

7.3 Communication and Culture

Aim

- ☉ To understand how media culture originated
- ☉ To become aware of how culture helps communication

Materials Required

- ☉ Magazine/Newspaper article,
- ☉ Newspaper/Magazine news item
- ☉ Newspaper/Magazine advertisement
- ☉ TV/Radio advertisement

Procedure

Part I: The participants give their contribution on the following:

1. What is culture?
2. How is media culture born?
3. Discuss the reasons for declining interests in traditional media among contemporary youth.

Part II: Let students/participants form groups of 4-5 and discuss the impact of modern means of communication on African culture. They will take one popular programme or feature in the following media: Newspaper, Magazine, Radio, TV and Movie (Cinema) and critically assess its impact on traditional African culture. Their assessment could be presented to the whole class.

Input

Culture

Culture is one of the most developed words that is so diverse that it defies definition because of the limitations that accompany every definition. However in the field of communication, this definition by George Gerberner suffices. He refers to culture as ‘that system of messages and images which regulates social relationship... it is that symbolic organization which socializes us and cultivates our fantasies about a world we do not experience directly.’

In this definition, the communication elements of messages and images are the focus of culture. It is through communication, of these messages directly and indirectly and images that makes our socialization possible.

In traditional African context, this systematic symbolization organization which makes us part of the society is done through the rites of passage at various stages of the individual.

If culture makes our socialization possible, then culture creates a society. That is why culture in the same communication framework is totality of all the expressions of a people: art, technology, education, politics, religion, economy, media and all symbolic institutions. It is the total non-biologically transmitted heritage of human beings.

Culture Communication

It is the communication process by which we are socialized or ‘culturalised’ in a specific culture. This process involves imbibing beliefs and habits, behaviour and rituals transmitted to us by that culture, directly or indirectly; verbally or non-verbally. This shapes us in our adult life. Thus we can talk of human beings as culture-shaped and culture-transmitting beings. We are not only shaped by and participate in the transmission of our culture, we also influence it and contribute to its reshaping.

This transmission and reshaping of culture is carried out by us through the symbolic organisation of messages, images, behaviour, roles and norms. Thus communication is very central to culture. Without it, a culture dies. It is communication that shapes public opinion, creates a sense of belonging with common ways of thinking, feeling and behaving.

Impact of Cultural Communication

Positive Impact

As a vehicle of change, cultural communication can positively affect cultural revolution in terms of thinking, feelings and behaviour of people. In this way, mass



media (radio, TV, movie) plays a major transforming role in behaviour change.

Sharing

Let the class discuss a situation of a mass media outlet used to bring out a positive cultural change in the area of behaviour and action.

Negative Impact

Cultural communication, because it permeates the very core of culture, can be used as a means of fuelling tensions, strife and tribal clashes. Mass media (Radio, leaflets, TV) have been used to bring about these.

Sharing

Let the class discuss an example of a mass media (radio, leaflets, TV) used to fuel ethnic clashes.

Due to the mass influence of cultural communication, these communications are able to transcend individual cultures and create a global culture.

Intercultural Communication

Culture is purely individualised. Each human being is born into a particular socio-cultural context and this gives us a multiplicity of cultures. In its multiple forms, each culture differs from the other, but the mass form of this communication makes interaction or encounter with another culture possible. Thus each culture is shaped and influenced by other cultures. The communication that takes place between people of two different cultures in the area of their beliefs, values or norms is called Intercultural communication. From one cultural perception, some things could be 'natural' e.g. it is natural to greet by shaking hands. But is this really natural? We will only know this when we encounter other cultures where it is natural to greet by waving.

This interaction, communication between cultures, should avoid superiority and ethnocentrism. Superiority prevails when one considers their culture as more 'advanced' or 'civilized', and the other 'inferior' and 'primitive'. Ethnocentrism, in the same vein, is to view other people's culture from one's own cultural glasses.

For proper intercultural communication to prevail, there must be what anthropologists call 'cultural validity'. Cultural validity stipulates that an observer should take pains to evaluate a culture first in terms of its own values, goals and norms before proceeding to compare it (positively or negatively) with any other culture. Intercultural communication should therefore comprise the processes of enculturation, acculturation and inculturation.

Enculturation is the process whereby individuals learn their group's culture, through experience, observation and instruction. This is a pre-requisite for intercultural communication, because one cannot communicate effectively with another culture if they do not know or are not sufficiently grounded in their own culture. They will have nothing to contribute in this relationship and the whole dialogue of communication will turn to be one sided.

