

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN A MEDIA-CENTRIC SOCIETY

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Abstract: Usage of media is part of the humdrum of our lives and it is important to understand the foundational change media brought about in our lives. Religion in general has been at the foundations of society and/or social structure. Over the years both mass media and religion have intertwined with each other and this research analyzes the changes brought about in religion due to the influence of mass media and explores the possibility of a creative dialogue between religion and mass media. The first part answers the foundational question of media and presents a comparative report of the effect of media. The challenges that religion has to face from the media are investigated in the second part. The third part explores the role of religion in the possible and necessary transformation of media. By being more media conscious and participative, and co-authoring our part effectively we could use mass media as a social institution for fostering harmony, peace and a universal fraternity.

Keywords: Co-authorship, Communication, Confluence, Media, Religion, Transformation

1. Introduction

We are engulfed in a media saturated world. Bombarded with media messages from all sides, it is difficult for anyone of us to remain ignorant of the rapid changes that are taking place all around us. The effect of media has been perceived and acknowledged by many and much research has been conducted

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to understand the extent of these effects. Human, social, religious, cultural, commercial, financial sectors have all felt the impact of media. In this paper we will reflect on the impact of media on religion and study the possibility of religion's role in the creative transformation of the media through creative cooperation. The main questions that we will try to answer are "Has media taken the place of traditional Religion?" and "What can be done about it?"

Media today is considered to be the essential environment in all culture and periods. There have been quite a few studies on the topic 'Impact of media'. However, very few have focused on its impact in the area of religion. The usage of media is a part of the humdrum of our lives. It is one thing to understand the effects of media, but understanding the foundational change brought about by it is a totally different issue. Religion in general has been at the foundations of any society or social structure. Over the years both mass media and religion have intertwined with each other. Hence, this research is to analyze the change brought about in religion due to the influence of mass media and what religion can do to enter into a creative dialogue with the mass media.

To this effect, the first part deals mainly in answering the foundational question of the effect of the media on religion and it presents a comparative report of the effect of media. We cannot just stop here and hence we move on to recognize the challenges that religion has to face from the media world in the second part. It discusses issues and makes a few comments for reflection over the pervasiveness of media. The third part of the paper is crucial and the most important for it presents the role of religion in the possible and necessary transformation of media which by nature is value-neutral. This is not an attempt to provide a remedy, but rather a step towards being more media conscious and participative, which leads to the final conclusion of this paper.

2. Has Media Taken the Place of Traditional Religion?

What is Religion? Different people have their own interpretation of the word ‘Religion’. An Indian priest-psychologist Peter Lourdes defines religion as consisting of the four Cs: Creeds, Codes, Cults, Community.¹ He speaks of the four Cs as a human necessity to practice religion especially to provide harmony and unity. He expresses an existential need: to evolve from the four Cs and transform religion from an extrinsic reality to an intrinsic reality. But what if this very tool of moving from the exterior to the interior of the person turns corrupt or degenerates or modifies?

Media was developed in view of promoting religion. The question that we pose here is: “Has Media taken the place of traditional religion?” We can answer this question only through a phenomenological process. The mass media is affecting the faith-life in a very fundamental way. The messages communicated are certainly causing a devaluation of human values which have traditionally been nurtured by faith-life.² The major target for changing the culture is the young people. The lack of exposure and the early induction of mass media in their lives give them very little scope to escape the ‘New World’ created by the mass media. In this part of the paper we will make a comparison of the effects of mass media on traditional religion, especially by the emerging new mass media culture.

2.1. The Impact of Television

‘Seeing is believing’ is a famous adage which is made true in the medium of the TV. In the 70’s it was especially noted that, the dawn of popular Indian TV programs affected the lives of the people. The regular activities of play times and even prayer timings were adjusted to make space to watch TV The programs

¹Peter Lourdes, “Less Religion More Experience,” Ivo Coelho, *Philosophy of God: Notes for Students with Selected Readings*, Class Notes, Divyadaan: Salesian Institute of Philosophy, Nashik, 2001.

