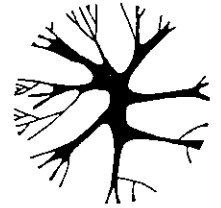


# RESEARCH TRENDS IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION



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## Youth, Evangelization and the Media

Shortly after his "Jesus of Nazareth" was broadcast, Zeffirelli was asked to visit a parish on his vacation route. After some hesitation, he arrived to find five teenagers just about to be baptized. They had found Christ through Zeffirelli's film, a Christ never even mentioned by their parents. Troubled at their neglect, they had gone to the priest, gotten instruction and now were being baptized. The media had done for these young people what neither the families out of ignorance nor the church through lack of contact had been able to do.

The challenge is there for the churches to take up: to continue to serve older parishoners with more traditional forms of worship, and yet somehow to reach out to the young with the Good News in accents they recognize. This involves using as much of youth culture as can be legitimately adopted. And it is precisely here that the controversy rages. How much of the new media and youth culture can be suitably used for reaching the young? Are the usable elements in rock music, for example, separable from the unusable? This supplement will explore these questions and present some experiences of those who have begun to grapple with them.

## I Religious Values in Youth Music

### Pastoral Care of Youth by Radio

Jim McLaren, "Present-day aural literature of the young." (*Media Development* Vol 29, 1982, pp. 37-38).

Fr Jim McLaren of Sydney, Australia, is the disc jockey for an extremely popular phone-in and music radio programme for youth. He has been successful in reaching many of the lonely and alienated by combining a friendly, non-judgemental style with their favourite Top 40 songs. His wide experience with the young has convinced him that the church should grow in respect for the culture and music of the younger generation.

Through his work with the Catholic Communications Centre (74 Greenwich Rd, Greenwich NSW 2065) MacLaren has developed his radio ministry to youth from an initial series of 7-minute programmes to a full four-hour Sunday night programme, *Cross Talk*. He regularly handles about 45 phone calls and 14 music tracks each evening.

#### Reaching the Lonely in City and Suburb

About 70% of the potential teenage audience regularly listens to *Cross Talk*. They have a chance to talk with him and hear their peers discuss real life events they are interested in as well. They feel free to talk about anything — drugs, leisure activities, records — and to ask questions about religion and relationships.

McLaren's approach is to be available in a setting familiar to youth and formed by their kind of music. Deep theological discussions are avoided; religion is taken as a natural part of everyday life. In moral questions, he encourages looking ahead to the consequences. McLaren himself has often been surprised how the show has touched people. He reports meeting three women at a community

centre who told him the way he helped a caller thinking of suicide gave them strength to resist suicide themselves.

McLaren's style is simple and direct, his voice warm, accepting and friendly. It is not what he says but his gentle manner that holds his listeners. When he is talking with one caller, all the other listeners can feel involved. To phone him or to listen in is to enter into a family. Some have written that they often will say a prayer for callers whose problems touch them deeply. Bit by bit over the years a kind of vast "church of the air waves" has grown up.

#### Youth Music as the Key to Youth

MacLaren is aware that there are many kinds of contemporary music, not all of it helpful for young people groping for a mature identity. He is selective about what he plays and tries to situate each music track in an everyday problem. For example, in commenting on Elton John's "I Guess That's Why They Call it the Blues", he remarked: "Just stare in the space, picture my face in your hands. Live for each second without hesitation and never forget I'm your man. And that's why they call it the blues." They're apart and little doubts creep into the mind. So never forget what you mean to each other...I've had several calls about this situation [one parent forced to work away from home] and the wife is feeling lonely and blue. Love can be the most elastic part of the human being. It's certainly amazing how far you can stretch the love of God...all your life and it will still pull you back to him."

