

involvement with the media. It seems as though we cannot get near to it without being contaminated by the corrupt use of media by others.

### Let Us Now Collect Our Wits About Communications Technology

Let us recognize the media for what they are. They are primarily extension and reinforcement instruments; they can only take and extend what we have and what we are. And they can never be a suitable substitute for the church. With the exception of countries where access to the gospel is denied, our main media thrust has to be linked with our churches where the vertical side of communications is fostered in prayer and fellowship.

The challenge before us is to use these tools to express the life which can be found in God. We must help each other in this by sharing both our successes and failures. We must be willing to ask hard questions, otherwise we will be used by the media rather than using the media.

What are we saying to people through our publishing activities? We publish sixty-five thousand new titles on Christian subjects each year. Why are there so many? And why are there usually such small numbers of each title? Are we writing books which have interest to people outside of our immediate constituency?

What are we saying to people through our radio and TV programs? These tend to be an extension of the letter and the spirit of what we do. If that is vital, then our media will be vital. If it is of poor quality, undisciplined, and unprofessional, that will be extended also.

What are we saying to people through our use of traditional media, such as drama, dance, music, and fine arts? In some cases, our very silence is revealing. The church often swings between the two poles of acceptance and rejection of these media tools. Yet, these traditional media, perhaps more than any other, touch the heart of many cultures.

There is no disputing that today we have unparalleled opportunities through the use of media to touch the lives of many millions of people with the Good News of the gospel. But we must reject the simplistic perspective which views the building of transmitters or the printing of tracts as the magical way to reach the world for Christ.

We do indeed face a challenge today. We must work out our strategy together, not in isolation. Will we choose to mimic the methods and techniques the world offers us in media use? Or will we choose to begin with who we *are* and let that direct the quality of what we *do*.

If in this way, we collect our wits about communication technology, then we will have strong tools for evangelism which will complement, rather than compete, with the local church in its mission.

## COMMUNICATION AND EVANGELIZATION II

# Communication Technology and Its Impact on the World

Philemon Choi

The communication media are having a tremendous impact on the way people think and live, both for good and for evil. We need to understand this impact so we can fight the negative aspects and utilize the positive ones.

On September 11–15, 1988, a distinguished group of Christian communicators met in Wetzlar, West Germany, to consider the role played by the media in evangelism. They drafted an important “Consultation Statement on Media and Evangelism.”

In that Consultation Statement, the centrality of proclamation was stressed, and they emphasized that proclamation needs to be accompanied by presence. The dimension of incarnation was discussed at great length, and they concluded that without incarnation in some form, evangelism is impossible. Evangelism was looked at as a process, and by increasing the sensitivity to an audience, it was less likely that communicators would simply “unload” irrelevant and inappropriate messages or materials upon the audience. Finally, they cautioned that the dimension of worldviews was more than a concern for conflicts at the cognitive level; it involved the clash of competing powers, the conflict of the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light.

They went further than merely identifying these four dimensions of evangelism, and attempted to scrutinize them in terms of five key criteria:

- Faithfulness to Scripture
- Contribution to the local church
- Effectiveness—however it could be measured
- Integrity and openness
- Culture and artistic form

As a Christian communicator, I would like to express my gratitude to these fellow warriors for the Lord for laying down some crucial foundations as we study the role of communication technology in the evangelization of a rapidly changing world.

### Communication Technology and the Polarization of the World

Futurologists like Alvin Toffler and John Naisbitt vividly portray a world being ushered into the information era by modern technology. Most of these authors look at the world from the perspective of the first world, and they sometimes neglect the further

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polarization of the world in terms of economy, values, and lifestyles.

As we attempt to tackle the issue of the Christian response to communication technology and the polarization of the world, we are indebted to the studies of the futurologists and the writings of Christian leaders who have a futuristic outlook.

### The Haves and Have-nots

All futurologists are conscious of the "north/south economic inequality." Developments in modern technology make little contribution in terms of economic equality. In reality, there seems to be further polarization of the world into the "haves" and "have-nots." Communication technology, both in terms of hardware and software, is still the monopoly of the first world, that is why the most sophisticated media productions still come from the world economic powers: the United States of America and Japan. Some Asian countries have voiced their resentment towards such modern versions of imperialism in terms of American and Japanese cultures.

Christian organizations who can afford to use modern communication technology still cluster in the first world. As we attempt to proclaim Christ through the modern media (such as communication, satellites, videotapes, or discs), it is crucial that the "haves" involve the "have-nots" in the areas of strategizing, planning, production, and distribution. This would avoid the trap of insensitivity to culture, resulting in poor reception and even rejection.

