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The Priest and Communications

Jacob Srampickal, S.J.

Director, Communications Studies,
Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

Email: srampickal@unigre.it

Abstract: The need for priests to understand and use media and communications effectively, and to embody the message of the Gospel, is brought home powerfully, for the purpose of building up the community. The framing of a new ecclesiology, and spirituality from media are proposed. Several important aspects of media are highlighted. Practical suggestions with illustrative examples are provided.

Keywords: Media, communications, priest, ecclesiology, spirituality, message, audio-visual.

Traditionally, priests tend to associate communications with the images of media, technology, violence, manipulation, pornography, mobiles and cyber communications, etc. There are priests, even theologians and church leaders, who believe that communication and media are secular subjects, that have nothing to do with the church. Naturally, they give no serious attention to communications. Also in the church there has been a trend of extreme moralism that focused on the bad effects of media, starting from the days of Luther who used the nascent print medium to propagate his thoughts about the decadent church of his times. In the process, the church thwarted the entire good that communications could do. It was like ‘throwing the baby with the bath water’. Living in a media-saturated world, a priest simply cannot say that he is not interested in media, or that he does not care about

these, because the people with whom and for whom he works are much influenced and even led by the media. He also, whether aware or not, is "like fish in the media waters". The life style of pastors, priests and religious speaks loudly about the media influence on their own lives and this realization should make a priest a keen learner of the media messages, so that he can critically sift between the good and the bad, the better and the best and help his people to do the same.

Today, in fact, a priest needs to be more interested in communication, and media must be understood as much more than a mere help to better one's communication. Normally, we use the word 'communications' in plural to include both communication and media.

What kind of communications is needed for a priest?

Priests need to have a clear knowledge of both communication and media. He must become a **communicative person**, and, secondly, he must be **at home with the media culture** which in fact is the very identity of today's generation.

A **communicative person** is someone who has the capacity to build a community, through communion, which is what communication tries to do. For this, firstly, he has to listen and be open to the opinions of others. This leads to dialogue, debates, further clarifications and an understanding of both sides of the issues and this he is able to reach consensus or communion. He allows others to become fully involved in management, and functions as a team person who can receive what the people can offer, to make the institution in which they work to perform better. A communicative person is one who strongly believes in delegating to, and empowering his

subordinates. Clearly, in priestly ministries today, these are important requisites as these are important leadership skills. Like Jesus, a priest is one who is true to his word, and like Jesus he must become both the medium and the message. A person who is communicative also has excellent counselling skills, an extra ability to understand people, and to reach out to help others. Above all, he is a person of compassion, one who feels with the suffering and the marginalized, and who seeks for ways to improve those sufferers' situations.

A. Communication and the priest

Let us look at the power of good communication in a priest's life. The basic purpose of communication is to create unity, harmony, communion and mutual understanding among persons. We accept that the Church is commissioned to create communities of love according to the vision of Jesus. This should convince a Christian as to why communication is so very basic to the Church. The Church simply cannot be true to her mission without proper communication. The Church, in fact, exists only to communicate the vision of Jesus. If she does not do so, she will be betraying her Master. The problem actually is that a lot of people in the Church try to get on with media and technologies without understanding this reality. Hence, an instrumental concept of using media takes the upper hand. In fact all media usage must be directed at building communication.

Communication is a basic need of life. In a social structure one cannot move forward, relate and become oneself without genuine communication. Communication is a basic human skill that can be developed. This is all the more important for priests with a commitment of service to the people as they are supposed to communicate life and

love, hope and freedom, harmony and reconciliation – the Kingdom values and thus to foster communities of love. In that context we can say that the quality of a Christian community is to be measured not in terms of the number of associations, programmes, conventions, etc., but in terms of the unity and mutual care in the community. The communication of Jesus, whether verbal or non-verbal was always pointed to relate to people and to help people relate to each other and to God.

