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The cartoons on pages 5, 11 and 31 are by Canadian artist and minister Bob Haverluck and were especially commissioned for Media Development.
EDITORIAL

In 2005 the World Council of Churches organized a conference called ‘Critical Moment in Interreligious Relations and Dialogue’. It encouraged reflection on the meaning of dialogue and promoted critical thinking about future directions.

At the conference, Catholicos Aram I identified the essential characteristics of what he described as ‘credible dialogue’. In order to help religions take a coherent and holistic approach to crucial issues in the life of societies, he proposed:

- That the integrity and distinctiveness of each religion can be affirmed and respected by deepening knowledge of each other through interreligious dialogue.
- That interreligious dialogue should be guided by a broad vision of cooperation, while clearly spelling out existing differences.
- If dialogue is to be credible, its risks and limitations must be recognized.
- If the aim is a convergence of opinion based on an exchange of perspectives and experiences, the agenda for dialogue should take into account the circumstances in which it takes place.
- In dialogue people should not only talk to each other, they should listen to each other in a spirit of sharing a common humanity.
- Credible dialogue shapes and reshapes people’s attitudes towards the other and enriches their identity in relation, not in opposition, to the other.
- Credible dialogue does not question the claims of other religions, nor does it seek compromise. It enhances the common search for truth through awareness-building and education.¹

Such precepts echo calls within the communication rights movement for interactive and participatory processes that regenerate and revitalize the basic meaning of ‘to communicate’, understood as sharing information and knowledge, genuine conversation, and creating community in solidarity.

In 1986 the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) elaborated its Christian Principles of Communication. They evolved out of an increasing realization that, while communication is the oxygen of human interaction, the way people communicate – their reasons for communicating – their reasons for communicating – should be subject to an ethic of reciprocity.

In communication terms, the Principles anticipated the 1993 Declaration of the Parliament of the World’s Religions ‘Towards a Global Ethic’, which called for a commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life; a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; and a culture of equal rights and partnership between women and men.

There are five Christian Principles of Communication, but two seem to have particular relevance when it comes to communication for ecumenism and the need to affirm the dignity and integrity of people everywhere.

Communication creates community. Genuine communication can strengthen a sense of belonging and rekindle community spirit, because the model for such communication is participatory and inclusive, rather than one-way and exclusive. For today’s pluralistic and multicultural societies to coexist peacefully, a genuine community of peoples and nations, including their different faith-based traditions and religions, will have to emerge.

Communication is prophetic. Prophetic communication expresses itself in both words and deeds. It involves critically reading today’s communications scene, promoting equitable access to new information and communication technologies, sharing information and knowledge, and challenging limitations on freedom of expression and the right to communicate – even if the subject is religion itself.

It is difficult to conceive of a genuine ecumenism that does not affirm the dignity and worth of human beings everywhere. In this sense, communication for ecumenism must be a dynamic co-pilgrimage towards living in real community and towards justice and freedom for all.

Its effectiveness will depend on its ability to deepen understanding, to take risks, to listen, and to celebrate difference. ■

Note
A Latin American pilgrimage towards ecumenism

Dennis A. Smith

Personal reflections on ecumenism and WACC's Christian Principles of Communication by its President.

I grew up in a middle-class Evangelical home where I learned to take religious belief and practice very seriously. This rather hermetic world was not very comfortable with difference. We viewed people from other traditions with suspicion and, sometimes, fear. For example, after John Kennedy was elected President of the United States in November of 1960, I remember sensing an undercurrent of tension at our church: Had the US become subject to Rome? How could God have allowed such a thing to happen?

Nor were we comfortable with Pentecostals. The exuberance of Pentecostal worship – exotic practices like speaking in tongues and divine healing – generated suspicion. We were taught that such manifestations were only appropriate for the primitive church; we suspected that such spiritual self-indulgence was a sign of immaturity.

Yet this apparently closed faith community offered me many opportunities to broaden my world, to find myself face to face with ‘the other’. One summer our youth group offered Bible classes to poor children in the logging camps of Northern California. That summer we also visited jails and talked to prisoners. Another summer I lived on Navajo lands, working with a church mission. Such experiences led me to ask myself questions about history and about social systems rooted in violence and injustice.

With time I learned that difference need not be met with fear. I learned that God is bigger than I had been taught. Perhaps the Creator was not subject to my rules, nor to the dogma so carefully articulated by my church. As I grew up I began to understand that I understood very little; I learned to make room for nuance, ambiguity and contradiction.

Guatemala: discovering an ancient silence

I first arrived in Guatemala as a volunteer in 1974. I spent the year traveling throughout the country: observing, listening, learning. I was embraced by a warm, wise and generous people who, at the same time, observed this young gringo from a distance, marked by an ancient silence.

I returned to Guatemala in 1977 as a mission worker for the Presbyterian Church (USA) and soon discovered that my academic training had not provided me with the analytical framework I needed to come to grips with the economic and political exclusion experienced by most Guatemalans. Patient Guatemalan mentors and a few veteran missionaries introduced me to Latin American literature, history and culture.

In my youth, I had embraced a technological optimism that saw God working in a special way through the electronic media. What better way to evangelize the world than through television and radio? Gradually, I learned that such powerful media were hampered by a built-in defect: they only permitted monologue. Using these media to initiate nuanced conversations, to build real relationships, was contrary to the technology itself.

Furthermore, such media, in the context of rapidly growing global entertainment and information empires, tended to create an imbalance of power: producers and broadcasters – even religious ones – had a monopoly on words and images and used this power to promote their own agendas; the audience was cast in a passive role.

In the 1970s I found colleagues with similar concerns who came to question the efficacy of the electronic media as evangelistic tools. Perhaps the electronic media were best used to promote moral principles, we suspected. Perhaps professionally designed micro-programs could speak to the spiritual angst of the age, offering consolation and challenge in the person of Jesus. Perhaps the media could be
used to teach and encourage those who were already believers.

In the late 1970s I had my first contact with the Latin America region of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). WACC Latin America colleagues challenged me to consider new notions of what communication is and how it works. They helped me to see communication as a process rooted in human culture, not technology. Communication became thicker, rounder, more sensual. In the words of Argentine communication theorist María Cristina Mata, I came to understand communication as building meaning in common.

In the 1980s, faced with the growing power of media systems to impose political ideologies and promote the consumer society, WACC-Latin America worked to promote media education. Pioneers like María Elena Hermosilla, Valerio Fuenzalida and Francisco Gutiérrez developed strategies to help excluded sectors of society – women, youth, peasants, families – to set aside their passive role and become active, critical media consumers.

In Guatemala, I witnessed how the ancient, complex beauty of Mayan culture could be reduced to a tourist poster, and, in this colourful representation, the people themselves, their very way of being, could be invisibilized; their voices could be silenced.

I heard Guatemalan colleagues ask themselves: What happens when not only your land but also your story is stolen from you? Your memory of who you are and why you are here, usurped? What happens when you move to the city in search of survival, and you must come up with a new narrative to explain to yourself and others who you are and where you belong?

I learned that once a people is silenced and invisibilized, genocide becomes a viable policy option for those in power.

Citizen participation and accountability

Through WACC I also came in contact with the work of researchers like Rosa María Alfaro and her colleagues who documented the power of the media to set the agenda for public discourse. Again, WACC members were on the front lines of developing strategies to use the media to promote citizen participation and to demand accountability of those in authority.

In Latin America we are famous for our novelas – over-the-top soap operas that ooze with stereotypes of gender and class. But communication researchers like Rosa María Alfaro and Jesús Martín Barbero have documented how poor folks in Latin America can resignify what they watch; the disenfranchised use TV to give them a language for describing what seems to be out of control in their lives – especially their relationships and their role within the community.

During the 80s, civil conflict raged in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, and the US intervened militarily in the region. I witnessed how radio was being used in nearby El Salvador as a tool for promoting social change and for organizing political resistance. In Guatemala, courageous journalists used radio to break imposed silences and to challenge impunity and injustice. Community groups throughout the region used radio to question the status quo and to propose policy alternatives.

I discovered that many people were honing their ability to read between the lines; they understood that ‘the official story’ was a lie, but they had little access to information and analysis that would help them more fully to understand the devastation that was being poured out on their communities.

In addition to my work in media education, in the 1980s – a time when the US intervened militarily in Central America and when churches were riven by volatile ideologies – I worked with colleagues to document the impact of US-based television and radio preachers on local Protestant and Catholic parishes. In the 1990s I began to look at how new religious movements were using the media to establish themselves as powerful actors in the religious marketplace and how these emerging media entrepreneurs challenged the cultural power of traditional religious institutions.

What makes Christian communication ‘Christian’?

Christian churches in Latin America exercise an absolute religious majority. Dealing with difference has been played out mostly in racial-ethnic, cultural and ideological – rather than religious – arenas. An important exception has been the history of bitter rivalries between Roman Catholics and Protestants in the region, including fierce competition for privileged access to political and economic elites. Over the centuries, minority religions and spiritualities – especially the ancestral spiritualities of indigenous
and African peoples—have been violently repressed. Small Jewish, Muslim and other religious communities are largely limited to major urban centers. In recent decades, however, traditional Christian churches have been forced to negotiate their privileged access to cultural power with new religious movements and resurgent ancestral spiritualities.

This is the context in which WACC-Latin America embraced efforts by global WACC to understand our Christian identity in a pluralistic world. What does it mean to be a world association of ‘Christian’ communication? What makes Christian communication ‘Christian’?

WACC was created in 1968 by traditional Protestant broadcasters and publishers from Europe and North America. Many had shared the technological optimism of my youth, seeing in the media an ideal tool for spreading the Christian message. In the 1980s WACC became a truly global association as communicators from the South assumed new levels of protagonism.

WACC’s Board and professional staff understood that information and communication systems were exacerbating the world’s growing economic, political and cultural divisions. Instead of being a tool for promoting understanding and reconciliation, the media were ‘widening the gap between rich and poor, consolidating oppression and distorting reality in order to maintain systems of domination and subject the silenced masses to media manipulation’.

As an expression of these concerns, in the early 1980s WACC participated actively in UNESCO debates on communication rights, especially promoting the MacBride Commission’s proposals to create a more just and equitable world information and communication order. In 1984, General Secretary Hans W. Florin guided staff in the development of a statement of WACC’s core identity for the consideration of the Board. By 1986, the Board had adopted the Christian Principles of Communication.

The Principles affirmed that:

• communication creates community;
• communication builds participation;
• communication liberates;
• communication defends and promotes human cultures in all their rich diversity;
• communication speaks prophetically to power structures.

Michael Traber, head of WACC’s studies unit, was the key drafter of these principles. In the context of the UNESCO debates, WACC hoped these ‘Christian Principles’ would challenge church hierarchies ‘to disassociate themselves from power structures which keep the poor in a position of subservience’ and to promote ‘genuine reconciliation by means of which the dignity of all people can be reaffirmed.’

WACC proposed the Christian Principles in a decidedly secular age; many North American and European social scientists were proclaiming that the days of organized religion as a cultural force were numbered. In this secular environment, the word ‘Christian’ in WACC’s name must have been viewed with a certain bemusement by some. Nonetheless, WACC had established credibility in UNESCO circles and the academic world through their energetic and thoughtful promotion of communication rights.

Through the Christian Principles, WACC challenged the secular ethos of the age by insisting that communication is a function of transcendence. The introduction to the Christian Principles observes
that ‘communication remains God’s great gift to humanity, without which we cannot be truly human.’ Somehow, there is something sacred about the creation of meaning in common; communication reflects the spiritual values that are at the heart of human identity.

**Resurgence of the cultural power of religion**

In Latin America, the Christian Principles came to be a core expression of a common agenda that would permit church media producers and journalists to forge a common bond with other communication professionals, activists and academics in the region. Many activists and academics who had become distanced from organized religion found in the Christian Principles a useful statement of their own ethical and political commitments.

The 1990s proved that religion, far from dying out, was growing in political, economic and cultural influence. Unfortunately, in recent years much media coverage of religion has been limited to documenting the rapid rise of religious fundamentalisms. More thoughtful journalists have delved into the complex connections between personal religious commitments, religious institutions, histories of political, economic and cultural exclusion, gender, class, and ethnicity. Simultaneously, the academic world, especially the social sciences, has scrambled to try to describe and understand the resurgence of the cultural power of religion.

Simultaneously, we are witnessing a renaissance in ecumenical and interfaith relations. Within the Christian community, new ecumenical fora allow Pentecostals and Evangelicals to sit at the same table with mainline Protestants, Orthodox and Roman Catholics. Many communities throughout the world have now experienced direct, thoughtful conversations – even shared projects of community service and joint celebration of holy days – between faith groups that have experienced conflict with one another. Many communities are moving beyond tolerance of the other to celebration of diversity.

At the same time, the information and communication environment is changing rapidly. Ownership of media content providers and distribution systems – especially emerging digital technologies – continue to be highly concentrated. Yet these same technologies have blurred the traditional lines between consumers and producers, offering previously unimagined possibilities for using new media as spaces for real conversations and for building real relationships, for networking, and for building grassroots social movements.

This new millennium offers WACC the opportunity to revisit the ‘Christian Principles’, reaffirm their validity within the Christian community, and offer them as a discussion starter to communication professionals from other traditions.

**Living out and sharing faith stories**

In my own faith journey, there came a moment when I moved from understanding evangelism as proselytism to evangelism as living out and sharing my faith story. I came to understand that God is neither Christian nor Jew, Muslim nor Hindu. God is God. Joyfully, I can affirm that I am a follower of Jesus; this is part of my core identity. Can I offer my faith journey to others humbly, respectfully, while remaining open to being enriched by the faith stories of others? Can I embrace the insights and practice of justice lived out by those of no faith tradition?

WACC’s Christian Principles begin by affirming that communication grows out of a sense of transcendence. Mystery and longing for meaning lie at the very core of all that is. Our longing for understanding and for building relationships is closely linked to our sense of the sacred. This is the starting point for our understanding of communication.

WACC offers the Christian Principles to the Christian family, mindful that within many religious institutions communication still is viewed as technology and technique more than telling stories of justice and mercy, building relationships and creating a common hope.

WACC offers the Christian Principles to colleagues from other faith traditions and to those from no faith tradition. We do so with trepidation, mindful of the horrors that have been committed throughout history in the name of the Christian faith. We do so expectantly, in the hope of being enriched and challenged by others. We do so humbly, hoping that these principles can help to strengthen our shared commitment to the common good.

This is the sense in which I, as a communicator and as a follower of Jesus, offer WACC’s Christian Principles to other communicators as a gift – the raw material for a pending conversation – and as
a challenge: Do the stories we tell and the images we create build community? Do they liberate? Do they foment participation? Do they defend and promote human cultures? Do they speak prophetically to power? Let's talk...

WACC’s Christian Principles of Communication can be found on its web site at http://www.waccglobal.org/en/about-wacc/principles.html

Dennis Smith is President of WACC and a mission worker of the Presbyterian Church (USA). After serving for 33 years in communication training and social research in Guatemala, in 2011 he will begin a new appointment as PCUSA Regional Liaison for the Southern Cone and Brazil.

Communication is the call to share

Olav Fykse Tveit

It is my pleasure to congratulate the World Association for Christian Communication on more than 40 years of promoting communication for social change. The values upheld through WACC’s work around the world and its Christian Principles of Communication significantly overlap with those of the ecumenical movement and of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

I was asked to contribute an article to this issue on ‘Communication for Ecumenism’ in my first month as WCC general secretary. Now, almost a half year into this calling, I already feel that the experiences I have had in visiting churches and participating in ecumenical events have contributed to my understanding of how critical good communication is for promoting greater understanding of each other and encouraging an ecumenical approach to our differences, even within the Christian family. One particular event, the assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, held in Kuala Lumpur in April 2010, helped me in clarifying my thinking on this subject. The theme of their assembly was ‘Called to Prophesy, Reconcile and Heal’. This is not compartmentalized approach, but rather a holistic one. These three aspects cannot be separated in our Christian witness and if I am to speak about communication, it cannot and should not be delinked from other aspects of the Christian mission.

Communication is not separate from accountability – to God and to each other. We are accountable for what we teach and preach, and for the effects of what we teach and preach. And, we are accountable for the consequences of not addressing the issues affecting those who need the Gospel of
the Kingdom of God in this world.

As Christians we are called to keep these roles (prophesy, reconcile, heal) together, we are called to fill them together. Together we are called to be one church, not to exercise these roles individually or announce ourselves individually and autonomously to be prophets or reconcilers or healers. The fruits shall be the proof of our work.

New life in common
There is no true prophecy that does not speak both critical truth and contribute to the building of a vision, a dream of the new life in common. Communication must aim at what we shall address in common as well as what we want to have together. The church is called to share the good news of God’s love for the world – the whole world, the love that is ultimately expressed in God’s giving of his own son (John 3:16). The call to share the Gospel with all is forever the basic calling of the church. The call to share the Gospel will, however, forever be the call to share the realities of the kingdom of God as announced by the Gospel.

The ministry of reconciliation will always have an element of prophetic ministry as a critical voice – a voice communicating within and to the world. To preach the forgiveness of sin will always be a critical word of repentance, pointing to the need for change, to resist, even to fight against injustice, oppression and violations of human dignity and basic human rights. The reconciliation of God through Christ is not ignorance of what is wrong, a minimizing of the problems of evil, sin and death. The description of Christ’s death as atonement for sin, as described in the Bible, is an expression of taking the sin seriously, as well as taking those seriously who are hurt and affected by sin, and, finally, taking the sinner, seriously. The forgiveness of sin is a proactive act of God to stop sin, to break the evil circle, so that we shall not sin. Thus, the proclamation of the Gospel of reconciliation will always also be a word of truth, a prophetic witness, a critical approach.

At the same time there is no true Christian prophetic witness that does not aim at reconciling and healing. The prophetic and critical word is also a transformative word speaking of something new. The prophets were both critical to their contemporaries and pointing to the possibility of another future, a vision of new life, of salvation, of shalom. The word of God allows us to recognize the truth of what must be changed and the promise and power of God to bring forgiveness and change.

We have many challenges today and some of them can be seen as results of a one-sided and uncritical use of religion ending up being very destructive and bringing neither justice nor peace. Therefore, it is very appropriate that we as churches reflect precisely on how the prophetic, critical ministry can be a ministry of real reconciliation and healing, not only criticizing but also articulating and communicating new visions for the future, of what God can create for us and with us today and tomorrow.

The emphasis of the prophetic witness and mission of reconciliation and healing by the ecumenical movement has come to the fore in many different contexts and attracted the imagination of people inside and outside the churches. The ecumenical movement needs to manifest a bold accompaniment and costly solidarity with its member constituencies in their engagement for peace with justice and in their response to the call to prophetic witness and mission of reconciliation and healing.

Platforms for peace with justice
One of the longstanding engagements of the global ecumenical movement is in the context of the ongoing violent Arab-Israeli conflicts due to the unsettled Palestinian question. In 2002, responding to a call from the churches in Jerusalem, the WCC created the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and in 2007 launched the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) as a platform to promote prophetic witness for peace with justice and to prepare for reconciliation and healing processes in Palestine and Israel. The global ecumenical fellowship’s commitment towards this direction is an honest contribution to a comprehensive just peace in the whole Middle Eastern region.

In this context a very significant development has taken place in the ecumenical family pertaining to the situation in Palestine. In December 2009, Palestinian Christians from a variety of church traditions issued a call to churches around the world, a call that they refer to as the ‘Moment of truth: a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering.’ It came to be known as the ‘Kairos Palestine’ document because the ecumenical
family saw in it an opportune moment to intervene and put an end to the suffering of both Palestinians and Israelis.

This ‘Kairos call’ is a cry of hope that asks Christians to see the realities in this situation, to see that in the name of justice and peace this situation cannot continue and to stand against injustice, violence and occupation. One way to do so is to revisit Christian theologies that justify dispossession of the land and legitimize occupation. This is not an expression of theological triumphalism over and against Jews, but a criticism of Christian theologies openly supporting or legitimizing the occupation of Palestine.

The document also contains an important call to non-violent resistance as a right and obligation and as an act of liberating love for Palestinians and Israelis. The discussion among Palestinian Christians includes what means of non-violent resistance are important and appropriate, and it presents itself, for instance, as discussions of a possible call to boycott goods from Israel. These are complicated issues. From the World Council of Churches the call not to buy products illegally produced in occupied territories and the call to member churches for proper stewardship of investments so as not to benefit from occupation remain both well known and unchanged.

The document is based on a deep conviction of the need for prophetic critical speech against injustice and occupation from the perspective that this is a prerequisite for much needed reconciliation and healing. Here our prophetic witness needs to be expressed through our love for the Palestinians as well as for the Israelis, as all parties need healing and reconciliation. The ‘Kairos Palestine Call’ has the potential to become an important rallying point for justice and peace within a context that threatens world peace. It has been communicated in local and international press and through its website (http://www.kairospalestine.ps/).

The communication of this initiative has become key in motivating others towards common prayer, dialogue and action. It provides a good case study for how communication can contribute to greater understanding in our diverse world. The act of communicating in itself may be one of the most crucial factors in bringing about change; change in understanding of reality and change in attitude towards a love for both parts in a conflict that must be resolved for the sake of both of them.

The vision of the ecumenical movement is and will be always rooted in Christ’s prayer given to us in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John – ‘That they all may be one’. We are called to this and we are also living it – through the ecumenical movement facing the world as it is. It is an important aspect of our vision for the ecumenical movement that the ecumenical movement is a movement with many eyes all over the world. We are able to see the world as it is because we are many and we are not only in one place, but we are where life is changing, where life is threatened and where life is celebrated.

As one ecumenical movement witnessing together, we speak out about what we are seeing. We not only reflect, we also proclaim that there is one humanity, that there is a wholeness of creation, that there is a beauty of creation. We stand together proclaiming the word of God that tells us that God loves this world and all human beings. Therefore, we proclaim God’s will that justice should prevail in this world.

Communication is an expression of the essence of the church – the call to share. To share the Gospel, to share the reality we live in, to share the burdens of one another, to share the perspectives and traditions we have, to share our calling and our gifts. If there is not good communication, this cannot become a reality. If there is a high level quality of communication, we really can be able to live together and benefit from the richness of diversity in a multicultural world.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit is general secretary of the World Council of Churches. At the time of his election, he was general secretary of the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations (2002-09). Before taking up the post of general secretary, Tveit served the WCC as a member of the Faith and Order Plenary Commission and as a co-chair of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum core group. Previous assignments include the position of secretary for the Church of Norway Doctrinal Commission (1999-2000), and Church-State Relations (2001-02). Tveit is an ordained pastor in the Church of Norway and has also served as a parish priest in Haram, Møre Diocese, 1988-91 and an army chaplain during his compulsory year of national service (1987-88). In 2002, Tveit was awarded a doctorate in theology by the Norwegian School of Theology/Menighetsfakultetet in Oslo for his dissertation on ‘Mutual Accountability as Ecumenical Attitude’.
Promoting peace and social justice through commonality

Robert S. Fortner

It probably goes without saying that, if people could achieve peace and/or social justice in the world, we would all applaud. Unfortunately, these two goals are often elusive and can be impossible to achieve at the same time. In a perfect world achieving social justice would in fact lead to peace. But justice in our world is too often in the eye of the beholder. Justice for one party can be an intolerable injustice to another. Not only is a decision by an impartial referee required, but also the means and will to enforce the decision lest it lead to increased conflict.

