

'What if God were one of us?':
Using popular culture transformatively in adult religious education

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*presented 25 November 1996 to the
Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education
New Orleans, Louisiana*

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Popular culture has been a part of religious experience from the beginning of our attempts to label such things as “culture,” “the popular,” “religious experience,” and so on. What is unique about the last several decades however, particularly from 1930 on, has been the technology available to turn “popular cultures” — defined in the plural as the myriad expressions of ordinary people’s engagement with the everyday, material resources found around them — into mass-mediated, commercialized popular culture (in the singular), which encompasses such media as radio, television, film, popular magazines, and so on. Christian churches in the United States have engaged that transformation in a variety of ways, but perhaps the two most predominant have been, to use Michele Rosenthal’s phrase about television, as “Satan or Savior”(1996).

Many scholars have traced the early conflict between the “mainline” churches (those typically members of the National Council of Churches), and the evangelical churches over putting religious programming on the air. The evangelical churches lost the early battles over sustaining time financing, and had to create their own networks to promulgate their own programming, a history that has led to our contemporary context wherein Christian broadcasting stations, Christian publishing companies, Christian radio stations, and so on, amount to a three billion dollar a year industry (Wuthnow, 1996). The mainline Protestant churches, on the other hand, while maintaining control of the sustaining time provisions, ultimately lost the “war” when those provisions disappeared from the scene. From that point on, with some exceptions, they have confined themselves to producing media criticism, either through the popular press (magazines such as *America*, *Commonweal* and so on come to mind in the Catholic community), or through media literacy curricula.¹

Thus the dichotomy: from an evangelical perspective, the mass media are useful instruments of evangelism, of spreading the good news (with the proviso that it is controlled and constrained by their definitions, “Christian” broadcasting): in Sullivan’s terms “TV as Savior”; while the mainline churches have taken on the role of preaching “TV as Satan” through campaigns to label and boycott objectionable content, and through media literacy curricula. Obviously I’m exaggerating this dichotomy to a certain extent, because there are still a few attempts being made to produce religious programming through mainline religious

¹ For this history, see in particular Hoover, Sweet, and Rosenthal.

communities, and there are evangelical Protestant church communities who find any kind of television or radio, Christian or otherwise, an unmitigated evil (Brown, 1996). In addition, rapidly emerging technologies may create other opportunities. The main reason I'm drawing this caricature of recent history is to point out that either of these responses is too simplistic, and that recent cultural studies research would suggest a more complex approach is in order.

cultural studies approaches to mass media

Contemporary research into the ways in which people respond to mass mediated popular culture has shifted away from previous paradigms, which themselves were analogous to church responses. By focusing on mass media in their role as "culture industries," scholars have begun to see popular mass mediated culture as neither simply a process of ideological domination, with commercial imagery and meaning forced upon an unsuspecting and passive populace, nor as driven wholly by the meanings people themselves bring to it, in some masquerade of grassroots consumerist paradise. The religious analogy would be to the "satanic" nature of ideological domination (see here the mainline concern with commodification issues as far back as the 1940's) (Rosenthal, 1996), versus the apparently infinite potential for evangelization if the media are simply conduits for passing on the Good News.

Instead communications and cultural studies scholars are suggesting that "media culture,"² to use Kellner's term, is a complex amalgam of representations produced by commercially driven processes. These representations are then not simply passively received and consumed, but rather provide basic "notes" with which people then improvise their own "melodies" — with the proviso that those melodies are constrained by the limited nature of the tones provided and the scales people can bring to them. These scholars point to the ways in which media culture

² Kellner suggests that "the term 'media culture' has the advantage of signifying both the nature and form of the artifact of the culture industries (ie. culture) and their mode of production and distribution (ie. media technologies and industries). It avoids ideological terms like 'mass culture' and 'popular culture' and calls attention to the circuit of production, distribution, and reception through which media culture is produced, distributed, and consumed." *Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) 34-35.