### **The Need for Radio Ministry to Youth**

What Jim McLaren is doing in Sydney to share young people's music and growing pains — emotional and religious — finds its counterpart elsewhere. San Francisco is served by two very popular programmes. Tom Hunter's four-hour Sunday night radio programme and Fr. Harry Schlitt's *God Squad* have a loyal following. The ABC Contemporary Radio Network recently included the award-winning *God Squad* in its programming aimed at young adults. Dennis Benson (Box 12811, Pittsburgh, PA 15421) has involved young people in producing another award-winning radio programme, *Passages*. They edit interviews with those whose strong faith has sustained them in incredible difficulties. These youth ministers feel they must first appreciate and respect the culture of their young audiences. It provides an invaluable resource in opening up a discussion on such key topics as life, love and suffering. The religious roots of much of the music facilitates talking about religious questions.

### **Korean Church Encourages Good Pop songs**

Raymond Sullivan, "Pop music: medium and message." (*Media Development* Vol 29, 1982, pp. 35-37).

Church involvement in the youth music world has so far been considered in the disc jockey ministry. Raymond Sullivan (Maryknoll Father, Box 206, Seoul, S. Korea) has gradually developed a different kind of ministry to young people by working to improve the quality of their pop songs. The more he realized how widespread western pop songs had become in Korea, the more convinced he became that the church should become interested in this important medium of communication.

About 1969 for the fun of it he sent his English translation of a Korean pop song to its composer. He was so impressed he later asked Sullivan's help in translating another song for an international festival. From this accidental beginning his involvement in bringing a Christian dimension to the world of the Korean pop song has grown. His contact has been mainly with song composers, especially worthy but as yet unrecognized ones. He has also been instrumental in setting up a monetary award from the church to honour the writer of the best Korean pop song. He thus hopes to publicize the church's interest in promoting pop songs with wholesome lyrics. He has also written two LP records of his own English and Korean pop songs. When John Paul II visits Korea in 1984 he hopes his song about the Pope will become a hit.

What Sullivan is doing could well be imitated by the church in other countries. For, as the church shows itself respectful of the host culture, all can benefit. The culture benefits by receiving the Gospel, and the church by being open to the ways in which God's Spirit has been working in that culture.

### **Debate about Rock Music Evangelism**

John Blanchard, Peter Anderson and Derek Cleave. *Pop Goes the Gospel* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1983). Steve Goddard. *Buzz: Faith to Face Your Future*. September 1983, pp. 36-39; 60-61. (37 Elm Rd., New Malden, Surrey, KT3 3HB).

Blanchard et al. think that the chief means for the evangelism of young people should be preaching and not Christian pop concerts, because the rock music idiom is a fundamentally unsuitable vehicle for the call to conversion. The authors believe rock's hedonism and stress on the emotions disqualify it from ever being able to convey the Gospel's spiritual, moral and ethical demands. Steve Goddard flatly denies this criticism. He testifies from his personal experience of being helped by Christian pop singers to find Christ. Furthermore, Goddard considers some contemporary Christian songs as the most eloquent statements about belief he has ever heard.

### **Scripture Scholars Attack Gospel Pop Evangelism**

Coming from an evangelical perspective, Blanchard is a widely

known writer on how to live as a Christian today. His thesis is that, since the Gospel's appeal is to the mind, listening to Christian pop songs, however biblically based they may be, cannot ever lead to genuine conversion and change of heart. Only preaching can convey the full power of the Gospel. Furthermore, he considers the rock music idiom as so intrinsically and irrevocably tainted by sheer emotionalism that the mind can neither grasp the full Gospel nor be free enough to respond.

As for the efforts of Christian pop singers to purge the rock music style sufficiently to become an effective way to introduce Christ to those who do not yet know him, Blanchard thinks these are in vain. The loud music drowns the Gospel message so it cannot be heard, much less understood and responded to. Furthermore, he believes this music encourages worldly values by undue emphasis on the performance itself, the clothing of the performers, and the purely sensual at the expense of the spiritual. In his opinion, the star singer and the music become more important than the Gospel. It is clear to him, therefore, that a youth evangelism which relies on the Christian pop music idiom is in a dead end which should be abandoned. He is sure that a really effective preacher would achieve more conversions than any number of concerts could.

