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SINGAPORE PASTORAL INSTITUTE

*Dear Friends,*

July has come upon us, and if you are any bit like the moviegoer that I am you will feel anticipation in the air as we look West towards Hollywood for the latest summer blockbusters.

Movies have been very effective ways of conveying stories of hope and desire – the great narratives of humanity. Expressing ourselves through narrative we struggle with the big issues of life and find some resolution for them. To the big and perennial question of “why is there evil?” traditional moviemaking has provided an answer: so that the good guys can triumph over the bad guys. So that people who are wronged can get justice. So that villains can get their come-uppance at the end. So that heroes, through their virtuous and altruistic struggle, can

vanquish evil (and look good while doing so).

However the storytelling of late has changed to reflect a more ‘realistic’ flavor. Good doesn’t necessarily win evil all the time anymore. Heroes are now darker, often plagued with inner conflict, and fallen. Bad guys do not turn to villainy by choice but do so pressed by poverty, desperation, or accident. Modern narratives seem to tell us that our world has moved from black and white to shades of gray – motives are mixed, outcomes are uncertain, it is not so simple any more. They seem to say that in the real world, there are many possible answers to the big questions. Life’s certainty has given way to ambiguity, and sometimes the meaning of it escapes us. Some filmmakers even assure us that meaninglessness is OK— accept it as normal.

How do pastors respond to this? What narratives can Catholicism put forward to address the big questions? How do we tell them?

This issue of the Institute’s eNews focuses on popular media among other things. Christ’s message now occupies ‘ad space’ alongside a multiplicity of narratives in the consciousness of our faithful. Shakespeare once described the world as a stage; there are now many actors, and it’s high time we Catholics got our act together.

We would do well to begin analyzing the effects of the mass media as a critical pastoral concern.

*AG*

*PS: For some movie previews try*

[www.apple.com/trailers](http://www.apple.com/trailers)

## Media awareness

*Presented by Augustine Anthuvan*



Modern mass media brings

the world closer than ever before. News happening thousands of miles across the globe appears right in our living room on our TVs and our computers. The media is very much a part of our life; our children grow up in the era of reality TV and internet. Podcasts and instant messaging are part of their daily lives. Even education has taken on e-learning as a strategy for the future. How aware

are we of the impact the media has on us? How do we teach our children about the media?

This media awareness workshop aims to help parents, teachers and those who work with young people to understand the impact made from the media on our young people. How do we, as parents, guardians and educators, harness the positive energy of the media when engaging our young people? The presenter is Mr. Augustine Anthuvan, who

is currently a news editor of Channel News Asia. As a media man, Mr. Anthuvan has many years of experience of the impact of media. Being a parent too, he will also share from a parent’s perspective.

**Date:**  
**19 July 2008 (Sat)**  
**Venue:**  
**CAEC, 2 Highland Road**  
**Time:**  
**2.00pm—5.00pm**

Call **6858 3011** or email [spi@catholic.org.sg](mailto:spi@catholic.org.sg) to register.



TOO COSTLY IN THE EYES OF THE LORD IS THE DEATH OF HIS FAITHFUL

PSALM 116:15

ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS GREGORY YONG 1925 - 2008

## LET THERE BE LIGHT – FROM THE TV



Even if some of us don't visit the cinema often, the television still occupies pride of place in our homes. Through the technological wizardry of Samsung, Sony, Panasonic and other TV makers, we modern folks know where and when to go looking for our Hi-Def 1080 progressive-scan fix. Detective enthusiasts get their forensic fantasies fulfilled by CSI; reality lovers keep up with which American Idol is in or out. Savvy business types are never far from the stock-tickers on Bloomberg or Reuters; music junkies tank up on MTV; and for those of us with extra-terrestrial inclinations the Sci-Fi channel is a godsend. TV can be a peacemaker (or at least deferrer of conflict as long as everyone's favorite show is on), and is by far the most efficient nanny we have ever known. We might even say that the TV is the most important member of the family! Now with the internet, we don't even need to be stuck in front of our TVs – just download the episodes into your iPod or 3G mobile phone and watch them wherever we are.

Blessed are those who are plugged in.