“texts”³ can be a window into widespread hungers, particularly if one considers what kinds of pleasures are produced by the representations so transmitted, and the social location of the audience for whom the “text” is marketed.⁴ In ignoring complexity of this process, we also ignore its structural, systemic, hegemonic implications.

At this point perhaps two examples from popular culture will help to make the utility of this kind of analysis clearer. The first has explicitly religious themes, the second does not.

“What if God were one of us?”

At the beginning of 1996 rising rock star Joan Osborne’s single “One of Us,” a slow-paced, blues/rock tune with hauntingly phrased lyrics (see Appendix One) jumped to the top of the charts. The song (and the album on which it was found) eventually earned her five Grammy nominations, including record of the year, and best new artist (Powers, 1996, p. 46). The release of the song coincided with the beginning of my dissertation research workshop, a series of sessions for religious educators on using popular culture in religious education. I chose to use the song as an initial meditation in that context, and the reactions were fascinating. Everybody in the workshop had heard the song; it was all over the commercial radio dial, not to mention in trailers for the upcoming Grammy awards telecast. But no one had taken the time to try to listen to the lyrics carefully, let alone think about them in the context of their work as religious educators.⁵

Several people had had students from their high school religion classes, or Sunday school classes, ask them about the song. In particular, these young people

³ By “text” I mean individual “pieces” of popular culture, such as one episode of a television show, one popular song, one MTV video, and so on.

⁴ For further discussion of these issues, consider both Colleen McDannell’s *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); and Margaret Miles’ *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

⁵ Workshop participants were in many ways very diverse, although all named themselves as members of some kind of Christian community. They ranged in age from 28 to 56, and resided in the greater Boston area. Ten of them were Catholic, one was Unitarian, and one was part of an urban, evangelical Protestant community. Nine of the participants were white, one was African-American, one was of American, Mexican and Chinese ancestry, and one was a Chinese-German immigrant who has been in the United States for the last decade. Three of the participants were members of vowed religious communities. Eight of the participants were women, and four were men.

told stories of the ways in which their fellow classmates from more fundamentalist Christian backgrounds were being forbidden to listen to it. One teacher from our workshop eventually used the song as a conversation opener in an eighth grade religion class, and afterwards had to justify her use of it to teachers in the teachers lounge who accused her of promoting blasphemy.

Yet if you consider the lyrics, this song, more than anything, is a series of questions that ought to open up a dialogue rather than shut it down. So what was going on? To begin with, on the more transmissive end of the religious educational spectrum asking these kinds of questions, particularly as a young person, is not a behavior that is encouraged. The issue is not *whether* to be religious, but *how*. On the other end of the spectrum, decades of church effort to make people conscious of the dangers of mass media messages has led in many cases to people simply shutting out media messages, or at least automatically assuming worst case interpretations. To hear “what if God were one of us, just a slob like one of us?” over and over on the radio merely confirmed for many of these people the extent to which the mass media contribute to all the evils of modern culture. In some ways the perceived irony of the song simply reaffirmed the interpretation of the song as somehow blasphemous, or at the very least, problematic.

At the same time, young people were embracing the song, dancing to it, singing to it: one workshop participant pointed out that when she asked her students about it, they broke out in a Capella harmony and sang the whole song for her. Yet these same young people were also very clear about the issues it raised: they immediately identified questions of incarnational theology as being central to the song. When such students heard adults “dissing” the song, those adults lost credibility, both in terms of their ability to listen to these young people with respect, and in terms of their own authority on the religious messages they were trying to teach.

Graduate students who spoke with me about the song pointed out that Joan Osborne herself readily talks about the influence of feminist theologians on her work, and that other songs on the album *Relish* include “the portrayal of Eve as the inventor of the kiss in ‘Lumina,’” and “the sanctified street dealer of ‘St. Theresa’” (Powers, 1996, p. 49). These young people had no patience for the willingness of other adults to pass judgments on a song to which they hadn’t even considered the lyrics.

