

ESSEX HALL LECTURE

MASS COMMUNICATIONS  
AND THE  
SPIRIT OF MAN

BY

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Director and Secretary, Modern Churchman's Union  
Formerly Editor *Church of England Newspaper*

LINDSEY



PRESS

Price 2s. net

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THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE, 1959



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THE LINDSEY PRESS  
LONDON, W.C.2

## MASS COMMUNICATIONS AND THE SPIRIT OF MAN

### NOTE

The Essex Hall Lecture was founded by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in 1892, with the object of providing an annual opportunity for the free utterance of selected speakers on religious themes of general interest. The delivery of the lecture continues under the auspices of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, as a leading event during the course of the Annual Meetings of the Assembly. A list of the published lectures, including those still obtainable, will be found at the end of this lecture.

*Essex Hall,  
Essex Street,  
Strand, London, W.C.2*

PHILOSOPHERS have recently given close attention to the psychological origin of human communication and its significance. I want to make a case for asking that not only philosophers but also sociologists and churchmen should give more attention than they have yet shown signs of doing to the latest developments in communication. So pregnant are these developments both with mischief and with promise that those whose concern it is to interpret the condition of Man and guide his purposes cannot reasonably ignore them.

In the earlier stages of the human story, however many tens or hundreds of thousands of years ago they may have occurred, the ability to communicate the processes taking place within the psyche must have been one of the most important manifestations of the differences between Man and his next of kin, the animals. There were others, of course, such as the capacity for making tools and weapons. But none of these would have carried him any great distance towards the objects of his striving had he been unable to communicate with some measure of precision.

His first efforts may have been more rudimentary even than those of our domestic pets at the present time. A child's cry of pain would bring a parent running to feed him. An adolescent's expression of the joyful pangs of sexual desire would attract a mate sharing these feelings. Before they could formulate their instinctive requirements so as to understand with any clarity what they were about they must have words at their disposal. Without them there can be no thought worthy of the name. Even self-consciousness and the personality structure associated with it could

only be a sketchy sort of affair with little complexity or refinement. Upon the sharing of language with others rested the possibility of turning the herd, held together by primitive instinct, into some elementary form of organized society. Once that was achieved the vistas of civilization before mankind were, as we now know, infinite.

Another stage was reached when men learned how to translate the ephemeral sounds of the voice into permanent signs on stone, hide, papyrus or other materials. Not only could they send messages to each other accurately over considerable distances, what was more important, they could store their experiences, knowledge and thoughts for future reference, indefinitely. By their ability to communicate over longer distances they extended the range of their voices. By their ability to put the contents of their minds into storage they were released from the limitations of memory. No longer had they to rely on such custom and oral tradition as they could retain: they had at their disposal a vast artificial collective memory upon which anybody could draw at will. Advanced civilization and culture became possible.

Printing had already been known in Korea for half a century when it was invented independently by the German, Gutenberg, in 1454. Previous stages in the development of communication were a long way apart. Now the tempo began to quicken. The potentialities of printing began to be evident when it made a first, shattering impact on European society at the time of the Reformation. Could that tremendous series of events have moved rapidly and effectively without it? The printing-presses took the writings of Luther, the first great pamphleteer, far and wide and to every stratum of the population with a speed and efficiency that had previously been inconceivable. To appreciate the revolution that had occurred we need only contrast the long-drawn and pitiable efforts of the Lollards and

Hussites, which petred out miserably in the end. In that contrast is all the difference between a scatter of isolated flames and an uncontrollable prairie fire.

By means of this instrument social and religious movements could achieve new dimensions and a different order of speed. Education was more and more widely disseminated. Change in many spheres was hastened because, through printing, more minds could be brought to bear on any particular problem. The State and industry acquired an indispensable tool in building great and complicated organizations. Printing was a necessary condition of the apparatus of modern administration with all that it means for the employment of machinery and technics and the control of vast multitudes of people.

In 1814 *The Times* announced its adoption of 'the greatest improvement connected with printing since the discovery of the art itself'. This was the application of steam power to the printing-press. Almost a century later mechanical type-setting completed the technical preparations necessary for the inauguration of mass communications. The revolution in communication gathered momentum with the progress of the technical revolution. When the rotary press and the type-setting machine had extended the range of the pen to its utmost limits, along came film, radio and television to perform the same service for sight and voice.

If the original beginning of communication and each subsequent development have been as fateful as we have seen, there is at least a case for believing that the latest phase may also be of considerable importance. Yet, although much has been written about the present condition of human society, and although thinkers have pronounced scathingly against what they call 'mass man', comparatively little thought has been contributed to the media which, at first look, would seem to have played so large a part in his degradation—



if he is, in fact, degraded. There are endless collections of statistics about this or that aspect of this or that medium. For example, I could quote for you pages upon pages of tables showing what kind of people listen to which kind of television programme. Millions of money have been spent on gathering figures to assist boards of directors in placing their wares before potential purchasers. The volume of material available to the sociologist is enormous. Some of it is not easy to come at; hidden away and forgotten in the files of audience-research departments; marked 'confidential' in the offices of publicity firms and advertising agents; scattered through the pages of obscure technical magazines here and in America. By itself this information conveys little of significance. What we need is a treatment that will make sense of the whole situation.

