

Whenever consistent with our goals, aid the churches in communication between themselves — often an important service in remote or rural areas; (iii) Deal with the local church's problems realistically — know them first-hand through personal contact and feedback from the church; (iv) Consider making the local church part of the follow-up plan in your strategy of evangelism; (v) Consider making the local church a distribution center for literature or other materials offered by radio; (This is particularly difficult in areas like Muslim countries and Latin America, where the Roman Catholic church membership finds entering a Protestant church offensive; however, it must at least be considered.) (vi) Consider making radio the central, coordinating element in a national or regional strategy for evangelism. Radio's efficiency of cost, speed of communication, universal coverage, and flexibility for last-minute change in content make it ideal for such a role.

### Combining resources

One of the major problems confronting Christian use of radio is the "bits and pieces" approach to program production. There are literally hundreds of agencies producing programs varying in length from one minute to one hour. In turn, these programs are aired on Christian or secular stations — typically with little thought as to how they relate to each other. So quite often there are a few minutes of this, a few minutes of that, and a few minutes of something else. Nothing could be less attractive to the non-Christian — an issue of prime importance if we want to attract, hold, and convince the unreached.

Seemingly the only course for action in this case is for program producers to form cooperatives. Some producers have fine talent, others exceptional strategies and planners, still others have financial resources. Combine these elements and it would be possible to produce programs of greater length and more frequent schedule — both essential for evangelism. We have seen how in countries like Nepal and Afghanistan Christian agencies have been forced to band together, combining the best of their individual resources into a cooperative in order to work in the country. Certainly broadcasters must consider the same approach in order to get maximum benefit from the massive resources required for optimum use of the few available frequencies!

So, then, radio brings unique properties to the challenge of evangelism. However, there must be carefully defined goals and a plan for implementation if these unique capabilities of radio are to be captured for maximum effectiveness. Finally, there must be more careful integration of radio's efforts — with other broadcasters, with other Christian media, and with the local church.

## FILMS AND EVANGELISM ... "COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL BY MEANS OF THE FILM"

*Peter Church*

*Mr. W. Peter Church, Johannesburg,  
Transvaal, South Africa, is Director of Go-  
Tell Communications.*

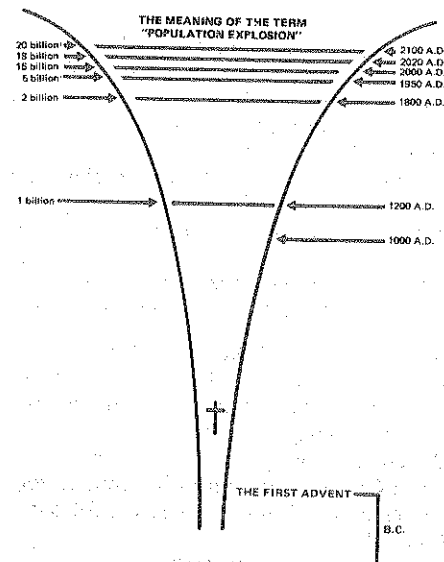
### *This is our world*

What makes our generation different from those which have gone before? Many things; but among the phenomena which have shaped the twentieth century is communication — the media. We can scarcely imagine a world without radio, television, film, the telephone, the press. The destinies of men and of nations are swayed by the rapid transmission of news and ideas. Fashions and life-styles are transmitted from country to country and from continent to continent with bewildering speed.

These changes often leave us groping and confused. Old landmarks of morality and standards of behavior often crumble and vanish before we can discover where the cult or change began.

Another important factor in understanding the media and the role which they can play in world evangelization is the staggering increase in the population of the world.

### *This then is our world*



From the time of creation it took till the year 1200 after Christ for the world's population to reach the figure of one billion. The second billion came 600 years later; THEN — the explosion.

### *And this is the challenge we face*

Certain nations have made enormous strides in curbing the population growth, but the situation facing the Christian Church today is clearly stated by Leslie Lyall in his book *A World to Win*.