The song provides an interesting example of the myriad ways in which people consume (and improvise with) popular culture, and of the peril and promise of its use in religious education. It holds peril if we label it blasphemous when in fact it expresses heartfelt questions emblematic of contemporary culture. Yet at the same time, is it enough to simply validate the raising of such questions? This song may be even more problematic if we accept it wholeheartedly and ignore the commodifying frame any piece of mass-mediated popular culture carries with it. If it is neither “Satan” nor “Savior,” what then?

One road to finding “promise” with this text, and indeed with many texts from media culture, comes from recognizing the yearnings to which such a text responds, accepting the pleasure it produces, and then finding appropriate resources in our own communities with which to respond to such longings, and with which to counter pose deeper joys. These resources need to be theological. In this case: what do we mean by incarnation? what do we believe it looks like to say God was indeed one of us? what do we mean by “accepting” the prophets, and what action does such acceptance compel us to? But they also need to be sociological and psychological — what is the social location from which this song arrives? how did it get national air time? does our own religious community (whatever that is) have music that is specific to it? what makes it possible for a song like this to be aired nationally, but for our own music not to be? what is different about the ways in which we “practice” music in our specific religious communities?

The question of “practice” is a particularly fruitful one with relation to mass-mediated popular culture, because very often the “practices” associated with, suggested by, a specific song or television show, magazine or film, are not those by which a religious community is defined. Yet many of them are very pleasurable. Thus our task, as religious educators, becomes yet another level more difficult, because we must know both what is “out there” (that is, we have to be consumers of popular culture), and what is “in here” (we have to be extraordinarily religiously literate). Indeed, we have to resist such a dichotomy altogether if we are to affirm an incarnational theology. We have to be able to accept the pleasure that comes from engaging media culture, but witness to a deeper joy within religious practice, and not simply speak about it, but practice it, empower it, create it with our students. In short, we have to be adept at building “translational spaces,” at creating “border

communities.”⁶ It is perhaps fairly obvious how to do so with a song such as this, with its explicit religious themes. But what about other media culture texts that do not carry such explicit themes?

“Just for the thrill of it”

The second example I draw from the research workshop comes from our work with television genres. In considering television commercials, we looked at a Diet Coke commercial as representative of much of what is out there. This particular thirty second commercial, which aired nationally in the spring of ‘96, was essentially a video montage of images set to the tune of the Diet Coke anthem.

Just for the thrill of it. Just for the chill of it. Just for the taste of it. Just for the thrill of it, Diet Coke, the pure appeal of it, the pure appeal of it, this is the taste of it, Diet Coke. This is the best of it, forget the rest of it, just for the taste of it, Diet Coke.⁷

Moving to the thrumming of an upbeat guitar and a swelling chorus of singers, the images presented in this commercial were stereotypically “American”: cowboys twirling their lassos, a thin young white woman posing for a camera, a circus clown, another young white woman waiting for a subway train, a group of grungy mechanics in a garage, a brightly uniformed marching band in a parade, boxers working out in a gym, an older Black man teaching a young Black child to play guitar on front porch steps, a barber shop, a group of older men in a corner diner. The product itself only appeared in a few of the images, and never very obviously, although the product’s colors — rich, deep red and bright white — were present in almost every flashing picture. Most people viewing the commercial for the first time generally enjoyed it, remarking on the upbeat nature of the music and the richly textured beauty of the images.

What does such a commercial have to do with religious education? In order to try to answer that question, our workshop spent the better part of an evening repeatedly watching a taped version of it, and then breaking into small groups to reflect upon it. Commercials are a television “genre,” if you will, that work more by

⁶ “Border community” is a term used by many scholars within cultural studies. See Giroux, *Between Borders*, for an extended discussion of this idea.

⁷ Transcribed by me off of a videotape from network television.

evoking feelings than analysis. This was the first time anybody in our group had ever tried to reflect upon a single commercial. The more we considered this particular text, the more it became apparent that it was appealing to our sense of “togetherness,” to the ways in which as Americans we could sense our unity in the midst of our diversity. But what kind of unity was it promoting?