We are still at the position where the wildest and woolliest generalizations will capture the credulity of sensible and experienced men who are supposed to be professionals in communication. The Lambeth Report of 1958, for instance, stops in full course an enlightened and well-informed discussion of the family in contemporary society to remark, *à propos* of nothing whatever. 'The use of "depth psychology" in advertising in place of honest argument and an appeal to sound judgment is a menace to democracy and Christian living'. The Bishops may properly concern themselves with the spiritual implications of modern methods of advertising, and perhaps more particularly that of organizations which describe their methods by such terms as 'depth psychology' and 'motivation research'. If the advertising interests are now obliged to spend money advertising in defence of their advertising against the suspicions such pretentious phraseology arouses they have only themselves to blame. They should be more modest; but if there is one place where humility is not a virtue it is in the publicity industry. But that does not excuse the Bishops for issuing a blistering denuncia-

tion, damaging to numerous honest men and frightening to the public, unsupported by argument, unrelated to the previous history of the subject and, I suspect, devoid of any basis either in observation, first-hand study, statistics, systematic research or any other kind of evidence.

It is worth stopping to consider this question of motivation research in advertising because it is characteristic of the way in which the directing minds work in other branches of mass communications besides publicity. These minds, it must be said, are not for the most part in any sense irresponsible or diabolical minds, wishing to exploit a gullible public for a sordid purpose. Many of them are minds trained at our best schools and universities, Christian and ethical and humanitarian minds, animated by the desire to earn a decent livelihood in an honest and interesting manner so that they can maintain their families and hold up their heads among their friends. Of course, there are others, too. Every profession has its shady element, not excluding the clerical.

Now it is not the object of an advertiser, as it should be of an artist, to produce a perfect object for sale that will conform to some Platonic standard laid up in the heavens, but to market an object that the public are likely to buy. After much experience in marketing, the bigger advertising agents hit upon the method of finding out what the public were likely to want by the simple expedient of sending interviewers to ask them. As time passed it dawned upon them that people seldom give a straight answer to a straight question and that all kinds of obscure motives, which they hesitate to acknowledge even to themselves, colour their preferences. Understandably the advertisers determined to use more indirect and crafty methods to unearth these motives.

What they discovered was not uninteresting, but was, perhaps, more amusing as a revelation of the quirks

and idiosyncracies of human nature than menacing as a social evil. They found, for example, that men preferred an expensive car to support their ego and their prestige, with a surge of power to flatter their virility, to a cheaper one that would fulfil the function of moving them from place to place with equal efficiency. Hence the vast, two or three hundred horse-power American contraptions that occupy so much space at the Motor Show.

They found, and this is the classic case, that the public despised the nutritious prune because they associated it with vinegary landladies, monotonous meals at school, childhood medicines and similar disagreeable things. So they devised a campaign to associate it with healthy young folk on holiday, good looks, strong men and such things as people like or admire; whereupon the sales of prunes began to soar.

In my own experience, I once realized that I was at considerable trouble to avoid one brand of petrol and obtain another although unaware of any difference in their quality. On examining myself I discovered that the garishly painted pumps of one suggested cheapness and nastiness, while the clean design of those of the other suggested taste, refinement and class. It is the business of motivation research to analyse reactions of this kind and construct in the minds of the public an attractive brand-image of the product offered for sale.

If depth psychology plays any part in this analysis it is no more than the commonplaces of popular Freudianism and Adlerianism. There is nothing about it so sinister as to justify a crusade. When, in their advertising, firms employ dubious arguments to distinguish between brands of detergent or tooth-paste which, in reality, do not differ at all in hygienic value we may deprecate the economic waste but can hardly claim that democracy itself is under a threat. Whether the experience gained could be put to evil purposes is quite a different question. There may be a cumulative effect

that distorts values and renders the public more amenable to conditioning, but this issue can hardly be settled in relation to advertising alone. It is the whole system of mass communications that must be interrogated on that point, and not one comparatively small element.

What is of some interest is that Freud and Adler have replaced Pavlov as the inspiration of modern advertising. The crude behaviourism that relied on bludgeoning the public with incessant repetition of names and slogans has gone. Humour, wit, description and splendidly coloured pictures have made our railway-station platforms, our magazines and newspapers more amusing and more aesthetic than they used to be. We can see the difference between the two styles by contrasting the monotonously boring and irritating publicity of the various road-safety campaigns with the livelier advertising of the more opulent commercial concerns.

I have taken advertising as being so typical that we can learn much from it about the distinguishing characteristics of all mass communications. What is it that differentiates these media from earlier forms of intercourse?

First, it is *merely* communication. The actual intercourse involved is so small as to be negligible. The controllers of a medium simply give out what they think fit. The rôle of the public is to receive what the controllers imagine they want. There is no reciprocity of thought or feeling, no mutuality. Desperate attempts are made to produce the illusion of two-way conversation; but if the audience diminishes to such fewness that genuine discussion becomes possible it is a sign of failure. The controllers have poured their resources into the sandy wastes instead of into the right channels. Long before that happened the controllers would have faced bankruptcy. A second characteristic is that costs of establishment and maintenance are so

high as only to be economically justifiable if a vast number of people is served.

