



# COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS

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## The Ethics of Mass Communication

Recent years have seen an unprecedented uncertainty and debate over the ethics of mass media. James Thomson, curator of Nieman fellowships for journalists at Harvard University, detects in experienced journalists increasing doubt — even cynicism — regarding the morality of many accepted media practices. John Birt, associated with ITV in London, notes much more questioning of the morality of television programming in Britain.

One might expect the churches to help in clarifying issues of media ethics. The Catholic Church, for example, has a strong tradition of philosophical analysis of ethical problems. Yet, surprisingly, except in Spain, one finds little involvement of Catholic philosophers and theologians in current discussions of communication ethics. More consistent and serious study of media ethics is going on in Protestant circles, especially in the United States.

The moral guidance of media professionals is regarded by many as a priority work for the church. But there is little consensus on the best method of education in media ethics. As a case in point, the pastoral instruction of the Catholic Church on communication, *Communio et Progressio*, recommends that professional associations of communicators "draw up codes of ethics." However, many media professionals and leading scholars in media ethics argue that the emphasis on codes has been an *obstacle* to a reasoned, systematic ethics of mass communication.

The rise of mass-televised entertainment and news poses responsibilities for both the media professionals and the public. This issue of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS surveys current study of this difficult question and examines progress toward more systematic values in media ethics.

### REVIEW ARTICLE

## The Search For Values In Media Ethics

*Questioning Media Ethics*, Ed. by Bernard Rubin. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979.

*Media Ethics*, *WACC Journal*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4 (1979).

The present trend in the media professions towards attitudes of pragmatic expediency reflects the state of drifting uncertainty in mass communication ethics. In his article, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics,"<sup>1</sup> Clifford Christians affirms that the many studies of responsibility in the media have failed to produce coherent ethical guidelines. Speaking primarily of the American context, he echoes a general evaluation of research in media ethics.

Christians' review of a half century of publications on this topic identifies four major concepts of media ethics, each responding to the social, philosophical and political trends of a particular period. A journalistic ethics based on loyalty to the community and to fellow journalists was frequently proposed at the beginning of the century when social bonds rooted in the small town and local church were stronger. But increasing urbanisation and relativisation of values swept away this reasoning.

The 1930's saw journalists adopting "non-partisan objectivity" — letting the facts speak — as the norm of good journalism and professional morality. Journalism schools shared the unbounded faith in natural science models of pure factual empiricism — not values — as the basis of social progress. However, by the late 1940's, after a shattering international

*A Seamless Robe: Broadcasting Philosophy and Practice*, Charles Curran. London: Collins, 1979.

*Freedom of Expression in Democratic Societies*, Ed. by James W. Carey and Clifford G. Christians. University of Illinois Press, 1980.

economic collapse with movements for social reform in the 1930's and the questioning caused by World War II, "objectivity" was debunked as socially irrelevant. Studies revealed the control of the media by powerful economic and political interests and confirmed the subjectivity and selectivity hidden in much so-called "objective reporting." Social responsibility, demanding more public accountability in the media, was introduced as the norm.

Some form of "social responsibility" ethics is now widely

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### The Church and Media Ethics

A discussion of the Church's efforts toward clarifying values in media ethics. Page 5.

#### Current Research on the Ethics of Mass Communication

A listing of the major researchers in media ethics and their present work. Page 6.

#### Deciding on Priorities in the Church's Communication Ministry

Reports on studies of the Church's communication ministry in Canada, Korea, Spain the United States and Venezuela. Page 7.

professed in media circles. But proponents have so far failed to fashion a comprehensive social theory of mass communication which would outline the role of the media in the cultural and political development of society. Christians points out that social responsibility is presented as lists of the professional duties of the individual journalists with no explanation of the social significance of a given "duty". Without some broader understanding of media in society, the social responsibility ideal has spawned a multiplying hodge-podge of ad hoc codes, conflicting pressure group action, and supervisory commissions uncertain of their own principles. In practice, many journalists blindly follow the letter of the law and do whatever the codes

**"We may agree with the common-sense 'ethics of everyman' — that certain practices in media organisations are unjust and defrauding the public, but we cannot agree on ethical principles, codes, sanctions, or even what constitutes an ethical problem."**

or commissions let them get away with — thus avoiding any real personal or social responsibility.

Finally, the rights movements of the 1960's and 1970's, often radically challenging major political, economic and religious institutions, have provided the background of the "new" or "advocacy journalism". But the contention of some advocacy journalists, that the "noble ends justify any means," easily degenerates into personal opportunism.

### **Need for a Systematic Theory of Media Ethics**

This state of confusion in mass communication ethics is summarised well by Robert Rutherford Smith in *Questioning Media Ethics*. We may agree with the common-sense "ethics of everyman" — that certain practices in media organisations are unjust and defrauding the public — but we cannot agree on ethical principles, codes, sanctions, or even on what constitutes an ethical problem.