²Desmond D’Abreo, *The Mass Media and You*, Bombay: Better Yourself Books, 1994, 101.

included news, songs and films.³ People of all religions were glued to the live images shown on the TV. Due to the globalization of culture taking place, local cultures and community traditions were changing.⁴ At first, it was prayers and religious services that brought the family together. Now we will find that it is the TV that brings most of the family around it without any resistance.

A research was conducted by the Institute of Cultural and Urban Anthropology (ICUA), Ahmedabad, on the impact of TV and Video on the people. They found that with the growth of commercial TV the following things in the routine of the people decreased:⁵

1. Visiting temples or places of worship.
2. Spending time in prayer.
3. Attendance at religious functions.
4. Visiting relatives.
5. Family conversations at meals and other times.

The people participating in the research opined that due to decline of religion people may forget God and worse still, the coming generations may not know what exactly religion was. Due to westernization there is a danger that we too would face the same psychological problems that they (the west) faced like loneliness, depression, laziness, etc.⁶ The scenario is now changing as parents and children are busy with the social media or working from their offices and also from their homes. Children and youngsters are left to themselves and engrossed in playing virtual games and surfing the internet unbridled. Religion is given very little space and sometimes ignored altogether.

³D'Abreo, *The Mass Media and You*, 101.

⁴D'Abreo, *The Mass Media and You*, 49.

⁵Harshad Trivedi, *Mass Media and New Horizons: Impact of T.V. and Video on Urban Milieu*, ed., S. P. Agarwal, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1991, 99.

⁶Trivedi, *Mass Media and New Horizons*, 100.

2.2. Developing Opinions

We constantly develop opinions of our own when presented with a situation. We develop these opinions on the following basis: the knowledge of the situation, knowledge of its background or history or contexts; and knowledge of significant authority. On closer analyses of the mass media, we will realize that mass media does more than bringing information. It has become a beacon in matters concerning public opinion in spheres like politics, social life, fashion, morality, etc.⁷ Previously many would resort to religious leaders and authorities for opinions for doing anything, now we tend to accept the opinion provided by Mass Media, which we may have come to understand as universal in nature.⁸

2.3. Living a Virtual Religion

Religion of old was adamant on its inter-subjective dimension. ‘The community that prays together stays together’ was a common axiom. We had a more open and liberal approach towards others. Religious services brought families together. With the development of Virtual Reality⁹ and Virtual Communities¹⁰ there has also been a development of a *Virtual Religion*. Looking now at the growth of Facebook and other social networking websites, one will easily notice that the addiction to having a virtual presence has brought real physical inter-subjective communication to jeopardy. Virtual Identity is a must for those who want to show that they are in step with society.

To be religious, one need not be present at religious services or be found praying but would suffice to post a comment about God and cite a religion. This practice of so called ‘virtual religion’ would also consist in attending religious services not at

⁷D’Abreo, *The Mass Media and You*, 112.

⁸D’Abreo, *The Mass Media and You*, 113.

⁹Shing-Ling Sarina Chen, “Virtual Reality,” *Encyclopedia of New Media*, ed., Steve Jones, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003, 470.

¹⁰Lori Kendall, “Virtual Community,” *Encyclopedia of New Media*, 467.

a particular place but right from home through the T.V. by means of viewing religious programs. You become virtually a part of the event being broadcasted.

2.4. Solution to Personal and Faith Crises

Humanity has always had recourse to prophets and soothsayers; this is true in every culture, context, time and generation. The ones who are able to do so are placed on the top rung of society. One such institution is that of religion, which acts like a social and moral guardian of the people. Religion provides strict norms and procedures, which all have to listen and accept. There are no two ways to religious precepts. Mass media has managed to dethrone religion by giving people what they want, catering to various audience types and luring them by their weakness.¹¹ The messages given by media are like massages, they only aim at providing temporary relief. Hence people can choose the message they want as per their convenience.

Previously people who had a problem in life or found life confusing often resorted to religious leaders especially priests for guidance. The word of the priest was the final word and was carried out dutifully. But today with the dawn of media and advanced specializations in human sciences, religious leaders seem to be losing ground as spiritual directors. The media itself presents a problem and proposes its own solution. Rather than meeting priests and seeking counsel, one would prefer seeking 'Professional Help'. People are eager to listen to the Tele-Gurus discourses and find what they want.

