

**3 The creative challenge:** How can messages be crafted that will deliver the Gospel via technology to large audiences in a way that will draw attention, and will be of the high quality worthy of the task? What forms can media messages take, and who will create them?

- A Gospel story/screenplay for the [location] culture
- What artwork can be used (and what cannot) in videos for the [location] culture?
- What music can be used (and what cannot) in video/audio for the [location] culture?
- Graphic design in videos for the [location] culture
- A format for regular Christian programming for the [location] culture

**Jas Lonnquist and Mike Klebig wrote:**

What do these things have in common? An interpretive dance. A painting. A flannel graph. An outdoor play in South Dakota. A Bollywood movie. A rock opera. Puppets. A TV drama. A bathtub toy. A symphony. A board game. An iPod series. Plaster figurines. A comic strip. A parable. A radio program. An accordion concert. A carved grain of rice. A text message. A song. A parade float. An interactive online class. A theme park. Action figures.

All have served as creative vehicles for religious messages. Some are sophisticated. Some border on sacrilegious. But do they succeed? Do people actually explore the New Testament on a grain of rice? Do religious conversions take place during an accordion mass? Do souls sing at the sight of a nativity made of *cat figurines*? Paul speaks of becoming “all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” But the first and most important thing is to deliver the message if the goal is outreach.

This is a vast topic, but here are a few ideas to ponder when you consider creative strategies for outreach. (a) Notice how others successfully reach out to your **target** group. (b) **Localize** teaching materials. (c) **Compel** with outstanding creativity and quality production values. (d) **Think beyond** traditional approaches. (e) Give TV and videos **longer shelf life** by avoiding fads in clothing, slang, music, etc. (f) Plan for **distribution**, not just production, in the budget. Find out **what others pay** for air time for radio and TV time so you’re not overcharged. (g) Always **observe the law**, honoring copyrights and obtaining releases. (h) Be creative, but never compromise the message.

**SAMPLES OF WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING** (*For information only – not an endorsement of services or content*)

- **Trans World Radio** [www.twr.org](http://www.twr.org)  
Global Christian radio network. Its “China Church Kits” include a radio (fix tuned to TWR station in Guam), a Bible in Chinese or Mandarin, sermon outlines, teaching materials, and ongoing education via radio. Affiliation: Doctrinal statement on website
- **The Jesus Film Project** [www.JesusFilm.org](http://www.JesusFilm.org)  
Distributes “Jesus”, a two-hour docudrama about the life of Christ. Released in 1979, the film has been seen in every country of the world and translated into hundreds of languages. Affiliation: 150 Christian church bodies, details on site
- **Spark and Echo Arts** [www.sparkandecho.org](http://www.sparkandecho.org)  
Illuminating passages of the Bible through visual, literary, and performing arts. Affiliation: See website
- **JCTV** [www.jctv.org](http://www.jctv.org)  
Christian TV stations. Youth-oriented TV and streamed programming. Many outreach efforts. Affiliation: Non-denominational
- **Polynesian Cultural Center** [www.polynesianculturalcenter.com](http://www.polynesianculturalcenter.com)  
Leading with a Luau. In 1865, LDS missionaries purchased a 6,000 acre plantation on Oahu. In 1955, they added a college, a BYU extension, and began presenting a “Polynesian Panorama” show to the public. The show grew to a theme park complete with 2,800 seat amphitheater and 1,000 seat restaurant. The profitable PCC employs and provides student aid for hundreds of BYU students. Most employees are Mormon. Admission prices range from \$48.95 (adult) to \$228.95 (VIP experience with dining). While acknowledging the PCC is affiliated with LDS on

its website and at the (alcohol-free) luau, promotional materials focus on the Polynesian shows and cultural attractions and target the general public. The LDS message is not overt in the park. One exhibit, a replica of an early LDS mission church, is a place Mormons offer to share teachings with guests. Affiliation: LDS

## CREATIVE CHALLENGE WORKSHEET: MEDIA TECHNOLOGY FOCUS

Be sure your project is:

- **Targeted:** The right creative approach, medium, and technology for the audience.
- **Clear/accessible:** Don't create barriers. Avoid or explain expressions and metaphors that a person new to the gospel may not easily understand (e.g. "bathed in the blood of the lamb" "uncircumcised hearts")
- **Respectful:** This is God we're talking about. Provocative, edgy, and funny are great, but not at the expense of the message if the goal is outreach.
- **Substantive:** The main take-away is the message, not anecdotes or melodies if the goal is outreach.
- **Localized:** Music, art, and teaching styles of the region, e.g. a Hmong story cloth.
- **Creative:** See approaches at top. One person's puppet show may be another's *Small Catechism*.
- **Excellent:** Excellent quality to compete with other media, capture interest, and be worthy of the subject.
- **Actionable:** Should always include the opportunity to make contact and learn more.
- **Free:** Mission materials should be free. Cost shouldn't be a barrier to hearing the gospel.