The quality of leadership in any community depends on the quality of communication practiced and fostered by its leaders. If one were to think of a legalistic community then the style of communication is that of dictating rules and demanding observances. But if the community has a vision of communion then the picture changes. The leadership in this community communicates to animate, to motivate, to encourage and to unite, and the characteristic atmosphere is one of freedom and responsibility. In the Indian situation, most priests and religious have leadership roles – small or big – in the Christian community. Hence learning to communicate effectively is a must for all leaders, since their role is to do with building relatedness in the community.

a. Witnessing as a communicative value

In the audiovisual world that we live in today, visuals are more important than audio. Naturally, people expect to *see* how a leader perform. People need role models to imitate. Clearly the youngsters' craze for role models, and the academic quest for good examples to explain theories point to the need for witnessing. Pope John Paul II said it in very brief words, "The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission." (*Redemptoris Missio*, 42).

According to Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase, "medium is the message", the content of a message is conveyed more through the way it is communicated rather than by the message itself. Hence, attractive packaging is crucial for the sale of products. In the Christian context, it simply points to the witnessing aspect of one's life. "Seeing is believing". This is the first criterion for good faith communication. Do the people see Christians as loving, caring, peace-loving, peace-promoting, forgiving, prayerful persons, and not just hear them teaching about these aspects. A familiar saying goes, 'What you are, sounds so loud that I can't hear what you say'. Another explanation of 'medium is the message' is, medium and the message must be same; i.e. there should be no disparity or contradiction between what one says and does. That is why *Communio et Progressio* called Jesus the "perfect and model communicator"(11). Although He was an apparent failure in the judgement of the world, He lived his message to the fullest. This is the clearest example of witnessing – someone whose words and actions tally, someone who lives what he preaches. Gandhi, too said it clearly quoting Jesus, '*My life is my message*'.

Jesus' words and presence equally challenged both the good and the not-so-good, and each responded to that challenge in their own way. It points to the fact that leaders who take a stand, who hold on to the Kingdom values will have to go through unpleasant experiences even to the point of misunderstanding, suffering and rejection. Learning to disagree in an agreeable way, with nobility and with compassion reveals one's strength of character. One who tries to please everyone can end up in a mess, pleasing no one at the end. Every follower admires a leader who takes a stand, who can look beyond self to the mission. That is why Jesus' hearers told him, "Master

you teach us with authority unlike the scribes and Pharisees” (Mt. 7:29).

A good communicator is one who is able to strike a wavelength with the one communicated to. What else is incarnation than God coming to the wavelength and nature of human beings? As a result, the one who is communicated to understands and responds to the communicator, in such a way that effects a change in him. There are many aspects that make communication effective. The language, the expressions, the imagery, the knowledge one has on the subject, etc., but the most important is the quality of embodying the message. This is all the more essential in the case of communicating faith. Commitment calls for conviction and only authentic persons can convince. This is well expressed in the saying: “The only Bible that I have today is you”.

There is an ancient story attributed to Ramkrishna Paramhansa. Lots of people used to flock to this noble sage for advice and direction. Once a woman came to him with a six-year-old daughter, travelling two hours from a village outside Calcutta. She stood in the long queue and when her turn came she told the sage, “My daughter has a problem. She always asks for *rosgollas*. I can neither afford to buy these sweets whenever she asks, nor do I think these are good for health. Can you advice her to stop this bad habit?” The sage looked at the woman, then at the child. Then he quietly said, “Can you come next week?” The woman came exactly a week after. The same process was repeated and each time the guru told her to come next time. This went on for almost three months. At the end of the third month the guru told the girl, “Look here, you should stop eating too many *rosgollas*, it is not good for your health. Besides, your mother can’t afford to buy them

daily for you. Go home and obey your mother” But the mother was not so pleased. “Is that all you want to tell my daughter?”, she asked. “Yes”, the guru said humbly. “You could have said this the first time I came here,” argued the mother. “I couldn’t have said it that time,” said the guru with a humbler smile, “That time, I myself used to eat a lot of *rosgollas*. How could I then give such an advice to this innocent girl? In the last three months I tried to wean myself out of that habit. Hence I can give her this piece of advice!”

