

THE DOVE AND THE SERPENT

by M. X. Pooranam Demel

Message proceeds from the barrel of money, (Apologies to Mao). Hence for many reasons the current search for self-financing of Christian Media Centres is a step in the right direction. For this affirms the local against the universal (Is there any, except in the essentials?). This admits of diversity as against a suffocating uniformity. Politically, in today's world order it has vast implications for Message Formulation by the Third World, whose Christian communication is funded (controlled?) by the First World. Not to speak of the wider world information imbalance. For always history is written by the conqueror. The dominant message in any era is that formulated by the dominant. Be it the First World, MNC's, Ted Turner (CNN), or Rupert Murdoch (Star TV).

Hence self-financing in the long run will help the Third World find its own voice, formulate in its social milieu its own message for change in its own cultural idiom. And move forward towards a more Christian, humane living.

I - The Boundaries to Self-Financing

The above why's of self-financing apart, prior to a search for the how's, a brief reflection on the more fundamental issue of «Church and Finance» is imperative. This would point out certain limits to self-financing.

Message Vs. Marketability: Two Basic Contradictions

1) In the 'Weltanschauung' of the two orders: The Church is an established religion based on a set of moral codes/norms. By calling, it belongs to the Normative Order. Finance or economic activity, especially in today's dominant paradigm geared towards ever more profit, is based on a set of amoral codes and belongs to the Existential Order. Often its codes border on the immoral, say, like selling untested HIV-infected blood for mere profit.

➤ The job of the Church (its communication) is to proclaim «how things ought to be». Whereas economic activity thrives on «how things are». The normative order (Church) is concerned with doing the right thing to enhance the quality of life. And the existential order (finance), with doing things right to enhance profit. The Church by calling, questions «what is». It strives for «prophetism». The economic order exploits «what is». It strives for «profitism». Hence, for the Church, an essential conflict between Message and Marketability.

The moral message of the Church from the normative order is not easily marketable in the amoral existential order of finance. The one thing that can give an edge to the message is the sweep of Charism. A rare commodity in any institution. This is a limit at the ontological level of the Church.

2) In the organisation of the Church structures: The way power, roles and status are organised in the Church structures are just not compatible with the logic of the economic order today. The ecclesiastical structures today are still Medieval, monarchic, closed and secretive, hierarchised where person-centred feudal loyalties sway its interhuman relationships. This inherently inhibits the operations demanded in a relatively democratised, open, objectively contractual relationship based on the capacity for productivity, characterising the economic system today. Concepts like confidentiality, adhocism, cura personalis, loyalties (based on nepotism, favouritism, caste, tribe, race) and the inflated egos of individual Church institutions and the individuals heading them, characterise the Church organisation. They end up in hush-ups of bunglings, protectionism and a sheer absence of professionalism. Here a problem (even so material as finance) always tends to become a mystery.

Always history is written by the conqueror

«Church and Finance»

Prophetism vis-a-vis Profitism

The ontological limit

Ecclesiastical structures today are still Medieval, monarchic, secretive

The organisational limit

The total absence of democratised decision-making in the Church results in financial muddling by Church personalities at various levels. Not to speak of Banco Vaticano or Banco Ambrosiano. This problem demands a deeper treatment. This is a limit at the organisational level of the Church.

The present (un)equation in force, wealth and information

Global Games

Outside this, the more powerful limit is that the existence of a dependent (funded) Third World is the necessity for the dominant (funding) First World. (Raw materials, cheap labour, NAFTA, technology transfer etc.) This is linked to the present (un)equation in force, wealth and information between these nations. Specifically, the world trade relations that are uneven.

Change always proceeds from the underside

Any attempt at self-financing has to realistically reckon with these three fundamental limits and creatively search for ways to reach the goal. This is important from the point of change. For change always proceeds from the underside. And in this, self-financing, hard and slow, will be more effective.

Horizontal democratisation of information and decision-making

II - Self Financing

This means here, not only to meet the immediate running costs from the local income, but also total self-reliance in the future. The following suggestions flow from the communication experience in the Indian context.

Funding agencies should evolve norms for networking and collaboration

1. Set right, streamline the present financial management in the Christian Communication Centres: For this reorganising information and decision-making is needed. In any organisation when information is specialised and hierarchised its functioning also will be similar. Today, for efficient financial management, a horizontal democratisation of information and decision-making is a must.

