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Mass Media, Ethics and the New International Order—An Overview from a Third World Perspective

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This article which is a discussion of secular media ethics challenges churches and Christian media agencies to develop biblical guidelines for the communication of the Gospel worldwide.
(Editor)

I have attempted to provide in this paper a basis and framework for discussing issues involved in the secular debate on communication and ethics, in particular the mass media, with special reference to the non-Western world. I have, however, confined myself to the noncommunist Third World since media subservience is built into the communist political philosophy. The mass media there are used as instruments of the state and the party, are closely integrated with other instruments of state power and party influence, are used as instruments of unity within the state and the party, as instruments of state and party revelation, and almost exclusively as instruments of propaganda and agitation characterized by a strictly enforced responsibility. In communist theory, freedom of the press means "approaching every facet of social life and the activities of every man with the yardstick and criteria provided by Marxist scientific methodology". Thus under the communist theory absolute freedom is not possible since freedom and responsibility are inseparably linked. The communist mass media are integrated into the total communication system to accomplish desired changes. Hence by definition, in countries such as Cambodia, China, Cuba, Vietnam and the East European countries, the mass media are subservient to the government, and freedom of the press has to be understood in terms of the communist philosophy.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE THIRD WORLD

The Third World is largely characterized by the traditional societies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They have been variously classified as "developing nations" or "underdeveloped" or "non-industrialized", but they have certain common features. They are all poor and p. 101 are getting poorer with the exception of the oil producing countries. It has been estimated that there are approximately 750 million poor in the developing countries of whom 600 million (80%)—including virtually all the absolute poor—live in rural areas. Forty per cent of the people in the rural area of these countries are poor. Improving their lot is central to any development effort in which the role of the mass media is crucial. These countries all require access to relevant technology; they all have to meet increasing debt burdens with shrinking earnings and budgets and most are seeking to emerge from a past of imperialist and/or colonial domination and exploitation.

What do these similarities mean in human terms? Very briefly, illiteracy, high unemployment, a loss of cultural identity, a pervasive sense of psychological inferiority and dependency, a shortage of managerial and professional skills, lack of technology, unproductive attitudes and rising expectations (the latter largely due to the influence of

Western media and advertizing both direct and indirect). These nations have become formally independent only within the last three decades but it soon became evident to all of them that they were faced with virtually insurmountable problems and obstacles in their efforts to meet the rising expectations generated by the mass media and to a certain extent competitive party politics locally.

Development scientists who have studied the process of political evolution in emergent countries in the three continents (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) have concluded that the aspirations and expectations created in the wake of political liberation are doomed to remain unsatisfied. These countries engaged in the uphill struggle on the road to modernization find the task facing them bewilderingly complex and painful. No shortcuts exist that would enable an emergent nation to attain the goal of modernity without travail. This is why Dr. Gunner Myrdal was so pessimistic in his assessment of the Asian scene in his classic work *Asian Drama*. Myrdal did not see much hope for the peoples of the region because of the inadequate tools available to them to tackle these tasks. Modernization itself has tended to nullify progress, since development quite often meant a widening of the gap between the urban elites and the rural poor. Daniel Lerner has pointed out that poverty makes sustained economic growth impossible, since each specific rapid advance is back-stepped by some counter-tendency in the social system.

Similarly low production ensures that there are no surpluses for investment which in turn means accumulation is impossible, hence progress is limited. Stated differently, an undeveloped country is poor because it has no industry; and it has no industry because it is p. 102 poor! Even foreign aid cannot often be assimilated by these countries because they lack the necessary technological infrastructures to utilize such assistance effectively.

In many of the developing countries such an excessive population growth is one of the most striking counter-tendencies. Ironically more effective health measures have virtually eradicated malaria and typhoid, minimized the incidence of cholera and smallpox, reduced the number of deaths and increased life span, but in the process contributed to a staggering increase of population. This population explosion has had severe repercussions on the already inadequate food resources and all aspects of development planning. Again in the case of education, more education without a simultaneous expansion in the economy has only contributed to an increase in the number of unemployed—and at that the educated unemployed—who then tend to form the spearhead for fostering popular economic and social discontent.

