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MEDIA INFLUENCE

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by Edmond Ng

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2 NAS)

Media influence and its effects have long been a topic of extensive discussion. While it may be true that without the media much of the information we know today could not have been communicated, many people believe the media can still have negative influence in shaping how we think about certain matters.

According to cultural and media studies expert Colin Mercer, the way people in a society live their lives are shaped by how we as media audiences subject ourselves to governance and meanings constructed within discourses, created through the occasions of reading media texts. This means when we discuss about what we see, hear or read from the media through spoken, print, graphic or electronic communications, we are in effect exposing ourselves to media influence.

Media texts from advertisements, for example, give advertisers the ability to target consumers through text, image, video, animations and other forms of media representations. By repeated showings of such texts, consumers can grow to accept propagandas of what is portrayed as good, acceptable or better than others.

Discourse on crime is another example. Statements such as 'punishment', 'theft' or 'penalty' produce the knowledge of criminals as subjects of deviancy, and we as citizens may see ourselves as different from them because we behave 'normally.' Being 'normal' however is a constructed regime of truth that has been naturalized into habituation and assimilated into social norms. Such differentiations although may seem to be a good way of knowing what is right or wrong, it can also construct what is unacceptable in certain cultures to become acceptable in another.

If a government chooses to regulate the brothels, casinos, clubs and other unhealthy forms of entertainment as legally acceptable, do they automatically become right? If we gamble and drink, is it right or wrong? At which point of addiction are we considered wrong? Is it only when we become violent as a result of these addictions that we are deemed as deviant? Who defines the standard anyway, and who benefits most from such set of rules? Is it the rulers or the citizens? Is it the saints or the sinners?

In the Law of Moses there are many rules, and some of these rules are considered unacceptable today or even quite impossible to adhere, given the freedom we have. Freedom however is a choice, and it can be a bad choice or a good choice. The fact remains unchanged that what may be considered good or bad is relative and subjective, differing in the eyes of men and in the eyes of God.

We know we have been saved by God's grace. Should we then continue in sin that grace may increase (Romans 6:1-2)? Certainly not! Rather, we ought not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we may prove what the will of God is, which is good, acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).

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When we read, hear or view media texts, therefore, let us diligently decipher what is being represented, rather than accept it without consideration. We should not be influenced by the media, but should measure what is good or bad according to the standard of God, not men. Only when we are guided by the Holy Spirit and the word of God can we know what is truly right or wrong (Psalm 1:1-2; Proverbs 29:18).

Dear Lord, help us not to be easily taken in to believe whatever is constructed by the media is the truth. Do not let us be influenced by what we see or read to normalize what is unholy as acceptable social norms. Open our eyes Lord that we may not unwittingly classify people by the way we have been taught through the media to differentiate ourselves from them and leave them to die without You as their Lord and Savior. Keep our minds clear Lord and guide us by Your word and Spirit to know what is right and what is not. Renew our minds and transform us that we may prove what Your will is, which is good, acceptable and perfect.

About the Author

EDMOND NG is a freelance writer for print and digital media, and writes online for various Christian communities. He has served in various Christian ministries, including youth club and cell group leadership, Bible study and worship leading, gospel events ushering and counseling, new converts follow-up and nurturing, among many other areas. He has also studied at a Bible college under a continuing education program for lay leadership training, and written articles for church newsletters and Christian magazines.

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