2. Pooling, Networking of resources: In the media fora this is a phrase worn out by overuse. Vast infrastructures of many centres lie unutilised, underutilised. A dead capital. In the author's experience the one block to networking, sharing and nonduplication of resources and product is ego. The rat race for control and claiming credit for «the results» - more often than not born of creative imagination. Here the funding agencies should evolve norms for networking and collaboration between centres as a precondition for funding the seed-money under pain of rejection of projects otherwise. External coercion delivers internal cohesion. This is an everyday social fact. Christian media history tells that joint pressure from agencies is a must for networking profitably (cf. *LEARNING FROM GIANTS*, Gohla, CAMECO IB, 1/94). Nothing short of a marriage between centres is needed. This requires crushing certain fossilised caucuses.

Trained and appointed to 'man' a centre

3. Personnel Management:

(i) Selection: A priest (it's the man invariably) gets trained and appointed to 'man' a centre, because back in the seminary he played the organ at mass - or the second fiddle - so well! - apart from the fact that he was well connected. This has to go. A few heads may have to roll. The acid test for any prospective staff in the centre must be proving their calibre in the harsh secular media area.

Keep minimal full-timers

(ii) Salary: *Keep minimal full-timers:* There are three advantages. The Centre can pay them competitive salaries. This will stop migration of trained staff, a chronic malady. Secondly, the less staff, the less emotional drain for the manager. Thirdly, communication needs creative persons. A full-timer soon tends to repeat. Creative people can also be eccentric, adding to managerial burden. So get creative work done outside on contract. So much less strain on monthly salary budget. Pay commission/incentive to staff on income. This will increase centre's productivity.

Pay incentive to increase centre's productivity

4. Local Corpus Fund - Reserve Fund: Profit from sale of products, participant's fee for training programmes, remuneration for services by Centre's staff paid by other organisations accruing in local currencies can be put aside as a

reserve fund. This can meet salary, administrative expenses or be invested in efficient securities.

The Agencies instead of funding a project for many years can give a one time grant (seed-money) to be invested in long-term securities or immovable properties like shopping complexes. Income from this can finance the project. Local financing and long-term planning for media works should be integrated.

5. Tap Local Sources: A voluntary agency in Madras gets a loan from the World Bank at 4% interest for house building, charges the beneficiaries 10% and with the margin funds its development programmes. Many other Volags have financially successful garment export units, with which profit they finance their programmes. Lots of funds allotted for welfare works by the government or the local philanthropic organisations lie unutilised. Such local resources should be exploited.

6. Profitable Media Openings: Cable TV, Sponsored TV Programmes and recently, FM Stereo broadcasts are opportunities largely untried by our centres in India. At least one centre - to our knowledge - has produced sponsored programmes for TV and made profit.

7. Equipment: *Buy minimally, hire the rest.* Most centres are over-equipped and underused. It has to do with the temptation of the minority Church to show off huge infrastructures. Also the urge of celebrities to leave behind a vicarious progeny. Financially it is catastrophic. Maximise income by commercial use of equipment, studio, space etc. Modernise obsolete equipment only through such income without asking for further funds. Cost-Benefit Analysis, a term unheard of in Church organisations, must guide planning.

8. Message:

(i) Don't preach, sell. Time was when lambs listened to the Shepherd in silence. Now the silence of the lambs is a thing of the past. Science and mass media have much demystified traditional authorities like religion. People switch off if you are preachy. Avoid the dogmatism that you have the fullness of truth. Our centres have to learn to only suggest, indicate. Not dictate moralistically. The freedom of the receiver to make meaning out of the message has to be respected. *Meaning is in the receiver, not in the message.*

(ii) Packaging and Advertising Income: Our packaging the message is mediocre. An expert in this art was Jesus. His parables with a twist at the end (like Oscar Wilde's stories), always subverted the expectation structures of the listeners adding drama to the story. Entertaining narrative, whatever the medium, has to replace dull exhortation. This would increase the readership, viewership, listenership and invite more income through advertisements.

(iii) Create alternative audience: The Coca Cola story tells us how winter buyers can be created for a summer drink. Most communication products have no clear definition of the target audience. Their target is the evaluators from the agencies. We have to learn a lot from the worldly wise entrepreneurs.

