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COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN CHURCH-BASED ACTIVITIES OF SELECTED RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS IN LOS BAÑOS, LAGUNA PHILIPPINES

Maria Stella C. Tirol

Background and Rationale

Communication, religion, and development are seemingly interrelated concepts. The nature of their inter relationship can be viewed from multiple lenses since communication, religion, and development involve processes that are dynamic, iterative, continuing, and never ending.

Religion and Communication

The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) acknowledges that a relation exists between religion and social communication. First, religion is practiced in society. And second, communication is embedded in religion and religious practices of society. Thus, it becomes challenging to study the ways and means of communicating in and with religious communities (FABC, 2009 in Rationale for Roundtable on Religion and Social Communication: Relations and Challenges).

According to Udeani et al. (2006), religions are not only communities of faith but also of communication. Furthermore, religious communication takes place vertically

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between human beings and a transcendent holy entity. It also occurs horizontally among individuals and groups. Given this situation, communication technologies have permeated most religions. Consequently, religions experience the challenge of facing issues in using communication technologies which are also their instruments for religious communication.

The use of communication technologies in religion provides opportunities and challenges. Stückelberger (2006) enumerates these opportunities or 'chances', namely: access to information and argumentation; broader access to different traditions around the globe; and deeper understanding of religious and non religious ethics through easier access and exchange. Meanwhile, the challenges include relativism, pragmatism, syncretism, and opportunism. These chances and challenges emphasize the necessity of responsible ethics in utilizing communication technologies.

In this 21st century, religious organizations are embracing cutting-edge communication technologies. Among those of the Jewish faith, iBlessing helps them figure out which blessings go with which food while Siddur gives them prayer times based on geographic positioning system (GPS) coordinates. Roman Catholics can access iBreviary, which pulls up and displays complete missal and principal prayers in Spanish, French, English, Latin, and Italian. Islam followers have been downloading verses from the Qur'an (Newsweek, 2009).

Is there a synergy between communication technologies and religion? How can each assist and benefit the other? These questions offer much ground to explore the nexus of communication technology and religion. There are important reasons on the relevance of exploring the relation between communication technology and religion. First, religion and

communication technology share a common goal. Their goal is to "improve society and transcend human frailty (Huang, 2005 as cited in Religion and Technology: Chapter 1, 2006). Second, there is a growing interest on how communication technologies influence the expression of religion within society. Third, there is the question of whether technology is changing the world's religiosity by making people more or less religious. And last, the emerging phenomenon of virtual religion and the ways by which communication technology may help religions attain their goal and mission remain relatively unexplored (Technology and Religion, 2006).

Another concern relates to how religions appropriate communication technologies for their purposes. Very few cases have systematically documented the appropriation of communication technology in religions. Batchelor and Farrell (FAO Document Repository, nd) said that local appropriation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is about communities and groups selecting and adopting communication tools according to the different communication and information needs they had identified and adapting the technologies so that they become rooted in social, economic, and cultural processes.

Religion and Development

Eilers (2004) points out the special role of religious communication. According to him, communication through inter religious dialogue and through sharing of values and experiences can be directed so that they promote human dignity and quality of life.

In their study, Khan and Bashir (2008) learned that it was not possible to separate religion from development since

religion drives people's behavior and actions in a more productive direction. Results of their meticulous review of theory and empirical studies yielded a positive relationship between religion and economic growth and development.

However, there was no consensus on the precise causal relationship (one- or two-way) between the two. Hence, they concluded that the relationship between religion and development is likely to be complementary as long as religious beliefs and practices promote 'moderation' rather than 'extremes'. They recommended that a peaceful co-existence of various religious groups remain the essential prerequisite for growth and prosperity in today's highly interconnected world. Further, more research with extensive data sets covering a wide range of countries should be undertaken.

Harcourt (2003) opines that religious belief, faith and hope cannot be marginalized easily. Religious and secular leaders within the development context worked from similar positions of power. Development was embedded in many of the same issues as religious communities. She realized it was more realistic to understand the important role religion plays in very practical social, economic and political ways in people's lives. Religion, whether understood as individually chosen or as part of a historical or cultural inheritance, informs many aspects of people's lives and therefore development practice.

Similarly, Kumar (2003) states that people need development and religion simultaneously. Development concerns economic, social and material aspects of life. On the other hand, religion is supposed to concern internal, personal and spiritual dimensions of life. Kumar explained that without the external, there can be no internal, and vice versa. Spirituality without matter remains unmanifest and matter

without spirit is dead matter. Thus, religion and development complement each other. Kumar states: "When there is a balance between fasting and feasting and when everyone is able to fast and feast, then development and religion reveal themselves as two sides of the same coin."

In their study on faith-based transformative action in Kenya, Hope and Timmel (2003) analyzed the effect of religion in development. According to them, good religion enhances in many ways the reverence and generosity that development planners and workers bring to their work. It also places its development program within the context of a caring community that provides an inbuilt system of accountability.

Tyndale (2003) was able to show the effectiveness of faith as an inspiration and guide for work to improve life for the poor. She delved into the difficulties of the relationship between religion and mainstream development. In the end, Tyndale (2003) found that the elements of 'idealism' and pragmatism are present on both sides of religion and development.

Religious institutions are viewed as purveyors of moral values which are important for bringing a fairer deal for the poor onto the development agenda. Faith-based organizations are thus seen as essential agents both for influencing the opinions and attitudes of their followers and for carrying out development work at the grassroots. Their influence is recognized as a potentially key element in the solving of conflicts, even though, or perhaps because, religious groups are often seen as the cause of them.

To what extent can religions contribute in concrete ways to improving quality of life? Kliksberg (2003) responds that "religion has a mobilizing potential." Religion inextricably

links thought and action. An integral part of the religious experience is learning the necessity of helping others in order to achieve a sense of coherence and fulfillment. The social ethics of religious teachings make clear that it is necessary to reintroduce ethical values into daily life in order to give meaning to one's personal life, family life and to history. Among the most important of these values are love, solidarity, justice, righteousness, integrity, sincerity, honesty, humility, respect for the elderly, protection for children, the centrality of the family, the elimination of corruption and the end of discrimination – whether based on ethnicity, race, gender or any other factor.

Objectives

This paper describes the perspectives of selected leaders of five religious denominations in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines on communication, religion, and development.

Specifically, this paper aims to: 1) find out how selected church leaders from five religious denominations perceive communication technology within the context of their religion; 2) describe the church-based activities where communication technology is commonly used; 3) determine the effects of using communication technology in church-based activities; 4) identify the policies on the use of communication technology in church-based activities; 6) gather ideas on how church leaders look at communication technology and religion in the next 10 years; 7) describe the how communication, religion, and development link together in church-based activities; and 8) generate potential areas for research on religion and social communication as a field of study and practice.

Methodology

The case study was applied as the research design. Five religious denominations in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines were purposively identified as sampling units based on accessibility, availability, and willingness of church leader to participate in the study. The selected religious denominations were the following: 1) Los Baños -Evangelical Baptist Church (LB-EBP); 2) the Church of Christ of the Latter-day Saints (CCLC); 3) United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP); 4) Roman Catholic Church (RCC); and 5) Islam.

A formal letter was sent to the leaders of the five religious denominations to explain the purpose of the research, to seek their approval for interview, and to schedule the date of their interview. All of the five leaders willingly agreed to be personally interviewed on their perspectives on communication technology, religion, and development.

The interview was done in the church leader's office using guide questions. The interviews were tape recorded. Moreover, with permission from the church leader, portions of the interview were video taped as documentation. Various photographs and existing video clips of church activities were also requested as secondary data sources.

The photographs and video clips were integrated into a short video presentation as secondary data. The video was presented during the Roundtable in Bangkok, Thailand on February 8-11, 2010.

The tape recorded interviews were transcribed and used as preliminary data source for the study. The transcribed

interviews were analyzed qualitatively using narrative texts as exemplars or examples of empirical data.

Findings

Idea and Purpose of Communication Technology

The five religious leaders viewed communication technology as a multi-media equipment that includes audio, visual, and audiovisual media. They identified three major purposes of communication technology, namely: 1) to convey or spread message about religion; 2) to create awareness about teachings, scriptures; and 3) to communicate love of God.

Excerpts from the interview transcriptions reflect such perception of what communication technology is and what its purpose is.

- a) *Communication technology is primarily multi-media equipment that uses electricity and some form of computerized/digital system (e.g. computers, cameras, projectors, television/monitors, sound systems). It is primarily used to transfer information or message from one location to another in the form of audio and/or visual media, for the purpose of informing, educating or entertaining people. Cell phones are also multi-media equipment in the sense that they also use audio and visual information that runs on electricity.*
- b). *Communication technology includes audio and visual tools and Internet. But we can also use the simple technology like the sign board and post it in on wall to serve as reminder to the people in*

the community about the message from our God or Prophet so that every time people look at it, they can remember the message and apply it in their life.

- c). *We are a global church. We actively use media, even advanced communication technologies. We consider them a blessing for us to be able to reach as wide as we could. During the early period of the church, whatever was available at that time was used. When radio came into being, we used radio for broadcasting music and the spoken word – the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. And when television came, we also used television for broadcast. And then when video came in, we used video to disseminate conferences and the written material. Every year, we hold general worldwide conferences where we hear our leaders. Before, the information during conferences was disseminated by a magazine such as Laionah. It took some quite some time before it reached us all over the world because it is translated. But then as communication technologies improved, we also started using them. So we are very open to adapting emerging technologies to help inform our members and to spread the messages to the homes of our members.*
- d) *New or modern communication technologies include methods, tools, equipment that are available only very recently and which have improved the way communication purpose is accomplished. This improvement may be in the form of speed,*

area of coverage, number of people served, sound and print quality, and other interests in communication. Other aspects that may be considered are the associated costs, which include monetary costs as well as and other aspects. Examples of these technologies are the use of modern computers, cellular phones, the broadband communication networks, Bluetooth and infrared data transmission technologies, digital photography, modern public address systems, and the like. Within each major technology, like modern computer system, for example, are related technologies like the internet and various programs. Many technologies are interrelated in make and function.

- e) *During the Eucharistic celebration, we use the LCD so we need good sound system so that people will not only hear clearly but also see. Seeing and hearing are two basic components of good communication. Without the visual, it will be difficult to understand the message. So, communication technologies include conveying the message to others using new tools or new instruments.*

Communication Technology and Church-Based Activities

A number of church-based activities were reported to be undertaken in the various religious denominations. The more common ones are worship, education, formation or training, fellowship, Bible study, conferences, outreach or service

programs as “stewardship of the church for the benefit of people, environment and society”.

One religious leader said that: “as communication technologies improved, we also started using them. We are very open to adapting emerging technologies to help inform our members and to spread the messages to the homes of our members. The home or the family is the basic unit of the church. We strengthen that. Now, with the onset of new technologies like cellular phones, scriptures can now be in the cell phone. We also still the print scriptures like the Bible. We have a book of Mormons. And, messages can also be downloaded from the Internet. So, conferences and other messages are made available in any medium available now”. Thus, communication technology is used

According to the leader of Islam, “communication technology is permissible in our religion. Right now, we can have the lesson through the movie. It’s good because the movie is also part of the technology to show history. We can learn many things from the movie. As long as the movie presents message that is permissible, then it’s okay. For example, no naked scenes or no scenes harmful to morality should be shown in the movie. We don’t produce the movie but we watch it together. For example, the movie titled “The Messenger” tells us about our prophet when he was first teaching Islam then Islam developed with many people. The movie talks about next the people after “The Messenger” who continue to preach about Islam and deliver the message from our Messenger and from God’s people.” This exemplar shows the value of movies in educating Muslim children.

The UCCP leader shared about the use of communication

in three church activities. He stated that *“worship primarily utilizes the audio system with speakers and mixer. There are times when the video system (LCD projector and notebook computer) are used to project lyrics, scripture text or worship outline. The 6:00 pm worship (Vespers service) is a contemporary worship and use both audio and video technologies. Fellowship activities of more than 20 persons use the audio system, and sometimes the video system depending on the type of fellowship activity. The schedule of activities is published in print and also online in a blog site. Our website is still being constructed. The cost was initially prohibitive therefore its construction had been delayed. Bible study or meetings of usually less than 20 persons sometimes use the video system depending on the type of presentation (e.g. reports or small lectures)”*.

At the Evangelical Baptist Church, the pastor said that *“during worship service, we use sound systems to amplify sounds so that information could reach the audience audibly, clearly, and pleasantly without disturbance, including verbal messages, songs, and sounds of accompanying instruments. In the school (Los Banos Faith Christian School, Inc. – a ministry of the Church), various tools are used to convey information and promote learning among pupils, such as LCD projectors and computers. The same tools are used in our training programs.”*

Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic priest described the use of communication technology in the following statements:

“Catechetical instruction is part of the formation of catechesis and evangelization. In catechetical instruction for children, the parish provides a portable sound system to our catechists. So, it is now easier for our catechists to teach 40-60 children using the sound system. We bought six sound systems for catechists to use in the barangay or village. The catechists bring the portable sound system to schools in Putho or Tuntungin. The sound system can play CD tapes. We add music because children love to sing so we teach them action songs. They also use animation for teaching children from different schools in Los Baños like South Hill, Makiling School, and Morning Star Montessori which are our catechetical schools under the parish.”

Actually, I am compiling CDs about baptism, confirmation, and seven sacraments of Church in 15-minute video CD. We buy them from St. Paul publication). For our confirmation seminar, we use a short video about sacrament of confirmation. We are planning to buy a CD player but we have financial constraints...

The interview results indicate that most religious denominations use various kinds of communication technology in their church activities. Such technologies are even used in direct visitations to communities and also in developing partnerships with other organizations. It can be said that church activities are now technology-based with accompanying face-to-face interactions or discussions.

From the data, one can also deduce how communication technology is used in church-based activities, namely:

1. To enhance participation in the church.
2. To facilitate action and learning.
3. To serve as reminder.
4. To evangelize or educate people about their faith.
5. To clarify and understand church issues.
6. To seek advise from elders or prophets (counseling).
7. To amplify sounds and visuals so that information can reach audience audibly, clearly, and pleasantly

Several advantages and disadvantages of using communication technology in church activities were cited by the different religious leaders. The advantages are as follows:

1. *People are attracted and enjoy comfort as they worship.*
2. *Reception of message is enhanced.*
3. *PowerPoint is easy and simple.*
4. *Communication technology connects us to our church leaders who give us counsel.*
5. *Technology makes people aware about Islam.*

On the other hand, the religious leaders also pointed out the disadvantages of using communication technology in church-based activities.

1. *Equipment is expensive.*
2. *There is possibility of information manipulation – propaganda, brainwashing*

3. *Mega churches and tele-evangelists make relationships with community impersonal (encourage individual 'religiosity').*
4. *Communication technology can also be conveyor of evil – access to pornography, scenes harmful to morality, malicious information, satanic movements*

Effects of Communication Technology Used in Church-Based Activities

When asked about how communication technology influences the conduct of church-based activities or religious practice, the following responses were obtained from the church leaders.

United Church of Christ in the Philippines:

The audio system enables the incorporation of contemporary musical instruments during worship and fellowship services. The video system enables us to use less paper. Participation is enhanced, especially from the youth in terms of contemporary music since they are the ones using most of the equipment.

Islam:

We really need communication technology to transfer and deliver the message from the instructor to the kids in our religion class. Sometimes, we connect online using the Internet like when somebody in class asks questions and we need to find the answer right away so we directly browse the Internet in the class. So, besides the textbooks that we have, we also rely on the Internet; we just type the keyword and information already appears on screen. So, it's very easy and very fast. We can immediately find the answers.

Church of Christ of the Latter-day Saints:

Satellites are now used during our conference. It used to be broadcast by radio or the conference is recorded in VHS tapes and then sent to the different parts of the world. Thus, we usually listen to our leaders in the general conferences a few months delayed. But now, with communication technology, it is only a matter of time. It can be the same time that they are speaking, we are hearing in our own language, depending on our choice – the message is translated. So we have our own stake center where there's a satellite dish that receives broadcasts from central Manila which also receives the broadcasts from the US. So where it is possible that we can establish a satellite, then we can view the conference simultaneously as it is going on. Where it is not possible, then we use whatever means is available. We do not shun technology because we know it helps in forming and keeping our members aware. And, it is also useful in promoting continuing education about our religion and about how we can cope with each other.

Roman Catholic Church:

I make my own visuals. Before I just prepare my homily, put it in the computer and print it and deliver my homily. But now, I have to create visuals. The visuals are really beneficial for the people because they can see, hear, and read. If they go home, they will get the message from the gospel.

One of my proposal is to make communication technologies part of the curriculum in the seminary for the formation of priests. I'm teaching 4th year class in the seminary, so in the presentation of their thesis, I teach them how to use PowerPoint and how to make their presentation clear and attractive.

We use video CD for seminars for parents, for children for confirmation, for communion to make the session attractive. Children want visual techniques.

Los Baños Evangelical Baptist Church:

Definitely, all of these new communication technologies have positive impacts. Modern technologies in worship service attract attenders as people also enjoy comfort as they worship. Every one tends to enjoy participating in the singing and other activities. Reception of messages is undoubtedly also enhanced. The same is true in the school and in the training activities.

Through modern communication technologies, the spread of the Gospel (Jesus Christ, the Good News) is greatly enhanced. We can communicate easily with our missionary workers in all parts of the world anytime, and mass communication of the Gospel is now easily done through the internet, cable television, cellular phones, not to mention the affordability of the print media with the new technologies. Partnerships among Christian (and other religious groups for that matter) organizations are made easy so that there is cooperation and coordination among these groups toward attainment of a common objective. Such technologies as tele- and video-conferencing are very useful in this aspect.

Among the most common modern communication technologies used in the church are computer related ones like the internet, which facilitate multimedia communication within and outside the church and other wireless technologies like the cellular phone and wireless landlines. The use of LCD projectors and projection screens is also very useful in the worship service where songs and outlines of messages are projected, as well as in training sessions and formal classes. Other technologies help in providing pleasant and worshipful

atmosphere like high definition music and sounds resulting from modern microphones, music players and other equipment. For some pastors and leaders, the availability of the bible in electronic form makes it easy for them to locate at a click a specific verse in any book of the bible and in several different versions at any one time.

The effects of communication technologies in the Church are summarized below:

1. The technologies enable modern culture to change traditional ways of religious worship especially in music – electric guitars and drums are accepted as instruments to enhance worship experience.
2. Tele-evangelists have maximized potential of communication technology.
3. Communication technologies can be used to counteract new youth culture especially when cultural values are not congruent to faith values.
4. Communication technology allows access to information so we can make a choice.
5. Partnerships are created with our missionaries in all parts of the world.
6. People are drawn to church and faith development is enhanced.

Policies in the Use of Communication Technology in Church-Based Activities

All of the religious leaders mentioned that their Church does not have any policies yet on the use of

communication technology for church-based activities. Two indicated their Church has formulated some informal guidelines on the use of communication technology.

We have no formal written policies except for the care and security for the equipment because of their value. For their use, an unwritten understanding is that the content presented is along the lines of educational and moral values, that nothing lewd, vulgar and violent is presented (UCCP).

The policy is only one – as long as the communication technology does not disturb or break the situation when we pray. For example, if there is cell phone, turn off cell phone during mass. Silence it. As long as there is a good purpose about seeing the movie and it does not contain something that will adulterate our moral, then it's okay. But if there is content that will adulterate our moral, don't use it. It's wasteful (Islam).