There is a clear need for a *systematic theory of media ethics* based on something more than the current journalistic fashion or the latest exposé of media malpractice. Scholars such as Christians and Smith think that an integrating perspective will come from an internally coherent underlying set of values which outline broad personal and social ideals. They see in the metaethical traditions of Aristotle, Kant or more recent existentialists the possibility of a consistent, mature methodology that can be applied to the study of current problems of media ethics. Such a systematic ethics would provide more reasoned moral criteria for the decisions of media professionals. It might also lead to a more coordinated vision of the responsibilities of media practitioners, users, and regulators in terms of mutual service — offsetting the present tendency toward ever-increasing legal tangles over the right to know vs. the right to privacy.

Adequate models of a systematic media ethics remain to be developed. A review of different tendencies in the study of media ethics suggests the limitation of any one approach, but also the various elements that might constitute a more systematic, comprehensive media ethics.

### **An International, Comparative Ethics of Mass Communication**

One of the obstacles to developing an integrating perspective in media ethics is the pluralism of ethical, philosophical traditions within the same national or international communications network. Prof. Anne Van der Meiden, The State University in Utrecht, The Netherlands, points out in the *WACC Journal* that mass communication increasingly crosses national and cultural lines. He cites as an example the difficulty of isolating "moral aspects between an Iranian Islamic sender and a

liberal/pragmatic American receiver." The problem is that most discussions of media ethics are based on one or other philosophical-religious tradition of one cultural region of the world. Van der Meiden sees the need for study of the relation of ethics and mass communication within an international, pluralistic framework.

Yet, a theory of media ethics must still take into account the congruence of public morality in a particular country and the political-philosophical tradition of that country. Robert Rutherford Smith argues that the American penchant for expressing public morality in written constitutions, codes, regulatory agencies and various other forms of legalism can be traced back to the Puritan moralism and the rationalistic philosophy of the founders of the nation. In contrast, continental Europeans have an increasing distrust of codified formulations. Smith sees the background for this in the socio-political context of Europe in the 1920's and 1930's — economic collapse, rise of fascism, increasing urbanisation and relativisation of perspectives. Philosophical movements based on existentialists such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Jaspers attempted to develop a theory of ethics responsive to subjective experience rather than to codes.

Particular forms of broadcasting organisation obviously vary according to socio-political contexts, and it is reasonable to expect the expression of media ethics to vary as well. For example, in spite of talk about internalising social responsibility, Americans seem to prefer the rough-and-tumble freedom of unencumbered ideas and actions limited only by an external code. Perhaps in the American context of a heterogeneous ethnic melting pot and continual waves of politically-tinged minority movements, this unusual combination of libertarianism and legalism is the only workable basis for media morality.

The solution to this problem of creating a media ethics responding to both national and international cultural contexts may be a comparative framework developed on the basis of national case studies of public morality. This framework could explain the variable application of broader ethical principles in specific socio-political contexts.

### **Ethics in Media Organisations**

Obviously, moral decisions in the media are not simply individual decisions, but part of the practice and policy of often complex media organisations. James Thomson, in *Questioning Media Ethics*, concludes that to improve ethical standards in the media professions the most important factor is the training of young journalists in fairness, accuracy and compassion by experienced editors *within newspaper or broadcasting organisations*.

We are far from a comparative study, across national and cultural frontiers, of how major newspapers or broadcasting systems express values and norms in their policy and decision making. One approach is the systematic case study of a single organisation such as the late Sir Charles Curran's analysis of the BBC, *The Seamless Robe*. Curran, Director General of the BBC from 1969 to 1977, addresses the question of how directors, administrators and producers of the BBC "gauge what should be their moral responsibilities to society?"<sup>2</sup>

Curran's discussion of the BBC's origin, charter, governing organisation, ideology and financing makes it apparent that ethical practices are built into the institutional structure of a media organisation. This institutional pattern grows out of the socio-cultural-political context of the country and receives its basic orientation from the ideals and decisions of the founders. The nature of this institutional organisation can make media ethics complicated and lead to endless conflict with regulatory agencies, the public, and employed professionals — or it can allow ethics to be simple and straightforward.

Curran contends that the BBC is relatively independent of

political and commercial pressures because it was organised as a public service institution with a royal charter and an autonomous board of governors. Since the BBC is financed directly by the users and does not have to defend its annual budget before the British Parliament, it is more directly responsible to the users in its programming.

The BBC charter has no specific guidelines or legal prescriptions for programming, and the BBC has adopted no official ethical or ideological stance. Written codes for programmers and producers are pointedly avoided. Rather, a tradition has been established of trying to respond to the increasingly pluralistic values, interests and tastes within the general consensus of British society. The BBC tries to encourage critical thought and debate about these issues and interests. As far as is tolerable, it introduces new options which are beyond the established consensus or which represent sectors of dissent. Producers are encouraged to take initiatives, and to follow their own consciences and perceptions of public taste.