9. Alternative Media: In today's AV era, Christian intervention in the costly electronic media is a must. Yet the effectiveness of the low-cost folk media, especially for the rural masses, should not be overlooked (cf. author's article: People's Media, CAMECO IB Sept. 1993). This would make self-financing easier.

10. National Media Offices should necessarily manage with contributions from the regional centres and not depend on international funds, in order that they will reflect the local needs. Only then the grassroots felt-needs would shape the national policies.

11. National Context and Financial Implications: The legal environment, e.g. Income Tax Act, religio-cultural context, e.g. fundamentalism and the socio-political ambience, e.g. the dominance of a particular power-elite in a country

Local financing and long-term planning
for media

Local resources should be exploited

Buy minimally, hire the rest

Cost-Benefit Analysis, a must

Avoid the dogmatism that you have the
fullness of truth

Meaning is in the receiver, not in the
message

Entertaining narrative, whatever the
medium, has to replace dull exhortation

Create alternative audience : learn
from the worldly wise entrepreneurs

Low-cost folk media should not be
overlooked

Be independent of international funds

A high degree of professionalism and a realistic blend of commercialisation

and their consequences for local income generation by Christian Centres have to be taken into account.

In sum, a high degree of professionalism and a realistic blend of commercialisation is vital for viable self-financing. Perhaps what is needed is a judicious mix of the dove and the serpent. (Thanks to Jesus).

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RESUMEN

Padre M.X. Pooranam Demel SJ, director del Centro "Cultura y Comunicación" en Madras, India, favorece intensamente la idea del auto-financiamiento aun cuando para los países en vía de desarrollo el proceso de ganar autonomía financiera sea difícil y lento y tenga que cumplir con varias condiciones. Insiste en que especialmente instituciones vinculadas con la Iglesia estén luchando con estructuras de trabajo muchas veces inefectivas. Las razones son diversas: una burocracia torpe, poca transparencia del cómo y por qué tomar decisiones, incompetencia en la gestión por la influencia de ciertos "amigos", recursos locales subutilizados o la distribución de contenidos exclusivamente orientados hacia lo religioso y en un tono de sermonear, dogmático y moralizador. Solamente un alto grado de profesionalismo junto con una medida realista de comercialización posibilitarán a las entidades eclesiales un camino hacia un auto-financiamiento viable.

RESUME

Le P. M.X. Pooranam Demel SJ, directeur du Centre "Culture et Communication" à Madras (Inde) soutient avec force que l'auto-financement des activités de communication de l'Eglise est possible, même s'il reste convaincu qu'il s'agit là d'un processus difficile, dont l'accomplissement requiert du temps et est soumis à quelques conditions préalables. Selon l'auteur, les activités d'Eglise se révèlent trop souvent inefficaces à cause de leur fonctionnement bureaucratique, de l'absence de transparence dans la prise de décision, de l'incompétence et du favoritisme dans leur gestion, de la mauvaise utilisation des ressources locales, du ton et contenu dogmatiques et moralisateurs des productions... Il exprime ici sa conviction qu'un professionnalisme exigeant et une approche commerciale pragmatique sont la base de toute recherche d'auto-financement à long-terme.

WANTED: MONEY ... FINDING ONE'S OWN FINANCIAL FEET

by Daniela Frank
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Most questions which responsible of, not only Christian but any media have to face every day are common: how to cover the running costs of the respective institutions, how to secure fair salaries, how to finance necessary investments, how to forge a closer link with the readers or listeners, how to be competitive with commercial media around without losing one's own specific profile ... and many more.

Around the world many attempts are being made to answer these questions, to develop solid ways to reach financial self-reliance. And if there is one thing clear after all the discussions which already have taken place, then it is the following: There are no solutions which would be acceptable for everybody and all types of media, and adaptable to all situations. Video production centres cannot be compared with a diocesan newspaper, and a rural Catholic radio station follows other rules than a publishing house or a national Communications Secretariat. Hence this issue of the CAMECO Information Bulletin cannot be seen as a cookbook full of new recipes. But it can, and wants to be, a forum for experiences and perspectives. Often it is very helpful to get to know what others are trying and learning from. Sometimes such an example could already give new impetus to one's own reflections. Many ideas from different continents are