I don't know of any policy that we cannot use this or that. As far as I'm concerned, the general trend has been as technology becomes available for us to communicate with each other worldwide, nationwide, within the family, we go for it.

We have several tenets. One of our beliefs is that we believe that whatever is good or whatever is virtuous or lovely or praiseworthy, we seek out these things. So these are the guiding principles for us. We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, and virtuous and in doing good to all men. So anything that would help us become better people, become more responsible citizens, become more better families, then it's welcome (CCLS).

We have no written policies yet on the use of communication technology in religion. However, Christian doctrines imply that malicious use of them should not be done (LB-EBC).

No policies yet. The Internet or cell phone can be used in an immoral way. This leads to violence and wrong notions about sex. The Church should adapt to the culture of the youth and learn from it. In catechetical instruction, I tell the catechists to emphasize that Internet is not only about playing games but using technology in a more beneficial and affirmative manner (RCC).

Despite the absence of policies in the use of communication technology in the Church, the religious leaders shared ideas about what the policies should contain as stated below:

1. Content should be along the lines of educational and moral values – nothing lewd, vulgar, violent.
2. Communication technologies should be used for good purpose. We teach correct principles and let people choose the use of communication materials. Individual makes decision whether to use it for good or bad – freedom of choice and accountability.
3. Communication technology should not disrupt worship.
4. Christian doctrines imply malicious use should be avoided.

In addition, they proposed three key policy areas as starting point for development and implementation, namely: 1) oblige

all churches to use LCD in their services; 2) make communication technologies a part of the academic curriculum in the seminary or formation of priests; and 3) train seminarians and lay leaders in the use of communication technologies.

The finding implies that there is a need for exposure of the different church denominations towards the importance of policymaking for church communication technology.

Communication Technology and Religion in the Next 10 Years

The religious leaders had different visions about the future of communication technology and religion. Excerpts from their interviews give the following responses:

- a) *There will be a proliferation of mega churches and tele-evangelists, because people will be able to afford cheaper televisions and prefer to worship at home for convenience.*
- b) *Traditional worship will give way to contemporary worship and congregations can grow into mega churches if it is able to wisely use modern communication technologies.*
- c) *Large church buildings will eventually be difficult to maintain through traditional means. They'll have to go into business (e.g. build schools, funeral services), or become mega churches or be used by tele-evangelists as venues for their multi-media programs. Small church buildings will be difficult to maintain.*

- d) *I think we cannot avoid communication technology in the next ten years. It will be much more developed.*
- e) *Audiovisual technology will be used more in Islam—audio and audiovisual. Continue using audio – it's very simple but very useful to us in communication.*
- f) *Communication will adapt to our religion. Since our religion already exist long, long time ago, but later on they develop communication to adapt it to how religion works. In Indonesia, we have so many radio to communicate Islam. TV not specific only 1 or 2 TV station for Islam. Annual Idul Frti is sometimes broadcast live in TV. In Indonesia, they broadcast the preaching in the open field.*
- g) *The development of technology allows messages to reach many, many people. And in religion, communication is part and parcel or an integral part of religion. So in the next 10 years, communication technology will continue to develop and along with it, there will be increasing use of technologies by different religious sects and religious groups in reaching their members. Like our religion, which is a global church now, there are also many churches and religions that will continue to be integrated and need these technologies to help them reach their members. We know of some uses of TV to reach as many people as we could. And I think that will be part of it.*
- h) *I would also like to see that technology will not depersonalize communication. These technologies will allow more interaction among people, among*

- religious organizations. I see that religion and communication technology will be growing hand in hand as new opportunities come to bring information quicker, more accurately to members of organization and those technologies will also be put in place by those groups. Coming from our own religion, where for the last 100 years we have already been using as technology becomes available we use it for the good that it can do for the church and the members.*
- i) *Communication is a major function of our church. We believe that a local church exists, among other purposes, to communicate to everyone and to every nation the encompassing love of God so that everyone can enjoy life fully in both personal and eternal relationship with Him. This is a great communication task. Added to this, we communicate to God through prayer, singing and other praise activities, and meditation of His word. We communicate among ourselves, members and church leaders. We communicate with other churches and church-related organizations and individuals both locally and in other parts of the world. With this, communication involvement of a local church, just like any other secular organization, is tremendous and important enough that any appropriate communication technology coming up should be fully utilized.*
 - j) *In the next 10 years, the Church should learn how to use modern communication technologies. Otherwise, it will be left out. And God's message*

or message of the religion will not be accepted by the people and the faith values will be left out.

- k) *Globalization is fast due to modern communication technologies. If religion is not included in advancement of modern technologies, religion may become irrelevant later on. If the Church will not use it, it will diminish or lose its influencing factor. Hence if the priest or pastor or rabbi does not prepare for preaching using communication technology, he will not be attractive to the youth.*

The future of religion and communication technology is summarized below.

1. Proliferation of mega churches and tele-evangelists because people can worship at home for convenience
2. Traditional worship give way to contemporary worship.
3. Congregations can grow into mega churches if communication technologies are used wisely.
4. Large churches difficult to maintain thru traditional mean
5. Preaching will be accomplished thru modern communication technologies.
6. Adapt communication technologies to religious practices
7. Communication is part and parcel of religion. Technology will continue to develop and there will be increasing use by different religions in reaching

their members. Religion should learn to adapt to communication technology.

Communication, Religion, and Development

The religious leaders expressed their views about communication, religion, and development. They said that:

1. Religion teaches us principles (self-reliance, honesty, uprightiness, etc). It is a way of life. As a way of life, religion helps us to contribute to development of our community.
2. We use religious teachings and principles of religion to better our lives – to be independent, to stand on our own feet.
3. Human development through religion is further enhanced by new communication technologies.
4. Contributions of religion to development come in the form of fasting, tithing, feeding program, charity giving.

Recommendations for Research

Possible research problems that may be studied in the future include the following:

1. Perspectives of congregation (lay people, believers, followers) on communication, religion, and development
What are the reactions of congregation members to use of communication technologies in worship, service, training, education, formation?)

2. Inter-religious dialogue among church leaders
To what extent do church leaders diverge or converge in their views on use of communication technologies in religion and development?
What are the capacities of church leaders in the production, utilization, storage, and retrieval of religious messages thru ICT?
3. In-depth study of effects of communication technologies on religious practices and factors influencing them
Can we predict religious attitude from use of ICTs or media?
How do ICTs influence expression or practice of religion?
How can religion help promote community development?
4. Issue of ethics or morality in use of communication technologies in religion
How do religions respond to the challenges posed by information and communication technologies?

Conclusion and Implications

Communication technologies are now very popularly used in church-based activities. However, the skills in developing and presenting messages using communication technologies are still lacking. Thus, capacity building on communication technology is needed.

Communication technologies have advantages and disadvantages. They also have positive and negative effects on church activities and religious practices.

There are no church policies on using communication technologies in church activities. But, one key factor is ethics and morality.

Communication technologies will become more popular in the next ten years. The church should take caution on their use in promoting religion and values.

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EFFECT OF HINDU SPIRITUAL CHANNELS ON VIEWERS

**Study of Swami Ramdev Baba's prime time
live broadcast on Aastha television**

Dr. Kiran Thakur

Abstract

Yoga is known to relieve stress and to improve general health by fitness enthusiasts in India and abroad. Several television channels have been broadcasting Yoga and Pranayam (breathing exercises) programmes of about 25 minutes duration over a period of time. There are video and digital cassettes that have flooded the market. Yet there is an Indian Hindu religious channel, Aastha that ventured to broadcast 150 minutes of live telecast on Yoga and Pranayam five years ago.

It has attracted millions of viewers who continue to remain glued to their television sets in the wee hours, and follow the instructions of Swami Ramdev Baba on Yoga postures and Pranayam.

As the researchers in the team witnessed through participant and non-participant observation for a considerable period of time, these viewers hear the presenter with rapt attention when he discusses Indian way of life, and its culture and traditions. They respond to him positively during his discourses, interspersed between Yoga postures, as he speaks against corruption, and lack of ethical values and urges them to be patriotic.

Who are these viewers? Are they dominated by males? Are they youngsters or the senior citizens? Do they show any change in their attitudes and behaviour after watching the television programmes for a considerable period of time?

A survey of 1,869 respondents who attended the Swami's Yoga Science Camps in three cities found that the live telecast of the Swami's discourses has had an overall positive effect on the viewers. The study found that contrary to popular belief, Aastha viewership was not limited to the senior citizens, but included a sizeable youth and adult population.

The viewing of Swami Ramdev Baba's programme on television was not an activity of an individual in a family. People watch it together with their spouses, relatives and friends and practise the Yoga instructions given by the presenter of the programme. Most viewers had learnt Yoga and Pranayam while watching this TV programme, and not in schools or gyms, and have continued to do it. These viewers reported positive effects on their health.

The viewers also reported positive changes in their behaviour and attitude. They feel more energetic and more efficient and have become more social than before. They experienced mental stability and quietness in their life and have become more tolerant.

The results of the study suggested that the viewers have started taking interest in the problems of others more than before. They have become more religious but they would not support superstitions borne out of Hindu traditions and rituals. Many viewers reported that quarrels in their families were reduced after watching the programme over a period of one to five years.

Overall, the degree of the effects, however, was small. This suggests that the viewers are not that different from the Indian population at large and that fears of jingoism or religious discrimination are misplaced.

Introduction

Mumbai-based Aastha TV launched the first 24 hour Hindu religious channel of India. Soon Sanskar and other channels of this genre appeared on the scene during the subsequent decade. These channels began offering programmes such as Bhajans and Kirtans (devotional songs), religious discourses by spiritual leaders, documentaries and coverage of festivals and religious events live from different places.

Aastha (meaning Faith) began live telecasts of Yoga Science Camps addressed by Hindu spiritual leader Swami Ramdev Baba in various cities and towns in the country for the past four years. These camps are telecast live from five a.m. to 7.30 a.m. (Joshi A, 2009). The time slot has become prime time for this channel as it attracts television rating (TVR) of 0.03 (TAM Media Research Pvt Ltd, 2009). The TVR is the highest among the 28 religious channels in India and highest across channels of all the genres during this time slot. Aastha is ahead of all religious channels in terms of reach, reach percentage and audience share during the time slot (Joshi A, 2009).

The channel is claimed to be India's top socio-spiritual-cultural network, reaching over 30 million households, with more than 200 million viewers worldwide (Indianetzone, 2008). The Swami's programme is watched by loyal viewers who squat in front of the TV screens in their homes and follow his instructions on Yog, Pranayam and Indian philosophy. Many of the participants of every camp enthusiastically say

over the camera that they lost or gained weight; their acute and chronic illnesses were cured due to Yoga and Pranayam. Many insist that they were exposed to the benefits of these Indian techniques only after they began watching the prime time programme of Aastha. These statements encourage others watching the live telecast to learn Yoga by following the Swami's programme. The Swami has avoided the complex Yoga postures that require personal attention of experienced instructors at gyms or training centres that have come up in cities and towns. His package of training over television includes simple Yoga postures and breathing technique which can be learnt without the supervision of instructors. Unlike most spiritual leaders and Yoga instructors, Swami Ramdev Baba lays more emphasis on Pranayam to improve health and to cure diseases that could not be successfully treated by modern medical system. (Pathakji, 2008)

Researchers of this project watched the live telecast for over six months in year 2008 and attended his Yoga Science Camps in three places. They observed that the Swami intersperses his training instructions with preaching of Indian way of life, Hindu philosophy, ethics, and family values. He discusses social, political and economic issues facing the country.

This is a new use of modern satellite technology that is believed to have effect on the health, behaviour and attitudes of the practitioners of Yoga and Pranayam taught through television channels every day of the year. The 150-minute programme is telecast live for from 5 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. and is recorded for repeat telecasts later. The repeats could be four times the same day or it could be later when the Swami does

not have any camp to address on some days of the year. Effects of this communication process needs to be studied.

Review of Literature

Television's impact on viewers is the most explored area in the communication research. Television can be segregated in various programmes including advertisement, violence, sex, and women. There are various studies carried out to test the impact of advertising, violence on viewers. Impact or effects of religious television on the audiences is also one of the fascinating subject for communication scholars. The increase in spiritual content of today's mass media certainly deserves scholarly attention (Paul, 2000).

Since its inception, watching television has been considered a relatively passive activity, where the most a viewer could do is to zap between stations. This passivity led Krugman (1980) and Lee and Lee (1995) to consider television viewing as a relaxing and stress-relieving pastime, a way to escape from everyday worries (Levy and Nebenzahl, 2006). But still this stress relieving past time can be the key time which may lead to the change in the behaviour of the viewers.

Up until the 1940s, the mass media were primarily viewed as being magic multipliers of invariant messages, leading to direct, immediate, and power effects on audience members (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Researchers have discussed many ways of, direct and indirect, impact of media which leads to social change. Papa and Singhal (2008) in their research paper on "How Entertainment-Education Programmes Promote Dialogue in Support of Social Change" discussed a two step flow model of media effects. In the first step, the mass media influenced only a limited number of individuals in a social

system (often called opinion leaders), mostly through a process of information transmission. In the second step effects goes from opinion leaders to other individuals in the social system who are connected through existing social networks. Here interpersonal communication, discussion, and dialogue were the key vehicles of influence (Papa and Singhal, 2008).

Parasocial Relationships

The parasocial relationships talks about the relationship between viewers and characters in the media. The listeners or viewers of a media program get themselves attached to the characters in the media. They develop an internal dialogue with those characters like face-to-face relationship between people. Parasocial relationships are the seemingly face-to-face interpersonal relationships that can develop between a viewer and a mass media personality (Papa and Singhal, 2008).

When a parasocial relationship is established, the viewer appreciates the values and motives of that particular character in the media. The viewer treats that character as a counselor, comforter, and model (Papa and Singhal, 2008).

Rubin and Perse (1987) argued that three audience dimensions of parasocial interaction are: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. In the cognitively-oriented parasocial interaction, the viewer carefully receives the media character and his message, and thinks about its educational content after the exposure. Such reflection on the educational themes can help media consumers recognize that they could make different behavioural choices in their personal lives. Affectively-oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which an audience member believes that his/her and the media character's interests are same. Behaviourally-oriented parasocial interaction is the

degree to which individuals give openly reaction to media characters, by "talking" to these characters, or by conversing with other audience members about them. Such conversations may influence audience members' thinking about an educational issue and motivate them to change their behaviour in a specific way (Papa and Singhal, 2008).

Papa and Singhal, (2008) further argued that social change seldom flows directly and immediately from exposure to an entertainment-education media program.

Practitioners of Indian medical system Ayurved believe that Yoga and Pranayam can be part of the therapy for scores of diseases. Swami Ramdev Baba laments that Allopathic experts in the West view Yoga and Pranayam therapy with suspicion and disdain. This is in spite of the fact that thousands of patients report to his charity trust Patanjali Yogpeeth about the cures of diseases that seemed incurable to the Western system of medicine. The Yogpeeth has started documenting the data on such cases as was required by the researchers (Balkrishna Acharya, (2007).

However there are a number of medical practitioners and medical research centres in USA who testify that Yoga therapy has been effective in scores of serious cases. Time magazine reported in its cover story of the medical experts to confirm what Indian yogis and Ayurved practitioners already knew. Yoga has already gained its place in America. Fifteen million Americans include some form of Yoga in their fitness regimen--twice as many as did five years ago; 75% of all U.S. health clubs offer Yoga classes (Corliss, R., Fowler, D., Funderburg, L. et. al., 2001)

Yoga is practiced by so many stars with whom audiences are on a first-name basis--Madonna, Julia, Meg, Ricky, Michelle, Gwyneth, Sting--that it would be shorter work to list the actors who don't assume the asana (Corliss, R., Fowler, D., Funderburg, L. et. al., 2001). Dr. Timothy McCall, an internist and the author of *Examining Your Doctor: A Patient's Guide to Avoiding Harmful Medical Care* says that "Genuine Hatha Yoga is a balance of trying and relaxing. The workout warriors have to realize that Yoga is more an Athenian endeavor than a Spartan one. You don't win by punishing your body. You convince it, seduce it, talk it down from the ledge of ambition and anxiety. Yoga is not a struggle but a surrender". McCall further adds that "All the drugs we give people have side effects. Well, Yoga has side effects too: better strength, better balance, peace of mind, stronger bones, cardiovascular conditioning, lots of stuff. Here is a natural health system that, once you learn the basics, you can do at home for free with very little equipment and that could help you avoid expensive, invasive surgical and pharmacological interventions" (Corliss, R., Fowler, D., Funderburg, L. et. al., 2001).

The above quote of McCall underlines the importance of Yoga. Yoga is also being used in reputed cardiac institutes. At New York Presbyterian, all heart patients undergoing cardiac procedures are offered massages and Yoga during recovery. At Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, cardiac doctors suggest that their patients enroll in the hospital's Preventive and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center, which offers Yoga, among other therapies. Dr. Noel Bairey Merz, the center's director says that "While we haven't tested Yoga as a stand-alone therapy, patients opting for Yoga do show tremendous benefits. These include lower cholesterol levels and blood pressure, increased cardiovascular circulation and, as the

Ornish study showed, reversal of artery blockage in some cases". (Corliss, R., Fowler, D., Funderburg, L. et. al., 2001).

Dr. Robert Rose, executive director at the MacArthur Foundation's Initiative on mind, brain, body and health research argued that "Thousands of research studies have shown that in the practice of Yoga a person can learn to control such physiologic parameters as blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory function, metabolic rate, skin resistance, brain waves and body temperature, among other body functions." Critics are quick to note that few of those studies were published in leading science journals (Corliss, R., Fowler, D., Funderburg, L. et. al., 2001).

In 1998 Dr. Ralph Schumacher, of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and Marian Garfinkel, a Yoga teacher, published a brief paper on carpal tunnel syndrome in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The eight-week study determined that "a Yoga-based regimen was more effective than wrist splinting or no treatment in relieving some symptoms and signs of carpal tunnel syndrome" (Corliss, R., Fowler, D., Funderburg, L. et. al., 2001).

In 1998 Ornish published a study, in the *American Journal of Cardiology*, stating that 80% of the 194 patients in the experimental group were able to avoid bypass angioplasty by adhering to lifestyle changes, including Yoga. He also argued that lifestyle interventions would save money--that the average cost per patient in the experimental group was about \$18,000, whereas the cost per patient in the control group was more than \$47,000. And this time, Ornish says, he is convinced that "adherence to the Yoga and meditation program was as strongly correlated with the changes in the amount of blockage as was the adherence to diet."

Objectives of the Study:

The present study was undertaken to find out the viewership pattern of the use and utility of the Hindu spiritual channels. The Aastha's live telecast of Swami Ramdev Baba's Yoga and Pranayam camps was chosen for the study. The effect on the health, behaviour and attitudes of the viewers of the programme was to be the focus of the study.

Research Questions:

- R1. Who are viewers of the Aastha's live telecasts of Swami Ramdev Baba's Yoga and Pranayam programmes? Are they senior citizens dominated by males?
- R1. Do they show any change in their health after they learn and practise Yoga and Pranayam?
- R2. Do they experience improvement in their efficiency?
- R3. Do the viewers show any effect on attitudes and behaviour after watching the television programmes for a considerable period of time?
- R4. Do they become more social, religious and spiritually inclined?
- R5. Do the Swami's preaching change the outlook of the viewers in terms of behaviour vis-à-vis their family and the society in which they live?

Hypotheses:

- H1. a: Senior citizens form a large percentage of viewers of the programme.

