RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication

ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

iii

THE SPIRITUALITY OF TOLERANCE: EMINENT MUSLIMS IN THEIR ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANITY

Henry Francis B. Espiritu[1]

And nearest among them in love to the believers
wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians":
because among these are men devoted to learning
and men who have renounced the world,
and they are not arrogant
(Al-Qur-an, Surah Maidah: 82).

Say: I believe in the Book which Allah has sent down;
and I am commanded to judge justly between you.
Allah is our Lord and your Lord:
for us is (the responsibility for) our deeds, and for you, your deeds.
There is no contention between us and you.
Allah will bring us together,
and to Him is our Final Goal
(Surah Shuraa: 15).

Introduction

The current expansion in mass media communication reveals more evidently that our world contains variety of cultures, races, religions, and ideologies. Despite globalization and its attendant efforts towards homogeneity, ours is still a pluralist world. As such, tolerance is a foundational notion and a very relevant conceptual and practical prerequisite

[1] Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu is an Assistant Professor VII in Philosophy at the University of the Philippines-Cebu College. He is a Ph.D Candidate in Philosophy at the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU). He obtained his Master of Arts (M.A.) in Philosophy from the University of the Philippines (UP)-Diliman Campus and his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Political Science (Cum Laude) from the University of the Philippines PhiliPhilippines (UP)-Cebu. He is a convert to Islam; and his Islamic name is Abdil Ghaffar.

in establishing a pluralistic society. In pluralism's point of view, people living in a society with varied religious, cultural, and ideological commitments should enjoy equal rights and should not sacrifice their beliefs at the mercy of the hegemonic ideology of a particular State or of the dominant religion of the majority community. In our highly globalized world, tolerance and amity are all the more needed for the survival, cohesion, and progress of its citizens.

The contemporary mass media portray Islamic societies to be intolerant of other's religious and ideological persuasions. The purpose of this paper is not to examine whether the contemporary media is right or wrong in perceiving Islamic societies as intolerant. My aim in this essay is to show that authentic Islam as contained in the pristine revelation of the Qur-an, promotes tolerance, harmony, and goodwill of all peoples despite their differences. In this paper, I want to reflect straight from the original source of Islamic tenets (i.e., the Qur-an) the tolerant attitude of Islam vis-a-vis religious, cultural, and ideological diversities found in human societies. Likewise, I will endeavor to show some thematic framework found in selected passages of the Qur-an that encourage tolerance and societal concord. Side by side with my exposition of authentic Islam's framework of tolerance, I will provide several historical instantiations of this "spirituality of tolerance" in the lives of selected Muslim servants and revered Islamic personalities of various epochs in their encounter with Christians.

I sincerely hope that by showing the tolerant and pluralistic pronouncements of the Qur-an, and the historical instantiations of tolerance manifested in the exemplary lives of these prominent Muslims as they relate with Christians, I will be able to encourage Muslims to fully practice and live-out the Islamic mandates of amity and inter-religious understanding in their daily lives. Likewise, I further hope that in this essay, I will be able to inform non-Muslims that genuine Islam as contained in the Qur-anic revelation, in the model conduct of the Prophet, and in the exemplary lives of pious Muslim personages is a very tolerant religion that acknowledges and respects the divergent beliefs and ideological views of others.

Spirituality of Tolerance: Philosophical, Metaphysical, and Mystical Presuppositions

Firstly, let me briefly explicate my own conceptual framework and philosophical presuppositions in understanding tolerance. Tolerance presupposes plurality and diversity of identities. Pluralism further presupposes alterity or otherness, since diversity entails variety of identities and plurality of existing values. The opposite of pluralism is hegemony where one particular value is imposed and where there is an enforced totalization of expressions of life to make human values comply to a uniformed worldview and a set praxis. Now, tolerance can only exist in a pluralistic framework since pluralism celebrates in the difference of the "other". Tolerance is a very important ethical value in the face of the alterity of the "other". Tolerance therefore presupposes an "other" since without an "other", there is nothing to tolerate at all. In hegemony, however, the "other" is swallowed and annihilated by the sheer imposition of uniformity and forcible totalization. Thus, with the absence of the "other" in a hegemony, tolerance will also be non-existent—this is why all totalitarian and hegemonic societies are most intolerant of differences and dissenting views.

Secondly, I will likewise explain why I consider tolerance as spirituality. A person who can tolerate the "other" is able to see the unitive Source who permits and wills these various differences and diversities as found in the world. This unitive Bond that permeates all diverse phenomena of creation and transcends multiplicities—the mystics termed, "the One God". In the words of the Holy Qur-an: "And your God and our God is One. There is no god but Him, the Merciful, the Compassionate... There is no contention between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and to Him is our Final Goal (Surah Baqara: 163; Surah Shuraa: 15)". Therefore— for the Qur-an—God is both the Ultimate Source of these diversities and the Essential End of all varied cosmic entities. Spirituality or mysticism acknowledges God as the unifying Connectivity that deeply binds the whole of creation to Himself despite their apparent differences and multiplicities. Muslim and Christian mystics are well able to tolerate religious differences because in their inner beings, these mystics see the vision of the One, and this unitive vision enabled them to go beyond creedal and dogmatic differences. It is by this divine grace of an all-inclusive vision of the One that enables saints and mystics to tolerate the "otherness" of the other.[2]

[2] See Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam*. London: Mandala Books. 1964; pp. 13-18.

Tolerance in dealing with others, particularly the religious "other" is spirituality because by tolerating differences, one acknowledges the divine Wisdom of God who wills that these differences be made manifest. By reflecting on this ineffable theological tension regarding the plurality or diversity of God's creation and the essential oneness of creation in the Being of God, mystics of all religious traditions appreciate the mystery and spirituality of tolerance; an unfathomable and sympathetic understanding that is holistically related to a consciousness of divine unity manifesting in and through diversity. Tolerance permits us to experience the sympathetic feeling of divine inter-connectedness among diverse creatures in the divine immanence of the Creator who permits these differences.

My own prayerful reflections evidently reveal to me that authentic Islam, i.e., the Islam as expressed in the pristine pages of the *Qur-an* and in the exemplary conduct set forth by Prophet Muhammad—in contrast with the rigid and hegemonic "Islam" as interpreted by "extremist" exegeses or "fundamentalist" hermeneutics—clearly advocates pluralism and encourages tolerance in its relationship with the religious "other". In the next subsections, we will examine how the *Qur-anic* understanding of pluralism is intimately connected to the spirituality of tolerance. We will also see how the *Qur-anic* discourse of tolerance is practically exemplified in the lives of selected Muslim saints in their encounter and dialogue with Christians.

The Qur-anic View of Pluralism and Its Relevance to an Islamic Understanding of Tolerance

The *Qur-an* is fully conscious of the pluralistic nature of human societies. Many Qur-anic passages describe the diverse expressions of life as found in human communities. Pluralism is therefore a fact which the *Qur-an* accepts as the basic reality of our human existence.

The *Qur-an* says:
> To each among you, We have prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but His Plan is to test you in what He has given you, so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah. It is He that will show you the Truth of the matters in which you dispute.[3]

---
[3] Surah Maida:48; Abdullah Yusuf Ali Translation of the Holy Qur-an. Istanbul: Asir Ajans, 2005.

The above passage is a very decisive proclamation supporting tolerance. The verse fully points out the pluralistic condition of humankind. The passage admits to the existence of societal and religious diversity characterizing human communities when it declares; "to each among you, we have prescribed a law and an open way".

Notice that this verse says that our pluralistic situation is something that is willed and permitted by God to test human communities so that each community will vie with each other in doing good deeds.

It further says :
> "If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but His Plan is to test you in what He has given you, so strive as in a race in all virtues". Surah Maida:48.

It is likewise a very relevant verse in understanding the nature of Islamic tolerance. If God willed that this world contains socio-cultural and religious diversities (when He could have made the world a "single people"), and if God himself has a divine reason for allowing these diversities (so that each society will "strive as in a race in all virtues"); then humankind should strive to accept, tolerate, and appreciate the fact of our pluralistic world.

Good Will, Courtesy, and Mutual Respect: The Basic Ethical Pillars of Qur-anic Tolerance

Maulana Muhammad Ali *(circa 1879-1951)*, was an eminent Pakistani scholar of *Qur-anic* and *Hadith* exegesis. He authored a voluminous book of *Qur-anic* exegesis, Bayan-e *Qur*-an and a commentary of the Prophetic Traditions, entitled, *The Manual of Hadith*. Maulana.

Muhammad Ali strove to present Islam as a rational, tolerant, and forward-looking religion during the era of the British rule of the then undivided India. In this period of the British Raj, various Christian missionary groups representing different denominations compete for the conversion of Indians to Christianity. Seeing the zeal of these missionaries, Maulana Muhammad Ali began to reflect on the state of the Muslims in

India; he re-evaluated the Indian appropriation of Islamic tenets and found out that the Muslims in India were enveloped with customs which were thought to be Islamic, but in reality, were products of obscurantism, and therefore devoid of Islamic significance. Maulana Muhammad Ali likewise engaged the Christian missionaries in a friendly dialogue to clarify common misconceptions of Islam.

His scholarly book, The Religion of Islam, which was the result of these dialogic exchanges, show a very rational explication of Islam; at the same time fully cognizant of the Christian missionaries' objections against Islam by responding to these objections using the *Qur-an* and Sunnah as bases of clarification. In all his writings, one can admire the profound respect that Maulana Muhammad Ali accorded to his interlocutors, both Christians and Muslims. I will quote from his Urdu commentary of the Holy *Qur-an* on the necessity of courtesy (adab), good will (ahsan), and respect (izzat) in dialoguing with others. Commenting on the Qur-anic ayah (verse): "Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner" (Surah Nahl:125), Maulana Muhammad Ali had this to say:

> Remember, if we desire to establish communication with other religions and their followers, the first pre-requisite is good will (ahsan). We need good will because we have to be reminded that followers of other religions desire for our own good when they want to convert us. And we too, desire for their own good when we invite them to Islam. Everyone sincerely believes that his or her respective tenet is the truth. Thus, keeping in mind that every religion desires salvation, the Holy Book requires us to conduct our concourse with others in the best manner of etiquette (adab). In his inner heart, the other person who communicates to us his religion thinks that he is doing an act of piety.

In Surah Ankabut:46, the Word of Allah reiterates its exhortation to concourse with the People of the Book, in the attitude of respect and courtesy, when it says:
"And argue not with the People of the Book except by what is best..."
And say:
> "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you and our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit".

It is therefore with this innate intention of good will that our Holy Book requires us, for the second time, to establish friendly concourse with followers of other faiths, in the spirit of courtesy and profound respect.[4]

Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his encounters with Christian missionaries, was able to articulate and apply the ethical principles of dialogue and tolerance, which were already laid down by the Holy *Qur-an* (i.e., Surah Nahl:125 and Surah Ankabut:46). Maulana Muhammad Ali understood tolerance as something inherent in our being persons of good will; and that this divine awareness of good intention leads us to respect the viewpoint of the other person even if we do not subscribe to his creedal tenets. The verse in Surah Nahl:125 encourages Muslims to dialogue with the religious "other" in the spirit of sincere courtesy, profound sensitivity, and deep respect for each other's differences, by granting a concordant presumption that the other's intention in striving to convert another person is due to good will (i.e., for the "other's" spiritual salvation).

Surah Maida:48 as Potent Islamic Manifesto Supporting Tolerance

Maulana Muhammad Ali asserts that Surah Maida:48 is an explicit endorsement of pluralism and its attendant duty of tolerating the various diversities of humankind. I quote from Maulana Ali's exhaustive *Qur-anic* commentary to this particular passage:

> The appointment of a law and a way for everyone refers to the giving of different laws to different nations... Thus, the Holy *Qur'an* here recognizes the principle to which it refers frequently, that prophets were raised among every people (see Holy *Qur'an* 10:47; 13:7; and 35:24)... Man [sic] is placed above the whole of creation in that he has been granted discretionary powers so that he can choose to follow one path or another, as against the rest of creation, which must necessarily follow the laws to which it is subject. Hence led by that [God-given] discretion, men follow different ways, adopting different sects, whereas if man's very nature had been so made as to make him unable to use his discretionary powers, all men [sic] would have been a single people, but then man's better qualities, would not have been manifested.[5]

---

[4] See Bayan-e Qur-an (Counsels from the Qur-an). Lahore: Maktab-e Ahmadiyya Lahori, 1959; p 158.

[5] A Commentary of the Holy Qur-an. Columbus, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore, 1998; pp.256.

As commented by Maulana Muhammad Ali, Surah Maida:48 explicitly declares that Almighty God sent his messengers to diverse groups of peoples and gave these communities their respective commandments in keeping with the different circumstances of each community. The laws prescribed by God to the different communities ensure the holistic development of their respective people. The verse continues,

"If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but His Plan is to test you in what He has given you, so strive as in a race in all virtues."

This verse clearly pointed out that if God so willed it, He can create a single community out of varied groups of people. Nevertheless, God planned that humankind be varied in its communitarian expression. God's endowment of a pluralistic world is His grace to humanity. Our differences provide venues for existential celebration of life and of living: variety and diversity being the potent antidote to our humdrum existence.

Each community has its own unique way of life, its own customs and traditions, its own laws. Nevertheless, no matter how diverse these ways of life are, it should be understood in the light of the Almighty's life-affirming purpose in allowing such diversities' human flourishing. It is therefore clear from Surah Maidah:48 that although God can produce a uniformed world of totalities by imposing a single law for all communities, yet He prefers to create pluralistic communities so that humankind will learn the values of tolerance, harmony, and fraternity.

Another aim of God in creating varied communities is to test human beings in the conduct of virtuous deeds. He tests the various societies if they can live amicably and cordially with each other despite their differences. The divergence in each society's ways of life should not be a cause of disharmony and differences; instead, societal divergences should prod each community to vie with one another in the performance of virtuous conduct.[6] The *Qur-an* insists that the best way of putting an end to religious, cultural, and ideological conflict is to tolerate differences with openness and good faith. Each religious community should do righteous deeds according to their tenets; leaving to God the judgment as to which

---

[6] Cf., Reza Shah Kazemi, The Metaphysics of Interreligious Dialogue. London: Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001; pp.5-7.

community is the best. The final section of the passage states, "It is He [Allah] that will show you the Truth of the matters in which you dispute."

The verse is very precise in stating that it should be left to God (and to God alone) in deciding the truth of the matters that peoples dispute. It is not for humans to pontificate which view is true and which is wrong. Vain and fruitless arguments as to which religious, ethical, and ideological point of view is right or wrong will only lead to communal fracas and infringement of societal concord. Likewise, the verse firmly admonishes human beings to contend with one another in good deeds by utilizing their own respective laws as bases of their righteous conduct.

God as the Ultimate Source of Revelation: A Central Tenet in the Qur-anic Understanding of Tolerance

The prologue of Surah Maida:48 states,
"To you We sent the Scripture, in truth confirming the Scriptures that come before it and guarding them in safety."
(Abdullah Yusuf Ali Translation of the Holy Qur-an, op.cit.)

This verse is a strong proclamation in favor of tolerance and pluralism. The Qur-an is referred to as "guarding in safety" the truths revealed by earlier scriptures. Likewise, one of the roles of the *Qur-an* is "confirming the Scriptures that come before it." According to Ustaz Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, a Fatimid theologian and philosopher of the tenth century AD, this verse implies that the scriptures of various religions may be different, but the Ultimate Source of all revealed scriptures is the One and Only God. Thus, scriptures of different faiths are based on Divine revelation. The tolerant nature of Islam as a religion can be seen in this verse in that, the *Qur-an* takes it upon itself to be the confirmer and guardian of truths revealed in earlier scriptures.[7]

Before elaborating further on Ustaz Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani's view of the *Qur-an* as "the guardian of previous divinely-revealed books" and the implications of this *Qur-anic* guardianship to an Islamic framework of tolerance, a brief historical background of Ustaz Sijistani's life is in order.

---

[7] Paul Walker, Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary. London: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 1996; pp. 26-32, 58.

Ustaz Abu Ya'qub Sijistani—although himself an Isma'ili Shi'a—maintained amicable relations with the orthodox Sunni majority during the period of the Fatimid Caliphate (i.e., 10th-11th century A.D.). To the dismay of the rabid Shi'as, Ustaz Sijistani forbade his disciples to curse the first three Caliphs of Islam; warning them, that Prophet Muhammad lavished praise on these three Caliphs, and therefore, it is never right and against Islamic prudence to curse whom the Prophet had abundantly praised. His endeavor to establish Sunni-Shi'a rapprochement was also matched by his spiritual and intellectual relationship with the Coptic Christians of Egypt, the Arab Orthodox Christians of Iraq, and the Jews. He studied the Torah in Hebrew and the New Testament in the Syro-Aramaic text. He often consulted Jewish rabbis and Orthodox hermits and enquired from them regarding their interpretation of some obscure passages of the Bible. His encounters with Christianity and Judaism were indeed intellectually stimulating since Ustaz Sijistani wrote six (6) religio-philosophical treatises reflecting on his relations with Christianity, Judaism, not to mention orthodox Sunni Islam. Sijistani's main books, The Wellspring of Wisdom (Yanbu-al-Hikmat) and Proofs of Prophecy (Ithbat-un-Nubuwwat) were written to show that God is the ultimate Source of Revelation and that this divine Revelation is progressive, i.e., it is sent according to the measure of the spiritual preparedness of humankind to receive divine guidance. Ustaz Sijistani was therefore a perfect example of an "ecumenical Muslim"—if I may be permitted to coin such a term.

Let us now explicate on Sijistani's understanding of progressive revelation and its implication to an Islamic perspective of tolerance. As per Ustaz Sijistani, the inclusive nature of the Islamic faith can be clearly observed in the *Qur-an's* numerous narrations regarding the ministries of Jewish, Christians, and other pre-Islamic prophets. The *Qur-an's* inclusion of the prophets of other religions preceding Islam is meant to illustrate the pluralistic and tolerant dimension of the *Qur-anic* Revelation. The list of prophets as found in the *Qur-an* was never meant to be exhaustive; it was meant to illustrate the extent of the universal chain of prophethood. Thus, we can safely assume that other religious communities that were not mentioned in the *Qur-an* are likewise included in the all-inclusive *Qur-anic* guardianship.[8]

[8] Walker, Ibid, pp. 45-58, 110-112.

Furthermore, Sijistani opined that the Qur-an fully acknowledges the different expressions of worship undertaken by different religions, while at the same time firmly holding to the Islamic expressions of worship (i.e., the five-times-a-day liturgical prayers, prescribed pilgrimage, Ramadhan fasting, etc.).

In Surah Baqara:148 it is stated: "To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good". Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, interpreted the phrase, "to each is a goal to which Allah turns him" to signify the diverse spiritual communities and their different approaches of worship. Ustaz Sijistani, also pointed out that Surah Baqara:148 is very much related to the phrase in Surah Maida:48, viz; "To each among you, We have prescribed a law and an open way".[9]

The Qur-an on Oneness of Humankind and Diverse Expressions of Human Cultures

The *Qur-an*, in many numerous passages explicitly proclaims the oneness of humankind. Humanity was "created from a single being" (Surah Nisah:1). All humans came from a single ancestry and living in the same homeland—earth (Surah Hujurat:13). Furthermore, Surah Baqara:213 says that the whole of humankind is essentially one in origin'

God, humankind's Creator. God sent various messengers with their respective scriptures to guide the peoples of the world to righteous living. These prophets were sent to different places of the world and their revelations were suited to the varying milieus, mentalities, contextualities, and circumstances of the peoples and societies in which they were being sent. However, instead of respecting other societies' contextualities, people begin to be divided and incessantly fight against each other. Surah Baqara:213 further states that God in giving His revelation to different communities did not intend that they fight each other; but that each communities respect each other's differences.

The *Qur-an* balances its affirmation of the ontological oneness of humankind by equally highlighting on the divergent racial, linguistic, ideological, religious, and national identities of each societies.

[9] Ibid, pp. 49-51.

God wills these identities; as the *Qur-an* plainly states,

> "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the
> earth and the variation in your languages and your colors. Verily
> in that are Signs for those who know" *(Surah Rum:22; Abdullah
> Yusuf Ali Translation. op.cit.).*

This passage acknowledges cultural differences as "signs" of God and must be duly appreciated as these "signs" serve as venues for each society's expression of identity.

Cultural differences are essential for establishing a community's identity and these divergences should prompt peoples to celebrate each other's cultural and national identities.[10] Therefore, the Qur-an undoubtedly recognizes cultural, religious, and societal diversities as being willed by Divine Providence; even as it affirms the essential unity and oneness of humankind.

Tolerance and the Diverse Liturgical Expressions of Worship Found in Other Faiths

As of this juncture, it is noteworthy to quote some *Qur-anic* passages that illustrate the practical dimensions of Islamic tolerance with respect to the different worship expressions of other faith-traditions.

The *Qur-an* says:

> It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East
> or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last
> Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers, to
> spend of your substance out of love for Him, for your kin, for
> orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and
> for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice
> regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you have made;
> and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity,
> and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of
> truth, those who fear Allah.[11]

---

[10] See, Maulana Muhammad Ali's commentary of Surah Baqara:213, Hujurat:13 and Maida:48; op.cit.

[11] Surah Baqara:177; Abdullah Yusuf Ali Translation, op.cit.

The great master of Islamic mysticism, Hazrat Muhaiyaddin Ibn Arabi (circa 1164-1240 AD), in his Sufi treatise, Bezels of Wisdom *(Fusus al-Hikam)* provided a very universal and inclusive interpretation to the above passage, showing the tolerant nature of Islamic Sufism that Ibn Arabi espoused. Before discussing Ibn Arabi's explanation of the above-mentioned passage, I feel that it is beneficial for our understanding to describe briefly his historical contextuality. Ibn Arabi's tolerant and pluralistic approach to Islamic spirituality can best be gleaned in his oft-quoted pronouncement:

> My heart is open to every form: it is a pasture for ecstatics,
> and a cloister for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the Mecca
> for the monotheists, the tablet for the Torah and the bookstand
> of the *Qur-an*. I embrace the religion called 'Love'; I go where
> my Beloved's caravan asks me to go. My religion is the creed of Love.[12]

Ibn Arabi's frequent discussions and meetings with Jewish and Christian philosophers and mystics may have influenced his all-inclusive and panentheistic approach to understanding Ultimate Reality (wahdat-ul-wujud). Ibn Arabi's homeland, Andalusia, a cosmopolitan region in Spain was ruled during Ibn Arabi's time by the extremely tolerant Umayyad sultans. The emirs of Andalusia encouraged learning and supported all educational institutions, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish. It was during this period that Christians all over Europe flocked to Muslim Spain to study Greek philosophy as mediated by the Arabic textual sources; likewise, it was in Muslim Spain where Jews from all parts of Europe and the Mediterranean took refuge from pogroms that greatly diminished their ranks. Ibn Arabi's Islamic Andalusia ruled by the enlightened Umayyads offered an atmosphere of intellectual freedom'an atmosphere that was so different from the rest of Europe where inquisitions and religious persecutions were the order of the day.[13] This historical context contributed to Ibn Arabi's universal and all embracing approach to Islamic mysticism.

Now let us come to Ibn Arabi's inclusivist exegesis of Surah Baqara:177 and how this exegesis conduces to an Islamic spirituality of tolerance. Commenting on the above-mentioned verse, Ibn Arabi says:

---

[12] Shahabuddin Maliki, Light from the Sayings of Shaykh Ibn Arabi. Decca, Bangladesh: Markaz Towheedi, 1977; p.63.

[13] See Oliver Leaman, A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy. Oxford: Polity Press, 1999; pp. 158-164.

Beware of being bound up by a particular creed and rejecting others as unbelief. Try to make yourself a prime matter for all forms of religious beliefs. God is greater and wider than to be confined to one particular creed to the exclusion of others. For He Himself says: "To whichever direction you turn, there is the Face of God".[14]

Ibn Arabi admits that although in Islam, there exists a specific direction and prescribed liturgical postures by which a Muslim faces when praying, yet for him, the *Qur-an* equally acknowledges with respect the various directions and gestures of prayer adopted by other religions in their worship. More importantly, for Ibn Arabi, Surah Baqara:177 encourages religious pluralism and tolerance by going beyond (i.e., transcending) the ritual demands of different ceremonial expressions of worship and focusing instead on the importance of humane character, viz, compassion towards others and persevering faith in the midst of trials and difficulties.[15] Ibn Arabi explained that the divine purpose of the various prescribed acts of worship is for the spiritual education of humankind, aside from the avowed aim of glorifying God. For him, more than outward manifestations of piety, the crucial intention of the *Qur-an* is for the Islamic Ummah (community) to produce proper human beings who are sensitive to the needs of others. The Qur-an endeavors to create compassionate and "humane" persons who act with benevolence and equanimity to everybody with no regard whatsoever to racial, cultural, religious, or ideological differences.[16]

Instantiations of Tolerance from the Life of the Prophet of Islam and His Companions

The *Qur-an* clearly reveals that,"all sons and daughters of Adam are equally esteemed" by God (See, Surah Bani-israil:70). The *Qur-an* also takes an all-inclusive humanistic view in its understanding of justice and equality among all peoples. When it comes to judging actions that either benefit or harm humanity, the *Qur-an* does not distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims. As pointed out in Surah Nisah:123-124,

"Not your desires [i.e., Muslims], nor those of the People of the Book [i.e., Jews and Christians] can prevail. Whoever works evil will be requited accordingly... If any do deeds of righteousness'be they male or female—and have faith, they will enter Heaven and not the least injustice will be done to them" *(Abdullah Yusuf Ali Translation, op.cit.).*

[14] Ibn Arabi quoted in Reza Shah Kazemi, op.cit., p. 11
[15] See, Henry Bayman, The Station of No Station: Open Secrets of the Sufis. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2001; pp. 166, 206.
[16] Ibid, pp. 97-98, 103.

The *Qur-an* further affirms; "then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it." (Surah Zilzal:7-8).

According to the Qur-an, God does not consider a person's dogmatic or creedal commitment when rendering judgment of an action. Everyone will be given their just recompense based on one's deeds and not because of one's religious adherence.

Furthermore, the *Qur-an* exhorts Muslims to respect places of worship of other faiths and to ensure that these will be protected and safe from acts of vandalism and destruction.

Surah al-Hajj:40 says :
"And if Allah did not check one set of people by means of another, there would have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will surely aid those who aid His cause."

The abovementioned verse is very explicit in enjoining Muslims to sacrifice even their very own lives to defend the sanctity of churches and synagogues, and not just mosques. Interestingly, this particular passage avers that whether in church, synagogue or mosque, God's name is "commemorated in abundant measure" in all these places of worship.[17] Here, we can find that the Qur-an did not make any distinction between shrines of worship—it acknowledges the sacredness of places of worship where God's name is celebrated with reverence.

The *Qur-an* solemnly affirms, "there is no compulsion in religion" (Surah Baqara:256). The Qur-an is very keen in preserving freedom of conscience and freedom of belief—two crucial elements which are at the heart of tolerance. In this connection, a narration of two episodes in the life of the Prophet Muhammad is very pertinent in order to show that Islam fully respects the freedom of peoples to practice their own faith. When the people of Medina accepted the Prophet as their lawmaker and

[17] Cf., Muhammad Hamidullah, Islam: An Introduction. Lahore: Kitab Islami Wakf. 1979: pp.34-35. See also Kazemi, op.cit., p.12.

chief governmental executive, the Prophet himself immediately asked his scribes to write a declaration assuring the freedom of Jews and Christian residents of Medina and Najran to practice their faith. Likewise, when Christian monks and priests from Abyssinia came to Medina to see the Prophet, they inquired where they can hold their Eucharistic service (since they were still in Medina on a Sunday), the Prophet Muhammad gladly offered half of the space of his masjid (i.e., the first masjid built by the Prophet's own hands) to the Christian priests for their liturgy. The priests tearfully thanked the Prophet for his hospitality, munificence, and cordial act of tolerance by offering and allowing them to hold their Divine Liturgy in his masjid.[18]

In keeping with the example of the Prophet Muhammad, the second Caliph of Islam, Hazrat Umar al-Farooq, assured the delegation of Coptic and Orthodox Christians that their churches and monasteries were to be protected and to be held inviolable by the Islamic State. The same Caliph Umar climbed by foot to Mount Sinai, Egypt to sign a treaty guaranteeing the safety of the monks and nuns of St. Catherine's monastery. During this visit, the Caliph gave five thousand dirhams for the repair of the monks' convent and chapel. The trustworthy Arab historian, At-Tabari narrated that the call for the noon prayer once overtook Caliph Umar while he was having consultations with the Christian patriarch of Jerusalem at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The kind patriarch offered Caliph Umar to pray inside the church premises. The Caliph gently declined the patriarch's offer saying that he was afraid that future Muslims might claim the church for themselves on account of the fact that the second Caliph of Islam prayed his noon prayer inside it. Caliph Umar then went out of the church and prayed at a vacant yard nearby.[19]

These historical instances and many others show the extent of tolerance and concordance that the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad afford to Christians. The continued existence of Arab, Coptic, Armenian, and Kurdish Christian communities in the Middle East and the marked presence of churches and convents in these Islamic places give witness to the tolerant attitude of authentic Islam to the religious "other".

---

[18] See, Maulana Muhammad Ali, The Religion of Islam. Columbus, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore, 1990; pp.281-291. For numerous instances showing the Prophet Muhammad's tolerance and concordant treatment to non-Muslims particularly Christians and Jews, see also, Mumtaz Ahmad Faruqui, Anecdotes from the Life of Prophet Muhammad. Columbus Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore, 1997; pp.18-19, 35-37, 40-43.

[19] Cf., Hafsah Dawud Zikri, The Exemplary Precedents of our Righteous Sunni Ancestors. Pakpattan, Pakistan: Daawat-e Irshad, 1963; pp.68-85.

Epilogue: Acceptance of "the Other" as Foundational Basis of an Islamic Spirituality of Tolerance

The Qur-an is very explicit in its pronouncement that non-Muslims should be given the right to worship based on the prescriptions of their own scriptures. As already mentioned in this paper, non-Muslims were given their civil, political, and religious rights during the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

After the Prophet's demise, the companions and the Caliphs of the Prophet made numerous provisions so that the rights of Jews and Christians will be acknowledged and respected. Tolerance towards non-Muslims were also implemented by various Islamic monarchs like the pious Umayyad Caliph, Umar ibn Abdul Aziz; the Abbasid Caliph, Harun-al-Rashid; the just Sultan of Palestine, Saladin Ayyubi; the Mughal Sultan Akbar; the Ottoman emperors, Mehmet Fateh and Suleiman Kanooni; and the emirs of the Moorish courts of Cordova and Grenada. These Islamic monarchs not only tolerated non-Muslims, much more, they employed Jews, Christians, and even Hindus in their administration, supported their respective places of worship, clergies, and educational institutions. These non-Muslims were accepted with dignity and treated with respect and at par with the Muslim citizens.

Authentic Islam based on the Qur-an and as practiced by the Prophet and his companions are not against the promotion of a pluralist egalitarian society that guarantees tolerance and respect to all religious communities within the society. The Qur-an recognizes religious diversity not only as a basic reality of human existence but also as a venue for humanity's spiritual development (Cf., Surah Maida:48). It is indeed regrettable that in our contemporary times, most of the so-called Muslim nations are perceived as lagging behind in fulfilling the spirit of tolerance as plainly expressed in the Qur-an and the Tradition (Sunnah) of the Prophet. It is equally lamentable that political and religious extremism failed to see the pluralistic and tolerant dimension of Islam as found in the Qur-anic texts and in the conduct of the Prophet.

As amply shown in history, it cannot be denied that there were many instances of bloody conflicts between Christians and Muslims and

that atrocities and violence can be equally attributed to both sides. The era of the Crusades during the Middle Ages and the more recent phenomenon of Western colonization of Muslim lands painted a different picture of Christianity in the perceptions of Muslims—a grim and greedy "Christianity" which is far from the peace-loving Christianity of the Gospels. Similarly, basing their perceptions on the Western media's skewed descriptions of Muslims and the intolerance of some Islamic movements, Christians perceived a rigid and inflexible Islam—an "Islam" very different from the tolerant and concordant Islam of the Holy Qur-an. It is high-time now for both Muslims and Christians to move past these historical contingencies'contingencies that were political, economic, and pragmatic in nature; which had little or even nothing to do with the essential contents of both faiths as expressed in their respective Scriptures.[20] Indeed, it is high time now for both Muslims and Christians to go back to their respective Scriptures and be nourished by the precepts of tolerance, understanding, concordance, and amity enjoined by both the Bible and the Qur-an. In so doing, both the largest and the second largest religions of the world will be able to contribute actively towards achieving world peace.

It is likewise imperative for academicians engaged in Muslim-Christian dialogue and researchers of Islamic political philosophy to work out theoretic and praxis in pursuance to the Qur-anic vision of tolerance and amity, by taking into consideration present realities of our pluralistic world. There is no contradiction in accepting the truth of one's own religious and ideological perspective and in tolerating or respecting the beliefs of others. Similarly, the Qur-anic belief in the ontological oneness of humanity does not contradict the pragmatic reality that humankind's expressions of culture, spirituality, and political ideology are varied and diverse. Authentic Islam as found in the Qur-an respects the freedom of conscience of every individual; which includes the right to practice one's own religious, cultural, ethnic, and ideological commitments. By paying careful and prayerful reflection to what the Qur-an says regarding tolerance, coupled with the faithful adherence to the Qur-anic values of amity and harmony amidst differences, Muslims and non-Muslims will be able to live a tranquil, serene, and secure life—a life of dignity and justice by accepting with openness and good faith each other's differences. May this hope become a Reality for all Muslims and non-Muslims. Insha-Allah (God willing)!

---

[20] Jean Rene Milot, Muslims and Christians: Enemies or Brothers? New York: Alba House, 1997; pp. 31.

REFERENCES

1. Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. English Translation of the Holy Qur-an. Istanbul: Asir Ajans, 2005.
2. Ali, Maulana Muhammad. Bayan-e Qur-an, Volume I (Counsels from the Qur-an). Lahore: Maktab-e Ahmadiyyah Lahori, 1959.
3. _____. The Holy Qur-an: Translation and Commentary. Columbus, Ohio: Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore, 1998.
4. _____. The Religion of Islam. Columbus, Ohio: Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore, 1990.
5. Bayman, Henry. The Station of No Station: Open Secrets of the Sufis. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2001.
6. Hamidullah, Muhammad. Islam: An Introduction. Lahore: Kitab Islami Wakf, 1979.
7. Kazemi, Reza Shah. The Metaphysics of Interreligious Dialogue. London: Institute of Isma'ili Studies, 2001.
8. Leaman, Oliver. A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy. Oxford: Polity Press, 1999.
9. Maliki, Shahabuddin. Light from the Sayings of Shaykh Ibn Arabi. Decca, Bangladesh: Markaz Towheedi, 1977.
10. Milot, Jean Rene. Muslims and Christians: Enemies or Brothers? New York: Alba House, 1997.
11. Schuon, Frithjof. Understanding Islam. London: Mandala Books, 1964.
12. Walker, Paul. Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary. London: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 1996.
13. Zikri, Hafsah Dawood. The Exemplary Precedents of our Righteous Sunni Ancestors. Pakpattan, Pakistan: Daawat-e Irshad, 1963.