In 1900 - 38% of the world's population was Christian

In 1950 - 30% of the world's population was Christian

In 1970 - 26% of the world's population was Christian

If this trend continues, by the year 2000 the Christian population of the world will be less than 10%”

### *Is there an answer? Yes, ....but!*

One of the most serious problems in facing the task of world evangelism is the tendency to over-react. By nature we seem to be “either-or” in our assessment of the methods with which we may reach the world with the Gospel of Christ. Through different convictions we believe that we must use either one method of evangelism, or another. We seem to feel that the task can be accomplished either by the simplicity of personal proclamation, or by media. It is my firm conviction that we need to adopt an attitude of “both - and.” This would allow for an acceptance of what the Apostle Paul describes as “all means.” But it is in this area of Christian activity that we have seen so much injury to the Body of Christ. Personal jealousies, prejudices, and animosities have blinded even men of spiritual stature and caused them to embark on campaigns of assassination against another brother who dared to use some new or different method. We must surely believe that God can use every legitimate means to reach his creation with the Gospel. The Gospel of Christ is still the power of God unto salvation.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

The *message* of God's redeeming love remains unchanged, but *methods* of communicating that message may change.

### *How do the media affect man's ability to communicate?*

Communication is the transfer of information. It is also “the interacting between people by means of messages.” An international authority on communication has said, “Man cannot non-communicate.” God created man in his image. It is the very nature of God to reveal himself. As basic as God's revelation of himself, so too man does not exist without communication. Consider then the following facts:

#### WE LEARN

1% by means of tasting

1% by means of touching

3% by means of smelling

11% by means of hearing

83% by means of *seeing*

#### WE REMEMBER

10% of what we read

20% of what we hear

30% of what we see

50% of what we *hear and see*

(Survey conducted by the Secony Mobil Oil Co.)

With these statistics before us it is not presumptuous to say that the most effective means of communication available to the church today is the sound motion picture — “The Film.”

As early as 1893, Thomas Alva Edison was conducting the first “peep shows” in the United States. By means of moving pictures he was putting to work the inventions and discoveries of the pioneers of the moving picture. In 1896, Joseph Jefferson produced a moving picture story, “Rip van Winkle.” By the year 1910, the film industry in the United States of America was well on its way to becoming the premier form, not only of *communicating information* but of *entertainment*. Through the early years of this twentieth century, dramatic development took place throughout Europe, and the film industry established itself as the principal means of communicating with the masses.

Why these dates? Simply to convey the fact that it took the Christian community, or more accurately, the Christian Church more than half a century to grasp the significance of this particular form of communication. The reasons for this are dealt with by other speakers. I refer more specifically to the paper “Evangelism and the Media: A Theological Basis for Action,” by Phillip Butler.

The traditional attitude of the church is summed up in the fact that many individual churches, and sometimes entire denominations, have written into the by-laws and constitutions of the church that “The Film” is evil and may not be exhibited on the church premises. Some do not go that far, but certainly will not allow a motion picture to be exhibited in “the sanctuary.”

### *An unchanging commission*

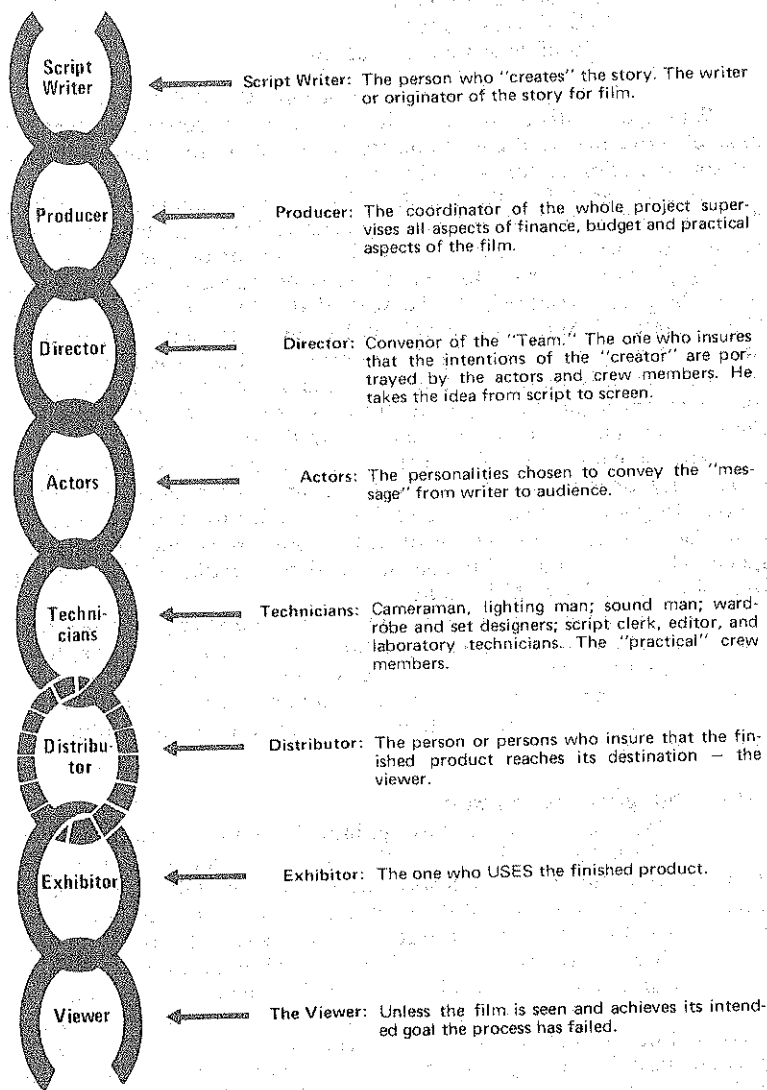
The Master commanded us to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel” (Mark 16:15). What does this mean? For many years my interpretation of this commission was based on a geographical concept. It seems to convey to many that the Gospel is to be carried into every inhabited part of the earth. This is true! But there is another consideration. It is my firm conviction that this commission includes not only geographical boundaries, but also social and behavioral dimensions. A man's “world” is where he “lives.” It includes the place where he works, where he finds his recreation, where he goes for entertainment — every sphere of his daily activity. This is where we need to take the Gospel. It is at this point that the media and particularly the film have such significance in our times.