Faith educators can get a very important message from this story. More than all the methods and skills of teaching they master, the quality of their life matters. Can they boldly say, “My life is my message”, “Go and tell them what you see me doing”, or “Come and see” like Jesus.

All this points to the fact that a priest as a faith educator is a special person, with a unique call, and integrity must be an essential trait in him. This is because faith education has to do with taming the heart and not just reading out from some catechism books. Faith educators are called to introduce their learners to respond to God’s grace and to establish a personal relationship with him. One reason for so many “faith-less” Christians today may be due to the routine learning of precepts than coming in contact with persons of faith and commitment – right role models of faith.

b. The Homilies

A homily is a privileged exercise for the priest to communicate effectively with the people. Whatever be the length of the homily it must be interesting and inspiring and based on the gospel reading of the day. More than stories or quotes from various sources, what must be stressed is the personal experiences of the priest in trying

to live the faith based on the reading. More than rhetoric and theatrics, what is need most is sincerity and depth of scholarship which many educated people seek from a priest.

The man, the whole man, lies behind a sermon. Preaching is not the performance of an hour. It is the outflow of a life. Good preaching or teaching is not basically a matter of mastering certain techniques. It is, above all, a matter of being mastered by the Master and his convictions. Christianity is a religion of the heart. There are many references to the heart in the New Testament – the purity of heart, sincerity of heart, believing from the heart, heart as the seat of good and bad, etc. The Old Testament also has similar references while narrating the God-man relationship. Unfortunately the overemphasis on theology has led to a situation where faith is reduced to the affirmation of formulas and definitions -- literary gymnastics – while Jesus was very clear and audio-visual in His communication. Our catechesis even today remains much on the head level and refuses to come down to the heart level. Somehow the fear of emotions in matters of faith seems to grip our faith educators. And yet, faith has a lot to do with the heart. Remember Mary Magdalene calling out '*Rabboni*'? Was it an intellectual exercise or a loving response to a love experience?

One cannot really say what kind of a homily must be given. It is an audience-specific issue as in any communication. I am reminded of a theology professor who was keen to get experiences from grass-root bases for his teaching and so would be in parishes on and off to celebrate Sunday mass. Once while he was at a parish, there were just a couple of people only, as most had gone

away for a shrine feast. He approached one of the parishioners, a farmer, and inquired, "I have prepared a 20 minute homily, do you think I must deliver that for just the four of you?" The farmer replied, "Well Father, if you ask me, when I approach my cattle shed with food, even if only two come to be fed, I don't leave them hungry". The priest then delivered the homily. At the end of the Mass he asked the same farmer, "What did you think about the homily?" He said, "Father, when I go to feed my cattle, if only two come, I don't feed them with the entire food I brought for the forty".

c. The use of Group media

In whatever activity the priest may be involved in, the people may be sub-divided into groups, so that everybody has an opportunity to work and contribute in a very carefully planned manner. Here the group media process can be at work wherein the people share openly, everyone listens, questions, challenges, debates, deepens and decides together, and thus their sense of belongingness to the group and responsibility to the work increase. The varied group activities go on to focus more on individual growth for community development.

The priest can also encourage sports and arts clubs activities like tournaments and competitions not simply to encourage talents, but to help the people share, interchange and work together among themselves and thus foster leadership qualities among the people. In such activities even people of other religions too may be included, thus helping the people live in religious harmony.

