

Communicating for Life, by Quentin J. Schultze

reviewed by [Joseph B. W. Smith](#) in the [August 15, 2001](#) issue

Media literacy is an issue picking up steam in the church, as I discovered when I found myself attending two conferences on the subject last year. John Peterson, director of public media ministry and electronic media production for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Tex Sample each addressed multimedia possibilities and worship.

Peterson and Sample are both media-savvy educators who place the swarm of available means of communication in the context of the Holy Spirit's activity. Each stressed that media literacy is important for communicating the gospel well in our congregations and neighborhoods. But my colleagues at each forum, confronting the large array of information technologies and the prevalence of glitches with the equipment, were tempted to bury their heads in the sand and limit themselves to the office word processor.

Quentin Schultze, professor of communication arts and sciences at Calvin College, takes media literacy to a deeper level. He reminds us that media literacy is not about a technological keeping up with the Joneses. Rather, it fits into the wider context of how each person uses God's gift of communication.

Typically, stewardship messages deal with our abundant resources, especially the financial resources we can use either for advancing God's glory or for selfish gain. But Schultze's concept of communication stewardship goes deeper than money--or even the congregational ritual of "time and talent" inventories. Communication is a gift of God, and to communicate faithfully takes a Christ-shaped discernment.

Christian stewards of communication are called to bring God's shalom into the world, to bring "the presence of God [into] our everyday relationships." Christians are called to share God's presence with others in every facet of life--from what we buy to what we say, what organizations we support, and how and why we use information.

Discussing several aspects of communication, Schultze explores what it means to spread shalom in different forums. Developing communication literacy or awareness will not necessarily make communication easier, but it will help us to advance God's glory and humanity's well-being.

Several striking images and stories (some of which may inspire homiletic illustrations) give form to each of Schultze's concepts. The index gives a good indication of the breadth of his illustrations--they range from Marilyn Manson to the Tower of Babel, from Humpty Dumpty to Stalin.

Spreading shalom is about more than media awareness and communication. Merely addressing media literacy is not enough. Schultze does not spare criticism of the media, though he is just as critical of those who scapegoat the media as the source of societal problems. Spreading shalom involves transforming sinners through Christ. Schultze is adept at showing us the sin embedded in our communication and our need to be transformed by God's grace to enable us to become agents of shalom. He is convinced that "books, teachers and ideas can help us greatly, but we must first follow the One who called the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee."