

# 6.9 Issues in Media and the Christian Response

## Aim

- To identify the main issues in modern media and the Gospel's stand on these issues
- To discover ways of incarnating the Kingdom of God in a media dominated world

## Materials Required

- A copy of the Bible
- A critical appraisal of media productions: Radio, Print (Newspaper Magazines, Journals), news, features and articles, radio and TV programs, cinema and theatre, commercial films (videos), Internet sites and their context.

## Procedure

- Divide communication outlets among the groups in the class. Each group is to take one prevailing dominating theme in the assigned media and contrast it with the Gospel and Christian message

## Input

- a) Understanding Communication:

### Print Media

#### i. Newspapers

- They are historically traced to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and published daily or weekly. A newspaper is characterized by actuality i.e. presentation of the news and events of the day, by periodicity, i.e. available in the shortest time and interval possible (that is why some have two or three editions a day) and by universality of content and access i.e., it covers the important aspects of human life: politics, education, business (economic and markets), sports, leisure and entertainment. Its accessibility is in the area of pricing. It is affordable to many. They can be concentrated in a specific discipline like sports, business or religion. However, some pages may be devoted to other related areas. E.g. a sports daily can carry some articles on politics or economics that affect sports. They go for sensation, gossip, scandal, etc. which are presented in bold and large headlines. The philosophy of some newspapers make them either pro or anti-Christianity and this determines their allegiance or opposition to the Good News.

#### ii. Magazines

- These are published on a periodic basis, i.e. weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. Their content is limited or specialized to one or a few areas of concern. They are more in depth in presentations, unlike newspapers which are more cursory in writing. Their content lasts longer than the newspapers. They come as inserts in newspapers or on their own. Much emphasis is put on layout to make it attractive. The material is also more durable than newspapers. In addition, they convey sensations, going into nitty-gritty details. Mostly they are found in the fashion, entertainment and sports categories and offer a strong alternative attraction from the gospel.

#### iii. Journals

- These are serious academic and professional magazines concentrating on a particular field of human endeavour. They carry serious and well researched articles and are very educational in their content. Examples include Medical, Law and Philosophical Journals.

#### iv. Leaflets

- These are one page publications concentrating on a singular theme. It may be an advertisement of a programme or event, information about a product, service, person or persuasion, in favour of or against a product, service or person. They are very brief in content and attractive in appeal and only go into necessary details with bold headlines. Their duration is short, and they are meant to induce immediate response.

#### v. Bulletins

- These are mediums used by institutions and organisations for information dissemination. They are brief accounts or statements of news or events.

## B Electronic Media

### i. Radio

- This is a system of communication using electromagnetic waves propagated through space. The term 'radio' is applied to sound broadcasting in general. Now commonly available on FM, they are advantageous for countries with both low and high literacy



rates, especially as an alternative to reading. Radio can give news immediately, without going through the complications of newspaper production. It attracts the masses, travelling through the airwaves. There is therefore no need for a physical means of transportation.

In most African cities, towns and villages, FM radios are prevalent and are major sources of information and entertainment. There are radio stations in various languages and cover various disciplines of life: politics, economics (markets and currencies), fashion, entertainment, religion, weather, music and many other interesting features. Interesting features like talks, commentaries, interviews, magazine, drama, and phone-in shows are examples of some radio productions.

## **ii. TV**

TV is a system of mass communication involving the transmission of images and sounds to distant screens, by electronic means over electric or fibre-optic transmission lines or by electromagnetic radiation (radio waves). In TV, the visual element is very central. More than being audio, it is prominently visual, with the ability to combine both. It also has mass appeal, being able to reach a large number of people, over long distances. TV stations specialize in particular human disciplines such as: Sports, Religion, Fashion, News etc.

The main feature that attracts masses to TV in most African countries is the news and to a large extent the soap operas. Football is another attraction. Some of these soap operas have sex, violence and drugs as their themes, though some of them are educative and inspiring. Since there is choice from a variety of free channels, the problem then is which channel to tune into. Will it be the religious or the fashion channel or the sports one?

