

COORDINATION OF CHRISTIAN MEDIA FORCES: WINNING THE GLOBAL BATTLE OF EVANGELIZATION

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Putting our whole body into the task

Communication is a total cultural phenomenon; the solution of communication problems therefore lies in the coexistence and cooperation of all the modern mass media. When we communicate we put our total organism into the task. We seldom can talk to somebody on one thing while thinking of another.

In mass communication which enables the Christian Church to communicate collectively with its target audience, it should also enter the relationship of communication with its whole body, the combination of all its media forces, including individual Christians.

The mass media are but instruments placed in the hands of the media people. They can perform only the functions each of them can perform in accordance with the specifics of the particular medium. The experienced advertising planners know this. They devote much of their time and effort to the complex business of formulating the best possible "media mix."

Regarding the indispensability of media coordination, here are a few lines from a book with which you are all familiar: "Our bodies have many parts, but the many parts make only one body when they are all put together Suppose the whole body were an eye, then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything? So he has made many parts, but still there is only one body." Source: I Cor. 12:12-20. Date: A.D. 59.

So the issue of coordination is not a new one, but it has taken on a significant new dimension which poses serious problems for all Christian communication media, now and in the future, if we do not find an answer: What Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning the diversities of spiritual gifts to men applies comfortably to the mass media, which are nothing but extensions of the human body, of our abilities and senses. The rule that "the body is one and one in Christ" has already given us the keynote to which the Christian media orchestration should be tuned.

Mass media are interrelated

There are many things you can do with a screwdriver; you may tighten screws or loosen them, pierce a hole, even stab someone in the

back. But there are things you cannot do with it: pull a nail, cut a piece of glass, spoon-feed a child.

A mass medium is like the screwdriver. It has a function, a range of uses. The limits of that range are not always very clear. A skillful user may achieve wonders with the most "frail" medium. But there is a line where he has to stop because the medium is totally inadequate to do what has to be done. With a pen and paper a good writer can write for hours, but he will need a camera to take pictures that help illustrate what he says in the article. "A good picture is worth a thousand words."

Much of the available experimental knowledge in the field of media effects study indicates that there are some built-in differences among mass media. Some media are space-organized, such as printed materials, still pictures, and art objects. Space-organized media offer more favorable conditions for difficult concepts, for criticism, and selectivity on the part of the audience. Some are time-organized, such as a radio broadcast, having advantages for learning of simple material, and for encouraging suggestibility in an audience. Others are space-and-time organized, sharing the strengths and weaknesses of space media and time media. These include sound films and television.

These functional differences, or "gift diversity," of the mass media not only demonstrate themselves in time and space organization, but are also discernible in the degree of audience participation, speed of communication, and sense of permanence.

High audience participation tends to create a sense of involvement, a group influence. A medium of high-participation such as television seems particularly fitted for the work of exchanging and sharpening opinion; whereas a medium of low-participation such as a book is good in transmitting condensed information on the culture to new members of the society.

Speed of communication is maximum in television and radio; some in magazines; less in films; least in books. Yet books give the greatest sense of permanence. Next come films and magazines. Least permanent are radio and television.

Media of low participation, low speed, and greater permanence lend themselves to teaching, to the process of forming public opinion; while media of high participation, high speed, and less permanence would seem to commend themselves to swift and widespread communication, to report or persuade.

Two Stanford communication experts after a thorough study of the mass media as sources of public affairs, science, and health knowledge, had the following to say:

"Tentatively, we can say that the public affairs, science, and health information to be learned from television is more closely related to events, more likely to capitalize on the present moment, than is the information to be obtained from newspapers and magazines, which can afford to offer more perspective.

"...From the parade of events through television, which is the most vivid and dramatic carrier of events, we tend to fill in facts and findings, but to add concepts and understanding we are likely to turn to the slower print media which can somewhat more easily offer perspective and interpretation.

