



## **The Seven Channels of Cultural Influence**

*(Chapter Excerpt from The Next Christians)*

Culture isn't just a concept. Millions of goods, services, organizations, history, and attitudes pervade our way of life and make up a culture. Everyone plays some role in it—big or small—including you. Seeing it this way helps culture become less nebulous and more tangible. And in a similar way, the method by which we come into contact with the ideas culture distributes is just as real.

Several friends understood this principle well when they first convened in Warrenton, Virginia, back in 1988. This gathering of 175 leaders representative of various cultural institutions, who came together around an important set of issues was monumental. They believed their ideas could have consequences if they were smart, tactical and could keep their message simple.<sup>1</sup>

But as an underwhelming minority, the odds were stacked against them to truly effect change. They came together from every corner of society, setting aside their personal agendas and differences to unite around the central tenets of a movement. They determined to advance their cause strategically and tactically one step at a time. And advance they did.

These friends formed the beginnings of what is now known as “the gay movement.” Hold on. I’m not about to explain how being homosexual is a strategy for restoration or Christianity, but there are some points to take from their accomplishments. Ironically, the group that began the gay movement followed some profound cultural dynamics. In the process, they showed us what it looks like to work the levers of cultural influence with mastery.

Their accomplishment informs us. Those committed activists worked alongside average Americans to help a faction find its stride in American culture by the mid-nineties. They demonstrated the power of showing up right where they worked and letting their ideology and beliefs permeate everything they did.

Here’s how it worked.

Their movement systematically inundated every sphere of society with the message of civility, tolerance, and equal rights for gays. As Paul Rondeau points out in *Selling Homosexuality to America*,” their strategy was employed in five important markets of social influence . . . which touch every citizen in America: government, education, organized religion, the media, and the workplace.”<sup>ii</sup> In the business channel, vigorous attempts were finally successful for same-sex couples to be recognized with benefits equal to those of married couples.<sup>iii</sup> In the education channel, books like *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy’s Roommate* about same-sex parenting found their way into schools and public libraries. On television, *Ellen*, *Will and Grace*, and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* recast the image of gays and lesbians as fun, engaging, and talented trend-setters. Within the cultural channel of the church, major denominations like the

Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ opened leadership roles for gays and lesbians.<sup>iv</sup> No corner of society would go untouched.

I'm not suggesting we celebrate the rise of the gay movement. Perhaps you're offended that I've even used it as an illustration. Instead of taking offense, be provoked! Their ability to shift cultural thought highlights a sociological principle that has been at work for centuries: When leaders disperse throughout all spheres of society—or “channels of culture”—and work toward a common goal, change can happen.

With a few exceptions, cultural anthropologists generally agree that there are several cultural tentacles that reach every person. I've designated seven “channels of cultural influence” because they represent the institutions and industries that are consistently shaping culture. These are the fields where most people are applying their vocational callings:

Business	(e.g., corporations, technology, advertising, commerce)
Media	(e.g., publishing, television, Internet)
Arts and Entertainment	(e.g., film, music, sports, classical arts)
Social Sector	(e.g., nonprofits and civic organizations, foundations)
Government	(e.g., judicial, executive, and legislative branches, military)
Education	(e.g., schools, sciences, medicine, research)
Church	(e.g., churches, para-church and religious organizations)

Most people fit into one or more of these. Those who aren't directly contributing to a particular one are likely influenced by it. For instance, even if you don't work in the

film industry, the last movie you saw probably affected your attitude and imagination. You may not be a politician, but the laws they make have a profound impact on your life—and so on.

The spread of ideas—specifically, the Christian idea of restoration - will happen best and most powerfully when every channel of culture is leveraged. Keeping restoration isolated just to the church channel will only further separate Christians from the rest of the world. It's one explanation given for why parts of our culture have grown more dark in recent decades. Christians separated and retreated, leaving a vacuum where others have spread their ideas instead. We left our posts.

Consider the gay movement again. Their success at spreading an idea through all seven channels of culture was obvious. In just thirty years, the idea of being gay has moved from being abnormal and abhorrent in society to being an acceptable and normal alternative lifestyle. This change of perception didn't just happen—it came about as a result of leaders embodying their ideology and message wherever they showed up each day.

As a natural by-product of God's plan for his Kingdom, the next Christians are being dispersed as restorers throughout all channels of culture. They are carrying the message of Jesus—bringing restoration, renewal, and healing; fighting injustice, telling the truth; affirming goodness; and celebrating beauty—in their places of service. They play a key role in overcoming the evil that otherwise overwhelms everything. <sup>v</sup>

From genetic scientists to artists, businesspeople, and educators, these Christians are letting their gifts flood the world from the place they feel called to work. They don't only serve the need of the moment, but bring a bigger, overarching viewpoint to their

fields. They have a keen eye to sense what is missing, broken, or corrupted and are courageous enough to respond. Put simply, the next Christians recognize their responsibility “not only to build up the church but also to build a society to the glory of God.”<sup>vi</sup>

Each channel of culture has things broken within it. Our role isn't merely to run reports, create spreadsheets, and show up on time. We are called to find the things that are broken and affect them in some positive way.

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<sup>i</sup> Paul Rondeau, Regent University Law Review: Vol 14, Number 2, *Selling Homosexuality to America Essay* (Virginia Beach: Regent University Law Review, 2001-2002), 445.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> *Corporate Equality Index*. (Human Rights Campaign. 2006), [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org).

<sup>iv</sup> Steve Inskeep and Barbara Bradley Hagerty, *Openly Gay Bishop Consecrated by Episcopal Church*. (National Public Radio, 2003).

<sup>v</sup> Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey. *How Now Shall We Live*. (Carol Streams, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers: 1999), 33.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.