

MEDIA: Instrument of Family Pastoral Care

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Abstract

In the West Nile Region media, a truncation of communication, used to be an ‘organized means of dissemination of fact, opinion and entertainment’ that builds the nation. In the church, media serves as instrument of family pastoral care. However, today media are accused of promoting violence, pornography and distorting cultural and Christian values. In the Catholic Church, many media practitioners are challenged when witnessing some local media stations promote hatred/violence. This study is qualitative research. It addresses bias and misconception of people about the media broadcast. Major media contributors are not technology but people. They either use well technology to build, or misuse technology to destroy their nation. The paper focuses on media in family pastoral care.

Keywords: Media; instrument; family; pastoral; care.

1. Introduction and methods

This paper focuses on media as instrument of family pastoral care in the West Nile Region of Uganda. The term ‘media’ has several meanings. It is a message – referring to information that the media disseminate. The reader should understand it as oral storytelling – a truncation of organised dissemination of fact, opinion, entertainment, and other information. These include newspapers, magazines, out-of-home advertising, cinema, film, radio, television, the worldwide web, books, CDs, DVDs, video cassettes, computer games, internet sources, and other forms of publications [16:85-179]. In this research paper the reader needs to be aware that when the writer refers to the media, he also includes journalists (the media information collectors, editors, broadcasters, etc.) and not only technology. Technology is a lifeless irrational entity.

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Media technology disseminates information: for this information to reach people, it requires communicators (media personnel/journalists). The media are also pointing at the culture around the listeners that so readily provides an environment and market for aggressive, violent, or pornographic media. These are significant contributing factors that hinder family pastoral care and, in turn, inhibit nation building.

This is a qualitative research paper. It is a 'form of enquiry that uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them' [29:119]; it investigates culture, society, behaviour through an analysis of people's words and actions'[18:3]; it can be described as 'pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experience of people' [12:2].

The data collected and analysed were either the original words spoken by the research participants, or their words written in the documents issued to them; these are complemented by the words of the researchers themselves to present the activities. The sources of information were basically observations of and interviews with the participants [43:16–21], as well as archives of records and documents (e.g. newspapers and articles) concerning this issue.

Qualitative research is about finding out what people think, feel, and/or believe, the researchers used interviews, questionnaires, and attitude scales to reach answers [12:3]. Qualitative research is done in the presence of the people being studied, and within the environment they are examined. This is 'uniquely suited to discerning human participation in what happens to them' [13:411]. Included is the 'desire to understand behaviour and institutions by getting to know the people involved and their values, rituals, symbols, beliefs, and emotions' [11:281].

1.1 Procedures for collecting data

Empirically, data collection was through questionnaire, oral interview [26:169–183] and review of scholarly works of other authors [35:34–45] and e-sources. Questionnaire sample size has been only ten people (male and female). For this study only 18 interviewees (out of a possible 180) were selected because of their educational backgrounds (graduates from university) and experience (35 years and above) in youth pastoral care ministry in the above mentioned region.

1.2 Procedure for data analysis, management and ethics

The researcher followed active analytic processes throughout all phases of the research to understand processes and interpret correctly data. They use inductive reasoning is used to analyse data and to generate ideas [26:169–183]. The researchers gained consent from the people as an essential part of obtaining information from them. Participants provided information voluntarily. Confidentiality was observed in data collection and analysis.

The study also noted that indirectly, the media also participate in promoting criminal activities. However, the writer is convinced that the technology itself is not 'criminal'; the problem lies in its abuse in evil/criminal ways. The media are like dynamite, something powerful that demands proper handling: it can be used to assault humanity, and as a result, parents become not only frustrated, but also helpless. The Christian radio broadcasts

in the West Nile Region of Uganda - Radio Pacis 94.5 and 94.5 FMs [37:7] and Radio Maria [6:1] - Roman Catholic and Voice of Life FM 100.9 [42:1] - Anglican Protestant - motivate this paper. The paper highlights major problems, their root causes, and how they can be pastorally tackled so as to allow local media broadcasts function as instruments of family pastoral care in the region. However, the readers need to take note of limitations of this paper.

1.3. Limitations of the study

The paper focuses on media as instruments of family pastoral care in the West Nile Region of Uganda. This means that the research study does not cover other regions in the continent and the world where the social context is different, and therefore others may not benefit from the findings of this study. As the research team only used English in conducting the interviews, it was difficult for people who did not speak English to contribute. It has also been highlighted that the study only selected people with higher educational backgrounds (graduates from university) and experience (35 years and above) in youth pastoral care ministry in the above mentioned region (cf. subheading 1.1). Young people might easily feel being excluded because of these restrictions. However, it is hoped that the fruit of this researched project will benefit both young and old because it is family based.

The researcher's background and experience as a practical/philosophical theologian has influence on this researched study. His own background of being a native of the primary region under study also has some influence. Nevertheless, there is great hope that this research paper may benefit not just philosophical theologians and people living in the West Nile Region, but also all of society, those native to African and those from other religions from other parts of the world. In other words, though the study centred on media in relations to family, other institutions such as school, church and some government services like the police would also benefit from this study.

2. Background and problem statement

In the past media was seen as an 'organized means of dissemination of fact, opinion and entertainment' in the West Nile Region. In the church, media was perceived as an instrument of family pastoral care and used interchangeably with the words 'Missiology' and 'Evangelization' in the same region [4:1-8].