In considering who was *not* represented in the commercial, several groups immediately stood out: there were no older women, there were no women who were not thin, there were no women of color, there were no Asian or Latino people, there were no people with obvious religious affiliation, there were no business executives, and so on. The sequence of images culminated in a particularly disturbing juxtaposition: first there was a shot of a young Black man in a barber shop chair surrounded by Black barbers; and then the very next shot was of exactly the same scene, only this time the young man in the chair was white. Clearly the kind of “unity in diversity” being represented in this media culture text is not that of diversity at all, but of interchangeability — a dynamic that plays very dangerously into institutionalized racism’s structures.

The questions such an analysis poses to religious community are many and varied. The ones we chose to focus on as religious educators grew out of our situatedness (see footnote #5) and had to do with how to affirm the desire to embrace diversity while yet at the same time posing a more just and Christian embrace. It may be true that nearly everyone in this culture can afford to buy Diet Coke, but what kind of nourishment does it provide? If we affirm the relevance of relationality to our understanding of God, then how can we move from the very narrow, commodified “relationality” portrayed in this kind of text to the deeper, richer, empathic relationality that Jesus embodied? What does our faith community call us to do as “consumers” of this media text?

Confronting this text immediately drew us into profound and important questions of Christian belief and practice. Engaging media texts this way is very useful in religious education, but it pretty much requires of religious educators that we be able to explore the world from what Kegan terms an “institutional” or “fourth order” consciousness stage. Because Kegan’s framework is so useful in this context, particularly in its ability to point out the depth of our dilemmas, I need to take a small detour into his work.

epistemologies and learning communities

Robert Kegan is an adult educator and psychologist who argues that educators and psychologists have for too long paid attention to epistemology primarily in terms of cognitive processes. He argues instead that “epistemology” is far more than a set of cognitive abilities, or even of abstract philosophical assertions. Rather it is a set of principles for how “one constructs experience more generally, including one’s thinking, feeling, and social- relating” (Kegan, 1994, pp. 33-34). These principles are essentially bound up with process rather than with content, they are principles for how we *organize* our “thinking, feeling, and social-relating.” Our epistemologies have consequences, then, not merely for our intellectual development, but for how we relate to ourselves and each other, how we are empowered or disempowered, how we live and move and have our being.

Kegan believes human development proceeds along a spiral path, a dance between increasing relationality and increasing autonomy. At any given point in our development of a central sense of self and an ability to relate responsibly to the world, we use different clusters of organizing principles to make sense of our experiences. Each cluster is definitive of a different “order of consciousness” or meaning frame. While we are firmly embedded in a specific cluster of such principles the world is navigable and coherent, but any of a number of natural and artificial crises can lead to chaos and meaninglessness.

How we negotiate such crises has everything to do with how supportive of growth our environment is. When it poses difficult contradictions to our meaning frames, does it also provide a curriculum that helps us adequately meet and incorporate those challenges? Kegan is particularly helpful in his discussion of how our environments do or do not function as curricula. For him, an environment adequately supportive of human development will provide three crucial dynamics: confirmation, contradiction, and continuity.

“Confirmation” has to do with how well a particular environment corresponds to a specific meaning frame. If you believe the world is basically a good place, and you can survive well in it if you work hard and follow certain rules—yet the environment you are in is violently dangerous to your health, and follows no perceptible “rules,”—then your meaning frame is not “confirmed” by your environment. Either your frame changes, or your world swallows you up.

“Contradiction” is Kegan’s label for the process of posing challenges to meaning frames. These challenges can arise spontaneously amidst everyday life, or they can be deliberately created educationally. So-called “peak” experiences are one kind of challenge, as are traumas and other kinds of important losses. Experiencing an ecstatic religious vision is an example of a “peak” experience that could pose a crucial challenge to someone whose meaning frame does not allow for such experiences. Having a child born with a disability is an example of an event that might pose a traumatic challenge within some meaning frames. The point Kegan makes is that such a challenge can shake a person’s meaning frame to such an extent that their whole way of life is called into question. Unless his third dynamic, “continuity,” is present, such a challenge can prove catastrophic, leading to rigidity of belief, paralysis of action, even death.

