

COMMUNICATION AND EVANGELIZATION I

Communication and Evangelization

Viggo Sogaard

Communication and Evangelism! Evangelism is communication! It is the communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who do not yet follow him.

Unfortunately, the word *communication* has different connotations. For some, it means fund-raising, for others it is public relations or advertising. For many, communications people are the media people, in particular those working with the mass media. But communication is a subject that is of equal importance for pastors and missionaries, laymen and clergymen, broadcasters and development specialists.

This morning, we will focus on the technology and the use of media in effective evangelism. Some will argue that it is not possible to do so. We would respond: If you are attempting to reach the world, you cannot afford not to seriously consider communication principles and media use. The topic will be presented through videos, a paper by Philemon Choi, some comments and an interview. We will start with the original title of this session, Communication Technology.

Viggo Sogaard is a communications specialist and missionary and a citizen of Denmark. He is a member of both the Communications Working Group and the Strategy Working Group and is the Director of the European Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

VIDEO PRESENTATION

Communications Technology and World Evangelization

Producers: Wayne Craig, Cal Bombay

Writers: Tom Houston, Bill Thatcher

Let Us Now Praise Communications Technology

Publishing is being revolutionized by computer technology: from computer graphics to desk top publishing, to simultaneous newspaper production in different locations at once. Add to this, computer assisted translations. Bible agencies lead the way in its application to thousands of languages, and aim to increase their 120 million annual distribution of Bibles and New Testaments.

In the field of sound, radio reception is rapidly increasing, with receivers becoming cheaper and smaller all the time. Cassettes of greater quality and smaller size are being used for every kind of purpose. Cassettes and compact discs are replacing the record for the reproduction of music in a booming industry.

Satellite communications are multiplying. People with relatively simple computers can communicate with their friends half a world away. Personal computers are becoming more and more common with seven hundred million computers in use today. Computers and computer research, which used to require a whole roomful of equipment, can now be done on one's lap.

Films and television multiply space and are extended in their viewing by cable and videos in astonishing numbers. India is now producing more films than Hollywood. Through all of this, information is exploding at the astonishing rate of six hundred million words per hour—beyond the power to keep up.

Let Us Now See the Corruption of Communications Technology

All of this communicating power is in the hands of ordinary sinful mortals who are using it with increasing abandon for their own selfish purposes, and often even for demonic ends.

Much of the output from Hollywood, and its counterparts in other countries, is pouring into the world a portrayal of sexual permissiveness that is undermining the family in every country, regardless of its family tradition. From this field spring the idols, heroes, heroines, and role models of our generation.

Politics is influenced and dominated by what the television can show and say. News reporting is sometimes biased by the sensational and prurient. In many Third World countries, there is some strict censorship and manipulation of the media that distorts truth in ideological directions.

It is tempting to think we are in a losing battle and things can only get worse. No doubt they will get worse for some people, but not necessarily for most if we lay hold of the truth of the gospel and the power of the Spirit. All this tends to deter us from

Anglican mission to try to find someone willing to answer our questions. After four or five visits, we found a lot of people were interested in Jesus. Now, nineteen families have become Christians and about sixty people were baptized.

Narrator: To ensure that radio will achieve its maximum potential as a bearer of the Good News, Christian leaders are calling for new programs and ideas.

Henri Aoun: We produced a special drama that listeners loved. We're getting hundreds of letters from all over the Arab world from people who benefitted and learned a lot from those programs, simply because they were in story and drama form.

Dave Adams: Radio is a flexible medium. It's able to be responsive to the circumstances of a group of people. We've had examples where we've been able to change our message quickly. When there's been a natural disaster in a region, for example, within hours we can be talking about the immediate problems, helping people through those difficulties, and be relating the gospel of Christ to the crisis.

Narrator: But more than anything else, this powerful technology needs native-language speakers from unreached people groups. The power of hearing a radio broadcast in your own language is undeniable. As a convert from a closed country testifies:

Mohand: I speak French, and I understand English. Still, it was something marvelous when God seemed to "lower himself" to speak my language.

Paul Freed: People must speak to their own people. They know their people, they can reach their people. Therefore, nationals are absolutely essential for radio ministry.

Narrator: In addition to the critical need for native speakers from unreached people groups, producing radio programming depends on people of many talents.

Phill Butler: Probably the biggest single problem is finding men and women from the language group who are committed to Christ and who can be trained to do the behind-the-scenes work of producing, airing, writing, and recording radio programs.

Narrator: Radio is a powerful technology. It is even more irresistible when used by the grace of the Holy Spirit, broadcasting in languages that are music to a native listener's ears, and combined with other evangelism tools for a complete presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Phill Butler: As was said of Esther, she came to the kingdom for such a time as this. It may be that broadcasting, despite the fact that it has been used for five or six decades, possibly has come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

(VIGGO SOGAARD, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 314)

Yes, broadcasting is with us, ready to be used. And so are many other media. We could mention magazines such as *Breakthrough* in Hong Kong and *Step* in Africa.