However, today in family pastoral care ministry, media are accused of promoting violence, pornography, distorting cultural and Christian values. In the Catholic Church, many media practitioners are now helpless when witnessing other local media stations promoting violence, and destroying the morals of the nation [38:14]. At the same time, local media stations in the Region experience other media broadcasts. Instead of promoting responsible parent-child nurture, some media mislead young people into both criminal and immoral behaviour by marketing pornography, wars and drug abuse [6:3]. During field work in the region understudy, it became apparent that media plays dubious role in the region.

2.1 The church's perspective

In the Church's response to social decay related to youth conduct in the region, reference is made to media marketing which includes the promotion of pornographic images, violence, war, rape, and stealing. What children experience listening to media, they practise in everyday life. The people living in the West Nile Region see the print- and electronic media as an extension of 'Western culture and globalization', and utilise its ways of communication for improving the upbringing of children and young people.

But looking at the situation in the region, as being a member of the church, a person cannot fail to note the influence of western media especially television, which have undermined local media efforts in the region. The limitations of the media in general and television in particular include the following: media focus on universal audiences, media as a corruptive influence, media presenting children with adult life circumstances, media failing to provide privacy and media provoking violence.

2.2 Questionnaire and oral interview reports

Questionnaire and interview responses within the school and Church circles depict some of these media campaigns. Of two head teachers interviewed, both of them said that young people are more curious to imitate what they see in the media, especially video shows which are so common in the Region. Of two priests interviewed, both of them noted that young people are watching pornographic images, violence, wars, raping, and theft on the media. Linking both responses, it is clear that media are having a negative effect on young people in the region.

My experience in the West Nile region is that some of these pornographic images not only come from videos and films, but also from magazines such as *Red Pepper*, internet sources, and so forth. This implies that the media can challenge basic beliefs and customs, which can be used in subtle ways by powerful groups. The media can twist the truth. If people are not sure of their values, the media can manipulate them into changing their moral and religious beliefs. Family members have to develop a critical mind, in order to choose what is right and good.

2.3 Literature reviews

In the literature the study identifies Radio Pacis as Catholic Community radio broadcast in Arua, the capital city of West Nile Region of Uganda. This radio station reported on the Rwandan local radio broadcasting that promoted violence between Tutsis and Hutus in 1994.

Here is the challenge and the mission of Radio Pacis: In Rwanda, in the year 1994, a radio was able to incite so much hatred between two tribes that people were led into genocide. If a radio can bring evil into the hearts of so many people why can't Radio Pacis plant seeds of peace and development in the hearts of 5 million listeners living in 7 dioceses (Arua, Nebbi, Hoima and Gulu in Uganda; Mahagi in Congo; Yei and Torit in Southern Sudan) through our programmes that educate towards faith, health, agriculture, ecology, human values? [38:14].

In the viewpoint of James Putzel & Joost Van de Zwan, this was devastating time; the problem was the local media [21]. The authors point out that the Rwandan radio had succeeded in fermenting evil in the hearts of so

many people in Rwanda during the genocide. The radio station even located the exact places where people were hiding for their lives.

2.4 Frustrated youth and scared parents

The media have influenced many young people to live their lives without accepting any responsibilities. Most young people practise what they see on television, internet, cell phones, newspapers, and magazines. Afterwards they become frustrated, threatened, and some of them lose hope. Faced by challenging situations, young people often resort to taking drugs - chewing marungi, smoking opium, marijuana, cocaine - and abusing alcohol. Young people, who abuse these substances, take them chiefly as a kind of self-medication to reduce their stress. For example, a young girl who drinks alcohol, may have failed to find relief from drugs, and is more likely to be vulnerable to suicide.

Looking at the rate of youth drug abuse, many parents are scared. Children under the influence of drugs bring shame to their parents. The research noted that 33% of social decay related to youth conduct in the Region is due to youth involvement in drug abuse. In the interview, it was noted that, out of 10 elders, 21 school administrators, 8 Catholic priests, 20 students, 28 people chewing marungi and smoking opium, 2 senior police officers, 6 LC1s, and 20 young Christians, 63% believed that social decay related to youth conduct is caused by youth engagement in drug or substance abuse. Only 37% (65 interviewees) gave other causes. In *The New Vision*, Uganda's national newspaper (vol. 31 no. 49 of Wednesday 9 March [40:38] these illegal drugs and substances, commonly abused by the youth, get named 'sachet waragi, beer, kuberm cigarettes, shisha, marijuana, khatmiraa, cocaine, and glue'.

2.5 Children fail to mature

Media present adult material to all consumers, including young people. Unfortunately young people under the age of 18 who watch television and access the internet, read newspapers and listen to the radio, are exposed to sexual affairs, wars, and murder – which push them prematurely into the world of grown-ups and inhuman violent practices [1:94]. This issue hinders their spiritual, intellectual and emotional development. It can also make them incapable of sustaining genuine emotional relationships leading to marriage, which is the cell of family and society. The promotion by the media of an adult way of life causes anxiety, pain, and escapism of various kinds among children. Watching television for some children can be described as narcotic, which allows them to escape from their inner prison; for others, it is a source of relief from the traumas/responsibilities of life [9:60].

2.6 Media lead family members cultivate violence

The study noted the media sometimes lead family members into cultivating violence. Viewing television violence is not harmless; instead it has very profound effects upon the viewers and society in general. However, television is not the direct cause of violence that pervades the Region – it is a contributory factor. Take pornography for example [14:1-8], being frequently mentioned in the previous subtopic: the media highlight sexual violence and the use of audio-visual techniques as a violation of human privacy and can reduce the

human person to an anonymous object that one can use for satisfying one's base instincts.