This third dynamic of “continuity” is a process by which a person who has sustained a radical contradiction to their meaning frame incorporates a new meaning frame, a new “narrative,” if you will, that allows them to make sense of their previous experiences and beliefs, while at the same time meeting the challenges presented to them appropriately and authentically. My interest in Kegan’s work in this context stems primarily from his assertion that now, more than at any time in our previous history, there is a fundamental mismatch between the meaning frame most people use, and that which is required to meet the demands of contemporary U.S. culture.

In the past, he argues, a so-called “traditionalist” culture required of its participants that they be able to structure their meanings across categories, that they be capable of what Kegan terms “cross-categorical knowing.” These are the principles of knowing we most often expect of adolescents:

The capacity to subordinate durable categories to the interaction between them makes their thinking abstract, their feelings a matter of inner states and self-reflexive emotion (“self- confident,” “guilty,” “depressed”), and their social-relating capable of loyalty and devotion to a community of people or ideas larger than the self (Kegan, 1994 , pp. 29-32).

Yet while this order of consciousness may make “loyalty and devotion to a community” possible, it does not make it possible to “construct a generalized system regulative of interpersonal relationships and relationships between relationships” (Kegan, 1994, p. 30). Identity in this context is largely defined by the group, and

relationality is more important than autonomy. Anyone who is familiar with adolescents knows the strength the peer group asserts in adolescent experience. Is the inability to construct a system that operates between sets of relationships a problem? Perhaps not yet for adolescents, who are expected by dominant U.S. culture to be in the process of establishing identity, and who are still under the explicit guidance of a family system. But what about the adults who are expected to be furnishing such a system? Or the adolescents who are themselves parents? Kegan believes that our “modernist” culture requires what he terms a “fourth order” consciousness.⁸

In suggesting that our culture is a modernist one that requires a “fourth order” frame, Kegan uses parenting as an example, for in setting limits for a child a parent is actually honoring that child’s freedom at a deeper level of relationality:

Out of this context Alice might refuse to meet certain of her daughter’s claims (... to sleep over at a friend’s house for a third straight night, to have her mother buy her a whole new wardrobe because her clothes don’t have the right designer label, or to take the subway downtown by herself because she “is too” old enough), refusals that may inspire Ann’s [the daughter] grief or wrath, refusals that may even cause her to claim that Alice has violated the bonds of the relationship. But the interesting and important thing to note is that neither Alice’s refusal nor Ann’s claim that Alice has breached the relationship will by themselves constitute an actual breach... In establishing this larger context in which the relationship would go on, in creating a relationship to the relationship, Alice would ... be demonstrating a fourth order consciousness (Kegan, 1994 , p. 92).

Previously it might not have been necessary for individuals to have this order of consciousness because the community itself carried these abilities. Traditional gender roles, rigid class and labor structures provided a framework within which:

⁸ For people unfamiliar with Kegan’s work, it is useful to note briefly that he describes these “orders of consciousness” as having the following organizing principles. “First order” frames are primarily constructed through sense perceptions, and as such are characteristic of very young children. “Second order” meaning frames are very concrete, lending a sense of “actuality” to the world, and thus making it possible to develop a sense of self in separation from primary caretakers. “Third order” frames permit abstractions, and thus “ideality.” While such frames allow for role consciousness and what Kegan terms “mutual reciprocity,” there remains a heavy investment in group conformity. “Fourth order” frames recognize the utility of abstract systems, and thus are capable of constructing ideologies. These frames permit movement towards self-authorship and autonomous identity construction. Finally, “fifth order” frames are dialectical, with dynamics that Kegan terms “trans-ideological or post-ideological.” As such they recognize how interconnected and interpenetrating myriad realities are, and they perceive paradox and ambiguity as rich resources rather than difficult challenges.

the third order consciousness of individuals [could] be supported to resolve the fourth order tasks of adult life, such as those intrinsic to parenting. This continuous, uninterrupted provision of fourth order support in the Traditional Community is ordinarily less a matter of other people actually telling us how to set limits or preserve boundaries.... More often, such “information” communicates itself in the very fabric or ground of living (Kegan, 1994, p. 104).