Third, the few communicate with the many. This is the most revolutionary feature. Never before the beginning of this century has it been possible for one person or a small group of persons to address simultaneously a whole nation, or even a whole continent. The brevity of the time within which the communication occurs can be ranked as a fourth characteristic. For example, whereas the works of Plato and Aristotle must by now have been read by millions of students, they could hardly be ranked as mass communications. They were intended for the few, and it is only during the course of some twenty-three centuries that millions of 'the few' have read them. By contrast, an estimated fourteen millions read the *Daily Mirror* during the course of a morning, while half the adult population of the United States may hear and see their President when he wishes to address them on an important topic by means of the radio and television networks. His voice may be relayed to every important town in the world.

These are the basic characteristics. Others derive from them. In a large measure the technical characteristics of the media dictate the conditions of its use and the content of the communications. The word 'mass' itself implies some of these. It is a detestable word for a deplorable phenomenon. For the nearest likeness in its day the *New Testament* uses the word 'multitude', signifying a multiplicity of individuals. The word 'mass' implies singularity and shapelessness. The individual is obliterated in the collectivity. To the cultural élite the mass is an ugly phenomenon from which they turn with a disgust and a contempt which the Christian faith can understand but cannot condone or excuse.

Again the communicators do their utmost to create an illusion that they are addressing themselves to

individuals. Television producers bring men and women typical of different classes to the screen for games and competitions. They ask their audiences to write them letters, and send stereotyped replies. The picture the television producer or artist has before him is of a typical, ordinary family seated in armchairs before the screen. The impregnable amiability of stars and announcers is an attempt to be friendly and personal. But when they have done all they have not communicated with a single individual. The best they can do is to address that in each person which he holds in common with all the rest of the constituency. Whatever is peculiar to him as an individual, which means everything that makes him a real personality and a character, is deliberately left uncatered for. As a consequence, the more distinguished a person in mind and character, the less satisfaction he can find in mass communications. The greater his potentiality for contributing to his fellow men, the more estranged from them he is likely to feel. Hence the bad spirit of mutual contempt that now exists between the cultural élite and the masses. To the latter, the former are 'eggheads'; to the former, the latter are 'the mob'.

This characteristic of mass communications intensifies as their efficiency improves. The more efficient the medium, the greater the number of people served at one time. The greater the number of people, the lower will be the common factor addressed and the smaller will be the opportunity of discrimination. In this country radio listeners to all intents and purposes have the choice of two programmes, both the work of the same authority. There was an inexorability about the way in which the Third Programme, even in its best days, provided the worst reception. Television viewers also have the choice of two programmes, but different controllers are in charge. Significantly, the statistics show a strong tendency, especially among children, to switch from a better-quality programme on

one system to a lighter programme on the other. Being interpreted, this means that the minority interest is automatically extruded like a foreign body. The controllers are not to be blamed for this: they can do nothing about it.

When technical requirements do not make for the reduction in the range of choices, the insistence of the constituency does. In journalism in this country this is particularly noticeable. The general tendency is towards a reduction in the number of independent journals and the syndication of news and articles to those that remain. It seems that newspapers and journals appealing to the general public, as distinct from a specialized public, such as a particular profession or a group with similar interests, must popularize or perish. More than one of the great national newspapers are at present having to struggle for their lives. The multi-million circulation papers, such as the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express*, on the other hand, seem unshakably entrenched. Mr. Cecil Harmsworth King, Chairman of the *Daily Mirror* group, has made public his conviction that the process will continue. While as a responsible citizen he regrets this, the pressures in the situation compel him to further it. Among the provincials the tendency has been either to die or to fall under control of the great chains that can provide some of the advantages of mass production. The way of independence is hard.

Yet even the greatest can trip up. I think of one Sunday paper, for instance, that served the tastes of its constituency with such accuracy that as it has aged and died circulation has shown corresponding casualties. Instead, the *Sunday Pictorial* takes over the new generation as it comes along, and probably now has a circulation close on saturation point among the age-group between sixteen and thirty-five.

Once a trend such as this sets in other circumstances co-operate in order to intensify it. Unquestionably the

policies of the great national advertisers have seriously contributed to the reduction in the number of independent journalistic voices. Having discovered that they can cover the entire population by advertising through television and the few multi-million circulation journals, it is obviously in their interest to eliminate all the rest from their appropriations. This they have done ruthlessly, with disastrous consequences for minority journalism. Perhaps at some future date when, as a result of this policy, they find their effective access to the public has fallen into the hands of a tiny group of men with a financial axe of their own to grind they may regret it.

Ease of availability is another quality of mass communication that has consequences. Radio and television, for instance, are 'laid on' like the corporation tap-water. The flick of a switch brings a flood of sound into a room. Film is less accessible. The audience have to put on their hats and coats and make their way to the cinema, paying money at the box office and possibly having to stand in a queue for the privilege. Once inside, their attitude is passive. No further demand is made upon either will, physical energy or intellect. A sequence of artificial day-dreams fascinates. With the Press a small range of selection is possible, as with films, but is seldom used. A large proportion both of readers and of audiences act according to habit in making their purchases of news and entertainment. The need of initiative is reduced to the minimum. In this the mass-communication media differ strongly from books, which offer multitudinous choices necessitating thought and research. Taste and the capacity for discrimination are refined in the process.