THE VIRASAIVA MOVEMENT IN KARNATAKA

Dr. Jagadeesh Kivudanavar[1]

Introduction

Virasaivism is one of the most popular religions in South India. Virasaivism or Lingayatism is a branch of Saivism with its guiding principle of Bhakti or devotion. It stressed the simple religion of the heart. Saivism was a part of the universal democratic movement in Indian culture for the spiritual regeneration of the common man. Virasaivism was a revolt against the caste system and elaborate ritualism or ceremonialism of traditional Hinduism. The Hindu society was paralyzed by the evil practices. Therefore, many Virasaiva saints launched socio-religious reform movements against the Hindu traditional practices and revolted within Hinduism. The study of ethico-social basis of Virasaivism shows certain fundamental departures from the prevalent ideas of traditional Hinduism. The main object of Virasaiva reform movement was the abolition of caste system, sati, child marriage etc., and giving equal value to every kind of work. The occupation of man was given a socio-religious significance by the principle of Kayaka (work).

Virasaivism further stressed that occupation did not make a man high or low. The people from various castes entered into the fold of Virasaivism continued to follow their old occupations without any discrimination in the religion. The caste system on occupation prevailed in India from ancient times. Women considered as unfit for freedom, which worsened her condition. She was ill-treated in every field of Hinduism. In the twelfth century A.D., Basavesvara and his followers launched a socio-religious reform movement in South India particularly, in Karnataka, in order to bring socio-religious equality and uplift the living conditions of

[1] Dr. Jagadeesh Kivudanavar is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of History, Karnatak Arts College, Dharwar, India, a prestigious constituent college of Karnatak University. He obtained postgraduate degrees (Phd., M.Phil., M.A., and Dip.) in Epigraphy from the same institution.

the untouchables. Basava and his followers accorded all of them with great respect. It was the ambition of the Virasaiva followers to establish a society based on equality. To establish such a society among people who had practiced caste distinctions for a thousand years was a very difficult task. With this aim, Virasaiva saints composed of Vachanas in Kannada touched the hearts of people and, Virasaivism enjoins every Lingayat to follow certain rules of conduct. These rules were backed by religious ideas. The Virasaiva followers, under the leadership of Basavesvara tried to evacuate the social evils and brought socio-religious equality by composing many Vachanas. An attempt is made here for the social reform movement of Sivasaranas (Saiva devotees) of the twelfth century A.D. in southern parts of India.

The Virasaivism

Virasaivism is distinct from Saivism and it had a fairly large following in Karnataka. As propounded by Lord Basavesvara, there is no caste system and no Varnasrama dharma in it. The concept of Guru-Linga-Jangama, Ishthalinga, Ashthavarana and the concept of Shatsthala are the distinct features of Virasaivism. The Vedas are not accepted as an authority and not studied as religious texts, as in the case of Kalamukha Saivism. It attained prominence from the period of Basavesvara, a great social and religious reformer.

The roots of Virasaivism or Lingayatism can be traced back to the early centuries of the Christian era. According to Dasgupta :

"The Kernel of Virasaiva thought is almost as old as the *Upanishads* and it may be found in a more or less systematic manner by way of suggestion in the writings of Kalidasa who lived in the early centuries of the Christian era".

In the works like *Sutasamhita*, probably during the sixth century A.D., subtle shades of Virasaiva thought can be traced.

The distinctive mark of Virasaivism is the wearing of the *Linga*, which is called *Ishthalinga*, the symbol of the infinite, on the body of each person. This Ishthalinga form of worship makes the Virasaivas differ from all other Saivas who worship the *Linga* in temples.[1]

Virasaivas-heroic Saivas are so called because of their ardent devotion towards Lord Shiva. These heroic Saivas are heroes to check the evil nature of the Hinduism and heroes to bring equality among the human beings. The Virasaivas condemned the *Varna* system of Hindu religion and they tried to protect the human rights. Therefore, the ardent of the Virasaivism revolted against the caste-based society. The Virasaiva sect therefore were compared to Protestant Christian forms of religion.

Dr. R. Blake Michael writes thus,

"Unfortunately much Western scholarship has failed to acknowledge the multiple dimensions of the Virasaiva movement, its distinctness and relatedness, its universalism and particularism, and its subjectivism and objectivism. Western attention has, rather, focused on the ways in which Virasaivism, like Protestant Christianity, zealously stood over and against its social and religious context as a distinct, particularist, and subjectivist reformatory movement. In fact, a persistently implicit and occasionally explicit evaluative comparison of Virasaivism to the norm of Protestant Christianity has permeated the literature".[2]

The Virasaivism has universal principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Therefore a large number of people accepted Virasaivism as their religion.

Reform Movement and the Sivasaranas

History is a movement and it moves on. History in a sense repeats it self. Lord Buddha and Basava's attempts to reform Indian society seem repetitions of one and the same phenomenon-emancipation of society from the shackles of superstition and ignorance. Both made history, each in his own time, and possessed one thing in common: the vision of casteless society. "The Buddha believed in intellectual enquiry, freedom of thought and action, and dignity of labour (Kayaka). Basava continued the Buddha's noble tradition in these respects".[3] Both the Buddha and Basava fought against caste, idolatry, sacrificial rites, untouchability and inhuman treatment of women. "Both preached their religion through the medium of the common man, one in *Pali* and the other in *Kannada*. Both gave freedom of thought, expression, and action the masses by liberating them from the shackles of superstition and ignorance. Both gave to the women folk full rights in social and religious matters. Both founded fraternities open like to the young and the old, to the touchable and the untouchable, to the rich and the poor, to the male and the female, to the wise and to the ignorant".[4]

Basavesvara and his followers were free regarding the ability of women to pursue salvation and admitted women freely into *Anubhava Mantapa*. Their approach to the problem of inequality was more liberal and more humanistic than that of the Buddha. Among the seekers of equality Basava and his followers rank highest and anticipate what Ambedkar in our own time endeavored to do to bring about equality by annihilating caste.

In the pre-*Vedic* period, the society was divided into four classes — Brahmana (priestly class), *Kshatriya* (ruling class), *Vaisya* (merchant class) and *Sudra* (untouchables). In this social structure no class was high and low; all the four classes were socially equal and equally essential for the society to function effectively. But in *Vedic* period class system became a rigid. Caste is the real reason of exploitation, there is no equality in the Hindu society, and it ruined the Hindus.

The existence of caste in Indian society is actually a very vexing problem. There have been attempts to find out the true reason why caste persists in India. Once a person was born a Brahmin he continued to enjoy all the privileges of that caste, whether he deserved them or not. The high caste people got precedence over the low-caste people in all matters. The high-caste people sought to establish their domination over the low-caste people. It became a demon casting its sinister shadow on the Indian society. Hence, Basava and his followers tried to annihilate caste, encouraged inter-dining, and inter-marriage.

The Anubhava Mantapa and the Equality

Anubhava Mantapa, a forum of free thinking and platform of social, religious and economic equality founded by Basavesvara, the leader of socio-religious movement in the twelfth century. Allamaprabhu was the president and Channabasavanna was the secretary of the forum, whose membership was drawn from all castes, professions, and sections of the society, based on the dignity of labour, equality between the sexes, and unity in the ineffable climatic experience of the one reality.

The *Mantapa* was democratic in its character. D.C. Pavate said,
> "The society he (Basava) visualised was the one advocated by Mahatma Gandhi eight hundred years later, without any distinction between man and men, based on either caste or wealth".[5]

At *Anubhava Mantapa,* the academy of Siva devotees, all the devotees met without caste-distinction and shared their mystic experience. Basava felt that it was wrong to divide a village into different colonies such as the colony of high priests and the colony of low castes and out castes. Basava's message to humankind was that religion and society are nobody's private properties and that as all individuals are equal in the eyes of God they should be treated with equal justice and honor.

The fundamental principles of the members of the Anubhava Mantapa are as follow:[6]

1. All are equal.
2. No man is high or low either by birth, sex or occupation.
3. There is no discrimination between men and women.
4. Woman has equal rights with man to follow the path of self-evolution.
5. Each one should follow a profession of his own choice.
6. Women also can take up any Kayaka (work).
7. All Kayakas are honorable professions. No Kayaka is either low or high.
8. Varnas (castes) and Asramas (stages) are to be discarded.
9. Self-development is to be achieved through Kayaka.
10. Renunciation and dwelling in forest are ruled out as cowardly tendencies to escape from life.
11. Untouchability has no place in the society and inter-group marriage and free dinning should be encouraged.
12. Every man is free to think on all spiritual and social subjects.
13. Reason and experience are the only guiding lights for free thinking and spiritual advancement.
14. Language of the people should be the medium for imparting spiritual and secular education.
15. All men have equal rights to participate in spiritual knowledge and to follow the same path of self-evolution.

Kayaka and *Dasoha*

Kayaka is dedicated work which is as good as worship - work is worship. *Kayaka* is spiritual view of labor, according to which every man has to sublimate his physical labor by dedicating it to the community. *Kayaka* does not encourage hoarding of wealth in any form and cuts at the root of greed in man.

The gains of *Kayaka* are to be dedicated to *Jangama*, who is a spiritual guide to the society. It opposed to beggary and dependence. It embodies the principle of dignity of man and labor. "The Kayaka view of life is in conformity with the modern democratic principle of equality, liberty, and fraternity, which are laid down in the preamble to the Constitution of India.[7] Kayaka is opposed to the Karma theory too, because Karma theory perpetuates caste system. According to this nobody has any freedom to choose his own profession. Therefore, the Sivasaranas condemned it. The Sarana community received a great respect without any discrimination, those who hailed from different castes and professions. Basava and the Saranas reduced the gap between equality and fraternity.

The Reform Movement and the *Sivasaranas:*

Under the leadership of Basavesvara, a versatile genius under his leadership, hundreds of Saranas or spiritual aspirants rallied together and rejuvenated the ancient Virasaiva religion by their mystical utterances. Their works gave an added sharpness and brilliance to the world religion. In fact, it is a turning point in the history of Virasaiva religion when Basava made it a vehicle to fulfill his great mission of establishing social justice and upliftment of the common person to divine heights.

The Saiva devotees composed many Vachanas and tried to eradicate the social evils. *Vachana* is a unique literary form in Kannada. A novel form of literary expression, these came into currency in the eleventh century. Apparently through in prose, the Vachanas have the rhythm of poetry because they are the expressions of a mind illumined and enchanted by divine harmony and music. Each Vachana may be called prose lyric.

Basavanna:

He was a leader of social reform movement born in 1131 A.D., in a Brahmin family at Bagewadi in Bijapur district of Karnataka. He rejected the ritual ridden Vedic religion in favor of Virasaivism, a protestant religion in India. Refusing to undergo the sacred thread ceremony, Basavanna went to Kudala Sangama, a well known center of learning in that period. King Bijjala was very much impressed by Basavesvara's wisdom and experience, besides his commanding personality, Bijjala appointed him as his Prime Minister. Holding a key position in the court of Bijjala, he started a revolution which was unique in its nature; it was a socio-religious revolution. Basavesvara's intention was to bring about radical changes both in the caste-ridden society and in the ritual-ridden religion. He recommended Ishthalinga, worship for self-realization. Basavanna preached universal and human religion of equality and purify the Hinduism at the grass-root level. He rallied the low-caste people, and created in them awareness about the importance of their role in building a new community of Sivasaranas on the strong foundation of *Kayaka* (work) and Dasoha (donation for daily food). The community of Sivasaranas was a casteless organisation in which people of all castes and creed enjoyed equal privileges, held equal, and gave them equal opportunities to work out their own salvation and at the same time to work for the welfare of others in the community. Basavanna vehemently condemned the old practice of discriminating between man and man, and man and women".[8] At Kalyana, Basavanna founded a spiritual forum for Sivasaranas and it was called Anubhava Mantapa an academy of Siva devotees. He encouraged inter-dining and inter-caste marriage. Haralayya, a cobbler, an untouchable, had married his son to the daughter of Brahamana Madhuvayya. It was a Pratiloma marriage forbidden by lawgivers.[9] King Bijjala sentenced the newly wedded couple and their parents to death. Then the enraged Sivasaranas assaulted and assassinated Bijjala. Basava left Kalyana for Kudala Sangama and merged in Lord Kudala Sangama. His Vachanas bear the signature Lord Kudala Sangama.[10]

An inauspicious speech heralds death,
As does the ominous barking of a dog.
So do not bark, You O respondent:
Do not carp. You o accuser?
Is there any taint of caste in devotion and
love - making?

Look, iron turns into gold at the touch of
          Philosopher's stone.
If you discriminate between the castes
     of our Kudala Sanga's devotees,
You will descend to the lowest
Circle of hell, to be sure!
          He alone is *Madiga* who kills animals;
          He alone is a *Holeya* who eats filth.
          What worth is the caste of those well born?
          Who sacrifice an animal and eat it?
          Our Kudala Sanga's devotees,
          Who wish all the living well,
          Alone are well born.
God, O God, heed my word:
It regards all Siva-devotees as one caste,
With the high priest at one end
And the low 'untouchable' at the other;
I deem all non-devotees alike
Including the high-caste Haruva
And the low-caste Svapacha
Thus does my heart believe?
If there be in what I say
The slightest shadow of doubt,
Chop my nose in such fashion
That all my teeth show out,
O Lord Kudala Sangama!

          Should they look for caste in this?
          Should they look for obstinacy in this?
          Having built a house of bones
          In the colony of Periahs.
          Covering it with leather
          Decorating it with a bower of nerves.
          Should they look for caste?
          If a *Periah* woman and *Periah* man
          Went to bathe in blood
          Impurity did go;
          Caste did not go.

          Should they look hair
          In the food picketed in a blanket?
          Lord Kudala Sangama
          Will not be pleased with such pretenders, Sir.
Vyasa was a fisherman's son,
Markandeya, a Matangi's;
Mandodari was a frog's daughter!
Lo, do not look for a person's caste.
What did you get by caste in the past?
Agastya was *Kabbila* actually,
Durvasa, a shoemaker,
Lo, the sage Koundinya,
As the three worlds know, was a barbar.
Says our Kudala Sanga;
He alone is deemed well born,
Who is Siva's devotee?
Though he is a *Svapacha*.

          Sir, will it be proper to call
          The colony of the untouchables a *Holageri*,
          If the king should go and camp there?
          You should believe that the house
          Of one who wears the *Linga* verily is Heaven.
It is said:
"If a Siva-devotee lives in the street
          of the untouchables
It becomes the Siva-world, and the house
     where he stays a Siva-temple".
Do not listen to the words of the hypocrites,
There truly is Heaven
Where Lord Kudala Sangama dwells.
          Look, there is no difference
          Between the world of Gods
          and the world of mortals.
          Good conduct is Heaven.
          Bad conduct is Hell.
          You yourself are witness to it,
          O Lord Kudala Sangama!

Allamaprabhu:

A contemporary of Basavanna, Allamaprabhu was born in a small village called Balligavi. He belonged to a class of temple servants. His service was to play upon a double-headed drum. Animisa iniated Allama in to Virasaivism, which emphasizes the worship of Ishthalinga. Then, he became a great Sivayogi. He did not keep his knowledge to himself but went around Karnataka to meet other well-known Sivasaranas, and enlightened them dispelling their ignorance. He joined the band of Sivasaranas who, under the leadership of Basavanna, had launched a novel programme of Kayaka, Dasoha, and Anubhava. As the president of Anubhava Mantapa, like Basava and other Saranas, he wrote many Vachanas.[11]

Wearing the cloak of equality,
Putting on the cap of good sense,
Stepping into the slippers of passion,
Not falling into the pit of darkness,
Not stumbling over the log of anger,
Not stepping over the scorpion of pride,
I, the devotee of Guhesvara, have come
Offer the alms of devotion,
O Sanganabasavanna!

Tell me who else could grow
        to such a great height,
By rejecting the caste in which he is born.
Tell me who else could become Linga
By wearing out himself in the service of _Linga_
        and _Jangama_
Without allowing his mind to spread to
The three sprawling mountains
Because, he himself is _Linga_, himself,
    Sarana and himself the other-self,
    'Hail, hail' to your Sarana,
    Sanganabasavanna,
    O Guhesvara!

Know the differences of castes, Sir,
Tear off the difference between the 'before'
        and the 'after', Sir,
Love brings the dawn once again, Sir.
When that happens,
Know that it is Guhesvara, Sir.
    The _Veda_ is a word of reading
    The _Sastra_ is bazaar news
    The _Purana_ is a discourse of rowdies.
    Logic is nothing but a fight of goats,
    And devotion, a gainful dinner
    Guhesvara exceeds all in greatness.

Chennabasavanna:

He was a nephew of Basavanna and Akkanagamma's son. Though the youngest among the Sivasaranas, Chennabasavanna, bore the wisest head on his young shoulders. All acknowledged him as a born wise person. He was well-versed in sub-limiting physical activities (Angakriyas) into spiritual activities (Lingakriyas), and which ultimately led to consubstantial union with Linga (Linganga Samarasya). At the Anubhava Mantapa, the title of Satsthala Chakravarti (the emperor of the six-fold system) was conferred on him. Age was no criterion, birth was no criterion, and caste was no criterion, to honor a person. Sivasaranas honored wisdom and mystic experience, wherever they noticed it, be it in the lowborn, be it in the highborn, be it in the young or old.[12] He wrote many Vachanas and actively participated in the movement.[13]

Does a _Sarana_ possessing the equanimity of mind
Suffer from forgetfulness?
Does a _Sarana_ who is beyond compare?
Need the aid of words?
Do the undivided _Linga_ and the measureless _Sarana_
Know the limits of boundaries?
Therefore, there is no birth and binding
To your _Sarana_ who is bodiless.

What if a _Brahmin_ becomes a Bhakta?
He will not abandon impurities.
What if a _Kshtriya_ becomes a Bhakta?
He will not abandon anger.

What if a *Vaisya* becomes a Bhakta?
He will not abandon deceit.
What if a *Sudra* becomes a Bhakta?
He will not abandon love of his own caste.
Will Lord Kudala Chennabasavanna ever love
Such ones as make an outward show of caste?
O Sirs, you say there are
Seven days and eighteen castes.
We say, 'No'
Day is one and night, another
We know, O Kudala Chennasanga,
That there are only two castes
Bhavi is one and *Bhakta*, another.

Siddharama:

He was born in Sonnalapur (Solapur) and was one of the stalwarts of Virasaivism. Siddharama was born dumb to his aged parents. His parents brought him up with loving care and put him to tending cattle. He did hard *Sivayoga* and met Allamaprabhu, persuaded him and brought him to Kalyana, a centre of revolutionary activities of Basava. At Kalayna, he met Basava and other *Saranas*. He became a Virasaiva by wearing the *Ishthalinga* and undertook social work through religious pursuits.[14] He wrote *Vachanas* on the theme of equality. Like Basavanna, he too regarded woman as equal to man.[15]

Difference is in the mind, not in the object, O Sir,
Difference is in action and non-action
          not in knowledge, O Sir,
Difference is in beauty and ugliness,
          not in the vital force, O Sir,
Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna!
          What do I do, being high born?
          God is not in caste; God is in one's mind.
          What matters of what womb one is born?
          He alone is high born.
          Whom you love, O Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna!

If the high caste and the low caste ones go to drink water,
Does water push them away,
Saying, Go, get burnt?
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
When will your virtue of equanimity,
That can keep me in calm state of mind,
Ever possess me?

          What if one belongs to one of the four castes?
          He is a Virasaiva
          Who can transcend the four castes?
          What if one has read the four Vedas?
          He is a Chandala
          Who has not shed the body?
          What if one heads a four-fold army?
          Look how he rules his state without
                    wit and wisdom!
          Look, what boots a grand body,

          What means the existence?
          Unless *Gajacharmadhara* Kapila Siddha
          Mallikarjuna
          Smiles His benediction on him?

What if one is a Sudra by birth?
He is a Virasaiva in the eyes
Of Mahadeva lodged in him
It is not wrong to say:
"Gold, silver, brass become through alchemy
One and the same gold.
So also *Sudras* and others
Become Siva through the alchemy of Sivajnana"
O Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna!

          At the common dinner session
          There should be no discrimination,
          If there is discrimination,

Let non take note of it,
If one takes note of it,
One should not tell it to others.
Even if one tells,
It should not be a cause for breaking a family.
Should the family break,
Let there be no breach in the hearts,
Look O Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna!

The _Sastra_ is love's weapon;
Vedanta is the root-disease of mind;
Purana is the story of the dead;
Logic is but a monkey's game;
The _Agama_ is but _Yoga's_ sin;
History is the saga of kings;
Smriti is observed with sin and merit,
The ancients' _Vachanas_ are a great store
     of knowledge,

To understand
Our Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna!

Listen, O Sir, how the state of our parents is
They are like the moon and her light
And like Siva and Sakti, you see
There is no difference at all here,
Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna!

Ambigara Choudayya:

He was a boatman by profession and was a prominent member of the Anubhava Mantapa. His Vachanas are imagery drawn from his profession. He compares life to a river. In this life the boatman, who can reach devotees safely to the other bank, the bank of deliverance, is none else than Lord Siva himself. Choudayya is impatient of those who are ignorant of the way of good to man and of those who are unrighteous. He lashes at the hypocrites mercilessly. His Vachana Mudrika bears his own name, which is very individualistic.[16]

Will they be elders in knowledge?
Till they fight for caste and pride?
Their knowledge should be
Like a childis dream,
Like the spell of a false word,
Like knowledge without action,
Said Ambigara Choudayya.

Where did your _Sastras_ go
When Isvara, the Lord of creation,
Ate in the house of the low caste?
When the locked door opened automatically
To the amazement of the hunter,
The sacred threads worn by the priests were cut.
Where were your Vedas,
When the gargled water was poured over the _Linga_?
Let me not share the suffering of your _Veda_,
Said Ambigara Choudayya.

They allow those who eat sheep, hen and fish
     to dwell in their village.
They ask those who eat the cow that
     mulches nectar to dwell outside their village
The body of that cow became a boat,
     A bag, a measure, a whip and slippers,
     It became a drum to be played in a temple.
"If I see the dwarfish periahs
Who eat the gee from a leather bag purifying it,
It will cut their mouth with an owl",
     Said Ambigara Choudayya.

Jedara Dasimayya:

A precursor of Basavanna, Jedara Dasimayya was popularly known as Devara Dasimayya. He was a weaver by profession and continued it as his _Kayaka_. His wife Duggale was also a composer of Vachanas. Dasimayya treated men and women as equal, and several of his Vachanas vouchsafe this. He strove to propagate Virasaivism with a missionary zeal.

For this purpose, he travelled far and wide. Dasimayya was a devotee of Ramanatha and his Vachanas bear the signature of Ramanatha. He is supposed to have converted a large number of Bhavis to Virasaivism. Basavanna held him in high regard. He writes as follows:[17]

> I bow to those Saranas
> Regarding them as high-born,
> Who pleased you by abandoning their caste.
> O Ramanatha,
> His head is on the gallows
> Who does not bow to the Saranas
> That pleased you by mingling freely will all!
> > O Lord of the community,
> > I bow to those who bow to you,
> > Like a ripe paddy.
> > If I bow not, owing to
> > The superiority of my caste,
> > My head is on the gallows,
> > O Ramanatha!
> If a piece of bone is planted in a well,
> The whole world calls it impure,
> If a mouth with several bones
> Utters words of partiality,
> It is worse than the well of the untouchables!

> > The low-caste people cannot worship by
> > touching the *Linga*.
> > Once they touch Him, they should hold
> > on to Him firmly.

> Having touched you, If they go back to
> > their previous caste,
> They will be born next in the womb of a bitch
> Lying before the house of *Periah*.
> It is sure, you see Ramanatha!

Madara Chennayya:

He was an untouchable-tanner by profession. He also worked as a hay cutter. He supplied hay to the royal stable in the kingdom of Karikala Chola (A.D.1070 to 1120). While he was gruel to the Ishthalinga, the king also offered rich food to Lord Siva in the temple. God ate along with Chennayya to his hearts content while the royal food in the temple remained untouched. King Karikala prayed God to eat royal food. Lord Siva told him that he found Chennayya's gruel tastier than the royal food. Then the king saluted Chennayya with a great respect. He wrote many Vachanas on social equality.[18]

> The races of mankind are many
> But all are from the woman's womb born.
> So also are castes, creeds and communities.
> Day and night are distinguished
> By light and darkness only.
> Strength is masculine though varied
> With feminine is another source.
> The views that appear to the eye
> Are varied and many
> But who can hear or see beyond
> His own capacity?
> The pupil is the same to see
> Water, the earth, the sun, and the moon.
> As the eye sees things varied
> Fair and lovely,
> So if one knows the secret
> There is no impurity of castes.
> Do not be a sole to the footwear
> Subject to the awl in hand.
> Know Nijatma Ramaramana!

> > The fluids of human body
> > Like semen, blood, flesh, sinews
> > That creates hunger, lust, and thirst
> > Are common to all human beings.

They follow professions varied
But the spirit of pursuing them is the same.
Of whatever caste he be,
He alone is the enlightened who knows him.
And he is the wordly who writhes
In the excretion of illusion.
Know this and no not forget it.
Do not be a sole to the footwear
Subject to the awl in hand,
Know Nijatma Ramaramana!

Dohara Kakkayya:

He was a tanner by profession who came from Madhya Pradesh.
He was a close associate of Basava and Saranas. He played a vital role in
creating a casteless society.[19]

O Linga father, you made me
Take birth in low-caste,
O Sir, I am undone,
For though I touched you,
Yet I cannot claim to have touched you.
Cannot my mind touch you?
However, my hands do not?
O Abinava Mallikarjuna!

Madivala Machideva:

He was a washerman by profession and one of the trusted
followers of Basava. He wrote many *Vachanas* to bring equality in the
society.[20]

Not knowing what low caste is
    and what high caste is,
Subjecting all eighteen castes to
    the rigour of Logic;

Getting their vision blurred by over-eating,
Not knowing the abode of truth and good conduct,
The 'low castes' that eat the left over of
        Prostitutes and other gods,
And not knowing the way of your devotees,
Went to hell in ever lives,
Look O Kalidevaradeva!

Listen, Ye worldilings,
Who are called high born?
By eating the left over of eighteen castes
In the world that lives on the leftover.
Listen, Ye unrighteous ones
Who, walking with the gait of an elephant,
Kill goat and cow
And are yet called nobly born.
By learning the speech of the *Brahman*,
You become *Brahmanas*.
There are no ritualists worse than you.
You went without knowing the way of your religion.
You trod the path of perdition,
Not following whole-heartedly the wise path of *Sivabhaktas*.
You eat the tasteless as pure.
You eat the leftover of drunkard Bovaras.
You call the milk, curds, and butter milk
Contained in leather bags pure.
In the house of which caste
Will the milk, curds and buttermilk
Left eaten by Sudras is regarded as pure.
You drink water from the same leather bag,
From which *Sudras* drink.
You regard yourselves superior to all the eighteen castes.

"In finite hell awaits all the twice born",
Says Kalidevaradeva.

Adayya:

He was a Jaina merchant hailed from Sourashtra. He brought Somesvara Linga and installed it at Puligere. He was a staunch follower of Virasaiva and composed many Vachanas.[21]

The body is a skeleton of bones,
a tank of excretion and a spring of urine;
A house of brain, a parlour of pus,
and a seed-bed of worms.
A cocoon of insects, a syringe of semen
and a reservoir of blood,
A leather coat for flesh and a gauge of
hair follicles;
A rope of nerves and muscles
and an abode of mental and physical diseases.
O fool, tell us which is your caste
and creed among these?

So *Sruti* says,
Both low caste and high caste are born of woman.
Foetus is made of seven elements.
So what is the use of caste?

What to call those who, knowing this,

Are lost in the six-fold illusion,
O Sourashtra Somesvara!

Women in the Socio-Religious Movement:

In the early Vedic period women enjoyed equal rights with man. Husband and wife were regarded as equal in all respects. Both took equal part in the intellectual and spiritual life of the society. Woman continued to enjoy freedom and respect even in the post-Vedic period, but that period is too brief. The dark period of subjugation of woman seems to loom large in the history of civilization.

Manu disqualified women from socio-religious rights. Among many evil practices of Hinduism was its ill treatment of woman as a slave, as an impurity, as a weakling, as a curse etc., which worsening the condition of woman in the society.

When Basava was born, the condition of woman was the same as that in the post-*Vedic* dark period. It was also a dark age in which the society was ridden with caste and sex distinctions. Then women were ill treated as slaves. Basava strove to free women from the fetters of impurity and inequality. The *Anubhava Mantapa*, founded by Basava threw open its doors to women too. Consequently, the Mantapa had a good number of women as its members. By virtue of her right to Linga Diksha, woman was able to overcome her inferiority complex. Basavesvaras movement of emancipation of woman has few parallels in the history of the world.

Basavesvara did away with caste distinctions, liberated women, and the untouchables from social tyranny. The movement was the beginning of a renaissance. It gave free scope for discussion and thought the dignity of labor. Basava inculcated the spirit of looking upon any work as worship. He emancipated the people from age long social superstitions and restored in them self-reliance, self-confidence, the spirit of freedom and initiative. He, thus, not only achieved social solidarity an democratic foundations, but also made the common man pulsate with new energy and enthusiasm. He gave the country a new literature called Vachana Sahitya, heralding a new epoch in the history of the land. In a word, Basava achieved a great social transformation in the life or the nation. He brought about a synthesis of head, heart and mind, *Jnana, Bhakti and Kriya*. In all these ways, his movement tended to elevate the nation in general, and women in particular. Basava and his followers' achievement of woman's emancipation was a sure step towards the realization of the good of community in terms of equality. Many woman devotees joined their hands with the Saranas and composed many Vachanas to eradicate the social evils. Like the *Saranas*, they also succeeded in touching the heart of the people.

Akka Mahadevi:

Akka Mahadevi was born in A.D.1140 at Shimoga district. At the age of eight, she was blessed by Shri Gurulingadeva with the *Ishthalinga* and was told that her Ishthalinga was her husband and that she was to realize him. Akka Mahadevi fled Udutadi necked and came to Kalyana, where she faced the hard test of *Sivasaranas* and passed it to the astonishment of all the members of the Anubhava Mantapa. She participated in the religious discussions and composed many *Vachanas* and criticized the contemporary society.[22]

An elephant's fighting against a moonstone
Is like an elephant's dying by fighting against its own shadow.
The elephant's intelligence is responsible for its fate.
The moonstone with the likeness of an elephant
Is an elephant all right,
And yet it is not.
What shall I call it?
Why the illusion of I and you?
As you are caught in my palm,
There is no difference between I and you,
As I am none else then you,
O Chennamallikarjuna!
    Is there any difference between the frozen ghee
       and the liquid ghee, O Sir?
    Is there any difference between the
       lamp and the light, O Sir?
    Is there any difference between the body
       and the soul, O Sir?
    As my master her turned my body in to *mantra*.
    There is no difference between the bodied and the
       bodiless, O Sir,
    Why do you make me talk, O Sirs,
    Who have lost my mental poise
    By merging in Lord Chennamallikarjuna?
To a true woman, man becomes impure,
To a true man, woman becomes impure,
If the impurity of mind is mitigated,
Will there be any room for the impurity of body?
O Sir, the world became mad or the impurity that
    never existed.
To my great God Chennamallikarjuna,
The whole world become a woman,

    look, O Sir!

       What if I have breasts and braids of hair,
       When I do not have the nose?

       Why the hood of sari on my head,
       When I do not have the natural will?
       A bubble born of water remembers its origin.
       I showed your place to Hari and several others,
       O Srigiri Chennamallikarjuna!
As he is born of no woman,
He has no pride of caste.
As he is peerless,
He has no pride of obstinacy.
As he is pure in three aspects,
He has no pride of wealth.
As he has attained the impossible,
He has no pride of scholarship.
As you have blessed your devotee,
Who is a disembodied soul
No pride bothers him at all
O Sir Chennamallikarjuna!

Akkama:

She attributed 152 *Vachanas* in bulk, her Vachanas rank next to Akka Mahadev's. Her Vachanas lack in poetic quality, but they are a store house of information about the social and religious conditions prevailing at Kalyana during the twelfth century.[23]

    The naked one are all the children of a donkey.
    The bold-headed are all the children of a widow.
    All those with knotted hair on the head are
       the children of *Periahs*.
    What matters of what birth they are?
    O Sir, what matters is their knowledge.
    In Ramesvaralinga to whom good conduct
       itself is the life-breath.
       If conduct and vow agree
       In matters of food, dress and marriage,
       The quality of the person who is a strict observer
       of right conduct does not diminish,

Just like the sweetness of sugar does not diminish,
Even if the sugar cane bud branches off in to several cones.
Bodies are many but not the womb.
Gold form is many but not its colour.
Bows are many but not knowledge.
Fields are many but not the water that irrigates them.
Both field and water are of the same womb.
Because the womb that goes before creation is the same,
Just like the slab used for making roti is one,
However, the flour assumes many shapes,
This is right conduct, it knows no falsehood,
It is true, I swear by you,
You yourself who are worthy of conduct know it.

Amuge Rayamma:

Her _Kayaka_ was weaving. She wrote 15 Vachanas and addressed
to Amugesvaralinga. She is a frank criticiser of hypocritical _Jangamas_.[24]

If a person becomes a Silavanta
He must give up his caste.
If a person becomes Sivajnani,
He must give up his religion.
Why news of the illusioned worldly men
To the illusion-free Sarana,
Amugesvara!

Goggavve:

She hailed from Kerala state. Goggavve wrote that there is no
difference between man, women, and that in such matters of love and
worship, woman has as much liberty as man. She was a bold champion of
woman's rights of equality and liberty.[25]

One who grows breast and braid of?
          hair is called a female.
One who grows moustaches and beard?
          is called a male.

Is the knowledge in either female of male?
O Nastinatha?
          If a man takes a woman by wooing her,
          He should know that she becomes his ornament.
          If a woman takes a man by wooing him,
          He becomes a problem to which she should hold
          a key.
          I call Nastihatha a Whole Being
          If He can be happy by mitigating
          The sense of twain between male and female.

Kadira Ramavve:

She was a spinner. She wrote only four _Vachanas_ of which three
are riddles and one is simple. Her contention is that _Kayaka_ (work) irons
out difference of caste, and transcends the narrow limitations of the rigid
caste system.[26]

O brothers, hear the caste and creed
          of the spinning wheel I operate.
The base plank is Brahma,
The head is Vishnu,
The standing doll is Maharudra.
The two dolls that follow Rudra
Are the ears controlling the thread,
The spinning needle is consciousness.
When the hand of devotion turned the wheel,
The Yarn wound round the needle,
And soon the spindle became full.
Enough, I cannot turn the wheel any longer.
My husband has pounded me
And I am broken down.
What more can I do, O Gummesvara,
          the lord of Kadira Remmi!

Kalavve:

She is the only woman Vachana writer of low caste; twelve Vachanas have been attributed to her. Her main concern, like other woman saints, was strict adherence to vow. She slashed boldly at the high caste Brahmins. The Basava movement had reached the lowest of the low. Her defiant attitude is a result of the involvement of the low caste people in the movement, which encouraged women, and low caste people to join the band of liberators.[27]

They regard those as of high caste,
Who eat sheep, hen, and fish?
They treat the cobbler as of low caste,
Who eats cow milching nectar for Siva?
How did the cobblers become low-caste people?
Why did you become low, O castes!
The leftover of a Brahmana fell on the grassy
            ground and a dog licked it.
The leftover of the cobblers adorned not only
The grass but also the Brahmana
You ask, how? Know it then.
Bags for ghee and water are made of
            Cowhide.
Hell awaits without fail the stupid priests
Who drink ghee and water from?
The leather bags, considering them pure.
O Mother, Urilinga Peddigalarasu will
            not accept them!