- H1. b. The viewers are dominated by males.
- H2. The viewers experience overall better general health.
- H3. The viewers experience improvement in their efficiency.
- H4. The viewers tend to become more social, religious and spiritually inclined.
- H5. The viewers are at peace with themselves, family members and neighbours.

Research Methodology

The viewership study was carried out as follows:

Quantitative research: A questionnaire with 36 questions was prepared after a focus group discussion was organised, and pre-testing and pilot study were carried out in Ahmedabad. All questions were close ended. Of these, five questions were drafted to elicit five preferences of each respondent. There were three other questions drafted as per Likert scale to find out changes in their behaviour and attitudes. Some statements were positively worded and some were negatively worded.

The questionnaire was translated in local languages of the places where it was to be administered. Thus, for Pune (Maharashtra state), Marathi questionnaire was prepared, for Gandhidham (Gujarat) Gujarati version was formulated. For study in Silchar (Assam), questionnaires in Assamese and Bengali was formulated as the region has communities speaking the two languages.

These were administered to the participants attending Swami Ramdev Baba's Yog Science Camps before he began his sessions at 5 am (when Aastha's live telecast would also begin). Investigators would fill in the questionnaires also after 7.30 am when the day's sessions would be over. The data collection was carried out on the following dates: Pune: January 18-23 2009, Gandhidham: February 03 to 08 and Silchar: February 17 to 22, 2009.

Sample: Respondents were drawn from a purposive sample of participants attending the Swami's camps at these three places.

Qualitative research: The researchers interviewed executives of the Patanjali Yog Peeth and the Aastha channel, besides several participants to record observational data for qualitative and exploratory studies for the project.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the data was done with descriptive statistics and cross tabulation. The population of the sample was divided into male and female as indicated in the table below.

Table No 1: Gender wise distribution of Aastha viewership

Gender	City			Total
	Pune	Gandhiham	Silchar	
Male	46.5	47.7	50	48.1
Female	53.5	52.3	50	51.9

The table shows that the viewers consisted of 48.1 % males and 51.9 % females.

Hence, the hypothesis H1 b "The viewers are dominated by males" was rejected.

Table No 2: Age wise distribution of Aastha viewership

	City			Total
	Pune	Gandhiham	Silchar	
Age				
Youth (16-29 years)	21.6	26.4	21.1	22.9
Adult (30-59 years)	69.4	69.4	70.9	69.9
Senior citizen (60+ years)	9.0	4.2	8.0	7.2

In Indian scenario, a person is treated as a senior citizen when he/she crosses the age of retirement, which is 60 years. For the purpose of the present study the respondents were divided into age groups as Youth (16-29 years), Adult (30-59 years) and Senior citizen (60+ years). The study established that viewership of the Swami's programme was dominated by the adult viewers (69.9%). Only 7.2% the viewers consists of senior citizens. Contrary to popular belief, a high percentage of the viewers were youth (22.9%). This pattern remains the same in all the three cities: Pune, Gandhidham and Silchar. **Thus, the hypothesis H1a: "Senior citizens form a large percentage of viewers of the programme", was rejected.**

This could be because of the positive effects of Yoga and Pranayam on the people as the data presented later in this paper indicated.

Watching the programme is not an individual activity

Table No 3: Watching the programme with family members

Spouse	55.5
Son	22.9
Mother	20.3
Daughter	17.3
Father	15.5
Brother	10.4
Sister	7.2
Any other	4.7
Neighbors/friends	3.7
Daughter-in-law	3.1
Grandchildren	2.2
Total N	1869

Above data indicates that watching Baba's programme is more of a family matter than an individual affair. Most people (55.5 %) watch Baba's programme with their spouse, with their son (22.9 %), mother (20.3), daughter (17.3), and father (15.5). Only 4.7 % people watch it alone or with any other relatives and less than four per cent watch with others such as neighbours, friends, daughter-in-law and grand children.

Positive effects on the health of the viewers

Table No 4: Effect on the health of the viewers

Improved	68.2 %
Controlled	23.5 %
Remained unchanged	7.2 %
Got worsened	0.05 %
Became worst	0.21 %

Aastha viewers (91.7 %) have categorically stated that their physical ailments were cured or were controlled because of Yoga and Pranayam taught by the Swami through the Aastha channel. Only about eight per cent respondents said that they did not experience good positive effects.

Therefore, the hypothesis H2 'The viewers experience overall better general health' has been proved.

Learning and practising Yog and Pranayam through the channel

Table No 5: People learnt Yoga and Pranayam

	Yes (%)	No(%)
Learnt Yoga and Pranayam after watching the Swami's programmes on Aastha.	90.6	8.8
Continued to do Yoga and Pranayam while/ after watching the channel.	88.1	10.6 %

About 91 % respondents said they learnt the Yog and Pranayam watching the Swami on Aastha. After learning, they continued to do Yoga while watching it on the channel. Common people interested in learning Yoga and Pranayam in the past had to join gyms or Yoga training centres mostly

available in the cities and towns. These options are available even now, but the live telecasts opened up opportunities to anyone, in the cities or villages, who have the Aastha channel available on their television sets. The inexpensive mode of learning seems to have encouraged viewers to learn Yoga and Pranayam and improve their health. The present study has proved this.

There were some exceptions, however. During interaction with the researchers, some participants had said they had attended Swami's camp or other training centres earlier, and had later continued to practise Yoga watching the channel.

Changes in attitude and behaviour of the viewers

The question had 18 sub-questions to probe if there were changes in the behaviour and attitudes of the respondents. These sub questions were organised in a manner that would not allow respondents to simply tick checkboxes and give wrong responses. These 18 sub questions were grouped under the five types of changes in the behaviour that are as follows: changes in efficiency level, social behaviour, mental stability and peace, spiritual changes and positive attitude.

The analysis of these changes was carried out with the cross tabulation of the period of watching the programme and the changes occurred among the viewers.

Table No 6: Changes in efficiency level

	'Since when are you watching Swami Ramdev Baba's programmes?'				Total N
	One year or less	2 - 3 Years	4 - 5 Years	Total	
'You generally look more tired'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	25.1	18.4	15.3	19.2	358
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	62.1	72.3	73.1	70.1	1310
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	12.9	9.3	11.6	10.8	201
'You appear to be more energetic'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	82.2	87.4	90.3	86.9	1624
Strongly Disagree+Disagree	7.2	4.2	2.7	4.5	85
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	10.6	8.4	7.0	8.6	160
'Your efficiency has increased'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	88.7	90.6	88.0	89.5	1672
Strongly Disagree+Disagree	2.3	3.1	2.7	2.8	52
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	9.0	6.4	9.3	7.8	145

Most participants reported that they experienced several positive changes which occurred in their behaviour after they started watching the channel to learn and practise Yoga and Pranayam.

Most concurred with the statement that now they felt more energetic and their efficiency had increased due to Yoga. About 70 % people disagreed with the statement that they look

more tired. In personal conversations with the researchers, they had said that they were feeling more 'energetic and efficient' now.

People feel this 'energy and efficiency' has increased after they began watching the Swami's programme. This level of 'energy and efficiency' appeared to have increased with the length of viewing period. The people who have been watching the programme for 2 to 3 years have more positive effect than the ones who are watching for one year or less.

The above data accept the hypothesis H3 "The viewers experience improvement in their efficiency".

However, it was observed that there was not much of difference in 'feeling more energetic' as experienced by those who watched this programme for 2 to 3 years and those who watched it for 4 to 5 years. The responses, nevertheless, did suggest that they felt 'energetic and efficient' more than before they learned and practised Yoga and Pranayam. Regular viewers felt energetic and have become efficient in their sphere of work and their level of energy and efficiency did not decrease as they continuously watch the programme and continue to practise the Swamy's techniques.

The level of increase or decrease in 'energy and efficiency', in the cases of these respondents was not measured as a part of this project. It was however felt that it would be difficult to expect changes in the level due to increase or decrease in the years of continuity of Yoga and Pranayam. It would perhaps remain static beyond a certain period. It would not be easy to measure these as such feelings were subjective.

It could be surmised that the respondents would feel 'energetic and efficient' within the first year of practising the Swami's technique and its level would remain static after some period. This aspect however needs to be studied further.

Yet it should be noted that the positive effects of the programme ranged between 70% and 80%. It also supports the above discussion that overall this programme has good impact on the viewers.

Table No 7: Changes in social behaviour

	One year or less	2 - 3 years	4 - 5 years	Total	N
'You interact with people more than before'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	75.6	78.8	80.2	78.4	1465
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	6.8	5.1	6.8	5.9	111
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	17.6	16.1	13.0	15.7	293
'You take more interest in problems of others'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	65.2	69.0	68.8	68.1	1272
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	16.0	12.8	13.6	13.8	258
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	18.7	18.2	17.6	18.1	339

People have become more social than before due to after they started watching the Swami's programme on Aastha. The programme is not limited to Yoga and Pranayam. He discusses Indian way of life, its culture and traditions. They respond to him positively during his discourses, interspersed between Yoga postures, as he speaks against corruption, and lack of ethical values and urges them to be patriotic.

It appears to have influenced the viewers in changing their attitude to life. They reported that they had started interacting more with others. They now take more interest in the problems of others. This socialization increases among more people over the period of watching the programme.

Table No 8: Changes about Mental stability and peace

	One year or less	2 - 3 years	4 - 5 years	Total	N
'You have become impatient'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	19.9	11.4	12.0	13.5	253
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	65.2	75.1	72.5	72.1	1347
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	14.9	13.6	15.5	14.4	269
'Quarrels among members of your family have reduced after you started doing Yoga and Pranayam'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	56.9	63.4	58.3	60.5	1131
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	18.3	12.4	15.7	14.7	274
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	24.8	24.4	26.0	24.8	464
'You get irritated quickly'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	22.1	16.2	18.4	18.2	340
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	58.7	70.5	65.7	66.5	1242
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	19.2	13.3	15.9	15.4	287
'You have become quarrel-some'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	9.0	4.7	4.5	5.7	106
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	81.0	82.1	82.0	81.8	1529

Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	9.9	13.3	13.4	12.5	234
'You have become a quieter person'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	77.4	77.4	78.1	77.6	1450
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	9.0	3.9	5.0	5.4	101
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	13.5	18.7	16.9	17.0	318
'You are more tolerant now'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	77.9	83.5	82.9	82.0	1533
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	5.9	3.7	3.5	4.2	78
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	16.3	12.7	13.6	13.8	258

The viewers stated that they experienced peace and mental stability with themselves as well as with their family members, neighbours and friends. They have become patient and tolerant after watching this programme. Quarrels among the family members of the viewers of this programme (60.5 %) were reduced after they started watching the programme and doing Yoga and Pranayam. They do not get irritated quickly (66.5 %) and have become quieter persons (77.6 %). They are not quarrelsome (81.8 %). Here again one can see that the mental stability is more among those viewers of 2-3 years old compared to those with one or less than one year viewership. Hence, the hypothesis H5, "The viewers are at peace with themselves, family members and neighbours" is proved.

Table No 9: Spiritual Changes

	One year or less	2 - 3 years	4 - 5 years	Total	N
'You speak in favour of need to have a spiritual guru'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	78.6	81.4	84.1	81.4	1522
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	7.7	6.5	6.8	6.8	128
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	13.8	12.1	9.1	11.7	219
'You do not believe in God'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	13.8	12.5	17.6	14.1	264
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	75.8	79.2	72.9	76.8	1435
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	10.4	8.3	9.5	9.1	170
'You are more religious now'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	67.9	71.8	70.9	70.6	1320
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	9.7	7.2	9.5	8.4	157
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	22.3	21.0	19.6	21.0	392
'You oppose superstition'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	63.7	70.7	66.1	67.8	1268
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	17.4	14.0	16.3	15.4	288
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	19.0	15.3	17.6	16.7	313

The data suggests that the viewers of the Swami's programme have become more religious than before and have faith in God but they do not support superstitions. Most of them speak in favour of the need of a spiritual Guru (teacher) in their life.

Over 81 % people speak in favour of a need of a spiritual Guru, 70.6 % people feel that they have become more religious now, 76.8 % disagreed that they do not believe in God. But 67.8 % people said that they oppose superstitions. About 51 % people disagree that they do not consider the progress made by India in science and technology

The data in the tables No 7 and 9 supports the hypothesis H4 "The viewers tend to become more social, religious and spiritually inclined".

Table No 10: Positive Attitude

	One year or less	2 - 3 years	4 - 5 years	Total	N
'Your attitude to life has become positive'					
Strongly Agree + Agree	85.3	87.4	87.0	86.8	1622
Strongly Disagree+ Disagree	4.1	4.1	3.9	4.1	76
Neither Agree nor Disagree+Cannot say	10.6	8.5	9.1	9.1	171

Viewers of the programme insist that their attitude to life has become positive because of the discourses and sermons of the Swami. This change is visible among the viewers irrespective of the number of years of watching the Swami's programme.

With the above data it can be concluded that viewing of this programme have many positive effects on the attitude and health of the viewers. But why does this programme have so many positive effects? This is an interesting question.

The social change or the change in the behaviour occurs among the human beings only when the issue related to change gets discussed among them. This discussion may take place with their family members, friends or others in the community. Human beings do not change their attitude or behaviour immediately just after seeing any television programme. They discuss and test the content or message of the programme with their experiences of life.

Papa and Singhal, (2008) has discussed some components of dialogue, central to the relationship between the media and their audience effects. They stated that once the programmes are broadcast, the following forms of dialogue are linked to audience effects: internal dialogue (a function of parasocial interaction with favorite characters), interpersonal family dialogue, and community dialogue. They also observed a reflexive turn from community dialogue to mass dissemination of socially relevant information. They found dialogue supportive to the social change often must confront forces of power, resistance, and paradoxical behaviour Papa and Singhal, (2008)

Papa and Singhal's (2008) argument is validated in the case of Aastha viewers. It is proved in this research that viewing of this programme is a family or group activity. This group activity leads to the discussion or interaction among these group or family members about the content or message of the Swami's programme.

Several Aastha viewers attends the Yog Science Camps also. This gathering of people at one place, leads to the discussion or dialogue and creates good environment for change. The teaching process of Yoga and Pranayam through TV is as similar as the ancient Guru-Shishya tradition. In this

tradition the relationship between Guru and Disciple remains forever unlike the modern educational institutions. In this case, Swami Ramdev Baba is the Guru and the Aastha viewers are his disciples. Therefore the disciples of the Swami develop the relations among themselves too, over a period of time. This relationship and dialogue continues, which creates positive environment for change.

Limitations and scope for the future study

The study had a purposive sample consisting of disciples of the Swami who are also loyal viewers of the Aastha channel. The findings of the present study were likely to be subjective. It would therefore be necessary to undertake a study of viewers and non-viewers of the Swami's live telecast on the Aastha channel to compare effect of the broadcast on health and behaviour of the people.

The study has covered the telecast only of the Aastha channel. There are other Indian channels that broadcast Yoga and Pranayam programmes of the Swami and other Yoga exponents, although these are for shorter durations. It will be worthwhile to undertake study of effects of such broadcasts and compare the findings with the outcome of the present research.

The broader issue of impact of Indian religious channels needs to be studied. These channels broadcast Hindu, Christian and Islamic programmes from different stations and are watched by followers of these faiths. These channels, including the Aastha, have spiritual discourses around the clock. Impact of these programmes on attitudes of the viewers will help the

programme producers, as also social thinkers who are concerned with the well-being of the human beings irrespective of the religious faiths.

Conclusion

The present study has found that the live telecast of the Swami's discourses has had an overall positive effect on the viewers. Contrary to popular belief, Aastha viewership was not limited to the senior citizens, but included a sizeable youth and adult population.

The viewing of Swami Ramdev Baba's programme on television was not an activity of an individual in a family. But it is being watched together with their spouses, relatives and friends who practise the Yoga instructions given by the presenter of the programme. Most viewers had learnt Yoga and Pranayam while watching this TV programme, and not in schools or gyms, and have continued to do it. These viewers reported positive effects on their health.

The viewers also reported positive changes in their behaviour and attitude. They feel more energetic and more efficient and have become more social than before. They experienced mental stability and quietness in their life and have become more tolerant.

The results of the study suggested that the viewers have started taking interest in the problems of others more than before. They have become more religious but they would not support superstitions borne out of Hindu traditions and rituals. Many viewers reported that quarrels in their families were reduced after watching the programme over a period of one to five years.

The research concluded that viewing of the live telecast of the Swami Ramdev Baba's programme of Yog and Pranayam on Aastha channel; people have positive effect on their health as well as behaviour.

Implications of the study

The study established the positive side of the electronic media which have always been criticised for projecting sex, violence and other negativities that adversely affect the members of the society. It has demonstrated that television in general and religious programming can have positive effects on the viewers. The requisite will be that the communicator has a strong message to give and the method of packaging of the programming will have to be attractive and beneficial to the viewers. The television channels, producers and social thinkers can evolve strategies to use the electronic media to reform the society that needs peace and harmony in the world.

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GLOBALIZATION, CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd¹

The word “Globalization” seems to be over-used already by economists as well as NGO’s, politicians, business people and many others. A study on the frequency of the use of the word “globalization” in a German national newspaper showed already at the turn of the century that it was used in that paper 1993 only 34 times but in 2001 it had multiplied to 1136 times (Stierle, 2003, 345). The word is new but the fact is probably much older. When did globalization start in human history and what does it really mean? Is it used as a promise and threat, as a challenge or culprit? There is no unified and precise definition agreed upon by all or a majority.

In a broader sense, the word seems to indicate an interrelated world where people from different places are related and possibly dependent on each other in some way. Globalization thus, is the growing interdependence of people which began in European history at the latest already after the discovery of the Americas in 1492 when Emperor Charles V stated that “now the sun would not set any more” in his empire. There might be something of this feeling also today when carmakers or other producers tell us that their products are designed and made by teams in Tokyo, New York and Munich or any other place around the globe or when we

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participate through modern communication means in happenings from all parts of the globe.

Different from this view, others date the beginning of globalization with the opening of the Suez Channel 1869 which made shipping beyond the Americas and Europe to the East easier. Others date the beginning of globalization with the Bretton-Woods System 1944 or the landing of the first man on the moon on July 20, 1969.

All these attempts try to show that nobody on this planet is isolated but rather all are interrelated and thus, also in one way or the other responsible for each other. The modern means of communication, reporting instant news from all corners of the world into the smallest village of the earth, are developing this experience further and the question arises if we are moving towards a world culture, where the local is endangered or lost (cf. Stierle, 2003).

Already in 1960, Marshall McLuhan coined the expression of the 'global village'. Are we condemned to that?

In a more restricted sense, we talk about globalization as an expression for new ways of interrelation between financial markets and business undertakings beyond nations and continents. Deregulation is one of the key words to loose national ties and push open the whole world as a market for business. Liberalization and privatization are strongly related other phenomena. If the cheapest places for production are in China or anywhere else in Asia it is no difficulty for European or American companies to shift their production to these places. The governing forces here are profit, money and power but not necessarily the concern neither for people and the individual nor for the well-being of society. We experience the "Death of Distance"

(Cairncross, 1998) because everything is instantly available and possible every time, anywhere. Time and space are no longer a hindrance for international business and economy to thrive and finances to flow.

All this is especially made possible through the modern technologies of communication. It is no longer a problem for newspapers with world-wide circulation like "International Herald Tribune" to be published and printed simultaneously at 26 and more different places in different continents of the world but edited centrally at the main editorial office in Paris. Almost all papers today have their online edition which are quicker and more easily distributed through the Net. Such globalized communication, however, was not born over night. Already the "World Post Treaty" of 1874 prepared the ground with international postal services, overseas telegraph and telephone. Some people thus have defined globalization as a multidimensional and polycentric happening which can not any more be reversed.