Also arising out of the nature of the media is the tendency to monopoly control. In the first place it is the few who address the many. In the second, vast financial resources are indispensable if they wish to do



so. The few who actually communicate, easily organized and easily replaced, are wholly dependent on the financiers. Without their sanction no minority with a message can gain access to the public. In Great Britain nobody has been able to establish a formal monopoly. Should this become likely, government interference would be certain. No government could afford to allow power on that scale, power which could challenge its own authority, to rest in the hands of one person or group. Nationalization and State monopoly might well be the answer. Yet the situation has much in common with monopoly.

Without entering into details of ownership, one fact stands out unmistakably. With the solitary exception of the B.B.C., the whole effective control of the mass-communication media in this country is in the hands of the moneyed interests of the City. Now this is not a rhetorical attempt to paint a lurid picture of unscrupulous opulence with sinister intentions deluding the innocent public. That would be very far indeed from the truth. To mention only one of those involved, Lord Rank, financial leader of the film industry, is first and foremost a man of religion who experienced a vocation to use the power of his wealth in the service of the highest standards. That is well enough known. But, when all allowance is made, the truth remains that the control of the mass-communication media in this country are owned by a comparatively small number of men, who are all, in the last resort, governed by the logic of City finance.

What is more, despite personal rivalries between them, their interests overlap and interweave inextricably. Film companies and newspaper proprietors have staked out their claims in commercial television and so on. That is why the plea that commercial television would bring the stimulus and variety of competition into its medium was so foolishly misguided. So far was it from fulfilling this purpose that it did exactly the

opposite. It extended the control of the money interest from one medium to another and greater. The 'principality and power' and, in some instances, the same individuals, who controlled publications and films now control the air as well. The nature both of the medium and of the competition they provided for the B.B.C. simply forced the B.B.C. to follow their lead. In the end the financial interest indirectly took charge of the B.B.C. as well.

As individuals the men concerned may be full of idealism, and many of them are; but, in the last resort, they must follow the financial logic of the situation; and they can never be expected to sympathize with a scale of values that is contrary to that logic, however objectively true or splendid it might be. Voices that expressed this fear when the subject was in controversy were overwhelmed under the floods of words from the other side, most of which emanated from the newspapers of men who might very likely, at a later date, own large interests in commercial television. It should be added that the financial logic of the situation is quite obviously that the various media should follow the course of the most widespread public reactions with the least possible interference. Under these conditions neither genuine cultural leadership nor the prophetic in religion are likely to have a chance of exercising themselves. Some time ago the *Daily Sketch* published a series of articles asking what Christ would do were he to be born among us at the present time. The answer is that he would be amiably shepherded out of the studios, since no offence must be given to any section of the public. The social and religious influence of mass communications will always lie heavily on the side of conservatism, though not necessarily a conservatism of the more bigoted or reactionary kind. In any conflict, it is usually the authoritarians and reactionaries who are satisfied at the expense of the liberals; witness the furore over the broadcasts of

Mrs. Margaret Knight or the apologies of the B.B.C. to the Cardinal Archbishop for broadcasting an unorthodox play about the Holy Family at Easter.

If there were ever to be serious conflict for the soul of the people in this country it could hardly now be between different sections of the same medium. One newspaper may recommend the Tory Party and another the Socialist. Opinions may differ as to whether or not that particular conflict is any longer a fundamental one; but there will surely be agreement that it is unlikely to affect the whole course of our civilization. On any issue as basic as that we are hardly likely to see a struggle developing between Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere, Mr. Cecil Harmsworth King and Odhams Press. Had the question of ownership been more carefully considered, competition on this scale might easily have developed between one great medium and others. It is not inconceivable that the Press might have stood for one set of values and radio or television, under some different kind of control, for another. The merging of the two systems of ownership and control precludes that possibility. But severe competition between the educational system and mass communications, or between the churches and one or the other of these cannot by any means be ruled out as a possibility.

It could be maintained with some show of evidence that an undercurrent of rivalry between the churches and the educational system, on the one side, and mass communications, on the other, is already in movement; truly a battle of Titans. The ostensibly good relations that exist between them hardly affect the analysis. It is true that we have religion on television and use television in schools—the handshake before the big fight. It is true, also, that none of the responsible people in any of these phases of our national life either want a struggle or are conscious in their daily life of participating in one, despite occasional outbursts from leading dignitaries and teachers. Yet we know per-

fectly well that a child brought up to full maturity with no influence upon him other than a school and a church would differ considerably in mental outlook and in standards from one brought up under mass communications alone. Look at a week's programmes on television; study the popular Press for a few days; set them beside the educational and religious ideal and the contrast will be clear.

Not only actual contents are involved, but also format, make-up, presentation; the whole approach. Nobody deliberately seeks a conflict: it is strongly arguable that the inner nature of these great institutions is such that they must always be engaged in a struggle which can never have a conclusive outcome and in which victory is impossible. What sets the contestants in opposition to each other is that whereas the mass media are fundamentally impersonal, only dealing with the individual as submerged in the crowd, religion and the schools are personal, dealing with the individual as a member of a community of individuals.

