

THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND IN THE NEWS MEDIA

Without Fear or Favour

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour...”

Ephesians 4:25

While claiming to be neutral, newspaper journalists and TV presenters often report the news from an anti-Christian point of view. At one time, especially in the 19th century, most leading newspapers were Christian. However, there has been a major shift in the news media on what is covered and how it is covered.

Is There an Agenda?

Instead of the wide-angle lens of context, all too often the zoom lens of selective focus has predominated. Is there an agenda? Or are we dealing merely with bias and prejudice?

Misinformation on Mozambique

My first mission field was Marxist Mozambique. Many asked why the mass media accounts of what was happening in Mozambique differed so radically from Frontline Fellowship reports.

My answer was that there simply was no freedom of speech, freedom of movement or freedom of the press in Mozambique at that time. Most press accounts in Mozambique came from Frelimo's Agency Information Mozambique (AIM). These press releases were distributed by telex and the wire services of SAPA-Reuter and others. Most articles in the print media and items on radio and TV originated with AIM, a Marxist, state-owned propaganda agency – hardly renowned for honesty and lack of bias.

During the 1980's very few journalists actually visited Mozambique, and those who did were normally restricted to the five-star Polana Hotel in Maputo. Their main sources of information were briefings by Frelimo officials, or guided tours and stage-managed interviews – all hosted by Marxist officials and translators.

In a country with a history of concentration camps, torture, public floggings and mass executions, it was easy to find co-operative villagers and pastors who would espouse the desired party line. Those gullible and naïve journalists who then readily parroted the standard stock phrases, parrot cries and clichés no doubt received Frelimo's approval, and further invitations to return for another propaganda exercise some other day.

By way of contrast, our missionaries had continual contact with the people on the ground, in the rural areas. We got the feel of the country by personal experience, over long periods of time, and as the villagers unburdened their hearts to us and related what they had suffered. *“An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory.”*

Disinformation in Rwanda

The ease with which the orchestrators of the genocide in Rwanda confused international journalists and abused their national media to mobilize the unprecedented concentration of carnage, raised uncomfortable questions.

In its 1200 page report on the genocide in Rwanda, African Rights concluded that: *“The response to the aftermath of the genocide was almost as shocking as the response to the genocide itself...Progress towards justice has been negligible. On the contrary, there is a concentrated attempt to distort or deny what has happened. The survivors of the genocide are not the beneficiaries of national and international compassion and support, rather they are almost wholly forgotten, while displaced people and refugees receive massive and indiscriminate assistance...The refusal to face the reality of what is one of the very worst crimes against humanity since the foundation of the United Nations...”*

The AR report found that the killings were meticulously organised in advance. The French-trained Presidential Guard, the Army, the Gendarmes and Civil Administrators were willing instruments in the genocide. The killings in Rwanda were no spontaneous outburst, but followed instructions from the highest level.

African Rights condemned the gullibility of the international media for accepting the MRND party line that the killings were merely “*tribal anarchy*” and “*uncontrollable tribal killing*.” By portraying the genocide as “*tribalism*” and as a result of “*the war*” they provided a smokescreen of confusion, which allowed the killers to proceed with their diabolical plans.

Central to the Hutu MRND government strategy was to sow confusion so that no one knew what was happening. They isolated their victims by imposing a news blackout, cutting telephone links, establishing a dense network of roadblocks, and imposing a nationwide curfew. These measures kept people in their homes and prevented most people from fleeing. By cutting communications and restricting travel they isolated their victims and sought to stifle the flow of news.

When the genocide was launched on 6 April 1994, most African correspondents were in South Africa for the elections. There were, actually, only two international journalists in Rwanda at that time – and they were in Kigali, cut off from what was going on in the rural areas

Following the assassination of the president the MRND government launched a campaign of disinformation. They portrayed the killings as a spontaneous outbreak of “*tribal violence*.” They sought to confuse the mass killings of defenseless peoples with “*the war*” and insisted that a ceasefire was the pre-condition for involvement. Thirdly they played “*the humanitarian card*” by pleading for emergency aid. All this deflected attention from the central issue of the genocide.