For instance, while Charles Taylor (2009, xi) starts one essay with the claim that ‘it is generally agreed that modern democracies have to be “secular”’, it is hard to imagine those deeply committed to a fundamentalist interpretation of their faith agreeing. This would be especially the case if they read Taylor’s definition of secularism, which requires the right not to believe in anything, to have a society in which no particular religious outlook has a privileged status, and that allows all spiritual families to be heard (Taylor: 2009, xii).

But this is extremely difficult to pull off. All religions have adherents who range from the über-tolerant to the exclusive. Some will accept central truths from holy texts not their own, some only those truths that coincide with their own (such as reverence for life), and some refuse to encounter others’ texts under any circumstances. So any effort to appeal to the principles of a text, by definition, privileges one over another and delegitimizes (at least to some degree) the claims of another spiritual family.

But even this difficulty pales in comparison to the situation where there is an official Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or Islamic state. And this more difficult situation pales, too, in comparison to the one where not only is there an official religion, but that religion is seen by people as being part and parcel of their identity – even if unpractised. This seems to be the case in France and Belgium as successive governments have taken aim at the ‘ostentatious display’ of religion by Muslim women wearing veils, hijabs, or burqas, especially in state-funded schools.

Clashes of cultural values
France has the largest Muslim population in Europe, the result of allowing immigration from the formerly French colonial empire. Now that there are millions of Muslims living in France, elements of the society and government are attempting to turn back the clock on the multicultural ideal. People are only welcome if they become truly French, if they assimilate completely. One can be religious, but only to a point.

And no religion can be rubbed in the face of secular French citizens, by which is meant, making it possible to recognize a person of faith by her attire. To some French people, the wearing of obviously Islamic dress (which may seem to Muslims a response to the Qur’an’s requirement of modesty), is an affront to their assumptions about Islam and human rights. They do not mix. So any woman who wears a hijab, veil, or burqa is, ipso facto, being denied her basic human (and independent) dignity.

This is not to select the French for criticism, or to unfairly castigate secularism or Islam, for we could find similar circumstances in other countries and with other religious traditions. It is merely to provide one example of the sort of difficulties we find when cultures are thrown together as a result of emigration, poverty, conflict, discrimination, ethnic cleansing, globalization, natural disaster, or any of dozens of other reasons that people move from
their homeland or accept their mythologies (‘God’s chosen people; Serbia for the Serbs’).

In every society there is a prevailing ethos as to how ‘others’ (e.g., legal or illegal immigrants) are treated. Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink (2004, 13) refer to this ethos as ‘societal beliefs,’ and say that they ‘often foster the emergence of collective emotional orientations.’ They continue: ‘They are formed in the course of the conflict, disseminated to society members, maintained by societal institutions, and supported by collective memory. They fuel the continuation of the conflictive relations and constitute obstacles to the progress of peacemaking.’

Some societies aim to assimilate others, working to strip them of their distinguishing culture and identity to make them as near to native as possible. Some attempt to incorporate them into a multicultural mix that expects only some aspects of the new culture to be taken on, but allowing other aspects of the former culture to be maintained. Still others adopt an ‘inclusive and intercultural’ approach that welcomes ‘cultural and ethnic diversity,’ allowing the other to live in the new society without shedding any aspects of the former identity (see Watt: 2006).

Achieving social justice or maintaining the peace occurs in each of these types of societies using different approaches. Assimilation-focused societies tend to define both peace and social justice as achievable only by assimilation. To the extent that such societies do successfully assimilate (whether through persuasion, incentive, suppression, or threat), they argue that peace and social justice will be achieved – and not otherwise.

Multicultural societies are less corporate in orientation, allowing for some room to co-exist with other cultural traditions, and achieving peace and social justice is murkier, more problematic, more open to the possibility of polysemia, or multiple interpretations by the constituent groups in the society that do maintain a modicum of independence from the dominant ethos. Interculturally-based societies are the most culturally individualistic societies, accepting of the traditions that comprise them by and large, with only nominal restrictions that may violate basic human dignity or rights to life and liberty.

The task for religious leaders in promoting peace and social justice is similar in all three cases, but not always identical. Since the three types of societies range from the corporate focus (society is more important than the individual) to the balanced (both society and the its constituent cultures have legitimate claims on a person’s allegiance) to the more purely cultural (a person’s cultural Weltanschaung has superior claim on its members), there are nuances that religious leaders must take account of in the effort to promote peace and social justice.

In every society, too, there is a dominant religious tradition or two, and minority traditions. Depending on where the leaders sit as religious authorities in a society also affects the degree of responsibility they have for achieving and maintaining peace and social justice. The Islamic scholar Adnan Silajdzic (2002) argues that in an era of ‘technically feasible holocaust... the dialogue between Christians and Muslims is more vitally necessary than ever before.’

He continues by suggesting that the views that adherents to different religions have of one anoth-
er are seriously flawed, despite the fact that ‘many books and studies have been written in which Muslim and Christian authors have pointed out the necessity for revision of traditional attitudes about each other, for the sake of the creation and for the human being in a more decent and humane world.’

Undoubtedly an overwhelming majority of the earth’s people wish to live in a more decent and humane world, yet it is an unusual week that does not carry headlines about a new atrocity, increasing violence, or a breaking of the peace in one place or another. We just don’t seem capable of reaching that place of nonviolence that Christ preached about in the First Century.

Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn (2006, 4) provide a reason for that: ‘We retain a capacity for acts of immense irrationality (not to mention cruelty and callousness), and we adapt ourselves readily to the moral disorder which Plato once hoped to eliminate from the world. We humans, it seems, can get used to anything, bending our practice and shifting our allegiances to enhance our chances for fulfillment and self-gratification.’

Ethical imperatives for religious authorities

What, then, should we expect, ethically speaking, from those who represent religious belief in society? How might such authorities represent the will of God in such a way that it will promote peace and achieve social justice? Given the introduction to the problems associated with these goals in the last few pages, the following ethical imperatives are in order.

It is imperative that religious authorities affirm, through speech and action:

1. The equality of all people, regardless of cultural tradition, race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. This means that they are committed to the inclusiveness of all within national societies. The use of demonizing words, references to ‘others’ or using separatist language, in reference to the ‘other’ must be eliminated from speech. Media or other references to minorities, or identifiable groups, in derogatory terms must be called out and it must be made clear that such references are not only ethically unacceptable, but the first step toward legitimizing violence against the ‘other.’

2. The commitment to establishing a more decent and humane world for human habitation. This requires a protective stance toward any in the society who are disadvantaged by mental or physical infirmity, age, gender, or socio-economic status. This does not necessarily require the creation of a ‘nanny-state’, but it does mean working to provide opportunities for those who have been marginalized in the society. It may mean an active defensive posture when they are castigated by the society at large; it may mean going on the offensive to force the society to take account of their needs and to address them in a reasonably comprehensive fashion.

3. The effort to understand, and to explain, the basics of religious faith and to initiate (if the dominant religious tradition) or join (if a minority one) in common efforts to dispel animosity and misperceptions, to work for common ground, and to collaborate wherever possible on policies or activities that have the intention to address debilitating circumstances within any group, regardless of religious orientation, that has been marginalized within the society.

4. The willingness to look beyond ‘obvious’ causes for differential social status to underlying or hidden causes for it. This means eschewing the common or socially accepted reasons for one’s position into structural or traditional definitions of issues in favour of analytically-determined ones. It is the welfare of the other that is at issue, the reduction of grievances, the dignification of the widely-accepted undignified that are at issue. Only by engagement, defence, and address of apparent inequities of different groups in the society are tensions reducible and grounds for acceptance made obvious.

Commonness trumps exceptionalism

In other words, it is ‘commonness’ that must be stressed by those best able, and most accepted, within the society to do so, not exceptionalism. Perhaps these requirements are only common sense, but it is a foundational requirement that is probably most difficult for religious people to accept: this is the requirement that whatever one’s faith, it cannot be publicly proclaimed that it is the only way to God.

I know – I’m in trouble now. We Christians are recognized as members of the world’s most exclusive faith: Christ is the only way to salvation. But let me split some hairs – ethically speaking. There are two great commandments: to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our
neighbour as ourselves. By loving our neighbour we also love God.

But imagine this. If we recognize that Christ is the only way to salvation, that does not require us to think him the only way to see God. Yes, we do see God in the Son, and if we want to know what God is like we look to the Son. There is no argument from me on that. But the Son commands us, for instance, to show mercy and compassion. Other faiths demand the same. So adherents to those faiths see God through the commands of their own scripture even if they do not know Christ. They may not (indeed, to true Christians, they will not) thereby achieve salvation, but on the need for mercy we are agreed.

So when it comes to achieving social justice or peace we need to recognize that we often have need of one another. We cannot achieve it unilaterally and we dare not point exclusively to the bible as the scriptura sola justifying the search for justice or peace because to do so actually injects a religious dispute into the effort, thereby negating it in the eyes of other religious traditions. Where we can make common cause, the requirements of ethics (that is, to reduce the potential for misunderstanding or conflict in the quest for peace, for instance) are that we do so.

We can still pray for the salvation of those of other faiths through acceptance of Christ as saviour and Lord, can still engage in discourse with them over the question of truly knowing God through other means. But that is an evangelical question and such conversations should be restricted to those cases when the two faiths, in good faith, sit down to engage in theological talk.

In the public sphere, where people do make common cause in pursuit of equality, constructing a more humane world, dispelling misperceptions of faith, and examining the root causes of people’s exclusion or disadvantage within a society, ethics demands that the battle of theology be put aside.

If people of all faiths are willing to acknowledge the intersections of commonality, and to agree that, whatever one’s faith, achieving social justice or peace requires a commonness of purpose and perspective for the benefit of the ‘other’ (whatever side is the ‘other’), only then can religion make its maximum contribution to achieving these goals.

References

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INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL PEACE CONVOCATION

17 - 25 May 2011, Kingston, Jamaica

The WCC’s International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) will celebrate the achievements of the Decade to Overcome Violence which began in 2001. At the same time it will encourage individuals and churches to renew their commitment to nonviolence, peace and justice.

The IEPC aims at witnessing to the Peace of God as a gift and responsibility of the oikumene.

The goals are:

- To affirm what we can say together
- To identify topics for further discussion
- To recommend fruitful examples and promising initiatives
- To initiate practical services for committed groups

The dialogue decalogue

Leonard Swidler

The ‘Dialogue Decalogue’ (Ground Rules for Interreligious, Intercultural Dialogue) was first published in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies in 1983 and has been translated into more than a dozen languages. While the ‘Dialogue Decalogue’ was originally written primarily to further interreligious dialogue, it has been adapted to a variety of other circumstances to help people of diverse ideologies and value systems build bridges and find common ground.

Dialogue is a conversation on a common subject between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow. This very definition of dialogue embodies the first commandment of dialogue.

In the religious-ideological sphere in the past, we came together to discuss with those differing with us, for example, Catholics with Protestants, either to defeat an opponent, or to learn about an opponent so as to deal more effectively with her or him, or at best to negotiate with him or her. If we faced each other at all, it was in confrontation—sometimes more openly polemically, sometimes more subtly so, but always with the ultimate goal of defeating the other, because we were convinced that we alone had the absolute truth.

But dialogue is not debate. In dialogue each partner must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as s/he can in an attempt to understand the other’s position as precisely and, as it were, as much from within, as possible. Such an attitude automatically includes the assumption that at any point we might find the partner’s position so persuasive that, if we would act with integrity, we would have to change, and change can be disturbing.

We are here, of course, speaking of a specific kind of dialogue, an interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue. To have such, it is not sufficient that the dialogue partners discuss a religious-ideological subject, that is, the meaning of life and how to live accordingly. Rather, they must come to the dialogue as persons somehow significantly identified with a religious or ideological community. If I were neither a Christian nor a Marxist, for example, I could not participate as a ‘partner’ in Christian-Marxist dialogue, though I might listen in, ask some questions for information, and make some helpful comments.

It is obvious that interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue is something new under the sun. We could not conceive of it, let alone do it in the past. How, then, can we effectively engage in this new thing? The following are some basic ground rules, or ‘commandments,’ of interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue that must be observed if dialogue is actually to take place. These are not theoretical rules, or commandments given from ‘on high,’ but ones that have been learned from hard experience.

First Commandment
The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly. Minimally, the very fact that I learn that my dialogue partner believes ‘this’ rather than ‘that’ proportionally changes my attitude toward her; and a change in my attitude is a significant change in me. We enter into dialogue so that we can learn, change, and grow, not so we can force change on the other, as one hopes to do in debate – a hope realized in inverse proportion to the frequency and ferocity with which debate is entered into.

On the other hand, because in dialogue each partner comes with the intention of learning and changing herself, one’s partner in fact will also change. Thus the goal of debate, and much more, is accomplished far more effectively by dialogue.

Second Commandment
Interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue must be a two-sided project – within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities. Because of the ‘corporate’ nature of interreligious dialogue, and since the primary goal
of dialogue is that each partner learn and change himself, it is also necessary that each participant enter into dialogue not only with his partner across the faith line – the Lutheran with the Anglican, for example – but also with his coreligionists, with his fellow Lutherans, to share with them the fruits of the interreligious dialogue. Only thus can the whole community eventually learn and change, moving toward an ever more perceptive insight into reality.

**Third Commandment**
Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. It should be made clear in what direction the major and minor thrusts of the tradition move, what the future shifts might be, and, if necessary, where the participant has difficulties with her own tradition. No false fronts have any place in dialogue.

Conversely, each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners. Not only will the absence of sincerity prevent dialogue from happening, but the absence of the assumption of the partner’s sincerity will do so as well. In brief: no trust, no dialogue.

**Fourth Commandment**
In interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner’s practice, but rather our ideals with our partner’s ideals, our practice with our partner’s practice.

**Fifth Commandment**
Each participant must define himself. Only the Jew, for example, can define what it means to be a Jew. The rest can only describe what it looks like from the outside. Moreover, because dialogue is a dynamic medium, as each participant learns, he will change and hence continually deepen, expand, and modify his self-definition as a Jew – being careful to remain in constant dialogue with fellow Jews. Thus it is mandatory that each dialogue partner define what it means to be an authentic member of his own tradition.

Conversely, the one interpreted must be able to recognize herself in the interpretation. This is the golden rule of interreligious hermeneutics, as has been often reiterated by the ‘apostle of interreligious dialogue,’ Raimundo Panikkar. For the sake of understanding, each dialogue participant will naturally attempt to express for herself what she thinks is the meaning of the partner’s statement; the partner must be able to recognize herself in that expression. The advocate of ‘a world theology,’ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, would add that the expression must also be verifiable by critical observers who are not involved.

**Sixth Commandment**
Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are. Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible while still maintaining integrity with his own tradition; where he absolutely can agree no further without violating his own integrity, precisely there is the real point of disagreement—which most often turns out to be different from the point of disagreement that was falsely assumed ahead of time.

**Seventh Commandment**
Dialogue can take place only between equals, or *par cum pari* as the Second Vatican Council put it. Both must come to learn from each other. Therefore, if, for example, the Muslim views Hinduism as inferior, or if the Hindu views Islam as inferior, there will be no dialogue. If authentic interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue between Muslims and Hindus is to occur, then both the Muslim and the Hindu must come mainly to learn from each other; only then will it be ‘equal with equal,’ *par cum pari*.

This rule also indicates that there can be no such thing as a one-way dialogue. For example, Jewish-Christian discussions begun in the 1960s were mainly only prolegomena to inter-religious dialogue. Understandably and properly, the Jews came to these exchanges only to teach Christians, although the Christians came mainly to learn. But, if authentic interreligious dialogue between Christians and Jews is to occur, then the Jews must also come mainly to learn; only then will it too be *par cum pari*.

**Eighth Commandment**
Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust. Although interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue must occur with some kind of ‘corporate’ di-
mension, that is, the participants must be involved as members of a religious or ideological community— for instance, as Marxists or Taoists—it is also fundamentally true that it is only persons who can enter into dialogue. But a dialogue among persons can be built only on personal trust.

Hence it is wise not to tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning, but rather to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground, thereby establishing the basis of human trust. Then, gradually, as this personal trust deepens and expands, the more thorny matters can be undertaken. Thus, as in learning we move from the known to the unknown, so in dialogue we proceed from commonly held matters—which, given our mutual ignorance resulting from centuries of hostility, will take us quite some time to discover fully—to discuss matters of disagreement.

Ninth Commandment
Persons entering into interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions. A lack of such self-criticism implies that one’s own tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary, but even impossible, since we enter into dialogue primarily so we can learn—which obviously is impossible if our tradition has never made a misstep, if it has all the right answers.

To be sure, in interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue one must stand within a religious or ideological tradition with integrity and conviction, but such integrity and conviction must include, not exclude, a healthy self-criticism. Without it there can be no dialogue—and, indeed, no integrity.

Tenth Commandment
Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner’s religion or ideology ‘from within’; for a religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and ‘whole being,’ individual and communal. John Dunne here speaks of ‘passing over’ into another’s religious or ideological experience and then coming back enlightened, broadened, and deepened.

As Raimundo Panikkar notes, ‘To know what a religion says, we must understand what it says, but for this we must somehow believe in what it says’: for example, ‘A Christian will never fully understand Hinduism if he is not, in one way or another, converted to Hinduism. Nor will a Hindu ever fully understand Christianity unless he, in one way or another, becomes Christian.’

Experiencing from within
Interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue operates in three areas: the practical, where we collaborate to help humanity; the depth or ‘spiritual’ dimension where we attempt to experience the partner’s religion or ideology ‘from within’; the cognitive, where we seek understanding and truth. Interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue also has three phases. In the first phase we unlearn misinformation about each other and begin to know each other as we truly are.

In phase two we begin to discern values in the partner’s tradition and wish to appropriate them into our own tradition. For example, in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue Christians might learn a greater appreciation of the meditative tradition, and Buddhists might learn a greater appreciation of the prophetic, social justice tradition—both values traditionally strongly, though not exclusively, associated with the other’s community. If we are serious, persistent, and sensitive enough in the dialogue, we may at times enter into phase three.

Here we together begin to explore new areas of reality, of meaning, and of truth, of which neither of us had even been aware before. We are brought face to face with this new, as-yet-unknown-to-us dimension of reality only because of questions, insights, probings produced in the dialogue. We may thus dare to say that patiently pursued dialogue can become an instrument of new ‘revelation,’ a further ‘un-veiling’ of reality—on which we must then act.

There is something radically different about phase one on the one hand and phases two and three on the other. In the latter we do not simply add on quantitatively another ‘truth’ or value from the partner’s tradition. Instead, as we assimilate it within our own religious self-understanding, it will proportionately transform our self-understanding. Since our dialogue partner will be in a similar position, we will then be able to witness authentically to those elements of deep value in our own tradition that our partner’s tradition may well be able to assimilate with self-transforming profit.
All this of course will have to be done with complete integrity on each side, each partner remaining authentically true to the vital core of his/her own religious tradition. However, in significant ways that vital core will be perceived and experienced differently under the influence of the dialogue, but, if the dialogue is carried on with both integrity and openness, the result will be that, for example, the Jew will be authentically Jewish and the Christian will be authentically Christian, not despite the fact that Judaism and/or Christianity have been profoundly ‘Buddhized,’ but because of it. And the same is true of a Judaized and/or Christianized Buddhism.

There can be no talk of a syncretism here, for syncretism means amalgamating various elements of different religions into some kind of a (con)fused whole without concern for the integrity of the religions involved – which is not the case with authentic dialogue.

Note

1. The Second Vatican Council (also known as Vatican II), the largest council in the history of the Church, with some 3,000 participants drawn from all over the world, was called by Pope John XXIII to promote ‘peace and unity of all human-kind,’ and was in session from 1962-65. It opened up the Catholic Church to the modern world and radically changed the traditional official attitudes toward non-Catholic Christianity, non-Christian religions, and Catholics who called for freedom of thought and conscience. Self-segregation, condemnation, and proselytizing gave way to constructive dialogue with the secular world and other denominations or religions. (Note by Ingrid Shafer).

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rastrs e historias de los ciudadanos y ciudadanas que cada día protagonizan acciones de resistencia y rituales de recuperación de la memoria colectiva. Los medios dan cuenta también de aquellas voces de las víctimas de la violencia que reclaman por una auténtica política de reparaciones, las minorías religiosas que demandan verdaderos estados laicos, las radios comunitarias que denuncian atropellos a la libertad de expresión, los pueblos originarios que exigen respeto a sus derechos, y cada vez más voces de mujeres de mujeres que cada vez más se resisten a callar frente al maltrato. Hay pues muchas historias de esperanza que los ciudadanos y ciudadanas de a pie construyen cada día.

Pero, es importante observar que en el mundo contemporáneo otros son los escenarios públicos en el que las voces de los movimientos sociales transitan; nuevos rostros de la exclusión han emergido desde el margen que reclaman reconocimiento, visibilidad y solidaridad. En ese contexto, se hace necesario repensar nuestros discursos, reconstruir nuestras estrategias de incidencia política, y considerar los nuevos espacios de mediación cultural y política para animar la protesta social.

En ese sentido, es importante reflexionar en torno a algunos desafíos que el escenario contemporáneo nos plantea a quienes nos movemos desde fronteras alternativas, ciudadanas, ecuménicas y proféticas de la comunicación.

**Re pensando las alteridades**

En primer lugar, necesitamos volver a repensar el valor de la alteridad y la otredad en nuestras prácticas comunicativas en el mundo contemporáneo. Esto implica construir un discurso ético pensado no sólo desde nuestros presupuestos políticos, teológicos o culturales tradicionalmente institucionalizados. Hace falta recrear, repensar y afirmar nuestros ‘discursos de resistencia’ desde la interacción con los diversos actores de la sociedad, tomando en cuenta los nuevos lenguajes y relatos que la gente usa para expresar y canalizar sus menadas y propuestas.

En ese sentido, necesitamos fortalecer nuestras capacidades políticas para aprender a transitar en medio de las nuevas pluralidades y aprender a incorporar en nuestra agenda las reivindicaciones de los otros, lo cual supone desarrollar una actitud de escucha y valoración respetuosa de lo diverso.

Es interesante, por ejemplo, observar como en la protesta a favor del Estado laico se encuentran hoy desde los movimientos feministas hasta los grupos religiosos pasando por redes ciudadanas que sostienen que la laicidad es un componente fundamental de la democracia. Aquí el desafío se plantea en términos de encontrar nuevos puentes de interacción entre las tradicionales reivindicaciones políticas e ideológicas y las demandas culturales contemporáneas. Esto nos plantea otras formas contemporáneas de abordar las incidencias políticas, la protesta social y la construcción de las agendas públicas.

Aquí es importante volver nuestra mirada a la gente, a los nuevos espacios desde los que los ciudadanos y ciudadanas abordan los problemas sociales, para plantearnos la pregunta: ¿Quiénes son “los otros”, los interlocutores de nuestra comunicación hoy?, ¿Desde qué fronteras y matrices culturales establece la gente de este tiempo sus prácticas ciudadanas?; ¿Cuáles son sus nuevos espacios de mediación?; ¿Cuáles son sus nuevos sueños, sus nuevas utopías, sus nuevas creencias?