Community building, inter-relatedness, group animation, decentralization, sharing, etc., are the many

expressions of such a vision. In fact, the philosophy of group media is one of total participation by all the members of a group. In this process, a priest has to be a good communicator – good at listening carefully (not only to what is said, but also to what is not said) and good at responding rightly. Hence he needs to learn to hold interactive sessions in groups. Since the aim of Christian communication is fostering relationships and forming communities, group interactions are very useful and are a major tool in faith education.

d. Framing a new ecclesiology

Moving on from the above and focusing more on the very communicative nature of the priest, we can talk of a new ecclesiology. The capacity to be a sociable person, easily accessible and available to the people can add much to the communicative strength of a priest. This leads to a more human ability to relate with the public in general, especially with persons of other Christian denominations and faiths. Developing such an ecumenical and inter-religious amity and sharing is important in the life of a priest.

Our mental images and concepts, about the Church and about people, are reflected in our relationships. It goes without saying that a priest needs to come a long way from the hierarchical model of the Church. Imbibing the spirit of Vatican II and post-Vatican documents, he needs to change his mindset and learn to see the Church more as a community (Body of Christ which has many members), modelled after the first Christian communities and Jesus' own community. It is here that communication plays a vital role, since the Word of God becomes the convening force of the community and the Bread of Life, the

nourishing and unifying power. Emerging from the above fact is the whole concept of developing a participatory church. Community building, inter-relatedness, group animation, decentralization, sharing, etc., are the many expressions of such a vision. In fact, the idea of group media, as explained above, is basically one of making everyone feel part of, and hence responsible for decision-making. Hardly anyone would give whole-hearted collaboration to a project or decision in which one was not part of, from the beginning. A priest needs to need to learn the art of involving others who are part of the mission/project, in major decisions in their area of service. In this process, he has to be a good communicator – good at listening and responding to every issue raised. This is necessary unless the leader be carried away by the ‘powerful’ of the group, who may have personal agendas, or may get confused and lost amidst different ideas. It is easy to be rulers in an autocracy but so very difficult to be animators in a democracy. Hence, there is the need to learn the art of communication. Obviously this is a major challenge to a priest who may be tempted to a ‘one-man-show’. A priest may assert that the Church is not a democracy. True, but he still cannot deny that it is a community – and that is something more than democracy!

Hence a priest needs also to be sufficiently sociable, warm, caring and welcoming. He has to be genuinely interested in people, selfless, eager to capture every opportunity to share the Father’s love. A genuine smile and a pleasant look can be an asset to help people feel at ease with him as these render him approachable. This has nothing to do with looking pious and sanctimonious. People are too sharp today (media-influenced people) to pick up messages and to sense the sincerity and simplicity

of committed persons. True virtue has to be carefully cultivated, and has nothing to do with 'being nice' as with some receptionists in the corporate sector, who can easily put on a 'plastic' smile.

e. Spirituality from communication

The priest must also be a paragon of **communicative virtues**, like listening, having the capacity to confront difficult situations, forgive and forget the evil done, and be eternally patient.

Spiritual leadership has to rise above religiosity to genuine spirituality. A priest's relationship with God has to go beyond rituals and practices, to a deeper experience and search for God. He has to develop the capacity to "encounter God" in all of life's expressions - people, things, events, environment. The measure of true spirituality in a priest is his quality as a 'medium' of Christ. The communication deficits among Christian leadership can to a great extent be solved through proper formation in seminaries and formation houses, although real formation has to take place through each developmental stage of a person from childhood onwards. We also need to address the issue: are we recruiting vocations or job seekers in our seminaries/religious houses? In the corporate world one has to prove his/her mettle for any profession one seeks. Shouldn't that be so for the profession of witnessing Christ and leading his people, too? It is good to remember, "Quality is inversely proportional to quantity". Are we gradually entering a period in the Indian Church history where leadership is up for grabs, as there is no quantity to choose from, and so quality is terribly at stake? In such a situation, formation needs to be more sharply focused.