Acculturation is the fruit of genuine intercultural communication, where continuous contact between two or more cultures causes cultural change. As a result of the contact with other cultures, a culture is modified and enriched.

Inculturation is incarnating the Gospel message in a particular culture. It is commonly used in Africa, to talk of theology, liturgy, ecclesiology and even communication, where use has to be made of the traditional medium of communication for the Gospel. Here the African culture is the starting point. It is this culture that will receive Christ's message and pose their own question in the light of their own experience. Then they will give their action plan in the light of Christ's message. Inculturation seems to be limited only to theology and liturgy, but in the area of catechesis and evangelization, African cultural elements need to be taken into consideration.

Types of Cultures and Church Communication

It is important to identify the main types of cultures in order for us to know how Church communication must proceed. We group cultures according to their outlook on certain human features. Basically we have two groups, the societal and individualistic oriented types.

The societal oriented culture has two sub-cultures, that of the elders and adults which is basically for continuity and safeguarding of norms and the youth who are swayed and identified by peer pressure.

When we come to the urban, individualistic oriented culture, we see the sub-cultures of objectivity, where there is a conscious effort to belong and act together and the subjectivity, where the individual listens to the self more.

In the following table, we present their views on certain prominent aspects of human life. This table is adapted from the sociological analysis of cultures by David Hesselgrave. The classification cannot be said to be exclusive. There is interaction between the sub-cultures and they influence each other. Therefore, the classifications should be viewed as open to other influences from the other groups. All the same, for church communicators, we cannot ignore the contexts and exigencies of culture. We should have a working framework where we are able to distinguish cultures and even

subcultures. This will enable us tailor the Gospel message according to the tastes and expectations of the said group.

TYPES OF CULTURES				
ASPECT	SOCIETAL ORIENTED		INDIVIDUALIST ORIENTED	
	ADULTS	YOUTHS	SUBJECTIVITY	OBJECTIVITY
1 Values	Traditional: How it has always been	Popular: What everybody is doing	Intuitional: What the evidence shows	Lawful: What is written
2. Models	Great people of the tribe/clan	Good guys and gals of the gang or club	Gurus and tycoons	Lawmakers and prophets
3. Media	Myths and legends	Interviews and opinion polls	Reports of success stories	Law books and sermons
4. Family	Prominent, promoted and extended	Seen as authority and obstacle	Undesirable and avoided	Restricted to the parent-child relationship
5. Attainment of Goal	Harmony through the will of the ancestors	Conformance to the expectations of peers for acceptance	Identity to and from the inner self	Obedience to the law for reconciliation
6. Avoidance of Goal	Shame of dishonouring the ancestors	Shame of disappointing the peer group	Guilt of not following personal vision	Guilt of disobeying the law.
7. Change	Threat to security,	Novelty and appreciated	Encourage it, progress and innovation	Should be institutional and approved

Sharing

Students/Participants can take these classifications and analyse the characteristics given with particular references to cultures that fit the description.

Review

1. Culture is ‘that system of messages and images which regulates social relationship... it is that symbolic organization which socializes us and cultivates our fantasies about a world we do not experience directly.’
2. Culture Communication is the communication process by which we are socialized or ‘culturalised’ in a specific culture. This process involves imbibing beliefs and habits, behaviour and rituals transmitted to us by that culture, directly or indirectly; verbally or non-verbally.
3. For proper intercultural communication to prevail, there must be ‘cultural validity’.
4. Each culture differs from the other, but the mass form of communication makes interaction or encounter with another culture possible.
5. This interaction, communication between cultures, should avoid superiority and ethnocentrism.
6. Enculturation is the process whereby individuals learn their group’s culture, through experience, observation and instruction.
7. Acculturation is the fruit of genuine intercultural communication, where continuous contact between two or more cultures causes cultural change.
8. Inculturation is incarnating the Gospel message in a particular culture.
9. It is important to identify the main types of cultures in order for us to know how Church communication must proceed.

Reflection

In what ways have you practiced ethnocentrism in the past? Resolve to be humble and tolerant of other cultures.

Relevant Skills

As an apostle of Jesus Christ, undertake cultural validity for the community you are entrusted to shepherd spiritually and use the information you’ve acquired to better minister to your flock.

Resources

Laurenti Magesa. Rethinking Mission. Kenya: AMECEA Craba Publications, 2006