Financial markets are in the center of the discussion in their limiting and/or determining social, economic and communication developments. If 75 percent of the world capital flows only into 12 countries of the world and only the rest into the remaining 140 other countries of the world then there is an imbalance which calls for remedies and concern. Globalization in this understanding therefore, does not promote balance but rather promotes greater imbalance. The same holds for the development of trade and commerce. It is mainly the rich countries which profit from free trade zones and liberalization (Stierle, 2003). In communication we talk about the 'Digital Divide' to indicate the discrepancy between

those who have and have not the most modern devices for communicating.

In this situation, human rights are easily violated and human development hindered. There are structural injustices leading to unrest, but also hostilities, armed conflicts and power struggle. Some Asian countries experience civil and/or political repression, disenfranchisement of individuals and groups with repressive national security acts and endemic graft and corruption. There is lack of religious freedom. And, problems of religious and ethnic fundamentalism are on the rise. Job insecurities and inhuman labor practices are another reality partly caused or promoted by globalization. Genuine human development is not realized, and groups of people are marginalized or excluded from public participation and a decent human life.

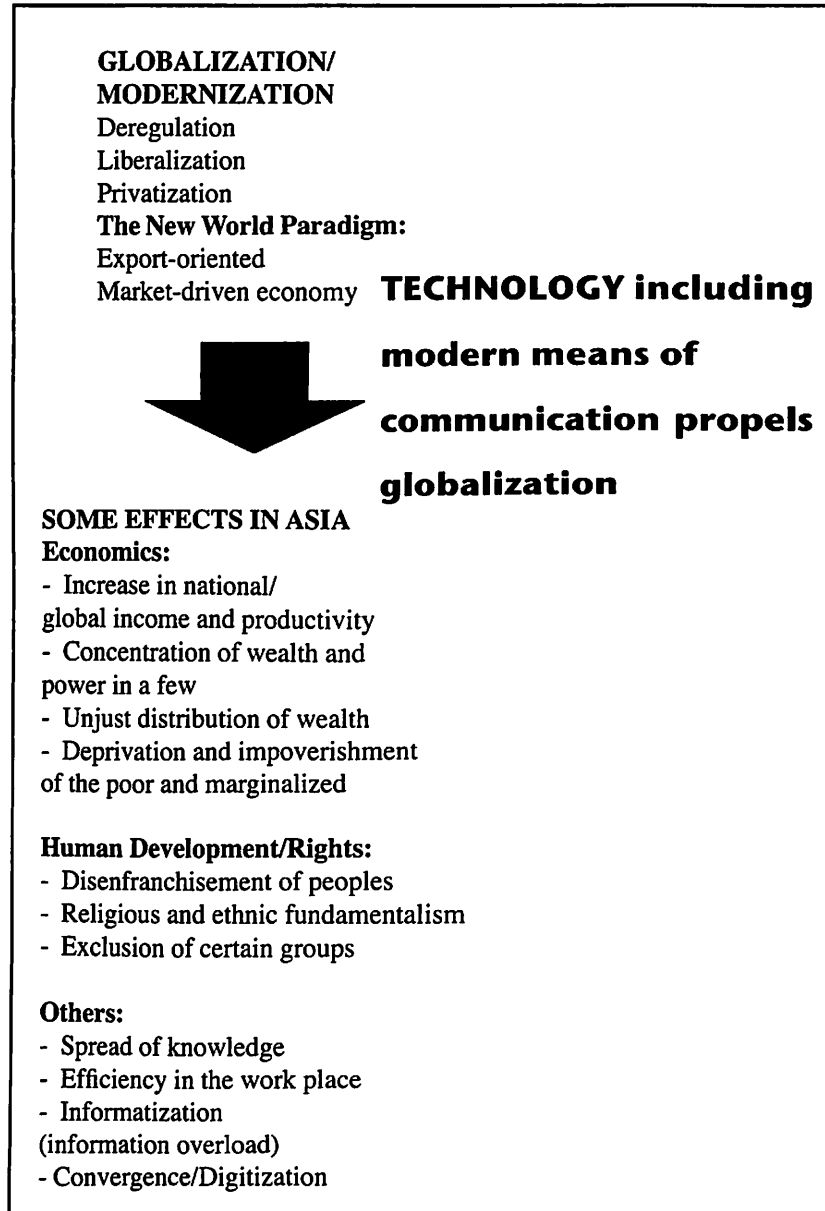
On the positive side, globalization increased efficiency and production of goods and services. Access to new technologies makes more intensive and ongoing relations between people possible leading to deeper understanding and solidarity among people.

The modern means of social communication facilitate the exchange of knowledge and scientific developments but in many ways also change the way people live. If one considers the use of cellular phones and computers, especially in urban centers but also in a growing way in the country side, instant information becomes accessible to almost everybody. Through satellite and cable television as well as the increasing privatization of these means, change (if not to say threat) is becoming widespread among individuals as well as regional and local cultures. There is even a new word already when people talk about "the hybrid between globalization and

localization" as "Glocalization" where "local cultures are blended with national and international ones" (Abercrombie/Longhurst 156). Here simple people might be confronted with lifestyles, values and world views that are completely divergent, even contrary, to their own traditions. How can we reconcile local cultures with the "new culture" characterized by new ways of communicating – "new languages, new technologies and a new psychology" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, 37c)?

Behind such a situation are mainly multinational corporations and in some cases, also political powers. Because such developments are mostly export-oriented and market-driven, local cultures are often sidelined. Instead of promoting people and their cultures, they are made objects of business.

An overview of these realities could look like this:



The new information and communication technologies and the resultant “Death of Distance” are decisive elements in our modern world. They might threaten local cultures and communities but not everybody is convinced that this will really lead to a world culture which substitutes the local. Wang, Servaes and Goonasekera e.g. argue “for the strength of the local cultures and even cultural industries that mitigate the threat of dominance and monoculture posed by global media” (cf. Mc Anany 2002, p.10).

Some people see a ‘world culture’ emerging which subsumes local cultures to lose their identity. Thus, with an emerging world culture for entertainment especially for young people for example, traditional values and productions of art might be lost. It is difficult, however, to see this in a simple black and white, either-or manner. Globalization also challenges local cultures to become more aware of their values and treasure more their own philosophy and religion which has grown over centuries and are not lost automatically to modern superficiality. In fact in many cases, “there is a refusal to be uprooted from particular religious soil, precisely because without such concreteness, religion evaporates into thin air” (Wilfred, 2002, 3).

Acceptance of and/or resistance to modern globalization have also to be considered under the perspective of culture and cultural strengths. Cultures change but they are deeply rooted in the lives of peoples and their communities. Dharm P.S. Bhawuk has studied “culture’s influence on creativity” for India and comes to the conclusion that it is Indian spirituality which has shaped the country over 2000 years. He presents a long list of spiritual masters over 2500 years. “A closer examination of the list shows that these spiritual gurus came from all castes, and were not limited to the caste of Brahmin

only, the caste that had the privilege of being a teacher or a guru. They also came from many religions, e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, and Sufism. Also, they were not limited to any particular part of the country..." (2003, 5) After a more detailed presentation of three modern spiritual masters, he states "that India continues to innovate in the field of spirituality even today." He also sees mother Teresa of Calcutta as a recent example. "Mother Teresa's Nobel Prize could be argued to recognize Indian spirituality, since she is the only Catholic 'saint' to receive this prize, albeit in the form that the sponsors of the prize can relate to." "Spirituality can be seen to permeate the masses in India, and social life revolves around rituals that work as a symbolic reminder that people in this culture value spirituality..." (2003, 17)

In an overview on the foundations and directions of Asian discourse studies Shin-xu refers to Asian world views, values and ways of thinking as being "influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, Shintoism etc" (2009, 383) and states that "Asian wisdoms (are) influenced by these religions. Thus "Asian cultures share an ontological view of the Universe" and are based on a holistic world view to "achieve societal Harmony and Balance as their highest principle"(391)

All this indicates that spirituality and religion are important sources to counteract or balance negative developments of globalization and to save and even develop also local realities and independence.

Philosophy and religion of cultures and people are generally rooted deep in peoples' lives and beliefs so that they change only slowly, over a longer period of time. On the other hand, also cultures are not museum pieces and untouchable.

They always have developed over time and tried to find answers to new and challenging situations. This refers also to religions and religious communication.

Already the very first known definition of Culture by Edward E. Tylor (1871) includes "beliefs, art, customs, and any other capabilities or habits acquired by man as a member of society" as essential parts of culture. Louis Lutzbetak sees cultures as but different answers to the same basic human needs demanded by the physical, social and ideational environment. The ideational needs are reflected in the respective philosophy and religion of a group of people. There is no culture without this ideational dimension which means religion. This does not support attempts to relegate religion to the private sphere. In a growing way leading thinkers like e.g. Juergen Habermas admit that human society can not exist without religion. After all it is religion which gives the basis for values, ethics and the moral structure of society.

Religions

How should religions as essential part of culture respond to the challenge and especially also the negative effects of globalization? The Indian philosopher and theologian Felix Wilfred (2002) sees three possible responses:

First, the thinking could go "in the direction of creating a planetary religion and ethos that presumably would match with the nature and demands of this process (globalization). In keeping with the process of homogenization, religions also could be metamorphosed into an ideally conceived 'religion' coupled with a well-packaged 'global ethics' which everyone all over the world would consume as standard spiritual and moral goods. Humankind, equipped thus with an ideally shared

religion and ethics, could expect, as a matter of natural course, that the long-cherished ideal of unity and peace would come its way... In this model we could note that dialectics between the particular and universal is resolved in favor of the latter..." The considerations and attempts of theologian Hans Kueng for a "Global Ethos" or "World Ethos" (1993,1998,2010) go in this direction.

The *second* possible response would be religious tribalism against globalization. Similar to the latter, "religious tribalism too is a projection of a particular religious identity which claims to be the universal. Here religions vie with each other to catch the global religious market and sell their spiritual goods as the best and even the only one. What appears to be global outreach hides a power agenda which is behind such aspirations as to see the whole world as Islamic, Christian, Hindu etc. The process of globalization has added fuel and supplied the instrumentalities for competing of religions, and indeed for religious conflicts... What is worse is that religious tribalism does not allow any room for self-critique... The threat religious tribalism feels, coupled with the absence of self-critique, incapacitates it to revise its own traditional image of the other groups... Much like the process of globalization which 'progresses' by continuously excluding more and more people, so too religious tribalism excludes all who do not belong to it..." Here the study of Pradip Ninan Thomas on "Christian Fundamentalism and Communication in India" published under the title "Strong Religion, zealous Media" (2008) can serve as an example. (cf. also: Hoover/Kaneva 2009)

The *third* possible response would be religions in struggle for universal community which is not the same as 'global' community. "Globalization in its nature and trajectory

is opposed to the project of genuine universal community. The very fact that it creates deep divisions in the contemporary world and causes a chasm between the rich and poor offers no prospect for any universal communion... In a situation of inherent disintegration of community through globalization, the religions could re-define their relationship to community in a new way and in new terms. In the first place religions need to be aware of the fact that the reality of community does not end with those belonging to its fold. In other words, there is legitimate place for a confessional community based on shared symbols, beliefs, rituals etc. But there is also the larger community which goes beyond the confessional boundaries. The crucial question is to what extent the various religious traditions are capable of supporting the coming together of peoples, nations and cultures... the disintegration inherent in the globalization process needs to be challenged by religious traditions, by their role in the public sphere to help transcend the identities based on language, ethnicity, culture and nation." Here in a special way social communication comes in and should help to pay attention to grassroots and to bring people together in solidarity and in common concerns backed up by proper research and studies.

Religious Communication

Such developments challenge Religion as an essential part of cultures especially in their own teaching and formation for and in theology. In western Christian theology it is mainly the 'ratio', the head which is essential to teaching and preaching but also to living religion. Modern communication technologies, however, are in view of the audience rather image and emotion oriented. They try to reach and 'buy' the heart of people often in such a way that there seems to be no space any more for

religion (Palakeel, 2003). But our Asian cultures are based to quite an extent on spirituality and religion as essential elements (cf. Bhawuk, 2002).

Looking back in history, it is revealing to see that religious convictions and commitments are also fruits of certain communication trends moving towards universality – or should one say ‘globalization’? Most world religions, especially Islam and Christianity have been right from their beginning ‘global’ in trying to grow all over the world. Even Buddhism spread all over Asia including India though in different traditions at a very early stage. There seems to be a parallel with modern globalization if one remembers that religions in the past were very often spread and promoted through business by itinerant merchants who brought their religious convictions to the places they visited or even created for their business undertakings. Already Marco Polo reported in 1292 that on his return from China he found at the northern tip of Sumatra Indian business men who converted the local people to Islam. The foundation of Malacca (now: Malaysia) goes back to the beginning of the 15th century. Since it was a main place for business, also here Islam found fertile ground from where it further spread to Java and Sumatra thus being the beginning of Islamisation of Indonesia (Stoehr/Zoetmuller 1965,280ff).

Long before modern globalization all world religions aimed at extending and communicating their beliefs and practices beyond their place of origin. Buddha sent his monks out individually and Buddhism developed all over Asia in different forms (Waldenfels, 1987, 81ff).

Hamid Mowlana in writing about the “Foundation of Communication in Islamic Societies” refers to the Islamic term *tabligh* (Propaganda) which is distinguished from the general

modern use of the term ‘propaganda’ (2003, 306 ff). It “is dissemination and diffusion of some principle, belief or practice. It is the increase or spread of a belief by natural reproduction; it is an extension in space and time.” He sees in this expression in a broader sense “a theory of communication ethics.” Here, ‘truthful propagation (*tabligh*) and group cohesion (*assabieh*) are considered “as two fundamental factors in the rise of world powers as states and large countries.” It further emphasizes intrapersonal/ interpersonal communication over impersonal types (308 ff.).

Jesus Christ sent out his apostles into the whole world to preach the ‘good news.’ He sent them “*catholon*” (all embracing), and this is the beginning of the ‘Catholic’ Christian Church:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt. 28,19 ff.). This “*catholon*” was reflected right at the beginning of the Church on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came over the disciples to preach about Jesus to representatives of the whole world who were present that time in Jerusalem: the “Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome; Cretans and Arabs...” (Acts 2, 9-11).

The birth of Christianity was thus a global happening right from the beginning even without modern technologies of communication but in the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit also accompanied the first preachers and apostles in sharing their faith beyond the limited Jewish community of that time to the Hellenists and non-Jews. In fact this ‘globalization’ was

especially developed by the apostle Paulus who continued his profession as a tent maker. He was confirmed in this undertaking through the first council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the very first council in the history of Christianity. The recipients of Christian communication were not only the Jews but all the people of the world.

This kind of "globalization" of religions is quite different from modern globalization where profit, influence and power are decisive. The sharing of religion is to uplift the 'inner person,' to support the dignity of humans and to bring meaning and fulfillment to their lives. This is true especially also today in Asia. It is revealing that Dong Underwood titles his recent book on the history of Journalism in the United States "From Yahweh to Yahoo!" looking at "the religious roots of the secular press." He shows that right from the beginning even of the secular press in the States there is a religious root which even today is reflected though not always in a conscious way. (Underwood, 2002).

How should religious communication respond to the fact of modern globalization, which is based especially on new ways of developing and using communication technologies?

John Naisbitt has predicted for Asia eight 'megatrends' which are partly promoted by globalization: 1. From Nations to Networks, 2. From Export to Consumer cultures, 3. From Western to the Asian Way, 4. From Government-controlled to Market-driven, 5. From Villages to Super Cities, 6. From Labor Intensive to High-technology, 7. From Rich to Poor, and 8. From Men to Women. These megatrends were taken up by a group of Asian communication bishops in 1999 who analyzed their communication consequences. They added two

further developments which should not be overlooked: "From Traditions to Options" and "From Belief to Fundamentalism." (Eilers 2008, 37-44)

The first of these poses a special challenge in the defense and strengthening of local cultures. Young people in the past grew up within traditions but today they have many options. How are they accompanied in this process and how to find the proper balance? Cultural values and traditions should still accompany them and have to be integrated. The same is true for a wholesome integration of religion into life without getting in extremes which are never a reflection of reality but rather of an ideology.

Modern religious communication should not be a matter of 'trial and error' but should be based on solid research and reflection of reality. This was stated by a group of Asian communication scholars in a Round Table' organized 1999 at the Assumption University in Bangkok, which led to the foundation of the "Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication" at St. John's University in Bangkok (cf. Eilers, 2002, 49-54; Kofski 2002, 129-134)

Such a research should consider the actual usage but also the potentials of modern Communication for religion and especially serving in human rights, peacebuilding, community development, and the provision of proper ethics which respects local and universal values to promote and consolidate a grounding of societies and people beyond consumerism and commercialization. The dignity of the human being must be central and is the concern of every religion.

Beyond this the effects of modern communication, especially Television, on values and beliefs of people, especially

the young should be of special concern. Not everything what is technically possible is also of value to human life and existence which again is at the center of every religion.

We also need to study the kind of people listening or viewing or even interacting with or within the communication media. Thus the recent discussion on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and others should be of special concern for educators and people concerned about the values and ethics of human life and society.

In modern communication the participants are not any more the somehow passive receivers of the past. They are now active participants: everybody becomes his/her own editor. Globalization and modern communication live on interactivity. What are the consequences of this for religious beliefs and practices and the development and preservation of culture and values in human society: the dignity of human life, of the human person and communities of people? This also leads to the often neglected field of communication ethics beyond mere legal considerations...

If religion is an essential part of culture and society it should have the potential for a proper grounding of values and mutual understanding of and within societies beyond individualism, power, consumerism. Communication is an activity in community and essential part of this is also the experience of the "beyond" of a single person or group.

Like religion also communication has an interpretative function to bring meaning into life and society. How far does this determine our modern communication? Are we only business and profit making or is there something more beyond the utilitarian view and concern?

Based on presentations at an international and inter-religious congress on Media, Religion and Culture in Edinburgh (1999) Jolyon Mitchell (2003, 337-350) sees in general seven areas of concern for religious communication which could be adjusted and developed into a proper research program in our Asian situation and globalization:

1. He sees a *participative turn* in seeing the audience not merely as passive objects but as active participants in any communication process "creating their own identities with the help of mediated narratives."
2. The *narration of identity* follows similar lines and helps to better understand "how viewers account for their uses of the media" (339).
3. The *multi-religious* perspective refers "to the emerging work on separate religious traditions and the media" (340) which is especially important in the view of globalization and local realities. Here Mitchell notes that "other rich, historic religious traditions have not to-date received such extensive treatment as Islam and the media or Christianity and media." He sees a real need for scholars to deeper investigate the relation between the media and other religious traditions.
4. *The quest for communicative justice* is another field which has to be dealt with. Communicative inequalities in technology, in news and information flow but also in distorted reporting characterize our world. Especially scholars on religion and media

are challenged in their concern for ethics and the protection and development of values.

5. Develop the *historical perspective* which means to put context and background on the information which brings also the religious dimension into the interaction of religion and social communication.
6. A *transformation of religious and theological reflection* goes beyond the instrumentality of the media as vehicles for religious communication into a deeper theological understanding of the communication process as a theological happening.
7. Finally, the *ethics of the audience* emerges especially in view of the new media. How far do users of media really take responsibility? Can a virtual community on the Internet really 'care' for somebody? This indicates a move from producer-oriented ethics to an audience-centered approach.