Even in many of the developing countries of the world, the film is the major form of entertainment. This would be true in the context of the cinema, television, and the rapidly rising home movie industry. This then

is the background to the consideration of communicating the Gospel by means of the film.

### Understanding the film

These are the processes and people responsible for a film:



Note: The link in broken lines indicating THE DISTRIBUTOR is intentional. It is my observation that this is the weakest link in our present use of the film for evangelism.

### Using the film

The use of media is not presenting an alternative to the power of God's Spirit. Hear the words of Jesus: "And when He (The Holy Spirit) has come he will convince the world of its sin, and of the availability of God's goodness, and of deliverance from judgment" (John 16:8). It is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to convict men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. It is our duty to convince the mind of men; it is God's work to convict the heart and turn man to himself. Neither can we abdicate our responsibility by declaring that the whole work and prerogative is God's. We have to say with Paul, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." "Now then we are ambassadors for God. We beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). As we face the challenge to reach and teach mankind the Gospel of Christ, there is available to us today an array of tools and aids previously unknown in the history of man. There is hardly a corner of the globe today where we cannot reach our generation with dedicated use of the media. In highly industrialized countries man is subject to the influence of multimedia. His whole life is shaped by the media: radio, film, television, the press.

All these have profound influence upon the manners and morals of society. Even in developing countries we have available to us the use of one or several of these means of communication. For example, in 1955 there were an estimated 55,000 transistor radios in Africa. By 1965 this figure had risen to five million!

### The film and the local church

A noted Christian leader involved in the use of media in proclaiming the Gospel has used the following illustration: The church can be likened to a highway construction company. Imagine this construction company given the task of constructing one of our modern freeways. With all its technical and scientific knowledge it is no easy task to lay the impressive network of highways and expressways which have made their appearance in all the developed countries of the world. With this in mind this author has said that the church is like one of these construction companies, but *it is trying to do the job with a teaspoon*. The analogy may sound strange, even ridiculous, but in the face of the staggering challenges which face us today the church must rethink its total program of world evangelization.

### What part can the film play in this task?

Once prejudice against the film as a medium of communication has been overcome, there are limitless possibilities in its use.

Any local church wanting to attract the members of the community surrounding the local assembly needs only to take a local cinema or theater, screen a good Christian film, and with adequate publicity and advertising they are certain to draw people. This is not generally true of the normal preaching or sermon-orientated type of program which the church has become so tied to. *The Gaggling of God*, by Gavin Reid is a must for any person wanting to research this point further. Not that we advocate the supplanting of the traditional preaching of God's Word. It is a mistaken notion to think that if a message is on film it is no longer the proclamation of God's Word. The task of the church is detailed by Paul

in Col. 1:27,28, "We warn every man we meet ..." that is *Evangelism* ... "and we teach every man we can ..." That is *Follow-up*.

Someone has described much of our church program today as being "keepers of the aquarium — rather than fishers of men." In the total program of the local church, the use of films can be of untold value. The film can help the church to communicate with a media-oriented society. It can also make use of the film to gain maximum advantage in its teaching and training role.