2.5. Confluence of Media and Religion

Basing oneself on the above presented situation one can affirm that Traditional Religion has been affected by the new Mass Media Age. Mass media has thus challenged the hold of religion. The human being is not a static being. We are all in a constant process of evolution. Orthodox religion does need to change with the times but it must not compromise on fundamental

¹¹Jan R. Hakemuldar, Fay A. C. de Jonge and P. D. Singh, *Mass Media*, New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1998, 88.

values of respect and dignity to the human person and God. The interaction of media and religion is an important dimension in today’s context, because, the media are a source of information about religions, religious trends, and religious ideas. We can see that religion has changed the media and that the media has changed and is changing religion. Hence, whether we like it or not a new religious media culture or a new mediatized religious culture demands the attention of scholars and leaders in the fields of media and of religion.

3. Challenges to Sacred Religion by the Media

Media is definitely changing the face of religion. It would be next to impossible for a person to remain totally unaffected by the media. In this part we will deal with the challenges that religion has come to face in this mass media world.

Religion is the most sacred element in the daily life of the people. Mass Media makes much use of religious elements to attract people to them. This may include glorifying one’s religion and also to a certain extent playing down of another religion. *The McCombs and Shaw Agenda-Setting Model of Media Effects, 1976*,¹² helps us to understand the impact of media and the ‘directional influence’ it can have on the thinking of the people. Religion has been one such sphere of influence which has undergone the onslaught of media.

The naïve religion of the past centuries has been awakened to face and answer questions posed by the generation-next not necessarily due to a spiritual awakening but rather due to a relativistic attitude presented by the media. Let us then look at some of the effects caused by media that pose a challenge to authentic religion today.

3.1. Hegemonic Mediation

“A state of hegemony is achieved when a provisional alliance of certain social groups exerts a consensus which makes the power

¹²James Watson and Anne Hill, *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, 2nd edn., New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, 1996, 102.

of the dominant group appear both natural and legitimate.”¹³ For centuries previously it was religion that provided the means for the dominant groups to maintain their power. The advent of mass media coupled with the religious sentiments of the people has turned out to be an infallible combination to the power handlers. Both religious and secular events are subject to such mediation. The dominant groups may present religious images in-line with their interests and aspiration. Thus inadvertently religion also becomes a source of income with a very high margin of profit. The values presented here are not necessarily the values of the religion rather they can be created or mediated values tailor-made to fit the general picture of the religion and maintain hegemony.

3.2. Intercultural Invasion

In the recent years several media researchers have sought to assess the degree, if any, to which the mass media in developing countries have reflected the values of economically dominant countries like the USA and as a result have undermined traditional values.¹⁴ J. O. Boyd-Barrett called this the ‘Intercultural Invasion’.¹⁵ The point for concern here is that while the media is used in aiding modernization it has also chipped away the traditional values which are unfavourable to western style economic development and has produced a cultural dependency which could be said to reflect the economic and political dependency on the west.¹⁶

The celebration of traditional religion has been affected. In the name of being modern in celebration, the traditional rites and rituals become often only a convention. The rites and rituals

¹³Watson and Hill, *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, 79.

¹⁴Watson and Hill, *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, 88.

¹⁵Cited in Watson and Hill, *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, 89.

¹⁶Watson and Hill, *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, 89.

also undergo change under the impact of marketing and advertising. Religious events lose depth in meaning and often are only connected to superfluous exhibition and consumerism.