**Recreando nuestras formas de visibilizar las voces y sentires de la resistencia**

En segundo lugar, necesitamos recrear nuestra estrategias comunicacionales para visibilizar las voces de la resistencia. Es un signo de esperanza encontrarnos aún con comunidades proféticas que no han dejado de indignarse frente al atropello y de levantar su voz cuando desde el poder se intentan negarlas, silenciarlas y estigmatizarlas.

Los pueblos indígenas y originarios aun siguen luchando por el respeto de sus derechos, las minorías religiosas aún reclaman un verdadero Estado laico que reconozca la diferencia y anule los tuteajes enquistados en el poder, las radios comunitarias aún luchan contra las fuerzas legitimadas por el Estado que intentan silenciarlas frente a cada desarrollo de la verdad, los movimientos populares aun gritan por sus reivindicaciones frente a Estados que han optado por actuar bajo la lógica de la criminalización de la protesta.

En muchos de nuestros países, los gobernantes –aquellos que en los grandes foros internacionales suscriben declaraciones en defensa de la democracia y los derechos humanos– despliegan una serie de estrategias no sólo para anular la voz de los movimientos sociales que protestan contra el atropello, sino también para estigmatizarlos, con la complacencia
y apoyo de muchos medios de comunicación.

Este fue el caso de la protesta que las comunidades indígenas en la selva del Perú realizaron en junio del 2009 a raíz de la aprobación de una serie de dispositivos legales que afectaban la propiedad de sus tierras y que fueron emitidos a espaldas de ellos, sin ningún diálogo ni consulta previa. El propio presidente de la República respondió al clamor del pueblo indígena de este modo:

“Ya está bueno de protestas... Estas personas no tienen corona, no son ciudadanos de primera clase... [Nosotros] hemos sido elegidos no para lavarnos las manos y decir: para que no haya ningún herido miro al otro lado y mientras nos quedamos sin gas ni petróleo. Eso quieren?”

Lo que en realidad las comunidades nativas demandan desde hace mucho tiempo es el elemental derecho a ser escuchados, a tener un lugar activo y respetado en la mesa donde se toman aquellas decisiones que afectan su desarrollo. Y en esta ocasión, a juzgar por las propias palabras del presidente peruano, la respuesta vino cargada de mucha soberbia, sostenida en un discurso agresivo, discriminator e intolerante. Y es que el modelo de desarrollo que sostiene el discurso oficial en muchos de nuestros países no entiende ni acepta la diferencia, tampoco tolera y más bien arremete contra la disidencia, generando brechas y acrecentando las exclusiones.

Pero al mismo tiempo es importante mencionar que resulta alentador encontrarnos con nuevos aliados en las esferas del poder político y desde los medios de comunicación que están dispuestos a acompañar y respaldar las causas de los excluidos. Columnistas de los diarios, conductores de los programas políticos y corresponsales de las cadenas periodísticas que antes estigmatizaban al movimiento social han contribuido a legitimar emblemáticas campañas de incidencia en estos años.

En este contexto, nuestras estrategias requieren previamente de una rigurosa re-actualización de nuestras miradas del escenario y de los nuevos actores políticos y mediáticos, a fin de que los rostros y relatos contemporáneos de la resistencia ciudadana sean realmente visibilizados, las demandas de los excluidos sean incorporados en las agendas públicas, sus historias sean narradas pedagógicamente, para generar solidaridades mas amplias, menos coyunturales y mas sostenibles.

En este sentido:

“No se trata de diseminar y multiplicar mensajes, sino de gestar redes de articulación entre actores e instituciones de diferentes ámbitos... Lo que ocurre en el mundo importa hasta en las más pequeña comunidad si es que sabemos hacer los puentes necesarios, montando una información pedagógica altamente comunicativa y convocadora, capaz de enlazar voluntades y experiencias de cambio” (Alfaro, 2004: 151).

Re-pensando nuestra interacción en la esfera pública

En tercer lugar, lo dicho anteriormente nos plantea una re-actualización de nuestra manera de entender nuestras incidencias desde la comunicación alternativa en la esfera pública. En ese sentido, necesitamos seguir construyendo un discurso público alternativo, pero no marginal, que convoque al diálogo inter-cultural, que conecte la reivindicación con procesos pedagógicos ciudadanos más amplios.

En ese sentido, es importante tomar en cuenta que la protesta social implica no solo claridad respecto al mensaje de la reivindicación, sino también la construcción de estrategias comunicacionales que generen debate público, que construyan agenda pública, que convoquen y sensibilicen no solo a los “concientizados” sino también a los otros actores políticos y sociales, a los sectores que muchas veces miran desde lejos el clamor de los marginados.

En esta misma línea, esta estrategia requiere crear puentes y relaciones con los líderes de opinión que intervienen/actúan desde medios que legitiman la agenda pública. Esto significa, en muchos casos, repensar nuestras estrategias de relación, construir nuevos códigos de comunicación así como nuevas maneras de leer la realidad, nuevas formas de interactuar con todos los actores políticos y sociales.

Precisamente, nuestros esfuerzos por visibilizar las voces de los sectores tradicionalmente excluidos pueden contribuir a la construcción de una esfera pública plural que devele todas las desigualdades, que ayude a revelar no solo nuestras demandas, sino también los otros conflictos que nos atraviesan como sociedad (Fraser, 1977).
Esto implica, por un lado, reconocer los espacios y agendas públicas construidos por los otros sectores que luchan por obtener poder real y simbólico en la sociedad. Por otro lado, también implica ayudar a las organizaciones sociales, incluyendo las propias iglesias o comunidades de fe, a democratizar sus propios espacios de diálogo, a valorar no sólo el consenso, sino también el disenso, y a conectar las reivindicaciones propias y particulares con las demandas políticas más amplias que otros sectores de la sociedad plantean.

Además, como bien señala Dennis Smith, esta estrategia nos exige plantearnos otras formas de abordar lo político. Sin meternos a proselitismos y sectarismos, debemos rescatar la belleza, la dignidad y el coraje de los excluidos, otorgándoles nuevos espacios donde puedan compartir sus historias y estremecernos con la fuerza de su humanidad (Smith, 1998).

**Construyendo comunidades de confianza**

En cuarto lugar, en un contexto caracterizado por la emergencia de sociedades fragmentadas, frágiles y con visibles signos de incomunicación se hace necesario volver a recrear nuevos sentidos de pertenencia a comunidades en donde la gente se sienta afirmada, reconocida y valorada.

En ese sentido, debemos trabajar desde aquellas comunidades ya constituidas, como la familia, las iglesias, el barrio, la escuela, a fin de recuperar las afectividades personales, cultivar los lazos de solidaridad, hacer del encuentro una experiencia terapéutica. Solo así construiremos redes de solidaridad que poco a poco construyan comunidades nuevas que sean capaces de convertir los relatos colectivos y personales cotidianos en semillas de una nueva cultura democrática que sostenga y le de sostenibilidad a los cambios estructurales.

En otras palabras, de lo que se trata es de construir, para decirlo en términos de Habermas, una comunidad de comunicación, donde todas las personas sean interlocutores activos en la acción comunicativa (Haberlas, 1989).

Estuve recordando mi experiencia junto a los agentes pastorales que en la época de la violencia política en mi país acompañaron a los injustamente encarcelados. Muchos de los inocentes que fueron apresados, acusados por terrorismo, fundaban en la prisión verdaderas comunidades de fe. Era interesante ver como en un país en el que hay tantos muros que impiden la interacción ecuménica, católicos y protestantes se reunían para cantar, orar y compartir sus suenos y frustraciones.

Pero, paradójicamente, cuando recobraban la libertad e intentaban incorporarse a las comunidades cristianas a las que antes pertenecían, se encontraban con iglesias emocionalmente frías, si espacios donde compartir sus historias, con marcados rasgos de individualismo y con un púlpito desencarnado de la realidad.

En ese sentido, las comunidades de fe tienen un gran desafío, en tanto que pueden ayudar a crear espacios de encuentro, desde una espiritualidad conectada con la ética ciudadana. Esto implica animar una cultura de la espiritualidad que recupere el sentido del encuentro, del aprendizaje en el camino para que –como en aquel liberador encuentro entre Jesús y sus discípulos en Emaus– nos reconoczamos al partir junto el pan.

Con ocasión de la presentación del libro en homenaje a la obra del padre Gustavo Gutiérrez, Luis Jaime Cisneros, un reconocido intelectual peruano, sostuvo que la época actual invita a los cristianos a recuperar el sentido liberador de la espiritualidad. Cisneros sostuvo que debemos evitar aferrarnos a una fe accidental y transitoria, y planteó la necesidad de vivir una espiritualidad que recupere la dimensión terapéutica de la fe, es decir aquella que hace que una comunidad transforme la amistad en un acto liberador, que hace que la vida sea libre, bella y llena de esperanza.

Esta manera de concebir la espiritualidad está conectada con la construcción de prácticas ciudadanas que interpenen y convoquen a los movimientos sociales, comunidades de fe y colectivos culturales a insertar sus discursos y prácticas sociales tomando en cuenta no solo la necesidad de cambiar las estructuras políticas de opresión, sino también las mentalidades muchas veces legitiman ciertas prácticas culturales de opresión en la vida cotidiana.

En ese sentido, el referente comunitario se constituye en un factor fundamental en nuestras rutas de liberación. En palabras del padre Gustavo Gutiérrez, “sólo en comunidad podemos escuchar, acoger y anunciar… el llamado a superar todo lo que rompa la comunión fraterna (opresión, injusticia, marginación, discriminación, etc.)” (Gutiérrez, 2004: 198).
Los comunicadores que apostamos por el cambio social desde el camino de los marginados y excluidos de la sociedad, tenemos el enorme desafío de contribuir al fortalecimiento de espacios de mediación, a la construcción de caminos que permitan que nuestras organizaciones, iglesias y redes ciudadanas aprendan a encontrarse con otros en medio de las cruzadas de liberación, a luchar no sólo por sus propias reivindicaciones sino también por la de los otros, y a disfrutar de la solidaridad ecuménica.

Quisiera terminar con un hermoso verso escrito por el Obispo metodista Federico Pagura, en el que invita a las iglesias a ser comunidades verdaderamente terapéuticas, ecuménicas y proféticas:

Hoy se confunden los siglos en un encuentro frontal
siglos que mueren de viejos
y uno que empieza a rodar
del pasado sopla un viento
que es destructivo y letal,
pero también los clamores
por más justicia y por paz

¡Vamos a andar,
vamos a andar
hijas con hijos del cielo
busquemos la paz!

Las iglesias son sepulcros
si no proclaman la verdad,
si no cierran las heridas
y si no enseñan a andar.
las iglesias son paganas
si no denuncian el mal
del “imperio” y del tugurio,
que destruyen por igual.

Referencias

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Comunicar para la construcción de una “otra” oikoumene

Violeta Rocha

Comunicar es un acto básico en la tradición cristiana. La comunicación es un elemento imprescindible en el desarrollo de la fe y de las comunidades de creyentes. La propia Escritura, en la mayoría de los casos, es un ejemplo del deseo del pueblo de Dios de comunicar sus experiencias, de compartir los testimonios que le alimentan, sus aprendizajes, luchas, sospechas, esperanzas.

En la tradición judía como en la tradición cristiana, la comunicación ha mostrado un anhelo por extender las obras de Dios a toda la humanidad, llevar las buenas noticias de su amor y su justicia al resto del mundo. Por tanto, el espíritu ecuménico acompaña al pueblo de Dios en sus empeños comunicativos desde sus orígenes.

En el largo andar de las relaciones ecuménicas en América Latina hemos aprendido que no puede haber ecumenismo sin comunicación, pero tampoco puede haber comunicación sin espíritu ecuménico, es decir, sin la sensibilidad adecuada con la realidad de las y los otros, sin el compromiso con la transformación del mundo pensando, compartiendo, aprendiendo, desaprendiendo, celebrando con ellas y ellos.

Hay que reconocer que pese a que la comunicación estuvo presente en el andar del pueblo de Dios, este no siempre experimentó el espíritu ecuménico y liberador. En su caminar percibimos hegemonismos, imposiciones, prejuicios que en más de una ocasión revelaron un rostro desfigurado del Dios de justicia y liberación. Estas iniciativas de comunicación fueron protagonizadas por las elites jerárquicas cuyo objetivo fue mantener el control y la autoridad.

Cuando hablamos de comunicación con espíritu ecuménico lo hacemos en la tensión entre lo hegemónico y lo popular. El ecumenismo planteado desde las jerarquías en ocasiones es poco comunicativo, traza lineamientos que no siempre están basados en las realidades de las feligresías, sus saberes, cosmovisiones, sus formas de espiritualidad, sus experiencias de lo sagrado, y en la equidad de género.

Hoy se habla del invierno ecuménico, y mucho de esto encuentra fundamentos en una comunicación verticalista entre las iglesias, las denominaciones y sus jerarquías que obstaculiza el diálogo liberador. Sin embargo hay otro ecumenismo, a veces ignorado e incluso estigmatizado. El ecumenismo de base es más comunicativo al ser más dialógico, ofreciendo más espacio y oportunidad a la participación popular.

Los procesos de comunicación ecuménica que tienen lugar en las bases de algunas iglesias, pueden tomarse como modelos antagónicos al modelo de comunicación oficial. Se trata de rescatar y recuperar las experiencias de reflexión y acción comunitaria, así como la forma de relacionarse con lo sagrado, convirtiéndolas en sujeto de información. Allí se busca compartir la empatía, es decir la participación afectiva y emotiva de un sujeto en la realidad ajena, que constituye uno de los factores más destacados en la comunicación devolviendo el papel protagónico a las personas.

Esta manera de comunicar crea nexos, conciencia, estimula la socialización, recrea, educa y motiva transformaciones más concretas. En ciertos casos, se expresa como una comunicación contestataria ante el predominio de los espacios y medios de comunicación oficiales, donde la ideología dominante aplasta las expectativas y el criterio de las mayorías. Destacan en estas mayorías las relaciones asimétricas entre hombres y mujeres. La ideología patriarcal todavía es una característica que empeora la comunicación y la sitúa muchas veces fuera de la realidad.
La comunicación ecuménica popular tiene por protagonista al pueblo de fe en su amplísima diversidad. La realidad de la diversidad se hace más visible en América Latina, una diversidad no sólo cultural sino social y política. Las mayorías ya no son receptoras pasivas de las directrices de las jerarquías eclesiales, sino artífices de nuevas relaciones, proyectos, experiencias ecuménicas diversas y enriquecedoras.

Basados en los planteamientos de la educación popular y las múltiples experiencias de trabajo comunitario, se desarrollan técnicas, instrumentos, metodologías que incluyen el diagnóstico de la realidad, la planificación y la evaluación participativa. Desde esta perspectiva la participación de las y los protagonistas populares es considerada como un elemento central del proceso de comunicación ecuménica, en una búsqueda de la horizontalidad y la plena participación no solamente eclesial sino ciudadana.

Es cierto que siempre surgen líderes ecuménicos a quienes la mayoría escucha y toma como referente. Pero en el proceso de comunicación popular el liderazgo asume que el protagonista es el pueblo de fe. El liderazgo no es el emisor de la oikoumene, ni de los medios para perfeccionarla. Como explica Mario Kaplún: “Nosotros no tenemos que ser los emisores. El emisor es la comunidad… Es la comunidad la que tiene que comunicar a través nuestro. Nosotros somos los facilitadores, los organizadores, los animadores de esa comunicación.”

Sin duda, la comunicación, desde esta perspectiva, es un proceso complejo y conflictivo. Se enfrenta a los hegemonismos, propone nuevos derroteros para el diálogo entre las confesiones y con la sociedad misma, habla desde la experiencia de vida, retando a los/as teólogos/as, en las academias mismas a participar en un proceso de apertura, para dejar de ser herméticas y asfixiantes.

Un nuevo modelo en Génesis

“Pronunciar el mundo es transformarlo; transformarlo para humanizarlo”, expresó el pedagogo brasileño Paulo Freire. Pero resulta imposible pronunciar-comunicar el mundo sin emprender un proceso de diálogo, reconocimiento, humildad para nutrirnos del aprendizaje colectivo. En este sentido, algunos textos bíblicos brindan luz acompañándonos en el camino de la comunicación ecuménica.

Desde esta perspectiva, ciertos relatos de la Biblia nos permiten descubrir que una de las funciones de la comunicación es colaborar en la transformación-humanización del mundo, de la sociedad y de nuestras comunidades de fe; quizás su función fundamental. Al comunicar ecuménicamente se pretende colocar una esperanza de vida allí donde el mundo, la sociedad y nuestras comunidades pierden sentido frente a las víctimas de la incomunicación, la comunicación controlada, así como el silenciamiento, la invisibilización, la injusticia.

Anunciar la esperanza se transforma, entonces, en un acto de comunicación popular con el que se busca iluminar los caminos que conducen a una “otra” realidad posible. Es aquí donde algunos relatos bíblicos en un proceso de relectura nos animan a esclarecer el andar, abren nuevas alternativas y hacen brotar otros significados para la transformación del mundo.

Uno de esos relatos iluminadores se encuentra en el libro de Génesis 18,16-33, casi olvidado en la predicación y desfigurado por interpretaciones opresoras y hegemónicas.

Sin duda, Gn 18,16-33 es fruto de la reflexión popular del pueblo bíblico en pos de la transformación liberadora del mundo. Nos introduce en el proceso de comunicación que acontece entre Yahvé y su pueblo. Aquí el comunicador no es solo Yahvé; comparte dicho rol con Abraham hasta el punto de aprender misericordia como lógica de la auténtica justicia liberadora.

¿Qué imagen de Dios nos ofrece el texto? Yahvé es Dios comunicativo. No transmite unidireccionalmente su criterio de justicia sino que comparte en libertad con su pueblo para construir juntos la obra de justicia (v. 17). Dios aprende a recorrer los senderos de la participación solidaria y la cooperación mutua (v. 19). Reconoce la necesidad del diálogo en la construcción de una nueva sociedad y no minimiza el juicio humano, la palabra humana. El Dios comunicativo hace diagnóstico de la realidad en contacto directo con sus actores (v. 21).

En el texto, Yahvé no es el poseedor de toda la verdad, una verdad absoluta lista para ser acogida, sin la más mínima posibilidad de ser enriquecida y transformada por la participación humana. El texto nos muestra un proceso de negociación que se da a través del diálogo franco. Por un lado Abraham como interlocutor manifiesta su duda en relación a
la cantidad de personas justas que puede encontrar, con el propósito de salvar la ciudad. Una actitud muy humana, tener conciencia de la realidad en la cual se vive, y correr el riesgo de negociar con el Juez de la ciudad, Yahvé.

Yahvé reconoce, en un auténtico proceso de comunicación libre, que la verdad y la justicia se construyen en el debate popular, que al descubrir los matices de la realidad introduce el sentido de la misericordia, sensibiliza la justicia con la situación de los habitantes de la ciudad.

Abraham representa a la sección del pueblo que emerge del anonimato, y que se convierte en sujeto a través de los encuentros con Yahvé. Abraham protesta contra la insolidaridad y el verticalismo en la toma de decisiones. Enseña a Dios desde su experiencia en legítima celebración de la vida (v 25). En su clamor descubrimos el clamor de todas/os los marginados, así como las voces de mujeres y hombres que asumen su tarea de defensores de la vida.

Ahora bien el texto no hace eco de un pacifismo evasivo como pudiera pensarse. Abraham no pide a Yahvé dejar impune los delitos de quienes pisotean la vida y la esperanza. Interpela a Dios para que se haga justicia y comunique misericordia, no sin antes reflexionar comunitariamente sobre sus consecuencias. Si bien el texto al igual que muchos otros, no tiene un final feliz, pues la ciudad es destruida incluyendo la vegetación, el diálogo descrito en Gen.18, 16-33 es muy desafiante para el trabajo bíblico y la reflexión teológica y pastoral para nuestras comunidades.

Desde el punto de vista teológico, el texto representa una herramienta para la crítica frente a la comunicación verticalista que hace de las mujeres y los hombres receptores pasivos de la “voluntad de Dios”, tantas veces manipulada desde el poder para silenciar y dominar a las mayorías. Desde el punto de vista de la comunicación popular, el texto se vuelve un paradigma en medio de los esfuerzos por devolverle al pueblo el protagonismo y la palabra, tanto en la sociedad como en las iglesias. Estimula la crítica humanizadora y la reflexión para hacer de cada ser humano un agente de la transformación social y eclesial.

Este relato coloca varios desafíos a la hora de llevar adelante nuestras prácticas de comunicación ecuménica. ¿Qué retos presenta la imagen de un Dios que aprende a comunicarse con el ser humano en un proceso de diálogo popular? ¿Cómo introducir este paradigma en medio de las actuales coyunturas de injusticia en que nos vemos envueltos/os? ¿En qué medida somos como Abraham y Yahvé en nuestras luchas por la justicia en la sociedad y en las iglesias? ¿Cuál es nuestra visión de sociedad? ¿Qué juicios éticos hacemos para separar a los buenos de los malos? ¿Qué experiencias de negociación hemos aprendido comunitariamente?

El desafío en nuestro contexto

En América Latina necesitamos construir una “otra” oikoumene donde “Cada miembro se siente tratado como individuo y se siente estimulado para ofrecer ideas nuevas, aunque aun las tenga en un estado de confusión y vaguedad. Cada miembro busca el bien del grupo a través de la máxima utilización de las capacidades individuales”, esto es proclamado por muchas experiencias de base que ensayan nuevos procesos de comunicación desde sus propias vivencias y posibilidades.

Hay que tener en cuenta que nuestro contexto experimenta la tensión entre lo hegemónico y lo popular de forma muy dramática. Las y los latinoamericanos seguimos siendo tomados por receptores pasivos de los enfoques, criterios y modelos importados de los países Norte industrializados, el consumismo, las ideas equivocadas sobre lo qué significa calidad de vida en detrimento de unos con respecto a otros. En este sentido urge redescubrir y replantear los principios de la comunicación participativa antihegemónica presentes en las raíces de nuestros pueblos y en sus procesos de liberación.

El relato de Gn 18,16-33 aporta para la construcción de esa “otra” oikoumene en la apuesta por el diálogo e intercambio de saberes bajo el criterio de que no existe un emisor apoderado de toda la información y el conocimiento y receptores pasivos, totalmente ignorantes y desinformados. La experiencia ecuménica de las bases nos aclara que solo construimos esa oikoumene en diálogo participativo, en procesos de comunicación popular que apuntan hacia otras salidas posibles.

En consecuencia crece la nueva “casa habitada” ante el modelo hegemónico que intenta subordinar al resto de las propuestas, empobrecerlas y sofocarlas. La asfixia comunicacional que provoca el modelo autoritario se hace evidente al quebrar el diálogo e intercambio de saberes y experiencias bajo el
criterio de unidireccionalidad.

En este sentido, la comunicación popular plantea que es imposible promover el ecumenismo transmitiendo ideas y conceptos en una sola dirección sin posibilidad de intercambio, retroalimentación, transformación. No se “crean” iglesias o instituciones ecuménicas transfiriendo lineamientos sin abrir el debate sobre su eficacia y pertinencia, sin permitir que las/os “receptores” puedan expresarse, deconstruir significados, criticarlos, reformularlos, enriquecerlos.