Even the so called "Green Revolution" which caused a tremendous leap in agricultural output only tended to intensify social injustice, as it was the wealthy land-owners who were able to benefit most from it. It resulted in a widening of the social and economic disparity, making the rich richer while the poor continued to remain poor. Even land reforms in the pursuit of social justice did not realize their objectives as the new peasant owners were illiterate, poor and lacked financial resources.

Most developing countries are beset by a scarcity economy which necessitates controls implemented by bureaucracy, often resulting in corruption. In fact, this is one of the reasons for its prevalence in these countries. They also have to contend with imported inflation, fluctuating commodity prices not within their control, and scarcity of foreign exchange for essential imports.

In the political sphere the difficulties encountered are possibly even more formidable. Take the case of some Asian countries. In Sri Lanka parliamentary democracy showed an inclination to the left, which culminated in 1971 in an abortive insurrection engineered by extremist elements, largely comprizing unemployed, educated youth who found in extremist ideologies a possible avenue through which they could vent their frustrations. In the Philippines, delayed social reform and political crises compelled President Marcos

to declare martial law in 1972 and enforce agrarian reforms. Malaysia and Singapore are practically one-party states which have to contend with internal ethnic problems while Indonesia has undergone political upheavals. Pakistan's problems of ethnic and cultural pluralism have p. 103 resulted in a military take-over and a form of controlled democracy.

Political consciousness has also stimulated (among ethnic and cultural groups) the hope of a political identity for themselves. This has given rise to subnational cultures and loyalties which are in conflict with a national loyalty. The most notable case was the East Bengal problem of Pakistan which resulted in a war of liberation culminating in the formation of an independent Bangladesh.

It is not surprising therefore that these countries are going through a phase of political experimentation—sometimes radical or even extremist—in their search for a viable alternative. This complex of diverse and difficult problems calls for an efficient political and social system. This is why several leaders in the developing countries have raised the question as to whether democracy can deliver the goods. In fact President Marcos of the Philippines, when he suspended the democratic system in his country, is on record as having said: "If democracy cannot offer a system which guarantees change, other methods will have to be tried." What we have evidenced in India—a country which has enjoyed political stability comparatively speaking—in 1975 and 1976 was a move to devise an alternative political system suitable for the sub-continent.

It is not surprising that many of the developing countries faced with insurmountable problems, even though they started as democracies, soon found the democratic system too slow, inadequate and cumbersome to tackle the complex problems. They gradually changed into "guided" or "controlled" democracies, one party states and even dictatorships. The mass media and freedom of the press were the main victims of these changes since it was felt that a free press controlled by private interests was not contributing to the development of a national consciousness for a nation still trying to determine its own path forward. What these countries of the Third World are attempting is to devise a political system suited to indigenous conditions which could solve their peculiar problems in their struggle for develoment, modernization, and national stability. It is in this context that one seeks from the Western world sympathy, understanding and constructive criticism rather than harsh judgements. These countries are only in the process of experimentation in their search for a viable political system.

It is the reporting of these aspirations as perceived by the peoples of the developing nations, that needs to be communicated to the rest of the world by media personnel who have a thorough competence, understanding and knowledge of these complex issues. p. 104

MASS MEDIA AND ETHICAL ISSUES

Media practitioners have not paid serious attention to the ethics of mass communication. It appears that professionalism was their main concern since the inception of the mass media. All effort has been concentrated on technical development and the perfection of mass media techniques for producing programmes, and for editing and publishing newspapers.

When the developing nations acquired the technology of printing and broadcasting, they also imported the methods, formats and styles of the media from the Western world. Overseas training for mass media professionals from developing countries further reinforced Western concepts of communication and models of operation. However, when one has to contend with the problems in a developing nation and make use of the media to achieve social ends, one soon begins to question the role of the media in this context.