The first generation of the BBC established a tradition of personal responsibility on the part of producers, and it is expected that there is now a live weight of tradition which would be automatically exerted against anyone who tries to pull that responsibility out of line. This tradition is continually expanded by a process of retrospective dialogue and review on the part of the board of governors, the directors, programmers and producers. The belief is that good professional broadcasting will also respect moral values, just as good art is good morality.

The organisation of the BBC as a public service institution has tended to attract administrators whose education and background have prepared them for public service. Curran emphasises, for example, the value of his study of constitutional history at Cambridge University. It helped him to understand broadcasting as a stimulus to the open debate and circulation of ideas necessary in the political system of parliamentary democracy. Moreover, he carried on a lifelong reflection on the theological and philosophical underpinnings of his own Roman Catholic convictions. This, he suggests, provided a reasoned methodology and intellectual capacity with which to analyse the broader human, moral and religious implications of his decisions as director general.

Curran sums up his own philosophy of broadcasting thus: "Looking back, the great virtue of finding one's career in the BBC is the enjoyment of the sense of public service without the corruption which can follow from the search for profit. It is entirely possible for an institution with the standards of the BBC to produce excellence without the profit motive."<sup>3</sup>

### Reform of Media Institutions

Not everyone is convinced that one can trust the present institutional organisation of the media to embody the ideals of media ethics — not even the BBC, to judge by critiques of the BBC in recent years. A second important pattern of research under the heading of communication ethics is the analysis of the dysfunctions of the present institutional pattern of the media and proposals of how this might be reorganised to better achieve basic social goals.

Most of these structural approaches to communication ethics have one or all of five dimensions of analysis: 1) positing a basic value or *social function* which the media should be filling; 2) describing *fundamental* tendencies in the development of the present organisation, highlighting opposition of present tendencies to the expected social function; 3) analysis of the legal, governmental or professional *supervisory system* which attempts to direct the institutional organisation of the media back to its social function; 4) the mechanisms employed by the media to *resist, avoid or subvert* the supervisory mechanisms and 5)

the author's proposal for *reform* of the media and/or the supervisory mechanisms.

An incisive illustration of this pattern of analysis is the article by Everett Parker, "The Fairness Doctrine," in *Questioning Media Ethics*. The basic social value proposed is the protection and promotion of "the right of the people to speak freely and circulate their ideas widely so that they might debate issues and ferret out the truth, and thus govern themselves wisely."

Parker notes three fundamental tendencies in American broadcasting: the relative monopoly of broadcasting that derives from the licensing of frequencies and the tendency toward concentration of ownership of the media; an increasing dependence of American society on the electronic media to disseminate ideas and provide a forum for the debate of the issues; finally, the development of the media into an advertising business which subordinates all broadcasting functions to an immensely lucrative moneymaking operation.

The control system highlighted in this article is the "Fairness Doctrine." This has developed because broadcasting, unlike the press where there is supposedly easy multiplication of different types of newspapers, has limited frequencies and a limited number of hours. So the American Federal Communications Commission directs stations to provide means of voicing of alternative points of view of public importance and for a balanced presentation of views in whatever issue a station raises.

The resistance of American broadcasting to the Fairness Doctrine comes, in Parker's interpretation, from a variety of causes. There is the fear of losing revenues because of the

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diversion of time away from pure non-controversial entertainment which attracts the most advertising money; the fear of losing listeners who object to the voicing of a viewpoint they don't like; or advertising clients objecting to socially controversial views. There is also the fear of incurring additional costs required to mount any kind of programme other than canned music.

The reform which Parker proposes for improving broadcast journalism is the more widespread use of the press "editorial page" concept: giving opposing viewpoints in news presentations; allowing people to answer back to broadcast news; and greater access for a multiplicity of persons to state in raw, unedited form their alternatives and arguments.

It is significant that much of the pressure for media reform is coming from groups representing citizens' interests such as Everett Parker's own Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ. The media say that they are simply giving the people what they want. Ultimately it is the public which has a moral responsibility for the structure and content of the media. As Prof. Van der Meiden observes in his article in the *WACC Journal*, discussions of media ethics have given an almost exclusive emphasis to the duties of the message formulators. Mass communication ethics must also take up the responsibilities of audiences.

### The Factual Basis for Ethical Practices

A quite different type of research related to communication ethics is the providing of evidence that a particular type of

broadcast content is causing harm and is therefore unethical.

Usually the need for research springs from the concern of specific interest groups who begin to put pressure on regulatory agencies or directly on the broadcasters. To resolve the debate as to whether the programming is really harmful, researchers are asked to "get the facts."

The research usually has two dimensions: 1) content analysis to determine the presence and extent of the harmful broadcasting and 2) proving that exposure to the content does actually influence the harmful beliefs, attitudes or behaviour. The research may also reveal the extent and militancy of the discontent, the legal-regulatory action taking place and may formulate codes or propose concrete regulatory action.