El propio concepto de transmisión debe ser superado por el de compartir el saber, la información; como plantea José Ramón Vidal: “Transmitir y compartir se sitúan en polos opuestos en una posible acción de comunicar. Transmitir significa la admisión de que algún conocimiento que poseo y puedo pasarlo a otro, mientras que compartir significa combinación, encuentro, participación, elaboración con otro del conocimiento.” 3 No es posible el ecumenismo sin permitirle a las/os llamados “receptores” actuar como “emisores”. No hay “otra” oikoumene sin solidaridad, ni solidaridad sin encuentro, reciprocidad, diálogo, simbiosis y respeto.

No existen recetas cerradas para la comunicación ecuménica antihegemónica ni hay formulas mágicas para fomentar el ecumenismo. Gn 18,16-33 revela lo complejo del diálogo participativo y los resultados al final del mismo. Como indica Raúl Fornet-Betancourt: “El diálogo es problemático porque supone en parte el desmontaje teórico de nuestras unilateralidades, pero él es al mismo tiempo el mejor camino para realizar ese presupuesto.” 4

La comunicación ecuménica antihegemónica supone también un proceso pedagógico de diálogo entre saberes. En el proceso pueden vivirse situaciones de subordinación si se restringe el debate participativo y se limita el intercambio de experiencias, por ello el proceso supone aprendizajes y desaprendizajes. Se debe hablar y escuchar, dejarse interpelar y desafiar por las/os otros, sus conceptos, críticas, prácticas. Ellas/os también son emisores de propuestas ecuménicas y nadie posee la última palabra. Esa “otra” oikoumene emerge del encuentro y complementariedad, pues ninguna confesión o institución es completa en sí misma. Si no se acepta este presupuesto es imposible que exista un proceso de comunicación ecuménica participativa.

Todo el mundo aporta a la oikoumene, nadie hace ecuménico/a a nadie, sino que nos “ecumenizamos” en la relación participativa, el diálogo, la reflexión y la celebración conjunta.

Otro elemento a tener en cuenta es que lo ecuménico pierde sentido si no atendemos al contexto histórico. Un análisis detallado de las coyunturas en las que nos movilizamos nos reubica en el tema del poder. El análisis de las relaciones de poder en nuestro contexto eclesial dejará ver múltiples opresiones, silenciamientos, exclusiones; del mismo modo, insubordinaciones y resistencias.

Estos son elementos presentes en todo proceso ecuménico. Detectarlos nos hace conscientes de los conflictos que tienen lugar en nuestro medio y abre la posibilidad para repensar los objetivos de nuestros empeños comunicativos. Nuestros esfuerzos por construir esa “otra” oikoumene no se abstraen de la indignación ética ante las víctimas de un sistema injusto, así como de las luchas por la justicia social.

Por último, sin identidad no puede haber ecumenismo. Yahvé y Abraham no son iguales, ni se hacen iguales en el diálogo. Parten de sus diferencias y logran consenso, lo que no quiere decir uniformidad. La comunicación ecuménica antihegemonía no supone hacerse como las/os otros sino intercambiar, negociar, pactar, concertar. En esa “otra” oikoumene ha de existir respeto por las diferencias y claridad sobre lo que una/o es y desea. Luego se emprende el diálogo, el descubrimiento de lo que son y anhelan las/os otros, el consenso, la transformación.

Profundizar en las raíces de nuestra identidad eclesial y social resulta un ejercicio primordial si aspiramos a esa “otra” oikoumene. En este sentido la comunicación es un reto y nada debe ser improvisado.

Notas

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Chancen und Herausforderungen der Ökumene

Friedrich Weber

Für die Glieder der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen (ACK), die die Plattform der Ökumene in Deutschland darstellt, gilt, daß sie den einen christlichen Glauben in getrennten, aber einander ökumenisch sich verbundenen Kirchen leben. Nur dies läßt die bohrende Frage nicht vergessen, warum es denn noch getrennte Organisation geben muss?

Edmund Schlink hat 1984 in seiner Ökumenischen Dogmatik geschrieben:


Ich glaube, ehe wir zu den Chancen und Herausforderungen kommen, gilt es dieses kritische Wort zu hören.


Daraus leitete die Mitgliederversammlung der ACK für die Arbeit in den nächsten Jahren folgende Schwerpunkte ab:

- Gottesfrage in der säkularen Gesellschaft und Missionarische Ökumene;
- Fortsetzung des Gesprächs über zentrale theologische Themen, z.B. über die wechselseitige Anerkennung der Taufe und den Umgang der Kirchen mit Tradition;
- Vertiefung und öffentlicher Ausdruck einer multilateralen ökumenischen Spiritualität
- Ökumenisches Lernen;
- Förderung der jungen Ökumene;
- interreligiöses Lernen;
- Versöhnungs- und Schöpfungsethik / Tag der Schöpfung;
- Integration und Begleitung von Migrationskirchen;
- Erschließung von Kontakten und Dialogen zu Pfingstkirchen und der charismatischen Bewegung.

Ja, es hat sich viel verändert und bewegt und doch, manche Gräben zwischen den Konfessionsfamilien sind noch tief. Darum die Frage: Was verbindet uns?

1. Die gemeinsame Taufe. Am Anfang unseres Lebens oder unseres Christseins steht das große Zeichen für die Auferstehung aus dem Tod. Mit
In der Kirche aufgenommen. „Das große Zeichen des Lebens, die Taufe, und das große Zeichen einer unsichtbaren Gemeinschaft, die Kirche, sind uns gemeinsam.“ (Zink)

2. Die gemeinsame Quelle: die heilige Schrift

3. Das gemeinsame Bild von Gott, wie es durch die Gestalt und das Wort Jesu bestimmt ist.

4. Das gemeinsame Bild vom Volk Gottes, vom wandernden Volk Gottes, das grundsätzlich in Bewegung ist, ohne sich fest anzusiedeln. Wir haben auch die Verholzungen und Verfestigungen gemeinsam und wir brauchen die „reformatio“.

5. Der Glaube an den einen Geist Gottes, der sein Volk auf dem Weg begleitet.

6. Gemeinsam ist uns der Gottesdienst, die Feier Gottes, die Frage nach dem, was er von uns erwartet (Anspruch) und die Bereitschaft, seinen Zuspruch für uns zu hören.


„Wir lehnen es ab, daß man das Ich des anspruchsvollen Menschen für das Wichtigste auf dieser Erde hält. Wenn es in dieser Welt noch Liebe für die Behinderten gibt, Hingabe für die Leidenden, Begleitung und Tröstung der Sterbenden, Mitleiden für die, die am Rand stehen, Hilfe für die Hilflosen, dann auch deshalb, weil es noch Christen gibt. Weil es noch Menschen gibt, die bereit sind, auch einmal auf ein Recht zu verzichten, auf eine Freiheit, auf einen Erfolg. Wenn also die Welt der Menschen eine Welt ist, in der man leben kann, dann auch deshalb, weil es Christen gibt. Und in dieser Aufgabe brauchen wir nicht mehr zusammenwachsen, da sind wir längst bineinander und tun unsere gemeinsame Arbeit für die, die zu leiden haben unter dem Geist unserer Zeit oder unter ihrem Schicksal oder unter den Folgen ihres Tuns.“ (Zink)

Die gemeinsame Herausforderung

In dem 1994 erschienenen gemeinsamen Text des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und der deutschen Katholischen Bischofskonferenz zur Vorbereitung des Konsultationsprozesses zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Deutschland heißt es: Gerade die Wirtschafts- und Strukturkrise hat gezeigt, „in welchem Ausmaß der Sinn für das Wohl aller Menschen verlorengegangen ist und daß versäumt wurde, diesen Sinn wachzuhalten, beziehungsweise zu wecken (...). Wenn sich die Kirchen zu der wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Deutschland äußern, tun sie dies aufgrund ihres christlichen Auftrages und ihrer Verantwortung. Sie sind dabei von drei Optionen geleitet, der Option für die Schwachen, der Option für eine soziale Friedensordnung und der Option für eine soziale Gestaltung der Zukunft der einen Welt.“ 2

Die Optionen sind orientiert an dem Gebot der Gerechtigkeit.

Folgende Herausforderungen werden in dem gemeinsamen Wort für die kommenden Jahre genannt:

- Verantwortung für die Eine Welt
- Wege aus der Arbeitslosigkeit suchen
- Stärkung der Familien
- Reform und Konsolidierung des Sozialstaates
- Bekämpfung der Armut
- Bewahrung der Schöpfung

Diese Herausforderungen stellen auch im Jahre 2010 noch konkrete Aufgaben dar, die die Kirchen allerdings nur in ökumenischer Gemeinschaft angehen können.

Wir können voneinander lernen


„Wir haben die anderen christlichen Gemeinschaften nicht mehr so anzusehen, als ob sie sich um unsere Kirche als Mitte bewegen...., sondern wir müssen erkennen, daß wir mit den anderen Gemeinschaften zusammen gleichsam wie Planeten um Christus als die Sonne kreisen und von ihm das Licht empfangen. Diese Wende im ekklesiologischen Denken ist unerläßlich, wenn wir in der
ökumenischen Frage weiterkommen sollen. Wir haben die anderen nicht mit uns zu vergleichen, sondern wir haben uns mit ihnen zusammen mit dem apostolischen Christuszeugnis zu vergleichen und werden nur so, von Christus her, die eigene und die fremde Wirklichkeit erkennen. Wir müssen lernen, uns gewissermaßen von außen zu sehen. Dabei kann es geschehen, daß wir innerhalb unserer Gemeinschaft größere Gegensätze erkennen als zwischen ihr und manchen von uns Getrennten.“³

Als Ergebnis bleibt die Einsicht, daß die Erfahrungen der anderen lebensnotwendig für die eigene Glaubenspraxis sind.

Ich nenne einige Beispiele aus evangelischer Sicht:
• Für evangelische Christen beispielsweise ist das ganze Feld der mystischen Überlieferung fremd
• Wir haben die Schrift von jeher in Gegensatz zur Tradition der Kirche gestellt, dabei aber übersehen, daß über die Schrift in allen Jahrhunderten nachgedacht worden ist und daß die Tradition aus Gedanken über die Heilige Schrift besteht
• Wir suchen nach Formen des kommunitären Lebens.

Ökumene müde und hellwach

1. Der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen in Genf ist 60 Jahre alt geworden. Nicht ganz ohne Turbulenzen hat er die Ziellinie erreicht.⁴ Gefragt wurde: Hat der ÖRK noch Relevanz? Bringt er die Ökumene voran? Hat er die Mittel und die geistige Kraft, der ökumenischen Bewegung neuen Schwung zu geben oder sie wenigstens auf Fahrt zu halten? Auch im Blick auf die ACK sind uns diese Anfragen nicht fremd.


4. Eine weitere Zukunftsperspektive liegt in der Verbreiterung und der Vertiefung der „koinonia“
– dies ist der im ÖRK favorisierte Begriff für die Gemeinschaft der Kirchen.

5. Die Aufgabe des ÖRK und die der ACK ist es, die konfessionellen Traditionen nicht einzuebnen, sondern sie zum Strahlen zu bringen. Der ÖRK kann und soll keine Superkirche werden, sondern eine Gemeinschaft von Kirchen, die von den Konfessionsfamilien getragen wird und in welche diese ihre Schätze einbringen.

Nehmen wir doch unsere Aufgaben so wahr, wie sie schon 1948 beschrieben wurden: Die ACK ist ein Forum der Kirchen in Deutschland, das „sich im Glauben an die sichtbare Einheit der Kirche in Gebet und Gottesdienst, im theologischem Dialog, Mission und gesellschaftlichem und sozialen Handeln engagierte“. Damit ist sie ein äußerst wertvolles Zeichen gegen das Gerede von der „Eiszeit in der Ökumene“. Und lassen wir nicht nach, die uns prägenden geistlichen und theologischen Einsichten bereichernd aufeinander zu beziehen.

Ich wünsche mir, dass sich in der ACK das ökumenische Modell der versöhnten Verschiedenheit verstärkt Bahn bricht.

Wider die Müdigkeit im ökumenischen Gespräch

Feiges Analyse stimmt. Wo finden sich waches Interesse und die geschwisterliche Zuneigung zu den Menschen in den anderen Kirchen? Wo wird das Gespräch zwischen Gemeinden gesucht und zwar über die aus der Not geborene Frage hinaus, ob man das Gemeindehaus einmal mitbenutzen dürfte? Wo meldet sich die Gemeinschaft der Christen in einer Stadt, wenn es darum geht auf soziale Verwerfungen, wie Kinderarmut, hinzuweisen und gegen sie zu agieren und zu demonstrieren?

Gott sei Dank geschieht genau dies in vielen unserer örtlichen ACKs, nämlich gemeinsame theologische Arbeit, Praxis gemeinsamen spirituellen Lebens in Gottesdienst und Feier und gemeinsamer Dienst zum „Besten der Stadt“. 

Fazit
Die Ökumene ist müde und hellwach zu gleich – wir müssen nur Sorge dafür tragen, dass die gelegentliche Erschöpfung uns nicht dazu verführt, die erreichte Grunderkenntnis, dass das, was uns verbindet, viel stärker ist als das, was uns trennt, zu vergessen. Aber wie sollten wir uns das erlauben, bittet doch der Herr der Kirche, Jesus Christus, „für die, die durch das Wort an mich (sic. Christus) glauben werden, damit sie alle eins seien.“ (Joh 17,20f)

Ob die Christen in der Ökumene sich in diesen Überlegungen wiederfinden? Wir brauchen Phantasie in diesen schwierigen Zeiten, vom Geist Gottes
inspirierte Phantasie, um in einer Gemeinschaft von Christen, die die Verschiedenheit ihrer Kräfte und Begabungen aushalten, gemeinsam einzutreten für den einzelnen Menschen wie für die ganze leidende und zerrissene Welt.

Fußnoten
3. Schlink, a.a.O., 696
5. Bericht des Weisungsausschusses, Nr. 21
6. ACK. Eine Kurzinformation, Frankfurt 2007, 4
8. Petzoldt, 184ff
9. Petzoldt, 185


Ecumenism - a movement for all seasons

John Bluck

I remember the time with a mixture of pride and bewilderment. We returned home from the 1983 Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, feeling that at last the communication issue had been securely placed on the ecumenical agenda.

Alongside the classic items of witness, unity, peace and justice, learning and community building, the Assembly had debated, studied and spoken out on the issue of ‘Communicating Credibly’. The Cinderella topic of the ecumenical movement had finally been allowed into the ballroom. In the official reports of the Assembly our statement sat proudly alongside the other preoccupations of such international meetings.

And rereading our carefully crafted words 27 years later, they still challenge and disturb the churches they were addressed to: experiment with alternative forms of communication, find new symbols to embody the ecumenism we share, enter into a critical encounter and more confident dialogue with those who work in the media, deepen our awareness and understanding of how mass media shape our lives as Christians, integrate the study of communication into theological training.

The WACC has continued to do all these things, but the World Council and its agencies internationally lost the means, but more importantly the will, to develop this new beginning that Vancouver provided. By the Canberra Assembly in 1991, the issue had been recast into ‘communication for liberation’ and the language had become more urgent but also less confident, even despairing: Mass media are now something sinister... a means of cultural impe-
rialism... hidden control... the truth is not told and we cannot exercise free judgement. Communication for liberation is distorted as people become mere consumers of media that promote violence, pornography and obscenity.

The recommended action? The Vancouver list is repeated plus disparate calls to boycott bad media products, listen to the powerless and advocate universal primary education. Little of the carefully consulted study and research work behind the earlier assembly is evident now. And apart from a single, rather desperate call to renew ‘The New World Information and Communication Order’, the communication agenda was becoming too hard for a much depleted and downsized WCC.

Had the ecumenical movement continued to flourish in its old form, as it promised to through the 1970s and early 1980s, the outcome would have been very different for resourcing programmes and study of communication and media development. Quite why the movement slowed so suddenly remains a mystery to many. Especially in my own country of New Zealand where we moved in the course of thirty short years from having a thriving national council and later conference of churches, Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic, and an almost but not quite Uniting Church, to today’s ecclesiastical landscape where few people know how to spell the word ecumenical anymore.

What went wrong?
A lack of nerve? A lack of courage and commitment? A lack of clarity? Shortcuts in consultation and preparation? Underestimating the magnitude of the issues we so confidently wrote and declaimed about?

Some of all of that, but more importantly, I think we underestimated the real depth and breadth of the ecumenical vision we claimed. We had a tiger by the tail but we acted at times as though it was a wild cat we could tame.

I think we trusted too naively and uncritically in the denominational legacies we carried so proudly. We treated them like battleships when they only deserved to be tug boats that would nudge and bump us out of our safe harbours and send us out to sea.

I think a huge amount of ecumenical energy was diverted from structural and political reform into experiential revival provided by the charismatic movement. That was itself a form of untamed and unlicensed ecumenism though in retrospect it hasn’t proved to be as revolutionary and robust in crossing theological lines. But it certainly resonated with the individualism and sensory aesthetic of the age and proved more attractive to baby boomers than institutional ecumenism.

I think we were prisoners in a mono-cultural orthodoxy that simply wasn’t resilient and robust enough to prepare us for the turmoil of the 90’s and the new millennium.

By and large the ecumenism of the 1970s and 80s did try to come to terms with the gender revolution, the challenge of feminist theology, the beginnings of an inclusive language for thinking and talking about God. In Aotearoa New Zealand three women shared the leadership of Conference of Churches – a model hailed as prophetic and far ahead of what any member church had achieved.

But what ecumenists in my country didn’t do was come to terms with the drive and energy of indigenous people, Maori in particular, to determine the future of their churches and theology along with the rest of their lives.
If we had listened more carefully to our own words at Vancouver we might have been prepared for what followed.

**Listening to Vancouver**

The first recommendation from the Vancouver report says with an understatement of breathless proportions: ‘In many places our practice of communication is not rooted in our national or local cultures. We have yet to reckon with the cultural renaissance of our time.’ It goes on to describe the alienation of groups whose culture and language is disregarded by the churches, and calls for ‘an environment in which full respect for culture is shown so communication can take place.’

Despite our best efforts, and with the wisdom of hindsight, I don’t believe we got close to creating such an environment in those heady days of ‘communication for ecumenism’. The WCC still worked and thought eurocentrically, so the struggle to become more multi-cultural in the way we communicated was always an uphill battle. The nearest we came to real progress was not in the reports we wrote and the speeches we made, even when surrounded by the best translators, but in the worship we offered and the songs we gathered and sang from round the world, the symbols of faith, rich in their variety, that spoke for themselves, and the silences we shared, without worrying about making sense of all the words.

The other obstacle to communication for ecumenism was the sheer ambition of our rhetoric and mode of operating. Centralised in Geneva, reliant on plane tickets and short meetings of jet lagged participants, pretending to speak for millions of Christians but effectively communicating with only a handful internationally, there was an unreality built into much of what we did and how we spoke. Even our use of a common English language rarely provided the intimacy that sharing faith requires. It often felt we were attempting to hold university level debates with a vocabulary that was effectively at primary school level.

If the ecumenical structures had provided us with solid ground to stand on, and resources to do the work, the communication issue would have flourished. It finally won a place in the sun on the ecumenical agenda. But the sun was setting and the day was drawing to a close.

There is a new day, of course. Ecumenism is a movement for all seasons. It doesn’t end with the chapter we wrote together in Vancouver. The new book being written – multi-cultural, languaged and faithed as it is – gives a better and bigger picture of what God’s house might look like across the whole, inhabited earth.

The debates about a new world information and communication order that I so eagerly joined in the 1970s and 80s feel like Don Quixote campaigns now. But in a strange way they have prepared me to join the local battles for media that do justice and give respect to the people around me, for images and music that swell up from the ground beneath our feet, that belong in our own soil, and honour those who have gone before us here.

It’s smaller, quieter stuff, much more modest in its ambition than the work I used to do. But it’s the stuff of ecumenism, indisputably so, driven I believe by the same barrier breaking, culture crossing, justice seeking Spirit that drove the movement that formed me then, and shapes me still.

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The world changed in our generation

Ingmar Lindqvist

There are not many today who might readily subscribe to the almost jubilant slogan used at the meeting in Edinburgh 100 years ago: ‘The world evangelized in our generation!’ Yet, communication tools nobody could dream of or imagine at the time of Edinburgh are readily available to our generation. Must we draw the conclusion that the effects of communication have decreased as the possibilities to communicate have multiplied? It certainly seems so.

The question is: how do we communicate if our goal is to achieve change? Is it not obvious that we should try to reach as many people as possible with the aid of available communication technologies? May be not.

In the 1960s the Canadian media scholar Marshall McLuhan saw the world changing into a global village – at least as far as communication went. McLuhan may have been thinking of Plato and Aristotle and their notion of the ideal state when coining the global village phrase. According to Plato the ideal size of a state was about 5,000 people (5040 to be precise, because that figure is divisible with all integers from 1-10). Aristotle qualified Plato’s ideas about the proper number of citizens by declaring that ideally one speaker should be able to be heard by all the inhabitants.

With the extension of our senses through radio, television, and Internet one person today can (technically speaking) be seen or heard in every corner of the world at the same time. Billy Graham, the preacher, was one of the first to try this feat with the aid of communication satellites. He certainly did what he could to bring about change, to christen the world in his generation. But the world is still not christened.

Today Plato and Aristotle might see the globe as being an ideal state at least as far as communication goes. Then again they might not. In their ideal state the citizens could convene in council, where they could listen and also be listened to. Aristotle saw citizenship as being actively involved in the affairs of the city. From this perspective the global communication village of today is definitely not an ideal state.

Advances in communication techniques and technology have largely increased our possibilities of communicating at a distance at the expense of personal, eye to eye communication. The old mass media were furthering one-way communication in spite of many attempts at involving the audience. The Internet has changed that. Now everyone can express their opinions for all the world to know (again technically speaking – web communication is still a prerogative of the few, as we all know, but tend to forget).

The result seems to be that like-minded people group together in virtual space. You do not get very much of an exchange and development of new ideas. You get more of a strengthening of already internalized ideas.

Communication at a distance does this. It normally tends to strengthen the ideas and beliefs of all parties involved – provided there are preconceived notions about the matter under discussion. When we are confronted with something that is news to us, the way facts are presented, for instance in news reporting, may influence our way of thinking about the matter at hand in the future.

To make us change our minds about familiar things we need to be challenged in personal communication and preferably by people we trust and regard highly. Communication scholars are quite unanimous about the strong links between personal communication and change. Aristotle’s qualification was a good one.

At the WACC global Congress in Mexico in 1995 Cees Hamelink talked about the bomber-syndrome
among users of the web. He noted it was easier to abuse others over the net than in person because, just like those dropping bombs from above, they do not see those they hit. Neither is there a need for anyone to reconsider their views about the person(s) in question as there is no personal communication.

Today we see a growing number of hate groups on the web. We also see a growing number of groups who are convinced that they are in the right and everybody else is wrong. So we have a situation where facts, views and opinions are more readily and abundantly available than ever and at the same time a tendency towards limited insight and fundamentalist attitudes.

How to bring about change?
So what about evangelizing the world in our generation? That is no longer a problem. Not if your main goal is to disperse the seed all over the globe as Billy Graham attempted to do. Already back in the 1970s tele-evangelists in the USA talked about the communication satellites as God's angels, the greatest blessing God had bestowed on humankind since Jesus Christ.

