

But for the Haredi reader, they pose an even greater threat than the secular press. When a Haredi reader picks up a secular newspaper, he/she doesn't expect Jewish messages. He knows what to anticipate. But when he/she reads a Jewish newspaper, he/she definitely expects to find Jewish values — and is bound to find something else. We encourage our

readers to shy away from these publications, and I understand that segments of the Modern Orthodox leadership do the same. Let's face it — the Jewish world comprises many stripes, streams, and colors. You cannot put all the facets and factions into one supermarket — or into one newspaper. It just doesn't work.

Christianity and the Media in America

Quentin J. Schultze

CHRISTIANITY IS a rhetorical religion grounded in proclamation. Its first great theologian, St. Augustine, was trained as a secular rhetorician before his conversion and ascendancy to bishop. This is most evident in the United States, where the Puritans and other Christian groups came not just to avoid religious persecution but also to plant the "City on the Hill" — a biblical term recited by one of the first Pilgrim ministers and championed publicly by President Ronald Reagan.

This is why so many churches and parachurch ministries use the media to reach out to the "unsaved." They pioneered mass printing and distribution in the 1830s, operated about one out of twelve radio stations already in the 1920s, launched some of the first cable and satellite TV channels, and most recently created the most popular religious Website (www.gospelcom.net) in the world, with about twelve million "hits" daily.

Currently, Christians, primarily Evangelicals and a few Roman Catholics, run about 1,200 radio stations in the U.S. These and Christian cable television channels are available in nearly all markets across the country, urging viewers and listeners to respond financially and spiritually. Before the televangelism scandals of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart in the late 1980s, over a dozen broadcast ministries elicited tens of millions of dollars annually in donations and claimed audiences in the low millions. Even without such high-profiler personalities, Christian media continue to shape religious opinions and doctrinal emphases. Religious media thereby compete for attention with local Christian leadership and national denominational authority.

But many Catholics and more mainstream Protestants criticize seemingly deceptive broadcast messages that promise new believers complete happiness, financial rewards, and physical healing. Mass-marketed faith

tends to give audiences what they want, not necessarily what they should have. This is why well-respected broadcast ministers such as Rev. Billy Graham have avoided using daily and weekly television programs, which are quite expensive.

Beyond evangelism, Christians have used more specialized media to strengthen cross-generational and cross-geographical faith communities. These include denominational newspapers and magazines, books and other educational materials, films, DVDs, private and public Websites, e-mail lists, and online video and audio streaming.

Christians generally recognize that their faith must be passed along from generation to generation. They realize that *community* is *communication* (the two words come from the same Latin root meaning "to make common"). Together with local Christian bookstores and national publishing houses, congregations form faith communities not just through worship, but also through extensive education programs and workshops, retreats, and conferences. Such events provide opportunities to purchase materials for personal and collective spiritual growth.

But Christians also face a growing politicization of their educational media. Most Christian media advance morally and politically conservative stances on public issues from abortion to federal judicial nominees and U.S. policies in the Middle East. Moreover, some Christian broadcasters are fueling such politicization. Ironically, this is causing significant rifts within denominations and congregations.

Orthodoxy, that is, true or authentic belief, is becoming oddly fashionable in many Christian circles. The key to this development seems to be two-fold: First, the desire to learn from tradition (Christian church historian Jaroslav Pelikan says *tradition* is the

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living faith of the dead, and *traditionalism* is the dead faith of the living); and second, the anonymous availability of online resources that an interested person can access without having to visit a church or theological library. I hear regularly from Christians who want to know how they can use print, electronic, and now digital media synergistically with local congregations to help interested persons and families reclaim ancient wisdom. After all, they say, our information-rich society is wisdom-poor.

My own life is a case in point. Raised Roman Catholic, during college I became a Protestant while reading about doctrine and theology. I had never really internalized the Catholic tradition to make it my own. A few years ago I discovered and traced online my Jewish roots. Moreover, I found on the com-

puterized database at the Holocaust Museum in Washington that one of my Viennese relatives was a Holocaust survivor. Using the Internet, I was able to determine that he was still alive, and last year I connected with him via e-mail. I now read the Bible through a different lens. I'm studying ancient Hebrew and later Jewish wisdom literature. I no longer use the term "Judeo-Christian" in my academic lectures and writings. Even as a Christian, I find that term disrespectful to Jews, and I struggle as the Apostle Paul did to understand both the commonalities of and distinctions between the two faiths. I don't know where this will lead. Yet I do see the mass media as gifts from God — gifts that can help all of us to share our faith humbly, build communities of shalom, and reclaim wisdom that transcends the foolishness of our age.



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