Nilamma:

She was second wife of Basavanna, the first being Gangambike, supported her husband in all his revolutionary projects whole-heartedly and stood by him in all critical movements. In her intellectual caliber, Nilamma was equal to Basavanna and wrote Vachanas that speak volumes for their ideal conjugal relationship. She wrote hundred and twenty-six *Vachanas* with Sangayya as their *Mudrika.*[28]

I am not yours, O Sir,
I belong to Animisa.
I am not yours, O Sir,
I belong to Ajaganna.
I am not yours, O Sir,
I am Madara Chennayya's granddaughter.
I am not yours, O Sir,
I am a servant of the lowest order
In the house of the Prasadis.
I am not yours, O Sangayya,
I am the daughter of a maidservant in
        the house of Basavayya.

Urilinga Peddi:

She was a wife of Urilingadeva, a Guru and a licentiate giver of Linga to those who would desire to follow Virasaivism. She criticized the caste system through the Vachanas.[29]

O God, are you formless,
Birthless and self-born as you are?
Because, though born they deem not born.
Your Puranas alone are formless.
Because though born in a caste they are not in it.
Your Puratanas alone are of high caste.
The Linga existed in the beginning,
And Sarana is without a beginning,
Are you easily obtainable?
By naming the nameless
And by possessing the placeless Linga?
No, you are not.
You are casteless and invisible.
Who knows you?
O God, our Puratanas possessed you
When you came to them
By offering whatever you desired
They never went begging after you,
O Urilinga Peddi Priya Visvesvara!

Other Devotees:

They belonged to all sections of the society, high and low, rich and poor, learned and uneducated. They pursued various avocations and were associated with different skills and crafts. The enlightened sages, the saints and seekers of divine realization who came to Kalyana for inspiration from Basavesvara, and to be benefited by communion with the galaxy of mystics, are described in contemporary and later Virasaiva Literature. The other devotees are Havinala Kallayya, Aggavaniya Honnayya, Kinnari Bommayya (a goldsmith), Madivala Machideva (a washerman), Dohara Kakkayya (a tanner), Kumbara Gundayya (a potter), Jodhara Madanna (a soldier), Marayya of Sakalesh (belonged to ruling class), Ramideva (a village servant), Bahurupi Choudayya, Masanayya, Sripati Pandit.

There were many distinguished women too, they are Satyakka, Muktayakka, Gundavve, Ammavve, Annaladevi, Pittavve, Sivapriya Nachi who came from different parts of the country and played an important role in the reform movement.

Conclusion:

The followers of Virasaivism are the champions of the socio-religious movement in the twelfth century South India. Basava, a bold free thinker and his followers opened a new chapter in the Annals of India. He attracted a number of devotees from different and untouchable's castes without any discrimination. Here he is chanting the hymn of equality. The majority of persons who took part in the epoch making movement started by the Saranas, mostly writers of Vachanas, possessed courage and independent thinking, and wielded words and pens as effectively as warriors would wield a sword. All the members of Anubhava Mantapa, the parliament of free thinkers and mystics, enjoyed freedom of thought and expression. Women too thought independently and expressed their independent views freely at the Mantapa. Like men, women as well wrote Vachanas. The Vachanas of Sivasaranas constitute a significant and sizable part of Kannada literature. Great was the contribution of Sivasaranas to Kannada literature; greater still was their contribution to the socialist philosophy of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Their views about the welfare state and casteless society are not only original but also unique, and carry a ring of authenticity. These Vachanas advocating the practice of the democratic principle of equality are outstanding.

The path to equality is not smooth. It is strewn with thorny hurdles like caste-consideration, birth-pride, wrong notions of impurities, discrimination of all sorts of these the biggest hurdle seems to be caste. So Basava and his followers waged a war against the caste system, which was responsible for putting up artificial barriers between one person and another, and ultimately for dividing humankind into innumerable fragments. Hence, the Vachanas geared to the objective of annihilation of caste are large in number. Equally significant and large in number are the Vachanas advocating eradication of discrimination in respect of man, women, Guru, Linga, Jangama etc. Very often human beings are discriminated because of physical disability and deformity. However, the Virasaiva philosophers gave importance to the quality of a person. Those who discriminated among them were condemned to hell. Sivasaranas wore the cloak of equality. Putting on the cap of good sense, they trod over passion by making it a pair of slippers. Neither did they ever fall into the pit of ignorance nor stumbled over the log of anger. They went about begging alms of devotion at the door or Lord Siva.

REFERENCES

1. For more details S.C. Nandimath, *A Handbook of Virasaivism*, (Dharwad, 1942), pp.17-18; R.G. Bhandarkar, Selected works, (Bombay, 1897) iv, p.195.

2. R. Blake Michael, *The Origins of Virasaiva Sects*, (Delhi, 1992), p.12.

3. S.B. Shapeti (ed.), *The Buddha and Sri Basavesvara, Sri Basavesvara Commemoration Volume*, (Bangalore, 1967), p.172.

4. Navakalyanmath Kumarswami, *Buddha and Basava*, (Dharwad, 1957), p.10.

5. S.C. Nandimath (ed.), *Sunya Sampadane*, (Dharwad, 1965), p.i.

6. V.K. Javali, **Kayaka and Dignity of Labour,** (Bangalore, 1967), p.141-42.

7. Ibid., p.140.

8. C.R. Yeravintelimath and M.M. Kalburgi, *Heaven of Equality*, (Dharwad, 2003), p.147.

9. P.B. Desai, *Basavesvara and His Times*, (Dharwad, 1968), p.195.

10. M.M.Kalburgi (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), i, *Vachana* Nos.343, 568, 591, 711, 1158, 589, 608, 239.

11. B.V. Mallapur (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), ii, Vachana Nos.1579, 1130, 1206, 465.

12. R.C. Hiremath, *Sri Channabasavesvara*, (Dharwad, 1978), pp.39-44.

13. B.V. Mallapur (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), iii, Vachana Nos.843, 1460, 1623.

14. A. Menezes and S.M. Angadi (ed.), *Vachanas of Siddharama*, (Dharwad, 1978), pp.ii & iii, (introduction).

15. S. Vidyashankar (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa, Siddharamesvara Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), iv, Vachana Nos.1153, 420, 1383, 498, 1624, 1221, 1121.

16. M.M.Kalburgi (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa, Sankeerna Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), vi, Vachana Nos.119, 1013, 117.

17. S. Vidyashankar (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), vii, Vachana Nos.786, 787, 893, 782.

18. B.R. Hiremath (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), viii, *Vachana* Nos.160, 1164.

19. S. Vidyashankar (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), *Vachana* No.992.

20. B.R. Hiremath (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), *Vachana* Nos.569, 523.

21. M.M.Kalburgi (ed.), *Samagra Vachana Samputa, Sankeerna Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), vi, Vachana No.846.

22. A. Menezes (tr.), *Vachanas of Akkamahadevi*, (Dharwad, 1973), pp.9-12; Veeranna Rajur (ed.), *Sivasaraneyara Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), v, *Vachana* Nos.170, 158, 349, 283, 144.

23. Veeranna Rajur (ed.), *Sivasaraneyara Vachana Samputa*, (Bangalore, 1993), v, *Vachana* Nos.446, 593.

24. *Ibid., Vachana* No.609.

25. *Ibid., Vachana* No.1385.

26. *Ibid., Vachana* No.665.

27. *Ibid., Vachana* No.652.

28. *Ibid., Vachana* No.797.

29. *Ibid., Vachana* No.1387.

ONLINE RELIGION :
RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN CYBERSPACE
THE WEB AS "CHURCH"

Anthony G. Roman[1]

Scholarly work on religion in cyberspace has gradually built up, along with the spread of Internet use since the mid-1990s. Western scholars have analyzed the phenomenon of Internet use beyond the academic or professional fields and into man's search for meaning and expression of religious beliefs.

Some scholars sought to systematize for purposes of research and academic work the myriad forms of religious expression in cyberspace. One such scholar, Anastasia Karaflogka, came up with the phrases "religion on cyberspace" and "religion in cyberspace." According to her, "religion in cyberspace" is any form of religious belief that is created and exists exclusively in cyberspace, where it enjoys a considerable degree of so-called "virtual reality." Based on the previous session and upon this definition,"religion in cyberspace" can be taken synonymously with "online religion."

Virtual reality as we know is a kind of technology that allows users to interact (visually with images on the computer screen, thru the hearing sense by means of speakers or headphones and more recently, thru touch) with a computer-simulated environment. We will be able to view some examples of this later. But for now, it is enough to say that "religion in cyberspace" has no counterpart in the physical realm. Thus, its followers gather in front of their own computer screens and participate in religious rituals and practices online. Here, Morten Hoejsgaard says, the Internet functions as a "creative or formative environment fostering new religious contents and activities online."

"Religion on cyberspace," on the other hand (in Karaflogka's terminology), refers to "the information uploaded by any religion, church, individual or organization, which also exists and can be reached in the off-line world." This definition corresponds to our understanding of "religion online" again based on the previous session. Here, the primary function of the Internet is to "mediate information on religious contents and activities that has already been established or defined by various religious traditions outside cyberspace." We have already seen in the previous session how religions on cyberspace make use of online possibilities for information dissemination and propagation of the faith, while adopting practices that may well be categorized as "online religion" or "religion in cyberspace."

In this presentation, our concern is to show first, a useful framework for categorizing a "religion in cyberspace" or "online religion" put forth by Morten Hoejsgaard and then present some examples taken from the Internet itself. Again, we shall be touring cyberspace and will see by briefly analyzing a handful of websites how the Internet is used to serve man's search for meaning and faith expression. How effective it is in doing so is the subject of another study. Our goal here is to only show the different forms of alternative religious practices in the Internet today.

Yahoo! turns up close to 10 million results in the search for the key words "virtual church." For the words "cyberchurch," the search engine turns up some 27,100 results. Google, on the other hand, turns up more than 6 million results in the search for "virtual church" and close to 20,000 results for "cyber church." Not all of these results represent religious groups some turn out to be news or titles of articles and scholarly essays. Yet several new media scholars estimate that there are more than a million single web pages with religious content of the Internet today. How large those religious groups are in terms of membership cannot be easily identified but the staggering number of religious websites alone means that religious expression has indeed taken root in cyberspace and continues to grow. The Barna Research Group in California projects that by 2010, fully 10 percent of the population of the United States, or 50 million people, will be relying entirely on the Internet for their religious experience. Double that number will get at least some spiritual experience via the Internet. (source: http://www.infotoday.com/linkup/lud110102-conhaim.shtml)

This trend still needs validation here in Asia, but as long as Western culture remains the locus of Internet communication the statistic already foretells what the future holds for religious expression in cyberspace.

Morten Hoejsgaard's analysis of a number of what she calls "cyber-religion" (or "religion in cyberspace" or "online religion"), has led her to devise a modeling framework for what characterizes a pure "cyber-religion" or "online religion." Three parameters should be tested, Hoejsgaard said. These are:

1. Mediation
2. Content, and
3. Organization

These three parameters are plotted to comprise a chart with three axes, at the center of which is what ought to be a pure "cyber-religion" or "online religion." Each parameter measures a corresponding sub-parameter and the closer this measure is to the center of the chart the closer that religion in question simulates a cyber-religion or online religion.

The parameter "mediation" spreads from virtual or disembodied communication to body-centered or embodied communication. The more a ritual, for example, is conducted online the more virtual or disembodied the communication is. The more the followers are directed to a physical church outside the Internet to worship, the more body-centered or embodied the communication is and consequently, the farther the religion in question belongs to the so-called "cyber-religion" or "online religion" category.

As to "content," Hoejsgaard says, the spread goes from a reflection of Internet culture to a reflection of traditional religious expression. A religion's reflection of Internet culture follows what Yves Lambert, sociologist of religion, describes as the trends or expressions of the religious landscape within contemporary society. Lambert puts it as: "this-worldliness, self-spirituality, de-hierarchization and de-dualization, parascientificity, pluralistic, relativistic, fluctuating, seeking faiths, and loose network-type organizations (indeed, religion without religion)."

So, the more a religion in cyberspace approximates this description and the farther it deviates from the doctrine and practice of established religions, the more it is aptly classified as "cyber-religion" or "online religion."

As far as "organization" is concerned, the spread goes from "non-institutionalization" at the center to "complete institutionalization" at the periphery of the model. Authors of virtual religiosity, it is observed, "oppose the static features of large organized religions in the offline world e.g. traditionalism, conservatism, economic bureaucracy, and anti-idealism." Cyber-religions or online religions, in their pure form, focus primarily on transmission and testing of ideas and thoughts rather than promoting sacred institutions, hierarchies or sacraments.

The model thus appears as:

Mediation

Body-centered
communication

Virtual
communication

Cyber-religion/
Online religion

Reflection of
Cyber-culture

No institutionalization

Complete
institutionalization

Reflection of
Religious traditions

Content

Organization

The cyber-religious field
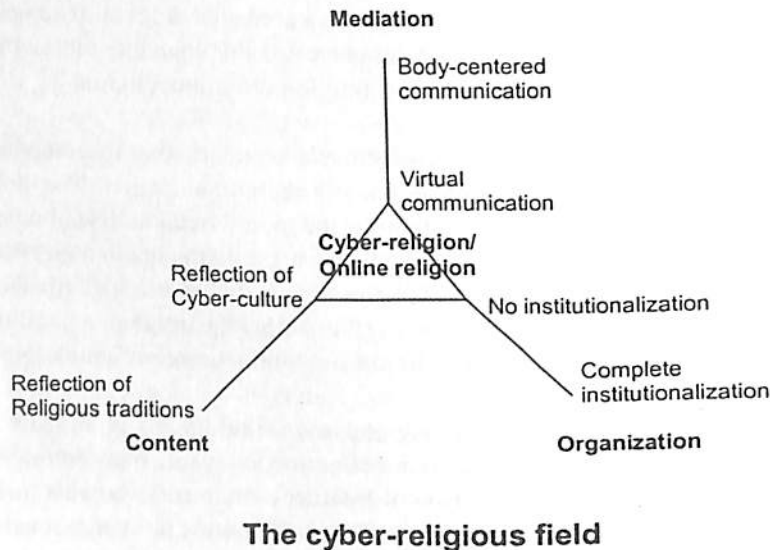
Let us look at some examples to illustrate this model further:

Case 1. Infinite Church
A New Day in Worship
URL: http://www.infinitechurch.com

The Infinite Church is an authentic Internet-only church. The developers of this site aim at a genuine faith-based experience online. There are prayer services completely conducted online with pre-recorded instructions, reading of texts as well as musical accompaniments to songs. Lyrics to the songs are provided which online devotees can follow. The experience of this online worship is that one remains in the comfort of his/her home or office while praising God. There is provision for accepting contributions during Offertory. Baptism is also done online with a link explaining the elements needed to administer the sacrament along with a Scripture-based explanation as to how online Baptism can be valid. However, towards the end of the link followers are directed to related websites whose groups are engaged in real-life immersion in water in case they would want to experience that same kind of Baptism.

Infinite Church's weekly schedule is interesting. Because the time reference is the Central Time Zone in North America, visitors coming from outside the U.S. or Canada are encouraged to log on at the appropriate times to be able to join the online services. Non-English speaking surfers will find it impossible to follow the liturgies and prayer services. For those who are inclined to acquire an exclusive online faith experience, a computer software should be downloaded for free from the website itself to enable them full participation in the worship sessions. There is an option to use the Internet software to avoid the downloading process and undergoing the tutorial sessions for using the software but this provision was disabled at the time of research.

The site also offers a virtual tour of the Infinite Church with a slide show of the auditorium where the supposed worship takes place, the prayer room of the virtual church, the exterior as well as the entrance to the church along with the pastors that facilitate the worship.

Infinite Church's Weekly Schedule		
8:00 PM Central	Sunday	**Worship Service**
8:00 PM Central	Monday	**Prayer Meeting**
8:00 PM Central	Tuesday	**Group Bible Study with Bunny**
9:00 PM Central	Thursday	**Book of James Study with Joshua Richards**
9:00 PM Central	Saturday	**Fellowship Night with BfChris**

The over-all feeling of a neophyte visitor of this site is that the Church itself is real and a good way of spending time in cyberspace.

Case 2. Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua
URL: http://www.dogchurch.org

*Virtual Church of the* **BLIND CHIHUAHUA** DOGCHURCH.ORG

The site dogchurch.org claims to be a sacred place named after a small dog with cataracts who barked sideways at strangers because it could not see where they were. In the same way, the cite developers say, we are the blind Chihuahua — making more or less joyous noise in the direction where we think God is, and expecting a reward in return. It is interesting that in the home page, just below where the site's logo is displayed, internal links to Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Baha'i are presented. Within the enclosed texts, links to other related websites are provided.

The site's offerings include articles about what the members call "canned theology" or their set of beliefs categorized as "liberal, conservative and wacko." It does not affiliate itself with any religious tradition notwithstanding the references given to other religions.

"You may bring your dogma, but only if it doesn't bite' reads an entry message. The first part of the statement of beliefs also reads: "I believe that the members of the Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua believe all kinds of different things."

The site map is interesting because it presents the floor plan of the virtual church showing the different rooms both visitors and devotees can visit.

Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua
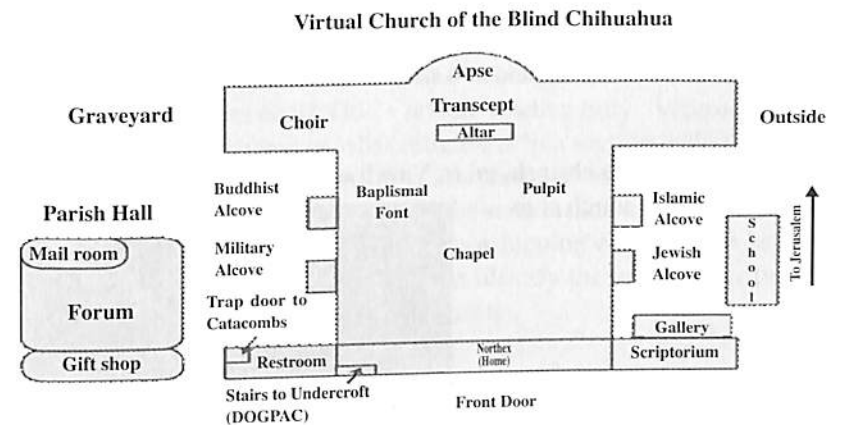
It is interesting that in dogchurch's "Chapel," devotees are offered liturgies from different Christian traditions. The link to Greek Orthodox, for example, directs to the website of the Greek Orthodox Church in America (http://www.goarch.org/en/chapel/text.asp). The liturgies and prayers, however, are suggestive that they ought to be conducted in the presence of a congregation, in a physical church, and not so much in the privacy of the home, in-front of a computer screen.

The site's Chapel also offers the so-called "Book of Uncommon Worship," which we suspect are original prayers crafted by members and officials of the virtual church. There is also a column of homilies in the Chapel, notably comprised of exhortations of members suited for Christian feasts like Christmas, Easter and Advent, among others. The different "alcoves", the equivalent of side-chapels in centuries-old Christian basilicas, are devoted to mainstream religions like Judaism, Islam, Bahai, Buddhism, Hinduism, and interestingly one that is named "Military". The last alcove is filled with audio files of hymns and prayers as well as links to related

websites (e.g. The Wounded Soldier Project at http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org), dedicated to soldiers and their families involved in the Global War on Terror.

The site is mono-lingual with English as its only mode of presentation. It has a library called "Reference Shelf" with titles of books listed according to subjects and linked to an online bookstore. Weblinks are provided e.g. to the site of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life (the online "CrossCurrents" magazine at http://www.aril.org/), giving the dogchurch site the impression of a portal a virtual place where one starts and ends his/her journey into cyberspace.

Case 3. Don't go to church, go to Vurch.com
URL: http://www.vurch.com
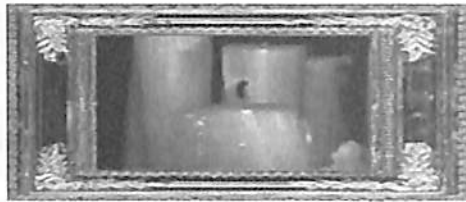
Vurch.com is interesting in that it does not affiliate itself with any religion. In fact, in its welcome remarks to visitors, vurch.com promises to be a place of respite and reflection without religion. Religion is seen as non-fitting to what people really need. Therefore, the site is posted as an alternative to established religious institutions and traditions. The welcome remark reads: "Think about life, another way of being, wonder at what it's all for, take a different route, see if God will answer back. Imagine there's no religion."

Interestingly, however, the site developers acknowledge some Christian (and Catholic) groups to have inspired them to set up the website. Among those acknowledged in the page "Thanks" are The Jesuits in Ireland, Christian Aid Foundation in the UK, the spiritual website beliefnet.com which aims to assist faith seekers — not just Christian faith seekers but seekers of other religious traditions as well e.g. Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. "Sticky music," which is set up by three musical geniuses affiliated with a worshipping community in Scotland, provided

the musical backdrop in vurch.com's "The Room with a View," and "The Dream Room."

Although the site is inspired by traditional religions, there is certain uniqueness in the presentations that characterize it as "cyber-religion" or "online religion." For one, it takes visitors away from any notion of religion. The phrase "Don't go to church, go to vurch.com" is displayed prominently on the home page as well as on a signature vurch T-shirt that is sold online. Second, the prayers are by no means known formulas in Christianity or even Catholicism. Visitors are encouraged to post their own prayer on the so-called "Vurch prayer wall" to be viewed by other vurch-goers or for God's private reading only. Visitors are also asked to share their view of what religion is in a section called "Bastard Theology" and to submit a song (any kind from classical, pop to ambient) which they think is religious enough to be sang in Church. This, in fact, is the site's only reference to an offline worshipping environment but still maintains no particular doctrine that can identify the followers or the site itself with any established religious tradition.

Overall, the impression is that this site is a good example of "cyber-religion" or "online religion." Vurch.com exists only in cyberspace and has no physical counterpart whatsoever in the offline environment. The design aesthetic reflects pop-culture although there are few images of Catholic emblems that are reminiscent of worship in a physical church. Rituals do not actually play any part in the whole worship process in vurch.com and in their place, prayer, specifically individual prayer the exact kind of prayer and the most any individual can do in front of their computer screen is given primary importance.

Case 4. Technosophy
URL: http://www.technosophy.com/"

The Technosophy website exists to promote the belief that everything on earth that we experience with our senses, including the universe itself, is technologically organized. From its Greek roots, tekein (to fabricate) and logos (word or discourse), the word "technology" is taken

to mean not just the man-made gadgets that we see functioning but a 'discourse or discussion on how to make things' — everything including the human body. The additive — sophy from the Greek word sophia meaning skill or wisdom makes for the word "technosophy." The word "technosophy" was coined by the site's maintainer, Terry Alden, to mean the "science of making or fabricating."

Technosophy's mission statement further reads:

The Motto of Technosophy is "Deus ex machina" or "God from a machine." In application to the concepts to be presented, it emphasizes the dual aspect of the human situation, the physical body as machine or collection of technologies and the spiritual or "soul" aspect which seems to be behind and directing the physical biocomputer and mechanical systems. The "Ghost in the Machine" is another expression of the mysterious mind (or spirit) vs. body relationship.

"Deus ex machina" comes from the scholarly study of Greek and Roman drama. It refers to a device often employed in ancient plays in which a god intervenes at the end of the drama and makes everything work out right, as though by waving a magic wand. The dictionary gives: "Any artificial, forced, or improbable device used to resolve the difficulties of a plot." As technology becomes increasingly powerful and "magical," it may well resolve, one way or another, the difficulties of the World Plot, that Divine Comedy in which we all participate as we strut and fret our brief hour upon the world stage.

Science is the *de-facto* religion of our time in the sense that it provides us our paradigm or world view. It tells us what is proper for us to believe ... about everything. True, it has ignored some of the more perplexing problems, like spirit, psychic and other paranormal phenomena, etc. It has attempted (probably unsuccessfully) to demystify our outlook on the world, which is ironic since it has also provided so much evidence of the miraculous and magical nature of life. This is a good place to state Arthur C. Clark's Law of Technology: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magick."

Much of the "philosophy of technology" was given by Dr. Marshall McLuhan, whom the writer was privileged to know. Many of McLuhan's ideas will be presented here as they are integral to this discussion. McLuhan believed that modern electrical technologies are causing a shift in human cognition back toward the mystical mode of consciousness which he associated with tribal cultures. The right hemisphere of the brain is being stimulated leading to an holistic outlook on things which is reviving everything from the occult to spiritualism and religion. Technosophy embraces the idea of spiritual wisdom brought about by a profound study of and appreciation for technology in its broadest implications.

Interestingly, this text was last update in April 1999. Entering the so-called "Technosophy Maze" on the site's homepage, visitors are led to also read the cyber-religion's 12 Precepts. One of them reads: "There is no LIVING organism in the Universe which is not an example of technology or an example of a technologically-organized system intelligently optimizing some form of survival strategy incorporated into the design and performance of its attendant biophysical mechanisms."

There is also the so-called "Architect's Office" which is a section devoted to the writings of Terry Alden, the founder of Technosophy and maintainer of the Technosophy website. The "Lunar Lounge" opens to a web address where sites relevant to Technosophy are listed —some are feminist movements, others are volunteering work. The "Blue Drawing Room" is another repository of resources for Technosophy followers. It is a virtual library of weblinks and articles on topics such as astrology, mythology, metaphysics and technology, virtual religions and others. The site also has an art gallery featuring works by Matisse, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec and others.

Apart from these offerings, the site itself has no noted ritual or worship mechanism for the practice of Technosophy. Serious followers are only directed to other virtual religions featured in the Blue Drawing Room.

Case 5. The Church at Fun City
URL: http://www.funama.de/
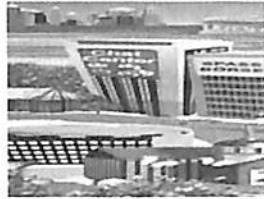
"The Fun City" is a virtual urban community that is complete with all the amenities imaginable in an offline environment. The opening page shows the city map where each point that is labeled (e.g. bank, cinema hall, the city hall and even fire department) links to a particular place the browser can visit. One interesting feature is the "church" of the virtual city. The church is essentially "Christian" in its belief system and the pastors and staffs are all real people. However, it resides entirely in cyberspace. There is no such place existing in the physical realm, not anywhere in Germany or in Europe's German speaking countries. The processes inside the virtual church can only be done online. Thus, it qualifies according to our understanding of "cyber-church" or "online religion."

The panorama of the city itself is quite telling. The church, or the image of it, is dwarfed by the towering structures shown on the map. At quick glance of the vista, the place of worship is not easily distinguishable. There is also no label on it unlike the neighboring chat center, for example, or the city hall. Also worth mentioning is the fact that the virtual church is portrayed stereotypically, with its run down, moss colored facade and centuries-old look. However modern the city is and especially given that it resides in cyberspace, the church is still thought of as a structure of antiquity.

Upon clicking it, the browser is led to the interior entrance of the church and given directions where to go. The main worship area is actually a chatroom, where people interact among themselves like they normally would in any Internet chatroom. The presumption here is, however, that the subjects of discussion strictly revolve around Church topics with no hanky-panky in between.

Upon entering the so-called "Pfarrhaus," the browser can choose to chat with "real" counselors residing in separate virtual rooms. These counselors, at least two of whom are wearing religious habits, are ready to listen and give advice to anyone in need. They have their own photos uploaded so that the browser knows somehow who he/she will be interacting with. The apparent disembodied communication using the computer and Internet in effect becomes an embodied one, to some extent.

The experience visiting the Church at Fun City is anything but uninteresting and stale. A sacramental encounter with God may not be readily verified but the expert use of technology to simulate offline activities such as counseling and chatting with religion-minded people can already prepare the ground for such a deeper union in other venues: private prayer or Bible reading, for example.

Case 6. The Virtual Church of Scotland
URL: http://www.webchurch.org/
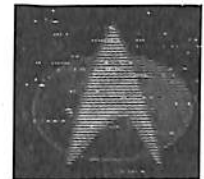
There are other examples of using technology to express faith and practice religion online. The "Virtual Church of Scotland" (http://www.webchurch.org/), for instance, positions itself as the "spiritual home on the Internet." It has all the typical accompaniments of a religion website e.g. inspirational stories and quotes as well as prayers. But an interesting addition is the interpretation of Star Trek episodes from a Christian point of view and in the process leaving some moral lessons to browsers. There is also a section on different Christian religions, among them Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and others.

Case 7. The Church of Fools
URL: http://churchoffools.com/

The "Church of Fools" (http://churchoffools.com/) is another example where the concept of "virtuality" — from the space itself to the rituals — is central to the functioning of this cyber-church sponsored by the Methodist Church, U.K. To enter the church, as a cartoon character

and move around as such requires a specific version of Shockwave software. Only then will any browser can navigate him/herself throughout the virtual edifice. There is a section called "View Movie Clips" where prayers like the "Our Father" as well as group chat and a sermon can be seen in animated format.

Case 8. Other virtual churches
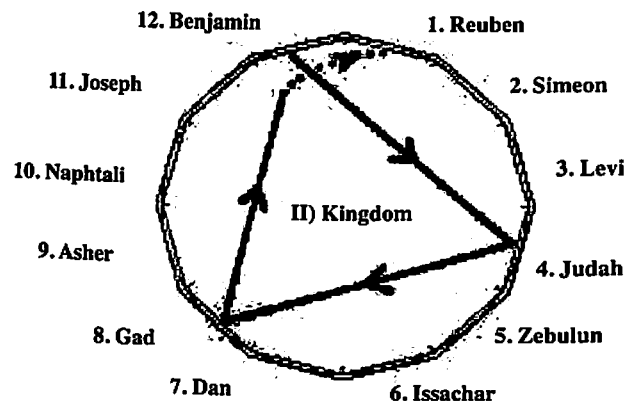
The Horary Chart of Israel's Tribes.
Copyright http://occult-advances.org

Webring.com (http://n.webring.com/hub?ring=virtualchurchoft) hosts a collection of 13 virtual church sites that "allow for a little breath of distance (and even humor) within our basic respect and caring toward ourselves and our religions, histories, cultures, philosophies, spiritualities, literatures, and sciences." The list includes "Divination and Meditation: Paths to Enlightenment" (http://www.pathstoenlightenment.com/), the "Timeless Ink Press" (http://www.timeless-ink-press.com/index.html) where magic and the world of fairies expressed in poetry meets man's search for meaning, the Occult page (http://occult-advances.org/) where Jewish mysticism, alchemy and some Hindu practices meet, and the Guided Meditations on http://www.fyrewind.com.

Conclusion

John Naisbitt describes contemporary society as a "Technologically Intoxicated Zone... defined by the complicated and often paradoxical relationship between technology and our search for meaning." The indicators of this state of affairs are that people in contemporary society seem to prefer "quick fix, from religion to nutrition... fear and worship technology... blur the distinction between real and fake... love technology as a toy... live (their) lives distanced and distracted.

Mark C. Taylor perceives the cultural environment of contemporary society at large to be virtual and religious at the same time. He writes: "Processes that have long seem natural and relations that have long seemed material now appear to be information processes and virtual realities." And religion evidently is no exception to this trend.

After the short and not-so in-depth analysis of a handful of cyber-religious websites, we have seen that indeed the realm of religious expression in cyberspace is expanding as well as gaining sophistication e.g. in the presentations as well as in the technical add-ons. We have seen varied formats and design aesthetics that establish identity, like that of a corporate entity, as well as increase the sites' visual appeal. We have also seen how, complementary to texts, audiovisual materials were included along with familiar emblems used by mainstream religions in order to simulate the worship environment in the offline world. It might be reasonable to think, however, that the belief systems presented in some of the sites were devised only by individuals or institutions who wish to assert themselves as well as their so-called "doctrine" in the new medium and in the process, to gain followers.

But do these initiatives actually constitute what can be regarded a "church"? Is there valid evidence, up till now, suggesting that online worship in front of a computer screen and in the absence of a community sharing the same belief can be more effective or can replace altogether the rituals, chants and prayers of a group of people within a physical location? In short, can cyberspace be the focal point of devotion?

Considering the idea of a virtual Jerusalem, Stephen OLeary asks the same question:

"Is it possible to imagine that Jewish people could ever come to accept and practice a purely virtual enactment of this ritual? Isn't the physicality of the place itself something that cannot be dispensed with? How could a cyber-temple replace the actual wall of the real one?"

A cyber-religion or online religion in its purest form, says Hoejsgaard is one that is 100 percent virtually communicated, one that reflects the Internet culture, and one that detaches itself completely from any institutionalized religion and by itself exists without any hierarchy, devoid of structure.

We briefly return to Yves Lambert's description of today's religious landscape. He said: "this-worldliness, self-spirituality, dehierarchization and dedualization, parascientificity, pluralistic, relativistic, fluctuating, seeking faiths, and loose network-type organizations (indeed, religion without religion).

Could we then ask a basic question? Is cyber-religion or online religion, in its purest form, a religion indeed? In order to verify this, a next logical step can be taken i.e. to ask directly the followers of cyber-religion or online religion. What sort of spiritual gratifications do they derive from online worship? Is there indeed an other-worldly experience online, an experience comparable to the sacramentals of the Christian Church, for example? If so, how do these online devotees translate their online experience into living in the offline world? Theologians could also shed some light on this issue.

References:

Morten T. Hoejsgaard, "Cyber-religion, On the cutting edge between the virtual and the real." In Morten T. Hoejsgaard and Margit Warburg (eds.), "Religion and Cyberspace," New York: Routledge (2005), pp. 50-64.

Wallys W. Conhaim, "Accessing Religion Online." Retrieved April 27, 2007 from http://www.infotoday.com/linkup/lud110102-conhaim.shtml

Other web sources:

Infinite Church: A New Day in Worship
URL: http://www.infinitechurch.com

Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua
URL: http://www.dogchurch.org

Vurch.com
URL: http://www.vurch.com

Technosophy
URL: http://www.technosophy.com

CONVERGING COMMUNICATION

Allwyn Fernandes[1]

In the '70s, my home had a Telephone (voice)
In the '80s, the Television (video/pictures) came in
In the '90s, the Computer (data) came in

They all lived separate, independent lives, via separate wires (networks).

But now, they are being integrated into one 'network'. The Telephone (voice) has "married" the Television (video) and the Television has married the Computer (data)!

Two things are happening as a result, as we get increasingly nomadic in our use of communications:

In the home, all three are available through a single "pipe" or network coming into the home. In other words, the single wire that connects my telephone to the outside world also connects to my TV and my computer! It delivers news, entertainment, games and video films on demand from 300 or more channels to my TV and, at the same time, enables me to connect to the Internet through my PC (personal computer).

In due course, I expect my wife to call out: **"Your Television Is Ringing!"** because the call comes via the cable TV line!

---

[1] Allwyn Fernandes is a Communication professional based in Mumbai, India.

As I was writing this talk, I decided to "yahoo" my son who has just moved to California and is setting up house. The conversation went like this:

---

allwynfernandes: Hi Rohan, are you unpacked and connected to the Internet now?
Rohan: hi daddy... yes...i am connected now..
allwynfernandes: Great!
Rohan: yes...had all that done today....
allwynfernandes: How's everything? Put everything in place?
Rohan: not yet unpacked everything...so working on that...
allwynfernandes: Did you get a TV too?
Rohan: yes..i got a tv too....
Rohan: so am actually typing on my tv right now..
allwynfernandes: how do you mean?
Rohan: my laptop display is through my tv...I am testing it out...
allwynfernandes: So the statement that 'The Telephone (voice) has "married" the Television (video) and the Television has married the Computer (data)' is true!
Rohan: yes...it's true
allwynfernandes: And this week Reliance here offered a handphone that offers TV programmes and news channels!
Rohan: ok...that's great
allwynfernandes: So the first part is also true - the telephone has married the TV!
Rohan: yes...as you saw in my previous house too....the caller ID was displayed on the TV

Out of home also, I am able to access voice, video and data (three-in-one) through a tiny hand-held instrument — my mobile phone, handphone, cellphone, and *Blackberry*.