"This is one reason why the print media are more likely to serve as a source of long-term science and health knowledge, and the broadcast media as a source of political facts which are useful in an election campaign that calls them forth, and may be forgotten thereafter."

Here again we have research evidence that even in the function of dissemination of information on a particular subject these differences of mass media exist.

Media are but extensions of the human body. No medium is all-purpose. If you adopt a space-organized medium such as magazines, or time-organized such as radio, it increases and limits your capacity at the same time. Mass media are interrelated and intercomplementary. "Those organs of the body which seem more frail than others are indispensable" (I Cor. 12:22).

Different forms to reach different audiences

Each message takes a form for the medium to carry to its destination. Language is the basic ingredient of all mass communication forms, but not the only one. "There are many forms of work" (I Cor. 12:6).

Words, spoken and written; pictures, printed or on a screen; other symbols, verbal or non-verbal; all are important components of the structure of a message. A message is the lengthened shadow of its author, providing the skeleton of the form he sees fitted to the medium.

A writer who has an idea and intends to get this across to his readers will first decide which form he should use that will most effectively and almost fully express this idea. He may write it into a poem, prose, a novel, or a drama. Each form has certain unique requirements and holds certain distinctive appeals. To reach this uniqueness or to achieve this distinctiveness, the process of an adoption becomes necessary if we want to change from one form to another, and keep more or less the same theme.

In a broad sense, each medium is an unique form which is good for certain types of message. A news event reported by newspapers differs in many ways from a television one. A fleeting emotional expression of a man which requires a few hundred words to describe takes only a fraction of a second on the small screen; yet television will find its time too precious and its capacity too limited to depict in details, to disclose in depth, the psychological factor or the cultural root of this emotional facial movement. These differences are so patently valid as to be beyond the need of objective demonstration.

Marshall McLuhan's "The Medium is the Message," it seems to me, is but the same old message expressed in his typical semi-logical, fascinatingly provocative form. What he actually was saying is that the different media present different sensory stimuli; that one is perceived visually, another aurally, and the like; that different media require different treatment of the material; that there are eye-men and ear-men who are especially skillful in receiving space- or time-organized communication. But these were all things said before by many others.

McLuhan is right at least in one point. We are in a new world, and our techniques are such that we have given ourselves a new form of com-

munication, but we have not figured out yet the right way to use it. We use television, but without knowing what we do. I believe this is why we are here to find out the right and effective ways to use all the different forms of communication for one task: world evangelization.

So now it is clear that a message may take different forms to reach effectively its target audiences. This is especially important where socio-economic factors make a difference in media distribution, usage and habit.

Under normal circumstances no medium can claim to have the full attention of people in all walks of life, nor of audiences of the whole spectrum of faith. It is not omnipresent or omnipotent in terms of audience participation and involvement. All media must work together with different forms of message to have an above-average coverage of the population of a certain area.

A radio message may be less effective in reaching a busy white-collar worker or a non-set-owner than a printed message. A message in the form of a daytime serial may be as persuasive to housewives as a prominent evangelist's 15-minute TV talk. Sermons are not the only way to preach, and, in order to meet the particular requirement and appeal of different media, require adaptation by skillful writers or producers.

We all know that language is the basic ingredient of all mass communication forms. The word "language" used here means both the written and spoken. Many a man has raised the question whether the written language is still as important as it was even ten years ago in effective evangelization.

For many years, Christians have regarded illiteracy as the major obstacle to social progress as well as to world evangelism. Therefore the first and foremost task was usually to remove that obstacle and teach the people to read. But now we know it is no longer the obstacle it once was. In fact, preschool children in Hong Kong or in Tokyo learn quite a bit from television, which has replaced reading to a great extent. The "Sesame Street" series in America is proving this point quite dramatically.

To bring across the simple truth of God's salvation to the minds of people in areas where the literacy rate is low, it may no longer be necessary to require them to learn to read first, if and only if the ear-organized and ear-and-eye organized media such as radio, television, and film can be effectively developed and widely used.