Taking on from the Trinitarian concept of the Father,

Son and the Spirit in perfect communion, a priest needs to learn to live closely with his companion priests and his co-workers, as someone who embodies God's love and shares this with others. The daily celebration of the Eucharist needs to become the central element of his life wherein he finds the example of Jesus, who through his total self-giving invites him daily to perfect communication i.e., his own total self-giving for his mission. And when it comes to speak up or act, he must always remember that he has to communicate Jesus' love, seeing everything through the eyes of Jesus and acting as per the vision of Jesus. **"What would Jesus do in such a situation?"** needs to be his spring board.

g. Theologising

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a priest must have the capacity to link his theological scholarship with the reality he and the people live with. If not, his theology is purely cerebral, not related to life and good for nothing. This is why communicators who are concerned with Church renewal, constantly insist on theologizing and ask that theology be made more contextual. A theologian needs to definitely connect whatever is happening around him with his faith understanding. This element of 'connect' has to do with communication. It has been said that contextual theology means making faith relevant to one's life situations. In any situation, a priest needs to relate the Christian faith to the living experiences of the people with whom he works. Naturally the problems of the people need to be reflected, and 'what does my faith say to these problems?' must be the concern of real active theology. In other words the priest must be able evoke a constant dialogue with the theology or God talk and the current problems of the people. This means that in each

place a different kind of understanding of God may emerge as per the situation. We can take the Christian God in general, to be a kind, compassionate and loving God. But this same God can be interpreted differently in different contexts. For example, in a situation of injustices where the rich Catholics oppress and ignore the poor, and the rift between the poor and the rich continues to grow wider, the priest may interpret Jesus as a liberator, i.e. as one who can alleviate the pains of the poor and establish justice.

Every human being, despite culture, religion or any other societal bindings longs for and seeks after love, belongingness, happiness and friendship. Christianity is all this. This is what Jesus communicated at every occasion, “I have loved you with an everlasting love”, “I am with you always”, “You are all brothers and you have one Father – God”, “I give my life that you may have life, and have it in abundance” and many more such tender expressions of love. The Church, as the prolongation of the historical Jesus and endowed with his mission, and the priest as his representative, has these beautiful and sought-after messages to communicate to all races and nations. One may see the contradiction in the state of affairs when we see modern men and women turning away from the Church in boredom and seeking love and belongingness elsewhere. Why does this happen? Those who represent Christ and His Church today have to become relevant messengers (credibility and openness to the signs of the times) and appealing medium (witness of life) to be able to communicate the love of God to his people. The package of the Church’s message is so often very unattractive that the content is also shed of its simplicity with too much theology and dogma. This indeed is a matter of concern to

her, as her basic concern has to be people, as it was for Jesus.

B. Being at home with media

Before we talk of how the media can be of any use to the priest, let me outline the power of the media today.

Media power today

Today, as already noted, we live in the media age. Sociologically, it is not that media influence our culture, media IS our culture. Media serve several functions in society. Theoreticians say the primary function is agenda setting, i.e. media tend to tell us what are the most important matters to think and worry about each day. When they say ‘top stories of the day’, or ‘headlines today’ they are underlining what matters, and we think these alone are the matters that need to be cared for. The second function of media is creating public opinion. Any opinion on public matters emerges from what we have read, seen or heard on the media. Through very subtle editorials, articles, features, etc., they supply us opinions on issues that matter, which we tend to share with others. Again, we always depend on the media for information. Human nature, inclined as it is for gossip and instantaneous information, is taken for a ride by the media. Often we tend to gather too much useless information on celebrities of sports, fashion and media. For some the share market has become serious business. Unfortunately we have hardly any interest in more serious issues like global warming, nuclear warfare, political maneuverings, etc. At another level, one cannot deny the importance of ‘made up’ entertainment that the media provide through comedy, suspense, music, drama, dance and other aesthetic considerations. In a world where people are over-

worked these forms of entertainment help to “re-create” and “revitalize” our lives.