### **The Case for Youth Evangelism with Gospel Pop**

When Steve Goddard, the editor of *Buzz*, a monthly for Christian youth, was searching for God in his early teens, he found the help he needed from Christian pop singers. He had searched in vain for heroes and preachers to guide and inspire him. Then one Saturday night in 1963 a Christian "beat" group, "Whispers of Truth", gave a concert in his church. Despite their name, they played so loudly the police had to be threatened to get the volume lowered. Nevertheless, the Gospel truth they witnessed to touched Goddard deeply and planted the seed of faith. Just before the group packed up, one guitar player remarked that he could play only four chords and was happy to use his little skill for the Gospel.

For other young people searching for God, Goddard feels that Christians active in Gospel pop music can be their only door to the Christian community. And he resists Blanchard's efforts to shut that door because of the kind of rock music some groups play or the lifestyle some lead.

Such success in youth evangelism is in good part due to using the kind of music young people know and like. The Gospel comes alive for them when they see and hear a peer proclaiming it in song. They start to listen as they never could before. The accepting and warm atmosphere of the concert also facilitates their taking the bold step of coming forward for counselling.

According to Goddard, therefore, there is nothing in the Christian pop music idiom which in any way disqualifies it from being suitable for the Gospel proclamation. Each one of Blanchard's objections is answerable, he feels. He can point to Christian singers who do not blot out the words with excessively loud music, who do not seek more attention for themselves than for the Gospel, and whose music does have a profound spiritual, moral and ethical impact. The exchange between Blanchard and Goddard has highlighted the issues in expressing the Gospel to those yet to meet Christ and in celebrating it with those seeking a closer contact.

### **Religious Symbolism and Rock**

Bernice Martin, "Religious Symbolism Among Youth Sub-Cultures in Britain: From Religious Belief to Rock Music." (*Kerygma* Vol 16, 1981, pp. 80-107). "Rock Music as Quasi-Religious Ritual." (*Media Development* Vol 29, 1982, pp. 3-6).

Martin thinks that rock music could be interpreted as the secular quest for ecstasy. This can take two forms. First, by the oriental path of union of the One with the All, whether with all other people, the Life Force, etc. Or second, through the experience of transcending bodily limits of time and space. She finds that the

religious metaphors and imagery in the "insider" literature of youth culture reflect such a religious search. The great interest in Eastern cults is, in her opinion, in good part motivated by a desire for mystical enlightenment. Gone are the days when young people disdained Christianity as "fairy tales" and opted for a scientific world view. Martin sees much of the rock scene as a re-discovery of the power of mystery and fantasy. She wonders whether the churches' failure to counteract the trend to de-mystification drove the young outside for the mysticism and mystery that was in Christianity all along.

In their ignorance and rebellion, Martin considers it was therefore quite easy for the young to attack Christianity. They satirized standard "square" religious types and tried to shock mainstream religious sensibilities by breaking taboos. But it has been more common for youth culture to ignore mainstream Christianity than to lampoon it.

## II Religious Education for Youth in a Media Age

### Media Create a New Type of Christian

Pierre Babin and Marshall McLuhan. "L'Univers religieux des jeunes" in *Autre homme, autre chretien a l'age electronique* (Lyons: Chalet, 1977). pp. 47-43.

### Renewed Interest in Mysticism

Babin, Director of CREC-AVEX (Centre Recherche et Communication—Audio-visuel Expression [of Faith], 29 Chemin des Mouilles, F-69130 Ecully) interviewed McLuhan about the new context of youth evangelism formed by the electronic media. McLuhan described previous catechetical styles as like trying to swallow the nut of doctrine without ever savouring its contents. Youth today, however, expect an intense, personal and interior experience of what they believe. They have learned to make such demands from their experience of the electronic world, which is intuitive, holistic, acoustic, global and total. They reject the old quantitative world view of science and opt for intense personal involvement with the deepest aspects of their experience.

McLuhan notes a return to mysticism and interiority. The chief voyage the young want to take today is into their own interior. As for authority, they do not reject it but require it to take forms they respect. What counts today is not the doctrine to be communicated but authority's image. They readily listen to disc jockeys expound on the questions which the catechism used to teach. McLuhan speculates that authority should perhaps adopt a more personalized, tutorial way to convey the faith. Religion teachers, moreover, should themselves become aware of the church's rich mystical tradition and share it with students.