Now it was finally possible for one person to be heard all over the globe (again – in principle, while disregarding the fact that only a fraction of the world's inhabitants had and have access to the communication technology necessary to be part of the global village). The Christian satellite enthusiasts were content with reaching the many. They did not seem to concern themselves with the question: does it bring about any change? That problem was left for God to deal with.

But the biblical God is not known for communicating via satellites or impersonally. Since one of God's main concerns during the ages seems to have been to bring about change in human beings it should be worth seeing how communication took place. Not surprisingly the answer is: personally and locally.

According to the Gospels even the revolutionary event at the first Christmas was dealt with strictly locally and personally. A group of shepherds in the Bethlehem area was treated to wonderful music. Then followed a short speech and an exhortation to go and see for themselves the wonder at Bethlehem. They did so and were filled with joy. Personal presence made them believe.

Why did not God encircle the entire globe with his angels (no satellites needed!), have them sing to all people and proclaim the message to every living creature then and there? The global village would have come into existence through real angels 2000 years before satellites. And the world could have been evangelized in Jesus' generation.

But no. God seems to have known the inherent laws of communication all along. Through global one-way communication those already drawn to him would have been drawn even closer and those of a different disposition would have been antagonised. He would simply have further cemented existing opinions.

Jesus never wrote apart from once in the sand, so there were no teachings of his to be sent around to attract new disciples. Paul sent his letters to existing congregations to strengthen them, never to the 'pagans'. Non-believers were always confronted in person.

Jesus said that where two or three are gathered he was going to be in their midst. We have tended to interpret two or three as a minimum and see a significantly larger crowd as the ideal. Maybe Jesus was talking about the ideal situation? Two or three makes for ideal personal communication.

Bringing people face to face
The main-line churches, whose representatives were meeting in Edinburgh in 1910, were instrumental in founding the ecumenical movement to bring people together and initiate discussions between churches with differing views on many things. WACC is also part of this movement and has been bringing communicators from many churches together. While the cold war was still on, WACC-Europe saw it as one of its main challenges to make it possible for representatives of churches behind the Iron Curtain to be part of the ongoing dialogue. In person.

Today with growing concern over climate change it is almost a sin to fly – apart from the fact that a minor Icelandic volcano can make most of the flights within Europe come to an abrupt halt. Besides, we have become increasingly aware that traveling by any technical means leaves a negative impact on nature. In addition we have the problem of dwindling funds.

So we seem to be forced back to web communication and other means of communication at a
distance. Communication which is more apt to reinforce than to change. Do we have any options in a future in which an ever growing number of like-minded groups bond on various different web sites?

Maybe we need to revise our thinking and strategy. Maybe the road to global change is indeed local action and local communication in spite of all the new possibilities of communicating on a global scale? Maybe global developments and communication theory combine to lead us in the right direction? Jesus certainly thought in global terms and very decidedly acted locally. His working method was personal communication.

Sometimes he drew large crowds. The Gospels tell us that those that had already decided that he was no good invariably found new evidence of faulty teaching on those occasions. Those whose interest had already been kindled by relatives or friends got food for thought and felt nourished.

Sometimes things get out of hand between ethnic or religious groups. The best way to cement intolerance and hatred is to build walls, visible or invisible, between the various groups. The main cure in the long run is more personal contact.

Communication at a distance may not be our best option to bring about change. But web communication and other means of extending our impersonal presence are great in supporting, strengthening and furthering change that has been initiated by personal communication. The web is extremely well suited to give those interested, but not yet ready to commit themselves in public, a chance to establish contact. The web is an excellent media for the Nicodemuses of today.

The world evangelized in our generation? Well, theoretically what is needed is that every Christian communicates personally with at least two persons that do not share the Christian faith. The world changed into a better place in our generation? Theoretically what is needed is, in the first place, that people everywhere are prepared to communicate personally with those in their neighbourhood and not least with those whose impact on society is destructive. After that we need a massive and ingenious use of all available communication technologies.

The question is: how could we as individuals, WACC as a global actor, and the whole Christian movement become ever more deeply involved in inspiring, empowering and activating more people to become engaged in personal communication for change. On top of that, how do we continue to support the use of communication technology that is best adapted to reinforce and strengthen that change?

How can global actors, like WACC, come close enough to the very local, to the grassroots, as to be personally present? When that question is successfully answered, things will change for sure!

Note

1. This slogan was coined by the American Arthur Pierson in 1885 and adopted via John Mott by the Christian Student Volunteer Movement, the presence of which movement was strongly felt in Edinburgh.

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Unity, diversity, and love in the Middle East

Riad Jarjour

What is the present-day situation of ecumenism in the Middle East? Is it stumbling or has it made sufficient progress so that its goals are more attainable than before? What are its obstacles? What are the ways by which it could move forward? How do we view the future of church unity, and what could be the role of communication in promoting ecumenism?

These questions are not only important, but decisive in that they relate to the life of our churches in the Middle East, the birthplace of monotheistic religions and the model of religious pluralism. Answering these questions requires a longer discussion than space here allows. We can only touch briefly on these issues in a way that might move the reader to reflect, search and investigate what Christians ought to pursue as they diligently strives to obey the will of Christ.

At the time of writing this article, news came from Cairo, Egypt, that the Coptic Orthodox Church has announced its withdrawal from the Middle East Council of Churches. As one of its founding members, it is the church that with the biggest Christian population in the region.

The news did not come from the church in public; it came from the Egyptian media that communicated the withdrawal of the church in a very provocative way, and included words such as ‘the Geek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem accuses the Coptic Orthodox Church of being a traitor or of betraying its cause in the Middle East Council of Churches.’ Communicating the news in such a way was very negative and some went as far as portraying what happened as the ‘second’ Chalcedon Council Church Division.

It is unfortunate that the Christian media or other member churches in the Council did not respond to counter that and for some reason the media were silent or, unfortunately, played no positive role in reacting. If they had done so, it would have helped in fostering ecumenical relations and led to reconciliation and Christian unity. This definitely raises the question of the role of communication in ecumenism.

The reality of division
A general and objective view of the status of the ecumenical movement leads us to conclude that the churches are still divided, although all of them hope for the realization of Christ’s will that His disciples be one.

Divisions in the church are not a recent phenomenon; they go back to the days of the first church and have increased over the ages. Today we are divided into four major ecclesiastical families: Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical. The Christian churches today are in a state of division. Nevertheless, this aspect of division must not blind us to another aspect, namely, that all these churches, in spite of the divisions, embody the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Christ. The unity of the churches is manifested in their faith in one Christ, as Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 4:1-6).

The Church, then, is one body headed by Christ. The visible churches are local churches that are rooted in a variety of environments, languages, traditions and cultures. They have expressed their faith in Christ in a variety of ways, and they have manifested themselves sociologically and historically as confessional communities. It is these visible churches that are divided and whose unity we seek. What, then, were the attempts to unite the churches and to advance towards true ecumenism?

Attempts at unity
There were attempts to reunite the churches in the first millennium, but they all failed or did not last long. Some Protestant church leaders speaking of the first steps in the formation of the ecumenical
movement, and particularly the Middle East Council of Churches, go back to the world missionary conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. They believe the Edinburgh conference took decisive action in promoting modern ecumenism, and especially the world mission movements that came later to the Middle East in 1924, (the first missionary movement was held in Jerusalem under the name ‘Council of west Asia and North Africa’).

As for the second millennium, especially in the 20th century, the ecumenical movement achieved significant progress, with occasional setbacks and opportunities. The second half of the 20th century was distinguished by the work of organizations instituted for the purpose of advancing unity, including the World Council of Churches, the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and the Middle East Council of Churches, among others. One should mention the significant progress that the ecumenical movement achieved in the Middle East:

1. The establishment of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in 1974, joined by the Catholic family in 1990, made that Council a distinctive framework for animating the work of the churches in the region for the achievement of its goals, most importantly that of church unity. The MECC is unique among similar Councils around the world in adopting the concept of an ‘ecclesiastical family’ as its structural and organizational unit.

2. The Pastoral Agreement of 1991 between the Greek Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox Patriarchates. After resolving doctrinal differences, the Agreement launched a leading pastoral experiment. The Agreement stated the following: ‘We belong to one faith, in spite of the fact that history has highlighted our division more than our unity.’

3. The Balamand Document of 1993 which was issued by the International Joint Commission between Orthodox and Catholics. Especially significant in this Document was the affirmation ‘that Uniatism is an outdated form of unity’. As a result of this document a change of attitude took place in the Catholic churches whereby proselytism; i.e. ‘catholicizing’ the Orthodox, diminished.

4. The agreement between the Catholic and Orthodox Patriarchs of the Middle East, which took place on October 14, 1996, concerning three important pastoral issues for believers in a region that includes a variety of churches. These issues related to: (a) Mixed (Orthodox-Catholic) marriages; (b) a unified book of Christian Education for public schools; and (c) First Communion.

5. The consensus and unity-oriented documents issuing from bilateral encounters between the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Syriac, Coptic and Armenian) and the Vatican.

These accomplishments may appear modest to some people; nevertheless, they are very significant, for they relate to believers in varied yet neighbouring religious communities regarding matters of daily religious and parish lives. Therefore, they are appropriate and effective achievements in preparing for doctrinal unity and making the churches actively involved in the ecumenical movement. Even so there are obstacles that stand in the way of unity, just as there are issues that facilitate unity.

**Obstacles to unity**

1. **Proselytism.** If Christian churches regard each other as sister churches and believe that truth, or the orthodox doctrine, is not the monopoly of one single church, then churches must not pursue a policy of proselytism in a Christian milieu. The Evangelical family in the MECC, having become national churches and having founded the ecumenical movement, have abandoned proselytism and the idea of ‘stealing’ believers from other churches. The same applies to the uniate churches in their relation to the Orthodox churches of the East.

2. **Tension between particularity and universality.** The Christians of the Arab Middle East experience a certain tension between the local church and confessional community. They live in the church as members and in the confessional community as sons and daughters. The church is a spiritual bond and communion of faith, while the confessional community is the sociological embodiment of the church. It is a social and cultural coalition that is distinct from ‘the other’ and that derives its identity from its own history.

In the ecumenical movement this tension manifests itself either as isolation within a certain tradition or as openness to others. Isolation leads to an over-sanctification of tradition. The tradition is viewed as unique, and so the importance and beauty of others are minimized. This leads to a passiveness in the process of unity.
3. *Confessional Councils.* In relation to the issue of particularity and universality, the churches in our region currently display two contradictory tendencies. The first is in harmony with the ecumenical orientation, working at gathering the churches for encounters in spiritual, social, and cultural fellowship. Such gatherings of churches could play an effective and important role in achieving church unity. They could also play an important role on the question of national involvement and commitment and in openness to other religions, thus enabling Christian witness in the best possible form.

The second tendency, however, gathers some churches within one church identity, regional or local, for the sake of consultation and coordination and in order to voice unified positions. This direction may involve some dangers. One that should not be underestimated is that sectarian positions embrace narrow nationalist orientations. It is no secret that such directions cause harm to believers both on the spiritual and ecclesiastical level as well as on the social and national levels.

Thus, we ought to remain vigilant so as not to betray our Christian mission. The desired church unity is not merely a social gathering nor is it isolationist; rather, it is a spiritual partnership aimed at sharing the pains and joys of our communities. It is an authentic human encounter with others: all others.

**What facilitates the realization of unity/ecumenism?**

The difficulties obstructing the path to unity or real ecumenism will remain so long as Christians do not proceed, individually and collectively, to eliminate them on different levels and in various directions. It is true that the Holy Spirit is the one who works in us and that unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. But we must remain ever prepared to receive the inspiration of the Spirit lest we impede His work in us.

As for the means that could facilitate unity, some are spiritual; some are psychological and intellectual, while others are practical.

1. Spiritually, reconciliation with God always leads us to reconciliation with others, and reconciliation with the other is futile unless it leads us to love and accept others. Love, then, is the safest way to meet the other; it is the greatest commandment in Christianity.

2. Psychologically and intellectually, we must, for the sake of achieving unity, transcend all our old wounds, i.e. the divisions which were accompanied by rejection, excommunication, disdain and even persecution, as well as religious wars which used the pretext of religious differences to achieve earthly gains. When our wounds are healed we can be reconciled with the past and with history, and we can accompany the other on a journey of discovery of what unites us and what makes us witnesses to the risen Christ. Then we shall discover how much we have distorted each other’s image in the past, and thus agree to rediscover the other as he/she really is. The role of communication is vital to accompanying this process and facilitating its realization.

3. Practically, there are many ways of facilitating unity, all of them falling within the general area of joint pastoral, cultural and social initiatives. What has been achieved during the past three decades in terms of collective parish projects makes us, on the one hand, appreciate the value of such initiatives in ecumenical work, and motivates us, on the other hand, to continue moving in that direction.

**What is media’s role in the ecumenical movement?**

Media play a fundamental role in modern societies. This is particularly obvious when one sees the rapid and astonishing progress on the level of media technologies. It is also acknowledged that the media constitute a fourth power after the legislative, executive, and judiciary.

As for the role of media in the ecumenical movement, the following considerations need to be taken into account.

Media contribute to giving a true image of others; therefore, they help overcome prejudices towards other relations. When introducing others, media can highlight their richness on all levels. It has been said: ‘you are the enemy of what you ignore’, and to this can be added that ‘you are the enemy of what and whom you ignore’.

The ecumenical movement has its own history, track, events and life. On this level, media can report on all the ecumenical movement’s developments whether they are bilateral agreements between churches or local, regional and international agreements. Hence, any Christian can keep in mind all the progress towards the unification of churches
and pray for the realization of this unity.

The media also play an essential role in creating public opinion. Public opinion can often constitute a barrier against the spread of an ecumenical mentality, and media can orient public opinion towards developing and accepting the requirements of Christian unity.

In addition, public opinion generated by the media can influence the achievement of Christian unity or true ecumenism. All churches use the media to spread God’s word. Why wouldn’t the ecumenical movement then resort to this important means of spreading the ecumenical spirit?

Finally, there is no escaping the principle that dates back to the earliest centuries: ‘Unity in what is essential, diversity in what is disputable, and love in all things’. Can communication promote that?

We continue to hope that the torn and fragmented body of the Church shall be gathered and revived by the Lord, and that we shall all return to be one healed body according to Ezekiel’s vision:

‘Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord… So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet’ (Ez. 37: 5-10).

The will among believers for true ecumenism exists, especially nowadays in a torn and volatile Middle East. It needs to move and be active. Faith is essential, but communication is vital in moving it towards realization.

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**Persistence, a loud speaker and a thesaurus**

**Kristine Greenaway**

As I walked along a hot residential street one day last summer, I reflected on the surprises of being an ecumenical communicator. When I graduated from a postgraduate programme in communication at Canada’s McGill University, I had not expected to one day find myself on foot carrying the entire sound system for an international event in the form of a single loud speaker.

This and the hand held microphone attached to it by a long cord were all we had to ensure that ecumenical leaders gathered in Geneva to plan the shape of a new global organization linking Presbyterian, Reformed, United and Waldensian churches in 108 countries could hear each other.

We had no communication budget. Therefore, when at the last moment we learned that there was no sound system in the lecture hall, we contacted a Catholic colleague in another organization who was rumoured to have once brought a portable loudspeaker to a social event. We called her cell phone, found her in morning mass, arranged for the loan, and I found myself hiking to a meeting venue in a nearby lay training centre, ‘sound system’ in hand.

Drawing on goodwill, last minute problem-solving and a lack of money are the hallmarks of modern ecumenical communication.

This may be the era of social networking, on-demand printing and Google translations but it is also the era of diminishing resources for the communication infrastructure needed to communicate the
work of churches who are collaborating worldwide in response to the social and ecological challenges created by rampant consumerism and exploitative economic, political and military systems.

Denominations that traditionally have not worked ecumenically which include those that preach the ‘prosperity gospel’ (‘only believe and you shall be made rich’) are rich in financial resources for sophisticated communication outreach. Web radio, television, movies, glossy print material, skilled public speakers all are part of their daily technological fare.

The so-called ‘mainline denominations’ those who are members of the World Council of Churches, the new World Communion of Reformed Churches and regional ecumenical councils tend to be those that are committed to social justice issues and committed to social change based on their faith and values. They are also the ones in financial and demographic decline.

It is an open question to what extent the lack of money they invest in communication is a cause of that decline or the result of it. I would argue the former, others might argue the latter. Whichever came first, the decline in investment in communication or the decline which led to the reduced investment in communication, the end result is that a strong back and good pair of walking shoes is what it takes to set up the communications system for ecumenical meetings.

Making voices heard also depends on the language that we use to communicate our message. In part this involves meeting the perennial challenge of finding the financial resources and skilled personnel required to translate websites and print resources and for simultaneous interpretation. But there is also the deeper question of the verbal imagery we use to describe the initiatives in which people are invited to participate.

**Speaking a language listeners can hear**

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches which merged in June 2010 with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches is known for its calls to reform the global economic system so that there is a more just distribution of financial resources among all peoples and a sustainable level of consumption of the earth’s natural resources.

In 2004 at its global assembly in Accra, Ghana, WARC issued a statement condemning the current world economic order which causes so many people to suffer hardship because they are impoverished and marginalized by a market-driven approach to economic development which takes little or no account of the impact on peoples and the environment.

The intent was laudable. The language in which it was couched was explosive. It exploded in a powerful and empowering way in the ears of delegates from the Global South. It exploded in a powerful and disempowering way in the ears of delegates from the Global North. The use of a word like ‘empire’ to describe the powerful forces (military, economic, and political) which support the economic system and of a word like ‘neo-liberal’ to describe the system itself, set off huge debate.

Churches in North America and Europe felt attacked and sidelined by such language. Churches in the South insisted that those words were prophetic and had to be heard. It has taken seven years and a great deal of intensive dialogue to get to the point where the churches can agree that they understand and agree to the principles and articles of faith underpinning the declaration that was drafted in Accra.

As a communicator I believe that the use of synonyms is an acceptable way of communicating an idea in a variety of contexts. We must speak the language our listeners can hear. Just as there are many words and images for God, there are many ways of describing evil. By using the appropriate metaphor or reference for the context in which we are speaking, we open the way to discussion of the idea, not its envelope.

This is not an isolated example of how words can either divide or unite. An ecumenical communicator is often called on to urge impassioned colleagues who are deeply committed to an issue to consider how to use words that invite rather than condemn or proclaim. For a communicator the challenge is to build community through language which unites rather than divides. It is the difference between the Babel experience and the Pentecost experience.

Yes, a sound system or word is only a communication tool. But, without tools, how can people build? How can they see what a difference it makes when churches work together to confront the rape
of the local environment, the abuse of children’s rights, racial abuse? How can the message of solidarity with the poor and marginalized be heard?

Ecumenical communicators are often crying in the wilderness. We wander in the heat with our sole speaker and microphone and with this we seek to change the world, to protect the vulnerable, to reverse destructive patterns of the earth’s resources.

We have to believe in the power of the Spirit. We have to remember the parable of the mustard seed. We must think of what one piece of yeast can do. Being an ecumenical communicator is an act of faith. It demands persistence.

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At the closing celebration of the conference ‘Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today’, marking the Centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference, participants affirmed the following ‘Common Call’.

As we gather for the centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910, we believe the church, as a sign and symbol of the reign of God, is called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God’s mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Trusting in the Triune God and with a renewed sense of urgency, we are called to incarnate and proclaim the good news of salvation, of forgiveness of sin, of life in abundance, and of liberation for all poor and oppressed. We are challenged to witness and evangelism in such a way that we are a living demonstration of the love, righteousness and justice that God intends for the whole world.

2. Remembering Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross and his resurrection for the world’s salvation, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths – and no faith – to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practises hospitality.

3. Knowing the Holy Spirit who blows over the world at will, reconnecting creation and bringing authentic life, we are called to become communities of compassion and healing, where young people are actively participating in mission, and women and men share power and responsibilities fairly, where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation.

4. Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances
of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.

5. Affirming the importance of the biblical foundations of our missional engagement and valuing the witness of the Apostles and martyrs, we are called to rejoice in the expressions of the gospel in many nations all over the world. We celebrate the renewal experienced through movements of migration and mission in all directions, the way all are equipped for mission by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God’s continual calling of children and young people to further the gospel.

6. Recognising the need to shape a new generation of leaders with authenticity for mission in a world of diversities in the twenty-first century, we are called to work together in new forms of theological education. Because we are all made in the image of God, these will draw on one another’s unique charisms, challenge each other to grow in faith and understanding, share resources equitably worldwide, involve the entire human being and the whole family of God, and respect the wisdom of our elders while also fostering the participation of children.

7. Hearing the call of Jesus to make disciples of all people – poor, wealthy, marginalised, ignored, powerful, living with disability, young, and old – we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere. In joy we hear the call to receive from one another in our witness by word and action, in streets, fields, offices, homes, and schools, offering reconciliation, showing love, demonstrating grace and speaking out truth.

8. Recalling Christ, the host at the banquet, and committed to that unity for which he lived and prayed, we are called to ongoing co-operation, to deal with controversial issues and to work towards a common vision. We are challenged to welcome one another in our diversity, affirm our membership through baptism in the One Body of Christ, and recognise our need for mutuality, partnership, collaboration and networking in mission, so that the world might believe.

9. Remembering Jesus’ way of witness and service, we believe we are called by God to follow this way joyfully, inspired, anointed, sent and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and nurtured by Christian disciplines in community. As we look to Christ’s coming in glory and judgment, we experience his presence with us in the Holy Spirit, and we invite all to join with us as we participate in God’s transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation.

Edinburgh, 6 June 2010.
El derecho a la verdad: De la memoria a la acción

Roberto Burgos
Para Jon de Cortina S.J.
In memoriam

En El Salvador, el tema de la verdad y la construcción de una memoria necesariamente colectiva, ha sido un esfuerzo que desde la sociedad civil asumieron únicamente las organizaciones sociales. En particular, aquellas que defendieron históricamente los derechos humanos, debido principalmente a su vinculación con el trabajo de iglesias, sindicatos o universidades.

Dicha labor se vio condicionada desde que finalizara la guerra civil en 1992 por la falta de recursos suficientes para ampliar sus acciones al mismo tiempo que se dio una persistente polarización de la vida política salvadoreña dentro de la cual se dio un exacerbado optimismo. El Salvador intentó presentarse ante los ojos del resto de Centro América como un modelo de construcción de paz negociada.

Es así como durante los últimos dieciocho años, las denuncias en contra de antiguos personajes de la vida política y militar salvadoreña, y los señalamientos a las instituciones utilizadas por estos y por los sucesivos gobiernos como mecanismos de represión sistemática a las demandas colectivas, fueron ignoradas mediante los mecanismos normativos que garantizan la impunidad: léase Ley de Amnistía, el uso de la prescripción penal por parte de los jueces, e incluso por los fueros personales que como funcionarios gozan antiguos perpetradores de secuestros, torturas y desapariciones.

A lo anterior, se suma la existencia de una prensa controlada por un sector conservador y más preocupado en la cobertura de los procesos económicos activados en la posguerra y por las sucesivas problemáticas propias de una sociedad en transición: delincuencia, pobreza y migración, factores todos que atentan contra la paz y la gobernabilidad del pueblo salvadoreño, pero que difícilmente se pone en perspectiva a la luz de lo ocurrido durante doce años de guerra civil.