The question for you and me is not one of saying yes or no to media, but it is one of *how* to use media effectively in the service of evangelization. We must admit that in

spite of enormous resources committed to the use of media, we have often seen very few results. Let us not avoid the problems, but let us face the challenges and respond to them.

One of the challenges facing us today is the question of an increasingly non-reading world. The number of illiterates alone is staggering and the number is increasing daily. We are not winning the war against illiteracy. India alone has up to six hundred million non-readers. Bangladesh about one hundred million. Even though we see effective use of printed materials, less than half the world's population can be reached this way. And most of the unevangelized people are among the non-readers.

This is a tremendous challenge to Bible Societies, for example. How do you translate for the non-reader. Maybe we have to learn from the early church that did not have a New Testament, in a time when it has been estimated that only 5 percent of the people were literate. This is also a challenge for the radio people we just met on the video. Most radio organizations use letters as follow-up, but if you cannot write, how do you respond? Radio broadcasters have no choice but to come up with effective follow-up systems that do not require the skills of literacy.

But, let us not just think of the so-called Third World. We want to re-evangelize Europe. In a country like Denmark that claims 100 percent literacy, recent research shows that 22 percent never read or write anything, and you can probably add an equal number who only read headings and pictures. They spend their time in front of videos and television. And most of the programs available on video is at an intelligence level that, to use John Stott's words, "stupidifies" people. We could add, video is probably one of the most destructive elements in our society today. But, if we are to reach these groups, we have to learn how such media can be used effectively in evangelism.

It may be that our main problem as media people has been the exclusion of the local church in strategy development, planning, and programming. But, it is the local church that must give credibility to the message. Let us look at one example of how this can be done. The Cinema Leo ministry in Kenya has movie vans traveling all over the country, showing films. They decided to make their ministry church centered, so when the cinema vans arrive in a community, it is the local church leaders who give the welcome and pray with the seekers.

(A VIDEO PRESENTATION OF THE CINEMA LEO MINISTRY WAS SHOWN AT THIS POINT.)

So the movie vans come as servants of the local churches.

There are four key questions that I often use as my guide in planning effective use of media in evangelism (but they are, of course, of equal importance to the pastor preparing a sermon): The questions are,

1. Who is my listener?
2. Where is my listener?
3. What are the needs of my listener?
4. How can I meet the needs of my listener?

We so often take the audience for granted. We sit in studios and in offices, making programs and sermons for people we do not know. We don't really have the right to produce programs for people whose needs we have not discovered.

When we start with these four questions, we soon realize that they cannot be answered without the help of the local church. I realize the challenge this is to radio and

other mass media organizations, but this does not make it less important. I realize that it may seem cheaper and easier to just copy a television program produced in the United States than to produce another one in the Philippines, but we may be seriously mistaken if we are to judge the expense in relation to the number of Filipino viewers and the effectiveness of the program.

If the church is to function as a base for our strategies and communicational activities, ownership, at least felt ownership, must be shared with the church. Often such an approach will turn our attention to the smaller media such as audio cassettes. Of course the use of such media is less prestigious. It sounds much better to be a radio or television producer than a cassette producer, even though cassettes and other smaller media may prove to be of equal or greater value to the church.

One day I was in the village of Sriperampudur in South India with an evaluation team from World Vision. A crowd had gathered around us and a woman came up to us with a young child on her arm. She proudly showed the child to us, telling us how beautiful and healthy he was. "But," she said, "this child has always been sick and weak. Then we heard this tape about water, and it was mentioned that we could pray to Jesus. So we prayed for our child, and see what Jesus has done."

Franklin Joseph works for World Vision India. He has been in charge of the development of this audio cassette project.

Interview: Viggo Sogaard and Franklin Joseph

Viggo Sogaard: Franklin Joseph works for World Vision India. World Vision is a relief and development organization. Franklin has been in charge of the audiocassette project. Why did you start a cassette project?

Franklin: The people we try to help have many problems. Mothers bring their sick children for medical attention; the youth come looking for employment; and others are addicted to alcohol. They come looking for solutions to many problems. We have programs—educational and health-oriented—that attempt to meet their physical needs. But we felt the need to integrate the gospel into our social programs. The people had needs that were social, educational, and spiritual.

Viggo: You have developed quite an extensive strategy. Will you tell us about that?

Franklin: It all started with your visit to us. You asked the simple question, "Who is the audience? Where are they? What are their needs? How best can you meet their needs?" So we began our program by answering these questions.

Viggo: Did you know your audience?

Franklin: To get to know our audience and their needs, I went to live with them. By living closely with them, I sometimes discovered beliefs that were causing some of their medical problems. For example, I found that most of the women think that diarrhea in children is caused by evil spirits. They tie talismans around the child's hand to combat the disease, but they never bother to give the needed medicine.

Viggo: I understand you were a shepherd for a few days?

Franklin: Yes, before producing the cassette, "Good Shepherd," I wanted to spend time with a shepherd to experience some of his feelings and beliefs.

