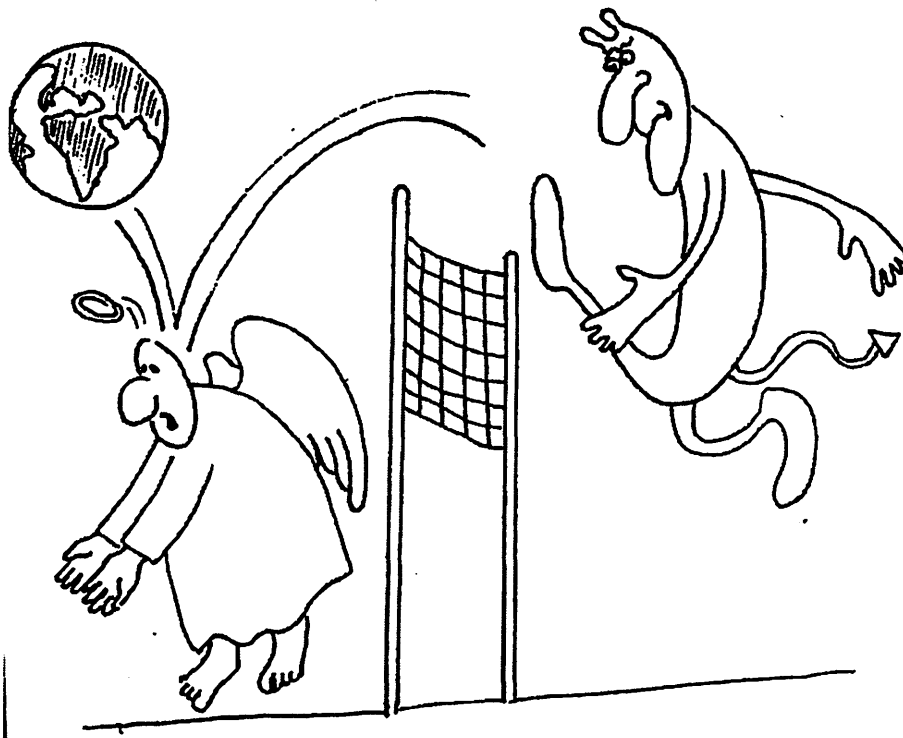
"So take everything that the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way…This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.
Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's word is an indispensable weapon. In the same way prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare' (Ephesians 6:18-22)

Daniel and his friends are separated by exile from their homeland, and given high places in a culture very foreign to their own. They learn the language, literature and diplomacy of Babylon and yet they live wisely and with discernment in this culture. Ironically, this is what distinguishes them! By requesting an alternative diet, and evidencing an alternative lifestyle, they are given influential positions so that they can have an influence in the culture for God's glory. What a challenge for the media literacy teacher to lead students through this discovery.

The entire life of Christ on earth displays a clash of ideologies (John 1 elaborates this theme). The cross is a public display of where the ideas of Satan lead; to their consequences. Ultimately Satan wants to be worshipped. Embedded in popular culture is the idea of celebrity and worship. Worship in this context can mean acceptance of ideas. Idolatry leads human beings to worship themselves.

A prophetic response

Themes in the prophetic books of the Bible, as well as many of the Psalms, include the need for a diagnosis of what is normal and a challenge to identify the abnormality of it all. It is a question of numbness in the reality of enculturation and an awareness of where we are in relation to prophecy. Jeremiah serves as an example:

> "Clean up your act – the way you live, the things you do – so I can make my home with you in this place. Don't for a minute believe the lies being spoken here – 'This is God's Temple, God's Temple, God's Temple' Total nonsense! Only if you clean up your act (the way you live, the things you do), only if you do a total spring cleaning on the way you live and treat your neighbors, only if you quit exploiting the street people and orphans and widows, no longer taking advantage of innocent people on this very site and no longer using your souls by using this Temple as a front for other gods – only then will I move into your neighborhood...
> Get smart! Your leaders are handing you a pack of lies, and you're swallowing them! Use your heads! Do you think you can rob and murder, have sex with neighborhood wives, tell lies nonstop, worship the local gods and buy every novel religious commodity on the market – and then march into this Temple, set apart for my worship, and say, 'We're safe!' thinking that the place itself gives you a license to go on with all this outrageous sacrilege... Well think again. I've got eyes in my head. I can see what's going on" (Jeremiah 7:3-12).

The call to a Christian response to contemporary culture is a scriptural theme that is significant in media literacy.

Conclusion

I detect a common theme in many of the approaches to media literacy, namely, the importance of the informed citizen in democracy; the value of virtue and moral sensibility for the purpose of renewal; the correlation between advancement in technology and progress, social improvement, reconstructionism, change and achievement of utopia, the Kingdom of God, New Age, Karma and One with the Cosmos. The Kingdom NOW idea has a lot to do with how many Christians

choose to live today and this has implications for what we ought to do with our mediated culture. Paul also emphasizes this to Titus:

> "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11;14, NIV).

But the context is not preparation for the Kingdom of God on earth. Rather it is a heart-felt response to the imminent return of Jesus Christ. A clear understanding of the Great Controversy and a Biblical interpretation of eschatology are fundamental to a Seventh-day Adventist approach to media literacy. It takes eye-salve and seeing the reality of God's army of angels juxtaposed against the army of the enemy. Just as we watch the media and recognize the need to study it, the media studies us as either critical or non-discerning viewers and provides us with messages that have intentional meanings.

Appendix 1

The following questions provide a framework for using a semiotic approach to visuals/texts (cartoons, advertisements, photos etc.). They can be used to discover the levels of meaning, namely, the denotation, connotation and values, ideas and/or ideology of the communicator.

A. Isolate and analyze the important signs in the text.
  1. What are the important signifiers?
  2. What do they signify?
  3. Is there a system that unifies them?
  4. What codes can be found (e.g. symbols of status, colors, music, composition)
  5. Are ideological or sociological issues being addressed?
  6. How are they conveyed or hinted at?

B. Identify the central structure, theme, or model of the text.
  1. What forces are in opposition?
  2. What forces are teamed with each other?
  3. Do the oppositions or teams have psychological or sociological meanings? What are they?

C. What is the narrative structure of the text?
  1. How does the sequential arrangement of the events affect meaning? What changes in meaning would result if they were altered?
  2. Are there any formulaic aspects to the text?

D. Does the medium being used affect the text? How?
  1. Use of shots, camera angles, editing, dissolves etc.
  2. Use of lighting, color, music, sound, special effects, etc.
  3. Paper quality, typefaces, graphics, colors etc.
  4. How do the speaker's words, gestures and facial expressions affect meaning?

E. How does the application of semiotic theory alter the original meaning that you might have ascribed to the text?

The signifier (the representation e.g. the supplied cartoon) is made up of signs. A sign is a representation of something, it stands for something, it has a referent. The 'devil' is a sign and so is the 'angel'. The 'world' is a sign. All of these signs make up the signifier, which is a representation, i.e. a re-presentation or a message that has meaning that a communicator wants to communicate. The signified is the meaning and in some cases the reality, i.e. a picture of a dog probably represents some actual dog etc. There is therefore a 'gap' between the signifier and what is signified that the recipient of a message has to bridge from his/her experience etc. In this discourse with for example, this cartoon, there is discussion about the meanings. It is in this discourse that instructors and students confront their reality to deal with signification, truth, realism and reality. These are important opportunities for dealing with the media and this is the heart of what media literacy actually is.

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