The tenancy of most journalists to label every conflict in Africa as “*tribalism*” has become absurd. Many foreign aid workers fuelled this tendency with ill-informed comments such as: “*Everyone is killing everyone!*”; “*It’s uncontrollable violence*”; “*the Hutus and Tutsis are killing one another again!*”

Having killed opposition politicians, Rwandese journalists, human rights activists and others who might present an accurate report on the bloodshed, the MRND government then pursued their second strategy of disinformation to confuse the issue with self-serving false reports. They portrayed the violence as “*spontaneous rage*” in response to the assassination of the president, even though it was the MRND government and military who were responsible for the assassination of the President themselves.

In the first days, international attention generally focused on the plight of foreigners. Camera crews were, understandably, only prepared to travel with international troops – whose mission was to evacuate foreigners. This naturally led to a slanted and incomplete picture being portrayed to the world.

The strategy of disinformation and terror so callously and effectively orchestrated by the MRND Hutu government in Rwanda was spectacularly successful. With most international attention focused on South Africa’s volatile elections, there were no journalists in the rural areas of Rwanda reporting on the massacres there. The rural genocide was effectively hidden from the outside world for almost three weeks.

Aaron Makuba, whose whole family was wiped out complained: “*The world persists in characterizing the bloodshed as ethnic clashes. We who have lost our families, relatives, colleagues and neighbours regard this as unfair, unjust and a source of immense pain.*”

“*People should stop describing Rwanda to us as tribes who are in the process of killing one another,*” Dr Jean Herve Bradol of MSF – France concluded, “*I think it is really the final insult to the victims, to present the matters in this way. And I believe that this way of presenting things is not altogether incidental, perhaps in order to justify the passivity of various parties...*”

Focusing on Darfur and Ignoring the Nuba

It is quite remarkable that such a vast amount of media attention has recently been focused on the suffering of Muslims in Darfur, while completely ignoring the vastly greater and much longer tragedy of Islamic *Jihad* against the Christians of Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

Approximately 2 million people, most of these Christians, died in the 50 years *Jihad* against the Christians in Southern Sudan. Yet, the news media showed little interest and the UN and Western governments did comparatively little for the Christian victims of *Jihad* in Southern Sudan.

However, for some reason, the five years of low intensity conflict in Western Sudan in Darfur has received enormous worldwide media and government attention. As a result it has also received disproportionately more Church attention and aid.

Darfur is a 99% Muslim area in Western Sudan. What had been going on in Darfur is Muslim-on-Muslim violence. It is typical Arab banditry that has been going on for centuries. In this case Muslim Arabs are fighting against Muslim Blacks. The Christians that we serve in Southern Sudan, Northern Nigeria and other parts of Africa, are somewhat cynical about this, pointing out that it seems the West is only concerned for Muslims and never Christians.

The West was tremendously concerned for Muslims in Bosnia, Muslims in Kuwait, Muslims in Somalia, Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq and Muslims in Darfur. However, the West stood by while hundreds of thousands of Christians were slaughtered in Rwanda and in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. The point made is that it would seem that the world media, and the UN, would only mobilize international campaigns to support Muslim victims, never Christians.

Another point worth noting is that the Black Muslims of Darfur have traditionally been some of the worst slave raiders, guilty of many of the worst atrocities committed against Christians in Bar-el-Ghazal, and the Nuba Mountains. When General Charles Gordon travelled to Sudan in the 19th century, he saw that the worst slave raids came from the Darfur Muslims. At that time he noted that 7 out of every 8 Black people in Sudan were slaves.