Are Western models suitable for a developed society the best means of communication in a traditional culture, characterized by poverty, ill health and illiteracy? This is the point at which political leaders and media practitioners began to question the ethical values of the Western media, giving rise to the growing debate on the New International Information Order. The term was first introduced into the international discussion by the "Symposium on Communication Policies" organized in March 1976 by the non-aligned states in Tunis, whose key resolution stated

> Since information in the world shows disequilibrium favouring some and ignoring others, it is the duty of the non-aligned countries and the other developing countries to change this situation and obtain the decolonization of information, and initiate a new international order in information.

This was endorsed by the 5th Conference of the Heads of State of the Governments of the non-aligned countries held in August 1976. It brought into focus the differing values and standards in the media. Thus the various societies with their different religious cultures, social and moral standards found it difficult to reconcile the principles and ethics of the Western media in relation to freedom of speech, right to be informed, protection of the individual and society, and so on.

DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM

Let us now look at some of these issues from a Third World point of view. It is generally agreed that the media have an indispensable role to play in modern society. They are an essential two-way link between P. 105 the government and the people. On the one hand, they keep the ruled informed of the government's policies, actions and activities, and on the other they bring feedback to the rulers from the ruled.

The media further are an instrument for exchanging messages, both views and information, between different sections of the country—between the rural and urban sectors, between industry and labour, between the majority and the minorities. As a result people are helped to make their own decisions on basic issues.

In a developing nation, the media have the additional role of sharing with the government the responsibility for the task of nation building in which communication plays an important part. It is because of the recognition of this ethical, moral, and social responsibility that "development journalism" and "development news" grew. However, unfortunately, this new form of journalism has been very severely criticized by the Western media which treats information largely as a commodity.

Let us for a moment consider what is development journalism. Briefly it is reporting on development processes rather than events. The emphasis on "development news" is not what happens at a particular moment or on a given day but what is happening over a period of time. Development news is significantly different from so called "action" news as an effort is made to provide information on the continuing and long term process of economic and social change.

Development journalism is one of the most important innovations in news reporting in recent times. In the developing countries it could make the highly elitist media relevant to their predominantly rural societies. Internationally it could enable the developed countries to perceive the Third World not just as objects of pity and charity but as human beings like themselves, struggling to provide the basic necessities of life and improve living conditions against tremendous odds. The developing countries have denied the lack of such news particularly in the international media. But what has been the outcome? Some media representatives from the West have generally denounced development news

as a camouflage for government control or management of news. Others have equated the Third World demand for development-oriented information with government propaganda and information handouts. Even some editors and correspondents in the developing nations themselves still under colonial orientation, have not taken eagerly to development journalism.

What appears to be the primary concern of Western correspondents—especially p. 106 those engaged by the four major international news agencies, Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), Agence France Presse (AFP) and Reuters—are disasters, famines, corruption, wars, and civil disorders which tend to make for "action" copy: Economic and social development, being a slow and imperceptible process, rarely appears to be newsworthy.

FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

Let us now turn to the question of the "free flow" of information. Its international application came about in the late forties as a result of the world community approving a principle put forward by the United States news agencies. The agencies have used this concept to continue their own interest, according to the determinants of the transnational system of which they form a part. In practice the principle of "free flow" means that the agencies determine what is news and what shall be distributed for consumption worldwide, and thus they become the arbiters of reality. The manner in which the principle of "free flow" has been applied has not been questioned until recently and until now these agencies have been able to act with responsibility to no one but themselves.

It is therefore not surprising that they reflect neither the interests nor the social realities of the Third World. This is most startlingly evident in their reporting of events in which progressive governments or liberation movements are seeking to change dominant structures or to question the traditional status quo.