Viggo: Is the local church involved also?

Franklin: Yes. Up in corn hills, a tribal area, the Baptist church is involved in the production, distribution, and follow-up.

Viggo: Could you tell us what's on a program? What does it sound like?

Franklin: Oh, yes, please listen. (An audiocassette is played.)

Viggo: Please describe what's happening?

Franklin: It's about creation of God.

Viggo: What are some of the other programs?

Franklin: We have programs on the evil of drinking, salvation, and eternal life.

Viggo: Would you describe an incident from your ministry?

Franklin: We have many stories to tell, but I'll share a favorite. Up in corn hills, we played the cassette on the evils of drinking. The local village leader came and listened to that cassette. He was so moved that he called all the village people together to listen to the cassette on the evils of drinking. Afterwards, they decided to stop brewing liquor and to heavily fine anyone caught breaking the law. Now almost the whole village is turning to Jesus Christ.

Viggo: What challenge do you have for us?

Franklin: The challenge for us is to unite modern media with personal, caring relationships. That way people are attracted and challenged to Christian action. It is said that anything that holds the attention of the people leads them to act.

(VIGGO SOGAARD, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 326)

Thank you, Franklin. So, how can media be used to reach people with the Good News and to build them in the faith and spiritual maturity? Is it possible to harness the mass media to effective evangelism? It can be done. We certainly do not want to worship technology, nor do we want to reject media because of the corruption and misuse we see.

As we close this session, let me just remind all of us that the master communicator was Jesus himself. He started with the needs and interests of his listeners. From there he led them into a discovery of how those needs could be met and new life in Jesus could be a reality.

In John 3 we have the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. The listener—Nicodemus—was a highly educated man, a philosopher, a man with status, someone

who would be embarrassed if seen talking alone with Jesus. Jesus showed his acceptance and empathy by sacrificing his sleep to meet with Nicodemus on the roof when nobody would see them. The very language Jesus used shows respect for Nicodemus and an understanding of his needs. Jesus aptly entered into that frame of reference and from there led Nicodemus into new discoveries. Jesus dealt with the questions and assumptions which Nicodemus had.

The language used in the following chapter, John 4, with the Samaritan woman is quite different. The Samaritan woman was an outcast the Jews did not even treat as a human being. But Jesus bowed down and spoke with her, treating her as a person, building up her self-esteem. His language was appropriate, and he quickly led her on to discover the truth.

Let us, like Jesus, be sensitive to the diverse cultural and social backgrounds of the people we are trying to reach. The woman in South India I mentioned earlier had listened to a simple tape, telling about clean water, and relating that to the teachings of Jesus. As a result, dysentery had dropped in the village from 35 to 15 percent, and within a few months, forty to fifty families were attending Bible studies and prayer meetings. Communication principles had been followed carefully, research been done, strategy worked out, holistic tapes produced, and communication technology was used effectively to proclaim the kingdom of God to the poor.

SACRIFICE AND COMMITMENT I

Sacrifice

Eva Burrows

Lausanne II was designed to lead us to a more effective evangelization of the whole world in obedience to Christ's Great Commission. Underlying this program are basic emphases on "urgency, sacrifice, and unity." In the preparatory material, I often noted such phrases as "the costliness of the task," "the demands of love," and "the total mission of sacrificial service."

We are simply and solemnly asking, "If the world is to be evangelized, if men and women of all nations are to be brought into the kingdom of God, what kind of sacrifice will be needed? What is the price to be paid? What will it cost us?"

The Cost of Identifying With Christ

There is no other place to begin our quest than at the cross of Christ, where by his sacrifice he became the Redeemer of the world. Sacrifice was the outstanding principle of Christ's fruitful life. Fruitfulness in evangelism will be ours in proportion to the degree the cross of Christ is operative in us. Christ taught this and lived it.

He taught it as a revolutionary spiritual principle as he spoke to the Greeks in Jerusalem during those final days before Calvary. He said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24, KJV).

The Greek outlook on life was very much that of the world today—seeking self-gratification, self-culture, and self-enjoyment. Jesus proclaimed that only as we die to self, renounce the self-centered life, can we experience the abundant life that produces a harvest for his kingdom. There was no other way for him than the way of the Cross. And we, the followers of a cross-bearing Savior, should not be cross-evading disciples.

The devil has always been aware of this law of spiritual harvest, that is why he often tried to convince Christ to avoid the Cross. That is why Satan tries to draw us back from commitment and sacrifice. But Christ, for the joy that was set before him—the joy of the spiritual harvest in millions of redeemed lives—endured the cross, bearing the shame.

His death, the one grain of wheat that died on Calvary, made possible the harvest of three thousand souls on the day of Pentecost a mere seven weeks later. The sacrifice of those early disciples produced the millions who give allegiance to Jesus Christ throughout the world today.

Sacrifice and commitment were the secret of the effectiveness of the greatest of all

Eva E. Burrows is General of the Salvation Army and a former missionary educator. She is a citizen of Australia.