Villifying the Victims and Justifying the Villains

Over the last 26 years that I have been serving as missionary to the persecuted in Africa, I could not help but notice how frequently the mass media chose to target those targeted by international communism. Is it just coincidental that during the Rhodesian War, the Border war in South West Africa/Namibia, the riots in South Africa, the Killing fields of Mozambique, the civil war in Angola, the massacre of Matebele tribesmen in Zimbabwe, the Red Terror in Ethiopia, the holocaust in Rwanda, the *Jihad* in Sudan, the wave of church burning in Northern Nigeria, or any other of the many calamities and conflicts in Africa, most of the mass media have chosen to confuse the issues, avoid the heart of the matter, vilify the victims and whitewash the villains?

Pro-Abortion Journalism

After one interview with a journalist from The Argus concerning our work in Sudan, I asked: “*Why is it that The Argus continually publishes Pro-Abortion articles, and ignores Pro-Life events such as the Life Chains and the National Day of Repentance?*”

The answer was astounding: “*Well, we’re pro-choice.*”

“*Yes, I understand that, but surely it is your intention to report events and present the facts, without fear or favour, from both sides?*”

She smiled and shrugged her shoulders: “*Well, I’m pro-choice. Every journalist that I know is pro-choice. And, well, I guess we’re just biased!*” she grinned broadly.

That was a remarkable honest statement, but there is no doubt that most of the print media in South Africa is pro-abortion and pro-homosexuality.

Selective Focus

Although most journalists and editors will claim that they are objective, even the most objective journalist has to admit that they collect far more facts than they publish. There is the judgment on what to cover, how to cover it, and what facts, opinions or viewpoints that they have come across to include in the story and which to discard.

Secondly the reporter or editor decides which of the facts should be included in the first paragraph of the story and thereby emphasized above the others.

Thirdly the editor will decide whether the story is placed on page one, or page sixteen. On page one it will attract far more attention than it would on any other page.

Spiking the Spiritual

Although at one time, particularly in the early part of the 19th century, journalism emphasized God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, most modern journalists choose to spike the Spiritual. At one time newspaper articles pointed out that kings who disobeyed God were exposed and deposed. Those who engaged in duels were without true honour because they sought esteem amongst men more than following God's commands. Lightning storms were seen to demonstrate Spiritual lessons. Lack of repentance was shown to have murderous consequences.

Publishing God's Obituary

However, as non-Christian journalists came to dominate newspapers, they redefined reality by excluding the Spiritual realm. Many editors actually tried to publish God's obituary declaring: "*God is dead!*"

Redefining Reality

Typically newspaper stories present random events in a chance universe. Journalists who believe in evolution tend to evidence the Humanistic worldview that we came from nothing, we're going nowhere and life is meaningless. Instead of seeing patterns in events, journalists with a materialistic worldview simply see random effects of time plus chance. Governments rise and fall, corruption stories are published, people are murdered, cars crash, natural disasters occur, some people abuse children. However, there's no explanation. No patterns exposed. No lessons to learn.

Behind the News Headlines

The fact that most murderers are under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time will not be emphasised. The fact that most vehicle accidents are alcohol related is apparently irrelevant. The Islamic doctrine of *Jihad* and its role in over 90% of the wars and terrorist campaigns in the world today will not even be referred to. The Marxist ideology of dictators and mass murderers such as Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Pol Pot, Mengistu, Fidel Castro and Robert Mugabe will scarcely receive a mention.

The Unmentionable Facts

Apparently personal beliefs are unimportant in the mind of many modern journalists. The fact that AIDS was originally called GRIDS (Gay Related Immunisation Deficiency Syndrome) and that a vastly disproportionate percentage of homosexuals contract AIDS is ignored.

Most humanist reporters who believe in a materialistic worldview refuse to consider the possibility that AIDS could be a judgment of God and a warning to promiscuous and adulterous individuals who violate God's commands.

If such a possibility is even referred to, it would be in the context of ridiculing the idea that the terror of AIDS provides us with an opportunity for repentance.