3.3. Alienation of Religion in the Young

David Kinnaman in his book, *You Lost Me; Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church... and Rethinking Faith*¹⁷ observes that no generation in the world ever faced such rapid cultural changes resulting from changes in media, technology, sexuality and economy. The new manner of communication that has evolved due to the digital tools has influenced their ways of relating, working and thinking. Due to the orthodoxy of many an institute, many teens and young adults feel isolated from their families, communities and institutions. The change in the family structure too has made it difficult for the passing of the faith from the parents. Their skepticism towards the institutions that have shaped society in the past has led to a distrust of authority. The ‘inroad’ of pluralism and holding conflicting ideas, takes the upper hand over Scriptures and moral norms.¹⁸

Kinnaman noted that there are many frustrations that lead young people away from religion such as the religious obstacle to creativity and self-expression, boredom of superficial teachings, a perceived incompatibility between faith and science, repressive rules especially on sexual moral norms, claims for possessing universal truths, and inadequate ways of handling doubts.¹⁹

The above points do represent the views of young people but we must remember that it is in the context of a media-crazy world that these issues have emerged. There are some points that are valid but there are also points that have been induced by the media. The media in giving free access to communication in

¹⁷David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me; Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church... and Rethinking Faith*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2011 as quoted in John Flynn, “Drop Outs: Why Young People Leave the Church?” *Smart Companion* (December 2011) 28.

¹⁸Flynn, “Drop Outs,” 29.

¹⁹Flynn, “Drop Outs,” 29.

the young without any guidance or correction has led the young towards an alienation from their own culture and religion.

3.4. Rise of Radical Religious Fundamentalism

Religious Fundamentalism can be defined as a movement that calls for a return to the original fundamentals of a certain doctrine, ideology or religion. But these fundamentalist doctrines tend to be closed and hence very aggressive in the defence of doctrine. Fundamentalism is found in all major religions be it Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Judaism. Problems between fundamentalists occur due to doctrinal and ideological differences. Many of the fundamentalists take it upon themselves to safe-guard the honour of their religion.²⁰

From time immemorial, the media has been a fertile and well-used tool for religious fundamentalists who are in ruthless competition to win souls to their cause. God sells. Hence, the marketing of paradise has become big business today. For them every medium of communication is a gift to disseminate God's message. In a world when we are coming closer to each other by the hour, the fundamentalists are engaged in overt and covert wars aimed at establishing the primacy of one religious worldview over another.²¹

The role of religion here is hence corrupted. That which was meant to unite thus becomes a cause of major division among the radical-minded people. The traditional religion which was more peace loving, non-violent and tolerant gets replaced by an aggressive one which is more defensive and non-tolerant in nature. This to a certain extent marks the sign of regression in a religion.

3.5. Mean World Syndrome

American media analyst George Gerbner argues that the more people watch television, the more likely they will consider that

²⁰Pradip Ninan Thomas, *Strong Religion, Zealous Media: Christian Fundamentalism and Communication in India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008, 28.

²¹Thomas, *Strong Religion, Zealous Media*, xi-xii.

there is a ‘Mean World’ out there.²² If what they see on T.V. happens to resonate with what they experience then they confirm their vision of the world. The combination may result in a coherent and powerful ‘double dose’ of the television message.²³

The central message of a religion is love and service. But when the television presents to people a cheating and degraded world, the people are led to doubt the practicality of this message. Many a time only cases of robbery and murder done under the pretext of goodwill are reported in bold headlines in the news media. Since real good works are rarely reported, they go unnoticed. The importance for many a media channel is the TRP that it generates hence only the sensational is captured. If the person encounters such crimes in his life his latent vision of a mean world comes true. There comes a complete distrust of strangers and there emerges a sceptical attitude to charitable works. Love for neighbour is at times strangled by the mass media.

3.6. Pseudo-Contextualization

Neil Postman says of a pseudo-context that it is “a structure invented to give fragmented and irrelevant information a seeming use.”²⁴ The pseudo-context does not offer us any useful information in terms of action, problem-solving or change. The mass media is the major culprit. All that is actually presented to the ‘de-contextualization of fact’ by the media is only to amuse. All knowledge, having been fragmented turns into a trivial pursuit of truth.

Traditional Religion offers the truth to people in black and white terms. This causes a great deal of distress to people who want to overcome it. Hence the media is used to reconstruct

²²Watson and Hill, *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, 105.

²³Watson and Hill, *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, 149.

²⁴Cited in Watson and Hill, *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, 142.

messages in a new light. Pseudo-contexts are mainly used by media to help in advertising and increasing the level of consumerism prevalent in the society. The buying of new things at the time of major festivals is the pseudo-context used by the media for rampant increase in product sales and services. Instead of enhancing the quality of a given festival the consumerist attitude turns a religious festival into a materialistic drama.