Otro factor fue la falta de actores estatales que cumplieran plenamente con las responsabilidades asignadas a ellos por los diversos instrumentos y acuerdos del derecho internacional, particularmente en lo que se refiere a la investigación de graves violaciones a derechos humanos y a la reparación para las víctimas. Dichos factores contribuyeron a que en El Salvador existieran dos historias divergentes en lo que se refiere al registro de los hechos acaecidos entre 1980 y 1992.

Exceptuando el registro de los hechos contenido en el Informe de la Comisión de la Verdad creada por la ONU, y las publicaciones a cargo de instituciones privadas o de la sociedad civil, el Estado salvadoreño nunca auspició o alentó durante dicho período esfuerzos sistemáticos para dar a conocer a una nueva generación de salvadoreños y salvadoreñas, las causas estructurales e históricas que permitieron el estallido de la guerra civil. Tampoco se registraron los factores internos y externos que contribuyeron a su final mediante un acuerdo negociado entre las partes, con plena participación de la comunidad internacional y de la ONU.

La construcción de la memoria histórica

Los Acuerdos de Paz de Chapultepec fueron prolíficos en el diseño de una serie de medidas a implementarse a corto plazo, destinadas a sentar las bases para la construcción de una memoria colectiva en El Salvador y a garantizar, en cierta medida, la no repetición de los graves hechos ocurridos durante los años de guerra. Se esperaba que la creación de una obra monumental que recordara a todas las víctimas civiles del conflicto; la instauración de un día feriado de conmemoración de la paz; y procesos educativos y de acción ciudadana que llevaran a la creación de una nueva “cultura de paz”, donde se
privilegiara el diálogo y la democracia como nuevas formas de convivencia, tendría que dar como resultado la refundación del Estado salvadoreño. Se esperaba desarrollar un modelo de sociedad capaz de abolir los viejos fantasmas que desangraron al país y le condenaron a la repetición irreflexiva de una historia oficial cargada de efemérides sin vinculación alguna con los procesos sociales. 

Así, y a manera de ejemplo, muy poco se sabe en El Salvador sobre las revueltas e insurrecciones indígenas del siglo diecinueve, o sobre los intentos fallidos de juzgar a las autoridades responsables de la época y sobre los focos de resistencia de cientos de comunidades que se revelaron inútilmente ante la pérdida de sus tierras ejidales. En cuanto a la masacre de indígenas y campesinos con la que inauguró su hegemonía la clase cafetalera y militar en 1932, esta se manejó durante mucho tiempo como un secreto a voces, censurados los medios de prensa y eliminados por las autoridades de la época los archivos y las fuentes directas que podrían haber evidenciado lo ocurrido.

Los esfuerzos para desarraigar de la memoria colectiva los abusos descritos y la tradicional imposición de una lectura unívoca desde el Estado sobre ellos, junto con la pobreza, la injusticia y la impunidad, formaron parte de las causas originarias del conflicto armado. Es por ello que la construcción de la memoria histórica en El Salvador, entendida como un proceso de gestación colectiva e impulso de políticas públicas, que de manera participativa busquen la recuperación de lo ocurrido y la ejecución de medidas efectivas de restitución de la dignidad de las víctimas, constituye quizás la mejor alternativa para salvaguardar los escasos pero contundentes resultados que el proceso de paz legó al pueblo salvadoreño.

Las bases para esta concepción participativa en la gestación de la memoria histórica, fueron asentadas por los sectores de la sociedad civil salvadoreña, que durante el conflicto registraron en forma artística, verbal o documental lo ocurrido, demandando justicia dentro o fuera del país, y que tras el fin de la guerra fueron perseverantes en la búsqueda de información y retribución legal para las víctimas o sus familiares, tal y como se menciona al inicio del presente artículo.

La variable inédita en El Salvador y que en menos de un año ha comenzado a hacer suyo dicho proceso, han sido las demostraciones desde el nuevo Gobierno del Presidente Mauricio Funes, en las que por primera vez en El Salvador, un gobernante ha reconocido la honorabilidad de las víctimas, ha pedido públicamente perdón a la sociedad por los desmanes y violaciones a derechos humanos cometidas por agentes estatales y ha impulsado actividades públicas de homenaje con participación popular.

Es así como la ceremonia de conmemoración del décimo octavo aniversario de los Acuerdos de Paz, realizada en el campus de la Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), representa los primeros pasos impulsados desde el Estado para una verdadera transición hacia la paz en El Salvador. La ceremonia se realizó en el vigésimo primer aniversario del asesinato de la comunidad jesuita y de sus dos colaboradoras y apenas una semana después de los treinta años del asesinato del Arzobispo de San Salvador, Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero a manos de un escuadrón de la muerte.

Dicha ceremonia representa un aporte gubernamental a la construcción efectiva de una memoria histórica y que inevitablemente deberá pasar de la rememoración y la celebración, a las acciones concretas de justicia que permitan sancionar a los responsables de estos y otros hechos, igual que lo hicieron sus pares en Chile y Argentina.

El derecho a la verdad
En un texto reciente, la jurista peruana Susana Vílлярán, expresaba lo siguiente:

“La unidad de las naciones se cimenta en la igualdad, la libertad y la justicia, no en la intolerancia, el odio y la injusticia. De esta premisa básica e incontestable se deriva la necesidad apremiante de verdad, y de que los pueblos necesitan conocerse a través de la verdad...”

La cita anterior, otorga a la necesidad de contar con información sobre lo ocurrido en tiempos de conmoción social, de una posibilidad de cohesión colectiva en torno a los valores más caros para la convivencia de los grupos sociales. La justiciabilidad de esta aspiración mediante la exigencia de un “Derecho a la Verdad”, ha sido puesta a prueba en varios procesos legales sobre casos emblemáticos ocurridos en El Salvador, tales como el de niños y
niñas desaparecidos durante el conflicto, la persistencia de los escuadrones de la muerte en la etapa inmediata posterior al fin de la guerra, entre otros.

De esta forma, hace menos de diez años que los alegatos en torno al Derecho a la Verdad por parte organizaciones y representantes de víctimas fueron esgrimidos, primero ante la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos y luego ante la Corte con sede en San José, Costa Rica en el “Caso de las Hermanas Serrano Cruz Vs. El Salvador”; sentencia del 23 de noviembre de 2004, que reconoce en la actualidad por medio de su jurisprudencia la existencia de un verdadero derecho cuya titularidad, tanto individual como colectiva, vincula a los Estados miembros de la OEA mediante la obligación de informar sobre lo ocurrido a las víctimas de violaciones a derechos humanos y permitiendo el acceso a sus archivos y registros oficiales.

Este Derecho a la Verdad tantas veces negado por la justicia salvadoreña, articulado con el lento proceso de recuperación y construcción de la memoria histórica reseñada más arriba, debe indefectiblemente dar paso a la acción concreta, no solo mediante el inicio de causas judiciales que señalen responsabilidades individuales o institucionales, sino que también a través de la incidencia política y los esquemas participativos que mantengan viva la memoria y el legado de más de setenta mil víctimas del conflicto.

Del recuerdo a la acción

Siendo El Salvador un país marcado por la violencia y por el desbalance entre la suma de hechos ocurridos y la escasa producción historiográfica a lo largo de su desarrollo, el encuentro con la contundencia de los hechos y la recopilación documental de lo acaecido, no pueden quedarse en la mera acumulación de datos o imágenes.

Hoy más que nunca, la memoria colectiva deberá dar paso a las acciones reivindicativas que logren perforar la agenda pública con los testimonios de lo sucedido: el documental, la filmografía, la investigación histórica y la misma cobertura mediática se vuelven las herramientas para reunir la fragmentada historia salvadoreña en un mosaico de hechos que no deben volver a ocurrir.

¿Cuáles son estas acciones reivindicativas en el seno de la sociedad salvadoreña?

En primer lugar, la educación de las generaciones de la posguerra, que carentes de un conocimiento mínimo sobre la historia nacional reciente, apenas demanda la obtención de un conocimiento histórico que les permita conocer los antecedentes de la sociedad en la que viven y en la que indefectiblemente van a interactuar como actores políticos. La falta de un basamento histórico entre este sector, hace peligrar los logros alcanzados a tan alto precio e impide darle continuidad a los retos pendientes en la construcción de una verdadera identidad colectiva que no de la espalada a su propio pasado.

En segundo lugar, la transformación de un gran sector del periodismo salvadoreño, en un periodismo más independiente e investigativo, que sea capaz de indagar en las raíces mismas de los procesos nacionales, alerta a los avances de la justicia transicional y restaurativa, que sea capaz de contrastar la inacabada posguerra salvadoreña con otros procesos latinoamericanos de transición y que vuelque los resultados de sus investigaciones a un nivel al que no pueden llegar los juristas ni el sistema judicial, siempre amarrado por la legalidad formal, las amnistías y los vicios del poder.

En tercer lugar, poner fin a la postergada posibilidad de reparación para las víctimas, ya que solo la dignificación real de quienes sufrieron el embate de las guerras internas, auspiciadas en aras de la seguridad nacional, permitirá ponerle fin a la coexistencia cómplice de dos versiones discordantes sobre la historia salvadoreña: aquella que niega la gravedad de los hechos que ocurrieron, y la de aquellas personas que perdieron sus proyectos de vida, su salud o a sus familiares.

Finalmente, valga insistir en que solo el acceso al conocimiento de la verdad mediante procesos formativos y participativos, la satisfacción moral y material para quienes todavía sufren y el registro responsable de sus testimonios, son la garantía real de que estos episodios no vuelvan a ocurrir. El Salvador, se mueve finalmente en esa dirección, la posguerra comienza hoy.
La Dolce Vita ha cumplido 50 años

Carlos A. Valle

¿Es La Dolce Vita una vieja reliquia del pasado? ¿O es una imagen de un mundo que hoy persiste? De entrada se convierte en un filme polémico y controvertido que produce seducción pero también repudio. Resultaba demasiado duro aceptar las críticas a una sociedad que lucía decadente y volcada a la frivolidad y el cinismo. Sus imágenes reproducen descarnadamente una sociedad marcada por una perentoria necesidad de vivir apasionadamente un turbulento sin sentido.

Cuando fue estrenada en 1960 La Dolce Vita recibió prontamente la condena del Vaticano a través de una serie de artículos en L’Osservatore Romano. En España la película solo fue conocida 20 años después. Las repercusiones de todo tipo dieron mayor promoción al filme. Mientras tanto, en el Festival de Cannes recibe la Palma de Oro ese mismo año.

“No hay fin. No hay comienzo. Solo existe la infinita pasión por la vida”, dijo alguna vez Federico Fellini. La Dolce Vita nos pinta una Roma que, dinamizada por el fuerte crecimiento económico, refleja a una sociedad que ya no repara en la miseria y el dolor de la guerra, sino muestra signos crecientes de un postmodernismo donde vuelven a aflorar las viejas y descarnadas divisiones sociales.

La presencia de lo religioso
El Cristo ha ido paseando por históricas ruinas romanitas, ha sobrevolado los nuevos y enormes monobloques, los niños jugando entre calles aún sin reconstruir y se ha ido acercando al Vaticano. Este Cristo que sobrevuela la ciudad pudiera verse como el manto de un cristianismo que rodea y cubre la ciudad pero también como una señal de un Cristo distante de un mundo en el que no tiene lugar.
La presencia de lo religioso se repite. En la escena del falso milagro de la aparición de la Virgen, se juega con la ingenua y, por momentos, brutal reacción de la gente ante el presunto milagro. Pero, mayormente, el escenario está exacerbado por la presencia de un periodismo que no se detiene en nada para lograr la toma de un milagro inexistente. Su saciedad por lograr público y público exaltado no tiene límites.

Lo que pinta Fellini ya ha sido superado hoy por un manejo más sofisticado y una tecnología más avanzada, pero conservando el mismo propósito. El sacerdote que mira la escena se lamenta por lo sucedido, porque para él el milagro no puede acontecer en el bullicio sino en la intimidad. Más tarde, aparecerá otro sacerdote encaminándose a decir su misa con la dueña de un castillo mientras observa atónito a los agotados visitantes que han pasado la noche de fiesta en los innumerables escondrijos de la torre.

Para poder comprender la vorágine de esas vidas y la urgente necesidad de saciedad que las motiva, hay que concentrarse en lo que puede considerarse el centro de esta película: el encuentro de Marcelo con Steiner, un intelectual que vive en su peculiar mundo rodeado de otros intelectuales que muestran su apego a la cultura oriental, desbordan en alabanzas a la libertad sin compromisos y sin hijos, cuyo lema es: “fumar, beber, la cama” mientras se embelesan escuchando la grabación de los sonidos de la naturaleza.

Destellos de un mundo dentro del bullicio del que parecen apartados pero con el que, al final y al cabo, comulgan. Marcelo visita ese círculo y muestra su admiración por Steiner a quien pide volver a visitarlo. Steiner muestra su interés por él estimulándolo a que cumpla su sueño de ser escritor.

**El miedo al futuro**

Steiner parece tener una familia perfecta con dos hermosos hijos, pero hay algo que le angustia: la vida miserable que reclama la sociedad donde “todo está calculado y perfecto”, por lo que no oculta su miedo al futuro y la posibilidad del fin de todo. Por eso Steiner ha tomado una drástica decisión, mata a sus dos hijos y se suicida. Para él la pasión por la vida ha entrado en una senda sin retorno. ¿Está muy alejado Fellini de lo que hoy podría decirse sobre la precaria estabilidad de un mundo nuclearizado y con enormes poderes incontrolables?

La chispa de esperanza que había aparecido en la vida de Marcelo se desvanece para siempre. Con la trágica muerte de Steiner han muerto todos sus sueños y por eso se abandona en el torbellino del ruido y de la nada. En los últimos instantes del filme lo vemos, después una agitada fiesta, dirigirse en la madrugada, como parte de una comparsa, hacia las orillas del mar. Allí los pescadores están sacando en una red un enorme pez que yace en la orilla, cuyos ojos atónitos parecen reflejar su incertidumbre y la incertidumbre de los que lo rodean.

**Paola, el ángel**

Desde lejos alguien procura hablar con Marcelo. Es Paola, la jovencita con la que en un momento él se ha encontrado en un pequeño restaurante de la playa. No es de Roma, viene de un pequeño pueblo que extraña. Marcelo le dice con total candor que es bella y, mientras le pide que se ponga de perfil,
Comenta, “Pareces un ángel, el de la Iglesia de Umbria”.

Marcelo no la ha olvidado pero no alcanza a escuchar su voz e interpretar sus gestos. Pareciera que Paola le está haciendo una invitación, pero Marcelo sin mucha insistencia hace un gesto de “no se escucha” y se va con su grupo. La cámara se posa en la límpida y sonriente mirada de la jovencita que lo ve alejarse, una mirada en búsqueda de calidez humana que se vuelve sobre el espectador.

Es posible hacer una lectura de todo el filme a partir del tema de la incomunicación. De las reiteradas barreras creadas por los personajes para abrirse a los demás. Marcelo con las mujeres, el ocasional encuentro con su padre a quien parece casi no conocer. La búsqueda de máscaras con que actuar en cada ocasión y el vacío de no haber podido conocer de verdad a Steiner y de Steiner de compartir su angustia. Y este final, de intento frustrado, de no poder aceptar el llamado de este ángel que pareciera prefigurar un camino distinto. ¿Una nota de ilusión en medio de tanta desazón social?

Han pasado 50 años, las técnicas narrativas y los recursos técnicos han cambiado, pero no podríamos dejar de reconocer que La Dolce Vita es una pintura dolorosa, amarga pero real de un mundo que cada vez más ha hecho del hedonismo y del sin sentido de la vida un motor hacia el egoísmo de las personas y de los pueblos, lo que el crítico Robert Richardson llamó un “abrumador sentido de disparidad entre lo que la vida ha sido o debería ser, y lo que en realidad es.”

Nota
La cita de Montanelli viene de El País, 15.03.2010 y es una traducción del italiano.


Ingmar Bergman’s legacy on Farö

Ylva Liljeholm

Ingmar Bergman wanted the Orkney Islands for the shooting of Through a Glass Darkly but was carefully pointed by the producer in the direction of Fårö (for economic reasons, of course). Fårö is a harsh and barren island five minutes ferry-ride from the north point of Gotland, Sweden’s biggest island.

Bergman arrived for the first time on a stormy April day in 1960 and immediately fell in love with the place. He lived there most of the time until his death in July 2007 and is buried, together with Ingrid Bergman, at Fårö church. The grave quickly become a growing tourist attraction on Gotland.

Fårö is the place where Ingmar Bergman sought inspiration and tranquillity and is also the place which most of all is associated with his work.

Over the years Fårö has changed from being a remote place with a decreasing population to a summer paradise for wealthy mainlanders, mostly in the political or cultural sphere, Olof Palme being the most famous example. Ingmar Bergman put Fårö on the world map but involuntarily and indirectly also contributed to the insane increase in house prices. Something that makes life difficult for the locals whose children cannot afford to buy as much as a hut on the island.

Even so, the relationship between the locals and Bergman is always described as having been very respectful. The locals directed curious tourists as far from Bergman’s home at Hammars as they could, and Bergman for his part always used local craftsmen when he needed something done to the several buildings on his estate.

After his death a public dream of getting access
to Bergman’s estate was awakened. A chance for everyone to have a look at this part of Fårö that Bergman mastered and that has always been surrounded by a touch of mystery.

As things turned out, this will not be the case, but at least his houses will be opened to an exclusive population of artists and cultural workers. More about this later.

**The Ingmar Bergman festival**

In 2004 a group of enthusiastic people representing Gotland University, the regional film resource centre Film on Gotland, and locals from the Fårö Future association decided to arrange a festival – the Bergman week. The festival consists of six days with films, seminars, guests and tours to filming locations around Fårö. (Bergman shot seven films on Fårö).

Today it is the Fårö Bergman Centre foundation that is the main organiser of the now very popular and established festival, together with the organisations mentioned above and the Gothenburg International Film Festival. Bergman visited the festival on several occasions, sometimes unannounced and his spontaneous dialogue with bishop Lennart Koskinen in Fårö church is legendary. It began with Bergman asking Koskinen if the Bishop really believed in God!

Over time the festival has hosted famous guests like Ang Lee, Wim Wenders and Kenneth Branagh – all of them giving their personal views on the impact Bergman has had on their work and introducing their own Bergman favourite film. In 2010 Liv Ullman will visit the festival and hold a masterclass for film students.

During the festival; Bergman’s private cinema at Dämba with 15 seats will be opened to the public for the first time (at least the lucky ones who can get hold of the exclusive tickets). Three of Bergman’s nine children will introduce a film that will be shown at Dämba.

**The Norwegian saviour**

After Bergman’s death, and the realisation of his last will (‘sell everything at the highest price’), the Fårö Bergman Centre foundation had to give up its ambition to buy the four estates at Hammars and Dämba that Bergman owned. The Swedish government had no ambition to give as much as a nickel to rescue the estates from being placed in the hands of anyone with enough capital, and the foundation lacked the financial resources to put in.

Therefore, the emergence of a Norwegian billionaire, Hans Gude Gudesen, was an unexpected godsend. The Bergman Estate foundation was created in 2009. Bergman’s daughter Linn Ullman is the engineer behind the vision to become an international centre for artists, journalists and scholars which will be run according to Ingmar Bergman’s ideals.

This means it will be a residence for hard work. Linn Ullman’s vision is also for the foundation to repay the locals and the whole of Gotland’s population for letting her father live his life in peace at Fårö.

The foundation’s work will take the form of a lot of cultural activities for children and young people in collaboration with the school in Fårösund and with other Bergman foundations. You can read all about her visions and goals on the foundation’s website.

**Three Bergman foundations**

There is a first Bergman foundation, established in 2002 on Ingmar Bergman’s own initiative. The objective of this foundation is to administer, preserve and provide information about Ingmar Bergman’s collected artistic works. This foundation is situated at the Film house in Stockholm.

The somewhat confusing situation today is thus that there are three separate Bergman foundations.
with different yet sometimes similar visions and goals, of which two are based on Fårö. The Bergman Centre with little economic clout and the Bergman Estate with much more. So far there has been a friendly relationship between them and this year’s Bergman week will be a collaboration between the two.

Hopefully the good intentions will continue and grow for the benefit of Bergman-lovers all over the world. The logical way forward is for the two foundations on Fårö eventually to become one, but let that be a process that takes the time it needs. No one will benefit from a situation in which the foundations compete with each other.

More information is available about the foundations at www.bergmancenter.se (The Bergman Center foundation at Fårö); www.ingmarbergman.se (the foundation taking care of Ingmar Bergman’s archive among other things); www.bergmangardarna.se (the foundation that owns the physical heritage of Bergman at Fårö.)

Ylva Liljeholm has a background as a journalist but now works with supporting young film talents at the regional resource centre for film, Film on Gotland. For many years she has been a member of a film-theological network hosted by the culture council of Church of Sweden and of Interfilm.

Film in anti-trafficking and anti-slavery campaigns

William Brown

Human trafficking has been described as a global pandemic. In and of itself, smuggling people across and within borders is a dangerous practice, and it is thought that at least 10,000 people die from drowning, suffocation and other causes each year while illegally in transit.

Human trafficking is inherently tied to various other phenomena that also result in fatalities and other human rights infringements, and which might be grouped together under the umbrella term contemporary slavery. Contemporary slavery includes the exploitation of labour forces, especially through bonded labour, as typified by the sweat shop, but also illegal nannies and domestic helpers, mail-order brides, the practice of forced prostitution, child smuggling, and the farming of humans for their organs.

If there are as many as 27 million slaves in the world today, a figure offered by Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd and Alex Kent Williamson in their book, Modern Slavery, then the slave industry is as large now as it ever has been – and this industry is in large part enabled by the practice of human trafficking, even though human trafficking and slavery do not amount to precisely the same thing.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union, and the G8 nations all addressed the issue of human traffick-
ing in 2000, with the UN Protocols on trafficking and smuggling being signed in Palermo, Italy, in the same year. In addition, inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), UNICEF, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the Anti-Slavery International, all have anti-trafficking programmes in place.

And yet, in spite of these measures, the widespread practices of human trafficking and contemporary slavery remain largely ignored, even though the two constitute a ‘global pandemic’ that likely takes place in relative proximity to each and every one of us.

If the above organisations are to be lauded for their efforts, perhaps there is also criticism to be levelled at them in that, particularly with regard to governmental agencies, white papers offering figures and solutions to a problem only get read by a handful of people, while there should perhaps be a more widespread and ‘pandemic’ response to this pandemic issue.

If it is a truism, or simply common sense, to say that the media can serve as a major outlet for passing on information about an issue such as human trafficking, perhaps it is less obvious to say that the media, with cinema and television as perhaps the two most powerful examples, can also inspire intervention, help prevention, and raise awareness of contemporary ills.

**Raising awareness through cinema**

While many of us in the contemporary age think with and through films (‘it was just like in such-and-such a film’), not so many people seem to use films as a way to do precisely this: to help those afflicted by human trafficking at some point in their lives and to inspire those who know of it but do not know what to do about it to get involved in the eradication of this widespread and pernicious phenomenon.