Conclusion

Modern globalization is market-driven and export-oriented resulting in some marginalization and violation of human rights. It offends the dignity of persons and nations to some extent and this can not be tolerated. On the other hand, it also introduces new communication technologies which can be used and harnessed to unite people, bring them closer together and raise them up from their isolation. Globalization must not necessarily destroy or substitute local cultures. They rather should be encouraged to develop strongly on their own, especially based on their spirituality and religious roots. Religious communication has to play a special role in this

through inter religious dialogue, sharing of values and experiences in such a way that they promote human dignity and quality of life. Academic research in this is especially needed. The "Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication" at St. John's University is a step in this direction.

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**MODERN BROADCAST TECHNOLOGIES FOR
PREACHING ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES**

**A study of Indian religious channels
with reference to Yoga programme telecast by Aastha**

Dr. Kiran Thakur

Abstract

India has seen the emergence of more than 28 religious channels during the first eight years of the new millennium beginning with Aastha and Sanskara launched in year 2000. These were besides the 376 other television channels offering news, entertainment, movies, cartoons, knowledge and sports programmes. The proliferation of so many channels during a brief period from 1991 to 2008 is significant because just a decade earlier there was only one state-owned broadcaster and a section of politicians had opposed introduction of colour television in India in early 1980s. One could have scarcely imagined that there would be channels exclusively devoted to religions, and, that these would offer spiritual messages in Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada, besides English.

News and entertainment television have always been in the public glare. In contrast, these spiritual channels have remained low profile, quietly building up their audiences. Advertisers, general interest newspapers and society leaders rarely took notice of these channels. It is not therefore surprising that Indian media scholars are yet to study the emergence of the phenomenon. This is similar to the situation in the West, where study of religious channels has been paid little attention, with exception of the few such as Peter Horsfield's "Religious Television: *The American Experience.*"

This paper traces the emergence of these 24-hour Indian religious channels from its early beginnings to the current status. It is part of a larger project to study the effect of teaching of Yoga and Pranayam (breathing exercises) telecast live on Aastha, 150 minutes a day year-round. The research was conducted with qualitative and quantitative methods and through participant and non-participant observations.

The study documents the history of the emergence of the genre vis-à-vis growth of TV broadcasting in India. A broad overview of the programming of the Hindu and Christian channels based mainly on primary data collected from senior functionaries of the industry is presented. Secondary data helped clarify how Hindu channels differed from their Christian counterparts in programme contents.

Aastha, like other Hindu channels, offers 24-hour programmes in Hindi. These include devotional songs, sermons, documentaries and live coverage of major religious events in important pilgrim centres in India. Yet, Aastha stands out among its contemporaries in the genre as it has utilised the broadcast medium to impart training aimed at improving physical health of the viewers and to impact their attitudes and behaviour.

The live telecasts of Yoga guru Swami Ramdev Baba's six-day training camps have been watched by millions of viewers for more than five years in India. The broadcasts are available to non-resident Indians in other continents through Aastha International. These viewers, as we learnt through non-participant observation and from the field studies, watch the programmes on their television sets at home and practise the Yoga and Pranayam sessions regularly.

In the process, the ancient Indian Guru-Shishya (teacher and disciples) tradition of imparting knowledge is being re-established with the intervention of the modern satellite-based television technology.

The paper concludes that Indian religious channels have a niche audience segment and have a growing viewership looking for contents that is different from the programming of news, entertainment and other popular genre.

Introduction

'We want food, not colour TV'. This was among the arguments made by the opposition when the then Indian information and broadcasting minister sought to introduce colour television in early 1980s (Ninan, 1995). People do not have water to drink; how can the country afford TV, they asked the government.

Journalist Sevanti Ninan's book *Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India*, narrates how Delhi's newspaper The Pioneer, had carried a story on 26 December 1994, headlined 'Television: Satan's tool?'. It had reported how a cleric's sermon on the evils of television had prompted residents of a high rise building in Mumbai to throw their TV sets out of their windows. They were convinced that 'TV was a Satan's tool' (Ninan, 1995).

Contrast this with another piece of news published during the same period about a satellite TV channel launched by the Ahmediyas sect to spread the religious word for the believers worldwide including those in Mumbai (Ninan, 1995).

A few years later, Kirk Johnson, studying impact of television on Indian village life, came across some graffiti on a

wall in Delhi which read: 'We don't want Coke and MTV, we want jobs'. Coke and MTV in this case must have represented the Western culture, but the graffiti writer had made the point once again that television was not the priority for the starving Indians (Johnson, 2000).

Nobody would take that posture now, as the first decade of 21st millennium draws to a close. During the intervening period, the world experienced 15 turbulent years of terrorism, wars, Olympics, and World Cups, brought to the people through television sets that have become a part of life for rich and poor, men and women, or, devout and atheist.

The earlier dichotomy was perhaps inevitable in the initial phases of transition when priorities for the people, as also for their government, were different. Broadcast technologies were evolving and nobody knew how this new medium was going to help the viewers. Will it be a provider of news, or a medium of entertainment or a platform for debates on all matters of interests to people, including the religion? As years unfolded, people realised that this medium was all these and much more.

History of Broadcasting in India:

Broadcasting made a beginning in India in August 1921 with a special radio programme in Mumbai (then Bombay) organised by The Times of India in collaboration with the Post and Telegraph Department. This was just within a year after the first regular radio station at Pittsburgh, USA, opened in 1920 and before the British Broadcasting Company began its programmes in UK on November 1922.

Radio in India: Although the Indian initiative in Mumbai was short-lived, British officials and native elites continued their efforts to start radio stations during the decade. Stations were set up in Chennai (then Madras), Kolkatta (Calcutta), and Mumbai in the 1920s. These stations broadcast entertainment programmes initially for some hours a day. From May 1, 1936 Delhi started its regular morning transmission from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. This programming included 'a short religious item' (Luthra, 1986). This suggests that religious broadcasting in India dates back to at least 1930s. Spiritual programmes that evolved during the subsequent seven decades included devotional songs, radio plays, talks, panel discussion, and radio features aired on occasions. All India Radio has continued to broadcast such programmes even in the first decade of the new millennium as was experienced by the members of the research team who are the listeners of the radio.

Indian Cinema: Feature films based on religious themes have drawn huge audiences, be it in USA or India.

In USA, Cecil B Demille's big budget films, *The Ten Commandments* (1923) and *The King of Kings* (1927), created box office records of the period. These proved Demille's remark that 'God is box office' as the awe-struck Christian and non-Christian audiences turned up to the cinema halls in USA and elsewhere in the world.

The Indian cinema began in 1913 with a mythological film *Raja Harishchandra* liked by the audiences wherever it was screened (Dwyer, 2006). Later on, audiences lapped up religious films based on epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, and those depicting stories on Shree Krishna, irrespective of the Indian languages in which these were made. The religious films formed a higher percentage of films produced in 1930s

when the era of silent movies was coming to an end. The initial talkie films also had predominantly mythological and religious themes when these began to be produced in India since 1931. These talkies were made in several Indian languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada. Among the all-time top earners of the Indian film industry is a Hindi mythological, *Jai Santoshi Maa*, released in 1975 (Dwyer, 2006).

History was repeated when television sets entered into Indian homes and serials on epics *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Shree Krishna* were telecast in 1980s. (Dwyer, 2006, and Ninan, 1995). These stories were repeatedly filmed for the television and movie audiences. Directors and producers did not face dearth of commercial response as was experienced latest in year 2008-09. These experiences proved that Indian audiences continue to be enamoured by the religious, spiritual, and cultural programmes. It was not, therefore, a surprise that television channels also chose to provide such contents in their programming. The state-owned Doordarshan started the trend to air spiritual programmes around 1995s in their early morning packaging. Other private channels Zee, Sony, etc, Sahara, and ETV soon followed with their own religious offerings (Indiantelevision.com, 2008).

These programmes follow the government of India's secular policies to respect sentiments of all religions and communities, not to encourage superstitions and to promote scientific temper. These programmes continue to attract listeners as evidenced in periodic mandatory audience research surveys conducted by AIR (Page, 2009).

Television Era: India's television broadcast era began on September 15, 1959. That day, the Delhi Television Centre of Government of India went on air for half an hour, three days a

week. The range of the transmitter was 40 kilometres around national capital Delhi. Soon programmes began to be beamed twice a week, each of 20 minutes' duration. The audience comprised members of 180 'teleclubs' which were provided sets free with the funds given by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Information and Broadcasting Ministry, Government of India, 2008).

Now five decades later, the television news and entertainment programmes are broadcast 24 hours from scores of state-of-the-art studios set up by the government-controlled Doordarshan and by listed companies. These studios are located not only in Delhi, but also in three other metros, state capitals and smaller cities. Besides these, there are 60,000 cable operators who telecast programmes produced locally for local audiences in cities and towns. Doordarshan alone operates 30 channels in 22 Indian languages and is one of the largest terrestrial network in the world (Information and Broadcasting Ministry, Government of India, 2008) besides the channels run by private companies that offer programmes in all these languages.

These programmes reach 127 million households in this vast Indian sub-continent as per the annual report of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India for the year ending March 31, 2008 (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2009). Of these, 71 million households subscribe to cable television services receiving programming from 133 Free-To-Air channels and 95 Pay Channels respectively being carried by the multi-system operators. It appears that 111 more channels were in the pipeline as is indicated by the list of 339 licenses granted by ministry of Information and Broadcasting in 2006. In April 2009, however, a list of TAM Media Research Pvt Ltd, contained 376 channels about which the company offered

viewership data (Satellite & Cable TV, May 2009). Of these, a total of 28 channels broadcast 24-hour religious programmes as per the list compiled as part of the present study.

Although viewers were initially sceptical about the conditional access system, demand to install Set-Top-Boxes rose reaching 607,883 in metros of Delhi, Kolkatta, Mumbai and Chennai, by the end of the financial year 2008. During the period, six private Direct-to-Home licencees, apart from the DTH service of the Doordarshan, were serving the customers across the country (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2009).

The audience in various regions of India are now treated with a rich fare of software produced in India and abroad. DTH service providers have classified the total 376 Indian channels as per their respective business strategies. Of them 154 channels, covered by one of the DTH service providers, Reliance Big TV, are classified by this company under 10 genres (Ujjanage, 2009) as follows:

Business News 05 (channels), Entertainment (18), Kids (07), Knowledge (07), Movies (13), Music (05), News (23), Regional language programmes (64), Spiritual (05) and Sports (07). (Total 154)

Of these categories, Indian religious channels were taken up for the broad study. The present paper is a part of this study that focussed on Aastha channel's live telecast of Yoga and Pranayam programme addressed by Swami Ramdev Baba.

Review of Literature

Media and communication scholars have contributed substantially to the body of knowledge concerning impact and effects of television on the viewers during last several decades. There is a rich tradition of research in areas such as media effects, content analysis, uses and gratifications, cultivation, mean world syndrome, and agenda setting.

However, there are very few studies on production, contents or impact of religious broadcasting although it has origins in regular radio programming since early 1920s in USA. Religious programmes were among the contents of the first telecasts when television was introduced in the world in 1940 (Horsefield, 1984).

Horsfield averred that 'each time a new mass medium has emerged the church has been there and adapted the medium's use to the church's purpose. The first mass printing of a text was of the Bible in 1456. Within just two months after radio programming began in US, religious service began to be broadcast in 1920. Television appeared in 1940 and within a year, religious programmes were launched (Horsefield, 1984). Similar scenario is visible in the Indian context: the first book in an Indian language was in Tamil titled 'Thambiran Vanakkam' by a Portuguese missionary, Henrique Henriques, in year 1578. William Carey brought out books in 1793 to preach Christianity. He translated into Bangla and published 'Matthew' of the New Testament in 1800. The New Testament was published in other languages like Oriya (1807), Malayalam (1811) and Assamese (1813) (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009).

First Study in USA: The National Council of Churches in association with Yale University, USA, made a serious effort

to study religious broadcasting with the publication *The Television-Radio Audience and Religion in 1995*. However, the research thrust in this domain was not visible later, even when the religious television developed in terms of number of channels and total programming. Only six of the 176 executives of US production houses, agencies, and television stations had stated that they had undertaken independent research into their audiences or programme effectiveness. Paucity of funds was the main reason for lack of interest in the research in this field. Evaluation of the programme was based on intuition, personal experience, and informal feedback, messages through e-mail, phone or snail mail letters written by the people to the TV stations (Horsefield, 1994).

Religion continued to be the most neglected research topic in the modern humanities and social sciences (Carey, 2002).

Key executives of most of these channels did not respond to the e-mail query of the researchers who sought information from them about any audience studies these broadcasters might have undertaken. Executives of only five channels reported that they did not have funds for such research. They depend on the e-mails and letters, as also oral communications, for the feedback and plan their programming accordingly (Pankonin, Prince, CBNOnline, and Roos, 2008).

The few studies undertaken in the West related to who watches and why they watch religious television programmes. Viewership of this genre has been on the rise because of the expansion of television industry and quantity of contents available for the telecasts. An important study also indicated that these viewers were mostly selective, purposeful, information seekers, and were not heavy viewers of television. Some viewers

turned to watch religious television because they were generally dissatisfied with commercial TV (Abelman, 1987). Such studies provide a broad perspective about spiritual television, but were of little help to get details of Hindu channels of India.

Software production: As the number of TV channels grew, software production houses also started coming up to provide entertaining programmes to the broadcast stations. Among these houses was Christian Broadcasting Network India which began its operation in year 1995 with its programme 'Flying House' for Doordarshan 2 (DD2). Among its early programme was a serial on the life of Christ, 'Dayasagar', broadcast by DD1. It set up a studio in Hyderabad in year 2000 that produced spiritual programmes in various Indian languages such as Hindi, Telugu and Tamil (CBN India, 2009).

Scene in India: Mythological and religious films were produced during the early phase of Indian cinema in 1920s (Dwyer, 2006). Indian radio began broadcasting religious programmes since mid-1930s (Luthra, 1986). The Indian television began religious broadcasts in early 1970s, yet there are only a few studies on this domain, which included the research by Johnson, Butcher, and Ninan. The present paper is devoted to a part of a larger research project on religious channels of India with emphasis on Aastha's live telecast of Swami Ramdev Baba's live programme on Yoga and Pranayam.

Objectives

The study was undertaken to record history of religious broadcasting in India, with a focus on Aastha television channel. It was to document how this channel's live telecast of Yoga and Pranayam programme organised by Swami Ramdev Baba

was evolved. It was also to find out if such live telecasts could be described as reintroduction of India's ancient Guru-shishya (Guru-disciples) tradition using modern technologies to preach Hindu philosophies.

The present paper deals with the following research questions:

- R1. How did religious broadcasting originate in India?
- R1. How many religious channels are available to the Indian audience vis-à-vis viewers of broadcast stations abroad?
- R2. What is the USP of the Aastha channel, which has the highest TRP among the Hindu religious channels during the prime time?
- R3. Is the preaching through a TV channel akin to the Indian guru-shishya (teacher-disciple) tradition?

Research Methodology

The exploratory study was carried out as follows: A list of Indian religious channels was compiled through the web search, interviews with key executives in the industry, e-mail interviews with executives of broadcast stations in India and abroad. Secondary data was collected to record historical aspect of the religious channels and the ancient Indian education tradition. Participant and Non-participant observations were carried out to record details about the history and functioning of the channels. Quantitative study on effects of Swami Ramdev Baba's live telecast was carried out from a sample of 1869 participants of his camps held in Pune

(Maharashtra state), Gandhidham (Gujarat) and Silchar (Assam) in January and February 2009.

Results and Discussion

Members of the research team have been viewing television programmes since early 1970s when Doordarshan, the State-owned television company, was the only broadcaster. It had been providing spiritual contents such as devotional songs and feature films, many times borrowed from Indian mythological and social movies. Private channels that entered Indian skies in 1990s gradually evolved and popularised programmes such 'Good Morning India' or 'Breakfast Shows' which are packaged with a mix that includes the likes of religious discourses, Yoga and fitness exercises.

It is not known if introduction of such religious contents in news and entertainment programming schedules was on the basis of systematic audience studies or gut feelings of the planners. By the time the present study was undertaken in 2008-09, however, religious contents had become an integral part of most news and entertainment channels as was experienced by the members of the research team while watching television.

India boasts of 28 religious channels including Aastha and Sanskar that joined the mainstream broadcasters in year 2000. There are others like Sadhna (Sanskar, 2008) that have been on the scene for the last few years.

Another important player, Zee Jagran, was launched in January 2004. By this time, Maharishi Veda Vision, MiracleNet, Eternal World Television Network, Global Catholic Church Network, and Jeevan TV from the Syro Malabar Church had gone on air. Some international channels

joined like God, and 3ABN during the same period (Nagaraj, 2004).

These channels apparently believe in remaining low profile as can be deduced from the lack of self-promotion in television or print media. Aastha's General Manager (Marketing and Research) Arvind Joshi insists that his company has not spent any money on such promotion ever since it was launched nine years ago.

Television Channels are not licensed by the government authorities on the basis of genre or type of the programming. Therefore, genre-wise list of the channels is not available from the government sources. In case of religious channels the nomenclature used in the media varies as 'spiritual', 'devotional' or 'faith'. Some viewers used to watching only Christian channels describe any such channel with the generic name 'God' probably because of the popularity of the God channel in USA, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Lacuna in global lists: Few outside India seem to be aware that India has a host of religious channels. This can be realised from the contents of various websites that provide lists of such channels which have not taken any cognisance of the Indian channels. One such web site, http://wwitv.com/portal.htm/tv_channels_6929 (as accessed on February 26, 2009), has presented a list of 155 spiritual channels arranged country-wise with another column stating religion of each of them. The list shows 137 Christian channels, 13 Islamic, three Indians (without mentioning the names of the religions) and two Buddhists.

Such lists on the web do not seem to present a complete picture of religious channels as was found in respect of India.

It would have to be conceded, however, that owner of any such website would face difficulties in compiling a list in absence of an authentic single source that could classify the channels on the basis of language and religion. Even in the case of the Indian list, the one who has compiled it would face a similar problem. It is no wonder, therefore, that the list mentions only three Indian religious channels.

Compilation of Indian list: The genre-wise list has been prepared by the Audience Measurement and Analytics Ltd. for channels, advertising agencies, advertisers and other clients. After cross-checking through web search and e-mail queries, some errors of duplication and wrong genre-wise categorisation were removed. The corrected list (Lakhani, 2008) has the following names (arranged alphabetically):

Table 01. List of Indian Religious Channels:

1.	Aaseervatham TV	15.	Miracle Net
2.	Aashirvad	16.	New Hope
3.	Aastha	17.	OM Television
4.	Aastha 2 CMM	18.	Peace TV
5.	Angel	19.	Power Vision TV
6.	Bhakti TV	20.	Pragya
7.	Blessing	21.	QTV
8.	Daya Star	22.	Sadhana
9.	ERA Channel	23.	Sanskar
10.	EWTN	24.	Satsang
11.	FE TV	25.	Shalom
12.	GOD	26.	Shraddha
13.	Living Word TV	27.	TBN
14.	Maharshi Veda Vision	28.	Zee Jagran

It must be noted, however, that even this list can not be claimed to be complete and error-free. This is because some of these channels are not available for viewing in Ahmedabad, where the data was recorded. Some channels do not have their websites which could have offered the details of their programming. It could also be that some other religious channels might have been in operation in other parts of India but their information was not available in Ahmedabad.