I am not making a bid to write off the importance of the printed media. What I am saying is that we Christians have a variety of evangelizing tools and combinations from which to choose with considerable confidence and that they can be used effectively, for certain specific purposes.

Media at the receiving end are also interdependent

At the receiving end of a mass communication process is the audience, relatively large, heterogeneous and anonymous. A pastor who speaks to a gathering of 500 from a platform can feel more comfortable and confident than a radio evangelist in that he can see his audience and receive immediate feedback, and interact with its members on a face-to-

face basis. The audience needs no other receiver than the natural organs, such as eye and ear. Yet when it comes to the reception of mass media communication, the audience needs a "dock" to receive the "vehicle" that carries the message. This receiving instrument or device is an extension of his seeing-hearing mechanism. The printed media provide both the message and the receiver, the paper, in the form of books, magazines, and newspapers; and in ordinary situations, the reader pays wholly or partially the cost of both. We have Christmas "gift subscription" of a magazine, but we have not heard of a Christmas "gift radio program."

We sometimes buy a TV set as a New Year's gift to a friend for him to receive television programs. Radio and television require the audience themselves to provide the receiver, the set; while movies require a reel of film provided by the sender and projection equipment provided by the audience, to complete the process of communication.

The audience exposure to a message disseminated through various media closely correlates with the availability of these receivers. Televised programs, though powerful in persuasion, cannot reach homes without a television set. Radio waves can penetrate the Bamboo Curtain and reach far beyond, but only to those who happen to own a short-wave set, and have the courage to listen in.

Not only the availability of the receivers should be considered when Christian media strategists decide when and whether to use certain media. Two other considerations need also to be taken into account on the receiving end: cost and specific need. Not only the language barrier has prevented the majority of the Indian people from enjoying television, the cost of obtaining a set is beyond the reach of their purchase power. As to the third matter, it should be pointed out again that the different media do not meet precisely the same needs. For instance, television and films are good teaching means, because they both carry sound and sight. Comparing the two, it is clear that films have one advantage and one disadvantage vis-a-vis television. A film can be stopped for comment, or repeated to clear up a point. Television, on the other hand, is a much more efficient system of delivery than films; it can be changed and kept up-to-date.

For certain purposes certain combinations of media are necessary. Beside every TV set there is almost always a "TV Guide," and newspapers ordinarily carry radio/TV program schedules. TV is asked to advertise magazines and newspapers. This again proves the interdependence of media. Wider and longer exposure on the side of the audience can be accomplished through close media cooperation to make known to the public where and when they can receive the message they need through the receivers available or accessible to them. "God appointed each limb to its own place in the body" (I Corinthians 12).

Stage of media development differs from country to country

The development of mass media goes forward with economic development, and differs with political centralization, geographical barriers, and cultural heterogeneity. Based on existing statistics in approximately one hundred countries, two communication researchers have found that modern communication grows along with the other elements

of society that one would expect to be related to communication — urbanization, literacy, per capita income, school attendance, and so forth.

At any given time when we find a country where income, urbanization, industrialization, school attendance, and other such social factors are relatively high, we can be quite confident that the number of radio receivers, the circulation of newspapers, and the flow of information throughout the country will also be relatively high.

The stage of national development therefore makes a difference in the stage of communication development and both together make for differences in the uses of mass media for various purposes.

The advent of modern mass media to developing countries does not necessarily follow the same order as it did in more advanced countries: magazines may be first, then newspapers and radio and television. Nor do the media develop at the same speed and with the same dimension. In general, we can only say that the more the economic growth, the more likely a country is to give the mass media a major role in its development program. Political centralization, or to be more accurate, political ideology makes a difference in the mass media development which varies with the degree to which power and control are centralized.

R.R. Fagen, by comparing media growth in "modernizing autocracies" with that in "modernizing democracies," has found that strongly centralized countries seem to be more likely to put above-average resources behind the mass media, so as to develop the media system somewhat out of phase with the general social and economic growth. He has demonstrated that even though the two groups had about the same average national per capita income, the rate of radio growth was much greater in the autocracies than the democracies. On the other hand, a politically centralized state is more likely to own and control the media, and therefore is more likely than other countries to use those media single-mindedly to further economic development.