The media can also promote violence and aggression by creating military heroes. It makes media act like 'a role model that trains to kill' Killology Research Group [23] reports. There was a report that a teenager committed suicide because he wanted to feature in a television show wearing a military uniform. This made a disturbing impression on the minds of many teenagers. Many disturbed teenagers, when subjected to challenging situations, have resorted automatically to a copycat suicide as seen on the television. Consequently, currently television stations rarely cover suicides in the Region.

2.7 Side-lining cultural and Christian values

The media do not attempt to explain complex matters carefully and truthfully, especially foreign media. Early on, it was stated that foreign media (Western broadcasts) do not give due consideration to the priorities and problems of our countries, or respect our cultural values. However, we must also understand that we are very often ambiguous in our attitude to such offerings. Very often, adults desire for themselves the same entertainment that disturbs them when they see their children exposed to it. Practical example used to be Arua One 88.7 FM (Islamic established media) before New Vision took it over. Monday – Friday Line up of Arua One 88.7 FM journalists used to spend more time on a programme known as the 'Romantic Zone'. It was one of the important programs in Islamic established media in the region. 'Romantic Zone' takes three hours daily from 11.00 A.M to 2.00 P.M and from 9.00 P.M to 12.00 A.M [5:1].

Instead of giving a detailed explanation of complex matters, they tend to oversimplify them. Take sex education for example: in the Region, traditionally sex education takes the form of an arcane discipline. Sex education progresses gradually, stage by stage, according to age and understanding, throughout the natural development of the children. Sex education is important because of the role it plays in both marriage and family life. This includes the responsibility parents have in raising their children. However, the media oversimplify this by exposing everything to children at a tender age (Pontifical Council for Social Communications - PCSC [31:9]. The results are sexual promiscuity and violence, unwanted pregnancies, and even worse, HIV and AIDS. It means that nobody can consider him/herself immune to the negative effects of the media such as pornography. In the face of violence, or/and injury at the hands of those acting under their influence, the young and the immature are especially vulnerable and most likely to be victimised. Pornography and sadistic violence debase sexuality, and corrode human relationships. It undermines marriage and family life, fosters anti-social behaviour, and weakens the moral fibre of society [31:10].

With foreign media on the internet, a distorted vision of life and human beings is often imposed. The media flood communities such as the Region with pornography and violence. The internet does not only come with formative messages to young people, but also provides them with pornography. It has been easy for the youth to access the internet through mobile phones and computers. Internet use can lead to addiction because of explicit images about sexual gratification. This use can trigger and leave an impression in the memory, where fantasies are created which can be easily recalled. The internet can easily ensnare the unsuspecting, including young people. The images and sexual gratification the internet brings tempt young people to look at these images again

and again. With repeated use, the viewer builds up tolerance to its effects, with a progressive need for more stimulating images, which can cause intense physical changes in the body and brain, and reinforce disordered thoughts and behaviour. With repeated use, the obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviour associated with sexual images become increasingly difficult to interrupt or resist.

Young people in the Region find themselves living in a culture that is increasingly dark and death-dealing. Young people easily absorb these negative influences – taking them in like a plant absorbs through its roots what is in the soil or ‘culture’ in which it is planted. They are becoming numb and do not even realise that they are slowly being poisoned. Although the government can impose undue control over the media and so prevent easy access [9:14-16], it lacks the will to do so. Media abuse has become one of the causes inhibiting family pastoral care in nation building. But how can the situation be addressed without knowing the root cause(s) of the problem that hinder local media broadcasts from functioning efficiently as instruments of family pastoral care in the region?

3. Questions and root causes of local media hindrance

How can Christian media promote family pastoral care in the West Nile Region of Uganda? Complementary questions: what are the key problems that affect Christian media in the West Nile Region? What causes these problems? How can these problems be resolved?

The key root cause for local media not to function as instruments of family pastoral care in the West Nile Region of Uganda is family breakdown. Family is ‘the domestic Church’ [41:11] - a place where parents are enriching their children in many ways; it is a school for human enrichment [33:52] - a place where parents and their children grow in love for each other, for God, for the Church, for other people, and for all of God’s creation. It is ‘the primary vital cell of society’ and ‘domestic sanctuary of the Church’ [34:11] - portraying the family as the place where different generations come together and help one another to grow wisely and harmonise the rights of individuals with other demands of social life. It is a ‘fundamental social group in society typically consisting of one, or two parents and their children’, and ‘two or more people who share goals and values’, and have ‘commitments to one another, and reside usually in the same dwelling place’ [10:15].

The above definitions portray various meanings of ‘family’ in scholarly literature located within the constraints of legal (e.g. marriage, adoption) or biological (parent/children, grandparent) boundaries. Family is defined as ‘a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction’ by functionalists such as Murdock [32:555-561]. This is where family includes adults – male and female – at least two of whom maintain a socially approved relationship, and one or more children with at least four main functions, including: 1) male and female relationships; 2) economic co-operation among members; 3) reproduction; and 4) socialisation of infants and children.

However, looking at ‘family’ in terms of functions seems too narrow. It does not cover the type of families that differ from the current traditional family structure. Most sociologists adopt a definition of ‘family’, based on the idea of kinship, but limited to the function of child care. Family is also seen as a ‘small kinship structured group

with the key function of nurturing socialization of the new born'. Included is family described as 'an intimate community of life and love' [7:294]. It is recognition of GS [33:48], which sees the family as 'an intimate community of life and love'. Family is the 'fundamental unit of society and the Church' [20:22]. The family recognises the vocation of parents and the rights of women in all aspects of social and religious life. Principles of Catholic social teaching are upheld where the focus is placed on the well-being of families: the preferential option for the poor, the dignity of a human being from the moment of conception until natural death, the right to dignified work; a just salary, decent housing, education and health care, as well as solidarity with farm workers, refugees, victims of political abuse, and undocumented immigrants, with special attention given to discrimination against immigrants.