Difference between Christian and Hindu channels

The research team had the limitation of non-availability of all the religious channels in Ahmedabad. Another limitation was lack of knowledge of languages of the telecasts. The team had to depend on programme schedules mentioned at the web sites of channels that could be visited. Based on the information at these web sites, it could be said that the Christian channels such as the Miracle Channel, Rainbow Television, New Hope TV, GOD TV and Shalom Television, offer programmes that can be categorised broadly as Prayers, Sermons, Gospel shows, Religious programs for children, Religious conventions and conferences and Devotional music.

Hindu channels offered programmes on bhajans, keertans, devotional music, discourses by spiritual leaders, and activities of NGOs set up by them. In addition to these, the Hindu channels telecast programmes on ancient philosophies, Yoga and Pranayam, and Indian health system Ayurveda, religious festivals and events. Such programmes are not noticed by the Christian channels.

Aastha channel

Aastha is among the first channels offering religious contents since year 2000. It offers programmes to Indians in Asia, USA, Africa, Australia and Europe. The channel was set up by Mr Kirit C Mehta as a Mumbai-headquartered Aastha Broadcasting Network Limited.

The channel is claimed to be India's top socio-spiritual-cultural network, reaching over 30 million households, with more than 200 million viewers worldwide (Indianetzone, 2008). Its television rating point for April 2009 was 0.03, the highest among the religious channels in India. (TAM Media Research Pvt Ltd, 2009).

These Aastha and Aastha International channels broadcast prayers, devotional songs, sermons, panel discussions, documentaries, live telecasts of important Hindu festivals and congregations in different parts of India 24 hours around the year (Aastha TV, 2008).

Swami Ramdev Baba's live telecast: A highlight of the Aastha channel which has brought it a name, TVR and advertisement revenue is the live telecast of Swami Ramdev Baba's programmes on Yoga and Pranayam (breathing exercises) (Joshi, 2009). Its TVR for this time slot ranged from 0.03 to 0.07 during the four weeks of February, 2009. (TAM Media Research Pvt Ltd., 2009). There are 27 other religious channels broadcasting Hindu, Christian and Islamic programmes which lag behind this programme as can be seen from the performance report for April 2009. (Annexure: 01 TAM Media Research Pvt Ltd. report).

These programmes have roots in occasional coverage of the Swami's discourses telecasts by various channels by the beginning of the new millennium. He had begun organising Yoga Science Camps on open grounds in various cities where he would display a package of simple Yoga postures and Pranayam methods that ordinary people could practise at home. Aastha channel apparently felt the pulse of the people as it began live telecasts of the six-day camps. These telecasts were repeated when the Swami did not have the camps.

The Swami's message to the audience has been to follow the Yoga and Pranayam as the way of life advocated by ancient Hindu sage Maharshi Patanjali to improve physical and mental health. His fan following grew by leaps and bounds since Aastha began the live telecast since year 2005. The programme is telecast from 5 a.m. to 7.30 a.m.

TRP of the programme grew consistently, eventually to take its viewership rating to the top among the Hindu religious channels during the time slot. This has become the prime time slot for the genre and has highest audience across all Indian channels, religious and non-religious, during this time slot (Joshi, 2009).

Family members learn together: The Aastha's prime time live programme is different from those telecast by other religious channels in that its audience follows the presenter's Yoga and Pranayam instructions in real time for 150 minutes. Family members sit together on the floor in front of the television monitors to learn and practise the Yoga postures and breathing techniques. The Swami's discourse during the training camps (and thus through the live telecasts) include Indian philosophy and messages on ethical values, patriotism, peace and love. He does not advocate worship of

any of the scores of Hindu gods or of rituals and superstitions. He comes down heavily on the godmen and their disciples who project them into cult figures, as was experienced during non participant observation.

Other modern preaching aids: The Patanjali Yogapeeth, a charity foundation set up by the Swami Ramdev Baba in 1995 at Hardwar, Uttaranchal state in north India, has produced books and magazines publications (18 in all, in English, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Malayalam, Telugu, Urdu, and Punjabi), VCDs (40), DVDs (22), MP3s (5), Audio cassettes (6) and Audio CDs (2). Besides these, the foundation's website www.divyaYoga.com provides information and advice to the people who need help in respect of health and well-being through Yoga, Pranayam and Ayurveda.

Thus, the Swami's live telecasts are aided by other tools available through media technology for the preaching of ancient philosophy for way of life. The Swami communicates to disciples in the following manner:

- a. Directly at the camp site to participants squatting close to the dais on which he sits
- b. Through four to six screens of close circuit television to the participants sitting at a far away distance at the site
- c. Through Aastha's channel to disciples in their homes, watching the live telecasts
- d. Through CDs, DVD and VCDs played on screens of their television sets or computers at their convenience

- e. The web site of the Patanjali Yogapeeth at their convenience
- f. Books and magazines at their convenience.

The Swami gets instant responses from the disciples as in (a) above. Feedback to (b) above is after the day's teaching over through personal contact at the site and (c) to (f) above through letters, e-mail and fax messages to the headquarters of the Patanjali Yogapeeth (Arya 2008). The Divya Yoga Mandir Trust, the publication department of the Yogapeeth, gets 1300 letters and 1175 calls per day from people seeking help and advice from the Swami and the executives of these trusts (Balkrishna, 2007)

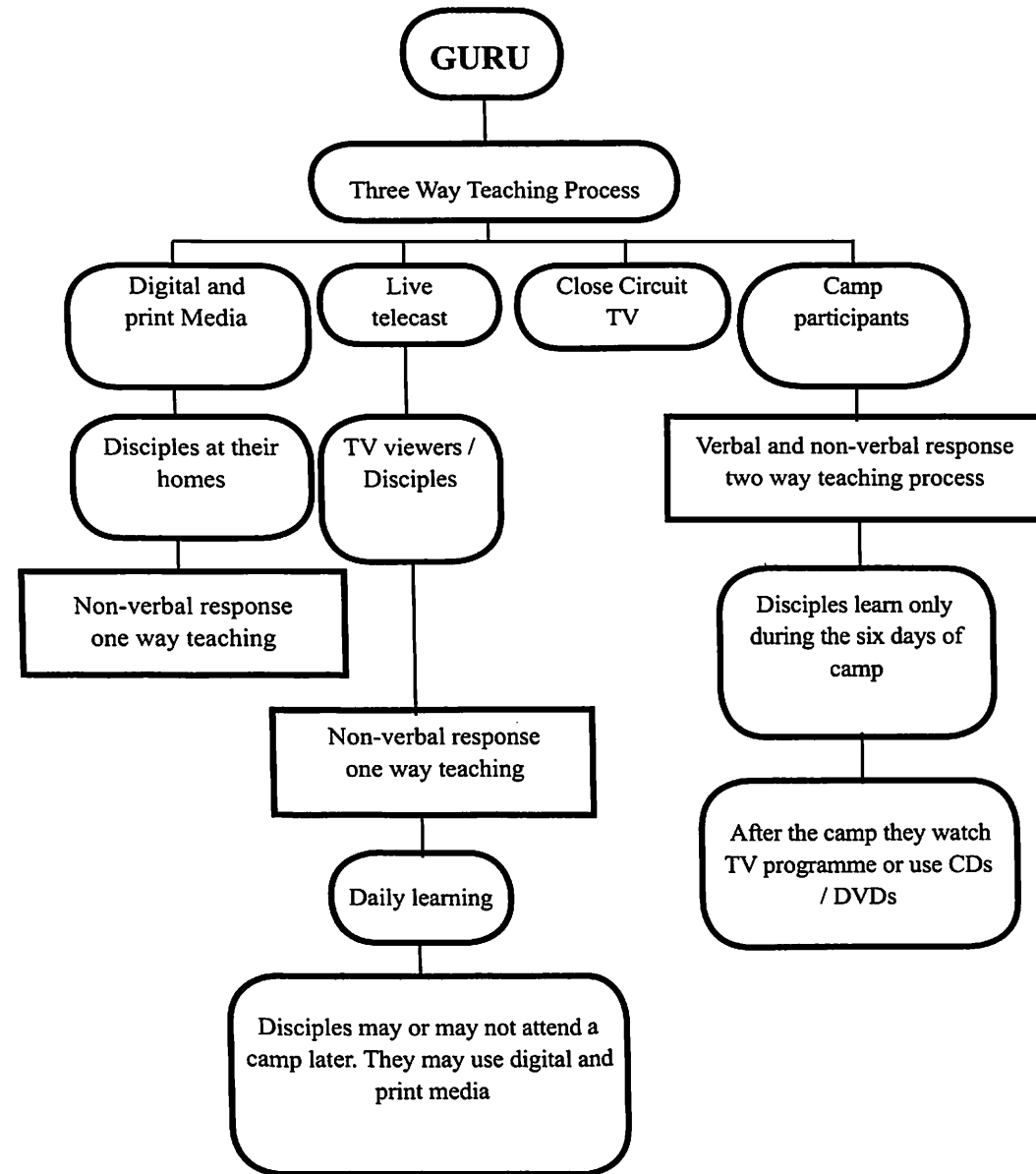


Fig 01. Modern technologies for teaching ancient Hindu philosophy

Guru-Shishya parampara

Observation by the members of the research team and media reports had indicated that scores of Aastha viewers watched Swami Ramdev Baba's live programme on TV sets sitting in their homes. They first learned Yoga and Pranayam and later practised these watching the programme as a daily routine around the year. This was confirmed when this research team carried out quantitative study at three centres in different parts of the country, namely, Pune (Maharashtra), Gandhidham (Gujarat) and Silchar (Assam).

The study indicated that the viewers watched the live telecasts in a group of the family members. They watched with spouses (56 per cent), sons (23), mother (20), daughter (17), father (16), brothers (10), sisters (7) and others like daughters-in-law, neighbours and friends (14). About 90 per cent participants said they learnt the Yoga and Pranayam after watching the live telecasts earlier. About 88 per cent of these had continued to perform Yoga and Pranayam while watching the channel. Many participants had first attended similar camps at other places earlier. They continued to perform at home while watching the Aastha channel after these camps were over. They came back to the new camps again for re-orientation, so to say.

The scenario was akin to the Guru-Shishya (Guru-disciple) tradition among the Hindus prevalent during the Vedic age which is 'from unknown antiquity to 3000 B.C., (Bokil, 1925). Under the education system of this period, young boys would be sent to reside in an Ashram (cottage) of a sage in a nearby forest. The sage would teach the disciples a wide range of subjects such as religion, philosophy, commerce, warfare, medicine and music. On completion of their

schooling after several years, these disciples would return home to lead their life (Bokil, 1925). Scores of scriptures such as Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda, and epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata cite references to the education system that prevailed in the Indian subcontinent for several centuries. The tradition went into oblivion gradually during the rules of successive dynasties. The British rulers introduced the European education system of schools, colleges, and universities set up in various places in India since the 19th century. In the process, the guru-shishya tradition disappeared completely.

The new information and communication technologies appear to be re-introducing the guru-shishya tradition albeit in a different format. Students have already been learning physical and social sciences through the Internet and satellite communication. The new age Hindu sages like Swami Ramdev Baba have re-introduced the guru-shishya tradition using the television channels, particularly the religious channels. The jurisdiction of the ancient sages was confined to a very limited geographical location. The modern sages, on the other hand, can spread knowledge and wisdom to disciples spread across the globe through the live telecasts. In other words, the disciples do not have to live in the Ashrams and sit at the feet of the gurus for years as was expected during the ancient period.

Limitations and scope for future research

The present study covered only Swami Ramdev's Yoga and Pranayam programme telecast live by the Aastha channel. This channel has other programmes during the 24 hour broadcast schedule around the year. These include discourses by other Hindu spiritual leaders telecast live, and other programmes of religious events. Similarly, there are

other Hindu, Christian and Islamic channels from India whose history and programming needs to be studied as a part of further effects studies.

News, business, sports and entertainment channels receive attention for studies from time to time, but religious contents are rarely taken up for serious media research.

Similarly, further studies in modern technologies for the delivery system and the reinvented Guru-shishya tradition in respect of disciplines other than religion will help educators in particular and the society in general.

Conclusion:

The study has established that there are 28 religious channels. These include Hindu, Christian and Islamic channels that broadcast programmes in Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, and Telugu languages. These 28 are from among the 376 channels licensed to offer broadcast from India. Aastha is among the most popular religious channel and its live telecast of Swami Ramdev Baba's Yoga Science Camp has a television rating of 0.03 which is highest among the channels under the genre. The live telecast of the camp is watched by members of families collectively in their homes in India and outside. The family members learn, and later practise, Yoga and Pranayam. They have reported benefits from watching the programme on a regular basis.

The study drew parallel between the ancient Guru-Shishya tradition of the Vedic period which was lost in oblivion with passage of time. Under the ancient system, young pupils leave their homes, live in a cottage in the forest and learn from the Guru for years before they go back home. The Swami's programme has in a way re-introduced the tradition wherein his

disciples go to Guru preaching from a dais erected on the open ground from where he would instruct his disciples at the venue, and through live telecasts, squatting in front of the TV sets in their homes.

Implication of the research

This exploratory study has documented the history of Hindu Indian religious channels and more importantly, basic information of these channels which was not collectively available so far. This will help the future research into the contents, impact and effects of their programming. The study explains how India's most popular religious channel, Aastha, has been telecasting Swami Ramdev Baba's live programme on Yoga and Pranayam watched collectively by members of families. These programmes have ushered in modern technologies to preach India's ancient philosophies in the Guru-Shishya (Guru-disciple) tradition that existed in the Vedic period. Along with the telecasts, modern teaching aids such as books, CDs, VCDs and DVDs are being made available to the people that can change the education and health delivery systems of the country.

The re-invented system of education can be deployed to train students spread across the world with entertaining and useful packages that can impact the society in a cost-effective and meaningful way.

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Annexure 01**Television Ratings of the Indian Religious Channels**

Table showing television rating of the Indian religious channels, their reach, reach percentage and share of the audience and time spent in minutes and seconds as per audience measurement data of TAM Media Research Pvt. Ltd for April 2009. It shows Aastha channel is ahead of the rest of the Indian religious channels.

(0 in the table indicates negligible viewership/ programme not telecast.)

Channel	TVR	Reach	Reach%	Share	Times Spent mins & Secs
Aastha	0.03	32694	25.73	0.26	11.45
Sanskar	0.02	23458	18.46	0.17	7.45
MH1 Shraddha	0.01	8490	6.68	0.08	3.23
Divya	0.01	7393	5.82	0.07	3.11
Sri Venkateshwara Bhakti	0	4075	3.21	0.04	1.46
QTV	0	11816	9.3	0.03	1.31
Sri Sankara	0	1388	1.09	0.02	0.53
Zee Jagran	0	7466	5.87	0.03	1.08
Pragya TV	0	2194	1.73	0.01	0.32
Sadhna	0	4957	3.9	0.01	0.36
Bhakti TV	0	2275	1.79	0.01	0.3
GOD	0	4712	3.71	0.01	0.23
Peace	0	2352	1.85	0.01	0.15

Satsang	0	1445	1.14	0	0.1
Aasirvatham	0	1123	0.88	0.01	0.27
Angel TV	0	513	0.4	0.01	0.14
eRa Channel	0	634	0.5	0	0.1
Ahimsa	0	0	0	0	0
Aradhana	0	0	0	0	0
Blessings	0	0	0	0	0
Day Star	0	1480	1.16	0	0.02
Islam Channel	0	0	0	0	0
Jain TV	0	240	0.19	0	0.01
Miracle	0	998	0.78	0	0.03
OM TV	0	0	0	0	0
Sanskruithi	0	0	0	0	0
Shakti	0	972	0.76	0	0.02
Shalom	0	365	0.29	0	0.01
Sudarshan	0	518	0.41	0	0.07
Aashirwad	0	31	0.02	0	0
EWTN	0	401	0.32	0	0.01
FE TV	0	153	0.12	0	0.01
Power Vision TV	0	1	0	0	0
TBN TV	0	236	0.19	0	0.01

Source: TAM Media Research, March 2009

RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION: RELATIONS AND CHALLENGES.

A Few Personal Observations

John Mansford Prior, svd

Personal Impressions

On receiving an invitation to take part in this roundtable discussion,¹ I contacted relevant persons at the *Office for Social Communications* and the *Office for Inter-religious Affairs* at the Indonesian Bishops' Conference in Jakarta, and also a number of prominent communication centres such as *Sangguh Prativi* (Jakarta) and *Studio Audio-Visual Production and Training Centre* (Jogjakarta). However, it seems that none of these contacts, whether Christian or Muslim, has heard of any survey or research completed in Indonesia on the impact of religion on social communication or of social communication on religion.²

Thus, I come to this roundtable discussion as an interested theologian to listen and learn. I present personal impressions only. We theologians need to learn first in order to be able to make a possible contribution to future inter-disciplinary studies. This is an important issue. If data in Indonesia were to be collated and studied by experts and practitioners in social communications, the other social sciences, religious studies and by theologians, it would greatly assist plotting directions for future mission.

¹ Roundtable on *Religion and Social Communication: Relations and Challenges – Towards a Research Agenda*, at the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication, St. John's University, Bangkok, 9-11 February 2010. Organised jointly with the FABC Office of Social Communication.

² Neither has the FABC-OSC any knowledge of such studies in Indonesia

My impressions come from my location in eastern Indonesia, on a small, largely Catholic, multi-ethnic island in the majority Christian Province of East Nusa Tenggara in a predominantly Muslim Indonesia. Surely few nations could make more use of the mobile phone and the mobile internet than do Indonesians! They enjoy being able to converse and text any time anywhere. Seemingly, pre-literate and post-literate communication, however wide the technological gulf, interconnects effortlessly. What intuitions have I gained from this observation?

Primacy Of Relationships

In all communication, whether traditional (oral), modern (printed, radio, television, telephone) or post-modern (handphone, cyber), interpersonal and inter-group relationships remain primary. Social communication, both traditional and cyber, is not just enhancing these relationships but changing them and shifting the values that underpin them. Nevertheless, personal relations remain at the hub of all networks. Accordingly, we can evaluate social communication by studying how it is altering - enhancing or diminishing - personal relationships. Here I wish to take note of the important impact of modern and post-modern communication on two crucial areas, that of gender and inter-ethnic relations.

Gender Relations

Global and regional communication is swelling demands for a radical readjustment of unjust gender relations. Feminist movements, both moderate and radical, although numerically small, are strongly felt in each of Indonesia's

religious traditions.³ Local, national and international networking is strengthening their resolve, keeping them informed of developments elsewhere and educating activists on goals and strategies. Gender relations are changing in business, in government, in schools and in the family. For instance, wife-husband relations are becoming more egalitarian, girls are being treated more equally; regarding government, some 30% of candidates for legislative seats at national, regional and local level must now be women. This ongoing moderate feminist movement in both Islam and Christianity is being strengthened and broadened through cyber communication. Advance is most notable in Islam and in Protestant Christianity while it is more cautious in the Catholic Church.⁴

The biggest road block to gender justice is no longer legislative (much progressive legislation has been passed by parliament over the past decade) but patriarchal cultural attitudes reinforced by discriminatory readings of the Qur'an and the Bible. That is why after 10 years of data collation, education and advocacy, *the National Commission on Violence Against Women* (an independent body established by the government in 1999) tasked three groups of theologians - one Muslim, one Protestant the other Catholic - to reread the Qur'an and the Bible from the perspective of the victims/

³ The Protestant National Communion of Churches and the Catholic Bishops' Conference both have women's desks. The two major Muslim networks, *Nahdlatul Ulama* (40+ million members) and *Muhammadiyah* (30+ million members) have women's committees in their central organisation. Women also make their presence felt in NGOs, whether Muslim, Christian or Inter-faith. For instance, Neng Dara Affiah, head of education and research at the National Commission on Violence against Women, has published a theological autobiography under the title, *Muslimah Feminis: Penjelajahan Multi Identitas* ("A Feminist Muslim: Exploring Multi-Identities." Jakarta: Nalar, 2009). Ibu Neng is also active in Fatayat NU, the women's committee of Nahdlatul Ulama.