Media play a major role in education, not just academic education, but also education for life, gently advising us through inspiring stories of great values, courage, fortitude, etc. In fact one needs to be aware of the kind of values that media dole out, as some of these can be negative.

Media also play major roles in propaganda, proclaiming certain ideologies. The very concept of consumerism, materialism and capitalism are the basic ideas global media continuously proclaim. It is in this context that media get the perfect ally, the commercial sector as it is only through their wheels – publicity – that the media can ever hope to run. We must also realize that if some people take a fancy for a certain type of films or serials, those do answer certain psychological needs of those people, even clarifying and asserting their very own identities. Women taking to a certain type of characters in serials, or youth worshipping certain types of invincible heroes, are clear examples.

Quite a number of faith educators do not have a sense of contemporary audio-visual culture and so fail to understand their students, who form their identities, absorb their values, and find their role models from the mass media. They are to be helped to guard themselves from the cultural deviations of modern society – who mistake 'doing one's own thing' as freedom, who take relationships casually and get into trouble, who fail to respect men and women as persons, and who believe that to have more, is merrier.

The priest and the media

I see the following potential interactions between the priest and the media.

1. Relevant Message

The priest must have the capacity to make the Christian message relevant in today's mediated society. *Redemptoris Missio* said it clearly, "Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the *new culture* created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the *new culture* originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology. Pope Paul VI said "the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time,"(62) and the field of communications fully confirms this judgment." (RM. 37c). Often priests fail to 'connect' with today's generation. Clearly, priests have to develop the ability to inculturate the Gospel to these new cultures, constantly shaped and reshaped by the influx of media.

Church communications is at times like answering questions which have not been asked, ignoring questions that have been asked, and answering them in a language that is not understood, answering them in places where nobody is listening, and avoiding the marketplaces where people are sure to listen. And what is worse, by the time the Church finds the answers to the questions asked, the

questions may have already changed. Today when a lot of youngsters hardly ever come to churches but are often navigating on social networking sites like Facebook, Open space, Twitter, Orkut, Flixter, etc., the priest could surely be there answering the kind of queries the youth normally tend to ask about religion, spirituality, death, life immortal, values, etc.

2. The Audio-visual, a Sensorial Language

In faith communication, the importance of visuals, symbols, signs, sounds, etc., cannot be overstressed. The teachers of the past used to take the trouble of showing pictures, using signs, telling stories, etc., to communicate with children. Today, these pictures and stories are put away as irrelevant (many of them are). The gap is not filled with new symbols, new stories, new signs. In this process of updating, the modern media can be a great example in the way they use stories, images, signs, symbols, colours and sound bytes.

In all media, the sensorial element is very vital. Modern media thrive on using the five senses, especially the audio-visual senses to communicate powerfully. We are no more 'argued' in but 'allured' or 'drawn' in to their messages. They succeed in captivating every age group, very specially the youngsters, by catering to their wavelength, vibes, tastes, senses, and emotional urges.

The ambience of pilgrim centres, venues of music programmes, ballrooms, etc., have that look and feel which give us a thrill. We become part of the show, charged by the sensorial impact created also by the ambience. The faith educator thus cannot forget to create an ambience of faith experience, whether in the class or at worship, allowing the involvement of the various senses

(Jesus touched the blind man's eye with mud), of participation (bring the five loaves and two fish), of feeling the presence (the *Rabboni* experience of Mary Magdalene), of happy fellowship ('it is nice to be here', 'come apart a while and rest', 'take some fish and eat'). A close look at the Gospels will give us so many examples of faith experience. One can see how the meal together has become a great symbol in Christian fellowship.

Pierre Babin, a noted faith educator, who channeled the power of media for faith experience, was thoroughly 'converted' after he met McLuhan and understood the full implications of his saying, 'medium is the message'. Babin suggests the symbolic way and the way of beauty for effective faith education today. He says we have passed from the Guttenberg age to the electronic age of audio-visual images.