### *The strength of the film as a tool for evangelism*

1. This form of communication combines all the elements of communication which insure greatest possible effectiveness. More than any other single means, the human senses respond to the stimulus presented by the film.

2. Once a film has been produced, its message is constant. Depending on the quality of the film, the message which it contains will always be the same. If the correct film has been selected for the correct audience, then one is sure of the message having its desired effect.

3. Through the means of films a single message can be communicated to unlimited numbers of people. Correctly produced, distributed and exhibited to the correct audience, a film can touch untold multitudes. Through television and by means of sub-titling and dubbing in foreign languages, a film is a unique messenger.

4. The film provides unique opportunity for using gifts within the body of Christ. Consider diagram No.2 which gives the production of the film in detail. You will immediately realize that within this framework there is opportunity for creativeness which rarely exists apart from the use of media. From the most talented technician right down to the ordinary man in the pew there is a new world of opportunity. Not everyone can *make* a film, but even the least talented can learn to use a projector or organize a film show.

### *The weaknesses of the film as a tool for evangelism*

1. There can be a reliance upon the film as a novelty which replaces true strategic planning and a faithful personal presentation of the Gospel. It can be argued that by the use of the film we could replace personal responsibility within the life of the church. This need not be so. A well-equipped evangelist armed with projector and film does not necessarily have to be unspiritual or ill-prepared in prayer. Conversely, even if an "evangelist" (i.e., the ordinary Christian) is ill-equipped or not endowed with physical abilities and natural gifts, he could still use a film to evangelize because the message is contained in the medium — the film.

2. I now want to concentrate on weaknesses not in the use of the film in evangelism but in the production of the film for evangelism. I refer again to diagram No.2 (production of the film). The two main areas of weakness in this all-important consideration are: a) Research.

Someone has aptly said the problem with the pulpit today is we are answering questions people are not asking. To avoid this pitfall not only in our preaching but also in the use of media, and more specifically in the production of films, we need adequate research. It would appear that this is one of the main problems in the production of the film today. People of creative ability are often turning out films which they themselves have a compulsion to create. Because of this, many films are unsuited and as a

result lie unused by the church and its workers.

#### b) Distribution.

Every successful commercial enterprise is based on the principle of marketing. No matter how good a product, unless it is properly distributed, marketed, or sold — whichever word one wishes to use — that product will never see the light of day, or it may have only a poor or very limited circulation. At this point we touch upon the all-important question of distribution of Christian films. If one were to take any Christian publication dealing with the media, I would be bold enough to say that you would rarely, if ever, find any reference to the question of marketing and distribution. One's remarks could be very specific at this point, but I would rather leave the point made to be grasped and considered.

3. One of the major weaknesses in the use of the film is often the lack of "feed-back." "Feed-back" is the reaction of the one who received the message. This could be a decision registered by the person viewing the film or a response to some specific stimulus received through viewing the film. This problem can be overcome if the local church would rise to the challenge of using the film in communication. If a local church uses films, then that church should be responsible for the recording of attendances and decisions. That church should then, just as in every other presentation of the Gospel, assume the responsibility of following up and nurturing those who indicate a desire to follow Christ.

### *Conclusions*

There are two suggestions which I wish to make.

1. (Rationalization) We must learn to pool our resources and coordinate our activities. Vast sums of money are being spent in sometimes disastrous ventures. Through united research, production, and distribution we can utilize the media and more specifically the film to communicate the Gospel to our generation. Yes, it will cost money, and large sums of money. But God requires of us that we be good stewards. Let us rethink our priorities and, after honest evaluation, move forward in a program of evangelization which will reach the billions who have never heard.

2. (An international Christian film festival) My colleague, the Rev. Tony Louch and I attended the International Film Festival, in Cannes from May 9 to 24. The purpose of our visit was to observe the functioning of the secular film industry. Let me say immediately that not every secular film produced is necessarily a success. There *are* failures. But at this annual event every facet of the secular film industry is benefited. Buyers and sellers meet in the marketplace; distributors acquire the latest product; producers and directors mingle; technicians see the latest developments in techniques. The entire industry takes a momentous step forward.

Can we do something similar? Can we have a common meeting ground where the newest Christian films can be screened, where Christian workers can view all that is available to them in their task of proclaiming Christ? We need this kind of interchange to help us in the challenging and exciting task of using all the means that God has placed at our disposal to make Christ known, *NOW*.