## **iii. Music**

Music is an art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, and colour. In most traditional societies, music is a powerful means of communication. There are songs for all occasions, played and sung on traditional instruments. Traditional songs were a means of inculcating and communicating values and norms. Today, they are used as an alternative media especially in societies with low literacy rates.

In this vein, Christian songs (hymns) go along the same line of traditional music, meant to communicate the mystery of our salvation. However, with secular music production, and music videos, things have taken a different turn. The language, lyrics and pictures portrayed in this secular music sometimes leave little to be desired and run contrary to the gospel message.

## **iv Theatre/Plays/Drama**

This is one dying area of communication in Africa. In the traditional context, drama and theatre were the medium of cultural heritage and societal formation. Values, norms and expected behaviour were passed on through the medium of plays and drama. Dances, poetry, prose, drumming, folklores and tales are fundamental modes of transmission of societal values. These are done mostly during festivals and prominent occasions.

Plays and drama of high African cultural quality were produced in the years after independence in many countries of Africa. There were also quality novels written about African culture and some of these were used as textbooks in schools and colleges.

Plays and drama are very important tools of church communication, especially in Africa, where illiteracy is a problem in some areas.

These values and customs are finding their way into videos. But the effect is not the same, especially when they have to be modified to fit a script.

## **v. Cinema/Video/Film**

African cinema which was born only thirty years ago, has produced some first-rate film-makers and films which rank with the great classics of world cinema. But although cinema is important in the eyes of connoisseurs and film buffs, it is still relatively unknown to a wider audience, whether at home or abroad, since it has developed in isolation, virtually without help from the outside world, sure of its inspiration, its strength and its rights. For this very reason, despite the crisis affecting the film world everywhere, African cinema today is indispensable, because its aesthetic, its themes and its symbols are like an influx of new blood. African film-making carries within itself the seeds of a renewal of cinematographic language. Apart from the similarity between the latter and African storytelling, African civilization possesses another feature which links it with the language of film: the fact that the imaginary and the real are placed on an equal footing. There is a strong similarity between African stories and the language of film. In Africa, modernity and tradition seem incompatible, more so than anywhere else. African cinema is striving to find a point of convergence between these two types of societies. This is true, above all, of the first generation of African film-makers. African cinema uses the tradition/modernity dichotomy to illustrate political issues as well as cultural and psychological themes.

This opposition between the modern world and the world of the ancestors is a constantly recurring theme in the works of two of the founding fathers of African cinema, Ousmane Sembene, from Senegal, who is also a novelist. Ousmane,

aware of the cultural and political role that any creative artist has a duty to assume in society, became a film director for the better part to attain his chosen objectives. He very quickly realized that, in Africa, films reached a wider audience than literature. His films, like his books, take a shrewd look at the past and present attitudes of the peoples of Africa. With rare courage and lucidity, this man strives through his work to denounce vacillating, cowardly or ineffectual behaviour on the part of those who are motivated by greed for profit and glory, masquerading as religious faithful and respectors for tradition. Conversely, women and the younger generation are bearers of the hope that someday a fine, strong African society will emerge.

Whereas for Sembene the two cultures, traditional and modern, must blend into a single culture in order to eliminate both the ignorance behind a blind respect for tradition and the powerlessness that is often engendered by a false concept of modernity, Oumarou Ganda a film producer from Niger made a painful choice in favour of village life.

However, he was well aware that village life cannot remain set apart from economic and cultural developments. His analysis therefore coincides to some extent with that of Ousmane Sembene.

The film director, novelist, playwright and producer, the Nigerian Ola Balogun, trained in Paris epitomes the second generation of film-makers who have won international recognition for African cinema. In fact, Nigerian movies have flooded all the corners of the world, to the extent that they are equated to African movie, i.e. when one talks of African movie, it is really a Nigerian movie they are talking about

Some of these videos promote ideas contrary to the gospel, namely, violence, pornography, aggressiveness for material wealth, drugs and prostitution. They pose challenges to the churches' communication and even the use of videos and films.

