

Rebuilding families through BCCs in the context of electronic media

Fr. Malcolm Sequeira, Poona

In the primitive community of Jerusalem, the disciples “devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42). The very process of sharing faith was held in common while the early community met in upper rooms. Their faith was expressed through both, prayers (breaking of the bread) and fellowship. The whole group of believers was of one in heart and soul, their faith in Jesus Christ inspired them to sell even their lands and houses to help the needy in their communities (Acts 4). Their personal faith was not limited to their own selves but it was oriented towards the larger community of Kingdom of God. They fully understood that “faith is a treasure of life which is enriched by being shared” (CCC, 1994:949).

Hence,

1. Faith formation should not lead families just to recite prayers, frequent the religious practices and celebrations, but also to go out of themselves and reach out to others. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.....” (Lk 4:18).
2. Community is the ideal platform for family faith formation.

Keeping in mind this, the statement of the Fifth General assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) held at Bandung, proposed the Church of Asia as ‘communion of communities’ which is based on the “fellowship of life, charity and truth” (LG#9). Thus promoting BCCs as a priority of Asia. Participation, sharing, service and regular meetings are hallmarks of the BCCs.

But in most of the areas not all the members of a family attend the regular activities of BCCs. WHY?

1. The meetings are long and boring
2. The meetings are too structured
3. The youth and children feel out of place
4. The men feel the BCCs are only for women
5. The activities are monotonous and repetitive
6. They are too spiritual
7. They do more gossip sharing than Gospel sharing

Therefore they need to be set on fire!

The paper presented by Rev. Fr. Jayapalan shows importance of media in our age. Youth have a great attraction towards media, if the BCCs integrate media in their activities, the youth will not just participate but also be resourceful. According to the author, *93.9% families owned television set in the cities (2.4)* Therefore media could be a uniting factor. Can we rebuild families through BCCs in the context of electronic media?

Media has a direct influence on the family today. *The media, especially the television influence our values, fostering consumerism and materialistic values (Intro.) Media, especially television has become “the primary ‘story teller’ and often the backup baby sitter” (3.1).* Dr. George Gerbner said, where once family, church, school and public life shaped the values and beliefs of youth, today a world saturated with media images does that instead.

When there is no emphasis on catechesis in families or SCCs, there is a strong tendency among the members to go to the media for answers to their many questions about faith, morality, social and life issues. Eg. Moral – premarital sex, contraception, Doctrine – euthanasia, evolution, sin. Social – relationships, AIDS, corruption. The Vatican Council earnestly exhorts the laity to take more active part in the explanation, defence and correct application of Christian principles to the problems of our day. *Many of the serials tell us what we should do in our families; we get guidance how to solve certain problems (2.4). The electronic media which is audio-visual has direct impact on “the very concept of faith”, (3.1) especially when it brings in a maxim, “being seen is being” (5.1).*

The findings from the research has shown that, *more practicing Catholics use less of television and less practicing Catholics use more television (2). People are more dependent on media for information, formation and entertainment (2). The family is caught between the audio-visual culture, and the faith symbols of our tradition which are counter-cultural in many cases. (3.1). Thus, the media is not just the presence of audio-visual but a new culture and a new way of living. (2.4)*

The fact remains that, the television creates dumb. There is less interaction within the family (2.2). Media on its own does not invite the viewer for a dialogue in its true sense. Especially a television or video actually creates an attitude of aloofness, isolation.

But we need to look at the media more critically. It has a lot of positive influence. *The use of media for social programmes enhances their involvement in the social upliftment and their positive attitude towards the role of faith in social transformation (2).* A television or video clipping can be a launching pad to animate discussion, sharing opinions, experiences, feelings etc. thus initiating a dialogue among the family members.

In our century communication towers have grown taller than church steeples. Documents of the Second Vatican Council as well as post-councilar pastoral instructions have strongly and positively seen media as “gifts of God” (CP#2), thus promoting the integration of media in the Church and by her faithful. *Aetatis Novae* invites us “to identify new strategies for evangelization and catechesis through the application of communication technology and mass communications” (AN#28-f). “We express our gratitude to the media for contributing substantially to liberate our society from the dark forces of caste and communal hatred, corruption and crime” (CBCI-FS#2).

The Church strongly invites us ‘to integrate’ media (5.2). In 1971, Pope Paul VI in the document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* said very strongly that the Church would find herself guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is

daily rendering more perfect. It is through these media that she proclaims the message of which she alone is the depository. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit (No.45).

The author asks an important question, *can we use television instead of being used by it?* (4). *The appropriate response to electronic technology is not to stop it, but to accommodate it, respond to it and shape it* (5.5).

The group media could be the answer. Group media leads the group into active participation. "Group media are effective means in small groups to develop a critical attitude towards the reality of the self, the other, the community and society through participation" (Srampickal & Joseph, 2003:180). A good audio-visual production makes the group react, seek and discuss. It appeals to what is rooted in human ambiguity, a question with many different possible answers. When the families come together under the banner of BCCs and integrate an audio-visual, they have different understandings that arise from their own life experiences and thus sharing in groups becomes rich and profound. It will help the Family members further to be conscious of themselves by finding their own as well as family needs/situations in the audio-visuals, then by expressing themselves, by finding a space for freedom in questioning and re-discovering themselves.

Some points proposed for further discussion:

- ◆ BCCs meet once in a way whereas family meets the media everyday
- ◆ Many atime just one or two representatives from a family attends the BCC activity
- ◆ BCCs are repetitive, media is innovative
- ◆ BCCs are lengthy, media is brief and precise
- ◆ Can we encountering media with media?