Within what Kegan terms a “modern” community, in contrast, we are called upon to author these boundaries, to construct and maintain them, amidst other competing, conflicting, and powerful, alternatives. Thus religious educators in the late ‘90’s must not only define for our students “what” we know, but “how” we know it, and we must do so in the context of pluralism, where other communities, other cultures, have differing claims and frames.

In this paper, I am arguing that one of those competing communities is mass-mediated popular culture — and mass-mediated popular culture is a community in which most, if not all of us, are immersed. Religious educators, if we are to be fully authentic and responsive to a faith that contests and counters hegemonic culture, must be at the leading edge of creating “border communities” that allow us to engage in the kind of collaboration that transforms epistemologies, that stretches us beyond our more limited understandings and into a “modernist” age.⁹ We need to develop learning environments and learning events, that deliberately move people toward at least a fourth order frame not simply with respect to mass mediated popular culture, but also inevitably with respect to religious community and religious identity.

what does such a pedagogy look like?

We can — and need to — exploit the improvisational quality of people’s interactions with media culture. We can play with media culture texts, enjoy them, and build contexts where people can engage them together, rather than in the isolation that is more typical of media culture consumption. We need to work on helping people develop an awareness of both the hungers such a culture seeks to elicit and satisfy, as well as the empty nature of the food it is offering us. But that is only the beginning! Media literacy educators have been trying to do these tasks for a long time. What they have not done, or perhaps what was not their job to do, is to

⁹ Perhaps even a “post-modernist” one, but I am uncomfortable with the vagueness with which that term is used, and would at this point suggest that that’s an issue for another paper.

identify the resources within religious community that not only offer different food that is more nourishing and sustaining, but also that critique and judge the limitations of the representations we are being sold in favor of the more profound and compelling imagery and empowerment of religious community.

One way to ensure that we do this is to focus on the epistemological framework that undergirds and makes possible such a complex response. We need to take seriously Kegan's descriptions and find ways to build curricula that would provide the bridges people need to move, to transform their epistemologies. Religious educators working in the midst of media culture can structure our pedagogies to attend to these three dynamics: confirmation, contradiction, continuity. There is a certain kind of "confirmation" that can take place in accepting that people find pleasure in popular media products. As George Lipsitz notes, media culture texts have also made it possible for students to engage contradictions in their lives not otherwise accessible to conversation (Lipsitz, 1990, p. xiv). The danger for religious educators is either to accept that pleasure uncritically, or to deny it altogether. Instead, we need to find ways to hear the deep desires and hungers that media culture attempts to respond to, and then interpose what I would argue are far richer and more profound responses to these desires.

One of the best resources we have to offer is a differing epistemological frame. We are not going to be able to convince people to "tune out" the culture, indeed trying to do so would contradict much of our incarnational perspective. Rather, we have to practice "confirmation" of people's hungers, but then "contradiction" of the frameworks that suggest where those hungers arise from and how they are to be filled. Finally, we need to build communities in which more developmentally appropriate and authentically adult meaning frames can exist in "continuity" with previous ones, but which provide the bridges necessary to support epistemological development.

How is this a shift from current media literacy work? One fairly obvious example grows out of the resources of the media literacy curriculum we used in the research workshop. One of the handouts from that kit outlines "media myths" (see Appendix 2). Obviously these are not the only myths that arise, or perhaps even the most dangerous to religious community, but take a moment to try an exercise. Ask yourself two questions about the examples listed on this handout: what hunger is this myth pointing to? and what alternative resources does my particular

community offer in response? The answers you begin to arrive at should help to make clear the epistemological stance of your faith community.