A Challenge for Life Changing Repentance

Few journalists today will consider the perspective of the Lord Jesus when reporting on man-made or natural disasters. "*Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.*" Luke 13:2-5

Spiritual Realities

Christian journalism would recognise the reality of the Spiritual realm. Firstly God is sovereign, so no events happen by chance. History is His Story. Nations rise and fall in response to how they respond to God's Word and Law. Obedience to God's Word has produced the most productive, prosperous and free nations in History. Disobedience to the Law of God has had disastrous consequences.

There is evil in this world. Satan and his legions of fallen angels, demons, are active in the world. Although we may not always perceive it, we are involved in a great Spiritual World War between God and His angels, and the devil and his demons.

Mankind is fallen Creation. Man is created by God, but our human nature is sinful. Because we are created by God there is some good, even in the worst of us. Because we are fallen there is bad even in the best of us. Suffering and evil are the result of man's rebellion against God since the Fall. ***“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”*** Galatians 6:7

God is ultimate reality. Our basis for knowledge is God's revelations. We can know what is right and what is wrong from the Word of God. The purpose of our existence is to glorify God and to worship Him forever.

The destructive tendencies of sin within each one of our hearts is very real. Without the Grace of God and the Redemption brought about by Christ's sacrifice on the cross we would all be doomed.

God really does answer prayer. Not by making us feel better psychologically, but by actually transforming earthly situations, although not always in the way we expect.

By seeking to exclude Spiritual realities from the front page, Secular newspaper editors are ignoring fundamental reality.

Biblical Examples of Balanced Reporting

We can find good examples of complete news coverage in the Bible. The report on the parting of the Red Sea in **Exodus** takes into account both the physical events and the Spiritual dimensions. The battles and conflicts against the Philistines in **Judges** reports factually the interaction of Spiritual and material forces.

The conquest of Canaan by **Joshua** and the Israelites not only includes military and sociological details, but is clearly shown to be God's Judgment upon wicked and immoral people, even as His mercy, guidance and protection is bestowed upon the Hebrews.

1 and 2 Kings and **Chronicles** not only report on the various national leaders and their achievements, but expose their failures and evaluate them in the light of how faithful they were to God's Law or not.

The **Gospels** and **Acts** include firsthand, eyewitness reports of miraculous healings, deliverances, and all the drama and intrigue of the plot by the religious leaders to arrest Christ, the treachery of Judas's betrayal of Christ, the political double-dealing and cowardice of Pontius Pilate, the brutal tortures and execution of Christ, and his triumphal Resurrection from the grave.

The ancient Bible book of **Job** reports a series of sensational disaster stories – a family wiped out, their house destroyed by a tornado, herds stolen, physical affliction, mental turmoil, marital dissention, not as random events in a chance universe, but as part of a drama involving Heaven, hell and earth. The report on Job's tribulation begins with the conflict between God and Satan. The drama on earth is seen in the light of a dialogue in Heaven.

Of course earthly reporters do not have access to what is going on in Heaven at this time. The inspired Biblical reporters were privileged to have God reveal facts that we could not discover on our own. However, we do have the Bible to enable us to understand earthly events in the light of Spiritual realities.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” John 1:1

For any journalist wanting to present a compelling report which is accurate, interesting, relevant and insightful, the Scriptures provide many case studies.

“In the past God spoke...through the prophets...but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son...”
Hebrews 1:1-2

Distinguishing Between News and Views

We need to recognise the fact that in every news story we are not only receiving information, but we are being influenced. The news media includes more views than news. The particular worldview of any journalist will come through. Underlying every article we read is the worldview, whether it be theistic, pantheistic or atheistic.

To evaluate any journalists' worldview we should ask:

1. What are his fundamental beliefs about life?
2. What is he using to interpret the facts?
3. What are the practical implications of his worldview?
4. How consistent is his worldview?
5. What implications would it have for me personally?
6. What would it mean for the world in general?