F. Earle Barcus in "Ethical Problems in Television Advertising to Children," *Questioning Media Ethics*, touches all of these dimensions except proposing codes or regulatory action. For example, he summarises the extensive evidence that advertising in U.S. television is affecting children's food

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choices in favour of more expensive but less nutritious food. This influences parents' food purchases for children, and, in turn, is contributing to a national nutritional problem. There is also evidence that advertising, by clever techniques, does cause children to misperceive the nature of products and that there has been flagrant exploitation of children's programming in order to sell. However, Barcus concludes that long-term exposure to advertising is not causing deeper personality changes in children such as materialistic values and permanent susceptibility to advertising pressure. At least, researchers have not yet been able to prove this.

Certainly issues such as children's advertising and the treatment of women and minority groups in the media are serious, and public protest is an important indicator of possible moral abuse. But the danger is that definitions of what is ethical or unethical will depend on the ability of an interest group to mount a campaign in favour of its cause. This directs the attention and finances of researchers to the problem, and the criteria of right and wrong are developed by the ability of psychology or sociology to conceptualise the problem. These criteria in turn influence the ethical concepts of policy makers in media organisations and in regulatory agencies. In this sort of procedure the blind may be leading the blind. Pressure group action, description of ethical problems, codes, and the social sciences do not in themselves provide a methodology for developing valid criteria of right and wrong action. Ethics is a discipline in its own right.

### Teaching Media Ethics

Many university programmes of communication now have courses on ethics, and many of the publications in this area are written by professors as textbooks for these courses. John Hulteng's *The Messenger's Motives*<sup>4</sup> and Bruce Swain's *Reporter's Ethics*<sup>5</sup> are examples of widely used texts in the U.S.

As Clifford Christians observes in his article in the *WACC Journal*, "The Ethical Training of Journalists," most of these texts are little more than collections of accepted conventions

and codes of the broadcasting and newspaper trades — a sort of catechism for reporters. Theoretical perspectives for organising the course material are not well developed — at least not in American journalistic training. Without clearly articulated value systems and sets of principles according to which conclusions are drawn, ethics tend to be reduced to legalism, and students are encouraged to mechanically accept superficial ad hoc codes. Christians would emphasise training students in the ability to recognise moral issues and to reason from more general principles to personal ethical decisions.

### Toward a Normative Media Ethics

Much of the research reviewed here is simply describing ethical problems in the media: the practices of media organisations, the harmful effects of some media content, the conventions and codes of media professions, etc. However, as we noted above, descriptive ethics does not in itself contain a methodology for developing valid criteria of right and wrong.

Clifford Christians proposes that a *normative ethics* is needed which would link metaethics, the philosophical study of ethical theory, with descriptive ethics, the reporting of actual moral behaviour of given groups and persons. His concept of normative ethics is best interpreted as the systematic application of general ethical principles of metaethics to the decision making of message formulators and receivers in concrete circumstances.

In his contribution to *Freedom of Expression in Democratic Societies*, Christians says that the major task in developing a normative ethics is the clarification of the contribution of the media to cultural and political development. He thinks that Paulo Freire's concept of "political literacy" is a much more helpful way of understanding these goals than journalistic libertarianism or the public's right to know. Applying Freire's pedagogy of human freedom implies that the press and broadcasting would not simply pour out pieces of information and distracting entertainment to passive audiences. Rather the media would stimulate a more in-depth reflection on the cultural and political forces influencing our lives. They would also stimulate much more questioning of these forces. The goal is to help the public see alternatives more clearly so that it is possible to freely and consciously construct a more human society.

Are the media really capable of being a source of greater human freedom? Clifford Christians cites the view of French social philosopher and theologian, Jacques Ellul, that free decisions are virtually precluded by our monolithic, standardised, overwhelmingly propagandised environment. To counter this reality, we must work to make the person the central goal and measure of meaning in society. The poets and dramatists, through many kinds of media, have always helped to discover the meaning of being a person in a given age. And religious traditions, expressed in the language of symbol, poetry and drama, have been an integral part of this discovery.

### Footnotes

1 Clifford Christians, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics," *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 27, No.4 (Autumn, 1977), pp. 19-29.

2 Charles Curran, *The Seamless Robe: Broadcasting Philosophy and Practice*. London: Collins, 1979. p.90.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 351.

4 John L. Hulteng, *The Messenger's Motives, Ethical Problems of the News Media*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

5 Bruce M. Swain, *Reporter's Ethics*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1978.

# The Church And Media Ethics

Many newspaper reporters and television writers or producers see media ethics as a jumble of restrictive codes and meddling regulatory agencies. Scholars are only too aware that discussion of communication ethics is bogged down in arguments over different philosophical positions. If the Church enters as the dogmatic, high-powered salesman of a narrow repressive morality, this may only cause more confusion. But there is an increasing search in the field of communications for a deeper, more coherent value system on which to base media practices. If theologians and media professionals with religious convictions are willing to join humbly in this search, drawing with confidence on their own rich value tradition, they may help to clarify many issues. Especially convincing is the action of the Church in concrete witness such as the annual Humanitas Award for television writers in the United States, the work of Centro Pellin with journalists in Caracas or the activities of Chitrabani in India.