### New Model of Communication

McLuhan also challenges the church to adopt a new model of communication. Formerly communication used to be described as passing information from point A to point B. Now communication is seen as a matter of being tuned in to the right frequency, to resonate with others, to be "with it". And as the very notion of communication changes, so too does thinking about communicating the Gospel through religious education. McLuhan stresses the need to situate religious education education in its widest social and cultural context. He thinks those who wish to work with young people should take into account the overall cultural attitudes which shape life today. He is convinced that, since the media are a dominant force in our culture, any religious education which hopes to be successful must come to terms with this new context.

### Christian Forms of Rock Culture

She notes there is a branch of rock which is explicitly Christian. It draws on two sources, both from North America. First, black soul music has risen out of a long and powerful popular tradition with deep roots in their religious experience of slavery, liberation and struggle for equality. Second, a small part of country and western music presents moral and religious themes which reflect the mentality of the Southern Bible Belt. Martin's research leads her to the conviction that the powerful symbolic messages youth find in rock music are the ones which they take most seriously. They bring to their experience of rock music all the normal human mystical needs. Thus, a recent convert to a cult said, when asked his previous religion, that it had been punk music. Martin, therefore, would urge religious communicators who wish to reach young people to see how the young are using rock music in their attempt to fulfill their religious needs.

### Youth Evangelize Youth in Africa

Arnel Duteil et al. REDAJA [Recherches pour l'Education Affective des Jeunes en Afrique — Explorations in the Affective Education of African Youth]. (Munich, Pettenkoferstr. 26; Nairobi, Box 22778; Manila, Box 4082: SONOLUX, 1981).

Religious education among African young people is full of promise and challenge. Promise, because of the young's eagerness and openness for such education. The challenge lies in deciding how to speak to young people whose tribal culture is being rapidly changed under the impact of foreign cultural influences brought by the media such as songs and movies. Duteil, a French missionary (8, rue Duret, BP 160 Saint-Louis, Senegal) has it hit upon one successful solution in REDAJA, a series of slides used to start a directed discussion on a religious/moral question.

### Faith Discussion Groups African Style

Since the 1960s Duteil has had three strong ambitions: faith discussion groups, Africanization, and youth involvement in the church. First, he wanted to start his parishioners asking the question: How should I as a Christian respond to the pressures of living in Africa today? He insisted on lay participation and gathered a team to promote such groups.

They soon realized their first solution, to stimulate discussion through topical plays put on by a travelling theatre, could cope neither with the travel to the widely scattered villages nor with the thousands of urban students. What was needed was a powerful discussion-starter multiplied indefinitely as well as handbooks for discussion leaders and participants. Technically, the best method seemed a short series of dramatic slides projected on an ordinary cloth and powered by a car battery.

### New Use for an African Teaching Method

Deciding the slide series' content brought into play Duteil's second resolve, Africanization: programmes distinctively African in subject matter and approach. The team easily adapted the traditional method of instructing the young in tribal ways. A village elder would recount stories about other villagers as models of wise or foolish behaviour to caution and inspire the young.

The sudden death after an abortion of a team member's daughter highlighted the need for a thorough discussion of sexuality and marriage. From this initial insight have grown more than thirty slide series, usually varying from 12 to 24 slides, each with its own manual. Most treat some aspect of developing interpersonal relationships crucial for a successful marriage, which the revolution in traditional customs has made very difficult to achieve.

For example, *Stephanie* describes how a 13-year-old gradually learns true friendship is not merely sharing dresses but selfless giving. She teaches dress-making to shanty town women despite time lost from study. The stories develop in seriousness. *Pauline* shows a girl who learns too late the dangers of careless affairs; she is sterile at 18 from an abortion. *Gabriel, Odette and Martine* touches on polygamy, still practised in Africa. *Henry and Josephine* an engaged couple not rushing into marriage but becoming better acquainted before-hand.