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### ***Terry Schultz wrote:***

Why not create evangelism films that depict real-life situations from within the target culture? Why not use stories that portray social practices and tribal beliefs that Satan uses to keep the entire village in bondage?

For example, many animists are astounded to discover that a life free of fear of evil spirits is

possible, and that such a life is being lived right now by those who follow the one true God. What an exciting challenge: Researching and scripting tribal life situations (with the help of cultural insiders), perhaps shooting a film on location for authenticity, then returning to the studio to add special effects that portray supernatural beings or forces. Of course the film would climax with a presentation of the only cure for every fear: the one who has already defeated the devil and the evil spirits, Jesus Christ. What an exciting night in the community when a story based on village life appears on the large screen!

Regarding music: Selecting appropriate music for cross-cultural media productions is critical. What is considered sacred music in the host culture? For example, right now one finds reggae, calypso, and other Caribbean rhythms incorporated into Haitian worship music.

There is often the difficulty of finding local composers to produce music at affordable rates. In Haiti we are using the powerful melodies of public domain African American spirituals set to Caribbean rhythms to create Creole worship songs. Song verses containing additional doctrinal content are often added to the original songs. One of the most amazing musical experiences of my life occurred while standing with a roomful of Haitian Bible students, whose ancestors came to Haiti in the slave trade, singing a Creole version of "Soon I Will Be Done with the Troubles of the World." Unbelievable!

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### ***Ugis Sildegs wrote:***

If we play by the rules of the modern media world, we will be forced to present our message as entertainment, amusement, distraction. Of course, we cannot go that way. The Gospel can't be changed in order to please people. Therefore all our creative efforts should be strictly made subservient to the message. Our Master Communicator Jesus himself was an artistic genius teaching his parables, but at the same time all of his parables served one single purpose, the revelation of the Kingdom.

From our newspaper experience we learned that the real problem is not getting attention but keeping it. Artistic tricks, noisy ads and creative approach can draw an immediate attention, but eventually we should recognize that the message we preach will not be welcomed by most people.

I remember a highly successful ad campaign when I went on TV and offered a cheap subscription. ("Call us today and you have it!") It worked. People just love getting cheap stuff. That day we received about 1000 new readers. Unfortunately, most of them were not keepers and after a year we didn't hear from them any more.

I believe that a great deal of our creative energy should be devoted to the crafting of our discourse not "according to this world" (which is sensational, fragmented, impersonal), but according to the spirit of "the Christ, crucified", "the Savior of sinners" - a "foolishness" and "scandal" by the worldly standard. The glory of Christ certainly is different from the glory of this world. It means that our story will have to be shaped by "his cross," and not by some kind of "glory story."

Our *Latvian Lutheran* stories took a variety of forms. In our paper we tried to make use of different artistic and communicative means to tell the same Gospel story over and over again. Directly and indirectly. In teaching and preaching. In prose and poetry. In discussions and interviews. In paintings and photos. Using all kinds of visual artworks, both ancient and contemporary. We did our best to subordinate all our means of expression to one single purpose.

We found that there are plenty of good references we can use as contact points and conversation starters (for example, many Christian references contained in our language; introducing former and present cultural personalities confessing their faith; publishing Christian art and literature which has been forgotten or lost through the years, etc.). But in all those efforts it is important to make sure that standards of good taste and quality are upheld.

The artistic quality of media is crucial. The public often seems to care more about style and form than about subject matter and content. The style is the first thing that is noticed, giving the initial impression. The quality of language is absolutely essential for any medium, especially the printed one. Very important is also design and art work. It would be best that these things would be done by professionals, if possible.

Question:

What kind of people attract the greatest public attention? Celebrities. The crowd arguably takes them as the most creative people. Do we have to learn from them? Do we promote our own media personalities? Or do we seek a different kind of distinction and attention? How do we use human sentiments that are widely exploited by the secular media?

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***Paul Hartman wrote:***

The *Road to Emmaus* film has had some impact. Of the more than 200,000 DVD's distributed, about 57% have gone to the WELS, 31% to the LCMS congregations and 12% to others. It has been published in six foreign languages and has been translated into two more. The film was designed to go across cultures by presenting a biblical story rather than a contemporary story which is necessarily more culturally specific and which becomes dated. Make up and cinema-photography ameliorates somewhat the problem of dubbing, since lip-syncing is not practical. On the other hand, the film is aimed for a literate audience that is willing to think analytically. It will be less successful in highly oral cultures.

We are experimenting with the filming of a story from *Bible Stories in Pictures*. Using the "comic book" format and written by Dr. Beck after WW 2, the stories teach law and gospel clearly and show how the entire Bible teaches salvation through Jesus Christ. Each story is four pages long; most are in full color. The filmed version might reduce the verbiage displayed on the screen, while the recorded narrator tells the story in an interesting way with an appropriate musical background. The camera would focus on

characters and other aspects of the pictures in the story. The stories could be loaded onto a digital tablet and displayed to a small group by means of a portable projector and speakers. The artwork, admittedly, is Eurocentric and representative of a style used 50 years ago. Nevertheless, 92 of the stories have been distributed in book form in 12 languages.