When modern communication technology has its glamour and power in terms of touching millions at a time, we should not forget that in the Two-Thirds World, many people still consider radios a luxury, and videocassettes and laserdiscs are just myths. We cannot undermine the crucial role of the basic form of communication through the printed page. Yet, in China, two hundred million people are illiterate, so the printed page is meaningless to them. Still, there is no substitute for personal communications when we keep in mind the deprived situations of the "have-nots," which constitute a significant proportion of the unreached peoples in the world.

### The Global Village and Segmentalized Cultures

Since the term *global village* was coined, we have been under the impression that the entire world is within our reach. This is true in terms of transportation and communication technology. However, when we think about evangelism, we cannot define people as being reached merely by geographical proximity or accessibility of communication technology. There are other barriers to evangelism that we have to overcome such as racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, political, and ethical. We have a paradoxical situation: the people of the world are closer than ever before, yet are more alienated at the same time. We can think in terms of global economics and global politics, but we cannot assume the emergence of a global culture.

With the coming of "the third wave," people's consumer habits tend to be more segmentalized and individualized. Members of the same family view different television programs through cable networks or via satellites. The "pop cultures" of the seventies and eighties are gradually being replaced by the "segmentalized cultures" of the nineties. While mass media still has a role in reaching millions through common denominators, we have to be aware of the trend towards segmentalized media, group media, and even individualized media (each person can read his individualized edition of newspaper each day).

We are deceiving ourselves if we think the task of world evangelization is simplified because of the advancement of communication technology. Statistically, it may be

impressive to claim we have proclaimed Christ through the satellite to so many nations and so many millions of people. But are we really communicating, are we being understood correctly? We should not refrain from using communication tools to help us reach millions at a time, but we should also attempt to understand each segmentalized culture carefully in order to bridge the invisible gaps of communication. This cannot be accomplished by a few communication specialists, we need the input of anthropologists, sociologists, theologians, missiologists, and above all, people that live among that particular culture. No wonder Jesus did not communicate the gospel through the trumpets of the angels from the clouds, he chose to live among men in flesh and blood.

As Christian communicators of the gospel, we have to be willing to live among other people. We cannot forget the fact that there are many different peoples in the same global village.

### Multiple Option and Real Choice

John Naisbitt identified one of the world trends as the "either/or—multiple option." Modern communication technology has promised the media-consumers a wide range of options. The cable network can easily transmit forty channels of television programs to a household, and the same family can pick up several hundred international television broadcasts via satellites.

However, some TV viewers find there is no real choice among the eye-dazzling parade of options. The television producers only provide them with more of the same. In Hong Kong, for example, the newspaper stands offer the option of over sixty newspapers and over four hundred magazines, radio broadcasters offer their programs through wire channels, and there are four channels for television broadcast. The coming cable network promises to deliver up to forty channels of television programs to the subscribers. In this ocean of mass communication, a Christian presence has been hardly visible until recent years.

The church in Hong Kong has gradually risen to the challenge of communicating the Christian message to the non-Christian world through the mass media. Christian magazines and books are beginning to appear in the newspaper stands and chain stores, and Christian journalists and broadcasters are beginning to make their impact felt through the print media as well as electronic media. The Christian voice is finally being heard outside the four walls of the churches.

Because we are aware of the impact of the media on the way people think and live, we are convinced that the gospel does offer a true alternative, a real choice—the church as a whole cannot afford to give up this strategic battlefield. This implies greater commitment in terms of human and financial resources, training a high caliber of professionals with the ability to master modern communication technology and marketing skills, and production and distribution of good quality media products which can stand the test of the highly competitive secular market.

If we are not willing to pay the price to offer the people a real choice in the midst of multiple options promised by communication technology, then the task of evangelization will be made doubly hard as we present the gospel to them through other means. Evangelism does not take place in a cultural vacuum, the cultural mandate and the evangelistic mandate cannot be dichotomized.

### Information and Insight

In the information age, people will be flooded with information, resulting in information overload and indigestion. The picture is not merely one of information

explosion, there will be information confusion and pollution.

David McKenna proposed a Christian response, a *megatruth*, which he defines as “the application of the unchanging Word of God to the new and changing information through the work of the discerning Spirit of Truth.” People are not satisfied with information alone, they thirst for insight, and megatruth implies that Christians should be able to offer insight by his Spirit.