⁴ This evaluation is based on the number and prominence of women theologians and religious leaders and their acceptance by their respective religious community.

survivors of gender injustice. These volumes reinterpret the Muslim and Christian scriptures, both the general principles and spirit behind the scriptures but also some key problematic passages. Each has a foreword by the respective religious leaders, namely by the mass Islamic educational movement Muhammadiyah, the (Protestant) Communion of Churches and Catholic Bishops' Conference.⁵ This movement to transform gender relations through focusing upon cultural and religious change, is being galvanised for the most part through cyber communication. I might also record that it is taking place largely outside official religious establishments. I shall point out the theological issue here towards the end of this paper.

Ethnic Relations

Urbanization on a gigantic scale has led to the fragmentation of rural society which makes a majority "feel left behind". There are no longer any purely mono-ethnic enclaves if there ever were.⁶ This social and cultural vulnerability buttresses negative ethnocentric attitudes: fear of "the other", seeing "the other" as threat. Culturally, religiously and economically vulnerable people can be easily mobilised by political and religious leaders for their own narrow personal and communal ends.⁷ While the global secular consumerist society is marginalizing Asia's cultural and religious values,

⁵The three-book series is entitled *Memecah Kebisuan: Agama Mendengar Suara Perempuan Korban Kekerasan demi Keadilan* ("Breaking the Silence: Religions Listen to the Voice of Women Victims of Violence, for the Sake of Justice". Jakarta: Komnas Perempuan, 2009).

⁶Over 50% of the inhabitants of formerly "isolated" Indonesian Papua and of Kalimantan, for instance, come from, or are descendants of, ethnic groups from other parts of the country (mainly from Java, Nusa Tenggara & Maluku).

⁷This is the theory of Hannah Arendt (1906–1975); those who feel left behind ("Gefuehl der Verlassenheit") are prone to be taken in by authoritarian ideologies. See, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951, revised English edition New York: Schocken, 2004) and *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

religious symbolism is frequently manipulated for political ends. It is difficult to find a single major Indonesian politician of the stature of the generation of leaders ("generation '45") who transcended narrow interests and led Indonesia to independence. My impression is that instant communication tends to reinforce gut ethnic and religious responses which are more often than not negative.

Observation

From these two key issues, gender and ethnic relations, it can be seen that social communication is both enhancing right relationships but at the same time is reinforcing unjust ones. Right relationships are nurtured through gradual, ongoing nurturing - a totally different pace from instant "click culture".

The Cyber Village

Today all forms of communication are at work virtually everywhere. Everywhere family and ethnic relationships remain vital while the mobile phone is ubiquitous. Thus the family and ethnic group now form the nucleus of wide-ranging networks both regional and global. For perhaps centuries, youth migration has long been one key source of regional outreach and culture change on Flores island.⁸ These days migration is global both through increased economic and educational opportunities, but also through "virtual migration" via the mobile phone and cyberspace.⁹

⁸In the past migration seems to have been a rite of male "coming of age"; young men migrated for a few years before returning to settle down and marry in their village. Today, migration is primarily for economic reasons.

⁹I often joke that I am just about the last person among the almost two million inhabitants of Flores island without a mobile phone (not that much of an exaggeration).

People who have minimal formal education, who have not travelled far from their native village, are now in regular contact with family members, friends and acquaintances through texting on mobiles or tapping on keyboards. Two experiences:

Some years ago when I was in Agats, a small wooden town built on piles above swampland in Southeast Indonesian Papua, I saw two youths paddle their dugout canoe to the local post office. Having tied up the canoe they clambered up to the office where they typed out email messages to acquaintances overseas. Then they paddled back home. I found this mind-blowing: the most efficient means of local communication is the dugout canoe, a 40-thousand year old technology. The most effective global communication is cyber. These youths were bridging 40 thousand years of technology and seemingly taking it in their stride.¹⁰

A couple of years ago the elderly mother of a professor at Ledalero Seminary was given a mobile phone so that her son could contact her as she became increasingly frail. She lived on the small isle of Solor off the southeast coast of Flores. Startled that she could have a phone without either a telephone office on the island or cables in the village, she was shown how to open the phone when it rang, turn it off and plug it in the mains supply to recharge. Back in the seminary, the son phoned her mother. She opened it successfully and the conversation began. A few minutes later the confused son asked her 10mother why she was talking in the national

language of *bahasa Indonesia*. For 60 years, ever since he was born, the mother had inevitably used their mother tongue of Lamaholot. The mother explained: "I thought this advanced phone wouldn't understand our local tongue!"

The mobile is just about ubiquitous,¹¹ the internet can be accessed in all towns and in villages near the towns. Meanwhile the Florenese remain a "migrant-loving" people. How is this effecting religion and religion effecting communication? Crucially, what is happening to relationships, are they bonding more closely or fracturing more sharply? The short answer is "both".

Inter-Faith Networks Of Compassion

In times of "natural" disaster,¹² networks of compassion, often faith-based, have successfully mobilised immense humanitarian aid. An illustration:

The compassionate response was phenomenal to the tectonic-quake induced tsunami that swept through Banda Aceh on 26th December 2004 killing over 168 thousand people in this war-torn zone. Such compassion from all quarters, national and international, Muslim and Christian, broke down this enclave, which had been cut off militarily for almost 30 years. Peace talks were facilitated

¹¹ There are still some villages on Flores which cannot yet receive a signal. Massive national investment in the fiscal year 2010-2011 is further expanding the service.

¹² In Indonesia 65% of "natural" disasters between 1998 – 2004 were triggered by environmental mismanagement. According to the environmental NGO *Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia* (WALHI) between 1998-2004 there were 1.150 "natural" disasters killing 9.900 people. The two largest disasters were floods (402 floods killing 1.144 people) and landslides (294 landslides killing 747 people).

¹⁰ See, "Asmat Sketches: 2000-2001", *East Asian Pastoral Review* 38/3 (2001), 238-261.

between the Aceh separatists and the national government, an accord was reached, elections were held and a three-decade insurrection was brought to an end. While many factors were at work, this “sea-change” in social and political relationships would not have been possible without cyber-communications that made possible the faith-based global network of compassion which arose immediately after the tsunami and the subsequent peace and reconciliation networks which mediated the signed accord.

Triggering Emotions Rather Than Nurturing Understanding?

Texting and social networking sites such as Facebook have broadened associations of acquaintances, breaking down familial and national boundaries. Yet, my impression is that most of this communication is reassuring, reconfirming, shoring up values adhered to already. Horizons are not necessarily being broadened, but rather previous stands are being buttressed by a wider group. The big change is that this communication is virtually “instant”, and this is making for a more volatile society. For instance:

When one of Indonesia’s former presidents, Abdurrahman Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur, died on 30 December 2009, cyberspace was overworked. A controversial Muslim Kiayi (teacher), Gus Dur was proclaimed “The Father of Pluralism” by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (universally known as SBY). This provoked an immediate angry reaction in cyberspace which “impelled” the Ulama Council (MUI) to reassert their fatwa of some years standing that rejected pluralism.

In heterogeneous societies like Indonesia, where religious and ethnic identities are perceived to be threatened, instant cyber-communication can easily churn up and exacerbate instant emotional reactions. Texting can sharpen fractures in a multi-religious society.

The same communication technology is being used by moderates and pluralists to garner support for inter-religious and inter-cultural tolerance and understanding. Of its nature, tolerance and understanding are slow, gradual, calm, accumulative. Of their nature ethnic-religious reactions are immediate emotional knee-jerks.

It is also true that texting has prevented immediate violent reactions in heated situations. When texted gossip that a local church had been burnt down (untrue) mobilised a youth mob to attack the local mosque, texting from the local parish halted the Catholic mob in its tracks and retaliation was prevented. This was possible only because the priest who texted his youth group was invested with enough credibility.¹³ Yet again, inter-personal relations, in this case invested with strong trustworthiness, were the key. A personal remark:

I was priest in the interior parish of Wolofeo, home for some ten thousand ethnic Lio people for seven years in the 1980s. In those days there were no proper roads – only “mouse tracks” to link the numerous villages and hamlets that clung to Pu’u Buti volcano. Most were primary school drop-outs, a few lower secondary school drop-outs. Today I am in contact with a few of those I once baptised as babies – via the social network Facebook.

¹³On another occasion when the police texted a priest requesting him to calm down a riotous mob about to attack a courthouse, he was heckled by his parishioners; he simply did not have the necessary moral authority.

Intra-Church Change

Justice and Peace Advocacy

There are three major mining explorations in Flores today. Each is strongly supported by a collusion of financial, bureaucratic and political interests. For reasons of ecology and fairness (there is virtually no financial benefit for the local community) these projects are being opposed by the local people with support from NGO activists and some concerned clergy. This advocacy is only possible through texting and the internet. In West Flores pressure to cease mining has so far failed; in Lembata in the east it has met with initial success, while in Ngada (central Flores) exploration, and thus Church-supported opposition, has only recently commenced.

Activists work closely with the villagers, keeping tabs on government and business manoeuvres, sending photos via their mobile phones of what is actually happening to the press and uploading them onto the internet, thus giving lie to official statements to the contrary. The mobile phone and cyberspace are presenting and reinforcing a "JPIC spirituality", a "*Gaudium et spes*" socially-engaged Church over against the supposedly conventional inward-looking, clerical, devotional, ritualistic Florenese Church of yesteryear.

Diminishing Clerical Credibility

Both migration and ongoing contact through the mobile phone allows villagers in the most "remote" parts to evaluate the policies of their local church through the prism of alternatives elsewhere. There is no such thing as an inaccessible village any more. A case in point:

After Christmas morning Eucharist in a small village community on the isle of Lembata off the southeast coast of Flores, the people asked for an informal meeting. It looked like an ordinary village group: some wearing flip-flops, several in sarongs, a few bare footed. Many were chewing betel nut. They asked for the meeting to air grievances about their local clergy to the visiting priest from the Major Seminary. Throughout the conversation they compared the policies of their clergy with the procedures of clergy in other parts of Indonesia (Kalimantan) and overseas (Malaysia).

More and more "ordinary laity" are simply making up their own minds on an increasing range of moral and ecclesial issues. In former times migration was limited to a few years; today contact is maintained virtually for life through the mobile phone. Far flung villages have multiple sources of information with which their inhabitants question and evaluate their local surroundings. A recollection:

Back in 1981 I visited a tiny hamlet in a remote part of an interior parish in central Flores. Most of the families had hardly walked more than 20 kilometres distant from their place of birth. Yet, on hearing that I was British, they began asking about Ian Paisley and the situation in Northern Ireland. We had an intelligent conversation. On asking where they had heard about the Catholic-Protestant politics of Northern Ireland, an old man pointed to his small radio-which was kept on the air by 20 or so not quite dead batteries, placed end to end in a bamboo and attached to the radio

with wires and cigarette packet foil! Apart from regional and national radio, they tuned into Radio Australia, Radio Beijing and the BBC, comparing the differing viewpoints. Barely literate, they were sharp in their analysis of the news from national, western and communist sources.

Before, in this status society, many laity were in awe of their clergy and whatever the priest said was taken as an instruction from on high (not that much of an exaggeration). Today villagers are making up their own minds on an increasing range of religious issues without allowing this to impinge in any way on their Catholic identity. This happened in Europe, North America and Australia in the aftermath of the publication of *Humane vitae* (1968); it is happening today in rural and urban Indonesia through cyber-communications, in particular the mobile phone. The authority and the credibility of the ordained leadership of the local church is on trial.

The psychological impact is immense. Villagers from a small eastern island who form an ethnic and religious minority, are no longer feeling left out; they have discarded any inferiority complex; they feel less vulnerable than previously in a Muslim majority nation. The mobile phone seems to be an empowering agent which unleashes enormous potential.

One reaction to the increasing autonomy of the laity is for some clergy to become even more authoritarian. On the other hand, clergy who have deep concern for the people and who have sincere inter-personal relationships with them, are ever ready to listen and learn, and look for a way forward together. They are morally authoritative without having to rely on formal authority structures.

Texting Clergy

Clergy are among the most avid “texters”! What is this doing to them and their relationship with the people they serve? If on the one hand being a priest is regarded as more of a status (authority position) than a calling to servant-leadership, then addiction to the mobile phone can lead these clergy to distance themselves from their people as they form their own elite network with very different interests from their pastoral calling or from the majority of the people. In this case, such communication can further advance an increasingly autonomous clerical caste. On the other hand, clergy faithfully rooted in their local scene can remain open to the wider world through cyber communication. If the heart of the pastor is with his vocation and he loves the people he serves, then cyber-networking can enhance his pastoral engagement. The ideal seems to be: “think locally, think globally; act locally, act globally”. A recent case:

I have been awed by stories coming out of quake-devastated Haiti in the Caribbean.¹⁴ Religious sisters and brothers, who for years have been living close to the poorest of the poor, have been passing on inspiring “grassroots” information via their mobile phones to newspapers and Caritas networks. These moving stories contrast with news on the international TV networks which have concentrated on the shocking and the obvious, largely confined to the capital, Port-au-Prince. Rooted in the poor, equipped with mobile phones, these missionaries have been

¹⁴ For instance the series of grassroots reports from missionaries embedded among Haiti's poor on National Catholic Reporter Online (www.ncronline.org).

giving us the face and the voice of the “little ones”, the hardy survivors.

The More Incredible, the More Believable

Apart from the above, we know that social network sites buzz also with the incredible, the fantastic, the spectacular, with visions and miracles and the oddest occurrences. The more unusual the incident, the quicker its apparent acceptance. An instance:

A woman from Malaysia moved to a village on the south coast of Flores. She began claiming that after communion on Sundays the consecrated host turned into flesh in her mouth. With almost daily exposure in the local press (sales of the local daily newspaper Flores Pos was boosted by over 100% for the duration), the village church became a place of pilgrimage not just for local people but for people as far away as Jakarta (1,500 kilometres away). Many of these were clergy and sisters, and members of charismatic groups. The ‘miracle’ was later found to be a hoax and the woman returned to Malaysia. It transpired that she had not even been baptized.

Our e-mail inboxes get full of spam. Some are inclined to be taken in by such hoaxes, and end up pouring church money into incredible scams – and then, naturally enough, loosing the lot.¹⁵ When cultural roots are shaking, where there are no commonly accepted public norms, at a time when we have little or no control over our future

¹⁵ Not just individuals, also church institutions (schools, religious houses) and the leadership of religious congregations.

(everything from local prices to global meltdown lies outside our ambience) we seem ready to be taken in by the spectacular. Life has become a gamble, a game of roulette.

On a global level I was intrigued by reactions to one of Dan Brown’s anti-Catholic novels, namely *The Da Vinci Code* (2003). I have no problem with all the distortions of history in his books as they are novels, that is, fiction. Brown makes up history as he likes as in *Angels and Demons* (2000), *Deception Point* (2001) and *The Lost Symbol* (2009) and of course in *The Da Vinci Code*. What caught my attention was that so many Catholics put more trust in this dubious fiction than in denials made from the pulpit by respected clergy. How come that absurd, low quality but successfully marketed fiction is more credible than the voice of church authority? Seemingly, most who reacted, whether pro or contra, had never actually read the book, but learnt about it on cyberspace or from the television.

Dislocation

Seemingly, virtually all internal Church communication media in Indonesia at parish, deanery, vicariate, diocesan and bishops’ conference levels, both printed and cyber, remain tied into its conventional role of internal information and instruction. Which is good as far as it goes. Meanwhile believers are exposed to and make use of, or indeed create, cyber communications where they pick up and contribute to uncensored information, ideas and attitudes. Many seem prone to accept much of the information and many of the attitudes found in cyberspace, however eclectic, as long as it makes sense to the seeker. Internal Church communications and those of the wider society are a world away.

As I see it, the challenge is to influence, guide, probe and question both fellow Catholics and adherents to Islam, the majority religion, with Gospel and human values within a religiously and ethnically pluralistic society. The stark alternative seems to be a reinforcement of an exclusive Catholic identity which seeks protection within a cultural ghetto, cut off from mainstream society. In the words of theologian Eko Darmaputra, such a Church is “internally insignificant, externally irrelevant”.¹⁶

As I see it, social communication can, and indeed should, nurture a Catholic culture, but a Catholic culture that is inclusive and open, not exclusive and closed. In times of crisis the latter could lead to sectarianism and even violence, while the former gives ground for understanding and hope. The challenge is: can official Church media create a welcome space for the religious and moral debates already taking place among believers in every form of communication from traditional face-to-face encounters to “facebook” on the web?

Elections in Religious Congregations

The USA press claimed that the internet was the “winner” of the 2009 Presidential election. I am not sure of the impact of the net, however the mobile is already effecting elections of superiors in religious communities. An election might well take place in a certain room in a specific place. But many of the electors will be busy texting their “base” back home and giving their vote accordingly. To my mind this decreases the extent electors listen to each other, indeed

¹⁶ Eka Darmaputera, “Memberdayakan Komunitas Basis”, Spektrum XXIX, No.1 (2001) 71-80. Quote from p.71.

they do not need to listen to each other. They are listening to their “interest group” via the mobile phone. This seems to be reinforcing factions within a Congregation’s province. Perhaps this is also true in family life: we are closer to contacts in our cyber network than to one or other of our blood relatives living in the same physical space.

Ritual

A short note on ritual. Over the past forty years the liturgical books of the Catholic Church have been adapted to many Indonesian cultures through local hymns/songs which on festive occasions are accompanied by traditional movement/dance as well as through the adaptation/improvisation of prayers in a local genre. Television and videos have brought about a marked change in the form and type of movement/dance which is no longer “purely” ethnic, but has incorporated styles seen on the screen. Local ethnic and national cultures have merged.

Where Is The Church?

All the above raises a fundamental theological question: where is the Church today? The formal structure of the Catholic Church is clear: parish, deanery, diocese. The parish is often patterned on a communion of basic ecclesial communities (BECs) coordinated by a pastoral council. Dioceses are linked by regional and national Bishops’ Conferences which in turn communicate through regional federations of Bishops’ Conferences such as the FABC in Asia. The whole is kept together through the unifying role of the Bishop of Rome and the various offices of the Holy See. Each level is called *communio* – community, although obviously in quite different ways. In Flores a basic ecclesial community

(BEC) is a communion of neighbours who interact day by day in everyday life; they know each other, support each other, share both the scriptures and life together. An urban parish is a “community” although most members do not know many of the others; they are a “community” because the members share the same faith, similar ideals, and sometimes take part in the same rituals and other parochial activities. A person’s sense of belonging can be intense at the BEC and parochial levels but less so as the ecclesial unit becomes wider (denary, vicariate, diocese, conference). This is not to deny the reality of “an Indonesian Catholic identity” or an “Asian Catholic identity”. But it seems that as we move from the local unit to wider units so we move from Ferdinand Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft* (*communio*) to his *Gesellschaft* (society).¹⁷

The question I raise is: in a cyber-world, where in practice is “Catholic identity”? Where is the Church?