Family also refers to household composition [3:1-258] - The extended family living in a single household is only typical in wealthy urban and rural homes. The typical rural African household has many children and many members, even though there is a high rate of infant mortality. Children are often leaving home early to make a living for themselves. Many households have few elders – usually both parents have already died. Surprisingly, female-headed households are just as common now as they were then, but for different reasons! Rural families sometimes share their one-room households with livestock, while urban dwellers usually have someone outside of their home living with them. Urban households have lodgers. Sometimes several unrelated families share one room. The traditional family lacks privacy and well-defined boundaries. Families eat, sleep, give birth, dress, and engage in sex in front of one another. These crowded living conditions are undermining family relations.

However, in this paper, the concept 'family' should be understood as referring not only to a 'household under one roof', but also a group of people sharing a common ancestry and origin. This is in agreement with the anthropologists and sociologists who claim that the family is a universal social institution – vital for the well-being of society [45:227].

3.1 Parent child neglect

It is the parents who are the head of the family. Every human being is the product of the family. The family is not only the cell of society, but also the intersection of Church, school, and government. This is where the government, as the state functionary, belongs. The family is the foundation of life in society, and 'the back bone of any nation' [24:5]. All institutions exist because of the family – this includes health centres (hospitals and clinics). They are extensions of the family into the bigger extended family. However, in the West Nile Region the majority of parents do not take responsibility for rearing their children for nation building. Parents give birth to children but these children are often not nurtured by them. Children are nurtured by their grandparents, the school, and the Church, as well as house-helpers, children in child-headed households, and other adults such as aunts and uncles.

Very few parents attempting to form close attachments with their children do not get support from outside their family - from neighbours, NGO, and government organizations. Few parents try to show the right way to their children, but when they do this, the children are ignoring them and do whatever they want. The methods that parents utilise or fail to use in child nurture also contribute greatly in setting back local media's family pastoral

care ministry in the Region. Some of these methods can be examined.

3.1.1 Proxy child nurture

Children are nurtured by grandparents, schools, and the Church [44:3]. They are nurtured by house helpers and other adults such as aunts and uncles. Some children are nurtured by older siblings in child-headed households. Directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, this scenario encourages biological parents to block local media as instruments of family pastoral care. The children are left in the care of others and do not know the love of parents. Some children are left in crèches. Many parents criticise the over-restriction of children by other adults as an unhealthy way of raising young people in the Region. Indirectly, the research also indicated this by showing that some families do not want their children to socialise with other children. Parents who neglect their children in this way reveal ignorance; they abuse their children's rights. Parents should cultivate and develop their children's capacities to praise and glorify the Creator. By growing to maturity and realising their potential, children will gain both temporal and eternal happiness.

3.1.2 Threats and carelessness

A majority of parents threaten their children in order to discipline them. It is difficult to find the reason for this. Perhaps they perceive it as the best way of raising children. But they are forgetting what is most fundamental – 'love' [10:129] 'aroused by the attraction of the good. Love causes a desire for the absent good and the hope of obtaining it'. Many children fear their parents. Fear is the apprehension of not only criminal violence, but also 'evil that causes hatred' and 'aversion', especially fear of the impending evil. Children under fear end up in sadness and anger.

It is possible that some parents may be influenced by Old Testament ideas, such as 'to fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Sir 1:11-25), or 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'. These ideas may be uncomfortable for the religious pastoral counsellor, but if the difficulties can be resolved, there is also the possibility of improving the problem of fear-based 'guidance' at home.

3.1.3 Child parenting

As a method for human upbringing of young people, some parents require children to care for themselves and to care for other children. Children must provide themselves with the basic needs such as food, shelter, education, medical care, and so forth. Some child-headed-families are headed by children below 13 years of age. Parents abandon their responsibility to their children. When such a child fails to cope up with the situation, parents don't care. The child joins street life, and gets involved in criminal activities such as theft and abuse of illegal drugs [40:38], e.g. opium smoking. Sometimes they are abused by older people. This includes sexual abuse, especially of girls and child labour.

3.1.4 Separation and divorce

Before begetting children, women and men live together, eat together, and sleep together in the same house.

After begetting children, this situation often changes. Many fathers distance themselves from the mothers of their children. It is not clear why fathers do this. Seemingly the majority of women, after giving birth to their children, with or without the knowledge of the biological fathers, distance themselves from the important elements for unity (such as child birth and intimate human love). Many mothers prefer to be single parents, combining both roles of mother and father. Often when they fail to manage, they leave their children to head their families. In agreement with [25] 'we as a society should help to find out what has gone so wrong that the beautiful gift of a sexual relationship is being abused and degraded by the people. This delicate issue may be an indication of the influence of patriarchal systems in some African cultures'.

3.1.5 Abuse of drugs

Alcohol drinking and tobacco smoking is very common not only among the young people but also with adults especially parents [40:38]. Many children learn alcohol drinking and tobacco smoking from their young parents, especially young male parents. Children are given money and sent by their parents to buy for them alcoholic substances and tobacco/cigarettes. They often taste what they are about to buy in order to find the best quality of alcohol and tobacco from the sellers. Children also learn how to brew some alcoholic substances and grow tobacco from their parents. For some parents, there is no day when they have not taken alcoholic substances and smoked tobacco. Drinking alcoholic substances and smoking tobacco are done openly in front children in the Region.