Bill Watterson, creator of the popular comic strip "Calvin and Hobbes", does some nice social commentary by parodying our fixation on television. He draws Calvin offering up a bowl of tapioca pudding as homage in a late night ritual to a static-ridden TV symbolizing how it has turned his brains to gray mush. Calvin's gratitude to the TV for relieving him of the responsibility to reason is funny and worrying at the same time. The TV has been called the idiot-box and aptly so because it is entirely capable, through indiscriminate consumption, of desensitizing our perceptions. The scary part is that we like it. At some time or other we have surely heard someone say, "I've had a long day, and I want to watch something senseless where I won't have to think." While watching TV for some diversion is one thing, somehow I get the feeling that our faith behavior is affected by our media habits well.

Catholics are a touchy-feely bunch; yet growing demand for modern audio-visuals in worship, catechesis, and other 'churchy' activity seems to suggest that the traditional symbols of Catholicism no longer speak as effectively to us as before. We want to consume higher quality sounds and images in our appreciation of God. We come often to church on Sunday less willing to participate than to watch a ritualized dramatization, hopefully a virtuoso one,



. Calls for the 'modernization of symbol' extend to all corners of the Catholic experience. Some wish at Mass for the jaunty tunes of pop-gospel *ala* Don Moen, others for the inculturated strains of the erhu, angklung or sitar, yet others prefer a return to the solemn bass hits of the pipe organ accompanying evocative Latin Gregorian chants sung by choristers preferably trained in a proper *schola cantorum*. Fewer and fewer parishes remain without PowerPoint capability, as LCD projectors are now regular fixtures in any worship space. We now expect slides with idyllic pictures of Caucasian Jesus to be flashed on-screen during the times when 'not much' is happening at Mass. Lack of sound and image begins to feel like God is not present; a privation of senses leading to slow death by boredom. No matter how you slice it, we have come to measure quality of worship according to how well modern media accompanies that experience.

An evolution of our attention span is taking place along with our growing thirst for auditory and ocular stimulation. We are beginning to pay attention according to how we are accustomed by the media: 2 hours for a feature movie, 1 hour for a TV program, 3 minutes for a music video, 25 seconds for a spot commercial. Studies have shown that users on the World Wide Web will wait no more than 8 seconds for a page to load before losing patience and going somewhere else. How much time would people give in attention to a homily?

On the social front, the mass media is rewriting the rules for human association. Our young people, according to a recent newspaper article, prefer to communicate with each other via SMS than physically meeting up. They discover with the help of technology to transcend their social and physical limitations with chatrooms, webforums, and the blogosphere. Online sites like Facebook, Second Life, or MMORPGS (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) enable us to join virtual communities and experience fantastic new ways of self-expression and socialization. Living through avatars – self-created representations of ourselves in the online world – we discover internet society to be immensely more gratifying than real society. Slowly, our grasp of the real is lost as we wander around in our online paradise and find ourselves thinking: "Why do I need heaven if I can already create my own heaven here?" A class of poor is born—deluded, lonely and gullible—ripe for predation.

Through mass media we can and have already produced new realities. Some call it hyper-reality; glossy worlds filled with illusion and propaganda, often superficial, prone to distorting truth, but highly efficient manipulators of human desire. Immersed in its sounds and lights day-in-day-out, we are saturated by the good news proclaimed by hyper-reality and gradually fall into an unhealthy discontent with the real world.

Our experience in virtual-life raises important and challenging questions for our real life. There is much to discuss here that pertains to our Christian faith. What can we do? A possible first step is to increase our literacy of the media. We must become critically aware of who is speaking through the media, how it works, what influence it wields over us, and how we allow ourselves to be changed by it: otherwise we simply continue to give permission for the tail to wag the dog.

# CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

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An airplane that has lost one wing does not stay aloft; it drops groundward in a diving spiral, unable to regain the balance necessary for stable flight.

Religion that has unhitched itself from the worldly and only focuses on the transcendent behaves in the same way, gradually spinning itself into irrelevancy.

Jesus Christ proclaimed the Reign of God as **both** here and not yet (Mt. 13:1-53). Although



God ensures its completion in the end times, our work of arriving there needs to begin in this-world. We must cultivate the mustard seed today – and the Social Teaching of the Catholic church is the crucial tool for our ‘gardening’.