One important factor that religion has a hold over is the sense of guilt or shame or sin. Religious morality is put at stake in a pseudo-context, for if the sense of sin or guilt is avoided in any context then everything that we are asked to do will be a pleasure for a person. Pseudo-contexts have become very popular in mass media usage.

3.7. Existential Question: Way Ahead?

Religion is challenged in every possible way by the new media. Even the usage of media does at times prove to be an ethical dilemma. With the dawn of the 21st century the usage of media has percolated every level of human existence. Media has become a major tool of control. Sometimes statements like ‘the one who owns the media owns the world’, ‘the key to success is in holding information’ make the rounds. They may sound to be exaggerations but definitely have an element of truth. The media surely does not make the world go round but it takes information right round the world.

Religion may have been a dominant factor in defining the world. Now its dominance is being used by media to define a new and ruthless humanity. So are we to be afraid of the media? Are we to shun the mass media and remain closeted from the global village of humankind?

4. Religion’s Role in Media Transformation Movement

Ever since the dawn of the media age, institutional religion has pushed forth for a transformation in the usage of media. Every new development in communication technology is taken heed of and analyzed. But this role of religion in transforming media is less obvious since it is a *value-based transformation* movement. It

challenges the very structure and intent of mass media as an institution in society.²⁵ This effort is not only based on religious grounds but also on humanitarian grounds. The mass media is often accused of stereotyping, superficiality, excluding minority and alternative view points and mostly providing users with only sensationalism.

If we are gripped by the media culture then there come two questions that need an answer, namely: 1. Why this transformation? and 2. What sort of transformation?

One of the major reasons for people especially young people to stay glued to the media is entertainment. Hence, too often to help keep viewers entertained media makes use of action and violence of the physical, emotional and spiritual varieties. There is a gradual process of victimization that has taken place due to media stereotyping. These myths that media creates are not always explicit but implicitly ingrained in the attitudes and behaviours of the people. Thus, the mass media has created an image of the world and society which is fragmented and destructive of the values that nourish and sustain society. This media transformation aims at becoming aware of such messages conveyed by the media and participating in creating and promoting value based media.²⁶

This value-based transformation movement is grounded in an ethic that is at once universal, self-actualizing and liberating.²⁷ It is directed towards media awareness and helps people to analyze its inherent values so as to participate in it responsibly.

Here we will take a look at a few ways in which we can initiate this transformation in a *media-cultured* world.

²⁵Elizabeth Thoman, “Religion’s Role in the Media Reform Movement,” *Reporting Religion*, ed. Benjamin J. Hubbard, California: Polebridge Press, 1990, 45.

²⁶Thoman, “Religion’s Role in the Media Reform Movement,” 147-148.

²⁷Thoman, “Religion’s Role in the Media Reform Movement,” 149.

4.1. The Right Way to Communicate

A possible distortion in the message of the media may already contain indicators for the right way. Distortion does not simply mean saying the opposite of the truth. They are distortions because they disfigure a truth that they still contain. The right way would be to single out the truth and avoid the distortions. This can take place only when there is sharing in mutual love and trust.²⁸ There are two things that play a vital role in understanding the truth namely: the revealed or divine truth which is authentic in its very nature and does not need outside authority. It is not self-evident to us but is revealed to us through the tradition of religion. We are called to witness to this truth in the form of dialogue with other religions. Secondly, the inherent power of the truth which is only to be used for the service of the truth. It is an invitation to make authentic use of the power of truth and the challenge for transparency. This transparency is to be seen not only in the communicator but in the message as well. Hence here we do not find antagonistic concepts of truth and power but concepts complementary to each other. This would be a right way of communication.²⁹

4.2. Co-Authoring of Media

A major role that religion can play in transforming media is co-authorship with media. It generates a renewed sense of an active audience and stresses the active responsibility of the media user. On the other side the reality of production hegemony and unequally distributed power and resources make it also necessary to stress the responsibility of the creators of media products. Thus "Co-Authorship in media culture takes two forms: the 'creator co-author' and the 'consumer co-author'. One

²⁸Here 'sharing in mutual love and trust' points that authentic distinction can take place only when there is a dialogue between two people with clear intentions and love for truth.