Unfortunately, the consequences of alcohol and tobacco consumption of parents have been many in the Region: several children spend their lives chewing marungi and smoking opium; many young people commit suicide because of the negative effects of opium; countless families lose their loved ones in road accidents and numerous young women are raped because of over-drinking.

3.2 Limitation of parents

Parents are very limited in regard to their understanding of the role media can play in pastoral care. Parents struggle to gain an income for their families, and most lack education. They fail to help their children mature during the years of adolescence. They are uncritical of the media. All of this affects negatively how parents communicate with the media so that the media in turn try to promote family pastoral care in the region.

3.2.1 Search for money

Money as legal tender can be good or bad, depending on how it is used [28:1-139]. Take the Church as a good example: on the one hand family members in the Church are praying to God as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; on the other hand, the congregation is thinking about money offerings in Church. Family members talk about education, but money is needed (school fees, tuition fees, boarding fees, etc.). Many parents seem to view school fees and Church offerings as payments for teachers, clergymen and -women, and religious nuns to educate their children. It is a misconception of priestly and religious vocation, as well as the teaching profession.

Today many men and women use money to seduce and dehumanise others by making sex objects of them –

especially poor women and girls [25]. Some of them get pregnant and give birth to children, while the biological fathers don't take responsibility. While many mothers lose heart in their difficulties and neglect their children, somebody has to take over the responsibility to raise their children for them. Money therefore plays a significant role not only in promoting parent-child neglect, but also in encouraging prostitution. Rich parents employ others to take care of their children, as they claim that they do not have time to be with them.

As has already been said, parents behave in this way, because as young people they were badly mistreated by their parents and other adults. The researcher noted this during the interviews, where a group of 32 biological fathers and mothers stated: 'During our time we were not treated like eggs' (cf. the notes taken during interviews and observations).

3.2.2. Ignorance of education

Parents lack sufficient knowledge about the importance of education, which would enable them to take care of their children. The questionnaire reflects this when it states: 'Parents do not follow up their children at school to find out from the teachers how children and other young people behave at school and socialize with other young people'. These parental attitudes reveal child neglect. In the perspective of the head teachers, this continues to reflect itself in 'poor family planning'. In the perspective of the documentation, it reflects itself in parents' refusal to send children to school, because the children are visually impaired. Parents seem to see such education as a waste of time [8:15].

Interview finding indicates, as young people, learner and students experience this lack of parental care on a daily basis, which, according to them, 'made most youth to go and stay on the streets and look for ways of survival'. The Church is not an exception. Parish priests are grieving because some parents do not assume their responsibility for sending their children to school. It refers to parents who are completely ignorant and do not see the importance of educating young people for life in society. This burden tends to fall on pastors. Priests, during their home-to-home family visitations, sensitise parents about the importance of education in order to send children to school. School administrators (teaching staff) complained about the lack of parental care during the interviews, which leads the youth to ignore their parents. Parents are not teaching their children about sexual matters; as a result, many girls drop out of school, and others continue to drop out because of different reasons.

3.2.3 Many children

Most parents have many children. As the researcher has already noted, poverty and unemployment drives the youth into night disco dances and sexual promiscuity. Similarly, when parents are unemployed, many search for something to keep them busy and give them satisfaction and pleasure. Many resort to sexual relationships. The more this happens, the more pregnancies occur, with women giving birth to unwanted children. It reaches a point where the majority of mothers find it difficult to take sufficient care of their children, focusing only on the basic needs – food, shelter, health care, and security. Poor families have more children compared to well-off families in the Region. One reason could be that the poor female family members misuse sex to earn a living and have pleasure. They have many children and fail to care for them [10:2-4].

Gender preference (certain parents want girls and others want boys) also plays a role in having many children. Those who want boys – if they only give birth to girls – continue having sexual relationships aiming to have boys. Sometimes they end up producing more and more unwanted girls. Some parents believe that to be a man or a woman in society, you must have many children to show your manhood or womanhood. Many people in the Region want to have big families or a clan or a village of their own. The men marry two or more wives, and have many concubines to realise their dreams to have a big family. Many people still uphold polygamous family life. They believe that an African man must be polygamous. Many people fear death – they do not want to be completely forgotten by this world. These people get consolation from having many children. When men see young people dying early in life, it compels them to get even more involved with women in order to have many children, as a man will be remembered through his living children. Producing many children has become a means of security during old age: children are expected to provide for the needs of their parents and take care of the family.

It implies, most parents do not plan their family size and are thus liable to have many children. These parents seem not to have taken birth control (family planning) into consideration. This can be either through natural family planning (NFP), which the Church advocates and is valued and cherished [39:21], or through artificial contraceptives, which can easily lead to sexual promiscuity and abortion. Natural family planning helps to space children after two consecutive births, helping the parents to decide when to have another baby. This lack of family planning in the Region reflects itself in parent-child neglect. Many parents are unable to provide for the basic human needs of their children. As a result, parents neglect them, so that other adults and institutions end up raising their children. Religion (Christianity, Islam, and ancestral spirit worship) also fulfils a significant role in the parents' attitude to having many children. Christianity believes in the monogamous family (one adult man and one adult woman), while Islam promotes a polygamous family (one adult man and a maximum of four adult women). Ancestral spirit worship advocates for a polygamous family (one adult man and unlimited women).

3.2.4 The lack, or poor introduction of children to sex education

The majority of the parents do not feel comfortable to introduce children to sex education. This neglect is not confined to the Region. Many African family members feel the same. Generally, African parents are shy to speak about sex. Parents may feel comfortable when somebody else teaches their grown-up children about sex, but not their young children. It is unfortunate that this happens to be one of the reasons why parents neglect their children. During fieldwork in the Region, the researcher discovered that the youth knew nothing or very little in regard to coping with their sexuality.