The Catholic Social and Community Council (CSCC) is publishing “Salt of the Earth,” a new guide on the principles of Catholic social thought. The Institute recommends all groups

of Christians (including SCCs, catechists, those in ministries) who wish to rediscover this intrinsic part of our faith tradition to sign up for the briefing on how to use the book. Complimentary copies are available only to groups who register.

Please visit [http://www.cscs-singapore.org/socialteachings/salttofearth\\_about.html](http://www.cscs-singapore.org/socialteachings/salttofearth_about.html) or email [salt@cscs-singapore.org](mailto:salt@cscs-singapore.org) for more information. May God help the Church to fly level!

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## SCC Story

### An example and eye-opener for others:

This story is about an SCC group that decided in their Gospel Sharing to clean the road leading to their colony. The outcome of this initiative was really amazing and inspiring. Unlike other times the members come early in the morning without being called or even reminded about the work. Each person took lead and started cleaning the road. No one could believe that it was really happening. Another interesting fact was that they had become inspirers through their

action. Many passers-by asked them why they were doing this work. They openly but humbly shared that they were members of an SCC Gospel Sharing group; that this was the action they decided to undertake after having reflected and prayed together on the scriptural passage of the day. Having heard of these the general public appreciated them saying that the Catholics are really a service community. Some even

expressed their desire to join in the work since such deeds are for the general good.



*Shillong Archdiocese, Collected by Sr Martina Thaba*

*Taken from “In the path of the new way – SCCs share their faith experience”*

# “Goods-rich Time-poor in Singapore” by Ooi Jin Bee

Time is precious, especially human time, which is scarce and limited. Human time is further divided into work time and non-work time. The choice to optimize usage of one over the other would result in two very different societies. Prof Ooi Jin Bee in this 2006 book: “Goods-Rich, Time-Poor in Singapore” helped to create the awareness of the types of social cost generated in pursuing economic growth.

Goods-poor, time-rich societies refers to most poor countries engaging in agriculture work. In these societies people spend little time in generating income, leaving them much time on hand for non-work (leisure) activities. Goods-rich, time-poor is the term used to describe industrialized economies where time is spent on generating more wealth for more material goods resulting in having less time for activities that do not generate material wealth. Most countries opt for economic development to alleviate poverty. However, in exchange for material goods, these economies become time-poor.

Prof Ooi speaks at length of the opportunity cost faced in the goods-rich, time-poor societies, particularly Singapore. In such material societies, people do not give importance to time intensive activities such as child bearing and minding the elderly as they do not help to generate material wealth. Wealth is the measure of success in such societies. As competition builds up, non-work time is also being traded for opportunity to generate wealth. For example, we would only meet for lunch if there is a possibility of a sales contract. We only play golf in exchange for million-dollar deals. As such, time intensive activities that do not generate material wealth become social issues which our government is trying hard to address, namely, low birth rate, latchkey children and an increase in the number of lonely or abused elderly.

As Prof Ooi points out in the end, it is inevitable when we successfully overcome poverty to become enslaved by the bondage of time. Every minute and second is a race to make more wealth to meet our

wants. As such, our children and elderly are pushed to the side because to care, share and love is time intensive activity which does not generate equally in terms of material gains. Singapore, in alleviating poverty in particular, cannot choose otherwise due to its small size and dense population. But we need to know the price we have to pay in exchange for material wealth. We cannot disregard this fact in our search for solutions to those social problems.

Reading and reflecting on this book leads me to wonder: can a society that finds no time in raising their young and looking after their elderly find time to experience God?



## Coming up ...

What has “anime” got to do with the formation of the laity?



Find out in August over 4 Sundays beginning 17 Aug with 4 handouts on “The Lay Faithful of Christ-vocation and mission in the Church & in the world”

The *Feminine* Genius

*All About the Spirituality of Women*

By Edwina Yeow, Sr Christine Santhou and Sr Elizabeth Lim

11, 18 & 25 July (3 Fridays)  
8.00pm—10.00pm

Church of the Holy Spirit,  
Attic

Contribution: love offering