The mobile phone is getting smaller, but increasingly powerful thanks to increasingly power-efficient chips. It is increasingly becoming a multi-media computer. You can carry it around with you and use it to make

or receive calls, watch television on it, even see the news or a film if you have the time, and send email or transmit data.

And when you reach the office or home, you can plug it into your full-size home or office PC and ensure uninterrupted connectivity in the home, on the road or in the office.

'Move over PCs, your time is over!'

This is happening because of an important new development. In the "old days" — actually only in the recent 1990s! — you bought a computer and loaded it with expensive software like Word, Excel, email, photoshop, etc. that you needed.

Now you no longer need to do that because much of that software is available on the Internet. In other words, computing has moved from the "box" of your computer to the Internet. The "box" of your computer is becoming less important, in fact irrelevant, because you no longer need to install the software on your computer. Word, Excel, PowerPoint and a lot of other software is available on the internet. You don't need to install it on your PC any more. You can directly use these tools on the Net and save your work there itself.

> *"We call it cloud computing — it should be in a 'cloud' somewhere. If you have the right kind of browser or the right kind of access, it doesn't matter whether you have a PC, a Mac, or mobile phone or a BlackBerry — you can get access to the cloud by going to www.gotomypc.com from any Internet connection, click connect and the PC desktop shows up!" - Google CEO Eric Schmidt.*

One more development: Your mobile phone not only provides voice, video and data. — it is also beginning to link up with your frig, your microwave, your coffee-maker and your washing machine in a wireless (not wireline) way because of sensors embedded in them. These sensors result in machine-to-machine communication. They enable my mobile phone to talk to these machines using Bluetooth technology which is stamping out wires from your life. We are moving into a world without wires.

In due course, my wife will be able to use her cellphone to instruct our washing machine to start washing the clothes as she leaves her school, so that the clothes are done by the time she reaches home; or to get the microwave to start cooking the food as she turns the corner into our lane, so that dinner is ready by the time she gets there!

These machines have already begun to "talk" to each other much like fax machines do before they give you a printout that says: "Transmission OK" or " Transmission Error".

All this was considered science fiction a couple of decades ago. Not any more!

A new Trinity of the Communication Age has come into existence. And, honestly, we don't know where it is heading!

It is just like electric motors that slowly appeared in everything, from eggbeaters to toothbrushes and elevators in the first half of the 20th century.

Then in the second half of the 20th century, computers began to colonize all kinds of machinery, from cars to coffee machines, thanks to sensors embedded in them. Today, many aspects of the car, including your brakes, your airbag and your seat belt are controlled by sensors.

So, we are beginning to live in an age that is increasingly becoming

- Wireless
- Everything connects
- Always connected
- Offering personalized experience in terms of voice, video, data content

This is resulting in another new development — what is coming to be called social media and social networking. It is bringing together people with shared interests — People Like Us (PLU) — together in new communities in cyberspace through websites like MySpace, Orkut,

YouTube, Digg, fropper, facebook, Flickr, Bebo, hi5, digitaljournal, lifejournal, blogger, and wikis (www.wikipedia.org).

There are over 106 million users of MySpace as of Sept 2006. If MySpace were a country it would be the 11th largest in the world, between Japan and Mexico. These people feel empowered through increased sharing of information relevant to them and increased responsiveness and interactivity. They are forming new web-based communities cutting across distances, borders, races, religions, nationalities, and gender.

The Power of You and Me-dia

This is called the power of "You and Me-dia". Technology is making geography history and technological convergence is resulting in social convergence.

It is also creating another phenomena. Today you don't need banks bricks and mortar — for banking! You can do your banking at thousands of small machines called ATMs (Automated Teller Machines or AnyTimeMoney) and on the phone (phone-banking) and on the Internet (Internet banking) simply through "clicks" on your PC! Last week, I heard the Managing Director of a bank say: "We want to bring banking to you, rather than bring you to the bank!"

So, **are we still looking at bringing people to the Church or are we looking at taking Christ/Church to the people?** I have often heard Church critics say that the Church was obsessed with geography and real estate, with buildings — bricks-and-mortar. In those days, the Church wanted to be a visible presence through land and buildings. And we too felt good seeing the tall spires of a Church building. The Church of the future, it seems, may need neither land nor buildings! No more bricks and mortar! Just clicks!

But before we go into that, let's look at what new communications technologies and convergence are doing to human behavior and thinking processes and changing the nature of social interaction.

Impact of New Communications Technologies

Earlier	Today
Top-down, centre-out, one-way communication, often in an authoritative and defined, precise way	An additional horizontal axis of communications: top-down, centre-out and interactive in all in directions (gets everyone involved/engaged) 3-dimensional (3D)
Knowledge controlled by a few. Carefully scripted process for dissemination of information. Knowledge segregated for elites and masses, for age groups, etc.	24 X 7 TV, the Internet, camera phones, blogs, etc. make information available to all. This information is evaluated and acted on based on Regularity of Dissemination, Consistency, Source and Integrity. Unscripted process is in real time, hence unpredictable, continuous, messy with increased risks. Also, powerful peer-to-peer conversations are more influential
Institutions, private and public, were trusted and given benefit of doubt (even if they erred) by people who mattered most to them. Trust wasn't earned. It was there!	Rising influence of NGOs Nothing "official"/sacrosanct about institutions! Attitude of increasing skepticism towards the "official". Death of deference. Now trust has to be earned!
Academic credentials, analysis mattered	Experience trumps academic credentials, passion matters as much as analysis! Eloquence is visual, not verbal!

Earlier	Today
Mainstream media (MSM) main source of information	Mainstream Media (MSM) + New Media draw from expert opinion + mass experience ('phone in and tell your what you think' or be a 'citizen journalist') People rely more on the opinion of others in deciding what to watch or read. 'Watch the Top Ten Videos of the day' or 'Top User Selected Stories' User-Generated Content (UGC)
	Unprecedented sense of knowledge, information, empowerment across audiences

What's the resulting impact of all this?

One difference is the way our use of the Internet has changed from the late 1990s to 2007. The most important and revolutionary change that has come about on the Net is the gradual rise of a new collaborative Web (involving you and me, not the experts!) that is now known as Web 2.0. It has changed the way we think and use the Internet.

> "Web 2.0 refers to second-generation of web-based services - social networking sites, wikis, blogs, User-Generated Content (UGC) - that accentuate online collaboration and sharing among users. It is an arena where the web is a dominant platform, not your desktop."

What actually has changed in the last few years? In the past, the Internet was primarily a platform for one-way interaction where people used to get information or services by going online. The web pages on the original web were too static and there was no way a user could have contributed or customized them the way s/he wanted (this is what we mean by a personalized Web).

Now, your Web pages have come alive! And Internet users are engaged in a two-way collaborative platform with an amazing array of web services like tagging, blogging, vodcasting, podcasting, and social networking among others.

Web 2.0 is seen by many as a confluence/convergence of technology, people, and their attitudes. It has changed the way we think and use the Internet.

Generators, not just users, of content!

In the words of Tim O'Reilly, Web 2.0 is based on social software where the users **not just consume** the content, but **generate** it.

Now Internet users can contribute and create all types of content - from text (www.wikipedia.org) to pictures (www.photobucket.com) to videos (www.muvee.com like movie) to personal information (www.hi5.com) to open source software (www.openoffice.org).

There is a variety of innovative and rich Web 2.0 applications being used by youngsters, students and almost all who seek knowledge. The most prominent among them being Nuvvo (www.nuvvo.com), Schoolr (www.schoolr.com), Learn Without Limits (www.learnwithoutlimits.com), and Qunu (www.qunu.com).

There are hundreds of Web 2.0 websites catering to the increasing appetite of the online community. According to a business report, more than 1000 Web 2.0 companies were started in Silicon Valley last year. Technically, Web 2.0 has ensured the replacement of the personal computer as a platform by the Net.

Under a 'Universal Search' approach that Google began rolling out from May 23, Google began showing videos on its main results page along with photos, books and other content separate into different categories all on the same page! Google is now promising sounds to come alive on Google Earth — right from the Brazilian rainforests to Arctic ice sheets!

In the new world that is emerging, Television and Internet have a time edge in that they are instantaneous. But print, which is slower, has credibility. Radio, now digital radio, has reach. And there are lots of synergies between the radio and the Internet because they are personalized mediums, both are tremendously interactive and offer a platform for self-expression. All these are now coming together on a single page to enable you to access tomorrow's paper on the Web today, watch TV, listen to radio, or express yourself through a blog!

This new Web environment has so become a part of our daily lives that Time magazine named its Person of the Year for 2006 as **'You'.** The decision was made because of the role played by the new Web in changing the way people use the Net.

According to Time magazine:

"The story of 2006 was a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few, and helping one another for nothing, and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes."

In Conclusion:

The Web is no longer static. It has come alive with words (text), pictures, video, radio and, now, sound! People are getting increasingly connected via the World Wide Web all the time through hand-held mobiles.

People are contributing to the Web in a collaborative way and customizing its content and delivery to suit their needs using tagging (labels to make it easier to find blog posts, photos and videos that are related), blogging, vodcasting, podcasting, and social networking among others.

Is there a learning in all this for us as Church leaders?

Are we just **tinkering** with how we communicate with our new Internet-generation audiences (introducing audio-visual presentations for sermons) or are we looking at a whole new mindset approach relevant to them?

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them!" — Albert Einstein

****

Additional Background and Information

There was a time when

- telephone companies provided only a dial tone,
- cable companies offered television stations and specialty channels, and
- Internet companies offered service over telephone line-based modems.

Those days are long over.

- Cable companies now provide high-speed Internet access over cable lines, phone services, and radio frequencies (Wi-Fi and many other standards).
- Telephone companies are offering cable TV-like services in many parts of the world using very-high-speed DSL (digital subscriber line/loop) or fibre-to-the-home (FTTH).
- Cable firms will soon license TV programs they own to the cellphone companies to stream over third-generation (3G) cell networks to new cell phones, on which you can watch programming on demand.
- Cellphone companies will soon start offering handsets that have Wi-Fi and cell standards built in to provide what's known as unlicensed mobile access (UMA), a form of voice over Internet Protocol and Internet telephony. With UMA, instead of a cell phone hooking up with a nearby cell tower, it senses a local (an in-home) Wi-Fi network and connects, using a bit of the Internet to then transmit calls to the cellular operator's gateway and off into the phone system (forever connected— no place you can hide or stay unconnected!)

- UMA also offers better-quality indoor calls, still a problem for cellphones indoors.

Telephony today is less about voice (that's POTS — Plain Old Telephone System!). It's getting increasingly mobile as we get increasingly nomadic in our use of communications!

Mobile telephony is more about VAS (value added services like SMS, MMS, Instant Messaging) and other revenue-generating applications all over the world.

With the constantly increasing computing power of 'smart phones', users want much more out of their devices than to be able to just talk!

Already, your wrist watch is no longer a necessity — it's now a mere fashion statement! Your mobile phone is now your wrist watch, you digital camera, your diary, your Internet browser. It is now about to take the place of your cash and credit cards too, making wallets obsolete! It will also become your entrance card, employee or voter ID card, train or air ticket...it will enable you to do online banking!

Nokia, the world's biggest handset maker, a number of telecom service providers — China Mobile, Vodafone, Cingular, AT&T, BellSouth, Telefonica — and MasterCard have worked out a global initiative to turn mobile phones into wallets — **m-wallets.** They will soon embed a wireless chip into phones that will make them the cheapest and fastest way of making wireless payments.

The m-wallet works on the same concept as credit cards. It will be like storing a credit card in the mobile phone. The device will do much more than just make transactions. It will also hold coupons, pay bills and do other forms of online banking. Information like the remaining electronic cash balance, or transaction records, can be directly read offline by the cell phone. The only real challenge is security and ensuring no one can misuse it if it is stolen.

That's why everyone has to have a handphone today — even a semi-literate farmer for whom this is his first connect with the Internet! And these phones

are now being powered by solar batteries because Asia has plenty of God-given sunlight!

An important point to remember is that the mobile phone revolution is really Asia's revolution, not that of the western world where mobiles have been slower to catch up.

American cellphone operators used to dismiss Japanese advances in mobile phones with questions like "Do American users really want to send text messages, watch video on their phones, or buy ringtones? Or is that something peculiar to Japan?" Well, as it turned out, they do! Today, everyone across the world wants text messaging, video and gaming on their mobile phones!

About the Internet

Globally 1.1 billion people are online today (expected to hit 1.8 bn by 2010). They constitute 16% of the world's population.

About 500,000 people are coming online every day, mainly in Brazil, Russia (+Eastern Europe), India and China. If you look at Asia alone (our focus for this seminar), South Korea is the most advanced as far as digital infrastructure is concerned.

It leads in Internet usage and speed with 25.4 subscribers per 100 inhabitants. Ninety percent of South Korea has blazingly fast, 3-megabits-per-second broadband at home, and similarly high-speed wireless connections on the road. The telecom market is fiercely competitive, and broadband service costs the consumer less than $20 a month. There are 20,000 *PC* baangs, or Internet cafes, where you can rent a superfast machine for $1 an hour. Online gaming has become a way of life, with nearly 3,000 South Korean videogame companies boasting combined revenues of up to $4 billion.

China though has the largest number of Internet users in Asia — 132 million (10% of its population)! The figure for India is 50 million (5% of the population).

The figure of 16% of the world's population being online is expected to rise to 32% soon, with India and China being key drivers in that growth. Internet use in India has risen 700% since 2000. It is a mere question of time before India is in the Top 20 which means that at least 60% of people will be on line.

The US is slipping as Asian countries catch up, it has already fallen from fourth in the world in 2001 to 15th today in high-speed Internet penetration per capita.

Even in terms of language, it is no longer the English-speaking blogosphere — only 39% of it is English, 33% is Japanese, 10% Chinese, and Spanish (3%), Italian, Portuguese, French and Russian (each 2%), German (1%) and Farsi (1%).

In fact, the launch of a new .asia domain name later this year (after the resounding popularity of the .eu domain name), is yet another sign of the growth in popularity of Internet in the region along with Chinese character domain names like .cn for China, .kr for Korea, and .in for India. It will include five of the 12 largest economies in the world : Japan, China, South Korea, India and Australia.

So, we need to think again when we talk of the 'digital divide' — technology is reaching the digitally-deprived no matter what we think, because new technologies, competition and government investment are driving down costs and putting these Internet-connected telephone devices digital dividends — into the hands of more and more people.

Internet Use in Asia in terms of Penetration[2]

Hong Kong	4.9 million Internet users as of Feb/05, 68.2% penetration
	1 million broadband subscribers as of Dec/02 - 17 ISP (2000)
Japan	86 million users as of Dec./05, 67.1% penetration
	7.9 million broadband subscribers as of Dec/02
Singapore	3 million or 67% of the 4.5 million population
	392,000 broadband subscribers as of Dec/03 - 9 ISP (2000)
Taiwan	13 million or 60% of the population of 22 million
Malaysia	11 million Internet users as of Sept/2006, 38.9% penetration

South Korea	12.5 million or 25.4 per 100, very high speed broadband
Viet Nam	14.5 million Internet users as of Dec./06, 17.1% penetration
Thailand	8.4 million Internet users as of March/05, 12.5% penetration
China	132 million Internet users as of Dec./06, 10% penetration
	77 million broadband subscribers as of Jun/06
Philippines	7.8 m Internet users as of March/2005, 9.0% penetration
Indonesia	18 million Internet users as of Dec./05, 8.1% penetration
Pakistan	12 million Internet users as of Sept/06, 7.2% penetration
India	50 million, 5% penetration (broadband is negligible)
Sri Lanka	280,000 or 1.4% of the population
Nepal	175,000 Internet users as of Sept/05, 0.7% penetration
Myanmar	300,000 Internet users as of Oct/06, 0.5% penetration
Laos	25,000 Internet users as of Sept/06, 0.4% penetration
Bangladesh	370,000 Internet users as of Mar/07, 0.3% penetration

Internet Use in Asia in terms of sheer numbers[3]

China	132 million Internet users as of Dec./06, 10% penetration
	77 million broadband subscribers as of Jun/06
Japan	86 million users as of Dec./05, 67.1% penetration
	7.9 million broadband subscribers as of Dec/02
India	50 million, 5% penetration (broadband is negligible)
Indonesia	18 million Internet users as of Dec./05, 8.1% penetration
Viet Nam	14.5 million Internet users as of Dec./06, 17.1% penetration
Taiwan	13 million or 60% of the population of 22 million
South Korea	12.5 million or 25.4 per 100, very high speed broadband
Pakistan	12 million Internet users as of Sept/06, 7.2% penetration
Malaysia	11 million Internet users as of Sept/2006, 38.9% penetration
Thailand	8.4 million Internet users as of March/05, 12.5% penetration
Philippines	7.8 m Internet users as of March/2005, 9.0% penetration
Hong Kong	4.9 million Internet users as of Feb/05, 68.2% penetration
	1 million broadband subscribers as of Dec/02 - 17 ISP (2000)
Singapore	3 million or 67% of the 4.5 million population
	392,000 broadband subscribers as of Dec/03 - 9 ISP (2000)
Bangladesh	370,000 Internet users as of Mar/07, 0.3% penetration
Myanmar	300,000 Internet users as of Oct/06, 0.5% penetration
Sri Lanka	280,000 or 1.4% of the population
Nepal	175,000 Internet users as of Sept/05, 0.7% penetration
Laos	25,000 Internet users as of Sept/06, 0.4% penetration

In India, when mobile phones were introduced in 1994, they used to cost $7,000 per instrument and you paid Rs 16 (33 cents) per minute of talk time. These costs have now come down to less than $20 for the cheapest phone and just about a rupee (less than ½ a cent) for calls to anywhere in India. And India is big — almost 4,000 from north to south and 3,000 km from east to west!

We are living in exponential times
Motorola introduced the first mobile phone in 1983.

It took 20 years to get to the first one billion subscribers but just 3 years (2006) to get to two billion, with 1.6 m being added daily.

The third billion is coming even faster - by the end of this year instead of 2008 — for a world population of 6.5 billion!

By 2010, that number is expected to reach 4 billion, with India and China alone adding 11 million subscribers a month.

"In the world today, we have four births per second. In the mobile world, we sell 25 mobile devices per second."
Ed Zander, chairman and chief executive of cellphone giant Motorola

The number of text messages sent and received every day exceeds the population of the planet.

Between photos, videos, e-mail, Web pages, instant messages, phone calls and other digital content, the world generated 161 billion gigabytes or 161 exabytes of digital information last year (i.e. 1 exabyte = 1 billion gigabytes)

****

---

[2] The information was retrieved form http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm.
[3] The information was retrieved form http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm.

What's coming?

Your Television Is Ringing! Because the call will come via the cable TV line!

Broadband Wireless Picture
Wi-Fi network to an entire city by connecting wireless access points into existing cable lines up on telephone poles. WiMax, a broadband point-to-multi-point wireless standard that's just starting to move into the market in urban areas as a replacement for leased digital lines.

Internet Phone Technology or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)
It is as far as one can get from Alexander Graham Bell's first telephone where the distance the signal travelled depended on how loudly you shouted down the telephone!

Internet Phone Technology or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) converts ordinary phone conversations into digital files for cheap Internet phone calls.

VOIP is effectively distance-independent. Just as storage and bandwidth are playing havoc with traditional broadcasting economics, so distance-independent voice traffic will undermine the carefully constructed cradle of domestic and international costs and tariffs. From 16 million global users at the beginning of 2005, there will be 200 million VOIP consumers by 2008.

Hand-Held Devices and Entertainment

Definitely, the fourth major growth area. We are already increasingly nomadic in our use of communications.

Voice recognition and Voice controlled systems are also coming in. If you call Microsoft, an electronic voice answers and asks you for the person's name you're trying to reach. You say it - "Jeff Sandquist" and then it comes back with a recording of Jeff Sandquist so you know you're going to the right place. "Are you looking for 'Jeff Sandquist, Channel 9' ? Why yes I am! The call goes right through.

If it doesn't, or you hacked Jeff's name, it prompts you for a whole lot of other things. "Do you know the email address of the person you are trying to reach?" etc. Imagine calling a number and saying "Pope Vatican" and getting routed to the Pope's secretary!

> In 2001, China became the number one country in the world in terms of its mobile subscriber base with 145 million mobile phone users. Today, China has topped 409 million, or 30 handsets for every 100 people, a rise of more than 5 million new handsets every month.
>
> In India, the 5 million telephones in 1991 have skyrocketed to over 200 million phones today, of which 120 million are cellphones and 80 million are landlines. The mobile is now Indias best selling consumer product, pushing bicycles to second place!
>
> The Indian government proposes to offer all citizens free high-speed broadband connectivity @ 2 MB per second by 2009 through the two state-owned telecom providers BSNL and MTNL.
>
> Against one government-run TV channel in 1991, 70 million homes, mainly in urban areas, now have access to over 300 channels on cable & satellite, opening up minds and fuelling expectations. With Direct To Home (DTH) coming in, rural homes will be able too access satellite TV with a simple dish on the terrace.

Convergence

Convergence is the product of the transition from analogue to digital where all forms of content be it voice, text, pictures, figures, audio and visual — are undifferentiated bits of data.

> To digitize is to translate into digital form — that is, translate into 'bit' or dot maps. Optical scanners digitize images by translating them into 'bit' or dot maps, a dot being the smallest identifiable part of an image. It is possible to digitize sound, video, and any type of movement. To digitize sound, for example, a device measures a sound wave's amplitude many times per second and then records them digitally, in 'bits' or dot maps. Laser printers, for instance, re-create characters and images by printing patterns of dots.

Digital has several advantages:

- It expands capacity hugely even over today's infrastructure fibre speeds over copper.
- Digital brings with it high definition and interactivity where, increasingly the user rather than the broadcaster is in control. This is most obvious in television as well as the Internet.

Thanks to digitization, movies are being beamed directly to cinema houses, reducing the opportunity for piracy though CDs and DVDs.

As next generation access networks come on stream, our capacity for information and communication is limited only by our imagination! It's increasing Convergence which offers for innovation, enhanced consumer choice and expanded information, education and entertainment that electronic content brings to enrich our lives.

How fast is this coming?

Most projections in 2000 expected the UK market today to be at about 7 million digital households. In fact the number was twice as much by 2005! Broadband was expected in 1 million UK households by 2005. Instead, there were over 6 million broadband homes by 2005, growing at 60,000 a week; with a blended average speed of 1mb plus and falling prices.

In digital radio, in 2003 there were only 100,000 sets in the UK market. Today there are almost 1.5 million dedicated sets with many millions more people listening to digital radio via the digital TV set, through broadband or over module. 6 million Americans have listened to Podcasts. There are 100 million podcasts and subscribers are growing at the rate of 20% per month. YouTube serves 100 million videos every day, and served 2.5 bn videos to 20 million visitors in June 2006.

And all this is **Empowering** users by providing **information** and enabling them to **respond** and **share** their own writings, photos, lists, and other creative efforts — their **UGC** — through use of their geographical location and search history.

Allowing users to **personalize** how they search the web, moving beyond the one-size-fits-all approach. The Internet, not newspapers, is now the first rough draft of history and old media outlets are restructuring their websites and marching in line online.

"More people are now going to the Internet for news because it's not just static content. Since the advent or broadband, the Internet has evolved hugely in terms of audio and video content and news is a beneficiary."

A 28-year-old young son of a journalist in the US, when offered a free issue of his local newspaper and a free copy of USA Today turned them both down. He got all the news he needed from the Internet, he said.

"It is no secret that the Internet is an immediate and plentiful source of news and information that has no deadline. It has decimated print's ability to provide the information I want quickly and relevantly. There are a plethora of credible online sources (not newspaper websites) that constantly update news that is readily available in an online form at any time.

"My generation does not know what it means not to have the internet. High speed internet can be bought in some cases for less than a subscription to your paper. I might as well take the price of a newspaper subscription and put it towards a faster bandwidth internet subscription, enabling me to get my information even faster!"

"Our world has become a global one, and newspapers have remained content to localize your audience. A newspaper, while meeting very basic needs of information, falls far short of my expectations and the expectations of my generation."

What he wants is "instant" state, national and international news plus hyper local news on his particular "community". If it was all there on the newspaper's website then he would give up print permanently — it is the smart newspaper publisher who figures out the right combination to converge the newspaper and website together so that both platforms are necessary.

But the Net's greatest strength is its immediacy and an open communications environment in which free speech can flourish — cannot compensate for its biggest weakness its inaccuracy, its promotion of rumour and misinformation alongside real information. False pictures of the Virginia Tech killer were on the Net within hours. On the other hand, the Internet allowed a collective show of emotion, enabling people to post messages of support, sympathy and outrage online with tributes, eyewitness accounts, photos and video on the Net.

****

'WORD AND THE WORLD': FROM A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

Sebastian Periannan[1]

Introduction:

In the Christian religious context, the Word (Logos) or more preciously the Word of God is understood very dynamically. Jesus Christ is the Word of God par excellence; He is the eternal Word of God who reveals the mystery of the Triune God. However, the Sacred Scripture is also seen as the Word of God who continues to reveal to humanity. Thus, it is evident that "The Word of God is like a hymn with many voices, proclaimed by God in a variety of ways and forms (cf. Heb 1:1). The history of Revelation is long and has many heralds, yet it is always characterized by a hierarchy in meaning and function."[2] To have better comprehension of the Word of God, it is worth exploring the Biblical, historical, philosophical and cultural background of the use of Logos which signifies the Word of God.

The Johannine Prologue begins with Logos. However, the word Logos has a long history in its philosophical and the ological significance. The word is LOGOS in Greek — meant "counting, reckoning". For Heraclitus word is logos — a metaphysical reality, connecting principles which form a rib of understanding between old and young, between man and God. For him, logos is the principle order of universe.

According to Stoic Philosophy, Logos is a mind of God, guiding, controlling and directing all things. Philo uses many times (1500) — according to him Logos is mediating figure which comes from God and establishes a link between transcendental God and the world (man). Word is intermediating between God and universe, communicating of the principles and in away secondary God.

---

[1] Sebastian Periannan, PhD is Dean of Communications and the Rector of St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore, India.

[2] Instrumenum Laboris for synod of Bishops: XII Ordinary General Assembly on the World of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (Vatican City 2008), p.9

The Hellenistic Understanding of Logos: The Greeks understood the Logos mainly as reason or rational principle within every human being. For them it was the expression God's mind which kept the world in order.

The Hellenistic Jewish Understanding of Logos: Our knowledge of the Hellenistic Jewish concept of the Logos derives mainly from the writings of Philo (ca 20BC — 50AD), a Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria. According to him no one can see the very nature of God, but one can see his image, which he calls the most holy Word. He regards Logos as God's self-manifestation, in the place next to God, and thus almost a "second God". For a better comprehension of this Logos we have to analyse the foundations of the Present concept of the Word.

1. FOUNDATIONS:

The concrete foundations of the "Word" are inspiration from God through the Holy Spirit, God experiences and encounters of the People of old and new Israel, authentic writers of the Word, translation, publication and interpretation of the Word, reading, listening, celebrating and living the Word.

Dabar in the Old Testament

► It is the word in the OT. It has got some power and equal to God. In Hebrew, it refers to spoken word but it is more than that. In Hebrew thought, "Dabar" the word, has certain energy, power and dynamism of the source.

► In the OT, the word of God is very effective and always end with meaning and creativity. The Word has creative power e.g., 'Let there be light' (Gen 1:3). God's word is effective. Examples are:

Hosea 6:5: "Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgement goes forth as the light";

Is 11:4: "But the righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked"; and,

Heb 4:12: "Indeed, the word of the God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joins from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart".

It ends in action. God's word is salvific. Just as God created the world through His Word, he brought salvation through salvific Word in promising him seed, land and blessing to the all nations.(Gen 12:1-12)

► Prophetic Word Jer 1:4-19: "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, before I formed you in the womb I knew you..."

► God's word is revelatory. God brings good news to man by word. God makes known to man his plan and ways. By his word we come to know who He is revealed.

Is 2:3-5: "The word of the Lord came from Jerusalem, he shall judge between the nations...Let us go up to the mountain".

Is 55:10-11: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth..so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purposes, and succeed in the things for which I sent it".

► In Targumin Literature (Aramaic Bible) MEMRA (Aramaic), Dabar (Hebrew) it does not only stand for word of God, but for God, Holy Spirit.

► When the people of Israel came back to Jeremiah, they began to see a kind of parallelism between the word of God and a kind of divine wisdom. After returning to Jeremiah, they had great devotion to word of God.

Wisdom 9:1-2: Wisdom came down on earth. Wisdom formed human beings.

Sir 24:3: "I came from the mouth of the most high, and covered the earth like a mist".

Prov 1:24-28; Prov 8:22-23:

"The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
that first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was
set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth".

The so called Johannine prologue is the only place in the NT that the term Logos (Word) is used as a title and in an absolute sense (elsewhere, as in Rev 19:13: it is used in combinations such as 'the Word of God' which is a name of the exalted Christ, the 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'.

The Jewish understanding of Logos: For a Jew, the word that comes out of God's mouth is not merely a voice but creative power. It actually does things. The Hebrew equivalent dabar, is used in the creation story to bring shape to a void land, to being light to a dark sphere, and life to all beings. God uttered the words: "Let there be..." (Gen 1,3) and everything came into being. The creative activity of the Word is summarized in Ps 33, 6.9: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (v. 6) "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (v. 9)

In Jewish thought, what the Word was and did are also ascribed to Wisdom (Sophia). By Wisdom, God founded the earth (Prov. 3, 19-20). Wisdom existed from eternity and was involved in creation (Prov 8, 22-31; Sir 1,1-10). Word and Wisdom are used with identical meaning to show that God made all things by his Word and humanity by his Wisdom (Wis 9,1.2). Just as the Word is in the bosom of the Father (1, 18), Wisdom is described as coming forth from the mouth of the most high (Sir 24, 3). Both Wisdom and Logos are revealed to Israel in the Mosaic Law, but are rejected by human beings (Sir 24; Bar 3, 9-4, 4; 1 Enoch 42). There are many more parallels between Wisdom and Word, as well as law, in Sirach 24. The Wisdom of Solomon 18, 15 refers to the pre-existence of the Logos on the royal throne in heaven. The Aramaic equivalent of Logos is menra which is used in the Targums mainly as a periphrasis for God and his activities. Thus Jews in the first century AD understood Logos as the

Wisdom of God which had the power to create, heal, deliver, and fulfill God's purpose. In the Targums, the Word represented God participating in human affairs.

From **creation** event and encounter, to the father of all nations, Abraham, leader of the law; Moses, kings of Yahweh; and the prophets, who spoke His Words: "Word as instructive, the Word as salvific, and Word as creative are to be found in the prologue of John, in it the Word is personified". This Word appeared in human form and who pitched his tent to dwell among us humans (Jn 1:14, cf Sir 24:8 / 12-13), for like the wisdom of old, his delight is to be among the children of humans (Prov 8:31)[3]

Word does not mean only the written or spoken Word: it may well mean the events of history, the signs of the times, messages that come to us in a myriad ways. Word is operative within the nature and the history of humanity.

Long ago, St. Bonaventure spoke of:

Liber naturae	- *the books of nature*
Liber scripturae	- *of scripture*
Liber vitae	- *and of life*[4]

Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in sacred scripture, have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

This 'Word' is everything for some, something for many, and nothing at all for few. There are people who argue that the biblical World view has very little to do with our life — World as of today. But the heart of the matter is that, we need to be nourished, cherished, in the biblical Worldview and trained to think in terms of its foundations, communication, connections, distinctions and convergence on the issues of our times, lest we lose our spiritual, moral, and social vocation altogether.

---

[3] Rui de Menezes, *Functions* of the Word in the bible, Delhi: Vidyajyati Journal of Theological Refection, 66(2002) 873-883

[4] S.Arokiasamy (ed), *God creaed the World by Hits Word*, Delhi: Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Refection, 72/5, (2008) P. 1

Genesis creation story of light and darkness, the sun and the moon, the waters, the earth and living creatures; all of which are 'good' in God's eyes (cf. Gen 1:1-2:4) "How majestic is your name in all the earth?" (Ps. 8:1). Genesis 1 presents the universe as a projection of God's Word into cosmic reality. "God said: let there be light, day and night, stars and sky, earth and water, plants and beasts..." To the perceiving eye, the universe is a image of symbols, a polymorphic message proclaiming the glory of God. "Day to day conveys the message; night to night imparts the knowledge without sound of Words, without voice being heard, the message goes forth to the ends of the earth" (Ps 19:2-5). It stems from the divine identity of a God who speaks of a Messiah who is "Word". It is the continuation of the self communication of a God who, through creation and incarnation, wants to share his deepest identity. It is the on-going echo resounding in the World of the voice of the one who is the Amen, the faithful and true witness to the God of truth (Rev. 3:14; cf. Is. 65:16).[5] "God so loved the World that he gave his only Son" (Jn. 3:16).

The **translations of the Bible** are the Word of God that brings to people the core meaning of the inherited faith. Therefore, the Word is the primary source of our faith, hope and charity. In the second place, the Word is the confirmation of dogma and doctrine. The Word's basic paradigm of divine communication is the narrative and story approach. We need "to feel our thoughts and to think our feelings" (T. S. Eliot)[6]

2. COMMUNICATION:

The very word 'Bible' means 'books' and books are one of the main forms of communication. The books of the Bible report the Word of God. 'Word' means language, which is the very heart of the communication process. The entire Bible is language and communication. The biblical God is a God who speaks.[7] St. John announced that communication is at the heart of the Divine reality. God not only creates but also communicates from the beginning. "God's word is not merely a carrier of information. God's communication is a Self-communication. Its content is necessarily God's Self, even when the Word speaks about the world and the humans in it".[8]

[5] L.Legran, Missionary Communication: A Biblical Perspective: A paper presented in the National Seminary on "Mission and Communication" held at St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalor, November 2004, p. 1-5

From a communication perspective, the source for the Word and the world is God. The content or the message of the Word is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The channel or the medium of the Word is the Bible and the Cross. The receivers of the Word are the People of God, people of good will and any human being living in the world. The effect or the impact of the Word is Salvation.

Word Is:	World is:
• Active, instructive	Natural, spatial, temporal
• Alive, efficacious	Sanctuary for animals and humans
• Dynamic, Healing	Created by God as a gift, resource
• Prophetic	Temple of Religions, Reforms
• Liberative	School of Knowledge, creativity
• Creative	Abode of wisdom and Spirituality
• Participatory	Vehicle of culture and civilisation
• Salvific	House with problems, sins and solutions.

These aspects of the Word are highlighted in the scriptures itself. This we shall illustrate below:

Liberative
"But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Mt 4:4

Creative
"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Jn 1:1. "In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth," Gen 1:1

Salvific
"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." Lk 21:33

[6] S.Arokiasamy, *The Word growing in the field*, Delhi: Vidyajyothi Journal of Theological Refection

[7] L.Legrand, op, cit

[8] Vincent M. Concessao, God's Word – Living Hope and Lasting Peace, Delhi: Vidyajyothi Journal of Theological Refection, Vol. 72/5, May 2008, p328-329.