3.2.5 Complaints about young people & Negative comments about life

Complaints by family members about young people show that they are difficult people to deal with: the majority are behaving badly. When some parents hear these complaints, they feel traumatised, other parents resort to neglecting their children, and some parents try hard to raise their children. The children do not seem to notice their parents' struggle for them, so they tend to demonstrate ill behaviour – it is a behaviour that seems to

scandalise many parents up to the extent of neglecting their children. Parents fail to monitor them when they do wrong, either in school or in Church. The parents are representatives of all the other adults in the community: they are to show the right way to their children, but when they do this, the children are ignoring them and do whatever they want – they are following their own ways. The same applies to parents who are separated and divorced, leaving their children alone. Later on, they will blame the young people for their failures in life by not doing the right things, such as hard work and respect for elders.

When people In the Region are asked, ‘How is life for you today?’, they often respond with remarks such as, ‘life is hard’ or ‘life is difficult’. It is a simple response that has huge negative implications on young people and the society at large. The researcher strongly believes that this is one of the causes of child neglect in the Region: parents believe that human life is hard. Many parents give birth to children and do not take care of them, because they believe the destiny of their children is to have a hard life. Parents say, ‘During our time we were not treated like eggs. Today, young people are treated like eggs’ [10:142]. A child in such a situation undergoes psychological pressure. Destructive criticism can produce fear or guilt. This includes withholding of love and support, and isolation. Many biological fathers have failed both the people who regard them as heads of the family, and also their children who regard them as key figures at home. They abandon both mothers and children, sometimes leaving them without food. Young people are treated badly – some have wounds that are not treated. Children lack medical care. Some mothers are harsh towards their children, refusing to listen to them and even ignoring the needs of their babies.

3.2.6 Difficulty coping with human sexuality

It has become difficult for many parents to cope with their sexuality. As sexual beings they know sex is God’s creation: sex is for complementarity between a mature man and woman, and for responsible human procreation and raising of children; sex is also for expression of love between a mature man and woman in marriage (legal marriage). Yet, all of this is missing: responsible sex seems to be far from the minds of many parents. As a result, when they have lots of children, they cannot afford to care for them; when they fail to take care of them, they want somebody else to take care of them; if a person accepts to help them, they do not thank that person and they do not follow-up to make sure their children are well taken care of.

For many parents sex is like a commodity to be used merely for pleasure. If a person asks them, ‘If sexual union can be deliberately separated from fertility and regarded as only something to express intimacy or to experience pleasure in a recreational way, why restrict it to married couples?’ [39:60], they cannot answer the question, because this is how many people, even the very young, regard sex today in the Region. Sexual pleasure and having fun have become the major focus, with no connection to the grave responsibility of rearing children – sex became a tool for recreation and not for procreation. It highlights sexual misconduct which is widespread among young people in the Region. It points out that every Saturday there are night discos in different trading centres in the Region where the youth get entangled. Teenage boys and girls become sexually promiscuous and sexual acts are performed even on small children. Sexual immorality between teenagers is pronounced during holidays, market days, and independent day celebrations, including child prostitution, and so forth.

The South African Catholic Bishops' Conference [39:60] states: 'Sex is portrayed endlessly in the media, advertising, and entertainment industries just to make money. It has become a commodity'. Ignorance of the purpose of human sexuality becomes ignorance of the marriage bond – the seed of the human family in a permanent human relationship (covenant). Christian marriage is not a temporary contract.

Sacramental marriage is where the priest asks the couple: 'Will you accept children lovingly from God and raise them according to the way of Christ and his Church?' He asks the bridegroom: 'Do you take (the lady here present) to be your wife? Do you promise to be true to her in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love her and to honour her all the days of your life?' [27:157]. He also asks the bride the same questions. In the Catholic Church, it is custom and law that Catholic couples marry in Church. Catholic marriage is a sacrament of Christ's involvement in the ongoing married life of a couple.

Yet, the example set by many parents to their children is bad, as they are constantly quarrelling and fighting each other. Some parents even fight with their neighbours, while the young people are experiencing all these quarrels and fighting at home. These parents are ignorant of child nurture, lacking a sense of the effects of bad example on their children. Drug abuse by young people is also a significant reason for parent-child neglect in the Region.

3.3 Political instability

World Vision [47:17] reports children being used as 'pawns' for military and political purposes. The nature and duration of conflicts in the Region have a tremendous (negative) social and economic impact on all the inhabitants, and particularly on the youth: children are abducted; the girls serve as wives to top military commanders, and become the mothers of their children, while the boys are fighting as soldiers in the bush. The teen mothers, who happened to escape from the bush, and reached their homes, fail to cope with the normal and peaceful situation of responsible child nurture, as they were young and had been exposed to violence. Somebody has to take care of their offspring. Nobody is able to give them counseling. Though they seemed to be physically strong, and capable of responsible child upbringing, they are continually harsh and angry with their children, adding to the vicious spiral, as their young ones tend to run away from home. The challenge is how to resolve these problems?

4. Media – Instrument of Family Pastoral Care

The good news is that from the above information, one realises the struggle of people (the so-called 'West Nilers') living in the Region, in trying to combine the roles of the media and interpersonal communication. Currently the mass media play a major role in creating a climate of modernisation among villagers in the Region. However, the mass media are less successful in utilising technological innovation in the interests of promoting pastoral, although there is potential for doing so if church media and secular media could work together. Similarly the local media stations that have not taken seriously that the traditional media, such as village theatres and traveling storyteller need to do so because they have been very effective in incorporating the role of the modern media. Everett [36:44-54] bears witness to this when he says: 'The traditional mass

media...have an important potential for development purposes, especially when they are combined with the modern electronic and printing media'. Furthermore, in order to cure the root cause hindering media pastoral care, the study noted three things: promotion of responsible parental care, education/training, and government support.