Church communication through videos and films has improved a lot throughout the years. Many dioceses and religious congregations have video producing houses and they come out with excellent productions. Some however, are facing managerial and financial problems.

#### **vi. Internet**

The internet is a collection of computer networks that operate to common standards and enable the computers and the programs they run to communicate directly. Each connected computer—called an Internet host—is provided with a unique Internet Protocol (IP) address—198.105.232.1, for example. For obvious reasons, the IP address has become known as the “dot address” of a computer. Although very simple and effective for network operation, dot addresses are not very user-friendly. Hence the introduction of the Domain Name System (DNS) that allows for the assignment of meaningful or memorable names to numbers. DNS allows Internet hosts to be organized around domain names: for example, “toshiba.com” is a domain assigned to the Toshiba Corporation, with the suffix “com” signifying a commercial organization

The suffix .com is called a generic top-level domain name, and before 2001 there were just three of these (.com, .net, and .org), with .edu and .gov restricted to educational institutions and government agencies respectively. As a result of the rapid growth in Internet use, seven new top-level domain names have been prepared for use, some by specific sectors (.aero, .coop, and .museum) and some for general use (.biz, .info, .pro, and .name). All these were possible due to the establishment of the World Wide Web (WWW) in mid-1995 as the easier-to-use multimedia portion of the Internet to bring it closer to the mainstream. The WWW in turn has offered immense access to seemingly limitless information and data and unprecedented possibilities for interactivity.

Many encounters and information are available on this digital communication media. It is the fastest growing media, where information and data are available and transferred at supersonic speed. There are websites for all sorts of disciplines of human endeavour. Websites are mostly for interaction and information.

The Internet, though being a good tool for Gospel communication, also poses a great challenge to the Gospel. In this media is found pornography, violence, drugs and other immoralities. These issues run very contrary to the Gospel and therefore there is need for education on the use of the Internet.

The Gospel is announced in this media as well. There are many sites that provide Bible studies, Bible groups and other Christian enterprises. Internet services are mostly an urban reality, with the culture of cafes having sunk in with many youths in African cities and towns. However, colleges and universities have internet facilities at a cheaper rate making it more accessible to both students and lecturers.

## **Review**

1. A newspaper is characterized by actuality i.e. presentation of the news and events of the day, by periodicity, i.e. available in the shortest time and interval possible (that is why some have two or three editions a day) and by universality of content and access i.e., it covers the important aspects of human life: politics, education, business (economic and markets), sports, leisure and entertainment.
2. TV is a system of mass communication involving the transmission of images and sounds to distant screens, by



electronic means over electric or fibre-optic transmission lines or by electromagnetic radiation (radio waves).

3. Music is an art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, and colour.
4. The traditional context, drama and theatre were the medium of cultural heritage and societal formation. Values, norms and expected behaviour were passed on through the medium of plays and drama.
5. African cinema which was born only thirty years ago, has produced some first-rate film-makers and films which rank with the great classics of world cinema. But although cinema is important in the eyes of connoisseurs and film buffs, it is still relatively unknown to a wider audience, whether at home or abroad, since it has developed in isolation, virtually without help from the outside world, sure of its inspiration, its strength and its rights.
6. The internet is a collection of computer networks that operate to common standards and enable the computers and the programs they run to communicate directly.

## Reflection

‘The Internet, though being a good tool for Gospel communication, also poses a great challenge to the Gospel.’ Write a 2 page reflection on this statement.

## Relevant Skills

Identify the major obstacles that the mass media pose to the Church. In what ways can their effects be counteracted by the Church?

## Resources

Franz-Joseph Eilers, svd. *Communicating in Ministry and Mission*. India: ATC, 2004