We are also working on an interactive digital approach to the *Bible Teachings Series*. 25 books (ca. 100 pages per book) are used in distance learning programs at the discipleship level. A digital approach would allow us to avoid printing and shipping costs and avoid customs issues, when a digital approach can be used.

Although not all visual depictions of Bible history is accepted everywhere, such illustrations are more likely to be accepted than scenes of contemporary life in a particular area of the world.

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***Gonzalo Delgadillo wrote:***

Creativity is a fruit of gifts and deep knowledge.

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***John Lawrenz wrote:***

I do not consider myself an expert by any means. A few things I know. Large audience forums are as common or more common in East Asia as America. In East Asia the population of villages start at a quarter million people and there were 660 cities of a million inhabitants or more in China a decade ago. America has nine.

Teaching a roomful of students is not unusual. Learning English for the Beijing Olympics often required tens of thousands learning together in a sports stadium. Rallies and crusades (*a la* Billy Graham) have a natural attraction. Hong Kong has its own cinema industry. Movie making is emerging in mainland China. Video via hand devices reach 20% of China's 1.3 billion today. Reaching the masses through visual media is worth doing if it can be done well. We are

watching closely the reception and "reach" of the MLP/NPH/WELS video "The Road to Emmaus."

Art work is a challenge. To me it is significant that the Scripture offers no physical description of Jesus apart from the words of Isaiah that he had no special form or attractive features that would attract us to him. The Gospels underscore that it was the words of Jesus spoken with authority that was his hallmark. In Saginaw, Michigan, I received some push back by hanging a black Jesus on the cross inherited from our Central African WELS mission field. I also recall those days when beards had a special irritation for conservative Christians. Visual art cannot be ignored. And it cannot be foisted either. Conservative Chinese have gotten used to the Western depictions of Bible stories. They also love their version of the "King James Bible" and resist making either art or translations more contemporary and "true" to the way things are in 2012. In this regard a person embarking on the artistic presentation of the Gospel in music or visual ways would do well to gather focus groups of likely audiences to find out where attitudes lie. That done, sanctified Christian common sense would need to be invoked. We should neither be the last to leave the old or the first to embrace the new. And we will have to have special patience when we know that "what's out there" is not what the people recognize as close to home. In East Asia today, Christianity remains in many minds a "Western" import. Art can either confirm or disabuse our audience of this canard. The Chinese today have a taste for the best. Many have developed ability in the arts at the cost of great personal sacrifice and self-discipline. We need to engage such people when they become Christians. And we should do it without hesitation and with the trust that new believers, better than we, will know how to adorn the Gospel with appropriate adornment.

At this conference I have been permitted to show a short "Christmas video" which is not from China, but from Pakistan. I saw it for the first time when teaching in Nepal during Easter 2011. This video has had an unbelievable number of hits on YouTube. Pakistan is 97% Moslem. I'm sure I would not have produced this video myself, nor do I appreciate why it is so appealing. As a

“critic,” I don’t know where to begin. Artistic forms can be imported, but this video shows that imported items may be way beyond the ability of average Westerners to appreciate at first blush. We can and must collaborate on the mission fields.

outside than use a piano or organ if the pastor could not lead the people with his own voice.

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Moving from videos to translations, I am also aware that in Pakistan a controversy arose this past year over the term to be used in the Urdu translation of the New Testament to describe Jesus as the “son of God.” The concept of God having a son is horrifying to Moslems. Yet it is crucial to the Gospel message. In Asia we should be prepared to face choices that are surprising. Would you think twice about carrying a Bible below the waist? In Pakistan this is not done by Christians because the Moslems do not carry a Koran in such a way. Is this conforming? Or is it saying what needs to be said in a Pakistani way about our reverence for the holy Bible? The answer should be obvious, but it takes getting used to.

In the USA we have our customs that govern worship. Asians will allow laymen and laywomen on occasion to read Scripture and to initiate prayer. It all depends on the service or the people available to serve. Hongkongers don’t don vestments in Lutheran churches, but pastors wear collars to distinguish ordained pastors from evangelists. The Chinese of Hong Kong enjoy humor in the pulpit. Wedding services are elaborate, beautiful, but never “formal” in a somber way. A chaste kiss of the bride raises no eyebrows. Curiously, they frown if anyone but a pastor gives the benediction at the end of the service. Testimonials are normal for adult confirmands. Things are done decently, but in an order that diverges significantly from what passes in Midwestern America for acceptable. I found the same to be true in Ukraine where I served before going to East Asia. In Ukraine a proper pastor had to wear a pectoral cross while leading the service. I can remember holding up Sunday worship until a proper cross was found for me to wear when I discovered too late that mine was left behind at home. In Ukraine a proper liturgy is sung with the human voice, not accompanied by instruments. Small missions in Ukraine would rather hire singers from the