## The Law of the Spirit

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of religious moral traditions is the concept of ethics as a normative principle of human, spiritual growth rather than as codified law. At their best, religious traditions hold out a personal and social ideal of justice and compassion. More importantly, the focus of religious concern for morality lies in the internal struggle of the person to discover values in the confused situations of life and integrate these values into a balanced *personal* ideal. Out of this personal search and struggle with "the world, the flesh, and the devil" develops an interior sense of responsibility and human sensitivity which transcends external, coercive law. Ethics in this sense can call forth the creativity and freedom of the media professional.

This may seem to be repeating the obvious — until one looks more closely at how "ethics" is currently developing in the mass media industry. The accepted professional premise is that newspaper and broadcasting organisations will drive reporters and programme producers to the maximum of individual ambition and opportunism. The destructive results of these pressures both upon the media practitioners and upon the suffering public eventually becomes intolerable. Sociologists are then drafted in to "demonstrate" that harmful results exist and perhaps suggest new rules of the game. These rules defining the intolerable limits of opportunism are made into a "professional" code, the code is sanctified by the media profession or governmental regulatory agencies, and this becomes the catechism handed down to journalism students in schools of communication.

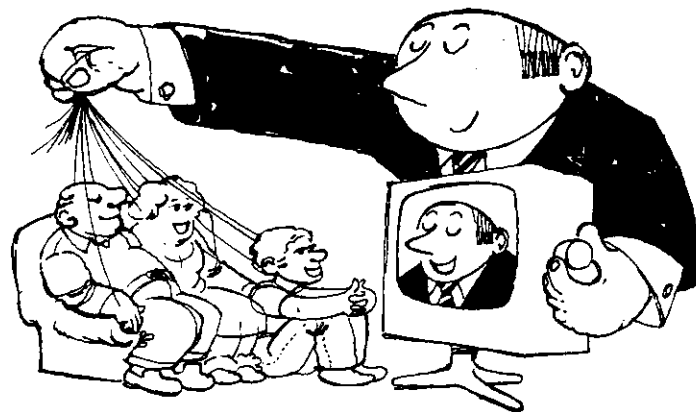
Ironically, the Church also can be seduced into relying on codes and censorship. She neglects the genius of her own moral tradition as a pedagogy of spiritual growth. Such a pedagogy in the field of mass media would be based on a fundamental integrating ideal which sees communication as contributing to the self-realisation and freedom of other persons and groups within the human community. It is an ideal which could encourage the creativity of the journalist or television producer, bring out the potential for beauty in each medium, develop the responsibility and good taste of the user who becomes an active participant not just a passive receiver, and indicate the role the media might play in developing a nation's cultural life.

## Morality in the Structural Organisation of the Media

A second possible contribution is the Christian perception of

morality not simply as individual perfection but as part of a social context. That is, one's personal moral growth is defined in terms of encouraging growth and freedom in other persons and, in turn, is influenced by the moral pattern of the group. Media morality is not simply a question of individual decisions, but is supported by the normative ideal built into the structure of media organisations.

This moral insight might be translated into a research program which studies how some newspapers or broadcasting systems have been able to embody this ideal in their policies and practices. We have had a great many studies showing negatively that the domination of the media by the financiers and technicians is destroying journalistic integrity and dramatic artistry. But we need studies which show how the media helps individual reporters and programme producers to be more creative and live up to their personal moral ideals.



## The Universality of Human Goals

A third contribution of religious traditions of morality is the concept of universal human values which are valid through history and across national, cultural lines. Although religious traditions develop within different cultural regions and are coloured by that background, all believe that the human goals they present are universally applicable. This provides some basis for a comparative media ethics which respects different political and cultural possibilities, but at the same time suggests some common goals. It also encourages media organisations to respect the validity of continuous value traditions of a nation or region even if these value traditions must be adapted to new historical circumstances.

## The Symbolic Rituals of Community

The theologian Jacques Ellul fears that bureaucratic efficiency has become so much the model of communication in our societies that everybody is an instrument to everybody else. All "communication" has become a form of manipulation. In this context, perhaps the only way to restore trust and real human sharing is through the religious rituals of community in the family, the ecclesial gathering and the nation. The language of these rituals is the *symbol* which functions at the affective level and disarms rationality and manipulation. The greatest contribution of the Church to communication ethics may well come from a reflection on the meaning of these rituals of community which are at the heart of its tradition.

Robert A. White, Editor

# Current Research On The Ethics Of Mass Communication

## The Netherlands

**Anne Van Der Meiden**, the State University in Utrecht (Oudenoord 6, 3513 ER Utrecht) is editing in English *A Reader on Ethics and Mass Communication* to be published in 1980. His recent publications in Dutch include *Masscommunicatie en ethiek — Mass Communications and Ethics* (Intermediair, 1976) and *De grenzen der beïnvloeding — The Limits of Freedom* — (Intermediair, 1978). Since his doctoral essay on the *Ethics of Advertising*, he has had a strong interest in the ethical problems of advertising and media persuasion.