As an example of the effect of geographical barriers, let us think of Indonesia, which, because its islands are so many, has to give radio a fuller development than the printed media. As an example of the effect of cultural heterogeneity, we can think of India with its horrendous language problem. As a result of this problem, India can hardly have a national newspaper, and has to think about using communication satellite for a nation-wide educational television broadcast program. Yet a national leader in a small country like Cuba, which has no important geographical barriers and uses one common language, is in a position to talk to all her people at one time through the small screen.

What is the implication of these findings? Is it not clear enough that strategy of media evangelism should be phased in accordance with the media development in each country? Well-designed and thoroughly-researched coordination is necessary to achieve this.

"God has combined the various parts of the body..." (I Corinthians 12).

All media can be used to teach and report

Why should we discuss media coordination? Is it not because the Christian media lack the necessary coordination at a time when the tradition-bound demarcation of media has already begun to fade out?

Historically, Christianity was an individually-directed and orally-organized religion. "Tongues like flames of fire".... "They began to talk in other tongues."

Traditionally, Christians were pulpit-centered, and to them the printed medium was a natural extension of the man who preached from the pulpit. Many of the books published after the arrival of the printing presses were collections of sermons.

To these Christians, Gospel tracts represent the orthodox means to reach men in the street. They could see the men and women to whom they hand the tracts. The audience is within their reach in the same sense that the congregation is within the sight of the preacher. Gospel tracts are therefore an extension of the pulpit.

As for periodicals, a weekly is as far as they could go. Newspapers? No! Not only could they not see who was receiving the message, but to a Sunday-oriented mind they are too frequently published.

To those Christians who have accepted the use of radio at all, it is but another form of the pulpit. This might explain why in the early stage of our Christian radio development, and even now in some areas, radio was crowded with amateurish sermon-type programs.

To them, television was mainly for entertainment, too far away from the teaching function of the pulpit. Television was once described as a devil's instrument of degeneration on and corruption of the human mind. Therefore, it was regarded as taboo in Christian homes.

The eye-men of the Gutenberg Age should turn their ears to the voice that the ear-men have heard and listened to: "Much is given, much is required." All the modern mass media God has given to us are capable to inform, to reach consensus, to teach, and to entertain. The role the Christian mass media is asked to play is more of a reporter and a teacher than an entertainer, yet personnel in entertainment programs, where programs are properly projected can become top class teachers and reporters.

The rapid arrival of the Communication Revolution Era is already forcing a drastic change in the tradition-rooted attitude toward modern mass media. Ours is an age in which we shall soon see a world newspaper, a direct-to-set-owner television broadcast, all to be made possible by the high-power satellites hovering above the equator.

The *British Economist* in its booklet, "The Communications Revolution," has the following to say concerning this age, "The changes that are coming...should end the sense of isolation that parts of the world have felt for centuries."

Isolation is already a luxury few Christian media can afford to have. The age-old concept, "to be my own boss," the individualism born from human egoism, should give way to Christ-centered international-minded coordination and co-operation. All mass media, old and new, must be adequately used to teach and report the Good News for modern man; at the same time, we remember also the demonic possibilities latent in media.

How media coordination can be implemented

Proclamation of the Good News to all nations is a cross-cultural communication process. If the Christian church could have

systematically collected and analyzed data based on studies of the missions she has sent out for centuries, then the specific characteristics of this process could have been isolated and evaluated, and would have been of tremendous help in the planning of the much needed media coordination.

MARC, the Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center located at Monrovia, California, has initiated a series of studies on this and other subjects. This effort should be encouraged and supported to bring more light to the problems with which we are now confronted.

Judging from what we have said concerning the nature and functions of mass communications, we perhaps know why well-designed and well-researched coordination is imperative. When we come to the question of how this can be implemented, thorough discussions and exploration of all the possibilities by people who are working with Christian media are required.