In the information era, we cannot reduce the task of evangelization to a simple formula, and attempt to present the gospel to everyone in the world in a simplistic form. God’s truth has the power to penetrate the barriers of all forms of human knowledge. This is far more complicated than the mastery of communication technology—it involves the integrated efforts of theologians, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, economists, and lawyers. The day of monopoly of truth by any single discipline is gone. New insights are possible through multi-disciplinary studies, with the Word of God as the basic foundation, and the Holy Spirit as the guiding light.

In the information age, apologetics and evangelism take on new dimensions and reach new heights. With the help of communication technology, the task of proclamation can reach a much wider scope. However, we have to remember that breadth is no substitute for depth.

### High Tech and High Touch

Another megatrend identified by John Naisbitt is, “The more high technology around us, the more the need for human touch.”

Communication technology is most deceptive in this area. By means of manipulation of the audience’s emotions, through the charisma of the performer, and assisted by all kinds of interactive forms, the media can give the consumer a sensation of intimate touch. However, this “pseudotouch” evaporates once the television is turned off, or at the moment you walk out of the cinema hall.

Some Christian communicators are trapped in the game of pseudotouch. The tears of a TV evangelist is no substitute for weeping with the wounded, and the “electronic church” is no substitute for true Christian community life.

Communication through mass media has the strength of offering information and insight to a large audience. It can arouse interest, challenge the mind, and even lead to decision. At the same time, we have to acknowledge the limitations of the communication technology. It cannot offer genuine human touch. Personal communication is more effective in terms of persuasion, decision, and individual problem-solving. There is no real relationship except through real-life interaction.

There is a great need to integrate mass communication and interpersonal communication in the realm of evangelism. High-tech and high-touch should not be mutually exclusive; they complement one another. Christian media organizations need to work closely with the local churches, so each can capitalize on the strength of the other. United in Christ, we can offer a genuine Christian touch to an increasingly technological world.

### Eros Defiled and Redeemed Sexuality

John Stott has identified sexuality as an important contemporary issue. John White has defined the problem as “eros defiled.” James Dobson has championed the Christian cause in the battle against widespread hard and soft pornography. With the progress in communication technology and the deregulation of media censorship, it is impossible to stop the wildfire of pornography, which has spread worldwide.

Perversion of human sexuality has become a major cause of the disintegration of

families, the breakdown of entire cultures, and the corruption of the human soul. Adolescents are deceived by the deceptive sense of intimacy, and adults are addicted to the pursuit of ecstasy.

Christians have been playing the role of police in this whole area of pornography. Efforts in the study of the theology of sexuality are very scarce, and comparatively little is being done in the area of public sex education. As police, Christians play the role of social conscience. If Christians can be more actively involved in sex education, utilizing the modern communication technology, we can offer redemptive measures in the area of human sexuality.

Evangelism involves the redemption of the whole man. There are born-again Christians who need to be redeemed in the area of sexuality. Christian communicators cannot afford to neglect this dimension of the human soul.

### Pseudospirituality and True Spirituality

God is Spirit, and man created in his image has an ultimate need which can only be met by a true spiritual encounter with God.

Evangelism is a spiritual battle, which involves encounter with powers and principalities. In recent years, the New Age movement and various religions are using communication technology to promote their cause, and they attempt to offer the audiences all forms of counterfeit spiritual experiences. The pursuit of the occult and all kinds of pseudospirituality has become a worldwide phenomenon.

This is an age that demands spiritual insight and discernment. We need to expose the deceptiveness of the spiritual counterfeits, and we have to avoid falling into the trap of offering pseudospiritual experiences through the mass media. Such experiences may amount to nothing more than manipulation of emotions. In a positive way, the communication technology can be used to point the audience to the only true Way. This requires qualities in the communicator which go beyond techniques. The spirituality of the Christian communicator is far more important than his communication skills. We cannot underestimate the power of communication technology. It changes the patterns of our thinking and living.

When used properly in the hands of truly spiritual Christian communicators, communication technology can be effective tools as we endeavor to fulfill the cultural and evangelistic mandates.

We cannot overemphasize the centrality of incarnation: Christian communicators have to live among the people they attempt to reach, and Christian media productions have to penetrate the secular market in order to offer people a real choice. In our attempt to fulfill the Great Commission, we need to recognize the complementary roles of mass communication and interpersonal communications. There is an urgent need for parachurch media organizations to join hands with the local churches on this strategic battlefield!