Tension also exists under the surface, as I have already hinted, between the cultural élite, consisting of creative people such as artists, scientists, original writers, composers of music, dramatists and their associates, on the one hand, and mass communications, on the other. Again it is quite true that they draw upon each other both for personnel and for finance, to say nothing of ideas. But their purposes are poles apart, and in some measure militate against each other. The élite may contend that association with mass communications prostitutes and degrades their creativity. From the other side may come the allegation that the élite make unrealistic demands upon them. Artists and scientists claim to be men seeking a country. Inaccessible though they may be, beauty and truth are at least available to reverence. They are to be sought for their own sake. If other people appreciate what is done in the course of this search, that is fine; but

public reactions are not the determining factor in the work. Many great artists have endured hardship willingly in their quest; not gladly, perhaps, and often with contempt for the Philistines who let them starve, but none the less without remorse. By contrast, the whole object of those engaged in mass communication is to please the crowd. It is their business in life to play to the gallery. Hardship is not an irrelevancy but a mark of failure. To find out what the public want and to give it them is their main object, as it is that of the manufacturer and his advertising agent. With a happy flair and good luck they may create new and better needs: normally they would prefer to provide worthy satisfactions than to offer the shoddy or the third rate. That is also true of the manufacturer and his sales staff. I hasten to add that there is nothing discreditable about the desire to please! Would that we all had it in greater measure.

Having examined the nature of this new and strange phenomenon, we must differentiate between the purposes it can serve. Apart from the rare emergencies when mass communications provide vital information for the public, as during war or industrial disputes, and apart from the few useful services they can offer, such as weather forecasts for seamen and farmers, they must always and everywhere be entertaining. The masses are not earnest students who will sit through hours of boredom for the sake of a shred of knowledge. They are people with time on their hands who will accept nothing that is not more amusing or interesting than any other easily available alternative. But interest and amusement can be directed in all kinds of ways. Danny Kaye's antics on the screen are amusing: so too are Low's cartoons, while there are people who find advertisements for beverages and detergents more amusing than either.

This gives us our clue. Mass communications can be used either for straightforward entertainment, instruc-

tion, advertising or propaganda. We have totalitarian propaganda when all the media of mass communication are concentrated in one institution, which is always an organ of the State. Under monopolist control it may be possible to impart propaganda and instruction without the element of entertainment, but never when the public have alternative media available. On the other hand, the fact that I could not use the term 'pure' entertainment to describe what I meant without an overtone of obscenity indicates that no such thing as pure, or mere, entertainment is possible. Entertainment always carries with it valuations and attitudes which, often enough, are all the more influential for not being explicit. The hidden suggestion is tacitly accepted with a laugh but without a thought. Much of the research devoted to cinema and television programmes, more particularly in relation to their child audiences, has consisted of attempts to examine the unarticulated assumptions that underlie them, and to discover what of them are uncritically accepted. It is extremely difficult, even with the best techniques of contemporary social research, to track them down. The child who was discovered sprinkling powdered glass in the family's milk pudding to see whether it worked 'like on the telly' should not be considered typical.

With instruction I would include such programmes on the radio as party political broadcasts at their best, and the better kind of political article in newspapers. Propaganda is different. It is the attempt to impose the mind of one person or of a group upon large numbers of others through mass communications, whether by the appeal to the emotions or by other methods of persuasion, regardless of reason. I would include such activities as poster campaigns during election time. Advertising, in this connection, is any attempt to secure sales by means of mass communications. Totalitarian propaganda can secure its ends largely by controlling the availability of the facts with which

the minds of the constituency can work. If the constituency has at its disposal only the facts of the situation favourable to the propagandist's case it is likely to reach the desired conclusion of its own accord. It may be that one of the most socially valuable results of exposure to the rival claims of advertisers is to render the public spontaneously critical of propaganda. How influential propaganda by modern methods can be was clearly demonstrated by the rapid success of the Nazis in securing the loyalty of the German people once they had their hands on positions of power. Comparatively few were able to withstand the barrage.

Hitler achieved this success by playing upon a neurosis that was sufficiently widespread among the German people to generate a neurotic atmosphere throughout the nation. Under those conditions neurosis is epidemic. Because no effective competition prevented him, Hitler's success was extraordinary. It even spread beyond the borders of Germany. Though I have no statistics available to prove it, my impression at the time was that anti-Semitism in this country rose markedly during the period of Hitlerism and fell again with his defeat and with the discovery of what his anti-Semitic bigotry had meant in human terms. Totalitarian propaganda often has the effect of arousing resentment against its immediate, superficial aims, while leaving behind a detritus of principle. Thus the Hungarian insurgents repudiated their government while accepting the Marxist assumption.

It is possible to exploit mass neurosis on a lesser scale than that. The less-reputable sections of our own Press can hardly be acquitted of doing so. In that case the appeal is usually to frustrated sexuality. But there are less obvious methods. It is not always in a laudable desire to put down the mighty from their seat and exalt the humble and meek that publicists lend themselves to campaigns of denigration and seem set on discrediting or debunking those in high places. They know that

people like to be able to look down upon other people and more particularly upon those they are normally expected to look up to. Editors know only too well that news of some wretched parson who has fallen into moral delinquency will provide a welcome salve to the murky consciences of thousands: they always thought they were as good as the standard bearers themselves, and now they know they are better. Their guilt feelings are smoothed away.