Healing

The Word also brings healing and deliverance (Ps 107:20).
The Word is the means by which God's will and message were revealed (Jer 1, 4; Ezek 1,3; 6,1; Amos 3, 1.8).
It accomplishes God's mission (Isa 55,11) and carries out divine judgement (Isa 9,8).
In brief, the Word in the OT is not merely a speech, but is energetic power that creates, heals, delivers, reveals and judges, and thus accomplishes God's will.

Alive and Active

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart". Heb 4:12

Dynamic

"But the word of God grew and multiplied". Acts 12: 24

Prophetic

"Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" Jer 23: 29

Participatory

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55: 10-11

The Word interacts with the World

The authenticity of the Word is reflected and portrayed in the following table from the interactive dimension of the Word and the world. The very interaction between the Word and world can be seen from the revelation of God."The authenticity of this revelation, true to God and true to man, appears especially in the Passion. On the Cross, Jesus is true to man by a death which is most physically authentic".[9]

[9] L.Legrand, op.cit.,

The Word, biblical values or the kingdom of God values more percolate into the streams and fabric of our family, church, society and the World which is shown in the following table:

Dimension	*Religio-cultural*	*Socio-political*	*Economic-environmental*
Creative	Creation	People of God	Food & Security
Liberative	Exodus event	Sin / Covenantal relationship	God's protection
Prophetic	Leadership	Judgement & Promise	Stewardship / Holiness
Dynamic	Revealed Word	Incarnation	Parables & Miracles
Redemptive	Transfiguration/ Glory	Crucifixion / Radiance	Resurrection / Evangelisation

Word encounters the World

In Christian reflection it could be further said that the World is the very 'otherness' of God and in creating the World. God is expressing His inner irreducible "otherness" (the logos) through the created reality. Thus seen, the material universe is holy and sacred.[10]

The Word is totally revealed and fully manifested in the love, justice, mercy and peace of God through His only Son Jesus Christ and His Spirit reflected and exercised in the created world.

The world is impacted by the word but influenced by feudalism, Catholicism, Protestantism, ecumenism, capitalism, socialism, communism, science and technology, renaissance and reformation, structural and functionalism, critical and conflict schools of thought, post-modernism, deconstructivism, and information explosion.

3. CONNECTION

The 'word' is connected to the whole of created world and the cosmic universe. For our reflection and understanding of the 'word and the world' I am looking at the prism of connection in the following reflection with, history, culture, religion and civil society which might suffice our discussion for the objective of this paper.

[10] B.Joseph Francis, *Humans in God-Given Word, God-Man-World Theology*, Bangalore: St.Peter's Pontifical Institute Publication, 2001, p. 17.

Word and History:

The whole universe is God's revelation and if God through the Word and the Spirit is present in the World, all are under the same spell of the same God who comes for all and directs the destiny of all (Amos 9:7).

The whole history of the World is about God's dealing with the World and every people have their place in this divine history. God is the Lord of this history. This is the sacredness of all history. It has been strongly expressed and beautifully articulated by various thinkers like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

There are lot of myths and superstitions callously found in the world, whereas the Word brings conviction and direction to the hearts of humankind. In the same way, we also find the mystical element of mystery in the world history where the Word is radiated through charity.

Word and Culture:

The Word Incarnate, through his birth, ministry, death and resurrection, not only manifests God's nature as love and compassion, but also shows in what way this God relates to the World.

The Incarnate Word transformed the Jewish culture by being counter-cultural to whatever was dehumanising i.e., whatever was inconsistent with his relation to God as "Abba". This incarnational mystery is the heart of the kingdom of God, and the model of inculturation for every community of his disciples.[11]

Any given culture is the web of imaginations and the bedrock of innovations or discovery provided when culture is inspired and acculturated or inculturised by the Word. There are cultures which are endowed with responsible freedom and enlightened knowledge through the essence and

---

[11] Jacob Kavunkal, *The Word in the World and the Church's mission*, Delhi: Vidyajoythi journal of Theological Reflection, 66 (2002) p. 901-913.

substance of the Word of Truth. Absence of truth leads to clash of civilisations and culture of death.

Word and Religions:

In so far as the whole creation is the work of God through the Word who enlightens everyone coming into the World (Jn 1:1-4, 9), every religion too is permeated by the Word. According to St. John the Word is the Truth. "The search for truth, however must be carried out in a manner that is appropriate to the dignity of the human person and his social nature, namely, by free enquiry with the help of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue."[12]

Religion by its very nature is not opposed to reason but supposed to be filled with belief system and propagate its faith. If all the religions will work for spirituality and wisdom of the people then people will experience and enjoy the salvation promised by the Word. Without the benevolence of peace, justice, spirituality and wisdom, religions will only promote competition, condemnation, confrontation, antagonism, conflict and catastrophe.

Word and the Civil Society:

God's creation is one and it is good, splendorous, marvellous and a sparkle of the sun in the ocean of the universe.

The concerns for non-violence, sustainable development, justice and peace and care for our environment are of vital importance for humanity.

Our World has grown weary of greed, corruption, war, violence, exploitation and division of the piecemeal responses, and the pain of false promises.

Our hearts and minds are yearning for a vision of life
          where love endures,
          where gifts are shared
          where unity is built
          where freedom finds meaning in truth, and
          where identity is found in respectful communion.

---

[12] Vatican II, *Decaration on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humanae*, 7 Dec. 1965

India today identifies as "graduate to the new World" thus:

- Diversity
- International trade
- Shrinking boundaries
- Globalisation
- Opportunity
- Uncertainty
- Knowledge economy
- New technology

Scars which mask the surface of our earth:

- Erosion
- Deforestation
- Climatic change and food crisis
- The squandering of the World's mineral and ocean resources in order to fuel an insatiable consumption.

Social Environment:

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Exaltation of violence and sexual degradation often presented through TV and the Internet as entertainment

Man, the apex of God's creation? Everyday we encounter the genius of human achievement. From advances in medical sciences and the wise application of technology, to the creativity and enjoyment of peoples lives in many ways are steadily rising.

Civil society is a juridical entity with the political, structural and administrative underpinnings. The civil society must offer law, order, justice which will offer liberation to people rather than showing partiality, injustice, dehumanising values and principles. Civil society offers the freedom to the people through various ideologies and services. If the service rendered and the ideology propagated are based on the Word of God then there will be real transformation.

4. DISTINCTION:

There are many today who claim that God should be left on the sidelines, and that religion and faith while fine for individuals should either be excluded from the public forum altogether or included only in the pursuit of limited pragmatic goals.

This secularist vision seeks to explain human life and shape society with little or no reference to the creator. It presents itself as neutral, impartial and inclusive of everyone. But in reality like every ideology, secularism imposes a World view. If God is irrelevant to public life, then, society will be shaped in a godless image.

According to Bultmann, the Johannine concept of world is humanity as opposed to God. Human beings can make decision either for God or against God. Man's decision for God liberates world from darkness, sin, falsehood and death. Jesus as 'light' liberates humans from the defective and distorted visions of selfishness, hatred, jealousy, violence, depression, despair and all the 'negative outlooks of life'. Whereas Jesus, the 'word' gives a positive, creative, and integral vision of life.[13]

Word is challenged by the World realities such as:

Conviction	x	Suicides, Euthanasia
Inspiration	x	Corruption
Charity	x	Violence
Faith	x	Fundamentalism
Truth	x	Ignorance
Liberation	x	Terrorism
Transformation	x	Communalism
Salvation	x	Globalized consumerism, and individualism

Fundamentalism is a more widespread phenomenon than we recognize it to be. "Fundamentalism consists of uncritical adherence to ancient beliefs and practices. Communalism on the other hand consists of animosity of persons belonging to one religion toward persons of another

---

[13] Thomas Vallianipuram, "New Society in John's Gospel", Aloor: Biblia Publications, 2008, pg. 67, 289-290.

religion. A fundamentalist need not be a communalist at all (v. v.). Fundamentalism requires to be opposed by all humanists and democrats".[14] A fundamentalist who regresses to the past fabricates the historical truth and his advocacy is marked by the collapse of reason.

Fundamentalism is a reaction to modernism and secularism but perpetuates Brahminic hegemony in India. Fundamentalism in India has to be seen in the global context of ethnic and religious rivalries. Today, the Christian message is caught between two extreme ideological positions, namely 'ethnocentrism and relativism'.[15]

The present situation offers both a challenge and an opportunity for us who read, listen and live the Word. As Christians we should engage ourselves in the reconstruction, reconciliation and renewal of the contemporary World on solid foundations of life giving values. Jesus came that we may have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10). Sharing and witnessing to this life is called Evangelization.

Evangelisation means liberating all in creation that is distorted from the effects of sin, taking away ignorance, injustice, exploitation, untruth, disunity and planting in their place the human values as found in the Gospel.[16]

Communalism

Communalism is against harmony, communion and relationships.

Economic and Political Roots:
It is evident that economic poverty, social discrimination, religious antagonism and political aberrations are important roots of communalism.

The craving after wealth and power has been a reason for several communal riots when the prosperity of one group in business or industry has been resented by the others. The poor have always been victims of exploitation. They have to work for all and fight for all sections even

[14] Valson Thampu, *The Word and the World*, New Delhi: Theological Research and Communication Institute, 1997, p. 6.

[15] S.M.Michael, ed Thomas, *Context and Challenges of Fundamentalism Today in* The Church in India in The Emerging Thir Millennium, Bangalore: NBCLC, 2005, p. 78-95

[16] Vatican Council II, (Ad Gentes, 12. Redemptoris Missio, 58-59)

during communal clashes for making a living. They are the greatest sufferers in every bund and curfew. They are deprived of their daily employment and of their daily bread.

Political Aberrations:
Every possible means, legitimate and otherwise, are used by politicians and other vested interests to get power and position. While to the poor they preach the paradise of equality and sufficiency, to the religious groups they promise security and growth.

Socio-cultural Roots:
Communal conflicts take place largely in urban and industrial areas where conflicting socio-cultural interests exist and political awareness is high.

Ideological Support:
The absence of a clear ideology capable of directing movements to secular goals has strengthened the forces of communalism.

Psycho-religious Roots:
In an urban society lost in anonymity, identity consciousness becomes an important factor of polarisation.[17]

Consumerism

It is fascinating to see the creativity of the 'media manipulators' who use media in such a powerful way to sell their commodities, to beguile and convince people about the 'good news' of their products. Media is the language understood by everyone.

Consumerism divides the people into 'have' and 'have nots', rich and poor. Most of the people in materially developed countries and middle-class people in the Third World already live in the consumer society. And poorer people increasingly aspire to join it.

[17] Sebastian Periannan, (Helmuth Rolfes & Angela Ann Zukowski, eds.) *Spiritualiy of Communication in the Context of "Communalism, Consumerism and Terrorism,* in Communicatio Socialis: Challenge of Theology and Ministry in the Church - Festschrift for Franz-Josef Eilers, Kassel: kassel University Press, 2007, pg. 93.

The new possibility, for hundreds of millions, of living in abundance and comfort has immense social, ecological, cultural, moral and personal repercussions in today's world. Many crucial problems are indeed related to the wasteful consumer society and its demonstration effects on the economically less developed countries.

Consumerism is ultimately based on wrong values, which make genuine development impossible. For material self-interest is the predominant incentive in our society. In many ways, we idealise economic prosperity. Our real goals are economic growth and "a constantly greater increase in the standard of living".[18]

Consumerism has become an environment. All our senses encounter the presence of consumer durables, which engulf the poor and the rich alike. A wide ranger of consumer commodities seems natural and organic. But a closer look at the distribution of these commodities exposes the reality.

Capitalism propagates that consumer goods are 'essential' for human life.

Consumerism is an ideology. It creates an anti-poor value system.

Consumerism works on human emotions and fears. People are often gripped by a sense of insecurity. Casual and contract labour as well as unstable employment create much anxiety.[19]

Terrorism and Violence

Terrorism spoils and kills, prevents peace and promotes violence. The terrorists in the international level are, no doubt, well marshalled into doing all kinds of activities needed for a modern man. The present air travel facilities have provided worldwide mobility to all. Radio, television, internet computers (to exchange information worldwide) and

---

[18] Ibid., pg. 94

[19] Ibid., pg. 94

---

communication satellites have provided facilities to millions of people throughout the world. With the help of such scientific aids the terrorists get easily attracted toward the mentality of violence and death. Because of such facilities, there has already been a long tradition of privatisation of fear phychosis of terrorist violence.

Terrorism is most commonly born out of political events and circumstances. Such political circumstances keep on changing while terrorism persists even at a low ebb. It is something enigmatic for us. The terrorists comprehend that violence is a part of modern politics, a part of life. According to their philosophy, terrorism endeavours to bring political redressal in a short time.[20]

Hardly any of the daily news bulletins communicated to us by the mass media fails to mention one or more terrorist acts that have taken place in some part of our world. The names of well-known international terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda, Taliban and others have today become common household names. Most of us in the contemporary world are getting so accustomed to hearing about terrorist attacks such as car bombings and suicide bombings that we have become more or less insensitive to the immense damage and destruction done to human lives and property in almost every such attack.[21]

Terrorism is a systematic, unpredictable mode of violence pitted against innocent public in order to terrorise individuals or even a government to attain political objectives. Terrorism has been used by political organisations both rightist and leftist; and also by nationalistic and ethnic groups, in the name of revolution. In some special cases the army and the secret police of an elected government may resort to terrorism to achieve some selfish aims.

Terrorism infuses a feeling of catastrophe amid human life. It brings irretrievable loss, or inevitable death. It puts life on ransom and portray a picture of gruesome horror.

---

[20] Ibid., pg. 94

[21] Ibid., pg. 95

The ambit of violence in creating anarchy, disorder, insecurity of life and property and holding society at ransom has increased manifold during recent years. The proclivity for bloodshed, hostility, wrath, jealousy, contempt, resentment, frustration, ethnic hatred, etc. are the early signs of future terrorist behaviour.

For the insurgents of different parts of the developing world, terrorism has become a usual and burgeoning campaign. The Jewish terrorists, the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, the Palestinian terrorists, the modern religious fundamentalists, the Mujahideens of Kashmir under the abetment of Pakistan are some examples of modern day terrorist campaign. Terrorism is a steadily growing intimidation to the world today, which thwarts peace to linger in this beautiful world.[22]

No just and peaceful society can be built through the use of violence that ignores the dignity of persons and the sacredness of life.

Martin Luther King Jr. said,

"Violence as a way of achieving justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction of all. The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers". (Nobel Prize Address, Oslo, December 11, 1964).

President Prathibha Patil of India, addressing the nation on the eve of Independence day said, "violence in any form undermines" the nation's progress. We must stand united against the threats emanating from terrorism. Terrorists with their disruptive agenda will never succeed in discouraging us from our resolve to build a strong India.[23]

---

[22] Ibid., pg. 95

[23] Prathiba Patil, *"President: No place for Violence"*, in the newspaper 'The Hindu', August 15t[b], 2008

The present condition of the world is diseased. If I were a doctor and asked for my advice, I should answer: Create silence, bring people to silence. The Word of God cannot be heard in the world today. If it is blazoned forth with all the panoply of noise so that it can be heard even in the midst of all other noise, then it is no longer the world of God. Therefore, create silence.

A faith approach to Communication is not just a matter of utilising modern media to spread the Gospel message. The message must ring true. Communication is effected through words, signs and symbols. But it is also to be accompanied with deeds and be the expression of an authenticity of life. In silence it will find its roots in the depths of the divine mystery and of the human soul.[24]

5.   CONVERGENCE

Henry Jenkins observed (2001): First, there is social or organic convergence, which can be defined as social practices in which we are engaged in more than one level of media attention. Multi-tasking in the workplace would be an equivalent to the organic convergence of watching TV and texting a friend at the same time. Second, Jenkins defines cultural convergence as new forms of cultural creativity at the intersections of media technologies. Third, global convergence recognises that there is two-way 'cultural traffic' in a global communication network, which leads to cultural hybridity.

The wider understanding and deepening of our faith in the meaning and power of the Word in the whole creation demands, that our missionary vision becomes as all encompassing as God's own vision in the context of today's convergence.

The Word interfaces the World

At the level of:
- Individual — "Repent and Believe" in the Gospel, (Contemplation, Conversion, Compassion)

---

[24] L.Legrand op.cit.,p.5

- Inter-personal — Reconciliation and Forgiveness
- Intra-group — Family, Prayer and Study
- Inter-group — Sharing, Commitment and Unity
- Institution / Organisation — School of Faith, Hope, Charity
- Social / Society — Awareness of the Word, analysis of the situation, Action for a better World.
- Global — Impact of the values of the kingdom of God

Respect for one and others:

Human respect includes all those behaviours and attitudes related to the development of a healthy awareness and knowledge of oneself and others. If only we know to respect each other, nature and culture, there could have been lot of human problems averted. Human respect demands accepting one's emotions honestly and facing them constructively and sensibly. We should respect others through kindness and patience.

As it is said by Paul in Acts (17:27): God is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist.

Dialogue:

- The dialogue of life, in which persons seek to live together in an open and neighbourly atmosphere.
- The dialogue of action, in which Christians work together with non-Christians.
- The dialogue of religious experience, in which persons rooted in their own religious traditions share their religious experiences of prayer, contemplation and quest for God.
- The dialogue of theological exchange, in which specialists deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage.[25]

---

[25] Pontifical Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, Document *"Dialogue and Proclamation"*, No. 42.1991

Friendship:

Friendship entails a number of good things, one being the effort and ability to understand our friends as they understand themselves. Only when we share their joys and sufferings, we will have a chance to understand how their faith helps them to cope with their sorrow and how it nourishes their hope. This is the kind of understanding which is crucial for inter-faith spirituality and it makes friendship a key-virtue.

Gratitude:

If gratefulness is deep and profound it implies what German mystics have called Gelassenheit. The term covers meanings like calmness, equanimity, and letting go or not being attached. One must show ones gratitude to God, nature, parents, teachers, elders and leaders and all those who contributed for our well-being.

Research:

Awareness of strength and weakness:

Strength and weakness are internal factors of oneself, others, community, organisation and institution When we are aware of these factors we will be able to assess the situation and act accordingly. We should be aware of our resources and limitations at all levels of spirituality and communication.

Analysis of opportunity and threats:

It is one thing to be aware of the problems and situations and at the same we should also take into stock of the available opportunity and the threats that emerge from consumerism, communalism and terrorism. These are the external factors of culture, religions, ethnicity, business, trade, administration and languages. The analysis of opportunity and threats might answer the question, whether it is the goal or the means.

Reconciliation:

Reconciliation is a significant task in society, religion and peace for that matter. It is always attentive to the affirming, the dignity and rights of every individual. Reconciliation should not be used to derail the peace process of establishing justice. As followers of the prophetic Christ we seek justice; as followers of the self emptying Christ we seek reconciliation. Our efforts to pursue justice must take place, and find direction, through our efforts to pursue reconciliation. Here, one can reiterate the restorative justice over retributive justice. Growth in communal harmony, balanced view of life and respect for the neighbour always has to deal with overcoming crises, with rejuvenation, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Conclusion:

The word of God is God's revelation to man. It is unfathomable and its significances are many; such as creative, salvific, liberative and Dynamic. It demands reactions from man. These reactions were positive and negative.

Through a healthy dialogue among those who receive and reach to the word, there can be a convergence, communion. The dialogue of Christians with members of other religions is an urgent need, providing mutual understanding and working together in promoting religious, ethical and moral values, thereby, contributing to a better realization of the effects of the presence of the Word in the World and there by contributing to the building of a better world.[26] This will make the presence of the word in the world more and more effective and salvific.

---
[26] Instrumentum Laboris, § 56

<div align="center">

RELIGION ONLINE :
RELIGIOUS INFORMATION AND PRACTICE IN CYBERSPACE
CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEB

Anthony G. Roman[1]

</div>

Introduction

The 1996 study by the Barna Research in California concluded that "church organizations quickly establish their presence in cyberspace or they would lose touch with many of their parishioners and risk losing the ability to advise them in an era of rapid technological growth." When the World Wide Web was still relatively new and uncharted, organized religion was urged to establish its presence on the electronic frontier before it was too late.

In 1999, at the second BISCOM on modern communication technologies, the same call resounded: that Asian Churches should engage in Internet communication or else... One resource person made a lasting impression when he asked this question to the bishops: If the Church established herself firmly in the Gutenberg technology, can it miss the digital revolution that is sweeping our region?

Over the years, Christianity and Christian religious expression have multiplied on the World Wide Web. Christopher Helland reported that by August 2002, the categories of websites representing Christian beliefs and practices had increased by over 300 percent from Yahoo's 1999 figures, and "showed no signs of abating." In a chapter in "Religion Online, Finding Faith on the Internet," Helland also reported that 78 percent of the religious websites registered in the web search environment called "Open Directory Project" (ODP) are labeled "Christian." Within this fraction, Roman Catholicism is found to be the largest single denomination represented in cyberspace.

---
[1] Anthony G. Roman is staff assistant of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences-Office of Social Communication. He is associate professional lecturer at the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas in Manila (Philippines)
This paper was presented at the sixth Bishops' Institute for Social Communication "Converging Communications for Ministry in Asia : Modern Communications Technologies for the Church ", held on May 28 - June 2, 2007 at the Assumption University, Bangkok.

We are going to look at some examples later. We will tour the Internet and see some Catholic materials uploaded there. But before that, let us first acquaint ourselves with the concepts "religion online" and "online religion." These concepts are the first fruits of scholarly work which sought to systematize research and study of religion on the Internet.

In a chapter of the 2005 release "Religion Online, Finding Faith in the Internet" Glen Young expounded on these two categories of religious expression in cyberspace. Basing on previous research, Young cited the distinction between (1) "the provision of information about religion versus the opportunity for participation in religious activity; and (2) primary reference offline (towards) preexisting religious traditions versus primary reference to religious activities taking place online."

Hadden and Cowan describe "religion online" as that which "provides the interested web traveler with information about religion: doctrine, polity, organization and belief; service and opportunities for service; religious books and articles as well as other paraphernalia related to one's religious tradition or quest." They contrast this with "online religion" which they describe as that which "invites the visitor to participate in the religious dimension of life via the Web; liturgy, prayer, ritual, meditation, and homiletics come together and functions with the electronic space itself acting as church, temple, synagogue, mosque and grove" (Hadden and Cowan 2000; Helland 2000). Young said "religion on the Internet includes a multiplicity of activities that fall at various places along the spectrum (extending) between information and participation." The "first axis that extends between "religion online" and "online religion" concerns provision of information and participation in activity." (cf. Dawson and Cowan, 2005 p. 94)

The Catholic portal "Catholic Online" at www.catholic.org is filled with information and all kinds of services but not necessarily online prayer. Net visitors are still directed to Churches and the sacraments. Catholic Exchange at www.catholicexchange.org similarly offers news and information but it also has a link to a virtual adoration chapel at www.savior.org.

Let us take a look at the new video blog of the Filipino bishops hosted by youtube.com:

Case 1: Video Blog of Filipino Bishops
URL: http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=cbcpmedia

The video blog of the Media Office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) started on April 2, 2007. As of May 3, 2007, 104 individuals are active subscribers of the blog, some of them are Filipinos working overseas. In the 'Comments' section of the website, one who is working in the Middle East said he appreciates the video programs especially because he and his companions miss the Lenten activities in their own parishes and hometowns. (Most of the materials uploaded at that time were about the rituals and meaning of Lent.) There is an appeal from a priest of a remote parish in southern Luzon for religious audio-visual material. An SVD seminarian also posted an encouragement directed to CBCP to keep on uploading videos. This seminarian happens to maintain his own blog for the Divine Word Missionaries in the Philippines (http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=fielsvd), which has been up in cyberspace, in the same Internet facility, for nine months ahead of CBCP.

The CBCP Media Office decided to go into video blogging, "in answer to the call of the Holy Father 'to make the Internet as a new forum for proclaiming the Gospel,'" a section in the homepage reads. "The launching was timed for the Holy Week, it being the most appropriate time to issue short catechesis on the liturgical significance of the celebrations that have been most misunderstood," said Msgr. Pedro Quitorio III, spokesperson of the CBCP and director of its Media Office.

Quitorio said the video blogs are "short, fast and easy" and are attuned to the psyche of today's youth." The YouTube account is actually conceived as a service to the young faithful who, according to the priest, "are more inclined to listen to the latest technology rather than the age-old sermon." "It seemed a good way to reach our target audience," Quitorio added.

The CBCP Media Office has an Internet facility that provides broadband connectivity and filtered of pornography through satellite systems, VSAT and Radio IP systems, to over 100 Catholic schools and dioceses nationwide.

The Office has a team of designers, and hosts websites including the official website of CBCP itself located at http://www.cbcponline.net/ where seven of the 80 Filipino bishops in the country maintain their own individual weblogs. The Office also gives training to church workers on IT (e.g. Systems Administration, Educational Technology, Web Design and Multimedia applications for Evangelization). It also produces video documentaries using the latest in software and hardware technology. The monthly Impact Magazine and the fortnightly CBCP Monitor are all under the Media Office's direction including the local Catholic news agency, CBCPNews Service.

Case 2: The Official Website of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines
URL: http://www.cbcponline.net

The bishop's weblog is a clear example of "religion online" — using the Internet solely for information dissemination and clearly a one-way flow of communication between communicator and net visitor. The same is true for the bishops' official website which is teeming with all sorts of information from the organizational structure of the bishops' conferences, to news, pastoral statements, documents and homilies. There is a section called "The Word Today" which shows a calendar with dates linked to the relevant Scripture reading for the day. As of May 3, 2007, this section was updated up to the month of October 2006.

The website also highlights a spot dedicated to the current president of the bishops' conference as well as the Bishops' blog featuring seven of the 80 Philippine bishops. The blogs themselves are textual by nature and an ideal resource for students doing research as well as for the general laity aiming at a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith.

However, there is no section dealing with Catholic rituals or prayers. It is also noteworthy to mention the absence of any link to external websites related to the Catholic Church, not even the Holy See's website at www.vatican.va nor the FABC website at www.fabc.org. There is, however, a free email service and links to the different dioceses in the country and to the more than 30 commissions and offices of the bishops' conference.

Now let us look at other websites that are oriented towards 'religion online' but offer 'online religion' services at the same time:

Case 3: The Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters
URL: http://www.adorationsisters.org/index.html

The "pink sisters" or the adoration sisters of the Divine Word congregation are never seen in the public but their name resounds well in the Philippines. In their famous chapels, Cory Aquino decided to run for president in 1986 and so did encumbent Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2004. The humble sisters are now present in the worldwide web through their own website maintained from the sisters' house in Philadelphia, USA. (Source:http://beta.inquirer.net/nation/index.php?index=1&story_id=1583)

The site is filled with information regarding the congregation, their history, mission, their way of life as well as a directory of their houses in nine different countries worldwide. Without a doubt, the site was envisioned to be a vocation promotion tool. Thus, it has a special section titled "why join the adoration sisters?" explaining the benefits of living a contemplative life. The "virtual tour" section opens up to a slide presentation showing beautiful photos of the sisters' houses and their daily activities in the convent. There is also a section on vocation discernment titled "am I being called?" featuring an article written by Fr. Anthony Bannon.

What makes this site unique is a section where net visitors can send their prayer requests. Pink sister convents, at least in the Philippines, are famous for accepting prayer requests. An online version of this religious practice was apparently conceived and this makes for a two-way religious communication in cyberspace. With this kind of service, there is reciprocity in information exchange between communicator and net visitor. This site of the Pink Sisters while clearly exemplifying a "religion online" simultaneously represents an instance of "online religion."

Case 4: The Jesuits in Singapore
URL: http://www.jesuit.org.sg/

The website of the Jesuits in Singapore is another example of "religion online" but at the same time offering "online religion" services. The site is impressively equipped with prayer guides which any individual can follow at any time of the day. These prayer guides include instructions like when to "close your eyes" as well as what to think about e.g. when the net visitor is asked to "Review the day." The rituals and practice of the so-called "Ignatian spirituality," which for centuries are conducted in a physical location or in recollections or retreats, are made available with a click of the mouse or stroke of the keyboard. The site itself directs net visitors to a physical Church to worship but the online prayer guides offer the convenience of anytime anywhere (as long as there is a computer) prayer as well. Like in the previous example, the Jesuits in Singapore also accept prayer petitions from net visitors thereby promoting a two-way communication with net visitors beyond the simple feedback gathering mechanism that is common to sites like these.

Case 5: The Society of Jesus in the Philippines
URL: http://jesuits.ph/

The website of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines (http://jesuits.ph/) is yet again an example of "religion online" with some hints of "online religion." However, unlike in the previous case where the provision for online prayer is included right within the site itself, net visitors are directed to related Jesuit sites outside the Philippines e.g. to the Sacred Space site at http://www.sacredspace.ie/ by first clicking either the "Ministry" or "Spirituality" option in the main menu and into the Center for Ignatian Spirituality blogspot at http://cisphil.blogspot.com/. There, under the section "Your daily spiritual drop," is a link to "Daily Prayer Online" on Sacred Space. "We invite you to make a 'Sacred Space' in your day, and spend ten minutes, praying here and now, as you sit at your computer, with the help of on-screen guidance and scripture chosen specially every day, reads its homepage. Upon entering and choosing a particular date, the net visitor can then start prayer and reflection.

Not all websites within the "Catholic" classification, however, represent the official voice of Roman Catholicism. Along side online representations of official Church organizations, bishops' conferences, dioceses and parishes, there are websites which according to Helland present Catholicism from a popular perspective, some pose questions and openly dispute the teachings and doctrine of the centuries-old religion. The number of such websites increases further, says Helland, as one tries to explore websites outside the "Catholic" or "Christian" classification, for instance, those dealing with witchcraft or with "New Age," etc. Here are some examples:

Case 6: The Modern Wiccan
URL: http://www.modernwiccan.com

ModernWiccan is a community of Pagans from all walks of life. This community exists to inspire, teach, and enhance our magickal lives.

ModernWiccan.com was first launched by Blake Schreurs in January of 2001 with the goal of creating an on-line community of pagans. The site was and still remains to this day focused on providing information, material resources for the practice of witchcraft and paganism. Many of the articles featured in the "Articles & Essays" section (http://www.modernwiccan.com/article_tbl.php) are anti-Christian and anti-religion in general. Another wiccan site is The Celtic Connection (http://www.wicca.com/) site which links to a practitioner's site that claims to be Bible-oriented in her wiccan (pagan or witchcraft) practice (http://www.kardia2000.com/). Like other wiccan, pagan or witchcraft sites, The Celtic Connection, offers potions, spells, calendars and rituals as well as external links to related websites.

Case 7: New Age Religion
URL: http://www.modernwiccan.com

There are many websites devoted to the so-called "New Age Religion" which contain references to Christianity in their literature. "The God Kind" website (http://godkind.org/index.html), for example, features articles seeking to debunk many Christian concepts from salvation to Christmas using Scripture itself. The New Age Pride website (http://www.newagepride.org/) does not openly challenge Christian or Catholic beliefs but teaches followers and possible converts concepts that could potentially put those beliefs in serious question. Another site that is interesting and which offers a wealth of information to New Age followers is "New Age Information" (http://www.newageinfo.com/) There, visitors can find articles upon articles on a wide range of subjects from divinity,

astrology, health concerns and others, all expectedly veering away from Christian beliefs. It has an open directory of web resources on new age (http://www.newagewebdirectory.com/) listing "products, services and information for the body, mind and soul."

Case 8: The True Catholic Church
URL: http://www.truecatholic.org/

The "True Catholic Church" is a site maintained by a handful of followers who wish to continue the legacy of Vatican I and completely rejects Pope John XXIII (and the succeeding popes) as well as the reforms he initiated through the Second Vatican Council. The site refers to the Church in the Vatican as "false" and the pope residing there as "impostor." The church exists in an undisclosed location and promotes its own papacy. The man revered by its followers call him Pope Pius XIII, who has written statements, encyclicals, and condemnations since the 1998 conclave which appointed him successor of Peter.

In 1996, Time's Robert Wright wrote that "out on the fringe of the World Wide Web, beyond mainstream religion, storefront preachers and offbeat theologians are springing up like mushrooms." In the turn of the millennium, Helland observes, that the trend "has become even more prominent, since individuals can now create their own websites without having to learn HTML," the programming language for creating websites. The increase of free web hosting and design services, and certainly the advent of " blogging" have contributed to this trend.

Along with the official voice of the Church, some unofficial, personal and outright hoax versions of our religion are available to net visitors wherever they are in the planet. Both voices are firmly established, fully grounded in the World Wide Web. This is reminiscent of Pope John Paul II juxtaposing the Internet alongside the ancient Roman Forum as two similar venues where intellectual minds of varying magnitudes converge.

But consider this: Like in the era of Gutenberg, where control of information has shifted with the development of a mass communication tool, we might have to agree with recent scholars observing that the continued development of Internet and cyberspace communications might result yet again to a "radical shift in who is in control of information." Ordinary people are now able to propagate so-called doctrines and upload them in the same space where official Church teachings also reside. Net visitors, on the other hand, are free to visit any religious website they want with a click of the mouse and stroke of the keyboard.

Having said that, it might be then useful to look at the Internet and cyberspace beyond its utility and indeed as a place, a virtual place that people can visit, access, log on to in order to gratify some need and serve some purpose. Internet scholar A. Markham validates this through his 1998 detailed ethnographic study of Internet participation. He found that people indeed viewed the Internet as a tool and a place, and even as a "state of being" —and each level of perception affected the interactions of the individuals with the Internet environment.

Helland said this finding has a significant impact upon the manner in which individuals will attempt to "do" religion online. Further he said: "Organized religious websites that are using the Internet only as a tool to communicate 'information about' their religions will not have the ability to meet the religious needs of those who want more from the medium." In this case, the scholar added, "it is the popular religious sites or the unofficial religious sites that are providing the preferred environment for the online practitioners."

This statement could not be quantified easily therefore, it can only be taken as speculative in nature and at best, representing only an opinion rather than a fact. We cannot be certain of preference for popular religion in the Web with no scientific inquiry to back up our claim. However, we can agree that the Internet has become more than a search tool for net visitors. Some studies indicate "that people who connect to the Internet are more likely to use it for cultivating their social and cultural proclivities" (Matei and Ball-Rokeach, 2001). For many people, cyberspace is a real space. It is an acceptable medium for religious and spiritual participation. Helland says, it is becoming an environment — a place — where people can "be" religious if and when they choose to be.

REFERENCES:

Christopher Helland, "Popular Religion and the World Wide Web: A Match Made in (Cyber) Heaven." In In Lorne Dawson & Douglas Cowan (eds), "Religion Online, Finding Faith on the Internet," New York: Routledge, 2004. pp. 23-36.

Glen Young, "Reading and Praying Online: The Continuity of Religion Online and Online Religion in Internet Christianity." In Lorne Dawson & Douglas Cowan (eds), "Religion Online, Finding Faith on the Internet," New York: Routledge, 2004. pp. 93-105.

Leo Magno, "Pink Sisters go hi-tech; prayer requests online." Retrieved May 4, 2007 from http://beta.inquirer.net/nation/index.php?index =1&story_id= 1583

WEB SOURCES:

Video Blog of Filipino Bishops
URL: http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=cbcpmedia
The Official Website of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)
URL: http://www.cbcponline.net
Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters
URL: http://www.adorationsisters.org/index.html
The Jesuits in Singapore
URL: http://www.jesuit.org.sg/

MEALS AND CELEBRATIONS IN BUDDHIST CULTURE

Ven. Dhammananda Kabilsingh [1]

My homework for this morning is to talk about Meals and Celebration in Buddhist Culture and Perspective. You have been listening about the Eucharist. You have to clean up your mental slate a little bit because when we talk about meals and celebration in Buddhist context, it is very different from Eucharist. But I will speak half of the time and the other half, please ask questions and then we can start having discussion between Catholic and the Buddhist — to bring about a better understanding for me as much as for you. Dialogue must come from both sides.