²⁹Peter Henrici, "Truth and Power in Ecclesial Communication," *The Church and Communication*, ed., Patrick Granfield, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994, 55.

initiates the process of generating meaning and the other concludes it.”³⁰

Each of us is a ‘consumer co-author’ of the media experience in as much as we choose what we want from the media and decide the amount of attention and credibility it needs to get.³¹ The ‘creator co-authors’ on the other hand are the Media Corporates who give us a range of products and meanings to select from. They are directly responsible for influencing the experience of culture that we have. They tend to provide mediocrity and are only interested in making profit rather than provide enlightening and challenging material. But it is ultimately we who take from them and make our own experience.³²

The ‘creator co-author’ hence has many responsibilities. They must be sensitive to the ‘user co-author.’ But the participants thus getting involved should be mature and not very young and emotionally damaged or this will have dangerous consequences.³³ “Co-Authorship lets no one off the hook.”³⁴ If creators are responsible for providing the products then users are responsible for giving feedback. Only a sound religious and moral education can help to conscientize people as to what is right and wrong for them and for the society at large. This calls for moral prudence to the extent that one allows media to affect one’s life.

4.3. Responsibility of Intellectuals

The world today is experiencing a swift advance in science and technology. The communication process prevalent today is much faster and effective compared to that of the 20th century. But if we analyze the process of this change, we will find that it is the result of hard work, research and experimentation of a few on

³⁰Michael R. Real, *Exploring Media Culture: A Guide*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996, 268.

³¹Real, *Exploring Media Culture*, 268.

³²Real, *Exploring Media Culture*, 268.

³³Real, *Exploring Media Culture*, 269.

³⁴Real, *Exploring Media Culture*, 269.

whose shoulder's humanity has moved forward. These are the intellectuals whose contributions are impossible to forget. And in some form or the other these are implicitly the educators of humankind.³⁵

All humans are blessed with intelligence, with the potentiality to attain truth not only in science but also in relation with the 'person of the other' and also the 'person of God'. Hence in this regard the advancement of science, the progress of technology, etc. though essential is not enough. We also face the problem of irresponsible intellectuals. All of us cannot carry out research work and experimentation in various fields to have a say in it. But the responsibility lies with the intellectuals who are in-charge of these fields and should do so 'with a rigor, conscientiousness and a seriousness which inspires confidence.' But this is not always the picture. Hence it becomes difficult for people to turn to them when in doubt.³⁶

When we look at the developments taking place in the world the main tool used by the media to sell its products is leisure. Thus there has been a degradation of human leisure as being only materialistic. It is due to our freedom and liberties that we have this leisure. These liberties do need to have limits due to its preciousness and in its own defence. This delicate task of education of our liberties is in the hands of the intellectuals. They must not corrupt it for vested interests. Their duty is to make 'free people' into 'responsible people' through their works and the motivations and goals that drive them.³⁷ The basis for the intellectuals must be the precepts of religion and that of natural moral order. For it is in these that one will find motivations and goals for an equal and egalitarian development of society. Development must take place together with the promotion of respect and dignity for human life in all its forms.

³⁵Jean Daniélou, "The Crisis in Intelligence," *The Crisis in Culture*, ed., Mary Dominic, Slough: St Paul Publications, 1970, 107.

³⁶Daniélou, "The Crisis in Intelligence," 108.

³⁷Daniélou, "The Crisis in Intelligence," 109.

