

Media Awareness: A Forgotten Dimension in Mission

Whereas media technologies are increasingly shaping global cultures, media awareness and critique often seem to be a forgotten dimension both in society at large and in evangelical mission and churches. However, the urgent need to equip pastors, youth leaders, and church pastors for engaging both the news and the entertainment media properly is crucial. This session addresses this urgent need and introduces key tools and resources, including [CultureWatch](#) and [EngagingMedia](#). Though global and local media present some major challenges to mission and churches, by identifying key issues and asking key questions, we can transform the challenges into fantastic opportunities to engage with people in appealing, non-threatening ways. This session includes an interactive part where people are sharing ideas and impressions from local, national and / or global media.

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1. Wherever technology goes, media messages follow

New and old technologies allow western popular culture and media messages to spread, and for non-western media messages to become part of our popular culture.

“To think intelligently today, means to think worldviewishly” (Don Carson)

1.1 Media awareness

“Popular culture reflects the society it helps to create” (William Romanowski)

Media reflect popular culture

Media shape popular culture

1.2 Media critique

“No story exists neutrally as raw entertainment without reference to cultural beliefs and values.”

(Brian Godawa)

Threes levels to think about:

- Surface – see media as entertainment
- Middle – realise that there is a message
- Deep – discover traces of worldviews

2. Christian Responses to Media

Through all the news and entertainment media, we encounter an enormous variety of media messages. None of these is neutral, and neither are we neutral observers. All of these media messages, whether news or entertainment, communicate things about beliefs, values and attitudes. That is, they communicate worldview themes and perspectives. It is vital, therefore, that we learn to engage missiologically with these messages.

2.1 Niebuhr’s five models of relating to culture

a. Christ against culture: “The counterpoint of loyalty to Christ . . . is the rejection of cultural society.”

b. Christ of culture: “Jesus as the Messiah of society, the fulfiller of its hopes and aspirations . . .”

c. Christ above culture: “They cannot separate the works of human culture from the grace of God . . .”

d. Christ and culture in paradox: “loyalty to Christ and responsibility for culture”

e. Christ transforming culture: “hopeful attitude toward culture”

“No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” (Abraham Kuyper)

2.2 Missional engagement with media

Understanding the context – media awareness

Knowing the language – media literacy

Engaging with the stories – media critique

2.3 The Damaris Approach

“[We] are called to double listening, listening both to the Word and to the world. . . . We listen to the Word with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand. We listen to the world with critical alertness, anxious to understand it too, and resolved not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathise with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it.” (John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, pp. 27–29)

Biblical study

Cultural study

Biblical communication

Cultural communication

3. Points of contact and points of tension in popular media

3.1 Understanding worldviews

“A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”
(James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant* p. 122)

“We don’t see it because we see with it.” (Os Guinness)

What is the view of reality?

What is the view of humanity?

What is the view of knowledge and wisdom?

What is the view of morality and ethics?

What fundamental problem confronts humanity, and what is the solution?

3.2 Asking key questions

Many media messages challenge our claim that Jesus is Lord, but asking key questions about media is an extremely effective way of provoking interest in that claim.

Recommended resources

- Peter Fraser and Vernon Edwin Neal, *ReViewing the Movies: A Christian Response to Contemporary Film* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000).
- Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom and Discernment* (Downers Grove, Il.: IVP, 2002).
- Nick Pollard, *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult* (IVP, 1997)
- William D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2007).
- James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (fourth edition) (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2004).
- James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2004).
- Tony Watkins, *Focus: The Art and Soul of Cinema* (Milton Keynes: Damaris Books, 2007).
- Tony Watkins, *Dark Matter: A Thinking Fan's Guide to Philip Pullman* (Milton Keynes: Damaris, 2004).

www.engagingmedia.info – new web resource for helping ask the right questions about media

www.tonywatkins.org – resources relating to *Focus: The Art and Soul of Cinema*, plus articles and other resources

www.damaris.org – main Damaris site

www.culturewatch.org – looking at the media from a Christian perspective but for secular readers (Damaris)

www.toolsfortalks.com – quotes, videos, illustration finder, passage picker, commentary (Damaris subscription site)

www.deovox.com – audio Bible studies, relating the text to contemporary culture (Damaris)

www.artisaninitiatives.org – site for people working in arts, entertainment, media and fashion

www.artscentregroup.org.uk – the Arts Centre Group supports Christians working professionally in the arts

www.culture-making.com – Andy Crouch's site, related to his book, Culture Making

www.hollywoodjesus.com – Christian reflection on film

www.licc.org.uk – London Institute of Contemporary Christianity