

**4 The Legal / Political challenge:** What legal / political barriers must be addressed in each nation in order to deliver Gospel messages to large audiences via media? How should risks to life and livelihood be addressed?

- Where in the world can Christian messages be broadcast? Where can't they be?
- Personal safety factors in pursuing world missions with media.
- Licensing and permission requirements in [location].
- How do we get "on the air" in [location].
- Strategies for Gospel penetration into hostile areas of the world.

**Terry Schultz wrote:**

I have not researched the subject of intellectual and cultural property rights or the challenges in obtaining legal permission to bring foreign film crews into the countries I work in. I would however, make a case for cultural sensitivity and knowing the political climate at the local or community level. For example:

In many tribal societies, supreme political and spiritual authority resides in one person: the village chief. A direct challenge to the tribe's false religion may be perceived as an attack on the chief's authority. In other societies, the religion expert (shaman, witch doctor, Vodou priest) is simply a local practitioner who is both feared and respected. There is often an exceptionally renowned occult practitioner presiding over a large region who is considered more powerful than the local purveyors.

Christianity confronts and challenges the cultural status quo. Why not produce a series of videos or picture books with minimum text that sensitively contrast local beliefs with Christian beliefs? Recall how Paul in Athens respectfully commented on the Athenians' interest in religious things (Acts 17:22). Imagine the interest in the community watching on a big screen a conversation in which a shaman and then a Christian offer their views of spiritual reality. Their competing stories could be dramatized during the conversation. A third character, a villager facing real-life choices, would be depicted as caught between the two belief systems.

Ideally such videos and picture books would be presented by an evangelist of the culture who had crossed over from the tribal religion to

Christianity. Such evangelism materials and presentations would send a powerful message. Not only would the materials challenge the worldview of each villager, but the villagers would know that the filmmakers and presenters have no fear of retribution (black magic curses, physical harm, etc.) from the area occult practitioners they challenge!

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**Gonzalo Delgadillo wrote:**

Legal issues must be defined by expert local attorneys.

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**Jas Lonquist and Mike Klebig wrote:**

**Censored:** Search on the word "river" in the United States and Google serves up more than 1.5 billion responses in 34 seconds. Search on the word "river" in China, using the Google search engine, and you may find yourself disconnected, blocked with an error message, or frustrated by a timeout. Why? The Chinese word for river (jiang) happens to be the name of former Chinese president Jiang Zemin and it is a banned search on anything but a government-sanitized server.

**Breached:** In December 2009, a Google information security manager detected a break-in to Google's system in China. Among the information hacked - Gmail accounts and correspondence of Chinese dissidents and human rights activists. It is believed the Chinese government was involved in the break-in. On January 10, 2010, after four years of struggles

with the Chinese government, Google closed its offices north of Beijing.

Google is a multi-billion dollar company with skilled government relations experts on staff and some of the best information security people in the world. It's eye-opening that, as powerful as Google is, it struggled with censorship and information security breaches against a government unfriendly to its beliefs.

**Ideas to consider:** (a) Offer **programs that benefit the community**. Sarah's Hope in India helps and provides a home for disabled children. It's blatantly Christian in a region that does not necessarily support Christianity, but the charity responds to such a devastating, unmet need – taking in abandoned, disabled children living on the streets – the local government now sends children to them. (b) **Remain impartial and neutral** on political issues that do not conflict with Gospel messages. (c) If there's risk that your **computer** or smartphone could be seized or impounded, be sure to protect addresses and personal information that might endanger others in the wrong hands. (d) Seek allies in **businesses and groups** already operating there. (e) **Remember you're a guest** in the country. Know and obey all laws for your safety and to best represent what it means to be a Christian to locals.

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

- **United States State Department**  
[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)  
Updates on security threats for American citizens. Affiliation: U.S. Government
- **Federal Trade Commission**  
<http://business.ftc.gov/privacy-and-security/data-security>  
Data security information. Affiliation: U.S. Government
- **Kwintessential**  
[www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html](http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html)  
Free guides on language, etiquette, customs, business localization. "Whether it's a website, app, social media campaign, Facebook page, online

*content, video, software or e-commerce platform – we can localize it."* Affiliation: Secular

- **Crisis Consulting International**  
[www.cricon.org](http://www.cricon.org)  
"For more than 25 years, CCI has been the premier provider of security and crisis management services to the Christian missionary, humanitarian and church sending communities." Risk assessment. Policy development and contingency planning. Training of staff, leaders and crisis management teams. Management of major events, conferences and disaster response. Resolution of hostage and kidnapping events, extortion and other threats. Updates on current security threats on website. Affiliation: Value statement on site

## **LEGAL/POLITICAL CHALLENGES WORKSHEET: MEDIA TECHNOLOGY FOCUS**

- Are there government restrictions on web content?  
Does the government allow a free press?  
Are there laws specifically against Christianity or proselytizing?  
Can Christian materials be shared and exchanged openly?  
Can foreigners own and operate radio or TV stations? If not, can they partner with locals to operate?

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**Paul Hartman wrote:**

Two of the reasons why we are interested in digital publishing relate to cost and customs issues. Nepal and Indonesia do not allow the importation of Christian literature. Importation to Pakistan and Nigeria is very difficult, if not impossible. Customs and shipping issues make importation to Latin American countries difficult and expensive.

Broadcasting is possible in surprising locations, such as from Pakistan to Muslim countries. Outreach to China is possible through QQ—the Chinese version of Facebook.