### Youth as Successful Evangelizers

Youth involvement in the church, Duteil's third desire, is fulfilled throughout the whole REDAJA production, projection and discussion process. Young people have proven themselves effective

evangelizers, especially of their peers — fellow students, friends, neighbours. The purpose is not to impose a solution but to enable discovery of how to incarnate belief in Africa today. The discussions provide a forum to recognize one's own behaviour in the light of the story and faith.

REDAJA also enriches such events as training catechists, homilies and retreats. Christian and Muslim youth have even grown to respect one another after common discussions.

REDAJA is available in a SONOLUX edition of 14 of the 30 + series, with a publisher sought for the rest. And there is good reason to expect REDAJA to grow even more. It actively involves youth in their own religious formation and uses the local situation as the source and context of the series. As an example of evangelizing youth with the media, REDAJA offers a successful model.

## References on Youth, Religion and the Media

### Catechetics and Evangelism of Youth

**Rev. D.S. Amalorpavadass.** *The Catechetical Pedagogy for Youth.* Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Ctr, 1975. Helps young people see how their religious questions are taken up in the media, their culture and their literature.

**Catechesis: Realities and Visions: A Symposium on the Catechesis of Children and Youth.** Washington, DC: US Catholic Conference, 1977. Stimulated by four studies of future religious education needs of Catholic youth. Emphasizes need to build catechesis on the actual experience of young people.

**Franciscan Communications** (1229 S. Santee St, Los Angeles, CA 90015) produces a four-filmstrip series, *Evangelization*, for secondary school students struggling with what it means to be a believer.

**Frontier Youth Trust** (130 City Rd, London ED1V 2NJ) publishes *Information Service* on work with disadvantaged youth to bring the Gospel to the unemployed or those whose expectations have been so inflated by a media view of the world that they are never satisfied.

**Rev Peter Hackert, SJ.** "Faith for Adolescents." *The Month*, Nov 1982, pp. 378-381. Articulate explanation of how religious education might change when faith is considered more as sharing the community's faith than as handing on dogmas to be defended.

**Rev Francis D Kelly.** *Media & Catechetics Today: Towards the Year 2000.* Washington, DC: Nat. Conference of Directors of Religious Education (One Dupont Circle), 1980. On the use of media in catechetics. Cf. Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski "The Use of Cable TV for Religious Education", pp. 6-10.

**Lumen Vitae** (International Ctr for Studies in Religious Education, 184 rue Washington, 1050 Brussels). Frequent articles on media for youth evangelism, eg, "Bible Comics and Catechesis." (1979, 2).

**P J Philibert and J P O'Connor, eds.** "Adolescent Religious Socialization: A Study of Goal Priorities According to Parents and Religious Educators." *Review of Religious Research* Vol 23, 1982, No 3. Whole issue. A study of how the parents' denomination influences their choice of goals for their children's religious education. A study from the Boys Town Ctr for the Study of Youth Development (Catholic Univ, Washington, DC), a major research centre, which studies youth's intellectual, social, moral and religious development.

**Wayne Rice et al., eds.** *Creative Communication and Community Building.* Winona, Minn: St Mary's Press, 1981. Series of imaginative exercises to involve young people personally and experientially in their religious education.

**E Samson** (Catholic Communication Ctr, St Anthony's, Jalan Robertson, Pudu, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia). Catechetical slide series for youth organizations to promote Basic Christian Communities.

**Michael Warren.** *Youth and the Future of the Church: Ministry with Youth and Young Adults.* New York: Seabury Press, 1982. Describes religious education model which makes allowances for the way media influence young people's attitudes.

### The Church and the Young

**Joseph Damreel.** *Search for Identity: Youth, Religion and Culture.* London: Sage, 1978. A 6-year study of a US Hindu group of young people. Shows how their quest for exotic religion is accelerated by joblessness.

**L. Fee, Andrew Greeley et al.** *Young Catholic in the United States and Canada.* Los Angeles: Sadiier, 1981. Report to the Knights of Columbus on teenagers' religious attitudes. Shows they are much more inclined to belong to the institutional church than had been thought.