The functioning of these transnational news agencies is characterized by a variety of practices that run contrary to the needs of the developing nations, especially those countries attempting to bring about national structural changes or where conservative and repressive regions are meeting with local opposition. Their criteria for selecting news is consciously based on the political and economic interests of the transnational system and the countries in which the system has its roots, and they concentrate on subjects of interest to the preponderant markets of the agencies. Thus in a study made of the coverage of the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Colombo in 1976, 50% of all despatches sent by UPI mentioned the subject of Korea while only about one per cent of the final Declaration of the Conference was devoted to the subject. The agency coverage thus reflected an evident lack of relationships between the relative importance of the subject within the meeting and the image they transmitted. p. 107

Distortion of news is a regular feature of international information. It does not necessarily mean a false presentation of events but rather an arbitrary selection and slanted evaluation of events. So says Juan Somavia, the Director of the Latin American Institute of Transnational Studies Mexico, who further points out the various forms of such distortion:

- Overemphasizing events that have no real importance.
- Putting isolated facts together and presenting them as a whole without the whole ever having existed.
- Distortion also by silence, by failing to report on situations that are no longer of interest to the agencies' home countries.

- Misrepresentation, by presenting facts so that the conclusions drawn are favourable to the interest of the transnational system.

All the news flowing out of the Third World reflects the preferences and needs of the Western media. This is why leaders in developing countries refer to the "one-way flow" of news. These countries would wish for the availability of news with a Third World perspective—and this need not and should not be an official one at that. Do the developing countries not deserve recognition of their efforts to alleviate their problems?

DEVELOPMENT OF THE "WHOLE MAN"—COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Let us next turn our attention to the values in traditional society such as social goals, community, and solidarity, and see what influence Western media have on them. The yardstick of the Western world has been Gross National Product and this unfortunately came to be the criterion used for judging development and progress in the Third World too. Only in recent times has the question of social good been brought into the discussion.

The doctrine of progress has been a major premise when one talks of development; but what has progress meant in practical terms? It would appear that material acquisitions of property and wealth are evidence of progress and the Western media certainly have emphasized consumption contributing to happiness. At a conference a decade ago, *Church Communication and Development*, the task of communication was seen as helping "each man to increase his sense of dignity as a human being, to preserve his spiritual values, as well as to assist him to achieve greater economic development." p. 108

Social justice, self-reliance, and economic growth must be considered as inter-related goals and are now widely recognized as the three major factors in any significant discussion of development. But what do Western media treating information as a commodity, ignoring its social significance, contribute? A well-documented paper presented by Dr. Luis Beltran, at the loth General Assembly of the International Association of Mass Communication Research on the subject of television impact on the minds of Latin Americans, identifies what he calls the "twelve main images" induced by television delivery systems studied in Latin America—all of them in direct confrontation with development needs and priorities of traditional societies. They are Self-defeatism, Providentialism, Romanticism, Aggressiveness, Individualism, Élitism, Racism, Materialism, Adventurism, Conservatism, Conformism (this listing does not imply any order of ranking). This is an area that needs further discussion and consideration by media professionals since it raises ethical issues of the conflicting values and images presented by Western media in relation to the aspirations and nation-building efforts of the developing nations.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Freedom of expression as it operates in a democratic society is based on a group of rights to form and hold beliefs and opinions on any subject, and to communicate them through any medium. It also includes the right to listen and the right to access of information. The rights of all in freedom of expression must be reconciled with other individual and social interests. The state has a role to play in assuring free expression in society through providing facilities and information. Freedom of expression in a democratic society is essential for advancing knowledge and discovering truth, assuring individual self-fulfilment, achieving a more adaptable and hence a more stable community, and providing for participation in the decision-making process by all members of society.

One of the media used for accomplishing this group of rights has been the Press. Many leading Third World figures have put forward the view that freedom of the press does not and cannot mean the same thing to underdeveloped countries as to developed countries. Their argument is that press freedom is divisible, it is one thing, say in the Third World; it is another thing, say in the Western World. Comments made by a leading political figure in the Caribbean, George Walter, are representative of the view in developing nations: p. 109

> By and large, in the more developed societies, the Press has been able to fulfil its obligations without encountering any severe legal constraints. Two factors account for this: the first is that they have accepted the fact that if they are to enjoy the freedom which they want, they must display a corresponding degree of responsibility … The second is that the preponderance of publications and other means of mass media communications have created several counter-vailing pressures which ensure that a great degree of responsibility prevails.
>
> In the Caribbean today, we cannot say that a similar situation exists. Instead of having the development of several local publications, which would generate several counter-vailing and independent views on any issue, we have a situation where:
> (a) our mass media are practically dominated by one large multi-national corporation whose editorial policy is hardly designed to serve the needs of our region;
> (b) very little is being done to train and upgrade the standards of our journalists; and
> (c) where our mass communications media are locally owned; in a number of cases they are the organs of minority political parties.