In Buddhist context, there are two important meals in the life of the Buddha that might be of interest to you. The Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, started his life as Prince Siddhartha in the northern part of present India. I have to be very careful saying this, you know, because the people from Nepal will say, "No! You said wrong." He was born in Nepal. Lumbini, the birth place, is in the present Nepal. But of course at that time, 2500 years ago there was no Nepal, there was no India. So that's why I chose to say he was born in the northern part of the present India, and of course in the border city of Lumbini.

He was married and had a son but left his royal image to seek for spiritual path. Having observed the suffering of life, old age, sickness, and death and to be confirmed that all of us have to go through the same process, he asked a very existentialist question: how am I to overcome this suffering? So in Buddhism, this is a big quest. Because this prince had this spiritual quest, that's why we are now entering into Buddhist teaching. If the prince did not have this quest, Buddhism will not be in reality.

His quest and the spiritual discovery six years after, wondering in the wilderness made him the Buddha. Once when he was enlightened, people called him the Buddha which means the fully enlightened one. There were many before him. He was just that one who discovered the truth at that time.

So that truth has always been there, like God is always there. Jesus comes and then you had the Messiah coming. Just at the time when the prince was practicing serious self-mortification, he stopped eating completely. He went through all kinds of self-mortification as we read in the text, breathing in and holding his breath and not breathing out until he turned green on his face. He stopped eating and sometimes he would hold his fist for so long that the nails start growing through the other side. I don't know if that is true but that's the way the text says.

Then after this self-mortification, he realized that this is not the path. This is not the way to lead him to realization. So he decided to eat. And when he did so, that was the first meal before enlightenment. So that meal, he thought a great deal about. He decided to come back to the middle path of taking food to sustain the body. The very first meal after the penance was offered by a woman called Sujata.

Sujata made a vow to the gods that she would make an offering of rice pudding but the rice but must be picked from the field when the rice just turned green. So when you pick this rice from the field, you squeeze it with your fingernail, some milk is coming out. That is young rice which is then cooked in honey and milk. She made a vow that she wanted a son. The son was born and she did not yet made an offering. It so happened that when the prince wanted to have his first meal, the same time, she wanted to also make an offering that she vowed long ago to do. So she made this rice pudding and she came to make the offering.

Having made the offering in gold tray, she left. The prince ate the rice pudding and then on the bank of the river made a vow that if he should be enlightened that night, may this gold tray float up the stream. The gold tray floated up stream and when down to the Naga world, the serpent's world underneath. And apparently that Naga had been protecting the golden tray of the previous Buddhas also, so when this gold tray came

down to that pile of gold trays in the underworld, as soon as he heard the sound, he knew that there is going to be another Buddha coming that night.

So the Buddha was enlightened that night, on the full moon night of the sixth month, according to the Lunar calendar. That day was called Vesakh in the Buddhist terminology. In India, you call it Vesakh month. That's why we call this celebration, the Vesakh celebration.

So this is the symbolic meal in the Buddha's life story. Some of you might have read some of these stories. We can discuss about the symbolic meaning of the meal but the feminist often pointed out that the meal from which the Buddha gained his strength and became enlightened later was offered by a woman as life sustainer. It could also be symbolized as the balance between the mind and the body: the need to take care of the body so that the body could serve the spirit. We Buddhists do not give up the body completely like some of the ascetics in India. They don't care for the body at all. They will be completely naked and they will be standing there for so long that creepers climb on their thighs. They completely deny their physical existence. This is not the case with Buddhism. Buddhism pays much attention to the body so that the body could serve the spirit.

The second meal in the Buddha's life is the last meal before he passed away. The Buddha was 80 years old and he was making his last journey from Sravasthi to Kushinagar. There were just the two of them, himself and his cousin and attendant, Ananda. The Buddha decided that he will pass away in Kushinagar. He was invited to a meal that was offered by a man called Cunda. This Cunda was the son of a goldsmith in that area. At that meal, a particular kind of dish was offered and it was called sukramadava. It had been translated as soft pork. In the last two or three decades, Pali scholars disagreed and again tried to understand the word sukramadava. Sukra is pig, madava is soft so now it is translated as soft meat liked by the pigs which is supposed to be some kind of mushroom. I think in English you call it truffle, a kind of mushroom. But this particular kind of dish was very hard to digest. The Buddha ate but he said, whatever remains in the dish better bury it. He did not allow the monks to eat the leftover. It must have been hard for digestion. And after eating, his stool became bloody and soon after he died.

Before dying, he told Ananda, his attendant, that people will blame Cunda for offering this meal. He foresaw people's reaction after his death. So he said there are two meals in his life and the people who offered these two meals make lots of merit — the highest merit. The first was the meal before he was enlightened and the last meal before he passed away. These were the two meals where the donors received highest merit. So this was in the Buddha's lifetime.

Now, we talk about the monastic meals — for us now. The Buddha started a community of monks and nuns to continue his teaching. These monks and nuns, I would rather use the word monks and female monks. Because when I use the word nuns, in Christianity, it would mean something different. But in Buddhism we have the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni, more or less of the same standard or level. We have four-fold Buddhists: the ordained male and female, and then the unordained laywomen and laymen. These four-fold Buddhists have equal share in Buddhism and the Buddha said that Buddhism will either decline or prosper in the future depending on these four-fold Buddhists.

So some Buddhists in the present day tend to be afraid of the Catholics, afraid of the Muslims, afraid of this and afraid of that. But I say, no! No outsiders can destroy Buddhism, it is the Buddhists themselves who are going to destroy Buddhism by not understanding Buddhism. The Buddha has said, long time ago and also he expected, when he established Buddhism, that the four-fold Buddhists will (1) study his teaching, (2) put his teaching into practice, and (3) be able to defend the true teaching. That was how he established Buddhism and he never said for once that Buddhism must be in the hands of the monks. No! Buddhists have each other. "You take care of each other," the Buddha said. He also said, Buddhism will decline when people do not practice the inside meditation. He was very clear on that. But when you neglect the practice, then eventually you bring about the downfall of Buddhism.

The life of monastic Buddhists start early in the morning with the "morning alms around." That is the time when we are supposed to go for alms round. Right after ordination, we receive a clear instruction that if there is no robe, we are to make use of racks thrown at the funeral pyre

where the people discarded the cloth used to cover the dead. That's why it is patched because it is collected, then cut into squares and washed them clean and then, stitch them together. That's why the robes that the Buddhist monastics are always patched.

And if you are in the forest and you have no medication, you use your urine and preserve it with some kind of herb that could be collected in the forest. And the third requirement is, for food, you go out for alms round. You don't make a livelihood. Therefore, you life depends completely on the laypeople. So we are not supposed to cook. We go for alms round with our bowl and people make their offerings in the bowl.

The last requirement for the monks is for residence. If there is no residence, then you must be able to live even under the trees, in the cave, so very much living in a natural setting, and out of this livelihood or lifestyle that the monks live in the early period, we realize a much better understanding about nature — how we have to respect nature. In the history of the early monastic community we started out in a forest setting so we have a clear understanding of how to respect nature.

Now, I give you a little idea about the alms around — what we do. I have started this practice about seven years ago with my ordination from Sri Lanka. We go out for alms as required by the Buddha. We walk silently, barefoot, until we come to the first house and the laypeople set food in front of the house on a small chair or on a small table and they would invite verbally. They have to say it in a formal way then we would stop, open our bowl and they would put cooked rice into the bowl and the cooked food comes now in plastic bags.

But previously it is supposed to be everything in the bowl, so when you go to the first house, they might give rice and pumpkin. In the next house, they serve again rice and some curry. In the third house, rice and another dish placed on top. So when you come back to the monastery, you have a mixed bowl of everything. And that's our training. We must not complain. Of course, we must know that it is tasty or salty or sweet or hot. We have not lost our sense of taste but we are not supposed to cling to the taste of our liking. That is supposed to be the practice.

But now, the food comes in plastic bags so we can sort them out and put it on the table in the monastery buffet style. And every time we receive food from the people, we have to give them blessing. In Bangkok, because life is so much in a rush the monks may not give a long blessing. They will only give a short blessing, in Pali always in Pali-and people like to hear that Pali sound even though they don't understand a word of it. So in our temple, we usually give two languages: first, we do the Pali, and then we translate into Thai.

Addressing people, of course, by this time we know each household, what kind of problems they have, what kind of joyful event they are expecting. So we usually give blessing according to that household. So this is actually a binding between the people surrounding the temple and the temple itself and we literally know all the families that we visit. It takes about one hour to finish the whole round. It is quite a good exercise, you know, when we come back we really have a great appetite after the morning round.

To the Buddhist this means, particularly with monastics, lay people could be quite fussy about arranging meals for monastics. It will be laid on the table and they would offer each dish into your hand. If you are a male offering to a female monk like me, then I have to have a piece of cloth to receive it, and vice versa. If ladies offer meals to male monks, then the monks would have to have a piece of cloth to take the food from them. And when you read sacred texts, they are very strict. Things that are offered to you must be lifted from the table or from wherever it is, high enough so that "a cat could crawl underneath."

What does this mean? It means that the person who makes the offering really intends to offer. It's not like okay take this. With this kind of attitude, that person does not really want to give. Thai people go through lots of being very humble in making offerings, even kneeling on the floor, and all that. Westerners might feel a little awkward but that's how the Thai people would do it. And they would do that even in foreign countries, not adapting fully in the foreign countries and making some adjustments. But they still insist doing the traditional way whenever they can. What does it

mean to offer not only food but other things to monks? It is a great way of making merit and Thai people love making merit. It is one country that is full of merit making.

At meal time when the monks are seated, then the lay people would be walking around seeing that the monks everything that they need and after the meal, then the monks give blessing. There is one blessing before the meal, that is, the monastics would look at the food that we are eating and they would say: This food that we are partaking, it is only to sustain the body, not for the taste. It is not for you to be greedy but just simply to keep this body going so that we can work better to serve Buddhism. So we are very mindful with our bowl. Then you will come to understand that during Buddhist meals particularly with the monastics, they don't talk. That is the polite form: they don't talk because they are supposed to be mindful of what they are eating. So they always set us separately. The monastics don't eat together. This idea of eating together is not normal. We are supposed to sit single file like this and each one of us would just be mindful with our bowl.

At the end of the meal, they give blessing and thanks to the donors. It might be one plate of rice in front me, but in order for this one plate of rice to be in front me I have to think about farmers tilling the soil, growing rice and taking care of the paddy fields. From there until you go to the market so the blessing goes through this whole line of how this plate of rice was obtained and laid down in front of me. That's the practice in Buddhism.

So this giving of rice, giving of food and giving of many things of fulfilling the "perfection." In order for a person to become a buddha, a person should be able to fulfill ten perfections. Giving is number one. It is much practice in Thailand and offering food is very popular among the people of the country. So when we talk about the meals, when we talk about celebration, it is very different idea from Eucharist. But somehow through our discussion, we can bring about an understanding of both the Catholic practice as well as the Buddhist practice.

The Buddha said, for monastics, you go out for alms only. But the food that you receive in the morning, if you want to take lunch again, you can divide. Actually in our temple, there are three of us — three monastics — three bowls of rice. But we could feed the whole room so people who come for Sunday meeting, for meditation and the Dharma talk, we can feed all of them.

So we eat in the morning at 7:00 or 7:30 am and then we eat lunch at 11:30am. We are supposed to sit down at mid-day. Now mid-day differs from one country to another. Here in Thailand, it is 18 minutes after 12 noon. It is considered mid-day. So if I sit down before 18 minutes after 12 noon, I could continue my meal until after that time. So that's why when you come to this country you will find that the monastics are very fussy about lunch because it is their last meal of the day. After that there is no more meal, only drinks fruit juices and tea and coffee, etc.

Also for us, some of us are very strict. They take only one meal a day and the lay people, you know, when you tell them that you take one meal a day they really have high respect for you. That's not so good for health, it is not good to eat only one huge meal a day and starve the rest of the day, I have to confess that in the evenings, sometimes we get very hungry and we have to do with all kind of drinks. And then many of the monks end up contracting diabetes because the kind of drinks that people provide you in the evenings always have sugar, coffee, tea or whatever always have sugar. Sometimes, the monks simply take sugar like blocks of sugar cane and they drink hot water after that. So it is always sugary, something sweet.

We don't have a sacred meal like the Eucharist. We just have celebrations, birthdays or New Year, general celebrations. Now what we eat differs between the Mahayana and the Theravada. In Mahayana, starting from China, they started as vegetarian so therefore, people who eat meat you will not find in Mahayana tradition. I took my first vow as a lay person in Taiwan and also following that tradition of not taking meat. But in Thailand, the monks may take meat.

This is because the Buddha actually allowed "pure" meat. Pure meat is that meat which you did not hear, you have not seen, you do not

suspect that that animal was killed for you. That is considered pure and then you can take it. There is a story of a forest monk. He was going to visit this household and on the way to that household, he saw this trap for the fish. He knew right away that the fish inside the trap is going to be his lunch. He knew because he saw the fish so that when he arrived at the place, he was told that he will be served curry fish, that same fish that he saw. He refused to eat it. Of course he did not tell the house member why he did not want to eat. But he saw it with his own eyes so he did not eat. This is correct practice.

But in consumeristic culture like Thailand, I think it is very difficult to say that we don't know that the meat was killed for us. We don't make clear connection but when we go to India, it is very clear. When you order chicken curry, they reach their hand into the chick cage and grab the live chicken and cut the throat. So when you order chicken curry, you order that a chicken be killed for you. So that's very clear. In Thailand, however, it is not clear because when you buy chicken, it is all wrapped in this foil or plastic and it's on the shelf in the supermarket. You don't make a connection that that chicken was killed for you. Kids nowadays don't realize that that chicken meat is the same chicken which was running in the front yard. They don't make that connection.

But I think this is also part of the culture, because Thai culture before we accepted Buddhism before the 13th century, we were not meat eaters. But we were eating fish and rice, very similar to Bengali culture. Those were our main staple. Meat comes after having opening ourselves to the Chinese communities who eat pork and beef. But before that, the major diet in Thailand was rice and fish.

So even accepting Buddhism, we have not given up our culture. That's why it is kind of mixed. The same also in animistic belief, we have not given up animism. We are Buddhists but Thai Buddhism is very different from Buddhists elsewhere because we have that part of animism still practiced in Thai Buddhism itself. You go to Myanmar, the same thing. They have "Nats." I think that's true with Christianity also. Christianity also goes into a lot of inculturation with the local land that Christianity arrives at.

The meals in Buddhism are usually placed in the buffet table and everyone comes and takes the meal. But of course, the monks come first and then the lay people the same kind of meal. I think equality must be there in a religious community where you don't eat separately and the abbot always gets the best kind of dishes. No, we don't have that. We all take the same kind of food but when we sit down and eat, we eat in silence separately.

I think it is very clear that we come together and become really one in the practice of meditation. There is one particular meditation technique that we do with the breathing and we connect with each other through this practice. We become one and at the end of the meditation session, we would have "dedication of merit." This dedication of merit actually goes to all sentient beings. When the Buddhist talks about sentient beings, we cut across those whom we love and those whom we hate. We wish them both happiness and we wish them to be free from suffering. That is real unifying force among Buddhists. For that reason, the Mahayana not only limits to human beings but also animals. When we said sentient beings, it cut across human beings as well as animals.

The concept of praying to God is not present in Buddhism. We do not have this "God" concept. To be clearer, we Buddhists are not God-centered. Whether there is God or not, we are here already. Whether we were created by God or not, we are here already. But I would also say that Buddhism is not atheist who denies the existence of God completely. We are rather non-theist. We don't talk about God. God is not our central concern. So in that strict sense of Buddhism, there is no prayer because when you pray, you are praying to God. We rather do chanting. So before we start eating, we say that this food that we are partaking, I will consume without greed. This is a kind of reminder and self-reflection for the purification of this act of eating; that this act of eating is not to increase my greed. It is chanting but in a different sense from the Christian concept of prayer. Then we give blessing to the people who make this dish of rice possible for us to eat. For the blessing, we say the blessing for the people. We bless the people, asking them to be joyful that they have brought this food to sustain the monastics and because you sustain Buddhism, you prolong Buddhism, you prolong the life of Buddhism.

The community of Buddhist monks and female monks involve many recitations when we come together. There are rituals that must be done by the community: (1) ordination. This must be recognized by the community of monastics. Among monastics, we meet twice a month, during full moon and dark moon, for confession and recital of our monastic rules. The most serious one is *Parasika*, defeat, which means he had not been able to keep the precept. The most important precept he already transgressed and suppose nobody knew about it. But because he was in this community of giving ordination, the ordination that was performed with him will be invalid. So in my ordination, I had 12 monks and when asked why 12, my teacher says: "Just in case." This is a very short answer but it implies a lot of meaning.

Monastic life is very important. Once I am ordained, I have to live as a monastic and living in the community. Why so? Because it is only when you live together that you realize you have to make a lot of adjustment. Living in monastic life is like putting potatoes directly from the soil where they have been picked into a bucket, place water and stir the whole lot. The potatoes themselves cleanse themselves by rubbing against each other. The result is a cleaner lot of potatoes. But of course sometimes, the potatoes jump out of the bucket. Some people cannot stand monastic life so they have to leave the community and we have people like that. So, ordained life in Buddhism is very much monastic life. That is where you can practice. That is when you get to see your own faults and purify and improve. Monastic life is very important but not easy. It is not easy to live together if you are not serious in your goal.

When the bell rings at 5:30am, I still want to have some more sleep. But I have to get up. In the beginning it was difficult for me to get up for the morning chanting and then I read the text. In this particular text the Buddha said that in the future, there will be people from good families joining the order and will be very lazy and he or she will get up after the sun has risen. I literally jumped up feeling as if the Buddha had actually addressed me in that particular text. We don't as monastics follow our own liking. We have to go according to the monastic "rhythm."

At 11:30 am the bell rings again signaling lunch time. I could not say: "I am not hungry, I will eat later." No! We have two choices, either we eat or we don't eat. We cannot eat later because that is the monastic time. So this is the real training and the food that is laid on the table — three or four dishes — must be eaten. Whether you like it or not, that's your business to handle but we all eat the same thing. This monastic life, this community, is very important.

(inaudible question)
Some of you who have known me when I was a lay person, with long nails all painted red. That was the kind of lifestyle that I led and then I never rode the scooter because my hair will then fly all over. Now, I shaved my head and this is the permanent hairstyle that can go on any vehicle. It's a simple lifestyle. In Buddhism, monastics talk very simple — down to earth. This robe is a uniform which is uni-sex. Monks and female monks wear the same thing—exactly... the same thing—and this very fashionable. It's been on from the Buddha's time up till now. So, when you cut all the frills of life, and you just answer to the basic necessity and the rest of the time when you can really focused. In Christian terms, "focus for God's work." We Buddhists let go of the frills. Many people are very worried of my cotton bag. They always want to make a fancy bag for me. This is the bag that I was ordained with seven years ago and I am still happy with it. People come and fuss around me also, the lay people. They bring new set of robes, shiny ones, and the next week they come and check. "Venerable Mother, you are not wearing my robe." I answer: "Oh, I thought you already offered to me. How is it you're saying that it is your robe?" I mean, if I change the robe every week I would be a fashion lady. I am no longer a monk. So, we always have to be reminded of what we are here for. We are here to let go of the frills of life so that we can focus clearly.

Once you have accepted this life, in Christianity you would call it "the call from God." Once you have received this call from God, the interests of life which varies and are scattered, and you really waste your energy a great deal doing a hundred other things. But once ordained, you should be very focused. You path should be clear. We can let go of many things. So I stopped completely the first two years to break away from my normal way of life as a lay person. I stopped reading newspapers. I stopped

watching television. We don't have a television set in the monastery. Just so that we are clear that this is another passage of life that we have chosen as monks. So, life has become very focused and the energy that comes is marvelous. I never had this kind of energy when I was a lay person. But once you are ordained and you are very clear, in your goal, in your spiritual goal and commitment, I don't know how many years I have in life. I really don't know. But whatever I have, I put it in this tray and I offer it to the Buddha. This is my offering. Total, complete, simple.

So, when we have that kind of understanding in our part, I think we have lots of energy to work. It's not penance, but to us it is "simplicity." This simplicity brings us back down to the connection with nature.

There is great hospitality in Buddhists from where I come from. People can stay in monasteries, can stay and also eat. In the modern age, you go for alms to support yourself. Does that mean that you only take alms from people, houses around you, or just like us Catholic we also beg digitally, through the Internet. Is there a sense of international support also and what do you do, suppose you are self-sufficient in a way and do you let people also come to monasteries for food like in Catholic institutions like that of Mother Theresa? Poor people line up there for food. Does it work both ways like this for you?

When people go to the temple for food, they are not expected to pay. They are going to be fed with whatever the monks can offer. In our temple, we go for alms-round twice a week. Sunday is our regular day and then on Buddhist day. Buddhist day keeps on shifting so you have to look at the Thai calendar where there is a small Buddha image printed or a sign of the moon on the calendar, and that is every week. So this week, I think Buddhist day falls on Saturday. So we go out on Saturday and Sunday. And we receive alms from people bringing fresh foods to the temple. Sometimes it is their birthday. They always like to make offering on their birthday so we have many birthdays coming up. Or otherwise, people just come and offer money. We have this big donation once a year. That is the robe offering ceremony, which is called *Kathina*. But now actually, it means donation so that we could collect if we have construction that is going on in the temple. That is a once a year collection.

Generally, the donation comes from people around the world. In my organization, it is a bit international so sometimes we get big donations, small donations, but from many people. We try to avoid big donations from a single source because that could mean "control." You will understand that once you have one big donor, you tend to end up being controlled by that donor. This will create very unhappy situations.

In the Catholic tradition, when someone joins to become a priest or religious nun, it's about after 20-25 years of age. But we see sometimes, small kids and they are in the temples like "child monks." How long to they stay there and can they leave in between?

Questions like this will highlight certain facets of Buddhism. The very first novice was the Buddha's own son. He was only seven years old. In the text, it did not say seven years old. This is an interpretation found in the commentary afterwards. If a boy is old enough to know how to drive away the crows from the paddy fields, then he can join the order. Then the commentary says "seven years old." In Thailand, mostly poor kids become monks. Their parents think that if they become ordained, this is their access for higher education. So they get training from the monks and they are sent to school in general public schools as well as Buddhist schools. And then when they reach the age of 20, there is full ordination. So yes, school age kids can be trained as monks but they are called "novices" not for life.

Just two days ago, I read a report from a research saying that the number of monks dropped drastically in Thailand. The researcher actually suggested that maybe the government should consider the ordination of women. That's why I was interested. In Thailand, they don't have ordination of women.

Coming back to the question of meals: I wonder whether if this understanding is correct. But in Buddhism, the communion — union — among members is established through mindfulness which is a sign of transcending oneself the egoic-self, getting out of oneself. And that brings about a deeper union with one another. Even meal sayeth together, eaten together in silence would mean that the silence becomes the medium of a deeper level of communication. And so, even in our Christian tradition, we have a very great insistence that when you have received the sacred

food, ideally you should be in silence. But unfortunately, the noisy world captures us and we want to shout at the top of our voices and to all the rest after the meal is over and we have a "hell" of a noise in the Churches. Though the Popes and the Vatican Council have been all saying that there must be silence, but we tend to think that we become somebody and that we are somebody if we make noise. Am I right?

You are right and I am very happy that you brought out this mindfulness , the practice of mindfulness. You are very right. I experienced that when I went to Assisi in the dining room there was complete silence. This is still observed and each priest come in with his tray of food and the benches are very long and you sit on either side. It is the same idea. So I was very happy when I was in Assisi and said to myself, "This is exactly the same way that we practice in our community." So when we go back to the spirit, we are talking of the same thing.

Do you think therefore, that the Christian Churches in Asia where religions make an appeal to go the center of one's being need a change?

It is always a learning process. There is something good and there is something bad. Some Western people who came to the forest monastery for the first time, they could not stand the silence during meals. These people are so unfriendly (they think), they don't even talk to me during meal time. That's because they don't understand the practice that we are doing. They say: "I will never go back to this monastery again because they are very unfriendly." For it is read in another way. But actually, that is the time when we have to be connected spiritually rather than verbally.

Even in my monastery, I often have to remind them that meal time is silence. It is very difficult for human nature. I told them, you can speak but don't talk. Now, you have to differentiate between "speak" and "talk." If I sit next to Father, I could say: "Father, could I have salt." This is speaking. But if I turn to the other and ask: "Oh Mr so and so, how many children do you have?" This is talking, not speaking. If you get yourself involved in unnecessary conversation at meal time, it is not appropriate.

From my point of view as a Christian, I always entertain and am enthralled by this idea that Buddhism could be a fertile ground for Christianity in the sense that we see Buddhists perfecting themselves to become Christians. The fulfillment of Buddhism could be found in Christianity. But of course you will have to see it in a different way, and see Christianity as coming from outside and for you it should never happen, that somebody from outside will destroy Buddhism. In connection with the meals taken in the Buddhist culture, I was impressed by this silence during the meal where you are mindful of not only of yourself eating because you want to eat but because simply you want to sustain the body and you are mindful also of those people who have contributed the food to you. Is there a chance when the fellowship that happens among those who eat the meal will enjoy fellowship with the one who provided the meal that One, the God whom we recognize but you do not think of this because in Buddhism as you said is a non-theist. Is there a chance that Buddhism would make that next step of being God-centered?

I think it is the other way around. When can Christians leave the idea of a "God-head"? You see, when we talk about Nirvana, we talk about Buddha-hood. We are not talking about one particular person. We are not talking about personified God. We get stuck with this personified God in Christianity. If you can take one step further to talk about God without having that old man as God — go beyond and go to let's say "godliness." Then we talk about the same thing. I think we talk about the same thing but we get stuck with terminologies. So, we talk about climbing the mountains and we climb the same mountain. But we disagree because each one of us has not reached the top of the mountain. You are climbing from that end, while I climb from this end. You see a deer, I see a tiger. If we are really true to our spiritual commitment, we don't have to disagree whether you see a deer and I see a tiger. Just keep on going. But once when we get there, we just look at each other's eyes and it's just the experience of that Oneness: whether you call it God, and I call it Nirvana; or whether I call it Enlightenment, and you call it God. You know, the problem we have is that because we are climbing the mountain at different spots, we don't realize that we start from different entrances, so to say. So, I think that if each one of us is serious in our own practice, we go to the same thing.

In Hong Kong, each year the Buddhist leaders organize a grand celebration on the birthday of Buddha. After their liturgical celebration, they also entertain us with vegetarian banquet in the hotel even. So, how would you interpret this or what comment could you give as a Buddhist in Thailand on this arrangement?

I would just go along and enjoy the banquet. It is a celebration we can look at from different levels and simply enjoy the present moment.

(inaudible question)
You may want to hear about my passage into ordained life. When we were ordained, we say to the preceptor: "I will try my best to lessen my suffering. I will try my best to be enlightened." That is our goal — our goal that we go forward to. Of course, we have to let go of our family. In my case, I had to take a divorce but I waited until my sons were grown. The youngest one was 24 when I took ordination. I don't have bad feelings that I left them half-way.

As I said earlier, during the Buddha's time, he set up the four-fold Buddhists. The bhikkhus, male monks, female monks, lay men and lay women. These four-fold Buddhists must take care of Buddhism itself. But when it came to Thailand, we never had ordained women. We started as a nation since the 13th century and we never had ordination of women. Ordination of women had to start like this: a woman aspirant to monk-hood must first be ordained by a chapter of bhikkhunis, a chapter of ordained nuns. In the same day, you have to be ordained by a chapter of male monks. But in a country with no ordained female monks, you could not possibly start the ordination process. That's why I had to go to Sri Lanka to receive this lineage. But the community here, the church here, has been comfortable with the idea that the community or church would only have male monks. This went on for the last 700 years. Legally, I have not done anything wrong but in order for the government to accept me, the church has to accept me first. The government will listen to what the church has to say.

Now the church defines the word "sangha" to mean the community of monks only, whereas the Buddha has established both the bhikkhus (male monks) as well as female monks. So this is where we got stuck. I used to host a television program and your organization has awarded the last two years of my work. When I was ordained, the government channel refused to acknowledge my new status. They say that because of my ordained status, I will confuse the children. So, sometimes they would have my program in but without the word "bhikkhuni" which means ordained nun. And without my face, they use only my voice. This is a very strange situation that we find ourselves in but the world is very small. Now with Internet, we are connected. So, the world outside I think know more about the situation and the ordination of women in Thailand more than the Thai people.

INFORMATION NEEDS, LISTENERSHIP OF RADIO VERITAS ASIA KACHIN SERVICE, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN KACHIN STATE, MYANMAR

Fr. John La Raw[1], Madeline M. Suva[2], and Ma. Stella C. Tirol[3]

Background and Rationale of the Study

Radio Broadcasting for Development

Information is one of the most powerful and useful resources in society today. Having access to events and developments in the community and knowing the latest information and how to use it properly can help build community awareness and spirit, and eventually lead to individual change as well as community development (Librero, 1990).

Radio is one of the modern developments of technology. It can reach a large number of people at any one time, transmit information with speed, and overcome the communication barrier of illiteracy. As an adult education medium, it can be used to raise the level of skills of people by carrying out educational programs needed by people, especially those in far flung areas (Ginzberg, 1972).

Radio broadcasting can serve as a tool for social change. It can help shape, mold, and sometimes break an individual's set of perceptions and way of thinking. It can help accomplish the transition from old to new customs and practices, change attitudes, and lead to the truth. It can penetrate even the remotest area where other electronic means are not available. This is where Radio Veritas Asia (RVA) becomes most important and effective, particularly when sowing the seed of faith among the underprivileged that comprise most of its audience (Pope John Paul II, on the 25th Anniversary of RVA, 1995).

[1] Fr. John La Raw, SVD, graduated with the MS in Development Communication degree from the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), College, Laguna, Philippines in 2007.
[2] Dr. Madline M. Suva is associate professor of development communication at the College of Development Communication, UP Los Baños, College, Laguna Philippines 4031 and research adviser of Fr. John La Raw.
[3] Ma. Stella C. Tirol is assistant professor of development communication at UP Los Baños, College, Laguna, Philippines 4031 and a member of the research guidance committee of Fr. John La Raw.

Radio Veritas Asia and Radio Veritas Kachin Service

Radio Veritas Asia is a private, non-commercial, non-profit Catholic radio station. As such, it depends on donations for its maintenance and operation. Its studio complex is located in Fairview Park, Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines. The station is owned and operated by the Philippine Radio Education and Information Center (PREIC). It is committed to proclaim the message of God's love to the people of Asia by producing human development and Catholic evangelization programs. This is done in cooperation with recognized Asian production centers via short wave and other related means of electronic media.

Radio Veritas Asia strengthens the spirituality of the faithful and guides the people to become fruitful in their community. Radio Veritas Asia not only nourishes the spiritual welfare of the faithful but also contributes to human development through its educational, news, and entertainment programs. Since community development involves economic development as well as the social, political, cultural, spiritual and physical well-being of the people (Luna, 1997), Church evangelization, through radio, can promote community development.

Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service (RVA-KS) is one of the 17 language services broadcast to Myanmar mainly to the Kachin State. Kachin State is one of the seven states of Myanmar located in the northern part of the country. It has a land area of 33, 903 sq. miles and a population of 1,090,000 (Census 1996). Myitkyina is the state's capital city, and also the center of the Myitkyina Diocese. Myitkyina Diocese has a Catholic population of 98,090 scattered all over the vast mountainous mission territory (Annual Report of the Diocese of Myitkyina, 1999).

According to Bishop Paul Grawng, "RVA Kachin Service is the only radio station that could reach the people to give them religious information, guide them on moral principles, and promote human development as well." (Annual meeting of the RVA Kachin Service, Myitkyina, Myanmar, 2001)

Myanmar is predominantly a Buddhist country. Christians are just a minority, but they are free to worship to a certain extent. The military government does not allow the establishment of any religious and private radio station. In the whole country, there is only one radio station, "Myanmar Ah Than," which is run and operated by the government. It is difficult to hear the Word of God, especially in the remote areas. Based on the information from priests working in the mountainous places, two-thirds of the Kachin people in the remote areas need spiritual guidance especially those who have been converted to Catholicism but were not adequately instructed (http://www.inforplease.com/ipa/A010780.html).

RVA Kachin Service broadcasts twice daily — from 7:30 AM to 7:55 AM and from 8:30 PM to 8:55 PM, Philippine standard time. The total broadcast time is 50 minutes. The program broadcasts every morning on the frequency of 9.545 (MHZ) 31 meter band and every evening on the frequency of 15.225 (MHZ) 19 meter band.

Relevance of Radio Program Planning in Community Development

People look for radio stations that cater to their specific rather than general interests. Gomez (1976) said that radio stations have to make decisions on the kinds of information they want to broadcast. They should plan the type of programming that will reflect the needs of a particular audience. She stressed that the effectiveness of radio as a medium can be further enhanced if radio stations are localized and geared to programming that meets the specific interests and needs of their audiences.

Such advice supports Abbot and Rider's views (1957) that "the true functions of broadcasting relate to the community it serves. It bears upon the needs of the community. The broadcasters should not force their own opinions or attitudes upon their audience, but they need to listen to the voices of their communities, for those voices express the needs and problems of the individuals who are their listeners and viewers."

Knowing the needs and problems of the people would be very useful to development workers in planning practical and effective community development projects. After all, the principle of community development is that the development programs should be based upon the

needs of the community (Dunham, 1963). Since radio, if used in the right manner, can help improve the lives of people, its programming must be properly planned. However, this is just one side to the coin. Radio programs conceived for development can only be effective if people listen to them (Snow, 1988).

One of the reasons why a radio program is not fully utilized is due to lack of listenership and audience study. Program sponsors and coordinators usually find their broadcasts a flop because they have failed to conduct studies which could have provided a holistic view of the radio program beneficiaries and which could have exposed helpful perceptions of their beneficiaries about the broadcasts (Adkins, 1988).

Therefore, to have a sustainable and effective radio station, it is very important to find out the information needs of the audiences. It is likewise important to study the listenership of the stationıs programs. Information needs and listenership can have policy implications for the development of rural communities.

Objectives of the Study

Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service (RVA-KS) has been disseminating religious and developmental information since 1982. To date, only one study has been conducted about the station's broadcasting activities. The station seeks to move forward and further improve its programming. It wants to get to know its primary audience better because "broadcasting begins and ends with the listeners" (Wavell, 1969).

This study looked at the information needs and listenership of RVA-KS among the Kachin people in Myanmar vis-a-vis the implications for policies on communication and development processes in a rural community. Its specific objectives were to:

1. describe the profile of respondents in Kachin State, Myanmar and the characteristics of their radio sets;
2. identify their information needs and their preferred information channels;
3. describe the station staff profile of RVA-KS;

4. find out how the RVA-KS staff prepare for their radio programs and describe their roles in the management and operation of the station;
5. determine the management and broadcast policies, if any, of Radio Veritas Asia and Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service;
6. find out how RVA-KS staff perceive their station and what its problems are; and
7. describe the listenership of the respondents to RVA-KS.

Methodology

This study was designed as a descriptive type of research. It used a combination of research methods that included a survey, focus group discussion (FGD), and key informant interview (KII) in data collection.