## Spain

**José María Desantes** is currently director of the Dept. de Derecho y Deontología de la Información — Dept. of Communication Law and Deontology — Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Capitán Haya 20, Madrid 20). He has recently published *Fundamentos del Derecho de la información* (Madrid, 1977) and, with **A. Nieto** and **M. Urabayen**, *La cláusula de conciencia* (EUNSA, Pamplona, 1978). Other publications: *El autocontrol de la actividad informativa* (Madrid, 1973) and *La verdad en la información* (Valladolid, 1976).

At the Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, **Luka Brajnovic** has recently published *Deontología Periodista* (EUNSA, Pamplona, 1978) and **Miguel Urabayen**, *Derecho a la intimidad* (EUNSA, 1977) and *Vida privada e información: un conflicto permanente* (EUNSA, 1978).

## The United States

The Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences (The Hastings Center, 360 Broadway, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York 10706) under the direction of **Daniel Callahan** is carrying on an extended study of the teaching of ethics in American higher education. The study covers ethics in undergraduate and professional education in seven major fields including journalism.

**James W. Carty, Jr.**, Bethany College, Bethany, West Virginia, has written recently, "The Tension Between Law and Morality" (*WACC Journal*, Vol. XXVI, No.4) and "Methodology for Teaching Mass Communication Law," (*Journalism Educator*, in 1980 or 1981).

**Allan Casebier**, U. of Southern California, Los Angeles, was coordinator of the NEW Conference on Plato's Theory of Beauty and Art in 1979, and is programme director of the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in 1980. Recent publications include *Social Responsibilities of the Mass Media*, ed by **Allan** and **Janet Casebier**. (Washington: University Press of America, 1978). Special interest is the relation of media ethics and aesthetics.

**Clifford Christians**, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, Champaign, Ill. 61820, has just finished a two-year study of ethics in professional journalism education supported by the Carnegie Foundation and supervised by the Hastings Center in New York. He is currently carrying out with **Prof. Kim Rotzoll** a two-year inductive study of how media practitioners in broadcasting, journalism, magazines, cinema, advertising and book publishing actually make ethical decisions. Christians is bringing out, with **William Rivers** and **Wilbur Schramm** the Third Edition of *Responsibility in Mass Communications* (Harper and Row, May, 1980) and with **James Carey**, *Free Expression in Democratic Societies* (University of Ill. Press, 1980). He also has chapters in *Research Methods in Mass Communication* (Prentice-Hall, 1980) and in a *Reader on Ethics and Mass Communication* ed. by Anne Van der Meiden. Christians was Visiting Fellow in the philosophy dept. at Princeton U. in 1978, studying communication ethics. His interests have been the social philosophy of communications and the human-social impact of communications technology. He has studied extensively Jacques Ellul, Paulo Freire and Marshall McLuhan. He is interested in the theology of communications and edited "Communication and Spirituality" *Communication*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1979.

## SWITCHBOARD

The next issue of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS will review research on THE NEW INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION ORDER.

If any of our readers have done work in this area, please send us information regarding your current research and publications. A brief mention in TRENDS may help you to make useful contacts.

And if we have missed any researchers in MEDIA ETHICS, we would be pleased to receive names, addresses and some information regarding them.

Robert A. White, editor

**Georgetown University** has an Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1211 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, studying aspects of international communication.

**George N. Gordon**, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA, is publishing *Erotic Communications: Studies in Sex, Sin and Censorship* (Hastings House, 1980).

**John Hulteng**, author of *The Messenger's Motives*, has recently published *The News Media* (Prentice-Hall, 1979) and continues to contribute to the *Nieman Reports* on media ethics.

**Richard L. Johannesen**, Northern Illinois U., De Kalb, ILL, is the editor of a forthcoming issue in 1980 of the *International Journal of Communications* on "Ethics in Communication" and is co-editor with Lee Thayer and Hanno Hardt of *Ethics, Morality and the Media: Reflections on American Culture*. Johannesen's *Ethics in Human Communication* (Ch. Merrill Publ., 1975) is again in print! His "Ethical Responsibilities in Communication", a selected annotated bibliography published by the Speech Communication Module (2nd ed. 1976), is available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills. Johannesen has focused most of his work over the last ten years on ethical perspectives in persuasive communication, the emerging concept of communication as dialogue, accountability and responsibility in government communications and freedom of speech.

**John C. Merrill**, U. of Maryland, has recently published *Existential Journalism* (Hastings House, 1977) and is preparing a book on the *Philosophical Dimensions of Journalism* (Longmans, 1980).

**John M. Phelan**, Director of the Public Communications Ethics Program at Fordham University is publishing *Disenchantment: Meaning and Morality in the Media* (Hastings House, spring, 1980).

*Reporter's Ethics* by **Bruce Swain**, U. of Kentucky, Lexington, was chosen as a final committee selection in the category of University Press Books for Public Libraries.