The point is, in this cyber-age Catholics can belong to any number of social networks that transgress formal ecclesial boundaries. These networks can be socially-oriented (human and ecological rights, social justice and reconciliation) or more individually-oriented (charismatic, devotional, ritual). Some networks are intense and longstanding, others are passionate and momentary. Many Catholics identify more with such networks (communities) than with the local parish let alone diocese.

And so we can no longer simply categorize Church members as “practising” (active in the local parish structure), “non-practising” (not participating in parish liturgical celebrations regularly) or “recovering” (returning to more

¹⁷Ferdinand Tönnies (ed. Jose Harris), *Community and Civil Society*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. (Original idea published in German in 1887.)

regular parochial involvement). *Senses of identity and belonging* are now increasingly diverse – thanks to contemporary social communications.

Can the pastoral leadership of the Church readjust – no longer seeing their role as the head of a local parochial organization (priest as manager), but rather as the animator and coordinator of a host of differing groupings, each partly sustained through modern and cyber communications, some parish based, many transgressing ecclesial boundaries. The pastoral team would then view the parish as a nexus of many networks/groups/communities. Their role is to ensure that none of these groups becomes exclusively inward looking but reaches out to, and learns to appreciate, the others, in particular those with very different approaches. The parish would then be a “meeting point” of multifarious groupings that give shape to the Catholicism of its members in quite different ways.¹⁸ The pastoral team, including its ordained leadership, would have to abandon any sense of organizational control – let alone of a staid Catholic conformity - and rediscover servant-leadership in animating, motivating and energizing Catholics wherever they happen to be.

TOWARDS A RESEARCH AGENDA?

If some of the observations and intuitions outlined in this paper are in any way correct, then there are elements here for a research agenda. We would need to investigate how the complex, ever advancing digital world is altering our feeling of up-rootedness and rootedness in various cultural communities,

¹⁸ I am inspired by the suggestion of Antonio B. de los Reyes that Charismatic movements and Small Church Communities should be brought together to enrich each other, despite their often belonging to different social classes. See, FABC Paper No.92h, a workshop paper of the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, Bangkok 2000.

as well as our changing sense of identity as a minority amidst a Muslim majority. Such a study would help us theologians to locate "ecclesial community" in all its complexity where it is actually experienced today without needing to confine it to the geographical parish or diocese. Such a study should surely impact pastoral courses in seminaries and faculties of theology, and provide us with data to sketch out a contextual theology of the Church.

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THE POSSIBILITY OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND SOCIETY:

A Korean Case Study

Fr. Kim Min-soo

I. Introduction

In recent years religion has been remarkably stood out as social issues in Korea. Protestantism has been embroiled in controversy over mega church phenomena, aggressive missionaries, politicized evangelist fundamentalists, and so on. Buddhism has flourished through temple stay programs and its historic tourism resources as cultural heritage, but is now under religious discrimination by the present government. Catholicism has expanded its congregation very fast before and after the passing away of Cardinal Kim Soo-Hwan in 2009 and marks the first of the three mainline religions in the rate of social credibility, but is more and more becoming conservatism and the middle class

The Korean society has maintained the coexistence of religions for a long time, in spite of the multi-religious one composed of Confucianism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and other national religions. In these days, however, there are unfortunately some inter-religious conflicts and dissensions, resulting in social disintegration. Some of Protestant churches take a hostile and exclusive attitude toward other religions with a superior and one-way mission perspective. Some Protestant churches have involved the conservative element of Protestants and given the impression of selfish interest instead of the common good. Especially, President Lee Myung-bak as an elder of the Somang Church, one of the conservative churches,

has also divided the conservative and progressive elements in Protestantism and brought division between religions and within groups in society, by means of a very noticeable pro-Christian bias in the selection of his cabinet and filling places in government. Lee's attitude toward religious discrimination is accelerating the politicization of Protestantism.

The conflict between the government and religious groups like Buddhism and Catholicism becomes increasingly militant by the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project that President Lee carries forward in a unilateral way. All of the religious groups are very active in keeping from carrying out the project, because it will have to give a rise to huge environmental pollution and ecological destroy. At present, a religious environmental group composed of Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Won Buddhism has launched a campaign against the project.

Another recent example for the opposition between the government and religious groups is Yongsan tragedy led to the deaths of six people, including a police officer. It was caused from the government's crackdown on protestors in their showdown with the police in the redevelopment area in Yongsan, Seoul, on Jan. 2009.

The inability in the public role of religion or the conflict between religion and society brings about social conflict and confusion, with a requirement of religious groups' awareness that civil groups stimulate. Religion plays a positive role of social integration and leads to practice love and justice in the field of politics, economics, and culture through its transcendence and historicity, changing a personal and social life into holiness. It also tries to make an effort to solve

social problems such as life, environment, national reconciliation, and so on, through an inter-religious dialogue and collaboration.

However, the long-life religious authority and status had been in the holy field without any criticism and then had operated as a cause of social division. Now the society that has remained long as the object of religious criticism has occupied its new position in which it rebukes various social evils caused by religion through modern culture and communication. Especially, routinized digital culture carries out the criticism of religion in various and complicated ways. For example, anti-Protestants spread out systematically anti-Protestant movements gathered as a form of civil groups by using anti-Protestant websites.

Many people expect the authentic restoration of religion with a concern about its negative function. How can religion restore its original function? How should be the relationship between religion and society or inter-religious relations? How can communication be understood for religion to play a positive role in society? This article emphasizes the necessity of inter-religious, interactive communication in order that religion, in particular, Christianity can apply to the age of culture and then make a contribution on social integration. Communication makes available for sharing and symbiosis, getting through the blocked and linking the unconnected. This article suggests a new paradigm for mutual understanding and interactivity in terms of the communication between religion and culture. First of all, it redefines the relationship between gospel and culture and proposes a new paradigm of the two, with understanding of this culture age. Then, it introduces concrete cultural practices for the interactive communication between religion and society, and inter-religious communication.

II. The Age of Culture

The past European culture meant a Christian culture. Even until the middle ages, the Christian culture was an everyday lifestyle to govern all of the society. However, the secularization of religion was accelerated, passing through a process of modernization after the enlightenment times. In other words, the modernity produced a secular culture, as an independent other, separated from religion. It was to ensure the autonomy of the secular culture. As a result, the opposition between Christian culture and secular culture took place. In addition, there was little room for the Church in the pluralistic society, and the Christian culture which kept the strong influence to the nation and the whole society was weakened gradually. In other words, the Church lost her unequaled position which mediated a norm and a value to its cultural role.

With rapid growth of the secular culture, modernization represented by industrialization, commercialization, and commodification has given a huge impact on the society. The secular culture, in particular the mass culture has become dominant in everyday life and all of social areas. It has taken the role that the school, home, and the Church have played as an ideological state apparatus from a long time ago. The authority of parents and teachers has been substituted as entertainment stars, idols of the young people. The mass culture has become a storyteller or played a pseudo-religious role in meeting individual and collective demands. Now religion has given its place to the mass culture.

In particular, culture is exchanged in the global scale and plays an important role in formulating and sustaining the capital and the power. It also has been generalized, connecting with all the way of life. This phenomenon has a close

relationship with pluralism and relativism, which have appeared recently. These trends treat an individual with respect, tolerate his/her meaning and difference, and influence consumption and leisure culture to depend on individual freedom and concern. The choice of the individual is operated by universal habitus in the lifeworld and then is deemed to accelerate the secularization of religion. Therefore, Christianity has much more to do with the choice of the individual rather than the public life.

Recently, one of the phenomena presenting the secularization of religion in our society is 'a deregulation of religion.' This one, the decline of religious monopolies, means that religious belief and practice remain strong, but traditional religious authorities and institutions lose their power to influence both society at large and their own believers.¹ The deregulation of religion is strongly caused by consumer culture based on the choice of the individual. For example, believers today are quite comfortable belonging to a church, but prefers their optional attitude toward the ethics of aborted or mercy killing etc. rather than the teachings of the Church. This deregulative phenomenon of religion spreads out rapidly in the society.

Especially, the quick evolution of digital media induces new consumer culture and leisure culture continuously. The interactive and multilayer communication such as the Internet and mobile phone services stresses the individual with global consumption and leisure culture. According to Thomas Freedman, "the power of change in the globalization 1.0 Age was a nation-state and a corporation in the globalization 2.0 Age, but the power and the subject in the globalization 3.0 Age

¹ Miller, Vincent J., *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*, New York: Continuum, 2004, pp. 91-94.

is the individual.” Global consumption, leisure culture and lifestyle, which are reorganized by an individual-oriented way, have a negative as well as a positive impact simultaneously on Christianity and its members’ consciousness and attitude toward community-centered faith.

Christianity takes more advantages of an opportunity to proclaim the gospel and communicate with the world in various ways, due to the globalization of culture. Satellite broadcasting or the Internet covers the everyday life of the pope over the world. The Church induces various ways of faith, applying a digital culture to the mission and pastoral ministry. On the other hand, the globalization of culture “leads Asian societies to secular, materialistic, global consumer culture.” (『Ecclesia in Asia』 No. 7) The globalization of culture brings about ethical and moral problems run counter to Christianity in that consumer culture results in secularism, hedonism, materialism, etc.

Moreover, digital culture changes the nature of the Church in terms of its various characteristics. Even until recently, the perspective of ‘institutional Church or of ‘sacramental Church,’ has been sustained with the one-way and vertical communication between the clergy and the laity. This perspective has structuralized ‘the authoritarianism of the Church’ and ‘the clergy-centrism’ for a long time. However, the emergence of a digital culture, like the Internet characteristic of interactivity, has raised an objection to this traditional status of the Church, and consequently changed from the one-way and authoritarian perspective into the horizontal and interactive one of the Church.

Now that we live in the age of culture, the Church should recognize the importance of culture that can mediate

between religion and society in order that the Church can communicate with the society. If the Church ignores the mediatory culture, she cannot only communicate with the society, but also her culture would remain a ‘fossilized faith’ stuffed in a museum and be valid to only the few. The culture allows the Church to communicate with the society in various ways. Now this article suggests that the relationship between the Church and the society should be based on ‘interactive communication’ as a fundamental principal.

III. The Interactive Communication of Gospel and Culture

1. A Gospel-Culture Paradigm

It has been said that the traditional point of view of Christianity on culture is dominant with a dualism of ‘Gospel versus Culture.’ That is to say, the Church has regarded culture not only a degraded secular but also an object that should be changed by the gospel. In this regard, the relationship between the gospel and culture has been not interactive but hostile or unilateral. However, if the Church exists alone without communicating with culture, she could not practice her mission of evangelization due to her closure against modern society. Therefore, today the Church should redefine the relationship between gospel and culture to communicate with the world.

In fact, it has long been recognized that the culture within which the Gospel is communicated influences how the Gospel takes shape and is understood.² Likewise, the Gospel has given a spiritual and transcendental dimension to culture. Tillich put it this way³: religion, understood as ultimate

² Peter Horsfield, “Teaching theology in a new cultural environment,” *Religion and the Media*, Chris Arthur, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993, p. 41.

³ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 51.

concern, gives substance to culture; it provides culture with its base of fundamental concerns. In short, religion is the substance of culture, and culture is the form of religion. In sum, Gospel and culture are, and must be, inextricably intertwined as they communicate values and world-views.⁴

With the recognition on the indivisible relationship between Gospel and culture, in reality, it is very significant to explore how the Church has responded culture in her history. According to Niebuhr's classic study *Christ and Culture*, the Church has the possibility of five responses to culture, ranging from complete identification with it to absolute withdrawal from it. These five responses are to be represented in the perspective of the Church as a subject. In this perspective, culture remains only an object which is under control by the Church. However, the one-way communication of the Gospel towards culture is not available in the globalization and informatization era. It is necessary that the Church should accept culture as a subject which influences herself, with a two-way communication.

The condition that Gospel and culture can be interactive can be found in Levinas' subject concept.⁵ According to him, if he/she wants to find his/her authentic self, he/she should look at the other's face. He/she can find himself/herself through the other's face. Now, the other becomes a subject, while he/she a object. Just like the other's face, culture as the other becomes a subject, while the Gospel is de-subjectified. However, a prerequisite for this is the respect and consideration for culture. Therefore, the Church can be a subject which has a

⁴ William F. Fore, "The religious relevance of television," *Religion and the Media*, Chris Arthur, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993, p. 56.

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Duquesne University Press, 1985; *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, Duquesne University Press, 1987.

responsibility to transform culture as the other in the light of the Gospel. On the contrary, culture also conducts as a subject that influences to share with and renew the Church. Then, each of church and culture would be richer if the interactive communication between them be possible.

2. Inculturation for the Interactivity of Gospel and Culture

The interactivity of Gospel and culture or church and culture must be what Christianity is. How can the interactive communication between church and culture be possible? A Korean Protestant theologian Chung Sung-ha suggests an inculturation of Christianity to find its cultural elements.⁶ For its inculturation, he tries to make an effort in disorganizing and fragmenting Christianity by means of modern semiotics. According to modern semiotics, a sign as Christianity can be fragmented into a signified as gospel and a signifier as a visible emblem. He also connects to Smith's study of religion. Smith divides religion into faith and accumulative tradition.⁷ This division corresponds to Chung Sung-ha's use of modern semiotics. Faith is accounted a signified, while accumulative tradition can be said as a signifier. With the ideas of both Chung and Smith, Christianity can be segmented as follows:

Christianity = Signified + Signifier = Faith + Accumulative Tradition (Church's Culture)

⁶ Chung Sung-ha, *The Inter-Space and the Mission of Religion and Culture*, Handul Press, 2004, pp. 122-127.

⁷Smith, Wilfred C. *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Augsburg: Fortress Publishers, 1991.

As mentioned above, Christianity can be segmented into faith and culture. From here, the visible area of Christianity can be recognized, through inculturation, as ecclesial culture. This segmentation can be available of encounter and communication between church's culture and other culture, and then can realize inter-inculturation. In terms of inter-inculturation, Christianity transforms secular culture or is influenced by other culture and then both gets through cultural change to reach cultural adaptation.

3. Interactive Communication between Church Culture and Other Culture

As described above, the research on the relationship between Gospel and culture suggests various prerequisites for a communication between church and society. Above all, the Church must accept a gospel-culture paradigm with interactive communication. The Gospel transforms culture, while culture influences the Gospel. For this paradigm, secondly, the Church must be aware of herself as an object as well as a subject. She, a subject, can take an initiative towards the other culture as an object. Likewise, the other culture as a subject can influence the Church as an object. Thirdly, however, the interactive communication between Gospel and culture can be implemented by the inter-inculturation process in which both of church culture and other culture are changeable each other. Therefore, this research asserts 'the interactive gospel-culture paradigm' as a theoretical framework for communicating between church and society or inter-religious dialogue.

IV. Concrete Practices for the Interactivity between Church and Culture

1. A dialogue with Mass Culture

The Church tends to be frequently threatened by mass culture such as 'The Da Vinci Code' (2006) and 'Avata' (2009), and so on. However, she should take a good opportunity to reflect and renew herself, going through such a negative impact. She The ongoing process into (religious) pluralist society a challenge to the Church this phenomenon. Culture now becomes free from an object that the Church must evangelize and hen as a subject it reversely presses on the Church. On one hand, secular culture, like consumer culture or leisure culture, presents pseudo-religious characteristics and spreads skillfully new spiritual movements, such as live spirit training, yoga, meditation spiritualism, mediumism, channeling, and so on, with the appearance of health, culture, or the arts. Therefore, the Church should practice the evangelization of culture to renew herself as mature one as well as self evangelization through interactive communication rather than a radical exclusivist attitude

2. The Participation in the Society

The Korean society has rapidly developed the public space of civil society owing to the realization of formal democracy and economic growth in the late 1980. In addition, the various social movements such as environment, green, life, women, alternative education, alternative community and local autonomy have been followed up in the 1990s. Especially, these social movements have had a tendency to implement a cultural access to politics and economics with forming cultural value and status tacitly or to regard culture itself an active pattern which enhances the quality of life.⁸

⁸ Shim, Kwang-Hyu, "Neoliberalism and the Crisis of Civil Society: The Emergence of Cultural Public Space" *The 21C Korean Society and the Prosepect of building the Public Space*, Cultural Science Publishing, Guellila series, no. 13, 1998, p. 80.

With the realization of democratization, the Korean Catholic Church has participated in various newly emergent social movements, simultaneously holding out a trend toward conservatism and the middle class after 1990s. The Church has had a great impact on public issues such as life, human rights, environment, welfare and the reunification of North and South, etc, banding with government authorities or NGOs. In this regard, her role in the society disproves 'the theory of secularization' that has predicted the decline of the public and social influence. In other words, the phenomenon of de-secularization stresses the public role of religion in the society.⁹ The rapid increase of religious articles in Korean journalism proves the importance and status of religion in the society. The Korean Catholic Church uses various, old and new media to implement the evangelization of the society. For example, the Life Committee of Seoul Archdiocese has held public contests for a good quality of UCC(user created contents) on life respect. This UCC usage for Life movements leads participation and sharing of its content in two-way communication between church and society.

In a de-secularization society, religion, in particular, the Catholic Church has been changed into 'open church.' For example, many parishes trend to open their facilities and places to use for all of local residents regardless of religion. They provide welfare spaces appropriate for local status like children and elder people care center, organic food store, recycling store, etc. Here, parish spaces are a set of instruments to communicate local residents. They play an important role in the interactive communication between church and local

society. Therefore, "the opening of parish facility is the best way to recognize the fact that the Church is the reality living together with local residents."¹⁰

3. Inter-religious Dialogue

Korea has sustained a plural religious society for a long time. There coexist national religions like Cheondo-kyo and Won Buddhism as well as three major religions as Buddhism, Protestantism and Catholicism. However, the inter-religious tension and conflict are always inherent, and some of Christian fundamentalist propensities have expressed vandalism or an exclusivist attitude toward other religions.

In the recent years, the inter-religious dialogue and collaboration has been promoted in overcoming various socio-structural problems in the political, economic, or cultural area. Network Movement for Life and Peace open to those who want to participate in regardless of religion; Religious Environmental Conference composed of four religions, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Won Buddhism; Sam-sowhoe in which Buddhist nuns, Catholic and Anglican nuns, Won Buddhist nuns, and Protestant female religious make a pray; ect.

V. Conclusion

The interactive communication between church and society or church and culture is the necessity for mutual evangelization. The Church should acknowledge the other culture and make a dialogue with it, and look at herself. However, in reality, to what degree will the Church opens herself and communicates with culture as the other?

⁹ According to the analysis of religious articles on Korean major newspapers by the Korean Protestant Church Press Association, 2007's religious articles have been much more increased compared to 2004's.

¹⁰ Catholic Social Welfare Department of Seoul Archdiocese, *A Guide for Social Welfare Work*, 2000, p. 40.

The Church should learn how to communicate with the world (and neighbors). To do so, it is necessary for her to accept and practice a culture of dialogue. The understanding of such a culture can be available through Miklos Tomka's questions asking the churches in Eastern Europe: "whether she can summon up the courage and strength for a dialogue with the world or whether she will persist in a monologue. Will they understand the worldliness of the world as a gift of God? Will they accept the minority situation of believers as an opportunity and a task? Will they be able to affirm the plurality, the provisional character, the modernity of our world and accept it as a sphere for realizing the kingdom of God?"¹¹

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¹¹ Coleman J-Tomka M., (ed). *Concilium*, 1996 London: SCM Press, p. 52.