Kachin State was purposively chosen as the survey site because most of the Kachin people and Catholics live there. It is one of the biggest states with 18 townships and 699 villages. Some parts of the state are mountainous places with no electric power and with very poor communication and transportation services. Radio is the only means by which the people obtain information.

The study covered four randomly selected towns in Kachin State: Myitkyina, Burmo, Mogaung, and Phakant. In each town, two villages that were densely populated were purposively chosen. From the eight selected villages, 30 percent of the households were randomly selected from a list provided by the municipal government and village heads. The household head served as respondent of the study. If the head was not available, the wife or eldest child was interviewed. Out of the 258 households, only 226 were eventually surveyed because 32 families had already left their farms and moved to another village.

A questionnaire was translated in the local dialect as the survey instrument. It had four parts: a) respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, b) their listenership to and perception of RVA-KS programs, c) their comments or suggestions to improve the programs, and d) their information needs. The researcher trained two villagers who can read and write to help in data gathering.

A discussion guide was prepared for the focus group discussion. The participants in the FGD consisted of a mix of light listeners (those who listened once a week), medium listeners (those who listened three to four times a week), and heavy listeners (those who listened seven times a week) with varying age and gender. Three FGD sessions with eight participants each from Myitkyina, Mogaung, and Phakant were held. An FGD was also held with the broadcasters of RVA-KS to probe in-depth about their roles, program preparation activities, and problems in radio broadcasting.

Using an interview schedule, key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out with the management and staff of RVA and RVA-KS to find out about the management and broadcasting operation of RVA and RVA-KS. All FGD discussions and KIIs were videotaped and recorded.

The survey data were analyzed using frequency counts, averages, and percentages. The data gathered from the FGD and the KII were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively.

Results and Discussion

Profile of Respondents and Characteristics of their Radio Set

The respondents were mostly male (60.6%) household heads whose age ranged from 15 to 89 years old with 41 as the mean age. They were married (65%) and Catholic (77%) with high school education (36.7%). The bigger percentage comprised of farmers (29.7%) and businessmen (26.5%). (Table 1)

Majority (64.6%) owned a radio set for almost for 1-3 years (27.4%) and 6-10 years (23.55%) which was still in good condition (45.1%). Apparently, the respondents had new or old radio sets (Table 2). Due to the good condition of their radio set, it was expected that they would receive clear broadcast signals in their area.

Information Needs and Preferred Information Channels of Respondents

Almost half (48.7%) of the respondents expressed their need for information on the Good News of Christ as well as on the Church's teachings (Table 3). The Kachin people wanted to continue acquiring knowledge about their Catholic religion and seemed concerned about their spiritual development. At the same time, a small percentage expressed the need for information on family and health care (16.8%), agriculture and livestock (9.3%), acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), and drugs (8.8%). Besides spiritual development, the Kachin people seemed to be concerned about development problems

When asked about their preferred information channels, majority (69.5%) indicated radio (Table 4). Obviously, radio is a popular medium among the Kachin people. This is because it is cheap, affordable, easily available, and portable. In Myanmar, a Chinese-made radio costs only 7000 kyats (US$5).

Management, Programming, and Policies of RVA and RVA-KS

Data on the profile, management, and programming of Radio Veritas Asia (RVA) and Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service (RVA-KS) were gathered through KII and FGD with the staff of RVA and RVA-KS. Secondary data such as RVA-KS print materials and documents also served as sources of data of the study.

Staff Profile of RVA and RVA-KS

The general manager and assistant program director of RVA and six staff members of RVA-KS comprised of the president, coordinator, person in charge, and three program producers were included as FGD participants and key informants of the study. Of these eight staff, four were priests, two were nuns, one was a religious brother, and one was a lay person.

The RVA and RVA-KS staff had a mean age of 43 years old which was quite close to the survey respondents' mean age of 41 (Table 1). The youngest staff was 28 years old while the oldest was 58. Majority (62.5%) were male. All were single, Catholic and had higher education than the survey respondents. Four were college graduates; two had a master's degree; and another two finished high school (Table 5).

Before joining RVA-KS, half of the radio staff was involved in the social communication activities of their respective dioceses. Three served as church workers and one was a businessman (Table 5).

The RVA-KS staff had extensive experience in church and social communication activities by virtue of their position (i.e., priest, nun, religious brother) and by the nature of their previous work.

Broadcasting Experience of RVA and RVA-KS Staff

A big majority (75%) of the radio staff had attended short courses and seminars on broadcasting. More than one-third (37.5%) had worked for less than a year in broadcasting while one-fourth had worked 3-4 years (Table 6). The RVA-KS coordinator had worked longest for seven years in the station. The RVA general manager and two RVA-KS producers had only worked for less than two years with the station. Indeed, the RVA and RVA-KS staff had accumulated broadcasting experience.

Of the eight radio staff, five were engaged in radio program production : the RVA-KS coordinator, the person in charge of RVA-KS center in Myanmar, and the three producers. Table 7 lists the various programs of the RVA-KS staff.

The RVA-KS coordinator, who is a priest, handled five program segments of the station. Three segments were church-related such as Sunday homilies, Catechism/Bible study, and Church news while two were on world news and general question-and-answer.

One RVA-KS producer, who is a religious brother, produced program segments on the youth, culture, and public information.

Meanwhile, the program producer who is a nun handled program segments on the family, Church history, agriculture and livestock, and song requests. Another nun who is in charge of the RVA-KS center in Myanmar produced the drama and expert interviews for the different program segments. The third program producer, who is a lay person, managed the program segments on health care, education, and song requests. Except for the RVA-KS coordinator who handled the highest number of five program segments, the rest of the radio staff managed from two to four segments of the station's program.

Based on the list of 16 program segments of the RVA-KS in Table 7, seven were developmental (i.e., youth, cultural, family, agriculture and livestock, health, education, expert interview); four were Church-related (i.e., Sunday homily, Catechism/Bible study, Church news, Church history); and three each were informational (i.e., world news, question and answer, public information) and entertainment programs (2 song requests, 1 drama).

Out of 16 program segments, three to four program segments were grouped for daily station programming. It can be observed that for each day's programming, a combination of Church-related, developmental, and entertainment type of program segments were broadcast (Table 8). This type of programming reflects the infotainment or enter-educate strategy in community development programs.

The RVA Kachin Service broadcasts daily in the morning from 6:00 to 6:25 and in the evening from 7:00 to 7:25, Myanmar standard time. The total broadcast time is approximately 50 minutes. The program broadcasts every morning at the frequency of 9.545 (MHZ) 31 meter band and every evening at the frequency of 15.225 (MHZ) 19 meter band.

Program Preparation of Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service

Data sources. The RVA-KS management and programming staff referred to various sources of information in choosing the topic or message that they will broadcast in their program segments. They identified books, subject matter specialists or experts, Internet, personal experience, and other people's experiences as sources of materials for their program.

Program preparation and production. All of the RVA-KS staff searched for their own broadcast materials, wrote their own program scripts, and recorded their own programs (Table 9). Fr. Peter Hka Awng Tu, the RVA-KS coordinator who produces and broadcasts the Sunday homily, Bible study, and Church news programs, said: "It is not enough to get the information from the biblical commentaries. I also need to reflect and pray on the bible passage which I am going to preach."

As experienced by RVA-KS staff, program preparation involves several activities. The staff had to search for information, collect the information, read and reflect upon it, then write the radio script, and record the material for broadcast. Sometimes, the staff had to consult with experts to verify the information presented in the program segment. With the feedback letters, the staff had to read and choose several for broadcast since not all of the letters could be read on air due to limited air time. The Bible readings also had to be translated into catechism lessons for broadcast. Other staff watched television and listened to other radio stations to update themselves on the latest news and information that can be broadcast in their program segment (Table 9).

Finding out listeners' information needs. The RVA-KS learned about the information needs of their audience through feedback letters. According to the RVA-KS staff, the listeners usually mentioned their needs and wants in their letters. Sometimes, the listeners also sent messages through telephone, email, and fax.

The RVA-KS coordinator also stated that: "We get the information needs of the listeners through listener meetings and through research on listeners. We usually have a yearly meeting with the listeners. Likewise, we have staff members at the diocesan center who are doing continuous research on the listeners" needs.

Preparing programs to meet the listeners' needs. In preparing the program, one RVA-KS staff prioritized the information needs of the listeners based on feedback and research. Another staff prepared the program segment based on the current problems in the country and in the community.

The producer and broadcaster of RVA-KS's health care program said that "during the rainy season, they prepared health care programs on diseases prevalent during such period in order to make listeners aware of these diseases." It can be deduced that proper timing of broadcasting messages that suit the listener's current need or problem is important.

The RVA-KS coordinator, on the other hand, observed that since their listeners come from different places, their information needs varied. As he said: "Sometimes, we receive letters asking us to broadcast this and that information. If the information is not very important to all or most of the listeners, we just skip it. We look after the good of all listeners."

Launching campaign for RVA-KS. Sister Ja Nan reported that the priests and catechists usually encouraged the Kachin people to listen to RVA-KS during the program launch campaign. She added that RVA-KS broadcasters explained the usefulness of listening to radio so that the people would value listening to the radio.

Brother Tu Lum, RVA-KS program producer, met one non-listener who told him that s/he did not listen to the radio because s/he did not have a radio set. He commented that giving radio sets to non-listeners was not the solution. "What we can do is to explain to them the importance and usefulness of listening to radio. We then anticipate that they will save money, and buy and listen to a radio set," he said.

To encourage more listeners, Miss Magaret Roi Awn, the lay producer said: "We give prizes to the regular letter senders so that they will write and send more feedback letters. We also conduct interviews with the listeners and solicit their comments and suggestions for RVA-KS," she said.

Monthly meeting. The RVA-KS staff held monthly meetings to discuss problems and other concerns of the station. They even held an emergency meeting "if there was an urgent problem or important matter concerning RVA-KS that needed to be addressed immediately."

Getting feedback from listeners. According to the RVA-KS staff, they obtained feedback from listeners mostly through airmail letter. They also used the telephone, email, and fax to get feedback.

Monitoring and evaluating the programs. Monitoring and evaluation (ME) was an important activity of RVA-KS. Its coordinator described how they carried out ME in their staton: "Everyday after recording and before we air the program on radio, we usually listen to our recorded programs together. If there is a need to change any aspect of the program, we change it right away. While listening to our programs, we correct and guide each other. We evaluate our programs once in six months. Sometimes we get evaluation letters from the listeners and discuss the content of these letters."

Roles in the Management and Operation of RVA and RVA-KS

The general manager explained his role in the management of the RVA in the following statements: "As general manager, I have to oversee and supervise the smooth running of the radio station based on the guidelines of the Federation of Asia Bishops' Conference (FABC). I also have to build good relationship among the different radio sections since we have many nationalities from different cultures and backgrounds."

For his role, the assistant program director said that: "As the assistant program director, I have to arrange training for the producers and coordinators. I also need to facilitate the monthly program council meetings. In these meetings, we try to see to the smooth running of the programs. The coordinators and producers share their experiences and opinions on the success and failure of their respective programs."

Meanwhile, the RVA-KS coordinator mentioned that his duties were to "schedule the production and recording of the programs in advance; guide and encourage the producers to broadcast good programs; monitor all the programs that are aired; and regularly keep in contact with the person in charge of the RVA-KS center in Myanmar for updates."

The person in charge of RVA-KS center in Myanmar said: "Being in charge of the RVA-KS center, I have to monitor the radio programs and the clarity of the radio signal. I also regularly send the feedback letters of

the listeners to the radio station. If there is urgent news, I send the news through email or fax even though fax is expensive. We also produce some drama and interview programs at the center and then send these to the RVA station in the Philippines for broadcast to the Kachin State in Myanmar."

The president of RVA-KS talked about his role in the station: "I try to link and maintain the network between the RVA-KS station in the Philippines and the RVA-KS center in Myanmar. I also take care of the needs and attend to the problems of the station and the center. I give advice on the assignments of the RVA-KS staff."

The three RVA-KS producers performed similar roles, namely: preparing the program, writing the script, and recording the program in time for airing.

Policies of RVA and RVA-KS

The main policy of Radio Veritas Asia focused on the sustainability of the radio station. As a policy, regular contact with and smooth communication are enforced among the persons in charge of the RVA programs in the station and in the center in their respective countries. Radio Veritas Asia has existing policies but these are still in the process of being polished and refined. The radio station plans to publish a booklet on its policies for distribution to its staff.

Management policies. RVA-KS has no written policies yet. This is partly because the president of RVA-KS, who is the Bishop of Kachin State, Myanmar, is often occupied with pastoral ministries. However, he has planned to meet with the board members and production staff of RVA-KS to discuss and plan policies for managing and operating Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service.

Broadcasting policies. The general manager of RVA explained that:"We are a short wave radio station. In terms of broadcasting, we have to follow the rules and regulations of the telecommunications authority in the country where we are broadcasting our programs. The RVA producers based in the radio station in the Philippines have to contact with the persons

in charge of RVA centers in other countries. We broadcast from our radio station in the Philippines and our programs are heard in the Kachin State in Myanmar and in other Asian countries. We need to have contact with the people in charge of the RVA centers in the respective countries that we reach so that they can help us monitor our programs and signals. So, there is a link, harmony, and cooperation between the staff of the Philippine-based RVA station and the RVA center in the target areas."

The RVA assistant program director also explained that: "In the framework of human development and evangelization, we allow the coordinators and producers to decide by themselves what programs are relevant and useful in their target areas. We also encourage the target audience to actively participate in listening to the radio programs by giving comments and feedback to the radio station and by involving them in the production of the programs."

The RVA-KS coordinator and the person in charge of the RVA-KS center in Myanmar shared the same view. They supported broadcast policies that encouraged the production of appropriate and relevant programs for their intended audiences. In the process, they helped build up their audiences spiritual lives and promote human development.

Radio Staff Perception of RVA and RVA-KS

The radio staff perceived RVA and RVA-KS in the following manner (Table 10): 1) the station is useful (100%); 2) the quality of the program is good (87.5%); 3) there is no need to change the program format (87.5%); 4) there is a need to change the morning air time or broadcast (100%); 5) there is no need to change the length of broadcast time which is 25 minutes for the whole program (100%); and 6) the frequency signal is clear (100%).

Various reasons were cited with regard to the perceived usefulness of RVA and RVA-KS. Based on the listeners' feedback letters, RVA-KS was useful because it guided them in their spiritual life and human development. The general manager of RVA explained that: "RVA is still very important because it is an alternative source of information especially in countries that do not have options for broadcasting." Almost similarly,

the RVA-KS coordinator stated that: "RVA-KS is the only radio station that broadcasts religious programs and the Good News of Christ in Myanmanr. "Hence, it is essential for the listeners to get spiritual nourishment and guidance in their faith." The RVA-KS president attributed the usefulness of the station in his statement that: "The programs of RVA-KS are changing the lives of the listeners to become better persons and better Christians."

Although the program quality was generally 'good', one staff pointed out that the program still needs improvement. He noted that: "RVA-KS had been broadcasting its program in the same format for over 20 years, so it may have become boring among its listeners. It would be better if we could change the program format so it will be more relevant to the current situation".

The staff perceived that the morning broadcast time, which is from 6:00 to 6:25 AM, Myanmar standard time, should be changed because the time is in conflict with the schedule for the Holy Mass. Furthermore, the broadcast time was considered to be too early in the morning in Myanmar.

All the RVA-KS staff perceived that the current 25-minute broadcast time allotted to a combination of three to four programs was sufficient because they thought that a much longer broadcast time would bore the listeners.

The RVA assistant program director shared his comments about his perception of RVA-KS by saying that: "We have our own distinct and unique broadcasting." Even though we are a Catholic radio station, we are not a one-sided radio station. We are very ecumenical. We broadcast some interfaith programs to build unity, peace, and harmony among the religions. While we currently have information overload from the Internet, satellite cable TV, newspapers and magazines, the RVA programs are based on Asian realities and Christianity. We complement the other radio stations and media. Our audience tends to appreciate the programs of RVA because they cannot get the kind of information that we broadcast from other radio stations or media sources."

Problems on Funds, Personnel, and Equipment

The general manager acknowledged that RVA has encountered difficulties in funding. Since the budget is being cut down, he said that RVA is trying to mitigate the problem. "It is digitizing to reduce the number of staff and producers. Within a few years, the radio programs will be produced in the respective centers of the countries. Hence, in the future, RVA will only be the transmitter of those programs," he revealed. With the lack of funds, a staff also mentioned that the station could barely give salary to the radio staff.

The second problem was personnel. "Sometimes, the people who are sent by the Bishops do not have the necessary qualifications for radio broadcasting. These qualifications include knowledge of computer, Internet, and of course digital recording," he explained the general manager.

Another major problem was the poor equipment for producing programs at the center. "Because of the poor communication system in the Myanmar, it is difficult to communicate with the radio station in the Philippines," pointed out the person in charge in Myanmar.

Problems on Politics and Policy

The coordinator of the RVA-KS also explained some 'political' difficulties of the station. "We cannot broadcast the real happenings in the country especially politics since the media are totally controlled by the military government. The military government scans the programs that are broadcast. If it finds out that the programs are against their policies, the broadcaster's life will be in great danger. Besides government control of the media, we also find it hard to get updated news from our target areas and to communicate with our listeners because of the poor mailing system in the country and the difficulty in accessing the phone, fax, and email."

In addition, the president of RVA-KS pointed out the need for policies. He said that "since we do not have the policies yet, we experience problems in management, especially in the transfer of the RVA staff and producers. Often, misunderstandings occur in the transition and cause unhappiness."

Related to the earlier problem on personnel, the general manager of RVA mentioned that "There are certain policies in hiring personnel. These include the qualifications of personnel who will work at RVA. They should have a college degree and training or experience in broadcasting. Sometimes, these requirements are not met."

The assistant program director talked about a policy problem of RVA in program monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Since RVA is composed of foreign staff who broadcast in 17 different languages, the management board finds it difficult to do monitoring and evaluation. As the program director explained, "Since the management board members do not understand the languages broadcast, it is hard to monitor the programs and to decide on the program standard."

Listenership Profile and Characteristics of Listener's Radio Set

The listeners of RVA-KS in Kachin State, Myanmar had a mean age of 42 years. More than one third (37.4%) of them were between 41 and 60 years old. Majority were male (67%) and married (66.5%). Most (80.2%) of the listeners were Catholic. An almost equal percentage reached high school level (35.7%) and obtained middle school education (31.3%). A larger percentage of the listeners were farmers (28.0%) and businessmen (26.9%). The rest were students, church workers, pensioners, and government officials (Table 11). The students were the eldest children who were interviewed when the household head or wife was not available at the time of the survey.

Majority (72.5%) of the RVA-KS listeners owned a radio set (Table 12). Nearly one-third (30.2%) had owned their radio set for one to three years while slightly over one-fourth (27.5%) owned it for five to ten years. Half of them (50.5%) had a radio set in good condition.

Listeners' Information Needs and Preferred Information Channels

Nearly half (49.4%) of the listeners wanted information on the Good news of Christ and Church teachings (Table 13). It appears that the Kachin people are interested to learn about their religion. It also shows a concern for their spiritual growth and development as Catholics.

An almost equal but low percentage expressed the need for information on agriculture and livestock (9.3%), AIDS and drugs (8.8%), and family relationships (8.2%). Also, the same albeit small percentage (6.6%) wanted information on health care and business (Table 13). It can be assumed that the farmer-listeners would be interested in information on agriculture and livestock while the businessmen would tune in to information related to their business.

Drug and alcohol addiction, AIDS, and health care emerged as existing problems in the Kachin State based on the FGD with the listeners. The need for information on these topics reflects the listeners' interest to learn more about them and probably to take some action to minimize these problems.

Concerning drugs and alcohol, Mr. Zau Awng from the town of Myitkyina said that: *"Nye kasha ni hpe ka ni ya, tsa ya nbyin hkra gara hku lam madun ra ai lam ni hpe, RVA kaw na shapoi ya yang, anhte kanu kawa ni a matu grai akyu rawng na re"*("I want to know how to raise our children not to become drug and alcohol addicts. If RVA-KS can broadcast some educational programs on drugs and alcohol, it will be very good for the parents"), he pointed out.

On AIDS, Mr. Zau Ing from Pha Kant wanted information to resolve the conflict between using condom to prevent AIDS and the Catholic church's stand on this. He said: *"Ngai zawn, AIDS gara hku chyam bra mai ai hpe n-chye ai ni grai nga ai. Dai lam ni hpe chye mayu ai. NGO magam gun ni condom gam hkawm yang, sara ni nlam na hku tsun ma ai. Hpa majaw nawku hpung hku na, condom lam na pat shingdan ai lam ni ma chye mayu ai"* ("There are many like me who do not know how AIDS can be transmitted to people. I want to know how so that we can prevent it and protect ourselves from the disease. NGO workers are distributing condoms in the villages but the Church leaders say that it is sinful to use them. I want to know the teaching of the Church on forbidding condoms and the reasons behind it").

On health, Mrs. Ja HPa from Pha Kant, who admitted being a sickly person, said: *"Ngai grai machyi ja ai jan re. Hkamja hkra nga sa ra ai lam ni the, ana zinli na lam ni, gara hku koi gam ra ai lam ni mung chye mayu ai"* ("I want to know the seasonal diseases and how to avoid these diseases so that I can live longer").

Mrs. Marip Jan, on the other hand, wanted information on business so that she can earn more income. As she said: *"Ngai matsan ai. Sahti mayu ai. RVA kaw na, jam gumhpraw hpe gara hku tam brang nna, gara hku jai lang, mahkawng ra ai ni hpe shapoi ya yang, ngai na matu grai akyu nga na re"* ("I am poor. If RVA-KS can broadcast information on how to earn money, it will be useful for me. I also want to know the methods of saving and managing the money").

As regards their preferred information channel, a large majority (73.6%) of the RVA-KS listeners indicated radio as the channel for getting information (Table 13). This further confirms the pervasiveness of radio as information channel in the rural areas.

Perceived Capability of RVA-KS to Provide Listeners' Information Needs

Most (87.9%) of the listeners perceived that RVA-KS was able to provide their information needs. They said that they got the information for their spiritual guidance and for improving their lives from RVA-KS (Table 14).

Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service answered their need for information on the Good News of Christ and Church teachings through broadcasting programs on Sunday homilies, catechism/Bible study, Church news, and Church history. Likewise, RVA-KS broadcasts development programs on family, health, agriculture and livestock, education, and culture which also turned out to be the listeners' information needs. The findings confirm to the practice of RVA-KS to prepare its programs based on its audience's needs which its staff gathered from feedback and research. The RVA-KS staff also produced programs based on the current problems in the community.

Sources from Whom Listeners Learned about RVA-KS

Majority (53.3%) of the listeners learned about Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service from the Church leaders in their area (Table 15). As mentioned earlier, the priests and catechists carried out a program launch campaign to encourage listenership. It can be deduced that the Church leaders took an active role in advocating their programs among the Kachin

people. Furthermore, the campaign served as the communication strategy in increasing the Kachin people's knowledge about the programs of RVA-KS.

Reasons for Listening to RVA-KS

Majority (51.1%) tuned in to RVA-KS to hear the good news of Christ and to learn about the Bible while more than one fifth (42.3%) listened to the station in order to gain knowledge (Table 16). In fact, Mr. Tu Lum from Bhamo town listened to RVA-KS for Gospel preaching and Bible teaching.

The reasons that the listeners cited for listening to the RVA-KS confirm the station's vision of evangelization and human development by "broadcasting the Good News of Christ [as well as development programs] through short wave radio".

Listening Habits and Behavior

Length of listenership to RVA-KS. An almost equal number had listened to the station for 20 years (28.0%) and for 5 years (25.8%). Interestingly, nearly one-fifth (17.6%) had been listening for 25 years since RVA-KS started in 1982 (Table 17).

It can be assumed that those who spent 20 years listening to RVA-KS would be the older listeners in the 41-60 year age bracket. Besides age, their length of listenership may be attributed to the fact that RVA-KS is the only station in the Kachin State that broadcasts for evangelization and development. Since RVA-KS has no competing station in the area, it would be able to capture a large share of the audience listenership.

Frequency of listening to RVA-KS. Almost half (48.9%) of the listeners tuned in 8-14 times a week to RVA-KS (Table 17). This relatively high number of times spent in listening to a radio station may be because RVA-KS is the only station that broadcasts religious and developments programs twice a day in Kachin State. Private media are not allowed to broadcast in the country.

Length of time spent in listening to RVA-KS. Almost all (96.2%) of the listeners listened to the whole 25-minute broadcast time of the program — that is from beginning to the end (Table 17). This implies that the listeners listened to the complete program due to its reasonable length of broadcast time.

Preferred time of listening to RVA-KS. More than half (56.6%) of the listeners preferred listening to RVA-KS in the evening because they had more free time in the evening. The rest (43.4%) preferred listening in the morning because there was less noise from the surroundings and because they also had free time (Table 14). This implies that the Kachin listeners have different free time — some in the evening and some in the morning.

Number of programs listened to. Except for two, all (98.9%) of the listeners listened to all of the 16 program segments of RVA-KS. Because the program segments were aired in only 25 minutes, the residents had free time to listen to the broadcast (Table 17).

Favorite programs. The listeners favored Church news (28.6%), family programs (16.5%), catechism (8.8%), and Sunday homily (8.2%) (Table 17). Church news, catechism, and Sunday homilies were a favorite among the listeners because through these programs they learned about Church activities and Church teachings. The listeners favored the family program because they found the information useful in building a happy family and in raising children properly. Health care was also a favorite program because it addressed the listeners' various health problems.

Manner of listening to RVA-KS. Out of the 182 listeners, half (50.6%) listened to RVA-KS with their family members while more than one fourth (27.5%) listened to the station with their friends and neighbors (Table 17). Mrs. Ja Bu, a listener from Myitkyina town said: "Our family always listens to RVA-KS together so that we can guide our children by referring the message from the radio programs."

Mr. Zau Hkawng, a listener from Mogaung town, listened with her friends because she had no radio set. Another listener, Mrs. Lu Ra said, "By listening to RVA-KS together with friends, we can discuss the message from the radio."

Activity while listening to RVA-KS. The listeners did not carry out any other activity while listening to RVA-KS in the morning (56%) and in the evening (71.4%) as shown in Table 17. They were just sitting or lying in bed as they listened to the station. The rest listened performed other activities while listening to the radio such as doing household chores, walking or exercising, or having their meal.

Information Listeners Obtained from RVA-KS

The larger percentage (37.4%) of the listeners obtained information on current world events and on Church activities from RVA-KS. More than one fourth (27.5%) said they heard information about the Good News of Christ. The rest received information about family life, health and medicine, guidance for the youth, and agriculture and livestock (Table 18). The results confirm that RVA-KS delivers both Church-related and development information to Kachin people.

Listeners' Perception of RVA-KS

The listeners perceived the frequency signals of RVA-KS to be 'good' or clear in the morning (53.8%) and also in the evening (51.6%) (Table 19). Apparently, they are satisfied about the clarity of the station's signals. They also perceived the broadcasters' voice, choice of words, and performance to be 'good'. Likewise, the broadcasters' style of announcing was perceived as being 'good' (Table 20). Generally, the listeners had favorable perception of RVA-KS.

Listeners' Change in Behavior

The listeners acknowledged a change in their knowledge (100%), attitude or feeling (98.9%), and practice (96.2%) as a result of listening to RVA-KS (Table 21).

Change in Knowledge. Majority (69.2%) of the listeners gained knowledge about the Church and Church teachings (Table 22). The rest learned about diseases and medicines, cultural values, and agriculture. Mr. Tu Mai, who is a listener, said he was "gaining information and knowledge daily" from RVA-KS.

Change in Attitude. Almost half (46.7%) of the listeners claimed that they tended to feel more charitable towards the underprivileged people. The rest changed attitude in terms of being more honest, patient, and humble in dealing with other people (Table 22). Mr. Awng San from Phakant stated that "by listening to RVA-KS, I became patient, humble, charitable, and positive-minded".

Change in Practice. The listeners noted some changes in their religious practices (Table 22). These changes included going to Church more often (74.3%), becoming more actively involved in Church activities (16%), and participating in charity work (9.7%). Mrs. Roi Nu from Bhamo said that "by listening to RVA-KS programs, I became more religious such as attending mass and going to confession regularly. I also became active in church movements and in charitable works."

Listeners' Suggestions for Improvement of the RVA-KS

The listeners (74.2%) suggested that RVA-KS should undertake more research in order to provide more detailed and complete information about a topic. They also had suggestions for broadcasters to improve their performance such as to speak naturally and in a lively manner, to read names of persons and villages correctly, to practice before recording and also to broadcast only the truth and the listener's need (Table 23).

Listeners' suggestions to further improve the quality of RVA-KS programs were as follows:

1) to add more programs (69.1%);
2) increase broadcast time (11.5%);
3) award or give incentives to letter senders (6.1%); 4) launch more program campaigns and assign campaign facilitators (5%);
4) broadcast using a more powerful transmitter (4.4%); and 5) broadcast news and activities for Protestants (3.9%) (Table 24).

Conclusion

The listeners of Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service were mostly farmers and businessmen in Kachin State with a mean age of 42 years old. They were male, married, and Catholic with high school education. They have owned a radio set for 1 to 3 years and the radio was in good condition.

The listeners tuned in to RVA-KS to learn more about the Good News of Christ and Church teachings and to gain knowledge. They had been listening to RVA-KS mostly in the morning, eight times a week, from beginning to end of the program over a period of 5-20 years.

The listeners expressed a need for information on the Good News of Christ and Church teachings. They also wanted information on AIDS, drug and alcohol addiction, culture, and Christian unity which they considered as problems in their society. They preferred radio as their information channel.

The staff of RVA and RVA-KS staff composed of priests, nuns, a religious brother and a lay person who had training and experience in broadcasting. Each staff individually searched for broadcast materials, wrote, produced, and recorded the program segments that were later combined into one program for broadcasting. Their program preparations consisted of finding and prioritizing their audience's information needs, holding monthly staff meetings, launching program and listenership campaigns, implementing a feedback system, and program monitoring and evaluation. They performed a variety of roles such as being a station supervisor, program adviser, facilitator, linker, feedback gatherer, and program producer.

There were written policies for the management and operation of the RVA but these have not been published and distributed. There were no written policies yet for the RVA-KS, thereby sometimes affecting the smooth management and operation of the station.

The RVA and RVA-KS are perceived as useful and essential. They are able to meet the information needs of the listeners. The station's signals are clear and its audience is satisfied with the performance of its broadcasters. However, there is still a perceived need to improve the program format. The main problems of the station included lack of policies, funds, equipment, and personnel. There were also problems on government control of media in Kachin State.

Despite these limitations, the listeners of RVA-KS experienced a change in knowledge, attitude, and behavior after listening to the station.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Policies are important to guide the planning and implementation of rural development programs, including radio broadcasting, to facilitate the processes of communication and development in a rural community. As RVA-KS had experienced, the absence or lack of policies can hamper proper management and operation of development-oriented programs. Some recommendations for policy development of Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service are presented below.

For the Management of RVA

To solve the problems encountered in the management and operation of RVA, the general manager and board members of RVA should set up certain policies in the following areas:
a. Personnel-reassess policies on the required qualification, job experiences, and length of service for future personnel of the station.
b. Language Radio Services-Since RVA is comprised of 17 language services, the radio station should have policies on equal budget allocation for each service and on the use and maintenance of equipment. Further, the station should also have policies on limiting the number of staff and producers in each service and on assigning a specific number of programs to be produced in the RVA centers of the respective countries. For example, 50 percent of the radio programs should be produced in the centers of the respective countries. The creation of policies in these areas will greatly help in solving the station's financial problem and in getting qualified personnel for the station.

For the Management of RVA-KS

To ensure effective management and smooth operation of RVA-KS, policies related to personnel and program development are needed:
a) personnel-RVA-KS should develop policies on hiring and employing radio program management and production staff. The personnel are one of the important elements that will lead to the success or failure of a program; and
b) programs-policies should focus on producing quality and relevant programs that meet the listeners' information needs. Policies on program monitoring, and evaluation should also be upgraded.

Recommendations for the Staff and Producers of RVA-KS

Program content. Since the Good News of Christ and Church teachings are the main information of the listeners, the producers of RVA-KS should produce Bible learning programs and Church teaching programs more frequently and with longer air time.

To deal with increasing problems on AIDS patients as well as with drug and alcohol addicts, and even on Christian unity and culture, the RVA-KS producers should conduct more thorough research on these problems and should broadcast educational types of programs that address these problems.

Program format. The RVA-KS has been using the same program format since 1982. The format can be replaced with one that is relevant based on the current situation and needs of listeners. The magazine format can be explored.

Broadcast time. The morning broadcast was found to conflict with the time of the Holy Mass and was considered too early in Myanmar. Hence, the morning broadcast time should be moved to a later time when most people could listen to the station.

Regular research and listeners' meetings. To know the information needs of the listeners and to upgrade the radio programs, the RVA-KS producers should conduct continuing research and frequent listener meetings in the target area. The listener meeting should be conducted at least four times a year and in different regions of the target areas because the listeners' needs may differ depending on the place and situation.

Maintenance of RVA-KS center in Myanmar. The management and producers of RVA-KS should equip and upgrade the RVA-KS center in Myanmar with the necessary broadcast equipment and information data base. This will enable the staff to produce more quality radio programs in the center and lighten the work load of the producers who are making many programs within a limited period of time. This also will create more opportunities for the listeners to participate in the production of radio programs.

Recommendations for the Church Leaders in Myanmar

The study found that the Good News of Christ was the main information need of the Kachin people. Many Christians in Kachin have no chance to study the Bible since religious teachings are totally forbidden in government schools. No religious schools are also allowed to be set up across the country; hence Christians are not well informed about the Bible and the teachings of the Church.

Broadcasting bible learning programs through radio alone will not be able to fulfill the Kachin people's hunger for the Word of God. Therefore, Bible seminars and Bible learning programs should be conducted in each region led by the leaders of Christian Churches.