**Rev Dr Leslie J Francis.** (Research Officer, Culham College Inst for Church Related Education, 60 E St Helen St, Abingdon, UK) In *Teenagers and the Church* (Collins, 1984) surveys church-going teenagers from eight major churches on why they attend, what they expect, and what can be learned from their fidelity to the church. See *Youth in Transit: A Profile of 16-25 Year Olds* (Aldershot, 1982) for their attitudes, beliefs, and morals. *Psychology and Religious Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (London: Marshall Morgan Scott, forthcoming).

**The Gallup Organization and the Princeton Religion Research Ctr.** *The*

*Religious World of American Teenagers.* Princeton, NJ 1982. Results of a 6-year Gallup Youth Survey of religious beliefs, practices, views towards role of religion in society.

### A Selection of Productions and Experiences

**Catholic Television Network of Chicago** (1 N Wacker St, Chicago) produces "The Best We Can Be", six programmes on how everyday events can throw light on the meaning of the sacraments for young people.

**Margaret Christie** (Head, Rel Ed, St John Houghton RC School, Derbyshire, UK) uses pop/folk music, eg, by playing version of Psalm 137 and encouraging pupils to compose their version. They make slides, posters, records, etc. for many para-liturgical services.

**The GEN** (New Generation), the second generation of the Focolare Movement (Centro Gen, via Corridoni 3, Grottaferrata, Rome), as a way to live out Christ's desire for unity, hold workshops for young people in about 140 countries, eg, on writing and performing their own music, to establish new relationships with other young people and build a united world.

**Rev Los J Gorman and Mark Connolly, CP** (Passionist Communication, Box 440, Pelham, NY) produce the award-winning "That's the Spirit", a half-hour TV show over 2,000 cable distributors. Brings religious and moral values to the young regarding competition, prayer, sexuality and social awareness.

**IKON** (Hilversum, Netherlands), an ecumenical broadcasting corporation, offers *Pubertijd*, a talk show on the problems of puberty, eg, first love, going out on dates, and parental conflicts.

**Rev Ellwood E Kieser, CSP.** (Insight, 17575 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades, CA) produces *Reflections* about teenager moral values. The professionally scripted and acted *Insight* series is one of the few religious prime time TV programmes regularly watched by older male teenagers.

**Rev Don Kimball** (Cornerstone Media Inc, Box 6236, Santa Rosa, CA) trains young people in producing quality radio material for the many unchurched young. The award-winning "Codebreaker" series of 60-second messages consists of Top 40 songs and comments on relationships with oneself, God, and others.

**Kevin O'Brien** (WAVELENGTH coordinator, Youth Ministry/CYO, 2519 L St, Sacramento, CA) produces a 30-minutes all music programme on the problems youth write in about. Also "Crossfire" radio spots based on pop songs and a typical story about youth experiences.

**Aline Seeuws** (Chretiens-Medias, 19 rue de l'Amiral d'Estaing, Paris) notes programmes for the young: "Parole Donnée" has a youth-produced format about school, work, youth movements. The well received "Itinéraires" is dedicated to the Third World.

**Anton Täubl** (FWU-Inst for Film and Picture in Science and Instruction, Grünwald, Germany) produces many school films, some about how to live ones faith, eg, "Life Goals" presents how three people base their lives on alternative, religious or traditional life goals.

### Youth and the Media

**Rev. A P Purnell, SJ.** "Alienated Youth and the Faith." *The Month*, Oct 1983, pp. 338-340. Advice on how to help youth estranged from the church by listening to them and showing how their experiences can be described in the Christian vocabulary of hope, sin, reconciliation, etc.

**Sr Margaret Ivers, IBVM** (Exec Dir, Catholic Campus Ministry Assoc, 3700 W 103rd St, Chicago) is concerned with youth evangelism through cable programmes.

**Strait: The Greenbelt Newspaper.** (15 Eynham Rd, Wood Lane, London) for youth interested in rock music and the Gospel. No. 7 featured interviews with Malcolm Muggeridge about his Christianity and with Cliff Richard, a leading Christian rock musician.

**Craig Trygstad, Nat Dir, and Sr Ann Christine Heintz, BVM** (Youth Communication 207 S Wabash, Chicago). At six centres teenagers help make programmes which about a million teenagers see.