Sex, crime and royalty have been the staple formula for the popular Press for a couple of generations. There are week-end publications that carry little else. But an injustice is frequently done to the multi-million circulation papers by the thoughtless inference that this is all that any of them carry. While it is true that they include much triviality and some nastiness, they also select with great skill from the plethora of information that pours into their offices each day what is of greatest significance to their public. With superb brilliance they will reduce a voluminous Blue Book to a few incisive and readable paragraphs. They publish the work of columnists who go ruthlessly to the root of social and political problems in a manner that the semi-educated can understand. Among those who affect to despise these newspapers the obvious fact that, by definition, half the population are of intelligence below average, is often overlooked. Sheer intelligence quoti-ent enters deeply into the character of mass communications of all kinds, and the response to them. The popular Press deliberately caters for the lower half. These are just as much persons, with just as real a stake in the community and just as real a vote in elections, as university graduates. Through the machinery of trade unionism they wield enormous power, sometimes with a desperate absence of understanding. If there is any treason of the intellectuals in these days it is in the failure to give adequate leadership to that half of the nation. The editors, leader-writers and columnists



of the popular Press are making the attempt. If they conceal the pill within a thick layer of strip-cartoons, bathing beauties and sensations is that really worth the trouble of deploring?

Up to a point the medium and the public dictate the style of writing and even the content. The size of the headline requires a paragraph that will justify it. The column width demands short sentences even if the public would bother to read long ones. Qualifications of statements, parentheses, shades of meaning; all have to go by the board. The public will only tolerate strong, nervous, easily understandable statements forcefully worded. The archetypal light and dark must be met by putting all issues into unmistakable black and white. Discussion must be dramatized as personal conflict. Everybody and everything must be depicted in the columns a little larger than life. Problems of the utmost magnitude and complexity must be brought within the experience of the back street.

Undoubtedly the result is a distortion. What is the alternative? The ignorance that is a still more grave distortion. If this is the nearest to an accurate picture the readers are likely to reach the least we can say is that it is much better than nothing. The panorama presented is full of life and movement. It is full of lush sentimentality, too, but seldom does the popular Press endorse what is vicious or cruel. Almost invariably its influence is on the side of kindness, justice and the fundamental decencies of life. Whether that element in the Press that tends to wallow in the morbid and the sordid does serious damage is open to question. When, in the United States, the Kefauver Committee investigated the influence of morbid or violent films on juvenile delinquency the evidence of the psychologists and sociologists who came before it was inconsistent and contradictory. Probably an enquiry into the murkier section of the Press would be equally as incon-

clusive. All that is known for certain is the difficulty of tracing particular instances of wrong-doing to films or stories. Nobody can say confidently what the general effect is. Mass communications have become part of the environment, and we know what a powerful influence environment exerts on character. Yet an environment that provided no satisfactions for the dark side of the human psyche might be more dangerous than one that offers a vicarious satisfaction in the sensational crime and sex stories of the dubious Press. On the other hand, the appetite grows by feeding. Nobody has the answer to these conundrums. What most of us know is that we should like to see the end both of the demand and the satisfaction for what is ugly and of ill report.

Suspicion and doubt have greeted each new medium of mass communication as it has come alone. Similar questions, and still more, to those asked of the Press have also been asked about film, radio and television. One curious feature of communications is that no new medium ever displaces an old one, but all run together side by side. Language did not dispose of laughter and sighs. The pen did not do away with the tongue, neither printing, nor even the typewriter, eliminated the pen. And, in spite of fears, the Press, film and radio show every sign of survival alongside the lusty competition of the newest comer to the field.

Some of the fears have already turned out to be illusory. The folk who glue their eyes to the television screen hour after hour are not subtracting their energies from any more active interest. They had few such interests before it arrived. The average viewer watches the set for a couple of hours a day or less. The time children give to it is taken neither from homework nor from healthy play but from reading 'comics'. The general knowledge of the brighter children has fallen off very slightly as a result of television, while that of the duller ones has slightly improved. The dream

ambitions of the poorer classes have changed. Constant exposure to programmes that reproduce the middle-class atmosphere has gradually coloured them. The youth who knows he will have to spend his life as a plumber nowadays wistfully imagines what it would be like to be a company director or a bank manager. Before the television era he would dream of being—a plumber.

Among children, at any rate, the time spent in viewing does not vary according to social class but according to intelligence quotient. A child with an I.Q. of, say, 115 is likely, other things being equal, to spend less time with television than one with an I.Q. of 90. Apart from very small children, violence on the screen does not frighten or disturb unless the victims are so portrayed that personal identification with them is easy. On the evidence we need not worry about the endless succession of wild Westerns with their shootings and fist fights. The characters in them are so stereotyped as to have comparatively little personal significance to the child viewers. They see the struggles between them more as the archetypal conflict between good and bad, light and dark, than as instances of human suffering. When that suffering is made realistic and individual, as in close-ups of tortured features, identification occurs and the child experiences a corresponding emotional upheaval within himself. This occurs far more often when children are watching adult programmes, as most of them do, in which the mysterious or the uncanny are prominent.

Television is not as often as would be expected a cause of dispute in families. On the contrary, it provides an interest in the home that holds families together and raises topics for conversation. The family of nightmare that sits hour after hour, silent under the magnetism of the screen, is in the minority and, in all probability, was no more constructively occupied before the advent of television. If less books

are read than formerly the class of neglected volumes is the one most easily spared. Classics, such as *Jane Eyre*, have been in higher demand after dramatization on the screen. In some small measure television stimulates the desire for knowledge.