**Lee Thayer**, University of Wisconsin Parkside, Kenosha, Wisc., has recently edited *Ethical Issues in Mass Communication* (Gordon and Breach, 1979) and *Ethics, Morality and the Media: Reflections on American Culture* (Hastings House, 1980).

**G. Norman Van Tubergan** and **S. Whitlow**, U. of Kentucky, Lexington, are studying ethics of professional communicators and TV/film aesthetics.

**John Wicklein**, Boston University and member of the Board of Managers, Communications Commission of the National Council of Churches, is the recent author of "Cable Television: Potential Spy in the Home," (*WACC Journal*, Vol. XXVI, No.4) and is preparing a book on the social and ethical consequences of the new technologies of communication (Videotex as in Prestel, teletext as in CEEFAX, two-way television as in QUBE, satellite communication networks and direct broadcast satellites.) To be published by Viking Penguin, 1980.

# Deciding On Priorities In The Church's Communication Ministry

National and diocesan offices of communication in the Church constantly face the problem of choosing the most effective communications for the gospel. Should we emphasise more direct, confessional approaches in evangelisation or more indirect emphasis on gospel values in general life contexts? The press, or electronic media? Group media, or the mass media? Increasingly the Church throughout the world is realising the importance of study, patient discussion, and planning for its communications ministry. RESEARCH TRENDS present various examples of this research for selecting courses of action in the Church's communication activities.

## English-Speaking Canada

The Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops (CCCC) is carrying out a three-phase project to develop a broad communications programme for the anglophone Church. Fr. John E. O'Brien, S.J., Professor of Communications at Concordia University, Montreal, is the director of the project, now beginning its second phase.

This is very much an "action research" effort involving representatives of each diocese or region and major superiors of 107 religious congregations. These Church leaders are being asked to 1) assess their needs, 2) consider alternative models suggested by *Communio et Progressio* or experiences in other countries, 3) propose recommendations for centres at the diocesan and/or regional levels. The role of director, Fr. O'Brien, has been to guide diocesan leaders and communications officers in religious communities in analysing the Church's problems of communication, encourage the development of diocesan offices of communication, and propose study materials for alternative courses of action. He is also responsible for drawing together the reports and recommendations from dioceses and religious congregations for a summary report to the CCCC.

A major step in Phase One was the organising of three-day study seminars in Calgary (the West), Halifax (the Maritime Provinces) and Toronto. In the Toronto meeting participants reviewed:

1. Factual reports on the present activities and needs for each of the 33 dioceses represented;
2. A detailed report on the state of communication training in Canadian seminaries based on a study of Fr. Joseph Borg of Malta, a former graduate student at Concordia University. This report confirmed that little is being done, but outlined possibilities for the future.
3. A paper, "Ecclesiology and Communication" by Fr. Dan Donovan, Prof. of Theology at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, outlining a theological basis for a communications programme.
4. Four talks by Maury Sheridan, Executive Director of Catholic Communications Northwest in Seattle, USA:
  - "The Communications Revolution and Its Meaning for the Church."
  - "A Communications Ministry in the Modern World."
  - "Launching and Developing a Mature Communications Ministry."
  - "A Model: a Total Communications Concept on the Diocesan and Regional Level."

These papers, in a mimeo report, *Blueprint for Action, Communications Working Papers*, are now serving as background materials for workshops at the diocesan and regional level.

In the Third Phase, reports and recommendations will be collated, the possible role of a national centre will be discussed, and a final report will be presented for action by the bishops' conference.

Highly recommended! *Blueprint for Action* available at \$7.00

## New Institute for Research in Religious Communication

The Spanish Bishops' Conference has established "INTER", a national institute for research, study seminars, and training in social communication. INTER is located at the Fundación Pablo VI on the campus of the national university in Madrid. The objectives are to provide planning and training support for the Church's work in communications and to involve media professionals in a deeper study of the moral and religious aspects of modern communication. The institute will emphasise theological reflection, study of the communication problems of the Church, ethics of mass communication, and the impact of the media on religious values in Spain.

from the Dept. of Communications Studies, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke St. W., Montreal, Quebec H4B 1R6, Canada.

## Spain

The XXIX National Assembly of Spanish Bishops, June 1978, was dedicated to a series of papers and round table discussions leading to a national plan of communications.

A first objective in this seminar was to provide the bishops of Spain and those directly responsible for diocesan offices with information on how the media are increasingly affecting the views and values of Catholics in Spain. Also presented were a general view of the science of communications (for example, a paper on the language of the image); the institutional organisation of the media in Spain; and an excellent review of current work in theology, media ethics and pastoral guidelines for communications.

A number of the papers represent original research done for the conference: the analysis of the ethical and religious values expressed in the Spanish press; a study of the distribution of phonograph records in Spain and the impact of this on youth culture; detailed descriptions of the organisation of radio, television and the press in Spain today; and a summary analysis of Spanish legislation concerning the mass media.

In part as a result of this national seminar, the Spanish Bishops are establishing in Madrid a National Centre for Research and Training in Communication, strengthening diocesan offices of communication and revitalising the national network of diocesan radio stations.