Media literacy activists have, over the past several years, developed a rich set of resources, not the least of which are cogent questions, for helping people to *begin* such a task. Their questions are often deceptively simple — Hoffman suggests “who wins, who loses?” and “who’s in, who’s out?”¹⁰ — but can help to point the way to an actively critical engagement with the myriad images, sounds, and meaning frames encountered in popular media. The Center for Media Literacy suggests that there are five “core concepts of media literacy” that ought to be at the heart of media education. They are that: “1) all media are constructions, 2) media use unique languages, 3) audiences ‘negotiate meaning,’ 4) media have commercial interests, and 5) media have embedded values and points of view” (Ibid.).

Putting these concepts to use leads naturally to contradicting “interpersonal” or “third order” (and certainly hegemonic) epistemological frames, because it is difficult to believe that media *construct* reality simultaneously with the belief that media simply *present* or transmit reality. Likewise the recognition that media use unique languages leads naturally to comparisons with other language systems, particularly symbol systems embedded in the communities within which people are situated. The latter concepts, particularly the sense in which audiences “negotiate meaning,” and the implied assumption that audiences are formed for commercial purposes can have a profound effect on religious education as well.

Obviously this task is not always an easy one, but it can be great fun. Asking people to think about popular culture texts immediately engages them. The difficult work is not that of critiquing media culture texts, but rather of ensuring that we have the religious resources we need to fill these hungers in more satisfying ways. My research group had no problem singing along with Joan Osborne, but when I tried having us sing “Deep Within” a song used fairly commonly in Catholic liturgy (and remember, the majority of people in the workshop are Catholic religious educators), people were uncomfortable and had a hard time doing it. This example is not meant to suggest that we ought to promote Catholic music on pop radio, but rather that singing *together* is a crucial religious practice that we need to reclaim and enjoy. I’m very excited by the work of the Valparaiso Project, because it is uncovering and sharing theological and historical practices we need, resources that

¹⁰ Mary Byrne Hoffman, media literacy trainer for the Center for Media Literacy, personal communication, October 5, 1995.

make it possible to once again suffuse daily life with religious meaning.¹¹

We can't reclaim everyday life in this way by ignoring mass-mediated popular culture, or condemning it out of hand. We will only make daily life more sacred, more fulfilling, when we can empower people to become actively engaged with media culture, rather than passively consuming of it. If we can do that we will truly be about transformative adult religious education.

¹¹ The Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith is a Lilly Endowment sponsored, collaborative and multi-dimensional project. One book that shares some of their research, *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, edited by Dorothy Bass.

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Appendix 1

“One of Us”

performed by Joan Osborne, written by Eric Bazilian
(from the Album *Relish*, PolyGram Records 1995)

If God had a name what would it be?
And would you call it to his face
if you were faced with him and all his glory?
What would you ask if you had just one question?

And yeah, yeah, God is great.
Yeah, yeah, God is good.
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

What if God was one of us?
Just a slob like one of us?
Just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home?

If God had a face, what would it look like?
And would you want to see,
if seeing meant that you would have to believe,
in things like heaven
and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets?

And yeah, yeah, God is great.
Yeah, yeah, God is good.
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

What if God was one of us?
Just a slob like one of us?
Just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home,
he's trying to make his way home,
back up to heaven all alone,
nobody calling on the phone,
'cept for the pope maybe in Rome.

And yeah, yeah, God is great.
Yeah, yeah, God is good.
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

What if God was one of us?
Just a slob like one of us?
Just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home,
just trying to make his way home,
like a holy rolling stone
back up to heaven all alone
just trying to make his way home
nobody calling on the phone
'cept for the Pope maybe in Rome.

(Transcribed by Mary Hess. I don't know what line breaks were originally intended.)

Appendix 2

This handout is taken from the booklet “Living in the Image Culture” found within the curriculum kit *Catholic Connections to Media Literacy*, copyright 1992 by the Center for Media and Values.

(Please contact the Center for Media Literacy in LA, CA for this publication).