Recognising Humanistic Bias in the Media

You can recognise some of the basic tenants of Humanism in most newspaper articles, and in many films and news programmes.

Materialism maintains that there is no reality beyond the physical.

Existentialism evaluates everything from subjective personal experience.

Agnosticism maintains that it is impossible to settle the primary questions in life because of the limitations of human knowledge.

The **Evolutionist** maintains that we are matter in motion, evolved slime, monkeys who mutated, from goo to the zoo to you. From mud to monkeys to man. A cosmic accident. The result of random chance.

Marxism maintains that everything is primarily determined by economics.

The **Hedonist** maintains that we should live for our own personal pleasure.

Relativism teaches that truth is only whatever a particular individual or society decides that it is. There are no absolute standards of right or wrong, no universal truths and no absolute code of conduct. All truth is relative.

The **Utilitarian** declares that "*the end justifies the means.*" The belief in radical individualism and autonomy unguided by virtue is the essence of utilitarianism. Personal happiness and success are to be achieved and justified by whatever means are necessary to obtain them. Using circumstances and people is justified. The goal is everything. Whatever means are needed to reach it are utilized and justified.

The **Secular Humanist** declares that: "*There is no God to save us; we must save ourselves!*"

The **Post-modernist** says: "*There is no absolute truth; we must create our own!*"

And the **New-ager** declares: "*There is no God; I am my own god!*"

Dr. David Noebel observes: "*At first the temptation is to see **mankind** as God. Then it becomes **us** as God. Then finally it is **me** as God. So the progression moves from the worship of man, to the worship of us, to the worship of me. In the end all anthropologists become idolaters. I am god! Like little anti-Christ's that exalt to magnify themselves in the temple of their minds.*"

The Humanist Agenda

Much of journalism today promotes the Humanistic agenda: that man is a product of evolutionary chance and that this theory must be taught as a fact of science at school. That education must be controlled by the state; that education must be Secular, and free of moral absolutes. That sex education must be compulsory in schools. That pornography should be allowed as "*free speech*". That abortion is a "*woman's right*." That homosexuality is an

acceptable “*alternative lifestyle*”. That criminals are “*victims of society*” requiring treatment and rehabilitation, rather than punishment.

The Curse of Socialism

Despite the devastation and destruction wreaked by socialism throughout the last century, it is incredible how many journalists believe in the unworkable economics of socialism. Socialism destroys incentive, initiative, income and industry. Yet it still seems to be the favourite form of economics promoted in all too many newspapers.

Superficial and Sensational

Superficial, sensational and immoral material predominates in the modern entertainment industry. It is producing an increasingly superficial, selfish, mindless and immoral society. However, it is just this kind of entertainment that receives most of the attention and accolades in the average Secular newspaper. Those like Mel Gibson who try to produce an accurate and realistic film on the life of Christ receive abuse and scorn.

Antinomian Ethics

Most journalists reject the Law of God and instead vigorously promote situation ethics, amorality, existentialism, hedonism, pornography, homosexuality, sex education and abortion.

Aborting God

Evolution is an attempt to abort God retroactively. Evolution destroys all meaning, purpose, direction, justice and hope in life. Yet evolution is the favourite theory of origins promoted in most Secular publications today.

Secular Humanism is attempting to kill God by eradicating Him from the classroom and the minds of the next generation. Many in the news media are seeking to assist in this. By eliminating the Bible as the basis for all knowledge, humanists are removing the very foundation of truth. They are prohibiting the only objective standard by which reality can be evaluated.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correction and training in righteousness.”
2 Timothy 3:16

Learn to Discern

We need to be careful and critical in what we read. We need to be selective in what news sources we trust. We need to read and listen with discernment, evaluating everything in the light of the Scriptures. Subscribe to trustworthy Christian newsletters and magazines, listen to faithful Christian radio stations and visit reliable Christian websites.

“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:50

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