We have been told often how propaganda radio broadcasts to occupied countries during the War encouraged resistance movements and nourished the spirit of subject populations. We have heard less often that radio had a similar influence in this country, quite apart from the magnificent addresses of Sir Winston Churchill himself. The familiarity of the voices of announcers and commentators, always calm and sane in manner, never flustered or anxious, acted as a steadying influence. By imparting psychological security radio made for emotional stability in circumstances that might have given rise to panic. Television might be even more powerful in that respect. Such influence as this is not easy to measure statistically; but the ubiquity of this mental environment cannot be without effect in a period distinguished by rapid movements of population and economic fluctuations. To switch on the television is to gain reassurance.

Television has made inroads into other media of mass communication even if it has not by any means displaced them. The magazine, *Picture Post*, succumbed under its pressure. A printed publication interpreting the contemporary world in still pictures could not compete with a medium that was able, for instance, to bring moving pictures of incidents in the Hungarian or Suez affairs to the family circle within hours of their occurrence. By and large, it is publications providing for a general interest that have suffered, whereas those catering for specialized interests have easily ridden the storm. So, too, have the women's glossy magazines. Nobody seems to know why.

The cinema industry has suffered even more drastically. Its recent losses are notorious. By attending

more carefully to the quality of its films it seems likely to retain a firm foothold, but is unlikely to recover the massive public it had during the halcyon post-war years. Fortunately for the cinema, neither television nor any other medium is adjusted to the psychological needs of adolescence. Young people want to escape from the restraints of home. The presence of parents is always an emotional burden at that age. The teenagers like the snug gregariousness of the cinema. Their weekly or twice-weekly visit is a social occasion. They sit among a crowd of their own kind, although silently, and enjoy the presence of their beloved of the moment without embarrassment. Adolescent psychology is the salvation of the cinema.

One other type of publication that may, by some little stretch of the imagination, be included among the media of mass communication, should have mention. This comprises the horror comics, pulp magazines, novelettes and suchlike. The circulation of this material is considerable. It seeps through a psychological jungle whose growth seems free of any inhibitions. It may be that from the study of this we could gain some inkling of the answer to the conundrum whether mass communications create or express a particular psychological condition.

Of recent years a change has been observed in the character of this literature. From sentimentality it has veered towards lush, fleshy sexuality verging on pornography and towards a wallowing in the detail of violence and sadism. This change chimes in by more than coincidence with the phenomena of Teddy Boy gangs and periodic outbreaks of social disorder. The minute description of elemental, uncontrolled passions in their crudest and most physical manifestations seems to provide satisfaction and security to types of people who are devoid of purpose in life. From the little I have seen and heard of it, I would suggest that this material is the product of a nihilism, or an atheism,

that really means what it says. It is a nihilism so real and so profound, even when not explicit or articulate, that it can discern no significance whatsoever either in human life or the universe itself. The only value is therefore the satisfaction of the primitive instincts that brutishness can give. While censorship is always regrettable, it is sometimes necessary. I am not among those who can dismiss a phenomenon of this extreme kind as negligible on the ground that it provides vicarious satisfactions for what already exists in any case. Nihilism of that depth is itself neurotic and, given favourable conditions, neurosis is infectious. This literature, sometimes produced, it must be admitted, with literary flair and a gift of observation worthy of a loftier purpose, could be a potent germ carrier.

Such thoughts provide a good background for discussing the significance of mass communications as a whole, as distinct from particular media. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that it is as a whole that they must be considered if they are to be properly evaluated. When investigated piecemeal they will always appear to be innocuous; impotent for good or for evil. What we want to know is the cumulative effect of a barrage from a variety of weapons, differing in calibre, incessantly maintained without relaxation or respite. The system may be ambivalent but cannot be negligible. It provides the spiritual and cultural environment for all except a small minority of the population. Were it negligible, the astronomical cost of bringing it into existence would never have been incurred.

It was brought to birth at the close of the last century when the genius of Lord Northcliffe discerned the need of the products of the 1870 Education Act for journalistic material that would satisfy their literacy while remaining within their intellectual reach. Lord Northcliffe was one of the great educators of democracy. At every stage, indeed, the development of mass communications has corresponded with social need. Without

them life in the great modern conurbations, ugly, dreary, depressing, frustrating, would be utterly intolerable. At the lowest they are necessary for escape and for the vicarious satisfaction of instinctive urges that have no adequate outlet.

We no longer live in the real world. We live in an artificial cosmos within the cosmos, to which nature comes as an occasional visitor in the guise of wintry fog or the sweaty heat of summer. Having created his own physical environment, Man is having to create a spiritual environment to match it and thus complete his cosmos. Mass communications are the answer. They are not a luxury but a necessity. If we ask what philosophy or what religion interprets the meaning of mass communications the only reply can be: the same that interprets the industrial, technological civilization that has demanded their existence, whatever that may be. The ultimate meaning of technological civilization will find its rationalization in the teleology expressed through the mass media. Just as Man's contact with the natural cosmos gave rise to the traditional religions, refined at last into Christianity, so, too, does the artificial cosmos give rise to its own religion. Surely it is not mere coincidence that the element in society which values Christianity most is the class best enabled by traditional education, by experience of life and by intelligence to stand critically aside from the artificial cosmos, namely, the bourgeoisie.