Let us now look at what foreign standards might be. The British socialist, Francis Williams, in his book on journalism, *Dangerous Estate*, makes this point:

> the freedom of the journalist—freedom not only from censorship or intimidation by the State but from Censorship or intimidation by anyone including his own employer—is an essential part of press freedom. This freedom involves the right of individual reporters to report facts honestly even if they prove inconvenient to the fancies or prejudices of editors or news editors; it involves the freedom of foreign and political correspondents to report and interpret the evidence before them according to their independent judgements and journalistic conscience, even if to do so is awkward for the policy of the paper that employs them; and it most certainly involves the degree of independence possessed by an editor in his relations with his publisher. Such independence clearly cannot be absolute … The freedom of the press differs from, and ought always to be recognized as greater than, the simple freedom of an entrepreneur to do what he pleases with his property. A journalist has commitments to the commercial interests of those who employ him. But he has other loyalties also and these embrace the whole relationship of a newspaper to its public.

How far apart are these views? Could the Williams formula be applied in the Third World without getting entangled in the net of Mr. Walter's legal constraints? In his book, *The Politics of Change*, Mr. Michael Manley, another leading political figure in the Caribbean, poses this question: p. 110

> Where is the dividing line between the rights of the press to its freedom as one of the main instruments by which a free society protects itself against totalitarian encroachments and the claims of social responsibility? … Because this line is so difficult to draw; because it is so difficult to decide what is an over-riding social responsibility to which the press should be subject, it is to be hoped that the issue never has to be decided by a government acting unilaterally in restraint of the press. On the other hand, the press itself must recognize that if it will not impose restraints upon itself through self-discipline, it invites a confrontation sooner or later. For example, the press cannot expect its freedom to be defined to include the right to lie and distort merely because it may disagree with a policy

being pursued by a duly elected government. There are other ways in which honest disagreement can be expressed, and provided the disagreement is expressed honestly, the press is entitled to its freedom.

Is the press really free? Are there no powerful commercial interests that influence and even control the media? If profit is the primary motive of newspaper proprietors, can they provide socially relevant information? If they are unable to do so, is there no justification for the call by governments for a free and balanced flow of information and the establishment of a New International Information Order?

WESTERN MEDIA AND TRADITIONAL CULTURES

The impact of Western media, particularly television, on traditional cultures, values and arts has been such that these cultures have been overwhelmed by an influx of Western popular culture—pop music, comic strips and television programmes. The leaders in developing countries saw in the media, particularly broadcasting, instruments which would contribute to integration. They viewed the media as helping create a nation out of local, regional, tribal and ethnic loyalties. They also saw them making a significant contribution in socio-economic development, through motivating the peoples of these countries.

Now there is a further call for more indigenous self-expression and for promoting traditional culture. The concern is not just national prestige, but for providing a vehicle to reach people with the message of national integration. But what in fact is happening in the developing nations where oral tradition and time-binding communication patterns are still formative elements in the culture and daily lives of the people? The global communications system which is a vehicle for "cultural homogenization" ensures that alien television programming is foisted on these cultures. The Global Television Traffic in particular is a matter of grave concern. Even as early as a decade ago p. 111 Herbert Schiller in his book *Mass Communication and American Empire* pointed out the extent to which the major US networks had established marketing, management, financial and/or technical arrangements, with the television services of other nations. WORLD-VISION, ABC's international network, reaches 60% of the world's TV homes—a total of 23 million homes excluding the US. About the same time NBC's international activities include syndication of 125 film series and service to over 300 television stations in over 80 countries. CBS distributes its products and services through over 70 subsidiaries to over 100 countries. Karle Nordensteng and Tapio Varis published a UNESCO report aptly titled "Global Television Traffic: A One-Way Street". They report that 60% of all TV programming in several countries is mostly imported from the US. Thus many developing countries find their communications capabilities filled with foreign material. To the extent, then, that it can hardly be used for community development and local communications, this material is of questionable value to their people.