Using films does not necessarily mean showing pre-existing films, although this does happen. The Unchosen Film Festival, for example, has been running in Bristol, UK, since 2008, and is about to expand to several other locations in 2010. The festival shows various films that deal with human trafficking in an attempt to raise awareness about this issue not just (if at all) to those involved in policy-making and regulation, but to the average citizen who would do well to know about such matters. And yet, despite backing from Amnesty International, Fairtrade, Greenpeace, and others, Unchosen is an independent undertaking that, like many of its ilk, struggles with costs of venue and relies upon many favours (such as free film hire).

However, since using films does not necessarily or uniquely mean showing pre-existing films, it can also mean making films. Again, for the most part, this seems to be something undertaken by independent producers and creatives. If films such as Nick Broomfield’s *Ghosts* or Ken Loach’s *It’s a Free World…* both highlight the injustices of bonded labour, together with the complications that ensue when trying to put a stop to this practice, then these are films that remain to an extent commercial endeavours.

This is to say that coverage of the films, together with the films themselves to a certain extent, will likely focus on the entertainment value of the film as opposed necessarily to the function that it can serve in anti-human trafficking and anti-slavery activism. This despite the fact that *Ghosts* also encourages viewers to contribute to the Morecambe Bay Victims Fund, the film itself being a recreation of the death of 23 Chinese workers in Morecambe in 2004 and whose families are still paying off their debts to the Snakeheads who helped to get them there.

However, if films are predominantly produced independently and if they do have the recovery of production costs as their bottom line, this is not uniquely the case. *Holly*, for example, is, like the two films mentioned above, a feature length narrative film about human trafficking. It differs, however, in that the film is a core component of Guy Jacobson’s Redlight Children Campaign (RCC), which has as its goal the protection of children caught up in the global sex trade.

*Holly* did have a commercial theatrical release in the USA (where it grossed US$166,620), but more importantly it is a film that has screened not only at the UN and at the US State Department, but whose non-theatrical life also involves screenings held by the RCC in collaboration with various NGOs and corporations.

In other words, rather than being a film that is
simply ‘out there’ as far as anti-trafficking and anti-slavery organisations are concerned, it is a film whose creators actively seek to incorporate into activist campaigns.

While organisations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UNGIFT) produce public service announcements (PSAs) that also help to raise awareness of human trafficking and contemporary slavery, these do not necessarily gain the same coverage and thus do not have the same potential for bringing about change as a feature length film, especially if the film can be sold/publicised on account of its stars and/or as a result of awards gleaned from film festivals. Holly, for example, which is about a Vietnamese girl in Cambodia who has been smuggled into the country to take part in the sex trade, stars internationally recognised actors Ron Livingston, Chris Penn, Virginie Ledoyen and Udo Kier.

Furthermore, while a PSA can succinctly and clearly highlight that trafficking is a major problem in the contemporary world, it can do little to get to grips with the complexities of the issue. The UNODC’s PSA Trafficking in Women, for example, might well convey the fact that 700,000 women are forced into the sex trade each year, but it does so by reproducing many of the clichés involved in the issue: namely attractive young women in particular are put forward as victims.

This is not a criticism per se of the UNODC, but a feature length film provides the opportunity to explore the complex network of personnel involved in human trafficking and slavery, as well as the multiplicity of reasons for which people might find themselves caught up in it. In effect, saying that human trafficking and slavery are ‘bad’ is fair enough, but getting closer to how and why humans will exploit others and, more particularly, put themselves at the risk of exploitation, is a far more important message to get across – and this can perhaps only be done in the longer format of the feature.

Avoiding pitfalls

One objection to using feature films to promote awareness of, and to inspire activism and to improve prevention measures against human trafficking and slavery might be that they will always to a certain degree fall foul of clichés. Many films that feature human trafficking are prey to this tendency, including glossy North American and European productions such as Trade, Taken, The Transporter, and Sex Traffic.

Either the villains are stereotypical bad guys defined along racial/national stereotypes, or global trafficking is the brainchild of a single mastermind whose removal would supposedly bring the whole trafficking infrastructure tumbling down. Similarly, those most often at risk are typically virginal teens whom audiences are encouraged to find as attractive a commodity as the traffickers in the film do.

However, while these are among the pitfalls involved, this does not mean that some films and filmmakers do not responsibly charge themselves with the task of making conscientious films that depict the wide-ranging reasons for people to be involved in trafficking and slavery – as the examples of Ghosts and It’s a Free World... hopefully illustrate, with other films from around the world, such as Israeli director Amos Gitai’s Promised Land, Slovenian Damjan Kožole’s Spare Parts, Spanish Chus
Gutiérrez’s Poniente, and British Michael Winterbottom’s In This World.

Similarly, one might object to the use of film in anti-trafficking and slavery campaigns because films appeal less to the logic of the campaign in question (‘trafficking is bad’) and more to the emotions of those watching the film. As tools for inspiring emotions and not reasons, films can be overlooked as ‘mere’ diversions and entertainments.

But it seems that by appealing to the emotions of those watching the films that films can much more easily lead to a positive – and hopefully subtle and complex – engagement with issues like trafficking and slavery than can the reproduction of cold, hard facts.

I would argue that personalising and humanising trafficking and slavery is a more effective means of encouraging reflective thought than is assailing audiences with alienating figures. In fact, the PSAs from UNODC and UNGIFT are a testament to this, except that in the short form these films must also avail themselves of unsubtle clichés.

Given the pandemic nature of slavery and trafficking, it seems an important moment for government agencies and NGOs to start using feature films, both in terms of involvement in production as well as in terms of providing channels of exhibition, as part of their campaigns. This would help to unify those diverse but committed strands that are currently trying to use films to help raise awareness of and, hopefully, to bring an end to these contemporary evils that go on all around us and yet which people seem to know precious little about.

ICTs past: The telegraph in India

Sujatha Sosale

Little is known about the roles of the media in early modernization efforts in the colonies. Archival evidence suggests that colonizers struggled with the hopes, fears, and above all, identities (their own and the recipient communities’) related to significant social changes in the colonies in which new media technologies played an important role.

It is generally acknowledged that modern social development began under colonialism, at times as an inevitable extension of the industrial revolution in the West, and at times because of the introduction of technologies for administrative convenience in the colonies. Not surprisingly, such introductions led to unexpected outcomes where technologies, especially communication technologies such as the press, the telegraph, and the railways, became weapons in freedom struggles.

Understanding the colonial origins of modern social development as we know it involves, at least in part, looking at the ways in which technologies were talked about among the people, both in the colony as well as in the home country of the colonizers. In this article, I share the results of an exploration of pamphlets circulated in Britain about the telegraph in India that revealed a public domain rife with hopes, encouragement or disappointments regarding the medium. This information and communication technology (ICT) of the time was regarded as an enabler of peaceful change, and alternately, as a catalyst in unleashing violence and destruction that forcibly effected change.

The introduction of the telegraph led to an expansion of communicative capacities that in turn
revolutionized the newspaper into its modern form as a new mass medium. It also led to a more heightened globalization of financial institutions because of instantaneous real-time communication, a process that has normalized globalization in its most recent manifestation. The speed of information exchange and the realization that that speed confers power is apparent in both the routine working of the telegraph as well as attempts to disable and destroy the technology in the course of conflicts such as large-scale uprisings and clashes with the ruling powers in the colonies.

As some archival sources indicate, perhaps one of the profound changes that occurred in this entire process involved perceptions of changing identities for both the colonizer and the colonized. Structural change and related changes in identity perceptions serve as an index to understanding social change. Examining the discussions about the medium at the time can provide some insights into the perceptions of the colonial, developed self and the native other.

Pamphlets, public documents examined for this study, were authored by at least moderately prominent figures in their respective professions, most of whom depended to varying degrees on the telegraph for practicing their professions, and circulated amongst the public in Britain at the time to stimulate debate and discussion at large. I have drawn the pamphlets from the digital archive maintained by the Knowsley Collection at the University of Liverpool, and made available on a trial basis to selected US university libraries. Authors included editors, journalists, military officers and government officials.

Based on the analysis of the archival data, I provide a glimpse of the perceptions and opinions around the telegraph in British India, still considered a part of the global South, even if contemporary India has moved up in the economic hierarchy of developing regions.

**The telegraph as new technology in British India**

Writing about the political economy of British India, Goswami (2004: 46, 47) identified three categories of development that summed up the governing role of ‘state works’ – communication, built environment, and irrigation projects. Communication included railways, canals, roads, lighthouses, postal services, and telegraphs. With the introduction of the telegraph in the mid-19th century in India and other colonies (Boyd-Barrett 1998, Rantanen and Boyd-Barrett 1998), it was possible to network centres and territories for administration purposes. State involvement was apparent, as also the involvement of private interests such as the Cable and Wireless Company in Britain.

A series of stakeholders in relation to the cable as mode of communication and cable as physical product emerged at this time (Hills 2002). Information-brokering companies such as Reuters and other state-owned organizations such as the French Havas and the German Wolff introduced entrepreneurial innovations with this technology. For example, compression of signals was a valued business and technological strategy for information transmission that Reuters soon mastered and established in India. This enabled Reuters to offer larger information packages at lower rates, undercutting the standard packages offered by hitherto monopoly organizations like Cable and Wireless Company (Hills 2002).

The anticipations and effects of this medium seem to be extensively debated in many venues, especially in relation to several aspects of British communication policies. Hills’s key works on telecommunications and empire serve as a helpful introduction to the world of the telegraph business and telecommunication policy in Britain and her colonies, though the goal of the book was to understand telecommunications and US-British relations at this time. Policy and other forms of regulation shaped the telecommunication structure, processes and market, and they reveal the close connections between the cable industry and the British administration. The intention was to secure the telegraphic networks worldwide, and to enable this in the East, Britain established India as the telecommunication hub for networking further east to her colonies (Hills 2002).

Besides colonial administration, corporations began using the telegraph for global financial transactions such as foreign direct investment, with Reuters establishing itself as one of the earliest financial news and information brokers in modern media communication. Although colonies, arguably the equivalent of so-called developing regions of today, figured in such transactions, it is not clear whether they were themselves transactors of business using
this infrastructure and Reuters’ services. Nevertheless, new media played powerful roles in effecting social change in these regions.

Changes related to these new communication technologies were also apparent in Britain at this time. Britain’s domestic communication policies were altered to facilitate domestic companies’ operations abroad as well as accommodate foreign companies’ operations within the country, especially the United States, which was especially interested in penetrating the Indian and South African networks, both British strongholds, at the time (Hills 2002).

Colonial rule in India around 1857
Most of the pamphlets examined for this article were circulated in the wake of the Indian uprising of 1857. This uprising has been referred to by many names such as India’s First War of Independence, the Sepoy Mutiny, or the Indian Rebellion. Textbooks in India refer to the First Indian War of Independence, whereas the British referred to it as the Sepoy Mutiny or the Indian Rebellion. The reasons leading to the war are complex and go back about three decades prior to its happening.

A series of policies established by the British such as the Subsidiary Alliance (British protection of princely Indian states in return for the stationing of British troops) and later the Doctrine of Lapse (British acquisition of certain categories of kingdoms without heirs to the state) enabled the British to rapidly gain political power over Indian princely states and acquire ownership of land in the form of kingdoms. Indian troops were selected by the British to keep peace within India, with some supplementary English troops. Caste and religious divides among the troops added to the increasing discontent and unrest among the Indians as a result of these policies. Textbooks also cite inflammatory practices such as greasing cartridges with pork and beef fat, which offended both Hindus and Muslims, further inciting the mutiny that was carefully planned to break out in several places either simultaneously or in succession.

Archival documents show that this war left a deep scar on the colonizers’ psyche. The East India Company, which had gained increasing political power in India, folded, and the British government took over the rule of India. References are made to ‘India, our country’ in these documents. It is evident that this deep trauma caused the British to talk about India and Britain in specific ways, with particular references to the greatness of Britain, her resilient spirit, and the need for renewed zeal to control the natives using different measures of governance rather than force and autocratic rule.

Those who had been urging the government for a more perceptive understanding of the natives and the land took this opportunity to drive home this point with the British government. Other, more progressive-minded English who were in favour of India and Indians prior to the uprising abruptly changed their minds after the rebellion, and so on. Overall, there seemed to be support for the British government taking over India. And in relation to this state takeover, ‘state works’ including steam power, railways, and the telegraph were discussed quite extensively. Communication technologies became serious considerations in the change of rule and consolidation of political power.

Public discourses about the new medium
Public discourse about the telegraph at this time was circulated in pamphlets as much as in other media. Over time, the concept of the ‘pamphlet’ has varied in some ways, but in others, especially its circulation in the public domain, it has remained unchanged. For instance, its etymology, as explained in Etymonline, is traced to the 14th century, when ‘small, unbound treatise[s]’ were called pamphlets; ‘popular and widely copied’ is another description, as also ‘brief work dealing with questions of current interest.’

UNESCO has defined pamphlets as ‘non-periodic publication of at least 5 but not more than 48 pages, published… and made widely available to the public.’ The 19th Century British Pamphlets Project (the digitized collection of which served as the database for this study), describes pamphlets as ‘an important means of public debate in the 19th century, covering the key political, social, technological and environmental issues of the day.’

Using the Knowsley Collection, I culled about 7 pamphlets, from 5 to 65 pages in length. Two were published in 1853, one in 1859, one in 1863, and the rest were published in 1858, the year after the first war of independence. These pamphlets provided a glimpse into the attitudes, debates, and talk about the telegraph at the time. All of them were
authored by British administrators, editors, or military officers and were circulated in public in Britain. Detailed examples from a few pamphlets have been given to provide an idea of the opinion climate around this medium in this venue.

In a pamphlet titled ‘Notes on India’, Dr. George Buist, scientist and newspaper editor of the Bombay Times, praised the speed and reach of information dissemination as ‘conveying intelligence instantly to all parts of India’ (1853, p. 22) and quoting from the popular missionary publication Friends of India, anticipated that an all-India telegraph network would be established by 1858. Speaking about its implications for British rule – that it ‘will entirely alter the character and complexion and the exigencies of the administration’ (p. 24), Dr. Buist described the increased power that administration could wield because of instantaneous communication of events in the provinces to the central administration. This would render the councils of the presidencies of Bombay and Madras ‘old’ and ‘lumbering’ and ‘altogether out of date,’ an argument that favoured reduction in administrative bureaucracy in governance.

The second document titled ‘The Government of India Under A Bureaucracy’ (1853) by John Dickinson, (whose credentials are given in initials; other information beyond this is not available), covers several domains, including finance, governance, social problems and public works. The acknowledgments show that the pamphlet used several sources for inspiration, among them The Times, Friends of India, and Bombay Times. References to the telegraph in this pamphlet urged the British government to pay equally close attention to roads and railways since transportation at the time was considered to be a conveyer of information, along with the telegraph.

A pamphlet titled ‘India: its dangers considered in 1856’ (published in 1858), a reprint of a letter written by retired military officer Nathaniel Alves to Lord Metcalfe, Lieutenant Governor of Agra, analyzed causes of the 1857 ‘insurrection’ – and provided ‘suggestions towards producing a permanent state of peace, prosperity and happiness in that great country.’ Alves warned the government of what he called the ‘delicate character’ of networks like railways and the telegraph, whose maintenance:

‘Depends upon the good temper of our native subjects, and in all the wilder tracts of country...as well as temper of the less civilized tribes that inhabit them. It is but too well known how little is required to derange either an electric telegraph or a permanent line of rails, and how fearful might be the consequences of the latter taking place occasionally in India.’

But rather than discourage the government from developing these networks, Alves argued for ‘rendering’ British rule ‘popular by justice and generous policy so as to secure the maintenance of our telegraphs and railways through the willing assistance of all our subjects and native allies in India.’ Such a policy would ensure that the subjects participated in the making of change. This document hints that destruction of communication networks was part of the arsenal of strategies in the first war of independence, similar to contemporary war strategies where information and communication hubs are often targeted for destruction.

The document also reveals an optimism about the establishment of this communication technology in India, but always keeping in mind the advantages for Britain. Britain is characterized as a benevolent ruler and Indians as natives who could be coaxed and trained into becoming the ideal subjects. One other footnote that is telling of a profound change the technologies wrought was at the level of language. Here, Alves recommends developing technical and scientific terms for advanced native literature from Sanskrit and Arabic, the root languages of ‘Hindoo and Mahomodan languages’ respectively. Interestingly, state governments now work to introduce modern technical terms in regional languages, some of which are apparent in television newscasts.

In two lectures on the Indian Mutiny, military officer Major Wilberforce Bird observed – ‘It was supposed that the natives would not use these advantages, and that the expense would fall on the Indian government, and yet none made more use of these things than the natives.’ It is because the British did not extend themselves to understand the natives sufficiently, Major Bird argued, that communication networks were destroyed (presumably in the uprising – this is not clear, but it can be inferred because of the year of publication – 1858).
In the second lecture, Major Bird also stated that if Indians used the railways and the telegraph, this could be a resource for Britain in her quest to maintain dominion over India. So ‘mutual confidence, mutual advantage and mutual prosperity, alike to the Native and the European’ was key to maintaining peace. This elevation of the native to almost equal status because of the natives’ proficiency in using these technologies is representative of the more progressive-minded thinking about British rule in India. Not surprising in itself, efficient use of communication technologies is viewed as an enlightenment of the natives, although that perception of colonized populations has been amply contested.

Conclusion
These examples suggest that ICTs such as the telegraph (and later the radio), introduced by colonial powers, were seen mainly as being advantageous to the rulers. The advantages to India seemed to be treated more as a by-product, and at times, a bonus if Indians were to become proficient in the use of the technologies. Expectedly, Britain positioned itself as a world power in its discussion of these technologies because there were other dynamics in place in relation to cable and other competing world powers at the time, notably the United States.

In these discussions at this point in history, the fact that the telegraph separated communication from transportation (as James Carey has observed in another context) had not yet been considered, perhaps because of the newness of this technology in these years, coupled with the trauma that Britain experienced with the Indian uprising. It is likely that this differentiation might have occurred a few decades later, when discussion around wireless (especially shortwave radio) in comparison to the telegraph brought the focus more on communication, separating it from transportation.

The subsequent networking is traced by Goswami (2004: p. 53):

‘By 1880, more than twenty five thousand miles of telegraph lines and submarine cables linked the major urban centers in colonial India – among them Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Karachi in present-day Pakistan – to financial and political centers in London. [As a result,) buy and sell prices of commodities were posted in more than one place [and] remittances by the colonial state to Britain [could now be wired].’

Contemporary ICTs continue to be linked to socio-economic development and power, and empowerment. Wireless networked technologies such as the mobile phone now feature prominently in changing socio-economic conditions in developing regions, sparking discussions around leapfrogging development. Intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations Organization and the World Bank, and highly localized community-level organizations alike recognize the empowering potential of ICTs and continue to define media development along these lines, but in very different contexts, and in power structures that differ radically from the past.

References


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Peace journalism training in East Africa

Levi Obonyo

Kenya went to war with itself in 2007 following the general elections that were not conclusive (see Waki Report, 2008). Both contending parties, Party of National Unity and the Orange Democratic Movement, claimed victory at the polls. Some have blamed the lead up to the mayhem on biased media reporting while others hold that media have the potential to bring about peace if their approach to journalism could promote harmonious coexistence. But journalists in East Africa are disadvantaged to carry out this role unless they are prepared from the outset.

Peace journalism (PJ) approaches the craft of scribes with an inbuilt objective of influencing the reduction of tension and violence among nations, ethnicities, and communities. Students of PJ see its potential in reducing tension particularly in the emerging democracies of the South comprising separate ethnic nationalities for long lumped together, a legacy of their colonial history. Over the years this history has been exacerbated by untamed greed for power by the post colonial elites manifested in election rigging, unchecked corruption, lingering suspicions among communities and a myriad other factors including competition for limited natural resources.

As Fackler (2010) has observed:

‘In East Africa, Nilotes, Cushites, Bantus, Indians and Westerners were tucked within common national boundaries by European powers in 1886. The region, a geographically rich swath of earth, has bloodied its soil with periodic violence, destruction, and brutality: South Africa with apartheid, Rwanda in 1994, Burundi thereafter, Sudan since the 1980s, Eastern Congo since the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko, Uganda from 1971 and onward in the north, Ethiopia in the 1980s and 90s, Zanzibar in its quest to secede from Tanzania, and Somalia seemingly forever. Kenya “burned” in late 2007 and early 2008’.

Following the botched 2007 elections Kenyan media marked a unique day in their history when, on the first Sunday after the elections, and following days of bloodletting in the theater of violence, all the newspapers carried a similar headline: ‘Save our beloved country’. On that same day at 6:00 pm, in a 60 minute program the electronic media throughout the country switched to a standard broadcast appealing for peace through an hour long prayer, patriotic poetry and solemn music that implored the nation to return to its senses and restore peace. The cut throat competition characteristic of the Kenyan media took backstage.

Responsibility or lack of objectivity?

Some journalists and journalism scholars question media’s business in appealing for peace. Their position is informed by an age old tradition in the craft: the normative philosophy that reporters should be reasonably emotionally detached from the events they cover. Critics have pointed that it is not the role of journalism to advocate a set position, that journalism should simply state the facts as they are being careful to exercise fairness, balance and objectivity. They make a point that any journalism that fails to observe these tenets is bad journalism and that differentiation should be made between bad and good journalism. In essence what the industry should be concerned with is the promotion of good journalism and that peace journalism is the wrong answer to bad journalism.

Without empirical research it may not be possible to estimate the impact of Kenyan media’s peace reporting. The question as to whether this approach made any difference and changed the course of
the nation may not be known. However there are enough voices in the media industry in Kenya who believe passionately that the Kenyan situation could have been worse but for the stand of the media and that this was one occasion when the media rose to the nation’s service, and behaved responsibly in advocating for peace. But there are also those on the other side of the divide, although such voices are few in the Kenyan media industry, who think that the media at that time subscribed to a misconceived notion of peace and adopted a partisan position betraying the ideals of journalism. At the core of these questions is one debate that has characterized media studies over the years: what is the effect of the media on its audience?

The effects of media
Media effects dialogue is long standing going back nearly seventy years in the history of media studies beginning with the bullet theory. The magic or hypodermic needle theory assumed media had direct, immediate and powerful effect on their audience with the capability to bring about social change. The media, according to Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudent (1944/1968), uniformly shot or injected audiences with appropriate messages that had effect on the choices they made at elections.

It was not only the bullet theory that assumed a powerful effect model. Other understandings of media effect such as agenda setting, spiral of silence, diffusion of innovation, cultivation and other social change theories suggest that media have an impact on their audience. While scholarship provides an empirical support to the powerful effect model, popular culture is equally inundated with anecdotal discourse that tends to agree with this position.

However, the maximum effects school is tempered by other intervening schools of scholarship observing that audiences do not automatically succumb to the power of media messages. This thinking led to the concept of the obstinate audience. The obstinate audience, studies determined, were not as passive as they had been perceived to be, and did not automatically succumb to the media content. In seeking to explain this contrary thinking scholarship evolved the two step flow theory of communication that analyzed how messages were transmitted from the media outlet to the audience but through opinion leaders.

In spite of the introduction of the opinion leader in this model it still supports, even if only to a lesser extent, the notion of a strong or powerful media. However the perception that the media are not powerful, are mediated by opinion leaders is one that is consistently contested through the promotion of advertising which is the lifeline of the media industry. Both advertisers and media managers believe in the power of the media to influence the behaviour of the purchasing audience in making choices.