Christian unity emerged as a societal problem in the research study. Disunity among Christian denominations is a scandal in Myanmar. Instead of showing the true Christian spirit of love, peace, and unity, there are misunderstandings and lack of mutual respects. More ecumenical movements and activities are needed among Christians to solve this problem.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further studies may include a study on the effects of the RVA-KS programs on the religious and spiritual lives of the listeners. Since the RVA-KS mainly broadcasts religious programs, the listeners are getting much religious information. The research should focus on how the listeners utilize the religious information heard from RVA-KS. Such research will find out how the RVA-KS religious programs can influence the spiritual lives of its listeners, which are vital in total human development.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents of the Study

CHARACTERISTIC (N= 226)	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Age		
15-25	47	20.8
26-40	69	30.5
41-60	80	35.4
61 and above	30	13.3
Mean age = 41		
Sex		
Male	137	60.6
Female	89	39.4
Civil Status		
Single	71	31.5
Married	147	65.0
Widow/Wiodwer	8	3.5
Religion		
Catholic	174	77.0
Protestant	52	23.0
Educational Attainment		
Primary school level	32	14.2
Middle school level	67	29.7
High school level	83	36.7
College level	27	11.9
Illiterate	17	7.5
Occupation		
Farmer	67	29.7
Businessman	60	26.5
Student	3	19.0
Church worker	32	14.2
Government official	12	5.3
Pensioner	12	5.3

Table 2. Characteristics of the Respondents' radio set

CHARACTERISTIC OF RADIO SET	FREQUENCY (N= 226)	PERCENTAGE
Ownership of Radio Set		
Own	146	64.6
Do not own	80	35.4
Duration of Ownership of Radio Set		
1-3 years	2	27.4
3-5 years	31	13.7
6-10 years	53	23.5
No radio set	80	35.4
Condition of Radio Set		
Good	102	45.1
Poor	27	12.0
Not functioning	17	7.5
No radio set	80	35.4

Table 3. Information Needs of the Respondents

INFORMATION NEED	FREQUENCY (N= 226)	PERCENTAGE
Good News of Christ and teachings	110	48.7
Family and health care	38	16.8
Agriculture and livestock	21	9.3
AIDS and drugs	20	8.8
Business	12	5.3
Social interaction	10	4.4
Elderly people	6	2.7
Human rights and social justice	4	1.8
Support for physical disability	2	0.9
World and country news	2	0.9
Jokes	1	0.4

Table 4. Preferred information channels of the Respondents

INFORMATION CHANNEL	FREQUENCY (N= 226)	PERCENTAGE
Radio	157	69.5
Television	27	11.9
Newspaper	25	11.1
Face-to-face preaching	16	7.1
Internet	1	0.4

Table 5. Profile of the staff of Radio Veritas Asia and RVA-Kachin Service

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N= 8)	PERCENTAGE
Age		
28	1	12.5
38	1	12.5
43	1	12.5
45	4	50.0
58	1	12.5
Sex		62.5
Male	5	37.5
Female	3	
Civil Status		
Single	8	100.0
Married	0	0.0
Religion		
Catholic	8	100.0
Protestant	0	0.0
Educational Attainment		
High school	2	25.0
College (BS degree)	4	50.0
Postgraduate (MS degree)	2	25.0

Table 5. Profile of the staff of Radio Veritas Asia and RVA-Kachin Service

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N= 8)	PERCENTAGE
Nature of Work before Joining RVA-KS		
Involved in social communication	4	50.0
Served as church worker	3	37.5
Engaged in business	1	12.5

Table 6. Broadcasting experience of RVA-KS staff

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N= 8)	PERCENTAGE
Training and Education on Broadcasting		
Short courses and seminars	6	75.0
MS degree in development communication	2	25.0
Length of Service		
Less than a year	3	37.5
1- 2 years	1	12.5
3- 4 years	2	25.0
5- 6 years	1	12.5
7 years and above	1	12.5

Table 7. Programs handled by the RVA-KS staff

RADIO STAFF	PROGRAM
Fr. Peter Awng Tu (Coordinator)	1. Sunday homilies (Laban shani na Chyum mungga 2. Catechism/Bible study 3. Church news (Nawku hpung shiga) 4. World news (Mungkan shiga) 5. Questions and Answers (Ga san, ga htai)
Br. Richard Tu Lum (Producer)	1. Youth program (Ramma lamang) 2. Cultural program (Htung Hkring lamang) 3. Public information program (Bu ga n-dau)
Sr. Ja Nan (Producer)	1. Family program (Kun ding hku lamang) 2. Church history (Nawku hpung labau) 3. Agriculture and livestock (Hkai, Rem lamang) 4. Song request (Mahkawn kumhpa)
Sr. Mary Lu Mai (Person in charge of RVA-KS center in Myanmar)	1. Dramas for different programs (Mau mwi shala) 2. Expert interviews (hkrum zup mung jahta lamang)
Ms. Roi Awng (Producer)	1. Health care (Hkamja lamang) 2. Educational program (Hpaji ningli hkaja lamang) 3. Song request (Mahkawn kumhpa)

Table 8. List of program segments broadcast in each day of the week

DAY OF WEEK	PROGRAM SEGMENT	PRODUCER
Monday	Bible study (Chyum laika hkaja lamang)	Fr. Perter Hka Awng Tu
	Health care (Hkamja I am lamang)	Ms. Roi Awn
	Song request (Mahkawn kumhpa)	Sr. Ja Nan
Tuesday	Church history (Nawku hpung labau)	Sr. Ja Nan
	Public information (Buga n-dau)	Bro. Tu Lum
	Song request (Mahkawn Kum hpa)	Ms. Roi Awn
	World news (Mungkan shiga)	Fr. Peter Hka Awng Tu
Wednesday	Agriculture (Hkai rem lamang)	Sr. Ja Nan
	Culture (Htung Hking)	Bro. Tu Lum
	Song request (Mahkawn kumhpa)	Ms. Roi Awn
Thursday	Question-and-answer (Ga sai ga htai)	Fr. Peter Hka Awng Tu
	Education (Hpaji hka ja lamang)	Ms. Roi Awn
	Song request (Mahkawn kumhpa)	Sr. Ja Nan
Friday	Health care (Hkamja lam lamang)	Mr. Roi Awn
	Church news (Nawku hpung shiga)	Fr. Peter Hka Awng Tu
	Expert interview (Hkrum zup jahta)	Sr. Mary Lu Mai
Saturday	Sunday homily (Laban shani mungga)	Fr. Peter Hka Awng Tu
	Public information (Buga n-dau)	Bro. Tu Lum
	Song request (Mahkawn Kumhpa)	Ms. Roi Awn
Sunday	Family program (Kun dinghku lamang)	Sr. Ja Nan
	Youth program (Ramma)	Bro. Tu Lum
	Drama (Maumwi shala)	Sr. Mary Lu Mai

Table 9. Data sources for the programs and steps in preparation of the program

PROGRAM SEGMENT	INFORMATION SOURCE	PREPARATION
Sunday homily *(Laban shani na chyum mungga)*	Bible, homily books, story books, biblical commentaries	Reading, reflecting, and praying on the Bible passage; writing the script and recording
Catechism/bible study *(Tara laika the chyum laika hkaja ai lamang)*	New catechism of the Catholic Church book and Bible	Translating into catechism lessons, writing the script, and recording
Church news *(Nawku hpung shiga)*	Eternal Word Television Network, Zenith, Union of Catholic Asian News, and Vatican news	Listening and watching radio and TV programs, collecting information, writing the script, and recording
World news *(Mung kan shiga)*	AFP, internet, TV, BBC and CNN	Searching for relevant and updated news, writing the script, and recording
Question and Answer *(Ga san, Ga htai lamang)*	Listeners' feedback letters, Bible, Church history, personal knowledge, and experiences	Reading the questions asked, looking for the best answer, writing the script, and recording
Youth program *(Ramma lamang)*	Books, Internet, and experts	Searching for information on youth, writing the script, and recording
Culture *(Htung hkring lamang)*	Books, Internet, and experts	Looking for information, reading books, asking the experts on culture, writing the script, and recording

Table 9. Data sources for the programs and steps in preparation of the program

PROGRAM SEGMENT	INFORMATION SOURCE	PREPARATION
Public information *(Buga n-dau)*	Feedback letters; written regional activities and news	Reading feedback letters, collecting relevant news, writing the script, and recording
Family program *(Kun dinghku lamang)*	Books, Internet, experiences of married people, and experts	Looking for information, writing the script, and then recording
Church history *(Nawku hpung lamang)*	Books, Internet, and Bible	Reading and writing the script, and recording
Agriculture and livestock *(Hkai Rem lamang)*	Books, Internet, experts, and farmers	Reading, consulting farmers and experts, writing the script and recording
Song request *(Mahkawn Kumhpa)*	Listeners' feedback letters	Reading song request letters, choosing relevant songs, writing the script, and recording
Education program *(Hpaji hkaja lamang)*	Books, Internet, teachers, students, and parents	Reading, consulting, writing the script, and record
Drama *(Maumwi shala)*	Books, Internet, experiences of the people, and personal creativities	Looking for a topic, writing the script, choosing the characters who will portray the roles, and recording
Interview *(Hkrum zup mung jahta)*	Experts and the listeners	Choosing the topic, looking for persons to interview, and recording

Table 10. RVA and RVA-KS staff members' perception of RVA and RVA-KS

PERCEPTION OF RVA-KS	FREQUENCY (N= 8)	PERCENTAGE
Perceived Usefulness of RVA-KS		
Useful	8	100.0
Not useful	0	0.0
Perceived Quality of RVA-KS Program		
Quality is good	7	87.5
Need to improve quality	1	12.5
Perceived Need to Change Program Format		
No need to change format	7	87.5
Need to change format	1	12.5
Perceived Need to Change Broadcast Time		
Need to change evening airtime	0	0.0
No need to change evening airtime	8	100.0
Need to change morning airtime	8	100.0
No need to change morning airtime	0	0.0
Perceived Need to Change Length of Broadcast Time (25 minutes per program)		
Need to change length	0	0.0
No need to change length	8	100.0
Perceived Clarity of RVA-KS Frequency		
Frequency is clear	8	100.0
Frequency is not clear	0	0.0

Table 11. Demographic profile of the RVA-KS listeners

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N= 182)	PERCENTAGE
Age		
15-25	33	18.1
26-40	56	30.8
41-60	68	37.4
61 and above	25	13.7
Mean age = 42		
Sex		
Male	122	67.0
Female	60	33.0
Civil Status		
Single	53	29.1
Married	121	66.5
Widow/Wiodwer	8	4.4
Religion		
Catholic	146	80.2
Protestant	36	19.8
Educational Attainment		
Primary school level	27	14.8
Middle school level	57	31.3
High school level	65	35.7
College level	18	9.9
Illiterate	15	8.3
Occupation		
Farmer	51	28.0
Businessman	49	26.9
Student	32	17.6
Church worker	31	17.0
Pensioner	10	5.5
Government official	9	5.0

Table 12. Characteristics of the radio set of listeners

CHARACTERISTIC OF RADIO SET	FREQUENCY (N= 182)	PERCENTAGE
Ownership of Radio Set		
Own	132	72.5
Do not own	50	27.5
Duration of Ownership of Radio Set		
1-3 years	55	30.2
3-5 years	27	14.8
6-10 years	50	27.5
No radio set	50	27.5
Condition of Radio Set		
Good	92	50.5
Poor	25	13.7
Not functioning	15	8.2
No radio set	50	27.5

Table 13. Information need and preferred information channels of the listeners

INFORMATION NEED AND CHANNEL	FREQUENCY (N= 182)	PERCENTAGE
Type of Information Needed	90	49.4
Good News of Christ and Church teachings		
AIDS and drugs	16	8.8
Family relationships	15	8.2
Health care	12	6.6
Business	12	6.6
Social interaction	8	4.4
Elderly people	6	3.4
Human rights and social justice	4	2.2
Support for physical disability	2	1.1

Table 13. Information need and preferred information channels of the listeners

INFORMATION NEED AND CHANNEL	FREQUENCY (N= 182)	PERCENTAGE
Preferred Information Channel		
Radio	134	73.6
Televison	18	9.9
Newspaper	17	9.3
Face-to- face preaching	12	6.6
Internet	1	0.6

Table 14. Perception of RVA-KS to provide listeners' information needs

PERCEPTION OF RVA-KS	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Able to give information needs	160	87.9
Not able to give information needs	15	8.2
Partially able to give information needs	7	3.9

Table 15. Sources from whom listeners have learned about RVA-KS

SOURCE	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Church leaders	97	53.3
Friends and neighbors	45	24.7
Myself while scanning short wave	32	17.6
Myself while scanning short wave	8	4.4

Table 16. Respondents' reasons for listening to RVA-KS

REASON	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
To hear the Good News of Christ based on the Bible	93	51.1
To gain knowledge	77	42.3
Useful for life	7	3.9
To get all kinds of information	5	2.7

Table 17. Listening habits and behavior of RVA-KS listeners

LISTENING HABIT AND BEHAVIOR	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Length of Listenership		
1 year	16	8.8
5 years	47	25.8
10 years	36	19.8
20 years	51	28.0
25 years	32	17.6
Frequency of Listening Per Week		
1-3 times	66	4.7
4-7 times	27	14.8
8-14 times	89	48.9
Length of Time Spent in Listening		
10-20 minutes	7	3.8
25 minutes	175	96/2
Preferred Time of Listening		
In the morning	79	43.4
In the evening	103	56.6
Number of Programs Listened to		
All programs	180	98.9
Some programs	2	1.1

Table 17. Listening habits and behavior of RVA-KS listeners

LISTENING HABIT AND BEHAVIOR	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Favorite Program Segment		
Church news	52	28.6
Family relationship	30	16.5
Catechism	16	8.8
Sunday Homilies	15	8.2
Health care	14	7.7
Song request	10	5.4
All program segments	10	5.4
Culture	8	4.4
Youth	8	4.4
Agriculture	8	4.4
Public information	5	2.8
World news	5	2.8
Education	1	0.6
Manner of Listening to RVA-KS		
With family members	92	50.6
With friends and neighbors	50	27.5
Alone	40	21.9
Activity While Listening to RVA-KS in the Morning		
Doing nothing	102	56.0
Doing house chores	54	29.6
Walking and exercise	12	6.6
Having meal	7	3.9
Reading book	7	3.9
Activity While Listening to RVA-KS in the Evening		
Doing nothing	130	71.4
Doing house chores	21	11.5
Walking and exercise	18	9.0
Having meal	5	2.8
Reading book	8	4.4

Table 18. Information obtained from the RVA-KS

INFORMATION OBTAINED	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Current activities in the world and Church	68	37.4
The good news of Christ	50	27.5
Many kinds of information	32	17.6
Knowledge on family life	15	8.2
Health and medicine	9	4.9
Guidance for youth	5	2.8
Agriculture and livestock	3	1.6

Table 19. Listeners' perception of the clarity of RVA-KS's signal

PERCEPTION OF SIGNAL CLARITY	MORNING		EVENING	
	FREQ (n=182)	PERCENTAGE	FREQ (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Good	98	53.8	94	51.6
Satisfactory	50	27.5	64	35.2
Poor	34	18.7	24	13.2

Table 20. Listeners' perception of Radio Veritas Asia-Kachin Service

PERCEPTION	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Clarity of Voice		
Good	100	54.9
Satisfactory	70	38.5
Poor	12	6.6
Style of Announcing		
Clear	161	88.5
Slow	9	4.9
Fast	6	3.3
Not clear	6	3.3
Choice of Words		
Good	148	81.3
Satisfactory	19	10.5
Poor	15	8.2
Performance of Broadcaster		
Good	145	79.7
Satisfactory	25	13.7
Poor	12	6.6

Table 21. Perceived change in listeners' behavior

PERCEIVED CHANGE	BEHAVIOR (n=182)					
	KNOWLEDGE FREQ	%	ATTITUDE FREQ	%	PRACTICE FREQ	%
Changed behavior	182	100.0	180	98.9	175	96.2
Did not change behavior	0	0.0	2	1.1	7	3.8

Table 22. Perceived change in listeners' behaviors

CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Change in Knowledge (n=182)		
Know about the Church and its teachings	126	69.2
Know about medicine and diseases	24	13.2
Know about culture	20	11.0
Know about agriculture	12	6.6
Change in Attitude (n=180)		
Become more charitable	84	46.7
Become more honest	45	25.0
Become more patient	38	21.1
Become more humble	13	7.2
Change in Practice (n=175)		
Go to Church more often	130	74.3
Become active in Church activities	28	16.0
Participate more in charity work	17	9.7

Table 23. Listeners' suggestions to improve performance of broadcasters

SUGGESTION	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Try to undertake more research	135	74.2
Speak naturally and in a lively manner	22	12.1
Read correctly names of persons and villages	11	6.0
Prepare well and practice before recording	9	4.8
Broadcast only the truth and listeners' need	4	2.3
Avoid words that hurt other religions and Protestants	1	0.6

Table 24. Listeners' suggestions to improve quality of RVA-KS program

SUGGESTION	FREQUENCY (n=182)	PERCENTAGE
Add more programs	126	69.1
Increase broadcast time	21	11.5
Award letter senders	11	6.1
Launch more campaign and assign facilitators	9	5.0
Broadcast with more powerful kilowatt transmitter	8	4.4
Broadcast news and activities for Protestants	7	3.9

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BARBA, S. M., 1980. "Attitudes and Program Preferences of Listening Group Members of Lingap ng Pangulo Sa Barangay in Selected Towns of Laguna". College, Laguna: IDC, UPLB.

BAUTISTA LORRAINE MAGRACIA, 1993. DZLB's Listenership and Audience Profile. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

BAUTISTA MARY JASMINE R., 2004. Listener's Evaluation of the Radio Station DZLB-FM 97.4. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

BELTRAN S. 1982. Listenership Study of "Pagatasan sa Nayon" over DZLB. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

BERLO, D, K., 1960. The Process of Communication. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.

BILODEAU DENNIS. 2005. Women's Access to Radio in Mali. Research paper. Mali.

CABRERA, BARBARA JANE ENCARNACION.2004. "Los Banos" Resident's Perception of DZLB AM. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

CAMPBELL, J. H. and HALL HEPLERI, 1966. Dimensions in Communication. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc.

CADIZ, M. C. H., 1991. Educational Communication for Development. College, Laguna, Philippines: CA Publications Program.

CASAL, MARIA STELLA L. 1987. People's Perception of the Communication Roles of the Roman Catholic Church in the February 1986 Philippine Revolution. Graduate Thesis, UPLB.

CASTILLO, MARAKIT THEA DELA CRUZ. 2004. A Study on the Usefulness of the PCARRD Monitor, the Official Newsletter of PCARRD-DOST. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

CENTURION SVD, DIOSNEL. 1987. Communication Roles of the Roman Catholic Church in the February 1986 Philippine Revolution as Perceived by Church Representatives. Graduate Thesis, UPLB.

CHRISTUS DOMINUS (Vatican Document). 1995. Rome, Vatican: Veritas Publication.

DANCE, F.E.X. 1967. "A helical model of communication. Human Communication Theory. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

DAVID, M. J. R, 1991. Radio's Role on Rural Development: A Case Analysis of Mahaweli Community Radio, Sri Lanka. Graduate Thesis, UPLB.

DENIS McQUAIL and SVEN WINDAHL. 1993. Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication. Second edition. New York, USA: Longman Publishing.

DIEGO, JONAS CARANDANG. 1999. "DZLB-FM: A Listenership and Audience Profile. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

EBISA SVD, ROBERTO M. 1996. Radio Drama as Support Medium for Teaching the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in the Archdiocese of Cebu. Graduate Thesis, UPLB.

EILERS, F. J. 1992. Communicating Between Cultures. Manila: Divine Word Publications.

EILERS, F. J., 1994. Communicating in Community. Manila, Philippines: Logos Publications, Inc.

FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE. 1999. Office of Social Communication. FABC OSC. 14 (2).

FISHER, B. A., 1978. Perspective on Human Communication. New York: Macmillan Publishing.

FLOR, ALEXANDER. 1995. Broadcast-Based Distance Learning Systems. College, Laguna:UPLB.

FLOR, A. et al.1979. DZLB Listenership Survey Among UPLB Constituents. College, Laguna: IDC, UPLB.

FLOR, ALEXANDER G., ELY D. GOMEZ, FELIX LIBRERO, PAULINO L. MANALO, BLANDINA L. DE MESA and GLENN L. PAJE. 1979. "A Manual on Radio Broadcasting. Los Banos, Laguna: IDC, UPLB.

FORWARD JOURNAL. 1988. Ministry of Information, Union of Myanmar,

GOMEZ, ELY et al. 1973. A Survey of the Listenership of DZLB-UPLB, College, Laguna.

GONZALES DEARYLL DISIERTO. 2004. Information Needs and Communication Preferences of Small Scale Fruit Tree Planters in Kidapawan City. Graduate Thesis, UPLB.

GRIFFIN, E. AL. 1991. A First Look at Communication Theory. USA: McGraw Hill Inc.

HALL, GEORGE L., WILLIAM HAWES, ROBERT L. HILLIARD, DONALD B. UPHAM and EARL R. WYNN, 1967. Radio Broadcasting: An introduction to the Sound Medium in Robert L. Hilliard (Ed.). New York: Hastings House Publishers.

HKA AWNG TU, PETER. 2003. Content Analysis of Feedback Letters of Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service. Graduate Thesis, UPLB.

LIBRERO, F. 1990. Community Broadcasting. Concept, Philosophy and Strategies. A report on regional course on community broadcasting. ALBA, Penang, Malaysia.

MANIGQUE, MA. ESTHER F. 1978. Information Needs of Barrio San Isidro East Malvar Batangas. Graduate Thesis, UPLB.

MCQUAIL, DENNIS. 1997. Audience Analysis. London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

NUYLES, CIRLO P. 1979. Listening Habits and Program Preferences of Radio DZLB Listeners in Three Selected Barrios of Laguna. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

PALLER L. JUNELLE. 1997. DZLB: A Listenership Study in Los Banos, Laguna. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

LIBRERO, F. 1990. Community Broadcasting. Concept, Philosophy and Strategies. A report
on regional course on community broadcasting. ALBA, Penang, Malaysia.

MANIGQUE, MA. ESTHER F. 1978. Information Needs of Barrio San Isidro East Malvar
Batangas. Graduate Thesis, UPLB.

MCQUAIL, DENNIS. 1997. Audience Analysis. London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

NUYLES, CIRLO P. 1979. Listening Habits and Program Preferences of Radio DZLB
Listeners in Three Selected Barrios of Laguna. Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

PALLER L. JUNELLE. 1997. DZLB: A Listenership Study in Los Banos, Laguna.
Undergraduate Thesis, UPLB.

ABSTRACTS

The Religion and Media interest group, AEJMC's (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) largest interest group, was established in 1996. The RMIG is dedicated to the exploration of the intersection of media and religion in our world. It encourages scholarly analysis (both quantitative and qualitative) of this intersection in three areas: (1) religion portrayed in secular media, (2) the manner in which religious institutions and organizations use the media to propagate their message, and (3) the impact of religion and/or religiosity of media consumers and its impact on their media use. In the July 2008 issue of AEJMC News, the following abstracts were featured:

'I'd vote for him because...' Religious beliefs and closed mindedness as factors explaining how individuals use political endorsements when evaluation candidates — John Wirtz, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. This study explores the degree to which agreement with orthodox Christian beliefs (Hunsberger, 1989) and cognitive close mindedness (Webster & Kruglansk, 1994) explain variation in how individuals use endorsements when evaluating political candidates. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three candidate endorsement conditions (Christian/ conservation, secular/ liberal, local/ neutral) and asked to read a portion of a campaign website including position statements and the political endorsements. Participants then described what was important when evaluating the candidate.

Time to "get" religion? An analysis of religious literacy among journalism students — Jeremy Littau and Debra Mason, University of Missouri. Research shows the earlier students are exposed to a topic, the greater the potential for long-term knowledge gain. A survey (N-513) tested religious knowledge for journalism students and non-journalism students. Results indicate journalism students scored poorly on basic religious knowledge and in fact fared no better than non-journalism students. We argue that small changes in curriculum emphasis can help increase religious knowledge and improve job performance for journalists, who face an increasing diversity in both readership and news sources.

Reporting Buddhism in Taiwan — Chiung Hwang Chen, Brigham Young University (Hawaii). Through analyzing media coverage of Buddhist events and utilizing interviews with key actors in media and Buddhism, this paper examines how the mainstreaming of Buddhism in Taiwan has changed, if at all, people's perception and understanding about Buddhism. Specifically, the paper assesses both the position of Buddhism in contemporary Taiwanese society and the media/ Buddhism relationship.

The Double-Edged Sword: LDS Church Leaders' Messages on Media, 1900- 1948 — James Phillips and Brad Rawlins, Brigham Young University. This study is the first attempt to examine every remark LDS (Mormon) Church leaders have made in the church's bi-annual conference regarding mass media. Utilizing grounded theory, sermons covering the pre-television era were inspected, with several themes emerging. Overall church leaders viewed media as a powerful tool that could be used for good or ill, cautioning church members to practice selective exposure.

The Press, Pulpit and Public Opinion: The Clergy's Conferral of Power and the Concomitant Call for a Journalism of Advocacy in an Age of Reform — Ronald Rodgers, University of Florida. This study of the discourse that appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in books, the newspaper trade journals, and periodicals — both secular and religious - reveals the pulpit's publicly stated conferral of its role of agent of education and moral uplift to the press as the moral agent for change in an age of reform and demographic upheaval.

"Who Does God Want Me to Invite to See This Movie?": Thoughts on Marketing The Passion of the Christ to Evangelicals — Jim Trammell, St. John Fisher College. The analysis explores dominant themes of The Passion of the Christ's marketing campaigns to evangelical Christians, and explores what these themes reveal about the relationship between religion, media and consumption. The marketing suggested that Passion's purported accuracy, authenticity, rating and images culminate into an experience that would appeal not only to the faithful, but to the unchurched as well. It also challenges the notion that religious cultures are weakened through cultural consumption.

A Question of Ethics: Comparing Framing Stem Cell Research in Evangelical and Mainstream News Media — Nicole Smith Dahmen and Lisa Lundy, Louisiana State University. Scientific knowledge is gained through a complex environment and is heavily influenced by one's beliefs, values and the view of other people. As such, the religious connection in stem cell research provides a fruitful area of inquiry.

Cinematic Spiritualities: Finding Religion in Bollywood — Ally Ostrowski, University of Colorado. Bollywood cinema is a proverbial machine, cranking out upwards of 800 new films each year. Recently, however, Indian directors have begun looking toward Hollywood for an abundance of storylines to reform for Bollywood consumers. In most cases, the original Hollywood plotline is indiscernible amidst the Bollywood panacea of singing and dancing. Indian religious references are often inserted to validate and legitimate characterizations, situations and bring an Indian cultural atmosphere that Bollywood audiences require.

Effectiveness of Islamic School Teachers in the Intervention of U.S. News Media Framing of Islam on Muslim Students — Thomas E. Ruggiero, University of Texas at El Paso. Informed by Said's Orientalist theory, this study examines the perception of U.S. Islamic schools, and how they react to U.S. news media framing about Muslims. Results suggest that Muslim teachers and students agree that news media coverage of Muslims focused primarily on terrorism and war, providing a simplistic and generalized description of Muslims, and of a severe lack of positive images for young Muslims to emulate.

Free from Religion, Bound to Language: The Dilemma of Atheist Discourse, a Case Study — Melissa Tully, University of Wisconsin-Madison. This paper is a case study of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), a nontheist, educational group concerned with free-thinking and the separation of church and state. Using the FFRF as the primary example, this paper examines discourse related to atheism and non-belief, particularly focusing on the FFRF discourse and news coverage of the Foundation.

Religion, Media Credibility and Support for Democracy in the Arab World — Guy J. Golan, Seton Hall University and Spiro Kiousis, University of Florida. Ever since the events of September 11th, 2001 and the subsequent war in Iraq, the U.S. State Department has invested much effort into winning the hearts and minds of individuals all around the Muslim world. Using secondary data from a large-scale public opinion survey of Arab youth in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the study presents a model that identifies the complex and multidimensional relationship between religion-based variables, media credibility and individual assessments of democracy.

Scandal is a Sin: How Church and Victims Framed the Boston Catholic Priest Abuse Scandal — Stacie Jankowski, Indiana University. This study examined framing of causes and solutions by the Catholic Church and abuse victims during the Catholic priest abuse scandal in the Boston Archdiocese from 2001 — 2003. A random sample of news articles from the Boston Globe and the Boston Herald was analyzed according to source, frame, valence, and thematic or episodic mentions. The analyzed stories were then compared both within the newspaper and between the newspapers.

Religion and Secularism as Embedded Imaginaries: A Study of Indian Television Narratives — Sanjay Asthana. In Critical Studies in Media Communication vol. 25, no. 3, (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group) August 2008, pp. 304-323.

ABSTRACT

JOHN LA RAW, University of the Philippines Los Baños. December, 2007. **Information Needs, Listenership of Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service, and Policy Implications in Kachin State, Myanmar.**

Major Professor: Dr. Madeline M. Suva

The study sought to determine the information needs and listenership of Radio Veritas Asia Kachin Service (RVA-KS) among residents in Myanmar and draw their implications for policies on communication and development in rural communities.

A total of 226 randomly sampled respondents in four towns in Kachin State, Myanmar were surveyed through a questionnaire. Out of 226 respondents, 182 were listeners and 44 were non-listeners to RVA-KS. Focus group discussions with selected respondents and key informant interviews with the management staff of the Radio Veritas Asia (RVA) and RVA-KS were also carried out. Data were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively.

The respondents needed information mostly on the Good News of Christ and on Church teachings, AIDS, drugs and alcohol addiction, Kachin culture and Christian unity. They preferred radio as their information channel.

They had been regularly listening for five years or more to RVA-KS in the morning; they were satisfied with the station's signal and performance of its broadcasters; and they said that the RVA-KS met their information needs. Moreover, they noted a change in their religious knowledge, attitude, and practice. They gave several suggestions to improve the quality and format of the programs.

RVA-KS has no formal policies yet. Its loosely structured and flexible policies negatively affect its management and operation. While the station is perceived as useful and essential for listeners' spiritual and human development, it needs to address its financial, equipment, personnel, and policy problems.

BOOK REVIEW

Daniel Arasa. *Church Communications Through Diocesan Websites, A Model of Analysis*. Rome: EDUSC (2008). 456 pp. ISBN 978-88-8333-186-2.

There is a growing use of modern communication technologies especially the Internet by different religions.† The Pontifical Council for Social Communications has published documents on Ethics on Internet and Church and Internet already in 2002 and the Pope's World Communication Day message in the same year is entirely devoted to the Internet as "a new forum for proclaiming the Gospel."

The new book of Daniel Arasa takes up this challenge in extensively studying and analyzing Internet use for diocesan websites. The book covers in a very detailed analysis nine diocesan websites from all five continents of the world - from America (Bogota, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Sao Paulo), Asia-Oceania (Manila, Melbourne), and Europe (Milan, Madrid). The detailed presentations follow a "website communication model" (WCM, p. 170ff.) which studies websites under four different aspects ("pillars"): (1) content and services, (2) technical ways of presentation, (3) people behind the website to produce, update and promote it, and (4) the visitors of these websites.

The results are arrived at through (1) observation of the websites and the evaluation over two years, (2) direct exchange of information with webmasters of these sites, (3) establishment of a descriptive and comparative table of websites, (4) interviews with journalists, (5) data analysis.

With this, Arasa comes to very detailed results which show the actual content and use but also the management of these sites run by Catholic dioceses in the world.

The detailed presentation of data is embedded in the general description and overview about the "institutional communication" of the Catholic Church with a short historial overview, the presentation of essential Church documents, and also the Church's teaching and approach to Internet.

With this study, Arasa who teaches at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, wants to serve as "a lance to open up research in this area." Through his study, he finds indeed "numerous possible fields for future research." (epilogue)

This book and study is an excellent contribution to the field of religion and social communication exemplified in some Church websites from all continents of the world. By Franz-Joseph Eilers, svd

2004 - 2007 BSDC Journal/Research articles
(Bachelor of Science in Development Communication)

1. **Agramon, Lorena C.**
   Knowledge Creation and Storage of family Planning Knowledge Assests: A Case of Sto. Rosario Parish, San Pedro, Laguna
   BSDC Research Journal
   November 2004
   Adviser: Julienne V. Bariuan

2. **Alcantara, Pamela N.**
   Listenership and Audience Profile of Religious Programs in DWXI-PPFI Among Selected Residents of Los Baños
   BSDC Research Journal
   2006 (no specific date/month indicated)
   Adviser: Hermilea Marie P. Cabral

3. **Armero, Liza V.**
   Message Content Analysis of the ReligiousCounseling Program *Ok Ba, Father?*
   BSDC Research Journal
   2004 (no specific date/month indicated)
   Adviser: Ma. Stella C. Tirol

4. **Austria, Arlene O.**
   Selected Tanauan Vendors Association Members' Perception of Muslim-Christian Relation as It AffectsTheir communication Practices (The Case of Tanauan Muslim Brothers and Sisters Vendors Association and Tanauan Parish Liturgical CommitteeMembers)
   BSDC Research Journal
   March 2007
   Adviser: Rhodora Ramonette M. De Villa

5. **Baluyot, Julienne K.**
   Communication Flow Among the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
   BSDC Research Journal
   October 2006
   Adviser: Ines Vivian D. Domingo

6. **Britanico, Stella Concepcion R.**
   Elementary Pupils' exposure to and Perception of the Social Values portrayed in Children-oriented TV Darama Serial
   BSDC Research Journal
   March 2007
   Adviser: Dr. Cleofe S. Torres

7. **Buti, Catherine Princess C.**
   Attitude of Muslims and Non-Muslims Toward the Documentary Film *Karangaya,* Inaregiong Kasai
   BSDC Research Journal
   February 2007
   Adviser: Lolita L. Vega

8. **Caymo, Earl Anthony IV, P.**
   Perception of the Mosque as a Medium for Development Communication
   BSDC Research Journal
   April 2007
   Adviser: Dr. Serlie B. Jamias

9. **Coronel, Eileen Gay M.**
   DWAM-99.1 Spirit FM. Listenership and Audience Segmentation in San Jose, Batangas
   BSDC Research Journal
   April 2005
   Adviser: Ma. Stella C. Tirol

10. **Cueto, Ivy S.**
    Verbal Communication of Evangelists: An Exploratory Study
    BSDC Research Journal
    2004 (no specific date/month indicated)
    Adviser: Luningning A. Matulac

11. **Custodio, Christine G.**
    Communicating the Bible to Pre-School Pupils in Christian School International
    BSDC Research Journal
    April 2006
    Adviser: Julienne V. Bariuan

12. **Epondulan, Golda A.**
Information Sources and the Knowledge of and Attitudes Towards
the Roman Catholic Church's Advocacy on the Use of Artificial Birth
Control Methods Among Selected Los Baños Parishioners
BSDC Research Journal
2004 (no specific date/month indicated)
Adviser: Ma. Stella C. Tirol

13. **Galay, Ryan Jay I.**
Listenership and Perceived Contribution to Youith Development of
DZJV's *May Kaibigan Ka* Among the Kristyanong Kabataaan Para
sa Bayan (KKB) Movement in District 2, Laguna
BSDC Research Journal
March 2008
Adviser: Hermilea Marie P. Cabral

14. **Gonzales, Genivieve D.**
Development Content of the New Testament Books of the Christian Bible
BSDC Research Journal
November 2007
Adviser: Dr. Cleofe S. Torres

15. **Gulbani, Janina A.**
Utilization of Text Messaging Srvice Among EL Shaddai Members I
Five Towns of Laguna
BSDC Research Journal
2006 (no specific date/month indicated)
Adviser: Ma. Rovilla C. Sudaprasert

16. **Hermosa, Sheryl Edd**
Utilization of Text Messaging Srvice Among EL Shaddai Members I
Five Towns of Laguna
BSDC Research Journal
April 2006
Adviser: Ma. Stella C. Tirol

17. **Lara, Ma. Kathrina T.**
Communication Strategies of A Civic-Oriented Religious Group in
Gawad Kalinga Freedom Village, Sta. Rosa, Laguna
BSDC Research Journal
October 2005
Adviser: Dr. Cleofe S. Torres

18. **Macalos, Aina Francene F.**
Listenership Study of DZJO-AM in Selected Barangays in Infanta, Quezon
BSDC Research Journal
October 2005
NO adviser indicated

19. **Maloles, Joyce Marie S.**
Evaluation of the Learning System of the Evangelical Baptist Church
of Los Baños, Laguna in teaching the Concept of Cell Group Among
the Young People
BSDC Research Journal
April 2007
Adviser: Elmer Harold o. Grande

20. **Tobias, Princess Marie Angelique C.**
Potential of Online Learning on Adult Faith Formation Among
Selected Catholic Groups in San Pablo City
BSDC Research Journal
2004(no specific date/month indicated)
Adviser: Ma. Stella C. Tirol