Understanding of media language should motivate the faith educator to use all kinds of audio-visual aids, including charts, graphs, puppets, pictures, posters, role plays, films, videos, cyber-texts, etc., to give an experience of faith.

3. Story Telling

We all know that Grandma's enchanting stories had their thrill. These stories narrated at leisure, generation after generation embodied the cherished values of each society. Today media have become the greatest storytellers, the TV almost pushing out the grandma from her honoured seat in the family.

Children by nature are very fond of stories. In faith-education story-telling has great value. Jesus was a great storyteller. In fact, we call his life itself the "story of Jesus". God's story of love is called the Salvation History.

We celebrate the greatest episodes of Jesus' story during the Paschal season. Stories provide us characters to identify with, to emulate or to dislike, they provide us crises to be resolved and peace to be established, they ignite our imagination and get us involved, they provide us an opportunity to look at reality from far, outside of us so that we can learn from other people's experiences. That is why stories are always popular and powerful. What kinds of stories do our children hear today? Faith educators have to be good storytellers. The heroes and heroines of the salvation story have to be etched in the heart of our learners. Faith educators need to adapt the stories of faith to the times and tastes of their learners, without missing the basic messages.

. Role-plays, skits, dances, audio-visual stories, etc., can be put to great use by the educator. In some areas there is a specific story telling culture like *yakshagana*, *kathaprasangam*, *chavittunatakam*, *nautanki*, *tamasha*, or other forms of dance dramas, ballet, etc. What is important is that faith educators choose the type of storytelling that would fit in with the message to be communicated. They must familiarize themselves with the cultural expressions of the people in their locality so that they also can communicate Christian values successfully through such cultural, artistic forms.

4. Media Analytical skills

The priest must be a media educated person, i.e. becoming a discerning viewer and developing the capacity to help others to become discerning viewers. Normally priests, like other mortal human beings, tend to take the media for pure entertainment, without a critical attitude. At a time when Catholic media worldwide have lost

credibility due to their self-righteous attitudes and self-proclaimed guardians-of-morality syndrome, and Protestant and Jewish media rule the roost, popular views in the international media need not be taken at face value. The alertness to ask “who says these?”, and “why?” must come before accepting any opinion at face value. No Christian leader would feel scandalized to realize that values of the present generation are shaped more by media than by the traditional bastions like parents, teachers and religion. By the time a child is two years old it starts picking up values from the media – cartoons, comic books, sounds, visuals, films, etc. So contemporary leaders, even if they are not media educators per se, should at least be able to demystify the media for the people they serve. That is why, in 'Ratio Fundamentalism Institutionis Sacerdotalis' (1970), Pope Paul VI had advised that all those preparing to be priests and religious go through sound training in the understanding of the media. (RFIS, 4). The priest must be capable of making nuanced criticism of media productions and discern how these influence Christian values. Often media project values contrary to the gospel. He must be able to underline how some of the popular media that the people devour without questioning carry subtle anti-Christian messages. William Fore of the National Council of Churches of Christ points out that the mythic worldview of television programmes contradicts the Gospel on at least four counts: that the fittest survive, that power and decision-making start at the centre and move forward, that happiness consists of limitless material acquisition, and that progress is an inherent good.(4) Whatever *aggiornamento* the Church may be involved in, these values need to be countered. Today, the Catholic Church professes values that are often negated by the secular world. Pro-life issues, gay and

lesbian living, live-ins, cloning, etc. are some such examples. A total defiance of secular ways can make the church a *ghetto*, leading to what is happening now, i.e. having a large number of believers but not practitioners. Accepting secular ways blindly can make the Church lose its real identity. Hence a more acceptable response to the world could be that of a controlled, well thought out and limited accommodation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a kind of *aggiramento* to which John XXIII alluded to at the Second Vatican Council. Many modern Catholics clamour for more freedom, wanting to do things their way. Many go against morals and the teachings of the Church. They assert, why does the Church want to protect us? The country protects us, and if we do anything wrong, the country will punish us. We have only one life and we want to enjoy it thoroughly. Window shopping, watching sports, enjoying food and drink, and other forms of media generated entertainment have replaced their interest for religion and morals. The Church however, believes in eternal life and she wants her people to do good and not just keep away from evil. Unfortunately, even some good Catholics think of God and religion only when they are in trouble or are close to death (following the example of the thief on the right side of Jesus on the cross!). These are clearly signs of an uncontrolled media influence.