It is against this backdrop that the debate respecting the role of media in conflict situations should be explored. The question is not whether media have effect, but what effect, and the extent of those effects, and whether the study attributes maximum or only limited effects to the industry. This is borne in the scholarship and models of mass media. Lazarsfeld’s model, who says what, through what channel, and with what effect already anticipated the effects of the mass media.

Charles Wright (1986) in his seminal study outlining the role of mass media in society from a functional point of view not only hypothesized such roles as entertainment, correlation, surveillance among others, but also considered the dysfunctional role of the mass media. We thus have to deal both with the functions and dysfunctions of the mass media and explore the extent of the functions and dysfunctions.

Media impact in conflict situations
Hanitzsch (2007) demonstrates that there is a growing school suggesting media impact on conflict situations. Media impact vary depending on the stage of the conflict. Students of this school divide conflict into various phases and argue that the impact of media is influenced by the stage of the conflict. They identify three phases of conflict: the low intensity stage or pre atrocity stage, the atrocity stage, and the post atrocity stage. At the low intensity stage media have limited effect. The coverage has impact as the conflict intensifies and such impact diminish after the intensity of conflict.

Obviously there are characteristics of media, their operational philosophy, the structure of news frame and news values that influence the impact of media at these varied stages. The very nature of news values conspire to make coverage vary at the various stages of the conflict. Journalism scholars
agree that an event’s newsworthiness is influenced by many factors including proximity of the event, magnitude of the conflict, nobility, bizarreness, and bloodiness among others.

At low intensity stage news values are typically missing and such events would in any case go unreported. This characteristic is evident not only during the low intensity stage but also in the post intensity period. If media do not intensely focus on events at these various stages then obviously the impact of the media would be limited. On average, by the time the conflict reaches high intensity, the intervention if any would be too late anyway.

Critical then to media’s interventionist role is a reappraisal of the very values of news stories as they have evolved over the years of the history of western journalism. The late Michael Traber attempted to do just that. In the manual *Reporting Africa* (1985) Traber and his colleagues argued that western news values were not in consonance with the realities of Africa. In Africa, the majority of the population is in the rural, the concrete relational orientation of the African suggest an approach different from the normative news processing frame of the West, the continent’s infrastructural spread dictated that priorities of the African media would be different.

As a result Traber, Kasoma and Mwaura, among others thought of a different framework of news for Africa. This framework required identification of alternative news sources, alternative framework of time and other related frameworks that make the events relevant to the needs and worldview of the African. Because such a model has not been extensively explored in Africa nearly two decades after it was proposed it would be premature to speculate on its potential. But there are variances of this that are emerging, for example, the interest in civic journalism in North America.

Need for training in the local context

Why has African journalists failed to explore these alternative frameworks? The answer appears simple enough. African journalists are trained in the West, or are trained by professors who were themselves trained in the West. They have been trained on Western technology with a Western value system that incorporates Western models. Internalizing the Western model comes easy to them. The African media houses are mostly African in name. The structures are premised on Western value system of profit motive.

The newsroom structure through which news is processed is an elaborate mechanism that forms a cog within which the individual is only but a spike. This structure has a systemic weakness providing little wiggle room for individual journalists. Beginning from the point of training a potential journalist is drilled on the values and ethos of the system. It is only to the extent that the individual conforms to the laid down frame that the individual will be admissible to the practice. Once they get into the industry the process of conformation continues through which the enculturation that began in training institutions is grounded.

Some of the agencies of doing this include newsroom colleagues, the environment, the traditions passed on and so on. By the time a journalist becomes established in the system the process of grounding is already complete with the new entrant becoming the embodiment of the institution itself. Journalists will then tend to see reality in the same way and conform to the typical way of framing reality. This is the impediment that suggesting a new way of doing things runs counters to. A paradigm than runs counter to this tradition would then be dismissed.

There is, however, a strong case to be made for peace journalism model and especially in a region such as East Africa. Research in international conflict suggest that since such data began to be kept there has been, on average, an increase peaking, in 2009, at 365 conflicts (Heidelberg, 2009). It means that in the previous year a conflict of varying intensity was breaking out every day. According to the Heidelberg Institute on International Conflict Research sub Sahara Africa ranked second as the most conflict prone region of the world. Their study places the northern part of the continent, the white Africa, in a different regional category, but it is probable that if Arab Africa was categorized with the rest of the continent, then East Africa would be the most conflict prone in the entire world.

How does East Africa fare?

Certainly, not very well in peace terms. There are multiple conflicts of varying intensity unfolding in Uganda, DRC is still unsettled, Rwanda is only beginning to settle down with the outstanding ques-
tion of what happens to Rwanda after President Paul Kagame. In Kenya the violence that characterized post elections has not been conclusively addressed. To Kenya’s north in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somali there is continuing conflict, only Tanzania in the region shows surface calm.

The potential of these conflicts escalating is certainly high. Elections are set to take place in many of these countries. There is increasing limited resources in these nations, itself a source of conflict. The limited resources include natural ones such as oil, land, water, grass and mineral deposits. According to the Heidelberg institute the causes of conflict in order of their frequency are: systems and ideology, resources, power, regional predominance, territory, secession, autonomy, international power and others. The challenge in the continent, and which other parts of the world may not be facing, is the consideration of power itself as a resource.

Across the continent the distribution of national resources too often favour those in power. As such a leadership position is not so much the question of occupying an office to serve the public, but rather a strategic position to influence the distribution of resources in favour of the leader’s preferences. This leads to economic inequality and conflict. It is this that raises the question of what role the media either play in contributing to the conflict or to reducing it.

Do African peculiarities then demand that reporting Africa observe a different approach to journalism, particularly in light of the framework advanced by Traber and his colleagues? Certainly. But why have journalists not done so? There are several arguments against peace journalism. On top of the list is the notion that it is not the business of the media to champion peace (Loyn, 2007). Students who study media are of that opinion since professionalism requires detachment and objectivity.

This notion of objectivity is the second impediment. The news processing structure, with its myriad gatekeepers and massive wheels has a specific model of considering newsworthiness of an event. In this model peace related events only make it to press when the conflict has already reached atrocity stage, and the conflict is already bloody. At this stage the conflict provides appropriate pictures and feed. It is not possible to change this paradigm without attacking the heart of it – the news manufacturing model which must be transformed. The transformation of the machine must be at its core – at the stage where its values are formed, at the entry level, and with the hope that at some appropriate time a critical mass will emerge. It is this critical mass that will wield the power to transform the institution.

Training institutions in East Africa can be categorized into three along the lines of their incorporation and longevity. In the first category are state institutions, in the case of Kenya, established by separate Acts of parliament. Among these institutions include the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Egerton University and Moi University. Nearly every one of these universities has a department of mass media or media training.

The second category is institutions founded under and the same Act of parliament. In the case of Kenya these are the private universities. Again, nearly all these universities have departments of mass media studies. In the third category are the mid level training institutions, some with questionable credibility. The training programs in these institutions vary widely.

The training in these institutions is standard: training using western textbooks, faculty trained by Western scholars and even more importantly, curriculum and models developed in the West. In one sense training institutions in Africa are invariably extensions of trainings in the West. None of these curricula incorporates peace.

Transforming journalism training

Five years ago, the World Journalism Educational Congress developed a model curriculum of journalism a variation of which UNESCO published. This model curriculum divides training into skills oriented courses and general courses then proposes content based courses that inform the field journalists specialize in. This broadly is the kind of curriculum adopted by the more progressive programs in East Africa.

It seems to me that conflict sensitive journalism, or peace journalism should target the craft area where the students’ value systems and assumptions are formed. This would transform the framework that journalists apply in their news formulation. At the moment there is no institution in EA that has a curriculum that incorporates this.

Universities have recognized the commercial im-
importance for training in peace and conflict resolution and increasingly courses or minor and even major areas of studies are developing in this critical area. Some of these courses and programs are found at Daystar University, the University of Nairobi, and at Makerere University among others. But these are not fully fledged peace journalism studies.

There are only about a handful of universities in the world that have programs in peace journalism. In some of these universities there is a provision for students who have registered in journalism programs to take minor areas of study in peace and conflict fields. But there is still a weakness with this approach. While the peace and conflict provide the theory and content, it does not provide an integrated whole to enable students understand how to frame the reporting process. This can be done at the first level of the WJEC paradigm.

Some (Loyn, 2007) have argued that what is needed is not peace journalism but good journalism. Good journalism is informed by the values held by the journalist. These values include neutrality, which is not necessarily detachment but a balanced engagement with both sides of an issue; a sound ethical framework, and observance of all other values of news. These scholars argue that too often journalism is simply bad journalism in the sense that it does not ask the critical question and seek to provide relevant answers.

If the craft of journalism has failed to live to its ideal and examination is necessary, it may well be that its genesis needs to be in the educational institutions. Once questioning is effected at the training level, the structures and traditions of the industry equally need re-examination to consider whether journalism is not unnecessarily conflict-oriented. It is this conflict orientation that ought to be re-examined with a view to internalizing a peace orientation. How we call this peace orientation – good journalism, conflict sensitive journalism – does not matter so long as the overall goal is achieved. And that goal is harmonious coexistence.


References

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RELIGION COMMUNICATION CONGRESS 2010

RCC2010’s theme was ‘Embracing Change: Communicating Faith in Today’s World’. Some 650 communicators gathered for three days of presentations and workshops during which WACC Global and WACC North America led five events.

RCC2010 took place April 7-10, 2010 in Chicago, USA, where participants heard sports journalist, talk show host, and award-winning author Mitch Albom open with two stories of faithful change. The first was Albom’s own return to religion having been asked to give a eulogy for his community’s rabbi. The second was the story of Henry Covington, a drug-dealer-turned-pastor ministering to the poor and homeless of Detroit. Both are the subject of Albom’s latest book, Have A Little Faith.

‘It’s the choosing to have faith in what you cannot see, the choosing to pray and believe in something beyond your reach – that makes faith the incredible, sometimes maddening, but ultimately rewarding journey that it is,’ said Albom.

In another plenary address, Rev. Otis Moss III, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, suggested that older communicators should be ready to ‘remix’ their message if they want to reach today’s generation. Moss contrasted the leadership styles of Old Testament figures Moses and Joshua, beginning his story with the statement that ‘Moses is dead, Joshua is the new generation.’

‘Joshua was able to remix because Moses gave him the tools. We must be willing to do what Moses did: transfer power. We can advise, as Moses did, but we must let the new generation reach their own. We should provide the mentoring.’

Undercurrents of pluralism pervade RCC2010

Martin E. Marty, professor emeritus of the University of Chicago Divinity School and renowned religion historian, moderated a panel addressing the changing media landscape. Panellists included Kevin Eckstrom, editor of Religion News Service, Barbara Bradley Hagerty, religion beat reporter for National Public Radio, and Kenneth Irby, founder of the photojournalism program at the Poynter Institute.

Marty prefaced the discussion with a reminder to the audience that from the perspective of religious history, ‘it often takes 250 years to settle an issue.’ Eckstrom, who spoke of some of the difficulties wrought by the social media revolution, said truth, objectivity and credibility can suffer because of the speed at which information now moves through tweets, blogs and other new media.

On the positive side, those same social media offer writers more direct contact with spokespersons – from religious leaders to politicians and celebrities – whom they are able to access through social media pages without having to rely on public relations officers or agents.

Hagerty said her job at National Public Radio (NPR) is to wade through the mountain of materials available – she was recently asked to skim 10,000 pages of court documents in 45 minutes for a story – but that her best and most unique story ideas still come the old fashioned way: from talking to people about their ideas and experiences and finding a unique or interesting angle.

Irby, who also is a pastor, said that in the age of the ‘always on and the 20-second deadline’ the role of journalists is to be ‘sense makers’. He believes that community building can and does happen through social networks, but that the danger of some networks lies in users accessing only links connected their Facebook friends, and not taking advantage of a wider diet.

In a separate keynote address, Diana Eck, professor and director of The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, affirmed that, ‘Pluralism begins with difference. Real religious pluralism means our engagement with one another requires building sturdy relationships.’

Identifying the challenges faced in the United States with its complex religious landscape, Eck noted that, ‘We are not all the same. Pluralism begins there. Trying to understand these differences
is a great human challenge... The world is changed with faith practices of those we know little about. How do we deal with religious differences?

Noting that diversity is a fact in our world and that borders are often only dotted lines on a map, she reminded listeners that in our electronically connected world, no one really speaks in private. Yet, ‘Pluralism is more than differences, more than tolerance. It requires we know something of others. It is based on relationships.’

The Pluralism Project was the subject of the article ‘Crossing borders to common ground’, by Kathryn M. Lohre in Media Development 4/2009.

**WACC-related workshops**

Sarah Macharia, WACC’s program manager for Media and Gender Justice, gave a workshop on WACC’s Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). Now in its fourth incarnation, the GMMP looks at gender portrayal and representation in the news. Statistics from the preliminary report tell a shocking story: Only 24% of people interviewed, seen, or read in the news are female; and only 18% of people heard as experts or spokespersons are female.

How does gender inequality get played out in different topics in the news? Politics, government, and the economy receive the most press, but these are also the areas in which women are most invisible. In contrast, issues of critical import to women such as peace, gender-based violence, poverty, women’s political and economic participation receive negligible attention in the news.

Macharia used visuals from WACC’s 2009 photo competition to underscore the potential for change: a woman working in her own tire shop; a team of women rowers in India competing in an all-male race; a man coddling his child in a classically maternal posture. Such images depict the kind of reportage that not only challenges stereotypes but is more gender-fair, equitable and balanced.

Preliminary results from GMMP 2010 are available at www.whomakesthenews.org. Full results will be available later in the year.

In his workshop, Basilio Monteiro, Associate Professor of Communications, at St John’s University, New York, and WACC-North America Executive Committee member posed provocative questions. ‘Is religion our “business”? Is it another commodity to be traded in the open marketplace?’

Monteiro believes that, ‘Religious communication needs to communicate a theology, otherwise it is not different from corporate communication.’ He challenged religious communicators to beware presenting faith as a product. It’s important to understand that communication is a process, he told workshop participants. ‘What we are trying to present cannot follow corporate paradigms, which are driven by quantifiable outcomes.’

WACC Deputy Director of Programmes, Philip Lee, took as the theme of his workshop ‘Communication Rights and the Millennium Development Goals’. ‘While there are critics of the MDGs, they are still being taken seriously by many governmental and non-governmental agencies. Considerable public resources are being applied to achieving them and – therefore – we need to look at the role that communication rights might play in facilitating their achievement.’

Why, then, is it unlikely that the targets will be met? Political and economic obstacles apart, one reason is the ‘conspicuous absence’ of attention to the role communication might play. Since communication lies at the heart of change, ‘In practical terms, and in direct relation to the MDGs, recognizing, implementing, and building on communication rights will help create “enabling environments” in which structural, political, economic, and cultural obstacles to social change can be identified, analyzed, and action taken to overcome them.’

In this respect, communicators – including those from faith communities – can help in three key ways. They can:

- Provide increased space for and attention to the voices, perspectives, and contributions of those most affected by poverty;
- Improve understanding of the world’s cultural diversity; significantly expand public debate and dialogue on the issues that are a priority in international, national, and local contexts;
- Advocate more open, participatory, and inclusive processes of policy development that emphasize the perspectives of those most affected by the absence of social justice.

**Screening of documentary Triage**

Participants at RCC2010 saw a WACC-sponsored screening of the thought-provoking documentary Triage: Dr James Orbinski’s Humanitarian
Dilemma. The film, directed by Patrick Reed and produced in 2007, depicts the real-life work of the former president of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) in Somalia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Orbinski’s story – also published in a book titled An Imperfect Offering – raises disturbing questions about humanitarian aid and global politics in the context of one man’s commitment to bringing relief and a measure of stability to people whose lives have been torn by conflict.

Unable to be present, James Orbinski sent a short speech introducing the film. He noted that, ‘As communicators on themes religious, you are called to enter the most complex and ambiguous of human questions. These most often have no objectively provable right answer, but they do have an answer that is often far more powerful than what can be proven objectively.’

He continued, ‘It is the answer that comes from a place of deep humility, and from that place of “silence before the unknown” where you can listen – “if you have ears to hear” – and where you come to know with absolute certainty what is right.’

Orbinski said that the success of Triage could be measured to the extent that it encouraged debate about the essence of humanitarianism in all its complexity and uncertainty. ‘Humanitarianism is not separate from politics but in relation to it, and is a challenge to political choices that too often kill or allow others to be killed. Hopefully the film shows a different way of seeing and responding to the world.’

An article about James Orbinski and his work...
appeared in Media Development 4/2009 under the title ‘On the borders of (in)humanity’.

Global partners discuss ICTs impact
A panel of global partners convened and moderated by WACC President Dennis Smith and WACC General Secretary Randy Naylor (photo above) discussed the impact of communication technologies on religious communication.

Panellist Rolando Pérez from Peru discussed the mediatisation of religious practices in Latin America, a region which although becoming religiously diverse, remains predominantly Catholic. He presented photos of public processions, gatherings on national days and various social protests to illustrate the extent to which religion permeates all aspects of Peruvian society.

Pérez advanced several arguments that religion’s concern with social influence is more evident now in diametrical opposition to concern for individual conversion. Religious communication is interested in ‘shepherding rather than converting political and social leaders.’ At the same time, he said, political leaders legitimate their authority and discourse through participation in evangelical rituals.

Panellists Mathilde Kpalla from Togo and Marcela Gabioud from Argentina drew attention to gender in the news media through discussions of their experience in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). Gabioud explained the ways in which organisations in Argentina have used the GMMP to understand gender inequality in news content and to lobby successfully for the adoption of gender-responsive communication legislation.

Panellist Bassem Maher from Egypt used the case of the Ibrahimia Media Centre (IMC) in Alexandria, Egypt, to expound on current religious approaches to radio and television. Maher located his discussion in the historical context of the influence of Christian groups on social practices.

He said that broadcast media are influential in the Middle East in general, while Christian broadcasting and particularly Christian television lag behind secular broadcasting.

Panellist Wong-Wei Wang discussed new media and protestant churches in China. He noted that China is at the forefront of new technologies yet new media are not reflected in the communication channels used by the church. Use of new media is imperative if more people are to be attracted to the church whose congregations are predominantly made up of the elderly.

WACC President Dennis Smith synthesized the presentations. ‘One of the unique privileges of forming part of a global association of communicators is to be able to witness our inter-connectedness, our inter-dependence, but also our high degree of particularity. Ours is not a single reality, but countless realities – some more inter-connected than others.’

Smith pointed out that religious communities have become more audible as voices speaking against discrimination, exclusion and oppression, resulting in a blurring of the divide between the political and the religious. He emphasized WACC’s own work to provide a minimum ethical agenda for social change through communicative practices that build inclusive and participatory communities.

Report by Philip Lee, WACC Deputy Director of Programs.
ON THE SCREEN...

NYON (SWITZERLAND) 2010

The prize of the Interreligious Jury at the festival Visions du Réel (www.visionsdureel.ch) held in Nyon 15-21 April 2010 went to Steam of Life (Miesten Vuoro) directed by Joonas Berghäll and Mika Hotakainen (Finland/Sweden, 2010).

The citation reads: ‘Through the sauna, a cornerstone of the Finnish art of living, the co-directors present men who show themselves naked – in every meaning of the word. With the rhythm of a choral song, Steam of Life mixes tears and smiles, sorrows and joys, shared emotions, in a spirit of forgiveness, serenity and brotherhood.’

SIGNIS and INTERFILM have been present at the Visions du Réel Festival in Nyon (Switzerland) since 2005 with an interreligious jury. From 2008 the jury has included a representative of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Church, and a member of the Jewish and the Muslim faith.

The jury awards its prize to a film in international competition and possibly a commendation. This prize is endowed with CHF 5,000 by the Swiss Catholic and the Swiss Protestant Churches (Conference of the Churches in the French speaking part of Switzerland/CER and the ‘Reformierte Medien’ in Zurich).

OBERHAUSEN
(GERMANY) 2010

At the 56th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen (29 April - 4 May 2010) the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury carrying prize money of 1500 Euros went to Mur i wieża (Wall and Tower) directed by Yael Bartana, Israel/Netherlands/Poland 2009.

The citation read: ‘A group of Jews follows the call to re-establish Jewish life in Poland by building a Kibbutz where the Warsaw Ghetto used to be. A provocative satire and a parody on old propaganda films, this film shows the creation of a political sculpture against anti-Semitism, nationalism and forgetting.’

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to Electric Light Wonderland directed by Susanna Wallin, Great Britain 2009. The citation read: ‘A caring single father engages with the desires and needs of his two adolescent sons. In a subtle visual language and empathetic close-ups, the film talks about mutual respect and trust between father and sons.’

CANNES
(FRANCE) 2010

At the Cannes film festival 12-23 May 2010 the Ecumenical Jury awarded its Prize to Of Gods & Men, directed by Xavier Beauvois (France, 2010). This movie of great artistic value benefits from a remarkable group of actors and follows the daily rhythm of work and liturgy.

It depicts the sacrifice of the monks of Tibhirine (Algeria 1996) choosing to maintain their peaceful presence despite surrounding violence. The deep humanity of the monks, their respect for Islam and their generosity towards their village neighbours make the reason for our choice.

The Jury awarded a Commendation to Another Year, directed by Mike Leigh (England, 2010). Along the rhythm of the seasons, friendship and tenderness bring together ordinary people dealing with the joys and pains of everyday life. Clear directing and great acting combine to express authentic relations. It’s up to everyone to be responsible for their own life.

The Jury also awarded a Commendation to Poetry, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (South Korea, 2010). Through the charm of poetry, Mija, a decent grandmother weakened by disease and culpability, opens up to a contemplative perception of the world.

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**Why not join the World Association for Christian Communication?**

http://waccglobal.org/

WACC promotes communication for social change. It believes that communication is a basic human right that defines people’s common humanity, strengthens cultures, enables participation, creates community and challenges tyranny and oppression. WACC’s key concerns are media diversity, equal and affordable access to communication and knowledge, media and gender justice, and the relationship between communication and power. Being WACC means ‘taking sides’.

Membership of WACC is open to individuals, churches, church-related agencies and media producers, educational institutions, secular communication organisations and everyone sympathetic to WACC’s mission and to its *Christian Principles of Communication*.

**Membership opportunities**

Membership of WACC provides opportunities to network with people of similar interests, to learn about and support WACC’s work, and to receive information on global and local issues of communication rights and the democratization of the media.

WACC members receive regular publications, occasional books, an annual report and other materials. Regional associations also produce newsletters. In addition, members are invited to participate in regional and global activities such as seminars, workshops, and Congresses.

**Application Process**

Organisations may apply for Corporate Membership and individuals may apply for Personal Membership. Visit http://www.waccglobal.org/en/join.html for further information about benefits.

Applicants will be linked to the Region in which they are based. Final decisions on applications for membership are taken by WACC’s Executive Committee only after the relevant Regional Association has had the opportunity to make a recommendation.

**Current membership rates**

*North America* 40 USD (Personal) 120 USD (Corporate)

*Rest of the World* 30 USD (Personal) 100 USD (Corporate)

*Student Rate* 10 USD