Relative to Road to Emmaus, Steve Boettcher reports: "I think we had approx. 8-10 television

broadcasts during Easter 2010, 2011, and 2012 on TBN. According to TBN's website, TBN is now the world's largest Christian television network. Across the world TBN is carried by TV stations and cable systems to millions of homes. TBN is on 5,000 television stations, 33 international satellites, internet and thousands of cable systems around the world. "

We do not show on the Internet names and locations of Christians who live in countries where hostility to the gospel makes the profession of the Christian faith dangerous.

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***Ugis Sildegs wrote:***

Certainly, in different countries there are different issues in respect to religious and media freedom. Therefore wisdom and sensitivity is needed to grasp and comprehend the local situation in legal and political matters.

But doing public media projects will never be a completely smooth ride, and some sort of problems can arise in any country. In this regard there are always fights worth fighting, but there are also those fights which waste our time, money and energy. And we have to be smart in distinguishing which is which.

Being an Eastern-European and Post-Soviet country, Latvia has both democratic traditions and the challenging heritage of the totalitarian past. While Lutheranism is a traditional faith of the country, our Confessional Lutheran (free) Church according to Latvian legislation is considered a "non-traditional," "new religious organization," since we were registered only recently. It meant that we were perceived as a suspicious organization that should be checked and controlled for a 10 year period, according to the law.

The Department of Religious Affairs had a duty to monitor our activities, and several times we experienced attempts to restrict our religious freedoms. Once again, we were reminded of the feeling that "Big Brother" was watching us. Those, undoubtedly, were relics of the old Soviet

system, and we felt urged to take up fight against such an attitude.

On one occasion, we learned that the big Lutheran Church sought to deny our Church and newspaper the right to use the name "Lutheran." Thankfully, they didn't succeed. On a couple of other occasions some state representatives obliquely and by hinting expressed their discontent about our doctrinal statements (regarding the Roman Catholic Church, ecumenism, etc.) and tried to restrict our freedom of speech. However, seeing that we were not scared or intimidated and that we defended ourselves, they gave it up.

By and large, our newspaper has served us well as a public medium, guarding our freedoms against state officials and bigger denominations which often have a tendency to assert their dominant role. Thus we have experienced the positive power of mass media, as it has protected us and made our little Church more respectable in the eyes of the general public. Having such a medium and a free public voice is always an advantage, especially in contemporary social structures where mass media play such an important role.

Questions:

The Church history of the Soviet period also reveals that legal and political issues can become a dangerous trap set up by enemies of the Church. Being hard pressed and desperately trying to survive in the atheistic world, the Lutheran Church eventually became loyal and too obedient to communists. The Church became a kind of "Soviet Church," losing her salt, spiritual strength, freedom and credibility. It was devastating. In consequence, membership declined from 55% before the WWII to 1% after the Soviet era.

So we ask: What kind of lesson can be learned from such a history? In a situation when the whole political and legal system is set up against you, aiming to put an end to the existence of the Church, is it worth striving to fit in to such a system and work out compromises? Or is it better to go underground and become a "martyr's Church"?

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***John Lawrenz wrote:***

Hong Kong is a part of the People's Republic of China under a "one country/two systems" compromise hammered out with the departing British in 1997. It is indeed a strange situation which allows Hong Kong to be rated the most "capitalistic" political entity on earth inside a nation which is still under one party communist rule. Hong Kong is ruled by law. The mainland is ruled by the party who make the rules. An independent legal judiciary inside China is yet to be crafted.

At the present time it would be very, very difficult to distribute a major media item inside China. Yet in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as Singapore, it is quite possible to do so. Inside mainland China books are regulated by the state. Inside the Peoples Republic the only recognized "Protestant" church is the Three-Self Patriotic Movement over which the party exercises control and censorship. House churches flout government control and there are more house church congregations than licensed congregations. It is dangerous to do anything that appears to break the "harmony" that the party wishes to impose on society. Open challenges to the government's control of religion has been met with force, though inconsistently and sporadically.

People passing through customs may carry religious items for personal use, but there is always a watchful eye open at the border crossing lest anyone bring religious items into China for distribution. Visas for people who put down the purpose of their visit as "religious" risk being denied. Scores of confessional Lutheran young people regularly teach English in Chinese schools and have done so for more than a decade. The local authorities know who they are and are not oblivious to the meetings held in the evening over prayer and Scripture. Large groups are discouraged. Evangelism is illegal for minors, therefore child baptisms are technically breaking faith with the government.

Asia Lutheran Seminary makes use of safe internet communication as a prudent caution. We are actively seeking official permission for Lutheran books and pamphlets to be distributed through intermediaries who work with the government. Our general position is "don't poke the dragon in the eye." The attitude reflects what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 13. Yet we monitor carefully how "the powers that be" act and consider their public practice more significant in respect to "law" than some of China's public statements that throttle religion and that strictly limit the sharing of the Gospel. We are aware that many in the party welcome Christianity if their adherents contribute in tangible ways to the stability of the state. We believe that a Christian citizen in China can practice and share faith without becoming rebellious and we encourage this in the same way that the apostles encouraged first century Christians to honor Rome and its emperor.

More can be said. At the conference I will be willing to speak orally of some things that are best not distributed in print or put on the Internet. China employs an unbelievable number of people who monitor the emails of people inside and outside of their country. A careless, well-meant, but insensitive church bulletin in one of our confessional American Lutheran churches could shut down operations half a world away. This very thing has happened to other denominations. "Don't poke the dragon in the eye!"

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