4.1 Promotion of responsible parental care

This needs collaboration between local media, family, church, school and government. Through local media broadcasts, media personnel can communicate family stories. Through these stories from the media, family members remember events and experiences. It keeps their memories alive after those who have actually experienced them. It can also serve as a socializing function by informing children, who are new family members. Through family stories, parents are expected to communicate their own experiences to their children, perhaps how lucky they were to survive and how they persevered through danger and death. It is a way the local media link the family with the past, present and future. The elderly also need to have this exposure. Through experiencing family programs in the media, the elders in the families can receive guidance and instruction directly and indirectly on how to teach children to respond to different situations in the life. This instruction can be given indirectly, by telling stories that incorporate moral lessons or family codes. Walter Kawamoto and Tamara Cheshire point this out by stating that:

When I was brought up, my grandparents did most of the disciplining. The grandparents are usually the ones who end up being the teachers. I think that is where the respect for the elders came in a long time ago. They used to sit me down if I did something wrong, and a lot of times they'd tell me stories of how to gather my food if I was alone, and if I was playing around when I was supposed to be working, they'd tell me coyote stories, about how this coyote didn't do his work and the outcome where we learned the lesson [46:30]. Adults often use parables to instil a sense of morality in their children. In this way, children learn the values of familial love, togetherness, and ancestral love and wisdom, and living a moral life.

4.1.1 Grief, a matter of concern

Local media can influence the family on how to come to terms with grief, which needs openness and protection. Most often, it is very difficult for a family to come to terms with grief, especially when they lose a child because of drug abuse, and other criminal/immoral behaviour in the region. Novelist Hoffman Alice recounts this in a story: If you ever lose a child, the way I did, then you'll know the other side of the truth. You understand what it means to be destroyed and still get up every day and fill the kettle with water. You will see steam from the kettle and weep [2:7]. This shows that parents keep their grief private and fail to give it a voice. When the media communicate such a message, they try to show that it is not the right way of coping with grief; grief both has to be kept private and be given a voice to heal it. Families therefore must refer to the local media to help them to understand and deal with family problems and tragedies. This will help the family to portray a joyful mood to children, because when adults in a family are sad, children too are affected and they too become sad. It affects them more than the adults themselves. In such situation local media helps to resolve conflicts in a family.

4.1.2 Filial Love

Local media must instruct the family on love. For example, media programs courtship stories, when parent watch/listen them, they remind them of their first meeting, love dating and wedding ceremonies. It instructs family members in the meaning of love and become part of the family stories about matters of significance to the family. Stone Elizabeth [15:74] complements such media program 'offers at least one possible way to enter into this intricate dance, they suggest what to feel about love, how to recognize it, what to do with it'. Parents and other adults use them to educate young people about courtship and advise them to approach family life slowly and reasonably, 'flyaway passion was a danger to family stability: it led to divorce, abandonment, and agricultural ruin' [15:55]. Therefore with such messages, children are helped to grow morally aware and learn that passion is not the best way to a good family life. This must involve local media creating a sense of belonging for children. Some media programs focus on the birth and responsible child nurture, and when young people read/watch them, it often gives them a sense of how each of them fit into the family, the roles they are expected to play, and an understanding of their parent's hopes and dreams for them. This makes some children become convinced that they are special in the family, when their parents tell them how they were born, and their own expectations and hopes for them. For instance, if the parents tell the child: 'you are special, you are unique' [15:55] the child will grow up knowing that the family has invested its own success in what s/he will do. The child will try to do his or her best in order to meet the parent's expectations. In case of adopted child, local media can deliver programs about adopted children. When families come across such programs, either through the newspaper or listening to the radio or watching the television, they can relate the information to their adopted children, how much they wanted a child, and how hard it was for them to get a child, and how happy they were when they adopted a child. Such parental messages to the adopted child help the child appreciate his/her heritage and ethnicity [17:64-68].

4.1.3 Poverty eradication

In West Nile Region many families do not know how to cope with the problem of poverty this is especially true in respect of rural areas. The local media can help deprived family members to survive. The media can provide certain programs, which are particularly directed towards poverty eradication. When people listen to them, they teach them how it is possible to cope in a world that is not always welcoming and charitable, through encouraging and forcing children to concentrate on education. This provides the hope that in the future their children will not face the same problem of poverty. This then becomes the parent's strategy to survive, because their children will not only liberate themselves but also their family and society. In complement, local media can also enable families to cope with a family crisis. According to Cissna Ken, Cox Dennis and Bochner Arthur [22:272] the media do not necessarily enable families to cope with a family crisis, because the parents and other members of the family are 'bound to come into conflict in every family'. For Jorgenson Jane and Bochner Arthur [19:528], this is natural, and it promotes ways of thinking and talking about families (that) may discourage or ignore alternative depictions and narrative forms'. From the above scholars, sometimes media programs challenge parents with negative family experiences we have already seen earlier. Examples of this are: programs portraying a woman's decision to get divorced after being raped by her husband because of drug abuse; Couples, who have been unable to conceive terminating an unexpected pregnancy because opium

smoking. Parent neglected child getting abuse from other adults and resorting to drug abuse; Child adoption that fails and so forth. The point Jorgenson and Bochner want to stress is that families are routinely influenced by the media and are expected to cope with exceptional and transformative crises, and to invent new ways of acting and speaking when old or traditional ways fail them. The local media are warned to take note of the media that now broadcast programs that can easily mislead young people. These programmes may appear sensible but many make light of potential pitfalls and dangers.