5. Creativity encourages everyone

The modern generation, especially the youth, is used to newer and innovative ways, all introduced to them by the creative geniuses working in media. Hence, to make themselves appealing, faith educators need to be constantly creative and inventive. The Word of God is living and active and it has to be transmitted as such. The

art of presenting the same message in umpteen ways without losing the punch is very much the art of media. In fact, the popularity of media today arises from their creativity in appealing to the 'tastes' of their diverse audience. This should make our leaders realize the need to be creative and inventive. They can learn from the language of the media – sensorial, capturing, full of images appealing to the senses, especially the audio-visual senses. This learning can help them to make their communication more audio-visual, symbolically rich, interesting and experiential. This has to be the case also with regard to liturgical celebrations and spiritual exercises. We are all familiar with the fact that people today flock to centres of popular religion where sensorial experiences are provided. The fact the while traditional centres of worship have failed to attract audiences, popular religious centres like shrines, retreat centres, pilgrim centres, sanctuaries, group encounters, etc., have thrived, shows that these have many elements of creative elements in them to capture the audiences.

6. Learning from the media

The media is a source of information on various issues – political, social, economic, spiritual, psychological, etc. It is important that leaders are well read and sufficiently knowledgeable on current issues. They should be interested in all the areas the people are interested in, and must be able to give calculated and well-thought out comments on these. Leaders who are able to communicate at the wavelength of their people find it easier to get their co-operation. This does not mean that one should waste time in front of the 'story box' – the TV, or the computer screen – neglecting one's duties and responsibilities, or take pride in being a cricket fan, serial fan, movie fan.

Disciplined viewing is the key to profitable viewing. This has to be emphasized in priestly/religious formation and leadership training.

7. Using the media

The priest needs to have the capacity to effectively use the media to voice the Church's concerns and the values of Jesus Christ, when an occasion arises. Often secular media have productions with very notable Christian values. He could use these as part of catechesis as well as in homilies, making the people realize that popular media still uphold Christian values. He must also be alert to use as much media productions as possible in his teachings, prayer sessions, discourses, etc.

8. Being on the media

The priest must also have the capacity to be on the media and speak to them authoritatively when necessary. Often good public relations with the local media help him reach out to the media when an occasion arises, and he must know how to speak to the media in an effective manner. Public Relations refer also to the priests' specific capability to relate with the media around him. This capacity is always an asset in good and bad times. This friendliness and rapport can not only help the priest exchange ideas, learn and collaborate with each other, but also project a meaningful image of the mission of the Church among the public. Often it is seen that when a tragedy or a disaster strikes, that the priest runs around to find media persons and do some disaster management. It is good for priests to remember that he leaves an impression, good or bad, on all whom he meets by virtue of his position. He may forget the many faces he sees, but not vice versa.

Suggestions

To conclude let me also suggest a few simple ways that a priest needs to learn from the media:

1. All teaching and preaching activities must be interesting, involving and entertaining. Make these as audio visual as possible. To bore people is a cardinal sin today!
2. One needs to be sharp and clear in whatever one wants to say. Media call for this cryptic style of expression.
3. Build the ability to say what one needs to say, in minimum words. In the media, space and time cost much, and expressions are limited to minimum visuals and words. The media-influenced people of today are used to this type of expressions.
4. Finally, most priests are technology savvy and such knowledge is of great help today in every situation.

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