The developing countries have seen in television's powerful visual impact a useful vehicle for achieving worthwhile goals, such as eradicating illiteracy, alleviating rural isolation, providing information about national goals and policies, developing national aims, and in general creating social consciousness. But once the country is adequately equipped, it finds it difficult to maintain programme output because of prohibitive costs. Consequently it is compelled to purchase overseas programmes to provide even a minimum service. Overseas producers can "dump" programmes at very low rates as costs have already been recovered. Thus the little financing available for local production is reduced even further by foreign purchases. The original objectives for which the system was introduced tend to get lost. Each nation and culture must seek to maximize its

capacities for generating its own messages and programming. Unfortunately television and similar technology foster one-way communication with the powerful nations providing the input and others receiving the output.

How does one reconcile this situation and provide for free expression while also developing mass communications which permit the exchange of ideas without being detrimental to national cultures?

ADVERTIZING

One aspect of media ethics which I believe has somehow not received sufficient consideration is advertizing. And it is not only direct P. 112 consumer product advertizing that I am concerned with. It is the whole range of images created and promoted indirectly through television programmes and films.

Let me take the case of Latin America, where research studies undertaken on advertizing show that US companies lead the advertizing field in most of these countries. Some of their main clients are the US transnational corporations. In Mexico, of the 170 advertizing agencies operating in the country, only four are solely in the hands of Mexicans. Of the $500 million spent in that country $400 million are handled by 11 US agencies. The top ten agencies in Venezuela are US-owned or controlled. Of the 78 members of the National Association of Advertizers of that country, 42 are US transnational firms. Six of Argentina's ten most important agencies are US affiliates or associates. One US agency handles almost all advertizing in the Central American countries. The sales of the two US agencies in Brazil—which are the largest in Brazil—represent twice the sales of the leading national agencies. Advertizing is therefore a very strong transnational influence on the mass communication system of Latin America. Is it surprising that the "coca cola" culture tends to envelop the globe?

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

May I refer very briefly to another area of growing concern? This is the whole subject of the new communication technologies, in particular satellite communications and especially direct satellite broadcasting. The development of new communication techniques associated with the new technologies poses an even greater threat to the developing nations. This is particularly so in the case of television where distribution of programmes via satellites which recognize no national boundaries, will further contribute to "cultural homogenization" through global electronic invasion of the Third World countries. Similarly the development of video technology and the mass distribution of video cassettes by the Western media will almost certainly have an adverse effect on national cultures. It will become virtually impossible for societies to protect themselves from these influences because of the very nature of the technology.

THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVES

From the foregoing it becomes evident that the debate on the media tends to be centred on the difficult concepts of information and particularly news. While it is generally accepted that the values of the P. 113 West may be applicable to industrialized countries, developing countries look at their information providers as having special functions as instruments of social progress. Even though the Third World countries have different political and social systems and differences exist, they also share common problems and common national and international aspirations. This is why it is argued that since

development is a pressing problem, all national efforts including the mass media must be geared to the purpose of meeting the ends of social progress and economic development. Emphasis is given to the need for accuracy, truthfulness, and objectivity of information. Further, information, instead of misleading people, should enlighten, create national identity, and promote international goodwill.

Media practitioners in the Third World generally advocate a supportive role for the media. A leading Asian journalist has observed that:

> the tasks of economic development are so complex and so urgent that they must necessarily be the prerogative of governments to tackle. So are the responsibilities of security. If Asian newspapers were to play parallel or independent roles, they would only confuse and complicate the situation beyond endurance. Asian newspapers must concede that it is both practical and proper for broad social, economic and political objectives to be set by governments. It should then be the responsibility of Asian newspapers to lend their support to the achievement of these objectives—not in a spirit of partisanship but of active contribution to national life playing the "devil's advocate" too when it is necessary.