This conclusion is one from which I can find no way of escape. It seems to me inexorable. If there is any truth in C. G. Jung's psychology of religion we can draw out the implications and test them against observation. The archetypes have in earlier religions projected themselves in terms of the supernatural, with its father and mother gods and goddesses, its fertility gods, its angry or lustful gods, its devouring gods, its good and evil spirits, ancestral spirits, its angels and archangels and all the heavenly hosts, and

in the sacrificial and other rites that have gone with them. Now the archetypes have, so to speak, been secularized. The sacred has fallen into obsolescence. The archetypes are satisfyingly projected on to political father images, athletes, cricketers, actors and actresses. And what shoddy, third-rate sort of gods some of them are indeed! The conflicts of the psyche are fought out in wild Westerns. The Cisco Kid stands duty for the guardian angel. Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham play important rôles. There is no need for traditional religion, even if the denizens of our industrial conurbations were capable of responding to its symbolism.

Precisely because of their efficiency in this respect, mass communications fulfil adequately the function of cementing society together. They do what the Church did in mediaeval times; sustaining the conventions and encouraging social attitudes. They explicate and dramatize the assumptions without which society would collapse. Yet, the fact that they fail to satisfy at both ends of the social spectrum, and the fact that they possess no formulated philosophy out of which they can answer the great questions that men insist upon asking, are a standing criticism. The highly educated regard them with mild derision at the best, while, at the other end of the scale, the fringe of society is left bewildered, confused, purposeless, frustrated and outlawed. Interestingly, the same is true of every highly industrialized country at the present time.

Now the crucial question to traditionalist churchmen is this: can mass communications be exploited in the service of their faith? Since 1950 the statistics of church membership and attendance have shown a slight but steady upward tendency. This may be due to the flood of religious material that has poured through nearly all the media. There are a number of alternative explanations. In nearly forty years, since the inauguration of radio broadcasting, I have known



only one person who has claimed to have been definitely influenced by it in a religious sense, and this turned out in the end to be hopelessly neurotic. There may be others, but I have neither encountered them, heard of them nor read of them. Social surveys indicate that a variety of influences may be decisive but not that. If the broadcasting of religion even had a gentle and diffuse influence there should still be some among whom it had been sufficient to precipitate a decisive change.

That it seems to do so seldom, if at all, is not a reason for abandoning it altogether. Much will have been achieved if it only assists in maintaining a high standard for the medium. But it does imply that we should not delude ourselves with extravagant hopes. The Billy Graham campaigns, which had the benefit of all the media (he made religion into front-page news!), were a test case. A number of people were converted, and surely we are all glad of it. But a campaign on this scale must be judged by its declared aim, which was to engulf Great Britain in a wave of religious revival. It certainly failed calamitously in that. As a proportion of the total population the results were negligible. Indeed, they were hardly noticeable at all. Critics have suggested that by forcing upon the attention of the public an obsolete symbolism, devoid of meaning for them, Billy Graham only emphasized the gulf between traditional orthodoxy and the general public. This may be true. If so, the more efficient and pervasive his publicity, the greater the harm he would do.

Suppose that by a combined propaganda operation over a long period, regardless of expense, the mass media could be exploited to fill the pews of all the churches and chapels and to secure professions of orthodox belief from millions upon millions of people: what would in fact have been achieved? The population would have been mentally conditioned. It would have been organized into dedication or devotion. Would a conditioning such as that be tantamount to the con-

version that churchmen say they want to see? If it were possible, which is open to question, I doubt very much whether that kind of conditioning would be the equivalent of conversion. Obviously we want to make the mass communications part of the environment as favourable as possible to religion. The gestalt psychology has shown how powerful is the impact of environment upon human experience. But surely faith is too personal to be evoked by manipulating the environment. To maintain that it could implies a denial of human freedom.

If religion is to be received at all in this environment, however, its formulation, mythology and symbolism will require drastic change. They cannot be received, because to the masses they are meaningless. Imperceptibly, it must be said, the change is going forward. What religious speakers say through television nowadays is hardly recognizable as the same message as that given by the evangelists of a couple of generations ago. The choice of hymns and prayers is undergoing steady revision in a quiet way. The symbolism of pearly gates and the sacrificial blood, for instance, hardly gain a mention. It is possible to hear many broadcast sermons without encountering the traditional theories of the atonement at all. Yet this change in the message is due more to the reduction of religion to the level of the common denominator than to the discovery of new means of religious expression. The necessities of the media are dominating Christianity itself. On the evidence the purveyors of mass-communicated religion would revert to the old ways if they could.

But the issue at stake is stated in the wrong way when churchmen talk of using mass communications to convert Britain. Christian sociologists have written much about the need to redeem civilization itself. Without examining the phraseology too closely, most churchmen would agree with what they obviously mean. The machine, technics, finance and social forces must not be

allowed to impose their own logic on human society as they have done for so long. There must be a transformation of the underlying aims and purposes, and civilization must be led towards them. The human person must be restored to its rightful status. Such terms as community and liberty must be enriched in meaning. When we are well set on that course the fundamentals of Christianity will begin to make realistic sense again.

Mass communications are not the means of doing this or of converting individuals. They are part of the civilization that has to be transformed. To set them over against each other as if the one could redeem the other is to make an artificial divorce. Before they are well out of the Court the parties will be together again. Mass communications are an integral part of the contemporary form of civilization. The problem of their influence on the human spirit is only one aspect of the larger question as to what modern civilization itself is making of mankind—and what mankind is making of modern civilization.

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