

The following is excerpted from the Newsletter of the Department of Religious Education of the Orthodox Church in America, Midwest Diocese, edited by Fr. Theodore Bobosh, June 1995.

Christians and Popular Culture is the subtitle of a book by Ken Myers called *ALL GOD'S CHILDREN AND BLUE SUEDE SHOES* (Crossway, 1989). The book is another analysis of the mass media culture's domination of our thought processes and worldview. Just a couple of quotes to ponder. Writing about a "Christian" response to our culture, Myers says,

Rather than starting our own TV networks, movie production companies, or imitations of *PEOPLE*, we would do much better to make the church a living example of alternatives to the methods and messages of popular culture. Virtually all cultural institutions, from literature professors at Ivy League schools, to producers of soap operas, to the loudest heavy metal bands, are equally bereft of points of perspective for their activities. In such a time, the church could be a community displaying, in its corporate life and in the lives of its members, a *culture of transcendence*. This would not mean escaping the world. It would require refusing to conform to its ways, not only when they are evil, but when they are not beneficial or constructive (see I Corinthians 10:23ff - "All things are lawful, but not all are beneficial. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other...")

Without a doubt his idea closely reflects many voices in the Orthodox world. One more quote, One reason aesthetic questions rarely arise in the study of popular culture is that cultural relativism is so well-entrenched; it is generally assumed that questions of *taste* merely reflect *political* interests rather than any transcendent order of beauty or propriety. ...Culture is not (as many scholars today believe) simply the battleground for a perpetual war of classes, races, and genders. ... Culture has very much to do with the human spirit. What we find beautiful or entertaining or moving is rooted in our *spiritual* life."

The following chart from page 120 shows the tendencies in popular culture verses the tendencies in a higher culture, with which the Orthodox Church through the centuries has identified. It is worth studying and can be utilized in discussions with our teenage students.

POPULAR CULTURE

- Focuses on the new
- Discourages reflection
- Pursued casually to "kill time"
- Gives us what we want, tells us what we already know
- Relies on instant accessibility; encourages impatience
- Emphasizes information and trivia
- Encourages quantitative concerns
- Celebrates fame
- Appeals to sentimentality
- Content and form governed by requirements of the market
- Formulas are the substance
- Relies on spectacle, tending to violence and prurience
- Aesthetic power in reminding of something else
- Individualistic
- Leaves us where it found us
- Incapable of deep or sustained attention
- Lacks ambiguity
- No discontinuity between life and art
- Reflects the desires of the self
- Tends toward relativism
- Used

TRADITIONAL & HIGH CULTURE

- Focuses on the timeless
- Encourages reflection
- Pursued with deliberation
- Offers us what we could not have imagined
- Requires training; encourages patience
- Emphasizes knowledge and wisdom
- Encourages qualitative concerns
- Celebrates ability
- Appeals to appropriate, proportioned emotions
- Content and form governed by requirements of created order
- Formulas are the tools
- Relies on formal dynamics and the power of symbols (including language)
- Aesthetic power in intrinsic attributes
- Communal
- Transforms sensibilities
- Capable of repeated, careful attention
- Allusive, suggests the transcendent
- Relies on "Secondary World" conventions
- Encourages understanding of others
- Tends toward submission to standards
- Received