Similarly an Asian broadcaster has commented as follows:

> Media people love to think of themselves as the great custodians and purveyors of objectivity and truth. Increasingly, governments and people are tending to treat this claim with cynicism or to reject it outright. The least media people can do is to come alive to the historical processes in which they are inextricably caught up and adapt their styles and priorities within them. *Theirs has always been and will continue to be only a supportive role*—supportive of values and systems that are not theirs to prescribe. Those values and systems are fashioned by economic and social forces much larger and more fundamental than themselves. The media ego must learn to diminish gracefully.

MEDIA—A SOCIAL NECESSITY?

How can these positions be reconciled with Western values? We must possibly examine the present concept of information and prevent it from being merely a commodity. It has to revert to being what it should always have remained, a social necessity. This is the thinking P. 114 behind the call for a new world order for the free flow of information, a call based on the desire for liberation.

The mass media are useful vehicles for propagating culture, ideology and nation building. The media are capable of fostering these bonds of human affection which hold societies together. A modern community is held together through a sense of common identity and destiny, a tolerance of the plurality of which it is made, active participation by its citizens in the decision-making process, and a measure of cultural integration that makes possible a consensus on economic and political priorities. The media have a vital role to play in all these areas by giving expression to national identity, supporting pluralistic values, providing access for the participation of the minority groups, and blending the old and new cultural elements. To accomplish this, the media must be relatively free from pressure—particularly the government—while being accountable to society.

I would like to conclude with a quotation by the father of the Indian nation, Mahatma Gandhi. It embodies the dilemma confronting the developing countries:

> I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my window to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. Mine is not a religion of the prison-house.

———————————

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How Biblical is Your View on Divorce and Remarriage?

Bruce and Kathleen Nicholls

The traditional Protestant stance is that in certain circumstances Christians may divorce their partners and that divorced persons are free to remarry. A *Christianity Today* gallup poll (*Christianity Today*, June 6, 1980, p.27) estimated that 40% of evangelical clergy in U.S.A. accept remarriage after divorce in cases of desertion or adultery, while 27% accept remarriage after divorce regardless of the reasons, if reconciliation to the former spouse is not possible. One recent survey of divorced rates by profession found ministers with the third highest rate behind only medical doctors and policemen (*Leadership*, Fall 1981, p. 119). The same issue of *Leadership* reports on a recorded forum with five evangelical pastors who had personally experienced the trauma of divorce. All but one had remarried and all were continuing in their churches or in other churches. At least one had gone out and started a new church.

We can admire the openness of these men in the interview in their willingness to share their personal tragedies in print. Those of us who are fulfilled in marriage would be quick to add that our marriages are what they are by the grace of God. All of these pastors condemn divorce and all had been crushed emotionally by their devastating experience. All were deeply grateful for the supporting pastoral care of their elders and fellow ministers. They continued in the ministry because of a strong sense of God's call and enabling. One stated "the divorce enabled me to preach God's grace and forgiveness more realistically"; another said, "divorce increased my sensitivity to people". In no sense did they condone divorce but rather they testified to forgiveness, healing and the recovery of their ministries. The editors of *Leadership* asked a number of well-known Christian leaders in America to comment on this forum. All expressed their concern about this growing tragedy inside the Church and made many perceptive and helpful comments on the report of the five ministers.

Our concern in this issue of *ERT* is to ask the question, "How biblical is our attitude to divorce and remarriage? Does our attitude to the authority of Scripture reflect that we have accommodated it to the changing values of our culture?" There is the subtle danger that we assume what Scripture says and then proceed to interpret Scripture accordingly. This enables us to justify our feelings and actions and yet intellectually declare our belief in the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Nowhere is this clearer than in the widely held assumption p. 116 that those who divorce on biblical grounds are free to remarry. Our strong sense of compassion for those who have fallen and suffer becomes the assumed basis for accepting the view that divorce includes freedom to remarry. Is this line of reasoning any different from that of those liberals who argue for universalism in salvation on the grounds that God is absolute love? Edmund Clowney of Westminster Theological Seminary, expressed his concern in his reply to the forum when he said, "It is most