The papers, recommendations and specific plans of this seminar are now published as a book, *La Iglesia ante los medios de la comunicación social* (Ediciones Paulinas, Protasio Gomez 15, Madrid 27). A helpful booklet for organising diocesan offices of communication is available in Spanish from P. Rafael de Andrés, Secretariado Nacional de la Comisión de MCS, Alfonso XI, Madrid 4.

## Korea

A method for implementing the recommendations of *Communio et Progressio* is the focus of the recent M.A. thesis of Fr. Raymond Sullivan, M.M. After six years as the secretary of the Korean Bishops' Mass Communication Committee, this veteran missionary decided to study how to plan national and diocesan Catholic Communication programmes. The Graduate School of Corporate and Political Communication at Fairfield University, Connecticut offered a particularly good basis for studying communication in an organisation such as the Church.

A major objective was to get groups especially important for

communications in the Korean Church to define needs and make recommendations. Fr. Sullivan identified seven major sources of input for planning the Church's communication: 1) twelve diocesan representatives of UNDA-Korea; 2) the Daughters of St. Paul involved in publishing; 3) the papal nuncio; 4) the Korean Bishops' Mass Communication Committee; 5) foreign missionary groups; 6) interested groups of Korean sisters; and 7) the deacons at the major seminary in Seoul. To elicit ideas from these groups, he asked them to discuss in systematic fashion the recommendations of *Communio et Progressio*, models of diocesan communication programmes in the USA and especially in the Far East, and descriptions of current Catholic communication activities in Korea.

The recommendations varied according to the group. The papal nuncio, the bishops, and the clergy put greater emphasis on introducing at least a semester course on communications in the major seminary. Those who were associated with key leadership positions in the Church's communication ministry were especially concerned with setting up diocesan and national communications offices. The sisters were strongly interested in training in communications but also in the coordination of their present activities with the national plan. Ironically, the deacons in the seminary — who were supposed to be recipients of a new course — never gave Fr. Sullivan complete feedback because their full class schedule left no time!

Fr. Sullivan's own conclusions clarify the role of a national Catholic communications office, and he presents a valuable model of internal and external communication in the Church. He stresses the need for further work on the philosophy and theology of communication.

For information write: Fr. R. Sullivan, C.P.O. 16, Seoul, Korea.

### The United States

A process for establishing priorities in a national communications budget is exemplified in the consultation by the Communications Committee of the U.S. Catholic Conference in March, 1979. This represents perhaps the most extensive study the Catholic Church in the USA has done to date for planning its communications activities. However, planning did not include a comprehensive study of how Catholics and others actually use religious broadcasting. This is surprising given the facilities for audience research in the U.S.

The hearings from five major cities and 240 written responses were a major contribution toward setting six priorities:

1. Increased allocation of funds for production of religious programming both for prime time national television networks and for syndicated distribution to local stations. This would include a national media resource centre at the disposal of the regional and diocesan offices.
2. Development of an improved "delivery system" for Church communications, including use of cable and satellite.
3. Provide training for Church personnel entering communications work.
4. More concerted effort to influence communications policy making in the Federal Communications Commission and in legislative action.
5. A continuing, aggressive programme of direct contact with media decision makers and writers for the media to influence media policy and to have greater contact with Catholics in the media.
6. Assistance to Catholic communicators in the Third World, especially through training and through international Catholic communications organisations.

The communications committee of the USCC emphasises that research should be an integral part of all of the priority activities.

Information is available from: The U.S. Catholic Conference, Dept. of Communications, 1312 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C.

### Venezuela

The importance of surveying how Catholics actually obtain religious information through the secular and religious media is highlighted in a study sponsored by the Venezuelan Bishops Conference. The research was carried out by the national Catholic secretariat for communications with the cooperation of professors and students from the School of Communications, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas.

The survey indicates that the Church in Venezuela either is not generating any news or is not getting news of its activities into the secular media. Only 15% of Catholics interviewed are aware of and use the Church's own media. Respondents recommended that the Church make more attempt to use the commercial and public media, especially television. The communication services of the Church should emphasise, in the following order of priority: 1) important decisions and events within the Church; 2) the Church's action on behalf of the poor and oppressed; 3) diffusion of the message of the gospel; and 4) spiritual direction of Catholics. In general, the study detected a growing moral and religious ignorance in the public, disinterest in religious themes and an increasing lack of public awareness of the Church.

The results of this study provided the materials for a week-long discussion of communication planning in the plenary meeting of the Venezuelan Bishops Conference, January, 1978. In their recommendations the Venezuelan Bishops gave highest priority to the formation of the clergy, religious, seminarians and Catholic professionals in the media. As a support for these educational activities, the bishops encouraged the organisation of or strengthening of regional or diocesan offices of communication. Summaries of the study and the recommendations are available in Spanish from the Director, Dept. de Comunicación Social, Secretariado Permanente del Episcopado Venezolano, Apartado 4897, Caracas 101, Venezuela.

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