In some cases we may need mergers and affiliations such as have taken place in the United States between publishing houses and electronics firms. In other areas partnership may be in order. But everywhere there is the need for coordination among all Christian media to meet this challenge unprecedented in the history of human communication.

There are four kinds of coordination. First, coordination within one medium. For instance, the publishing houses should find out by themselves what kind of audience each of them, either individually or jointly, wishes to reach. One publisher may choose youth as its audience, another may be aimed at an urban readership.

Second, coordination within all Christian media. For instance, the publishing houses may do the follow-up work for a radio station or a TV program through a Bible correspondence course or other printed projects; radio may be asked to "fight" in rural areas where illiteracy is high; the printed media can do in-depth teaching in the urban district.

Third, coordination through the secular media. This includes coordinated sponsorship of programs, supply of syndicated material, and provision of trained personnel.

Fourth, coordination between the Christian mass media and the interpersonal communication among individual Christians and the non-Christian world.

An effective implementation of this coordination may take the following steps:

- a. A coordinating office or a communication center on each of the continents — the command tower, under collective leadership.
- b. A communication foundation or a Christian World Bank to finance worthwhile projects.
- c. A research center with scholars from a variety of academic disciplines, responsible for investigating cultural patterns, national and tribal mores, linguistics, music, system analysis, mass persuasion techniques, etc.
- d. A post-graduate-level school of communication with Christian professionals from the mass media teaching men

and women for careers in communication research, teaching, and as professional specialists in radio/TV, journalism, film, and other connected fields.

A country goes to war with its complete armed services, a combination of military, naval, and air forces. We Christians should enter into the global battle of evangelization with united, accorded, and well-coordinated media forces if we are to win.

We have no objection to the diversification of Christian media. Yet media coordination has today become a necessity. It not only makes media diversity meaningful; it makes a global communication of the message of Christ possible.

COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH

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In his book, *Man's Need and God's Action*, Reuel L. Howe, who is recognized by many as a practical theologian, expresses compelling ideas as to the basic concepts of communications as they relate to the Christian faith. He writes:

"We have the gift of the new relationship from God in Christ into which baptism is the door. He gave us this gift not for ourselves only, but for all men. The Christian Church exists primarily for those who are not in it, which is to say that our chief aim is missionary. The first meaning of baptism for us is that we are cared for, but its second meaning is that we are called to care for others; first we are ministered unto; but finally we must minister. How easy it is, however, for us to think of the church as existing primarily for those who are already in; how easy it is for us to be concerned for our parish's success, prestige, and adornment and to forget those to whom we are sent. We may be so forgetful of our mission as to resent any reminders of our responsibility to those outside and to resent, also, their intrusion into our "fellowship" when they appear as a result of others' invitations. On the contrary, the Christian's mark of maturity is his readiness to seek out and care for, or minister. All of us having been baptized are ministers of Christ, both laity and clergy."

As part of the concept of baptism defined in the preceding quote, it would seem that Christian communication has an essential function to fulfill in the broadcast sense of the mission of the church. The key essence here is one of "seeking out" and then ministering. The process of seeking-out is a complicated procedure in all areas of scientific involvement, not least within the area of communications. However, while difficult, this "searching" is also the most necessary if there is to be any element of effectiveness and any consolation in knowing that a job is being done well.

The church is beginning to realize the significance of the use of mass media as a cogent force of propagation. However, what is still needed is the knowledge of how to disseminate its message to receptive audiences.

The realized need of audience analysis is not limited to our age. The phenomenon can be traced back as far as to Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers who took great pains to understand their audiences in order to communicate with them. Shakespeare was obviously well aware of his audience, as he drew upon it for many characters in his plays. Christ exemplified in the Gospels the art of knowing to whom one is speaking so as to communicate in the most meaningful manner. In any communication endeavor the question of *whom are we talking to* is