4.4. Encouragement of Folk-Media

Globalization is changing the world by replacing the social stratification of old. Religion through its culture perpetuates itself. In wake of the changing times the concepts and ideals that remain are no longer reflective but symbolic. These symbols have meanings which are inherent. Thus changing of the symbol not only distorts but destroys the meaning referent to it. “These meanings reside within the relation among things and the distinctions they make.”³⁸ “Folk lore reflects not only symbolic actions towards object but also human relations and hence becomes the very media that expresses ‘Faith’.”³⁹

Folk-lore and folk-media of communication is a wonderful way of keeping traditions and the culture alive. It provides identity to a particular group. With the help of folk-media it is possible to fight the *media stereo-typing*⁴⁰ of society. It adds variety and familiarity in an alien and standard mass media culture. The symbolism enshrined in the content of folk-media can be used to educate the masses about various social issues in a creative, humorous and acceptable manner. The mass media too makes use of folk media but very often to increase popularity and profit or for political propaganda.

The folk media is one of the most creative and indigenous ways of connecting with the ordinary people. It is a reflection of the religion and tradition of the people that needs to be defended.

³⁸Y. A. Sudhakar Reddy, “Folk Media as Communication for Faith Formation: Reflection from an Art Form of a Marginalized Community,” *Media A Language for Faith Formation*, ed. Herve Morissette, Bangalore: Indian Catechetical Association, 2003, 41.

³⁹Sudhakar Reddy, “Folk Media as Communication for Faith Formation,” 41.

⁴⁰Media stereo-typing of society refers to the presentation of a monotonous image of society, which undermines the variety of characters present in a real society.

4.5. Media: Secular and Divine

To conclude this part I wish to represent Charles R. Kandula's distinctive table of the communication model between the usage of media with secular characteristics and divine characteristics:⁴¹

Communication Model	Secular Characteristics	Divine Characteristics
<i>Source (S)</i>	Ownership & Control in the hands of a few.	Involve all people & empower them
<i>Receiver (R)</i>	Build up customer base with allurements.	Invitation to people to participate. An option left to the people.
<i>Message (M)</i>	Fulfilment in life through material prosperity, muscle power, self-gratification by all means.	Communion with God and people through sharing, self-sacrifice, humility and other virtues.
<i>Channel (C)</i>	Images & life styles not relevant to common people; a false world.	Relevant & meaningful images for all people, connected with real life.
<i>Effect (E)</i>	For personal profit.	For the wellbeing and salvation of all.

The above table clearly shows how the communication model that uses media with the divine characteristics is far superior to the communication model that uses media with secular characteristics. It succeeds in making the communication process meaningful and relevant to the life of people leading to the desired transformation for the wellbeing of everyone.

⁴¹Charles R. Kandula, "Jesus the Perfect Communicator," *Media A Language for Faith Formation*, ed. Herve Morissette, Indian Catechetical Association, 28.

5. Conclusion

We have dealt here with the impact of media on religion and the consequential new challenges that have arisen. These challenges are detrimental to the values of religion and the concept of religion itself. Hence there is a need for religion to respond to Media. This will happen not if the media is shunned but by being an active participant and co-authoring media. It outlines the necessity of finding a right and appropriate way to communicate and being faithful to the truth. It presents the need to be more culturally sensitive by giving due importance to the role of folk media. Religion can use media as a tool to spread values favouring life and love. Thus creative collaboration between media and religion will lead media to be divine in character empowering people to live a meaningful life for the wellbeing of humanity at large

To help us understand the positive impact that media can have on behalf of religion Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* noted:

When they (media) are put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the good news to reach millions of people. The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect [...] In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit.

Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes.⁴² Thus, a proper and creative use of media by religion can help people to enrich their lives. Media can be used to carry news and information about religious events, ideas, and personalities. They can be used to serve as vehicles for evangelization and catechesis as well as contribute to people’s spiritual nourishment. They can further provide inspiration,

⁴²Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1988, #45.

encouragement, and opportunities for worship to persons confined to their homes or to institutions.⁴³

Media culture is important yet elusive, powerful beyond imagination, awe-inspiring in its genius, fearsome if abused, media culture is something of a nuclear explosive device in its collective force. By co-authoring our part of it effectively, [...] we may be able to discover our best future and our best selves.⁴⁴

We could thus use mass media as a social institution for the fostering of harmony, peace and a universal fraternity.

⁴³Pontifical Council for Social Communications *Ethics in Communications*, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000, #11.

⁴⁴Real, *Exploring Media Culture*, 279.