4.2 Cooperate between local media and Government

These are media in the West Nile Region and Uganda government. The media are there for the good of everyone and to serve everyone. So, at once, they concern both citizens and public authorities. These authorities have the essential duty of not only maintaining freedom of speech but also of seeing that the right conditions exist for the local media to promote family pastoral care in nation building. In some cases, however, the state has to intervene for the local media. Government can stop or prevent media that violates human dignity by promoting unacceptable behaviour such as pornography, violence and drug abuse in family pastoral care. This is paramount because the well-being of society requires absolutely moral and crime free society. It also requires that both as communicators and as recipients exercise responsibility and self-control. Voluntary associations are desirable and essential in this regard. The role of the civil authorities is essentially a positive one. Their chief task is not to create difficulties or to suppress anybody, though at times corrective measures may become necessary [30:84]. Professionals in both local and national media have to join together to set up councils on their own account. This will help them to have their own statutes and be concerned with all aspects of social communication as instrument of family pastoral care not only in the region but nationally. Representatives of the different sections of the population can be invited to sit on this council. It will eliminate not only the wrong sort of interference from state or economic interests, but it will also strengthen cooperation and fellow-feeling between communicators. This will benefit not only a single family but also the entire nation. In some cases the state can set up advisory board to supervise the media. In this case, the boards should by law, be representative of all shades of the opinion within the community. The law should protect the young from what can do them permanent psychological or moral harm. It is the task of the legislation in this field to give the necessary support to the local media's family pastoral care ministry so as to promote this care in the schools by educating young people to promote a peaceful, moral and crime free society in the region [30:88-89]. The study presents new findings and recommendation.

4.2.1 Findings

Looking at the document, the study recommends that a good understanding of media as instruments of family pastoral care must always take into account three things: the media itself, family, and practical/philosophical theology – because they are linked to each other.

- Each one of these factors must focus on the development and progress of all human beings as equal family members.
- It must be noted that every person is not an island but rather a social being that must not be blocked

from socialising with other human beings, creatures, and creator.

- There must be recognition of human beings as made up of two things: ‘matter’ and ‘form’; whereby matter refers to a physical or material body and form denotes the spiritual part commonly known as the ‘soul’.

These days, most human beings use media for disseminating and receiving information. It highlights that the humane and moral use of media requires education and training of all media practitioners and receivers – local and internationally.

4.2.2 Recommendation

The article recommends that all media practitioners, especially the journalists, information communicators and editors, need to undergo human family pastoral care ministry. This will help them to be sufficiently equipped with practical/philosophical theology, i.e. because of theological problems associated with media usage.

- Reflection on practical theology for a theological theory of communicative actions reveals a concept which may be complex and difficult to communicate, primarily because of the media general unfamiliarity with practical theology.
- If media practitioners are lacking in this awareness, they will have difficulty developing theories and studies linked to the interaction (relationship) between communication theory and practical social outcomes.
- It reveals moving away from *practical* theology being understood as the application of theological analysis or the co-ordination of theological reflection from a range of disciplines, but rather as a practical guide which can be applied in to actual daily situations.

Media practitioners always need to note that the strengthening of peace and international understanding, the promotion of human rights and the countering of criminal and immoral activities, such as incitement of war demand a free flow and wider and better balanced dissemination of information. To this end, the media will have a leading contribution to make in family pastoral care ministry. This contribution will be effective only to the extent that the information reflects the different aspects of the subject dealt with in the region under study.

5. Conclusion

In this study, it became clear that sometimes media are used as scapegoats to avoid solving human problems. These problems include drug abuse, child neglect, violence, theft and robbery. Different groups tend to blame each other for society’s ills: the government blames the media and vice-versa; the family/school blames the media and the media complains about the lack of cooperation from the family/school environment. Consequently, these societal problems remain unsolved in the West Nile Region of Uganda. The family as the fundamental institution of society is greatly wounded. National development and progress is greatly impeded. Local media requires collaborative support from family, church, school and government so as to impact upon the situation of indifference and neglect. Family, school, church and local government must also assume their

responsibility and play their part. Family and church must value pastoral care and seek opportunities to collaborate with the media, so that the media, in turn, can become an influential tool in promoting pastoral care in the region.

Acknowledgement

With accomplishment of this researched paper, I am humbled to acknowledge the support of all those who provided relevant information for this article, especially works of different scholars. Included are those who provided information during field work in the West Nile Region, namely the police officers, teachers and students/graduates, traditional leaders, church leaders and lay Christians, grandparents/parents and young people, and government officials (e.g. Local Council One, Local representative of the government (LC1)). I would like to acknowledge some of the readers and correctors of this work. I acknowledge the Internal and external reviewers, because of their critical remarks which have shaped the quality of this paper as a scholarly and scientific article. I thank Fr. Michel Benetti, who was always ready to read and correct some of my English and grammar, and Sr. Sally Duigan, Director of Holy Family Child Care Centre, who never said no to me when I approached her to check information regarding this article, and used those computers which she purposely bought for our vulnerable HIV/AIDS orphans and suffering children in the diocese of Tzaneen. Finally and in a special way I would like to thank very much the American Scientific Research journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences (ASRJETS) for detailed information about my manuscript information. I also cannot forget to mention all other professionals for helping me in developing scholarly ways of researching which hopefully will enable me to help others also to develop the same scholarly skills.

May God bless you abundantly.

Dr Cyril Arima

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